A Kiss with a Fist is Better Than None: Violence and Sexuality in The Maltese Falcon and The Big Sleep

Julie Nascone
Syracuse University
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Julie Nascone
Candidate for BA Degree and Renée Crown University Honors
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Honors Capstone Project in English and Textual Studies
Capstone Project Advisor: ____________________________
Steven Cohan, Professor

Capstone Project Reader: ____________________________
Jolynn Parker, Professor

Honors Director: ____________________________
Stephen Kuusisto, Director

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Abstract

Based on Annette Kuhn’s theory that censorship does not merely repress a text but produces one as well, this thesis examines the ways in which The Maltese Falcon (1941) and The Big Sleep (1946) bear the mark of their industrial and cultural contexts. Censorship of violence and the transformation of actor Humphrey Bogart produce symptomatic representations of violence in the films The Big Sleep (1946) and The Maltese Falcon (1941).

The Maltese Falcon stars Humphrey Bogart in the early years of his film career. Until The Maltese Falcon, Bogart was known purely for his onscreen roles as a gangster and his off-screen battles with his alcoholic wife. The film was censored throughout production for open displays of sexuality between Spade and Brigid. These constraints contribute to the final text of the film, causing the focus to remain not on the heterosexual couple Spade and Brigid, but instead on the violent interactions that occur homosocially between the men of the film. Conversely, at the time of The Big Sleep’s release, Bogart had recently starred in the romantic classic, Casablanca, and even more recently married his costar in The Big Sleep, Lauren Bacall. Further contributing to the film’s context, the PCA censorship of The Big Sleep focused on violence. Throughout The Big Sleep, restrictions of violence and Bogart’s image influence the onscreen creation of Marlowe and position him as a romantic hero who adheres to knightly codes of conduct. These limitations also cause sexuality to become a symbolic representation for female aggression. The constraints of the film shift focus from the homosocial to the heterosexual and sublimate problems with violence onto sexuality.

Ultimately, for the two pictures, censorship and the controlling factor of Bogart’s changing image contribute to the film’s text. In The Maltese Falcon, Bogart’s reputation as a violent character and off-screen machismo enable Spade to become a violent hero who cares more about his partner than he does the female. The censorship of the film’s sexuality further contributes to its focus on violence and shifts its importance away from the heterosexual couple. In The Big Sleep, Bogart’s romantization in Casablanca and popular marriage to Bacall make Marlowe a gentler, knightly hero. The censorship of the film’s violence causes symptomatic representations of that violence to occur through sexuality, which furthers the emphasis of the heterosexual couple. In either case, the films’ constraints produce meaning in the text; they bear the marks of the contexts.
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Annette Kuhn theorizes that censorship in cinema is not merely repressive but productive as well. In her essay, “The Big Sleep: censorship, film text and sexuality,” Kuhn explores the ways in which censorship and other institutional constraints on sexuality produce symptomatic representations of that sexuality in the mise-en-scène of The Big Sleep. She explains: “the text is not merely marked, but is positively structured, by the operations of censorship, or censorships. Censorships, in an important sense, produce this text” (Kuhn 79). Marlowe’s continuous return to Geiger’s house, the scene of Geiger’s murder as well as many other violent actions, is a symptom of the industry’s censorship of sexual transgression, whether as female promiscuity or male homosexuality, in the film’s complex narrative. Though sexuality in this film is censored and restrained from ever being literally displayed through dialogue or action, “visual cinematic codes [are] a site onto which prohibited representations could at times, consciously or otherwise, be displaced” (Kuhn 94). Geiger’s house and its contents become a symbolic representation of that which troubles normative sexuality, thus compelling Marlowe (and the narrative his point of view controls) to return there.

Kuhn attributes the narrative confusion often associated with The Big Sleep not to unresolved or unexplained plot mechanics but instead to these symptomatic visual codes. Though censorship is put in place with the hopes of removing certain themes, “as film text, The Big Sleep bears the marks of its context, of its various institutional conditions of production. These contexts effect the text, in that they are productive of meanings within it” (Kuhn 84). In The Big
Sleep then, sexuality subverts institutional attempts at censorship and is ultimately expressed, whether consciously or otherwise, through the film’s mise-en-scène.

While Kuhn explores the effects of institutional constraints on representations of transgressive sexuality, the productive effects of institutional censorship and other institutional constraints can be seen throughout the genre of film noir. The imposition of Breen’s administration frequently creates symptomatic representations of transgressive themes in censored films. In The Big Sleep, productive censorship is not limited to censorship of sexuality. The PCA’s censorship of violence in the film is similarly productive. Likewise, Humphrey Bogart’s image as a film noir hero has the same kind of productive effect due to the constraints of his romantic star image.

The Maltese Falcon (1941), which established film noir as a genre and Bogart as the noir male hero, illustrates the historical process by which censorship produces meaning. As the last of three film adaptations of the same text, The Maltese Falcon was subjected to different institutional censorship and as such differs from its predecessors in focus—rather than concentrating on sexuality, the film focuses on male homosocial violence. In comparison, The Big Sleep was heavily censored for violence and the film’s many revisions raise questions about violence as an index to Bogart’s noir masculinity and conceptions of female sexuality. As will be shown through violence enacted by detectives Sam Spade and Phillip Marlowe, the film noir male’s changing persona occurs in direct relation with changing conceptions of Bogart’s hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, occurring in relation with this constraint as well as the constraint of
PCA censorship of gendered violence, shifts in normative femininity can be seen through the films’ movement from Brigid, the femme fatale or spider woman,¹ to Vivian, the redeemed angelic sister.

**The Wartime Context of Film Noir**

Film noir, as a genre, is frequently cited as beginning in 1941 with the release of John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon*, which premiered a little more than a month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Though the term “film noir” did not arise until 1958, the majority of the films considered characteristic of this genre were created between 1941 and 1958. Imitation of Huston’s film did not immediately follow *The Maltese Falcon*; until 1943 Hollywood avoided films “which ran counter to the wartime project of ‘cultural mobilisation’” (Krutnik 36). But as the United States became more deeply involved in World War II, so did audiences’ fascination with the dark moral ambiguity of film noir. While *The Maltese Falcon* initiated the trend, “Noir’s tough, conflicted spirit, narrative corruption, and hard-bitten psyche grew out of anxieties, paranoia, and harsher realities in America’s home front and the rough-and-tumble world of pulp fiction detectives” (Biesen 41). In retrospect this shift in values seems dramatic, and it did not go unrecognized at the time. A *New York Times* article from August 5,

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¹ The spider woman is defined by film theorist Janey Place as “the evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction … [in film noir] women are active, not static symbols, are intelligent and powerful, if destructively so, and derive power, not weakness, from their sexuality” (47).
1945 recognizes the sudden overwhelming presence of violence in cinema and a tendency for “the wholesale production of lusty, hard-boiled, gat-and-gore crime stories… Hollywood says the moviegoer is getting this type of story because he likes it, and psychologists explain that he likes it because it serves as a violent escape in tune with the violence of the times” (Shearer). Violent crime stories and graphic war films provided audiences with a much-needed cathartic escape from life on the home front.

Although there is debate over the definitive categorization of film noir, it is typically said to be characterized by a dark visual style and a morally ambiguous world, through which the hero must navigate and hope to maintain some semblance of self. Whereas 1930s films saw rise to the “cerebral” detectives, who rely on their superior use of knowledge to solve a crime, film noir in the 1940s, drawing on 1930s pulp novels in the US, gave rise to the “hard-boiled” detective in film. One important distinction between the two detective figures is that in film noir, “crucially, the private eye—the most archetypal ‘hard-boiled’ hero—operates as a mediator between the criminal underworld and the world of respectable society. He can move freely between these two worlds, without really being part of either” (Krutnik 39). The hero in film noir repeatedly finds his moral strength of character tested and made ambiguous by the criminal underworld’s temptations. The film centers around the hero’s struggle as immorality becomes nearly irresistible, while morality becomes less appealing and clear cut. He wrestles with the intriguingly dangerous possibilities of controlling wealth, power, and most importantly, the erotic woman. In film noir,
the femme fatale or spider woman challenges the hero above all else because she
is irresistible and, as a result, deadly:

There is, then, a significant ambivalence attached to the ‘erotic
woman’: she is fascinating yet at the same time feared. There is an
emphatic strain of male sexual paranoia that runs through the
1940s ‘tough’ thrillers: the idea that women can be gently
converted from self-seeking ambitions to other-directed love is
framed as a fantasy that is less easily realizable than in the 1930s.

(Krutnik 63)

This ambivalence towards the feminine reflects conflicting emotions that
arose throughout the course of the Second World War as a result of the war’s
inevitable upheaval of patriarchy. Before the war, socially acceptable ideals of
masculinity and femininity were defined by a patriarchal system in which men
and women were each required to fulfill specific roles. “Patriarchal culture relies
upon the maintenance of a gender-structured disequilibrium. This involves not
merely a power based, and power-serving, cultural hierarchy of male and female,
but also the establishment of normative ‘gender values’ which are internalized by
both sexes” (Krutnik 75).

Normative gender values of the 1930s dictated that women operate
primarily in the domestic sphere. However, following the attack on Pearl Harbor,
women experienced several dramatic shifts in responsibilities in the time that
spanned between 1941 and the years after the war. With the movement of
thousands of husbands, brothers, and sons overseas, women were given the
responsibility of maintaining a stable home and a stable nation. Women across
the United States left the safety of domesticity for the workplace. Out of
necessity, they filled the absent husband’s role as breadwinner and provided the
home front with the services required to support the war overseas. At the start of
the war, “a 1942 government survey revealed that only 33 percent of childless
wives, and 19 percent of those with children, expressed willingness to take a job
outside the home. Less than one in three men accepted the idea of their wives
working. Yet by the final months of the war the number of women in the work
force was 50 percent higher than it had been in 1940” (Roeder 48).

Over time, feelings of obligation changed. By the end of the war, statistics
also showed, “80 percent of all women in the work force wished to continue
working after the war ended” (Roeder 48). While men were forced to give up
their wartime roles as the draft ended and discharges were issued, women
expressed a wish to continue theirs. Before national necessity gave women this
opportunity, it was a widely held belief that “since women bear children they
must stay at home with them; God gave women uteruses and men wallets…The
mere possession of uterus and ovaries condemned women to a sheltered life…It
was fortunate that men were by nature ‘robust and striving,’ because women—
even spinsters—required their life-long protection and support” (Ehrenreich 69).
During the war, even the incredible success of female workers and the continued
smooth functioning of the United States’ industries could not overpower “the
notion that women in heavy industrial jobs were fundamentally out of place. The
message was made explicit by a badge that women driving buses in Washington,
D.C., wore on their uniforms: ‘I am taking the place of a man who went to war” (Roeder 49). Breadwinning was a position natural only for men; thus from the start, a woman’s position in the workplace could be seen as nothing more than temporary. Moreover, the possibility of a permanent feminine shift to the work force threatened the established patriarchy because it was feared this movement meant women would be taking jobs that belonged rightfully and naturally to the nation’s men, effectively forcing soldiers out of work. America desperately needed peace and order, and the employment ambitions of women threatened that.

This national anxiety manifests itself frequently in film noir. “The new prominence of women in the economic realm was matched by a wide-scale and rapid redefinition of their place within culture. These changes set in motion a temporary confusion in regard to traditional conceptions of sexual role and sexual identity” (Krutnik 57). Film noir allows this uncertainty around female sexuality to be shown through characters who challenge the structure of patriarchy. The spider woman, in particular, threatens the natural order of patriarchy because unlike the complacent or subservient role women were expected to inhabit, the spider woman is supremely self-interested and overpowers men through violence or sexuality, in order to gain personal advantage. The problem of the film noir woman is heightened because “self-interest over devotion to a man is often the original sin of the film noir woman and metaphor for the threat her sexuality represents to him” (Place 58). As the nation struggled with the task of coming to terms with women’s changing roles in society, the film noir hero must avoid
sexual temptation and punish or force the spider woman back to her subjugated position or be destroyed by her power.

**The Maltese Falcon**

In 1931 Warner Bros. released Roy Del Ruth’s *The Maltese Falcon*, an adaptation of Dashiell Hammett’s pulp fiction novel of the same name. The film follows detective Sam Spade (Ricardo Cortez), a smug ladies man, after his partner is unexpectedly killed while working on a case for the beautiful and mysterious Ruth Wonderly (Bebe Daniels). Above all else, the film emphasizes Spade’s sexual prowess. Wonderly blatantly attempts to bribe Spade with sex by spending the night in his bed and at one point is even forced to strip naked in his kitchen (see Figure 1). She is but one of a string of women Spade is shown to be involved with throughout the picture. Conversely, violence is distinctly absent from the picture. Rather than muscle, Spade relies on the power of the law to resolve situations, and he does not carry a gun. He only becomes violent when it is absolutely necessary and in these cases, he does not throw more than one swift debilitating punch.

In 1934, however, the film industry was forced to make a change responding to the kind of sexual behavior shown in the 1931 adaptation of Hammett’s novel. The National Catholic Legion of Decency threatened Hollywood with a boycott because of the increasing prevalence of lewd film content. This resulted in “the strengthening of the Hays Code self-regulatory
form of censorship in 1933 and 1934 which required the studios to ‘play it safe’ in matters of sexual content and violence” (Krutnik 36). The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) established an office known as the Production Code Administration (PCA), with Joseph I. Breen as its head, and began strictly enforcing the Hollywood Production Code as a means of avoiding the impending threat of governmental censorship.

Consequently, when Warner Bros. did another film adaptation of Hammett’s novel in 1936, this time called Satan Met a Lady (dir. William Dieterie), the studio had to cut down the sex and change the narrative’s tone, which resulted in more attention to the story’s violence. “According to some critics, the 1936 remake was the result of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA)—the enforcers of the Production Code—denying Warner Bros. approval to re-release the 1931 film because of the film’s overt references to, and depictions of, sexuality” (Gates 12). The studio’s response to the dramatic increase in censorship shows through the film’s choice of genre: Satan Met a Lady is a comedy. While it maintains the same plot as Hammett’s The Maltese Falcon, the film treats the violent events in a decidedly different manner. Detective Ted Shane (Warren William) attempts to solve the mystery of who murdered his partner after Valerie Purvis (Bette Davis) mysteriously hires the two to follow a man for her. Shane, like Cortez’s Spade, is a ladies man, but rather than inhabiting this position with reserve and passivity, Shane (and the many other characters of the film) treats violence as if it were innocuous. In his interactions with female adversaries, violence becomes a sort of
courting ritual where the two can be found laughing between blows and making eyes over the smoking barrel of a gun (see Figure 2). Cartoon-like violence becomes a way of expressing sexuality and minimizing its consequences. Even when Shane is first informed of his partner’s death, he proceeds to make a series of jokes about the troubling situation that continues, unrelenting, for the duration of the film. For the *New York Times*, this light treatment of such a serious topic was unsettling, for “so disconnected and lunatic are the picture's incidents, so irrelevant and monstrous its people, that one lives through it in constant expectation of seeing a group of uniformed individuals appear suddenly from behind the furniture and take the entire cast into protective custody” (B.R.C). The film, though sardonic in its depictions, circumvents censorship of sexuality by expressing such feelings through violence—hence the way violence underlies the courtship of Wonderly by Shane.

Five years later, first time director John Huston readapted the novel once more, and *The Maltese Falcon* was released October 18, 1941. Huston’s version begins when detectives Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) and Miles Archer (Jerome Cowan) are hired by Brigid O’Shaughnessy (Mary Astor), who is posing as Miss Wonderly, to retrieve her sister from an inappropriate romantic entanglement with a man named Thursby. Though Spade and Archer suspect Wonderly is not telling the whole story, the two take on her case. Shortly into their investigation, Archer is shot to death, and Thursby similarly turns up dead a few hours later. As the police focus their investigation of the murders on Spade, he begins his own investigation by questioning Wonderly. He soon discovers Wonderly is really
named Brigid. Rather than searching for her sister, Brigid is searching for a statue known as the Maltese Falcon. The Falcon is so extraordinarily valuable that men have died because of it and many are willing to do anything to obtain it. Also in the Falcon’s pursuit are an enormous man named Kasper Gutman (Sydney Greenstreet), Gutman’s trigger-happy gunman, Wilmer Cook (Elisha Cook Jr.), and a small, shrill man from an unknown foreign nation, Joel Cairo (Peter Lorre). Despite Brigid’s attempts to seduce Spade, Gutman’s attempts to bribe him, and Wilmer’s attempts to intimidate, in the end Spade solves the murders in question by pretending to join their selfish and bloodthirsty search for the Falcon. In doing so, he discovers Wilmer shot Thursby four times in the back and murdered another man, who had been momentarily in possession of the Falcon, before purposefully lighting a ship on fire. More shockingly, Spade discovers Archer was murdered by Brigid.

Huston’s film, like Dieterie’s and Del Ruth’s before it, was similarly censored for its depiction of sexuality. Despite the violent nature of this film, when it was reviewed in both preproduction and postproduction stages by the PCA, it was in large part cited only for counts of “illicit sex and drunkenness” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 31 May 1941, M.F. files2). Throughout the voluminous correspondence between Joseph I. Breen and the makers of The Maltese Falcon, Breen was mainly concerned with Spade’s relations with women,
including his partner’s wife, Iva. Breen demanded: “any flavor that Spade and Iva have been illicitly intimate must be eliminated…It is essential that there is no physical contact between Iva and Spade, other than that of decent sympathy” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 27 May 1941, M.F. files). Furthermore, Breen disapproved of a fade out that left viewers with the impression that Brigid O'Shaughnessy and Sam Spade have sex when they return to Spade’s apartment. He thought the mere suggestion of sex to be so transgressive that even in innocuous scenes, it was specified that “there must be nothing sex suggestive in Spade’s eying of Brigid” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 27 May 1941 M.F. files). Similarly, Breen was very concerned with the characters’ abundance use of alcohol and sent numerous letters identifying every instance, noting, “some other business besides drinking must be substituted” and “we must insist that the actual drinking be kept to the absolute minimum necessary to the development of the plot. It seems that audiences are offended not so much by the presence of liquor as by the actual drinking” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 27 May 19411 M.F. files).

Yet regardless of Breen’s strict adherence to regulations of sexuality and drinking, he made minimal restrictions to the film’s frequent recourse to acts of violence. The few instances where changes were commanded did not eliminate violent actions at all, but rather specified that the action occur out of direct view of the camera. When Bogart’s character is kicked by Wilmer, he is lying on the floor with his back to the camera so that audiences can see the kick, yet they cannot see the actual contact between Wilmer’s shoe and Spade’s face. The kick
was not required to be off screen, it was simply requested the contact “should be masked” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 23 May 1941 M.F. files). In her exploration of “body genres,” Linda Williams discusses the reason violence in horror films is marked as “gratuitous.” She attributes this label to “the perception that the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on screen” (Williams 270). Similarly, such detailed visualization of violence violated the Production Code because, in comparison with the level of violence that is permissible in text, “the latitude given to film material cannot, in consequence, be as wide as the latitude given to book material … a book describes; a film vividly presents. One presents on a cold page; the other by apparently living people” (“The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930”). By masking the connection of Wilmer’s foot with Spade’s face, the visualization of the kick is largely confined to one’s imagination, which presumably lessens the impact of the kick on the viewers themselves. Despite the attempt to mask of gratuitous violence without eliminating it entirely, Breen’s censorship of sexuality remained strict. This unrelenting attempt at eliminating sexuality shifts the focus of *The Maltese Falcon* to Spade’s aggressive masculinity, which is in turn perpetuated by the violent manner typical of both Bogart’s onscreen and off-screen personas.
Though he earned small roles in several films beginning in the late twenties, Humphrey Bogart’s film career took off in 1936 when Warner Bros. bought the rights to the play, *The Petrified Forest*, and actor Leslie Howard demanded Bogart be brought to Burbank to reprise his stage role in the film. Acting opposite the successful Bette Davis and Howard, Bogart plays a ruthless gangster who holds a secluded diner full of people hostage while on the run from the police. He was critically acclaimed for his performance and taken under contract by Warner Bros. for a mere $400 a week. The film’s success, however, branded the actor as a veritable tough guy. He became the man “who can be a psychopathic gangster more like Dillinger than the outlaw himself” and was typecast as such repeatedly (Nugent). Though he mostly earned smaller and secondary roles, he worked steadily under this typecast. In Hollywood there was “a wave of gangster films, and Bogart made twenty-nine of them in a row for Warner’s [sic] in the three years between *The Petrified Forest* and *High Sierra*. He was a jailbird in nine of these pictures and electrocuted or hanged in eight” (Hyams 57). In *High Sierra*, which was released January 25, 1941, just nine months before *The Maltese Falcon*, Bogart plays “Mad Dog” Roy Earle, a notorious criminal recently released from prison who attempts to rob a resort.

Bogart’s extremely public personal life contributed to typecasting as a gangster. In 1938 he married actress Mayo Methot—a third marriage for both. The pair received notoriety not for their acting abilities but for their drunken
disagreements, which over the years became increasingly violent. Mayo was an alcoholic struggling with depression, and throughout the course of their marriage Bogart’s drinking increased in turn. Biographer and close friend Joe Hyams notes that while Bogart’s star persona was characterized as ferocious, Bogart in actuality was not. The violence in Bogart’s marriage to Mayo was instead a result of his aggressive wife: “Mayo was truly tough: She was a tiger who would take on anyone in a fight” (Hyams 65). Mayo’s depression, jealousy, and alcoholism were so powerful that she frequently resorted to throwing glasses at Bogart and inflicting black eyes. During the shooting of *Casablanca* in 1942, Mayo became so jealous of Ingrid Bergman that she threatened she would kill Bogart if he left her: “believing the threat a real possibility, [agents] Sam Jaffe and Mary Baker took out a $100,000 policy on Bogie, insuring their firm against the financial catastrophe his death would cause” (Hyams 85). During their good days, Bogart would brag about his wife’s fierceness, and it seemed their fighting was exactly what held Bogart’s interest. The press quickly took to referring to the pair as “The Battling Bogarts,” and their fights became a favorite topic for gossip columns and tabloids (Hyams 65).

Yet throughout his many gangster roles and violent home life, Bogart desired more challenging acting opportunities. He resisted the one-dimensional gangster characterization as much as possible, repeatedly rejecting the roles in hope of something more. He explained his trouble with Warner Bros.: “I’d read a movie script and yell that it was not right for me … Jack Warner would phone and say, ‘Be a good sport.’ I’d argue and say ‘no.’ Then I’d get a letter from the
Warner Brothers lawyers ordering me to report. I’d refuse. Then another wire from Warner saying that if I did not report he’d cut my throat” (Hyams 73). So, in a final attempt to break free from typecasting, Bogart took on the role of detective Sam Spade and signed on to play a heroic, if shady, man on the right side of the law for a change. Though this role deviates from his previous performances, Bogart’s characterization as a gangster still weighs heavily in the promotion of him and his performance in The Maltese Falcon (see Figure 3). In the theatrical trailer, the film’s appeal is specifically generated around Spade’s aggression. Between shots of Spade cleaning guns, angrily smashing glasses, and viciously punching Cairo, the text reads: “Who is this man? He makes crime a career—and ladies a hobby! He’s as fast on the draw—as he is in the drawing room…”

Indeed, this is how he is largely portrayed throughout the film. In almost every conversation held, Spade has a habit of reacting aggressively when things take a turn he does not like. He thus switches quickly and effortlessly between comfortable conversation and open hostility. When two policemen arrive at Spade’s apartment in the middle of the night to investigate the detective as a possible suspect in the murder of Archer, Spade first welcomes the men politely into his home, offering them a drink. After only a few routine questions, however, Spade’s mood switches dramatically to one of defensive aggression, as he growls: “I don’t like this. What are you birds sucking around here for? Tell me or get out.” For the duration of the scene Spade’s responses are short and bitter. His body becomes increasingly tense, like a dog on a chain waiting to
attack, until he can finally discern the meaning of their questioning. And this coarseness is not merely reserved for men. The women around him frequently express an uneasiness or fear at his growing aggression. Effie, his secretary pleads, “Oh don’t be cranky with me, Sam” and Archer’s widow begs through tears, “Be kind to me, Sam” as he barks at each in turn. Reminiscent of the gangster roles that earned Bogart a following, Spade is a fierce man with a short temper.

Spade’s characterization as “the most ruthless lover you’ve ever met” can further be seen in his final interactions with Brigid. After sending the police to catch the others involved in the murders of the Maltese Falcon, Spade forces Brigid to confess to the murder of his partner, Archer. As he speaks, he is urgent and harsh—threatening her with prison and hanging. Brigid apologizes, and though it is unclear what her true intentions are because the typical film noir woman “is not often won over and pacified by love for the hero,” she appeals to him out of love nonetheless (Place 63). Her pleas are completely disregarded as Spade protests, “I won’t play the sap for you!” There is a savagery to his final speech (see Figure 4). His eyes are frenzied as he backs Brigid into a wall. Though he does not physically touch her, the force of his words is biting, causing Brigid to quiver like a battered woman. Spade’s unrelenting dedication to justice

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3 In the novel, Spade’s mere act of surrendering Brigid to the police is treated as cruelly. In the final scenes of the novel, Spade’s secretary Effie Perine reads about the imprisonment in the newspaper, and upon learning it was Spade who sent Brigid to prison, “the girl’s brown eyes were peculiarly enlarged and there was a queer twist to her mouth. She stood beside him, staring down at him … Her voice was queer as the expression on her face. ‘You did that, Sam, to her?’ … She
is such that he will stop at nothing to see that Brigid is punished, and he does so without regret, regardless of her claim to love him.

Furthermore, Spade’s ferocity serves to prescribe a normative masculinity for Bogart by enabling the character to overpower the other males in the film; this male hierarchy prioritizes Spade’s heterosexual aggression over femininity and alternative forms of masculinity. Such a structuring of masculinities, in fact, soon became characteristic of the genre, in that “film noir uses displays of violence (physical, sexual, mental) to create a hierarchy of men outlining homosocial power relations among hegemonic, conservative and subordinated masculinities within its diegesis” (Cohan 84). Spade is shown to be superior to all other male types through his violence, thus labeling his hegemonic masculinity as superior while also condoning the homophobia and misogyny underlying that violence. This is why the film focuses largely on homosocial relationships between the many men involved in the fight to find the Falcon. The text prioritizes Spade and his relationship with Archer above all others, and in doing so condemns Cairo’s homosexuality and Gutman and Wilmer’s dishonorable use of masculine aggression.

When Joel Cairo arrives at Spade’s office, he is introduced by a calling card scented with gardenia. He visits under the premise of hiring Spade to find the Maltese Falcon. Their simple discussion of payment is interrupted as Spade turns from his guest in order to receive a brief innocuous phone call from his secretary. After finishing the call, Spade turns back to face Cairo only to find the escaped from his arm as if it had hurt her. ‘Don’t, please, don’t touch me,’ she said brokenly” (Hammett 216-217).
latter has unexpectedly drawn a small pistol from his pocket and is holding it point blank at Spade’s abdomen. He instructs, “You will clasp your hands together at the back of your neck. I intend to search your office.” Spade stands and complies. He is then instructed to turn and face the wall, which he also does without protest. However, upon turning Cairo increases his threat by pressing the barrel of the gun into Spade’s back. Having finally tired of compliance, Spade retaliates. He first disarms his attacker by grabbing his wrists and punching him twice in the jaw. Then, Spade delivers one swift and forceful punch to the face that renders Cairo unconscious. Spade now uses this time to search Cairo’s belongings and discover his motivations for bearing arms in what had at first seemed to be a calm conversation. In Cairo’s pockets, Spade finds several falsified passports, and a gardenia scented handkerchief. Later when Cairo regains consciousness, he fusses over the wrinkles the skirmish made in his shirt. He and Spade once again attempt to discuss their business arrangement regarding the Maltese Falcon civilly, prompting Spade to politely return Cairo’s weapon when he asks for it. However, immediately upon receiving the pistol, Cairo once again points it at Spade’s chest and coolly directs, “You will please clasp your hands together at the back of your neck. I intend to search your office.” The scene concludes as Spade smiles condescendingly and laughs in acquiescence while clapping his hands together at the back of his neck.

Cairo’s altercation with Spade demonstrates a homophobic hierarchy of masculinities by contrasting the ways in which the hero and his effeminate enemy attempt to assert their dominance, and in doing so, establishes Spade’s
heterosexuality as normative and superior. From the instant of Cairo’s introduction he is characterized in a manner designating him as a homosexual. Though Breen initially disapproved of this—“We cannot approve the characterization of Cairo as a pansy as indicated by the lavender [sic] perfume, high pitched voice, and other accouterments”—the subject matter remains and Cairo displays these mannerisms in the final film (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 23 May 1941 M.F. files). Cairo’s sexual orientation, moreover, enables the proliferation of a specific ideology because it determines the two men’s interactions in this scene:

Homosociality has as much to do with power (over women as well as other men) as it does desire (for other men as well as women), which is why it so readily takes the form of one man’s domination of another, emphasizing independence, competition, and aggression as the hallmark features of virility, and usually going even further to manifest fear of alternate male behavior—such as effeminacy—in homophobic violence. (Cohan 84)

Cairo’s deviation from heterosexual normativity is condemned through Spade’s physical domination. Spade towers over Cairo by at least six inches (see Figure 5), and the pair is filmed from low angles so as to accentuate their physical difference⁴. This contrast contributes to the fact that Bogart’s normative masculinity consists of more than carrying a gun can provide. As Raymond

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⁴ In certain instances in *The Maltese Falcon*, the actors’ heights are portrayed accurately, but in this scene, Bogart’s height is enhanced in order to emphasize his power. In actuality, the height difference between the two actors is much less—Humphrey Bogart stood a mere 5’8” while Peter Lorre was 5’5”.
Chandler explained: “as we say here, Bogart can be tough without a gun”—meaning he is a man who possesses such strength and agility that he does not require anything other than his fists for protection (The Raymond Chandler Papers 67). Cairo, on the other hand, who is feminized through his concern for appearance and the gardenia scent, can only prove his strength with his gun, which he produces overzealously at the slightest impression of being threatened (see Figure 6). Without his (rather small) gun, Cairo is powerless, castrated. He must appeal to Spade’s mercy and looks up at Spade with wide, desperate eyes, speaking without the confidence he had previously displayed when armed. The belief in the inferiority of homosexual masculinity is affirmed once more at the close of the scene, when Spade returns Cairo’s pistol. As Cairo holds Spade at gunpoint a second time, Spade laughs: “Oh sure, go ahead. I won’t stop you,” signaling to audiences Cairo’s impotence, his inferiority of strength in comparison to Spade’s heterosexual masculinity.

Homosocial relations between Spade and Kasper Gutman similarly serve to sustain Spade’s hierarchal position among the male characters—all of whom have more ambiguous loyalties (not to say sexualities).\(^5\) When engaged in seemingly civil negotiations with Gutman, Spade is offered drink after drink. Being a polite guest, Spade accepts each in turn; however, a short while into the conversation his vision becomes incredibly blurred. He blinks several times to

\(^5\) Though I am focusing on Gutman and Wilmer’s brutality in the film, it is worth nothing that the two characters are also portrayed as homosexuals, further setting them apart from the heroic (and heterosexual) Spade. However, their homosexuality differs from Cairo’s in that the pair’s deviant sexuality does not result in feminization, as it does for Cairo.
regain focus and attempts to continue the conversation until finally realizing he has been poisoned. Rather than directly confronting Gutman, Spade stands and desperately tries to leave the room. Within an instant of standing, however, the poison shows its effects. He takes a few pathetic steps and obliviously walks into an end table, knocking it to the ground. Wilmer, who upon the summons of Gutman has slipped into the room from hiding, kicks the already incapacitated Spade in the back of the knee, causing him to buckle and fall to the ground. Though Spade makes no attempts to rise, Wilmer then savagely kicks him in the face—in the scene somewhat muted visually according to PCA demands. In the course of this incident, Gutman removes the smoking jacket he had previously been wearing with a general air of relaxation to reveal a business suit underneath and flees the scene.

Gutman and Wilmer’s dishonorable and excessive use of violence further implies the ideological appropriateness of Spade’s masculinity by condemning the immoral conman, thereby dictating the normative masculinity to be one that adheres to knightly codes of honor. When Gutman is first introduced, he is appropriately dubbed “the fat man.” At 357 pounds, Gutman is clearly physically inferior to Spade’s brawn (and Bogart’s slender, leaner body). Because of this, in a match of strengths, Gutman must resort to underhanded and dishonorable means in order to defeat Spade. Gutman relies on the deception of a smoking jacket and the underhanded convenience of poison, not to say Wilmer. He cannot overcome Spade in a fair match of strength, so he relies on a coward’s use of violence, which positions him as the uncontrolled savage enemy, disrespecting all manner
of social rules (see Figure 7). Moreover, by shooting Thursby in the back and viciously kicking Spade when he is already incapacitated, Wilmer further perpetuates this distinction between Spade’s normative and the others’ troubling masculinities. What separates Gutman and Wilmer from Cairo, however, is that the former represent a genuine threat to Spade’s safety. Their gratuitous means of violence enable them to match Spade’s strength, but simultaneously position them as villains. While Spade’s aggression is present throughout, it is often used as a performance of hypermasculinity. In contrast, Gutman and Wilmer sadistically overindulge in violence and do so without purpose. In showing gratuitous violence as a tool of the malicious, The Maltese Falcon labels Spade’s masculinity as dominant and reaffirms the dominate characteristics of hegemonic masculinity.

II: “You’re good. Chiefly your eyes, I think, and that throb you get in your voice when you say things like, ‘Be generous, Mr. Spade.’”

The final confrontation between Spade and the many people in search of the Maltese Falcon occurs in Spade’s apartment. Partway through debating amongst themselves who will be the fall guy for the crimes committed in the process of finding the Falcon, Brigid steps out of the room. When she is out of

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6 In Spade’s first meeting with Gutman, Spade leaves the room in a fury—throwing his cigar across the room, smashing his glass, and slamming the door behind him. As Spade approaches the elevator outside Gutman’s apartment, his hand shakes, but his face appears amused, signaling his own exaggeration of his hostility. Though Spade is aggressive in temperament, he consciously controls these instincts in performance, rather than acting on savage impulse.
earshot, Gutman instructs Spade to come closer and offers the following: “I’d like to give you a word of advice … I dare say you’re going to give her some money, but if you don’t give her as much as she thinks she ought to have, my word of advice is: be careful.” Spade responds to this unsolicited warning by asking if she is dangerous. Gutman offers one simple, but ominous, word: “Very.”

If *The Maltese Falcon* is in fact the original film noir, it is fitting that Brigid O’Shaughnessy is the quintessential femme fatale. She is introduced to Spade by his secretary with the line, “You’ll want to see her. She’s a knock-out,” and this is perhaps the last truthful fact either Spade or the audience learns about her. She presents her false case to Spade and his partner under an equally false name. She stutters and avoids eye contact, keeping her true identity veiled, so as to appear a perfectly demure and trustworthy woman (see Figure 8). But for Brigid, “values, like identities, are constantly shifting and must be redefined at every turn. Nothing—especially the woman—is stable, nothing is dependable” (Place 51). Brigid is not the timid woman she pretends to be and will don any hat necessary to gain control of the Falcon. As the only prominent female in a world of men, Brigid is dangerous because she is dedicated to serving her own self-interests. In doing so, she operates in opposition to the establishment of patriarchy, and she is more than willing to lie, betray, and kill in order to obtain the Maltese Falcon. Still, her immorality is not her most dangerous quality. It is her beauty that poses the greatest threat to men:

Her power is of a peculiar sort insofar as it is usually not subject to her conscious will, hence appearing to blur the opposition between
passivity and activity. She is an ambivalent figure because she is not the subject of power but its carrier (the connotations of disease are appropriate here). Indeed, if the femme fatale over represents the body it is because she is attributed with a body which is itself given agency independently of consciousness. In a sense, she has power despite herself. (Doane 2)

Though she does resort to a gun occasionally, the body is Brigid’s primary weapon of choice. She is undoubtedly aware of the powerful potential of her sexuality. She poses constantly when in conversation with Spade and other men, wholly aware of her position as the object of their gaze (see Figure 9). She uses her sexuality and the allure of her body in order to convince men to trust her unconditionally.

While a gun may physically kill Archer, it is Brigid’s body that causes his downfall. Upon first meeting Brigid, Archer is captivated by her appearance. He eagerly leans across the desk, hanging on her every word, assuring her that he will look after her case personally (see Figure 10). Yet it is precisely this captivation that makes Archer an easy target. Spade, knowing that Archer is too skilled a detective to go to a secluded area with an unknown male without so much as touching the pistol in his pocket, realizes Archer’s death cannot be attributed to his weakness as a detective but must be attributed to his weakness as a man. Spade angrily confronts Brigid: “But he’d have gone up there with you angel. He was just dumb enough for that. He’d have looked you up and down and licked his lips and gone grinning from ear to ear. And you could have stood as close to him
as you liked in the dark and put a hole through him with a gun.” Brigid’s body, like that of the typical noir spider woman, threatens the order of patriarchy because it allows her to physically overpower a man whom she should not be able to overpower and ultimately represents an uncontrolled (and unrepressed) female sexuality. Her sexual freedom is so potent that no man, it seems, no matter how tough, is safe. In this regard, though Brigid and Cairo’s bodies are equally no match for a straight male, she is so much more dangerous than Gutman, Wilmer, or Cairo—Brigid can seduce Spade; the others cannot.

The only instance in which the audience actually sees Brigid use brute force to get her way is when her body cannot possibly take her further. Naturally, Brigid’s body has no effect on Cairo, so she must resort to other means. After learning Brigid and Cairo know each other, Spade arranges a meeting between the two so that they may share information and better their chances of surviving the fight to find the Falcon. In the middle of the conversation, Cairo outright blames Brigid for a past loss of the Falcon. At this Brigid swiftly leaps out of her seat in indignation and silences Cairo with a cold hard slap. Infuriated and humiliated, Cairo tries to retaliate, but to no avail, for he is no match for the power of Brigid’s body. Her seemingly failed advantage saves her once more when Marlowe, offended by the threat of Cairo harming the femme fatale, steps in. Cairo, then realizing his inferiority, draws his gun in a frenzied attempt to save face. Spade easily disarms him with a sharp blow to the wrist and puts Cairo in his place with the statement: “When you’re slapped, you’ll take it and like it.” Spade then fiercely slaps Cairo four times before being interrupted by a pair of policemen at
the door. Initially, the script indicated that Cairo should slap Brigid in response to her attack. Breen disapproved of this: “The action of Cairo slapping Brigid should be suggested out of frame. Otherwise it will be deleted by some political censor boards” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 23 May 1941 M.F. files). The slapping of a woman, even if provoked, was deemed unsuitable and ultimately cut from the script entirely.

The altercation between Brigid and Cairo further emphasizes the film’s subscription to patriarchal values by clearly ranking the three characters in a power struggle. Brigid and Spade both assert their dominance over Cairo through homophobic violence (see Figure 11). But the power in the scene is clearly held by Spade. Brigid may slap Cairo once, but it is only Spade who is able to control the little man (and slap him repeatedly). During their conversations, Spade’s power over both Brigid and Cairo is further emphasized through the physical positions of the characters (see Figure 12). As Cairo and Brigid eagerly discuss recent events, Spade silently watches the two from a chair opposite them. His position is like that of a presiding judge—though he may allow their conversation to take place without him, he is clearly the one in control. Spade possesses a dominant gaze, positioning both Brigid and Cairo as objects he commands visually. Feminist Film theorist Laura Mulvey notes that “an active/passive heterosexual division of labour” is enacted visually in film by designating the male as the active holder of the gaze and the female as the passive subject of that gaze (Mulvey 63). While Brigid and Cairo’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” designates them as passive and thus inferior, Spade’s gaze demonstrates the ways in which
“the male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action” (Mulvey 64). In commanding the gaze, Marlowe’s heteronormativity is once more shown to be dominant over both the female and the homosexual male.

In the end, The Maltese Falcon furthers misogynistic anxieties toward feminine sexuality by using the narrative to punish Brigid for her crimes and simultaneously for her rebellion against patriarchal power. Unlike Archer, Spade is not completely won over by the female seductress. As later becomes a convention in film noir, “not only is the hero frequently not sure whether the woman is honest or a deceiver, but the heroine’s characterization is itself fractured so that it is not evident to the audience whether she fills the stereotype or not” (Gledhill 31). In The Maltese Falcon it is Spade’s distrust of Brigid from the beginning that enables him to survive her crimes. As the film nears its conclusion and it becomes more apparent Spade will surrender someone to the police, Brigid uses her body and the memory of the night the two spent together in an attempt to persuade Spade to protect her. She holds his hand as they wait for the Falcon to arrive and presses her body completely against his in a tight embrace when he threatens to turn her in. By turning Brigid in to the police, Spade restores order and reminds viewers that “the lesson is obvious: only in a controlled, impotent, powerless form, powerless to move or act, is the sexual woman no threat to the film noir man” (Place 60). Similarly, by ignoring Brigid’s pleas, and in doing so, denouncing the heterosexual couple, the film focuses instead on the importance of Bogart’s relationship with his late partner—
the femme fatale’s victim. When Spade surrenders Brigid to the police for her crimes he gives the following explanation:

When a man's partner is killed, he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it. And it happens we're in the detective business. Well, when one of your organization gets killed, it's—it's bad business to let the killer get away with it, bad all around, bad for every detective everywhere.

The strength of the bond between Spade and Archer overpowers any possibility of love between Spade and Brigid. In recognizing this, the narrative emphasizes the importance of homosocial relationships over the heterosexual couple and dictates a passive femininity by punishing the actively self-interested female.

As the PCA censorship repressed displays of open sexuality of the heterosexual couple in *The Maltese Falcon*, morally ambiguous usage of violence becomes a symptomatic site of the removed sexual transgression and consequently takes the forefront in the film. Thus representations of both violence and sexuality in *The Maltese Flacon* is a response to that industrial context. In Spade’s interactions with Brigid, with sexuality removed or at least constrained, ferocity becomes a necessary response to the alluring and dangerous threat of Brigid’s body. For the men of *The Maltese Falcon*, questions of morality lie in the appropriateness of violence—with men on either side of the law so quick to come to blows, what crosses the line? In drawing a distinction
between appropriate and excessive uses of violence, the film attempts to sort out what had previously been made ambiguous, thus allowing Bogart to begin his shift—that would later fully become evident in *The Big Sleep*—from the ruthless gangster to the knightly hero, who both saves the kingdom and wins the maiden.

**The Big Sleep**

Despite the fact that he was married, in his earlier films Humphrey Bogart represented “that special kind of unshaven squalor that is the mark of bachelorhood in a modern American city—unscraped dishes in the sink, rye whiskey in the file drawer of the desk” (Hyams 76). His aggressive mannerisms and tough characters appealed to audiences but failed to deliver to the active opportunities Bogart desired. In 1942, however, Bogart took a chance on a role in a film that nobody involved thought was going to be successful: *Casablanca*. Bogart plays an expatriate bar owner in Casablanca who is forced to reassess his values when the woman who permanently broke his heart suddenly reappears with another man. The film won three Oscars—Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Screenplay—and earned Bogart a nomination for Best Actor. More importantly for Bogart’s career, the role became the turning point for which he had been waiting: “audiences watching Bogart play in tender, understated love scenes with Ingrid Bergman … were suddenly aware of a quality—very much a part of his own character—that had never before come through so clearly on the screen … Warner finally began to think of Bogart as a romantic leading man”
With the success of the film, Warner reevaluated his consistent designation of Bogart as the “heavy” or ambiguous gangster-style hero and decided to profit off his recent success by casting him in similar roles.

In 1944 director Howard Hawks began production on a film loosely based on Ernest Hemingway’s novel *To Have and Have Not*. In the film, Bogart plays an expatriate boatman on the island of Martinique who, despite attempts to stay neutral, inadvertently becomes involved in World War II by transporting important fugitives for the resistance. The role is reminiscent of his role in *Casablanca* and provided Bogart with another opportunity to show his romantic side. Alongside Bogart, the film was set to star newcomer Lauren Bacall as Bogart’s love interest. Bacall was Hawks’s personal project—his wife had discovered her on the cover of an issue of *Harper’s Bazaar* and suggested Bacall to her husband (see Figure 13). Impressed, Hawks personally put Bacall under contract. Though Bacall was only 19 years old at the time, the onscreen romance in *To Have and Have Not* with Bogart soon developed into an off-screen affair. For both actors though, the romance was more than the ordinary illicit Hollywood affair. The two fell deeply in love; Bogart wrote, “I want to make a new life with you—I want all the friends I’ve lost to meet you and know you and love you as I do—and live again with you, for the past years have been terribly tough, damn near drove me crazy” (Bacall 118). For Bogart, Bacall was a new life, a chance at a happy and peaceful marriage. The public similarly fell in love with the up-and-coming Bacall, and *To Have and Have Not* was considered another overwhelming success for Bogart. In a memo to Warner Bros. staff head of publicity, Charlie
Einfeld boasted the film “is not only a second *Casablanca* but two and a half
times what *Casablanca* was … This is one of the biggest and hottest attractions
we have ever had. If this sounds like I’m overboard, well I am” (Bacall 119).

Even before the release of *To Have and Have Not*, Hawks began shooting
a second picture with the duo. Based on Raymond Chandler’s pulp novel, *The
Big Sleep* follows detective Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) as he works on a
case for the wealthy General Sternwood (Charles Waldron). Sternwood hires
Marlowe because his usual detective, Shawn Regan, has recently run off and his
youngest daughter, Carmen (Martha Vickers), is being blackmailed by a man
named Geiger. Marlowe agrees to look into the blackmail, but Sternwood’s other
daughter Vivian (Lauren Bacall) suggests the disappearance of Regan may be
important to look into as well. While investigating Geiger’s house, Marlowe finds
Geiger dead and Carmen drugged at the scene. Hours later, Sternwood’s driver,
Owen Taylor, is found dead in the river. As Marlowe begins to investigate
further, more men are killed. Marlowe discovers Joe Brody (Louis Jean Heydt),
has been blackmailing Carmen since Geiger’s death, but within moments, Brody
is shot by Carol Lundgren, Geiger’s driver and lover. Harry Jones, another
involved in the blackmail, is poisoned by Canino—who is the gunman of Eddie
Mars, a local casino owner. Finally, Bogart discovers Vivian’s interest in the case
is due to the fact that Eddie Mars had been blackmailing Vivian for months,
threatening to expose the fact that Carmen killed Regan. In truth, Mars is really
the one responsible for Regan’s murder. Ultimately, Marlowe resolves the
situation by shooting Canino and causing Mars to be shot by his own men. The
film concludes with the promise that Carmen will be sent away for her sins and that Marlowe, who has fallen in love with the elder Sternwood sister, will save Vivian.

Throughout production, *The Big Sleep* was highly censored for its use of violence. In his review for the PCA, Joseph Breen routinely noted that the film remained unsuitable for approval because “some of the killings are also unduly brutal” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 29 September 1944, B.S. files⁷). The end had to be revised extensively upon Breen’s request because it was initially considered to be too violent in many ways. Though Carmen is the murderer in both Chandler’s novel and the original script, censorship dictated that Mars be made the murderer instead. While violence is used in *The Maltese Falcon* by both Spade and his adversaries, in *The Big Sleep* Breen requested that even the villains’ brutality be muted. In an incident reminiscent of Wilmer’s kick to Spade’s face, *The Big Sleep* features a moment in which Marlowe is kicked in the stomach by two thugs. The men are firmly established as treacherous characters in the film and the violence serves no purpose of glamorizing such actions; it merely stands to show the dishonor of those men and to position unregulated violence as a tool of evil men. Yet for *The Big Sleep*, Breen determined that this incident was “unduly brutal and could not be approved.” Though Hawks disregarded Breen’s protests and filmed the sequence any way, several local censors required the action to be deleted in order for the film to play (B.S. files).

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Breen also cited the film for many counts of inappropriate language and overuse of alcohol, but his main point of contention was its use of violence.

Regardless of numerous script revisions, *The Big Sleep* officially ended shooting in January of 1945 and completed postproduction by March 1945. Yet in an effort to release all WWII related films before they became dated by the conclusion of the war and to anticipate a postwar strike (as happened in 1945), the studios stockpiled films. Warner Bros. thus held *The Big Sleep* from general release in favor of releasing war themed films. Rather than showing the next Bogart-Bacall film to the public, the studio only previewed *The Big Sleep* to servicemen overseas in the summer of 1945.

The public, however, would not see this version of the film for over fifty years. Many involved in production were not happy with the preview version—in the year after its completion, situations had changed considerably. Mayo and Bogart, no longer delaying the inevitable, quietly filed for divorce in May 1945. Twelve days after the divorce, Bogart and Bacall married. The ceremony took place on May 21 and lasted only three minutes. “Bogie said it was when he heard the beautiful words of the ceremony and realized what they mean—what they should mean—that he cried” (Bacall 160). The couple that Americans had fallen in love with in Hawks’s *To Have and Have Not* became Hollywood’s latest dream couple and Bogart was transformed in the press from a spectacle of drunken confrontations to a man very much in love with his wife. In press releases attempting to maintain Bogart’s position in film as a heavy, there is:
an allusion to the ‘real’ Bogart (newly married and domesticated…) [which] momentarily falsifies the star’s persona, pulling away the mask in order to authenticate his consummate skill as an actor. Far from being ‘pure’ or exuding from some ineffable gender essence, Bogart’s virility continually needs to be performed in a discursive setting (supplied by the publicity machine as well as the films themselves), and his screen virility is always in danger of being reformed there as a psychotic villain.

(Cohan 80)

But this newly created image of a “real” Bogart, separate from his onscreen virility, caused problems for The Big Sleep, especially considering Bogart was billed opposite his new wife. First, the marriage solidified Bacall’s place as a starlet and fueled audiences’ desire to see more on-screen chemistry between her and Bogart. But in the preview version, The Big Sleep initially did not feature that desired sort of romance. Instead, Bogart’s character spends the duration of the picture suspicious of, and subsequently restrained with, Bacall. Though Marlowe was undoubtedly attracted to Vivian, he was cautiously wary, much like Spade, of the woman’s own self-interest. Marlowe showed Vivian no more warmth than the hardened detective Spade showed Brigid O’Shaughnessy.

In November 1945 Bacall’s agent, Charles K. Feldman, requested that several scenes be reshot and that new scenes be added in order to build up Bacall as Bogart’s romantic interest and to include more of the fast paced innuendo-laden dialogue earlier audiences had so appreciated in To Have and Have Not.
Hawks agreed with Feldman’s suggestion, and in January 1946, the film began retakes. Though some scenes that were to be cut from the preview version are said to have compromised clarity, the new version of the film, which was released August 31, 1946, significantly builds up the Bogart-Bacall romance (see Figure 14). In the 1946 version, Marlowe is transformed from a tough, hard-boiled character who was suspicious of the elder Sternwood daughter, into a softened character, deeply in love with Vivian. Romance was a tactic typical of Bogart’s post-*Casablanca* films, because it allowed the hard-boiled protagonist to “successfully [integrate] his tough-guy masculinity, depicted as volatile and uncontrollable through a crime plot, into the social order by heterosexualizing it through a romance plot” (Cohan 83). Marlowe’s violent actions are tamed and controlled, and thus made socially acceptable by his relationship with Vivian, just as Bogart’s aggressive masculinity is changed by his marriage to Bacall.

III: “My, my, my! Such a lot of guns around town and so few brains.”

Despite criticism that Philip Marlowe “is just as vicious as the criminals whom he apparently outsmarts in the end,” this character’s use of violence is dramatically different from Spade’s because Marlowe’s violence is lessened in congruence with Bogart’s marriage to Bacall and consequentially increases importance of the heterosexual couple (Crowther, “Violence Erupts Again”). Marlowe only uses aggression when provoked. In his analysis of Chandler’s novel, Charles J. Rzepka studies Marlowe through the lens of the knightly virtues
of Camelot, a reading that can be applied to the film as well. Ultimately, much like the version of Marlowe created by Chandler, Bogart’s Marlowe can be identified as a “true” knight because he uses violence with a “strict adherence to the rule of *comitatus,*” while his treacherous enemies manifest key characteristics of the “‘feudal’ form of medieval knighthood, defined by its “ruthless use of violence in the service of the family of the liege lord” (Rzepka 704). These contrasting characters propagate a hegemonic masculinity much different from that propagated by *The Maltese Falcon,* and this change mimics the change in Bogart’s star persona.

Marlowe’s softened use of violence can be seen through the murders of Lash Canino and Eddie Mars. Though Marlowe plays a central role in both situations, each is justified as violence necessary to restore order to the Sternwood household, protecting Vivian and the heterosexual couple. Marlowe is single-handedly responsible for the murder of Canino. As Marlowe unexpectedly escapes from captivity in Eddie Mars’s house, Canino attempts to use deadly force to stop him. Marlowe and the hired gunman each fire several rounds at each other, but Marlowe ends the exchange by firing three bullets directly into Canino’s chest—killing him instantaneously. This is Marlowe’s most violent act throughout the film yet the narrative separates the killing from the brutality of Spade’s excessive blows by justifying this as necessary and heroic.

When attempting to explain what differentiates this act from other situations in which the hero could have committed murder but refrained, one could readily make the argument that Marlowe’s use of deadly force is inherently
justified by the shots fired at him. In fact, when the scene was under review by the PCA, Breen cautioned, “as written, this scene of Marlowe killing Canino, is suggestive of the slaughter of an un-armed man. It should be handled so as to be definitively self-defense” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 29 September 1944, B.S. Files). But while framing the killing as self-defense may have been justification enough for the film to be approved, in order to preserve Marlowe’s knightly status further justification is required. Out of self-defense, Marlowe could have conceivably disabled the villain without killing him. Instead, Marlowe’s murder of Canino is justified in a monologue given just six minutes earlier in which he explains to Eddie Mars’s wife how he knew where to find her:

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.

In vocalizing his guilt over the murder of a harmless and likable Jones, Marlowe establishes the need for justice in response to Canino’s crime (see Figure 15). Because of this dialogue, when Marlowe does murder Canino, it is not blind rage or uncontrolled aggression; instead it is heroism akin to medieval ideals of true knighthood, which demand “fealty to lord and lady with devotion to God. The ‘true knight’… tries to satisfy God’s demands to do justice” (Rzepka 704). Harry is a physically small man, seen as greatly inferior to Marlowe. The murder of
Canino is not mere violence, but instead an attempt to stand up for those who could not defend themselves. Marlowe’s actions remain true to the demands of his role as the heroic male and demonstrate his commitment to justice, in light of his feelings of guilt over Jones’s death and of the sadism displayed by Canino as he forces the honorable Jones to drink the poison.

Marlowe’s adherence to the use of only justified violence is further made apparent through the murder of Eddie Mars. Marlowe does not physically pull the trigger that causes Mars’s death but allows the gangster’s own men to commit the murder. In the final scene of the film, Marlowe confronts Mars in Geiger’s empty house and proves Carmen’s innocence in the murder of Shawn Regan. After establishing Mars as Regan’s murderer, Marlowe then demands justice. He fires three shots at Mars, but deliberately misses him each time, knowing that the sound of shots fired will cause the men Mars has waiting outside to shoot the first man who walks out of Geiger’s front door. As each shot comes threateningly closer to penetrating his body, Mars is forced to make a desperate attempt for the door in the hopes that his men will recognize him and hold their fire. His cries for mercy are unsuccessful, however, and Mars quickly dies out of view of the camera in a spray of undiscerning bullets that symbolically puncture the door, which he had closed behind him; the bullets stop and Mars’s lifeless body then falls back into the room where Marlowe, the true hero, remains physically and, possibly, morally safe.

Though Marlowe undoubtedly contributes to Mars’s execution, if he is to remain a true knight, and maintain his romantic image, his indirect involvement
with the crime prohibits him from physically committing the act (see Figure 16).

In the confrontation before Mars’s death, Marlowe verbally establishes a need for justice by citing Mars as Regan’s murderer who profited from his crimes by preying on the Sternwoods’ weaknesses. Furthermore, when forcing Mars out the door with the threat of gunshots, Marlowe angrily references Canino’s murder of Jones, establishing his personal need for justice in the situation at hand. However, as Mars is not directly responsible for the murder of Jones and Marlowe cannot be given full responsibility of bringing the man to justice (as he frequently reminds Vivian, he was not hired to find out who killed Shawn Regan), Marlowe cannot murder Mars and maintain his status as the male heroic archetype. His actions would be considered passion fueled revenge instead of much needed justice, the honor code of comitatus, and the limitations imposed by the Production Code: “Revenge in modern times shall not be justified” (“The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930”). The true hero “must overcome temptations to use violence unjustly (as often happens with the ‘feudal’ knight) or to give in to sexual temptation (as sometimes happens with the ‘courtly’ knight)” (Rzepka 704). Knowing this, Marlowe neither commits the murder, nor prevents it from coming to pass. In this situation Marlowe must demonstrate the restraint of a true hero (and thus comply with the restrictions of the production code) and not allow himself to murder Mars out of anger or revenge. Instead, Marlowe must let Mars’s own men commit the deed in order to preserve his integrity and uphold the industry’s “moral” standards of acceptable heroic violence.
Sometime during the earliest stages of the novel’s adaptation, Marlowe’s involvement in the final acts of justice against Carmen was similarly tamed by his surrender of justice to an outside force. In a letter to publisher Jamie Hamilton, Chandler describes the initial idea for the ending to the film, which had been discussed as a possibility in the preproduction stages by Chandler and Hawks. Chandler’s proposed ending is reminiscent of what the shooting script would later display in that the final moments are spent with Carmen and Marlowe in Geiger’s empty apartment. The interaction is tense and Carmen has just been revealed to be the murderer of Shawn Regan. Further straining the outcome of their conversation, Eddie Mars waits outside the house with the hope of killing Marlowe as he exits. Marlowe is aware of this fact, yet Carmen is not. Thus, when the girl attempts to escape, Marlowe is faced with a difficult moral decision.

“[Marlowe] didn’t feel like playing God or saving his skin by letting Carmen leave. Neither did he feel like playing Sir Philip Sydney to save a worthless life. So he put it up to God by tossing a coin… If the coin came down heads, he would let the girl go. He tossed it and it came down heads” (Chandler, The Raymond Chandler Papers 68). Regardless of the fate’s decision, when Carmen again attempts to leave, Marlowe gives in to his guilt and tries to stop her. Unfortunately for Carmen, instead of paying attention to his warning, she draws a gun on her savior and ignorantly enters the spray of bullets anyway.

This ending allows Marlowe to remain completely guiltless Carmen Sternwood’s death. Not only does another man pull the trigger, but Marlowe does his best to save her from this fate. The blame may be placed on Mars, who pulls
the trigger, on God, who chooses heads, or on Carmen, who ignores Marlowe’s help. “He wanted that decision made by the authority who allowed all this mess to happen” (Chandler, *The Raymond Chandler Papers* 68). First, he vows to leave the morally questionable decision up to God and then disregards fate’s harsh decision in favor of mercy. No matter Carmen’s transgressions, the true knight does his best to protect her life. Thus Carmen’s death can only be attributed to her own wickedness and Marlowe’s conscience may remain completely clean.

Marlowe’s control over his aggression and dedication to honor does not mean he is completely unable to use violence, for the true knight must also be able to skillfully use violence when necessary. In the film, when Bogart’s character does need to commit an aggressive act, it is neither habitual nor without reason. By the ethical standards of the Hollywood Production Code, the violence Marlowe is able to commit is limited to actions that can ultimately be attributed to his desire to uphold justice. “The presentation of crimes against the law is often necessary for the carrying out of the plot. But the presentation must not throw sympathy with the crime as against the law nor with the criminal as against those who punish him (“The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930”). These limits can most readily be attributed to his status as a heroic figure throughout the film. Marlowe’s use of violence is reminiscent of Spade’s in that it is bound by a similar heroic code of honor, yet the two differ in the softening of Marlowe’s general demeanor. As a consequence, no matter how violent Marlowe’s actions may seem, by adhering to the code of comitatus and the Production code, for 1946
In showing Marlowe to be a man who uses violence sparingly and only for good, the film contrasts him with immoral men, who use violence in brutal excess. When Marlowe is attacked in an alleyway by two of Eddie Mars’s men as a rather painful message to stop his investigation, he does not fight back. The men restrain Marlowe while he is punched repeatedly. They then throw him to the ground and viciously kick him, yet throughout this beating Marlowe makes no attempts to return blows. Canino and his fellow villainous thug are easily distinguished from Marlowe by their brutal use of force, even when he is unwilling to fight back. This altercation allows for a clear creation of a dichotomy of aggressive masculine types, which are contingent upon their use of violence. Marlowe represents the honorable principles of justice and control, while Canino demonstrates a reckless and feudal use of violence, condemned in the narrative through its use by the enemy. This tactic is reminiscent of the use of violence in WWII combat films, which created a “dichotomized way of seeing linked images Americans devised of the enemy with those they devised of themselves. If the enemy was treacherous, cowardly, and heartless, Americans were fair, courageous, and caring” (Roeder 88). In *The Big Sleep*, the use of excessive force by Canino lessens the impact of Marlowe’s later use of justified violence. Though upon initial review of the script the scene was chastised (“the section in scene 132 of Marlowe being kicked in the stomach, etc., is unduly brutal and could not be approved”), the incident, which does appear in the final
film, serves to further substantiate the belief that a ruthless use of violence, like its use by Canino, is a tool of only immoral men, and therefore upholds the Production Code Administration’s system of ethics (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 29 September 1944, B.S. Files).

IV: Marlowe: “What’s wrong with you?”

Vivian: “Nothing you can’t fix.”

With growing national anxieties concerning shifting gender roles, film noir attempts to solve this uncertainty by narratively punishing transgressive women. In The Big Sleep, women display their violent actions through sexuality, as result of increased censorship of violence, and in turn, punishment is required for both. Of the three most prominent female characters, Carmen is most readily identifiable as the femme fatale of The Big Sleep. Her uninhibited use of sexuality and aggression enables her to effortlessly control the men around her and defy the boundaries set for her by society. In Raymond Chandler’s novel, Carmen is literally a threat to patriarchy by viciously murdering men who disapprove of her sexual promiscuity. In the novel, Marlowe and Carmen retreat

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8 Ironically, much of the aggression in the film can be attributed to the script’s female writer, Leigh Brackett. Hawks had brought Brackett onto the script because he was impressed with the gritty, hard-boiled quality of her first novel and consequently was “somewhat shaken when he discovered that it was Miss and not Mister Bracket” (McCarthy 379). Similarly, Bogart complained that having a woman writer was causing the dialogue and interaction to be too soft, but as she pointed out, Faulkner wrote the moments Bogart contested. After this incident, “Bogart went straight to Bracket, whom he nicknamed Butch, whenever he wanted any of his dialogue toughened up” (McCarthy 387).
to a secluded area of the woods under the pretense that he will be teaching her how to shoot. Almost as soon as the gun is placed in Carmen’s hand she fires five chambers directly at Marlowe. “The gun pointed at [his] chest. Her hand seemed to be quite steady. The hissing sound grew louder and her face had the scraped bone look. Aged, deteriorated, become animal, and not a nice animal” (Chandler, *The Big Sleep* 203). After having previously murdered Shawn Regan for rejecting her sexual advances, Carmen attempts to kill Marlowe for the same reasons. Yet Marlowe remains unscathed. Carmen realizes the rounds were blanks and as her rage grows, the murderess begins to uncontrollably shake and is disarmed by an epileptic fit. Marlowe later returns Carmen’s unconscious body to her sister upon the condition that Vivian agrees to send Carmen away permanently. He does not require her to be surrendered to the police, but she must be put somewhere that she will be watched at all times. Carmen, like many spider women before her, uses a potent combination of violence and sexuality in order to break out of the role cast for her as woman. The sadistic and animalistic pleasure she derives from this serves to remind readers that her defiance is an act of perversion. The most notable difference between this and all possible endings of Hawks’s film is that in the original text, the killer is not punished with death. Because of this, the novel’s conclusion is by far the tamest of the endings the story received in its many incarnations when examining its literal violence. The murderer, be it man or woman, can be justifiably punished by being sent away and watched at all times (although not necessarily by the police). So long as Carmen is under some sort of supervision, all is well.
In the shooting script and the completed film, the endings take a darker turn and detail Marlowe taking more severe actions against the killer—actions more akin to those the war obligated men to take in combat films. In the shooting script for *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe and Carmen find themselves in Geiger’s bungalow. As the two stand off, Eddie Mars waits outside, hoping to shoot Marlowe when he leaves through the front door. Marlowe returns the gun he had taken from Carmen earlier. Unbeknownst to Carmen, the barrel is filled with blanks—Marlowe is testing the extent of her corruption. Without a second thought, “she fires point blank as Marlowe takes a step toward her, continues to fire, four shots in all. Then she waits until he has almost reached her and thrusts the pistol almost into his face. He catches her wrist just before she fires, pushes her hand aside as the shot goes off” (Faulkner, Brackett, and Furthman 321). Carmen then begins to leave. Marlowe, who is described as “not looking at her,” hands her his coat and hat and says, “Better take these Carmen, it’s raining” (Faulkner, Brackett, and Furthman 323). He then knowingly snaps off the outer light when she steps outside the house so as to further cloak her identity in darkness. Believing the shadowy figure to be Marlowe, Mars shoots and kills Carmen without hesitation.

Yet because of the strict self-regulation of Hollywood, in the filmed action, Carmen does not actually kill anyone. In the original script submitted to the PCA, Carmen was every bit as violent as she is shown to be in the book, but the Breen office ultimately found such terrible actions committed by a woman far too transgressive and, accordingly, unsuitable for depiction on the screen. Upon
reviewing the first unfinished copy of the shooting script, Breen responded with several notes regarding necessary changes: “the first of these has to do with the characterization of the girl Carmen. We cannot help but feel that there has been an attempt to suggest certain phases of depravity in connection with this girl which, if our guess is correct, could not be approved under the Code” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 29 September 1944, B.S. Files). It is precisely this self-regulation that produces complicated representations of violence with regards to women in the film. As Kuhn explains with regards to sexuality, “the trouble, the disturbance, at the heart of The Big Sleep is its symptomatic articulation of the threat posed to the law of patriarchy by the feminine” (Kuhn 95). Similarly, Carmen’s violent actions produce symptomatic articulations of this through her sexuality.

The PCA also rejected the script’s ending for its cruel enactment of Carmen’s slaughter. The ending suggested by Chandler was deemed wholly unsuitable for the screen and would need to be extensively rewritten if the film were ever to appear in American cinemas. On several occasions, Breen expressed his concerns regarding the ending in letters to J. L. Warner: “Furthermore, Marlowe’s action on pages 166 and 167, of dressing Carmen in his clothes, and then sending her out to be shot down by Mars, amounts to a cold-blooded murder which is justified. This also could not be approved” (Joseph I. Breen to Jack L. Warner, 29 September 1944, B.S. files). After several phone calls from Breen emphasizing the importance of this matter, Hawks finally agreed that “he [would] change the action on page 166 to get away from the present suggestion that
Marlowe deliberately sends Carmen out to her death” (Warner Brothers Memorandum, 5 October 1944, B.S. files). Based on Breen’s written assessment of the script, it would seem that the action of “a cold-blooded murder which is justified” by the hero is inappropriately vicious enough onscreen behavior to be disallowed by the PCA. The final ending to the 1946 film, however, challenges this assumption and complicates the problem of violence in the scene by contributing the scene’s transgression not to the action but to Carmen’s gender.

In the final standoff between Marlowe and Shawn Regan’s killer, Carmen is noticeably absent. As detailed previously, the clash in Geiger’s bungalow is instead between Marlowe and Mars, the revised killer of Shawn Regan. Marlowe shoots threateningly at Eddie Mars, until Mars has no choice but to exit the front door of Geiger’s to be killed by his own firing squad. Apart from the victim of the gunfire, the action written for Carmen and Marlowe in the shooting script is fairly similar to the action portrayed in the final film. The only significant difference between the two scenes is that while Marlowe uses trickery to bring about Carmen’s death, he uses brute force to bring about Mars’s. Nonetheless, in either situation, Marlowe’s actions can readily be described as “a cold-blooded murder which is justified.”

Because Mars is murdered in the same manner that Carmen is murdered in the original script, it cannot be concluded that the savagery of the action alone was objectionable. While the first version is more underhanded in nature, it is arguably less brutal because “it was quick. She didn’t even know, probably” (Faulkner, Brackett, and Furthman 325). Rather, it was the brutality of the action
against a woman that elicited such disapproval. Violence against women in cinema is an ongoing point of contention. Whether governed by the Hays Code or rated by the present-day Motion Picture Association of America, “violence in scenes of women being tortured or beaten has a particularly disturbing quality that is not apparent in those scenes where men are the victims. This is because the violence is sexually charged.” It expresses a sexual rage or contempt for the woman as victim that has no counterpart in scenes with male victims” (Prince 181). Despite the threat Carmen’s character poses toward patriarchy, it is the institution of patriarchy that prevents her onscreen murder. “Because the sexualized rage adds an extra component to the violence, it amplifies its ugliness and intensity, and this is what makes those scenes feel so uniquely different from male-on-male violence” (Prince 181). This union of violence and sexuality in violence against women is so ingrained that it seems almost natural that Carmen’s sexual promiscuity would then be implicitly fused with her character’s violence.

After Breen’s censorship Carmen’s murderous aggression remains present in the film through her sexuality. In an adaptation of Freud’s theory of sublimation, feminist film theorist Mary Ann Doane explains: “although Freud equates sublimation with desexualization, it is still the case that sublimation is subtended by sexuality: ‘the energy for the work of thought itself must be supplied from sublimated erotic sources.’ But while the source or origin of sublimation is sexuality, sublimation is sublimation by virtue of a radical

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9 A 1984 study conducted by Dr. Neil Malamuth, of the University of California at Los Angeles, shows that nearly a third of all men are sexually aroused by depictions in cinema of violence against women, regardless of whether or not the violence itself is sexual.
disjunction between the two, a gap which is unbridgeable” (Doane 254). In the case of *The Big Sleep’s* Carmen, this sublimation is reversed. The transgressive action of murder is, by sublimation, displaced onto her sexuality. This sublimation rather overtly reveals itself when one examines the motivation regarding the picture’s many deaths. In the start of the film, Owen Taylor kills Arthur Gwen Geiger, the film’s first victim, because he is intensely in love with Carmen. This sets off a chain of deaths: Owen Taylor, Joe Brody, Harry Jones, Lash Canino, and Eddie Mars. Even without committing the physical act of murder, it is Carmen’s sexuality, like Brigid O’Shaughnessy’s in *The Maltese Falcon*, that is the catalyst causing the deaths of each subsequent victim. Carmen’s sexuality renders her culpable for murder.

In order to resolve anxiety surrounding the femme fatale, Carmen must be punished for her transgression. As is common in film noir, “the ideological operation of the myth (the absolute necessity of controlling the strong sexual woman) is thus achieved by first demonstrating her dangerous power and its frightening results, then destroying it” (Place 56). In the novel, Carmen is guilty of the crimes of promiscuity and murder. In the film, Carmen is somehow implicitly guilty of both. “The text’s response is to recuperate pleasure and reassurance through closure, but at the same time to hint at obsession and violence where closure threatens to fail” (Kuhn 95). Carmen’s resolution is satisfying and yet distinctly unsatisfying. In the novel, after affirming Carmen’s guilt, Marlowe returns her to Vivian with the urgent instruction: “You’ll take her away … And do that awfully damn quickly … Get her out of here and see that she’s watched every
minute. Promise?” (Chandler, *The Big Sleep* 213). Similarly, in the film, as Marlowe delivers his concluding speech, he instructs Vivian, “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.” Despite the fact that Carmen has not committed any murder, she is punished in the same manner as in the original text. In doing so, the film symbolically punishes the transgressive female qualities of sexuality and aggression and helps to create a firm reestablishment of the ideals of patriarchy.

What is further unsettling about the females of *The Big Sleep* is the film’s abundance of women who display a threat to patriarchy. Most often, much like Brigid in *The Maltese Falcon*, the femme fatale is a solitary figure meant to convey the dangers of social deviation. Carmen, however, is not alone in her debauchery. Ordinarily, film noir creates a picture of one deviant woman inhabiting a violent world created for men; *The Big Sleep* depicts a world with many female characters, the majority of whom are violent beings who can, rather successfully, operate on the same dangerous plane as men. However, this increase in female characters in *The Big Sleep*, and simultaneous increase in the presence of dangerous women there as well, furthers the film’s support of patriarchal ideology. The many transgressive women are troubling because while Brigid is an exceptional threat in a world of less treacherous women, like Iva and

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10 Some attribute an increase in important female characters in the late 1940s to the war’s effect on Hollywood, which like the dramatic increase of women in many other industries, saw more women involved in the production side of the film industry than ever before, as well as an increased proportion of women moviegoers as men were sent overseas.
Efie, Carmen, Agnes, and Vivian prove the world of *The Big Sleep* to be one of many threatening women. The film must then seek to eliminate this threat by punishing the three women for their transgressions.

While *The Maltese Falcon* creates a hierarchy of masculinities, *The Big Sleep* creates a hierarchy of femininities within the text. This shift in focus corresponds with the prominence of the heterosexual couple for the film and further signals a shift away from the importance of the homosocial structuring of masculinity seen in *The Maltese Falcon*. The women’s aggression, simultaneously violent and sexual, is punished, enabling an ideologically appropriate femininity to be prescribed. With this shift in focus, censorship and the Hollywood couple are not merely limiting *The Big Sleep* text, but instead, they are producing it as well.

As in *The Maltese Falcon*, violence against women is rather consistently used in cinema as a method of “[reinforcing] a structural hierarchy where women (sex), and individuals with feminine characteristics (gender) are left out or physically placed in positions of subordination by male or masculine characters who frequently resort to violent means” (Eschholz and Bufkin 660). Often films establish a gendered hierarchy through portrayals of domestic abuse, sexual violence, or unprovoked menace. In *The Big Sleep*, to be fair, there is but one scene of violence in which women receive blows from men and this attack only occurs in response to acts of female aggression. Violence against women is not used with undue brutality. Though it may be a shock that the hero, Marlowe,
delivers the first blow to a woman, rather than the antagonists of film, he does so only after being provoked by the armed women.

Midway through the picture, Marlowe follows Vivian to Joe Brody’s apartment, where he catches her paying off her blackmailers, Brody and Agnes (Geiger’s assistant in his illegal pornography ring; a job which associates her with promiscuity, thus positioning her outside the realm of normative femininity), despite prior advice not to do so. When Marlowe confronts the three, Brody draws a gun. Marlowe is unthreatened by this presentation of a weapon, though, for Brody does not appear to be serious about using it. His hold on the gun remains relaxed and the conversation continues regularly, until the door buzzer suddenly interrupts. Brody takes his aim more carefully and tensely grips it as he hands a second pistol to Agnes. She uses this in order to continue to hold Marlowe and Vivian at gunpoint. Once this is done, Brody slips his weapon into his pocket before cautiously answering the buzzer. With the door barely open a crack, Carmen, shrouded in a long black dress with black gloves and a similarly black hood, forces her way into the room with her own pistol pointed directly into Brody’s unguarded chest. Marlowe takes advantage of this distraction and wrestles the second gun from Agnes’s hand. She desperately tries to regain control of the weapon, but Marlowe, in a display of superior force, effortlessly shoves her away. Simultaneously, Brody trips Carmen, causing her gun to fall to the floor. Though she drops to her knees and desperately crawls across the floor in an attempt to rescue her pistol, Marlowe retrieves the weapon before she can—
leaving Marlowe with a gun in each hand and the women who had brought the weapons with none.

This scene is the one scene in the film in which a woman is harmed in any way. Though the action occurs superficially as a matter of self-defense, it occurs because of an overwhelming need for the narrative to restore order to a patriarchal world. The only armed beings in the room are women. Before answering the door, Brody had placed his gun in his pocket. It is up to the hero of the film, Marlowe, to restore order and disarm the women. In the climax of the scene, which is comprised of three women and two men, neither man possesses a weapon. Instead, Carmen and Agnes hold the two men at gunpoint while Vivian stands by, idle. The men are outnumbered and outgunned. The scene articulates masculine anxiety towards women threatening masculine dominance by literally threatening the safety of Marlowe and Brody. By physically disarming the pair, the men are also revoking the women’s agency and the female right to break free from patriarchy.

Additionally, once the women are disarmed, order is restored to the frame by visually placing the women in an inferior position. Carmen is forced to the ground by Brody. The two men then stand over her cowering figure, looking literally and figuratively down upon her. In a gesture of submission, Carmen turns her head up towards the superior figures and waits until Marlowe grants her permission to rise. He tersely remarks, “Get up Angel, you look like a Pekingese,” further lowering her status with a cruel comparison (see Figure 17).
He then turns to Agnes and similarly asserts his dominance with the command, “Sit down, sugar.”

Agnes obeys and quietly sits on a low coffee table, where she remains in a position of subservience for the duration of the scene (see Figure 18). Vivian (as instructed by Marlowe) takes Carmen home, and calm conversation continues once more between Marlowe and Brody. Throughout the course of this dialogue, Agnes massages her wrists in pain, reminiscing upon her scuffle with Marlowe. Each time she speaks in an effort to participate in the conversation, she is either immediately interrupted or blatantly ignored. Her interjections mainly serve to vocalize her disdain for her currently enforced position, but she makes no physical movements to regain control. She merely continues to massage her hurt wrists. Noticing the tender movement, Marlowe finally acknowledges her and asks, “Did I hurt you much sugar?” Agnes responds with a morose look and an even more bitter remark, “You and every other man I’ve ever met.” Marlowe returns to conversing with Brody before she responds, and this commentary is, of course, ignored. Later in the film, Agnes once more attempts to subvert male dominance and fails, causing the death of her fiancé. Ultimately, Agnes is forced to leave town or risk similar slaughter at the hands of one of Eddie Mars’s men as punishment for challenging patriarchy and facilitating female promiscuity.

Vivian too, is punished for her transgression, although she is punished differently than the other women in the film. Because of Bogart’s romantic relationship with Bacall, the film emphasizes the importance of the heterosexual couple over Marlowe’s homosocial relations with men, unlike in *The Maltese*
*Falcon.* Bogart frequently shows interest in women throughout the film and they frequently show interest in him, but it is his relationship with Bacall stands out above all the rest. This relationship not only upholds Bogart’s new star persona as a romantic hero but also prescribes expected gender roles by transforming Vivian from the transgressive female to one who maintains a normative femininity. “In each film the woman is singled out, made simultaneously unique and yet the very embodiment of a universal axiom of femininity. This necessitates a process whereby the protagonist is clearly differentiated from other women” (Doane 77-78). In *The Big Sleep,* this woman is Vivian, the romantic interest for Marlowe and the only one of the three vixens with a genuine potential for good. It is a typical convention of film noir to offset the spider women with the angelic sister. “The opposite female archetype is also found in film noir: woman as redeemer. She offers the possibility of integration of the alienated, lost man into the stable world of secure values, roles and identities. She gives love, understanding (or at least forgiveness), asks very little in return (just that he come back to her)” (Place 60). Vivian’s moral ambiguity, however, renders her unfit to be cast as Marlowe’s redeemer. Vivian is a divorcée, with a predilection for gambling, and an unrelenting will to protect her sexually deviant sister.

Instead of protecting Marlowe, the hero, Vivian can be seen as the angellike protector of Carmen. She is literally the spider woman’s angelic sister. Throughout the film it is shown that she is willing to go to great lengths to protect, and eventually redeem, her deviant sister. Vivian’s potential for good can be seen through her own participation in violence. While Carmen and Agnes both
use guns in order to gain the physical advantage over the masculine figures of control, Vivian does not. Instead, Vivian slaps or at least attempts to slap for more honorable reasons. After delivering Carmen to her sister in a drug-induced slumber, Marlowe questions Vivian, pressing her for more information. He casually takes the opportunity to ask about Carmen’s involvement in the disappearance of Shawn Regan. Vivian’s face, which had been playful and calm before, suddenly drops. She is overwhelmed with a look of concern. As quickly as her confidence faded, Vivian masks her fear once more with a coy smile and asks, “What did she tell you?” Unimpressed by her façade, Marlowe smugly retorts, “Not half as much as you just did.” With this, Vivian once again lets her emotions overcome her control and flinches as if preparing to slap Marlowe for implicitly questioning her sister’s innocence, but Marlowe stops her before she can fully raise her palm (see Figure 19).

Vivian’s sole demonstration of aggression is not to further her own interests, but to protect another; she, like Marlowe, is faithful to the knightly ideals of justice and loyalty. The two are thus coupled in the film, corresponding with Bogart and Bacall’s Hollywood romance. *The Big Sleep* opens with the silhouettes of a man and a woman smoking and closes with a shot of their two cigarettes resting next to each other, coupled (see Figure 20). But in order for the narrative to fully construct this heterosexual couple, Vivian must first renounce her greatest transgression against patriarchy—her loyalty to her sister. As the film comes to a close and Marlowe explains to Vivian the consequences her sister now faces, Vivian reminds him of her own transgression. She points out,
“You’ve forgotten one thing—me.” Marlowe asks in response, “What’s wrong with you?” She pauses for a moment and then replies, “Nothing you can’t fix.” In order to fully be redeemed, Vivian’s patriarchal rebellion must be punished in the narrative by forcing her to relinquish to Marlowe her devilish sister and to give up her role as a sibling protector. Vivian and Carmen must be separated for the elder sister to truly survive. In demanding that Carmen be sent away somewhere where she can receive help, Marlowe creates an opportunity for Vivian to be redeemed. Now separated from her sister, it is up Marlowe to “fix” Vivian and restore her back to her proper role as wife.11

11 In 1978, director Michael Winner remade The Big Sleep. Most notably, the film is a more faithful companion to Chandler’s novel in terms of its adaptation of the plot. Much like the first film, however, its attitude toward violence is a reflection of the time in which it was created, and it is in this reflection that the film strays from the text. For ambivalent audiences of the 1940s, hard-boiled films were gritty not because of the simple presence of violence but because of their trait characteristic of moral ambiguity. Cinematically, the late 1970s and early 1980s were a time characterized by “knee-jerk coarseness and juvenile vulgarity divorced from ideological intent” (Elsaesser, Horwath, and King 109). The popularity of “slasher” films increased dramatically, and the demands of the so-called exploitation generation ensured that nudity and graphic violence ran rampant in what would be otherwise mundane films. And to this, Winner’s remake of The Big Sleep proves to be no exception. The excessive violence marks a change from the first film, but instead of giving the remake a darker tone, it serves to remind the audience of its lack of purpose. “The decade’s legacy is equally contradictory: partial nudity, coarse language and brutal violence are now commonplace in mainstream movies, but truly dissident themes, thorny characters and ambiguous narratives are not” (Elsaesser, Horwath, and King 109). The characters of the film are either so clearly on the side of good or clearly on the side of evil that the film has become completely devoid of the satisfaction that arises out of Marlowe’s interaction with those of lower moral caliber. By making the morality of these characters so explicitly clear, Winner ensures that the morality of the violent actions committed by these characters is clear and that neither Marlowe, nor the audience struggles to fight the temptation of evil at any point in the film.
Conclusion

When *The Maltese Falcon* was released in 1941, it was met with extensive praise. *New York Times* film reviewer Bosley Crowther called the film “a combination of American ruggedness with the suavity of the English crime school—a blend of mind and muscle—plus a slight touch of pathos” (“The Maltese Falcon”). Crowther praised the film because of Bogart’s rough and aggressive portrayal of “a shrewd, tough detective with a mind that cuts like a blade, a temperament that sometimes betrays him” (“The Maltese Falcon”). Though the picture did not immediately begin the trend of film noir, its influence on the genre is undeniable—the film’s success in large part allowed for the success of the genre.

By 1946, however, immediately after the close of the WWII, the release of *The Big Sleep* met a substantially different critical response. Crowther states: “the whole thing comes off a poisonous picture” particularly because he disapproves of the fact that “everyone in the story, except the old father, seem to carry guns, which they use at one time or another with a great deal of flourish and éclat. And fists are frequently unlimbered, just to vary the violence,” (“The Big Sleep”). Furthermore, Crowther claims Bogart’s character “is just as vicious as the criminals whom he apparently outsmarts in the end” (“The Big Sleep”). Yet Marlowe’s heterosexualization and knightly code of honor bridle him, leaving him significantly less aggressive than his 1941 counterpart. Crowther’s negative
description of Marlowe would better fit Spade. Crowther’s disdain for the violence of the picture, despite its tamer development of violence than *The Maltese Falcon*, can perhaps then be attributed to the text’s sublimation of violence.

*The Maltese Falcon*, which was more greatly censored for sexuality, outwardly portrays violence and must symbolically portray sexuality. Homosocial violence between Bogart and the three male villains creates a hierarchy of masculinities which places Spade’s heteronormativity at the forefront and condemns the masculine other—in this case defined by homosexuality and sadistic, brutal aggression. Bogart’s past typecasting as a gangster and the film’s suppression of the heterosexual couple create an appropriate space for this masculine aggression. The homosocial overshadows the heterosexual, and the dangerous woman is easily destroyed in the end. The violence Spade displays in response to the femme fatale punishes Brigid for her aggression and thus enables the proliferation of patriarchy. In each case, violence remains a part of the film’s method of defining normative sexualities.

For *The Big Sleep*, the romanticized Bogart and stricter censorship of violence do not simply remove aggression from the film, but instead enable its sublimation onto morally ambiguous sexualities, which the film attempts to rectify through the creation of a heterosexual couple. Institutional constraints of *The Big Sleep*, however, impose the heterosexual couple onto the detective, causing Marlowe to be transformed into a knightly hero, unlike the more ambiguous Spade. These constraints also cause the sublimation of Carmen’s
violence onto her sexuality—though Carmen has done nothing wrong, she becomes implicitly guilty. These symptomatic representations of violence show throughout the film, leaving viewers, Crowther included, with the impression of that which was actually removed to suit PCA standards.

Ultimately, Bogart could not have made *The Maltese Falcon* in 1946, nor could he have made *The Big Sleep* in 1941. The context of his star persona and previous roles weigh heavily on his performance in each, thus enhancing both roles but limiting them as well. In 1941, Bogart’s marriage to Mayo and his gangster reputation were such that he could not have successfully played the romantic hero in *The Big Sleep*; while in 1946, Bogart’s marriage to Bacall and his post-*Casablanca* success would have sabotaged his hard-hearted aggression in *The Maltese Falcon*. Moreover, each would have been a very different picture had it been subjected to the censorship of the other’s time. Despite, or rather because of, attempts to remove transgressive themes from *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*, each bears the mark of its industrial contexts. For both films, these constraints are limiting and yet enhancing. For both, symptomatic representations of that which was removed define their greatness.
Figure 1. Ruth Wonderly covering herself after being forcibly strip-searched.

Figure 2. Valerie Purvis threatening, and in doing so flirting with, Shane.
Figure 3. The 1931 poster for *The Maltese Falcon* makes use of Bogart’s growing fan base from his violent roles in gangster films.
Figure 4. Spade relentlessly forcing Brigid to confess.

Figure 5. The physical domination of Spade (left) over Cairo further signals the domination of Spade’s heterosexuality over Cairo’s homosexuality.
Figure 6. Cairo’s (left) reliance on a pistol for power.

Figure 7. Gutman (left) and Wilmer (right) watch unaffected as Spade falls incapacitated to the floor.
Figure 8. Brigid hides behind her “school girl act.”

Figure 9. Brigid poses for Spade, hoping to win him over with the power of her body.
Figure 10. Archer (right) immediately enchanted by Brigid’s good looks, while Spade remains skeptical.

Figure 11. Brigid slaps Cairo (right), while Spade watches, waiting to become involved.
Figure 12. Spade (center) presides over Brigid and Cairo’s interaction.

Figure 13. Bacall on the 1943 cover that so enchanted Hawks and his wife.
Figure 14. 1946 Poster for *The Big Sleep* emphasizing the Bogart-Bacall romance
Figure 15. Canino (right) sadistically poisons Jones as Marlowe watches out of frame.

Figure 16. Mars falls back into Geiger’s house after being shot repeatedly by his own men.
Figure 17. Carmen (right) rendered physically inferior to the Marlowe (left) and Brody.

Figure 18. Agnes similarly rendered physically inferior to Marlowe (right) and Brody.
Figure 19. Vivian tries to slap Marlowe at the threat of incriminating her sister.

Figure 20. Bogart and Bacall’s cigarette’s coupled.
Works Cited


Based on Annette Kuhn’s theory that censorship does not merely repress a text but produces one as well, this thesis examines the ways in which *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *The Big Sleep* (1946) bear the mark of their industrial and cultural contexts. The PCA’s censorship of violence in *The Big Sleep* is ultimately productive. Likewise, Humphrey Bogart’s image as a film noir hero has the same kind of productive effect due to the restraints of his romantic star image, while *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), which established film noir as a genre and Bogart as the noir male hero, illustrates the historical process by which censorship produces meaning.

Both films are popular contributions to the genre of film noir, which is characterized by a dark cinematic style, moral ambiguity, and a solitary male hero, whose principles are often challenged by a seductive and dangerous woman, known as the femme fatale (or deadly woman). *The Maltese Falcon* is often identified as the founding film of the genre, thus making it an ideal point of comparison for *The Big Sleep*. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Humphrey Bogart plays an aggressive private detective searching to find who killed his partner while the two were investigating a case for a beautiful woman named Brigid O’Shaughnessy. In the course of his investigation, Spade is challenged by four dangerous and selfish villains—the homosexual Cairo, the sadistic Gutman and Cook, and the deadly
Brigid O’Shaughnessy. In the end, Spade discovers Brigid murdered his partner and, despite her attempts to seduce him, surrenders her to the police.

*The Maltese Falcon* stars Humphrey Bogart in the early years of his film career. Until *The Maltese Falcon*, Bogart was known purely for his onscreen roles as a gangster and his off-screen battles with his alcoholic wife. Furthermore, the film was created when Hollywood’s self-censorship board, the Production Code Administration, was highly concerned with regulating onscreen depictions of sexuality. Because of this, the film was greatly censored throughout production for open displays of sexuality between Spade and Brigid. Each of these constraints contributes greatly to the final text of the film. Focus remains not on the heterosexual couple of Spade and Brigid, but instead on the violent interactions that occur homosocially between the films’ numerous men. These violent interactions create a hierarchy of masculinities by rendering one male dominant and the rest subservient, which promotes Spade’s aggressive heterosexual masculinity and labels it the masculine norm. Similarly, *The Maltese Falcon* condemns the otherness of the homosexual male and the sadistic males through their villainy and ultimate inferiority in comparison with Spade. Though this concentration on homosocial interactions is extremely violent, Bogart’s onscreen reputation for aggression makes this role possible. Moreover, Spade’s interaction with Brigid depends upon his rejection of her sexual allure and subsequently, his rejection of the heterosexual couple. Spade is aggressive in his interactions with Brigid and shows no mercy in turning her over to the police.
In doing so, Spade’s aggression further proves the dominance of the heterosexual male and once again emphasizes the importance of homosocial male interactions.

At the start of the *Big Sleep*’s production, Humphrey Bogart had recently starred in the romantic classic, *Casablanca*, and even more recently had married his costar in *The Big Sleep*, Lauren Bacall. The Bogart-Bacall romance in Hollywood was a fan favorite and they were billed as the perfect Hollywood couple. Further contributing to the film’s context, the PCA censorship of *The Big Sleep* greatly focused on violence. The PCA head, Joseph Breen demanded that several significant changes to the script be made in order to remove violence—among these changes is the complete revision of the film’s ending, which changes the murderer from Carmen to a gangster, Eddie Mars. In the final version of *The Big Sleep*, detective Phillip Marlowe (Bogart) investigates the blackmail of Carmen Sternwood, a wealthy heiress. In doing so, Marlowe stumbles upon a chain of murders to solve, which began months before he was brought on the case, and falls in love with Carmen’s sister, Vivian (Bacall). In the end, Marlowe punishes each murderer in turn, restores order to the Sternwood family, and falls in love with Vivian.

Throughout *The Big Sleep*, restrictions of violence and Bogart’s image influence the onscreen creation of Marlowe and position him as a romantic hero who adheres to knightly codes of conduct when forced to demonstrate aggression. These limitations also contribute to the development of the women in the film.
Female heteronormativity is prioritized as the film condemns the female sexual other. Sexuality becomes a symbolic representation for female aggression. Carmen, though innocent of murder in the film, is implicitly guilty through her sexuality and must be punished accordingly. Vivian must be separated from her “deadly” sister and normalized through the heterosexual couple. In contrast with *The Maltese Falcon*, the constraints of the film shift the noir narrative’s focus from the homosocial to the heterosexual and sublimate problems with violence onto sexuality.

Ultimately, for the two pictures, censorship and the controlling factor of Bogart’s changing image contribute to the film’s textuality. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Bogart’s reputation as a violent character and similar off-screen machismo enable Spade to become a violent hero who cares more about his partner than about his female lover. The censorship of the film’s sexuality further contributes to its focus on violence and shifts importance away from the heterosexual couple. In *The Big Sleep*, Bogart’s *Casablanca* romantization and publicly adored marriage to Bacall create Marlowe as a gentler, knightly hero. The censorship of the film’s violence causes symptomatic representations of that violence to occur through sexuality, which furthers the emphasis of the heterosexual couple. In either case, the films’ constraints produce meaning in the text; they bear the marks of their industrial contexts.