

Heroes for our times:
Tommy Cooper

Susannah Radstone

Susannah Radstone explores the complex ways in which screen personas relate to the vicissitudes of historical and psychical life, taking as her focus the comedian Tommy Cooper and some recent film roles played by Anthony Hopkins.

With Tom, he had that wonderful expression - that he could look at things and...you see, when you do...like an idiot; and I say we're all idiots because we're making a mess of this world...and the real people I *love* are the people who know they're idiots. It's the people who don't know they're idiots that I'm frightened of. But *Tom*: you see if you *look* at an object - let's say I'm looking at you - *Tom* would look (leans to the side, while looking with exaggerated concentration). Now that's just that much (repeats the movement) that differentiates between the people who have control of everything - who just say, like, 'when did you last see your father'... but Tom - {leans again}. '

Descriptions of our times as 'uncertain', or 'destabilised' have become ubiquitous on the left, as has the tendency to detect dismaying portents in the signs of our times. Eric Sykes's stumbling yet eloquent appreciation of the comedian Tommy Cooper's performative skills bears traces of the fear which underlies many of these contemporary forewarnings: that we (in the West) may be approaching the abyss from which the horrors of fascism can spring. His 'when did you last see your father?' brings to mind images of *another* father figure - not the one who gets taken away,

1. Eric Sykes speaking about Tommy Cooper in *Heroes of Comedy: Tommy Cooper* (Dir. Iain McLean, Thames Television Production, Channel 4, 13 October 1995).

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the lost father, but the ghastly figure whose rule sanctions atrocities such as those to which Sykes obliquely refers.

This darting reference to the lurking risk of what can happen if we forget that 'we're all idiots' occurs towards the beginning of *Heroes of Comedy: Tommy Cooper*, an appreciation of the life and work of this British comedian-magician which follows his career from its wartime beginnings entertaining the troops. In this context, Sykes's remark brings forth from the shadows not just the abstract threat of what *might* happen, but a concrete memory of what *did* happen, and the ghostly figure which emerges here is surely that of Hitler himself. Against *this* threat, Sykes offers us the image of Tommy, shambling across the stage, playing the idiot, making sure that we see exactly how his tricks *don't* work, exposing magic's machinery to the naked eye.

In the context of renewed fears concerning the possible return from the shadows of the fascist mentality - replete with the desire for a charismatic, heroic leader - Sykes's comments start to look like something more than 'light entertainment', directing us, as they do, to appreciate and learn to build from counter-tendencies wherever they are to be found. In *Heroes of Comedy: Tommy Cooper*, an illustrious parade of admirers, including Clive James, Spike Milligan and Anthony Hopkins, bear witness to Cooper's power to captivate his audience: they were helpless before him; he could do *anything* to them; but above all they speak movingly of both their, and the wider audience's, sheer *love* for Tommy, and at points offer tantalising analyses of his capacity to elicit such powerfully benign feelings. No doubt Cooper offers countless grounds for exclusion from the 'politically correct' canon of heroes - his jokes were, after all, sometimes (though not often) at his wife's (or other women's) expense. His 'playing the fool' gets laughs by mimicking the 'intellectually challenged'. But Cooper's powers to captivate - to bring forth warmth, and even love - were inextricably tied to the audience's acknowledgement of his *flaws*. What was striking about Tommy - and what 'Comedy Heroes' underlined most forcefully - was his capacity to *hold* his audience in thrall, while systematically divesting himself of all heroic qualities: 'perfection', control, and power, the qualities that film and cultural theory align with 'heroism' in general, and that have been said to find their apogee in the fascist leader in particular.

The insights provided by such theorisations should not be under-estimated. Much valuable work has developed from psychoanalytic film theory's alignment of the fascination of cinematic heroes with infantile, narcissistic desires, and feminist

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psychoanalytic film theory's uncovering of classical cinema's sexual division of labour which ascribes heroic power and agency to male characters and object positions to female characters. Yet for all their value, these approaches to 'the hero' seem to ignore certain types of fascination which neither repeat nor neatly overturn the orthodox strategies by means of which heroes are constructed and through which fascination is exerted.

Cooper, for one, refuses to fit. His paradoxical performance consists in the *charismatic* divestment of the heroic—it occupies a space *between* mastery and incompetence, between the classically heroic and the classically unheroic. Standard analyses of 'the hero' focus on genres of adventure, detection, action and romance, largely ignoring comedy and *its* heroes. But perhaps comedy heroes, and Cooper in particular, offer us evidence of a continuing form of *powerful* fascination that runs counter to, but is not a straightforward reversal of, the fearsome extremes to which much writing on cultural heroes despondently points. And perhaps a closer analysis of this type of fascination might deliver a less reductive, as well as a more cheering view of our contemporary capacities, wishes, and desires: reasons to be cheerful.

Uncertain times, uncertain heroes?

In 'Comedy Heroes', one of Cooper's most ardent eulogists, the actor Anthony Hopkins, describes with lucidity those qualities which called forth his admiration: Cooper's irreverence; his capacity to make us laugh at the fool in ourselves, and his 'rare gift' of courage - the courage 'to just go and make a mess of everything'. With wry regret, Hopkins admits that he'd much rather have been a comic, but that he simply couldn't do it: that what he does is easier than what Cooper could do. Faced with Hopkins's towering recent performances - in *Silence Of The Lambs*, *Shadowlands*, and, most notably, in *Remains Of The Day* - it would be tempting to dismiss these comments as mere self-deprecation, or even as disingenuousness, but such easy dismissal risks overlooking the (admittedly credulity-stretching) *comparison*, or even the equivalence, between their work that arguably underlies Hopkins' appreciation of Cooper.

But it's no wonder that Hopkins admires Cooper's capacity to turn loss into gain, to make 'losing it', and 'mak(ing) a mess of everything' deliver us to love and laughter. In each of the aforementioned films, Hopkins's much lauded performances have detailed the sufferings of men for whom control - too much control - has

been their undoing. In *Shadowlands*, Hopkins plays the Oxford don and author C.S. Lewis. The film concerns itself with Lewis' late, brief marriage to the terminally-ill American Joy Gresham. Hopkins wrests from this role a performance that bespeaks an agonised redemption grounded in pathos: the C.S. Lewis character is finally delivered from his rigid, over-controlled and cloistered life, but too late, leaving the audience crying not for what can never be, but for what comes too late.

In *Remains Of The Day*, Hopkins' enactment of the 'consummate butler', described elsewhere as the 'perfect portrayal of English repression', condenses *Shadowlands* exposure of the individual costs of too much control with a detailing of the potentially devastating *political* costs of such excess. As in *Shadowlands*, the Hopkins character acknowledges personal desire too late, so that love can never be his. In *Remains*, however, this devastating loss is set beside the character's belated realisation that his rigid adherence to the rules of the house, and his refusal to acknowledge that which might breach those rules, had led him to collude in collaboration. He finally acknowledges what he has 'known' all along: that during World War Two, his master had been on the side of the Germans. *Remains Of The Day* connects the stealthy development of fascism 'at home' to the butler's over-rigid adherence to the rules of the house. Though *Remains* looks like a 'nostalgia film' its relation to this genre is ambiguous. For while the historical 'nostalgia film' arguably contains anxieties about the present by offering us mythical and idealised versions of the past, *Remains* exposes those myths *as* myths, forcing us to acknowledge not only darkness within the home, but also the potential darkness within each of us.² Nevertheless, the film's historical setting does allow some distancing, perhaps, from its work of 'bringing it all back home'.

Unlike *Remains*, *Silence Of The Lambs* - described by Lizzie Francke as 'Jonathan Demme's omen for the millenium' - locates the heart of darkness in the present, or, perhaps, in the very near future. In *Silence Of The Lambs* Hopkins plays Hannibal Lecter, a one-time eminent psychiatrist turned serial killer, entombed in the top security cell of the Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally Insane. What startles in this performance is Lecter's diabolically fascinating *charisma*.

2. This cursory reading of *Remains Of The Day* is indebted to a far more complex and insightful analysis given by Gillian Rose: 'The Beginning of the Day: Fascism and Representation', delivered at the 'Modernity, Culture and the Jew' conference, University of London, Friday 13 May 1994.

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Lizzie Francke describes Hopkins's Lecter as 'renaissance man turned into mediaeval gargoyle':

He draws the Duomo in Florence from memory, can distinguish which version of the *Goldberg Variations* he prefers...A reincarnation of Dracula, he personifies a self-devouring high culture *turning in on its own impeccable order*'(emphasis added).³

Though *Silence is* arguably concerned with 'order', or, more specifically, with an order 'turning in on itself, here the Hopkins character is both 'supremely' controlled and *in need of* control. As the above commentary pointed out, Lecter is marked out from 'ordinary man' by his mastery and his knowledge. His skills - particularly his psychoanalytic skills - appear magical, as he peers into the recesses of the Jody Foster character's mind and stuns her with his perspicacity.

In *Remains* and in *Shadowlands* redemptive affect follows from the belated acquisition of the knowledge of the human heart; and, in acknowledging the flaws and the darkness within, these characters are delivered from isolated narcissism to join the human race. In *Silence*, however, the Lecter character knows all there is to know about his darkest wishes and desires - Lecter knows it all already. His suave saunterings through the nether regions of murder, desecration and bestiality mark him out as both knowing and yet unredeemed. Instead of the compromised redemption that concludes *Shadowlands* and *Remains*, *Silence* leaves us with a terrifying vision of a world in which redemption has become impossible: while Lecter's grandiosity is fed rather than chastened by his knowledge of inner darkness, the film's millennial fantasy is of a culture still rigidly *refusing* to acknowledge that which *Lecter* so blithely acts out. Lecter must be caged up, hidden, for what he tells that world about itself; Lecter is 'the other' who cannot be acknowledged within. No wonder, then, that Lecter's eventual escape to Haiti fills the spectator with guilty relief.

Though *Shadows* and *Remains* map the stakes of psychic integration at the level of the individual and the social, their nostalgia arguably compromises their, at best partial, optimism, suggesting that even the retarded and partial redemption they offer may no longer be possible. *Silence* refuses nostalgia, offering us in its place a dystopic vision of a world within which the redemption which *Shadows*

3. Lizzie Francke, *Sight and Sound*, Vol 1 Issue 2, June 1991, p 62.

and *Remains* do achieve is no longer possible. Instead of an eventual and partial integration of the other within, the film details the terrible cost of disavowal: and the Hopkins part can perhaps best be understood not as a 'character' in troubled quest of integration, but as a 'part' - in the sense of a part of the self- that cannot be integrated and must therefore be projected elsewhere, caged up and punished.

Hopkins' recent roles - the butler in *Remains Of The Day*, C. S. Lewis in *Shadowlands*, and Hannibal Lecter in *Silence Of The Lambs* - cannot be straightforwardly classified as cinematic heroes. Certainly, that is, their traits and functions diverge from those of the *classical* cinematic hero. Whereas the classical hero masters the narrative by controlling action, for the butler and the C. S. Lewis character, at least, the capacity to act is severely constrained by psychological rigidity. In *Silence Of The Lambs* the film's fear of what might happen if such rigidity were to be abandoned produces Lecter, who cannot be allowed to act at all. To an extent, each of these characters arguably *critiques* the classical hero. Each of these performances occupies that 'in-between' space that belongs neither to the anti-hero, nor to the absolute hero, whose supreme *control* and mastery of narrative action has been said to appeal to a spectatorial narcissism which underwrites the patriarchal construction of masculinity.⁴ This argument, rooted in early feminist psychoanalytic film theory, takes as its starting point cinema's capacity to return us to primitive stages of infantile development.

Heroes and fantasy

Psychoanalytic studies of the cinema suggest that, once sitting still and quiet in the darkened auditorium, the spectator is lulled into a state close to dreaming. In this state, the boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious are no longer as secure as they remain in waking life. In dreams, and at the cinema, infantile ways of thinking and fantasising come to the fore once more. Tiny infants are helpless and dependent upon their parents or carers. In order not to be overwhelmed by feelings of dependence and helplessness the child will identify, in fantasy, with the mother, and then the father, who are each perceived in turn as all-powerful. This type of fantasy belongs to the primitive infantile stage known as narcissism, and the power of larger-than-life screen heroes can be seen to stem, in part, at least, from the cinema's re-kindling of such early narcissistic fantasies.

4. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol 16 no 3, 1975.

Though the child's earliest fantasies of omnipotence may emerge in relation to the mother, these fantasies take hold most completely in relation to the father. According to feminist psychoanalytic theory, patriarchal culture depends upon maintaining, to a degree, this primitive view of the father. To this end, patriarchal constructions of 'woman arguably disavow all knowledge of masculine dependence, need, or fallibility, by displacing them onto 'woman'.⁵ On this argument, classical cinema emerges as one site upon which patriarchal subject positions are endlessly re-secured, through the captivation of spectators by screen heroes. Though these performances occupy that "in-between" space that belongs neither to the anti-hero nor the absolute hero' this feminist critique of the mainstream screen hero has been influential, its insights do not appear to shed light on the issues raised in this article's discussion of either Tommy Cooper's performative skills or Anthony Hopkins's recent roles. These performances and roles appear neither to invite, nor simply to refuse, narcissistic identification and fantasy. Instead, they each seem to inhabit a space that falls somewhere 'in-between' the spaces of primitive narcissistic fantasy, and of the more recognisably 'adult' world of limitation, possibility and in/competence. The characters both have, and lack, control. Can psychoanalysis help us to understand the identifications and pleasures offered by such roles and performances, and can their emergence be understood as anything more than an accident of history?

Since the 1970s, film studies has been striving to overcome the apparent resistance of psychoanalysis to questions of history. Such research seeks to understand the appeal of particular types of heroes to particular audiences at particular times. If *Shadowlands*, *Remains Of The Day* and *Silence Of The Lambs* together tell a story about contemporary history and about contemporary fantasies, desires and identifications, how can we interpret this story, and how might we understand those 'in-between' spaces to which these stories (and Cooper's performances) take us in psychoanalytic and historical terms.?

5. This is a highly condensed summary of a range of contested positions. For a more elaborated discussion of psychoanalytic film theory see, for instance, Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: an introduction*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1988; entries on 'psychoanalytic film theory', 'audience and spectator', and 'scopophilia' in Annette Kuhn with Susannah Radstone (eds), *The Women's Companion To International Film*, Virago, London 1990.

Heroes, history and mourning

Eric Santner's *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany*, offers a starting point for considering these questions concerning contemporary culture, heroes and their fascinations." The helpfulness of Santner's work lies in its psychoanalytical and historical approach to questions of narcissism and the fascination of heroes. At its heart, *Stranded Objects* is concerned with advocating a culture of 'mourning-work', without which, Santner believes, our western societies risk falling back into a fascist mentality similar to that which gripped Germany so recently. Santner's thesis is of interest since his re-theorisation of fascism in relation to narcissism and 'failed mourning' sheds light on, and offers a possible psychoanalytic and historical interpretation of, the 'in-between' spaces inhabited by Cooper and the Hopkins characters.

Santner argues that the task undertaken in order to work through infantile narcissism can best be understood as a type of mourning-work that gradually enables the child to work through and eventually move beyond its fantasies of omnipotence, control and mastery. Santner theorises this mourning-work through object relations theory, and, more specifically, through D. W. Winnicott's theory of the 'good enough mother'. For Winnicott, the successful working through of narcissism depended upon the child having access to a caring and holding environment within which loss (of narcissistic fantasy) could gradually come to be tolerated. Winnicott's 'good enough mother' provides this environment and witnesses the child's struggles to come to terms with loss through its play with 'transitional objects'.⁷

Moving on from Winnicott, Santner then introduces Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'aura' and coins the term 'auratic de-auratisation' to name a particular process of mourning-work that he seeks to advocate in the postmodern West. For Benjamin, the term 'aura' referred to a particular quality of gaze or look: the quality of a returned gaze. In *Illuminations* Benjamin deploys the term in relation to his elegy for a premodern world within which varied experiences could be exchanged and

6. Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany*, Ithaca and London.

7. D.W. Winnicott, 'The theory of the parent-infant relationship' (1960), in D.W. Winnicott, *Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, International Universities Press, New York 1965; and 'Transitional objects and transitional phenomena' (1951), in D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock, London 1971.

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recognised.⁸ He deploys the term to describe, then, types of experience which he believes to be on the wane. For Benjamin, an awareness of the time of nature, and of death, ground the auratic exchange of experience. But Benjamin believes that, in modernity, crowds, cities and machines have destroyed those conditions in which the gaze could be returned under the sign of death. In the modern world, death remains hidden, and the cycles of natural history are masked by the progress of the machine. In premodern communities, it was this awareness of death and of natural history which grounded the exchange of experience. An awareness of that which is shared: death, and the subjection to natural history, underpins the capacity to recognise others and their different experience. Thus, here, in Santner's return to Benjamin, we find a model for forms of *recognition* within which an awareness of human limitation, death and natural history undercut narcissism's fantasies of fusion with omnipotent heroes. Santner's aim is to wed Winnicott to Benjamin. Returning to Winnicott's notion of transitional space, Santner re-theorises the activities that take place there as 'auratic de-auratisation'.

Santner's theory of auratic de-auratisation has two combined aims, each of which is pertinent to our consideration of Hopkins's and Cooper's 'in-betweenness'. Firstly, Santner's theory can help us to understand and *appreciate* these performances in relation to history and politics: more particularly in relation to the threat of fascism which, as I have already suggested, lurks implicitly within each of the Hopkins vehicles, and, as Sykes's comments suggest, behind Cooper as well.

Santner advocates a contemporary culture of mourning-work, or of 'auratic de-auratisation', to counter what he sees as a contemporary political threat in the West: the threat that unless our western cultures nurture a culture of mourning, we risk falling back into a shared pathology similar to that which arguably gripped Germany fifty years ago. Though Santner stresses the differences between those times and our own, his opening premise is that the

postmodern destabilisation of certain fundamental cultural norms and notions, above all those dealing with self-identity and community, cannot be understood without reference to the ethical and intellectual imperatives of life after Auschwitz. For if the postmodern is, in a crucial sense, about the attempt to

8. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (Hannah Arendt (ed)), Schocken Books, New York 1968.

'think difference', we take on this risk in the knowledge of what can happen if we turn away from such labours (p xiv).

Santner's understanding of the collective pathology that contemporary instabilities threaten to induce is informed by his reading of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's *The Inability To Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour* (Grove Press, 1975), which attempted to explain the lack of melancholy and depression that might have been expected in postwar Germany after the loss of Hitler as *Fuhrer*. His re-reading begins from Freud's distinction between melancholy and mourning.⁹ This distinction rests on an understanding of the primitive nature of melancholy's relation to loss. In mourning, what has been lost is understood to have been separate from the self. In melancholy, the lost object has been perceived not as separate from the self, but as a mirror 'of one's own sense of self and power' (Santner, p 2). A predisposition towards melancholy signals, therefore, an incomplete working-through of infantile narcissism, so that the self 'lacks sufficient strength and cohesion to tolerate, much less comprehend, the reality of separateness' (p 3). In melancholic grieving, what is at stake is the coming to terms with separateness and with the *limitations* and *fallibilities* of the bounded self. For the Mitscherlichs, the German people's identification with Hitler comes to be understood in relation to secondary narcissism: unstable conditions led to the formation of an identification with a powerful, larger-than-life figure, which enabled the German people to disavow the instabilities, in the fantasised return to narcissistic fantasies of fusion and omnipotence. Otherness - the child's separateness from the mother - comes to be revised, in this pathological secondary narcissism, as the threat posed to the nation by 'othered' groups: Jews; homosexuals; gypsies....

Santner's weaving together of the Mitscherlichs, Benjamin and Winnicott produces a cultural theory alert to questions of the psychical, and to questions of social and cultural history. The Mitscherlichs emphasise the interplay between a collective psyche and historical and environmental factors; Benjamin's elegy to the aura emerges within a broader consideration of modern life and culture. Winnicott's object relations approach to infantile development replaces Freud's emphasis on innate drives with a focus on the impact of the environment and the

9. Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Hogarth Press, London 1953-74, vol XIV (first published 1917).

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mother in infantile development.

Taken together, these influences enable Santner to make a significant shift. Much writing on the postmodern is suffused by what Santner describes as a postmodernist 'rhetoric of mourning' (p 7). Poststructuralist and Lacanian in orientation, such writing emphasises the primary losses entailed in the entry into culture and language, turning us all into heroic 'victim-survivors'. Such writing would have it that, though such losses have *always* been attendant upon the entry into culture, poststructuralist and Lacanian theory have made them apparent.

Santner's critique of this 'rhetoric of mourning' is two-pronged. Firstly, he argues that such an abstract theory makes us *all* heroic victim-survivors of loss: what place here for historical trauma and catastrophe? Secondly, he suggests that the writers who produce and even revel in this rhetoric of mourning (Derrida's name is foregrounded here) are actually narcissistically *retreating* from particular acts of mourning-work, by producing themselves and their readers as heroic victim-survivors. Santner returns to the Mitscherlichs to explain how an identification with the victim can occur as part of a retreat to secondary narcissism. According to the Mitscherlichs, the melancholy which should have followed on from the loss of the *Fuhrer* never took place. The trauma could not be acknowledged, and in place of acknowledgement what was found was a series of defences against the acknowledgement of loss: the past was de-realised; narcissistic identification shifted suddenly from Hitler to the allies; identification shifted to the victim. Santner's critique of the postmodernist rhetoric of mourning suggests, then, that its characterisation of the human subject as a heroic victim-survivor might be likened to the narcissism which, according to the Mitscherlichs, characterised the pathology which gripped post-fascist Germany, where the narcissistic identification with the *Fuhrer* was too toxic to be gradually and carefully worked-through in mourning-work.

In place of the postmodernist rhetoric of mourning, which Santner likens to this defensive and narcissistic post-war identification with the victim, Santner advocates a fully historicised approach to culture and mourning, that differentiates between historically specific identifications and fantasies. Here the analytic task becomes that of mapping the relations between a possibly universal, though *variously negotiated*, primary loss and later historical experience. This approach can aid us in our attempt to understand the emergence and appeal of Cooper and of the cluster of Hopkins vehicles under discussion.

The second prong of Santner's critique of the postmodernist rhetoric of mourning finds its advocacy of leave-taking paradoxically 'unpostmodern', in that it uncritically accepts and works with the binaries of fusion/separation and possession/mourning. Santner's critique of this unpostmodern mobilisation of rigid binaries returns to the psychoanalytic insistence that developmental stages are only ever layered over, rather than superseded by, later and more mature ways of thinking. Moreover, he reminds us, usefully, I think, that the residues of these early identifications and fantasies fuel later and more mature processes. Thus Santner proposes that narcissistic desire - the desire to be 'gazed upon' and fused with larger-than-life figures - is never completely abandoned: 'One must, in other words, learn to recognise and even celebrate the deep core of libidinal fuel of these apparatuses' (p 125).

Santner mounts this critique before moving on to propose the urgent need for a culture that can provide spaces for auratic de-auratisation: by which he means cultural spaces analogous to the space within which the child can come to terms with its losses under the mother's good-enough gaze. But for Santner these losses are always *historically specific*, as is the quality of the environment within which they can, or cannot, be assimilated.

Santner advocates this culture of auratic de-auratisation in relation to the perceived threat posed by modernity, which 'de-stabilises the good-enough communal structures that are required for the constitution of human selfhood as well as for the performance of labours of mourning in adult life (pp 126-7). Though Santner's thesis fails to engage with the constitution of *sexually differentiated* 'selves', it is nevertheless the case that the de-stabilisations of modernity have arguably led to what some have described as a crisis in patriarchal masculinity.¹⁰ I therefore want to conclude this essay by returning, via Santner, to my *feminist* as well as to my historical questions concerning contemporary heroes and their fascinations. The patriarchal hero is classically defined as the *agent*, rather than the *object* of history and of narrative. The hero makes things happen. The victim, on the other hand has things done to him or her - is the object, that is, rather than the agent of narrative or history. In each of the Hopkins's vehicles, the main

10. Elsewhere, I have addressed the question of the relation between mourning and a 'crisis in masculinity' more fully: see Susannah Radstone, "'Too straight a drive to the toll-booth': Masculinity, Mortality and Al Pacino', in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds), *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1995.

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character is neither wholly victim, nor 'classical hero'. What follows from this is that each role falls somewhere 'in between', offering itself up neither for a purely narcissistic spectator, nor for a spectator who has taken absolute leave of such positions. Each performance, then, undertakes a *degree* of mourning-work, that can be appreciated from a feminist position, as well as from a Santnerian position concerned with questions of historically specific mourning tasks and *gradations* of mourning-work (though space precludes anything but the merest sketch of the historically nuanced work undertaken by each film).

Heroes, fantasy and history

Though in 'Comedy Heroes', Hopkins stressed the difference between his skills and capacities and those of Cooper, I suggested earlier that Hopkins' fascination for Cooper might be driven by a sense of something shared. I now want to propose that these similarities and differences can best be understood in relation to varieties of 'mourning-work'.

In *Shadowlands* the C.S. Lewis character emerges as time's *victim*. Though he comes to acknowledge emotional need, dependence and self-insufficiency, love comes too late, and the film leaves us crying tears of pathos and of nostalgia for a lost moment (of love) and a lost historical period - a period that the film lovingly evokes. If identification with the victim position constitutes a defence against mourning-work, then *Shadowlands* pathetic victimhood emerges as closer to narcissism than to its working-through. Yet the tears elicited by the film *also* acknowledge that something has been worked-through, that to an extent, the Hopkins character has moved from the rigid and heavily bounded world of cloistered self-sufficiency to a world tempered by acknowledged need. Following Santner, I would propose that the mourning-tasks undertaken by the film respond to the demands of feminism and of postmodernism. The world of science, learning and absolute knowledge is challenged, as is the citadel within which narcissistic patriarchal masculinity attempts to secure itself against chastening intrusions. Yet those worlds are evoked nostalgically here, leading me to conclude that this film's 'in-betweenness' *defends* against postmodern and patriarchal losses more than it works them through.

Earlier, I proposed that *Silence Of The Lambs* enacts a process of displacement: that difference within, or internal 'otherness' that cannot be acknowledged, becomes displaced onto a monstrous figure, Hannibal Lecter, whose literal 'cutting

up' of people represents a monstrous displacement of narcissism's working-through of hallucinatory fusion. Here, once again, the film's affect is produced through an identification with the victim position, which oscillates between those at threat from Lecter, and Lecter himself. But whereas *Shadowlands*' victim-hero arguably defends against mourning-work, here the glimpses of Lecter as victim limit the film's ability to construct the entire world as victim. Here, we are allowed a glimpse of the irrational processes that have formed him, and, by extension, aspects of ourselves. And since Lecter can only be freed if 'we' take back as our own the monstrously deformed aspects of ourselves that have formed him, *this* victim-hero arguably initiates a degree of mourning-work. Earlier, I quoted a critic who viewed *Silence* as a 'self-devouring high culture turning *in on its own impeccable order*'. What I am finally proposing, then, is that in *Silence* the 'in-betweenness' constructed by our identification with a monstrous victim-hero does lean further towards mourning than it leans towards preservation: mourning and moving beyond, rather than preserving, that is, a modern culture that, in its rigid adherence to order, risks forgetting the disorderly within.

In my introductory description of *Remains Of The Day*, I argued, following Gillian Rose, that the power of this film rests in its undoing of historical and psychical idealisations of the past. Unlike *Shadowlands* and *Silence Of The Lambs*, which solicit our identification with a victim-hero, *Remains* refuses the spectator the comfort of wallowing in pathos and victimhood. Instead the butler gradually comes to acknowledge both his own responsibility in collusion and his own previously unacknowledged desire. This acknowledgement of *responsibility* does not return us to heroic agency, but to a chastened vision - to what Gillian Rose described as 'the remains of the day' - it delivers us, that is, to a vision of what is left, and what *can* be done, once omnipotent fantasies and narcissistic control are worked through. At the same time, *Remains* does allow the spectator many of the 'auratic' pleasures of the historical nostalgia film, pleasures that call up that narcissistic longing for an impossible return to a Utopian past, only to work them through. This version of auratic de-auratisation arguably offers us a new chastened 'hero' whose lineaments appear cut to the measure of feminist, postmodernist and left political desire. Yet the Hopkins character *remains* fascinating, remains a powerful figure with whom to identify. The film, and the butler character, in particular, does occupy, then, that 'in-between' space that is the basis neither for narcissistic identification, nor for an absolute leave-taking

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from such positions: auratic de-auratisation. And its mourning tasks are clearly related to a postmodern coming to terms with chastened masculinity and with the threat posed to culture by an environment within which absolutes, certainties and clear allegiances rule. The film's strength, it seems to me, lies in its *explicit* historical references: to fascism and to a dying order. If it has a failing, it would lie perhaps in its final vision which offers so *very* little hope. The butler is aging; his redemption has come too late and to *that extent* the traces of pathetic victimhood - and victimhood's refusal to acknowledge imperfection - remain.

As the visual track of 'Comedy Heroes' displayed shots of Tommy Cooper hitting himself on the head with the ball he was supposed to be juggling, catching his hand in his 'trick' clock and bruising himself during a 'failed' attempt at karate, Eric Sykes concluded the remarks with which this article opened: 'that's the quality of Tom - and the quality of all the comics we know and love - their vulnerability.' Yet though, in Spike Milligan's words, his face was 'a call for help', and though the audience witness his *failing*, here pathos becomes the source of laughter rather than tears, and the joke becomes, in the words of Bob Monkhouse 'that you were watching him at all'. Here, that is, the defence of 'victimhood' is challenged by the consistency with which grandiosity is undermined.

Cooper's 'victimhood', the desire for magic, and for a hero with super-human powers, is clearly grounded in narcissism, but so too perhaps is the capacity to become *helpless* with laughter, as feelings of utter dependency merge with fantasies of larger-than-life figures: as Spike Milligan said of Tommy Cooper, 'he could do *anything* to me.' To be sure, then, the comedian trades on those primitive desires for the long lost heroes of infancy. Yet, as admirer after admirer testified, Tommy had only to stand up, to have audiences *weak* with laughter, as the joke became that they were watching him at all. Though even his posture and facial expression spoke of the sheer ridiculousness of him standing there and 'us' watching him, his magic tricks elaborated the story. Though the audiences wanted magic, and though his tricks spoke to that desire, the *real* pleasure was, as one critic has already pointed out, in witnessing the magic fail:

for it was his awareness of the limitations of his magic role that produces the most brilliant comedy. You know his tricks won't work, that his sleight-of-hand will be as surreptitious as a brickie's hod - the flowers from the empty vase only pop out when he struggles with the spring mechanism, the disappearing clock-

in-the-box disappears only to fall out of the back...And this was Tommy's genius: his unfaltering ability for getting his trade wrong, for showing the mechanisms and strains of his theatrical performance - then expecting to get rewarded for it.¹¹

Stuart Cosgrove's reading of Tommy Cooper foregrounds his anarchic undermining of the work ethic: 'Cooper's aesthetic form of human work, with all its wasted efforts and desperate humour, came far closer to the real futility of industrial labour than the smooth blandishments of the "proper" magician; and the response is empathy and laughter, rather than respectful applause.' While this 'workerist' reading of Cooper is illuminating, what it overlooks is that the audience's applause and laughter paradoxically acknowledged the skill with which Cooper's 'bungling' had been performed. Time after time, Cooper's admirers spoke of the sheer work and effort Cooper invested in getting 'getting it wrong' right. But even here, the emphasis is on *work*, reminding us, once more, that there *is* no such thing as magic, and that this hero had, in Spike Milligan's words, 'hands like bunches of bananas' - and feet of clay. Earlier in this article, I was trying to explore the fascination exerted by this ambiguous performance that intertwines power with powerlessness, capacity with incapacity. I am now proposing that Cooper's performances exactly enacted the process of auratic de-auratisation; but what mourning-tasks did such performances work through? In 'Heroes of Comedy', references to the British experience of the Second World War came thick and fast. War-time experience was certainly chastening, levelling and disabusing of omnipotent fantasies, particularly concerning Britain and Britishness. Yet for all that, Britain did win the war and defeat fascism. Cooper's performance, his creation of a space that is both auratic and de-auratising can best be understood, perhaps, in this context: in the context of a nation's struggle to come to terms with its losses and its gains, though the reasons for one nation's fall into fascism and another nation's defeat of fascism are clearly far more complex than this consideration of heroic qualities can admit.

Though 'Heroes of Comedy' mourned Cooper - though the programme was elegiac - here, mourning was tied not to the wished-for return of impossible idealised heroes, but to a wished-for space in which such impossible nostalgic longings become transformed into the bonds of an alliance of care - a care that even inflected

11. Stuart Cosgrove, *New Musical Express*, 16 August, 1986.

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the tone of Cooper's critics: 'Several scores of readers told me why they disliked Tommy Cooper...What I liked about their letters was their *tolerance*. Quite a few admitted that they could be wrong. Hardly anybody wanted to have Tom shot, flogged, or strangled...'¹² This appreciation of Tommy Cooper has not been 'politically correct'. I have not attempted to read his performance in relation to difference. I have not asked how different audiences, in different places and times, might read Cooper. Instead, I am proposing that his performance provided a space in which the fear of 'difference' could be worked through—a space in which auratic de-auratisation took place, and relations between imperfect others could be forged: 'hardly anybody wanted to have Tom shot, flogged or strangled.' In *Stranded Objects*, Eric Santner argues that it was precisely this space - the space of auratic de-auratisation - that postwar Germany lacked, and that our society loses at its peril. Remember Tommy Cooper.

12. Peter Black, *Daily Mad*, 22 April 1986.