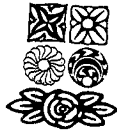

RAVING ABOUT THINGS THAT WON'T SOLVE: MARYLEE HADLEY IN *WRITTEN ON THE WIND*.

VICKY LUZÓN
UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA

In her introduction to *Home is Where the Heart is*, Christine Gledhill (1987: 37) claims that

> the figure of woman, which has served so long as a powerful and ambivalent patriarchal symbol, is also a generator of female discourses drawn from the social realities of women's lives—discourses which negotiate a space within and sometimes resist patriarchal domination. In order to command the recognition of its female audiences, melodrama must draw on such discourses. [T]he dual role of woman as symbol for the whole culture and as representative of a historical, gendered point of view produces a struggle between male and female voices: the symbol cannot be owned, but it is contested.

On the other hand, David Rodowick (1987: 272) has commented on the dangers that wish-fulfilment and desire, and especially female sexuality, pose to successful psychological socialisation and argues that

> successful socialization requires the division of sexuality from sociality. This problem is especially crucial in the representation of women who, split between the passive, suffering heroine and the turbulent sexual rebels are identified in the relations of patriarchal authority only by their systematic exclusion. The [illegible] of this exclusion refer of course to the assumed right of

> patriarchal authority to confer social and sexual identity. As opposed to the male characters, whose conflicts devolve from the difficulty of attaining an active sexual identity in which patriarchal power can be confirmed and reproduced, the conflict of the women stems from the difficulty of subjugating and channeling feminine sexuality according to the passive functions which patriarchy has defined for it, that is, heterosexual monogamy and maternity.

It is the aim of this paper to identify these juxtaposed and often clashing discourses on femininity and female sexuality within the framework provided by Douglas Sirk's representation of the US-American middle class in his popular film *Written on the Wind* (1956). I will try to demonstrate how the workings of ideology, which usually culminate in the ideologically correct traditional "happy ending", are subverted through the imposition of an arbitrary and quite implausible resolution. From here, I shall attempt to read the ending of the film against the grain of received "ideological correctness". But first, let us quickly consider the development of the melodramatic form.

In his discussion of Hollywood melodrama, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1987: 70) claims that the melodramatic genre emerged from the confluence of three different factors:

1) the development of realism and tragedy, which provided the melodramatic form with a structural skeleton.

2) A set of social determinants, which are related to the rise of the bourgeoisie.

3) A set of psychic determinants, which often take the shape of an Oedipal conflict within the realm of the family, a symbolic microcosm of society.

Mise-en-scène is also considered an integral part of the melodramatic artefact, usually providing the spectator with additional information which is often denied to the characters within the diegesis. As Elsaesser (1987: 62) puts it

> [m]elodrama is iconographically fixed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeois home and/or the small town setting, its emotional pattern [...] reinforced stylistically by a complex handling of space in interiors [...] to the point where the world seems totally predetermined and pervaded by meaning and interpretable signs.

The melodramatic form is thus generally identified with the bourgeois milieu and ideology. As a genre, it was initially juxtaposed to tragedy, which was traditionally associated with the representation of the much-loathed and corrupt aristocracy. In its early days, the melodramatic conflict was clearly a class conflict, the villains always being members of the aristocracy and the victimised hero/ heroine, a member of the bourgeoisie, the emerging class. When the latter social group finally established itself and acquired a significant socio-economic status, the class conflict lost its relevance and the melodramatic form sought then to establish bourgeois values as "standard" values set against the background of the family, the social institution that often upholds bourgeois ideology and its interest in maintaining the *status quo*. The family was meant to become a kind of "Heaven on Earth", where, it was assumed, all problems generated outside its scope could be solved. In this way, the family institution became psychologically overburdened since the emotional expectations generated around it could seldom be fulfilled, which resulted in frustration and disappointment. As Chuck Kleinhans (1991: 200) puts it,

> [u]nder capitalism people's personal needs are restricted to the sphere of the family, of personal life, and yet the family cannot meet the demands of being all that the rest of society is not. This basic contradiction is the raw material of melodrama.

On the other hand, in the US this line of development cannot be so easily traced because there was no aristocracy as such. However, there exist variations on this theme, as the sophisticated "aristocratic" family melodramas of the 1950s evince. Families of *nouveaux riches* substitute for the aristocracy, but the former can hardly epitomise virtue due to the bad taste and extravagance that often characterise them, defects that the self-controlled bourgeoisie abominates.

Along with the subgenre of the aristocratic family there exist others such as the (extramarital) love story, the maternal melodrama and the adult film, a subgenre to which, according to Barbara Klinger (1994: 37), *Written on the Wind* belongs[1]. This specific subgenre is best characterised by its brazen depiction of male and above all, female sexuality.

Partly for economic reasons and partly to counteract the success of television, the studios financed a great deal of similar "adult film" projects and this saucy trend became the norm rather than the exception[2]. That is to

open to the representation of socially inadmissible demands (usually on the part of the female characters), rather than in its adult content, that is, in its explicit depiction of sexuality and frustrated desire. The "adult film" was more part of a business strategy on the part of the studios geared to attract adult audiences to the cinemas, than a conscious attempt to promote sexual liberation. Sexuality was overtly represented but the chances were that those characters who exceeded the norm, however appealing to the spectator, were to be punished or suppressed in one way or another.

However, in the hands of Douglas Sirk, censorship constraints would become self-consciously exploited and exposed through what has come to be known as the "Sirkian system", mostly characterised by self-conscious creative irony[3]. In other words, Sirk's films presented situations that were familiar to the American audience but they strove to uncover the objectionable vices affecting the American middle class.

In *Sirk on Sirk* (1973), Halliday summarises the director's professional trajectory. Douglas Sirk started work as a director in the Germany of Weimar and, following the Nazi take-over, he abandoned the country. He first moved to Scandinavia and then to the US. When he started work in Hollywood, he found himself subjected to a fixed artistic practice conditioned not only by moralistic constraint and institutionalised censorship, but also by the cliché-ridden expectations of a mostly naive audience. The stuffy cinematic practice often relied on threadbare conventions and a repetitive story pattern centring on the American Dream of affluence and upward mobility was employed over and over again. It is not difficult to imagine that a Brecht-influenced Sirk, having survived the horror of Nazism, found it hard to digest the pervasive infantile belief in the American Dream and the seeming ability of the family to provide individuals with their heart's desire. Thus, Halliday explains, he distanced himself from the ideology founded upon the long-standing myth of happiness which permeated the American family institution. Klinger (1994: 14) takes up this line of argument again and explains that

> Sirk's relevance came about as a result of his Brechtian credentials, evidenced, for example, in his use of mirrors and barrier framings as distancing devices. Within his excessive, unrealistic style, Sirk was essentially a modernist in Hollywood, subverting the system and its ideology from within.

Since the publication of Halliday's interview with Sirk, *Sirk on Sirk*, in which the director revealed his Brechtian affinities (mainly characterised by critical social commitment and ironic detachment from the plot), most critics have striven to find traces of an ironic subtext in his works. This creates a

problem as these assumptions inevitably condition anyone's personal reading of Sirk's work, which may indeed result in a farfetched misreading. It seems that an ironic undertone should be taken for granted: we may feel forced to consider his production as inevitably subversive in that it ironizes about the bourgeoisie. Consequently, the Sirkian ironic subtext has been discussed from many different points of view. Critical reading is always historically specific and it reflects the prevailing trends of its social/ historical context. "This mobility of meaning suggests that academic readings come to terms with the formal properties of a text through a series of interpretative grids provided by the developments in the discipline, rather than through a rapport with the single 'truth' of the text" (Klinger 1994: 25). Thus, it is understandable that critics may reject and disagree with each other's readings of the same text. Feminist critics, for instance, are bound not only to find traces of patriarchal strictures in Sirk's works, but also to accommodate the characteristics of the ironic Sirkian system to their attacks on patriarchy. Commenting upon sexist readings of the character of Lana Turner as the "bad mother" in *Imitation of Life* (1959), Christine Gledhill (1987: 12), for example, rejects this labelling for it is just "a judgmental temptation few Sirkian commentators have been able to resist, despite [the possibility], within the logic of the 'Sirkian system', for ironically exposing ideologies of motherhood. Ironic value in this context has an implicitly misogynistic edge". Her reading of irony works in a different direction from that suggested by other critics. Particular critical readings may not only clash with previous ones, but they may also overpower authorial intention. As reader-response criticism defends, an artistic artefact becomes meaningful (if it ever does) through individual reading, and understanding cannot be fixed. If we take, for instance, the ending of *Written on the Wind*, we may see that what for some (de Cordova 1987: 266) is an (apparently) ideologically correct "happy ending" reinforcing the bourgeois social order as represented by the main(?) characters in the film, might easily be subverted and contradicted if we concentrate on the position and signification of the fringe characters. This is what the next part of my analysis will be devoted to.

Written on the Wind tells the story of the wealthy but decadent Hadley family, whose members are either physically or mentally ill. Affluence, ironically once again, has not provided this family with happiness, as the capitalist myth of the fulfilled affluent family is self-consciously exposed. The two Hadley children are stark embodiments of maladjustment and decadence, which actually seems to be expanding to the small town itself, aptly named after the family, and thus turning the Hadleys into an extended public family. The audience is not meant to identify with them for, as de

Cordova (1987: 260) asserts, the point of view offered to the audience in the sophisticated family melodramas of the 1950s is that of the privatised bourgeois family "over and against a more public one". The stylisation of the mise-en-scène through colour and deliberate bad taste reinforces the tendency to resist identification. Paranoid Kyle Hadley (Robert Stack) and nymphomaniac Marylee Hadley (Dorothy Malone), the inadequate children, are constantly contrasted with the sober characters, Mitch Wayne (Rock Hudson) and Lucy Moore/Hadley (Lauren Bacall). This juxtaposition is carried out through acting (excessive vs. subdued), mise-en-scène (flashy colours and cars are associated with Kyle and Marylee, whereas darker or mellower colours are associated with Lucy and Mitch) and dialogue[4]. The audience is meant to identify with self-control and not, in the words of Lucy, "hokey playing". As Rodowick (1987: 279) explains, the general ideology in the aftermath of World War II "promised, through an acceptance of its authority, a world of economic mobility, self-determination and social stability, but delivered in its stead a hierarchic and authoritarian society plagued by fears of the internal subversion of its ideologies". Sociopath Kyle, and especially Marylee, embody the much dreaded "internal subversion"[5] in the film and for this reason they will be subjugated through some form of ideological containment.

However, it is on the figures of Marylee and Mitch that I would like to concentrate and from here defend, following Klinger, my own reading of the final moments of *Written on the Wind*, which is bound to be different from what audiences might have experienced upon the release of the film, in the 1950s. As Elsaesser (1987: 47) explains, "melodrama appear[s] to function either subversively or as escapism —categories which are always relative to the given historical and social context". From the point of view of spectators in the 1990s, the characters of Mitch and Lucy, whom de Cordova (1987: 266) refers to as the "ideologically correct couple", may not always be the object of identification, as might have been the case in the 1950s. These days, with the workings of the dominant ideology being constantly exposed, contested and deconstructed, it is easy to trace and identify the workings of patriarchal ideology and its effects in a way that may entice us to identify more readily with the subversive "victims" of a repressive patriarchal system (i.e. Marylee Hadley), than with the characters that seem to be endorsing it.

Elsaesser (1987: 45) argues that "[h]istorically, one of the interesting facts about [the melodramatic] tradition is that its height of popularity seems to coincide [...] with periods of ideological crisis", such as the 1950s. This was indeed a time of deep ideological crisis, as the prewar social organisation had to be forcefully restored. These were the years of the Cold War and it

should not be forgotten that, during the War, women were given the chance to enjoy some measure of social, professional and economic independence. When the War ended, the men came back and took over the jobs that women had been doing meanwhile. As a consequence, the women had to return to their homes and adopt the traditional roles of mother and housewife granted to them under patriarchy. This provoked a sense of general anxiety among the population at large, as both men and women found it hard to adjust to the roles available to them within the social network. According to Mintz and Kellogg (1988: 195-196)

> Several factors contributed to a widespread sense of discontent among American women. The closing off of employment opportunities and freedoms enjoyed during World War II frustrated women who had tasted the economic and personal independence of "men's work". A tension underlay woman's need for personal fulfillment and the sometimes conflicting demands of her family role. On the one hand, young women received the same education as men and were encouraged to develop their skills and intellectual abilities. On the other, women were pressured to maintain their "femininity" and to seek fulfillment as wives and homemakers, and they were cautioned against pursuing a career. The result was a deep sense of ambivalence and internal turmoil toward both homemaking and career. [...] Men's roles, too, were subjected to extreme stress in the postwar United States. With chagrin, psychologists traced the decline of the traditional father and his replacement by a bumbling "dad" who seemed out of place in the family home. [...] Popular culture was saturated with acute cravings for calm, decisive, strong, consistent, strict paternal authority, but real fathers seemed incapable of meeting these needs.

Moreover, Klinger (1994: 112) explains that the refusal to accept such roles could actually be considered pathological:

> [w]hat was defined as sick often centered on deviations from normative ideals of proper male and female roles. In a culture still uncertain about the success of postwar civilian readjustments and enmeshed in a Cold War that left its powers somewhat in question, the definition of gender roles attained paramount importance, particularly because of their implicit affiliation with social stability. Concomitantly, "failures" at assuming proper gender responsibilities, such as wife and mother or father and breadwinner, caused [...] sociologists [and] psychologists [...] to

> pathologize deviations and ponder their destructive force on national security.

Marylee Hadley is portrayed as the excessive and overtly sexual woman posing a threat to the social/ patriarchal order. Her excess is signified in several ways: she has money (her access to it is never questioned in the film), she drives a flashy car, she is hardly ever seen without a glass of liquor in her hand, she smokes and, most importantly, her sexual needs never seem to be fully satisfied. On the other hand, in the opening sequence of the film, she is visually juxtaposed with Lucy, the other important female character in the film. Marylee is bare-shouldered and shot surrounded by shadows, with a characteristically suggestive and malignant expression on her face. For her part, frail Lucy is seen in bed wearing a prudish white nightdress. At the end of the sequence, Marylee, always active and determined, goes down the stairs[6] and enters the room where her brother Kyle and her beloved Mitch are. Lucy, however, remains in her room and finally faints upon hearing some shooting[7].

Marylee's character is far too excessive to be accommodated into the narrative and successfully turned into a fit figure for sympathetic rapport, and her juxtaposition with Lucy serves this purpose. Bacall plays the perfectly bourgeois heroine meant for identification. Her status, however, is initially problematic and unclear. In the opening sequence mentioned earlier, we can see her in bed with Mitch at the window. This image may lead the spectator to infer that they form a couple and thus her interest in, and final marriage to, Kyle in the first section of the film becomes unsettling. On the other hand, it is Mitch and Lucy that we see at the New York office after the opening credit section. They both seem to click, so much so that Mitch at some point is led to conclude, "we're two of a kind". The spectator is therefore bound to assume a close link between these two characters, especially because upon meeting Kyle, Lucy does not seem to show great interest in him. They meet at the 21 Club and she appears to dislike Kyle's ostentation, a feeling that Mitch shares. She explains that she envisages her future involving "a husband, a house in the suburbs and kids". Kyle believes that she deserves better than a boring "bourgeois" suburban fate and invites Lucy to join his club for "the prevention of boredom". Thus, they end up flying to Miami aboard Kyle's plane and staying at a very expensive "little boarding house". Once there, Kyle makes it plain to Lucy that with him she could have all the material wealth she could ever aspire to. It all proves much too materialistic for Lucy to digest and she leaves the hotel.

off the plane. After promising her that he will behave like "Tom, Dick and Harry, [he will] take her to lunches and the movies", he proposes to her. She, oddly enough, agrees to marry him there and then without having a chance to witness his transformation from a spoilt rich young man into a normalised bourgeois adult. What Lucy values above all is the marriage certificate itself, and she duly achieves it. It is this that leads Mitch —and perhaps the audience— to become disappointed in her, for he thought Lucy (with whom he had already fallen in love) was a "different kind of girl". After their honeymoon, they move to the Hadley home and Lucy meets Marylee. Once again, the two characters are visually juxtaposed in the scene in Lucy's room through the device of the looking glass. As Bacall brushes her hair, we can see Marylee's reflection on her mirror, and they actually seem to be making the same movements, which hints at the possibility of each being the "mirror image" of the other. They would represent the two faces of the category "woman", of the representation of femininity. They would thus become the two sides of the same coin, one a representative of the law, of adherence to the establishment, and the other, a representative of subversion, non-conformity, or in Rodowick's (1987: 273) terms, authority and madness[8]. Such a rigid juxtaposition and typecasting for women within patriarchy —that is, the healthy girl-next-door or the subdued sexless wife or the whore or sexual vamp—calls for further consideration of the only roles available to women in a bourgeois milieu. As Rodowick (1987: 273) explains

> the inability to resolve these two extremes —that is, to find a way to compromise the inertia of the law (the social system defined by patriarchal authority) and the restlessness of desire within individual characters— constituted a real crisis of representation for the domestic melodrama.

This crisis characterises the ending of *Written on the Wind,* for, as I will try to show, the epilogue to the film, which starts after the trial sequence, seemingly works to uphold the bourgeois order as represented by Lucy and Mitch, who are seen happily leaving the rotten aristocratic world of the Hadleys. But does this "happy ending" really work? Marylee is also foregrounded through a crosscutting of images of her and the newly formed couple and her representation remains too powerful for the ideologically correct bourgeois ending designed to make us forget her. She was supposed to

be necessary to analyse her relationship to Mitch. Though the character of Lucy is meant to be a substitute for the Law[9], it is Hudson's character that is most ideologically laden. Barbara Klinger (1994: 109-12) has explored the ideological implications of the roles played by Hudson through his acting career. He epitomised "normalcy" and was often contrasted with the paranoid split characters that actors such as Marlon Brando or Robert Stack played. "Normalcy" (or what would nowadays be considered a lack of appeal) was attractive in postwar American society:

> Hudson's normalcy did not simply operate to counterpoint psychoanalytic inflections of masculinity. [...] In the post-World War II era, social critics often equated troubled masculinity with weakness, [which] in an ascending spiral of possibilities, could lead to perversion and homosexuality.[10] On a deeper level, Hudson's image represented a "healthy" [...] solidly heterosexual masculinity within Cold War perceptions about the deterioration of virility and its implications for national power and familial stability.

The link between a healthy masculinity and national stability and between a deviant (and therefore "un-American") sexuality and the communist threat was thus hinted at. Marylee's behaviour is openly deviant within the social context in which it is situated. Her sexual needs are so urgent that they take her to bars frequented by members of the working class. In the film, she metaphorically becomes a symbol of the Red Scare. As Babington and Evans (1992: 55) have noticed, she has an almost obsessive fixation with the colour red (her car, her clothes, the flowers in her room), but most importantly, she mingles with the lower classes, unashamedly breaking class barriers —and thus laying bare the American myth of democratic classlessness— and crucially breaking the law of bourgeois legitimate inheritance since

> [Marylee's] very existence as a sexual being poses a threat to the patriarchal order, i.e., the offspring of a misalliance between propertied female and non-propertied male cannot be disavowed as easily as when the sexes are reversed. The containment of female sexuality [...] is necessary for the legitimate transfer of property in capitalist societies. (Orr 1991: 382).

Marylee is about to spend an "interesting afternoon" at the bar when Kyle and Mitch, after receiving a call from the bartender, arrive and try to stop/ repress her in the name of the patriarchal Father. Her defiance of the Law does not,

however, stop here and on a second instance, she is caught by the Police at a motel with a petrol station attendant, whom she had actually picked up. She is taken home and the development of this section, underscored by the "Temptation" dance that Marylee performs (a powerfully sensual musical element), actually leads to the death of her father, Jasper Hadley, of a heart attack. Frustrated desire (Marylee frantically dances in front of the picture of the man she loves) defeats a decrepit symbol of patriarchal domination. Following Jasper's death, we are first allowed to see Mitch Wayne in the study, thus creating a symbolic identification between him and Jasper. He becomes the symbolic "heir" to the aristocratic family throne since it has become clear in the course of the film that neither weak and death-driven Kyle nor nymphomaniac Marylee can be turned into ideologically legitimate heirs to Jasper's position. In Kyle's words, only Mitch "can fill his father's shoes". Once again, decorum and "normalcy" are set against maladjustment and deviance.

In her analysis of Rock Hudson's persona, Klinger (1994: 113-114) complains that

> the shrillest analysis of the family man linked his failure to the looming presence of the "modern woman" [...] [who] enjoyed increased authority in society due to [...] changing conceptions of home life that found her sharing housework and decision-making with her husband in a new spirit of democracy, her increased participation in the work force, and her growing prominence as a sexual being with equal right to satisfaction in the bedroom.

She goes on to quote an article in *Look* magazine and adds that

> [o]f particular concern was woman's "new sexual aggressiveness", resulting in the sexual domination of men [...]. Men suffered symptoms that ranged from fatigue, passivity and *anxiety (about satisfying women)* to impotence and the Freudian "flight from masculinity" that resulted in homosexuality [...]. For the postwar era Hudson represented the quintessence of the manly man, The Great Straight Hope in an environment increasingly defined by changing and contested conceptions of manliness (p. 114-115, emphasis added).

This sheds light on the reasons why Mitch constantly (and perhaps more consciously than is generally acknowledged) rejects Marylee's advances. He, as a representative for the dominant ideology of the time, rejects the castrating/sexually deviant modern woman. Orr (1991: 382) convincingly

explores Mitch's fear and comments on two sequences in the film where substitute objects are meant to symbolise the phallus and fear of castration. The first example is the moment when Jasper suggests to Mitch that he should marry Marylee. He responds that he could not do it since "she is too much like a sister to [him]". However, the composition of the frame, the acting and the prominence given to the (phallic) pencil that Mitch is nervously handling, suggest that Mitch is overtly anxious and lying. He rejects Marylee because he is afraid of her castrating power and the only way he finds to defend himself is by humiliating her: "You're sick Marylee. Your sickness won't be cured by marrying me". He indeed tries to parry her sensual attacks by asking Marylee near the end, "Would I ever be enough for you?". He is aware that he could not possibly satisfy her for her desire has its roots in her "sickness", that is, social maladjustment through unchecked sexuality. Elsaesser (1987: 57-58) remarks:

> [the] unrelenting internal combustion engine of physical and psychic energy [or desire], generically exemplified by the [...] crackling aggressiveness of the screwball comedy, [...] shows signs of a definite slowing-down in the 50s [...], where raucous vitality and instinctual "lust for life" is deepened psychologically to intimate neuroses and adolescent or not so adolescent maladjustments of a wider social significance [...]. In the films of Sirk an uncompromising [...] innocent energy is gradually turned away from simple, direct fulfilment by the emergence of a conscience, a sense [...] of responsibility or the awareness of moral complexity.[12]

Further evidence of Mitch's anxiety can be traced in the party sequence, when Marylee and Mitch talk alone in his old room. Orr (1991: 382) gives psychoanalytic significance to the phallic oukelele that Mitch is playing and which he puts down immediately after Marylee sits close to him. I would add another instance: when Marylee takes Mitch home after the incident at the bar, she is seen driving her powerful sports car against a background of oil derricks. While she is telling him how much she loves him, how desperate she is, Mitch, once again rejecting her, repeatedly fails to light his (phallic) cigarette. Marylee closes the conversation with the following remark: "I'll wait, and I'll have you, marriage or no marriage". Mitch rejects her because, on the one hand, that would entail "castration", he would somehow relinquish his bourgeois masculine authority, and on the other "he [would ...

Marylee cannot have Mitch, who, for his part, cannot have Lucy, the woman he loves. Mitch, however, remains "faithful" to her, and in a duly decorous way, respects her marriage. For their union to become possible, its main obstacles must be eliminated. Kyle's accidental death facilitates their way out of the Hadley family. He dies and the full course of action seems to have been closed, this scene being also the opening sequence of the film. We are nevertheless presented with a long final sequence, the trial against Mitch Wayne. Orr (1991: 385) remarks that this section is only necessary for the "correct" couple —and by extension the sympathetic audience— to be exonerated of all (psychological) guilt, which is finally (psychologically) imposed on Marylee. He considers that this final section would otherwise become unnecessary. However, the trial sequence becomes a ploy to "tame" Marylee and allow bourgeois morality to triumph over the decadence of the affluent, despite Marylee being in a clear position of power at the inquest. At the Hadley home she tries to blackmail Mitch —with as little success as ever— into marrying her by reminding him that she "could talk [him] right into the State Penitentiary", and although at the trial she initially testifies against him, she suddenly collapses, stops lying and tells the whole truth, supposedly, out of truly felt romantic love for Mitch. This moment is somewhat contradictory. It may just be the case that, as Doane (1987: 118) argues, "[i]n a patriarchal society, the myth of romantic love is always there to act as an outlet for any excess energy the woman may possess, to, somewhat paradoxically, *domesticate* her" (emphasis added). The Euripidean *deus ex machina* device is employed to make Marylee suddenly change her mind and provide Lucy and Mitch with an easy exonerating escape. But why would she let Mitch go? Orr (1991: 385) questions the plausibility of these final moments,

> Why after being driven to destroy her father [through her excessive sexuality] and brother [through her slanderous machinations] out of sexual frustration, should she spare the principal cause of that frustration? The salvation of the hero is clearly arbitrary—a resolution imposed from above. Had Marylee been allowed to act consistently, the film would in fact have revealed to the implied audience the "real conditions" of its existence.

That is to say, the actual existence of socio-economic power structures based on class. But Marylee is not allowed to finally exercise the power she has

have the "ideologically correct" ending involving Mitch and Lucy that the film would, supposedly, endorse. This is the traditional "happy ending" in which the family melodrama often culminates, though it is indeed a little eerie that two recent deaths should so unproblematically give way to a joyful resolution. On the other hand, we have the recently redeemed(?) character of Marylee. She, however, is excluded from the happy ending, since her presence would undermine the joy of this final moment. She is denied access to this blissful scene, and hence it might be concluded that she has not been clearly contained within the ideological project of the film. Her position lingers on the boundaries between inclusion —i.e., at the end of the trial sequence —and exclusion— she remains enclosed at her prison-home. Her disruptive presence throughout the film has proven far too powerful for it to be disavowed through an apparent "taming" process in the trial scene. Her own "unhappy ending" remains to be examined. As I mentioned earlier, it calls for further consideration of the roles allotted to women in patriarchal societies. She has now rid herself of the shackles of her repressive father, but as was suggested at the beginning of this paper, hers is an aristocratic family which has merged with the community itself. This implies that although Marylee does not have to confront her father now, she will have to confront the community at large, the bourgeois social order. However, though she has lost what she most loved (Mitch), as her suggestive stroking of the (phallic) oil derrick suggests, she has now the power that money and class confer, as her ambiguous smile evinces.

Marylee, thus, has not really lost the power she had previously enjoyed, and so, whose position (whose ending) is now more prominent? The fact that despite everything Marylee now has the power that had previously repressed her (she is visually connected to her father in a mise-en-abîme composition) threatens to unsettle the apparently happy ending. Rodowick (1987: 276) explains that

> [w]hat isolates the domestic melodrama of the 1950s [...] is its inability to fully internalise [...] two contradictory demands [...]. On the one hand, the affirmative tendency [...] restricted to the conventional "happy end", [...] [and o]n the other hand, [a] structure of conflict common to the domestic melodrama [which] was produced *internally* by contradictory forces which challenged the bourgeois family and patriarchal authority from within.

In *Written on the Wind,* the ending attempts to reproduce and foreground this conflict by having two different female characters associated to each of these contradictory demands. Lucy is assigned the "happy end" and Marylee the "forces of contradiction". However, the ending works precisely to expose the two alternative and irreconcilable outlets available to women in a patriarchal society that represses (female) citizens through its arbitrary imposition of the bourgeois family institution as *the* norm to be assimilated and perpetuated. By laying these options open, Sirk succeeds at self-consciously and critically exposing the plight of women in a system that leaves personal determination available only to men and reserves to itself, to take up again Rodowick's earlier argument, "the right to confer social and sexual identity". Although Marylee now has the power of money, it is not clear whether she is satisfied with her lot or not. If she is not, then her punishment has become effective, but if she is, then the apparently bourgeois ideology of the film has finally failed and so it would become obvious that the film is just openly, to quote Marylee describing her brother Kyle, "raving about things that won't solve".

NOTES

[1]. The subgenres included within the category of "Family Melodrama" often merge. Consequently, we may find a film such as *Written on the Wind* typified as, for instance, a "family aristocratic melodrama" (see Schatz 1991: 161) or an "adult film" (see Klinger 1994: 37). However, I will mainly base my analysis on the latter definition.

[2]. Klinger (1994: 56) cites other films that were included within this trend: *The Cobweb* (1955), *Tea and Sympathy* (1956), *Bigger than Life* (1956), *Some Came Running* (1959), etc.

[3]. See, for example, Babington, Bruce and Peter Evans. 1992. "All that Heaven Allowed: Another Look at Sirkian Irony". *Movie* 34-35: 48-58.

[4]. A typical instance: Mitch comments on Kyle's whim to have a steak sandwich at the 21 Club in New York, which he characterises as evidence of Kyle's "simple-mindedness".

[5]. Or, as one of the readers of this paper kindly suggested, "un-Americanness".

[6]. In *Melodrama and Meaning* Barbara Klinger (1994: 60) comments upon the connotations inherent in the staircase itself and reproduces some publicity describing it: "'it takes a circular staircase to bring out a girl's sex appeal. [...] That stairs and sex appeal go together [...] has been proven many times over'. [...] Dorothy Malone is singled out as a 'staircase actress' *par excellence*".

[7]. Although this is clearly a sign of her own excessively hysterical behaviour, it works in an altogether different direction from Marylee's.

[8]. Christopher Orr (1991: 384) claims that "[w]ithin the body of the text, Marylee functions as a symbol for the return of the repressed and the revenge that repressed desire turned perverse, exacts on the agents of repression. [...] [S]he need[s] to destroy Lucy because of Lucy's complicity with the Law; Lucy married Kyle rather than Mitch because she was attracted to Kyle as an object to be reformed/ castrated".

[9]. As Babington and Evans (1992: 54) note, "Lauren Bacall [is] here showing none of the spirited independence of her Hawksian roles". Yet, in some of her other 50s films, she plays a similarly mellow role: *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953), *The Cobweb* (1955), *Designing Woman* (1957).

[10]. The unforeseen ironic implications of turning Hudson into the epitome of untroubled masculinity are analysed by Klinger in the last section of her book.

[11]. Elsaesser (1987: 56) argues that "[t]he melodramas of [...] Sirk [...] deal with [...] what one may call an intensified symbolisation of everyday actions, the heightening of the ordinary gesture and a use of setting and décor so as to reflect the characters' fetishist fixations".

[12]. As Mitch laments in front of Marylee: "How far we've come from the river".

WORKS CITED

BABINGTON, Bruce and Peter EVANS. 1992. "All that Heaven Allowed: Another Look at Sirkian Irony". *Movie* 34-35: 48-58.

CORDOVA, Richard de. 1987. "A Case of Mistaken Legitimacy: Class and Generational Difference in Three Family Melodramas". In Gledhill, Christine. (ed.). *Home is Where the Heart is*. London: BFI: 255-267.

DOANE, Mary Ann. 1987. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana U.P.

ELSAESSER, Thomas. 1987 (1972). "Tales of Sound and Fury". In Gledhill, Christine. (ed.). *Home is Where the Heart is*. London: BFI: 43-69.

GLEDHILL, Christine. 1987. "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation". In Gledhill, Christine. (ed.). *Home is Where the Heart is*. London: BFI: 5-39.

HALLIDAY, Jon. 1973 (1971). *Douglas Sirk*. Trad. J. Oliver. Madrid: Fundamentos.

KLEINHANS, Chuck. 1991. "Notes on Melodrama and the Family". In Landy, Marcia. (ed.). *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State U.P.: 197-204.

KLINGER, Barbara. 1994. *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana U.P.

MINTZ, Steven and Susan KELLOGG. (eds.). 1988. *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*. New York: The Free Press.

NOWELL-SMITH, Geoffrey. 1987 (1977). "Minnelli and Melodrama". In Gledhill, Christine. (ed.). *Home is Where the Heart is*. London: BFI: 70-74.

ORR, Christopher. 1991. "Closure and Containment: Marylee Hadley in *Written on the Wind*". In Marcia, Landy. (ed.). *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State U.P.: 380-387.

RODOWICK, David N. 1987 (1982). "Madness, Authority and Ideology: The Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s". In Gledhill, Christine. (ed.). *Home is Where the Heart is*. London: BFI: 268-280.

SCHATZ, Thomas. 1991. "The Family Melodrama". In Landy, Marcia. (ed.). *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State U.P.: 148-167.