

Howard Hawks: Redefining gender dynamics in the '*Hawksian*' universe.

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Declaration of Originality

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

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the representation of masculinity and femininity in Howard Hawks' films, focusing on three important works across three genres of film: Screwball Comedy: "*Bringing Up Baby*" (1938), Film Noir: "*The Big Sleep*" (1946), and Western: "*Red River*" (1948). Through an in-depth review of these films, it explores how Hawks deals with traditional gender roles and creates complex characters that question conventional concepts of masculinity as well as femininity. Hawks' characters, David Huxley and Susan Vance, provide a humorous and unconventional portrayal of gender dynamics in "*Bringing Up Baby*". The film subverts typical gender expectations by contrasting David's cautious and timid demeanour with Susan's impulsive and determined personality, illustrating the flexibility of gender roles. In "*The Big Sleep*", gender dynamics are explored through the interactions of private detective Philip Marlowe with various female characters, namely his romantic relationship with Vivian Rutledge. These relationships are accentuated by violence as Marlowe navigates a harsh environment of crime. His masculine heroism is tested against femmes fatales and corrupt men, showcasing an interesting mix of power dynamics. In "*Red River*," Hawks delves into themes of masculinity set against the historical context of the American frontier. This film explores the inner dynamics of male groups, and showcases the difficulties of masculine identity and power through the characters of Tom Dunson and Matthew Garth, as well as the tenacity and independence of female characters such as Tess Millay. By examining these three films, this thesis seeks to provide a thorough understanding of Howard Hawks' multifaceted approach to gender representation in classic Hollywood cinema.

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Introduction

Howard Hawks is regarded as an iconic figure in classic Hollywood film, possessing directing talent that transcends generations. Despite not being as popular as the more prominent directors of the time; Hitchcock, Capra, Ford or Wilder, between the years of 1938 and 1948, Hawks had a remarkable uninterrupted streak of hits that propelled him to the top of the commercial charts; this success established him as a dependable source of entertainment, a discoverer of fresh talent, and a director of the 'big stars'(McCarthy, p3). With a career encompassing numerous genres, Hawks engineered storylines that frequently featured complex human relationships, enticing audiences with his unique representation of gender dynamics. This thesis descends into what is referred to by critics as the "Hawksian" universe, examining how Hawks questioned and reinvented traditional gender roles in his cinematic works. By examining key films by genre and analysing character interactions, this study seeks to unveil the nuanced ways in which Hawks' narratives reflect and influence societal perceptions of gender, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of masculinity and femininity in twentieth-century America. Each chapter centres a work of Hawks across three significant genres; Screwball Comedy, "*Bringing Up Baby*(1938)", looking at how David and Susan's unconventional relationship dynamic subverts typical gender roles and portrays the flexibility and performativity of gender identities; Film Noir, "*The Big Sleep*(1946)", focusing towards private detective Philip Marlowe's representation of the classic 'tough guy' persona and masculine hero of film noir and how the genre aims to soothe societies fears of shifting gender norms by punishing unruly women in the film (Nascone, p.44); and Western, "*Red River*(1948)", exploring the inner dynamics of male groups, and highlighting matters of manhood and positions of power via the characters of Tom Dunson and Matthew Garth, as well as the resilience of female characters like Tess Millay. This thesis seeks to explain the cultural significance of Hawks' contributions to the discussion of gender representation in film through a critical inquiry and cinematic analysis viewpoint.

Chapter One: Screwball Comedy; “*Bringing Up Baby*” (1938)

“Screwball” comedy is a subgenre of “romantic comedy,” given to a run of films made in 1930s and 1940s Hollywood. The arrival of synchronised sound introduced the possibility of a new range of film genres that wouldn’t have been achievable in the silent era, changing performance and acting style. Actresses like Katherine Hepburn being able to talk at speed was a crucial aspect of the early ‘talkies’. Relationships with their male co-stars formed into a vital narrative aspect of screwball comedy, and their amusing verbal battles on-screen were an integral part of the genre's success (Wilkins, p.9). Having voice as a key focus in mainstream cinema at the time was freeing for women in film. Screwball comedies enabled women to retire from their role of being solely a visual entity on screen and gave them a clear ‘aural presence’, unlike the role of actresses during the 1920s (Wilkins, p.10).

Directed by Howard Hawks in 1938, *Bringing up Baby* follows a palaeontologist, David Huxley(Cary Grant), whose main objectives are to find all the pieces to his brontosaurus skeleton, inquire a donation for his museum, and to marry his assistant, Miss Swallow the following day. However, while golfing with the lawyer of a possible donor, he meets a young woman named Susan Vance(Katherine Hepburn), who ‘trails chaos in her wake’, continuously sabotaging him throughout the day (Kozloff, p.185). As Cary Grant’s character begins the film as a level-headed, workaholic scientist, Hepburn’s character and her eccentric, free spirit help him find joy and romance in his life. Films have quite often operated as a reflection of the order of society, within the timeframe it was made. The comedy genre of film, especially, is in a position to critique, question, and lay bare the current state of society, without repercussion, because they make use of “the entertaining comic form”. Hawks’ screwball comedy *Bringing up Baby* effectively challenges masculine power in Hollywood traditions and contradicts traditional gender stereotypes (Krause, p. 1).

At the beginning of the film, in the museum, we are introduced to the relationship between David and his bride-to-be, Alice Swallow, a connection far from romantic. Her first line “*Dr Huxley’s thinking..*”, shows her referring to him in a way one would assume would be too cold and formal for a couple expected to be wed the next day(Swaab, p. 14). Ms. Swallow states that their union will be “*without any domestic entanglements*”, and when David proposes the idea of children, she immediately shuts down that idea, when referring to the brontosaurus skeleton in front of them says, “*This will be our child.*”As Swaab points out, it is noteworthy to compare this image to a ‘Frankenstein moment’, with the idea of ‘creation

without procreation', and an 'offence against nature'(Swaab, p. 16). Ms Swallow makes clear she has little interest in David beyond his work, undermining his sense of masculinity.

Hepburn's character is adept at manipulating the truth as well as generating confusion and misunderstandings throughout the film;

David: (frightened by the leopard) Susan, you've got to get out of this apartment.

Susan: But David I can't. I have a lease.

David is led to believe that Susan was attacked by the leopard, as a way of getting him to come to her. She convinces Constable Slocum that the car parked in front of the fire hydrant doesn't belong to her, to get out of a parking ticket, and she tells her Aunt Elizabeth that David is actually 'Mr. Bone', a friend of her brother's, suffering a mental breakdown. Kozloff quotes Kathleen Rowe, "*Through wordplay, storytelling, misunderstandings and lies Susan entangles David in a script she is authoring, which is also the script of the film—her hunt for David and her demolition of all that stands in her way*"(Kozloff, p. 188). The audience are never quite clear on how much of Susan's 'dizziness' is purposeful, as she is quite able of being clear-sighted, as shown when David accuses her of playing his golf ball, she simply remarks; "*What does it matter? It's only a game, anyway.*" Whether she is being deliberate or not, she is responsible for 'the breakdown of rational discourse'(Kozloff, p. 188). According to Krause, many screwball leads have been regarded to be representative of "early feminist trends". The film's heroine, Susan Vance, strays considerably from the stereotypical 'Victorian role model', defenceless and unassertive, a character portrayed on screen and also resided within society at that time (Krause, p. 2).

Bringing Up Baby transposes the gender roles between Susan, and her counterpart, David Huxley (Cary Grant). This is evident when they first meet on the golf course. David Huxley and Alexander Peabody converse and discuss business on the golf course, which functions as a stereotypically masculine setting. The two men are accompanied by their male caddies, and all four of their costumes virtually match their surroundings. Therefore, they appear to belong in this masculine setting (Krause, p. 2). The viewer is first introduced to Susan with a long shot, showing her at a distance, while also being centreframe. In contrast to the men, dressed in all white she stands out in the frame. Susan assumes control of the scene, and the game of golf when she commandeers David's golf ball, depicting her 'strong femininity'(Krause, p. 3). She is by no means intimidated, despite being the only woman present. None of the men

can stand in her way and stop her from playing the ball she chooses, even if she is the one in the wrong. She emasculates the men, by lacking any respect for their game. The shots that follow have Susan remain as the focal point of the frame, while David and the caddies are placed on either side of her. As Susan steers the men towards the green, the camera follows solely her movement from left to right, in a tracking shot, signifying her to be the root of all the action on-screen. The men grapple to keep pace with Susan, implying that she is ahead of them, physically, but also in terms of intellect. As Krause states, “The woman sets the tone and the men follow- a subversion of male supremacy” (Krause, p. 3).



Fig 1:“Bringing Up Baby”(1938), Dir. Howard Hawks

In the hotel, David slips on the olive left on the ground as a result of Susan’s failed attempt at the bartender’s trick. She innocently makes her way over to him, declaring, “*Oh hello, you’re sitting on your hat*”. Susan never takes the blame for any of the damage she causes. Her approach to David is to ‘willfully misunderstand’ to steer the conversation in her favour (Kozloff, p. 187). While the assertive role of the courting ritual is typically reserved for the man, it is Susan who takes the lead here. The frame’s composition demonstrates how the male and female societal dynamics are inverted. Susan is conveyed to be of the superior sex,

towering over him as he sits on the floor beneath her, needing her assistance to get up. When he falls, he falls onto his top hat, a signifier for an 'upper-class gentleman'. For another time, David's masculinity is compromised by Susan (Krause, p. 3).

From the beginning of the film, Hawks makes use of the recurring image of David's belongings being destroyed, at the hand of Susan; his car when she mistakes it for her own at the golf course, followed by his hat, and his torn coat later in the scene, his socks and glasses at Aunt Elizabeth's house in Connecticut, and lastly his brontosaurus skeleton in the final scene. Generally speaking, masculinity has been known to be linked to materialistic values, whereas femininity is linked to a greater regard and appreciation for life's quality (Krause, p.4). As a result, Hawks presents the viewer with the demolition of David's manhood as the film progresses. This isn't supposed to be seen as a defeat against femininity, however, but how David is now free from the constraints of these masculine ideals. As time goes on, and the more damage Susan causes in his life, David focuses less of his attention on their materialistic value. David's character development, and Susan's positive influence on him, is crucial to one of the film's core themes, that 'happiness is more important than materialism' (Krause, p.4).

Unlike many films that propose masculine power against feminine frailty, Hawks allows both of his leads to present themselves as equals in the world of *Bringing Up Baby*. In the hotel, the tearing of David's coat by Susan is closely followed by the tearing of her dress by him. David's 'gentlemanly instincts' now call for him to lead the interaction, in an attempt to cover her up. She, however, is trying to get away from him, for the first and only time in the film (Swaab, p.34). That being said, this clever use of 'doubling' also creates an equality between the pair, as they are both affected to the same extent (Krause, p.4). They walk tightly together in sync, David stationed behind Susan as he tries to lead her out of the restaurant. This scene proposes the question of who is really in control here, presented by Cavell in his interpretation of the shot as "the man leading the woman yet following her pace" (Krause, p.5). There is no social hierarchy to be seen here amongst them, therefore they are each other's equal.

What's particularly interesting about *Bringing up Baby* is how Hawks divulges the concept of gender to be 'purely performative' (Krause, p.6). Gender is not the origin, but the result of the divergence between male and female leads. Susan steals David's clothes while he takes a

shower, leaving him no choice but to wear one of her negligees when he emerges, just as he meets Aunt Elizabeth for the first time, immediately creating tension when she asks why he is “wearing that idiotic outfit”. Grant exclaims while jumping in the air “*I just went gay all of a sudden!*”. As the squabble between them intensifies, David yells at Susan and her aunt, even going as far as stomping on Susan’s foot in an attempt to diffuse the argument. David demands the aunt give him some men’s clothes to wear instead, in an assertive tone. This shot calls to attention the performance of gender. Although adorned in a profoundly feminine manner, the audience sees David behave more stereotypically manly, raising his voice and holding his own against the women than ever before seen throughout the film. The film illustrates a ‘contemporary notion of gender’ that wouldn’t have been commonly established in other films in Hollywood or society at that time (Krause, p.6).



Fig 2:“Bringing Up Baby”(1938), Dir. Howard Hawks

When it comes to the film's portrayal of sexuality and gender, it is important to consider the character traits of Aunt Elizabeth and Major Applegate. The audience is introduced to both of these characters, without any mention of marital status, despite them being ‘well into middle age’ (Swaab, p.81). However, there isn’t any negative connotation involved with being a

bachelor or spinster in the film (Swaab, p.84). Aunt Elizabeth is considering leaving her fortune to Susan, so it can be assumed she has no spouse or children of her own. Upon first appearance, Elizabeth's attire, 'a full-length riding cape and check coat', paired with a 'unisex trilby-style hat' could be considered more on the masculine side (Swaab, p.81). Major Applegate is contrastingly more feminine in his demeanour. The major shares an exchange with Susan cut from the final draft;

Susan(referring to David): Isn't he sweet? Did you ever see such shoulders?

Applegate: And what legs! He'd make a splendid messenger boy.

Although this line may have been seen as 'too risqué' for the film, it by no means is out of character for the Applegate the audience knows on-screen (Swaab, p.82). Swaab also describes the relationship dynamic between Aunt Elizabeth and the Major as a "queerish parody of a heterosexual couple taking an evening stroll in their garden"(Swaab, p.84).



Fig 3: "Bringing Up Baby" (1938), Dir. Howard Hawks

The woman's authority over the man initiates the comedic element that follows in their romance, as is customary in the screwball genre's portrayal of heterosexual couples. This is evident in the visual elements of the scene following the restaurant, where Susan drives David home (Wright, 2020). In the opening of the scene, Susan is sitting in the driver's seat of her car, while David is standing outside. He leans down to speak with her, while she leans over the passenger seat. This composition allows Susan to be framed within the windshield of the car, separated from David. This signifies David as an outsider, and his hesitance to engage in a romantic relationship with her (Wright, 2020). David declares, " *Don't think I don't appreciate all you've done, but there are limits to what a man can bear*". The intentional decision from Hawks to remove David from the following shot is extremely effective. Continuing to argue with Susan, he follows with " *and besides that, tomorrow afternoon I'm getting married*" The camera cuts to a close-up of Susan's reaction, capturing her face as she rolls her eyes and merely laughs at him. The audience understands Susan sees his impending nuptials to Ms Swallow as nothing more than an empty threat (Wright, 2020). Susan is the kind of woman who gets what she wants, she understands the power she holds in this situation and is confident this won't be the last she sees of David Huxley, evident in her smug grin.



Fig 4: "Bringing Up Baby" (1938), Dir. Howard Hawks

The shot that follows positions David in the centre of the frame, showcasing on his head the now crumpled top hat, from his previous fall in the restaurant, while he states “*My future wife has always regarded me as a man of some dignity*”, completely unaware of how foolish he looks. His dignity is weakened and vulnerable by Susan’s amused reaction, clearly aware of the irony of his words (Wright, 2020). Hawks ignores the typical rules of film to further emphasise this role reversal between David and Susan. David is positioned at the top of the frame, a position usually preserved for the character in power of the scene. This notion is flipped, because in her presence, he is rendered powerless. Contrastingly, she is placed towards the bottom of the frame, and due to the darkness of her background, her face is all that is visible to the audience. However, she remains in control. David’s trip up at the end of this scene further relinquishes him of any dignity or power he has left when it comes to Susan. The scene's concept of sexual transgression in the screwball comedy genre has significance to the gender stereotypes of the characters and the contrasts between the sexes, as well as how they are positioned on screen (Wright, 2020).

In the scene at the jail, when Susan attempts to wrangle ‘Baby’ into the jail by the collar and leash, David is quick to intervene and come to her rescue when he ascertains that, with the real Baay sat beside him, Susan has not got docile, domesticated Baby, but the escaped, wild leopard in her grasp. In an act of bravery, David darts to protect “*poor, darling Susan*”, claiming she is ‘helpless’ without him, a statement contradictory to what the audience has seen thus far (Swaab, p.103). This fleeting moment of redemption for David’s crumbling manhood is swiftly undone as he faints into Susan’s arms immediately after coming to her rescue, relinquishing the power back to her. During the final scene in the museum. David concedes that his chaotic day with Susan “*was the best day I ever had in my whole life*”. By embracing Susan’s ‘chaos’ as the new standard rather than rejecting it, this feat of acknowledgment accelerates the destruction of the patriarchal system (Swaab, p.107). *Bringing Up Baby* successfully creates a strong, independent female lead in Susan Vance, representative of female liberty, yet also challenges these expectations in such a way that ‘dismisses male and female under the notion of performativity’(Krause, p.7).

Chapter Two: Film Noir; “*The Big Sleep*” (1946)

French critics used the term ‘film noir’ to outline a specific type of Hollywood film following the Second World War, literally meaning ‘black film’. This title was inspired by the dimly lit, gloomy scenes that would convey the solemn tone of society at that time (Moustakas, p.105). Aside from the visuals of noir film, its most distinctive trait is its leading characters. The female lead, famously named the *femme fatale*, or ‘fatal woman’ often manipulates her male counterpart with her sexuality, creating tension between the pair which according to Moustakas “is different from the more orthodox representations of gender in the standard Hollywood film”. The male protagonist is ordinarily a ‘doomed victim’ of the *femme fatale*, but several noir films show the male lead triumph over her, Philip Marlowe(Humphrey Bogart) in Howard Hawks’ *The Big Sleep*’ for example. While the female protagonist, enacting as the *femme fatale*, is in a position of power in these films, the main protagonist is typically male (Moustakas, p.106). Moustakas describes three distinct narratives of film noir that each showcase a unique representation of masculinity; the ‘investigative thriller’, the ‘male suspense thriller’ and the ‘criminal adventure thriller’. The investigative thriller follows the male protagonist, typically playing in a detective role, where he must reinstate order in a world of crime, while also confirming his own sense of self and masculinity. Contrastingly, the male suspense thriller involves a hero who is in a predicament that puts him in an inferior position to both the criminals and the law enforcement, and must solve the conspiracy on a path to redemption. Finally, the criminal adventure thriller conveys a male protagonist, often with the help of the heroine, finds himself in trouble with the law and must brave the ramifications (Moustakas, p.106). Of the three, *The Big Sleep*’ fits the description of the investigative thriller.

Based on Raymond Chandler's novel of the same name, *The Big Sleep* is a famous film noir directed by Howard Hawks and released in 1946. The story follows the wealthy General Sternwood(Charles Waldron) as he hires private investigator Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) to look into his two daughters Vivian(Lauren Bacall) and Carmen's(Martha Vickers) gambling debt and blackmail problems. A complicated web of deception and murder entangles Marlowe as he investigates the case. With a plethora of characters and subplots that add to the overall mystery, the film is renowned for its complex and multilayered structure. As the film progresses, Marlowe must work to unravel the web of crime and corruption encircling the Sternwood family.

Marlowe's Masculinity

Externally, Marlowe presents himself as the typical, tough, 'manly man' of film noir. There is, however, an underlying doubt about Marlowe's manhood in the way he is portrayed. Marlowe frequently dances around important personal issues with his sharp quips, remarks that could shed light on his personal views and inexplicable past (Moustakas, p.106). His suits lack much personality, dark coloured suits, plain ties and white shirts. This choice in attire aligns with the dark, shadowy atmosphere of his world and his solitary lifestyle. It's worth considering whether Marlowe's character is truly a 'man's man' as he presents himself, or if his inflated masculinity is merely an attempt to cover up a hidden weakness (Moustakas, p.106). Marlowe's existence is perceived by male audiences as an unattainable fantasy, the kind of man they can't be; a bachelor, who lives life on the edge, and isn't constrained by marriage or a traditional day job. Moustakas notes however, that for someone as traditionally manly as Philip Marlowe, he deems it necessary to remind the audience of his hypermasculinity (Moustakas, p.107). Marlowe appears to be deeply afraid of not living up to his potential as a man, as is evident in his interactions with women. He consistently flirts with almost every woman that appears on screen. It is understood that this is purely an attempt to boost his own ego and prove himself to be charismatic and desirably masculine, as he never follows through on any of the attractions (Moustakas, p.107). While in the car with Vivian, Marlowe appeals to Vivian's feelings for him, to manipulate her into revealing information about a murder, and when she discovers this she is furious and demands he take her home. Despite this, the growing sexual tension between Bogart and Bacalls' characters is inviting to the audience because this budding romance is unpredictable. Hawks never suggests a stereotypical 'happy ever after' narrative for their relationship. It's possible Marlowe's philandering may raise issues in their future (Moustakas, p.108).



Fig 5: “The Big Sleep”(1946) Dir. Howard Hawks

There are some aspects of the film that differ from Chandler’s novel, most notably the relationship between Marlowe and Vivian. Hawks incorporated additional romantic scenes between real-life spouses, Bogart and Bacall, with the pair verbally sparring on screen. One of the extra sequences had Marlowe and Vivian in the bar having a witty exchange about horse racing. Their playful conversation alludes to the customs of sexual negotiation. Hawks’ interesting decision to implement this into the original narrative emphasises the love story of the film, and almost reshapes this film noir into a romantic comedy (Moustakas, p.106). *The Big Sleep* is well known for its chaotic and complex plot, with Chandler himself unable to provide an answer as to who committed one of the murders, and even to this day some critics appear to be unsure of the film’s ending. Hawks added more romance to counteract this chaos in the plot (Moustakas, p.107). Thompson spotlights the significance of the romantic plot point, “so long as Marlowe keeps moving with assurance, and talking in perfect funny sentences, the disorder is bearable.” When Marlowe pays Brody a visit, any questions the viewer may have as to why are of little importance because he is ‘pursuing Vivian’. Although

she isn't there originally, the decision is made to have her in that scene (Thompson, p.49). When we look at other films about the character of Philip Marlowe, for example, *'Murder My Sweet(1944)*, directed by Edward Dmytryk, Dick Powell portrays Marlowe as your stereotypical noir protagonist, who is charmed and misled by the femme fatale. Bogart's Marlowe isn't phased by Carmen's temptations and retains control in every situation. Additionally, the film frequently pits Bogart against Marlowe's character; joking about him not being tall enough to be a private detective (Moustakas, p.107).



Fig 6: "The Big Sleep"(1946) Dir. Howard Hawks

Violence and Heroism

The Big Sleep's use of violence is crucial in illustrating the type of man Marlowe portrays himself as. It can be argued that Marlowe is just as violent and aggressive as the thugs and criminals he faces throughout the film. The key difference however is that Marlowe 'only uses aggression when provoked', and for good reason (Nascone, p.36). Marlowe's more restrained use of brutality is demonstrated by the killings of Lash Canino and Eddie Mars. Even though Marlowe is heavily involved in both scenarios, his violence is vindicated by

way of saving Vivian and aiding the Sternwood Family, in an almost ‘knightly’ gesture (Nascone, p.37). Marlowe is at fault for Canino’s murder. He is held captive in Mars’ home, and in a bid to escape, with the help of Vivian, Marlowe must use lethal force on Canino, shooting him three times in the chest. Although this is the private eye’s most harrowing action in the film, there is a significant detachment of the violence from the murder, as Marlowe’s decision can be justified as a necessary act of heroism (Nascone, p.37). Not only is it justified by the shots fired at him by Canino, forcing Marlowe to act in self-defence, but also by a monologue delivered by the private detective to Mrs Mars prior to the shooting;

“A little man named Harry Jones told me. A funny little guy. Harmless. I liked him. Came to sell me the information because he found out I was working for General Sternwood. ... Anyway, Canino, your husband’s hired man, got to him first while I stood around like a sap in the next room. And now that little man is dead.”

Audiences sympathise with the killing of an innocent man, and therefore can justify Marlowe’s act of violence as an effort to ‘stand up for those who could not defend themselves’(Nascone, p.39). Marlowe skilfully plans a way to kill Eddie Mars without having to pull the trigger himself. By instead having his own men ambush him as he is forced out the door by Marlowe, deliberately missing shots he fires at Mars, the detective can’t be held accountable for the murder. Marlowe’s deeds adhere to his position as the ‘heroic male’ protagonist (Nascone, p,39).

Women in Film Noir

Film noir seeks to dispel public fears about changing gender norms by penalising rebellious women in the film. Due to the Production Code’s censorship laws, women exhibit violence with their sexuality. Carmen is most distinctly the femme fatale of *The Big Sleep*. She easily dominates the males in her immediate vicinity, with the exception of Marlowe, and pushes past social limits because of her unrestrained use of aggressiveness and sexuality. She is quite literally an affront to masculinity as she murders Sean Regan for rejecting her sexual advances, and attempts to do the same to Marlowe in Chandler’s novel (Nascone, p.44).

In most film noir, the femme fatale works alone, emphasising the consequences of societal deviance. *The Big Sleep* however possesses many women that challenge the patriarchy

(Nascone, p.51). *The Big Sleep's* portrayal of more dangerous women and a rise in the number of female characters, many with the potential to be as violent as the men, reinforces the patriarchal worldview of the film. The film must then work to neutralise this danger by holding the women accountable for their wrongdoings (Nascone, p.52).

In the sequence where Marlowe visits Joe Brody at his apartment, he is held at gunpoint by Brody. The conversation between the pair isn't threatening and both Marlowe and Brody's demeanour appears relaxed until the door buzzes, interrupting them. Brody gives Agnes, his accomplice, a second gun and tensely makes his way to the door. Agnes then holds both Marlowe and Vivian at gunpoint as Carmen enters, dressed head to toe in black, pointing her pistol at Brody's chest. Marlowe seizes the opportunity and removes the second pistol from Agnes' grasp. She scrambles to resume control of the gun but ultimately fails due to Marlowe's unequalled strength. Carmen drops her gun as Brody trips her, being quicker than her, Marlowe gets the gun before she can, leaving him with both guns in his hand, and the previously armed women with none. He emphasises his dominance over the women further with sharp, belittling remarks, "*Get up Angel, you look like a Pekingese,*" and "*Sit down, sugar*" (Nascone, p.53). It is Marlowe's responsibility as the heroic male to disarm the women and 're-establish order in a patriarchal world'(Nascone, p.54). The two men are 'outgunned and outnumbered'. This physically puts Marlowe and Brody's lives in jeopardy, articulating the concern towards women who challenge patriarchal supremacy (Nascone, p.54).



Fig 7: "The Big Sleep"(1946) Dir. Howard Hawks

It is typical of noir films to feature a leading lady who is both emphasised and presented as the epitome of a universally accepted definition of femininity, *The Big Sleep* establishes conventional femininity by evolving Vivian from the rebellious woman to one who upholds anticipated gender roles. Vivian, of the female cast, is the only one with actual promise for good (Nascone, p.56). Vivian's primary objective is to protect her sister, Carmen, and goes to great lengths throughout the film to do so. Her choice in violence demonstrates this capacity for good. She doesn't utilise weapons to get the upper hand over the men in the film, like Agnes and Carmen do. Alternatively, she slaps 'for more honourable reasons' (Nascone, p.57). When Marlowe returns Carmen to her home in her drug-induced state, he interrogates Vivian about Carmen's potential role in Reagan's disappearance. Her fearful expression gives her away.

Vivian: What did she tell you?

Marlowe: Not half as much as you just did.

Furious, she loses her composure and reaches out to slap Marlowe for casting doubt on Carmen's innocence. He is, however, able to restrain her before she can do so. Like Marlowe, Vivian shares his 'knightly' values and only uses aggression as a means of protecting others, and for this reason, they are rightfully paired as love interests in the film (Nascone, p.57). The centrality of the heterosexual relationship is given prominence in the narrative over Marlowe's homosocial relationships with men, due to the off-screen marriage of Bogart and Bacall (Nascone, p.55). But in order for this to come into effect, Vivian needs to give up her allegiance to her sister, her worst offence against patriarchy. Marlowe informs her,

"You'll have to send Carmen away, from a lot of things. They have places for that. Maybe they can cure her. It's been done before."

Through his insistence that Carmen be shipped off to a place where she can be treated, Marlowe gives Vivian a chance at redemption in society (Nascone, p.58). Masculinity is the primary inspiration for *The Big Sleep*. Although not without insecurity, Philip Marlowe is the ideal tough guy representation of male power that male audiences can only dream of achieving. Hawks delves deeper into this theme of masculinity later in his career, with '*Red River*' (1948).

Chapter 3: Western; “*Red River*” (1948)

The western genre 'predates the invention of cinema', with a trail leading back to the novels of James Fenimore Cooper in the early 19th century.(Kozloff, p. 139). Westerns were a fundamental part of the silent era, "*The Great Train Robbery*"(1902) for example, before transitioning to sound with "*The Virginian*"(1929). Between the 1930s and 40s we have what is known as the era of the 'classic Western'(Kozloff, p.140) The genre's primary focus is on its central character, 'the Western hero'. This hypermasculine hero boasts incredible skill and courage and he has a strong sense of honour and morality that audiences admire (Kozloff, p.140). Howard Hawks' first western, "*Red River*"(1948) follows Thomas Dunson, played by John Wayne, as he starts a successful cattle ranch, with the help of his trail hand, Groot(Walter Brennan), and Matt Garth(Montgomery Clift), an orphan he took under his wing as a young boy. In need of money during the difficult times following the Civil War, Dunson and Matt conduct the first cattle drive along the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Abilene, Kansas, in hopes of a better chance at fortune. However, the task at hand and their tiring journey create many conflicts between the characters. Grant notes the narrative of the film could be reflective of Hawks' career, and his desire to work separately from the Hollywood studio system. Both Hawks and Dunson had to find a way to get their product to market, Hawks was a founder of Monterey Productions, who would produce *Red River* (Grant, p.53). Although the story of "*Red River*" is driven by political and economic concerns, it is the social relationships that are most important to the plot. These include the relationship between father and son, boss and hired hand, and primarily, the relationship between man and woman.

Red River's male and female characters are seemingly equal, they complement each other, 'neither man nor woman can be whole without the other, and neither can ever be complete within her or himself', claims Larsson (Larsson, p.2). This type of mutual beneficence is representative of all social relationships within the film. Dunson and Matt are father and adopted son, as well as partners. We see at the beginning of the film that Matt needs Dunson for guidance and guardianship, but he also needs Matt, for his cow to undertake a successful business, and for help, as the boy is 'quick with a gun'. Full partnership between the two, however, will not be granted until Matt has 'earned' his initial on the brand. This demand for mutual support is also evident between Dunson and the other cowboys, he needs them to steer the herd to market, and they need him for money (Larsson, p.2). Within these relationships economic components are present, however devalued. The exchange of goods and services is established through mutual understandings and pacts, rather than legal contracts. Although

these contractual relationships can be swayed by aspects such as colour and setting. Black and white hats play a significant role. When we first meet Dunson, he wears a white hat. The Mexican who attempts to stop him from settling on the land wears a black sombrero. Because he is the one who draws his gun first, he is unquestionably the bad guy when he is shot. Following a fifteen-year time jump, the audience sees an older Dunson now wearing a black hat. After being gone a while, Matt is informed by Groot that Dunson has changed. Both the hat and the additional crosses above the graves of trespassers indicate that this change is not for the better. The viewer can suspect that the father-son relationship is bound for trouble. In spite of the friction between Matt and cowhand Cherry Valance(John Ireland), the neutral tone of their attire proposes the true conflict lies somewhere else (Larsson, p.3).

Masculine dynamics

Male groups in Hawks' films consist of their own inner dynamics, and their principles and morals stem from fulfilling a goal while working together as a team. Notwithstanding the fact, that Wollen never comments on *Red River* in his evaluation of the 'Hawksian Universe', the film is a perfect example of the Hawksian professional setting (Grant, p.57). A group of different men are brought together to work the cattle drive and undergo an action-packed adventure full of the dangers of the western frontier. Within the typical 'Hawksian drama', outlined by Richard Thompson, which pertains to *Red River*, there is a 'heroic' and 'professional, male authority figure'. He is accompanied by 'demi-heroes' with the desire to prove themselves in one way or another. Within this world, there is also a woman 'a professional, aggressive, competent woman, and she and the hero fall in love' (Grant, p.58).



Fig 8: "Red River" (1948) Dir. Howard Hawks

Within the *Red River* society, action and hard work take place outdoors, while the indoors are reserved for making agreements that enable them to work together. The cowboys sign up for the cattle drive indoors. Mr Melville greets Matt outside the town on horseback, but the pair discuss terms in the office. With the help of the setting, Hawks also shows a contrast between day and night. The night is shown to be a dangerous time, while the day promotes cooperation and conflict resolution (Larsson, p.3). By day, the cowboys work together driving the herd, by night, they complain about the food, two of the hired hands, Teeler and Laredo, desert the rest of the group, and most importantly, cause of selfishness and human equation, Kenneally attempts to steal some sugar from the wagon, and in doing so topples the pots and pans, spooking the herd and causing a stampede that ultimately takes the life of a fellow cowboy (Larsson, p.4). During the day, when Dunson threatens to hang the deserters, that is when Matt speaks out against his father, takes control, and restores order to the cattle drive. The relationship of the boss-hired hand is restored, however, the night still brings the threat of a vengeful Dunson (Larsson, p.4).

The cowboys must go up against outlaws and Indians, internal quarrels, and the elements in order to succeed and safely bring the cattle to the railroad. Hawks produces the image of a community, a representation of American men, conveying a range of different ethnic backgrounds, including an Irishman, a Latino, and a Native American (however a

stereotypical representation). Hawks pans the camera across the group before the drive commences, to accentuate the group, as a team. The director later provides a close-up shot of each of the characters, preserving their individuality, but this takes a backseat to signifying their interdependence. Being an all-male group, this propels the idea that Hawks' frontier is no setting for women, "just another space for testing masculine prowess"(Grant, p.58). Grant presents the idea that this 'masculine prowess' is indicated especially through the use of gesture and hand movements in *Red River*. The way in which male characters bond is typically conveyed by their hands (Grant, p.58). For example, the way Dunson rubs his holster when asking for a shovel and the Bible to bury one of Diego's men at the beginning of the film. While being attacked by Indians, Groot throws Dunson a knife and he catches it in the river without looking, providing him with the advantage he needs to achieve victory in the fight. The flawless synchronicity of the toss showcases a solid bond between the pair, eluded by Groot in the opening scenes, "*Me and Dunson, well, it's me and Dunson*" (Grant, p.59). Hawks also uses hands to depict masculine strength and dominance. In reference to his achievement of building his cattle ranch, Dunson vocalises, "*I built something with my own two hands*". Matt refrains from shooting Teeler after his attempt to desert, but remarks that his hands were shaking. By the end of the film, he has matured enough to assert dominance and maintain stability throughout Dunson's taunting during their culminating head-to-head. Dunson draws the new brand into the soil with his hands, by adding the 'M', Dunson believes Matt has become a man, and earned his place on the brand (Grant, p.60).

We see more of Hawks' emphasis on hands and gesture with Groot's assistant cook, Bunk Keneally, to exhibit immaturity. He is shown licking and poking his finger into the sugar barrel to appease his sweet tooth. Groot scolds him, claiming "having a sweet tooth is almost as bad as a whiskey tongue or liking a woman", this particular line has significance in the Hawksian universe, as in Hawks' "*Rio Bravo*", Dude bears the weight of both (Grant, p.60). It is this immature behaviour, when repeated later on, that causes the stampede that takes the life of another cowboy. The following morning, Dunson furiously condemns Bunk for "*stealing sugar like a kid*" and deems whipping a suitable punishment for 'kids' like him (Grant, p.61).

Red River deals with the masculine principles of authority, with the dialogue being made up of archetypal notions about being 'good enough', delving into Wollen's take on Hawks' paramount theme of "the problem of heroism" (Grant, p.61). The film illustrates this theme

through the contrasting forms of masculinity seen in Dunson and Matt, and the tension this causes between them. Matt is seen as ‘soft’ and feminine, while Dunson is your typical tough, rugged hero of the harsh and dangerous frontier (Grant, p.61). As Dunson departs from the wagon train, the wagon master deliberates suggesting he stay. Groot reminds him, “*When his mind is made up, there’s nothing you can do about it—watch out he don’t stomp on you on his way out.*”



Fig 9: “Red River”(1948) Dir. Howard Hawks

Western films are known for shots of beautiful scenery and majestic landscapes, however, this is not the case for Hawks’ *Red River*. With the exception of two fleeting scenes at the beginning of the film; the opening scene with the wagon train travelling along the valley behind Dunson and Fen, and again when Dunson stands over a grave reading from the bible, the clouds floating over the row of hills behind him. (Grant, p.63). Other than these scenes, the visuals lack any beauty or charm. Hawks instead depicts a vast, unrelenting wilderness where only the strongest survive, a kind of place where a man like Dunson would thrive. Many critics claim Dunson is wrong in his choice to leave Fen behind with the wagon train. Dunson’s mistake of walking away from the girl he loved, unknowingly leaving her to be

attacked by Indians, bestowed onto him an all-consuming need to accomplish all his other ambitions, according to William R Meyer (Grant, p.64). The audience soon sees Dunson's bull-headed, callous nature to be the ramification of a broken heart, "*Like knives sticking in you*", described by both Tess and Dunson whilst in her tent. Grant, however, views Dunson's decision to be the right one, and 'consistent with the Hawksian view of masculine professionalism' (Grant, p.64). When Fen begs Dunson to let her go, she speaks only in regard to sexual desire, "*The sun only shines half the time,*" and "*the other half is night,*". Dunson withstands this temptation as he is aware of the danger he would put her in would he take her (Grant, p.64). The film staggers scenes of daytime and nighttime, showcasing that a threat can come at any time of day. The attack of the wagon train takes place during the day, while the Indians later attack Dunson and Groot in complete darkness. The stampede occurs during the night, however, we see one of the hired hands run across the screen in long johns and his gun belt in the early hours of the morning, presenting the audience with the concept that dangers in the frontier are constant, and you have to be one of the few 'good enough' to take them on (Grant, p.65).

Dunson takes on a monocratic role of leadership, becoming more of a tyrant as the film progresses. He wants to hang the deserters, and announces to them, "*I am the law*". He is then seen as the villain for the remainder of the film, sporting a black shirt and hat, and leading a band of anonymous gunmen to Abilene to his showdown with Matt (Grant, p.66). Matt has contrasting methods to Dunson. When one of the cowhands rides up to him, claiming there are 'women and coffee' just a day's trek away, the men are eager to go. Matt stops them however, from rushing ahead, insisting they will all go together, 'as an ideal Hawksian professional group' (Grant, p.66). When they get there, he is also prepared for the possibility of losing the herd in order to help when the wagon train is attacked, an idea of a team united together, unimaginable for a man such as Dunson. "Matt is the captain of a team, whereas Dunson is the general of an army" (Grant, p.66). Though Matt is willing to adapt and make compromises, Dunson holds men accountable for their words. Westerns continually and passionately emphasise the value of verbal pledges and the 'sanctity of words'. Their heroes are admirable not only for their dexterity with a pistol but also for their social uprightness (Kozloff, p.146). In the film's opening, Dunson determines that he has the right to get off the wagon train because he hasn't signed any contracts, just as he ultimately believes anyone who joins in is expected to complete it. The 'Red River' name itself turns into a kind of agreement that Matt has to uphold (Grant, p.66). Dunson believes Matt won't be able to finish the cattle

drive without him, as he is too ‘soft’ a trait continuously shown as feminine throughout the film. Matt wears the bracelet originally given to Fen by Dunson, when a young Matt is found wandering alone with his cow following the attack on the wagon train, he exhibits traits of hysteria, a disorder correlated with women. The night Tess finds Matt outside on watch for a vengeful Dunson, Matt is displayed in a lounging position, with Tess hovering over him, her the one initiating the kiss, not him (Grant, p.67).

Femininity in Hawks’ Western

Whilst infrequent, the appearances of women in *Red River* are essential to the plot. The woman is the obligatory counterpart to the man, she is what he needs to restore order within himself (Larsson, p.4). Dunson’s greatest blunder was not letting Fen come with him. With the wagon train soon after being attacked by Indians, it is the guilt of feeling responsible for her death and the lack of her good influence on him that causes him to morph into this coarse, lonely man we see before us. Whatever good is left in Dunson, stems from his relationship with Matt. The feud between Dunson and Matt is only reconciled when Tess intervenes during their fight, wielding a pistol. In the original screenplay, Dunson is fatally shot by Cherry and dies when taken home to his ranch (Grant, p.68). Tess serves Hawks's purpose of mediating the two men's reconciliation (Grant, p.70).



Fig 10: “Red River”(1948) Dir. Howard Hawks

The women in *Red River* are a catalyst for domesticity. Their place is indoors, and in the towns, while men belong in the outdoors of the country. At the wagon train camp, in her tent, Tess holds her own against the men. She appears the stronger of the two as she confronts a wounded Dunson, standing over him, she proves herself to be his equal. The added detail of them both being wounded and in slings further proves this. In her element, she has the power to convince Dunson to take her with him to see Matt one more time (Larsson, p.5). Tess Millay is an excellent example of a 'Hawksian woman', she takes an arrow to the shoulder with little grievance, doesn't fear guns, has the valour to challenge Dunson, and stops the fight between him and Matt. Unlike the heroines of other Western films, she is not passive, she engages with the world around her and keeps the social relationships of others in operation. Grant states she is 'tough like a man, but aware she isn't one'. During the attack in the town, she joins Matt in shooting at the Indians. However, she recognises she lacks the skill in shooting and would be more helpful in loading Matt's rifles (Grant, p.61). When she is later shot herself, her minimal reaction affirms this 'toughness'. Having resolved their conflict, Dunson commends the kind of woman she is with his remark to Matt, "*You should marry that girl*" (Larsson, p.5). The women in *Red River* play a pivotal role in planting stability and order in the world Hawks' has created, which without them would be less appealing.

Conclusion

Fascinated by the overlooked and undervalued films in classic Hollywood, French critics in the 1950s fabricated the auteur theory. The auteur was seen as a director who imprinted his own persona and distinctive style on the filmmaking process. Outwardly, Hawks style is 'invisible', lacking any prominent visual style. Hawks, on the contrary, was one of the most stylised of directors, but this stylisation was more about how the actors performed, dialogue, tempo and character behaviours rather than distinguished camera angles and repeating locations (McCarthy, p.4). For his own amusement, Hawks was known for incorporating scenes which 'mirrored, or even parodied' the behavioural traits and relationships of individuals he knew personally or knew of; how the dynamic between David and Susan in Hawks' *'Bringing Up Baby'* was supposedly tailored to reflect the romance between Katherine Hepburne and director John Ford (Wollen, p.9). Similarly, Lauren Bacall's on (and off-screen) persona was sculpted around Hawks own wife, 'Slim'. French archivist and cinephile Henri Langlois first admired Hawks' work at the age of fifteen, during 'his silent days', while watching *A Girl in Every Port*(1928). Seven years later Langlois founded the *French Cinematheque*, an archive to store lost films as well as screen them at the *Cercle du Cinema* (Wollen, p.11). In the forties and fifties, following the second World War, he frequently screened Hawks films. From this, his works were exposed to a group of young writers at *Cahiers du Cinema*. The *Cahiers* group's 'cultist enthusiasm' launched the auteur theory, and placed Hawks 'in the forefront of a polemical film canon'(Wollen, p.12). Between 1953 and 1960, critics published various reviews of Hawks films, commending him for his 'genius'(Wollen, p.12). However, the American reviewers were less convinced. Andrew Sarris and Eugene Archer couldn't understand how more renowned directors were disregarded by the *Cahiers* for a director like Howard Hawks (Wollen, p.13). One of the reasons being that, by the late 1950s, Hawks' films were difficult to come by. In 1961, the New Yorker theatre, with Sarris and Archer's encouragement, launched a 'Forgotten Film' season, eleven out of the total twenty-eight screened films being by Howard Hawks, leaving critics 'blown away' by his talent as an auteur and his ability to '*transcend genre*'(Wollen, p.14).

Exploring gender dynamics within the '*Hawksian*' universe reveals a complicated mix of conventional and progressive factors. A review of Howard Hawks' films reveals that, while certain societal prejudices and gender roles persist, there are also indications of subversion

and redefinition. The representation of strong, self-driving female characters like Susan Vance, Vivian Rutledge and Tess Millay with their nuanced male counterparts highlights the changing nature of masculine and feminine relationships in Hawks' cinematic universe. Exploring this ever-evolving environment provides us with important insights into not just the history of gender standards, but also an opportunity to reshape social views and expectations. As we continue to reassess and reinterpret gender relations in both cinema and society, Howard Hawks' legacy affords a compelling lens that allows us to study these present-day discussions.

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