The Depictions of Women's Roles in Mid Twentieth Century Film

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) (programme name). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Louisa Armstrong

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of film as a tool of propaganda and control in the depiction of women's roles during and after the Second World War. Examining cinema produced in Nazi Germany, wartime Britain and America, and the post-war British and American film industries, it explores how women were repeatedly moulded into simplified caricatures. These were designed to serve the political and social needs of their respective societies. Despite the varying national contexts, a reoccurring factor was the reliance on restrictive female archetypes to regulate women's behaviour.

This thesis identifies three main caricatures that recur across wartime and post-war cinema: the self-sacrificing mother, the wholesome "girl next door," and the dangerous independent woman. These figures showed a clear agenda in coercing women, rewarding submission and domesticity while punishing ambition and independence.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

30. Kerkow Herbert Productions (1944) *'Supervising Women Workers'* Available at: https://archive.org/details/Supervis1944. . [Accessed 3 Feb. 2026].

31. Massingham (1942) *Women after the War.* Available at: https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-women-after-the-war-1946-online (Accessed 9/01/26)

32. Massingham (1942) *Women after the War.* Available at: https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-women-after-the-war-1946-online (Accessed 9/01/26)

33. Massingham (1942) *Women after the War.* Available at: https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-women-after-the-war-1946-online (Accessed 9/01/26)

34. Massingham (1942) *Women after the War.* Available at: https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-women-after-the-war-1946-online (Accessed 9/01/26)

35. Massingham (1942) *Women after the War.* Available at: https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-women-after-the-war-1946-online (Accessed 9/01/26)

36. Butler (1953) *Calamity Jane*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOG0puR3KnE (Accessed 9.01/26)

37. Butler (1953) *Calamity Jane*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOG0puR3KnE (Accessed 9.01/26)

38. Butler (1953) *Calamity Jane*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOG0puR3KnE (Accessed 9.01/26)

49. Zinnemann (1955) *Oklahoma!* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vj6rW_ZvWcM (Accessed 9/01/26) …… pg. 65

50. Zinnemann (1955) *Oklahoma!* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vj6rW_ZvWcM (Accessed 9/01/26) …… pg. 65

51. Zinnemann (1955) *Oklahoma!* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vj6rW_ZvWcM (Accessed 9/01/26) …… pg. 66

52. Zinnemann (1955) *Oklahoma!* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vj6rW_ZvWcM (Accessed 9/01/26) …… pg. 66

The Depiction of Women's Roles in Mid 20th Century Film

Introduction

Throughout history, women have been moulded and shaped into what is expected of them by society. Forming young girls into the ideal role of a woman that best aids the society that they are living in, often a patriarchal one. Betty Friedan, a theorist credited with sparking the second wave feminism movement in the 1960's with her book 'The Feminine Mystique' critically analysed and denounced the prevailing belief that a truly feminine woman did not work, form their own political views or form their own identity outside of their father/husband's. She particularly highlighted women's discontent with their place in society. Friedan states "The feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity. The mystique says they can answer the question 'Who am I?' by saying 'Tom's wife...Mary's mother'" (Friedan, 1963, p.43). The perfect ideal of a women has been pushed by society for centuries, using media as an instrument.

The Second World War allowed for significant disruptions in political systems and everyday life across Europe and the United States, in a way never seen before. Some of the greatest yet often overlooked and over simplified transformations were the ones of women. As their nations tried to keep afloat during the war, women were thrusted into new roles as workers and symbolic representatives of national endurance.

Film began to emerge as one of the most powerful mass media forms of the twentieth century and played a crucial role in shaping and constraining how women were imagined and remembered during and after the war. With the introduction of film only mere decades before the start of the Second World War (WWII) and its rapid rise in popularity over that time, it became an influential role in society. Movie stars were becoming influential to the general public in a way only seen by royals in the past. Their roles in film had a huge effect on audiences in ways never seen before. Dyer states "Stars articulate what it is to be a human being in contemporary society; that is, they express the particular notion we hold of the person of the individual. But they articulate both the

promise and the difficulty that the notion of the individual presents for all of us who live by it.' (Dyer 1987, p.8). People began to look to the silver screen not only for entertainment but also for guidance.

This thesis examines how wartime and post-war cinema functioned as an instrument for propaganda, highlighting its construction of gender roles and image. Focusing on films produced in Nazi Germany, wartime Britain and America, and post-war Britain and America, this thesis argues that despite vast political differences between regimes, cinema consistently relied on highly stylized female caricatures. In doing so they were able to promote socially desirable behaviour. These caricatures include the **self-sacrificing** mother, the wholesome girl next door, and the dangerous independent woman, which recur across national contexts. However, they are used to propel different ideologies depending on political necessity and film was uniquely suited to this task. Unlike other forms of media, cinema combined visual spectacle and emotional identification allowing preconceived notions with influential intent to be embedded within romance and musical numbers. During WWII, governments increasingly recognized cinema not just as entertainment, but as a strategic tool capable of shaping public morale and normalizing sacrifice. Women, as both the primary cinema audience and a newly mobilised workforce, became central subjects of the newly found cinematic coercion.

In Chapter one I will discuss how in Nazi Germany, film reinforced a rigid gender ideology rooted in and driven by racial purity. Women were depicted primarily as biological and domestic vessels of the state who were bound to the home through motherhood. Their independence was framed as a threat to racial and social order. Films presented women as moral upholders, for example, *Alles Leben ist Kampf* (Hüttig and Gerdes 1934), *Die große Liebe* (Hansen 1942), and *Die goldene Stadt* (Harlan1942). Submission and domesticity were rewarded, while independence and sexual autonomy lead to isolation and suffering. The ideal woman is rendered as a symbol rather than a multi-dimensional person. A mother, a daughter, or a loyal supporter were the only acceptable roles for a woman to inhabit while the independent woman is framed as corrupting and dangerous to the racial and social order.

In Chapter two I will discuss how in contrast, British and American wartime cinema outwardly appeared more progressive. Faced with severe labour shortages, the British and American states encouraged women into factories and agricultural labour. *Millions Like Us* (1943) and *The Gentle Sex* (1943) celebrated and encouraged women's participation in the war effort, portraying women full of camaraderie and resilience in a time of desolation. However, this thesis argues that these films only offered conditional empowerment for women, for a limited time only. Independence was framed as a patriotic duty rather than a right. The rewards seen in film, remained deeply conservative, often ending in a modest wedding. Even as women laboured in traditionally male roles, cinematic narratives ultimately steered them toward marriage and self-sacrifice, reinforcing the innocent "girl next door" archetype as the most socially acceptable form of wartime femininity.

The post-war period marked a decisive switch in the perception of women's role in society, as will be discussed in Chapter three. As men returned from the war, women's wartime independence was rapidly reframed as disruptive and unnatural, labelling them as a nuisance in the workforce. Film and media once again became tools of containment. Women were encouraged back into their old domestic roles through nostalgia and moral cautionary tales. Musicals and romantic dramas such as *Calamity Jane* (1953) and *Oklahoma!* (1955), though set in earlier historical periods, reflect contemporary anxieties surrounding female autonomy. Their narratives repeatedly depict a journey from independence to domestication. Fulfilment was displayed as achievable only through marriage and submission to traditional gender roles.

Across these contexts, this thesis identifies three dominant female caricatures repeatedly portrayed by cinema. Firstly, the mother figure, who symbolises sacrifice and national survival. She is selfless and defined entirely through her service to others. Secondly, the innocent 'girl next door', who is modest and emotionally restrained. She may work or show independence temporarily, but ultimately desires marriage and stability. Finally, the dangerous independent woman, who is sexually aware and ambitious. She is framed as disruptive and is punished narratively through rejection and humiliation. These archetypes function as disciplinary tools, guiding audiences toward acceptable forms of

femininity while discouraging any sort of deviation. Submission was consistently rewarded while autonomy was punished. Wartime and post-war cinema contributed to the long-term reinforcement of patriarchal norms, even in moments when women's real-world labour was indispensable to national survival.

Chapter One

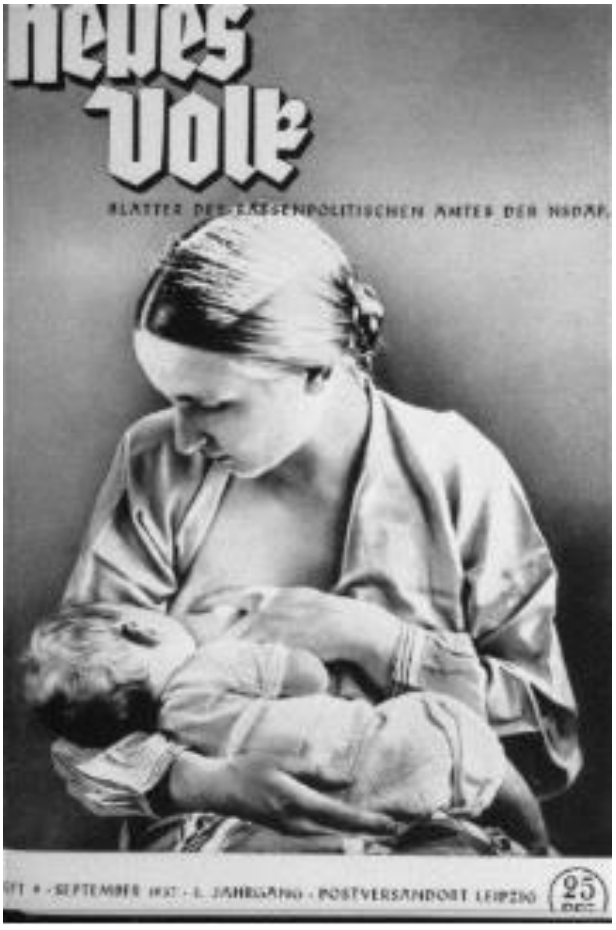
Germany during WWII

During WWII, film became a new tool to utilize, employed by both Axis and Allied forces. The importance of propaganda during WWII cannot be overstated, serving as a powerful device which not only shaped the perception of the public but also boosted morale and motivated citizens to do their part in supporting and aiding the war effort. Propaganda was not just used simply to disseminate information but also to craft narratives intended to resonate with its audience and mould beliefs and actions. Welch states "During World War II, propaganda was recognized by all governments as an essential instrument of war, shaping public opinion, maintaining morale, and demonizing the enemy." (Welch, 2017). Germany took advantage of the new source of media to distribute propaganda and was truly made use of in the years leading up to and during WWII. Fox states, “Both the British and German governments recognised the cinema as an essential instrument of propaganda, capable of reaching vast audiences and shaping public opinion and morale.”. (Fox, 2007).

With the rise of WWII, there arose a new need from women, a need to help the war effort in a way that best suited their governing powers. Every element of society was in need of being utilised, the men who could govern, fight and command armies and then the women, who were left at home. The war allowed for new roles to be delegated to women, particularly propelled by film. Both sides implemented film as a tool for propaganda, utilising it in different ways to influence their audiences for the desired outcome.

As the Nazi party grew, and the Third Reich developed, their strong ideals were being heavily reinforced. As the Nazi party was famously known for, they skilfully used propaganda to impel their objectives. Women played a crucial part in the ideal new world where they were trying to create a racially ‘pure’ race. A woman’s key role and

purpose was depicted to be a child bearer at home, encouraging breeding as many children as possible for the 'super' race in Germany. Following traditional values, they propelled the idea of true femininity, domesticity, and submission. To combat this was an act of rebellion against the Nazi state and heavily condemned. Women's roles were often simplified into three caricatures, the mother, the innocent girl, and the independent dangerous woman.



1. (Neues Volk (New People), 1937)

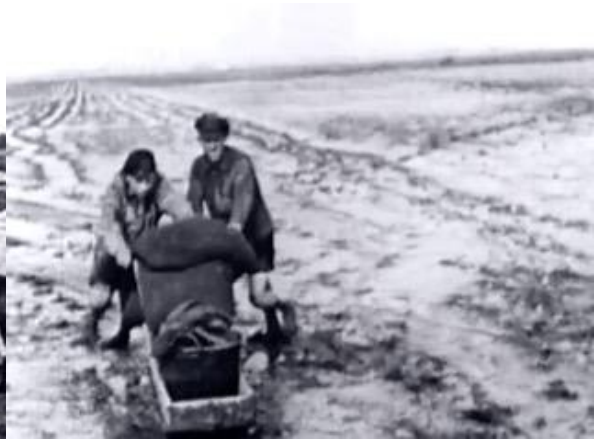
Above is a photo on the cover of a Nazi publication on race, *Neues Volk* (New People), portraying the 'perfect' image of an Aryan mother and child. The woman is depicted fulfilling her intended duty, having borne a child to aid to the evolution of the Third Reich, reinforcing the depiction of the ideal role of a woman in the eyes of the Nazi party. This image displays the woman as nothing other than a mother. She is dressed in simple, plain clothes and her hair is scraped back into a sensible and practical bun. Her clothes and hair are free from any sort of self-expression or allure. Long, loose hair was

associated with sensuality, seen as a private and intimate affair, meant to be seen only by a woman's husband. This stems from Victorian traditions and societal rules. Salon, M. states, ‘Clean, neat, and properly styled hair showed a woman's virtue no `matter the style. These hairstyle expectations helped separate proper ladies from those with questionable character. Married women could only let their husbands [...] see their loose hair. These rules showed the strict moral boundaries about female appearance.’ (Salon, M. 2024). Her pose also indicates total attention to her child; her eyes direct the viewer to the child she is nursing, highlighting that the focal point is the child. These children were seen as the next generation of the Aryan race, and the mothers were seen as nothing more than a vessel and steppingstone.

A film that depicts the push for German women to have children at this time is *Alles Leben ist Kampf* (*All Life is Struggle*) *(*Herbert Gerdes and Hüttig, *1937).* Produced by the Nazi Party’s Racial Policy Office (Rassenpolitisches Amt), this film heavily demonized people with disabilities, proclaiming that in order for the ‘true’ German people not to be become ‘extinct’, those who are hereditarily healthy, should bear as many children as possible.

2.

(Gerbes and Hüttig 1937)



3.

(Gerbes and Hüttig, 1937)

The film displays hardworking Germans, like farmers and sailors, working to provide for the country. Strong, able-bodied men were utilized to propel the ideology that these were

the ‘true’ Germans that belonged to the land and deserved to reproduce. This was contrasted in the film with people with disabilities.

 4.

(Gerbes and Hüttig, 1937)

The film then goes on to show footage of people with disabilities in a care home. This footage is used in contrast to the working men, proclaiming their lack of contribution to society is a key reason for Germany’s downfalls, following the first World War. The depiction of these people is harsh and unsympathetic, encouraging the viewer to feel distain towards these people in comparison to the men who work to provide. The main purpose for this comparison is to encourage hereditarily healthy Germans to reproduce in order to avoid the ‘death of their people’ (Gerbes and Hüttig 1937).

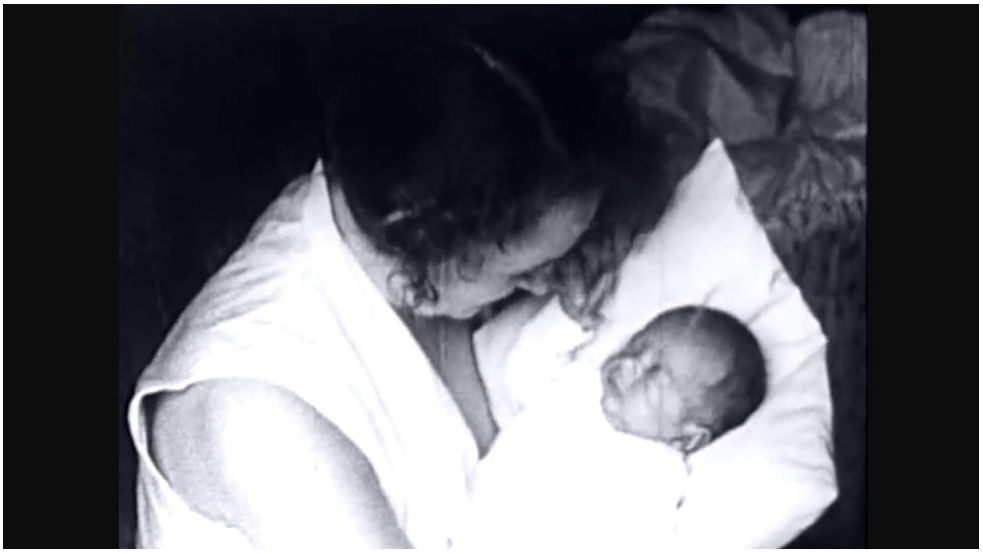
5.

(Gerbes and Hüttig, 1937)

6.

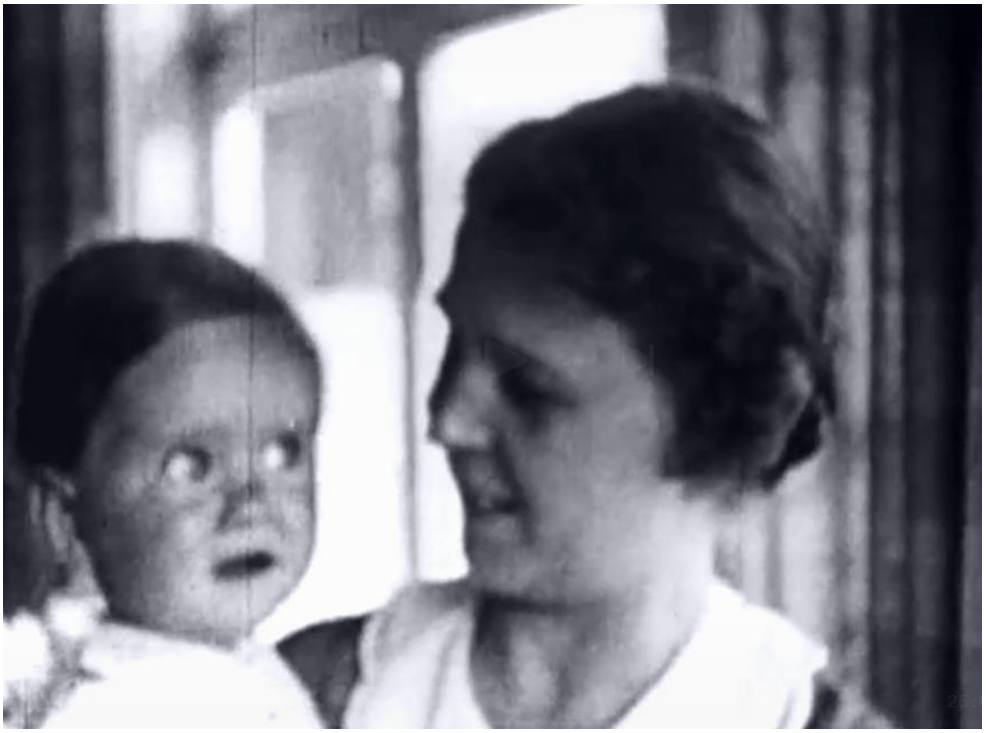
(Gerbes and Hüttig, 1937)

The film displays several young, healthy, German children, playing, and walking through the streets. It particularly focuses on a young, blonde girl, displaying the ideal vision of an Aryan child. Along with the negative depictions of people with disabilities, the film focused on highlighting the need for reproduction of healthy children for the continuation and advancement of the Aryan race.



7.

(Gerbes and Hüttig, 1937)



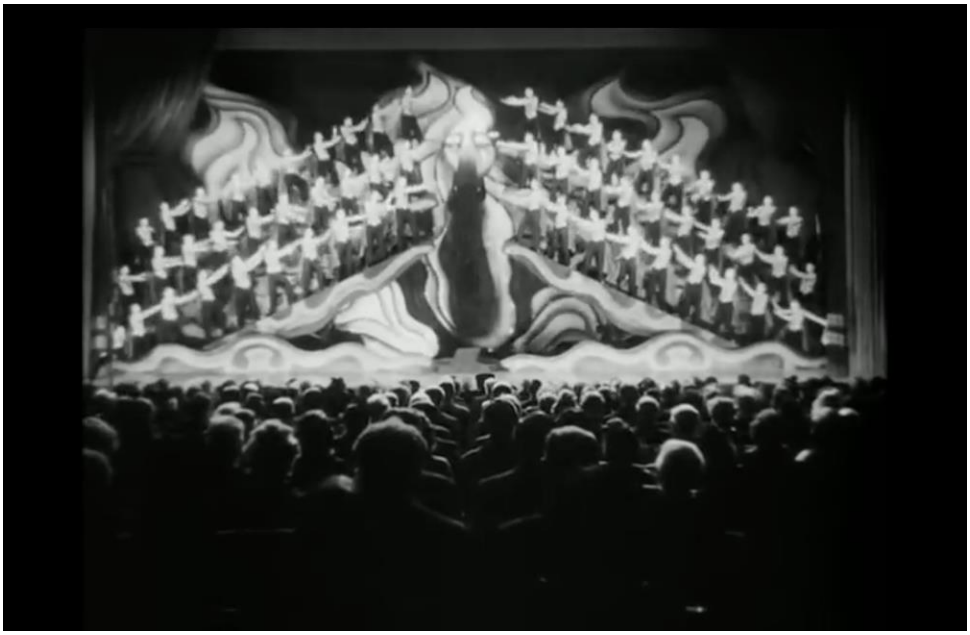
8.

(Gerbes and Hüttig, 1937)

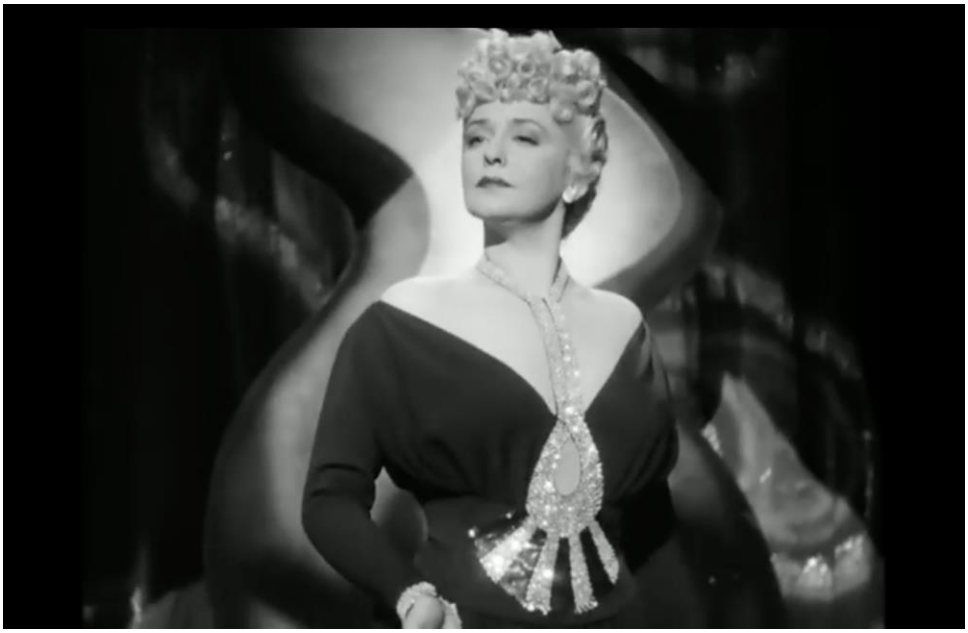
Above shows two of the few scenes in the film centred around women. In both, the women are holding their young children. The children are both wearing white, showing their innocence and purity as they are a part of the ‘true’ Aryan race. The film calls for the increase of births of hereditarily heathy, German children. Healthy German women

were expected to have as many children as possible for the good of the state, despite their own wants. The message of this film is clear, calling for the increase in Aryan children, taken directly from Nazi ideology. In this film, the depiction of women is no more than a vessel to aid the 'super' race they coveted, heavily reinforcing the regime's gender ideology of 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche' ("Children, Kitchen, Church") (Holocaust Encyclopedia)

By far one of the most famous and successful films of the Nazi era was *Die große Liebe (The Great Love)* (Hansen 1942*)* directed by Rolf Hansen. This romantic drama war film was the most commercially successful film to be produced under the Third Reich. Starring already well renowned actor, Zarah Leander, the film follows love interests, Lieutenant Paul Wendlandt, a young Luftwaffe pilot and Hanna Holberg, a famous singer. Their love story unfolds over the war period, following Hanna's luxurious life on the stage and Paul's devotion to the war effort.


9.

(Hansen 1942)


10.

(Hansen 1942)

The film opens with Hanna starring in an elaborate, dazzling show number, seen centre stage of the performance. She skilfully displays her talents and flourishes in the limelight. Her confidence and stage presence shines through in her performance and opens the film on an extravagant note. Hanna is praised for her talents and relishes in the adoration. She is displayed as an independent woman who flourishes by herself in her career. Dressed in

a seductive, off the shoulder dress, bejewelled and dazzling, Hanna glides across the stage, effortlessly. She is a picture of Aryan beauty, despite her nonconforming lifestyle and outfit. As the film progresses, and she meets Lieutenant Paul, Hanna's appearance and outlook on life drastically changes.


11.

(Hansen 1942)


12.

(Hansen 1942)

The contrast between the beginning and end of this film is vast. After meeting Paul, a decorated Lieutenant who continually chooses self-sacrifice for the good of the nation,

Hanna learns to overcome her desires of independence and adventure and learns that her true duty as a woman is to support her countries men and maintain morale at home. The film ends with Hanna having changed in almost every way. Outwardly, she has abandoned her showstopping attire and swapped it out for sensible, modest clothes. Her blonde wig, seen earlier has been replaced for her natural hair, donned in a tight and practical perm, out of her face, perfect for a wife and presumably a soon to be mother. She inwardly discovers that her independent life was ultimately unfulfilling, and her true meaning could be found in a modest life, serving her husband, children, and country. She has left behind her self fulfilling life and traded it for the one of a dutiful wife. She faithfully shows nurturing love and loyalty to the soldier, a cinematic metaphor, encompassing women's domestic duty.

Rentschler talks about this film and others of Leander and their part in Nazi propaganda, stating,

> The singer learns to be patient and to suffer in silence; her great love must reconcile itself to the greater German cause [..] Leander's performances/ tells us much about the place of women in Nazi Germany and the place of woman in the Third Reich's cinema. National Socialism/ managed to reintroduce "the three big K's of the good old days: Kuche, Kirche, Kinder |kitchen, church, children]./The Nazis did not simply proclaim a return to the status quo for women, but rather an earthquake, a vibration of blood and soil in questions of femininity.

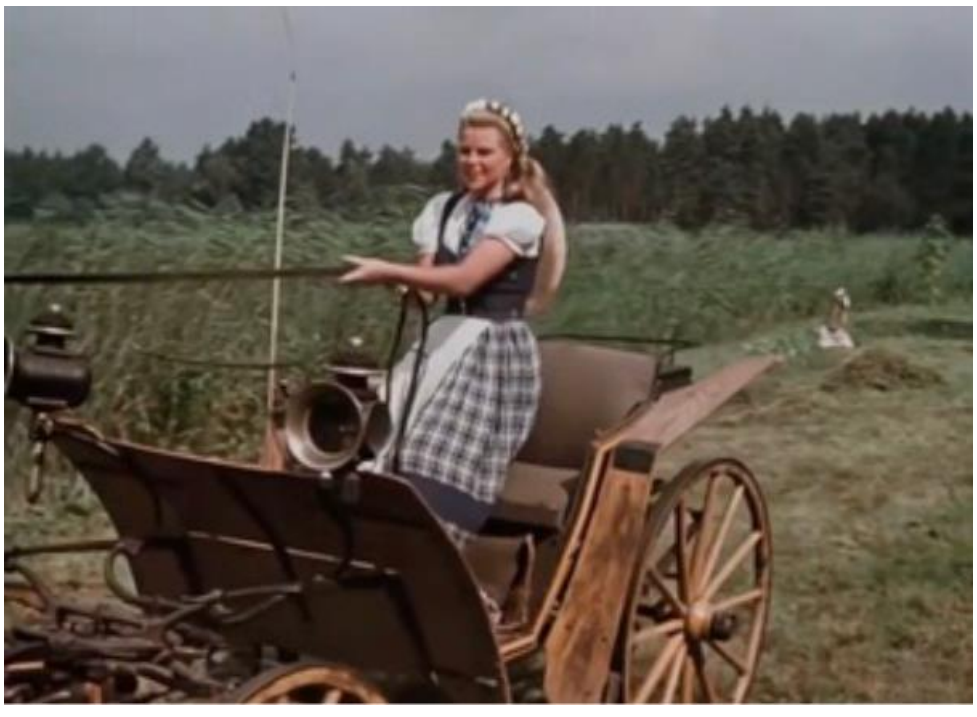
(Rentschler, 1996, pp.140-144)

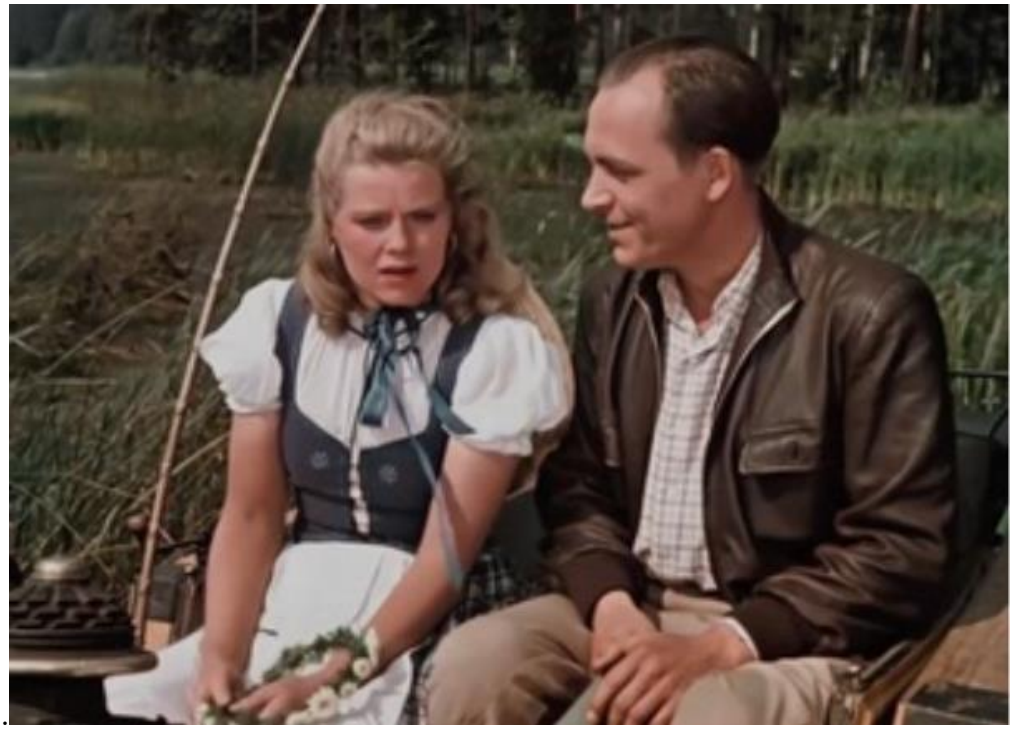
The ideal depiction of women was consistently being presented as the state sanctioned, devote wife and mother, staying home to care for the family. In contrast to this was the depiction of women seeking self-fulfilment and independency, often demonized as there was no room for these kinds of women in the Third Reich. These kinds of characters were often played by actress, Kristina Söderbaum. Seen as a sex symbol of the Third Reich, Söderbaum appeared in many of her husband, Veit Harlan's films. Often, these films emphasized harsh punishment like emotional isolation or even as extreme as death

for women who went against the grain, acting disobedient and seeking self-liberated lives. These women were repeatedly portrayed as weak and purposeless, in need of the help and correction from an authoritative masculine figure. Welch states “Nazi cinema propagated the doctrine that women should devote themselves to home and family. Female characters who pursued independence or careers were punished, while mothers and homemakers were exalted as national heroines.” (Welch 1983 p.188). The main roles depicted in film during the Third Reich often came down to two contraries, the pleasant, not very intelligent, Aryan girl who embraced her role in becoming a mother and was glorified for her ‘choice’ and the reckless, self-indulgent woman who meets her demise in an undesirable way. The contrast between these two caricatures is broad. The independent, self-assured woman was seen as dangerous yet something to be utilised. Nazi cinema used these stylised depictions of women as a tool to help sculpt the mindset of viewers. However, women such as Kristina Söderbaum were still used as sex symbols in films, although often meeting a regretful demise, they still were used to promote films and provide a lascivious selling point.

The film *The Golden City* (*Die goldene Stadt)* (Harlan 1942), starring Harlan’s wife, Kristina Söderbaum, encompasses the danger independence supposedly threatened for women.

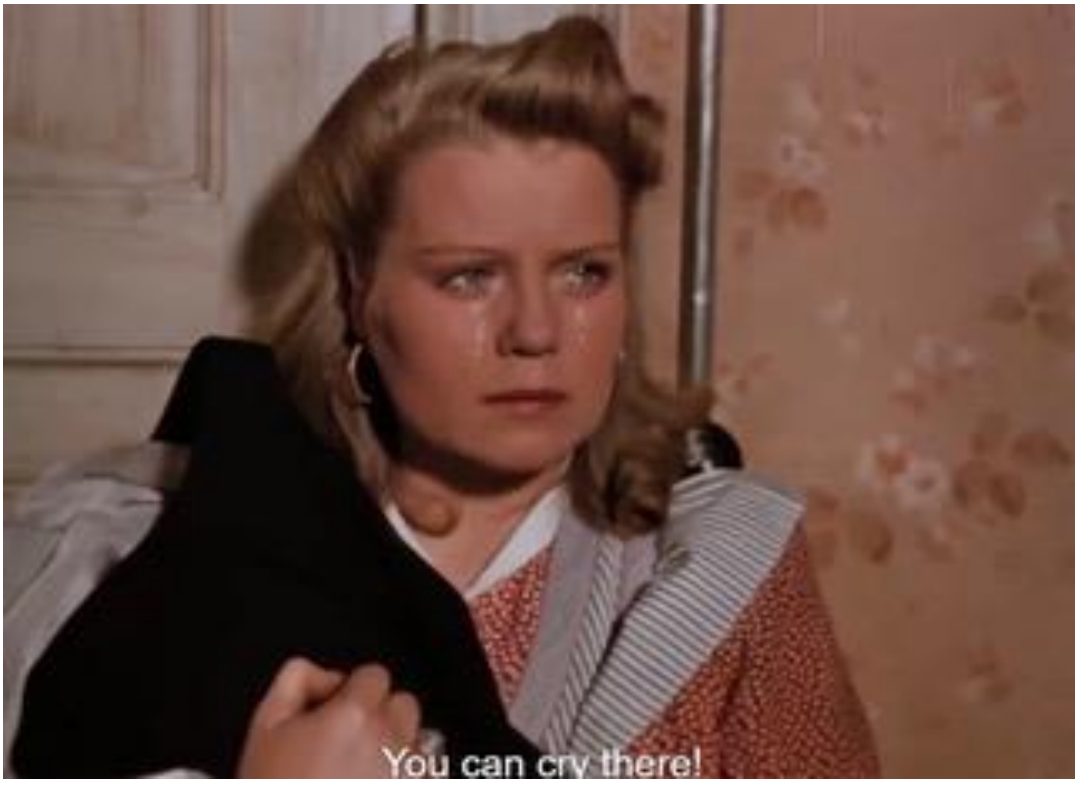
13. (Harlan 1942)





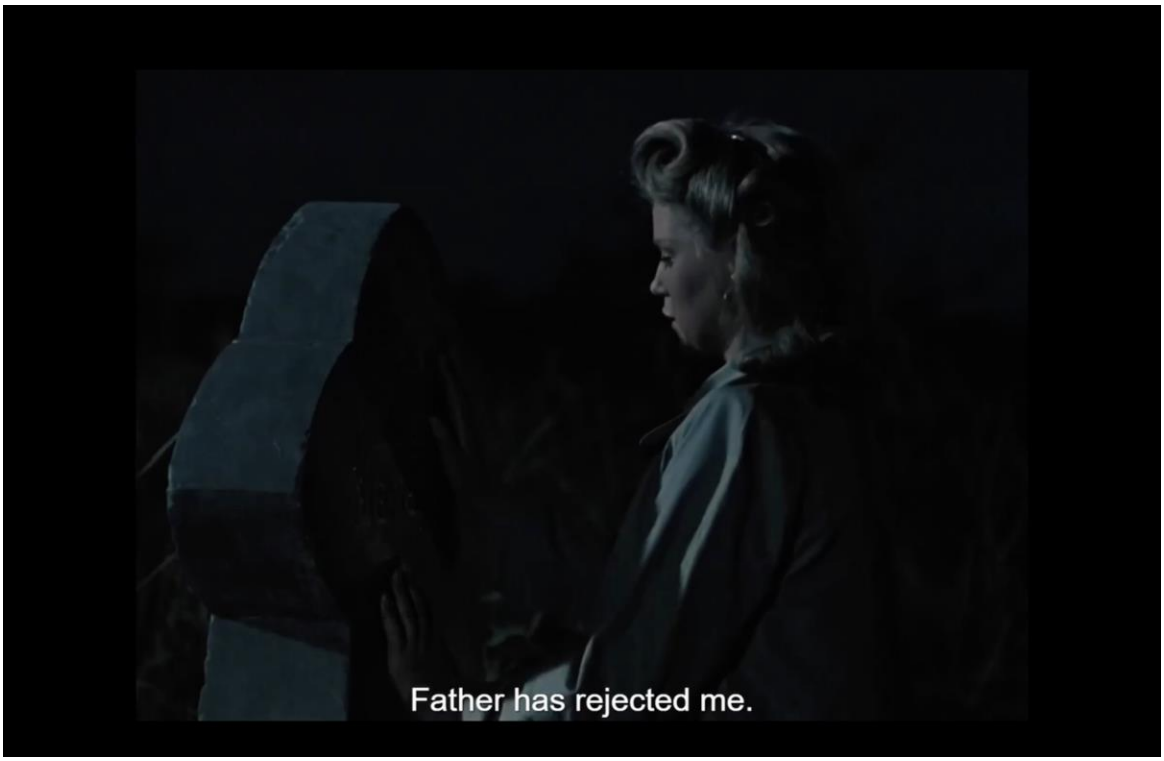
14. (Harlan 1942)

The Golden City follows naive Anna, the daughter of a farmer. She is the perfect depiction of the ideal Aryan women. With blue eyes and blonde hair, decorated with white flowers, a clear indication of her innocence, she is dressed in a traditional Dirndl. She is an aid to her father on his farm but expects no thanks in return. It is then that she is influenced by a passing surveyor. She confides in him, her dreams of independence, hoping to one day travel to Prague, or as she calls it, the golden city. As she tells him her wants and desires, she takes off her crown of white flowers, as seen in figure 14, symbolizing that her want for independence will only cause her to lose her innocence. The film follows her descent into corruption through self-indulgence.



15.(Harlan 1942)

After arriving in Prague with the surveyor, Anna is led into a life of disruption. Her dreams do not go as planned in Prague. It is her own decision making and defiance of her father that led her life to ruin. Once she arrives in the golden city, in an attempt to live out her desires of independence, she allows the city to change her. Her hair is styled in the new fashion, wearing less traditional and sometimes immodest clothing. She is seduced by a man from the city, leaving behind the surveyor. He ultimately betrays her and sends her home in tears as seen above. Anna is inconsolable as she learns the harshness of the world.



16. (Harlan 1942)

After returning home to her father, he rejects Anna coldly and shoos her away, not willing entertain her apology and lacks any kind of forgiveness. It is this last act of rejection that leads to Anna's death. She runs away from her father's house towards the swamp her mother had died in. As seen above the sun filled fields have turned to a dark swamp. Encased in the darkness of the night, she cries and confines to her mother's gravestone. In hopes of being reconnected with her mother she willingly drowns in the swamp. The lesson that is portrayed here is that independence leads to danger and corruption. The once innocent farm girl that Anna used to be is completely gone by the end of the film. She has been wronged by everyone she has encountered since leaving the farm, falling for the seduction of men and a life of independence. She ultimately learns there is no satisfaction to be gotten from independence like she once dreamed and it was her defiance against her father that led to her untimely death. This depiction of an innocent, naive farm girl, falling from grace once again pushes the Nazi ideology that a women's place is in her father's care until rightfully passed onto her husbands. This film demonises independence in women and glorifies the submissive daughter, best suited for a Nazi society.

One of the most important figures, who helped push the doctrine of the Nazi party was female, film director, Leni Riefenstahl. Serving as an instrument for Hitler and Head of Propaganda, Joesph Goebbels, Riefenstahl directed some of the most prevalent propaganda films during the Third Reich, including *Triumph des Willens (Triumph of the Will*, 1935) and *Olympia* (1938). In the film *Triumph des Willens*, women are only seen in brief, fleeting shots, predominantly in cheering crowds, either serving as the support system expected of them, or as a decorative accessory.

17. (Riefenstahl 1935)

The scene above depicts a group of young women, arms outstretched in support of the Nazi party. Wide smiles cover their faces as they beam towards a passing Hitler on the street. Women are only seen briefly in this film. This is the only shot of the film with women in the majority of the shot and they are cheering and displaying their great love for Hitler. They are nothing more than supporters. The film showcases men, young and old, in and out of uniform. It demonstrates the power that men had at this time and how

women were only seen as supporters. This contrasts with the men featured in the film, presented as participants in political and military action. Their role as women is to embody the ideals of the Aryan nation, fertility, beauty, and innocence. Susan Sontag, an acclaimed theorist, critically examined the aesthetics of Nazi Germany, particularly the ones moulded and produced by Leni Riefenstahl. Sontag argued that Riefenstahl transformed political ideology into a seductive and artistic style and that this imagery promoted submissive behaviour and a fascist ideal of beauty.

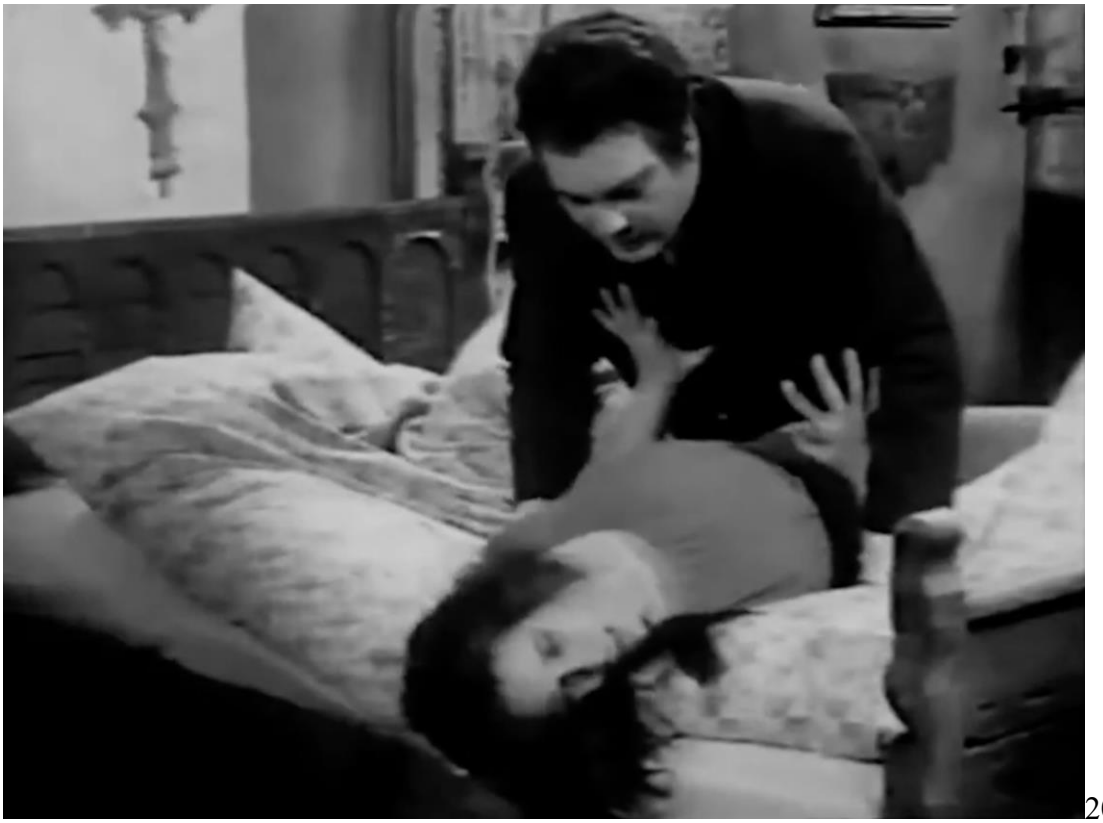
Sontag, states "In Riefenstahl's films, women are never agents of history. They are symbols — of fertility, continuity, and aesthetic perfection — not of action.*"* (Sontag, 1991). However, in the beginning of Riefenstahl's career, she depicted strong and independent female protagonists such as Junta, in *Das Blaue Licht* (Riefenstahl 1935). Despite this, with the rise of fascism in Germany and her employment under the Nazi party, Riefenstahl's female characters regressed and devolved into ones such as Martha in *Tiefland (Lowlands)* (Riefenstahl 1954). Although released in 1954, most of the film was shot between 1940-1944, only delayed due to the end of the war. This film, starring Söderbaum, follows the actresses typecast, as she plays a woman, once longing for self-sufficiency who eventually falls into a helpless state due to her independency.

18.

(Riefenstahl 1954)

19. (Riefenstahl 1954)

Once again, the female character depicted in the beginning and end of Riefenstahl's film is vastly different. In the beginning of *Tiefland*, the audience is introduced to Martha, a beggar dancer, as seen above. She's seen wearing a lowcut dress, adorned with lace and ruffles. She's seen showing her exposed legs to men and moves her body sensually around the stage for money. She uses her sexuality to entertain and make a living for herself, living independently. Her hair is curled but not as tightly or as styled as usually seen in films during this time. There is an unruly nature to her hair as also seen in her character. This ultimately fades as we see a shift occur over the course of the film.

 20.

(Riefenstahl 1954)

Later in the film, she encounters a man named Sebastian who becomes infatuated by her. He sees her dancing and alluring clothes and sees this as an invitation. He decides he must be with her but is already planned to marry a sensible woman for her money. In turn he deicides Martha will become his mistress. Above we see Sebastian force himself upon Martha as she pushes him away. Her hair is unbound and loose as he has caught her in a private moment. He believes she is his to own and acts accordingly, mounting himself on top of her. He is dressed in dark clothes in contrast with her lighter dress. It is portrayed that Martha has found herself in this situation because of her provocative and independent lifestyle, with no one to protect her. She is ultimately saved from Sebastian by another man. Despite her unruly start of the film, she changes her ways and is rewarded by receiving the ultimate happy ending in a Nazi film, getting married and living a modest life.

This is another example of the ‘New Nazi Woman’, expected to be willing to sacrifice her personal wants and desires for the greater good of her country and the war effort that was repeatedly being depicted as the ideal role during the Third Reich.
Despite what was being presented in Nazi propaganda films and other media, women served as a backbone to the war effort and upholding society during the Third Reich, promoting and aiding the Nazi regime. The contrast in what was being depicted and what was really happening was vast and failed to credit the women not only cooperating with the nazi party’s regime but also uplifting it.

The war required the Nazi’s to abandon the fictitious, domestic model of the stay-at-home mother for women. The undeniable need for labour during the period of war prompted the state to desert the exemplary image of the ‘New Nazi woman’ and thrust women into the workforce, out of necessity. An example of this is the Duty Year, the compulsory service plan, enforcing women to help with the war effort. All single women in 1939 had to report for their compulsory labour, in industries related to the war. Despite this, they were still pushing for the perfect Aryan mother on the silver screen. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum states ‘German women played a vital role in the Nazi movement, one which far exceeded the Nazi Party’s propaganda that a woman’s place was strictly in the home as mothers and child-bearers. Of the estimated forty million German women in the Reich, some thirteen million were active in Nazi Party organizations that furthered the regime’s goals of racial purity, imperial conquest, and global war.’ (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, accessed 2025).

Women’s roles during this time and region were filtered down into caricatures, overlooking the depth and layers to women and their lives during such an egregious time. This was one of the Nazi party’s well known, tactics in propelling the ideals and models they believed was needed in order to fulfil their regime and create the ‘perfect’ Germany while discouraging those seeking their own autonomy. This contrasted with the allied forces and their methods of propaganda through film and their depiction of women's roles.

Chapter Two

Britain and the America during WWII

Similarly to Germany, Britain used film as an aid in dispensing propaganda. Film, as a form of propaganda, had already made a brief appearance in Britain towards the end of the First World War, such as the film *Nurse and Martyr* (Moran 1915). This film followed a dramatized interpretation of a real nurse during WWI who ultimately was captured and killed by German soldiers. She is depicted as a mother figure, sacrificing her own safety for the care of others. However, it was in the early 1940s that film propaganda began to have a real impact. Film producers such as Michael Balcon and Alexander Korda propelled the use of entertainment to sweeten and gloss over the propaganda laced throughout films. A new sort of short 'filler' film was peppered into cinema programmes, giving advice and warnings on war related issues such as firebombs and shelters. During the course of the Second World War, cinema programmes, and these 'fillers' were primarily aimed at women. With a huge sum of the male population off fighting on battlefields, there was a new hierarchy. McClintock states

> The family image came to figure hierarchy within unity as an organic element of historical progress and thus became indispensable for legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism, and imperialism. The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial thus depended on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children. (McClintock Pg 45 1995).

The transition of women from the domestic sphere into the workforce during the Second World War in Britain can be understood through the lens of the family metaphor described in the quote. Prior to the war, women's roles were naturalised as domestic and subordinate, mirroring the hierarchical family structure in which men were positioned as providers and women as caregivers. However, the demands of total war disrupted this ideological framework, temporarily reconfiguring gender hierarchies that had long been justified as "natural." Yet this shift did not fully dismantle the family metaphor; instead,

women's wartime labour was framed as an extension of their familial duty to support the national "family." In this way, women's entry into the workforce challenged traditional domestic roles while still operating within a system that relied on gendered hierarchy, demonstrating how deeply entrenched assumptions about women's subordination underpinned broader social and political structures in Britain.

Women were the main cinema goers at the time. Although not fighting on battle fields, it was the war effort from the factories, fields, kitchens, and allotments that was a new area to be tapped into. Women represented a new and largely untapped labour resource that the British and American state turned to in response to severe workforce shortages. Women were therefore recruited for organisations like the Women's Land Army and factory employment. A new role for women had been uncovered, for the first time, women's work was being appreciated and celebrated, in services, factories and in running the home. It was one of the governments most pressing matters to encourage women into the workforce and to aid a helping hand more directly in the war effort, something unheard of in the past, but necessary for the war-stricken world. A complete shift had occurred in the role of women, allowing for a potentially new hierarchy to take shape in the world. Botting states

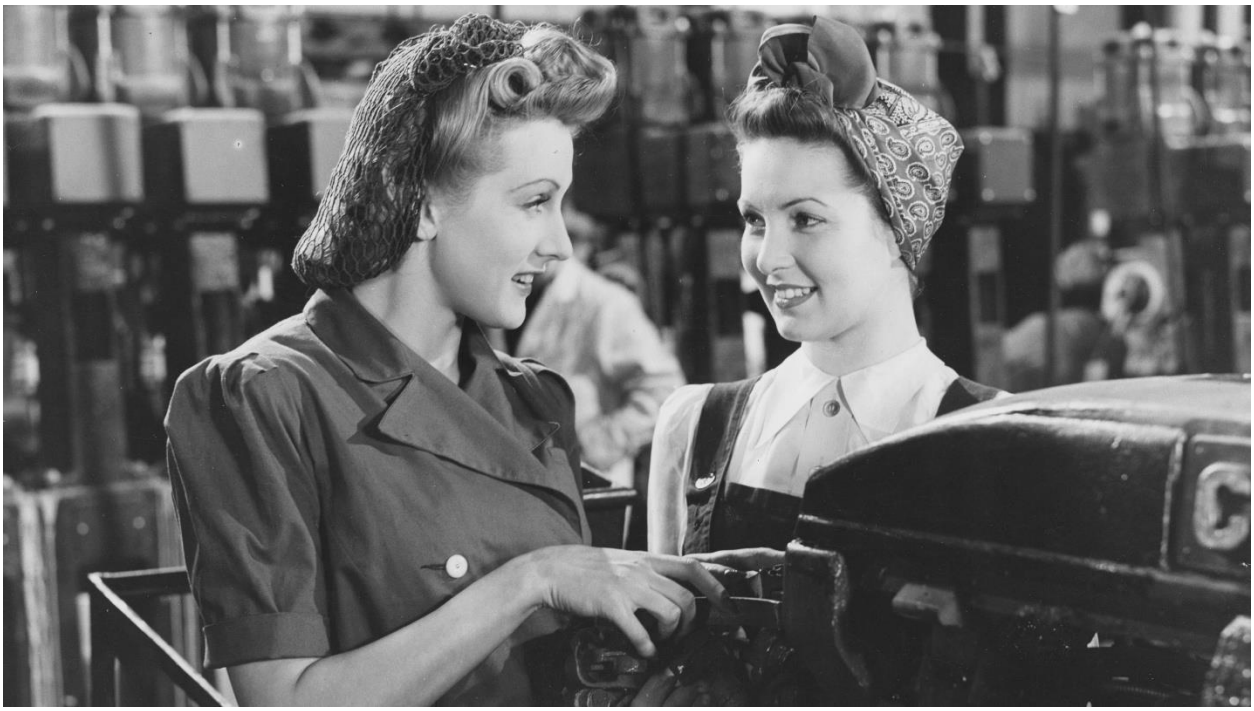
> 'One of the government's most urgent needs was to encourage ordinary women to participate more directly in the war effort by joining the services or taking up factory work. This focus on women's importance to the war provided new opportunities for female involvement in the film industry but was not always positive in terms of the portrayal of women. The emphasis was on the desired collective effort expected of women at the time, and there was little space for character development.'
>
> (Botting 2017)

As demonstrated in chapter one, women were boxed into caricatures, best fit for display. Although new 'independent' roles were being portrayed in film, they were still under the

thumb of the war driven government, moulding them into what was needed of them at the time.

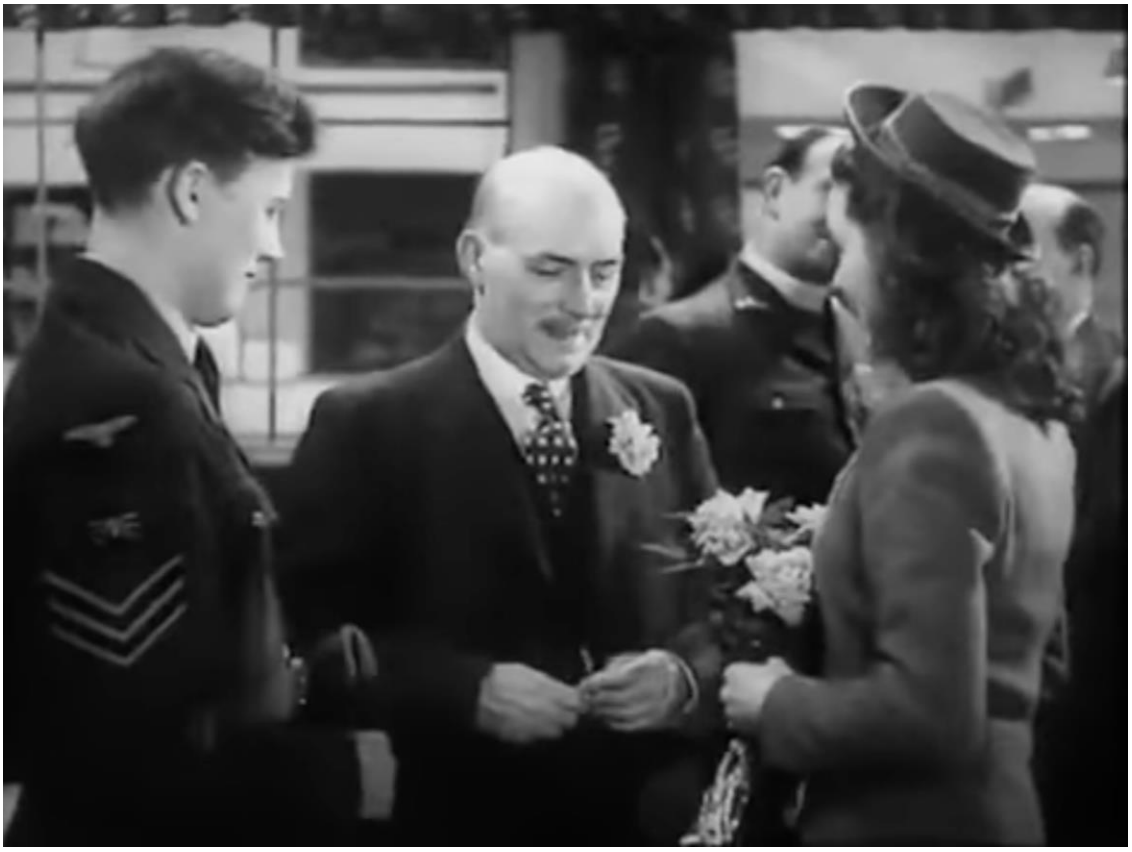
An example of a film that pushed for more women working for the war effort is *Millions Like Us* (Gilliat and Launder1943). This film follows female factory workers during WWII in a secondarily romance but primarily propaganda film. The film's main premise explores the collective responsibility of the British people, particularly to contribute to the war effort. This included dismantling old class prejudices and taking inspiration from Churchill's sentiments of the war not being won from a small few but by the efforts of the 'millions like us.' (Gilliat and Launder1943)

21. (Gilliat and Launder 1943)



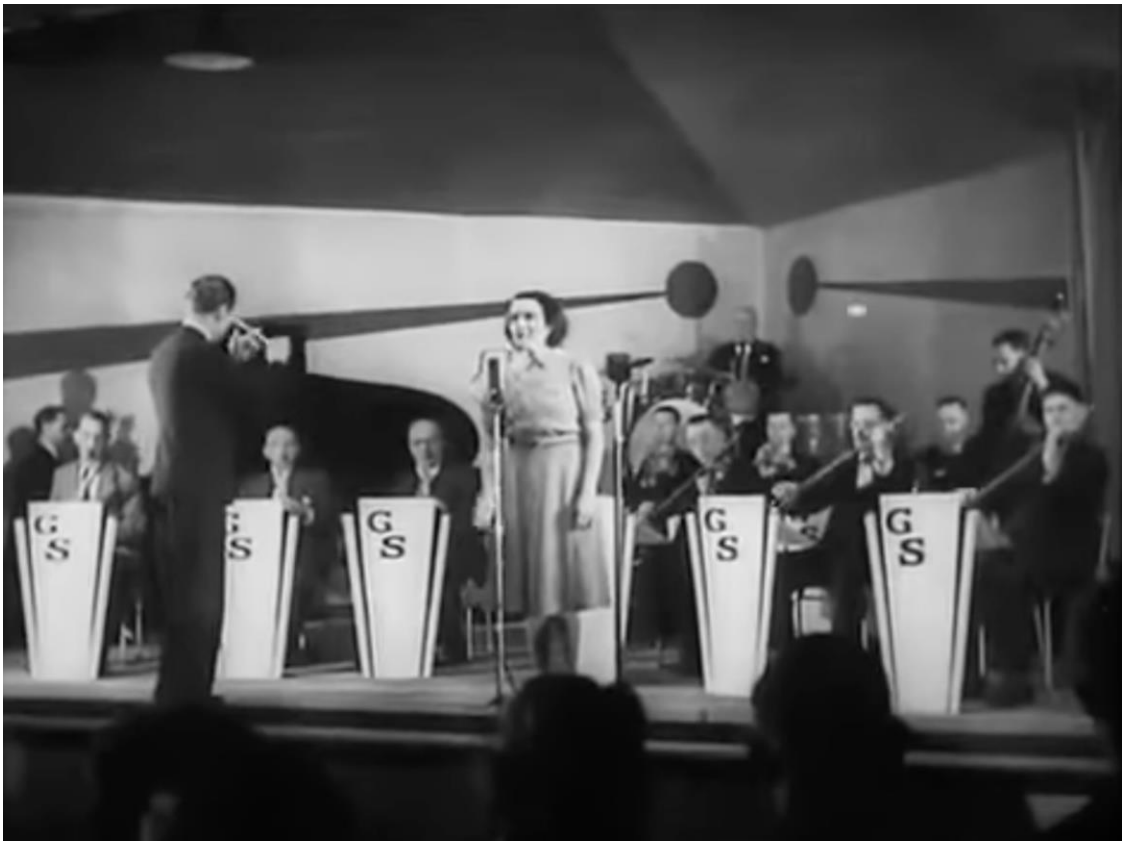
22. (Gilliat and Launder 1943)

Above displays two scenes from the film that portrays the true intention of the film, to display the working girl of the era, doing her duty for her country. This film follows Celia, an ordinary and plain girl who follows a mundane and sheltered life, which drastically changes when she is called by the Labour exchange to work in an aircraft factory. The first scene portrays the women, arriving together to the factory and learning the ropes of working life. They all come from different classes and backgrounds, yet all have the same job and living quarters in the factory. Together, their worlds expand to include meaningful female camaraderie and a communal cause to work for. Celia emerges as a poster girl for the war effort, embodying the empowering strength of a united cause. The second scene above shows Celia and Jennifer, a stuck up, privileged woman, who initially disapproved of doing factory work and her living quarters, overcome her vanity and embrace the work fuelling the war effort. Their change in attitude is rewarded, though only within narrow, conventional limits. Despite being somewhat independent, working women, the film still fuels the ideal role for a woman of the time, becoming a wife. Both women fall in love over the short period of time that the film takes place.

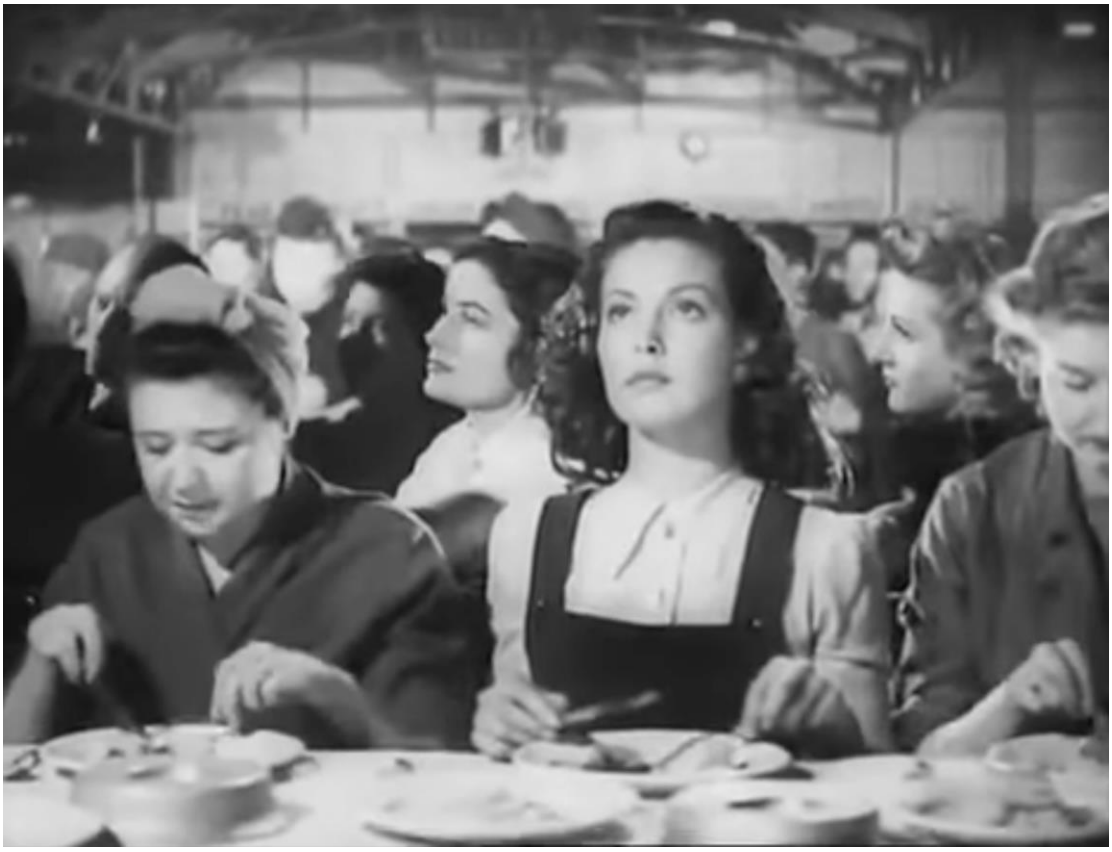


23. (Gilliat and Launder 1943)

Above shows the humble wedding scene. The couple, after a brief time together, decide to get married, before Frank, Celia's new husband, most go off to fight. Surrounded by immediate family and some friends from the RAF and factory, the modest wedding is simple, ideal for war time. Celia is dressed in a simple outfit, donning her usual hair and makeup. Celia's character remarks that she would not have it any other way, demonstrating the humble nature she has learned to adopt over her time in the factory. Celia portrays the perfect war time girl, serving her country in an unglamourous job, marrying a man of her status in a modest ceremony, and doing it all without a complaint. Desai states 'Celia becomes a shining example of the empowering effects of the collective war effort – but the rewards are deeply conservative. As romance blossoms with a co-worker at the factory and a wedding ring is secured, Celia's transformation is complete – a humble and hardworking wife is born.' (Desai 2015)



24. (Gilliat and Launder 1943)

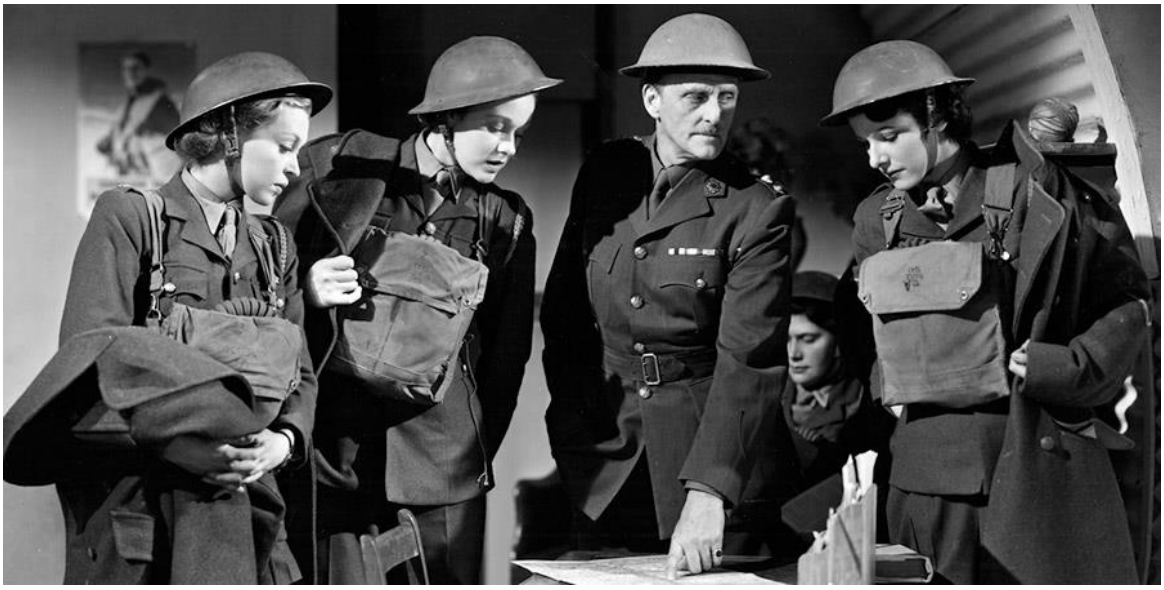


25. (Gilliat and Launder 1943)

This film truly leans on the camaraderie of the working women. Celia's husband is killed in a bombing raid. Newly bereaved, she sits in the factory's canteen with her fellow working women and listens, teary eyed to the band. The women all join in on singing a particular song, one once played at Celia's wedding, displaying the bond between the women. *Millions like Us* had a tough job, to try to persuade women that factory work was just as important as the men on the battlefront, and in its own way, appealing.
Botting states 'even though overalls could not compete with a uniform for style [...] this film is perhaps the best of all the British wartime paeans to women's work, and its closing scene, in which the recently bereaved Celia joins in a canteen sing-song with tears in her eyes, is one of cinema's most poignant.' (Botting 2017).
Similarly, *The Gentle Sex* (Howard and Elvey 1943), was made to encourage women to join the Auxiliary Territorial Service. This film did extremely well, becoming one of the most popular films of the year. It follows a group of women who join up and train as lorry drivers, but the film's emancipatory efforts are somewhat undermined by the rather

patronising attitude expressed by the men. One soldier, pondering on their late arrival remarks: “I expect they’ve stopped to have their hair waved.” (Howard and Elvey 1943) Yet the film clearly had the right combination of glamour and realism to make war work seem attractive.

26. (Howard and Elvey 1943)



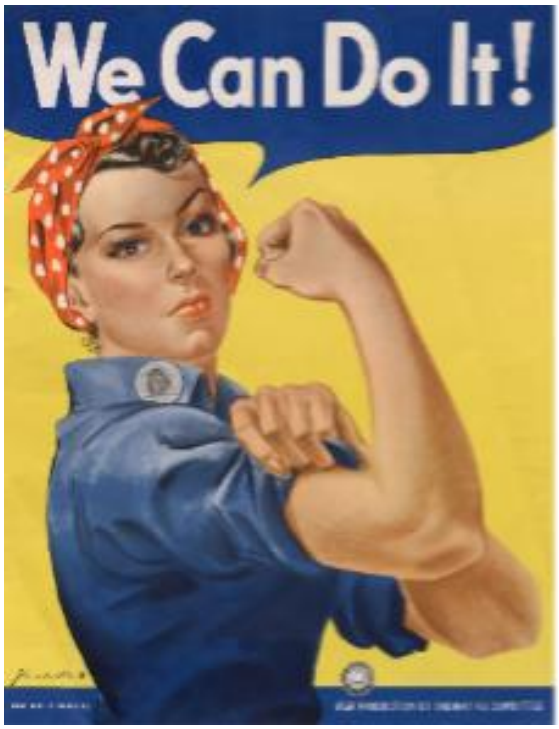
27. (Howard and Elvey 1943)

These two stills from the film are taken from the beginning and end. In the beginning, as seen in the first image, the girls are well groomed in their new clean uniforms. Each has their hair styled in a sleek, well maintained, and high effort updo. One character is seen checking her manicure as they wait to join the Auxiliary Territorial Service training camp. Each of the girls wear simple yet effect makeup, like blush, eyeshadow, and lipstick. The high effort and maintenance in their appearance is highlighted in this scene before they face any hard work. In comparison to the second photo which features the girls later in the film, they are no longer focused on their looks but now on their work ahead. They have swapped their well-kept hairstyles for helmets, and their uniforms are worn in. They have learned to drive lorries and man ack-ack batteries. For their hard work throughout the film and change of attitudes, learning to do their part for their country and the war effort, they are rewarded with romance. However, as the narrator of the film says 'war is not kind to lovers' (Howard and Elvey 1943).

These two films offer a great insight onto how the government and film industry viewed women during the time of the war. These films were both well received at the time by critics and general audiences. The focus on everyday people was a new concept at the time and while even though being propaganda, the films ensured to include plenty of entertainment through comedic, relatable dialogue and heartwarming romance. This was in order to make it more digestible to viewers, especially catering to women. Britain's main goal in these propaganda films was to portray the ideal working woman. An idealisation begun to form of the working woman and what she could do for her country. The ideal working woman was humble, she was not vain yet still presented herself well, she worked unforgiving jobs without complaint, she took care of those around her and mourned her husband in silence. Summerfield states 'The ideal woman worker was one who combined efficiency with femininity." (Summerfield 2014 pg. 36). These women worked hard for the war effort, sacrificed almost all they had, without a mutter of grievance and still stayed in line to be become the perfect, submissive wife.

American films played a similar part to play in producing WWII propaganda films. After joining the war in 1941, the U.S. began to take part in producing their own propaganda.

Most famously, Rosie the Riveter became a motivation to the working women of the time, pushing them into the workforce.



28. (Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company) (1942)

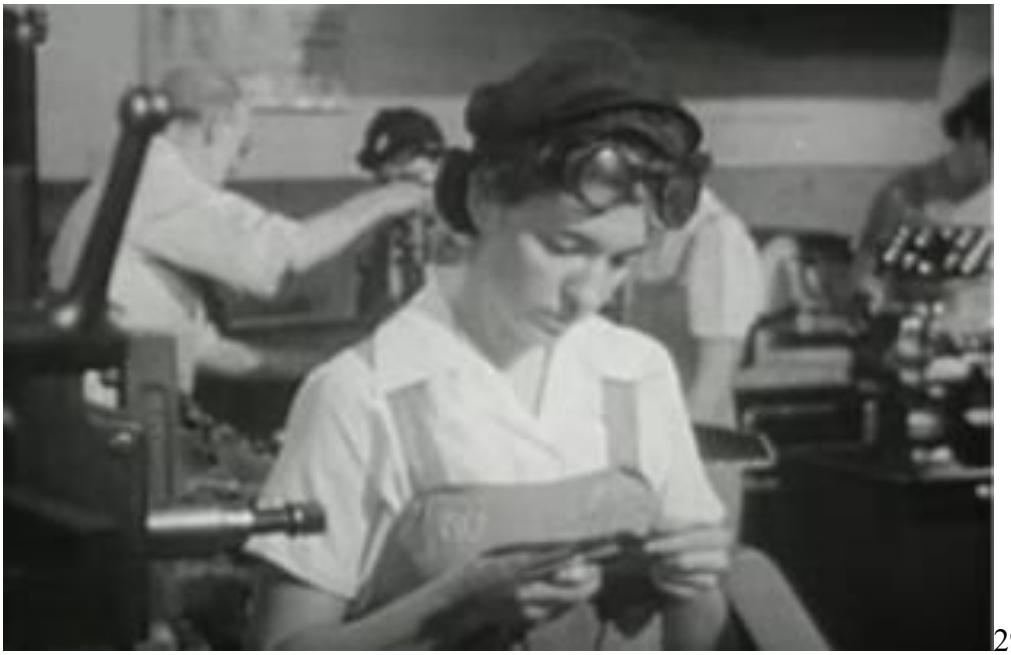
The motivational quote 'We Can Do It!' (Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company) (1942) once again glorified the community and camaraderie that came from working as a collective for the war effort. This was a completely new image for women to be taking on, now that it was deemed necessary by their governments. Davenport states

> The widely propagated notion that the U.S. woman is born to be a housewife has been slowly undercut by the rising participation of women in the paid workforce and changing family patterns throughout the twentieth century. However, deeply held cultural values die slowly and serve to mask and mystify people's actual experiences, and thereby, their consciousness. (Davenport 1983)

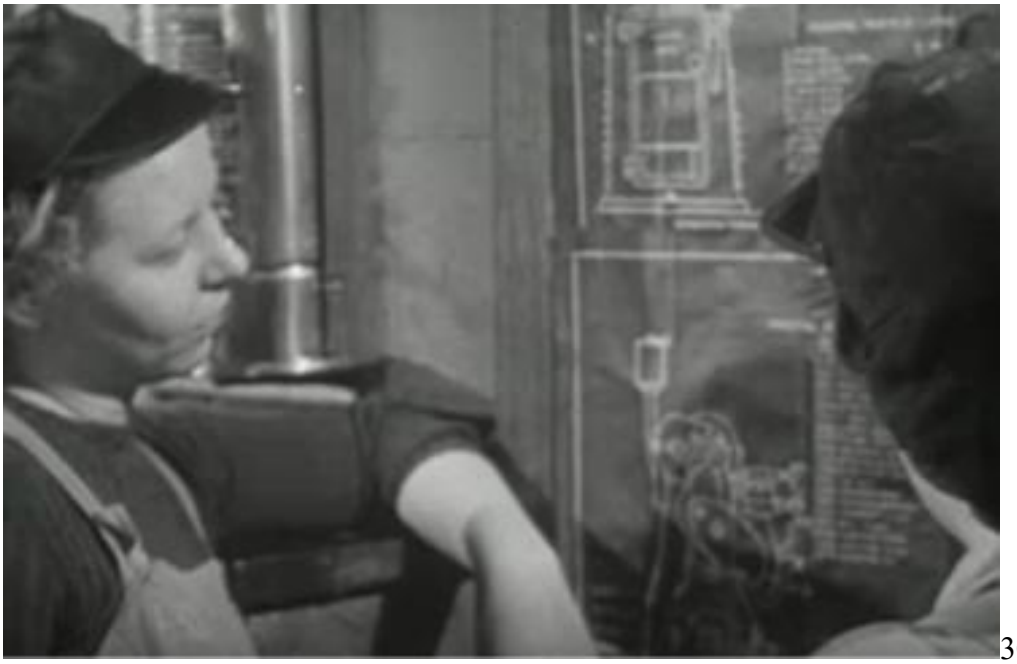
Rosie displays a tough, stern face, ready for action. Wearing a boiler suit paired with a full face of makeup, she encourages others to do their part for their country all while not disregarding their femininity. The ultimate message was she can do the same hard work a man could, all while keeping up with beauty trends and maintaining her femininity.

‘Supervising Women Workers’, a training film produced and distributed by the American government was aimed at companies producing war materials that were taking in women workers for the first time. Although not a film intended for general audiences, this film shows a depiction of women from the lense of the American government and highlights how necessary women were needed yet still treated condescendingly and with lack of respect. A women’s independence was framed as a patriotic duty rather than a right and something

Independence was framed as a patriotic duty rather than a right. The rewards seen in film, remained deeply conservative, often ending in a modest wedding. Even as women laboured in traditionally male roles, cinematic narratives ultimately steered them toward marriage and self-sacrifice, reinforcing the innocent “girl next door” archetype as the most socially acceptable form of wartime femininity.



29. (Kerkow Herbert Productions 1944)

 30.

(Kerkow Herbert Productions 1944)

Above shows two of the several scenes depicting the women working in the factory. They are shown wearing the factories uniforms, listening carefully to instructions, and paying attention to and carrying out their work effectively. The women are not depicted as being self-centred concerning their looks as seen in *Millions like us* or *The Gentle Sex* and only seem focused on the work at hand.

However, the male characters in the film talk about these women in a demeaning and condescending way. One of the high-ranking male employees says that ‘women scare me, at least in a factory’ (Kerkow Herbert Productions 1944), reinstating that women in the factory is outlandish and something to be mocked. There is a constant comparison between the men and women workers and almost all of the comparison to women is negative, often disguised within backhanded compliments such as "Women workers can be surprisingly good producers". (Kerkow Herbert Productions 1944). The danger of ‘mixing pleasure with business’ (Kerkow Herbert Productions 1944) is also mentioned several times throughout this training film, warning the men of how favouritism and too much attention can give the feminine mind the wrong idea. Women are repeatedly diminished into weak, naive stereotypes in this film that are only begrudgingly needed due to the war.

This campaign film displays the frivolous and delicate view of women that was prevalent during WWII in America despite the actions of millions of women proving their capabilities within the workforce and Armed Forces. Ultimately the appearance of the working woman during the war was undermined with the use of harmful stereotypes. Women were expected to work without complaint for their country all while being held to a double standard. These films reinstate that although Britain and America appeared to have a more progressive representation of women during the war than Germany, it was only conditional and temporary. A women's independence was framed as a patriotic duty rather than a right and the rewards for their labour in traditionally male roles were often conservative, pushing them towards marriage. This reinforces the innocent "girl next door" archetype as the most socially acceptable form of wartime femininity.

Chapter Three

Britain and America post WWII

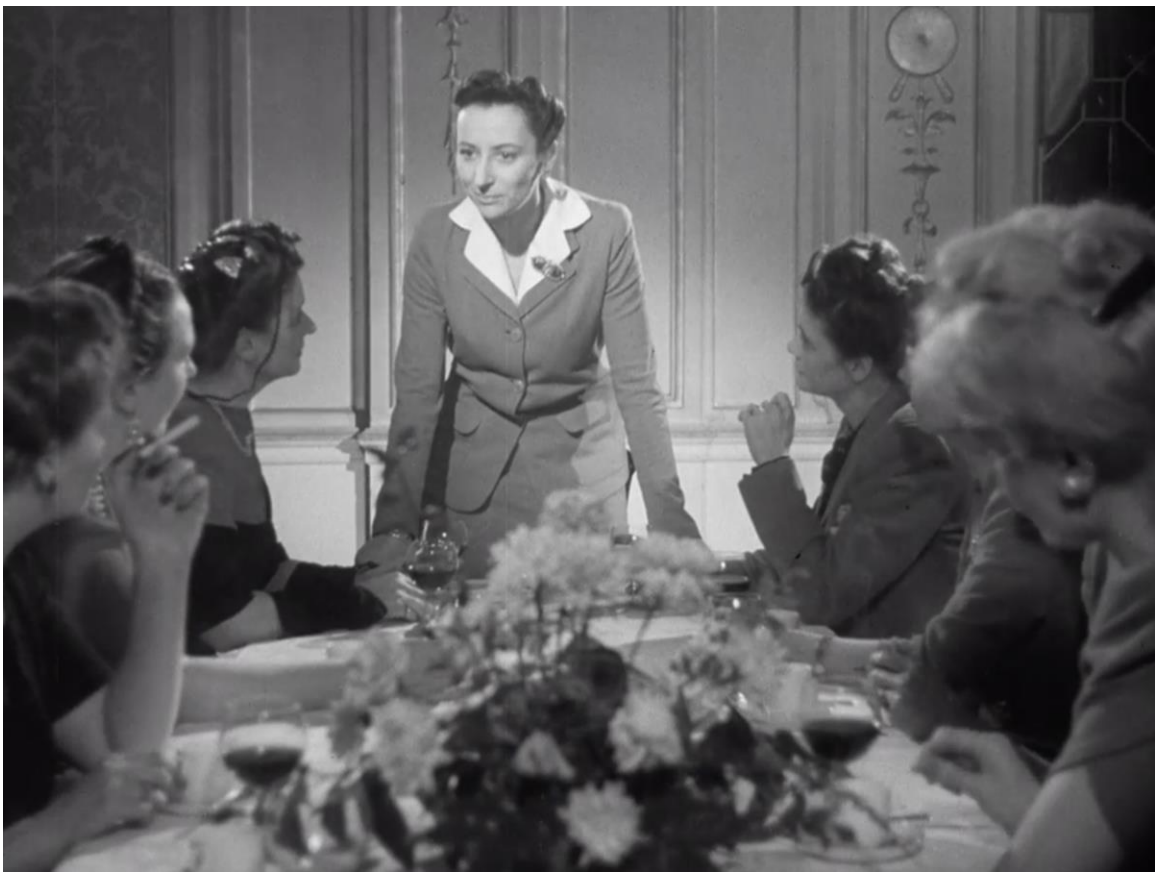
Following the Second World War, a shift occurred that once again rearranged the structure of society. With the men returning from war, dynamics in the workplace and home were regressing to their previous state from a few years prior. It was no longer deemed as profitable or necessary for women to be in the workforce after the war had concluded. However, it was not met with complete surrender. Women who had now lived a life of work and independence were more hostile to give up their newly found freedom. ‘Women want a new world; women want new ideas’ (Massingham 1946).

This led to an array of propaganda pushing for demonization of independent women in media. Media was propelling the regression of women back into their roles as housewives in the wake of the war and the arrival of men returning. The British and United Sates governments were effectively pushing propaganda in a completely different way than during the war. The rise of marriages, birth rates, and lack of divorces in the years following the war were somewhat a result of the propaganda and media being propelled post WWII. May states that in the USA ‘Procreation in the cold war era took on almost mythic proportions / couples who married in the 1940s and 1950s completed their families by the time they were in their late twenties' (May 1988). The need for women to return to their old roles was indispensable for the continuation of the patriarchy.

Governments began producing media to aid the return of the housewife, using film as a persuasive tool. May states ‘Experts called upon women to embrace domesticity in service to the nation, in the same spirit that they had come to the country's aid by taking wartime jobs.” (May 1988). During this time in cinema, the roles of women were flipped and reverted to the prewar ideals for women. Once again, women were encouraged to get married, become mothers and fulfil their duties as a good housewife. At the time of media that sold the ‘American Dream’, the ideal role for women was no longer in the factories or the fields, it was in the kitchen, in the bedroom and always in the grasp of

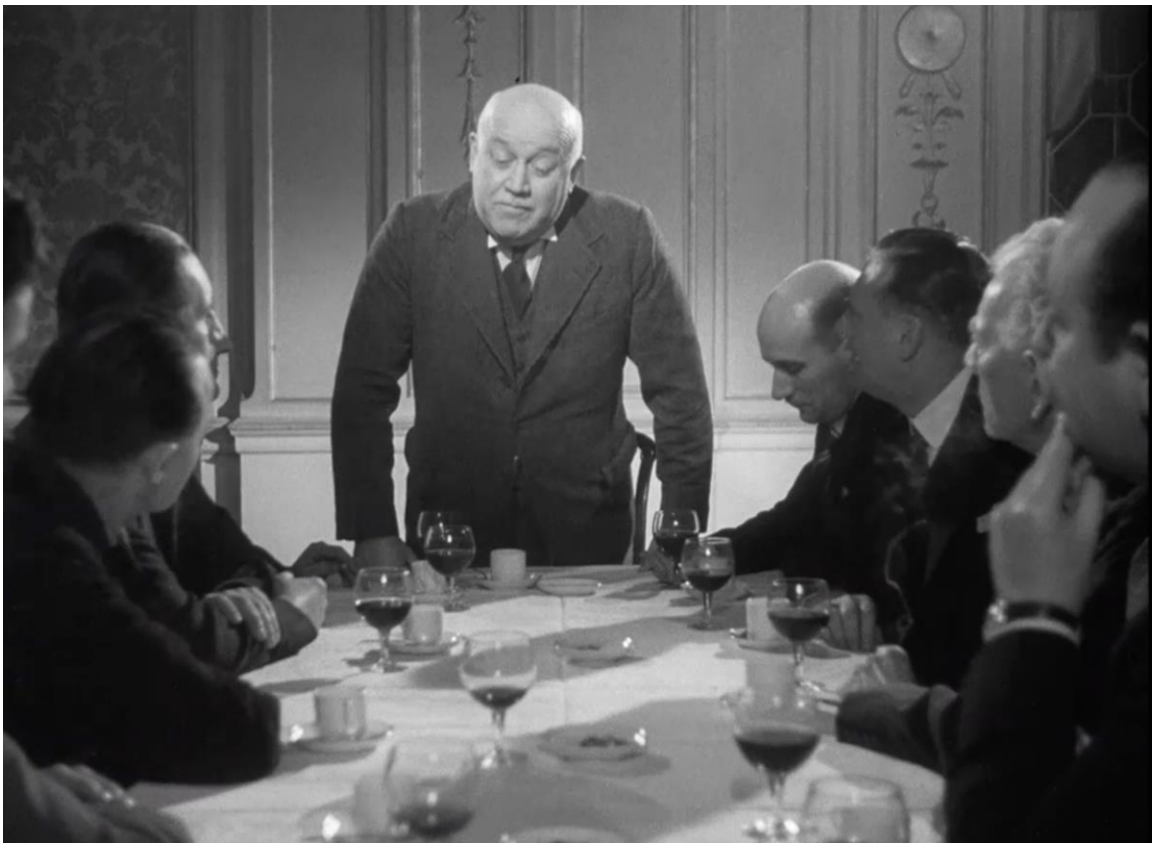
their husbands. Haskell writes ‘The propaganda arm of the American Dream machine, Hollywood.’ (Haskell, M. 1974). The same three caricatures of women seen during the Second World War were again implemented in the post war period, once again trying to portray women in a way most suitable for both Britain and America’s post war regimes. The mother and innocent girl caricatures were extremely important in pushing against the working woman as was the demonification of the independent woman

The film, *Women after the War* (Massingham 1946), produced for the Directorate of Army Kinematography, shone a light on the challenges faced for British women post war. With the return of men from battlefields, the previous hierarchy within the family dynamic was struggling to slide back into place. This film highlighted the thoughts of both men and women, offering different perspectives and asking the question, where is a women's place in a post war Britain?



31.(Massingham 1946)

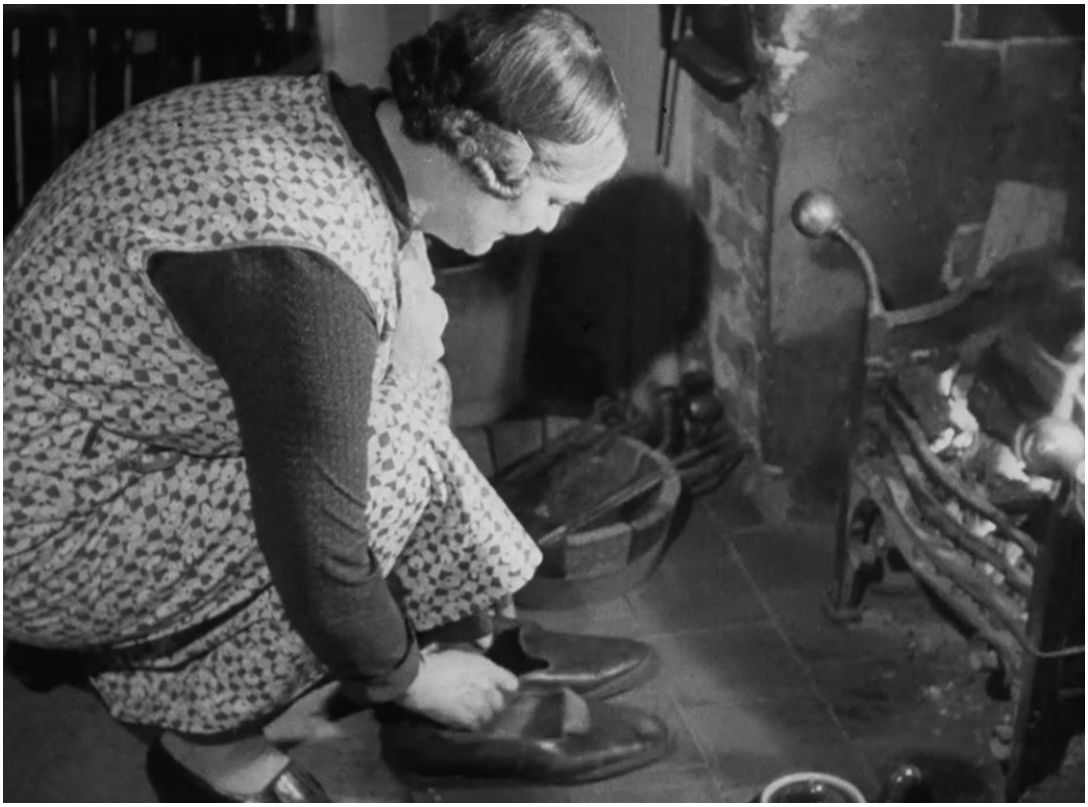
The campaigning film opens with a strong woman, talking to her peers, seen smoking and drinking around a table. They look to the woman in the centre as she gives a speech. Well dressed, with tailored clothes and fashionable hairstyles, these women appear wealthy. The table is well decorated with a flower centre piece, showing the care put into their meeting. The centre woman states, ‘Women have shown what they can do in war and now that the fighting is over, women intend to show the world what they can do in peace’ (Massingham 1946). Their intentions are clear; they intend to keep working as they did during the war. They have shown their capabilities and do not plan to slip back into their prewar, housewife roles, they intend to smoke and drink as the men do. The woman don determined faces, gleaming with hope for their working and independent futures.



32.(Massingham 1946)

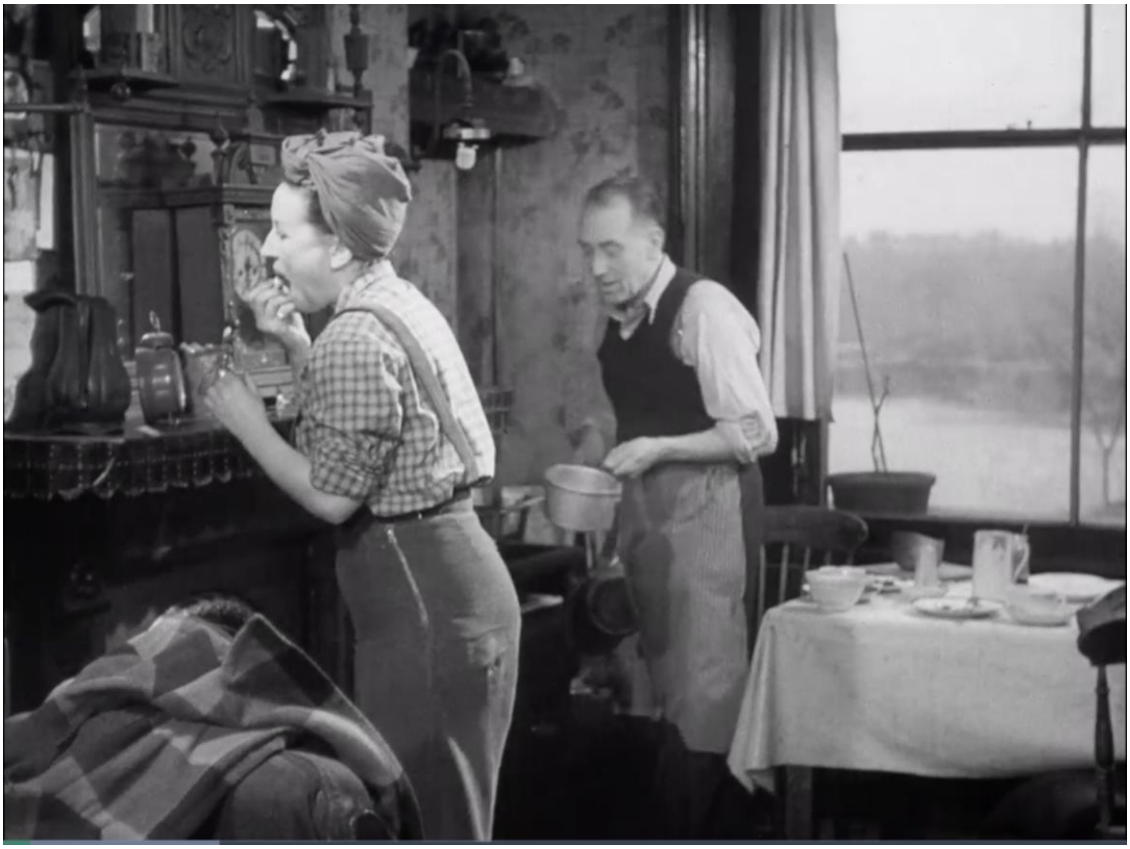
The shot then fades into the next, displaying men in the same positions the women were, drinking and smoking while watching the centre man give his speech. The men are all dressed in the same expensive looking suits, the table no longer displays a flower arrangement but just their glasses and cups and saucers, which can be presumed has been

served by a woman. The centre man then goes on to say, in contrast to the previous woman, ‘And now that the fighting is over [...] the little dears can [...] get back to their pots and pans’ (Massingham 1946). The difference between these two scenes is clear, the men see their return as a direct reason for the women to return to their place within the home before the war. The men not only expect the women to return to serve the house but also belittle them, calling them little dears and reduce their work to just the pots and pans.



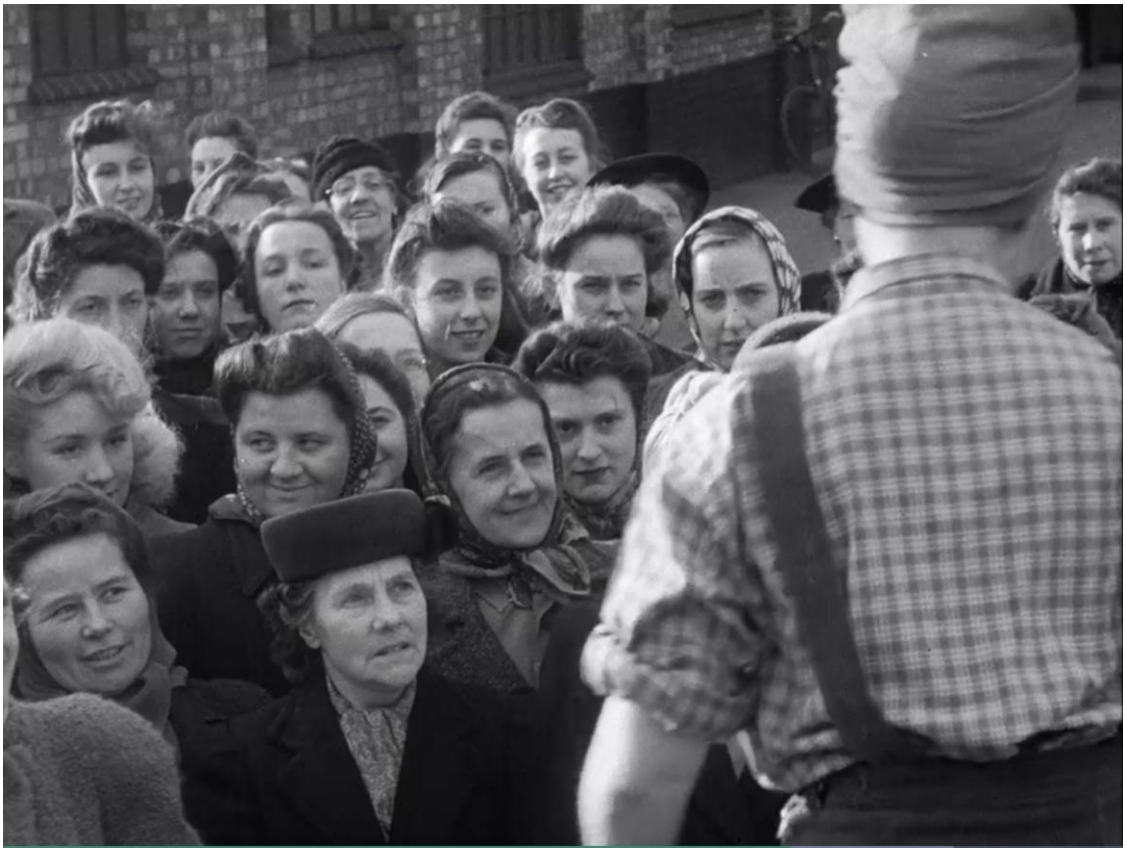
33.(Massingham 1946)

The film comments on different kinds of women during this time, such as the ‘household angel, who stayed at home, raised a family and humoured her husband’ (Massingham 1946). To accompany this description is a women wearing a house dress and practical, short hair. She dutifully places her husband's slippers before the fire to warm them for him, before making him a cup of tea, all with a warm smile on her face. She is portrayed as nothing but a caregiver and is what is expected of the women now that the war is over.



34.(Massingham 1946)

However, this film also showcases the working woman and her perspective, post war. Above, the scene depicts a woman applying lipstick in the mirror, ignoring the man who struggles to prepare his breakfast. The narrator comments that ‘the little woman goes to her part time job at the factory and leaves the old man to cope [...] he’s not very good at coping, is he? And why should he be? [...] Women’s place is in the home’ (Massingham 1946). The woman is well regulated to this routine; she has had to adjust to help her country. She moves about the room with confidence, her belongings layed out, ready to pick up just as she sets off out the door. The man looks bewildered, struggling to adapt, pots of water boiling over on the stove and pans burning with food. His apron looks out of place on him, intended to be comical for a man to be wearing. The table is scattered with dirty dishes he is expected to attend to. The clear reversal of roles is intended for a comedic moment, despite this being the reality of many women of the time.

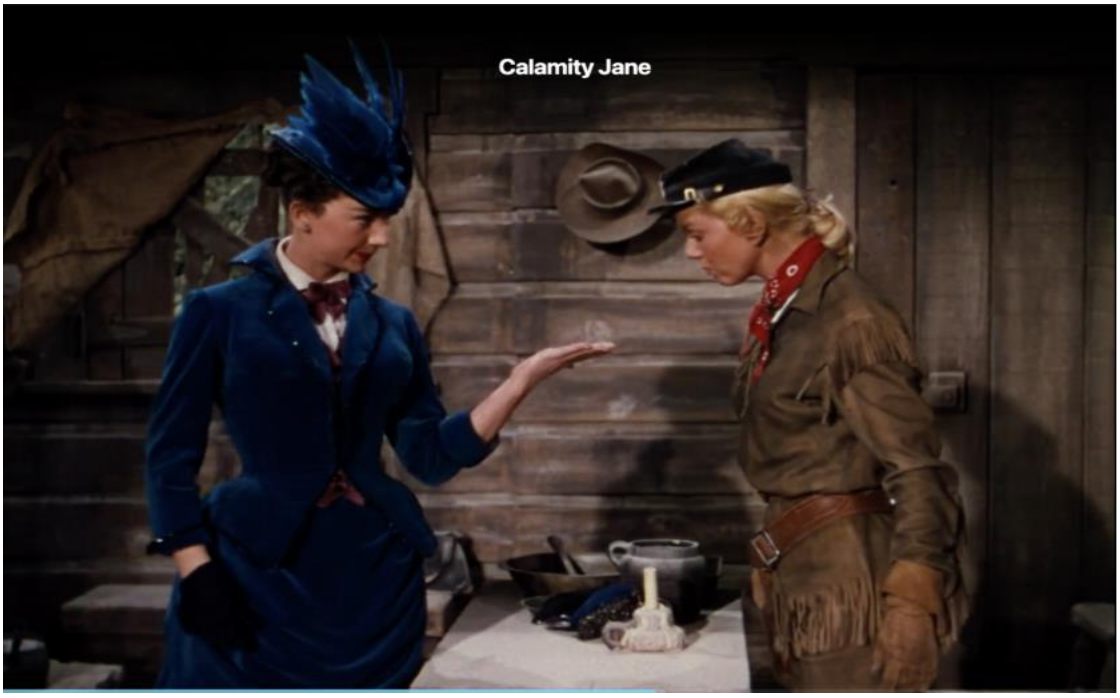


35.(Massingham 1946)

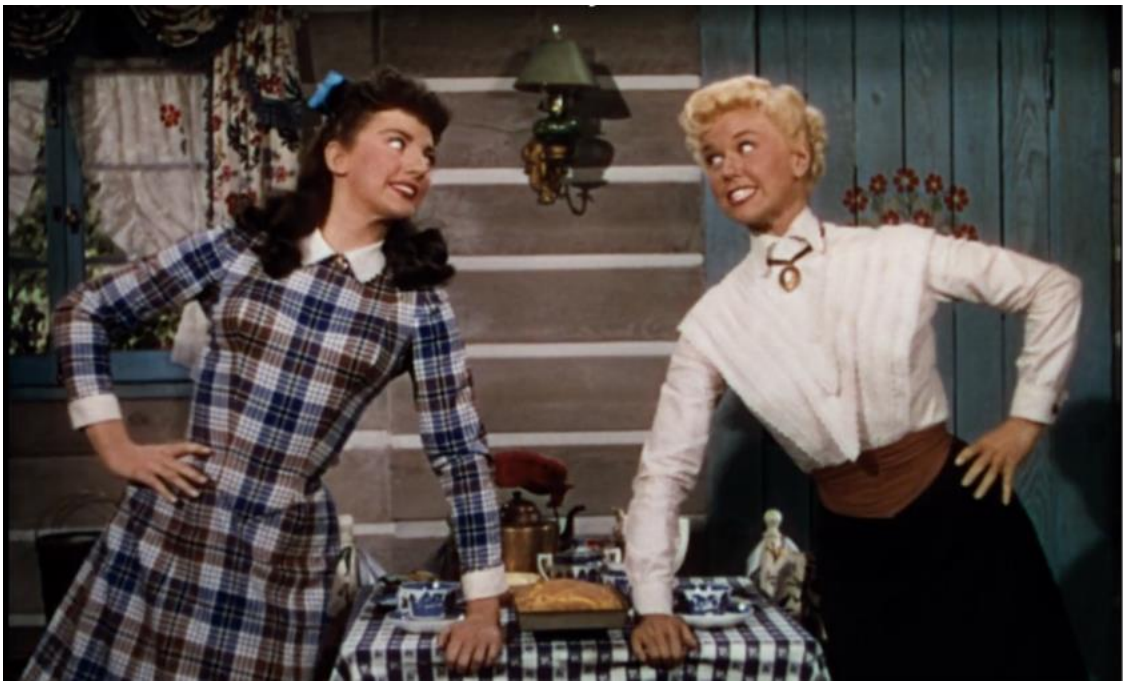
One of the main arguments made in the film is that women are taking the men's jobs, now that the war is over and they have returned. Despite displaying their full capabilities of physical endurance and mental concentration, women continue to be belittled, and their work reduced to nothing more than a nuisance. Their wages are numerously called ‘pocket money’, comparing them to children, doing their chores for pennies. Above is an impromptu meeting of female factory workers. The leader exclaims the need for equal wages for equal work. The woman is charismatic and compelling, urging the women to fight for equality. The crowd is mixed with smiles and questionable looks but as the speech goes on the women become riled up and hopeful. The woman exclaims that ‘if payed the same wages as men [...] undercutting disappears.’ (Massingham 1946). This was one of men’s biggest arguments about women in the workforce, due to earning less, they were more likely to be chosen for jobs than men, equal pay would eradicate this. However, this was not the solution that men wanted.

The film presented different views and depictions of women at the time. The consensus was that men were happy to return to their old routines with the women returning as the ‘household angel’ (Massingham 1946), while women who had now had a taste of work life, were not only going to fight to keep their jobs but improve them also.

This small budget campaign film is an example of the small-scale films being produced by Britain in the post war era. During a time of rations and rebuilding, this film depicts and comments on a woman’s place in society. In comparison, Hollywood’s huge scale productions were full of glamour, musical sequences, and stars. However, they too were illustrating and remarking on a woman's place. Both Britain and America follow the same three archetypes of the innocent, conforming girl, the mother, and the independent, ‘fallen’ woman, pushing the same messages of a societal conforming woman.



36.(Butler 1953)



37.(Butler 1953)

The images seen above are two stills from a musical number, ‘A Woman’s Touch’, in the 1953 film, *Calamity Jane.* This film ultimately shows the title characters' journey from independence to domesticity. The film follows Calamity Jane in late 1870’s Deadwood, South Dakota. Jane is a tough woman, known for acting, talking, and dressing like a man and her sharp shooting and riding on the frontier. She makes a boastful claim that she is to bring a famous showgirl, Adelaid Adams, to the lonely patrons of Deadwood’s saloon. However, unknowingly brings her maid, Katie, instead. After discovering the truth, they become friends, and Katie moves into Jane’s shabby shack that lacks any kind of homely touch, as seen in the first image. From there we see a makeover scene. As the shack receives a ‘Women’s touch’, so does Jane, swapping her manly attire to an ensemble that perfectly encompasses a respectable woman of the time, as seen in the second image.

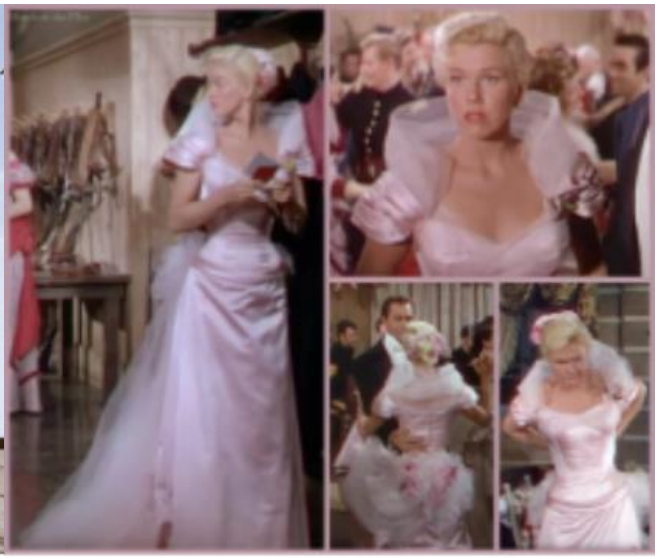
This Western musical comedy, released only eight years after the end of the Second World War, was a commercial hit, aimed at everyone in the family. During a time of Cold War anxieties in the United States the film was seen as entertainment escapism, while also using comedy to reinforce the gender roles that had been disrupted during WWII. Audiences embraced the light-hearted comedy and praised, leading lady, Doris

Day for her performance. As seen in a review of the film of the time, 'RIP-ROARING outdoor musical/ Doris Day, the Forces and the masses' favourite, is simply terrific [...] with a hand-picked supporting cast' sets a gruelling and a glorious pace.' (Kinematograph Weekly 1954)

In this scene in *Calamity Jane*, see figure 11., despite being set decades before, there is a comparison between Jane and the women of the post war period. Jane's life is completely her own. She is firstly independent; this is displayed in a masculine way as men were commonly the only ones allowed any independence. She is renowned for her shooting abilities and dresses in the best clothes for the job, a man's. Presenting herself in a masculine way, carrying out a male dominated job is seen as one of the biggest running jokes in the film. But for many women, this was their reality, what was asked of them, not even a decade prior, before having it taken away from them.

The makeover scene that I have chosen to discuss is a great example of the switch women were expected to make and once again was reinforcing gender roles in film. Jane, with the aid of Katie goes from an independent, free spirit to the role of a dutiful housewife. Her cabin is redecorated, allowing Katie to teach Jane skills like cleaning the home, cooking, baking and overall adding the 'women's touch.' Everything about Jane is changed to fit the societal expectations of her, as a woman of both the time when the film was set and when it was made. The makeover in which Jane goes under is in fact all for the engrossment of a man.

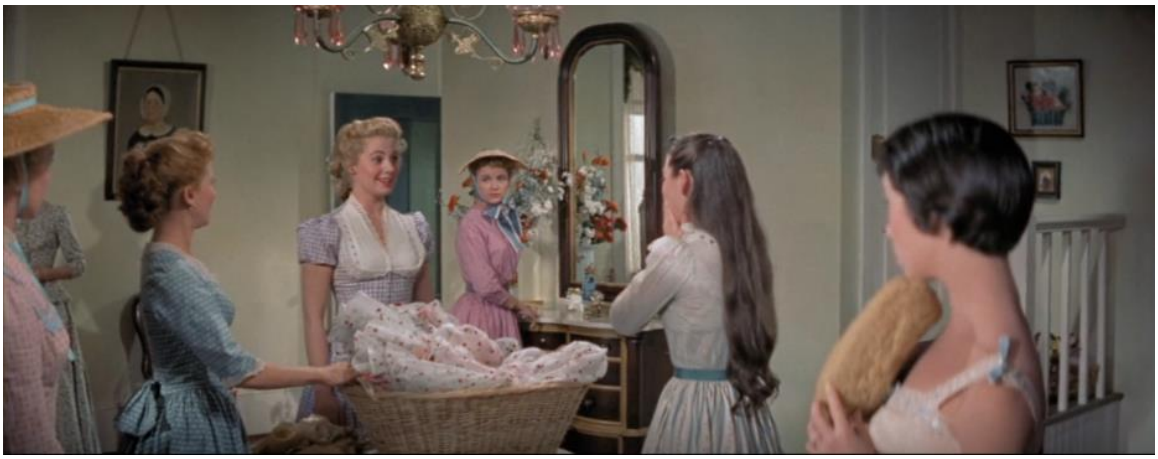
38.(Butler 1953)



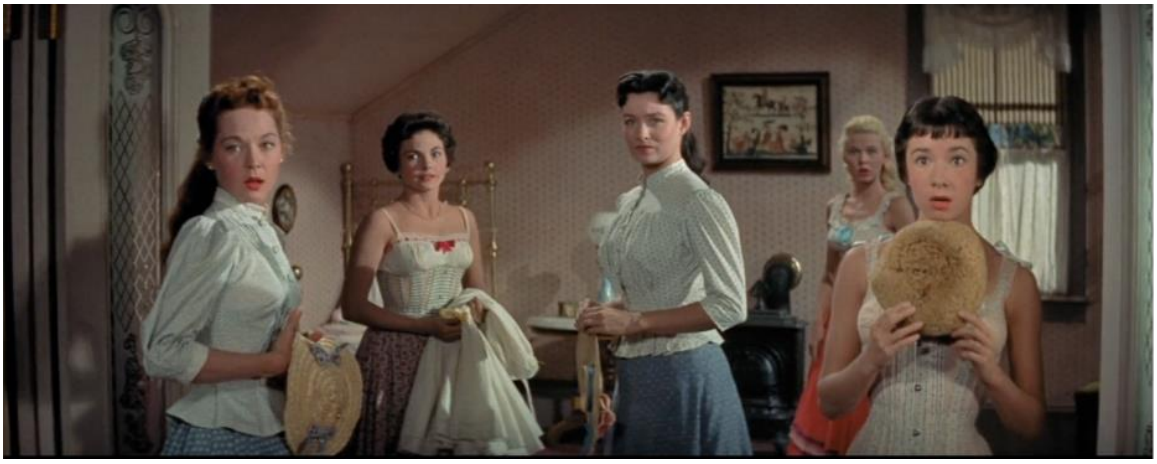
39. (Butler 1953)

Her interest in a man justifies changing everything about herself. In return, she settles down in a life that is portrayed that every woman should want. The film ends on what is meant to be a high, featuring a double wedding, each woman marrying their respective men. However, this ending feels like an underwhelming step back from the life Calamity Jane has led so far, travelling across the country. This can be seen as comparison to the real women of the time, going from independent lives, full of working days, and fulfilment to being sent back to work in the home with little to no freedom, now once again, tied down by their husbands.

Another film from this period is *Oklahoma!* (Zinnemann 1955), similarly, it is a period piece from the frontier era that depicts Laurey, a young woman, confident in herself, leading a life for herself and undeterred or amused by men. This presentation of a strong female lead also deteriorates over the course of the film and ultimately sees her married to the man she claimed she detests throughout the film. This film ultimately categorizes women into three caricatures. The innocent girl next door, who ultimately gets her happy ending of marriage, the motherly figure, and the immoral girl, aware and in tune with her own sexuality. This is seen in the nude photos of the French girls and in the character Ado Annie.



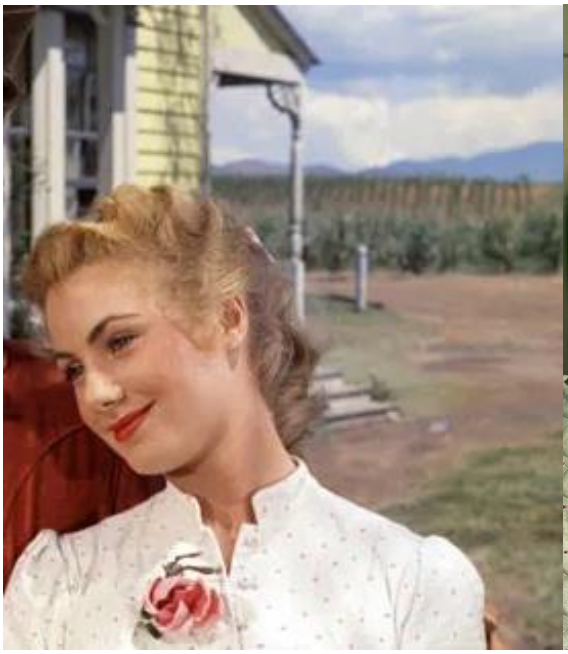
40. (Zinnemann 1955)



41.(Zinnemann 1955)

Above is a scene from the musical number ‘Many A New Day' which depicts Laurey’s annoyance at her peers blubbering over men. She is an independent woman who does not understand the reasoning behind allowing the men around them so much control over their emotions. In the song she sings ‘Why should a woman who is healthy and strong, Blubber like a baby cause her man's gone away [...] Never have I once looked back to sigh, Over the romance behind me’ (Zinnemann 1955). She makes it clear that she does not care for the attention or lack thereof, of men. She stands up straight and speaks clearly and purposefully, it is clear that she is confident and true in what she is saying. The women around her are confused and shocked at her unconventional mentality, displaying faces of judgement and bafflement. Laurey does not see the appeal of allowing

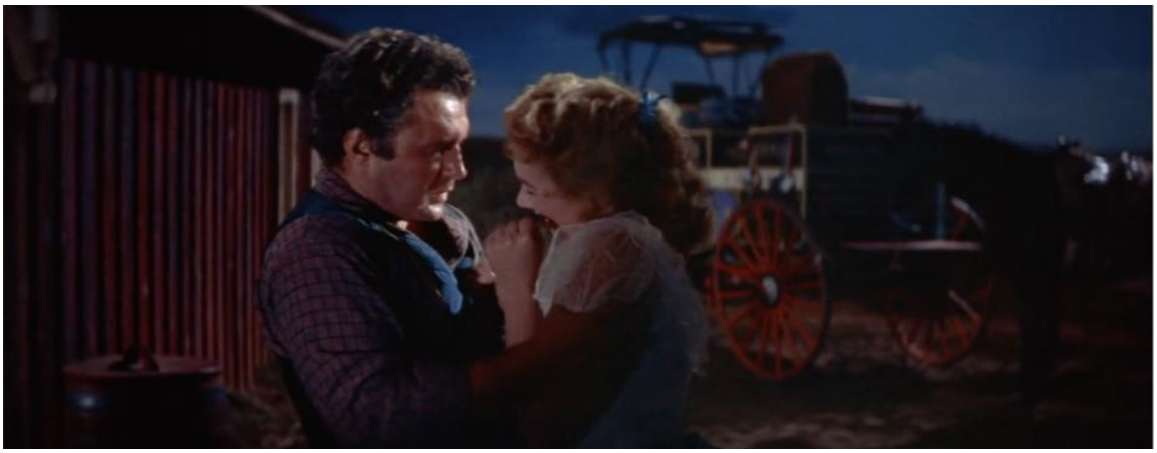
these men to control their lives and follows her own emotions with little influence. However, she later detours from this state of mind.



42.(Zinnemann 1955)

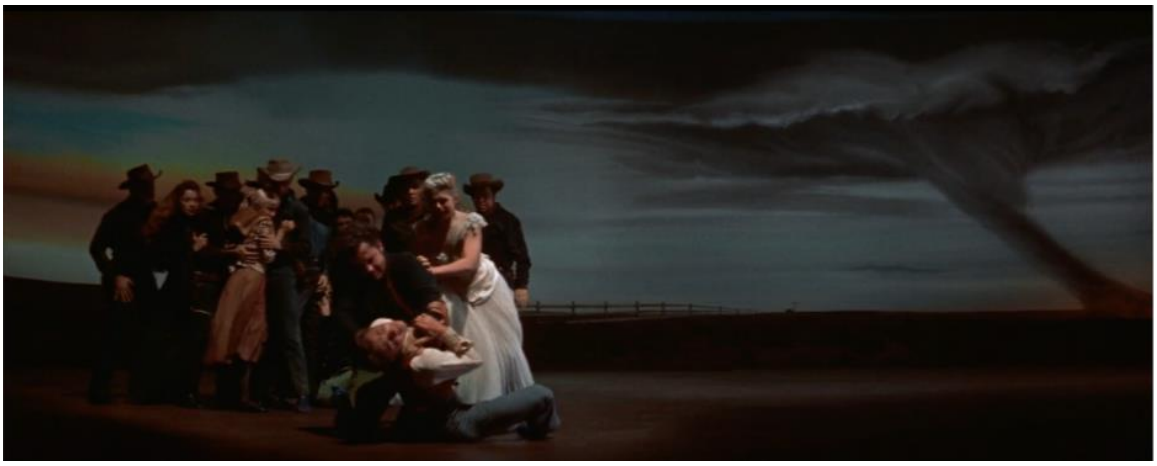
43. (Zinnemann 1955)

Laurey is the perfect depiction of the ideal young woman at the time. She slots into several architypes and male fantasies, like the girl next door and farmers daughter. She effortlessly looks beautiful, with her blonde hair styled to perfection, dressed in a white dress with a high neck, adorned with flowers and a full face of makeup, all while doing her part of the farm work. Laurey rejects the advancements of another man and chooses the man that has been chasing her the whole film, despite her initial rejections. She is rewarded for her admirable choices with a dream wedding and happily ever after.



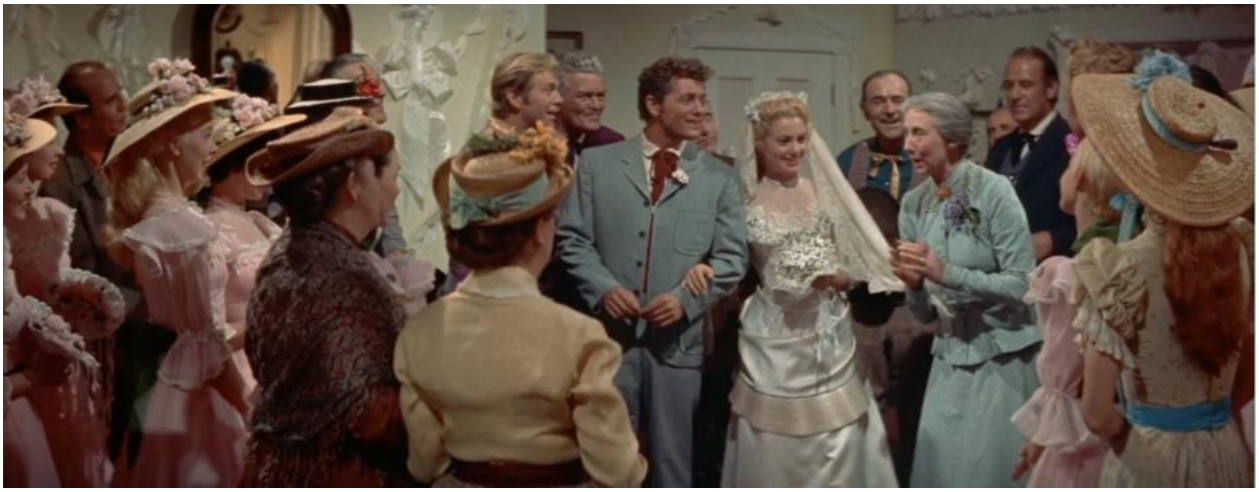
44.(Zinnemann 1955)

Laurey, is threatened, as seen above, by a rival love interest, Jud. He sees her as a prize or reward, something to take for his own and does so by force with little regard for her wants or emotions. He is depicted as a typical farmers hand, wearing a checkered shirt and vest, he is a working man that believes for his hard work he should receive something in return. He grips her forcefully as she tries to turn to walk away from his unruly confession of lust and desire. Throughout the film, it is apparent that the men are driven by lust, many flaunting and gawking at photos of nude French women, blathering on, unbashful of their desire and craving of a woman they can own like an object, similarly to the photos. The motherly figure 'Aunt Heller' also remarks that the girls in these photos 'ought to be ashamed of themselves' (Zinnemann 1955). These women are far from exempt from scrutiny. This reinforces the belief that the working, unmarried, immodest woman is wrong and immoral.

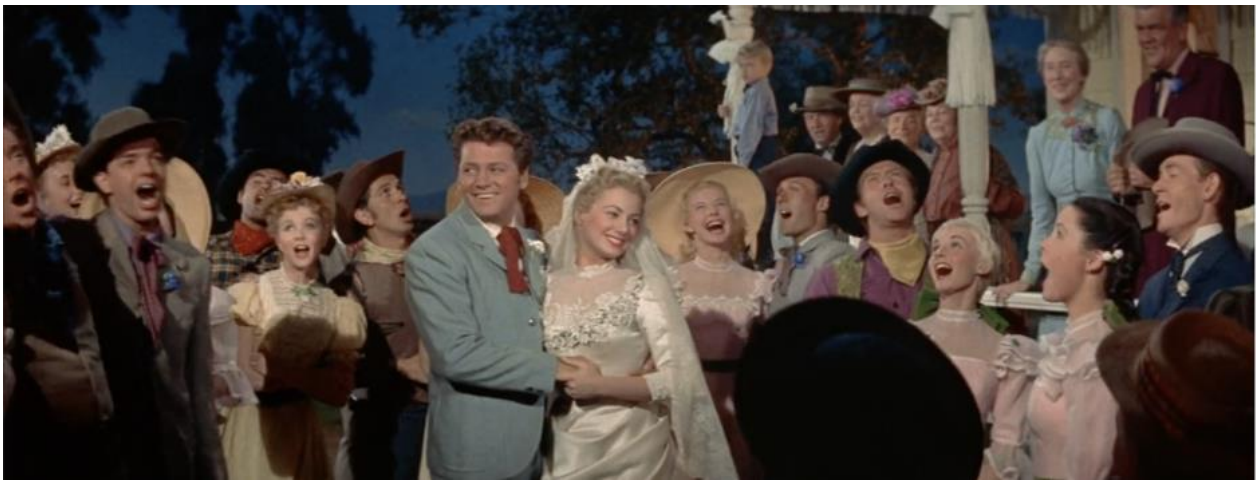


45.(Zinnemann 1955)

The dream sequence depicts Laurey watching Jud, attack and kill her main love interest Curley and brutally take her away by force. The scene depicts an overwhelming sense of fear and dread. In the background, a tornado can be seen approaching, filling the sky with dark swirling clouds. The townsfolk stand behind, clustered together with no sign of helping, fuelling Laurey's feeling of isolation. She is unable to pull her lovers attacker off him and feels helpless in this moment, falling to the ground weeping. The dark and foggy landscape consumes her, fading her once pure white dress into grey. Once an independent girl, uncaring of the men and their wants, she is now submissive from worry and fear. She ultimately decides that in order to remain safe in this world, she must have the protection of a man.



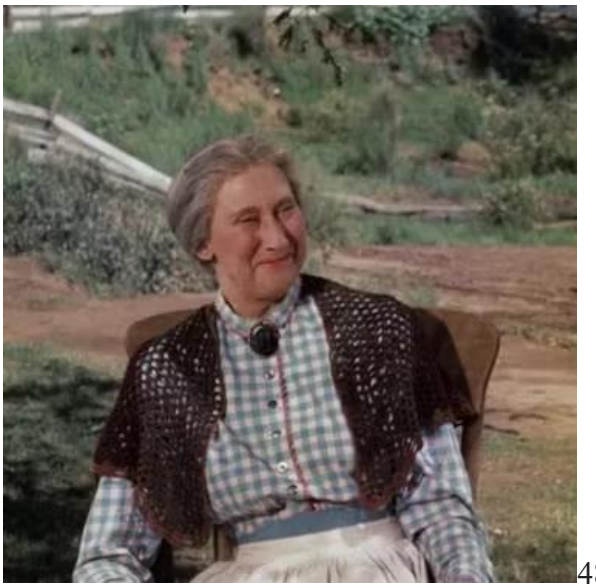
46.(Zinnemann 1955)



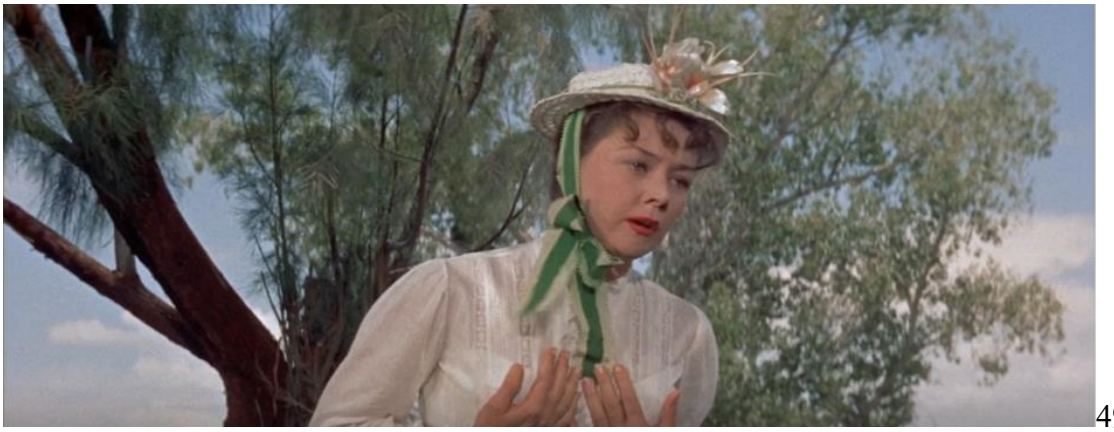
47.(Zinnemann 1955)

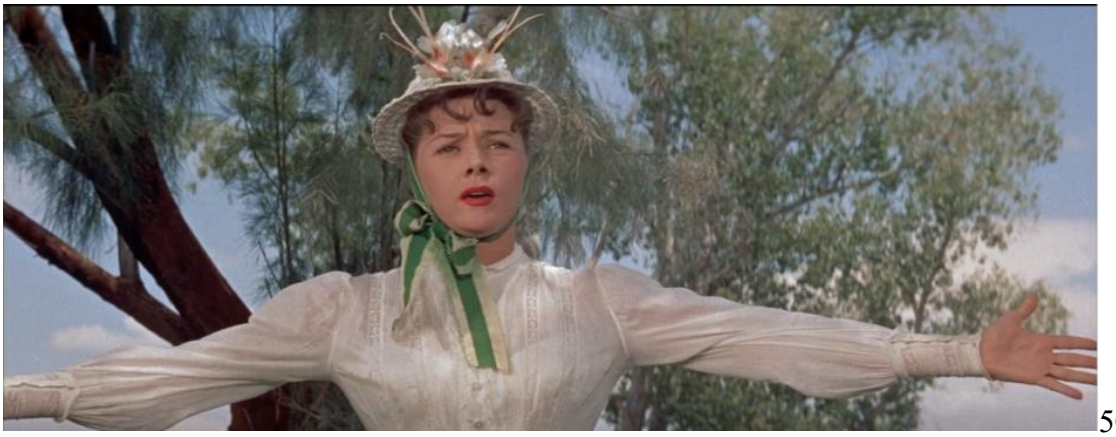
Towards the end of the film, Laurey gets her fairytale wedding, surrounded by the townsfolk and her peers. She wears a modest white dress and is beaming with delight as she fulfils her duty of becoming a wife. The townsfolk, dressed in pastel colours, gladly sing and congratulate the young couple. She ultimately gets married, partly as a form of protection and later realizes, also love, despite spending the majority of the film loathing her husband to be. Laurey gets her ideal happy ending as any young woman does in a film from this time. Though once seen as a working independent woman, she has been struck by fear and has stepped into her ‘role’ as a woman, a wife.

Despite these two films being set before either World War, they correspond with the women of the time of the release of these films, depicting a parallel to their once independent lives that have been deemed unattainable after the end of the war. Their roles are being knocked down to be the submissive housewife that best suits their societies.

 48.(Zinnemann 1955)

Aunt Eller also follows a formula for a well-respected woman. She is affectionally called Aunt by everyone she knows, sliding into the mother figure for everyone she meets. She is dressed in old house clothes, never seen without an apron, insinuating all the unseen work done in the background. No longer is it appropriate for her to dress in all white, decorated with flowers like the young girls she mothers. Her grey hair is scraped back in a sensible bun as she rocks back and forth in her rocking chair, barking complaints at those who go by. She is reduced to nothing more than a caregiver. Her character, as often with this caricature, is one dimensional and lacks any real depth. She shows no wants or desires and despite being a prominent character, she does not receive any time towards her personal journey, in comparison to many of the other main characters.

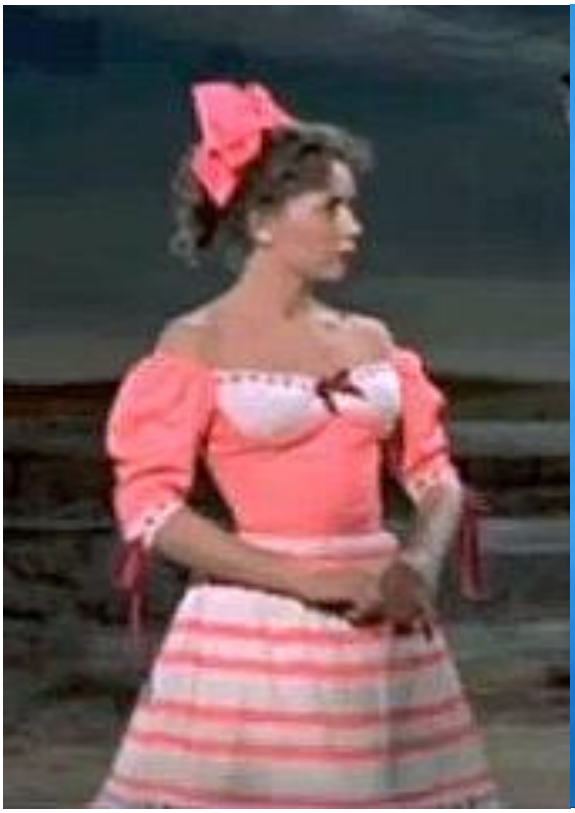

49.


50.

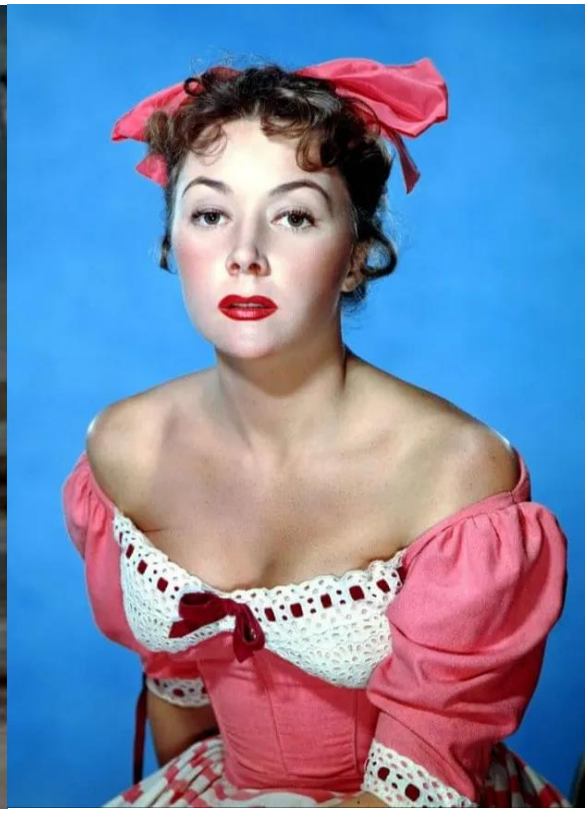
Ado Annie's character differs from Laurey's and Aunt Eller's. She is still a well-respected girl, due to her father and has expectations to marry well. She dresses in white, symbolizing her innocence, yet the fabric is sheer and covered in lace, suggesting her silhouette and skin. She presents herself as a respectable woman, wearing her hair up and a decorated hat. She also wears red lipstick, as opposed to Laurey's baby pink lipstick. This feels intentional, as her character is more in tune with her sexuality, wanting to be with a man. May states 'World War II, pilots named their bombers after their sweethearts and decorated their planes with erotic portraits. [...] In the postwar era, female sexuality continued to represent a destructive and disruptive force.' (May 1988). Independent, sexually aware women were seen as dangerous during the time of the release of this film and something that needed to be tamed.

When with either man, Annie caves to their advances, and each encounter ends in a passionate kiss. She sings a song named 'I Cain't Say No.' In this song she sings "Whut

you goin’ to do when a feller gets flirty, And starts to talk purty? [...] I hate to disserpoint a beau, When he is payin’ a call. [...] Soon as I sit on their laps [...] Somethin’ inside of me snaps—I cain’t say no!’ (Zinnemann, 1955). This song reveals how she enjoys the company of men and although it is seen as her responsibility to refrain from any kind of improper behaviour, she finds herself having a challenging time doing so. It is seen as typical for the man in this situation to try to persuade her into inappropriate behaviour but wrong for the woman to give in, reinforcing the gender roles and the responsibilities and expectations that ensue with them. The double standard for men and women is clear here, women are expected to suppress their own wants and desires while also rejecting the advances from men, for if they gave in it would not be the man's reputation that would be ruined, but the woman's.



51.(Zinnemann 1955)



52.

Annie later changes from the white dress and into a bold pink dress, off the shoulder, with a low cut. This heavily contrasts Laurey's white, high neck dresses, highlighting the difference in the character. Annie holds heavy expectations on her shoulders and struggles to adhere to the double standards and societal rules. In contrast to Laurey she wears a heavy face of makeup, with plenty of blush and red lipstick. She has a similar look to the nude French girls that the men gawk at in the film. She faces scrutiny for her desires and lacks the choice to choose her lover, as her father does not let her have a say.

The post WWII shift allowed for the glorification of submissive women in film. Unconventional and unrestrained women were illustrated as undesirable and unfit for society. The agenda of film at the time of post war uncertainty was to push women back into their roles in the patriarchy, below men. This was done by painting caricatures of women, promising an ideal life and fairytale ending to those who accepted societal rules and misfortune to those who did not. This is one of the leading factors that led to propelling of gender roles in the 1950's and the one-dimensional depiction of women during this time that was pushed onto women.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how film functioned as a powerful tool to influence the mindsets of audiences during and post Second World War. Society was constantly shaping and reshaping the social expectations placed upon women. Across Nazi Germany, wartime Britain and America, and post-war Britain and America, cinema repeatedly reduced women into easily digestible caricatures, designed to guide behaviour rather than reflect reality. While the political intentions behind these films varied across regimes, their treatment of women revealed a similar core view, women were valued most when they served the needs of the state and punished when they sought anything beyond those needs.

As discussed in Chapter One, Nazi cinema served as a visual representation of the state's mentality. It aided in promoting women primarily as biological instruments of the Third Reich. Aryan motherhood was idealised and narratives condemned independence as corrupting and dangerous. Women were stripped of individuality and transformed into symbols of racial and national continuity. Films such as *Die große Liebe (Hansen 1942)* and *Die goldene Stadt* (Harlan 1942) reinforced the belief that female fulfilment could only be achieved through submission and domestic devotion.

British and American cinema during the war presented a more outwardly progressive image, as discussed in Chapter two. The state temporarily embraced women's labour and celebrated their contributions on screen. Films acknowledged women's capabilities and promoted the collective effort from women as vital to victory. However, this thesis has shown that these portrayals remained tightly controlled. Women's independence was allowed only within defined limits and framed as temporary. The working woman was encouraged to remain humble and oriented toward marriage. Even in moments of empowerment, the films ending also ensured that women's identities were realigned with traditional femininity as seen in *Millions Like Us* and *The Gentle Sex.*

Chapter three discussed how the post-war period shift saw cinema work to undo the social disruptions caused by women's wartime independence. Films released in the late 1940s and 1950s reflect a cultural anxiety surrounding women who had tasted

independence and no longer wished to relinquish it. Through comedy and romance cinema reframed independence as unnatural and unfulfilling. Characters such as Calamity Jane and Laurey in *Oklahoma!* begin as confident and self-directed women, only to be softened or frightened by the narrative into wives. Their stories suggest that independence must be surrendered in exchange for safety and social acceptance. The dangerous independent woman is often neutralised, and her independent lifestyle traded in for marriage and domesticity.

Across all three contexts, this thesis has identified a recurring pattern in which women are filtered into three dominant caricatures, the self-sacrificing mother, the wholesome girl next door, and the dangerous independent woman. These figures guided audiences toward acceptable femininity while discouraging deviation. As these archetypes continued to dominate screens, real women's experiences began to become flattened, erasing the complexity of their real lives. Countless women worked and sustained their societies through the war period and cinema continued to largely deny them any complexity in these narratives Instead it offered watered down roles designed to serve gender roles.

Through tracing these depictions of women across different political systems, this thesis highlights the power of cinema to shape cultural memory. The legacy of these wartime and post-war portrayals extends far beyond their original contexts and resulted in the contribution of rigid gender expectations that continued to dominate popular culture throughout the mid-twentieth century. Through examining these films, this thesis recovers the way that women were constrained on screen and the means through which women's independence was repeatedly portrayed as conditional, temporary, and expendable.

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