

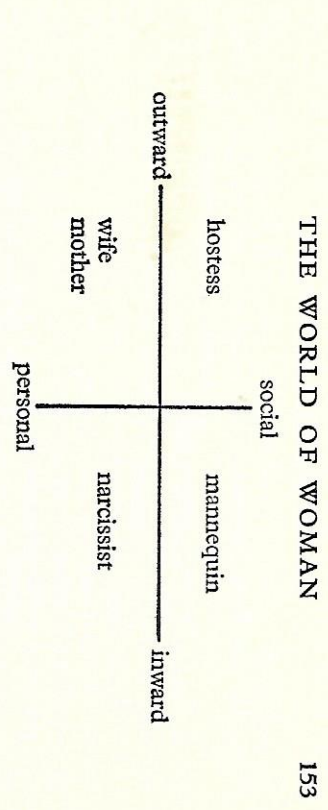
ACTORS AND THEIR WORLDS

We have two opposed sets of characteristics which arise from consideration of the detailed analysis of female actors. The general nature of each will be apparent, but the detailed picture can now be completed. It should be emphasized again that these sets of characteristics are not the result of *one* group of correlations, but the outcome of a whole series of interdependent and mutually validating correlations.

There does exist, between the two opposed types, a middle ground which provides the skeleton of a 'neutral' type. However, with these illustrations and the women portrayed in them, the tendency in the majority of cases is towards one of the two extremes, not towards the middle area.

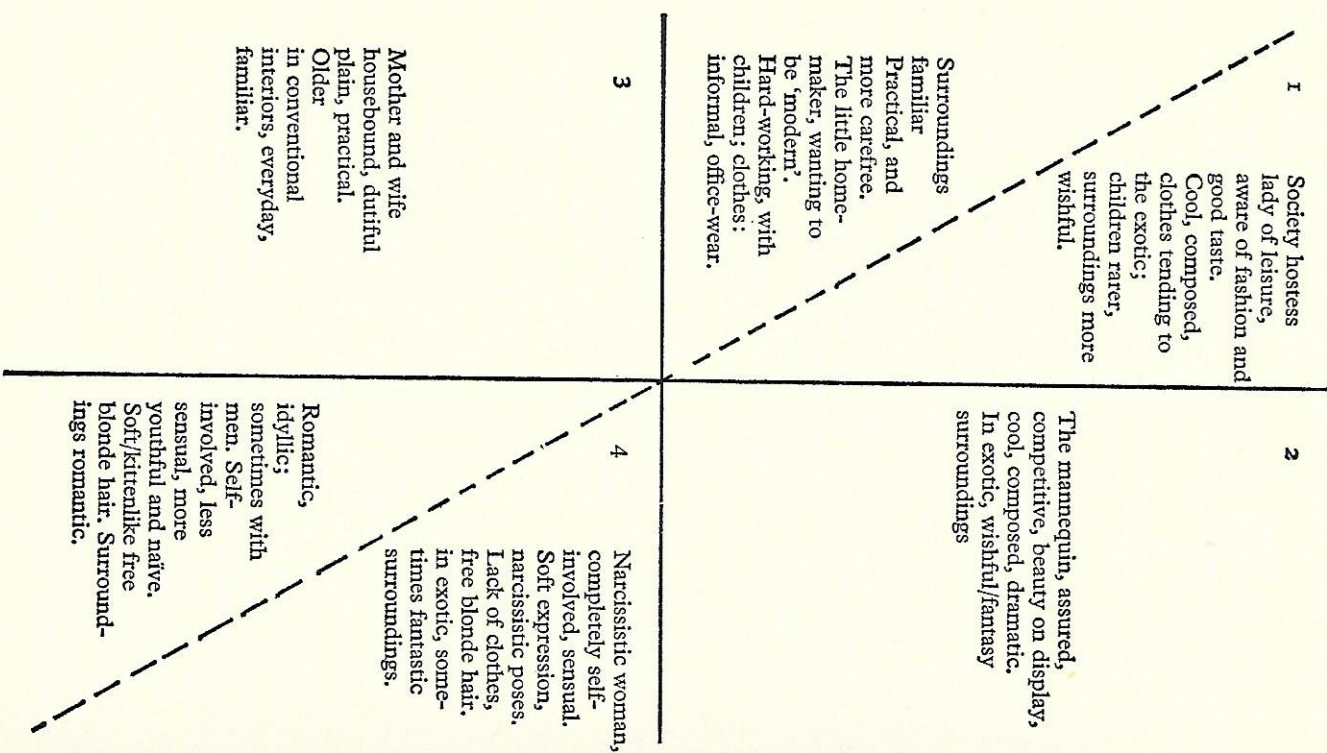
<i>Inward/self-involved:</i>		<i>Outward/concrete:</i>
attention to self, middle-distance		attention to objects, people
tactility to self		tactility to objects, people
narcissistic, soft expressions		practical, maternal expressions
dramatic, relaxed, narcissistic		functional poses
poses		moulded, non-blonde hair
freethrowing, blonde hair		informal or office-wear, uniforms
exotic clothes and lack of clothes		older
younger		plain
sophisticated		
<i>Neutral:</i>		
attention to reader		
no tactility		
catalogue, carefree (and cool?) expressions		
dummy, carefree (perhaps composed) poses		
shaped hair		
exotic, informal, office-wear		

The two main sets can be seen from differing perspectives, and we here choose to take two oppositions which seem crucial to them, namely (i) the distinction between inward-looking-ness and outward-looking-ness (which contains something of the unreal/real and ethereal/concrete oppositions) and (ii) the distinction between the public and the private, the social and the personal. The qualities can then be grouped on the two axes in order to generate four types, an arrangement which seems to summarize the relationship to each other of the most recent roles or ways of life which are presented in the illustrations:



Sophistication, or lack of sophistication, is another of our major perspectives. This can also be shown on the schematic arrangement we have just made. The sophisticated/non-sophisticated (or most sophisticated/least sophisticated) axis would run diagonally and the division between more and less sophisticated would run through the middle of the hostess and the narcissist roles as shown below. The mannequin remains the most sophisticated and the mother and wife the least so. Expressed in detail the arrangement would look like the chart on p. 154, though the terms obviously remain general.

The *mannequin* is the least lifelike of the roles. She is in an artificial world, often obviously so in the way she stands and looks (dummy poses and catalogue expressions). She is on show, on exhibition—but, crucially, on exhibition in a competition with others. Backgrounds, props, expressions even—seek to add to her sophistication, fashionableness, or uniqueness. Although in a social/competitive situation, sometimes with men present, but more often with women, the mannequin is essentially interested only in herself and the impression she is making. She does not condescend to notice her associates and thereby admit her ordinary stature. She is aloof, haughty, and ostensibly sufficient unto herself, while relying on others to reinforce her self-image. Her outdoor surroundings tend to be exotic, and her indoor ones, non-domestic. The relationships which involve her are divergent, and her attention is rarely directed towards things or people. The props accompanying her are not functional, and the presentation is streamlined, complex, and fully exploits visual techniques. The evidence supports the view expressed by Murray Wax (above, Chapter 3) that clothes are essentially social, and explains his inability to account in the same way for the use of make-up, which he also thought to be socially oriented, but which he knew was widely used by women spending the whole day on their own. The evidence of the preceding chapter suggests that clothes are predominantly social in nature, while cosmetics are primarily private and personal. This does not mean that a substantial number of cosmetic and hair preparation illustrations, for example, do not portray the woman as mannequin, but it does point to a significant distinction



between the crucial functions of cosmetics and clothes. Examples are common – but see the advertisements for Berlei and Sun silk (plates 10a and 7a) for two typical variations.

There is perhaps a greater variety of products represented in the *narcissistic* sector. The most central, nevertheless, are cosmetics and hair preparations, though underclothes form a substantial part. The narcissist – 'self-involved female' is perhaps a better, less exclusive term – varies from the woman who is literally and metaphorically wrapped up in herself, to the girl deep in a reverie. Even when being seductive, she is (perhaps more than ever) aware of her own femininity and sensuality rather than of the presence of any potential lover. At the periphery of this type is the girl in a haze of romance – perhaps with a man – but who is in the last resort more bound up with aspirations and dreams of her own than with the actuality of the man. The ubiquitous diamond engagement ring advertisements are almost all perfect examples. This is odd, because engagements *are* relationships with men. Yet more attention is paid to the girl's feelings about herself in this aspired-to situation than to the bond itself. The self-involved female has, typically, a soft expression and directs her attention and tactility towards herself. She is sophisticated or naïve – her hair is frequently long and blonde and she often wears very few clothes or none at all that the reader can make out. She is alone with herself, involved in her body and her own beauty.

Mention has been made of the proliferation of nakedness in the media. In this respect the advertisements are obviously in line with a general change in standards of 'acceptability' or 'decency', or at least with a change in the media. The numerous nudes are not merely a feature of an allegedly permissive society, however. In the first place, nudity, even if not as blatant as currently portrayed, has been common in women's magazine advertisements for some years. Second, its occurrence is restricted to certain fairly well-defined areas and is by no means used to sell everything and anything from careers to cornplasters. Nakedness is a feature of advertisements for products of the 'feminine' sort and to a lesser extent of tights and underclothes. It coincides with features outlined above – long blonde hair, for example; but also, and equally crucially, with such factors as self-directed tactility and self- and middle-distance-directed attention, and most especially with introversion and the narcissistic role. It is not the same sort of nudity as that which graces the pages of magazines for male readers such as *Playboy*, which is brazen, directly suggestive in a rather arch way, and has far more in common with the inaccessibility of the mannequin type. This type of nudity is private, isolated, and the source of wonder, pleasure and satisfaction to the subject. It does not differ, however, from the *Playboy*/stripper variety in its experience of the body as alienated/object rather than integrated/subject. The body is reified, something seen as

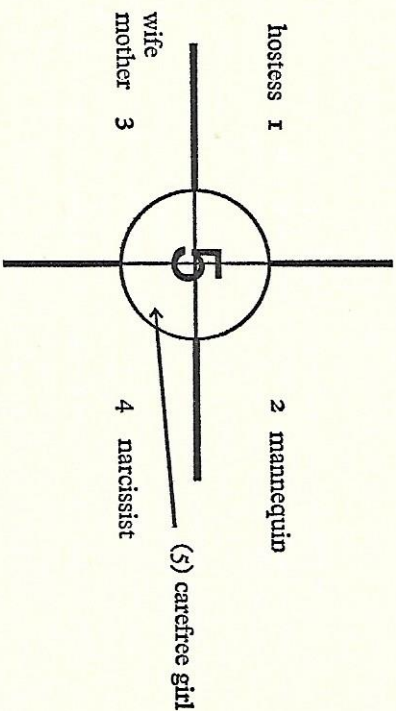
an object to admire or even revere in a quasi-religious way. The use of dramatic, isolating shadow, mysterious darkness, the ethereal mistiness of focus are common techniques of transporting the female to a personal world of reverie and self-contemplation. The Enkasheer illustration is a good example as are also the illustrations for Cutex and Bides (see above) and the Féllice advertisement shows the introspection of the girl even when accompanied by a man (in a typical semi-reciprocal relationship).

The *hostess* has much in common with the mannequin. Like the mannequin she sees action on the social front: her peers may in fact be her competitors. She moves in a domestic world, however; the house is her realm and her *raison d'être* is to exhibit, not herself, but herself externalized in the form of food and decor. The house, its furnishings, its decoration, and the food served in it, are marks of her sophistication, fashion awareness, sense of good taste and status. Sometimes she may veer to the extravagant (with luxurious furnishings and exotic cuisine); at other times she moves more securely in a modern, tidy, neatly decorated house. She is aware that her surroundings are speaking for her and must therefore be on her guard lest they open their mouth in the wrong place or say the wrong thing. Because what they say is very much altered by the passing of time, she must be constantly alive to changes in styles and fashions. She is proud of this world, which is her creation. Nevertheless, although she has produced this world, she cannot possibly escape *from* it. The alterations she can make to it are marginal and not structural, its basic nature remains firmly intact, restraining and resisting every effort at reconstituting its function. She is more object oriented than the narcissistic or mannequin, more often sophisticated than not—frequently exotically dressed but older—just a little more staid—than the two roles already considered. The example, New World (see plate 8a) is extreme but not uncommon or untypical.

A similar situation surrounds the *wife and mother*, but the actual concrete environment is of much less importance. The home is important, crucially important, but it is not the decor nor the fashionableness of it that is important so much as the duties that are carried out in it: those of being a housewife and a mother. Interiors tend to be far more conventional, everyday and familiar than those accompanying the *hostess*—and exteriors, where they occur, are local witness Dr Whites 'everyday is much the same'. The wife and mother is older and plainer than the women portrayed in the other main roles, unsophisticated, and practical in outlook. She dresses more functionally, though rarely in really workmanlike clothes. Her relationships are more often reciprocal than in the case with other women and she gives her attention to objects or people—often children. The props that accompany her are functional in the main, and moreover, the style of the advertisements in which she appears tends to be crowded, with fewer techniques and a smaller

number of constituent elements. It is a busy, plain and simple, honest world. Her task is a private, non-competitive one. The home may be beautiful, but only as a backdrop to the role being played by the woman. Her creative drives are not to be wasted on fashionableness or status-seeking, but to be channelled into the loving and cherishing of husband and children, and the running of the complex mechanism called the household. It is a demanding job and a challenging one, it requires effort, skill, endurance and knowledge to be executed successfully. The reward, the satisfaction, is personal and private. There is a contradiction, nevertheless, between the presentation of woman as a real hard-worker and the idea of a calm, satisfied, attractive woman. In fact, the work is never too gruelling. It is skilful, creative and needs a great deal of love and care—but it need not make you ugly—just more mature and fulfilled. See advertisements (plates 5a and 13b) for Cookeen (kitchen-mum), Electricaire (baby-centred-mum) and there are the fun-mums and grans for different aspects.

Of the roles enumerated at the beginning of this chapter, those unaccounted for in the scheme so far are the *friendly/carefree girl* and the *independent or career woman*. The former is balanced between sophistication and unsophistication—for the girls are often fashionable, but perhaps rather naïve—not dowdy, but not chic; between the social and the personal, and the inward and outward. The carefreeness or friendliness is social by its nature to some extent, and outgoing as well, and yet the exuberance and the cheeriness is rarely directed to anyone or anything in particular, rather to an image held only in the actor's mind (see Tampax). The role takes up, therefore, a central position in the schema.



In a way it is a mock carefreeness, for the freedom is not the freedom to do anything specifically. Further, the carefree female is always a *girl*, which gives one a sense of a short spell of deceptive freedom before

the inevitable decline into one or other of the roles on either side. It is, by its nature, a transitional role. She is the fluttering butterfly which has not yet decided where to settle. She is 'having fun while she's young', but she too will (and she knows) settle down quite soon, and in fact looks forward to it.

At no point does the schema allow for the social woman to be doing anything that is more constructive or indicative of an independent personality than hosting or being beautiful (showing off, in either case), or for the private woman similarly to be doing anything more than admiring herself or carrying out household duties. The *independent woman*, or the *career woman*, is the remaining role presented in the illustrations. She is the only woman to be involved in something not to do with social success, home and family, or her own femininity, who has any stability or substantial nature. First, it must be realized that she is infrequently portrayed. The schema cannot accommodate her without considerable disruption.

A major part of this role stems from illustrations for career advertisements and it is clear that, outside of (dull) career advertisements, females in jobs—whether unmarried girls or working wives—are hardly ever represented. The impression gained from the roles offered is that women are of sufficiently noble birth to have means of their own, or that they are provided for by men, be they boyfriends or husbands.

Who is the independent/career woman? What is her portrayal like? Her very scarceness makes any overall portrait very difficult to draw. As has been mentioned before, a fair proportion, if not most, of these women are members of the armed services or (less frequently) the nursing profession. These are careers, certainly, but they allow very limited independence. They are complete, self-contained worlds in the way that the world of the wife and mother is. They offer the extreme alternative to any of the feminine roles previously discussed and preclude any composite alternative which would take account both of a job and a normal social life. They can be the complete opportunity for opting out for anyone who cannot meet the demands of the other roles, because they offer a total identity, a world which is completely self-validating. It is significant that in this way the career becomes irreconcilable with other roles—with being married, with having a good time or good taste, etc. What remains? An office-worker or two, women as comics, women setting off to travel, a couple of more mature ladies. From the picture presented by these illustrations one could not begin to grasp the fact that one-third of the total labour force is composed of women. The 'working woman' is simply omitted from the world of meaning of the illustrations. No one would think that women ever participated in any pastimes, hobbies, sports or any non-domestic interests. The girl in the Tampax illustration (plate 4b) is one of the few instances of the excep-

tion. (The advertiser might ask why the advertisement should refer to such things. The Tampax advertisement replies: why not?) The WRA F illustration (plate 7b) is representative of the picture presented by career advertisements. The impression given is that of a life which is dull, unfashionable and regimented.

How far is the type of role portrayed a result of the type of product advertised? Product type and role are connected, and closely connected, but there are sufficient variations to make a one-to-one correspondence impossible. Clothes might have been presumed to correspond fairly completely with the mannequin role but the correspondence is in fact not at all complete, and products such as tights and underclothes, cosmetics and hair preparations, are to be found in several differing sectors. The nature of these links will become clearer when we turn to consider the products.

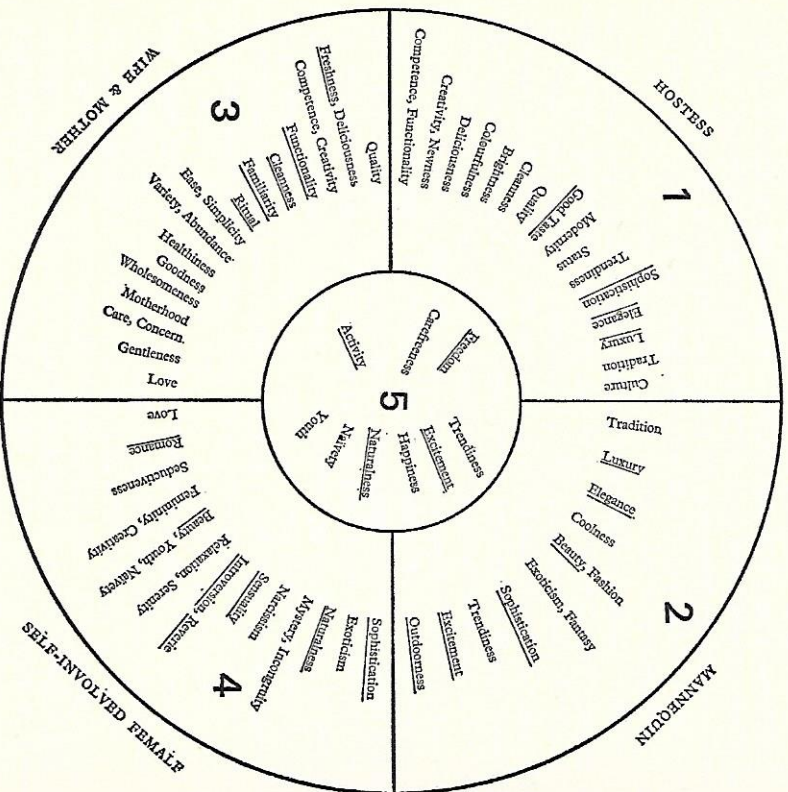
A further mechanical/economic connexion needs to be examined. Is it perhaps that the limitations of role options available is due to the need to sell those products which those sorts of women on whom the roles are based are most likely to buy? Is the selling of femininity or housewifeliness a necessary corollary of selling 'feminine' or household goods? A proper response to this theory is that there is no reason why frying pans and shampoos could not be sold with an emphasis on the time-saving, efficient qualities which would leave one free for other things (Brillo took this approach a year or so ago). Nor is there any reason why illustrations for products which make people look nice are obliged to concentrate on elements of introversion and passive femininity. (However, would such products sell as well to an audience tuned to a world of equality, wage-earning and extra-domestic interests? How would expensive 'special' cosmetics body lotions, and false eyelashes sell in such a world?)

The clusters of meanings derived from the props when examined more closely, fit into the well-defined world of woman as so far described. The largest grouping is that of good taste, status, discrimination, etc. and following that, naturalness and femininity. The other three areas are childhood/babyhood, domestic ritual, and fun/excitement. One can see how these correspond to the explanatory scheme that has been derived, and it becomes apparent that these meanings relate to each other in broad but important ways. The meanings may or may not correlate fully with illustrations portraying the corresponding roles. Where they do, there is extra reinforcement, but it is with the overall pattern, the underlying structure, that we are concerned. Recreation connects with the concern for nature and the outdoors, which itself links up with the naturalness of femininity. Femininity leads on to maternity (babyhood) and hence to the domestic ritual of wife and mother. On the other hand excitement, and the enjoyment of the good life connects with

sophistication and fashionableness, with fashion and style in the home, concern with the domestic, and back again to the domestic ritual.

If we take into account, not female roles, but female life patterns, moving from carefree youth through to the responsibilities of home and family, and superimpose these dynamic relationships, two paths emerge.

A Guide to the World-of-Meaning of Advertisement Illustrations included in this survey



Underlinings indicate greatest frequency of occurrence.

Meanings are not restricted to the zones in which they appear of course. Happiness, for example, occurs throughout, wherever women are pleased and satisfied with their present roles—but it occurs most of all in the area indicated.

All the meanings noted have positive values in the advertisements. This is the world-of-meaning of the advertisement illustrations.

One path lies through sophistication, social competition and concern with fashion and style, into the home. The other moves through naturalness and femininity through to maternity and the establishment of the household. One is more assertive (competitive and public) and the other inward, 'sensitive' and private. These, one suggests, are the two paths offered to women as patterns for their lives. They move inevitably towards the same goal.

The absence of a link between sophistication and naturalness is interesting and may prove significant. There is a connexion of sorts in that many of the mannequin settings are outdoors and rural. Is this countryside-as-backdrop the same as or similar to the 'naturalness' of the more self-involved female, or are there important differences? In the case of the mannequin, the countryside is a backdrop, it is not integral—its purpose is to be exotic, exciting, fashionable—or merely to provide an interesting, colourful background. Second, in the more narcissistic cases the natural elements are more closely associated with the actor, the relationship is far more tactile.

MEN, if anything, are more stereotyped than women. They exhibit a far more restricted range of appearance and manner: their dress is conventional and their hair short and neat. The plain ones tend to be workers or husbands, and the sophisticated ones to be heroes or mannequins. There is a sameness about them, however, which gives an overall impression of characterlessness. The sophisticated type merely has more style to his characterlessness than the plain type.

Men, of course, are the opposite of self-involved. Their attention and tactility is most often directed towards people or things and their general manner is frequently practical/functional and outward going. It is in this respect that the men in advertising differ most radically from the women. Man is as noticeable by his absence as by his presence and it is the *aliveness of the woman* which is important in so many cases, as has been noted above. In contrast, the man is only rarely seen on his own. Most of the time he serves as an accompaniment to the female. Man either works or is concerned with the world of the woman in a supporting role. Most men alone are those with specific work roles; those with women are husbands, boyfriends, heroes... The worker is separate, in another world, unconnected to the woman by bonds of romance or family.

The male mannequin is more common than might have been anticipated in women's magazines. In many cases he is wearing and exhibiting clothes knitted by the woman, or clothes presumably bought by the woman. He is, in a sense, a projection of herself in a way similar to that in which the he-man/hero is a manifestation of her dreams. The husband and the boyfriend are real, while the mannequin and the hero are unreal, ideal, flawless, even if they are cut-out dummies. Their

relationship to the woman is insubstantial and ephemeral. The ordinary often plain and simple, boyfriend or husband is more lifelike and more attainable. He is closer, concrete, fallible. The ideal is, perhaps fortunately, unreal—and the real is easily dealt with, for the men are but simple beings.

Frequently, as we have seen, the relationship between male and female is one-sided: it is a relationship in which the man is giving his attention to the woman while she is interested elsewhere, and that elsewhere is often herself. This occurs in all roles, but noticeably with the boyfriend. Nowhere is the female self-sufficiency and quiet contempt for the outside world more clearly stated (Félice, plate 12a). There are some occasions where the boyfriend is treated rather more romantically. The boy and girl (rarely persons of great maturity) signify this by looking dreamily into each other's eyes. The content of their communication is mysterious, full of what we assume to be the unspoken language of people in love.

As father, with the happy family, the man is more like a child himself, moving closer to the buffoon role. The father is one more responsibility for the woman to look after. As husband, he is served, waited on, and ministered to—the guest in the wife's house. He is the man whose main business and concern is elsewhere; his job—somewhere 'out there' where he becomes one of those workers pictured in other places, is removed from intimacy into the unconnected and unknown world of his work.

To the husband who cannot cope by himself, the father who is really just a kid himself, the buffoon who spills things and acts the fool, the boyfriend who is a slave and suitor—to all these the woman is superior, she is in control of the situation. On the other hand the man as mannequin, hero, or sometimes as boyfriend, is often but a cipher, a thing of no substance, something standing for 'a man' and little more.

Outside of these examples that we have considered at length, what other roles, stereotypes, caricatures even, are left? There are not many. Only a handful of the actors do not fit the roles already described. The occurrence of other roles is usually deliberate and purposeful—for example, a butler is used in order to add class and prestige, or a Chinese man to make a point about washing or the exotic East. Most work-roles have already been considered, but there are those which transcend just being a job, and seem to be a way of life—like the butler, and the vicar.

Of the men, the following can be distinguished. *Racial types*: Chinese (indicated by facial characteristics, exotic tunics, high collars: there is one old gentleman with a round Chinese cap, a long wispy beard and an inscrutable expression) and Arab (mounted on camels, dark and sullen, dressed in flowing white robes). *Elderly gentleman*: the refined gent (with neat moustache and three-piece suit), dashing gent (balding,

with large moustache and glint in the eye), grandfather (surrounded by kids, white-haired, genial, serene, with newspaper, pipe and glasses) and the old man (with beard and glasses and a tweedy suit). *Special vocations*: butler (respectable, efficient, white-haired and fatherly), policeman (genial, stout, the honest Mr Ploot) and vicar (grey-haired, black clothes and dog-collar, plus an ingrating smile; or younger, comic, with a foolish awkward smile). The only other portrayal is that of a melodrama villain—with evil eyes, sleek black hair and a thin moustache.

All the women so far unaccounted for are middle-aged or older, apart from one portrayal of an innocent heroine from melodrama. The rest are, broadly, either 'grannies' or 'old wives'. The *grannies* have grey/white hair, short, often in bun or hairnet, sometimes wearing traditional black clothes, surrounded by children, plump and serenely smiling. There are various *old wives*: the shocked (maternal, respectable, prim, mouths open and hands flung in the air); the bumbly, fussy and nosy—usually thinner—and in one case accompanied by net curtains and aspidistra (well-known stereotypes are used to communicate messages clearly and quickly: the peering nosy woman is easier to identify as such if she has net curtains and an aspidistra as props); and the advice giver (comic, often a bit tatty, old-fashioned, sure and set in purpose). Apart from grannies and old wives there is only (a) the elegant woman—with dyed hair, neat but stylish clothes, heavy jewellery and rather neutral—and (b) the office woman—neat, efficient, strict, and rather formidable—and these are few and far between.