

**Female Sexuality, Taste and Respectability:  
An Analysis of Transatlantic Media Discourse Surrounding  
Hollywood Glamour and Film Star Pin-Ups during WWII.**

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## **Abstract:**

This thesis examines the cultural politics surrounding public femininity in Britain and the United States between 1939 and 1949 in relation to glamour and the figure of the film star pin-up.

Using Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth – the era’s most popular Hollywood pin-ups - as its case studies, the study reveals the issues of taste, class, national identity, modernity and propriety which informed the wider reception of the film star pin-up in wartime Britain and America.

A range of primary sources including magazine and newspaper articles, trade publications, promotional materials and advertising tie-ups, as well as contemporaneous surveys of public opinion which engage with these stars and with pin-up and with glamour are discussed with a view to exposing the varied and nuanced discourse surrounding female sexuality in circulation in Britain during this era and exploring the translation, understanding and acceptance of American mores when such products are imported into differing cultural contexts.

Informed by Bourdieu’s theorisations surrounding taste and cultural capital, Skeggs’ work on glamour and working class respectability, Buszek’s discussion of pin-up and sexual agency, Moseley’s notion of resonance and Dyer’s work upon star personas this study elaborates upon existing discussions (from the 1930s up to the current day) regarding Hollywood’s female representations at large and the Hollywood pin-up in particular as either objectifying and oppressing its female subjects and audiences within a wider discourse of patriotic ‘beauty as duty’ or offering a potentially radical and empowering form of female sexual agency.

This study therefore forms part of a wider reassessment of the film star pin-up and Hollywood glamour at large and of two popular Hollywood stars in particular, whilst contributing to revisionist histories of British and American women in the Modern era, of the study of class and taste, of transatlantic cinema audiences in the Second World War more generally.

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Finally, thanks must go to my Mum. In just one generation, look how far women like us can come when given both the tools and the opportunity. I wrote this for you and I'd like to think that if you were here, this would have made you proud.

**Introduction:**

**Making a  
Public Spectacle...**

## **INTRODUCTION:** **Making a public spectacle...**

This thesis is, in many ways, concerned with women who make a spectacle of themselves. That this is something that ‘nice’ girls are invariably told *not* to do and what is said about those who *do* is of particular pertinence here, as this thesis is also concerned with issues of taste and of class and with the politics of public femininity and feminine performativity within a very specific historical context - this being the wartime period of 1939 to 1949.

The classic women’s liberation catchphrase ‘the personal is political’ is particularly applicable to Britain in this exceptional era, as during this time the both the British and American state sought to infiltrate the ‘feminine’ domestic enclave and draw women en masse into the public sphere; this traditionally being the domain of the ‘masculine’ and of less respectable femininity - making these women increasingly vulnerable to attack for ‘inappropriate’ behaviour.

The similarity of the term ‘public femininity’ – a term which is used throughout this study to refer to modes of femininity (lived, representational, and discursive) in circulation within the British and the American public sphere throughout the war era - to the notion of the ‘fille publique’ – a French term for prostitute which gained common parlance in the 1800’s - is also pertinent here as both terms evoke an inevitable negotiation of propriety<sup>1</sup> undertaken by any woman who increases her public visibility and who exercises or makes evident her sexual agency within that public sphere.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In the case of nineteenth century French womanhood, these negotiations were between the unclean, disreputable and ultimately suspect ‘fille publique’ and her apotheosis, the ‘fille honnête’ or ‘honest woman’.

<sup>2</sup>Writing on women’s experience between 1830 and 1880 Dorothy Mermin notes that ‘Any venture into public life by a woman risked being greeted as a highly sexualized self-exposure: the morals of women who went on the stage were notoriously suspect, and ‘public woman’ (in French, ‘fille publique’) is an old term...for a prostitute.’ Mermin *Godiva’s Ride: Women of Letters in England 1830 – 1880* (Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, 1993) p.xiv

A key source of feminine spectacle during this era was Hollywood films and their associated promotional materials; their female stars offered apparently fantastic examples of modern, self-possessed (and during the war period, fervently patriotic) Western femininity which both repelled and attracted spectators. One of the most public and spectacular of feminine spectacles, which constantly negotiated the boundary of the sexually acceptable, was the film star pin-up. What follows therefore, is a study of the negotiations inherent within 'appropriate' public femininity through the prism of the film star pin-up and the transatlantic discourse surrounding glamorous femininity, (using the specific examples of Columbia studios' biggest star Rita Hayworth and Twentieth Century Fox's biggest box office draw Betty Grable), its purpose being to offer us a coherent means through which to explore wider wartime debates regarding female sexual agency, taste, class and national identity.

### **Methodology:**

Rather than theorising an idealised response or catch-all spectator or consumer for Hollywood cinema and the materials which promote it, this thesis explores the range of discourse surrounding wartime public femininity, sexualised spectacle, pin-up, glamour and Hollywood cinema through the examination of a range of media texts and several contemporaneous surveys of public opinion which engage with these notions.

As Janet Staiger very astutely notes, 'if post-structuralism, new historicism and cultural studies teach anything, it is that audience response cannot be derived through examination, exclusively of texts.'<sup>3</sup> This study therefore seeks to balance the textual analysis of contemporaneous wartime texts with a range of primarily contemporaneous audience observations in order to gain a more complete picture of debate surrounding these two stars

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<sup>3</sup> Staiger, J. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) p.12

and the limits of acceptable female respectability, and to determine if, how and to what effect elements of what art historian Maria Elena Buszek terms as ‘female sexual agency’<sup>4</sup> may have been manifest or understood to be manifest in the discourse upon and images of spectacular Americanised femininity. This discourse has largely been found in extra-textual materials: film ephemera, press books, film advertisements and advertising tie-ups for particular films, in ephemera and the discourse surrounding Hayworth or Grable, Hollywood glamour, Hollywood film stars and film star pin-ups in fan magazines and film annuals (*Picturegoer*, *Picture Show*, *Film Review Annual*), industry-focused magazines (*Kine Weekly*) and other popular magazines of the era (*Picture Post*, *Woman’s Weekly*), newspapers of the period and, in some instances, in additional advertising for glamorous products and the accoutrements of glamour, (cosmetics, toiletries, fashions and other female-targeted leisure goods).

The ultimate aim here is a closer exploration of some of the reasons for the rejection or acceptance of Grable and/or Hayworth and a greater appreciation and contextualisation of what might have been at stake in women’s representational negotiations and the factors that shaped and informed them. Potential factors include: what constituted acceptable and unacceptable public behaviour for a woman, fears regarding national identity such as British fears regarding the ‘Americanisation’ of British culture, class antagonism and the potential threat of an ‘other’ with differing politics, pursuits and notions of appropriate sexual conduct, and a more general concern with how appropriate glamour and pin-up were in a context of wartime austerity.

Class and taste have arisen as the most significant factors within this study and it is therefore very much indebted to Pierre Bourdieu’s theories on taste distinctions and to Beverley Skeggs’ *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* which utilises

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<sup>4</sup> See Buszek, M.E. ‘Representing “Awarishness”: Burlesque, Feminist Transgression, and the 19th-Century Pin-Up.’ *The Drama Review* v.43 #4. Winter 1999, pp.141-162; and Buszek, M.E. *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

Bourdieu's theories of cultural, symbolic, social and economic capital in particular to discuss working-class women's attempts to negotiate for themselves greater levels of agency within society through means such as attention to one's appearance and attempts to appear 'respectable'.

Central to these issues of taste and class is Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Archaeologists Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn offer a particularly useful definition of the concept, this being;

[That] which we might define as socially constituted structuring principles or dispositions operating within each individual<sup>5</sup>

before they move on to quote Bourdieu himself who states that it is:

a permanent disposition embedded in the agents very bodies in the form of mental dispositions, schemes of perception and thought... such as those which divide up the world in accordance with the oppositions between the male and the female, east and west, future and past... etc. and also at a deeper level, in the form of bodily postures and stances... ways of standing, sitting, looking, speaking or walking.<sup>6</sup>

Equally applicable to behaviour and lifestyle, sartorial expression (in fact, any form of expression) as well as to values, beliefs and tastes, the habitus is formed through, and because of, contextual influences such as individual experience and activities or material conditions, and is the resulting scheme of principles or a personal ideology which defines *who* a subject is. One notable function of the habitus then is how it forms particular tastes and how those tastes ally the subject with other similarly inclined or experienced subjects but also (and perhaps more importantly) distances the subject from those who are *differently* inclined.

The possession of economic capital is the key factor in determining who is allowed (and perhaps more importantly, denied) privileged access to a particular lifestyle or quality of life and to a higher standard of education (leading to increased cultural capital). Subjects are divided therefore, into those *with* cultural capital (and often economic capital – largely the

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<sup>5</sup> Renfrew, C. and Bahn, P. *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice*. (Third Edition) (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000) p.216

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* p.216. Here they quote Bourdieu, P. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p.15

middle and upper classes) and those who have *little or no* cultural or economic capital – largely the working-class. Taste therefore is a space in which both those with and those without cultural capital assert their places (and their difference from those who are unlike them) within the cultural order. Therefore as Bourdieu notes ‘taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.’<sup>7</sup>

For example, attitudes to the use of cosmetics in Britain during the 1940s demonstrate this point. Whilst the overt use of cosmetics was an acceptable assertion of glamorous femininity amongst many social groupings<sup>8</sup> – a symbol of femininity, strength, maturity, and morale boosting ‘beauty as duty’ - for others the excessive, ill-timed or unskilled use of such goods, particularly by certain *types* of individual (namely those who possessed little economic, cultural or symbolic capital), was (and still is) often considered to be brazen or inappropriate. In the instance of sexually precocious young women the use of cosmetics was frequently considered an index of such a woman’s tastelessness and poor conduct. Such opinions can be found in three purportedly objective British anthropological studies from the 1940s, namely H.D Willcock’s 1949 Mass Observation study and a 1946 study in the *British Medical Journal*, both discussed by Carol Dyhouse. Firstly, as Dyhouse notes, when writing upon young female delinquents

H.D Willcock’s report on juvenile delinquency... published in 1949, contained observations such as the girls are all extremely heavily made up, with extra thick lipstick applied carelessly’ and ‘Their faces were heavily and inexpertly made up, one [girl] sported a pair of long ear rings’<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu, P. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. (London: Routledge, 1984) p.6

<sup>8</sup> ‘According to a wartime social survey two thirds of all women applied cosmetics. They were used by 90 per cent of the under-30s, but only 37 per cent of women over 45. Regular use of cosmetics was high among clerical and distributive workers (85 per cent), somewhat lower among factory workers (75 per cent), and lowest among housewives, the retired and unoccupied women (55 per cent)’ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption 1939-1955*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). p.91. She also observes that ‘demand for cosmetics was high since women focused on elaborate make-up inventive hairstyles, and coupon-free accessories to counterbalance the limitations of their wardrobe.’ *op cit*.

<sup>9</sup> Dyhouse, C. *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women* (London: Zed Books, 2013) p. 118. Quote is taken from Willcock, H.D. (ed). *Mass Observation Report on Juvenile Delinquency*. London: Falcon, 1949) p.54



Similarly Dyhouse also notes that the 1946 study in *The British Medical Journal* claims that the ‘unstable adolescent girl’, spent

a great deal of time on making up their faces and adorning themselves, though they often do not trouble to wash and are sluttish about their undergarments.<sup>10</sup>

A further example can be found in Pearl Jephcott’s 1941 study of young women’s social habits *Girls Growing Up*:

A ‘typical’ factory girl of sixteen owned ‘an attaché case, a brush and a comb set, a watch (broken), seven children’s books and some magazines, a pair of scissors, three boxes of face powder and one of face cream.’ Cosmetics were the favourite spending item, along with ‘romance magazines’ like *Oracle*, *Miracle*, *Girl’s Crystal*, and *Glamour*. The staple content of these and other ‘erotic bloods’ was the standard Cinderella complex fantasy.<sup>11</sup>

In the first example, Willcock appears to imply that by wearing makeup his subjects are not only signalling their sexual availability (inappropriate in itself as these are young, unmarried women) but the use of the terms ‘extremely heavily made up’ and ‘extra thick lipstick applied carelessly’ also suggests a woeful lack of restraint which is somehow indicative of a lack of decorum in their social and sexual conduct. Similarly the second study’s use of the word ‘sluttish’ with regard to the washing habits of its subjects suggest an explicit judgement as to their self-discipline, playing upon established notions, discussed by Beverley Skeggs (1997), of the working-class female body as potentially dirty, unwholesome or contaminated or contaminating.

In all three of these instances the assumed objectivity or scientific distance required of such a study is subtly exploited by the observer to allow them to assert their distance from their subjects, with subjects in each example being presented as either aberrant or unfortunate. Rather than remaining impartial, the subjects’ dysfunctionality is explicitly

<sup>10</sup> ‘The Unstable Adolescent Girl’. *British Medical Journal*, (19<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1946) p. 118

<sup>11</sup> Savage, J. *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875-1945*. (London: Pimlico, 2007) p. 354. Quoting Jephcott, A. P. *Girls Growing Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941) page reference not supplied.

judged by the observer through the use of emotive, morally loaded and even derogatory language ('careless', 'sluttish', 'they often do not trouble to wash') presumably because the subjects' norms, values and behaviour are alien, distressing or distasteful to those of the observer. Here 'social identity is [being] defined and asserted through difference.'<sup>12</sup> As in all 'matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation'; and here tastes are expressed 'perhaps first and foremost[as] distastes'<sup>13</sup>, with *the observers* habitus – their 'structuring principles or dispositions' – being made as evident as those of the subjects.

This work therefore seeks to move beyond largely accepted class and taste hierarchies and beyond conventional, typically bourgeois notions of 'worth'; to explore in some detail the limits and debates at the heart of acceptable public femininity and determine what uses, appeals and resonances pin-up imagery, pin-up stars and Hollywood glamour actually offered.

The period of 1939-1949 lends itself particularly well to this study, due firstly to the plethora of varied and wide-ranging Mass Observation studies of British cultural experience undertaken during this period, and to additional studies such as Mayer's 1946 and 1948 studies of British cinema going; whose examples of engagement with the film star pin-up or with glamour cumulatively help to form a more comprehensive picture of audiences' wartime encounters with such imagery and notions than one might find in other eras. At times, this data has been supplemented with responses found in more recent texts, such as Jackie Stacey's 1994 audience study of British female film fans remembrances of Hollywood stars in the classical era.

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<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu *Distinction* p.172

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* p.56

## **Methodology:** **Research Design and Structure**

The use of all of these texts has, however, been undertaken cautiously for a number of reasons. Firstly, the subjects of pin-up or glamour, or even Rita Hayworth or Betty Grable, are not the specific subjects of these studies, and any mention of these stars or phenomena appear often in the briefest ways. (For example several respondents in Mayer's study make mention of Hayworth, whilst Grable appears several times in Stacey's study: as such these responses have been noted and utilised within my study but obviously cannot be the key resources used.) Nor can the individual agendas of these studies be forgotten, as obviously they shape the results gained and the way they are presented. (For example, Mayer's left wing anxieties about the opiate effect of movie-going are prevalent throughout both his study and his conclusions, whilst Stacey's understanding of her female respondents' responses to Hollywood film stars is framed within the confines of Psychoanalysis and gendered determinism. Equally the Mass Observation studies need to be approached with caution due to their frequently inconsistent methodological approaches, their mixed methodology for sampling and analysis and (although at times their biases and presumptions about their data are abundantly evident, sometimes problematically so their occasional hidden biases and their own agendas.)

This problems of objectivism and subjectivism are considerable and is identified and discussed at length by Bourdieu in several of his more theoretical methodological works, such as *The Logic of Practice* and *Outline of a Theory of Practice*<sup>14</sup>. In the latter work he states,

The anthropologist's particular relation to the object of his study contains the makings of a theoretical distortion inasmuch as his situation as an observer, excluded from the

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<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu, P. *The Logic of Practice*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), Bourdieu, P. *Outline of A Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

real play of social activities by the fact that he has no place (except by choice or by way of a game) in the system observed and has no need to make a place for himself there, inclines him to a hermeneutic representation of practices, leading him to reduce all social relations to communicative relations and, more precisely to decoding operations<sup>15</sup>

These methodological problems, and the further problems of Mass Observation's negotiation of these, have been borne in mind as engagement with the above resources has been undertaken. These issues were well known to Mass Observation at the time and had been raised by critics both within and outside of the organisation, but the organisation felt that they could train their researchers to 'check' subjective material, rendering it somehow objective, rather than adding a further layer of subjectivity as Bourdieu would argue. For these criticisms and Mass Observation's reactions to them see *War Factory*.<sup>16</sup>

Another issue raised by many of these sources is the overlooking of context and reception. In both Stacey and Mayer's studies vital contextual factors surrounding the reception, particularly, of stars are unacknowledged. For example, in Mayer's studies the employment of both the respondent and their father is noted (presumably to determine the respondents' economic status or class) but little else is known about them other than their (then) current opinion upon particular films and film stars. Save that mentioned in the responses, any information as to viewing contexts or other contexts in which the respondent may have engaged with a star or film (such as a film magazine, for example) is absent. Equally the gendered determinism of Stacey's psychoanalytical approach problematizes her attempts to claim discerning, active involvement by her female participants in their construction of what they understand particular female film stars to 'mean.'<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p.1

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, T. 'Industrial Survey' in *War Factory*, (London: Cressett Library, 1987) p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> 'How do women look at their Hollywood ideals on the cinema screen? What pleasures can they gain from the feminine images produced for the male gaze? What readings do female spectators make of the female Hollywood stars produced by a male dominated film-industry?' Stacey *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.11

Finally it must also be born in mind that the responses to both Mayer and Stacey's studies are remembrances rather than *in situ* responses (in the case of Stacey's study a considerable time after the event of viewing) and could therefore offer accidental misrepresentations in the form of mis-remembrances.

The study itself falls into three sections. The first section explores the wartime representation of and discourse surrounding Betty Grable, unruly or inappropriate working-class femininity, the notion of American-ness and British wartime and pre-war fears regarding Americanisation. The second section explores the wartime discourse surrounding the more 'exotic' (and thus intriguing and sophisticated) Rita Hayworth and her associations with glamour, consumption and appropriate or respectable aspiration.

Finally, the third section of this study moves to explore the representation of both of these stars in the immediate post-war era in order to discuss just how permanent wartime gains were and the Hollywood pin-ups place within these changing social contexts.

In terms of why these two stars in particular have formed the focus for this study, the reasoning is simple. As supposedly the most and second most requested film star pin-ups (the accolades, like so much Hollywood hyperbole, being gloriously vague), these two women formed the natural choice for the study of debate surrounding the intersection of Hollywood, glamour and pin-up in Britain as much contemporaneous discourse surrounding them exists. In addition to this, even the most cursory of glances at these two women's pin-ups, or indeed at their star personas or their films reveals a significant difference in their appeals. A study of the supposedly homogenous form of 'the Hollywood pin-up' through the significantly differing figures of these two stars allows us to explore a larger part of the spectrum of

‘resonances’ (‘the way audiences relate and respond to texts’<sup>18</sup>) which that form actually had to offer.

### **Pinning Down the Pin-Up:** **Etymology and Definitions of the Form.**

The notion of the ‘pin-up’ appears in a wide range of work and in various contexts but without the term or its conventions being concretely defined. As a result the definitions, limitations and uses of the pin-up vary significantly according to the agendas of the writers in question. Equally, whilst the notion of glamour is central to the understanding of Hollywood and the star system in the classical era, surprisingly, with the exception of Carol Dyhouse’s study *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism*, in which the larger meanings of glamour throughout the twentieth and twenty first century are explored (using a mixture of American and British sources), relatively little academic attention has been paid to discourse regarding either pin-ups or Hollywood glamour, certainly within a British context.

The study of pin-up images, the pin-up girl, and of Hollywood glamour is intimately bound to the notion of public femininity and necessarily crosses over with the study of the prostitute, the chorus girl, actress and the model, with vaudeville, burlesque and variety, theatre and dance, and in the case of the film star pin-up, with classical Hollywood’s obsession with all of these. Such a study must engage with the politics of gender, of appearance, of sexuality and ‘the gaze’, of the photographic image more generally; with the economics and sociology of consumption and advertising; and specifically in relation to the film star pin-up; with the construction and promotion of star personas by studios.

In terms of definitions, the *Collins Dictionary* terms pin-up as

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<sup>18</sup> Moseley, R. *Growing Up with Audrey Hepburn: Text, Audience, Resonance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p.92

1. *Inf.* a. a picture of a sexually attractive person, esp. when partially or totally undressed. b. (as modifier): a pin-up magazine.
2. *Sl.* a person who has appeared in such a picture.
3. A photograph of a famous personality<sup>19</sup>

whilst the Oxford English dictionary terms pin up as

Adj... 2. Of a photograph or other picture, designed to be fixed to a wall, etc. Also applied to a favourite or sexually attractive young person, the typical subject of such a photograph; also in extended use. Also pertaining to or characteristic of such a picture or person<sup>20</sup>

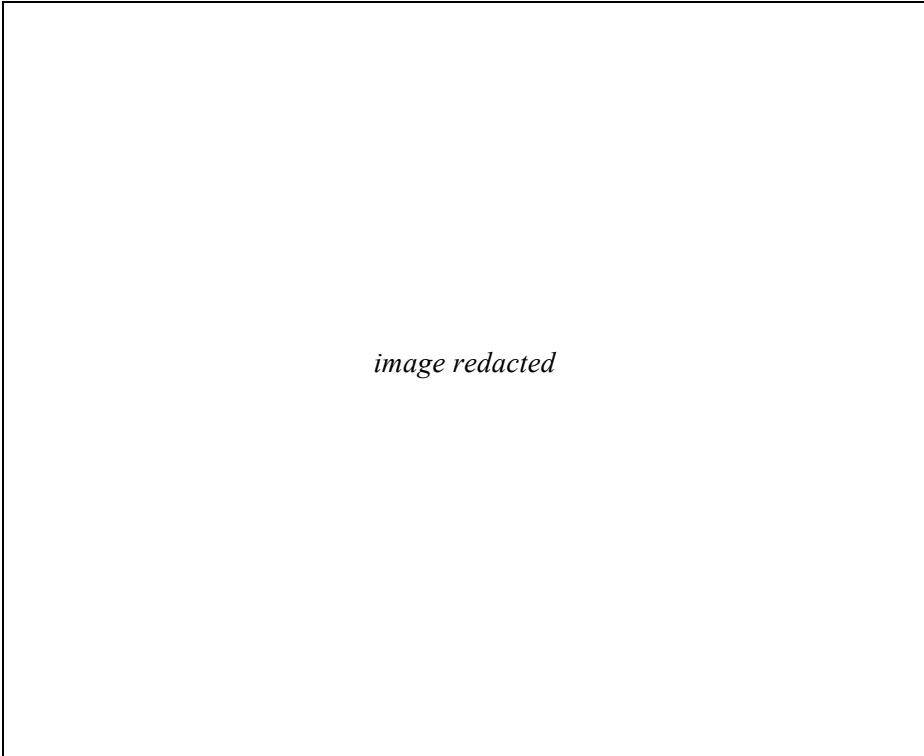
both definitions suggest the term's link to both its form and its subject yet only hinting at the very crucial notion of taste ('sexually attractive person', 'favourite' ) implicit in the highly subjective reactions the form (not unlike any other cultural product) elicits.

Originally a by-product of the interface between the emergent advertising industry, technological developments in printing and photography between 1905 and 1920, and of the increasingly predominant celebrity culture, the pin-up represents the epitome of a product of both the modern age and of Western culture. To this day the form remains a phenomenon of two parts: as the OED definition quoted above suggests, the term 'pin-up' firstly refers to the object itself, a photographic or illustrated image of the human form, 'pinned up', in order that it may be admired, which celebrates stardom, desirability and/or champion status. Whilst the epithet 'pin-up' also quickly came to denote the *subject* or the *star* of a pin-up image, so Betty Grable or Rita Hayworth featured in popular pin-up imagery and therefore became recognisable in popular culture as 'pin-ups'.

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<sup>19</sup> *Collins Dictionary* (Ninth Edition). (Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers. 2007) p. 1235

<sup>20</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* (Second Edition) v. XI. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) p. 882



*image redacted*

**Fig. One:** *Albums of the John Player cigarette card series 'Film Stars' which featured pin-up and glamour images of Hollywood stars*

The advertising industry's rapid adoption of photographic replication and offset printing at the very beginning of the Twentieth Century fortuitously coincided with, and fed the meteoric rise of the Hollywood film industry and the subsequent public mania for 'picture personalities.'<sup>21</sup> This led to a fortuitous circumstance whereby mass circulation and promotion could now be easily and effectively achieved through the first film magazines and through cheap, easily accessible, ubiquitous and highly collectible forms such as cigarette cards, ice cream container lids and matchboxes – all items invariably available for purchase at reasonable prices in cinema kiosks.<sup>22</sup>

Presumably due in part to the inherent disposability attached to such items (as well as their mildly erotic appeal), from its inception, the pin-up - mass produced for huge, and what

<sup>21</sup> See DeCordova, R. *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Gledhill, C. (ed.) 'Introduction.' *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991) pp.xiii-xx; and Barbas, S. *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Which often formed parts of sets with titles such as 'Film Stars', 'Stars of Film and Stage', 'Beauties of Stage and Screen' and 'Cinema Beauties'.



were often presumed to be undiscerning, lowbrow audiences whose only purpose for consumption was titillation – has been commonly discussed in relation to value (traditionally, by the Bourgeoisie in particular, it is perceived to have none), its sexual appeal (degrading and debased, even a threat) and its presumed male audience (often cast as dangerous or vile oppressors)<sup>23</sup>.

The *St James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture* observes in its definition of the pin-up that

Viewed within a large frame, the pin-up is a species of the portrait, yanked down off the walls of exclusive galleries and museums and posted in ordinary gas stations and pool halls. Generated by the development and proliferation of inexpensive processes of photography, lithography and colour printing, the pin-up contributed to more democratic, and perhaps inevitably more vulgar, understandings of celebrity, voyeurism, consumption, and eroticism, closing the gap in taste and appreciation between classical nudes and burlesque showgirls.<sup>24</sup>

Here the emphasis upon the ‘ordinary’ and ‘inexpensive’ appeal of the pin-up (opposed to the extraordinary and valuable ‘art’ found on ‘the walls of exclusive galleries and museums’) appears at first to have been taken as evidence of a more egalitarian form. Yet this seemingly celebratory definition simultaneously reveals the paradoxes which operate at the very heart of the pin-up. Firstly it must be noted that both the ‘gas station’ and the ‘pool hall’ are commonly marked and clearly intended here as male homosocial spaces, thus revealing a presumed male audience and a female subject who is ascribed no physical presence or agency within this equation. Secondly, Bourdieu’s observation that it is not the content necessarily that divides lowbrow and highbrow, art and pornography, but the ways and contexts in which in which particular texts are consumed, is particularly applicable here. Whilst it is suggested

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Jancovich’s observation upon pornographic images of women is equally applicable to pin-up erotica here. The notion of titillating images of women as oppressive generally has an ‘an almost taken-for-granted status’ which means that those who interested in ‘a more complex understanding of this area [a]re largely marginalised.’ Jancovich, M. ‘Naked Ambitions: Pornography, Taste and the Problem of the Middlebrow’. *Scope: An Online Journal of Film & TV studies*. June 2001.

<sup>24</sup> *The St James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture* [http://www.bookrags.com/pin-up\\_girl](http://www.bookrags.com/pin-up_girl) accessed May 2007

that the pin-up occupies a cultural space between ‘classical nudes’ and ‘burlesque showgirls’, the form’s noted ‘inexpensive[ness]’ and its ‘vulgar[ity]’ mark it clearly as lowbrow, and therefore unwelcome within ‘exclusive galleries’ due to an inherent unworthiness.

Hoggart, for example, considered pin-ups to be ‘standard decoration for servicemen’s billets and the cabs of lorries’<sup>25</sup>, also hinting strongly at a male audience, a lack of intellectual depth (both jobs listed could be termed as ‘manual labour’ requiring physical rather than intellectual capability), and a distasteful masturbatory function. Whilst Ralph Stein’s definition also emphasises the pin-ups lowbrow credentials by highlighting their erotic potential:

When the word pin-up was coined it indicated that the erotically stimulating picture was to be literally pinned to a wall or other surface, and further, that it had been reproduced in great quantities.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, the term ‘Leg Art’ - a common vernacular for pin-up imagery in popular usage during the 1940s - deliberately conflates the forms preoccupation with objectification and a sexualised simplistic appeal – arguably pin-ups’ primary function.

This could be seen to be reinforced by Margaret Farrand Thorp’s 1945 observations upon American film fan magazines, whereby she generalises

A careful study of fan magazine illustration reveals that the importance of a star can be measured inversely by the amount of leg shown in her photographs. She mounts the ladder by way of sun bath and swimming pool poses. Not until she is safely at the top can she take to hostess gowns.<sup>27</sup>

The use of the pin-up image to stimulate interest in Hollywood starlets was a given<sup>28</sup>, and it is supposed here that only when the apparently desperate, attention-seeking or exploited starlet

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<sup>25</sup> Hoggart, R. *The Uses of Literacy* (4<sup>th</sup> edition) (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960) p.177

<sup>26</sup> Stein, R. *The Pin-Up: From 1852 to Now* (London: Hamlyn/Ridge Press, 1974) p.15

<sup>27</sup> Thorp, M.F. *America at the Movies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945) p.60

<sup>28</sup> For example, an undated print-based advertisement for respected pin-up photographer Bernard of Hollywood claims a photo session at their studio and a subsequent set of photographic prints will give the sitter ‘the open sesame to Hollywood’, see Bernard, S. (ed) *Bernard of Hollywood’s Marilyn* (London: Boxtree, 1993) p.8

has become recognisable enough can she cease such demeaning practices, become respectable, 'take to hostess gowns', and attain the ultimate validation of being seen to have become a legitimate actress.

In 1971 film critic Andre Bazin discussed the pin-up girl as an 'industrial product', a standardised, manufactured good, 'rapidly perfected like a jeep', 'subject to well-fixed norms and as stable in quality as peanut butter or chewing gum.'<sup>29</sup> It is not surprising then, that he '[did] not value this kind of cinematic eroticism very highly.'<sup>30</sup> It is perhaps this lack of esteem for the form that explains his failure to correctly identify its 19<sup>th</sup> century genesis or engage with its use by female performers from this period onwards as he discusses the form as a 'weapon of war', incorrectly identifying the pin-up's origins as being during the Second World War;

Produced by special historical circumstances, the feminine ideal reflected in the pin-up girl is in the last analysis (despite its apparent anatomical vigour) extremely artificial, ambiguous and shallow. Sprung from the accidental sociological situation of the war, it is nothing more than chewing gum for the imagination. Manufactured on the assembly line, standardised by Vargas, sterilised by censorship, the pin-up girl certainly represents a qualitative regression in cinematic eroticism<sup>31</sup>

Bazin claimed that with the outbreak of peace the pin-up therefore supposedly 'lost her *raison d'être*'<sup>32</sup> – presumably her ability to represent an ideal of femininity and a symbol of home to which pin-ups' presumed male audience could relate and would consider worth fighting for. Yet as numerous examples in this study demonstrate, the film star pin-up 'spoke' to audiences in many ways throughout both the wartime and post-war period, and as Bazin's brief discussion of the pin-up girl highlights, the origins of pin-up are as contentious as its pleasures.

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<sup>29</sup> Bazin, A. 'Entomology of the Pin-Up Girl.' *What is Cinema?* v.2 (London: University of California Press, 2004) p.158

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p.161

<sup>31</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p.160

Writers such as Maria Elena Buszek and Mark Gabor claim that the form began when early burlesque artistes appropriated the cartes de visite photograph at the very end of the 1800s, to create ‘awarish’<sup>33</sup> (i.e sexually self-aware and self-confident) images of female sexual agency and promote themselves as a provocative commodity. But according to The Oxford English Dictionary the first recorded reference to knowingly ‘pinning-up’ such an image was in a 1941 feature in the US magazine *Life* which noted ‘Dorothy Lamour is No.1 pin-up girl of the US Army.’<sup>34</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the first print appearance of the actual term ‘pin-up’ as being in US Army magazine *Yank* on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1943, therefore somewhat contentiously marking it - in origin at least - as a particularly American term. Yet even this etymology is contentious as an earlier, May 6<sup>th</sup> 1940 reference to ‘pin-up’ appears in a two page explanatory feature “‘Pin Up Pictures’ for Soldier’s Walls’ in *Life* magazine which claims

‘In wartime the staidest of British journals feel a patriotic obligation to let down certain bars for the benefit of the lonely man on the front. In 1914-18, even England’s ‘class’ magazines, ordinarily devoted to society doings, so far unbent as to publish ‘Pin-up Pictures.’...Once more ‘Pin-Up Pictures’ have appeared among the knights and duchesses in such magazines as *Sketch* and *Tatler*.’<sup>35</sup>

Much work, not unlike Bazin’s ‘Entomology of the Pin-Up Girl’, not only homogenises the film star pin-up and the pin-up form at large, wrongly, but understandably (considering Hollywood cinema’s domination during the war era) claiming that the pin-up

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<sup>33</sup> Buszek ‘Representing “Awarishness”’ *passim*

<sup>34</sup> *Life* 7<sup>th</sup> July 1941, p.34

<sup>35</sup> “‘Pin Up Pictures’ for Soldier’s Walls Grace British Magazines’ *Life* 6<sup>th</sup> May 1940, pp.88-89

**Fig Two:** *Life* article on pin-up in British magazines, p.88-89 May 6<sup>th</sup> 1940

*Images redacted*

was an example of ‘cinematic eroticism’ but also associates the pin-up form with the cultural moment of the Second World War<sup>36</sup>. As is argued in chapter two this is presumably because this was the period in which the form reached maturity and gained true cultural ubiquity, when Hollywood glamour was at its most firmly entrenched (the war and immediately post-war era representing the very apex of Hollywood cinema’s popularity and box office returns - 1946 being Hollywood’s most profitable year ever<sup>37</sup>), and when the term itself, if the *Oxford English Dictionary* is to be believed, appears to have actually been coined.

<sup>36</sup> The *St James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture* also notes that ‘The terms most evocative use recalls the drawn, painted or photographed representations of idealised all-American femininity produced in the decades surrounding WWII.’ *The St James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture* [http://www.bookrags.com/pin-up\\_girl](http://www.bookrags.com/pin-up_girl) accessed May 2007

<sup>37</sup> As Robert Beverley Ray notes ‘At the end of World war II, America and Hollywood arrived simultaneously at the summit of power and influence... By any standard of measurement, the Hollywood of the immediate post-war period was immensely successful. In 1946, domestic films grossed \$1.7 billion, the most profitable year since the beginning of the American film industry.’ Ray, R.B. *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema 1930-1980* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1985) p.129

In more recent reception and (re)appropriations of the form, the notion of ‘retro’ and of a nostalgic approach to female sexual expression, and the conventions through which that sexuality is represented, seems to be a pervading element particularly amongst burgeoning rockabilly/psychobilly subcultures and the neo-burlesque movement<sup>38</sup>, with the Second World War era serving as a particularly common focus point for such sub-cultural movements.

More recently historian Carol Dyhouse, whilst championing glamour, somewhat problematically discussed ‘cheesecake’ imagery as ‘slang for female sexual attractiveness and display, originated in the United States’ which ‘impl[ies] feminine passivity, rather than agency: women represented for the purpose of male consumption’.<sup>39</sup> Whilst Dyhouse does at least discuss the origins of the form as laying in a cultural moment prior to the Second World War<sup>40</sup>, her use of ‘an early reference in *Time* magazine [which] defined cheesecake as “leg pictures of sporty females”’<sup>41</sup> is still problematic. If the subject of cheesecake imagery is ‘sporty females’ then rather than figures of passivity these subjects were subjects defined by their physical activity and, if Buszek is to be believed, were therefore potentially in possession of a particularly significant level of agency.

In her introductory chapter of the compelling art history study *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture*, Buszek cites the key traits of the pin-up to be ‘her aggressive sexuality, imperious attitude, and frightening physique’<sup>42</sup>, demonstrating the

<sup>38</sup> See Ferreday, D. ‘Showing the Girl: The New Burlesque.’ *Feminist Theory* v.9 #1 2008 pp.47-65

<sup>39</sup> Dyhouse, C. *Glamour: Women History, Feminism* (London: Zed books, 2010) p.90

<sup>40</sup> *ibid* p.91 She associates the terms ‘cheesecake’ and ‘pin-up’ and uses *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*’s etymology of these terms. Here it is claimed that ‘cheesecake’ ‘originated in the 1930s’ and that references to ‘pin-up’ ‘date from the 1940s.’ However Buszek, Gabor and I would contend this still is still too late.

<sup>41</sup> The dictionary cites the first reference to cheesecake as being in 1934. See Simpson, J. A. and Weiner, E.S.C. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP/Clarendon Press, 1989) p.78

<sup>42</sup> Buszek *Pin Up Grrrls* p.3

potential for significant fluctuations in the potential ‘meaning’ of such texts, from reader to reader, rather than the presumed or ‘immanent’ reading of second wave feminists.

What this study seeks to consider, therefore, is what meanings and pleasures (or displeasures), or as Rachel Moseley discusses, ‘resonances’ (or lack thereof), the film star pin-up and Hollywood glamour could offer wartime women and how, and to what effect, were the issues that coalesce around glamour and film star pin-ups articulated?

### **Objectification or Agency?: Existing Debate Surrounding Women, Pin-Up and Glamour.**

Given its contentious and titillating appeal, it is surprising there is not more academic work that engages directly with the film star pin-up. Of the four key texts to engage with the form are Maria Elena Buszek’s ‘Pin-Up Grrrls’, Mary Beth Haralovich’s ‘Film Advertising, The Film Industry and The Pin-Up’<sup>43</sup>, Joanne Meyerowitz’s ‘Women, Cheesecake and Borderline Material’<sup>44</sup> and Richard Dyer’s ‘Don’t Look Now’<sup>45</sup>, but only two of these four texts deals at any length with the notion of the film-star pin-up; Buszek, Haralovich and Meyerowitz are concerned only with a US context, and Dyer’s work is concerned primarily with the male film star pin-up.

Academic engagement with the notion of glamour is more plentiful - the key texts being Carol Dyhouse’s *Glamour* (2010), Castelli and Gundle’s study of the repertoire or ‘material language of glamour’<sup>46</sup> *The Glamour System* (2006) and Gundle’s subsequent transnational, diachronic study *Glamour: A History* (2009). However, not unreasonably,

<sup>43</sup> Haralovich, M.B. ‘Film Advertising, The Film Industry and The Pin-Up: The Industry’s Accommodations to Social Forces in the 1940’s’ in Austin *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law* V. 1 1985 pp.127-164

<sup>44</sup> Meyerowitz, J. ‘Women, Cheesecake and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in Mid Twentieth Century US’ *Journal of Women’s History* v.8 #3. 1996 pp.9-35

<sup>45</sup> Dyer, R. ‘Don’t Look Now: The Male Pin-Up.’ in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995) pp.265 – 276

<sup>46</sup> Gundle, S. and Castelli, C.T. *The Glamour System* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) p.16

many such studies engage with glamour in a broad sense (historically and geographically), and the result is a reduced focus upon Hollywood glamour and notions of glamorousness, in relation to Hollywood or to the context of war, or of wartime Hollywood, and little or no focus upon the film star pin-up. However this doesn't mean that these resources are not extremely useful and key principles established and discussed in detail within these studies cannot form a foundation upon which this study can build.

For example in *Glamour: A History* Gundle examines glamour as an essentially modern phenomenon, with its roots in the 1770s, and which came to prominence with the rise of meritocracy and the industrialised age:

The conversion of royal magnificence into modern glamour occurred as a result of the spread of manufactured commodities, the growth of large cities dominated by widespread anonymous socialization, the transformation of the urban mob into a modern public and the development of the press and advertising.<sup>47</sup>

As he notes the significant cultural shifts presented by the drive towards modernity gave rise to an increasingly prominent middle class who were keen to assert their increased economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital and, more importantly, their difference from those who had not achieved (for whatever reason) such capital:

As the middle class asserted its influence, its members desired to establish their pre-eminent status and communicate it to their fellow men. One way of doing this was the assertion of virtue and through differentiated gender roles that consigned women to the home. Another way was by establishing status markers by means of material display.<sup>48</sup>

These two quotes express points which are explored at length and evidenced in detail throughout *Glamour: A History* and in *The Glamour System* and if we consider them more closely they also present numerous valuable points for consideration within this study.

For example in the former quote Gundle's mention of 'the replacement of hereditary privileges by meritocracy' carries an allusion to glamour's highly seductive illusion of being

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<sup>47</sup> Gundle, S. *Glamour: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p.7-8

<sup>48</sup> *ibid* p.8.



democratic<sup>49</sup>, and therefore offers pertinent points of consideration with regard to Bourdieu's theories regarding uneven access to economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital<sup>50</sup>.

In the former quote several other observations, pertinent to this study, are also raised, offering valuable intersections with the project of this thesis. These include the shift in societal structures and behaviours required by the conversion from a feudal to an industrialised society ('the growth of large cities dominated by widespread anonymous socialization, the transformation of the urban mob into a modern public'); the tensions created by the imprecise demarcations between 'public' and 'private' spaces in modern, densely populated spaces such as 'large cities'; and the skilled negotiation required of the modern subject with regards to public conduct (with subjects being coerced to behave as a sophisticated 'modern public' rather than an uncivilized 'urban mob').

In a similar vein Gundle's second quote regarding the rise of the prominent middle class and their desire to 'establish their pre-eminent status and communicate it to their fellow men' presents further pertinent lines of contemplation with regard to female public conduct and therefore to this study. For example the tendency to link status to virtue required the suppression of allusions to or direct expressions of assertive female sexuality, whilst the required negotiation of the boundaries of feminine respectability features frequently within the examples scrutinized within this thesis. Similarly debates borne out of the 'differentiated gender roles that consigned women to the home' are also still very much in evidence in the discursive negotiations undertaken with regard to women's rightful place, female performativity and appropriate female public conduct examined within this study.

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<sup>49</sup> As Gundle notes elsewhere 'The trappings of glamour – make-up, clothes, accessories, etc. – give everyone a chance *in theory* of defying the effects of age and the limitations of the physical body.' *ibid* p.4 (my emphasis).

<sup>50</sup> As Gundle himself notes 'The oxymoronic qualities of glamour... helped fuel illusions and deceive people about the hierarchical reality of social relations. In this way, glamour played an important role in the creation and maintenance of a given pattern of power.' *ibid*. p.12

Most predominantly though Gundle's above quotes emphasise the import of consumer culture and the increasing significance of the media – of 'press and advertising' – to the glamour phenomenon.<sup>51</sup> By interrogating a range of wartime promotional and advertising resources which employ the notion of Hollywood glamour and other media that engage with debates surrounding female conduct, this study develops several of Gundle's arguments and presents a detailed and historically specific case study which demonstrates the interdependent relationship between glamour, consumption and the media, reveals the mass media's awareness and exploitation of its essential role within this self-perpetuating system of enticement and which, through the use of Moseley's notion of resonance and Beverley Skegg's work on the accumulation of cultural capital through attention to one's appearance, leaves space for an active consumer of media, glamour and the film star pin-up.

Alternatively Carol Dyhouse's work - a study of glamour which traces a link between Hollywood and glamour from the pre-war era - is also useful. However, her focus upon both American and British case studies is, at times, problematic. Cultural contexts sometimes become muddled, and with such a large area to cover, her focus upon the specifics of the glamour phenomena and certainly of the pin-up form at all is often all-too brief. However, her consideration of many of the more troublesome elements associated with glamour and public femininity is expanded three years later in her study *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women*. Again this study is extensive in its remit, offering a broad historiography of popular debates surrounding young women in Britain and America from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century right up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, once again, examples of protracted and in-depth analysis tend to be at a premium. The study does,

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<sup>51</sup> As Gundle (and Castelli) states elsewhere, in *The Glamour System* 'glamour, it may be argued, is integral to capitalist modernity' and 'became more important as modernity spread and the mass media developed. Popular magazines, cinema, radio and, later, television provided opportunities for staging, representing, and inventing people, events and commodities.' Gundle and Castelli, *The Glamour System* p.7

however, offer several examples which are of particular use as springboards for discussion within this study, such as that of the sensational 1944 ‘Cleft Chin’ British murder case involving

a seventeen-year-old girl named Elizabeth Marina Jones but styling herself ‘Georgina Grayson’ [and]... a Swedish-born American GI named Karl Hulten. The pair went on a six-day spree of cold-blooded, hit-and-run crime and violence in London and South-East England which led some to liken them to an English Bonnie and Clyde. p.108.

She continues

Elizabeth Jones brought into focus widespread but diffuse contemporary fears about the good-time girl. Alwyn Raymond, a journalist who wrote a popular account of the case, represented Elizabeth in just these terms. She is described as a striptease artist who had been booed off the floor, but had discovered the lucrative potential of American servicemen. “From this discovery can be dated the life of dancing, drinking and comparative luxury that she counted as a success. In a few weeks, she had thrown away all her old clothes. Now it was silk stockings, high heels, American perfume, flashy jewellery and all the things that she thought made her ‘glamorous.’”<sup>52</sup>

In this example (discussed further in chapter six) it is notable that specific accoutrements (or ‘tools’) of glamour - ‘silk stockings, high heels, American perfume, flashy jewellery’- are presented by Alwyn Raymond as indexes of Elizabeth’s downfall, and that Raymond also observes that Jones ‘counted’ ‘the life of dancing, drinking and comparative luxury’ as a ‘success’, suggesting Jones was misguided and was confusing expensive symbols of economic capital with the display and possession of cultural capital. The principles of cultural capital, habitus and the notion of ‘trading up’ through glamour, all key to this thesis, are all evident here.

Other studies which engage with glamour and female sexuality within a wartime context (and in some cases with many other elements we seek to explore in this study) can be found in Sue Harper’s work upon the articulation of ‘splendor’ through costuming and mise-en-scene in the British Gainsborough melodrama of the 1940s (1997) (discussed in detail in

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<sup>52</sup> Dyhouse *Girl Trouble* p.122, Quoting Raymond, A (1945) *The Cleft Chin Murder*. London: Claude Morris. p.6

chapter three), in Swanson's work upon morale, consumption and sexuality in wartime Britain (1996) (discussed in chapter six), Philomena Goodman's *Women, Sexuality and War* (2001) (discussed later in this introduction), Sarah Street's study of contemporaneous British texts which engaged with broader wartime debates surrounding nationalized notions of appropriate and inappropriate femininity regarding wartime film stars (2000) (discussed in detail in chapter one), Jackie Stacey's 1994 work upon female film fandom from during and after the war period and Pat Kirkham's discussion of female conduct, British national identity and advertising and their relationship to the paradoxical wartime phenomena she terms as 'beauty as duty' (a process whereby despite a severe shortage of products and goods, '[British] women were exhorted to beautify themselves to keep up morale – not only the morale of the home front but also that of the men fighting abroad'<sup>53</sup>, and which informs elements of chapter six of this study). However none of these texts engage directly with the film star pin-up and all of the above focus upon British audiences or British subjects, excluding an American context.

However, it is worth briefly returning to 'Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up the (Home) Front', Kirkham's study of the British state's attempt to 'create a common outlook and *national* identity amongst all women' whereby 'emphasis was placed on features of women's culture which closely related to the shaping of their *individual* identities.'<sup>54</sup> Obviously, the notion of 'beauty as duty' and its inherent negotiation of propriety, sexuality, public femininity and consumption is pertinent to this study:

The national call was for a united front of individual female 'fronts' to keep up appearances and maintain the illusion of normality in the face of extraordinary odds, a

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<sup>53</sup> Kirkham, P. 'Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up the (Home) Front.' in Kirkham, P and Thoms, D. (eds) *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995). p.13

<sup>54</sup> *ibid* p.13-14

masquerade seen to be in direct contrast to Germany where visible signs of sacrifice and hardship seemed to denote the ideal female supporter of the war effort.<sup>55</sup>

But in particular it is Kirkham's observations regarding particular female subjects' investment in glamour and the reasons for this investment that have provided food for thought within this study and several examples of reception discussed herein. So whilst a significant section of the British (and American) female populace *did* subscribe to the notion of 'beauty as duty', as Kirkham notes, particularly amongst 'young working-class women', this was not always for patriotic reasons:

It was defiance of anyone who wanted them to change their ways more than patriotism which sustained the determination of many young working-class women to keep up appearances at all costs. Tom Harrisson, Director of Mass Observation, noted in his introduction to Celia Fremlin's 1942 observational study of women factory workers that the aimlessness, apathy and boredom she found amongst the young were confirmed by other studies. He wrote of '*the dangerous decline in positive citizenship*', especially amongst the young... Ironically, it was those suffering from what Harrisson called 'cultural passivity', dislike of bosses and working hours which left little time for leisure or sleep who took most care to make themselves look attractive.<sup>56</sup>

Equally she notes that

The skills of 'putting on a front' in terms of appearance were acquired by most girls, as part of learning to be a woman, but keeping up a respectable appearance and good grooming were more entrenched in British middle-class culture than in that of the working-class. Furthermore, beauty as duty discourses were inflected with something of the stiff upper lip associated with the British upper classes.<sup>57</sup>

These examples from Kirkham's work demonstrate, once again, the central issues of class and of taste distinctions, with a middle class assertion of cultural and symbolic capital through the control or containment of unruly or unacceptable female conduct, appearance or sexualities undertaken here in the name of patriotism rather than 'good taste'. It is not surprising, then, that, in a way similar to that observed by Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: The*

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid* p.15

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* p.17

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* p.17

*Meaning of Style*, style, and in this instance also conduct, become ‘form[s] of refusal’<sup>58</sup>, means through which identity and, more importantly, difference is declared and the middle class, their cultural capital and their taste distinctions are dismissed, as many working class girls actively reject the respectable and demure middle class notions of attractiveness or conduct typically exhibited by more ‘lady like’ role models, and instead deliberately adopt or imitate more provocative, ostentatious or lurid appearances and modes of conduct commonly associated with less ‘legitimate’ role models such as American film stars or pin-ups.

Street’s discussion of ‘Ladies or Dames’, a 1945 *Picturegoer* article which ‘foreground[ed] the equation of national identity and different embodiments of femininity in a particularly interesting manner’<sup>59</sup> through its support for British ‘actresses’ and rejection of tasteless American ‘stars’, has provided a useful starting point for my investigations regarding intersections of taste, appropriate female behaviour, and cultural identities in British discourse of the war period (see chapter one) but doesn’t discuss pin-up directly and deals only tangentially with the politics of glamour.

Valuable historically and culturally specific studies of the sexually active public woman as ‘problem’ or ‘folk devil’ can be found, not only in Carol Dyhouse’s *Girl Trouble*, Jon Savage’s *Teenage* and Philomena Goodman’s *Women, Sexuality, War* but also in Marilyn Hegarty’s *Victory Girls, Khaki Wackies and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War* and the journal article ‘Patriot or Prostitute: Sexual Discourses, Print Media and American Women during World War II’.<sup>60</sup> Hegarty’s work discusses the contradictions at the heart of American wartime government’s problematic and simultaneous

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<sup>58</sup> Hebdige, D. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. (London: Methuen, 1979). p.2

<sup>59</sup> Street, S. ‘Documents of Fandom: Margaret Lockwood and Ewan McGregor’, *British Cinema in Documents*. (London: Routledge, 2000) p.100

<sup>60</sup> Hegarty, M. *Victory Girls, Khaki Wackies and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), Hegarty, M. ‘Patriot or Prostitute: Sexual Discourses, Print Media and American Women during World War II’ *Journal of Women’s History* V. 10 #2 (1998) pp.112-136

campaigns to mobilise a more permissive female sexuality as a reward for the embattled male populace, the ‘concurrent campaign to prevent and control venereal diseases in the military’ and the media depictions which ‘reflected and reinforced [these] socio-political concerns regarding excessively sexual women who came to symbolise contamination.’ The result, Hegarty claims, is that ‘the line between the patriotic “good girl” and the prostitute or “promiscuous bad girl” collapse[d]’ forming the troubling and morally ambiguous ‘patriotute’<sup>61</sup>. Other pertinent case studies of media discourse as moral arbitration includes Stanley Cohen’s seminal work *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*<sup>62</sup>, a study of the ways in which, through a process of amplification, small pockets of antisocial behaviour (actual and misconstrued) particular adolescent groups came to be understood within the British media, and subsequently, wider British society, as ‘folk devils’ (‘visible reminders of what we should not be’<sup>63</sup>), and Simon Watney’s analysis of the discursive politics and panics surrounding sex and the media representation of ‘deviant’ sexuality at the height of the 1980s AIDS epidemic *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media*<sup>64</sup>. These studies have proven to be particularly useful as points of comparison when considering wartime texts which express concerns about female sexuality and appropriate female behaviour.

Non-academic texts which engage directly with film star pin-ups are plentiful but tend towards the realms of fan literature or the retelling of Hollywood myth focusing upon the star themselves - their lives, their roles and their achievements more generally. The star subjects

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<sup>61</sup> Abstract ‘Patriot or Prostitute: Sexual Discourses, Print Media and American Women during World War II.’ Hegarty, M (1998). *Journal of Women’s History*. V. 10, # 2. pp. 112-136

<sup>62</sup> Cohen, S. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1980)

<sup>63</sup> *ibid* p.10

<sup>64</sup> Watney, S. *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media*. (London: Methuen, 1987).

popularity or notoriety *as* a pin-up, is merely one element of their appeal and as such is generally not scrutinized in any meaningful sense.<sup>65</sup>

Such texts can, however, occasionally demonstrate to some extent the function within larger cultural memory that pin-up imagery or images of particular film star pin-ups can perform, but can still be particularly problematic when trying to establish any actual facts.<sup>66</sup> For example, whilst Spero Pastos' biography of Grable is an interesting but problematic study of Grable's personal life and her stardom more generally, there is little scrutiny of her as a pin-up or of any of the pin-ups in which she appeared, and what discussion there is, is essentially drawn from unsubstantiated observations;

Rita Hayworth's sweetly seductive *Life* spread ran a poor second to the Grable pin-up during WWII...Not until Marilyn Monroe's scandalous nude calendar photo would anything quite equal the impact of Betty's pin-up. And nothing since, except, perhaps, Sophia Loren's *Boy on a Dolphin* photo displaying her breasts in a wet dress.<sup>67</sup>

More dedicated non-academic studies of the pin-up are often little better. Frequently aimed at armchair 'experts' and connoisseurs of erotica, 1940s and 1950s Americana and fetishism, these studies frequently tend towards titillation or soft porn, exploiting a current trend in 'vintage' and nostalgia and a market for fetishism, reinforcing the notion of pin-up as lowbrow. Alternatively their intent is to overlook the less savoury elements of pin-up in order to rehabilitate such images as an form of egalitarian art.

Texts about and containing such imagery can offer the pin-up historian an insight into the sheer range of pin-up imagery that had previously been available but the images contained within must not be assumed to be wholly representative. Removed from their

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<sup>65</sup> Excellent examples of particularly rigorously researched biographies of our film star case studies include Tom McGee's *Betty Grable: The Girl with the Million Dollar Legs* (Lanham, Md.: Vestal Press, 1995) and John Kobal's *Rita Hayworth: The Time, The Place and The Woman* (London: W.H. Allen / Virgin Books, 1977) both of which are clearly rigorously researched and which possess formidable bibliographies.

<sup>66</sup> A fact explored and its implications noted more fully in chapter two in relation to the appropriation into the mythology surrounding the iconic Powonley/Grable bathing suit image.

<sup>67</sup> Pastos, S. *Pin-Up: The Tragedy of Betty Grable*. (NY: Berkeley Books, 1986) p.68



physical as well as historical contexts these images can be co-opted to various different writers' and publishers' ends. For example, in Mark Gabor's<sup>68</sup> 1996 book *The Pin-Up: A Modest History* his occasionally inappropriate tone combined with the books admittedly lovingly reproduced, yet text-lite, glossy, coffee table literature approach, is one such example whereby it could be considered to reinforce the preconception that pin-up is inherently unworthy of serious, in-depth consideration or analysis. In terms of style and approach the most 'academic' section of Gabor's book is its 'proto-feminist' foreword 'The Packaging of Rape: A Feminist Indictment' – a four-page essay by Joan Nicholson; which feels dry and staunch due to its lack of pictorial illustration, reinforcing the stereotyped notion of feminists as puritanical or sanctimonious, whilst its jarring tone makes the section feel like an afterthought jammed into the manuscript to counter accusations of misogyny. This to an extent de-legitimises Gabor's subject matter further by intimating that pin-up not only *is* oppressive ('packaging *rape*') but is deliberately so and that the only position a female subject can take with regard to it is a vehement rejection ('a feminist indictment') or a passive and unquestioning enjoyment of her own sexual oppression.

Academic approaches to the pin-up can be equally problematic, but for a range of different reasons. Not surprisingly due to the varying degrees of sexualisation such imagery possesses, much academic engagement with pin-up (film star or otherwise) tends to fall within the remit of gender and sexuality studies. In the numerous examples of the film academy engaging with sexualized female representations, such imagery is often discussed in relation to a sliding scale of female objectification and thus oppression, with Laura Mulvey's 1975 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' and her notion of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and its implication of the unequal observer/observed, male/female, oppressor/oppressed power

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<sup>68</sup> Gabor, M *Pin-Up: A Modest History*. (London: Taschen, 1996)

dynamic forming the cornerstone of this critical scrutiny.<sup>69</sup>

Whilst subtly different to the pin-up, as Simon Watney observes, pornographic imagery is often extended in second wave feminist arguments to include ‘newspaper pin-ups, advertisements, anything in fact which may ever give any woman ‘offence’<sup>70</sup>, and as Mark Jancovich notes, pornography tends to provoke a very particular oppositional argument. An argument which can be made equally applicable to the politics of taste surrounding the reception of the pin-up :

criticisms of pornography tend to present it as the cause, rather than an effect, of sexual inequality (Rodgerson and Wilson, 1991)... in many criticisms of pornography, [it is claimed] that women who enjoy pornography or even penetrative sex are necessarily complicit in their own subjugation (Segal, 1994). As Willis has pointed out, for example, this kind of work not only ends up reproducing very familiar conservative notions of female sexuality, but also essentialises them in the process. (Willis, 1989)<sup>71</sup>

Most frequently governed by an exclusive, largely middle-class (and predominantly white) agenda, such criticisms ‘not only presume the authority of the feminist to designate what were correct images and ways of seeing for all women, but [is] also underpinned by a hostility towards the popular.’<sup>72</sup> As Simon Watney, in his discussion of pornography and homosexuality, notes

The discourse of pornography offers us ‘good’ sex and ‘bad’ sex, ‘good’ images and ‘bad’ images... it collapses any possibility of considering how we actively negotiate all signs in our culture to make sense of the world, into a crude picture of supposedly fixed universal meanings.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Other examples of such an approach can be found in (but are not limited to) the work of Haskell, M. *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Rosen M. *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (London: Peter Owen, 1973); and Basinger, J. *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960* (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1993)

<sup>70</sup> Watney *Policing Desire*. p.71

<sup>71</sup> Jancovich, ‘Naked Ambitions’ (2001) Sources cited: Rodgerson, G. and Wilson, E. (eds.) *Pornography and Feminism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991). Segal, L. *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*. (London: Virago, 1994) and Willis, E. ‘Sexual Politics’ in Ian A. and Sut J. (eds.), *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*. (New York: Routledge, 1989)

<sup>72</sup> Hollows, J. And Moseley, R. ‘Popularity Contests: The Meanings of Popular Feminism.’ *Feminism in Popular Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006) p.5

<sup>73</sup> Watney *Policing Desire*. p.75

A pertinent case in point is Philomena Goodman's study of British female sexuality and wartime experience which discusses pin-up imagery in pornographic terms and as an oppressive form intended to contain and belittle women. A taste distinction is therefore made upon the form and its subjects, which is entirely understandable, given the ideological premise of the study. However, such an 'Effects' approach oversimplifies the functions and appeals both of pornography and of the pin-up. If pin-up can be considered pornography at all (which itself is debateable – the term pornography being culturally loaded with connotations of obscenity – yet the appeal of the pin-up tends to be constructed around a tension generated by the suggestion of sexuality without any real physical revelation) an assumption is made here, borrowed from feminist anti-porn rhetoric that women are victims; within such imagery, of such imagery, and of a misogynist society that produces such representations.

These gendered generalisations are problematic in that within such an absolutist structure men are cast as sexual aggressors, sex is to be endured rather than enjoyed by women, the expression sexuality is tantamount to lewdness, and that such imagery must be created by men, of women, for men's sexual pleasure. Yet as Richard Dyer's study of the male pin-up, Simon Watney's discussion of pornography and homosexuality and my own personal experience as a heterosexual women who finds such imagery pleasing but not arousing demonstrate: pin-up, or any form of erotic imagery, is not necessarily obscene and its reception and subsequent acceptance or rejection is largely subject to a range of contextual factors.

The relative brevity of Goodman's focus upon this contemporaneous form which was such a popular and ubiquitous cultural phenomenon and whose function was as erotic spectacle within a study that is entitled *Women Sexuality War* is somewhat disappointing. A

(somewhat hasty) judgement is pronounced upon the form as one apparently coherent mass, and the form - and presumably its subjects and its fans - are found lacking.

Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane<sup>74</sup> seek to use psychoanalysis as a 'weapon' with which female subjects can examine and ultimately call into question the patriarchal structures that underpin society and its media representations. This approach, whilst well-intentioned, supposes that the female 'armed' with a psychoanalytic critique of patriarchy is possessed of superior analytical skills and therefore of increased agency, whilst the mainstream female spectator, supposedly naïve, unarmed and therefore disempowered, is somewhat deterministically imagined as passive - unquestioningly accepting and helpless. Her viewing and consumption practices are imagined as being totally subject to her sex.

As Janet Staiger, amongst others, has noted, context is all and there is no such thing as what she terms an 'immanent meaning'<sup>75</sup>, an ideal reader, or a standardized response to cultural phenomena such as films, film stars or film star pin-ups.<sup>76</sup> As Walkerdine (1997) and Moseley (2002) have demonstrated, the ways in which audiences respond to and make sense of particular stars and what Dyer terms as their 'total star text'<sup>77</sup> - the star as represented across multiple media which cumulatively forms a complete star image - are not that straightforward or uniform and a more flexible, positive and practical framework in which to theorise the consumption of these women's performances and images by female fans is required if the nuances of female spectatorial experience are to be more evenly explored.

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<sup>74</sup> See Doane, M. A. 'The Economy of Desire: The Commodity Form in/of Cinema.' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* v.11 #1, May 1989, pp.23-33 or Doane, M. A. 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995) pp.227-243

<sup>75</sup> See Staiger *Interpreting Films* p.8 & 26

<sup>76</sup> As Teresa de Lauretis states 'If gender is a representation subject to social and ideological coding, there can be no simple one-to-one relationship between the image of woman inscribed in a film and its female spectator. On the contrary, the spectator's reading of the films (including interpretive and affective responses, cognitive and emotional strategies) is mediated by her existence in, and experience of, a particular universe of social discourses and practices in daily life.' de Lauretis, T. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) p.96

<sup>77</sup> See Dyer, R. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. (London: Macmillan, 1986) p.17

Using Rachel Moseley's term 'resonance' - here taken to be the 'back and forth'<sup>78</sup> of meaning between 'star' or more specifically the 'star text' and fan - offers a less prescriptive 'way of describing the relationship between [a star] as discursive formulation/image-text'<sup>79</sup> and the fans with whom this image resonates is offered. Film fans are cast neither as cultural dupes nor resistant audiences<sup>80</sup>, but are considered in more individual and respectful terms.

As Joanne Hollows observes in her 2006 study of middle-class women returning to the home in the 2000s, the 'cultural significance' of women's engagement with cultural elements and ideologies that run counter to second wave feminist notions of tolerable female representations nonetheless still 'need to be take[n] seriously'<sup>81</sup> as valid cultural phenomena and in order to engage more representatively and without prejudice (even if that prejudice occurs with the finest of intentions) with the texts and subsequent resonances they offered female audiences who *didn't* reject such ideologies – who pinned-up such imagery, who read and revelled in articles on glamour, who attended and enjoyed Betty Grable or Rita Hayworth's wartime films or bought into wartime glamour.

Yet the assumption tends to prevail that pin-up images are suggestive and therefore they are sexualised. As a result they possess an inherently biased power dynamic, skewed in the favour of men, for men, at the expense *of* women and if women are to be seen to possess

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<sup>78</sup> Moseley *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn* p.8

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* p.74

<sup>80</sup> As Walkerdine notes, the notion of a resistant subject is equally as problematic as that of the cultural dupe as it 'fails to get to grips with any aspect of oppression and exploitation and there is no mention whatsoever of conformity.' Walkerdine, V. *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) p.22; Moseley summarises Walkerdine's work, noting that she 'argues forcefully against the 'resistance' paradigm common to much cultural studies work addressing working-class identities, and rather for an understanding of the strategies for 'coping and surviving' mobilised by 'ordinary working people.' Moseley *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn*. p.20. An explanation which this seems particularly suited to an era defined precisely by its arduousness; its crushing drudgery, boredom and shortage, its interim nature and its liminality.

<sup>81</sup> See Hollows, J and Moseley, R. 'Popularity Contests': The Meanings of Popular Feminism' and 'Can I Go Home Yet?: Feminism, Post-Feminism and Domesticity' *Feminism in Popular Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006) p.5

any self-respect or agency they must reject them. Certainly, these concerns should be a consideration<sup>82</sup>, but they are not a forgone conclusion.

A pertinent example of these assumptions can be found in Abigail Solomon Godeau's 'The Legs of the Countess', a 1986 study of 400 professional cartes de visite photographs made between 1856 and 1865, of the Countess de Castiglione - famed French beauty and mistress of Emperor Napoleon III of France - whereby the complexities inherent in the visual representation of female sexual agency, public femininity and feminine self-representation, are highlighted, prompting the author to ask 'who's desire?'<sup>83</sup>

Solomon Godeau argues that the photographic images form a 'fetishistic photographic project' whereby as a subject the countess and her desire, not unlike the pin-up subject at large, are presumed here to exist only for the pleasure of others<sup>84</sup>, but in such an inevitable and deterministic arrangement, how could the female subject occupy any other space other than that of the oppressed?

Here Skeggs' notion surrounding the negotiation of cultural capital is fruitful. In a capitalist patriarchy wherein female subjects invariably possessed little or no cultural power or influence, the Countess de Castiglione negotiated respectability and increased her social capital and public visibility by using the glamour inherent within her renown as a form of representational currency with which she could further raise her cultural profile and increase,

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<sup>82</sup> A key example of this can be found in Kathleen Sweeney's investigation of the representation of the sexualised female teen star, asks if the women or girls who feature in much sexualized imagery are being empowered or exploited, and in turn, if women who consume such images are in some way vulnerable or potentially at risk of harm asking 'who is being manipulated?.. The young performer...or the consumer?' Sweeney, *Maiden USA: Girl Icons Come of Age*. (Oxford: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008) p.58

<sup>83</sup> Solomon Godeau, A 'The Legs of the Countess' *October* v.39 Autumn 1986, p.108

<sup>84</sup> 'With whose eyes does the Countess gaze at images of her face? Her legs? Her body? Having no culturally privileged organ of narcissistic identification and being positioned outside the symbolic order of patriarchy, defined only as other in relation to the masculine one, the feminine position, it is argued, precludes an achieved subjectivity -subjectivity here understood as a positively, rather than differentially, defined identity. Consequently, the woman, whose self-worth and social value is contingent on her status as object of desire, has so internalized the male gaze as to produce a near-total identification with it.' *ibid.* p76

maintain and secure her social, symbolic and cultural capital. Furthermore, as Solomon Godeau herself notes

the countess's photographs, though taken by a professional photographer, could with some justice be perceived as having been authored by her. Such an attribution would be predicated on the fact that the countess, far from passively following the directives of the photographer, substantially determined her own presentation to the camera, dictating the pose, costume, props, and accessories, and occasionally decided upon the colouring and/or retouching of the photographs.<sup>85</sup>

Whilst acknowledging that to this extent the Countess is ‘the architect of her own representations’<sup>86</sup> and that ‘the woman model looks directly into the lens of the camera, thus meeting the gaze of the spectator....depart[ing] so emphatically from traditional modes of pornography’<sup>87</sup>, Solomon Godeau still asserts that the Countess’s images ‘are the personal expression of an individual woman's investment in her image - in herself as image... this individual act of expression is underwritten by conventions that make her ‘less an author than a scribe’<sup>88</sup>and that

the masks, the disguises, the postures, the poses, the ballgowns, the display of the body- what is the countess but a tabula rasa on whom is reflected a predetermined and delimited range of representations? And of what does her subjectivity consist if not her total absorption of them, her obedience to a scopic regime which inevitably undercuts her pretended authority as orchestrator of the look?<sup>89</sup>

What we are therefore presented with is a complex and ambiguous image of femininity with clear polysemic potential.

The politics surrounding the photographic representation of the female subject are just as fraught when considering the strictly controlled and highly contrived images of the Hollywood stars (both in terms of photographic imagery but also the ‘image’ perpetuated by a star’s persona). With their labour and likeness literally the property of their studios, it becomes even more difficult to claim any sense of authorship, autonomy or the female sexual

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p.70

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p.67

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p.97-98

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.* p.67

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.* p.105

agency discussed by Buszek for the female stars who featured in such images. However, Hollywood was a business (and a business that firmly believed women to be its core audience<sup>90</sup>) and as film critic Mick LaSalle (2000) notes ‘complicated women’, female agency and modernity were hugely popular with audiences in the pre-code late 1920s and early 1930s and such representations only ceased because the implementation of the Production Code made such depictions difficult to bring to market.<sup>91</sup>

In practice responses to particular pin-up images, to glamorous stars or to the debate surrounding either, are never so conveniently divided along gender lines, and pin-up imagery -not unlike *any* imagery, sexualised or not - has the potential to elicit a range of meanings, as do the stars who appeared in them. As examples within this study demonstrate media and public engagement with and reaction to the film star pin-up phenomena, to particular stars who were perceived to be pin-ups and to glamorous representations and representatives and to debates surrounding all of these is just as commonly informed by factors such as classed notions of taste, and wider cultural occurrences, trends and contexts (such as, for example the wider cultural context of wartime Britain) and are particularly variable depending upon who exactly the pin-up or marker of glamour actually is. For example, chapter seven explores Richard Dyer’s contention that particular film star performances break down under the weight of that stars’ charisma as other elements of that performer’s ‘star text’ seep into a films ‘meaning.’<sup>92</sup> (The example given being Rita Hayworth’s performance in 1946 film *Gilda* which due to Hayworth’s ‘charisma’ as a star problematises the viewer’s investment in

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<sup>90</sup> ‘As Thomas Schatz notes, in Hollywood’s studio era producers had long been convinced that most movie goers were women.’ Hanson, H. *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film*. London: Tauris, (2008) p.8

<sup>91</sup> LaSalle observes that ‘when censorship came, it came fast and irrevocably. Movies changed overnight.’ LaSalle, M. *Complicated Women: Sex and Power in Pre-Code Hollywood* (NY: St Martin’s Press, 2000) p.189

<sup>92</sup> Dyer, R ‘Resistance Through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*’ in Kaplan, E.A. (ed) *Women in Film Noir*. (London: BFI, 1992) See also Dyer, R. ‘Four Films of Lana Turner’ *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp.79-111



the film's protagonist Johnny.) It is equally possible then that film star pin-up imagery - intended to offer a privileged look into a star's persona beyond their film roles – could carry a whole range of potential readings linked to various elements of that persona, peripheral to that pin-up, and the way those elements play into wider cultural values and debates.

Dyer observes that 'a star's physiognomy carries the meanings of her/his image in whatever character she or he plays'<sup>93</sup> and, as such, film star pin-ups are a suggestion of that star represented beyond that frozen image. It could therefore be argued that in the film star pin-up a particularly rounded, realistic representational model is offered, one which encourages identification with its subject rather than encouraging objectification, and which urges the reader to consider the image as part of a wider lexicon of representations and meanings, which together constitute 'Betty Grable' or 'Rita Hayworth'. This can, however, also work against a star, causing the reader to reject the pin-up image because of its subject as an example discussed at length in chapter one demonstrates. In a 1943 Mass Observation study to ascertain the most popular pin-up amongst British servicemen and women, Grable's pin-up image is rejected by several respondents precisely *because* it is Grable in the image.

This recurring theme in Dyer's work - the pin-up as part of a larger star text - appears to be surprisingly absent in his study of *male* pin-up imagery. Considering the function and the potential agency inherent within what Dyer reflexively terms (in a play upon the notion of 'the gaze') as 'the look' of the male pin-up subject within such images, Dyer discusses how the 'right to look'<sup>94</sup> and the power inherent within that right<sup>95</sup>, is invariably denied to women as 'one of the fundamental ways by which [uneven] power relations between the sexes are

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<sup>93</sup> Dyer 'Four Films' p.81

<sup>94</sup> Dyer 'Don't Look Now' p.265

<sup>95</sup> As Dyer notes, here 'the idea of looking (staring) as power and being looked at as powerlessness overlaps with ideas of activity/passivity' *ibid.* p.269

maintained'<sup>96</sup>. This is a compelling argument certainly, but one which relies, once again, upon a very generalised, subjective and thus problematized argument and a polarized, gendered response:

In the case of not looking, where the female model typically averts her eyes, expressing modesty, patience and a lack of interest in anything else, the male model looks either off or up. In the case of the former, his look suggests an interest in something else that the viewer cannot see – it certainly doesn't suggest any interest in the viewer. Indeed it barely acknowledges the viewer, whereas the woman's averted eyes do just that – they are averted from the viewer.<sup>97</sup>

Whilst such a generalised argument may be applicable to some pin-up images, a universal 'meaning' behind such a stance cannot be assumed. Most obviously (and surprisingly, considering Dyer's notion of 'total star text' informs this study so significantly) such an approach to pin-up imagery overlooks the significant function of the star's persona in terms of helping to shape the image's 'meaning'. For example, some male stars' personas were more firmly associated with assertive masculinity than others, just as some female stars were considered more demure or lady like. As such, their direct gaze (or lack thereof) could have signified very different things. Equally, the star is not the only element of such images, as is explored in chapters two and five in relation to iconic images of Grable and Hayworth: other elements within an image's mise-en-scene and its construction also carry the potential to shape an image's 'meaning'. Some such examples include (but are not limited to): location (is it exterior or interior? Does it evoke the jungle, a library, a boudoir, for example?); Lighting (is the image a crisp, high-key studio shot or a low-key Hurrell-esque glamour shot?); focus (is the focus soft or sharp, are we being presented with a dreamy fantasy or with crisply shot, 'authentic' document?); the subject's posture, gestures and facial expression (is the subject reclining or upright for example; do their postures or facial expressions suggest

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<sup>96</sup> *ibid.* p.265

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* p.267

vulnerability or confidence?) In addition to the type of image itself (is it a health and vigour pin-up, or glamour shot?)

Equally, whilst female pin-ups may often be ‘caught in the middle of an action’<sup>98</sup> this could carry a range of connotations besides being the passive, sexual oppressed quarry of an objectifying or voyeuristic gaze. Firstly such a representation could suggest that the film star subject has a busy, active, modern and enviable lifestyle – a crucial element within glamour<sup>99</sup> - whilst more importantly this staged quality requires a clear element of performance from its subjects, frequently manifest in a sense of what Buszek terms as ‘awarishness’ or possibly even a sense of irony with regard to the use of pin-up’s (certainly by the 1940s) well-established conventions.

As Joanne Meyerowitz (1996) and, more recently, Maria Elena Buszek (2006) argue the pin-up is a form which, despite initially appearing to offer a primarily masculine and particularly misogynist appeal, can, and has, since its inception, actually offered not only a significant feminine appeal but a *feminist* appeal for many female consumers and spectators of such imagery through its representations of female sexual agency. Such examples from Meyerowitz’s work are discussed in detail later in this study but discussion of one of Buszek’s examples is useful here. Buszek notes of the illustrated pin-ups by Alberto Vargas which appeared in *Esquire* magazine between 1940 and 1946 that ‘Vargas girls were part of the dialogue that gave women a language for ... sexual self-expression’<sup>100</sup> and such a stance towards the Vargas’ images can very feasibly be expanded to encompass the film star pin-up.

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<sup>98</sup> *ibid.* p.270

<sup>99</sup> As Stephen Gundle notes ‘Glamorous people are not rooted but rather are constantly on the move...To be on the move, almost nomadic, is often a feature of the person of glamour.’ Gundle. *Glamour*. p.13

<sup>100</sup> Buszek *Pin Up Grrrls* p.227

In stating this Buszek's study moves beyond the accusations of oppression, irrelevance and unworthiness and adopts Hollows and Moseley's approach, considering more 'seriously' the social conditions, historical context and 'cultural significance' of the pin-up form:

Because the pin-up is always a sexualised woman whose image is not only mass-reproduced, but mass-reproduced because intended for wide display, the genre is an interesting barometer for western cultural responses to women's sexuality.<sup>101</sup>

However, whilst Buszek's work historically contextualises the pin-up within a larger art-history tradition, generally acknowledging the intricately interlinked relationship between Hollywood and the pin-up<sup>102</sup> as a sub-generic category, the film-star pin up, particularly during the war era, forms only a small subsection of that study. In her brief chapter on 'Sex, Women and World War II' perhaps not surprisingly, given her art history approach, Buszek favours a re-consideration and re-appraisal of the illustrated pin-ups of *Esquire* magazine illustrator Alberto Vargas as 'an icon for this powerful, if fleeting moment in American history'<sup>103</sup> rather than an expanded consideration of the photographic wartime Hollywood pin-up.

Buszek's claims regarding the Vargas pin-ups are pertinent and well-observed but the Vargas pin-up was an entirely fabricated feminine representation - two dimensional, nameless, characterless *illustrations* of women created by a male artist - and as such they are both simplistic and problematic in ways that Hollywood pin-up photography of the period is not. The film-star pin-up carries with her a seemingly more 'real', 'active', enduring and established persona; she speaks with her own voice, has her own, often distinct performance style, her own skills and her own private life (as speculated upon in fan magazines) - her 'star

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid.* p.5

<sup>102</sup> She notes significantly, that 'the professional, sexually self-expressive woman that Hollywood had been glamorising since the First World War.' helped to shape public opinion and in turn the social conditions into those in which pin-up could flourish. *ibid.* p.187

<sup>103</sup> *op cit.*

text’ - which can be ‘tapped into’ by audiences across a range of media *in addition* to her pin-ups.

Also despite Buszek’s brief mention of Grable’s 1944 film *Pin-Up Girl* as ‘a work that unquestionably reflects the home-front understanding and acceptance of the pin-up by the end of World War II’<sup>104</sup> she undertakes no actual analysis of the iconic Frank Powolny pin-up photograph (which actually features in that film) or of Grable’s image and notoriety as a pin-up. In short, the Hollywood pin-up is briefly identified as a ubiquitous wartime cultural phenomena during the war era, but its context is wholly American-centric and particularly limited. Buszek’s work has nevertheless proven invaluable to this study due to her claims surrounding the pin-up’s appeal to female as well as male audiences (effectively evidenced through a range of compelling American examples) as such she offers a refreshing challenge to existing preconceptions surrounding gender, pin-up consumption and the politics of looking.

Elsewhere, the film star pin-up fleetingly appears in Marjorie Rosen’s wider discussions of Hollywood’s misogynist representations of women. In a chapter entitled ‘Pin the tail on the pinup’, mainstream female audiences are once again painted as cultural dupes, with Rosen claiming that ‘men loved pinup. Women anesthetized by the idea of glamour couldn’t care less.’<sup>105</sup> It is claimed that the pin-up was used as part of a wider Hollywood wartime drive to ‘soft pedal’ sex to the American public for fear of offending the female patrons who formed the greater part of the wartime audience. Yet whilst both pin-up and more explicitly sexualized imagery may have offended some women (although surely it will have been just as likely to offend some men) the suggestion here is that pin-up was an innately conservative, repressive form - a ‘soft’ option whose appeal lacked in sexual thrust –

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<sup>104</sup> *ibid.* p.223

<sup>105</sup> Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.207

which is at odds with much closer studies surrounding Hollywood and decency at this time, such as Thomas Doherty's study of American censorship in the pre-war 1930 to 1934 period.<sup>106</sup>

In fact, as Doherty notes, it was precisely the pin-up's ability both to provoke and to suggest – not only sexual desire but also, as Buszek contends, freedom, modernity and its subject's agency - that was the reason the form continued to be so strongly favoured by studios' promotional departments.

Equally, Rosen's conception of the pin-up and the unified and purportedly passive reactions it supposedly elicits also run contrary to the more challenging conception of the film star pin-up found in Mary Beth Haralovich's 'Film Advertising, The Film Industry and The Pin-Up: The Industry's Accommodations to Social Forces in the 1940's' whereby Haralovich claims that Hollywood's promotional sector seized the opportunity to exploit the radically altered cultural conditions of wartime America, challenge the jurisdiction of industry regulators the Production Code Administration (PCA) and push the boundaries of acceptable representations of female sexuality specifically through the use of the pin-up form.

Haralovich's case study of the promotional campaign surrounding the 1943 film *The Outlaw* (Howard Hughes Productions) presents the pin-up as one such particularly complex form; on one hand, a challenging representational mode whose marketing in particular deliberately provoked and sought to expand the boundaries of acceptable feminine representation, yet on the other simultaneously charted the unfortunate and unscrupulous sexual exploitation of a young Jane Russell throughout *The Outlaw's* promotional campaign,

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<sup>106</sup> Doherty notes that 'pen-and-ink drawings filled in, or left out, material that no actual photograph could depict without being legally actionable. Throughout the 1930s and beyond, the non-photographic publicity picture remained popular in one-sheets and ad mats because illustrations could undrape actresses and flaunt cheesecake more explicitly than photographs.' Doherty, T. *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999) p.110

demonstrating the fine line Hollywood promotional departments often walked and the industrial, economic and social factors which contributed to such representations.

### **The Glamour Image**

In terms of the film star pin-up itself, developments in the teens; in studio, lens and lighting technologies, made effective sharp focus, short depth of field and close-ups possible and consequently the glamour photograph and film star pin-up and formats quickly became codified. The glamour image, exemplified by the work of George Hurrell, was invariably shot in a studio location - making the lighting, mise-en-scene and the resultant image more controllable, predictable and easily replicable.

Identifying characteristics of the glamour image included dramatic, exaggerated gestures and posturing, reliance upon expressionistic Chiascuro-style lighting to create heavy theatrical shadows intended to convey danger, ambiguity or depth of character, 'dramatizing and conferring an atmosphere of sexual allure on the subjects'<sup>107</sup>. A truncated depth-of-field was intended to imbue the image with an unreal, insubstantial and dreamlike aura and an emphasis upon textures such as reflective surfaces (gelled hair, mirrors, rhinestones, jewels), smooth complexions and translucent fabrics to suggest sensory excess. In light of such conventions it is not surprising then that such imagery is often discussed within a psychoanalytical framework and why film stars of the era came to be known in the popular consciousness as enviable screen 'gods' and 'goddesses'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Gundle and Castelli *The Glamour System*. p. 71

<sup>108</sup> As Dyer notes 'Glamour of the Classical Hollywood period relied on creating a glowing image for the female star – the convention of three types of lighting, key, fill and back, established in the 1920's, created a virtual aura around the female stars.' Dyer, R. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1997).p.87. Carol Dyhouse's brief discussion of the black and white photography of Hollywood cinema also identifies some key characteristics of the photographic genre. See Dyhouse *Glamour* p.30-33

The successful selling point of this format therefore appears to have been the effective combination of three factors. Firstly the flagrant glorification of its film star subjects, secondly, the way such images allowed the player to simultaneously demonstrate their ‘personality’ and acting range through the emphasis upon their invariably flawless visage and its exquisite expressions (the face within such images performs a metonymical function; carrying the burden of the star persona – here the eyes really are expected to be understood to represent ‘the windows to the soul’). The third and final selling point of such images was the ‘closer’ emotional access these images appeared to allow audiences to the pictured star precisely because of these images’ facial preoccupation.

Both exoticised and, in some ways, legitimised by being ‘artful’ in form, such pictures, whilst appearing to offer privileged access, often concealed as much as they revealed. As such they embody the very quandary at the heart of glamour. Whilst those who created such images imbued their images with an air of sophistication or artistry through the meticulous crafting such image’s *mise-en-scène*, (to create as seemingly complete an illusion of glamorous perfection as possible and isolate any extraneous mundane details that may link its ethereal subject to the humdrum reality), this contrivance also had the unfortunate consequence of heightening the potential for the film star subject to be perceived as a mere element within that photographic *mise-en-scène*. As such the subject has been discussed not unlike the inanimate objects which surround them - a passive vehicle or vessel for ideologies, as such the star becomes a *tabula rasa*, whereby aspects of their photographic rendering – their eyes, lips, lashes, coiffure, eyebrows, complexion, jewellery, clothing - are subject to sculpting, editing or ‘glamorisation’ in the editing process by the notorious airbrush. Therefore whilst making some sort of appeal at least to an emotional authenticity or integrity,



such images very artifice can simultaneously suggest an inauthenticity and manufacture or even deception or trickery.

Furthermore, as a product designed specifically for mass mechanical reproduction and mass distribution and lacking a true ‘original’ (with the exception of the negative which in itself is a questionable original), in a Benjaminian sense such an image therefore lacks an ‘aura’<sup>109</sup> and thus legitimacy as a work of art. As Benjamin notes

The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the “spell of the personality,” the phony spell of a commodity.<sup>110</sup>

Use of the term ‘spell’ also alludes to the notion of misdirection, glamour or trickery (a range of ideas explored in detail with regard to Hollywood and female attractiveness in chapter four) whilst marking this ‘cult’ (suggesting its followers are devotees, or even dupes) as a hugely aspirational phenomenon linked inextricably to consumption through the use of sex appeal.

The very purpose of such images, rather than a relatively realist rendering of the film star subjects’ body, was to deliberately emphasise or exaggerate, the star’s form or parts of that form as exceptionally desirable, graceful or spectacular. Using techniques similar to those developed by the earliest of experimental photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron<sup>111</sup>, Hollywood glamour photography drew specific attention to a singular detail (in most examples, predominantly the eyes - ‘the window to the soul’) which was invariably the only element of such images which appeared in sharp relief, with a view to enhancing the sense of the photographed star’s artistry and - ironically in a medium which was so intensely mediated - their emotional sincerity or authenticity. As such these are intensely seductive,

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<sup>109</sup> As Benjamin observes ‘aura is tied to... presence; there can be no replica of it.’ Benjamin, W. ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ Holmes, S and Redmond, S (eds) *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (London: Sage, 2007) p.8

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.* p.9

<sup>111</sup> Whose work comprised of religious, mythical and romantic iconography and tableau vivants.

alluring images, but images which are reliant upon the stasis of their very deliberately posed, frequently reclining or recumbent subject, as a flattering and effective combination of soft and sharp focus within one mise-en-scene becomes much more difficult to execute once the subject is in motion and that mise-en-scene constantly shifts.

### **The Health and Vigour Pin-Up**

Whilst glamour images presented stars as enviable and untouchable, the health and vigour pin-up emphasised a stars exuberance and likability. Obsessed with motion, facilitated by developments in outdoor photographic equipment, and using sportsmen and women, dancers as well as picture personalities, pin-ups of the 'health and vigour' variety (as both Heather Addison and Carol Dyhouse have noted,) generated strong connotative associations surrounding the then hugely popular cultural discourse surrounding physical fitness.<sup>112</sup> In the case of the film star pin-up, other associations were made with the glamour and celebrity of Hollywood, through the use of sunny California locations which suggested the freedom, hedonism and plentitude of Hollywood as a location, with its subjects often captured 'performing' exciting and novel up-to-date leisure pursuits, wearing becoming and up-to-date fashions, whilst its financially independent, emancipated female stars were conspicuously consuming. In addition, due to their status as modern movie stars, as Heather Addison<sup>113</sup> has noted, these pin-ups also carried strong connotations not only of modernity but as Buszek argues, of female agency.

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<sup>112</sup> What Heather Addison terms as 'body shaping' 'Hollywood, Consumer Culture and the Rise of "Body Shaping"' in Dessler & Jowett (Ed.). *Hollywood Goes Shopping*. (Minneapolis, Mn.: University of Mineapolis Press, 2000) p.3

<sup>113</sup> Addison, H. *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003) and Addison, H. "'Must the Players Keep Young?': Early Hollywood's Cult of Youth' *Cinema Journal* v.45 #4 2006, pp.3-25

The function of many film star pin-ups was to market star personas and therefore these images displayed the performer outside of their film star vocation (extra textual image), supposedly enjoying leisure time – swimming, sunbathing, picnicking, roller skating, sailing. Designed to invite additional readings about the star *beyond* their mere appearance in specific film texts, these images supposedly gave fan readers a supposedly ‘authentic’, yet certainly no less constructed, ‘behind the scenes’ insight into the ‘real’ star. Indeed, probably the key identifying feature of the pin-up at large is the contrived, very deliberate choice of presentation, posture and costuming, which suggest motion but (for obvious reasons) cannot actually display it. These images were purposely adopted in order to show off to maximum advantage the physical perfection, vigour, vitality and charisma of the subject, frequently in a semi-clothed state (swimsuits, shorts or playsuits supposedly intended as sports and leisure wear but all offering the potential to titillate; or the costume of the showgirl or burlesque artiste) designed to sexualise and draw attention to the subjects form whilst subsequently also strengthening the associative link between sexuality and leisure and liberation.

Not surprisingly, it was quickly realised that the film star pin-up could be used to sell anything from cosmetics, to clothes, to kitchen goods, and when the exotic appeal of the glamour pin-up was not appropriate, the selling potential of the health and vigour pin-up could be utilised instead. Advertisers frequently utilised pin-up imagery to project an image of healthy, modern, assertive femininity of the kind in which Hollywood quickly came to specialise, which made role models of the film stars featured, and status symbols of the products that they used, wore and endorsed. As Dyer notes, what such pin-ups implied was

leisure, and the strength and vitality to use it. The celebration of the body in sport is also a celebration of the relative affluence of western society, where people have time to dedicate themselves to the development of the body for its own sake<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Dyer ‘Don’t Look Now’ p.271

Whilst from the late teens onwards the flourishing cosmetic industry both benefitted from and fuelled the growing public preoccupation with Hollywood and its immaculately groomed stars, as the use of cosmetics and the appropriation of glamorous femininity became an increasingly accepted (and even expected) element of a woman's public 'look'. Consequentially by the 1940s cosmetics were no longer just the instruments of actresses and prostitutes and provided moderation was observed the everyday use of cosmetics was acceptable practice. As Kathy Peiss<sup>115</sup> has noted, long before the outbreak of war, the use of such products could signify liberty, modernity, self-respect and sexual agency. Equally Sarah Berry<sup>116</sup> notes that it was cosmetics in particular that were key to Hollywood's selling of glamorous 'exoticism' in the 1930s.

As many film historians have suggested, Hollywood films and promotional imagery therefore swiftly came to function as glorified catalogues or lifestyle guides, marketing lifestyles to their audiences whilst offering up willing potential consumers to service providers, advertisers and manufacturers.<sup>117</sup> Glamour is therefore the point at which Hollywood's idealised representations of abundance and of alluring female sexual agency become appropriated via the act of consumption with film star pin-ups such as Grable and Hayworth, the glamour they embodied and their pin-up imagery offering us a particularly fruitful means through which to investigate the negotiation of aspiration, consumption and taste during this period of acute shortage.

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<sup>115</sup> Peiss, K. *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (NY: Holt, 1998)

<sup>116</sup> Berry, S. 'Hollywood Exoticism: Cosmetics and colour in the 1930s' in Desser & Jowett (eds) *Hollywood Goes Shopping* pp.108-135

<sup>117</sup> For example, one of Mayer's respondents in his 1946 sociological study of Cinema-going notes 'I am influenced as regards etiquette. The type of clothes to be worn at different social functions; the correct and most interesting method of laying a table for dinner. The correct wines with different meats and fishes; the correct uses of cutlery.' Mayer, J.P. *The Sociology of Film: Studies and Documents* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946) p.194-5

### **Case Study One: Betty Grable**

The first section of this study explores the film star pin-up in relation to debate surrounding ‘Americanness’, and taste through the figure of Betty Grable. If justification were needed as to the use of Grable as a case study the sheer magnitude of Grable’s success and economic power, her cultural influence and her value to Fox as a highly marketable and profitable personality, it is evidenced in Gomery’s brief appraisal of her:

Zanuck found a profitable formula for Fox’s Technicolor spectacles in the Betty Grable musical. To say this was a successful strategy is to underplay how valuable Betty Grable became to Fox during the 1940s. The evidence is imposing. For ten consecutive years (1941-51) she was among the top ten money making stars. She was paid accordingly. By 1945, Grable ranked among the highest of all salaried persons in the United States, and she reportedly received more than 10,000 fan letters per week through the Second World War... She made twenty-two Technicolor films for Fox...all finishing near the top revenue generators for their respective years. Except for Tyrone Power (1940) and Gregory Peck (1947) no other Fox star of the 1940s made it into the annual top ten ranking of stars. As Fox’s economic fortunes improved in the 1940s, it was surely due in no small part to the continual popularity of Grable musicals in Technicolor.<sup>118</sup>

The first chapter contextualises the film star pin-up’s reception in Britain within wider cultural debates specifically surrounding notions of American-ness, the Americanisation of British culture and how these cultural concerns became transposed onto US film stars and icons, who possessed common currency in wartime Britain, such as the phenomenally popular and culturally ubiquitous Grable.

In both academic reappraisals and audience recollections of Grable, a key feature of her persona that is frequently invoked is her ‘averageness’ or ‘ordinariness’. For example, despite frequently noted as being her most popular feature and reportedly insured with Lloyds of London for \$1,000,000, her legs were praised ‘less for their exceptional beauty than for their approximation to the “average.”’ As a star whose persona seemed to hinge on the

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<sup>118</sup> Gomery, D. *The Hollywood Studio System* (London: Macmillan, 1986) p.95-96

repeated disavowal of any exceptional qualities<sup>119</sup> (as [popular US magazine] *Life* reported, Grable's legs – “her private trademark” - were celebrated not as being extraordinary but as “the great American average legs: straight, perfectly rounded and shaped, but judged by the standards of millions of others.”<sup>120</sup>) and marketed as the very ideal of the American girl-next-door<sup>121</sup>. Richard Dyer's concept of Hollywood stars' simultaneous ordinariness and extraordinariness (whereby stars ‘live more expensively than the rest of us, but are [perceived to be] not essentially transformed by this’<sup>122</sup>, in fact the ‘wealth and success of the stars can be seen as serving to isolate certain human qualities’<sup>123</sup>) is therefore particularly applicable to Grable. However, the term ‘average’ carries two significantly different implications with regard to Grable and as a study concerned with cultural distinctions, it is worth briefly outlining them for the first time here.

Whilst, with certain audiences, the terms ‘average’ or ‘ordinary’ seem to have suggested a *relative* normalcy and unpretentiousness in line with Dyer's formulation; an irresistible combination of the ‘girl-next-door’ with the extraordinary glamour of a Hollywood star, through which it could be argued female audiences could vicariously experience glamour<sup>124</sup> and male audiences could find a gorgeous yet attainable sweetheart

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<sup>119</sup> A sentiment Grable herself engaged with when discussing reasons for her appeal in an interview in the 1960s, ‘As a dancer I couldn't out dance Ginger Rogers or Eleanor Powell. As a singer I'm no rival to Doris Day. As an actress I don't take myself seriously. I had a little bit of looks without being in the big beauty league.’ Shipman, D. *The Great Movie Stars: The Golden Years* (NY: Crown, 1970) p.250

<sup>120</sup> ‘Westbrook, R.B. “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James”: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II’ in *American Quarterly* v.42 #4, Dec 1990, p.599

<sup>121</sup> Sicherman and Hird-Green note that ‘Grable's acting, singing and dancing were adequate but not exceptional, a fact partly responsible for her success; girls with average talent could identify with her. As one writer observed... ‘Betty represents a daydream that might come true’ Sicherman, B. and Hird-Green, C. *Notable American Women: The Modern Period* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1980) p.290 citing ‘Living the Daydream’ *Time* 1947, p.40; Whilst Robert Westbrook also observes ‘Grable's rise to champion during the war was due as much to the women who flocked to her movies as to the soldiers who pinned her up overseas. ‘Girls can see me in a picture’ she said, ‘and feel I could be one of them.’ from Westbrook ‘I Want a Girl’ p.605

<sup>122</sup> Dyer, R. *Stars* (London: BFI, 2007) p.43

<sup>123</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>124</sup> This would certainly seem to be reflected in responses given to Stacey in her retrospective reception study of British female cinemagoers of the 40's and 50's: ‘Betty Grable was my favourite because of her clothes (ours

figure<sup>125</sup>. Alternatively much academic work (almost all undertaken *since* the war era) has, with the benefit of hindsight and of second wave developments in feminist academia, misappropriated both ‘average’ and ‘ordinary’ to suggest something entirely different and much more critical about Grable.

In this instance Grable’s ‘averageness’ (as opposed to her being understood to be exceptional) intimates her function as an ‘everywoman’ and her popularity as the quintessential film-star pin-up is indicative of a wider cultural practice whereby women’s wartime function was as a ‘reward’ for men, with Grable being cast as passive, anodyne, unchallenging and somehow complicit within this formulation. Grable’s wartime notoriety and the pin-ups in which she appeared are frequently offered as evidence of a prevailing, and pervasive ideology of wartime chauvinism and female oppression and of many women’s inability or unwillingness to question their place within this ideology -the ‘false consciousness’ theory rejected by Hollows and Moseley.

As Westbrook notes; ‘the consensus of opinion, including Grable herself, was that, as *Time* [magazine] put it, “She can lay no claims to sultry beauty or mysterious glamour...Her peach-cheeked, pearl blonde good looks add up to mere candy-box-top prettiness.”’<sup>126</sup> This definition of Grable as a confection, along with Marjorie Rosen’s assertion that she was the ‘peaches-and-cream incarnation of the virtues of the American girl’<sup>127</sup>, once again suggests something of bread and circuses: superficial and inconsequential, a cultural confection or reconciliatory tidbit served up to an easily distracted audience.

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were rationed), glamorous locations (shelters for us) and handsome escorts (ours were in the forces). We were living such a different life - this was the stuff dreams were made of.’ And ‘In the 40s it was Betty Grable for me, I loved musicals – she was so bubbly, so full of life it took you out of yourself.’ Stacey *Star-Gazing* p.111; Similarly, one respondent in J.P Mayer’s 1946 study claims ‘in *Pin Up Girl* Betty Grable wore a nice cream lace dresse and smart white suite. Of course you imagine yourself in them so much more if the film is in Technicolor’ (sic) Mayer *Sociology of Film* p.236

<sup>125</sup> ‘A symbol of the kind of woman for whom American men – especially working-class men – were fighting’ Westbrook ‘I Want a Girl’ p.596

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.* p.599

<sup>127</sup> Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.208

To further complicate matters, academic reappraisals of Grable's work, and her persona more generally, frequently merge her photographic and filmic modes of representation in the collective historical consciousness, forming a strange and questionable amalgamation comprised of Grable's at times surprisingly asexual film roles combined with the overt sexuality and the agency which Buszek argues is implicit within the pin-up form particularly of this period, which both become subsumed within Grable's function as the wartime 'GI's sweetheart'; a figure frequently associated with obligation and exploitation. Perhaps not surprisingly then, many critiques of Grable become critiques of the pin-up, and the derisory tone towards Grable and the pin-up form which she came to embody still not only prevails, but dominates. Marjorie Rosen, argues that

Grable's staggering success may be puzzling to those indifferent to her plumped-out face, plumped-up lips, and just plump body. Yet there was about her a directness – her virginal naivete; her full, uncomplicated voice, always incredulous and vacantly girlish; her exuberance. Ardent in love and pertly angry when disappointed, she may have been... the most feminine, uncomplicated, and ripe female on-screen during the war years. While all the grande dames... were busy weeping their way through 'women's pictures', Grable, blonde and pink and glowingly healthy, celebrated the joy of being a girl untouched by war, work, grey serge, or brains. Because she so curiously embodied both familial and maternal warmth and 'all-American sex appeal', she outdistanced all box-office competitors. Giving succour at the family level and in the trenches simultaneously was no easy trick, and it carved Grable's niche in the history of American movies.<sup>128</sup>

Similarly, Schickel remarks that

Her special forte was the backstage musical, in which her famous legs were put on display on the most absurd of pretexts. Miss Grable's beauty – if that is the word for it – was of the common sort. Nor did she offer much in the way of character or maturity. She was, at best, a sort of great American floozie, and her appeal to lonely GI's was surely that of every hash-house waitress with whom they ever flirted.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *ibid.* p.208-209

<sup>129</sup> Schickel *The Stars* (NY: Bonanza books, 1962) p.217



Whilst Haskell, in her study of female representation in Hollywood cinema, surmises that 'Dietrich's extraordinary legs were nevertheless but one part of a total picture of her, Grable's were a substitute for a deficient whole.'<sup>130</sup>

Such evaluations are often part of a wider and particularly generalised approach to female Hollywood stars whereby a star and the roles she portrays are either celebrated as progressive and challenging (a star whose work stands out against paler representations which seemingly support and further a culture of female objectification and oppression (thus making them a 'legitimate' performer) or a performer whose work is conservative, unchallenging and symptomatic of a culture of female objectification and oppression), thus making them an 'illegitimate' performer such as Grable.<sup>131</sup> Accounts of these latter type appear to delight in very personally berating Grable's looks (her 'beauty- if that is the word for it'), her level of intellect and lowbrow appeal (Haskell terms her a 'deficient whole') and hint strongly towards notions surrounding Fox's cynical manipulation of audiences ('giving succour at the family level and in the trenches simultaneously was no easy trick') making sexual oppressors of her male fans and, as discussed previously, positing her female fans as passive cultural dupes who through their acceptance of Grable - a ubiquitous icon of sexual obligation - therefore willingly participated in their *own* sexual oppression. ('Men loved the pin-up. Women anesthetised by the idea of 'glamour', didn't care less.'<sup>132</sup>) One may, therefore be tempted to wonder for whom and why Grable held an appeal.

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<sup>130</sup> Haskell *From Reverence to Rape* p.105

<sup>131</sup> Another example of this generalized approach to female Hollywood stars can be found in Basinger, *A Woman's View* (1993). This study provides a highly subjective analysis of particular stars with a view to either celebrating them as progressive or assertive performers or critiquing them as figures of objectification and oppression. This problematic project is undertaken through the examination of very particular elements from particular films whilst scant attention is paid to any of these films additional materials or to external discourse surrounding these stars.

<sup>132</sup> Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.207

Chapter two then explores some of the reasons for Grable's popularity.<sup>133</sup> As with many other Hollywood stars, a mythology prevails surrounding Grable, and central to that myth is her reigning period as the forces' number one pin-up. Chapter two explores some of the reasons behind and functions of that myth, considering several Grable pin-up images, particularly the iconic Powolney swimsuit pin-up, firstly to demonstrate the ubiquity of Grable's pin-up persona (in both the US and the UK), but also to reveal how the symbolism of these particular images can shift in differing reception contexts by offering an alternative reading of the iconic Grable swimsuit pin-up beyond the mere placing of her within a framework of sexual obligation. This chapter makes evident several of the problems inherent in the assumption of a universal reading of Grable and her pin-up imagery.

Chapter three of the study expands some of the issues surrounding Anglo-American relations with a view to evaluating what cultural currency Grable possessed in Britain, both as a star and as a pin-up and how (and to what extent) Grable's pin-up persona and her wider film star persona were interrelated, to determine her actual level of British popularity (and with whom) and, by discussing several images of Grable in circulation in wartime Britain, to further interrogate the range of meanings Grable elicited within a British context.

### **Case Study Two: Rita Hayworth**

The second section of this study looks to a second pin-up case study; Rita Hayworth, by far Columbia's biggest wartime star, supposedly voted by the US Navy to be 'The redhead

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<sup>133</sup> Grable was Hollywood's top female star for ten years, Shipman *The Great Movie Stars* p.250 notes that Grable was 'one of the exhibitors Golden Ten in the US for ten consecutive years - for four of them [she was] the top female draw.' On June 17<sup>th</sup> 1946, British newspaper *The Daily Mirror* reported that in 1945 Grable earned the US equivalent of £43,000 per year, "more than any other woman in America" in Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.208; and in terms of actual box-office draw, to this day Grable remains one of Hollywood's top-ten female stars of all time. See Bilbow, T. and Gau, J. *Lights, Camera, Action* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995) p.141

we would most like to be ship-wrecked with'<sup>134</sup>, and the second most popular Hollywood pin-up after Grable. Described by Rosen as:

Sultry, she radiated sex. Yet just as Grable's duality included a Betty Crocker motherliness, Hayworth's was a frank and open beauty. Her smile dazzled; her strong, lithe body was amazingly fluid. Unabashedly sexual, she also possessed a playful abandon that the screen had never seen before.<sup>135</sup>

Shipman also notes

Whatever the other girls had – and sexy, desirable girls were never in short supply in films - Rita had more of... It wasn't just physical allure...but she did have that special star lustre. One fan-mag-writer in 1963 considered her 'an interesting interval - if not an especially dynamic one – between Jean Harlow and Marilyn Monroe', but her sex-appeal was somewhat more subtle than either.<sup>136</sup>

Exoticism and eroticism were crucial to Hayworth's appeal. Born Margarita Carmen Cansino, Hayworth was supposedly a painfully shy girl but a naturally talented dancer, who made her professional debut aged 12. Her Irish mother had danced in the Ziegfeld Follies and her father (her dance partner in an act called 'The Dancing Casinos') was a famous specialty Spanish dancer, and each of these elements were played upon in the marketing of Hayworth's star persona. Having been discovered dancing in a nightclub in Mexico with her father Hayworth was signed to a contract in 1935 and spent the remainder of the 30s working her way up from bit parts to major film roles through various 'B' movies to high budget films, whilst Fox and then Columbia studios tried to create a distinct and marketable identity for her. At first the studios worked to the Latin firebrand stereotype, they then decided to 'nominally de-ethnicise'<sup>137</sup> Hayworth by erasing some of the more obvious markers of Hayworth's ethnicity such as her name (Cansino), her low hair line (removed by electrolysis), and her hair colour (changed to vibrant, Americanised auburn presumably

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<sup>134</sup> <http://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2009/05/10/rita-hayworth-pin-up/> accessed July 2010

<sup>135</sup> Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.210

<sup>136</sup> Shipman *The Great Movie Stars* p.270

<sup>137</sup> Ovalle, P.P. *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex and Stardom*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010) p.76

intended to emphasise Hayworth's Irish extraction). Despite these and many other creative embellishments and alterations to Hayworth's person and to her personal narrative, as McLean observes 'Hayworth's star image is marked by... a discourse of authenticity' posing a key point of differentiation from Grable who (as chapter one discusses) was frequently associated in audience responses and critical and academic reappraisals with falseness and artifice as a star.

Grable's popularity seemed to rest on a truly hyperbolic ordinariness, marked as such on two levels: by a well-publicised absence of acting, singing and dancing talent, and on an eroticism, if such it was, that was contained and made comforting by domesticity and a working life presented as being subsidiary to the needs of husband and children. In contrast, although subject to studio manufacture, Hayworth's star image is marked by both a discourse of authenticity – she was truly talented, truly beautiful – and by an increasingly melancholy awareness and understanding that her eroticism, beauty, and even performing talent were powerful but in ways that would keep her forever outside the comforts of domestic life and happiness.<sup>138</sup>

McLean also alludes here to a persistent idea of victimhood or passivity frequently invoked in relation to Hayworth. This is interrogated at length in her work, is encapsulated in Hayworth's famous lamentation that all the men she had loved were dismayed to have 'fallen in love with Gilda but awakened with me'<sup>139</sup>, and is highlighted by Winthrop Sargent in 1947 in his article 'The Cult of The Love Goddess in America.'<sup>140</sup> Ralph Willet, in his discussion of Wartime Hollywood picks up on Winthrop Sargent's notion of Hayworth as a muse<sup>141</sup>, who provokes or inspires action but is not herself active, emphasising her moulding at the

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<sup>138</sup> McLean, A. 'Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth Pinned Up' in Griffin, S. *What Dreams Were Made Of: Movie Stars of the 1940s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2011) p.169

<sup>139</sup> There are many variations upon this particular quote, one of which can be found in Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.212

<sup>140</sup> 'The Cult of The Love Goddess in America' *Life* 10<sup>th</sup> November 1947, pp.81-89. As McLean notes 'under the "power of passivity" Sargent defines Hayworth's fundamental "trait" as "simply the desire to please people"; she 'causes or inspires action, but she does not act herself except in response to the desire of others...Rita, like Helen [of Troy] is totally lacking in ambition and is mentally incapable of initiating anything on her own.'"' McLean *Being Rita Hayworth* p.187, cites Sargent *Life* p.89

<sup>141</sup> A frequently reoccurring trope used in relation to Hayworth being a comparison to Terpsichore – the muse of dance, whom she eventually played in *Down to Earth* (1947).

hands of both director husband Orson Welles and the studio system at large.<sup>142</sup> However, both Adrienne McLean and Priscilla Pena Ovalle in their studies of Hayworth have provided careful and well-constructed arguments for Hayworth's agency, skill and ambition as a professional performer, and these arguments have informed this study. In order to justify these claims, both McLean and Ovalle reference various elements of Hayworth's persona and history that strongly suggest agency, competence, skill and ambition: her reputation as a hard worker<sup>143</sup>, her assertive performance style - which utilised an ambiguous exoticism which affirmed and disavowed Hayworth's Latina 'otherness' (the ethnic identity which simultaneously allowed Hayworth to embody a particularly sensual and assertive feminine ideal<sup>144</sup>) and perhaps most importantly her post-war negotiations with Columbia to become one of very few female stars who formed their own production companies; Beckworth<sup>145</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> Willet notes that 'Rita Hayworth was manufactured into every man's pin-up. Born Margarita Carmen Cansino, her Spanish characteristics were only partially retained by the studios. Her hair was tinted auburn, and her hairline painfully altered by electrolysis... [The] image (of a cover girl or advertising model)... Welles took up and inflected in *The Lady from Shanghai*.' Willet, R. 'The Nation in Crisis.' in Davies, P. and Neve, B. (eds) *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981) p.69

Even during the 1946 media circus surrounding the testing of the atomic bomb over Bikini Atoll in July 1946 (upon which Hayworth's image, and the name 'Gilda' - the character Hayworth played in the film of the same name, which was still on release in cinemas at the time - supposedly appeared), Hayworth was once again cast as a passive, powerless, victim, supposedly distraught that her image may have been party to such destruction. In an interview for Hayworth's biography 'If This Was Happiness', Hayworth's husband at the time, Orson Welles recalled Hayworth's reaction upon hearing her image may have been on the bomb: 'Rita almost went insane, she was so angry. She was so shocked by it! Rita was the kind of person that kind of thing would hurt more than anybody. She wanted to go to Washington to hold a press conference, but Harry Cohn (president of Columbia Pictures) wouldn't let her because it would be unpatriotic.' On the phone with Orson, Rita insisted that Cohn had himself been responsible for the Gilda-bomb, as a sick publicity stunt, but Orson tried to persuade her that it probably wasn't so.' Leaming, B. *If This Was Happiness: A Biography of Rita Hayworth* (New York, Viking, 1989) pp.129-130

<sup>143</sup> One of McLean's several examples given is from 1941 *Life* article 'Rita Hayworth Rises From Bit-parts Into a Triple-Threat Song And Dance Star' it is observed that that Hayworth "never went out" because she was rehearsing 'tirelessly,' seven hours a day, for five weeks. her dancing ability, not her status as a 'clotheshorse' is what allows her to make the leap for stardom' McLean *Being Rita Hayworth* pp.37-38

<sup>144</sup> As Ovalle notes firstly, of Hayworth's performance in *You'll Never Get Rich* 'According to traditional critical analysis of Hollywood musicals...dance functions as symbolic copulation: by teaching the musical female to dance, the musical male awakens his female partner's sexuality...Often a musical siren intervenes to complicate the narrative...she is often characterised as a dancer who needs no tutelage, a perfectly tempting partner. For her own pleasure, the siren attempts to seduce the musical male. (Altman 1987, 28-58) *You'll Never Get Rich*, however, plays with this musical formula by hybridising both virgin and siren figures through Hayworth's character.' Ovalle *Dance and the Hollywood Latina* p.83. Source cited: Altman, R. *American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). Of the 'You Excite Me' number in 1945 musical *Tonight and Every Night* she also observes 'You Excite Me' blends various styles of so-called foreign

Throughout chapter four a significant concern is with exploring how factors such as the marketing and imagery and the rhetoric surrounding Hayworth differ from that employed regarding Grable, thus demonstrating the range of film star pin-up identities and subsequent ‘resonances’ available to audiences during the war period and once again moving towards an argument that a universal, one-size-fits-all reading, particularly of the film star pin-up becomes problematized by the very personality of the film star within the pin-up image.

The chapter explores the linguistic discourse used to frame Hayworth and ‘sell’ her to British audiences, drawing specific attention to subtle but pertinent difference in the way both Hayworth and Grable were discussed, before moving on to discuss two sources which present the Hollywood pin-up (namely Ginger Rogers) as well as Hayworth in particular as the benchmark, and at times, arbiter of appropriate, respectable or responsible glamour in wartime and immediately post-war Britain. Therefore whilst chapter one contends that in Britain ‘Americanness’ as well as ordinariness and very specific markers of what was understood in Britain to be working-class identity were considered key elements of Grable’s star persona, with Hayworth, due to her Latina roots, a notion of exoticism prevailed with regard to Hayworth’s star persona which appears to have converged to form a particularly sophisticated, worldly and aspirational identity.

This chapter therefore offers a more rounded view of the range of meanings the American film star pin-ups offered both British and American audiences and how contextual factors such as discourse could shape these meanings.

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signifiers... as visual reinforcements for the themes of temptation and excitement at the core of the song’s lyrics and performance. The seductive intent of this number is so strong that the song becomes the films motif for desire... The exotic sensuality of ‘You Excite Me’ established the cornerstone of Hayworth’s Love Goddess persona as articulated by her siren-virgin persona... The language of the song – in terms of both lyric and movement – supports the agency and power of Rosalind [Hayworth’s character] as an active subject: she is simultaneously desired... and desiring.’ *ibid.* pp.88-89

<sup>145</sup> See McLean, A. *Being Rita Hayworth* pp.61-62

Chapter five explores probably the most iconic wartime Hayworth image, a black and white, candid-looking shot of Hayworth in a silk negligee, knelt on an unmade bed. This image, like Grable's iconic Powolney pin-up, had its own mythology, supposedly being distributed to over 5 million troops, whilst more quantifiably, a full-page reprint of the image (with accompanying article) appeared in *Life* magazine on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1941. As Costello observes

Alongside Betty Grable was an array of Hollywood stars whose appeal was more erotic than inspirational. Rita Hayworth was the runner-up to Grable in the wartime pin-up stakes. She was a brunette who had originally been stereotyped as a 'Latin firebrand', an undeniable beauty who exuded the sultry sex-appeal of a mature woman, where Grable relied on her innate, teasing charm. Hayworth leapt into the wartime pin-up stakes in 1941 after *Life* magazine displayed the star on a bed of satin sheets with a scanty lace bodice clinging to her shapely body: the picture was captioned, not without erotic justification, 'The Goddess of Love of the Twentieth Century.'<sup>146</sup>

This analysis forms a direct point of comparison to our previous discussion of the Powolney/Grable pin-up, elucidating further differences in the two stars personas and functions *as* pin-ups.

The first section of chapter six identifies some of the strategies arrived at by British advertisers to depict women in the British wartime media with a view to performing a brief comparative analysis against the American advertising strategies which were developed after American entry into the war. Using the works of several American social historians, ranging from those who focus on American women's war experiences such as Rupp, Boris and Hartmann, to broader cultural studies of the period such as that by Leff and Renov, to histories of American advertising such as those by Ewen and Lears, contextual differences between the two nations are isolated, namely the British context of state regulation and control of industry, clothing, labour and consumption, as well as advertising, whilst the

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<sup>146</sup> Costello, J. *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45* (London: Collins, 1985) pp.188-189

approach to wartime propaganda and marketing adopted by America was largely free market and much less restricted.

The second section of the chapter explores examples of primarily US print-based, wartime advertisements for a range of goods, from cola, to cosmetics, to fur coats, to beauty soap. All the advertisements discussed feature star endorsements and all of these endorsements - with the exception of one example, which features Betty Grable - are endorsements by Hayworth. The glamorous appeal offered by Hayworth and the agent appeal of the products she endorses is discussed and in the final three examples (two American advertising tie-ups in *Good Housekeeping*, and a British advertising tie-up in *Picturegoer*, all for Lux beauty soap) a direct comparison is made between the resonances and marketing opportunities offered by Hayworth's star persona and those offered by Grable's star persona and how, both linguistically and pictorially, they were sold to consumers. This analysis demonstrates how these advertisements articulate the two women's differing levels of glamour and social, cultural and symbolic capital in different ways, making explicit the differing resonances offered by the stars and the unique glamour they each embody.

Finally, chapter seven draws together several of the conclusions made throughout the previous chapters and shifts to the immediate post-war era in order to explore how, during a period so strongly associated with a conservative 'backlash'; the 'feminine mystique'; and the wholesale return of the working woman to the home, the pin-up and glamour discourse reflected these changes and engaged with these debates.

During the war years the pin-up form reached maturity in Britain and America, as the unique conditions created by war offered considerable potential for radical and empowering representations of female sexual agency. It may be assumed, then, that such progressive readings of pin-up imagery became more problematic after the unique conditions of the



Second World War came to an end, with the regressive societal shifts and attendant changes in female representations instigating a similarly backsliding change in pin-up representations, their ideologies and, as a result, in post-war audiences' responses to them. But was this the case? This chapter considers Hayworth and Grable as pin-up case studies during the transitional period from war to peace in order to determine to what extent, if any, societal changes *did* take place, and to briefly highlight any reasons for these supposed changes, and to examine the speed and fervency with which any changes were actually implemented in relation to the pin-up form and discussions and depictions of glamour.

**Case Study One:**

**Discourse Surrounding  
Betty Grable**

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**A Yank at the ABC: Grable, American-ness**  
**and The Pin-Up in 1940s Britain**

In wartime Britain the film star pin-up was a contentious medium, one which was discussed within the context of a range of debates and concerns, and offered a very specific kind of appeal. This was partly because of its provocative subjects and partly, as this chapter shall discuss, because of its American origin. As the film star most commonly cited as the Hollywood's 'number one' wartime pin-up and the star for whom the most wartime requests for autographed photographic images was received, Betty Grable embodied much of what was perceived in Britain to be good (and bad) about both the Hollywood pin-up, and about 'American-ness' at large. As notions of America and of American-ness were crucial both to the British understanding of what the film star pin-up was and to the reception of Hollywood stars such as Grable this first chapter will therefore examine much of the contextual discourse surrounding American-ness and the then very real fears surrounding the Americanisation of British culture which coalesced around the popular cultural figure of Grable.

As Tom Ryall notes, 'invasion' rhetoric surrounding American popular culture was firmly established in Britain by the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Wider anxieties surrounding modernity combined with the encroaching influence in Britain of US popular culture during the interwar and war years - its benefits, drawbacks and even its perceived threat was a source of much discussion in British society throughout the inter-war and war years.

In his 1934 travelogue *English Journey* J.B. Priestley presents Britain's cultural landscape in the post WWI era as an uneasy juxtaposition of abject poverty and 'Americanised' modernity:

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<sup>1</sup> Ryall, T. *Britain and the American Cinema* (London: Sage, 2001) p.33. Equally, an authoritative overview of British fears of Americanisation and cultural homogeneity is provided by the editor's introduction to McKay (ed.) *Yankee Go Home (and Take Me With You)* (London: Continuum, 1997) pp.11-52.

Belonging far more to the age itself than to this particular island. America, I supposed was its birth place. This is England of arterial and bypass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance halls and cafes, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor-coaches, wireless, hiking, factory girls looking like actresses, greyhound racing and dirt tracks, swimming pools, and everything given away for cigarette coupons.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, three years later fellow author and social commentator George Orwell noted that in 1937 Britain,

In a decade of unparalleled depression, the consumption of all cheap luxuries has increased. The two things that have probably made the greatest difference of all are the movies and the mass-production of cheap, smart clothes since the war...The girl can look like a fashion plate at an even lower price. You can have three halfpence in your pocket and not a prospect in the world, and only the corner of a leaky bedroom to go to, but in your new clothes you can stand around on the street corner, indulging in a private dream of yourself as Clark Gable or Greta Garbo, which compensates you a great deal.<sup>3</sup>

Such arguments were not uncommon. As such, the symbols of ‘modern’, ‘Americanised’ culture, dance halls, cigarette coupons, mass-production clothing and pin-ups as well as Hollywood cinema, were frequently associated with American culture, transient or throwaway, cheap yet glamorous, ubiquitous, popular and invariably hedonistic, but they appear to have offered small and temporary compensations to many of the poverty-stricken, hopeless working class in Depression-era Britain and later, throughout the privations, inconveniences and anxieties of war. These distractions raised fears concerning the mechanisation and homogenisation of British culture and offered a prime target for criticism both amongst the right, who lamented the erosion of Britain’s cultural hegemony and believed such culture to be symptomatic of an attempt to seize Britain’s global dominance, and by the left because of the ‘false consciousness’, soporific effect and the short term solutions these distractions seems to be offering apparently unaware, uneducated audiences.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Priestley, J.B. (1934) *English Journey: Being A Rambling But Truthful Account Of What One Man Saw And Felt And Heard During A Journey Through England During The Autumn Of The Year 1933*. (1934) (London: Mandarin, 1994) p. 397-401

<sup>3</sup> Orwell, G. *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) reprinted as volume 5 of *Complete Works of George Orwell* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1997) p.8.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Kracauer, S. (1926) ‘Cult of Distraction: On Berlin’s Picture Palaces’ in Levin, T.Y (Trans.) *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) pp.323-336.

As Ryall notes, the critical consensus was that Hollywood ‘had achieved its prominence through hard-selling, through ‘exploitation and manipulation’ and ‘was, in short, commercial, anti-art and education, and peddled corrupt messages.’<sup>5</sup> However, as Paul Swann argues, British responses to American popular culture at large varied wildly, and were frequently divided along class lines;

Europe’s lower classes fixed the image of America as cornucopia in their minds, an image which was quite at odds with that of the intelligentsia.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, American-ness has been historically associated with glamour along with abundance and even excess. As Beverley Skeggs notes ‘[Stacey] argues that glamour was defined against British respectability in the 1950’s in which it was understood to signify confidence, sophistication and self-assurance.’<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the ‘lowbrow’, Americanised pleasures the film star pin-up and Hollywood glamour offered seem to have been very well-liked with a particular section of the British public, perhaps even because of their propensity to antagonize other sections of society.

### **The Cultural Currency of the Pin-Up**

Evidence of the cultural prominence of the pin-up in Britain just prior to war can be found in George Orwell’s observations upon small British newsagents shops in the interwar years and the products they stocked;

Their main selling line is the twopenny weekly... the sporting papers, the radio papers, the children’s comics, the various snippet papers such as *Tit-bits*, the large range of papers devoted to the movies and all more or less exploiting women’s legs

He continues

probably the contents of these shops is the best available indication of what the mass of the English people really feels and thinks.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ryall, T. *Britain and the American Cinema* p.154.

<sup>6</sup> Swann, P. *The Hollywood Feature Film in Postwar Britain* (London: Routledge, 1987) p.18.

<sup>7</sup> Skeggs, B. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997) p.110.

<sup>8</sup> Orwell, G. ‘Boy’s Weeklies’ in *George Orwell: Selected Essays* (London: Penguin, 1960) p.175.

Such imagery even found its way into newspapers. Probably the most popular and culturally prominent example of pin-ups in wartime Britain was the phenomenally successful adult-aimed cartoon strip *Jane*. Initially called *Jane's Journal: The Diary of a Bright Young Thing*, *Jane* as the strip came to be known, was a cartoon adventure serial starring an alluring adventuress who invariably found herself in a state of undress as part of the narrative's denouement and which first appeared in popular left-wing British tabloid newspaper *The Daily Mirror* on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

Pitched initially as a scatterbrained, hedonistic and upper middle-class flapper figure, Jane was later co-opted into the war effort, by being conscripted, just as all British single women between the ages of 20 and 31 from December 1941 were, but somewhat improbably, as a glamorous but often clueless secret agent<sup>9</sup>. In this role she was subsequently re-cast and became commonly understood to be a patriotic pin-up, acquiring the status of a British institution who was discussed as a point of national unity due to the perpetuation of troop culture and her immense popularity with British troops, who keenly followed her daring, patriotic and mildly titillating exploits from various corners of the world.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst Jane herself was upper middle-class, the strip's appearance in *The Daily Mirror*, a newspaper with a primarily working-class readership, certainly seems to support the notion that cheesecake imagery held a particularly working-class appeal in wartime Britain. Equally the protagonists' naivety (upon which the strips' premise rests) marks the Jane cartoons as belonging to a tradition of working-class texts that undermine, or poke fun at the middle or upper-class both socially and sexually, as Jane, whilst clearly portrayed with

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<sup>9</sup> See 'Hush Hush House,' *Daily Mirror* 15<sup>th</sup> January 1940.

<sup>10</sup> Numerous histories of the war have attested to Jane's massive popularity and morale-boosting ability, documenting how her image adorned tanks and planes and even suggesting that Prime Minister Winston Churchill referred to Jane as 'Britain's secret Weapon'. As one nostalgic website notes 'The cartoon's prominence was such that submarine captains were given copies of the strips weeks in advance so their crews didn't miss out on any crucial developments' <http://www.sklighters.org/jane/> accessed June 2009.

affection, was also cast in the strips as a variant of that stereotyped bourgeois archetype: the ‘upper-class twit.’

Whilst Jane’s wartime notoriety demonstrates both the existence of distinctly British pin-up imagery and the existence of a British audience for such texts, the pin-up was commonly associated with American culture. British debates surrounding pin-up, taste and the threat of Americanisation were antagonised by America’s delay in joining Britain in their fight against fascism, and became further complicated by the arrival of large numbers of US soldiers on British soil in 1942. This led Orwell to define wartime Britain as ‘occupied territory’<sup>11</sup> and prompted other bitter grumbles from others;

With a pride in the achievements of British film production there came a resentment that America was taking too little notice. As Gregory Dawson, J.B. Priestley’s fictitious scriptwriter pointed out: ‘Some of us here in the film business can’t help feeling rather bitter... Our people here were up to their neck in the war... and if they found their way through the black-out to spend a shilling or two at the pictures – what did they see all too often? The Sunset Boulevard notion of war. The American way of life. Yanks winning the Battle for Democracy.’<sup>12</sup>

Grable’s 1941 war melodrama *A Yank in the R.A.F* (1941) was one of the first US produced pro-WWII films (and as such received stiff criticism in its native US market<sup>13</sup>) and explores the politics of wartime allegiance and cross-cultural relations in a very interesting manner. Grable’s character Carol defies American isolationism and relocates to Britain in order to enlist and assist the British in their war effort by, as she says, ‘trying to help out’. Honest, fair, practical, but also sassy and self-possessed, Carol is not only the modern American feminine ideal, but also directly embodies traits listed by British respondents to a 1942 Mass Observation study of Anglo-American relations cited by David Reynolds

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Reynolds, D. *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain 1942–1945* (London: Random House, 1995) p.241.

<sup>12</sup> Here Murphy is quoting Berenstein, S. *Film and International Relations*. (London: Jackson Press, 1945) p.13. Murphy, R. ‘Under the Shadow of Hollywood’ in Barr, C. (ed.) *All Our Yesterdays: 90 years of British Cinema* (London: BFI, 1986) p.60.

<sup>13</sup> The film’s subject running contrary to Hays office regulation of this period which stipulated a policy of ‘strict neutrality’ to the war in Europe in all Hollywood output, see Glancy, M. *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood ‘British’ Film 1939–45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) p.54. This was undertaken primarily as a protectionist measure – to prevent antagonism in both home and foreign markets, again Glancy *passim* pp.38–58

Americans were liked most for their “friendliness”, a composite trait that included generosity, candor, kindness, and hospitality, and for their “vigour”, whose cognate buzzwords were initiative, virility, zeal and openness.<sup>14</sup>

Alternatively, fellow American, Tim (Tyrone Power), who also finds himself in Britain and embroiled in the war, but seeks to turn these events to his personal advantage, possesses character traits which correlate directly with some of the most disliked traits commonly associated with Americans by the British and identified in the same 1942 survey:

Americans...were disliked most for their ‘boastfulness’, ostentation and a propensity for talk without action, and for their ‘materialism’, greed and love of money. As Mass Observation observed, the traits from which Americans evoked dislike amongst the British public were the ‘degenerate’ or negative forms of those for which they were approved.<sup>15</sup>

Arrogant, philandering and mercenary; Tim can certainly be seen to conform to one of the popularly held conceptions of ‘an American’ in Britain during this period, and demonstrates a remarkable awareness on Fox’s part of such conceptions and their need to be challenged in the name of transatlantic unity. As such Tim only agrees to ferry planes to Britain in return for exorbitant pay (as Carol suggests, he is ‘the boy who blanks out at anything less than a thousand a month’) and sees his opportunity to ‘play’ the hero, in order to ‘trick’ his way into Carol’s affections. However, in the course of the narrative, Tim is ‘re-educated’ by both his British colleagues and by Carol herself into realising the importance of self-sacrifice, team spirit and a rejection of ostentation, inadvertently becoming a hero proper and ultimately winning Carol’s affections legitimately, and hopefully the approval of critical anti-American British audiences.

In *A Yank in the RAF* we therefore see a clear example of a US star functioning as an ambassador for her country, reassuring British audiences of America’s integrity, presaging North America’s forthcoming entry into war, whilst also enlightening her fellow countrymen about the code of values underpinning the war in Europe and endorsing their involvement

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<sup>14</sup> Reynolds *Rich Relations* p.37

<sup>15</sup> M/O 1095, 16 February 1942, 11, quoted in. Reynolds *Rich Relations* pp.37–38.



whilst her character's love within the narrative is the driver that helps to inspire Tim to himself become a good ally. However, whilst the rejection of ostentation may be a trait with which the character of Carol is associated throughout *A Yank in the RAF's* narrative, as we shall see in the following section, this wasn't necessarily always the case with Grable's star persona or with many of her other film roles.

### **'An Experiment in Taste': Mass Observation and Appropriate Femininity**

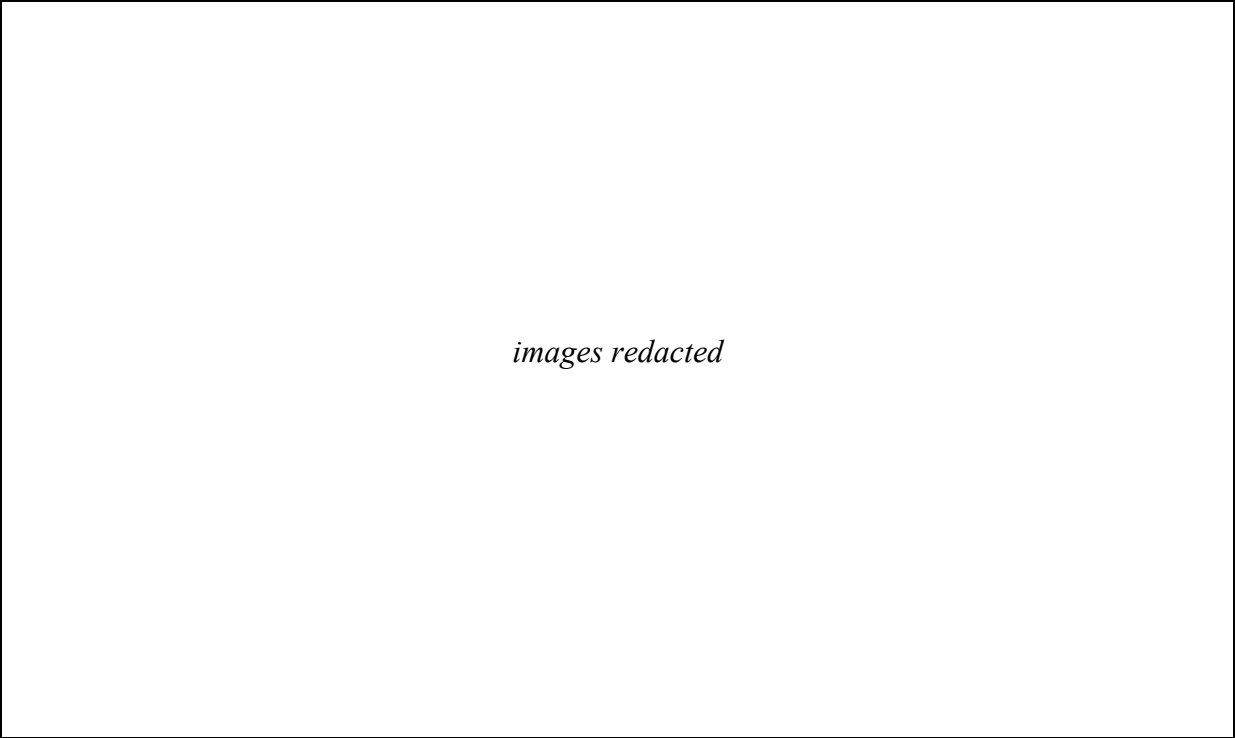
Many of the debates surrounding nationality, class and taste are evident in the various responses to the Mass Observation picture ballot *Soldiers and Pin-ups*<sup>16</sup> discussed in 'An Experiment in Taste: What is a Pin-Up Girl?' (see figure three) - an article in the February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1943 edition of *Picture Post*<sup>17</sup>, a weekly, left-leaning British photojournalistic magazine with a house style similar to that of American magazine *Life*. As a magazine, *Picture Post* was both populist and had a phenomenal cultural reach; selling 1,950,000 copies a week in 1943, not to mention the number of readers to whom each copy was passed on (a common practice during war due to government entreaties to recycle and reuse). It is therefore an excellent barometer of cultural trends during the war period.

The 'What is a Pin-Up Girl?' article and *Soldiers and Pin-ups* picture ballot demonstrate Grable's iconic status and her metonymic link to both the pin-up form and Hollywood cinema at large within popular British culture at this particular time, reflecting the range of reactions, from emphatic approval to disgust, which she drew from her wartime British audience.

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<sup>16</sup> *Soldiers and Pin-ups*. Picture Ballot. SxMOA1/52/1/E: Aug-Sept 1944. (Mass Observation Archive)

<sup>17</sup> Although the participants responses are abridged in this version. Full responses can be found in the Mass Observation archive at the University of Sussex along with a copy of the *Picture Post* article.



*images redacted*

**Fig. Three:** Picture Post feature ‘An Experiment in Taste: What is a Pin-Up Girl?’ February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1943.

For this study twelve individual images of women, ranging from old masters, to Horace Royce ‘art’ nude, to the popular illustrated British pin-up ‘Jane’, were displayed for consideration in the upstairs lounge of service club The Nuffield Centre in Soho. Amongst these images appears an upper-body publicity shot of Grable in typically extravagant showgirl-inspired attire. As the article’s title: ‘An Experiment in Taste’ suggests, the respondents were asked to fill in a simple form selecting their first, second and third choice from these images to be hung on their own barrack wall. In addition, they were also asked to select which image they would *least* like to see hung on their wall.

In keeping with the broader methodologies of Mass Observation, supplementary observances were also drawn from researcher observations (on conduct, attitude and even dress), direct interviews and overheard conversations. Participants ranged in age from the late teens to the late 30s and ‘about one fifth of the voters were NCOs, the rest “other ranks”’.

Rather over half the votes were from the army, over a third from the RAF, and the rest from the Navy. No officers were present, and women's votes were excluded from the total.<sup>18</sup> That such a high proportion of participants were NCOs (non-commissioned officers) rather than senior officers does mean the responses of this particular demographic goes unobserved and is therefore unknown to us. This is a shame, as a wide a range of potential responses to both the pin-up form and to Grable as possible would be preferable here. However, as Sue Harper and Vincent Porter note in their analysis of a 1950 Mass Observation survey upon the practice of crying in the cinema,<sup>19</sup> particular 'types' of people, of a particular age, class and gender, are more likely to participate in such studies and the consequence is an implicit bias within the results which must be borne in mind when correlating results and formulating a hypothesis.<sup>20</sup> Similarly the predominance of male subjects in the sample is of equal note, as the Mass Observation observer notes there were few women in attendance to offer their responses and those who braved the exhibition felt 'a bit out of things'. Presumably this means the subjects were embarrassed or disconcerted, as one female subject's response to the images is: 'they make you blush a bit, don't they?' However, the responses detailed here do at least offer some insight into the wartime British reception of pin-up and of Grable.

The study is of use particularly due to its contemporaneous demonstration of the strong cultural currency Grable possessed and of British subjects' awareness of and engagement with the pin-up form. Equally, whilst Grable's image is only one of the twelve discussed by respondents, several of the responses obtained offer us significant qualitative insights into the reasoning behind individuals' tastes - their acceptance or rejection not only of the pin-up itself but also of Grable and the exotic, artificial elements of the Hollywood

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<sup>18</sup> 'What is a Pin-Up Girl?' *Picture Post* 23rd September 1944, p.14-15.

<sup>19</sup> As Harper and Porter note in their study, 'Moved to Tears: Weeping in the Cinema in Postwar Britain' *Screen* v.37 #2 pp.50-60. Alternatively a more detailed breakdown of individual responses has been published as an occasional paper by the Mass-observation Archive, entitled *Weeping in the Cinema in 1950: A Reassessment of Mass-Observation Material* and the original responses are available at the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex.

<sup>20</sup> Harper and Porter 'Moved to Tears' p.153.

industry her representation seems to have metonymically symbolised within British culture<sup>21</sup>, with study respondents here frequently recognising Grable without prompting and repeatedly drawing upon her broader film star persona to interpret and inform their appreciation or rejection of this particular pin-up image. For example, the researcher notes three male sailors who ‘noisily’ came in through the lounge, made a ‘full halt at the pictures, [and proceeded to] whistle and click tongues. Two hesitate, one goes over to [picture] 8[the image of Grable] and calls others. They stand and “phew!” First goes out saying “mmh! Betty Grable ain’t it.” Second: “I’ll say Betty Grable, I know her right enough when I see her. Mmh!”’ On a separate occasion, another sailor exhibits similar homosocial behaviours cheekily commenting ‘ah like a bit o’ that!’ upon Grable’s image. Yet Grable fandom was not unique to male cinemagoers. One 21 year old WAAF officer, made Grable’s image her second choice and argued she had ‘got everything it takes.’

Despite the claim that Grable here had ‘everything it takes’ to be a successful pin-up, it is notable that the Grable image itself isn’t the stereotypical full-body shot normally favoured for pin-up imagery. Instead it is a medium shot of Grable’s upper-body and face, notably *excluding* Grable’s trademark legs and privileging the upper-body and the face, therefore giving the photograph a more intimate feel and placing greater emphasis upon Grable’s personality as conveyed through facial expression. Equally, whilst the sailors were rather bawdy in their assertion that they “like[d] a bit o’” Grable, the image is certainly not the most explicit of the twelve images offered for consideration and nor is Grable’s manner or pose particularly sexually provocative.

Grable and her image were not, however, universally appreciated and both Grable detractors and supporters frequently discussed Grable’s ‘lowbrow’ appeal both in relation to

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<sup>21</sup> Although notably, a photograph of another Hollywood film star also appears in the selection; Dorothy Maguire, whose more demure head and shoulder portrait, with hair much less obviously styled, in a smart blouse and gaze directed *away* from the lens, is captioned thus ‘Dorothy Maguire representing *unspoiled* young womanhood’ (p.15) revealing an implicit bias towards less glamorised and possibly assertive modes of Hollywood femininity.

the specific Grable pin-up, but also more generally. This explicit acknowledgement of taste distinctions, the lowbrow and the highbrow, the acceptable and the less acceptable, could be due to subjects delivering what they believe to be their 'expected' responses in a well-known popular anthropological study with a cachet of middlebrow 'seriousness', or it could simply be that they were aware that Grable was meant to be understood as gaudy, tasteless and ultimately working class and possessed little or no cultural capital. Either way participants discuss both Grable and her pin-up in relation to wider contemporary debates surrounding appropriate female sexuality, glamour and the benefits and drawbacks of the Americanisation of British culture.

For one 38 year old gunner, who claims that Grable's image is 'cheerful and vulgar – cheer you up after a bad spell of duty', the supposed tastelessness of both Grable and of the Grable pin-up was actually the source of the image's appeal. Whilst another male respondent, from the army, aged 29, of undisclosed rank, having been instructed to place an X next to his least favourite choice of image, placed 'XXXXX – no comment needed' next to Grable's image: Grable's tastelessness apparently being self-evident. Similarly, one female respondent (notably, described by the Mass Observation researcher as 'art conscious, a little affected but fairly sincere') comments 'as for Betty Grable, you know what I'd do with her? I'd tear it up! Kick her out. I think she's dreadful.' The repeated use of 'her' and 'she' suggests a slippage for the respondent between the film star persona and the image observed, and reflects the frequent supposition that Grable lacked validity as a cultural product worthy of any serious scrutiny or appreciation. Meanwhile, an 18 ½ year old member of the RAF claims Grable's image 'appears more like a cheap magazine cover.' Is the implication here merely inexpensiveness? Or is there a further inference of the lowbrow, or tastelessness? Frustratingly, the respondent does not elaborate further.

A more pronounced value judgement comes from a 30 year old member of the RAF who claims ‘Betty Grable is – just Betty Grable, not even a good photograph, lighting bad – harsh, which makes Miss Grable’s brassiere even more pronounced.’ A comment which engages with the sheer recognisability of Grable (‘just Betty Grable’) ostensibly offering a criticism of poor technical execution (‘not...a good photograph’, lighting bad’) and a reliance upon female sexual display (Grable’s ‘pronounced’ brassiere’) but belies an assumption that this approach is ‘just Grable’ i.e. typical of Grable; an inappropriate or excessive (‘pronounced’) display of female sexuality. Whilst these are valid comments, they do however appear somewhat unfair as the lighting, for example, in Dorothy Maguire’s image appears no better or worse than that in Grable’s image and the criticism of the unseemly, superfluous eroticism that the ‘pronounced’ brassiere represents is not applied to the other twelve ‘pin-ups’ exhibited, seven of which are bare-breasted and one, an illustration (Jane, who appears in only heels and in a negligee in a generic cheesecake pose). Of the seven nudes six are paintings, and the seventh is a photograph by ‘Roye who specialises in nude photographs, and has published a number of books of his work.’ Presumably within the habitus of many of the studies’ respondents, the poses and settings of these seven nude images more closely resemble a high ‘art’ aesthetic and therefore they are assumed to possess a greater legitimacy or cultural capital than Grable’s ostentatious image.

Ultimately Grable ranked number six (with seven votes)<sup>22</sup> making her ‘the most explosive material for exposure in a billet’<sup>23</sup>, scoring ‘a high proportion of anti-votes as well, which pulled her down the list. She might provoke a fight in the barrack room.’<sup>24</sup> If, as the *Picture Post* article surmises

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<sup>22</sup> As the *Picture Post* article notes: ‘The vote totals were reduced to percentages of a possible hundred marks, which would have been obtained if everyone present had voted A for the same picture. On this basis the voting was as follows:- The picture numbered (1) secured 6 votes: (2), 22; (3), 13; (4), 5; (5), minus 24; (6), 0; (7), minus 12; (8)[Grable’s image], 7; (9), 10; (10), minus 12; (11), 46; (12), 39.’ p. 15

<sup>23</sup> ‘What is a Pin-Up Girl?’ *Picture Post* p.25

<sup>24</sup> *op cit.*

It is the Venus of Mile end, not the Venus of Milo, which men like to have around the barrack room... someone they can think of as perhaps meeting sometime. Of course she won't look as good as that, but she may have something of the Roye figure and vitality, of the Maguire homeliness and unelaborated beauty, mixed with a little of [British newspaper cartoon pin-up] Jane's boldness and adventurousness.<sup>25</sup>

It is significant that Grable gained +7 votes, as this implies that at least a few of the respondents found Grable's pin-up image appealing enough to want to put them on their barrack wall. The article's brief summary emphasises the subjects' desire for the average, the ordinary, the humble, the more attainable, even the least superlative or exceptional ('the Venus of Mile end, not the Venus of Milo') and whilst, as we shall see in chapter three, discourse surrounding Grable repeatedly claimed her to be average, ordinary or modest (either as a means to deride her, her skill and her appeal, or as a means of presenting her as 'down-to-earth') clearly this was not the kind of average or ordinary many of the Mass Observation respondents were looking for.

In terms of what the respondents *were* looking for, a desire for the ordinary was coupled with an inclination towards images which conveyed an 'unelaborated beauty' (i.e. without an excess of glamour - an accusation which, as we shall see in chapter three, was also frequently levelled at Grable). It would appear therefore that in wartime Britain, with its hardships and privations, the consensus on an appropriate level of glamour needed to be held in a delicate equilibrium, and this is particularly pertinent when considering British responses to Grable and the type of glamour she symbolised.

As Stephen Gundle notes 'glamour is excessive and abundant and it strikes at the imagination by bypassing the commonly accepted bourgeois sense of moderation and measure'<sup>26</sup>. This certainly seems appropriate when considering Grable and is borne out in the negative responses to both her and the Hollywood glamour that she clearly symbolised to many of the Mass Observation respondents. The most emphatic response of this kind can be

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<sup>25</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Gundle, S. *Glamour: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p.11

found in a brief exchange between the Mass Observation researcher and a sailor respondent as he made his selections which ran as follows;

Interviewee: These others, you can see them anywhere... There's too much glamour

Interviewer: So you don't think much of Betty Grable?

Interviewee: She makes me sick

This almost visceral response alludes once again to the notion of excess so frequently associated with Grable, highlighting the problematic nature of glamour, its articulation and potential need for containment. Equally this and several of the other responses which make reference to appropriateness and excess demonstrate the strength of feeling the politics of glamour could invoke, particularly during a period of acute privation and where ostentatious display, in many instances, required careful negotiation and an allusion to patriotism.

### **Having Their (Cheese) Cake and Eating It.** **Picture Post and the Problem of American Glamour**

Despite the *Picture Post*'s on-going preoccupation with British examples of glamour, and its frequent features upon various American film stars, American films and wider American culture, *Picture Post*'s relationship with these subjects and with more Americanised glamour was anything but simple.

Whilst pictorial features on mildly titillating subjects such as the chorus girls in the daily nude revues at London's Windmill Theatre<sup>27</sup>, the wartime popularity of reviews featuring an array of attractive young girls<sup>28</sup>, the 'dressers' who dress the show girls at the London Hippodrome<sup>29</sup> (and the girls they dress), or even 'A Girl Puts Up a Tent'<sup>30</sup> (in a two-piece bathing suit), appeared with such regularity that many readers, such as 'R. Draper, High

<sup>27</sup> 'Backstage 1940', *Picture Post* 19th October 1940 p. 18-19

<sup>28</sup> 'Applesauce', *Picture Post* 14<sup>th</sup> September 1940 p. 30-31

<sup>29</sup> 'Dressing Beauties', *Picture Post* 10<sup>th</sup> June 1939 pp.32-34.

<sup>30</sup> 'A Girl Puts Up a Tent', *Picture Post* 19<sup>th</sup> August 1939 pp.28-29.



Street, Middleborough', were moved to complain<sup>31</sup>. *Picture Post* reserved the right to disdain such imagery, ostensibly in the name of lofty ideals such as artistic integrity and national pride, whenever required. For example, both in February 1942, and in August 1944 the publication ran derisory photo features which lambasted the formulaic nature of the Hollywood publicity still yet both features appeared to want to have their cake and eat it.

In the 1942 article 'Film Stills: Photography at Its Most Antiquated' the feature's twelve images – a handful of which could be termed classic cheesecake shots, the remainder conforming to a more generalised publicity still format - are captioned with mocking titles presumably intended to undermine the image's artistic integrity and highlight their formulaic nature, 'the kind-to-little-creatures still', 'the chicken-eating still' and 'the only-go-by-plane still'. The article deftly disassociates itself from its apparently 'inferior' subject matter, with its grumbling copy:

Every time Hollywood finds a girl it's the same old story. Never mind who she is or what she's like...once the film men get hold of her, she's put through the same old routine and out of it come the same old stills. All smiles, all legs, all flying skirts – and thrilling as old porridge<sup>32</sup>

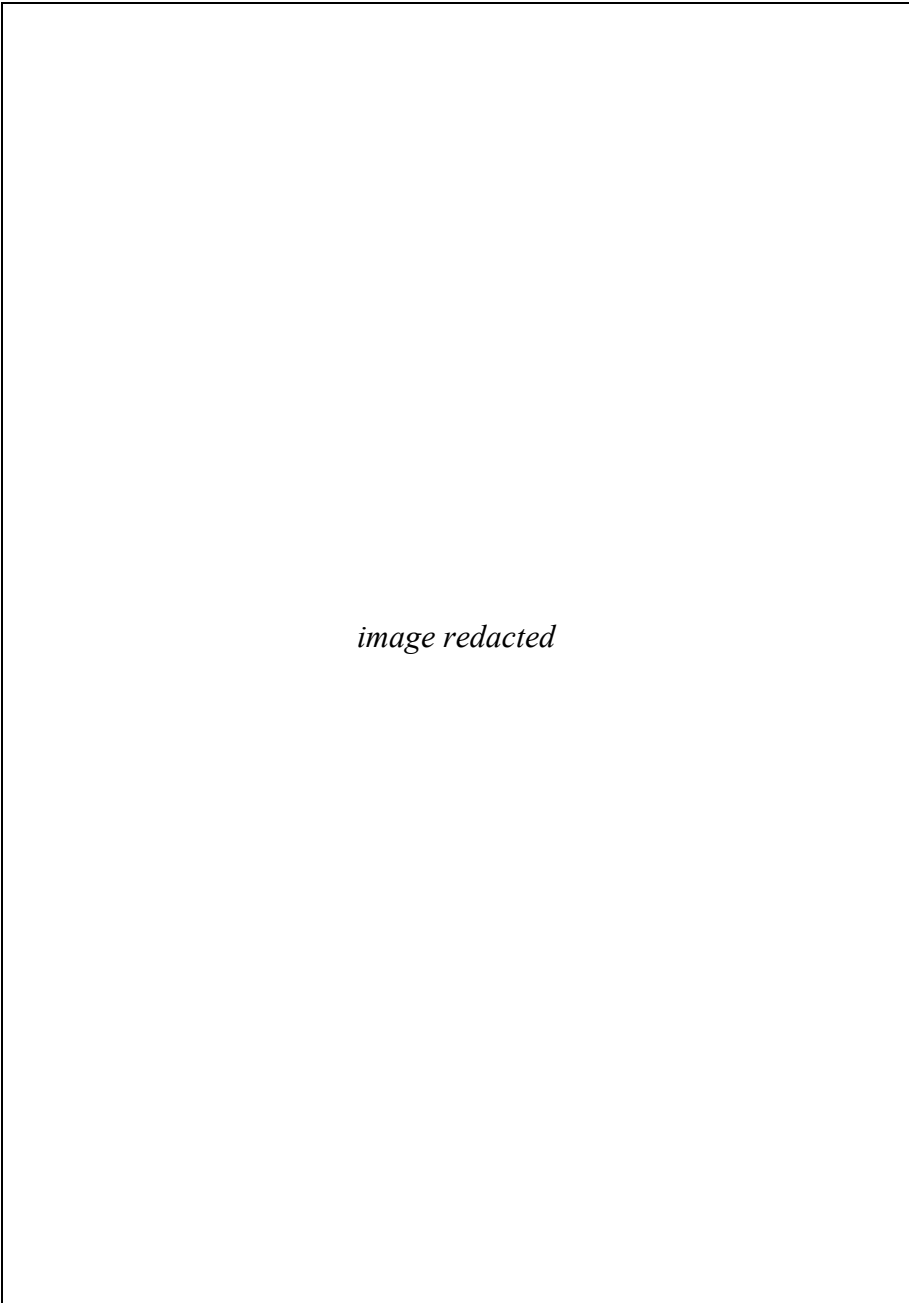
Similarly, the 1944 article 'Big Hopes in Scanty Swimsuits'<sup>33</sup> (figure four) focuses on Hollywood's use of the film star pin-up as a means to market new female stars, illustrating its point with four images which appear to offer the reader 'behind the scenes' access to a pin-up shoot. The article observes that 'building up starlets is still a small industry in Hollywood. The publicity man's first job in launching a new girl is to get luscious pin-up pictures taken', elaborating:

'Cheesecake' is the name American reporters and cameramen give to the so-called bathing belle subjects – to the girls with their skirts pulled up too high and their frocks cut too low, to the long, long trails of naked limbs that compose the typical 'pin-up girl' picture. Producing 'cheesecake' pictures is an industry that keeps a number of people

<sup>31</sup> 'I thought you had at last decided to make your book clean, as so many of us have asked. But no... we have the same half-dressed hussies, this time in ridiculous fancy stockings.' Draper, R. 'The Policewoman's Job', *Picture Post* 5th August 1939 p.63.

<sup>32</sup> *Picture Post* 7th February 1942 pp.24-25.

<sup>33</sup> *Picture Post* 12th August 1944 p.21.



*image redacted*

**Fig. Four:** *'Big Hopes in Scanty Swimsuits', Picture Post, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1944.*

steadily employed - with no over-great mental effort on the part of photographers or their models.<sup>34</sup>

Other scornful photographic captions, presumably intended to highlight the drive for profit over creativity in the Hollywood industry, include 'It won't be exactly a new subject. In fact,

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<sup>34</sup> *op cit.*

it's one of the very oldest. But he reckons it will sell' and 'a girl, a swim-suit, a sun shade - the same old picture, but the troops still love it. Perhaps it will get her a fat part in a film.'

However, the images which appear within both of these *Picture Post* features *are* still flattering and could even be deemed titillating. 'Film Stills: Photography at Its Most Antiquated' offers convincing reconstructions of established Hollywood iconography, whilst the behind-the-scenes feel of 'Big Hopes in Scanty Swimsuits' even offers the *Picture Post* reader an additional level of titillation (due to the 'thrill' of seeing how such an image is actually created). Both articles feature attractive young women over a full page ('Big Hopes.') and a double-page spread ('Film Stills...'). So whilst these features offer a seemingly derisory comment upon Hollywood's drive for uniformity, they are actually just as indicative of *Picture Post's* heavy reliance upon visual spectacle, female pulchritude and novelty, and its occasional need for Americanised glamour, in order to provide additional copy in slow news weeks and maintain its popular appeal.

As a British publication with middlebrow pretensions and keen to court an audience of tastes which ranged from the working-class proper, through the respectable/aspirant working-class, to the lower-middle and middle-class, both of these articles highlight the irony of an industrial system whereby stars were marketed as 'picture personalities' – apparently exceptional individuals with distinct talents and appeal - yet the very means through which they were represented and marketed was clearly indicative of a system that inherently lacked and actively stifled originality and individual creativity. These articles allude to the Hollywood industry's drive towards profit and therefore away from 'art' ('It won't be exactly a new subject...But he reckons it will sell') manifest in a preoccupation with the star as a perfectly packaged, mass produced product ('a replica of a hundred other glamour girls') simultaneously presenting the supposedly exploited party in the equation – the pin-up

subjects within such images as fame-hungry, opportunistic and materialistic ('perhaps it will get her a fat part in a film').

The formulaic nature of the imagery in both articles is presented as indicative of a lack of artistry for all concerned ('when will they employ some real photographers, and take some actual photographs?', 'no over-great mental effort on the part of photographers or their models') and in line with Bourdieu's claims that 'social identity is defined and asserted through difference'<sup>35</sup> and that in 'matters of taste... all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost [expressed as] distastes'<sup>36</sup>, the *Picture Post* reader is frequently offered a handy means through which to distance themselves should they find themselves either absorbed or titillated: either through the use of ironic captions in 'Film Stills..' or the claim in 'Big Hopes...' that the pin-up photographer was capturing 'the same old picture, but the *troops* still love it.'

A lack of innovation and a subsequent flattening of variety is suggested throughout both articles - arguments frequently raised against Americanisation and against US products more generally and adroitly transposed onto then current debates regarding appropriate/inappropriate, British/Americanised feminine behaviour and representations in a wartime context. Yet, as the 21 year old WAAF in the 'What is a Pin-Up Girl?' study demonstrates; she believed that Grable had 'everything it takes'. As in wartime Britain, glamour - the element upon which the pin-up was arguably most reliant - possessed a dual status. Whilst it could be repudiated as Hollywood fantasy ('all smiles, all legs, all flying skirts'; frivolous and unreflective of the harsh realities of Britain's austere wartime experience) it could conversely be mobilized as essential to morale not just for men but also for women; as part of the cultural phenomenon of what Pat Kirkham terms as 'beauty as duty':

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<sup>35</sup> Bourdieu, P. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. (London: Routledge, 1984) p.172

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p.56

[whereby] women were exhorted to beautify themselves to keep up morale – not only the morale of the home front but also that of the men fighting abroad. Because it could not be sure that women's concerns with something that was considered ephemeral and non-functional could or would survive either drastic shortages or the tremendous drain on energies that a sustained war demanded, morally worthy overtones inflected discussions of beauty and dress in wartime Britain.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, returning once again to 'What is a Pin-Up Girl?', the Mass Observation researcher inadvertently observes how the wider debates surrounding the low and the highbrow are frequently reoccurring tropes when subjects attempt to compare American with European culture, as they note 'men aren't always honest and women are intellectual snobs' with 'girls on the whole tr[ying] to take an artistic view point.'<sup>38</sup> 'Artistic' here being a metonym for 'cultured' or 'possessed of cultural capital'.

A 1945 article by *Picturegoer* columnist John Stapleton entitled 'Ladies or Dames?'<sup>39</sup> makes explicit these distinctions between British and American screen femininity; with 'Ladies' being cast as the skilled British 'actresses' (such as Phyllis Calvert who is pictured in the feature) and 'Dames' being cast as 'stars', the given pictorial example being Betty Grable.

As Sarah Street observes in her study of the British film star Margaret Lockwood, film stars function as cultural sites whereby wider debates surrounding taste, appropriate female behaviour, and cultural identities are frequently negotiated, in the case of this particular article, 'foreground[ing] the equation of national identity and different embodiments of femininity in a particularly interesting manner.'<sup>40</sup> Street's study notes that the supposedly increasingly 'Americanised' wartime roles that Lockwood played and the way

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<sup>37</sup> Kirkham, P. 'Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up the (Home) Front.' in Kirkham, P. and Thoms, D. (Eds). *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995) p.13

<sup>38</sup> A point which is further problematized by the partiality expressed in observer's own value judgements upon subjects. Therefore the female subject who would 'tear up' the Grable image and 'kick her out' of the pin up parade is described by the observer as 'art conscious, a little affected but fairly sincere' for 'trying to take an artistic viewpoint' whilst the girlfriend she arrived with is somewhat patronizingly described as 'a good example of a typical not-very-deep-thinking, nice person'.

<sup>39</sup> Stapleton, J. 'Ladies or Dames?' *Picturegoer* 10<sup>th</sup> November 1945 p.11

<sup>40</sup> Street, S. 'Documents of Fandom: Margaret Lockwood and Ewan McGregor' in *British Cinema in Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.100.

she was subsequently represented invited derision in the British media, as to be an ‘Americanised’ actress was to associate yourself with

values that were not, at that time associated in dominant discourses with Britishness: pleasure, guile, visual splendour and sexuality.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, as Carol Dyhouse notes

Glamour involved confidence and self-possession: it didn’t sit easily with more traditional virtues of innocence and modesty.<sup>42</sup>

In ‘Ladies or Dames’ the same differentiations are made between the domestic British film industry and Hollywood, its foreign but more ‘modern’ rival, with the respective industries becoming transposed on to homogenized notions of ‘Hollywood’ stars and ‘British’ actresses, who in turn, are made to become national representatives of a generalised notion of British and American femininity.

Being ‘ladies’, British actresses were perceived as rejecting ‘pleasure, guile, visual splendour and sexuality’ and eschewing excess and falseness, both in terms of acting style and appearance, demonstrating not only their ‘lady-like femininity’<sup>43</sup>, their respectability, decorum and gentility, but also their ‘naturalness’; their talent and versatility; their ability to “‘act’ as opposed to ‘star.’”<sup>44</sup> As Christine Geraghty observes in her study of the acting styles of three contemporary actresses, ‘Performing as a Lady and a Dame: Reflections on acting and genre’<sup>45</sup>, the terms ‘lady’ and ‘dame’ are very closely bound up with class distinctions, with ‘dame’, ironically, being used here to suggest a certain lack of class<sup>46</sup>, subtly deriding and undermining these performers by associating them with glamour, falseness, exaggeration

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<sup>41</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Dyhouse, C. *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London: Zed books, 2010) p.45.

<sup>43</sup> *Street British Cinema in Documents* p.95.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p.87.

<sup>45</sup> Geraghty, C. ‘Performing as a Lady and a Dame: Reflections on Acting and Genre.’ in Austin, T and Barker, M. (eds). *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom*. (London: Arnold, 2003) p.105.

<sup>46</sup> As Geraghty notes ‘Dame of course has other connotations in the British honours system.’ *ibid.* p.105. Equally Maria DiBattista notes how ‘slang has a way of puncturing pretentious usages’ and that ‘in calling a woman a dame, then, Americans are rejecting all the genteel associations adhering to the word.’ *Fast Talking Dames* (London: Yale University Press, 2001) p.8. She later observes ‘dames inspire such ambiguous tributes because they tend to ignore...traditional notions of respectable femininity’ *ibid.* p.9

and a specialization in a specific genre thus covertly implying the formulaic nature of the Hollywood product and a lack of originality or adaptability as a performer.

The association of Hollywood with formula and repetition and its specific relevance to Grable had, in fact, been not unkindly raised two years earlier, again in *Picturegoer*, this time by long-term Grable supporter Lionel Collier in his article 'Does Grable need a change?'<sup>47</sup> Collier's issue, rather than with Grable, was with Twentieth Century Fox and their repeated deployment of Grable in 'colourful, peppy dance musicals' and films of 'the eternal co-ed variety' whereby 'Betty's legs became more important than her undoubted talent.' This overt acknowledgement of Grable's competence as a performer displays a sense, in Collier's eyes, that in being limited to appearing in these two genres alone and being repeatedly promoted and presented in terms of her physicality rather than her acting talent, there is potential to squander any acting ability Grable has. He therefore asks 'will the public get tired of her curvaceous Grable formula?' and wonders should she 'change this routine and go in for more serious drama?' - presumably to demonstrate her acting range, thus 'legitimizing' herself as a performer and enabling her to shift into a category of actress more akin to 'ladies' and therefore affording her greater respect both from her audience and possibly her studio.

Here Collier's issue is with the regrettable constraints the Hollywood system placed upon actresses such as Grable, constraints which to an extent were also placed upon 'ladies' who worked within the British film industry. However, having considered the article's central question, Collier acknowledges Grable's morale-boosting function, and concludes regarding the question of a change for Grable, that

Personally I don't think so. In these days of repetitions, spy stories and war melodramas the Betty technique comes always with a freshness and lightness of atmosphere which in the old days was supposed to soothe tired business men and now does the same for tired members of the Forces and the workers on the home front.

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<sup>47</sup> Collier, L. 'Does Grable Need a Change?' in *Picturegoer*, 20th February 1943, p.6.

After seeing *Footlight Parade* (sic) I would say, stick to the bright lights, soft music and glamour Betty<sup>48</sup>

British responses to Hollywood glamour and a ‘lightness of atmosphere’ were not always so philosophical though, particularly when the author was not constrained by a publication’s ‘official line.’ For example, following an ebullient four-page *Picture Post* feature upon the marriage of American film star and fellow Hollywood pin-up Carole Landis (marketed as the ‘Blonde Bomber’ or ‘The Ping Girl’) to British Captain Thomas Wallace entitled ‘A Film Star Marries’<sup>49</sup> one ‘A. Murray of Bedford Street, London’ felt moved to offer the following indignant response in the publication’s ‘Letters’ section;

It is a disgrace in war-time to indulge in an orgy of satin, orchids and wine as these people are doing at the film star’s wedding (Jan.23) And an even greater disgrace that you, the *Picture Post* should give publicity to it.<sup>50</sup>

The letter refutes the feature’s potential to promote accord between the UK and the US, conveniently ignoring that Landis was a star renowned internationally for her work with The Red Cross and for her frequent and gruelling overseas front line tours with the USO (a year after this article, whilst on overseas tour Landis contracted amoebic dysentery and malaria and nearly died) and the wedding’s ‘make-do’ elements explicitly discussed in the article (such as the cardboard wedding cake, due to the lack of available ingredients) and favoured instead, a description of the event as “an *orgy* of satin, orchids and wine” thus openly engaging with the cultural discourse surrounding American culture and its association with excess, seemingly suggesting an irresponsible and ill-considered act of immorality or impropriety rather than a wedding. That this is followed by another reader’s letter, from one James Rigby, Prince of Wales Drive, London, who claims ‘It did [his] heart good to see the

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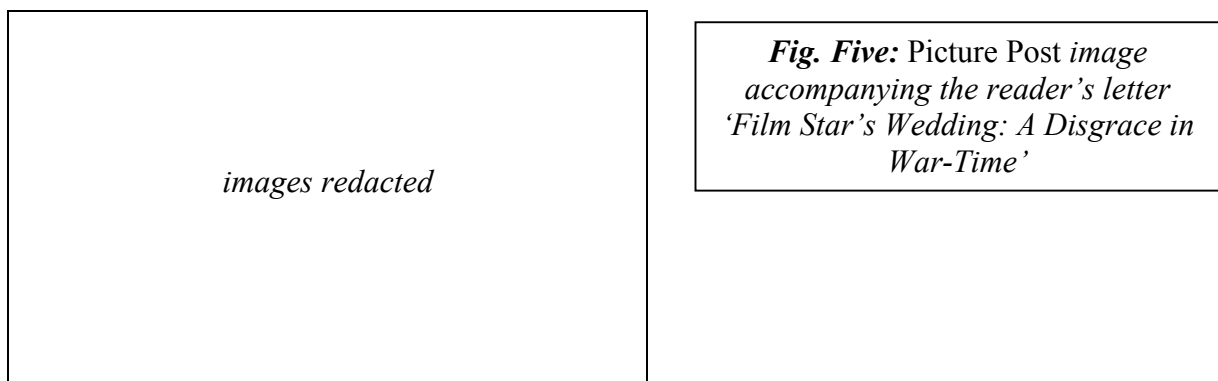
<sup>48</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>49</sup> *Picture Post* 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1943, p.16.

<sup>50</sup> *Picture Post* 6<sup>th</sup> February 1943, p.3.



beauty and happiness of Miss Landis's wedding'<sup>51</sup> and juxtaposed next to a small caricatured illustration (figure five) of a glamorous blonde bride - presumably Miss Landis - surrounded by happy wedding goers, whilst a glowering killjoy in a pantomime-esque black cloak and shrouded by a thundercloud looks on, demonstrates the range of responses at the time to such a glamorous spectacle and would suggest that *Picture Post*'s editorial team were not exactly in agreement with the sentiments expressed by 'A. Murray of Bedford Street, London.'



In conclusion, British debates surrounding the pin-up and glamour, which were frequently associated with debates surrounding the film star pin-up and with Hollywood at large, map very closely onto wider British debates surrounding American culture and fears surrounding the Americanisation and degradation of British culture. These concerns were further exacerbated by broader wartime anxieties, and by general shortage and privation in the face of government appeals for patriotic restraint. Equally much regarding Hollywood cinema, the pin-up form, and Grable's persona, spoke to existing class anxieties and prejudices which were also prevalent at the time. Whilst for many - namely those whose cultural capital gave them an investment in the dominant cultural paradigm - the pin-up and pin-up film stars at large signified the alien, the dangerous, the facile and the potentially

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<sup>51</sup> The letter reads in full: 'It did my heart good to see the beauty and happiness of Miss Landis's wedding. We have almost forgotten what a real wedding is like, so trained are we now to a utility way of life. Thank you Miss Landis, and many happy days to you.' *Picture Post* 6<sup>th</sup> February 1943, p.3.

immoral, and for others - namely those who, having not been adequately served by British culture, sought to subvert the dominant taste paradigm and found Hollywood to be either a positive escape or an empowering tool with which to establish or exhibit cultural capital - film star pin-ups were a symbol of vital difference: of American exoticism, freedom, modernity and even transgression. In short, pin-ups in Britain during the war era were deeply divisive and intensely problematic.

As Hollywood's most requested film star pin-up subject, and as a star whose persona was so specifically marked as American, in Britain Grable's name (for better or worse) became synonymous with and indicative of these, the country and its supposed national traits. Whilst in her native US Grable's persona and pin-ups may (or may not) have been less problematic and closer to the 'uncomplicated' 'symbol of the kind of woman for whom American men – especially working class men – were fighting'<sup>52</sup>, a passive symbol of sexual obligation (although, this is highly contentious as work by Haralovich and Buszek and evidence, offered in the next chapter, indicates differently), for British audiences, Grable's image, her pin-ups and her performances offered a whole range of additional readings, challenges and complexities which were permeated by broader debates surrounding taste, class and national identity.

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<sup>52</sup> Westbrook, R.B. "“I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James”: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II" in *American Quarterly* v.42, #4. December 1990 p.596.

## **CHAPTER TWO:** **A Passive Patriot?: Unpacking the Powolney** **Pin-Up and the Grable Myth**

This chapter moves to an American context and takes some of the elements discussed in the introduction and chapter one, namely the notion of ‘total star text’<sup>1</sup>, the range of ‘resonances’<sup>2</sup> a star text elicits and, in particular the instances in the previous chapter whereby respondents in the Mass Observation study ‘What is a Pin-Up Girl?’ applied their broader experience of Grable’s star persona to their reading of her pin-up imagery, and seeks to develop this principle a little further.

Just as many readings of the Grable pin-up in the Mass Observation study were informed by Grable’s star persona, it is equally as plausible, then, that other elements of Grable’s wider ‘star text’, such as knowledge of and engagement with her previous film performances, could also influence audiences’ interpretations of Grable’s pin-up imagery. So with a view to this, and to the underpinning intent of this thesis – demonstrating how the Second World War pin-up was a form which could offer a range of resonances, including empowering and appealing images for female audiences - this chapter will consider Grable’s broader ‘star text’ in addition to her cultural and historical context in order to tease out some of the meanings a Grable pin-up could offer wartime audiences, and why. This will be done through textual analysis of a range of American media texts including Grable’s most iconic pin-up, the Frank Powolney swimsuit shot - an image which, because of the wartime context, and its phenomenal popularity with American GIs during the war, is often presumed to epitomise the link between pin-up and feminine passivity.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The star as represented across multiple media which cumulatively forms a complete star image.’ See ‘Introduction’ herein p.37 for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The way audiences relate and respond to texts.’ Moseley, R. *Growing Up with Audrey Hepburn: Text, Audience, Resonance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p.92.

As was mentioned in the introduction to this thesis<sup>3</sup>, discussions of Grable often conflate Grable's performances, Grable's star persona and Grable the pin-up. In pulling apart this prevailing, overly simplistic and somewhat problematic amalgamation, we can ultimately gain a more insightful understanding, not just of Grable, or of the myth which surrounds her as the ultimate patriotic (and supposedly passive) pin-up, but of the way, and the reasons why, film star pin-up imagery itself functions.

As has also already been discussed in the introduction, key to Betty Grable's significant popularity with audiences was her representation as being somehow still 'ordinary'. This 'ordinariness' was manifest, amongst other things, in her acting style, as Garff B. Wilson observes in his 1951 essay 'Levels of Achievement in Acting';

After a novice [actor] has learned control of his body and his voice, he may acquire the ease and technique which enable him to 'play himself' to project his own personality in simple situations... Think, for example, of the acting of Betty Grable, Bing Crosby, or Esther Williams. They are enormously attractive and ingratiating people – and their acting consists of projecting their attractive, ingratiating selves to millions of movie goers. The films in which they appear always present simple, familiar, pleasant situations, in which the performers can move and speak exactly as they do in everyday life. The emotions of grief, rage, terror, pity, triumph, or despair are never introduced.<sup>4</sup>

In presenting Grable 'as...in everyday life' and demonstrating her 'attractive ingratiating self' Grable's films were a means through which fans of Grable's pin-ups or the Grable persona could be coaxed to attend cinemas and generate revenue, whilst the films themselves simultaneously stimulated further interest in and awareness of Grable's pin-ups themselves and of the notion of Grable *as* a pin-up with film attendees.

Whilst these elements clearly offer mutual benefits to one another, and together help to form Grable's wider star text, Grable as portrayed in films and Grable as portrayed in pin-ups function subtly differently by virtue of the fact that they are very different representative modes which can offer differing pleasures and appeals. Whilst all of these elements are often

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<sup>3</sup> p. 57

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, G.B. 'Levels of Achievement in Acting' in *Educational Theatre Journal* v3, #3. October 1951 p.232.

merged in the collective memory, Betty Grable the pin-up is different to the Betty Grable presented in films, if only because the restrictions and requirements of the Hays code would not have allowed Grable's screen performances to deliver what every good pin-up promises<sup>5</sup>.

Although the standard Betty Grable pin-up offers an appealing image of desirable, glamorous and well-groomed femininity, Grable's on-screen costuming and performances were frequently more excessive and unruly, in many instances even bordering upon a travesty of femininity. These elements were therefore in urgent need of control and containment to enable the film to conclude with a conventional and harmonious heterosexual union.

As we shall discuss in more detail in chapter three, the on-screen representation of Grable's excessive femininity was invariably manifest in extravagant costuming which at times verged upon the ridiculous, and often operated as a source of humour within her film's narratives. Accompanied by her exaggerated performance style (described by Rosen as 'always incredulous and vacantly girlish'<sup>6</sup>), Grable's presentation within many of her films could be considered to have entered the realms of the overly melodramatic, the absurd, of the camp or even of drag.<sup>7</sup>

One notable example of Grable's inappropriate on-screen excess occurs in a sequence in *Coney Island* whereby impresario protagonist Joe (Caesar Romero) meets potential love interest Kate (Grable) for the first time. Kate, a performer with what Jeanine Basinger terms

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<sup>5</sup> As Thomas Doherty notes, 'In December 1933 [head of the Production Code Administration - William] Hays tried to extinguish the flash point of lurid advertising. In an emphatic memorandum whose anatomical precision well describes the kind of material being routinely circulated, he issued a set of twelve commandments to rein in the libidinous flow of pictures and words.... Ultimately, the come-hither copy and lurid images that baited moviegoers proved to be hooks that caught the studios on their won lines. Scanning newspapers, handbills, and billboards, moral guardians were alerted to the awful doings in films they would never have been aware of otherwise.' *Pre-code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999) pp.112-113.

<sup>6</sup> Rosen, M. *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (London: Peter Owen, 1973) p.209

<sup>7</sup> The question of drag and Grable's performance, particularly in relation to the work of Martin Shingler is discussed in further detail in chapter three herein.

as “plenty of pizzazz”<sup>8</sup>, is ready to take to the stage, clad in an abundance of costume jewellery, a splashy canary yellow evening gown with various feather adornments, a showy feathered headpiece, and an excess of rouge. The poor combination of unfortunate makeup choices, the headpiece, the jewellery, the gown’s garish shade and its feathered appendages, are simply ‘too much.’ As Basinger notes

Her costumes indicate perhaps *too much* pizzazz, as they are always flashy and overdone to match her character's exuberant, peppy, but cheap style of performing.<sup>9</sup>

Joe, our protagonist, openly ridicules Kate’s outfit (prompting the spectator’s mutual rejection of Kate’s ‘style’) and Kate and Joe begin to verbally spar. A little later, Joe rips the feathered appendage from Kate’s gown and as Sean Griffin notes ‘sets to revamping Kate’s performing style – specifically trying to tone her down. In trying to make her more upscale... he handcuffs her hands and feet before one performance to limit her histrionics.’<sup>10</sup>

Both Griffin and Basinger’s works discuss Grable/Kate’s excess of ‘style’, in that she is simply ‘too much’ in terms of delivery and costuming. Considering Garbo’s garb in the 1933 MGM film *Queen Christina* Jane Gaines notes that ‘a hornet’s nest of issues are raised when we look squarely at [costume] style.’<sup>11</sup> This is certainly the case here, if only because, as means of expression, both Grable’s costuming and her performance style are both intended here to signify a lack of restraint – either an all-too-obvious bid to call attention both to herself and to her physicality or a misguided attempt to display cultural capital.

Whilst the femininity Grable presents in her films is often unruly, it isn’t necessarily sexually provocative. In fact at times Grable’s costuming is so ridiculous that such provocation would seem impossible. However, a preoccupation with Grable’s body and its

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<sup>8</sup> Basinger, J. *A Woman’s View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960*. (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1993) p.129

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p.129

<sup>10</sup> Griffin, S. ‘The Wearing of The Green: Performing Irishness in the Fox Wartime Musical’ in Negra, D. (ed) *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) p.66

<sup>11</sup> Gaines, J. ‘The Queen Christina Tie-Ups: Convergence of Show Window and Screen.’ *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* v11. #1 1989 p.39

ability to provoke prevails in contemporaneous discourse upon Grable's film performances. For example *Picturegoer*'s Malcolm Phillips' observation of Grable's performances in *Tin Pan Alley* and *Down Argentine Way*, that 'so far there is more sex appeal than subtlety in her method of attack'<sup>12</sup> suggests, through the use of a particularly physical and assertive metaphor ('attack'), that Grable didn't turn in 'subtle', nuanced or skilled acting but instead, she deliberately utilised the appeal of her physical form and its ability to provoke to state her presence within the narrative. Similarly 'the curvaceous Grable formula'<sup>13</sup> – Grable's physical attractiveness and erotic appeal – was central to *Picturegoer* film reviewer Lionel Collier's very appreciative readings of Grable and her performances.

Despite her relatively chaste storylines, and his supposed appreciation of her skills as a performer, Collier's reviews of Grable's films fixate upon Grable's ornamental function and occasionally invoke a more suggestive idiom. So, for example, in his review of *A Yank in the RAF*, Tyrone Power is 'breezily nonchalant as the American' and John Sutton is 'very good as the Wing Commander' but Grable is 'very attractive as Carol'<sup>14</sup> (my emphasis); in his 1940 review of *The Day the Bookies Wept* Collier notes that 'Betty Grable looks decorative as the heroine'<sup>15</sup> (my emphasis). Equally in 1943, when reviewing *Footlight Serenade*, he enthuses, 'Betty Grable puts over feminine appeal, sings and dances, all equally effectively'<sup>16</sup>, whilst in his review of *Coney Island* later that year he goes further still, observing 'Betty Grable, keeping her curves nicely in hand sings and acts well as a cabaret star who is loved by an unscrupulous café owner'<sup>17</sup> (my emphasis).

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<sup>12</sup> Phillips, M. 'Look Out Ginger! Here Comes Grable' *Picturegoer* 26<sup>th</sup> April 1941, p.6

<sup>13</sup> Discussed previously in chapter one, this term appears in Collier's article 'Does Grable Need a Change?' *Picturegoer* 20<sup>th</sup> February 1943 p.6 whereby he laments how 'Betty's legs [had become] more important than her undoubted talent' but ultimately returns to his own preoccupation with Grable's physique.

<sup>14</sup> *Picturegoer* 7<sup>th</sup> February 1942, p.12

<sup>15</sup> *Picturegoer* 24<sup>th</sup> February 1940, p.28

<sup>16</sup> *Picturegoer* (5<sup>th</sup> March, 1943) p.12

<sup>17</sup> Collier, L. 'Shop For Your Films With Lionel Collier' *Picturegoer* 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1943, p.12

Here, in addition to the ongoing fascination with her body and a mildly distasteful prurience, a notion of excess (both bodily and in terms of performance) and the need for its containment, so frequently iterated in relation to Grable, is also alluded to. Here Grable's 'curves' must be kept 'in hand' within the context of her performance precisely because of their potential to suggest, provoke and arouse, not least, it would appear, for Collier. These semantic examples demonstrate not only how central Grable's physicality was to contemporaneous understandings of her and her performances, and how her performances were understood to be a performance and negotiation *of* femininity (she successfully 'keep[s] her curves in hand'), but also, presumably, in part, because of her notoriety as a pin-up; just *how* eroticized these understandings were.

Just as her star persona and her 'Americanness' was carried into the Mass Observation subjects' readings of her photographic representation within the 'Soldiers and Pin-Ups'/'What is a Pin-Up Girl?' study, the sexual appeal (and arguably, the sexual agency) associated with Grable's well-established and culturally prominent pin-up persona appears to have been carried over into her film performances. So just as Richard Dyer theorises in relation to Hayworth's performance in *Gilda* (discussed in detail in chapter seven), audiences bring to their viewing of Grable's films a host of extra textual (and non-filmic) detail and inference which they relate to Grable's star persona, suffusing their readings of her films with a sexual charge and a further erotic appeal, as the star's context influences their understanding of her performance.



**That Picture:**  
**Grable & the Powolney Pin-Up**

So what elements of Grable's star persona were most commonly emphasised in wider discourse and advertising surrounding her and how was this signified in her photographic representations?

Once again interpretation is an issue here. No one definitive or immanent reading is ever offered by a photographic image and Grable images were, and still are, part of a wider network of images and representations – the 'total star text' - which will have offered, and still offers, a range of Grable representations. Equally, the 'meanings' Grable offers as a signifier obviously varies from image to image, from a 'health and vitality' poolside pin-up to a George Hurrell-style glamour shot. But it would be beneficial to determine to what extent Grable's photographic persona is consistent with her on-screen persona and in what way further resonances are generated within her photographic representations.

A logical starting point from which to attempt such an investigation would be the most iconic static representation of Grable; *that* 1940s Frank Powolney bathing costume shot (figure six). Billed by Fox as 'the picture that launched a thousand dreams', it is frequently claimed that this particular image catapulted Grable to international notoriety as the ultimate film star pin-up.

In the intervening period since the photograph was taken, this iconic image has come to signify many things, essentially due to the historical context in which the picture both emerged and was initially received. The precise date on which the image was taken is uncertain. However the Margaret Herrick archive dates the image as 1943 and the earliest instance I have found of the image's use is on the December 1943 cover of American magazine *Movie Story*, where the image is tinted (blonde curls, peach skin, canary yellow

bathing suit, and red heels and lipstick) and ‘pinned’ with a drawing pin at each corner, with the caption ‘Betty Grable starring in “Pin-Up Girl”’.

As with so many other successful and ubiquitous Hollywood products a dedicated, and, at times, improbable mythology soon evolved, borne out of a combination of adept studio marketing and audience fantasy. Grable biographers Doug Warren and Tom McGee both use slight variants upon the notion that having taken some preliminary shots for the *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* wardrobe department, Powolney asked Grable to model a range of swimsuits and some additional publicity stills were taken<sup>18</sup>. As McGee observes

apparently the studio needed a bathing suit shot for costume designers about to start work on her wardrobe for *Sweet Rosie O’Grady*, Betty’s next film...Powolney was so pleased with his picture that he dispatched it to publicity.<sup>19</sup>

One Grable fan site notes

Many stories have been told about the origin of the most famous ‘pin-up’ picture in American history: that she was pregnant and tried to hide her stomach; or that she was finished with the photo session and had turned her back to walk out of the studio, saying “that’s it!”; or, that she turned to smile at Darryl F. Zanuck who had entered the studio unexpectedly; or, that it was a costume shot for *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* released Oct. 1, 1943.<sup>20</sup>

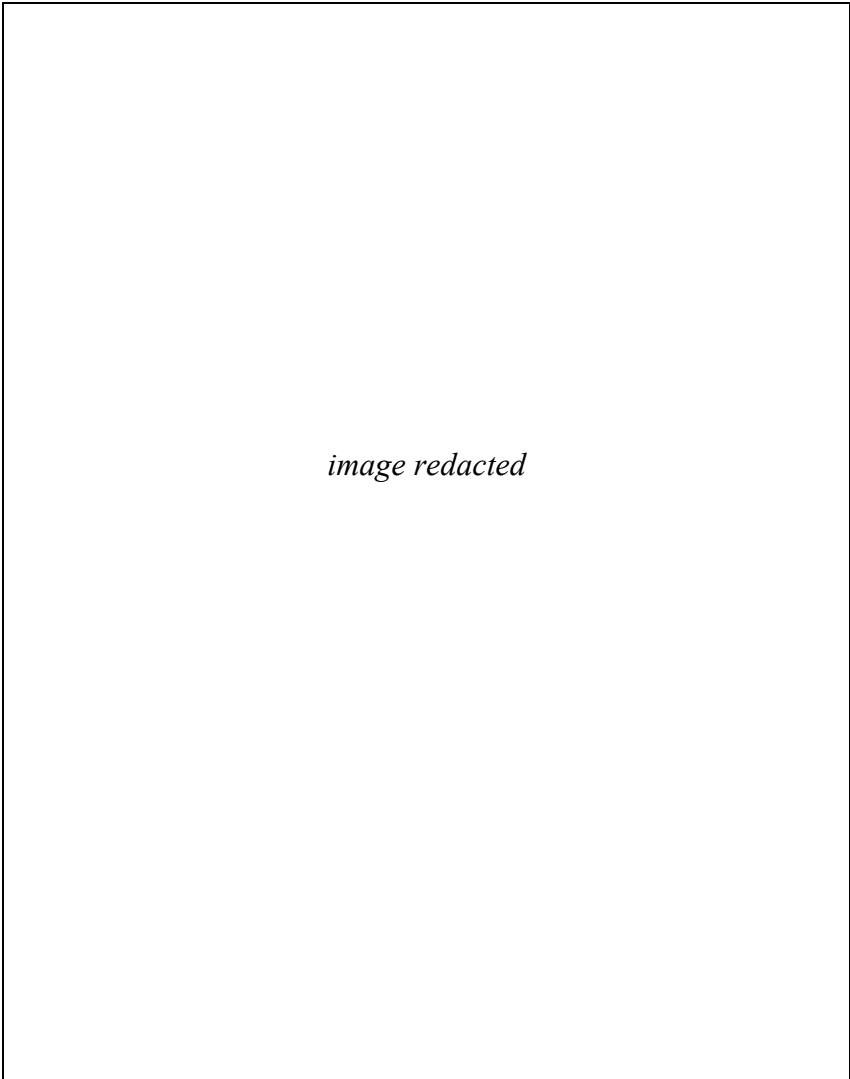
What *is* known, though, is that as early as 1941 Fox Studios were already exploiting the GI’s sweetheart/number one pin-up trope within Grable’s star persona, as the British campaign book for the comedy musical *Moon over Miami* boasts that she had supposedly already ‘received approximately 18,000 letters from men in the army during the past four months requesting her photographs’, and several companies had ‘asked Miss Grable to become [their] sweetheart.’<sup>21</sup> It is commonly presumed that, in response to those requests, it was the Powolney image that was mass-distributed to overseas servicemen and subsequently became

<sup>18</sup> McGee, T. *Betty Grable: The Girl with the Million Dollar Legs* (NY: Welcome Rain Publishers, 2009) p.109; and Warren, D. *Betty Grable: The Reluctant Movie Queen* (London: Robson books, 1982) p.78

<sup>19</sup> McGee *Betty Grable* p.109

<sup>20</sup> <http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/ww2Timeline/bettygrable.html> accessed 17th May 2007

<sup>21</sup> Campaign Book *Moon Over Miami* (London: 20th Century Fox, 1941) source BFI Library.



*image redacted*

**Fig. Six:**  
*Frank Powolney/Betty  
Grable pin-up*

the most requested film-star pin-up of the war period, but in a British context no proof has been found, only perpetuations of the myth. For example the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*<sup>22</sup> claims that ‘nearly 3 million prints’ were made of the Powolney image but it fails to clarify its source. No reprint of said image can be found in any issue of British magazine *Picturegoer* magazine between January 1939 and December 1949 nor does the image appear in the magazines *Picture Post*, *Lilliput* or *Woman’s Weekly* at any point during this period, despite these publications running features on or mentioning Grable. Whilst the

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<sup>22</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> July 1973, BFI clipping file.

Powolney image may have been ubiquitous in its native USA<sup>23</sup>, little can be found to suggest it was in Britain, and therefore a cross-cultural analysis of the image is problematic.

Evidence of the cultural currency of the Powolney pin-up does, however, occasionally arise within several film texts. Instances where the Grable/Powolney image appears in films include the opening sequence of Grable's 1944 musical *Pin Up Girl*, in which the film's title credits appear over a Vargas-esque rendering of the Powolney image and shortly after, in a deft merging of character and star persona, fiction and reality, when Grable's character - Lori the 'darling of the USO' - hands out signed copies of the famous Powolney image to eager servicemen suitors.<sup>24</sup>

The Powolney pin-up also makes a less prominent but no less significant film appearance in the 1943 war drama *Guadalcanal Diary* (figure seven). William Bendix's character 'Taxi' Potts shaves in front of a mirror hanging from a palm tree, and to the left of the mirror the Powolney pin-up is also pinned to the tree - another contemporaneous example of the adoption of Grable as a pin-up 'sweetheart', and, one could argue, evidence of her successful integration into homosocial spaces<sup>25</sup>. Similarly to the *Pin Up Girl* example, though, using the appearance of the Powolney image in *Guadalcanal Diary* as proof of cultural currency is not without its problems. This is, after all, a fictional appropriation of a homosocial space, rather than an actual homosocial space, and as such it is possible that it

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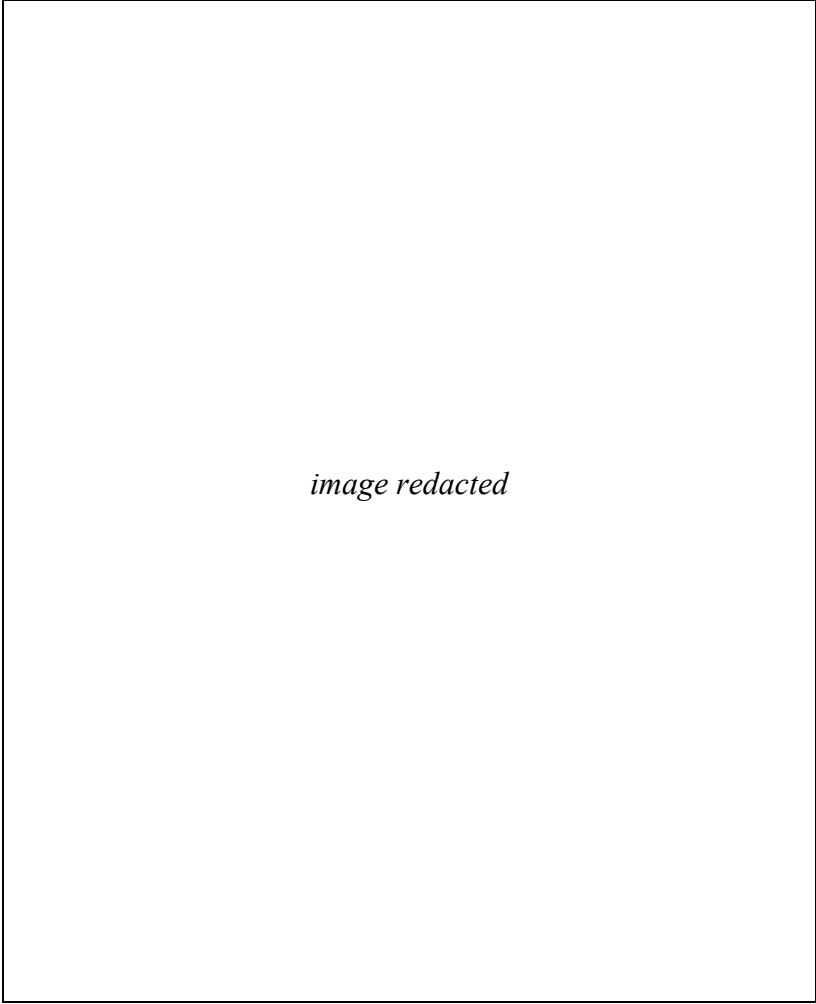
<sup>23</sup> I cannot comment authoritatively upon American print media coverage, having not gained access to extensive runs of any US publications other than *Life*, but once again, despite finding many features on Grable, only one Powolney photograph was found (the cover of *Movie Story*, December 1943). A fuller exploration of American magazines would be a key point for further investigation if this study were developed further.

<sup>24</sup> Whilst somewhat ironically indulging in a touch of myth making herself, claiming that she is set to head for Washington 'to go with one of their road shows, they are sending me to all their camps and I think they are going to make me an honorary colonel...' - a series of self-aggrandising exaggerations Fox's marketing team would have been proud of as her character had in fact, somewhat less glamorously, simply been commissioned as a stenographer for the civil service in Washington.

<sup>25</sup> Nor is this the only time such a trope is used in the popular media. The association of Grable as pin-up with homosocial spaces occurs not only in the Mass Observation study discussed in Chapter One but also in a 1944 print advertisement for American cigarette brand Chesterfield (*Life* 1<sup>st</sup> October 1944) which features an image of a shelf in what is presumably a barracks, on the shelf are masculine accoutrements such as two clothes brushes, a packet of Chesterfields, an officers cap, a notebook and a head and shoulder image of Grable.

may not be a fully accurate representation of the type of space the film's makers sought to recreate. Whilst there is a chance the inclusion of the Grable pin-up in the mise-en-scène was an attempt to heighten the scene's realism, as *Guadalcanal Diary* was also a Twentieth Century Fox picture and, at this time, Grable was Fox's biggest star, it is possible that the studio were simply taking the opportunity to continue to perpetuate the Grable 'force's sweetheart' myth whilst raising their star attractions' profile further still.

What these contemporaneous examples do show, though, is that this particular image *was* in circulation, had currency at the time of the film's making and that, at the least,



*image redacted*

**Fig. Seven:** *Taxi Potts and the Powolney/Grable pin-up in Guadalcanal Diary.*

attendees of both of these films will have encountered the image, if only fleetingly. Equally, the repeated use of the same Powolney image within *Pin Up Girl's* title sequence and throughout its narrative seems to suggest a certain cultural ubiquity: that Fox were keen to consistently link Grable with the armed forces and frame her star persona within a discourse of patriotism.

Such an approach to the marketing of a star (male or female) between the years of 1941 and 1945 was not unusual, as each of the Hollywood studios took great pains to present all of its stars as good patriots and model American citizens as soon as America entered the war. However, for Grable, this notion was evident even prior to America's entry into the war (namely because of her appearance in interventionist tale *Yank in the RAF*<sup>26</sup>) and became increasingly crucial to her persona as the war continued<sup>27</sup>.

Every biography of Grable refers to the lengthy period between Grable's first film role at the age of fourteen (in the 1930 musical *Whoopie!*) to her eventual breakthrough as a leading lady ten years later in the musical *Down Argentine Way*. As the substantial period between films suggests, Grable's fame was by no means instantaneous or easily gained. As Lionel Collier observed in 1943 'Betty in screen terms is an old timer, but it would take a very devoted fan to be able to name the films she appeared in before she made a hit in *Down Argentine Way*.<sup>28</sup> In the intervening period, Grable had worked sporadically in films, many of which were 'dreary American college pictures the studios continued to produce with sickening monotony'<sup>29</sup>, and in addition to this she posed for endless studio pin-ups<sup>30</sup>, worked

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<sup>26</sup> For further discussion of this film and the representational implications for Grable see chapter one.

<sup>27</sup> 'Her rise to box-office champion during the war was due as much to the women who flocked to her movies as to the soldiers who pinned her up overseas...During the war, she was offered to women – especially working-class women – as a model of female virtue on the home front.' Westbrook, R.B. "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James": American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II' in *American Quarterly* v42, #4. Dec 1990 p.605

<sup>28</sup> Collier 'Does Grable need a change' p.6

<sup>29</sup> Phillips 'Look Out Ginger' p.6

in vaudeville and musical theatre, sang in nightclubs, and gained notoriety through her marriage and subsequent divorce from former child star Jackie Coogan. As Malcolm Phillips notes;

For years Betty Grable was a prominent and decorative part of the Hollywood scene. She was one of that exclusive band of players who are almost legendary film figures without ever having actually done anything important in films.<sup>31</sup>

Yet despite posing ‘in more swimsuits than California has bathing belles, put[ting] over more Christmas messages than Santa Claus himself and modell[ing] more evening gowns and playsuits than Hollywood has parties and playrooms’<sup>32</sup> Grable was repeatedly overlooked and her contract with RKO eventually cancelled. It would appear that what she needed as a ‘product’ was a point of differentiation. Marketed not only as a wartime pin-up, but the *number one* pin-up, who was simultaneously ‘ordinary’, down-to-earth and as American as apple pie, Fox finally found Grable’s niche as the archetype of the pin-up patriot.

Whilst being integral to Grable’s star persona, an awareness of and engagement with the ‘Number One Pin-Up’ myth has also problematized posthumous interpretations of the Powolney image. Several instrumental articles upon Grable and her stardom (in particular those by Robert Westbrook and Jane Gaines) engage with this significant element of Grable’s persona but locate their discussions within a gendered binarism whereby male subjects are cast as active protectors – all unchecked aggression and raging libido - and female subjects are passive quarry, in need of protection. In short, what Delano refers to as ‘familiar narratives of war, with their rigid gender codes and their overvaluation of masculinity’<sup>33</sup>, are deferred to, and it is frequently concluded that the Powolney pin-up functioned as a

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<sup>30</sup> As Phillips (1941) notes Grable ‘was – and is – richly endowed with those ‘selling angles’ that delight the hearts of studio purveyors of ‘leg art’ and picture page editors. Whenever the publicity department found it wasn’t getting results it sent for Grable.’ ‘Watch out Ginger’ p.6

<sup>31</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>32</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Delano, P. D. ‘Making Up For War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture.’ *Feminist Studies* v.26, #1 Spring 2000, p.36

‘surrogate object of sexual desire for soldiers far from home’<sup>34</sup>, making it typical of a hegemony which endorses female objectification as a means to civil defence, into which fed a sense of feminine sexual obligation<sup>35</sup> and ‘beauty as duty’.

Such arguments are certainly logical and persuasive. However they do not necessarily represent the full picture. As was discussed in chapter one, both the pin-up and its stock-in-trade, glamour, operate and are used in more complex ways than such a ‘sexual obligation’ reading gives them credit for. As Buszek has noted, the agency with which the pin-up form was frequently associated during the war period meant that pin-up girls were often understood to be problematic, potentially transgressive figures, whilst in Britain in particular the excess that Hollywood glamour invoked during this period stood in direct contrast to a wartime need for moderation and restraint. Whilst it has been argued that such images co-opt women into potentially exploitative, demeaning or objectified roles, and that pin-up images reinforce male misogyny, pin-ups were not universally appreciated by men, nor did all female subjects find pin-up imagery objectifying. As Joanne Meyerowitz’s work upon female readers of *Esquire* magazine highlights, one can never guarantee how an image will be read, or to what effect.<sup>36</sup>

In terms of mise-en-scène, the Powolney image itself has no contrived narrative set up (which often provides the ‘excuse’ for a pin-up subjects’ state of undress). There are no props, there is no obvious location (other than presumably a studio), and Grable’s costuming, unusually for her, is not particularly extravagant. Is this, then, the reason why this particular Grable image has become so iconic and has become of such significance? Is it because in this

<sup>34</sup> Westbrook ‘I Want a Girl’ p.595

<sup>35</sup> *ibid* p.589

<sup>36</sup> This is demonstrated in the 1946 supreme court case *Hannegan v. Esquire* and the three female witnesses stated responses to the Vargas pin-ups featured in the popular magazine *Esquire* as discussed in Meyerowitz ‘Women, Cheesecake and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in the Mid –Twentieth Century US.’ *Journal of Women’s History* v8, #3 1996, pp. 15-18. This is discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Another example can be found in as the variations in female response to Grable’s image, from adoration to scorn, in the Mass Observation study ‘Soldiers and Pin Ups’ and the *Picture Post* feature upon this study ‘What is a Pin-Up Girl?’ discussed in chapter one herein.



particular image we just get Grable? She's not in character, she's not posed by a pool and there are no distracting props: we simply get, in Garff B Wilson's words, Grable's 'attractive, ingratiating sel[f]'?<sup>37</sup>

As an example of a pin-up photograph, the image itself certainly isn't wholly representative of the range of pin-up styles that were available in the media at this particular time. Yet all of the forms' key conventions are evident here; the semi-clad, youthful female subject, an overt glamorisation of that subject and a suggestive, but not lascivious tone with the 'eliminat[ion of] the explicit representation (or suggestion) of a sexual act by both eliminating the presence of men (and generally, other women) and strategically covering the genital area of the female subject.'<sup>38</sup>

Could it therefore be that the image possesses a continued cultural significance because of the precise period at which it gained its greatest cultural prominence: the Second World War period, the period with which the pin-up became most strongly associated in the popular imagination, and the time at which the film star pin-up came to full maturity? During this period, whilst simultaneously serving the talismanic function for male audiences discussed by so many academics, as Buszek has argued, the pin-up also carried a range of connotations linked to modernity and feminine agency, particularly a female sexual agency, and an agency so powerful it needed to be monitored and contained<sup>39</sup>, or could conversely be used by agencies such as governments in advertising materials to persuade women to adopt new wartime roles within society<sup>40</sup>. As such the pin-up was very contentious and far from

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, 'Levels of Achievement in Acting' p.232.

<sup>38</sup> Buszek, M.E. 'Representing "Awarishness": Burlesque, Feminist Transgression, and the 19th-Century Pin-up.' *The Drama Review* v.43, #4 Winter 1999 p.143

<sup>39</sup> As evidenced in the *Esquire* case discussed by Meyerowitz in *Women, Cheesecake and Borderline Material*.

<sup>40</sup> Pin-up artist Alberto Vargas designed several recruitment posters for the American forces SPARS featuring glamorous, beaming, smart yet unmistakably provocative female subjects rendered in Vargas' distinctive style.

being a universally accepted, homogenised or oppressive medium with a comprehensive, universal or coherent ideology.

In the Powolney image Grable *is* glamorised through the use of make-up, through her intricately coiffured pompadour ‘bangs’, high-heeled satin shoes, earrings, charm bracelet and anklet, which one could therefore argue may increase her potential to be objectified and thus rendered passive. However, arguments for the confidence-boosting, empowering potential of make-up can be, and have been made by academics such as Delano<sup>41</sup> and Kirkham<sup>42</sup>. Equally whilst her figure-hugging bathing suit facilitates an overt and flattering physical display, the garment simultaneously links the subject with action, and physical potential, engaging with the Western preoccupation with the healthy, vigorous body, with Hollywood’s obsession with what Heather Addison terms as ‘Body Shaping’ and with what Juliet Gardiner terms as ‘the cult of fitness and fresh air’<sup>43</sup>. As Addison writes in her study ‘Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture’, the era immediately post-World War One fostered

an aesthetic of pure movement...Industrialisation, mechanisation, and mass production produced the systems, the perceptions, the mentality, and the artefacts of the present: the bicycle, the streetcar, the automobile, the airplane, the phonograph, moving pictures, and the telephone.<sup>44</sup>

and prompted an obsession with the human form as the ultimate example of a well-honed machine, perhaps best epitomised in popular synchronised mass physical exercise displays, kaleidoscopic Busby Berkeley musical dance routines, as well as the physical display evident in the ‘health and vitality’ pin-up.

The Powolney image represents the culmination of three previous decades of ‘health and vitality’ pin-ups, photographic studies of spectacular sporting bodies of both sexes, and

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<sup>41</sup> Delano *Making Up For War* (2000)

<sup>42</sup> Kirkham, P. ‘Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up the (Home) Front.’ in Kirkham, P and Thoms, D. (eds) *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> Gardiner, J. *The Thirties: An Intimate History of Britain* (London: Harper Press, 2011) Book sleeve.

<sup>44</sup> Addison, H. *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003) p.12

of Hollywood glamour imagery. As such it is typical of Hollywood's deft negotiation of industry censors The Production Code Administration (PCA) and the Advertising Code Administration (ACA), whereby it was paramount that the representations offered in both Hollywood's films and in their advertising remained relevant and sexy enough to appeal to more moderate adult audiences but still adhered to the PCA or ACA regulation regarding good taste and appropriate subject matter in order to prevent outcry and ultimately external interference such as state censor intervention.<sup>45</sup>

If we consider this in relation to the Powloney image, in this instance we have a film star in a bathing suit, an item of clothing with two functions: as a utilitarian garment in which to swim but also as a glamorous and revealing garment in which to sunbathe, promenade, be seen (and be seen to be attractive). It can therefore legitimately be claimed that as Grable wears a bathing suit in this image, she evokes a whole raft of iconography surrounding health, vitality and vigour and thus wholesomeness. Equally, as I have discussed elsewhere<sup>46</sup>, the cultural associations of physical activity (particularly swimming) with liberty, modernity and empowerment for women throughout the early twentieth century means that there *could* also be an implication of agency offered by the image of Grable in her swimsuit (although these associations are problematized somewhat by her wearing of jewellery and satin heels and her ornate hair style, all of which would most likely impede her in any actual swimming activity).

However, due to the swimsuit's revealing, figure-hugging fit, images of swimsuit-clad subjects do also possess a suggestive appeal, which is clearly deliberately heightened in this

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<sup>45</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the role of the pin-up, particularly during World War Two in debates surrounding film promotion and censorship see Mary Beth Haralovich's 'Film Advertising, the Film Industry, and the Pin-Up: The Industry's Accommodations to Social forces in the 1940s.' in B. Austin (ed.) *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law* v.1 1985.

<sup>46</sup> For further discussions of the role of the swimsuit in challenging censorship code regulation and the swimsuit as an index of female empowerment see Wright, E. 'Spectacular Bodies: The Swimsuit, Censorship and Early Hollywood.' *Sport in History Special Edition*. v.2, 2014, Forthcoming.

instance by the fact that the subject also wears jewellery, satin heels and has an ornate hairstyle. The bathing costume is used here, then, to display the subject's form to its maximum advantage, in a way which offers a level of exposure which could only be replicated through the wearing of lingerie, which the Production Code strictly prohibited. In this instance, then, the garment's associations with the healthy, wholesome activity of swimming means that the image maintains the hint of respectability required for PCA approval.

One other costuming element in the Powolney image warrants further consideration here: Grable's ankle bracelet. In an early sequence in the 1944 film noir *Double Indemnity* (Paramount), both the camera and smitten protagonist Walter are visually drawn to femme fatale Phyllis's 'honey of an anklet'. The adornment itself serves as an index of Phyllis's provocative, alluring, slightly brash and ultimately deadly sexuality. Indeed the function of this particular bodily ornament is precisely to draw deliberate attention to the ankle it adorns, thus giving both Walter and the camera an excuse for their preoccupation with Phyllis's legs. *The Dictionary of Fashion History* describes ankle bracelets as a 20<sup>th</sup> Century fashion, claiming

Although ankle bracelets or chains were worn by performers in earlier periods, it was only in the later 20<sup>th</sup> Century that they became fashionable. Usually one bracelet was worn; often a thin chain in a precious metal; its position on one or other ankle supposedly signalled availability or otherwise, to a potential partner.<sup>47</sup>

Equally, in 1947 *Chain Store Age* (a monthly publication aimed at American retail executives) advised its readers to prepare for a trend towards ankle jewellery;

'Watch ankle chain jewelry! With hemlines dropping and less leg exposed, gals are taking to eye-attracting ankle chains.' (sic)<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Cumming, V, Cunningham, C.W and Cunningham P.E. *The Dictionary of Fashion History*. (London: Berg, 2010) p.5

<sup>48</sup> *Chain Store Age*. Volume 23, Issues #7-12

Here the items' popularity was presumably owing to an attempt by female consumers to counter any potentially 'dowdy' effects of an American trend in lowered hemlines<sup>49</sup> and thus maintain a note of glamour and eroticism in their attire.

That anklets were 'worn by performers in earlier periods' in order to draw attention to a shapely ankle, and that an anklet's 'position on one or other ankle supposedly signalled availability or otherwise, to a potential partner'<sup>50</sup> is also significant as Grable's wearing of such an item could therefore be construed as possessing a particularly sexual signification. When discussing 19<sup>th</sup> century female stage performers Buszek (1999) notes that these women, by nature of their occupation, were assertive and financially independent figures of public femininity who could, therefore, have been the focus of admiration, but, because of their frequent lack of social and cultural capital, combined with their unrepentant public visibility and their frequent reliance upon physical spectacle, were largely perceived as disreputable, morally loose and generally troublesome.

The anklet therefore associates Grable, even if only loosely, with these troublesome performer forbears - actresses, dancers and burlesque queens - very specifically-classed, brazen and therefore potentially problematic types of womanhood which, despite demonstrating female agency<sup>51</sup> and using their supposedly improper femininity in order to call attention to, express, empower and financially support themselves, ultimately lacked in cultural capital and were frequently understood to be challenging, distasteful and self-evidently and problematically sexual.

One final element of the image remains to be discussed: Grable's pose. With her back to her audience, displaying her *derrière* and infamous legs to their maximum advantage, this

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<sup>49</sup> In contrast, in Britain, hemlines rose due to restrictions and fabric rationing, any needless waste of fabric, even pleats and ruffles, was largely considered unpatriotic.

<sup>50</sup> Cumming, V, Cunningham, C.W and Cunningham P.E. *The Dictionary of Fashion History*. (London: Berg. 2010) p.5

<sup>51</sup> See Buszek 'Representing "Awarishness"' pp.141-162

stance could be seen as objectifying or alternatively connoting an agency, attitude and sexual self-confidence because of the subject's direct eye contact (a convention frequently employed in pin-up imagery) which implicates the spectator, seemingly presenting a direct, good-natured and knowing challenge to the spectator – 'so, are you going to come get me?'

Grable's right arm creates a physical barrier which mediates further visual access to her body and whilst the spectator can freely observe much of Grable's form, and despite pin-ups' strongly codified, contrived and static posturing, in turning *away* from her audience and slightly raising her left foot Grable's pose carries an implication of motion, hinting at her potential to *walk away* from her spectator. The implication then is of a female subject who is confident, in control of, and seemingly enjoying the process of mediating just how much of her physical form can actually be viewed by her spectator.

As has been highlighted throughout this thesis, and at various points in the analysis of this particular image, the 'meanings' derived from imagery such as the Powolney pin-up are not fixed, and numerous interpretations, subject to a number of contextual influences, can, will and will have occurred. Therefore readings of this image as a signifier of objectification and disempowerment could just as feasibly be made. But for such an iconic image to be cited so often, particularly when discussing the cultural context of the Second World War, yet its semiotic elements and their potential implications discussed so rarely in any detail can severely limit or, at the other end of the scale, overestimate the contemporaneous cultural currency this image actually possessed. Close textual analysis of this image then allows us to interrogate more closely many of the cultural signifiers amassed and embodied within this text with a view to understanding more closely some of the meanings the text may have elicited within its original context.

### **‘What We Are Fighting For’: Pin-Up and Patriotism**

Given that Grable’s notoriety as a film star, pin-up and cultural icon was cemented during the Second World War, it is not surprising, then, that her persona so frequently invokes a notion of both American-ness and of patriotism and that her exuberance was interpreted as a ‘can-do’ wartime spirit. But what particular factors contributed to this interpretation?

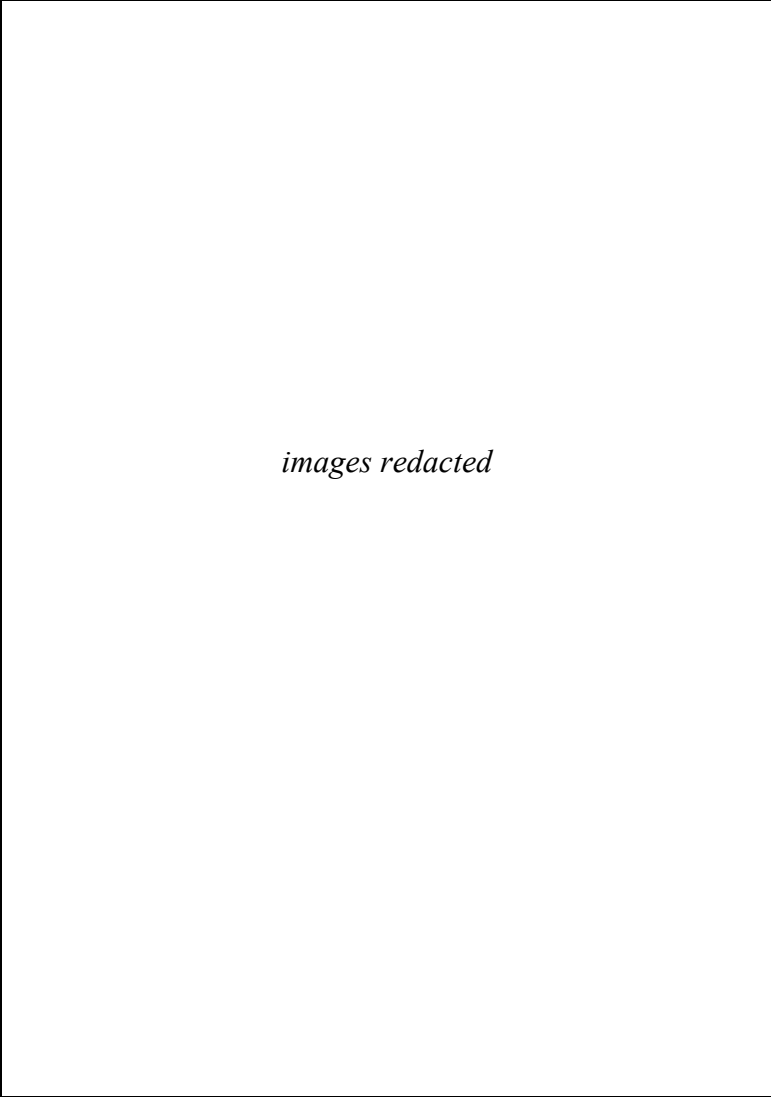
A surfeit of outdoor pin-ups exist of Grable participating in healthy ‘all-American’ pastimes such as baseball, roller skating, gymnastics on the beach, posed by pools or on diving boards. Alternatively Grable is attributed a more overt, and period-specific patriotism in studio-based pin-ups, holding clusters of stars and stripes balloons, in provocative pseudo military uniforms, smiling benignly whilst holding weaponry, or even gamely ‘sparring’ whilst wearing heels and a sequined patriotic star-spangled playsuit with matching boxing gloves.

Meanwhile Grable’s films possess a nostalgic preoccupation with three of the cornerstones of American popular culture; vaudeville, burlesque and the sideshow (see *Tin Pan Alley*, *The Dolly Sisters*, *Footlight Serenade*, *Mother Wore Tights*, *Coney Island* and *Sweet Rosie O’Grady*), therefore marking Grable as American and firmly locating her persona and performances within a specifically American performance tradition. This is combined, in several wartime films, with war themes and patriotic narratives, such as *Footlight Serenade*, *The Dolly Sisters* (set during the World War One) and *Pin Up Girl*<sup>52</sup> to generate a star who was very much the pin-up patriot.

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<sup>52</sup> For example, Buszek discusses the concluding section of the 1944 home front musical *Pin Up Girl*; a sequence which in no way furthers the films’ plot and would appear to serve simply to demonstrate Grable’s credentials as the ultimate patriotic pin-up: ‘A lengthy, military-influenced finale, where Grable seems to divide herself before our eyes into an all-woman corps performing drills – and exposing the similarities between military and Busby Berkeley spectacles lead by Grable herself barking orders in a stern, drill sergeant style. Buszek, M.E. *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality and Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) p.224

One particularly striking convergence of US patriotism, pin-up and Grable's persona can be found in the marketing for the 1945 variety showcase that was *The All-Star Bond Rally* (figure eight). Released on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945, and bombastically billed as 'The greatest entertainment for the greatest cause!' this variety showcase also starred Bob Hope, Vivian Blaine, Jeanne Crain, Bing Crosby, June Haver, Harry James and his orchestra, Harpo Marx, Carmen Miranda and Frank Sinatra. Despite the appearance in this poster of 14 other high-profile stars (several of these also being popular film star pin-ups), in the American 40" x 60" poster and much of the film's promotion, much of the patriotic weight is borne by Grable and her supporting fleet of chorines (termed, in an interesting convergence of sexual



*images redacted*

***Fig. eight:***

*All Star Bond Rally poster  
(USA) 1945*



objectification, chorus line precision and military reference as ‘The Bombardiers’<sup>53</sup>) and it is they who command the most significant portion of this image (the Bombardiers assuming the entire top portion of the poster). If we are in any doubt that Grable is clearly a key draw to this film, popular performers Bing Crosby and Bob Hope both appear to look directly at (and therefore direct the readers’ gaze to) the centrally-placed Grable, who is juxtaposed between the ‘All’ and the ‘Star’ of the film’s title, standing proudly to attention, in a flatteringly cut pseudo-military costume (the only person in the image wearing anything approximating uniform), saluting her allied audience and unabashedly displaying her million-dollar ‘gams.’

Perhaps not surprisingly as the ‘symbol of the kind of woman for whom American men – especially American working-class men – were fighting,’<sup>54</sup> the tone of Grable’s actual routine in this film revue (a song and dance sequence from the 1942 musical *Footlight Serenade*) whereby Grable reassures her thousands of G.I. admirers serving overseas that ‘even though we’re apart – I’ll be marching to a love song – the love song in my heart’), is clearly intended as a symbolic reciprocation of the chivalrous ‘protection’ or at least patronage Grable was currently enjoying as the GI’s pin-up of choice, and as such could once again be seen to further substantiate arguments surrounding this notion of feminine obligation or passivity. However, as will be discussed in chapter three, the characters Grable tended to play, particularly once she reached the height of her success, were most certainly not passive; headstrong, argumentative, aspiring and self-assured, Grable’s specialism was the portrayal of attractive yet unruly women.

Yet this notion of Grable as the glamorous and patriotic incarnation of the all-American girl-next-door is a significant factor within her persona and is clearly evident in

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<sup>53</sup> Who perform a song and dance sequence entitled “I’ll Be Marching to a Love Song” from Grable’s 1942 musical *Footlight Serenade*.

<sup>54</sup> Westbrook ‘I Want a Girl’ p.596

many advertisements such as a March 1944 American advertising tie-up<sup>55</sup> for American Crown Cola and *Pin Up Girl* (figure nine). The Crown Cola ‘taste test’ adverts frequently appeared in US magazines throughout the 1940s and invariably featured prominent film stars in tie-ups with upcoming Hollywood features. These aspirational adverts which habitually emphasised wholesomeness, health and physical activity, as well as a notion of abundance or material comfort also frequently used pin-up iconography and therefore linked their product to the modernity, liberty, leisure and vitality more widely associated with pin-up at large.

Wider notions of democracy and patriotism are also invoked in this particular advertisement (note the GI to the right of the image) but references to the wartime context are

***Fig. nine:***  
*American Crown Cola/ Pin-  
Up Girl advertising tie-up*

*images redacted*

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<sup>55</sup> A ‘cooperative advertising arrangement between merchant and exhibitor.’ Gaines ‘The Queen Christina Tie-Ups’ p.38

absent in Grable's image. Instead, a full body shot, of Grable in a bathing costume, surrounded by beach props, is featured. Conventions familiar to pin-up which are in evidence here include her exposed legs, swimsuit, groomed hair and makeup as well as her contrived static pose – arched back, chest out, raised head.

The advertisement does however simultaneously limit its own potential to objectify, indicating that Grable's appeal here was not only as a sex object. In this instance Grable's shoulders, gusset and the majority of her midriff are covered and a heavy emphasis is placed upon Grable as a personality: her signature is used to the bottom right of the advertisement to indicate her celebrity endorsement as a 'star' consumer as well as a newly married 'modern' working wife and mother (Grable having married heartthrob trumpeter Harry James in July 1943 and had given birth in March 1944). Any invocation of Grable's status as a consumer and therefore as a wife, mother or homemaker suggests a target audience of female rather than male consumers for this advert, and this reading is supported by the common assumption within advertising that as 'the prototype of the modern consumer'<sup>56</sup> it was women, rather than men, who tended to make most purchases, particularly in terms of home goods and foodstuffs.

In conclusion, having become so prominent in American popular culture, Grable became symbolic not only of the United States itself and that nation's culture and values but Hollywood and the American film industry's commitment to the Allied war effort.

Given that the Second World War was the period in which Grable rose to cultural prominence and her persona became established, and that that a significant element of Grable's star appeal was her 'ordinariness', her subsequent association with the armed forces and her role as a patriotic pin-up was virtually inevitable. Consequently Grable and her pin-

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<sup>56</sup> Doane, M.A. 'The Woman's Film: Possession and Address.' Gledhill, C. (ed.) *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI, 1987) p.23

ups have primarily been understood in the intervening decades as morale boosters for the male populace, ‘object[s] of obligation’ who served to remind men of the all-American girl they left back home and remind women of the importance of ‘beauty as duty’.

As the discussion of several contemporaneous, American pin-up examples have demonstrated here, the signification and potential reception of such imagery is much more complex. The close textual analysis of several pin-up images of Grable in circulation in advertisements and movies in wartime America demonstrate how it is possible to make both positive and negative readings of both the Powolney pin-up and of Grable’s pin-up persona at large. Existing readings frequently merge Grable’s film star and pin-up identities into one, ignoring the unruly and combative elements of her star persona and the many roles she played. A significant potential contributory factor in this oversight is the interpretation of Grable and the iconic Powolney image made from the standpoint of a vastly differing cultural and historical context. Examining some of these images and their contexts from a slightly different viewpoint, therefore, allows for a broader range of potential interpretations and permits a closer exploration of other ‘givens’ surrounding Grable, the Powolney image and the pin-up at large. We have begun to examine just how correct the assumption was that the key audience for pin-up imagery during this period was gendered very specifically as male, acknowledging and exploring Grable’s wartime cultural currency, here in her native US whilst simultaneously calling into question the actual ubiquity and cultural significance of the Powolney pin-up during this period, the legend surrounding Grable as the forces pin-up, and the function that the Powolney image played within that legend, as there appears to be a significant chance that the legend was simply studio hyperbole, inadvertently perpetuated by historians due to the snug fit such a legend offers within a larger war metanarrative surrounding ‘beauty as duty’ and women’s sexual obligation.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **'Batty about Betty': Discussing Grable's Appeal in Wartime Britain**

Whilst Grable is frequently invoked in discussions of American wartime experience and she clearly possessed a level of cultural prominence in Britain at this time, how prominent and just how popular she was in Britain during this period and for what reason is harder to determine. So what was this appeal, did it inform the public's reactions to Grable's pin-ups, and if so, how?

Retrospective accounts of wartime Hollywood frequently make mention of Grable as a cultural icon (many filmgoers have posthumously attested to their wartime engagement with the star and her films<sup>1</sup>) and as the previous two chapters have demonstrated, and this upcoming chapter will further suggest, that reference to Grable and her films was made in a wide range of cultural products. She appeared, for example, with a certain amount of regularity in magazines, and she and her films are mentioned (both in flattering and critical terms) by respondents in various wartime and immediately post-war sociological studies of British cinema-going. The regularity with which Grable's name is invoked, both contemporaneously and posthumously, suggests that she was both prominent and popular in wartime Britain. Yet still she is notably absent, even at the height of her fame, from British popularity polls such *Picturegoer's* awards of 1944<sup>2</sup>.

Posthumous discussions of Grable are obviously much more problematic, especially when, for example, Quigley's annual poll of top box-office draws suggests that Grable's

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<sup>1</sup> See for example novelist John Wilcox's childhood war memoirs and his remembrances of Grable as his 'first and lasting love' (Wilcox, J. *Bombs and Betty Grable* (Warwick: Brewin Books, 2010) p.47); or the several mentions of Grable by Stacey's respondents in her 1994 study of female cinema-going in the 40s and 50s (Stacey, J. *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994)).

<sup>2</sup> The top five female stars instead being Greer Garson (21.2%), Margaret Lockwood (16.5%), Ingrid Bergman (10.8%), Ann Sheridan (7.2%) and Rosamund John (6.9%). 'Our Gold Medal Winners', *Picturegoer* 8th July 1944 p.11.

period of greatest box office success was actually in the late war and post-war period<sup>3</sup>, as there is a possibility that a combination of Grable's post-war success and the prominence and perpetuation of the 'most requested wartime pin-up' myth may have subsequently coloured British filmgoer's remembrances of Grable in wartime Britain.

Contemporaneous sources can offer the film historian firmer grounds for consideration. For example, in 1944 Grable's British box-office draw was such that the British cinema industry publication *Kinematograph Weekly* observed

Conspicuous by their absence during the last few weeks, queues were actually in evidence during the run of 20th Century Fox's Technicolor musical 'Pin Up Girl' at theatres in the North and West London release area. The receipts on the Betty Grable starring 'Pin Up Girl'...must surely be interpreted as a glowing tribute from the film-going public to their No. 1 star as recorded by the recent poll of exhibitors all over the world. In the provinces too, 'Pin-Up Girl' is drawing huge crowds wherever it is showing.<sup>4</sup>

As an exhibitors' publication *Kine Weekly's* function was to predict and highlight trends in cinema attendance that were ripe for exploitation. As a result the 'receipts on the Betty Grable starring "Pin Up Girl"' are interpreted here as 'a glowing tribute from the film-going public to their No. 1 star'. However, whilst high attendance at this film most likely does suggest Grable's popularity with audiences, this isn't necessarily entirely the case. A film's star is certainly a significant feature in the selection of a film to attend, but it is not the only one. Other factors such as other local competition (or lack thereof) for the attendee's disposable income, ticket pricing, the quality and clientele of the cinema itself, the attendee's current financial situation (is it the end of the week or month for example, or just after payday?), or even something as basic as weather, as well as factors such as the film's genre, its other stars, and whether it has received positive reviews, are just some of the potential contributory factors in terms of cinema attendance.

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<sup>3</sup> She ranked number 8 in 1942, number 1 in 1943, number 4 in 1944 and 1945, slumped to number 9 in 1946, rose to number 2 in 1947 and 1948, number 7 in 1949, number 4 in 1950 and her last appearance in the top ten was as number 3 in 1951. Prior to this she did not rank.

<sup>4</sup> *Kinematograph Weekly* 7th September, 1944, p.6

What this brief article does highlight however is the question of hidden and conspicuous audiences, which is pertinent here for a number of reasons. It is significant that *Kine Weekly* discusses the popularity of *Pin Up Girl* ‘in the provinces’ as these provincial audiences are frequently overlooked in academic and historical studies of reception and cinema-going, in favour of the audiences in much larger, more culturally influential and affluent cosmopolitan cities such as London, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago. The reason for this oversight is presumably firstly that the cinema going audiences of these much smaller, northern and frequently heavily industrialised British cities such as Liverpool, Hull or Leeds tended to be less affluent, less progressive and were commonly understood to possess less cultural capital than their more cosmopolitan counterparts, and secondly because of the limited or non-existent access to, and availability of, primary materials regarding these audiences and other resources through which such research could be undertaken. The result, as Douglas Gomery notes, is therefore that ‘[that local film history] is a large and hitherto virtually untapped source of original film investigation.’<sup>5</sup> However as an exhibitor’s publication *Kine Weekly*’s financial success was contingent upon its relevance to the multitude of film exhibitors who were trading in Britain at that time; from first-run picture palaces, to flea pits, to metropolitan, small town and neighbourhood cinemas, however considerable or slight their profit margin, and whatever their audience demographic. It is presumably for this reason that the article also demonstrates an awareness of wider, international trends, with a view to emphasising, for its readers, the potentially profitable avenues that were being taken by other exhibitors not only in other parts of the country but further afield, as presumably the ‘Poll of Exhibitors’ referred to is the Quigley’s 1943 survey in which Grable was the top ranking star. In undertaking to indicate and, to an extent,

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<sup>5</sup> Allen, R. C. and Gomery, D. *Film History: Theory and Practice* (Boston, Ma: McGraw Hill, 1985) p.193

scrutinize exhibition trends, *Kine Weekly* reveals more populist tastes, less well represented in publications with a more aspirational and domestic agenda such as *Picturegoer*.

Nor is this the only instance of *Kine Weekly* providing valuable resources for determining reasons for Grable's popularity. In 1943, a year prior to *Pin Up Girl*'s release and *Kine Weekly*'s article upon Grable's popularity in the provinces, Grable, her box-office pull and, in particular, her legs, all constituted enough of a cultural phenomenon within Britain that *Kine Weekly* felt compelled to gently satirize them in a short rhyme:

A feature of the 20th Century was a return to the worship of the Golden Calf,  
And the calf belonged to a beautiful young Goddess called Grable,  
And the boys were batty about Betty,  
And the more they saw of her calf the more gold they brought to the  
box-office altars and so it became more and more golden,  
And the worshippers gave the Hoorays because their Goddess  
already had the 'hips'.<sup>6</sup>

The poem itself discusses Britain's then current preoccupation with 'the Golden Calf' which can be taken to mean 'leg art', a cultural trend alluded to in Orwell's 1939 observation regarding the wide availability and 'large range of papers devoted to the movies and all more or less exploiting women's legs.'<sup>7</sup> As such this poem overtly acknowledges not only Grable's remarkable cultural impact and box office appeal but how her pin-up persona was a key element of that interest. The term 'Golden Calf' also engages with the popular fascination with Hollywood's unique variety of abundance and glamour ('golden calf', 'beautiful young goddess', 'more and more golden') and also with physical culture ('the worship of the golden calf', 'Beautiful young goddess', 'their goddess already had the 'hips') and defines the allure of these cultural trends as part of a seemingly modern phenomena ('a feature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century').

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<sup>6</sup> *Kinematograph Weekly* 11<sup>th</sup> November 1943 p.5

<sup>7</sup> Orwell, G. 'Boy's Weeklies' reprinted in *George Orwell: Selected Essays*. (London: Penguin, 1960) For a more detailed discussion of this source see Chapter One.



Whilst the religious rhetoric used within the piece could be seen to suggest something of false gods<sup>8</sup> ('worship' 'goddess', 'altars'), and manipulation for Hollywood's financial ends, the tone of the piece – its comic use of alliteration and half rhyme ('batty about Betty'), its concluding pun regarding Grable's 'hips', the allusion to Hollywood cinema as a new, and inevitable, form of classicism (with the attendant legitimacy this invokes) and, most importantly, the context in which the poem appears – an exhibitor's medium - makes this highly unlikely. Instead the poem acknowledges that as a product, a star's success is based upon their ability to attract audiences and generate revenue, and therefore the cultural prominence of Grable's 'golden cal[ves]' and the popular 'worship' of them is indicative of Grable's success as a star. Not unlike a religion or a god(dess), a star's 'power' is derived from their being observed, followed or even, as is the case in this instance, 'worship[ped]', and a similar principle is acknowledged here as being applicable to Grable's legs. As this verse recognises, in a bizarre self-perpetuating cycle, it was the notoriety of Grable's legs that actually made her legs all the more notorious ('the more they saw of her calf the more gold they brought to the box office altars and so it became more and more golden'). Interest in Grable's legs generated interest, which in turn, generated further interest, and at every stage the Hollywood machinery nurtured that interest. This was done firstly, and ironically, by celebrating the legs as the very epitome of the average American leg<sup>9</sup>, and secondly by highlighting the act of observing, following or worshipping said legs and therefore provoking further curiosity.

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of 'star-worship', be that good or bad, is not uncommon. As Stephen Gundle and Clino T Castelli note 'in *The Stars*, the French sociologist Edgar Morin argued that, for the audience Hollywood film stars were god-like figures, the worship of whom implied a process of spiritualisation.' Gundle, S and Castelli, C.T. *The Glamour System* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) p.1. Quote is taken from Morin, E. *The Stars* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

<sup>9</sup> 'Betty Grable's legs... have not attained fame by being unusual. They are The Great Average American Legs: straight, perfectly rounded and shaped, but withal judged by the same standards as millions of others.' *Life* 7<sup>th</sup> June 1943, p.82

If we develop Jane Gaines' argument regarding Grable's legs and commodity fetishism further, Grable's cultural and symbolic capital, her legitimacy as a star, and her 'worth' are all asserted by the Fox marketing department through the repeated emphasis upon the monetary 'value' (one million dollars insurance) attributed to Grable's legs. This is not really remarkable in itself – as Richard Dyer asserts<sup>10</sup>, much of Hollywood's discourse fixates upon superlatives; not only monetary excess (the most expensive film, the highest paid star) and the portrayal of visual splendour, but upon stars being the most talented, the most beautiful, the best dancer and so on. It was this 'value' that is intended to legitimate any preoccupation with Grable's legs.

In terms of other potential sources of cultural or symbolic capital there is a considerable possibility that the use of the term 'the Cult of the Golden Calf' was a reference to 'The Cave of the Golden Calf', London's notoriously decadent bohemian basement night club, which opened in 1912 and closed due to bankruptcy in 1914. The venue's patrons included socialites and royalty as well as many of the most famous and respected artists, writers and theorists of the period, and as such its notoriety and cultural cachet extended way beyond the two years it was open. Renowned for its ragtime music and bawdy cabaret, the association of Grable here, however tenuously, with such an avant-garde, sexually liberal establishment with considerable cultural prestige, carries very interesting implications in terms of the wider understanding of both her persona and the characters she played within her films, as we shall discuss later in this chapter.

With regard to Grable's audience and appeal the poem makes two key suppositions. Firstly that it is 'the boys' – namely male troops - in particular who are 'batty about Betty' and secondly, that Grable's physical attractiveness and/or cheesecake charm is central to her appeal. However, as the 'What is a pin-up Girl?' Mass Observation study discussed in

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<sup>10</sup> See Dyer, R. *Stars* (London: BFI, 2007) p.43

chapter one demonstrates, Grable's image elicited positive responses from several of the (somewhat scarce) female participants in the study, and several respondents (both male and female) drew upon elements of Grable's wider star persona when discussing their reasons for selecting or rejecting the Grable image.

Furthermore in Britain, not unlike the US, female cinema attendance was fractionally larger than male and a healthy portion of that 'glowing tribute from the film going public to their No.1 star' must therefore have been from female cinema-goers<sup>11</sup>. It is therefore also apparent that Grable's cultural prominence during this period was not just due to her success with enlisted men as a pin-up (although this is an undeniable element of her star persona) but that she must have also had female fans, and held some source of appeal or resonance for these female fans.<sup>12</sup>

Locating the source of Grable's appeal in any cultural context is obviously somewhat problematic for a range of reasons, not only because there will be as many variations in taste as there are Grable fans, and levels of Grable fandom itself will vary from subject to subject. But from one's current historical standpoint one can retrospectively surmise that the key traits with which Grable has become associated, (identified in chapter one as being her American-ness, her notoriety as a pin-up, her association with the Technicolor musical and the attendant nostalgia for 19<sup>th</sup> Century United States and early US performance traditions with which these films are associated, her glamour, and conversely her 'ordinariness' or 'averageness') must have functioned, at least for some, as the source of her star appeal.

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<sup>11</sup> As most of the service men posted overseas were subject to free film screenings of Hollywood films. As Gaines notes 'Every month features and shorts, along with 4 million books and 10 million magazines, were shipped to the front by Special Services Division on the Armed forces. From 1942 to 1944, 30,000 short subjects and 25,000 features and newsreels were made available to the government for shipping overseas, compliments of the Hollywood studios.' Gaines 'The Showgirl and the Wolf' *Cinema Journal* v20 #1 Fall 1980, p.58

<sup>12</sup> Hoffman and Bailey note 'Grable's main claim to fame lay in her ability to transcend film roles, becoming a phenomenally popular cultural icon during World War II.' Hoffman, F.W and Bailey, W.G. *Arts and Entertainment Fads* (London: Routledge, 1990) p.129

In the introduction to this thesis it was discussed how Dyer's notion of 'extraordinary ordinariness' - a paradox whereby in short Hollywood stars 'live more expensively than the rest of us, but are not essentially transformed by this'<sup>13</sup> - was particularly applicable to Grable's film star persona and how, in line with Dyer's observations on stars at large, Grable's 'wealth and success' was 'seen as serving to isolate certain human qualities' within her<sup>14</sup>. In Grable's case she became 'the peaches and cream incarnation of the [average] American girl.'<sup>15</sup> However within a British cultural context, Grable's glamorous Hollywood associations, her exotic American-ness and the sheer abundance with which she was associated (in her excessive costuming and in the excess of her musical plots), largely precluded her from being perceived by British audiences as an 'ordinary' or 'average' girl-next-door.

For Britain, a nation enduring intense austerity, committed on every front to fighting what was termed 'the people's war', and simultaneously engaging in bitter and protracted internal class war, the discourse surrounding the persona, pin-ups and films of this singularly American star reveal much about the anxieties surrounding class, taste and most importantly appropriate female sexuality occurring more widely in wartime Britain.

If 'Grable's legs were celebrated less for their exceptional beauty than for their approximation to the 'average'<sup>16</sup> but, as studio hyperbole claims, they were simultaneously insured with Lloyds of London for one million dollars, then what did the term 'average' actually imply in relation to Grable?

It would seem that Grable's apparent 'average-ness' or 'ordinariness' performed a metonymic function for her audiences, with this being the defining quality cited in many histories, academic and anecdotal, as the key reason for her popularity. So then, did the

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<sup>13</sup> Dyer *Stars* p.43

<sup>14</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Rosen, M. *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (London: Peter Owen, 1973) p.208

<sup>16</sup> Westbrook, R.B. "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James': American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II" in *American Quarterly* v.42 #4 Dec 1990, p.599

combination of the supposed average US ‘girl-next-door’ who happened to be portrayed through the cinema medium (with all its glamorous and exotic Hollywood implications) mean then that any ‘glamour’ Grable possessed (or a more egalitarian form of glamour) could be vicariously experienced by cinema fans *through* their consumption of Grable?<sup>17</sup> This would certainly seem to be the suggestion in Sicherman and Hird-Green’s anthology of ‘Notable American Women’ of the modern period:

girls with average talent could identify with [Grable]. As one writer observed... ‘Betty represents a daydream that might come true.’<sup>18</sup>

If we consider how Grable posits *herself*, many direct Grable quotes allude to her ‘ordinariness’ and even her lowbrow appeal, playing down the qualities that actually made her exceptional, and emphasising her tendency towards the ‘showy’ the ‘tasteless’ or the ‘crass’. It should also be noted that these are attributes which are frequently assigned to representations or groups of little economic, social or cultural capital, such as sexualized, working-class and female. It would appear, then, that despite the unusual economic situation Grable found herself in (in that whilst she was supposedly ‘average’ she was, for a brief period in the 1940s, the best paid female film star in the world), Grable continued to ascribe to the notion that as an *ideologically* working-class woman she therefore inherently lacked in cultural ‘worth’ or capital.<sup>19</sup> Grable’s own self-appraisal can be encapsulated in the numerous variations on these three regularly cited quotes:

1. “I’m a song and dance girl. I can act enough to get by. But that’s the limit of my talents.”
2. “It’s loud, it’s cheap, and it’s gaudy. It’s like everything I’ve ever done - I LOVE IT!”

<sup>17</sup> This would certainly seem to be reflected in responses given to Stacey in her retrospective reception study of female cinemagoers of the 40’s and 50’s: ‘how could a young girl *not* want to look like that?’ Stacey *Stargazing* p.152

<sup>18</sup> Sicherman, B and Hird-Green, C. *Notable American Women* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press) p.290. Quote taken from ‘Living The Daydream’ *Time* 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1948, p.40

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, as Beverley Skeggs notes in her study of respectability and the working class, respectability ‘would not be something to desire, to prove and to achieve, if it had not been seen to be a property of ‘others’, [i.e. the middle and upper classes] those who were valued and legitimated.’ Skeggs, B. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. (London: Sage, 1997) p.1

3. “There are two reasons why I'm in show business, and I'm standing on both of them.”

Given the propensity by studio marketing departments for embellishment, it is possible that these quotes were never even uttered by Grable, but the regularity with which sentiments to this effect appear, both in contemporaneous discussions and retrospective appraisals of her demonstrates that they have nonetheless contributed to Grable folklore. Each quote deliberately undercuts Grable's talent, commitment and popularity, typecasting her as tasteless or lowbrow ('loud', 'cheap', 'gaudy'), and appear to personally affirm Richard Schickel's snide terming of her as 'democratic womanhood's lowest common denominator.'<sup>20</sup> These statements could be offered as evidence of Grable's modesty (as Westbrook states 'above all it was Grable's self-effacing modesty that recommended her to women'<sup>21</sup>) or of her awareness of her lack of status or prestige particularly amongst individuals who possess greater levels of cultural capital. So whilst some cinemagoers and critics saw the somewhat synthetic Hollywood glamour that Grable portrayed as 'gaudy' and 'cheap', as a star who, 'play[ed] h[er]self'... project[ing her] own personality in simple situations... to millions of movie-goers,<sup>22</sup> others, such as two American subjects in the 1955 American study 'Popular Hero Symbols and Audience Gratifications' found cause to empathise:

“I like Betty Grable very much. She's a nice person. I think she'd make a very good family life too. Her family life is first to her, then her career.”<sup>23</sup>

“She has married a very fine man and they are getting along well; they have a good home life”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Schickel R *The Stars* (NY: Bonanza Books, 1962) p.217

<sup>21</sup> Westbrook 'I Want a Girl' p.605

<sup>22</sup> Wilson G.B. 'Levels of Achievement in Acting' in *Educational Theatre Journal* v.3 #3, October 1951, p.232

<sup>23</sup> Elkin, F (1955) 'Popular Hero Symbols and Audience Gratifications' in *Journal of Educational Sociology* v.29 #3, Nov 1955, p.102

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p.104

However, these are American responses, gained from experiences within an American context. We shall now ask how prominent was Grable in Britain, then, and what might have been the source of her appeal for British fans?

### **‘An American Film of the Betty Grable Type’: Taste, Class and British Responses to Grable**

The recurring issues of class, taste and nationality, discussed previously in chapter one, are once again very much to the fore in the numerous mentions of Grable that appear throughout J.P Mayer’s two sociological studies of British cinema-going undertaken shortly after World War Two.

Drawing on testimony from readers of British publication *Picturegoer* who responded to an advert placed in the magazine requesting information on their film preferences, neither the 1946 *Sociology of Film* nor the 1948 *British Cinemas and Their Audiences* are without their problems: namely Mayer’s inappropriate cherry-picking of responses to support his Left-wing agenda surrounding American popular culture and the notion of false consciousness. Not surprisingly, then, Grable emerges most notably in participants statements of rejection, derision, visceral dislike, and sometimes even disgust. Examples of her mention include the response of a 24 year old female stenographer who believes ‘Betty Grable, [Dorothy] Lamour and Carmen Miranda have a certain “brassiness” which has no appeal... being rather “cheap” in my estimation.’<sup>25</sup>

Similarly a 24 year old male who, engaging with the negative connotations of Grable’s ‘ordinariness’, states that he also dislikes ‘the cheapness of Betty Grable, Betty Hutton, etc.’ and that he hates ‘Technicolor musicals [which] are the most boring films with nine times out of ten no story, in fact nothing but hideously painted lips.’<sup>26</sup> The apparent lack

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<sup>25</sup> Mayer, J.P. (1948). *British Cinemas and Their Audiences*. (London: Dennis Dobson, 1948). p.216.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p.117

of taste, value and of cultural capital ('cheapness', 'boring') is raised again here with claims being made that in films such as Technicolor musicals feminine bodily display is privileged over narrative strength or skillful performance, and an accusation is made as to a lack of artistry, skill or worth. This was not an uncommon complaint. Another respondent claimed that such films were 'Hash... showing neither talent in singing, acting, nor setting, merely a frame for a pair of legs, or more nude body', before taking pains to ensure that they assert their difference in taste and their own social identity, in line with Bourdieu's assertion that 'social identity is defined and asserted through difference'<sup>27</sup>, by concluding 'But everyone to their taste.'<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, a 14 year old female respondent lodges complaints against *two* Grable vehicles and another complaint against fellow blonde Betty Hutton's films;

As an example of the type of film I do not like I'd say *Pin-Up Girl*, *Sweet Rosie O'Grady*, *Incendiary Blonde*. Some of the songs were passably good but the story spoilt the film, it was hopelessly weak, and at times tailed off altogether, while everyone in the film apparently forgot that there was more to acting a part in a film than singing, dancing and giving an undoubtedly pleasant display of legs.<sup>29</sup>

Whilst a 16 year old production clerk who loves *Millions Like Us* (1943) and *Love Story* (1944) (both British films, about British characters, starring notable and respected British performers) finds 'Betty Grable... to be the film star I cannot bear, and I think her pictures are awful. I have only seen one of them but that was enough.'<sup>30</sup> This is coupled with a (perhaps somewhat unfair) critique of such films' divergence from any kind of realist framework ('The American film of the Betty Grable type makes me feel really sick chiefly because it is so false'<sup>31</sup>).

<sup>27</sup> Bourdieu, P. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984) p.172

<sup>28</sup> Mayer *British Cinemas* p.237

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p.159

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p.170

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* p.178. Equally, Harper and Porter note that male respondents to the 1950 Mass Observation study from which their article stemmed, displayed a distinct preference for "realist or at the least 'quality films. They could thus display their broader cultural competence and perhaps distinguish themselves from others with lowbrow and low-status tastes.' See Harper, S. and Porter, V. 'Moved to Tears: Weeping in the Cinema in Post-War Britain.' *Screen* v.37 #2, Autumn 1996, p.155



The formulaic nature of Grable's films was a commonly-voiced complaint, frequently proffered by respondents as evidence of the lowbrow nature of a 'certain type' of Hollywood product and the 'certain type of filmgoer' who watched them;

I dislike the Betty Grable musicals that seem to rely on legs, scanty clothes and beautiful girls for their popularity. I admit that these type of films are good entertainment value for a certain type of filmgoer but, in my opinion only about ten per cent of the stars in these films have any acting ability.<sup>32</sup>

Another respondent even goes as far as to associate the typical Grable protagonist with contemporary prostitutes, drawing upon debates in wider culture surrounding glossy lowbrow popular entertainment and mental and moral degeneracy:

I dislike intensely films like ...*Coney Island*...[Films whose] heroines are almost always the type of woman seen pacing either Piccadilly or Lime Street in Liverpool. I imagine these films please only the unintelligent. I may be wrong!''<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, one female respondent in Mayer's 1946 study makes another somewhat condescending observation:

I have been going to the cinema since about 1930. With the help of the *Picturegoer* I have chosen the more or less worthwhile films but as yet they have failed to influence me in any way. The cinema has the power to influence people. Of that one is sure. There are so many Betty Grable's and Rita Hayworth's trotting about.<sup>34</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that those who *do* like Grable and may be perceived to be 'trotting about', supposedly unquestioningly emulating either her or Hayworth's style rather than developing their own, are often defensive and frequently attempt to justify their 'guilty' admittance of enjoyment. For example one respondent notes:

Then came the Betty Grable musicals, which I still enjoy when I see them, but I have since learned to appreciate such films as *Random Harvest*, *Mrs. Miniver* and recently *Since You Went Away*.<sup>35</sup>

We see expressed here an implicit idea of this 21 year old cinemagoer's 'learned' development of taste, discrimination between films, and the politics of distinction, over time,

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<sup>32</sup> Mayer *British Cinemas* p.172

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p.173

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p.188

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p.66

but still Grable's 'musicolour' appeal remains. Here the respondent demonstrates an awareness of what constitutes a legitimate and an illegitimate media text, and shame is expressed here at the enjoyment of the 'base' pleasures offered by such a lowbrow product, quite possibly because the respondent is aware that her response will form part of an 'academic' study undertaken, presumably, by scholars who are generally assumed to possess a greater level of cultural capital.

Nonetheless, there were a few unrepentant statements of admiration in the Mayer survey, including the schoolboy respondent who invokes both the question of Grable's class status and his personal maturation in his chivalrous defence of the star: 'Now I am older my idol is Betty Grable and although some people say she's common, I do not agree with them.'<sup>36</sup> Or the 15 year old girl who definitively states that 'The type of film I like best is the American song and dance film, and I like Betty Grable's films most of all.'<sup>37</sup> It is a shame here that neither respondents have elaborated, giving reasons for their preferences but it is notable in the first example that the term 'common' to describe Grable is specifically rejected and the term 'idol' invoked in an attempt to re-ascribe the star with value as an object worthy of worship. Meanwhile, in the second example, one can only assume that it is precisely the song and dance format, the energy and possibly even the excess of these 'American song and dance films', that appeals and that a 'Betty Grable film' is understood, by this respondent at least, to be the finest embodiment of such a film.

Grable's films also get positive responses in Mass Observation questioning in a 1944 study, including those from older, female subjects, providing further evidence that it might not be just 'the boys' who were 'batty' about Betty's films, and that their appeal was also not limited to those with younger, supposedly less developed or discriminating tastes. Among these respondents was a 43-year-old female newsagent, from Barry, Wales, who said that

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p.32

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p.168

Grable's 1943 musical *Coney Island* was 'typically Hollywood but...I enjoyed it particularly for its pleasant music and colour photography.'<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, a 41-year-old housewife and clerk from Sheffield singled out the Grable vehicle *Springtime in the Rockies* as exemplary escapist fare, offering superb 'light entertainment...it just took us away from the blackout and such for an hour or so.'<sup>39</sup> These sentiments surrounding the morale-boosting value of the 'musicolours' [sic] in which Grable appeared were echoed two years later in a reader's letter published in a *Woman's Weekly* feature entitled 'Your Views on Films'<sup>40</sup> from Margaret E. Emberson, of Leeds, who attended the cinema 'to escape the dreariness of everyday life [through a] light-entertainment type of picture such as [1945 Grable musical] *Diamond Horseshoe*.'<sup>41</sup>

A year later, in a brief 1947 article on his film *Brief Encounter* for *The Penguin Film Review*<sup>42</sup>, British director David Lean made explicit the commonly understood link between Grable and escapism. Comparing British cinema to its American counterpart and invoking notions of artifice versus reality, integrity versus fraudulence and artistry versus formula, Lean criticised Hollywood's widespread commitment to the principle that 'the only criterion of success is box-office' and its propensity to 'box-office formula'. Correspondingly he lamented the British public's lack of interest in indigenous cinema or films about 'real',<sup>43</sup> 'adult problems'<sup>44</sup> and proposed a reason for their partiality for the 'American product'; remarking that filmgoers

go to the movies as an escape from reality. Big studio executives know this, and have provided a liberal diet of saccharin and silver linings.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Richards, J. and Sheridan, D. *Mass-Observation at the Movies*. (London: Routledge, 1987) p.272

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p.288

<sup>40</sup> *Woman's Weekly* 8th March, 1946, p.5

<sup>41</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Lean, D. 'Brief Encounter' *The Penguin Film Review*. (London: Penguin, 1947) pp.27-35

<sup>43</sup> Lean p.30

<sup>44</sup> Lean p. 27

<sup>45</sup> *op cit.*

Lean's article is valuable for the way he acknowledges that cinemagoers were keenly aware that the films they watched were frivolous and escapist and that they enjoyed these films precisely *because* of their frivolity and escapism, but even more noteworthy is the example he uses to epitomise Hollywood's lure. Whilst cinemagoers could watch 'real' films about 'adult problems':

There's that other film up the road with Betty Grable, Tyrone Power, four bands and Technicolor. And life is very drab. I see their point.<sup>46</sup>

The use of Grable as an example here demonstrates how her repeated performances within 'American song and dance films'<sup>47</sup> had resulted in her becoming commonly understood as a metonym (along with fellow matinee idol Tyrone Power, big bands and Technicolor) for the musical genre and big budget Hollywood cinema at large<sup>48</sup> and how that function as a metonym had contributed to the notion that, like the product in which she so frequently appeared, Grable was glossy, trivial, clichéd and lowbrow.

Grable also features significantly in subsequent retrospective studies of audience preferences during the 1940s. Her name is frequently invoked, and much less apologetically than in Mayer's research, in Jackie Stacey's 1994 work on film fandom, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. In this study, just as at the time, alongside the mentions of blackout and the dreariness of everyday life, Grable's power as a star continues to be understood in terms of a wartime and immediate post-war context of general deprivation and austerity, and again as an effective morale booster:

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p.28

<sup>47</sup> See previously discussed response by 15 year old female respondent in Mayer *British Cinemas* p.168

<sup>48</sup> A number of Mayer's respondents, discussed earlier in this section, identify a Grable film formula which is fundamentally linked to broader understandings of her star persona and of her as the epitome of Hollywood excess: 'The type of film I like best is the American song and dance film, and I like Betty Grable's films most of all' (Mayer *British cinemas* p.168), 'the Betty Grable musicolours' (*ibid* p.66), 'the Betty Grable musicals that... rely on legs, scanty clothes and beautiful girls for their popularity' (*ibid* p.172) and 'Betty Grable [is]... the film star I cannot bear, and I think her pictures are awful. I have only seen one of them but that was enough.' *ibid* p.170

Betty Grable was my favourite because of her clothes (ours were rationed), glamorous locations (shelters for us) and handsome escorts (ours were in the forces). We were living such a different life - this was the stuff dreams were made of.<sup>49</sup>

Quotes in a similar vein regarding Grable, her films and her costuming are not uncommon and can be found with relative ease. For example, Jon Savage cites a wartime teenage Londoner who remembers

There was this great magic about America. It was to do with the films – we used to go to the pictures three times a week. We were so drab and it was another world, so glossy and clean. With picket fences and pretty white houses and Betty Grables and they all had lovely clothes<sup>50</sup>

Whilst one respondent in Mayer's *Sociology of Film* states

You asked do films ever influence your life. Well I think that they do especially technicolored films.... Nowadays give any girl the chance to wear any of the modern clothes that you see on the films... In *Pin Up Girl* Betty Grable wore a nice cream lace dresse... and a smart white suite... Of course you imagine yourself in them so much more if the film is in technicolor.<sup>51</sup> (sic)

Somewhat tellingly, one of Mayer's 1948 respondents observes of their trips to the cinema

I find that after a film that I have enjoyed very much, that has many beautiful glamour girls in it I feel irritable and want something better out of life – I try not to be irritable.<sup>52</sup>

Qualities such as exuberance and a glamorous appearance, which have in several instances attracted derision as indicators of cheapness, inappropriateness or excess, are given a much more sympathetic hearing by respondents in the above quotes and more generally in Stacey's study, particularly in the accounts of the respondents Pam Gray ('my favourite female star was Betty Grable. The songs she sang in the film, I would try to remember, I would sing and dance all the way home'<sup>53</sup>) Betty Cunningham ('In the 40s it was Betty Grable for me, I loved musicals – she was so bubbly, so full of life it took you out of yourself, you could bury

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<sup>49</sup> Stacey *Stargazing* p.111

<sup>50</sup> Savage, J. *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875-1945*. (London: Pimlico, 2007) p.418

<sup>51</sup> Mayer, J.P. *Sociology of Film: Studies and Documents* (London: Faber, 1946) p.236

<sup>52</sup> Mayer *British Cinemas* p.36. Similarly another respondent in that same study states 'Films have a great influence upon me. I find myself trying to be original in my method of attire, and copy Hollywood beauty 'tips' when using make-up... the desire to become an actress is still prevalent and my interest in drama has increased Thus I have become rather dissatisfied with my present existence...' *ibid.* p.51

<sup>53</sup> Stacey *Stargazing* p.164

yourself in her parts'<sup>54</sup>) and Shelia Wright ('And of course her [Betty Grable's] clothes – how could a young girl not want to look like that?'<sup>55</sup>).

Furthermore, consideration of Grable's flamboyant costuming and, to an extent, the retrospective settings of her nostalgic musicals in light of some of the conclusions drawn in Sue Harper's exploration of the visually ostentatious Gainsborough melodramas, made between 1943 and 1946, is also particularly fruitful here. Although the Gainsborough historical film cycle was hugely popular, the films within it were frequently derided as lowbrow women's fayre<sup>56</sup>, due in no small part to Gainsborough's signature use of visual excess in costuming and mise-en-scène as well as performance. Harper details how these films' formula of '(idiosyncratic) historicized décor, but not a historicized sexuality'<sup>57</sup> presented a 'non-verbal, 'unconscious' part of [the films'] discourse'<sup>58</sup> and generating historical texts that were not *authentically* historical in terms of their level of visual accuracy<sup>59</sup> but were intended as modern tales to be vicariously enjoyed as 'site[s] of sensual pleasure'<sup>60</sup> for their own sakes;

research indicates that the audience preferring costume melodrama was predominantly female and working class. Records of contemporary responses to these films suggest that the style of costume was a very important factor in audience enjoyment<sup>61</sup>

Cinema attendees looking for greater levels of historical accuracy and a reduced level of melodrama in terms of performance were not the intended audience for such a film cycle.

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<sup>54</sup> Stacey, J. 'Feminine Fascinations: A Question of Identification?' Marshall, P. D. (ed.) *The Celebrity Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006) p.267

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p.152

<sup>56</sup> As Harper notes, the Gainsborough melodrama's audience 'was specifically female, and the films received unparalleled critical opprobrium since they did not conform to the criterion of 'good taste. Predictably, their lack of quality is related by critics to their low-status audience.' Harper, S. 'Historical Pleasures.' Gledhill, C. (ed). *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. (London: BFI, 1987) p.167

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p.180

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p.182

<sup>59</sup> Harper offers the following description of the signature Gainsborough visual style; 'a Jacobean door, a Baroque candleholder, an Elizabethan canopied bed, a Puritan bible, a medieval fire-basket[which] are combined to form an unpredictable and dense visual texture. The past is signified not as a casual, linear structure, but as a chaotic amalgam – an opened cache of objects with uncertain meaning but available 'beauty''. *ibid.* p.180

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p.181

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p.182

Postulating upon reasons why costuming may constitute such a significant element of the audiences enjoyment of such texts, Harper notes that the wartime context of austerity, shortage and rationing in which audiences viewed these films was key;

Spurning the enthusiasm of the fashion writers [and wider popular culture] for simplicity and economy of means [in terms of costuming], the female population clearly felt unhappy about its sartorial conditions...We may conclude, then, that one reason for the [Gainsborough] cycle's popularity was its representation, through 'costume narrative', of a female sexuality denied expression through conventional signifying systems.<sup>62</sup>

Even a cursory recap of the positive audience responses to Grable noted previously in this chapter ('how could a young girl not want to look like that?', 'Betty Grable was my favourite because of her clothes... glamorous locations... and handsome escorts', 'Betty Grable wore a nice cream lace dresse... and a smart white suite... Of course you imagine yourself in them so much more if the film is in Technicolor' (sic), 'lovely clothes', and perhaps most tellingly; 'after a film that I have enjoyed very much, that has many beautiful glamour girls in it I... want something better out of life') reveals that, as with the *mise-en-scène* and the female characters in the Gainsborough melodramas, the frequently gaudy visual excess which Grable's films often displayed was something in which Grable fans could, and *did* revel, and for a number of reasons.

It is also important to note here that, as Harper observes, the costuming in Gainsborough's melodramas works to deliberately 'foreground sexual difference', similarly Grable's extravagant costuming also frequently worked to emphasise and perpetuate either the 'uncomplicated girlishness' noted by Rosen<sup>63</sup> (gleaming cherries in her hair, gingham dresses, ruffles, bows, brightly-coloured costumes) or the showgirl element of her star persona (rhinestones, feathers, ruffles, fringing, lace, corseting, bustles). The result was therefore a grotesque, exaggerated hyperfemininity which bordered almost on drag and was

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p.187-188

<sup>63</sup> Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.208-209

of a kind similar to that which, when utilized by other actresses, specifically those whose personas have come to be more strongly associated with independence and willfulness, and have since be claimed as ‘feminist’ stars, has subsequently been read as a political statement about the construction of gender.<sup>64</sup>

Not that it is being claimed here that Grable, her wardrobe department, or her studio were making such statements through Grable’s costuming and appearance in her films. But then nor can (nor does) Martin Shingler claim to know definitively what Bette Davis’ political intent was when she portrayed the grotesquely feminine character Fanny Skeffington in *Mr Skeffington* (Warner Bros, 1944). What can, however, be surmised here is that several women’s responses noted above specifically remark upon and thus demonstrate an active engagement with and appreciation of Grable’s costuming; the ability it had to impress, to empower, to inspire and at times make subjects dissatisfied with *their* lot. In short, Grable and the films in which she starred, when they were liked, appear to have been frequently liked not for their realism, but precisely for their ability to encourage and arouse her audiences’ most excessive fantasies.

### **‘Wot’s She Got that I Ain’t Got?’: ‘Ordinariness,’ Excess and the Marketing of Grable**

How then was Grable marketed to British audiences? Also how significant was her ‘ordinariness’ and conversely, the excess associated with both her costuming and her films in selling Grable’s persona and films? Is the process of active engagement with and negotiation of Grable’s image by female audience members demonstrated throughout the previous two chapters explicitly or repeatedly acknowledged in media representations of Grable? If so how is this acknowledged within promotional and other extra textual materials?

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<sup>64</sup> For a detailed discussion of exaggerated feminine attire combined with a grossly exaggerated performance of femininity for subversive ends, see Shingler, M. ‘Masquerade or Drag? Bette Davis and the Ambiguities of Gender.’ *Screen* v.36 #3 Autumn 1995, pp.179-192



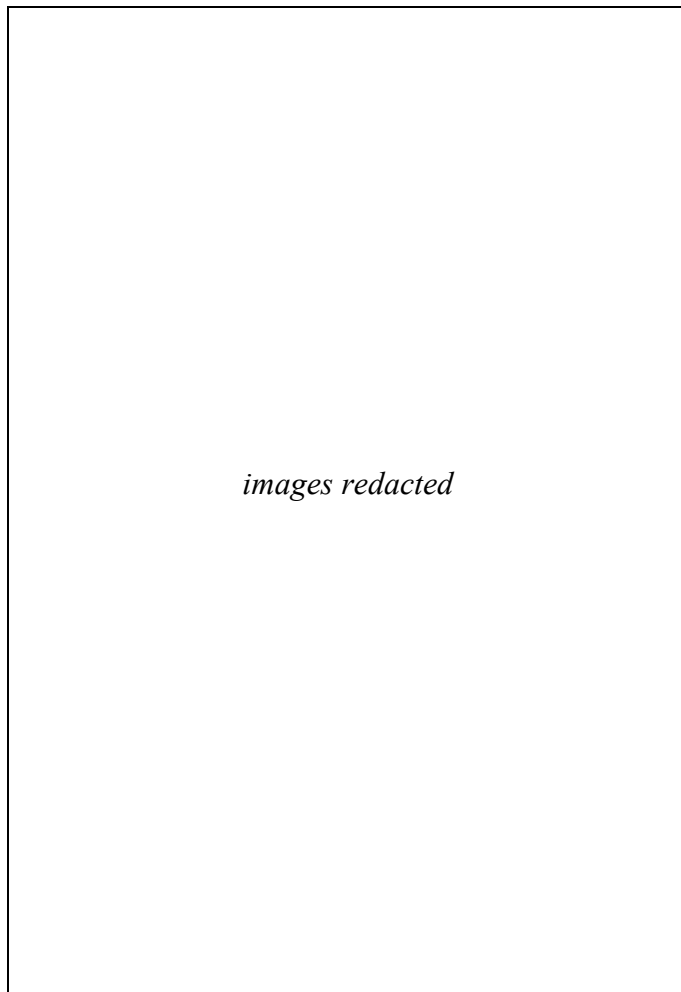
Two key sources are crucial here: a double page advertisement for 1943 Grable musical *Sweet Rosie O'Grady* (Figure Ten) in British cinema trade publication *KineWeekly*<sup>65</sup> and a contemporaneous comic postcard by artist J.L Bryson of Penrith. The *Kine Weekly* advertisement features a cheesecake illustration of Grable, 'pinned-up' on a wall. Whilst this is most likely intended to suggest the wall of a picture house exhibiting the *Sweet Rosie O'Grady* movie, the brick wall on which this image is pasted surely suggests a more backstreet location, the peeling poster itself being strongly reminiscent of titillating imagery used to publicise performers in the low class American burlesque or 'grind' houses, or even alluding to the more 'adult' variety theatres (such as London's notorious Windmill Theatre, with which *Picture Post* was so fascinated) Grable is therefore associated here not only with sexualized performance modes but also with working-class locales, pastimes and in turn, audiences. The peeling poster and the brick wall, conversely suggesting a certain absence of glamour whilst the vivid yellow background and Grable's extravagant costume stand in stark contrast to the children's drab clothes and Britain's austere cultural context at large.

Readers are prompted to perceive Grable's poster image as desirable by a tagline, directly below the pin-up image (presumably the thoughts of the love-struck ragamuffin on the right) 'What a girl... and what a musical!', whilst to the young boy's left, his indignant female companion, presumably his sweetheart, also looks Grable over and angrily asks 'What's she got that I ain't got?'

The *Sweet Rosie O'Grady* advertisement supposes a prior awareness of the pin-up form, trading explicitly upon Grable's status and identity as a distinctive cultural icon within Britain, upon the ubiquity of her star image, and on her then current notoriety as the popular

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<sup>65</sup> *Kinematograph Weekly* 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1943, pp.8-9



**Fig. Ten:** Two page Kine Weekly advertisement for *Sweet Rosie O'Grady* (1943)

and well established epitome of the film star pin-up. By representing Grable as a separate pin-up image *within* the advertisement, the advertisement itself engages with Grable's star persona *outside* of *Sweet Rosie O'Grady* by overtly referencing (and simultaneously both normalising and encouraging) the act of viewing Grable not only as a star but also *as* a 'pin-up'. Here gentle humour is derived from the young male subject's roving gaze, which is directed towards Grable rather than his young girlfriend, who, in a Lacanian act of narcissistic identification, also feels compelled to gaze upon the Grable pin-up to determine how *she* measures up to this adult feminine ideal.

Grable's prestige and her notoriety as the ultimate embodiment of the Hollywood pin-up ideal is further emphasised by the young boys' exclamation 'what a girl!' (use of the term

‘girl’ not only encouraging further comparisons to the actual girl in the image whilst also emphasising Grable’s vivacity – an essential pin-up element) and whilst one might reasonably presume that the ‘girl’ referred to, is not the actual girl stood next to him, but the adult character Rosie O’Grady pictured in the pin-up poster (Grable is pictured in costume and therefore ‘in character’), in a deliberate blurring of star and character, it is the name ‘Betty Grable’ rather than ‘Rosie O’Grady’ that appears next to her representation.

The bill poster image within the advertisement is recognisable as Grable, her name is prominently placed and it is of note that neither the poster, nor the advertisement makes reference to any of Grable’s *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* co-stars; indicating Grable’s box office power in Britain at that time. In fact such was Grable’s cultural currency around this time that shortly after this advertisement, (8<sup>th</sup> January, 1944) the British magazine *Picture Post* were moved to use a demure head-and-shoulder studio portrait as its cover image, with the attached tagline ‘The most looked at face of 1943 - Betty Grable, star of *Coney Island* and *Sweet Rosie O’Grady*’ (Figure Eleven).

The *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* poster itself tells us little about the film’s narrative (demonstrating how crucial Grable’s star power was to the film’s marketing strategy) but one might assume that *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* will run to the anticipated Grable musical formula; a light, nostalgic, romantic comedy in which Grable’s character will almost invariably be feisty, earnest and often intent on social mobility through either hard work or through marriage, that she will get into ‘comic’ scrapes, or into a ‘duel of wit and words.’<sup>66</sup> with her male co-star, often attempting to ‘score points’ against them and that it is with the male character with whom she fights the most, that she will, by the end of the film, have fallen in love.

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<sup>66</sup> ‘London Trade Show’ *Kinematograph Weekly* 4<sup>th</sup> November, 1943, p.6 (review of *Sweet Rosie O’Grady*)

In addition, this piece of publicity engages with the contemporaneous politics of female wartime sexual obligation as well as those of the spectatorial gaze. Its premise being that the magazine reader, gazes upon a young, female subject, who in turn gazes upon Grable. As the viewer is directed to consider ‘what a girl’ Grable is, one might presume that the poster directly privileges a male audience, whilst female readers, like the irate young girl on the left of the image, are expected merely to compare how short they fall of the feminine ideal that Grable’s poster image so self-assuredly embodies. But whilst the young girl in the advertisement may, at first glance, seem disempowered, humour is gained from the fact that the male subject is still just a boy and would therefore not be ‘man’ enough for Grable (the only adult in this configuration) anyway.

The two young subjects could also be perceived as crude representations of Hollywood’s supposedly infantile audience, seduced by the Hollywood machine and by Grable’s star persona. That they are adolescent, whilst Grable is a sexually mature woman with all the physical and social attributes that this brings, could be seen as indicative of what many saw as the potentially exploitative power dynamic in place between Hollywood and its audiences or the notion of the imperiled, infantile spectator immersed within cinema’s fantasy world and in need of protection from a corrupting media.

As Gillian Swanson, Carol Dyhouse and Jon Savage all claim, and as has been discussed in the introduction to this thesis; during the war era shifts in Britain<sup>67</sup> surrounding class, gender and sexual behaviour, both instigated and accelerated by the war<sup>68</sup>, lead to a

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<sup>67</sup> Although, concerns regarding youth behaviour and popular culture were certainly not specific to Britain and British culture; concerns about the conduct of youngsters in other countries such as the US, France and Germany have been documented at length by Savage *Teenage* passim. Alternatively for British and American examples see Dyhouse, C. *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women*. (London: Zed Books, 2013) or Swanson, G. “‘So Much Money and So Little to Spend it On’: Morale, Consumption and Sexuality’ Gledhill, C and Swanson, G. (eds.) *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) pp.70-90

<sup>68</sup> For an intimate and authoritative discussion of many of these cultural phenomena in wartime Britain, including the rising rates in marriage, divorce, STD’s, births out of wedlock and divorce and concerns surrounding teenage delinquency and the breakdown of ‘the family’ during the war, see Costello, J. *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45*. (London: Collins, 1985)

moderate rise in juvenile delinquency<sup>69</sup> and a heightened preoccupation with the control and containment of unacceptable, deviant or even threatening behaviour. Perhaps not surprisingly, as a figure whose ‘relationship to femininity has been produced [often by the middle-classes] through recourse to vulgarity’,<sup>70</sup> the young, particularly working-class female was targeted as cause for potential concern, lest she become the troublesome folk devil figure<sup>71</sup> of the ‘good time girl’:

The good time girl was ‘no better than she ought to be’. She had probably had her head turned by watching too many Hollywood movies. She was likely to wear cosmetics and cheap perfume, and to dream of owning a fur coat. With the outbreak of war in 1939 the kind of anxieties around girl’s behaviour with servicemen which had been evident during the previous world war resurfaced. Posters warned of peroxide-blondie harpies preying on soldiers for favours. There was widespread concern about ‘venereal disease’ (VD) reaching epidemic proportions in the armed forces. When American servicemen arrived in Britain, anxieties intensified and acquired another dimension. Would English girls throw themselves at well-fed and healthy bodied American GIs with good teeth? Would they trade their virtue for nylons and chewing gum?<sup>72</sup>

Working-class females were therefore targeted as ‘a prime object of research and discussion as well as the focus for campaigns of sexual management.’<sup>73</sup> What resulted was a glut of well-meant but often ultimately methodologically problematic, patronising, or even damaging studies whose intent was invariably the ‘improvement’ of society at large and more specifically of the errant subjects of the study. As Swanson notes, in Pearl Jephcott’s 1942 study *Girls Growing Up*, Jephcott ‘bemoans the influence of popular entertainments and

<sup>69</sup> As Longden (2012) notes ‘In December 1943, Basil Henriques, the Chairman of East London Juvenile Court, gave a speech at Hackney Rotary Club highlighting the social problems he encountered on a day-to-day basis. As widely reported in the press, he reported that child delinquents coming before the courts had increased from between 3,000 to 4,000 a year to 8,000 or 9,000 a year in wartime. p.344.

<sup>70</sup> Skeggs *Formations of Class and Gender* p.100

<sup>71</sup> In Cohen’s parlance a ‘condition, episode, person or group of persons [who] emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.’ Cohen, S. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1980) p. 9. Speaking about post-war moral panics surrounding ‘folk devils’, Cohen observes that the ‘most recurrent types of moral panic in Britain since the war has been associated with the emergence of various forms of youth culture (originally almost exclusively working class, but often recently middle class or student based) whose behaviour is deviant or delinquent, *ibid* p.9-10.

<sup>72</sup> Dyhouse, C. *Girl Trouble* pp.107-8

<sup>73</sup> Swanson, *So Much Money and so Little to Spend it On*. p.81

***Fig. Eleven:*** *‘Most looked at face of 1943’ on the front cover of Picture Post, January 1944.*

*image redacted*

consumption claiming that ‘if the food is low-grade it is only too likely that the mental and spiritual quality of the consumer will be the same.’<sup>74</sup> This sentiment strongly echoes regular *Daily Sketch* reviewer Elspeth Grant’s less-than-glowing description, in her *Sight and Sound* column, of Grable and her fans – presumably the ‘provincial’ audiences referred to in *Kine Weekly* – as a ‘pin-up charmer’, whose films were ‘coma-inducing pap’<sup>75</sup> and who ‘may not be able to act but can pull enthusiastic morons into the movie houses.’<sup>76</sup>

Yet if we return once again to the *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* advertisement, this notion of moronic, passive audiences doesn’t hold true. Here the young female subject engages with the politics of the gaze and, not unlike so many of the feisty and determined characters Grable played in her films, refuses to accept her place as unobserved (and thus powerless) within in a power dynamic that excludes her. In this instance Grable’s ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’<sup>77</sup> is a source of female power, not a symptom of female oppression. Rather than being subject to a ‘controlling and curious’<sup>78</sup> disempowering gaze, the female subject (actively) invites and holds the gaze, exerting a hypnotic control over the powerless (passive) male observer, and consequently inciting the young girl’s envy.

A combination of Grable’s direct gaze and provocative pose, her ostentatious and suggestive period costuming, and the smitten response of the young boy, necessitates a reading of the Grable pin-up within this advertisement as an example of cartes-de-visite – the very first turn-of-the-century, mass produced ‘pin-ups’ – and places Grable – cast as a bawdy burlesque star or theatre actress – within Maria Elena Buszek’s framework of ‘awarishness’. Like her actress and ‘leg show’ performer forbears, Grable’s representation ‘blur[s] the

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p.83

<sup>75</sup> Grant, E. ‘From Pearl White to Pearl Harbour’ *Sight and Sound* v.11 #42, Winter 1942, p.61

<sup>76</sup> Grant, E. ‘Those Critics!’ *Sight and Sound* v.12 #49, May 1944, p.4

<sup>77</sup> Mulvey, L. ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1995) p.27

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.* p.24

borders between character and actress, performance and reality'<sup>79</sup>, whilst her direct, assertive gaze and self-possessed demeanor present a sexually aware challenge to the boy, the girl and us, the wider audience;

Like the stage identities the images were meant to represent, these photographs not only called into question the legitimacy of defining female sexuality according to a binary structure, but also marked as desirable the spectrum of unstable and taboo identities as imaged between these poles...What resulted from burlesque performers' use of the pin-up genre was a "de-containment" of their unstable, sexualized performances from a specific physical site, and the establishment of the pin-up as a genre defined by the manipulation of its media and viewers by its "awarish," or sexually self-aware, representational subjects.<sup>80</sup>

As such, the image of Grable here, like those of so many other Hollywood 'stars', offers a role model for 'modern' female attractiveness, feminine assertiveness and agency, and whilst her costuming is nostalgic, her implied exoticism (as both an American but more importantly here, as a showgirl) makes her image appear intriguing, relevant and even current.

Rather than exercising bourgeois restraint or demonstrating modesty, Grable appears unapologetic for her frankness, confidence and gaudiness, offering a prime example of assertive, modern and therefore potentially troublesome femininity, a star who is not only unashamed of her sexuality and its transgressive potential, but who actively and willingly flaunts and revels in it. It is woefully apparent, then, that the young boy is no contender, at least currently, for this thrilling woman's affections.

Grable's function as a model or marker of idealised western femininity; 'the schoolchild's personification of what can best be termed 'glamour''<sup>81</sup>, is also abundantly evident in Iona and Peter Opie's 1959 anthropological study of British playground habits *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* which observes that of all Hollywood stars, it was Grable in particular that appeared most frequently. ('In oral rhymes of a mildly erotic nature

<sup>79</sup> Buszek, M.E. 'Representing "Awarishness": Burlesque, Feminist Transgression, and the 19th-Century Pin-Up.' *The Drama Review* v.43 #4. Winter 1999, p.43

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* p.142

<sup>81</sup> Opie, I and Opie, P. *The Lore and Language of School Children* (Broadbridge: Clarendon Press, 1967) p.134



she was named many more times than her younger and sometimes more exotic rivals.’<sup>82</sup>) As Opie and Opie observe Grable ‘seems in the forties and early fifties to have been the most envied princess in the Hollywood book of fairy tales.’<sup>83</sup> Whilst the Grable rhymes featured in the Opie’s study will have most likely been created due to the rhyming potential offered by the name ‘Grable’, as much as any deeper meaning, these rhymes tend to make explicit reference to Grable’s attractiveness or desirability (‘I say what a smasher, Betty Grable smoking pasha’ (1952-54)<sup>84</sup> or ‘My wife is Betty Grable, She’s the fairest in the land. She can dance and she can sing and she can show a leg, the only thing she cannot do is make a bairn’s bed’ (1952))<sup>85</sup> to her trademark legs and her popular cultural association with pin-up (‘Betty Grable, Sitting on a table, Showing off her legs, To Clark Gable.’ (1952))<sup>86</sup> and her star status (‘Mickey Mouse in his cradle, up pops Betty Grable, Betty Grable is a star, S-T-A-R.’ (1958))<sup>87</sup> and that such rhymes are cited as being sung by (and therefore continue to be relevant to) children as late as 1958 also demonstrates effectively Grable’s continued currency within the British popular imagination long after the war and even after her box office appeal started to wane.

It is also worth noting that several key elements of the *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* advertisement evoke a wider bawdy and subversive British tradition of ‘Wendyish, sub-pornographic [pictures] which exploit the love affairs of children’<sup>88</sup> often found, particularly in popular British postcards and greeting cards. Writing in 1942 on the saucy British postcard more generally, commenting upon the style of postcard which Yorkshire-based Bamforth Postcard Company specialized, which features ‘[an] endless succession of fat women in tight

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<sup>82</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>83</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>84</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p.135

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p.134)

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p.135)

<sup>88</sup> Orwell, G. ‘The Art of Donald McGill.’ Originally printed in *Horizon*, February 1942. Reprinted in Orwell, S and Angus, I. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume 2: My Country Right or Left. 1940-1943.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984) p.183

bathing dresses'<sup>89</sup>, and using the example of artist Donald McGill, George Orwell observes a series of conventions, well-established by 1942, which included 'crude drawing and unbearable colours, chiefly hedge-sparrow's egg blue and Post Office red'<sup>90</sup> (a style and colour palette also notable in the *Rosie O'Grady* advertisement) and a frequent use of 'inter-working class' humour with comic 'malapropisms', 'dropped aitches' and 'rough manners', (also prevalent within this advertisement) in a form intended for consumption by 'the better off working class and poorer middle class'<sup>91</sup>, this being a key portion of the cinema-going public<sup>92</sup> and, presumably, Grable's key audience.

The *Kine Weekly* advertisement is not the only instance of the placing of Grable within this 'Wendyish' tradition when attempting to address the notion of female audiences and their inevitable personal comparisons to the star. Another particularly pertinent example exists within the second key resource: a pre-1945 postcard by artist J.L Bryson of Penrith (Figure Twelve). The postcard features a young girl, clad in a child's two-piece bathing suit, blonde pigtails and a sailors hat, attempting, in her unsophisticated way, to vicariously experience the lavish world of Hollywood by mimicking the pin-up posturing of its 'bathing beauties' whilst determinedly claiming 'I'se got everyfink Betty Grable's got, only she's had it longer.'

This humour of oppositions, common to the saucy seaside postcard, is established, whereby polarized definitions of femininity are presented for humorous effect. If we briefly consider the example of the corpulent female in 'saucy' Bamforth postcards, she was invariably presented as a figure of inappropriate, unruly and thus undesirable female sexuality. This troubling and transgressive figure, 'monstrously parodied, with [a] bottom like

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<sup>89</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>90</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>91</sup> *ibid* p.186-187

<sup>92</sup> 'A large proportion of regular cinema-goers in Britain in the 1930s were working class women under the age of forty.' Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women History, Feminism* (London: Zed books, 2010) p.49

[a] hottentot'<sup>93</sup>, is understood to have outgrown appropriate sexuality. To further emphasise her inappropriateness, she is frequently juxtaposed either against a comparatively small husband – suggesting cuckoldry, domineering femininity, and male inadequacy or impotence - or against a husband who has a heightened sexual interest in other younger, more attractive, dainty (yet ample bosomed) and 'appropriate' female figures.

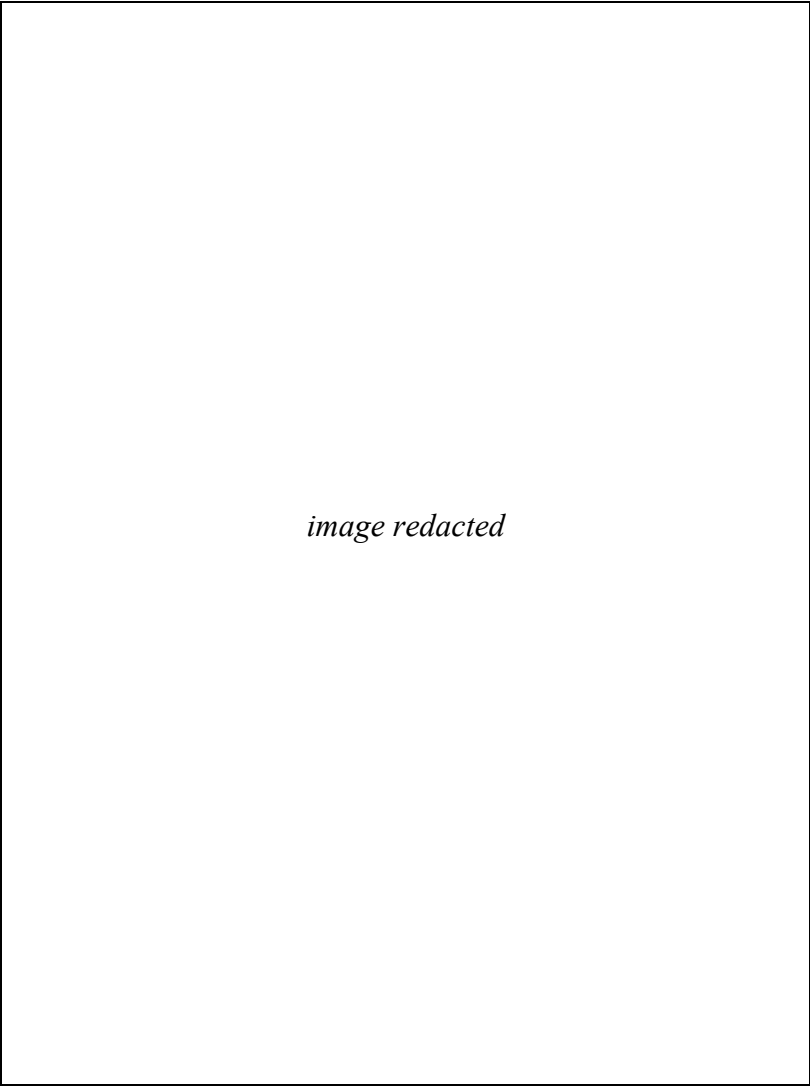
If we apply this established principle of oppositions to the Bryson 'Ise got everything Betty Grable's got' postcard, then, the girl's youth in this instance obviously makes any expression of sexuality unacceptable, just as the young male subject in the *Kine Weekly/Sweet Rosie O'Grady* advertisement was incapable of adopting the archetypal assertive masculine role, here our young subject falls short of the feminine ideal. Whilst in the postcard the more mature Grable - so iconic in Britain at this time that she need only appear only in name - functions here as the opposite of our young female subject, as the marker of *appropriate* and desirable feminine sexuality to which this young girl clearly aspires. Grable here is the genuine article: the embodiment of authentic Hollywood glamour, rather than a poor-man's British seaside pastiche.

Gentle humour is, once again, evinced from the fact that the subject is a small child, whilst in a further act of bathos, the young subject's working-class, British accent, coupled with the fact that this postcard was most likely intended for sale at various British seaside resorts, indicates that the little girl is most likely holidaying on a British beach and not in balmy California.

That this artifact is intended as a souvenir of leisure time spent primarily by the working-class at coastal resorts is also pertinent, due to the seaside's close association with the carnivalesque; a notion which frequently appears in many Grable films owing to the regularity with which she played working class characters who often resided and/or worked

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<sup>93</sup> Orwell 'The Art Of Donald McGill' p.185



*image redacted*

**Fig. Twelve:** *Comparisons to Grable in a British postcard circa 1945*

in carnivalesque spaces such as fairs, theatres, music halls. As with Rabelais' notion of the banquet, entrance into a carnivalesque space and participation in carnivalesque activities represents for its participants 'a temporary transfer to a utopian world of pleasure and abundance.'<sup>94</sup> As Orwell notes McGill's work and the wider postcard tradition functions therefore as a 'harmless rebellion against virtue.'<sup>95</sup> As Robert Stam observes

Carnival for Bakhtin...played a central symbolic role in the life of the community...The carnivalesque principle abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes, and creates another life free from conventional rules and restrictions. In carnival all that

<sup>94</sup> Stam, R. *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989) p.87

<sup>95</sup> Orwell 'The Art of Donald McGill.' p.194

is marginalized and excluded – the mad, the scandalous, the aleatory - takes over the center in a liberating explosion of otherness. (sic)<sup>96</sup>

Orwell states that McGill's postcards specialise in 'very 'low' humour'<sup>97</sup>, that 'many of them are not despicable even as drawings, but it would be mere dilettantism to pretend that they have any direct aesthetic value,'<sup>98</sup> that they possess an 'overwhelming vulgarity'<sup>99</sup>, and that they are 'so completely typical.'<sup>100</sup> Base humour, no artistic value, vulgar, generic: once again, taste distinctions are being mobilised against a form and, more importantly, its working-class audience, who possess little in the way of cultural capital. The 'comic card' serves as a means of carnivalesque subversion - embraced at least in part *because* of its lowbrow status, its tastelessness, twee-ness, its potential to offend or for its willful simplicity - by the largely working class audience at which it was, and still is, aimed. It is not surprising then that Grable serves within the Bryson 'Ise got wot Betty Grable's got' postcard as the subject's infantile (read: unsophisticated or limited) cultural experience as a source of aspiration, a symbol of mobility and the benchmark for attractive, glamorous and modern femininity.<sup>101</sup>

### **The Performing Pin-up: Reading Grable in *Coney Island* and *Sweet Rosie O'Grady***

Whilst in Grable's photographic images we are faced with a static Grable (with the possible implications of submissiveness or passivity) Grable's performances in her films present Grable *in action* and therefore can frame our reception of Grable's image very differently. As

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<sup>96</sup> Stam *Subversive Pleasures* p.86

<sup>97</sup> Orwell 'The Art of Donald McGill.' p.184

<sup>98</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>99</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>100</sup> *ibid* p.185

<sup>101</sup> Similarly, one of Jackie Stacey's respondents; Mary E. Wilson discusses how she and eight other girls in the North East of England played throughout their childhood, on waste ground near their housing estate, on mounds of earth they affectionately termed 'the Beverly Hills', casting themselves as the film star residents living in their mansions; 'We played there for hours - visiting one mansion after another and each being our own favourite film star...I often bump into Betty Grable in Morpeth - I'll mention your letter next time I see her.' Stacey *Stargazing* p.160

has been discussed in the introduction to this thesis, much film scholarship focuses upon the site of the actual film texts as the presumed site of definitive authenticity. Yet considering films removed from their wider contexts can raise a whole range of additional issues. The consideration of extra textual materials relating not only to particular films but to the total star text, provides the film scholar with the opportunity to obtain a broader picture of the range of meanings a star image may offer. So, whilst the moving image is a fleeting “stream of underselected images, each of which cancels its predecessor”<sup>102</sup>, the photographic image is enduring and as such can be possessed. This implies a level of power or control for the images possessor and a lack of agency for those ‘captured’ within the image. This can have negative implications; as Kathleen Sweeney notes in her study of the representation of teenage female representations:

A photograph is a possession. You buy *Rolling Stone* magazine, you own the cover. So in whatever form, this ownership extends to a piece of [cover girl] Lindsay Lohan. She becomes a public commodity... packaged to all who consume her image.<sup>103</sup>

But it can also have positive implications in terms of possession and control for an audience who are frequently imagined both as passive and disempowered. As Sontag argues

Movies and television programs light up walls, flicker and go out; but with still photographs the image is also an object, lightweight, cheap to produce, easy to carry about, accumulate, store.<sup>104</sup>

Film star pin-ups, just like their cartes-de-visite forbears, were cheaply and easily attainable (although wartime paper shortages will have made such images more difficult to come by) and were designed to be consumed repeatedly, meticulously, and in a private space. As such they represent a distinct contrast to the consumption of films, which during the classical period was fleeting, took place at most only a few times and was undertaken in a *public* space. The difference in consumption context between the static and the active cannot help but alter the reception of that which is consumed, and it is therefore pertinent to consider

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<sup>102</sup> Sontag S. *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1977) p.18

<sup>103</sup> Sweeney, K *Maiden USA: Girl Icons Come of Age*. (Oxford: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008) p.57

<sup>104</sup> Sontag *On Photography* p.3

Grable's representation in a film such as *Sweet Rosie O'Grady*, as her active representation within this film will have helped to shape how the female audiences who saw this film would have received and perceived Grable.

Core to our understanding of both Grable and of her films, but often absent in many of her Hurrell-style glamour shots in particular, is that within her films Grable's characters are clearly and repeatedly figured as 'ordinary', 'average' and in working-class terms. In terms of defining her labour, as a performer Grable was (and still is) frequently referred to as a 'hooper', a person who dances professionally – or more specifically a jobbing dancer. At first glance this is seemingly innocuous. Yet when we consider the way fellow dancing pin-up Rita Hayworth is frequently discussed, I have found no example of Hayworth being described in such terms.

Instead, Hayworth is presented as a virtuoso performer, and it is repeatedly noted in media discourse that Hayworth comes from a dancing family<sup>105</sup>, that she has danced professionally since childhood<sup>106</sup>, and that she is of Latin extraction (and therefore apparently has some innate sense of rhythm and a passion for dance). Consequently Hayworth is frequently discussed in relation to Terpsichore (the goddess of dance) and is often described as something akin to a force of nature who finds the urge to dance irresistible, and who other, less talented or exceptional performers would struggle to replicate. This is perhaps best encapsulated by choreographer Jack Cole's superlative-laden remembrance of one of Hayworth's performance in the 1945 Musical *Tonight and Every Night*:

So I rehearse with Rita a couple of times around and we're ready to start. Well, baby I don't know what hit me when they turned the camera on. Monroe was the same way -

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<sup>105</sup> As Adrienne McLean notes '[in] *Motion Picture* in June 1938 Rita Hayworth is "a newcomer who hails from a theatrical family. She is part Spanish and knows her Spanish dances"....in a 1938 sheet music ad she is [discussed as] "daughter of the famous Spanish dancer Eduardo Cansino."' Whilst an article in the magazine *Movies* in September 1939 it is noted that she is "'known as a Cansino.'" McLean, A. *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity and Hollywood Stardom* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004) p.35

<sup>106</sup> As McLean notes in an article ('Fred Finds the Right Girl at Last!' - source unknown) Hayworth is referred to as the "daughter of the once-famed fast-stepping Cansinos, who taught her to dance before she could walk" *ibid.* p.39)

when it was for real, it was like “look out!” For the first shot I just went up six ways from Sunday. Suddenly this mass of red hair comes hurtling at me, and it looked like ninety times more teeth than I ever saw in a woman’s mouth before and more eyes rolling, and... you know, she was the most animated object ever. I didn’t know how to deal with it; I’d just never seen so much animation giving out.<sup>107</sup>

As a virtuoso performer Hayworth has been ascribed a level of skill, agency and natural ability that ‘average’ Grable was not be granted. Like all hoofers (and not unlike Hayworth) Grable had worked hard and she had worked long, rising up through the ranks. She had ‘paid her dues’ and honed her craft in vaudeville theaters throughout the US as a singer, dancer, actress and musician. Yet ultimately as a working-class ‘hooper’ (a term which also suggests something of the workhorse) the implication is that Grable’s performances are specifically designed and taught to her with the intent that they be ‘worked through’ time after time, show after show, take after take, thus carrying negative implications in terms of creativity, spontaneity and agency. It is possible that it is this set of associations that, whilst making her appear down-to-earth, prevented her from obtaining the level of recognition of a much more respected and even revered performer.

The notion that Grable’s dancing may be the mere execution of a specific sequence of moves whilst Hayworth’s dancing is discussed as a spontaneous expression of joy, or even sexuality, is inadvertently reinforced in a photographic feature in which Grable and noted Hollywood choreographer Hermes Pan demonstrate to *Picture Post* readers the basic steps to a ‘Nursery Conga’<sup>108</sup> (Figure Thirteen), and would certainly seem to be reflected in the often benevolent, yet ultimately demeaning tone which pervades throughout the media with regard to Grable. A clear example can be found in British film magazine *Picturegoer*’s film reviewer Lionel Collier’s remarks, discussed in chapter two, on Grable’s performance in films such as *Coney Island*, that she was ‘keeping her curves nicely in hand.’<sup>109</sup>

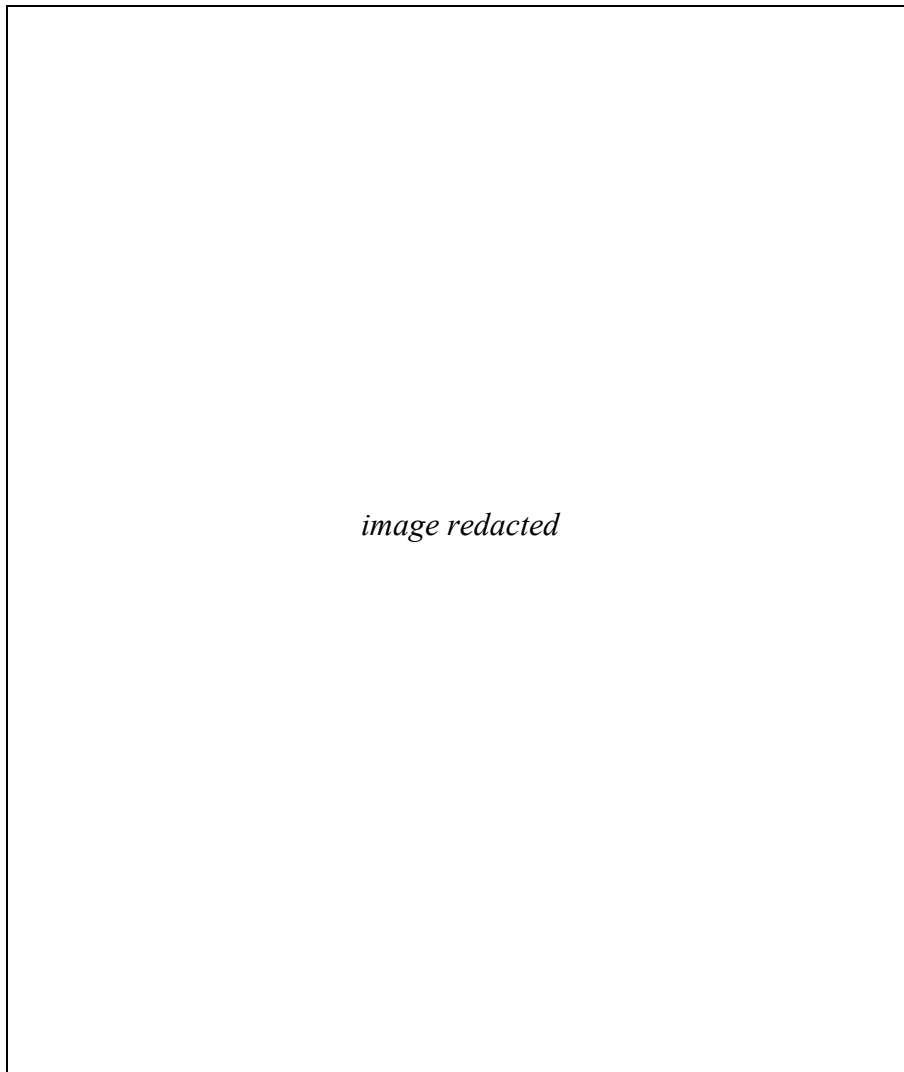
<sup>107</sup> Kobal, J. *Rita Hayworth: The Time, The Place and The Woman* (London: W.H Allen and Co., 1977) p.191

<sup>108</sup> ‘Betty Grable’s Nursery Conga’ *Picture Post* 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1941, p.23

<sup>109</sup> Lionel Collier ‘Shop For Your Films With Lionel Collier’ *Picturegoer* 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1943, p.12



In terms of Grable's costuming and presentation, particularly in her promotional images for *Sweet Rosie O'Grady* and *Coney Island* (both musicals whose narratives were based upon the premise of 'taming' or containing an unruly or uncouth working class woman<sup>110</sup>), we return, once again, to the point raised earlier in this chapter regarding the caricaturing of feminine conventions. Grable's characters frequently resemble a travesty of



***Fig. Thirteen: 'Betty Grable's Nursery Conga'***  
Picture Post, 30<sup>th</sup> August 1941

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<sup>110</sup> A potentially oppressive and regressive mode of feminine representation based upon the premise that such a woman who "Through her body, her speech her laughter, especially in the public sphere, she often creates a disruptive spectacle of herself." and must therefore be contained or restrained. Rowe, K. *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 1995) p.31

femininity and demonstrate an innate lack of refinement which is observable in their propensity towards laughable excess, manifest visually in the form of ridiculous adornments such as sizable and mind-bogglingly ornate poodle-like pompadour hairstyles, fussy frilled and sequined bodices and ridiculous (and presumably cumbersome) frilled, over-size bonnets (see Figure Fourteen).

Meanwhile Grable's characters were often feisty, combative and resourceful, or even 'on-the-make' (all potentially unpalatable character traits), and Grable was firmly associated with the lavish (yet lowbrow and much maligned) Technicolor musical, in which she was often cast as a working-class performer – most frequently as showgirls, chorines or torch singers,<sup>111</sup> these being vocations traditionally perceived as being inherently disreputable. However Grable's star persona and her persistent marketing *as* working-class ('ordinary', 'average', of 'limit[ed] talents') serves, within her film narratives, to minimise the potential for unpleasant interpretations. Instead the image of a hardworking, down-to-earth performer is presented. For example,

*images redacted*

**Fig. Fourteen:**  
An innate lack of  
refinement evidenced  
through laughable  
excess

as stage performers (rather than more middle class, 'respectable' women) Grable's characters would have needed to have been feisty, resourceful and shrewd in order to make their living and whilst many of the vocations of the characters Grable played may have carried some implication of disreputability, the working-class status of these characters suggest that it is

<sup>111</sup> For example, between the release of *Down Argentine Way* in 1940 and 1943 and the release of *Sweet Rosie O'Grady*, Grable starred in 10 films, 9 of which were musicals and 8 of which Grable played a stage performer. These were *Sweet Rosie O'Grady* (1943), *Coney Island* (1943), *Springtime in the Rockies* (1942), *Footlight Serenade* (1942), *Song of the Islands* (1942), *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941), *A Yank in the RAF* (1941 – the film featured musical numbers despite primarily being a melodrama), *Moon Over Miami* (1941) and *Tin Pan Alley* (1940).

economic necessity, rather than lack of moral fiber that dictates each character's career choice<sup>112</sup>. In addition whilst the characters she plays may tend to be chorines, models or showgirls, vocations reliant upon bodily display, remarkably little allusion is made to immorality in Grable's films. Most likely because of the strictures of the Hays code, but also possibly because, as financially independent working-class girls, the characters Grable plays are simply making use of the only resources available to them.

Returning once again to the *Kineweekly/Sweet Rosie O'Grady* advertisement, the posters' gaudy use of colour and Grable's ostentatious costume, with its feathers, frills, top hat, cane and other fripperies suggests both a text and an unruly female protagonist who revel in bawdiness. Whilst the use of the words 'aint' and 'wot' by the young female in the advert carry very particular class implications regarding the presumed audience for the film. Similarly the dropping of one's aitches, as discussed above by Orwell, indicates a lack of refinement, which once again alludes to the working-class to which the Rosie O'Grady character, and the film's intended audience will largely have belonged.

This may go some way towards explaining how, whilst much has been made of how apparently unchallenging and conservative both Grable's representations and the films in which she starred were, Grable's typical film narratives invariably attempted to contain or control (through heterosexual romance) Grable's difficult, spirited or even 'unruly woman' - a deeply troubling, but significantly, here, hugely likeable feminine figure. Furthermore, rather than the taming-of-the-shrew style narratives favoured by Hollywood actresses from this period who possessed greater levels of cultural capital and were therefore largely more

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<sup>112</sup> If we compare this to Hayworth's glamour and showgirl roles Hayworth is represented as being much more morally ambiguous and as such is punished for her transgressions, for example, in *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) her husband and ex-lover are killed, in *Angels Over Broadway* (1940) she is put in danger and then abandoned, in *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941) she is imprisoned in an unhappy marriage, in *Blood and Sand* (1941) she is murdered, in *Tales of Manhattan* (1942) her husband is murdered by her lover, in *Cover Girl* (1944) she loses her lover, then loses her career, in *Gilda* (1946) she is tricked into marrying an abusive and arguably gay ex-lover, in an attempt to escape her abusive first husband, and in *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) again she is murdered.

respected, in which comparatively more acceptable or respectable female characters were shown their errant ways and successfully indoctrinated into more passive feminine models, the Grable formula, often much more brash, boisterous and ‘knockabout’, was, instead, more *Pygmalion* in its structure<sup>113</sup>, and Grable’s ultimate subordination within the heterosexual pairing at the narrative’s conclusion was not always a resounding success.<sup>114</sup>

In one of the few academic discussions of Grable’s film representation, Sean Griffin’s analysis of *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* and *Coney Island* Griffin explores how Fox’s nostalgic turn-of-the-century-inspired wartime musicals used representations of Irish Americans, and the notion of the carnivalesque (with particular regard to its appropriation by Kathleen Rowe in her theorisation of ‘the unruly woman’) to safely negotiate wartime attitudes surrounding gender and race in the United States. However Griffin overlooks the class implications of such ethnic representations. For example, in his discussion of a beer hall scene from *Coney Island*, Griffin asserts:

As the scene progresses... the [stage] performance is interrupted by a full-scale donnybrook among the drunken revelers, who gleefully join in the melee as part of the evenings festivities. In the course of about three minutes, almost every Irish cliché is performed on-screen: maudlin ballads, working-class labour, drunkenness... Such invocations of Irish stereotypes also appear in... *Sweet Rosie O’Grady*.<sup>115</sup>

The negative class implications of these culturally homogenised representations are largely neglected as ‘Irishness’ in these two particular film’s functions as a metonymic signifier for a working-class which is also coded as being dangerous, brash, criminal, uncouth and idiotic.

Similarly, whilst Griffin *does* note how integral ‘feistiness’ was to the Grable persona in these films, he fails to explore how integral Grable’s playing of such roles was to the

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<sup>113</sup> See *A Yank in the RAF* (1941), *Coney Island* (1943), *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* (1943), *Springtime in the Rockies* (1942) or *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (1947).

<sup>114</sup> Several Grable comedies conclude with the suggestion that the battle of the sexes between the two central lovers, which has been central to both the love affair and the films narrative momentum, is merely at a hiatus rather than a full halt. See *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (1947), *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* (1943), *Coney Island* (1943).

<sup>115</sup> Griffin S. ‘The Wearing of The Green: Performing Irishness in the Fox Wartime Musical’. Negra, D. (ed.) *The Irish In Us: Irishness, Performativity and Popular Culture*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) p.72

audience's interpretation of the Kate Farley and Rosie O'Grady characters she plays, and in turn how, if at all, these roles affected Grable's reception.

While studio communications indicate the [studios] conscious desire to make the female leads more aggressive and independent... Grable['s body is] most definitely on display for the delight of the male gaze in these... films... A male critic in the *Dallas Morning News* reviewing *Coney Island* even indicates how the objectification may have helped male viewers accept aggressive female characters. He evinces a sense of vague annoyance at Grable for her "assertive personality" and for "talk[ing] incessantly" but he concludes that "maybe her generously displayed chassis enhances the values of her histrioni[cs]"

Thus, the strong-willed nature of the women in these films is balanced, and possibly even negated, by their presentation as sexual commodities for the heterosexual male in the narrative and the audience.<sup>116</sup>

Observing that these films 'retell narratives of Irish American characters climbing the ladder of success'<sup>117</sup> and therefore implicitly acknowledging the centrality of class and social mobility to the representation of these film's female protagonists, Griffin's analysis stops short when considering these very specifically classed female representations. For example, in his discussion of *Sweet Rosie O'Grady*, Rosie's deep desire for social advancement is only hinted at, through a discussion of her almost pathological attempts to deny and disguise her apparently shameful working-class roots.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile the 'problem' of public femininity, or more specifically of the socially visible working-class woman, in *Coney Island* is only touched upon in his analysis:

The sweetheart of her predominantly Irish working-class clientele, Kate exhibits a singing style and personality that are loud, feisty and brash. [Male protagonist] Eddie wheedles his way into managing the beer hall and immediately sets to revamping Kate's performing style – specifically trying to tone her down. In trying to make her more upscale... he handcuffs her hands and feet before one performance to limit her histrionics.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *ibid.* p.74

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.* p.69

<sup>118</sup> 'Irish American singer Rosie has left the New York beer halls for Britain, where she has changed her name to Madeline Marlowe, and become a star on the legitimate stage...As she sails back to America as Madeline Marlowe, though, her secret is exposed by an intrepid Irish American reporter from *The Police Gazette*.' *ibid.* p.67

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.* p.66

The theme of attempting to ‘trade up’ through masquerade and heterosexual coupling (attempts at both are not always successful and are more often than not thwarted by Grable’s characters’ tendency to fall for the working-class guy who can offer her little in the way of social advancement) is by no means limited to *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* and *Coney Island*. For example, in *Diamond Horseshoe* Grable’s character seduces the boss’ son to win a mink coat in a bet but falls in love for real; in *Moon over Miami* Grable’s character poses as a socialite to bag herself a rich husband and support her sister and aunt; and in *How to Marry a Millionaire* the same occurs but in an attempt to obtain rich beaus for herself and her two friends. In both *Coney Island* and *Sweet Rosie O’Grady* Grable’s female protagonists are presented as crude, displaying an undesirable and, at times, laughable excess of exaggerated feminine display the like of which is discussed at length in Beverley Skeggs’ 1997 ethnographic study of the vilification of white working-class female sexuality in Britain.<sup>120</sup>

The label working-class when applied to women has been used to signify all that is dirty, dangerous and without value [and]...whilst [many working-class women subsequently] made enormous efforts to distance themselves from the label of working-class, their class position (alongside the other social positions of gender, race and sexuality), was the omnipresent underpinning which informed and circumscribed their ability to *be*.<sup>121</sup>

Bearing this and the audience responses to Grable earlier in the chapter in mind then, notions surrounding both class, taste and cultural capital were central to an understanding of Grable and the characters she played in her films. Whilst UK and US understandings and appropriations of class are very different, there is enough evidence here to suggest that Grable could feasibly have been understood by British wartime audiences as a working-class star whose forte laid in playing working-class roles.

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<sup>120</sup> ‘Working-class women’s relationship to femininity has always been produced [often by the middle-classes] through recourse to vulgarity’ and how ‘It is in the desire to avoid being positioned by the vulgar, pathological, tasteless and sexual [and] in order to prove their respectability, that [many working-class women] make investments in femininity.’ Skeggs *Formations of Class and Gender* p.100

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.* p.74

In conclusion then, considering the tendency to focus upon Grable's association with the pin-up form, rather than the types of roles she played, and despite the fact that Grable's period of greatest box-office success actually occurred in the post-war period, Grable's wartime association persists presumably because this was the period in which Grable rose to film fame, thus making the war appear an intrinsic part of her persona. It could also be that in the absence of any accurate critical appreciation, Grable's post-war success may have coloured, homogenized or simplified the popular memory and historical reception of her wartime role. The largely lacking contemporaneous and post-war assessment of Grable's cultural meaning is rooted in the split in her reception between her embrace by the popular press, exhibitors and a significant portion of working and lower middle-class audiences on one hand, and her rejection by cultural critics and academics on the other.

This rejection by cultural critics comes partially out of the wider anti-Americanism of British cultural arbiters (as detailed in chapter one), for whom both Hollywood and pin-up were the apotheosis of US low culture, and this notion of Grable as 'low' culture also suggests something of the class implications and taste debates surrounding both Grable and the kind of audience her films and pin-ups attracted (although these were not necessarily precisely the same audience for both mediums) and popular critics such as Lionel Collier, with his *Picturegoer* 'Shop For Your Films' features discussed in chapter two, and the Opie's child audiences, found much in Grable's favour.

The tendency to link Grable and her popularity primarily to the both pin-up and to the turn-of-the-century musicals in which she starred conveniently reflects an (understandable) academic preoccupation with defining Grable as a wartime tool for nationally sanctioned nostalgia deployed without discrimination in a period of intense economic, political and social unrest. But to do so is to conveniently place Grable's representation and subsequent reception within a historical narrative which presumes four problematic notions. Firstly, that

all classes of wartime women possessed or had equal access to equal amounts of cultural capital, that those women all possessed both similar and equal wartime aims and perhaps more alarmingly, that all women were accepting of both the war itself (and their role within it) and of their sexual oppression at large (through ideologies such as ‘beauty as duty’), unquestioningly and without difficulty offering themselves up as sexual prizes for their fighting men folk, keeping the home fires burning, and plugging the gap in the nation’s workforce. This simply wasn’t the case.

Unpacking the significant yet largely overlooked class implications of the Grable persona and exploring the more unruly elements of the characters she played allows the film historian to step away from the convenient theorisation of Grable as a mere cultural comfort blanket and offers two benefits.

Firstly this approach reveals how, for many film goers, of a range of ages and social backgrounds, Grable functioned as an example of assertive, progressive, modern (and therefore esteemed) Western femininity, whose films, roles and persona bore relevance to the new and complex wartime roles and responsibilities arising from the unique demands of the period. Secondly, it also allows us to investigate more effectively the more assertive and challenging elements of Grable’s persona and roles, the notion of a female and a non-sexual enjoyment of Grable’s pin-up imagery, and achieve a theorization of Grable and Grable film enthusiasts as more than mere cultural dupes. We are therefore, hopefully, one step closer to formulating a less reductive understanding of the contextual and discursive nuances surrounding Grable and, by implication, other film star pin-ups, and the resonances offered by such a star to the many ‘ordinary’ or ‘average’ wartime cinemagoers who are, or were, their fans.



**Case Study Two:**

**Discourse Surrounding  
Rita Hayworth**

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **How Do I Look?: Hayworth, Public Femininity and The Discourse of Respectable Desirability**

In this second section of the thesis we move to our second case study – Rita Hayworth. This second section presents a direct comparison of Hayworth to Grable in order to demonstrate, through these two hugely popular American stars, the lack of representational uniformity that the cultural phenomenon of ‘film star pin-up’ actually offered, and to highlight just some of the range of film star pin-up identities and attendant ‘resonances’ (or aberrations) on offer throughout the war period.

Beverley Skeggs’ work on women, class and respectability<sup>1</sup> and Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinctions*<sup>2</sup> will prove invaluable throughout this second section of the thesis, primarily because of both Skeggs’ and Bourdieu’s preoccupation with access to or the denial of cultural capital, with the articulation of ‘taste’ and its links to identity – all of which are key considerations within this study. Equally the utility of Skeggs’ work derives also from her focus upon working class *female* subjects – young female audiences in particular having formed the core audience for Hollywood cinema in both Britain and America during the war period<sup>3</sup>, and therefore being the demographic most likely to experience a resonance with film star pin-ups such as Grable or Hayworth. Simultaneously, as historian Carol Dyhouse<sup>4</sup> discusses at length, this same social bracket were frequently cast as folk devils at the centre of wartime fears in both America and Britain surrounding appropriate, proper and patriotic

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<sup>1</sup> Skeggs, B. ‘Refusing To Be Civilised: ‘Race’, Sexuality and Power.’ Afshar & Maynard (eds.) *The Dynamics of ‘Race’ and Gender: Some Feminist Interventions* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994) pp.106-127; Skeggs, B. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997); Skeggs, B. *Class, Self, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu, P. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984)

<sup>3</sup> Carol Dyhouse is not alone in noting that ‘A large proportion of regular cinema-goers in Britain in the 1930s were working class women under the age of forty.’ Dyhouse, C. *Glamour: Women History, Feminism* (London: Zed books, 2010) p.49. Here Dyhouse references Richards, J. *The Age of The Dream Palace: Cinema and society in Britain, 1930-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) pp.12-15

<sup>4</sup> Dyhouse, C. *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women* (London: Zed Books, 2013)

modes of wartime public femininity<sup>5</sup>. Both Bourdieu and Skeggs suggest pertinent motives both for problematic behaviours and, in turn, for the concerns raised and expressed with regard to such behaviours. Equally Skeggs' claims regarding subjects' active cultural negotiations, and use of a symbolic means or currency such as glamour as a method of asserting one's self and accumulating and maintaining cultural capital, is a crucial precept within this study.

The underpinning tenets of both Bourdieu's and Skeggs' work, that 'class remains a key category for understanding the formation of identity'<sup>6</sup>, and Skeggs' assertion that glamour – the stock in trade of pin-up - functions as one of the few effective tools or 'cultural resource[s]'<sup>7</sup> with which working class female subjects, can legitimately or 'respectably'<sup>8</sup> assert their identities and increase their cultural 'capital'<sup>9</sup>, informs the preceding discussions of pin-up and the following comparisons of the appeals and repulsions of these two very different film star pin-ups.

The differences between our first case study of Grable and our second case study of Hayworth clearly demonstrate the range of differing appeals offered by the film star pin-up and the futility of discussing pin-up as one homogenised form. Whilst research indicates that Grable was largely understood to be 'average' or 'ordinary' (despite being a Hollywood

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<sup>5</sup> Dyhouse claims that even prior to the Second World War 'the good-time girl had become a folk-devil' *ibid* p.117

<sup>6</sup> 'Despite its relative absence from contemporary feminist analysis.' Moseley R. *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn: Text, Audience, Resonance* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2002) p.18

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*.p.19

<sup>8</sup> 'Being 'respectable' emerges as a key way of 'passing' for middle class, through appearance and conduct, which while producing great anxiety, enables relative access to certain kinds of power otherwise unavailable to working class women... Skeggs offers the notion of 'glamour', which while difficult to achieve, she argues is perhaps the only way of holding together femininity and sexuality with respectability for working class women.' Moseley *Growing Up With Audrey Hepburn* p.20, referencing Skeggs *Formations of Class and Gender* p.110

<sup>9</sup> As Skeggs notes 'Glamour is a way of transcending the banalities of femininity which render women as passive objects, as signs of appearance without agency, as something which has to be done...Glamour involves attitude as well as appearance... It is the attitude that makes the difference. It gives agency, strength and worth back to women and is not restricted to youth. They do glamour with style. Glamour is about a performance of femininity with strength.' Skeggs *Formations of Class and Gender* p.111

star<sup>10</sup>), and American-ness was understood to be a crucial element of her star persona, this American-ness was also often understood to represent brashness and excess, and she was frequently understood to be unruly, unrefined and thus ‘common’ or distasteful. Alternatively, as this section shall demonstrate, both as a pin-up and as a star, Hayworth was framed entirely differently – a Latina star with a more subtle acting technique but an entirely more suggestive dance style, Hayworth’s appeal was cast as more exotic, sophisticated and aspirational, and her pin-ups reflected this.

### **From ‘Charm’ to ‘Oomph’: The Discourse of Respectable Desirability**

Not surprisingly, with western culture being so preoccupied with the female form, the range of rhetorical devices employed to discuss feminine pulchritude has always been wide, varied and impressively imaginative. The vocabulary utilised by the media throughout the 1939-1949 period when discussing desirable female sexuality is certainly no less diverse or inventive, with terms ranging from those still in circulation now, to others which were very much of their time.

In order to better contextualise the resonances offered by Hollywood, its stars and its distinct brand of glamour, and discern what constituted the appropriate models of female attractiveness and public female behaviour during the war period, a discussion of the semantics of the complex lexicon through which these ideas were invariably discussed and defined is beneficial. For example, having examined several British print based media from the period, from the broadly appealing *Picture Post*, to the more targeted, but still widely accessible *Woman’s Weekly*, *Picturegoer* or *Pictureshow*, to more niche or specialist trade publications such as *Kinematograph Weekly*, it would appear that within this lexis a strand of

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<sup>10</sup> For other discussions of this concept within this study see Chapter Three, alternatively see Richard Dyer’s discussion of ‘Stars as Different’ Dyer, R. *Stars* (London: BFI, 2007) p.43-6

adjectives with particularly interesting connotations appear frequently and consistently when discussing female film stars during the 1939-1949 period. Furthermore, it is possible to split these recurrent adjectives into two distinct modes, the first of these being a more ‘ladylike’ and respectable group of terms which demonstrate a preoccupation with the modest, the unthreatening and the romantic; essentially an ‘appropriate’ middle-class femininity with a greater level of status or cultural capital. The second mode is preoccupied with the *less* respectable or acceptable and with public femininity which has much less cultural capital. These terms demonstrate a semantic tendency towards the corporeal and the base, toward the more threatening, unruly or even the transgressive.

Of the terms associated with the former, adjectives such as ‘glamour’, ‘allure’, ‘loveliness’ and ‘charm’ appear to be amongst the most prevalent examples used to describe female attractiveness during this period, and it is of note that each of these terms suggest a seduction of the senses – an exquisite surrender, alluding to the feminine potential to bewitch, enchant and distract or misdirect. For example, in terms of dictionary definitions the phrase ‘allure’ is described as:

‘*v.tr.* attract, charm or fascinate. *n.* attractiveness, personal charm; fascination. [from Old French *alurer*]. allurements’<sup>11</sup>)

Equally, the term ‘charm’ is defined as:

*n.* 1a the power or quality of giving delight, arousing admiration, or influencing. b. (usu.in *pl*) an attractive or enticing quality... 3 an object, act or word(s) supposedly having occult or magic power; a spell... *v.tr.* 1 delight, captivate. 2 influence or protect as if by magic (*leads a charmed life*). 3 cast a spell on, bewitch.’<sup>12</sup>

The term glamour<sup>13</sup> was one of the most frequently used (and one would presume therefore fashionable) terms and carries strong associations of magic and enchantment. This is perhaps

<sup>11</sup> Simpson, J.A. and Weiner, E.S.C. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989)

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> For an in depth analysis of the term, its etymology, its implications and a historical contextualisation of its function during specific periods, see Gundle, S. *Glamour: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Gundle, S and Castelli, C.T. *The Glamour System* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

most amply reflected in British sociologist Margaret Farrand Thorp's observation that in their attempts to create glamour, Hollywood publicity agents 'took the facts and bathed them in a rich warm light.'<sup>14</sup> As Gundle and Castelli note in their definitive history of glamour:

According to The New Fowler's Modern English Usage (1996), glamour was originally a Scottish word. Etymologically, it was an alteration of the word grammar which retained the sense of the old word 'gramarye' ('occult learning, magic, necromancy'). When it passed into standard English around the 1830s, it did so with the meaning of a 'delusive or alluring charm'. A century later, in the 1930s, it was applied to the charm or physical allure of a person, especially a woman.<sup>15</sup>

They continue:

The most exhaustive treatment of the terms' Scottish origins is to be found in an 1879 Etymological Dictionary of Scottish Language. For the volume's author, glamor or glamour was 'the supposed influence of a charm on the eye, causing it to see objects differently from what they really are. Hence to cast glamor o'er one, to cause deception of sight.'<sup>16</sup>

Developing these principles further, and locating them within a commercial context, Gundle theorises in his second treatise on glamour that:

Glamour is best seen as an alluring image that is closely related to consumption. It is an enticing and seductive vision that is designed to draw the eye of the audience. It consists of a retouched or perfected representation of someone or something whose purpose it is to dazzle and seduce whoever gazes on it.<sup>17</sup>

In each of the three quotes above there is a suggestion of seduction or trickery. The glamorous prize 'draw[s] the eye' of the beholder 'dazzl[ing] through sophistry ('a charm on the eye', 'retouched', 'perfected') and promises gratification, increased cultural capital and potentially raised social status through the possession of that glamorous object (be that a literal ownership or experienced at a remove - such as the adopting of a similar hair style to a particular film star or the purchase of a product a star endorses such as cosmetics or

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<sup>14</sup> Thorp M.F. *America at the Movies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945) p.51

<sup>15</sup> Gundle and Castelli *Glamour System* p.3

<sup>16</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid* p.5

toiletries). It is not surprising then that in 1945 Margaret Farrand Thorp claimed that ‘the place to study glamour today is in the fan magazines’<sup>18</sup>.

Discussing the consumers of film fan magazines Thorp employs a discourse which suggests illness or mental deficiency, and is notably reminiscent of that used by British sociologist Pearl Jephcott and British film critic Elspeth Grant<sup>19</sup>, both discussed in chapter three. Claiming that ‘no one unaccustomed to fan literature should enter upon a course of it without a doctor’s certificate,’<sup>20</sup> she continues

Fan magazines are distilled as stimulants of the most exhilarating kind. Everything is superlative, surprising, exciting; everybody is always having a wonderful time, or else recounting with great gusto the details of a desperate early struggle or overwhelming catastrophe met with a fighting courage which led to the giddy heights of glamour. Nothing ever stands still; nothing ever rests, least of all the sentences. Fan magazine writers employ a special vocabulary of telescoping phrases; they leave out all possible connectives; they eschew relative clauses; they beat upon the reader with adjectives – and he comes back for more.<sup>21</sup>

Thorp’s observations regarding the fan magazine make many allusions which are equally applicable to the notion of glamour itself. There is derision towards the medium’s hyperbole and excess, of the sense of unrelenting motion but to no particular or (more importantly here) worthy end, and of the limited, unoriginal vocabulary. Once again, despite the author’s best intentions (‘*America at The Movies* is a study of the sociological impact of films on our contemporary civilisation... Miss Thorp gives, to our knowledge, the best survey of the effects of films on American society that has yet appeared’<sup>22</sup>) and despite its light tone, Thorp’s work is indicative of a wider derisory attitude towards glamour and its fans.

Value judgements permeate the study, with fan magazines being likened to drugs (‘stimulants’), derided for their unoriginality and cliché (such as the ‘desperate early struggle

<sup>18</sup> Thorp *America at the Movies* p.51

<sup>19</sup> Jephcott’s 1942 study claimed ‘if the food is low-grade it is only too likely that the mental and spiritual quality of the consumer will be the same’ Jephcott *Girls Growing Up* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942); whilst Grant had referred, in her article to Betty Grable as a ‘pin up charmer’ who ‘may not be able to act but can pull enthusiastic morons into the movie houses.’ Grant, E. ‘Those Critics!’ *Sight and Sound* v.12 #49 May 1942, p.4

<sup>20</sup> Thorp *America at the Movies* p.51

<sup>21</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>22</sup> ‘Editor’s Preface’ by H. L. Beale and J. P. Mayer in Thorp *America at the Movies* p.9

or overwhelming catastrophe met with a fighting courage which led to the giddy heights of glamour'), their lack of quality ('they leave out all possible connectives; they eschew relative clauses'), and the gullibility of the reader is assumed ('and he comes back for more'). (Although it *is* notable that the Hollywood fanatic is described here as a he: running counter to the frequent feminisation of the 'passive' fan.) Through the use of an ironic, detached tone and the use of trivialising terms such as 'the giddy heights of glamour', Thorp infers to the reader that Hollywood glamour represents a false or unworthy goal, that film stars are themselves false and unworthy, and undermines those who marvel at such achievements. Equally, it is suggested that whilst in the 'real' world the ability to face and overcome life's trials and misfortunes supposedly builds character and calls for respect, in the 'reel' world of Hollywood misfortunes are often cynically used, or even manufactured, by the studios' marketing departments in order to legitimate their stars' opulent lifestyles, suggesting a gullible audience and manipulative industry.

In British media of the war era various contemporaneous examples can be found of the use of the term 'glamour'. For example, an article in fan publication *Picturegoer's* 1939 Summer Annual gives readers some of Hollywood's 'insider' secrets on 'How to Glamourize Your Personality.'<sup>23</sup> Whilst in *Picturegoer Weekly*<sup>24</sup>, an advertisement for Pond's face powder features a personal endorsement by 'Lady Betty Bourke' and claims that 'there's a glamorous shade for you in this NON-DETECTABLE powder!'<sup>25</sup> This notion of the powder being 'non-detectable' is worth considering further here as its implication is that the key to *true* 'loveliness' (as opposed to false, artificial and therefore substandard 'loveliness') is for the finished product - the glamorised woman - to draw as little attention as possible to the

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<sup>23</sup> *Picturegoer Summer Annual* (London: Odhams, 1939) p.68

<sup>24</sup> *Picturegoer Weekly*, 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1939. p.27

<sup>25</sup> The advertisers assertion that 'Pond's shades are more glamorous than ordinary shades' because of their 'non-detectability' is echoed in their aristocratic endorser 'Lady Betty Bourke's' claim that it apparently 'gives the loveliest effect and it never looks chalky.'



process or tools (the ‘trick’ or the misdirection) which facilitated her glamorisation. Those who subscribe to such a strictly confined definition of female attractiveness would doubtless have no truck with the kind of deliberately exaggerated visual excess associated, for example, with a star such as Grable. Equally, rather than presenting a democratic notion of glamour or making an allusion to averageness (the kind of glamour of which Grable was seen as being symbolic whilst ironically being one of the most distinctive and well-paid performers in the world) the face powder is used and endorsed by a member of the aristocracy, and as such a very *specific* type of well-heeled, aspirational glamour is suggested here, closely linked to notions of exclusivity and superiority, economic, social and cultural capital.

Another popular term - ‘Loveliness’ - defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘Lovely adj. 1.exquisitely beautiful. 2.colloq. a pretty woman’ - refers less to trickery and influence but is equally bound up in value judgements. Instead the subject’s preciousness and possibly its/her superior value or worth is emphasised. The term was therefore an obvious linguistic choice, particularly for advertisers when marketing aspirational products such as clothing, cosmetics and toiletries. To this end, literally hundreds of the adverts which appeared in British magazines during this period made clear and often repeated reference to the importance of female ‘loveliness’. Whilst pleas abounded for consumers to ‘Stop using just anything to wash your hair...Make it gloriously *lovely* with Eve [shampoo]’<sup>26</sup>, readers were informed by a lux soap tie-up with the 1944 Columbia musical *Cover Girl* that ‘Like 9 out of 10 film stars, [Rita] Hayworth keeps her complexion *lovely* with *Lux* soap’<sup>27</sup>, and were advised to ‘look *lovelier* – feel fresher [with] Lifebuoy toilet soap’<sup>28</sup>.

Use of the trick analogy has one further use here: for a woman to be described in any of the above terms it is therefore required that she successfully pull off a ‘trick’ in presenting

<sup>26</sup> *Picturegoer* 25<sup>th</sup> February 1939, p.37

<sup>27</sup> *Picturegoer* 30<sup>th</sup> September 1944, p.16

<sup>28</sup> *Picturegoer* 29<sup>th</sup> April 1939, p.18

her sexualised self in a convincingly sophisticated way, performing a mediated or tempered sexuality which transcends her physicality, directing attention away from that which the construction seeks to hide. This behaviour can be transformed within the social and symbolic economy into prestige, worth, or cultural capital.

Alternatively, the second group of terms, encompassing the adjectives ‘Sex appeal’, ‘it’ and ‘oomph’ or ‘umph’, demonstrate a failure, inability or an unwillingness to effectively negotiate this same trick. These terms reject the sophistry surrounding female allure and sexuality. These corporeal terms were much less subtle in their allusions to the carnal, revealing a preoccupation with the physical which marks the woman thus described either as problematic and disreputable or as exciting and dynamic.

For example the word ‘oomph’ or ‘umph’ has a certain guttural quality to it: its monosyllabic structure conveys a deliberate and directed force and energy, a certain physical exertion, excitement and vigour, whilst its association with the vernacular does little to recommend it as a respectable term. According to American magazine *Life*<sup>29</sup>, precisely because of the potentially suggestive nature of such a term, in August 1939 the American film fan publication *Motion Picture* magazine actually pondered of Ann Sheridan ‘Will the Oomph Title Hurt Her?’ Would the use of such an explicit label potentially damage Sheridan’s star value or her box office draw by placing excessive emphasis upon her sexuality, potentially diminishing her respectability and therefore lowering her cultural capital and her economic worth?

Such concerns weren’t without good reason. If we return again to the British media and examine a *Picturegoer* article entitled ‘Now They Call It Umph’, it is somewhat sardonically noted that:

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<sup>29</sup> *Life* 24<sup>th</sup> July 1939, p.64

[the] leading exponent of the new glamour is red-headed Ann Sheridan. Ann was recently elected by 25 Hollywood judges as ‘the umph girl of 1939’. She is to star in a film of that title and will have *twelve* leading men. That’s what umph does for you.<sup>30</sup>

On an overt level, the article suggests firstly that Sheridan’s worth both to the studio and to cinemagoers was considered such that she required not one but ‘*twelve* leading men’ to adequately match her value. In itself this is obviously no bad thing. However in attaching Sheridan’s worth to her ‘umph’ – namely her glamour and sexuality – and in attributing the requirement for twelve male co-stars to that ‘umph’ (‘twelve leading men. That’s what umph does for you’) the article appears to discuss Sheridan’s star value or worth to her studio, but also makes an inference about her sexual value. Not only Hollywood excess, but the star’s sexual excess is simultaneously suggested here as there is an implication of a voracious sexual appetite or/and of moral laxity. As such, the article highlights the difficult trade-off which must be made when dealing in a currency such as glamour which signifies agency but whose value is sexual.

Examples of the use of ‘oomph’ in beauty rhetoric during this period can be found in abundance in articles such as the 1939 *Picturegoer Summer Annual* fashion feature ‘The Oomph Girl is our Mannequin’<sup>31</sup>, in US magazine *Modern Screen*’s “Oomph for Sale”<sup>32</sup>, and in *Life* magazine’s article upon Ann Sheridan ‘America’s Oomph Girl: Ann Sheridan, Hailed As a Second Jean Harlow, Is The Movie Find of The Year’<sup>33</sup>, which observes

The word ‘oomph’, long current in U.S slang, had rarely appeared in print before being used to describe the peculiar attractions of Ann Sheridan. Since March, prolonged semantic investigations have been carried on to uncover its exact meaning. Asked to define it, the Hollywood *bon vivants* who applied it to Miss Sheridan were by no means unanimous. Gene Towne, a celebrated screen writer, described it as ‘the indefinable something that lies in women’s eyes – oomph, oomph, oomph’ The Earl of Warwick

<sup>30</sup> *Picturegoer* 29<sup>th</sup> April 1939, p.18

<sup>31</sup> *Picturegoer Summer Annual* (London: Odhams, 1939) pp.30-31

<sup>32</sup> *Modern Screen* December 1941. Page number not supplied. The contents of this article on Rita Hayworth are discussed in detail in McLean, A. *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity and Hollywood Stardom* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004) p.41

<sup>33</sup> Noel F. Busch ‘America’s Oomph Girl: Ann Sheridan, Hailed As a Second Jean Harlow, Is The Movie Find of The Year’ *Life* 24<sup>th</sup> July 1939, pp.64-69

countered politely with ‘Oomph is a feminine desirability which can be observed with pleasure but cannot be discussed with respectability.

Whilst back in Britain both the faddish and the provocative nature of the term is highlighted in articles such as the *Picturegoer*’s ‘Now They Call it Umph’ which defines oomph as ‘Hollywood’s latest brand of glamour, the successor to sex appeal’<sup>34</sup> and supposedly a concession offered to replace the apparently too explicit ‘sex appeal’. ‘They don’t call it ‘sex appeal’ any more. They call it ‘oomph’ because the Hays Office thinks that the phrase ‘sex appeal’ is naughty.’<sup>35</sup> Later that year in an early wartime allusion to ‘beauty as duty’ a *Picturegoer* article entitled ‘How to Get Oomph’ notes:

In its essence [oomph] is a quality of sex in a woman that appeals to all men and to most women.”<sup>36</sup>...“It’s a quality that inspires men to do their utmost – to conquer or try to conquer. They say to themselves ‘If that little woman believes in me I’m wonderful!’<sup>37</sup>... Actual oomph, as Hollywood understands it, means that a woman has such imperative charm that every man recognises it and says to himself: ‘I should like to meet that girl. I should like to have a date with her. She would be interesting!’”<sup>38</sup>

As Hollywood actor Alan Dinehart observes at the article’s conclusion:

You were born with oomph or without it – there’s nothing you can do about it. Even in Hollywood, where they can do wonders to make you beautiful, to improve your figure, rearrange your teeth and so on, they can’t give you oomph if you lack it.<sup>39</sup>

This being a sentiment akin to that in ‘Now They Call It Umph’ which also argues: ‘You may be as beautiful as Dietrich and as talented as Bergner, but you may not get far on the screen today unless you’ve got ‘umph.’”<sup>40</sup>

‘Oomph’, for a brief period, appears to have been an extremely fashionable, faddish and up-to-the-minute adjective, used, on both sides of the Atlantic, alongside the more enduring ‘it’ or ‘sex appeal’, to discuss fashionable, up-to-the-minute stars, trends and

<sup>34</sup> *Picturegoer* 29<sup>th</sup> April 1939, p.18

<sup>35</sup> ‘Back to Flaming Youth’ *Picturegoer Summer Annual* p.12

<sup>36</sup> *Picturegoer*, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1939, p.6

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p.33

<sup>38</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>39</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>40</sup> *Picturegoer*, 29<sup>th</sup>, April 1939. p.18

issues.<sup>41</sup> Knowledge of, and engagement with ‘oomph’ was an effective means of demonstrating an awareness of and engagement with current popular culture, debates and discourse and therefore a means of accumulating cultural capital, imbuing their users with a certain ‘expertise’ and making them appear modern and possibly even glamorous themselves. Yet the faddish nature of Hollywood, the vocabulary with which its stars are discussed, and the resultant perplexities experienced by those attempting to maintain pace with its ever-changing trends is perhaps best encapsulated in the title of an April 1939 *Picturegoer* article, ‘Now They Call It Umph’<sup>42</sup>. Four months later another article in British publication *Picturegoer* entitled ‘How to get Oomph’ grumbled ‘Once it was sex-appeal. Then it was ‘It’. Now it’s ‘Oomph’.’<sup>43</sup>

Alternatively, the term ‘It’ had been in common usage for some time prior to the outbreak of World War Two, its etymology supposedly deriving from a 1927 two-part serial story in popular American magazine *Cosmopolitan* by novelist Elinor Glynn, in which ‘it’ is discussed in terms remarkably similar to ‘glamour’, ‘charm’ or ‘allure’. ‘It’ was defined as:

that quality possessed by some which draws all others with its magnetic force. With 'It' you win all men if you are a woman and all women if you are a man. 'It' can be a quality of the mind as well as a physical attraction.<sup>44</sup>

The concept of Glynn’s story was bought by Paramount and turned into the 1928 film *It* starring flapper star Clara Bow. The success of the film was such that Bow quickly became known as the ‘It girl’ and the term gained a common parlance which remains to this day. As *Brewers Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* notes, ‘It’ is:

a synonym for ‘sex-appeal’, popularised by the novelist Elinor Glynn in *It* (1927) and promoted both visually and verbally by the film star Clara Bow, the ‘It’ girl (1905-65), who appeared in a film version of this novel in 1928. It was the word used in billings to

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<sup>41</sup> Similarly the term ‘vamp’ was a deeply fashionable term applied to sultry femme fatale stars such as Theda Bara during the teens to mid-twenties after which it drifted out of common parlance, making it evocative of a very particular period in Hollywood history.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Now They Call It Umph’ *Picturegoer* 29<sup>th</sup> April 1939, p.18-19

<sup>43</sup> ‘How To Get Oomph’, *Picturegoer*, 19<sup>th</sup> August 1939, p.6

<sup>44</sup> Quote taken from opening title card, *It* (Paramount, 1927).

describe her particular appeal. Kipling had used the word earlier, however, and it was used for sexual intercourse ('to do it') in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>45</sup>

Alternatively the term 'sex appeal' was another popular, yet suggestive, term for female attractiveness which achieved longevity. It is termed by *The Oxford English Dictionary* as:

Sexual attractiveness; qualities which attract members of the opposite sex; also *fig.*: hence sex-appeal *v.trans.* and *intr.*; to attract sexually<sup>46</sup>

The term's cultural currency is demonstrated in articles such as *Picturegoer and Film Weekly*'s article 'Sex Appeal 1939'<sup>47</sup> which attempts to predict which of Hollywood's upcoming starlets is in possession of the greatest amount of 'sex-appeal' and thus most likely to go on to become the new '[Clara] Bow's, the [Theda] Bara's, the [Pola] Negri's' - all three women being Hollywood actresses who possessed a notable and distinct sex appeal.

However, as is the case with all language, these words possess 'multiaccentuality'<sup>48</sup>: their meanings are not entirely fixed, no universal consensus upon any of these terms will have existed and each term could potentially have been interpreted or used in a range of both complimentary and derogatory ways. But what *is* useful here, though, is the dichotomous structure into which terms used to express and contextualise female attractiveness can be placed – into the respectable, refined and acceptable, and the disreputable, the provocative and the unacceptable.

### **'You Were Never Lovelier': Hayworth, Exoticism and Reassurance**

If we extend our discussion regarding this limited vocabulary firstly to descriptions of Grable, as was noted in chapter two, many contemporaneous reviews and discussions of Grable's

<sup>45</sup> *Brewers Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2005) p.726

<sup>46</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* (Second Edition). v. XV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) p. 108

<sup>47</sup> 'Sex Appeal 1939' *Picturegoer and Film Weekly* 25<sup>th</sup> February 1939, p.3

<sup>48</sup> Vološinov, V.N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. (1929) Trans. Matejka, L. and Titunik, I.R. (NY: Seminar Press, 1973) p.21-24

films expressed an intense preoccupation with her physicality<sup>49</sup>. Her hallmark ‘ordinariness’ or ‘typicality’ is subsequently discussed in synecdochal terms, with reference frequently being made to her ‘gams’, her ‘wiggle’, her ‘chassis’, and in more recent reappraisals perhaps not surprisingly (but certainly disappointingly) Grable is also derided in physical terms - because of her ‘plumped-out face, plumped-up lips, and just plump body.’<sup>50</sup> In being excessive in her performance and dress Grable is perceived as drawing attention both to herself and to her physical form, and is therefore understood to be demonstrating her lack of refinement, sophistry and cultural capital. As such it is feasible to locate Grable and much of the discourse surrounding her within the latter, corporeal linguistic camp.

Alternatively, described repeatedly as ‘Terpsichorean’ - a Hollywood goddess - *the* ‘Love Goddess’, discourse surrounding Hayworth links her not only to Greek mythology (thus locating or associating her within a higher status, higher brow habitus), but fluctuates between painting her as positively ethereal - a star who embodies ‘loveliness’, ‘grace’ and ‘charm’ (although such terms also carry potentially negative connotations surrounding passivity and lack of agency, as evidenced in Winthrop Sargeant’s 1947 ‘The Cult of The Love Goddess’ *Life* article<sup>51</sup>) - and conversely, as an exotic, sensual creature whose sexuality was intimately bound to (and therefore to an extent excused by) her ability as a dancer. So whilst Grable’s point of differentiation as a star was her averageness, Hayworth’s was her exceptionality, both in terms of her looks and her dancing skill

As a result, when discussing Hayworth there appears to be a tendency, certainly in the British media, towards the use of more romantic and refined, less sexualised terminology, and when on the infrequent occasions corporeal terms are used with regard to her, great care is

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<sup>49</sup> For example, Lionel Collier, film reviewer for British fan publication *Picturegoer* in his review of *Coney Island* observes of Grable’s performance in the film; “Betty Grable, keeping her curves nicely in hand sings and acts well.” ‘Shop For Your Films With Lionel Collier’ *Picturegoer* 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1943, p.12

<sup>50</sup> Rosen, M. *Popcorn Venus* (NY: Avon Books, 1974) p.209

<sup>51</sup> Sargeant, W. ‘The Cult of The Love Goddess’ *Life* 10<sup>th</sup> November 1947, pp.80-96

taken to balance this with additional romantic or sophisticated discourse, presumably in an attempt to neutralise the overtly sexual implication.

McLean observes that ‘Grable was not a virtuosic dancer’<sup>52</sup>, the term ‘virtuoso’ being taken from the Italian for ‘learned, skillful’. Whilst not intended as a derogatory comment, what McLean acknowledges here is Grable’s (self-confessed) limited ability. Alternatively Hayworth’s aptitude, skill and talent as a dancer was such that certainly the American press considered her more than capable of stepping into and adequately filling the shoes of Ginger Rogers when partnering Fred Astaire in the Columbia musicals *You’ll Never Get Rich* (1941) and then *You Were Never Lovelier* (1942).<sup>53</sup>

Yet the term ‘virtuoso’ doesn’t quite fit Hayworth either, as Richard Dyer notes

Hayworth dances in a manner different in certain respects from that of previous leading women dancers in Hollywood. Unlike Ginger Rogers, Hayworth did not require a partner for her dancing; and unlike Eleanor Powell, who did do solo numbers, Hayworth’s style is not mechanical and virtuoso.<sup>54</sup>

Instead Dyer discusses Hayworth’s use of dance as ‘self-expression’, using Marjorie Rosen’s formulation of Hayworth’s performance style: ‘For the first time a heroine seemed to say ‘This is my body. It’s lovely and gives me pleasure. I rejoice in it just as you do.’<sup>55</sup> As such, presumably in part because of her Latina ethnicity, Hayworth’s style is characterised not only as highly erotically charged but as innate, spontaneous, authentic or somehow less moderated, more intense, even spectacular. This is most amply evidenced in the comments discussed in chapter three by choreographer Jack Cole regarding his not knowing ‘what hit [him] when they turned the cameras on’ during the filming *Tonight and Every Night*:

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<sup>52</sup> McLean, A. ‘Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth Pinned Up.’ in Griffin, S. *What Dreams Were Made Of: Movie Stars of the 1940s* (New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2011) p.175

<sup>53</sup> As American magazine *Time* magazine noted ‘Those who saw russet-haired, incandescent Rita Hayworth dance before the movies drafted her knew she was a dancer to partner even the great Astaire. But few of them would have expected her to keep up with his wry, off-beat brand of comedy.’ ‘California Carmen’ *Time* 10<sup>th</sup> November 1941, p.90

<sup>54</sup> Dyer, R. ‘Resistance Through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*.’ Kaplan E.A. (ed.) *Women in Film Noir* (London: BFI, 1992) p.120

<sup>55</sup> Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.226



this mass of red hair comes hurtling at me, and it looked like ninety times more teeth than I ever saw in a woman's mouth before and more eyes rolling, and... you know, she was the most animated object ever... I'd never seen so much animation giving out... Rita always did it for real - she always gave more than she got.<sup>56</sup>

The differing discourse surrounding these two women, with their distinct implications of taste and class offers a significant insight into the wider politicisation of the classed female body at this particular time. If we consider several of the marketing stills and promotional posters for *You Were Never Lovelier*<sup>57</sup>, a notable phenomenon becomes apparent: Hayworth's representation and costuming differs significantly from that in the film itself - the partially transparent gowns, boudoir settings and the prominence in many images of Hayworth's bust, could be seen to present a much greater level of titillation than that on offer in the film. That the Advertising Code Administration (ACA) would overlook such representations may seem at first surprising. However, as Mary Beth Haralovich states in her investigation of the function of pin-up in the advertising and promotion of the 1943 western '*The Outlaw*' (Howard Hughes Productions), by the 1940s Hollywood was doing little more than paying lip-service to the suggestions of the Hays Production Office and those of its advertising equivalent, the ACA, whose restrictions were less imposing than those of the PCA, in terms of its use of static female representations. As Haralovich discusses the physical form of '*The Outlaw*'s female star, Jane Russell, (or more specifically her bust) was so central to the marketing of the Howard Hughes film (a special bra was allegedly made for Russell to give the appropriately titillating level of lift in the marketing stills) that considerable controversy ensued, and the film's release date was postponed until the controversy died down.

Whilst Russell's promotion in *The Outlaw* was probably one of Hollywood's most controversial examples of static female representation of that time, Thomas Doherty's

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<sup>56</sup> Kobal, J. *Rita Hayworth: The Time, The Place and The Woman* (London: W.H Allen and Co/Virgin Books, 1977) p.191

<sup>57</sup> These images are identifiable as such because in many of these pictures, Hayworth is photographed in scenes and locales deliberately identical or at least strongly reminiscent of the film and wearing costumes either worn in the film, or costumes clearly intended to resemble those *seen* in the film.

description of ‘lurid’ pre-code ‘pen and ink drawings [that] filled in, or left out, material that no actual photograph could depict without being legally actionable’<sup>58</sup>, and of ‘revealing’ photographic images often of ‘lesser known actresses... [which] were distributed by press agents and publicity departments’ and were ‘in clear violation of the Advertising Code’ but were ‘widespread and subsidized by the publicity departments of the major studios’<sup>59</sup>, suggests the objectification of Hollywood’s leading ladies certainly wasn’t unusual, despite the key market for the film industry during the war period being *female* cinemagoers.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, in the advertising for her films, Columbia studios (like Howard Hughes with Russell) took every available opportunity to display as *much* of Hayworth’s body as possible.<sup>61</sup> But the significant difference between the representation of Russell and the representation of Hayworth was the tone of the text that accompanied their images.

Whilst the scale of misjudgement regarding the promotional images used in *The Outlaw* campaign was second only to the accompanying rhetoric that appeared with it (potential filmgoers were inelegantly asked ‘would *you* like to tussle with Russell?’), the key, presumably, to Hayworth’s consistently successful marketing as respectable throughout her time as Columbia’s top star lay in the studio’s capitalising upon her appeal to both men *and* women. The saying ‘men wanted her and women wanted to *be* her’ is particularly appropriate here. As Ovalle observes

Men desired Hayworth as a pinup with a cool demeanour, while women imagined themselves in her sexually powerful and desirable likeness; in fact, women composed a

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<sup>58</sup> Doherty, T. *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934* (NY.: Columbia University Press, 1999) p.110

<sup>59</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>60</sup> This was due to the absence of the huge portion of men both in the home US market and in second-biggest market – the UK, as they were obviously called into service and therefore tended to have free or no access to films. See Hill, J. ‘British Cinema as National Cinema’ Turner, G. (ed.) *The Film Cultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001) p.168

<sup>61</sup> See ‘Movie Censorship: It Confuses British Movie Makers but US Producers Get Around It.’ *Life* 11<sup>th</sup> November 1947, pp.45-47

large percentage of Hayworth's audiences, defining what McLean calls 'women's musicals'<sup>62</sup>

For although Hayworth's star persona was presented as particularly sensual, erotic and therefore potentially scandalous, aware of how vital the female audience's support was in the making or breaking of a female star, Columbia was keen to emphasise that as well as being provocative Hayworth's persona possessed a romanticism and was ultimately unthreatening, particularly to female cinema goers. Equally her representation as a highly skilled performer who adhered to an ethic of hard work was also crucial to her image, and her representation as such a performer also functioned to balance any potential accusations of moral laxity.

But this was not always successful. Two instances can be offered to demonstrate this. The first example can be found in a one page pictorial feature in the 1946 British film annual *Film Review*, sardonically entitled 'Progress', which focuses upon a sensational promotional still from *Gilda* featuring Hayworth and Glenn Ford in a surprisingly passionate clinch. Juxtaposed next to this is a small image from 1896 film *The Kiss*. The editorial is worth noting in full;

In 1896 cinemagoers were startled and some were shocked by...[the film] '*The Kiss*', and in it the audience watched John C. Rice implant a chaste little example of osculation on May Irwin. [The small image featured.] The Clergy were horrified and denounced the film; the audience, true to form, flocked to it. But time marches on and passion on the screen in 1947 is a very different affair. This somewhat torrid example above is from '*Gilda*' with stars Rita Hayworth and Glenn Ford in a close embrace. And nobody said a word.<sup>63</sup>

Use of the adjective 'torrid' – defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'very hot and dry; highly emotional' - and the concluding phrase 'and nobody said a word' (implying that someone *should* have) offer negative value judgements upon the image – namely that it is inappropriate – too hot, too emotional, and a symbol of the increasing sexualisation of cinema. Meanwhile it is the stars 'Rita Hayworth and Glenn Ford' who are 'in a close

<sup>62</sup> Ovale, P.P. *Dance and the Hollywood Latina: Race, Sex and Stardom* (New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2010) p.90; referencing McLean *Being Rita Hayworth* p.117

<sup>63</sup> 'Progress' in *Speed Film Review Annual* (London: Macdonald, 1947) p.119

embrace' rather than the characters they portray in *Gilda* and as such they too are implicated in the accusations of inappropriateness.

A second, more significant instance can be found in the scandal (discussed by both McLean<sup>64</sup> and Smith and Wright<sup>65</sup>) surrounding Hayworth's 1948 affair and 'illegitimate' pregnancy with the married 'playboy' Prince Aly Khan. A lack of adequate moderating discourse surrounding the relationship, and more specifically the star's conduct, meant that a brief media and public backlash ensued against the star and the love affair was quickly cast as that of a 'wreckless woman' and an 'extravagant... coloured Indian Prince' - "an insult to decent-minded women the world over"<sup>66</sup>. Shortly after, in an attempt to prevent further damage, this narrative was reframed and Hayworth was subsequently repositioned, being presented to the public by America's best known gossip columnist and noted moral arbiter – Louella Parsons - as a 'Cinderella princess.'<sup>67</sup> Hayworth had been reassigned her social and cultural capital, her conduct within the public sphere was rewritten, and her status as respectable restored. In short, in being *discussed* as the model of ideal and appropriate feminine looks, manner and conduct, even if her photographic representation wasn't always such it was possible for Columbia to still secure for Hayworth much respect and favour amongst female filmgoers.

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<sup>64</sup> McLean, A. 'The Cinderella Princess and The Instrument of Evil: Revisiting Two Postwar Hollywood Star Scandals.' McLean, A. and Cook, D. (eds) *Headline Hollywood: A Century of Film Scandal* (Piscataway, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2001) pp.163-189

<sup>65</sup> Smith, P. and Wright, E. 'A Glimpse Behind The Screen: Tijuana Bibles and the pornographic re-imagining of Hollywood.' in Ursel, et al (eds.) *Tabu - Trend - Transgresja v.2: Skandal w Tekstach Kultury* (Warsaw: Uniwersytet Wrocławski, 2013) pp.149-169

<sup>66</sup> American paper *The Age*, reported upon *The People*'s call for a British boycott of Rita Hayworth if she chose to return to her filmmaking career: 'Hollywood must be told its already tarnished reputation will sink to rock bottom if it restores this reckless woman to a place amongst the stars.' *The People* 9<sup>th</sup> January 1949 cited in 'Call for Boycott of Rita Hayworth', *The Age*, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1951, p.5. McLean also supplies several international examples of similarly outraged media responses to the affair - McLean 'The Cinderella Princess' p.183

<sup>67</sup> As gossip columnist Louella Parsons termed her in her 6-part series 'Cinderella Princess: Colourful Career of Cinderella Girl Told By Film Writer.' *Los Angeles Examiner*, May-June 1949.

Looking at a range of Hayworth's glamour photography and promotional materials from around 1941-42<sup>68</sup> although these images possess an overtly sexual element (she is often photographed on beds, in sumptuous boudoirs, wearing sheer evening gowns, nightwear or revealing beachwear, either reclining or dancing provocatively and often fully exposing her legs, often with hair tousled or flying) *written* discourse *about* Hayworth either as an actress or as a star<sup>69</sup> generally avoids written reference to Hayworth's 'sex appeal' or her 'oomph'. Two notable exceptions are a late 1940 *Picturegoer* pictorial feature on Hayworth which states that: 'Rita Hayworth is the girl of the moment in Hollywood. Rita has just replaced the suspended Ann Sheridan in 'Strawberry Blonde' which practically promotes her to 'oomph girl' status<sup>70</sup>. Whilst in early 1941, *Picturegoer* claims: 'Rita Hayworth, glamour girl... in *Strawberry Blonde* out-oomphing the oomph girl, Ann Sheridan, who refused the very part.'<sup>71</sup> However, the use of this term in both instances serves only to make comparisons between Hayworth and 'Oomph girl' Sheridan, who was originally cast in the role of Virginia Brush in the 1941 musical *The Strawberry Blonde* and whose role Hayworth took following contract dispute between Sheridan and Warner Brothers.

Once the studios had arrived upon a clear and consistent persona for Hayworth, discourse surrounding her also tended to avoid explicit preoccupation with particular anatomical features (as was the case with stars such as Betty Grable, Jane Russell or Lana Turner) in favour of her overall 'loveliness' or allure. Instead Hayworth's sexuality was manifest in provocative glamour shots, her convulsive, erotic and exotic dancing style, her

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<sup>68</sup> During which time *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941), *Affectionately Yours* (1941), *Blood and Sand* (1941), and *You'll Never Get Rich* (1941) and *My Gal Sal* (1942), *Tales of Manhattan* (1942) and 'You Were Never Lovelier' (1942) were released in the USA.

<sup>69</sup> Rather than the film in which she was appearing or the character she was playing - although the character she portrays is a well-bred, eloquent, and light-footed socialite who assures Robert that "she's old fashioned...[she likes] the old fashioned ways." i.e. she is reserved and conservative in her tastes, and normally, her behaviour.

<sup>70</sup> 'Rita Hayworth' *Picturegoer*, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1940, p.13

<sup>71</sup> *Picturegoer* 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1941, p.5

flirtatious, bordering on camp verbal delivery, and her potentially ‘hot’ Latina ethnicity, very much in line with Stephen Gundle’s observation that

The woman of glamour was often a foreigner who was seen to encapsulate some particular spirit like French eroticism, Latin passion, or Eastern exoticism. In both cases, there was ample opportunity for the construction of dream inducing narratives about the subject’s rise from poverty, her mysterious origins, or her varied life experiences.<sup>72</sup>

Reliance upon the ‘spicy’ Latina stereotype and the affiliation of Latina ethnicity with the sensual was not unusual for Hollywood representations of Hispanic starlets at this time. However, use of the Latina stereotype with regard to Hayworth did differ from its use in relation to other Hollywood Latinas, such as the Dominican-born Maria Montez, her Mexican-born predecessor Lupe Velez and, as Ovalle discusses - Hollywood’s ‘first brown female star’<sup>73</sup> – the Mexican born Dolores Del Rio.

That Del Rio starred in films such as *Bird of Paradise* (1932) and *Flying Down to Rio* (1935), whilst Velez played the lead in the ‘Mexican Spitfire’ film series (1939-43) and starred in other films such as *The Hot Pepper* (1932) *Strictly Dynamite* (1933) and *The Girl from Mexico* (1939), and Montez was marketed by Universal studios as ‘The Caribbean Cyclone’, is not coincidental: these film titles and epithets suggest intensity, passion, exoticism and abandon: all traits stereotypically linked with the figure of the Latina. However, rather than the close reliance upon crude racial markers in the construction of star persona, such as was the case with Velez, Montez and Del Rio, Hayworth’s racial identity betrayed a greater ‘racial ambiguity’<sup>74</sup> and appears to have been much more malleable, essentially functioning like a costume which could be appropriated and discarded as and when Columbia required, enabling Hayworth to accrue greater cultural capital than her Latina counterparts may have been able to attain:

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<sup>72</sup> Gundle *Glamour* p.12

<sup>73</sup> Ovalle *Dance and the Hollywood Latina* p.24

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p.78

Rita's evolution from dark-haired senorita to All-American strawberry blonde was a story of upward mobility, an assimilation process that procured more and better roles after her name was changed to something with a 'good old American ring'<sup>75</sup>

Hayworth's Latina roots *were* acknowledged (through her 'hot' dancing style, the kinds of 'exotic' roles she was occasionally given, and frequently through iconographic elements of her photographic representation) but in written discourse anglicised elements of Hayworth's star persona such as her maternal Irish ancestry were equally emphasised. Indeed, it is notable that when Hayworth's affair with Prince Aly Khan became public and outcry against her ensued, British newspaper *The People* described Khan as a 'coloured Indian Prince' whilst Hayworth is labelled a 'wreckless' *white* woman<sup>76</sup>:

If a white film star is prepared to go off on an escapade with a coloured Indian prince who is already married she could hardly expect the marriage to be founded upon anything but sand.<sup>77</sup>

What the above also demonstrates is that Hayworth was therefore no less contrived, fabricated or false a star than Grable, but that she embodied a very different set of traits, several of which were racial characteristics which combined with other fortuitous factors which functioned across international markets to imbue her star image with greater credibility or symbolic value.

The trends observed in the magazines examined suggest a repeated reliance upon sedate, unthreatening and ultimately respectable adjectives such as 'lovely' and 'charming', and consistently and deliberately juxtapose the potentially scandalous, unpalatable or overly assertive elements of Hayworth's persona and Latina ethnicity alongside a persistent discourse of more respectable, demure femininity, intended to persuade more conservative

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<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p.79 - here quotes *Motion Picture* magazine, September 1940 (no page number supplied), as referenced by McLean *Being Rita Hayworth* p.37

<sup>76</sup> However, as Smith & Wright demonstrate, this was not necessarily a universal response to Hayworth's indiscretion. In the Tijuana bible 'We Could Make Millions' a combination of Hayworth's Latina identity and the fact that she is a Hollywood star (Hollywood being frequently imagined in popular culture as a city of questionable moral values) are linked to a voracious sexual drive supposedly indicative of a rash, impulsive and 'spicy' Latina identity. Smith & Wright 'A Glimpse Behind the Screen' pp.159-163

<sup>77</sup> *The Age* 30<sup>th</sup> April 1951 quoting *The People*.

audiences that such images were produced within a respectable context, upon a respectable individual, and were therefore, by implication, respectable. Nonetheless, as both Ovalle and McLean note, Hayworth's Hispanic ethnicity certainly was not erased completely. Hayworth's exoticism (the 'spectacle of difference'<sup>78</sup>) did, in certain contexts (particularly her glamour and pin-up photography) form an essential erotic element of her star image, which accommodated and legitimised much of the sophisticated sensuality inherent in that star persona<sup>79</sup>. This notion of sophisticated sensuality was not unusual with 'exotic' female stars, such as Velez, Montez and Del Rio; as Berry notes in her work on exoticism and cosmetics in 1930s Hollywood, fellow 'exotic' Hedy Lamarr's striking looks were cultivated and enhanced to cause a 'sensation with her appearance in [the 1938 film] *Algiers* [as] a 'red-lipped, tawny-eyed, black haired girl' whose 'lush, exciting beauty' combined sensuousness with an aloof glamour''<sup>80</sup>

So whilst, as discussed above, some of the more prominent Hispanic elements of Hayworth's appearance were ruthlessly erased so that her appearance would more closely resemble Anglo-American physical ideals, Hayworth was still often cast as an immigrant, a foreigner or exotic 'other' in many of her films<sup>81</sup>; her exoticism being a Production Code-friendly way of suggesting female self-sufficiency, worldliness, sophistication and ultimately female sexual confidence.

Glamour is constantly shifting and intensely problematic and in Hollywood needed to be negotiated carefully, in order to ensure the success of a star, particularly in the context of

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<sup>78</sup> Shohat, E. 'Gender and Culture of Empire: Towards a Feminist Ethnography of Cinema.' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* v.13 #1-3 1991, p.68

<sup>79</sup> As Kobal observes, when Hayworth was first signed up to Columbia, it was intended that she would become another "[Hedy] Lamarr 'type'", Kobal *Rita Hayworth* p.155

<sup>80</sup> Berry, S. *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis, Mn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) p.126

<sup>81</sup> Most obviously in her earliest films such as *Charlie Chan in Egypt* (Fox Film Corporation, 1935); (she is Egyptian), or *Dante's Inferno* (Fox film Corporation, 1935); (Hispanic), but also in her later films such as *Angels Over Broadway* (Columbia, 1940) (Russian); in *Blood And Sand* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1941) (Spanish); *You Were Never Lovelier* (Columbia: 1942) (Argentinean), *Down to Earth* (Columbia, 1947)(Greek) and *The Loves of Carmen* (Columbia, 1948) (Romanian).



war and when promoting a star in markets outside of America. Therefore a range of linguistic framing techniques which implied prestige, worth, sophistry – largely a mediated sexuality - were utilised to contextualise many stars (such as Hayworth) as desirable and exciting yet crucially still possessed of respectability and of cultural capital.

### **Glamour Means More Than Pin-Up Lines: Making glamour respectable**

A 1945 *Picturegoer* article, entitled ‘Glamour Means More Than Pin-Up Lines, Says Ginger Rogers’<sup>82</sup> (Figure Fifteen), offers us a fascinating contemporaneous insight into the fraught political negotiations surrounding glamorous Hollywood femininity and the film star pin-up in wartime Britain. The article itself makes an overt link between the notion of glamour (in this article, presented as being an exclusively positive feminine trait) and the archetypal figure of the film star pin-up.

Whilst its subject, Ginger Rogers, was obviously a different star to Hayworth, embodied a set of different traits, and offered a different range of resonances, there are many notable similarities between the two performers; Rogers was also known as a musical star (although Rogers had successfully branched out to become a non-musical actress) and both were popular film star pin-ups.<sup>83</sup>

The article is notable in that the key questions it ostensibly seeks to examine are ‘what exactly is glamour?’ and ‘what makes a woman glamorous?’ Yet whilst comparisons are made to ‘It’;

Some years ago the popular mode of describing a young girl attractive to the male eye was to say she possessed ‘it’... eventually the epithet came to mean every kind of charm from sheer sex appeal to the inner something which is of spiritual origin.

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<sup>82</sup> ‘Glamour Means More Than Pin-Up Lines, Says Ginger Rogers’ *Picturegoer* 12<sup>th</sup> May 1945, p.11

<sup>83</sup> Known as ‘The Chin-Up-Pin-Up’ in an amusing play upon the notion of ‘beauty as duty’. ‘Ginger The Chin-Up-Pin-Up Girl’ *Picturegoer* 13<sup>th</sup> May 1944, p.11

The answer to these questions, perhaps not surprisingly, given the self-acknowledged difficulty of finding such a definition ('hasn't it struck you as odd that the meaning of a word which has come so much into fashion that its practically on everybody's tongue, is often hard to define?'), is not really provided. Only examples of those who possess it (namely Ginger Rogers) can be given.

According to this article, the traits that mark the film star Ginger Rogers out as being a positive example of the embodiment of glamour, imbue her with cultural capital and make her particularly desirable and admirable, are that:

she irradiates a magnetic glow, and an aura of attraction that has nothing to do with the shape of her nose, her contours or the photogenic properties of her legs.

The article continues, claiming that Rogers also:

exploit[s]her talent for living, welcoming each new experience, good, bad, or indifferent for what it could teach her and cultivating an interest in places along with sympathy for her fellow creatures. Result: she is very much alive and altogether charming

Not unlike pieces upon both Hayworth and Grable, the article normalizes Rogers, emphasizing her 'extraordinary ordinariness', by 'isolat[ing] certain human qualities'<sup>84</sup> through a number of means, such as drawing attention to her modesty as evidenced in her quote:

Beauty? Nobody ever accused me of being one. Now I'M supposed to have acquired glamour. How come? I'd never know. I haven't changed my make up in five years, as far as I know, I look the same as when I first entered pictures, except perhaps a bit older, naturally.(emphasis in original text)

and the article's comment:

these remarks of Ginger's bear one hallmark of the true glamour girl. She doesn't know she has it; is unselfconscious about her qualities.

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<sup>84</sup> Dyer *Stars* p.43

*images redacted*

***Fig. Fifteen:*** Picturegoer article 'Glamour Means More Than Pin-Up  
Lines Says Ginger Rogers'. May 12<sup>th</sup> 1945.p.11

Again, not unlike discussions of Hayworth and Grable, Rogers' ethos of hard work, positivity and ambition is also emphasised:

when I was a youngster I was dance crazy, and when I found out I was pretty good, I kept at it night and day, until I got enough notice to get a decent part in a show

and the author enthuses that Rogers 'welcom[es] each new experience, good, bad, or indifferent for what it could teach her', offering her as a role model or a reassuring agony aunt figure:

Don't despair reader, you too can be attractive...How has this personality been developed? Now listen to Ginger, without meaning to, she gives the key.

In terms of the article's illustrative imagery, it is of note that a head-and-shoulder shot of Rogers is used in addition to a full length pin-up image, emphasizing the importance of the star's personality or star power in addition to her 'pin-up lines.' This combined with the claim that Rogers possesses

a magnetic glow, and aura of attraction that has nothing to do with the shape of her nose, her contours, or the photogenic properties of her legs'

strongly suggests that here, at least, glamour is not merely dependent upon physical traits, but is itself a 'force welling up from within' - an element of personality which is therefore equally demonstrable through conduct and intimately bound to cultural and social capital - a point strongly reminiscent of Jeanne Basinger's observation of Hollywood femininity between 1930 and 1960:

although the concept of glamour includes fashion, it ultimately involves more than what a woman puts on her body. It deals with the lady herself.<sup>85</sup>

This is the underpinning crux of the feature. Whilst glamour is a 'desirable quality worth striving for' it is important that its potential or 'worth' is not squandered, misappropriated, abused or undermined. So whilst, as the article notes, 'a girl can be glamorous in uniform, in

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<sup>85</sup> Basinger, J. *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960*. (Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan University Press, 1993) p.137

the home, at the workers bench or behind the counter, as well as on the screen, stage or cabaret platform' – any of the many modes of culturally current public femininity, 'sense and sincerity' - traits which are also attributed to Rogers in this article - are also supposedly a prerequisite of glamour. As the article concludes:

For me the word implies something striking in appearance, due not necessarily to features but to make-up, smartness or colourful clothes, originality of outlook as expressed in conversation, and an inner being so in tune with life and vital that it completely eliminates the drab and sordid.

It therefore presents a bizarre, intricate and somewhat confusing juxtaposition of almost anti-consumerist, self-improvement rhetoric ('as expressed in conversation, and an inner being so in tune with life and vital that it completely eliminates the drab and sordid') alongside a flagrant endorsement of consumerism ('make-up, smartness or colourful clothes'), whilst the use of the subjective 'for me' demonstrates, once again, the importance of taste distinctions and the reliance upon subjectivity within the complex politics of glamour.

### **'Every Woman Should Glamour for Attention': Negotiating Glamour**

An article from the 1946 British annual *Film Review* entitled 'Every Woman should Glamour for Attention'<sup>86</sup>, and supposedly written by Hayworth, also attempts to define and discuss Hollywood glamour, its relevance to everyday British women and the limits of its appropriate use. This time it is Hayworth who is positioned as the bench mark of, and expert upon glamorous femininity: an expert advisor guiding the reader in the correct appropriation of the various facets that will help them to become a proper, correct, or appropriately glamorous model of public femininity:

Rita Hayworth...knows practically everything there is to know about this much-discussed subject. She is considered to be the most completely glamorous, seductive

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<sup>86</sup> 'Every Woman Should Glamour For Attention' *Film Review Annual* (London: MacDonald and Co, 1946) pp.101-102

woman on the screen and in this article tells how you, madame, can become so bewitching that men will gasp in the street as you pass them. And you sir, will learn how it is all done.

Despite being written shortly after the war the preoccupation, evident in the earlier Rogers article, with retraining and ‘making appropriate’ women’s expression of their sexual agency, remains. In terms of social context, as David Kynaston’s definitive study documents<sup>87</sup>, and as we shall discuss further in chapter seven, Britain remained in the grip of austerity for several years after the close of war, with the majority of consumer goods still either on the ration, actually becoming rationed for the first time, or largely unavailable. It is perhaps not surprising that in an article upon a phenomenon such as glamour, which links female self-expression with consumption, explicit mention is made of shortage and the continued importance of self-regulation. As Hayworth observes

Glamour does not mean a flagrant overplus of personality; it does not mean a striking hairdo or the marvelously enameled complexion. And, to girls in coupon-starved Britain, I would point out that it certainly does not even mean an enormous wardrobe of expensive clothes.

This article also emphasises the importance of female grooming (‘There is no excuse for not making that effort – every woman can and should be glamorous’), employing a rhetoric strongly reminiscent of wartime ‘beauty as duty’. However, slightly altered social conditions now allow for that duty to be to one’s self rather than to one’s country or loved one. This rhetoric brings to mind Mary Ann Doane’s observation that within Western capitalist society the attractive/appropriate body, particularly the active/appropriate *feminine* body, operates within what Doane terms as a ‘commodity system’ whereby

The effective operation of the commodity system requires the breakdown of the body into parts – nails, hair, skin, breath – each one of which can constantly be improved through the purchase of a commodity. Stuart Ewen points out, [...] ‘each position of the body was to be viewed critically, as a potential bauble in a successful assemblage’.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Kynaston, D. *Austerity Britain. 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007)

<sup>88</sup> Doane, M.A. ‘The Economy of Desire: The commodity form in/of cinema’ *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* v.11 #1 1989, p.31

Similarly, Hayworth's writing openly acknowledges that glamour is the opposite of the natural, as by its very nature it is a process of embellishment, finessed and commodified. So whilst this article also advocates that glamour is an intrinsic part of one's personality or the natural ('Glamour comes from the very soul itself'), the author also highlights the importance of consumable goods and the process of glamorization as a means of physically manifesting and demonstrating that innate charm. 'The latest tips and beauty aids', 'Crimson finger nails with nail varnish', 'perfume' and 'lipstick'. The reader is encouraged through the use of self-help rhetoric to critically observe herself, each 'potential bauble', both physical and in terms of personality, in order to create 'a successful assemblage' and empower herself through the augmentation of both her looks and her *self*:

to possess glamour is the right of every woman for only through expressing her personality and her innate womanliness can a woman maintain her own self esteem.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the strong linkage of glamour to commodity and consumption, the pervading sense of true, authentic and indisputable innate womanliness which this commodification process is supposed to enhance underpins the consumer rhetoric here. Whilst it is simultaneously implied throughout the piece that sex and gender amount to the same thing, the very process of glamorization - the subject's manoeuvring of particular gendered markers into 'a successful assemblage' - suggests a gendered performance, or a feminine masquerade, whereby, in the words of Joan Riviere 'Womanliness...could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it.'<sup>90</sup> The article itself even hints at the reprisal if the female subject should fail to consider each 'potential bauble' or, worse still, rejects glamour and its processes altogether. Simultaneously reaffirming glamour's supposed inclusivity, whilst also

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<sup>89</sup> 'Glamour for Attention' p. 101

<sup>90</sup> Riviere, J. (1929). 'Womanliness as Masquerade.' *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. v. 10. p.306

reinforcing gendered divisions, Hayworth observes ‘it is every bit as right for a woman to excel at glamour as it is for a man to excel in sports’, yet she goes on to claim that

nothing can be more foolish than the sports girl type trying to ape the languorous pose of the night club habitué, but there is no reason at all why they should not forge their own line of glamour<sup>91</sup>

As such what constitutes an appropriate mode of public femininity is placed within very specific limits, with the ‘sports type’ presumably being the less girlish or demure lady. But perhaps not surprisingly within a consumerist culture, differing modes of femininity are presented as a consumption choice, with a ‘type’ of glamour for everyone – just as the Max Factor cosmetics company maintained there was a shade of lipstick for every ‘type.’

That the feature demonstrates a preoccupation with maintaining mystery, subtly encouraging and reinforcing gender differences, whilst once again, endorsing restraint is perhaps best encapsulated in the article’s title - ‘Every Woman Should Glamour for Attention’ – this play upon the notion of *clamoring* for attention, suggesting that as an appropriate alternative to being brazen, drawing inappropriate attention, those who possess ‘real’ glamour should know to exercise restraint in exhibiting it. This would certainly seem to be supported by Hayworth’s claim that ‘mystery is the essential ingredient of your glamour’. However, in terms of appropriate moral behaviour there is an acknowledgement that ‘mystery’, with its implication of concealment and of trickery, must be tempered, specifically with ‘sincerity’:

Do you think sincerity and mystery can go hand in hand? I certainly believe that they can and that, if you achieve the two, you will have achieved glamour.

She continues, alluding to the notion of a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, a moral and *immoral* glamour,

plenty of women can be mysterious by being completely unscrupulous. This doesn’t add up to *real* glamour

before drawing to a close with a call-to-arms evocative of wartime ‘beauty as duty’:

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Glamour for Attention’ p.102



It is your duty to be glamorous. This workaday world needs all the enchantment that it can get and it is up to you to provide your quota.

Whilst the evidence presented above may seem, in many ways, both conservative and prescriptive in its approach to the articulation of the public and, to an extent, sexualized femininity, and the parameters of glamour, Hayworth concludes

The girl with pretty features can be lovely but it is the girl who uses her intelligence who becomes glamorous<sup>92</sup>

As such the association of glamour with intellect or guile could therefore be understood to suggest an element of agency and of any glamorous woman's self-aware engagement with the mediation of her own public image.

In conclusion, the study of various print based media from the outbreak of war to the immediately post-war period reveals a range of recurrent linguistic devices used to frame female sexual appeal. Many of these terms are not associated with female sexual agency. In fact, they appear to have often been deliberately chosen for their passive connotations and for their ability to temper provocative images or elements of a film star's image which may have been seen to be too challenging or improper by more conservative audiences. Alternatively a range of terms also quickly become apparent which are less acceptable, less respectable and more provocative – 'oomph', 'it', 'sex appeal' - which due to their 'poor taste' possessed the potential to harm a star's image if not used carefully.

Locating these terms within a binary structure and considering how they may function within a symbolic/social economy firstly allows us an insight into what was at stake for subjects/cinemagoers in finding either positive or negative resonances, accepting or rejecting film stars who were associated with such terms. Secondly it helps us in discerning the range

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<sup>92</sup> And quotes preceding – 'Glamour for Attention' p.102

of resonances stars such as Grable and Hayworth offered and some of the potential reasons for those resonances.

The key articles discussed within this chapter present these terms and their resonances within context, demonstrating a continuation of certain war themes, in particular restraint, presumably due to Britain's continuing austerity conditions (which are explicitly mentioned within one article) but also due to notions of appropriately demure (i.e. middle-class) feminine behaviours whilst still endorsing glamour and advocating consumer choice, setting the scene for a post-war consumer society and presenting a notion that women had now earned the right to be glamorous.

**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**‘Triple Threat, Singing, Dancing Glamor Star’:**  
**Cultural Capital in the Landry/Life Pin-Up**

Having discussed the rhetoric surrounding Hayworth as a film star pin-up and a glamorous public figure in circulation in both Britain and the US during the war, in this brief chapter a more detailed and culturally specific analysis of a Hayworth pin-up shall be undertaken.

This shall be done with a view to exploring three key areas. Firstly, what possible appeals or ‘resonances’ Hayworth’s pin-up image in particular could have offered, in this instance, to US wartime audiences. How and to what extent Hayworth’s pin-up imagery exhibited a sense of status, worth or what Bourdieu terms as ‘cultural capital’, this being social (but non-financial) assets or tools at a subject’s disposal. finally, this chapter will re-examine some of the issues surrounding sexual agency and sexual objectification which are so central to the pin-up form, and determine how and to what effect they bore out in relation to Hayworth’s pin-up image.

Not that close textual analysis of one particular image is not without problems. By their very nature textual analyses are highly subjective, and once taken out of context the texts studied can be grossly misrepresented, either purposefully or by accident. In addition, a single image only has a very limited ability to shed light upon the kind of queries listed above. As Staiger or Vološinov, for example, have noted, ‘the sign’ (in this case the pin-up image) ‘may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse’<sup>1</sup>, and context is key when considering such texts. But the analysis of one particular image can function effectively as a case study, and here it will demonstrate how a number of the concepts discussed in previous chapters operate in practice, whilst illuminating further points for

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<sup>1</sup> Vološinov, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929) trans. Matejka, L. and Titunik, I.R. (NY: Seminar Press, 1973) p.21; Quoted in Staiger, J. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) p.6

consideration. With this in mind, this chapter's approach is similar that of chapter two, on the Betty Grable/Powolney pin-up, exploring the implications of one specific image, framed within the originating American context, in which the image (and in this instance its' accompanying article) originally appeared.

The image in question is commonly understood, in a manner similar to the myth surrounding the Grable/Powolney photograph, to have been the most requested Hayworth pin-up, and the second-most requested wartime film star pin-up, and so also warrants consideration. Here we move back to a consideration of a specifically American context, as British audiences at large will most likely not have had access to the particular image or the accompanying article. However these two artefacts will still have possessed the potential to shape British audience's perceptions of Hayworth as there is an extremely high probability that those who wrote the discourse to which British audiences *will* have been exposed will have encountered the image in question and experienced the accompanying media ballyhoo. The consideration of this particular image is therefore helpful in developing themes introduced in the previous chapter and instituting themes which shall be developed further in chapter six, whilst a study of Hayworth as a film pin-up which excludes any detailed discussion of an actual Hayworth pin-up image is surely even more problematic.

### **That Picture:** **Hayworth & the Landry pin-up.**

With the exception of the notorious image of 'Gilda' in silk sheath dress, cigarette in one hand, nonchalantly trailing a fur with the other, the image that is the subject of this chapter (Figure Sixteen) was probably Hayworth's most iconic image. Shot by Bob Landry and

*image redacted*

***Fig. Sixteen:*** Bob Landry/Rita Hayworth pin-up

featured in the August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1941<sup>2</sup> edition of American magazine *Life*, the Hayworth/Landry image, not unlike the Grable/Powloney pin-up, has also come to be surrounded by a certain level of ‘myth’, and this is both indicative of and central to the image’s iconic status. So popular was the image that allegedly five million copies were sold. Yet the image itself is rumoured to be the result of an accidental flash misfire (hence the pronounced shadows) that Landry took a liking to precisely because of its ‘candid’ effect.

The negligée in which Hayworth appears has simultaneously been claimed to have been made by a mother of a member of the crew, to have been Hayworth’s own, and to have come from Columbia Studio’s costume department. The location has been claimed to be both Hayworth’s own bedroom and a set created for Hayworth’s 1941 musical *You’ll Never Get Rich*.<sup>3</sup> Just as with the Grable/Powloney image, many rumours persist surrounding this image, and that they do stands as a testament to the fascination with its subject (here Hayworth), her popularity as a pin-up, and the appeal of the image itself. Meanwhile these speculations regarding the image simultaneously function to imbue the image with the crucial elements of both spontaneity and authenticity; the misfire of the flash, Hayworth’s expression and off-camera gaze (speculation exists as to whom precisely she is looking at and why), the potentially ‘borrowed’ costume, and the notion that the image may have been shot ‘on the spur of the moment’ whilst on the set of *You’ll Never Get Rich*, make the image all the more intriguing.

A common convention of the film star pin-up is the sophisticated contrivance of costuming, lighting, mise-en-scène and posture. In the instance of the Hayworth/Landry

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<sup>2</sup> *Life* 11<sup>th</sup> August 1941 p.33

<sup>3</sup> For a series of discussions surrounding some of these elements see, for example, <http://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2009/05/10/rita-hayworth-pin-up/> retrieved 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2009 or <http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/hayworth/index.html> retrieved 10th July 2012

image this conventional contrivance, specifically with regard to lighting, is notably absent and therefore a candid 'feel' is produced. Yet the image possesses a multitude of other typical (and thus contrived) cheesecake elements, but manifest in such markedly different ways to those of the Grable/Powolney pin-up that they warrant consideration here, primarily because the differences between the Hayworth/Landry and Grable/Powolney images are indicative, in many ways, of the very different appeals the two stars themselves held.

Hayworth's low cut, form-fitting satin and lace negligée (rather than other pin-up costuming staples such as the swimsuit, featured in the Grable image), as well as the image's bedroom setting, make for a particularly suggestive image; alluding to a distinctly sexualised identity which is generally absent in Grable's pin-ups.

The presence of the framed print, the bed's cushioned headboard and the dishevelled satin bedding situates the image and Hayworth within the 'real', simultaneously suggesting either a domestic, home or a hotel environment. The combination of Hayworth's long, painted nails, her negligée and the bedroom setting suggest something of the mistress rather than the housewife. In contrast the Grable/Powolney pin-up is marked by a total absence of mise-en-scène (the image is shot in a studio against a blank backdrop) giving the image a heightened sense of the 'unreal' or fantasy, and meaning that a combination of Grable's physical representation and star persona must bear the full weight of the image's implications without the aid of 'props'.

The differences in costuming between Hayworth in the Landry image and Grable in the Powolney image are also notable. As a 1940 pictorial feature in *Life* magazine upon Hollywood's 'big ten [censorship] no-nos' noted, industry regulation stipulated that films featuring actresses clad in 'lace lingerie' (into which category Hayworth's costuming could reasonably be considered to fall) would not be granted a certificate of approval. Whilst in

subsection three (the 'Costume' section of the 'Particular Applications' of the 1930 PCA code) 'indecent or undue exposure' was 'forbidden', as were 'undressing scenes... save where essential to the plot' and 'dancing costumes intended to permit undue exposure or indecent movements in the dance'. Yet swimsuits received no specific mention in the code. As a result by the time the Grable/Powolney image had entered popular culture, the swimsuit had been functioning for over a decade as a 'Trojan horse'; a 'form of undress that functioned as a symbol of dress'<sup>4</sup> and a key means through which

sexuality and spectacular or desirable physicality could be smuggled into both films and their promotion cloaked in discourse of modernity, empowerment and at times, ironically, clean living. The utility of the swimsuit justified states of relative undress and narrative use of swimming, bathing, swimmers and the swimsuit ensured that charges of 'undue exposure' could be countered by claims of being 'essential to the plot.'<sup>5</sup>

And as such Grable's swimsuit was supposedly less provocative because of the garment's associations with 'clean living' (although the extent to which this is actually true is arguable).

Whilst a swimsuit may be considered more 'respectable' than lingerie, as a star Grable was (and still is) attributed less cultural capital than Hayworth, and her image considered less sophisticated than Hayworth, less mature, developed or complex. As such Hayworth's greater cultural capital and her exotic Latina connection, combined with the careful use within such imagery of props and contexts which suggest good taste and considerable financial means, legitimates the use of provocative imagery by lending such images an air of sophistication.

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<sup>4</sup> Lencek, L and Bosker, G. *Making Waves: Swimsuits and the Undressing of America* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1989) p.11

<sup>5</sup> Wright, E. 'Spectacular Bodies: The Swimsuit, Censorship and Early Hollywood.' *Sport in History - Special Edition* v.2 (Forthcoming) p.4



Presumably too risqué for *Life*'s front cover (instead the magazine ran with Hayworth in a more wholesome bathing suit picnic scenario)<sup>6</sup> the Landry/Hayworth image itself invokes a sophistication which is notably absent in the Grable/Powolney image. A sense of affluence and luxury - economic and cultural capital - pervades and is manifest in signifiers such as Hayworth's lace and satin negligée, the satin bed sheets and the possible hotel setting. These elements invest Hayworth's image with a very specific class capital and it is of note here that this image, in its original context, appeared alongside an article that proclaimed Hayworth's ascendance in the Hollywood pecking order 'from bit parts to triple threat star' therefore drawing deliberate attention to the star's increased cultural and social capital.

A strong sense of the sensual is invoked within the image, through visual signifiers such as the satin negligée, the satin sheets and Hayworth's exposed flesh, whilst Hayworth's dark eyes, dark hair and tanned skin suggest an exotic sensual 'other' and a more mature, confident and 'sophisticated' sexuality than the wholesome, Arian feminine ideal offered by the Powolney/Grable image.

Considering the image's immediate context, the article 'Rita Hayworth Rises From Bit Parts to Triple-Threat Song and Dance Star' also carefully emphasises Hayworth's self-assured sexual potency by casting her as a powerful 'seductress':

In her black and white nightgown, Rita needs no excuse for decorating a page but she has a good one. Playing the seductress in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox's *Blood and Sand*, Rita stole the show from Linda Darnell and Tyrone Power when she did a Spanish dance in a tight red dress.<sup>7</sup>

The 'tight red dress' and the 'Spanish dance' are noted as crucial tools through which Hayworth assumes the mantle of successful 'seductress' and 'show-stealing' star. That the dress is red – a colour frequently associated with the traditional Spanish dance the Flamenco -

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<sup>6</sup> "“I think the editors of *LIFE* would have considered it too risqué for the cover”, says *LIFE* photo editor John Morris. “It was OK inside.”” <http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/hayworth/index.html>. retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> December 2012

<sup>7</sup> *Life* 11<sup>th</sup> August 1941 p.33

links Hayworth to her Spanish ancestry, emphasising her exoticism further. The dress's colour could also be symbolic or indicative of both danger or of desire – both traits which are applicable to Hayworth's 'scarlet woman' Latina identity and to her character in *Blood and Sand*.

As such the dress functions as a provocative tool or prop of glamour imbued with potency and dynamism, the adoption or appropriation of which enables Hayworth to assert her sexual and personal agency in order to realise her potential and accrue symbolic capital or legitimacy, both as a mature woman ('now Rita poses on her own bed, in her own home where she lives near Hollywood with her husband') and as a multi-faceted performer ('triple-threat, singing, dancing glamor star').

Interestingly, the 'Triple-Threat, Singing, Dancing Glamor Star' article very deliberately charts Hayworth's process of growth or maturation, and her gradual and subsequent accumulation of cultural capital, *through* a discussion of recognised pin-up convention, or more precisely through the use of specific conventional pin-up props; it charts Hayworth's progression from unassuming starlet in wholesome 'health and vigour' shots into the 'glamor star' typically found in Hurrell-esque glamour shots;

At various stages of her career Rita Hayworth has appeared in LIFE demonstrating a zipper-front bathing suit, going on a bicycle picnic, or wearing a \$250,000 pearl dress.

The article's focus upon these glamorous pin-up props or tools also offers us a useable example for considering more closely the two differing pin-up appeals offered by Hayworth and by Grable.

Whilst the most iconic Hayworth pin-up images (such as the Landry shot or the *Gilda* imagery) present an exclusive lifestyle, invoke 'status', 'worth' or high amounts of cultural and economic capital, and feature luxurious and glamorous props of the '\$250,000 pearl dress' kind, in the public imagination Grable became and still remains associated primarily

with pin-up imagery of the ‘zipper-front bathing suit’ and ‘bicycle picnic’ kind. Once again bringing to mind Margaret Farrand Thorp’s observation that:

The importance of a star can be measured inversely by the amount of leg shown in her photographs. She mounts the ladder by way of sun bath and swimming pool poses. Not until she is safely at the top can she take to hostess gowns.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, in terms of box-office returns, and sheer cultural currency, it would be foolish to suggest that in America or Britain Grable was an unimportant film star. But if we alter Farrand Thorp’s wording slightly to ‘the *status of, or cultural capital possessed by* a star can be measured inversely by the amount of leg shown in her photographs’, (after all, what is ‘importance’ if it is not concerned with value or status?) this statement reflects the representational contrast between the more exclusive and sophisticated Hayworth (associated in the public imagination with ‘hostess gowns’) and Grable, the ‘average’, populist, ‘girl-next-door’ (remembered in particular for a certain swimsuit pin-up).

Hayworth’s pin-up images frequently incorporated the accoutrements of glamorous adult femininity and her image rapidly progressed into the realms of a more mature and complex female sexuality (and as such she is subsequently remembered as ‘unabashedly sexual’<sup>9</sup> - ‘whatever the other girls had... Rita had more of’<sup>10</sup>) whilst Grable was, and still is, denied cultural capital and discussed as a pin-up *girl*, a ‘deficient whole’<sup>11</sup> who offered little ‘in the way of character or maturity’<sup>12</sup>, and a star whose performances ‘celebrated the joy of being a girl untouched by brains.’<sup>13</sup> Not that these methods of representation worked entirely against Grable (clearly they didn’t – she enjoyed phenomenal box office success, and playing the uncomplicated girl next door enabled Grable to become, for brief period, the highest paid

<sup>8</sup> Thorp, M.F. *America at the Movies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945) p.60

<sup>9</sup> Rosen, M. *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (London: Peter Owen, 1973) p.210

<sup>10</sup> Shipman, D. *The Great Movie Stars: The Golden Years*. (NY: Crown, 1970) p.270

<sup>11</sup> Haskell, M. *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) p.105

<sup>12</sup> Schickel, R. *The Stars* (New York: Literary Licensing, 1962) p.217

<sup>13</sup> Rosen *Popcorn Venus* pp.208-209

woman in America) or worked entirely for Hayworth (see the previous chapter for a discussion of the 1946 *Film Review* annual's reaction to a promotional image for *Gilda*). But as has been discussed throughout this study, such a sexualised female representation was not without its pitfalls. Either a censorious public outcry by more conservative audiences, or the objectificatory potential of such an image, could conversely undermine Hayworth's appeal as anything other than a pin-up starlet. So by a very similar process to those detailed earlier in this study, once again, care is taken to temper the sexualised iconography of the Hayworth/Landry image with a contextualising discourse of respectability.

The Landry image's accompanying article carefully justifies both the use of the image in its publication and Hayworth's reasons for posing within such a shot. ('Rita needs no excuse for decorating a page, but she has a good one'. The excuse being her new-found cultural currency and phenomenal rise to prominence.) Simultaneously the reader is assured of Hayworth's agency (thus reducing the potential for its subject to be objectified) through a discussion of her skill and ability (she is a 'triple threat' performer. i.e. she can sing, dance and act) in an attempt to legitimate her as a bone fide performer rather than mere sex symbol, glamour girl, or 'pin-up.'

Hayworth's representation within the image also invokes sophistication in the truest sense of the word – in that each element is very clearly and determinedly constructed. Her long, painted nails, immaculately styled hair, beautifully made-up face, and her contrived pose all cumulatively function to convey a strong sense of feminine performativity, whilst linking Hayworth forcefully to the processes of glamorisation and conspicuous consumption which (as we shall discuss further in chapter six) are also strongly associated with notions of self-respect and self 'worth'.

Further to the constructed nature of the Landry pin-up two key factors within the iconography warrant further consideration here: namely the incongruous and imposing shadow, and Hayworth's off-camera gaze. These two elements formed what was in 1941, when the Landry picture and accompanying article appeared in *Life*, a very familiar photojournalistic, 'candid-camera' aesthetic<sup>14</sup> that infers an obviously impossible lack of contrivance. Consequently these images suggest a titillating, unmediated insight into the 'real' star beyond the studio-sanctioned view, and make Hayworth's persona and her glamour appear more 'authentic'.

In terms of Hayworth's 'performance' within the Landry image, her confident and relatively open posture allows visual access to her figure, and whilst her torso faces to the left she looks to the right of the image, over her left shoulder rather than meeting the reader's gaze. This pose certainly *could* make Hayworth appear vulnerable and thus further increase her chances of objectification. However if we bear in mind the notion discussed above, of glamour as 'worth', as well as Hayworth's wry smile, her relatively open demeanour and the fact her gaze is clearly trained upon an anonymous, out-of-shot, third party with whom she is clearly comfortably communicating (the focal point of the gaze is surely not the photographer, which therefore suggests Hayworth has an audience) this suggests a social confidence, an ease with and possession of her own body and a sense of control very much in line with Rosen's observation upon the ideology of Hayworth's performances: 'this is my body. It's lovely and gives me pleasure. I rejoice in it just as you do'<sup>15</sup>, even when in an

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Beth Haralovich notes that 'On November 23, 1936, Henry Luce's *Life* appeared on the newsstands and the candid-camera craze began. In January 1937, *Look* appeared, followed the same year by *Pic* and by *Click* in early 1938.' Haralovich 'Film Advertising, The Film Industry and The Pin-Up: The Industry's Accommodations to Social Forces in the 1940's' in Austin (ed) *Current Research in Film: Audiences, Economics and Law*. v. 1. (1985) p.135; Haralovich (p.134) quotes Johnston, J. L. who states that 'the sponsors of *Life*, *Look*, *Pic*, *Click* and newspaper editors... hoping for 250,000 circulation [had] suddenly found a demand for 2,500,000 copies.' 'Still Men Mustn't Stand Still.' *International Photographer*. v.10 #1 (February, 1939) pp.9-17.

<sup>15</sup> Rosen *Popcorn Venus* p.226

essentially private, potentially intimidating situation (semi-clothed, in a confined bedroom setting, with an audience).

If we also briefly revisit Richard Dyer's discussion of eye contact and agency in the pin-up form, Hayworth's lack of eye contact in the Landry/Hayworth image offers an intriguing combination of what Dyer considers to be the typical 'male' and the 'female' pin-up gaze;

In the case of not looking, where the female model typically averts her eyes, expressing modesty, patience and a lack of interest in anything else, the male model looks either off or up. In the case of the former, his look suggests an interest in something else that the viewer cannot see – it certainly doesn't suggest any interest in the viewer. Indeed it barely acknowledges the viewer, whereas the woman's averted eyes do just that – they are averted from the viewer.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst Hayworth's gaze is focused away from the camera lens, suggesting her interest is elsewhere other than with the viewer, simultaneously her posture - turned towards the camera - clearly acknowledges both the viewer and her role as the viewed. Equally, Hayworth's averted gaze may not necessarily suggest modesty but could connote confidence.

Equally Dyer notes the importance of 'the set of the mouth' to characterisation or performance and the visual politics of such images, particularly, when the gaze is supposedly returned by the pin-up subject. He states that 'when the female pin-up returns the viewer's gaze, it is usually some kind of smile, inviting.'<sup>17</sup> As Hayworth's gaze is not upon the viewer it could be feasibly argued that her smile is also not for them. Nor even, is that smile a broad, or even necessarily a reassuring smile (unlike Grable's smile in the Powloney image). Hayworth's smile is a *knowing* rather than a reassuring smile, presenting the onlooker with an enigma rather than offering reassurance and uncomplicated gratification. What is she smiling about, and to whom? As such, whilst many claims have been made as to the passivity and

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<sup>16</sup> Dyer, R. 'Don't Look Now: The Instabilities of the Male Pin-Up.' *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 2002) p.123

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p.128

objectification of sexualised images of women (see the introduction of this thesis for examples), assertions as to the passivity of this particular pin-up subject are problematised here as the power balance, at least to some extent, lies with the enigmatic subject rather than the curious onlooker.

Finally, that the Landry image entered public circulation as Hayworth came to the pinnacle of her fame offers further evidence of her cultural capital, as the image's unveiling in *Life* magazine - one of the most widely read publications available in America at the time – either represented a significant promotional coup or was indicative of just how significant a cultural icon Hayworth had already become prior to the article's publication.

Either way Hayworth's cultural currency was intensified further still, when on November 10<sup>th</sup> - 3 months later - an illustrated pin-up of her by popular *Esquire* pin-up artist George Petty appeared on the cover of America's other market leader, *Time* magazine, and the Landry image, the accompanying *Life* article and the George Petty/*Time* illustrated pin-up will have been very deliberately chosen by Columbia's promotional team to cement Hayworth's association in the public consciousness with the pin-up form, increase Hayworth's cultural currency and cultural capital, and to market Hayworth to the American public as a glamorous, aspirational and acceptable example of public femininity.

In conclusion, many conventional pin-up elements are evident within the Landry/Hayworth pin-up, and it could therefore be argued that the photograph offers an image of objectified, or even passive, femininity intended particularly for a male audiences. However performative and gestural elements within this image – namely Hayworth's performance of confident, knowing and self-possessed female sexuality (what Buszek would term 'awareness'), the star's established persona, her cultural capital accumulated across various media to form a 'total star text', in addition to her apparent command of what could

be a potentially threatening or disempowering situation, and the possible implications of her gaze - offer a considerably more complex image, featuring a subject whose potential as an object of sexual objectification for male onlookers is not so easily argued. Indeed, counterclaims can be made that these elements in fact suggest a glamorous, assertive and self-possessed female subject.

Admittedly, as the example, in chapter four, of Ann Sheridan and the problem of 'oomph' demonstrates, the linkage of glamour to 'worth', to female self-confidence, independence and modernity, and the notion that the effective implementation of glamour is indicative of successful self-realisation is not unproblematic. However the connotations attached to such imagery complicate readings of Hayworth as a passive or objectified female subject within the image. As a representation of sexualised feminine agency the image possesses several potentially disreputable or scandalous elements, and therefore a negotiation has been brokered whereby as well as the pin-up form (as Buszek in particular has observed, was so often the case) and its glamorous contrivances being used to present an image of agency, confidence and modernity (but within the image's original reception context of *Life* magazine), great care has also been taken to contextualise Hayworth's pin-up persona through the discussion of a combination of elements which are both part of and separate to the Landry image which crucially denote Hayworth's respectability, legitimacy, success, status and affluence (Hayworth is represented as talented, culturally current and hardworking, respected by her peers, married and owns her own home) – namely her cultural capital. As such this picture and its associated article demonstrates the inherent differences between the ways in which Hayworth and Grable were represented and discussed within their most iconic pin-up images.



**CHAPTER SIX:**  
**‘Do as Glamorous Rita Hayworth Does...’:**  
**The Pin-up, the Tie-up, The Politics of Glamour**  
**and of Female Purchasing During World War II**

In the opening years of World War II British advertisers developed advertising strategies to avoid claims that they were encouraging inappropriate or excessive consumption. Advertisers marketing women's leisure goods were particularly susceptible to these claims and therefore developed rhetoric to address and appeal to the British female consumer. That rhetoric was two-fold, co-opting support for the war and for women's new roles within it, whilst simultaneously implying that consumption of the products they advertised was somehow patriotic. Similarly upon America's entering the war, US advertisers developed marketing approaches to counter their own changing social contexts, but conditions in the United States being both economically and culturally different to Britain, similar but subtly different strategies were required.

British advertisements for American products and brands, not unlike US advertisements in America, had long been in the habit of utilising well-known Hollywood stars to endorse and promote products, invariably reusing marketing stills produced for the American market with subtle linguistic modifications, and this continued throughout the war. The images of those stars when featured in such adverts for luxury goods, in their own films and for their own promotional material, also had to undergo a similar patriotic negotiation in order to justify their continued cultural visibility in a war context.

Using a range of print-based advertisements for women's leisure goods from American and British magazines throughout the war period, this chapter will briefly discuss British wartime advertising before moving to more closely investigate American advertising rhetoric and film star endorsements during this period. This will be done with a view to a brief comparative examination of the negotiations required when advertising to female

consumers, in Britain and the US, during a period when goods and free time were in short (or shorter) supply.

This chapter will also expand upon an argument established in chapter four regarding the differing appeals and the representational and discursive differences between the working-class glamour embodied by Grable, and the more high-end, middle-class and exotic glamour with which Hayworth was associated. Several American and British wartime advertising tie-ups featuring Hayworth will be examined and compared and, in particular, two American tie-ups for the same product, placed in the same publication, will be discussed before moving on to discuss a third tie-up for that same product, in the same publication, just four months later, but this time featuring Grable. This is undertaken with a view firstly, to demonstrating a continuity of representation regarding Hayworth, across products, and then demonstrating the differing glammers these two stars embodied and the differing ways these glammers were marketed to consumers.

### **State Regulation and Negotiation: British Wartime Advertising Strategy**

In Britain, in a context of shifting economic and social priorities and anticipating a decline, definitely in materials, and possibly in consumer activity, advertisers at large were anxious that their products and services were seen to remain culturally relevant to their (largely female) consumers. They therefore swiftly moved to incorporate women's newly-increased social and financial independence and their altered roles in the employment market into their advertising representations. The implication of much of the female-targeted commercial advertising was either that the maintenance of one's looks was a patriotic duty<sup>1</sup>, or that the purchase of certain goods such as cosmetics, toiletries and in particular, less practical

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<sup>1</sup> See the numerous examples detailed in Kirkham, P. 'Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up the (Home) Front.' in Kirkham, P and Thoms, D. (eds) *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995). pp.13-28

garments or adornment, offered consumers a potential means to participate in, and embody, the exciting modes of modern femininity that were springing up during this period.

Meanwhile, in Britain, as threatened shortages became a reality, advertisers also incorporated scarcity into their adverts as a spur for consumers to ‘buy while you still can’ and to promote their own reduced production as their own patriotic wartime sacrifice - an assurance that in purchasing their advertised goods the consumer hadn’t in any way harmed the war effort (although neither had they necessarily benefitted it!)

These techniques carried the added bonus of allowing advertisers to continue commercial production in a way that required as little alteration as possible to both production and sales techniques, whilst all importantly still *appearing* patriotic. To this end, it could therefore be argued that to an extent these advertising techniques simply co-opted the wartime woman and her apparent new-found freedoms to simply be the freedom to buy and to consume.

### **‘The American Advertising Industry’s Finest Hour’: Wartime Advertising in America**

In terms of a comparison with the British context, it is important to begin by noting that at no time in wartime North America were there the level of privations and shortages that were experienced in wartime Britain. This was the case for a number of reasons, but primarily because of the much greater availability of goods and materials<sup>2</sup>.

Another contributory factor in America’s blurring of commercial sector and state interests and the considerably more lenient approach to advertising regulation was that being

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<sup>2</sup> For example, by July 1944 clothing shortages were such that British women were finding it ‘increasingly difficult to keep themselves even respectable’ (Public Records Office, *Home Intelligence Weekly Report* I/292, 6-13 Oct., 27 Oct. – 3 Nov. 1942) conversely, as Leff observes, ‘what Americans called sacrifice often involved limits on substantial gains rather than the horrific deprivations and destruction suffered by the citizens of other belligerents.’ Leff, M. H. ‘The Politics of Sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II.’ in Martel, G. (ed) *The World War Two Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004) p.337

largely cut off from Europe by the war, American manufacturers were more reliant than ever upon their native market, and as such US women were encouraged to consume in order to continue to bolster a US economy still expanding out of depression. As a result, Sue Hart has claimed that the war era 'may well have been the American advertising industry's finest hour'<sup>3</sup>, in which the true might of the commercial sector became entrenched in American popular culture, and a smooth transition was forged from growing, post-depression economy to post-war consumerist boom.

Whilst the British government moved swiftly, upon entry into war, to regulate much within British society including employment, industry, production, distribution, and advertising, in stark contrast, Stephen Fox notes that although 'ultimately the [advertising] industry donated about a billion dollars' worth of space and time to the war effort, and many conventional product adverts included war messages' many of them actually contained the most 'dubious assertions of how the product was helping win the war.'<sup>4</sup> As Jackson Lears notes in his history of American advertising

Whilst the Advertising Council (which became the War Advertising Council from Pearl Harbour to V-J Day) provided free advertising space to the government and in general to demonstrate that advertising agencies and their corporate clients could be viewed as patriotic citizens... by cooperating with the government's Office of War Information... The OWI itself was increasingly dominated by corporate advertising people like Gilbert Price of Coca-Cola...the death of the OWI [in 1943], due to lack of congressional support, only underscored what everyone already knew about wartime publicity: the 'private sector' was in the saddle.<sup>5</sup>

A deeply exploitative system therefore developed whereby the tail appeared very much to be wagging the dog. The propagandistic messages presented to the American masses were neither in any real sense an act of altruism or of patriotism, as the intent was essentially to curry favour with the Roosevelt administration, whilst exploiting state endorsement in the

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<sup>3</sup> Hart, S. 'Madison Avenue Goes to War: Patriotism in Advertising During World War II.' Holsinger, M.P and Schofield, M.A. (eds) *Visions of War: World War II in Popular Literature and Culture*. (Bowling Green, Oh: BGSU Popular Press, 1992) p.114

<sup>4</sup> Fox, S. *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising* (London: Heinemann, 1984) p.170

<sup>5</sup> Lears, J. *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (NY: Basic Books, 1994) pp.248-249

name of war production and maintaining or establishing market dominance in readiness for the end of war. This policy achieved its desired effect. As Stephen Fox observes, early in the war ‘the Federal Trade Commission stopped bothering Madison Avenue,’<sup>6</sup> whilst the state had not only subsidised all manner of production but was also considerably indebted to the commercial sector.

### **‘A Host of Contradictory Messages’: Communicating with the British Wartime Woman**

If we add to these situations, Western culture’s common positioning of women as ‘the prototype of the modern consumer’<sup>7</sup>, and combine it with many women’s increased or new-found financial independence gained through war work, then it is not surprising that the resultant message that was often conveyed from the wartime commercial sector, on both sides of the Atlantic, was that the hard-working wartime woman was justified in making such a purchase as she had *earned* the right to consume with her hard-earned wages.

This was not uncommon, and goods such as cosmetics as well as fragrances and toiletries were frequently made all the more appealing through the reimagining of their (occasionally questionable) practical merits, invariably being portrayed as ‘essential’ aids either to wellbeing and health or to quick, effective and efficient grooming, intended to make their audience better wives, better housekeepers, better mothers, better war workers. What resulted, as McNeil notes in his study upon the impact of war and of the Civilian Clothing Order of 1942<sup>8</sup> upon British dress, was a host of ‘contradictory messages’:

Whilst retailers attempted to release new lines to encourage spending, state propaganda and a steadily rising tax-base demanded moderation, many of the

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<sup>6</sup> Fox *Mirror Makers* p.169

<sup>7</sup> Doane, M.A. ‘The Woman’s Film: Possession and Address.’ in Gledhill, C. (ed) *Home Is Where The Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film* (London: BFI, 1987) p.23

<sup>8</sup> Commonly known as the ‘Utility’ scheme, this was a directive ‘laid down by the Board of Trade in order to regulate the manufacture and distribution of clothing to a wartime populace.’ McNeil, P. ‘Put Your Best Face Forward’: The Impact of the Second World War on British Dress.’ *Journal of Design History*, v.6 #4, 1993, p.283

exhortations to save position woman as culprit, playing on the cultural conventions which described the consumer as a fashion-hungry, impulse-driven female...This conflation of spending, temptation, and indulgence with the female consumer was a stock-in-trade of sales psychology in the inter-war period.<sup>9</sup>

Some particularly creative British interpretations of the practical virtues of luxury goods can be found in three wartime examples of the British Max Factor cosmetics advertisements; a 1943 half-page Hayworth 'Colour Harmony'/'You Were Never Lovelier' tie-up (figure seventeen) from British film fan magazine *Pictureshow*<sup>10</sup>, a 1941 quarter page Max Factor preparations tie-up with MGM star Heddy Lamarr with the headline 'An Apology and a Promise' from *Picture Post* (figure eighteen)<sup>11</sup> and a 1944 quarter-page 'Pan Cake' make up advertisement from *Picturegoer* (figure nineteen)<sup>12</sup>, which whilst unendorsed still carefully emphasises the product's link with Hollywood more generally. (Note the use of star icons and the references to 'Max Factor, Hollywood and London' and to their production of the 'cosmetics of the stars'). Each of these advertisements skilfully adapt the dominant wartime ideology in order to accommodate and excuse the individual (rather than collective) needs or desires that the advertisement invokes. Nor is this untypical. The creative interpretation of both the benefits of Max Factor products and of necessary and widely-held wartime cultural ideologies runs throughout the Max Factor campaigns of the war period. Although this practice was by no means specific or limited to Max Factor advertising.

The appeal to continue consuming is presented as justified despite the noted scarcity of such materials<sup>13</sup>, whilst the shortage rhetoric skilfully reimagines that

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p.291

<sup>10</sup> *Pictureshow* January 1943 p.16

<sup>11</sup> *Picture Post* December 20<sup>th</sup> 1941 p. 3

<sup>12</sup> *Picturegoer* September 30<sup>th</sup> 1944 p. 16

<sup>13</sup> According to Zweiniger-Bargielowska the 'legal supply of cosmetics was restricted to 25 per cent of the pre-war level.' Not surprisingly 'against the background of high demand it proved to be impossible to eradicate black market manufacture and supply in excess of legal limits.' Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption 1939-1955*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p.185

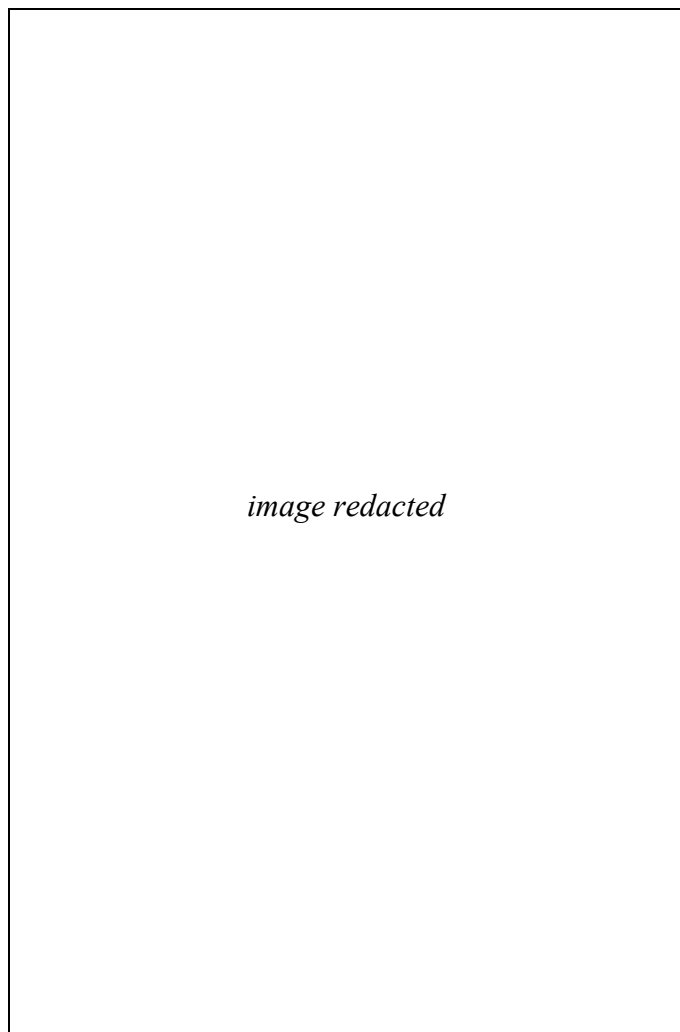
*image redacted*

scarcity as rarity, preciousness and exclusivity. For example, the 1943 Hayworth/*You Were Never Lovelier*/Max Factor tie-up claims that

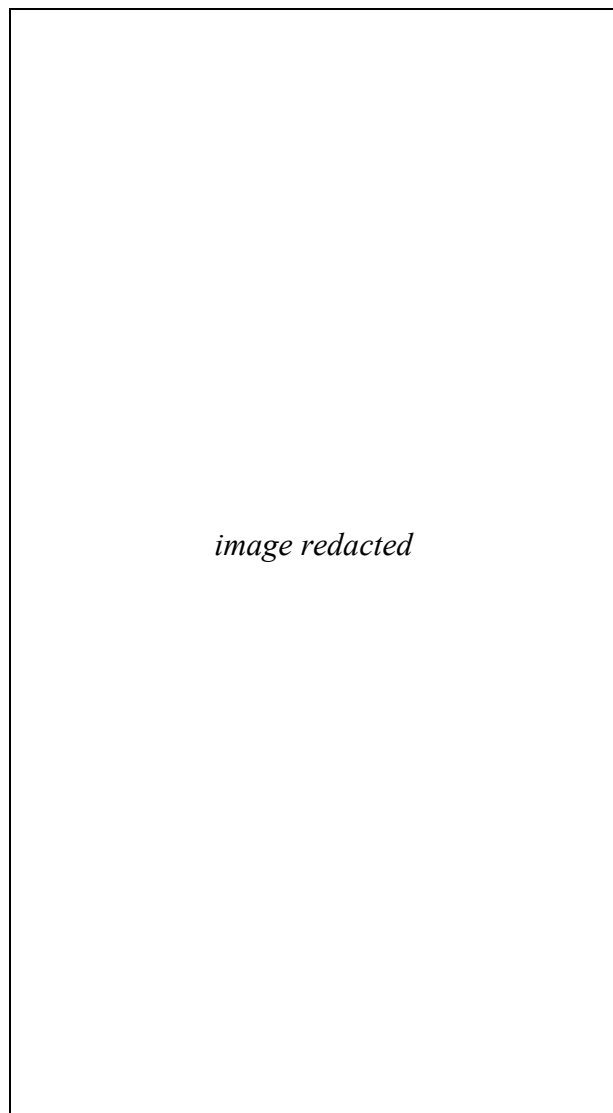
Everything humanly possible is being done to ensure that every town and city will have its fair share of these carefully chosen cosmetics.

Whilst the unendorsed advertisement perhaps optimistically couches the limited availability in terms, again, very strongly linked to exclusivity (as if the restricted retail opportunities were a deliberate Max Factor strategy: ‘only obtainable from your local chemist, hairdresser or store’), the Heddy Lamarr ‘An Apology and a Promise’ advertisement more openly acknowledges the shortage of available cosmetics caused

**Fig. Seventeen:** *Max Factor/ You Were Never Lovelier tie-up, PictureShow January 1943*



**Fig. Eighteen:** *Max Factor 'An apology and a promise' tie-up Picture Post, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1941.*



**Fig. Nineteen:** *Unendorsed Max Factor advert, Picturegoer, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1944*



by the British cosmetics quota. Alternatively the unendorsed 1944 ‘Pan Cake’ advert<sup>14</sup> takes a different approach and trades upon the products supposed convenience (‘invaluable as a time saver’) and is marketed as an essential piece of ‘kit’ for the busy wartime working woman whilst once again also playing upon the items scarcity (and thus exclusivity) in order to drive up demand.

Yet while female consumers were making daily sacrifices towards the war effort, the British Max Factor wartime campaign misdirects the reader towards the patriotic concessions supposedly being made by manufacturers in terms of the conservation of materials (‘slight alterations to packs will have to be made’<sup>15</sup>, ‘packed to conserve vital metal for the war effort,’<sup>16</sup> and ‘The national need of metal has, naturally, greatly restricted the manufacture of lipstick cases. As a solution to this problem Max Factor are producing for the first time special refills of lipsticks.’<sup>17</sup>) Any accusations of manufacturer’s profligacy and profiteering could therefore feasibly be avoided, whilst the consumer is absolved of any patriotic guilt, and paradoxically, is instead reassured of their responsibility and patriotism in *saving* resources. (‘Max Factor Lipstick refills are ready to fit the container we hope you have saved’<sup>18</sup>, ‘be careful not to throw away your present case.’<sup>19</sup>)

In each instance, the female subject’s failure to subscribe to their position as a patriotic consumer, to the ideology of the text or to the wider cultural discourse surrounding beauty as duty, simply isn’t a consideration, as the subject appears at face value to merely be being instructed by another well-meaning party to save another resource (in the case of the Hayworth endorsement, this is even reiterated – ‘save your lipstick containers’) to aid the war effort. In this sense (along with the notion that Max Factor products are a ‘timesaver’) the

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Pan Cake’ advertisement *Picturegoer*, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1944, p. 16

<sup>15</sup> ‘Colour Harmony’/ *You were Never Lovelier* tie-up *Pictureshow* January 1943 p. 16

<sup>16</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>17</sup> ‘An apology and a Promise’ tie-up *Picture Post*, 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1941, p.3

<sup>18</sup> ‘Colour Harmony’/ *You were Never Lovelier* p. 16

<sup>19</sup> ‘An apology and a Promise’ p.3

Max Factor wartime campaign isn't dissimilar to other commercial campaigns of the period, many of which had an almost didactic tone strongly reminiscent of British governmental campaigns such as 'make do and mend', 'careless talk costs lives', 'dig for victory' and, ironically here, those which encouraged citizens to ignore 'the squander bug'. But while these government drives were designed to conserve resources, promote thrift and encourage a sense of patriotic involvement, as with this Max Factor example, much commercial advertising from the period picks up on that sense of inclusion but distorts these well-meaning arguments into excuses to consume *more*.

### **Hollywood Goes To War: Consumption in an American Cultural Context**

By the time America entered the war on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, war themes were already very much on the American cultural agenda. As chapter one discussed, Hollywood was keen to appeal to British markets and in several cases to win over US isolationists<sup>20</sup>, and so had already begun to adapt its products and market its stars for the wartime market. Even escapist musicals starring the likes of Hayworth and Grable were exploring wartime patriotic themes and issues and making use of wartime settings. This allowed British, and later, American audiences to feel that not only was their own wartime experience being reflected and depicted on screen<sup>21</sup> but their engagement with cinema and its range of extra filmic texts was a key, positive and easily accessible part of a shared cultural experience. However, just as was the case with the advertising industry, this was no act of altruism on Hollywood's part, and similarly, as Thomas Doherty has observed, the wartime 'liason between Hollywood and Washington' was another mutually beneficial example of a 'distinctly American and

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to a range of other reasons detailed authoritatively by Glancy, M. *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)

<sup>21</sup> As Glancy discusses at length, the appearance of war themed films and films that advocated American entry into the war caused much animosity in America prior to US entry into the war. *ibid. passim*.

democratic arrangement, a mesh of public policy and private initiative, state need and business enterprise.’<sup>22</sup> Threatened by senate in the pre-war era with anti-trust legislation and given little choice other than to toe the OWI’s propagandistic line throughout the war, the film industry, keen to protect itself, moved to demonstrate their indispensability to and cooperation with the larger war effort to the Roosevelt administration.

That said, many well-meaning, patriotic stars were keen to publicly support or aid the Allied cause in whatever way possible. Military uniform quickly became a frequently-used trope both in films and in star promotion, a core of popular male stars joined up and actually fought, whilst female stars, as we saw in chapter one, in the case of Grable, were marketed as morale-boosting patriotic pin-ups, gave their own time performing tasks such as washing pots and waiting on GIs at venues like The Hollywood Canteen, and promoted women’s civilian and industrial war duties, setting a patriotic example for their fans to emulate. Many stars (such as Carole Londis, as discussed at the end of chapter one) performed to the troops or to civilians at war bond drives both at home and overseas and during the summer of 1943 Hayworth appeared in ‘The Mercury Wonder Show’ a services magic and variety show which toured US army bases, before she was recalled by Columbia (amidst claims in the US press of Cohn and Columbia’s lack of patriotism) to commence filming for *Cover Girl*.<sup>23</sup>

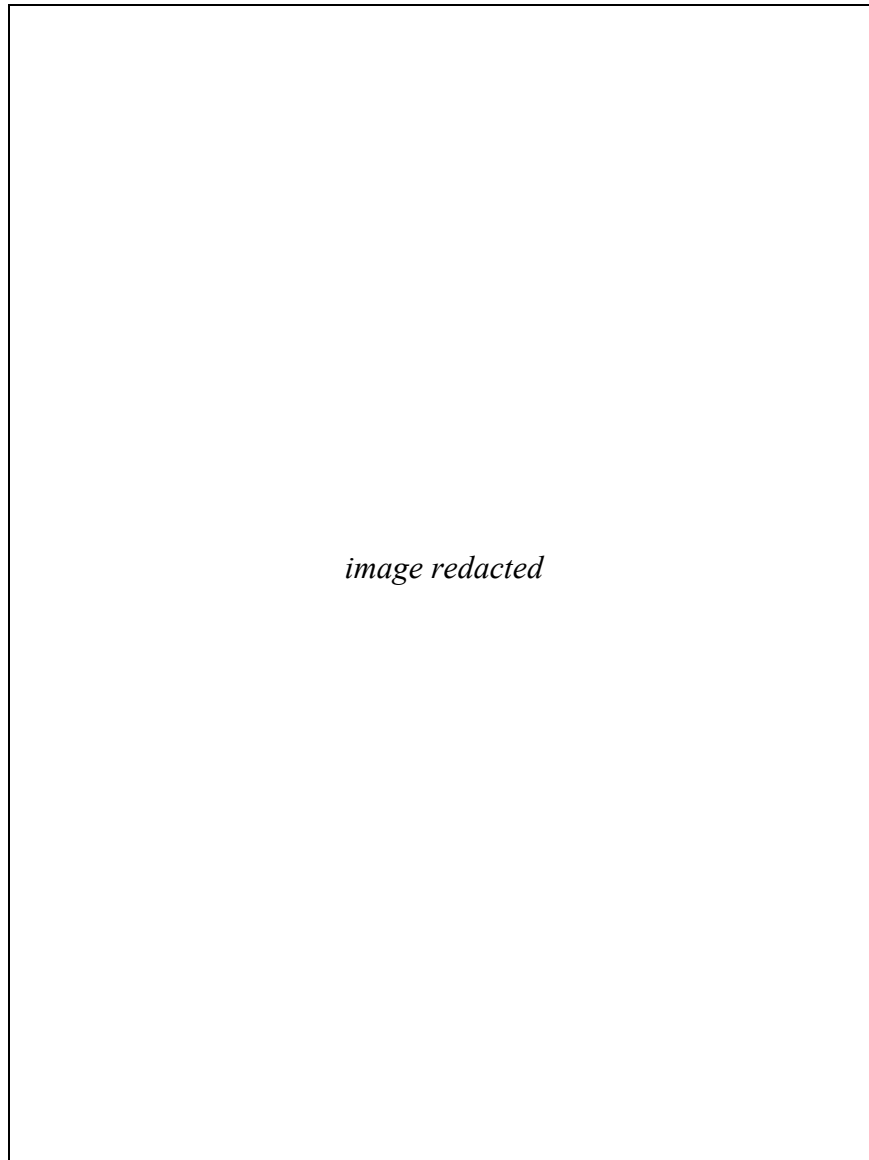
These newly adapted patriotic film star personas were readily adopted by advertisers for whom the work of making their adverts and products patriotic had largely already been done by the studios in adapting the star’s personas to a wartime role. Hayworth’s 1944 endorsement of American brand Crown Cola is a prime example of this process in action (Figure Twenty). As discussed in chapter two, the Crown Cola ‘taste test’ adverts frequently appeared in US magazines throughout the 1940s, and invariably featured prominent film stars

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<sup>22</sup> Doherty T. *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II*. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999) p.61

<sup>23</sup> For further details of the media controversy surrounding Hayworth’s recall from ‘The Mercury Wonder Show’ see McLean A. *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity and Hollywood Stardom* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004) p.78

in tie-ups with upcoming Hollywood features. In this instance though, rather than the swimsuit clad star featured in the Grable/*Pin-Up Girl* tie-up, with its implication of leisure time and relaxation, the frequently used trope of the uniform, with its connotations of labour, patriotism and duty, is employed.



**Fig. Twenty:** *American Crown Cola/Cover Girl tie-up. Circa 1944*

Although Hayworth's uniform has no connection with the Crown Cola product, as part of the advert's wider cultural context this does not appear incongruous. Hayworth's serving of the Crown Cola product to grateful servicemen, along with the advertisement's bottom three images of Hayworth pictured at work and learning her lines on the set of *Cover*

*Girl*, humbles and normalises the star (as did the work of many top box office stars at venues such as the Hollywood Canteen), demonstrating the philanthropic potential of the industry and its stars and making a patriotic role model of Hayworth, whilst alluding, not only to her popularity as servicemen's sweetheart, but also to the idea of women 'serving' within the wider war effort, in uniforms, in factories, or in the home as household maintainers and nurturers. A role Hayworth is clearly meant to represent here.

**'Do as Glamorous Rita Hayworth Does':  
Hayworth and the Hollanders Fur Coat**

A particularly striking example of the use of Hayworth as a role model can be found in a 1944 advertising tie-up for Hollanders furs and Hayworth's 1944 box-office hit *Cover Girl* (figure twenty one). This advertising tie up is also noteworthy for the very particular ways in which it ascribes agency and cultural capital to its film star endorser.

Here once again shortage is played down in this advertisement in favour of an endorsement of commercialism. This is dressed in notions of thrift and patriotism, carrying a subtle emphasis upon the importance of the continued expansion of America's home economy, which is not surprising given the American textile industry's reliance at this period upon its home market and, compounded by the fall of Paris to Fascism in 1940, that home market's inclination to look to Hollywood rather than to Paris for its fashion trends as did Britain and much of Europe. Here the Hollywood movie star therefore functions as an established style icon, serving her country by endorsing US fashions and helping to boost the US economy. It is suggested that in the unfortunate absence of a new fur coat, the reader could instead have their 'old' fur coats 'Hollanderised', ie not repaired or cleaned, but completely disassembled and remodelled by accredited professional furriers, presumably into the latest fashionable style, and so the established cyclical notion surrounding the inevitable obsolescence of styles is employed in tandem with the star appeal and the style cachet of

Hayworth, to urge readers that, in the absence of other alternatives, money should still be spent, but in the absence of suitable materials, upon services instead:

chances are that old fur coat of yours has a lot of wear left in it yet...have it repaired or remodelled where you buy your furs so that you recapture your original pride of ownership

In terms of the advert's symbolic economy, and its use of Hayworth as a signifier Hayworth's cultural capital and her status as a sophisticated star is emphasised through a number of striking linguistic means, such as a reiteration of the word 'precious' (used here in relation to the furs; however, there is an implication that this is a trait shared with the 'precious' star endorser). Similarly, through the association of Hollander furs with 'loveliness' (as found in the advertisements' tagline 'For lasting loveliness') the audience are consequently invited to also perceive the star endorser as 'lovely.' Elsewhere in the advertisement Hayworth is represented in hyperbolic and superlative terms consistent with that of a Hollywood star<sup>24</sup>. She is not just Rita Hayworth, but '*glamorous* Rita Hayworth'; and readers are, once again, invited to perceive Hayworth as their glamorous role model: being encouraged to 'follow Rita Hayworth's example' and 'do as glamorous Rita Hayworth does'.

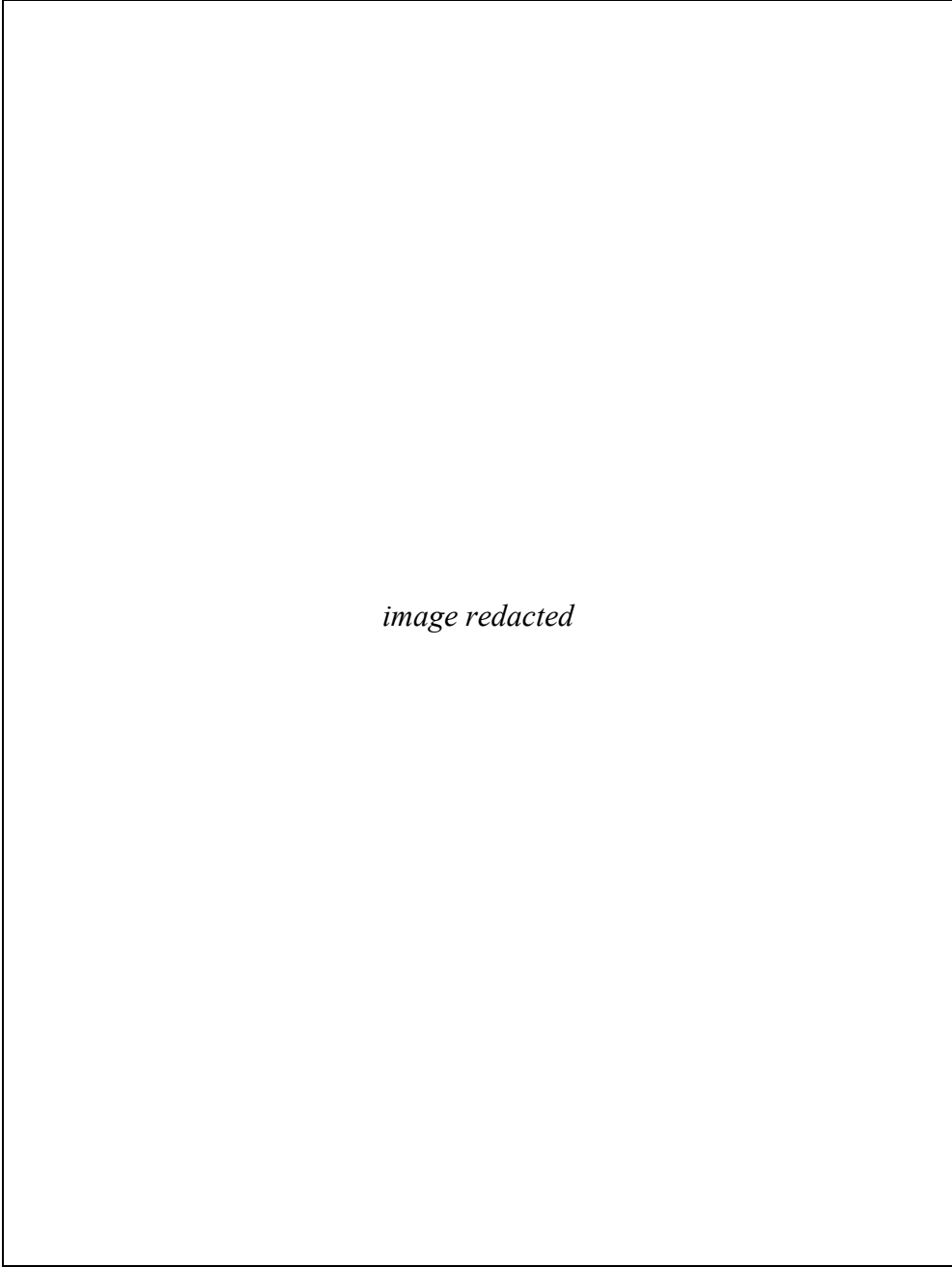
In terms of visual signifiers the top left tableau features a young Latina girl, whose garb suggests she is perhaps Hayworth's maid. This, in turn, suggests Hayworth's significant status and wealth. However Hayworth's star narrative - also as a labouring Latina - permeates this image ('star of Columbia Pictures new Technicolor production'), suggesting this status and wealth has been built upon hard work rather than upon privilege or inheritance.

This lack of pretension offers an assurance that Hayworth, despite her fame, is unaffected, practical and down-to-earth, and is evidenced in a number of additional ways. For example, Hayworth's engagement with lower status characters within the advert (her maid

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<sup>24</sup> For Richard Dyer's discussion of stars as superlative see Dyer, R. *Stars* (London: BFI, 2007) p.43

top left, a gentleman in a shop overcoat – presumably a furrier - top centre) and her direct eye contact both with these individuals, and, in the bottom centre image, with the reader, suggests genuineness. Equally the top left tableau in which a smiling Hayworth hands her fur coat to her maid, anchored with the following text, ‘If you no longer want your coat do as glamorous



*image redacted*

**Fig. Twenty one:** *American Hollanders Furs/ Cover Girl tie-up, circa 1944*

Rita Hayworth does. Give it to a friend, a relative or some worthy charity,' suggests that Hayworth has generously decided to give her coat to the young Latina maid.

Familiarity is encouraged through the repeated use of Hayworth's first name, and a repeated attempt to liken and link Hayworth to her audience through habit and behaviour, in line with Richard Dyer's principle of 'extraordinary ordinariness' whereby stars 'live more expensively than the rest of us, but are [perceived to be] not essentially transformed by this'<sup>25</sup> ('do as glamorous Rita Hayworth does' follow Rita Hayworth's example' 'Rita models for you' 'when I buy furs'), again exploiting Hayworth's potential as a credible role model for 'everyday' women. Conversely as a Hollywood star and one of the period's most desired pin-ups, great pains are taken to emphasise Hayworth's *extra*ordinariness through the repeated use of adjectives such as 'lovely' and 'glamorous' ('do as *glamorous* Rita Hayworth does'). She is made to appear visually striking or extraordinary through such 'feminine adornments' as the opulent fur coat she models (an item that can 'keep someone... warm, *beautiful*, happy'), the paint on her nails, the intricate coiffure of her hair, and the enhancement of her good looks through immaculate make-up: all visual elements which combine to develop and maintain her allure as a star, her position as an authority upon glamour, and signify an abundance of style, of economic capital and of leisure time in which to enjoy this.

As has previously been discussed in chapter four, Columbia were very aware of how vital the female audience's support was in the making or breaking of a female star. They were therefore keen to emphasise Hayworth's grace and skill, commitment and professionalism, and frequently whilst alluding to her off-screen shyness and conversely her smouldering, yet somewhat sanitised/Americanised exoticism. These existing persona traits combined with traits presented within advertisements such as the Hollanders endorsement coalesced to form

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<sup>25</sup> Dyer, R. *Stars* London: BFI, 2007) p.43



a sensual and sophisticated, aspirant yet decent persona which was particularly suited to selling luxury goods without intimidating the ‘ordinary’ film-going public.

The *Hollanders* tie-up notes that Hayworth is the ‘Star of Columbia Pictures’ new Technicolor Production, ‘Cover Girl’: a film in which Hayworth’s character – a hard-working dancer in a Brooklyn nightclub – is selected to undergo a process of glamorisation to appear on the front cover of a popular women’s magazine. From this platform her character gains further fame and fortune. Here a parallel is drawn between Rusty and Hayworth’s labour narratives, Hayworth functioning as an enviable and glamorous clothes horse and as role model for potential female consumers, whilst it is simultaneously demonstrated how, in an era of unprecedented levels of female employment, glamorous accoutrements (such as a fur coats) can be legitimately earned indexes of its wearer’s financial independence and agency – a much-deserved item purchased with hard-earned wages.

Returning again to Hayworth’s popularity as a film star pin-up, as Buszek has argued, the pin-up form itself, particularly during the 1940s carried strong connotations of modernity and of female agency, and was particularly popular with young, working and lower middle class women – a key demographic at which the *Hollanders* advert will have been aimed.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of the reasons for the popularity of *Hollanders* furs with such a demographic, Beverley Skeggs’ 1997 ethnographic study of British working-class women and their relationship with ‘respectability’ is both useful and equally applicable to a US context. Skeggs notes how the symbolic positioning of working-class women, in her instance, within British society, severely restricts their ability to trade or convert the few cultural resources they possess for those considered to be of a greater cultural value and therefore gain any

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<sup>26</sup> As Hill notes ‘A survey of the British cinema audience in 1943... revealed that certain social groups were more likely to attend the cinema than others. Women went to the cinema more than men, the manual working class and lower middle class went more frequently than managerial and professional groups, town dwellers more than country dwellers. Most strikingly of all, the cinema audience was characteristically made up of the young rather than the old: the under 45s accounted for 85 per cent of the cinema audience but only 68 per cent of the overall population.’ Hill, J. ‘British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, audience and representation’ in Turner, G. (ed.) *The Film Cultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001). p.168

sense of class mobility or ‘move through metaphorical and physical social space.’<sup>27</sup> Certainly, in the absence of opportunity, resources, or education, glamour was (and still is) one of the few seemingly effective tools in the cultural tool box of either the British or the American woman who wants to ‘trade up’ in terms of her social status.

If, for example, we return briefly to journalist Alwyn Raymond’s 1945 ‘popular account’ of the sensational ‘Cleft Chin’ murder case involving ‘English Bonnie and Clyde’ ‘seventeen-year-old... Elizabeth Marina Jones but styling herself ‘Georgina Grayson’ [and]... Swedish-born American GI... Karl Hulten’, discussed both in the introduction to this study and by Dyhouse in *Girl Trouble*, Raymond emphasises good-time girl Jones’ love of

dancing, drinking and comparative luxury that she counted as a success. In a few weeks, she had thrown away all her old clothes. Now it was silk stockings, high heels, American perfume, flashy jewellery and all the things that she thought made her ‘glamorous.’<sup>28</sup>

In this instance the disposal of poor quality clothing and the amassing of higher status goods form part of the subject’s attempt to ‘pass’. Through the adoption of the more exotic, sophisticated and sexually experienced persona of ‘Georgina Grayson’ and acquiring the accoutrements of glamour (in this particular instance ‘silk stockings, high heels, American perfume, flashy jewellery’) - a technique so popular, and seemingly successful, in Hollywood films - Jones intends to gain increased social capital by appearing to have transcended her current, low-status social network and gained cultural capital (‘the things that she thought made her ‘glamorous’) and to then, with this borrowed capital, actually trade-up into that higher status network. She therefore undertakes the literal and symbolic act of throwing away ‘her old [presumably unglamorous] clothes’ and embarks upon a different repertoire of behaviours (‘dancing, drinking,... luxury’, all behaviours which require economic capital to

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<sup>27</sup> Skeggs, B. *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997) p.2

<sup>28</sup> Dyhouse *Girl Trouble* p.112; Quoting Raymond, A *The Cleft Chin Murder* (London: Claude Morris, 1945) p.6

be undertaken on any regular basis) in an attempt to generate a new, more sophisticated or seemingly affluent persona of ‘comparative luxury’.

However, due to Jones’ poor social and symbolic positioning, these signifiers of status are actually made to work *against* her, coming to symbolise immorality, falseness and vulgarity. To a large extent though, the ultimate failure of this subject’s attempt to ‘pass’ as ‘classy’ is secondary. What is notable is that in the absence of other options, Jones saw glamour and the accumulation of glamorous props as the means through which she could transcend her previous humdrum existence. Nor is this uncommon. As Gundle notes, ‘in commercial society, beauty became an accepted channel of social mobility for women and the selection and presentation of beauty soon became a business’<sup>29</sup>, and it remains so to this day. Therefore items with significant financial value (luxurious, glamorous items such as fur coats) can operate as signifiers of wealth and social class or sophistication, a means of asserting one’s self which symbolically imbue their owners with glamour, exoticism and cultural capital, even attributing ‘worth’ and ‘respectability’ owing to the coat’s function as the physical manifestation, and to an extent realisation of the individual’s financial and social aspirations<sup>30</sup> and a means of marking ‘middle-class respectability...onto the sexual [ie; working class, female] body.’<sup>31</sup>

As Page Dougherty Delano notes in her study of female sexuality and citizenship in wartime culture, it would be tempting to take the view that in purchasing such goods, subscribing to the message of adverts such as the Hollanders tie-up, or assenting to beauty as duty rhetoric, constitutes the female subject literally ‘buying-into’ or, as Mary Ann Doane argues, wilfully ‘participat[ing] in her own oppression’<sup>32</sup>, and that the purchase of ‘female

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<sup>29</sup> Gundle *Glamour: A History*. (Oxford: OUP, 2009) p.11

<sup>30</sup> The Hollanders advertisement recommends that repairs be made to old fur coats to ‘recapture your original pride of ownership’; clearly alluding to the aspirational symbolism associated with such an item.

<sup>31</sup> Skeggs *Formations of Class and Gender* p.110

<sup>32</sup> Doane, M. A. ‘The Economy of Desire: The Commodity Form in/of the Cinema.’ *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* v.11 1989, p.24 In the case of the Hollanders advert, the feminine ideal is explicitly linked to middle-

adornment' such as furs could be 'linked solely to the limiting and trivial 'production of docile bodies'<sup>33</sup>. However this leaves 'little room for women's agency' <sup>34</sup> and can be perceived as being 'overly moralistic and anti-pleasure,'<sup>35</sup> particularly when considered in light of Beverley Skeggs' hypothesis regarding working-class women's appropriation of glamour and glamorous items in order to accumulate cultural capital. As the work of theorists such as Tania Modleski<sup>36</sup>, Ien Ang<sup>37</sup>, Samantha Barbas<sup>38</sup> and Maria Elena Buszek<sup>39</sup> have highlighted in their various works on female consumers of varying forms, the theorisation of women as passive or gullible consumers does not allow for a subject's individual interpretation or rejection of such media imagery<sup>40</sup>, for the range of resonances each star can potentially offer, or for the consumer's individual method of appropriation or usage of that advertised product, should they actually choose or be able to afford to purchase said item.

Equally, such an approach overlooks the fact that, as was discussed with regard to Grable in chapter two, the body itself is a political space, not least because of the subsequent communicative potential of the items that individuals select to adorn it.<sup>41</sup> As Joanne

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class aspiration and respectability as that for many, despite the adverts claims that their "budget minded fur[s]... beauty belies its *small* price" will still have been an unobtainable ideal.

<sup>33</sup> Delano, P. D. 'Making Up For War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture.' *Feminist Studies* v.26 #1, Spring 2000, p.60

<sup>34</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>35</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Modleski, T. *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge, 1988)

<sup>37</sup> Ang, I. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985)

<sup>38</sup> Barbas, S. *Movie Crazy: Fans, Stars, and the Cult of Celebrity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001)

<sup>39</sup> Buszek, M.E. *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality and Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006)

<sup>40</sup> As Millum notes 'Seeing is not a passive process – by which meaningless impressions are stored up for the use of an organising mind which construes forms out of the amorphous data to suit its own purposes; seeing is itself a process of formulation'. Millum *Images of Woman: Advertising in Women's Magazines* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975) p.27

<sup>41</sup> As Delano states; 'To an extent...drugstore girls' dresses and lipstick blare their membership in the national community, celebrated in wartime advertising. Robin Kelley focuses on the role of zoot suits, but surely these teenage girls, too, "reinforce a sense of collectivity as well as individuality. They exhibit their own performance of a patriotic stance, a 'patriotism' otherwise so uniform that it disavows or attempts to contain deviation. Their attire, to borrow Kelley's phrase, "collapse[s] status distinctions between themselves and their oppressors." Their lipstick also marks an unstable/ unruly female identity suggesting public, sexual young women, for the drugstore was the oft-cited site to pick up victory girls.', Delano 'Making Up For War' p.58

Entwhistle notes, clothing ‘articulates the body, making it social and identifiable’<sup>42</sup> and to this end, Delano notes:

Wearing makeup during WWII sometimes indicated overly sexualized, manipulated women... For others, makeup suggested a woman intimately bound to sex, prostitution, and rape, for whom lipstick signified their regrettable victimization, or an iconic woman who was more advertisement for a well-wrought nation than real, vocal flesh and spirit. But there was, I contend, another woman in this wartime picture, evoked in the words of army nurse Ruth Haskell. ["A fresh application of makeup, my helmet at a jaunty angle, and I was ready for anything."] Makeup could be a sign of female agency that included sexual power and citizenship, and as such, was disruptive of wartime's masculine codes of power.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore just as makeup could have denoted an assertive public femininity during this period, this is surely equally as applicable to other forms of ‘female adornment’<sup>44</sup> such as furs<sup>45</sup>, and whilst these ‘props’ of femininity possess the potential to ‘sexualise’ and ‘limit’ the women who wear them, they could also surely have offered these women ‘possibilities of visibility and assertiveness.’<sup>46</sup> As Beverley Skeggs concurs;

Glamour is a way of transcending the banalities of femininity which render women as passive objects, as signs of appearance without agency, as something which has to be done... Glamour involves attitude as well as appearance... It is the attitude that makes the difference. It gives agency, strength and worth back to women and is not restricted to youth. They do glamour with style. Glamour is about a performance of femininity with strength.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Entwhistle, J. ‘The Dressed Body’ Entwhistle, J. & Wilson, E. (eds) *Body Dressing* (Basingstoke: Berg, 2001) p.55; Quoted in Boris, E. ‘Desirable Dress: Rosie’s, Sky Girls and the Politics of Appearance.’ *International Labor and Working-Class History* #69, Spring 2006, p.124

<sup>43</sup> Delano ‘Making Up For War’ p.33

<sup>44</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>45</sup> As Boris notes, in America, attempts were made by both employers and government agencies to police women’s work time appearance through campaigns such as that by The War Manpower Commission who staged a cautionary image featuring film star Veronica Lake with her trademark ‘peekaboo bangs’ caught in machinery (See ‘Veronica Lake: By Government Demand She Puts Up Her Long Hair As a Safety Measure.’ *Life*, (8<sup>th</sup> march, 1943) p. 39) These campaigns, however, lead to defiance from many female workers; ‘government agencies stressed safety and output, but in keeping with a quest for self-definition, women workers also interpreted these warnings on the dangers of undesirable dress as attacks on their sex-appeal.’ Boris ‘Desirable Dress’ p.128

<sup>46</sup> Delano ‘Making Up For War’ p.33

<sup>47</sup> Skeggs *Formations of Class and Gender* p.111

### **Lux Tie-Ups:** **The Contrasting Glamours of Hayworth and Grable**

As discussed previously in this thesis, beauty as duty rhetoric was commonplace in Britain and the US throughout the war and was aimed at women of every social class, but in different advertising examples that same message was presented differently when addressed to consumers of higher economic and social status to those of lower economic and social status; or at least when that advertisement featured a star endorser who was coded as possessing a habitus of either higher, or slightly less privileged economic and social status. This is particularly evident in a series of advertising tie-ups for beauty soap manufacturers Lux which were placed in the American magazine *Good Housekeeping* (and other magazines) during 1943 and 1944. The first and second tie-ups feature ‘our lovely Rita – Columbia Pictures star’<sup>48</sup> (figure Twenty Two) and ‘star of Columbia Pictures *Cover Girl*’<sup>49</sup>, whilst the third features ‘Betty Grable star of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox’s *Coney Island*’<sup>50</sup>. Through consideration of these examples we can examine the differing resonances offered by these two stars’ personas, and how and to what effect they are manifest.

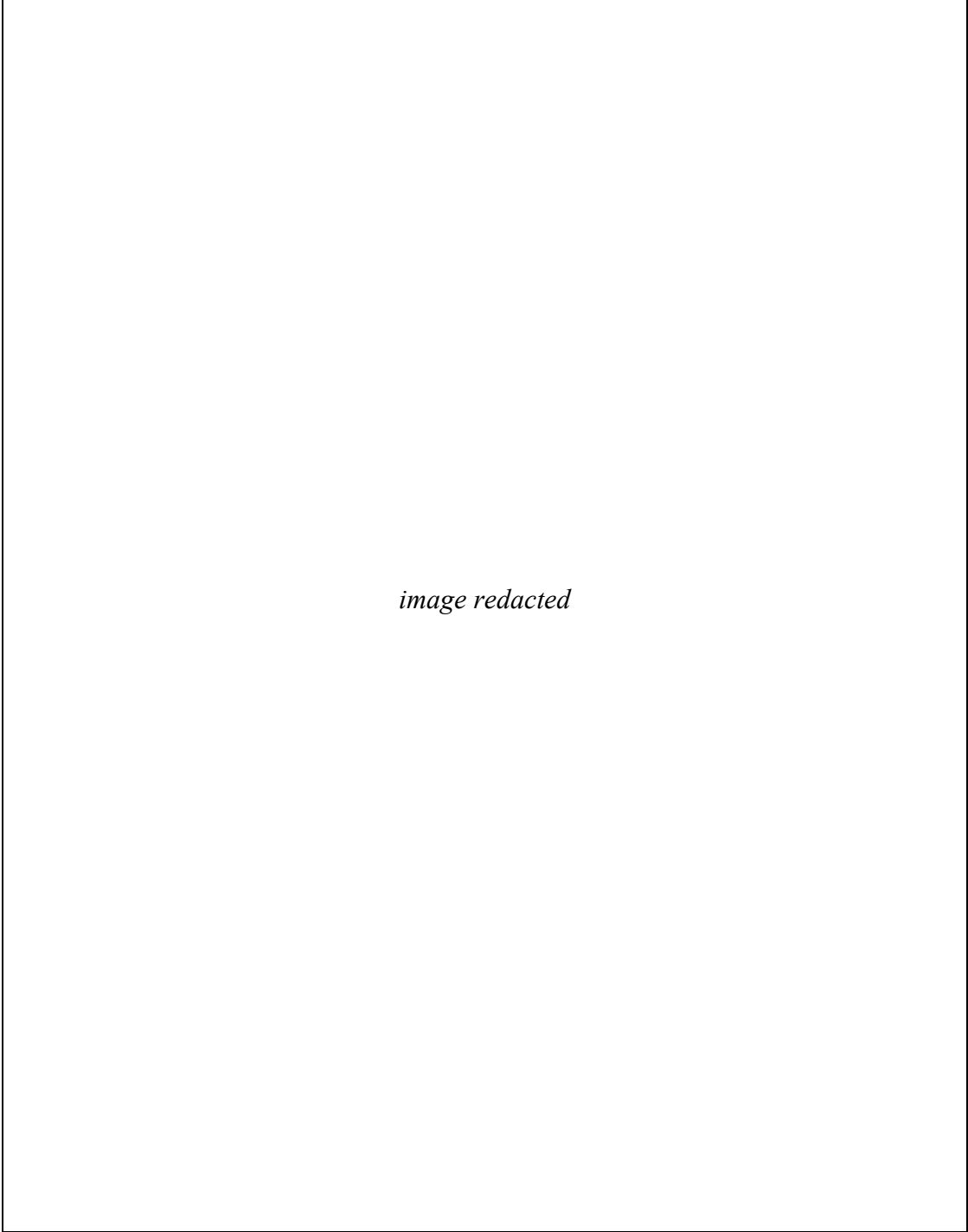
Whilst Hayworth’s tie-ups emphasise how Hayworth’s ‘beauty care really makes skin lovelier’, ‘adorable’ and ‘flower fresh [and] exquisitely smooth’, showing ‘the beauty soap she uses every day’ for her ‘active lather facials’ in order to enhance, maintain and refine her visible beauty, and make those physical attributes more glamorous, Grable’s use of this same product is presented in very different terms. (See figure Twenty Three). Not for Grable the active lather facial. Pictured possibly stepping into the shower (her bath robe tantalisingly slipping to expose the shoulder over which she glances, as she draws to one side what one may presume is a shower curtain), ‘Betty Grable... uses her complexion soap as a bath soap too’. Here, rather than to enhance beauty the soap is instead used on the body to remove

<sup>48</sup> *Good Housekeeping* February 1943 p.9

<sup>49</sup> *Good Housekeeping* 1944, month unknown, p.66

<sup>50</sup> *Good Housekeeping* June, 1943 p.69

traces of labour, of sweat, of sex ('Lux soaps ACTIVE lather... swiftly carries away every trace of dust and dirt') and this is emphasised further still with Grable's claim to the reader that 'if a girl isn't dainty, no other charm counts. A daily *lux soap* beauty bath makes you



*image redacted*

***Fig Twenty Two: Hayworth Lux Tie Up 1943.***

*sure.*' As Carol Dyhouse notes, the term daintiness was, in the context of the 1940s 'often a code for personal hygiene.'<sup>51</sup> In this advertisement the agent potential offered by the manufacturers and advertisers of this bar of soap is mediated by Grable's presence, with her working-class, girl-next-door star persona, chosen to promote the product as a means through which women who lack in cultural capital can potentially trade up in terms of status and hopefully pass for respectable through the use of the glamorous Lux product. (Hence the use of 'a daily lux soap beauty bath makes you sure').

Alternatively Hayworth, whose star persona marks her as already having traded up and achieved middle class respectability - a process of struggle and attainment reiterated in her film narratives - offers a slightly different function to that of Grable. With Hayworth the potential of the soap is changed to one of the maintenance and consolidation of respectability and cleanliness rather than an attempt to mask disreputability.

Away from the American market, a 1944 British Lux tie-up<sup>52</sup> featuring Hayworth invokes this same process of struggle and the narrative of labour to attain respectability. Here the 'sparkling [clean?] *Cover Girl*' and star of 'Columbia's glamorous film' is featured in a glamorous head and shoulder shot in costume as nightclub dancer Rusty Parker, the protagonist of *Cover Girl*, whilst a portion of *Cover Girl's* narrative is relayed, inviting the reader to make comparisons, in terms of a rise to fame and success and a legitimate and successful attainment of cultural capital, between Hayworth and her character Rusty:

she stars as Rusty Parker, shining light in a small Brooklyn nightclub, who is photographed for the cover of a famous magazine and quickly gets her name in lights on Broadway.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to being attributed one of the qualities of a precious stone ('sparkling') once again Hayworth is described in admiring, ethereal, 'ladylike' and respectable terms

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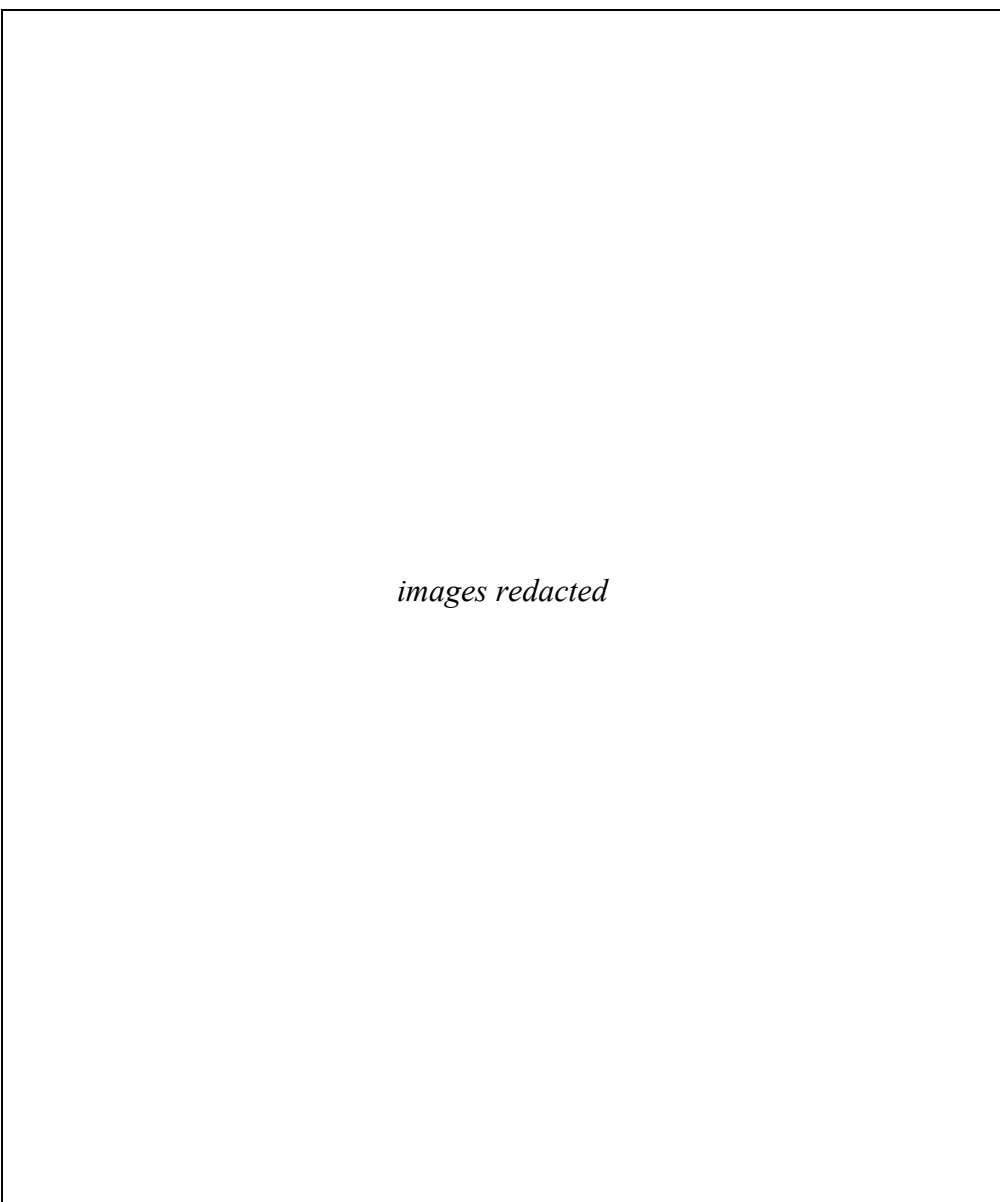
<sup>51</sup> Dyhouse, C. *Glamour: Women History, Feminism*. (London: Zed Books, 2010).p .75

<sup>52</sup> *Picturegoer*, September 30<sup>th</sup> 1944. p.16

<sup>53</sup> *op cit*



‘which demonstrate a preoccupation with the modest, the unthreatening and the romantic, ‘appropriate’ middle class femininity possessed of a significant level of status or cultural



*images redacted*

***Fig Twenty Three: Grable Lux tie-Up. 1943***

capital’ rather than corporeal or base terms. We are invited to ‘see how lovely Rita Hayworth is’ and note her ‘dazzling’ complexion and skin that is ‘fresh, clear and flawless’.

In conclusion, advertising strategies for women's leisure products required a delicate balancing act on both sides of the Atlantic. Once this approach was perfected it proved to be a highly successful way of keeping both glamour products and conspicuous consumption respectable and thus maintaining consumption in a time of shortage.

Despite cultural differences, British and US wartime advertising had much in common, with both nations' advertisers representing women war workers, women in uniform, and women in relation to the men in their lives; as the sweethearts, mothers and sisters of servicemen. Advertisements on both sides of the Atlantic frequently employed rhetoric surrounding the notion of beauty as duty, or a woman's sexual and patriotic obligation, as well as that surrounding recycling, reuse, and conservation, as well as patriotism at large.

The study of the differing ways in which Grable and Hayworth are represented within these adverts offers an insight into the differing glammers their star personas offered, or at the least the differing glammers Lux's advertisers *believed* these two stars offered, depending upon the levels of cultural and social capital with which each star was associated. Despite these differences in representation, each advertisement discussed offers an image of female agency either attained or maintained through the adoption of practices and products. Although the linkage of agency to glamour and glamour to consumption may seem to suggest that the women who subscribe to the Lux advertisements' message are in some way passive or even gullible, as Delano observes such a theorisation leaves 'little room for women's agency'<sup>54</sup> and can be perceived as being 'overly moralistic and anti-pleasure,'<sup>55</sup> particularly in light of Skeggs' suggestion that such items can become part of a semiotic arsenal with which disenfranchised wartime women could empower themselves.

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<sup>54</sup> Delano 'Making Up For War' p.60

<sup>55</sup> *op cit.*

# **Implications and Conclusions**

**CHAPTER SEVEN:**  
**‘From Muscles to Mammary Glands’?:**  
**Reconsidering the Issue of Post-War Pin-Up**

During the previous six chapters an exploration of the discourse surrounding American stars, the film star pin-up and the notion of Hollywood glamour has been undertaken with a view to revealing some of the broader transatlantic debates surrounding taste, class, respectability, sexuality and public femininity that were in circulation in Britain and America during the Second World War.

Over the course of the study, and through the consideration of several broader contextual factors, it has been demonstrated that during the Second World War film star pin-ups, the notion of Hollywood glamour, and the accrual and embodiment of glamorousness rather than offering female objectification and oppression, for many, offered a range of positive resonances, including feminine agency, emancipation and even defiance.

These resonances appear to have originated from two sources. Firstly the ‘awarish’ performance (the posture, facial expression, so on) of the film star pin-up subject, this being a key convention of the pin-up image which (as Maria Elena Buszek discusses) can be understood to project an appealing image of empowered eroticism. Secondly these resonances derive from the charisma and the broader star narrative or ‘total star text’ of the film star so presented. Meanwhile, glamour and its usage appears to have been perceived by many during this period as emancipatory and at times defiant – a means through which to challenge prescriptive boundaries of taste and respectability, to express and assert one’s self, and to potentially increase one’s cultural capital (as discussed by Beverley Skeggs).

Moreover, it has also been this study’s assertion that the unique conditions created and fostered in both American and British culture by the Second World War<sup>1</sup> meant that the pin-

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<sup>1</sup> As Barbara Caine notes ‘The Second World War, even more than the first was so drastic in its impact on the daily lives of masses of civilians as to make it seem likely, even inevitable, that it would be accompanied and

up form at large reached maturity and gained maximum public visibility during this period, and as such debates surrounding Hollywood, film stars, film star pin-ups and the notion of glamorousness were not only inevitable but were one of several key terrains upon which disputes over taste and women were fought. That these arguments were so vociferously contested was due, in no small part, to the uncertain times in which they were taking place. As Westbrook notes women were supposedly ‘objects of obligation’<sup>2</sup>, ‘what [men] were fighting for’<sup>3</sup>, and those who kept the home fires burning, and were charged with preserving a sense of national identity. As such debates surrounding Hollywood glamour and film star pin-ups also reflect the shifts in public opinion towards women’s broader sexual identities as well as national identity (as chapter one’s discussions of the fear of Americanisation and the subsequent rejection of the all-American Grable amongst sections of the populace demonstrated) and their expression within the public sphere.

This final chapter shall therefore begin to draw together the various arguments made over the previous six chapters and move towards a conclusion by looking beyond the boundaries of the war and moving into the immediate post-war context.

In considering the discourse surrounding public femininity, and its relevance to our two film star pin-up case studies during the transitional period from war back to peace, we can explore to what extent media representations of sexualised femininity such as pin-ups reflected broader attitudes to actual female sexuality and to publically visible women at this time. Further to this we can determine what those attitudes were and to what extent, if at all, popular discourse turned against publically visible women in the post-war era. Finally we can begin to hypothesise some of the possible reasons for this change (or lack thereof) and restate, with a fresh set of examples, the importance of star personas to the interpretation of

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followed by extensive social change.’ Caine *English Feminism: 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.227

<sup>2</sup> Westbrook, R.B. “‘I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James’: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II’ in *American Quarterly* v.42 #4 Dec 1990, p.589

<sup>3</sup> *ibid* p.588

film star pin-ups.

Equally, the shifting of our contextual focus slightly, from an era in which public femininity was prevalent and typical to a period which has come to be associated with *domestic* femininity, and with the supposed wholesale disbanding of a sizeable female workforce, women's wide scale return to the home and the re-implementation of domestic feminine ideal, should help us to better clarify and summarise some of previous arguments made surrounding the film star pin-up and its relationship to the politics and discourse surrounding wartime public femininity on both sides of the Atlantic.

It must be noted here, though, that whether (or not) the pin-up form and the film star pin-up may have gone on to become the oppressive hegemonic tool assumed by many scholars at a later date is beyond the scope of this work. The intent of this chapter is a very basic historical comparison and its scope is far from exhaustive. It *shall* however seek to explore the notion of backlash, its implications and its relevance to Hollywood's post-war pin-ups and post-war culture (and vice versa) with a view to exploring any insights popular discourse can offer regarding the commonly held perception of women's post-war mass-migration back into the home, and asking if such a phenomenon actually occurred and, if so, asking to what extent could it represent the post-war retrenchment of patriarchal ideology?

Many claims have been made for this period's unique conditions, its transitory and impermanent nature<sup>4</sup>, and its significant and far reaching impact upon every area of British and American society. Equally the common (and in many cases, justified) perception of the immediately post-war era is that the end of hostilities saw any gains made by women during the Second World War almost immediately and vigorously reversed, via a nationally-sanctioned mass call for women to return to the home, a call in which supposedly Hollywood and the entertainment industry were key players.

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<sup>4</sup> Caine claims that at large, the wartime experience of women 'was seen as temporary and exceptional.' Caine *English Feminism* p.4

Carol Dyhouse, in her study of glamour throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century, assumes a cultural shift away from the commonplace representation of feminine agency and female assertiveness, and a return to familiar passive stereotypes coupled with a shift towards exclusion and the retrenchment of class boundaries:

The glamorous wartime pin-up girls popular in both the United States and Britain had showed their mettle by contributing to the war effort. Nevertheless, in post-war Britain, such glamour girls were firmly sidelined by high fashion, which instead associated itself with the icy aloofness of models such as Barbara Goalen, Dovima and Fiona Campbell-Walter. Films and the popular imagination focused on princesses in love. The Cinderella story exerted a potent appeal...unlike glamour girls who got up and went for what they wanted, fairy princesses stayed submissive in the face of adversity: or at least they were clever enough to act like ladies and not to look pushy.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst discussing the American context of the same period, Maureen Honey notes in her study of American war propaganda surrounding women

My work on wartime propaganda grew out of an initial interest in the contradiction between our image of Rosie the Riveter, a strong, capable woman in non-traditional work, and her ultimate replacement by Marilyn Monroe, Lucille Ball, and other stars of the 1950s, who embodied a childlike sexuality and comic naivete that were far removed from the images of competence in wage work so recently highlighted by women's entry into war production. How could we go from strength to weakness, worker to sexpot, muscles to mammary glands in such a short period of time?<sup>6</sup>

Earlier chapters have discussed how pin-up images generally, but in particular, because of the star persona of the subject portrayed, can offer a range of appeals or resonances, and have offered instances whereby such images can be understood as representing agency and even empowerment. In the instance of any cultural 'backlash' against publically visible and sexually agent women then surely such readings of pin-up imagery become much more problematic after the unique conditions of war came to an end. Equally the hypothesised regressive societal shifts, and attendant changes in female representations at large, must surely have also instigated a similarly backsliding change in

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<sup>5</sup> Dyhouse, C. *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2010) p.93

<sup>6</sup> Honey, M. 'Remembering Rosie: Advertising Images of Women in World War Two' in O'Brien, K.P. and Hudson Parsons, L. (eds) *The Home Front War: World War II and American Society*. (London: Greenwood Press, 1995) p.83

pin-up representations, their ideologies and, as a result, in post-war audiences', responses to them?

### **Backlash: Western Women in The Post-War Context**

Maria Elena Buszek's discussion of the pin-up during the post-war era centres solely upon an American context, is contextualised through the two notions of 'the backlash' and of 'the feminine mystique', and is focused primarily upon the 1950s rather than on the immediate post-war period. Whilst such an approach is logical given the focus and scope of Buszek's study, the immediate months and years succeeding the declaration of peace, particularly in Britain, provide just as fertile an area for study and so cannot realistically be overlooked. However, several of the arguments Buszek raises provide an excellent springboard for discussion surrounding the Hollywood pin-up glamour and public femininity in a period that became synonymous with continued economic growth for America and shortage in 'austerity Britain',<sup>7</sup>

Engaging with the notion of a societal backlash against women (defined by Joan Smith as 'an attempt to divide and isolate women at a crucial moment in the struggle for equality, independence and autonomy'<sup>8</sup>) Buszek's chapter on 'new roles and readings [of the pin-up] in the post-war era'<sup>9</sup> largely overlooks the mid to late 1940s period, moving instead to discuss 'the 1950s era of the 'eternal virgin' and 'dizzy blonde bombshell''<sup>10</sup> whereby

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<sup>7</sup> Kynaston, D. *Austerity Britain. 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007)

<sup>8</sup> Faludi, S. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (London: Vintage, 1992) p.xiv; Whereby through what Susan Faludi terms the 'most subtle means of persuasion' *ibid.* p.67 a 'campaign to thwart women's progress' *ibid.* p.492 is undertaken. However, as Faludi also notes, whilst the general phenomena which accumulate to constitute a backlash are clearly related 'that doesn't mean they are somehow coordinated. The backlash is not a conspiracy... For the most part, its workings are encoded and internalised, diffuse and chameleonic. Taken as a whole, however, these codes... move overwhelmingly in one direction: they try push women back into their acceptable roles – whether as daddy's girl or fluttery romantic, active nester or passive love object.' *ibid.* p.16

<sup>9</sup> Buszek, M. E. *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality and Popular Culture* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2006) p.232

<sup>10</sup> *ibid* p.235 Quoting Robertson, P. *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna*



‘women’s sexual simplicity, and even humiliation was suddenly sexy.’<sup>11</sup> Buszek suggests that in mainstream Western society, the cultural shifts brought about by the end of war meant that assertive, self-aware female representations at large, but specifically in pin-up (and even more so in film star pin-ups), were no longer in vogue;

Hollywood pin-up constructions of idealised womanhood since the 1910s had comfortably conflated traditional standards of physical beauty with unconventional elements of intelligence and sexual self-awareness. In the post-war era, these same pluralistic constructions of women (and, incidentally, the women whose star images were formed characterising them) spelled ‘box office poison’<sup>12</sup>

The notion that post-war Hollywood presented only the ‘eternal virgin’ and ‘dizzy blonde bombshell’ is particularly reductive, and overlooks a myriad of female representations offered in ‘B’ pictures and main features alike. In dealing only with US pin-up and shifting her focus from Hollywood stars to the model and amateur fetish film star Bettie Page as the exemplar of transgressive post-war female sexuality, Buszek fails to notice how Hollywood marketers and exhibitors for both the major and minor studios and those of other national cinema industries, not to mention any other tangential and thriving industries, such as magazines (in particular ‘candid’ magazines), were still very much dealing in a range of self-aware, sexualised female representations.

Equally, whilst the film star pin-up remained a promotional staple for Hollywood actresses, some of the most iconic and enduring film star pin-ups of this era were stars of European ‘art’ cinema, such as Anita Eckberg, Gina Lollabrigida, Sophia Loren and Brigitte Bardot. In his study ‘Art, Exploitation, Underground’ Mark Betz observes

A historiography of European art cinema of the 1950s and 1960s [which]...when it ventures occasionally outside the rubrics of auteur or national film movement under which practically all work on art cinema is written, has generally considered and represented its object as a heroic, modernist response to Hollywood’s global

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(Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1996) p.89

<sup>11</sup> *ibid* p.236

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p.240

domination in economic and/or aesthetic terms<sup>13</sup>

Despite these discussions of European cinema in the post-war era, in the 1950s and 60s themselves such films weren't always understood to be 'art' or to possess cultural 'worth':

The moribund situation is very much the result of the shifts in taste culture that have characterised academic film studies' theoretical reorientations from May 1968 on – Althusserian Marxism and semiotics, psychoanalysis and feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism, cultural studies and cult.<sup>14</sup>

The very 'foreignness' of these films lent and, to this day, continues to lend them a cultural cachet with many critics and academics who perceived/perceive these films as an antidote to the commercialism and prescriptiveness of Hollywood cinema of that same era. Meanwhile any cultural capital that these films possessed excused and continues to excuse their frequent representation of an overt or sensational (typically female) sexuality<sup>15</sup>, in their marketing as well as their narratives, giving the promoters of such films licence to display an exciting and unfamiliar eroticism which was not that dissimilar to the provocative yet less 'highbrow' female representations found in pre-code Hollywood advertising (documented by Doherty and discussed previously in chapter five of this study);

explicit sexuality became expected in foreign films, to such an extent that 'foreign film', 'art film', 'adult film', and 'sex film' were for several years almost synonyms<sup>16</sup>

This double standard with regard to sexualised female representations, and the move (in some instances more rapid than others) to accept European art film into the 'legitimate' canon

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<sup>13</sup> Betz, M. 'Art, Exploitation, Underground' Jancovich, M, Reboll, A. L, Stringer, J, and Willis, A. (eds) *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p.203

<sup>14</sup> Betz 'Art, Exploitation, Underground' p.203

<sup>15</sup> 'Virtually all of the scholars who have written on art cinema as a movement or as a field of textuality mention the degree to which sexual frankness and 'adult' displays of sexuality are constituent elements of European art cinema's appeal.' Betz 'Art, Exploitation, Underground' p.204-5. For a discussion of the significance of sexuality and the notion of the scandalous to the sensational (and frequently misleading) marketing of films such as *Rome: Open City* (1945) and the film *Stromboli* (1950) (a film whose American tagline was 'Raging island! Raging passions!' and whose notoriety was bolstered further still by the relationship between its star Ingrid Bergman and its director Roberto Rossellini) see Smith & Wright 'A Glimpse Behind the Screen: Tijuana bibles and the pornographic reimagining of Hollywood.' *Taboo, Trend, Transgression Vol. 2* (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Lev, P. *The Euro-American Cinema*. (Austin: University of Texas, 1993) p.13; Quoted in Betz 'Art, Exploitation, Underground' p.205

raises several issues discussed at length by Barbara Klinger in her 1994 study of the 1970's reappraisal of the director Douglas Sirk<sup>17</sup> and tells us more about the politics of taste and the setting of critical and academic agendas than the quality (or lack thereof) of the films themselves.

So whilst European art cinema was habitually marketed using techniques very similar to those of the 'lowbrow' Hollywood exploitation fare with which it so frequently shared the same bills, and to which it supposedly offered a legitimate alternative, shifts in the political landscape have led to the reappraisal and reclamation of these European art cinema directors as artists and their texts and their stars as 'respectable.' As such these films' sensational sexualised representations (particularly in their advertising) have been somewhat hypocritically reinterpreted as markers of depth, complexity and emotional maturity, whilst the Hollywood product is often either derided as licentious, lowbrow, tasteless or, as in Buszek's case, simply overlooked.

Discussing the emergence, in 1953, of the American magazine *Playboy* and its 'compliant' playmate centrefolds as a replacement for the assertive, 'intelligen[t] and sexually self-aware' pin-ups of the war era<sup>18</sup>, Buszek posits that the editorial intent of this magazine was 'to reclaim both the genre and women's sexuality for a privileged male gaze':<sup>19</sup>

Unlike *Esquire's* cultivation of a female readership in the 1930s and 1940s, from its first issue in 1953, *playboy's* founder emphatically stressed the magazine's interest in catering exclusively to a male audience. In the first issue's publisher's statement, articulating the magazine's 'philosophy,' while Hefner invited the readership of men 'between the ages of 18 and 80' he churlishly added: 'We want to make it very clear from the start, we aren't a 'family magazine.' If you're somebody's sister, wife or

<sup>17</sup> Klinger, B. *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994)

<sup>18</sup> 'Instead of idealising contemporary womanhood as complex and independent, Hefner believed that the Playmate should rather reflect the compliant and accessible 'girl next door'... [with] a 'seduction-is-imminent' look' that addressed not the subjects but the male viewers sexual desire.' Buszek *Pin-Up Grrrls* p.237

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p.237; Also see Breazale, K. 'In Spite of Women: *Esquire* Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer' *Signs* v.20 #1 Autumn 1994, pp.1-22

mother-in-law and picked us up by mistake, please pass us along to the man in your life and get back to the *Ladies Home Companion*.’<sup>20</sup>

Buszek posits that in seeking to exclude, control and disdain any potential female readers *Playboy*’s intent could be seen as being amongst the first contributions towards a concerted movement *against* pin-ups’ female audience, with a view to the creation and ‘cultivation of a space for the sole enjoyment of men.’<sup>21</sup> This is certainly a compelling argument. However, Buszek does also engage with Joanne Meyerowitz’s edited study of American women between 1945 and 1960<sup>22</sup>, and acknowledges that despite this particular example of a move against female pin-ups fans, sexualised yet agent female representations did continue to emerge elsewhere in the post-war era:

Meyerowitz’s further analysis of the period shows that, while the *Playmate* constructed for exclusively male viewership was by far the best-known manifestation of the pin-up in the post-war era, constructs of the dominant, sexually self-sufficient pin-up disappeared neither from the genre, nor from the visibility of female audiences.<sup>23</sup>

In particular Buszek focuses upon the presence of assertive female pin-ups in American ‘counterculture ‘specialty’ pin-up publications’<sup>24</sup> during this period, and offers the specific example of the iconic pin-up and fetish model Bettie Page.<sup>25</sup> However, in referring both to Page and the magazines in which she appeared (such as *Bizarre*, *Wink*, *Titter* and *High Heels*) as ‘counterculture’, Buszek deliberately highlights dissimilarities with wider American

<sup>20</sup> Buszek *Pin-Up Grrrls* p.237; Quote taken from Hefner, H. ‘Publishers Statement’ *Playboy* December 1953.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid* p.238. Although the notion that *Playboy* was a solely male space is even debateable, as Carrie Pitzulo highlights debates within the magazines letters page which feature letters from female readers and notes that *Playboy* was an advocate of sexual liberalism for men and women, to an extent, of broader women’s rights as well as of abortion rights: ‘Evidence of this position can be found in the magazine’s articles and editorials as well as in the charitable donations of the Playboy Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the magazine, which contributed thousands of dollars to abortion rights organizations before *Roe V. Wade* overturned anti-abortion laws in the United States.’ Pitzulo, C. ‘The Battle in Every Man’s Bed: *Playboy* and the Fiery Feminists’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality* v.17 #2 2008, p.259

<sup>22</sup> Meyerowitz *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994)

<sup>23</sup> Buszek *Pin-Up Grrrls* p.242

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p.244

<sup>25</sup> Buszek presents Page demonstrating a significant level of artistry, highlighting her agency, artistry and competence observing that the ‘hammy gusto’ with which Page posed ‘served to expose the very construction of the genre, revealing both its artificiality and performative nature, as well as its potential as an expressive medium for the woman so represented.’ *ibid.* p.247)

culture:

At the end of the Second World War, and with the return of men from overseas, the home-front climate changed dramatically in terms of national ideals of female identity that had been so thoroughly transformed during wartime. The nation that had rallied feverishly for women to question their traditional stations in the domestic realm during the war soon demanded with equal ferocity that it was now just as much their patriotic duty to return to their homes – and their supposed pre-war contentment there – as it had been to rush into the labor [sic] force during the war.<sup>26</sup>

Using the conclusions of May<sup>27</sup> and Gatlin<sup>28</sup> as well as Meyerowitz, Buszek surmises that in

America at large:

images of women in popular culture reflected the post-war American interest in idealising a less aggressive, thoroughly nostalgic construction of the contemporary woman, fit to cultural demands for a return to more traditional gender roles.

Such representations would certainly seem to fit within a ‘back-to-the-home movement’<sup>29</sup> as defined by Susan Faludi; a backlash technique believed by many historians to have been prevalent in popular culture during the years immediately following the declaration of peace.

A similar backlash premise, and an understandable lamentation at contraction of opportunities for women, is frequently employed when discussing Britain’s post-war cultural context. This is presumably because, as Barbara Caine notes in her study of English feminism between 1780 and 1980:

Just as the drama of the militant suffrage campaign made the quieter activities of interwar feminists almost invisible, so too the sudden and dramatic rise of the Women’s Liberation movement in the early 1970s has made it very hard to see or understand the feminist activity or debates about women of the preceding decades.<sup>30</sup>

So whilst the post-war period *was* a ‘troubling period’<sup>31</sup> in terms of feminism, significant gains *were* still made during by British women in terms of their lived experience, the

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p.235)

<sup>27</sup> May *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (NY: Basic Books, 1980)

<sup>28</sup> Gatlin, R *American Women Since 1945* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1987)

<sup>29</sup> This being ‘a creation of advertisers and... a recycled version of the Victorian fantasy that a new ‘cult of domesticity’ was bringing droves of women home.’ Faludi, S. *Backlash* p.77

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p.222

<sup>31</sup> Caine *English Feminism* p.223

recognition of female worker's rights and women's increased rights within marriage<sup>32</sup> but are often overlooked:

The pattern of women's lives underwent certain marked changes, with higher rates of marriage, a decreasing birth rate, and with an increase in the numbers of married women in paid employment, standards of health and of living increased markedly for women, with the expansion of the welfare state and the introduction of the National Health Service.<sup>33</sup>

Yet the very the real hurdles of Britain's immediate conditions of existence still remained. These are perhaps best encapsulated in David Kynaston's recounting of Anthony Heap's end-of-1945 review:

No sooner did we awake from the six years nightmare of war and feel free to enjoy life once more, than the means to do so immediately became even scantier than they had been during the war...Housing, food, clothing, fuel, beer, tobacco – all the ordinary comforts of life that we'd taken for granted before the war and naturally expected to become more plentiful again when it ended, became instead more and more scarce and difficult to come by.' He concluded, 'I can remember few years I've been happier to see the end of.'<sup>34</sup>

These intolerable conditions were compounded by the inevitable post-war termination of America's Lend-Lease programme, which, as Mollie Panter-Downes observed, meant that

The factories, which people hoped would soon be changing over to the production of goods for the shabby, short-of-everything home consumers are instead to produce goods for export. The government will have to face up to the job of convincing the country that controls and hardships are as necessarily a part of a bankrupt peace as they were of a desperate war.<sup>35</sup>

Add to this, the gross inequalities in terms of conditions of existence still experienced across the rigidly defined class boundaries and the increasing dissatisfaction<sup>36</sup> and heightened awareness throughout the war and immediate post-war period amongst huge sections of

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<sup>32</sup> As Caine observes 'it was during these years that some of the issues which had been of most concern to feminists in the 1920s and 1930s were satisfactorily resolved.' She gives the following examples: "The marriage bar... began to disappear...The campaign to have women police recognised as a permanent part of the police force was successfully completed in 1945 and the British Nationality Act allowed British women to retain their nationality on marriage...some issues from the agenda of the 1920s were still outstanding, most notably equal pay... but the first measure of equal pay was introduced in the early 1950s." Caine *English Feminism* p.222-223  
<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p.225

<sup>34</sup> Kynaston *Austerity Britain* p.104; Quoting Heap's diaries. Unpublished (available in London Metropolitan Archives). 1<sup>st</sup> September 1945 Bowmer, fol 1090;

<sup>35</sup> Kynaston *Austerity Britain* p.103; Downes 'Letter from London' *The New Yorker*, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1945.

<sup>36</sup> See Calder, A. *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992) and Calder, A. *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992)

British society, of an urgent need to rapidly and decisively improve conditions and prospects for the 75 per cent of the British population who were working-class<sup>37</sup>, and one becomes acutely aware of the at best inconvenient and at worst intolerable nature of British existence, particularly for that two thirds of the British populace in the immediate post-war era.

In the US stark comparisons between the wealthy and the poor, the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’, were also prominent, but by and large the US experienced significantly greater prosperity than Britain in the immediate post-war era, as the US industrial sector had foreseen the potential for growth and consolidation that hostilities offered and risen to the challenge of wartime production to transform its home economy from that of post-depression recovery to that of the world’s superpower. Equally whilst Britain was both financially and physically ruined by war<sup>38</sup>, US citizens had not been subject to the same level of privation and nor had US soil been subject to prolonged physical bombardment. As living standards on the whole rose in the US, in Britain even the middle-class and upper classes were restricted in their access to housing, goods, technologies and fashions<sup>39</sup>, with many post-war shortages and

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<sup>37</sup> See Kynaston *Austerity Britain* p.39; This thirst for change was most effectively evidenced in the sweeping Labour victory of July 5<sup>th</sup> 1945 and was voiced, perhaps most explicitly, in the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1941 edition of *Picture Post*. As Kynaston observes ‘outlined in a celebrated special issue (complete with six naked, presumably impoverished small children on the cover) ‘A Plan For Britain’. The magazine recalled the sudden end of the war in November 1918: ‘The plan was not there. We got no new Britain...this time we can be better prepared. But we can only be better prepared if we think now.’ Accordingly, a series of articles (including ‘Work For All’, ‘Plan For The Home’, ‘Social security’, ‘A Plan For education’, ‘Health For All’ and ‘The New Britain Must Be Planned’) offered an initial blueprint for ‘a fairer, pleasanter, happier, more beautiful Britain than our own.’ Kynaston *Austerity Britain* p.20)

<sup>38</sup> As Kynaston notes by the end of war ‘three quarters of a million houses destroyed or severely damaged [by war]... [whilst] Britain’s debt [stood at] a record £3.5 billion.’ *op cit*.

<sup>39</sup> For example, when, in 1947 Dior premiered the ‘New Look’: ‘A collection which included day-dresses which employed large amounts of pleated silk emerging from already full coat-skirts, and evening-wear which revelled in vast swathes of luxurious fabrics with crinolines and underskirts.’ See McNeil, P. “‘Put Your Best face Forward’: The impact of the Second World War on British dress’ *Journal of Design History* v.6 #4, p.293, quote taken from Giroud, F. *Dior* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987) p.91, 170. The collection quickly came to be emblematic in the public imagination, of a break from wartime austerity and constraint, with ‘part of the immediate appeal of these garments lay[ing] in the abundance, the excess, of the fabric and labour invested in them.’ McNeil ‘Put Your Best Face Forward’ p.293; However, in reality it was precisely these qualities that placed the style out of reach of the majority of British women and not surprisingly, also drew significant derision.

restrictions actually increasing.<sup>40</sup>

As such, Betty Friedan's vision of the educated yet bored middle-class, suburban housewife – that 'tenacious stereotype' 'domestic and quiescent' who 'moved to the suburbs, created the baby boom, and forged family togetherness'<sup>41</sup>, which as Joanne Meyerowitz observes is intensely problematic even when applied to American women<sup>42</sup> - must also be approached with significant caution when applied to the vastly differing cultural experience of British women.

### **Perfect Wives, Perfect Pin-Ups: To What Extent a Post-War Backlash?**

Certainly, if anyone needed evidence of a post-war drive to undermine women's achievements, coerce them back into the home and relinquish any gains they made during the war era many British and American examples can be found. In a period of great flux and great anxiety one would anticipate a surfeit of media texts which engage in a number of ways with changes occurring within the shifting cultural landscape.

The 1945 Pathe newsreel *ATS Train for Housework*<sup>43</sup> is one such example, as it follows young British servicewomen, anticipating demobilisation and the imminent return of husbands and sweethearts, being coached in how to appropriately perform domestic duties and learning to 'become a perfect wife at an LCC training school... under the guidance of an expert'. The film's concluding shot of these women, smart and competent in their uniforms, yet gazing longingly through a shop window at the pitiful array of utility furniture and home

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<sup>40</sup> Whilst never having been formally rationed during the war, in 1946 until 1948 Bread went on the ration. Potatoes were rationed in 1947 and end of all food rationing did not cease until July 1954. <http://www.iwm.org.uk>

<sup>41</sup> Meyerowitz *Not June Cleaver* p.1

<sup>42</sup> 'With the feminine mystique Friedan gave a name to housewives' discontent, but she also homogenised American women and simplified post-war ideology; she reinforced the stereotype that portrayed all women as middle-class, domestic, and suburban, and she caricatured the popular ideology that she said had suppressed them' *ibid* p.3

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/a-t-s-train-for-housework/query/ATS+housework> retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> March 2012



goods with which they could furnish their post-war homes, is particularly provocative, if only because of its perpetuation of the domesticated, 'nester' stereotype discussed by Susan Faludi. Upon closer inspection, *ATS Train for Housework* – a film made for post-war exhibition in British cinemas – reveals other more complex and subtle readings, representations and tensions in operation in post-war Britain.

The least glamorous but the largest of the British women's wartime services, with some 200,000 members by the close of war, the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) was the direct descendent of what, during WWI, had been called the WAACs (Women's Auxiliary Army Corps). Throughout WWI members of the WAACs had been the frequent and repeated butt of jokes and malicious speculation surrounding their virtue<sup>44</sup>, and this this prejudice prevailed, despite the change of name, into WWII. Whether such accusations were founded or not is irrelevant here but what does bear consideration is the reasons why such rumours persisted. Writing upon fears in Britain during and shortly after WWI regarding 'women aping men'<sup>45</sup>, DeCourcy observes that

Some of the hostility was a hangover from the anger aroused by the campaigns of the suffragettes to win the right to vote which, to the hidebound, appeared to be an attempt to win a male prerogative: the idea of a female military force seemed to be taking this concept an unwarranted step further. Some of it was simply an unthinking expression of the belief that a woman's role was solely that of wife and mother and that no good could come of any attempt to pervert this natural order.<sup>46</sup>

Certainly this would seem to be a very persuasive argument, particularly when considered in light of Faludi's theories surrounding backlash. Yet one additional contributory factor should be considered here in the distinctly moral judgement being made of these women. ATS Officer and former debutante Judy Impey observes of her time training ATS recruits:

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<sup>44</sup> According to Anne DeCourcy popular jokes at WAACs expense ran along the lines of 'would you rather have a slap on the face or a WAAC of the knee?' Decourcy, A. *Debs at War: How Wartime Changed Their Lives*. 1939-1945. (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1995) p.123. Decourcy claims the organisations 'Chief Controller actually had to sign an affidavit to certify that no recruiting for prostitution had ever taken place' p.123

<sup>45</sup> DeCourcy observes 'letters in *The Times* anathematised 'women aping men both in their work and their clothing.' p.122-3

<sup>46</sup> *ibid* p.101

I was well aware that we in the ATS were the rough tough ones – we got all the dregs. They would come in, ragtag and bobtail in civilian clothes, no table manners - you didn't have to teach them but you hoped it brushed off a bit – and some of them hungry. One of the awful jobs was delousing them. Also inspecting their feet. They had to have baths in disinfectant and they were given coarse underclothes.<sup>47</sup>

It was these 'dregs' (i.e. the working and lower working-classes) that constituted a significant proportion of the ATS's recruits and any judgements of these women was as much a judgement of their class (as being inherently childlike or unintelligent 'unpure, dangerous and sexual'<sup>48</sup>) as a judgement of any transgressive 'aping of men'. Further evidence as to these perceptions, be them founded or not, can also be found in the recollections of Officer Meg Egerton, another society lady who trained 'the slum dwellers from Newcastle and Glasgow';

We had to teach them to be clean. At Glen Cross we had a 'head hut' where the heads were deloused. With a new intake we used to have a sweepstake on how many dirty heads out of a hundred there would be. Yes, we cleaned them up but when they went home on leave they got nits again.<sup>49</sup>

In many ways *ATS Train for Housework* demonstrates a similar sense of probably well-meant but ultimately demeaning patronage, an attempt to 'better' these women, not necessarily with a view to social mobility or increased opportunity, but to exercise control, reinforce existing biased class and gender structures, and reassert dominance to ensure that the women featured conform to largely middle-class standards of respectable femininity. Therefore the subjects are required to become what the narrator terms 'The perfect wife', the skilled laundress, cook or decorator, the consummate shopper, the ideal daughter-in-law:

'During their ten day course as housewives they are taught everything about running a home. Even down to laying the table properly so that when George's mother comes home she won't be able to find fault.'

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid* p.129

<sup>48</sup> 'As Ware (1992) notes, during the nineteenth century...working class women were defined and designated as unpure, dangerous and sexual.' See Skeggs, B. 'Refusing To Be Civilised: 'Race', Sexuality and Power.' in Afshar, H. and Maynard, M. (eds) *The Dynamics of 'Race' and Gender: Some Feminist Interventions* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994) p.110. A perception which, in many ways, endures to this day.

<sup>49</sup> DeCourcy *Debs at War* p.132

Such attitudes were by no means restricted to *ATS Train for Housework*, as numerous historians such as Jane Lewis<sup>50</sup> and Juliet Gardiner have noted

It was feared that during the Second World War domestic arts were being lost. The handing down of female wisdom from mother to daughter had not been possible when homes were being evacuated or mothers out working in war industries. *Picture Post* reported on two different training schemes but with a single aim – to re-domesticate women and professionalise their home making skills.<sup>51</sup>

Just as widespread concern existed surrounding the need for a successful, safe and incident-free rehabilitation of the British men who had, until recently, been state-sanctioned, trained killers back into peacetime society as balanced, functioning civilians<sup>52</sup>, so military women's successful reintegration back into 'civvy' society as well as women's wider restoration, following service to their country, back into more domesticated roles featured prominently in the British post-war media. House wife training courses and rhetoric surrounding women returning to the home therefore formed part of a larger programme of post-war reassurance and rehabilitation, portraying the successful transition from public to private (or more overtly domesticated) femininity<sup>53</sup>.

A similar preoccupation with transition and, supposedly, wider societal progress is also evident in a disparate collection of American newsreel footage gathered together and narrated

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<sup>50</sup> As Lewis notes 'public anxiety came at the end of the Second World war when professionals and politicians stressed the need to 'rebuild' the family, and attention focused squarely on the issue of 'adequate mothering' as the surest means to securing future social stability.' Lewis, J *Women in Britain since 1945: Women, Family, Work, and the State in the Post-War Years* (London: Blackwell, 1992) p.11

<sup>51</sup> Gardiner, J. *Picture Post Women* (London: Collins and Brown, 1993) p.123. The article itself observes that 'several of these home making courses are now being tried out... Several L.C.C schools have fully equipped flats attached to their cookery department and youth organisations are rapidly turning their per-service instruction into courses for brides and future mothers.' *ibid* pp.21-22

<sup>52</sup> A concern which is explored directly and at length in numerous American film noirs such as *Crossfire* (RKO, 1947), *The Blue Dahlia* (Paramount, 1946), *High Wall* (MGM, 1947).

<sup>53</sup> Equally, the 1945 *Picture Post* article 'Girls with a Problem to Solve' explores a similar theme, following a group of girls on a similar week-long, Board of Education-funded domestic science course in Dorset where 'the Girls Training Corps gives fortnightly home training courses at a country cottage.' Marchant, H. 'Girls with a Problem to Solve' *Picture Post* 8<sup>th</sup> December 1945, pp.21-23; Here the infantilised, urban mobile woman, until recently venerated but now seemingly redundant, is seen to come of age through the successful acquisition of domestic knowledge and execution of domestic duties. As such, the project itself can be seen to fit neatly within the previously discussed wider post-war trend in Britain for social experimentation designed to create a 'better' and fairer post war Britain.

by voice over for British audiences under the dubious title *Girls at War*<sup>54</sup>. The brief narrative arc of this 1944 Movietone News feature traverses footage of well turned out, skilled American female officers being decorated for their ‘great services’ and ‘sterling work’, to footage of American female nurses in foreign climes performing a regimented exercise displays (framed by overhanging palms - an index of the ‘exotic’ locale - and stockings and ‘scanties’ hung upon a washing line; giving the viewer a titillating sense of voyeurism) to those same nurses in bikinis frolicking provocatively in the sea, (‘[making] the best of a few hours off. Good fun, so she told us. Plus swimming is slimming!’), to WAVES (‘that’s WRENs to us!’) instructing male students at a naval air gunnery school in the states. (‘Girls teaching men how to shoot? That *is* news!’), before concluding, on a somewhat retrograde note, with a series of medium shots featuring several young women posed provocatively in bathing suits as pin-ups ‘for the boys’ (‘Florida. But not exactly recognised war work. Still it’s a patriotic duty to see that the supply of pin-up girls equals the demand. That’s what they are doing. Their pictures will appear in camps and barracks all over the world’).

Here women’s achievements are initially celebrated during the newsreel’s opening sequence, yet any progressive potential is subsequently undercut through a series of misogynist and derisive verbal interpretations of successive sequences, in the interests of creating a convenient, conservative and yet tenuously coherent news narrative out of such disparate footage. The film relies on familiar, established and simplistic female stereotypes which nonetheless purport to capture, for British audiences, something of American women’s wartime experience at large. In the film’s final sequence any progressive or subversive potential offered by the pin-up is co-opted, whilst the agency, abilities and achievements of these ‘girls at war’ are repeatedly underestimated and undermined throughout the text (with ‘girls’ – rather than ‘women’ - here even being presented symbolically ‘handing back’ that

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<sup>54</sup> May 1944, see

[http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/search.php/story?q=%22girls+at+war%22&date\\_start=1939&date\\_end=1946&newsgroup=&newsreel=&newsreel\\_flag=&sort=&page\\_size=10](http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/search.php/story?q=%22girls+at+war%22&date_start=1939&date_end=1946&newsgroup=&newsreel=&newsreel_flag=&sort=&page_size=10) retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> March 2012

agency in the form to the instruction ‘given’ by WAVES to male students at the naval air gunnery school).

Whilst it is possible that attitudes and representations expressed within *ATS Train For Housework* and *Girls At War* may demonstrate a wider societal backlash against women within the public sphere and a push for women to return to the home, and certainly it could be tempting, with the benefit of hindsight, to do so, these government orchestrated pieces of propaganda may or may not necessarily be representative of wider trends or opinions regarding women’s agency at large or pin-up’s role within this. Whilst these resources are indicative of post war attitudes to public femininity, representing women being ‘trained for housework’ or shifting roles from capable, skilled workers to ‘something for the boys’ they provide no evidence that real women at large actually left either the job market or the public sphere as war conditions came to an end, and without evidence of actual responses to these films we cannot realistically surmise one way or the other how they were received or to what extent these narratives were representative of women’s lived experience.

### **‘Gilda, Are You Decent?’: The Puzzle of the Femme Fatale and Post-War Public Femininity**

In discussions of post-war Hollywood representations, the iconic figure of the femme fatale is probably the most frequently invoked and perpetually discussed female archetype. Frequently offered as an anomalous figure of subversive power, the femme fatale’s psychosis, duplicity, depravity and crucially her containment, through an invariably ugly fate, is commonly offered as understandable but all-too-convenient proof of the re-entrenchment of the wider social misogynies which had been temporarily relaxed by the unique conditions of war.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For Christine Gledhill noir representations of femininity were indicative of ‘the post-war drive to get women out of the workforce and return them to the domestic sphere; and... the perennial myth of woman as threat to male control of the world and destroyer of male aspiration. Gledhill, C. ‘*Klute* 1: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism.’ in Kaplan, E.A. (ed.) *Women in Film Noir* (London: BFI, 1980) p.19.

Freudian notions such as Oedipal conflict and castration anxiety lend themselves well both to the study of noir narratives<sup>56</sup> and the study of a society in the throes of a backlash, and so it is not surprising then that the image of Gilda, or more specifically of Rita Hayworth *as* Gilda (the female protagonist in the film of the same name was alleged to have been emblazoned upon the side of the atomic bomb tested over Bikini Atoll) is occasionally offered as proof of the potentially devastating nature of self-possessed female sexuality and male ambivalence towards such a woman. As Michael Wood claims in his treatise on the dangerous woman of 1940s Hollywood cinema

The symbolism is enough to frighten off any but the most intrepid Freudians: the bomb dropped on Bikini was called Gilda and had a picture of Rita Hayworth painted on it. The phallic agent of destruction underwent a sex change, and the delight and terror of our new power were channelled into an old and familiar story: our fear and love of women.<sup>57</sup>

However, an extremely persuasive counterargument to this popular conceit can be found, not only in Helen Hanson's work on the 'working girl investigator' archetype and her claim that

While the femme fatale figure has been an important one in initiating feminist debates about the politics of Hollywood representation, and interpretation in feminist criticism, the story of film noir's women is not reducible to this vice-virtue polarity. There is a much wider range of female characterisation in the noir crime thriller during the 1940s, and these characters undertake roles and display agency in ways that are not solely reducible to their sexuality.<sup>58</sup>

But also in Mark Jancovich's 'Phantom Women: The War Worker, the Slacker and the Femme Fatale'. Here Jancovich points out the not-so-convenient fact that the femme fatale - that 'nightmarish manifestation of masculine anxieties within the [post-war] period'<sup>59</sup> - rather than being a post-war phenomenon, was a product of, and response to, wartime conditions and wartime femininity. The figure was in popular circulation well in advance of the end of

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<sup>56</sup> As Clare Johnson notes 'At the centre of the [noir]enigma is the Oedipal Trajectory of the hero – the problem of the knowledge of sexual difference in patriarchal order.' Johnson, C. 'Double Indemnity' in Kaplan, E.A. (ed.) *Women in Film Noir* (London: BFI, 1980) p.101

<sup>57</sup> Wood, M. *America in the Movies: Or Santa Maria, It Had Slipped My Mind!* (NY: Basic Books, 1975) p.51

<sup>58</sup> Hanson, H. 'At the Margins of Film Noir: Genre, Range and Female Representation.' *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film*. (London: Tauris, 2008) p.4

<sup>59</sup> Jancovich, M. 'Phantom Ladies: The War Worker, the Slacker and the 'Femme Fatale.' in *New Review of Film and Television Studies* v.8 #2, 2010, p.166

the war, not only in wartime film noir but also in the pre-war pulp novels upon which many noir films were based. For example, Jancovich notes one of noir's most notorious femme fatales – *The Maltese Falcon*'s Brigid O'Shaughnessy - made her first cinematic appearance in 1931 played by Bebe Daniels before being played in 1936 by Bette Davis and later by Mary Astor in the definitive 1941 version. As a figure, the femme fatale was one of many female archetypes (the good time girl being another) which engaged with anxieties about women's conduct and was by no means specific to the post-war era.

Upon closer inspection of the cultural context, rather than the simple binary structure of 'good' domesticated women and 'bad' public woman, the social situation in both America and Britain, and the subsequent female representations, were much more complex. Rather than being understood as a traditional 'fille publique' character – sexualised and sophisticated but firmly associated with the *public* sphere - as Jancovich notes, in contemporaneous critical receptions of films which contained femme fatale figures, the femme fatale was invariably presumed to be representative of the figure of the wartime 'slacker' - 'the woman who refused to take on war work and preferred to remain insulated within the domestic sphere'<sup>60</sup> – rather than the post-war working woman as is so commonly presumed. Jancovich's article therefore demonstrates how the femme fatale, rather than representing a cultural rejection of women's increasing visibility within the public sphere, was in fact representative of an increased cultural acceptance and the normalisation of both assertive public femininity and of the working woman brought about by social circumstance. This coupled with the fact that as Jancovich notes 'the films within which [femme fatales] appeared were often identified with female rather than male audiences'<sup>61</sup> is also indicative of an increasing acceptance amongst both men and women at large of women in the public sphere and a situation whereby assertive, non-domesticated female representations were

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p.166

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p.164

neither widely vilified nor unavailable.

The transition from wartime to a post-war workforce, in Britain where the need to shift to a highly productive export economy to pay off the nation's debts was essential, led to a more gradual process of cultural transformation whereby many conditions remained frustratingly unchanged, but the key difference was that the state was no longer actively encouraging or endorsing women in the workplace. Alternatively, in the prospering US, as Haskell observes

A poll of working women taken during the war came up with the startling fact that 80 per cent wanted to keep their jobs after it was over. After a sharp drop-off following the end of the war - when women were fired with no regard for seniority - married women did go back to work, although as late as 1949 it was still frowned upon.<sup>62</sup>

For many women, in the US as well as Britain, leaving the workplace simply wasn't a financially viable option. Whilst most women may have left the traditionally more masculinised roles they undertook during the war, to make way for their returning male counterparts, rather than leaving the workplace entirely the female workforce shifted into less visible, more stereotypically feminised employment, which frequently fitted more comfortably around their domestic responsibilities. Equally, rather than being an affront, for many of the women in both Britain and America who *did* leave the work force, at least during those initial years of peace, the post-war reduction in responsibilities on top of other domestic duties was a relief as was the escape from the monotony and imposition involved in much of the work<sup>63</sup>

Equally, many young women, who had deliberately put off taking on a home and starting a family 'for the duration', felt that having spent the last either four or six years serving their country and putting their lives on hold 'for the duration', they had earned the

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<sup>62</sup> Haskell, M. *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987)

<sup>63</sup> As one respondent in the Mass Observation study *War Factory* commented 'The day the war is over I'll be the first one out of here. I'll be down that path before they've finished announcing it.' Mass Observation *War Factory* (1943) (London: The Cresset Library, 1987) p.51



right in the peacetime society to finally please themselves. As Penny Summerfield notes of the British context:

at the end of the war, skilled and professional women expressed the strong desire to continue in full-time employment, but women engaged in repetitive, monotonous work were often pleased to return home for at least part of the time. (Summerfield, 1984)<sup>64</sup>

The second issue with the linking of the femme fatale stereotype to regressive social attitudes towards women in the post-war era is one frequently raised whenever the figure is discussed: namely the issue of her resonance. The femme fatale may be presented as deviant and dangerous and the Production Code dictated that such a character must be punished for her aberrance, but as Janey Place notes, the femme fatale is presented in a ‘potent’ and ‘highly stylised’ way, leaving the audience with the incredibly attractive impression of an ‘erotic, strong, unrepressed (if destructive) woman’:

Visually film noir is fluid, sensual, extraordinarily expressive, making the sexually expressive woman, which is its dominant image of women extremely powerful. It is not their inevitable demise we remember but rather their strong, dangerous and above all, exciting sexuality.<sup>65</sup>

So whilst the dictates of censorship meant that noir narratives moved ultimately to both condemn and contain this problematic figure, throughout the course of the narrative, the femme fatale’s charisma (both sexual and personal and often due in no small part to the performance and the resonances offered by the actress who portrayed her) frequently undermines the censorious intent, offering many a representational message, not of submission but of resistance, and of empowerment rather than restriction.

Equally some treacherous women are less treacherous than others, and many are so for good reason. Just because a character is coded as a ‘bad girl’ (or at least her aims pose

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<sup>64</sup> Lewis *Women in Britain* p.3; Similarly, Juliet Gardiner notes that ‘Younger [British] women who had done long hours of menial work in war-production factories, or felt regimented and drilled to death in the Forces, were delighted with the opportunity to resume studies, careers and comfortable home lives, with marriage prospects.’ Gardiner, J. *Wartime: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Headline, 2004) p.587

<sup>65</sup> Place, J. ‘Women in Film Noir’ Kaplan, E.A. (ed.) *Women in Film Noir* (London: BFI, 1980) p.36

some threat or enigma to the protagonist) doesn't mean that she isn't still likeable or that audiences are not able to find some form of resonance with such a character.

If we briefly consider two of Rita Hayworth's post-war (and possibly most iconic) roles, as Gilda Munsen/Farrell in *Gilda* (Columbia, 1946) and Elsa Bannister in *The Lady from Shanghai* (Columbia, 1947), it is apparent that Hayworth's star persona is actually misplaced (and as a result deeply problematic) in what is generally understood to be the role of the 'unknowable'<sup>66</sup> femme fatale in *Gilda* whilst her character Elsa in *Lady from Shanghai* is portrayed as a heartless, manipulative and murderous 'kept woman' or, in Jancovich's terms, 'slacker', rather than as an independent or challenging *working* woman.

Hayworth notably plays 'against type' in both of these roles, having established previous form, certainly in the years prior to the release of these films, as likable, decent and even patriotic good girl protagonists in women's musicals such as *You'll Never Get Rich* (1941), *You Were Never Lovelier* (1942), *Cover Girl* (1944), *Tonight and Every Night* (1945) and *Down To Earth* (1947). This playing against type is evident in in *The Lady from Shanghai*, but actually becomes problematic to the film's ideological structure in *Gilda* – as Richard Dyer observes in 'Resistance Through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*':

A star's image is constructed both from her or his film appearances (typical roles, modes of presentation, performance and dress styles, etc) and publicity (including promotion, advertising, fan magazines and gossip). In any particular film, this image is an already signifying complex and the character the star plays as written and otherwise constructed (e.g., through dress, mise en scene etc).<sup>67</sup>

Dyer posits that two key elements make Hayworth's performance in *Gilda* particularly problematic:

By the time of *Gilda*, elements were accruing to the Hayworth image that would, in traditional terms, make her an identification figure for heterosexual women. These were partly her role as partner (rather than menace) in musicals and partly details of her life surrounding marriage... what *Gilda*/Hayworth does can thus be read not only as a

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<sup>66</sup> See Dyer 'Resistance Through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*' in Kaplan, E.A. (ed) *Women in Film Noir* (London: BFI, 1992) p.92

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p.92

projection of male fantasy but also as an identification of female life concerns.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to this, Dyer discusses the intrinsic linkage of Hayworth's star persona with movement (due to her notoriety as a dancer, her frequent casting in song and dance musicals, and her spontaneous and passionate 'Latina' ethnicity), he discusses her use of dance as 'self-expression'<sup>69</sup> and comments specifically upon the 'erotic expressivity'<sup>70</sup> of that dancing style, noting that

In her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Laura Mulvey suggests an opposition between stasis and movement in relation to sexual objectification. The former fixes or controls the object of desire for the pleasurable gaze of the spectator, whereas the latter 'escapes' this control<sup>71</sup>

What Dyer suggests, then, is that because of Hayworth's associations with motion (or more specifically dance) and through the cultural capital she possesses as a skilled dancer, her presence as a performer destabilises the dichotomous power dynamic which is intended to 'fix' or 'control' her as a passive erotic object and Johnny as an active, questioning subject within *Gilda's* narrative. So although 'generic conventions are very powerful as are more over-arching conventions'<sup>72</sup> and we are repeatedly prompted through Johnny's first-person narration to both distrust, condemn and even dislike Gilda, 'to side with him in his denunciation of her, to rejoice in his final possession of her,'<sup>73</sup> but 'signification is never that fixed, and the narrative and star image procedures of *Gilda* do do some mischief with these normative conventions.'<sup>74</sup> As a result, as Dyer notes, it is 'not so easy either to identify with Johnny as the hero or to assent to his view of Gilda.'<sup>75</sup>

In this particular film both Hayworth's pin-up persona and her association with sensual motion are both deliberately invoked, perhaps most strikingly the first time we

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p.96

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p.97

<sup>70</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>71</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* p.98

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p.93

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p.98

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p.93

encounter her character within the film's narrative. As Ballin calls to Gilda, the camera cuts to a medium close up whereby Hayworth's character is seen 'cut in on a movement (tossing her hair back) [providing] a particularly dynamic effect.'<sup>76</sup> A move she frequently and famously used when dancing, and to great erotic effect<sup>77</sup>. Softly lit and smiling her trademark dazzling smile, Hayworth looks just off camera, and asks 'Me?' She pauses, mid-movement, her bare shoulders, immaculate visage and beautifully backlit hair framed within a reverential medium close-up. Momentarily she holds her pose and fixes her expression in an attractive, but nonetheless consciously contrived, manner. This deliberate hiatus allows the audience to recognise who Gilda/Hayworth is and to appreciate her beauty but also evokes the iconography of the Hurrell-esque Hollywood glamour shots with which Hayworth's persona was, at this stage, so firmly associated. Another significant element of this first glimpse of our heroine lies with the question to which Gilda is responding, this being: 'Gilda, are you decent?' The use of the medium close up allows the audience to scrutinise Hayworth/Gilda's face for 'evidence' as to the film's central concern – Gilda's moral fibre. Is she good or bad? Cheap or high class?

But ambiguous post-war female representations can be found in abundance throughout film noir, and indeed Hollywood cinema at large, in both the wartime and post-war era. In her study of the female-centred gothic film noir cycle of the 1940s, Helen Hanson seeks to 'retrace noir's relation to its socio-cultural contexts by exploring the resonances of the working-girl investigator archetype as a representation of female independence in the 1940s.'<sup>78</sup> She quite rightly claims that despite the 'imaginative shadow'<sup>79</sup> cast over Hollywood films of this period by the femme fatale, and a persistence amongst the majority

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.* p.98

<sup>77</sup> For example, Jack Cole's remembrance of Hayworth's performance in *Tonight and Every Night* (1945) highlights the effective deployment of this technique: 'suddenly this mass of red hair comes hurtling at me...' Kobal, J. *Rita Hayworth: The Time, The Place and The Woman* (London: W.H Allen and Co. 1977) p.191

<sup>78</sup> Hanson 'At the Margins of Film Noir' p.1

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* p.4

of academics<sup>80</sup> to cast female noir subjects within a ‘vice-virtue’ polarity’ (‘the dark lady... and her sister (or alter ego) the virgin... the redeemer’<sup>81</sup>) in order to demonstrate a wider and inherent misogyny, there was, in fact, ‘considerable variety’ in terms of female representations even within the constraints of the 1940s noir crime thriller ‘and these characters undertake roles and display agency in ways that are not solely reducible to their sexuality.’<sup>82</sup> For example, the archetype of the ‘working girl investigator’ ‘offers a different picture of gender relations than the ‘gender crisis’ or ‘gender conflict’ that is so commonly ascribed as central to noir’s meaning’<sup>83</sup> and

[by] bringing the range of female characters of the 1940s out from under this shadow means looking again at noir’s contemporary moment, acknowledging the heterogeneous array of films and character types that comprise it, and registering their coexistence and popularity at the time.<sup>84</sup>

As many historians of both British and US society have noted women, particularly working-class women, constituted a significant portion of both the British and the US workforce long before the outbreak of war. Not unlike Britain, in the US, it was ‘the norm for young women to work between finishing their education and marrying’<sup>85</sup> and ‘temporariness typified female employment, but this became particularly accented and visible during the war era.’<sup>86</sup> This was even more likely in Britain than America, Britain having higher rates of female employment and a greater social acceptance of women in the workplace prior to the outbreak of war. It was, most likely, the increased wartime visibility of female workers (if only because of the significant number of working women who shifted out of less visible, most typically ‘feminine’ domestic labour such as charring, laundering, seamstressing, and

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<sup>80</sup> However, recently Catherine Haworth has presented an extremely compelling argument upon the use of music score to enhance noir detective heroines agency within particular narratives entitled. *Detective Agency? Scoring the Amateur Female Investigator in 1940’s Hollywood*. (article currently under review with *Music and Letters*)

<sup>81</sup> Hanson ‘At the Margins of Film Noir’ p.3

<sup>82</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* p.2

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* p.4

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p.14

<sup>86</sup> *op cit.*

into more visible, public work or work, defined as being more ‘masculine, or the increased number of media representations which made the layoffs, the post-war increase in domestic female representations and the supposed transience of the female workforce around the close of war seem so very pronounced.

As Hanson notes, using the work of D’Ann Campbell, in the US

In the years 1940-7, American women held an average of 41.4 percent of all white collar jobs... Women also held the majority of all clerical positions in the American white-collar workforce, forming 52.6 per cent of clerical workers in 1940, rising to 70.3 per cent by 1945 and dropping to 58.6 per cent by 1947.<sup>87</sup>

This trend continued in both Britain and the US with both countries experiencing an initial drop and then a sustained rise in female employment beyond the post-war era and into the era characterised as that of ‘The Feminine Mystique’. As even Faludi observes

In the 1950s, while women may have been hastening down the aisle, they were also increasing their numbers at office – soon at a pace that outstripped even their wartime work participation. And it was precisely women’s unrelenting influx into the job market, not a retreat to the home that provoked and sustained the anti-feminist uproar... As literary scholars Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe of the post-war era, ‘[J]ust as more and more women were getting paid for using their brains, more and more men represented them in novels, plays, and poems as nothing but bodies.’<sup>88</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that with her ‘intelligence, resolve and resourcefulness’ and ‘her character [which] is thus both determined and determinant’<sup>89</sup> the working girl investigator became a regularly used female archetype in post-war film noir and that narratives which featured these characters also made use of the agency inherent within pin-up imagery as part their promotional campaigns. For example, whilst the one, two, three, six and twenty four sheet promotional posters for the 1947 working girl investigator narrative *Lured* (United Artists) used the conventional noir motifs of expressionistic, damp, sodium-lit cobbled streets, its star - Lucille Ball - presented as alert, agent and inquisitive (revolver in hand, upswept hair and smartly attired in a smart raincoat and with heels) other promotional

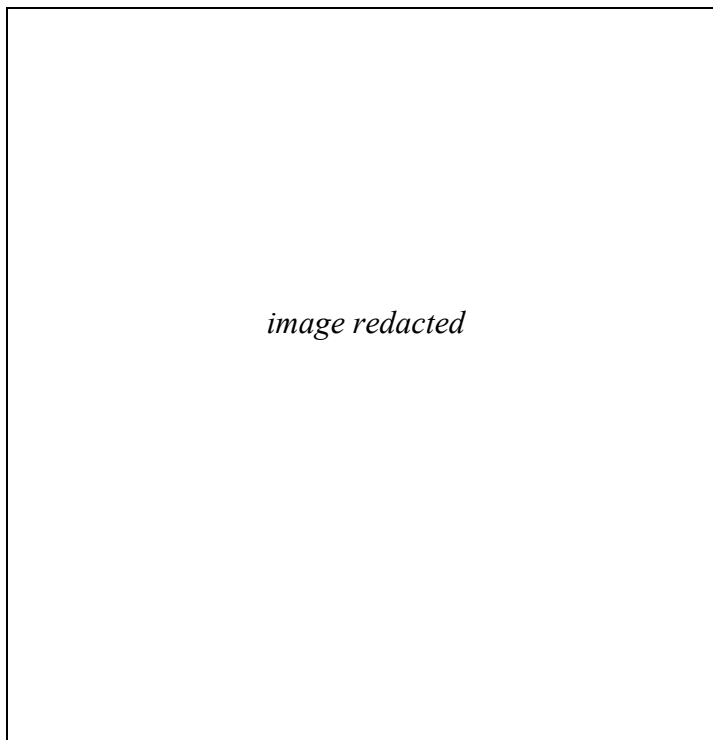
<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p.15

<sup>88</sup> Faludi *Backlash* p.74

<sup>89</sup> Hanson ‘At the Margins of Film Noir’ p.19

materials include a series of three glossy black and white cheesecake shots of Ball: a full body shot in a one-piece, strapless bathing suit posed before a large parasol on a beach studio set, a head and shoulder shot in the same bathing suit, as the subject plays provocatively with her ponytail and full body shot of Ball in a long, figure-hugging black evening gown which she teasingly lifts to display her legs in classic cheesecake style (see figure Twenty Four).

The ‘working girl’ was not a representation specific to noir. Grable’s 1947 musical *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (Twentieth Century Fox) is a film about a working girl protagonist who is capable, skilled, independent and is operating, with purpose, within the public sphere. The image then, of a young professional woman, neatly and fashionably attired, seated at a gleaming Remington typewriter ready for work and smiling out to the reader, would, in 1947 when it appeared in an unsourced American magazine, have been

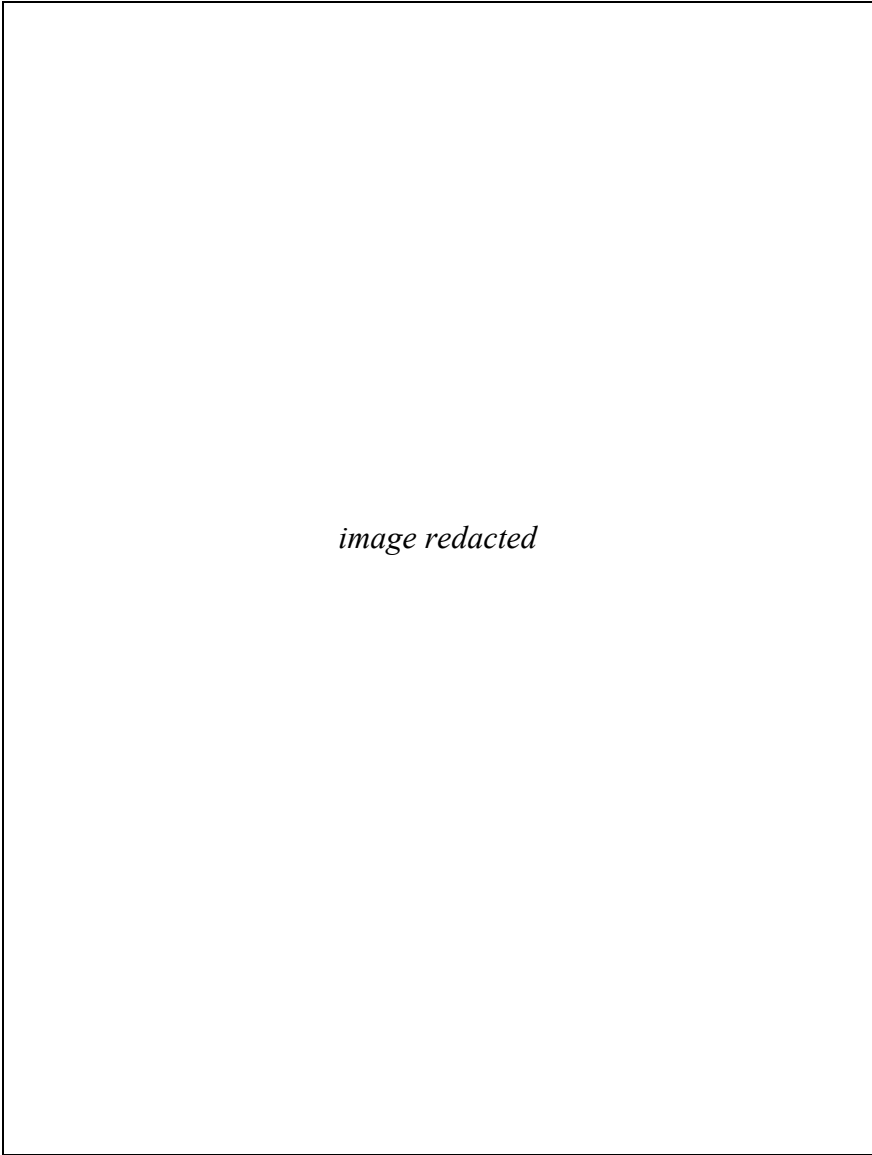


***Fig. Twenty Four:***

*The working girl  
investigator does  
cheesecake – Lucille Ball  
in promotional image for  
Lured (1947)*

typical; offering a number of resonances for readers. (See figure twenty five). In the Remington typewriters tie-up with *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, it is Grable who features at

the typewriter but whilst the film in which she plays a stenographer - *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* - is a period piece (the film is set in the 1870s) Grable is pictured in modern attire, indicating that rather than being 'in character' as Miss Pilgrim, she is out of character and being 'Grable the star'. Here the link between the notion of the independent, public femininity from the film's narrative context of the 1870s to the film's contemporary context of 1947 is made all the more explicit and is clearly presented as a respectable or acceptable female representation.



*image redacted*

***Fig. Twenty Five:*** The Shocking Miss Pilgrim / Remington typewriter tie-up.



### **‘Shocking? She’s Sensational!’: Miss Pilgrim and Pin-Up**

Just as the marketing for the female detective narrative *Lured* utilised promotional pin-up iconography to evoke and further enhance the desirability and the agency associated with the working girl investigator character, the promotional strategies for *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, perhaps not surprisingly considering that Grable is its star, also prominently feature pin-up imagery.

Whilst the use of pin-up iconography may seem in some ways incongruous considering *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim’s* proto-feminist heroine, equal rights subject matter, period setting<sup>90</sup> and the fact that (incorrect) contemporaneous reassessment of the film has linked any lack of box office success to a failure to display Grable’s legs in the film or its advertising (although Grable’s legs very deliberately *do* appear in the film!), Grable’s strong, and by 1947, well-established association particularly with the film star pin-up, but also with self-possessed female characters, in many ways makes *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim’s* use of such a representation inevitable.

Within the British campaign book for this film all of the key promotional materials feature one of four deliberately contrived cheesecake images of Grable, these being: 1) Grable smiling directly into the camera, 2) Grable winking directly at the camera, 3) Grable directly addressing the camera with the conventional wide-eyed, open-mouthed ‘startled doe’ or ‘ooh!’ expression, 4) the straight-to-camera ‘startled doe’, with one gloved index finger raised to her mouth. These primary images are interspersed with less prominent supplementary images of either Grable coupled with Haymes (in two variations upon a romantic clinch), or in a few cases, of Haymes individually.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> However, as Buszek discusses, carte-de-visites images – amongst of the first coherent examples of pin-up imagery - were certainly in existence by this time in which this film was set. See Buszek, M.E. ‘Representing “Awarishness”: Burlesque, Feminist Transgression, and the 19th-Century Pin-up.’ *The Drama Review* v.43 #4, Winter 1999, pp.141-162

<sup>91</sup> As an indicator of the vastly greater box office appeal that Grable possessed over Haymes the sheer visibility

Unusually, for pin-up images, and particularly of a film star who was famed for her ‘million dollar gams’, all poster and advertisement block images are upper body shots. However each foregrounded pin-up image still clearly conveys that vital sense of ‘awarishness’ discussed by Maria Elena Buszek - a quality attributable to ‘sexually self-aware, representational subjects’<sup>92</sup> which produces an ‘erotic yet performative and self-aware depiction of female sexuality’<sup>93</sup> to generate humour in a manner similar to artist Joanna Frueh’s contemporary photographic pin-ups;

Frueh... uses the pin-up for its potential to suggest ‘that a [...] woman is erotically vital, self-consciously erotic, takes pleasure in her beauty, and also thinks that the whole enterprise of erotic/aesthetic artifice is, to some degree, ridiculous.’<sup>94</sup>

The prominent use of the word ‘Shocking’ in the film’s promotional materials is surely intended as a reference to pin-up’s provocative and purportedly lowbrow nature whilst simultaneously hinting at the form’s traditional associations with liberation and modernity. Meanwhile, the frequently used and deliberately ambiguous tagline ‘Shocking? She’s sensational!’ merges star and character (it is unclear whether it is Miss Pilgrim or Grable who is sensational) whilst once again hinting (along with an advertisement block tagline ‘The biggest eyeful of musical entertainment ever!’) at the potentially challenging and even inappropriate nature of both the film and of the photographic form with which Grable had become synonymous. As Buszek notes

[the pin-up] represents a space in which a self-aware female sexuality is not only imaged, but deemed appropriate for display in a societal atmosphere which has, since the genre’s rise, largely viewed such blatant displays of female sexuality as appropriate only for private, guarded consumption--if not downright threatening and therefore taboo. Is it possible, then, that representations of female sexuality can be interpreted as

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of both stars in the films range of promotional images is telling. Of the nine advertisement blocks available in the campaign book, Grable is only pictured *with* Haymes in one. Haymes appears on only four of the nine advertisements in total. Of the two poster designs offered – the lobby display poster and the 20x60 posters – Grable is featured in a clinch with Haymes in both but is also individually foregrounded in a medium close up.

<sup>92</sup> Buszek ‘Awarishness’ p.142

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.* p.160

<sup>94</sup> *op cit.*

*image redacted*

***Fig. Twenty Six:***

*The front cover of the  
The Shocking Miss Pilgrim British campaign book.*

a subversion of oppressive cultural mores as readily as they are a subordination to them?<sup>95</sup>

If this is the case, and if, as Buszek also notes, pin-up imagery invariably presents an ‘implicit depiction of a specifically female and contemporary sexuality’<sup>96</sup> then *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*’s promotional imagery, particularly when considered in relation to the allegorical potential of the film’s emancipation narrative, and to the specific foregrounding, in the film’s campaign book, that

Betty Grable may be blonde and beautiful but she is certainly not dumb. Intelligence and hard work, plus a good deal of help from her mother – which Betty is the first to acknowledge – provide the keys to her popularity<sup>97</sup>

offers an intriguing riposte to claims that Hollywood cinema ceased to offer its audiences positive representations of public, assertive, intelligent, self-aware yet sexually attractive women in post-war era.

**“I have ...[an] unshakable conviction that women should have equal rights”: *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, Allegory and Post-War Public Femininity**

That a character played by Grable might utter a statement such as the one above may seem somewhat surprising<sup>98</sup>, particularly if we are to believe the numerous accounts that suggest her film star persona, the characters she played and the way she played them were essentially vacuous and that the films in which she starred were essentially fluffy confections occupied

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.* p.143

<sup>96</sup> *op cit.*

<sup>97</sup> *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* British campaign book. p.2

<sup>98</sup> As Jeanine Basinger notes of this speech ‘Who would one imagine enacting this discussion? Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn? George Brent and Bette Davis? Clark Gable and Joan Crawford? Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell? It happens to be a serious, straightforward argument between Dick Haymes, the singer, and Betty Grable, the pin up girl of World War II, in a Technicolor musical comedy called *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (1947). Its leading lady, Cynthia Pilgrim, is a hero. And she never gives up.’ Basinger, J. *A Woman’s View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960* (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1993) p.46

solely with the business of sentimentally manipulating the masses and maintaining and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Nonetheless Grable's, or more specifically her character Cynthia Pilgrim's, earnest and 'unshakable conviction' as to women's emancipation is quite emphatically made during the course of *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*'s narrative, to love interest Mr Pritchard (Dick Haymes) who apparently "not asking [her] to do *any* more than a million other women would consider it their *duty* to do," tells Miss Pilgrim that when they marry he expects she will give up her career as a stenographer and permanently enter the domestic sphere. Miss Pilgrim's response is that

equal rights is not a habit like biting your nails, it's a principle, and you don't give up principles over night... it's a fundamental difference in the way we think and if we disagree on this, we'll be disagreeing on every social advancement for the rest of our lives... You keep saying that [we are to be married] as if you have just bought me in a slave market, I have no intention of becoming anyone's chattel.

As such, what remains of this chapter will work on the assumption that *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* functions, to a significant extent, as an allegorical narrative and, as such, offers the film historian some significant insight into contemporaneous post-war debate in America surrounding the changing roles of women.

The film was also released in Britain in 1947 and so a combination of examples from both the film text itself and marketing techniques within the films' British campaign book will be used in this chapter to demonstrate the film's positive engagement with the notion of women's continued financial independence and visibility in the work place within post-war popular culture, and show how Grable and her pin-up notoriety as America's sweetheart were used as a reassuring line of continuity from the war-time representations of the public female to post-war representations of agent and independent, yet still desirable and acceptable femininity.

Returning again to Grable's speech above, her use of the term 'social advancement' belies a remarkably permissive ideology concerned more with a continuation of wartime attitudes towards women rather than a retrenchment of pre-war attitudes. Not that this chapter seeks to suggest that *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* is a particularly feminist, proto-feminist or even progressive text. Elements of the film's narrative are, in many ways, deeply frustrating and ambiguous, particularly when viewed within a present-day context<sup>99</sup>. But what is notable is that as Twentieth Century Fox were (and still are) in the business of selling appealing narratives to as substantial an audience as possible, clearly the presence and popularity of this particular film within post-war American and British popular culture suggests the film's ideological premise must have chimed with the broader cultural ideology of the time.

It is in their nature that battle-of-the-sexes narratives are representationally troublesome whatever their eventual outcome, if only because in the process of the 'battle' the participants frequently become crude and unflattering gender stereotypes. Equally, as is the nature of a battle, rather than facilitating the gender equality so venerated by the Miss Pilgrim character, one party must ultimately become the 'loser'. Claims and counter claims can be made regarding the fact that whilst Miss Pilgrim may be the ultimate 'victor' in *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*'s battle-of-the-sexes, it can be claimed that any gains made in the name of feminism or the seriousness of the feminist message are undercut by Grable's hammy acting approach, exaggerated emotionalism and her status and notoriety as a 'glamour' star. But to what extent, if at all, do these elements actually diminish any ideological message regarding the utility and warranted ubiquity of working women within the public sphere? The *Sunday Express* review of the film as quoted in the *Shocking Miss Pilgrim* British campaign book offers a pertinent insight:

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<sup>99</sup> For example, the workplace bullying and lechery to which Grable's character is subjected by her male workmates or that the sight of Grable's famous 'gams' is the clinching factor that enables Miss Pilgrim her keep her job and that both of these scenarios are played for laughs could all certainly be understandable bones of contention for a contemporary viewer.

Miss Grable, looks delectable as a bonbon, and then, with a flick of expression, lifts herself out of the cosmetic doll class and becomes as deft and engaging a comedy actress as I know<sup>100</sup>

Here not only is Grable credited with performance skills in a number of areas (comedy, glamour), legitimated as a performer and attributed cultural capital, but *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*'s adept use of that skilled performance, both of comedy and of glamorous femininity combined with Fox's renowned lavish production values represents an iron fist in a velvet glove – a seemingly fluffy confection that under closer scrutiny actually reveals a serious ideological implication.

If we briefly apply John O. Thompson's 'commutation test' whereby we 'hypothetically substitute[e] performers in roles, [so that] significant differences in the meaning of the actor are made visible'<sup>101</sup> and replace Grable's unruly woman persona with that of one of another significant female star of the period, whose performances and star persona may possibly be considered more suited to a film of female emancipation, such as Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn or even Joan Crawford, the latter two having been labelled 'box office poison' by the *Hollywood Reporter* in 1938<sup>102</sup> (presumably because of how notoriously assertive or 'difficult' they were), the tone of the film would have been altered to such an extent that the film's deliberately and delicately balanced, light-hearted and boisterous yet feminist message would have been much harder to achieve.

It is notable that whilst Hayworth's collaborative relationship with female producer and screenwriter Virginia Von Upp on *Gilda* and *Cover Girl* has been offered both by Lizzie Francke and Adrienne McLean as evidence of female agency and artistry within the

<sup>100</sup> Quote from the *Sunday Express*, taken from *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* British campaign book, p. 3

<sup>101</sup> McDonald, P. 'Why Study Film Acting? Some Opening Reflections' in Baron, C, Carson, D and Tomasuolo, F.P. (eds) *More Than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004) p.26

<sup>102</sup> May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1938 stars 'whose public appeal is negligible. [yet] Receiving tremendous salaries necessitated by contractual obligations' see Desjardins M. 'Not of Hollywood: Ruth Chatterton, Ann Harding, Constance Bennett Kay Francis and Nancy Carroll.' in Maclean, A. (ed) *Glamour in a Golden Age: Movie Stars of the 1930s* (Piscataway, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2011) p.42

Hollywood industry<sup>103</sup> the involvement of Grable in *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* – a movie penned by female screenwriter Frederica Sagor Maas - has been presented in no such terms.

As Maas's *New York Times* obituary reads:

The film [*The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*] was about a young stenographer who becomes the first woman ever hired by a Boston shipping office, but even that was twisted by the Hollywood homogenizers. Written as a study of a woman's empowerment, "Miss Pilgrim" was turned into a frothy musical starring Betty Grable.<sup>104</sup>

A trailblazing and outspoken Miss Pilgrim figure herself, Sagor Maas was 'labelled a "troublemaker" by producer Harry Rapf'<sup>105</sup>, and there is a definite implication in the above quote that the provision of such a supposedly inferior star in her script's title role, represented a stifling of Sagor Maas's creativity, an institutional disregard for her craft, and a wilful dilution of her film's emancipation message, presumably because of a combination of financial imperatives and a depressing lack of belief in the audience's ability to accept such a narrative.

That the film's title was changed from the original intended 'Miss Pilgrim's Progress' to 'The Shocking Miss Pilgrim' is presented as evidence of the supposed 'dumbing down' or 'sexing up' of the original source material, however the extent to which this is true is questionable. The 'sexing up' of source material isn't necessarily a problem and altered, or not, from its original source material, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* still presents many challenging elements concerned with women's empowerment.

Rather than simply emphasising Grable's potentially titillating pin-up associations, the 'Shocking Miss Pilgrim' title simultaneously hints at the potentially unruly, boisterous

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<sup>103</sup> Francke, L. *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood* (London: BFI, 1994); or McLean, A. 'It's Only That I Do What I Love and Love What I Do': Film Noir and the Musical Woman.' *Cinema Journal* v.33 #1, Fall 1993, pp.3-16

<sup>104</sup> Martin, D 'Frederica Sagor Maas, Silent-Era Scriptwriter, Dies at 111.' *New York Times* 14<sup>th</sup> January 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/15/arts/frederica-sagor-maas-scriptwriter-from-the-silent-era-dies-at-111.html> accessed April 29th, 2012.

<sup>105</sup> This quote is taken from a review by film historian Kevin Brownlow of Sagor Maas' 1999 autobiography Brownlow 'The Shocking Miss Pilgrim: A writer in Early Hollywood' *Publishers Weekly* 24<sup>th</sup> May 1999, p.56



nature of the film's star and the challenging nature of the character she plays. But as a populist film intended as a musical vehicle for the most populist of stars (in America in 1947 Grable was the number box office attraction in America) this film was surely concerned with reflecting and endorsing populist views, which makes the film's ideology and its choice of performer all the more intriguing as it suggests that the film's ideological premise was not that unfamiliar or unpalatable.

**'Daring Young Ladies Who Were Called Any Number of Things':  
Revisiting the Politics of Propriety through *Miss Pilgrim***

Not unlike many Grable vehicles before it, and perhaps not surprisingly in a film about a decidedly public labouring female figure, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* demonstrates a narrative preoccupation with notions of respectability, status and social mobility. As Grable indignantly states when unsuccessfully attempting to seek accommodation:

I'm from New York - which in my opinion is a lot better than Boston. I'm a typewriter and I work in an office - and don't turn up your nose at it 'cause its honest respectable work.  
And if you Bostoners weren't so stupid and narrow minded you'd realise it. I'm sick and tired of your superiority and being treated like an outcast...

Throughout the film, Boston society is characterised as overbearing, sanctimonious and petty, ostracising our protagonist simply for being a 'working woman'. As Miss Pilgrim observes, it is 'a gigantic woman's club' repressed, fixated upon status and identifiable by both their determined location within the domestic sphere and their lack of meaningful activity, this stifling, conservative female elite represents a direct counterpoint to the honest and hardworking, 'modern', mobile and skilled public figure of Miss Pilgrim. As Miss Pilgrim's future mother-in-law Mrs Pritchard confides to Miss Pilgrim:

I admire you for stepping out in the face of criticism and doing something constructive, for showing men that women are capable of something more than sitting on their bustles with bottles of smelling salts.

*The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*'s tone is firmly and immediately established in its opening sequence, with Miss Pilgrim being set up immediately as a trailblazing figure to be admired for her willingness to call convention into question. As the opening caption reads:

On July 4, 1776, men became free. On January 1, 1863, slaves became free. On June 10, 1874, women became free...Or at least independence winked at them for the first time. Not because congress passed a law but because of a newly invented typewriter which was called most impractical,.. and a handful of daring young ladies who were called ... any number of things.

As such, Grable's Miss Pilgrim character bears some striking resemblances to the noir figure of the working girl investigator, whose explorations of the ambiguous noir underworld have been read as a metaphor for women's wider negotiation of the public sphere throughout the war era and beyond, and whose navigation of the perils and pitfalls in such narratives can be perceived as being bound intricately to and strongly reflective of real women's attempts to negotiate the wider politics surrounding appropriate behaviour in the public realm.

*The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*'s opening sequence shows a graduation ceremony whereby a professor tells his assembled male and female graduates

I just want to remind you of the great responsibility that rests on your shoulders. You are the first group of typewriters to graduate from any business college anywhere in the world. The future of this newly invented machine rests in your hands. And on you ladies; falls an additional responsibility. Until now the business world has been a man's world. If you fail, it will remain so. I hope you succeed.

And so the precedent for the film is set. We subsequently follow our protagonists attempts to find and maintain employment and, once she falls for her boss, her attempts to maintain and defend her independence.

To a large extent *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* is another example of the popular Grable 'battle of the sexes' formula, with Grable's character (drawing heavily upon the oft-used headstrong, boisterous and at times confrontational Grable persona) and said boss quarrelling about women's fitness to work from their very first meeting. Forced to employ Miss Pilgrim by his suffragist Aunt, who owns the controlling share of his company, Mr Pritchard then

changes tack in his approach to Miss Pilgrim and sets out to ‘marry’ (read: bed and ultimately control or contain) her via means of a charm offensive. And so follows a tit-for-tat game whereby childish points are scored against one another and squabbles frequently occur as the couple inevitably fall for one another. That the progress of the budding relationship is charted in a series of cutaway shots of newspaper headlines whereby Mr Pritchard is represented as ‘management’ and Miss Pilgrim as ‘labour’ (such as ‘BETTER FEELING ESTABLISHED BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND LABOUR’) is telling, reflecting the biased power balance between the two characters and introducing to the narrative the notion of social mobility and the gaining of ‘respectability’ so familiar to Grable’s narratives. Yet as is the way with the Grable formula, the couple, having proclaimed their love for one another, have to have one last significant fight; in this instance over Miss Pilgrim’s proposal to remain in the workplace and to continue to attend suffrage meetings after she is married. As the cutaway to another newspaper headline ‘NEW TROUBLE FLARES BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND LABOUR’ suggests, the couple part and Miss Pilgrim leaves the Pritchard Shipping company.

Equilibrium is only restored when, having won over another of Mr Pritchard’s employees, Mr Saxon, with her capability, Miss Pilgrim and Mr Saxon arrange, without the knowledge of Mr Pritchard or the audience, for The Pritchard Shipping Company to receive a number of comically unsuitable applicants for Miss Pilgrim’s vacant position sent by the recently established the Boston School of Typewriting. Frustrated by the applicants, Mr Pritchard asks Mr Saxon ‘where do you get them from? The zoo?’, and walking straight into Mr Saxon and Miss Pilgrim’s snare, Mr Pritchard resolves to find a capable stenographer himself. Upon visiting The Boston School of Typewriting himself, Mr Pritchard is asked a series of questions to determine what qualities he seeks in an employee:

*Receptionist:* Do you wish a female secretary?

*Mr Pritchard:* Yes, I’ve found they are much more suitable to the position than men.

*Receptionist:* Do you have any objection to employing a married woman?

*Mr Pritchard:* I've come to the conclusion they have a perfect right to work if they want to.

*Receptionist:* Is it the policy of your firm to allow your employees free political expression?

*Mr Pritchard:* Of course! I'm not running a slave market!

It is only then that Mr Pritchard realises who the proprietor of the school actually is and that his views on women in the workplace have finally shifted. Finding Miss Pilgrim in the office behind the receptionist's desk he sheepishly asks 'You knew that I'd come round to your way of thinking didn't you?' Followed by a conclusive refrain of the song with which Mr Pritchard initially wooed Miss Pilgrim:

*Mr Pritchard:* Unfortunately we had to break up

*Miss Pilgrim:* Eventually I knew you'd wake up

*Together:* Now true love makes us make up, and aren't you kinda glad we did?

whereby the film's audience are presumably intended here to share in their protagonist's delight at finally 'awakening' Mr Pritchard to a more liberated view as to women in the workplace and, perhaps more importantly, an acceptance that public women can be 'decent' women too.

In conclusion, a form of cultural backlash against public femininity did indeed take place in the post-war era, if only in that during the period following the declaration of peace, the overwhelming state-sanctioned endorsement of women in the workplace ceased, allowing more conservative voices a greater chance of being heard. A range of on-going fears which had surfaced during the war, surrounding its effects upon society at large (the supposed collapse of the family, the 'selfish fur coated mothers'<sup>106</sup> who were perceived to prefer the glamour and excitement of the public sphere to their domestic responsibilities and left their children in child care to continue to work, the short-lived anxieties about 'Britain's supposedly declining population,'<sup>107</sup> panic surrounding unsupervised children and delinquent

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<sup>106</sup> Faludi *Backlash* p.72

<sup>107</sup> Kynaston *Austerity Britain* p.98

teenagers and a soaring post-war crime rate<sup>108</sup>) which had been voiced throughout the war were no longer obscured by a call to arms by the state and merged with other, new, peace time anxieties. Subsequently this angst was picked up by the popular media in the on-going search for a new 'angle' - even the media which had previously been very supportive of women in the wartime workplace.

As the sources in this chapter have demonstrated, the post-war shifts in American and British culture and resultant media representations of public femininity were in many cases less discernible, concentrated or coherent than has been claimed by many, and as Faludi notes, a backlash 'is not a conspiracy.'<sup>109</sup> As a result the meanings and effects of these subtle shifts in cultural ideology with regard to women's place in society and their public interactions were much more dispersed and protracted and whilst the mainstream hegemony may, to some extent, have induced women to leave the workplace and enter or re-enter the domestic sphere, through a plethora of romantic representations of women within the home, such representations had not been uncommon before the war and as such could be seen to represent more a return to normalcy than a backlash.

The notion of normalcy is also relevant when considering the women themselves, as many women were keen to see the end of exceptional wartime circumstances and to either return to or enter, for the first time, the domestic sphere in order to start families, establish settled relationships, repair fragmented families and broken marriages, to leave hard, inconvenient or dull jobs and put down roots after having been expected to work for the past six years as 'mobile' war workers. However, for many British women, particularly those of the working-class, such a move was not financially viable, and as such, many simply shifted in their employment to less visible, more domesticated jobs, whilst Britain's potentially

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<sup>108</sup> According to Kynaston's study, the month of October 1945 was 'the busiest Scotland Yard had ever known' *ibid.* p.112

<sup>109</sup> Faludi *Backlash* p.16

ruinous post-war debts required the rapid shift to an export economy which was heavily reliant upon a sizeable workforce invariably including women workers.

Equally, the semiotic potential of stars cannot alter overnight. As Richard Dyer's work on Hayworth and charisma highlights, each film star performance is a complex combination of current performance, past performances, star persona and that performer's off-screen life, and, in the case of our two film star pin-up case studies, any agency established with regard to either star during the war era is still very much in evidence in both of these star's post-war personas.

In the case of Hayworth, the agency and self-aware sexuality associated with both her star persona and her pin-ups, accompanied by her popularity with female audiences largely because of her 'respectability' and her high levels of cultural capital, problematizes her playing of unscrupulous, 'slacker' femme fatale characters, particularly in *Gilda*. Meanwhile Grable's feisty star persona and her notoriety as the ultimate film star pin-up are relied upon heavily throughout *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim's* narrative and promotional materials. The film itself effectively demonstrates public women's worth within society with the all-American pin-up endorsing an all-American ideological message of emancipation and equality presented in potent terms evocative of those surrounding America's founding fathers and the Declaration of Independence. Despite Grable being repeatedly discussed as passive, an 'object of obligation'; and a star who was an inappropriate choice for such a narrative, in *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* Grable effectively portrays an agent, eloquent and politically engaged protagonist who doesn't only inspire action but *takes* action.

Whilst it lays outside the remit of this study, it would be interesting to explore just how these two stars' personas played out beyond this study's era, when both Hayworth and Grable were starred alongside their respective 'replacements', Hayworth in the 1957 musical *Pal Joey* (Columbia) with Kim Novak and Grable in the 1953 comedy *How to Marry*

*a Millionaire* (Twentieth Century Fox) alongside Marilyn Monroe.

Despite Buszek's assertion surrounding the cultural move in popular female representations from complex, sexually assertive female pin-ups towards the easy-to-please playboy playmate and sexualised yet innocent fantasy figures such as Monroe, sources presented in this chapter demonstrate that because of the agency attached to Grable's image and carried over from the war era – and, because of the agency associated with Hayworth's image when performing *as* Gilda – the post-war Hollywood pin-up still represented a space whereby female agency could still be articulated and potentially enjoyed by female audiences, with Grable's *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* pin-ups and other associated promotional imagery flying in the face of the supposed nationwide call for women to return to the home.

## **CONCLUSION**

This thesis began life as a reception study about how British women perceived, and possibly utilised pin-up imagery and the notion of Hollywood glamour, focusing upon the film star pin-ups Rita Hayworth and Betty Grable and the differing types of glamour they embodied. Its intent was to contest the frequently expressed ideas surrounding the pin-up and the unique brand of glamour offered by Hollywood: the presumed (male) audience for the pin-up, that any female enjoyment of pin-ups or of glamorous film star representations was indicative of either subjugation or idiocy and that the 'the pin-up' form was homogenised and could be discussed in generalised terms.

Given the pin-up's lowbrow appeal, its ephemerality, its extensive use within advertising and promotion and its provocative, sexualised subject, it is understandable why it has repeatedly been either derided or inadvertently or purposefully overlooked. However its pronounced wartime ubiquity and influence and the film star pin-up's worth to Hollywood's studios as a highly effective means of promoting not only its stars, but also the concept of Hollywood as the glamorous, vibrant capital of film making, made this a necessary project, particularly in terms of its potential to explore some of the multitude of resonances offered to the abundant range of consumers the American film industry addressed and subsequent potential to gain a broader and more inclusive understanding of that industry its audiences and that industry's *idea* of its audiences.

What became evident during the course of my investigations were two things. Firstly the materials I had found were simply not suitable for an adequate reception study and using them to claim to authoritatively interpret an audience's reception of Hayworth, Grable, glamour or of film star pin-ups was just as problematic as the gendered approaches to media consumption that had prompted my study in the first place. Secondly, it became clear that the material that was truly revealing and informative was the discourse itself; the critiques of the



form and its subjects, the divergent positioning and uses of the film star pin-up revealed within the discourse and the positioning of its audiences.

That the received or understood audience for pin-ups was a gendered (male) one, and that the material's content was sexual and key to its use and consumption as a borderline pornographic product is both the problem with and the key to understanding pin-up culture. Obviously gender is a key structuring element within any subject's sense of identity, but, as has been discussed at length in the introduction to this thesis, arguments which attempt to divide the consumption of images, moving or static, into a gendered binarism of male voyeurs and female narcissists, subjective, active males and objectified, passive females, male aggressors and female victims and 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' female representations in the absence of any context is, as Simon Watney observes<sup>1</sup> problematic to say the least. Whilst the underlying grievances regarding sexualised female images and gender and sexual inequality are valid and need be voiced, often the approach taken to do so can either inadvertently or deliberately work to obscure and therefore maintain other inequities in terms of access to cultural capital<sup>2</sup>. In scrutinising the wartime discourse surrounding sexualised feminine representations what quickly became apparent was not whether film star pin-ups did or didn't oppress or empower female cinema goers, but who or more specifically what kind of woman was or wasn't permitted to publically assert themselves or articulate their sexuality, who lacked in cultural capital and who possessed and jealously guarded it. In short what was articulated was the fine, but very distinct ideological line between being desirable and being 'too much'.

The sheer visibility of Hollywood, its glamour and its pin-ups in British and American

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<sup>1</sup> Watney, S. *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1987) p.75

<sup>2</sup> Such arguments are 'not simply... political struggles over gender relations, but also... political struggles between... different taste formations.' Jancovich, M. 'Naked Ambitions: Pornography, Taste and the Problem of the Middlebrow'. *Scope: An Online Journal of Film & TV Studies* June 2001 <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue=jun2001&id=274&section=article>. Retrieved 27 July 2012

popular culture throughout the Second World War and the frequent association of Hollywood and its stars with modernity and liberation through the use of forms such as health and vigour pin-ups made debates surrounding Hollywood, film stars, film star pin-ups and the notion of glamorousness inevitable and as such glamorous female representations were a key part of the cultural landscape, where disputes over taste and female conduct were fought. As has been discussed previously in periods of immense upheaval and uncertainty, such as war, the politics of identity become particularly fraught. That women's conduct was such a hotly-contested and debated area throughout the war demonstrates just how crucial British and American women were to their nation's wider war effort and how crucial very particular notions of womanliness and womanly conduct: fragile, tenuous and contested, were to those nation's values and identities.

The discourse surrounding the film star pin-up and Hollywood glamour circulating in Britain and the US throughout the war and post-war period has therefore offered a useful barometer of wider debates surrounding female identity and public femininity. The examination of a range of contemporaneous media has revealed the broader cultural agenda, highlighting the limits of propriety in operation at that particular time and has afforded a greater appreciation of what was at stake in women's representational and behavioural negotiations, and the factors that shaped and informed them. Reconsidering the evidence these factors include; notions of acceptable (and perhaps more importantly unacceptable) feminine behaviour, anxieties regarding a sense of national identity and, in Britain, the 'Americanisation' of British culture, issues of taste, of class antagonism and the 'othering' of potentially threatening working-class politics, pursuits and sexuality, and a more general concern with how Hollywood's hedonistic, lavish and frequently individualistic representations of femininity actually corresponded with real women's lived experience in an era commonly associated (particularly in Britain) with duty, frugality and collectivism.

A significant gap exists between the theorised spectator and actual film audiences and to a significant extent the intent of this thesis has been an attempt to bridge that gap, and to demonstrate that the understanding, appreciation or rejection of any cultural product, be it a cigarette card pin-up or a Hollywood film, is not fixed or determined wholly by a subject's gender, but is predicated upon a combination of numerous environmental factors. Reliably determining exactly how media texts were, or are, received by audiences is problematic as it is in a text's nature that they offer a broad (but not unlimited) range of 'meanings' and resonances, some of which may not even have been anticipated by the text's producer (for example, whilst both Grable and Hayworth were understood in Britain to be the glamorous, American film stars, the resonances these two stars offered were very different, the range of responses they elicited from the British public differed to those of an American audience and the resonances on offer from them also shifted over time as contexts and the stars themselves changed). As various examples throughout this study, and the approaches of Bourdieu, Skeggs and Moseley in particular have revealed, an individual's response to the particularly contentious forms of the pin-up, or the film star pin-up is shaped by that individual's prior experience and in turn by their habitus, their contextual influences or 'structuring principles or dispositions'<sup>3</sup>.

One of the structuring principles of this thesis has been that two key points of potential resonance are offered by the film star pin-up: the subject's 'awarish' performance (which connotes sexual self-awareness and self-confidence) and the star's charisma. As has been previously discussed awarish performances can also be present in other pin-up forms such as photographic pin-ups featuring unknown subjects or illustrated pin-ups such as those by Alberto Varga or Zoe Mozert. In contrast, resonances stemming from a pin-up subject's

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<sup>3</sup> Renfrew, C. and Bahn, P. *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice*. (Third Edition) (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000) p.216

charisma or ‘total star text’ obviously require a ‘known’ subject such as the film star or celebrity pin-up. As a signifier within the image the star or celebrity intimates a range of meanings (such as ‘wholesomeness’ or ‘Americanness’ in the case of Grable, as discussed in chapter one, or in Hayworth’s case ‘exoticism’ or ‘sensuality’ as discussed in chapter five) and the potential of reading that star as a mere passive object of a sexualising gaze is, to a large degree, complicated or even possibly obfuscated by the myriad of additional significations and associations that that star’s broader persona brings to that image, such as the star’s home life, their labour, even their politics. Star personas were the stock in trade of the Hollywood studios and extra textual materials were crucial to ‘selling’ those stars. As I have stated in studies elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

During the classical era studios frequently had more than one property which they were promoting within any one film campaign; the film and the longer term investment of their star, and while the star lent their value to the marketing of the film, equally the film and its reception had to add to and not damage the star’s currency. Film advertising and promotion then presented a carefully constructed and multifaceted blend of textual signifiers which amongst other saleable commodities, such as genre or prestige, commonly emphasised...a star’s established persona and a recognisable character archetype (frequently closely linked and complimentary to the performers established star persona; what Barbara Klinger refers to as the ‘character/star unit’<sup>5</sup>) and an indication as to the function of that character within the film’s narrative, with a view to creating what Barbara Klinger terms as a ‘consumable identity’<sup>6</sup> for the film and making the film as appealing and saleable to as broad an audience as possible

so extra textual materials such as film star pin-ups, both of the health and vigour and the glamour variety, were therefore a fundamental means of highlighting specific marketable elements of a star’s persona. In the case of the glamour pin-up these included (but were not limited to) a star’s complexity, intensity, potency (and occasionally their vulnerability),

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<sup>4</sup> Wright, E. “‘Glamorous Bait for an Amorous Killer!’: How Post-War Audiences were *Lured* by Lucille and The Working-Girl Investigator.’ *Frames. The Cinema Journal*. #3. May, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Klinger, B. ‘Digressions at The Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture’ *Cinema Journal*, v28, #4 (Summer 1989) p.14

<sup>6</sup> ‘The production of a film... includes the making of its ‘consumable’ identity. Promotion acts on this aspect of a film’s design by providing designated elements with an inter-textual destiny: certain filmic elements are developed into a premeditated network of advertising and promotion that will enter the social sphere of reception.’ Klinger ‘Digressions at The Cinema’ p.9

sensuality, exoticism, and crucially their enviability. Whilst in the instance of the health and vigour pin-up attributes that were commonly emphasised included wholesomeness, exuberance, spontaneity, vitality, sense of humour, and likeability. Film star pin-up images didn't exist within a vacuum, their purpose was to market the broader personality traits, ideas, associations and appeals (or as Moseley terms these 'resonances') that coalesce to form a coherent star persona (the 'total star text') rather than a mere physical form.

As has been demonstrated, particularly in chapter six, these potential resonances were such that that numerous other media such as advertising tie-ups were able to co-opt the star's 'total star text' and by association imbue the product advertised (Max Factor cosmetics, Crown cola, Hollanders furs, Lux soap) with the desirable or positive attributes and associations linked to the star endorser. In these texts consumers were encouraged to participate in the imagined habitus or 'total star text' of the star, adopting or imitating that star's glamour by incorporating elements of that star's habitus into their habitus and borrowing some of the star's cultural capital, in line with Beverley Skeggs' theories regarding British working class women's use of glamour as a means of accumulating cultural and social capital. This therefore suggests an active negotiation of and determination to challenge the existing symbolic economy and in several instances a refusal to capitulate to prescribed notions of the appropriate, in terms of conduct or taste, born out in the defiant declarations of love for 'common' Grable and her films expressed by some Britons in chapter three.

Obviously the resources examined have demonstrated an *imagined* audience: who advertisers, editors and studios of the war era believed their audiences to be and what they believed these people would find appealing, engaging and worth spending their hard-earned money on. Judging by the frequency with which notions of glamour and glamorousness, pin-up imagery and film stars such as Grable or Hayworth were discussed or used within the

American and British popular media, what the public wanted obviously did include glamour and pin-ups. But glamour was, and still is, a multifarious thing. The differing resonances Hayworth and Grable's star personas offered and the way those resonances were used differently by varying studios, companies, publications and advertisers, in differing contexts and towards differing audiences (as demonstrated in chapter six), demonstrates the very multiplicity of implications and appeals that the film star pin-up and the notion of Hollywood glamour actually offered. By undertaking a discursive analysis the cultural context in which the pin-up existed has been revealed, informing this film historian about the habitus, if not the habits, of the audiences for film star pin-ups.



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**Filmography**

*Affectionately Yours* (Warner Bros, 1941)  
*Angels Over Broadway* (Columbia, 1940)  
*Blood and Sand* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1941)  
*Campus Confessions* (AKA *Fast Play*) (Paramount, 1938)  
*Charlie Chan in Egypt* (Fox Film Corporation, 1935)  
*Coney Island* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1943)  
*Cover Girl* (Columbia, 1944)  
*Crossfire* (RKO, 1947)  
*Dante's Inferno* (Fox Film Corporation, 1935)  
*Down Argentine Way* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1940)  
*Down to Earth* (Columbia, 1947)  
*Footlight Serenade*. (Twentieth Century Fox, 1942)  
*Gilda* (Columbia, 1946)  
*High Wall* (MGM, 1947)  
*Homicide Bureau* (Columbia, 1939)  
*It* (Paramount, 1927)  
*I Wake Up Screaming* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1941)  
*Million Dollar Legs* (Paramount, 1939)  
*Millions Like Us* (Gainsborough Pictures, 1943)  
*Moon Over Miami* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1941)  
*My Gal Sal* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1942)  
*Only Angels Have Wings* (Columbia, 1939)  
*Pin-Up Girl* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1944)  
*Rome: Open City* (Excelsa Film, 1945)  
*Song of the Islands* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1942)  
*Springtime in the Rockies* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1942)  
*Stromboli* (RKO, 1950)  
*Sweet Rosie O'Grady* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1943)  
*Tales of Manhattan* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1942)  
*The Blue Dahlia* (Paramount, 1946)  
*The Lady From Shanghai* (Columbia, 1948)  
*The Loves of Carmen* (Columbia, 1948)  
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*The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1947)  
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*Tin Pan Alley* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1940)  
*Yank in the RAF* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1941)  
*You'll Never Get Rich* (Columbia, 1941)  
*You Were Never Lovelier* (Columbia, 1942)