

WOMEN MURDER WOMEN: CASE STUDIES IN THEATRE AND FILM

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Thankyou Peter, for holding up the mirror. And Liz, for your ivy scorn that let me see in it.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at two cases of women who murdered women – the Papin sisters (Le Mans, 1933) and Parker-Hulme (Christchurch, 1954) – and considers their diverse representations in theatre and film, paying particular attention to Jean Genet’s play *The Maids* (1947), Peter Jackson’s film *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) and Peter Falkenberg’s film *Remake* (2007), in which I played a part. What happens when two women (sisters, girl friends) commit violent acts together – not against a man, or a child, but against another woman, a mother or (as in the case of the Papin sisters) against women symbolically standing in place of the mother? How are these two cases – the Papin sisters and Parker-Hulme – presented in historical documents, reinterpreted in political, psychoanalytic and feminist theories, and represented in theatre and film? How might these works of theatre and film, in particular, be seen to explain – or exploit – these cases for an audience? How is the relationship between prurience – the peeping at women doing something bad – and the use of these cases to produce social commentary and/or art, better understood by looking at these objects of fascination ourselves? My thesis explores how these cases continue to interest and inspire artists and intellectuals, as well as the general public – both because they can be seen to violate fundamental social taboos against mother-murder and incest, and because of the challenge they pose for representation in theatre or film.

INTRODUCTION

In Le Mans, France, in 1933, twenty-seven year old Christine Papin and her twenty-one year old sister Lea murdered their female employer and her daughter by hitting them over the head with a pewter pitcher, carving their flesh with a knife and gouging out their eyes with their fingers. Just over twenty years later, in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1954, sixteen year old Pauline Parker and fifteen year old Juliet Hulme carried out a plan to murder Pauline's mother, Honora Parker, by hitting her repeatedly over the head with a brick in a stocking. These two murder cases not only received avid press coverage in their time; they inspired the speculation and studies of political, psychoanalytic and feminist writers, and they have provoked a range of theatrical and filmic representations, perhaps most notably in Jean Genet's play *The Maids* (1947) and Peter Jackson's film *Heavenly Creatures* (1994). They have also come together to serve as material for a recent film, *Remake* (2007), by Peter Falkenberg, in which I played a part.

This thesis looks at two cases of women who murdered women and their representations in theatre and film. What happens when two women (sisters, girl friends) commit violent acts together – not against a man, or a child, but against another woman, a mother or (as in the case of the Papin sisters) against women symbolically standing in place of the mother? How are these two cases – the Papin sisters and Parker-Hulme – presented in historical documents, reinterpreted in political, psychoanalytic and feminist theories, and represented in theatre and film? How might these works of theatre and film, in particular, be seen to explain – or exploit – these cases for an audience? How is the relationship between prurience – the peeping at women doing something bad – and the use of these cases to produce

social commentary and/or art, better understood by looking at these objects of fascination ourselves? My thesis explores how these cases continue to interest and inspire artists and intellectuals, as well as the general public – both because they can be seen to violate fundamental social taboos against mother-murder and incest, and because of the challenge they pose for representation in theatre or film.

The basic facts of the cases, including the guilt of the Papin sisters and Parker and Hulme, are not in question, and can be summarised as follows. For six years, sisters Christine and Lea Papin lived and worked as maids in the household of Monsieur Lancelin, a retired solicitor, Madame Lancelin and their daughter Genevieve, in the town of Le Mans, France.¹ On February 2nd 1933, while the family was out, a fuse blew as the sisters were ironing. This fuse had already blown and had been fixed the previous day. The cost had been deducted from the maids' wages. Madame Lancelin and her daughter returned home to discover the lights out. They confronted the maids on the stairs, where they were murdered. After the murder, the maids bolted the doors to the house. They then bolted the door to their own room and lay together in bed. Monsieur Lancelin, on returning home from a game of bridge and finding himself locked out, eventually broke in with the help of a locksmith and three policemen and discovered the scene. The maids were tried and found guilty of murder, despite a defence of insanity. Christine was sentenced to the guillotine; however, she actually died in an asylum, four years after the trial, of a lung infection as a result of starving herself. Lea was sentenced to ten years of hard labour, after which she returned to her former occupation as a maid and to live with her mother.

¹ My information on the Papin case has come from the research by Rachel Edwards and Keith Reader in their book *The Papin Sisters* published in 2001.

Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme met at Christchurch Girls High School in the city of Christchurch, New Zealand.² Juliet's family had just moved from England, because her father, Henry Hulme, had taken up the position of Rector at Canterbury College (now the University of Canterbury). Pauline's family lived in the central city, ran a boarding house and managed a fish shop. Despite the class difference, the girls were close friends, spending a lot of time together writing poems, novels and operas; they played in the gardens of Juliet's home at night, shared a passion for cinema and music, went on holidays at Port Levy together with Juliet's family, talked frequently on the telephone, went for midnight swims at New Brighton on their bicycles, and rode horses. As the Hulme family prepared to shift back to England, the girls consolidated a plan to move together to America in order to pursue their dreams of getting published and starring in films. Because they were about to be separated, the girls made a plan to murder Pauline's mother, Honora Parker, and on June 22nd 1954, they enacted their plan during a walk in Victoria Park. As with the Papin sisters, despite a plea of insanity, they were found guilty of murder. Too young for the death penalty, they received prison sentences of five years. After serving their sentences, Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme moved away from New Zealand and took up new identities, which were only recently exposed as a result of the revival of interest provoked by the film *Heavenly Creatures*.³

The public interest in both these cases, fuelled initially by the press coverage of the trials, has been extraordinary. It is possible that the aura of theatricality

² My information on the Parker-Hulme case has been drawn from trial transcripts as they were published in newspapers at the time and what has been made available of Pauline's diary. This can be accessed in the "Fourth World - The Heavenly Creatures Website", which also contains information on the case itself. For many facts of the case, I have relied on Julie Glaumizina and Alison Laurie's research in their book *Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View*, published in 1991.

³ Juliet Hulme became Anne Perry. She eventually returned to England to live close to her mother and began a career as a writer of crime fiction. Pauline Parker became Hilary Nathan. She also moved to England and ran a horse riding school for children.

surrounding the murders was a product of the trials, which allowed the public to be collectively entertained by dramatic accusations of shocking and scandalous acts [see appendix C and D]. Writing about the Papin sisters, Edwards and Reader note that during the trial, the courtroom was packed with forty journalists from Paris whose interest “was less in the facts of the case, already widely known, than in the appearance and attitude of Christine and Lea” (Edwards and Reader 13). According to Edwards and Reader, this coverage provoked the gathering of an angry crowd outside the courthouse to call for the death penalty (13). Similarly, Glaumizina and Laurie note that in the Parker-Hulme trial, hundreds of people queued each day outside the Christchurch courthouse to get seats in the small public gallery (Glaumizina and Laurie 82).

Spectators seem to have been drawn to the Parker-Hulme trial on much the same terms as they were drawn to the violence on the rugby field -- the traditional arena of entertainment in Christchurch's popular culture then, as it is now. Gurr and Cox tell us that one day of the trial clashed with a rugby game, so the courtroom was full of “beribboned supporters of the opposing teams in an inter-provincial match, *Canterbury v. Waikato*, who remained in court until within a few minutes of game time” (*Famous Australasian Crimes* 156). It is also possible that the attraction of the Parker-Hulme case was amplified by revelations about the personal lives and details of the families involved, published in verbatim detail by the daily newspapers like episodes in a soap opera. Thus the public learned that Hilda Hulme had had an affair with Walter Perry (a consulting engineer whom she had met through her work at the marriage guidance council), and it was also reported that Pauline Parker’s parents

were not legally married; Pauline's father, Herbert Rieper,⁴ had abandoned a previous family and wife, whom he had not divorced (Glaumizina and Laurie 36-7).

Given the success of both the Papin case and the Parker-Hulme case as courtroom dramas for relatively large audiences, it is perhaps unsurprising that the cases were so exploited by the press, and that these accounts have come to attract the attention of academics and artists. The details of the murders, which emerged during the court cases and were widely transmitted through media attention, were shocking and inexplicable. What made the Papin sisters gouge out the eyes of their victims and mutilate their bodies? What made Pauline and Juliet, according to Pauline's account in her diary, plan their murder with great anticipation and joy over a six week period and then carry it out without any sign of immediate remorse?⁵

For most onlookers at the time, and for the theorists and artists that followed, the motives for the murders seemed at odds with the degree of violence and cruelty in their performance. For the prosecution, the explanation was that the murderous women were bad, their acts the result of their inherently immoral characters. For the defence, the explanation was that the murderous women were mad, their acts the result of delusions brought about by the unnaturally close relationship between the two sets of women. In both cases, psychologists were used unsuccessfully by the defence to treat the murders as case studies in order to diagnose the women with a form of insanity, due to the presumed homosexuality of both relationships.

In the press, these two explanations – mad and bad – were collapsed into an image of monstrous women. In the case of the Papin sisters, the press called them the “Monsters of Le Mans” upon reports that the lawyer for Monsieur Lancelin reached

⁴ Rieper was the family name but Pauline was charged under Parker, her mother's name, since it was revealed at the trial that her parents were not legally married.

⁵ What is available of Pauline's personal diary is that which was revealed during the trial. This can be found in the “Fourth World – The Heavenly Creatures Website” at <<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/studio/2194/>>.

the conclusion in court that “since they behaved like wild animals, they must be treated like savages and wild animals” (Edwards and Reader 14). The press also compared a portrait that the sisters had professionally taken of themselves to the police mugshots of them after the murder, articulating a transformation from innocent sisters to ravaged madwomen – or “Raging Lambs” as another headline termed them (Le Guillant 880; see appendix C). The inexplicable but implied immorality of their character - a result perhaps of their spending too much time alone together - was highlighted by the judge: “Your heads hadn’t been turned, if I may say so, by certain reading material. Only religious books were found in your room” (Edwards and Reader 106).

Similarly, the Christchurch press used a family photo to juxtapose the image of Juliet Hulme before the murder, posing in the garden of her home amongst flowers, against descriptions of the murder which accentuated the horror of what she did [see appendix G]. Writing closer to our own time, film scholar Ruby Rich notes that “the extent to which the trial and media coverage sought to perform a ‘monsterisation’ and ‘eccentrication’ of the two remains striking” (“Introduction to the U.S. Edition” vi). A mug shot of Pauline looking particularly grim (and monstrous) was printed repeatedly [see appendix B], while headlines picked up and repeated the Crown Prosecutor’s label, “dirty-minded girls,” among others (*The Press* 30 August 1954, p12).

The evidence presented in both trials and reproduced by the press was almost immediately taken up as material for analysis by psychoanalysts interested in pursuing a diagnosis of insanity and in constructing psychological theories to explain the murders. At the same time, politically motivated studies of the cases began to emerge which took issue with the guilty verdicts but also contradicted the

psychological explanation with a social explanation that placed responsibility on the institutions of patriarchy or the class system, many interpreting the act of murder as an act of rebellion in the pursuit of freedom. These case studies were generally produced for an elite, intellectual readership, but they have provided the basis for the plays and films that have found much wider audiences.

The rest of this introduction looks at a range of psychoanalytic and political theories which will be used to frame the case studies and my analysis of the way they appear in the representations of the cases in theatre and film. I will look first at the Electra Complex, which might be seen to explain the act of mother-murder, and then at the concept of *folie a deux*, which might be used to explain the way the close relationship between two women can lead to murder. In the first formulations of these theories, by Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan, they remain diagnostic in a medical sense. However, as the century progresses, theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous take issue with such psychoanalytic theories and reframe them towards a feminist agenda. They use the Electra story to discuss an equivalent for women to the Oedipus complex that they see as having been erased or subsumed into patriarchal culture.

Early psychoanalysis developed the Electra Complex to explain the desire a daughter has to murder her mother. Freud speculated about the inversion of the Oedipus complex where young women come to identify with the experience of young males. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* he used the story of Oedipus to show how a young male's desire to murder his father is a normal development in all young males: "It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that that is so" (262). He described the dreams in which these

desires emerge as wish-fulfillments and substitutes for the carrying out of the wish itself. A woman's experience of this Freud called the "feminine Oedipus complex" (*The Complete Psychological Works... Vol. 18 155*) and is, according to him, where a young girl expresses object-love towards her father (because of her castration anxiety) and feels hostility towards her mother in the desire to eventually take her place. According to Freud, the desire of a daughter to murder her mother is a normal part of development.

The Greek story of Electra can be considered an equivalent myth for females to the Oedipus story. In the story told by Sophocles and Euripides, Electra is the young daughter of Clytemnestra who instigates the murder of her mother by her brother Orestes, to avenge her father's death at Clytemnestra's lover's hands. In his essay "A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman", Freud both makes the connection to and rejects the Electra story as an equivalent for women to the Oedipus story: "I do not see any advance or gain in the introduction of the term 'Electra complex', and do not advocate its use (Vol. 18 155). Later he repeated this opinion: "We are right in rejecting the term 'Electra Complex' which seeks to emphasize the analogy between the attitude of the two sexes" (Vol. 21 229). He suggests here that women do not have the same desire to murder their mothers that males have to murder their fathers. It is an important fact that Electra does not commit the murder herself but that her brother does, and this may have been evidence for Freud in support of his dismissal of the story as an equivalent complex for women.

But Freud's reticence could also be because his psychoanalytic theory depends on the idea that women suffer from a castration complex and as a result are passive and masochistic. Freud suggests that in women there is little chance of their desire to murder their mother eventuating in reality. He says, "it does little harm to a woman if

she remains in her feminine Oedipus attitude” (Vol. 23 194). As a female Oedipus, her violence is castrated. In Freudian terms, for women to be aggressors contradicts what is perceived to be normal feminine behaviour. In this way, Freud’s first consideration of a theory for why women murder women does not offer an explanation for it, but for why it is unlikely.

As an equivalent analogy for women to the Oedipus complex, Jung later considered the relevance of and need for the Electra story to explain the desire women have to murder their mothers: “We would have to choose a different name for the corresponding motif in a woman’s psychology” (Jung Vol. 3 261). He believed that the Oedipus complex “must obviously have its feminine counterpart which will express itself in corresponding forms” (Vol. 18 535). In 1912, he wrote: “We could call this the Electra complex” (Vol. 4 154). He sees murder resulting from the arrested development of the sexual drive: “If the sexual libido were to get stuck in this form, the Oedipus and Electra conflict would lead to murder and incest” (155). He places explanation for the murder on the daughter’s desire for the father: “As everyone knows, Electra took vengeance on her mother Clytemnestra for murdering her husband Agamemnon and thus robbing her – Electra – of her beloved father” (154).

The Papin case can be explained by Freud and Jung’s theories as a symbolic matricide. Madame and Mademoiselle Lancelin were, as female employers, in the position of maternal authority. The eye gouging in the act of murder can be read as a symbolic act of castration such as in the Oedipus story, and can be seen to represent an equivalent feminine Oedipus complex. Christine and Lea tore out the eyes of the other women, not their own. This could be interpreted as a refusal of their subordination as they saw it reflected in their employers’ eyes. They also slashed the thighs and buttocks of these women with knives, suggesting a sexual attack, which

could be seen as evidence of Jung's connection of murder with the arrested development of the sexual libido. The animosity directed at the women's sexualities, was perhaps as a reaction against the oppression of Christine and Lea's own sexualities.

Following Jung's lead, it could also be seen that the motivation for the Papin murder was to do with desire for the father. When they were younger, Christine and Lea's father, Gustave, was accused by their mother of molesting their elder sister and their parents divorced. Christine grew up after this in a convent and was later placed as a maid by her mother in several households. Lea later joined her. Blaming their mother for their father's absence, perhaps Madame Lancelin became for them a substitute for their mother in the act of murder. On the other hand, Christine Coffman suggests that the possible molestation of Christine or Lea may have prompted a disdain for males ("The Papin Enigma" 7), but it is also possible that they resented their mother for their father's sexual misdeeds.

It is clear that both Papin sisters, like Electra, had little to do with their father or Monsieur Lancelin (if he is considered a father substitute within the household in which they worked) - the two male figures in their lives. Monsieur Lancelin spoke at the trial, revealing that both he and his wife had little to do with the maids: "The quarrel with their mother certainly embittered the sisters, who became gloomy and taciturn. Since then, neither my wife nor I had any conversation with them outside their work. They were polite, and since we felt that they would take exception to any comment and they did their jobs in the house impeccably, we were patient" (Edwards and Reader 9). This lack of paternal involvement can be compared with Jung's use of the Electra story. Electra's father Agamemnon was absent, away fighting the Trojan War for the ten years before the murder which occurred on his return.

The Parker-Hulme case can perhaps be more easily fitted into Freud and Jung's theories as it was a literal matricide. Pauline and Juliet's fathers appear largely absent in their lives also. It is possible that this increased their desire for their fathers in the way Jung's conception of the Electra Complex prescribes. Julie Glaumizina and Alison Laurie note Juliet's great periods of separation from her parents due to her recurrent tuberculosis. Reginald Medlicott, the defence psychiatrist, who went on to write a study on the case, says about Henry Hulme that, "Although fond of his two children he has not had the same contacts with them as his wife who was the one who assumed the major responsibility of bringing them up" ("Paranoia of the Exalted Type..." 206-7). Medlicott finds that Herbert Rieper, Pauline's father, was "fond of his children" but that of Pauline, in particular, "her mother assumed the major responsibility in disciplining her" (206). It is possible that the discipline Pauline and Juliet both received from their mothers resulted in a stronger sentimental attachment to their fathers. However, the evidence that Pauline and Juliet or Christine and Lea, murdered out of desire for a father figure, remains questionable.

Freud claimed that the desires inherent in the Oedipus complex (and so it might be inferred in the Electra Complex in Jungian terms), in the functioning of a normal psyche, were not at risk of being transformed into real acts: "No matter what impulses from the normally inhibited Unconscious may prance upon the stage, we need feel no concern; they remain harmless, since they are unable to set in motion the motor apparatus by which alone they might modify the external world" (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 568). Here Freud uses a theatrical analogy to describe our desires as they "prance upon the stage" of our unconscious. He understands the function of art and particularly theatre as Aristotle described it, as a place where these

desires can be presented for our consciousness in order for us to purge them through pity and fear.

Freud describes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as the most well known example of the Oedipus complex rendered on stage for an audience (apart from the play of Oedipus itself): "Each member of the audience was once, in germ and in phantasy, just such an Oedipus and each one recoils in horror from the dream-fulfilment here transplanted into reality" (*The Complete Psychological Works* Vol 1 265). He states: "Its destiny moves us only because it might have been ours" (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 267). Here he talks of the audience identifying with Hamlet as if they were all males, with no acknowledgment of the female spectator or any equivalent identification of them. Freud's theatrical analogy, however, introduces what is at the heart of my thesis - the examination of how, and to what effect theatrical and also filmic representations present these women who murder women, for an audience. Can these dramas/films I discuss be considered an equivalent to the Oedipus story for a women centred new modern age? Are these rare and shocking cases, evidence of a common desire among women?

Jung's use of the Electra story explains the desire a daughter has to murder her mother, but it does not account for the relationship between the two women who committed it, and the effect this may have had in these cases. The relationship between the two women who murder together adds an element that is considered perplexing and suspicious. The murder that results from these relationships between two women has been explained psychoanalytically by Jacques Lacan. He developed a diagnosis of *folie a deux* or 'madness of two', using the Papin case as a specific example of it. He saw this type of paranoia developing out of what he called the mirror-phase, a narcissistic period of development where the child sees an image of

the self in an 'other'. Once again, like the Oedipus stage, this is usually passed through. He used the Papin case as an example of where the arrested development that led to paranoia and *folie a deux*, resulted in murder. He saw this form of paranoia as linked to a homosexual desire. Coffman notes that Lacan brings up the lack of a father figure as "evidence of their 'fixation' at the homosexual stage" ("The Papin Enigma 7). Reginald Medlicott, the psychologist for the defence in the trial of Pauline and Juliet, was influenced by Lacan in his diagnosis of what he called "Paranoia of the exalted type in a setting of 'folie a deux'" ("Paranoia of the Exalted Type..." 205), considering homosexuality an integral part of their paranoia which led to murder.

Homosexuality was also linked to Freud's feminine Oedipus attitude. As I mentioned, Freud's discussion of the female Oedipus attitude arose in his essay, "A case of Homosexuality in a Woman". Freud links the daughter's desire to murder her mother with homosexuality. At one point he describes the forces that "led the girl's libido from the normal Oedipus attitude into that of homosexuality" (*The Complete Psychological Works... Vol. 18 167*), that is, if she remains fixated on, and starts to over-identify with, the phallus. His analysis of this case of homosexuality also "revealed beyond all shadow of doubt that the lady-love was a substitute for – her mother" (156). If a homosexual relationship is assumed, it could be interpreted psychoanalytically that these women who murdered together, found substitutes in each other for the mother or mother figure they murdered.

In regards to the Papin case, Christine's subsequent madness and decline into death that followed the trial, and her attempt to gouge out her own eyes, was integrated into a Marxist explanation by psychologist Dr Louis Le Guillant. He explained the murders as hysterical reactions emerging from madness due to the sisters' status as victims of the class system, which lessens a dependence on the

Electra Complex as an explanation for the murder. Le Guillant was also published in a surrealist journal, as was Lacan. While the surrealists were politically motivated and influenced by communist ideas, they supported the psychoanalytic approach of delving into the unconscious. Instead of diagnosing the women with a form of madness, however, the surrealists chose to see society as mad instead. Francis Dupre in another later study chose to keep to Lacan's original diagnosis of paranoia.

So far, the psychoanalytical explanations I have considered for why women murder women have all been provided by men – Freud, Jung, Lacan, Le Guillant and Dupre. In 2000, a psychoanalytical study of the Papin case by Marie-Magdelaine Lessana was the first to see as significant the fact that Christine and Lea, as well as Genevieve Lancelin, were all menstruating at the time of the murder. Lessana's study followed the emergence in the 1970's, of female psychoanalysts who took up the discussions of male psychoanalysts about the case and in addition took up a political stance, claiming that the use (or misuse) of the Electra myth by these males supported the patriarchal society in which they wrote. The attitudes of such feminist psychoanalysts as Lessana, are often ambivalent. They express the right to have a female equivalent to the Oedipus complex in the Electra story that allows women to murder. At the same time, they are critical of the way this story denies that women have the potential to murder in the way that men can.

A feminist explanation for women who murder women understands the women who murder as taking on the traditionally male role as the active perpetrators of violence, which accounts in part for the particular fascination and taboo surrounding the cases. The passionate expression of violence in women is rare, and when it does occur is usually directed at males and interpreted as a defensive reaction to violence that originated in the male. As I established in my discussion of Freud,

when female violence is directed towards other females it contradicts the passivity and non-violence associated with women. For these reasons, within a patriarchal society where the father or male is understood as the oppressor, matricide in particular is less easily explained than patricide.

Many young women wish at some point their mother were dead. Very few of them actually murder her. According to Chris Straayer, matricide is a shocking crime because it rejects the sacred role of the mother in society: “The idealisation of mothers is compatible with dominant ideology” (Straayer 106). From Straayer’s perspective, the sacrifices that mothers make of themselves to their fathers, husbands and children are revered as a woman’s greatest achievement. In these murders however - literally in the Parker-Hulme case and symbolically in the Papin case - the sacrificial ‘mothers’ are sacrificed themselves, to make way for demanding, desiring, angry daughters. These women can be seen as murdering what the mother attempts to reproduce and refusing what the mother stands for, what she offers them, and what she demands in turn that they become.

Adrienne Rich explored mother and daughter relationships from a feminist perspective and in 1976 stated that, “Like intense relationships between women in general, the relationship between mother and daughter has been profoundly threatening to men” (Rich, Adrienne 226). This is evident in the Papin and Parker-Hulme cases of real and symbolic matricide that can be interpreted as upsetting the patriarchal structure as they situate women as the perpetrators as well as the victims of violence. Juliet Mitchell described Freud’s reluctance to commit to the ‘Electra Complex’ as an expression of his opposition to “any idea of symmetry in the cultural ‘making’ of men and women” (Mitchell 404). She has the same inclination as Jung here.

On the other hand, in response to Euripides' version of the Electra story, Marianne Hirsch took issue with its use as an equivalent complex for women and saw it as reinforcing women's place in society, especially as Electra does not actually commit the murder: "Electra is featured on stage as her brother commits the murder offstage. The emotion is hers; the action, his" (Hirsch 31). In Sophocles' version of the play Electra [spelled Elektra] comments after the murder: "Ahh. GOD, I wish it was Aegisthus [Clytemnestra's lover whose own death finishes the play]" (Pound and Fleming 83).

Electra's desire for the murder to be of a male immediately undercuts what shock might be attached to her desire to murder her mother. The fact that she gets her brother to do it for her also prevents what shock might be attached to the committing of the crime herself. The female's attachment of her violence onto males, shows just how taboo the idea of matricide and female violence, potentially is.

Luce Irigaray, like Hirsch, suggests that the silencing of the Electra story and the murder of the mother is due to its central role in founding this patriarchal society: "For Irigaray, the murder of Clytemnestra is the mythic representation of the mother's exclusion from culture and the symbolic order" (Hirsch 30). In a 1991 paper called "Le corps-a-corps avec la mere" (The Bodily Encounter with the Mother), at a conference on 'Women and Madness', Irigaray states: "When Freud describes and theorizes, notably in *Totem and Taboo*, the murder of the father as founding the primal horde, he forgets a more archaic murder, that of the mother" (*The Irigaray Reader* 36). Margaret Whitford considers this idea to be the "cornerstone" of Irigaray's work (25).

Irigaray argues that, in addition to the death of the mother, the madness of Electra makes way for the continuance of a male order in the form of her brother

Orestes, which reflects the contemporary world where men's "discourses, their values, their dreams and their desires have the force of law, everywhere and in all things" (35). She describes how, for both man and woman, madness is always connected to the relationship with the mother: "Electra, the daughter, will remain mad. The matricidal son must be saved from madness to establish the patriarchal order" (37). Whitford describes the silence surrounding the myth of Electra as perpetuating "the most atrocious and primitive phantasies – woman as devouring monster threatening madness and death" (25). The representations in the general media of the women in both cases, as monsters, could be seen to prove this. Irigaray herself advocates that women must conquer this matricidal need to erase our female genealogy, in order to "keep our identity" (44). She might therefore, interpret the Papin and Parker-Hulme cases of real and symbolic matricide as a reinforcement of patriarchal order as it continues this matricide upon which it is based.

Irigaray discusses the effects of this matricide on society in psychoanalytic terms in an earlier essay, "Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre" (And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other). Every daughter has the potential to become her mother, in the sense that she will replace her in her role. Because of the dominance of Freud's theory of female castration, "Mothers, and the woman within them, have been trapped in the role of she who satisfies need but has no desire" (51). Irigaray describes the effects of this on women in general, where they are "paralysed in their relationship with their bodies, in the living and desiring relationship with the mother, which has been censored" (52). She explores the mirroring inherent in the mother-daughter relationship: "I look at myself in you, you look at yourself in me" ("And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other" 61) and notes the claustrophobia that results, where "I grow angry, I struggle, I scream – I want out of this prison. But what prison? Where

am I cloistered? I see nothing confining me. The prison is within myself, and it is I who am its captive” (60).

Irigaray’s description of this confinement and paralysis of desire presents the possibility that murder for the women in these two cases, unlike Electra who does not commit murder, could be interpreted as an act of rebellion against this passive state and a shattering of the mirror that creates madness in Lacanian terms. Adrienne Rich expresses this need for a break from the mother in her discussion of matrophobia (the fear of becoming one’s mother): “Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free” (Rich 236). In the terms Irigaray presents, matricide can be considered as having subversive potential as a refusal of the mirror image of women’s own containment, an act of violent refusal that is at the same time a passionate reaching out towards the mother.

Angela Carter based a screenplay on the Parker-Hulme case, which I will discuss later. Like Irigaray, Carter wrote of the reproduction of mothers in their daughters in her discussion of Marquis de Sade’s fiction: “Mother seeks to ensure the continuance of her own repression” (*The Sadeian Woman* 124). She claimed that freedom for women in such an unfree society necessitates murder: “The daughter may achieve autonomy only through destroying the mother, who represents her own reproductive function, also, who is both her own mother and the potential mother within herself” (123). She explores the character of 15 year old Eugenie from one of de Sade’s novels, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, as a 'female Oedipus', who both fucks and murders her mother, reinterpreting Freud’s use of this term by erasing the role of the father and ensuring the daughter is not blinded and therefore castrated but, instead, enlightened and emancipated (117).

The relationship between the two women who commit the murder in these specific cases could be read as a substitution and demand for the freedom Irigaray desires in a mother/daughter relationship. Hirsch, for example, sees Electra's failure to form a bond with her sister as explaining her politically conservative fate: "In planning the murder of her mother, in refusing to bond with her more conventional sister Chrysothemis, Electra eliminates the possibility for women to challenge the paternal order and perpetuates a sexual division of labour by which she can only act through her brother" (Hirsch 31).

It could be that the death of the mother or mother figure was necessary in order to attempt to preserve or enable the existence of a relationship that Irigaray proposed, where the women could remain the same but different. In the case of the Papin sisters, it is often suggested that the older and more dominant Christine substituted as the mother figure for Lea, especially since they severed their ties to their mother during their employment at the Lancelins' (Edwards and Reader 9). In the Parker-Hulme case, it is apparent from her diary that Pauline's mother Honora prevented her desires and demanded that Pauline evolve in her own image – to become the same, in Irigaray's terms. It can be interpreted that in the act of murder, Pauline refused to become consumed into her mother's existence and wanted her own instead. In her diaries, Pauline described her desire to be the daughter of Hilda Hulme – an alternative desiring mother in Irigaray's terms. Perhaps Pauline abandoned this search for a desiring mother and sought, instead, in the act of murder, to preserve a relationship of this kind with Juliet, and vice versa. Rich describes these relationships between women that are considered threatening within a patriarchal society: "Women are made taboo to women – not just sexually, but as comrades, co-creators,

conspirators” (255). The relationship between Pauline and Juliet was discouraged and caused disruption in many ways.

Irigaray, however, as I mentioned, insists that freedom is only possible when it does not result in real or symbolic matricide or severance: “And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive” (“And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other” 67). She advocates recognition of difference and the ability to express individual desire: “I would like us to play together at being the same and different. You/I exchanging selves endlessly and each staying herself. Living mirrors” (61).

Irigaray sees freedom not in murder but in her development of a concept of the divine, which describes the necessity for relationships between women that enable this exchange of desire and difference. She advocated that this was possible through a God or deity that is female in conception: “Only the divine offers us freedom” (*Sexes and Genealogies* 68). As it stands, God is male and, therefore, “Woman has no mirror wherewith to become woman” (67). When women see an image of themselves in this existing patriarchal divinity:

the “We look at ourselves in the mirror to *please someone*, rarely to interrogate state of our body or our spirit, rarely for ourselves and in search of our own becoming. The mirror almost always serves to reduce us to a pure exteriority – of a very particular kind. It functions as a possible way to constitute screens between the other and myself” (65).

The women who murder could be seen in this way as trapped in an image of themselves, along with the accompanying expectations that they have imposed on them by patriarchy.

Irigaray describes the need for a divinity in the image of women in order for women to have goals of their own: “It is essential that we be God *for ourselves* so that we can be divine for the other, not idols, fetishes...” (71). This search for the divine

woman can be seen in both case studies to be found by each woman in the ‘sister’ she murders with, as a substitute for the murdered ‘mother’ and a reason for rejecting her. Irigaray’s particular concept of the divine woman describes an alternative heaven: “In heaven, there will be music, colors, movement, dancing... none of the austerity often attributed to God the Father” (70). This is a similar conception to the “heavenly” Fourth World that Pauline described in her diary, which she and Juliet shared.

Julia Kristeva wrote about the significance of the mother in society in *Powers of Horror*. Like Jung, she says: “Freud notes that the morality of man starts with ‘the two taboos of totemism’ – *murder* and *incest*” (Kristeva 57). Both Freud and Kristeva are referring to the Oedipus story, yet this can also be applied to the Electra story -- the incest occurring between father and daughter. The Electra story features, in addition, the incestuous relationship between Orestes and Electra (in their conspiring together) and its association with the murder. In the Papin case, the homosexual element between the sisters was also incestuous. The suggestion of a homosexual relationship between Pauline and Juliet could also be seen as a kind of incest if it is considered that they identified as sisters (in a poem, they wrote of being two daughters of the same father).

In recognition of the connection between taboo and morality, Alison Martin, in a discussion of Irigaray’s concept of the female-divine, claims that “the moral guardians of unethical societies” are women (Martin 132). Kristeva describes the role of the mother in particular as upholding the morals that have emerged as a reaction to the taboos of murder and incest, committed by men: “Oedipus...situates impurity on the untouchable ‘other side’ constituted by the *other sex*, within the *corporeal border* – the thin sheet of desire – and, basically, within the mother woman – the myth of natural fullness” (Kristeva 83). When moral order is violated, Kristeva terms what

emerges from it, as abject and inextricably linked to the mother. She describes the abject as “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Both murder cases can be read as abject, in Kristeva’s terms, as the women murder and violate the symbolic mother.

Mothers in a puritan society are the accepted enforcers of moral hygiene and the eviction of the abject. The mother upholds everything the abject emerges in opposition to. She is the God and regulator of cleanliness: “Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self’s clean and proper body” (72). Abjection is their enemy. They will not let the abject live in their house. It is filthy, dirty, unclean, unholy and uncivilised. A blemish, a spot, and a disgusting, shameful obscenity. They will seek it out, punish it and refuse it. Mothers dedicate their lives to eradicating the abject, and their self-worth is defined in direct relation to their perceived lack of it. They are paradoxically, though in fact, obsessed with the abject. They have an especially intimate and symbiotic relationship with it. Kristeva describes its physical incarnation: “the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body” (54). In the mother’s obsession to overcome abjection, she creates it. It is all around her. Mothers see filth (what is essentially transgression) everywhere, even in places where it doesn’t exist.

The two taboos Kristeva recognises are central to the abject nature of both the Papin and Parker-Hulme cases. Death is, by Kristeva’s definition, abject: “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life” (4). Murder is more so: “Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility” (4). The

(presumed) sexual relationship between the two women in each of these cases is also abject, as it is “sexuality without reproduction” (85): a rejection of the essential function of the mother given their “decisive role of procreation for the survival of the social group” (64).

Kristeva recognizes that in order for society to continue unchanged and unthreatened by the abject, drama in an Aristotelian sense is where the abject can be most effectively purified and purged. This has echoes of the way Freud described the purgation of the Oedipus impulse. Kristeva in her discussion of the abject, also discusses the function of art: “The various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion” (17). In Aristotelian terms this means that the audience can vicariously experience abjection and then purge themselves of it through a catharsis, where order is restored and identification with the abject is broken: “Through the mimesis of passions...the soul reaches *orgy* and *purity* at the same time” (18). If the cases are represented in art in this way, it enables what is abject and taboo about them to be effectively purified so that society remains undisturbed by them. It supports an interpretation of the murders as reinforcing the sacred role of motherhood.

To enable this experience, the spectator must be seduced initially, into empathy for these murderous and abject women. Their imagined suffering or oppression must serve as a reminder of our own. We must empathise and vicariously identify with their intimacy, indulge in their shared experience, their passion, their pain and even transgress with them. But only to the point where they commit the biggest sin, and this could be either the taboo of incest or murder. Then we the spectator can experience the great pleasure which is to renounce all identification,

complicity and empathy and enjoy the horror of bloody, passionate murder. We can experience the joy of having nearly been there but of being able to extricate ourselves in time to find cathartic relief in our own sanity, rationality, virtue, heterosexuality and humanity. We can stand apart and judge what we are not. We are able to flirt with transgression and then to reject it with the very same passion with which it seduced us in the first place; to take pleasure in that fine but absolute boundary which separates ‘them’ from ‘us’; to be so close to filth and yet remain so clean; to enjoy the abject in the security of knowing it is ultimately nothing to do with us.

The abject as it exists in these two cases, can be transformed into something entertaining which titillates and thrills. It fascinates, especially in a puritan society, because it allows the spectator and in extension the society, to reassure and define itself and its actions as being everything that the abject is not – a person who *does* respect borders, positions, rules, who is *not* in-between, ambiguous or composite. This is confirmed by indulging in spectacles of the abject. The more transgressive the experience (of murder), and the more abject the situation (of incest), the more pleasure there is to be gained by watching it vicariously and the more secure the notions of decency and normality remain.

Barbara Creed explores the abject in *The Monstrous Feminine*, describing how it is used in horror films to achieve this purging and catharsis, where a feeling of titillation or empathy with the protagonist is forcefully broken, the shock and thrill of this providing an exceptionally powerful experience for the spectator. Creed describes how women who reject conventional notions of femininity often stand in for the monsters in a horror film: “Woman is not, by her very nature, an abject being. Her representation in popular discourse as monstrous is a function of the ideological project of the horror film – a project designed to perpetuate the belief that woman’s

monstrous nature is inextricably bound up with her difference as man's sexual other" (Creed 83). Horror film appears as the artistic medium most preferable for displays of the abject as it offers an audience a vicarious experience of it.

Such filmic representations of these cases show the women as victims and the murders as desperate frenzied acts of retaliation. The women are shown to us, and their murders explained, often as they were in the legal court cases, with the selection of two alternatives. Either, 'madness' takes away their ability to have willed their breaking of taboos and they are vicious lesbians seized by a frenzy of hysteria, or, inherent 'badness' emerges from lesbian activity and they are callous calculating killers. Or they are a combination of both – monsters - abject, contaminated and cruel. The horror film genre creates an industry where money can be made from images of such abjection. These representations reproduce the horror and abjection of the imagined murder, which may also have the effect for an audience of authorizing, encapsulating and immortalizing it as an historical event. However, Creed also recognizes the subversive possibilities of the abject: "the notion of the monstrous-feminine challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity" (151).

In her article, "The Laugh of the Medusa", Helene Cixous describes the way women have become alienated from their voices, bodies and passions: "Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst.... And I, too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn't open my mouth, I didn't repaint my half of the world. I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear. I said to myself: You are mad!" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 876). She encourages women to 'write' as a way of reclaiming a body and identity that has been eliminated by a capitalist society that only recognises the writing and voices of men and that creates

images of the abject that relegate women to the image of monsters. She gives Electra as an example, speaking of this society, where “men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies.... They have made for women an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven’t got!” (878). Like Irigaray, she also seeks the mother within every woman “who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation” (882).

Cixous’ definition of female writing is not limited to the female gender but to writing that opposes that which satisfies “a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy; that is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated’ (879). She gives as an example of such writing that “inscribes femininity”, as an opposition to the status quo, as that of Colette, Margaret Duras and Jean Genet: “There are some men (all too few) who aren’t afraid of femininity” (885).

Cixous’ need to ‘write’ as a way of becoming embodied and passionate, is an act of rebellion, transformation and becoming: “By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her” (880). Murder in the two cases I write about could be described in these terms. Cixous could be seen to be advocating the act of writing as a possible alternative for women to the act of murder. In both cases, the murders appear to be propelled by some form of passion or desire. This was perhaps repressed in the case of the Christine and Lea and threatened in the case of Pauline and Juliet. The transgression that Cixous relates to the act of speaking and writing could be seen as akin to murder: “Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away – that’s how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak – even just open her mouth – in public” (880).

In her essay, "Aller a la mer", Cixous imagines a stage as if it were a woman, a theatre, where "it is possible to get across the living, breathing, speaking body" ("Aller a la mer" 547). She describes it as an alternative to the traditional theatre, one which might produce images of abjection and "which is built according to the dictates of male fantasy, [which] repeats and intensifies the horror of the murder scene which is at the origin of all cultural productions. It is always necessary for a woman to die in order for the play to begin" (546). Some of the representations of the Papin and Parker-Hulme cases in film, often begin with the murder as a foreshadowing of the climax to the film. Cixous criticises such cinema which "screens us from reality by foisting mere images upon us" (547). She describes her conceptions of writing and theatre as acts of love, and perhaps the murders in these cases can also be understood in this way - perhaps most especially when they are represented on the stage, where "instead of being acted out, life is lived, women will be able to go there and feel themselves loving and being loved, listening and being heard, happy as when they go to the sea, the womb of the mother" (548).

In the light of these readings by Irigaray, Carter, Kristeva and Cixous, a feminist explanation for violence by and against women and specifically the 'mother' within patriarchal society, can be seen in two ways. It is an expression of women's subordinate role within society and can be interpreted as an enactment of the 'matricide' on which this patriarchal society is based, as seen in the story of Electra. Such murders can also be seen conversely, as an attack against or rewriting of, the role of women and 'mother' within this society.

An alternative political explanation for why these women murder women is that it is the result of their oppression within the class system. Like the feminists, these political explanations also take issue with the early psychoanalytic explanations

at the same time that they are also sometimes integrated into a psychoanalytic approach. They too take issue with the legal explanations for violence committed by and against women, which punish such deviant behaviour in order to maintain existing society.

Class difference, in each of the societies in which these specific cases occurred, can be used as a political explanation for them. Coffman notes in regards to the Papin case that “two of the most sensational journalistic themes [during the trial] concerned the possibility of a lesbian relationship between them and of class rebellion as a motive for their crime” (“The Papin Enigma” 1). The Papin case can be explained as an example of the oppressed working class taking revenge on their oppressive bourgeois employers. Christine’s motive, which she stated in the trial as the blowing of the fuse, suggests that built up hatred, resentment and frustration towards their employers, was unleashed by this relatively minor event. The blown fuse took on a symbolic significance.

The Lancelin family by all reports treated the sisters as any other household treated their serving staff. That such impulsive rage was possible in circumstances that were common to many households of the time, incited fear in bourgeois society. The patriarchal head of the family was not the target of the maids’ attack, which makes a reading of political rebellion problematic. However, this feud between women suggests that class oppression within the domestic sphere and lives of women, was just as insidious as it was outside of it. These women attacked two important elements of the bourgeois institution of the family - the mother and daughter. Their act was seen by one communist publication as akin to the communist call for the “Abolition of the family!” (Marx 40). Christine and Lea themselves had a family life that contradicted all the facets of the bourgeois ideal of family.

The surrealists Paul Eluard and Benjamin Peret wrote together about the Papin case specifically, making heroes of the women and embracing the murders as an act of rebellion against class and family. The gendered nature of the crime did not interest the surrealists and they identified the women with male revolutionaries. Janet Flanner however, an American journalist who reported on the case, explored the gendered nature of the murder, noting the injustice of having twelve men on the jury. It is significant, if the Papin case is interpreted politically, that the maids deadlocked the doors to the house and to their bedroom after the murder, and that Monsieur and the policemen were forced to break in. Monsieur Lancelin, the father, was prevented from entering his home that had been taken over by these women. These women and maids could be seen as demanding their own space and intimacy, within a home and society that was not theirs to possess.

In the Parker-Hulme case, class can be seen to be a factor in the murder. As Carter comments: “To be a woman is to be automatically at a disadvantage in a man’s world, just like being poor” (*The Sadeian Woman* 78). Juliet Hulme was from an upper-class English family. They moved in very different social circles to Pauline’s family. From the evidence in Pauline’s diary, she appears to have been very resentful of her parents and stated she wanted to become part of the Hulme family. As I mentioned earlier, she fantasized about being Juliet’s sister and the adoptive daughter of the Hulmes. That it was Pauline’s mother who was murdered, and not Juliet’s, seems significant. The murder could in this way be interpreted as a politically conservative act - a rejection of the working class for the ideals of the upper class. Alternative political readings are provided by Julie Glaumizina and Alison Laurie who consider the oppression of what they believe was the girls’ lesbian sexuality, as an important motivating factor for the murder.

In this thesis I will consider these psychoanalytic and political theories and specific case studies, to examine the representations of both cases in theatre and film. In Chapter One I examine the Papin case and in Chapter Two the Parker-Hulme Case. In each chapter I will explore in more detail the psychoanalytic and political case studies, briefly introduce the literary representations and end with the theatrical and filmic representations, which are the focus of this thesis. I will discuss these separately in order to see how the two different artistic forms affect the interpretations of the cases for an audience. I will examine the representations of the cases in terms of having either a psychological or political emphasis, although the difficulties in distinguishing these approaches will emerge.

In Chapter One on the Papin case, I will begin with the psychological case studies of Jacques Lacan, Dr Louis Le Guillant, Francis Dupre and Marie-Magdeleine Lessana. I will then look at the political case studies of Paul Eluard, Benjamin Peret and Janet Flanner. I will introduce the representations of the Papin case in literature by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Paulette Houdyer and Robert Le Texier, followed by the theatrical representations by Jean Genet and Wendy Kesselman, and end with the films by Nico Papatakis, Christopher Miles, Nancy Meckler, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Pierre Denis and Claude Ventura.

In Chapter Two on the Parker-Hulme case, I will begin with the psychological case studies of Reginald Medlicott and M Bevan-Brown. I will then look at the political case study of Julie Glaumizina and Alison Laurie. I will introduce the representations of the Parker-Hulme case in literature by Vin Packer, T. Gurr and H.H. Cox, followed by the theatrical representations by Bruce Mason, Reginald Denham, Mary Orr, Kathleen Fallon, Elana Kats-Chernin and Michelanne Forster, and end with the films and screenplays of Joel Seria, Angela Carter and Peter Jackson.

Finally in Chapter Three, I will discuss the film *Remake* by Peter Falkenberg which I was involved in and which brings together both the Papin and Parker-Hulme murder cases, both the psychological and the political explanations, and both theatre and film - using Genet's play *The Maids* as part of a filmic exploration of the Parker-Hulme case.

CHAPTER ONE

PAPIN SISTERS: CASE STUDIES AND REPRESENTATIONS

Jacques Lacan was interested in the Papin case as a psychoanalyst. The findings of the three psychologists in the trial found the girls sane, supporting the verdict of guilty. This ‘bad’ verdict functioned to maintain society as it was. It made the sisters entirely responsible for the crime in the way a ‘mad’ verdict would not have. Lacan disputed this guilty verdict, believing that the sisters were insane. He looked for an explanation to the motive of the crime in the sisters’ psyches. He had just written his PhD thesis devoted to the study of paranoia and saw the Papin sisters as a perfect example of it, writing a paper on the murder titled “Motifs du crime paranoïaque: le crime des soeurs Papin” (Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters).

Starting with Freud’s writing on narcissism, Lacan diagnosed the Papin sisters with “paranoid delirium”, which later became associated with what is known as *folie a deux*⁶. He saw this paranoia as developing out of what he called the mirror phase: “The mirror-phase makes it possible to stress the love each one of us has for her or his image, the passion we entertain for our beloved self/ego” (Edwards and Reader 35). In relation to the Papin sisters he saw this narcissism having the effect “that the sisters could not even distance themselves sufficiently from each other to bruise each other. Real Siamese souls, they form a world forever closed on itself” (36).

Lacan’s explanation for the murder that resulted in “paranoid delirium” is described by Edwards and Reader as a disavowal of and defence against a homosexual and sado-masochistic desire that arose in the mirror phase: “This

⁶ “*Folie a deux*” is a psychiatric term that dates to the late nineteenth century.

homosexual tendency is expressed only through a desperate denial of itself, which gives the conviction that one is persecuted and designates the beloved one as the persecutor” (35). After the murder, Christine said that in another life she believed herself to be her sister’s husband, which Lacan saw as proof of her homosexual desire and what Edwards and Reader term a “classic manifestation of paranoid delirium” (35). Lacan implies the existence of this homosexual desire in the form of a question: “what might be the significance...of the two sisters’ exclusive mutual affection, their mysterious life, their bizarre cohabitation, their fearful huddling together in one bed after the crime?” (35).

He saw their desire for each other manifested in the aggressive drive and resolved by its denial, in a projection onto their victims, explaining the sexualized and violent nature of the murder: “they assailed the bodies of their victims, bashing their faces, baring their genitals, and deeply slashing the thighs and buttocks” (“Le Crime des Soeurs Papin”). In this act of murder Lacan suggests their narcissistic mirror was briefly split and turned onto this other set of women, drawing them into “an atrocious quadrille” (“Le Crime des Soeurs Papin”). He believed that the maids saw themselves in their victims, and therefore killed a part of themselves: “That fateful evening, under anxiety of an imminent punishment, the sisters mingled the mirage of their illness with the image of their mistresses” (“Le Crime des Soeurs Papin”). He adds: “They tear out eyes as the Bacchae used to castrate” (Edwards and Reader 37).

The fact that the sisters gauged out the eyes of their victims is especially significant in Lacan’s interpretation. In Freud’s Oedipus complex, Oedipus’ gauging out of his own eyes, after he discovered that he had slept with his mother and murdered his father, took on the significance of a symbolic castration. Therefore, eyes in psychoanalysis have this meaning of castration attached to them. Lacan sees the

maids' gauging out of the eyes of their victims as a self-blinding, a destroying of the mirror that allowed the sisters to see themselves in each other. In talking of Christine in particular, Lacan states that through the act of murder "the desperate experience of the crime tore her from her other self" ("Le Crime des Soeurs Papin"). He means it tore her from her own image in the eyes of her mistresses and also from Lea, her double - that through the act of murder their paranoia was dispelled or as Edwards and Reader put it, the mirror was shattered (Edwards and Reader 36). The last sentence of Lacan's paper describes Christine's un-blinding: "when she thought she saw her sister dead - dead no doubt from the blow she had struck. Only then could she shout out, in the presence of the judge who brought them face to face, those words of a passion whose eyes were finally opened to itself: "Yes, say yes" (36).

Edwards and Reader describe Lacan's description of Christine as a kind of "peasant Electra" (36), although Lacan himself makes no reference to it. It is possible that Electra's desire for the father contradicts Lacan's emphasis on Christine and Lea's homosexual desire for one another as an explanation for the murder. Madame could be seen to stand in for a mother figure: "The chief persecutor is always of the same sex as the subject, and is identical to, or at least clearly represents, the person of the same sex to whom the subject is most deeply attached to in his/her emotional history" (33). However, he limits his discussion of the relationships between the women to a sado-masochistic desire between the sisters. He sees the elder Christine as the stronger of the two, the sadist in the sado-masochistic relationship. In the act of murder Christine and Lea identified themselves as one half of a sado-masochistic binary. The persecutor became their employers, and as one, they sadistically attacked these other women.

Evidence for a homosexual relationship is speculative. Christine's desire to be

her sister's husband is not proof. Christine Coffman in her discussion of the case cites Lacan's "rhetorical strategy [which] therefore figures the sister's sexuality as an issue just as diffuse and hence undecidable as did the trial – as a question that no one, perhaps not even the sisters themselves, could answer" ("The Papin Enigma" 339). The sisters admitted to the murders and denied any homosexual relationship. This denial may have been for the shame attached to such a confession of homosexuality and could support Lacan's theory which depends upon it.

Logre, the psychologist for the defence, unsuccessfully argued that the sisters were involved in an active homosexual relationship: "The Papin sisters give every appearance of having an abnormal relationship, that of lovers. They never went out. Neither was known to have any emotional adventures. When they were separated, in prison, Christine showed the most intense despair. A lover forcibly removed from his beloved mistress would not have shown greater signs of grief" (Edwards and Reader 14). Logre was never able to actually interview the girls during the trial. Edwards and Reader note that Lacan may stop short of Logre's acknowledgment of an active homosexual relationship as it contradicts his diagnosis that the act of murder was a denial or deferral of this desire.

Lacan makes it very clear that the motive for the crime was totally psychologically based. Presumed homosexual attachment, seen as a perversion in this interpretation, again distances the maids from the heterosexual norms which govern society, lessening the threat to it. As long as the girls are 'mad' they are interpreted as passive actors in this drama. They had no control over their actions or power to will them. It consumed them. He does not altogether refute the political interpretations. He acknowledges the sisters' "brutal father" and the "abandonment of their education" ("Les Crime des Soeurs Papin"). But he says resolutely in his paper: "The real motive

for the crime was not class hatred, but the paranoiac structure through which the murderers struck down the ideal master they carried within themselves” (Edwards and Reader 34). Here he deliberately refers to a social relationship – that between servant and master, a possible analysis of the murder akin to a political approach, and makes it pathological by merging these roles into an individual psyche. Edwards and Reader take the view that Lacan’s psychoanalytic interpretation “accounts more fully for their peculiar violence than a symptomatic sociological explanation on its own could do” (34).

What is interesting is that this paper was published in a surrealist journal *Le Minotoure* at the end of 1933 the year the murder occurred. The surrealists also wrote about the case at this time but took a decidedly political approach to it as I will later discuss. Lacan’s diagnosis, which effectively reaffirmed society as it was by pathologizing the Papin sisters, contradicts their approach which was to examine and condemn *society* as either ‘mad’ or ‘bad’. So why were the surrealists interested in publishing Lacan’s paper? Like the surrealists, Lacan was dissatisfied with the verdict and sought another explanation for the motive of the crime. The surrealists were also interested in psychoanalysis and in Lacan’s further analysis of Freud. In particular, they supported the idea that the border between madness and sanity was not so certain (32). They were interested in the role of the unconscious, although for different reasons to Lacan and it is here where their psychoanalytic and political approaches conflict most. The surrealists used the unconscious to explore the way society repressed violent and libidinal impulses. Lacan, on the other hand, analysed these unconscious impulses as forms of sickness that were a threat to the well-being of the society and its standards of ‘sanity’.

Lacan and his re-reading of Freud is the main impetus behind the

psychoanalytical interpretations of the Papin case that followed. The next psychologist to write about the Case was Dr Louis Le Guillant in 1963, thirty years later. This paper was also published in a journal which had a political and philosophical interest, in this case, the 1963 November edition of *Les Temps Modernes* founded by Jean-Paul Sartre. Edwards and Reader describe how Le Guillant only discovered Lacan's paper just before it went to print. While he praised "the quality and richness of analysis", criticised it for containing "hardly any allusion to the fact that Christine and Lea were servants" and labelled Lacan as being complicit with the bourgeoisie (46). Perhaps Le Guillant's anti-bourgeois attitude is what led to his publication in this journal.

In reinforcing Lacan's diagnosis of paranoia while also drawing a connection to the society that creates it, Le Guillant is essentially attempting to integrate the psychological and political approaches. His suggestion towards a motive for the crime is ambiguous and he cannot reconcile these two approaches: "We cannot identify isolated criminal acts such as that of the Papin sisters with the violence of oppressed social groups, but nor can we separate the two categories entirely" (Edwards and Reader 49). He is saying that a purely political reading cannot be made but that neither can a purely psychological one. His interpretation appears as an attempt to fuse the psychological and the political which doesn't attempt to offer an explanation of the crime but instead insists on the necessity for a psychological interpretation to politicise itself. This fusion of approaches was something the surrealists had been interested in since their beginnings and something that at the time Le Guillant writes in the early sixties, the Frankfurt school of philosophers and later the French feminists, are also attempting. Edwards and Reader consider Le Guillant's paper as complimenting "rather than conflicting" with Lacan's paper (46). His approach

enables observations that emerge from placing psychoanalysis in a political context. For instance, he points out that internment in psychiatric institutions was more common for domestic servants than for other people (49).

Le Guillant reproduces for the journal article two photos of the sisters [see appendix A]. One is of their infamous portraits printed on the cover of *Detective* whose headline reads “Les brebis enrages” followed by “Deux anges? Non! Deux monsters qui...” (Le Guillant 881; see appendix C). A second photo is of the sisters standing in court to hear the verdict and their sentencing (881; see appendix E). Both images contain a judgment of the sisters, one by the media and one by the court; one of ‘madness’ – the headline being “les brebis enrages” to connote two gentle lambs gone crazy, and one of ‘badness’ – the verdict of the trial. In this way, Le Guillant uses his images to make yet another opposition, between the interpretations of ‘madness’ and ‘badness’.

The next significant psychoanalytical study of the case was by Francis Dupre. The title of his book published in 1984, *La ‘Solution’ du passage a l’acte: le double crime des soeurs Papin*, claims to present a ‘solution’, just as Lacan was to share his discovery of a ‘motive’. To provide a ‘solution’ suggests the diagnosis of “paranoia” was a sickness from which the girls needed to be healed in order to integrate back into society. Based on Edwards and Reader’s analysis, unlike Le Guillant’s, Dupre makes no reference to society as a context for their shared delusion. He reverts to and continues an analysis closer to Lacan’s. His most original contribution, according to Edwards and Reader, is “his analysis of the sisters’ relationship with their mother” (Edwards and Reader 38). He discusses the mother’s transference by the sisters onto Mme Lancelin, something Lacan neglected.

Dupre, like Le Guillant, also reproduced for his study ‘before’ and ‘after’

photos of the sisters [see appendix A] as well as photographs of the massacred bodies of the victims. Edwards and Reader say he uses them to discuss the mirror stage and its importance as the place where “the visual and verbal meet” (38). Lacan’s concept of mirroring, narcissism and the gaze are explored further as he describes Christine and Lea as “the duplication of the cloth and its lining, the original and its copy, the voice and its echo” (40).

The mother and daughter relationship that Dupre explores is also at the heart of a fourth psychoanalytical study by Marie-Magdeleine Lessana in her book *Entre mere et fille: un ravage*, published in 2000. Unlike Dupre’s further exploration of Lacan’s theory, Lessana harks back to Le Guillant and incorporates a recognition of social factors that may have affected their delirium. For example, when the sisters’ wages were no longer paid to their mother but transferred to Mme Lancelin: “The bond between the maids and their employers became tighter, and the girls fell under Madame Lancelin’s power” (44). Edwards and Reader also point out that Lessana is the only writer to see significance in the fact that Christine, Lea and Genevieve were all menstruating at the same time – according to her the murder then became a transgressive mixing of the blood and insides specific to women and their maternal bodies.

Lessana appears to be the first female psychoanalyst to write about the case and her gender can be seen as having influenced her interpretation⁷. Edwards and Reader note Lessana continues in the tradition of Kristeva in reinscribing psychoanalysis with an exploration of mother and daughter relationships (42). While Lessana makes reference to social factors that may have contributed to the sister’s

⁷ Lessana’s book remains published only in French. I have supplemented Edwards and Readers analysis with an automatically translated copy of extracts from it. There were two other books also published in 2000 on the case, *L’Affaire Papin* by Sophie Darblade-Mimounis and *L’Umbre double* by Gerard Gourmel.

paranoia she does not appear to attempt to fuse the psychoanalytical and the political like Le Guillant. In her book, she prints Christine's deposition speech in court, which describes at length and in detail her employment in the Danzard household and the murder itself (Lessana). She describes her good treatment there. This is very much at odds with the way she is often represented. Many representations focus on the silence of the sisters and their inability to speak of or to define their relationship. Christine's ensuing madness after the murders is frequently noted, yet here after the murder, her statement is lucid, intelligent and thoughtful. She expresses regret for the crime, wishing on reflection that she had not carried it out and states that it was not premeditated (Lessana).

I will now look at the studies that were inspired to approach the case politically. The first to show interest were the surrealists who I mentioned earlier. The surrealist movement was at its height in France during the late twenties and the early thirties, the time of the murder. It was started by Andre Breton and joined by writers and artists such as Salvador Dali and Antonin Artaud. It attacked bourgeois ideals and moralities and its institutions of family and religion, seeing them as being responsible for political and social injustice.

Surrealism was strongly influenced by Marx's ideology, forming close links with the Communist Party, and also by Freud who they saw as challenging bourgeois notions of 'sanity' and 'normality'. The surrealists became the first to attempt to integrate political objectives with psychoanalytic theory. They looked to the unconscious and dream-like states for what could be discovered through the examination of alternative consciousness in order to explore the desires and fears that were negated by the existing society and the rational thinking which dominated it.

Two of those closely involved in the movement were Benjamin Peret and Paul

Eluard. In 1933, Peret was chief editor of *Le Surrealisme au service de la Revolution*, a journal which published the works of the surrealists. Eluard was a poet who associated himself with the movement although later left to join the French Communist Party. Together, in the fifth edition of the journal in May 1933, three months after the murders, they wrote a short article about the sisters and published the infamous before and after photos [see appendix A].

Their interpretation of the murders explains it as a deserved and inevitable reaction by the sisters to an oppressive bourgeois society:

The Papin sisters were brought up in a convent in Le Mans. Then their mother placed them in a bourgeois home. For six years they bore observations, demands, insults, with the most perfect submissiveness. Fear, weariness, humiliations, were slowly begetting hatred inside them: hatred, the very sweet alcohol that secretly consoles, for it promises to add physical strength to violence one day. When the day came, Lea and Christine Papin repaid evil in its own coin. They literally massacred their mistresses, plucking out their eyes, crushing their heads. Then they carefully washed themselves and, freed, indifferent, went to bed. Lightning had fallen, the wood was burnt, the sun definitely put out. They had come fully armed out of one of Maldoror's songs... (Ward-Jouve 12-13).

Peret and Eluard interpret the case in order to direct their criticism at the institutions they fight against in their own work. The murder represents for them a brutal attack against the church and the class system. Edwards and Reader point out that *The Maldoror* is a famous surrealist text by Lautreamont, the hero of which is satanic (Edwards and Reader 55). The sisters are aligned with this surrealist hero, celebrated for having committed an act of evil in order to repay evil "in its own coin" (55). Their language is heavy with irony directed at the church and puritan society.

And yet the Freudian impetus is also apparent. They describe the way the maids bore their oppression with "perfect submissiveness" in a way that suggests the murder, although read politically, was manifested by an impulsive outburst of repressed instincts. In their reading, society is 'bad' or, as they state, 'evil' in having

created the madness in the maids. It is notable that the chosen representatives of the institutions they criticise in this article are exclusively women, which, as the feminist psychoanalysts revealed, are particularly associated with madness. Eluard and Peret blame first the convent which interred the sisters as nuns, then their mother who exploited them as maids, and then their mistresses who enslaved them. Was this array of female persecutors a conscious choice for Peret and Eluard? Were they interested in the gendered nature of the murder?

Nicole Ward-Jouve, much later in 1993, criticises Peret and Eluard from a Feminist perspective as ignoring the real sisters and interpreting the case in order to find heroes for their own cause. She accuses them of turning the Papin sisters into male heroes such as themselves. She reads significance into their use of Maldoror as well as (like the psychoanalysts) the reproduced before and after photos; she suggests Christine looks decidedly masculine and awfully like Andre Breton the founder of surrealism. She asks if it means that “through the act of killing, women become men – that a nobler, a revolutionary, male and poetic self is thus born?” (Ward-Jouve 14). She adds, “male writers who are revolutionary in their lifestyle, discourses, poetic and fictional voices, are so conservative in their reading and writing of gender” (15).

In their book on the Papin sisters, Edwards and Reader likewise point to Peret and Eluard’s “fear of the power of women and of female sexuality in particular” (Edwards and Reader 54). They also take interest in the fact that directly below the article there is a picture of a nun winking and hitching her skirt, revealing high heels, garter and petticoat [see appendix F]. It is an image clearly meant to offend the church. Edwards and Reader acknowledge its reproduction of the virgin/whore dichotomy thereby reinforcing conventional ideas of femininity (54). Yet they see that it can also be read that lurking underneath the surface of these women, and perhaps all

women, is a dangerous and subversive sexuality. Ultimately, they see Peret and Eluard as revealing “ambiguous feelings on the part of surrealists towards women” (54). It seems that at this point in the history of representations of the case, any political interpretation is limited to the realm of class and Marxist analysis. Gender is not an issue. Edwards and Reader point out that Peret and Eluard make no comment about the surmised homosexuality between the sisters, which seems central to the abject nature of the crime and its fascination. Perhaps the abject nature of the crime, the sisters surmised homosexuality, and their lives as women, conflicts with a view of them as revolutionaries.

For Janet Flanner however, in her account of the case several months later in 1933, gender is very significant. Her analysis of the gendered nature of the crime makes it a politically motivated one. An American journalist living in Paris, she wrote an article in *Vanity Fair* entitled “Murder in Le Mans”. It retells for an American readership, the discovery of the bodies and of the trial that followed. It is written in a lyrical, playful, witty realistic style embellished with fiction and full of sarcasm and sardonic irony. This tone gives her account a detachment, infusing it with lightness, a contrast to most accounts in the media which dealt to it with a sombre gravity⁸. At the beginning, her third person narrative describes Monsieur Lancelin entering the house with the police and discovering the bodies. It is this voyeuristic desire to discover the gruesome nature of the crime, which Flanner at the same time utilises and denies her reader.

She starts by saying that what happened “was not a murder but a revolution”, (Flanner) possibly taking up the position of the surrealists. She then quickly undercuts this with: “It was only a minor revolution – minor enough to be fought in a front hall

⁸ Edwards and Reader also mention reports written on the trial in the press by the Tharaud Brothers who, like Flanner, also displayed an unusual “absence of a condemnatory tone” towards the sisters (Edwards and Reader 25).

by four females, two on a side” (Flanner). She confronts straightaway the maids’ gender, which is ignored by Eluard and Peret, and with a satirical irony, acknowledges what prevents them from being ‘revolutionaries’ in a surrealist understanding of the term – their female gender. Like Peret and Eluard, she writes with a degree of poetic licence in describing the crime itself yet, unlike them, doesn’t inflate the horrific nature of it instead using the distance and lightness she creates to ridicule and criticise the authorities that dealt with it especially in relation to gender. She is cynical if not scathing about the judicial system, the psychiatrists, and the jury, pointing out the injustice that there were “twelve good men” appointed to judge two women. Of the prosecution she says they:

...summoned three local insane-asylum experts who had seen the girls twice for a half-hour and swore on the stand that the prisonnières were ‘of unstained heredity’ – i.e., their father having been a dipsomaniac who violated their elder sister, since become a nun; their mother having been an hysteric ‘crazy for money’; a cousin having died in a madhouse, an uncle having hanged himself ‘because his life was without joy.’ In other words, heredity O.K., legal responsibility one hundred per cent (Flanner).

She ridicules these “experts” and rubbishes the bourgeois notion of bloodlines as an explanation for criminal deviance. Unlike the surrealists who ignored the supposed homosexual aspect to the relationship, she reveals the prurient and uneasy way it was dealt with in the trial: “Logre’s illuminating and delicate allusion to the girls as a ‘psychological couple’” (Flanner) and the insane-asylum chief’s “broad-reference to Sappho. Of paramount interest to twelve good men and true, the girls’ incest was really one of the slighter details of their dubious domesticity” (Flanner).

Flanner is not interested in explaining the crime or passing judgement on it. She seems most interested in the issue of gender and the conservative and prurient attitudes surrounding the sisters’ and their trial. In this way, her analysis is politically motivated and she does not concern herself with the psychological. However, Lacan

was to publish his psychological study a few months after Flanner's account in December of that year, so like Peret and Eluard, a close psychoanalytic interpretation was not yet available for her to consider. She herself had abandoned a more conventional role for a woman and moved to Paris after university to work in journalism amongst the intellectual and artistic scene. She was known to be bi-sexual and wrote under the pseudonym "Genet". Her interpretation seems infused with her own experience and position as a woman in a man's world. Yet while she doesn't judge the sisters, neither does she advocate a case for them or show any sympathy. Her account is a detached musing, a satirical article for an American readership, which entertains and titillates while at the same time delicately unearthing deep travesties in the justice system. In Edwards and Reader's estimation, there is a tone of the realist novel in her writing which "more than any other contemporary chronicler of the case...brings Christine and Lea alive as human beings" (Edwards and Reader 28). They note that she also hints at the mirroring that is so "fundamental to the crime" (28). It is interesting to note that unlike the continued psychoanalytic case studies, which continued up until 2000 with that of Lessana, the political case studies have remained almost entirely within 1933 - the year of the murder itself. It appears that these politically motivated case studies, as evident from the direction hinted at in Peret, Eluard and Flanner's writing style, found almost immediate explanation and expression in artistic forms.

Some literary works embrace the possibilities inherent in fiction that Flanner and the surrealists first began to explore. Jean-Paul Sartre was interested in using the Papin case to explore his politics of existentialism, when he made reference to it in a *Erostratus*, short story he wrote in 1939. His existential protagonist and determined criminal stares into the mirror and contemplates the sisters in an image of himself. In

1963, Simone de Beauvoir wrote briefly in her autobiography *L'Force de l'age*, about her and Sartre's reaction to the case at the time, strongly scathing of the "respectable" bourgeois society that had created the sisters as "monsters" (de Beauvoir 108-9). Both Sartre and de Beauvoir use the case to support and discuss their own politics and criticise society. Conversely, the two novels based entirely on the case, fully utilize the explicit, violent and erotic details of the case as imagined by the media and some psychoanalytic interpretations. They appear motivated to exploit these aspects of the crime by adapting the case to popular literary genres. The first in 1966 was *L'Affaire Papin* by Paulette Houdyer, a realist romantic thriller which seems influenced by Lacan's theory in its description of the relationship between the maids: "the double we look for from the moment we are born, the one who shares and understands, whose presence brings the beauties of the world alive and turns life into a song" (Edwards and Reader 86). This novel was followed by another more recently in 1994, *Les Soeurs Papin*, by Robert le Texier. He uses the form of an American detective novel (87).

The literary interpretations along with the media coverage of the event, reached a public audience and enabled them access to the crime in a way that the case studies did not. But it is the representations of the case in theatre and film that seem to have most excited public fascination. One reason for this is their function as accessible forms of entertainment. Theatre, like literature, can also provide an outlet for the re-creation of an artist's imaginings of the crime. In addition, its form as a public spectacle, allows an audience to indulge in a collective imagining. The public scandal that the cases provoked can be shared publicly in a theatre as they were in court during the trial - theatre offers an opportunity for an audience to be present, at a live re-creation of the murder, a substitute for the real event. This mimetic quality and

the organic relationship between audience and spectator are unique to the theatrical medium.

The case, with its prurient attractions, lends itself to be easily adapted into film and filmic genres such as the horror film. Psychoanalytic film scholars relate films to the experience of dreaming where we sit in the dark, projecting our fantasies and being able to “work through anxieties that normal consciousness rejects” (Murnau 75). The surrealists used film to explore their theories of the unconscious and film seems an ideal form for the artist to re-create his or her own fantasies of the Papin sisters and share with an audience the inner lives of the sisters as they are imagined by them, shut up together in their dark little attic. De Beauvoir talks of her and Sartre’s fantasies of the sisters in her account: “we mused on the caresses, and the hatred, that their lonely attic concealed” (de Beauvoir 109). The reproductions of such fantasies in film become mirrors of the fantasies of the artist/film-maker who projects them.

I will explore these qualities that theatre and film have to enable a public to create or indulge in their fantasies about the murder and which enable the representations of it to remain in the public consciousness and imagination - sometimes even standing in for the event itself. As these imaginings can appear in theatre in film as historical records of the case, the way the case studies emerge in the artistic forms becomes particularly significant. I will start with the theatrical representations followed with those in film, examining them separately because of the different qualities that each form has to illustrate and interpret the case for an audience.

The Maids (1947) by Jean Genet

Jean Genet wrote *The Maids* in 1947, fourteen years after the Papin case

occurred. It was the first theatrical representation inspired by the case and the first play Genet had written, previously writing only novels. It is in this live form of theatre, as opposed to a form of literature, in which Genet wishes to resurrect the sisters. He describes the reader of a novel “especially my novels, is an invisible reader who sometimes even hides himself” whereas in his theatre “in order to see my works there’s no other solution than to allow themselves to be seen” (White 348). He describes how this concept completely changed his attitude towards writing. Although clearly based on the case, the play makes no direct reference to this original event. Many of the significant details of the case are changed. Christine and Lea become Claire and Solange. Madame exists, although Mlle Lancelin is not represented. The play revolves around these three women. Instead of murdering Madame with pewter pitches and knives from the kitchen, Claire and Solange plot throughout the play to murder her by poisoning her tea. When she fails to drink it, Claire stands in for Madame and drinks it herself in a suicide that is also a symbolic murder.

Genet is clearly not interested in recreating the specific details of the event for an audience. He takes two essentials from the case - the nature of the relationship between two maids and their mistress, and their desire to murder their Madame. That being said, it is speculative that this desire existed for the Papin sisters before the event and certainly Christine denied it. Genet initially denied any connection to the Papin case. What might have been his motivation for this? The perception of the sisters is that they were perverted criminals. Genet himself was regarded as a homosexual, thief and writer of blasphemous literature. The connection could easily be made that he was interested in the case because he identified with Christine and Lea’s similar position as marginal homosexual outsiders. However, his insistence on distancing himself from the case suggests he had other interests in it.

Theatre is often described as serving as a mirror, which is held up to society. The standard conventional form of twentieth century theatre was to imitate life on stage. The audience would come to the theatre to see imitations of themselves, their own lives or possible lives; to experience vicariously what they feared or desired, in the form usually, of tragedy or comedy. The conventions of naturalism function to place the audience in a position to peer through the fourth wall and be the voyeuristic spectators to this imitation of 'real life'. Most accounts of the Papin case in the media catered for the desire to discover or understand the gruesome and abject details of the Papin case in the way naturalistic theatre might also attempt. Flanner's article played with this desire that the public has, to have vicarious access to the experience of the murder. However, in changing significant details of the case and not seeking to imitate it, Genet reveals that his interest in it and in the function of theatre, lies elsewhere: "Without being able to say exactly what it is, I know what I deny it to be – the portrayal of daily gestures seen from the outside" ("How to Perform the Maids"). He is uninterested in reproducing the real life story of the Papin sisters themselves, in a naturalistic mode.

In a foreword to his 1954 edition of *The Maids*, Genet talks not of the play specifically but of this tendency towards naturalism in modern theatre generally: "I dislike it" ("A Note On Theatre" 37). He describes the "dismal bleakness of the theatre that reflects the visible world too exactly" (38), clearly uninterested in its ability to mimic real life on stage: "even the finest Western plays have something shoddy about them, an air of masquerade and not of ceremony. The spectacle that unfolds on the stage is always puerile" (38). If this is what he loathes about the existing theatre then what he desires it to be must be its opposite - something honest and carefully made, a ceremony without masks, a child's game played not childishly

but with the gravity that usually only children have when they play. He desires to bring “theatre into the theatre” (38). And if theatre is an imitation of life he reveals life itself to be in many ways equally as constructed and theatrical, a series of games based on fantasies and role-plays. He does this by adopting the form of ritual theatre.

Because Genet chooses to represent the Papin case in the form of a ritual, he is not interested in illustrating either a psychoanalytic or political interpretation of it. He refuses admission to any political motivation behind his play. In “Comment Jouer Les Bonnes” he says: “this is not a plea concerning the lot of domestic servants. I suppose that there is a trade union for domestic servants – that does not concern me” (“How to Perform *The Maids*”). In this same foreword he anticipates the deduction most have made of his maids, that they are mad, imitating the question as if it had already been asked of him: “Do these ladies – the maids and Madame – talk and act stupid?” (“How to Perform *The Maids*”). The French term he uses here “deconner” means to “talk crap” or to “talk out of one’s arse” but often connotes the idea of a mild sort of craziness or playing at being insane. He answers his own question with, “It’s like me in front of the mirror when I shave each morning, or at night when I am bored, or in a wood when I think I’m alone” (“How to Perform *The Maids*”). Here he dismisses with equal veracity, a psychoanalytic interpretation, at the very same time as he connotes Lacan’s diagnosis of paranoid delirium and its connection to the mirror phase. This renders it an extremely ambiguous statement. He doesn’t deny his maids’ madness, but instead goes to the heart of the question and asks what madness really is. He questions the questioner - forcing them to face their own question as Genet himself faces his image in the mirror when shaving.

There are fascinating parallels here to Sartre’s *Erostrate*, when Hilbert looks at himself in the mirror and contemplates the Papin sisters in his own image. Does Genet

mean the maids are an image of himself? He says: “I go to the theatre in order to see myself on stage...in a form in which I could not - or would not dare - see myself or dream of myself, and yet as I know myself to be” (“How to Perform *The Maids*”). Many interpreters of his play look at his maids as direct projections of Genet’s own fantasies. His description resonates with Irigaray’s discussion of the concept of the ‘divine woman’, which although for females, Genet perhaps identifies with the feminine in his writing more than most, as Cixous points out. Genet’s first novel *Our Lady of Flowers*, was written from his prison cell. His characters erotic and criminal lives were dreamed up in Genet’s imagination from his own isolation and incarceration. Is it possible that the maids were also manifestations of Genet’s own unconscious, an attic substituting for a prison cell? His statement can also be read more ambiguously. He speaks of himself in the way that he might wish every spectator to his play to see themselves in it: “whereby they can show me to myself, and to show me naked, in solitude and the joy of solitude” (“How to Perform *The Maids*”).

Genet’s ritual presentation of the Papin case is in any case removed from its associations with this original event and uninterested in representing or providing an explanation for it. It means that his play falls outside of my analysis of the way the psychoanalytic and political interpretations of the case appear in the theatrical and filmic reproductions of it. As a blasphemic ceremony, while *The Maids* is not motivated by a psychoanalytic or political interpretation of the Papin Case, some have read it as being so.

Some interpreters of Genet’s play interpret its ritual elements through existing conventional forms of theatre as imitations of the real-life murder. Those who interpret *The Maids* psychoanalytically, look to understand the motivations and the

unconscious behind Claire and Solange's behaviour in their relationship with each other, perhaps in order to understand the perceived pathological and deviant relationship between Christine and Lea. Those who read the play politically see Claire and Solange (and in extension perhaps Christine and Lea) as victims of or liberators from, the oppression symbolised by Madame. Some interpretations view Genet's representation of the Papin sisters as a case study of himself.

Genet's exploration of the relationships between the women and his use of role-playing and substitution, can be read as supporting Lacan's psychoanalytical diagnosis of paranoid delirium. Throughout the play he explores the relationship between Claire and Solange as they take turns at role-playing the character of Madame and each other as a way of expressing their desire for and hatred towards Madame "as a violent, sadistic tyrant... a distorted vision which may be attributed to paranoia" (Savona 60). Claire role-plays Madame in order to drink the poisoned tea that Solange who is role-playing Claire gives her. They do this so they can carry out the murder of Madame they have fantasised about throughout the play. Therefore the maids gaze at images or fantasies of themselves in each other as if in a mirror, a potential expression of Lacan's mirror-phase – when Solange role-plays her, Claire is looking therefore at herself. She says at one point: "I'm sick of seeing my image thrown back at me by a mirror, like a bad smell" (*The Maids* 21). Likewise Solange sees a projection of her own image of herself in Claire's attitude towards her when she incarnates Madame and incites Solange to look at herself closely: "You *are* hideous. Lean forward and look at yourself in my shoes" (8). Genet especially emphasizes this mirroring quality in the relationship between the maids. In each other they see themselves. The dialogue between the maids can be read as constantly reinforcing this notion.

The world of fantasy and reality are merged in the final act of murder, which could also be seen to support Lacan's diagnosis. It is possible to identify Claire and Solange's murder of Madame as a symbolic suicide, the same way Lacan interpreted Christine and Lea's murder of their own mistresses as a killing of their selves in the other. What the audience sees mirrored therefore could be seen as an image of madness - a world of delusion continually closing and turning in on itself. The audience in this reading is placed on the outside of this world in a position of sanity and objective reality. The play is all about fantasy, and fantasy in a psychoanalytical interpretation, when imposing on reality, becomes pathological delusion. Having a symbolic murder, which is in fact, a real suicide, immediately blurs the distinctions within the play between life and art, between what is real and what is fake, and the merging of the two can be interpreted as delusional.

Homosexuality was an important part of Lacan's diagnosis of paranoid delirium. Genet was himself a homosexual and in his novel *Our Lady of Flowers* stated that if he ever cast women in a play he would have them played by young males. Sartre interpreted this to mean Genet intended his maids to be played that way. It is assumed here by Sartre that Genet's interest in the relationship between the three women is in fact a disguise for male homosexuality. Sartre states, that "We know that neither women nor the psychology of women interests him" (*Saint Genet* 614). Jeannette Savona also notes, how Claire and Solange's changing of roles is a "common homosexual practice" (Savona 60). As a homosexual, a petty criminal, and abandoned son who spent a great part of his life in reformatories and prisons, Genet has lived most of his life on the outside of what is considered to be normal society. He identified himself as an outcast of this society. If everything that is marginal and abject is considered deviant and abnormal then Genet is easily linked with insanity, as

such writers as Michel Foucault have discussed. Foucault discusses madness and its origins in the classical age as being one of the consequences of passion, of which delirium forms an integral part (Foucault 84, 93). This connection between madness and passion must surely have been central to the fascination with the Papin case and its many interpretations. The nature of the relationship between Claire and Solange is often described in terms of sado-masochism and incest, both suggesting passion of a sexual nature. If a psychoanalytical interpretation is committed to, Genet's play becomes a portrayal of two homosexual young maids who get caught up in their 'role-playing' of ritualistic sexual fantasies about their Madame, seeking solace in a world of delusion and illusion and ultimately, killing the part of her they see reflected in each other, in a paroxysm of madness.

The studies of *The Maids* that support such a psychoanalytic approach are the ones which view Claire and Solange as naturalistic characters, attempting to unravel their psyches as if they were 'real' people as opposed to theatrical constructs. Sartre also shared Genet's interest in the Papin case. As I mentioned earlier, Sartre made reference to the sisters in his short story *Erostratus*, in 1939. Sartre's hero ponders the 'before' and 'after' images of the Papin sisters as he stares into the mirror at an image of himself.

Sartre's use of the case clearly references Lacan's study of the mirror phase in relation to the Papin sisters, when for example, Hilbert contemplates his own crime in the mirror: "a crime entirely conceived and organized by myself...a crime, cutting the life of him who commits it in two" ("*Erostratus*" 50). When contemplating the Papin sisters in an image of himself, Hilbert really seems to indulge in the abject nature of the crime literally embodied in the faces of Christine and Lea, as he imagines and compares the photos. The crime is measured by the degree of abjection

in the ‘after’ photograph: “horrible wrinkles of fear and hatred, folds, holes in the flesh” (50).

Here Sartre reveals a conflict between his Marxist ideals, and his exploration of the psychology of Hilbert and in extension the Papin sisters. The two possibilities for his protagonist are espoused by Edwards and Reader: “either Hilbert is an existentialist anti-hero, or he is a deluded character prey to acute paranoia and angst of a psychological rather than existential nature” (Edwards and Reader 57). Who does Hilbert see in the mirror and who do we? Edwards and Reader point out that Sartre’s Hilbert has often been compared to Genet as a kind of homosexual outsider and criminal. It is interesting that the Papin case inspired them both to use it in such different ways. Reality and fantasy have merged within Sartre’s use of the case, anticipating the themes of Genet’s play.

In 1952 Sartre based an epic critical work on Genet with *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* and devoted a substantial appendix in the book to *The Maids*, which was also used as a foreword to some editions of the play. As an outcast of bourgeois society Genet is, like Sartre, opposed to it. Sartre describes Genet as being abandoned by his mother; exploited by foster families; homosexual; and so rejected from society that crime was his only way of becoming like, and having the material possessions of, others. The prisons and institutions he was interred in, in some ways represented his only family. Yet he simultaneously desired to escape the confines of these institutions. As well as having a political interest in Genet, by positioning him as “saint” and “martyr”, Sartre speaks of him in religious terms and so I will explore his work further in my discussion of the ritual interpretations of *The Maids*.

From a position of gender Nicole Ward-Jouve argues that Sartre’s interpretation “makes the sisters into sufferers and recipients, not the actors, of the

deeds” (Ward-Jouve 16). She groups Sartre and the surrealists together with Lacan and Dupre – all males - in accusing them of turning the Papin sisters’ deed into “an empty vessel” for their own ideas (16). This may be true but it is also one of the fascinations with the Papin case and the aspect of it Genet makes absolute use of.

Simone de Beauvoir struggled with a conflict between a psychoanalytic and political reading in her own interpretation of the murder. She writes retrospectively in 1963 about her and Sartre’s desire at the time of the murders to view it as an act of liberation and justice on the part of the maids and describes how “distinctly shaken” she was when it became clear that “the elder sister was, beyond any doubt, suffering from acute paranoia” (de Beauvoir 109). Retrospectively for de Beauvoir “Christine’s malady tarnished her crime somewhat” (109). A diagnosis of paranoia meant that these women were not the Marxist heroes she desired them to be. She “conceded the evidence” that the sisters “had, rather, struck more or less blindly, in a state of terror and confusion” (109).

What is clear is that the creator of the fiction, in any artistic medium, is linked inextricably to its interpretation and that the sisters have become in a Lacanian sense, mirrors into which the artists see or contemplate themselves. Genet’s comment that Claire and Solange are as “mad” as himself when he stares in the mirror shaving, can be equally asked here - are Christine and Lea mad? The answer being of course, ‘mad’ like Hilbert or like Genet or like Sartre or like us, as we look at our image in the mirror every morning.

Edwards and Reader read *The Maids* as a mirror image of the Papin affair. They interpret it in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms, attempting to understand Genet’s unconscious in order to understand his own fascination with the Papin case. Here they make a distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘fake’. For example, after the first

sequence when Claire has been role-playing Madame and Solange has been role-playing Claire, the alarm clock rings. This suggests a break in the ‘fantasy’ and a return to the ‘real’ world, as if they were carried away by delusion and then were abruptly brought back to reality. Edwards and Reader see that in this “more naturalistic section” Genet goes away from the case (Edwards and Reader 70). They believe his interest lies in the exploration of mirrors and mirror-images which brings his interpretation closer to the essential nature of the case in Lacanian terms. They draw attention to the fact that at the beginning of the play Claire has her back to the mirror “as though refusing not just her own reflection...but the whole of that mirror-phase which had proved so complex and tormented for the Papin sisters” (72).

Kristin Ross provides a reading of *The Maids* that reveals an attempt to merge a psychoanalytical interpretation with a political one. In her 1997 article “Schoolteachers, Maids, and Other Paranoid Histories” she examines Genet’s screenplay *Mademoiselle* and *The Maids* to argue that Lacan and Genet were mutually interested in paranoia in women as a result of the oppressive social roles of schoolteacher and maid, both of which appear in Genet’s work. Ross positions Genet’s interest in the Papin sisters politically and also puts Lacan’s interpretation of them into a historical and political context. She says that “Paranoia is a disease of social position” and that Lacan and Genet both “historicize paranoia” (Ross 24). This echoes Le Guillant’s psychoanalytical case study, which also attempted this. Ross states that Lacan “shared Genet’s interest in the dramatic social situation of those middle-brow social types, the maid and the provincial school-teacher” (18) and was interested in women “whose disease revealed a preoccupation with social position or status” (18). According to Ross, Lacan’s interest in the social context of paranoia was in part to “bridge the gap” between his own medical study and the work of his

surrealist companions (19).

By interpreting Genet's play as having a political agenda, Ross places his representation of the maids' paranoia in a historical and political context. In response to Sartre's comment that Genet apparently insisted the maids be played by males: "What if it is the confluence of gender and occupation in these particular instances that enables Genet to identify with the role?" (14). She refers to studies of maids, to their particular and exploitative employment conditions, and to the subsequent relationships between the women: "an unmediated relation between mistress and maid, an entirely closed system of the type that appealed so much to Genet and Lacan" (26). She quotes Politzer, who studied the "psycho-social conditions of maids" and provided a model for both Lacan and Le Guillant, as saying "Human life constitutes a *drama*" (23). She sees that this drama "in Politzer's sense of the term, became, for a moment at least, Genet's own" (27). She makes a direct connection between Genet's own life and the dramatic lives of Claire and Solange.

A politicising of paranoia as we have seen from Ross' study, introduces the more political interpretations of *The Maids*. In a political reading Claire and Solange and their Madame form a microcosm which Genet uses to examine the power relationships inherent in the class system. Claire and Solange's use of role-playing in order to achieve a symbolic murder can be interpreted as either a conscious and fully realized act of two servants against their bourgeois master (in this case mistress) that could be read politically as an attempted act of liberation, or, as two maids who are oppressed victims of bourgeois society.

Genet was involved in politics outside of the theatre and worked closely with the Black Panthers and the Palestinian Liberation Authority. He became known for his political involvement as well as his writing, and his history of criminal activity

and life in institutions often placed him in a position to witness the oppression of the state and to associate himself with those also living on the margins of society, such as the Papin sisters were considered to be.

The references to class conflict within the play are not subtle. Solange says: “I’ve been a servant. Well and good. I’ve made the gestures a servant must make. I’ve smiled at Madame. I’ve bent down to peel vegetables, to listen at doors, to glue my eye to keyholes! But now I stand upright. And firm. I’m the strangler. Mademoiselle Solange, the one who strangled her sister!” (*The Maids* 38). Here Madame and Claire become merged in Solange’s imagination. The murder will be a symbolic one where Claire takes the place of Madame. It can be read as “a single, concerted alliance against oppression” (Savona 57). Savona who reads the play politically shows how the play “demonstrates the overwhelming strength of clichés and taboos over the dreams and mythologies of the oppressed who are trying to change their lot” (53)⁹.

This emphasis on the murder of Madame in a symbolic suicide leading to Claire and Solange’s symbolic freedom contains nothing of the Lacanian notion that the murder was a death of the self. As a political act however, the suicide as a substitute for murder, seems contrary to an attack directed towards the system. If a political interpretation was in fact Genet’s primary motivation, why would he not have them literally kill Madame? His choice of a symbolic murder makes it a less effective political act in these terms. The maids can be seen as victims of oppression, or mad monsters created by an even madder society, yet that hardly positions them as revolutionaries. Their act of ‘revolt’ has no liberating quality in these terms. The fact that Claire and Solange fail to kill Madame can be seen, as Nicole Ward-Jouve points out, to prove that “in the real world maids do not kill their mistresses, and when the

⁹ Further analysis of Savona’s political interpretation can be found in her book *Jean Genet*, 1983.

odd one does, it changes nothing to the system of mistress-ship or mastership” (Ward-Jouve 27). Also, as with the Papin case itself, the gender of Madame is problematic for a political reading as the society the maids attack is a patriarchal one. Only if Sartre’s belief that Genet intended all the characters to be played by males were true, would this reading still be possible.

The play has been performed with a political focus. Jeannette Savona describes a production by The Living Theatre in 1965 where the *mise en scene* “became a search for both social and personal freedom in a capitalistic society dominated by oppressive values” (Savona 42). Savona explores the play’s politics: “*The Maids* reflects important social patterns which greatly contribute to its total significance and impact, despite its anti-realistic features and despite Genet’s own anti-political declarations” (48). For Savona there is conflict between a conventional understanding of what is political and the ritual Genet provides. His “anti-political declarations” are clear, from his comment in “Comment Jouer Les Bonnes” about his disinterest in the plight of domestics, to a later comment: “Politics, history, classic psychological demonstrations, evening entertainment itself will have to give way to something more, I don’t know how to say it, but maybe more sparkling. All that shit, all that manure will be eliminated” (*Fragments of the Artwork* 106)¹⁰.

Genet’s choice of a ritual form is inextricably tied to its meaning. Savona recognises how Claire and Solanges’ quest for freedom read naturalistically would not have been more of a success politically had they actually murdered Madame. This is because their desire to murder is “neither founded on a constructive, realistic vision of the world nor supported by a revolutionary ideology” (Savona 52). In ignoring the efficacy of the text as a ritual experience, its meanings, especially that of the

¹⁰ Finburgh et al also draw attention to the political and theatrical implications of this comment.

murder/suicide, are limited. It is important to make clear here that while Genet had no psychoanalytical or political agenda for his use of the maids, his ritual use of the Papin Case can reveal psychological and political truths about the world. Ritual can be interpreted in psychoanalytical and political ways, and by elevating these women to the realm of sainthood and exploring the erotic and liberating possibilities of ritual, his representation is not limited to conventional theatrical forms of psychological and political interpretation. It is the ritual interpretations of Genet's *The Maids*, which I will discuss now.

Genet describes his theatre as “communion”, as opposed to naturalistic theatre, which he dismisses as “diversion” and “exhibitionism”. Theatre in Genet's terms should be like a Catholic Mass: “the loftiest modern drama has been expressed daily for two thousand years in the sacrifice of the Mass” (“A Note on Theatre” 39). The Catholic Mass is a ritual ceremony, which allows its participants to come into contact with God. A process called transubstantiation or consecration takes place during the rituals where bread and wine are literally thought to transform into Christ's body. The act of communion is when the congregation in turn receive and consume this body of Christ thus becoming imbued with Holiness and becoming closer to divinity. The ritual is transformative for the participant in this way. It is a ritual which is structured and repeatable and where the participants have carefully assigned roles. The language is elevated, there are costumes in the form of robes and gowns worn by the Priests, symbolic props and an altar. Genet embraces a similar form of ritual in his theatre.

His characters speak in an elevated and heightened language. The altar becomes Madame's dressing table. The sacred props become her perfumes and powders. As opposed to a real Mass, the ritual in Genet's play is contained on the stage and the audience are spectators to it, not participants of it. Victor Turner in his

in-depth study on ritual in performance cites Richard Schechner who defines theatre as coming into existence “when a *separation* occurs between audience and performers” (Turner 112) unlike in ritual, which does not distinguish between the two. While the spectator is not a part of the ritual on the stage, the presentation of *The Maids* can be understood as a “communion” between actor and spectator. In “Comment Jouer ‘Les Bonnes’” Genet twice makes mention of Ancient Greek theatre in seeking to link the performance of *The Maids* with an early form of ritual theatre. This early form of theatre, like the Catholic Mass, was a ritualistic spectacle full of signs and gestures, where the theatre was fully integrated into social and political life as a religious event, where mortals received guidance in communion with the Gods whose will was acted out upon the stage by the actors.

The two maids and their Madame form a trinity. Claire and Solange take turns playing Madame when she is not there. Their role-playing takes the form of what they call “the ceremony”, which Claire and Solange have played over and over in their attic, and where a murder of a symbolic “Madame” by strangulation, is the final part but also the part they never get to. At one point during the play Claire and Solange realize it is going to be discovered that they have denounced Monsieur to the police. They decide to murder the real Madame with poisoned tea before she finds out. But Madame is in a rush to be united with Monsieur, who has just been set free, at the Police station. When she has gone, Claire role-plays Madame and decides to drink it herself, fulfilling the murder symbolically and completing their ceremony. As a parallel to the Electra story, it is not the case that their desire to murder Madame is because of a desire for the father or father figure that Jung placed emphasis on. Neither the Monsieur of the house or any other male is represented on stage and the male object of desire, “Mario”, is ambiguously positioned as either a fantasy “pale

and charming lover” (*The Maids* 35) or a real-life milkman who is said to come in at night and seduce Solange.

If the play takes the structure of a Mass then the murder at the end can be compared to a communion where Claire drinks the tea as if she were Madame drinking communion wine and taking into herself the blood of Christ. Maggie Kilgour describes the communion as a “primal unity, in which man and God are returned to an original identity, ideally not through absolute identification but through the obfuscation of identity and rigid role-playing” (Kilgour 15). Yet in *The Maids* it is poisoned tea. “Madame” (played by Claire) is not becoming united with God, but murdered by “Claire” (played by Solange). Claire herself in this moment has become united with a symbolic Madame. Instead of being read pathologically or as a failed political attempt, within this ritual ceremony, the symbolic murder is much more efficacious – Claire really does die as she embodies Madame. She has made the ultimate sacrifice of her own life in order to free herself and Solange from Madame’s domination over their lives and fantasies. The transubstantiation that takes place in Genet’s version of communion is not between God and Madame but between Claire and Madame. As Bettina Knapp describes: “The one who dies will still live in the one who has absorbed him and will be reborn within him” (Knapp 115).

Claire has become elevated to the order of sainthood, and Solange - as murderer and as an embodiment of the profane Claire - to the world of criminals. For Genet these are deities of equal grandeur. Their profane lives have become inextricably a part of this ritual and theatrical act. Solange describes her own religious ecstasy that accompanies it: “Her two maids are alive: they’ve just risen up, free, from Madame’s icy form” (*The Maids* 42). This vision of his maids as they may be compared to the Papin sisters is noted by White as accounting for the “highly divided

reaction to the play, since the public likes to feel superior to its criminals and prefers to show them pity rather than respect” (White 351). There is also a degree of irony in his use of Christian ritual to represent the sisters considering the judges commendation of Christine and Lea at the trial – that they could not have been badly influenced by immoral ideas as only religious books were found in their room (Edwards and Reader 106). Genet indirectly parodies this idea also in “Comment Jouer ‘Les Bonnes’” when he says of Claire and Solange: “they could teach piety in a Christian institution” (“How to Perform *The Maids*”).

Sartre’s 1952 study *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, was the first to discuss Genet and his work in terms of ritual. He describes *The Maids* as a Black Mass. A Black Mass is a parody of the Catholic Mass. Instead of an adoration of the Host there is a profanation. Genet introduces murder as a profanation of the most devout act of communion. The culmination of the traditional Black Mass is an orgy. Kilgour describes the sexual connotations of communion as man “literally takes God, in the form of the Host, into himself” (Kilgour 15). Genet is interested in murder not only as profanation of a sacred ritual but as a most intimate and consummate act, a giving up of life that is at the same time the most lived moment, an transcendence or transformation, a kind of ecstasy. Irigaray’s concept of the divine is appropriate here as it is incarnated in their desire for, and to be, Madame.

If the play is read within the context of ritual there is no point where Claire and Solange clearly return to their ‘real’ selves after a break in the ceremony. ‘Real life’ and ‘fantasy’ are indistinguishable, because as signs, Claire and Solange have no psychology. As characters they are effigies, metaphors and constructions; their ‘real’ life is filled with fantasy and their ‘fantasies’ are filled with real life. Unlike Lacan’s use of the mirror-phase, illustrating, hinting at or diagnosing a psychological sickness,

Genet, creating the play as ritual, explores the freedom and possibility inherent in a mirroring between Madame, Claire and Solange. For Lacan, Christine and Lea's murder was an inward confinement, a shattering of the narcissistic mirror, a death of the bond between them. Genet however, sees the bond between them as most realized in this most glorified and transcendental moment; when Lacan sees them as the most blinded by madness Genet sees them as the most lucid. Irigaray's expression of mothers and daughters being "trapped in a role" - looking at themselves in each other and desiring out of the prison they feel within themselves - can be seen to express the kinds of desires between the maids and perhaps Madame, in Genet's play. Oreste Pucciani notes the mirroring that occurs between actor and spectator: "we come intuitively to understand the reality and truth of pathology, crime, and suicide. After all we are these people, we begin to think" (Pucciani 45). If the Maids are mad then so are we says Genet: "These maids are monsters, sacred or otherwise, like ourselves when we dream of this or that" ("How to Perform *The Maids*"). His maids serve as a mirror for our own fantasies. Because the characters are metaphors and signs, we do not identify with them in the way we would in an imitative naturalistic theatre, and we cannot objectify them in any rational way. They become symbols which we project our selves onto: "Genet deliberately inverts the normal relationship of the world and theatre and by a magic of his own turns the theatre into the world" (Pucciani 44).

A ritual reading casts doubt on the definition of Claire and Solange's (and so in extension Christine and Lea's) relationship as homosexual. As Genet does not draw a line between the real and the fake, neither does he between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The playing of the maids by young boys does not prove a homosexual relationship as central to the play. Everything is ambiguous and fluid. Claire and Solange and Madame are signs, tossing off sexuality and identity as if they were

children playing dress-ups. Nothing can be easily tied down to a psychoanalytic diagnosis.

As I have discussed and disputed, much of Sartre's discussion of *The Maids* stems from his insistence that "Genet's poetic themes are, as we know, profoundly homosexual" (*Saint Genet* 614). But in Genet's exploration of gender as a "heraldic sign, a cipher" (613), it could be just as much a heterosexual desire that he explores in so much as any desire exists and is created and sustained by fantasies and role-playing. In Genet's biography, White sees homosexuality as playing no role in the play unless the sisters are considered to be lesbians (348). It seems strange that Sartre thinks that "the necessities of public performance oblige him to disguise his thought" (614) as a lesbian relationship is surely not any more socially acceptable than a male homosexual one. White sees that Genet's exploration of sexuality takes on the forms of master-servant relationships and revolution; that his interest isn't in the explicitly sexual as so many interpret Genet, but in the way power relations in society are imbued and dependent upon the fulfilment of certain desires.

Foucault describes the advent of psychology as providing a language for madness, that "experience of unreason that has been psychology's meaning, in the modern world, to mask" (Foucault 188). As Sartre says of the effect of Genet's theatre on his actors and in turn his spectators: "He unmask them" (*Saint Genet* 612). Genet unmasks madness on the stage, allowing the spectator to see himself in it, as Genet of course sees it in the mirror while shaving. Foucault recognises the truth that exists in madness: "If illusion can appear as true as perception, perception in its turn can become the visible, unchallengeable truth of illusion. Such is the first step of the cure by theatrical representation" (178). Foucault in his discussion of delirium realizes how "confirmation in theatrical fantasy restores it to a truth" (181), and that "illusion,

turned back on itself, will open to the dazzlement of truth” (179). Genet’s theatre can be seen to achieve this effect.

The main idea Sartre explores in Genet’s ritual text is what he calls a “whirligig of being and appearance, of the imaginary and the real” (611). In explanation of this idea of a whirligig he declares: “Two, [is] exactly the number needed to set up a whirligig” (617). It is here that Sartre briefly mentions that the reader has probably already recognised Claire and Solange as the Papin sisters. His explanation of Genet’s “whirligig” revolves around an idea of mirroring, taken from Lacan perhaps, yet radically transformed; each sister “sees in the other only herself at a distance from herself. Each bears witness to the other of the impossibility of *being* herself” (618). In fact, to be herself and “to be true the actor must *play false*.... An actor plays at being an actor, a maid plays at being a maid; their truth is their lie and their lie is their truth” (620).

Artaud’s theatre of cruelty is often compared with Genet’s theatre. Artaud says similar things as Genet about his desire for the theatre to be rid of the psychology inherent in naturalistic theatre: “Psychology, which works relentlessly to reduce the unknown to the known, to the quotidian and the ordinary, is the cause of the theater’s abasement and its fearful loss of energy.... I think both the theatre and we ourselves have had enough of psychology” (Artaud 77). Genet is said to have compared Artaud when “confined in a mental hospital, to the imprisoned Sade” (White 349). In his novel *The Thief’s Journal*, Genet recalls how complicit the two institutions of prison and mental asylums are in incarcerating the marginal and disruptive figures in society. Upon sentencing for one of his many petty crimes, Genet was sent by the magistrate to a doctor who gave him two options: “The clink or the madhouse?” (201). Genet recounts his shock: ““But, Doctor, there’s nothing in between?” ‘There’s nothing in

between. You're crazy or you're not. If you're not crazy, it's the penitentiary. If you're crazy, it's the madhouse. Got it? Are you crazy or are you not crazy?"(201).

Genet decided he was not crazy.

Artaud demanded the similar "metaphysics of speech, gesture, and expression" (Artaud 90) that Genet insisted upon in the performance of his plays. Artaud's theatre like Genet's, addressed the senses and not primarily the rational mind. Roger Blin who has directed Genet's plays compares these respective ritual theatres concluding that Artaud's 'cruelty' resembles "religious cruelty as it is practised by the Aztec Indians. Genet's cruelty is more classical, closer to the Greek theatre" (White 495). However, Artaud talks of the recreation of crime in theatre in a similar way to Genet: "the image of a crime presented in the requisite theatrical conditions is something infinitely more terrible for the spirit than that same crime when actually committed" (Artaud 85). Genet shares his idea that not simply a theatrical murder, but a symbolic one, is desirable over a real one: "The idea of a murder can be beautiful. Real murder, that's something else.... It's the revolt that was beautiful, not so much the murder itself" ("Interview with Hubert Fichte" 135). Genet admitted in an interview with White, that "he had felt temptations of murder, but that they had been re-directed toward literature" (White 675).

Artaud also spoke of a social mask, which he sought to rip off, similar to the 'unmasking' Genet creates in his theatre. Sartre expands on this idea as he describes the masking and unmasking inherent in Genet's ritual whirligig as having its roots in a political interpretation: "the truth of a domestic is to be a fake domestic and to mask the *man* he is under a guise of servility" and so "their truth is always elsewhere...for the truth of the domestic in solitude is to play at being the master" (*Saint Genet* 619). In front of Madame "they put on their true faces again. But when they are alone, they

play. Claire plays at being Madame and Solange plays at being Claire” (618-19).

Social roles are seen to be interchangeable, unfixed and ephemeral. Sartre’s interpretation of the play reveals the dependence of masters on their servants and vice versa: “Madame is no more true in Claire than in Madame herself” (619).

In an interview with Hubert Fichte in 1975 Genet talks about a student protest he went to in May ’68. He reveals his interest in politics yet shows his much more avid interest in the power of the theatre to transform politics into something ritualistic: “One of the most daring student groups occupied the Odeon theatre. I went twice to the Odeon theatre when it was being occupied, and the first time there was a kind of violence that was downright incantatory. Look: the theatre and the stage are here; the revolutionaries, a crowd of students were here on stage” (“Interview with Hubert Fichte” 131). In Genet’s description of the violence as being “incantatory” he already sees the political action as being transformed once it is placed on a stage, and hints at the idea that it has a violence that only the stage and a ritual form can transmit: “There is one place in the world where theatricality does not hide power, and that’s in the theatre” (132).

If Genet’s ritual theatre is political it certainly isn’t Marxist: “I’m not all that eager for there to be a revolution. If I’m really sincere, I have to say that I don’t particularly want it” (132). It is the revolt that excites Genet, not the result of it: “I am not a man of adherence, but a man of revolt” (132). Sylvie Debevec-Henning suggests that within *The Maids* there is a similar desire to endlessly revolt that could be seen to be politically conservative: “Perhaps the heightened stimulation and tension of unsatisfied desire is even itself the goal of their nightly ritual. Playing with death, in other words, may be more exciting than dying” (“The Ritual Implications of Les Bonnes” 13). Yet this remains politically efficacious if society is seen in a sense as

being continually in revolt, continually changing and reforming. Genet describes ritual as “the recognition of a transcendence, and it’s the repetitive recognition of this transcendence, day after day, week after week, month after month” (“Interview with Hubert Fichte” 137). Certainly, this idea of a perpetual transcendence or revolt in his mythological theatre “does not preclude politics as such” (Finburgh et al 10). But his play is interpreted by some as blasphemous almost without reason. Raymond Federman for example, describes in his essay “Jean Genet: The Theater of Hate” that “The goal of Genet’s theatre is... to awaken in the spectator a common feeling of hate for the Enemy, whatever that may be” (Brooks et al 134).

Artaud describes his theatre’s relationship to politics: “our present social state is iniquitous and should be destroyed. If this is a fact for theatre to be preoccupied with, it is even more a matter for machine guns. Our theatre is not even capable of asking the question in the burning and effective way it must be asked, but even if it should ask this question it would still be far from its purpose, which is for me a higher and more secret one” (Artaud 42). This secret and elevated purpose, as Genet himself describes his own vision of a “secret theatre in the catacombs”, is not divorced from political ramifications: “We are not free.... And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all” (79). This search for freedom and transcendence that Genet also searches for in his theatre, cannot be separated from the society from which it is searched. Genet’s theatre, according to some, successfully “fuses two apparently impossible ideas: the sacred and the political” (Finburgh et al 10).

After Sartre’s 1952 study, the first real analysis of Genet’s work emerged in the 1960’s, within a time of great political and cultural change in the West. Oreste Pucciani wrote an article for Tulane Drama Review in 1963. He compares the play to 16th century French tragedy: “Genet is pure tragedy, but tragedy inverted” (Pucciani

59). This inversion is in Genet's choice of subject: "The only canon of classical tragedy which Genet deliberately violates is that his characters far from being kings and queens, are housemaids" (59). The 'classical tragedy' as Aristotle describes it, existed to reinforce values within existing society, inspiring pity and fear in the audience, which was then purged by a catharsis. White makes a direct parallel between Genet's theatre and that of Racine: "the long elevated speeches, the disciplined passions, the observance of the classical unities of place, time and situation, the conclusion precipitated by a final catastrophe" (White 348). In Genet's inverted tragedy, the values that are reinforced are not of the dominant order but of the underclass. The maids' "foul effluvia" is endowed with nobility; romantic notions are laced with abjection.

Pucciani describes how this 'inversion' allows the spectator "to assume a very different relationship to his plays than the one we consider to be normal" (Pucciani 43). Unlike in naturalistic theatre, "natural reality is of no interest" (43). Pucciani describes this experience where: "A monstrous metamorphosis occurs. Normal reality subsides and we enter into the world of monsters and make-believe. We even come to see their special sort of truth in this world where the world is theatre" (45). He describes how an inversion occurs when "the audience itself is on the stage" (43). By this he means, not that the audience is literally a part of the ritual, or even watching it on the side of the stage as was often the case in the classical French tragedy, but that by mimetic inversion, the stage reflects the fantasies that are played out in the real life 'dramas' of the spectators¹¹.

Pucciani refers to Sartre's description of the play as a "Black Mass. We come for diversion and witness instead some incredible sort of voodoo rite which fascinates

¹¹ Richard Coe discusses this further in his 1968 study *The Vision of Jean Genet*.

us in spite of ourselves” (44). Although he doesn’t mention it by name, he is the first to connote Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty where the audience is “left abandoned in a pit of the imagination where we must once again re-invent knowledge from the new data of our disturbed senses” (44). Yet the remoteness of the ritual as set apart from the spectator, “is essential to our participation. Without it there could be only sentimentality and diversion. There could be no rigor and there would be no communion” (45).

The psychological realm emerges strongly in Pucciani’s interpretation of Genet’s ritual yet it is not easily differentiated from a political reading. He describes aspects of the play as a “ritual of sado-masochism” (49), and sees in the role-playing, evidence of madness: “Schizophrenia is merely this: the possibility for human consciousness to live in two separate worlds” (57). At the same time he considers the monstrous creatures the maids become are “sub-monsters created by greater monsters: official Western bourgeois society” (44). Of the relationship to the Papin sisters Pucciani identifies its sexual nature: “we cannot help but recall that this is a transposed version of the crimes of the famous Papin sisters who murdered their mistress and cut her body into pieces. There is between the women a curious mixture of tenderness and violence, love and hatred. And there are constantly overtones, which are erotic. Their ecstasies have almost a sexual quality” (46). Linda Williams in her book *Hard Core* discusses sadomasochistic scenarios and fantasies which reveal the power structures within society: “the violence is depicted not as actual coercion but as a highly ritualised game in which the participants consent to play predetermined roles of dominance and submission. Discussion thus often ignores the fact that in these scenarios women can just as well be – and often are – the dominators” (Williams 18). She is talking about sado-masochistic scenarios as played

out between men and women but her discussion can be applied to Genet's play as a reflection upon the way he explores fantasies of power and submission in the relationships, beyond the strict limitations imposed by gender roles and a defined sexuality.

One year later in 1964, Herbert Blau, in his Manifesto on "Impossible Theatre", investigates the political relevance of theatre such as that of Genet, Beckett and Artaud, which rejects traditional models of political theatre. He describes this "drama of the underground" as having "restored enormous energy to the theatre by showing us, in a deranged world, that man is his own disease" (Blau 274). Here he speaks of madness politically, from a subjective point of view, where (once again) the world is as mad as one's own reflection in the mirror. His observations and insights reveal an understanding of Genet's ritual through an actual lived experience of it as a director. He describes what is at the heart of Genet's ritual theatre, where a director "has to contend not only with the life of the characters, and the life on which that life is predicated, but also with the real life of the actors playing the characters who are playing their fantasies" (268). Sartre also points out that Genet's actors "play what they are" (*Saint Genet* 615).

Lewis Cetta in his 1974 study of Genet in his book *Profane Play, Ritual, and Jean Genet*, discusses Claire and Solange's relationship as a direct expression of Freud's "feared unconscious, which is otherwise repressed by civilization's reality principle" (Cetta 6). Cetta concludes: "Genet has decided for illusion over reality just as he has chosen evil over good, homosexuality over heterosexuality and death over life" (3). Cetta's reading is influenced by Marcuse's work in trying to establish a relationship between psychoanalysis and Marxism. Cetta uses Marcuse's analysis to explain what he sees as Genet's vision: "It is only in a world where imagination is

given free play to be on a totally equal footing with the reality principle not subordinated to it, that complete freedom is achieved and servanthood is abolished” (40).

Sylvie Debevec-Henning writes in the early eighties about Genet’s use of ritual, stating that no study to date has done justice to his use of it. She is the first to discuss Archaic, not just Christian ritual. In Archaic societies, yearly carnivals were held where the church was profanated and the abject indulged in. These festivals which Mikhail Bakhtin explores in depth, existed to purge society of its transgressive desires in order to re-establish what maintained its existence: “The everyday profane world is turned upside-down as rules are suspended, normal relationships reversed and in general license recommended” (“The Ritual Implications of Les Bonnes” 222). Theatre was an important part of these festivals where often servants and masters often swapped roles (“The Impossible Ritual of Les Bonnes” 81). Debevec-Henning draws attention to one part of the festival where there is a symbolic execution and resurrection of a surrogate King. This symbolic murder “puts an end to the disorder provoked by the community’s failures, cleanses it, and allows it to be born anew in full vigor and health” (“The Ritual Implications of Les Bonnes” 220). These were “apparently radical means to an essentially conservative end” (227). The festivals were about maintaining and renewing existing society: “the old world is symbolically destroyed so that it might be born again” (226). Debevec-Henning views Sartre’s interpretation of Genet’s use of cyclical repetition (that he termed a whirligig) as narcissistic and sterile and seeks to question whether Genet’s use of such a ritual ‘murder’, like the symbolic execution in Archaic festivals, has only conservative ends (227).

Like the ritual mock execution of the King, *The Maids*, as a symbolic murder

of the reigning sovereignty of Madame, could be read as serving this same function. However, Debevec-Henning notes that the murder doesn't actually take place within the play and instead "we have only the ambiguity of the drama's final tableau" (230). The ritual theatre that Genet alludes to is an interesting parallel to Greek tragedy, where violence and murder occur offstage as the theatre was considered a holy place and to kill someone on stage was to kill them in the real world. She describes that because the cycles within the play are different every time, and the characters are constantly "vacillating" between different roles, that: "The maids' ritual cannot generate the traditional cycles of repetition because its elements are always in a state of flux" (232). This ambiguity resists the reintegration of its 'murder' back into society. Genet's subversive modifications on this traditional rite, "destabilizes the cyclical world-view on which that rite is based" (232).

Debevec-Henning notes that despite his use of Christian ritual, there is no total transformation. The transcendent union does not take place before the end of the play. Genet resists and denies his maids and his spectators this final act of transformation. She shows how Genet provides "a quasi-mimetic testing and even challenging of a broad range of conventional attitudes and concepts (e.g. the absolutism implied and at times proclaimed, by our traditional logic of identity and difference), [and] that theatre may in fact be clearing space for fresh approaches" (237-38).

Debevec-Henning reads Genet's use of these cycles of repetition as revealing that the actual consummation of the act is not the end in itself, but instead "the exciting and here even dangerous foreplay" (239). Genet is not so much interested in the murder as he is in the evolution towards it, which is precisely the same way he talked about revolution. In terms of Genet's use of the Papin sisters, we can surmise that it was not the murder itself that interested him, so much as the nature of the

relationship between them and their mistress. His play reveals Genet's own desire for "more creative relationships, in art and life, that it perhaps cannot directly represent" ("The Ritual Implications of *Les Bonnes*" 239-40). That there is no end to Genet's ritual means there is no cycle of re-integration, only a need for "continued testing and striving. Provocative playfulness might then be considered fundamental to Genet's art" (240).

Genet as a criminal and homosexual with no family, identified with the abject and explored it in his maids. Sartre describes the position of domestics as "pure emanations of their masters and like criminals, [who] belong to the order of the Other" (*Saint Genet* 617). David Houston Jones in his book on the abject body in the work of Genet and Beckett, defines what he sees as the fascination with *The Maids*: "the moment at which the body's boundary becomes indistinct due to the expulsion of waste" (69). These abject images have what Houston-Jones terms "a curious dependence on visual representation" (Houston-Jones 87) hence the efficacy of Genet's ritual in performance. He uses Kristeva's theory to explore the potential of this abjection that he sees as emerging from the visibility of the 'other' and as she says, is "related to perversion" (*Powers of Horror* 15).

The play is full of sequences where Claire and Solange indulge in their own abjection. For example Claire's speech at the beginning of their ceremony: "Servants ooze. They're a foul effluvium drifting through our rooms and hallways, seeping into us, entering our mouths, corrupting us. I vomit you!" (*The Maids* 34). They see this filth and abjection mirrored in each other. Claire says earlier: "I'm sick of seeing my image thrown back at me by a mirror, like a bad smell. You're my bad smell" (21). Claire sees herself as abject, in the mirror of Solange, as she simultaneously plays Madame.

Kristeva sees the liberatory potential in an acknowledgment of the process of abjection, which in some sense transcends it: “he who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law – rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime” (*Powers of Horror* 4). Houston-Jones also sees the liberatory potential of the abject in Genet’s play. Claire and Solange, by enveloping themselves in their own filth and “by embracing the role completely, to its limit...they display a psychological depth incompatible with it and achieve liberation from their condition” (Houston-Jones 69)¹². This echoes Blau’s comments of the acting required in Genet’s theatre: “On the most basic level of the actor’s psychology, he who throws himself into his role to the furthest limit of debasement achieves an extraordinary power” (Blau 272). Houston-Jones’ conception of the abject within Genet’s play combines the psychoanalytic and political to achieve liberation for Genet’s maids. As Genet said himself in an interview in the 1950’s: “My imagination is plunged into abjection but at least on that score it’s noble, it’s pure. I reject deception; and if I’ve ever exaggerated and pushed my heroes or their adventures in the direction of what’s frightening or obscene, it’s been an exaggeration in the direction of truth” (White 197). Lavery and Woodward describe how in the work of Genet the “desire to lose oneself in the abject functions as an inverted rite of passage” (Finburgh et al 120).

The abject is very much connected to Christian ritual in the play. Houston-Jones describes the “vital connection of an ironic sainthood with abjection” (Houston-Jones 76), which can be seen as incarnated in *The Maids* when murder and sainthood finally become merged. He says: “The fetishization of bodily filth is part of Genet’s mobilisation of a Christian value system to promote the revalorisation of the abject,

¹² Carl Lavery and Paul Woodward’s essay “Genet, Body Art and Abjection” in *Jean Genet: Performance and Politics* by Finburgh et al, contains the most recent examination of the abject in Genet’s work.

including the ‘criminal’ selves excluded from bourgeois society” (77).

When read as a representation of the Papin Case, Genet’s use of ritual resists the conventional psychoanalytic and political interpretations of it. His ritual form produces meanings that are ambivalent and changing, revealing the spectator’s own fantasies, psychologies and politics. He resists an imitation of the real event: “it is precisely because there is so much theatre about his theatre that he puts his finger on truths the others were blind to” (Ward-Jouve 26-7). Artaud provides a “protest against the idea of culture as distinct from life” (Artaud 10). The title of Artaud’s manifesto *The Theater and its Double* reverses the conventional notion that theatre is the double or imitation of life, by positioning life to be the double of theatre. Theatre is privileged as being the original, the object, the God to which everything else is an imitation or mirror image. Similarly, Genet dissolves the barrier between theatre and life, psychology and politics, the mad and the insane, spectator and actor, actor and character, saints and criminals, servants and their masters. He creates a theatre which Cixous recognised as enabling the passions and living breathing bodies of females to be expressed.

My Sister in this House (1980) by Wendy Kesselman

My Sister in this House was written in 1980 by American feminist playwright Wendy Kesselman. She was introduced to the Papin case by Flanner’s study of it in *Vanity Fair* and inspired by her style of writing about it: “I was mesmerized. It became like an absolute obsession for me” (Kamenish 120). Unlike Genet, Kesselman’s play appears principally motivated by a desire to recreate the crime for an audience and represent Christine and Lea as victims and slaves of a repressive and brutal patriarchal class system. The Madame and her daughter, whom the maids attack

at the end of the play, embody this. She keeps to the known facts and details of the case, although changes the family name of the murder victims from Lancelin to Danzard, as Monsieur Lancelin was still alive when she wrote it. Kesselman's play can be read as attempting a Marxist and feminist interpretation of the case. This comes into conflict however, with her illustration of it, which highlights the homosexual and incestuous relationship and psychoanalytical interpretations of the case.

Kesselman's Marxist interest in the case is clear. A great amount of dialogue is concerned with the financial situation and employment conditions of the maids in relation to their employers: "Two almost for the price of one" (Kesselman 12) Madame Danzard exclaims when Lea the younger sister joins the household to work alongside the elder Christine. The fact that the maids' mother receives Lea's wages is mentioned in Lea's monologue, which opens the play.

The theatrical form of the play presents this attempted Marxist interpretation in a very specific way to its audience. It privileges the audience throughout by the use of stage space and irony. The proscenium stage forms the frame of the 'house' within which the domestic drama takes place. The stage space within this 'house' is divided into areas, which separate the two sets of women. The maids' room is upstairs, the living quarters of the Danzard's is downstairs. The kitchen is directly below the maids' room to the left of the stage and this is also exclusively their domain. A Marxist dialectic is thus set up for the audience between these two sets of female characters in their separate spaces. Conversations between Christine and Lea in the kitchen and Madame and Isabelle in the dining room are literally cut together for the benefit of the audience and to the ignorance of the characters:

MADAME DANZARD: I never even have to tell them anything.

CHRISTINE: I know what she wants before she says a word.

MADAME DANZARD: They take such pride in the house. Not a speck of dust under the carpet.

CHRISTINE: Madame checks everything. I like that. (19)

The unspoken and complicit nature of this relationship is heightened and this separation of the characters is used to express how it upholds the existing class system. There is no spoken communication between the maids and their employers until the murder at the end. This reflects the real life Papin case where, as I mentioned, it was revealed by Monsieur Lancelin during the trial that he and his wife hardly spoke to their maids. The stairs are positioned theatrically as a symbolic part of the set, and the thing that separates the two sets of women. When Madame Danzard ascends the stairs at the end something is being crossed, entered, breached and broken. It is a metaphor for what divides the classes and upholds the class system breaking down, being transgressed and challenged. However, in this interpretation, the murder in a Marxist sense is not an act of revolt.

The play takes the form of a naturalistic tragedy that is more interested in making moral judgements than exploring a Marxist analysis. The play's sympathies are with the maids as they are positioned as victims of the class system. Kesselman sets up an identification with the maids and a disapproval of Madame Danzard and her daughter and their frivolity, greediness, indulgence and cruelty. A Marxist interpretation if adhered to strictly, perhaps in a more Brechtian sense, would not allow its audience to take sides but instead show up contradictions and explore the relationship of the characters in relation to their society. It would not pronounce judgement on the characters as Kesselman does. Her choice of this naturalistic tragedy as a theatrical form, relies for its drama on a logic of 'bourgeois aristocracy

bad, working-class maids good'. The climax to the narrative in this tragedy is a desperate murder, a fight of good against evil where evil wins out because the good has been turned into crazy delirious women. The audience are implicated in this moral tragedy as being partly responsible. Christine and Lea's tragic flaw might be their advent into an incestuous relationship. In this way Kesselman does not achieve a Marxist interpretation of the murder but instead reproduces the kind of binaries of good/bad, sane/mad, active/passive etc. that Brechtian (and some feminist) interpretations are critical of.

The audience is placed in a position where they become the judges over and moralisers of the drama. Judgment is indicated to the audience through the use of several theatrical techniques. Foreshadowing, double meaning and irony are used constantly throughout to inform the audience of their position in relation to the characters and to remind them of the outcome of the play and who is responsible for it. An example of foreshadowing is when Lea drops the pewter pitcher on the stairs that is later used as a murder weapon and where the murder occurs. Use of irony cements the audience's position as witnesses to the judgement of Madame Danzard and her daughter. For example, Madame Danzard says of the maids: "We have two pearls on our hands, Isabelle. Two pearls" (20). Everything she says has a double meaning, an implication, a hypocrisy; has hidden in it evidence of her implicit cruelty: "I never have to count the change when she comes back from marketing. Not one sou is missing" (20).

According to Ann Gavere Kilkelly, Kesselman compared her text with Genet's commenting that Genet's play could have happened anywhere whereas hers is located very much in the time and place of the murder (Edwards and Reader 76). Yet Christine and Lea within the narrative structure of her play, seem to stand for a

universal and unchanging idea of a master/servant relationship, which connotes a romanticised English idea of the class system, from an American perspective. The specific context of the Papin case appears secondary to the ways in which the play can draw on clichés in order to familiarize an audience. The play has been staged with success all over Europe as well as in the States (Kamenish 120). In her dramatization, oppression is always elsewhere, in England perhaps, or Le Man, but most crucially, on the other side of the proscenium.

The fact that there were no males directly involved in this particular case is responsible for its unique fascination. If the sisters, through murdering their employers, liberated themselves from their place in the patriarchal class system, it would make more sense for them to have murdered men instead of other women. This suggests that Kesselman was not motivated solely by a Marxist analysis. She is interested in this case of class struggle in the way it especially and exclusively applies to women. Like Genet she only includes females in her representation. Edwards and Reader describe the play as a piece of feminist theatre, which “subverts the patriarchal and heterosexual economy” (Edwards and Reader 77).

The first feminist to write about the Papin case was de Beauvoir in her autobiography. She takes issue with the Papin sisters’ portrayal in the general media as monsters. She blames society for producing a projection of them as “monsters”. For her “the whole ghastly system that had made them what they were” (de Beauvoir 108) was equally as monstrous and horrific. Kesselman takes up this feminist approach to the extent that she shows the bourgeois women as monstrous and abject themselves. For example there are specific stage directions such as directing Madame Danzard to clean her teeth with her tongue (Kesselman 19).

However, Kesselman is also fascinated with the taboo and abject relationship

between the sisters, which has the effect of marginalizing and viewing them pathologically. As de Beauvoir discovered, this conflicts with the aims of a feminist theatre based in a Marxist ideology. The emphasis Lacan placed on the relationship between Christine and Lea as an abnormal perversion in the form of sado-masochistic homosexuality and in their case incest, is very emphasized in the play. At the end of Scene 13:

“LEA begins to move around the room. Her movements have a strange grace of their own. She moves all over the small room, her hair flying. CHRISTINE watches her. Suddenly, she pulls LEA down to her. The light dims. (59)

While homosexuality is hinted at and clearly insinuated, it is not actually shown. The audience is forbidden to see what is most abject and fascinating and central to the diagnosis of paranoia and the interest in the case. This could reflect some puritanism on behalf of the playwright as well as a desire to use the abject to titillate the audience. It reproduces the fascination with the abject that accompanied the original event. It also reinforces to particularly conservative effect, that abjection is to remain hidden, and like the maids, locked away, executed and unseen.

Kesselman draws on the gazes between the women and the perversions that Lacan saw as central to the diagnosis of paranoid hysteria, to illustrate what she interprets as the exploitation of two maids by their bourgeois oppressors. She uses the gaze between the women to illustrate the abject nature of the crime for the benefit of an audience. The notion of the mirror and the gaze is quite consciously adapted to the text and direction of Kesselman’s play throughout. Sections of dialogue hint at it: “Are you blind?”; “Do you see?”; “Use your eyes”; “I couldn’t believe my eyes” etc. Stage directions are also specific in this regard: *“Lea looks up at Isabelle. Christine stands up and looks down at Lea. Lea moves to Christine. Isabelle watches her. Madame Danzard and Christine look at each other”* (53). Lacan emphasized the

importance of the gaze given the unspoken nature of the relationships between the women, “this silence could not be empty, even if it [it’s meaning] was obscure in the eyes of the actors” (“Le Crime des Soeurs Papin”). The gaze in the example from the text is not just between Christine and Lea, but also between Lea and Isabelle and between Christine and Madame Danzard. The audience may be not only positioned as the judge but also as the psychiatrist to Christine and Lea’s implied insanity.

The murder, like the homosexual relationship, is in blackout. Lacan interpreted the murder and its eye gauging as a literal blinding which enabled the unblinding of Christine and Lea by a shattering of their narcissistic mirror. In Kesselman’s play the blackout can be read in Lacan’s psychoanalytic terms as a shattering of the mirror of identification between audience and performers through a re-blinding of the Papin sisters. The sisters’ madness is therefore completed and not dispelled as in Lacan’s interpretation. Neither the maids nor the audience are allowed to see. Our sympathy with the maids can no longer be sustained. This is reinforced at the end of the play where Christine and Lea stand looking out towards the audience as if framed in a photograph while the lights fade, trapped within the frame and within the proscenium theatre in the same way as they appeared together at the start of the play. In this way the audience becomes substituted for Madame Danzard and her daughter in the act of murder. But the fourth wall is not broken and so the identification we initially had for the maids is now prevented and we are made complicit with the bourgeois. The judge’s voice over pronounces Christine’s upcoming execution. Kesselman does not reveal the fact that this was never in fact carried out.

Kesselman is fascinated with the abject nature of both the crime and the relationship between the girls, and desires to display this for a voyeuristic audience.

What cannot be seen can have the effect of being more horrific than what can. The madness of Christine and Lea supports Irigaray's use of the Electra complex connecting women who murder with madness. Kesselman's apparent Marxist/feminist agenda is complicated by this illustration of paranoid delirium. She does not historicize this paranoia within a Marxist/feminist analysis like de Beauvoir. While Kesselman's fascination with the case is similar to de Beauvoir's, her agenda as an artist and feminist is quite different. Kesselman desires to titillate her audience with images and imaginings of the abject. The murder in her representation exists to incite an audience with pity and fear in an Aristotelian sense which works against a Marxist/feminist interpretation.

My Sister In This House shows signs of being influenced by Genet's play. At the end of Scene 12, Lea begs Christine to role-play her favourite nun from the convent:

LEA: You're ready?

CHRISTINE. (*Turning toward LEA*) I'm ready. (*LEA opens her eyes, looks at Christine. The light dims*) (57).

This is identical to the way one of the games between the maids in Genet's text begins. Interestingly, where Genet's game begins, is precisely the point in Kesselman's text where the lights dim and the scene ends. Helene Keysser in her 1985 chronicle *Feminist Theatre*, compares Kesselman and Genet's theatrical interpretations of the Papin case: "A comparison of Genet's play with Kesselman's makes clear how quickly and deeply our resources for theatrical models of sexual politics have been enriched by feminist drama" (Keysser 180). This enriched model appears to be a reference to that which Kesselman provides. Keysser clearly prefers Kesselman's interpretation over Genet's in the degree to which this "social realism" promotes feminist qualities: "Genet's maids think of themselves as dirt, as the

despicable residence of ‘bad smells’. Kesselman’s sisters like their own and each other’s bodies” (181). And while Kesselman’s maids “become liberated from the illusion that Madame genuinely cares for them....the self hatred Genet attributes to the maids not only makes his maids victims, but victims at their own hands” (181). She interprets Genet from a position of naturalism which she prefers as a theatrical model for feminist theatre.

In the late eighties Patricia Schroeder wrote a paper on the play entitled “Locked Behind the Proscenium”. Like Keyssar, she describes Kesselman’s ability in the play to “demonstrate the potential power of formal realism when appropriated for feminist purposes” (Schroeder 105). She describes Kesselman’s use of an “imaginative combination of realistic and experimental techniques” (105). She sees the proscenium stage, as a place which “offers playwrights built-in opportunities for dramatizing the traditional systems of enclosure that restrict women” (111-112). Certainly Kesselman “engages our sympathy” for the “voiceless women imprisoned by an unjust society” for whom “anti-social actions become inevitable” (111). Yet this very inevitability, embedded in the tragic narrative of Kesselman’s play, illustrates a very conservative kind of feminism, and far from making problematic the title of her paper, Schroeder ensures the maids stay very much “locked behind the proscenium”.

Paula K. Kamenish in her 2003 article “Staging Crime”, discusses the fascination that murder has when rendered in art, using the Papin case, *The Maids*, and *My Sister In This House*, as examples. Such theatre she argues “exposes our own insidious yearnings for an encounter with the violence within us, the spectators” (Kamenish 117). She notes that the fascination with staged violence isn’t only connected to an Aristotelian notion of catharsis, or being witness to an imitation of an historical crime, but is connected very strongly to an experience of “perverse pleasure” and

“gratification”. She incites the complicity in the perpetuation of the fascination with the crime of all those who indulge in its representation, create them or write about it: “In a sense we applaud the murderers when we show our enjoyment in the re-enactment of a brutal crime as in *My Sister In This House*” (135).

Kamenish describes Kesselman’s play as “primarily a love story” where the two “ill-fated lovers....must revolt against and overthrow their oppressors in order to preserve the integrity of their relationship” (130). She disagrees with Keyssar's Marxist/feminist reading saying: “the play seems to view gender and class issues as ancillary”, and notes that “Kesselman’s language mimics the spectacular contemporary newspaper accounts” (133). She says that the play “pays homage” to all the interpretations and case studies that have come before although she does not make problematic the play's use of these different interpretations.

While the article was published in *The Comparatist*, Kamenish doesn’t compare the representations so much as illustrate their unique fascination with the crime: “Each play brings its viewers closer to understanding the motivations of the murderers” (117). She groups Genet in with Kesselman as demonstrating “an obvious attraction to the bloody incident, its causes, and its consequences” (133) yet doesn’t explore the ways in which Genet’s reenactment through a metaphorical and ritual murder might reveal a different kind of fascination to Kesselman’s.

Les Abysses (1963) dir. Nico Papatakis

I will now look at the filmic representations, which explore both the psychological and political studies of the case. *Les Abysses* (1963) was the first film to represent the Papin case and was directed by Nico Papatakis. His main interest appears to be not in the Papin case itself but in Genet’s *The Maids*. He had intended to

make a film version of Genet's play but Genet refused to let him because he had pulled a publicity stunt dressing Annie Girardot and Jeanne Moreau in maids' uniforms (Edwards and Reader 95). Instead, Papatakis got Jean Vauthier, another playwright, to write a screenplay based on the original case. The film is prefaced with a statement that claims it will tell "the true story" about the Papin Case and its "inevitable climax of terror...this study in abnormal psychology". This suggests he is interested in representing the Papin case and engaging with psychoanalytic interpretations of it. However, like Genet and despite this opening title, Papatakis changes all the names and details of the case significantly. He replicates Genet's use of the case, not representing the case itself but using it as inspiration for something else.

Edwards and Reader who are perhaps the first to have examined the film, claim that this "something else" is a metaphor for the Algerian conflict. The maids' rebellion against their bourgeois employers can be read metaphorically as the native Algerian rebellion against the French colonials. This suggests a political use of the case. And it is one that would explain the support the film garnered from significant political figures. When it screened at Cannes it caused great outcries over its violent content and Sartre and de Beauvoir along with the surrealists Prevert and Breton, strongly defended the film in *Le Monde* (White 529). De Beauvoir apparently said of it that it was one of the greatest films she had ever seen (Edwards and Reader 94-95). Genet also declared support for the film. His support might have reflected his own interest in the Algerian struggle as his 1958 play *The Blacks* also dealt with this. Perhaps Papatakis cleverly exploits the public fascination with the Papin sisters in order to present a much more unpopular subject such as the Algerian conflict which had finished one year before he made the film.

There is clearly a Marxist agenda behind the film as class relations are used to explain the murders. The plot consists of two maids, Michelle and Louise, who are owed 3 years wages by their employers who are trying to sell the property. The maids do not want them to sell, claiming it is also rightfully theirs (hence the parallels to French occupied Algeria) and terrorise their owners throughout the film finally resorting to murder of Madame and her daughter. A prospective buyer says to Monsieur at the end: “You took away their lives. You are the real murderer.” The end title asks: “Who is truly guilty here?” The implication is that it is the bourgeois who are guilty and the audience is potentially implicated in this guilt. Madame and monsieur are shown as bumbling, stupid, greedy and foolish, almost childlike, for example, when Madame gets upset over her broken china and spilled wine. Perhaps the scorn aimed at them is similar to the attempt Kesselman made to create monsters out of her bourgeois Lancelin females. Edwards and Reader in their discussion of *Le Guillant*, comment that he compares the sisters’ “bloody paranoia” to “an uprising of the colonized against their colonizers” (49). It is interesting then that Papatakis who made the film in the same year as *Le Guillant* wrote his paper, literally takes up the metaphorical potential of this comparison.

This representation is the first to include males. This changes the emphasis on the case from one based solely on the relationships between four women, to one which opens itself up to a community of other characters such as house buyers, and a much wider social context for the crime. The film becomes much more consciously about class divisions as held together by this figurehead of bourgeois patriarchy. While “sex and violence, normally the prerogative of men, are clearly associated” (101), the gender of Michelle and Louise situate them more easily as victims of patriarchy and not revolutionaries of it.

Papatakis' earlier motivation to create a film version of Genet's play is evident from the way he portrays the sisters' lives together. They constantly squabble and screech and play games on each other and their mistresses. There seems to be a clear attempt throughout to imitate the essence of *The Maids*. Edwards and Reader state the film's clear influence by avant-garde theatre and Genet's play (96). They also note that like theatre, the film adheres to the unities of time, action and space (96).

What works against the play's political potential as a metaphor for the Algerian crisis, is that the games that the maids play in Papotakis' film connote madness. The girls in this film appear to be suffering from Lacan's paranoid delirium. They are represented as hysterical, compulsive, mad, erratic, sadistic, schizophrenic, destructive, brutal and manipulative. One scene is set in the chicken house and they screech like chickens, slapping and beating each other and screaming "bitch" (in French). They clutch, grasp and moan to each other in a suggestively incestuous way much as is indicated in *My Sister In This House*. The first shot in the film is of one of the sisters looking at herself in a broken mirror, which connotes Lacan's mirror stage and the diagnosis of paranoid delirium. Although, as Edwards and Reader point out, the fact that Louise can only see her face partially, suggests she has not reached the mirror stage yet (99).

Edwards and Reader suspect that *Les Abysses* had an influence on Wendy Kesselman's *My Sister In This House* (94). Here there is also an exploration of the relationship between the younger maid and the daughter of the Madame of the house. The elder maid is jealous of this relationship as Christine is in Kesselman's play. *Les Abysses* was released as late as 1996, some thirty three years after its making and Edwards and Reader suspect this had a large part to do with the release of another film about the case at this time, *Sister My Sister*, which I will discuss later.

The Maids (1974) dir. Christopher Miles

Christopher Miles was the first director to succeed in making a film version of Genet's *The Maids (1974)*¹³. It was originally an English theatrical production directed by Minos Volanakis. When it ended its run at Greenwich in London it was made into this film for the American Film Theatre directed by Christopher Miles, using the same English actresses Glenda Jackson and Susannah York. The intent of this production is in using Genet's play as a vehicle to show-case the talents and the skills of the director and these well-known English actresses, for an American audience. Glenda Jackson comments on how the stage version was sold out before their rehearsals for it even began because everybody thought they were rehearsing a stage version of the well-known English television serial *Upstairs Downstairs*. It does not appear to be a representation that has any interest in re-interpreting the Papin case either psychoanalytically or politically.

There is an establishment of two different worlds within the film. The opening sequence is filmed and acted naturalistically, following the capture of Monsieur by police and his trip to the police station in a car through the streets of what looks like Paris. This 'real-life' sequence then makes way for the play itself, which is in contrast highly theatrical. At several points throughout the film a few moments of this 'realistic' back story cuts into the theatrical performance, although the play continues in voice over. This theatrical world, the world of the maids, is the world of theatre, what is 'inside'. The 'real' world of Monsieur, is the world 'outside'. These two

¹³ There was a 1966 'made for television' film of *Les Bonnes* by Gosta Folke and another directed by Michel Dumoulin in 1991. There was also an opera based on the play called *Jungfruna (Maids)* directed by Peter Bengtson in 1993. There was an earlier opera by Darius Milhaud that Genet allowed which suggests Genet was in favour of opera as a form of representation for his play. He had refused to let Milhaud make it into a ballet (White 529). A later film version in 1990 by Donald Kinney explores the homosexual possibilities of the text (Finburgh et al 171).

worlds are clearly delineated and distinct. The ‘inside’ world of the maids is shot more theatrically, often with longer shots and the action is located mainly in one single room as if it substituted for a stage. The mise-en-scene is light, colourful and luxuriant. The outside world is filmed more conventionally, with point of view shots, changes in location and quicker editing. It is raining, monochrome and drab.

The possibilities that the film has to explore the political potential of these two worlds as they are set against each other, is prevented by the understanding that Genet’s theatre is a place of forgery and untruth. It is not the sacred transformative space Genet intended for his maids. The maids and Madame posture and pose in a way perhaps expected of English character actors of the time. As consciously set against the outside ‘real’ world as it is, the actors display their ‘faking’ or ‘acting’ in a heightened mode of theatricality. The artificial is taken literally to mean false. The actors do not ‘believe’ what they are doing. Instead of being carried away by the devil (*The Maids* 11), the actresses demonstrate for the camera that they are playing at being carried away. This prevents any transformation into or consummation of actor and role that might occur in a ritual performance of the play. The actresses are prevented from being able to search for the truth in the character as a way of searching for the truth in themselves. They are props, lifeless and without passion. This production does not use Genet’s play as a ritual.

Glenda Jackson says of her experience: “I think Genet is an awful person to actors.... He likes to burst the pretensions of actors, which we all carry within us” (Jackson, Glenda). Her dissatisfaction is interesting in the light of what Blau says of the acting Genet requires within a ritual theatre: “Genet lures the actor by daring him to be the cynosure [centre of attention/admiration] of a regal procession. The actor may not be up to it but he may also feel he is being used.... The actor resists his

scenario, and should. The drama gains intensity of meaning from encouragement of the actor's natural grievances" (Blau 268). As a professional actress within the direction of this film, Jackson reserves her "natural grievances" and instead plays Solange, like a cardboard cut-out. She has not the opportunity to 'become' Solange to embrace her resistances to the role and to embody her in a ritual sense.

Genet gives his maids and their actresses the opportunity to become saints. It is in the moments of untruth, where for Genet, the truth is discovered; the "pretensions" he offers to his actors and to his maids are gifts. As Sartre recognises, it is precisely the "element of fake, of sham, of artificiality, that attracts Genet in the theatre" (*Saint Genet* 611) and what he invests with life. Jackson accepts the role like a martyr and curiously enough like Madame herself, as she fantasizes about being close to filth, degradation and hardship in order to make her all the more radiant and noble. Interestingly, Blau notes that "While Genet scorns the limitations of Western actors, he is too cunning not to absorb what he knows about them into the structure of the play" (266). It is also interesting that the American Film Theatre's canonizing of Genet in this film is ironically identical to the patronising homage that Genet despised and explored in the character of Madame. Miles says in an interview, that his work is always going against the grain: "I don't like joining groups or following fashions and trends – in film or otherwise" (Telotte 18). Perhaps he saw in Genet an own image of himself as an artist on the margins. Yet his film ultimately brings Genet back into line with the conventions of both theatre and film.

Jackson says of the film version: "That added sense of being watched by a camera probably helps the play. It is not the same thing as being watched by an audience" (Jackson). If she means that the film camera acts like a narcissistic mirror, then this is perhaps true, however, her idea that acting is posing in front of it, instead

of actually looking at what's there, is partly what prevents her performance from becoming something more transformative. Gene Plunka writes that despite strong support from the actresses and the cinematographer's "fancy camerawork to coincide with Miles's creative approach in using flashbacks and cutaways to trace Monsieur's arrest", "critics generally agreed that the film did not capture the spirit of Genet's text" (Plunka 173). Plunka also mentions that Minos Volanakis, who translated the text and directed the stage play that preceded the film, created a "less-than-successful production" (173) in these terms.

Sister My Sister (1994) dir. Nancy Meckler

Made in 1994, this is the first film to represent the Papin Sisters as themselves in name¹⁴. As in Christopher Miles' film it is an adaptation of a stage play, but in this case of the other theatrical representation *My Sister In This House*. Kesselman collaborated with director Nancy Meckler to write the screenplay. A title near the beginning of the film advises that it is "based on true events" and so a connection to the Papin case is made clear in a kind of documentary drama mode. The development of Kesselman's play into a film suggests such a move as a natural progression in order perhaps to more fully experience or understand the spectacle of the Papins' violence¹⁵. It also suggests that the film will be similarly interested in a political and feminist interpretation of the Papin case.

Like the stage-play on which it's based, *Sister My Sister* is interested in showing the oppression of Christine and Lea by way of class and gender in a

¹⁴ With the possible exception of a short film called *La Ligature* directed by Gilles Cousin in 1979.

¹⁵ This progression was also made by Neil Paton, who wrote a stage-play *Blood Sisters*, based on the Papin Case in 1998 and followed it up with a screenplay by the same name. I am not looking at either of these works in my thesis, but from the writer's comments on his website, his attraction to the case seems similar to Meckler's in the title's evocation and connotation of lesbian vampires. He also wrote a biography of the sisters called *The Monsters of Le Man*.

patriarchal society represented by Madame Danzard and her daughter. The political interpretations of the case are hinted at. But the film's fascination, as the title suggests, as in the stage-play, lies in the incestuous and lesbian relationship between the Papin sisters in comparison with the repressive relationship between the Danzard females. These two agendas have a problematic relationship.

This is caused by the most apparent difference made by the film's transformation from the original stage-play - its incarnation into a soft-porn horror film. The narrative follows the growing closeness of the sisters, leading to the eventual love making scenes. While the stage play dimmed the lights suggestively and ended the scene, the film allows the spectators to witness Christine and Lea's erotic lives together. In addition to this the murder at the end of the film provides a spectacle akin to a horror film, where what was initially 'good' turns 'bad' and the audience can indulge in a spectacle of violence and abjection.

As in the stage play, *Sister My Sister* draws its meaning through a juxtaposition of scenes and shots, between the maids and the Danzards. Moving between the two sets of women and the occasional scene between them, forms the structure of the film. The murder is where they meet and where the violence emerges. While the didactic structure of Kesselman's play was focused on the class distinctions between the two sets of women, in this filmic adaptation of the theatre text the contrast is provided by different expressions of desire. The bourgeois women are set up as grotesque caricatures of sexual repression and bourgeois Puritanism. They are presented with a great deal of irony and ridicule. The maids on the other hand are privileged as desiring and passionate. An example of this contrast in the film is when the sisters are making love, which is cut between a scene with Isabelle and Madame Danzard playing cards and getting increasingly excited. Meckler's fascination lies in

the relationships between these four women as class exposes them. The didactic structure used in the play to show up class difference is used in the film to illustrate its effect on the sexualities of the four women, making use of a psychoanalytical interpretation. This accounts for Meckler's interest in the case. The mirroring of the sexualities between the women creates a kind of suffocating prison within the film which connotes Irigaray's discussion of the relationship between mother and daughter. In the context of a conventional film genre this relationship and its distinctly lesbian nature becomes linked to the act of murder at the end.

The film's sympathy and empathy is directed towards the maids up until the act of murder. The explanation for the murder is provided in the first scene of the film by a threatened separation of Christine and Lea. This scene is a sequence shot in black and white of Christine and Lea playing with dolls as children. When their mother comes in and takes Lea away, Christine is clearly resentful and jealous. The film continues with a high angle pan over the bloodied bodies of the Danzards. The link here is clearly made between Christine's resentment towards the mother or mother substitute for the loss of Lea, and the murder itself and her ensuing madness.

The threatened separation, which provokes the murder, is based on a revelation and discovery of their lesbian and incestuous relationship by Madame and her daughter. Barbara Creed's notion of the abject within the conventions of a horror film, are reproduced here once this discovery is made and becomes the provocation for murder. Karen Boyle notes how the "discovery of the murder is also the point where the sisters are 'outed' – where the taboo relationship that they have conducted in their attic bedroom becomes public and is reviled" (Boyle 107). The murder itself becomes a revelation of the abject. Creed quotes Stephen Neale as saying: "it is woman's sexuality, that which renders them desirable – but also threatening – to men,

which constitutes the real problem that the horror cinema exists to explore” (Creed 5). As the sisters’ secret is exposed to the Danzards, their true identities as abject beings are revealed. Madame herself is sucked into this abjection through her spitting and use of language: “Dirt. Scum. Scum Sisters!”

This use of the murder at the end as an abject spectacle of violence cannot help but contradict the feminist intentions of the filmmaker. In the act of murder, Christine and Lea rush towards the camera as they go to gouge out Madame and Isabelle’s eyes. In this movement, much like at the end of the stage play, the audience are positioned as Madame Danzard and Isabelle. The spectator is positioned as the one who created these images of abjection. We are guilty and complicit in the bourgeois responsibility for the crime. However, within the context of a horror film, the effect of this is that far from identifying with the maids or understanding our own complicity in their crime, we remain more than ever a spectator to an abject and threatening ‘other’.

This deviance and abjection emerges and is expressed cinematically throughout the murder scene and during the pre-emptive conversation between the sets of women. In the last shot of the film, after the murder, Christine and Lea huddle together on the bed clutching at each other, shaking and dishevelled, deranged and sickly, as the camera moves in close to them for a better look. Edwards and Reader use the term “lesbian vampire” (Edwards and Reader 119) as if describing a horror film.

Sister My Sister makes use of the crime’s ability to present a spectacle of sex and violence through the specific film genres of soft-porn docudrama and horror film. The sisters’ erotic lives are linked to their violence. In a psychoanalytic reading, Edwards and Reader describe the murder as a climax and release of sexual energy

between both sets of women, Madame's abusive language symbolising a kind of oral ejaculation (119). Jill Mackey notes the titillation involved for the spectator when viewing the love scenes as the actors playing the sisters are of course not sisters themselves, heightening the pleasure perhaps for a lesbian viewer (Mackey 37). There are devices used to heighten dramatic tension such as a dripping tap motif that recurs several times. At one point Madame turns it off and Edwards and Reader interpret this psychoanalytically as Madame "putting into check potentially explosive forces" (Edwards and Reader 116). Within a horror film narrative it takes on the effect of heightening dramatic tension and building suspense.

In *Sister My Sister* the spectator is able to indulge in his/her fantasy of the crime through a voyeuristic presentation of the sisters' intimate life together and the bloody murder it produces. As the film pans over the victims' bodies, a repeat of the beginning sequence, a male voice (like all the voiceovers in the film) who is the pathologist in the courtroom perhaps, gives a commentary of the carnage on display. This documentary-like technique makes visible what has remained in the court case and in so many studies and representations of the case as purely imagined. Here the audience can indulge their desire to witness the crime, as well as to see evidence of what has been up until this point, a presumed homosexuality. This emphasis on the visual and on the revelation of the incestuous relationship as the motive for murder also makes sense of the eye gauging as a response to being discovered and 'exposed'. This literal interpretation conflicts with a Lacanian or psychoanalytic one as Edwards and Reader point out. Because Meckler defines the maids' relationship as actively lesbian, Lacan's diagnosis that the murder was a violent action of homosexual deferral, is refuted.

The voice-over at the end over the image of the sisters huddling together on

the bed, links the crime inextricably to their sexuality. The voice over of the judge asks: “Did anything abnormal happen between you and your sister... Was it simply sisterly love?” and states “You will be judged”. This informs the spectator that the sisters’ lesbian sexuality as well as the murder was put on trial and ‘judged’. This appears aimed at inspiring sympathy and pity for the sisters and also has the effect of finding an explanation for the murder in their lesbian and incestuous relationship.

Meckler appears to have an affinity for stories about young people with marginal sexualities. In 1996 she followed with the film *Alive and Kicking*: a romantic drama about a young dancer who discovers he has Aids. Perhaps this theme of burgeoning but oppressed sexuality in a patriarchal world was Meckler’s attraction to Kesselman’s text. However, the effect of its representation within a conventional film genre changes the effect she may have wished it to have. Despite her political interest in the class dynamics of the Danzard household, her portrayal of the maids’ lesbian sexuality overshadows this and confines her film to a “lesbian/horror” cult film genre. Ruby Rich notes that Meckler was “surprised by the film’s enthusiastic reception at gay and lesbian film festivals” (“Introduction to the U.S. Edition” vii). It won best film at the Torino Gay and Lesbian Film Festival the year it was released although appears to have had little mainstream success as a soft-porn/horror, one review calling it a “lifeless melodrama” (Null).

Boyle reiterates the notion that because of the way the sexual nature of the relationship between the women is illustrated voyeuristically for an audience, the positioning of the maids as ‘objects’ within a conventional male gaze doesn’t enable the subversive possibilities Meckler was perhaps intending. Edwards and Reader describe how the male voice-overs throughout, express the way “the sisters are brought under control and judged by a male voice and a male gaze” (Edwards and

Reader 120). They recognise perhaps, the way the film ends up reinforcing the ideas that it intended to present in a politically conscious way for its audience. Boyle reads the film politically and sees that the lesbian relationship, and in extension the murder itself, remains objectified and captured within this patriarchal world. According to Boyle Christine and Lea as they are represented in this film are not agents of their crime but victims of it.

Boyle also describes the way the absence of men from the crime and from the film itself, conveniently “displaces the threat to the patriarchal, bourgeois family posed by women’s violence, desire and incest” (Boyle 111). Boyle criticises the film for a “reading of the crime as *their* tragedy, a tragedy whose roots lie in the way they were mothered. This deflects attention away from the reality of the sisters’ crime” (112) and “obscures the violence *against* women that is at the heart of the “Papin affair”” (117). Her explanation for the crime lies partly in the abuse Christine and Lea received from their sexually abusive father of which there is no reference in the film, and also in the role Monsieur Lancelin who is also excluded from representation, might have played.

Jill A. Mackey on the other hand contests that the film is subversive in the way we might assume Meckler intended. Mackey links *Sister My Sister* with *Heavenly Creatures*, a film made in the same year and based on my other case, which I will explore in chapter two. She remarks on the tendency that people like Boyle have to see such films as creating stereotypes of murderous lesbians in their linking of “lesbianism and depravity” (Mackey 35). She wishes, unlike Boyle, “to rescue *Sister My Sister* from such a reading” (35) viewing it as a subversive representation of the case. She agrees with Schroeder that “traditional narrative techniques.... offer plenty of opportunities for spectators to enter into “dialectics and passionate detachment””

(41). Mackey claims that the depiction of the women as victims illustrates and makes the spectator conscious of, the patriarchal social structure that has oppressed them; that instead of reinvesting these structures with power as Boyle argues, it “speaks to the confinement and control of women” (37). Mackey sees the film as a demonstration of how “patriarchy uses women to ‘transmit’ the law of the fathers”

(42). Mackey cites Laura Mulvey who developed the notion of the male gaze, which she sees reflected in the film.

Edwards and Reader read the film psychoanalytically and are ambivalent about its subversive potential. They see the film as allowing the women to “assume positions which in the past have been the sole preserve of men” and that Christine and Lea “have been allotted the places which Freud, and later Lacan, accord to males” (Edwards and Reader 114). They do however, note the ambivalence of the film’s portrayal of lesbian sexuality, that on the one hand privileges it and on the other suggests that it “cannot be anything other than deviant” (119). Overall they see Meckler’s film as “filling in the gaps of Lacan’s assessment of the Papin case” (115).

The readings of the film as subversive or feminist are at odds with its depiction within the context of a horror film genre. While the film draws upon class to provide a structure for its narrative, the horror film genre designates the women as spectacles of abjection. If the horror film exists to purge the abject from the threat it poses to the self/spectator, this film has a conservative as opposed to subversive effect. Creed notes that: “The presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity” (Creed 7).

One of the striking things about the film, which poses another obstacle to a political/subversive reading of the Papin case, is that even more so than the stage play,

the specific political and social context of it is not explored. It is an English production, spoken in English, with well-known English actresses such as Julie Walters and Joely Richardson. In the same way that Kesselman's play (and Christopher Miles' film version of *The Maids*) hinted at an idea of the English class system as a recognised symbol of universal oppression, this film fully exploits this with well-known actors within a genre of soft-porn/horror.

Christine Coffman, who has written a lot about the case from a lesbian psychoanalytical perspective, is critical of the way Lacan's theory, which she sees as based in a bourgeois and patriarchal narrative, is used in the film ("The Papin Enigma" 350). She sees the discourse surrounding the case, such as this film, as "an attempt to fathom the seemingly unruly psyche of an abjected working-class other" (338). She observes that: "For bourgeois spectators, the sisters' mysterious chamber serves as the site of otherness that provokes both fascination and anxiety" (353). Within a psychoanalytical interpretation, she sees that the maids will always exist as the marginal and abjected other in order to maintain the normal bourgeois subject – that the film is not subversive while it retains this function. Ultimately, Coffman sees that the film "conjures up class oppression only to ignore it by giving exclusive play to an abstract and unsituated notion of the psychic" (331).

The last shot in the film turns black and white and freezes into a still image, as if this final frame and perhaps the film itself, has provided yet another definitive incarnation of them. As in the stage play, this emphasis on the photo images of the maids recalls the interest of earlier uses of the case such as Sartre, Le Guillant, Eluard and Peret. All remark on the 'before' and 'after' photos of the sisters which are often reproduced to demonstrate the way the crime exists in the transition between the two: from innocent lambs to deranged and abject monsters. What has become apparent in

the representations of the Papin case in film, is the growing fascination with a presumed lesbian sexuality between the sisters and in this film it is even implied in the younger Danzard daughter. Kesselman's feminist and political interest in the case and their use of the political interpretations of it to illustrate the relationships between the women involved, is contradicted and at odds with their decision to represent it within a popular film genre.

Their interest in and use of the Papin case is radically different in form and intent to Genet's. Yet what they have in common is their ability to be interpreted both psychoanalytically and politically. In his study on the fascination with serial killers in American culture, Mark Seltzer discusses the relationship between the 'psycho' and the 'social' interpretations of violence. He sees the explanations given of the Papin case in *The Maids* and *Sister My Sister* as being "coupled but opposed" (Seltzer 147). He sees both representations as illustrating the 'psycho' and the 'social' readings in converse yet symbiotic ways. Whereas in Meckler's film "private disorders of identification erupt in public and social violence", in Genet's play "social rivalries are driven within, implosively privatised in the form of an unrepentant familialism" (148). Seltzer argues that in spectacles of compulsive violence there is a "direct communication between public and private, social and sexual, exterior and interior, collective and individual, such that each appears simply as a replacement, substitute, or literalization of the other" (148).

The Ceremony (1995) dir. Claude Chabrol

In this film Sophie and her friend Jeanne gun down Monsieur and Madame Lelievre and their two children as they watch a live Mozart opera on television. It is an adaptation of Ruth Rendell's novel *A Judgement in Stone* in which Eunice

Parchman, a housekeeper, along with her female friend, murder the entire Coverdale family. Ruth Rendell's novel is often listed as one of the literary representations inspired by the Papin Case. Rendell makes a direct reference to the Papin sisters in the novel as the narrator informs the reader that they bear no resemblance to her protagonist, namely to establish that Eunice and her friend did not have a lesbian relationship (Edwards and Reader 103). Like *Sister My Sister*, *The Ceremony* critiques bourgeois society, but instead of doing it in the form of a docudrama/horror film, Chabrol utilizes the genre of a suspense thriller. The film version is set in Brittany, France in 1995, the year of the film's making, and the characters names are changed. Another significant change in the film and novel from the original Papin Case, is the presence of Monsieur, who is also the first member of the family to be shot. As in *Les Abysses* his presence furthers the emphasis on a political interpretation of the murders.

It is a film motivated by a desire to reveal the inequalities inherent in a class based patriarchal society. Both women reveal past crimes, which can be interpreted as attacks against the roles patriarchal society provides them: Jeanne is implicated in the neglectful death of her daughter and Sophie murdered her father in a house fire. Both women have violently rejected patriarchy and the role of motherhood in their pasts. In terms of class, one of the major themes in the film is the dyslexia and illiteracy of Sophie and in a wider sense the realm of culture and class that her illiteracy excludes her from. Her illiteracy reflects and "intensifies the situation of domestic workers by withholding the minimum of identification or mimesis through which they can assimilate their employers' ideals and modes of thought" (Polack 80). She manages to hide it from the family but when it is discovered, her reaction to the shame becomes the main explanation the film provides for the murders.

This class and gender analysis refuses to let the spectator take sides with the sisters against their bourgeois employers in the way *Sister My Sister* does initially. The spectator's identification is constantly shifting between the characters, creating what Jonathan Rosenbaum calls a "dialectical ambivalence" (Rosenbaum 2). For example, the Lelievres' daughter Melinda supports Sophie and challenges her parents about their patronizing and oppressive treatment of her. When the Lelievres' generously leave Sophie their old television, Melinda responds: "You want to pacify her with that t.v". She even suggests that her parents call Sophie "the domestic", unhappy with the euphemisms they otherwise find for her. Melinda is the one who discovers Sophie's illiteracy by wearing her glasses and discovering they are just sunglasses. This is potentially meaningful in a Lacanian sense in that Melinda discovers the truth of Sophie's secret, through adopting her gaze and seeing with her eyes.

However, Melinda will never be able to see through the eyes of "the domestic". When she offers to teach Sophie to read, Sophie coldly rejects her generosity with the threat that if she tells anyone about her illiteracy, she will tell them about Melinda's pregnancy which she has just learned about through eavesdropping on her and her boyfriend. Such rejection of Melinda's 'kind gesture' of help, an offer that could be read as bridging the gap created by class, is what makes the film so ambivalent and uneasy for the spectator. Chabrol reveals this 'kindness' - this bourgeois liberalism - to be exceptionally oppressive and humiliating for Sophie in that it disguises the very real power inequality that exists in class relations, with patronising generosity. The power of the bourgeois is even more pervasive in this act of kindness. If the spectator feels uncomfortable about Sophie's reaction to Melinda's gesture then they are implicated in this liberalism themselves. The film constantly

refuses to let the spectator's identification settle with any of the characters in an Aristotelian sense, making us aware of our desire for this and immediately increasing the political effectiveness of the film. Chabrol illustrates how this "upper-class liberalism...sets the final wheels of tragedy in motion" (Brown 2).

This murder is just as much a "clash between low culture and high culture as it is about one class wrecking revenge on the other" (Edwards and Reader 109). The murder scene occurs in the library, a place of high culture and symbolic of the place where Sophie is most alienated because of her illiteracy. High and low culture are reflected cinematically throughout the film through the use of television. In this murder scene in particular, the family are watching the opera *Don Giovanni* on television and this servant/master opera is cut away to several times in juxtaposition to the servant/master drama unfolding within the household itself. The spectator is in these moments implicated as the bourgeois watching this high art. Monsieur is identified with Don Giovanni and his death therefore becomes the most significant in the film in terms of a political analysis, deviating from the specifics of the Papin case yet more closely aligning it with the Electra story. In the murder itself, the women parody the genre of a western as they brandish their rifles playfully (111). In this way it can be read that the popular genres of Thriller and Western win out over the high art of opera in the murder itself.

The murder, far from being a frenzied massacre as it is in most representations, regardless of whether their emphasis is more psychoanalytic or political, appears clinical and passionless. The film does not provide any catharsis or clear identification with murderers or victims. The murder itself is not the climax one would expect from a tragedy or a thriller. It is a political act and a provocation to the spectator. Do we justify or denounce Jeanne and Sophie's actions? Or for that matter

the Lelievre family's? We are not told how to respond, but made aware of our desire to understand and explain Jeanne and Sophie's actions. Edwards and Reader make the connection here to Hilbert in Satre's *Erostratus*. Melinda says early on in the film in defence of Sophie that "She's not a robot". Yet her attitude towards her has made Sophie act with the lack of empathy and apparent calculation of an automaton.

Edwards and Reader claim that the fact that the women kill men in this act of murder means that Jeanne and Sophie "are codified as men so that the violence emerges as both masculine and heterosexual" (113). They support this with a view that in the murder, the women are made to assume the roles of men within the genre of a western (113). Yet this interpretation ignores the actual presentation of this act of violence by the women. Jeanne and Sophie show no change in behaviour from any that they have displayed elsewhere in the film together, which is playful. Even their insolent behaviour in a scene where they upset the church priest, is identical to the behaviour associated with rebellious schoolgirls. If anything, their lack of obvious vengeance, malice or unnecessary brutality in the murder - the depictions of violence associated with men, in fact highlights their femininity and Chabrol's subversion of the idea that violence only belongs to men.

The film can be read psychoanalytically. Polack describes the murder as the "transition from the enduring of a social condition to the furious alienation of an 'individual madness'" (Polack 85). Edwards and Reader interpret the murder in the film as "a mounting kind of *folie a deux*" (Edwards and Reader 109). Yet once again, these interpretations contradict the actual depiction of the murder itself. Chabrol acknowledges his desire to explore the psychologies of the women, stating that Caroline Eliacheff, the co-writer of the film, who is also a psychoanalyst, "uncovered the underlying psychological and psychoanalytical structure" (Berthomieu) and

apparently referred to the Papin Case itself¹⁶. However the psychological and political ambivalence of Chabrol's description of a conversation he had with a young "hooligan" which left him feeling "that society was about to explode, or implode rather" (Berthomieu), shows how inextricable these two interpretations are in his approach to the film. Certainly, the possible 'madness' of Sophie and Jeanne is not on display in the way it is in Meckler's film. Jeanne is an almost blank canvass, unpredictable and revealing little.

As has been the case with all representations of the case, the sexualities of the women are in some way on display. Some commentators on the film have associated lesbianism and the violence within it, supporting a psychoanalytic analysis: "the characters' latent sexualities may insidiously be equated with evil" (Lapointe). Jeanne and Sophie are childlike in their playfulness together, and Edwards and Reader interpret this relationship and compare it to a "child-like sexuality, reminiscent of the relationship existing between the two teenage girls in *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), before it becomes a fully-fledged affair" (Edwards and Reader 104). Edwards and Reader also make a sexual connection between Madame Lelievre and Jeanne: "Jeanne's need to defile Madame's bedroom unmasks Jeanne's ambiguous feelings towards her, based as they are on sexual desire and murderous intent" (109).

Yet Sophie and Jeanne's relationship is not a definitively homosexual one as in *Sister My Sister*. They are seen laughing on Jeanne's bed in a suggestively intimate scene and Chabrol teases the spectator with a suggestion of homosexuality, yet their intimacy refuses to be defined. He seems purposefully ambivalent about defining their relationship and sexuality and it appears to be part of his fascination with the story, as well as providing complex material for his two actresses, the well-established

¹⁶ Edwards and Reader (102)

Sandrine Bonnaire and Isabelle Huppert. For Chabrol, the women “will remain enigmatic until death” (Polack 85).

Sophie and Jeanne’s growing insolence is directed at the church, another institution Chabrol is interested in provoking. In one scene they go round to people’s houses collecting used clothing for the church mission, strewing the clothes everywhere in playful disapproval by accusing people that their “charitable donations” are in fact their discarded junk. The Priest accosts them about this and piously suggests that “Maybe you should see a doctor”. Jeanne mocks him in avid agreement, “What a very good idea!” This sequence reflects Chabrol’s use of the women to reject a diagnosis of madness while simultaneously inflecting this same notion of madness back upon the church itself. It could be seen that when the women reject this patriarchal religious institution, they alternatively embrace Irigaray’s divine in each other.

While *The Ceremony* is not an imitation of the Papin Case itself, commentators see the film as “indebted” to it (Edwards and Reader 102) and “haunted” by it (Polack 81). Chabrol possibly also shares Nico Papatakis’ fascination with Genet’s *The Maids*. Polack notes that the title of the film is “probably” borrowed from Genet’s term given to Claire and Solange’s ritual¹⁷. Edwards and Reader state that Jeanne and Sophie “succeed in doing what Genet’s maids failed to do in their ‘ceremony’, that is, to kill the other rather than the self” (Edwards and Reader 110-111), which ignores the political or ritual possibilities of the symbolic suicide in Genet’s play as well as presupposing the murder in Chabrol’s film as an act of revolution which it isn’t necessarily presented as. They point to the other use of the term “ceremony” being the act of the family gathered and dressed up around the

¹⁷ Reference to the “ceremony” is mentioned on page 34 of *The Maids*.

television to view high art (108). Julien Lapointe references what he sees as a ritual aspect to the film: “Sophie and Jeanne’s illicit behaviour is not simply a compulsive backlash against class inequality but a curiously ordained ritual” (Lapointe). This statement goes unexplored however and is perhaps more of an observation of the murderers’ solemn lack of hysteria.

Polack claims that a film such as Chabrol’s, is more naturally suited to what Genet intended for his maids as he described in his 1947 preface, quoted here by Polack: “a way of moving.... inscribed as the flight of birds is said to inscribe predictions, the bees’ flight a vital activity, or in the gait of certain poets, a movement of death” (Polack 90). Polack’s interpretation of this is that theatre has a “single, egocentric viewpoint on the event” which he contrasts with cinema which on the other hand he sees as providing a “diffraction of gazes” (90). This is not convincing as he seems to infer that the theatre is more didactic than the cinema and Genet’s *The Maids* is certainly not declaring a single viewpoint, just as Meckler’s *Sister My Sister* is not offering an array of competing ones. Polack also describes cinema as tending “toward the moment, the present, privileging the spatial and temporal facts, neglecting the characters psychology or the determinants of social analysis” (89). As they are not declared in a definitively Marxist way, he appears to misread Chabrol’s political intentions. He does note however, the way cinema can take advantage of “its multiplicity and modulations of viewpoint, of an endless slippage of utterances, of gaps between word and gesture, between facts and places” (89). For example, the meaning behind details such as Jeanne’s curious impulse to wash her hands is never explained yet can be read into as a lingering guilt when it is later revealed to be because she killed her daughter.

Chabrol’s use of and interest in Rendell’s novel is an attempt to explore and

represent the oppressive effects of bourgeois society. His inclusion of Monsieur as a victim confirms this reading of his use of the crime. His use of the case of two women who murder is perhaps because their gender makes an attack against the bourgeois more violent. In his interest to explore the psychologies of the women, Le Guillant's approach to the Papin Case, is perhaps the closest comparison to Chabrol's attempt to show how class is responsible for what is deemed to be the 'mad' and 'deviant' behaviour of those within it. In his refusal to provide a Marxist analysis but in his reworking of the genre of a thriller, Chabrol shows perhaps how to make "not a political film but rather to make a film politically" (Brown).

Murderous Maids (2000) dir. Jean-Pierre Denis

This film appeared in 2000 and provides an alternative fictional recreation of the case to that of *Sister My Sister*. Instead of using the dramatic narrative of a soft-porn/horror film, it recreates the lives of the sisters and the murder in the form of dramatic realism. In an interview included with the DVD, Denis says that "the story [as reflected in his representation of the Papin Case] has all the violence and sex, all the ingredients that could have made it a more commercial film". In resisting the commercial imperatives of the film industry he expresses his interest, not in titillating his audience with images of the abject, but in trying "to explain the murder" (Denis). However, his privileging of the form of heightened dramatic realism to provide a more truthful, authentic and objective account of the case than any other film genre, is problematic.

Denis says that in his search for an explanation, his intention was to break away from a Marxist interpretation of the case: "The explanation is not in the master-servant relationship" but in the accumulated effect on Christine's psyche of a life

spent “in the service of others” (Denis). Class then is not Denis’ primary interest in making the film, but an integral part in its representation, as Christine Coffman notes in her article on the film: “Telling the story of another person’s madness involves not directly recounting the experience of madness itself – an impossible task – but evoking the context in which madness germinated and unfolded” (“Framing Christine Papin” 416). The social context exists as a backdrop for the presentation of a psychological narrative.

An example of the political being subsumed into a psychological interpretation is when Madame Lancelin is contrasted to Christine’s previous employer as being much less authoritarian and more sympathetic. As Sylvie Testud, who plays Christine, notes in an interview, perhaps the reason for Christine being a victim is “Because she upset the rules” (Testud). But it could also be, as Chabrol similarly draws attention to, that this sympathy is actually a kind of patronising, liberal, bourgeois kindness which masquerades and superficially erases the obvious imbalance of power inherent in the class structure, and which only increases the humiliation and resentment on the part of the maids. However, any potential criticism of society is overshadowed in the film by an emphasis on Christine’s madness and the explanation the film provides for it as described by Coffman – her lack of contact with a father figure, which is blocked repeatedly throughout the film by her mother (“Framing Christine Papin” 418).

Denis’ emphasis on a psychological interpretation of the case is exhibited not so much in the relationship between Christine and Lea but through the growing psychosis of Christine alone. Unlike *Sister My Sister*, other characters aside from the women involved in the murder, appear in the film, and the first 40 minutes is a recreation of Christine and Lea’s childhood and working experiences before they were employed in the Lancelin household. The film revolves around Christine in

relation, not just to Lea or her employers, but to males such as Monsieur, her mother's lover and potential suitors. The most important relationships shown in the film however, are between Christine's sisters and most especially her mother. Unlike *Sister My Sister*, it attempts to examine many significant details in their lives and childhoods that might help explain the murder. The film starts with a sequence set in childhood (like in *Sister my Sister*) yet these scenes continue for half an hour, providing a much more complex back-story to the murder. The crucial deviation from other representations in the use of facts about the case is that Christine murders alone. Lea joins her after the initial massacre is over in order to share responsibility for the crime. In this way Lacan's diagnosis of paranoid delirium as occurring between the sisters and providing the explanation for murder, is not followed. *Murderous Maids* moves in the direction of the Electra story with Christine taking the masculine role in her relationship with Lea. Denis avoids providing the orgiastic frenzy of female violence with all its inherent sexual and abject connotations. The madness that inspires the murder is an individual one and Christine's alone.

The film emphasizes and explores the relationships between the women like in Lessana's psychoanalytic study of the case. It is unlikely that Lessana's psychoanalytic interpretation influenced the film however, as it was published in the same year. In one scene Christine wipes menstrual blood off her legs and then sees herself in the mirror on the wardrobe door, which she then slams. Her ironing of a bra is also shown. These sequences appear to stand for signs of a psychosis rooted in Christine's sexuality and gender. Christine and Lea's relationship is very clearly and definitively defined as homosexual. It is not represented voyeuristically, but the spectator's distance from it heightens its abject and deviant nature. Lea asks at one point: "Is this wrong?" Christine replies: "No. Being a whore would be worse."

While the film focuses on Christine, the spectator is prevented from identification with her over any of the other characters. Christine's madness is represented as something the spectator cannot completely understand. Coffman notes the problem of representing madness on film: "The psychoanalyst and the filmmaker alike are faced with the problem of constructing a narrative that accounts for a sudden psychic break in what appears to be a functional person (417-18). In a discussion of the Papin case Christine Coffman considers that "The impossibility of speaking or writing of madness accounts, perhaps, for the prevalence of dramatic and cinematic accounts of the Papin affair" (416). Often Christine's behaviour in the film is unexplained and ambivalent.

Denis talks about avoiding cinematic tricks and devices such as slow motion and lots of blood to emphasize the horror or spectacle of violence or the voyeuristic fascination with the sisters' sexual relationship. Yet his use of the cinematic techniques of dramatic realism to establish a psychoanalytic portrayal of Christine, is no less 'dramatic'. In one scene when Christine is mopping the floors with another maid in her first household of employment, the sound of the other maid's mop starts to irritate her. She starts shutting all the doors to the room she is in but the sound gets louder and louder. She is finally paralysed by this noise and becomes frozen in a chair oblivious to everything around her. In this scene the sound of the mop becomes so loud that it breaks away from the diegetic soundtrack to become a sound as experienced subjectively from Christine's perspective. The spectator is positioned in this moment to an experience from Christine's point of view, breaking the objectivity that Denis states he is aiming for in his depiction of the case.

Christine Coffman writes of this dramatic realism that works in the film to cement a psychoanalytic interpretation and emphasise the obvious pathology of

Christine in direct relation to the assumed sanity of the spectator. She explores the political implications of this; the way the film creates a dichotomy “between its own sobriety [as expressed through the conventions of dramatic realism] and the madwoman’s ravings” which is “a symptom of its refusal either to question its own role in creating the scene of Christine’s insanity or to acknowledge the possibility that the film and its spectators may be contaminated by something akin to the madness it represents” (423). While Chabrol implicates the bourgeois spectator, Denis distinguishes Christine “from the bourgeois people who created, and continue to create, the context in which she is read as mad” (423).

Murderous Maids was made in the same year and by the same production company as a documentary on the Papin Case by Claude Ventura - *In Search of The Papin Sisters*¹⁸. Polack’s description of the film compares it to *Murderous Maids*: “Denis’ classically constructed narrative film excels in its respect for, and attention to, details of the events’ unfolding, while Ventura’s documentary work develops as a stunningly accomplished exercise in the genre of suspense” (Polack 78). Ventura’s use of “noiresque music” (Edwards and Reader 124) and film techniques to heighten suspense and dramatic effect, sounds very similar to Meckler’s rendering of the case in the genre of the horror film. Ventura and Meckler are both interested in exploiting the spectator’s desire to see the ‘real’ thing. They both make claims as documentary and docudrama respectively – films concerned with the facts of the Papin crime. Yet the cinematic conventions used to express these facts and to fulfil this desire for the depiction of authentic details of the crime, give the spectator an experience of drama in an Aristotelian sense; they use the narrative conventions of fictional storytelling eg. of identification and catharsis. In an interview with the two directors Ventura is to

¹⁸ This film is currently unavailable for purchase or viewing, so I have been unable to examine it in this thesis.

have said to Denis: “You were looking for truth with actors, I was looking for fiction with witnesses.” (Edwards and Reader 123).

Murderous Maids, with its desire to imitate in a mode of heightened realism comes closer to the way we understand real life on film to be portrayed. Yet this doesn't provide the same satisfaction for a spectator whose understanding of the 'truth' of the crime is in direct relation to the degree to which they can voyeuristically experience it. An example of this is in a review of *Murderous Maids* by Stephanie Zacharek: “*Murderous Maids* may do a better job than *Sister My Sister* of showing us how it all might have really happened. But by the end of the film the actions of these girls make no sense in our minds or even in our imaginations.... A very different thing from feeling that we've walked even a few steps in these murderers' shoes” (Zacharek 2). A depiction of authenticity may rely on the denial of fantasy or illusion through its execution.

Representations that avoid catering for a voyeuristic desire to experience the crime, to identify with the murderers and “walk in their shoes”, are perhaps the ones that come closer to an understanding of it. As Coffman says, in our representations of and speculations about the case we can easily “misrecognise our own fantasies as the truth of the affair, and so fail to recognise ourselves” (“Framing Christine Papin” 424). Our understanding can only be at a distance, or in an acknowledgement of the very impossibility of understanding. This brings us back to Genet, the writer most interested in exposing what is artificial and fake, whilst acknowledging the truth in fantasy. Perhaps his approach to the Papin Case is the one that can most closely reveal some essential truth in relation to it.

The artistic representations of the Papin Case have explored the fascination with women who murder women. This fascination is with the abject nature of the

crime and the perceived deviant relationship between the women who commit it.

CHAPTER TWO

PARKER-HULME: CASE STUDIES AND REPRESENTATIONS

The Parker-Hulme Case did not receive the high-profile attention in the form of case studies that the Papin case did. The fact that it occurred in a more isolated part of the world is surely a factor. However, the fascination with it as a subject for artistic representation was not affected by its isolation. Writers, playwrights and filmmakers based both within and outside New Zealand chose the case for representation.

The first psychological case study is by Dr Reginald Medlicott, a psychiatrist from Dunedin whose diagnosis of paranoia was used unsuccessfully by the defence in the trial. He published his findings in the *British Journal of Medical Psychology* after the trial in 1955, under the name “Paranoia of the Exalted Type in a Setting of *Folie a Deux* - A Study of Two Adolescent Homicides”. Exactly as in the Papin trial, three state psychiatrists examined the girls and found them sane. Medlicott, like Dr Logre in the Papin trial, was used by the defence to prove the insanity of the murderers. Like Lacan, Medlicott also later wrote a paper on the case. It is important to note however, that Medlicott is not a psychoanalyst like Lacan, who had no involvement in the Papin trial and whose study was a part of his own work on paranoia. As a psychologist employed by the defence to prove the girls’ insanity, Medlicott’s job was not to try and psychoanalyse them but rather to diagnose their relationship within existing models of psychological illness to enable them to be acquitted from legal responsibility for the crime.

He begins with a description of Pauline and Juliet’s relationship with each other and their family lives, as revealed throughout the trial and based on interviews with the girls and excerpts from Pauline’s diary. He presents this information as objective evidence from which to diagnose insanity. The opening of his paper is a

retelling of the events immediately following the murder: “two apparently agitated adolescent girls rushed up to the manageress of a tea kiosk in a small park on the outskirts of Christchurch and blurted out a garbled account of an accident...” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 205). Medlicott simultaneously explains and dramatises the events following the murder. It is notable that Jackson’s film also begins with this sequence.

Medlicott describes the Case Histories: “Pauline P. is a dark, rather sulky looking but not unattractive girl of stocky build... while Juliet H. is a tall, willowy, frail, attractive blonde with large blue eyes” (205). He describes the two mothers’ appearance in social terms. Pauline’s mother “appears to have been a woman of normal intelligence with average social activities and interests” and Juliet’s mother is “a self-possessed, highly intelligent woman with many cultural and social activities” (206). Juliet, he says “came from a socially more prominent and an intellectually more sophisticated background” than Pauline and Juliet’s father is “a University man of high academic qualifications and record” (206). The first thing Medlicott mentions about Pauline’s father is that he “had had a previous undissolved marriage [which] was unknown both to the family and the community in which they lived” (205). He sets up social observations with implied genetic consequences from which to form his diagnosis of insanity. Interestingly, Medlicott never makes mention of Juliet’s mother’s affair with Walter Perry, which was very prominent in the newspapers and in the trial itself.

Although he doesn’t mention it in this article, during the trial Medlicott said of Pauline’s family that, her “mongoloid” [down-syndrome] sister and another stillborn sibling “raises a query as to the stock from which she came” (*More Magazine* September 1991, p58). He infers that biology has a role to play in the diagnosis of

insanity. His diagnosis of the girls is that they suffered from ‘exalted paranoia’. He derived this term from one of the founders of German psychoanalysis Emil Kraepelin. Kraepelin, who developed his theories during the late 1800’s and early twentieth century, believed in the biological and genetic origins of insanity and this explains Medlicott’s emphasis on Pauline and Juliet’s family backgrounds. This description of Pauline’s family “stock” becomes associated with his description of her class background as increasing the likelihood of Pauline’s insanity.

He establishes their ‘abnormal’ behaviour against examples of ‘normal’ behaviour. Pauline’s sister is “likeable in manner, sociable and keen on sport” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 206). Pauline in comparison could not participate in sport because of her osteomyelitis, which he says “deprived her of much group participation” (206). Likewise: “her church had never been able to involve her in its group activities” (206). Belonging to a group is contrasted with Pauline’s chosen isolation: “as a small child [she] would shut herself off in a room with her dolls” (206). When she did not spend time with Juliet, Medlicott notes that Pauline’s diary “contained more normal material” (211). He says later: “The feelings of solitude may arouse exaltation” (219), a key part of his diagnosis.

Of all the different types of possible paranoia that Kraepelin determined: persecuted, querulous, exalted, religious, amorous and hypochondriacal, Medlicott deduces that Pauline and Juliet’s is one of the “exalted” type due to their “extraordinary arrogant and exalted state” (218). Medlicott notes that when he interviewed them the outstanding thing “about their mood was the definite exaltation” (215). By this he seems to mean the apparent joy and lack of remorse they both displayed after the murder. Medlicott notes that paranoia is “characterized by persistent systematized delusions, the preservation of clear and orderly thought and

absence of hallucinations” (218). This distinguishes it from schizophrenia which does involve hallucinations.

In his paper, Medlicott also cites Eugen Bleuler who was a contemporary of Kraepelin. Bleuler went on to adopt Freud’s theory that psychosis was not inherently biological but could also be caused by psychological experience especially in childhood, hence Medlicott’s interest in Pauline and Juliet’s early lives. Medlicott uses Bleuler’s claim that the paranoiac has no empathy and cannot recognize the rights of others (219). In his 1924 text, Bleuler uses the term ‘folie a deux’ which he also called ‘induced insanity’ meaning that the paranoia of one is induced into another, building on the delusion to the point where both subjects “remain blind when confronted with the contradictions from reality” (Bleuler 534). This concept precedes by nine years Lacan’s article on the sisters. Bleuler was the first to term the condition of schizophrenia and Medlicott, while not mentioning this term, discusses the girls’ hallucinatory experiences which suggest this formed a part of his diagnosis.

Medlicott also uses Helene Deutsch’s 1944 study in *The Psychology of Women Vol. 1* to explain Pauline and Juliet’s intense narcissism, which he saw as contributing to such exalted paranoia (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 219). Helene Deutsch studied under Kraepelin but later worked very closely with Freud. Medlicott uses her discussion of narcissism to explain how “each acted on the other as a resonator increasing the pitch of their narcissism” (219). Deutsch discusses the concept of ‘folie a deux’ in Freudian terms in an earlier 1937 essay, stating its frequency in siblings of the same sex (*Neurosis and Character Types* 245). Despite how similar her description of folie a deux sounds to Lacan’s concept of paranoia in his discussion of the sisters, she makes no reference to it and in her essay that Medlicott cites, she does not make a connection between narcissism and paranoia.

Deutsch describes instead the intense relationship between two girls in adolescence as part of normal psychological development. She describes these adolescent relationships as “a source of warm emotional experiences and by relieving guilt feelings they create a certain freedom in areas of behaviour that are still strongly subject to inhibitions” (*The Psychology of Women* 28). This emotional interest in another girl “a kind of double of her own ego”, gives the adolescent “a certain protection against too strong ties with members of her family, especially against her ties with her mother” (338). Not surprisingly then “when the common activity of the two girls goes beyond the limits of the permissible”, that fear arises on the part of each family as to which girl “seduced” whom (28). Deutsch doesn’t relate this “common activity” to homosexuality but the inference can obviously be made. Rather than one girl dominating or “seducing” the other, she sees that both females in such relationships play an equal part: “for each of the girls would in most instances have renounced the forbidden activity had she not been encouraged by the other” (28).

Her description of such adolescent relationships, does not exclude a potential sexual element: “Common pursuits and learning about forbidden things endow this relationship with thrilling excitement, and the content of the common secrets gives it its sexual character” (338). Such experiences in her view do not amount to paranoia. Freud also discusses such relationships in his work *A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, where he concludes: “A romantic and sentimental friendship... accompanied by vows, kisses, promises of eternal correspondence, and all the sensibility of jealousy, is the common precursor of a girl’s first serious passion for a man” (*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works...*” Vol. 7 60). This phase can be returned to, he believes, “if a girl is not happy in her love for a man” and has a high occurrence in cases of psychosis (60). It is possible that

Medlicott overemphasizes the pathological and homosexual nature of this early relationship between women as aberrant. Certainly such narcissism does not appear necessarily delusional or indicative of paranoia and in fact Deutsch notes that among normal adolescents, “The deepest ecstasies of love are experienced in fantasy” (*The Psychology of Women* 100).

Film-scholar Ruby Rich, in her discussion of film adaptations of the case, considers that it was a “Lacanian reading, I suspect, that formed the basis of Medlicott’s own diagnosis” (“Introduction to the U.S. Edition” vii). However, Medlicott never mentions Lacan and it appears that he associated himself with the Freudian school of psychology. A Freudian psychanalyst, Heinz Kohut discusses narcissism further in his 1971 study *The Analysis of the Self*. He describes that in those with narcissistic personalities, the grandiose self has “Dreams, and especially fantasies, referring to a relationship with such an alter ego or twin” (Kohut 115). He also describes the relationship that such narcissistic personalities have to creative activity: “If the idealizing tensions of the lover become so great that they cannot be absorbed by the object cathexes, they may escape as if through a safety valve to feed a spurt of creative activity” (76). This would make sense of Pauline and Juliet’s prolific artistic creativity together. Kohut makes a distinction between this narcissism and the “unrealistic features of the love experiences of adolescent schizophrenics” (76) and it is unclear to which form he might diagnose the girls if he were to discuss this case.

The girls’ fantasy lives emerge as the prime factor in Medlicott’s diagnosis of paranoia. Juliet as a child apparently “found it difficult to stop play-acting games” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 207). The fiction they wrote together is implicated in this idea of fantasy: “they would creep out at nights for midnight sprees in which they would act these fictional characters until the early hours of the morning” (207).

Pauline and Juliet both in fact wrote plays, poetry and an opera. They had a world, which they called the 'Fourth World'. Medlicott quotes Pauline as saying: "I know it's real" (216). He says: "It was then pointed out to her that other people would look upon it as a delusion but she snapped back contemptuously: "They don't matter" (216-17). Their plan, according to Medlicott, was to go to New York together "where they would find someone to publish their books and then they would go to Hollywood, choose their actors and supervise the filming of their novels. Later they decided to send their photographs to Hollywood where they expected to be hailed as actresses" (211). Medlicott presents their desires as arising from insanity by grounding them in the idea that they were false, although this is based on his own judgement: "In actuality their writings, although profuse and imaginative, did not show talent" (212).

Medlicott also associates their amoral and 'evil' behaviour with insanity. He considers that an important part of Pauline and Juliet's fantasies together was the development of what they called the 'Saints'. These were film actors and celebrities such as Mario Lanza and James Mason, whom they worshipped at night in their garden in "various ceremonies...including the burial of discarded ideas" (212). The girls' reappropriation of Christian imagery is central to his observation that "gradually the substance of their writing changed from the not unusual, highly imaginative outpourings of adolescents to an increasingly morbid preoccupation with evil" (208). He uses dramatic terminology without irony to describe the evil that arose from their use of these fictional characters and actors: "the scene was set for a break with society and its morality" (208). He quotes from Pauline's diary: "Juliet and I decided the Christian religion had become too much of a farce and we decided to make up one of our own" (209). Medlicott mentions that Pauline, as she states in her diary "had had

bad dreams the proceeding night which suggest that some part of her personality at least was protesting [the planned murder]" (218).

He sees the emergence of murder in their writings as a sign of their "exalted" paranoia: "They were preoccupied with ideas of great power, especially to murder without reprisal" (209). He quotes a character from Pauline's novel: "I would like to kill someone sometime because I think it is an experience that is necessary to life" (210). He mentions Pauline's comment in her diary: "Why could not Mother die" (212). Their apparent obsession with murder in their novels is equated with the same degree of concern to Medlicott, as this growing 'evil': "Murder, however, was not their only preoccupation. They copied out the ten Commandments so that they could break them" (212). Rupert Furneaux reports that Medlicott said during the trial in regards to the Ten Commandments, that Pauline broke them all, but that Hulme only broke nine (Furneaux 43).

This 'evil' that Medlicott describes is a reflection of what was immoral in the society in which he writes. He refers to their discussion about becoming prostitutes: "We worked out how much prostitutes would earn and how much we would make in such a profession" ("Paranoia of the Exalted Type..." 211). The girls' rejection of morality, their fantasies of prostitution being just one example, is linked to Medlicott's diagnosis of paranoia: "The impression that their disturbance was really one of psychosis was increased when they entered into religio-philosophical discussions" (216). Medlicott states that this loss of morality was "recent" and in accordance to Pauline and Juliet's growing closeness. Medlicott also reveals as evidence, titillating and sexual details from Pauline's writing: "We realize now that we cannot be revolted. We can discuss the most unsavoury subjects. (Such as whether the Saints' sanitary habits are prevented by sex) during a meal...." (213)

In the trial Medlicott was supported in his diagnosis by Dr Francis Bennett, the Parker family physician: “As Dr Medlicott said, they are suffering from folie simultane” (*Christchurch Star* 27 August 1954). Pauline had been sent to him several months before the murder when Juliet’s father called upon Pauline’s parents to express concern over their relationship. Dr Bennett presents as evidence of paranoia the poem written by the girls which illustrated, as he says: “the extraordinary mood of the authors” (*The Press* 27 August 1954). Like Medlicott, he associates their amoral and criminal behaviour as proof of insanity. He mentions that Pauline wrote how she and Juliet cheated together at a game of monopoly, which showed in his opinion “how highly they regarded deceit” (*Christchurch Star* 27 August). Crown Prosecutor Alan Brown asked him about their shoplifting at Woolworth’s: ““Would you have said they shop-lifted because they were insane?” And he replied ‘Had I known as much as I do now, I would have said yes. They had no other reason...’. When asked if it was therefore an insane act he replied, ‘Yes. They were acquiring experience for their creations and their novels, as they explained it to me’” (*Christchurch Star* 27 August). He interprets what he considers as a lack of any suitable motive for shoplifting, as an insane act. He concludes by saying: “Although all this represents evidence of a moral irresponsibility of the paranoiac, it was the actual murder that was the final proof of the diagnosis....To remove a minor obstacle by such a tremendous crime, disregarding remaining obstacles, shows delusion” (*Christchurch Star* 27 August). This delusion as he saw it “was fed and nourished by their association, and was threatened by their separation” (*Christchurch Star* 27 August). What Bennett and Medlicott agree on in support of a reading of insanity is that the girls had no real motive to justify the crime. Medlicott says that there is “no evidence that their rejection of moral values and anti-social behaviour was dependant on any strong

grudge against society” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 219).

Pauline and Juliet’s motives are considered by Medlicott and Bennett to be delusional, because of their amoral nature. Medlicott notes that Juliet is reported to have said: “I would have been an absolute moron not to know murder was against the law” (217). Medlicott’s response to this emphasises this transgression: “They both expressed repeatedly the right to do what was in the interest of their happiness, irrespective of the law. Juliet also said there was really no right or wrong....although they appreciated that the law would punish them it was not a law to which they owed any allegiance or respect” (217). Juliet also apparently said to him that “Conscience...was bred in people so that they punished themselves; it was senseless” (217). Medlicott maintains in the light of these apparently lucid statements that “it is generally accepted that in spite of the apparent lucidity of the paranoid there are subtle changes pervading the whole personality” (219).

Three Crown appointed psychiatrists determined in opposition to Medlicott and Bennett, that the girls were sane. Dr Kenneth Stallworthy said: “There was no delusional basis whatever in the motivation of the crime” meaning that their immorality was a sign of their ‘badness’ (*The Press* 28 August 1954). He refutes the idea of exalted and “arrogant” behaviour equating delusion: “Adolescence is a conceited age” (*The Press* 28 August). He considers that there was in fact adequate “evidence of motive, planning and premeditation” (Furneaux 45) for the murder. He disagrees with Bennett, believing that “There is no relationship between shoplifting and insanity....I am of the opinion that they both knew they were acting against the law, and that they were breaking the law” (*Christchurch Star* 27 August). Dr Saville and Dr Hunter came to the same conclusions. In their view, the girls were fully aware of what they were doing, had a convincing motive to do it and were therefore sane.

Pauline and Juliet's sexuality is an important element in Medlicott's diagnosis of which 'evil' is associated: "There is of course no doubt that the relationship between these girls was basically homosexual in nature" ("Paranoia of the Exalted Type..." 222). He backs up this statement by citing Dr Charles W. Burr as writing that he cannot recall a case of paranoia in which the patient was not homosexual (222). Burr said this at a meeting discussing two cases of paranoia with folie a deux at the Philadelphia Psychiatric Society in 1935. The case studies that Burr and other doctors discuss, are of two deeply religious middle aged Negro Men who belonged to a devoutly religious group they called the "Saints Retreat" and although believing in immaculate conception and sexual abstinence were thought to have had sexual relations with both men and women. They were arrested together in compromising circumstances. Burr says of the first case study, that the leader of the religious group was "grossly ignorant, though with considerable intelligence for his race" (Burr 1341). The man in the second case study was said to be suffering folie a deux with the leader of the religious group. The four other doctors in the discussion did not come to the same findings as Burr, one defining the men simply as a "group of superstitious Negroes who convince themselves of certain facts which they can make useful to themselves" (1341). Medlicott appears to have used Burr's statement on homosexuality in paranoic cases to support his argument, although he has taken it out of its context in the discussion of two very different cases to which there were various interpretations.

Medlicott states the fact that both of the girls denied physical homosexual relations, yet uses their role-playing as evidence, as described in diary entries such as: "We spent a hectic night going through the Saints. It was wonderful! Heavenly! Beautiful! And Ours! We felt satisfied indeed. We have now learned the peace of the

thing called Bliss, the joy of the thing called Sin” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 213). When Pauline did not spend time with Juliet, Medlicott writes that she “showed a healthy interest in an older boy” (208). Heterosexuality here is equated with sanity. Yet as her relationship with Juliet grew “her attempts at heterosexual functioning rapidly failed” (210). In reference to information in her diary, he writes about her first “attempted seduction” by which he means sexual intercourse with a male: “The most striking thing about the sexual behaviour was the apparent lack of real erotic involvement on her part” (210). He declares: “Pauline’s attempts at heterosexuality ended in failure” (222). He also mentions their “frequent long baths together and hours spent in Juliet’s bed” (212). Crucially, he deems “that the choice of male partners in dreams and in play acting was simply a disguise [for their homosexuality]” (222). Dr Stallworthy in his rebuttal of this says: “I do not consider that homosexuality is any indication of insanity whatsoever....I feel the homosexuality in this situation has been rather overstressed” (*The Press* 28 August 1954). He appears unconvinced that they were homosexual given that in their fiction “the love scenes were between members of the opposite sex” (*The Press* 28 August 1954).

Because Pauline and Juliet (aged 16 and 15 years) were just emerging from their adolescent years, their ‘homosexuality’ is more easily understood as a normal phase that they would pass through. For Christine and Lea however, who were in their twenties, it is much more emphasized in Lacan’s interpretation of the murder perhaps because as a reversion to this earlier narcissistic phase, it is understood as a more fully blown homosexuality with the addition of incest. The most distinctive difference in the contribution of assumed homosexuality to the murder is that for Medlicott it was simply further evidence of Pauline and Juliet’s insanity, whereas for Lacan the actual attempted repression of Christine and Lea’s homosexuality was what propelled the act

of murder. Pauline and Juliet planned the murder and this has contributed greatly to the perception of them as ‘bad’, whereas Christine and Lea can perhaps be more easily considered as ‘mad’ because of the seemingly unplanned nature of the murder and its associations with a kind of sexual frenzy and uncontrolled outburst. I will explore later how these differences manifest themselves in the theatre and films.

Another difference in the cases is that Juliet was of a reasonably high class for New Zealand standards. Medlicott’s use of Kraepelin suggests the view that insanity, and therefore homosexuality was less feasible for a member of the upper class than it was for the lower class. In this light, the Papin sisters who were working class could perhaps be more easily classified as insane.

Medlicott defines the point at which the girls became insane: “The antisocial wishes previously expressed in the behaviour of their fictional characters were now being released in real life” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 212). He gives as an example: “we enacted how each Saint would make love in bed, only doing the first seven as it was 7.30 a.m. by then” (213) and “our main Ike¹⁹ for the day was to moider Mother. This notion is not a new one, but this time it is a definite plan which we intend to carry out” (214). Her reference to a “moider” is the Hollywood film slang for “murder”. In addition to this “Both the girls could consciously hallucinate almost at will” (217). This reference to their hallucinations, “hearing music and voices and seeing fleeting scenes” (217), suggests schizophrenic hallucinations. He says Juliet explained that “these reveries were often pure imagination at the start but then something came in which altered it, something which could happen in Paradise” (217). Medlicott obviously interpreted this “altered” state as evidence of hallucination. His use of hallucination in his diagnosis contradicts his use of

¹⁹ This is an error in the transcription of Pauline’s diary, according to Glaumizina and Laurie, and the original word was ‘idea’.

Kraepelin's description of paranoia as having an "absence of hallucinations" (218).

Medlicott uses Pauline's diary entries to prove their "exaltation", when he quotes from it: "It is because we are MAD. We are both stark staring raving mad. There is definitely no doubt about it and we are thrilled by the thought" (213). She pronounces Juliet's father Dr Hulme as mad also. During the trial, a verdict of insanity was obviously their own preference and Medlicott describes them as having said that "they had committed the murder to remain together [therefore] no one would be so illogical as to separate them" (215). Medlicott writes about their attempt to prove their own insanity: "They both presented reasons for their 'madness'. They pointed out the supposed relationship between genius and madness, said they were both subject to mood swings between ecstasy and extreme depths of misery....Juliet suggested the threat of separation had driven them temporarily insane" (216). Clearly they were intelligent enough to attempt to provide Medlicott with evidence for his diagnosis.

However, Medlicott does not consider their self-diagnosis of madness as genuine and sees it as different to one of actual insanity: "Naturally the writer [he refers to himself] was not impressed by their evidence of insanity and did not feel they really believed they were insane" (216). Dr Stallworthy for the prosecution agreed with Medlicott on this point: "It is extremely rare for an insane person to wish to be considered insane. That is part of their insanity" (*The Press* 28 August 1954). Medlicott understands their own claim to "madness" to be conceit in that it "was a distinction in which they exulted and of which they were proud" ("Paranoia of the Exalted Type..." 218). During the trial, Medlicott reported from a conversation he had with Pauline in which she said the opposite: "We are both sane. Everybody else is off the mark. Our views are more logical and sensible" (*Christchurch Star* 25 August

1954). It is such statements as these that are rendered by Medlicott in his study, as “grandiose delusions” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 219) and a conceited arrogance that he refers to repeatedly.

Pauline’s writing within the context of Medlicott’s study can be read to reveal the logic of the society from which he inscribes madness. In her insistence upon her own sanity, Pauline reverses the judgement of madness imposed upon her, reflecting it back onto the society that imposed it. When she conversely embraces madness in her diary, she has “turned back on itself” this madness and opened it to “the dazzlement of truth”.

Medlicott compares the Parker-Hulme Case to other similar cases. Firstly, that of Nietzsche, who believed with his concept of the ‘superman’ that: “To do evil was true virtue” (220). Medlicott draws a connection to the girls with the fact that Nietzsche “spent the rest of his life insane. Nietzsche’s ethical conceptions are very similar to those of Pauline and Juliet” (220). He describes Nietzsche’s last work, as written in a state of “persistent exaltation and fantastic conceit” (220). In a later essay, Medlicott says how Nietzsche “created a superman who was himself in daydreams” (“An examination of the necessity...” 276), emphasizing the similarity of his delusions to Pauline and Juliet’s. The one thing that distinguishes them in Medlicott’s view is that Nietzsche “was a man of words and never like the girls attempted to translate his ideas into actions” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 220). Considering the fact that Medlicott considered Pauline and Juliet’s “genius” was delusional, and even refuted their own insistence on a relationship between genius and madness, his conflation of them with Nietzsche, an acknowledged genius of philosophy, is contradictory.

Medlicott also compares the case to works of art such as Dostoevsky’s

character of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* who “chose murder”, and quotes a passage in which Porfiry describes Raskolnikov: “I know what was your mood at the time – Excitement of such a kind will drive you out of your mind” (221). It is ironic that he seeks to prove his “fact” that the girls were deluded by their fictional and fantasy worlds, with an example *from* fiction. He also draws comparisons with Aleister Crowley, a scandalous British writer of occult fiction who invented his own religion “Crowleyanity” and who, according to Medlicott, engaged in sexual perversions and illicit drug taking (“An examination of the necessity...” 277). This merging of fiction and reality occurred during the trial also, when prosecutor Alan Brown cross-examined Dr Bennett by bringing up Shakespeare as evidence of a great writer who also wrote a lot of tragedies about murder and sex but who was not mad. Bennett then himself brought up Shakespeare’s *Lady Macbeth* as evidence to the contrary, that unlike her, Pauline and Juliet had no remorse and were therefore insane (*Christchurch Star* 27 August). Medlicott then compares the case to that of Leopold and Loeb, a notorious case in America where two young homosexual boys decided to murder a fellow schoolboy. Hitchcock based his film *The Rope* on this case.

The strangest comparison he makes of Pauline and Juliet’s relationship is to the Nazi S.S. Organization. Here he attempts to connect the case with what is generally perceived to be the most definitive case of ‘evil’, especially so soon after the war as he writes. The Nazi S.S. he claims “was of a paranoiac nature” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 221). He describes the “frequently senseless and sickening brutality carried out...in a mood that was frankly exultant, was very similar to the way these girls approached their crime and responded to it afterwards” (221). If Medlicott insists that the Nazi’s were suffering from delusion, he takes away the responsibility they had for their crimes - a very controversial claim.

What is shocking about Pauline and Juliet's crime and what emerges clearly from Medlicott's own fascination with it as evident in his report, is their rejection of social and moral beliefs and values. Juliet reportedly said: "The best people are those who fight against all obstacles in pursuit of happiness" (217). In following their passions and desires above all other factors, which is ironically not far from many clichéd mottos advocated for normal healthy people within Western society, Pauline and Juliet reveal the structure of a society that represses such impulses. Society by necessity, must proclaim the girls mad or bad. Medlicott is an example of an attempt to pathologize them. By trying to relieve them of responsibility for the crime, he deprives Pauline and Juliet of any ownership of their actions or serious consideration of their motives.

The second less well-known case study is by M. Bevan-Brown. He was a psychiatrist based in Christchurch. Glaumizina and Laurie note that as a prominent member of "the Christchurch social religious establishment" he was acquainted with Hilda Hulme. He wrote an article in 1955 after the trial, which was published later in 1961 under the title "Adolescent Murder" in his book *Mental Health and Personality Disorder*. He perceives the Parker-Hulme case as an "urgent matter of mental hygiene" (Bevan-Brown 219) disagreeing with the defence and prosecution and stating that the crime was the result of inadequate nurture: "if one seeks the ultimate origin of this crime, it could be expressed as "Deprivation of love in early childhood"" (213). He resists the term 'insanity' that he considers has no place in psychiatry, calling the girls' condition a mental disorder, specifically a 'Pathological Character Trait' (214). The symptoms are relieved in the individual by outbursts of violence and crime, hence the murder (215).

He does not use psychoanalytic terms to describe his diagnosis and this may

be because as a psychiatrist his intended readership is parents and families. However, his diagnosis appears in a crude form to be an echo of Freud's idea of a failed transition from early primary narcissism into a development of the ego where love is directed at objects outside the individual. Bevan-Brown describes the early phase in childhood after birth as "egocentric" and selfish and that by "adolescence we expect him [the subject] to show some awareness of and consideration for other people's feelings" (218). He does not account for the coincidence that the two women simultaneously experienced this mental illness, although he says that "an essential factor was the intense homosexual relationship between them" (212).

Like Medlicott, Bevan-Brown's diagnosis reveals a morality which equates "Christian ethics" with the kind of psychology he professes (219). He considers "an incident in which Juliet found her mother with Mr Perry as critical in determining the subsequent course of events. The incident was I think the last straw in loss of respect for her mother and the final removal of basic security" (216). He feels uncomfortable about the way the different diagnostic opinions were handled in the trial and that psychologists should in such cases confer privately and then "announce their joint opinion. I must confess that as a psychiatrist, I felt some humiliation to the profession in such a public spectacle" (217). He acknowledges that he has been unable to speak with the girls in forming his own diagnosis and is surprised that they were given no opportunity to speak for themselves in the trial (217). He thought they were treated like "robots or dummies" (218). The defence's reason for not letting them speak was that they thought it would be harder to prove them insane if they did. Bevan-Brown does not place responsibility on the family "stock" as Medlicott does or even directly onto the parents concerned. Rather, he insists: "If we are looking around for someone to blame and punish, we must blame society, including ourselves, for ignorance and

indifference” (218).

In his later 1970 article “*An examination of the necessity for a concept of evil: some aspects of evil as a form of perversion*”, Medicott strongly criticises this approach to cases of mental perversion. He rejects such “liberal humanism” in the work of people such as Bevan-Brown; what he also calls “modern psychodynamic historicism where bad behaviour is attributed to mismanagement of the individual in his formative years” (“An examination of the necessity...” 273). He believes this approach “which obscures the truth about human nature by assuming that evil is to be found not in man but in social and political institutions” (279) is “one of the greatest stumbling blocks to self-knowledge” (279) and ignores “man’s individual responsibility to make a choice” (273). He sees that this choice is between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and is “not necessarily identical with the concept of criminal responsibility” (279).

Medicott clearly reveals his fascination with the Parker-Hulme Case as it stands as an example of ‘evil’. As in his earlier essay he examines and draws comparisons between the existence of evil in various cases and works of fiction, history, and clinical studies. He uses the same examples as in his earlier writing but adds additional examples such as Dargelos from Jean Cocteau’s *Les Enfants terribles*. Medicott describes Dargelos as a sadistic and arrogant man who sends a package of poison to a schoolboy Paul who idolizes him and who willingly takes the poison and dies. Medicott states Dargelos is “presumably incapable of marriage and parenthood” (275) which suggests his use of this story is as an example of the evil emerging from homosexual attachment. He also compares Pauline and Juliet to Mr Hyde from Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel. Medicott states Mr Hyde’s inability also, to achieve the “maturity” of marriage and parenthood. Dr Jekyll drinks poison to release the evil side

of him and become Mr Hyde. Eventually the evil in him takes over and Dr Jekyll is forced to commit suicide in order to murder Mr Hyde. Here Medlicott evokes an example, in fiction again, of paranoid schizophrenia, which seems at odds with his diagnosis for Pauline and Juliet of exalted paranoia. He also makes a comparison to the film character Rhoda in the 1956 film *The Bad Seed*. Eight year-old Rhoda kills her school friend and the plot revolves around her mother's feelings of guilt for having passed on murderous genes to her daughter. Medlicott's inclusion of this film seems connected to his emphasis on Kraepelin's theory, that biology is responsible for insanity and deviance. Also, the fact that this film was released soon after the case perhaps helped draw associations with it.

Medlicott's views changed in subtle ways since 1955 and his distinction between madness and sanity became less defined. Surprisingly, he seems to embrace the necessity for a degree of 'delusion' in order to maintain a distinction between the values of 'good' and 'evil': "Values to be vivid, meaningful and binding must be invested with energy or imagination" (272). This remains a non-pathological function so long as "the ability to recognize that it is an illusion is maintained" (272). Also, he admits to an inherent evil in everyone when he criticises the liberal humanist approach for his reliance on reason and discipline, which represses his "natural knowledge of evil and of his own demonic urges" (279).

It appears that years after the case he no longer believes simply that 'evil' is a sickness but that immorality is more of a conscious choice and the responsibility of the individual affected (although this seems to suggest a rational choice is necessary which is what he criticized in the liberal humanist approach). In his use of the Parker-Hulme Case he has moved from a psychological examination of a pathological sickness to a moral belief system, the outcome of which is much closer to the

prosecution's in the trial - that the girls are 'bad'. Now he notes, they "have ultimately redeemed themselves and are now leading reasonably constructive lives. Like Raskolnikov they illustrate that adoption of evil is not necessarily irreversible" (277).

There were a few legal accounts of the case in books devoted to detailing significant crimes²⁰. One of these was published a year after the case and agrees with the view of the crown, which found the girls guilty. It also echoes the view of the three state psychiatrists as well as the words of the Crown Prosecutor who said: "They are not incurably insane. They are incurably bad." (Furneaux 16). This first account in 1955 was "The New Zealand Girl Murderers" by Rupert Furneaux in *Famous Criminal Cases Vol.2*. It recounts the murder by describing the events of the trial. It includes information from Medlicott delivered during the trial that was not included in his own case study, such as "Parker told me I was an irritating fool and displeasing to look at. Hulme pulled me over the coals for not talking sufficiently clearly. After I had physically examined Parker she shouted out, 'I hope you break your flaming neck.' There was...a gross reversal of moral sense" (42). The criminal aspects of the girls' lives are emphasized in this account eg. the shoplifting, blackmailing Perry and stealing from Juliet's father's safe (43). Furneaux predicts that the case will be quoted in years to come as "the most dreadful crime of the century" (47). He concludes: "Complete egotists, they were insane only in the sense that their ideas were those of animals rather than of human beings. Their law was the law of the jungle and like wild animals they must be caged until they have shown themselves capable of living together with other human beings" (47). This seemed to be the general perception of society's attitude towards the girls at the time.

Another account in 1957 was "Death in a Cathedral City" by Tom Gurr and

²⁰ There are several other descriptions of the case in crime anthologies which Glaumizina and Laurie make a note of on pg 110 of the study.

H.H. Cox in *Famous Australasian Crimes*. In this record of the crime the histories of the girls and the murder are described with the embellishments of crime fiction. An interesting difference to Furneaux's account is that it starts off with a description of the "Cathedral" city of Christchurch before launching into details of the crime. It sets up Christchurch city itself as a spectacle and not just the girls' relationship. It comments on the rugby game which clashed with the trial. However, instead of exploring the potential connections between the crime and the society in which it occurs, which might lead to a more political analysis, it serves simply as a backdrop from which to illustrate the murder, having the effect of heightening its shocking elements.

Although it poses as an objective account it uses dramatic licence and assumes a subjective understanding of the girls several times. For example, during the murder: "that was the moment when Pauline wished it hadn't happened. But some force possessed her, drove her on, some inner voice which commanded: It is too late to stop!" ("Death in a Cathedral City" 155). Pauline is described as "lame Pauline" with "cold brown eyes" like a deviant character in a thriller. Her diary is described as one of the "most terrible exhibits in criminal history" (158). Its descriptions are full of judgement – Pauline and Juliet's world is "a universe of fantasy and gross design" (166). Interestingly, it uncannily predicts the future of Juliet who much later in life assumed a new identity and wrote crime fiction: "Juliet Hulme will be the one who will serve a short sentence; and it is possible that, under another name, the world in time will recognise a writer of talent" (165).

The only political case study is that of Julie Glamuzina and Alison J. Laurie in their 1991 book *Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View*. They begin by each discussing their fascination with the case. Laurie, who lectured at the time in the Women's

Studies Department at Victoria University, remembered when it happened and she was thirteen: “I was fascinated by the fact that the two girls were in love and had a close friendship. I fell in love with girls and had a rich fantasy life full of romance and passion.... I was fond of love poetry and influenced by the romantic art of Hollywood and the grand tragic passions of novels.... The whole episode was like a romantic story in which lovers die and conquer obstacles for their great love.... I sympathised with the girls and thought that they must have had some stronger provocation for committing such a deed than was apparent from the newspaper stories” (Glaumizina and Laurie 13). Glaumizina had been walking on Mt Victoria in Wellington with her parents in the 1980’s when her mother mentioned the rough details of a murder that had happened there, which sparked her interest. She later discovered it was in fact Victoria Park in Christchurch. Glaumizina mentions that her parents, like Pauline’s, ran a fish shop and Laurie makes mention of her own working-class background. This suggests that they both identify and desire to be seen to identify with Pauline.

They disagree with both the ‘mad’ and ‘bad’ verdicts by the prosecution and the defence and present an alternative interpretation: “we decided it was important to revise the main accounts of the case and to give a different perspective – one which was from a pro-lesbian, feminist point of view” (11). They use the case to provide discussion about the attitudes towards lesbians during the 1950’s. Laurie felt that it was important to write about the implications of the case for lesbians by lesbians and from the perspective of lesbians (13). They place the case within a historical and sociological context, using it as an example of where “lesbianism may be understood as resistance to male domination” (64) or to the Western patriarchal nuclear family, which as Glaumizina explains, exists “to control women and children in order to benefit men and perpetuate male supremacy” (*Listener and TV Times* 12 August

1991, 15).

They see the reasons for the murder being much more complex than the ones offered in the Court Case. They criticise the way the ‘bad’ verdict connected lesbians with murder (Glaumizina and Laurie 184) as well as taking issue with Medlicott’s ‘folie a deux’ interpretation: “Medlicott seems to be using details common to many women as evidence of mental illness” (125). What he sees as a psychological illness they see as a close lesbian relationship. And this relationship in itself they do not see connected to the violence of the murder: “We think that the causes of domestic murder lie in the frustrations and dynamics surrounding the relationship between killer and victim. Such murders are the culmination of long standing conflicts. We think the origins of this murder lie in the dynamics of both households and in the mother-daughter conflicts, not in any special or unusual abnormalities” (184). They report that in a 1985 article Medlicott admitted to misdiagnosing them but simply substituted the term of his diagnosis for “adolescent megalomaniacs” (131).

They also criticise Medlicott’s emphasis on ‘evil’, especially in his 1970 article, pointing out in their discussion of it, that all the fictional examples he gives “are discussed as if [they were] real persons” (130). They interviewed Medlicott before his death and he told them of a dream he had about Juliet “where he thought that an evil scorpion-type creature which crawled out of a wall symbolised her” (131) proving to them that the case still very much preoccupied him. They criticise Bevan-Brown’s psychological case study also, for linking homosexuality with what he considered abnormal behaviour, undermining the “social and political significance of lesbianism” (132). In describing his apolitical approach they cite Celia Kitzinger’s term: “a psychologised liberal humanistic approach” (132).

Glaumizina and Laurie’s research is thorough and they provide a

comprehensive source of detailed information about the case in the context of the time and place in which it occurred. They conducted numerous interviews to substantiate their study. The book begins by reproducing the details of the crime as exposed during the trial, followed by a short history of Christchurch and a description and analysis of it at the time as “a conservative and class-conscious city” (28) with a “desire for Englishness” (29). They note its lack of racial diversity and such details as the number of picture theatres and milk-bars. They then give a detailed genealogical description of both families and of the girls’ early childhoods, emphasizing the class differences between Pauline and Juliet. They mention Pauline’s satisfaction in a diary entry when it was mentioned to her ““how beautifully I spoke English, [and] that I almost had an Oxford accent”” (46). They detail the period of the 1950’s, its politics and economic conditions, and the expectations on both genders, which they see as deeply conservative. They write about the relationships between both Pauline and Juliet but also between the members of each family, closely examining the diaries as evidence. They describe the trial itself, the cases of the prosecution and defence, the punishment the girls received, and their experience in incarceration. In a chapter titled “The Stories”, they combine the representations of the case as shown in the media, psychological reports, crime anthologies and fictional works. In their chapter “Why Was Honora Parker Killed?”, they relate the history of literature about women and children who kill.

They then introduce what Ruby Rich considers as “key to their strategy...the interrogation of informants not recognized as “experts” by the society in which the trial transpired...namely Maoris and lesbians” (“Introduction to the U.S. Edition” vii). They detail the Maori explanation for the murder, which was not explored in any way during the trial. Pauline and Juliet spent time at Port Levy, an area with significance

to Maori. They had an experience there that Pauline writes about, describing their discovery of “the fourth world”. Maori believe they had been into Wahi Tapu (sacred area) at a crucial time, which brought them into contact with another spiritual dimension. In a Maori interpretation, if a tapu area is breached, the guardians need to be “placated with either cooked food or blood. If blood, the person killed would have to be someone of that person’s own group. In this context, Honora’s death could be interpreted as a sacrifice” (Glaumizina and Laurie 148). Their final chapters relate the case specifically to the experience of lesbians in 1950’s New Zealand. Individual lesbians give personal accounts of their responses to the murder and the impact it had on defining their own lesbian sexualities. These accounts are without names and defined by their date of birth and whether they are Maori or Pakeha.

Glaumizina and Laurie’s personal approach to the case and their identification with the women as lesbians is in direct contrast to Medlicott’s attempt at an objective analysis. Feminists often consider that objectivity is a patriarchal construct. Central to their approach is an embedded assumption that Pauline and Juliet were lesbians. This is not something they state outright and it is first discussed on page 64: “Did Juliet and Pauline have a lesbian relationship? In our view they did though there are difficulties involved in using the term ‘lesbian’ for women and girls of the past who may not have defined themselves in this way” (64). They support this definition citing Adrienne Rich’s idea of a lesbian continuum. Anne Perry however (formerly Juliet Hulme) certainly did not wish to be defined in this way: “There was never, ever, a sexual element to our friendship” (*Sunday Star Times* 1 December 2002). In a later article “Heavenly Images” in 2002, Laurie describes an interview with Perry in which she found it curious that she “can now admit to having killed a woman, but not to having loved one” (Laurie 19) and “I know she doesn’t agree with the lesbian

interpretation, but [I] explain that this is the way the case is seen. She makes no complaints about it but as I say goodbye I wonder what she thinks” (19). Glaumizina and Laurie lay themselves open to the accusation that it is not up to a woman herself to define her sexuality and that others can do it for her. They effectively deny Anne Perry’s right to be taken seriously when she claims she did not have a lesbian relationship with Pauline.

Laurie in her later article discusses the problematic of representing and interpreting their relationship: “Who owns ‘Juliet Hulme’ and can interpret her to the world? She has lost control over her own remembered past life; others have become authorities” (18). She ignores how in reducing or defining the relationship between the girls to a lesbian one and using it to explore lesbianism in a social context, she has also claimed “ownership” and “authority” over the girls’ identities. While Glaumizina and Laurie do provide an alternative to the “mad and bad theories” as they intended, they also limit the case’s possibilities to be interpreted in other alternative ways. Laurie says of their book that it “does not claim to be the ‘truth’, rather one account and interpretation of the case from a lesbian perspective” (20). Yet in their personal approach to the case and in their identification with Pauline and Juliet as being lesbians like themselves, they implicitly imply that Pauline and Juliet *were* lesbians and that this interpretation has more validity and perhaps more “truth” than the others. What could be read as the ambiguous and ambivalent nature of Pauline and Juliet’s relationship is unable to emerge from their reading. Glaummizina and Laurie’s assumptions and distinct agenda blind them from potential alternatives. This is apparent in an interview about the book where Laurie says: “They were absolutely isolated as young lesbians.... They undoubtedly felt that if they were separated, they would never meet anyone else again – so they were desperate. These days, we would

hope that two young lesbians in that position could ring up Lesbian Line and get advice and support” (*MORE Magazine* September 1991, p59).

Laurie’s interview with Anne Perry was in 1994 after the release of *Heavenly Creatures* when her former identity as Juliet was revealed. Laurie writes a scathing critique of the film in her article. I will discuss this later in my examination of the film. Laurie maintains in this article that the case is still understood as a distinctively lesbian one: “the case was and still is, portrayed in a context of female homosexuality” (Laurie 18).

For the U.S edition of Glaumizina and Laurie’s book in 1995, film critic Ruby Rich wrote an introduction. She engages with the fascination with the case: “only those trials that offer the public an entry into horror or fascination, beauty or glamour, class privilege or taboo rupture, and which combine a potent mix of such unique factors with a public moral...are the ones with which the public imagination cathects and which stay with us, seemingly forever” (“Introduction to the U.S. Edition” v). She considers that “Juliet and Pauline were exceptional protagonists for a murder case” (v) and perhaps also for a horror film. She notes a recent trend in lesbian vampire films and discusses Peter Jackson’s just released *Heavenly Creatures* in relation to Glaumizina and Laurie’s study. Likewise with Laurie’s analysis of the film, I will discuss Rich’s interpretation of it later also. Rich believes that its authors have “rescued the Parker-Hulme case from obscurity and began to explore the links it suggests between the 1950’s and the present - in Christchurch, New Zealand, and in communities everywhere where lesbianism is as taboo as matricide” (iii). She is enthusiastic about its local specificity but also its universal relevance to the rights and lives of lesbians and the way in which they are depicted in film.

Rich compares the case to the Papin sisters in which the prosecution also

found that “incestuous and homosexual love for one another figured as motivation and explanation” (vi). She supports Glaumizina and Laurie’s criticism of the diagnosis of *folie a deux* noting its “attractiveness as a theory implicitly collecting lesbianism under the banner of criminal pathology” (vi). Her perspective on the case and the book, as an American writer, highlights the possibility that New Zealand used the murder in some ways to raise a feeling of self-importance. She mentions that “the New Zealand press referred to Pauline and Juliet as the country’s own Leopold and Loeb” (vi). The previous year Edmund Hilary had climbed Mt Everest putting the nation on the map. Perhaps even such a scandal as murder was used to inflate New Zealand’s insecure national pride and prove that if it can happen here then we are on par with the rest of the world.

Rich is interested in the “extent to which both families had ‘secrets’ related to sexual behaviour that violated social norms” (v). Like Bevan-Brown and Glaumizina and Laurie she notes the significance of the planning of the murder being connected to Juliet finding her mother in bed with Walter Perry. Although she doesn’t moralize like Bevan-Brown, she suggests as he does that such a revelation of hypercritical immorality on the part of Juliet’s mother, may have encouraged their own deviance from accepted morality.

She is very much in support of Glaumizina and Laurie’s “extraordinary research” which she sees as “charting new territory” (viii) and as being “a work of recovery” (iv). She describes that it “allows us to slow down the myth machine” (ix) and present the case as it is embedded in historical and social detail. She is most interested in how their book might contribute to an understanding and as an attempt to fathom, the appeal and “contemporary resurgence” (x) of films about lesbians who kill.

Two fictional accounts of the case were published in the same year. In 1995 Ruby Rich made the claim about the Parker-Hulme case that “there was nothing about the long-ago event to attract U.S. notice” (ii). Vin Packer’s little known 1958 lesbian crime novel *The Evil Friendship* proves her wrong. Vin Packer is one of the many pseudonyms for the writer Marijane Meaker. She wrote lesbian novels under this name and suspense thrillers and young adult fiction under others. Packer was approached in her twenties by a columnist in the New York Times who brought her attention to the Parker-Hulme Case. She says: “I was fascinated by *folie a deux*” and the relationship between the girls (*The Evil Friendship* 35). She explores this relationship in the context of an English boarding school. She identifies with the girls’ desire to be writers. The original title for the novel was *Why Not Mother*, extracted from an entry in Pauline’s diary. This ambiguous yet rather provocative title was thought to be too “tame” and changed by her publishers to *The Evil Friendship*, placing the crime and the relationship clearly within acknowledged and established moral terms and within the recognised genre of lesbian fiction.

The second fictional work was written in the same year, 1958 by authors Tom Gurr and H.H. Cox²¹. *Obsession* is an extension, one year later, of the crime article they wrote together “Death in a Cathedral City”. They appear motivated by the same fascination that inspired their criminal account – to shock and entertain with a story of deviance and abjection. They use Medlicott’s case study almost like a bible in order to illustrate the girls’ “strangely exalted and unnatural happiness in homosexual love” (*Obsession* 5). Class does not appear to be a factor in this novel as it was in their criminal account. Names and details are changed although Christchurch is identified as the city., Gurr and Cox write: “No novelist would have dared to invent these

²¹ Two British journalists who came out to New Zealand to cover the trial, according to Fran Walsh.

occurrences, these situations, these bizarre occasions” (6). This is later echoed by Packer: “no mere writer could ever have invented a pair as swept away and deeply disturbed as this one” (“Why Not Mother?” 35). Like *Obsession, The Evil Friendship* fits into the established codes of crime fiction in the 1950’s linking lesbianism and murder.

The Verdict (1955) written by Bruce Mason

Bruce Mason wrote *The Verdict*, a stage-play, in 1955, within a year of the murder itself. It was the first play to be based on the case. Mason’s fascination lies not with the specific details of the Parker-Hulme Case but with the public’s fascination with these details as they emerged in the trial. The title of his play points towards two separate kinds of verdicts: the verdict of the jury and the verdict of the New Zealand public.

The verdict reached by the jury in the Parker-Hulme trial was that Pauline and Juliet were ‘bad’ and guilty of the crime of murdering Honora Parker. The public’s verdict was that their parents were also ‘bad’. Juliet’s mother was, in the eyes of the public the ‘bad’ mother as she had been having an affair with Walter Perry. This example of ‘bad’ morals was perceived as being one of the explanations for the murder and was significant in Bevan-Brown and Ruby Rich’s accounts of the case. It was also revealed that Pauline’s parents were not legally married. These were all elements of the trial, which excited, fascinated and horrified the public at the time. Mason wanted to expose an audience to their own fascination with these details in order to reveal the hypocrisy of their moral judgments. He uses the moral errors of bad parenting and infidelity that arose out of the trial to reveal how these “crimes” are not aberrations but common to a great portion of the middle-class. However, he leaves

out the most central fascination of all.

The names and identifying details are changed as in the fictional account of the case, *Obsession*. In addition, Mason has changed the victim of the crime from a daughter's mother (aka Pauline's) to her father and also the daughter single-handedly murders her father and has no accessory. These two details immediately change the nature of the fascination and subsequent "verdicts" that might have surrounded such a case.

In seeking to explore the public fascination with the Parker-Hulme case it must be asked why Mason changed these details. He may have done it out of sensitivity, to further distance his play from the case, as it was written so soon after the crime. He also may have done it because a daughter murdering her father is less abject and shocking. It is possible that presumed lesbianism was also too taboo even for Mason. It would have been much more scandalous, and undesirable perhaps to discuss the moral hypocrisies surrounding homosexuality or for Mason to suggest that lesbianism was also a "crime" of the middle-classes. Certainly this rather large cause for public fascination is not addressed at all during the play. His hesitance to use these details of the murder seems to suggest that his fascination with the public's fascination with it, is secondary to his desire to provide his audience with an explanation. He does this by providing a morality which exposes the moral crimes of infidelity and bad parenting in order to relieve the middle-classes of them.

In order to represent these moral hypocrisies onstage he substitutes the courtroom for a public bar. Inside this bar he puts two middleclass couples "on the stand" and under "interrogation" from Mrs Douglas, a mother whose 15 year old daughter Fiona has just been found guilty of murdering her father, a psychologist. It could be interpreted that Medlicott is the symbolic murder victim, the murder being a

rejection of a psychoanalytic diagnosis. Certainly, what little is revealed about Fiona who never appears in the play, suggests Mason wished to portray her as a deviant and ‘bad’ girl as opposed to a sick and deluded one. Mason attaches 15 year old Fiona with another equally shocking crime - she is six months pregnant to a sailor from a passing ship. The person on ‘trial’ in this surrogate courtroom, is not Fiona however, a symbolic Juliet or Pauline, but Mrs Hulme (in the guise of Mrs Douglas). The case is not of murder but of bad parenting and infidelity, two vices and moral sins of the middle-class. This has the effect of a semi-inversion of the public reaction to the trial itself - the moral judgments imposed upon Mrs Douglas, of infidelity and ‘bad’ parenting, as they were perceived to have contributed to the murder, are reversed and exposed in the middle-class couples. The judges become the judged. Mason presents a middle-class theatre going audience, with an image of their own hypocrisy and judgments.

Mason addresses the audience’s fascination with the case at the beginning of his play. The couples talk about the case and about the life it has brought to their conversations while mentioning how they tried to prevent their children from reading about it: “Much worse than horror comics” (Mason 5). Admission of their own fascination is deflected into a fear that their children will be influenced by this immorality. David Dowling notes Peter Harcourt’s retelling of the impact the play had on its audience:

“As the audience became aware that it was based on the Hulme/Parker case they sat in frozen disbelief and disapproval. There was a kind of stunned silence in the theatre which spoke eloquently of a Kiwi belief that ‘such things aren’t right as entertainment’ – conveniently overlooking the fact that the whole country had taken part in the spectacle of the original trial, pop-eyed at the macabre detail and the twisted relationships. The judge of the play competition commented on the author’s inappropriate choice of subject. This remark was curiously at odds with the play’s clear intention, which was to offer a defence and an explanation of something that many people, without thinking, regarded as inexplicable” (Dowling 13).

I think Dowling is incorrect in his comment that Mason was offering a “defence” of the crime; his defence is of Mrs Douglas against the judgments imposed upon her. Dowling does show clearly however, the audience’s refusal to acknowledge their own fascination with the case as something which entertains them, and which they see mirrored in the conversations of the middle-class protagonists. This also reveals the expectations of theatrical entertainment during the fifties, something very much based in an escape from real life, their own environment and society.

To reveal an image of the audience to themselves in this way is a potentially radical idea considering the time in which Mason writes. His theatre was unique in its desire to present New Zealanders and their lives onstage and not those from elsewhere which had previously been the case. He laments about the expectations for theatre of the time: “what must one do to liven up an audience of somnambulists” (Mason as quoted by Howard McNaughton *Bruce Mason* 76). His solution appears to be theatre which is a kind of church, where morality is discussed and debated - not a radical concept.

I will not discuss this play further as Mason’s use of the case removes the aspects of it central to my thesis. It is significant that while Mason uses the fascination with the Parker-Hulme case as the basis for his play, the specific details of its shocking nature are not expressed. A key part of the fascination with the case was that a daughter had murdered her mother. Pauline and Juliet appeared motivated by an impending separation but by implication they also violently rejected the icon of motherhood. Yet in changing the murder to that of the father, motherhood is the very thing Mason wishes to re-invest with sacredness. The crime is clearly referenced but ultimately disguised and unspoken. McNaughton also leaves it undiscussed in his description of the play in 1981 as: “based on a much publicised recent murder trial”

(*New Zealand Drama* 47). The unspoken nature of the Parker-Hulme murder, both within the play and by the commentators on it, reinforces the preservation of the unspoken and taboo nature of the Parker-Hulme murder and the fascination which fuels its appeal.

Minor Murder (1967) written by Reginald Denham and Mary Orr

In 1967 Mary Orr was a Broadway actress and Reginald Denham her director husband. They wrote plays together on Broadway and in London and were known for their thrillers and comedies. They heard about the Parker-Hulme case during a tour earlier that year of New Zealand and Australia with a play that Mary was starring in. It inspired them on their return to New York to write *Minor Murder*. This is the second play to be based on the Parker-Hulme Case. There is no indication that Denham and Orr read any of the case studies, newspaper reports or trial transcripts of the Parker-Hulme case. It is clear that their interest was stimulated by the information they gained about it through the opinions and attitudes of the general public, who were so disapproving of Mason's play ten years earlier. This means that their account of the case is influenced by the moral judgments and attitudes ten years on that Mason was attempting to criticise. Denham and Orr's fascination with the case as an inspiration for their play, lies therefore, in the general deviant nature of the crime as it must have been perceived by them in their travels. Unlike Mason, they chose to represent the relationship between the two girls and the deviant homosexuality associated with it. They also saw the potential in the representation of this deviance as something to entertain and fascinate an American audience unfamiliar with the details or cultural specificity of the case. Their perspective on this case makes a connection between the crime and their perception of a relatively uncivilized, uncultured part of

the world in which it is located.

The play is best described as a light drama in a crime genre. *Minor Murder* is an example of the kind of theatre that Bruce Mason's audiences expected - a genuine Broadway play of a kind that was and still is much imitated in amateur and professional theatre in New Zealand. It is no doubt the kind of repertory drama that Mason's audience would have approved, excepting the specific crime on which it is based. Like the use of the 'verdict' in Mason's play, the title *Minor Murder* has two different meanings. It refers to the age of the murderers and also connotes a murder of relatively small importance or severity and its occurrence in a relatively minor country. How is it that a crime that is considerably 'major' in its shock value and relative fascination compared to other crimes, achieved this 'minor' status?

The answer seems to be that their use of something explicitly shocking serves as a deviant and illuminating backdrop to contrast with and fore-ground, the genteel and romantic lives of the middle-class. They position the murder on the margins, both geographically and socially, serving to highlight what is considered normal and morally acceptable. The central drama is not the crime itself but the act of anaesthetizing, explaining and civilizing something that threatens to shock and disturb. It is not an attempt to understand the motive for the crime but to represent it in the genre of a 'who-done-it' narrative. The murder is understood as being a consciously deviant act inspired by their equally deviant fantasy lives. At particular fault is the writing and implied amorality of the girls' "pornographic" novel although theatre is also implicated in this deviance.

The crime is taken out of its specific social context and placed in one that is used to depict a more universalised idea of deviance. Unlike *The Verdict*, its intended audience was not a New Zealand one. Denham and Orr produced their play on

Broadway. It is a play for an audience who have not heard of the case or of New Zealand. Ironically, this ‘minor’ country was so minor that no American had probably even heard of it, so they set the play in a more recognised minor country - the outback of Australia, a familiar trope for somewhere in the less civilized antipodes with lots of sheep. They specify in their direction for the play in the preface, that “Although the setting is in Australia, no attempt should be made by the director to strive for the Australian accent or to cast the play with Australian actors. With the exception of two or three small parts, the principal characters are wealthy, well-educated people who speak good English with an international accent”. It is familiar enough but suitably other in order to fascinate an American public.

The isolation of this outback setting, and its exotic fascination, is used to explain the crime and distance the audience from it. With regards to Margaret’s (one of the two girls) private world, or diary and novel writing, Patricia says: “Isolation often creates introverts” (*Minor Murder* 11). Her use of introverts here, connotes perverts and inbreeds and all unsavoury things bred on the margins of society. As the characters are placed on the margins, the murder is explained by a desire that is somehow prevented or not achieved, to become more civilized and normal, that is, closer to civilization and European and American culture. The girls in this play, like the protagonists in Packer’s novel, also written for an American audience, want to leave for Paris and London to become writers, to live like Denham and Orr themselves perhaps who live in an apartment on Central Park, and who write, star in and direct their own plays (they also coincidentally have a cat called James Mason, one of Pauline and Juliet’s ‘Saints’). The play contains the notion that life outside the big cities leads to deviance and murder²². It is inferred that the more cultured, perhaps

²² Their attitudes to New Zealand culture that inspired this interpretation of the case

even the more American you are, the further you are away from deviance and abjection. It is significant that the murder weapon is a small “hatchet” that is an aboriginal tool on display as an artefact in the home of Shirley (the mother of Margaret). The girls’ crime is thus associated with dangerous and exotic natives. The abject is expressed as something that emerges from geographical and cultural isolation.

This distance between deviance and normality is created on the stage by the juxtaposition of the girls’ relationship to that of Patricia and Claude’s who are the moral arbiters of the play and provide a frame from which to position the girls’ relationship and crime within. Claude and Patricia are privileged in comparison to the deviant and ‘bad’ coupling of the girls as they are the obvious identification point for an audience. They appear to represent the positions and relationship of Denham and Orr themselves as they wrote the play. They are friends of the murdered mother but live in the city. Claude is a lawyer and Patricia a well-travelled journalist. Patricia says that she has written about criminals but always took their side and was not able to be impartial like lawyers (such as Claude). This suggests that the play will combine the (male) objectivity of Claude and the (female) humanism of Patricia. Their flirtatious relationship lightens the drama and their relationship develops alongside their role as detectives in discovering the truth of the crime.

Patricia and Claude are the ones who reveal the truth and ensure justice takes its course. Their ‘major’ relationship is what makes the deviant and murderous one ‘minor’. They civilize the relationship by situating it clearly as something deviant and

are revealed in their account *Footlights and Feathers: A logbook of a Theatrical Tour Down Under*. Orr says later in this account: “New Zealand does not cotton on to new ideas. The country is too set in its ways, too isolated. Anything that does not conform to the norm of the last fifty years is considered new-fangled and is taboo” (*Feathers and Footlights* 140). This idea of isolation both in geography and culture emphasizes their explanation of the murder in the play.

as inevitably solved or resolved as any narrative in a crime genre. The fascination with the motive for the murder that arose from the case itself is averted and transformed into a who-done-it plot where the audience is in the privileged position of waiting for what they already know to be discovered by these protagonists. There was never much question as to 'who-done-it' in the Parker-Hulme case itself, despite the initial attempts of Pauline and Juliet to make it appear as an accident. Margaret and Carla murder Margaret's mother in the garden (this happens off stage) and pretend it was an accident. The dramatic impetus is provided by the developing suspicions of Claude and Patricia that the girls are responsible for murdering her. In this genre the truth will inevitably be discovered, Patricia and Claude's flirting will inevitably lead to a proposal of marriage in the final scene and civilization will inevitably win out over isolation and deviance.

The death of Margaret's mother Shirley symbolically turns Patricia into the replacement mother. Patricia takes on responsibility for the girls, disapproving of their growing closeness and surmised homosexuality, intending to separate them and send them to boarding school as Shirley had herself intended and which had served as the motive for her murder. This is ironic given Vin Packer's depiction of the English boarding school as a breeding ground for homoerotic relationships in her novel. Patricia is positioned as another potential victim of matricide but this is safely averted at the climax of the play when the girls turn on each other and in a misunderstanding, Carla dobs Margaret in. The character of Patricia challenges some of the conventional ideas of a woman's place in society which Orr in particular might have been interested in portraying. Patricia left her first husband because, "He believed a woman's place was in the home" (*Minor Murder* 9). Patricia and Claude's 'modern' attitudes, which reveal presumably those of Denham and Orr themselves, are shown

in this play to be deprived in isolated places.

Daughters of Heaven (1991) by Michelanne Forster

In 1991, playwright Michelanne Forster appears to have decided that enough time had passed since the murder to represent the case in name with no attempt to disguise it. The Court Theatre in Christchurch, under the direction of Elric Hooper, commissioned Forster to write *Daughters of Heaven* based on the available trial transcripts and she worked closely with Hooper to write the script. The case was a scandalous and taboo subject of discussion let alone topic for representation. She recreates the relationships and events leading up to and after the Parker-Hulme murder, on stage. Forster was not brought up in New Zealand and her American perspective positions her with a distance, from which she can be critical without being affected by the sensitivities that the case could potentially arouse in those closer to it. Her proximity as a woman also suggests she will perhaps be able to empathize with the girls and not judge them. She recalls hearing of the case when she had just given birth to her first child, which led to her desire to write about it: “I was both repelled and fascinated” (Forster 10). Her initial fascination was therefore linked to a kind of horror in her identification as a mother, with the murder victim.

The decision to present a play of the case was a controversial one. It brought out a defensive attitude in some people including Dawn Lamb the Principal at the time of Christchurch Girls High at the time, the school the girls attended 40 years earlier: “We live with our history. I think there would not be many institutions 115 years old who could get by without having someone less than perfect attend them. You have got to put this in perspective, it was nothing to do with the school, really. We are a state school, in those days we didn’t have a zone and they were entitled to

come here” (Cropp). By zoning she means an area surrounding the school which entitles those who live within it automatic attendance. What she says doesn’t make sense because even if there was a zone at the time, Pauline, at least, would have been within it as she lived across the back fence from the school (on Gloucester St).

Lamb’s use of “zone” seems to indicate her unconscious desire for a barrier, which keeps deviant, abject or abnormal elements outside of what is considered normal, safe, and respectable. This puritanical reaction to the play as an attempt to distance her school from it, reveals how even 40 years later, the ability of the case to incite fear of association was still strong.

The Court Theatre, as one of the foremost cultural institutions in Christchurch, was enthusiastic to claim the first theatrical recreation of the case as a part of its history. The play was premiered in Christchurch under Hooper’s direction. He says in a press interview: “We thought things like that happened in movies and in America and everywhere that was 10 000 miles away” (Cropp). His desire to stage the play can be seen as part of a national desire to embrace the crime as evidence that we are up to play with the rest of the world and not on the margins of it, as Denham and Orr placed New Zealand in their play. Forster justifies her decision to stage the play with the claim that: “murder, however privately conceived, is a public act” (Forster 11).

The fascination with the case is very much connected to the rumours that Pauline and Juliet had a lesbian relationship. Howard McNaughton believes that the lesbian aspect to the case was central to its fascination: “without this dimension the Hulme-Parker affair would have been just another incident in Christchurch’s traditional arena for adolescent transgression, Victoria Park” (“Daughters of Heaven” 6). The lesbian relationship, says Forster, “never worried me. It was the passionate delivery of their souls to one another that I was concerned with - not what they did in

bed” (Forster 11). She is keen to express a desire to elevate the girls’ relationship above a physical or sexual one to some more essential non-physical love: “I was hunting the psychological heart of the murder” (10). Hooper speaks of his own fascination with the case in a Foreword to the printed edition of the play: “it was part of my life, part of the lore of this city and, most important, an engrossing and bizarre story” (7). He states, unlike Forster, that he is interested in the lesbian aspect to the case. He remembers his reaction to the case when, “I heard the word ‘lesbian’ for the first time” (7). Yet he distances himself from any desire to represent this scandalous aspect, describing the need to contemplate the case “in a detached and critical manner” (7). He implies that, despite the fascination with these lurid details, its representation in the theatre will not be sensational or in ‘bad taste’. He expresses this in his description of his aim for theatre generally: “Ultimately the aim of any play, whether based on fact or presented as total fiction, is to present a world, no matter how strange or extreme, which is consistent within itself and convinces solely by itself” (8-9). He implies that in the realm of art the case can be transformed and acquire a form of dignity in its very distance from the real events upon which it is based.

There is an ambivalence expressed here by both Hooper and Forster, where they speak of their fascination with the case yet distance themselves from their desire to reproduce the most scandalous aspect of it. Forster says she is not interested in lesbianism and Hooper says the function of theatre is to create a distance to such lurid detail. Yet, the most titillating parts of the play are examples of lesbian behaviour as it is imagined between Pauline and Juliet. Forster uses the girls’ role-playing to entertain the audience with the lesbian behaviour that she professes to have no interest in. For example, Pauline has just told Juliet about her attempt to have sex with a boy:

PAULINE: Mario's much better.

JULIET, *becoming Mario Lanza*: Yes, of course.

PAULINE: Mario

JULIET: Gina

PAULINE: Mario mio.

They kiss. JULIET begins to stroke PAULINE. Then notices her slip.

JULIET: It's gone a bit grey and slimy hasn't it?

PAULINE: I do have a nicer one at home (26).

Here they begin by exploring their homosexual desire through Juliet's role-playing of Mario. When it becomes sexual, as indicated in the descriptive use of 'kiss' and 'stroke' in the stage directions, this is the point at which they desist. Christina Stachurski notes how the "framing of Pauline and Juliet's physical intimacy with role-playing and dishonesty casts doubts about a sexual aspect to their relationship" (3). However, this is not so doubtful as the scene continues. They begin referring to each other under their role-playing female names, continuing the behaviour they initially desisted:

PAULINE: The least Mother could do is buy me some decent
underwear, stupid bitch!

PAULINE is trembling. JULIET strokes her.

JULIET: Poor Gina.

PAULINE: She even tried to make me wear one of her old bras.

JULIET: Poor, poor Gina.

JULIET takes her locket off and gives it to PAULINE.

PAULINE: Oh Deborah, I'm so happy when I'm with you.

JULIET: You're an idiot. It's only a locket.

PAULINE: I love it. I love you.

JULIET: Don't ever leave me (26).

The lesbian behaviour they tentatively began is now followed through in the guise of female role-playing resulting in a fully blown declaration of love where they promise never to leave each other. The confirmation of this sexual aspect is in the text of the stage directions ('*trembling*' and '*strokes*'). Christina Stachurski notes that Colin McColl's 1992 production of the play for Downstage theatre in Wellington presented the relationship as "overtly lesbian" (Stachurski 3) whereas in Lisa Warrington's for the Globe Theatre in Dunedin, "The girls kissed with closed mouths and a lack of passion" (3). Either way, in the text at least, lesbian love in a sexual sense is evident through their professions of love.

It is interesting that Glaumizina and Laurie's lesbian interpretation of the case came out just before Forster had finished writing the play. Forster agrees they were lesbians but resists that label as something she considers they would not have used to describe themselves, distancing her representation of Pauline and Juliet's relationship to Glaumizina and Laurie's distinctly lesbian interpretation: "They were certainly not making any militant or political stand as lesbians" (*The Press* 16 Oct 1991). Forster and Hooper's denial of their interest in and use of this lesbian aspect, shows just how delicate a subject it was in Christchurch in the early '90s. While the decision to stage the play caused great controversy, the publicity it generated and the titillating material it ultimately provides, may have made the choice of subject a wise economic decision for the professional theatre company. They disguised their exploitation of the sexual aspect of the case in order to satisfy an audience's prurient fascination with the real event. Hooper's insistence on the play's distance to the real events problematizes their decision to imitate the facts and details of the case.

There is an emphasis on facts and objectivity in the play that suggests it is attempting an authentic retelling of the case. It is created through what Hooper describes as one of three different levels in the play – this first level is “the external and legal facts” (Forster 8). Alan Brown the Crown Prosecutor delivers information and addresses the jury at the beginning but it would appear that this address is also to the audience: “You are here to decide the case on the evidence and on the evidence alone” (19). The play, perhaps in a similar way to *The Verdict*, is presented as the evolution towards some kind of judgment, to be made at the end of the play after all the facts have been presented. Howard McNaughton in a review of the Court Theatre production states: “the girls demand to be judged” (“Daughters of Heaven” 6).

These objective facts are contrasted by the second level to the play, the character of Bridget, who immediately rejects this notion of objectivity with her own personal commentary, the content of which is similar to the judgments and morals Mason sought to explore in his play. She shows Forster’s fascination with the immoral aspects of the crime. Her role is an invention by Forster of a housekeeper for the Hulmes, placing her in a position to witness and comment on Pauline and Juliet’s intimate relationship. Forster says that Bridget’s “preoccupation with trying to find a meaning for an inexplicable act began to be mine as well” (Forster 10). She appears at an opposite pole from the Crown Prosecutor’s statements, although one of her comments after the summing up at the trial - that they are “dirty minded little girls” (78) - is a direct quote from the Crown Prosecutor. Bridget comments on the events, reflecting the morals, opinions and attitudes of the time. She stands outside of the action, breaking the fourth wall, and speaks directly to the audience. Bridget embodies the pious and moral attitudes of the time in a satirical fashion for the audience. The audience is placed to recognise and find amusement and irony in her

moral piety and in doing so to feel themselves above it. Her function is to distance any relationship that might be made between the Christchurch audiences who watch the play and the society forty years before.

The play as a whole has the effect of placing the murder firmly in the past and establishing a distance to it. McColl who directed it at Downstage, expresses his attitude to the case as being something disassociated with the present: “It interests me very much that this happened in a provincial town in New Zealand in the 1950s. The pressure to conform was enormous in those days” (*The Evening Post* 27 May 1992, 41). He does not see any potential in the case to reflect upon the present. The crime appears in some ways to have been integrated into respectable society through its representation in art. Since the first productions of the play it has had frequent productions throughout the country and has become canonized as a play of choice for numerous sets of teenage girls performing scenes from it in competitive drama festivals.

Bridget is also a distinctly working class character put in the position of an outsider to the characters involved in the main action. This places working class New Zealanders on the margins and as less civilized or culturally evolved individuals than the assumed middle-class audience of the play. Bridget is associated as having more of an effect on Pauline than Juliet in her attempts to draw them into line with her insistent Christianity.

Forster was encouraged by Hooper to believe that “the strength of the piece lay in these many layers of conflicting viewpoint” where neither is given preference (Forster 11). The two objective structures of *The Crown Prosecutor* and *Bridget* are juxtaposed to present conflict. They also serve to frame the central fascination for the spectator, the relationship between the girls. It is represented primarily as a love story,

which Forster describes as: “that powerful emotion which sweeps reason and morality away in a crazy tide of two-ness” (11). Here she suggests that these scenes between the girls as the third level to the play, override both the objectivity of the Crown Prosecutor’s statements and the moralizing of Bridget, although she keeps her identification with the girls at a safe distance. The play opens with Pauline and Juliet in separate prison cells. This scene establishes a relationship that is split both geographically and thematically; a bond has been broken. They are both praying and the dialogue is cut between them. They are praying to different Gods. Pauline is repenting to the Lord and Juliet is speaking to Pauline “through the spirits of the fourth World” (17), a name for their own alternative religion. It sets up a love story that seems destined from its beginnings to lead to disjuncture, separation, and tragedy. This scene predicates the fated love story on which the “psychological heart” of the play is based.

New Zealand society was shocked when it was revealed during the trial that for Pauline and Juliet, “the Christian religion had become too much of a farce and we decided to make up one of our own” (“Pauline Parker’s personal diary” 14 June 1953). This blasphemy was exacerbated by their stated desire to break all of the Ten Commandments. The title *Daughters of Heaven* situates Pauline and Juliet in relation to their parents and two optional heavens. The heaven of the Christian religion to which Bridget is associated, and the realm of what Pauline and Juliet called the Fourth World which they discovered at Port Levy and defined as their own alternative religion: “I want you to remember paradise. It was ours once. We created our own map of Heaven. Haven’t I learned the hard way in this shit-hole of a place that that is all there is? Our heaven and the two of us?” (Forster 17). Stachurski believes Forster’s use of the Fourth World as an alternative religion is subversive, showing how

“Pauline and Juliet choose to construct religion rather than be constructed by it” (Stachurski 2). But it seems the radical potential of this active rejection of Christianity, is muted in Forster’s play as their Fourth World is sentimentalised and turned into a sad and delusional dream. She says her play became about “being undone by love” after her early drafts, which had focused on “the nature of insanity” (Forster 11).

Pauline and Juliet’s Fourth World is understood as being removed from reality, except at the end of the play and crucially during the murder itself. When the Fourth World appears through the play, for the most part, it is depicted as a transition into an alternate reality that supports an interpretation of schizophrenia, deviating from Medlicott’s exact diagnosis but not from his description of their hallucinatory experiences. For example, “*A glimmer of the Fourth World flares up then fades*” or “*The fourth World envelops them*”. The Fourth World is represented here as something subjectively experienced by the girls yet is represented here externally and visually for an audience with lighting and sound effects. This representation of their subjective experience contrasts with the formal objectivity, which frames the play. It renders this ‘world’ as evidence of schizophrenia, and in theatrical terms a world of escape and fantasy.

Hooper’s description in the Foreword to the play, of his vision of theatre as “a world no matter how strange or extreme, which is consistent within itself and convinces solely by itself”, could easily be a description of Medlicott’s diagnosis of insanity. He goes on: “Such is the aspiration, arrogance and sometimes the magical metamorphosis of art” (9). This could likewise be considered similar to Medlicott’s description of Pauline and Juliet as arrogant, conceited and exalted beings. Hooper reveals that the stage, in his view, is a place of illusion and delusion and not of truth

or reality, and this is how the murder itself is represented in the play.

It is significant that in the murder the barriers between their fantasy world and reality are erased: “PAULINE *strikes her mother*. JULIET *comes running to assist her*. *The fourth World envelops them*” (57). The murder is represented as a part of their Fourth World and therefore as an act of madness. Pauline and Juliet’s representation as ‘mad’ is the opposite to the verdict in the Court Case. This delusion or hallucination however, only takes over at the very act of murder. As they walk down the path in Victoria Park right before the murder, they joke about it being like a Hollywood film:

JULIET: It’s like a film isn’t it?

PAULINE: Universal Studios presents –

JULIET: Moidering Mother!

They try to stifle their laughter (56)

Madness is associated here with Hollywood film. It takes away their responsibility for the act and any inherent ‘badness’, while sanitizing it as a sadly delusional act of love. This sequence also places the crime within the context of a Hollywood horror film and anticipates the interest the case would have in Hollywood, not by Universal Studios, but by Mirimax and filmmaker Peter Jackson who made his film three years after Forster’s play. It is probable that Forster herself also desired to turn her play into a film, as Wendy Kesselman did earlier with her stage play²³.

The placing of the murder within both *Daughters of Heaven* and *Minor Murder* makes it clear that it is not the main event of the plays but provides the platform or is the trigger for them. It is notable that in both plays the murder takes place at the end of the first of two acts and occurs offstage. In Forster’s play, while

²³ Fran Walsh states in an interview that there was a film version of Forster’s play in development (14 Lippy). Peter Jackson mentions in another interview that it was “the basis of a possible TV film” (Sibley 226).

the murder beyond the first blow is not represented, Stachurski notes that both Hooper and McColl chose to stage it in their productions (Stachurski 3). In both plays the interest lies in the relationship between the women and the outcome after the act of murder. In *Minor Murder*, which takes the form of a crime drama, the interest and outcome of the play is in the discovery of the murderers' responsibility. In *Daughters of Heaven*, which imitates more closely the form of tragedy, the murder is what precipitates the catharsis of the tragic love story, the outcome of the relationship between the girls. Aristotle in *The Poetics* writes that it is the recognition scenes at the end, which are "the most powerful elements of emotional interest in tragedy" (Aristotle 63). In Forster's play, the audience are in a position from which they can pity the girls. This is illustrated in a review of an Auckland Theatre Company production of the play, where Martyn Sanderson describes how "their escapist theatrical games at times achieve a joyfulness that makes the tragic outcome all the more pathetic" (*Auckland Sunday Star* 18 April 1993).

The mother is presented as an archetypal 'good mother' reinforcing the values of family and marriage. Mrs Rieper's practical and somewhat common view of the world is shown as a desire to want what is best for her daughter: "If you think the world's going to pay you to write about some Italian horse you've got another thing coming. You'll end up washing dishes in some hotel unless you finish at Digby's [a secretarial college]" (Forster 42). She is shown to be concerned about Pauline's health and worried about her relationships with boys. When Pauline points out to her mother that she doesn't read much, Mrs Rieper reveals feelings of class inferiority in comparison to Mrs Hulme: "I'm your mother, Pauline, not Lady Muck" (29).

Christina Stachurski reads the murder within the play as an attack against this archetypal mother figure. She sees the play's effectiveness as a feminist text. She

understands the murder as an attempt, especially on Pauline's part, "to subvert the social conditioning of women...passed from mother to daughter" (Stachurski 2). In a 1997 article she states: "*Daughters of Heaven* allows the historical Pauline and Juliet to speak through the productions of this play text to contemporary society" (4).

Stachurski believes that "strong parallels can be found between the Dionysian experience of the Ancient Greeks and Juliet's and Pauline's experience" (2). She notes specifically, their experience of the Fourth World: "a strong parallel can be found between the Dionysiac revellers on the hillsides outside Thebes and Pauline and Juliet's transcendent experience on the hillside at Port Levy" (2). To prove this she makes a specific connection between *Daughters of Heaven* and Euripides' play *The Bacchae*. It is interesting that Lacan also mentioned the *Bacchae* in relation to the Papin murder in his comment on the sisters: "They tear out eyes as the *Bacchae* used to castrate" (Edwards and Reader 37). Lacan makes the comparison to support a psychological reading, whereas Stachurski makes a politically subversive one.

She uses this comparison to support her feminist approach to the play mentioning the way the revels of Dionysus subverted gender roles. She believes that Forster has encapsulated in *Daughters of Heaven* the subversive function of the women engaged in the Bacchic rituals of Euripides' play. She compares Honora to Pentheus who "is killed by the Bacchantes as he invalidates and interrupts their revels" (Stachurski 2). Therefore, "Honora's death can be attributed, at least in part, to her opposition to Pauline and Juliet's collective passionate acknowledgment and expression of the life force within themselves and the natural world" (2). The description of this desire is similar to Irigaray's conception of the female divine. Stachurski sees significance in the location of the murder in Victoria Park: "Honora, like Pentheus, is lured away from the city on to the hillside to meet her death amidst

the natural world” (2). She uses as examples of Bacchic ritual in the play, the chanting on stage when Pauline and Juliet recite their poem together: “the intense rhythm of the chant undermines language and becomes a point of focus of subversion” (3).

This is a problematic interpretation for several reasons, firstly, the actual performance style of *Daughters of Heaven* is, to quote Hooper: “more or less naturalistic” (Forster 8). It is not a ritual performance in the way Euripides’ play would have been performed or like Genet’s use of ritual in theatre. Instead the play-acting within Forster’s text demonstrates and indicates ritual within a naturalistic play. It does not contain any ritual element as such, which means the incantations would not have achieved the ritual efficacy that Stachurski indicates.

Secondly, Stachurski’s feminist reading of the play as a subversive text, ignores how after the murder, Bridget substitutes for the mother, breaking up the relationship so their lives can take a new course. Bridget converts Pauline, the more susceptible and similarly working class woman, to believe that Juliet does not want her to wait for her after prison. Bridget carries out and incarnates what the mother could not, that which is central to the ending of the play and crucial to the resolution of the tragedy and maintenance of the status quo. Forster’s identification as a mother in her reaction to the case seems played out here in this conservative ending.

Matricide – the Musical (1998) - Kathleen Fallon and Elana Kats-Chernin

The first musical theatre production to use the Parker-Hulme case was an Australian collaboration between two women in 1998, called *Matricide – the Musical*. My discussion of this musical is based on a paper drawn from a PhD thesis in progress by Helen Rusak and not on a viewing of the musical itself. Kathleen Fallon explains her inspiration for the musical when she was working with a group of female

actors “called Urban Blight Detox Theatre in Sydney. It was set by a woman in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous and funded by the Health Department...all the women in improvisation classes etc., talked, performed about their relationships with their mother” (Rusak 45). This prompted Fallon to draw on her fascination with the Parker-Hulme murder as subject for a musical. She worked closely with composer Elana Kats-Chernin to develop a score.

The conceit of their ‘opera’ within the musical itself, is a play with the idea that it is written by Pauline and Juliet themselves (Pauline recorded in her diary that they wrote an opera). This opera is staged in prison after the murder and trial. The subject being their fantasies about murder in the guise of the characters Impassionata (Juliet) and Chora (Pauline). This imitates the form of Peter Weiss’s 1964 play *Marat/Sade* although the parallel is not made in this article. The audience are positioned as “an invited and select group of prison officers, psychiatrists, psychologists, family and friends, bureaucrats from the Department of Corrective Services, Welfare etc” (46). In a comparison with Weiss’s play, Pauline and Juliet stand in for de Sade, the director of the play inside the insane asylum, a man imprisoned for his sexual sadism and moral licentiousness

Fallon describes the form as an opera within a musical “written by two crazy teenagers like Impassionata and Chora, it is their idea of what opera, theatre etc is or should be. They are ransacking culture (including music) to maintain their anger, rather than becoming depressed and passive, so it is [a] very serious game. This opens possibilities for pastiche, ironic, playful, humorous ‘mock’ opera, [and] theatre” (54). She regards this form as necessary to her exploration, whereas “to provide a serious setting, such as the movie version of the same story *Heavenly Creatures* did, might not allow the dimensions of parody required by the librettist to convey her ideological

discourse” (69). Fallon’s exploration of Pauline and Juliet’s (*Impassionata* and *Chora*’s) fantasies within the frame of their creative relationship is motivated by a desire to impart her feminist ideology.

Fallon states that the foundation of the text rests on the feminist and psychoanalytic ideas and writing of Irigaray and Kristeva. Helen Rusak in her documentation of the musical writes: “The feminist intentions for the work reside in Fallon’s ideological commitment that is informed both by feminist literature and by her involvement in the feminist debate” (68). The feminist literature that supports what appears to be a lesbian interpretation of the case is most likely Glaumizina and Laurie’s lesbian case study. The plot of this opera within the musical is an exploration of the fantasy of the murder and eating of a mother by her daughter, which Fallon describes as “symbolic of the birth of a female culture” (48). The prison in which the opera is set could be seen as symbolic of the confines Irigaray describes as existing in the relationship between mother and daughter.

The aim is described by Fallon as “a sort of ritualised rite of passage for girls into the cultural feminine” (46) and “gender terrorism to reclaim adolescence” (49), having the effect of “Unloosening the parameters of paralysis. Suggesting Irigaray’s female divine” (49). Rusak explains Fallon’s approach as the search for “an alternative site of expression of feminine difference, thereby providing women with alternatives not present within a phallogentric Symbolic Order” (49).

Their musical seems to be harking back to the radical feminist theatre of the 70’s. Fallon refers to her collaborator Kats-Chernin’s background in feminist “all-women projects of the late 70’s and 80’s”. Rusak describes it as “a work entirely written by women and performed by women for women” (68) and reports that Fallon gave Kats-Chernin tapes of women in childbirth to help inspire the music for the

musical (53). Fallon desired to exclude men from the performance: “I would like the first two or three nights to be women only audience, as a gesturing back to these earlier productions and also in order to experiment with the energies unleashed” (68). Their interpretation appears to be a lesbian one and certainly the photographic evidence of the musical suggests a lesbian relationship with at least one set of women taking on the distinctive roles of the ‘butch’ and the ‘femme’.

The opera consists of six female actors who play four different sets of women - a “Matricide couple” and three mother and daughter couples; a “Kitchen Couple”, “Bedroom Couple” and “Bathroom Couple”. In these scenes of mothers and daughters it seems likely that Kristeva’s abject is explored. These scenes take on certain themes, for example, the bathroom scene is about cleanliness and the kitchen scene is about a mother enticing her child to eat. If this is inspired by Honora’s concern at Pauline’s apparent weight loss the connection does not appear to be made and seems more abstracted and universal.

The material for the musical seems disconnected from the specifics of the Parker-Hulme case, garnered from a variety of sources and performed in a variety of ways. Rusak describes what appears to be an Artaudian inspired section where the audience walks through a tunnel smelling of damp earth and vegetation to view a painting behind chicken wire called *The Fall (of Woman)* by Brisbane artist, Cernak. Rusak describes the painting as “surrealist and saturated with painterly eclecticism” (50). Fallon describes Impassionata and Chora’s “imaginary travels through centuries of cultural representations (biblical, liturgical, advertising jingles etc) creating their own world” (69). This could perhaps be an attempt to represent Pauline and Juliet’s creation of their fourth world. It seems that the emphasis of Fallon and Kats-Chernin’s musical however, is the use of it as a theatrical exploration of feminist and in

particular lesbian theory.

Don't Deliver Us From Evil (1970) dir. Joel Seria

In 1954 Joel Seria, a college student in France, read an article in a French newspaper about the Parker-Hulme murder: “It made a very strong impression on me at the time. It reminded me of the problems I had with my own parents. It stayed with me” (Seria)²⁴. He recalled the case in 1970 when he went to make *Don't Deliver Us From Evil*, his first film. His fascination with the Parker-Hulme case as an inspiration for his film is not in two girls murdering their mother, or even the murder itself, but in the relationship between the two girls and their ability to blaspheme the church and the respectable morals of society.

Unlike the Parker-Hulme case, the murder in Seria's film is unplanned, in self-defence, and the victim is a man they do not know. Ann and Lore are two teenage girls who go to Catholic boarding school and in the summer holidays spend time together at Anne's house while her parents are away. They go for bicycle rides; kill birds; sexually provoke men; read blasphemous poetry; and commit general acts of 'evil'. They invite a man into the house late one night after his car has broken down. He appears to be a respectable middle-aged businessman. The girls strip down to their underwear in front of the fire, pour him whiskey and sit next to him on the couch asking him personal questions about whether he loves his wife and if he is an experienced lover. They explain, “We're researching marriage” and Seria is obviously keen to reveal the hypocrisy of this institution. Overcome with lust, the gentleman eventually loses control and pounces on Lore. Anne comes to her defence by bashing him on the head with a log, accidentally killing him. The murder therefore, has none of the elements that made the Parker-Hulme case so shocking - women do not murder

²⁴ This recent interview is on the DVD released in 2006.

other women, there is no implied lesbian relationship between the girls, and it is not premeditated.

It is also not the most significant act in the film. Earlier they kill a caged budgie and the close-ups of it dying are much more memorable and horrific than the murder. The climax to the film is not the murder but the result of it, their act of joint suicide. Seria describes his film as “a search for meaning”, an “escape”, a “desire for freedom” and an “act of provocation”. This “act” is suicide.

It is the relationship between the women that fascinates Seria. His choice of two girls to represent and enact his own desire to blaspheme the Catholic Church is fundamental to the film which is both politically and psychologically motivated. He strongly relates the making of the film to his own experience of Catholic boarding school and his parents who sent him there, both of which he hated: “I put a huge part of myself into this film. That’s why I made it. It’s really like a part of me. I put so much of myself into it.... my feelings of imprisonment” (Seria) His motivation here is a psychological as well as a political one. His identification with the girls is expressed cinematically through the use of subjective shots that illustrate their imagination, which contrasts with his otherwise objective cinematic techniques. For example, in church, the priest is seen from Anne’s perspective and at one point the shot becomes subjective. The edges of the frame become cloudy and the Priest has no clothes on and is preaching Satanism. This is positioned ironically within his actual sermon where he preaches: “Beware of cinema and television, vehicles also of depravity and degradation”. This sequence shows Seria’s influence by surrealist French filmmakers like Luis Bunuel who were also considered blasphemous and whose films were both politically and psychologically motivated. *Don’t Deliver Us From Evil* screened at Cannes in 1971 after which it was banned for blasphemy and was only released in

English in 2006.

At the same time that Seria allows the spectator to identify with the girls subjectively, the spectator is also placed on the outside as the voyeur. The murder is filmed by Anne bashing the camera with a log intended for the fire. It could be interpreted politically that the prurience of the spectator is being attacked, as Seria plays with the audience's gaze throughout the film. An example of this is when they decide to mercilessly tease a cow farmer. The girls like to use their sexuality as a tool to provoke men. They sit down with the farmer in his paddock and ask if he has ever been with a woman. Anne tells him that Lore wants to "do it" with him and the camera views her from his perspective as he peers up her skirt between her legs, much like in soft porn. The perspective then changes to hers as she opens and closes her legs. Eventually he loses control, like the murdered man will later, and throws himself onto Lore unable to control his violent sexual urge. The spectator to the film is torn here between identifying with the girls in their desire to provoke him, to being the one who is provoked, the voyeur and in the position of the countless males they titillate and tease with their sexual provocations. If a heterosexual male, the spectator is faced with an identification of his own desire for the girls, and if a heterosexual female, perhaps the spectator is faced with their own desire to become the girls. This psychological identification is put into conflict with the spectators' objective judgments about Anne and Lore's behaviour as well as their own desires. This accounts for the film's offensive nature but also the effectiveness of its political intention.

Seria's position as a filmmaker is also caught between subjective identification and objective desire - between an interest in the psychologies of his actors as well as a desire to use them politically. As the film is an "exorcism" of his own early

experiences with the Church and his parents, he identifies himself with Anne. He explains that the film is “about the story of one girl dominating another. How one girl gets her friend to do everything she wants” (Seria). He talks of Anne’s singular decision to commit ‘evil’ acts: “She’s seduced by it”, with no mention of Lore’s part in this. In the act of representing his identification with Anne on screen, as she is a female and he is a male, she becomes an object of desire for the gaze of the camera. His only way of becoming close to her in an attempt to identify with her is to place himself vicariously in the position of Lore thereby erasing her existence within his own experience of creating the film.

In this way he cannot see what he has actually created, which is a relationship between Lore and Anne, where it is unclear which girl is the stronger or more active. It doesn’t read clearly as one girl dominating the other. Their activities appear mutual and quite symbiotic. His exclusion from their relationship is perhaps one of the reasons for his fascination with it and his only way of identifying with Anne, as a mirror image of himself, is as a voyeur. Through the making of the film he and the actress who plays Anne, Jeanne Goupil, became lovers and are now married. Goupil talks of the role retrospectively as indistinct from her own identity saying: “I didn’t research the part because it was me” (Goupil).

Seria is fascinated by the sexuality that his main protagonists evoke or provoke in their community as well as a desire to share in their intimacy. He denies that they are lesbians. The first scene in the film is of Anne at night watching a nun taking off her clothes and habit behind a lit curtain, to reveal a silhouette of her naked body and lavish long hair. This could be read as a lesbian gaze on Anne’s part, yet it appears to have a more symbolic purpose as a mirror to her own narcissistic desire to explore her sexuality. The sexuality that lurks underneath this strict Catholicism is

what fascinates Seria and he explores this cinematically, emphasizing it by the use of shadow play, which places a screen between the object and the image. In the next shot Anne goes under her bed covers, switches on her own torch light and begins writing in her diary, a detail Seria may have derived from the Parker-Hulme case. In the context of the previous shot, this can now be read as going beneath the sheet or behind her role as Catholic school girl to undress her own sexuality. As well as writing in her diary under the covers, Anne also uses a mirror to apply red lipstick. This time however, the spectator is not watching from the outside but goes with Anne under her bedcovers. We are with her in her intimate space, and Anne is a mirror to our or Seria's own desire to share in this intimacy. As her diary writing is related to us in voice-over, it is as if we were sharing in her thoughts. Lore often joins Anne under the covers and they read erotic literature. It is suggestive and at times implied that they could be speaking erotically about one another, but it could also be that Seria is intentionally titillating the spectator with a suggestion of lesbianism. The only clearly lesbian element in the film is associated with the Catholic Church. Anne and Lore spy through the keyhole on two nuns kissing each other and later Anne reports them to the Priest. The audience is implicated as voyeur once again with a shot of the nuns through the keyhole.

While Anne's mother (if Anne is seen to represent Pauline) is not the murder victim, their relationship is explored in relation to Anne's discovery of her sexuality. Her mother is seen to apply lipstick in a mirror with Anne watching in the background, evoking the earlier shot of Anne imitating this under her bedcovers. In one scene Anne undresses in front of her mother's mirror while smoking a cigarette. The camera films her reflection. The spectator is positioned here again as the voyeur as well as from the perspective of Anne's own narcissism. The function of the mother

in this film is to provide Anne with a sexuality that she turns to ‘evil’ ends. Both Anne and Lore belong to respectable church going upper-class families.

As Seria uses the girls to explore his own early experience, he has them read together and recite from books that inspired him: “at that age it’s true that you are ripe for seduction”. They read Lautreamont’s *Maldoror*. This recalls Eluard and Peret’s comparison of Satan worshipping Maldoror to the Papin sisters in their 1933 surrealist article. It is clear Seria was influenced by the surrealists and their similar intent to blaspheme the church. There is no indication he was referring to or influenced by the Papin sisters’ crime as they were however, despite the fact it also occurred in France. The picture that follows Eluard and Peret’s article, of the winking nun hitching her gown to reveal high heels, garter and petticoat [see appendix F], is very similar to Seria’s depiction of the nun’s sexuality in the first scene when one of them undresses to reveal a hidden femininity and sexuality.

Seria has the girls perform a Black Mass that they call a ‘ceremony’ in an abandoned church. This immediately has echoes of Genet’s ceremony in *The Maids* and although Seria doesn’t mention Genet’s play he appears influenced by it. The girls recruit the simple-minded gardener to be the priest in their ceremony. As with the other men in the film, he is also violently overcome with desire and tries to grope them. As he represents a priest during their ritual, this becomes another blasphemy. Anne and Lore discuss their “Ceremony” as a theatrical event. A voiceover of Anne’s diary reads: “The Ceremony is tomorrow. Our rehearsal went well. Tomorrow writing these pages I will be like a different woman”. In this ceremony during which they wear see-through white dresses, they become blood sisters and recite: “We renounce forever Jesus Christ and all his works. We dedicate ourselves to Satan. We beseech thee, Satan, our Lord and Master. Teach us all the ways of wickedness. And at the

hour of our death, welcome us to your Satanic bosom”.

At the end of the film *Seria* substitutes a church altar for a stage - the church for a theatre, within which the girls enact a symbolic and theatrical suicide. During a school performance in front of their families and nuns from the school they set themselves alight on a stage after reciting surrealist poetry. The film sets up this eventual substitution of the altar for a stage in the film’s opening shot. This is a wide long shot of an altar in an old unused church the girls have taken over for their ceremony. On the altar is the small burning candle of the sanctuary lamp. The camera moves in slowly during the opening credits to a focused close-up of the flame. Overtop is the theme music, a melody played by a church organ and sung by two female voices. This music appears throughout the film when the two girls are associated with fire, for example when Anne lights a cigarette; when they set haystacks alight; when she is sitting by the fire with her parents; and when they undress in front of the fire before the murder.

The end scene mirrors this shot of the altar at the beginning of the film. The altar has become the stage upon which they sacrifice themselves and the camera moves in slowly towards them. Goupil describes this ending: “They staged their own life and death. Rather than being judged and dragged into the world of adults”. It clearly echoes their ceremony in front of a real altar earlier in the film. Again, they both wear white dresses but instead of reciting Satanic verse they read blasphemous poetry ending with verses from Baudelaire²⁵. They then pour lighter fluid over themselves and set themselves alight. The audience claps rapturously before realizing

²⁵ They recite lyrics from *La Voyage* which include: “O Death, Old Captain, it is time. Weigh anchor! / Let’s sail beyond the doldrums of our days / Though black as pitch the sea and sky.”

that it is actually for real and the film ends in the ensuing horror.

Seria has used the stage within his film as a ritual platform, a substitute altar, where their recital of the poem is a ritualistic incantation that has very real ends - unlike Stachurski's interpretation of Forster's use of ritual incantation in *Daughters of Heaven*. He uses a stage for its symbolic value, its ability to subvert the theatrical expectations of the audience within the film, and possibly the expectations of the viewer of the film itself. The spectators within the theatre are nuns and parents, yet in this 'church' the girls have taken over the role of Priest. The roles are reversed. This use of a stage as a symbolic altar also provides a way to place the spectators in Seria's film between these two positions, looking down at the audience from the perspective of the girls and also viewing the girls from the audience's. Goupil says of this ending: "They lived more in their imaginations than in the real world. Then they crossed over the line and it became real" (Goupil). This suicide could be understood as a delusional act based on her description of it, yet Seria positions it politically as an act of provocation and blasphemy.

This ritual and theatrical suicide and use of black mass maybe compared to the symbolic suicide of Genet's maids and his use of Artaud's ritual theatre. Art has become life through the use of ritual on the stage. The use of fire in the girls' sacrifice in flames upon a symbolic altar, points to Artaud's comment about the act of theatre "being like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames" (Artaud 13).

The Christchurch Murder (1988) – Angela Carter

Angela Carter heard about the Parker-Hulme Case and wrote the screenplay, *The Christchurch Murder*, in 1988²⁶. Over the course of her career she wrote novels,

²⁶ It was purchased by an Auckland production company but has not yet been made into a film, most

non-fiction, journalism, reviews, plays, radio works and screenplays. Her choice of film to represent this case reflects her exploration of the way Pauline and Juliet's fantasies and desires were deeply connected to the cinema. The screenplay itself is a fantasy of their relationship as much as it is a retelling of the Parker-Hulme case from a feminist perspective - the relationships between the two girls and their mothers are central to the film, unlike in the stage play *Daughters of Heaven*, for example, where the mother is not a point of interest. Carter carefully situates the film between fantasy and reality. The title of the film for example, is a clear factual statement – the film is about a real murder that occurred in the actual city of Christchurch. However, the real names are changed, Pauline and Juliet become Lena and Nerissa and Carter takes liberties where facts and details of the case are concerned. In this way at least, it is similar to Gurr and Cox's novel *Obsession*. Her choice to combine fantasy and reality is central to her exploration of how the murder unfolds.

Carter explores the connection between Lena and Nerissa's fantasy lives and their real lives. Her use of Hollywood is central to this; a very real place that is at the same time sustained by illusion and fantasy. Their relationship is founded on a mutual desire for Hollywood, expressed in their first conversation together. Lena says: "You've got hair like a film-star. Like Deborah Kerr". Nerissa replies: "Don't you think Hollywood must be wonderful?" ("The Christchurch Murder" 352). There are several scenes where they are inside the cinema watching films that Pauline and Juliet watched, such as *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* and *The Third Man*²⁷. It appears that Carter started going to the cinema at roughly the same time as Pauline and Juliet and it is possible that she watched these same films at a similar age: "It seemed to me, when I first started going to the cinema intensively in the late Fifties, that Hollywood

likely because of the Peter Jackson's 1994 film *Heavenly Creatures*.

²⁷ It is likely that Juliet saw this film as one of their Saints is named Harry Lime after the character in it played by Orson Welles. It does not appear from Pauline's diary that she saw this film.

had colonised the imagination of the entire world and was turning us all into Americans. I resented it, it fascinated me” (Sage 232). Laura Mulvey writes of Carter’s interest in the cinema, which “fetishised the appearance of erotic femininity into the star’s image” (232) and produced an effect of the uncanny where “the fantastic pushes at the boundaries of credibility” (233)²⁸.

There is no specific mention of Pauline and Juliet’s Fourth World in Carter’s screenplay and Hollywood takes over this function as they dream of the heavenly place they will eventually arrive at. Carter makes a connection to the dream factory of Hollywood and the fantasies produced by it that stimulate Lena and Nerissa’s very real desire and dissatisfaction with their present realities. Lena cries joyfully: “I want *so much!* (“The Christchurch Murder.” 354). Nerissa is more pragmatic: “I would be less bored in Hollywood” (362).

The connection Carter makes between illusion and reality is political, as it is not interested in psychologically diagnosing their fantasy lives but in revealing them to be socially constructed. Carter refers ironically to a diary entry that Medlicott made so much use of, when she describes Nerissa and Lena: “*They are mad with happiness*” (376). They dress up in Nerissa’s mother’s clothes and make-up, transforming themselves, sometimes into imitations of movie stars: “*Candles on the dressing-table illuminate the mirror, from which LENA’s face looks back at herself astonished (361)*”. Nerissa then encourages Lena to use her “costume” to work as a prostitute herself so they can earn money to get to Hollywood: “*LENA, transformed, weaves her way among the movie posters in the deserted Square, in the costume she and NERISSA invented in MARY’s bedroom*”(372). Carter has taken this idea from Pauline’s diaries where she writes of her and Juliet’s fantasies of prostitution: “We

²⁸ In a novel *The Infernal Desire of Doctor Hoffman*, Carter explores fantasy and reality, where a murder at the end restores reality.

worked out how much prostitutes would earn and how much we would make in such a profession and ‘should’ gradually changed to ‘shall’ ” (“Pauline Parker’s personal diary” 29 January 1954). In Carter’s script, the glamour of the cinema is linked to the reality of prostitution and directly to the upper-class mother.

Therefore, not only is reality and fantasy connected but ‘immoral’ lower class activity and upper-class values also. Carter makes no judgment. Carter writes with a feminist agenda but not with a lesbian one like Glaumizina and Laurie. She is interested primarily in the relationships between the two girls, the two mothers and each set of mother and daughter, revealing the complex desires of each woman in their individual social situation.

She explores the desires of the mothers as much as the daughters. Mary’s extra-marital affair with Quinn (reflecting Mrs Hulme’s relationship with Walter Perry) is explained by her husband’s lack of interest in a sexual relationship with her. Mrs Ball’s (Honora Rieper’s) own situation is explored. Her disapproval of Lena’s slutty behaviour is put in perspective when Lena reminds her of her unmarried status: “I’ll tell them all you’re nothing but Dad’s prostitute” (“The Christchurch Murder” 371). In this way mother and daughter both call each other prostitutes, becoming mirrors of each other.

Nerissa’s mother’s infidelity and Lena’s mother’s unmarried status are used by the girls to justify their own prostitution: “Our mothers do it with men they’re not married to. Both of them. We’re just following an old family tradition” (372). Carter reveals the moral hypocrisies inherent in society that Mason was also interested in, but does not pass judgment as he does.

Class is shown as deeply impacting upon the lives and relationships of the women. Lena’s resentment of her mother due to class, emerges strongly. Nerissa’s

Englishness is presented to Lena as something desirable that is elevated above her own class. Nerissa is described from what might be Lena's perspective: "*her hair and wonderful 'English' complexion shine*" (350). But Carter also allows these class differences as they are incarnated in the two different mothers, to be overcome, in moments, through their identification as women. For example, in one scene both mothers talk together about their lives and daughters: "*a sense of deep intimacy is building up between them, in spite of their differences*" (377).

As a feminist, Carter desires her women to be independent, creative and sexually free. Lena says to Nerissa when they discuss their prospects in Hollywood: "You'll soon get a job modelling or acting, something like that. You're quite pretty enough". And of her own potential: "I'll direct. Direct, write, produce. You'll be my star" (355). Not only do they plan on being the object in front of the camera but they will direct their own image as well. Carter takes the logic that the Hollywood fantasy provides, as a model for the emancipation of her female protagonists who will do whatever it takes to achieve it. Charlotte Crofts discusses Carter's "ambivalent" relationship with feminism and socialism: "On the one hand she critiques classical Hollywood cinema as an industry, one that creates icons, sells illusions and perpetuates culturally constructed dreams...At the same time, she celebrates cinema's capacity as a medium for illusion itself" (Crofts 104). Carter reveals the way Hollywood encourages them to sell their bodies yet also acts as a means to their expression and ambition. Carter presents gender roles as equally changeable as the roles they dress up in.

The act of murder is represented as an intimate meeting between mother and daughter. It is connected to Nerissa and Lena's desire for Hollywood and discussed in these terms: "we've got to write the script for the perfect murder, and then we've got

to stick to it. And then we'll be free" ("The Christchurch Murder" 386). This is contrasted with Mrs Ball's position and role as mother who forbids such desire. The last sequence in the film is as follows: "*She falls as if it were inevitable she should fall.... MRS BALL's face, stoical, accepting, resigned, even forgiving.*) MRS BALL: (*Softly, as to an injured child.*) Lena... (*Freeze on her face.*)" (387). The film ends with this shot of the murdered mother's face. If she looks into the camera in this shot it could be read as a mirror to the spectator's reaction to the murder, as if they were the mother, and for female spectators could function as a mirror of the mother in oneself that Irigaray proposes. It also positions the spectator as Lena. The brutality of the murder is not shown. This shot is an imploring and reaching out, both to Lena and the spectator. A mother's reaching for her daughter and a daughter reaching for something prevented by the mother who seems to understand more than anything in this moment what motivates her own murder.

Lena's reference to "the perfect murder" is with irony. Nerissa and Lena's "perfect murder" is not one which they will necessarily get away with, but has to do with the choice of victim, the mother.

In Carter's essay *The Sadeian Woman*, she interprets Marquis de Sade for feminist purposes, showing how for de Sade, the Mother is the antithesis of desire: "Mother is in herself a concrete denial of the idea of sexual pleasure since her sexuality has been placed at the service of reproductive function alone" (*The Sadeian Woman* 123-4). And: "The daughter may achieve autonomy only through destroying the mother, who represents her own reproductive function, also, who is both her own mother and the potential mother within herself" (124).

Nicole Ward-Jouve, who wrote about the representations of the Papin Case, writes about Carter's writing in which "the fiercest rebellion is against the mother"

(Ward-Jouve 152). She notes: “People who are able to distinguish clearly between reality and fantasy, psychoanalysis tells us, are people who are grown up. They have separated off from the mother” (150). She says that as Carter is detached from the mother and “can distinguish between the real and imaginary mother...[she] has no compunction about attacking the *archetype*” (151). The murder for Carter can be read as a breaking and separating of the bond with the mother at the same time as it points toward the alternative bond that Irigaray desires.

Carter’s murder is represented as an act of freedom. Nerissa and Lena’s desire to emancipate themselves from the expectations of their society, necessitates the immorality of their actions and perhaps the murder itself. In her analysis of de Sade’s writing Carter draws a connection between murder and female emancipation: “A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster. Her freedom will be a condition of personal privilege that deprives those on which she exercises it of her own freedom. The most extreme kind of this deprivation is murder. These women murder” (*The Sadeian Woman* 27).

Heavenly Creatures (1994) – Peter Jackson

Peter Jackson’s *Heavenly Creatures* released in 1994, became the model for the way the identities of Pauline and Juliet would be projected to the world in popular cinema and launched the international career of Peter Jackson. Jackson mentions in an interview that there were “at the time the film was being funded, five competing projects in various states of preparation” (Lippy). Angela Carter’s screenplay was one of these²⁹. Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh’s fascination with the case appears to be in

²⁹ Another was by New Zealand writer Fiona Samuel, who was given funding for script development from the film commission in 1989 to write a screenplay based on the case called *The Pursuit of Happiness*. She spent three years researching the film but as with Carter’s screenplay, Jackson’s film was most likely what stopped it progressing from this point. Another screenplay in development was

the potential of the real life relationship between Pauline and Juliet and their murder of Pauline's mother, to be represented and explored within the cinematic conventions of several Hollywood genres. Docudrama is used to illustrate the facts of the case drawing on an audience's fascination with the sensational aspects of it and its notoriety. However, these facts are expressed through the additional genres of fantasy, which enables the spectator to witness a subjective display of Pauline and Juliet's Fourth World that they can vicariously experience with them, and melodrama, which fulfils a desire to identify with Pauline and Juliet as female protagonists. The horror genre is used to cause the shock of abjection when this identification is broken, in the act of murder.

Jackson's choice of the Parker-Hulme murder as the subject for his film reveals an interest in it as a real historical event: "The fact that it is a true story with real people has excited me in a way that has never happened before with scripts I've worked on" (Sibley 228). In his application for funding to the New Zealand Film Commission he wrote: "WHY ON EARTH AM I ATTRACTED TO THE PARKER-HULME STORY?" and responded to his own question: "First and foremost, it is a great story, with great characters. Beyond that, it has one compelling attraction that is guaranteed to intoxicate film-makers: it is a very well-known but totally misunderstood chapter in New Zealand criminal history" (228). His reference to the case as a "story" with "characters" and as a "chapter" shows how he had already merged in his mind the case as fact, with its ability to be recreated as fiction. He stresses his motivation again in a later interview: "We were very much making it to

by Louis Nowra, an Australian playwright, and another by Dustin Hoffman's production company, Punch Productions. Jackson comments that one of these (although he doesn't specify which one) was to have been directed by Niki Caro who went on to fame with *Whale Rider* (Sibley 226). In addition there was also as I have mentioned the possible TV film planned for *Daughter's of Heaven*. A radio play based on the case did get produced, by Rachel McAlpine, who went to Christchurch Girls High at the same time as Pauline and Juliet, called *The Life Fantastic*.

try and rectify 40 years of misunderstanding about this case within New Zealand. In a way that was our main motivation for making the film” (Lippy). His emphasis on wanting to rectify misunderstandings about the case may in part be a reaction to the controversy and sensitivities surrounding the representation of it in film. He acknowledged his difficulty in a later interview: “‘The Sultan of Splatter’ doing the Parker-Hulme story is a difficult concept for people to accept” (Sibley 227).

The film opens with a sequence establishing the film in what appears to be the genre of a docudrama. Jackson and Walsh went to great lengths to show a dedication to the imitation and preservation of factually accurate detail in their film, says Jackson: “I have a thing about being as accurate as possible” (Lippy). They researched for months, interviewed hundreds of people, and managed to shoot most scenes in their authentic locations. In the opening sequence of the film, Christchurch is presented in the form of a 1950’s newsreel assembled from archival film and radio footage. This locates the time and place of the film for the spectator, in the guise of some form of authenticity. It is however, a very constructed sequence. Contemporary footage and a Montevani-esque orchestral soundtrack have been added to it and Jackson has edited it to parody and satirize Christchurch in the 1950’s as a quaint, reactionary, naïve and conservative city attempting to be an imitation of England. Like the character of Bridget in *Daughters of Heaven*, satire is used to enable the spectator to view Christchurch in the 1950’s at an ironic distance.

The attempt to shoot on original locations and imitate the facts of the case as closely as possible did have exceptions. The film didn’t include Pauline’s Downs Syndrome sister in the script as, “it was one area where we felt that we were being too invasive into the privacy of this family” (5). Where the lines of this privacy are drawn is ambiguous, considering the explicitly intimate portrayal of Pauline and Juliet’s

erotic lives in the film. The genre of the docudrama appears to exist for dramatic effect and has not all that much to do with an actual preservation of the facts of the case as expressed in Jackson's comment: "we wanted to nail the story before overlaying it with a lot of historical detail" (7).

Their desire to make the film, appears to lie less in their stated motivation for factual accuracy, and more in an identification with the girls, missing in other interpretations: "None of the accounts we came across were from the girls' point of view.... They all had other agendas, so we felt that telling the girls' story was important" (6). Walsh mentions the 'mad' and 'bad' depictions of the girls which they wished to rectify: "we didn't want to keep perpetuating the image of them as monsters" (Laurie 9). Telling Pauline and Juliet's story from their point of view translated to identifying and sympathising with them. Peter Jackson, like Joel Seria and Glaumizina and Laurie, found himself identifying with one of the girls in particular: "there was a lot of Pauline that I could recognise in myself" (Lippy). Jackson, like Pauline, came from a lower-middle class New Zealand family. Like Pauline he was reclusive and dreamed of escaping New Zealand in the form of writing and directing films in Hollywood, spending his teenage years making splatter films. His identification with Pauline can be seen, as she narrates in voice-over from her diary throughout. Fran Walsh, who apparently was first interested in the case as a teenager when she read the novel *Obsession*, talked Jackson into the idea of it as subject for a film. She was also drawn to Pauline: "She was a very imaginative, funny and clever young woman who had some quite pretentious ideas, as teenagers do, and I warmed toward her immediately" (Lippy).

In order to identify with the girls, Jackson and Walsh attempted to understand their psychological and subjective experience: "What interested us was to show these

two 15-year-old girls with no other agenda than to be as accurate as we possibly could, and to somehow imagine what was going on inside their minds” (2). In order to do this, one of their methods was to imitate their activities. They listened to the Mario Lanza records that Pauline and Juliet listened to, as they worked: “We had these songs playing while we were working to get ourselves psyched up to write a scene” (7). He describes the difficulty: “it took us a long time to learn who they were, and what was driving them. We were a bit confused, there was a bit of mystery” (6). Jackson claims to have got to the point where he felt he could understand them: “Once you learn who Pauline and Juliet were and why they acted the way they did, it all becomes very clear. I have tried to tell a complex psychological story in a way that I think represents the truth in a very accurate manner...” (Sibley 228).

This desire to represent the “truth” of the girls’ relationship is represented in the genre of a fantasy film: “I don’t like doing stuff that’s totally naturalistic. I like having a little bit of fun” (Lippy). Pauline and Juliet’s fantasies and subjective gaze are represented with digitally created special effects. A priest and doctor as well as both of Pauline’s parents (a curious foreshadowing) become decapitated or stabbed by the girls’ fantasy characters in their imaginations. This is similar to Seria’s use of film to reveal the girls’ fantasies, and both directors use it to blaspheme representatives of the church. The Kingdom of Borovnia from Pauline and Juliet’s novels, is depicted as a fantasy world of life sized clay figures. They also depict Pauline and Juliet’s Fourth World as a fantasy world: clouds part, followed by a transformation of the empty hillside of Port Levy into the alternate world of a colourful and manicured English garden complete with unicorns and giant butterflies, evoking a kind of Garden of Eden. Jackson has used as inspiration for this fantasy, Pauline’s account of their experience at Port Levy in her diary, which reads: “Today Juliet and I found the key

to the 4th World. We saw a gateway through the clouds. We sat on the edge of the path and looked down the hill out over the bay. The island looked beautiful. The sea was blue. Everything was full of peace and bliss. Then we realized we had the key” (“Pauline Parker’s personal diary” 3 April 1953).

Jackson replicates Pauline’s mention of the gateway through the clouds, but ignores the rest of her description ie. sitting on the path and looking at the island and the sea, using the concept of the Fourth World to create a sequence from a fantasy film instead. This section from Pauline’s diary is imposed over the image in voice over, but without the inclusion of Pauline’s references to the real world, which are erased. Jackson declares in his proposal: “I don’t intend to make a dark, brooding, little murder film. That would be the obvious clichéd way to go” (Sibley 234). His antidote to this is a fantasy film, yet the unicorns and giant butterflies represented in this sequence are clichés also, just of another genre. It is possible the unicorns were chosen because of Pauline and Juliet’s shared love of horses. Juliet owned a horse. Yet this fact is not mentioned or depicted in the film and so would not be clear to an uninformed viewer. Jackson’s ignoring of the detail of Pauline’s description of their experience in his depiction of their fantasy world, contradicts his stated desire to represent the “truth in a very accurate manner”.

Jackson identifies and shares Pauline and Juliet’s desire to make a Hollywood film. He imitates other pursuits such as their making of clay figures in the likeness of characters in their novels and actors from films they watched such as Orson Welles; Jackson used his early developments with Weta Digital technology to create fantasy sequences with life sized clay figures to represent the fantasy world from their novels and their cinematic heroes. Yet in his rendering of these fantasies into a film, something Pauline and Juliet never achieved, he deviates from their original nature.

While the girls made clay figures of the fantasy characters from their novels and wanted these novels made into films, these films would not have been animated fantasies of clay figures such as Jackson depicts, but imitations of the films that inspired them, romantic dramas such as *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*. In this way he has subsumed their fantasies with his own. Jackson seems to be less interested in understanding their fantasies than in using them to explore his interest in computer-generated imagery: “The truth was, we didn’t *really* need computer effects on *Heavenly Creatures*...I was honest enough to admit that to myself, but I thought, ‘God, what the hell! Why don’t we just get a computer and do some stuff, because this is a great excuse to learn about how these computer effects work!’” (242).

Jonathan Romney, in a review of the film for *New Statesman and Society*, a UK left wing political magazine, discusses the problem of representing the subjectivity of the girls: “Jackson’s speciality to date has been to leave nothing to the imagination, so it is understandable that he should come a little unstuck now that his central concern is imagination itself” (Romney). He describes the way Jackson’s attempts at enabling the spectator to get inside the heads of the girls’ excludes them even further “because we are at once outside the recognisable universe and outside the film itself” (Romney). He sees the film as failing, as it does not engage with the impossibility of the identification Jackson seeks: “You almost wish Jackson had done without imagination. A less fanciful film could have presented the very fact of the girls’ extravagance as being something far more marvellous and enviable, simply by excluding us from it” (Romney).

Jackson describes the way Pauline and Juliet were “clearly using real, live people as prototypes for some of their fantasy characters” (Lippy). This is an ironic statement given that Jackson also uses the real life identities of Pauline and Juliet for

the re-creation of them as his own “fantasy characters”. He reveals a contradictory approach to their representation: “there were really only two people who we needed to be realistic with, and they were Juliet and Pauline, both of whom were slightly larger than life anyway” (Lippy). Juliet, played by Kate Winslet in the film, is not identified with as closely as Pauline and her acting is strikingly over the top compared to Melanie Lynskey’s who plays Pauline. It could be that Jackson has positioned Juliet partly as a fantasy figure in relation to Pauline, or Jackson himself, as she symbolically embodies and represents everything that Pauline wants to be and escape to. In the film, Juliet is the one to introduce Pauline to the Fourth World describing it to her early on, and she is the one to see it first, imploring Pauline to “Look, look....”. Pauline in frustration replies: “What?...What?...What?”. Juliet implores, “Come with me...”. She is Pauline’s object of desire and fantasy and perhaps Jackson’s as well.

Jackson’s role in creating and directing these fantasies, enables him and the viewer to clearly distinguish between reality and fantasy. But for Pauline and Juliet themselves, within the film, the distinctions are not so clear. The way in which the Fourth World is depicted as a fantasy, shared by both Pauline and Juliet, combines the *folie a deux* interpretation of Medlicott’s diagnosis, ie. that their delusion was a result of joint insanity where “it is induced by a stronger character, the inducer, upon the weaker, the inducee” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 218). The film clearly illustrates a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. Alison Laurie, who critiques the film eleven years after the publication of her book on the Parker-Hulme case, describes the film as a “cautionary tale retold from Dr Medlicott’s unintended script” (Laurie 20).

While the filmmakers do not seem to intentionally depict the girls as insane, Walsh describes their Fourth World in terms which echo Medlicott’s diagnosis of insanity: “they have their first delusional experience together at Port Levy, where they

go into the fourth world” (Lippy). Like Laurie she also uses the word “delusional” here to mean hallucinatory, like a vision or mirage. Yet in Pauline’s diary she never says they actually enter this world. She says instead, that “on two days every year we may use the key and look in to that beautiful world” and that when they die “we will go to the 4th world” (“Pauline Parker’s personal diary” 3 April 1953). It is a world they see from the outside that is a part of their reality and not something they experience like a hallucination. Jackson, in his proposal for the film describes his intentions for the cinematography: “Camera movement and editing will build up to near manic levels during some of the more exalted sequences” (Sibley 235). Here he has also, perhaps unintentionally, translated the language of Medlicott’s diagnosis of exalted paranoia into his camera movements.

Medlicott made a connection between paranoid insanity and homosexuality and there are moments in the film where Jackson makes a connection between their fantasy world and a depiction of them as lesbians. The girls kiss each other naked in bed, taking turns imagining each other as their fantasy characters. This is almost identical to the way the sexual relationship was connected to the role-playing of fantasy characters in *Daughters of Heaven*. Corinn Columbar disagrees with a reading of this scene between the girls as erotic, stating that the use of role-playing “mediates any impulse to label Pauline and Juliet’s relationship “lesbian” or “homosexual” (Columbar 339). Her argument is that Jackson equates desire with identification in his film, which offsets any fixed determining of their sexuality and that when they fantasize about the other as a character from their fantasies, he “locates each girl in her own space and, by extension, her own fantasy” (339).

Yet the use of shot/counter shots within the erotic sequence can also be read as associating their lesbian relationship with madness in that the fantasy characters they

embody and make love to literally appear on the screen and are as 'real' as the characters of Pauline and Juliet themselves. A shot in their fantasy kingdom reveals all the clay figures engaged in an orgy, a metaphorical substitution for what Pauline and Juliet are also engaged in. If there is any doubt, a lesbian relationship is confirmed in the scene following the lovemaking sequence. It is of Pauline and Juliet's reunion after Juliet's spell in the TB ward. There is a shot from Mr Hulme's perspective in the rear view mirror of them touching each other's hands with illicit overtones. Pauline's voice-over emphasizes lines from her poem such as "the sweet soothingness of their caress...". This shot is from the subjective point of view of Mr Hulme but also implicates the viewer in his gaze, confirming suspicions.

Jackson states a desire to distance his film from an association with lesbianism and Columbar's reading of the film reinforces this attitude. In a comment, probably in relation to Glaumizina and Laurie's study, which came out a few years before his film, he says: "I have taken no sides, no political stance; the story is not about sexual politics, it is not about 'lesbian killers' or 'lesbian martyrs'" (Sibley 228). Within the film he specifically parodies Dr Bennett the family physician, who supported Medlicott's diagnosis in the trial. Dr Bennett is represented satirically (the victim of Pauline's delusional fantasies of killing him), and is used by Jackson to parody conservative fears of homosexuality: "It can strike at any time". Columbar believes this is evidence of Jackson's refusal to portray the girls as lesbian, functioning to "undermine the persistent tendency to associate sexual "deviancy" and criminality within both cinema and the discourse surrounding the Hulme-Parker murder" (Columbar 340). However, while Jackson distances himself from acknowledging a portrayal of lesbianism, much like Forster did in regards to her play, both depict it for the titillation of an assumed heterosexual audience. Laurie describes

the scenes as “suggestive of the classic ‘lesbian’ plot in mainstream pornographic videos” (Laurie 9). The film links their lesbian relationship to an explanation for the murder.

The explanation for the murder is also connected with a desire for escape, which is represented by the genre of melodrama. Throughout the film, when Pauline and Juliet’s fantasy world takes over, it frequently becomes a place of emotional abandon. They are shown as dominated by hysteria and desire similar to the way female emotion is expressed in melodrama. Thomas Elsaesser describes melodrama as “hysteria bubbling all the time just below the surface” (Bernink and Cook 158).

The filmmakers’ identification with the girls and especially Jackson’s with Pauline, as expressed in the genre of docudrama, fantasy and melodrama, comes into conflict with their need to reconcile it with the act of murder: “both Peter and I felt hugely sympathetic toward Pauline and Juliet, and we did start to identify and empathize with them, all the while trying to keep in balance the knowledge of this terrible act” (Lippy). Despite their intentions for making the film and identifying with the girls, they refuse to identify themselves with this “terrible” act. Yet it is the very fact of this “terrible” act that makes Pauline and Juliet’s relationship attractive as a film subject. Their desire to empathise and identify with Pauline and Juliet has a limit and that limit is the murder. Jackson says: “They did nothing that most of us haven’t done before....even fantasising about killing your parents. What has set them apart from the rest of us is that they went one step further” (Sibley 228).

This break in the film, in identification with the girls, transfers identification to the murdered mother, Honora Rieper. She is sympathized with as she was in her depiction in *Daughters of Heaven*. Laurie believes that the film’s depiction of Honora as the ‘good mother’ ignores evidence to the contrary provided by Pauline’s diaries.

Betty Jay in her article “*Let’s Moider Mother*” explores the mother/daughter relationships in the film and is critical of the way it establishes a good mother/bad mother dichotomy. In her reading, the doubling of the two mothers, suggests that, “inadequate mothering on the part of Mrs Hulme produces a violence which is misdirected at a woman who assumes a more conventional maternal role” (Jay 11).

In her article *Hose Stalking: Heavenly Creatures as Feminist Horror*, Jennifer Henderson explores the horror that arises in the film out of a confrontation between Honora as an archetypal ‘good’ mother figure and the “cheap little tart” which is her description of Pauline, and which is turned back on herself by Pauline’s revelation of her unmarried status. Henderson sees Honora’s doubleness as reflected in the stocking, which covered the brick they used to murder her: “a modesty associated with maternal law and an explosive eroticism” (Henderson 45). In the light of Henderson’s reading Pauline was killing a narcissistic image of herself in the image of her mother, in the way Irigaray proposes, although this does not account for Juliet’s involvement.

Jackson’s break in identification with the girls is connected to his packaging of the murder into the horror genre, which exploits its violence for the titillation of the audience. Near the end of the film, Pauline’s voice over announces their plans to commit murder over a low angle shot of the girls wearing black and standing, at night, behind a bonfire, ceremoniously burning their Mario Lanza records. The cinematic conventions of the horror film emerge here. They look like witches and it is followed by a montage of shots of Pauline and her mother where Pauline is continuously clothed in black, sickly looking, sinister and peering ominously up at her mother going about her humble domestic tasks. Pauline appears behind sheets of washing on the line in a way that hints at her appearance as a stalker in a thriller or a zombie in a

horror film.

This horror genre is foreshadowed at the beginning of the film when the newsreel docudrama sequence is abruptly cut into with the aftermath of the murder where Pauline and Juliet run along a path screaming and covered in blood. As I mentioned earlier this is a reenactment of the description Medlicott gives at the beginning of his paper on the girls. Laurie, who details various aspects in the film where accounts of the girls' behaviour contradict those depicted by Jackson, notes that Agnes Ritchie, the owner of the tea rooms at Victoria Park, said in her testimony that the girls were not screaming when they came back to the tea rooms (Laurie 17). The description in Medlicott's paper is "apparently agitated" and it appears Jackson has interpreted this with a bit of artistic licence. Jackson's depiction of the murder is very similar to the beginning of David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*, which plays with the genres of horror and psychological thriller. Jackson's use of the horror genre draws on his filmmaking up until this point in what he describes as the "splatter film" genre. He had just released *Braindead*, which was also set in the 1950's and there are similarities in his satirical depiction of the conservatism of the time. Elizabeth Moody played the mother in that film and appears as the mean and parodied French Teacher in *Heavenly Creatures*. Before his decision to make *Heavenly Creatures* Jackson was considering making *Bad Taste 2*, which is ironic given the use of this term in describing the decision to artistically represent the Parker-Hulme case by some people.

The very final shot of the film brings the melodrama and horror genres together. It is a brief shot of Pauline from the horror sequence covered in blood screaming "No!" This connects her desperation not to be separated from Juliet but also implies that the murder was not the outcome she really wanted. The walk down

the path to the murder is in slow motion overlaid with a Puccini aria imbuing it with sentimentality and inevitability. The murder is represented as a desperate and delusional act of deviance.

The filming of the murder reflects the filmmakers' ambivalence about the case. While they located the exact location of the murder they decided against filming there and shot this sequence 100 metres away: "It was enough that we were recreating the murder on film; to do that in the place where it had happened would have been going too far" (Sibley 252). And: "I had filmed lots of deaths...but they were different, they were make-believe: this was a scene recreated from real life.... we felt what I guess I can only describe as guilt...." (253).

Perhaps a part of this guilt is attached to the irony that *Heavenly Creatures* propelled Jackson to movie star status where Pauline and Juliet who shared the same desires, failed. The reason for their failure is the subject of *Heavenly Creatures* – their murder of Pauline's mother. What prevented them from the success Jackson enjoyed became the very material Jackson used to realise his own success, yet the one aspect of their relationship together that he refuses to identify with. This can be seen as a kind of exploitation and one that Jackson himself was aware of on some level. When recalling shooting the murder scene he says: "You can't help but feel that you are exploiting those people who were affected by that murder and especially those who are still alive" (253). He seems to specifically avoid referring to the most obviously affected people, Pauline and Juliet themselves, whose new identities were revealed publicly by journalists due to the making of Jackson's film. He spoke of this consequence: "we knew it would damage the film, and we knew it would damage us. It was inevitable that we would be accused of exploiting this woman's situation in order to promote the movie" (Lippy).

Upon the discovery of her identity following the release of the film, Anne Perry comments on the depiction of the relationship between her and Pauline, particularly the melodramatic aspect: “I mean certainly we were good friends, but it was a debt of honour. It wasn’t a great ‘I can’t live without you’ business that these idiotic movie makers are making out of it” (Darnton). This created a cross fire in the press when Fran Walsh responded: “We don’t appreciate being referred to as ‘idiotic movie-makers’. In all the interviews we’ve done for the movie, we’ve treated her with absolute respect. And while it’s clear she has no respect for us” (Hruska). Perry revoked her “unfortunate” comment explaining: “it must have been the heat of the moment” (Hruska). On the depiction of her lesbian relationship she said: “I find it grossly offensive...I was so innocent sexually then” (Darnton). Walsh maintains: “Unfortunately, Perry is feeling this pressure to deny things.... Forty years on, she has a career to protect – she’s rebuilt her life, and the last thing she wants to do is justify her actions as a fifteen-year-old” (Hruska). This may be so, as Perry has since become a Mormon, but it is also possible that the last thing Walsh and Jackson wanted to do was to look at their film critically in its depiction of a real case with real people still able to speak for themselves.

Walsh reveals a lack of curiosity when faced with criticism of her film from the person she based it on and a strong defensive reaction to it. This may be because on some level Walsh believed so much in her and Jackson’s fictional recreation of Pauline and Juliet that when the real Juliet turned up, their whole premise for making the movie was challenged. The “damage” they feared the revelation of Perry’s identity might bring appears as a real threat to their conception of the film as a “truthful” and “accurate” depiction of the girls lives: “We had tried so hard to get the research right. Fiction was our enemy” (“Fourth World – Heavenly Creatures

Website”). Walsh comments further on Perry’s denial of the film’s portrayal of their relationship: “I feel Anne Perry’s comment is absurd...If you don’t have a grand passion why commit a murder?” (Laurie 18). She reveals an idea of passion limited to the ways it is expressed in the genre of melodrama. The fact that the Parker-Hulme murder may not have been a crime committed in grand passion makes it incomprehensible to her. Pauline and Juliet planned the murder carefully - it was not a passionate but a rational act.

It is interesting that Perry’s criticism and judgment of the film and her understandable resentment towards the filmmakers, is interpreted as offensive and yet the making of judgments by the filmmakers about her life in their film remains unchallenged. Laurie notes how excerpts of the film were used in television coverage of the revealing of Anne Perry’s identity, giving “the fictional scene factual authority” (13). Perry says about the revelation of her identity: “It is all extremely painful” (Hruska) and “It was an absolute unqualified nightmare” (Donahue). Without a hint of irony she says: “I thought I would lose everything. I really thought it would kill my mother” (Darnton). She puts a distance between herself and her incarnation in the film: “What others see as fair and objective is not the way you see yourself” (Hruska). She likens the revelation the film brought as, “having some disfigurement and being stripped naked and set up in the High Street for everybody to walk by and pay their penny and have a look” (Darnton). Her description of this humiliation evokes the idea that she is an exhibit in a freak-show (something Carter explored in her screenplay).

The film also had implications on the real lives of the two actresses who play Pauline and Juliet, which is especially reflected in the melodramatic fantasy sequence at the end. Pauline missed the boat in more ways than one. Kate Winslet who played Juliet went on from the film to become a very successful Hollywood film actress

while Melanie Lynskey moved between Hollywood and New Zealand, struggling to find similar success. She says: “I’d always dreamed of being an actor” (Houlahan) espousing the dreams of Pauline herself to find success in Hollywood. Lynskey was eventually cast in small roles such as the simple and naive country girl and the ugly sister to the beautiful Cinderella. Lynskey’s identity as an actress can be seen as somewhat bound up in her role as Pauline and Jackson’s ultimate abandonment of her on the wharf. *Heavenly Creatures* was of course Jackson’s ticket aboard the Hollywood ship of dreams. It was a commercially successful film with mainstream audiences and his predictions for it in his proposal rang true: “I believe that *Heavenly Creatures* could be successful enough to give me a lot of clout over there” (Sibley 236).

Jackson renounces any political motivation for the film when he says: “the other various treatments all seemed to have a specific agenda, which attempted to make political statements about the murder” (Lippy). His film can be interpreted politically in various ways however. Jackson makes a clear distinction between the classes of the Rieper and Hulme families. Pauline’s desire for Juliet is linked to her desire for Juliet’s upper class status and the murder can be interpreted as a rejection not only of one mother for another, but of one class for another. Henderson reads the film as linking Pauline’s lesbian desire for Juliet as indistinguishable from her class envy (Henderson 49). Mary Alemany-Galway notes that melodrama does not exclude politics as “the central characters are often victims subject to social oppression” and that it can include both a Marxist and Freudian interpretation of society (Alemany-Galway 4). Elaesser, in his discussion of melodrama, describes how the form “provided a means of delineating social crises in concretely personalised and emotional terms” (Bernink et al 58). While Jackson blasphemes institutions within

society, Jackson's motivation is not political like Seria's. Jackson does it not in order to provoke the audience to the film but to provide a nostalgic parody of a past society. The murder at the end in Jackson's film is not an act of provocation but of resolution. The radical and disruptive potential of the murder is purged and resolved by existing explanations of insanity or horror monstrosity.

Ruby Rich discusses how the release of *Heavenly Creatures* "upstaged" their political study: "It wasn't just the Ninja-turtle styling of the fantasy kingdom that irked me" ("Introduction to the U.S. Edition" iv). Rich criticises the film specifically for the way it depicts the murder, which she sees in a similar way to Romney, as "particularly devoid of the mannered subjectivity and visual splash that run rampant elsewhere, as though imagination failed the filmmaker when faced with the act itself" (iv). She states the implications of this: "the film's withholding of its signature style at the key juncture of the murder effectively supplied the film with a moral message" (iv). This moral message she describes as a disapproving and conservative one. Jackson speaks in moral terms in order to validate his decision to make the film: "The moral issue of making a film about the murder of Honora Parker is one I have thought long and hard about. The story is part of New Zealand's history and is certainly valid material for film-makers" (Sibley 255). Rich sees that his moralising at the end "inevitably takes the audience with him" to "effectively prevent our return to a temporal or regional landscape that could make Pauline and Juliet's story comprehensible" ("Introduction to the U.S. Edition" ix). She sees Jackson as moralizing about the murder rather than attempting to understand it and believes "the movie has planted a distorted view of the girls and the case in a U.S. public previously ignorant of the material" (iii).

She notes how the film was successful not only in mainstream cinemas but

with gay and lesbian audiences at a time when there was a “vigorous niche market awaiting each new release” (ix). She also notes its success alongside the rise in the 1990s of films that catered for a lesbian market reflecting “a renewed interest in true-story movies about pairs of best friends (lovers, sisters, schoolgirls, or maids) who bond their affections with the spilling of blood and then pay for their crimes” (x-xi).

Alison Laurie views it as a lesbian film, one that “exists within a hegemonic heterosexual discourse, presenting ‘Pauline’ and ‘Juliet’ as objectified curiosities” (Laurie 8). Like Rich she also notes the proliferation of films where women murder women, viewing them in a lesbian context: “the depiction of lethal lesbians in films such as *Fun* and *Sister My Sister* places *Heavenly Creatures* within a framework of murderous deviancy and anti-lesbianism” (19). For this reason she states: “It is understandable that Perry avoids such an association” (19). These three films were all released in 1994³⁰. A fourth, *Butterfly Kiss* was released in 1995 by Michael Winterbottom, although the women in this film kill men as well as women³¹. These films have also sparked a mass of film criticism and internet websites.

Patrick Wen in an article *Dirty Minded Girls Who Wrote Novels Full of Murder*, describes this resurgence of interest in young women who murder in

³⁰ *Fun*, directed by Rafal Zielinski and based on a stage play, is about two teenage girls who decide to murder an elderly woman unknown to them, and is not based on either case in this thesis. It is filmed in a realistic style contrasting with Jackson’s vivid fantasy. The murder is a challenging of morals in that they have no motive other than it would be “fun”. This has echoes of a contemporary Leopold and Loeb style murder. The murder is presented with a detachment that is evident throughout the film. The arbitrariness of the crime is the central fascination with the murder although explanations are hinted at: “It was like we’d jumped into a big hole and killing her was the only way of getting out”. The murder precipitates the resolution to the film, which is the separation of the girls and the suicide of one of them. It is noted at the conclusion of the film that a portion of its proceeds were to go towards an abused children fund – in this film the girls are victims of their crime.

³¹ *Butterfly Kiss* by Michel Winterbottom is a lesbian road film where two women go on a murderous killing spree of men and women invoking the ‘mad’ and ‘bad’ explanations.

Lacanian terms as a “disorientating mirroring effect of a voyeuristic contemporary culture” (Wen 241). He takes issue with Ruby Rich’s analysis of the case in her discussion of Glaumizina and Laurie’s book. He disagrees with her “attack” on Jackson’s film, and sees it as politically subversive after all. But he also compares the film to the Papin case applying Lacan’s interpretation of paranoia to the girls’ lesbian relationship and its connection to murder. More interesting are the interpretations of the film as expressions of New Zealand post-colonial identity.

Fran Walsh describes the murder in the genre of a horror, evoking the ‘Cinema of Unease’ trope in New Zealand film: “There’s a level of violence, a subtext of violence, running through New Zealand society that comes out in our movies. We have a veneer of being easygoing, but underneath, we’re full of rage....Christchurch suffers from it more than another city in New Zealand” (Lippy). Sam Neill uses *Heavenly Creatures* in his 1995 documentary *Cinema of Unease*, to define our national cinema as based on this notion that out of our isolation has emerged an identity reflected in our films that is dark and dangerous.

Jackson’s representation of Pauline and Juliet is presented by Neill as an illustration of the “rage” underneath the civilized surface that gives evidence of his notion of a ‘Cinema of Unease’. Neill draws parallels between his own life and this development of a national cinema, using *Heavenly Creatures* to draw a parallel between the Hulme family driving their car in the Port Hills on the way to Port Levy, with his own experience of being taken for a drive after his arrival to New Zealand from England as a young boy in the mid 1950’s. His use of this sequence suggests he identifies with the Hulmes and possibly with Juliet as a young, upper class, English foreigner to the country, as well as Winslet who plays her, who was also from England and who found success in film in New Zealand before moving back to

England as Neill did himself to pursue an acting career.

Neill recalls Christchurch in the 50's as he stands outside his old home in Cashmere, cutting to footage of box car racing in the streets before recounting that less than a year before "only a mile up the road" two girls had murdered their mother, "a murder that haunted even our day time thoughts". This is followed by a short clip from the film of Pauline and Juliet covered in blood, screaming into the camera "It's Mummy, she's been terribly hurt". His use of Jackson's film within his own, recreates the same juxtaposition as Jackson created, of archival newsreel footage of innocent and naive Christchurch - a young boy receiving a scholarship for winning a boxcar race - that is then interrupted by the horror of the murder.

He refers to his frequent returns to New Zealand as "a return to my childhood". Pauline and Juliet's act of murder in Jackson's film can be interpreted as a reflection of a national identity based on an unfulfilled adolescent fantasy to grow up and break free from Mother England. Their search for identity can be read as running parallel with their journey into adulthood in the way Neill represents his own. Pauline and Juliet did not identify with New Zealand or England. Instead they viewed the world through the lens of Hollywood. Neill recalls his youth spent at the cinema, straight after the sequence from Jackson's film. This was the world Pauline and Juliet most identified with. Jackson's film can be seen to reflect the way New Zealand's values and desires come from somewhere else where they dream to escape. In killing the New Zealand mother they may also be killing Mother New Zealand.

Mary Alemany-Galway writes about Jackson's use of film genre and how it reflects New Zealand's identity as a postcolonial country. She sees that "the rejection of the meek and servile colonial position is signified by the killing of the mother" (Alemany-Galway 6). But she sees the ambivalence of this murder also: "just as

Pauline and Juliet are both victims and victimizers, a settler colony is built on an act of destruction of the indigenous society, while itself being a victim from the imperial center” (8). She explores how the melodrama of the ending exposes “New Zealand’s ambivalent rebellion against Britain, as well as its angst at being deserted by the mother country” (4).

She notes that the most significant theme in the genre of fantasy is the search for freedom: “like adolescents. Settler colonies must establish their own individual identity as separate from that of the parent (5). This freedom is sought by Pauline and Juliet within the film in their fantasy Fourth World. Alemany-Galway cites Ian Conrich and David Woods who note that “the most dominant and persistent New Zealand myth is of an Edenic garden, a natural utopia” (5). This is exactly Jackson’s depiction of their Fourth World. The girls’ fantasies in his film can be seen in this context as colonial myths portrayed as hallucinations. However, she sees the murder in Jackson’s film as a failed attempt to escape or destroy these myths - Jackson “twists the fantasy genre around because the bid for freedom has such dire consequences” (5).

Maureen Molloy in her article *Death and the Maiden* presents an idea of a displaced national identity that is both here and not here. She writes about *Heavenly Creatures* among other recent New Zealand films, in the context of national identity, examining the film as a “textbook” example of Kristeva’s use of Freud’s notion of the uncanny, produced out of its structure of repetition and doubling, which is used to provoke horror. For example, she notes how Christchurch is seen as both strange and familiar, and that the structure of the film at a personal and aesthetic level “is both homely and profoundly unhomely, magical and gruesome” (Molloy 4). In the context of nation she sees the film reflecting an identity embedded in the uncanny and in the

unsettling notion that it is connected to a violent rejection of an image of itself: “The nation is configured by a woman but, almost unbearably by a dead woman Honora, the good mother” (7).

CHAPTER THREE

REMAKE: PARKER-HULME AND *THE MAIDS*

My coming to write a thesis about why women murder women and how these acts are represented in theatre and film was sparked by my work as an actor in Peter Falkenberg's film, *Remake*. When Peter invited me to work with him on a project based on the Parker-Hulme case, I said yes – not because I had any interest in the case, but because, like Pauline and Juliet, I wanted to be in a film. Like they did, I live in Christchurch and it dissatisfies me. Before I made the film I was as they were, planning to go overseas and star in theatre and films. In exploring the parallels between my life here now and Pauline and Juliet's lives here then, I came to explore my desire for escape through fantasy. Up until my experience of *Remake*, fantasy had worked me into passions which resulted in narcissistic paralysis - a passive waiting for life to happen. Through my exploration of fantasy in *Remake*, the process of looking at myself in a series of mirrors [see appendix H] remade me as an actor not only in a film but in my own life here in Christchurch. This chapter revisits my involvement in *Remake*, testing Peter's proposal that making a film could be like an act of murder, and that my acting a role in this film might be a way to reconsider the experience, actions and desires of Pauline and Juliet as they might be similar to my own.

In *Remake* the Papin and the Parker-Hulme murders were brought together explicitly, as they are in this chapter of my thesis, to see what might be revealed as a result. One of the central aspects of the Parker-Hulme case as revealed in the interest it inspired as subject for representation, is the meeting of fantasy and reality. This is also central to Genet's representation of the Papin sisters in *The Maids*. In bringing these cases together, *Remake* also brings together theatre and film. The play of *The*

Maids is a theatrical world, positioned in *Remake* within a filmic exploration of the relationship between Pauline and Juliet. This hybrid form enables an exploration of the coming together of fantasy and reality in the Parker-Hulme case, in an alternative to *Heavenly Creatures*. I will explore the possibilities of these mergings to present *Remake* as an alternative representation and study of the Parker-Hulme case. As a way of preparing my discussion of the film, I will discuss in detail the merging of fantasy and reality in the lives of Pauline and Juliet and in addition how these elements came together within the trial itself and beyond that into the life of Juliet in her new identity as the writer Anne Perry.

Remake is an exploration of the relationship between Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme through two contemporary actors and a 'remake' of Peter Jackson's film *Heavenly Creatures*. Liz Sugrue, another actress, and I were encouraged by Peter to start researching the lives of Pauline and Juliet as material for a film that he had named *Remake*. He suggested that this was like a search for a Fourth World of our own and that instead of committing a murder we would make a film. Our search for Pauline and Juliet's Fourth World became, in the end, part of the narrative of the film itself.

Peter Falkenberg wanted the creation of the material for the film to be driven by us as actors. He provided us with the opportunity to create in the way Pauline and Juliet created together. He did not want to represent his own fantasy of our relationship but allow us to create a film which reflected our own. In order to attempt this he left us mostly alone for several months allowing us to do things Pauline and Juliet might have done had they lived in Christchurch now, fifty years later. We wrote in diaries over several months which we chose to give to Peter and he used as material. What scripts there are in the film were offered by Liz and me and scenes

were developed by all three of us. In this way the material for the film was ‘written’ and created by Liz and I, in the way Cixous encourages women to write and create as a way of becoming embodied and emancipated. Peter’s direction allowed us this freedom to work as actresses in a way that is at odds with the film industry’s approach to filmmaking and the approach of Peter Jackson when he made his own film about Pauline and Juliet - he cast his actresses into roles he had already completely developed and written himself. However, while Peter gave us freedom to research, invent and explore material and present ideas to him, they were ultimately used for his own conception of the film. We were still two women directed by a male and filmed by a cameraman (Shahin Yazdani, the cinematographer, participated in some of our discussions). We were also accompanied by various males in our exploits. This aspect is resolved in and central to the murder we enact at the end of the film.

While Jackson attempted to understand Pauline and Juliet through imitation, *Remake* is an attempt to understand the Parker-Hulme case through a recreation of the essential aspects of it in two different women. For example, the physical characteristics of Pauline and Juliet can be seen to be mirrored in Liz and Marian, where Pauline (the brunette) looks more like Liz and Juliet (the blonde) looks more like Marian. However, Peter did not cast actresses in order to imitate the real Pauline and Juliet and it can be read conversely within the film that Marian in fact takes on more of the tendencies of Pauline and Liz, Juliet.

Central to Pauline and Juliet’s fantasies was their experience of the Fourth World that occurred at Port Levy. A trip to Port Levy where we stayed in a cottage by the sea, was central to the experience of Liz and myself, as we spent time together remaking the relationship between Pauline and Juliet. Unfortunately, we could not stay in the same cottage owned by the Hulmes that Pauline and Juliet stayed in. Theirs

is privately owned, uninhabited and almost impenetrable with barbed wire and locked gates. We broke in and ate fruit from their garden; we swam in the sea; we read what is available of Pauline's diary; we wrote in our own diaries; we read the transcripts from the trial; we played music together; we played in the bath; we talked to 'Peter' [not our director] at the marae who told us more about Pauline and Juliet's apparent breaching of tapu; we walked in the hills around where they discovered the key to the Fourth World. The days I spent at Port Levy were among the most joyful I have ever experienced. At least I wrote about them that way. So did Pauline in her diary. My interest in making a film slowly developed a fascination with and desire for the relationship I imagined Pauline and Juliet had, and a developing curiosity as to how it led to murder.

Our search for the Fourth World propels the film between two different 'worlds'. The film itself moves between two different aesthetics – the world of the theatre and the world outside it - creating a doubling which is integral to its structure. First I will discuss the theatrical scenes in the film, adapted from *The Maids*. Theatre is a central Fourth World in the film. I had mentioned in my diary, which I gave to Peter occasionally and from which he drew material for the film, that my boyfriend had given me a copy of Genet's *The Maids* as a present a few years before, but that I didn't understand it. He brought this up and said it would be a relevant text to explore in the film as it was about two women who want to murder their Madame and that they play roles and games with each other. As I mentioned, while Peter did not cast Liz or me to play the roles of Pauline and Juliet, it happens that we almost perfectly fitted the characteristics and appearances of Solange and Claire: Solange being the elder, more aggressive brunette and Claire the younger, more passive blonde.

In the film these theatrical scenes are cut together and move between other

scenes from Marian and Liz's 'real' lives as they film each other searching for Pauline and Juliet's Fourth World. Our search for the Fourth World in drugs didn't amount to much, but one of my most intoxicating and risk-taking experiences with Liz was going to several Evangelical churches, joining cell groups and trying to experience the 'Fourth World' of God. We also tried praying for each other; we had a séance with some other actors; we watched *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*; we spent most of a summer in Old Queen's Theatre, an old building that was originally one of the first silent cinemas in Christchurch. Here we talked about our relationships with our parents and with boys, played around, and rehearsed sections of Genet's *The Maids* with Peter, who directed us. In this way, Claire and Solange (based on Christine and Lea), are explored by Liz and Marian who are exploring Pauline and Juliet. Fantasy and reality as explored in the two cases, reflect, mirror and converge upon each other within the structure of the film.

While the theatre scenes are filmed using conventional film techniques and within a film set, heightening the artificial and constructed nature of the scenes, the 'reality' outside of it follows the approach of the *Dogme 95* filmmakers. This movement, led by Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier, emerged in the mid 90's and was a reaction against the overuse of 'cinematic tricks' to achieve illusion in the cinema. These filmmakers were themselves remaking the ideals of the French New Wave cinema in the 60's with directors such as Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Rivette, who also vowed a return to a kind of truthfulness in the cinema through a documentary style. Both movements were reactions against the illusions created in the cinema of the Hollywood mainstream. The illusions enabled through the creation of new digital technology, such as that used to create the Fourth World in Jackson's film, was the type of film making that the Dogme95 movement was reacting against.

Remake is not the first time the Parker-Hulme and Papin cases have converged. They converged in the life of Melanie Lynskey who played Pauline in *Heavenly Creatures*. On her initial return to New Zealand from Hollywood after her failure to find roles as Kate Winslet had done, Lynskey went to Victoria University and played in a student production of *The Maids* at Bats Theatre. Lynskey does not specify which role she played but her description of it suggests it may have been Solange: “She’s a schizophrenic character.... Normally she’s very reserved, but she also has these intense moments where she goes a bit crazy and feels such extraordinary emotion.... It’s quite intense” (*Wellington Evening Post* 10 March 1997). Perhaps Lynskey was chosen for the role given its similarities to the part of Pauline she played in *Heavenly Creatures*.

Pauline and Juliet have held a mythological status in Christchurch since the trial. This was perpetuated in Jackson’s film. They have become gruesome artefacts of history, reproduced each year as a spectacle from the past in full page photo spreads in the Christchurch papers, which never miss an opportunity to republish photos of “one of the city’s most infamous murders” that they took of Pauline and Juliet outside the court house in 1954. Genet discussed myth in theatre: “if it is a fact – that the theatre cannot compete with such excessive methods – those of TV and cinema – writers for the theatre will discover the virtues unique to the theatre, which, perhaps, have to do only with myth” (*Fragments of the Artwork* 107). As with Genet and the Papin sisters, *Remake* can be viewed as examining the myth of Pauline and Juliet in both theatrical and cinematic ways.

Pauline and Juliet found a Fourth World here in Christchurch (or Port Levy) but central to it was a desire to leave. They wanted to go to Hollywood. I was twenty-one when we started making the film. I wanted to go to London after university, get a

post-graduate acting diploma and become a character actress in a costume drama. This idea occupied my daydreams. Five years earlier, when I was Pauline and Juliet's age at the time of the murder, my fantasies were more directed towards Hollywood and America, like theirs. I wanted feverishly to be a tap-dancer on Broadway and dreamed of going there to audition. I watched the 1933 film *42nd St*, a backstage musical starring Ruby Keeler, as a way to dream of this. Going to Broadway was a very real fantasy that I was determined to carry out and I started going to tap dancing classes and studied singing. I was intoxicated by musicals and would writhe on the floor, ecstatic, singing along to the soundtrack of *Chess*. I wanted to sing like the Australian actress Marina Prior and listened to her cassette tapes religiously. I had a close friendship with a girl from school. We used to talk fervently for hours about our dreams and fantasies. One time at night we had the most glorious time running around outside the Basilica, the Catholic Cathedral. When she first made me listen to a recording of the famous duet from the Italian opera *The Pearl Fishers* I remember being painfully and rapturously in love with it, which coincided with a desire to be in Italy, like (15 year old) 'Alex' from Tessa Duder's New Zealand novel where she goes to Rome and falls in love with an Italian male opera singer and actor. I had a map of Italy on my wall and started learning speech particles out of a book. I wrote in a diary. In many of these ways, my passions can be seen as experienced either by myself or in a close relationship with a girl friend. They were also based strongly on a desire to be somewhere else.

What may have inspired Jackson to make *Heavenly Creatures* is his possible empathy with Pauline and Juliet's similar desire to leave. Jackson represents and packages an exploration of their passions and fantasies into the form and genres of a Hollywood fantasy which reflects his own. *Heavenly Creatures* is a mirror to Jackson's own

desires for the fantasies of Hollywood. In *Heavenly Creatures* we do not see Pauline and Juliet, we see Peter Jackson's fantasy of them and in such a way that we are not made aware that we are seeing this. We are blinded from imagining them in any other way. While Hollywood provided Pauline and Juliet with material for their fantasies, their lives did not necessarily reflect them. In claiming his film as an accurate representation of Pauline and Juliet's lives together, Jackson refuses any acknowledgment that the Fourth World as he created and understands it might not be the one they experienced. The mirror he provides is a delusional one if what he says about a 'truthful' and 'accurate' presentation of the interior lives of Pauline and Juliet is correct. In my view, he is blinded by a mirror of his own narcissism whereas *Remake* shatters this mirror and offers an alternative understanding of Pauline and Juliet and what led to murder. Not only do we 'remake' the case as it was represented by Jackson, but we also remake scenes from other films by the Marx Brothers and Jacques Rivette.

In trying to understand Pauline and Juliet and their desire to leave, which felt so identical to my own, is now the reason that I haven't left and that I now don't want to leave, at least for the reasons that I once did. Making a film about wanting to escape, exploring this desire to escape, made me feel present in a way I have never felt before. It transformed my conception about who I was, from a feeling of invisibility, dependence, lack of culture, obscurity and passivity - an absolute desire to be somewhere else, in my physical self and in my fantasies - to a feeling that all these things might actually contribute to an identity for myself. And that this might also reflect upon and mirror a very real and unique national identity as a New Zealander, based on values and desires attained from elsewhere such as those reflected in the form of Jackson's Hollywood film. *Remake* allowed me to be interested in

Christchurch and myself in it - to see myself in it. It allowed me to feel like the world was here and not somewhere else. It acknowledged my dissatisfaction and allowed me a way to live with it - to act and write and create a way out of it, something I never conceived of or imagined before.

During the process of making the film, and through role-playing with Liz, I became more aware of my desire for the possibilities of the creative relationship that I imagined Pauline and Juliet had. I identified with the need to play roles in our theatre in order to understand the roles I play or don't play in my everyday life. We filmed the scenes from *The Maids*, at night on the top floor of an unheated warehouse in the middle of a freezing winter. I didn't think of Christine and Lea, upon whom Claire and Solange are based, alone in their similarly freezing attic, but of Pauline and Juliet who, within an enforced geographical and cultural isolation, isolated and excluded themselves further, and together within this isolation, found a kind of freedom. The theatre Genet creates is a confined space which reveals the world outside of it to be, conversely, in many ways itself a place of confinement. He uses his maids confinement on stage to a bedroom that is not their own to explore their fantasies and desires outside of it, as we did.

Our film felt full of possibility, like the planning of an act of murder perhaps, or the joy of writing as Cixous describes it. I was constantly full of anticipation, fear and excitement. Our film, as it substituted for murder, felt like a provocation. Genet similarly describes writing as a provocation, expressing what may have inspired Cixous' mention of his ability to identify with the feminine: "I wrote for the drunkenness, the ecstasy, and to cut ever more deeply the links that still attached me to a world that rejected me and that I rejected in turn" (White 213).

Remake is based on an acknowledgment that an authentic depiction of Pauline

and Juliet's relationship and *Fourth World* is impossible. We attempted to understand their relationship by remaking one of our own. Making *Remake* became my life in a way, because the way Peter directed the film enabled so much of the material for it to come out of our own lives, ideas, passions and dissatisfactions. I wanted to be consumed and consume it. I was dissatisfied with my relationship with Liz because I felt she was not so interested in 'writing' or creating in this way that Cixous encourages. I felt the time and space and opportunity we had been given to explore what felt like so much freedom and excitement was something I wanted to devote myself to. Liz on the other hand was more reticent and less willing to commit herself to something that promised no more reward than the experience itself. The time she needed to spend by herself 'to not go mad' as she put it, were precisely the times I wanted to be with her in order 'to go mad' - as mad as we might become staring at ourselves in the mirror or gossiping about people from church. Or as "MAD" as Pauline writes that she feels in her diary. Were there similar tensions in the relationship between Pauline and Juliet? This is not apparent from Jackson's film as it was perhaps not the fantasy he had of them.

In *Remake*, instead of being a voyeur into the imagined lives and fantasies of Liz and Marian, the spectator is invited in some scenes, to see from the perspective of Liz and Marian as we see each other and the world. We take up the camera ourselves, filming each other, our parents and our conversations with our boyfriends. When scenes are filmed from the perspective of the cameraman, Shahin's role as cinematographer is acknowledged within those scenes filmed from his perspective. When the scenes are filmed by Shahin, the *Fourth World* (with the exception of the dream scenes) is not a hallucinatory fantasy of digital effects but a view necessarily from the outside of what Liz and Marian experience. As Jonathon Romney

commented in his review of Jackson's film: "A view from the outside might have been another view entirely" (Romney 2). The spectators to *Remake* look both from Liz and Marian's perspective and from the perspective of the cameraman or director. Yet from both perspectives they are on the outside. The spectator cannot see through the eyes of Liz and Marian but only through their own. The fundamental impossibility of filming the subjective experience of Liz and Marian is acknowledged. Similarly, there is no way of knowing for sure what Pauline and Juliet experienced and how it might have led to murder.

The relationship between Pauline and Juliet as depicted in *Heavenly Creatures* is unrecognisable to me when compared to my own experience of the relationship Liz and I created. Our relationship was not full of the melodrama of unrequited devotion and unified happiness abundant in Jackson's film. My fantasy however, of Pauline and Juliet's relationship and in extension Liz and my own within *Remake*, was constantly at odds with its reality, which was often disappointing, painful and occasionally surprising. What felt, while making the film, like a failure to recreate a relationship like Pauline and Juliet's, revealed to me my own presumptions about what it was and the way my expectations were influenced by Jackson's film. There were pressures on both of us to be doing something else, suspicions and disapprovals about our film from others close to us, a desire for other things, a need to grow up and stop behaving like teenagers, to earn money, to pay rent and to have boyfriends. All these things were constantly affecting our relationship and consequently our film. And yet as these are acknowledged as part of the film, they became interesting and integral to our exploration of Pauline and Juliet within a society fifty years on from the one they inhabited, and not something to be denied or ignored. Some of these aspects were incorporated into the film, in the scenes where Liz and Marian place hidden cameras

to film conversations with their parents and film each other on the phone with their boyfriends.

Pauline and Juliet had conflicts with their parents and so Liz and I explored our own. The scenes with Marian's mother tend to focus on the abject - her mother's concern with cleanliness and purity, both moral and physical. In coming to choose material for these scenes these concerns must in some ways mirror my own, which means in many ways I am my mother or see myself reflected in my mother when I watch the film. Irigaray's discussion of the mirroring in the relationship between mother and daughter emerges in these scenes, where Marian and her mother both inhabit the same cinematic frame and yet are opposed and cannot communicate within it: "But we have never, never spoken to each other. And such an abyss now separates us that I never leave you whole, for I am always held back in your womb. Shrouded in shadow. Captives of our confinement" ("And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other" 67). This is emphasised in one scene where Marian and her mother (played by Helen Moran) are watching a scene from *Heavenly Creatures* when Pauline and Juliet are in the bath talking about murder. Marian has set the camera up on top of the television and provokes her mother into a conversation about Pauline and Juliet's relationship as depicted in *Heavenly Creatures*. Her mother comments: "I'm glad you're not a homosexual, I don't know what I would have done about that". Marian actively reveals her mother's homophobia and perhaps something of herself, for the spectator. This bath scene in *Heavenly Creatures* is suggestive of a lesbian relationship. In *Remake* we 'remake' this bath scene but instead of planning murder in it, Liz films Marian talking about her boyfriend.

If Liz and my exploration within *Remake* was a way of finding out what Pauline and Juliet experienced together, then I can say resolutely that they were not

lesbians. But why do I feel the need to say that? My vehemence must be a reaction against the assumptions and insinuations made by most people about Pauline and Juliet's relationship and as I never realized when we were making the film, fears about Liz and my own. It is more than my puritan fear of the abject connotations. It is a fury that an intimacy, like any intimacy, so precious in its inability to be explained or understood especially by myself, and that at times provided so much joy and freedom because of this, could be judged and explained and understood by others in such reductive terms. What it revealed to me about this society is a perverse and unacknowledged obsession with sexuality, resulting in the voyeurism and titillation inherent in so many of the representations of both cases in this thesis, which can only emerge out of repression. I am sure my own vehement denial of lesbianism is a reflection of this and comes out of being a part of this culture myself. Medlicott describes Pauline and Juliet's playacting during the trial as proof of their insanity: "the choice of male partners in dreams and in play acting was simply a disguise" ("Paranoia of the Exalted Type..." 222). My fascination with Genet's play is in his acknowledgment that everything is a disguise, a role, sometimes chosen and sometimes imposed by others, and in his refusal to define any essential or constant sexuality or identity. This creates ambivalence for Claire and Solange where it is impossible to pin down a definitive reading of homosexuality or insanity such as Medlicott provides for Pauline and Juliet.

Another way of coming to remake Pauline and Juliet's relationship during the making of our film, was to sit in front of the mirror to their fantasies and desires – Hollywood. By watching the films they watched, by sitting in front of this mirror and looking into the reflection, our experience might have things in common to their own. In a way we entered into Sartre's notion of the whirligig in his discussion of *The*

Maids, where Liz and I were ourselves vicariously attempting to play the roles of Pauline and Juliet. Pauline and Juliet's plan to go to Hollywood reflects a desire to get to the source of these Hollywood fantasies and enter into them. It is ironic that they eventually did, in Jackson's representation. Angela Carter in her screenplay uses Nerissa and Lena's desires for Hollywood (as they stand in for Pauline and Juliet) to stand in for a Fourth World also.

Their desire for murder or 'molder', as Orson Welles in a film they watched coined it, can be seen as inextricably linked to these films that they saw. One of these was *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*. Pauline describes watching the film in her diary: "It is the most perfect story I have ever known. The best picture (easily) that I have ever seen. Pandora is the most beautiful female imaginable and Him is far too wonderful to attempt to describe. I feel depressed and will probably cry tonight" ("Pauline Parker's personal diary" 14 December 1953). It is set in Spain, with flamenco, Spanish people and bullfighting – this evokes my own desire for the exotic as it might be experienced overseas and perhaps did for them as well. The film stars James Mason and Ava Gardner. James Mason was declared one of Pauline and Juliet's Saints. His character in the film, the Flying Dutchman, recalls in flashback, a murder he once committed and for which he received the punishment of immortality. He stands in court, in front of the judge and declares: "The evil is done and cannot be undone. The bloody death I still shall do and do again ten thousand times before I hang tomorrow". Then he blasphemes Christianity, crying out: "Faith is a lie and God himself is chaos!". Pauline and Juliet like any other person watching the film were exposed to blasphemy and murder in the form of their cinematic idol.

Pauline and Juliet were also presented with images in these films of women that they perhaps desired to be. Ava Gardner in this film plays Pandora: "the secret

Goddess that all men in their hearts desire". Pandora is a glamorous and beautiful woman who many men would love to marry, but she is dissatisfied and dispassionate towards them. She travels the world, London, New York and Spain, searching for something that inspires her passion, playing the piano and singing in nightclubs. The Flying Dutchman (James Mason) is the one for whom she has been fated and has been waiting for. She gives up her life for him to relieve him of his immortality, enacting the phrase echoed throughout the film: "The measure of love is what one is willing to give up for it". Murder and suicide are represented here as consummate acts of passion and are also central to Genet's play.

My own reaction to *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* as a way of guessing at the reaction of Pauline or Juliet, was a fascination with Ava Gardner and not particularly with James Mason. It was a narcissistic fascination and a vicarious desire to be as free and reckless as her as reflected in the scene at night when she abandons her boring fiancé, sheds her clothes on the beach and dives into the sea swimming out to the mysterious yacht without any idea who is inside it. She seeks adventure, danger and abandon. She heads for the sea as Cixous does. Perhaps Pauline and Juliet felt a similar way. Pauline writes of midnight swims they had at New Brighton. The degree of risk involved in sneaking out at night and riding their bicycles perhaps increased the enjoyment. Liz and I had a wonderful time swimming at Port Levy.

As I discussed in my first chapter, films can be considered psychoanalytically as dreamlike experiences where unconscious desires are played out on the screen. Conversely, the films the girls watched may have influenced their unconscious fantasies. Seven days before the murder Pauline wrote about a dream she had in which That and Gay and Boinard (Saints and presumably characters from their novels) joined her and Juliet at Port Levy: "It was so heavenly that I am determined to

make it come true” (“Pauline Parker’s personal diary” 15 June 1954). She continues: “We came home late and we intend to sleep. It is a glorious night, very similar to the one at the island at Port Levy” (15 June 1954). Here she speaks of a dream that she intends to recreate in reality while describing reality as being similar to the place that inspired the dream. Fantasy, reality and dreams are completely merged in her writing. It seems clear that they are becoming more and more infused or confused with each other.

I had a dream while we made *Remake* that I slipped down to the edge of the sea at dawn and the water was frightening but there were two girls swimming further out which reassured me. I got in just long enough to submerge myself and felt totally blissful and awakened. I had another dream during this time where I was standing on the edge of a wharf and wanting to jump into the sea but there was again something dangerous about the water. My mother was there enticing me to jump in by holding out a lolly. I was deeply suspicious of her. The water in my dreams and in many of my fantasies was a sensual desire kept at bay by fear of something unseen and lurking in the depths. Water is often associated with the feminine as Cixous shows in her essay “Aller a la mer”. Irigaray in her discussion of divine women, describes how “Our passions are transformed or transform us into phenomena that can be watery or heavenly...” (*Sexes and Genealogies* 58). Pauline echoes this in her description of the Fourth World in her diary where the sea is a central feature.

We recorded our dreams in our diaries as Pauline did, to use as material for the film. Both Liz and I had a dream scene. Marian’s dream scene is once again associated with water as a ‘remake’ of Waterhouse’s painting of Ophelia floating on her back, surrendering herself to suicide. Her body is a life-sized doll – a double or fake of myself. We floated it in the stream by Juliet Hulme’s old house at Ilam, which

is now the University Staff Club. Peter Jackson used this stream in his film in one scene at night when Pauline and Juliet are having a ceremony for their Saints in the garden. In his film there is a close-up shot of a picture of Orson Welles being sucked ominously into the rapids. We remake this shot but instead Marian's fake body gets sucked into the waterfall. This dream scene is a foreshadowing of a possible death, suicide or murder within the film.

As revealed in Pauline's diary, she and Juliet shared their Fourth World with eight 'Saints'. Her list of these (all male) Saints included James Mason as I mentioned. In Pauline's description of their Fourth World she specifies that only ten people can go there. These eight Saints plus Pauline and Juliet themselves equal the number of people that, twice a year, would be able to enter the Fourth World. Their list of Saints is made up of male actors and singers as well as fictional characters who appear in films. No preference or distinction therefore, is made between real life and fiction in their Fourth World. In an attempt to understand how they imagined this world, I will discuss these Saints in more detail.

In anticipation of seeing James Mason in *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* Pauline wrote: "I was living in a daze waiting to see" ("Pauline Parker's personal diary" 14 December 1953) suggesting she was in some way in love with him. Another Saint is the villainous character Rupert of Hentzau (played by James Mason, already a Saint in his identity as an actor) from the 1952 *Prisoner of Zenda* also starring Deborah Kerr. 'Deborah' was a name Pauline used to refer to Juliet in her diary. Another Saint was Suie Bjuling who appears to be the misspelling of Swedish tenor Jussi Bjoerling. Mario Lanza was another Saint, an opera singer and actor who starred in several Hollywood films including the 1951 *The Great Caruso* where he played the role of the real life opera singer Enrico Caruso – in this film he was starring as

himself in the role of another real-life singer, merging real life and fantasy within the film itself. Their Saints perhaps reflected their own passion as artists and imagined criminals.

The merging of reality and fantasy within the films they watched, as reflected in their choice of Saints is distinctive. Another of their eight Saints is Mel Ferrer, an American actor who starred with Ava in *Knights of the Round Table* in 1952. It is possible Pauline and Juliet saw him and Ava in this film, as it often took up to two years for films to come New Zealand after their initial release. They may also have seen Ferrer in the musical *Lili* released in 1953. Here he plays a puppeteer who conducts a relationship with a girl through her interactions with the puppets he manipulates. She naively engages with them as if they were real, becoming a part of his show. Mel Ferrer appeared in a third film a year earlier that it is also possible they saw. *Scaramouche* is about the back stage and front stage lives of a group of Commedia del arte actors. In both *Lili* and *Scaramouche*, reality and fantasy, life and art, are merged and confused by the protagonists. Another of Pauline and Juliet's Saints is listed as Monsieur de la Tour d'Azyr. He does not appear in the film of *Scaramouche* but is a central character in the novel by Rafael Sabatini upon which it is based. It appears that Pauline and Juliet must have read this novel. Another Saint was Guy Rolfe a British actor known for playing villainous characters.

Their final Saint is the character Harry Lime whom they called 'It', played by Orson Welles in *The Third Man* in 1949. This film is used in *The Christchurch Murder* and *Heavenly Creatures* as a reference to Pauline and Juliet's adoration of Orson Welles. Pauline recorded in her diary that she and Juliet went to watch a film with 'It' in it on Friday 11th June 1954. This was eleven days before the murder. Pauline's plan to murder her mother was first mentioned in her diary on April 28th so

the murder had been planned at the time they saw this film, four weeks before. Both girls appear to have been in a heightened state of excitement. After they see the film

Pauline reports:

“It was the first time I had ever seen It. Deborah had always told me how hideous he was, and I had believed her, though from his photos he did not look too bad. ‘It’ is appalling. He is dreadful. I have never in my life seen anything that, so... in the same category of hideousness, but I adore him (S’queer). We returned home and talked for some time about It, getting ourselves more and more excited. Eventually we enacted how each Saint would make love in bed, only doing the first seven as it was 7:30a.m. by then. We felt exhausted and very satisfied...” (“Pauline Parker’s personal diary” 11 June 1954).

This film they saw with ‘It’ in it however, was not *The Third Man* as Carter and Jackson suggest, but another lesser known film *Trent’s Last Case*. Orson Welles is in this film but plays a character called Sigsbee Manderson. While ‘It’ was one of their Saints, Pauline mentions above that *Trent’s Last Case* was the first time she had ever seen ‘It’. This reveals that she actually never saw *The Third Man* and the choice of the character Harry Lime from it as a Saint must have been Juliet’s, as it appears she had seen it. The fact that Pauline refers to ‘It’ not only as the character that Orson Welles played in *The Third Man*, but as the actor himself in this other film, shows how within her own logic, she has mixed up fictional characters with real actors and fantasy with reality.

Both Pauline and Juliet, after their five years of imprisonment, were required to form new identities new names and new lives – to create new fictional selves in order to erase their former identities. Juliet’s new identity is as Anne Perry, the author of crime fiction. On her website she merges fact and fiction in a playful and mysterious way to account for the period of her life in New Zealand: “After the Bahamas they [her parents] moved to a private island off the coast of New Zealand, where I lived a Swiss Family Robinson style of independence. We did a lot of fishing, building, boating etc” (“Anne Perry Website”). She invokes fiction in order to present

her life as biographical truth. She continued to play with fiction and fantasy perhaps, as she played with Pauline.

Juliet is mysterious to me in the sense that her diary was destroyed³². Her own thoughts have been obscured by the emphasis and fascination with Pauline's words. And what was made available of these during the trial is limited to that which associated them with murder and insanity. One of the only passages available from their novels is: "I would like to kill someone sometime because I think it is an experience that is necessary to life" ("Fourth World – The Heavenly Creatures Website"). While Perry's life is not a part of the film *Remake*, my fascination with her arose out of it and so I will examine further the fiction she created in her new identity, as a possible way to discover her voice.

A lot of attention has been paid to Perry's *Inspector Pitt* series of novels set in Victorian times. Before her previous identity as Juliet was discovered upon the release of Jackson's film, she wrote of her interest in writing these novels in a 1991 entry in *Twentieth-Century Crime and Mystery Writers*: "I see mysteries as stories of what happens to people and communities under the pressure of fear and suspicion, especially the violent changes in perceptions and relationships brought about by investigation.... There are so many understandable motives for crime, social ills, injustices, many of which are with us today" (Borck and DeCandido 842). Inspector Pitt's wife Charlotte and her younger sister Emily work behind the scenes to solve his crimes often without his knowledge. They are sisters yet live within different classes, as Charlotte married beneath herself to marry Inspector Pitt and Emily conversely married upward in society. Helga Borck and GraceAnne A. DeCandido write about Perry's novels three years before the public revelation of Perry's former identity:

³² Pauline's diary is held at the National Archives and a recent act was passed to permanently prevent public access to it.

“The relationship between Charlotte and Emily, with their vastly different lifestyles and shared interests, is wonderfully depicted” (842).

In her detective novels then, Perry has created a relationship between Charlotte and Emily that perhaps mirrors her own as Juliet with Pauline, in their different class positions but also one that reflects their desire to be sisters as mentioned in their poem and alluded to by Dr Bennett in the trial. Emily and Charlotte are of course allusions to the names of the real life sisters and writers Emily and Charlotte Bronte. Through fiction, perhaps Anne Perry began to explore and attempt to understand what had happened to her. She appears to have found a way to live vicariously as a writer, through the roles of the characters in her novels much like she did with Pauline in her earlier life: “Perry’s interest lies in showing how individuals in a restrictive society with rigid notions of status and propriety may respond to pressures to conform, and how society in turn protects its interests in the face of deviation or rebellion” (843). Borck and DeCandido mention that in one novel, *Silence in Hanover Close*, Emily masquerades as a lady’s maid. If Emily stands for Anne Perry or Juliet (as the sister who married upwards) then Juliet/Perry plays at ‘playing’ a maid in her novel just as Solange/Liz and Claire/I did in *Remake*.

Trents Last Case, that I mentioned as possibly the last film they saw before the murder, has significant connections to the life of Juliet in her new identity as Anne Perry that are ignored by its dismissal in the screenplay and film of Carter and Jackson, due possibly, to its apparent insignificance. This film is based on a mystery/detective novel by E.C. Bentley. Philip Trent is a detective and he appears as the main protagonist in a series of novels by Bentley. The plot of *Trent’s Last Case* involves a high society woman accused of murdering her husband (played by Orson Welles). Trent thinks he has solved the case but gets it wrong and his errors are

revealed to him by the real perpetrator of the crime. This film and its origin, as the first in a series of detective novels, parallels the detective murder mystery novels of Anne Perry. Her protagonists, Inspector Pitt and Detective Monk, are fallible and human like Philip Trent. In Perry's second series of crime fiction, Inspector Monk wakes up in the first novel *The Face of a Stranger* to find he has lost his memory. He goes back to work and in the process of solving a murder case discovers he has committed a murder himself that he had forgotten. This perhaps parallels the way Perry feels about her own experience of murder, as something she cannot understand and part of a life and identity that is separate from her new one.

The book on which *Trent's Last Case* is based is dedicated to a close friend of E.C. Bentley, writer G.K. Chesterton. Anne Perry in her entry in *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers* states that her favourite novel is by Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Chesterton's novel is classified as a thriller. The plot involves a meeting of anarchists who are all gradually revealed to be undercover detectives. It is about mistaken identity and the playing of roles. Orson Welles is also noted by one source to be a great admirer of Chesterton, who was very religious (as Anne Perry also became). Chesterton was fascinated by the occult and in this novel by nihilism and anarchy.

Perry published a story in 1988 in Alfred Hitchcock's *Mystery Magazine*, called *Digby's First Case*, what appears to be an allusion to *Trent's Last Case*, the film she watched 34 years earlier with Pauline. Digby's was the name of the secretarial college that Pauline's mother forced her to leave school for and enrol in. There is also a character in a novel Perry wrote the year before in her 1988 novel *Cardington Crescent*, a housekeeper called Mrs Digby ("Fourth World – The Heavenly Creatures Website"). What is most fascinating to me is that Perry still

alludes to her old life with Pauline. She makes references to it which she possibly never imagined would be discovered or would be meaningful to anyone but herself. The fact that the film they watched and that propelled them on towards murder should so closely echo the fiction she created afterwards shows her determination not to abandon the creative life she discovered for herself through her relationship with Pauline. It suggests that the murder didn't shatter any illusions she might have had or the 'madness' they shared, but in fact only propelled her even further to explore or understand the possibilities of what enabled her to commit the murder.

For Perry, fiction appears to have replaced murder as an act of writing herself, as Cixous might have conceived it. My exploration of these parallels has only uncovered more and more layers of mystery in the connections between Perry's own life and that of her fictional characters. Her life is a mystery not only to those trying to uncover it but also perhaps to herself. The more the truth is sought the further away it hides, as was revealed to Trent in the film they watched and to the protagonists in the novels Perry went on to write. Any truths that are uncovered are embedded in an ambivalence created by layers of fiction. In her mystery and fantasy writing, perhaps she tried to uncover truths both for herself and her characters. The merging and inextricability of fantasy and reality is still central to her life in the way it appears to have been before the murder in her relationship with Pauline.

While Perry's career has been largely built on crime fiction, in 1999 she published her first fantasy novel, *Tathea*. She expresses in it what appears to be a very genuine desire to understand what happened to her in her real life. This was the first novel she starting writing in her twenties but was never published. She went back to her manuscripts and completed it nearly fifty years later. She says of *Tathea* and its sequel *Come Armageddon*, that they, "reflect more than anything else I have written,

my religious and philosophical beliefs, and therefore I care about them in a unique way” (“Anne Perry Website”). It also may provide some idea of the novels that she and Pauline wrote together and which have been made unavailable to the public and possibly destroyed.

Tathea is an oriental fantasy. Tathea’s land is in the desert. Guy Rolfe, one of Pauline and Juliet’s Saints, starred in the 1953 film *The Veils of Baghdad*. It is possible they saw this film which explored Western fantasies of the orient. In Perry’s novel, Tathea is the Empress of Shinabar. In the trial it was revealed that the ‘Empress of Volumnia’ was a title given to one of Pauline and Juliet’s characters from their own novels. The novel begins as Tathea wakes in the night to discover her entire family have been murdered by usurpers to her reign of sovereignty. She escapes on horseback in the night and rides for days across deserts riding alone and with caravans, trying to escape the enemy. She heads towards the sea so she can sail back towards her mother’s land to seek refuge. Here she has to renounce her old identity and come to terms with her grief and what she describes repeatedly as a deep loneliness: “‘Everyone I loved is gone, everything I thought I knew,’ she replied simply. ‘I want to know if there is any meaning in life. Why do I exist? Who am I?’” (Perry 40).

If this is interpreted biographically, at the outset at least, Perry has reversed the murder onto the society that condemned her and Pauline and forced her eviction from everything she knew. She has positioned herself as if she was a reigning sovereign of a society which has usurped her reign unjustly. In this novel it is society who has committed murder – society who is the criminal. This echoes the surrealists’ position in relation to the Papin case. Tathea’s journey to her “mother’s land” seems to represent England and possibly Perry’s return there after her prison sentence, but is

curiously described like New Zealand: “her mother was from the Lost Lands, those shores beyond the Maelstrom to the south of the Island at the Edge of the World, where not even the bravest Shinabari mariner dared sail” (20). Tathea’s journey then is a reversal of Perry’s escape in real life. Her mother’s land is located geographically as Christchurch. It is here she seeks the truth and will encounter all kinds of evil in her journey to seek it.

It appears Pauline and Juliet’s act of murder could have had very different implications for both of them. If this novel is seen as a mirroring to the feelings of Juliet’s/Perry’s feelings about the murder, she appears anxious to re-establish a bond with her mother that appears to have been broken. In this book it is her own mother who has been unjustly murdered (along with the rest of her family). Once in the new land Tathea seeks out a priest who counsels her and asks her what she loved most that is gone: “She began with her mother. This was her place. A hundred things came to mind, both of joy and of sorrow” (35). She performs a ritual with the priest to deal with this loss: “The pain of grief did not go, but it became less sharp. She found companionship and much to learn. There was a deep comfort in growing close to the other half of her heritage. With every passing day she felt a deepening of the bond between her [murdered] mother and herself” (37). Perhaps the murder of Pauline’s mother was a substitute for Juliet’s own? Irigaray’s discussion of the mirroring relationship between mother and daughter, the prison they find themselves in and the desire to break free, seems relevant here. If the murder was a break with the ties of ‘Mother England’, Perry is eager to reattach them. This could be interpreted two ways both psychoanalytically and politically: either she is remorseful and wishes to undo the splitting of herself from her mother or she wishes to form a new bond with her mother perhaps in the way Irigaray encourages.

The way Perry plays (in my reading of her fiction) with the exploration of truth within fantasy as a kind of game, seems to me on reflection, as similar to the construction of *Remake*, which plays games with the spectator in terms of the narrative and which can be seen as a series of games most obviously apparent in the scenes from *The Maids*. The games Juliet played with Pauline perhaps Perry plays now by herself in her fantasy world of fiction. With Pauline, she escaped the real world into the fantasies of Hollywood as she now escapes into her novels. In fantasy, it can be proposed, she finds desire for herself in the real world. In a significant sequence from the novel, Tathea defends the evil Cassiodorus in a trial which could be seen as a reversal of Juliet's position in her own trial, enabling Perry perhaps to regard her old self in a mirror. Perry describes these two novels as "Still the most difficult things I have ever written. I delved very far into my own beliefs, stripped naked, for the journey. Maybe I could not have written it any earlier in my life" (Douglas). *Remake* is also an exploration of the truth that can be found in fantasy or in the theatre, as a way of exploring the illusions and fantasies that pervade real life.

Even within the real trial of Pauline and Juliet, fiction was invoked by both the defence and prosecution. Pauline and Juliet's poem *The Ones That I Worship* was used by Dr Bennett to prove insanity. He read from the poem: "There are living among two beautiful [this is transcribed incorrectly and the actual word in the poem is 'dutiful'] daughters, of a man who possesses two beautiful daughters...[sic]". Bennett highlights its deviation from fact because they are not sisters, and states how "it illustrates the extraordinary mood of the authors" (*The Press* 27 August 1954). Pauline and Juliet's desire to be sisters of the same mother, parallels the Papin case where Christine and Lea were actually sisters whose murder has been interpreted by many as the murder of a substitute mother. As I discussed, Perry recreates fictional

sisters in her novels, which reflects this desire and are derived from real life sisters and writers. Their fiction used in the trial revealed a truth that was used to prove insanity.

Their fiction was also used however, to prove their sanity. The Crown Prosecutor Alan Brown, whose role it was to prove Pauline and Juliet sane, responded to Bennett's use of the poem to prove them mad, by quoting some lines from Shakespeare: "'Not marble nor the gilded monuments/ Of princes shall outlive this powerful line'....Shakespeare wrote a lot of tragedies full of murder. Would you call him a genius?" (*The Press* 27 August 1954). Dr Bennett acknowledged: "Yes". Mr Brown continued to use Shakespeare as an analogy to prove that Pauline and Juliet's writing was not so different to other writers who were not mad. He describes *The Rape of Lucrece* being like the girls' novels as it is also full of sex (*The Press* 27 August 1954). As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Bennett invoked Shakespeare in his reference to Lady Macbeth as an example of remorse, using it to compare to Pauline and Juliet. Brown argues this point: "Did not Lady Macbeth welcome Duncan to the castle on the evening before his death?" and "Was she not calm and calculated throughout?" (*Christchurch Star* 27 August 1954). Brown claims here that Pauline and Juliet were as sane and therefore 'bad' as Lady Macbeth who was an accessory to murder. The fact that Lady Macbeth goes mad and kills herself at the end of the play is ignored.

Bennett uses Biblical figures and fictional characters from Shakespeare to prove the insanity of Pauline and Juliet, and Brown likewise draws on the same fiction to prove them sane. Brown brought up Bennett's description of the girls' behaviour after the murder as an "act". Bennett had presumably tried to equate their fantasy world with acting to prove the delusional nature of the murder. Brown

challenges him on this point asking him: “When Parker worked about the house and mother was charmed with her, was that an act?” Bennett replied: “Yes it was. It was deceit. It had an element of Judas Iscariot in it” (*The Press* 28 August 1954). Iscariot is one of the twelve Apostles who betrayed Jesus. Brown disputes this comparison arguing that Iscariot was sane and not mad in his act of deceit: “Was not Judas Iscariot cool and calm when he took bread and wine with our Lord?” (*The Press* 28 August 1954). How fantasy or fiction may be used to shed light on reality and the possible confluence of these aspects in the murder itself, is curiously reflected and disputed in the proceedings within the courtroom.

One of the most fascinating developments after the trial was the impact it had on the life of Crown Prosecutor Alan Brown himself. Glyn Strange, in his account of the lives of Barristers in Christchurch, describes the life of Brown in dramatic terms as a “tragedy” intricately attached to the Parker-Hulme case: “Although an experienced prosecutor, Alan Brown found it difficult to distance himself from this trial. As the father of two daughters whom he had successfully seen through the teenage years, he could scarcely believe what he was hearing. He was so shocked that tears were rolling down his face during cross-examination” (Strange 35). Strange notes that after the trial, Brown’s “mental health collapsed” and he was forced to cease practice and died seven years later: “The tragedy of his illness was his complete lack of awareness of any problem. He could not accept that there was anything abnormal about his behaviour which, at its worst, severely embarrassed clients, colleagues and family” (Strange 35-36). The man in the position of proving the girls’ sanity seems to have gone mad himself.

Whether he went mad or not it seems clear that he was profoundly affected by the case. Pauline and Juliet’s amoral and antisocial behaviour was used by Medlicott

to diagnose insanity, but in the end this did not prove it to the jury. Alan Brown, like Pauline and Juliet, also denied he was mad. It can be seen that in his examination of witnesses and the defence, Brown revealed the illogic of the plea for insanity. In doing so he revealed the logic of the crime itself and its inability to be easily explained or comprehended. In his cross-examination of Dr Bennett, Brown pointed to a question that can be seen as one of the central fascinations with the case and which possibly so deeply perplexed him: “They read and wrote tragedy, play-acted, and enacted a real killing?” (*The Press* 27 August 1954).

If what Strange says is true and Brown was moved to tears, it would appear he didn't demonise the girls and didn't judge them initially, but instead was trying to rationalize and explain what had happened. If he identified as a father because he also had two daughters, then his cross-examination of Bennett's use of the poem I have already mentioned, may have profoundly affected him: “There are living among two beautiful [dutiful] daughters of a man who possesses two beautiful daughters...[sic]” (*The Press* 27 August 1954). The next line that Bennett doesn't include is: “the most glorious beings in creation” (*The Press* 27 August 1954). These lines suggest that under a façade of obedience and charm something lies hidden that the ‘man’ or father has no comprehension or understanding of. Perhaps Brown's breakdown came out of his attempt to identify and understand something, which came into conflict with the morals and values that he held not only in his personal life but in his very incarnation (or ‘role’ as Genet might describe it) as Prosecutor for the Crown - the man whose job it was to enforce these morals and values that govern society. Brown's “collapse” of mental health has the appearance of behaviour that is pronounced insane because of its anti-social and amoral nature, as Foucault understood madness. It is fascinating here the way in which the themes within the case had effect outside of it. The same

can be said of *Remake* where our cameraman's refusal to see that he was playing a role had consequences that were reflected in the film.

Like Brown, Medlicott's involvement and fascination with the case also continued after the trial and his initial paper on it. In his 1970 paper "An examination of the necessity for a concept of evil: some aspects of evil as a form of perversion", he drew further comparisons of it to fiction which I discussed in the second chapter. In both additional examples the evil arises from the desire for, and evil use of, poison by the protagonists. In Louis Stevenson's novel, Dr Jekyll drank poison to transform himself into the evil Mr Hyde and in Cocteau's novel Paul receives fatal poison from the evil Dargelos. Medlicott quotes from Cocteau: "Dargelos had not forgotten the abject slave who once hung on his lips; this gift of poison was the crowning stroke of his derision" ("An examination of evil..." 275). Poisoned tea is central to the final murder/suicide in Genet's play. According to one source, Perry stated that Dostoevsky was a favourite writer, which is ironic given Medlicott's use of Dostoevsky's characters to compare Pauline and Juliet to evil in his case study. The characters that Pauline and Juliet liked were generally the evil ones (as reflected in their choice of Saints).

Medlicott also compares Pauline and Juliet to the writing of Marquis de Sade who "no doubt had positive qualities, but many of his characters pursued evil as a conscious choice" (275). He describes de Sade's characters as "'driven' or insatiable in their desire for pleasure. Their intense hatred of mature femininity and of reproduction is a striking feature of their personalities" (275-6). His disapproval of this aspect of de Sade's characters can be linked to Pauline and Juliet's rejection of the mother figure in the act of murder.

As I discussed before, Angela Carter conversely evokes the liberatory potential of de Sade's characters and it is these qualities no doubt that influenced her own representation of Pauline and Juliet. It is possible to read Genet's characters of Claire and Solange (and possibly as I mentioned earlier Marian and Liz) through Carter's reinterpretation of de Sade's Justine and Juliette. They are archetypes of femininity in a puritan world "whose identities have been defined exclusively by men" (*The Sadeian Woman* 77). Genet's creation of Claire is almost identical to the way Carter describes Justine in de Sade's writing: "narcissistically enamoured of the idea of herself as Blessed Virgin, she has no notion at all of who she is except in fantasy" (73). I felt, while playing the role of Claire, that Claire's playing of Madame was a way of rebelling against her passivity. She experienced this passivity in a similar way to Justine as she is described by Carter in de Sade's novels: "repression is Justine's whole being – repression of sex, of anger and of her own violence; the repressions demanded of Christian virtue" (48-9). Carter describes Justine as a "stabbed dove" and suggests "It is not rape but seduction she fears" (49). Solange describes Claire and simultaneously Madame as she is incarnated in Claire, in similar terms: "Madame has a lovely throat. The throat of a queen. Of a dove. Come, my turtle dove!" (*The Maids* 36). In Christianity the dove is a symbol of peace and of the Holy Spirit and so it is fitting that Genet wrings its throat when Solange intends to strangle Claire near the end of the play. Carter notes the real price Justine pays for her virtue: "solitary confinement in the prison of her own femininity" (*The Sadeian Woman* 50) which is similar to the prison Irigaray describes for women.

De Sade's Juliette is Justine's antithesis and can be seen as Genet's Solange – she is cruel and sexually active. Juliette was educated in the convent (like Christine Papin) and she also murders: "Her initiation is completed by a murder, for the convent

is also a Sadeian place of privilege where everything is permissible” (82). Carter describes both Justine and Juliet and the way they “mutually reflect and complement one another, like a pair of mirrors” (78). It seems clear to me that Carter’s exploration of these Sadeian characters infused her interest in the exploration of the femininities of Pauline and Juliet in her screenplay. Carter, as I mentioned in my introduction, speaks of the ‘murder’ necessary for free women within an unfree society. There are parallels between Perry’s use of fantasy in her writing and Carter’s interest in the case in her own use of it as a writer. Carter’s writing could also be seen as her search for a Fourth World in fantasy.

In the light of the way fantasy emerged from the case to infiltrate reality and vice versa, I will now discuss how *Remake* explores this realm of fantasy that seems so central to the lives of Pauline and Juliet. Genet embraces fiction and the fake in order to seek out truths. Often a lot more is revealed in fiction or in the theatre, than can be expressed in everyday life. The Fourth World of theatre and *The Maids* within *Remake*, is a world of escape, separate and distinguished from the rest of the film, which is set in ‘reality’. It is a space differentiated by its acting style and cinematography. Everything is highly artificial and designed to show its construction. In this theatrical world Liz and Marian play the roles of ‘Claire’ and ‘Solange’ just as in *Heavenly Creatures* Pauline and Juliet play the roles of ‘Gina’ and ‘Deborah’.

This role-playing and world of theatre, is cut into by scenes from the ‘reality’ of Liz and Marian outside of it. This provides a mirroring effect. The connections must be made by the spectator which gives them an active role of making sense of the film or the murder mystery; they must search for the ‘truth’ in the film similarly to the way Liz and Marian simultaneously search for the Fourth World within it. The blurring and spilling over of ‘fantasy’ and ‘reality’, which enabled a reading of

schizophrenia and paranoid delusion in Jackson's film, does not occur in Falkenberg's. While the theatrical Fourth World in *Remake* does spill over into the 'real' world in the form of props and costumes, Liz and Marian never role-play Claire and Solange outside of this theatrical Fourth World. Unlike in Jackson's film, there is an established difference between both worlds. Paradoxically, it is this clear distinction between these worlds, which enables connections to be made.

Within the context of *Remake*, *The Maids* means it cannot be read as something on its own but only in the context of the other 'real life' scenes which cut in and out of it. This can be seen in some ways as similar to Christopher Miles' film version of Genet's play. While *The Maids* itself draws no distinction between the real world and the world of fantasy, in the context of *Remake*, it is in the 'real' world and within the conceit of the film, that Liz and Marian perform Claire and Solange in the theatre. This adds a layer of meaning to Genet's play that might not exist in other productions of it. It challenges the notion that the theatre is separate from the real world and somehow less revealing of 'truth' than the 'reality' outside of it. In turn this 'reality' can be seen conversely as constructed or fake – the 'reality' it projects being a potential illusion. This is where the use of *The Maids* in *Remake* deviates from its use in Christopher Miles' film, which used 'reality' as an illustrative back-story. The fact that the role-playing and fantasy lives of Pauline and Juliet were intricately connected to their real lives, opens up possibilities within *Remake* to explore such a connection.

The use of *The Maids* in particular, within the context of an exploration of the Parker-Hulme murder, provides an alternative to Medlicott's psychoanalytic interpretation of the case. *The Maids* and its ritual form connote the rituals and ceremonies performed by Pauline and Juliet in their real lives. Medlicott connected

Pauline and Juliet's immoral behaviour to his diagnosis of insanity, giving as evidence their blasphemous use of Christian imagery, their creation of saints, and their "various ceremonies", where "their moral values became reversed and they embraced evil as good" ("Paranoia of the Exalted Type..." 219). These themes are central to Genet's play. Sartre's last words in his epic work on Genet, are specifically about *The Maids*: "Translated into the language of Evil: Good is only an illusion; Evil is a Nothingness which arises upon the ruins of Good" (*Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* 625). Good and evil are revealed in the play as constructions, fantasies and illusions. Sartre's comments can be seen reflected in the theatrical scenes of *Remake*, which problematize Medlicott's moral binary of good and evil as he applied it to Pauline and Juliet.

Medlicott used psychoanalyst Emil Kraepelin's description of delusion in his attempt to prove Pauline and Juliet's insanity and this has echoes of Genet's use of transubstantiation in a religious sense: "this internal working up of the delusion which leads to its *becoming a component part of the psychic personality*, to its passing into the flesh and blood of the patients" (Kraepelin 221). However, where Kraepelin sees such a process as a sickness, and where Medlicott used it to diagnose insanity, Genet uses it instead as a transformative and liberating ritual experience.

Kristeva's notion of the abject recalls certain passages of *The Maids* that we performed in our film. I came to understanding her theory through the embodiment of it in Genet's text. Claire at one point demands to be insulted by Solange:

"I said the insults! Let them come, let them unfurl, let them drown me, for, as you well know, I loathe servants. A vile and odious breed, I loathe them. They're not of the human race. Servants ooze. They're a foul effluvium

drifting through our rooms and hallways, seeping into us, entering our mouths, corrupting us. I vomit you!” (*The Maids* 34).

Here Claire is both demanding Solange insult her and insulting herself. The ‘you’ is simultaneously ‘I’. This is reflected in Kristeva’s own writing on the abject:

“...I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*.... ‘I’ am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which ‘I’ become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (Kristeva 3).

Genet’s use of doubling and repetition and mirroring in his text is equally evident in Kristeva’s: “Defilement will now be that which impinges on symbolic oneness, that is, sham, substitutions, doubles, idols” (104). The psychoanalytic interpretations and provocations that emerge within this theatrical world spill over thematically to influence the world outside of it.

In Lacan’s psychoanalytic exploration of the Papin sisters he describes their situation from which parallels can be drawn to the Parker-Hulme case: “With the only means available on their little island, they must resolve the enigma, the human enigma of sexuality” (Lacan, qtd by Ross 22). While he is referring to the Papin sisters, his metaphorical use of “little island” to describe their psychological isolation can also be applied to the literal isolation of Pauline and Juliet on the South Island of New Zealand. It can also help explain their experience at Port Levy where Pauline describes the island there in her description of the Fourth World: “The island looked beautiful” (“Pauline Parker’s personal diary” 3 April 1953). She describes a later dream as similar to the way she felt on the island at Port Levy (“Pauline Parker’s personal diary” 15 June 1954). The enigma Lacan recognises in this psychological

‘island’ on which Christine and Lea were confined, is as enigmatic to me as the experience Pauline and Juliet had on the island at Port Levy. They wanted to escape their isolation but at the same time they found great freedom within it. Genet describes his maids’ madness as akin to his own when he is alone in the woods. What was the madness Pauline and Juliet found alone on their little wooded island? What euphoric freedom did they find there and in their dreams of it? Their experience of the Fourth World can only ever exist in our own imaginations and within our own re-makings of it.

As I mentioned, within the context of *Remake* it is Liz and Marian who are trying on the identities of Claire and Solange who are trying on the identities of Madame and each other. Richard Schechner, who directed a production of *The Maids*, says: “In the play, Solange and Claire are always trying on identities and getting lost in them” (Finburgh et. al. 217). The play’s exploration of the transience of identity is opened out into the film as a whole. Liz and Marian can be seen to be playing roles in their real lives, with their parents, their boyfriends and each other. Angela Carter hints at role-playing within the real lives of her characters in her screenplay: “*They are playing a game, playing roles, but their discontent gives the game a bitter edge.*” (“The Christchurch Murder” 362). Fantasy is inextricably a part of the real world in *Remake* and this opens up possibilities for the interpretation of Pauline and Juliet’s relationship and the act of murder.

Peter [Falkenberg] used the essence of what Genet was exploring in his text and used it to explore the relationship between Liz and Marian in the context of this film. According to Finburgh, Lavery and Shevtsova: “the most successful productions of Genet’s play have been achieved when directors have abandoned the author’s words and instructions and treated the original as a score for performance rather than

as a blueprint” (Finburgh et.al. 12). Peter structured the theatrical scenes as a series of short games using excerpts of the text. While he didn’t change the text itself within the excerpts he chose, he left out the character of Madame and she only exists when Liz or Marian (as Claire and Solange) role-play her. Her exclusion from the theatrical Fourth World means her symbolic substitute as desired murder victim in the “real world” of the film is missing. As a ‘remake’ of the Parker-Hulme case, a murder is presumed within the narrative. Peter left it intentionally ambiguous who the murder victim in the film is. He sets up possibilities without giving preference to anything in particular. A remake of the Parker-Hulme murder would suggest it was my mother, but she is given no preference over Liz’s father, either of our boyfriends or Nick who we get to play music in our film.

Liz and Marian’s search for the Fourth World throughout the making of the film continues in parallel to the scenes from *The Maids* within the film itself. One place we search for the Fourth World is at church which is a remake of an experience I had when I was 16. Liz and I and members of the Free Theatre created the service as a theatrical event. The ‘key’ to this Fourth World of God was explained to Liz and Marian by Pastor Flint who told us “to open yourself up and *allow* yourself to *become* vulnerable”. Liz and I created the music and lyrics for the worship song, which we named after Pauline and Juliet’s poem “The Ones That I Worship”. Even though Medlicott said of Pauline that “her church had never been able to involve her in its group activities” (“Paranoia of the Exalted Type...” 206), we felt that if the evangelical churches that have sprung up in Christchurch relatively recently had existed in the 1950’s that Pauline and Juliet would have tried them out.

This search for God also runs parallel to the search for it by Pauline and Juliet in their new identities. Anne Perry in real life became a member of The Church of

Jesus Christ and the Latter Day Saints in her 20's. *Tathea* was first written during this period of her life. Pauline in her new identity as Hilary Nathan similarly converted to the Christian religion, in her case Catholicism. The significance of Pauline's new name is noted by Patrick Wen: "Nathan is a prophet sent by God to make David, King of Israel, face up to a crime of murder" (Perry 251). This divinity that Tathea/Perry and Nathan find is a male one, which reflects Irigaray's comment: "The love of God has often become a haven for women" (*Sexes and Genealogies* 63). While she states: "Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign" (62) she seeks it in a female divine as an alternative to this traditional haven of 'God'. The fact that Pauline and Juliet's Saints were all male also directly contradicts Irigaray's idea of the divine as a resistance to patriarchy. Both Pauline and Juliet and Nathan and Perry can be seen as politically conservative in this way.

Yet Liz and Marian's search for God within *Remake* is somewhat subversive in the context of their search for it as a Fourth World. Liz and Marian want to experience God but they don't necessarily want to become Christians. This has the possible effect of questioning the function of the church in society and people's desire for it. We had wanted initially to film at a church service at Elim New Life where Liz and I had been going regularly but decided not to as Pastor Clint would only approve this idea if he had the right to remove the footage from our final film if he considered we did not show the church in a good light. I am sure that he would have approved of the light reflected in the mirror we hold up to his church in this scene, however, in the context of *Remake* he may not have (in the following scene we search for the Fourth World in a séance).

The church scene links Liz and Marian's search for 'God' with Claire and Solange's ceremony in *The Maids*. As this church scene was a construction or 'fake'

of a real church service it provided a theatrical form in which to 'lose' ourselves. This mirrors the way Genet's maids and Liz and Marian as actors playing them within the theatrical Fourth World, attempt to lose ourselves in a role or in the offering up of ourselves to Christ or to each other or ourselves in the mirror. In a scene from *The Maids* that follows this church scene, Madame's dresser is used as an a symbolic altar to which Marian who plays Claire considers herself in the mirror as a 'more lovelier' version of the Virgin Mary.

Through the 'remaking' of this experience from my own life, I discovered that I only felt able to enter into this 'world' within the church when it was acknowledged as a theatrical experience. I felt overcome with euphoria and lost in a way that I had not been able to experience in a real church. If we had been at a real church I would have called it God. As we were in a theatre within a film I could call it an acting high. But as we were exploring the experiences of Pauline and Juliet I realize that it was the Fourth World. This experience made me yearn for more. Where else could we experience it?

Throughout the film, the ceremony in *The Maids* and the search for the Fourth World in reality, become more and more intertwined. The respective murder in each of these worlds within the film, approaches; the ceremony of Claire and Solange is reaching its end and in 'reality' several possible murders are presented. Within *The Maids* itself there is the murder of Claire as Madame, by Solange. Yet this murder is also a suicide by Claire herself. An interesting coinciding of the Papin and Parker-Hulme cases is that in *The Maids*, Claire and Solange's lover is named Mario. Within the context of *Remake* Mario can also be seen as Mario Lanza whom Pauline and Juliet idolized as one of their Saints, or potentially either of the unnamed boyfriends of Liz and Marian. Mario is positioned simultaneously and ambiguously as both a

reality and a fantasy. Mario is also the name of Tosca's lover who is murdered in the opera of the same name by Verdi. Pauline, as I mentioned earlier, makes reference to listening to *Tosca* in her diary: "This afternoon I played *Tosca* and wrote before ringing Deborah" ("Pauline Parker's personal diary" 23 April 1954).

One murder occurs in the theatrical world - the 'murder' of Claire/Madame by Solange in the final scene from *The Maids*. We changed the murder from drinking poisoned tea to Solange strangling Claire in the kitchen sink which is mentioned by Solange earlier in the play. Here Liz as Solange sings a final aria over the top of the final aria from a recording of *Tosca*, bringing a detail from the Parker-Hulme case into the final minutes of the film.

Liz/Solange sings the part in which Tosca commits suicide because her lover Mario is dead. Within this opera, like within *The Maids* within *Remake*, and even within 'the ceremony' within *The Maids* - it remains ambiguous whether this suicide or murder is real or pretend, part of fantasy or part of reality. Mario's execution in the opera was meant to be pretend. In the final scene Mario plans with his lover Tosca to stage a pretend death. Tosca sings: "With my experience in the theatre/ I should know how to manage it" (Puccini 75). He promises to pretend to be shot dead. And then they will be free to escape together by sea. As he is 'shot', Tosca sings: "How handsome my Mario is! There! Die! Ah, what an actor!" (77). Then she discovers he really *was* shot dead. She throws herself off the balcony and ends the opera. Reality punctured Tosca's fantasy, yet her reality was full of fantasies of love and sacrifice³³.

When Liz as Solange in *Remake* throws herself out the window in a remaking of *Tosca*, it also ends the scenes from *The Maids*. Seria's film also ends with the

³³ The recording used in *Remake* is a 1965 production starring Maria Callas as Tosca whose life was has been considered as tragic as the roles she played. Her career is described as having essentially ended with the role of Tosca. Callas is also to have spoken of her great admiration of Mario Lanza who died in his thirties of a sudden heart attack: "My biggest regret is not to have had the opportunity to sing with the greatest tenor voice I've ever heard." ("Mario Lanza").

suicide of the women on stage. In both *Remake* and *Don't Deliver us from Evil*, theatrical suicides are arguably more consummate acts than the murders in the real world. Hanging on the wall next to the window where Liz as Solange commits suicide, is a print of a Frida Kahlo self-portrait of Kahlo throwing herself off a tall building. Pauline wrote of suicide in her diary in a way which suggests that her depression was not without passion: "To-day I felt thoroughly, utterly and completely depressed. I was in one of those moods in which committing suicide sounds heavenly" ("Pauline Parker's personal diary" 2 November 1953).

Music especially inspired and impassioned Pauline and Juliet and their fantasies. Mario in *Tosca* sings of grand emotions (translated into English) which could indicate the passions of Pauline and Juliet who listened to it: "Only for you did death taste bitter for me / and only you invest this life with splendour / All joy and all desire, for my being / are held in you as heat within flame / I now shall see through your transfiguring eyes / The heavens blaze and the heavens darken" (Puccini 75). This kind of emotion and passion was evident in Pauline's diary and in the poem she wrote together with Juliet. Mario Lanza whom Pauline and Juliet idolized as a Saint, used the metaphor of theatre in one song, to sing of his similarly rapturous emotions: "The show has ended, I know that we're through / You just pretended that our love was true / You acted out the part, and I couldn't see, that deep within your heart you were laughing at me".

After the scene from *The Maids* where Liz as Solange playing Claire, murders Marian as Claire playing Madame, Liz sings *Gloomy Sunday* with Nick playing the piano. She is performing in the manner of Billie Holiday in this song about suicide and loneliness. Liz in this 'real life' scene wears the same black dress she wears when she plays Solange in the theatrical Fourth World. It is intentionally ambiguous

whether she is singing about the death of herself; herself as Solange; Marian; Claire; Madame; Billie Holiday herself; retrospectively Frida Kahlo in her painting; or Mario who has been killed in *Tosca*.

The spectator is not directed towards a clear narrative but instead presented with a film that, like a piece of music, has recurring themes and motifs. The music and sound within the film is all diegetic, with the exception of the dream scenes, and the songs at the beginning and at the end by Jolie Holland. Holland sings of herself and of another self, perhaps another person, perhaps a mirror of herself or an imagined self, a ghostly girl: “You are not real”. Her songs are have a simplicity and fit into the form and content of *Remake*, as they sound like they were recorded in her living room (and apparently some of them were); the making of her music in this way has parallels to the making of this film. Her songs are like dreams in the way they kind of drift along and disappear. We use a song of hers at the end of the film to mirror a similar song of hers we use at the end. The last song includes the lines: “I’d rather be lost than found / I thought I would lose my mind / But through your eyes I see / Past the billboards to the trees” (Holland). Here the psychological is referred to in her feeling that she is going mad and her seeing through the eyes of another. Yet the political also emerges here in her desire to see past what society sells her and into the trees beyond them – the woods perhaps where Genet by himself experiences a madness and freedom which he refuses to define.

A possible murder or death is suggested at the end of the scene where Liz sings *Gloomy Sunday*. Liz and Marian kidnap Nick our pianist and take him to Lake Ellesmere where they strip him naked, tie him up and write ‘rapist’ and ‘artist’ in lipstick on his chest. This is a ‘remake’ of an incident that happened to playwright Mervyn Thompson in the early 1980’s in Auckland when he was kidnapped by

feminists and had ‘rapist’ spray-painted on his car. The scene is a kind of re-making of and political comment on, the incident that happened to Thompson to suggest that he was a scape-goated as an artist and as a man, by a feminist movement that showed the kind of patriarchal brutality they claimed to be opposed to. The desire to film this was our male director’s, possibly as a comment on his own role in the film as the ‘director’ of these women’s fantasies.

The politics within *Remake* are ambivalent which brings me back to where I started. The structure of the film can be understood politically from a feminist perspective where two women subvert the conventions of the filmmaker by taking up the camera and the script to explore their own fantasies. One French New Wave film that Peter used as a *Remake* model is *Celine and Julie*, a 1974 film about the relationship between two young women, by Jacques Rivette. In this film Celine and Julie take drugs to experience hallucinations in which they enter a melodramatic film. Ruby Rich describes Celine and Julie as “laughing in the face of male fantasies” (*Chick Flicks* 77) as they revise and re-enact the role of women within a conventional narrative. She also describes the way the women “enter each other’s lives by magic and books” (77). *Remake* is in part a homage to this film, ‘remaking’ the boating scene from the end of it, and using it for the first scene. Rich describes the film making process of *Celine and Julie*, which indicates parallels to the making of *Remake*: “production credits indicate a total collaboration with the four actresses and coscenarists” (77). This film can be seen to resist the traditional roles for women both in the making of the film and in the film itself.

In *Remake* Liz and Marian do not pose in front of the camera for the spectator but for each other. This resists the male gaze, as Laura Mulvey describes it in conventional film narratives, which place women as the passive and silent objects: “as

a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning” (Kaplan 35). Marian and Liz are both self and other, both the image itself and the makers of it. In the alley way of the scene where Marian and Liz take Nos, Marian poses as ‘Ava’ for the camera, which is held by Liz posing as Marian posing as ‘Rita’. A male spectator is required to identify with a feminine position that subverts the conventional male gaze.

While conventional film narratives “give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world” (37-8), *Remake* presents the impossibilities of this for the spectator and yet at the same time invites them into the private world of Liz and Marian with an acknowledgement of their place as necessarily outside of it. This is similar to Seria’s film where he plays with the expectations of the spectator. Although in intimate scenes in Seria’s film such as under Anne’s bedcovers, the camera is still held by the invisible cameraman, whereas in *Remake* he is excluded from such intimate spaces. In *Remake* there is none of the factors that give a spectator what they usually pay money for. There is no definitive narrative; no money shot; no resolution; and no catharsis as in a conventional narrative. If this is the experience for the spectator, then it mirrors my own search for the Fourth World within the film as something I was constantly searching for and never satisfied with - an elusive moment or fantasy that could not be grasped.

Males feature in *Remake* and within *The Maids* within *Remake*, but feature as women might in a more conventional film narrative which revolves around the desires of the male gaze. Mulvey describes this gaze which “depends on the image of the castrated women to give order and meaning to its world” (Mulvey qtd by Kaplan 34).

In a conventional film as Mulvey describes it, the voice belongs to the male and the women are relegated to the passive image. This is subverted in *Remake* where Mario, for example, is represented by a mannequin. Nick is a victim. Also, the voices of Liz and Marian's boyfriends on the phone both reflect and subvert the position of women within the conventional film narrative Mulvey describes. For example, Liz and Marian are the silent and passive bearers of the "linguistic commands" imposed on them through the telephone. However, as they are using these male voices to construct and film their own images, to "make their own meaning", they manage to subvert this filmic convention. These phone call scenes can be seen as remakes of the phone scenes in *Celine and Julie* which Rivette uses to similar effect.

At the same time as they subvert gender roles, Liz and Marian also play them with passion, as exemplified in the final scene of *Tosca*, that Liz remakes, where Tosca kills herself for a man. This could be seen as conservative and evidence of Freud's positioning of women's desire in subordinate relation to men. Pauline and Juliet certainly had great passion for men and their fantasies and desires as expressed in their choice of Saints, as I mentioned, were exclusively for men. Liz and Marian's emancipatory explorations within the form and content of the film, are directed by a male and filmed by a camera man. Pauline and Juliet's fantasies, as they were inspired by and experienced in films they watched, were directed similarly. In this way the politics within *Remake* rest on ambivalence and interpretation.

Yet the most political aspect to the film, which has specific relevance to this thesis, is that the murder Liz and Marian commit is not of another woman but of a male – the cameraman himself. This final scene is a remake of the Parker-Hulme murder and its representation in *Heavenly Creatures*. In *Heavenly Creatures*, murder is the very thing that prevents Pauline and Juliet's freedom. It is the puncturing of a

deluded illusion. For Genet, murder conversely promises freedom and is transformed into something liberating. *Remake* was constructed on the notion that instead of committing murder, Liz and Marian would make a film. The spectator is positioned along with the cameraman in the position of Pauline's mother. Liz and Marian murder the gaze of the spectator, the male divine that creates women in his image. Instead of murdering the mother who made them, Liz and Marian murder the cameraman who makes them in his image. We shatter the mirror that allows the spectator to remain invisible or voyeuristic. We refuse the gaze of the spectator that is implicated in the view of the camera. When we filmed the murder scene in Victoria Park we weren't quite at the end of the shoot. As we had murdered our cameraman we were at a loss, but thankfully another cameraman stepped into this role in order to finish the film.

In an essay *Theatre of Unease*, Peter [Falkenberg] writes about his direction of *Remake* as part of a discussion of how theatre in New Zealand reflects an image of itself that reassures its audience – likening it to the narcissism inherent in Lacan's Mirror Stage. Falkenberg proposes an alternative theatre that mirrors the very real uneasiness which he sees existing in this culture: "Isolation, the lack of an other, ultimately can lead to the loss of identity, and makes it even more urgent to create one, even if only in the imagination" (Falkenberg 11-12). While this unease can be seen reflected in New Zealand film, he notes that even *Heavenly Creatures* ultimately reassures its audience by distancing their identification with the girls in the act of murder – the ultimate expression of their 'uneasiness'. Falkenberg's choice of the Parker-Hulme case for a film was in its ability to provide such a mirror to the situation and experience of middle-class New Zealanders. My own experience of *Remake* has mirrored the intentions he expresses here.

In the last scenes in the film that I have described, life and art converge and produce numerous possible interpretations. Four days before Pauline and Juliet murdered Pauline's mother, they appear to have been in a heightened, almost manic state of creativity: "We went to town and bought books to paste our characters in. We planned our various moiders and talked seriously as well" ("Pauline Parker's personal diary" 18 June 1954). Here Pauline makes a distinction between fantasy and reality and yet she plans the reality of her mother's murder in a diary, similar to the way she and Juliet wrote in books planning the various murders and adventures of the characters in their novels. The next day she records that they had nearly finished their books and reaffirm their plan to murder Honora. It seems this is when they decided on the details and the date and method of the "moider". The night before, Pauline wrote about a conversation with her mother: "I have discussed various odd saints with her today as I thought it would be interesting to have her opinion. She loathes That and It" (21 June 1954). It is as if Pauline invites her mother to be an actor in their play with murder.

Through the making of our film as it substitutes for a murder, I understood my own desire for it. *Remake* began for me as curiosity and narcissism but my desire to 'commit' to the film ultimately was as an act of refusal. A refusal to allow anyone to project their own desires onto my life and expect me to reflect them back. A refusal to be handed desires and fantasies that are not my own. A refusal to be cast in a role and directed towards a life that I don't desire and an identity that is not mine. Like Ava Gardner in *The Flying Dutchman*, or Irigaray who also refuses, on behalf of the mother within us: "We must refuse to let her desire be annihilated..." (*The Irigaray Reader* 43).

At the same time as planning and making our film was a refusal, it was also a reaching for and demand for something. Like Irigaray, who demands that the mother have her right “to pleasure, to *jouissance*, to passion” (43), I was consumed with wanting to be close to something. Wanting to emerge from something. To spill out of something. Like fulfilling a need to vomit, in order to avoid the madness that would come from containing the need to retch. A need to create an identity for myself. To dress up and become someone. I wanted to enter into something, a Fourth World, which I could only find with someone else who also wanted it. I needed Liz so I could look at her and see that it was real. A real thing as well as a fantasy.

Nearing the end of our film I felt that Liz was leaving, but not on a boat in the way Juliet left in *Heavenly Creatures*. I felt Liz drifting to a place where she would refuse to refuse any longer. Where she would gaze at me but past me, like other people. And I refused it in her because I refused to see it in myself when I looked at her. I felt she was slipping away from me when I demanded so much from her, from life and from this film. I wanted this Fourth World and I still want it.

Whatever this world is that Pauline and Juliet found on their own little island and within their own private world, can be seen as the world Genet was searching for in his use of the Papin case to explore the fantasies of his maids. In a foreword to the 1954 edition of *The Maids* Genet describes this world of theatre that he dreams of: “A clandestine theatre, to which one would go in secret, at night, and masked, a theatre in the catacombs, may still be possible” (“A Note on Theatre” 40). This clandestine theatre, that is a rite, a ceremonious game, play taken in full seriousness, an underground world where life meets death and nothing is certain but everything is possible - that Genet dreams of - is I believe, the world Pauline and Juliet created with each other.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I started by asking what happened in two cases where women murder women. How are these acts explained or explored in theatre and film, and what are the implications of representing them? I was especially taken with the question of two women acting together to murder a mother, or someone in the place of the mother, an act that seems more shocking and is potentially more radical than other kinds of murder. What seems significant to me now is how the representations of these two cases demonstrate a voyeuristic desire to *see* what is shocking about them, to allow the spectator to witness or indulge in their abject nature or in the intimate acts between women, and how this comes into conflict with a desire to provide psychological insight or social analysis. The representations of these two cases navigate between these desires in different ways.

I began by looking at the Electra story - the murder of a mother by her daughter. I want to consider now, the way the theatre and films that represent these women may reflect a necessity for a story where women murder their mothers. The specific fascination with what is at the heart of the Electra story, inexplicably enacted for real in these two cases, is perhaps evidence of a common desire in many women, as Irigaray understands it, as a parallel or counterpoint to Freud's Oedipus Complex for men.

This desire to murder her mother, remains for the majority of women, as the equivalent does for men, in fantasy. It can only be experienced vicariously in her own imagination or through representations of it. Throughout history, the Electra story has been overshadowed by representations of the Oedipus story. For example, the closest the defence in the Parker-Hulme trial could come to finding an equivalent for Pauline and Juliet's act of murder was found by Dr Bennett in Lady Macbeth. Yet she does

not commit murder herself, she encourages a man to do it, similar to the Electra story. And the murder is of a man, not a woman and not her mother. The representations that have been based on the Oedipus Complex, such as *Hamlet*, have the status of high art. An equivalent Electra story may be provided in the twentieth century by the murder cases I have discussed in this thesis. At least some of the feminists might have argued like this.

There is a lack of obvious or easy explanation for the two cases in this thesis, which suggests that the Electra myth is at odds with this society in a way the Oedipus myth is not. The specific nature of the murders could not be explained as acts of passion, madness, badness or political intent. What explanations existed (the response to the blowing of a fuse and the reaction to a forbidden desire to go to Hollywood) seemed incongruous with the acts of murder, as a result of them or way to achieve them. The enormous shock that was aroused by these two cases and their inability to be easily explained, may have helped to interpret and use these cases for a new mythical structure.

Irigaray argues that matricide is the founding myth of patriarchal society and that it has been silenced. This silencing of the Electra myth, apparent in its lack of equivalent representation, correlates with a similar silencing in the lives and fantasies of women in general; the silencing of their passions and ability to act in the way that men are able. It is possible to understand these two cases of murder from a feminist perspective as revisions of the Electra myth where Orestes, Electra's co-conspirator, is replaced by a sister. They see in each other an image of an active and defiant self – Irigaray's female divine perhaps - which excludes the traditional desire for the male.

The response to the rupture that these cases provoked was a need to explain them in studies and in representations for a public. The recent emergence of these

representations, especially in film, could suggest a development of new roles for women. In my first two chapters I explored the attention that the cases attracted and how it was exploited by playwrights and filmmakers for different purposes. Some were motivated by a desire to use the case as a product which fits into existing forms of entertainment. *Minor Murder* for example is a play which fits the murder into the genre of light crime drama on Broadway.

I examined the representations of each case chronologically to see if there was a progression to be discerned. A progression might be seen from stage plays into films and an increased desire for realism as if the act of representing the cases in film enables an experience closer to the real event itself. This move towards “realism” can be seen in the transition from the stage play *My Sister In This House* into its film adaptation *Sister My Sister* and more recent films such as *Murderous Maids*. *Sister My Sister* accompanied *Heavenly Creatures* in a mid 90’s revival of lesbians in film, by turning the spectacle of violence and incest into the genre of a horror film. *Daughter’s of Heaven* is motivated by a desire to see the women as victims of a tragic love that can be experienced vicariously by the spectator. In all these representations an imagined lesbian relationship and madness are central to the titillation provided for the spectator. These representations have the effect of exploiting and reintegrating the shocking and taboo aspects of the cases back into existing (patriarchal?) society.

Other representations were motivated to use the disruption the cases provided for overt political purposes. An early example is Nico Papatakis who used the Papin case to attract attention to the political situation in Algeria. Claude Chabrol in *The Ceremony*, later exploited the relationship between two women who murder to reveal the exploitation inherent in bourgeois society. Some artists who were initially interested in the case politically, such as Wendy Kesselman in *My Sister In This*

House, were ultimately unable to reconcile political intention with dramatic form, resulting in titillating spectacles that use politics as an alibi for the act of looking. Angela Carter exploited the confluence of females the Parker-Hulme case provided, to explore a feminist agenda. Joel Seria desired to identify with the women's amoral and blasphemous acts against church and society. In identifying with the women however, their acts became his.

These real murder cases can only exist in our own fantasy or in the fantasies we create out of them. The fantasies created out of these real acts, therefore reveal something of their maker. In the Parker-Hulme case fantasy was central to the relationship which led to murder. It was also central to Genet's representation of the Papin case in *The Maids* and the relationship which led to murder. In my third chapter I discussed how these two cases were brought together in the film *Remake*, where Jean Genet's representation of the Papin case was used as part of an exploration of the Parker-Hulme case. This enabled comparisons between the cases to be made and created a dialogue between existing psychoanalytic and political explanations for both. Central to *Remake* was the merging of theatre in film in an exploration of fantasy as reality and reality as fantasy, culminating in a 'real' murder.

Remake gives Liz and Marian, as substitutes for Pauline and Juliet, a voice in response to their silencing, as it is reflected in the silencing of the Electra myth, allowing them to create their own images, to explore their own fantasies and make their own murder in art. As Irigaray proposed, the women in *Remake* do not murder their mother. Instead, they murder the cameraman who creates them as women from the perspective of his own desires and fantasies - who makes an image of them that erases their own and so they have to erase him.

This film and remaking of the Parker-Hulme murder cannot be easily

integrated into conventional psychological, political or filmic narratives. It refuses to let the spectator see what they want. This perhaps reflects the gap and momentary lapse in understanding and rupture that the cases caused. *Remake* does not fill this gap with an explanation. This film was made not to reveal an image of Pauline and Juliet and their murder, but rather to disrupt the images and fantasies that we have made of them in representations to date.

Appendix A: Source - "Les Soeurs Papin Furent Elevees Au Couvent Du Mans." *Le Surrealisme au service de la Revolution*, no. 5: 27-8 (1968). By P Eluard and B Peret.

AVANT



APRÈS



• Sorties tout armées d'un chant de Malheur... • (Voir page 28).

Appendix B:

Pauline Parker (left). "Her diary referred to the possibility of her mother dying". ca 1954?

Source: Press, 17 June 1989, p23.
Negative: 1482

Juliet Hulme (right). "An IQ of about 170 but immersed in a life of fantasy". ca 1954?

Source: Press, 17 June 1989, p24.
Negative: 1483



Source - *The Press* 17 June 1989.

Appendix C:



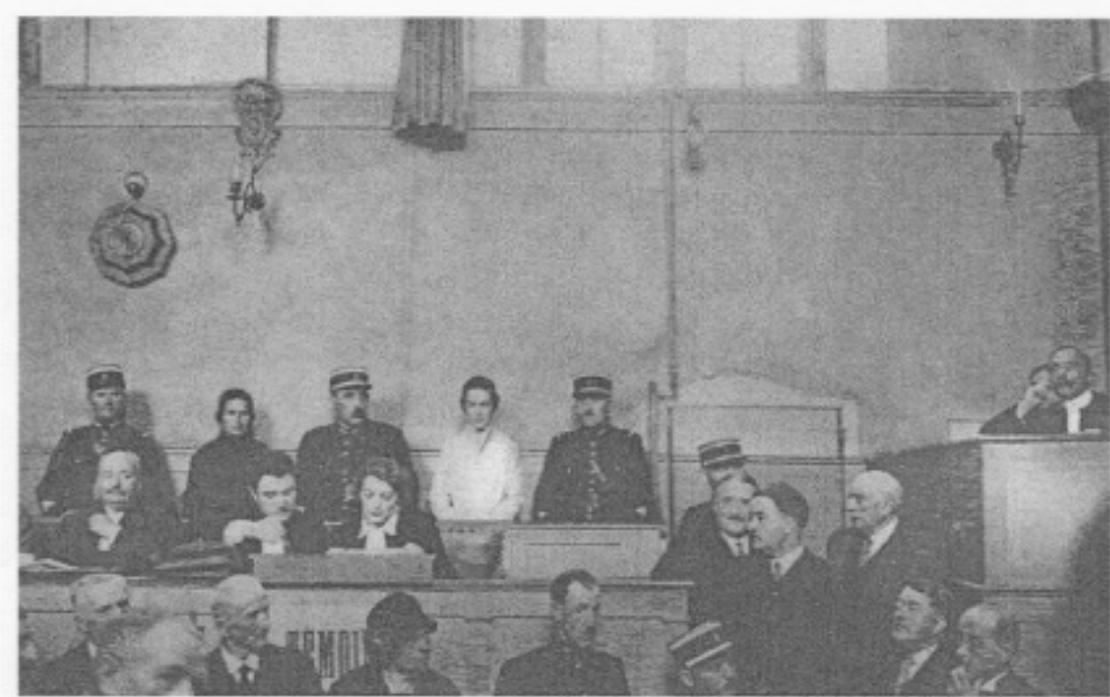
Source - "L'affaire Des Soeurs Papin." *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 210 Novembre (1963). By Dr Louis Le Guillant.

Appendix D



Source: *Christchurch Star* 23 Aug 1954

Appendices E and F



E: Source - "L'affaire Des Soeurs Papin." *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 210 Novembre (1963). By Dr Louis Le Guillant.



F: Source - "Les Soeurs Papin Furent Elevees Au Couvent Du Mans." *Le Surrealisme au service de la Revolution*, no. 5: 27-8 (1968). By P Eluard and B Peret.

Appendix G



Source - *Christchurch Star* 28th August 1954

Appendix H



Source – ‘Still’ from *The Maids* within Remake Dir. Peter Falkenberg. Free Theatre, 2007.

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