

*Susan Hayward  
in the 50s*



'I figure it this way. Marriage – it's lonely, but it ain't private.'

Jeremiah Watrus (Burt Mustin) to Jeff McCloud (Robert Mitchum) in *The Lusty Men*

Susan Hayward starred in nineteen feature films in the 1950s. Of the first thirteen, twelve were made for Twentieth Century Fox between 1950 and 1955. Taken as a whole, these films were financially very successful and confirmed Hayward as a prominent star. Joseph Schenck, the then senior executive of Twentieth Century Fox, said of Hayward 'On the basis of our investment alone, Susan Hayward is our most valuable player. We've tied up nearly one quarter of our studio budget on her' (Linett 1981: 131). For her 1950s work she was nominated for a Best Actress Oscar three times.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the decade in 1960, her celebrity was recorded by a place on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, at the same time as Judy Garland and Joan Bennett.

Yet her presence has not remained as vivid as some other stars of the decade. Reviewing her films, it is possible to suspect that the subjects or the genres of some of them are now ones which are distant from us, or which seem a little ludicrous or distasteful. There are love stories in antique costume (*David and Bathsheba*, *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, *The Conqueror*). There are examples of Americana (*I'd climb the Highest Mountain*, *The President's Lady*). There are films with the attractions of exotic settings (*White Witch Doctor*, *Untamed*, *Soldier of Fortune*). There are westerns, contemporary and otherwise (*Rawhide*, *The Lusty Men*, *Thunder in the Sun*). And there are films with earnest social messages for us (*I'll Cry Tomorrow*, *I Want to Live!*). Of

course there are pleasures to be found here, such as the bitter brilliance of Nicholas Ray's *The Lusty Men*, but even that stands in the shadow cast by Ray's other achievements, and the work Robert Mitchum (Hayward's co-star) achieved with (say) Laughton, Minnelli, or Preminger. But what is interesting is how little interest she has aroused.<sup>2</sup>

The case I want to make for Hayward's continuing claim on our attention involves a preoccupation running through part of her work. It has to do with her dramatisation of the perennial American topic of success, how it transforms the self and the nature of relations to others, what it makes of friends or lovers, and of children or what substitutes for children. And what it makes of dreams, of other lives that might have been, or might yet come to pass.<sup>3</sup>

I can make this clear only by practical attention to the films, and I shall begin by looking at two early 1950s tales of a woman with talent: *I Can Get it For You Wholesale* (Michael Gordon, 1951), and *With a Song in My Heart* (Walter Lang, 1952). From here I shall turn to a group of films in which Hayward plays a woman whose situation is to be committed to a talent in another, a man to whom she is married or firmly attached. This will involve discussion of *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (Henry King, 1952), *The Lusty Men* (Nicholas Ray, 1952), and *Garden of Evil* (Henry Hathaway, 1954). Finally I will consider how some of these subjects are treated in two of the late 1950s films, *I'll Cry Tomorrow* (Daniel Mann, 1956) and *I Want to Live!* (Robert Wise, 1958).

### **I: The Woman of Talent**

Let us consider the features that *I Can Get it for You Wholesale* and *With a Song in My Heart* have in common.

1) The Hayward role is that of a woman who possesses an unmistakable gift. It is such that matters of comparison are not greatly relevant; she is simply one of the very best at what she does. This gift seems to be present from the beginning, and the films have no interest in showing us an extended process of learning, or honing a skill. Typically there is a scene in which her quality is to be judged, and she makes clear that she already knows its value. Alongside the gift, although not inseparable from it, is the physical beauty and sexual attractiveness that Hayward brings to the role.

2) The gift is exercised, and the resulting life led, in a place which is unforgiving, something that could be thought of as a jungle, or a frontier. The consistent quality of these places is that they are unhomey, and where a home is invoked it feels provisional, or perhaps theatrical.

3) The exercise of her gift brings Hayward's character into relation with male figures who are subservient to it. They service, or manage it, or simply cannot lay claim to any work or talent that can compete with it.

4) What does Hayward's character want from these men? There are questions here that she finds herself disabled from asking directly, and which the men cannot answer satisfactorily. They touch on the matter of what a home is, and specifically (although more repressed) what it is to have a child and nurture it. For the Hayward character the repressed thought of a child surfaces negatively, or perhaps with more pathos, in the quality of childishness that she detects, or perhaps evokes, in the male adults who surround her.

5) The endings cannot entirely erase our knowledge of the distance between the couple as well as their desire. If we hope for a happy outcome, it is the genre rather than the narrative that presses us in that direction.

In *I Can Get it for You Wholesale* the talent posed is dress design. Harriet Boyd (Hayward) is a designer of unerring brilliance, from cheap frocks to haute couture gowns. The setting is the New York garment district – a jungle where clothes are made and sold wholesale, where no member of the public penetrates.

I will outline the relevant strands of the plot. Harriet is a young dress model with a portfolio of her own designs. She persuades a garment cutter (Sam Cooper [Sam Jaffe]) who is an older married man, and a young unmarried salesman (Teddy Sherman [Dan Dailey]) to leave the established firm in which all of three of them work and enter into partnership with her in a new enterprise, which they christen Sherboyco Dresses.

The firm is a modest success, but subject to the hazards of the jungle in which its business is conducted. Teddy finds Harriet dealing with the advances of Savage (Harry von Zell) one of the firm's more sexually predatory buyers. He knocks Savage down and proposes marriage to Harriet, who angrily rejects him, replying to his declaration: 'You love me – you mean you want to own me'. He tells her that 'I want out' but she reminds him that they have an unbreakable contract with each other.

Harriet encounters riches, power and sophistication in the shape of J.F. Noble (George Sanders), the owner of a top fashion house who is impressed by her as a designer, and attracted to her sexually, although he has no interest in marriage.

Harriet works unremittingly for Sherboyco Dresses, though increasingly she is nervous and ineffective. Teddy

proposes to her again and she refuses him.

Teddy finds Harriet with Noble and denounces them, reminding Harriet that she is still contracted to their original partnership. Relations between Teddy and Harriet grow more distant and she prepares to leave for Paris with Noble. At the last moment she breaks with him and returns to the Sherboyco premises, where she finds Teddy and Sam. Teddy makes to leave, but Sam reminds the couple that the world of the garment trade is a jungle. As if to give them a chance to start over, he makes a show of introducing them to each other.

Thus the film poses the character played by Hayward between two principal men, with a minor role for Sam, who seems to stand in the film for the vulnerability of an ordinary life. It is only in thinking of him that the financial risks of business seem to matter to the others.

As a travelling salesman, Teddy trails an air of undefined sexual conquests. He is also shown as a cool manipulator within the highly sexualised world of the garment trade, dealing with both female and male buyers and their demands for various types of sexual pleasure as part of the business deals. We could say that he is so used to the sexual elements of this world that he thinks of himself as professionally indifferent to it.

His first marriage proposal to Harriet is treated entirely negatively, as an impulsive response to his jealousy of Savage, continuous with the violence of the brawl in the restaurant that precedes it. Appropriately Harriet finds a frontier metaphor for her refusal: 'When you marry someone it'll be to rope her off, while you go on playing the field'.

The setting in which Teddy makes his second proposal is Central Park. His pitch here is certainly less violent, and he provides it with the rather unimaginative romantic setting of a pony trap ride, but it is treated as a barely understood impulse. What Teddy admits to is a degree of unavoidable sexual obsession: 'I never stop thinking about it [*marriage*] – and don't think I haven't tried'. Harriet seems to understand the proposal only as a threat, an unnecessary complication to the stresses brought about by her gift. When Teddy talks glibly of happiness she replies 'I don't want to be happy'. What does she mean? Perhaps she is challenging



the adequacy of thinking of marriage as a matter of a man who will make you happy.<sup>4</sup> She at least seems to know that marriage to this man would not bring her anything she wants. The scene ends by invoking immaturity: Teddy says 'You make me feel like a boy in love', and Harriet's reply is not a denial: she simply says 'Get me a cab, boy; I want to go home'.

Teddy is characterised as a jealous child<sup>5</sup> who wants to

dominate and control Harriet, while Noble is certainly not childlike. He is appreciative of Harriet's creativity in a way that Teddy never is, and he has none of Teddy's violence. But his belief that happiness is easily achievable by another route – shared pleasure in relation to material objects – seems equally unsatisfying to Harriet.

Let us review these matters – these men – from Harriet's point of view. Her first words in the film are to Sam, and are about the pressure of time passing: 'If you wait another year it'll be two years, then ten years and you'll never do it'. A quality of her character is this impatience; she wants the success she believes her talent should give her, and she wants it fast. She knows, of course, that her attractiveness gives her access to these men, an ability to persuade them to her purposes, but she is engaged by neither Teddy's fantasy of marriage nor Noble's pleasures. One indicative moment is the end of the scene in which Teddy has confronted Harriet and Noble, and threatened her with enforcing the legal contract that will prevent her rise in the fashion world. After Teddy leaves, this is the dialogue:

Harriet: Can you get me out of it?

Noble: He loves you, but he wants to own you, because he's a man who has nothing. I have everything, and all I want is to share my pleasure in it with you.

Harriet: Can you get me out of it?



Harriet's impatient brushing off of Noble's neat analysis speaks to the degree to which she is dominated by desire – the desire for success. For a moment she is close to indifferent to what lies outside it, the choice represented by the two men.

The ordinary couple – oriented towards marriage and family – is present intermittently, and always at a distance from Harriet. There is the good dull couple of Harriet's sister and her boyfriend in the opening scenes, and later in the film we see Arnold Fisher (Marvin Kaplan), the junior factotum at Sherboycy and Ellen Cooper (Barbara Whiting), Sam's daughter. This starts off as a comic turn, but soon shifts into an image of unexceptional young lovers, able to take simple pleasure in each other; notably they appear in scenes from which Harriet is largely absent. What connects these couples is the fact or the thought of children, something missing from Harriet's relations to the men who court her.

At the end of the film Sam manoeuvres the couple of Harriet and Teddy into each other's arms by the act of ritually erasing their past, by proposing to them that they can

somehow (how?) start over. There is no dialogue, and the film ends on the image of their embrace. Silence and eros may offer a kind of happy ending, but it would be difficult to claim that the film has argued that one of Harriet's suitors is to be preferred to the other, or why she has to choose either of them.

*With a Song in My Heart* was released one year after *I Can Get it for You Wholesale*, in April 1952. Lang's film is an account of years leading up to and into World War Two, and the patriotism of its second half reflects its contemporary moment, the Korean War. It offers some obvious contrasts to the earlier film: it is a gaudy Technicolor production, it makes a claim to authenticity as a biopic, and it avoids the difficulty of estimating the quality of dress designs. Here we are offered an externally confirmed skill, Jane Froman's performances as a singer.<sup>6</sup>

Again the Hayward character's evident gift attracts a male figure who whose career is subservient to hers. Here the figure is Don Ross (David Wayne), an untalented musician who becomes Jane Froman's (Hayward's) manager. Early on we understand that he is persistently asking Jane to marry him; she is by now well-established as a star. The climactic exchange in this campaign exactly catches what these films express and what they repress. The situation is that Don has returned to New York after a trip to Hollywood and visits Jane at her house. He renews his marriage proposal, and this is the climax of the scene:

Jane: I want to be sure. Maybe this is a silly thing to say, but I want a home, Don, a real home.

Don: (*gestures at the luxurious town-house set*) What do you call this, a shanty in old shanty town?

Jane: (*looking down, away from him*) I don't mean just a house.

Don: Look, if it'll relieve your mind I give you my word that as cook, dishwasher, lover-boy, I'll be strictly Phi-Beta-Kappa. What more could you wish for than that?

Jane: (*now looking directly at him*) I can't think of a single thing, Mr. Ross.

This is as near as Jane can come to articulating the absence that this marriage will not cure, what for her would be the difference between a house and a home. We can see that Don, breezily deaf to the undercurrent here, does not include the term 'father' in his list. As Hayward looks at him at the end of the sequence, we can wonder, but not know, if



she realises it too.

After the marriage takes place we do not see the couple in a new home but just another performance space, a Hollywood sound set. When they are next in domestic space, it is in the same New York house set as previously. Here Jane tells the increasingly self-pitying Don to 'Stop acting like a two year old'.

Shortly after this we see the house set for the third time. Its presentation is explicitly negative, a freezing, unhomey place where Jane hears the news of Pearl Harbour. At the next concert sequence Jane's second suitor appears, a pilot in uniform, John Burn (Rory Calhoun).

Jane leaves Don to fly to Europe for a USO tour, but the plane crashes while touching down. Jane and John Burn survive, and fall in love while recovering from their substantial injuries. John recovers completely, but Jane's leg does not heal well. She is reunited with Don, who manages her comeback performances. Although an invalid she continues to sing and eventually leaves for the postponed USO tour, where she performs, initially on crutches, for wounded American servicemen. The film concludes with Don giving up all claim to Jane; the footage of her last European USO concert is followed by the closing part of the film's framing device, an awards ceremony, where the final shot is a pull-back from Jane singing. John is in the audience.

The striking and consistent element of this half of the film is the emphasis on infantilisation. The romance set up between John and Jane before the air crash is minimal,<sup>7</sup> and it stalls as a result of the effects of the crash. The injuries infantilise the male patients, who are reduced to playing schoolboy games, putting a model frog in a glass to scare their nurse. In Jane's case, her greatly extended illness distances her from a sense of sexual desirability which she connects with the possibility of leading an ordinary life: 'I know I'll never be a normal woman again. I'll never dance, I'll never go shopping, I'll never do any of the things other women do'.



Jane is seen to have completely physically recovered only in the final scene, so that the romance with John can putatively take off after the film ends. What precedes this in the film's closing acts is the introduction of a third male figure, an unnamed GI played by a then inexperienced actor, Robert Wagner, who features in two remarkable sequences. The first of these is a performance number in which Jane invites the GI on stage. It stresses his boyishness, his extreme gaucheness and sexual innocence; during the delivery of the song Jane literally has to place his arms around her. It is in the song (*Tea for Two*), that the repressed fantasy of the desire for home / family being equally felt by both partners persists. Its climax is their one sung exchange:

Jane: We will start a family, a boy for you

GI: A girl for me.

The second scene is set in a hospital during the USO tour. It opens with another strategically pointed song, one that restates the problem of finding a suitable man: *They're Either too Young or too Old*. The same GI, now totally infantilised by shell shock, emerges from the audience. In the performance that follows he momentarily fills the role of the son that has remained for Jane only a repressed possibility. There is a brief exchange, about home and where it is, and Jane sings a love song which ends, not with an erotic embrace but a maternal one, his bowed head on her shoulder.



These two films are not romances in which the Hayward character passes from an unsatisfactory man to one who is, or has, or can, become satisfactory. Rather they suggest worlds in which the Hayward character has to engage with the knowledge that the choices that she makes are not likely to offer her any final version of happiness.

## II: The Supportive Woman

This is the strand of Hayward's work in which she plays a wife or an established lover, distinguished by her character's having no special, call it marketable, talent. Here the man's activity holds the key to success: he is a writer, or a rodeo performer, or a geologist / prospector. The treatment of motherhood is significant. Hayward's character is not hostile to motherhood, or even desirous of it, but she is always at a distance from the direct experience of it. This is characteristic of her roles in the early 50s films. In *Rawhide* (Henry Hathaway, 1951), Hayward's character is seen with a child and effectively assumes the role of its mother, but it is the daughter of her deceased sister. Even though *I'd Climb the Highest Mountain* (Henry King, 1951) is a generally benign account of a marriage, Hayward's character (a country preacher's wife) gives birth to a stillborn child.<sup>8</sup> In *David and Bathsheba* (Henry King, 1951) the child that is born to the adulterous couple of King David (Gregory Peck) and Bathsheba (Hayward) dies, and in *The President's Lady* (Henry Levin, 1953) Andrew Jackson (Charlton Heston) and his wife Rachel (Hayward) adopt an abandoned baby, who also dies.

Feelings regarding motherhood are at the centre of the single film in this period in which there is more than one female star. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* stars Gregory Peck as Harry Street, an American writer who recollects passages of his life as he lies on a sickbed on an African safari. The story of his love for Cynthia (Ava Gardner), told in flash-

back, uses the stereotype of the wandering man (Harry as a writer bent on collecting material by obsessive travelling) posed against a woman with an overwhelming desire for home and a child. Cynthia discovers that she is pregnant but is unable even to communicate this. She cannot penetrate Harry's self-absorbed idea of himself as the potentially great artist. Disaster follows when Cynthia causes her baby to miscarry and eventually flees from Harry and dies. Harry moves on to Liz / Hildegard Knief, a wealthy European aristocrat with a positive hostility to the idea of children. (A scene between Liz and Harry's Uncle Bill [Leo G. Carroll] has the sole function of making this hostility explicit.)

Harry's latest love is Helen (Hayward), who is nursing him on the safari. She is presented as recollecting Cynthia to Harry, but her different relation to motherhood is established in a brief scene in which they first meet. Harry's voice over has been telling us that since losing Cynthia he obsessively follows women who remind him of her. He catches up with Helen as she is about to enter a car and they come face to face. This is the exchange:



Helen: Yes?

Harry: Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought you were someone else, someone I know. I'm really sorry, I didn't know you were ...

Helen: (*aware of at the faces that we can make out inside the car*) ... a woman with a family? They're my brother's children. Now, why did I tell you that?

This scene is completely redundant in terms of the plotting of the film. It serves only to position Helen as midway between the woman for whom motherhood is a determining condition and the one for whom it is completely undesired. Not unconnected with this is the relation of the three women to domestic space. Both Cynthia and Liz are attached to, and shown in, significant interiors: Cynthia's homely 'One-and-a-half rooms' in Paris, and Liz's grand, impersonal European palazzo. Whereas we never see Helen inside a building of any kind. Often a figure who desires a home, Hayward is rarely a figure who achieves one.

*The Lusty Men* is one of Hayward's finest films of the 1950s but as it is sadly obscure I will summarise its plot here. The setting is the contemporary American South-West. Hayward plays Louise Merritt, a young wife who has picked her husband Wes (Arthur Kennedy) from a range of suitors, as the one who 'Wanted what I wanted', what she calls 'A decent, steady life'. The couple's ambition is to

raise enough money to buy their own place; they have their eye on a tumbledown local ranch near Wes' work in Texas. In what in some ways feels like a narrative of the depression,<sup>9</sup> this is impossible, for Wes' job as a ranch-hand simply pays too little. He can make sufficient money only in one way, by exploiting his talents as a cowboy on the South-West rodeo circuit. A chance meeting with Jeff McCloud (Robert Mitchum), a rodeo champion who has retired through injury, offers a chance to do this under Jeff's tutelage and the three set off for the rodeo season. Wes is successful and becomes a minor rodeo star, but he is also seduced by the culture of drinking, and intrigued by the promise of sexual pleasure, on the party circuit that adheres to the rodeo. The couple finally have enough money to buy the Texas ranch that was their original ambition, but Wes rejects the thought of quitting the rodeo, its pleasures and its financial rewards. By now Jeff is in love with Louise; he (in effect) proposes to her, and is rejected. Although out of shape, he returns to rodeo competition and is fatally injured. This death breaks a spell, releasing Wes from his attachment to the rodeo, and the reunited couple of Wes and Louise head for home, the ranch in Texas.

I am conscious of the lameness of this plot summary in the light of the considerable achievement that is *The Lusty Men*. It demands a much more detailed discussion than I can mount here, where I shall be confining myself to those elements of Hayward's performance which connect to the issues that I have outlined.

The choice between men – always between more or less unsatisfactory men – appears here, in the story of Louise working in a tamale joint (meaning, a place with no prospects whatever) and choosing Wes – 'I picked him real slow, and real careful' – from the range of her suitors. She uses the phrase twice, once towards the beginning when she is explaining her story to Jeff, and once towards the end of the film, at the opening of Jeff's proposal scene, when her ironic tone expresses her knowledge that the carefulness of her choice has not served her well. But even though Wes' defects are clear to her, she cannot choose Jeff.

Let us look at the scene in which Jeff proposes to Louise. They have left the party, and stand together in the anonymous hallway just outside the rooms in which it is taking place. She asks Jeff for his help with Wes, essentially asking him to be parental. They quarrel a little about money, and as a response Jeff tells Louise that 'The only thing that kept me stringing along was you'. On the final word of the line Ray cuts to a close-up of Hayward's face, her melancholy registered in it. What she is thinking becomes clearer when she can finally (we see the effort) contain herself enough to reply. She says 'Don't let Wes end up the way you *did*' (my emphasis). This a surprise, both in its content and in its tense, its reference to Jeff's ending up being something that took place long ago, the implication of the irretrievable. Jeff offers a literal gloss on this, 'You mean, a washed-up, beat-up bronc rider?'.<sup>10</sup> She corrects him, painfully enough, with something more penetrating: 'Don't let him end up crippled'.

In what way does Louise understand Jeff to be crippled? It is not a matter of physical injury. It has to do with what she understands him to want of the world (to want of a woman, to want of her), the kind of world his desire would lead them to. Perhaps she feels his attitude to his own life story is crippled, a quality of mind he cannot amend. A few moments later she will put her face up to be kissed, but this is a gesture to a physical feeling on which she knows nothing can be built. We could sum this up by saying that in some metaphorical rather than literal way, she feels that Jeff



The Lusty Men: *Louise's face as Jeff proposes.*

represents agedness, a figure with more past than future.

What Louise knows about Wes is that despite his skill (which we see) and his ambition (which she explicitly acknowledges) he is Jeff's opposite: childlike. This is pervasive in the script, in defiant comments by Wes – 'I ain't wearing diapers' – and in a series of exchanges between Louise and Jeff in which Louise insists on Wes' childlike quality and Jeff responds by refusing to treat him other than as an adult, so refusing to act as his father. It is also marked in the action, for example in the opening of the climactic party scene. Wes emerges from a room in which he has been kissing his hostess Babs (Eleanor Todd) with his face covered in lipstick. The gesture of roughly scrubbing it off which Louise makes here is one arguably intended to position Wes as a misbehaving child.

We have already seen that another way in which the image of the child can be invoked in Hayward's films has to do with the figure of the injured man, and we can trace here the movement between the two occasions that Jeff and Louise embrace. These are the erotic clinch in the hall (which Wes nervously tries to deride, or wants to locate, as a child's game: 'playing post-office') and the moment as Jeff lies dying at the end of the final rodeo sequence. Louise holds him, and what we see is the suffering man comforted in the maternal, not the erotic, embrace.

There is the matter of actual children. The first mention of children is in the conversation between Jeff and Jeremiah Watrus, the man who owns the tumbledown ranch that was once Jeff's family home and that is the objective for Wes and Louise later in the film. (This conversation serves as a species of prologue, introducing many of the film's

subjects.) Jeremiah tells Jeff that 'maybe if I was married I might fix the place over, or if I had kids'. This is the first instance of a note that will be picked up later in the film, that it is the presence of a significant woman that determines, or might once have determined, male behaviour. Jeff will tell Louise 'If I'd have had someone like you it might have been a different story'.

The places that the film takes us to produce no children, with one exception. Booker Davis (Arthur Hunnicut), who is Jeff's old partner in the rodeo, and who represents an overt, physical version of the crippling that rodeo riding can result in, has a daughter, Rusty (Carol Nugent). It is significant that she is a teenager,<sup>11</sup> and the sequence in which she is introduced stresses as much the passing of the older generation as the coming of the next one. Jeff picks Rusty up in his arms and jokes about being weak and Booker (again, nominally joking) imagines Jeff's death in harness: 'When he's holding flowers on that fancy shirt, and the rodeo band's playing soft and sweet'. Rusty's role is important at the end of the film, where she alone is in a situation – that of a (metaphorical) daughter – in which love can be unproblematically owned up to. As Jeff lies dying in the saddle room of the rodeo, she mouths the words 'I love you'.

The ending – Jeff's death being the shock that causes Wes' decision to quit, and the couple's disappearing into long shot on their way back to the ranch – feels like a series of familiar generic moves. But there are two elements that complicate it, and comment on it.

First is a plot development. As the reunited couple are leaving the rodeo, Booker asks if he and Rusty can come along, and the request is granted. The decision to include

these figures – an older man who finds a home, and a motherless child who finds a maternal figure – reflects the degree to which the film needs such elements if we are to read it as a happy ending. Otherwise, it is hard not to feel that Wes is still the less than satisfactory husband that he has been throughout, and that the future for the couple is uncertain.

Alongside this we should note that Hayward is silent in the final moments. Her gestures indicate eloquently her relief at the turn of events (taking off Jeff's competitor number and screwing it up, and her nodded assent to including Booker and Rusty), but she has no words for them. Her last words in the film are an answer to Wes' enquiry about Jeff outside the saddle room: 'He's dead'.

For such a world, what is success? There is a wonderfully suggestive moment in the conversation between Jeff and Jeremiah in which the old man complains that all the books on success are written by successful men: 'Fellas like you and me'd get a lot more help if the books and rules on success were written by failures'. I take this to be not



whimsy but a way of glossing the film's world, as one in which even a brief episode of success is likely only to be part of a larger narrative of loss. The story that Jeff will later tell to Louise, about the bartenders he has made rich and the money he has won and lost, is something like the account that Jeremiah was asking for, the story of success told by a failure. It is a world in which nothing, apart from hope, can be firmly sustained. The film is not about lucky or unlucky chances – it is not telling us that Louise would have been happier or more successful if she had been able to choose Jeff (if, say, Wes had been the one to sustain a fatal injury). Rather it records a world in which no such solution is possible: the dream that Jeff tries to grasp is already behind him.<sup>12</sup>

This characterisation of a declined world, and the significance of what Hayward's choices, and of the choosing of her by men, can mean, is taken to a more extreme and abstract point in one of Hayward's more remarkable, if not altogether successful, films of the period, *Garden of Evil*, a western that operates on an overtly allegorical level. I will again summarise the plot.

A literal breakdown (of a ship's engine) causes three travellers, strangers to each other, to be stranded in a tiny Mexican coastal town. They are evident stereotypes and well-cast: the older, grave and experienced cowboy Hooker (Gary Cooper), the equally experienced gambler Fiske (Richard Widmark) and the young westerner Daly (Cameron Mitchell).

1) Prologue: A singer (Rita Moreno) performs provocatively

for the men in the village cantina. Her act is broken up by a fight between two Mexicans.

2) Leah Fuller (Hayward) enters the cantina, looking for men to help her to rescue her husband. He has been prospecting for gold, and has been trapped by a mineshaft collapse near a town some distance from the coast, in Indian country.

3) The Mexicans refuse, but all three travellers agree to help this beautiful woman in distress. One of the Mexicans, Vicente (Victor Manuel Mendoza), changes his mind and the four men make the difficult journey across country to the place named (by a priest) the Garden of Evil.

4) The place is a kind of western Pompeii, a town that has been overwhelmed by a volcanic eruption. Nothing remains but the tower of the drowned church, the mineshaft and the cabin attached to it. The men rescue Leah's husband John Fuller (Hugh Marlowe) from the mine; his leg is broken.

5) The six characters are aware that they are surrounded by another overwhelming and deadly force, the Apaches. They start their return journey, but Fuller is aware that his condition is lessening the chance of collective survival. He leaves on horseback, and at this moment an Apache arrow kills Daly.

6) The remaining travellers find Fuller, killed by the Apaches. Vicente, the Mexican, dies.

7) Leah and the two remaining men, Hooker and Fiske, reach a narrow pass which also represents the limit of Apache country. The men draw cards for who will stay and defend the pass while the other takes Leah to safety, and Fiske, the gambler, wins. Leah embraces Fiske and leaves with Hooker.

8) When they are through the pass Hooker tells Leah that Fiske has cheated him (in the drawing of the cards) and that he must go back and tell him so. He returns to find Fiske dying. Fiske tells Hooker to 'Go home, build one somewhere'.

9) In extreme long shot, we see two figures, implicitly Hooker meeting up with Leah. They ride off together.

The initial proposition of *Garden of Evil* is established by its prologue: the powerful fascination that female beauty has for these men, and the premonitory linking of that fascination with violence. The little parable of the cantina singer



is a way of proposing what is not explicitly stated at the point of departure, that the men agree to risk their lives for Leah because they are spellbound by her, because of each of them thinks that she might somehow end up choosing him (not entirely unlike how Jeff explains his taking up with Wes and Louise in *The Lusty Men*) if Fuller turns out to be

already dead or dying. The violence that breaks out between Hooker and Daly over Leah on the journey is identified ironically by Fiske as a kind of indirect courtship. He tells Hooker 'Now she's got you fighting for her honour', even though Leah shows no interest in any of the men.

Feelings for Leah are alternately admitted and bitterly disavowed. After his rescue the crippled Fuller denounces her: 'None of it was ever for me, from the beginning ... That's all I ever meant to you, a pick and shovel, to get you gold'. When Hooker asks Leah if this is true, she prevaricates: 'It is to him'. Characteristically, she admits the connection between her marriage and material comfort: 'Yes, I wanted gold, I wanted all the things it could buy. Most people do. I didn't want it like this'.

Leah proposes an act of sacrifice, that she will stay at the cabin and let the others escape. It is not clear whether she has proposed this out of love of Fuller, or out of recollection that she once loved him, or the belief that he loves or loved her. Both Fiske and later Fuller offer to stay with her. Eventually she is denied the status that might come with such a gesture – Hooker knocks her out and the men carry her off.



Four more deaths follow. Daly and the Mexican die in similar ways, both struck by arrows from assailants that they never see, simply eliminated by a superior force. The other two deaths (Fuller and Fiske) are explicitly sacrificial, matters of protecting Leah. This quality and its Christian reference is underlined by the manner of death in Fuller's case, which alludes to crucifixion.

But does sacrifice mean love? The meaning of Fuller's gesture, his riding off to his death, is discussed in a scene between Hooker and Leah. Hooker puts the case to Leah that Fuller's act meant that he loved her. Leah's reply is characteristic of the reserve that is typical of Hayward's roles: 'I wish I could remember it like that, and believe it'. (Equally characteristic is Hooker / Cooper's reply: 'I do'.)

At the point at which Fiske and Hooker are cutting cards

to decide who will be her saviour, Fiske tells Leah to 'Stay out of this' and 'For once something's got nothing to do with you'; she is now merely the necessary subject of male heroics. Leah embraces Fiske, but she does not kiss him. The final conversation between Leah and Hooker is when Hooker is telling her that he must go back to help, or to confront, Fiske. They stand apart without touching, and Leah makes the point that he would have stayed if he had won the draw. Hooker's stoic reply – 'somebody always stays' – effectively claims that what is truly important is not who partners Leah but the matter of male sacrifice.

In his dying words, the final dialogue of the film, Fiske tells Hooker to 'Take her home'. This gesture towards a positive resolution is picked up in the final seconds, in the rhetorical long shot of the two riders posed against the horizon.

*Garden of Evil* is a story in which the sexual desire for Leah is totally disastrous, and results in actions that lead to the deaths of four of the five principal men in the narrative. The highly significant setting is not the west as virgin land, nor the developed or developing country, but a place in which civilisation has been established and then erased by forces outside human control. The metaphor is one of being overwhelmed; its physical embodiment is the volcano drowning the town and covering everything in a sterile layer of dirt, volcanic ash. Rather than tracing a progression from a bad marriage towards the hope of a better one, the film shows a civilisation gone into reverse. The retreat from the very idea of marriage is marked in a striking image, of Leah burying her wedding ring in the earth of Fuller's grave.

*Garden of Evil* closes with a sunset, but this is not so much the precursor of a new dawn as a metaphor for obscurity. Darkness envelops a couple we cannot quite see, who do not quite touch, and may be exchanging words which we certainly cannot hear.

### III: Worlds without Homes

I will conclude by looking at two films made as Hayward's rate of production slowed in the second half of the decade. Both *I'll Cry Tomorrow* and *I Want to Live!* address a social issue represented through the Hayward role, respectively alcoholism and capital punishment. And both films mark a shift in the physical violence enacted on the Hayward character.

*I'll Cry Tomorrow* can be related to two of Hayward's earlier roles, the alcoholic wife in *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* and the representation of a famous singer in *With a*



Garden of Evil: *the final shot*.

*Song in My Heart*.<sup>13</sup> It is a biopic of singer Lillian Roth, and the anxiety and impatience which go with the exercise of talent are again present, but repositioned. The first scenes of the film show Lillian's childhood and locate the source of the anxiety, the desperation for success, in her mother Katie (Jo Van Fleet). As a result, in characterising the adult Lillian (Hayward), we are given much less of the thrill of success than in the case of Jane Froman. The professional song and dance sequences, which are largely confined to the first part of the film, always carry the note that Lillian sings partly to meet her mother's desire. In the middle passages the singing is mostly implied rather than shown, and is important only in that it is the explanation for Lillian's continuing income.

Unlike *I Can Get it for You Wholesale* or *With a Song in My Heart*, the four male figures against whom Hayward's character is posed never encounter each other. The film is constructed as a series of panels in which her relation to each man is unfolded, and I will follow this prompt by discussing them in order of their appearance.

David Tredman (Ray Danton) is implicitly Lillian's childhood sweetheart; a child actor plays the role in the opening scenes. He is a positively treated figure, who follows Lillian to California with the deliberate intention of courting and marrying her. I have argued that the desire for home and children expressed in these films is one never quite directly articulated by the Hayward character. Here the indirection takes the form of there being a statement of complete clarity – 'I want to have a home, with three or four children' – but the line is spoken by David, in a confrontation with Katie, just before Lillian enters the room.

The association of Hayward's roles with young men suffering from kinds of physical weakness or debility recurs here. David suffers from an unidentified illness, and dies before the couple can marry (there is some business with a soft toy, which memorialises the children they will never have). This loss is never truly recouped: Lillian begins to drink excessively.

The second male figure is Wallie (Don Taylor), a young serviceman and an audience member of Lillian's shows. He can be compared to John Burn in *With a Song in My Heart*: charming, physically attractive, a little boyish, and star-struck. After a night of drinking, Lillian wakes up to discover that she and Wallie have married. She knows at once that marriage to a man who depends on her career and her money will inevitably prove disastrous. The rest of this



panel is an account of drinking and of Wallie coming to realise that 'I'm a man, and I have to get to work' and leaving her.

Lillian's next suitor and eventually husband is Tony Bardeman (Richard Conte), and here I want to discuss the violence in the film. In the earlier fifties films physical

violence towards the Hayward character is largely absent – the break in the pattern is when she is knocked out by Hooker in *Garden of Evil*. In *I'll Cry Tomorrow*, violence is endemic. There is a lot of emotional violence, and there is direct physical attack. In the opening childhood sequence we see Katie hit Lillian (Carole Ann Campbell) so hard that she falls to the ground. The nature and level of violence then grows greater and more explicit with each of Lillian's male partners.

In David's case it is accidental, only a falling lunch tray, knocked over by the ardour of the lovers. After his death it is followed by the self-inflicted violence that is excessive drinking. The connection between drink and violence is nicely made, in the scene in which Ellen (Virginia Gregg), Lillian's nurse, puts a stick next to her – 'That's in case you want to hit me' – in a passage that ends with offering Lillian a first significant drink. It is extended and underlined in the scenes with Wallie, which mostly focus on the accidental anarchy caused by drinking, and some physical forms of roughness, pushing Lillian about as the relation disintegrates. But he does not hit her.

Wallie is not a villain, but Tony certainly is. Tony embodies the horror of being alone with a supposedly desirable but sadistic man, a nightmarish version of the domestic intimacy that the Hayward character craves. His violence is associated from the beginning with places that are private while not being homely. This is clear from his first meeting with Lillian, where he corners a drunken party guest in a locked room and viciously beats him. It culminates in his beating of Lillian, in the setting of a sleeping compartment on a train.<sup>14</sup>



Violence is associated with the persistent feeling of homelessness. From the very beginning, in which we do not follow Katie and her daughter into their home but are left on the doorstep with David, this is a world without homes, one lived in restaurants, dressing rooms, hotel rooms. Later in the sequences of Lillian's most uncontrolled alcoholism, we see a descent in social terms, to flophouses, cheap bars, and the squalor of the street. The one exception is the sequence in which Lillian has moved back in with her mother. This is a passage of extreme physical and emotional violence, making the point that the milieu is the opposite of what a home might be.

The final male figure is Burt McGuire (Eddie Albert), Lillian's sponsor in the Alcoholics Anonymous scenes. In Burt, whose cautiousness with women is explained by his having had polio as a young man, we see the reappearance of the injured or weak male. The relation moves from Burt being fatherly, to Lillian offering him something that looks like motherly nurture: one scene ends with his kissing her



*I Want to Live!* 'Don't lose this': Barbara returns her client's wallet as a cop looks on.

hands, his head pressed to her chest. An erotic connection is finally forced into being by Lillian's determined declaration of her feelings.

This declaration scene takes place in Burt's living quarters, one of the only spaces to treat the domestic positively, but the film does not conclude there. The final sequence poses Lillian alone in the frame as she walks across a television studio in which she is going to tell the story of her life. For a social good she will divest herself of her privacy, in front of an unseen audience of 'Forty million people'.

I now turn to *I Want to Live!*. The film can be related to Hayward's earlier biopics, insisting on its authenticity via written titles at its beginning and end. But it is the inverse of the American success stories of Jane Froman or Lillian Roth. Barbara Graham (Hayward) is an indisputable victim; the film opens with an account of her life in a world of (mostly petty) criminality. Unexpectedly this turns out to provide a context in which she is charged with a vicious murder of an elderly woman. She is found guilty and sentenced to death. Wise and his screenwriters leave some narrative threads unresolved, so that it is not clear whether Barbara is or is not innocent of the crime.<sup>15</sup> So we are not quite invited to address an injustice. Rather the extended sequences of Barbara's life after her conviction, and then of her execution in the gas chamber at San Quentin, make a social case against the death penalty which is not dependent on the guilt or innocence of the victim.

The film follows the pattern in which Hayward's is the only major female role and she is placed in relation to a series of significant, and significantly ineffective, men. Before the murder the man is a disastrous husband, apparently the last of a series of equally hopeless marriages. When Barbara is convicted, she becomes part of the professional life of two men, a newspaper columnist Ed Montgomery (Simon Oakland), and a psychologist Carl Palmberg

(Theodore Bikel). The motif of the physically debilitated man is again present. The minor case of it is Ed's deafness but the more developed example is Carl, who has an unspecified medical condition and dies unexpectedly, before he can help Barbara.

One connection with *I'll Cry Tomorrow* is the violence surrounding the Hayward character, here located as part of the criminal milieu. She is beaten twice on screen, once by Hank (Wesley Lau), her drug addicted husband, and once by Santo (Lou Krugman), one of her criminal associates. (This latter beating could be thought of as standing in for the film's unseen murder. It implies, without stating it, that this is the man who committed the crime Barbara will be charged with.)

The location of a dream of an ordinary domestic world, one which haunts Barbara but which cannot quite be touched, is a structuring presence in *I Want to Live!*. It is announced in a sequence exemplifying the loneliness of Hayward's persona, at the very beginning of the film. Barbara is caught by the police in a hotel bedroom with a man. Before the cops arrive, she glances in his wallet, and we see a picture of a wife and family. A few moments later, after a manoeuvre by Barbara which will result in the man's avoiding prosecution, they part and she hands him the wallet with the line 'Don't lose this'.

Barbara does become a mother, but there is no trace of a benign context. Wise presents the marriage to Hank by cutting from the scene in which it is being happily announced, with Barbara saying 'I envy the housewives carrying out the groceries', to the screaming face of the child, followed by the one family scene, the row between Hank and Barbara in which he beats her. The exigencies of the criminal world soon result in the child being placed in the hands of Hank's mother (again we do not see anything more of this domestic context than the name on an apartment mail box). After



I Want to Live! *Motherhood in prison: Barbara's baby is brought to visit.*

Barbara's conviction the child appears in a series of scenes where the unhomely settings of the prisons underline the impossibility of enacting motherhood within them.

A significant difference between this and the earlier films is that the men are not suitors.<sup>16</sup> In the first part the mood is one in which Barbara is treated as something to be used for the convenience of others, from two hoods who need an alibi in an early sequence, to the husband who needs money for drugs, to Perkins and Santo, the killers who may have framed her for her role of third murderer.<sup>17</sup>

After Barbara's arrest her context shifts from criminals to cops, to prison officials, to the lawyers and Ed Montgomery and Carl Palmberg, and finally to the staff of the gas chamber at San Quentin. These situations vary widely, from the deeply aversive to attempts at human communication. But what is true for most of them is that Barbara's presence is part of the professional lives of those around her and their relations to her are conducted, for better or worse, within that frame and cannot move outside it. A sequence in which Barbara turns away when Ed Montgomery tries to speak to her about how he feels about his behaviour towards her expresses the limitation exactly. Whatever they do, the couple cannot touch each other.

The coolness and ritual of judicial execution feel like a logical consequence of this mood. A small thread of imagery in the film effectively confirms it, that of a sudden aversion to physical intrusion on the self. Twice Barbara expresses her aversion to being touched, once in an early prison sequence and on her arrival at San Quentin. As she walks to the death chamber, her last request is for a face mask, as if seeing and feeling the gaze of others is now too much. And the film's final image is of Ed Montgomery, unable to bear the world and its wailing sirens, turning off his hearing aid, so that the film's soundtrack falls silent.

At the centre of my analysis of these films has been the subject of what can be expected from a marriage (or a relation

that is like a marriage or might lead to one), and the experience that marriage might be lonely, while not being homely.<sup>18</sup> We have seen Hayward continually in situations in which an idea of home seems massively distant, lost in the past or suspended in an impossible future. What she searches for is a solution to this condition, which cannot be achieved alone. It involves making the best of what men there are – the fearful or the cynical or the bitter or the heroic or the immature or the too mature – figures that the films seem frequently to choose to represent, literally or metaphorically, through the imagery of the crippled. Her enduring power to move us lies in the intensity she can impart to this predicament, and it is the sadness of it that we read in Hayward's beautiful, disappointed face.

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<sup>1</sup> One of these nominations resulted in the award, for *I Want to Live!*. She had also been nominated at the beginning of the decade for the 1949 release *My Foolish Heart*.

<sup>2</sup> Two standard works on the woman's film indicate how little attention Hayward has received. Both Molly Haskell and Jeanine Basinger comment on her role in the final remake of *Back Street* (1961), noting in passing the decline from the qualities of the original. Haskell mentions *My Foolish Heart* (1949) and Basinger uses *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (1947) as part of her concluding argument. The only substantial mention of Hayward's work in the 1950s is a paragraph on religious marriage in *I'd Climb the Highest Mountain* (1951) by Basinger. See: Haskell 1974: 174, 184; Basinger 1993: 203, 327, 489-490.

<sup>3</sup> The roots of this preoccupation can be traced back to two films of the 1940s which lie outside the decade I am discussing here, both directed by Stuart Heisler: *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (1947), and *Tulsa* (1949).

<sup>4</sup> The moment brings to mind the final scene of *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942), and Charlotte and Jerry's exchange on the subject of 'Some man who will make you happy'.

<sup>5</sup> There is a moment in the film in which Teddy implies that he is aware that he shares his name with a child's toy.

<sup>6</sup> It is Jane Froman's voice that we hear: all of Hayward's songs were dubbed.

<sup>7</sup> The material preceding the plane crash consists of a scene in which John ties a Mae West jacket onto Jane as part of an in-flight demonstration, something that feels a little like a children's game of dressing up.

<sup>8</sup> In neither case is there anything in the film's plotting that requires this.

<sup>9</sup> One of the writers of the film was Horace McCoy, responsible for a classic novel of the depression, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935).

<sup>10</sup> This is an echo of an earlier conversation between Louise and Jeff which she ends by pleading with him not to turn Wes into a 'Saddle tramp like yourself'.

<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to turn the impression of the performance on screen into a number. Carol Nugent was fifteen years old in 1952.

<sup>12</sup> My language here is deliberately intended to recall one of the classic formulations of this feeling, the ending of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

<sup>13</sup> *I'll Cry Tomorrow* (MGM) had been originally submitted to Twentieth Century Fox and rejected. Daryl Zanuck came to see this as a mistake (Behlmer 1993: 256-257).

<sup>14</sup> The narrative of marriage to a husband who is revealed to be violent continues to the end of the decade. It is the main subject of *Woman Obsessed* (Henry Hathaway, 1959).

<sup>15</sup> The accounts of the events on which the film was based equally do not answer the question of the actual guilt or innocence of Barbara Graham (Linnet 1981: 216-217).

<sup>16</sup> Hank is not an exception to this, as the film shows us nothing whatever of any courtship.

<sup>17</sup> The point here, expounded in detail in the film, is that Santo and Perkins may have framed Barbara, with the motive that if convicted her death sentence will be commuted (as a mother) with a consequent effect on their own punishment.

<sup>18</sup> This is of course a re-phrasing, taking my 'homely' to mean something like what Jeremiah means by 'private', in the moment from *The Lusty Men* which is the epigraph to this article.