

CLEMENTINE PIRLOT

Working Women in 1940s Hollywood

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Introduction

Hollywood is a fascinating industry, born at the beginning of the 20th century, the influence of which is still underestimated. Indeed, cinema is often thought of as only a source of entertainment, but every film is more than just entertainment, and always delivers ideological messages, whether consciously or unconsciously. A film is made of millions of choices, and each of these choices reveals something about its ideology. Race, class, gender and sexuality are always represented a certain way on purpose and in order to decode ideology, a reading against the grain is necessary. Ideological assumptions are sometimes so well encoded in films and so internalized that people do not even realize they are social constructions. Classical Hollywood films offer many interesting ideological conceptions of race, class, and particularly gender.

The 1940s saw the heyday of the film industry, allowing films to reach more people than ever before, thus spreading their encoded meaning all over the world. The American involvement in World War II, in 1941 deeply changed the American society. With men sent to fight overseas, women were vividly encouraged to take over their jobs and step out of the domestic sphere into the public one. The most powerful symbol of the new American woman was undoubtedly Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter that first appeared on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1943. Women had entered the work force during the war, but as soon as it was over, men came back and women were massively fired. 1940s films offer a very good depiction of the dominant ideology about working women, and its many changes and contradictions before and after the war.

1. Ideology in Classical Hollywood films

Rosie the Riverter offered the image of an emancipated woman, yet most images of women in films during war time were still showing very conservative views about women. Women were faced to contradictory discourses that confused their identity, torn between the independent worker, and the dependent housewife and mother figure. In most films working women had to choose between a career or a man, but men never had to choose, they could always have both. We can see this ambivalence between public and private life in some movies, but there always seems to be a lack of correspondence between the representation of women on screen and women's lives at the time. This can be easily explained once we understand that Hollywood is not necessarily reflecting society, but rather offering mainstream ideologies about society, in other words how society should be. Distorted images of women were (and still are) a very powerful way of keeping mainstream ideologies dominant. Myths of femininity have always been very present in literature, and they were naturally transferred on the silver screen when cinema became a mass leisure. The Victorian myth of femininity saw women as biologically weak, and their proper place at home. In *The Father of the Bride*, (1950) women are only seen within the domestic sphere, they are presented as irresponsible with money, emotional and superficial, whereas men are presented responsible and down to earth. In *Lady in the Dark* (1944) Ginger Rogers is a magazine publisher, who goes in therapy because she is not happy. The conclusion of the movie is that she needs a man to be happy and being dominated saves her. She gives her business over to her husband so that she can be a housewife. When women do not choose the man over the career, they are punished for it and either die or are unhappy.

2. Feminist Film theory

The shift in this ideology during the war proves that gender roles have very little to do with biology but are rather social constructions. Still, Hollywood films still continued to revolve mainly about men and/or to punish women who did not perform their gender according to the dominant ideology. Classical cinema seems very much identified with patriarchal values but at the same time full of contradictions, that may not be immediately obvious. Feminist film theories appeared in the 1970s and tried to demystify cinema, and classical cinema in particular, in order to decode dominant ideology, and most importantly its hidden criticisms. Feminists observed that Hollywood cinema was constructed according to the unconscious patriarchal system that rules western societies. Thus the male gaze in films carries power, action and possession, and is objectifying women in order to make them less threatening. Patriarchal ideology involves a submission of women because they are feared as they are a threat to male dominance. Women as women are thus never on screen, as women in movies are what men think women are. As an audience, women are alienated, as they are only offered a male point of view on society and themselves. Feminists then wondered how women were positioned as spectators in such a system.

Obviously not all women resisted Hollywood films, as most of them were not even aware of the patriarchal ideology encoded in them. Women could then either identify with the male point of view or with the objectified women on screen which involves a total passivity, the female body only providing an erotic object for the male spectator and characters. In *The women* (1939), MGM presented an all female cast: Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford Rosalind Russell being the main stars. The film opening presented each star in a close up. In the film, they are always getting ready to be seen, we never see men but there are still present as they are suggested by objects, talked about and of course, behind the camera. This film was supposed to show how women are when men are not around, but is actually more about how men think women are when they are not around.

Feminists showed that reading movies “against the grain” was a way to identify the cracks in the dominant ideology. They uncovered that many Hollywood classical films such as those of Douglas Sirk, contain an internal criticism of the system and that there were cracks in some films that allowed us as spectators to deconstruct and go beyond the presented ideology. These movies are still to be considered within patriarchal ideology but studying the contradictions they present can help us see the hidden criticism.

3. Important Genres of the 1940s

Not exactly a genre, the woman’s film was made by men who decided what they thought would appeal to women, offering patriarchal ideas of womanhood. The woman’s film was destined to a female audience, which represented the majority of movie audiences during the war. The woman’s film is not a genre because it encompasses many genres, it could be melodramas, war films, superwomen films, screwball comedies. What made a film a women’s film was a shift from the classical focus on a male character to a female character, an emphasis on emotions rather than action, in other words not the usual patriarchal focus. There was no such thing as man’s films because most other films were actually men’s films.

The melodrama genre, was either entirely focused on domestic life or created a connection between the public realm and the home, as in *A Letter to Three Wives*, in which the thought of losing their husband paralyzes the three heroines. *Gone With the Wind* presented black working women in a very patriarchal way that did not necessarily reflect reality.

Film audiences peaked during the war, and many “unescorted females” would go to the theater several times a week. There were then more and more films made to address this growing female audience. In war films women could have strength and courage, there was a shift from

weak and passive characters to powerful characters. But of course in Hollywood they were still ultra glamorous even when they were doing “men’s jobs” as in *Here come the Waves*, that presented women in the navy.

Films noirs of the 1940s reflected the tension between the sexes and the threat that women had become. With men back from war, Rosie the Riverter had to go home. The femme fatale character was dangerous because she had power and wanted to pursue her own desires, she was not afraid of her sexuality and was obviously punished for it. Strong women were suddenly not acceptable anymore.

Superwomen films presented career women who were also perfect wives. In *Adam’s Rib*, the heroine is a successful lawyer but a trial against her husband, also a lawyer, endangers her marriage. In *His Girl Friday*, a reporter announces her boss and ex husband that she is leaving the newspaper in order to get married again. But it turns out that she cannot leave her job that she loves more than men and that being a housewife is not for her after all.

The screwball comedy was a genre of the 1930s but we can still see some late ones in the 1940s. *She Wouldn’t Say Yes* is particularly relevant for a study of the representation of working women as it presents a man stalking a career woman and even marrying her without her knowing with the help of her father. The ideology that women cannot be happy without a man is obvious throughout the film.

4. Real working women in Hollywood in the 1940s

Before sound was introduced into motion pictures in 1926, most screenwriters and editors were women. But in the 1940s, women screenwriters and editors had become a small minority. The male justification for such a shift was that sound movies were too technical for women. Women screenwriters and editors have been made invisible in research about the 1940s.

Costume design was a profession that was slightly more open to women. Still, most of them will remain unknown as almost no research was done on them. Only one woman was very well known and researched about: Edith Head. Her very long career and list of awards made her the symbol of Hollywood glamour on screen.

Being a director was almost impossible for a woman in the 1940s. The only two exceptions that prove the rule were Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino. Their careers were not easy ones and they were very often forgotten in studies of directors of the 1940s but feminists in the 1970s brought them back to light and gave them the recognition they deserved.

Female actresses in Classical Hollywood were symbols of glamour and stardom. But in reality there was nothing glamorous about being an actress. They were often treated as prize commodities by the studios, and the infamous seven year contracts made them salaried workers and gave them absolutely no control over the roles they played.

Part One — The Production of Culture: The representation of working women in 1940s films

Chapter I — The Woman's Film

Woman's film refers to a specific "genre" although not a real genre of classical movies created for female audiences. It cannot be considered a real genre because comedies, melodramas and even films noirs can be women's films. Most Americans went to the movies weekly in the 1940s, and during the war women were the majority of the audience, young girls even went twice a week (Walsh p37). But women did not enjoy action packed movies as men did and women's films were created in order to appeal to the new female audience. We find most representations of working women in women's films, that started with the flapper in 1920s who had "women's" jobs but was always looking for a husband in the hope of becoming a housewife. War years saw

the heyday of the woman's films, with stars such as Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn and Barbara Stanwyck who were no starlets but accomplished actresses, strong and quite powerful in Hollywood.

Women's movies revolved around women when the patriarchal society of the time did not, and focused on human attachment and emotions. Usually shot inside during the golden age of studios, words were much more important than action. The characters were mostly middle or upper class and money never really seemed to be a problem. Women's movies also had less fetishization of the female body, mostly because they were made for female audiences. Just like an important number of classical Hollywood films, many were adapted from famous novels. Many women worked on those movies, screenwriters, costume designers, sometimes editors but very rarely directors (only Arzner and Lupino) and the studios were omnipresent, controlling everything and leaving little to creativity. Since the Hayes Code was enforced in 1934, films were not allowed to show anything else than heterosexuality and in a very soft way. Career women were thus a much easier topic, but a moralistic approach was compulsory, as the code also forbade any sympathization with "immoral" characters. In appearance, unlike the flapper, working women did not work only until they would find a husband, but romance would still be the main focus and their career seemed to be secondary to it.

Most women's film involved sacrifice from the heroine as her only choice: sacrificing her career, or her happiness for a man or her children. Rosalind Russel who played many superwomen said: "the script always called for a leading lady somewhere in the 30s, tall, brittle, not too sexy. My wardrobe had a set pattern: a tan suit, a gray suit, a beige suit, and then a *négligé* for the seventh reel, near the end when I would admit to my best friend that what I really wanted was to become a dear little housewife" (Walsh p138). Working women in women's films were not factory girls, they were mostly middle class women who were very much a reality in the 1940s. In 1946 a survey showed that 25% of women wished they had been born men. Women's films sometimes challenged the patriarchal ideology but in a subtle way. By the 1950s women's film would decline because of television that took over.

Chapter II — Melodrama

1. Melodrama as a genre

The melodrama is always a woman's films. It relies on excessive talks in order to reveal feelings and thoughts much more than on action that is often limited because of the social pressure women have to face. It symbolizes everyday actions but they are not as important as words. Melodrama is very often connected to psychoanalysis, it appeared at the same time that Freud's ideas arrived in the US and tries to understand women's feelings through psychoanalysis. The melodrama is often characterized by the domestic sphere. Domestic melodramas are centered around family and women's unpaid work at home. The characters are sometimes in a quest for identity.

2. *A Letter to Three Wives*

A Letter To Three Wives, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, is a domestic melodrama in which three women receive a letter from their "frenemy" Addie Ross saying that she ran away with one of their husbands but they do not know which one. Stuck all day at a charity, the three women wonder if it is their husband and through flashbacks, the spectator enters their private

spheres. From the beginning, a voice over reinforces the identification with the character of Maddie. The first woman the film focuses on is Debra. Debra was in the navy, where she met her husband but she seems to have quit working now, as the voice over says she's "out of the navy." A picture of her in a uniform indicates that she used to be a working woman, but that when she found a husband she did not need to work anymore and could become a housewife. She says that meeting her new husband's friends is worse than her first day in the Waves. Her character is presented as particularly superficial, she is upset because her dress is four years old and Maddie's voice over says "women are so silly!" and does not mind degrading her own gender. Patriarchal ideology is everywhere in this film, as those "over privileged" ladies would be nothing without their husbands. The characters even say that men are strong and women weak.

The second woman we are introduced to is Rita, who is also a working woman, as she writes radio shows. Her husband is a teacher, so she is the "man" because she brings more money. But she is quickly pushed back in her woman role when she becomes emotional and cries, while her husband stays very quiet. He devalues her work, saying that to him radio writing is ridiculous, and tells her that her job is not a serious one. He ruins Rita's chances to get a new contract, but the spectator is more inclined to sympathize with him. They have a white maid/cook but she is presented very differently than the usual black maid we see in most melodramas. She is almost seen as equal to Rita. She speaks to her boss with no fear "look I don't teach you about teaching, don't you teach me about duck". A black maid would never say that, not even a white maid. She gets much more attention than maids usually get. She even speaks to the guests. The fact that the camera stays on her, even briefly, can be seen as a "crack" in the main ideology, as maids in melodramas are often never paid attention to as dominant ideology considers them as unworthy of attention.

The third woman, Maddie, married her boss. Her mother's house was so close to a railroad that the whole kitchen would shake every time a train passed by. She refused to be her boss' mistress, and insisted that he marries her. She appears very manipulative, insinuating that women would do anything to have a rich husband. She is the "gold digger" incarnated, the first times she goes to her boss' house she said "this is everything anybody wants". But her marriage is not a success, as her husband thinks of her as a commodity "If you only treated me like a woman

instead of a merchandize” Maddie tells him. We learn that Maddie’s husband was the one who ran with Eddie Ross but he came back in order to make the famous Hollywood’s happy ending. This film shows typical patriarchal ideas about women, while at the same time suggesting that working class women are not invisible.

3. Blacks in classical Hollywood and melodramas

During the silent era, white actors would play black people, such as in D.W Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*. In the 1930s black actors started to appear but the only part they could play was servant or maid. The 1940s saw the arrival of a new black character, the entertainer. All black musicals were released during war years such as *Hearts in Dixie*, *Halelujah*, *St Louis Blues*. Sometimes the servant would even sing such as Hattie McDaniel’s character in *The Little Colonel*. The entertainer characters were used to erase the tensions of war and were made for people to escape for a few hours. But blacks, whether servants or entertainers were still only here to please whites and did not act or have any impact on the plot. Many entertainment scenes were made to be removed for Southern audiences who would be upset by black characters or when a black maid seemed too familiar with the white characters.

In the 1920s and 30s there already were few representations of people of color but after the Hayes code was enforced in 1934 there were even less, as it forbade miscegenation (romance between white people and people of color). The few representations we saw in the 1940s were childlike and unthreatening characters that depicted black servitude, such as the Mammy character. Louise Beavers, Hattie McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen would only play servants, maids or slaves. Hazel Scott and Lena Horne, who were the most famous musical stars, were both light skinned. Interracial dancing was forbidden by the code so they never got important parts and their numbers were always removed in the South. When Lena Horne first started, with *Panama Hattie* in 1942, people first thought she was Latin American, and her studio, MGM, was

even accused of passing her off as white. She was not happy with the representation of black women in Hollywood: “they didn’t make me into a maid. But they didn’t make me into anything else either. I became a butterfly pinned to a column singing away in Movieland” (Bogle 127). In his book *The Negro in Films*, written in 1948, Peter Nobles wrote: “She has not yet been given the chance to do what she most wants to- to play an ordinary girl of her race in a Hollywood film with an everyday American background.” We now know that she was never given this chance. Black actresses simply wanted a representation that did not dehumanize them, as Horne said:

I am not so much interested in playing parts of conventional glamour girl or ever being called the most glamorous negro actress. I would rather establish myself as a prototype of the women of my race whose beauty both of body and character had been not been properly presented to the public (Noble 157).

Hazel Scott would even refuse to appear if audiences were segregated. She refused maid roles from the beginning but she always had to prove herself, and her career stopped in the mid 40s. She declared: “All we ask is that the Negro be portrayed as a normal person. Let us see the Negro as a worker, at union meetings, as a voter at the polls, as a Civil Service worker or elected official. The Negro is human too, you know” (Noble 158). Her roles were often sexual objects but she was too classy to be the usual slut stereotype, she seemed distant in her movies, mysterious.

In *In this our life* (1942) with Bette Davis and Hattie McDaniel, the main black character played by Ernest Anderson was an intelligent law student wrongly accused of a hit and run. This character is part of the “New Negro” tendency that tried to present black characters in a better way. With *The Negro Soldier* in 1944, Americans got to see black soldiers’ wonderful contribution to the war effort. We would have to wait until 1949 to see the first strong black woman character with *Pinky* but the main character, Pinky was played by a white actress. For once, a black character was not a maid, instead she was a nurse who passed as white in the North. She returned to the South but she was not accepted when she revealed that she was not white. She took care of an old white woman, which reminds very much of a maid’s job. This film offered the

first representation of interracial love: her fiancé was white. But as she was not actually black, it was accepted by audiences as it was not really considered miscegenation. The solution to black problems came from the white woman who helped her “find herself”.

Butterfly McQueen grew tired of always playing the same roles “She has been seen in a number of comic maid characters, in fact in so many of them that she often declared herself to be heartily tired of being cast in the same perpetual groove” (Noble 166). She decided to refuse to play “handkerchief head” parts and her career was over. The ugly truth in Hollywood for black women was “Act stereotypes or starve” (Noble 166). Louise Beavers and Hattie McDaniel were called “The eternal Mammy of Hollywood” by Noble in 1948 and he said they “both must share the responsibility in helping to perpetuate the Mammy stereotype” (171), when in reality they had no choice but to play those characters or be unemployed. Hattie McDaniel said she would rather play a maid for 700\$ a week than be one for 7\$ a week (Nestey 195). In his book, *Blacks in American Films*, Edward Mapp lists the stereotypical roles that black would play, among which only those were available for women: “the natural born cook, the natural born musician and the perfect entertainer” (31) To add to the stereotype, Hollywood made blacks speak in a way that most of them did not speak and if their diction was too good they could not have any role. White producers would only look for types, they did not care about talent: they wanted large women (in order to desexualize them) with dark skin (to make the white star look even whiter) and Hattie McDaniel happened to look exactly like that.

3.1 *Gone With the Wind*

Hattie McDaniel became the first African American to win an Oscar for her performance in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). In this famous melodrama, she plays a very faithful Mammy. At first, the African American Press was very skeptic about the film because of its very conservative story that they knew well from the book. But beyond the nostalgic depiction of a pre civil war

South, a reading against the grain allows viewers to see the contradictions of the film. It obviously offers a valorization of whiteness because it was considered the norm, and Mammy's black skin obviously makes the white characters seem even whiter, while her weight makes Scarlet look even skinnier.

The nostalgia for slavery is blatant, the text on screen calls slavery and the Old South "a dream". All the black characters speak in the way white people suppose they do, which was very usual in films at the time. Viewers were probably not shocked when seeing black children serving whites, and most black characters acting childishly. The other maid, Prissy is very childish, her voice is very high pitched (Butterfly McQueen was known for her voice), she is very emotional and scared of everything. Scarlet even hits her because she lies. She is given no consideration, when she goes to find Mr Butler, he and the white people at the party make fun of her. Prissy's cowardness makes Scarlet look even braver.

Mammy is the only character who introduces contradictions in the racist ideology. Her introduction is as strong as her character: the first time she appears, she is yelling at Scarlet and looking very mad at the window. There are some close ups on her, which was very rare for maid characters. She is talked about when she is not there, by Butler and Scarlet. Butler even offers her a drink, but she obviously does not drink it, she clearly knows better than to drink alcohol. She is very close to Scarlet, as she takes her in her arms when they are reunited and is even a mother figure to her. Mammy and another servant (who are house servants) stayed when all the other slaves (who were probably all field workers) left, to be free. Mammy's attachment to Scarlet and her family is here stronger than the desire to be free, which seems very unrealistic, but from a white's perspective, she is only worthy of attention because she is faithful. She has no identity without this family and she is only seen as she interacts with her masters, her personal life is eluded. She still appears stronger than any other black character. When Scarlet and her sisters have to work in the fields, as there is no slave left to exploit, and they complain about how hard it is, but the film never shows black slaves complain, insinuating that only white people have the right to complain. Mammy is not the usual maid, she is not silent, she is bossy and speaks her mind, and she is not scared of white people. Compared to Scarlet who looks very childish, Mammy looks responsible. She is Scarlet's conscience, and always knows what is best for her.

The famous scene in which Hattie McDaniel cries was the first representation of emotions by a black actor and contributed to make Mammy's character slightly more human than the other maid characters.

Chapter III — War Films

World War II introduced a drastic change in women's lives. The female labor force increased by 6.5 million but films still showed a strong attachment to traditional roles of women as housewives and mother figures. The greatest change occurred for married women who suddenly entered the work force but it was rarely shown in the movies (except maybe *Mildred Pierce* but she is punished at the end) because it did not correspond to the myth of traditional women. In 1942 the Bureau of Motion Pictures published guidelines saying that war films should show women what they could do in their homes to promote the war effort and even did a "woman at work" month in May 1943. This same year, women got the right to enter the army, marines and navy as soldiers. War films then offered representations of working women in order to make women enter the work force.

Here Come the Waves (1944) appeared as government propaganda. Women in the navy were called Waves and in reality their jobs were not the same one as men. In the militaries, about half of the women had administrative jobs. But the film depicts women trained as soldiers, and for the characters, it seems like the ultimate satisfaction: "I've never felt so good in my life" says one of the women. Even when depicting women in the navy, women are objectified: the two heroines are twins (both actually played by Betty Hutton) who are entertainers and sing propaganda in order to bring women in the navy, their songs have lyrics such as "join the boyfriend". The ideology here tells us that women can do men's jobs but that they still have to stay feminine. Bing Crosby plays a famous singer, Johnny Cabot, who is adulated by women and complain of this excess of attention. One of the twins is obsessed by him, whereas the other one

could not care less, and he will obviously fall in love with the latter. Rosemary appears wise and seems older, whereas Susie acts like a little girl, she is called “baby sister” by Johnny when in fact they have the same age as they are identical twins. Everyone likes Rosemary better, because she is a woman and Susie is just a girl. We barely see them work, the romance is the center of the movie, and the navy seems to be just a background for this love story.

This war film is supposed to show women in the militaries but actual women in the navy were not glamorous enough so they made the characters entertainers. During their show, a number called “If waves acted like sailors” shows an inversion of roles that offers the worst stereotypes about men and women. They sing that they have got a man in each city, and act indifferent and men talk about clothes and act superficial. The comical effect lies in the fact that gender roles are very strictly defined and that a man or a woman not performing his or her gender correctly is ridiculous. Women and men can only escape gender roles if it is a joke but in real life ideology tells us that they have to perform their gender as prescribed.

Women’s status was permanently changed by the war, working gave them confidence as breadwinners and sometimes involved a redistribution of responsibilities at home. But working women were not really popular heroines until the 1970s and the media focused on traditional housewives after the war, ignoring the increased number of women working during the war who wanted to keep their jobs. Even during the war years, courageous housewives were more popular than Rosie the Riverter on screen. War jobs were only temporary and these opportunities were taken away after the war. But work fulfilled a desire to escape domesticity, and women enjoyed the socialization and power they got from work and men did not want to share any of their power.

Chapter IV — Film Noir

1. Definition and historical context

Film noir is not exactly defined a genre for the very simple reason that the movies which are now called films noirs were not at the time they were made. Film noir is a movement, and contains key elements that unite movies together such as a particular use of shadows and darkness, specific characters and plots... The majority of films noirs was made right after World War II, and has to be understood in the context of post war America. Men returning from the war saw that women had taken their jobs in order to help the war industry and the traditional gender roles and family economy was now totally obsolete. Men's power was challenged. Work was a key element in the unfair battle of power between men and women. Although there were many representations of very powerful working women in films noirs, work is one of the symbols of power that men are not willing to let women possess. Family is a very important institution for the maintaining of patriarchy and working women in the 1940s endangered patriarchy by challenging the whole organization of the institution. Films noirs reflected the male's fear of independent and powerful women and displayed extremely powerful women. But this power was only given to them with the goal of showing American women what happened if they tried to gain too much power. The tragical fall and often death of the film noir's femme fatale was a way of maintaining control over women who were reluctant to go back to just being housewives.

As the US entered World War II, most men went to Europe to fight with the Allies, leaving the country to women. Men had to leave their jobs to go fight and the war industry needed to produce more and more. The government then decided to launch a campaign in order to get more women to work for the war industry. Before the war, some women were already working but they were mainly young women that only worked until they would find a husband and settle as a housewife. During the war, women from different class and older women were now working. Working women introduced a radical change in the traditional family. Women realized they were as capable as men, and that they could be more independent. When the war ended and men returned to the US, the government passed the GI bill that helped soldiers buy houses and thus create families.

Working women were now a problem because men were back and the government considering they were no longer needed, launched another campaign to try to push them back into the housewife role. Post war depression created a reorganization of the American economy: the consumer society was beginning to become very strong. The new trend for men was to be satisfied by the possession of a wife, children and of all sorts of goods. But women were not like real estate, you could not possess them so easily. During the war, they had become a growing social force and married women had realized that there was more to life than just staying at home. They now had two options: work or live off a man and they were not willing to go back to just one option. Men knew that it would not be easy to get them out of the work force and started to see women as a threat to their authority. Working women became the enemy, they had gained the power that was until then reserved to men: the economic power.

In reality, career women in the 1940s were not that much of a threat but film noirs displayed the extreme unconscious and symbolic fear of women. In films noirs, women were more central than usual. The movie industry was still mostly masculine and the representation of women was thus defined in male terms. The two stereotypes of women that we find in films noirs are either a *femme fatale*, representing the bad woman, who is strong and has a lot of power over men. These women are exciting childless women who work and are thus very independent. The other type of woman is the *femme attrapée*: she is the victim of men, she is submissive, boring,

has children and does not work. Not all films noirs have this dualistic vision of women, some show women character as deeper and with a more complex personality.

Working women in film noirs usually have image producing jobs such as model, singer... rather than factory jobs. Films noirs do not represent the reality of working women of the 1940s but a stereotype of working independent women. Sexuality and work are tightly linked as women's sexuality as well as their ability to be independent were threats to men. They even often go together: the femme fatale is a woman who not only is able to work and provide for herself but she is also in control of her own sexuality. The key to understand the representation of working women in films noirs is the understanding of the perennial threat that women are to men's control of the world. Films noirs are centered around the absence or destruction of romantic love and family. Women are more unstable than ever, they reject the traditional roles that men want to impose on them.

In films noirs, the dominant atmosphere is one of moral and physical chaos. Nothing is stable, especially not women who lead to the destruction of men. Women are evil and work is one of the things they stole to men, thus the need to maintain control over them. Films noirs express the alienation of women and punish them in order to put them back into patriarchy. Work is a metaphor for ambition but ambition was very inappropriate for a woman at the time. They were supposed to be the wife of someone not to have something of their own. But this supposition was a total deny of the fact that women were human beings and may aspire for more. After having had a taste of independence during the war, they wanted more freedom and they wanted the right to be self interested instead of being dedicated to a man. Films noirs heroines are the embodiment of ambition, they want more power, more money and sometimes working is not even enough. The femme fatale's introduction is always very spectacular and is often seen from the hero's point of view. The introduction sets the mood and reflects the woman's power.

2. *Mildred Pierce*

In the movie *Mildred Pierce*, work is a key element and Mildred's situation is a very good example of the disorganization of the family. Mildred rejects her class and the traditional patriarchal control over women. She divorces from her cheating husband and wants more independence and sexual freedom. First it is very interesting to notice that *Mildred Pierce* is not a typical film noir and thus the character of Mildred is not the typical femme fatale. Like the femme fatale, she rejects traditional gender roles but unlike the femme fatale she has children and she is a typical housewife before her husband leaves. "I felt as though I was born in a kitchen" is one of the first sentences she says in the flashback. At first she is more similar to the femme attrapée and gradually becomes closer to a femme fatale. The flashback parts of the movie look more like a melodrama than a film noir. When her husband leaves with another woman, Mildred is left alone with two kids to feed and she has to get a job. She then becomes the man and provides money. We can see that she has ambition because she refuses to remarry and chooses to earn her own money. She becomes a waitress but her daughter wants more and more money so she works even harder and opens a restaurant. She is so successful that it becomes a chain. But of course society will not let her have a business on her own so she has two male partners. What is very interesting in the character of Mildred is that unlike the typical femme fatale, she does not work so hard for herself, not because she wants money but because her daughter wants more money. She sacrifices herself for her children, which seems more like a melodrama female character but at the same time she is very strong and becomes a castrator, a huge threat to men. She even makes so much money that she lends some to her lover Monte, who is then totally impotent and deprived on any power.

As a woman, she runs her business very differently than men, she puts customer satisfaction before profits, unlike most men would do. This proves that women are not only as capable as men but can be more successful than men. Still, men refuse to let them do their own

thing because they want to keep their power. The only reason she loses her business is because Monte made a decision without telling her: her fall is caused by a man. From the moment she is betrayed, the movie turns into a film noir. She becomes more of a femme fatale and decides to make Monte pay for what he did. When she takes the gun and goes to his place with the obvious intention to kill him, her reaction is a metaphor of what most women feel when oppressed by men: a rage that turns into violence.

Her daughter Veda is closer to a femme fatale as she is blinded by ambition but she uses her mother to achieve it and doesn't act. Acting instead of being passive is very typical of a femme fatale and the one who acts is Mildred. But society, or should we say men, will not let her possess so much power. Veda, who is the reason why Mildred worked so hard, makes fun of her own mother because she works. She is marginalized and rejected by everyone including women who are afraid and jealous of her for having so much independence. She has phallic power and this is not accepted in a patriarchal society. What is very interesting in *Mildred Pierce*, is that her phallic power does not come from the typical phallic symbols such as having a gun or smoking a lot of cigarettes, neither from an open sexuality but only from work and by extension money. She has the economic power, which is a metaphor for all working women who provide for their entire family, challenging the expectations of society. This power has to be destroyed, women who will go to the movies have to understand that you will be punished if you try to challenge men's power. She is unfairly punished in order to show a lesson to all women in America. Films noirs display very powerful women only with the goal to punish them and warn women spectators that independence will lead to their fall.

3. *Gun Crazy*

In *Gun Crazy*, the heroine is the femme fatale by excellence. She is driven by an overwhelming ambition, working is not enough for her, she wants more money and does not

want to work hard so she becomes a criminal. Her rejection of gender roles is total, even though she is married with Bart but will never be a housewife and rejects the idea of motherhood. She is the symbol of men's fear of women, she is a liberated woman and of course a criminal for being liberated. Films noirs' working women are far from being role models, on the contrary, they are dissuasive and always receive a very harsh punishment: they either die or lose everything they have.

With the government campaign to make women enter the work force, millions of women realized their potential. They became conscious of their own economical strength and the return of men was followed by an attempt to push them back into the housewife role. They had become too strong for men, they were not safe anymore, they were not entirely dedicated to men anymore. Films noirs reflected the context of fear and displayed very powerful working women only to punish them for being independent. In order to make the lesson last in women's minds, films noirs' women had to be very dangerous and powerful so that their fall is spectacular. Work and economic power had led women to too much independence and thus had become key elements in the battle of power. Men had never had to share this power and did not want to. Films noirs had a certain impact on women, as the 1950s will see a lot of housewives living "the good life" in their suburban house full of technological products. But history will see men's control of the world challenged, and no film noir would stop this revolution.

Chapter V — Superwomen Films

1. *His Girl Friday*

The superwoman character appeared in the 1940s to please female audiences, as images of female power were acceptable to women but not to men. The superwoman has the power of words, she is not afraid to speak up and is a kind of Rosie the Riverter, with a better job. Always in a city, she had no children but seems to perfectly manage having a husband and a career.

Director Howard Hawks is famous for his women's films, among which *His Girl Friday*, a comedy with Rosalind Russel and Cary Grant. Russel plays Hildy Johnson, a reporter, and Grant plays Walter Burns, the newspaper editor who is also her ex husband. The film plays on the traditional war between men and women but this war is fought with words. Hildy has won the respect of the male reporters and seems to be one of the boys: she smokes, which is the ultimate phallic symbol of power, and she is a very confident, strong woman. Men are at her feet, her ex husband is obviously still in love with her. In the first scene, she tells him that she is going to marry again and that she wishes to quit her job. She says the man she is going to marry, Bruce, treats her like a woman, which implies that Walter treats her like a man. The fact that she behaves very much like the male characters creates a comic effect. She is the only woman in the press room and always looks smarter than her male colleagues. She is always cool, calm and collected, she is not emotional as female characters usually are. She even calls the men "a bunch of old ladies." She tells her colleagues: "I'm going to business for myself, I'm getting married." But she cannot quit, she loves action too much to become a housewife. Bruce looks very stupid, he is

rather feminized and Walter, the winning man at the end is the manliest one. Dominant ideology would push her out of the work force into the house, but Hawks' films tend to have contradictions and present subtle criticisms of patriarchal ideology. She needs a man, a real man, as patriarchal ideology prescribes, but she needs a man as intelligent as her and who does not want her to be a housewife. But at the end she cries, as a reminder that women are emotional and that they are not themselves without a man, Walter even says "you never cried before" as if she was not really a woman before.

2. *Adam's Rib*

Adam's Rib (1949) is inspired by a true story and stars Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy as married lawyers. This film seems to be the most progressive one of the decade, as Amanda, Hepburn's character, believes that men and women should be equal. Even if the title of the film shows that women are secondary, her character seems much more complex and interesting. They have a white maid, which is a sign that they are rich and Adam seems to bring more money than Amanda, because he is a prosecutor and she is a simple lawyer (who went to Yale). She drives their car, which could be seen as a symbol of power, but this power is taken away because she is the stereotype of women who cannot drive properly: "Ah you lady drivers!" They are opposed in a trial about a woman who shot her husband who was cheating on her because Amanda is revolted that cheating is more accepted for men "a woman does the same and she's an outcast" and decides to defend the accused woman, even if it means being opposed to her husband.

In Adam's office we only see men and in Amanda's office there are almost only women. The woman she defends appears childish and irresponsible, like female characters usually are, but Amanda seems responsible and mature. She is the only one who seems to rebel, and the usual war of sexes enters their home. The film gives much more importance to their romantic relationship than to work, even in court it all comes down to their private life: the hat he offered her is on her client's head and it then reduces the trial to a marital quarrel. Music is always used

when they are at home but not when they are in court, which makes the home scenes more pleasant. Adam tells her “you’re having a little fun”, insinuating that her job is a joke, and that only his is serious.

As progressive as Amanda’s character tries to be, she is still prisoner of patriarchal ideology, that tells us that women are emotional and unstable, and she cries, because only women cry when they are upset. In court, when her client says that her husband works under her, the whole court laughs, because men who have less power than women are thus feminized and ridiculed. Amanda’s radical beliefs that women should be equal create many tensions between Adam and her. She even has to apologize to him when actually, she is only defending her opinion and should not have to apologize for what she believes in. Adam does not like Amanda’s opinions and says: “I see something in you that I have never seen before and I don’t like it.” He even tells her that she has no respect for him and that she has outsmarted herself and him., revealing that his problem is that she does not perform the traditional ideas of femininity. He is even a sexist: “I’m old fashioned, I like two sexes.”

At the end of the film, all her feminist argument is destroyed and she is put back to her proper place when she says: “I don’t know what’s the matter with me”, implying that she must have a problem to challenge patriarchal ideology. After an argument, he leaves the house and the trial ends with them being separated. She wins the trial, which could suggest that her ideas are not so incoherent after all but it is a little victory since he comes with a gun when she is with the neighbor (who is in love with her) and, afraid to be shot, she says that “no one has the right” to kill, he then eats the gun which was actually in chocolate and tells her that he just wanted to prove his point “I am right and you are wrong.” At the end of the film he even cries and then admits that it was only a strategy to get her back, mocking women who are genuinely emotional.

Chapter VI — Late Screwball Comedy

The screwball comedy is a genre that appeared in the 1930s as an escape to the depression. It typically involved a romantic plot in which the characters cannot confess their attraction for each other, but also characters changing social class, and sharp dialogues.

1. *Meet John Doe*

In *Meet John Doe*, (1941) Barbara Stanwyck plays a newspaper columnist, Ann Mitchell, who gets fired for economic reasons. She cannot afford to be without a job as she is the only breadwinner of her family, her father died and she is the oldest child. As she has a last column to write, she decides to write a letter of protestation against society that she signs John Doe. This letter makes a lot of noise and even the governor wonders who John Doe is. Her editor calls her back to ask her who that man is but when she tells him she made it all up, he has no idea what to do. But she is a very confident and strong woman, even though men do not take her seriously. She suggests that they hire a man to pretend to be John Doe and thus gets her job back plus a bonus. The man they hire, John Willoughby (Gary Cooper) is very much attracter to her but never confesses it.

She is clearly more intelligent than her editor who calls her a “crazy woman” and tells her to “go out and get married and have a lot of babies but stay out of the newspapers business.” She

cleverly gets her job back by manipulating her dumb and sexist editor. She seems very in control through the film but we learn later in the film that she is also manipulated by the fascist newspaper owner who clearly has a political agenda. Her character is still a pretty good depiction of working women of the time who needed their jobs to live.

By pulling the strings behind the scene and writing for John Doe, she makes the newspaper sell many copies. She is the only woman we see in the whole movie, except some very brief appearance of receptionists. She is thus alone in a man's world but is not afraid to speak up and seems perfectly at ease. She only accepts the newspaper owner's offer to write speeches for John Doe because she needs money for her family, not because she is ambitious and blinded by money.

She is the only one of her family to work, as her mother probably never worked in her life. But as a woman, her beauty is obviously as important as her confidence and there is a romance between her and John Wiloughby, the man they hired to be John Doe. He is also offered more money to reveal that the whole thing is made up, but after hesitating he decides not to betray her. If she was a man he would have no problem betraying her for money but the romance prevents him from doing so. She pulls the strings of the whole John Doe movement but she gets no glory, he gets all the credit for her work. All the love and respect that John Doe creates is actually her work, as it is a message of universal love that seems more appropriate to come from a woman. Her power becomes huge as John Doe clubs are created everywhere in the country and people deeply touched by her words. But she has to stay in the dark, as most powerful women before her. John gets all the glory but when he realizes these people are fascist and want him to do politics he refuses and the newspaper owner reveals this was all made up. People turn against him personally just like they loved him before, and Ann who got no glory is also spared from the hatred. Although she appears evil when we learn that the newspaper owner is a fascist, her motivation and her guilt when she finds out make her a "good" woman. Her role is a crucial one, as she translates the frustration of American people at the time through John Doe.

There is very little emphasis on her femininity and she often appears as one of the boys, as she is the only woman and works for the same reasons as men, who need money for their families. She seems even more ambitious than the male characters but her ambition is not a

personal one, it is only for her family, which reminds us of the sacrificial mother figure. The conclusion of the film shows us that she needs a man to be happy, as she becomes ill when John disappears and even faints in his arms when she finds him. She does not give up her career, as most working women would do in classical films, and she is going to have the man and the career. She seems to be the strongest female character of pre war films, even before women's films really appear in the US.

2. *She Wouldn't Say Yes*

In *She Wouldn't Say Yes* (1945), Rosalind Russel plays a very independent psychiatrist, Susan Lane, who is not willing to get married and is perfectly happy single. Her character is not the usual female character, she is not interested in being dependent on a man, but still does not behave like a man. She does not drink, because, she says "I always like to know what I'm doing." She appears very independent and very proud but also seems to reject men in general. An independent woman could seem to be something positive but here it is presented as the worst thing that could happen to a woman. She is asked to help a woman who "hates men" because it is obviously a psychological problem to reject men. The two women seem to share a distrust of men. She does not want to get married nor have children, but her father is strongly pushing her.

She still lives with her father, which suggests that she is still a child and they have a butler (not a maid), who adds to the paternalist discourse, because he is on her father's side. But she possesses the phallic symbols of power: she smokes and she has money, her butler says: "She's very rich." So much power in the hands of a woman is not normal in a patriarchal society, and it is not accepted for a woman not to need and serve a man. Susan believes that men are responsible for women's problems.

She meets a man in the train, Michael Kent, who falls in love with hers and literally stalks her. Even though she clearly resents him, her father helps Michael to trap her and marry them without her knowing. She was perfectly fine without a man but patriarchal society does not

accept it, she is not performing her gender role correctly and she has to be punished through marriage. Michael says that “she’s too smart”, and her father even tells him that he is “scared of a little girl”, devaluing her social position, her job and her age that make her a woman, not a girl. Michael and her father are convinced that they are doing her a favor and that there is no way she can be happy without a man: “she’s in a terrible condition” “I know that’s why I’m marrying her.” The film makes acceptable, and even comic to marry a woman against her will, if it was the opposite, the woman would look crazy, but men have the right to dispose of women as commodities. Patriarchal ideology seems to speak directly through the character of her father when he says: “every woman should be a wife”, implying that a woman without a man is not complete, that she is lacking something.

Part Two — The Culture of Production: The real working women behind the scene

Chapter VII — Women Screenwriters

Women screenwriters were a majority during the silent era. But after sound was introduced, in 1926, women became a minority. Yet, screenwriting was one of the most accessible jobs for women compared to directing, cinematography or producing in Hollywood. The 1940s were the golden age of studio and more women screenwriters were hired during World War II, due to the shortage of men. But women were still only 15% of screenwriters (Francke 56). Many women would write women's films, because producers believed they would be better than men for women's films, but not for men's films. A small number of women only were writing men's films (western, film noir...) but because they were said to write like men. Screenwriters, whether men or women, were paid very little attention, directors and actors would be worthy of attention. Some directors, such as Alfred Hitchcock, even pretended to have had the writers' ideas. But writers had some kind of influence, even though very restricted by the producer and director's

control. The ideology, whether conscious or unconscious, encoded in films was and still is very powerful and influences many people's way of viewing the world.

Only after the 1970s did researchers pay attention to screenwriters of the 1940s, but many were already dead or very old and research was thus limited. Patrick McGillian interviewed 25 screenwriters of the 1940s and 50s, and with no surprise, only 5 were women. In an interview, Niven Busch talks about "fraternal commitment" between writers, (McGillian 95), as if there were absolutely no women writers, which we know was not true.

1. Becoming a screenwriter

Women's experiences in this man's world were different, but for all of them, getting into screenwriting was not easy. Dorothy Kingsley, who wanted to write comedy said: "It was impossible to get hired if you were a woman gag writer, as there was no such thing at the time". (McGillian 116) She started writing radio shows before being able to write for the silver screen.

The writing couple, Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett was actors and playwrights before coming to Hollywood. Many women would write with their husbands before they could write solo. Many writers came from journalism, playwriting and novel writing. Women had to start from very low jobs and try to climb up, many writers had to be secretaries first and prove they were good before given an opportunity to be a screenwriter. It was very hard for ambitious women in Hollywood and those who made it were strong and patient women.

Leigh Brackett, famous for co adapting *The Big sleep* with William Faulkner in 1946, was a science fiction and mystery novelist before she came to Hollywood. Famous director Howard Hawks read one of her books and thought she was a man so he hired her, he was surprised when he first saw her, but he liked her work and gave her a chance. She then almost exclusively worked for him during her long career.

Jane Murfin first wrote plays for Broadway, with very strong female characters, questioning women's role in society. Lenore Coffee started writing advertising and one day wrote a story thinking of a specific actress and sent it to the studio, not even hiding that she was a woman. She was then given the opportunity to become an editor and to write titles for silent movies until sound came and she had to learn how to write dialogues if she did not want to be unemployed.

2. Screenwriters' working conditions

Writers had to deal with self absorbed directors like Hitchcock who would pretend to have the writers' ideas and leave no credit to them "no writer ever got credit from Hitchcock." (McGillian 36) Many writers were lent to other studios like commodities, as they were under contract with one studio and worked as salaried workers. Many scripts were written in just a few weeks, usually between two and eight weeks. Writers were under a lot of pressure and were not paid that well. In 1938 only 17 screen writers (probably all male) made more than 75000\$ per year (McGillian 6). They were almost never on set, but always in their office, working long hours, some even had to clock in and out.

The Screen Writers Guild was created in the early 1930s in order to get better conditions; in 1941 they got a minimum salary, a little more control on credits, and royalties and benefits. Sonya Levien said: "I never knew what work meant until I hit the motion picture profession. The over lords pay well but demand every ounce of flesh and blood" (Ceclair 45). Levien did not have too much trouble finding work but was never really satisfied about it, as many people would rewrite her scripts. She felt disappointed that producers had so much control on what she wrote. Leigh Brackett said she would sometimes weep when she was very unhappy with how little control she had over her scripts. Many movies were written by teams of writers that could be very

big. Studios started to make writers work in teams, in the 1930s, when people with experience would be teamed up with new people.

Women sometimes worked together, at MGM Dorothy Kingsley worked with Zoe Atkins and other women writers, but she said she was very close to Isobel Lennart. Writers tried to have more control over what they wrote, but was way easier for men to become producers and especially directors so women would at least try to get as many solo scripts as possible. Even if you managed to work solo, many people still had more control over your script than you.

The collaboration between one of the only women directors and women screenwriters allowed the characters to be very human, Dorothy Arzner would pay much attention to screenwriters and even request them on the set. Lillian Hellman, very famous for *The Searching wind* (1946) said “I didn’t like the ones where I collaborated or where the director or the producers told me what to do” (Fine p143). All studios did not treat writers the same way, a male writer told McGillian: “I don’t think any of the studios valued writers very much. If the writer could fit the Warner system, it was far and away the best place to be. Metro, you might as well be out in the desert. Nobody even knew you were there.” (75) Fox was not the worst place to be either, as Darryl Zanuck, “claimed” to be a writer himself, he would pay more attention to them (McGillian 75). Screenwriters were still not the best valued profession, Frances Goodrich said “There was such a caste system out in Hollywood, the lowest layer was the writers” (McGillian 205). Producers has ultimate control and did not really consider the artistic part, as Goodrich continues: “it was curious out there. They did not want you to write an original. They preferred to buy something, look at it, know that they had it, and then adapt it” (McGillian 206).

3. Being a female screenwriter

Being a female screenwriter at the time meant being one of the only women in the office, and only strong women could survive in this man’s world. Jealousy and sexist ideas were always

around the corner and they often had to stand up to men. Lenore Coffee, who had a reputation for “fixing” scripts, because she could immediately see what was wrong in them, one said to a male writer whose script she “fixed” who wanted her to give up credit Lenore Coffee answered “I’ve heard the age of chivalry is gone, and now I believe it” before hanging up (McGillian 143). Coffee was known to be a tough woman, and her great power came from her charm “she could sell a whirling spray [birth control] to a nun”(McGillian 143). She gave a new personality to Joan Crawford that was so successful that Crawford would then keep playing the same character over and over again. Her theory about the drastic disappearance of women in screenwriting was that “a silent film was like writing a novel, and a script was like writing a play. That’s why women dropped out. Women had been good novelists, but in talking pictures women were not predominant“(McGillian 143). As a woman screenwriter, the emphasis would constantly be put on her role as a mother, she would be called when people were having trouble with their scripts and, like a mother she would give good advice. On her publicity photos, she would appear with her child, which would never happen to a man, whose professionalism would be emphasized.

Sexism and jealousy were already hard to cope with, and sometimes they even had to deal with harassment, in an interview, a male screenwriter said “certain writers in the writers’ building would give the secretaries a pretty bad time” (McGillian 75). Of course the only women in the building were the secretaries but female screenwriters probably had to deal with it too. Women’s work was not taken as seriously as men’s, as W.R Burnett, a male screenwriters shows:

on the lot we had one of those overnight geniuses –a woman- someone who had published a book about her family or some goddammed silly thing and is suddenly a national celebrity and then you never hear of them again. They were making her movie at the time, and she was throwing her weight around the studio (McGillian 71).

Women screenwriters would be paid less than men and would not be taken as seriously, so many women would only use their initials so that people would think they were men. The Screen Writers Guild was the only place where women could have power, Mary McCall Jr served as president three times. A male writer, in an interview declared: “I didn’t need to be in a union”

(McGillian 73), showing how things were easy for him. Most women probably needed a union in order to defend their rights as writers. Being a man meant many more opportunities, Charles Bennett told the story of how he met Hitchcock to McGillian “we went up to the Plough, which was the local pub on a hill, and had a lot of drinks together. And we became very, very good friends” (24). Women most certainly did not get jobs by getting drunk with directors, and they had to constantly prove themselves. Bennett even got to direct some movies, an opportunity that women, such as Rachel Crothers did not have, she wrote and directed plays but never directed a movie.

Joan Harrison, who used to work for Hitchcock for 8 years, was always reminded of it and sometimes not taken seriously because she started as his secretary. Charles Bennett even said “Joan was our secretary, but she happened to be Hitchcock’s protégée at the time, and he asked me as a favor if I’d mind letting her name be on the picture. She had never come up with a solitary idea or a solitary thought” (McGillian 36). Harrison was not the dumb secretary Bennett described, she went to the Sorbonne, was very educated and even became one of the very few women producers of the 1940s. Still, she would not be taken as seriously just because she was a woman, much attention was paid to her looks in the press, thus emphasizing her feminine aspect over her professionalism. In 1944, an article in the *Hollywood Reporter* entitled “Why I envy men producers” was made with Harrison’s collaboration. The article said that men did not have to worry about their looks and behaviors, whereas women were expected a certain appearance and behavior and felt that it was easier to be a man in this business. Bess Taffel, who wrote for Paramount, Godwyn and Fox between 1942 and 1951, said that some male writers would refuse to work with women because they pretended they would have to watch their language (Lizzie 78).

Virginia Van Upp also got much jealousy from male writers, as she was very feminine looking and also very close to Rita Hayworth, who would insist to have her on the set. The owner of the WB studio, Jack Warner was known to be afraid of women writers and for a long time did not hire any, but when men were at war, he did not really have the choice and had to hire female writers. Catherine Turney one of the first women to work for WB, had a perfectly normal business relationship with Henry Blanke, one of the top producers of WB. He was very nice to

her and men writers would be so jealous they would accuse her of having more than a business relationship with him. Some female writers had very good relationships with the actors, Bette Davis was always on the writers' side and requested Catherine Turney on the set.

Leigh Brackett's collaboration with Faulkner on adapting *The Big Sleep* turned out not to be a real one: "Faulkner came out of his office with the book *The Big Sleep* and he put it down and said 'I have worked out what we're going to do. We will alternate sections. I will do these chapters and you will do those chapters.' (...)He went back into his office and I didn't see him again" (McGillian 17).

4. Men writing vs. women writing

Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett wrote the script of *Lady in the Dark*, which can be considered the worst representation of a working woman in the 1940s. The main character is a working woman who goes in psychoanalysis because she is not happy, the conclusion is that she needs to be dominated and serve a man to be happy. The movie ends with her handing over her business to her husband and becoming a housewife. Goodrich said in an interview "I had a very nice woman in a play. And Albert rewrote the character and made her a bitch" (McGillian 201) we can guess who wrote most of the character of *Lady in the Dark*... Psychoanalysis became really famous in the 1940s and many women writers used it in films, especially in melodramas. The mix melodrama/ film noir was introduced by women writers, but in general producers only let them write "women's films" such as musicals and comedies, because they believed that was all they could do. Some women challenged this, such as Leigh Brackett, who wrote five films for Howard Hawks and was said to write like a man. Betty Burbridge was probably the most famous western writer, she even wrote for the young John Wayne.

5. The few successful women

Most women screenwriters remain unknown today, but a few made it to the top, whether alone or with a male writer. Betty Comden and Adolph Green were a famous couple, they almost only wrote musicals, but they were not married, they were only a professional couple. They are most famous for the script of *Singin in the Rain* (1952). They wrote together for 15 years but were only credited for ten films, which was common at the time due to the numerous writers assigned on one script. They still consider their experience at MGM was very good “we were treated very well. I think writers have always suffered a great deal in Hollywood- have their work rewritten by other people, and so on. We usually did not have that happen to us” (McGillian 78).

A few women would make it alone, such as Dorothy Kingsley, who received a Best screenplay nomination and Best written American musical award for *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. A few of them had the opportunity to gain a little more control over their work by becoming a producer. Lenore Coffee very surprisingly refused to become a producer but also to go on the set of Charlie Vidor’s *My Son, My Son*. She probably felt that she was satisfied with simply writing. Brian Atherne, an actor in the film sent her “I hope my performance will be worthy of your script” (McGillian 146). Her experience seems very different from all the others. She almost made it sound easy to be a woman writer at the time that we can doubt of the accuracy of her testimony, but she might have simply been lucky. She would work at home, which was a big privilege that she obtained by tricking the studio: she gave them the beginning of a story and then said that she could not work well if she was not at home and the studio liked the beginning so much that she was allowed to work from home. She seemed to understand perfectly the system and the studios’ expectations and knew how to have it her way: “I didn’t do anything I didn’t want to do” (McGillian 147). She was the only female writer at WB but she said “I’m not afraid of men” (147) which can explain why she did not hesitate to voice her discontent.

For other women screenwriters of the 1940s, whose scripts were rewritten and changed many times, it was necessary to gain some control over what they wrote. Joan Harrison and Virginia Van Upp became writer-producers and were the only ones at the time. At Columbia, Van Upp wrote and produced the hit *Gilda* with Rita Hayworth, who would only do the film if Van Upp would also produce. Van Upp wrote many working women roles, as the 1940s introduced the career woman, she wrote *Together Again* (1944) and *She wouldn't say yes* (1945) (which offered a terrible representation of a working woman as incomplete without a man). In both films the women do not wish to marry but society considers it bad, women have to be wives and should not have careers.

Frances Goodrich and her husband Albert Hackett, were a very admired team. Together they got 4 Oscar nominations, and 4 Writers Guild awards. They wrote the script of *The Father of the Bride* that turned out to be a great commercial success, and that got them a best screenplay nomination. They took 2 years to adapt *The diary of Anne Frank* as a play, and won the Pulitzer prize.

Frances Marion, whose career was mainly during the silent and pre code era, was one of the best paid writers and enjoyed much more freedom than other female writers. She said she would adapt novels and revise them to make the man passive and the female active: “we make the women dominate” (Lizzie 31).

Screenwriting in the 1940s was not an easy profession if you were a woman. To get started, women had to prove themselves much more than men and had to start writing for theater or newspapers. Men had the power in Hollywood and did not want to share it with women. The few women who succeeded in Hollywood were strong women who were not afraid to compete with men and deal with the sexism and jealousy in the office. A good number of women who wished to avoid it chose to write as a team with their husbands. The fact that business always triumphed over creativity, very hard to accept for a writer and many would try to have more control over their scripts. Only two women managed to become producers too, in Hollywood, women could be actresses or writers but they were not really allowed to have more power. Being a screenwriter

was already not the easiest job in Hollywood as they were not recognized and considered unimportant, but being a woman added additional difficulties. No attention was paid to screenwriters of the 1940s until about thirty years later, and many were then dead, which made research difficult and even then the attention was focused on men.

Chapter VIII — Women Editors

We know today that many women were editors during the golden age of the studio system, but there has been no research focusing on them and today most of them are dead and research is very limited. In the pre sound era, many women were editors, as editing used to be done with scissors and was thus considered as non creative, a job that men could let women do. In his book on film editing, Walter Murch wrote “[editing] was considered to be a woman’s job because it was something like knitting, it was something like tapestry, sewing. It was when sound came in that the men began to infiltrate the ranks of the editors, because sound was somewhat electrical...it was no longer knitting” (Wright 3). Consequently, after the 1930s, there were only eight women editors in Hollywood. By 1940s the number was down to three women, who had started in the 1920s, before sound was introduced, and who adapted to sound techniques. Editing suddenly became too complicated and too technical for women, even though some women had no problem adapting to the new techniques. Still, the famous Hollywood invisible style and seamless editing made the editors invisible too, men or women.

1. Margareth Booth

Margareth Booth was a female editor who had a very long career and was very powerful at MGM. During her almost 65 years of career, she made her way to the top by working harder than men. She became supervising editor at MGM, a powerful position as she had to agree to all the

cuts other editors, mainly men, did. Booth edited the very controversial film by D.W Griffith *Birth of a Nation*, among many others. She had to prove how good she was before she was hired as an editor and taken seriously, unlike men who were given a chance easily. She perfectly understood the Hollywood invisible style, that never draws attention to the form of the movie and that puts the emphasis on the content and she mastered it. She received an Academy Honorary Award in 1978 for her career and contribution to film editing. We know very little about her, as she would constantly refuse interviews and did not wish to be in the spotlight.

2. Barbara McLean

Barbara McLean worked for Fox when Darryl F. Zanuck was running it. Starting by being only an assistant editor, she proved herself and she managed to become Chief of the editing division in 1949, after having won an Oscar for *Wilson* in 1944. She was very much trusted by Darryl F. Zanuck and he would ask her advice on other elements of the films he worked on, in his article for the New York Times, Robert Thomas Jr writes “he rarely made a major decision on anything from costumes to casting without consulting her first.” She would even contribute to the career of actors, such as Tyrone Power. She had a long collaboration with director Henry King, but never got another Oscar, although she was nominated several times. In 1988, she received an American Cinema Editors Career Achievement Award.

3. Anne Bauchens

Anne Bauchens unsurprisingly started as a secretary for Cecil B De Mille's brother, before becoming De Mille's protégée. He taught her how to edit, and she caught up very fast. She then edited mostly his films. She was the first woman to win an Academy Award for *North West Mounted Police* in 1940. She was considered the pioneer of editing by Margareth Booth, who said De Mille was a bad editor, and that it made her look as a bad editor although she was not (Lewis).

The very few women who made a career of editing in the 1940s were very talented and determined women who managed to rise above the widespread gender bias in Hollywood. Unfortunately, there is very little research available on them, and today they are dead, but their memory and their work will remain forever.

Chapter IX — Edith Head, the costume queen

Edith Head is certainly the most famous costume designer Hollywood has ever had. With 8 Oscars and 30 nominations, she certainly left a mark on the industry, as Paddy Calistro said “she helped shape the Hollywood we know today” (Head and Calistro p11). She first started as a language and art teacher, then got her first job as a sketch artist, that was paid 50 dollars a week, twice as much as teaching. In her autobiography, she confessed that she got this first job as a sketch artist with sketches borrowed from other students at her art school. She then admitted to her boss that she did not know how to do sketches and he taught her “He thought the whole thing very funny” (Head 41).

Before and during the 1920s costumes were the actresses’ actual clothes. Only in the 1930s do costume designers start to be employed and widespread, as with the golden age of Hollywood, the bigger budgets allowed costume design. At first she was not credited for her work, only the head of the department was. She was very faithful to Paramount, and after 15 years she was promoted chief designer. As chief designers started to be a recognized profession, publicity became a component of the job after the 1930s because designers realized that what the actresses wore had an impact on women’s consumption. She then started to become a quite public personality and her now famous style developed and made her unique in Hollywood. Even in costume design, men usually held the high positions and most of the costume department heads were men. Working in the industry was not easy in costume design either, as she described in her autobiography, “there is no place at a studio for people who don’t know what they’re doing, so you can’t say you don’t know, or ask how” (Head 44). In the biography that Paddy Calistro wrote, she is described as very professional, she would go on the set and make sure the costumes were perfect and was “a producer’s and director’s dream” (Head and Calistro 48). Costume

design was a particularly difficult position, as they had to deal with all the professions because they all had something to say about costume design: the director, actresses, sound men, artistic director. Working for Cecile B. DeMille was particularly difficult, she had to get his approval for every sketch, and he would overstaff costume designers in “merely another of his ways of maintaining complete control” (Head and Calistro 118).

In 1948, the costume design category appeared in the Academy Awards. As she wrote in her autobiography, “the basis for the Academy Award is not how beautiful the costumes are but how much they contribute to the picture, how integral a part they are of telling the story” (89). This new category would allow her to win more Oscars than any other woman in Hollywood. From the creation of the costume design category to 1966 she would be nominated every year and in her entire career she won 8 times. From her first film in 1927 to her last in 1982, Edith Head never considered herself a career woman. She even seemed to dislike them in her autobiography “I don’t particularly like career women: think they can be treacherous animals” (Head 179).

During the 1950s, with the increasing competition of television, many contracts in the costume departments were not renewed and Head was the only one left at Paramount. Still, during that decade, her yearly average dropped to 16 films, when it had been more than 40 for the two preceding decades. The 1960s was a healthier decade for the film industry and she worked on many more films, and developed a long collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock. But her job was very different in the 1960s than in the 1940s, many clothes were now bought in stores and designers were now shoppers. In 1967, after 44 years at Paramount, her contract was not renewed and she went to Universal, where Hitchcock was under contract. Her very long career gave her a unique status in Hollywood and she wrote her autobiography that was proven not to be entirely accurate. Calistro in her biography of Edith Head recognizes that the autobiography might not be totally honest and that Head had a reputation of taking credit for other people’s work, but she also states that “she survived where no one else survived” (246), giving her the recognition she deserves for such a long and unique career.

Chapter X — Women Directors

1. Dorothy Arner, the pioneer

Dorothy Arzner, sometimes referred to as “The great exception”, was the very first woman director in Hollywood. From the 1920s to the 1940s, she delivered seventeen films that can be considered provocative, even if still within the studio system, as they go beyond the limits and stereotypes of Hollywood. Her persona, as well as her job was a unique one, as she had a very masculine look and challenged the usual gender dichotomy. She was not openly a lesbian, as Hollywood at the time did not accept homosexuality, but the closest person knew and her sexuality was never mentioned in film reviews. Many essays about her have focused on her sexuality but we will focus on her unique position as the first woman director.

1.1 From editing to directing

Dorothy Arzner was introduced to Hollywood at a very young age. Her father was the manager of a restaurant frequented by important people of the movie industry, such as silent film director James Cruze or actor Charlie Chaplin. As a girl, she would sit and listen to them talk, as

if trying to get as much knowledge as she could. Her actual career in Hollywood started, years later, when she got hired to type scripts. She obviously was not made for this job, she only did it for three months, as she turned out to be a very bad at typing. From very a conventional job for a woman, she turned to less traditional ones, and started editing films, first for James Cruze, the director who happened to be a regular at her father's restaurant. As her father had money, she was given more choices than most men and women of her time. She did not need to work and could be picky in her projects. Not many directors could afford to go several years without working, but she had this chance and would take it occasionally. She also made wise investments with her directing money and quickly enjoyed financial security and independence.

In the beginning of her career, she also wrote scripts, among which, *The Red Kimono's* in 1925 for Columbia. This script introduces what will be recurring themes in her movies: the importance of female community and a special attention to women's experiences. The directing, obviously made by a man, shows the very classical Hollywood pattern of woman objectification: close ups and fetichization of the female body. But we can still feel Arzner's presence in a script's detail: it is women who are objectifying another woman, unlike most Hollywood films in which men objectify women. But Arzner did not want to be a script writer, she wanted to be a director. Working for paramount at the time, she clearly made her boss understand that she would not wait by saying that she would "rather do a picture for a small company and have [her] own way than B picture for Paramount". She was then offered a directing job after threatening to leave the big studio. The first Hollywood movie ever directed by a woman was entitled *Fashion For Women* and went out in 1927, with mostly positive reviews.

Her directing would turn out to be very different from her work as an editor. Her editing showed action and adventure whereas her she directed "women's movies." But she continued her career as a director, and an even successful one, as she became a star maker, starting with Esther Ralston. Her first film being a commercial success, Paramount offered her a long term contract and she filmed Esther Ralston again in *Ten Modern Commandments*. Critics saw that her way of directing was different from what they were used to see and a review read: "miss Ralston, under the exclusive direction of men for her first few pictures was regarded almost solely as a model, or a pretty figure on which to hang clothes and parade in front of the camera for pretty and attractive

shots... Miss Arzner has done what her men directorial rivals have failed to do, that is, to see the humor and the charm of Esther Ralston's character and successfully transfer them on to the screen." Arzner was surprisingly successful for the first woman director in Hollywood and even directed the most famous flapper, Clara Bow in her first sound film. A few years later, in 1931, the movie *Working Girls*, which is regarded as her most daring film was a complete failure financially. Many people have said that it is the film that reflects the most Arzner's art, and that she took real risks, as she did not follow the classical Hollywood stereotypes. This film had no star and most importantly was dealing openly with unwed pregnancy. It thus got no publicity and was a failed commercially but would be considered by the next generations as her most innovative film. Arzner then kept on directing, with limited commercial success and even directed *Nana*, that cannot be called an adaptation of Emile Zola's famous novel as a very important amount of things were changed, and many characters removed. The credit said "suggested by Zola's novel", as it cannot be considered faithful to the novel.

1.2 Independence

In 1932, she left Paramount and became free lance, working for several studios. Her first independent movie, *Christopher Strong*, is one of her best remembered today. It starred Katharine Hepburn, but the collaboration was not very good as they did not get along well. A few years later, in 1940, *Dance, Girl, Dance* was not a commercial success but is one of her best films in terms of innovation and from a feminist point of view. In this movie we are plunged in the entertainment business which is very competitive and particularly hard for women. Men own the clubs and theaters and women are heavily dependent on them. The working girls we see in this film are either entertainer or men's secretaries, in both cases subordinates to men. The main character, Judy O'Brien, is a dancer who has to work to make a living. She has money problems, as it is very competitive and she has trouble finding contracts. Her friend Lily, who has become famous because she does burlesque, gives her the opportunity to dance in between her numbers.

But Judy's dancing is very professional, not flirty like Lily's and the male audience rejects her. This movie shows how hard it was for women to be independent and many chose the easy way, like Lily, which is to marry and become a housewife. Judy seems innocent and she is determined to make a living with dancing because she knows she is not the best dancer in the world but dancing is like breathing for her, she needs it. Women are constant objects of the male gaze in this business and they are thrown on stage to please male audiences. Judy rebels against it when the crowd keeps booing her dance because it is not sexy enough, she stops and talks directly to the audience, telling them that they should be ashamed of themselves.

Men seem absolutely unreliable, just like the man Judy falls in love with, who tells her: "keep away from guys like me". Male characters in this film are more complex than in most classical films, they have doubts and are not simply stereotypes of strong men. But women appear somewhat more reliable, as in most of Arzner's movies, the female community is very important, they all live together and support each other.

Three years after *Dance, Girl Dance*, she would shoot her last Hollywood movie, *First Comes Courage*, but she was not able to finish it because of a pneumonia. After that, she directed short films and commercials, among which fifty Pepsi cola commercial with her friend Joan Crawford. She also created a radio program, *You were meant to be a star*, in which she would help women by using acting.

1.3 Arzner's legacy to film and women history

Her best contribution to modern cinema is the fact that she taught at UCLA, allowing the next generation of film makers to benefit from her knowledge. Among her students was the now famous Francis Ford Coppola. Dorothy Arzner's work is crucial to film history and to women history, even though women have always been on the margin of film history. To understand the contribution of women in Hollywood, the context of male domination and patriarchy has to be

taken into account. Arzner movies could not drastically challenge Hollywood's stereotypes, but she managed to make subtle critiques while staying inside the studio system. Her movies often had tragical endings, which can be seen as a way of resisting Hollywood's happy endings.

Pam Cook, in her essay "approaching the work of Dorothy Arzner" said that Arzner, by changing identification, and the traditional continuity, created contradictions and managed to denaturalize patriarchal ideology and to disturb the fixed relationship of the spectator. Arzner's female characters are looking for their identity outside of male domination, they want to set free of male discourse. A very good example is the female character of *Christopher Strong*, who is a female aviatrix, in other words, a woman in a man's world. This situation is very much reminding of Arzner's own situation in Hollywood.

1.4 Being gay in 1940s Hollywood

Apart from the fact that she was the only woman director, Dorothy Arzner had another particularity: her persona. She was what we could call a "butch", she wore masculine clothing and had short hair. Her style, just like her movies, was provocative because it challenged gender dichotomy. You could not compare her looks to the male or female styles in Hollywood.

Although it was not explicit at the time, she was a lesbian and shared her life with Marion Morgan for forty years. Revealing your homosexuality was very dangerous at the time, especially in Hollywood but it was obvious for the people who knew her that she was a lesbian. Her films benefited from her different vision, and the importance of female bonding and community was clear in most of her movies. Esther Ralston, whose career was launched by Arzner, wrote in an autobiography that was published a few years after Arzner's death: "with Arzner trying to get me to sit on her lap between takes and insisting on patting and fondling me, I began to freeze up and resent her attention." We cannot be certain that Arzner did have an inappropriate behavior with Ralston but the latter insisted that they did not work together again. Attention from Arzner could

be interpreted as sexual harassment by people who thought lesbians were attracted to all women, and it is possible that Ralston did not accept Arzner's homosexuality. Fortunately, most of the collaborations went great with her other star actresses.

Most women at the time did not work and working women were thought to be very lonely women, whose lives were only revolved around work. But Dorothy Arzner did not fit into this stereotype and had a lifelong relationship with Marion Morgan, proving that having a successful career did not mean sacrificing her personal life.

1.5 A female perspective on directing

As the only female director, she obviously had a different approach and refused the classical objectification of women. Her female characters looked very human, and her gaze made them complex and more realistic characters and challenged the definition of women as objects. Her unique status in Hollywood was always referred to in reviews and she constantly had to prove herself. Her gender was sometimes even used to criticize her work, as in a review about *Sarah and son*, in which the critic said the film has “surrendered to sentiment (...) than it ends on a note of hysteria which I am inclined to blame upon the fact that its continuity was written by a woman, Zoë Atkins, and directed by another of the sex, Dorothy Arzner.” This review was obviously written by a man, but Arzner was so conscious of her delicate position that she said: “I was so averse to having comments made about being woman director that in my first contract I asked that I didn't even made screen credits” (Mayne 56).

In 1927, a newspaper article about her was entitled ‘Girl film director sets new standards of beauty.’ The use of the word girl instead of woman shows that she was not taken as seriously as her male peers. The standards of beauty of the title do not refer to her unique looks but to her female actresses. Men had always been the judges of female beauty in Hollywood and the fact that she was now challenging it was very new.

But her gender allowed a new perspective on film making and would provide actors and other people in the industry to work differently. She had more respect for writers than the male directors, and she would ask their opinion and even have them on the set, which was a first. Mary McCall, who wrote scripts for her, said that Arzner changed her life, by paying attention to her and asking her on the set. She would even ask McCall what she thought of certain scenes and follow her advice.

Her decision to retire from Hollywood was influenced by the fact that she had troubles with Lows B. Mayer from MGM who was a sexist and homophobe and who, when she turned down a few scripts, suspended her and spread mean things about her. Her films were then more or less forgotten until in the 1970s feminists had a renewal of interest for her work and achievements. As the first female member of the Director's Guild of America, she was recognized by her peers in 1975. What feminists liked about her films was her complex female characters, unlike most other at the time who were passive and objectified. Her movies were truly interested in women's lives and experiences and were especially interested in working women. Even though some of her working girls had stage jobs, such as the characters of *Dance, girl, dance* and *Sarah and son*, in other films, her working girls were more realistic. She depicted women struggling in a patriarchal society that deprives them of their identity. The usual male gaze was replaced by active women bearing the gaze. Even romances in her films went against Hollywood stereotypes and she preferred unconventional couples.

The relationship between women was very important and was even used for publicity, as in many pictures, Arzner and her female lead were gazing at each other, illustrating the opposition between Arzner's butch persona and the very feminine looks of her actresses. The female gaze is so powerful in her films that in *Dance, girl, dance*, that has now become a classic in feminist film studies, the main character, a dancer, reverses the gaze by telling the audience how she sees them. This scene, that clearly criticizes the objectification of women, is a crucial one for feminist film history. She was not supposed to direct this movie at first, but she came to replace another director, and immediately changed the script, the main change being to change the gender of the head of the troupe, who became a woman. Her films obviously had male characters but the focus seems to be more on female characters. *Working girls* was the first movie to take working women

seriously. She was a real challenge to the Hollywood codes of womanhood and femininity and brought a brand new perspective on films.

Dorothy Arzner entered history as the first woman director in Hollywood and showed that a female vision was very interesting. Of course, she had to work within the system and thus could not openly criticize Hollywood's stereotypes, but she managed to introduce in her films very subtle critiques of the fixed way things were at the time in the movie industry. The ambiguous treatment of female communities can be seen as criticizing compulsory heterosexuality and asserting women's power. She always avoided any feminist label but she cannot be blamed for that since the concept and movement of feminism did not even exist at the time she made movies. She was a real pioneer who inspired generations of women in Hollywood, the first one being Ida Lupino, who, a few years later will become the second female director in Hollywood.

2. Ida Lupino: quiet women never make history

Ida Lupino was born in England in 1918 in a family of artists. Acting was her passion since a very young age and she made her way to Hollywood after having been chosen for a part instead of her mother. After earning respect as an actress, she decided to create her own production company in order to fully express her creativity and to make movies about important and challenging subjects.

Being a working woman in the 1940s was not easy, but being the only female director in Hollywood and the very first woman to direct for television was extraordinary. Ida Lupino earned her place in history and opened the way for other women. As the only female director at the time, surviving in this man's world was an everyday fight. Many feminists have argued that her vision was anti feminist, that she treated "feminist question from an antifeminist point of view", but a

closer look shows that her characters and her own life are anything but conventional. She can truly be called a feminist for her exceptional achievements and her daring films.

2.1 The other side of the camera

Ida Lupino started her career in Hollywood as an actress. She became famous by playing femmes fatales tormented by life. On contract with the Warner Bros studio, she would not accept all the parts they wanted her to play and would often be suspended. She wanted to have some control over her career. With her then husband Collier Young, she created an independent production company, The Filmmakers. The first movie produced by The Filmmakers, *Not Wanted*, was going to be directed by Elmer Clifton but just when the shootings started he suffered from a heart attack and was not able to keep directing. Lupino then came to directing as she said “by accident”. She said that she was not credited for this film because she would ask Clifton and the editor their opinion on everything. The real problem was that in the 1940s, identifying a woman as director was risky, especially for a movie that was about unwed pregnancy and they feared bad critics and publicity. But after the commercial success of *Not Wanted*, it was clear that Lupino was a good director and she continued directing, this time appearing in the credits. But she was the only woman director in Hollywood then. And many people in Hollywood did not accept that, as the critic Andrew Sarris said: “directing was no job for a lady” (Kuhn 67).

In 1953 in *The Bigamist*, she was the first woman to direct herself in a film. But she got many bad critics for this movie and only made one more movie after that, in 1966. She would then refuse Hollywood offers and went to directing for television instead.

Women’s images in Hollywood were very fragile, they had to cope with judgments of people who would want them to be the incarnation of the characters they played. Women were objectified by the male gaze in Hollywood movies, but with a woman behind the camera, she now had the power to objectify women as well as men. Her third husband, Howard Duff refused to be directed by her, he considered it as unmanly. Sadly, none of her 3 husbands was very

supportive of her directing and she suffered from patriarchal oppression even in her personal life. She confessed that “it’s difficult for a wife to say to her husband, come sit on the set and watch” (Alferi). The appropriate place for a woman in the 1940s and 50s was at home and the only way those women could be accomplished was through being a wife and being a mother. But Ida wanted more. She wanted to express her creativity freely. Her crew on set would call her mother, rejecting in a way her real authority as a director and asserting her difference, but she liked being called so. She said herself that she wouldn’t act like a man, and that she had a very different way of asking things, gently, never yelling, which seems a very clever way to get things done. She was the second woman to be admitted at the Director’s Guild, after Dorothy Arzner, whom she admired but who was retired at the time Lupino was directing. She was a pioneer and helped breaking a glass ceiling and opened the way for women in this male dominated world.

2.2 Ida Lupino as a feminist icon

Her films had been forgotten and were rediscovered in the 1970s during second wave feminism, as she was a feminist symbol for daring to be the only woman director. But the content of her movies did not satisfy feminists. She was reproached with having an anti feminist perspective. Her representations of women were said unacceptable because of her passive heroines. Molly Haskell said she was “conventional, even sexist” as a director. The solutions to women’s problems in her films were thought to be often conventional, thus reinforcing the 1950s idea of womanhood. Her very passive female characters were stuck in silent solitude and would return to the norm at the end. Her movie *The Hitch Hicker* had no female character and presented male in a way very similarly to the femmes fatales of the films noirs.

But even in *The Hitch Hicker*, there was a female presence because the gaze was Lupino’s and her point of view was still that of a woman. It seems normal that her perspective was a pretty masculine one as Hollywood was male dominated, everything one could know about movies was from a male’s perspective. The fierce critics against her characters show that people did not understand her vision. She once confessed that she loved strong female characters, and that she could not bear a simple role. She was not able to play nice women who just sit there. She seems

to be indeed a feminist, since she was against the oppression of women, she could not stand passive women. Her heroines that feminists have criticized for their passivity were simply too paralyzed to act, frozen by fear. Alone in a man's world she could not challenge everything on her own. Just being able to direct was a huge step for a woman and she would never have been heard if she took a feminist position. Feminism did not even really exist at the time, and to me she was a feminist as we define it today. She was in favor of equality for everyone but she was not fighting for all women, she was just making her way to live of her art. Her female characters were working women, like her, unlike most Hollywood female characters who were just objectified, hers were never glamorous, they were simply working to live, like her. She was even more a feminist than people think as she would challenge Hollywood at the time where the code was fiercely enforced, she convinced the censors to let her make movies about very unconventional subjects and made the viewer sympathize with fallen women.

2.3 A European point of view

Ida Lupino had a very modern vision of cinema. She was obsessed with realism, almost all her scenarios were based on true stories. The female rite of passage was particularly important to her as in *The Trouble With Angels* (1966). French critics were fascinated by the way her films “confound the self sufficiency of melodrama” and in the UK, where people were always suspicious of Hollywood's artificiality, she had good critics. Her movies were very low budget, not shot in studios but in real décor and would never impose anything on the viewer, there was no moral lesson. This very realistic cinema seems closer to French cinema than to Hollywood's one. No glamour, just realism and very controversial themes: rape, bigamy unwed pregnancy, lesbian discovery... But those very delicate subjects were treated as everyday subjects. Her movies were breaking with the studio aesthetics, she wanted to produce “free of studio front office domination”. Her movies would never judge its characters, only give the more detailed portraits possible. She reproached Hollywood with never exploring unconventional subjects and she tried to explore those subjects with sensitivity and compassion, avoiding simple moralizing. She would

use the melodrama's codes but her movies were not made especially for a female audience, they were closer to films noirs and were intended to speak to everyone.

2.4 Lupino's legacy to cinema

Martin Scorsese said "Her work is resilient. [...] It is essential." Ida Lupino's work and life are crucial to film and women's history. Between 1946 and 1956 a lot of independent production companies were created and she saw the opportunity of being free and control her artistic production. She scripted, produced or directed 8 movies just between 1949 and 1954, with only one real commercial success, *Not Wanted*. The Filmmakers did not generate much profit, but money was not what she wanted. Each of her movie was an expression of herself and is a testimony of a working woman's life in the 1940s and 50s. *Never Fear* was the most autobiographical one, as it dealt with polio, from which she suffered herself in her youth. The fight of her heroine can also be seen as a symbol of her own struggle to be a director in a male dominated field. Her movies are also very interesting as they were made in the heyday of the production code. The words "rape" and "pregnant" were not even allowed and she dared to make movies about it. Many things were changed by the PCA to make her movies more "acceptable" but the result is still very daring for her time. Lupino's talent was also to see other people's talents. She thus revealed actors such as Sally Forrest and Keefe Brasselle.

She confessed she would have liked to see more women working in the film industry but she knew it took a lot of strength to survive in this world. The subjects of her movies were taken from real life and she was very interested in women's postwar lives. Her films offer a reflection of the postwar historical context but she raises questions that are still relevant nowadays.

Ida Lupino showed great achievement in a man's world. The only woman filmmaker of 1940s and 1950s Hollywood, she earned her place in history, not only because of her gender, but

for her daring and challenging ideas. People preferred to see her in front rather than behind the camera, where women's place normally was, as objects of a male gaze, but she decided to do things differently and took some control over her art. Some people have said her movies were antifeminist but it seems more accurate to say that she was a prefeminist and that her movies reflected women's lives at the time with as much realism as possible.

As one of the pioneers, she opened the way for more women in Hollywood. Kathryn Bigelow's Oscar for best director last year showed that women still have a long way to go to be really present in the movie industry as she was the first woman to ever receive this award in 2010.

Chapter XI — Actresses, the unglamorous reality

“If only those who dream about Hollywood knew how difficult it all is.”
Greta Garbo.¹

Acting seemed to be the only job really accessible to women in the 1940s. When spectators would see them on screen, they would envy them, thinking that their lives must be easy and full of happiness. But when seen from the other side of the camera, the glamorous lives of classical Hollywood actresses stopped being glamorous. Even when the cameras rolled, they had to hide that they were actually suffering, as the lights they used to film in Technicolor were unbearably hot. During the golden age of the studio system, actresses were salaried workers and had absolutely no control over their career. The very common seven year contract made them the studios' properties for a very long period of time, but most of them needed this stability and had no other choice. The star system and the publicity focused on their lives, and actresses had a public persona and often tended to play the same role over and over again, especially women of color. All actresses had different experiences that depended on their color, on which studio they worked for, and on many other factors.

Hattie McDaniel was one of the most successful African American actresses in Hollywood, but her life and career were constantly limited by her skin color and her achievements were sometimes violently criticized by the African American community. Rita Hayworth's Spanish origins (whose real name was actually Margarita Cansino), were drastically erased by the studio in order to make her the ultimate American sex symbol. Bette Davis' career seemed a miracle in

¹ "Greta Garbo." BrainyQuote.com. Xplore Inc, 2011. 17 March. 2011.
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/g/gretagarbo126961.html>

an appearance based Hollywood, and she always fought with the studios' executives to have more control over her roles and image. Barbara Stanwyck, although stunningly beautiful, was not the typical Hollywood beauty and managed to avoid the sex symbol roles only to get stuck in working women roles that always involved the patriarchal ideology that women are nothing without men.

1. Hattie McDaniel "In my life, God comes first, work second and men third." (Watts 25)

1.1 From being a maid to playing a maid

Hattie McDaniel was born in a poor working class family very far from Hollywood. Her father could not read and write very well and her mother was illiterate. Her father also did not know when he was born because he was born a slave. McDaniel was actually the name of the white man who bought him, as it was common at the time, their real names were replaced by their masters' names. In primary school, Hattie was one of the only two black students in her class. From the youngest age, she knew that her skin color, class and gender would only allow her to get the lowest jobs. When she was a child, her mother would take her when she worked as a cook and a maid for white people, persuaded that it would be her only possible job when she would grow up. But Hattie had a talent and a passion for singing and acting, and she started doing minstrel shows and musicals in her community. As she became an adult, she had to take maid's jobs because opportunities were limited for black people in show business. Domestic work at the time was not that far from slavery, they would live in white people's house and be available anytime of day and night. Hattie decided to create an all female minstrel show in which she would parody the maid stereotype. She then started her Hollywood career started in 1931 as an

extra and “even if she only worked 6 days a month, she could actually make more than in four solid weeks of domestic work” (Watts 83). Acting was better than being a maid, but it was not an easy job for black people, as they were forced to participate in reinforcing stereotypes, and McDaniel would always play maids or slaves when in reality, “when Hattie McDaniel arrived in Hollywood, she was no Mammy, real or imagined” (Watts 91). In the beginnings, she was very often not included in the credits and her parts were very small and limited, but she still tried to “rely on signifying, using the tone of her voice, her facial expressions, and body language to challenge the stereotypes that formed the foundation of her characters” (Watts 91).

Her part was rewritten for one of her earliest films, *The Mad Miss Manton* after it was considered inappropriately familiar with the white character by the Hays Office. She knew that her maid characters would be fired in real life, because she tried to add some attitude in them in order to make them look more human. Still, she had little space to challenge stereotypes, as movies were already written and actors had almost no control over their characters, but she always tried to put a very subtle criticism in them. White people identified her so much with the characters she played that one of her maid characters was actually named Hattie. In real life she would dress very elegantly, in total opposition with her work uniform.

1.2 A life changing role

The film for which she is the most remembered, *Gone with the Wind* (1939) was her first dramatic part. It was a very difficult part to get, but she really wanted it, “When I read the book *Gone with the Wind* I was fascinated by the role of the ‘Mammy’, and like everyone in the position to give it professional consideration, I naturally felt I could create in it something distinctive and unique” (Watts 147). She gave her best at the audition, but even when the producer, David Selznick chose her, the consultant on Southern culture, Susan Myrick said that she lacked “dignity, age, nobility” and “she just hadn’t the right face for it” (Watts 152). But

Selznick insisted that she was right for the part, and at 45 she was offered the part of Mammy and signed by Selznick for her best contract ever.

Many protests had emerged from the African American community against the adaptation on screen of *Gone with the Wind* because they saw it as dangerously perpetuation racial animosity. But the truth was that if McDaniel had said no, another black actress would have taken her place so she felt that she could not be held personally responsible for it.

The war had just broke in Europe and Selznick, who was Jewish, asked that the black villains of the book became white and said “as a member of a race that is suffering very keenly from persecution these days, I am most sensitive to the feelings of minority people” (Watts 154). There was only so much he could do as the ideology of the book remained deeply racist. He was persuaded that he had done a lot to represent black people better but he actually did very little and even insisted on keeping the word “nigger” in the script until he finally gave in and accepted to remove it at the last minute.

When the film was finished, Selznick was astonished by McDaniel’s performance: “rather than sinking into the background, Mammy, as interpreted by McDaniel, emerged as one of the film’s strongest characters” (Watts 167). Selznick’s opinion was shared by the columnist and radio personality Jimmy Fidler who wrote “long after I have forgotten [the other stars’] work, I’ll still see the emotion-wracked face of Hattie, tears coursing down her cheeks” (Watts 174).

1.3 An uneasy career

Hattie McDaniel quickly found out that being under contract with a studio meant having no control over her parts and her public image. She was very disappointed with the roles she got after *Gone with the Wind* because Selznick did not want her to play any role that would compete with Mammy. Selznick then sold her contract to Warner Bros, but after a few very small parts

they terminated her contract only to renew it for a lower salary. In 1941 she appeared in *In this Our Life* but only had three scenes. Still, this movie finally gave her the opportunity to play a more dramatic part, although very small, in which racism was denounced. During the war, she became involved by leading the Negro Division of the Hollywood Victory Committee, created to organize propaganda and entertainment for the army.

Walter White, chairman of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), who was actively lobbying the studios to get different parts for blacks, resented McDaniel and the other actors who would play stereotypical parts. He largely contributed to the rise in Hollywood of the “New Cinematic Negro” such as Lena Horne, destroying the careers of the “Old Negroes”. McDaniel did not think White’s strategy was the write one and considered that “the battle must be fought out right here by actors and it cannot be won if outside pressure groups shut the doors of opportunity against us” (Watts 220). She was not jealous of the new actors and even introduced Lena Horne to the Screen Actors Guild in which she was already involved.

McDaniel and other black actors suffered personal attacks from Walter White and the studios were not so unhappy with this split because it allowed them to keep on perpetuating stereotypes. White declared “one of the most important elements in that progress will be the behavior of Negro actors themselves in playing their roles with sincerity and dignity instead of mugging and playing the clown before the camera” (Watts 227), which McDaniel had already been doing since the beginning of her career. Finding roles began to be more and more difficult because of White’s comments.

McDaniel had been concerned all her life with discrimination and she bought a house in the West Adams area of Los Angeles that was then only inhabited by whites who did not want black people as neighbors. Louise Beavers and Ethel Waters soon followed her. Some white neighbors sued them but McDaniel fought very hard, because in real life she was not at all like her passive characters on screen and they finally won the case, paving the way towards the end of such segregationist laws.

1.4 Getting away from Hollywood

After the war, there were fewer representations of blacks. Her last very active year would be 1946 and she was only in four movies, mainly maid characters. *In Song of the South*, Disney turned black folktales into another assertion of racist ideology, but free from Selznick, she could now put similar elements of Mammy. In 1947 she only played in one film. She would now publicly blame Walter White for her lack of jobs, she was convinced that he was racist of darker skin people, which was probably true. She believed that White's approach was not a good one since it deprived many black actors from working and she suggested that a better idea would have been to help finance black studios. The white producers took advantage of the disorganization of the black movement and deleted sympathetic representations of black people.

In 1947 she became the first black woman to lead her own radio show, which lasted several years. She then appeared sometimes on television until in 1951 diabetes, heart problems and cancer led to the end of the career and her death in 1952.

We can contrast McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen's reactions to Hollywood's bigotry. While McDaniel coped with white people in order to keep having jobs, McQueen became so sick of the overt racism that she refused to play maid and condemned her career. McQueen called McDaniel a sellout for refusing to take a forceful stand against studio racism (Watts 163), but the question is whether no representation is better than a stereotypical one. An African American actor who voiced her disagreement would be labeled difficult and then get little to no jobs.

McDaniel has been accused of perpetuating racial stereotypes but she had no choice as starving was not an option. "I am trying each day to lift the position of my people and to create a deeper respect from the other side for us."(Watts 242) Working conditions for black actors had actually improved since the beginning of her career and she said "I have never apologized for the roled I played." (Watts 250)

2. **Rita Hayworth** "I haven't had everything from life. I've had too much"(Morella and Epstein 10)

Margarita Cansino was born in an artistic family, her father was a famous dancer, from Seville, in Spain and her mother, who wanted to be an actress, would perform with him sometimes. When he proposed to her he said “but *my* wife cannot be an actress. Wives must have babies and remain home” (Morella and Epstein 14). Rita did not really enjoy dancing at first but she pretended to for her father. As early as 7, she was integrated to her father’s act. They soon moved to Hollywood because her father knew sound films were going to be a good business. He became a choreographer for major studios and Rita started appearing as an extra in films. People thought she was Mexican, and she was first marketed by Fox as a Mexican beauty. They shortened Margarita into Rita Cansino. She played Barbara Stanwyck’s sister in *A Message to Garcia* but her scenes were cut from the final print. Edward Judson, a promoter, saw her screen test and decided to see her. He told her he would promote her in Hollywood but first she had to eliminate her Mexican look.

2.1 The making of a star

Columbia, which was at the time a very small studio who did a lot of B pictures, signed her but without conviction, Harry Cohn, the director said “latin types are out. She sounds too Mexican” (Morella and Epstein 34), so they changed her name to Hayworth, adding a “y” to her mother’s maiden name.

At only 18, she married Judson, who was over forty (older than her father). He suggested a physical transformation, starting with pushing back her hairline with Electrolysis, a painful procedure that Judson first paid, before the studio took over the payments. They then had her hair dyed strawberry blonde, which took hours, but was a necessary investment for her new image. It immediately worked, and she got a part in Howard Hawks’ *Only Angels Have Wings* with Cary Grant and other famous actors.

In person Rita seemed uninteresting, but on screen she was fascinating. Indeed, in real life she was very shy and unaware of her sex appeal, whereas on screen she seemed confident as ever: “she had a smile for everyone. She never failed to thank people and show appreciation” (Morella and Epstein 50). She was very innocent and her husband Ed Judson would have pushed her into the arms of anyone who could help her career, but she was too classy and did not need such stratagems to advance her career. Fred Astaire asked to work with her on *You’ll Never Get Rich*. She then became Astaire’s favorite dance partner, over his famous former partner Ginger Rogers.

She finally divorced from Judson but it was not easy, she had to give him almost everything she had in order to keep him from destroying her image. One of her attorney said “he married her as an investment, for the purpose of exploiting her...and he intended to get paid for the time he was married to her” (Morella and Epstein 59). When the divorce was finally pronounced, she could go on with her career. The film *Cover Girl* was a huge hit and asserted her as a “goddess”. Her second husband, Orson Welles was even more famous than her and they collaborated on a few films.

2.2 The difficult relationship with the studio

Working with Cohn was very hard because, as Virginia Van Upp said he was “verbally raping” all the women at Columbia (Morella and Epstein 62). In 1943 she was still underpaid by Columbia but could not get out of her contract. Harry Cohn, the infamous head of the studio had all the power and was not known for his generosity. A former Columbia employee said “Cohn wouldn’t spring for thirty bucks so his top star would look her best, that’ll give you some idea of what it was like there” (Morella and Epstein 80). She had made the studio a big one, she saved them from bankruptcy and was bringing them millions but she still had a little salary

In the now cult *Gilda* she played a pure femme fatale and made history, particularly with her number “Put the blame on Mame” but even though she really wanted to, the studio never let her sing in her films. She was very different from the other female stars, she would never look at her hair after the hairdresser was done, she was not self absorbed like most others but Rita and Gilda became one for the public. People expected her to be Gilda and it was very hard for her, as she was actually very shy in real life.

She demanded again to get more money, now that she was really famous and bringing Columbia more than they had ever gotten but Cohen still refused. She then decided to make him lose a lot of money and delayed the production of her movies by not showing up sometimes. He finally agreed to give her a percentage of her films’ profits. She now had 25% but she soon suspected him of lying about how much movies really made in order to give her less. There were many times where she would not talk to Cohn, their relationship was not easy. When she came back after having spent six months in Europe, “instead of welcoming back her star who would earn millions for Columbia, Cohn regarded her as a recalcitrant adversary who must be punished for her cardinal sin: walking out on Harry Cohn.” (Morella and Epstein 158)

2.3 The post sex-symbol years

Her love life was also very tumultuous, she had five husbands and as she grew older, she could not play sex symbols again. “Rita’s appearance reflected her state of mind- there was barely a vestige of youth left on her beautiful face, although she was only thirty-seven years old” (Morella and Epstein 201). Harry Cohn made Kim Novak, a 25 year old blond, the new Columbia star and Rita had no problem with it: “It was not in Rita’s nature to play ‘star’” (Morella and Epstein 206).

Her last film with Columbia was *Pal Joey* with Frank Sinatra and Kim Novak. She was finally taken seriously as an actress, now that she was not the sex symbol anymore. She was now

free from this long contract and absolutely wanted to stay freelance: “I’m choosing my own parts now. I want to do pictures that are good, and I want to play women that aren’t just beautiful or glamorous- they have to be mature women” (Morella and Epstein 213). Her post contract movies were more serious and she was happy to be considered a real actress and not just an image of what she was not. She went back to Europe and she was known to be a heavy drinker, the press turned against her and published unflattering pictures. When she filmed *Circus World* with John Wayne and Claudia Cardinale, the director, Henry Hathaway said her drinking caused production delay. With *The Money Trap*, which reunited her with Ford, her performance was acclaimed and she finally got recognition as an actress. Her last film, *Wrath* was a major film with her friend Robert Mitchum but soon after, she went through a depression and even if she wanted to get back to work, opportunities were limited and she only attended some industry events. In 1977 she was admitted to the hospital as she was “gravely disabled as a result of mental disorder or impairment by chronic alcoholism” (Morella and Epstein 246).

The industry had absolutely destroyed her. After making her something she was not, it was impossible for her to compete with such an ideal, as it was entirely made up by the studio. In 1980 it was announced that she suffered from Alzheimer. Her career and difficult relationship with Harry Cohn had gotten the best of her but she succeeded like no actress of her time and left a deep mark on film history, “Hollywood created the star but destroyed the woman” (Morella and Epstein 250).

3. Bette Davis, the exception

Ruth Elizabeth “Bette” Davis grew up in a lower middle class family, without a father, her mother supported the family. When she would audition, as she was not the typical Hollywood beauty, she would be told that she did not have enough sex appeal, but she had real talent and an intensity on stage that could be put on screen. The studio tried to change her name but she

refused. Her first movie, *Bad Sister* (1931) was also the worst experience of her life, as the film was “unbelievably bad and so was she” (Vermilye 21). Her first contract with Universal was very disappointing “had she known what lay immediately ahead, says Davis, she never would have crossed the Rockies” (Vermilye 18).

In the beginning, Universal would loan her to other studios as they did not know what to do with her, until she amazed by her performance in *The Man Who Played God* (1932) and *So Big* (1932). The studio then had a lot of films for her, among which *Of Human Bondage* that made her really famous. But like all actors under contract, she had absolutely no control over the roles she played, the studio would choose everything and she could not refuse without being punished. Still, she would voice her disagreement when she did not like a role, she sometimes even went “on strike” which would get her three months suspensions. She had very precise views on her career and she even said “if I continue to appear in mediocre pictures, I’ll have no career worth fighting for” (Vermilye 51).

She signed a contract with Ludvico Toeplitz for two European films with script approval. But for Warner, she had no right to work anywhere else so the WB went to court and they won. She went back to Warner but said “in a way my defeat was a victory. At last we were seeing eye to eye on my career” (Vermilye 53).

She refused the lead role of *Gone With the Wind* because Selznick wanted Errol Flynn to play Rhett Butler. Instead, she did *Jezebel*, for which she got an Oscar. During the shooting, Jack Warner wanted to change the director because the production was very late, but Davis fought for him, saying she would do extra hours and threatening to leave if the director did not stay. She won and did the extra hours. She was very stubborn and stoop up when she felt it was necessary. She asked for a raise and got it, as *Jezebel* brought a lot of money to the studio. She then sacrificed her appearance to play Elizabeth I and her face was dramatically transformed. She would play the queen again in 1955 in *The Virgin Queen*. In 1937 she published an essay called “The Actress Plays her Part” in the book *We Make the Movies*, about Hollywood filmmaking. She explains how she prepares her roles. It reveals the depth of her commitment to acting and her meticulous preparations for each part.

In 1941 she became the first elected President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, but she quickly resigned because there was a huge opposition to the changes she was trying to introduce. In 1949 she asked Jack Warner to be released from her contract and he surprisingly agreed. She was now free and choosing her own parts. *All About Eve* in 1950 was very good for her career, it was nominated for 14 Oscars and won 6. In the 1960s she appeared in horror films, when many stars would have simply retired.

She dedicated her life to her career “I am not very domestic” she once said in an interview (Laplace p143). She was a symbol of rebellion against all powerful, male owned studios “There wasn’t one of my best pictures I didn’t have to fight to get” (Vermilye 85). She was also very inspiring for other women, as her success was not based on her looks but on her talent.

4. Barbara Stanwyck, the superwoman

Barbara Stanwyck’s real name was actually Ruby Stevens. Her career started in the theater as a dancer on Broadway. Willard Mack, a producer, director and playwright, told her that Ruby Stevens was not a name for an actress and they found her new name in an old English theater program. He then offered her a role in which she would dance and act.

She moved to California but was first very disappointed by Hollywood and “for six months, Barbara Stanwyck was virtually ignored. She never forgot those days when Hollywood snubbed her. Fame would not change her mind about the brutality of the movie industry” (Wayne 28). During a meeting with director Frank Capra, she stormed out and slammed the door. But her husband miraculously got Capra to watch her screen tests and he was so amazed that he took her for his film *Ladies of Leisure*: “Capra told her that she was not beautiful and that if she was going to be a success it was for her acting, not her looks” (Wayne 33).

She cleverly refused to sign a contract with any studio and preferred non exclusive contracts with Columbia and Warner Bros, she did not want to be a studio puppet and she did not need the stability that seven year contracts brought. She was very much under the influence of her husband who was jealous of her career and she even refused a film to go to New York with him but Columbia sued her and she had to come back.

She had a drinking problem and was typecast during her whole life as tough women or superwomen, and she suffered from it because it was very limiting, she thought that “sometimes it seems that Hollywood does not want people to be happy” (Waynes 46).

Conclusion

The 1940s saw classical cinema at its peak, the first half of the decade allowing more representations of working women, as women had become the majority of film audiences. But men were still behind the camera and working women were showed from a male's perspective. In melodramas, work was very secondary and what women were always worried about were men. This genre focused almost exclusively on domestic life, thus never showing working women actually at work. Black working women were mostly seen in melodramas, as the only jobs Hollywood would give them were domestic ones. Even when there was a representation, the camera would usually not focus on black women at all, and they would rarely have a voice. In *Gone With the Wind*, for the first time, a black character had a voice and some humanity, but the point of view was still a white one and she was only seen in her interaction with the white characters. In war films, working women were also reduced to performers in *Here Come the Waves*. Made to attract women in the navy, this film almost never showed women actually working for the navy. Instead, the romance was the most important element of the film, insinuating that women would go in the navy only to find a husband. In films noirs, such as *Gun Crazy*, women were dangerous and lead to men's death. The film *Mildred Pierce* introduced a genre that combined film noir and melodrama, and the main character, Mildred, had become a successful business woman, and had to be punished for it. The only representation of working women that did not involve women choosing between their career or a man was found in the superwomen films. These superwomen were able to have a career and a marriage, but there were obvious patriarchal restrictions, and their husband's job was always more important than their own. The patriarchal ideology was the most obvious in late screwball comedies, such as *She Wouldn't Say Yes*, in which a successful working woman was seen as lacking something if she was not married.

Although there were more representations of working women in 1940s Hollywood movies, working women were still seen as unhappy without a man. When the war ended many women were fired from their jobs so that men could have them back (both the jobs and women), and

Hollywood then sent Rosie the Riverter back home. After the 1940s, Hollywood almost completely stopped representing working women, to focus on women's roles as housewives and mothers in the 1950s or as sexual objects in the 1960s. The media became flooded with images of housewives and the only happiness for women was to be found in motherhood and servitude to men. The following decades saw working women back into movies but the 1980s destroyed all that feminism had achieved and the backlash against women made working women in particular evil creatures. Today, representations of working women are back into movies, but the male's point of view is still problematic and patriarchal ideology is almost as strong as in the 1940s, only less obvious.

Working women on the other side of the camera in the 1940s seemed to be only the exceptions that proved the rule. Women screenwriters and editors, who were numerous during the silent era became a minority in the 1940s and the few women who managed to be successful have been forgotten by history. In costume design, Edith Head is the only woman who was not forgotten and whose career stands as an exception in Hollywood. The only two women directors, Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino, although they never considered themselves feminists, became icons of feminism when they were rediscovered in the 1970s and finally given the credit they deserved. The working women that history did not forget were most certainly the actresses, but only their on screen persona are remembered, their working conditions, that involved the infamous seven years contract and their lack of control over the roles they played have been erased from collective memory. In seventy years, and after two feminist waves, one would think that Hollywood today is more open to women than ever. The truth is that the statistics seem to show almost no change since the 1940s. In 2010, 93% of directors, 90% of screenwriters, 82% of editors, and 98% of cinematographers were male (Lauzen). These shocking figures show how male dominated Hollywood is, which allows patriarchal ideology and male points of view to be considered the norm and never questioned by spectators.

Filmography

- *A Letter to Three Wives*. Dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Perf. Jeanne Crain, Linda Darnell and Ann Sothorn. 20th Century Fox Studios, 1948.
- *Adam's Rib*. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn and Judy Holliday. Loew's, 1949.
- *Father of the Bride*. Dir. Vincente Minnelli. Perf. Spencer Tracy, Joan Bennett and Elizabeth Taylor. M-G-M, 1950.
- *Gone with the Wind*. Dir. Victor Fleming. Prod. David O. Selznick. By Sidney Coe Howard, Max Steiner, and Ernest Haller. Perf. Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Leslie Howard, Havilland Olivia De, Thomas Mitchell, and Hattie McDaniel. Loew's Inc., 1939.
- *Gun Crazy*. Dir. Joseph H. Lewis. Perf. John Dall, Peggy Cummins and Berry Kroeger. United Artists Corp., 1949.
- *Here Come the Waves*. Dir. Mark Sandrich. Perf. Bing Crosby, Betty Hutton and Sonny Tufts. Paramount, 1944. Film.
- *Meet John Doe*. Dir. Frank Capra. Prod. Frank Capra. By Robert Riskin. Perf. Gary Cooper, Barbara Stanwyck, and Walter Brennan. Warner Bros., 1941.
- *Mildred Pierce*. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Perf. Joan Crawford, Jack Carson and Zachary Scott. Warner Bros., 1945. Film.
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