

The University of Akron

IdeaExchange@UAkron

Williams Honors College, Honors Research
Projects

The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors
College

Fall 2019

Show Her It's a Man's World: How the Femme Fatale Became a Vehicle for Propaganda

Leann Bishop
lmb207@ziips.uakron.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Recommended Citation

Bishop, Leann, "Show Her It's a Man's World: How the Femme Fatale Became a Vehicle for Propaganda" (2019). *Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects*. 1001.

https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/1001

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

Show Her It's a Man's World: The Femme Fatale Became a Vehicle for Propaganda

An essay submitted to the
University of Akron Williams Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Departmental Honors

By:

Leann Bishop

December 2019

1. Introduction

Angelina Jolie, Catherine Zeta-Jones, and Lucy Liu: what do all these women have in common? They're all female actresses of the twenty-first-century. They're also all modern-day femme Fatales from some of Hollywood's most notorious films. These women have their predecessors: Bette Davis, Rita Hayworth, and Barbara Stanwyck to thank for their fame as modern-day sex symbols. Women like Barbara Stanwyck brought the seductive and cunning female leads from hard-boiled detective fiction to life in the 1930s and 1940s. These women were later coined femme fatales, a French phrase meaning "deadly women" (Mainon, Ursini 2).

Femme Fatales have a rich and extensive history predating the Bible. They are found everywhere from ancient Greece to Victorian literature and even modern-day television. However, it was during World War I and World War II that femme fatales experienced massive amounts of fame and attention. On the surface, femme fatales have a strong character and liberated attitudes towards sex. These characters represent the liberated women of the 1930s and 1940s; after the war, however upon further inspection, they ultimately still support the patriarchal system.

This essay will illustrate how the femme fatale known throughout time as a temptress was brought back during wartime to be used as propaganda to subtly tell women that their newfound liberation will not be tolerated and that they must return to their subservient roles. The novel and film version of *The Big Sleep* will be analyzed. Not only are the characters Vivian and Carmen juxtapositions they are also both put under the rule of patriarchy in different ways. The patriarchal messaging in the novel would later be picked up and used by the film industry to

spread the message of patriarchy to a wider audience thereby, lessening male anxieties after WWII and upholding patriarchal values that were commonplace in America.

2. A Brief History of the Femme Fatale

Temptress or seducers are hardly a new idea; they can be found in literature and art dating back thousands of years. These temptresses are the predecessors of the femme fatale. They are immensely beautiful women that use their feminine wiles to get what they want and no matter what century they appear in they always serve the same purpose: to pose as an example of how women should not behave. These women end up punished or scorned for manipulating or holding men back. The femme fatales of the noir era are similar to these women. They too are extremely alluring women. Screens are filled with full-body shots and close-ups of their lustrous gazes. David Schmid, the author of a publication about mystery and suspense fiction says that femme fatales are also deceptive. They are constantly plotting or lying. These women are intelligent, they show ambition, and they're able to go toe-to-toe with the male protagonists (The Femme Fatale). All of these traits combined to create a very dangerous character capable of anything. However, this seemingly powerful character is, in fact, quite powerless. These are the characteristics that set apart the femme fatale from her predecessors.

The Odyssey by Homer includes many different temptress characters. These characters impede Odysseus from returning home to his respectful wife Penelope. Calypso is perhaps the most memorable temptress from *The Odyssey*, as she kept Odysseus for seven out of the twenty years that he was away. The Greek philologist Filippomaria Pontani claims in his extensive essay that, "Most ancient and modern ideas about the true meaning of Calypso in Homer depend on the etymology of her name. Derivation from *καλύπτω* "to cover, to conceal" is pretty evident and

generally agreed on” (45). While there are a few ways this could be interpreted, one popular idea is that Calypso is concealing Odysseus from his family. In other words, Calypso is diverting Odysseus from his goals. She does so by using seduction. It is made clear that Calypso is a sight to behold. Whenever her name is mentioned, it is preceded with words such as “fair”, “lovely”, “beautiful divine” (Homer 8-462). She seduces him and takes him to bed, all with the goal of keeping Odysseus with her. She offers him the opportunity to be her husband. She even offers him immortality. However, while Odysseus did become distracted and led away from his main task, he ultimately declines all of Calypso’s offers. Calypso, after all, is no Penelope. Penelope is known for her marital fidelity and her wit. She keeps twenty suitors thinking they will get her hand in marriage as she awaits her husband’s return. Penelope is the perfect wife in the eyes of patriarchy. She stays in her domestic sphere taking care of the children and stays loyal to her husband because he said he would return to her. Penelope is even assisted by the Gods, while Calypso is scolded by them for trying to keep Odysseus. Hermes is the god that delivers Zeus’ order; he tells Calypso, “Release him at once, just so. Steer clear of the rage of Zeus! Or down the years he’ll fume and make your life a hell” (82). Calypso is scolded for seducing Odysseus and must now watch as he leaves her forever.

Another historical example of the temptress character comes from Victorian literature. The poem “La Belle Dame San Merci” by John Keats plays off of the courtly love genre. Courtly love romanticizes the medieval period. The genre is filled with brave men proving themselves through courageous acts and winning the heart of a fair lady. Keats’ poem takes these ideas and twists them. This poem features a knight, but instead of being filled with bravery and strong will he's worn down and tired,

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,

So haggard and so woe-begone?

The squirrel's granary is full,

And the harvest's done (Keats 1-4).

It is mentioned that the knight is alone in a quiet area near a lake where sedge does not grow.

The landscape and the knight himself paint a dreary image. The poem goes on to tell the reader why the knight has ended up like this. It is revealed that he met a beautiful fairy whom he spent the day with, and they fell in love. The majestic beauty turns out to be the knight's downfall:

And there she lulled me asleep,

And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide! —

The latest dream I ever dreamt

On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,

Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;

They cried— 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci

Thee hath in thrall!' (Keats 33-40)

The name of the poem is mentioned in these lines, La Belle Dame Sans Merci, which is French for "the beautiful woman without mercy". The faery seduced the knight and led him astray with false declarations of love. When the knight awoke from his nightmare, he found himself by the lake with withering plants, which are mentioned at the beginning of the poem.

While the femme fatale is not punished or scolded as Calypso is, she is still seen as the antihero of this poem. The reader is made to pity the knight from the beginning of the poem. Knights are known for being strong, brave, and chivalrous. The reader begins to think about what could have possibly happened to the knight that has left him in such a depressing state. Only to

find out it was a woman. One who claimed he loved him but turned out to be a liar. The reader sympathizes with the knight; he was left tortured by the one he loves. The reader then feels anger toward the female character; it is in this way she is punished and the *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, like other femme fatales that came after her inspired patriarchal ideology. By creating a villainous woman that should not be emulated.

Perhaps the most well-known predecessor of the femme fatale is Eve. All of Western (Anglo-European) civilization is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology, the main example being how Eve is portrayed as the first temptress and the catalyst in the fall of man. Karen L. Edwards' essay, "The Mother of All Femme Fatales: Eve as Temptress in Genesis 3" found in Catherine O'Rawe and Helen Hanson's book, *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts* talks about how Eve should be accepted by feminist as the archetypal femme fatale (36).

Throughout time the interpretation of Eve as a temptress is still accepted. Jean Higgins, writer of "The Myth of Eve: The Temptress" explores how throughout time theological literature shows an inveterate and wide-spread conviction that Eve tempted Adam to commit the first sin. He does so by examining the various translations of Genesis 3.6. Higgins sums up how Eve was characterized with this quote from a 15th-century witch hunters manual *Malleus Maleficarum*: "In the Old Testament, the Scriptures have much that is evil to say about women, and this is because of the first temptress, and her imitators" (qtd. Higgins 641), her imitators being the women that came after her.

Not only has Eve been depicted as a temptress in theological literature she has also been depicted as such in art. Michelangelo Buonarroti's *The Fall*, from the Sistine Chapel, depicts Eve tempting Adam and the serpent twisted around the tree. This painting portrays the serpent from the narrative as a woman as well. The serpent is the one that coerces Eve into eating the

apple. The serpent says to Eve, “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then ‘your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Authorized King James *Bible*, Genesis 3.4-5). The serpent acts as a deceiver, telling Eve to eat from the apple even though God has told her otherwise. Eve says the serpent “beguiled” her. She, in turn, beguiles Adam to eat. God curses the serpent thus making the serpent a symbol of evil. For Michelangelo to illustrate the serpent as a woman is telling of how women are viewed. Womenkind was blamed for the fall. Women are temptresses, they are corrupt. God not only punishes Eve by making childbirth painful saying, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception;” (Gen. 3.16) he tells her that her husband shall rule over her, creating the first patriarchy.



Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Fall*, detail of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508-1512.

The Fall not only depicts the serpent as a woman but also depicts Eve as a temptress. Leo Steinberg, author of "Eve's Idle Hand" explains the hidden meaning of Eve's pose in the painting. Steinberg reveals that Eve's hand is pointing toward her genitalia with her middle finger which is a phallic sign. This indicates that Eve is aware of her sexuality. The entirety of Eve's pose is erotic. She is in a relaxed reclining pose; known for being erotic during this time (131). In this depiction of *The Fall of Man*, women play both of the villains. Eve takes on the role of the temptress seducing Adam to sin. The serpent is also shown as a woman takes on the role of the

deceiver, a representation of evil. This painting like many interpretations of the *Bible* shows women as the temptation and the fall.

Just like in the story of Calypso and in “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” Eve, the woman is punished for her sexuality and her seduction of the male character. These women are used to conserve the sovereignty of men. These stories inform women that their sexuality is vile and punishable. This makes the ancestor of the temptress, the femme fatale, the perfect choice to portray the newly liberated women of the 1940s in noir films.

There are countless more examples of femme fatales in literature throughout the ages. All of them are portrayed as beautiful women, seductresses that lead the male protagonist astray. Not much is changed when femme fatales are portrayed in film noir. According to Christine Gledhill, the writer of “Klute1: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism ” an essay in an acclaimed text about women in film noir, there are five features of film noir: the investigative structure of the narrative, plot devices such as voice-over or flashbacks, proliferation of points of view, frequently unstable characterization of the heroine and an ‘expressionist’ visual style and emphasis on sexuality in the photographing of women (27). Most of these are found in *The Big Sleep* which will be analyzed as a patriarchal text that was turned into a film to be used as propaganda.

3. The Commandments of Propaganda

Propaganda is everywhere. It is constantly being utilized by politicians, advertisers, churches, and film directors. In fact, propaganda was used by the Catholic church in the 17th century. Pope Gregory XIII created a commission of three cardinals called *propaganda de fide*. Their job was to spread Christian doctrines in non-Christian lands. Several popes after Gregory

XIII established more formal organizations following the same idea (Fellows 182). Propaganda appears many years later in the 1900s, specifically during World War I. Erwin Fellows' "Propaganda: History of a Word" explains how the term was used during this time, "Some of the chief participating governments conducted and organized extensive campaigns of oratory and literature to convince the world of the righteousness and importance of their causes, to win the support of nonbelligerent nations, to lessen the morale and efficiency of the enemy, and to increase the morale and efficiency of their own fighting forces and civilians" (184). During the war America even created an organization, "The Committee on Public Information" or CPI. They were in charge of gaining public support for the war effort. The CPI was later curtailed by the government, so they took their talents to the commercial industry, and public relations was born. Ed Bernays is regarded as the man who invented the term public relations and taught propaganda-- used interchangeably with public relations-- in a university setting (Patrick 15-17).

Brian Anse Patrick is recognized as an expert on the history and technique of propaganda. In his book, *The Ten Commandments of Propaganda* Patrick states, "in general, propaganda-making elites say and do what needs to be said and done to advance or maintain themselves and their organization" (11). During World War, I and two propaganda was aimed towards patriotism and getting Americans involved in the war. It was also during wartime that America saw the largest increase in propaganda. Patrick explains that propaganda worked in waves much like feminism. While these waves highlight important periods of propaganda each more powerful than the last, it is not to say that propaganda is only present during these periods. Propaganda is constantly being utilized.

The wave most relevant to this paper is the third wave which occurred during World War II. During this time research was conducted on how to more effectively use propaganda. There

were countless propaganda campaigns used during and after WWII. During the war, propaganda was used to encourage Americans at home to support the war effort. Propaganda was even created in the form of movies. Indiana University holds a collection of propaganda films created during WWII (Indiana University Libraries). They cover topics ranging from agriculture, women in the workforce and movies focusing on the enemy. One such film is titled “Know Your Enemy: Japan”. The film shows images of the destruction done after Pearl Harbor. The film pairs these images with information about Japan that portrays Japan as a power-hungry country constantly looking to expand outward. The film also covers how Japan is exploiting other Asian nations. The film shows Japan as a villainous country. It shows that the Japanese do not care about their working-class and they have no say in government affairs (Know your enemy: Japan). The film gives Americans the idea that they are doing a heroic deed. They are stopping Japan from exploiting other countries and treating their working class as lesser than the rest of the country. The film shows countless places such as China and Malaysia in support of America's decision to go to war. The entire fourteen-minute film is dedicated to making Japan into a monstrous figure that needs to be taken down and America and its allies are willing to risk their lives to do so.

Patrick explains in his book that films and writing are the best medium for propaganda. Both develop a message and deliver it in a non-threatening yet easy to absorb way (44). After perfecting propaganda techniques, it makes sense that America would continue to use them in films after the war to help remind America of their values and get the country back to normal after the war. It would be reasonable to think that novels like Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*-- which is riddled with patriarchal ideas--would be used by the film industry to create propaganda supporting a patriarchal ideology.

4. You Can Do It...Until the War is Over

During WWI and WWII propaganda was used to encourage Americans to support the war effort. This propaganda came in the form of films, art, books, newspapers, and radio. Propaganda was abundant during this time. WWII saw the largest influx of propaganda. Even companies like Disney that rose to fame with films like *Snow White* participated in wartime propaganda with training films, and other productions such as *Education for Death*, *Reason and Emotion*, *Der Fuehrer's Face*, and *Chicken Little*. These films were Disney's frontal attack on Nazidom (Gabler 58).

Rosie the Riveter also became popular as propaganda used to encourage women into the workforce during the war. Women's study specialist Sheridan Harvey said this about women during the war, "When in need industries decided they were willing to hire women; after all, they wouldn't get drafted" (Harvey). Rosie the Riveter was created by J. Howard Miller in 1942 commissioned by Westinghouse Electric Company in an effort to inspire more women to join the workforce since companies were short on labor due to the war (Harvey). At first managers, husbands, and women were reluctant to join the workforce. However, about six million women joined the workforce for the first time due to propaganda like Rosie (Harvey). For many of these women, it was their first time leaving the domestic sphere. Rosie and other government propaganda encouraged these women to help in the workforce telling them they could help save their man. Women were finding freedom and independence and they wanted to keep this freedom after the war.

When soldiers started returning from the war, they wanted to get back to work, to normalcy. Women were expected to give up their jobs and return to the home. In Mark Jancovich's article "Vicious Womanhood: Genre, The Femme Fatale, and Post War America" he

talks about how the discourse on gender during the war that led to the emergence of “Vicious women” or femme fatales. Jancovich believes that femme fatales represented the women who did not participate in wartime efforts; however, this essay will analyze how these women are indeed representative of independent women that continued to crave equality and freedom.

World War I sparked feminism as women began involvement in politics for peace efforts; this spark continued to grow into a flame after the independence experienced during WWII (Tickner and True). Male anxieties grew during this time. Pam Cook best explains why the femme fatales made such a large appearance during this era, “the femme fatale was born out of the historical need to re-construct an economy based on a division of labour by which men control the means of production and women remain within the family, in other words, the need to reconstruct a failing patriarchal order.” (qtd. Jancovich 100). The femme fatale demonized independent women in order to uphold the patriarchal order that was falling apart as women left home due to the war.

5. The Novel

The Big Sleep was written by Raymond Chandler and first published in 1939. The novel reflects many patriarchal values. Charlotte Higgins, a feminist and author of “The Age of Patriarchy” explains that, “It [patriarchy] is upheld by powerful cultural norms and supported by tradition, education, and religion. It reproduces itself endlessly through these norms and structures, which are themselves patriarchal in nature; and thus, it has a way of seeming natural or inevitable...” (517). These cultural norms that support patriarchal thinking include: women are weak and need protection, women are in charge of the home, men are head of the men, and men are providers. Many of these and more are found in the novel.

The novel very quickly introduces the femme fatale. Her name is Vivian; the eldest daughter of the General. Marlowe informs the reader that, “She is worth a stare” (Chandler 17). Chandler takes his time describing her. It is made obvious to the reader that Marlowe is starrng as he says, “She was stretched out on a modernistic chaise-lounge with her slippers off, so I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stockings. (17). First impressions are important and the first thing the reader is told about Vivian is that she is beautiful. The line, “They seemed to be arranged to stare at” (17) implies that Vivian wants to be looked at: that she is seducing Marlowe with her actions.

After Marlowe has admired Vivian the reader gets to know her personality. Vivian is brazen. She uses her time with Marlowe by trying to figure out why her father hired a private investigator and if it has anything to do with her husband’s disappearance. The intensity and insistence Vivian shows towards Marlowe makes him suspicious of her. Vivian changes her approach throughout this meeting; at first, she is using her sex appeal. She is sitting daintily on the chaise lounge. She is not necessarily polite as she says, “I didn’t know they [private investigators] really existed, except in books. Or else they were greasy little men snooping around hotels” (18). Vivian is strong in her approach and proceeds to ask for the information she wants. Eventually, she becomes upset with Marlowe’s answers and snaps. She becomes angry and calls Marlowe out for his bad manners. Vivian then changes tactics again and begins pleading for Marlowe to find Rusty; if that is what her father wanted. She seems polite now. She is willing to give information. Once she finds out that Marlowe does not know the whole story, she becomes relaxed. Marlowe tells the reader her reaction to his lack of knowledge, “Then she smiled at me winningly. ‘He didn’t tell you then’. Her voice was almost gleeful, as if she had smarted me. Maybe she had” (20). In this chapter Vivian shows us that she is strong-willed: she

continues approaching Marlowe differently until she gets what she wants. This strong will, however, also makes her suspicious to the reader. The reader is also shown Vivian's intelligence. This first impression tells the reader they should be wary of her; that she may be hiding something.

Another important character in this novel is Carmen, Vivian's sister. Carmen acts as a foil to her sister. She is both vastly different yet cut from the same cloth as Vivian. Carmen is first mentioned in chapter one. She is described as being young, less sultry and more child-like than her sister. Carmen being infantilized is a theme that will be carried throughout the novel, along with Marlowe's focus on her teeth. Both of these themes will become more important later. When Marlowe first meets Carmen he describes her teeth, "She came over near me and smiled with her mouth and she had little sharp predatory teeth, as white as fresh orange pith and as shiny as porcelain" (5). Carmen proceeds to flirt with Marlowe and act in a childish manner by biting her thumb and purposefully falling so Marlowe will have to catch her. However, child-like Carmen acts the description of her teeth stays with the reader and clues them into the fact that this may be an act and something more sinister lies underneath Carmen's innocent persona.

The first chapter of the novel also gives the reader an important image. On the very first page of the novel, the reader is told that the Sternwoods have a stained-glass panel that shows, "a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the vizor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere" (3). The story from this panel ends up coming true in chapter seven. Marlowe finds Carmen in Geiger's house. She is drugged, naked, and in need of saving. Marlowe becomes her knight. He not only gets a drugged Carmen home safely but also leaves her out of the story

when he involves the police. Chandler wants the reader to view Marlowe as a protector and savior. Marlowe has all of the power in this scene. It is left up to him what will happen; this is reminiscent of how patriarchy works. Men are the knights, the protectors, the ones with power.

Chapter nine builds more suspicion about Vivian when information about the Sternwood chauffeur is revealed. The reader is also keyed into the fact that Vivian is a very capable woman. However, the power that Vivian is shown having in the chapter is soon diminished when she continues to hound Marlowe about Rusty. The reader may also begin asking questions such as: if Vivian so badly wants to know if Marlowe is looking for Rusty and if she has so much power could she not find him herself if she wanted? The answer is that Vivian has less power than she thinks.

Chapter nine vilifies the women of the novel. They get innocent men arrested, because of their “wild” ways as described by their father in chapter one. While the women are villainized and are put under suspicion the male protagonist of the novel is looked at as a hero. He’s compared to a knight saving a damsel in distress. While other characters express their pity for the General as his daughters are uncontrollable. Thus far Marlowe holds the most power and patriarchy is all about power. Susan Shaw wrote an essay titled, “Is Patriarchy the Religion of the Planet” in it she discusses the prevalence of patriarchy throughout the world by giving examples of how men have kept power from women. Marlowe exhibits the power that Shaw talks about in her essay. Shaw explains how patriarchy is all about power saying, “Patriarchy is a system of domination of men over women. It’s racialized. It’s shaped by economic resources and political access. It benefits some people more than others and in different ways across genders. But at its core it is a system that worships power—whether it be physical, political, social, or economic—

and devalues women and anything associated with them” (59). Marlowe has exerted power over Carmen by protecting her from the police making her life in his control.

Vivian and Carmen were, in fact, devalued the moment the reader was introduced to them. Their looks are the first thing mentioned. Vivian is sexualized and Carmen is infantilized. Neither is looked at as a human being; they are looked at by their qualities. They are not given the same respect that Marlowe gives their father. Vivian is devalued as just a sexual being while Carmen is devalued by being treated like a child. Vivian still holds some power at this point in the novel. She holds valuable information on how to solve the puzzle that Marlowe is working on in regard to his case, but Marlowe still remains as superior as he continues to deny any of Vivian’s advances or give her the information she seeks.

As the novel progresses Vivian continues to try to gain the upper hand with Marlowe. In chapter eleven Vivian relinquishes power when she requires Marlowe’s help; putting Marlowe in the position of the protector, similar to when he did the same for Carmen. Vivian attempts to recover what power she has left by evading Marlowe’s questions and attempting to seduce him. Marlowe stays steadfast and denies her advances. Marlowe refuses to let Vivian’s sexuality distract or impede his investigation by doing so Marlowe is taking away the power that Vivian has as a temptress and in turn giving himself more power.

In the next few chapters, the readers see that Carmen has a hostile side, she demands her pictures from her blackmailer as described here, “Carmen Sternwood pushed him back into the room by putting a little revolver against his lean brown lips” (Chandler 86). Carmen’s sharp teeth make sense now. While she appears innocent, she becomes predatory when denied what she wants. This scene makes the reader think back to when she was first introduced. Carmen was described as having sharp teeth; making the reader suspicious of a more sinister side. That side is

shown briefly. Carmen is saved by Marlowe again in this scene; he tells her, “Get up, angel. You look like a Pekinese” (87). This further devalues and dehumanizes Carmen making her attempt to take charge no more than a childish tantrum.

In the next few chapters, the Sternwood women are referred to as “wild” by the D.A. who feels sorry for the General for having such troublesome daughters. Readers also find out the Vivian gambles frequently; when Mars tells Marlowe, “They’re plain trouble. Take the dark one. She’s a pain in the neck around here. If she loses, she plunges, and I end up with a fistful of paper which nobody will discount at any price” (133). The “wild” that the D.A. refers to symbolizes the Sternwood women’s freedom. Carmen goes out with men for fun and Vivian gambles. Vivian and Carmen are playing in a man's world. Good daughters would settle down with a nice man and stay in the domestic sphere. Many essays have been written about advertisements targeted to women during this time that urged women to go back to the home. In one such essay Vandermeade states, “Then, as the war drew to a close, advertising campaigns and government propaganda used the same images of hyperfeminized women to support a cult of ultra-domesticity and to enforce heteronormative gender roles in order to bolster capitalism, consumerism, and traditionalism among the American public in the face of the Cold War” (1). The hyper feminized propaganda that Vandermeade talks about here is inherently patriarchal. It puts women in a subservient position to men. They care for the household, men go back to the working world. Vivian and Carmen are wild for not being ultra-domestic women and as the novel continues they are punished for this.

In chapter twenty-three the readers see Marlowe act as a knight for Vivian. He protects her from a mugging and offers to take her home after finding her escort heavily inebriated. The two take a pit stop at a diner and the beach. At the diner, Marlowe tells Vivian she has, “wicked

eyes” Vivian appears devious as she avoids questions about her and Mars. The reader gets the feeling that Vivian is like the casino she plays at beautiful on the outside, wicked on the inside. At the beach, Marlowe again tries to question Vivian about what Eddie Mars has on her. Vivian kisses him as a distraction; despite this Marlowe is persistent and asks again. This leaves Vivian unhappy and the two-part on a negative note. One of the main powers that femme fatales use over their male counter-parts is their sexuality however this is the second time that this has not worked for Vivian. Marlowe looks to be in complete control of the situation.

It is also in this chapter that Carmen attempts to seduce Marlowe as well by being naked in his bed when he arrives home. Marlowe quickly sends her home denying all her advances. This chapter portrays Vivian and Carmen as two temptresses that are not to be trusted, while Marlowe appears as a man who sees through their beautiful exterior for who they really are and remains focused on his task despite being tempted to sin.

In the last few chapters of the novel all is revealed. Carmen is responsible for Regan’s death and Vivian helped to cover it up. Marlowe explains how it happened, “I was thinking of the day Regan disappeared, late in the afternoon. When he took her [Carmen] down to shoot and put up a can somewhere and told her to pop at it and stood near her while she shot. And she didn't shoot the can. She turned and shot him, just the way she tried to shoot me today for the same reason” (Chandler 226). All of the foreshadowing that Carmen and Vivian are in fact villainous is proven true. Vivian admits to being a part of the plot to make it look like Rusty disappeared and asks Marlowe to promise he will take her sister to get help. Marlowe informs her that he will give her three days and after that, he will turn her over to the cops.

In the end, Carmen and Vivian who act promiscuous, liberated, smarter than their male counterparts are punished. It should be noted that Carmen, whose crimes are more heinous, is

shown more leniency. This is due to the fact that Carmen acted in a less threatening manner and showed more obedience to Marlowe. She was more willing to submit to the patriarchy. Carmen never questioned him or lied to him as Vivian did. Vivian's actions throughout the novel show her trying to gain power over Marlowe-- the patriarchy-- and for that, she is more severely punished. This ending leaves the reader with the thought that women who act out of place and try to take power away from their male counter-parts are punished and relinquished of any power they have in the end.

6. The Film

In the film adaption of *The Big Sleep*, released in 1946, Phillip Marlowe is played by Humphry Bogart and Vivian Sternwood by Lauren Bacall. The movie does take a few liberties and changes quite a bit from the novel. The most notable change is the love story between Marlowe and Vivian. In the novel, Marlowe makes his disinterest clear. Some of the more minor changes scenes with nudity, pornography, or heavy drinking are cut. This is because of the Hays Code.

Prior to the code cinema had little censorship. This all changed when Fatty Arbuckle was involved with the rape and death of actress Virginia Rappe. This scandal among others convinced studios to create The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). William Hays was made the president. William Hays rose to fame as chairman of the Republican National Committee and later as Postmaster General. It was his political and Presbyterian background that convinced Hollywood executives to make him president of the MPPDA in 1922. Hays and prominent Catholic leaders in the film industry created The Hollywood production Code in 1930 which detailed what could and could not be shown in films. The codes encouraged patriotism, law-abiding behavior, and religious moral values. It was not

until 1934 when Hays established the Production Code Administration (PCA) that the film industry started listening. Joseph Breen a militant Catholic layman ran the agency. For the next two decades, any movie made had to have the PCA's approval before distribution (Vaughn 126-152). As established earlier in this paper the values of Christianity support the system of patriarchy. *The Big Sleep's* film writers had to take out the obscener parts of the novel and replace them with more Christian--patriarchal--ideas and considering the novel is full of them this process was probably easy.

The first meeting with Vivian in the film is considerably less provocative than that in the book. Instead of showing off her legs on the chaise-lounge Vivian is shown pouring herself a drink as Marlowe enters. It is important to note that in this shot Vivian takes up the entire view and is centered on the screen. She demands the viewer's attention. The first impression of Vivian in the film is less seductive and more defensive and suspicious.

The first scene with Carmen plays just about word for word from the book. After Carmen falls into his arms Marlowe tells the butler that he should, "wean" Carmen. Marlowe is making a jab at how Carmen acts childish by comparing her to a child needing to be weaned off the bottle. Just like in the novel Carmen is heavily infantilized. In the essay, "From Riveter to Riveting: The Rebirth of the Femme Fatale in Post-War America" Hagan Whiteleather writes about the propaganda of the femme fatale. Whiteleather states, "When she is vulnerable, broken down, or helpless, however, her teeth and face are described with much more gentleness. It is almost a subtle equation of female power with evil and female submissiveness with physical beauty. As seen through the pro-war propaganda, subtly implanting feelings about vices and virtues is the most effective way to get a point across" (110). When Carmen is trying to lure in Marlowe with her sexuality she is described in a harsh manner in the novel. In the film, she is shown in a darker

light and doesn't show any of her childish characteristics. What Whiteleather is saying is that the film is using subliminal messaging; when women are vulnerable or submissive is when they are most beautiful. This tells women viewers that in order to appear beautiful they must act this way; they must be submissive.

In the scene where Carmen is found with a dead Mr. Geiger, Marlowe slaps her and proceeds to manhandle her to the couch as he tells her to be quiet. Marlowe is physically asserting his power over Carmen in this scene while also asserting his power by playing Carmen's savior. Carmen is shown as completely submissive. A distinct change from the novel is when Marlowe brings Carmen home, Vivian is there. She and Marlowe partake in flirtatious banter as Marlowe proceeds to gain more information about his case from Vivian's reaction to his questions. It is important to note that in Vivian's first few scenes she is shown in power shots. Vivian once again takes up the entire screen. Her head is held high as she struts through the house. She is exuding dominance. This changes over time, however.



Figure 2 Lauren Bacall as Vivian in *The Big Sleep* 1946

The next scene with Vivian is when she visits Marlowe at his office to ask for his help. In this scene, Vivian is seen sitting in the shadows. She starts out by apologizing for being rude. She once again asks for information in regard to what Marlowe is investigating; he refuses to tell her. In this scene, Vivian is sitting on Marlowe's desk. She is wearing a skirt that goes to her knees. During their talk, she begins playing with the bottom of her skirt drawing the viewer's eyes to her legs that have been put on display. Marlowe tells her, "Go ahead and scratch" so Vivian lifts her skirt higher showing more skin as she scratches her leg. The element of the male gaze comes into play in this scene. Laura Mulvey explains in her essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" That men during this era are the bearer of the gaze and women the objects. Mulvey writes, "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (62). Vivian's legs take center stage in this shot provoking one to look at them. There are other scenes such as Vivian in her satin robe described early that also have this effect. These scenes make women into sexual objects for the viewer's pleasure and normalize the objectification of women. Scenes like this tell the viewer, "It's okay to look".



Figure 3 Humphrey Bogart as Marlowe and Lauren Bacall as Vivian in *The Big Sleep* 1946.

A difference between the film adaptation and the novel is that Vivian is at the altercation with Joe Brody. She doesn't say much but she is by no means afraid of the fact that Brody is holding a gun to her. When Carmen comes in, she's dressed in all black and looks rather sinister as she says, "I want my picture, Joe". Marlowe saves both girls and Vivian thanks him before he leaves. While the image of the knight is absent from the movie it is made clear in this scene that it is entirely thanks to Marlowe that Carmen and Vivian were able to safely leave the situation with Carmen's pictures being safe kept. Marlowe asserts his dominance over Vivian in this scene as he takes over the situation and does all the talking, while she quietly sits beside him until told to leave with her sister.

Vivian and Marlowe meet again the next day for dinner. Vivian is dressed to the nines and flirts with Marlowe. She is trying to gain the information she seeks about his investigations. Marlowe continues to dance around the subject. Despite Marlowe playing along with her flirting he soon switches and begins interrogating Vivian about Eddie Mars. This makes Vivian tense as

she refuses to answer. This is a recurring theme in both the novel and the film; Marlowe asserts his dominance over Vivian by making it clear that he is playing no games with her. Marlowe does not allow Vivian's flirting or diversions to distract him from his case. By doing this Marlowe is staying in power over Vivian.

In the next scene, Marlowe visits Mars at the casino. The two men talk about Vivian's gambling; which just like in the novel Mars complains about. Another way that women are oppressed in patriarchy is through economics. Neither the novel or the book mention Vivian having a job all the money she has she received either from her husband or father. The scene of Vivian nearly being mugged plays out soon after. On the way back to the Sternwood's Vivian is shown lounging rather seductively in the car. Marlowe kisses her and Vivian says, "I like that, I'd like more". This scene and the one following, in which Carmen attempts to seduce Marlowe, are examples of the male gaze. In both scenes, the camera focuses on the women. For Vivian, it focuses on her lounged posed and "bedroom eyes". In Carmen's the camera focuses on her revealing clothing. In both scenes, Marlowe does not allow the women to gain an upper hand. Marlowe continues interrogating Vivian about Mars in the car, and he immediately sends Carmen home. Marlowe stays in control, he stays in power.

The next day Marlowe receives a call from Vivian saying that she found Mr. Regan and they will be going on a trip together; Marlowe does not believe her and continues his investigation even after he has been told to stop and has gotten his payment. This scene transitions into the last fight of the movie which Vivian has been added to.

In this scene, it has been proven that Vivian has lied once again. The first time about Joe Brody and now about finding Rusty and going away with him. Marlowe has been tied up when Vivian enters. Compared to her previous scene at the casino when she was wearing an all-white

dress, she is now shown wearing all black as she sits in a dimly lit room telling Marlowe he should have stopped. It is in this scene that Vivian's obedience to Marlowe is displayed best. Whiteleather also notices these changes saying, "The independence she does display will be transformed into a declaration of obedience to Marlowe by the end of the film. That sentiment is echoed by the ways the filmmaker uses camera angles to diminish Vivian's power and dominance in a scene (114). In this particular scene, Vivian follows every command that Marlowe gives her. He asks for a cigarette she does it, he asks to be cut free she does it, he asks for her help taking care of Canino and of course, she does it. Vivian has seemingly lost all her power and is now being praised for her submissive actions when Marlowe tells her, "You looked good awful good back there."

Vivian and Marlowe then return to Geiger's in the next scene and lure Mars' there. Marlowe then confuses his men and they kill him. The entire time Vivian follows all of his orders. The movie ends with Marlowe calling the police and telling Vivian that her sister will need to go to an institution. Vivian asks what will happen to her. Marlowe asks her what's wrong with her and the final line in the movie, "nothing that you can't fix" is said by Vivian as the credits roll. This ending remark stays with the viewer. What was wrong with Vivian is that she was too free, too "wild". She was not adhering to the rules of the patriarchal ideal, so Marlowe fixed her. He made her obedient, he made her a good woman. Unlike in the novel Vivian is not punished instead she is changed into a subservient woman and that makes her beautiful; it makes Marlowe love her.

The film is more subtle in its approach. In the novel, it is made clear that women like Vivian are evil and need to be punished. In the film Vivian is not punished, she is changed. The

viewer must pay close attention to how Vivian's shots are angled and how her behavior and body language changes throughout the film.

The film uses most of the dialogue found in the book, including one word which is heavily repeated: "soldier." Whiteleather explains why this word is repeated saying, "This feeling of animosity between, "soldier" like men and independent "wild" women parallels the feelings felt by many Americans during and following World War II" (111). This term comes up countless times. Mars uses it, the General uses it and Marlowe himself uses it. In this context, the word lets the viewer or reader know that soldiers are the good guys; Marlowe is called one multiple times. The term carried a type of camaraderie to it, that the good guys are now battling against the "wild" women that have taken over when they left to fight in WWII.

7. Conclusion

The film adaptation has quite a few changes from the novel. This is due to the PCA pushing Christian values in films. This removed scandalous scenes including nudity, drugs and other vices. What was left in, however, was the heavy use of patriarchal values, making the film a tool of propaganda to promote patriarchy and the normalcy that it represents. Many things changed after the war, the most prominent being women having more power and freedom. This was scary and many soldiers wanted to return the America they knew prior to the war. An America in which women were homemakers, not factory workers.

During the 1940s the government paid scholars to study effective propaganda and in turn, these studies were then used to ease male anxieties about women becoming too powerful (Patrick 19). The messages in novels and films such as *The Big Sleep* tells viewers that women are to be submissive, obedient, and innocent. Whiteleather says, "The fact that is made clear to the

audience is that in order to survive, a woman must subject herself to masculine rule. This submission to a patriarchal ideal is the exact sentiment of the postwar propaganda” (127).

Femme fatales reflect the dominant women of the 1940s after the war; they may seem powerful but, in the end, their power is taken to restore order and maintain the patriarchy.

Janey Place a writer featured in the *Women in Film Noir* collection states, “The attitudes towards women evidenced in film noirs - i.e., fear of loss of stability, identity and security- are reflective of the dominant feelings of the time” (50). Place also talks about how femme fatales were replaced in the 1950s with virtuous wives and professional virgins who became dominant cultural heroines (47). She explains that this was done to bring back the stability that was lost during the upheaval of the war (49-50). Films were not the only place that this was done advertisements during the time also reflected the need to bring back stability and have women return to the domestic sphere.

Advertising, a form of propaganda, also displayed the same qualities of patriarchy as explored in *The Big Sleep*. Scholar Samantha Vandermeade remarks, “In the 1940s and the 1950s, government agencies and advertising firms busily created, maintained, and developed a specific brand of femininity. The concerted efforts of the advertising agencies, in tandem with government propaganda agencies, presented the American public with ubiquitous images of certain kinds of femininity” (3). Vandermeade goes on to say that these advertisements were successful and accepted by Americans and images of Rosie the Riveter were soon replaced with that of June Cleaver a famed housewife. It is safe to say that for the most part propaganda supporting patriarchy during the time of *The Big Sleep* was successful and abundant. Perhaps too abundant as in the 1960s the second wave of feminism began criticizing ideas perpetuated by these advertisements.

The Big Sleep is just one example of the kind of propaganda tactics that were used in the 1940s and are still used today to reflect the values of patriarchy. Throughout the year's women have made strides in fighting for equality and proper treatment. There will always be those that feel anxious or threatened by the power of women and try to suppress them. It is the job of readers and viewers to pick up these suppression tactics and call them out so that society may continue to make progress.

Work Cited

- Chandler, Raymond, *The Big Sleep*. New York, Black Lizard Vintage Books, 1976.
- Edwards, Karen L. "The Mother of Femme Fatales: Eve as Temptress in Genesis 3." *The Femme Fatale: Images, History, Context*, edited by Catherine O'Rawe and Helen Hanson, E-Book, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, Pages 35-46.
- Fellows, Erwin W. "Propaganda: History of a Word." *American Speech*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1959, pp. 182–189. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/454039.
- Gabler, Neal. "Disney Joins Up." *World War II*, vol. 30, no. 6, Mar. 2016, p. 52. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=112344064&site=eds-live.
- Gledhill, Christine. "Klute1: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism." *Women in Film Noir*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan, BFI publishing, 2000, pages 20-34.
- Harvey, Sheridan. "Rosie the Riveter: Real Women Workers in World War II" *YouTube*, uploaded by Library of Congress, 10 Feb 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04VNBM1PqR8>
- Higgins, Charlotte. "The Age of Patriarchy" *Gendered Voiced, Feminist Vision*, edited by Susan Shaw and Janet Lee, 7th ed. E-book, Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Higgins, Jean M. "The Myth of Eve: The Temptress." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1976, pp. 639–647. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1463485
- Homer, *The Odyssey*, Translated by Robert Fagles, PDF

Indiana University Libraries. Indiana University Libraries Moving Image Archive, Indiana University Bloomington, <http://collections.libraries.indiana.edu/IULMIA/>. 12 December 2019.

Jancovich, Mark. “‘Vicious Womanhood’: Genre, the Femme Fatale and Postwar America.” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, Spring 2011, pp. 100–114. EBSCOhost, doi:10.3138/cjfs.20.1.100.

Keats, John. “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44475/la-belle-dame-sans-merci-a-ballad>

Know Your Enemy: Japan. Producer Gordon Knox, Princeton Film Center, 1942, <http://collections.libraries.indiana.edu/IULMIA/exhibits/show/war-films-categories/item/56>

Mulvey, Laura, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” 1975, Arizona State University, PDF

Patrick, Brian Anse, *The Ten Commandments of Propaganda*, London, Goatpower Publishing Place, Janey. “Women in Film Noir” *Women in Film Noir*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan, BFI publishing, 2000, pages 47-68.

Pontani, Filippomaria. “Speaking and Concealing – Calypso in the Eyes of Some (Ancient) Interpreters.” *Symbolae Osloenses*, vol. 87, no. 1, Oct. 2013, pp. 30–60. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/00397679.2013.822722.

Shaw, Susan, and Janet Lee. *Gendered Voices: Feminist Vision*. 7th ed. E-book, Oxford University Press, 2019.

Steinberg, Leo. “Eve’s Idle Hand.” *Art Journal*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1975, p. 130. EBSCOhost, doi:10.2307/776023.

The Bible. Authorized King James Version, Hertle Bible Publishing, 1970.

The Big Sleep. Director Howard Hawks, performances by Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, Warner Brothers, 1946

The Femme Fatale. The Great Courses, Written by David Schmid, 2018. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat02173a&AN=akr.b5952264&site=eds-live.

Tickner, J. Ann, and Jacqui True. "A Century of International Relations Feminism: From World War I Women's Peace Pragmatism to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda." *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 2, June 2018, pp. 221–233. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1093/isq/sqx091.

Ursini, James, and Dominique Manion. *Femme Fatale. ; Cinema's Most Unforgettable Lethal Ladies*. Hal Leonard Corporation, 2009.

Vandermeade, Samantha "Fort Lipstick and the Making of June Cleaver: Gender Roles in American Propaganda and Advertising, 1941- 1961", *Madison Historical Review*, Vol 12, Article 3, 2015 <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/mhr/vol12/iss1/3/>

Whiteleather, Hagan Faye. *From Riveter to Riveting: The Rebirth of the Femme Fatale in Post-War America*. Kent State University Honors College / OhioLINK, 2015. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ir00279a&AN=oletd.ksuhonors1431360238&site=eds-live.