

Good Bad Girls, Bad Good Girls, and Why We Love Them

Gone are the days of Donna Reed. Mothers like June Cleaver and Carol Brady are indeed a thing of the past. Yes, these women who cooked and cleaned in pressed dresses and perfect make-up were an invention of fiction, but we liked them anyway.

They represented something; the desire to do our very best. These women weren't stupid. They weren't confined by husband or society. They were free to choose, and they chose to care for their families. These were good women, but they are gone now. They've been replaced by a new ideal, a naughtier one, and whether we truly aspire to be this woman or not, we are hard pressed to find a movie that doesn't have this new female stereotype in it.

They are the femme fatale anti-hero/anti-villain. Her character traits don't denote what side of the moral line she's on because she's a little bit of both. In doing this, the moral line begins to disappear. Seductive, independent and rebellious, we never know what these women will say or do next. Their archetype conveys uniqueness and yet they all possess similar traits.

She's independent. In a world where men rule, she is her own man. She's armed with quick wit and mad fighting skills. Even Miss Piggy can pack a whopping karate chop. This femme fatale, even has a trademark uniform; the black cat suit that says, "I'm tempting but don't mess with me." Think of Katniss from *The Hunger Games*, Natasha Romanoff from Marvel's *The Avengers*, and Selina Kyle . Catwoman, in the new *Dark Knight Rises*.

They are, in essentials, the same woman in the same costume. While maneuvering men with their cheeky wiles, their beguiled quarries never seem to mind being deceived and manipulated.

They're even impressed by it. Take that as further evidence that this whole ruse is a work of fiction. How many times can a girl steal a man's car before it starts getting old? Katniss Everdeen resorts to manipulation and seduction in *The Hunger Games*. While she's morally conflicted about it, let's face it, she's turning tricks.

Yet, somehow, the world doesn't seem to mind. They feel she is somehow justified, which brings up another interesting observation. In a world of feminine liberation, with all of her intelligence, beauty and power, the femme fatale archetype has no choice but to be what she is.

She's liberated but trapped: capable but empty. Moreover, there's always a sense that they're fooling themselves. After all, they are women, the weaker sex. They are strong but not strong enough: independent but not wholly complete. They seem lost; not knowing who they are, needing reform; needing someone to save them. This is a metaphor for the human condition.

The movie usually ends the same way for the femme fatale hero or villainess. She's stripped of her glory in some fashion. She might be brought to justice, but it will be in a way that is pitiable, so that we still like her. Or, she might narrowly escape only to return to what she knows best. Is this the woman of the present? Is it the woman of the future? Are there any movies where a female can just act feminine; and, if there was, would we want to see it?

I'm not saying the femme fatale character is a bad thing. She's as old as storytelling, and I too secretly wish I was Natasha Romanoff. It's just that the extreme dominance of this kind of character in Hollywood is bound to take its toll on our culture if it hasn't already.

Besides, eventually getting bored with Hollywood's lack of creativity when it come to creating fresh, admirable female

characters, the good girl/bad girl femme fatale character can have a lasting effect on the self esteem of young girls. It teaches us that whether on the side of right or wrong, there's really only one kind of woman worth aspiring to. It limits individuality. Moreover, while disguising itself as feminist, it's really antifeminist beneath the surface. The femme fatale is femininity viewed through the tainted glasses of masculinity, but she's only the tusk on the elephant of womanhood.

On the silver screen, the femme fatale needs a foil to give her balance. Unless we resurrect a truly realistic ideal woman, like Caroline Ingalls or Annie Camden, the femme fatal will become as irrelevant and laughable as cleaning house in a poodle skirt.

Editor's note: Amy Swanson lives outside of Philadelphia, PA. She is an author, columnist, and playwright with her first screenplay currently in pre-production.