THE GIRL IN THE MIRROR: REPRESENTATION AND MEANING IN HOLLYWOOD FILM, 1939-1940

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By

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ABSTRACT

There is no shortage of historical sources that assert that film was the dominant cultural medium of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Being both a creator of and reflection of cultural norms and practices, films can provide evidence to support a good many claims about the cultural climate of the era. With women making up the majority of film audiences during the time in question, their attitudes about themselves can be seen in popular films. This thesis seeks to uncover the impact that films had on working-class women of the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Using a model of representational analysis, this thesis argues that working-class women found mirror-image role models in the images they saw on screen. Moving past the traditional idea that women viewed film simply as escapist, this thesis argues that women actually consumed films on both an escapist platform, but more importantly, on a realistic level as well. Therefore, the cultural representation of working-class characters that appeared on screen provided the most salient opportunity for women to self-identify and find meaning. Through an active reception of the film’s characters, working-class women in 1939-1940 were able to
consume, appropriate and use the images they saw on screen in order to find a proper place of meaning; meaning that helped women understand who they were and how they fit into the world around them.
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To my son, moon, and stars … you saved my life … “I love you” is not enough.

And finally, to Renée, you believe in me when I no longer believe in myself, you give me hope when I think all is lost, and you carry me when I can no longer walk. You are the foundation of my soul. You knew I could do this … you just had to convince me - All my love!
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Irene “Dora” Hendrix.
FOREWORD

I am the child of working-class parents, whose parents were working-class as well. Growing up in the south, I saw first-hand the working-class ambience that hangs over South Carolina almost as heavily as the humidity. It is seen in the faces of the people that live there; their callused, cracked hands and their wrinkled, overly tired faces. But, there is a pride that shines through that is unlike a regional pride anywhere else in this country. As a child, I heard the stories that my grandmother told about the past over and over again. With a memory that most people would love to have, she often talked about the “hard times” – the Great Depression. The struggle for survival always played a crucial role in those stories, but also important was the culture of the south, as men, and more interestingly for me, women created their own self-identifications in a changing world.

Along with my family, film has also played a crucial role in my life. Since film had such an impact on my young life and who I became, I often wondered what affect films had on other women in the south, particularly those women who went to the movies in the late 1930s, when my grandmother would have been a mere twenty-two years old. Therefore, the process of constructing this project, using film to hypothesize about working-class women, was a natural one for me to make. Using film as evidence, this paper analyzes the way that the content of certain films is used
to determine meaning through either direct reference or inference. The scripts outline many of the attitudes present regarding femininity and its place in high, middle and working-class society. By looking at the notions and attitudes below the surface, relationship between class, femininity and social hierarchy begin to emerge, bringing to light disparities in acceptability for the different classes. This text critiques physical attributes such as facial structure, hair color and appearance, and also costume or dress. Also, the examination of the language spoken is critical, as well as dialects used by the different characters to shed light on class differences and acceptable notions of femininity. Not only does the project utilize historical texts as a foundational method, texts from class studies, gender studies, critical theory and film theory will also be used to understand the cultural representations shown on screen. Because this project is not a social science project -- it is an historical and representational analysis -- there is no way to ascertain a definite reception by working-class female audiences in 1939-40. Rather, this project takes as its goal to uncover a possible place of meaning based on a representation of reality. Therefore, the evidence examined will be women who were most prominent on the Hollywood screen in three very popular movies of the time.
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Chapter 1. Introduction and Literature Review

As in other eras, films in the 1930s were more than just entertainment and often reflected the context of American culture and values beyond that of other mediums. In the 1930s, the relatively new medium of film, with spoken narrative and visual imagery, influenced American audiences, making film both a mirror and mover of cultural values and opinions.\(^1\) While other forms of popular entertainment existed, and even thrived, in the 1930s, film emerged as the pre-eminent form of culture for audiences of the 1930s.\(^2\) Although the 1930s were full of strife and economic difficulties, over half of all Americans, an estimated 85 million people, paid an average 25 cents to go to the movies sometime during the week.\(^3\) With this type of attendance, it is safe to say that films played a major role in influencing the thoughts and behaviors of many American women, including the negotiation of the dominant normative notions of gender. Because many young women used the movies to model their behavior, film played a critical role in helping women of the 1930s develop their own sense of self, providing archetypal characters to identify with.\(^4\) Thus, films provide prime examples to investigate and locate an ideal femininity during the 1930s. By

\(^1\) William H. Young, with Nancy K. Young, *The 1930s*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), xii.
\(^3\) Young, xii, 185.
examining female stars, with their coded appearances, gestures, personalities and roles, in films from the late 1930s, a more comprehensive image of the feminine ideal is possible. Also, an examination of these stars allows for an interpretation of how these stars were received and appropriated by different groups of women across not only the middle class but also the working class.

This project examines the ways working-class women identified and found meaning through film. Using the films as evidence and by placing them within an historical, social and cultural context, this paper will look at how these cultural representations were constructed and what impact, if any, they had on women in 1939-1940. This project will show that while the cultural representation of ideal femininity was the dominant image in Hollywood film, working-class women identified, and therefore emulated, the cultural representations of their mirror image, working-class women, on screen.

**Historical Framework**

The mood of the 1930s was dominated by economic suffering beginning with the stock market crash in October 1929. This event initiated an economic crisis that saw unemployment rates rise to 25 percent at the pinnacle of the catastrophe (Young and Young xvii). Known as the Great Depression, this was a time of breadlines and soup kitchens as many Americans fought to feed their families. In urban areas, people
were forced out of their homes because of failure to pay their rent or their mortgage, while in rural farming communities, the land dried up, forcing many farmers to lose their livelihood. In general, Americans were out of work, starving, and displaced.

Following a decade of hard times and social reform from the government, the years of 1939-40 still saw more than 17 percent of the work force unemployed.\(^5\) President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s reforms, known as the New Deal, had eased the depression but its power and effectiveness was waning in the last years of the decade.\(^6\) Also by end of the decade, the war in Europe was in full swing, and, despite the cries of many isolationist sects in the United States, the participation of America in a global conflict was eminent, evidenced by the gradual increase in defense spending on behalf of the American government. Still, with the persistence of economic hard times domestically and the threat of war globally, culturally the years 1939-40 stand out as watershed years in the development of the American society.

In *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* Robert S. McElvaine argues that the Depression fostered a sense of cooperation among both the working class and the intelligentsia, and the both were searching “for a life of community and sharing.”\(^7\) This work grounds the current research chronologically and contextually, while offering a somewhat general look at attitudes during the era. Winifred Wandersee’s

\(^5\) McElvaine, 306.  
\(^6\) McElvaine, 307.  
\(^7\) McElvaine, 202.
work, *Women’s Work and Family Values: 1920-1940* concentrates on the economics of the era but also examines the cultural ramifications from the ever increasing number of women entering the workforce. Wandersee cites the beginning of a “long-range cultural change that was rooted in the economic values of twentieth-century family life.”

The growth in mass consumption and advertising played a critical role in influencing family values; including the roles of women and children, employment and standard of living. Wandersee’s principal argument is that the growing acceptance of married women workers was a direct result of how family values were changing also. The first, and arguably most crucial, change that affected the attitudes about working married women was the rise in consumerism in the post World War I era. With consumerism on the rise, there was a new widespread expectation of attaining an American standard of living. Therefore, married working women were more readily accepted not because of an absolute need for them to work, but a relative one. Second, the changing legislation regarding child labor opened up more opportunities for women to earn ancillary income. Wandersee’s text is crucial in establishing the changing and progressive attitudes in mainstream American society with regards to working-class women.

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9 Ibid., 2.
Susan Ware’s main argument in *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* is that the status of women improved in the 1930s. She makes this assertion by looking at individual women and translating their achievements into collective gains, and while this is somewhat useful for the purpose of the current research, individual sections of Ware’s scholarship will be more beneficial. Because Ware’s work is full of data on the lives of everyday women, her text is useful in providing a foundation for contextualizing and generalizing across all working-class women, thus developing a model viewer that perhaps consumed and appropriated the films used in this thesis.

For example, according Ware, the primary responsibility of women in the 1930s was the maintenance of the house and child-care duties. With over half of all families having incomes of $1100 to $1200, this gave women only $20 to $25 per week to spend on food, clothing and shelter. Although times were hard, many Americans still found it important to spend their remaining pennies to attend the movies. Ware states that movies were different than other forms of popular entertainment in the 1930s because they maintained their viewership with 60 to 90 million Americans attending movies each week. Movies also had a huge impact on the young women of the era as many looked to the stars for fashion ideas and beauty ideals.

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11 Ibid., 3.
12 Ibid., 178.
13 Ibid., 179.
way in which movies not only taught young women how to look, but also how to
interact with men. This type of data informed assertion is crucial to understanding how
working-class women lived, what they thought was important to spend their money on
and, in turn, what types of influences were the most dynamic in their lives. By using
Ware’s text, this project is able to form an ideal working-class viewer.

Lois W. Banner’s book, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History*, is an
examination of the factors that affected women’s social lives. Banner argues that
although the modern American woman emerged in the 1890s and has progressed since
that time, only the feminist reform movements of the 1960s significantly altered
women’s roles in society. While this point is not directly related to the scope of the
current project, Banner’s discussion of popular culture during the decade of the 1930s
is crucial. Just as Susan Ware does, Lois W. Banner cites the overwhelming influence
of films in the lives of women in the 1930s. To touch on the ubiquity of film’s
influence, Banner cites author Maxine Davis’ assertion that in every part of the country
and in every social group, people were talking about female movie stars.14 With this
assertion, we can deduce that although there were some regional differences among
women, a good number of them still participated in either the viewing or films or in the
fan culture surrounding the movie stars. Banner goes on to say that although people

14 Lois W. Banner, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace
were living in desperate times, they still lived “vicariously through films.” Banner’s
text informs the current project by asserting that working-class women during the
1930s found film to be an integral part of their lives and that those same women used
film to create a social discourse around the characters they saw on screen. This
manuscript, along with Ware’s, develops the ideal working-class viewer more fully.

As a contribution to the growing literature on women as well as working-class
studies, Nan Enstad’s book *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women,
Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* explores the
relationship between working-class women and popular culture. Arguing that the
consumption of popular culture allowed working-class women to carve out their own
identities, Enstad looks at dime novels, films and fashion to substantiate her claim.16
This type of argument will be crucial to developing the current project’s assumption
that women used films to self-identify. Also, this book, due to its methodology and
execution of argument will provide a role model for how the current project will be
constructed. In a similar way, Lauren Rabinovitz’s book *For the Love of Pleasure:
Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*, will also be a model for
the current scholarship. Rabinovitz’s work examines the way in which working-class
women in Chicago used film to negotiate the new public spaces in the early twentieth

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15 Ibid., 213.
16 Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and
century. According to the author, the analysis of the “discursive interplay among cinema and contemporary institutions of spectacle and sociability” explains how meaning was made and organized for women during this era.\textsuperscript{17} By working at the fringes of several disciplines, history, film, and cultural studies, Rabinovitz’s work will be an ideal model upon which to base the current project. More importantly, however, Rabinovitz’s argument about the importance of film for working-class women in the early part of the Twentieth century lends weight to the current project’s assertion that film, in a variety of ways, played a central role in the lives of working-class women.

\textbf{Film History/Film Theory}

In order to study the impact of film in any era, it is necessary to look at what has been written about film history heretofore. By far the most important work in the study of film history is \textit{Movie-Made America: A Social History of American Movies} by Robert Sklar. Sklar’s approach to the subject is one that places the American film in context of American culture and society. In his introduction, Sklar classifies American films as “the first of the modern mass media, and they rose to the surface of cultural consciousness from the bottom up, receiving their principal support from the lowest and most invisible classes in American society.”\textsuperscript{18} Sklar goes on to introduce the idea

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of a tension between films and working-class cultures, between the values of the
cultural elites and the values of the working-class audiences. If, as Sklar asserts, film
provided working-class men and women with “alternative ways of understanding the
world,” then this work provides a foundational element to frame the current project. The current project will use Sklar’s work to assert that working-class women used films such as The Women, Rebecca, and The Wizard of Oz to understand their world in other ways, helping to create an understanding of the influence that film had on the working-class women, and their attitudes about themselves, during the late 1930s.

Critical for the current research is an article written by John E. O’Connor in the The American Historical Review. This article scrutinizes the impact that visual evidence (film) can have on understanding the past, while at the same time, he develops a two-stage approach to the historical analysis of film; a general and a specific. By generally examining film as evidence, it is crucial to reconstruct the experience of the audience in order to analyze meaning. The second, specific approach to investigating film is driven more by the nature of the historical inquiry; such as how a film might represent history, how confirmations of social and current values can be ascertained, gathering data that has not been gathered prior, and

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19 Ibid., 123.
20 Ibid., 316.
22 Ibid., 1206.
documenting the history of film and television. This article provides a methodological approach to researching history using film as evidence and is crucial to the development of the current research to provide a methodological approach.

Not only is the study of film history crucial to the current work, the study of film theory will provide a starting point for understanding the way in which images may have been consumed and used by working-class women in the late 1930s. For feminists concerned with gender difference and the position of women on the screen and in the audience, the study of film theory revolves around the use of psychoanalysis as a tool to understand the role of women in film culture. By appropriating Freudian psychoanalysis, feminist film theorists have demonstrated, through the examination of many crucial filmic texts, how film has become a mirror of the larger patriarchal society of Western civilization.

As a seminal essay in film theory, Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” provides a foundation for understanding the consumption of the film experience by the viewer. Using psychoanalysis, Mulvey argues that spectatorship in film is organized along gender lines with the female relegated to a passive position as a screen object, an icon. If women on screen are cultural signifiers for a male other, then her position within the narrative is one of “to-be-

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23 Ibid., 1207.
looked-at-ness” and her image is coded as perpetuating the dominant patriarchal order.\(^{25}\) This is significant for this project because it opens up a dialogue about the place of women as actors on the screen and spectators in the audience. If, as Mulvey asserts, the gaze is always male, what role does a female viewer occupy?\(^{26}\) For women in the 1930s who were watching films with stars such as Joan Crawford, Judy Garland, and Norma Shearer, it can be said that they occupied a male spectator position in their consumption of film. As film was the prime mover of cultural values, the images on screen of the feminine ideal resonated with the audience as they partook of the film from a decidedly masculine ideological viewpoint; the male gaze.

Drawing directly from Freud, Mulvey appropriates Freud’s use of the term scopophilia to describe the situation of the audience’s pleasure in watching a film. Although Freud’s description of scopophilia involved an active subjection and observation of other people, Mulvey believes that the cinema fits into this category as well. The cinema, while it apparently does not require the active participation of the spectator, does provide the viewer with the illusion that they are watching a private world.\(^{27}\) Moreover, part of the scopophilic process requires the “identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator’s fascination with and

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 179.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., 180.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 178.
recognition of his like.”28 Here, Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror-stage plays a central role in the development of her argument. By viewing the images on the screen, primarily in a dark room, misrecognition occurs and the viewer self-identifies with the actors on screen.29 The dichotomy set up between these two aspects of the scopophilic experience, one that implied a separation of the subject from the object and another that required identification with the object, creates a situation where the look is pleasurable.30 Therefore, pleasure is unconsciously derived from film through the gaze of the viewer. Mulvey’s theory of the gaze and woman’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” will provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the context and place of the screen image, the actress. In a similar way, her theory of scopophilia and the experience that accompanies it, will give the current project a method for placing into discourse how working-class women saw themselves in the images they saw on screen, and the pleasure that entailed.

28 Ibid., 179.
29 Ibid, 178.
Mulvey based many of her assumptions on Lacanian psychoanalysis, therefore Lacan’s theory of the “mirror-stage” is crucial to the current project. As explained in his seminal lecture “The Mirror Stage,” a child, upon first seeing his image in a mirror, begins to recognize himself in that mirror image. When this happens, it is called the “mirror-stage.”\textsuperscript{31} According to Jacqueline Rose, whose interpretation in \textit{Sexuality in the Field of Vision} attempts to place psychoanalysis and feminism in conversation, the child becomes subjectified based on external sources as a result of his identifying himself with the image in the mirror.\textsuperscript{32} As shown in the film theory section above with

\textsuperscript{32} Jacqueline Rose, \textit{Sexuality in the Field of Vision} (London: Verso, 2005), 173.
Mulvey, the working-class woman viewer in the 1930s will take the place of the child looking at his image in the mirror. In this way, an understanding of how those women consumed, appropriated and ultimately used those cultural representations on screen can begin to emerge, thereby providing weight to the argument of the current project.

In her article titled “Woman as Sign,” Elizabeth Cowie states that in film, women are not shown simply as women, or as human either.\textsuperscript{33} If that is the case, then film does not play the role of a producer of meaning, but rather a medium that passes on the cultural normative gender values that are pre-existent in our society. Therefore, for Cowie, women on film represent not real women but a category of signifying practices. As a result, the film itself plays a part in the fixing of the values for a society. If this is the case, the current project can use Cowie’s ideas to place the representation of women on screen into the larger normative gender culture.

Jackie Stacey offers an alternative theory of film in her work, “With Stars in Their Eyes: Female Spectators and the Paradoxes of Consumption.” Although Stacey uses spectatorship of films in the 1940s and 1950s England to examine modes of consumption among women, several aspects of her work are worth noting. In this article, Stacey examines the ways in which cinema played a role in promoting the consumption of other commodities, not only how Hollywood stars were consumed as

commodities. Using interviews with women who were spectators of the films in historical context, Stacey states that “spectators remember Hollywood stars through their connection with particular commodities and the ways in which they were worn or displayed … this association is made in relation to clothes, hairstyles, make-up and cosmetics and other fashion accessories.”34 This relationship of the spectator to the stars provides evidence to support the idea that many women of the 1930s looked to the movies to learn what the feminine ideal was, and how to perform that ideal in everyday life. Based on Stacey’s research, this current project will also look at clothes, hair, and makeup (among other things) in order to examine how women not only consumed those images on screen but, more importantly, how they appropriated them.

Crucial for the understanding of how certain audiences consumed, appropriated and used the messages embedded within a cultural work is Hans-Robert Jauss’ reception theory. As a theory that attempts to understand the place of a text within the context of the public reading of the work, Jauss’ literary theory can be used to contextualize film as well as posit about the reception of those viewing the film. A viewer is not merely a passive receptor of the information and meaning evoked from a text (film), they are active receivers of meaning through their “horizon of expectation,”

or frame of reference.35 If the meaning of the work is the based on the answers found in the “horizon of expectation,” then the understanding of the reception of that work lies not only in the interpretation of the signs and codes of the text but just as importantly in the contextualization of the culture of the viewing audience.36 In other words, meaning is found in the relationship of the text to the audience. For the sake of this project, this theory of reception will be crucial to bridge the gap between cultural representation and textual reception.

Richard Dyer’s essay, “Entertainment and Utopia,” suggests that Hollywood fulfills the utopian dream of the audience by depicting relationships between people in more simple and direct terms than in real life.37 In this way, the film acts on the viewer providing a model not of a utopian world but rather what a utopian world might feel like.38 By examining the reception of films from the late 1930s, with their vast array of simple characters, a roadmap for how audiences found role models for their own lives can be uncovered. The combination the theories discussed above lays the theoretical groundwork for understanding how working-class women found meaning in the cultural representation of working-class women in film during the late 1930s.

36 Ibid., 59.
38 Ibid., 373.
Class

As an interdisciplinary project, this study aims to look at the cross-section of class study, popular culture, and critical theory to develop a theory of reception for working-class women in the south. As such, scholarly work on class is a crucial component to understanding the lives of these women. At the forefront of the new working class studies scholarship is Sherry Linkon and John Russo. Their edited work, New Working-Class Studies provides a foundation for examining avenues beyond the traditional analyses of class and labor, politics and history.

According to the authors, the new field of working-class studies emphasizes a multi-disciplinary approach to examining working-class life and culture, which allows themes to emerge, such as “cultural representations as sources for understanding working-class experience.”

In Linkon and Russo’s book, Faues examines the relationship between previous working-class scholarship (read, labor history) and gender. …In “Gender, Class, and History,” Faue asserts that the new working-class studies, with its emphasis on using interdisciplinarity to examine race in equal terms with gender, can lead to an ever widening field of scholarship.

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discusses film as a powerful tool for understanding “class formations in general and working-class history in particular” in his chapter “Filming Class.” Zaniello believes representations of gender are both authentic (photograph as truth) and problematic because the ideological message can either be suppressed or completely visible. To understand the role, and power, of film as a source for the study of class, one of the things that must be considered is the way in which Hollywood laid out the archetype of the working-class image.

Judith Jackson Pomeroy in her article Representations of the Feminine Ideal in Women’s Popular Periodicals from 1920 to 1996: Considerations of Race and Class examines dominant depictions of femininity in magazines and how the feminine ideal is coded as “white, middle-class, and heterosexual.” In her article, Pomeroy contextually analyzes two popular magazines, Ladies’ Home Journal and Mademoiselle, periodicals that’s existence spanned the decades of her query. By dividing her evidence into either a grooming (appearance) category or an interaction style (behavior), Pomeroy is able to use a modicum of statistical analysis to document an ideal femininity as represented in these magazines. After examining the evidence,
Pomeroy identified two main paradigms; one that spanned the entire length of her work and another that emerged in the 1970s. The first paradigm will be the most crucial to inform this project:

“The traditional paradigm of femininity presents readers with prescriptions for behavior that emphasize gendered behavior; furthermore, it accepts hegemonic organizations of gendered behavior by emphasizing the importance of the romantic relationship for justifying woman’s existence and by focusing on obedience to a male partner through creating both an appearance and demeanor to his liking.”

This explanation of a traditional femininity can translate across mediums to inform the study of film.

**Gender/Critical Theory**

As a method for understanding subjectivity, critical theory provides a useful discourse to discuss cultural representations and the development of self-identification for women in the 1930s. First and foremost, is semiotics. Developed originally as a linguistic model for the decoding of language, semiotics can be used to inform how subjects understand meaning in images and sounds. By breaking down texts into signifiers and signifieds, semiotics delves into the inferred meaning of that text, thus

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providing a method of analysis. As a further corollary to the semiotics model of analysis, Roland Barthes theorized about an ideological impetus for the creation and use of signs. According to Barthes in *Image, Music, Text*, certain signs and codes anchored a preferred meaning in a cultural artifact; and that this anchorage functioned ideologically. Cultural values are created this way and continue to change with the evolution of anchored signs.⁴⁶ Thus, dominant notions of the culture will be anchored and disseminated through the signs of certain popular culture texts, including film. This idea is crucial for the current project as the signs and codes of the cultural representations will be scrutinized in order to locate a possible place of meaning for working-class women.

Another theory that is crucial to the understanding of how women in the 1930s self-identified as feminine is one set forth by Judith Butler. Although Butler’s original thesis was proposed after watching female impersonators in the film *Paris Is Burning*, it also provides a useful tool for examining all aspects of gender; including the re-thinking of more archaic ideas about femininity and masculinity. Butler’s assertion is that gender is performative and artificial.⁴⁷ Not only is gender performative, it is also “an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality


within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.” 48 By applying this to other notions of gender such as ideal femininity, the investigation of films from the Depression era can tell us a great deal about the dominant notions of a normative gender ideology at work in the 1930s. If the stars shown on screen are performing a gender in a certain way, one that is ideologically grounded in hetero-normativity, this performance is perpetuating a gender ideology to those women who saw the films. In turn, this informs how working-class women saw the feminine ideal of the 1930s.

**Primary Sources**

As primary source documents from the year they were made, films from the late 1930s will provide the bulk of the data for this project. Considered by many to be the pinnacle of Hollywood’s Golden Age, an astounding 388 movies (compared with 349 in 1988) were released by the major Hollywood studios in 1939, providing a rich resource for examining American culture and society during this year. 49 According to the American Film Institute’s (AFI) list of the 100 greatest movies, the two years from 1939 to 1940 has eight films on the list, more than any other consecutive years on the list. 50 While the year stood out as the arguably penultimate year for Hollywood film, several films from 1939-40 stand out due to their enormous popularity. Therefore,

48 Ibid., 173.
chapter two will analyze the melodrama *The Women*, a film that was released by MGM in 1939. Although this film did not make AFI’s list of the top 100 greatest films, it was one of the most popular films of the year. The plot centers on wealthy Mary Haines (Norma Shearer), a New York socialite who has been married for 10 years. Through the course of the film, Mary loses her husband to money hungry working-class girl Crystal Allen (Joan Crawford). With a supporting cast of over one hundred women, *The Women* presents and represents women from all walks of life and, is thus a primary source that offers a wealth of information and evidence.

In chapter three, Alfred Hitchcock’s first American film, *Rebecca* (1940), a film that is considered one of the most important films to come out of Hollywood as well as one of Hitchcock’s best efforts, will be examined. Winning the Best Picture Award for 1940, this film is a visualization of the Daphne DuMaurier novel of the same name. The narrative follows a young working-class girl (Joan Fontaine) as she becomes the wife of a rich landowner on the coast of England. Her transformation and blossoming into an upper-class wife provides evidence to examine femininity during the late 1930s. Also significant in this film is the presentation of Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson) as a demented and arguably evil working-class woman (the maid) and the implications for this on viewers.
Finally, another film from 1939 considered among one of the best of the decade is *The Wizard of Oz*, a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) release, will be the focus of chapter three. The film, considered by many to be an iconic American film, is the screen adaptation of L.Frank Baum’s children’s novel of the same name. With its three strong female lead characters, Dorothy, Glinda and the Wicked Witch of the West, the film is an exemplary text to examine.

**Conclusions**

A cross-section of disciplines is necessary to undertake the current project. Not only is it necessary to understand the history of the era, it is also crucial to examine and delineate the social atmosphere in relation to working-class women in order to gauge their possible reception of cultural representations of themselves. From film studies, it is crucial not only to understand the development of the film history in the context of the larger historical picture, but also to grasp the theories laid out by the psychoanalytic film theorists to further understand the reception and dissemination of film. The study of class, with its new emphasis on working-class studies, opens up new avenues of inquiry by forcing the re-examination of previously held ideas about class structure in America in relation to women, film and the cultural representation of working-class. Finally, the theories for understanding the construction of a normative gender ideal lays out a foundation for studying the presentation of the feminine ideal in film and
allows for an understanding of not only that same feminine ideal but also the subaltern presentations and interpretations of feminine.

As the boutique owner stands in front of the New York social crowd, she proudly announces that the fashion show to follow is not only innovative in that it shows the models going through “the rhythmic movement of everyday life,” allowing the socialites to study “the flow of the new line as it responds to the ever changing flow of the female form divine,” it also provides a glimpse into the future of fashion for the upcoming season and beyond.51 This introduction to the only colorized segment of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s (MGM) The Women (1939) introduces a part of the film that many dismissed as merely an intermission of sorts; something that slowed down the action in a very fast paced film.52 Although the critics of The Women in 1939 panned the fashion revue section of the film, it does serve as an appropriate example of the feminine ideal that some women looked to for meaning and identification. The insertion of the fashion revue in The Women also signals a dichotomous approach to examining the reception and consumption of filmic images in 1939. Did women spectators from all walks of life find meaning in the display of hyper-femininity they saw in images such as the fashion revue, or were there other ways for different classes of women to find self-identification and meaning in other aspects of popular

51 George Cukor, director. The Women, 1939.
Hollywood films? Is it possible, indeed probable, that working-class women viewers consumed two differing messages when they watched films, one that was merely escapist in nature and one that was based on real life and provided a possible place for meaning and self-identification?

Any type of film reception study is problematic, especially the type proposed in this research. The average age of working-class women under scrutiny in this project ranges anywhere from late teens to retirement age during the year 1939; a demographic that is virtually unreachable. Due to the immense amount of time that has passed since the year in question, the women are either passed away or unable to accurately respond to questions regarding their early lives due to health reasons. In order to frame this analysis of *The Women* and working-class representation, Hans-Robert Jauss’ theory of reception is crucial to understanding the possible meaning derived by working-class women from the images located on screen. As stated previously, Jauss asserts that reception of a text is not simply passive, rather the viewer takes an active role in the consumption and reception of texts based on her “horizon of expectations.”

Therefore, this project connects the cultural representation of working-class women on film to the lived experience of working-class women by placing them in conversation with each other through not only Jauss’ theory of active reception based on cultural

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background, but also through psychoanalytic film theory’s use of Lacan’s mirror image and Stacey’s theory of remembrance based on a connection of star image to commodity.

By examining the cultural representation of working-class women on film and looking at the lives of working-class women, this project identifies a possible location of self-identification and meaning for working class women as they consumed films on two levels; as escapist products of popular culture as well as models for understanding and creating their own social interactions with the world. Because a study of one type of femininity inevitably informs the other, the two cannot be separated as different and conflicting messages to viewers. Rather, how femininity is portrayed in all of its forms on film is important to understand how women of the 1930s developed meaning and self-identification through the images on the screen. If, as Jackie Stacey asserts that women identified and remembered stars based on their connection with certain commodities such as clothes and hairstyles, then by following the idea that women went to and consumed films on both an escapist level and realist level, then the images portrayed of both upper-class women and working-class women are of equal importance.54 By understanding that women used film as a mirror image to recognize themselves and their place in the world, the way they made sense of those images starts

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to fall into place, like pieces in a puzzle. Almost counter-intuitively, the site of meaning for women was found not in the actions of the main foregrounded characters, but rather in the margins, where the portrayal of working-class women in support of the main upper-class characters resembled their own lives as support personnel to the upper-class in American society. Therefore, film provided a double meaning, a type of double entendre, for audiences to see, hear, and appropriate. So while many women saw the glamorous and beautiful starlets of the late 1930s on screen and dreamed of a never-to-be-achieved emulation of her, those same audience members saw secondary characters or character actors as the real holders of meaning. These other characters possessed traits and characteristics similar enough to the viewer to evoke a true mirror image from theater seat to film screen, and thus proved themselves to be the location of meaning and identification for working-class audiences.

With the continuing presence of financial hard times, working-class women of the 1930s were a ubiquitous part of American society. This influx into the work force took place not only by single women seeking to make their own way in the world, but also by wives (and consequently, mothers) who sought to help their families financially. Although there was still a clear division between the roles of men and women, the employment of women served not only to achieve survival in the Depression, they also sought to maintain a new standard of living that had slowly
developed out of the changing family values of the 1920s and 1930s that allowed more flexibility for women working outside the home.\textsuperscript{55} Since the working-class woman was a more accepted part of society in the late 1930s, it was only logical that their cultural representation on screen would also be more pervasive, evident and positive.

Working-class women in the 1930s still saw the importance of cultural entertainment, regardless of the hard times that continued to plague the United States. Unlike other cultural forms of entertainment, films maintained their audiences with over 85 million viewers attending movies on a weekly basis during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{56} This type of steady attendance points to the tremendous importance of Hollywood films to people from all walks of life in the 1930s. According to Susan Ware, the dime spent on the “weekly movie was as important an item in their budget as bread or milk.”\textsuperscript{57} Film’s importance in the everyday lives of the working class cannot be underestimated, and the influence on their lives is obvious.

With the pervasiveness of film in the lives of the working-class, women (often young women) used the films as sources of information on behavior and appearance. This type of relationship between audience and cultural product is unique from other cultural mediums of the time like radio, in that film provides a multifaceted image for

\textsuperscript{56} Susan Ware, Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), xvi.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 178.
women to emulate. Not only could women see how their film counterparts dressed, they could also listen to how they talked and watch their movements and mannerisms. No other cultural medium provided women with an overall view of ideal femininity in the way film did.

As a film from 1939, MGM’s The Women provides a way to understand not only ideal femininity but also its counterpoint, non-ideal or subaltern femininity. Boasting a cast of only women, the depictions of various types of women covers a lot of ground in portraying all types of archetypal women for the late 1930s. The film was adapted to film by Clare Booth Luce after the play of the same name ran successfully for almost two years on Broadway. The story follows the divorce of New York socialite Mary Haines (Norma Shearer) to her husband Stephen Haines after he has an affair with working-class perfume counter worker Crystal Allen (Joan Crawford). Although the story centers on a gaggle of upper class, back-biting women from New York, the in-between images of working-class women is of particular note to understand and place meaning for working-class women in 1939.

As background for the main characters in the film, there are many women who are characterized as working-class. There are the women who are employed at the salon and day spa where the socialites get their hair and nails done. There are also the servants who work for the upper class women in the film, in particular Mary. There
are also the employees who work at the fashion show as well as the women who work at the perfume counter with Crystal before she moves up to the upper class through her marriage to Stephen Haines. Most importantly, however is the character of Lucy, played by Marjorie Main, who runs the ranch in Reno where the socialites go to get their divorces. Not only do all of these women have a femininity that is in sharp contrast to the glamorous main characters of the film, they also provide a mirror-image for working class women to identify with and find meaning in.

**An Air of Superiority: Mary Haines**

As the main character in *The Women*, Mary Haines is the epitome of upper class wealth and glamour. Not only is she impeccably dressed throughout the film, she is also the definition of beauty with her flawless physical characteristics and the essence of the privileged woman through her superior actions and interactions with those around her. By examining her personality, physical qualities and dress (costume), this section seeks to place Mary in a conversation with not only Lucy, the ultimate working-class character in *The Women*, but also with Crystal Allen and Miriam Aarons, working-class women who are flawed by their rise in social status. In order to understand Mary’s place in the film, and her place with a working-class female audience, the cultural representation of an upper-class woman must first be established through a dissection of her characterization. Then, by using the idea that
the viewing of a film happens on two simultaneous yet different levels (one that is escapist and another that is more realistic), as well as using Jauss’ theory of reception where viewers of a film text consume, use and transform that cultural text into meaning actively, then the importance of Mary’s character begins to emerge. Therefore, in *The Women*, Mary Haines occupies a possible place of escapism for a working-class female audience in 1939 based on her upper-class cultural representation in the film.

Because Mary is coded as a certain type of character, an upper-class woman, the specifics of that coding are crucial to understanding why she is seen as an escapist type of character; one that most working-class female viewers aspired to become but realistically knew they never would. Central to Mary’s characterization, and her upper-class representation, is her wardrobe. Throughout the film, Mary is shown in the finest of clothing, even flawlessly dressed after riding horses with her daughter. Rather than describe every outfit, only the evening dress worn in the final scene will be examined and used as an example of the type of clothing, and thus coding, that occurs with Mary Haines.

In the final scene, one in which Mary schemes and plots in order to get her husband back, her dress – and its glamour – demonstrates the upper-class representation of Mary Haines. The long evening gown is highlighted by two separate pieces. At the bottom, the skirt is light/white and flows to the floor elegantly.
Although the bottom is glamorous in its own right, it is the upper part of the dress that is pertinent for this discussion. Designed to simulate a jacket, the top of the dress is long sleeved, with poofed arms and a semi-high neck. There are no buttons evident but the back of the faux jacket is long and extends down to the floor with the rest of the dress. Although the skirt is one color, the jacket appears to be some type of lemay – since the movie was filmed in black and white, there is no way to tell if it was gold or silver lemay. Regardless of that fact, the appearance on screen is stunning. Although no color is ascertainable, the sparkle from the dress creates an aura around her in the close-up shots of her upper body and face. By setting Mary up as angelic from the beginning, the dress plays a huge role in establishing Mary as a character who is glamorous and out of the realistic grasp of working-class female audiences to appropriate and find meaning in.

Along with her dress, Mary’s physical beauty sets her apart as superior – upper-class. Her skin is soft and flawless, and her eyes and mouth are proportionate across her round, full face. She does not appear to have any blemishes on her face and her nose is small and straight. Although there is no way to know – based on this film alone – what color her eyes are, their light appearance on film gives the impression that they are blue. Mary’s hair, although not long and flowing, can still be considered glamorous in its presentation. Throughout the film, her hair remains in the same style.
Her hair is curly in the back and on the sides, yet slicked down across a part on the top. As a contrast to Rebecca’s described hair in *Rebecca* and Glinda’s hair in *The Wizard of Oz*, Mary’s hair is quite different. Although it is not long and flowing, as in the other films, the perfectly coiffed nature of Mary’s hair creates an air of glamour and beauty. It is obvious that this type of hair was styled by a professional stylist, something that a working-class woman could not afford in 1939. Also, this type of hair – with its perfection – was not feasible in the working-lives of women during the time either.

Finally, Mary’s personality, as well as her interactions with those around her, places the final piece of the puzzle into place regarding her cultural representation of upper-class femininity. Rather than actively and deliberately placing herself in a
superior position above those around her, Mary achieves the same effect through a distant and detached personality. Throughout the film, although she is seen interacting with everyone from her servants to her friends to her family (mother and daughter), she maintains an air of superiority over most of the other characters, barring perhaps her mother in the film. For example, she never indulges in the gossip that the other girls participate in, except in the end of the film when she schemes to get her husband back. Also, Mary refuses to discuss her relationship troubles with her friends. Finally, she refuses to fight for her husband and divorces him instead. Through her lack of action, Mary chooses to be a martyr-like character – a trait that raises her above the other characters in the film. This places Mary in a position of superiority, and by so doing, elevates her above the other characters even though they are upper class in all other aspects.

In *The Women*, Mary Haines has it all, except her husband; who in the end comes back to her anyway. As a character in a film, Mary is a cultural representation of an upper-class, high-society New York socialite. The elements that make up that representation, such as her dress, physical appearance and personality, are crucial to placing her as upper-class in order to understand how she was possibly consumed by a working-class audience in 1939. If the audience consumed the film in both an escapist and realistic way, then their consumption of the main characters worked along the
same lines. Combining that with Jauss’ theory that viewers of a cultural text such as a film consume, appropriate and ultimately transform the text into something meaningful for themselves creates a relationship between the characters as seen in the chart below. Therefore, Mary represents the upper-class, out-of-reach aspirational persona in *The Women*. She dresses the part, has the beauty for the part and acts the part. It is possible that working-class women in 1939 saw this characterization as character they could dream about being, but could never quite escape to.

![Graphic relationship of characters in *The Women*](image)

*Fig. 2.2: Graphic relationship of characters in *The Women*
Movin’ On Up the Ladder: Crystal Allen and Miriam Aarons

As characters that, at first, are working-class then move into the upper echelon of New York society, Crystal Allen (Crawford) and Miriam Aarons (Paulette Goddard) deserve special mention for this project. First, Crystal is a working-class girl who works behind the counter at Black’s department store on Fifth Avenue. We understand and see her purported working-class status in the way she dresses (although she is not in uniform, her outfit and those of the women she works with are similar enough to give the appearance of a uniform) and the way she talks (although not completely a heavy accent like the other working class characters, she talks tough like an urban raised city girl). In order to make Crystal’s jump from working-class to upper class believable, however, she is not completely wrapped up in the archetypal working-class persona. There are several noticeable attributes to her representation that give keys to understanding her as more than working-class. First, her hair is down and around her face; something not seen in the other working class women in the film. Second, her nails are manicured and neat. Third, she wears heavier makeup than her working-class counterparts. And finally, although she speaks with toughness, she definitely does not have a heavy accent. She speaks with the same type of non-accent that the upper-class women shown in the film possess, she enunciates properly and she uses correct
grammar in all that she says. In this way, Crystal is designated as a more middle-class woman who is moving up the ranks of the New York social ladder.

In a similar fashion, Miriam Aarons (Goddard) displays an in-between type of character. The audience is first introduced to Miriam on the train to Reno, where she, along with Mary, is going to get a divorce from her first husband. Another upper class woman, the Countess DeLave (Mary Boland) invites Miriam and Mary to have a drink of champagne to celebrate their divorces. In the conversation that ensues, Miriam is said to be a former chorus girl. This, in and of itself, designates her as less than upper class. Also, like Crystal, she is more frank with her use of language, while not quite possessing an accent. In the same way that Crystal was shown with both working-class and upper-class mannerisms in order to make her jump into the New York high society more believable, Miriam Aarons is also. Miriam’s hair is down, her nails are manicured and she talks without a discernible accent; all roads which lead to the appearance of class mobility.
Because of their moves up the societal ladder, both Crystal and Miriam are flawed in their cultural representation of working-class. In order for the working-class representation to have feasibility, she must occupy a place of realistic portrayal of
working-class attributes. Since both of these women do not fit into the typical mold of working-class, – average physical beauty, flat, dull hair, self-subservient behavior, etc. – neither can adequately provide a place of meaning for a working-class audience.

**And Then There’s Lucy: The Working-Class Woman’s Ideal?**

Although the characters listed above provide evidence to support that the representation of working-class women in film provided a mirror image to working-class women to identify with and find meaning in, no other character in *The Women* personifies this more than Lucy, played by Marjorie Main. As the original Lucy from Broadway, Main’s portrayal of Lucy in the film version of *The Women* provides ample evidence to support the idea that working class women self-identified with the cultural representations of themselves on screen, thus they found meaning in characters such as Lucy.

The scenes with Lucy in the film are short and only a few in numbers, yet the representation of working-class that is presented is one that resonates throughout the film. Not only does Lucy aptly represent a version of working-class that women in the 1930s could relate to, she provided a realistic counterpart to the glamorous main characters of the film. Lucy’s characterization also presented a model not only for working-class women in urban areas, but also for working-class women in more rural,
even southern regions of the country. Thus, Lucy’s character is the all-around role model for working-class women during the late 1930s in this film.

From the moment Lucy is on screen, her physical appearance gives clear evidence that she is of working-class status. First, Lucy’s hair lays the foundation for understanding her character. As with the other working-class characters in the film, Lucy’s hair is pulled up and away from her face. With her attempt to pull it into a bun, Lucy has nonetheless left her hair in an unruly mess. There are sections of her hair that are not up in the bun as well as single strands that are loose and all over the place. Lucy’s hair is an indication that her busy, working lifestyle does not allow her to be concerned with her appearance; she does not have time to be bothered with the fact that her hair is quite unruly.

Another aspect about her hair and its possible meaning is the textual appearance it gives on film. Although filmed in black and white, the audience cannot tell what color Lucy’s hair is. Nonetheless, by featuring her hair with frizzy, unruly hairs, there is the impression that Lucy’s hair is not as shiny as the hair of her those in the cast that are upper class. This could indicate several things in relation to her class status. Either she did not have suitable products to maintain proper hair care, or she simply was not able to wash her hair daily, like so many other working-class women in
the late 1930s. Whatever the reasons, Lucy’s hair, with its unruliness and lack of shine promoted her as a typical working class woman in the later years of the Depression.

As with the other working class characters in The Women, Lucy’s face was not a thing of beauty. Unlike Norma Shearer or Joan Crawford, Marjorie Main was not endowed with high cheekbones, flawless skin and the perfect balance of facial features such as eyes to nose, nose to mouth or mouth to eyes. Rather, her eyes were small and sat too far below her hairline, her nose was pointed and seemed somewhat prominent when she was looked on straight in the face, her face had begun to show signs of sagging caused by age, and her upper lip was almost non-existent and struck a differential balance when taken in context with the bottom lip. All in all, Marjorie Main, and therefore Lucy, was quite ordinary to look at; something that many working-class women could relate to.

Fig. 2.5: Marjorie Main (Lucy in The Women) (http://www.thegoldenyears.org/main.jpg)
Although her body was quite obscured from view during much of the time she is on screen, Lucy nonetheless is shown to have a less than stellar figure. In the first scene that she appears in, Lucy is talking with Peggy Day (Joan Fontaine). The juxtaposition of her figure against the waif-like figure of Peggy creates a dynamic image of Lucy as typically working class. She appears dumpy and overweight. Her arms, exposed in a short sleeved dress, are noticeably larger than Peggy’s and also show signs of sagging middle age, just as her face does. Not only is the appearance given that her arms are sagging, but also other parts of her body are showing signs of typical working class aging. Her breasts seem to be sagging and her bottom seems to be expanding. The typical curvy figure of the Hollywood starlet is nowhere to be seen in Lucy, rather, her body can be considered the archetypal bodily shape of middle-aged, working-class women.

Lucy’s mannerisms and the way in which she carries her own body are prime indicators of her working-class status. In particular when she is standing, Lucy appears to consistently slouch. Attaining the correct body posture is not something that working class women were taught unlike many upper class women who participated in classes to teach proper posture. Lucy’s lack of correct physical bearing indicates her status and creates meaning in her mirror image for working class women.
Not only does Lucy slouch when standing still, her countenance is such that she walks in a very masculine manner. She takes large strides and ambles across the screen with a sense of purpose usually associated with a male character. She is neither graceful nor elegant as she moves on screen. This lack of grace undeniably spoke to the many working class women who were not graceful themselves.

Along with her slouchy appearance and manly walk, Lucy was also very physical in her interactions with other characters, something that refined ladies of the time did not do. For example, in one scene, she physically smacked Peggy on the arm to make her point. In another scene, Lucy grabs Peggy around the shoulders and physically drags her in the direction she wants her to go. This type of physicality was not part of the upper class female’s repertoire. Rather, upper class women were reserved and did not use their bodies in this way. By exhibiting such physicality, Lucy demonstrates her working-class status, and thus proved a role model for working class women.

Although Lucy’s body goes a long way in interpolating her as a working-class woman, the clothes she wears also play a critical role in the understanding of her status. Her dress is common, with polka dots and no frills; it is collared and buttons up the front. It is interesting to note that, as if to signify a lack of caring, or a simple lack of time to correct it, Lucy’s collar is not properly laying down around the back of her
neck. In a similar way, her dress is not ironed and seems to be loose fitting; nothing like the tight fitting fashions worn by the upper class women in the film.

Around her waist, Lucy wears an apron, an albatross of a sign to denote her as working-class, and her shoes, although dark in color, are similar to the low, common shoes worn by both the salon workers and the servants in Mary’s employment. It is obvious from her appearance that Lucy is either not wearing a bra or that her bra is not fitted properly as her breasts sag quite low. This is in sharp contrast to the upper class women in the film, all of whom have the perfect, pointed breasts.

In a similar way that her clothing suggests a working class status, Lucy’s lack of make-up also points to her working class position. While the upper class women in the film are always shown in full makeup, the working-class women, particularly Lucy, are generally shown without any makeup at all. The wearing of makeup on a daily basis was not something that working-class women had the luxury of affording during the Depression.

Just as Lucy’s outer appearance gave clues to her status, and thus her position as a meaning maker for working class women, so too did her actions speak volumes to the women in the audience. As mentioned above, Lucy’s physicality helps place her well within a working-class status. Also significant are several things she does in her short time on screen. She opens a jug of corn liquor and pours it with such a sense of
purpose that it is obvious that she has done it many times before. Upper class women who drank often had either mixed drinks or champagne, but never partook of a drink that is considered moonshine in most parts of the country. Lucy’s other actions such as her carrying Sylvia’s luggage for her when she arrives at the ranch, taking a letter from her bosom, and refusing to break up a fight between Sylvia and Miriam all point to her lack of refinement; her working-class status.

The most significant aspect of Lucy’s character that places her in a position to be the mirror image for working-class women is the language she uses and the things she says. As the ranch housekeeper in Reno, Lucy’s enunciation and language are quite different from the other women in the film. Her words are sometimes crushed together like “nearly” becomes “nary” and “something” becomes “sump’en.” While Lucy does not flatten out her vowels as much as a southerner might, she still falls into this type of dialect often in her dialogue. For example, when talking with the Countess DeLave about her love life, Lucy consistently calls the Countess “ma’am.” As she says this word, she elongates the pronunciation, creating a western accent. This type of accent, an accent that is said to have inflections of the southern accent embedded in it, is often seen in American society as a designation of lower or working-class.

Along with her accent, Lucy speaks very loudly, creating the impression that she is not a demure woman, but rather a hard-working woman who does everything
hard; work, play, sing, etc. Prior to Lucy’s first appearance on camera, we hear her booming voice as she sings at the ranch in Reno. Her voice is loud and raspy, not an angelic singing voice by any means. While on screen, Lucy is either singing loudly out of tune or talking in a loud voice. Only in those few seconds when she is talking with another woman about her life does her voice quiet down to a normal pitch and volume. This loudness is often associated with the lower, working classes.

Equally important for understanding Lucy’s working-class status through her language is her use of improper grammar. Often in her dialogue she says “ain’t” and she consistently uses the wrong verb tense in her sentences. Not only did she misuse the language, she also often spoke in colloquialisms that were common in 1939. For example, at one point she asks Peggy, “How’s tricks?” and then in the same conversation says, “she’ll be mozyin’ around pretty soon.” These kinds of grammatical errors were common of speakers of dialects such as southern or western American English and can be attributed to her lack of education; a sign of being from the lower classes.

Although the manner in which she spoke said volumes about Lucy’s social status, no other part of her character placed her as the ideal cultural representation of working-class women more than did the things that she spoke about. By talking about her life, its hardships as well as the things she held dear, Lucy became the perfect

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mirror image role model for working class women. In the first scene where she talks about her life with Peggy, Lucy is set up as the archetypal working-class woman:

Peggy:  “You’ve never been married, Lucy?
Lucy:  I’ve had three! (spoken somewhat indignantly)
Peggy:  Husbands?
Lucy:  Kids.
Peggy:  Oh, well, then you’re probably very happy
Lucy:  Good gracious, ma’am, stopped thinking ‘bout bein’ happy years ago.
Peggy:  You don’t think about being happy?
Lucy:  Ain’t had the time, the kids and all. The old man’s such a demon when he’s drinkin’. Them big, strong red-headed men (winks), they’re fierce.
Peggy:  He beat you, Lucy, how terrible!
Lucy:  Ain’t it? When you think what a lot of women on this ranch need a beating worse than I do. I’ll have to get Buck to come fix that thing (speaking about a broken suitcase).
Peggy:  But Lucy, you live in Reno; you could get a divorce overnight.
Lucy:  Great Scott, a woman can’t get herself worked up into a thing like that overnight!”59

This dialogue between the upper class Peggy, in Reno to divorce her husband, and Lucy, sums up married life, at least stereotypically, for most working class women. They married, had kids and started the business of taking care of a family. With the widespread deterioration of living conditions during the Great Depression, happiness was on the back burner for most working class women just as it was for Lucy. Also during the late 1930s, domestic violence was often thought of as the sole propriety of the working class and Lucy exemplifies this in that she was beaten by her husband.

While Peggy sees this abuse as something completely awful, Lucy seems to take it in stride, as something that was to be expected.

Other parts of this conversation also point to the place that Lucy holds in society. For example, Lucy’s description of her husband as a big and strong with red hair, portrays him as either an Irish immigrant or the offspring of Irish immigrants; something that would automatically place him, and consequently her, in the working class. As if to bring the point home, Lucy talks about how he is a demon when he’s drinking. Drinking to excess is often something that has been consistently associated with the Irish immigrants, thus creating one of the most enduring and understandable stereotypes of the modern era.

The second conversation that Lucy has about her personal life makes her position and status. In recounting her experience of being in love to the Countess DeLave, there is no doubt about Lucy’s place in society as a working-class woman:

Countess: “Lucy, have you ever been in love?
Lucy: Yes ma’am.
Countess: Tell us about it.
Lucy: Ain’t much to tell. I kinda enjoyed the courtin’ time. He was as pretty a sight you ever saw to see him come lopin’ across dem hills. The sky so big and blue and that big top o’ his blazin’ like the bejiggers in the sun. Made me sit on my back fence and squaw. Ma’am, you know how dem big, strong, red-headed men are – they just got to get the point. So we got married, ma’am. Naturally, ain’t had no chance to think about love since.”60

60 Ibid.
In describing not only her dating experience but also how she felt very a very strong physical attraction to her boyfriend/husband, Lucy firmly places herself in the film as the epitome of a working-class woman. By describing her attraction to her future husband as a feeling that appears to be a very animalistic, Lucy places herself in the working class as the lower classes were more likely to act out on their animalistic feelings; her attraction to her future husband made her sit on her fence and shout with excitement. This type of physicality in love was a trait usually associated with animals, and the lower classes. Upper class women and men courted but always maintained a semblance of control when it came to the physical expression of that love.

Although several of the upper class characters in The Women were shown either with children or with the implication of children, and the main character Mary Haines herself had one child, Lucy’s talk of her children was quite different and something that placed her well within her class. Most particularly, however, is Edith Potter, who has seven girls when the film starts and has another girl during the film. Edith’s children, when shown on screen are all being taken care of by others; the voice teacher who is at the piano with one of the girls or the nanny who is walking the others. While Edith is the mother, at no point does she take an active role in the rearing of the children; rather she allows other to take care of her herd. Lucy on the other hand,
states outright to Peggy that she has not had time to be happy with “the kids and all.”

This indicates that Lucy has not only been working away from the house at the divorce ranch to help maintain the livelihood of her family, she has also been the sole person responsible for raising her kids. The dichotomy set up between Edith Potter as an upper class housewife who has tremendous amounts of help in raising her children and Lucy who has single-handedly raised her children, probably without the help of her husband, allows for a working-class audience to find their mirror image in Lucy. It was the very few who had the resources to pawn off the raising of their children to others during the Depression years, thus audiences saw Lucy as one of their own. Therefore, meaning for working-class women with children in *The Women* was located with Lucy, not Edith, although both women had children.

As the location for meaning in *The Women*, Lucy provides a comprehensive image for working-class women to idealize. Physically, she was not a raging beauty; as compared to the lead character of the film, Mary Haines, Lucy was sub-par regarding almost every physical characteristic such as facial structure, body stature and hair shininess. In regards to the clothes she wore, they were old, not well cared for and seemed to be almost too big; all of which could be a sign of their hand-me-down origins. Lucy’s voice and language placed her well within the working class in not only tone and volume, but also how she spoke and the grammar she used. Finally, the

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61 Ibid.
history of Lucy’s life was not the things that dreams were made of. Her past consisted of marrying a violent, drunken husband when she was quite young, having three kids almost immediately, and then being forced to work in order to maintain her family’s lifestyle.

With the intense examination of this character, along with others in this film, the stage is set for understanding how working-class women in the 1930s consumed, appropriated and used the images they saw on screen. In the film, Lucy is only on screen for four minutes and fifty-three seconds yet she provides the only image in the film that working-class audiences could relate to. Applying Jauss’ reception theory to this text, audiences used their own cultural background to understand and find meaning in the images they saw. Therefore, it is Lucy, and not the other glamorous characters, that provides identifiable meaning for working class audiences by being the mirror image of themselves. By understanding that the cultural representation of Lucy is in fact their mirror image, working-class women may have self-identified with her, related to her problems, and found more meaning in her character than the other characters who occupied a position as a simply an escapist personality. Therefore it is Lucy that became a role model for working-class women in the audience during 1939; someone they could imitate and emulate.
Film’s place in 1939 America, with its pervasiveness and importance as a cultural product, makes it an ideal text to study in order to better understand the cultural makeup of American society. By asking questions such as, “How did the cultural representation of a working-class woman speak to actual working-class women in 1939?,” and “How did working-class women find meaning in the images they saw on screen, and thus self-identify with those images?,” this project has attempted to better understand the ways in which a text can be read to locate meaning. By understanding that meaning is found not only in the images seen on screen but rather in the relationship between the viewing audience and the text itself, the reception of The Women points to the several conclusions. First, although, upper class women viewed and related to the main characters of the film on a personal and self-identifying manner, working-class women, who were in the majority of movie-goers at the time, had the same reaction but to the working-class women portrayed on the screen. Secondly, while working-class audiences related to their mirror image on screen, they also found meaning in characters such as Lucy who represented the archetypical working-class women. Working-class women self-identified with Lucy, related to her problems, and found more meaning in her character than the other characters who occupied a position as an escapist personality. Finally, since working-class women viewers found meaning in Lucy, they also found a character that they could imitate and
emulate, thus developing a sense of self from these images. Rather than simply seeing this film as an escapist fantasy into the upper class social life of New York City, working-class women found meaning in the cultural representation of working-class on film.
Chapter 3. “I’m not the sort of person men marry:” Representation and Meaning in Hitchcock’s Rebecca

“When would you prefer, New York or Manderley?”62 When asked this question by Maxim De Winter in MGM’s Rebecca (1940), the lead female character (“I,” played by Joan Fontaine) does not completely understand the true nature of what he is asking. As the scene unfolds, “I” begs Maxim not to joke about such a thing, and wonders out loud if he needs a “secretary or something.” When Maxim finally discloses his true intentions – he wants to marry her – “I” is so taken aback that she backs up to take a seat in a chair with a look of complete bewilderment on her face. Her speechlessness prompts Maxim to wonder if his idea is not what “I” wants. The following exchange between the two main characters serves as an example of the dichotomy set up within the narrative of this film that frames this section of the current research:

Maxim: “Well, my suggestion doesn't seem to have gone at all well -- I'm sorry.
“I:” Oh, but you don't understand -- it's that -- I -- well -- I'm not the sort of person men marry.
Maxim: What on earth do you mean?
“I:” I don't belong in your sort of world, for one thing.
Maxim: What is my sort of world?
“I:” Well -- Manderley -- you know what I mean.
Maxim: Well, I'm the best judge of whether you belong there or not. Of course, if you don't love me, that's a different thing. A fine blow to my conceit, that's all!

62 Alfred Hitchcock, director. Rebecca, 1940.
“I:” I do love you! I love you most dreadfully! I’ve been crying all morning because I thought I’d never see you again.”

This interchange, occurring approximately twenty minutes into the film, states outright what the coded messages embedded within the main character, the second Mrs. De Winter (or “I” prior to her marriage to Maxim), has been pointing to since the start of the film. The understanding of “I” as a working-class character, with her differences and similarities to other female characters in the film, provides a basis for locating a possible place for working-class women to find meaning in 1940. Using methods similar to those of the previous chapter on *The Women*, this section seeks to understand how the character of the second Mrs. De Winter provides an ideal cultural representation of working-class femininity through its manifestation as a mirror image for female working-class audiences to consume, appropriate and emulate, therefore providing a possible place for meaning for women in 1940.

As a method to identifying a possible place for meaning for working-class female audiences in 1940, this chapter not only identifies those characteristics that make a character endearing to a wide viewership, but also establishes that, in order to understand their consumption and appropriation of certain characters, certain principles of reception apply. For example, Jauss’ theory of reception states that consumers of a

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text (in this case, the film audience) does not simply passively accept the representations on film, rather the audience actively engages the text, consumes it, appropriates it and transforms it into a place for meaning actively. Also crucial to the foundation of this chapter’s argument is that viewership is set up as a dichotomy; certain characters and situations are understood and consumed by viewers as escapist while, on the other hand, other characters (those that provide a mirror image for the audience) are understood, consumed, appropriated and used by the audience on a more realistic level. This type of consumption and appropriation signifies a possible place of meaning for working-class female audiences in 1940.

As a cultural product from 1940, Alfred Hitchcock’s Rebecca can provide a unique insight into the study of women and their search for meaning. With its several film versions, a television serialization and the translation of the original Daphne Du Maurier novel into twenty languages, Rebecca is arguably one of the best known works of fiction from the late 1930s.⁶⁴ The initial film version of Rebecca appeared in 1940, only two years after the original publication of the book and marked Alfred Hitchcock’s American directorial debut. A comment on its tremendous popularity and success after its theatrical release, Rebecca was nominated for eleven Academy

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⁶⁴ Alison Light, “‘Return to Manderley’ – Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class,” in Feminist Review (No. 16, April 1984), 7.
Awards and won the Oscar for Best Picture in 1940.\textsuperscript{65} Described by Frank S. Nugent, film critic for the New York Times, as “brilliant,” this film reached a wide and varied audience during its release, thus providing an ideal popular culture product to examine.\textsuperscript{66}

Far from being just a film about how a second wife copes with the memory of her husband’s first wife, \textit{Rebecca} is more complex in the depiction of class conflict and strife. Not only does the second Mrs. De Winter come from a somewhat questionable (read = working-class) background, the other characters of the film are quite obviously from the upper class and high society. It is the places where these two worlds meet, when the second Mrs. De Winter attempts to immerse herself in their upper-class world, that the truth of her position as working-class is most obvious. And it is in those moments that working-class women in 1940 found a possible connection to the second Mrs. De Winter, creating in her the ideal cultural representation of themselves - their mirror image. It is through this connection that women viewers in 1940 not only consumed their mirror image, but also appropriated that image and made it their own; finding a role model in the second Mrs. De Winter to pattern their own lives after. Thus, rather than simply seeing the filmic narrative of \textit{Rebecca} as a thrilling, gothic

romance, women viewers in 1940 found a possible place to locate meaning in film based on the cultural representation and image created in the second Mrs. De Winter.

In order to better clarify this position, this project will look at three main female characters from *Rebecca*. First, although she is never seen on screen, the examination of Rebecca’s character is crucial to scrutinize. Though the audience never even catches a glimpse of Rebecca in pictures or drawings, her presence is undeniable. The descriptions of her physical, as well as psychical, attributes provides a counterpoint that is in sharp contrast to the second Mrs. De Winter. Second, the housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, will be examined. While she is obviously working-class (since her role in high society is that of a servant), the cultural representation that she presented to working-class female audiences in 1940 is flawed through her obsession with the late Rebecca. This flaw is evident in the subversive implication of sexual perversion on the part of Mrs. Danvers and the resulting mental instability (her suicide through the burning of Manderley) that is the climax of the film. And finally, the second Mrs. De Winter’s character will be analyzed to understand how she is an ideal cultural representation of working-class. By seeing her as the ideal mirror image for working-class audiences in 1940, this project asserts that working-class women viewers consumed that image, appropriated it and ultimately used that image in order to develop their own sense of self in American society. For working-class women in
1940, the image of the second Mrs. De Winter provided a possible place of meaning where they could understand themselves and the world around them, but more importantly, how they fit into that world.

“The Most Beautiful Creature I Ever Saw”: Rebecca

Although never shown on screen, Rebecca De Winter nonetheless is apparent to all who viewed the film. Not only is she described throughout the film, giving the viewer the sense of who she was, more importantly, her elegance and presence is also felt in the lavish objects found in the mise-en-scène of the entire film, especially in her bedroom. In fact, her omnipresence in the film inspired a real-life collection of gowns that was introduced into the 1940 fashion season.67 Coded from the beginning as upper class, Rebecca provides a telling counterpoint to the second Mrs. De Winter, thus giving working-class viewers in 1940 an escapist ideal of femininity in her, albeit invisible, cultural representation. With this study of Rebecca as an ideally feminine and upper-class woman, she embodies the aspiration of many working-class women to escape their ho-hum everyday existence. This informs and reifies the contention of this research that the cultural representation of upper class provided an escape for working-class viewers but the cultural representation of working-class provided a possible place for women to find meaning in 1940.

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Knowing very little of the specifics regarding Rebecca’s actual facial structure and body type, we do learn certain things about her appearance throughout the course of the film. The famous scene from inside Rebecca’s bedroom with Mrs. Danvers and the second Mrs. De Winter tells the audience that Rebecca had rather long, flowing hair. As Mrs. Danvers describes how she used to brush Rebecca’s hair in long strokes for twenty minutes at a time, imitating the way she used to do it when Rebecca was alive, the audience is able to visualize the length and softness associated with this action. Later in the film, the viewer learns from Maxim that Rebecca’s hair was black as he describes how she mocked him and their marriage while her black hair flowed in the wind. Finally, Dr. Baker, near the end of the film describes her as “dark;” a phrase that was meant to denote the darkness of her hair and physical attributes. Also from Dr. Baker, we learn that she was tall; a characteristic that is not at all like the second Mrs. De Winter.

More than just physically describing Rebecca, many other characters describe her as beautiful. While Frank Crawley, Maxim’s estate manager described her as the “most beautiful creature I’ve ever known,” others such as Mrs. Van Hopper and Dr. Baker also use the term beautiful to describe the dead Rebecca. Perhaps most telling about her beauty is Maxim’s description of her after her body is discovered:

Maxim: “Oh, I was carried away by her -- enchanted by her, as everyone was. And when I was married, I was told I was the luckiest man
in the world. She was so lovely -- so accomplished -- so amusing. ‘She's got the three things that really matter in a wife,’ everyone said – ‘breeding, brains and beauty.’ And I believed them -- completely.’

Her beauty and what the audience at first believes is the romantic story of her life at Manderley with Maxim, are idealistic fantasies that many working-class women viewers went to the movies to see. It was an escape from their monotonous lives as workers, mothers and wives.

Rebecca’s image, however, is more than just her physical appearance. More than anything, the mise-en-scène of the film lays out the personality and glamour of Rebecca. First of all, in the scene with Mrs. Danvers and the second Mrs. De Winter in Rebecca’s bedroom, the audience gets a view of the kinds of clothing worn by Rebecca. As Mrs. Danvers opens the closet, a vast array of very expensive evening gowns emerges. As Mrs. Danvers brings out one of the coats and shows it to the second Mrs. De Winter, she tells the young bride that it was a Christmas present from Maxim and that he was always giving Rebecca expensive gifts. Although the door to the closet is only open momentarily, the audience glimpses the expensive ball gowns and furs that have been lovingly maintained by Mrs. Danvers. Rebecca’s lavish extravagance and class position are noted in her wardrobe. The majority of the

evening gowns in the closet are those with fur lining around the neck. Also evident are those evening gowns that are adorned with gemstones and jewels. This type of wardrobe is indicative of a woman in the upper class. By coding of Rebecca as upper class, a situation is created where a working-class audience sees Rebecca and her life as part of an escapist fantasy. She becomes that which they aspire to be but can never quite become – and they know they can never make that move up to the upper class.

Fig. 3.1: Dame Judith Anderson (Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca*) and Joan Fontaine (the Second Mrs. De Winter in *Rebecca*)
(www.americanphoto.co.jp/pages/movie/RE/500.html)

Other aspects of the scenery allow a more in-depth analysis the possibility that audiences in 1940 consumed the image of Rebecca as merely an escapist character by her image as an upper-class woman. First, her room, in the west wing of Manderley,
was exquisitely furnished. For example, her bed was a canopied bed with lace curtains and a lace bedspread. It is likely that very few if any working-class women who saw this image related it to their own lives. Rather, the image of that type of opulence led women to see this existence (the life of Rebecca) as a fictional escape. It did not represent any reality that they were familiar with.

Second, although other rooms are shown in Manderley, none are singled out and described for their beauty like Rebecca’s bedroom. The room (and scene), as described in the film script, is stunning:

“REBECCA’S ROOM: …. The flood of day-light reveals an astonishing scene. "I" swings round amazed, as she sees a most elegantly furnished room, expressed in the lightest possible tones -- white predominates nearly everywhere. The four poster bed is very regal on its double-stepped dais. The bed is made up with the coverlet folded back. A large spray of lovely fresh white flowers is set in a prominent position. In another part of the room is an ornate dressing table complete with brushes, combs, mirrors, elaborate bottles of perfume, and so forth.

She gazes spellbound as her eyes begin to take in more details of the room. The view begins to sweep round the room, taking in as it goes the cream, silken bedcover, the cream velvet-wrapped posters of the bed, and on the cover, most astonishing of all, the palest grey satin nightdress case with the black initial "R" -- down across the very light carpet and past the tall cheval mirror.

She moves on, the view following her past the long cheval mirror to the dressing table -- where a picture of Maxim is prominently displayed. She touches the hairbrush lightly. Through the mirror we see the bed reflected -- "I"
sees it and is drawn toward it. She moves over and finds that she is staring down at the nightdress case which lies on the pillow.”69

This scene, as it was filmed, set a striking contrast to the rest of Manderley. The ceiling is tall and the curtains are flowing, giving the impression (one that is affirmed by Maxim later in the film) that Rebecca had a flowing sense about her physical appearance. From Rebecca’s bedroom, the audience learns more about her style and grace than from any description given of her throughout the film. It is obvious from the divine furnishings and accessories that Rebecca was a woman of great taste. She wore only the best clothes, and insisted on the best furnishings in her bedroom suite. Also, the audience learns that she was very particular about the way she looked and took great strains to maintain a certain routine. As Mrs. Danvers explains to the second Mrs. De Winter, when Rebecca would come home, she would always do the same thing: she would take a bath, allow Mrs. Danvers to brush her hair for twenty minutes, and finally retire to bed in her black chiffon nightgown. Therefore, not only was Rebecca well dressed, she was somewhat obsessive about her things based on her never erring nightly routine. This type of room, with all of its lavish extravagances, was something that women of 1940 could only dream about attaining.

Although Rebecca is never seen in the film, her presence pervades the narrative throughout. While many of the characters describe her as beautiful or lovely, the

audience gains just as much knowledge of Rebecca through the things she possessed at Manderley; things that are explicitly shown in the bedroom scene. While some have posited that it is the bedroom scene that introduces Rebecca as a sexual superior to the second Mrs. De Winter, this project asserts that the bedroom scene functions to provide the viewer with the almost complete visualization of Rebecca in corporeal form. It is because Rebecca is placed in a position of upper-class superiority that she functions as an escapist character; one that is not the mirror image of working-class women in the viewing audience in 1940. By placing Rebecca in this type of upper-class characterization, it can then be established that her counterpart in the film, the second Mrs. De Winter (a working-class girl and mirror image for audiences), possibly provides a more suitable (realistic) location for meaning for working-class women viewers in 1940.

**Dear Ole Dani: Mrs. Danvers**

As a symbol of class in early Hollywood film, no other image is more effective than that of a servant to designate a character as being from the working class. As seen in the previous chapter on *The Women*, servants are often depicted in uniforms, with their hair either up and away from their face or with some sort of hat on, and they are most often physically unattractive. Although the representation in *Rebecca* is somewhat different than that in *The Women*, the coded messages in the cultural
representation of the servants functions in a similar way. Although there are other female servants who appear on screen in Rebecca, none is as important or as imposing as that of Mrs. Danvers, played by Judith Anderson. From the moment she appears on screen, her image is coded in several ways; including being coded as working-class, as well as dark and evil. Although Mrs. Danvers provides one possible image of working-class for audiences to relate to, her subversive behavior makes her a less than adequate mirror image for working-class women viewers to appropriate and find meaning in.

As Mrs. Danvers enters screen left in her first scene, the physical nature of her appearance as a working-class woman is unmistakable. After getting caught in a rainstorm on the way back to Manderley, Maxim and his new wife come into the house looking disheveled because they are soaking wet. Arguably set up as a contrast to this appearance of Maxim and the second Mrs. De Winter, Mrs. Danvers’s appearance is quite in check and seemingly controlled. This appearance of Mrs. Danvers is the first in the film and the audience immediately becomes aware of her station through several key factors. First, her hair is crucial to understanding that she is indeed in the working class. Unlike many of the most popular characters in films from the late 1930s and 1940s such as “Leslie Crosby” (Bette Davis) in The Letter, “Tracy Lord” (Katherine Hepburn) in The Philadelphia Story or “Elizabeth Bennett” (Greer Garson) in Pride
and Prejudice, Mrs. Danvers’ hair is jet black. While this may seem somewhat insignificant at first, it casts her as an “other” character in the film. According to Susan Ware, sales of hydrogen peroxide went through the roof based on the popularity of such blonde actresses as Jean Harlow and Mae West, therefore, Mrs. Danvers’ hair color speaks volumes about her place in society. Although the color of her hair is important, it is not the only way in which her position is coded through the presentation of her coiffure. When Mrs. Danvers first appears on screen, and indeed throughout the film, her hair is braided and piled on top of her head. As if to designate a hat or headpiece that is not there, the braids on top of Mrs. Danvers’ head gives the illusion of a hat similar to the one worn by other female servants in this film and others.

Another physical aspect of Mrs. Danvers that needs to be examined in order to understand her as a possible cultural representation of working-class is her face. Recalling the first scene from above, one of the most noticeable features of Mrs. Danvers when she comes on screen is a mole that is located to the right and just below her mouth. Although this facial blemish is authentic to the actress, it appears that the filmmaker highlighted it (through lighting) in order to show Mrs. Danvers’ flaws as a person as well as placing her in a category of inferior femininity and class. How could

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70 Susan Ware, Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 179.
a woman with an imperfection such as that mole be anything other than unattractive, and subsequently second-class?

As if to hammer home the idea of who Mrs. Danvers’ is and what her place is in life through the highlighting of physical imperfections, she is often filmed in profile. By filming her in this manner, her nose takes on a more prominent figure on her face. From a side angle, it is easy to see that the nose is misshapen and large, and appears to monopolize her face. This type of nose is in stark contrast to some of the more glamorous stars of the day, such as Vivien Leigh who had a petite nose.

Although her facial appearance along with her hair code her as working-class, other facets of her persona are important for understanding and placing her within her class and position. In the initial shot of the return to Manderley by Maxim and the
second Mrs. De Winter, all of the servants have gathered to welcome home the happy couple. Almost all of the female servants are wearing similar outfits, with the majority of them wearing the traditional black, knee-length dress covered by a lace apron. All of them are wearing a hat except for one. With over 40% of female workers in 1940 being employed as some type of domestic worker, this type of costume certainly struck a chord of familiarity with the working-class viewer. Mrs. Danvers’ outfit, however, is different. In this scene, and in all the scenes that follow, she wears a long-sleeved, floor length black dress – one that is reminiscent of the old-fashioned Victorian age servant uniforms. It is form fitting at the top and flows out and down from the waist. It is buttoned up to the neck with small buttons and has a brooch holding on a decorative tie at the top. She changes the appearance of the dress only slightly throughout the film with the addition of different neck accessories, for example a lace tie for the costume party. While it is obvious, through a contrast with the rest of the staff, that this is not a uniform, it takes on the appearance of a uniform in several ways. First, Mrs. Danvers wears the dress throughout the entire film; second, it is all black with only a hint of white at the top with the decorative tie; and finally, it is designed very simply. By seeing this as a pseudo-uniform, one similar to outfits worn by many domestic workers in 1940, Mrs. Danvers’ social position is evident.

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Although Mrs. Danvers is clearly coded as working-class, other aspects of her appearance code her as “other:” something that made her an unsuitable mirror image for working-class women viewers. First and foremost, a dichotomy is set up between Mrs. Danvers with black hair and the second Mrs. De Winter with light or blonde hair. In this instance, the dichotomy of good versus evil is set up in the traditional white/black contrast. Secondly, Mrs. Danvers wears heavy, dark eye shadow. This coupled with the fact that the filmmaker consistently shot her with shadows across her face leads the viewer to designate Mrs. Danvers as other, or sinister. Finally, though veiled behind a long-sleeved, floor length black dress, her body can be seen to be not altogether overweight, but also not thin. More importantly, however, she maintains a taut stance at all times, with her wide shoulders drawn tightly back. In order to assert the strength and stringency of her character, Mrs. Danvers is shown standing in the
majority of her scenes. It is only during the deposition near the end of the film that she is shown sitting where, although seated, she maintains the rigidity of her body. This unnatural rigidity of stature is something that working-class women viewers in 1940 may have had a hard time relating to, thus forcing Mrs. Danvers to not occupy a place of possible meaning for working-class women who saw her on screen.

I Don’t Belong in Your World: The Second Mrs. De Winter

Playing the part of the second Mrs. De Winter, Joan Fontaine won rave reviews for her performance. With this film, Miss Fontaine saw her first leading role as well as her first Oscar nomination. It is safe to say that with reviews like the following, her career was established with the part as the second Mrs. De Winter:

“But after the director’s triumph, Miss Fontaine’s work is the outstanding quality of ‘Rebecca.’ Her success as the second and haunted Mrs. De Winter is the more remarkable, for never has the young player given evidence of such depth of feeling and emotional control. It is a characterization which will well stand the test of time.”72

But what makes her characterization of the second Mrs. De Winter so memorable? What makes her character one that most working-class women in 1940 relate to? Not only does Joan Fontaine physically embody the archetypical working-class woman persona, she also wears the clothes, talks the part and acts as a working-

class woman would if she were thrust into her position. Therefore, by examining Fontaine’s representation of working-class in *Rebecca*, and by understanding that working-class women viewers in 1940 actively consumed this image as a mirror image of themselves, appropriated it, and used it to help them self-identify in their own world, a possible place for meaning can be found in the character of the second Mrs. De Winter.

![Fig. 3.4: Joan Fontaine (The Second Mrs. De Winter in *Rebecca*)](http://www.homevideos.com/revclas/69b.htm)

Although a very beautiful young woman, the intentional alterations to the second Mrs. De Winter’s physical attributes code her as a working-class girl in *Rebecca*, and thus creates a mirror image for working-class audiences. Although her hair takes on several iterations throughout the film, the overall impression of it is that it is somewhat unruly and not at all right for a woman in the upper class. In fact, her hair is the subject of a verbal criticism leveled by Maxim’s sister, Beatrice Lacey:
“Beatrice: (Glancing at "I") Don't mind my saying so, but why don't you do something about your hair? Why don't you have it cut... (Searching for something to suggest)... or sweep it back behind your ears?

The second Mrs. De Winter’s appears behind Beatrice in a mirror and holds her hair behind her ears:

Beatrice: No, that's worse.”

Compared to her sister-in-law’s hair, the second Mrs. De Winter’s hair is quite different. Hers is not at all what was in style with the high society group as demonstrated by Beatrice.

Fig. 3.5: Dame Gladys Cooper (Beatrice Lacey in Rebecca) (http://www.thegoldenyears.org/Gladys_Cooper.jpg)

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If this style was common, as it was since Beatrice wore her hair this way, among the upper class in Great Britain at the time, then it is obvious that the second Mrs. De Winter did not wear her hair like a member of high society. Rather, her lack of style in regards to her hairstyle indicates her firm foundation within the working-class; a distinction that helped endears her to a working-class female audience.

Another way in which the second Mrs. De Winter is established as the ideal working-class character is her style of dress. It is in this regards that her class position is most apparent. Throughout the film, there is a series of outfits worn by the second Mrs. De Winter that establishes her as working class. In the beginning of the film, she is seen in the first scene wearing an outfit that is similar in color and gives the impression in the black and white film of drabiness. The skirt is just below the knees and has straight lines. The blouse, hidden under a sweater of similar color, is dull and has no demarcating qualities. It appears that the fabric of all of the above is either wool or cotton. Her shoes are white and casual (flat); resembling tennis shoes. Taken as a whole, this outfit lays the groundwork for understanding the second Mrs. De Winter as a working-class young woman. Plain and demure, the outfit screams working-class from its lack of ornamentation to its use of second rate fabrics (cotton or wool), to her wearing of unflattering tennis shoes.
In the next scene, one in which she is sitting with her employer Mrs. Van Hopper, the (future) second Mrs. De Winter is wearing her version of an evening gown. Compared to Mrs. Van Hopper’s dress, this dress is quite obviously a working-class version of an evening gown. It is not open at the collar or neck, it is not bejeweled, and it is simply not glamorous enough to be considered an upper-class type of dress. There are no shoulder poofs such as the ones on Mrs. Van Hopper’s dress, and no lavish gems like those on the evening gowns found in Rebecca’s closet – small attributes that emit a sense of superiority. And rather than wearing earrings and jewels, the girl wears a small, modest strand of pearls around her neck. It is clear in the contrast of the two dresses side-by-side, that the dress worn by the second Mrs. De Winter is far inferior to the one worn by Mrs. Van Hopper; a symbol of the stark class divisions of the two women on screen.

Fig. 3.6: Joan Fontaine (The Second Mrs. De Winter in *Rebecca*)
(http://www.homevideos.com/revclas/69b.htm)
Finally, in regards to her outer wear, the scene played out when she and Maxim are watching their honeymoon videos firmly establishes her social status based on her clothes:

“Her hair is rather sensationally dressed and beautifully coiffed, and she wears somewhat more lipstick than usual ….

‘I’: Good evening, Maxim.
Maxim: \textit{(not looking up).} Hello. The films of the honeymoon have arrived at last. Do we have time, do you think, before dinner? \textit{(He looks up to her.)} What on earth have you done to yourself?

She is seen standing at the door, and as she comes forward we see her in a close-up.

‘I’: \textit{(casually).} Oh, nothing -- I just ordered a new dress from London. I hope you don't mind?
Maxim: \textit{(crossing to her).} Oh, no -- no -- er -- only do you think that sort of thing is right for you? It doesn't seem your type at all.

‘I’: \textit{(very let down).} Oh . . . I thought you'd like it.
Maxim: \textit{(the cruel male).} And what have you done to your hair? \textit{(She doesn't answer. Maxim sees he has hurt her, and puts his arm around her.)} Oh, I see. Oh dear! Oh dear! Oh dear, I'm sorry. \textit{(Then, insincerely)} You look lovely -- lovely. That's very nice for a change. . .”\textsuperscript{74}

Not only do Maxim’s words deny her entry into his upper class world, her actions do as well. Her nervousness at wearing the clothes comes across as awkwardness; a symbol that she is more comfortable in working-class attire rather than upper-class evening wear. As if the second Mrs. De Winter’s class status was not

\textsuperscript{74} Robert E. Sherwood and Joan Harrison. \textit{Rebecca(1940), shooting script, version C}, (Alexander Street Press, 2002), 29.
already firmly established with the situation above, the scene ends by showing home movies of her and Maxim’s honeymoon. In those home movies, she is shown as happy and carefree – and always dressed in working-class dresses and skirts. It is as if her happiness, and indeed Maxim’s happiness with her is dependent on her status as that which he is not; namely, working-class.

If the adage is true that “actions speak a thousand words,” then nothing in this film can set up the second Mrs. De Winter as a working-class archetype as well as her own actions in interchanges with other characters. In the beginning of the film, she is a paid companion to Mrs. Van Hopper. Not only is she a mere employee of Mrs. Van Hopper, her acquiescence to the older woman places her in a lower social position. Indeed, she knows her position as working-class because of her employment with Mrs. Van Hopper. In a similar way, when recalling the scene where Maxim proposes to her, prior to her acceptance, she inquires if he wants a secretary. Her status as working-class, if not already firmly established by her physical attributes, is compounded with her own belief in her second-class status.

Other scenes in which the second Mrs. De Winter interacts with other characters offers examples of her actions coding her social status. For example, early in the film, just after arriving home at Manderley after their honeymoon and subsequently meeting Mrs. Danvers, she is followed out of her room by Mrs. Danvers
as she proceeds downstairs to meet Maxim for dinner. Rather than boldly walking in front of Mrs. Danvers as the lady of the house should do, the second Mrs. De Winter walks slowly, looking and almost waiting on Mrs. Danvers to catch up. In this manner, she seems to be acquiescing to Mrs. Danvers, much as she did with Mrs. Van Hopper. Rather than grasping her new station in life, the second Mrs. De Winter still sees herself as socially inferior to even the housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers.

By examining these few scenes, outfits and physical attributes of the main female characters in the film Rebecca, not only does the distinction between social classes become apparent through the cultural representation of those classes, but also a possible location for meaning emerges in the marginalized representation of working-class. One of the assertions of the current project is that films were consumed in two counter-intuitive ways (either escapist or realist) by women of the 1940s, therefore, by its nature, this film provides many dichotomies to attempt an understanding of how working-class female audiences consumed, appropriated and used the images they saw on screen, thus locating a possible place for meaning to be ascribed. By setting up a relationship between Mrs. Danvers, the quintessential working-class housewife and the second Mrs. De Winter, Mrs. Danvers cannot possibly provide a mirror image for working-class audiences. Her subversive and sinister actions caused her character to be placed on the escapist side of the spectrum. The second Mrs. De Winter, although
transformed and moved out of the working-class by her marriage to Maxim, occupies the ideal position of a mirror image for working-class female viewers in her embodiment of that cultural representation.

![Graphical representation of character relationships in Rebecca]

**Fig 3.7: Graphic relationship of characters in *Rebecca***

Another relationship can be set up between the first Mrs. De Winter (Rebecca) and the second Mrs. De Winter. Although she is never shown on screen, Rebecca’s image is clearly visible throughout the film and her status as an upper-class, glamorous
woman is never in question. In contrast to that, the second Mrs. De Winter consistently believes herself to be lower on the social totem pole than Rebecca, and thus the audience believes it as well. Therefore, the second Mrs. De Winter epitomizes the working-class woman in 1940, becoming a mirror image for those in the audience. By applying Jauss’ idea that reception of a cultural text is active, not passive, it is safe to posit that working-class female viewers in 1940 did more than just relate to the character of the second Mrs. De Winter, they also appropriated and used that image to develop their own sense of self. In this way, the character takes on a possible place for meaning in the lives of the viewers.
Chapter 4. Over the Rainbow: Working-Class Representation in MGM’s The Wizard of Oz

“Are you a good witch -- or a bad witch?” Glinda’s question is met with confusion as Dorothy looks around to make sure no one else is near. As Dorothy begins to realize that Glinda is in fact talking to her, she replies, “Who, me? Why -- I'm not a witch at all. I'm Dorothy Gale from Kansas.” This sentence, although not overtly explicit or powerful in any way, gives the viewer a type of summation for who Dorothy is throughout MGM’s The Wizard of Oz. More than just a girl from Kansas, Dorothy becomes not only the heroine of the film but also becomes a mirror image for working-class women in 1939. In her quest to find out who she is and ultimately where she belongs, Dorothy becomes a role model to working-class female viewers. This chapter seeks to nominate Dorothy as the possible place of meaning for working-class women through her cultural representation on screen as a mirror image of working-class women. The consumption, appropriation and emulation of her character by working class women sets Dorothy apart from the other two main female characters as a possible place of meaning for working-class women in the late 1930s.

The examination of her character, along with those of Glinda the Good Witch of the North and the Wicked Witch of the West, establishes a pattern that is consistent with the previous two chapters in this project. What begins to emerge in this

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75 Victor Fleming, producer. The Wizard of Oz, 1939.
76 Ibid.
examination is that each character is marked as holding a different place of meaning for working-class audiences in the late years of the Great Depression. The relationship of the three main female characters is set up in the following diagram:

![Diagram of character relationships in The Wizard of Oz]

Fig 4.1: Graphic relationship of characters in *The Wizard of Oz*

Just as in the previous two chapters, this chapter will use the principles set forth by Jauss’ reception theory, that the audience is an active recipient of the filmic text and actively engages, consumes, appropriates and transforms the text for their own purposes. Jauss’ reception theory and psychoanalytic film theory (based on Lacan’s mirror image) will play an important role in examining the characters in *The Wizard of*
Oz. Also crucial to this chapter will be the overarching theme of this project that some characters are consumed by a working-class audience as escapist characters, while others are consumed on a realistic level, thus endearing them to the audience and creating a possible place for meaning in the lives of the viewers. Therefore, this chapter will implement this methodology in order to place the three female lead characters in their places: first, Glinda as the character who occupies a place of escapism for the audience; second, the Wicked Witch of the West as the character who, although she is coded as working-class, cannot occupy a possible place of meaning for working-class women because her character is flawed; and finally, Dorothy as the character who ultimately occupies the possible place of meaning for working-class women due to her ideal mirror-image for women in the late 1930s.

*The Wizard of Oz* is arguably the most loved and treasured of all American movie classics, holding a special place in the lives of many people. Based on the 1900 children’s novel by L. Frank Baum, the film produced and distributed by MGM began principal filming in 1938 with the final film premiering on 12 August 1939 to glowing reviews. After its release in New York City and subsequently Washington, D.C., critic Frank S. Nugent of the *New York Times* raved that the film was a “delightful piece of wonderworking”77 while an unknown reviewer at *The Washington Post* called the film “one of the most amazing achievements in the history of American cinema.”77

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of cinema.” Although it was nominated for several Academy Awards, including Best Picture, it nonetheless lost out to MGM’s other smash film of the year, *Gone With the Wind*. Since that time, however, the film has received numerous accolades including being listed as sixth on the American Film Institute’s list of 100 Greatest Movies of all time. Also, *The Wizard of Oz* considered a culturally significant film by the Library of Congress and has been selected for preservation in the National Film Registry. Therefore, it is easy to understand that this film is one of the most memorable, loved and significant films of all time.

Its lasting imprint on American culture is evidenced by the wide popularity of artifacts and collectibles from and about the film. For example, one pair of the ruby slippers worn by the star of the film, Judy Garland, is on display at the Smithsonian Museum of American History while others have reportedly sold for more than $600,000. While original collectibles are rare and extremely expensive to purchase, everything from shirts to dolls to imitation ruby slippers continue to be sold worldwide to a growing number of *Oz* fans.

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81 Ibid.
Although popular during its original theatrical release, it was not until the film began showing regularly on television starting in 1956, that its place was cemented in American culture. With its original television air date near the Christmas holiday, the film became a staple of the holiday season for many children and adults growing up in the 1950s and 60s. According to Emily R. Coleman in *The Complete Judy Garland*, the film has not been off release since its debut in 1939; the longest continual release of any film ever produced.\(^{82}\) Judy Garland biographer John Fricke has even surmised that with the “nearly five decades of national telecasts, more than twenty years of home video, and the combined power of interpretation, story, and song, *Oz* has made it virtually impossible to find anyone in the United States over the age of two who doesn’t recognize Judy as Dorothy.”\(^{83}\) Not only did the film become a legend on its own, it also exploded the career of the iconic Judy Garland, creating an entertainer who has since become one of the most loved and cherished of all time.

Part of what makes *Oz* such an inviting cultural product to examine is its enduring presence in our society, either through the continual showing of the film on cable television or the retelling of the story through either re-makes or re-manifestations of the story. Since the original 1939 version of the film, there have

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been two notable remakes of Oz. The first, *The Wiz*, opened on Broadway in 1974, and then came to the big screen in 1978 starring Diana Ross as Dorothy and Michael Jackson as the Scarecrow, both of whom are immensely popular singing idols. Most recently in 2005, the Henson family produced and aired on national television, “The Muppets’ Wizard of Oz” starring Ashanti (pop singer) as Dorothy and Queen Latifah (pop singer turned actress) as Auntie Em. The most notable and significant retelling of the story of Dorothy, however, came in 1995 when Gregory Maguire released his novel, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. This novel tells the story of the lives of the characters from the Baum novel prior to Dorothy arriving in Oz. In this re-manifestation of the story, Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, is the heroine rather than the antagonist. This immensely popular novel was turned into an even larger and more popular Broadway musical that even today continues to sell out performances both in New York and on tour across the country. All of the re-makes and re-tellings of the Oz story are a testament to its enduring popularity with the American public. With its continuing fascination for young and old alike, it is possible that no other story has touched our consciousness as a group in quite the same way that *The Wizard of Oz* has.

With the immense popularity of the film, naturally there are a number of different scholarly manuscripts devoted to the examination of *Oz*. Any study of the
film would be remiss without the mention of Henry M. Littlefield’s seminal essay titled “The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism.” Although specifically concerning the Baum novel of 1900 and not the MGM film from 1939, this essay was the first to look upon the story with a critical eye. Littlefield concluded that Baum’s book can be seen as a critique of the populist movement in the late 1800s.\textsuperscript{84} Crucial for the current project is simply Littlefield’s proverbial opening of the door for critical inquiry into \textit{Oz}.

Other scholarship on \textit{Oz} soon followed and there have been several key essays written about the film. First is Lynette Carpenter’s “‘There’s No Place Like Home’: \textit{The Wizard of Oz} and American Isolationism.” Just as Littlefield did with the original novel, Carpenter contextualizes the 1939 MGM film by placing it within a larger historical context. According to Carpenter, when the film is placed within the international context of a world on the verge of another world war, it “reflects the spirit of isolationism” that existed in 1939 America.\textsuperscript{85} Other important works on \textit{Oz} include: first, the essay by Helen M. Kim “Strategic Credulity: \textit{Oz} as Mass Culture Parable” which sees the film as an allegory for American consumerism; second, an essay by Hugh Rockoff titled “The ‘Wizard of Oz’ as a Monetary Allegory” that is based on the

\textsuperscript{85} Lynette Carpenter, “‘There’s No Place Like Home’: \textit{The Wizard of Oz} and American Isolationism” in \textit{Film & History} (Vol. XV, No. 2, May, 1985), 38.
original Littlefield article but expands the idea to interpret it for economists and economic historians; and finally an essay by Joshua David Bellin titled “’I Don’t Know How It Works’: The Wizard of Oz and the Technology of Alienation” that seeks to place the film within the technological debates of the Depression in order to show how the film sanctioned the monopolization of technology by the few and alienated the vast majority of society. While all of these are important essays about The Wizard of Oz, their relevance for this project is more to show how this film continues to be popular among a wide range of scholars from many disciplines. By creating a new critical discourse surrounding the film that places the film within the sight of the working-class female viewer, this chapter seeks to contribute to the growing scholarship surrounding The Wizard of Oz, as well as the discourse surrounding class studies. Therefore, the current project seeks not only to decode and understand the film, as many of the previous texts have done, but to also contextualize and historicize the film in order to grasp its full impact on an America that was still in the throes of the Great Depression.

In order to examine the cultural representation of working-class women in The Wizard of Oz, this chapter will dissect the three main female characters of the film. In the first section, Glinda the Good Witch of the North will be considered. Glinda, because of her dress, stature and the fact that she holds power over the Munchkins, can be considered an upper-class character in the film. The second part will reflect on the
Wicked Witch of the West and her position as a cultural representation of working-class. Although she is coded as a working-class female, several factors point to her as a flawed image such as her skin tone, her dower dress, and others that will be examined in the text. Finally, Dorothy will be looked at and identified as the cultural representation of working-class that women in the late 1930s identified with, appropriated and used as a possible place of meaning. Dorothy’s meek background and demure dress are only two examples of how she is not only coded as a working-class female, but also coded as the appropriate place of meaning for working-class women viewers in 1939. Thus, in The Wizard of Oz, Dorothy occupies a possible location of meaning where women could self-identify as well as contextualize themselves in the world in which they lived.

Because the film is a fantasy film, the connections made between the cultural representation, of both working-class and upper-class, seen on screen and the working-class audience member will be a little more ambiguous than in the previous two chapters. While the audience could fully comprehend and see both Lucy in The Women and the Second Mrs. De Winter in Rebecca as working-class women in the other chapters, the attribution of character and placement of meaning on Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz will be on a metaphorical level. Although the viewer in 1939 was watching a film that in no way could be based in truth (thus its designation as a fantasy
film), the components of each characters persona specifically code each one of them in order to place them in a hierarchy of status. In realistic feature films, hierarchy does not necessarily invoke class. But this chapter will argue that because *The Wizard of Oz* is a fantasy, hierarchy metaphorically invokes class in this instance. Therefore, the following diagram places the characters hierarchically and subsequently, classically:

![Hierarchical relationship of characters in *The Wizard of Oz*](image)

Fig. 4.2: Hierarchical relationship of characters in *The Wizard of Oz*
A Magnificent Shade of Pink: Glinda the Good Witch

The image of the witch in American popular culture has generally been one of an older female who wears a long, black flowing dress while at the same time possessing unattractive physical features. As shown in *The Wizard of Oz*, witches can fit perfectly into that stereotype or they can alter that perception. In the case of Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, the representation of her as a witch is quite in contrast to the ugly, mean old witch of American memory. By coding her in ways that are not consistent with the archetypal witch, the film not only signifies that Glinda is different than the ordinary witch (like the Wicked Witch of the West) but also labels her as something better than that. Therefore, by presenting her this way, she is placed in a class above both the Wicked Witch of the West, Dorothy and indeed all the rest of the characters. This perceived class position causes Glinda to become that which all others hope to attain, therefore she does not provide a place of meaning for the working-class female viewer in 1939.

Even before Glinda appears on screen, she is coded as an angelic and beautiful creature. As Dorothy tries to figure out where she has landed, she sees a beautiful multicolored orb approaching from the sky; significantly, it comes from above as if whatever it is has been sent by God from heaven. As the orb comes closer, it turns a magnificent shade of pink. Because the universal symbol of femininity is pink, the
impression from the film is that whatever the orb is, or rather whoever is inside the orb, is the very embodiment of all that is ideally feminine. As Glinda takes a corporeal form, the coding of her image is consistent with that of the orb. She is shown in a long shot wearing a full-length, pink taffeta dress that is adorned with gems. Along with the lace wings on her back and a tall, pink crown on her head that has diamonds on it, she also carries a scepter made with diamonds in the shape of a star. In the time it takes to see and consume her image on screen, the coded message of who she is and what she stands for is concretized in the viewers’ subconscious.

Fig. 4.3: Billie Burke (Glinda the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*)

The delicate nature of the costume signals the dainty and feminine nature of Glinda which indicates that she does not work for a living, therefore she is placed clearly in the upper class. The dress, unlike many of the styles becoming popular in
the late 1930s (as seen in *The Women*), is full-length, and not modern in its lines. The bellowing out of the bottom signifies an old-fashioned type of femininity, one that is associated with the wealth and social status of the debutante. Simply by looking at how she is dressed, the audience consumes and understands Glinda as an upper-class female; one that is to be admired and revered in a fantasy, escapist way but not someone who holds realistic meaning for women in the 1930s.

Other aspects of Glinda’s costume also indicate class position. Just as Rebecca’s gowns in the closet had gems on them in *Rebecca* and Mary Haines’ dress had gems attached to it in *The Women*, Glinda’s dress has gems not only on the gown itself but also on the crown. Based on the evidence from *The Wizard of Oz* as well as the other films examined in this project, gems on dresses give the audience a visible clue that women who wear such dresses occupy a position in the upper class.

Just as her costume indicates social status, Glinda’s interaction with those around her also points to her higher social position and status. In the beginning of the film, Glinda is shown in Munchkinland where she first meets Dorothy. Her position of authority over the munchkins is indicated by two key factors. First and foremost, she is taller than them. Secondly, their childlike enthusiasm for her is noticeable in their reactions when she appears and subsequently leaves Munchkinland. As she appears, she reassures them, as a mother would, that Dorothy means them no harm and when
she leaves in the same orb in which she came, they all run after her waving and cooing as she flies off. In a similar way, only with more awe and reverence than in Munchkinland, the citizens of Oz all bow and show their humble regard for Glinda as she reappears to send Dorothy home. Finally, Dorothy’s submissive behavior also indicates that Glinda is to be considered upper class. In the beginning of the film, when Glinda and Dorothy first meet, Dorothy curtsies to Glinda in an obvious sign of obedience. At the end of the film, when Glinda comes to help Dorothy go home, Dorothy again curtsies, solidifying Glinda’s rank and position as something that is above her own. These three instances indicate that she is considered upper class by the people in Oz, the Munchkins and Dorothy, and thus should be considered upper class by the viewers of the film. By depicting her this way, Glinda comes to embody a fantasy, escapist characterization of an upper class, ideally feminine woman who working-class members of the audience can look up to but not necessarily relate to realistically. Therefore, Glinda does not occupy a position of meaning for working-class women in the 1930s.

No On Mourns the Wicked: The Wicked Witch of the West

Although the image of Glinda as a witch does not fit any conceived stereotype for witches in American thought and memory, the image of the Wicked Witch of the
West, on the other hand, is the archetypal image of the witch in western society. With her green skin, unattractive physical features and accoutrements (black, flowing dress and broom), the Wicked Witch in The Wizard of Oz has all of the qualities that typify a witch. But, by examining her in terms of class association, the Wicked Witch can be seen in a much different light. By examining the Wicked Witch’s physical features, costume and actions, her image as a working-class character begins to emerge. But, in much the same that Mrs. Danvers functioned in Rebecca, the working-class representation of the Wicked Witch is presented with certain flaws that bar working-class female viewers from finding an appropriate place of meaning in her representation. Therefore, while the Wicked Witch presented audiences with one image of working-class in The Wizard of Oz, the flaws that she exhibits make her character insufficient for viewers to consume, appropriate and ultimately find meaning in.

As a character in America’s social memory, the witch holds a recognizable quality that few other archetypal characters possess in cultural products. The American Heritage College Dictionary defines the witch in several ways with the first of these as a woman (note here that this is gender specific) who has supernatural powers and practices sorcery. In a secondary definition, she is also defined as an old,
ugly woman. These two definitions discuss how the witch is defined in American culture but how is she portrayed and what are the underlying impetuses for those definitions? In Marvin Harris’ text, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches*, the witch possesses certain characteristics that make her interesting for this study. Harris states that during the Christian witch hunts, transgressors were pulled from lower classes to weaken any attempt at solidarity and revolt. By seeing the correlation between the cultural representation of the witch as old, ugly, and adept at using supernatural powers and the implication that she is also from the lower classes (read: working-class), there are two overarching facets to the witch’s characterization. While it is generally accepted that she will be able to use special powers, she will also be implicitly from the working class. Thus, the cultural representation of the Wicked Witch, and how that could have been interpreted by a working-class audience, begins to take shape

Making quite an entrance in her first scene, the Wicked Witch quickly begins to take on the characteristics of both a working-class representation. Prior to speaking even one word, she is seen coming out of a blast of smoke, wearing a flowing black dress and hat; it is this image that meets the audience first. As seen in the chapter on *Rebecca* with Mrs. Danvers, a black dress is used to signify a servant or housemaid. While there is a possibility that the Wicked Witch and Mrs. Danvers, through their

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display of a simple black dress, wish to convey a certain type of middle-class respectability, their respective position as witch and servant prohibit their migration from the working-class to the middle-class. Indeed, the dress worn by the Wicked Witch is eerily similar to the one worn by Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca*. It is a long-sleeved dress where the upper body of the dress is tighter than the rest of the dress, although not completely form-fitting. It flows down and out from the waist and is floor length. Throughout the entire film, this is the dress that the Wicked Witch wears. Because her dress is similar to ones worn by servants, and because she occupies a place in the working-class by being a witch, the Witch is coded from her first moment on screen as working-class.

Since her dress codes her as working-class, the Wicked Witch’s hat codes her as working-class but flawed. As is the case with other working-class women in previous chapters, for example the salon workers in *The Women* and the servants in *Rebecca*, the Wicked Witch wears a hat that matches her dress; it is black. As a marker of working-class status, the hat has a special resonance with working-class women. According to Nan Enstad in *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, working-class women dressed in highly exaggerated forms of fashion, including large hats. Citing Clara Lemlich’s struggle with factory owners in the early twentieth
century to install dressing rooms for working women to hang their hats, Enstad claimed that Lemlich made the hat “the symbol of gender and class struggle.” Based on Enstad’s assertion about the primacy and meaning of hats for working-class women, and the fact that the witch wears a large, exaggerated hat, the assumption can be made that the Wicked Witch’s hat firmly places her within the working class.

Just as the dress of the Witch codes her as working-class, so too do the physical features of her face designate her as working-class. As seen in the previous two chapters with Lucy and with Mrs. Danvers, the working-class representation on screen often does not possess those physical features that are consistent with 1939’s image of beauty. Similarly to Lucy in The Women, the Wicked Witch’s nose is pointed, somewhat crooked in the middle, and takes a prominent position on her face. Other aspects of the Witch’s face code her as working-class as well. First, she has a prominent chin that creates an elongated look to her face. Second, her mouth is small and her lips are almost non-existent. Third, her eyebrows are bushy and point upwards on the outside half. Finally, although their faces are shaped differently, one key factor for both Mrs. Danvers from Rebecca and the Wicked Witch from The Wizard of Oz is the mole.

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As the mole on Mrs. Danvers’ face designates her as working-class, so to does the mole on the Witch’s face accomplish the same effect. All of these factors point to the Witch’s coding as less than attractive, which in turn can be seen as designating her as working-class based on this lack of beauty.

Finally, while her physical appearance codes her concurrently as working-class, so too do her accoutrements. As an example of this, her broom plays a crucial part in the coding of the Wicked Witch. Because the broom is an instrument of domestic production, the fact that the Wicked Witch has one in her possession is a sign to indicate her status as working-class. Unlike Glinda, who travels via brightly colored orb, the Wicked Witch is forced to use her broom in order to get from place to place.
In fact, the importance of the broom to the character of the Wicked Witch is seen in the request made to the Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion by the Wizard. Never specifically telling the group to kill the Wicked Witch, the Wizard merely tells them to bring the Witch’s broomstick in order to be granted their wishes. There is the implication in this directive that the broom is more important and powerful than first realized. If the broom holds the seat of the Witch’s power, then this places her specifically as a working-class woman by associating her, and her power as a woman (or a witch), with a broom.

Although there are many things about Witch that code her and place her well within the working-class, one aspect in particular designates her as flawed. Not evident from her first appearance on screen, it is only when the audience sees the Witch in a medium close-up shot that it becomes evident that she is green. While there are many assumptions and theories that can be made about how that could affect an audience. It is possible that one of the ways this manifested itself with audiences in 1939 was with the impression of immigrant status. There were waves of immigrants that hit the United States in the early 20th century, creating an atmosphere of fear in the 1920s among Americans who thought that American institutions would be weakened by foreign elements.89 Not only was this distrust of immigrants still lingering in

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American memory, the instability of the political situation in Europe created a feeling of isolation among a good number of Americans.\textsuperscript{90} By depicting the witch with a skin color that was vastly different than the average American (green rather than white), it is possible that her image created a negative response based on past non-acceptance of immigrants in the United States, and a distrust of foreigners based on the situation in Europe during the latter years of the 1930s. Although the film is a fantasy, metaphorically, it is possible that the color of the witch’s skin unconsciously created an image of “other” among working-class Americans. Thus, the cultural representation of the witch is significantly flawed simply based on the fact that she is green.

While the Witch’s skin color is the most significant aspect of her being that is flawed, there are other aspects of her characterization that can be shown as examples of her failings. First, while the broom is a significant indicator of her class status, there are also aspects of it that cause it to be seen as flawed. Not only is the broom large and oversized making it hard to handle, it is clear from the bristles that it would never work to sweep dirt away. They are long and flowing, not held taut like most brooms. By giving the appearance that the broom is not good for actual domestic work, the broom can be seen as flawed. Secondly, just as the relationship of good versus evil is set up in Rebecca, so too is the dichotomy set up in The Wizard of Oz. Based on the traditional white/black contrast, the Witch would necessarily be perceived as evil based

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 319.
on her dark hair and dark features. Finally, although the witch’s character, based on the fact that she is a witch, designates her as working-class, it also flaws her in the eyes of the audience. Using the two definitions from above, the audience can accept her as working-class because that is an integral and implicit part of that characterization. But because the witch is shown actually performing sorcery, as in the scene when she concocts a potion to make Dorothy and her friends fall asleep in the poppy field, her person is flawed. These are just a few examples of the flaws that exist in the Wicked Witch; flaws that make the witch take the place of “other” and create an unacceptable image for working-class women in 1939.

While the Wicked Witch of the West is clearly coded as working-class, her image is also flawed in the eyes of a working-class audience. Based on her clothing, physical attributes, and possessions, the Witch can be seen as a cultural representation of working-class on film. But because each of these attributes is flawed in some way (her clothing is flawed by the inappropriateness of the hat, her physical features are flawed by the fact that she is green, and her broom is flawed in that it will not work as an instrument of domestic production), the Witch herself becomes flawed in the eyes of the working-class viewer. Therefore, the Wicked Witch of the West, although coded and consumed by a working-class audience as a working-class representation of
themselves, cannot be appropriated by that audience and cannot hold a place of meaning for that audience.

**There’s No Place Like Homely: Dorothy**

As Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, Judy Garland created not only an iconic character whose image is still as recognizable today as it was in 1939, but she also embodied the very epitome of a working-class farm girl from Kansas. Although significantly older than the Dorothy from L. Frank Baum’s original novel, Garland’s portrayal of Dorothy in the 1939 film version of *The Wizard of Oz* lays the foundation for a possible consumption and appropriation of her character by working-class female viewers not as a child, but rather as a mirror image of themselves. This interesting and complex dynamic can be attributed to her coding as a working-class woman who personifies the very ideal of working-class femininity, through her clothing, physical appearance and actions, consequently endearing herself to the audience. Therefore, this section will show how Dorothy, because of her coding as a working-class woman, is a possible place of meaning for working-class women in 1939.

Unlike Judy Garland, however, Dorothy was a farm girl from Kansas; a fact that forces a brief look at her character as a *rural* working-class girl. Rather than detracting from her possible appeal to working-class women from all over the United States, Dorothy’s rural upbringing actually adds to her character’s appeal. By
exhibiting a sense of simplicity that can only be attributed to her rural upbringing, Dorothy is able to garner sympathy from not only the other characters on the screen, but also from the audience. This sense of simplicity is seen in Dorothy’s response to Glinda’s inquiry about whether she is a good witch or a bad witch; “Who, me? Why -- I'm not a witch at all. I'm Dorothy Gale from Kansas.” Indeed, throughout the film, Dorothy continues to act the part of the simple farm girl in several ways. First, her only wish is to get back home, something that should be much easier to achieve than procuring a brain for the Scarecrow, or getting the Tin Man a heart or even finding some courage for the Cowardly Lion. Secondly, she refers to herself, upon the group’s first meeting with the Wizard, as the small and meek. Finally, her general naïveté and surprise at the things she finds in Oz – like a talking scarecrow, a man made of tin, and a wailing lion – are indicative of a sheltered life; one that was spent on a farm. Thus, because the film is a fantasy, and because Dorothy is portrayed with a sense of simplicity, the fact that she is from a rural region does not take away from her appeal to a working-class woman from an urban area. It is precisely that characteristic that universalizes her character for working-class women across the country.

Although not unattractive in her role as Dorothy, Judy Garland was by no means the definition of an upper-class Hollywood beauty in The Wizard of Oz. Based

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on her biographer Gerald Clarke, she was not even considered beautiful by her boss at MGM, Louis B. Mayer, who often referred to her as his little hunchback.\textsuperscript{92} Part of her appeal in the role of Dorothy was Garland’s average looks, something that was played up in \textit{The Wizard of Oz}. Her costume, one that was not glamorous and rather ordinary, promotes her image as working-class woman to the viewer. As seen in \textit{The Women} with Lucy, Dorothy’s dress is common and not form-fitting. Blue gingham was used for the pattern of Dorothy’s dress with a white shirt that fits up to the neck. The use of gingham is important as the fabric itself denotes a working-class status based on its affordability. Also, the simple lines of the dress can possibly mean that it was homemade. This dress, in contrast to the dress worn by Glinda, is one that could potentially be found in any closet of a working-class woman in 1939 America. It is cute, yet not glamorous; it does not have gems and it is not designed to accentuate Dorothy’s body.

Along with Dorothy’s dress, her shoes also make a statement about her place in the social hierarchy. In the beginning of the film, Dorothy is wearing plain, black shoes that lace up and seem to be very worn and dusty on the front. Not the typical high society shoe as seen in \textit{The Women}, Dorothy’s black shoes designate her as working-class not only in their style but also by showing signs of use. One of the key

plots of the film is the transference of the ruby slippers onto Dorothy’s feet from the Wicked Witch of the East’s feet after Dorothy drops a house on her and kills her. At this point, while the shoes on Dorothy’s feet may have moved up a notch in status, Dorothy’s manner of wearing them remains the same. By showing Dorothy with blue socks on even after she obtains the ruby slippers, Dorothy demonstrates, through her clothing, that she has not yet made the move to the upper class. Rather, by showing the glamorous ruby slippers on feet that still have on blue socks negates the move to the upper class by the character and, thus, Dorothy remains decidedly working-class. With its commonplace quality, and its resemblance to inexpensive dresses that were popular during 1939, this dress signifies that Dorothy was the mirror-image of working-class women, just as the manner in which she wore her shoes from Kansas and the famous and glamorous ruby slippers. By not having the flaws associated with the objects in question, Dorothy is able to provide a possible place of meaning for working-class women in 1939 by representing a realistic mirror-image on screen of who they were in real life.

In much the same way that the second Mrs. De Winter exhibited a working-class persona based on physical features, so to does Dorothy. Although quite attractive in her own right, Judy Garland was not considered a raging beauty by the standards of the day. Subtle yet deliberate alterations to her physical self created a more mundane
and ordinary appearance of her body, thus creating a more working-class persona. Although Judy Garland did not have long hair, she was given extensions in order to make her hair appear in pigtails. With her hair parted in the middle and pulled to each side, her hair did not have a very glamorous appearance. Many women that had longer hair who worked, either on farms, in factories or in other jobs, often pulled their hair back for practical purposes; it kept the hair out of their way. Thus, by showing Dorothy’s hair in this way, many working-class women saw in her a woman who worked for a living and who needed her hair out of her face in order to stay on task.

Fig. 4.5: Judy Garland (Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz) (http://www.dvdbeaver.com/film/DVDCompare/wizard.htm)

Dorothy’s body also gives her away as a working-class woman. Not as tall as Glinda, Dorothy does not possess the height like many of the glamorous stars from 1939; Greta Garbo, Loretta Young, Bette Davis, etc. Also, it is a matter of record that
Judy Garland’s breasts were too large for Dorothy, therefore, they were bound make Dorothy appear less womanly.93 Not only was Dorothy shown as short and less buxom than the most glamorous women in society, she was not allowed to wear a lot of makeup. While it is obvious that she wears a moderate amount of lipstick throughout the film, she does not wear makeup on her eyes, as does Glinda. These attributes and modifications of/to her body causally create Dorothy as a working-class mirror-image of real working-class women in America in 1939. By portraying her as the epitome of a working-class woman based on her clothing and body type, the film provides a mirror image for women in 1939 to consume, appropriate and ultimately use in order to self-identify.

Finally, although the physical appearance and costume of Dorothy are important to place her within a working-class framework, her actions are also crucial to understanding how she is not only positioned within the hierarchy of Oz, but also how she views herself in the social framework. First of all, although Dorothy is revered and holds a higher position over the munchkins upon her entry into Oz, she is quite obviously lower in social status to Glinda. This is shown in one key way. As Glinda explains that she is a witch and that not all witches are ugly, Dorothy curtsies to Glinda in a show of subservience. In this way, Dorothy is acknowledging her lower status under Glinda and placing herself clearly as working-class as compared to Glinda’s

93 Gerold Frank, Judy (New York: De Capo Press, 1975), 129.
upper class. Dorothy repeats this action, a curtsy, at the end of the film when Glinda
arrives in the Emerald City to help Dorothy get home.

Also prudent to understanding Dorothy’s social status based on action is the
first scene with Dorothy, Glinda and the Wicked Witch of the West. As the Witch
approaches Dorothy and ultimately confronts her, Dorothy retreats back to the
protective arms of Glinda. By allowing herself to be wrapped in Glinda’s arms,
Dorothy confirms Glinda’s social status as one that is higher and more powerful than
her own:

![Image](http://www.gonemovies.com/WWW/MyWebFilms/Drama/WizardWest1.jpg)

Fig. 4.6: Margaret Hamilton, Judy Garland and Billie Burke in The Wizard of Oz
(http://www.gonemovies.com/WWW/MyWebFilms/Drama/WizardWest1.jpg)

Just as the curtsy is repeated from in the final Emerald City scene, the
sentiment of Glinda as the protector is repeated in the end of the film. As holder of
knowledge, at the end of the film, Glinda is shown to be in a position of authority as the holder of knowledge. It is she who knows how Dorothy can return to Kansas, and indeed she has known the entire film. It is not until Dorothy learns whatever moral lesson that Glinda wanted her to learn that Dorothy is shown the way back to Kansas by Glinda. Not only is Glinda the protector she is also the keeper of knowledge, two attributes that place her above Dorothy. As Dorothy curtsies, Glinda’s upper-class status is solidified and both of their social positions are determined.

In Dorothy’s dealings with other characters as well, she takes a subservient position. For example, she curtsies before the Wizard when the group first goes before him to ask for their wishes. Even after she learns that he is a fraud, she maintains a modicum of respect for the old man. Indeed with all of her interactions with the different peoples of Oz (the Winkies, the citizens of the Emerald City, and even the Munchkins), Dorothy shows respect and deference to all. By doing this, she voluntarily does not place herself at any time in a position above any of the groups mentioned. Rather, she believes herself to be either on the same social rung or below the others.

Dorothy, through an examination of her clothes, physical appearance and actions, has proven to be the archetypal working-class female. She dresses modestly, is not beautiful and actively places herself in a class below the main working-class
character in the film (Glinda). Considering all of this, it is safe to say that Dorothy was the mirror-image for working-class women in 1939. Since she did not possess any of the flaws associated with the Wicked Witch of the West, there is nothing to indicate that she cannot be placed in a position of meaning for working-class female viewers in the late 1930s. Therefore, based on the diagram above and the evidence presented, Dorothy is the only character among the three examined that can possibly be consumed, appropriated and used by working-class women to develop a sense of self. So while Glinda is definitely placed in the upper class, and therefore seen as an escapist character, and the Wicked Witch is placed in a working-class, flawed position, and not suitable for women to find meaning and emulate, it is only Dorothy that provides a proper mirror-image for working class women in 1939, and thus a possible place for meaning for those same viewers.
Chapter 5. Conclusions

As a woman from a working-class background, I often found myself more attracted to the working-class cultural representations that I saw on screen. Not only did the mirror-image of what I was appeal to only me, the women that I knew also seemed to be drawn to those characters that took on qualities that were consistently realistic for working-class women. As I spent night after night watching the old classical Hollywood films, I often questioned myself about whether or not this phenomenon, the adoption of a working-class character as the mirror-image of myself, was universal to other working-class women as well. The origins of this project sprang from those questions about representation, adoption, self-identification and the development of meaning.

While the heart of this thesis is historically based, it is also informed by many other disciplines. Historically, this thesis has explored who working-class women were in 1939-40, while at the same time it has sought to uncover the ideological apparatuses at work in their lives on the theoretical level. But trying to understand how working-class women felt during the late 1930s and early 1940s is a different ballgame. By approaching the idea of cultural representation from a literary standpoint, I was able to use content analysis of the character to explore a possible meaning behind their costume, actions and personalities. Using gender theory, I was
able to use the model of dominant feminine ideology to contextualize the cultural representation within a feminine ideal.

More importantly, though, the question about how working-class women used the images they saw on screen became crucial for this thesis. By using film theory and critical theory, the idea of the active viewer fell into place. Lacan’s “mirror-image” theory along with Mulvey’s theory of the gaze as the seat of desire helped create a viewer who did not sit silently in a theater watching a film, but rather created an active viewer who desired the characters they saw on screen. Finally, Jauss’ theory of active reception completed the theoretical model for this project by citing the viewer as not only active but also as a viewer who consumes, appropriates and uses the images shown to create their own sense of the world around them. By hypothesizing that women used the images of working-class cultural representation to help them develop their own sense of self, I was able to locate a possible place of meaning for working-class women in 1939-40.

There are several areas in which further research would be warranted for this type of project. First and foremost, the use of statistical analysis would have created a much different project. Since the time period that I used as my historical framework was the years of 1939 and 1940, it would have been difficult, and unrealistic to undertake the interview of women who would most likely have been in their late 80s
and early 90s. Also, if I had used interviews, the project would have required a look at memory and the fallacy of memory in its findings and conclusions. Given the above issues as well as a time constraint, the use of interviews and statistical analysis was not a feasible approach for this specific project but in the future would provide a wonderful opportunity for further research.

In order to better understand the full impact that characters had on the working-class women that watched films, an examination of the stars who played in the roles that women saw would provide a more well-rounded approach to this problem. As an emergent field of study within film studies, star studies places the persona of a star in a discourse that goes beyond the characters portrayed by the actor and sees the individual within a larger social framework. By doing this, a more comprehensive understanding of the impact certain stars have on a culture becomes clear. Using star studies to delineate the impact that Marjorie Main, Joan Fontaine and Judy Garland had on working-class audiences as stars as well as the characters that they portrayed could elevate a future project to another level.

Finally, a more comprehensive list of films needs to be included in order to get a more expansive set of data to use as evidence. Using other popular films of the time, a more quantitative examination of films would have increased the findings that

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working-class women indeed found places of meaning in the working-class characters they saw on screen. Since the year 1939 is considered by numerous film critics to be the most important year for Hollywood based on the number of hits produced, other films from the year, as well as from 1940, would be crucial to examine. Just to name a few, further research could look at *Gone With the Wind, Wuthering Heights, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, as well as a whole list of other films.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated how reception of cultural products based on an interdisciplinary approach can uncover possible places of meaning for certain groups. Specifically, by examining the cultural representation of working-class characters on screen, a possible place of meaning can be found for working-class women. Using theories that advocate active participation with the images seen on screen, this thesis finds that working-class women saw their mirror-image self on screen in the cultural representation of working-class portrayed. In so doing, they were able to consume, appropriate and use those images to self-identify and find meaning for their own lives.
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