

A Cold-War Oresteia
**Richard Condon's Eleanor Iselin, or
his Manchurian Clytemnestra**

Roger Macfarlane: BYU Classics

“I have conditioned them...or *brainwashed* them, which I understand is the new American term”

Dr. Yen Lo and 1950's psychology

“POW: The Fight Continues after the Battle” USArmy 1955

***Conditioned Reflex Therapy*, Andrew Slater 1949**

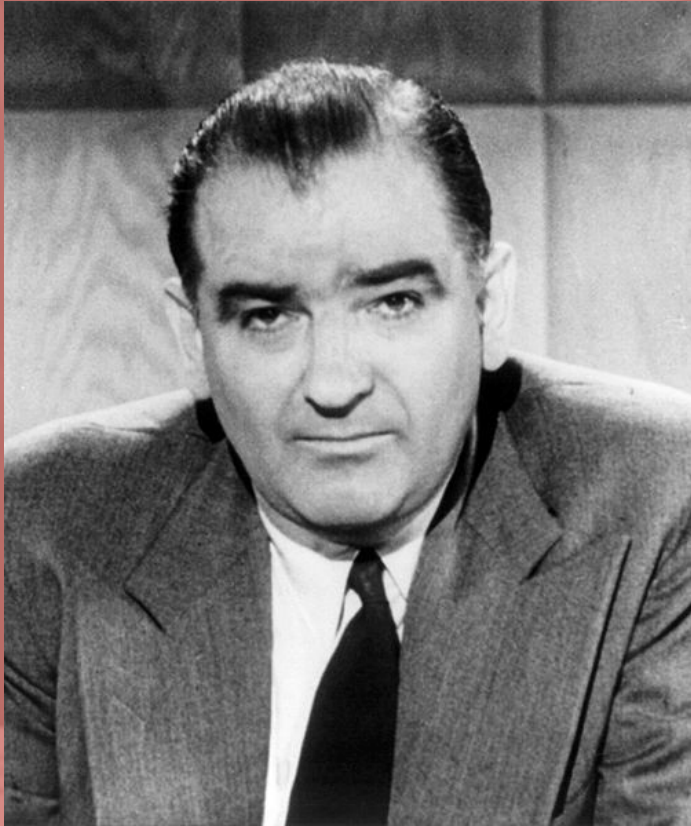
***Seduction of the Innocent*, Fredric Wertham 1954**

***Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: a study of 'brainwashing' in China*, R.J. Lifton 1961**

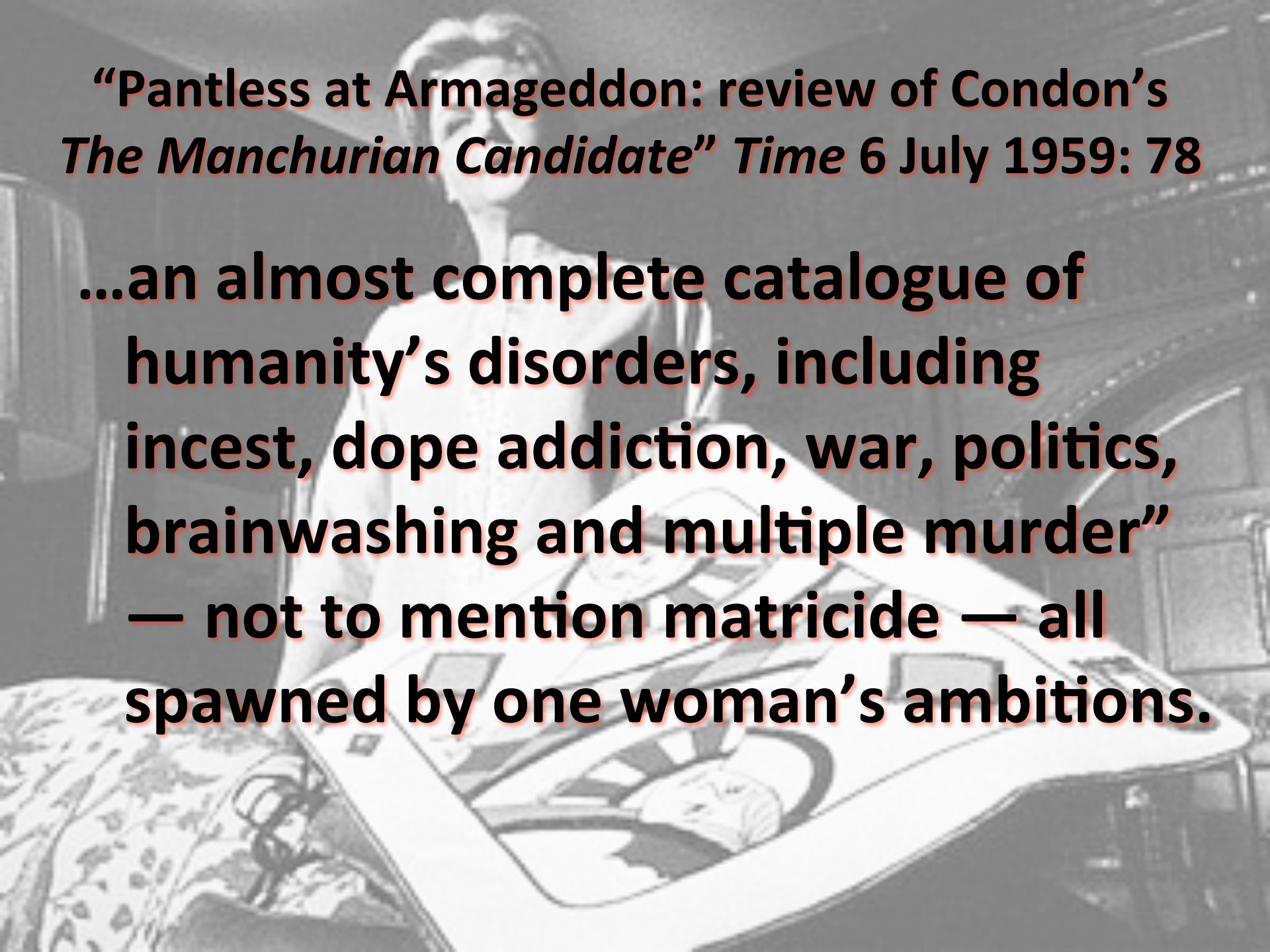
Yet among the film's great cinematic moments:

- [The circular pan-shot of Mrs. Whittaker's lecture "Fun With Hydrangeas"](#)

**“There are precisely 57
communists in the US
State Department.”**



**Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) and the “Second Red Scare”
9 Feb 1950 Speech to Republican Women’s Club of Wheeling, WV
1949 – 1954, 109 congressional investigations carried out**



**“Pantless at Armageddon: review of Condon’s
The Manchurian Candidate” *Time* 6 July 1959: 78**

**...an almost complete catalogue of
humanity’s disorders, including
incest, dope addiction, war, politics,
brainwashing and multiple murder”
— not to mention matricide — all
spawned by one woman’s ambitions.**

Axelrod's screenplay retains definitive, thematic likeness from Condon's novel.

In the Frankenheimer film, the first overt reference comes at minute 105, when Bennett and Raymond are good and drunk.

Shaw: "My mother is a terrible, terrible woman. ... Oh, but you don't want to hear about my mother."

Marco: "I'm interested. It's rather like listening to Orestes gripe about Clytemnestra."

In the Condon novel, the references to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* begin earlier and with more apparatus.

p. 22 f. "Marco always encouraged Sgt. Shaw to tell him [stories about his life] when they were on patrol. ... The captain liked to hear the story because...it was like hearing Orestes gripe about Clytemnestra. ... He was a reader."

p. 24 "Raymond...had large glaucous eyes with very large whites, like those of a carousel horse pursued by the Erinyes, those female avengers of antiquity."



Orestes Pursued by the Furies

Carl Rahl, 1865



William Adolphe Bouguereau, 1862



Carl Rahl 1812-1905: Orest von Furien verfolgt. Photo ©Maicar Förlag-GML

The *Oresteia*: key character correspondences

The *Oresteia*

Furies/Erinyes antedate all.
(Hesiod, *Theogony*)

Agamemnon leads Greeks to Troy.

Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon
upon his return to Argos.

Motives vary:
Iphigenia or Aegisthus

Orestes must avenge his father's
murder ...

... and matricide brings Furies.

The *Manchurian Candidate*

Raymond's mother cherishes recollection
of her abuse ...
... divorced Mr. Shaw when 6 months
pregnant and shortly before his
mysterious death.

Eleanor Shaw Iselin wields consummate
political power.

She promotes her — or, is it her new
husband's? — career *at all costs*.

Her son, Raymond Shaw, must do as he's
told...

... building narrative suspense.

Clytemnestra ... and/or not Aegisthus

P.N. Guerin, "Clytemnestra with Aegisthus" 1817



J.M. Collier, "Clytemnestra" 1897

Why don't you pass the time by playing a little solitaire?

“The queen of diamonds is a woman [of] intense and passionate temperament ... [who] always gets what she wants.”

M. Jones, *It's in the Cards: find your future in any deck of cards* (Boston: Weiser 1984), 174.



“Just as I am a mother before everything else, I am an American second to that.”

“Overweening American ‘momism’ ... threatens to weaken an entire generation of American boys and open a path of communist progress.”

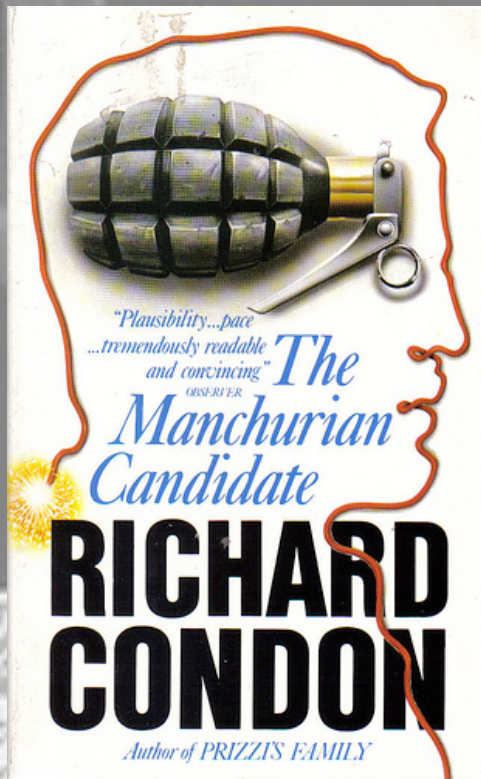
-- P. Wylie A Genertioin of *Vipers: a survey of moral want* (New York: Farrar & Reinhart, 1942) 204.



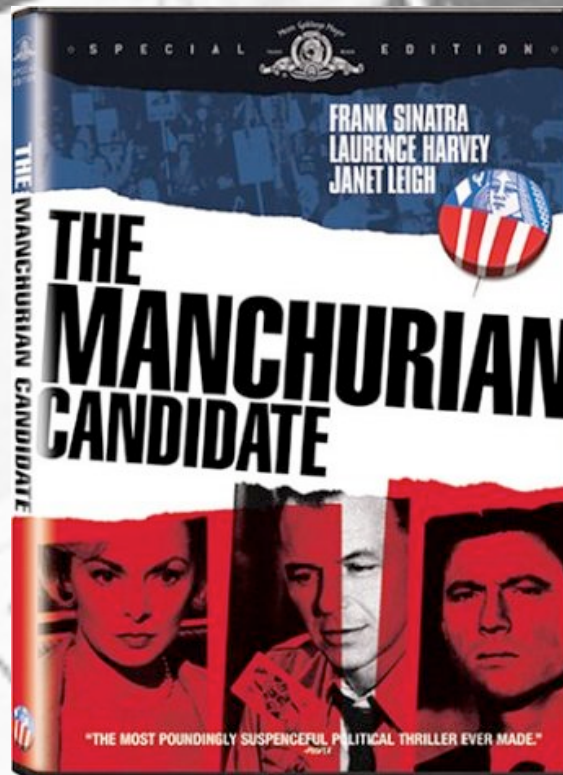
Barbara Billingsley as June Cleaver, “Leave it to Beaver”
1957 – 1963 (mostly on ABC)

How strong is the limb?

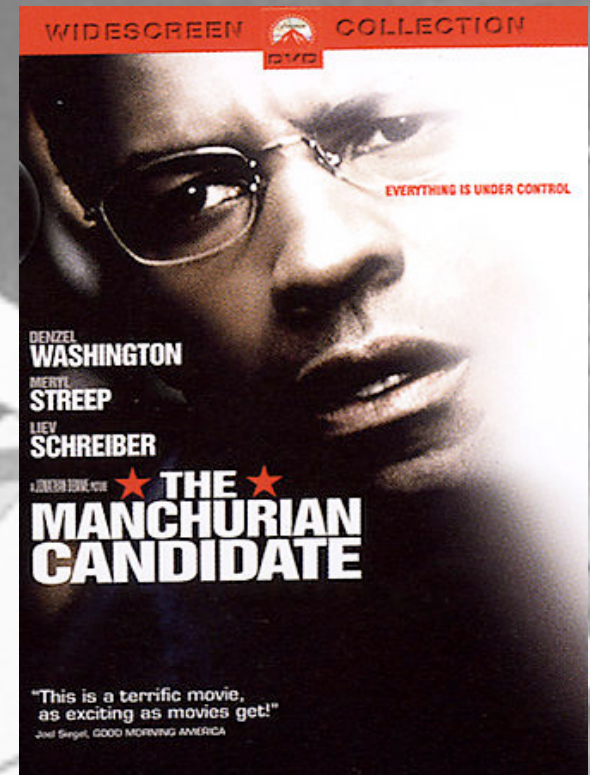
R. Condon, 1959



Dir. J. Frankenheimer, MGM 1962



Dir. J. Demme, Paramount 2004



Thematic use of Orestes theme.... diminished but present in film. No residual awareness of Orestes theme.