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Brando on the *Bounty*

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Film studio MGM's 1962 film *Mutiny on the Bounty* (hereafter *1962*) accords with no one's assumptions about the events that occurred on HMAV *Bounty* in 1787–89, and Marlon Brando is nobody's idea of Fletcher Christian. This may be why the film is impossible to see at the cinema, why it never gets shown on television, and why the DVD version is harder to find in libraries than MGM's earlier film of the same title, which was released in 1935 (hereafter *1935*). That film, starring Clark Gable as Christian and Charles Laughton as William Bligh, won the 1936 Academy Award for Best Picture, and remains the canonical cinematic version of the mutiny on the *Bounty*. The 1962 film (with Trevor Howard as Bligh) was nominated for seven Academy Awards at the 1963 Oscars, but was blown out of the water by David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*. Like another contentious epic, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *1962* was delayed by 'long choosing, and beginning late'.¹ Its production spanned two years and went through several writers and directors, including the uncredited Carol Reed. Although it did reasonably well at the box office, the film failed to recover its costs – a failure for which Brando (whose contract

1 John Milton, *Paradise Lost, Milton: Poetical Works*, Douglas Bush (ed), 2nd edn, London, Oxford University Press, 1966 (1674), Book 9, line 26.

gave him control over the script, who is reputed to have done much of the directing, and to whom the delays and budget blow-out have been attributed) has been exclusively blamed.

Neither of MGM's versions of *Mutiny on the Bounty* has any serious claim to historical accuracy, or draws consistently on the extant documentary sources of the mutiny and its aftermath. The courts martial, of Bligh on his return to London without his ship in 1790, and of the mutineers in 1792, are matters of public record; and, in addition to Bligh's official log and his private journal, there are eyewitness accounts from two *Bounty* crew members, Ship's Master John Fryer and Boatswain's Mate James Morrison. Both films cite a novel, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, by Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall (1932), among their writing credits and, therefore, as a 'source' for their content. This novel is narrated in the first person by one Roger Byam, a fictional creation based upon aspects of the character of *Bounty* Midshipman Peter Heywood.² From our perspective, Byam's main function in the novel is to be a friend and confidant to Christian. On Tahiti, he is Christian's interpreter, in the literal sense of translating the Tahitian language for Christian's understanding; but he is also the interpreter of Christian in the broader sense of his proximity to Christian supposedly affording him insight into Christian's motivation for the mutiny. Such insight, of course, is purely fictitious. Byam's presence and perspective are retained in *1935*, to which they are central, but *1962* does without him. This exclusion leaves Brando space in which to explore the dramatic possibilities of the mysterious character who is both the mutiny's prime mover and its black hole.

Most reviewers in 1962 were still well-disposed towards Brando, but they were puzzled by his performance in this film. Christian may have led a mutiny, but the character created by Brando bore no identifiable relationship to the earlier and more explosively rebellious characters of his career: Stanley Kowalski, Emiliano Zapata, Terry Malloy and Johnny Strabler. The main reason for the puzzlement was that Brando's performance could not be placed, for his career offered no model for what he did in *1962*. Subsequent commentators have responded more harshly to the challenge of Brando's Christian, dismissing his performance as extravagant and self-indulgent. Most recently, Dan Chiasson has said that in Brando's many historical roles – and he specifically mentions

2 For a comprehensive analysis of this novel, and an especially penetrating discussion of Byam's narratorial and cultural functions within it, see Chapter 4 of the present volume.

this one – his brilliance is ‘crusted over badly with deposits of silliness’, and lost in ‘the wilds of period accents’.³ Brando’s English accent in this film is routinely regarded as risible, but, in the early 1960s, ‘mumbling’ was generally admitted to be the hallmark of his acting style. Here, his precisely articulated diction is the absolute opposite of mumbling, and the accent with which it is inflected is the most potent sign of the class to which the film assigns him. It is also, incidentally, a sign of historical accuracy, for it acknowledges the fact that Christian was an Englishman, a significant advance on *1935*, in which neither Gable nor Franchot Tone (Byam) attempted an English accent.

The 1962 film, and its central character, Christian, are better understood in the contemporary social context of the early 1960s than in relation to events in the South Seas in 1787–91. It may be fanciful to see, in the elegance and style of Brando’s very English Christian, a reflection of the qualities of the recently elected US President John F Kennedy. It is equally fanciful, however tempting, to read the mutiny as both Christian’s Bay of Pigs⁴ (1961) and his Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), both of which were encompassed by the period of the film’s production. But it is less fanciful to sense, in Bligh’s resentment of Christian’s sophistication, which he can never attain, something of Richard M Nixon’s bitterness towards the playboy senator from Massachusetts, rising from a milieu of money and privilege that was light years away from the California backwater where Nixon grew up. (Nixon was Kennedy’s opponent in the 1960 presidential election.) Nor is it fanciful to see, in Bligh’s blind commitment to ‘the Admiralty’, the ideology of The Organization Man. This collective mindset has been identified by William H Whyte as a dominant social ethic in middle-class American society in the 1950s. It was promoted and sustained by ‘[those] of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions’.⁵ As a principle of collective ideology to which Bligh subscribes, it can easily be placed in opposition to the nonchalant individualism of Christian.

3 Dan Chiasson, ‘Where’s Brando?’, *New York Review of Books*, vol 62, no 1, 8 Jan – 15 Feb 2015, p 18.

4 ‘Pig’ is a charged word in this film. ‘You remarkable pig,’ Christian says to Bligh after the mutiny. ‘You can thank whatever pig-god you pray to that you haven’t quite turned me into a murderer.’ This echoes Rio’s furious outburst at Bob Amory, ‘you scum-suckin’ pig’, at an equally tense moment of rebellion in Brando’s own *One-Eyed Jacks*. On Pitcairn, Matthew Quintal refers to Bligh as ‘the old pig’. A willing participant in this porcine plenitude, Bligh refers to the mutineers as ‘these swine’.

5 William H Whyte, *The Organization Man*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1957, p 3.

Whyte interprets Herman Wouk's novel *The Caine Mutiny*, on which the 1954 film of the same name is closely based, as 'the problem of the individual versus authority ... raised to the nth degree';⁶ and the script of this film, which may be 1962's strong precursor, draws on *Bounty* material.⁷ But we need to look beyond the United States, because the film's insistent concern with class took it, with Brando's accent, across the Atlantic, which is why his performance, washed away in trans-Atlantic currents to become one of the many 'lost' Brando performances,⁸ should be seen from an English, indeed a European, as well as from an American perspective.

The historical Fletcher Christian came from an impoverished if established family and, as a representative of the genteel poor, and so obliged to work for a living, he would certainly not have enjoyed the leisured lifestyle glimpsed through 1962's representation of him. The eternal British obsession with class, accent and gentility was as tangible as ever in the early 1960s, when a postwar meritocracy – self-styled, of course – began to fancy its chances of attaining power and authority. From 1951 until 1964, Britain was governed by the Conservative Party, the party of the establishment. When Churchill, aged 80, resigned as prime minister in 1955, he was succeeded in that office by a line of Old Etonians – Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, then, astonishingly, by an Old Etonian who was also a Peer of the Realm, Baron Home of the Hirsell. The principles upon which the governing party apparently chose its leaders cut hard against a burgeoning popular culture, and the first Beatles film, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), poked good-natured fun at the Home Counties' establishment by celebrating new ways of being and by promoting new ways of talking. The tribulations of the Conservative Government's final years reflected such stresses in the British, and more particularly the English, social order. The judicial proceedings that followed from the Profumo affair, in which a minister was revealed to have lied to parliament about an affair that may also have been a security risk, opened the lid on a Pandora's box of

6 Whyte, 1957, p 243.

7 Lt Tom Keefer (Fred MacMurray) compares Captain Queeg to Bligh, and Queeg's obsession with missing strawberries is a reworking of Bligh's obsessive concern, immediately prior to the mutiny, with apparently stolen coconuts. See Caroline Alexander, *The Bounty: The True Story of the Mutiny on the Bounty* (London, Harper Perennial, 2003, p 424). The coconut episode is well documented; see Alexander (2003, pp 134–35). Crucial to both Nordhoff and Hall and 1935, it is significantly omitted from 1962.

8 For a discussion of Brando's neglected work in the 1960s, his decade of disasters, see Simon Petch & Roslyn Jolly, 'Brando in the Sixties' (*Heat*, new series, vol 10, 2005, pp 157–72).

licentiousness at the highest levels of society. In 1964, Harold Wilson, who both was, and sounded as though he was, a Yorkshireman, led the Labour Party to power. The class conflicts simmering beneath this changing demographic are brilliantly realised in Harold Pinter's script for Joseph Losey's *The Servant* (1963), when the servant (Dirk Bogarde) barks angrily to his master (James Fox) the unforgettable line: 'I'm a gentleman's gentleman, and you're no bloody gentleman!' Less dramatic, if equally challenging, was Al Alvarez's introduction to Penguin's famous 1962 anthology *The New Poetry*.⁹ Alvarez, who edited the book and who was himself an Englishman, identified 'the gentility principle' as the crippling weakness of contemporary English poetry.

Susan Mizruchi has claimed that 'the most important dramatic change' introduced by Brando in his ongoing work on the 1962 script is 'the emphasis on class',¹⁰ and his accent surely supports her claim. With its contemporary inflection, the 1962 *Mutiny on the Bounty* is less a remake of the 1935 film than a series of riffs occasionally inspired by the earlier movie. In one such riff, 1962 turns a phrase from 1935 into a major theme. When Christian and Bligh meet aboard the *Bounty* in 1935, it is explicit that they have sailed together before, for Bligh has specifically requested Christian as one of his crew; as he puts it, 'I like having a gentleman as my subordinate, being a self-made man'. This provocative statement is incidental in 1935 and, while it is not repeated in 1962, its implications are developed into the class principle that governs the Bligh/Christian relationship. As a matter of historical record, Christian and Bligh had sailed together before, and Bligh had indeed requested Christian's presence on the *Bounty* expedition. But, in 1962, Bligh and Christian meet for the first time when Christian arrives on board in all his finery, and their initial encounter seethes with class-conscious tension between the dandified gentleman and the professional sailor. A minor chord in 1935 is amplified, in 1962, into a major sequence that drowns out historical fact.

Our contention in this paper is that MGM's 1962 version of *Mutiny on the Bounty* offers a unique interpretation of the *Bounty* story, an interpretation that is significantly and demonstrably linked more to the historical context of the film's production than to the documented events

9 Al Alvarez (ed), *The New Poetry*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962.

10 Susan Mizruchi, *Brando's Smile: His Life, Thought, and Work*, New York, WW Norton, 2014, p 161.

of 1787–89. That context involves two postwar phenomena: changing British feelings in the early 1960s about class; and the emergence, in Europe, of Existentialist philosophy.

The appearance of the dandy

‘What’s this, a royal visit?’ asks William Bligh acerbically as Fletcher Christian’s fine carriage draws up on the Portsmouth dock. Christian (Marlon Brando) emerges from the carriage looking like a Cavalier who has lost his way amongst the Roundheads. He wears a finely decorated suit of silvery-grey material topped off with a splendid scarlet cloak, carries a cane under his arm, and is accompanied by two Gainsborough-style beauties who are also sumptuously dressed. Something odd is going on, sure enough, and we need the benefit of hindsight to discover it: the extravagant, even baroque gesture with which Christian doffs his top hat – an oddly Puritan-style appurtenance, as Susan Mizruchi has observed¹¹ – is a preamble to the elaborate play with his naval hat that is a feature of Brando’s performance. But at this early stage in the film, the viewer simply doesn’t have a clue.

Brando’s appearance in the film is startling. The discrepancy between Christian’s foppish self-presentation and the naval context of discipline and danger into which he must somehow fit is matched by the discrepancy between viewers’ expectations about a Brando performance and the extraordinary spectacle now presented to us. This highly artificial self-styling, so different from the attractively virile personas created earlier by Clark Gable (1935) and later by Mel Gibson (*The Bounty*, 1984) in the same role, prompts the question: what, as an actor, is Brando doing? Unfortunately, most critics of the film have not attempted to answer this question; rather, they have been, like Bligh, affronted. Donald A Maxton, knowledgeable as he is about *Bounty* representations, gets himself on the wrong foot by appealing to ‘history’: after a promising, historically informative start, he says, ‘the film begins to go downhill when Christian arrives in a splendid coach, dressed in foppish, un-seamanlike clothing and accompanied by two French-speaking women. Brando speaks his lines in a peculiar, distracting accent that makes it difficult to regard

11 Mizruchi, 2014, p 162.

his character seriously'.¹² To seasoned film critic David Thomson, Brando's 'Fletcher Christian from Harrods' 'ruined' the simple but effective outlines of the adventure story conveyed by *1935*.¹³ Perhaps it is not surprising that no one has taken any notice of Bosley Crowther, a contemporary reviewer who found himself at the wrong end of the right point when he complained that Brando's character was 'more a dandy than a formidable ship's officer'.¹⁴

If we entertain the possibility that Brando is offering a serious interpretation of the character, not merely an absurd caricature, we must consider not only why *Brando* should choose to act this way, but also why he should choose to have *Christian* act this way. For everything we see of Christian in this scene is a pose; not merely the actor, but the character also, is acting a part. He dresses and speaks like an aristocrat, although he is in fact not one. (His companions in this first scene are a 'Comtesse' and a 'Lady', although he is plain 'Mr' Christian.) This may shed some light on the accent that Brando adopts, which has been the object of so much critical scorn and ridicule. Unusually for the time among Hollywood actors, Brando was perfectly capable of producing a standard (Received Pronunciation) English accent, as he had shown in *Julius Caesar* (1953) and would show again in *Burn!* (1969) and *A Dry White Season* (1989). So, why should he choose to speak in this clearly artificial and affected way? One answer is that the accent is an affectation for the character, one of many that constitute his persona as no mere fop, but a dandy with the full force that 19th-century artists and 20th-century philosophers have given to that term.

To quote Jules Barbey d'Aureville's classic *Anatomy of Dandyism* (1845), this Fletcher Christian has 'the Dandy's assurance in conduct, the sumptuous impertinence, the preoccupation with exterior effect, and perpetually present vanity'.¹⁵ All these qualities are evident in the opening scene. Christian's 'assurance in conduct' is shown in the way he carries off the impropriety of turning up to work in this frivolous garb. Although his first words after introducing himself are 'please forgive my appearance',

12 Donald A Maxton, *The Mutiny on H.M.S. Bounty: A Guide to Nonfiction, Fiction, Poetry, Films, Articles and Music*, Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2008, p 217.

13 David Thomson, *'Have You Seen ...?': A Personal Introduction to 1,000 Films*, New York, Knopf, 2008, p 584.

14 Crowther is quoted by Mizruchi (2014, p 162; she gives no reference for the comment).

15 Jules Barbey d'Aureville, *The Anatomy of Dandyism, With Some Observations on Beau Brummell*, DB Wyndham Lewis (trans), London, Peter Davies, 1928 (1845), p 17.

this is in no sense an apology, for his tone and carriage make clear that he does not care whether he is forgiven or not. He may have offended naval protocol by reporting for duty thus attired, but he remains secure in his sense of social superiority to everyone else aboard the *Bounty*. Furthermore, his explanation – that he came straight from the country house where he was a guest – serves to emphasise the social inequality from which will spring his conflict with Bligh. Similarly, the favour he asks, to introduce his fashionable lady friends to the captain, brings out another difference in status and education: Bligh cannot speak French.¹⁶ One of the ladies coquettishly calls this ‘uncivilised’, lightly passing a judgement on Bligh that will resonate seriously as the plot unfolds.

‘Sumptuous impertinence’ is the keynote of Brando’s performance as Christian in all his dealings with Bligh, and it is well established in this first scene. Christian shows disrespect for the captain’s and the Navy’s values when he refers to the *Bounty*’s mission to collect breadfruit from Tahiti as ‘a grocer’s errand’ and asks, ‘Does it really matter when these vegetables arrive in Jamaica?’ He presents himself as carelessly indifferent to Bligh’s goals, accurately, but dismissively, characterising the captain as motivated by a desire for ‘promotions, even honours, and all that’. At the end of the scene, he uses Bligh’s own description of the gardener, Brown, as ‘the most important man on the ship’ to imply his lack of regard for his commanding officer’s authority.

In this first scene, Christian’s elaborate costume and manners demonstrate his ‘preoccupation with exterior effect’, while every speech and gesture expresses the ‘perpetually present vanity’ that makes him condescend to his commanding officer. The scene also introduces two further aspects of dandyism: its problematic relation to the concept of profession, and its aspiration to spiritual aristocracy. Before even speaking to Christian, Bligh impugns his professionalism by labelling him ‘a career fop’. This brings the captain strangely close to Charles Baudelaire, who wrote that the dandy’s ‘solitary profession is elegance’.¹⁷ In a study of the greatest dandy, Beau Brummell, Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly also found that the ‘vocation’ of

16 In Nordhoff & Hall, this failure to know French is a sympathetic disadvantage for Bligh. He has been told of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ideas, he says, ‘but unfortunately I left school too young to learn French’ (*The Bounty Trilogy*, Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 2003 (1936), p 9). In 1962, Bligh’s Francophone deficiency is a social disadvantage for which he can only apologise, and so an unsympathetic humiliation.

17 Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Jonathan Mayne (trans & ed), London, Phaidon, 1964, p 26.

dandyism was not often compatible with the more utilitarian conception of profession¹⁸ – for, he declared, ‘[a] Dandy cannot admit eager interest in or anxiety about anything on earth’.¹⁹ When questioned by Bligh about his choice of career, Christian replies, ‘One must do something’ – he appears to speak straight from the well of modern *ennui* that, according to d’Aurevilly, was the origin of all dandyism.²⁰ But, although he appears not to take seriously the idea of a career, he insists that he will perform his duties as a naval officer conscientiously and that an officer can, indeed should, also be a gentleman. The dandy’s mindset – although not necessarily his bloodline – is aristocratic: one must at least appear not to be motivated by bourgeois values of effort and ambition. Brummell expressed his disavowal of bourgeois society in the utter incompetence he brought to the only real ‘job’ he ever had, as British consul in Caen. Brando’s Christian, on the other hand, manifests his ‘aristocratic’ superiority by succeeding effortlessly as a naval officer, without seeming to care about that success. As Baudelaire observed:

Dandyism does not even consist, as many thoughtless people seem to believe, in an immoderate taste for the toilet [self-grooming] and material elegance. For the perfect dandy these things are no more than symbols of his aristocratic superiority of mind.²¹

It is his own conception of this aristocratic superiority of mind that Brando’s *Mr* Christian expresses through the mixture of carelessness and impertinence with which he establishes his anomalous presence on the *Bounty*.

This opening sequence of *1962* establishes the clash of personalities between Christian and Bligh, and sets up class difference as a major source of the conflict that leads to the mutiny.²² It also establishes Christian in the persona of the dandy, who, like any good actor, knows that dress, tone and gesture are as important as dialogue in creating a character. ‘The dandy,’ according to Albert Camus, ‘... is always compelled to astonish. Singularity is his vocation, excess his way to perfection.’ The dandy’s whole attitude is a protest – it is often not clear against

18 d’Aurevilly, 1928, p 61.

19 d’Aurevilly, 1928, p 32.

20 d’Aurevilly, 1928, p 9.

21 Baudelaire, 1964, p 27.

22 The class-conscious presentation of Christian has no cinematic precedent, but Donald A Maxton claims that this ‘well-worn theory’ was firmly established in 19th-century *Bounty* literature (2008, p 217).

exactly what. ‘The dandy is, by occupation, always in opposition. He can only exist by defiance’.²³ But will this turn out to be anything more than vanity? Camus maintained that ‘the dandy can only play a part by setting himself up in opposition. He can only be sure of his own existence by finding it in the expression of others’ faces’.²⁴ This opening encounter raises questions about what it will take to turn this dandy into a mutineer, to rouse him from his *ennui* and make him a rebel. The answer, of course, is Bligh; and, in the early stages of the film, two related sequences, one above and one below deck, anticipate the impending conflict between commander and officer.

Punishment, pedagogy and port

In his account of events aboard the *Bounty* in 1787, James Morrison alleged that, before the ship left England, William Bligh had purloined for his personal use two cheeses that were intended for the ship’s supplies. As Caroline Alexander has said, this allegation is ‘strikingly specific’:²⁵ Bligh had supposedly ordered the ship’s cooper to remove the cheeses, and then ordered another seaman to take them to Bligh’s house. This unsupported allegation has entered *Bounty* legend, and even found its comic way into *The Caine Mutiny* as Captain Queeg’s ‘great triumph, the cheese investigation of 1937’. Nordhoff and Hall’s *Mutiny on the Bounty* repeats Morrison’s account, and both films exploit the incident to raise the dramatic conflict between Bligh and Christian.

In *1935*, after a crewmember has been wrongly punished for supposed theft of the cheeses, conversation at the captain’s dinner table quickly gets into trouble. Bligh alone takes cheese: the other four at the table all refuse it, although Bligh offers it to them individually. Bligh demands an apology from Christian, and then dismisses him from the table. As the others also leave the table, the sequence ends with Bligh’s exclamation: ‘Before I’ve done with you, I’ll make you eat grass.’ In *1962*, this sequence is considerably expanded. The irascibility of Charles Laughton’s Bligh is replaced by Trevor Howard’s intransigence, here disguised as advice to his junior officers. Brando’s Christian remains at the table, and his subtle responses to his commander are themselves a form of disguise.

23 Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Anthony Bower (trans), New York, Vintage, 1991 (1951), p 52.

24 Camus, 1991, p 51.

25 Alexander, 2003, p 336.

The conflict between Bligh and Christian in *1962* is less overt and less stark than in *1935*; but, as the patterns along which this conflict will develop become apparent, the sequence evokes some of Brando's most finely detailed acting.

After the shortfall of two cheeses from the ship's recorded supplies is reported, Christian, without a hat, handkerchief occasionally raised to his nose, casually accuses Gunner's Mate Mills (Richard Harris) of the theft, on the word of another man. Detached, smiling, Christian is none too concerned, but Bligh, at the gunwale, looks on with interest. He then intervenes with the order that the men's cheese ration be stopped while the shortfall is made up. Below deck, Mills reveals to the other sailors that Bligh ordered him to take the cheeses to his home 'as a favour'. In Mills' account, Bligh has appropriated the sailors' rations for his personal use.

Both Bligh and Christian overhear Mills' insistence that the captain is the thief. Bligh claims, with considerable satisfaction, that the Articles of War offer a remedy for just such an accusation. Christian, smiling no longer, but attempting to defuse the situation, says confidentially to Bligh that a few weeks without grog will teach Mills to hold his tongue. His suggestion is dismissed, and he is ordered to summon all hands to witness punishment. Looking back at the group of seamen, he follows Bligh out.

On deck, with all hands mustered to witness punishment, Bligh reads the relevant passage from the Articles of War. Christian passes his left hand over his head; his eyes are averted, his body restless. He is not detached from the situation now, and although he is clearly troubled, his thoughts are impossible to read. The 'Hats On!' order is given, to lend the punishment its due formality. During the lashing, Brown (the gardener) turns away, unable to watch. To turn away would be to disobey the captain's order, and so Christian cannot do this, but his eyes are occasionally averted, and close-ups suggest his problematic absorption in a troubling situation. All we know for certain is that he has disagreed with his captain about the appropriate punishment for Mills. Bligh watches Mills' lashing with grim approval, and then, after the company is dismissed, Christian follows Bligh from the deck. The Articles of War held behind Christian's back in his left hand suggest his ethically compromised situation.

In the subsequent dinner sequence, four men are seated at the captain's table: Bligh, Fryer (Eddie Byrne), Midshipman Ned Young (Tim Seely) and Christian. They are served by a steward (Gordon Jackson). Christian's

back is to the camera, but the first cut shows him toying with his food, using his cutlery to keep it at a distance from him as much as to convey it to his mouth. He eats almost incidentally, without enthusiasm. There is no conversation, and the dinner is initially a drama of eyes and heads, with glances exchanged around the table as the men's heads bob to and from their plates. Young pleads that he is unwell, although Bligh orders him to eat. Christian shoots a glance at Bligh, to his right, then to Young, at his left, as if getting ready to enter the action, before putting down his cutlery. He then takes up his napkin, looks at it, wipes his mouth, opens the napkin, and flattens it against his chest before holding it away, then carefully folds and smooths it into a neat rectangular shape.

These gestures may be an elaborate expression of displaced distaste, but they also cover some confusion, and suggest both deliberation and evasion. The subsequent conversation concerning the punishment of Mills is superficially polite and, while Christian scrupulously observes the courtesies and conventions of rank when speaking to his captain, we cannot forget that he believes that Bligh is a thief and a liar. A plate of cheese is on the table between Christian and Bligh, usually close to the centre of the frame. Young, unable to stomach his food, leaves the table. Fryer and the attendant steward are virtually forgotten by the camera, which now concentrates on the drama between Christian and Bligh. Justifying the punishment of Mills, Bligh expounds his ideas about punishment, authority and command, which are predicated on a theory of cruelty as efficiency: 'This is a typical seaman: a half-witted, wife-beating, habitual drunkard. His whole life is spent evading and defying authority.' It is the professional sailor, not the accidental, dandified officer, who is the real snob here, holding his crew in contempt.

Christian listens earnestly, shifting occasionally in his chair. His right hand against the side of his face – Bligh is to his right – is more protective than supporting; he is not so much leaning on it as shielding it, covering his right eye, dropping first his eyes, then his little finger. It is a drama of body parts. When his hand moves to his chin, his little finger plays at his mouth, as if unsure how much to take in, or to reveal. Bligh, having finished his sermon, cuts the cheese and, at that instant, Brando's left hand, liberated from indecisiveness, makes for the decanter of port. He removes the stopper, fills his glass, replaces the stopper and returns the decanter to the table. Free to speak now, and apparently changing the subject, he says to Bligh, 'I'd be careful of that cheese if I were you, sir. It has a peculiar smell.'

I think it's a bit tainted. But then of course it's a question of individual taste'. As the enormity of this subtle rebuke dawns on Bligh, Christian takes a thoughtful drink and then compliments 'a damn good port'.

This sequence is the first clue to Christian's developing inward identity. The more intriguing drama is of his own interiority rather than in the developing tension between commander and officer; and this internal drama finds expression in the insecure relationship between what Brando is doing, and what he is saying. His spoken language and his body language are in disharmony, and he masks the troubling severity of his opinion of Bligh by his remarks about the cheese and the port. Such rhetorical evasions express his indecisiveness about what to do with the suspicion that a major injustice has been perpetrated aboard the ship, and with the anxiety that his captain is a thief and a liar whose theory of command is predicated on cruelty.

Susan Mizruchi has identified the need to communicate '*beyond* language' as one of Brando's seminal principles of performance;²⁶ and Italian director Gillo Pontecorvo, who later directed Brando in *Burn!* (1969), has said, 'When things are psychological, we trust the face of Brando'.²⁷ Things are psychological enough in this sequence, where Brando's contempt for his commander provokes conflict with himself; both of these are suggested by his focused inscrutability, his actions and movements. But although dialogue may be subservient to attitude and gesture, it always exists in relation to those aspects of performance, supporting them, qualifying them or, occasionally, in counterpoint to them. In this sequence, Christian's politeness to his superior officer is scrupulous, but superficial. His concerned indecisiveness finds expression in his toying with the cutlery while, at the same time, it is masked by his elaborate play with the napkin. Objects, like the glass and the decanter, are used to arrange, organise and focus the displaced hostility that is covertly expressed in his insubordinate caveat about the cheese, which is itself then dispersed in his praise of the port. Throughout this sequence, dialogue, gesture and object are in increasingly dynamic interplay.

26 Mizruchi, 2014, p 150.

27 Mizruchi, 2014, p 150. Pontecorvo is quoted by Mizruchi (p 216). On 'the modern American concept of acting, which emphasizes behavior over the dialogue-based English tradition', see Scott Eyman, *John Wayne: The Life and Legend* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2014, p 58).

A barrel of water

The cheese incident, the first major conflict between Fletcher Christian and William Bligh, establishes the pattern followed in the rest of the film, up to and including the mutiny itself. Bligh and Christian first disagree, then clash, with increasing personal animosity evident between them. Bligh's character is immovable and unchanging, as obdurate as John Milton's Satan, 'Like Teneriffe or Atlas unremoved';²⁸ whereas, in Christian, these confrontations provoke anxiety, driving him to go beneath his superficial persona to discover the unknown depths of his character. Bligh is the straight man around whom Christian must find himself, and the film allows Bligh nothing in terms of personal merit. In 1935, Charles Laughton's Bligh was permitted dignity and humanity in his treatment of the sailors with him in the launch on the long haul to Timor and, while in command of the *Bounty* he never, unlike Trevor Howard's Bligh of 1962, had anyone keelhauled. In 1962, Bligh's decision to make for Timor is an executive order imposed on his men in the longboat, backed by the threat of the sword. After the mutiny, Christian gives Bligh his own personal sextant, 'so you can be sure it's a good one', so that even Bligh's remarkable feat of navigation in getting the 3,600 miles to Timor may depend on the indirect assistance of the man who cast him adrift.

Bligh's professional judgement is brought into most severe question by his decision to round Cape Horn in winter. This leads, literally, to a turning point on the *Bounty's* voyage, and intensifies the ongoing confrontation between Christian and Bligh. As the wind and swell increase, with Bligh below deck, Christian orders the topgallants put away to save the straining masts. Bligh then emerges from the cockpit to order the topgallants wound out again, notwithstanding Christian's explanation of his own order. Bligh's order to release maximum sail has dangerous consequences for the crew; below deck, a barrel from the ship's cargo has come loose, and is careering unpredictably around. Christian takes charge, and heads a work party to make things safe by securing the rogue water barrel, which has evidently taken on a life of its own. Christian gives the order to let the ship run before the wind in order that the cargo can be stabilised by reducing the pitching movement of the ship as it heads into the fierce weather.

28 Milton, 1966, Book 4, line 987.

For the only time in the film, we see Christian here as a working sailor. Dressed in long, belted waterproof coat, boots, woollen beret and scarf, he is never less of a fop or dandy, but a capable and decisive officer leading his work party. In attempting to handle this crisis, Christian drops the dandy's pose of ironic detachment. Not only do we see him taking positive action, but we also see him working as part of a team – unthinkable within the dandy code of 'independence' and 'singularity'.²⁹ Although he is continually reassessing the situation, and giving the necessary orders, he is in as much danger as anyone and, at one point, is knocked off his feet. In this crisis of seamanship, Christian assumes his natural authority. For Charles Baudelaire, 'The distinguishing characteristic of the dandy's beauty consists above all in an air of coldness which comes from an unshakeable determination not to be moved; you might call it a latent fire which hints at itself, and which could, but chooses not to burst into flame'.³⁰ Here, for the first time in the film, the 'latent fire' of Christian's character breaks forth.

Bligh, who has been dozing in his cabin, then intervenes for the second time, with catastrophic consequences. Awakened by the changes in the movement of the ship, Bligh rushes on deck to countermand Christian's order again, refusing to hear any explanation of the necessity for it. As the ship again turns head to wind, the rolling motion loosens the barrel before it has been properly secured, and a seaman dies after being pinned beneath its weight. No one works harder than Christian to relieve or rescue the trapped man. Bligh here is at his most incompetent, and his most unfeeling. He has been negligent in making no attempt to discover why Christian gave the order that he did, and he is contemptuous of the man, Norman, for whose death he is responsible.

Christian now, for the first time, questions an order given by his captain by repeating it: '*Never mind Norman, sir?*' he asks incredulously. Throughout their subsequent conversation, although Christian takes exception to Bligh's attitude, he observes the courtesies and conventions of rank by continuing to address Bligh as 'sir'. But a new seriousness and intensity characterise his expression and tone. In his actions to try to save the sailor, and in challenging the captain when Bligh dismissively brushes aside the specific human cost of his own insane exercise of absolute authority, Christian has declared a value: the value of the individual life. Indeed, the

29 d'Aurevilly, 1928, pp 26–27, 70–71; Camus, 1991, p 52.

30 Baudelaire, 1964, p 29.

dandy figure has begun to be resignified, politically as a 'bloody traitor' (in Bligh's words), and ethically as the moral compass of the dramatic action. The class distinction between Bligh and Christian modulates into a conflict between opposing value systems, centred on the question of what it means to be a gentleman – or, in a phrase used later in a charged exchange between the two, an 'alleged gentleman'. While the title of 'gentleman' for Bligh means simply unearned privilege, for Christian it indicates allegiance to a standard of decency that he will ultimately defend at extraordinary personal cost to himself.

Neither Nordhoff and Hall's novel nor the earlier *Mutiny on the Bounty* film includes a sequence equivalent to that of the loose barrel. In each of these earlier narratives, the *Bounty's* change of route to the Cape of Good Hope is purely a necessary change in direction, dictated by natural circumstance. In *1962*, we are plunged into a crisis of seamanship at the most hazardous point in the Southern Ocean. The cinematic precursor here is surely the typhoon sequence in *The Caine Mutiny* in which, as the ship pitches into crisis, Lt Maryk (Van Johnson) takes over command of the ship. He is on the bridge, as is Captain Queeg (Humphrey Bogart), and for the officers it becomes a matter of whose orders to obey. That, of course, is a key issue in *1962*, especially for Ship's Master John Fryer, when the mutiny on the *Bounty* does occur. In the Cape Horn sequence, the crisis of command represented by the pattern of countermanded orders prefigures the later situation aboard the *Bounty*, and thus foreshadows the mutiny to which the narrative is building. Meanwhile, the cannonading barrel is a metonym for the *Bounty's* lack of appropriate authority.

The dandy is not a romantic hero

At the point of the *Bounty's* turn-about off Cape Horn, mutiny is a cause without a rebel, and this situation continues throughout the remainder of the voyage to Tahiti. One important reason for this is this film's unique characterisation of Fletcher Christian as dandy rather than romantic hero. A series of scenes early in Part Two (after leaving Tahiti) establishes an important distinction between dandyism and romanticism. Upon learning from Brown, the gardener, that some of the breadfruit plants are dying from insufficient water, William Bligh orders the ladle from the crew's water cask to be placed at the top of the mast; any sailor who desires water must climb the mast to retrieve the ladle, and replace it

after drinking. Sailors who lack the strength or agility to do this are in danger of dying from dehydration, from drinking seawater, or from the hazardous attempt to reach the ladle. The inhumanity of Bligh's behaviour is resented by all, including those who are themselves exempt from the water restrictions, such as Brown ('the most important man on the ship') and Midshipman Ned Young. Yet Christian remains silent on the point and, for a long time, complies with the order.

Four sequential scenes at this point in the film function to distinguish Christian from Bligh's more vocal critics on the ship. In the first of these scenes, Christian is on deck, wearing a mauve cravat and without his naval jacket. After polishing his sextant with a white lace handkerchief he turns to the gentlemanly activity of sketching. When a sailor who has gone aloft to fetch water falls from the rigging to his death, Christian reacts with a look of horror, but no words. One of the common sailors, however, rushes and strikes the captain, for which he is sentenced to the barbaric punishment of keelhauling the next day. In the following scene, Christian is in his cabin playing chess with himself. Ned remonstrates with him about the illegality of the punishment ordered by the captain, and demands that Christian respond to Bligh's cruelty. Christian refuses to be drawn; he even appears to make light of the situation, inviting Ned to stay and play chess with him, but Ned leaves in a temper. The next scene takes place on deck, where officers and crew are assembled to witness the sailor's punishment. As predicted in the previous scene by both Ned and Christian, the sailor does not survive the keelhauling. While the assembled men disperse, Christian appears lost in thought as he turns his officer's hat around and around in his hands; without speaking, he replaces it on his head as if thereby resuming his official naval persona. Obviously disturbed, he goes below deck to the officers' water cask where, still thoughtful, he bathes his eyes and takes a drink. Ned appears and refuses the water Christian offers him, saying 'I couldn't get it down'. In their subsequent exchange Ned comes across as emotional, warm-blooded and impetuous, while Christian is cold and aloof. Finally, Christian calls Ned 'a bore' for his emotional response, eliciting this judgement from his friend: 'You're exactly what you seem to be – a supercilious poseur without the slightest trace of humanity or compassion ... One needn't look further for your character than the pomade in your hair.'

At this moment there is a vast emotional gulf between Christian and Ned, whose friendship we know to have preceded this voyage. Now, each is strangely aligned with their common enemy, Bligh. Ned articulates his

condemnation of Christian in similar language to that previously used about Christian by Bligh. Christian meanwhile reproves Ned for his 'impertinence' and tells him to 'shut his arrogant mouth'. He now pulls rank: while addressing 'Midshipman Young', Christian taps the junior officer twice with his hat. This may be the film's most actorly moment, one of Marlon Brando's brilliant *coups de cinéma*. Brando reinforces Christian's words with a potent symbolic gesture, while simultaneously qualifying his character's gesture by using the hat to suggest the officer's insecurity; for, while Christian finds a use for his hat (which, after the keelhauling, he was unable to do), he stops short of putting it on, which alone would identify him absolutely with the power of constituted naval authority. The way in which he uses his hat to stress his words to Young silently suggests that Christian doesn't know how to wear it, and so his wielding of authority is also a withholding of authority. This action of tapping or prodding (the angle makes it impossible for the viewer to determine the exact nature of the gesture), forcefully intrusive as it is, bristles with uncertainties. Contact *per se* acknowledges connection. Christian's overt act of reproof may even cast a shadow of approval, his express rebuke covertly hinting at complicity, collusion, even sympathy. Brando's gesture is telling, in ways of which Christian is not consciously aware, as the physical punctuation of his verbal response to Young unintentionally expresses Christian's own repressed 'impertinence' to *his* superior officer. Although the sequence obviously dramatises a crisis in the relationship between the friends, its cross-currents gesture to the growing crisis in Christian's relationship with himself.

The sequence of these four scenes alternates between spaces above and below deck to show Christian's public and private responses to the increasing monstrosity of Bligh's rule. Interestingly, in the private, below-deck scenes, Christian aggressively refuses the role of romantic rebel offered (and modelled) to him by Ned, instead retreating into his dandy persona, but now emphasising the dandy's connection to privilege rather than dissent.

The character of Ned is important as it dramatises Brando's refusal of romanticism in his interpretation of Christian as a dandy. Part One of the film prepares the viewer for this. When Ned staggers down from the mast where he has spent the night as punishment for laughing at Bligh's walk (a misdemeanour in which Christian participated, but for which only the junior officer was disciplined), Christian asks lightly, 'Did you sleep well?' The younger man, full of outrage and self-pity, refuses to adopt

this nonchalant tone as he describes his sufferings. Christian, *sotto voce*, encourages him to maintain his dignity by laughing off the incident, but Ned cannot disguise his feelings in such a manner. The scene is an attempt by Christian to teach his young friend the dandy's code: as Charles Baudelaire insisted, 'A dandy may be blasé, he may even suffer; but in this case, he will smile like the Spartan boy under the fox's tooth'.³¹ Ned, however, subscribes to an opposite doctrine of emotional authenticity, as is shown in his naïve request to be married to his Tahitian sweetheart. Christian, by contrast, parts calmly from his lover, Maimiti. His farewell to her expresses little more feeling than his reaction to the parting gifts with which the Tahitians have just presented him ('Oh, isn't that jolly').

The contrast between Ned and Christian presents romanticism as dandyism's younger, less jaded and less self-disciplined cousin. As Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly wrote:

Dandyism introduces antique calm into modern agitations; but the calm of the ancients came from the harmony of their faculties and the plenitude of a freely-developed existence, whereas the calm of Dandyism is the pose of a spirit which has already ranged among many ideas and is now too languid to be capable of animation.³²

A dandy cannot be a romantic, because '[i]f one were passionate one would be too vital to be a Dandy'.³³ This seems to be exactly Christian's position in the scenes of conflict with Ned over the keelhauling and the water restrictions, as it is in a much earlier scene from Part One (before the landing in Tahiti), in which he absolutely declines to take part in or even react to an important meeting between Bligh and two of the men (later mutineers). Acting as a kind of shop steward for his mates, Gunner's Mate Mills, accompanied by the older sailor Smith (Hugh Griffith), goes to see the captain to point out that newly imposed food rationing is against 'the regulations'. Predictably, this attempt to persuade Bligh that 'right is right' fails, but what is most striking about the scene is Christian's presence as an unwilling observer of it. During the exchange between Mills and Bligh, Christian listens from his cabin where he sits in bed, dressed in a sumptuous red-lined dressing gown and a preposterous white nightcap, writing with a quill in a book while smoking an extraordinary long pipe more suited to opium than tobacco. This is the most outrageous

31 Baudelaire, 1964, p 28.

32 d'Aurevilly, 1928, p 17.

33 d'Aurevilly, 1928, p 23.

costume Christian has worn since the film's opening scene and, behaving at his most mannered and foppish, he looks and sounds so anomalous to the naval drama being enacted between master and men outside his cabin that he seems to inhabit a different world. Peering round the door, Christian acknowledges the others' presence, prompting an exasperated comment from Bligh that he has been given nothing to work with on this voyage but 'dirt ... and empty silk caps'. This odd juxtaposition links Christian to the discontented and later mutinous men, but at this point he firmly disavows the connection: he closes the door on both his captain and his subordinates, sealing his cabin as a private haven of gentlemanly disengagement from their vulgar concerns.

According to the dandy code, as explicated by d'Aureville and later Baudelaire, such behaviour is not mere selfishness. Rather, it expresses a mode of dissent. Ironic detachment is the dandy's default mode when faced by the absurdities of a world governed by ambition masquerading as morality and power disguised as law. For Baudelaire, such detachment included aspects of 'the spiritual and stoical':

In truth I was not altogether wrong to consider dandyism as a kind of religion. The strictest monastic rule ... were no more despotic, and no more obeyed, than this doctrine of elegance and originality, which also imposes upon its humble and ambitious disciples – men often full of fire, passion, courage and restrained energy – the terrible formula: *Perinde ac cadaver!* [just as if a corpse].³⁴

For Baudelaire, then, the dandy was distinguished not by lack of feeling, but by restraint of feeling. Interpreting Baudelaire's own practice of dandyism, Jean-Paul Sartre saw the dandy's voluntary submission to a set of arbitrary rules, punctiliously observed, as a form of discipline, which relieved the modern man from some of the terrible freedom to which he was condemned. Dandyism provided structure in a formless world. Around the same time, Albert Camus suggested that dandyism could be a source of 'coherence' in a post-religious age: 'The dandy rallies his forces and creates a unity for himself by the very violence of his refusal.'³⁵ Christian enacts such a gesture of refusal when he closes the door on Bligh, Mills and Smith. But he cannot refuse forever to engage.

34 Baudelaire, 1964, p 28.

35 Camus, 1991, p 51.

Mutiny

An important piece of information brought from the botanical experts at Kew by Brown, the gardener, at the beginning of the voyage, is that breadfruit trees have a ‘dormant period’ during which they cannot be transplanted. It is the desire to outrun the dormant period that sparks William Bligh’s decision to travel around Cape Horn, and it is the necessity of waiting out the dormant period that keeps the *Bounty* at Tahiti for so long, giving the ordinary sailors a taste of a life far different from that endured under Bligh’s command at sea. During preparations for departure from Tahiti, three men decide to make a run for it. They are headed off by Fletcher Christian and Ned Young, and returned to the ship. Bligh immediately adjudges them to be deserters, and has them confined in irons, preparatory to a court martial in Jamaica. Christian takes exception to the treatment and the punishment of these men, and he advances to confront his captain. Christian and Bligh face each other beneath a bulkhead. In this eyeballing situation, Christian drops the ‘sir’ in his address to Bligh and this indicates that *his* dormant period is over: overt defiance has replaced ironic, detached compliance. Echoing his earlier snobbery, Bligh wonders ‘why an alleged gentleman should give his first loyalty to ordinary seamen’. ‘Instead of to other *alleged* gentlemen?’ Christian replies, enunciating each word carefully. His ‘impertinence’, Bligh declares ‘shall be noted in the log’, but, as Christian’s further reply makes clear, the issue for him is not class, but cruelty: ‘I have never met an officer who inflicted punishment upon men with such incredible relish.’

The mutiny itself is not premeditated. Christian acts spontaneously, and he acts alone. In specific disobedience of Bligh’s order, he offers water to a sick man who will likely die without it. Bligh rushes towards the viewer, centre screen, and kicks the ladle from Christian’s right hand. A full-force backhanded swipe from Christian’s left hand sends Bligh staggering back across the deck, until he comes to rest on his hindquarters. Through his surprise and humiliation, Bligh realises immediately that he has won some sort of victory: ‘Thank you – I’ve been puzzling for a way to take the strut out of you, you posturing snob.’ He orders Fryer to take Christian below. Christian then strikes Fryer, takes a sabre from one of sailors and, back at the gunwale, announces that he is taking command of the ship. The mutiny has taken shape, but it’s still a work in progress.

Christian's release of water from a cask to relieve a suffering seaman links the mutiny sequence to its precursor, the episode of the loose barrel at Cape Horn: as the film gathers momentum, water becomes a symbolic rhyme, tying together the crisis points in the relationship between Christian and Bligh. The historical importance of water aboard the *Bounty* cannot be overstressed. Joseph Banks, as mastermind of the expedition, stipulated that the ship 'must be supplied with as large a quantity as possible, so that the gardener may never be refused the quantity of water he may have occasion to demand'.³⁶ Bligh's control of the availability to the crew of drinking water is a provocative issue in *1935* as well as in *1962*, and also in Nordhoff and Hall, although there is no conclusive historical evidence that Bligh appropriated the men's drinking water for the plants.³⁷ But, as the conditions that give rise to the mutiny take shape, the adjectives used by Quintal ('sweet') and Christian ('fresh') lend the water a symbolic, elemental significance, that may also carry biblical resonance. When the wandering Israelites are desperate with thirst, the Lord instructs Moses to 'smite the rock' of Horeb, 'and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink' (*Exodus* 17:6). Christian smites his captain, and his liberation of an elemental substance is a profoundly democratic action: now the people may indeed drink.

Although from this point Christian could not be more fully engaged in opposing Bligh's unjust rule, the film still resists the allure of romanticism. The most memorable glimpse of the historical Christian aboard the *Bounty* on the morning of the mutiny comes from the testimony of Thomas Ellison, one of the mutineers who would hang, at his court martial: 'My terror was more Increas'd, at the site of Mr Christian, he looked like a Madman is [sic] long hair was luse, his shirt Collair open'.³⁸ Ellison's testimony established the key elements of the Romantic iconography of the mutinous Christian as a kind of Byronic hero, and this was how Clark Gable played him in *1935*, in swashbuckling mode, with his shirt open at the neck and his sleeves rolled between wrist and elbow. Marlon Brando's Christian is more composed. His defiance of a commander's orders by giving water to a suffering subordinate is calm and deliberate, and although the blow that initiates the mutiny seems an instinctive reaction to Bligh's violence, his actions throughout the scene express more a Lutheran '*ich kann nicht anders*' than a Byronic surrender to passionate

36 Cited in Patrick O'Brian, *Joseph Banks: A Life*, London, Collins Harvill, 1988 (1987), p 235.

37 Alexander, 2003, p 448.

38 Alexander, 2003, p 268.

feeling. It is significant, in the language of dress, that Brando's Christian is in full uniform when he strikes Bligh. Although his hat falls off in the ensuing melée and his hair becomes dishevelled in the fray (whereas Gable, strangely, has not a hair out of place), his collar and naval coat remain buttoned throughout. He looks more of a professional sailor in this scene than in many others. Indeed, although he now acknowledges the ethical impossibility of failing to oppose the tyranny embodied in Bligh, this Christian is no anarchist. 'I am taking command of this ship', he declares, and remains aloof from the carnivalesque indulgences of the other mutineers, who whoop with joy as they throw the breadfruit cargo overboard. Instead, Christian thoughtfully smooths his hair, restoring order to his appearance, as he would like to restore it to the voyage itself.

The historical record shows that, on his return to England, Bligh was honourably acquitted at his court martial at Spithead, where it was decreed that no blame attached to him for the loss of the *Bounty*. The cause of the mutiny was of no relevance to this legal procedure,³⁹ but, in 1962, it becomes an important addendum to the legal verdict. Here the court martial takes place in the more imposing surrounds of Greenwich and, to its verdict of honourable acquittal, the court feels obliged to add comment in two parts. On the basis of evidentiary conclusion, the court laments, first, Bligh's 'excess of zeal'. While Bligh is not explicitly censured, the strong implication is that he must bear some responsibility for the mutiny. The court then goes on to say that, while no code can cover all contingencies and while justice cannot be put aboard ships in books, justice and decency are carried in the heart of the captain: 'It is for this reason that the Admiralty has always sought to appoint its officers from the ranks of gentlemen. The court regrets to note that the appointment of Captain William Bligh was, in that respect, a failure.'⁴⁰ Bligh's acquittal is thus doubly tainted, with indeterminate responsibility for the mutiny, and with the charged issue of 'gentility' that has driven his increasingly tense and antagonistic relationship with Christian. 'I am not leaving you, Mr Christian,' said Bligh as he left the *Bounty* for the last time, assuring the mutineer that he would always be behind him, rope in hand. But the

39 Alexander, 2003, p 172.

40 There may be some inconsistency in the script here. The first reference to Bligh in this sequence is to 'Lieutenant Bligh', which correctly identifies Bligh's rank aboard the *Bounty*. Later in the sequence, as we have seen, he is referred to as 'Captain'. Any such inconsistency is telling, for, as Caroline Alexander (2003, p 52) has said, the Admiralty's reluctance to accord Bligh the rank of captain surely contributed to any crisis of authority aboard the *Bounty*.

court martial addendum is a bitter defeat for Bligh, for now Christian will never leave him, moving through his mind by day, and a trouble to his dreams. Bligh, accorded no status by the Admiralty from which he has always craved validation, disappears from the film.

The existential dandy

Marlon Brando's performance contributes to the imaginative archive of *Bounty* representations a distinctly postwar interpretation of Fletcher Christian as an existential hero, placed in a moral world (constructed by William Bligh's command) that is both absurd and cruel, and forced to take responsibility for his existence through choices, decisions and actions that are defining and irrevocable. He is driven by a Sartrean imperative, unable finally to deny that responsibility falls upon the individual to choose how he or she will respond to the world in all its futility and injustice. In the minutes leading up to the mutiny, this imperative takes the form of a call to moral action, which Christian heeds. But, rather than lifting the existential burden, his actions merely intensify it. What next, after the grand gesture? How to continue, actively, to exist? How to deal with the continuing and terrible responsibility of exercising moral freedom?

Christian's post-mutiny traumas reflect the historical context of the film's production. In 19th-century literature, it was possible to imagine dandyism as an effective solvent of the troubles of the age. In Oscar Wilde's play *An Ideal Husband* (1895), Lord Goring, a 'flawless dandy',⁴¹ not only uses his knowledge of human nature to resolve the plot but also reveals, beneath 'the delicate fopperies'⁴² of his speech, manner and appearance, an emotional and ethical authenticity that allows him to claim the role indicated by the play's title. Like the character of Mirabel in Benjamin Disraeli's society novel *Henrietta Temple* (1837), Lord Goring is a 'dandy *ex machina* responsible for a happy ending'.⁴³ The *Mutiny* of 1962, as befits its post-World War II context, offers no such easy certainty.

41 Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2000, p 186.

42 Wilde, 2000, p 232.

43 Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1960, p 157.

In the first scene after the mutiny, we see Christian sitting alone in his cabin, his body uncharacteristically tense and graceless. Sounds of the sailors on deck celebrating the victory over Bligh emphasise his solitude and alienation from their communal joy. The cabin is strewn with richly coloured clothes, which are not part of Christian's naval uniform but represent the private wardrobe by which he has always signified his outsider status on the ship as well as his 'aristocratic' self-fashioning. His gorgeous scarlet cloak, cane, silvery suit and matching hat from the opening scene are all on display, seeming to frame – and mock – him in his despair. One could read the *mise en scène* as an allegorical tableau, the title of which would be 'vanity'. When Gunner's Mate Mills and the other main mutineers come below they are puzzled by Christian's depression: 'But we won, didn't we?', Smith exclaims naively. Christian wearily explains (after kicking away a piece of fine cloth that he has accidentally dropped) that they have only trapped themselves in a metaphysical prison, not locked in but locked out of a society they can never re-enter. He refuses the moral security offered by Smith, that he did 'what's right', although he finds some consolation in having shown allegiance to a higher authority than Bligh's: 'I believe I did what honour dictated and that belief sustains me.' This calls to mind Charles Baudelaire's comment on the dandy: 'If he committed a crime, it would perhaps not ruin him; but if his crime resulted from some trivial cause, his disgrace would be irreparable.'⁴⁴ In his own mind, Christian is not disgraced, but he is damned – self-exiled and trapped in a hell of his own making with no respite from the continuing existential necessity of making impossible choices for which he must always bear responsibility. As he pores over maps looking for a place of safety from the wrath of Bligh and the Admiralty, the consequences of his actions seem both inescapable and unfathomable. Fletcher Christian is now truly a Nowhere Man, for there is nowhere he can go, and nothing he can be. The contrast between the uniformed exile and Clark Gable's cheerful pirate, bare-chested and head-scarfed, could not be stronger.

In *An Ideal Husband*, Wilde showed 'the philosopher that underlies the dandy'⁴⁵ to be a kind of Japanese Buddhist, benevolent in his acceptance of the world's imperfections, his exquisite clothes expressing the arts of *iki* ('refined style') and *kire* ('the cut') as ways of signifying and responding to

44 Baudelaire, 1964, p 28.

45 Wilde, 2000, p 267.

the impermanence of all things.⁴⁶ Brando's Christian belongs to a different philosophical school, one created by the ideas of – amongst others – Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. In his analysis of the dandy-as-rebel, Camus quoted French romantic writer Petrus Borel: 'I was conscious of my power and I was conscious of my chains.' Camus commented: 'But these chains are valuable objects. Without them it would be necessary to prove, or to exercise, this power which, after all, one is not very sure of having.'⁴⁷ These words capture Christian's dilemma in the last part of the film. Without Bligh to position himself against, who will he be? To what use will he put the power unleashed when he cast off the chains that defined his dissent?

These questions are sharply posed for Christian by his Tahitian lover Maimiti when the *Bounty* returns to Tahiti after the mutiny. While the other mutineers rush ashore to renew their relationships with Tahitian women, Christian remains aboard ship, below deck, alone. When he fails to appear onshore, Maimiti goes to him, paddling a small outrigger canoe to where the *Bounty* rides at anchor. In this carefully composed shot, back-lit by the setting sun, Maimiti's silhouette converges on the larger shape of the ship. The visual imagery of this reversed beach-crossing establishes the poetics of contrast that determine the following sequence, in which Maimiti is the figure of agency, whereas Christian, once again, remains a mystery.

The next shot is a close-up of Maimiti's bare feet descending a ladder into Christian's quarters on the ship. On the rungs of the ladder are strewn various male fashion accessories – the *accoutrements* of Christian's dandyism, which in the first half of the film functioned as 'symbols of his aristocratic superiority of mind'.⁴⁸ Now, they are the detritus of his personal hell. As Maimiti's feet pick out a path between these now discarded items, the camera's movement traces a metonymy of contrasts, whereby the 'native' innocence and purity of her clean, naked feet offsets Christian's slovenly disregard for the luxurious appurtenances of an advanced civilisation. On the lowest rung of the ladder lies his naval hat, so carefully employed throughout the film to indicate Christian's fluctuating feelings about his professional identity, an identity that is now irrecoverable.

46 Graham Parkes, 'Japanese Aesthetics', in Edward N Zalta (ed), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011, plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/japanese-aesthetics.

47 Camus, 1991, p 50.

48 Baudelaire, 1964, p 27.

The camera pulls back from Maimiti's feet to reveal the full panoply of disorder in Christian's cabin, an elaborately staged *mise en scène* that symbolises his inner turmoil and moral crisis. Dozing, dishevelled and slumped at his desk, Christian's appearance offers a striking contrast to the 'assurance in conduct'⁴⁹ he displayed in all his earlier encounters with Maimiti; on arrival in Tahiti, and in subsequent 'beach' scenes, he has carried himself with confident but casual dignity. Beside him, now, standing for the world he has lost, is a globe. In the gloom of the cabin, the crepuscular light picks out Christian's ruffled white shirt, its improbable brightness the last vestige of his dandyism. Christian's shirt is a discordant off-rhyme to Maimiti's simple, spotless white *pareu*, superbly enhanced by the frangipani behind her ear. This 'white noise' has a clear message: adrift between two worlds, neither of which he can now belong to, Christian does not know who he is, or even how to be, whereas Maimiti is immaculate in her native self-possession.

As she begins tidying the cluttered room, Maimiti's movements wake Christian, who initially affects indifference to her presence. Reporting what she has heard on the beach, in a compact Tahitian rendering of the mutiny narrative, she offers him yet another identity: 'Fletcher chief now.' Christian's rueful response fends off this identity but, courteously enough, humours her: 'A very small chief, Maimiti, running for his life.' Christian then gets to his feet and fiddles ineffectively with a chart. The emotional temperature rises as Maimiti's insistence that she will accompany him when he leaves Tahiti, and her refusal to engage with his statements that he 'cares for nothing in the world' and has 'nothing to share with anybody,' provoke him to explode into the first ungallant thing he has ever said to her: 'Are you deaf as well as ignorant?' This insult, born of frustration and impotence, is as revealing as it is shocking; utterly unbecoming for either an officer or a dandy, it declares decisively that Christian is now neither. It provokes a torrent of angry words from Maimiti, spoken in Tahitian, and not translated. Language goes into momentary limbo as the emotions repressed at their formal parting on the beach before the mutiny, having been compounded by subsequent events, are now unleashed. The scene ends with Maimiti returning to pidgin English to deliver a piece of proverbial Tahitian wisdom. 'Tahitian people say, you eat life, or life eat you.'

49 d'Aurevilly, 1928, p 17.

The values Maimiti expresses here are instinctive, and the reasoning of her island wisdom is simple: to survive, to live, is enough. Is it? By closing the scene with Maimiti's compelling utterance, the film grants it, and her, dramatic authority. Indeed, in line with a long tradition of European representations of Pacific Islanders, it places her in the overlapping roles of Bon Sauvage and Philosophe Nu, figures of beneficent otherness rhetorically constructed to voice criticisms of European civilisation or to present a philosophy contrasting – and implicitly interrogating – supposedly progressive concepts such as ambition and shame.⁵⁰ But, if this scene invites the viewer to see Maimiti and, by extension, any future Christian might have with her, through 'Rousseau-tinted spectacles',⁵¹ the rest of the film dispels that thought. Christian's self-immolating attempt to save the *Bounty* from destruction by his fellow mutineers shows that he has not freed himself from the hope of one day reinstating himself in civilised society, and thus that he has not heeded Maimiti's 'traditional' wisdom.

The Tahitian proverb Maimiti quotes may be more resonant to the film's context than to the film itself, albeit in an ironic way. The injunction to eat life or be eaten by it is cruelly appropriate to the dog-eat-dog world of Realpolitik both in the United States and globally in the 1960s. When the film was released, in November 1962, President John F Kennedy had a year to live. His *Civil Rights Act*, stuck in Congress at the time of his assassination in 1963, was manoeuvred into law in 1964, thanks in large part to the political know-how of new President Lyndon B Johnson. Johnson's own *Voting Rights Act*, a pillar of his Great Society program, would become law in 1965. Such political changes failed to meet the social needs urgently expressed in Martin Luther King's march on Washington DC in August 1963; by race riots in Watts, Los Angeles, two years later; and by similar riots in cities throughout the United States in 1967. King was assassinated in April 1968, followed in June by Robert F Kennedy, the late president's brother, attorney-general and heir-apparent to his liberal legacy. Johnson, the last Roosevelt Democrat to hold presidential office, did not stand for his party's presidential nomination in 1968 and, in January 1969, Richard M Nixon, Dwight D Eisenhower's vice-president from 1952 to 1960, was sworn in as 37th president of the United States.

50 Neil Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, pp 7, 35; Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp 226–27.

51 Edmond, 1997, p 228.

Plus ça change. Whatever fate may have befallen Fletcher Christian, Bligh was back. (William Bligh would, indeed, return, and he would face yet another rebellion, as governor of New South Wales, in 1808. He was effectively deposed from the governorship, as Nixon himself would in 1974 be deposed from the presidency.)

The triumph of authority over hope played out in US politics in the decade following the film's release was, in 1962, already an old story to the peoples of the Pacific. During the 1940s and 1950s, their visions of independence from colonial rule had been replaced with the reality of life under the postwar superpowers as an experience of crushing authoritarian abuse, supposedly justified by the aim of maintaining international security. In 1959 in Tahiti, a politically controversial trial consigned the charismatic independence leader Pouvana'a a Oopa to an eight-year jail term, followed by exile to France; he was alleged to have attempted to burn down the capital, Pape'ete, as part of a revolutionary conspiracy. Elsewhere in the Pacific, the use of the region as a testing ground for the world's most dangerous and destructive nuclear explosions revealed a merciless exercise of superpower over subordinate and largely voiceless communities. The most extreme environmental and human abuses in relation to Pacific nuclear testing occurred in Micronesia, where tests carried out by the United States at Bikini, Enewetak and Johnston atolls between 1946 and 1958 dwarfed in explosive force and radioactive fallout all other nuclear explosions before or since.⁵² It is all the more shocking that the United States held these islands at the time in 'strategic trust' under UN authority, which committed the trustee nation to promote the entrusted islands' 'progressive development' while also respecting the Islanders' 'human rights and fundamental freedoms'.⁵³

US bomb tests in the Marshall Islands ended in 1958. British nuclear testing at Malden and Christmas islands continued until 1962. France began testing nuclear weapons in its Pacific territories in 1966. While we do not suggest that there are any intentional references to the Pacific nuclear testing programs in the 1962 *Mutiny on the Bounty*, there are resonances between the film and this aspect of the historical context of its production. The brutal exercise of executive authority in defiance of human rights and natural justice connects the nuclear powers in the

52 Tilman A Ruff, 'The Humanitarian Impact and Implications of Nuclear Test Explosions in the Pacific Region,' *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol 97, 2015, pp 778, 780–81.

53 UN Charter, Article 76, quoted in Ruff (2015, p 793).

postwar era with Bligh's style of command as shown in the film. Like Bligh on board the *Bounty*, in their nuclear-testing programs the US, British and French governments disregarded the wellbeing of the subjects under their control and exhibited no remorse for the suffering they imposed on those subjects. With reference to the script of *1962*, we might call this the 'never mind Norman' syndrome. Examples from the era of Pacific nuclear testing include US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's dismissal of the rights of the Marshallese with the comment 'There are only 90,000 of them out there. Who gives a damn?',⁵⁴ and a British military report prior to the 1957 Christmas Island bomb test, which justified exceeding internationally agreed levels of radiation because the resulting health hazards would arise 'only to primitive people'.⁵⁵

The choice of test sites also resonates eerily with the later stages of the *Bounty* story. US naval officers tasked in October 1945 with finding suitable locations for future test explosions would recall, 'We just took out dozens of maps and started looking for remote sites'.⁵⁶ The mental image this statement conjures is an ideologically inverted copy of the scene, late in the film, where Brando searches his maps for a secret island where the mutineers can hide. The difference, of course, is that, whereas Christian and the mutineers became displaced persons as a consequence of their own actions, the inhabitants of Bikini and Enewetak atolls were exiled from their homes as a consequence of events controlled by the US military⁵⁷ – events initially cloaked in the costume of 'choice'. In 1946, Commodore Wyatt, the military governor of the Marshall Islands, made the Bikinians an offer they felt they couldn't refuse. Cynically exploiting the Christian values of the converted Islanders, he compared them to the children of Israel and offered them the chance to do God's will by temporarily giving up their homeland to atomic testing for 'the good of mankind and to end all world wars'.⁵⁸ Instead, the Bikinians and other Marshall Islanders found themselves trapped in a human, cultural and environmental nightmare, worsened by the knowledge that their accession to the American request had only contributed to the proliferation of the world's most lethal weapons. In 1954, the Marshallese

54 Quoted in Ruff (2015, p 777).

55 Quoted in Ruff (2015, p 779).

56 Quoted in Sasha Davis, *The Empires' Edge: Militarization, Resistance, and Transcending Hegemony in the Pacific* (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2015, p 61).

57 Stewart Firth, 'The Nuclear Issue in the Pacific Islands', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol 21, no 4, 1986, p 211.

58 Quoted in Davis (2015, p 63).

petitioned the United Nations to bring an end to weapons testing in their region,⁵⁹ but UN resolutions in 1954 and 1956 authorised the continuation of US nuclear tests, overruling the explicitly stated wishes of the Marshall Islanders.⁶⁰

Conclusion: The end of freedom

The on-screen preamble to *1935* reads, in part:

Neither ship nor breadfruit reached the West Indies. Mutiny prevented it – mutiny against the abuse of harsh eighteenth-century sea law. But this mutiny, famous in history and legend, helped bring about a new discipline, based upon mutual respect between officers and men, by which Britain's sea power is maintained as security for all who pass upon the seas.

Historically, this is nonsense: mutinies broke out in the British navy at Spithead and the Nore in 1797, years after the *Bounty* courts martial, and Cunard's *Lusitania* had been torpedoed and sunk in 1915; but the intention, presumably, was to offer reassurance to a world in social, economic and political unrest.

The Caine Mutiny also kicks off with a preamble:

There has never been a mutiny in a ship of the United States navy. The truths of this film lie not in its incidents but in the way a few men meet the crisis of their lives.

Here, the film's focus is firmly on its individual characters, and any institutional or social implications are sidestepped. The on-screen afterword takes the form of a dedication, which the action of the drama, combined with its preamble, loads with cumbersome complexity: 'The dedication of this film is simple – to the United States navy.' The ethical difficulties raised by the mutiny depicted keep this dedication far from simple.⁶¹

59 Ruff, 2015, pp 795–96.

60 Ruff, 2015, p 793.

61 These complexities, which the film faithfully reproduces from the novel, are unpacked in Whyte (1957, pp 243–48).

On dry land, and just a year earlier than *The Caine Mutiny*, *The Wild One* (1953), in which Marlon Brando plays the iconically rebellious Johnny Strabler, is prefaced by a preamble that chimes with those quoted above.

This is a shocking story. It could never take place in most American towns – but it did in this one. It is a public challenge not to let it happen again.

In this film, decent middle-American townfolk rebel against the evidently impotent forces of law and order and, like the *Bounty* and *Caine* mutineers, take matters into their own hands. Johnny's rebellious behaviour is a bravura performance designed to cover his sensitivity, itself wonderfully realised in the exquisite smile of Brando to which the film builds. The film's truly 'shocking story' is the public challenge of social disorder wrought by law-abiding citizens.

All three films express terror of social disorder or institutional breakdown. The 1962 *Mutiny on the Bounty* shakes off the conservatism of its predecessors by showing no interest in such disorder, while also ensuring that anarchy does not follow from the mutiny, as Fletcher Christian takes command. But into what kind of brave new world does the *Bounty* sail? The mutineers may have rid themselves of William Bligh but, as Christian knows only too well and as he tells his newly appointed officers whom he addresses, with habituated if stilted formality, as 'gentlemen', they certainly haven't won. The burden of knowledge about this world falls on Christian, and its distinctive characteristic is the absence of God. 'May God help you' says Fryer to Christian on the *Bounty's* deck, before joining Bligh in the longboat. Christian politely thanks him. One of his new officers, Smith, offers cosmic reassurance:

When a man gives up as much as you did, just because he thinks it's right, the Good Lord would never let him down ... Wherever we might go, you'll find a happy life, sir. It's God's will.

The telling word here is the plural 'we', which surely reminds Christian that his fate is tied to that of the other mutineers. And the valediction of Mills, who is truly responsible for Christian's death, also comes with a benediction, as he says to the dying Christian: 'May God have mercy on you.'

At this point Christian must be beyond God, for he has already been in hell for some time. We have seen him sitting, motionless and erect, in one of the 'brown studies' to which the gardener's voice-over refers, surrounded by the deconstructed costume in which he had boarded the

ship; we have seen him kicking aside his furniture in frustration; and we have seen him hopelessly caught between the need to navigate and the desire to tear up his charts. There are no significant choices, and no meaningful direction, available to him. In the film's most interesting departure from the historical record of the mutiny, Christian does not repeat the words attributed to him by Bligh just after the mutiny: 'I am in hell – I am in hell'.⁶² But hell is where he finds himself, either in his cabin or on Pitcairn, and there can be no more powerful image of hell than the hooded figure blundering through the flames on the burning *Bounty's* lower deck in search of a sextant, to take him – where?

In the film's struggle between tyranny and freedom, tyranny is a given and freedom is the film's problematic – for Christian's dilemmas all involve the problem of freedom. Freedom from tyranny, to be sure, but liberation into what? The existential bleakness into which this film descends made it hard to end, and it falls to Ned Young to come up with an acceptably supple substitute for closure: 'We'll tell our story somehow, to someone.'

It's the most modern, most challenging of all *Bounty* stories.

62 Alexander, 2003, p 141.

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