“No Guts No Glory”: An Interrogation of Masculinity in Tim Winton’s *Breath*

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the development of masculine identity in Tim Winton’s novel *Breath* and suggests that a peculiarly Australian encounter with nature is fundamental to the development of gender in Winton’s work. The Western Australian environment becomes a powerful force within the novel, acting as a fundamental outlet for characters to explore and express their gender identities. Through his characters’ interactions with the natural world, Winton reveals the performativity of masculine identities and the possibility for a revisioning of gender ideals. The first chapter explores the intrinsic relationship between individuals, gender, nature, and nation from a theoretical framework examining works by Judith Butler, R.W Connell, and Anne McClintock, as well as non-fiction by Winton himself. Chapter Two focuses on the character of Sando, arguing that he embodies a hegemonic form of masculinity founded upon the domination of nature through increasingly risky surfing expeditions. As a masculine mentor throughout the novel, Sando plays an important role in establishing a masculine ideal for his teenage apprentices, Bruce and Loonie. Chapter Three explores how femininity in the novel is presented in a way that challenges dominant masculine scripts and suggests that gender roles are arbitrary. Finally, Chapter Four explores how the masculine ideal that Sando represents is problematic and encourages Loonie and Bruce to develop a disabling relationship with nature and the people in their lives. In the end, Winton proposes a revisioning of Australian masculine scripts that is possible through nurturing a positive and peaceful relationship with the natural world, and thus the self.
CHAPTER I: Introduction

In her examination of Tim Winton’s literary work Mind the Country (2006), Salhia Ben-Messahel argues that “social and individual identity are constructed as essential elements of the landscape” and further discusses how in his writing “Winton insists on the intrinsic relationship between place and people, arguing that the individual springs from the configurations and colours of the land” (104). Through this argument, Ben-Messahel suggests that in Winton’s work, identity and land are not two separate fields of focus but instead intertwined in a meaningful way. My thesis will expand on Ben-Messahel’s argument that Winton creates an interconnected relationship between the individual and nature in Western Australia while also arguing that individual interactions with nature lead to interrogations of fundamental aspects of Australian masculine identity. In Tim Winton’s novel Breath (2009), characters perform masculinity through their interactions with the natural world. Surfing becomes a mode for characters to interact with nature and establish a relationship with it. On one hand, Winton portrays surfing as a way for characters to dominate and challenge each other and the land; on the other hand, he describes it as a graceful activity that offers an opportunity for a peaceful connection with nature. My thesis will explore this dichotomy to show how Winton uses it to interrogate traditionally masculine relationships with the natural world and to offer alternative forms of Australian masculinity.

Winton’s novel Breath fundamentally contributes to his exploration of the relationship between masculinity and individual interactions with the natural world. Breath is “not simply about the waves and the riding of a surfboard, it is also about the individual in context, the individual as a component of place, defined by place” (Ben-
Messahel 16). Through his characters’ relationships with the environment, Winton demonstrates how nature is a powerful and forceful teacher that has a significant impact on the development of masculinity. The characters expose themselves to harsh and relentless seascapes where they test their limits and prove themselves as honourable “men.” Winton uses surfing to explore and interrogate relationships that the characters develop with the ocean and the way they construct their masculine identities through these relationships. Sando, the surfing guru, encourages his teenage apprentices, Bruce and Loonie, to test their limits in harsh conditions, creating a masculine ideal that involves proving their ability to dominate a hostile environment. Bruce, however, cannot maintain the masculine ideal that Sando encourages and he eventually uses surfing as a way to build a positive relationship with the natural world and explore alternative forms of masculinity. By developing both a strong masculine ideal through Sando’s influence, as well as alternative forms of masculinity through Bruce’s journey into manhood, Winton is able to explore the relationship between the natural world and the development of masculine identity.

By exploring the connection that Winton’s characters have with nature in *Breath*, I will examine how Winton uses the natural world and his characters’ relationship with it to develop alternative forms of masculinity. Critics often argue that in Winton’s fiction “[m]any of [his] male characters seem to move away from … stereotypical masculine conventions and display new models of masculine identity. In offering such novel male representations, Winton challenges the dominant patriarchal practices and discourses prevailing in the Australian culture and society” (Zapata 97). Throughout my examination of the relationship between masculinity and nature in *Breath*, I will argue
that critics are correct in suggesting that Winton challenges traditional gender ideals in his novel. Furthermore, I will discuss how these alternative forms of masculinity are directly associated with the Australian environment. By developing alternative forms of masculinity in his fiction, Winton interrogates fundamental gender narratives that are directly associated with Australian identity. The relationships that individuals have with the natural world through activities such as surfing are crucial to understanding Winton’s re-creation of traditional gendered scripts and Australian identity. Drawing from the work of gender theorists such as Judith Butler, Anne McClintock, and R.W. Connell, as well as theories of Australian landscape from critic Tracy Ireland and Winton himself, I will examine how Winton interrogates traditional Australian narratives of masculinity in Breath and how the relationships that the characters have with the natural world reveal the performative nature of gender identity.

Examining Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity is useful for understanding the socially constructed nature of gender that Winton develops in Breath. In her book Gender Trouble (1999) Butler explores the roots of gender and how gender is developed and performed through individuals and society. She argues that individuals participate in “acts, gestures and desire” which together make up their “internal core” and sense of identity. According to Butler’s theory:

such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if
that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse. (173)

Butler makes the argument that gender is a product of repeated, outward gestures and is thus performative in nature. Through this argument, Butler dismantles the common conception that gender is an inherent trait that derives from the physical body. Gender is not inherent but inherited through social scripts and culturally specific gestures and traditions.

It is easy to assume that Butler’s theory of gender performativity allows for individuals to choose how they would like to portray their gender, but Butler suggests that gender performativity is more complicated than simply choosing one’s gender and acting it out. Alternatively, “gendered bodies are so many ‘styles of the flesh.’ These styles are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities” (177). Butler describes how gender can never be completely self-created because there are social structures in place that outline how gender should be performed and what gender is. She describes how gestures, desires, and mannerisms that create gender are adopted and enforced by strict social influences. Social scripts then become internalized by individuals and make up core elements of their individual, gendered identity. Thus, gender is not a direct result of the physical, biological body but is instead developed in a social context.

Since gender consists of a collection of performative gestures derived from a social script, performative gender is a fabricated reality, not a true representation of individuals. There is no “proper” way to express gender or specific way that individuals act as a result of their physical body. What is important to note about Butler’s argument
is that socially gendered scripts do not often portray one’s personal sense of self, so it is possible that individuals will not identify with the gender script expected of them. However, there is still strong social pressure for individuals to act a certain way based on their physical sex. Moreover, there are consequences for individuals who deviate from normative gender scripts. Butler discusses how:

\[\text{[g]ender is \ldots a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility to those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (178)}\]

Normative gender scripts are maintained through social reinforcement and individuals who deviate from gender expectations are often viewed as deviant and are socially isolated. Because notions of normative gender are engrained into cultures through specific scripts and because there are consequences for deviating from these expectations, it is difficult for individuals who do not identify with gender expectations.

Like Butler, R.W. Connell argues that gender, and more specifically, masculinity is a result of the social environment. Connell’s discussion on masculinity is useful to consider when interpreting the different constructions of masculinity in Breath. He describes how “[m]ass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life” (45). Connell is aware that, in many cases, gender and masculinity are assumed to be a result of the physical body and because of this there is a strong belief that there is a “right” form of masculinity to which men must adhere. Like Butler, however, Connell argues against the claim that there is a “true gender” and a
fixed masculinity and instead describes how social environments play an important role in the development of gender identity. He claims that “everyday knowledge of gender is subject to conflicting claims to know, explain and judge. These forms of knowledge are…connected with particular social practices” (5). According to Connell, many people desire to understand gender and cast judgment on individuals based on their ability or inability to perform normative gender roles. However, he argues that gender is a result of social practices. The male body is not a determining factor for masculinity but instead “the body is a more or less neutral surface or landscape on which a social symbolism is imprinted” (45-46). Social scripts and expectations surrounding masculinity are imprinted on the male body and the body becomes a symbol of these gendered ideals. Traits such as dominance, aggression, and power are not directly a result of the male body but because of ingrained social scripts that associate these traits with masculinity, the male body becomes a symbol for them.

Because there is no “fixed” form of masculinity, it is possible, and likely, that individuals will deviate from normative masculine expectations. Like Butler, Connell describes gender, and masculinity, as a “bodily performance” but also notes that because it is not pre-determined “gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained” (54). For many individuals, social expectations of masculinity do not necessarily coincide with their personal identity. Connell explores the diversity of masculinities and male identities throughout his book by interviewing a wide range of men. Even though the men are subjected to similar social scripts and expectations, all of them experience being a man in very different ways. Connell’s interviews are significant because they demonstrate how despite common gendered expectations masculinity is interpreted and
performed differently. Many of these deviations, although not consistent with normative
gender expectations, are still influenced and shaped by social expectations and pressures.

Like Butler and Connell, cultural critic Anne McClintock suggests that gender is
not physically inherent but is instead developed through social interactions and
experiences. Her argument is consistent with Butler’s and Connell’s, but she focuses
specifically on colonialism and how gender scripts embedded within colonialism shape
the identity of postcolonial nations, like Australia, and the individuals within them.

McClintock makes the connection between gender and the land in postcolonial societies
in *Imperial Leather* (1995). For McClintock, “[g]ender… is not simply a question of
sexuality but also a question of subdued labor and imperial plunder” (5). McClintock
suggests that there is more to gender than anatomical sex and that an important factor in
the development of gender and gendered scripts is historical past. She argues that nations
that are created through the violent acts of colonization influence the development of
individual identity in a notably gendered way. McClintock describes how the colonizers,
who are portrayed as masculine in postcolonial discourse, penetrate and pillage the
uncivilized feminine land. This analogy is then internalized through patriarchal gender
expectations within the colonized nation and influences national identity. She explores
how “nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind but are historical practices
through which social difference is both invented and performed. Nationalism becomes, as
a result, radically constitutive of people’s identities through social contests that are
frequently violent and always gendered” (353). For McClintock, gender is also a social
fabrication which is performed, and she expresses how nations and national identity are
crucial in the formation of these gendered fabrications.
In postcolonial discourse, men and women experience colonialism and gender expectations in radically different ways. As McClintock describes with her analogy of the colony being a woman’s body that is penetrated by a male colonizer, distinct power relations are created between men and women. Not only does the historical past of a nation contribute to the formation of gendered scripts, but gender expectations also serve to symbolize important national power relations. In many “male nationalisms” developed through the act of colonialism, “gender differences between women and men serve to symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men” (354). An important aspect of masculinity portrayed through McClintock’s lens of colonialism is that many of the gender dynamics created relate to patriarchal dominance and power. McClintock suggests that much of the masculine power created in these nations and the individuals within them derives from the feminized subject of the land. By addressing the feminization of the land by colonizers, McClintock shows how the relationship that colonizers have with the land historically has implications for the masculine power relations and patriarchal dynamics that are formed within national identity. This past is then embedded within national narratives and becomes an important aspect of national and individual identity.

National identity and gender narratives in Australia are rooted in the landscape. In her paper “The Absence of Ghosts: Landscape and Identity in the Archaeology of Australia’s Settler Culture,” Tracy Ireland explores how the narratives associated with national identity in Australia derive from a strong connection to the land. She argues that “the landscape is seen as a determinant of not only the course of colonial history but also of the distinctive characteristics of national identity” (56). Furthermore, she connects the
influence that the landscape has on identity specifically with masculinity and the formation of gender narratives within Australia. She describes how when Australia was being colonized and settled “the dangerous and threatening character of the land was to be construed as the test of Empire and the test from which Australian manhood would emerge ennobled” (60). The Australian landscape was a force to be reckoned with, posing a challenge to the colonizers and settlers who came to live on the land. The struggle between the coloniser and the landscape created a foundation for masculine narratives in Australia today. Like McClintock, Ireland makes the connection between colonialism and the landscape and comes to the conclusion that gender expectations revolving around masculinity emerge as a result of this colonial relationship with the land. She describes how “[t]he results of the settler experience became essentialized in the myth of the ‘bushman.’ The bushman was a model of masculinity created by the effects of the Australian landscape” (60). During the struggle between the coloniser (man) and the dangerous, rugged landscape, the essential Australian figure of the bushman emerged as a symbol of manhood and what it means to be a “true Australian.”

The bushman is an important figure in Australian literature and contributes to a sense of national identity that is connected to masculinity. In The Australian Legend (1958), Russel Ward discusses the roots of the bushman narrative and explores how the figure of the bushman has shaped identity in Australia. He describes how:

[a]ccording to myth the ‘typical Australian’ is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others…. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion…. He is a ‘hard case,’ skeptical about the value of religion and
intellectual and cultural pursuits…. He will stick with his mates though thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong. (1-2)

The figure that Ward describes as being the “typical Australian” is rough, rugged, skeptical, loyal and, most importantly, male. The Australian narrative of the bushman encompasses essential masculine ideals of what it means to be Australian and what it means to be a man. In this portrayal of Australian identity, there is no room for femininity.

As Ward continues to examine the bushman narrative, he further argues that the masculine ideal of the bushman is a direct result of the Australian landscape. He describes how “the nature of Australian geography, and the great though decreasing scarcity of white women in the outback, brought into being an itinerant rural proletariat, overwhelmingly masculine in composition and outlook” (10). Ward’s explanation for why the bushman narrative is predominantly a male one is that the outback was isolated. There were not many white women for the white settlers to be with, and, as a result, a strong sense of masculine mateship developed. He continues to argue that “[a]mong the influences which shaped the life of the outback community, the brute facts of Australian geography were probably most important” (10). According to Ward’s argument, the environment of the outback played a fundamental role in shaping the narrative and the masculine ideals that it stands for. Because the climate of the outback was harsh and difficult to survive in, the men of the bush had to be resilient and rely on each other to survive in the isolated environment.

According to Ireland, the Australian landscape has played another critical role in the formation of masculinity in Australia, that of the uncivilized “other” which must be
tamed and dominated. Ireland argues that “[i]f the bushman has represented the nation, then the nation's ‘other’ has been seen as the land or the body of Australia itself. Analysts of cultural nationalism have outlined how the nation develops conceptions of itself in opposite to a perceived other, an object that may be simultaneously both desired and despised” (61). As she continues to explore the relationship between the male coloniser and the landscape, Ireland describes how the land becomes personified as the “other,” an opposition to the white, colonial man. In relation to the bushman narrative, the landscape is a force that helps to create national identity through the figure of the bushman but is also a powerful and destructive force that acts against the bushman and makes it difficult for him to survive. As Ireland suggests, the perception of the land as a threatening other creates an ambivalent relationship with the landscape in which the land becomes an object of desire and an important resource while also being a threatening and relentless enemy.

Ireland parallels the complicated relationship that the bushman has with the land to that of a mother and son. The land becomes personified as a female body that births the bushman while also acting against him. Ireland discusses how “[t]he linguistic signification of Australia as mother and the land as the body of a woman … is the colonialist framework of desire, to possess, master, and tame, which casts the object of this desire, the land, in a feminine role…. Australia is often personified as a ‘witch mother,’ experimenting on her helpless victims” (61). By exploring the ambivalent relationship that the colonisers had with the land, Ireland sheds light on an important aspect of masculinity that emerges from the colonial relationship with it, the need for dominance. A key factor in the Australian masculine narrative is overcoming the land,
taming it, and dominating it. This narrative also alludes to a sense of male superiority where the land, the feminine, must be pillaged, mastered, and civilized by a masculine power. What is essential to note within this framework is that not only the land but also the relationship that a nation and individuals have with the land plays an important role in narratives of masculinity in Australia.

In his memoir *Land’s Edge* (2012), Winton explores the importance of the natural world in the development of his personal identity and discusses how nature plays a significant role in the formation of masculine identity in Australia. He discusses how critical moments in his life and the lives of many Australians are shaped and influenced by the natural world. Winton focuses on the coastline, describing how “almost every Australian rite of passage occurs on or near the beach. The beach is where we test and prove our physical prowess” (40). Winton describes the relationship between individuals and the beach in masculine terms by focusing on “physical prowess,” a trait associated with normative masculinity in Australian culture. The coastline is a place for men to physically test themselves and prove “manhood.” Winton’s discussion of the relationship between identity and seascape suggests that essential elements of the Australian bushman narrative are still present in Australian identity and masculinity today. Furthermore, Winton describes how in Australia there is a sense of glory and accomplishment earned from encountering dangerous situations in nature. Discussing how Australians flock to the sea during dangerous weather conditions and storm warnings, Winton comments:

I suspect we go because of these warnings, at times, and not simply despite them. The sea is one rare wild card left in the homogenous suburban life. Deep down we still see ourselves as goers. Being last out of the water after a shark siren, taking
the biggest wave of the set, coming home with the meanest sunburn, right to the bikini line – these are still badges of honour. *(Land’s Edge 92-91)*

In this passage, Winton directly connects the relationship that Australians have with nature and their attitude towards the environment with their pride and a sense of national identity. Because Australians, according to Winton, view themselves as people who can withstand and prove themselves in harsh conditions, they take risks in nature and participate in dangerous activities. Like McClintock’s argument that national identity becomes gendered through repeated activities and practices, Winton’s analysis of the Australian desire to participate in dangerous endeavors suggests that how individuals interact with nature can shape national identity in a significantly gendered way.

Winton further explores the connection between identity and place by developing the natural world as active, influencing characters’ actions and impacting their sense of belonging. In Winton’s memoir and fictional work, the environment is not presented as passive, but instead “landscape or seascape is almost an actor; so much alive that it sets the mood and provokes a response” (Liu 172). In *Land’s Edge*, Winton discusses how he has always been completely captivated by the ocean and how “the ocean was completely consuming; it was a threat with one hand and a gift with the other” (66). He suggests that individuals are captivated by the natural world and their lives are deeply influenced by it. Moreover, his characters are clearly influenced by their relationship with the natural world and are greatly affected by it. Nature invokes a powerful response from the characters, inspires them to act, behave, and think in certain ways. As a result, the relationship that the characters have with the natural world has a direct influence on their senses of self and how they interact with others. Through his personal experience with
the ocean and his characters’ relationship with an active and inspiring landscape, Winton suggests that one’s relationship with the natural world is important in the development of identity.

Many of Winton’s critics are interested in how he uses the natural world to explore the development of masculinity. In *Mind the Country*, Ben-Messahel includes an interview with Winton in which he reflects on masculinity and what it means to be a man. He describes how “[b]ecause of our distorted training … boys are still trying to act and not to feel. Men regardless of their background and largely regardless of their education, will only allow themselves to feel up to a certain point before they have to act. Their training is that action equals power” (51). Like Butler and Connell, Winton describes masculinity as a type of performance that is developed and reinforced through social scripts. Because men have been dissuaded from conveying powerful emotions, they express themselves through action. The environment is connected to the development of masculinity because individuals use it as a testing ground to prove themselves as “men” while also exploring different forms of masculinity outside of conventional social scripts. When reflecting on the portrayal of masculinity in Winton’s work, Ben-Messahel argues that his “handling of themes illustrates the quest of men … for identity and their desire to belong to a particular place and space. The main Winton character is a rootless human being who wanders in hostile but essential geographical and social space in a fragmented but essential universe” (25). Ben-Messahel makes an interesting observation that the actively hostile and challenging environment that Winton creates in his literature often mirrors the turbulent social environment that the characters are experiencing as they search for their masculine identities. Like Butler, Winton shows how gender derives from
a social context, but he also uses the environment as a place where characters can explore pre-determined social scripts and challenge them. Through the interactions that his characters have with the natural world, Winton interrogates social scripts and suggests that many men do not identify with normative masculine ideals.

Throughout my thesis I will argue that scholarly critics such as Ben-Messahel are correct in suggesting that characters within Winton’s fiction are “a component of place, defined by place” and will show how individual relationships with the natural world help develop and form masculine ideals that are crucial to the characters’ sense of self. In *Breath*, surfing guru Bill Sanderson, also known as Sando, creates a masculine ideal that is tested and reinforced through the characters confronting the land and testing their “manhood.” Sando encourages the young narrator Bruce Pike and his friend Loonie to seek out and surf the deadliest and most daunting waves. Through surfing, Winton explores how individual relationships with the natural world can impact personal identity and social belonging. In the novel, surfing becomes a way for the boys to prove themselves as men, but it also allows Bruce to find a deeper connection with the ocean and discover alternative forms of masculinity. By drawing upon the work of both gender and postcolonial scholars, I will explore how Winton’s notion that identity and masculinity are connected to place can be developed and explored in a larger framework. I will examine how performativity and social scripts are related to the development of masculine identity and, furthermore, how the Australian landscape has a significant influence on the creation and reinforcement of gender scripts.

The second chapter of my thesis will focus on Sando and his role as a masculine mentor to Loonie and Bruce. By having Sando’s masculine ideal develop through his
interactions with the boys and the interactions he encourages them to have with the ocean, Winton reveals the performative nature of masculinity. Sando admits that he introduces the boys to incredibly dangerous situations to “make men” out of them (Winton 74), which suggests that masculine identity is something to be created through interacting with the environment. Chapter Three will focus on Eva and how, through her deviation from patriarchal femininity, Winton challenges dominant masculine scripts presented in the novel. As a competitive aerial skier as well as a mother figure and an object of desire, Eva does not fulfill normative masculine or feminine roles. Her deviance from normative gender expectations reveals how gender scripts are arbitrary and not inherent based on anatomical sex. Finally, the fourth chapter of my thesis will explore Loonie and Bruce’s relationship with each other and the natural world as they struggle to achieve the masculine ideal that Sando thrusts upon them. The boys are pulled into a world where encountering dangerous, life-threatening situations is not only a badge of honour but also a critical determinant of their identities and senses of belonging. However, the consequences of subscribing to and trying to maintain Sando’s impossible masculine ideal are disabling to the boys. Loonie’s risk-taking behavior leads to his early death and Bruce carries psychological scars from adolescence into adulthood. In the end, it is only through Bruce reconnecting with the natural world and reconstructing his idea of masculinity that he is able to find freedom, which suggests that altering one’s relationship with the natural world is critical to Winton’s revisioning of Australian masculinity.
CHAPTER II: Sando

Through the development of place and the interactions that characters have with the natural world in *Breath*, Winton shows how place is essential to the development of the masculine narratives available to Loonie and Bruce as they grow up in the small Western Australian town of Sawyer. Bill Sanderson is a fundamental figure of masculinity to the boys and represents a seemingly ideal masculine narrative. In Sawyer, there are not many opportunities offered to the boys. Because they are male, they are expected to follow in the footsteps of the other men in town, becoming fishermen, loggers, and miners. Through their jobs, the men in Sawyer have an ambivalent relationship with the land. They rely on it and exploit it for natural resources while also fearing it. The boys are also introduced to masculine narratives through their fathers. Bruce’s father is an immigrant and has not developed a sense of connection to the Australian landscape. His father is fearful of the dangers of the ocean and refuses to allow Bruce to explore and build a relationship with the ocean and the Australian landscape. Loonie’s father acts as a very different model for the boys. He demonstrates a normative script of male sexuality and highlights the expectation that men should show dominance in their sexual encounters. The men in town reveal the normative masculinity that is expected of Loonie and Bruce, but it is not until they are introduced to the surfing community and Sando that they can identify with a masculine ideal.

The local men in Sawyer fulfill normative masculine roles. The men in Sawyer have an ambivalent relationship with the natural world. On one hand, they are wary of the ocean and forest and on the other hand, they dominate the land and exploit it for resources. Most of the men in Sawyer are loggers, miners, or fishermen. All of these
occupations rely heavily on the environment and involve intruding on the natural world in order to obtain resources. Exploiting the land for resources whether through logging, mining or fishing signals their dominance over the natural world. As the men participate in these jobs, they exhibit their dominance over the landscape and use it for their own benefit. Although the men in Sawyer participate in these exploitive occupations, they are also fearful of the environment. Bruce’s immigrant parents are not unusual in their uncertain attitude about the ocean and the natural landscape within the Sawyer community: “[i]t was the way most locals were when [Bruce] was a boy, and they were equally anxious or ambivalent about the forest around them” (11-12). Growing up, Bruce learns from his father and the other men in the town that the ocean and the forest are to be avoided. The men in Sawyer do not have any desire to build a connection with the natural world but instead have an ambivalent relationship with it where they both exploit it and fear it.

The local men in Sawyer are not the only models of normative masculinity that the community offers the boys. The government encourages young men to participate in the military. Bruce describes how he and Loonie had the option to become “army cadets, learning to fire mortars and machine-guns, to lay booby traps and to kill strangers in hand-to-hand combat like other boys we knew, in preparation for a manhood that could barely credit the end of the war in Vietnam” (88). The government exploits young boys by encouraging a type of masculinity that demands violence and combat. As Bruce mentions, the military recruits members by exploiting “boyish fantasies” of adventure and heroism. Through recruiting young boys, the military creates an ideal that encompasses demanding standards of masculinity and strictly defines what it means to be
a man. In the military, men are required to be courageous and ruthless and there is no room for men to develop their own sense of masculinity outside of this ideal. What is interesting about this masculine narrative is that it is deeply embedded within a national framework, linking masculine identity directly to nationalism.

The boys’ fathers also play a central role in the development of masculine scripts through their interactions with the natural world and their social relationships. Bruce’s parents are “discreet and kindly” (16) immigrants from Europe and as a teenager Bruce finds it difficult to relate to them. Furthermore, Mr. Pike is timid and “naturally subdued” (12). Bruce’s father is not a strong or inspiring figure; he is a masculine model who is timid and cautious of the natural world. As an immigrant to Australia, Mr. Pike is “afraid of the sea” (11) and has not developed a strong connection to the Western Australian landscape. His fear of the natural world influences how Bruce grows up and how he interacts with the world around him. As a boy, Bruce “yearn[s] to swim in the ocean but [his] old man [is] firmly against it” (21). Although Bruce is infatuated with the ocean and, unlike the other men in Sawyer, wants to learn more about the ocean and the land, his father will not allow him to explore it. When Bruce begins to explore the natural world through surfing, Mr. Pike “tosse[s] [his Coolite] out into the weeds without a word” (27) in an attempt to discourage Bruce from interacting with the ocean. Because of his fear of the natural world, Mr. Pike discourages Bruce from developing a connection with the ocean that Bruce feels is essential to his identity.

Loonie’s father offers the boys a different perspective on what it means to be a man. Mr. Loon is a fundamental masculine model for the boys because he exhibits his masculinity through sexual dominance. The presence of a prostitute, Margaret Myers, in
Mr. Loon’s pub inspires Loonie to partake in the risky activity of voyeurism. When Loonie brings Bruce to the pub to spy on Margaret with him, Bruce recognizes that the man having sex with Margaret is Mr. Loon. He describes how he “stood clear, fully expecting Loonie to reel back out of the room at the sound of his old man right there through the wall, but he stayed where he was, lips pursed, head and palms against the tin, as though he’d seen it all before” (111). Loonie is not surprised to see his father having sex with a prostitute but this is Bruce’s first encounter with sex and it introduces him to an aspect of manhood that he has not yet engaged with. Through their voyeurism, Loonie and Bruce exercise their male gaze, performing their expected dominant role.

Furthermore, Mr. Loon acts as an example of this exploitive relationship with women by using Margaret as a commodity to serve his personal pleasure. The boys’ encounter with Mr. Loon and Margaret offers them an example of the patriarchal dominance that is deeply woven into masculine scripts in Sawyer.

Bruce and Loonie cannot identify with the masculine scripts presented to them in Sawyer and feel like outsiders in the town. It is not until the boys venture to the Point and are introduced to surfing that they find a masculine alternative that they can identify with. Unlike the other masculine figures in Bruce and Loonie’s lives, the surfers at the Point embody a type of masculinity that is connected to the natural world and encapsulates beauty and grace. The first time that Bruce sees men surfing, he is captivated and inspired by them because they are different from any other masculine role models that he has encountered. Reflecting on the moment when he is first introduced to surfing, Bruce recalls how “strange it was to see men do something beautiful. Something pointless and elegant, as though nobody saw or cared.” He continues to describe how “[i]n Sawyer …
men did solid, practical things, mostly with their hands” (25). As Bruce describes, the men in town participate in practical, industrial labor which he and Loonie cannot identify with. In “More Blokes More Bloody Water” Ben-Messahel argues that “[s]urfing… allows [the boys] to realize that men do not entirely fit into the inherited patriarchal tradition” (14). She suggests that surfing frees Bruce and Loonie from their boredom with the “settled” monotonous lifestyle of Sawyer and shows them that there are alternative forms of masculinity outside of the normative masculinity that is present in the community.

One of the main aspects of surfing that inspire Bruce’s infatuation is the connection that the surfers seem to have with the ocean. Unlike the other men in town, the surfers appear to connect with the ocean in a beautiful way, without dominating it or fearing it. In Sawyer “there [is not] much room for beauty in the lives of [the] men” (25) and there are not many opportunities for the men to connect with the environment in a meaningful way. Unlike mining, logging, and fishing, surfing is not harmful to the natural world and does not exploit the environment for resources. In order to surf, one has to connect and flow with the ocean. There is nothing to be gained and no end result. After seeing the surfers at the Point, Bruce idealizes this alternative and wants to learn how to surf so that he can participate in a beautiful form of masculinity which will feed his desire to interact and connect with the ocean.

After Loonie and Bruce begin going out to the Point to surf with the Angelus crew, they are soon introduced to Sando and are immediately inspired by his surfing ability and overwhelming sense of masculinity. Sando offers the boys an alternative form of masculinity as well as a connection to the surfers that Bruce and Loonie first see on the
Point. Through surfing, Sando presents a sense of freedom, adventure, and extraordinariness which Bruce and Loonie find very appealing. When Bruce first sees Sando surf he observes how Sando’s skill was extraordinary. There was something special about his insouciance and the princely manner in which he cross-stepped along his long, old-timey board, how he stalled and feinted and then surged in spurts of acceleration across the shoaling banks, barely ahead of the growling beast at his back, and when the wave fattened towards the deep channel in the middle of the bay, he’d stand at the very tip of the board with his spine arched and his head thrown back as if he’d finished singing an anthem that nobody else could hear. (30)

Bruce and Loonie are amazed by Sando’s extraordinary surfing ability, which signifies his “princely” power. Furthermore, it as if Sando is singing an “anthem,” which connects his masculine prowess to a sense of nationhood. To Bruce, Sando appears to represent a different type of nationality and masculinity than the one imposed on the boys by the military. However, the connection between Sando and the military may not be so different after all, as I will show in Chapter Four.

Sando is not only unlike any surfer that the boys have ever seen before but he is different from any man to whom they have been exposed. Sando’s extraordinary surfing skill is associated with his masculinity and manhood. He is “a delicious enigma. He never quite did what [the boys] might expect him to do and there wasn’t a man in Sawyer or Angelus in his league” (61). For Bruce and Loonie, who already feel like outsiders in Sawyer and do not identify with the masculine role models presented to them in the community, Sando is an anomaly and an inspiration. He is unlike other men and, because
of this, the boys look to him as a masculine mentor. Because Sando’s powerful influence on the boys is associated with his surfing ability but also with his extraordinary masculinity, Sando becomes a role model for the boys, not just as a surfing coach but as a man.

Sando’s physical body is essential to the development of the masculine ideal that he represents. Throughout the novel, his body becomes a symbol for his masculine ideals and his “manliness” as well as his relationship with the natural world. When Bruce first sees Sando, he is impressed by how the older man interacts with the ocean through surfing and connects his surfing style to his physical body. Watching Sando surf, Bruce notices how

[t]here was a casual authority in the way [he] surfed, a grace that made all [Bruce and Loonie’s] moves look jerky and hesitant. He was a big, strong man. The tight wetsuit showed every contour of his body, the width of his shoulders, the meat in his thighs. Water shone in his beard. His eyes were steely in the glare … [They] were bashful in his presence. (58)

The language that Winton uses to describe Sando heightens his embodiment of masculinity. He is a strong man with wide shoulders and a beard, traits that are traditionally associated with masculinity. These traits symbolize the ideal form of masculinity that Sando represents. He is a “big man and muscular” (36) yet he surfs with grace and beauty. To Bruce, Sando is the embodiment of the masculine alternative that he first identifies with at the Point. On one hand, Sando represents the rugged, normative masculinity that is similar to that of the Australian bushman, but on the other hand, he is also graceful and beautiful, which suggests a deviation from normative gender
expectations. Furthermore, the connection between Sando’s physical body and his masculinity is an example of how gender is performative and is created through acts and traits that are consistent with socially gendered scripts.

Sando’s physical appearance also gives him an authoritative presence which is connected to his relationship with the natural world. His strong features are not only a symbol of his masculinity but they are also a result of his surfing and his relationship with the environment. Sando’s body is “a map of where he’d been. He had great bumps on his knees and feet from old-school surfing, his forearms were pulpy with reef-scars and years of sun had bleached his hair and beard” (61). His scarred body is evidence of his interactions with the environment as well as his wild and dangerous relationship with the ocean. As a result of surfing the coast in all conditions, the coastal landscape has scarred and altered Sando’s physical appearance. From the sun bleached hair to the many scars, it is clear that his relationship with nature has impacted and changed him. Bruce sees these scars, which are evidence of the older man’s intense relationship with nature, as exciting and awe inspiring. How Sando’s physical body is portrayed and perceived by the boys is essential to the development of his masculine ideal, which Bruce and Loonie strive to achieve. He becomes a physical symbol of the ideal man whose manliness is directly related to the natural world and his interactions with it.

Sando’s extraordinary surfing skills and his masculine body give him an authoritative presence at the Point. Bruce reflects on a day when he and Loonie are surfing at the Point and “Sando turned up on the beach without a board, pulled on a pair of fins and swam out in his Speedos to bodysurf the biggest sets of the day.” Bruce remembers how, because of his skill, it “was as though he didn’t share [the other surfers’]
DNA” (61). By going to the beach without a board and still out-surfing the other men at the beach, Sando showcases his extraordinary skill and his ability to excel in the natural conditions of the ocean. As he is bodysurfing, “[n]obody dared paddle for a wave that [he] showed interest in. For the first time as surfers we found ourselves—man and boy—deferring to a mere swimmer” (61). Sando’s surfing prowess and ability to excel in the waves grants him social power. His authority through surfing is directly connected to his masculinity as no man or boy can compete with him. He is not only the most skilled surfer on the beach but he is also the most “manly.” By excelling in surfing, he proves himself as having obtained an ideal, dominant form of masculinity.

Sando’s competitive masculine ideal is reminiscent of traditional masculine scripts in Australia. Much like the Australian men Winton describes in *Land’s Edge* who run to the beach at the sound of a shark siren, Sando, Loonie, and Bruce throw themselves into dangerous encounters with the environment in order to gain a sense of glory and extraordinariness. Winton develops his argument that the beach is where identity and manhood is tested through Loonie and Bruce’s experiences as they participate in Sando’s ideal. Sando’s masculine ideal is created through testing oneself against the natural world and surviving. It is a form of masculinity that is discovered by having direct contact with the natural world and proving oneself by repeatedly overcoming fear and facing dangerous conditions. Through the masculine ideal that Sando encourages the boys to participate in, Winton recreates a traditional ideal form of masculinity that he sees present in Australian culture. Furthermore, the ideal masculine script that Winton develops through Sando is reminiscent of the bushman narrative and the importance of the natural world to the development of masculine scripts.
Overall, Sando creates a masculine ideal for the boys that involves risk, adventure, and proving one’s physical prowess in compromising natural conditions. Loonie and Bruce cannot identify with the masculine role models available to them in town so they look to Sando as a role model of an alternative form of masculinity. The masculine ideal that Sando represents is manifested through his physical appearance, his surfing abilities, and his connection with the natural world, which shows how gender is constructed through performative acts. Sando’s body and masculinity have been molded by interactions with the ocean and because of his relationship with the ocean Sando represents an ideal form of masculinity for the boys. In Sando, Winton establishes an Australian masculine ideal that he then explores and, as we will see, interrogates.
CHAPTER III: Eva

While Winton’s fictional world is predominantly masculine, female characters do play important roles. One of the ways Winton interrogates dominant masculine narratives in the novel is by acknowledging the performative nature of feminine scripts. Eva Sanderson, Sando’s wife and the main female character in the novel, deviates from the dominant scripts of femininity and in doing so she reveals the constructed nature not only of femininity but also of masculinity. Eva is unlike the other women in Sawyer and through her dominance of Bruce, her sexual deviance, and her ability to participate in dangerous activities, such as freestyle skiing, she embodies traits that are perceived as masculine in the novel. By presenting Eva as a masculine figure, Winton interrogates Sando’s dominant masculine script that excludes women and femininity. However, Winton does not simply interrogate gender scripts by presenting Eva as a masculine woman. Through her pregnancy and her role as a mother figure, Winton presents Eva as feminine as well as masculine. She does not fit into normative gender scripts but is a complex individual, fluctuating between different gender narratives and expectations. By placing Eva in both stereotypically masculine and feminine roles, Winton shows how ascribed gender scripts are arbitrary and how individuals do not necessarily fit into the gender roles assigned to them.

Normative femininity in Sawyer is constructed through appearance and a passive demeanor. The girls in Sawyer are defined by “the shape of their legs, the skinniness of their arms, the way they sheltered their breasts with their shoulders. Their perfumes smelt sugary as cordial. [Bruce] hated all their rattly plastic bangles, and the way they plastered their zits with prosthetic-pink goo and chewed their lips when they thought no one was
looking” (167). The girls that Bruce is acquainted with outline a specific feminine script present in Sawyer that focuses on physical appearance and aesthetics. Femininity is constructed and, just as Sando’s body is a symbol of masculinity, their feminine bodies and how they are accessorized symbolize normative femininity in the town. There is no indication that the girls at Bruce’s school have a connection to the natural world, and as a result, they are separated from what is perceived as a strictly masculine sphere.

One important example of femininity in the town is Bruce’s short-term girlfriend, Queenie Cookson. When Bruce is in a relationship with Queenie, certain gender scripts are expected of him that he is unaware of and does not subscribe to. When Bruce and Queenie are in the library, two army cadets loudly announce that “Queenie Cookson [has] great tits” (81). Bruce is unsure of how he should react to the cadets’ comments and wonders if he should “stand up and defend the girl’s honour and then fight [his] way to the door.” In the end Bruce does not act and he soon realizes that he has “failed a test whose rules [he] didn’t yet understand” (81). Through his relationship with Queenie, Bruce is introduced to femininity, as well as masculinity and how he, as a man, should act in a relationship. He is expected to defend Queenie because he is her boyfriend, but he does not understand the gender scripts presented to him and, as a result, Queenie gets mad and breaks up with him. The relationship between Queenie and Bruce outlines expected gender scripts in the town and indicates how men are expected to take the upper hand in a relationship and defend their women.

Another important model of femininity in the novel is Bruce’s mother. Mrs. Pike is a homely immigrant who is not present on many occasions throughout the novel except to work in the garden and mediate the relationship between Bruce and Mr. Pike. Like
Mrs. Pike, Loonie’s mother is also absent from the town as she left Loonie and his father. Near the beginning of the novel, Bruce encounters two other female figures while swimming in the creek. Like Bruce’s mother and Loonie’s mother these women do not fit into the environment of Sawyer. Seeing the women, Loonie decides to play a game where he holds his breath underwater, which scares the women “who were making a frightful noise [and] looked so strangely out of place” (14). As outsiders, the women that Bruce and Loonie encounter at the creek do not understand the natural environment and, as a result, do not understand Loonie’s prank. Although the boys’ mothers and the women at the creek are presented as outsiders, Eva deviates from these feminine role models because she does not accept her marginalization in the dominant patriarchal narrative.

Eva deviates from the feminine expectations in the novel because she possesses qualities that are associated with masculinity. The description of her body is fundamental in developing her as a masculine woman. From the description of Eva’s body, it is apparent that she does not fit into the patriarchal feminine script that operates in the town. Her body is “a sequence of squares and cubes. Her teeth [are] square, so [are] her ears. Her breasts and buttocks [are] block-like. Even her calf muscles ... ha[ve] corners. She ha[s] wide, blunt hands with square nails and deep ruts at the joints, and her feet [are] the same” (176). Eva does not have delicate and smooth curves or the makeup and artificial perfumes that are associated with the girls in Sawyer. Her body is rough, blocky, and strong. The strength and masculinisation of her body is described the first time that Bruce and Eva have sex. Bruce recalls how “Eva’s hair was unwashed and her mouth tasted of hash and coffee. Her fingers were stained with turmeric. She smelled of sweat and fried coconut. She was heavier than [him], stronger. Her back was broad and her arms solid.
There was nothing thin and girly about her” (164). As Bruce describes, there is nothing “girly” about Eva, especially compared to the other women in Sawyer and the feminine script that they represent. Through descriptions of Eva’s body, Winton develops her as a character who deviates from the feminine scripts present in Sawyer that label women as the objects of male desire.

Despite possessing traits that are associated with masculinity in the novel, Eva is excluded from Sando’s masculine ideal and is viewed as a burden and a liability to Sando. As Sando’s disciple, Loonie enforces masculine scripts and gender normativity in the novel. After seeing Sando’s surfing magazines and feeling awestruck by Sando’s skill and popularity, Loonie declares that he thinks Eva is “a drag, a bitch, a stupid Yank, and a junkie … a whingein female” and he says to Bruce “You saw those mags. [Sando] was famous, mate, and maybe if it wasn’t for her he still would be. Chicks, Pikelet. They drag you down” (70). Loonie’s hostile reaction to Eva is an example of the patriarchal discourse that exists in the normative gender narratives in Sawyer. As Loonie expresses, Eva is a potential threat to masculine success and normativity because she is female, and thus an outsider to the masculine narrative that Sando and his surfing fraternity establish.

The closer that Loonie gets to Sando and the more he subscribes to Sando’s masculine ideal, the more he dislikes Eva “as if his contempt for her fuelled his devotion to Sando. For in Loonie’s mind, Eva would always be the millstone around [his] hero’s neck. Her smooth American skin and blue eyes seemed to enrage him. He hated her acerbic talk and slanting mouth. She was in his way” (70). It is clear that Eva with her nationality and self-indulgent personality troubles Loonie. Loonie has a very patriarchal attitude towards Eva and women as a whole. To Loonie, women prevent men from
reaching their full potential. Furthermore, Eva aggravates Loonie because she is not submissive and does not act as Loonie feels a woman should. Loonie’s attitude reflects the patriarchal expectations of gender roles in the novel. Eva is not gentle and does not cater to the boys by praising them for their surfing feats, and because of this, she is a threat to the masculine ideal that he, Bruce, and Sando are participating in. Because she does not subscribe to expected female roles, Eva poses a threat and a danger to Sando’s dominant masculine script.

Judith Halberstam’s notion of female masculinity is useful to our understanding of Eva and the male reactions to her. In her analysis of masculinity, Female Masculinity (1998), Halberstam explores feminine masculinity and how it is depicted in popular culture. One of the main arguments that Halberstam develops as she analyses various interpretations of female masculinity is that masculine women are often feared and are portrayed as grotesque, abject, and undesirable. Halberstam argues that mainstream masculinity that is depicted as “correct” and desirable through mass media is often a white, heterosexual, male masculinity. She argues that many of the “‘heroic masculinities’ [that are presented and believed to be ideal] depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities” (1). According to Halberstam’s argument, dominant conceptions of masculinity only remain as socially ideal through the presentation of other forms of masculinity as subordinate. Types of masculinity, such as female masculinity, that deviate from the ideal white, heterosexual, male model of masculinity are threatening to these gendered scripts because they suggest that masculinity can take many different forms and can be presented in various ways, which proves that there is not necessarily a “correct” form of masculinity. As a result of societal
attempts to maintain an image of ideal masculinity “female masculinities are framed as
the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to
be the real thing” (1). As Halberstam is suggesting, masculine women are often portrayed
as volatile and undesirable. They are depicted as “wrong,” hideous, and villainous in
order to enforce masculine ideals that reinforce the dominant male and the submissive
female.

Although Eva can be read as a “grotesque” and antagonistic masculine woman,
Winton deviates from Halberstam’s observations of female masculinity. Through Eva’s
masculine body, Winton challenges conceptions of ideal femininity because, despite her
masculine traits, Eva is still portrayed as sexually desirable. Bruce notes how Eva
wasn’t quite the stuff of [his] erotic imaginings. True, she was blonde and
confident in that special American way but there was nothing Playboy or
Hollywood about her … Eva was stocky and blunt … If anything she was abrupt
and suspicious, handsome rather than pretty. Her limbs were shapely enough
though tough and scarred. Yet the idea of her had taken hold. The fact of her body
overtook [him]. (166)

Bruce makes it evident that Eva’s stocky body and harsh features are not what he expects
to find sexually attractive in a woman. He alludes to Hollywood and Playboy, which are
examples of social scripts that depict female sexuality and develop social conceptions
about what a desirable woman is. Eva does not possess the same traits as the Hollywood
stars and Playgirls who are socially associated with female sexuality and desirability yet,
Bruce is still attracted to her. Through the physical descriptions of Eva, as well as
Bruce’s overwhelming attraction to her, Winton challenges traditional conventions of female sexuality.

Through her relationship with the natural world, Eva further challenges masculine scripts in the novel. Before Bruce is aware of Eva’s past as an aerial skier, he notices how Eva seems to have an understanding about the adrenaline rush that he, Sando, and Loonie experience while surfing. He describes how

Sando was good at portraying the moment you found yourself at your limit, when things multiplied around you like a hallucination … Eva sometimes sat back with her eyes closed and her teeth bared as though she understood only too well. It’s like you come pouring back into yourself, said Sando one afternoon. Like you’ve exploded and all the pieces of you are reassembling themselves. You’re new. Shimmering. Alive. Yes, she said. Exactly. And I watched her, and wondered how she knew. (113)

Eva understands and relates to Sando’s description of the thrill induced by participating in risky activities and overcoming compromising natural conditions. Bruce wonders how Eva knows about these experiences because he associates this relationship with nature to Sando’s masculine ideal.

Bruce does not expect Eva to understand the thrill related to participating in risk-taking activities because in the extreme surfing that Sando encourages there is no room for femininity. Eva is badly injured so it is impossible for her to participate in Sando’s surfing endeavors, but it is also suggested, through the language that Sando uses, that his surfing fraternity is exclusively male. While Sando is giving Loonie and Bruce one of his many inspirational “guru” talks he mentions how “denying fear, well, that’s …
unmanly.” Listening to their conversation, Eva asks “[a]nd if you’re a woman?… I’m sure you mean unworthy” (117). Through her interrogation of the gendered language that Sando uses to express his extraordinary experiences, she reveals that within Sando’s masculine ideal there is no room for women or femininity. The boys do not even consider that women can be a part of their risk-taking lifestyle. The masculine script that Sando has created by seeking out dangerous natural conditions and overcoming them is strictly for men and is used as a way to create and establish manhood.

As Bruce gets to know Eva better and learns about her past as an aerial skier, he comes to realise that she has experienced the same dangerous and addicting relationship with the environment that that he initially believes is exclusively for men. Sando informs Bruce of Eva’s past and remarks: “She’s got guts, that girl” and Bruce realises that he had “underestimated her” (129). Sando and the others have strictly excluded her and any other woman from joining their surfing fraternity which focuses on gaining manhood and proving masculinity. She challenges that ideal because she has also participated in great feats of physical prowess and has confronted dangerous natural conditions. As Bruce describes her, Eva is “a woman not in the least bit ordinary… Like Sando she’d lived at the radical margin of her own sport. There was a warrior spirit in her, an implacable need to win the day” (172). Her participation in a dangerous sport proves that extreme sports and persevering in dangerous conditions is not exclusively for men but that women can participate as well. Both the skiers and the surfers use their bodies and physical prowess to compete against nature, to prove themselves in the most compromising conditions, and to succeed. What Sando calls manliness, Eva calls worthiness because she knows that one does not have to be a man in order to participate in this type of risk-taking activity.
Eva continues to challenge gender scripts presented in the novel through her dominance and cruelty during sex. The first time that she seduces Bruce, she shrugs off his protests by saying “[b]ut you want to. You’ll do it anyway” and “[s]he grabbed a fistful of my tee-shirt and twisted it with a kind of sneer ... There was a kind of disinterest in the way she held [her knuckles] against me” (163). By being aggressive, confrontational, and aloof during sex, Eva shows her dominance over Bruce. He recalls how “[i]n the sack or out in the yard she gave orders and [he] was glad to be told” (174). He does not mind that she likes to take control during sex and in other areas of their lives. Unlike his masculine role models, such as Mr. Loon, Bruce does not subscribe to the patriarchal script of dominance expected of him. Likewise, Eva is not willing to accept or fulfill her expected role as a woman.

Throughout the novel, it is difficult to interpret just why Bruce finds Eva so attractive and is happy to follow her orders. One possibility is that, like him, she deviates from normative gender scripts. Bruce cannot identify with or successfully perform the masculine scripts presented to him by Sando, and Eva deviates from expected patriarchal notions of femininity. In many ways, Eva and Bruce’s relationship is a further deviation from normative gender roles as neither of them can, or are willing to, perform their expected roles.

Eva’s sexuality is a crucial element of Winton’s interrogation of gender scripts in the novel. Her sexual preferences are unconventional and challenge patriarchal views about female sexuality. She approaches and seduces Bruce, and she is capable of taking the initiative for her own sexual gratification, especially through the practice of sexual asphyxia. In her article “Reviving Eva in Tim Winton’s Breath,” Colleen McGloin
discusses the practice of sexual asphyxia and draws attention to how it is often not discussed in relation to female sexuality. McGloin argues that because Eva’s sexual practices are not common and because she is able to achieve her own sexual pleasure without the assistance of a man, her “sexual asphyxia threatens the dictates of female heterosexual practice. She consequently disturbs the social order” (116). As McGloin argues, Eva deviates from social normative practices and, by doing so, upsets social order and understanding of gender expectations. McGloin continues to argue that “[t]he text depicts Eva’s behavior; both sexually and generally, as excessive, ‘unfeminine’, (indeed she is defeminized, disorderly, abject, in the sense that meaning is broken down, identity, systems, and order disturbed and norms transgressed” (114). By representing Eva as an unconventional woman both physically and sexually, Winton brings a sense of “disorder” to pre-conceived notions of gender in the novel. As McGloin argues, Eva’s masculinity unsettles gender norms and expectations that are already established by social cultures. Through Eva’s character, Winton offers an alternative to femininity in Australia as well as masculinity.

Eva is a significant character in Winton’s interrogation of gender roles and expectations in Australia not only because she is a woman who participates in activities associated with masculinity but also because while interacting with her environment in a supposedly “masculine” way she is still a woman, as can be seen through her pregnancy and role as a mother figure. By situating Eva in a feminine role as a mother as well as in a masculinised role that goes against the patriarchal feminine, Winton demonstrates how gender roles are arbitrary and that there is potential for women to develop and play an important role in his revisioning of Australian masculinity. Just as Connell, Butler, and
McClintock argue, gender is a social phenomenon comprised of social scripts and maintained through performance. Because gender and gender roles are not predetermined or biologically established, it is possible for an individual like Eva not to fit into a feminine role or a masculine role. Winton shows how Eva can be masculine in many ways and defy many female expectations while still being a woman and still having feminine qualities.

When Eva gets pregnant, Bruce perceives her differently and begins to notice and admire her femininity. When Bruce first realizes that Eva is pregnant he feels “strangely bashful, as though [they had] been restored to our proper roles” (195). Her pregnancy gives her an air of femininity that he does not acknowledge previously. It seems to him that she is finally taking on her “proper role” as a woman and he begins to fetishize her. At the “sight of [Eva’s] pot belly [Bruce] [feels] a tiny stab of lust” (198). Bruce’s fetishization of Eva is significant because in his lust, he views Eva as an object of desire and effectively blackmails her into having sex with him (201-202). By forcing Eva to have sex with him, Bruce exerts patriarchal dominance that is linked to socially constructed masculinity. This act of dominance haunts Bruce and fragments his sense of self as he develops into adulthood, which demonstrates how destructive normative patriarchal norms can be to individuals.

Along with showing the violence of patriarchal scripts through Bruce’s reaction to Eva’s pregnancy, Winton also uses pregnancy to revision how women and the female body are portrayed in Australia. Later in Bruce’s life, his wife Grace informs him that men were supposed to find pregnancy unattractive and “be turned off by all that fluid, the gross belly, the big backside and puffy ankles. That was normal” (205). Grace’s reaction
of disgust at her pregnancy is significant as it reveals how pregnancy and the female body are portrayed in dominant feminine scripts in Australia. According to Grace, the pregnant female body is repulsive and should invoke disgust in men. Furthermore, when Bruce shows Grace the controversial magazine cover of a naked and pregnant Demi Moore that he views as “brave and beautiful” she calls it “[g]rotesque” (206). Grace’s reaction to the photo reaffirms gendered scripts that the female body should invoke disgust. However, Bruce does not see the female body this way but instead thinks of it as beautiful and something to be celebrated. Furthermore, the presentation of the naked, pregnant female body on the magazine opens up room for a revisioning of femininity and how gender is perceived in Australian culture.

Although Eva is a controversial figure in the novel, Winton draws attention to the social dynamics that have encouraged Eva to be cruel to Bruce instead of framing her as a monstrous figure. Although Bruce wants to demonize Eva and blame her for his problems as an adult, he realises that although she had a profoundly damaging effect on him, she is not an “Eve” figure who is solely “evil” and responsible for all of his adult problems. In reflection Bruce describes how:

For a long and ruinous period of my later life I raged against Eva Sanderson, even as I grieved for her. In the spirit of the times I held her morally accountable for all my grown-up troubles. Yet had things proceeded only a little differently—had she been in less pain perhaps, and more clearheaded as a result—maybe we would have wound up friends, made our blunder and let it go, to look upon it afterwards as just another lumpy bit of history…. She had no business doing what she did, but I’m through hating and blaming. People are fools, not monsters. (173)
In hindsight, Bruce is able to see that, although Eva damaged him in a fundamental way, she is not a “monster,” or the sole reason for his unhappiness as an adult. Bruce realises that Eva is not necessarily an Eve figure who should be held accountable and be blamed for all of his trouble but instead he realises that, just like him, she and her actions are a result of the gender roles that she is expected to fulfill. Like Bruce and Loonie, Eva is a victim of Sando’s patriarchal ideology.

Through the character of Eva, Winton offers an alternative to the prescribed gender roles that Sando and his masculine ideal encourage throughout the novel. Eva is unlike the other women in town and does not subscribe to the patriarchal feminine role that is expected of her. Through descriptions of her physical body, her sexual practices, and her relationship with the natural world by engaging in extreme sport, Winton masculinises Eva, crossing the strict boundaries between masculine and feminine scripts. Because Eva has features that are considered masculine in the novel and does not follow expected female scripts, she poses a major threat to normative conceptions of masculinity and Sando’s masculine ideal. Like many Australian narratives of masculinity, Sando’s ideal does not allow room for women and femininity. By crossing into a masculine world, Eva challenges these prescribed gender scripts and proves that gender roles and expectations are arbitrary. She has a significant impact on Bruce and his own conceptions of masculinity, proving that in Winton’s revisioning of masculine narratives in Australia women play a critical role. Through Eva, Winton creates room for femininity and alternative female scripts to emerge in Australian culture while also interrogating and challenging dominant masculine scripts.
CHAPTER IV: Loonie and Bruce

Bruce and Loonie’s development throughout the novel shows the consequences of subscribing to damaging masculine ideals and creates space to interrogate normative gender scripts in Australia. The boys’ inability to identify with any of the men or masculine scripts presented to them in Sawyer leads them to seek out alternative forms of masculinity. The first time that the boys go to the Point, Bruce is captivated by the surfers and their representation of a masculinity that involves beauty, grace, and a peaceful connection with the landscape. In his need to find his own masculine identity, Bruce later associates Sando and his surfing style with the masculine alternative that he sees while watching the surfers at the Point and looks up to Sando as an important role model. Bruce and Loonie build a relationship with Sando and he teaches them how to become “men” through surfing dangerous waves. At first, Bruce and Loonie idolize Sando and use his teachings as a way to feel extraordinary. However, Sando’s masculine ideal involves sticking to a strict performative script which involves plunging headfirst into dangerous situations without doubt. Loonie, being a thrill seeker, thrives in this environment and takes surfing to the extreme. Bruce, on the other hand, does not fit into Sando’s ideal and is excluded from the group as a result. As Bruce is further exposed to Sando’s teachings, he begins to realize that instead of having a strong connection to the natural world Sando uses surfing as a way to dominate nature. Furthermore, as the boys continue surfing with Sando, his teachings begin to be socially disabling. Although Sando’s masculine narrative encourages the extraordinary, his methods and teaching reinforce patriarchal dominance.
In the end, Sando’s teachings and the normative patriarchal scripts that they represent are detrimental to his prodigies. Through Bruce and Loonie’s experience with Sando and his unreliable masculine ideal, Winton challenges traditional masculine scripts in Australia and shows the consequences of these scripts for individuals. In the end, Winton offers an alternative to these masculine scripts by showing how, as an adult, Bruce is able to reconnect with his masculine self by building a peaceful relationship with nature through surfing. It is only through connecting with the ocean that Bruce is able to find a sense of belonging and freedom from the masculine scripts imposed on him throughout the novel.

When Bruce first realizes that there are alternative forms of masculinity, through watching the surfers at the Point, he is captivated and blinded to the possible dangers that pursuing such an alternative may present. Bruce romanticizes the ocean and Sando in his search for a sense of belonging and identity. When Bruce visits the ocean with Loonie, he cannot “take [his] eyes from those plumes of spray, the churning shards of light” and although he tries to think of his father’s fear of the ocean “death was hard to imagine when you had these blokes dancing themselves across the bay with smiles on their faces and sun in their hair” (25). Unlike his parents and many locals in Sawyer, Bruce does not see the ocean as a place to be feared. He is entirely captivated by the surfers and the beauty of the men and, as a result, he creates an unrealistic view of the ocean.

Bruce’s infatuation with surfing and the lifestyle of extreme sports blinds him to the potential danger, both physical and emotional, that is involved. Bruce’s judgment remains clouded when he meets Sando. When Bruce first sees Sando surfing, he describes how he “watched the yellow blur of [Sando’s] board through the glassy black
of the wave. [He] saw the flash of [Sando’s] hands, his arms cast up. He was dancing” (59). Bruce associates Sando with the men that he sees surfing at the Point. Just as Bruce is unable to see the dangers of the ocean and surfing while watching the surfers, he cannot see the potential harm that Sando can bring. From the first time he sees Sando surf, Bruce idealizes him and assumes that Sando will connect him to the beautiful form of masculinity that he experiences the first time he sees men surf.

As the boys learn to surf, Sando becomes an important role model for them, teaching them how to become better surfers as well as how to become men by including them in a masculine ideal that involves risk, danger, and adventure. The first surfing endeavor that Sando takes the boys on is to Barney’s where they quickly learn that not only are the waves intimidating but a Great White shark inhabits the waters. When Loonie demands that Sando tell him why he brought them to such a dangerous location, Sando replies to “[m]ake men out of you” (74). For Sando, surfing dangerous waves in compromising situations is a sign of manhood, and by taking Bruce and Loonie to Barney’s, he intends to coach them in his masculine ideal. When Loonie is horrified that Sando takes them to such a dangerous location, Sando taunts him and questions whether or not he is “man” enough to take on the challenge. Loonie feels threatened by Sando’s remarks and is aggravated that Sando “[t]hinks [he and Bruce are] just gunna sit [there] like a coupla girls” (75). By challenging their sense of manhood, Sando teaches the boys that the best way to achieve ideal masculinity is by participating in his dangerous surfing excursions. Furthermore, it is clear, through Loonie’s repulsion at being associated with the feminine, that Sando’s masculinity is rooted in patriarchal discourse. The boys quickly subscribe to Sando’s ideal and, after surfing Barney’s, they feel empowered.
Bruce recalls how “[i]nside those waves our voices bounced back at us, deeper and larger for all the noise, like the voices of men” (75). For the boys, surfing Barney’s is their initiation into manhood and Sando’s masculine ideal.

After surfing Barney’s, Sando continues to mentor Bruce and Loonie in his masculine ideal. Bruce describes how he, Sando, and Loonie were an: unlikely trio… Sando and his maniacal apprentices…. Under Sando’s tutelage we ate carefully and worked on our fitness. He taught us yoga. We grew stronger and more competent, expected more of ourselves and forsook almost everything else for the sake of the shared obsession…. What we did and what we were after, we told ourselves, was the extraordinary. (102)

Sando becomes a critical role model for Loonie and Bruce, teaching them both as a surfing coach and as a masculine mentor. Sando teaches them how to improve their surfing and how to participate in what he calls “extraordinary” lives, making them unlike any other men that they know. The training that Sando puts the boys through is rigorous and demanding and is reflective of Butler’s examination of gender performativity and the acts that individuals must engage in in order to meet normative gender expectations.

In order to maintain Sando’s masculine ideal, Loonie and Bruce have to constantly prove themselves as surfers and as “men.” As soon as they show any doubt in Sando’s teachings or any reluctance to participate in Sando’s wild surfing expeditions, their manhood is questioned. One example of Sando reinforcing his masculine ideal through challenging the boys’ masculinity is when he takes Bruce and Loonie to the Nautilus and Bruce does not agree to surf the dangerous waves. Sando tries to pressure Bruce into participating in the surfing expedition by saying “I thought I brought surfers
with me. Men above the ordinary…. Pikelet, mate. We came to play. [Sando] was 
grinning as he said it but [Bruce] felt a sort of menace from him” (147). Sando reinforces 
his ideal and the participation of Bruce by questioning the boys’ masculinity, much like 
he does to Loonie when they first surf Barney’s. Through his taunting, Sando reinforces 
the idea that the only way for the boys to gain extraordinary masculinity is to continue 
pushing themselves to seek larger and deadlier waves.

As they seek to maintain Sando’s masculine ideal, Bruce and Loonie have to 
constantly prove themselves and their masculinity. Bruce and Loonie both want to gain 
Sando’s attention and praise to reinforce their place in Sando’s masculine narrative, 
which creates a competitive rivalry between the two of them. Prior to learning how to 
surf, Loonie and Bruce have a competitive friendship, but Sando is the catalyst for the 
deep rooted rivalry between them that goes beyond friendly competition. Bruce 
continually tries to get time alone with Sando and keeps secrets from Loonie in order to 
develop a stronger relationship with his mentor. The boys both try to spend more time 
with Sando than the other and prove their superior physical prowess. The competitive 
rivalry that develops between Loonie and Bruce as they try to fulfill Sando’s masculine 
ideal is not a coincidence but is instead deeply embedded within the masculine script that 
Sando creates. There is always a pressure for the boys to prove their manhood by facing 
the natural elements and by competing against each other. By framing Sando’s masculine 
ideal through surfing, Winton demonstrates how sport and physical prowess can play a 
critical role in the development of a dominating, competitive, patriarchal form of 
masculinity.
Following Sando’s masculine ideal has a fundamental impact on both Loonie and Bruce. Growing up, Loonie is already addicted to risky, adrenaline-seeking behavior. Before meeting Sando he likes “anything with an edge on it … [H]e’d want to play chicken … [a]ny game would do as long as it was dangerous…. [H]e was greedy about risk…. Being with him was like standing near a lethal electric current” (33). From a young age, Loonie is already addicted to the adrenaline rush that comes from danger, and because of his constant search for thrills, Loonie hurls himself into dangerous situations without inhibition. There is “a manic energy about Loonie, some strange hotwired spirit that made you laugh with shock. He hurled himself at the world. You could never second-guess him and once he embarked upon something there was no holding him back” (55). Loonie is manic in his desire for adrenaline, and he is fearless in the face of danger. For Loonie, surfing is another way to achieve his desire for risk and adrenaline and Sando’s mentorship further encourages this behaviour. As he surfs with Sando, Loonie finds a sense of glory and achievement that is linked to his ability to show dominance and physical prowess.

As Loonie surfs dangerous waves with Sando and Bruce, his sense of dominance over the natural world increases along with his need to gain recognition for his surfing feats. Loonie’s preoccupation with gaining glory through surfing is evident after Bruce and Sando surf Old Smoky without him. When Sando and Bruce return from their excursion, Loonie immediately asks “[h]ow big?” (101). Loonie is not interested in hearing about their experience at Old Smoky but is only interested in the risk involved and the achievement gained. Loonie’s need for glory is further emphasized when he later joins Sando and Bruce at Old Smoky and leaks the private location to the Angelus crew.
Annoyed with Loonie’s choice to tell others about the location, Bruce notes how “Loonie wanted an audience” (101). Although Sando emphasizes to Loonie and Bruce that his surfing method is not dependent on having an audience, Loonie seeks publicity and acknowledgment for his surfing achievements.

Not only does Loonie use surfing as a way to showcase his physical prowess and daring to others, but also, through surfing, he builds a relationship with the ocean that is dominating and ruthless. When he surfs Old Smoky Loonie does more than prove himself. He surfed like someone who didn’t believe in death … had the cold determination of a boy completely overtaken by an idea. It wasn’t that he was invulnerable or even particularly graceful, because he took some terrible beatings in attempting the impossible, but for every wave that nailed him he’d squeak clear of two others just as gnarly. He was fifteen years old. He hadn’t simply taken Old Smoky on—he’s taken it over. (101-102)

Loonie showcases his dominance over the harsh and relentless ocean not only by facing the ruthless waves and prevailing but also by proving his resilience to its thrashings and overcoming it through his persistence. Loonie does not have the grace or peaceful connection with the ocean that Bruce is inspired by when watching the surfers at the Point. Instead, under Sando’s tutelage, Loonie builds a relationship with the ocean that is dominating and territorial, a relationship in which he can showcase his bravery and physical prowess in the most perilous natural conditions. Sando encourages the dominating relationship that Loonie creates with the ocean and praises him for his “guts” and resilience.
Sando further encourages Loonie to participate in his masculine ideal by inviting him on trips to Asia. Before Loonie travels to Indonesia, his “devotion to Sando grew more intense” and he “hurled himself at Sando like a son putting himself in his father’s path” (103-104). At the beginning of their relationship, Sando is an important role model and father figure to Loonie. However, after returning from his trip to Asia with Sando, Loonie is different (140-41). Bruce describes how “Loonie’s time in Indonesia had granted him a new kind of seniority” (141). Travelling to Indonesia is a rite of passage for Loonie and secures his role as Sando’s prized apprentice. However, Loonie’s time in Asia also changes his relationship with Sando and his conviction in Sando’s teachings.

Loonie’s change in opinion about Sando is evident after he and Sando surf the Nautilus together and Bruce asks if Sando caught any waves. Loonie replies: “He got one. But he’s fucking scared of it…. Old” and Bruce recalls how “[t]here was something pitiless in [Loonie’s] smirk” (159) as he said this. Loonie is no longer devoted to Sando, and he sees Sando’s fear as a weakness, which leads him to believe that Sando’s teachings are phony. Because Loonie is relentless in his surfing, he has surpassed Sando’s expectations and, as a result, has grown away from Sando’s mentorship. Loonie strays even farther from Sando’s mentorship on their final overseas trip together. When Sando returns without Loonie, he describes to Bruce how Loonie is a “[w]ilful little bastard…. Fucking nuts, actually” (197). Sando can no longer rein in Loonie, and because of this, he has abandoned him. Loonie has taken his ideal to an extreme that even Sando cannot manage.

Unlike Loonie, Bruce does not approach surfing with the same fearlessness and daring. The first time that Bruce is caught in a situation where he has to surf large, dangerous waves is with the Angelus crew at the Point, and he is uncomfortable with the
prospect of surfing the waves. Stuck far from shore with the Angelus crew, he is “galvanized by fear. [He] ha[s] no intention of surfing these waves—they [are] way out of [his] range—but neither [does he] want to be mown down by them” (47). Surfing the waves is terrifying to Bruce. However, once he overcomes his fear and stands up on his board, he feels a rush of adrenaline and satisfaction. He describes how “[for] a fatal moment, now that [he] was unexpectedly on top of things, the whole enterprise seemed too easy. Within three seconds [he] went from saving [him]self from disaster to believing [he] was a thirteen-year-old hellman” (50-51). Despite his fear, Bruce feels charged and alive after surfing the waves. In his adulthood, he still vividly remembers the moment that he stood up on the board, which shows the significance of his surfing experience to his development into manhood.

After meeting Sando, Bruce finds himself facing even more compromising situations which, on one hand, increase his sense of adrenaline and satisfaction, but on the other hand terrify him. While surfing Barney’s for the first time, Bruce is “hapless and terrified” (75). He understands the great risk involved in surfing shark-infested waters, yet, as he does at the Point, Bruce manages to surf the waves and gain a sense of adrenaline and satisfaction. Again, when Sando first takes the boys to surf Old Smoky, Bruce describes how they “were in deep water, safe enough in the scheme of things, and I hadn’t yet understood the scale of what I was seeing, but the sight of the thing pitching out across the bommie drove a blade of fear right through me” (93). On Sando’s surfing expeditions, Bruce is forced to face his fears and, with Sando’s encouragement, surf the waves despite his terror. In some ways, Bruce’s addiction to adrenaline and the surge that surfing gives him blinds him to the risk and callousness of Sando’s teachings and
encouragement. However, the initial fear that Bruce feels when first seeing the deadly waves helps him perceive the danger that Sando’s surfing expeditions entail. Unlike Loonie, Bruce is cautious and does not throw himself headfirst into the face of danger.

Eventually Bruce’s caution and unwillingness to hurl himself into dangerous situations separate him from the group. Sando associates the boys’ willingness to surf the deadly waves and their bravery in the face of danger with their manhood, and because of his fear, Bruce does not fit into the masculine ideal that Sando is creating. Because Bruce does not fit into Sando’s masculine ideal and is doubtful of Sando’s teachings, he is excluded from the group. When Sando plans his trip to Indonesia he invites Loonie to come along with him but does not mention the trip to Bruce. After finding out that Sando and Loonie went to Indonesia without him, Bruce feels “overlooked—forsaken, unchosen” (133). Bruce is excluded from the group because he does not fit into a specific masculine script. He feels betrayed because he associates the time that he and Sando spend together with a deep emotional and intellectual connection. However, Sando is preoccupied with a specific masculine ideal that involves risk taking and dangerous surfing, and even though Bruce and Sando have an intellectual relationship, Bruce cannot meet the masculine standard that Sando creates. Instead of coaching Bruce and supporting him, Sando punishes and excludes Bruce for being different and for not meeting his masculine standards. In Sando’s masculine ideal, there is no room for deviance.

After Sando and Loonie’s trip to Indonesia, a new challenge comes to Bruce in the form of the Nautilus. Upon seeing the Nautilus, Bruce has a sinking feeling in his stomach and realizes the sheer danger of attempting to surf such a wave. However, by
this time Bruce has already begun questioning Sando’s teachings and masculine ideal. When Bruce shows his reluctance to surf the Nautilus, Sando tries to pressure him into surfing it, but Bruce describes how despite Sando’s snide remarks he “didn’t give a damn” (147) about Sando pressuring him. As he does on previous surfing expeditions, Sando provokes Bruce and tries to manipulate him by questioning his masculinity and creating a belief that the only way to achieve manhood is by participating in the dangerous sport. This time, however, Bruce refuses to conform to Sando’s masculine ideal, which aggravates Sando. Bruce has come to a fundamental realization that Sando’s teachings and dangerous lifestyle may not be ideal after all, at least not for him. He describes how on his arrival to the Nautilus he “felt plenty scared but not panicked; this time [he] knew what [he] was doing” (147). By the time that Bruce encounters the Nautilus, he has come to a realization that Sando’s practices will not bring him closer to the alternative masculine ideal of grace that he originally associates Sando with, and he is aware of the danger involved in Sando’s practices.

Over time Bruce becomes more aware that Sando and his surfing mentorship is not what he originally perceives them to be and his initial admiration of Sando’s princely surfing develops into the realization that Sando is not only self-centered but also eager to conquer, control and exploit every single surfing territory or person. Masculine camaraderie reverts to male control while surfing becomes a battleground attesting to man's ability to take the upper hand in perilous situations. (Ben-Messahel 14)

Although Bruce believes that Sando’s teachings will help him obtain the masculine alternative of beauty and grace that he sees at the Point, he soon realizes that Sando does
not use surfing as a way to connect peacefully with the natural world. Bruce is blinded by his first impression of surfing and his desire to identify Sando with the surfers that he sees at the Point. Instead of developing a strong connection with the environment, Sando uses surfing as a way to conquer and show dominance over a harsh and relentless natural world. In her article “Inspire and Expire: On Tim Winton’s *Breath*” Yunqui Liu makes the argument that, despite his first impressions of surfing, Bruce “comes to realize surfing may be beautiful but it is also something more: a pretext for a particular kind of male risk-taking behavior; a need for danger that is in its own way as addictive as drugs or drink or any one of a range of self-destructive behaviors at the same time” (172). As Bruce begins to realize that surfing is more than a beautiful connection with the environment, he sees the actual danger in the lifestyle and expectations that Sando presents to him and Loonie.

As Liu argues, Winton presents surfing as a duality. On one hand, surfing offers a peaceful alternative form of masculinity that involves a strong connection to the environment, but it is also used as a way to show dominance over the natural world and maintain a patriarchal masculine script that is not very different from the masculinity presented by the military and the miners in Sawyer. As Bruce becomes aware of this duality he also realizes the addictive nature of the type of surfing that Sando encourages. Other critics, such as Ben-Messahel, agree that Winton offers a dynamic view of surfing in the novel. Ben-Messahel even goes as far as to suggest that the type of surfing that Sando presents is “a prelude to sadomasochism and self-destruction” (14). Ben-Messahel is correct in suggesting that surfing acts as a precursor to Bruce’s destructive relationship with Eva as well as his problems later in life. Through surfing, Winton shows the
performative nature of masculinity and how one’s connection with the natural world through activities such as surfing can establish and develop masculine identity. Surfing acts as a liminal space for Bruce that offers room for growth and transformation. When using surfing as a tool for dominance and risk-taking, Bruce builds an antagonistic relationship with the natural world and his personal identity. However, as Bruce realizes during his first encounter with surfing, it can also bring him to a greater awareness of and connection with the ocean and an alternative form of masculinity that he can identify with.

As he continues to surf with Sando, Bruce realises that, through his surfing practices, Sando does not build a peaceful understanding and connection with the natural world but instead takes on the role of a colonizer, mapping and marking the land. Sando uses surfing as a way to explore and leave his mark on desolate, untouched seascapes. The relationship that he has with the natural world, seeking out seascapes that are not tarnished by human contact, is comparable to that of a colonizer seeking out new lands for personal gain. In Sando’s case, the personal gain is persevering in dangerous acts that define and illuminate his masculine ideal. Sando, like a colonizer, acts as “a pioneer” (115). For example, when Sando shows Bruce and Loonie the charts of the Nautilus Bruce describes how “[o]n the charts it was marked as a navigation hazard with multiple warnings,” and Sando proudly refers to the remote Nautilus as “[t]he next frontier” (115). For Sando, the Nautilus is a place to chart and conquer, more dangerous than any other waves they have dared to surf. Because of the danger involved, Sando is excited to surf the Nautilus and prove his manhood. Surfing becomes a way for Sando to find new desolate places and put his claim on them by being the first to surf the waves.
Furthermore, Sando’s charting of new frontiers through surfing is connected to a strong masculinist ideology. Sando refers to him and his prodigies as “gentlemen in search of a discreet location” (71). They are men willing to surf in places to which no one else had dared to venture, and this, according to Sando, is what makes them men.

Despite his realization that Sando’s mentorship is not ideal, Bruce still feels like a failure for refusing to surf the Nautilus and he is hurt because he is rejected from the group. He recalls how he

was gutted by that day at the Nautilus. A small, cool part of [him] knew it was stupid to have been out there trying to surf a wave so unlikely, so dangerous, so perverse. What would success there really mean—perhaps three or four or even five seconds of upright travel on a wave as ugly as a civic monument? You could barely call such a mad scramble *surfing*. Surely there were better and bigger waves to ride than that deformity. Yet nothing could assuage the lingering sense of failure [he] was left with. (148)

Bruce realizes that surfing waves like the Nautilus is not the surfing that he is originally infatuated by. There is nothing graceful about the “mad scramble” that surfing a wave as dangerous as the Nautilus requires. It is not about grace, beauty, or connecting with nature but is instead about survival and proving oneself against the odds of a ruthless environment. However, even though Bruce comes to the important realization that Sando’s surfing mentorship is not what he originally anticipates it to be, he still feels hurt for being excluded and not being able to meet an impossible ideal.

Sando’s exclusion, unreliability, and misguided teachings are damaging to his prodigies and have devastating consequences. At the end of the novel:
Loonie die[s] in Mexico, shot in a bar in Rosarito, not far from Tijuana. Some kind of drug deal gone bad. Maybe he did business with the wrong cops. For years stories had made their way back to [Bruce], sightings on the northern beaches of Sydney or in Peru or the Mentawais. [Loonie’s] reputation for fearlessness endured. He surfed hard and lived hard and seemed to finance it all with drug scams and smuggling. (211)

Following a masculine script implemented by Sando that involves risk and pushing oneself to the very edge, Loonie lives a dangerous and provocative lifestyle that eventually leads to his early death. Bruce further reflects on the impact that Sando has on Loonie’s life and early death noting how he “wonder[s] about [Loonie’s] apprenticeship with Sando, how much more than just surfing it might have involved—all those side-trips to Thailand, the long, unexplained absences, surfboards arriving from all over the globe—and whether Sando’s family money had been augmented by his darker business interests” (211). Although uncertain, Bruce has a suspicion that Sando involves Loonie in drug dealing along with dangerous surfing. Like surfing, drug dealing contains a certain risk and thrill that Loonie would be attracted to. Furthermore, Sando abandons Loonie on their final trip together, leaving his protégée to follow his ideal without further mentorship. Through Loonie’s death, Winton explores how following strict and impossible masculine ideals, such as Sando’s, can have devastating and fatal consequences on individuals subscribing to them.

Loonie is not the only character who is a victim of the strict gender ideals that Sando develops. Eva also has a devastating ending as a result of the gender expectations thrust upon her. Addicted to adrenaline and forced to find alternative outlets after Sando
abandons her, Eva is “found hanging naked from the back of a bathroom door in Portland, Oregon. A Salvadorean hotel employee discovered her with a belt around her neck. The deceased had been the sole occupant of her five-star room, the cause of death cardiac arrest as a result of asphyxiation” (208). Although Eva is a woman, she still participates in the ideal that Sando creates and indulges in risky and dangerous activities to gain a thrill of adrenaline. As with Loonie, the consequence of Eva following these ideals and becoming addicted to a compromising lifestyle is fatal.

Unlike Loonie and Eva, Bruce does not die as a result of subscribing to Sando’s ideal. However, he is still psychologically wounded as a result of his experiences with Sando, Loonie, and Eva. Sando’s teachings and masculine ideology are disabling to the individuals involved. After undergoing Sando’s training and his experiences with surfing and sex as a teenager, Bruce cannot properly communicate with the people in his life. Because of his inability to communicate, Bruce cannot maintain relationships with women, cannot connect with his daughters, and eventually retreats to a hermitage before admitting himself into a mental institution. His experiences surfing with Sando and Loonie as a teenager, as well as his sexual encounters with Eva, have scarred him and left him dealing with the aftermath of their relationship alone. The psychological scars that haunt Bruce as an adult are a result of trying to maintain a corrupt masculine ideal that he does not fit into. Bruce struggles with his personal identity and cannot build a connection with the people in his social environment. Through Bruce’s struggles as an adult, Winton shows the consequences of set masculine ideals that no men can or should achieve. In the end, Sando gets away with his damaging mentorship and continues partaking in risk-seeking behavior through financial investments. Through these financial investments,
Sando continues to encourage others to pursue risk-taking activities and profits from it. By having Sando continue to exercise his masculine ideal and manipulate others for his own gain, Winton shows how the cycle of exclusive, patriarchal scripts continues to impact Australian culture and suggests that normative gender narratives should be interrogated.

In the end, Bruce is able to separate himself from Sando’s masculine ideal and finds a way to communicate through reconnecting with the natural world. When Bruce is out of the mental institution and returns home to Sawyer, he begins surfing again and creates a peaceful relationship with the land and himself. He describes how while surfing as an older man, he learns “the sweet momentum, the turning force underfoot, and those brief, rare moments of grace. I’m dancing, the way I saw blokes dance down the line forty years ago” (218). Finally, after ridding himself of the masculine expectations that disable him as a teenager, Bruce is able to find a sense of personal identity and achieve the graceful masculine alternative that he seeks from the beginning. It is only outside of constructed masculine expectations and through a peaceful relationship with the natural world that Bruce can feel liberation and freedom. Furthermore he says:

My favourite time is when [he and his daughters are] all at the Point, because when they see me out on the water I don’t have to be cautious and I’m never ashamed. Out there I’m free. I don’t require management. They probably don’t understand this, but it’s important for me to show them that their father is a man who dances—who saves lives and carries the wounded, yes, but who also does something completely pointless and beautiful. (218)
Despite the scars that Bruce carries from his experiences as a teenager, he is able to reconnect with the land and himself through surfing, and this helps him communicate with his daughters. Through surfing he can reconstruct his masculine identity and become a man who partakes in the adrenaline-inducing activity of saving lives as well as a father who participates in beauty and grace. In the end, Bruce sees himself through his daughters’ eyes, stripping away the patriarchal masculine script that Sando associates with surfing and opening it up to a new form of identity.

Through Bruce’s reconnection to the land at the end of the novel, Winton shows how the natural world and one’s connection with it plays a critical role in the development of identity. Following Sando’s masculine ideal, Bruce has an antagonistic relationship with the landscape and furthermore a negative relationship with the world around him. Sando and his teachings represent gender scripts that are impossible to maintain and self-destructive to pursue. By following Sando and trying to maintain a masculine ideal that he does not fit into, Bruce struggles with feelings of defeat and eventually is excluded for not being able to achieve the ideal Sando expects of him. As a teenager, Bruce is confused, frustrated, and hurt that he cannot meet Sando’s masculine ideal and gets involved in destructive relationships, such as his relationship with Eva. Through his struggle to meet Sando’s impossible ideal and the consequences of not being able to, Winton shows the danger of normative gender scripts. As can be seen through Bruce’s experiences as a teenager, gendered scripts and ideals do not allow for individuality or freedom. At the end of the novel, Winton offers an alternative to gendered scripts through Bruce’s sense of liberation and agency while surfing. Bruce is able to free himself from the gendered scripts that have disabled him by reconnecting
with the land and by creating a peaceful connection through surfing. It is only through connecting with the natural world that Bruce is able to come to peace with himself and find a sense of identity and belonging.
Conclusion

In his novel *Breath*, Tim Winton examines and calls into question dominant masculine ideologies in Australian culture. Prominent in Australian national discourse are iconic figures such as the bushman, who not only provide a sense of national identity but are essential to the development of normative gender scripts in Australian culture. Not only does the bushman show his power and prowess by surviving in the harsh landscape of Australia but he embodies characteristics, such as loyalty and mateship, which are associated with manhood. The bushman narrative excludes femininity and any form of masculinity that deviates from the bushman ideal. Furthermore, the bushman has a fundamental, ambivalent relationship with the natural world that has influenced Australian nationalism today. Throughout my thesis I have aimed to unpack the masculine scripts that are present in Tim Winton’s *Breath* to explore how, through the masculinities presented in the novel, Winton interrogates dominant masculine scripts in Australian culture.

Winton’s novel is significant in the framework of Australian literature because it interrogates fundamental cultural practices that are taken for granted and reveals how essential the natural world is to the construction of identity and gender scripts. Looking to his own experience in Western Australia, Winton is aware of the conflicting relationship that people have with the landscape. As he notes in *Land’s Edge*, it is common practice in Australian culture for individuals to use the land and the ocean as a way to test physical prowess and gain glory. As an environmentalist and an advocate for the land, Winton is all too aware of the destructive and dominating relationship that individuals have with the natural world. In his memoir, Winton suggests that the land is much more than just a
resource to be exploited and dominated by humans. Reflecting on his own experiences growing up in Australia and interacting with the natural world, Winton finds a deep connection between identity and place.

In *Land's Edge* Winton also highlights dominant masculine ideologies in Australian culture that are fundamentally connected to the natural world. The land becomes a place for individuals to develop a masculine script through their relationships with the natural world and their desire to test their physical and mental limits in order to prove their ability to prevail in harsh and compromising conditions. The masculine script that Winton describes in his memoir is similar to other dominant masculine discourses in Australian culture, such as the bushman narrative, which also encourage a sense of “manhood” through prevailing in and dominating the harsh Australian environment.

Winton’s belief that personal identity is fundamentally connected to how one interacts and belongs to place is evident throughout his novel *Breath*. Throughout the novel, Winton recreates dominant Australian narratives of masculinity through the character of Sando and the relationship that Sando has with the natural world. Furthermore, Sando passes on his masculine ideal by encouraging his young disciples, Bruce and Loonie, to have a similar relationship to nature. Sando is a masculine mentor to the boys and he encourages them to participate in a masculine narrative that involves risk-taking behaviors and challenging oneself in the natural world. Although, as teenagers, Bruce and Loonie subscribe to Sando’s masculine ideal, as the novel progresses, Winton shows the self-destructive nature of such an ideal and the consequences of imposing strict gender narratives on individuals.
Sando imposes a dominant script that is reminiscent of the Australian masculinity that Winton describes in *Land’s Edge*. Through surfing and developing a relationship with the natural world through risk-taking behaviors and proving one’s dominance and prowess in dangerous conditions, Sando models a masculine ideal for the boys. As Sando and his surfing disciples go on their dangerous excursions, Sando teaches the boys that the best way to become “men” and achieve an ideal form of masculinity is through these extreme surfing excursions and consistently proving their prowess in the natural world. Sando represents a masculine ideal that involves danger and proving one’s dominance over the natural world.

Eva’s character challenges dominant masculine scripts in the novel because she deviates from what is expected of a woman. As a woman who has participated in extreme sports and is a mother figure, Eva does not fit into normative feminine or masculine gender roles. She deviates from patriarchal expectations through her physical appearance, sexual preferences, and past as an aerial skier. Her deviation from gender expectations highlights the performative nature of gender and suggests that gender scripts are arbitrary. Furthermore, Eva challenges dominant patriarchal scripts in the novel because she refuses to be marginalized based on her anatomical sex.

Throughout the novel, Winton creates space for femininity in his revisioning of Australian gender scripts. One of the ways in which Winton does this is through Eva’s pregnancy and how he represents pregnancy in the novel. When Eva is pregnant Bruce fetishizes her body and asserts patriarchal dominance over her. Through Bruce’s actions and the psychological damage that he carries later throughout his life as a result, Winton shows the dangers of participating in and maintaining patriarchal scripts. Furthermore,
alternative forms of femininity emerge along with Winton’s re-envisioning of gender scripts. By positioning Eva as a central and extremely influential character in the text, Winton suggests that women play a fundamental role in the development of masculine alternatives and his re-envisioning of masculine narratives.

As the novel progresses, Winton continues to shows the danger that normative gender scripts, such as Sando’s masculine ideal, pose for identity and sense of self. Loonie takes Sando’s teachings to the extreme, enforcing his dominance and macho masculinity on the natural world. Loonie’s precarious lifestyle and his early death demonstrate how dangerous pursuing masculine ideals that emphasise risk and dominance can be. Bruce, on the other hand, is more cautious than Loonie and cannot fit into the masculine narrative that Sando provides. Because Bruce questions Sando’s narrative and cannot meet Sando’s expectations, Bruce is excluded from the group and led to feel like a failure. Bruce’s struggle to maintain the masculine ideal expected of him demonstrates the consequences of forcing individuals into strict gender roles that are impossible to maintain. Furthermore, the type of relationship that Sando encourages the boys to have with the natural world is addictive, dangerous, and imposing on the natural world. The boys are pressured to constantly prove their manhood and worth to Sando and compete against each other to maintain their place in Sando’s inner circle. Sando’s ideal is disabling and prevents the boys from being able to form a peaceful relationship with the land and with the people in their lives.

In the end, Winton revisions dominant masculine narratives presented in the novel and suggests that an alternative form of masculinity is available that enables communication and a sense of self and belonging. Through surfing and connecting with
the natural world, Bruce is able to find individual freedom and is finally able to communicate with his daughters. He sees himself surfing through his daughters’ eyes, eliminating the exclusively male form of masculinity that Sando creates. By reconnecting with nature, Bruce is able to achieve a sense of identity and a masculinity that involves grace and connection. Winton’s re-envisioning of masculine ideals is only possible through connecting to the natural world and, as a result, finding a sense of self that is not filtered through disabling gender scripts. By exploring different relationships that individuals have with the environment, Winton creates space for new gender narratives to emerge and suggests that building a peaceful connection with the natural world is essential to finding a sense of belonging.
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