

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Fashion and the Shifting Semiotics of Sex and Gender in
Modernist Literature and Culture**


by

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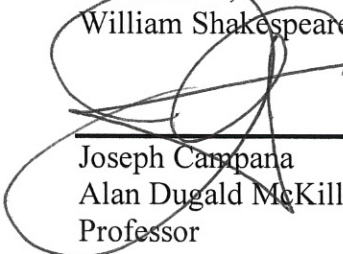
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ABSTRACT

Fashion and the Shifting Semiotics of Sex and Gender in Modernist Literature and Culture

Early 20th century women's fashion increasingly included the trope of "borrowing" – a trend that translated into women appropriating styles previously reserved for other subjectivities (children, men, athletes, blue-collar workers, sailors, etc). These borrowed fashions engaged an ambiguous semiotics that enabled multiple "readings" (linking a specific fashion to the demographics of a specific subjectivity) to exist simultaneously, and in some cases provided the occasion for *opposite* readings to exist simultaneously. This dissertation surveys a series of examples found in literature and popular culture during the early 20th century (focusing primarily on the 1920s and 1930s), analyzing the ways these "borrowed" women's fashions collectively create a semiotic mechanism that fluidly negotiates the shifting terrains of gender representation and sexual desire – at some intervals easing cultural resistance to "transgressive" genders and desires, and in other instances underscoring previously existing regimes of heteronormative conformity.

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Introduction

I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet.¹

I noticed that she wore her evening-dress, all her dresses, like sports clothes — there was a jauntiness about her movements as if she had first learned to walk upon golf courses on clean, crisp mornings.²

She was dressed to play golf, and I remember thinking she looked like a good illustration, her chin raised a little jauntily, her hair the color of an autumn leaf, her face the same brown tint as the fingerless glove on her knee.³

- *The Great Gatsby*

When the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway, first encounters Jordan Baker, he calls her “slender” and “small-breasted,” and compares her to a young (presumably male) military cadet. Later, at Gatsby’s party, Nick admires how Jordan wears her dresses “like sports clothes,” and remarks on her jaunty gait. In the final line above, Nick regards her in her golfing attire one last time before saying

¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*. (New York: Scribner, 2004), 11.

² Ibid., 50.

³ Ibid., 177.

goodbye forever, comparing her to “a good illustration.” Throughout the novel, Nick’s descriptions of Jordan focus on qualities that break with traditional binary masculine/feminine regimes of gender, and the narrative consistently points to Nick’s specific attraction to Jordan’s sporty fashion and boyish, athletic qualities.

Of course, Jordan’s athletic fashion sense is not an isolated phenomenon; her boyish, gender-bending style is (reciprocally) engaged with a larger aesthetic trend (her figuration in literature being understood as both an influence on and effect of popular culture). The late teens and early twenties saw the emergence and rise of the flapper, an iconic figure whose signature set of stylizations were largely predicated on the practice of appropriating fashions formerly linked to other demographics. Among the fashions and accessories that tend to be grouped under the general category as having caught the flapper’s magpie eye: The bobbed hair and short skirts of a schoolgirl, clothes cut to imitate the flat chest and narrow hips of a boy, an older man’s flask and cigarettes, a dress made to resemble a sailor’s suit – or, especially in Jordan’s case, the “jaunty” sports clothes of an elite, moneyed (again, presumably male) professional athlete. Borrowed fashions are a common characteristic of flapper style.

A number of the borrowed fashions embraced by flappers signal a break with established taxonomies of gender. Unlike her Victorian predecessors, Jordan wears sports clothes and travels the country playing professional golf – and, like other flappers of her day, she goes on dates, drinks, and smokes. While much of the material contained in the following chapters takes into account the ways in which borrowed fashions ultimately function to shift taxonomies of gender and sexuality (often naturalizing/normalizing values and activities that previously stood outside established regimes of gender and sexuality via ironic comedy or commercialized iteration), this is not to suggest that borrowed fashions solely and simplistically work to undo taxonomies altogether. Naturally enough, borrowed fashions can also provoke cultural anxieties, or can use irony to *underscore* regimes of gender and sexuality. As this study narrows its focus to the semiotics of borrowed styles specifically within the spectrum of women’s fashion, a number of the chapters take into account both the cultural backlash against the perception of women as usurping

masculinity as well as the emancipatory effects of challenges to existing gender regimes. Consider, for example, the popular 1922 song titled “We Men Must Grow a Moustache,”⁴ and the corresponding image that graced the sheet music:



(Fig. 1): “We Men Must Grow a Moustache”, 1922.

At first glance, the image presents what appears to be a woman in drag – wasp-waisted and red-lipped, but dressed in full tuxedo, hair combed like a man’s, twirling a moustache and holding a cane with a pair of mannish hands. The subtitle shouts, “That’s One Thing That The Girls Can’t Do!” While jocular and festive in tone, the theme of the song strikes a curious note, insofar as it strives to invoke a discourse of biology – biology, or the ability to grow a moustache is presented as the “one thing” that separates men from women. As borrowed fashions (and moreover, “borrowed style” – the word “style” meant more broadly in this definition to include

⁴ Speed Langworthy. *We Men Must Grow a Moustache*. Chicago: Harold Rossiter Music Company, 1922.

not only garments but also actions, composure and comportment) challenge previously established regimes of gender, cultural anxieties are often articulated via a renewed enthusiasm for and underscoring of biology. The message of the song title and image may also imply women's newfound abilities ("Look! Nowadays women can do everything we can, except this silly useless thing involving hair"), or – alternately – the message might signal a conservative effort to draw comfort from "science" ("Women can dress like us, they can behave like us, but don't worry, the joke's on them; they can never *be* us, fellas – trust in science!"). The image itself also presents a second reading – instead of a woman in drag, the figure can be read as an extremely effeminate man (he is, after all, growing the eponymous moustache in question – something the song claims women "can't do"). Whether joking or extortive, both of these readings take a jab at men who are insufficiently "masculine," highlighting perceptions of an emergent compromise of cultural patriarchy within popular culture.

The main characters of *The Great Gatsby* articulate several iterations of Jazz Age men. First, the chain of cuckolds: Tom Buchanan cuckolds George Wilson, a blue-collar mechanic who is essentially emasculated by his lack of ruthless ambition and material means (he had to borrow the suit he got married in, as Myrtle tells others with much disdain). In contrast to George, Tom embodies the epitome of previously established regimes of taxonomic, normative, "alpha" masculinity – he is rich and powerful, accomplished at sports, and is described by Daisy as "a brute of a man – a great, big, hulking specimen of a man."⁵ And yet, Tom is eventually cuckolded by Gatsby – a new sort of man, one who wears "a pink suit,"⁶ who drives a fancy yellow "circus wagon,"⁷ and who Nick describes as being especially sensitive, like "one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away."⁸ Throughout all of this, Nick stands on the sidelines, offering us his voyeuristic bird's-eye view as narrator. Nick comes across as a kind of "everyman," or "average Joe," perhaps in part due to his neutral role in the plot. Middle class and

⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 12.

⁶ Ibid., 122.

⁷ Ibid., 121.

⁸ Ibid., 2.

from the Middle West, Nick embarks upon the familiar terrain of belatedly obtaining grown-up employment (his “adult career” having been delayed by war service, his purpose in moving to New York is to take a passionless but respectable job as a bond salesman). Nick also enters into “the dating world,” so to speak, as he begins to pursue Jordan Baker.

Despite the many ways in which the novel presents Nick as a figure of taxonomic normativity, his desire for Jordan is often expressed in homoerotic terms. Descriptive lines such as the ones given in the opening of this chapter, during which Nick confesses his attraction to Jordan’s figure as the body of “a young cadet,” undeniably gesture to homoerotic signals of desire.

As a “fashionable tomboy,” Jordan Baker’s borrowed style engages an ambiguous semiotics that enables multiple readings to exist simultaneously, and in some cases provides the occasion for *opposite* readings to exist simultaneously. The conceit of “borrowing” in terms of fashion imposes an instant irony; the pairing of the wearer and the item worn stand in contrast to expectation. The act of borrowing enables the wearer to take a paradoxically simultaneous posture of alliance (“I identify with the semiotic values linked to this garment, however dangerous”) and disavowal (“I am borrowing this garment for fun and the humor is in the contrast”). In Jordan’s case, Jordan’s sporty style can be read as transgressive insofar as her boyish body, clothes, and comportment as a renowned golf champion violate previously established gender regimes – while at the same time, her style can be read as signaling to both a socialite’s privilege and a flapper’s embrace of ironic contrasts, ultimately underscoring established gender regimes and rendering her appealing to the heterosexual male gaze. Moreover – and to return to the dynamics that characterize Nick’s attraction – Jordan’s tomboy style can be read as inciting hetero and homoerotic desire, with one reading eliding the other, but both readings capable of existing simultaneously in time.

Film critic Sarah Berry parses the dynamic of this double-stance astutely in *Screen Style*, her study of iconic representations in film. For example, in Berry’s discussion of Marlene Dietrich’s 1930 tuxedo-clad appearance in *Morocco*, she describes Dietrich’s image as appealing to “male voyeuristic interest” while at the

same time engaging a wide range of women's desires to imitate Dietrich and perhaps even bed her, "enabling them to direct their erotic gaze at the female star without giving it a name."⁹

(Fig. 2): Marlene Dietrich as Amy Jolly in Morocco (1930), moments before she kisses the woman seated at the far side of the table behind her.



In comparing Dietrich's tuxedoed image to the tuxedoed cartoon that graces the sheet music cover of "We Men Must Grow a Moustache," Dietrich's version marks a departure from simple comedy and adds further complexity to the fashion statement. Her performance is entertaining, certainly, but any hints of comedy it

⁹ Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 147.

contains are sly and coquettish, unapologetic and smoldering with sexuality. In short, Dietrich's tuxedo, along with the stylized manner in which she wears it, is underpinned by a different set of semiotic signals and values than the sheet music's tuxedoed image.

The Great Gatsby predates *Morocco*, and the iterations have their differences, including their respective mediums; *Gatsby* paints this double-stance with words, while *Morocco* renders Amy Jolly via images and sound. Jordan's sporty style is interwoven into her quotidian existence, while Amy Jolly's tuxedo functions as a cabaret costume. Amy's tuxedo is a costume, and yet in her stylized wearing of it, Dietrich exudes an expression of deadly serious ownership – not only of the outfit, but of the desires it both expresses and elicits. In terms of their respective semiotic ambiguity (and its cultural advantages), *Gatsby*'s Jordan effects a similar posture as Dietrich later does in *Morocco* – in wearing sports-clothes and playing golf, Jordan can claim she's merely having a laugh, keeping herself entertained, but on the other hand, we know from the text that Jordan is uncompromising about her lifestyle, and likes to win tournaments so badly she is willing to cheat. Moreover, the nature of the desire that Jordan's ambiguous posture elicits from Nick is both contradictory and layered (he desires her as a young woman, he desires her as a young boy, he desires her as a child, he desires her as a famous athlete, etc). The novel – and more specifically, Jordan's stylized image described in the text – articulates and conceals Nick's ever-shifting desire for Jordan. Throughout the novel, Nick constantly describes Jordan in terms of her fashion; we see her through the eyes of a shifting audience (in this sense, Nick embodies shades of both Dietrich's male voyeur and homoerotic admirer – and more).

In other words, Jordan both incites unconventional desires (insofar as she evokes homoerogenous desire from Nick) and defies hegemonic gender roles (insofar as she lives the "liberated," often gender-bending lifestyle of an athlete and flapper). At the same time, *Gatsby* mitigates conservative readers' scandalized reactions to the transgression of gender and sexuality norms by hiding such transgressions in plain sight. The novel's overwhelming engagement of popular aesthetics offers its readers multiple and shifting interpretations of the semiotics at

play within the text, producing a figure like Jordan Baker, who (simultaneously) signals to opposite sets of values – in this case: subversive versus fashionably mainstream. And Jordan *is* fashionably mainstream; modeled after “Big Four” socialite Edith Cummings, Jordan is quite literally the girl in the magazine, i.e. the acceptable composite for universal admiration. Nick’s desire for Jordan’s boyish figure can be read as an appreciation of a commercialized ideal set forth by consumerism – and in some ways, as a slavish yet popular enthusiasm for consumerism in general. And if that is not enough to undercut the transgressive tones of his earlier desire, Nick ultimately shuns Jordan, purportedly “sickened”¹⁰ by her immorality. In fact, by the book’s end, Nick’s desire can only be reawakened by a fleeting moment during which Jordan slips back into fashionable abstraction in his mind, looking “like a good illustration.” In that moment, Nick experiences a moment of doubt and wonders if he isn’t “making a mistake”¹¹ in breaking up with her. Either way, Nick’s earlier homoerotic desire for Jordan is, in that moment, translated safely into an appreciation of fashion for fashion’s sake, the capitalistic desire of a good consumer.

In general, the semiotics of fashion and consumerism are central to character development and even plot in *The Great Gatsby*, often acknowledged as the semiotic systems they are. James Gatz transforms himself into Jay Gatsby by cultivating a very stylized appearance and lifestyle. He surrounds himself with what amounts to a series of material props, and his mansion, car, and hydroplane are all part of an elaborate simulacrum that characters perceive and react to early on in the book: His guests treat his mansion like a movie set during the very first party scene described, and make a game of guessing about his true identity. This perception is especially pronounced when Nick and Jordan go on a hunt for Gatsby, and encounter the man in the owl-eyed spectacles rooting through Gatsby’s library. “They’re real,” the man exclaims, meaning the books.

“Absolutely real – have pages and everything. I thought they’d be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they’re absolutely real. Pages and – Here!

¹⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 142.

¹¹ Ibid., 177.

Lemme show you... See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too – didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"¹²

Despite the fact the books are "real," the man in the owl-eyed spectacles remains aware of Gatsby's appropriated pose and purposeful, elaborate enactment of this pose via material objects. Instead of buying the illusion, he simply appreciates its "thoroughness" and calls Gatsby "a regular Belasco" – a famed theater producer of the day. Still other objects fail to convince his audience fully: Gatsby's medal from Montenegro and his photograph from his "Oxford days." When Gatsby hands the medal to Nick, Nick remarks, "To my astonishment, the thing had an authentic look,"¹³ his language implying extreme surprise to consider the medal might be real, while not ruling out the possibility that it might be a high-quality forgery. As for the Oxford photograph, Tom's heckling drags out the revelation that the photograph is a kind of half-truth, as Gatsby attended Oxford on the G.I. Bill, but quickly dropped out. Gatsby uses these props to fashion himself, to create a link between him and a carefully cultivated set of signaled values, but there are times the props fail, revealing the contrived, artificial nature of Gatsby's semiotic manipulation.

Overall, the characters in *Gatsby* repeatedly demonstrate that, on some level, they are aware of *what fashion does* – i.e. how fashion functions as a semiotic system. When Gatsby shows Daisy his house, they share a euphoric, maudlin moment while observing the simple existence of his beautiful shirts that are regularly sent over from England. Gatsby brings them out, delighting in each one as he throws them into a giddy pile while Daisy begins to cry:

"They're such beautiful shirts," she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. "It makes me sad because I've never seen such – such beautiful shirts before."¹⁴

¹² Ibid., 45.

¹³ Ibid., 66.

¹⁴ Ibid., 92.

One way to read this scene is to interpret Daisy's reaction as an acknowledgment of Gatsby's "thoroughgoing" transformation, understanding his tender love for the shirts to be part and parcel of his tender love for *her*. In this moment, Daisy is still aware of Gatsby's latent origins (she is the one character to have undeniably known him as "James Gatz"), but is moved by his commitment to enact a new persona through fashion. Daisy and Gatsby appear "fluent" in the language of fashion and advertisement, using it in a dual manner both to express themselves and to cloak their adulterous affair. Later on in the novel, while sweltering in the summer heat along with Nick, Jordan, and Tom, Daisy says to Gatsby:

"Ah," she cried, "you look so cool."

 Their eyes met, and they stared together at each other, alone in space. With an effort she glanced down at the table.

"You always look so cool," she repeated.

She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. His mouth opened a little, and he looked at Gatsby, and then back at Daisy as if he had just recognized her as some one he knew a long time ago.

"You resemble the advertisement of the man," she went on innocently. "You know the advertisement of the man—"

"All right," broke in Tom quickly...¹⁵

Tom interrupts this exchange, appalled. Surprisingly, everyone in the room appears to understand the subtext implicit in Daisy's comment – which is not just a comment, but a confession of love. The fact that Daisy would confess her love by remarking on his image, labeling it abstractly "cool" – and then trying to smooth the confession over by drawing a comparison between Gatsby and "the advertisement of the man" speaks to the level of communicative efficiency these characters invest in imagery, fashion, and the semantics of advertising. It is as if Daisy is finally and fully "buying into" Gatsby's transformation – in her mind he is not simulating anything with props in that moment, he has become the cultivated, "cool" man – the man that Daisy loves. Furthermore, to cloak her confession and make the

¹⁵ Ibid., 119.

observation more palatable to the others, Daisy sets about translating her comment into the language of advertisement – the latter of which, one might argue, specializes in suggesting that abstract qualities (coolness, elegance, health, and so forth) are linked to material objects and wholly purchasable. Ultimately, however, Daisy's vision of Gatsby marks a moment of transcendence that Tom cannot tolerate, and immediately sets out to undo.

The final moment during which Nick admires Jordan bears some key similarities to Daisy's confession of love for Gatsby. Just as Daisy suddenly sees Gatsby as "always so cool" and "the man in the advertisement," Nick is briefly struck by how Jordan looks like "a good illustration." Furthermore, the language of his overall description during this scene takes on a prescriptive tone typically favored by fashion magazines, and to a certain extent conflates Jordan with a piece of apparel – her golf glove – when he describes her face as "the same brown tint as the fingerless glove on her knee."

The prescriptive tone of Nick's language in this line evokes the tone dissected by Roland Barthes in *The Fashion System*. Barthes opens his study with a description drawn from a fashion magazine to demonstrate: "*A leather belt, with a rose stuck in it, worn above the waist, on a soft shetland dress*"¹⁶ (compare this to: "*...hair the color of an autumn leaf... face the same brown tint as the fingerless glove....*"). Barthes looks to the language used in fashion magazines and identifies what he calls "the written garment," which he describes as a kind of phenomenon analogous to Saussure's concept of language (institution) and speech (utterance). In the case of the written garment, "Fashion" (institution), "represented object" (image), and "described object" (written garment) all point to one another in a reciprocal semiotic exchange so as to form a closed – and notably paradoxical – system. In this system, Fashion is itself a language that functions to approximate the relationships between ideas and objects, objects and other objects (collectively an "assemblage"), and – coming full

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 3.

circle – ideas and other ideas. Fashion, in short, moves fluidly between the specific and the abstract, with a multiple and reversible flow.¹⁷

In terms of this dissertation, bringing *The Great Gatsby* into discussion with Barthes' *The Fashion System* implicitly begs the question: Why read literature in conjunction with fashion? Or, conversely, fashion in conjunction with literature? Barthes excluded literature from his effort to isolate the dynamics of fashion's semiotic system, calling "descriptions from literature proper... too fragmentary, too variable historically to be of use."¹⁸ I came to the subject of fashion's semiotics from the reverse angle; my interest was initially sparked by literary examples, and my own aim was to trace and isolate the fragments and historical variances that literature brings into focus – the fragments and variances Barthes sought to eliminate from consideration.

The relationship between fashion and literature is distinct in that, compared to fashion's relationship with the other mediums that I touch upon in the course of this dissertation (magazines, film, advertisements, society pages, etc), literature generally does not include images (rare cases like *Orlando* being the exception). As such, literature offers insight into the dynamic nature of what Barthes dubs the "written garment" as its *central* focus. Instead of tracing shifting semiotics as description moves between physical fashion, photographed fashion, and written fashion, literature reveals that semiotic shifting may exist within "the written garment" alone.

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes argues that "[t]he image freezes an endless number of possibilities."¹⁹ He suggests that the viewer possesses a freedom in choosing among these possibilities but that "[l]anguage eliminates this freedom."²⁰ For Barthes, words impose borders on an image, and ultimately function to "determine a single certainty."²¹ However, the original impetus for this dissertation pointed me in an opposite direction, in that I was compelled to unpack the

¹⁷ Ibid., 3-18.

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 13.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

ambiguous signals of Jordan Baker's style and fashion as presented in *The Great Gatsby*. It struck me that Nick's descriptions of Jordan do *not* work to "determine a single certainty." Instead, his descriptions enable Jordan to align herself simultaneously with multiple and opposing taxonomies of gender (i.e. signaling as feminine coquette, boyish gamine, or even mannish, ruthless athlete) while at the same time aligning Nick's desire with multiple and opposing taxonomies of sexuality (i.e. desires that admire her childishness or her boyishness comingling with desires that admire traditional femininity). In short, the semiotic abstraction of the written word (or "written garment" in this case) and a mobile, changeable articulation of existent links between signifiers and their respective signified values enables the ambiguity that, in turn, ultimately facilitates fashion's semiotic double-stance and paradoxical espousal of values that would otherwise conflict.

A second question naturally arises: Why *modernist* literature? This dynamic of hiding "in plain sight" in the pages of modernist literature is also integral to this dissertation. While tracing the semiotics of fashion in literary texts from any number of eras would likely prove fruitful (meaning: these tracings hold the potential to illuminate *how* and *with what implications* fashion offers a system of semiotics within the literary text that works to articulate subjectivities that are culturally intelligible), studying figurations of fashion and semiotics in modernist literature is a particularly organic fit. "Modernism" as a movement emphasized the innovation of form, and in particular the effort to "make it new" by challenging and/or disrupting established traditions in form. "Fashion" directly attends to form; "form," "style," and "fashion" are loosely synonymous. The many manifestos that defined modernism as a movement argued that the style in which artistic content is conveyed is as important as the content itself, and that its "meaning" or "essence" is inextricably linked to its form.

As the examination of the many examples from modernist literature shows, this combination of irony and shock work together to ease cultural reaction to such "new" styles – during those instances a fashion may be deemed transgressive and/or "scandalous," the wearer may retreat back into a pose of irony (irony functioning here as a kind of cultural safety valve). Furthermore, fashions from the

Teens, Twenties, and Thirties that were predicated on unexpected, ironic pairings (an adult flapper wearing a schoolgirl-length skirt, a woman wearing a man's suit, etc) already share a common value system and cultural dialogue with modernism's aim to achieve the "shock of the new." In many ways, fashion sets into motion a system of reiteration wherein styles that connote irony and evoke shock and are repeated to the point of becoming naturalized, moving through culture much in the same pattern as other modernist art, literature, music, etc. As an institution, fashion functions to mark a set of signals that flow and transform through iteration. Barthes focuses on iteration that moves through different formats (garment, represented image, written garment) but shifting may also occur between the values signaled by each repeated instance within a consistent format. This dissertation looks at some of the ways that repeated iteration of a particular fashion empties the set of values signaled therein, ultimately providing substitute values for the same fashion phenomenon. More specifically, this dissertation traces iterations of fashions that were "borrowed" by women during the early 20th century to understand better how these fashions signify multiple value systems simultaneously. Mapping this phenomenon illuminates how, say, a men's riding jacket worn by a woman may be read as signaling to lesbian or transgender values – yet this same fashion may eventually make its way into the uniform of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (female Hitler Youth) and may be read as signaling to a heterosexual reproductive imperative.

Cross-dressing in general is nothing new, but the early 20th century saw an exponential increase in the number of appropriated styles that made their way specifically into mainstream women's fashion. One reason for this may have been linked to new developments in technology: The greater mechanization of factories allowed for increased mass production, printed matter like fashion magazines became more readily available (and affordable), and other mediums – like film – provided further iteration of the latest styles. Whereas borrowed fashions may have previously only circulated within a rarified elite population, they enjoyed a more pervasive, trickle-down dissemination during the 20th century. For instance, when Coco Chanel borrowed her lover's riding jacket and had it tailored to her own figure,

she created a fashion that was reproduced – at first by Chanel for her own clientele, but soon imitated by other designers, until it had proliferated in its many forms throughout a broader population.²² Or, in another example, the “tennis dress” – a garment (or group of garments) inspired by men’s tennis wear – was scandalously worn by such celebrity athletes as Helen Wills and Suzanne Lenglen, yet eventually manufactured en masse and worn by a wider public. The tennis dress was short, the skirt sometimes even loosely sewn into shorts. In the course of her career, Lenglen even manufactured her own line of Bermuda shorts she called “Suzanne shorts.”²³ Essentially, and to summarize: With the rise of greater mechanization, it was possible to manufacture reproductions of Chanel’s and Lenglen’s styles, so that others might enjoy these fashions for themselves and reenact and these cheeky moments of “borrowing” (boldly borrowing from the fellas quickly becoming a fashion-forward stance in and of itself).

Greater iteration enables a higher volume of semiotic shifting and a more regular semiotic flow between the abstract and the specific. Each of the examples given in the previous paragraph implies a “primary” act of borrowing that is then repeated in multiple iterations. In the course of some iterations, even the specific context of *action* or *circumstance* surrounding the primary act of borrowing is emptied out – i.e. wearing a riding jacket with no intention of riding a horse, wearing a tennis dress with no intention of picking up a racket, etc. Moreover, the complex semiotic system that links these material items to a specific subjectivity can be somewhat dismantled through iteration – i.e. a riding jacket can be delinked from class/wealth, a tennis dress can be delinked from athleticism, etc. Items that formerly signaled specific owners *can* still signal the specificities of those original owners, but now may signal identities of other owners as well. In essence, borrowing as a practice in fashion provides a semiotic pivot point, an intersection where meaning may shift or point in a different direction – and, to underscore the

²² Rhonda K. Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*. (New York: Random House, 2014), 48-67.

²³ Larry Engelmann, *The Goddess and the American Girl: The Story of Suzanne Lenglen and Helen Wills*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 426.

paradox once more: a borrowed fashion may sometimes even signal to opposite meanings simultaneously.

Moreover, a number of the fashions depicted in literature that are examined in the course of this dissertation employ language that points to an external body of cultural references, thereby coopting the spectrum of readings about those images already in circulation. Nick describes Jordan's outfit, person, and demeanor and comments that she looked "like a good illustration,"²⁴ a familiar type in a fashion magazine. Just after the narrator in *The Sun Also Rises* describes Brett Ashley's menswear fashion and hair "brushed back like a boy's," the narrator states that "[s]he started all that."²⁵ With the single turn of phrase, "all that," the novel evokes a wide range of references, calling upon the many figurations of "trendsetters" – i.e., models, movie stars, artists, socialites, and so forth who famously wore short hair and/or menswear styles. The phrase's lack of specificity introduces greater ambiguity to Brett's already ambiguous look. It is possible to read her and her stylization as signaling to a wide and sometimes contradictory range of values. (Is Brett dressed like Coco Chanel? Henrietta Bingham? Radclyffe Hall? Is she challenging traditional taxonomies of gender with her menswear style, or is she exhibiting membership in the upper class?) Her figuration in *The Sun Also Rises* constantly shifts, and does not force or even privilege a "single certainty" above the others. Moreover, the claim that Brett "started all that" positions her at a point on an imaginary timeline of fashions that precedes the novel's narration/consumption. The literary examples discussed in this dissertation allude to a vast body of cultural references, or at the very least hint at their own consciousness of the existence of these cultural references. While initial chronology implies an ordered chain of influence, the many iterations of, say, "borrowed menswear" circulate discursively within culture, referring to and inflecting one another. Coco Chanel may present a set of iterations that predate Brett (Chanel achieved relatively wide fame during the Teens; *The Sun Also Rises* was published in 1926), but Chanel's iterations (and newer versions of the menswear style, too) carried on in prominent circulation after

²⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 177.

²⁵ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*. (New York: Scribner, 1926, reprint ed. 2014), 18.

Brett's appearance in literature. When Marlene Dietrich turned up in a sexy tuxedo in the 1930 film *Morocco* her iteration inherited the ongoing cultural discourse and circulation of semiotics surrounding this style, while also inflecting it.

Moreover, modernist literature prominently features fashion, and in many ways, modernist literature is distinguished by its exponentially increasing faith in the presumption of a mutual set of shared cultural references. The greater mechanization and dissemination of media – magazines, radio, and films – provided a level of saturation that is reflected in modernist literature (which in turn contributes to this greater circulation and saturation). Modernist literature marks an uptick in the mention of brand names, and reveals a burgeoning confidence in a shared comprehension of iconic images.

For this reason, the discussion of fashion and modernist literature – even one that centers on literature and the “written garment” – is inextricably tied to imagery drawn from magazines, film, and other sources outside literature via literature's referential inclusion. It would be impossible to separate literature's references to iconic examples of fashion from *how that fashion functions* within the iterations referenced, especially when the semiotic mechanisms that are manifest in literature overlap with those manifest in magazines or on film. An example of this would be the way that Brett's ambiguous stance – a stance facilitated by the quality of *ambiguity* as articulated via the written word (i.e. “she started all that”) – elides more transgressive genderings and sexualities so as to shield them from public scrutiny and attack. At least in its early pages, the novel offers a way to read Brett as a popular, trend-setting Coco Chanel, as opposed to an emasculating “bitch”²⁶ who incites miscegenation and “antisocial” homoerotic desires (the way the text paints her during its latter pages).

Similarly, the representation of Jordan Baker's athletic style strikes an ambiguous pose that evokes simultaneous contradictory interpretations. Her physically fit body and sporty fashion offer multiple modes of transgression, most notably as an emasculating figure, possibly interested in sex but disinterested in

²⁶ Ibid., 195, 197.

reproduction. Yet, at the same time, Jordan's mode of dress and comportment taps into a set of stylizations contemporaneously on display within the world of 1920s mainstream fashion: The healthy, all-American girl whose physically fit body and sporty style signal her superior qualifications to become an ideal wife and mother eventually. This "healthy helpmate" aesthetic competes with that of the "naughty flapper" aesthetic, both of them laying claim to many of the same fashions. Moreover, the idea of the healthy helpmate is embedded in discourses of eugenics and racial hygiene that began to dominate Western culture during the early 20th century – two of the most notable examples being the legislative movement of forced sterilization in the United States during the teens and twenties, and the more obvious example of genocide in Nazi Germany during World War II.²⁷

Jordan's sporty flapper fashion presents a semiotic double-hinge that points to two very extreme and very opposing sets of political values: one that breaks with existing regimes of gender and sexuality, and one that underscores these regimes even more severely. The dynamism of this double stance is (surprisingly) directly addressed in the text itself, when Nick regards Jordan in her golf attire one last time, and notes her resemblance to "a good illustration." In Nick's mind and in that moment, Jordan has transformed into a fashionable abstraction: empty of specific value – but empty, too, of values that gesture to the moral transgression he finds so repugnant by the novel's end. Nick is seeing a brief flash of "what fashion does," and how it intersects with the ever-shifting modes of "identity." He wonders if he isn't "making a mistake," but then the moment passes, Jordan's transmutable identity seems fixed again (to him), and he continues on his way, bidding her goodbye forever.

Up to this point, I have introduced the subject matter of this dissertation by giving examples of female characters dressed in fashions that signal to other genderings and subjectivities – and in particular, flappers dressed in menswear. It seems only natural that unpacking gender by examining instances of cross-dressing

²⁷ Jonathan P. Spiro. *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant*. (University of Vermont Press, 2009).

should evoke the work of Judith Butler, and in many ways, the idea of “performance” suggests that it encompasses fashion – especially when we think of fashion in terms of costume, and consider dressing in terms of action. But my intention here is to undertake a somewhat different study than to complete a straightforward exercise of applying Butlerian theories of performativity to flappers found in early 20th century literature in order to dissect how these figures execute gender identity. Instead, the aim of this study is to utilize fashion as a semiotic system to examine the fluidity of gender itself, how an articulation of fashion can signal to multiple genderings (even signaling simultaneously to those that stand in opposition to each other), and how repeated iterations of fashions (often shifting themselves via iteration) can work to alternately undo/complicate the binaries that underscore existing gender regimes – or shore them back up. I am working from my mentor Judith Roof’s assertion that “[i]dentities, like genders, are multiple, changing fictions of position, desires, and unification,” and I see fashion – an institution, according to Barthes, whose semiotics flow between material object, represented image, and described object, or “written garment” – as a useful medium to observe gender as an unfixed, ongoing process.

And as a final note of reply to the “why study fashion in conjunction with modernist literature” question: the study of fashion in literature presents an opportunity to bring new kinds of engagement to existing fields of literary criticism. In my case, as a student I was drawn to the figurations of characters I found paradoxical in a number of novels and stories by Fitzgerald and Hemingway. But, overwhelmed by the heavy biographical bent of the first and largest wave of criticism that took up their respective oeuvres, I found it difficult to write about these authors’ texts without addressing the large body of existent biographical criticism, or otherwise letting it encroach. Unpacking the semiotics of fashion as manifest in these texts offers a means to navigate delicately around “the biographical criticism trap.” It enables active acknowledgement of the fact that Fitzgerald’s and Hemingway’s “lives” were often fed to the public as legible texts, while at the same time steering clear of faulty notions of “truth in biography” or “authorial intent.” Details about the fictionalized figuration of Hadley in *A Moveable*

Feast, for instance, or the numerous magazine appearances of socialite-golfer Edith Cummings are relevant to a discussion that unpacks the various genderings and sexualities signaled in Fitzgerald and Hemingway's novels, but I seek to avoid a reductive approach that would "explain" such genderings and sexualities in terms of biography – especially biography that claims to know or be able to deduce conclusions about these authors' authorial intentions. Tracing the semiotics of fashion in literature provides a useful lens insofar as it tightens the focus around what is present in the text, what value or values the text signals, how, and by virtue of what dynamic or mechanism. When it comes to the study of Fitzgerald's and Hemingway's fiction, imposing a tighter focus by tracing the semiotics of fashion offers a fresh way back into the texts themselves, and it stands to reason that the merging of fashion, semiotics, and literature can offer similar critical leverage to other areas and periods of inquiry.

Other "Borrowed" Fashions and an Overview of Chapters

To avoid the suggestion that these borrowed fashions sprang forth from a void, it is relevant to address a few of the "borrowed fashions" leading up to or on the periphery of the ones that hold central focus within this study. The 1920s may have seen sportswear and other "new" styles of clothing enter the mainstream and reach new heights in popularity, but earlier generations had expressed the idea that women ought to have garments to accommodate a new range of activities via earlier iterations.

For instance, Victorian dress reform or the "rational dress movement" issued overt proclamations that women's fashions were in dire need of change, and championed such garments as the liberty bodice and bloomers. The latter of these – Bloomers – offers an example of a "borrowed fashion," not only in that it riffs on the notion of borrowing pants/culottes from menswear but also in the fact that advocates claimed bloomers were inspired by fashions glimpsed in the Orient (i.e. the looser trousers worn by women in Asia at the time, who seemed to benefit from a greater range of movement). Bloomers and other fashions favored by Victorian dress reform activists achieved a significant level of exposure in magazines and

newspapers, but there is limited evidence to suggest these styles were ever broadly adopted by the general populations of America or Britain. The idea behind these fashions was that a woman ought to be able to bicycle, swim, participate in athletic activities, etc – all with a degree of comfort and modesty. Rational dress struck the public as “modern,” but critics argued that it lacked aesthetic appeal; it neutralized a woman’s gender and therefore rendered her somewhat asexual. It was, to use a contemporary parlance, “not sexy.”

Instead, the public seemed more eager to imitate the Gibson girl – an iconic figure illustrated by Charles Dana Gibson – who got up to many of the same activities (bicycling, swimming, lawn games, even attending college) but did so while looking feminine, coy, and pouty. The Gibson girl, with her cinched waist and full bosom, arguably catered more wholly to the male heterosexual gaze. Nonetheless, she incorporated values of health and activity, which in turn represented a key change in the ideal woman’s lifestyle, and these values – “active” and “healthy” – at least as abstract suggestions, had entered the popular aesthetic in a lasting and forceful way.



PICTURESQUE AMERICA
Anywhere along the coast.

(Figs. 3, 4) Victorian Bloomers and a bicycle. Gibson girls enjoying the beach.

In some instances, notions of “health” and “activity” were even translated into a uniform. By 1910 in England and 1912 in the United States, Girl Guides and

Girl Scouts were respectively established. Drawing a through-line from rational dress and the Gibson girl, these organizations also championed an active lifestyle for girls and young women. Both Girl Guides and Girl Scouts required their members to wear uniforms, an outfit which tended to mimic its Boy Scout equivalent in pseudo-militaristic style, a direct borrowing from its Boy Scout counterpart. From the waist-up, the uniform was nearly identical: Long-sleeved shirt with epaulettes, neckerchief, ranger's hat, etc. Only the substitution of a skirt for pants distinctly genders the uniform female.



(Fig. 5): the original Girl Scout uniform.

The original Girl Scout uniform offers an example of a borrowed fashion where a competing set of aesthetic values more or less neutralized the gender-bending aspects of the style. Put another way: The plethora of other aesthetic values signaled by these uniforms – values of patriotism, nationalism, respect for “Christian” organizations, an American treasuring of wilderness and settlement the frontier, etc – overwrote the aesthetics of traditional gender regimes, eliding a reading that might otherwise interpret this uniform as transgressing gender norms.

Around the same time – that is, the turn of the century and the early 1910s in particular – women were beginning to enter the white-collar workplace in increasing numbers, mainly as typists. These spaces – regularly occupied by lawyers, accountants, clerks, etc – had previously excluded women. Along with the proliferation of the typewriter and consequently the proliferation of its operator, “the typist,” women gradually became a regular sight at the office. Even so, there was a great deal of anxiety about how they should dress. If they dressed in too feminine a fashion or rendered themselves too attractive, they might prove a distraction. Just as the original Girl Scout uniform had been modeled on the Boy Scouts’ uniform, some of the earliest female suits for typists were designed to directly mimic their male counterparts.

(Fig. 6, 7): A typist's suit from 1905. A typist's suit from 1908.



Again, as with the Girl Scout uniform, the potentially “shocking” or transgressive, cross-dressing connotations of these work suits were overwritten by a competing

set of values: These suits signaled to values of professionalism and utility. But also, harkening back to the “rational dress” of Victorian dress reform, these suits were considered lacking in sex appeal. “Frumpy,” “boxy,” and “mannish” were all adjectives employed to describe these new suits for typists. Anti-suffragists and the women of the Christian Temperance League had a special bone to pick with these clothes and the women who wore them, worried that such habits of employ and dress would ultimately “unsex” women at large.

The styles above – clothes that denote rational dress, Girl Scouts, or white-collar, female typists – all represent examples of fashions that were engineered to borrow directly from menswear. However, some of the borrowed fashions discussed in the chapters outlined below appropriate styles linked to other categories that go beyond that of a simple binary gender division – borrowing fashions that signify age, class, race, or even occupation. Each of the chapters described below singles out a particular fashion motif and unpacks the (multiple, layered, sometimes contradictory) semiotic values signaled by a selected range of that motif’s iterations, with an eye towards tracking these signals and corresponding values as they shift. Furthermore, each chapter is named after a borrowed garment that I am using to refer to a collective of style with enough of a common through-line to make up a trend. My chapter titles are as follows: Borrowed Knee Skirts, The Borrowed Riding Jacket, Borrowed Golf Gloves, Borrowed Turkish Trousers and Gypsy Scarves, and the Borrowed Fisherman’s Shirt.

Chapter One: “Borrowed Knee Skirts”

This chapter takes a look at the aesthetics that informed the style of the early 20th century flapper, and considers the role of youth culture and fashion. In particular, this chapter examines how and to what effects various adult female flapper figures “borrowed” from a set of fashions previously reserved to mark infancy, pre-pubescence, and early adolescence, a set of fashions I am collectively calling “borrowed knee skirts” here. The aesthetic, as I identify it, includes the iconic “flapper” fashions: Schoolgirl-style short skirts and bobbed hair, but also includes

stylized comportment, and more specifically, tomboyish and infantilized behavior. Overall, this chapter analyzes the ways in which “borrowed knee skirts” as a style/set of fashions ultimately serves to express taxonomic gender regimes that sometimes contradict one another. In unpacking the “borrowed knee skirt” aesthetic, I examine: (1) how, by gesturing to a liminal space between childhood and adulthood, the borrowed knee skirt aesthetic points to ripening sexual availability while at the same time thwarting the immediate conversion of that narrative into matrimony and motherhood (2) the manner in which borrowed youth culture – by ambivalently being able to claim a stance of childhood’s asexuality/pansexuality – permits the expression of alternate sexualities/otherwise marginalized desires, and (3) the manner in which women who continue to engage borrowed youth culture beyond a certain age are rendered “unnatural,” villainous, and even monstrous in literature and pop culture.

My readings of Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* bookend this chapter, as I trace Dick Diver’s desire for Rosemary Hoyt and the ways in which Rosemary periodically employs an infantilized stance to alternately lure Dick into an affair or excuse/elide their joint transgression. The first half of the novel carefully navigates to avoid characterizing Dick’s lust for Rosemary as pedophilia, while also avoiding characterizing Rosemary as an adulterer, or having homosexual overtones when she says she is in love with Dick and Nicole – “both.”

Furthermore, this chapter draws upon film historian Sara Ross’s turn of phrase for this infantilized mode of dress and behavior as she calls it playing the “baby vamp,”²⁸ and takes a wider look at the “baby vamp” on film and in fashion magazines. In particular, such Hollywood stars as Clara Bow and Louise Brooks helped to circulate the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic more widely, both in their portrayals on film and in their cultivated appearances as celebrities. Quick, agile oscillation between two sets of semiotic signals is key to their ability to play both “childish” and “sexy” while at the same time skirting semiotic signals of pedophilia or deviant desires (—“skirting” pun very much intended).

²⁸ Sara Ross, “‘Good Little Bad Girls’: Controversy and the Flapper Comedienne,” *Film History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.409-423, 410.

This chapter also looks at moments when the aesthetic does not fit the immediate context, and those moments when the aesthetic fails to convince its audience, unpacking Daisy's awkward introduction of her child in *The Great Gatsby*, and exploring the "monstrous" Florence's failed claims to youth culture in Noël Coward's *The Vortex*. By bringing in these readings, I identify those subjects who are able to deploy the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic (within specific instances), and locate those who fail to lay claim to the authority to do so (For instance: Rosemary is rendered more appealing for acting younger than her age, yet Florence is rendered an old woman in denial, clinging to artifice, and this chapter seeks to locate that tipping point). Touching lightly upon Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), I extend this discussion to pose the following questions: What happens when the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic *itself* ages out of fashion? Published at a time when flappers had fallen utterly out of vogue, I argue that *Lolita* is significant in that it literalizes the pedophilia-tinged tones of the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic – to horrifying hyperbolic effect.

Finally, I return to *Tender is the Night* and examine the latter half of the novel, which I argue grows increasingly conscious of the role of "acting" within the novel's theme and character development – and, relevant to this study, acting's relationship to Rosemary's deployment of the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic. Published in 1934, I posit that the novel heralds the aesthetic's popular decline.

Ultimately, this chapter is preoccupied with the semiotic mechanism of the "borrowed knee skirts" aesthetic, examining how striking a stance of infantilization can serve as a sort of cultural "safety valve" – functioning as a posture that makes flapper style "forgivable," and lessens the transgression against historically established gender regimes and codified sexual desires. At the same time, this chapter aims to take a step back and map both the surging popularity of the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic – and its waning retreat as it fell out of fashion.

Chapter Two: "The Borrowed Riding Jacket"

This chapter takes a look at "the borrowed riding jacket," defined herein as the style of equestrian dress originally worn by men and notably adopted (and

adapted) by various female trendsetters during the 1920s and 1930s. More specifically, this chapter examines the style/behavior of four women, real and fictional – Henrietta Bingham, Radclyffe Hall, Brett Ashley, and Coco Chanel – and parses the ways in which these female figures were defined by historically established taxonomic regimes of gender, or, alternatively, were able to live between/avoid such taxonomies. Moreover, this chapter focuses on the ambivalent nature of the “borrowed riding jacket” style, and how this ambivalence allows opposing political desires to simultaneously engage/express their cultural values through the same fashion.

I’ve organized this chapter in two major parts. In part one, I take a closer, comparative look at Henrietta Bingham and Radclyffe Hall, and more specifically the intersection of class/wealth as concerns the “borrowed riding jacket” fashion and taxonomic regimes of gender. I argue that the privileges inherent to wealth and membership in the upper class allowed certain women – like Henrietta Bingham – to dodge or live between taxonomic regimes of gendering. Equestrian fashion in particular offers one instance in which class overwrites taxonomic gender regimes; the “borrowed riding jacket” serves as a sort of loophole: Henrietta was not obliged to dress as “man” or “woman,” so much as “equestrian.” I look at ways in which Bingham modulated between traditional feminine fashions and borrowed masculine styles to achieve a degree of fluidity in her persona that would accommodate her private life and ever-shifting desires while simultaneously placating the social circles that counted her as a member and the wider public who read about her in the newspapers.

Also in part one, I take a closer look at Radclyffe Hall, her partner Una Troubridge, and Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness*. I trace two opposing “readings” or “interpretations” of Hall’s public image as concerns her engagement of taxonomic regimes of gender. The first reading of Hall’s public image is that, similar to Henrietta Bingham, Hall’s regular “borrowing” of men’s clothing – and tailored riding suits in particular – codes as a function of aristocratic, eccentric behavior (“moneyed eccentric” at times overwriting “lesbian”). Conversely, my second reading of Hall’s public image maps out the ways in which Hall and Troubridge used

clothing to code themselves quite doggedly according to taxonomic regimes of gender, with Hall's fashion and Troubridge's fashion signaling masculine and feminine roles respectively. I bring critic Katrina Rolley's analysis of Radclyffe Hall's dress over the years into consideration, and weigh Hall's advocacy of sexologist Havelock Ellis's theories – including his taxonomic differentiation between “congenital inverts” and “pseudo inverts.” I argue that while Henrietta Bingham uses borrowed fashions to subvert taxonomic regimes of gender, Radclyffe Hall (perhaps counter-intuitively) uses borrowed fashions to underscore an assumed “biological” binary. I argue that Hall's overt advocacy of Ellis's theories of sexology and Hall's insistence on taxonomy are the qualities that make contemporary critics (who have come to comprehend and articulate gender and sexuality in more fluid terms, and on an ever-changing continuum) uncomfortable with all that Radclyffe Hall represents and championed in her novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (which now seems fixed, reductive, restrictive).

Part two of this chapter brings politics more directly into the discussion of gender and the “borrowed riding jacket” – specifically the discourses of nationalism and fascism that arose during the 1930s. I claim that the same riding jacket “uniform” that signals to figures such as Henrietta Bingham's membership in wealthy, elite circles, repeated and reproduced on a larger scale becomes the class-leveling uniform that harnesses the masses and consolidates them into a national identity.

I examine instances in which the borrowing of men's fashions serves to re-emphasize a woman's “feminine appeal” as perceived via the heterosexual male gaze – taking a character such as Lady Brett Ashley from Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* into consideration. I argue that – like Henrietta Bingham and Radclyffe Hall – the fictional Lady Brett Ashley hails from the upper class (or, at the very least, we know she has married into a title, whatever her income at the time of the plot's action) and hence, is allowed all the eccentricities, “borrowings,” and even “misbehavior” the general public might expect from a member of the aristocracy. However, while Brett likes a good thrill, her appeal via the male gaze is perpetually re-emphasized; her presence among men as “one of the boys” serves as a reminder that she is *not* one of

the boys, she is the object of desire among them. Brett's style of borrowing is self-reflexive, pointing back to the very dynamics of borrowing/appropriation itself. Brett's role as sex object is important here: The characters around Brett often talk of "breeding" and "good breeding" and this discourse takes a dark, anti-Semitic turn as the characters object to Robert Cohn's sexual pursuit of Brett.

The narrator, Jake, evokes a kind of Coco Chanel figure as he describes Brett's boyish clothing and haircut, describing Brett as a trendsetter who "started all that" – and finally in this chapter, I turn my attention to Chanel, who very directly popularized "the borrowed riding jacket." Like Brett, Chanel's borrowing serves to reemphasize her appeal to a heteronormative masculine audience (she quite literally borrows her lover's riding jackets and has them retailed). Here, borrowed menswear and specifically equestrian dress still signals upper class wealth, but in Chanel's case, having been raised in poverty, her membership in this group is somewhat forged, as in, both fake and made/fabricated. I trace how Chanel's love of the "riding uniform" grows into an obsession with uniforms more generally, and a preoccupation with nationalism that bears overt anti-Semitic sentiments.

I argue that as the borrowed riding jacket fashion trickles down via repetition/imitation from a wealthy minority to the middle and working class majorities, the cultural values it implies or signals begin to shift. The discourse of "good breeding" (i.e. the selective breeding of horses and/or women, one's pedigree signaling wealth and exclusion) gives way to a(n anti-Semitic) breeding imperative. This shift in discourse is evidenced by the values touted by such organizations as the League of German Girls, or Band of German Maidens – the girls' division of the Hitler Youth (the "BDM"). The "borrowed" equestrian uniform of privilege and leisure sports becomes the super-regulated scouts' uniform of nationalistic and racial "health." While organizations similar to the BDM existed in both England and America (Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, respectively) and were established as early as 1910, directives about "breeding" and "hygiene" reach new levels of overt articulation via the fascist propaganda distinct to Hitler's Germany (and fashion – and specifically uniforms – prove integral to the propaganda machine).

The conclusion/point of this chapter is to draw out a working map of the ambiguous function/signification of the “borrowed riding jacket” fashion as pertains to gender and sexuality – how fervor for this fashion may have allowed women like Henrietta Bingham to avoid/live between taxonomic labels, while at the other end of the spectrum, this same fashion was successfully mobilized by fascist regimes that sought to underscore and enforce taxonomic categories of gender, sexuality – and even race.

Chapter Three: “Borrowed Golf Gloves”

This chapter returns to the lines about Jordan Baker quoted at the outset of this introduction, and delves deeper into the more specific relationship between sports, female athletes, and athletic fashion. Surveying the rise of the female athlete from the beginning of the century up through the Berlin Olympics in 1936, this chapter focuses on the semiotics of the physically fit female body in conjunction with the semiotics of reproduction. In particular, this chapter looks at ways in which fashion-driven abstraction acts as a fulcrum between athletic style that bears anti-reproductive semiotic values (promiscuous bachelorette or lesbian “flapper-athletes”) and athletic style that bears a reproductive imperative (pioneer America, Nazi Germany).

I begin by examining the American ideal of the able-bodied pioneer woman, considering Jim’s chief object of admiration in Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*. While the title character, Ántonia exhibits a number of the same tomboy qualities later consolidated into the tomboy-flapper aesthetic, the novel very thoroughly shores Ántonia’s athleticism up in a reproductive narrative by the novel’s end (describing her as the very earthy, glowing, and sated mother to no less than eleven children). Moreover, Ántonia bears similarities to a larger genealogy of athletic, all-American, “outdoorsy” women and I examine the ways in which some of Ernest Hemingway’s female characters who hunt and fish (Marjorie in the Nick Adams stories), ski (Hadley in *A Moveable Feast*), or tough it out in times of war (Catherine in *A Farewell to Arms*) all pay homage to the aesthetic values of Hemingway’s cultural forebears (Mark Twain, Teddy Roosevelt). However, romantic union and childbirth is fraught

in these Hemingway texts – especially as *A Farewell to Arms*'s Catherine dies giving birth.

Fitzgerald's athletic flappers may be contemporaneous to Hemingway's outdoorsy women, but by contrast, represent a set of values that point to a more cultivated "sportswoman" type. Reading Jordan Baker as she is represented in *The Great Gatsby* in tandem with images and articles about Edith Cummings and other famous socialite-athletes reveals a further shift away from the semiotics of the reproductive pioneer woman, with female athletes at the professional level signaling to travel, careerism, postponement or refusal to marry – i.e. generally an anti-reproductive aesthetic. However, by the thirties and along with the rise of Nazi Germany, reading various instances of the "professional female athlete" become increasingly complex and paradoxical. This chapter unpacks the contradictory and tangled semiotics of non-reproductive female athletes and the discourses of eugenics and racial hygiene that characterized the late thirties, parsing how Hitler could publicly embrace athletes such as the glamorous, rumored-to-be-promiscuous Sonja Henie, or the openly lesbian Violette Morris, while on the other hand the Nazi party's official line was to condemn such stylizations and sexualities and advocate athletics as a means to make young girls into "better wives and mothers."²⁹

In analyzing this double-stance, I return to the instance of Jordan Baker looking "like a good illustration," ultimately examining the ways in which iteration of the athletic female body en masse functions to ease specificities back into the realm of abstraction, and vice-versa. It is through reiteration of the image of the athletic woman (accomplished in America through commercialized magazines and film, accomplished in Nazi Germany through party propaganda) that particular iterations of the athletic woman may be linked – or delinked – from a reproductive imperative.

Chapter Four: "Borrowed Turkish Trousers and Borrowed Gypsy Scarves"

²⁹ Dagmar Reese, *Growing Up Female in Nazi Germany*, trans. William Templer. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2006.)

This chapter explores tropes of exoticism that appear in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), D.H. Lawrence's posthumously published novella, *The Virgin and the Gypsy* (1930), and the 1931 film *Mata Hari*, directed by George Fitzmaurice and starring Greta Garbo, and reads these texts against the semiotics of contemporary fashion trends that favored "gypsy" or "exotic" looks. In particular, this chapter looks at ways in which these tropes of exoticism signaled to the destabilization of normative genderings and sexualities.

The chapter evaluates the ways in which "Turkish," "gypsy," or "Oriental" motifs during the Teens, Twenties, and Thirties often signaled to an imaginary composite of values that do not correspond to a specific real-life culture. While a number of critics have parsed these exotic motifs and mapped out the racism inherent in the appropriation of the styles of these racial and cultural "Others," as well as the inaccuracies of many of these fashions, this chapter seeks to focus instead on how these capacious categories of largely imaginary "Otherness" enable the articulation of non-normative genderings and sexual desires.

I look at the ways in which Woolf engaged in various articulations of imaginary "Oriental Otherness" that cater to and exploit (inaccurate) British notions of non-Western culture, including her participation in the Dreadnought Hoax, wherein Woolf dressed up and passed herself off as an Abyssinian man. In many ways, Orlando's engagement of clothing as masquerade (dressing as a "Turk," dressing as a "gypsy," and eventually, dressing as an Englishwoman) echoes Woolf's participation in the Dreadnought Hoax, in that Orlando engages these motifs and the imaginary cultures/spaces they imply in order to permissively cross-dress, and such actions showcase an astute comprehension of clothing as semiotics and of fashion as a semiotic system.

I argue that the novel *Orlando* explores this understanding of fashion as a semiotic system in greater depth, and that those parts wherein the title character engages so-called "exotic" motifs to ease Orlando's transition between the sexes – while jovial in tone – nonetheless work to deconstruct essentialist conceptions of sex and gender. I also take into consideration the novel's overt philosophizing on the role of clothes in shaping Western gender regimes (upon dressing as an

Englishwoman, Orlando feels “the coil of skirts about her legs”³⁰ and feels a new sense of repression), and how the narration makes outlandish claims about genderings under the Turkish or gypsy tropes – stating, for example, that gypsy women “except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gypsy men.”³¹

Orlando is not the first novel to engage the gypsy motif in such a way as to destabilize regimes of gender and sexuality, and I compare the way in which this same motif is employed in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Virgin and the Gipsy* as a foil to “Englishness” and sexual restriction. Whereas Woolf’s deployment strives for comedy, Lawrence’s deployment takes a deadly serious tone, but both texts use the gypsy trope to suggest an alternative to British sexuality, which in both is portrayed as restrictive, stifling. Additionally, both texts raise the issue of marriage (and by extension, miscegenation). The narration marks Orlando’s acceptance among the gypsies by asserting that they would even allow her to marry one of their kind – but this is ultimately not to be when Orlando’s presentation of “Englishness” irritates her gypsy comrades to the point of inspiring them to plot to either murder or exile her. The fact that Orlando is ultimately rejected by the gypsies is amusing, because they are presented as a fantastical – and therefore completely imaginary – group. While the gypsies in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Virgin and the Gipsy* are articulated in more serious fashion, marriage once again presents an unbreachable divide when Yvette’s attraction to the gypsy is met with a reminder that marriage would be out of the question. The institution of marriage shifts discussions of gender and sexuality out of the private sphere and interprets romantic/sexual unions according to social structures.

Both of these texts present the gypsy motif as a means to challenge normative regimes of gender and sexuality, and when such challenges provoke cultural anxieties, the motif allows for anxieties about gender and sexuality to be translated into anxieties about larger social dynamics involving the institution of marriage, miscegenation, and national allegiance. While these translations hardly

³⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*. (New York: Harcourt, 1928, reprint ed. 2006), 115.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 113

quell the anxieties the trope provokes, they nonetheless divert scrutiny away from the signification of non-normative genderings and sexualities, providing a kind of social shelter through misdirection.

This dynamic of misdirection-via-exoticism is utilized in even more direct manner in the 1931 film, *Mata Hari*, wherein questions about Greta Garbo's character's romantic allegiances are rapidly translated into questions about her national allegiances. Mirroring the real Mata Hari, Garbo's character dresses in concatenation of styles borrowed from different regions in the South Pacific, and dedicates her erotic dance to the Hindu god, Shiva. The first half of the film focuses on Mata Hari's romantic and sexual mystique, which is presented as mysterious, aloof, unknowable. Her national allegiances are likewise presented as unknowable – the head of the French bureau, Dubois, has cast suspicion on her, but can prove nothing. The second half of the film poses a kind of juxtaposition; Mata Hari's romantic allegiance grows increasingly crystalline (she loves Lt. Rosanoff), a fact which ultimately leads to the revelation of her (treasonous) national allegiances.

As the film moves to steadily resolve and define Mata Hari's allegiances, her exotic wardrobe drops away and is likewise replaced in steady manner by darker, more conventional European clothing (she wears a black overcoat and fur to visit Rosanoff in the hospital, and then finally a black nun-like dress to meet the firing squad).

I argue that in the earlier half of the film *Mata Hari* uses nebulous, concatenated tropes of exoticism to perpetuate her own "unknowability," fluidly translating anxieties about her gender and sexuality into anxieties about her national allegiances and back again – but ultimately preventing these anxieties to reach definitive conclusion.

In the examples explored in this chapter, exotic tropes provide a means to access a kind of cultural shelter in the semiotic confusion they create. While other critics have focused on the obvious racism inherent to many of these exotic iterations of fashion and style, I am interested to understand the ways in which iterations of "exotic" fashions can facilitate the articulation of non-normative genderings and desires by eliding them with a kind of semiotic misdirection.

Chapter Five: “The Borrowed Fisherman’s Shirt”

This chapter looks at nautical fashions popular during the early twentieth century, and in particular, the two iterations of maritime style found in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *Tender is the Night* and Ernest Hemingway’s posthumously published novel, *The Garden of Eden*. I argue that these themed set of nautical fashions offer a layered semiotics that alternately undo constructs of traditional genderings (as I argue they do in *The Garden of Eden*), or underscore the transgressive nature of a kind of non-heteronormative hypersexuality (as I argue these fashions do in the case of Mary North and Lady Caroline in Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night*). This chapter unpacks how the semiotics of these styles oppositely shelter or condemn particular genderings and sexualities that break with traditionally established regimes.

Tracing the history of nautical fashions reveals that ironic borrowings – i.e. children dressed in sailor suits – made for some of the earliest and most popular nautical-themed clothing trends. By the late Teens, Coco Chanel brought the same sense of ironic borrowing to women’s fashion, wearing a Breton shirt (the shirt that had been famously worn by Napoleon’s navy) and integrating the Breton into her fashion line. I argue that in *The Garden of Eden*, Catherine Bourne riffs on these fashion trends to enable what essentially becomes her project to unify her appearance and her husband’s appearance under one gender-bending aesthetic. The novel both accesses nautical fashion’s history (and specifically of nautical fashion’s history of being ironically borrowed by multiple demographics) and ignores this history altogether, painting Catherine as a kind of lifestyle trendsetter. Catherine utilizes a set of fashions – the borrowed fisherman shirts, short haircuts, tanned skin – to effect an image wherein she and David look like “brother and sister,” and eventually, like brother and brother.

Meanwhile, *Tender is the Night* offers a very different iteration of nautical fashion, when Mary North and Lady Caroline quite literally dress up as sailors and go trolling for young ladies. The two women wind up arrested and in jail, and the novel’s protagonist, Dick Diver, must go and bail them out. Mark Spilka brings these

two texts – *The Garden of Eden* and *Tender is the Night* – into critical conversation together, championing a bio-critical perspective that interprets *The Garden of Eden* as Hemingway’s “corrective text” to Fitzgerald’s novel. Spilka traces two main motifs to connect the two books: (1) the theme of haircuts, and (2) attempted lesbian affairs. Spilka does not address the common theme of nautical fashion – i.e. that Catherine dresses herself and David in “striped fisherman’s shirts” (presumably similar to the iconic Breton), and Mary North and Lady Caroline dress up in faux navy uniforms. This chapter unpacks the semiotic signals sent by these fashions, with an eye toward those moments these motifs succeed or fail to enable non-normative genderings and desires. This chapter also compares the novel’s descriptions of Mary and Lady Caroline dressed up in sailor’s uniforms to similar images used in U.S. Navy recruitment posters during the Teens and Twenties, examining the ways in which such images possibly cater to homoerotic desires – as long as these images remain ambiguous enough so that a male viewer may be assumed, and homoerotic desire is not spelled out as specifically lesbian desire.

In *The Garden of Eden*, Catherine’s “borrowed fisherman’s shirt” aesthetic enables her to dabble in a kind of cross dressing without the kind of condemnation that befalls *Tender is the Night*’s Mary North and Lady Caroline (Catherine doesn’t wind up in prison). Moreover, Catherine is able to achieve a safe space, however temporary, wherein she is able to become “Peter,” styling her body and behavior in a manner that is in keeping with traditional regimes of masculinity. Both Catherine and David are able to act out a kind of male desire, both with each other and with Marita. But much like *Tender is the Night*, *The Garden of Eden* eventually works to cordon off female ambition and specifically lesbian desire, ultimately painting it as a usurpation of masculinity.

Final Introductory Note

Having outlined these chapters, I must reiterate my earlier caveat that the borrowed fashions discussed in this dissertation do not constitute an isolated phenomenon. Borrowing occurs throughout the history of fashion, spurred on by different events or shifting social relations, resulting in a wide variety of semiotic

linkings and delinkings. I have narrowed the focus of this study to borrowed aesthetics reflected within women's fashions during the early 20th century in part because a cluster of examples appears during this time period, peaking in popularity sometime 1920-1930. Through a practice of "borrowing" that was often playful or ironic in tone, fashion and style of the early 20th century problematized the existent binaries of gender and sexuality, diffusing established taxonomies and enabling greater ambiguity and mobility between a particular style and the set of semiotic values to which it links.

Chapter One: Borrowed Knee Skirts

In *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver is tempted into an affair with Rosemary Hoyt, a young starlet famous for playing the ingénue in a film with the revealing title, *Daddy's Girl*. As Dick first encounters her, the narration reads, “[h]er body hovered delicately on the last edge of childhood – she was almost eighteen, nearly complete, but the dew was still on her.”³² Just after their first kiss, Dick remarks to Rosemary, “When you smile... I always think I’ll see a gap where you’ve lost some baby teeth.”³³ The novel is rife with descriptions that infantilize Rosemary, and Dick’s desire for her is articulated so that it is persistently linked to values of youth, innocence, freshness – and to a certain extent, childishness, tomboyishness, and guilelessness, as well.

While *Tender is the Night* wasn’t published by Scribner’s until 1934, Dick’s attraction to Rosemary is predicated on a particular youth-driven aesthetic that enjoyed a booming popularity among the flappers of the 1920s,³⁴ a style that for the purposes of this chapter I’ve dubbed the “borrowed knee skirts aesthetic” – in acknowledgment of the shorter hemline that typically accompanied this style. Tracing this aesthetic as it appears in *Tender is the Night* illuminates a map of shifting semiotic values, and reveals how Rosemary’s stance of infantilization often serves as a sort of cultural “safety value,” functioning as a posture that renders otherwise racy flapper style “forgivable,” and lessens the perception of

³² F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*. (New York: Scribner, 1934, reprint ed. 1995), 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁴ It’s worth noting, too, that Fitzgerald was (and still is) often credited with “inventing” the flapper – “Fitzgerald, of course, did not invent the flapper,” says Bryant Mangum in his introduction to *The Best Early Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Modern Library, 2005 reprint), “but he did invent the flapper in fiction, bringing her for the first time to the attention of the more than two and a half million readers of... *The Saturday Evening Post*.” While tracing an “original inventor” poses a fruitless (and pointless) pursuit, it is sufficient to say Fitzgerald’s fiction indeed reflects a heavy engagement of the aesthetics that informed the “flapper type.”

transgression against historically established gender regimes and codified sexual desires.

The semiotic mechanism at play within the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic offers multiple and sometimes contradictory readings, and those readings that underscore traditional taxonomies of gender and sexuality serve to elide more progressive – or even transgressive – readings of gender and sexuality that may exist simultaneously within a given stylization. For instance, hegemonic values linking childhood and innocence function to counter-intuitively open up a sexualized space for young “bachelorettes”; by gesturing to a liminal space between childhood and adulthood, the borrowed knee skirt aesthetic points to ripening sexual availability while at the same time thwarting the immediate conversion of that narrative into matrimony and motherhood. Moreover, insofar as the aesthetic may ambivalently gesture to values of asexuality/pansexuality also linked to childhood, it functions to enable the expression of alternate sexualities and marginalized desires, softening social repercussions in the process.

During the turn of the century historical precedent dictated that certain styles signal a woman’s age – i.e. coming of age meant bobbed hair was grown out to long lengths and worn up, schoolgirl-length skirts dropped to the floor, etc. The 1920s notably saw not only the undoing of these signals, but the purposeful inversion, often intended to amuse and shock. Coco Chanel began featuring shorter hemlines as early as 1914, and successfully introduced them into her fashion line in 1918.³⁵ The playful irony – grown women wearing schoolgirl skirts – took off. As one cultural historian puts it, “[t]he most familiar ingredient of flapper fashion was the creeping hemline, which culminated sometime in 1925 or 1926 with skirts that fell fourteen inches above the ground.”³⁶ The obvious result of this trend in shorter skirts is more exposed flesh, and during the flapper’s earliest days, the effect of shorter skirts on the general public was that of both titillation and distress. The tongue-in-cheek op-ed that appeared in the introductory June 1922 edition of

³⁵ Rhonda K. Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*. (New York: Random House, 2014), 79.

³⁶ Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper*. (New York: Broadway Books, 2006), 158.

Flapper magazine (below)³⁷, describes this shock in terms of a “gasping world” and knees as a “terrible bump” to “masculine imaginations.”

THE FLAPPER

Not For Old Fogies
JUNE, 1922

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF KNEES

For the first time since civilization began the world is learning that girls, women, females, maidens and damsels have KNEES.

Nevertheless, it's the naked truth.

And it's becoming more evident every day.

Tain't necessary to roll the sox to disclose them.

The short dresses have revealed them to a gasping world.

And oh, what a shock!

Far from being a being of bewitching curves and dimples, the flapper is revealing herself as a sensation of angles, edges and protuberances.

She still possesses the slender limb that has made America justly famous in the beauty gossip of the world.

The pretty toes, the shapely ankle, the gently undulating leg—and then, to cap the climax—there is the knee. Or should we say knee-cap?

It's a terrible bump—to masculine imaginations.

Just when we were concluding that the flapper had nothing new to show us—along she comes and proves that there is something new under the sunburn.

O, well, I suppose we will be able to worry along, after we get used to them. The first hundred knees are the hardest.

After that you get callous. So do they.

As “The Psychology of Knees” demonstrates, *Flapper* magazine responded to potential public shock and moral outrage with a flippant combination of humor and titillation – the idea being that the latter (humor and titillation) may overwrite the former (shock and moral outrage). In surveying a series of “flapper types” as presented on film, in society headlines, and in literature, flapper style modulated between a stance of brazen, irreverent rebellion or gleeful, childish ignorance. Popular starlets, socialites, and literary characters tended to deploy a strategic blend of both; maintaining a playful tone proved instrumental.

³⁷ National Flappers' Flock, *Flapper*, Chicago: Flapper Pub. Co., vol. 1 (June 22, 1922).

Given the fact that flappers were, in essence, purposefully imitating teenagers, perhaps a comedic, playful tone is unavoidable. Historian Kenneth A. Yellis traces the etymology of the term “flapper” back to its roots, contending that [t]he term “flapper” originated in England as a description of the girls of the awkward age, the mid-teens. The awkwardness was meant literally, and a girl who flapped had not yet reached mature, dignified womanhood... The aesthetic ideal was, in a word, youth.³⁸

Adolescence, or, “the awkward age,” as Yellis refers to it, is a transitory state, a period of life one passes through for only a temporary time. Flapper style represents the indefinite prolonging of this time period, and the corresponding fashions offered ways to achieve this ideal: Breast flatteners minimized a young woman’s chest, drop-waist skirts and dresses deemphasized hips. Cultural historian Lois Banner writes that, what she dubs the iconic “voluptuous woman” of the mid-19th century was later “challenged by the tall, athletic, patrician Gibson girl of the 1890s, whose vogue was superseded in the 1910s by a small, boyish model of beauty exemplified by Mary Pickford and Clara Bow,” women who were “hipless, waistless, boneless.”³⁹ Similarly, Zeitz describes Chanel’s models – the house of Chanel rapidly becoming a sort of epicenter of fashion during that era – as “sleek and boyish” types, who “achieved a trim and linear figure with the help of a breast flattener that deaccentuated all traces of feminine lines.”⁴⁰

The images below – an adult dress pattern from 1927, adult women dancing the very stylized and very girlish Charleston, and a page from a dress catalogue displaying an array of fashions intended for young girls – when viewed collectively reflect the dissolution of semiotic demarcations meant to signal whether a girl was school-age or over eighteen. Gone are the telltale updos and longer skirts; the silhouettes of the adult women’s fashions and the cut of their hairstyles appear identical to those of the illustrated child models in the Philipsborn’s catalogue.

³⁸ Kenneth A. Yellis, “Prosperity’s Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp.44-64, 49

³⁹ Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty*. (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2005), 236.

⁴⁰ Zeitz, *Flapper*, 159.



(Figs. 8, 9, 10) Adult dress pattern envelope from 1927. Flappers dance the girlish Charleston. Compare to below: Page from a 1920s era Philipsborn's catalogue selling children's fashions.



However, it is important to note that while the flapper's "feminine lines" were often obscured, her sexuality was more often than not in plain view. The flapper's "boyish" aesthetic may have broken with traditional gender regimes, but the appeal of her style nonetheless carried sexual overtones. The signification of youth overwrites potentially transgressive, homoerogenous readings of the flapper's sexual appeal but by no means does it delink the aesthetic from the erogenous altogether.

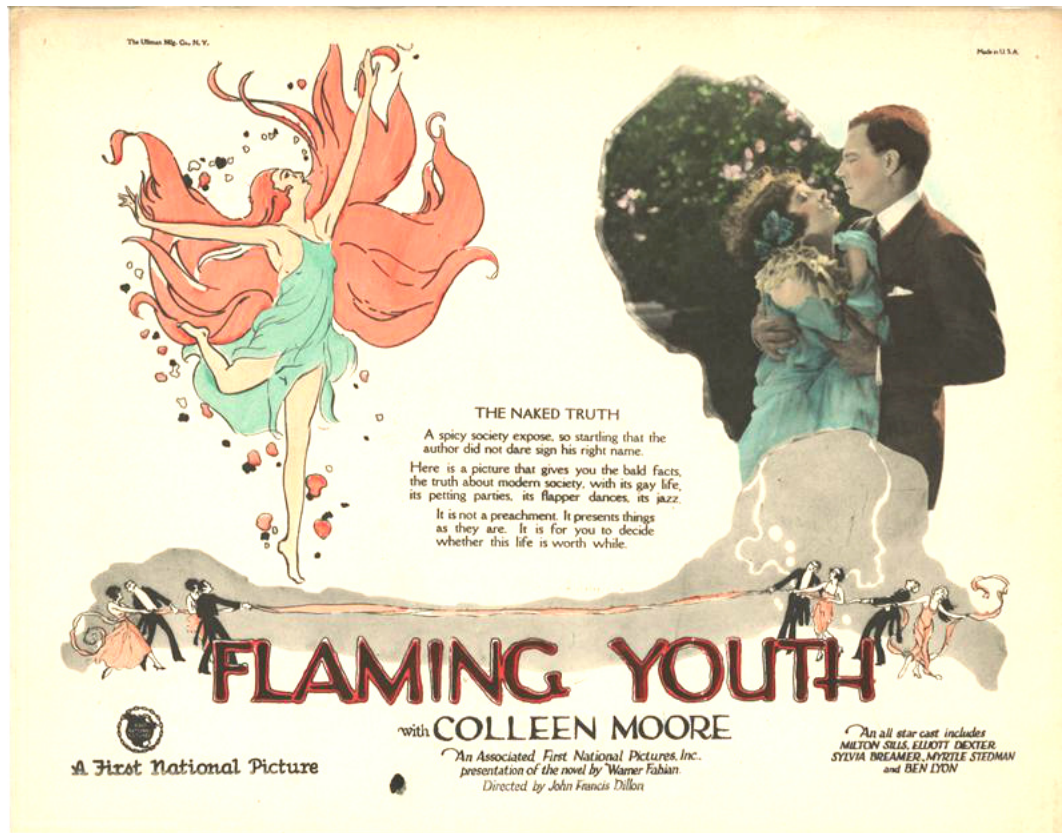
Popular cinema of the 1920s reflects a fascination with the flapper's sexuality as being a property very much on display. Moreover, the flapper's emphasis on youth is directly reflected in several film titles popular during the period. Consider, for instance, the images/motifs implied by such titles as: *Flaming Youth* (1923)⁴¹, *Wine of Youth* (1924)⁴², or *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928)⁴³. All three of these films – as well as many others produced during the era – can be described as coming-of-age stories that "observe" a bold heroine (or anti-heroine, as the case may be) against a backdrop of loose morals and fast times considered to be the mark of modernity in the 1920s.

Moreover, all three of these films claimed to showcase the flapper in her natural habitat, many of the ad lines reading as though flappers were a new breed of creature ripe for anthropological inquiry (with special emphasis on studying the flapper's sexual habits and morals – or lack thereof). Comparing the poster ad copy for *Flaming Youth* (a film based on an anonymously written novel of the same name, poster ad shown below) to the "The Flapper: The Psychology of Knees," the words "the naked truth" appear in both. The word "naked" offers a sense of titillation, but the notion of objective truth introduces a sense of clinical detachment and the tone skews unexpectedly towards the anthropological, as though both the commentary in *Flapper* magazine and film version of *Flaming Youth* offer insight into a sort of prelapsarian primitivism.

⁴¹ Directed by John Francis Dillon, produced and distributed by Associated First National.

⁴² Directed by King Vidor, produced by Louis B. Mayer, distributed by MGM.

⁴³ Directed by Harry Beaumont, produced by Hunt Stromberg, distributed by MGM.



(Fig. 11) [Full text reads:]

THE NAKED TRUTH

A spicy society expose, so startling that the author did not dare sign his right name.

Here is a picture that gives you the bald facts, the truth about modern society, with its gay life, its petting parties, its flapper dances, its jazz.

It is not a preachment. It presents things as they are. It is for you to decide whether this life is worth while.

Wrapped in this rhetoric, the flapper's life and lifestyle are rendered as that of a "primitive" (primitivism being a conceptual cousin of youth), removing spectators' interest in the flapper to a safe armchair-voyeur distance, couching it in a claim of natural, idle curiosity about this much more scandalous breed of creature. The invitation to judge is clearly an invitation to *watch*, without drawing judgment on

oneself – a stance that saw an exponential increase among popular consumerism of the Jazz Age, as it allowed individuals to watch or read about such scandalous tales, while sidestepping the moral questions presented by teetotalers, anti-suffragists, and censors.

Film historian Sara Ross traces two main tones of discourse that served to make the flapper more palatable for popular consumption: The sort of distancing, faux-anthropological rhetoric mentioned above, and comedy. Ross writes that “[flapper] comedies concerning modern girls eased the threat of making of light of and/or satirizing their behavior.”⁴⁴ She quotes *Variety*’s review of the film, *The Plastic Age* (1925)⁴⁵ starring Clara Bow, in which the critic’s pronouncement ran:

‘for the flappers and their sundae buyers *The Plastic Age* is perfect... and the home run hitter will be Clara Bow as Cynthia Day, a tough little baby to hang around a college campus, but her excuse can be that she had no mother to guide her.”⁴⁶

Ross’s focus remains trained on unpacking the ingénue as comedienne, but the language in the *Variety* review she quotes is heavily laden with references to an infantilizing dynamic between men and women both on screen and among members of the imagined audience, beginning with “flappers and their sundae buyers” – an allusion to the newly emergent ritual of dating, but simultaneously evocative of a sort of father-daughter trope, with the man taking “his girl” out for ice cream. Moreover, Bow’s character is described as “a tough little baby,” and her scandalous behavior is “excused” by her lack of a mother.

Values of childishness are evident in the two photographs of Clara Bow and Louise Brooks below. Both photographs are from 1927. On the left, we observe a still shot from Clara Bow’s 1927 feature film, *It*⁴⁷ – as in, “she’s got that ‘It’ quality” (which, the film sets out to prove, Clara Bow’s character has). In the film, Bow plays a shop-girl hoping to catch the eye of the department store owner. The photo below

⁴⁴ Sara Ross, “‘Good Little Bad Girls’: Controversy and the Flapper Comedienne,” *Film History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.409-423, 410

⁴⁵ Directed by Wesley Ruggles, produced by B.P. Schulberg, distributed by Preferred Pictures.

⁴⁶ ‘*The Plastic Age*,’ *Variety*: (November 8, 1923), 14.

⁴⁷ Distributed by Paramount Pictures, directed by Clarence G. Badger and Josef von Sternberg.

captures the image of Bow moments after her most successful date with her prized beau – a date wherein the two visit a carnival, laughing and behaving like a pair of giddy teenagers (Bow’s skirt flips up inappropriately on a carnival ride, her patron wins her the stuffed animals she is holding in the still frame). When her “date” drives her to her doorstep and attempts to kiss her, Bow swats him away, outraged with indignance at his aggressive advances, and dramatically runs inside her apartment building (as pictured below, left).

(Figs 12, 13): Clara Bow in 'It.' Publicity photo of Louise Brooks.



Suddenly, the same girl who earlier in the film leans over the shop counter sighing with blatant lust and whose line reads, “Sweet Santa Claus! Give me *him*,” indicates she feels preyed upon in this later scene, and sets about consoling herself by innocently cuddling stuffed toys like a child. As she sobs and sighs her way upstairs to her bedroom, she continues to kiss, pet, and cuddle the toy animals, looking wistfully out the window at her lover as he eventually drives away. This swiveling posture – one minute worldly, flirty, and naughty, and the next minute demure, pouty, and practically sucking her thumb – is the means by which Bow’s character strategically plays both the seductress *and* the ingénue. To achieve the flapper’s key

cultural balance, she needs both her love interest and the film audience to respect her vice and virtue in equal measures, and, oddly enough, she is able to accomplish this by vacillating between “vamp” and “baby” (in her article, Ross uses the phrase “baby vamp” to describe this particular trope of behavior).

Throughout the film, Bow dresses in flapper fashions in keeping with the “borrowed knee skirts” style, and in the photograph above, Bow is wearing a short pleated skirt, Mary Jane shoes with satin detail on the T-strap, a fitted sweater with a rather playful diamond pattern, and a gamine French beret secured over a short, bobbed haircut previously only worn by young schoolgirls. In an intriguingly similar portrait – also taken in 1927 – we observe Louise Brooks (above, right), also clutching stuffed toys. This second photograph, taken by Eugene Robert Richee, was a publicity photo-op of Brooks “relaxing in her home with a couple of soft toys.”⁴⁸ Brooks looks both more and less infantile than Bow, clutching the toys and looking directly into the camera almost like a mischievous toddler, yet dressed in what appears to be a low-cut velvet jacket of some variety, a necklace with lacquered beads strung high about her neck almost in the manner of a lariat, its loose ends dangling in the general direction of her cleavage. At the same time, the two photos still have striking similarities in how they inflect the subject’s overt sexuality with the cloying, juvenile props – the stuffed toys, held tight to each woman’s body (not to mention, the toys themselves are eerily similar – especially the spotted dog/lamb on each woman’s right side).

In both of these images, Bow and Brooks are clearly imitating children in a manner that conflates “childish” with “sexy.” In many ways, the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic opens up a space for young women to act on their desires without shame and penalty – while simultaneously ignoring the subtext of pedophilia inherent to the desire they incite. At forty years old, Bow’s love interest in the movie *It* was eighteen years her senior, but the age difference seems further exacerbated by Bow’s stylized presentation of herself as a pouty little girl. Similarly, Rosemary Hoyt – a young adult, but still a legal adult (she turns eighteen just before her first

⁴⁸ Richee, Eugene Robert, “*Louise Brooks Relaxing in Her Home with a Couple of Soft Toys*,” 1927. From Getty Images.

kiss with Dick) – has earned her fame and fortune by dressing and behaving like, as Dick puts it, “[s]uch a lovely child.”

At first glance, it appears as though Rosemary’s youth is an impediment to their romance – something for Rosemary and Dick to navigate carefully around. But upon closer inspection, Rosemary’s youth – or the signification of it – actually functions to *enable* their relationship, as the two of them can hide behind it during key moments in order to avoid scrutiny and judgment. As she and Dick begin their affair, Rosemary often cuddles up to him like a child, which infuses her adulterous confessions with an air of innocence.

She smiled up at him; her hands playing conventionally with the lapels of his coat. “I’m in love with you and Nicole. Actually that’s my secret—I can’t even talk about you to anybody because I don’t want any more people to know how wonderful you are. Honestly—I love you and Nicole—I do.”⁴⁹

The dynamic between them – the way her hands “play conventionally” with his lapels, the melodrama of her “secret” – all of this suggests that the star of *Daddy’s Girl* is actively playing the real-life part of daddy’s girl in this exchange. Moreover, her infantilized stance allows her to make the claim that she loves *both* Dick and Nicole, like a child devoted to two parents. This claim inflects her confession with both an extra tinge of danger as well as an extra tinge of safety – danger in expressing her potential desire for a woman, and safety in that her “couple-crush” shields her from accusations that she is essentially an adulterous interloper.

Significantly in this scene, *Rosemary* – not Dick – is the one to make the first sexual advance. The text reads:

Suddenly she came toward him, her youth vanishing as she passed inside the focus of his eyes and he had kissed her breathlessly as if she were any age at all. Then she lay back against his arm and sighed.⁵⁰

Her youth “vanishes” at the perfect moment so that Dick’s kiss bears no trace of pedophilia. Or, at the very least, the novel adds a note of ambiguity when he returns her kiss “as if she were any age at all,” thereby avoiding directly indicting him as a

⁴⁹ Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, 63.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

lecherous old man. And yet, only a few lines later, Dick makes the remark mentioned at the outset of this chapter:

“When you smile—” He had recovered his paternal attitude, perhaps because of Nicole’s silent proximity, “I always think I’ll see a gap where you’ve lost some baby teeth.”⁵¹

These lines signify that Dick has completed his own transition – he is no longer “lover” but fully transformed into “father,” having “recovered his paternal attitude.” By giving its characters dual (or multiple) stances (Rosemary as baby, Rosemary as vamp, Dick as lover, Dick as father) the text offers a way to read “around” a subtext of pedophilia.

Overall, a key component of the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic is its dynamism – i.e. its ability to shift between alternate significations. Take, for example, an adult woman quite literally wearing the shorter skirt of a schoolgirl. This image may signal infantilization and childish innocence, or – on the other hand – it may emphasize sexual maturity by presenting a contrast between the expected wearer of the skirt (a child) and the individual who has appropriated it (a woman whose legs are presumably the legs of an adult). Furthermore, within the discourse of childhood and youth, gender and sexuality are not monolithic or static. A “child” is not a singular identity. In terms of gender, discourses of childhood are often historically invested in reaffirming binary regimes of gender and heterosexuality (boys and girls are “naturally” drawn to opposite toys and behaviors), yet competing discourses portray childhood as a time of androgyny (boys and girls have not yet developed differences between them, much less the awareness of difference). In terms of sexuality, discourses of childhood wildly vacillate between extremes wherein youth is linked to asexuality on one hand, and a kind of pure id-driven pansexuality on the other hand.

Furthermore, “primitivist” movements of the late 19th century and early 20th century, marked by a desire to take a step away from technology and civilization,

⁵¹ Ibid., 64.

tended to conflate the “childlike” with the “uncivilized native.”⁵² Viewing youth as a primitive virtue consequently positions the infantilized flapper in opposition to the cultural institutions of civilization and more specifically, in opposition to mature roles within the archetypal family unit. For a flapper whose aesthetic appeal is predicated on her childlike whimsy, this means shunning the two “M”s that so often denote mature womanhood: matrimony and matriarchy. To play the flapper is to act the part of the single bachelorette, the girl who – like Rosemary Hoyt – has only just barely come of age, the “dew still on her.” Motherhood, in particular, undercuts the believability of one’s youthful performance.

At the outset of *Tender is the Night*, Rosemary is seventeen, and not expected to be a mother, or even necessarily pressing for motherhood. The female characters in *The Great Gatsby* are older, yet at the same time, none are particularly interested in motherhood. Daisy Buchanan’s famous (possibly post-partum-inflected) speech recalling her first moments of motherhood expresses her profound disenchantment with the birth of her daughter, and her hopes that her daughter will be a fool, as “that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.”⁵³ The glimpses that the novel gives of Daisy’s life as a mother are exceedingly few and far between. When readers *do* see Daisy in the role of mother, it is jarring, and her disinterest is plain. The solitary scene in which Daisy’s child makes an appearance has the effect of an ice-bath on *Gatsby*, and as readers, we are not far behind.

Note Nick’s language in this scene, as Daisy’s daughter is referred to as “the child,” and “it,” and note Daisy’s inability to speak to her daughter directly: She either coos at her daughter in baby talk or speaks about her in the third person, as though the girl is not in the room.

...a freshly laundered nurse leading a little girl came into the room.

“Bles-sed pre-cious,” she crooned, holding out her arms. “Come to your own mother that loves you.”

⁵² With this reference I am drawing on a much larger discourse within literature, art, and music. Taking a wide view, I am referring to the “primitive” motifs as incorporated into the work of Matisse and Picasso, or manifest in the music of Igor Stravinsky, etc, as well as overt proclamations such as Aleksandr Shevchenko’s 1913 pamphlet, “Neo-primitivism,” linking “folk art” and “the child.”

⁵³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*. (New York: Scribner, 1925, reprint ed., 2004), 17.

The child, relinquished by the nurse, rushed across the room and rooted shyly into her mother's dress.

"The bles-sed pre-cious! Did mother get powder on your old yellowy hair? Stand up now, and say – How-de-do."

Gatsby and I in turn leaned down and took the small reluctant hand.

Afterward he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before.

"I got dressed before luncheon," said the child, turning eagerly to Daisy.

"That's because your mother wanted to show you off." Her face bent into the single wrinkle of the small white neck. "You dream, you. You absolute little dream."

"Yes," admitted the child calmly. "Aunt Jordan's got on a white dress too."

"How do you like mother's friends?" Daisy turned her around so that she faced Gatsby. "Do you think they're pretty?"

"Where's Daddy?"

"She doesn't look like her father," explained Daisy. "She looks like me. She's got my hair and shape of the face."

Daisy sat back upon the couch. The nurse took a step forward and held out her hand.

"Come, Pammy."

"Good-by, sweetheart!"⁵⁴

The portrait that emerges in this scene does not paint Daisy in a very motherly light. Daisy's interaction with the child is brief, and she makes it clear that her interest in the child is primarily as a possession she might "show off."

Gatsby is shocked she has any child at all; in his mind Daisy has not altered one bit from the adolescent debutante he first encountered back in Louisville. This

⁵⁴ Ibid., 117.

leads to yet another observation: Note the odd use of language in this passage as concerns age. Daisy coos away in baby-talk, while her daughter (a girl whose name we might never know in the course of this novel, save for the fact her nurse calls her “Pammy” as they leave the room) is described as having “old yellowy hair.” Daisy hugs her, and folds her face into “the single wrinkle of small white neck.” An odd reversal of language surfaces in this passage: dressed in formal clothes to match the adults, Pammy bears the patina of the old, sexless matriarch, while Daisy plays the part of the dewy-faced infant, gurgling out baby-talk, presenting her daughter as a doll with which she plays, delighted and behaving in a precious manner herself all the while. Daisy may be overcompensating here; she clings to Gatsby’s idea of her, and she can’t be over the hill if she’s still a child, a young prepubescent girl yet on the verge of becoming a woman.

Daisy’s “overcompensation” is characteristic of the more extreme values of youth that are at play in the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic. An article entitled “Madame in Search of her Youth” that appeared in the January 1922 edition of *Vogue* magazine gives a detailed account of the reporter’s visit to a beauty salon that specializes in restorative facials. The subheading, or “shout line” reads: “No Matter How Fresh and Vigorous One’s Face May Be at Ten, When One Gets On The ‘Shady’ Side, Vigilance Is Necessary.”⁵⁵ The desire to remain young-looking is hardly anything new; history records the many efforts and potions favored by ancient civilizations. But the ideal age of beauty as stated is strikingly young here – the bar being set at how fresh one’s face looks “at ten.” Incidentally, the article’s author is Pauline Pfeiffer, who would later go on to have an affair with Hemingway and become his second wife. At the time she tested out the restorative facial in question, she would have been 26. A few pages away in the same edition of *Vogue*, an advertisement appears for The House of Youth, a clothing store. The illustrated model sports a baby face framed by short curly hair. “Springlike!” “Youthful!” the advertisement shouts repeatedly:

⁵⁵ Pauline Pfeiffer, “Madame in Search of her Youth,” *Vogue*, Vol. 1, Jan 1922, pp.88-90, 88.

9



**Striking a
New Note in Youthful Styles**

HAPPY companions are springtime and Youth-time, for do not spring and the freshness and bloom of Youth go hand-in-hand?

For spring, the House of Youth has created just the type of youthful styles in Coats, Suits and Dresses that express that vivacious spirit. The new modes portray every advance fashion note. The fabrics, the colors, the trimmings—all are distinctively, exclusively Springlike! Youthful! The spirit of Youth itself smiles at you from these delightful clothes.

Exclusive dealers are now featuring advance spring House of Youth styles. If you cannot locate your store, please communicate with us.

SCHULMAN & HAUPTMAN
38 East 29th Street, New York City
3 Avenue De L'Opera, Paris

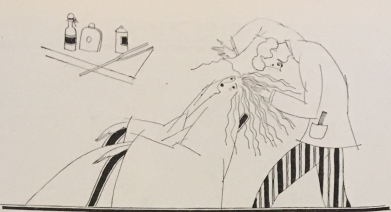
The House of Youth
CREATORS
**Exclusive Apparel
For Misses**


"Doris Goes Shopping,"
an interesting booklet will be
sent you free at your request.

(Figs. 14, 15) Ad for The House of Youth, "Exclusive Apparel for Misses."

Below: 26-year-old Pauline Pfeiffer's editorial piece on facials promising restored youth.

January 1 51



MADAME IN SEARCH OF HER YOUTH

No Matter How Fresh and Vigorous One's
Face May Be at Ten, When One Gets On
The "Shady" Side, Vigilance Is Necessary

By PAULINE PFEIFFER

ANY one can be reasonably sure that an acorn will grow into an oak, but no one

Then, in the middle of my anxious scrutiny, my feet began to hurt. They always do lately—no, rather

I was seized by one master after another, and I was the masterpiece of each. I felt, after every one, that my proper place was in the museum.

"Perhaps," I said hesitantly, "you think I am going to do more than I am going to do."
"Going to do more than you are going to do, Madame?" repeated a polite, English voice.
It sounded quite silly, the way the nurse said it—for, of course, I wasn't going to do anything at all. She was going to do it. But I had my dignity to maintain. I went right on.
"Yes," I said. "There are only a few little wrinkles around the eyes, and some tiny creases in my forehead and—I don't know why I didn't stop there. It must have been because she looked at me so seriously and expectantly—and maybe the cheek muscles do sag a very—"
"Oh, Madame," the voice interrupted, exhibiting itself as a medium for expressing deep feeling. "They are the first to go—the beginning of the end, unless," she added in firmer voice, "they are taken in time."

Pauline Pfeiffer

“The spirit of Youth itself smiles at you from these delightful clothes,” the advertisement promises. “Youth itself” (note how in the ad it is always spelled with a capital “Y”) is presented as the commodity for sale, an abstraction delivered into finite physical form via “apparel.” Surveying other 1920’s editions of *Vogue* (as well as *Harper’s Bazaar*, and *McCall’s*), ads predicated chiefly on “youth” and articles such as “Madame in Search of Her Youth” dominate the pages.

In some aspects, the popular emphasis on youth reads like a celebration of a wondrously carefree – albeit transient – time. At the same time, the persistent underscoring of youth signals a denial of aging and the stigmatization of old age. So far, most of these examples of fictional and real life women employing the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic discussed here have featured 20-something women behaving like prepubescent girls (or in Rosemary Hoyt’s case, an eighteen-year-old woman behaving like a prepubescent girl). But this begs the questions: What happens when a much older woman attempts to employ the borrowed skirts aesthetic? What becomes of the “aging flapper”?

Coco Chanel embodied one example of “an aging flapper” who continued to employ the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic well into her middle-aged years and beyond. According to biographer Rhonda K. Garelick, Chanel famously adopted a habit of wearing a “startling and incongruous accessory for a woman over fifty: a big floppy satin bow tied around her hair.”⁵⁶ Pleated skirts and schoolgirl sweaters still made regular appearances both in Chanel’s personal fashion as well as her manufactured line. However, Chanel stands somewhat outside of mainstream society, elevated by her status as a celebrity and tastemaker. Moreover, Chanel’s success in being able to continue “pulling off” the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic may be due in part to her attitude of ironic self-awareness in the act of appropriation. In donning a large, floppy, satin schoolgirl’s bow around her hair, Chanel did not disabuse anyone of her real age. As a fashion designer, Chanel presents herself as the master of her clothing’s semiotic signals, more puppeteer than puppet – her appropriation is conscious and the tone of it acknowledges the

⁵⁶ Garelick, 266.

“incongruity” between the bow and her advanced years. In other words: She doesn’t expect one to look at her and her bow and *actually see a schoolgirl*.

By acknowledging the irony inherent to her schoolgirl style and implying that it is purposeful, Chanel presents herself as desexualized, a designer and businessperson first and foremost, rather than presenting herself as an object of desire. But other older women who engaged the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic on a more fundamental consumer level did not benefit from Chanel’s unique cultural position. Playing a sexualized version of the little girl role for too long – at least, well beyond the limits of suspension of disbelief, that is – may be read as monstrous and unnatural. In *The Crack-Up*, Fitzgerald expressed his admiration for Noël Coward, and particularly for Coward’s play, *The Vortex*.⁵⁷ First performed in 1924, *The Vortex* focuses primarily on the relationship between a mother, Florence, and her adult son, Nicky. Moreover, the play paints a portrait of a woman who has become monstrous in her refusal to accept her age and act accordingly. In terms of her youthful behavior, Florence has painted herself into a corner, or so it would seem. One of the side-characters, Helen, observes that “it’s too late for [Florence] to become beautifully old. She’ll have to be young indefinitely.”⁵⁸ Helen later elaborates:

HELEN: You’re ten years older than I am, but when I’m your age I shall be twenty years older than you.

FLORENCE: *Darling*, how deliciously involved – what *can* you mean by that?

HELEN: I mean, I think it’s silly not to grow old when the time comes.⁵⁹

Over the course of the play, Florence’s “silly” behavior is revealed to be malignant. She regularly commits adultery, and moreover, has a long history of neglecting a son who has developed an addiction to cocaine.

In his introduction to the 1989 Methuen Drama edition of the printed play, Sheridan Morley relays Noël Coward’s account of the incident that inspired him to write *The Vortex*. Coward was recorded as saying

⁵⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack Up*. (New York: New Directions, 1936).

⁵⁸ Noël Coward, *The Vortex*. (London: Methuen, 1989), 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

“A friend of mine was a guards officer who had a problem mother, a lady whose lovers were men of her son’s age. One evening I was at a supper club, the Garrick Galleries I think, with my friend when his mother walked in. ‘Look over there’ someone said, ‘at that old hag with the good-looking young man in tow!’ I tried to imagine what her son must have been thinking, and the incident gave me the idea for *The Vortex*.”⁶⁰

Mirroring real life, Florence takes lovers her son’s age, resulting in an awkward exchange when Nicky’s fiancée, Bunty, and Florence’s latest lover, Tom, recognize one another and admit they “used to know one another awfully well.”⁶¹ This reunion touches off the unraveling of the hitherto existing unions – Tom dumps Florence, Bunty calls off her engagement with Nicky.

Ultimately, Florence takes the blame for all of it. The play’s resolution comes when Nicky finally confronts his mother, shaming her for her inability to act as a mature mother should:

FLORENCE: I’m still young inside – I’m still beautiful – why shouldn’t I live my life as I choose?

NICKY: You’re not young or beautiful; I’m seeing that for the first time how old you are – it’s horrible – your silly fair hair – and your face all plastered and painted – ⁶²

In the play’s final lines, Nicky lays down the law and declares

NICKY: Now then! Now then! You’re not to have any more lovers; you’re not going to be beautiful and successful ever again – you’re going to be my mother for once – it’s about time I had one to help me, before I go over the edge altogether – ⁶³

These final scenes reveal Florence’s appearance (“your silly fair hair” and “your face all plastered and painted”) as a mask – and one that she has unsuccessfully appropriated. Society’s cultural tolerance of the folly of youth is not available to her, and it would seem that the flapper act has an expiration date. As the comedic

⁶⁰ Sheridan Morley, introduction to *The Vortex* by Noël Coward. (London: Methuen, 1989), xiii.

⁶¹ Coward, *The Vortex*, 25.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 64.

dynamic that informs the cultural rhetoric of the flapper shifts from inclusive (the flapper, for all her “gee-whiz” is sly, in on the joke) to exclusive (Florence *is* a joke, an old woman in too much makeup, an unwitting clown).

Florence cannot strategically display and hide her sexuality behind an innocent little girl act. Neither can she expect forgiveness for acting on her sexual desires by spinning them to her audience as a child’s blameless, hypersexual/pansexual impulse. The flapper’s infantilized aesthetic is not hers to borrow or access, and in the end, Florence, her sexuality, and her artifice are left on full display for all to judge in revulsion.

While *The Vortex* showcases the failure of an individual character to engage this borrowed knee skirts aesthetic, a second hypothetical questions begs an answer: What happens when the aesthetic itself ages and falls out of fashion? By the time Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* was first published in 1955, the flappers of the Jazz Age had become mothers and grandmothers, and flapper fashion had grown antique. The post-World War II baby boom was in full swing, and a hyper-domestic aesthetic showcasing a curvy, small-waisted, full-skirted mature woman had wiped the childlike, tomboy flapper off the pages of *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, etc. In short, the “borrowed knee skirts” aesthetic had fallen from popularity when *Lolita* reached the public, and in many ways, *Lolita* is significant in that it gives the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic literal form, with shockingly monstrous results.

Humbert Humbert is absolutely articulate and precise in describing his desire for Lolita – the “nymphets” who steal his heart are “between the age limits of nine and fourteen,”⁶⁴ gives frequent description of slender arms, boyish hips and undeveloped breasts, and tells admiring anecdotes about the tomboy activities these nymphets get up to, involving roller skates, bubblegum, skinned knees and chewed fingernails. If Humbert’s descriptions of the object of his desire alone don’t make it clear enough, he reminds the reader that “the idea of time plays such a magic part in

⁶⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*. (New York: Vintage, 1989), 10.

the matter” that there “must be a gap of several years, never less than ten... between maiden and man.”⁶⁵

Humbert learns, too, that he is unable to accept staged approximations; it is not enough to dress and act the part of the infantilized schoolgirl, he finds himself ultimately betrayed by the artifice of adult women who portray themselves as younger than they actually are. In this regard, Humbert’s disdain mirrors Nicky’s rejection of his mother’s artificial youth in *The Vortex*, yet through hyperbole *Lolita* turns the aesthetic on its head. Florence presents herself as an object of affection in *The Vortex* but is denied access to the aesthetic she pursues, and in her failure is revealed to be monstrous. In *Lolita*, the infantilized aesthetic is literalized to its utmost extreme, and the aesthetic that informs the desire itself is rendered monstrous (as embodied by the male pedophile that is Humbert Humbert).

Tender is the Night comes quite close to literalizing the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic as well, but unlike *Lolita*, the novel does not exaggerate the aesthetic to the point of parody. Instead, *Tender is the Night* toys with the aesthetic in echoed themes – in particular, critics have pointed out the ways in which Dick’s desire for the childish-sexy Rosemary mirrors the dark and painful incestuous relationship between Nicole and her father.⁶⁶ Rosemary’s youth functions as a kind of shifting fulcrum for other characters – chiefly, Dick – to leverage their own shifting identities against. And while she ages over the course of the novel, we don’t see her advance into middle age (the infamous vanishing point for actresses in Hollywood). The glimpses of Rosemary that we *do* see reflect a popular “flapper type” who is able to use the aesthetic of youth to secure film contracts and express unorthodox desires (love for a married man, love for his wife) without repercussion. The catch, however, is that the reader’s glimpses of Rosemary are both limited and strategic.

Published in 1934, *Tender is the Night* serves as a herald that the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic was destined to fall out of fashion during the coming years

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ In particular, see Tiffany Joseph, “Non-Combatant’s Shell-Shock”: Trauma and Gender in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s ‘Tender is the Night’, “*NWSA Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Autumn, 2003), 64-81, which unpacks the relationship between Dick and Nicole as a reenactment of incestuous trauma Nicole experienced at a young age at the hands of her father.

(with *Lolita* later dancing on the aesthetic's grave – which is also not to say the aesthetic hasn't been periodically resurrected since). The components of the aesthetic as deployed by Rosemary Hoyt that effectively function in the beginning of the novel to facilitate Dick and Rosemary's shared attraction for one another are increasingly watered down and irrelevant by the book's end, as Dick's consummation of the affair signals his decent into moral decay. While *The Vortex* showcased an aging flapper losing her grip on the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic, *Tender is the Night* unpacks an alternate component of the same narrative of aesthetic failure. We don't see Rosemary attempting to deploy the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic and failing (as we see Florence); instead the novel slowly unravels Dick's moral character, ultimately faulting him for "falling for" the aesthetic in the first place and even participating in its discursive circulation. In his desire for Rosemary and her childish stylization, Dick is – much like Jay Gatsby – cursed with an outdated sense of nostalgia (paired with a false belief that he can perpetually relive his youth) that ultimately undoes him.⁶⁷ Both male characters are nostalgic for a younger, more childish self, and a more juvenile notion of romance.

While both *The Vortex* and *Tender is the Night* eventually unpack the failings of the popular flapper aesthetic of borrowed youth culture, *The Vortex* focuses on one aging flapper's failure to convince her audience with the aesthetic, whereas *Tender is the Night* takes a step back, offering a critique of the aesthetic on a larger, more macro level. The latter's more distanced perspective is possibly explained by the fact that *Tender is the Night* was published ten years after *The Vortex* was first performed onstage, and the novel reflects culture's further circulation/metabolization of the aesthetic during those ten years.

Furthermore, during those moments when the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic is successful in *Tender is the Night*, the emphasis is on *borrowed*. Acting is an important motif throughout the novel. Rosemary's onscreen success in *Daddy's Girl* suggests that – much like real life actresses Clara Bow and Louise Brooks – she has learned to engage the infantilized aesthetic on purpose, and to her own

⁶⁷ The same argument may be made about Humbert Humbert's relationship to nostalgia and his misguided pursuit of lost youth.

advantage. For his part – at least in the earlier half of the novel – Dick can't be reproached as a morally corrupt pedophile because, after all, Rosemary is *acting*; we are meant to understand that self-conscious performance is part of the aesthetic and irony is always intended. Acting also constitutes a profession for Rosemary, enabling her to count herself a breadwinner – a status that defies male/female gender regimes as well. Her mother sums up this transgender phenomenon when she gives Rosemary some advice about Rosemary's impending affair with Dick, saying to her daughter that:

“You were brought up to work – not especially to marry. Now you've found your first nut to crack and it's a good nut – go ahead and put whatever happens down to experience. Wound yourself or him – whatever happens can't spoil you because economically you're a boy, not a girl.”⁶⁸

On an immediate level, the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic transforms Rosemary into a child. But on a meta level, acting out this aesthetic in a professional capacity transforms Rosemary into an “economic boy” – which in this case, is a position of greater power and privilege.

The latter half of the novel unravels the aesthetic that informs much of first half's open-ended, “liberated” configurations of gender and sexuality. Moreover, the latter half of the novel forecloses on the “cultural safety valve” function of the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic. Having framed Rosemary as the designated “actor” and baby-vamp, the novel shifts its focus to Dick as actor instead. More importantly: The novel shifts its focus to Dick as a *failed* actor. Dick turns down Rosemary's repeated exhortations to do a screen test with her studio, claiming to take his job as a doctor too seriously to consider Hollywood, but as the plot reveals (and Kaethe remarks), “Dick is no longer a serious man”⁶⁹ Descending into alcoholism, Dick's life's work – in this case, rescuing his star patient, Nicole – is revealed for what it is: Nick acting the part of her protector/father and failing; his paternal attitude towards Nicole recreates her relationship with her pedophile father in some regards, and his affairs and increasing recklessness send Nicole into a relapse. In

⁶⁸ Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, 40.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

general, Dick's nostalgia and his enchantment with youth prove to be his folly (a point that is physically underscored when Dick tries to show off on water skis as he once did and, older now, hurts himself). Dick even predicts his own undoing at the mercy of the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic, declaring to Rosemary over the telephone that "[w]hen a child can disturb a middle-aged gent —things get difficult."⁷⁰

Overall, the *Tender is the Night* traces the greater life of the borrowed knee skirts aesthetic that peaked in popularity during the 1920s but began to fade during the 1930s. And while the latter two-thirds or so of the novel show the aesthetic as being Dick's "undoing," this does not eclipse the fact that during the beginning of the novel, Rosemary's ability to fluidly gesture to multiple sets of significations (a paradoxical simultaneity conveyed in the turn of phrase "baby-vamp") effectively carves out a crucial semiotic space, one that allows both progressive and conservative readings of gender and sexuality to exist simultaneously. In terms of gender, where she breaks with traditional gender regimes (drinking, traveling alone, earning a breadwinner's income) she is able to elide these transgressions by acting the part of an ingénue and child. In terms of sexuality, Rosemary is able to re-code her sexual aggression and adulterous behavior as the blameless actions of an impulsive, hypersexual/pansexual child ("I'm in love with you *and* Nicole" – emphasis mine). And in those moments where the desire between Rosemary and Dick may present itself as predatory, pedophilic, or homoerogenous, Rosemary's double-stance as a "baby-vamp" functions to elide the transgressive nature of both of their actions; oscillating temporarily away from "baby" and more directly towards "vamp," Rosemary's youth vanishes at will as she moves towards Dick and they kiss "as if she were any age at all."

⁷⁰ Ibid., 94.

Chapter Two: The Borrowed Riding Jacket

In Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, the narrator, Jake Barnes describes bumping into Lady Brett Ashley at a bar while in the company of Robert Cohn. She greets the two men in a familiar manner – “Hello, chaps” – as though to imply same-sex camaraderie between all three of them. When Jake asks her why she isn't “tight” (drunk), she replies, “Never going to get tight any more. I say, give a chap a brandy and soda.”⁷¹ This initial impression of Brett encapsulates several key components of her charm. First, she's clearly a regular on the Paris café and bar scene, which insinuates she can hold her own in the company of men. The fact that she immediately contradicts herself, saying she's “never going to get tight (drunk) any more” while simultaneously ordering a brandy and soda suggests she is being arch and witty. And finally, she refers to herself as “a chap,” while ordering her drink.

Jake goes on to note Robert Cohn's immediate attraction to Brett, narrating frankly that

Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy's. She started all that. She was built with curves like the hull of a racing yacht, and you missed none of it with that wool jersey.⁷²

Jake's description of Brett's appeal offers a mixture of images that are linked to opposite poles of a gender modality defined by a binary. Brett's hair is brushed back “like a boy's.” She wears a jersey sweater – an example of “sportswear” that was growing in popularity at the time – yet for all this garment's supposed androgyny, it serves to emphasize her physical difference as a woman by highlighting the curves of her body. In essence, Jake's description of Brett's aesthetic appeal presents an

⁷¹ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*. (New York: Scribner, 1926, reprint ed. 2016), 18.

⁷² Ibid.

image that includes a wide range of semiotic signals, signals that sometimes give contradictory interpretations of Brett's gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Jake describes Brett as having "started all that" – a seemingly abstract turn of phrase. Assumedly, "all that" has something to do with Brett's sporty sweater and masculine hairstyle and the fact that these styles as worn by Brett render her "damned good-looking."

Jake is also quick to gossip to Cohn and others about Brett's unusual social position. She is "Lady Brett Ashley," and although she is awaiting a divorce, she is an aristocrat by marriage. Perceptions of Brett's "borrowed" style are no doubt inflected by perceptions of her privileged, elevated status. Viewed in this light, she is not borrowing men's fashions out of necessity; she is appropriating masculine style because she wants to, and because she can. She is perceived to be making a conscious fashion choice, a distinction that positions her as a trendsetter, as opposed to fashion victim.

In tracing the semiotic signals evident in Brett's aesthetic appeal, a through line connects Brett to the real-life fashion icon, Coco Chanel. History records Chanel as one of the main female figures who "started all that" – i.e. appropriating menswear for the purposes of women's fashion. When Chanel borrowed her lover Etienne Balsan's riding clothes around 1908 and retailored them for her purposes it struck her admirers as the sort of fashionable whim that was typical of an eccentric aristocrat.^{73 74} Chanel was not a natural-born aristocrat (again, neither was Brett) but this fact was overlooked to the point of being forgotten, especially by the people who admired Chanel. Her admirers formed an ever-expanding circle that eventually included the general public, the latter of which came to see her as the epitome of upper class tastes. Eventually, Chanel went on to start her own house of fashion based on her tailored riding jackets and more. Chanel's equestrian-influenced

⁷³ Rhonda K. Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*. (New York: Random House, 2014), 50.

⁷⁴ A number of biographies about Coco Chanel have been published in recent years and provided insight for this dissertation. See also Justine Picardie's *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life*. (New York: It/HarperCollins, 2010) and Hal Vaughan's *Sleeping with the Enemy: Coco Chanel's Secret War*. (New York: Knopf, 2011). While Picardie paints an avid fan's portrait of Chanel, and Vaughan's account of Chanel was labeled "incendiary" by the *NY Times* and "controversial" by *The Guardian* due to its emphasis on Chanel's close relationships with Germany's Nazi party and his claim that Chanel actively spied for Germany, Garelick toes a middle-of-the-road line and takes the most academic approach, so I've mainly quoted from her here for the purposes of this dissertation.

fashions included, as Chanel biographer Rhonda K. Garelick phrases it, “pullovers like those worn by horse trainers”⁷⁵ – a description that echoes Jake’s description of Brett’s “slipover jersey sweater.” By the 1920s, when Hemingway would have been writing *The Sun Also Rises* (first published 1926), Coco Chanel had begun to manufacture and sell her fashions more widely, and her equestrian styles were everywhere – especially all over urban France.

I have dubbed this aesthetic the “borrowed riding jacket” style, a descriptor that refers to a group of fashions and stylizations borrowed from menswear and specifically linked to values of aristocracy and the structured leisure activities one might expect to find in a boarding school environment. Brett Ashley embodies one instance of the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic, which functions to elide potentially transgressive signals of gender and sexuality by emphasizing signals of class. Jake’s desire for Brett (along with the desire demonstrated by the other men in the novel) can be read as an aspirational class desire – Brett belongs to an elite circle; she literally has an aristocratic title and is presumably on the cutting edge of culture and fashion. The manner in which she styles herself, with her slipover jersey sweater and hair “brushed like a boy’s” can be read as signals of her avant-garde fashion sense and consequently as signals of her class status – therefore overwriting the potential homoerogenous characteristics of Jake’s desire.

While the “borrowed riding jacket” aesthetic may function to elide potentially homoerogenous signals, by no means do these signals cease to exist. In fact, given its ambiguous or pivoting nature, the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic allows both heteronormative and homoerogenous readings to co-exist simultaneously, easing social resistance against semiotic signals perceived as transgressive. Comparing several examples of real-life and fictional women who engaged the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic illuminates commonalities among the semiotics at work in each woman’s iteration of this aesthetic and reveals those moments wherein “borrowed riding jacket” fashion successfully eased this cultural tension (or conversely, this comparison helps to locate those cases when the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 81.

aesthetic failed to elide transgression or ease cultural tension with an eye towards unpacking this failure).

Like Coco Chanel, the American socialite Henrietta Bingham presents another example of a real-life Brett Ashley, a trendsetter who “started all that” by bending the expectations of fashion as linked to traditional gender regimes. Bingham’s great-niece Emily Bingham is the author of a recent biography about Henrietta, titled *Irrepressible: The Jazz Age Life of Henrietta Bingham*. The biography is largely informed by a lucky find in a family attic: A steamer trunk full of letters. Moreover, the trunk predominantly contained *love* letters, and the resultant biography reveals a portrait of a woman who enjoyed a certain degree of sexual fluidity; seducing, being seduced by, and ultimately sleeping with both men and women – all of whom were drawn to Bingham’s flamboyant yet ambiguous, tomboy-coquette style. Her early relationships mainly involved women (including a very formative relationship with Mina Kirstein, her instructor at Smith). At the same time, she had a number of affairs with men over the course of her lifetime and, according to her letters, she appeared to take marriage proposals from at least two of her male suitors into serious consideration. As stated in her diary entries, she genuinely enjoyed the company of both sexes, though perhaps grew more seriously infatuated with the women in her life. The list of people with whom Henrietta had romantic entanglements was lengthy, and included the aforementioned Kirstein, as well as Stephen Tomlin, Peggy Lehmann, John Houseman, Dora Carrington, Hope Williams, Helen Hull Jacobs, and many more.

Bingham was, in short, a woman who acted on her desires and enjoyed herself. At the same time, Bingham managed to escape public criticism. There is little to suggest she earned a negative reputation or endured the kind of disparagement about her sexuality that, say, her British contemporary, Radclyffe Hall, did. Hall and Bingham make for an illuminating comparison; both were socialites who hailed from wealth and both were extremely avid equestrians. Both dressed in fashions very much in keeping with the “borrowed riding jacket” style, but only Bingham seems to have engaged the aesthetic so as to benefit from the semiotic ambiguities available therein.

According to Emily Bingham, the fact that Henrietta hailed from wealth was immediately obvious to all who met her. Emily recounts David Garnett's impression upon meeting Henrietta and her teacher-slash-friend-slash-lover, Mina Kirstein. Bingham writes that:

Garnett was also something of a hustler, drawn, like Jay Gatsby, by the "inexhaustible charm" and "jingle" of money. Mina and "her friend, Henrietta Bingham, a lovely girl," were clearly "the daughters of very rich men," he wrote.⁷⁶

To a certain extent, her perceived status as a wealthy girl enabled Henrietta to "get away with" her sporty flapper antics, as Henrietta's unconventional behavior is normalized when coded as signifying her class. Through the lens of this reading, her privilege entitles her to a certain degree of eccentricity, as well as a healthy thirst for "adventure" ("adventure" overwriting "unladylike" as concerns drinking, smoking, traveling alone, driving fast cars, etc). "She was freer," Emily Bingham writes of her great-aunt, "by dint of her money and her courage, than most in 1927...even as the liberated flapper figure had moved closer to the cultural center."⁷⁷

Moreover, certain athletic activities – and equestrian pursuits in particular – bear out a sort of reciprocal relationship with Bingham's perceived wealth: Equestrian activities not only point back to Bingham's wealth but also legitimize that wealth, coding it as "old money" – i.e. wealth that harkens back to older notions of aristocracy, as opposed to crass capitalism. While living in England, Henrietta's passion for riding led her to become "obsessed" with the "daredevil foxhunt."⁷⁸ The sport of foxhunting serves as an apex of two categories in collision: Considered dangerous and a test of one's strength and endurance, the foxhunt is also the sport of royalty and general upper classes. By joining in, Bingham demonstrated her fearlessness, her utter lack of Victorian-era-chic feminine frailty. At the same time, Bingham was participating in a centuries-old convention, her participation tacitly reconfirming her membership in the "old money" club. Again, for Bingham,

⁷⁶ Emily Bingham, *Irrepressible: The Jazz Age Life of Henrietta Bingham*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 82.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

emphasizing the signals that speak to one value (class) seems to have helped eclipse the signals that would speak to a second value (gender).

Besides finding her way into the foxhunt, Bingham also found her way into the Bloomsbury circle during her time in England. Like Bingham, the majority of the members of the Bloomsbury Group were also born into a certain level of wealth and/or social prestige, and quite privileged in many ways. And also like Bingham, the members of the Bloomsbury Group were often involved in friendships, affairs, and even marriages (though none of the latter for Bingham) that defied taxonomic definition. The photograph given below shows Bingham dressed to ride, standing beside Stephen Tomlin. Bingham and Tomlin had an affair; Tomlin was reportedly besotted with her,⁷⁹ and yet, like Bingham, he lived a life of sexual bohemianism. Meaning: Tomlin had affairs with both women and men, his desire unrestricted by existing taxonomic regimes of sexuality.



(Fig. 16): Henrietta Bingham and Stephen Tomlin in 1923.

In general, the Bloomsbury Group embraced a wide spectrum of sexual desire, and the members were given to “open” marriages (such as that of Vanessa and Clive Bell) and bisexual affairs (such as that of Lytton Strachey, Dora Carrington, and

⁷⁹ Ibid., 94.

Ralph Partridge). Bingham's gender-bending, "borrowed riding jacket" style, along with her free-flowing, undefined desire seemed to fit in well with the sexual ambiguity of the group. The Bloomsbury Group thrived in a personal environment wherein gender and sexual desire were approached as changeable and undefined. If nothing else, they certainly gained a sort of refuge in ambiguity, which in many ways sheltered them from Britain's laws against homosexuality.

As a socialite – and one who was considered attractive and charming – Bingham garnered attention from the press and the general public; she toed a careful line, managing to carry on her various affairs yet dodge criticism or outright scandal. Her biography suggests Bingham may have learned how to strategically navigate public opinion from her father. Emily Bingham argues that Henrietta's relationship with her father was her first and closest relationship. There was no hint of sexual impropriety, but Judge Bingham interacted with Henrietta as though she were his primary partner and helpmate (as opposed to his wife or two other sons). Due to his dependence on her, this relationship shaped much of Henrietta's life. As Henrietta matured, Judge Bingham condoned her relationships with women – so long as they remained nebulous and informal. Emily Bingham argues that "he surely recognized at some level that Henrietta's lesbian relationships made it less likely that she would marry and leave his orbit."⁸⁰ While he may or may not have been aware of his daughter's many dalliances, Emily Bingham gives evidence to suggest Judge Bingham knew of Henrietta's stints in more prolonged, somewhat monogamous relationships with women such as Mina Kirstein and Peggy Lehmann. However, Emily Bingham estimates Judge Bingham's endorsement was tacitly implied at best, far from an open proclamation of acceptance and support. She writes that:

...even if he and other people knew or thought they knew about his daughter's sexual predilections, Bingham demanded that her clothing and public demeanor not prove it. Plausible deniability was essential. Henrietta must never outwardly affiliate with a group Radclyffe Hall's protagonist

⁸⁰ Ibid., 195.

called “maimed and ugly” perversities of God’s creation. “It nearly broke her heart when [her father] jumped on her” about her attire, her friend Sophie remembered. “She got so that she dressed” in “a skirt, always a skirt,” except of course when she was riding to the hounds, which meant jodhpurs and spit-shined black boots.⁸¹

Emily Bingham’s biography indicates that Henrietta’s father was specifically focused on attire, emphasizing his insistence that Henrietta dress like a girl when appropriate, no matter what other “un-feminine” pursuits she got up to. And Henrietta’s riding attire marks the one notable exception to this insistence, the one outfit and corner of Henrietta’s life where, again, class trumps gender. In this manner, the “borrowed riding jacket” serves as a sort of loophole: Henrietta was not obliged to dress as “man” or “woman,” so much as “equestrian.”

Furthermore, photographs of Henrietta Bingham taken throughout her life suggest that Henrietta understood clothing as “costuming” and as such, modified her dress depending on the circumstances. See, for instance, the photograph below of Henrietta on holiday in Italy – her travels on the continent providing a kind of anonymity, allowing her to dress as to suit her whim in trousers, a silk men’s tie, and black skullcap. By all accounts, Bingham gave the impression that she was equally at home in a glamorous gown as she was in the kind of trousers-and-tie outfit pictured above, and according to Emily Bingham’s chronicling of her great-aunt, both styles were perceived as being characteristic of Henrietta’s personality. Closer study of Bingham’s life reveals that more than anything else, *modulating* between the two (or really, between multiple) styles of dress was one of Bingham’s most defining characteristics. Placating audiences such as her father had likely taught her the value of strategically adopting different styles for different occasions. Bingham’s awareness of and savvy about stylized appearances stretched from her wardrobe to her love life, and to a certain extent, connected the two.

⁸¹ Ibid.



(Fig. 17): Henrietta Bingham, left, with Barry and Mary Bingham in Italy in 1931.

Just as her father influenced the manner in which Bingham dressed, her first lover, Mina Kirstein influenced Bingham's public presentation of her sexuality. Emily Bingham describes Kirstein as seducing Henrietta and writing her love letters, but then at other times disavowing direct acknowledgment of their sexual activities, and even urging Henrietta to also "try" men. Emily Bingham suggests a connection between Kirstein's ambivalence towards her sexuality and her ambivalence towards her Jewish identity, arguing that Kirstein was often surrounded by gentiles and comfortable in her ability to "pass" in such circles. According to Emily Bingham, Kirstein – a professor by trade, educated but not quite as moneyed as Bingham's regular crowd – gravitated towards liminality when it came to defining her social position. Kirstein's engagement of ambiguity seemed driven by a desire for social protection, a need to harness the ambiguity in order to "pass" – Bingham's engagement of ambiguity seemed driven by a need for protection, too, to a degree, but included an element of curiosity, and perhaps genuine comfort in living between/outside established taxonomic regimes of gender and sexuality. Either way, even at the height of their romantic relationship, together Henrietta and Mina

managed to avoid scrutiny from a potentially homophobic, anti-Semitic, conservative public by presenting an ambiguous outward appearance to the world.

Radclyffe Hall presents a prime counterpoint to Henrietta Bingham's engagement of the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic – and to a certain extent, to the Bloomsbury Group's engagement of this aesthetic as well. Also an avid equestrian, Hall wore similar fashions as Bingham, but Hall's image did not carry the same semiotic ambiguity in the eyes of the public that Bingham's image did. Emily Bingham writes that

The photo of Hall that was published in countless papers reinforced an image of lesbians as “man-like” in clothing, appearance, erotic desire, and ambition.⁸²

Whereas Henrietta Bingham modulated her attire throughout her lifetime, Radclyffe Hall did not. She famously wore tailored men's suits (often styled with equestrian flair). She was also very much in the public eye; photographs of her appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout Britain and the United States, especially once *The Well of Loneliness* was brought up on obscenity charges following its publication in 1928. In other words, people were just as likely – or even more likely – to “read” an image of Hall as glimpsed in a newspaper, as they were to read her novel. And unlike Bingham's image, Hall's was extremely consistent, to the point of presenting her audience with a fixed monolith of herself. From the waist up at least, she nearly always wore a suit – typically either a riding suit or a men's dress suit, tuxedo, etc.

The photograph on the below left appeared – as Emily Bingham phrases it – in “countless papers” as Hall's author portrait. Hall's “Spanish Hat” is a Cordova hat – a hat preferred by Spanish equestrians. Hall's ruffled shirt, tie, and jacket are styled after formal English riding suits, with perhaps a hint of matador flair. She is even seated on her chair in a manner that suggests a horse rider in profile. The photograph on the below right presents a portrait of Hall dressed in a pair of jodhpurs and tweed jacket, a beret, a tie, knee socks and a pair of men's dress shoes.

⁸²Ibid., 194.

The tweed jacket and jodhpurs in particular signal Hall's affiliation with equestrian activities, and all of the equestrian-themed signals in both photos likewise signal Hall's close affiliation with the old money wealth (just as these equestrian signals did for Henrietta Bingham).



Figure 2. Radclyffe Hall in Spanish Hat by the photographer Douglas, 1926.



(Figs 18, 19). Two portraits of Radclyffe Hall: Left, in 1926. Right, in 1934.

Making a parallel argument to that above (i.e. that wealth provides a certain amount of “license,” insofar as the semiotics of wealth may overwrite the semiotics of gender or sexuality), arts and fashion critic Laura Havlin argues that

[w]ealth didn't only buy Hall the masculine clothes she craved as a youngster but, combined with her standing in the upper echelons of society, it enabled her much more freedom to behave the way she pleased than she would have if she had been a few rungs down the class ladder. Hall's masculine dress and eschewing of traditional female roles in order to live with Troubridge very often came off as eccentricity.⁸³

⁸³ Laura Havlin, “Androgyny's Original Pioneer,” *AnOther Magazine*, anothermag.com, Aug. 20, 2015.

While Bingham had numerous affairs over the course of her lifetime, the majority of Radclyffe Hall's love life was defined by her relationship with the same partner, Una Troubridge, from approximately 1915 until Hall's death in 1943. The two women lived together and appeared in public together, the members of their social circle understood them to be long-term romantic partners.⁸⁴

However, some critics argue that around the time that *The Well of Loneliness* was causing a stir, not all of the general public knew quite what to make of Hall and Troubridge. In other words: The two women had not been categorically pigeonholed – at least not unanimously. Adding to the assertion that Hall's wealth afforded her a certain degree of license to dress as she pleased, fashion historian Katrina Rolley conjectures that Hall's "glamour" as a writer and a public figure may have blinded the otherwise uninitiated public masses. She writes that

[w]hilst the couple's wealth and class freed them from the constraints of public opinion, it also meant that for viewers who were unaware of their sexuality, especially those distanced by class, their appearance might be (mis)read as part of the aristocratic tradition of eccentricity, especially since Radclyffe Hall was also a writer. Even Patience Ross, who worked for Radclyffe Hall's literary agent during publication of *The Well of Loneliness*, still believed the couple 'platonic friends who had a mission to help "those poor people"'^{85 86}

Rolley writes that sheer expense of Hall's tailored suits, coupled with her status as an artist, may have "overshadowed other implications."

However, as Rolley continues to trace Radclyffe Hall's overall sartorial evolution in tandem with the events of Hall's life, Rolley notes that "... as the two women become more involved with, and convinced of, [Havelock] Ellis's theories about inversion, their styles of dress became increasingly polarized along 'masculine'/'feminine' [binary lines]."⁸⁷ In the course of their acquaintanceship with

⁸⁴ Richard Ormrod, *Una Troubridge: The Friend of Radclyffe Hall*. (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1985).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Katrina Rolley, "The Dress of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge," *Feminist Review*, No. 35 (Summer, 1990), 45-66, 56.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Ellis, he had “diagnosed” Hall as a “congenital invert” and Troubridge as a “pseudo invert, casting them as bearing masculine tendencies and feminine tendencies respectively.

Rolley asserts that Hall and Troubridge took the diagnosis to heart, or perhaps felt some comfort in the binary it presented, and used fashion to express their subscription to Ellis’s theories of sexology. Rolley claims that as time passed, Hall became more and more married to her identity as a “congenital invert” and used clothing as the number one means to “re-fashion” her body. Rolley writes:

Dress allowed women like Radclyffe Hall and Naomi Jacob to create certainty out of confusion. Defining themselves 'invert' gave women who 'weren't women' a gender, a sexuality and an identity, and dress allowed them to triumph over their female bodies and express and communicate this identity. Richard Ormrod records that whilst Una Troubridge and several female friends were happy to bath naked when on holiday France, Radclyffe Hall did not join them. Naked, stripped of her 'masculine' guise, Radclyffe Hall was revealed not as 'congenital invert', a member of the third sex, but as a woman, and whilst the role of 'invert' may have been a compromised one, was it necessarily any more compromised than that of 'woman'?⁸⁸

More and more, Hall clung to her suits while Troubridge often wore the feminine complement to Hall’s attire. In their famous 1927 portrait together (shown below), Hall stands smoking a cigarette (looking a touch dour and morose – almost like a stately banker with a case of indigestion), one hand in her pocket, dressed in a silk tuxedo jacket and bow-tie, while Una is arrayed on a nearby settee in a dress. Both have their hair cut short, but Hall wears the “Eaton crop” – a boys’ style borrowed for women – and Una wears her in the kind of bob made famous by flappers and movie stars like Clara Bow.

⁸⁸ Rolley, “The Dress of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge,” 65.



(Fig. 20): Una Troubridge and Radclyffe Hall, 1927

The portrait predates the first publication of *The Well of Loneliness*, but was more widely circulated once the scandal surrounding the novel had fanned gossip interest in Hall's personal life. This marks a common pattern in Hall's work and life – i.e. that observers often read the two in tandem.

Havelin's insight that Hall's wealth allowed her to be read as "eccentric" is sound, as are Rolley's observations that fashion provided a forum for Hall to express her belief in and interpretations of Havelock Ellis's taxonomies. But to combine these arguments and advance them one step further, the latter undoes the work of the former. In other words, in fashioning oneself so as to doggedly enforce a semiotic binary (a binary wherein masculine/feminine are aligned parallel to congenital invert/pseudo invert) Radclyffe Hall actively erases the ambiguities that alternately sheltered and empowered Henrietta Bingham. "Wealth" may overwrite

“homoerogenous,” but Hall overwrites all of this with a heavy-handed discourse of sexual taxonomy according to Ellis and other sexologists. Hall delivers into clarity what Bingham leaves open to multiple interpretations. Where Bingham’s style and behavior presented her public with semiotic ambiguity, Hall’s fashion comes across more as a semiotic polemic.

Radclyffe Hall claimed *The Well of Loneliness* was written with a specific agenda in mind; in this light, the character of Stephen Gordon reads as an argument proposed in an essay – one reason, perhaps, a number of critics have instinctually disliked the novel over the years, rejecting the novel as art and picking apart the novel’s relentless expository tone.

In the novel, Stephen Gordon is an “invert” trapped in a world that does not understand her, locked in perpetual opposition with those who would seek to coerce her into feminine, heteronormative conformity. The subject of fashion and clothing appears early in the novel, and is recurs throughout. Hall describes Stephen’s childhood battles with her mother as “warfare,” “the inevitable clash of two opposing natures who sought to express themselves in apparel.”⁸⁹ Stephen feels most herself in equestrian clothing, her mother, Anna begs Stephen to adapt to dresses. The narration charts their tug-of-war, stating that

... sometimes Stephen would appear in a thick woolen jersey, or a suit of rough tweeds surreptitiously ordered from the excellent tailor in Malvern. Sometimes Anna would triumph, having journeyed to London to procure soft and very expensive dresses, which her daughter must wear in order to please her, because she would come home quite tired by such journeys.⁹⁰

The novel describes a very irritated, frustrated Stephen, who only agrees to wear the dresses out of an acute sense of guilt. But even her atonement is not quite successful. Hall writes that Stephen would snatch the garment out of her mother’s hands,

[t]hen off she would rush and put it on all wrong, so that Anna would sigh in a kind of desperation, and would pat, readjust, unfasten and fasten, striving

⁸⁹ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*. (New York: Anchor, 1928, reprint ed. 1990), 73.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

to make peace between wearer and model, whose inimical feelings were evidently mutual.⁹¹

Like Henrietta Bingham, Stephen more or less obliges a domineering parent by dressing in conventionally feminine clothing, yet Stephen notably fails where Bingham succeeds. The text makes it clear that Stephen (“wearer”) and the dress (“model”) are absolutely at odds with each other. Equestrian attire proves to be one exception to her mother’s insistence on dresses – and to reiterate: An exception wherein class overwrites gender. Money is especially powerful in Stephen’s case, and when she comes into her inheritance, she exerts even more control over her wardrobe:

...Stephen was twenty-one, a rich, independent woman...Stephen now dressed in tailor-made clothes to which Anna had perforce to withdraw her opposition.⁹²

Between her inheritance and her equestrian-inflected suits, Stephen has managed to win the battle of wills. Wealth has passed from her father to herself, and with it, the head-of-household decision making power.

The novel – which includes a foreword from Havelock Ellis – doggedly employs Ellis’s concepts of “sexual inversion” and accompanying terminology, and I would argue that this insistence on taxonomy is what makes it so unappealing to a number of contemporary readers and critics. Insistence on the taxonomic definitions supplied by sexology limits the novel insofar as it precludes any reading that understands gender and sexual desire on a more fluid, ever-changing continuum, ever changing. Insistence on sexologists’ terms in *The Well of Loneliness* also risks (and some would argue does more than risks) framing “sexual inversion” as some sort of biological disability, and furthermore, Stephen’s language when referring to “inverts” – “maimed and ugly,” “He let us get flawed in the making,”⁹³ “mark upon Cain,”⁹⁴ etc – is often just too much to stomach.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 129.

⁹³ Ibid., 204.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 205.

Stephen's struggle to accept herself is at the heart of *The Well of Loneliness*, and given this fact, the novel is also largely about whom Stephen loves, and whom Stephen *should* love. While the two novels are not often compared to each other, the same general topic – whom Brett loves, and whom Brett *should* love – is also the central question that propels the plot's action in *The Sun Also Rises*. Most critics writing about *The Sun Also Rises* address the subject of Brett's sexuality, and more specifically how Brett's sexual choices upset the power balance implied by traditional gender regimes.⁹⁵ A woman in the midst of her second divorce and seemingly disenchanted with marriage more largely; Brett enjoys life on the café scene and pursues her desire even as it continuously shifts between subjects. Therefore, the men in the novel surround her, waiting in anticipation to see who will win her favor. This harem-like reversal (i.e. a woman who does the choosing as opposed to one who waits to be chosen) is often read as two sides of the same coin: Empowering and gender-bending for Brett, and "feminizing" for Jake and the other men. Hemingway critic Todd Onderdonk traces the flow of social agency in the novel, arguing that

Hemingway directs attention away from women's social powerlessness (Brett is broke and relies on men to support her hedonistic lifestyle) to the capacity of individual women to rend individual men. This is a strategic substitution... Hemingway's version of this representational war, women have the power to feminize men even when they are themselves disempowered, a construction that shifts the focus from women's collective grievances to individual male ones.⁹⁶

Onderdonk's reading frames Brett as more of a plot device, a kind of fulcrum for other characters to leverage their own social roles against. She represents

⁹⁵ Malcolm Cowley and Harold Bloom offer general responses to the assumption that Brett is most commonly read as both a liberated woman and emasculating "bitch," and the following critics and books/articles advance readings of Brett that evaluate her against a presumed binary of male/female behavior: Sam S. Baskett "An Image to Dance Around': Brett and Her Lovers in *The Sun Also Rises*," *The Centennial Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Winter 1978), 45-69. Ira Elliot, "Performance Art: Jake Barnes and 'Masculine' Signification in *The Sun Also Rises*," *American Literature*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (March 1995) 77-94. William Adair, "The Sun Also Rises: Mother Brett," *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Summer 2010) 189-208.

⁹⁶ Todd Onderdonk, "'Bitched': Feminization, Identity, and the Hemingwayesque in *The Sun Also Rises*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Spring, 2006), 61-91, 76.

everything that has changed in the world as her contemporaries know it, she represents Victorian morality turned on its head (and specifically *feminine* Victorian morality on its head). In this reading, World War I has literally emasculated Jake, and Brett is the “modern” woman, an agent of further emasculation – a woman comfortable with turning gender conventions and sexual choice topsy-turvy. For Onderdunk and numerous other critics, Brett Ashley is the challenging presence (her independence is a function of the world having gone rotten) that ultimately awakens and incites Jake’s own emasculated-yet-masculine grace (unlike Robert Cohn, who becomes infantilized by Brett, Jake manages to stoically rise above in the end).

Readings like Onderdunk’s⁹⁷ discuss Brett as a “feminist” figure – insofar as she appropriates male power – but nevertheless base their assessments on a presumed binary, and on established regimes of gender and sexuality. In terms of Brett’s engagement of the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic, criticism that reads Brett as an emasculating figure likewise reads her style as signaling the usurpation of male power – arguing for her reversal of taxonomic gender roles to the exclusion of readings that would trace her borrowed menswear to multiple sets of semiotic signals and hence to the ambiguity and positional versatility that enables her to live, travel, and behave as she does. In other words, readings like Onderdonk’s don’t account for Brett’s acceptance into Jake’s all-male group, the men’s continued desire for her, or their tolerance as she travels around with them picking up other men. At the same time, Onderdonk’s reading highlights the expectations that Jake, Bill, and Mike have for Brett – and more importantly how Brett defies these expectations. I argue that the men’s expectations (that she behave in compliance with their ideas of her as a social muse and a member of the waspy aristocracy) are partly informed by the signals implied by Brett’s fashion and overall style.

Onderdonk makes a list of the ways in which Brett offends Jake and Jake’s idea of social order, including the time Brett waltzes into a bal musette in the company of a group of openly gay men, calling it (in Jake’s view) “a refusal to respect

⁹⁷ Again, this is meant to refer to the established body of criticism that has commonly come to read Brett as feminist/bitch based on her reversal of a gender binary.

the bounds of sexual propriety and proper object choice.”⁹⁸ Jake is put off, if not outright disgusted, Onderdonk claims, arguing that Jake feels “Brett’s embrace of male homosexuality suggests a sort of pathology by association.”⁹⁹ Jake, Mike, and Bill may admire Brett with her hair swept back like a boy’s, dressed in wool jersey, smoking a cigarette at the bar – they may even admire her strong (manly) constitution for the blood and gore of the bullfight – but they only admire these qualities so long as Brett’s attire and behavior ultimately point back to (and reinforce) what they see as “natural” heteronormative sexuality and desire. They interpret Brett’s “borrowed riding jacket” style as a function of her chicness, culture, and class – a semiotic reference to her aristocratic title, her privilege and eccentricity. She is expected to choose among *them* – the group they’ve formed, a group that consists of straight, male, WASPs – and at the very least, if she doesn’t choose within their immediate group, they expect her to choose within normative categories of sexuality as dictated by the general hegemony.

Later, in choosing Jewish Robert Cohn for her lover, Brett rumples Jake’s feathers again (and Mike’s and Bill’s, etc). Mike complains to Jake, “Brett’s gone off with men. But they weren’t ever Jews, and they didn’t come and hang about afterward.”¹⁰⁰ Bill – who perhaps of them all, genuinely likes Robert Cohn the best – even lodges his own version of this complaint:

“What bloody-fool things people do. Why didn’t she go off with some of her own people? Or you?” – he slurred that over – “or me? Why not me?” He looked at his face carefully in the glass, put a big dab of lather on each cheek-bone. “It’s an honest face any woman would be safe with.”¹⁰¹

Once again, Brett has crossed a line with her band of male admirers by violating social expectations. Specifically, in this instance, she is not supposed to sleep with her racial “inferiors,” meaning: Robert Cohn. If the semiotic signals evident in Brett’s borrowed riding jacket style present multiple readings, Brett’s relationship with Cohn teases out the more transgressive reading. In this reading, Brett isn’t a

⁹⁸ Onderdonk, 78.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 114.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 82.

pedigreed eccentric; she is a figure of degenerate sexual promiscuity and a symbol of post-war moral decay in general.

"Pedigree" takes on enormous importance in *The Sun Also Rises*, and equestrian references become strangely overt in the novel as language with equine/bovine inferences take on multiple meanings. For instance, tracing the discussion of "breeding" reveals that Brett's title and her "good breeding" are discussed repeatedly throughout the book. Cohn himself makes one of the novel's earliest direct mentions of breeding – while admiring Brett, of course. He calls Brett "remarkably attractive," and explains to Jake that

"There's a certain quality about her, a certain fineness. She seems to be absolutely fine and straight."

"She's very nice."

"I don't know how to describe the quality," Cohn said. "I suppose it's breeding."

"You sound as though you liked her pretty well."

"I do. I shouldn't wonder if I were in love with her."¹⁰²

Cohn's choice of words, "absolutely fine and straight," and, "breeding," make reference to class and seem subconsciously and disconcertingly inflected by the discourse of eugenics.

During another interval in the book, when Count Mippipopolous observes that Brett will lose her title upon her divorce, he insists to Brett that "You don't need a title. You got class all over you."¹⁰³ Brett thanks him for the compliment and asks him to "write it out" in a letter she can send to her mother – a curious joke, as though the count would be authoring a letter of pedigree. Shortly thereafter, when Bill meets Brett, he asks Jake whether Brett is "really Lady something or other?" – to which Jake replies: "Oh, yes. In the stud-book and everything."¹⁰⁴ The language is jocular but crude, as Jake's analogy compares Brett to a breeding mare, undercutting

¹⁰² Ibid., 31.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 62.

any importance her title might have by discussing her as though she were a commodity, pedigreed and thoroughbred no differently than livestock.

Eventually, by the time the whole group (Jake, Brett, Mike, Bill, Cohn) has hit the streets of Pamplona, the discussion of “good breeding” (acceptable pedigree, proper behavior, “racially hygienic” sexual encounters, etc) has become conflated with discussions of the bulls’ breeding. Once things have gotten downright ugly in Pamplona as Cohn tags along to the bullfights, a drunk Mike demands (in front of everyone, including Cohn himself):

"I'm not drunk. I'm quite serious. *Is* Robert Cohn going to follow Brett around like a steer all the time?"

"Shut up, Michael. Try and show a little breeding."

"Breeding be damned. Who has any breeding, anyway, except the bulls? Aren't the bulls lovely? Don't you like them, Bill? Why don't you say something, Robert? Don't sit there looking like a bloody funeral. What if Brett did sleep with you? She's slept with lots of better people than you."¹⁰⁵

In this example, Cohn is the “steer,” the human subject reduced to animal status. Steers are also, of course, the term used to describe a neutered bull. Mike overtly states that there are “better people than” Robert Cohn, and this has been taken as a slight to Cohn’s identity as a Jew, and also as a “feminized” man.

As the novel begins to blur Brett’s equestrian style, her class “breeding,” and her actual breeding (sexual choices) it becomes clear that *The Sun Also Rises* showcases the circular and sometimes paradoxical semiotics at play in the “borrowed riding jacket” aesthetic. The same aesthetic that liberates Brett to do as she pleases (her masculine borrowing coding as aristocratic eccentricity) is the aesthetic that ignites the other characters’ extreme preoccupation with and policing of her choice of sexual partner (her masculine borrowing coding as moral decay) – and the text constantly moves back and forth between these (and other) readings.

Tracing a map of the many readings of Coco Chanel’s adaptation of the borrowed riding jacket style reveals further semiotic paradoxes implicit to the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 113.

aesthetic. In particular, examining Chanel's manufacture and distribution of equestrian-inflected fashions reveals the manner in which specific values are inverted: Chanel's original riding jacket symbolized wealth and class, but emulated on a mass scale, may be eventually translated into a uniform, a garment to be worn by the masses. The semiotic links that are already fraught in *The Sun Also Rises* become even more fraught on the real-life stage of the 1920s and '30s, as signals that would point to a rarified group (those who are "pedigreed") are steadily translated into shared symbols of nationalistic identity. In other words, Brett Ashley's engagement of the borrowed riding jacket fashion offers a map of one sort of semiotic hinge (offering moments when aristocratic eccentricity overwrites transgressive sexuality, and vice versa), Coco Chanel's engagement of the borrowed riding jacket fashion offers a map of another semiotic hinge: One that shifts between elitism and populism, and paradoxically offering up moments wherein both values may be read simultaneously.

Chanel mingled among and was accepted by (to greater and lesser degrees) the aristocrats of Europe, but was not born to such a station. Chanel had to forge her way into the closed circles of the upper class, and here the word "forge" serves very well: after all, Chanel is famed for both her social tenacity and her ability to create/manufacture goods that embody a specific fashionable style. Chanel was an expert when it came to coding class into her fashion/art, specializing in understated details – those little hints and cues that the upper classes use to mark themselves as aristocrats. Depending on which of her biographers' accounts one reads, Chanel achieved varying degrees of success in gaining membership to the aristocratic classes of France.

All of her biographers, however, agree as concerns her childhood: She was poor. And moreover, she was a specific kind of poor, for Chanel was raised by nuns. Garelick writes that

...Chanel's modernist revolution and its ongoing power have their roots in that long-buried childhood of hers, in the flinty soil of France's Cévennes region where she was born, in her hardscrabble, peasant ancestors, and in

the two major institutions that left their aesthetic, moral, and psychological stamp on her: the Roman Catholic Church and the military.¹⁰⁶

In the company of nuns, Garelick argues, Chanel developed an appreciation and predilection for uniforms, understanding the power of the nuns' "impressive starched white headdresses and flowing black pleated skirts (Chanel's future trademark colors)..."¹⁰⁷

Understanding the power of uniforms, Chanel likewise recognized that most – if not all clothing – can be read as uniforms, which brings us back to Chanel's knack for selectively including those "little details" used to signal membership within the upper classes. Garelick argues that Chanel's affair with Etienne Balsan, and the time Chanel spent on his estate, served as thoroughgoing training in this milieu of old-money semiotics. Garelick writes that

[s]ince most daylight hours at Royallieu were filled with equestrian activities, Coco focused on dressing for there. Aware that she looked especially fetching in schoolgirl or tomboyish styles, she created variations on these, often cadging items from Etienne's closets. Photographs from this period show Chanel in open-collared men's shirts worn with little schoolgirl ties, oversize tweed coats borrowed from Etienne, and simple straw boater hats, like the ones the men were wearing.¹⁰⁸

When Etienne gifted her money to have some clothes tailored, Chanel immediately had "a boy's riding costume with jodhpurs" made. Chanel understood equestrian attire as a kind of uniform – understanding equestrian attire's literal connection to cavalry uniforms, but also as a larger set of sartorial cues. She was wise to two factors: First, that equestrian clothing and activities signaled membership in her lover's elite peer group, and second, that instead of enacting a straightforward (possibly second-rate) imitation, she was better off coming up with a version of the style that she could make her own – hence, Chanel's trendsetting rendition of "the borrowed riding jacket."

¹⁰⁶ Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.



(Figs. 21, 22): Chanel's equestrian style in 1906 and below, sometime after 1908.



Chanel mixed a savvy instinct for old-money traditions with an eccentric's "modern" sense of irreverence to pull off the coup that was her tentative membership within both the upper echelons of society as well as the public's impression that she was a woman to be idealized and imitated. As Garelick puts it, Chanel was "always her own best advertisement"¹⁰⁹ – in part, I argue, because she straddled two worlds, alternately representing membership (and exclusion, when it benefitted her) in both. Historian Mary Louise Roberts argues that Coco Chanel is

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 77.

notable for making couture fashion popular among and available to mass consumers. Of Chanel's dressing in the style I've dubbed "the borrowed riding jacket," Roberts points out that

[w]hen George Sand dressed like a man in the 1840s, she was likely to remain an isolated phenomenon; when Coco Chanel did the same in the 1920s, she could be imitated throughout France and the world.¹¹⁰

Roberts traces the confluence of two factors: technological modernization in the wake of World War I (i.e. the rise of mass reproduction), and a shift in class relations (more aspirational zeitgeist among the lower and middle classes, and a larger middle class, period) – and at this confluence, she argues, individuals like Coco Chanel were empowered to function as trendsetters, true style-makers whose fashions could proliferate far and wide. When Chanel borrowed men's clothing it struck the masses as the fashionable whim of an eccentric aristocrat – but one they could purchase and imitate (Chanel, a shrewd businesswoman, was sure to make it purchasable).

This same duality of membership and exclusion underpins the conceptual dynamics of "uniforms" more largely. In Chanel's version of the "borrowed riding jacket," what initially signaled membership in wealthy/elite circles was eventually (at Chanel's direction) repeated and reproduced on a larger scale until it took on connotations of a sort of French "national uniform." Garelick asserts that Chanel was conscious of how her clothing engaged concepts of a French national identity, purposefully encouraging conflation between the two. With her equestrian jackets, her striped jersey sweaters, her schoolboy ties, Garelick argues that

Coco was something of a style nationalist – the possibility of *her* look becoming *the* uniform for all of France (and beyond) excited her greatly. To dress an entire country, to become synonymous with its style, fed her yearning to belong. Chanel craved something beyond success, wealth, or fame. She wanted to be a symbol of and for France – to achieve the deeply

¹¹⁰ Mary Louise Roberts, "Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women's Fashion in 1920s France," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (June 1993), 657-684.

rooted, almost genealogical, legacy that had been denied her by birth and by her several near misses at attaining aristocratic stature.¹¹¹

The ironic juxtaposition here, of course, is that in reproducing her own look, Chanel was reversing what was *exclusive* to make it *inclusive*. Garelick points out that in creating the Chanel logo, Coco created a paradoxical symbol that “granted prestige through uniformity, through mass identification with one idealized individual.”¹¹²

Chanel’s version of the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic emphatically included militaristic overtones – perhaps, again, in part due to her early awareness of the function of uniforms, her childhood among the nuns. But Chanel was also likely influenced by the larger cultural climate around her, just as much as she bore a reciprocal influence upon it. The years leading up to World War I were marked by a widespread ethos of nationalism and armament as militaries swelled to greater sizes than ever before. This zeitgeist was reflected in civilian organizations, with pseudo-militaristic groups like Boy Scouts forming and rising in popularity. In this case, girls were not excluded – not entirely, at least; the Girl Guides as an organization was founded in 1910 in England, followed by the Girl Scouts of America in 1912. Components of the Girl Scout uniform were directly borrowed from their “Boy Scout” counterparts (the camp shirt, neckerchief tie, ranger’s hat). In later years, the 1903s-era uniform of the Hitler Youth and *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (female branch of the Hitler Youth, hitherto referred to as the “BDM”) was to bear some similarities to the British and American scouting uniforms. Paradoxically, each of these uniforms was able to signal national patriotism to British, American, and German audiences respectively while at the same bearing strong stylistic commonalities.

¹¹¹ Garelick, *Mademoiselle: Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History*, 232.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 131.



(Figs. 23, 24): The first Girl Guides in 1910. Above right, the first Girl Scouts in 1912.

(Figs. 25, 26): Left, BDM winter regulation dress. Below right, BDM summer regulation.



All three uniforms incorporated equestrian elements. Chronicler of Boy Scout history, Robert Peterson, traces the uniform's equestrian style back to the original founder, Robert Baden-Powell, pointing out that Baden-Powell had been a

prominent member of the British cavalry and was likely influenced by his own military career and British upbringing (in fact, in speaking to the latter, the earliest incarnations of the Boy Scouts' accessories included a badge with a swastika on it – meant to reference Baden-Powell's love of Kipling. This badge was promptly discontinued as the Nazis rose to power in Germany).¹¹³ In the U.S., Peterson argues that Americans were destined to find the Boy Scout uniform an appealing echo of Teddy Roosevelt and his famous Rough Riders of the Spanish American War.¹¹⁴ These styles were later incorporated into the ranger uniform of the National Park Service, established by Roosevelt in 1916 and which patrolled by horseback.

According to the Peterson, people frequently criticized the appearance of the Boy Scout uniform (and by extension Girl Scout uniform as its derivative complement) as being too similar to that of the U.S. Army, and the scouting organization took pains to emphasize their role as an unaffiliated, wholesome, “pseudo-military” organization – not a *paramilitary* one. Two decades later the Hitler Youth would prove to be exactly that: a paramilitary organization that included both boys and girls. By 1934, the Nazi party decreed that participation in the HJ was mandatory, also openly proclaiming that members of the HJ could be called upon to provide actual military services (and in fact *were* called upon towards the end of the war¹¹⁵).

During the time that elapsed between the founding of the Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts in 1910 and 1912 respectively, to the rise of the HJ and BDM in the mid-1930s the link between horsemanship and military activity had waned, yet equestrian *style* remained in evidence in the HJ uniform. Again, the appeal of equestrian style is connected to its upper class, aristocratic signals (even from a military perspective, cavalry officers tended to be from a more elite background than say, enlisted soldiers). In taking a closer look at young girls' style under the HJ, the “most distinctive” element of the BDM uniform was thought to be the climbing

¹¹³ Lois H. Gresh and Robert Weinberg, *Why Did It Have to Be Snakes: From Science to the Supernatural, The Many Mysteries of Indiana Jones*. (New York: Wiley, 2008), 127.

¹¹⁴ Robert Peterson, “From Doughboy Duds to Oscar de la Renta,” *Scouting Magazine* (online), October 2002, <https://scoutingmagazine.org/issues/0210/d-wwwas.html>

¹¹⁵ Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

jacket (see winter regulation uniform above), a cropped-waist jacket with double-breasted buttons like a young cadet's uniform, or the uniform of a WWI cavalry soldier. Like Chanel or Lady Brett Ashley's deployment of the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic, the same style glimpsed in the BDM uniform gestures to an elite population and lends the outfit an aspirational air.

But while Brett and Chanel adopted a version of this aesthetic that enables them to dodge expectations of marriage and children, the BDM adopted the aesthetic in exactly the opposite way, overtly linking the BDM uniform and style of personal presentation to the Nazi party's articulation of a reproductive imperative. In essence, the BDM adopted a central policy that – in Hitler's own words – “the unshakable aim of female education must be the coming mother.”¹¹⁶ In the effort to shape the young women of Germany into better future wives and mothers, a large emphasis was placed on physical fitness and sports. Viewed this way, the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic is translated into propaganda: the increased physical activity that might be otherwise viewed as emancipatory from prescribed gender regimes is effectively circumscribed under an umbrella of conservative rhetoric that ultimately underscores traditional taxonomies.

Overall, the BDM's incorporation of the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic presents a paradox of at least two layers: (1) The uniform includes signals of elitism while consolidating the lower and middle-class masses, and (2) the wearing of the uniform and engaging in related activities promotes physical and military competence in women while binding this seemingly progressive stance up in a narrative that insists on women's heteronormative domesticity. Whereas Brett Ashley, Henrietta Bingham – and even Radclyffe Hall to a certain extent – engaged the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic to overwrite their sexuality with a discourse of class, the BDM engaged the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic as part of a literal uniform (again, a uniform in some ways functioning as a *class-leveler*), and endowed it with the overtly articulated mission of the BDM. In this capacity, the same

¹¹⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925, for various translated reprinted excerpts on the subjects of the BDM and girls' and women's prescribed conduct, see also Dagmar Reese, *Growing up Female in Nazi Germany*, trans. By William Templer, Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 2006).

aesthetic that functions to conceal and enable Brett or Bingham to choose lovers who may otherwise be perceived as transgressive or breaking with heteronormative expectation, functions to signal compliance with a heteronormative reproductive imperative. And not only does the uniform signal a girl's compliance with Germany's reproductive imperative, it signals her compliance with "racial hygiene" in choosing her partner – in other words, and more specifically in this case: The uniform is a nod to anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism had its own place in Chanel's perspective and aesthetic, as Garelick notes that "fascism and its symbolism clearly appealed to Chanel, who went on to establish her own close connection to the Nazi Party,"¹¹⁷ Garelick asserts that Chanel and her lover at the time, Russian Grand Duke Dmitri regarded Jews as "a benighted, unaesthetic race lacking a country,"¹¹⁸ and both heavily invested in the idea of a superior, deeply-rooted lineage, would want to distance themselves accordingly. Chanel's passport shows she made multiple visits to Berlin during the 1930s leading up to the war, and publically proclaimed both her support for Hitler as well as the policies of anti-Semitism he espoused.

Given all this, Chanel's articulation of the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic may be read as signaling many of the same values, particularly in the case of "racial hygiene" and anti-Semitism. Such readings would be especially likely wherein the tie between Chanel herself and the borrowed riding jacket fashion were closely linked (i.e. wherein the viewer identifies Chanel *with* the fashion). But also given how Chanel's fashions were mass-produced and imitated on an even more pervasive scale Chanel's original stylized fashion can be emptied out through reiteration, and its original set of semiotic values replaced with others. Iteration offers a critical space of removal that reintroduces ambiguity to the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic, allowing it to pivot between value sets.

In *The Sun Also Rises* Brett Ashley also offers a remove – the various characters read and re-read her style over the course of the novel. Her aristocratic

¹¹⁷ Garelick, 133. Again, exactly how close Chanel got to the Nazi party is the topic of much debate among her recent biographers.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

sportswear is read as “absolutely fine and straight” when Jake and Cohn first encounter her, but much less so when she turns up at the bal musette in the company of a group of gay men waving their “white hands”¹¹⁹ in a juxtaposition of expected gender stereotypes. She is once again admired, having proven herself able to stomach the gore of the bullfight, accepted as one of the boys, “coming through the crowd in the square, walking, her head up, as though the fiesta were being staged in her honor and she found it pleasant and amusing.”¹²⁰ But then, having slept with and discarded Cohn and the young bullfighter, Romero, Brett laments the fact that Romero’s peers made him feel ashamed of her, saying,

“Oh, yes. They ragged him about me at the café, I guess. He wanted me to grow my hair out. Me, with long hair... He said it would make me more womanly. I’d look a fright.”¹²¹

Romero’s fellow Spaniards are seemingly not ready for the “modern” aesthetic that informs Brett’s sleek tomboyish style; they can only read her as a figure who has strayed from the proper aesthetic of the established gender binary, and Romero himself offers suggestions (in this case, long hair) to help her recover the signals that he believes will code her appearance/body back to the “feminine” norm. Which is to say, here we have the only hint that Brett’s aesthetic is not universally effective. Somehow Brett manages to retain the (seemingly unconditional) acceptance and adulation she receives from Jake, Mike, and Bill (among others) by making use of the many modalities available to her via the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic. But Romero’s Spanish friends (implied to be provincial, unsophisticated) do not read Brett’s dress, style, or actions in the same manner. Brett’s appeal is predicated on a shifting ambiguity that doesn’t exist for a group of Spanish men who simply read her short hair as “not feminine” and nothing else.

Perhaps Brett’s shifting, ambiguous appeal – the appeal that is so effective on Jake – is embedded in the equally ambiguous description that the text offers. As Stephanie LaCava writes for *The Paris Review*, the novel doesn’t describe Brett as

¹¹⁹ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 16.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 164.

¹²¹ Ibid, 194.

“pretty” or “beautiful”; Jake declines to describe her facial features or hair color, etc. What the text *does* state is that “Brett was damned good-looking.” LaCava elaborates that

[i]t’s also, not incidentally, damn good style. Take, as example, Brett’s arrival in the first scene of *The Sun Also Rises*: She’s wearing a thin crewneck sweater, described as a tight-fitting wool jersey. It shows off her “curves like the hull of a racing yacht” – a man’s oversized toy. Brett’s paired this top with a tweed skirt – nothing breezy or delicate – and a man’s felt hat (although at one point she switches it for a Basque beret). In a later chapter, it’s noted that she doesn’t wear any stockings, as she perches on a high stool... rather than rolling them down, [she] wears no stocking at all as she dances and drinks in public.¹²²

As LaCava itemizes the novel’s descriptions of Brett, it becomes increasingly clear that Brett embodies a shifting concatenation of semiotic cues, and that none of these point to a fixed physicality. According to LaCava, Brett’s appeal is a question of “insouciance and style,”¹²³ and it would seem that in the transient character of Lady Brett Ashley, *The Sun Also Rises* manages to capture the full transient potential of the borrowed riding jacket aesthetic. As Jake’s concierge puts his admiration into equally passionate-yet-vague terms: “...that lady there is some one. An eccentric, perhaps, but quelqu’un, quelqu’un!”¹²⁴

¹²² Stephanie LaCava, “Character Studies: Lady Brett Ashley,” *The Paris Review Daily online*, July 19, 2012, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2012/07/19/character-studies-lady-brett-ashley/>

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 43.

Chapter Three: Borrowed Golf Gloves

The early twentieth century saw the rise of the female athlete. From its very first year, the new century brought with it the first Olympics to include women – the 1900 Games in Paris, France. “Twenty-two women (2.2 percent) out of a total of 997 athletes competed in five sports: tennis, sailing, croquet, equestrian and golf.”¹²⁵ As more sports were gradually opened to women, participation in the Olympics went up to “nearly 10 per cent” in 1928.¹²⁶ (While all this may sound like a slow and sleepy start, it nonetheless marks a significant increase from zero.) The early twentieth century also bore witness to a number of female celebrity athletes: Helen Wills, Suzanne Lenglen, Helen Stephens, and Sonja Henie – to name just a few. Moreover, the early twentieth century not only saw the rise of the female athlete, but also the *athletic female*. One can find echoes of the eponymous pioneer beauty depicted in Willa Cather’s 1918 novel *My Ántonia* – robust, adventurous, yet down to earth – throughout literature published during the years that followed, including in the female love interests depicted in Ernest Hemingway’s popular stories and novels of the 1920s and ‘30s. The flapper, a “type” forever linked to the writing of F. Scott Fitzgerald, posed a new kind of athletic female, different from the pioneer woman, but athletic and sporty nonetheless. As historian Lois Banner points out, the flapper’s sensuality was expressed through her “constant, vibrant movement,” reminding us that “[t]he athletic Charleston, not the erotic tango, was her characteristic dance.”¹²⁷ While the “female athlete” and the “athletic female” no doubt bear a reciprocal discursive relationship and both categorical types are defined by their semiotic emphasis on the representation of the healthy body, the former category tends to feature individual examples of career athletes who often

¹²⁵ Figures listed on the International Olympic Committee website, <https://www.olympic.org/women-in-sport/background/key-dates>

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Lois Banner, *American Beauty*. (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 1983, reprint ed. 2005), 227.

lived childless lives, while the latter category – the athletic female – refers to an abstraction, and is therefore more capacious in scope of what its aesthetic may be made to signify, and can serve to emphasize the healthy *reproductive* body.

For the purposes of this chapter, I've dubbed the aesthetic at the heart of my inquiry "borrowed golf gloves" in reference to a line about *Gatsby's* Jordan Baker. I mean it to refer to the style of the early twentieth century's athletic female, a style initially rooted in primitivism and later "borrowed" from men's sports fashion and translated by fashion magazines and popular culture for women's consumption. Tracing the semiotic flow between the female athlete and the athletic female reveals the way in which iteration may function to empty out specific context, and the aesthetic may be made to signal other values.

Moreover, unpacking different iterations of the athletic female reveals the ways in which even a binary reading of this aesthetic can be layered – and complicated – with intersectionality that is often paradoxical. The tracings of this aesthetic that are given in this chapter look at (1) iterations that signal to the athletic woman as careerist/as breaking away from the domestic sphere, (2) iterations that signal to the athletic woman as vampish/a perpetual bachelorette, (3) iterations that signal to the athletic woman as mannish/biologically male and/or homosexual, and lastly, a generally conservative version of this aesthetic that I address at the outset of this chapter with regard to American "pioneer women" and then later return to with an examination of propaganda that lauded the images of athletic young women within Nazi Germany: (4) iterations that signal to the athletic woman as a heteronormative, non-vampish, reproductive patriot.

Furthermore, the athletic aesthetic is highly transmutable and can adopt different semiotic signals that effectively elide others. Put another way, and to give an example: An image of an athletic woman may emphasize vampishness and therefore elide signals of careerism, or vice versa. This shifting extends to signals that connote sexual desire (or lack thereof). For instance, signals of homosexual desire can be elided by signals of asexual careerism, or forcibly translated by propaganda back into a hegemonic narrative that insists fit female bodies connote "healthy" heteronormative desire, insofar as fit bodies result in fit reproduction in

service of the state. The athletic aesthetic can provide a means to express desires that break with taxonomic regimes, but the aesthetic can also hide those desires in plain sight by overwriting them with a separate set of semiotic signals.

In essence, this athletic aesthetic ultimately reveals that readings about gender and sexuality based on a binary assumption (or based on many binary assumptions) are easily undermined when one considers an intersectional set of semiotic signals. Furthermore, iteration itself debunks binary semiotics by revealing greater multiplicity – and sometimes direct contradiction. For instance: the same model of commercialized iteration that defines the semiotics of fashion magazines and serves to empty out established signals while allowing for new/different signals that potentially break with established taxonomies of gender and sexuality also functions to reverse this flow in the case of Nazi propaganda, wherein each iteration of the athletic female works to shore her up within a specific set of semiotic signals. In this latter instance, iteration is the mechanism by which the politics of reproduction and eugenics may become embedded within mass-produced athletic style. As with the “borrowed fashions” discussed in previous chapters, the “borrowed golf gloves” fashion is one that is changeable, often ambiguous, and sometimes capable of simultaneously signaling contradictory values – in this case, the semiotics at play in the athletic female aesthetic may point to reproductive and non-reproductive values alternately – or, more paradoxically: simultaneously.

My Ántonia centers on the portrait of a robust, tomboyish immigrant whose athleticism not only helps her to survive in her new life on the Nebraska prairie, but also helps her to establish a deep connection with the American frontier, inflecting her embodiment of the athletic aesthetic with a kind of primitive, pastoral value. When Jim Burden first meets the titular character he is drawn to her vivacity and hardiness. Ántonia is described as having eyes that

... were big and warm and full of light, like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood. Her skin was brown, too, and in her cheeks she had a glow of rich, dark colour. Her brown hair was curly and wild-looking.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1918, reprint ed. 1995), 17.

Ántonia is nothing like the dainty flowers who decorated drawing rooms during Victorian days, entertaining visitors with their musical talents or other cultured skills. Instead, Jim is enthralled by Ántonia's sense of immediacy, and joyful, direct link with the world around her. Furthermore, Ántonia's narrative as an immigrant in many ways informs the wild vivacity that Jim finds so striking: She is a European returned to the (albeit often harsh) pastoral. Those members of the Shimerda family who are able to shed the trappings of Europe and embrace the American wilderness fare significantly better than those who aren't able (Ántonia's father, for instance, who misses his life in Bohemia, his old profession, and playing his violin – shoots himself). Ántonia, who is more "primitive" in spirit and more corporal overall, is one of those who takes to it more naturally, sustained by the simple joys found in nature and by constant physical activity.

She also delights in adventuring on the prairie together with Jim, accompanying him as an equal. Soon enough, Ántonia even surpasses Jim in terms of daily athletic exertion (and possibly athletic ability), when she works her family's land while Jim goes to school. Describing her as growing rapidly into a "tall, strong young girl," Ántonia wears "the boots her father had so thoughtfully taken off before he shot himself,"¹²⁹ and when Jim asks her if she wouldn't rather go to school, Ántonia replies:

"I ain't got time to learn. I can work like mans now. My mother can't say no more how Ambrosch do all and nobody to help him. I can work as much as him. School is all right for little boys. I help make this land one good farm."¹³⁰

Later in the book, when Ántonia is sent to work as a housekeeper in town, the novel's narration takes repeated note of the differences separating the cultured girls in town, and the country girls who are essentially imported from the homesteads on the prairie to serve as domestic servants. While the town girls take for granted their own superiority, Jim actually feels the country girls are more beautiful, having "the fresh colour of their country upbringing," and a "brilliancy" in their eyes.¹³¹ Jim

¹²⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 130.

remarks that he's not alone, and noting the townspeople's reaction to the country girls, he speculates that they are perceived as a "menace to social order. Their beauty shone out too boldly against a conventional background."¹³²

In this conceit – that there is something more vigorous and alluring about the "country girls" – the novel taps into a version of the aesthetic that idealizes a particular kind of athletic femininity. Again, *Ántonia* epitomizes a pastoral aesthetic with her primitive spirit and hardy physicality. The town girls may have their book-learning and finery, but theirs is the beauty of civilization, and therefore born of artifice. *Ántonia*, free of this kind of artifice (or with less access to it, really) is presumably more "pure." Moreover, potentially gender-bending elements of *Ántonia*'s tomboyish appeal are overwritten with values of primitivism.

While critics have more recently set themselves the task of retroactively parsing Willa Cather's sexuality¹³³, no matter their verdict, the novel itself works very hard – on the surface level, at least – to shore itself back up within a hegemonic discourse of heterosexual reproductivity. When Jim meets *Ántonia* later in life, he describes her as "battered but not diminished," still "full of vigour of her personality."¹³⁴ She has worked hard all her life – another primitive virtue – and is surrounded by the doubly metaphorical fruits of her labor: Her eleven children. Jim is able to notice defects in her appearance caused by age – her grizzled hair and missing teeth, for instance – but still sees the physically vital beauty that sets *Ántonia* apart from other, more urbane women, musing:

I was thinking, as I watched her, how little it mattered – about her teeth, for instance. I know so many women who have kept all the things she had lost, but whose inner glow has faded. Whatever else was gone, *Ántonia* had not

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Sharon O'Brien is credited with ushering a wave of criticism invested in defining Cather's sexuality with her 1986 biography, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* (Oxford: OUP). Consequent critics have suggested re-reading Cather's body of work with Cather's sexuality in mind. Obviously, these attempts have the hallmarks of "poor critical method," and my own stance on the matter is to agree with Joan Acocella, who sums it up thus: "...because [Cather] was supposedly a lesbian and because, therefore, all her work was considered encoded, full of secrets, [she] was made the sport of literary theorists." (<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/whats-in-cathers-letters>)

¹³⁴ Cather, *My Ántonia*, 213.

lost the fire of life. Her skin, so brown and hardened, had not that look of flabbiness, as if the sap beneath it had been secretly drawn away.¹³⁵

As Jim concludes his visit, he observes Ántonia's sons, who he very much regards as an extension of Ántonia herself as he remarks that

[i]t was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.¹³⁶

Here the novel makes its overarching aesthetic perfectly clear: Ancient or more primitive peoples – a.k.a., “the founders of early races” – possess a potency and beauty that modern civilization has forfeited in some manner. Ántonia is not only the matriarch of the Cuzak clan, she is a kind of Eve in her own right. The robust physicality and general vitality that make her so appealing serve a purpose: To deliver a generation of life into the world. The phrase, “the founders of early races,” not only speaks to discourses of reproduction, it also taps into discourses of eugenics, a passing reference to both the propagation of desirable genetic strength and the “founding” of “races” – plural – a kind of tribalism.

Many of Ernest Hemingway's female characters are also written as having a similarly robust, athletic aesthetic, but the iterations of athletic women in Hemingway's fiction aren't tied up within a narrative of heteronormative reproductivity quite so neatly. Conceiving a child is often the source of romantic tension (“Hills Like White Elephants”) or the death of an affair both literally and physically (Catherine's death in childbirth during the last pages of *A Farewell to Arms*). Moreover, some of Hemingway's fictional women can signal vampish qualities (i.e. Brett) or demonstrate “alternative” desires (i.e. Catherine in *The Garden of Eden* who brings a woman into her relationship with David). This athleticism also sometimes presents a threat to the (established taxonomic regime of) masculinity of Hemingway's male characters. Marjorie can fish as well as Nick in “The End of Something,” prompting Nick to make the snarky remark, “You know everything.” When Marjorie asks him not to be quarrelsome, he replies, “I can't help

¹³⁵ Ibid., 216.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 227.

it" ... "You do. You know everything. That's the trouble. You know you do."¹³⁷ In *The Sun Also Rises*, Brett Ashley's strong stomach for the gore of the bullfight wins her Jake's admiration and respect, but also speaks to her lack of womanly sentiment; saving Jake the trouble, Brett calls herself a "bitch" in the course of the novel.

But other female characters in Hemingway's milieu resemble Cather's Ántonia more closely, and two in particular stand out: as mentioned above, *A Farewell to Arms*'s Catherine Barkley, and Hemingway's fictionalized version of his own wife Hadley as she is portrayed in *A Moveable Feast*. Both are presented as ideal helpmates, women who are practical and capable, whose beauty products include fresh air and sunshine, and a healthy flush from activity. Hadley is described as an easygoing, forgiving wife who enjoys everything from trips to the racetracks outside Paris to skiing in the Alps. Hemingway admires Hadley most when she is at her most athletic. For instance, while skiing in Schruns Hemingway describes her as having "beautiful, wonderfully strong legs and fine control of her skis."¹³⁸ (See photograph below). Numerous critics have compared "Hadley" (both fictional and non-fictional) to Catherine Barkley, many of them determined to pinpoint the degree to which Hadley served as the inspiration for Catherine's creation. One motif in particular that recurs in both manuscripts is that both Hadley and Catherine suggest getting their hair cropped short to match their respective lovers,' leaving the reader with the impression that these female characters consider themselves as a kind of mirror image or complement to their male counterparts. An androgynous version of the athletic aesthetic defines the unions they share with their male partners.

¹³⁷ Ernest Hemingway, "The End of Something," *The Complete Short Stories*. (New York: Scribner, 1925, reprint ed. 1998), 81.

¹³⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*. (New York: Scribner, 1994, reprint ed. 1996), 200.



(Fig. 27): Hadley with her skis – and notably, her hair cut in a short, Eton-crop fashion.

Ultimately, reproduction (i.e. pregnancy and childbirth) disrupts the androgynous-driven athletic aesthetic as manifest in *A Farewell to Arms*. The novel marks one of Hemingway's few love stories that doesn't end in one partner betraying or disappointing the other (a cruel twist of fate does that for them). The romance between Lieutenant Henry and Catherine Barkley functions as a sort of paradisiacal refuge from the war and from the uglier side of humanity, and the motif of androgyny underscores this prelapsarian tone. Moreover, the dynamic of their early romance is distinguished by Henry's attraction to her "game" attitude – she behaves like a guy's girl, doesn't complain about potential discomforts, and is, in essence, a "good sport." The fact that she agrees to sneak around and have sex with Henry in his hospital bed, and the fact that their early courtship includes a visit to the racetrack and a stop into a gun shop (Henry buys a pistol) are evidence of her good

sport disposition. She is a levelheaded “modern” woman, a nurse who can’t be shocked by the graphic nature of the human body – very much the opposite of a corseted Victorian.

Henry also admires Catherine’s stiff upper lip and robust physicality, characteristics that she retains even after becoming pregnant. As Henry rows Catherine across the lake in their effort to emigrate from Italy to Switzerland, he grows tired and Catherine gamely offers to take a turn, arguing that, “Rowing in moderation is very good for the pregnant lady,”¹³⁹ and Henry rests for a moment, drinking brandy, admiring her, and perpetually pestering her to tell him when she’s tired (to which she repeatedly insists she’s fine). A short while later, as they travel around Switzerland by train, Henry expresses concern again that Catherine might be fatigued, and she admonishes him, “I like the ride” ... “Don’t worry about me, darling, I feel fine.”¹⁴⁰ And when the subject of skiing comes up, Catherine laments, “I wish I could ski” ... “It’s rotten not to be able to ski.”¹⁴¹ Henry promises to take her on a bobsled ride as a substitute.

However, Henry’s attraction to Catherine’s mental and physical endurance functions to heighten Henry’s sense of shock and grief when this endurance ultimately fails. Unlike Cather’s *Ántonia* – who is defined by the fact of having given birth to eleven “tall and straight” children – childbirth spells the undoing of Catherine, and her death dramatically shatters her paradisiacal union with Henry. Despite her vivacity, her game attitude, and her seemingly healthy body, cruel biology has played a trick on them: The physical difference that has allowed them to conceive a child is the difference that ultimately divides them by death.

Hemingway’s stories and novels – even when set in Europe – often include fishing trips or camping, and the female protagonists are often women who demonstrate an ironclad constitution (like Brett at the bullfight) and/or possess a capable air and willingness to keep up (like Catherine). In essence, Hemingway’s female characters – even those who are non-American (Brett is English; Pilar, the

¹³⁹ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*. (New York: Scribner, 1929, reprint ed. 2014), 237.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 255.

very capable matriarchal figure from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, is Spanish) – are athletic women, and bear some of the same “tough (wo)man” qualities as the idealized American pioneer woman, like Cather’s *Ántonia*.

Due to their overlapping biographies, and due to the fact that the first wave of Hemingway/Fitzgerald criticism was largely biographical,¹⁴² critics often compare Hemingway’s stories and novels to Fitzgerald’s body of work. But in considering the texts themselves in conjunction with the ways these stories and novels employ an athletic aesthetic in the depiction of their respective female characters reveals that whereas Hemingway’s work exported an American aesthetic to Europe, Fitzgerald’s work can be seen as importing a European aesthetic to America. Comparing Fitzgerald’s athletic female characters to Hemingway’s, Fitzgerald’s characters have little to do with camping and fishing. Instead, they are polished, cultivated “sportswomen” – most at home on a manicured tennis court, a golfing green, or a well-groomed beach on the French Riviera.

Furthermore, Fitzgerald’s characters present an iteration of the athletic, tomboyish female body as it is *delinked* from reproduction. The first time the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway, is introduced to Jordan Baker, he remarks:

She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet.¹⁴³

Nick’s description of Jordan does not paint a portrait of a traditionally feminine figure. “Small-breasted” implies Jordan’s physique possesses an androgynous, possibly prepubescent quality. Her carriage reminds him of a young cadet, presumably male. And yet, despite these qualities – or, rather, *because* of them –

¹⁴² Here I am referring to Carlos Baker and A.E. Hotchner, Matthew Buccoli and Arthur Mizener – early critics in their fields, who sometimes knew the authors in question, and who also wrote biographies. Also included in this group are critics like Philip Young, who advanced the influential “wound theory” regarding Hemingway’s work, suggesting that his stories and novels be reread via a psychoanalytic lens that considered the profound effect Hemingway’s wounds during WWI had on his work. My intent in this chapter is to refrain from biographical criticism, while at the same time acknowledging that these two sets of texts are often read together with the overall aim of comparing commonalities and differences that concern the athletic female characters depicted therein.

¹⁴³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*. (New York: Scribner, 1925, reprint ed. 2004), 11.

Nick is instantly attracted to Jordan, for he prefaces his observations with the point-blank statement, "I enjoyed looking at her."¹⁴⁴ Again, while the female characters in both Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's texts incorporate androgynous signals in their articulation of an athletic aesthetic, the women in Hemingway's fiction are more closely linked to the "natural," pastoral outdoorswoman, whereas the woman in Fitzgerald's fiction reflect a kind of polished, moneyed, high-fashion androgyny.

Nick eventually goes on to date Jordan, that informal form of courtship becoming an increasingly common social practice in the 1920s.¹⁴⁵ When he sees her next – the first time he attends one of Gatsby's parties – he competes for her attention with "her escort, a persistent undergraduate given to violent innuendo."¹⁴⁶ Later at the same party, when Gatsby requests a private audience with Jordan, Nick admires her as she walks away, stating:

I noticed she wore her evening-dress, all her dresses, like sports clothes – there was a jauntiness about her movements as if she had first learned to walk upon golf courses on clean, crisp mornings.¹⁴⁷

Nick's imagination may not be far off the mark, after all, Jordan is an amateur golf champion. She is very accomplished at the sport, too; Nick has heard of her professional victories and seen her picture in various sporting magazines.

Real-life socialites contemporary to *The Great Gatsby* offer further iterations or "readings" of the emergent athletic aesthetic. In a letter to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, Fitzgerald wrote about the character Jordan Baker, "perhaps you know its [sic] Edith Cummings."¹⁴⁸ Edith Cummings was one of the famed "Big Four" debutantes of Chicago, and a friend of Ginevra King.¹⁴⁹ Like Jordan, Cummings was a famous amateur golfer and frequently in the press. She was profiled in *Vogue* and

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Kathleen Drowne and Patrick Huber, *The 1920s: American Popular Culture Through History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood/Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 45.

¹⁴⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 44.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁸ John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer, eds., *Dear Scott/Dear Max: the Fitzgerald-Perkins correspondence*. (New York: Scribner, 1971), 90.

¹⁴⁹ "Chicago's Big Four were a quartet of debutantes in the Chicago social scene during World War I, described as 'the four most attractive and socially desirable young women in Chicago.'" (Jame LW West, *The Perfect Hour: The Romance of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ginevra King, His First Love*, New York: Random House, 2005). Ginevra King is considered the real-life inspiration for Daisy Buchanan, and Fitzgerald had followed these real-life socialites closely.

Ladies Home Journal, but most significant of all her press clippings, she was the first female athlete to grace the cover of *TIME* magazine.



(Fig. 28): Edith Cummings on the cover of *TIME*.

(Fig. 29): "The Fairway Flapper"



Nicknamed by the press “the Fairway Flapper,” Cummings was emblematic of an emergent wave of world-famous female athletes in the teens and ‘20s, a wave that included the likes of Sonja Henie (Olympic figure skating champion), Gertrude Ederle (first woman to swim the English Channel), Helen Wills (tennis player of international fame), and fellow golfer Glenna Collette. Relatively speaking, Cummings’ tenure in the golfing world was brief; once married, she quickly retreated from the spotlight. But while she competed in her sport for a shorter period of time than some of the other members of the peer group named above, she garnered a high level of fame – as evidenced by the cover of *TIME*. The press, who found that her image as a wealthy socialite sold well to the public, adored Cummings.

With much of the country enjoying the economic boom of the Roaring Twenties, the image that Cummings presented of a “socialite-athlete” was a palatable, aspirational one. She was moneyed, glamorous, fashionable, and rumored to always like a good party¹⁵⁰ – thereby shoring up the titillating impression that socialite-athletes were both literally and figuratively “game” for anything and incorporating signals that point to vampishness in the spectacle of her athletic celebrity. In newspapers and magazines, Cummings’ athletic performances were habitually described in tandem with her attire and her social engagements, effectively enacting an inextricable link between her performance and style.

In terms of intersectionality, socialites embody the convergence of athleticism and *class*. It makes a certain amount of logistical sense that some of the first internationally known female athletes tended to be socialites, as socialites would have access to sufficient leisure time to engage in various sporting activities on a regular basis (and hence acquire more advanced-level skill). This distinction hints at something larger: There is a notable lack of utility in the sporty socialite’s physical fitness. The socialite-athlete is active and athletic, but her athleticism has little in common with the physical fitness of America’s pioneer woman, or even the urban stamina of women who worked in laundries, factories, sweatshops, etc. The

¹⁵⁰ John R. Schmidt, “The Fairway Flapper,” May 15, 2013. <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-blogs/the-fairway-flapper/179c64a9-f025-404c-a84f-e695eaf32972>

sporty socialite exerts herself in a cultivated setting for amusement and pleasure, not for survival.

Due to its ties to the admired leisure class, the sporty socialite's version of the athletic aesthetic was more formally (and repeatedly) articulated within the fashion world. Specific styles were inspired by celebrity socialite-athletes and moreover, socialites could afford to consume expensive clothes (leaving less moneyed women to admire these fashions in magazines while also striving to purchase their cheaper imitations). In surveying a variety of women's fashion magazines from 1912-1939, a trend emerges in the number of times the words "sport" and "sporting" appear, both in advertisements as well as editorial features, and this trend appears to peak sometime in the mid-1920s. A related trend emerges in the rising number of advertisements and editorials about travel, leisure, and outdoor activities, indicating that consumers were hungry for adventure, and the sports clothes to accompany it. The trickle-down nature of this trend (as magazines and advertisements would have it), moving from socialites to everyday middle-class women, involves a rather obvious component in the imitation of wealth. Sporty flappers such as Edith Cummings in real-life and Jordan Baker in fiction are partially defined by their status as privileged young women with abundant social connections and financial means. Their images connote the young woman who can afford holidays by the sea or in the mountains, tennis instructors and golf lessons, thoroughbred horses and fast automobiles. Such a young woman is tan, not because she's spent her days laboring outdoors, but because she's spent her days *playing* outdoors, leisure being an important distinction and signifier of her privilege.

Thus, with celebrity socialites like Edith Cummings in mind, "athletic fashion" retains a materialistic note perfectly suited to encourage capitalistic consumerism. But no matter how booming the 1920s economy, the fact remains that the majority of the population could not afford to take up the socialite-athletes' (often expensive) pursuits. Hence, as the consuming masses adopt the new sportswear invented for and embraced by prominent socialites, the meaning behind the specific context is emptied out – i.e. the donning of boating sweaters when one is not boating, tennis skirts when one is not playing tennis, etc. Without engagement of the sporting

activity itself (and often the expensive accouterments necessary – boat, horse, tennis court, swimming pool, etc) these sports clothes lose their original signification and become signifiers of fashion for fashion's sake. In other words, where transgressions against traditional gender regimes may initially rely on a kind of redirection – i.e. distracting from a subversive gender pose by pointing instead to “equestrian,” “sailor,” “tennis player,” etc – as they gradually lose the signifiers linked to the redirection, the question becomes: How does this athletic aesthetic operate in terms of shifting gender values when “athleticism” is delinked from any actual athletic activity?

Fashion magazines in particular employ a shifting semiotics, moving from the specific to the abstract, and vice versa. In *The Fashion System*, Roland Barthes argues that each object has three structures – technological, iconic, and verbal – and asserts that fashion magazines do the work of translation.

...the circulation of Fashion thus relies in large part on an activity of *transformation*: there is a transition (at least according to the order invoked by Fashion magazines) from the technological structure to the iconic and verbal structures. Yet this transition, as in all structures, can only be discontinuous: the real garment can only be *transformed* into “representation” by means of certain operators which we might call *shifters*, since they serve to transpose one structure into another, to pass, if you will, from one code to another code.¹⁵¹

Barthes' inquiry is centered on the phenomenon of the “Fashion object” itself, and the (discontinuous) space between its existence(s) according to each of the three structures he names. Barthes' conceptual map provides a useful means to track the changes in signified values that occur via a process of iteration. In other words, understanding the space between each iteration as potentially discontinuous (especially in the case when an iteration is translated between structures), we understand how an item of sportsclothing, for example, may be emptied of its

¹⁵¹ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, trans. ed.1983, reprint ed. 1990), 6.

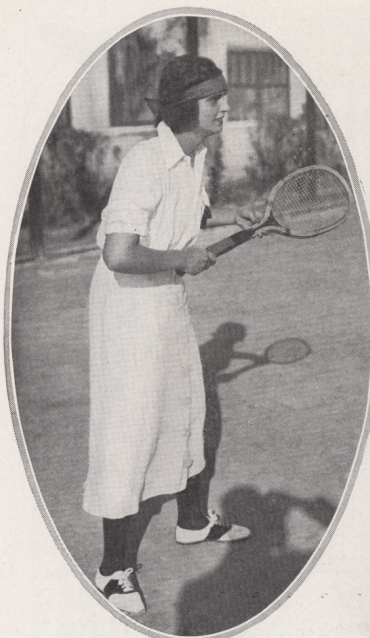
original referent (the intent to play tennis, go golfing, etc) – and also, how substitute referents may be put in place.

Barthes' investigation is an isolated, "pure" study of language and semiotics within "Fashion" (a language in its own right, therefore capitalized). Taking one step back from this tight focus to adopt a wider (Barthes would argue muddier) view that surveys semiotic representations in fashion magazines in terms of culturally-constructed identities, we see that the semiotic mechanisms at play in fashion magazines perform a series of secondary functions as well, including translation of a specific articulation (in this case, a socialite or sports celebrity) into the more abstracted qualities attached to that articulation (a generalized fashion or style). In surveying issues of *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Ladies' Home Journal* from the era, the prevailing tone fashion editorials deploy is that of reportage – regardless of whether the subject in question is a real flesh-and-blood socialite, a nameless model, or even an illustration. Indeed, the blurring of this line is obvious in a January 1922 *Vogue* spread on ideal holiday attire, as excerpted below. Winter is the time for a proper socialite to go north or south, to enjoy "Snow and Sand," and to dress accordingly. The spread includes a series of articles that recommend a wide variety of "engaging sports costumes" to be worn in St. Moritz, Palm Beach, or the Riviera. The manner in which the article fluently switches between illustrations, named socialites, and anonymous models suggests they are somewhat interchangeable.



(Fig. 30): Illustrated models wearing sportsclothes suited for Palm Beach or the Riviera.

(Fig. 31): Socialites dressed for warm weather sports,
and anonymous models dressed for winter activities.



Miss Peggy Thayer, at the Everglades Club at Palm Beach, shows how simply and sensibly one should be attired for work on the courts



Three Photographs © by Underwood and Underwood
Mrs. Lydig Hoyt, in a charming coat and skirt, exemplifies the perfection of country good taste. Mrs. Hoyt will soon appear in "The Squaw Man"



Mrs. Arturo de Heeren is well-turned out for golf. Her hat has enough brim, her blouse enough ease, and her gloves enough thickness



Three Photographs © by Central News Photo Service

Whether this lady of the snows should choose to disport her merry self in Tuxedo, Canada, or Switzerland, she would be equally well dressed for exercise



These comfortably-clad coasters know well how the snow creeps into every crevice, and have wisely equipped themselves in a way which defies getting wet



Skis, and the costume to go with them, are shown here. None but an appropriately clothed young woman could look so cheerful during such a strenuous sport

SNOW AND SAND, AS ONE GOES NORTH OR SOUTH, FORM BACK-

In the images above, the illustrations showing warm weather sportswear depict anonymous – and perhaps entirely imaginary – models. In the photographic montage, and specifically regarding the top row, Miss Peggy Thayer, Mrs. Lydig Hoyt, and Mrs. Arturo de Heeren all appear along with their names. Meanwhile, the skiing and sledding girls in the row of photos below it are unidentified. The magazine shifts fluently between specificity and anonymity.

An echo of this semiotic slippage turns up in *The Great Gatsby*, as Nick says of Jordan:

She was dressed to play golf, and I remember thinking she looked like a good illustration, her chin raised a little jauntily, her hair the color of an autumn leaf, her face the same brown tint as the fingerless glove on her knee.¹⁵²

This observation occurs towards the end of the book, when, having spent time courting her over the course of the novel, Nick ought to be acquainted with Jordan and her specifics more intimately than ever. Yet, in this moment, her image seems to slip back into the abstract, flattened out in his mind into a two-dimensional “illustration.” Once again, Nick finds himself attracted to Jordan, or rather, her stylized physical presentation. He’s there to put closure on the end of the dating relationship, yet says, “For just a minute I wondered if I wasn’t making a mistake, then I thought it all over again quickly and got up to say good-by.”¹⁵³ The statement implies Nick is seduced by an abstraction of Jordan – the athlete who resembles “a good illustration” – yet he is ultimately ready to part ways with the more specific, three-dimensional Jordan.

The scene from *Gatsby* quoted above – and in particular the passage in which Nick calls Jordan “a good illustration” – encapsulates the semiotic dynamic that is at the heart of this chapter. Not only does Nick conflate Jordan with an abstract, illustrated version of a sportswoman but his language takes his thinking one step further, ultimately conflating Jordan’s tanned face with an object: Her brown, fingerless golfing glove. It is significant, too, that this flow (from specific individual to abstract illustration to fashionable material object) provides a temporary

¹⁵² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 177.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

reprieve for Jordan in the narrator's eyes, a moment where his attraction for her resurfaces. Tracing Nick's flow of reactions – from disgust to attraction and back to disgust again – helps to map the push-and-pull magnetism of the “sporty socialite” aesthetic. More specifically, it highlights the semiotic pivot point wherein the potentially transgressive offense caused by certain actions or stylizations is subverted by the more abstract discourse of “fashion.”

Fashion magazines traffic in idealized abstraction (and in attaching that idealized abstraction to consumable goods), and during the early twentieth century a kind of shorthand was developed to embody the ideal in a kind of floating signifier: “the Parisienne.” During the first half of the twentieth century, the essence of American fashion was still largely a question of emulating the Parisienne, a term that was frequently employed in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Redbook*, etc, and bears a cultural significance for which one is hard-pressed to find an exact equivalent in contemporary culture. While a slippery signifier, the Parisienne was a term that denoted an ideal woman, and whatever “she” did or wore was held in the highest regard. In the 1920s, the Parisienne did not stay put in Paris; she became increasingly traveled, a socialite who spent considerable time in Saint Moritz and the Riviera, an athletic figure who was perfectly attired for every activity and occasion. In many ways, the Parisienne was an idealized embodiment of the sporty flapper – a version of the “good illustration” that Nick refers to when describing the perfect picture Jordan makes as she sits jauntily dressed in her golfing attire. The fact that her resemblance to this illustration (a resemblance strong enough for Nick to somewhat conflate Jordan with the illustration) temporarily redeems Jordan in Nick's eyes illuminates the ways in which the borrowed golf gloves aesthetic elides potentially transgressive qualities. In other words, Jordan's resemblance to the “ideal,” “healthy” image of a sportswoman temporarily overwrites Nick's impression of Jordan's moral decay and lack of (unselfish, womanly) empathy for others. Moreover, comparing Jordan to an illustration enacts a semiotic shift that likewise elides the homoerotic notes that otherwise characterize to Nick's desire for Jordan. His lust for Jordan's boyish figure is translated into appreciation for a consumer-driven ideal, and the specificity of his desire for Jordan is overwritten with the

slippery, abstract language of fashion – which in turn muddies a binary organization of gender that would otherwise force a specific (homoerotic) reading of Nick's desire.

This brief scene in *Gatsby* lays bare the semiotic mechanism at the heart of what I've dubbed "the borrowed golf gloves" aesthetic insofar as Nick's interpretation of *Gatsby's* Jordan looking like "a good illustration" maps at least one semiotic route that reflects the transmutable nature of the athletic female aesthetic. Nick's desire for Jordan is alternately characterized as an admiration of her boyish qualities, then mutates into an admiration of her vampish qualities ("...there were several [men] she could have married at a nod of her head," Nick says¹⁵⁴), transforms at another interval into an admiration of her careerist qualities (Nick asks her to dinner, desiring her as a "clean, hard, limited person"¹⁵⁵), and ultimately finds a kind of escape from all of these sets of semiotic values when his mind blurs Jordan's image and he sees her as "a good illustration."

While Jordan's example runs a gamut of transmutations signified by the athletic aesthetic, readings of various real-life female athletes offer supplementary examples of the shifting signifiers connoted, revealing the cultural "misdirection" to take a kind of circular flow. Meaning, for example that: Female athletes deflecting from negative interpretations of her behavior/characteristics as "careerist" might emphasize her style as vampish, or that female athletes deflecting from negative interpretations of her behavior/characteristics as "homosexual" might emphasize her style as careerist (implying an asexual life) – and so forth. The shifting nature of the aesthetic means that it is capable of pointing away from sets of values presently under scrutiny and criticism by society. Even simply analyzing one shift between two sets of semiotic values at a time, then analyzing the results in aggregate, nonetheless reveals a larger constellation indicating this adaptable, circular flow. Jordan also provides an example of the *reversible* flow between any two sets of semiotic signals. She uses her career and status as a sportswoman to distract from her bachelorette behavior, and vice-versa. And both of these sets of signals

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 177.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 79.

ultimately distract from Jordan's lack of interest or connection to the domestic sphere.

The typical course for the socialite-athlete was to eventually get married and become a wife and mother (Edith Cummings, as mentioned, left the amateur golf circuit, married, and had three daughters). There was, however, an alternate path opening up for an accomplished female athlete – a lifestyle that a female athlete might maintain into later years, and it had to do with the increased independence available to a successful female athlete. Women who pursued a sport (or sometimes multiple sports) and achieved a high enough mark of excellence might find herself traveling around the country – and even around the world, most notably in the case of the Olympics.

Female athletes who made it to the Olympics, or who were able to pursue a professional sports career found themselves in a position to postpone or even forego some of the conventional life events otherwise expected of a woman, most significantly: Marriage and motherhood. Moreover, a woman with a bonafide professional sports career represented a vast departure from Victorian norms in that she might, at times, even travel from sporting event to sporting event without the supervision of a (typically older, matronly) chaperone – implying that she might get up to whatever she wanted at night.

Again, *Gatsby's* Jordan is one such example of a “sporty flapper” who is living the more independent lifestyle accorded to female athletes. Jordan is a single woman, with no chaperone, playing in golf tournaments all over the country. Tom Buchanan, a character deeply invested in traditional gender roles and more or less the book's designated caveman, expresses his disapproval. “She's a nice girl,” he says of Jordan, “They oughtn't let her run around the country this way.”¹⁵⁶ Throughout the novel, Jordan never speaks of marriage, except to pass along a piece of gossip about Daisy's marriage, specifically that Tom is unfaithful and has “got some woman in New York.”¹⁵⁷ She displays close to zero interest in Daisy's child (during the single

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 15.

instance when the child appears in the novel), and never brings up Daisy's daughter or any other child in the course of conversation.

Jordan is, for all intents and purposes, the embodiment of a then-emergent type: The bachelorette, or, "Gal About Town." She is between childhood and a more established maturity that might involve marriage and children. She attends parties (her famous line about liking large parties, because "they're so intimate. At small parties there isn't any privacy"¹⁵⁸) and in terms of romantic commitments, she is free to play the field – to borrow from a sports metaphor – meaning: to accept and go on dates. Daisy attends the same parties as Jordan, but as a married woman; even if Daisy misbehaves, the idea is, she's "spoken for." As both a socialite and celebrity athlete, Jordan holds a special status within the period and culture presented in *The Great Gatsby*. Tom may complain about her relative independence in passing, but to some extent accepts her more progressive lifestyle – insofar as he is unprepared to take a further stand against it.

Even Gatsby references Jordan's athletic career, citing it as a kind of credential that places Jordan beyond moral reproach, as he says to Nick, "Miss Baker's a great sportswoman, you know, and she'd never do anything that wasn't all right."¹⁵⁹ (We know, of course, that this assessment is bogus, there are rumors Jordan cheats at golf, and given her participation in the Tom-Myrtle-Daisy-Gatsby love polygon, Nick's judgment of Jordan is ultimately that her "upstanding" reputation is a veneer). While in many regards Jordan represents the delinking of the athletic body from matrimony and reproduction, Jordan's style, comportment, and fashion appear to continuously point back to her status as – as Gatsby puts it – a "sportswoman." Her sports clothes, her "jaunty" manner of walking, her picturesque golfing attire as described in the book's final scenes all serve to remind Nick (and the reader) of her sportswoman status. Even while not engaged in a specific athletic activity, Jordan engages an aesthetic of "sportiness" – which in this case, serves as signifier that does variously different work than to simply connote her golfing prowess.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 71.

And again, while “sportswomen” like Jordan show little interest in marriage or children, this does not necessarily imply a total disinterest in sex. If anything, the flapper as an icon signifies a then-emerging variety of sexual identity – a highly physical, playful one, a sexuality that emphasizes sensuality and pleasure, and yet shuns reproduction altogether. Delinked from procreation, sex in the sporty flapper’s case takes on a tone of recreation. The 1910s and ‘20s saw discussions of birth control come to the forefront of American politics. The “ideal” content of sexual education was hotly debated, with lightning rod figures such as Margaret Sanger refuting the Victorian infantilization of young women with regard their sexuality, and opening the American Birth Control League (later to become Planned Parenthood) in 1921, a date coincident with early conceptions of the flapper. Among their founding principles, the ABCL posited that a child should be “born of the mother’s conscious desire.”

The idea that sex might be approached as recreational instead of procreative no doubt offered titillation for a public that was enticed but still adapting to this new notion. People were curious about the “new” and “modern” lifestyle of the flapper, and other socialite-athletes learned to employ a vampish style and demeanor to distract from giving the public an otherwise “careerist” impression. Biographer Larry Engelmann points out that press correspondents wrote with glee about “unconfirmed rumors” that as famous tennis star Helen Wills played the tennis circuit up and down the French Riviera in 1926, Wills had received two marriage proposals – “one from an English aristocrat and another from a plebian professional tennis player”¹⁶⁰ Helen’s response was to say

I won’t deny that I have had offers of marriage, and I won’t confirm the rumor. But if you are a betting man please lay odds that I shall return to California single if not singles champion.¹⁶¹

As Engelmann emphasizes, “marriage was not in her present program,”¹⁶² but argues that Wills understood the advantage in answering the newspapermen’s

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 129.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

questions, or at least playing coy and perpetuating interest. Throughout her career, Wills seemed savvy to the fact that public acceptance of her unorthodox, independent lifestyle hinged on her image as America's Sweetheart (like Jordan Baker, it behooved Wills to appear "like a good illustration"), and she obliged the press's curiosity about her accordingly. But Wills' ability to pursue her career to the exclusion of all else, and to live as she pleased (whether single, divorced, childless, etc) depended on the dissemination of her image as a sportswoman who entertained proposals from men.

One of Wills' chief rivals, French tennis champion Suzanne Lenglen, also lived a nontraditional lifestyle – perhaps even more so, for not only did Lenglen forego having children, she engaged in a number of "scandalous" affairs and never married. Engelmann tracks the tit-for-tat dynamic between French and American journalists, arguing that the French press

responded to romantic rumors concerning Helen with rumors concerning Suzanne. It was said suddenly that she had become engaged secretly to the Duke of Westminster, who had recently divorced.¹⁶³

According to Engelmann, Lenglen was always playful in her response to such rumors; she fanned interest in her personal life while at the same time playing coy. By striking this balance, she was able to maintain a flamboyant personal life but was rarely hindered with concrete accusations. When Lenglen entered into an affair with Baldwin M. Baldwin, for instance, "[h]e was a married man with a family who for another two years did not speak publicly about getting a divorce. In order to make it all look fairly innocent, he appeared in news releases as her manager."¹⁶⁴

Like Wills, Lenglen demonstrated an awareness of the importance of her public image, and how well it could serve her celebrity. However "unladylike" her behavior off the court was, she was lauded for her grace on the court and made the most of it. In particular, fans and reporters alike noted her resemblance to a ballet dancer in her movements. While not perceived as demure in her personal life, Lenglen nonetheless offered up the spectacle of graceful femininity that could be

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 280.

understood by her spectators according to traditional regimes of gender, and this went a long way to bolster her popularity and defuse her aura of scandal.



(Fig. 32): Lenglen tempered a scandalous reputation by encouraging the reproduction and dissemination of her graceful image on the court.

Over time, Lenglen demonstrated a growing awareness of when and how she would be photographed on the tennis court, and made it her job to deliver the kind of balletic poses that were sure to run in the press. While her poses often struck viewers as eccentric and over-the-top, they indicated that Lenglen knew it was in her best interest to make certain that there were plenty of “lucky” action shots that emphasized her image as embodying a conventional idea of taxonomic femininity – not to mention as a fun, flirty, coquette. At all turns, Lenglen was invested in making sure her celebrity image and headlines-worthy style was always capable of eclipsing the details of her personal life.

Not all female athletes mitigated their potentially scandalous athlete prowess with rumors of engagement or displays of traditional taxonomic femininity. Other

celebrity athletes redirected or overwrote the semiotics of their transgressive personal lives in other ways. By large, the only “scandalous press” about Helen Wills revolved around her supposed rivalry with Helen Hull Jacobs, which may have had more to do with Helen Hull Jacobs (“the Jacobs gal was news,” explains one 1933 article in *The Chicago Tribune* on the subject of why so much was printed about the rivalry between the two women). Helen Wills biographer Larry Engelmann notes that

Helen Wills cultivated a feminine appearance, carefully selected her clothing and hair style, and applied her makeup meticulously. Jacobs wore a hair net on the court, used little makeup, wore no nail polish, and chain-smoked. In 1936 *Time* reported that Jacobs “has thus far shown no romantic interest in men.”¹⁶⁵

Jacobs was at that time, in fact, already in a romantic relationship with Henrietta Bingham. It was a relationship that neither Jacobs nor Bingham seemed to go to great lengths to hide, traveling together and living together, allowing themselves to be frequently photographed together. As discussed earlier, Bingham’s status as a wealthy heiress overwrote critiques of her deviation from established regimes of gender and sexuality, coding her behavior and dress according to a narrative of aristocratic eccentricity. Jacobs, to a certain extent, also had access to this re-coding – many of the photographs of the two of them feature the couple dressed to ride, both of them astride Henrietta’s horses – in addition to the re-coding available to her as an accomplished sportswoman. Perhaps one of the reasons “the Jacobs gal was news” was because Jacobs was quite brazen, secure in her position of privilege.

Jacobs was able to live a relatively uncloseted life, while other athletes, such as Canadian all-star Bobbie Rosenfeld, felt obligated to compartmentalize. Rosenfeld was accomplished in track and field, basketball, hockey, softball, and tennis. She won two medals in the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam, and once retired, became a sports journalist. Born to a working-class immigrant family, Rosenfeld did not demonstrate the same ease or eagerness to turn her personal life into fodder for

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 335.

public consumption as, say, Wills, Lenglen, or Jacobs did. Instead, Rosenfeld worked hard to promote her public image as a kind of unilateral or monolithic identity, the implication being that her personal image simply didn't exist. Her colleague at the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, Robert Fulford, wrote of Rosenfeld that:

Bobby [sic] was the first lesbian I knew as such, and every day her moment of greatest happiness — happiness I could see her almost physically trying to hide, for reasons took me years to understand — coincided with her companion's arrival at her office to pick her up after work. One day this lady mentioned that she and Bobby were looking for a new apartment and needed two bedrooms — one for Bobby's trophies.¹⁶⁶

Rosenfeld's tactic (to elide her personal life with her public life, pretending to a certain extent that the former simply didn't exist) was not uncommon among female athletes throughout the twentieth century. Instead of engaging the "borrowed golf gloves" aesthetic (a semiotics of iteration, fashion, and consumerism), these athletes – like Rosenfeld – engage a semiotics of asexuality, of the athletic body as machine or perhaps cyborg, even.

By ignoring public curiosity about her gender and sexuality and underscoring her physical performances as the single most important factor in defining her culturally-constructed identity, Rosenfeld toes a dangerous line (i.e. putting all the focus on the physical body), entering the realm wherein sports and the scientific narratives – and more importantly, pseudo-scientific narratives – of athleticism converge. As it was, being an accomplished female athlete had its risks; certain athletes who were suspiciously *too* good at a sport were sometimes subjected to "sex-testing." As women began to achieve greater feats in the sporting world, some were targets of suspicion and derision, subject to the accusation that they were actually men in disguise. This atmosphere reached a fever pitch at the 1936 Olympics – perhaps one of the most controversial Olympic Games, insofar as it was held in Berlin and charged with a great deal of political undercurrent. Hitler hoped to use the event as a means to showcase "the genetic superiority of the Aryan

¹⁶⁶ Robert Fulford, <http://www.ithappenedinhockey.com/2009/10/greatest-female-hockey-player-of-the-1920s/>

race”¹⁶⁷ and justification for the Nazi party’s incorporation of eugenics into their policy-making. Trumped up belief in biological determinism set the tone of the 1936 Olympics, so perhaps it makes sense that the stage was set for sex-testing. When Helen Stephens won the 100-meter final with a time that was 11.5 seconds below the world record, she was accused of being a man and forced to prove her female biology via an examination – the first at-event “sex-testing” in the history of the Olympics. Stephens passed.¹⁶⁸

Two ever-evolving cultural dialogues, sports and science have often been linked in fraught ways. Because athletic achievements are mathematically quantifiable (at least in part), athleticism is often statistically judged, which in turn provides a platform for eugenicists to link categorical identifiers (such as ethnicity) and athletic prowess. Sports becomes a narrative that provides “proof” of a particular subjectivity’s superiority – a dangerous narrative that may in turn be used to support, say, an overarching political agenda such as that espoused by the Nazi party which preached Aryan superiority and racial hygiene. For non-“Aryan” athletes (and for non-“Aryan” people at large) the value judgment inherent in the pseudo-scientific categorical generalizing that characterized the Nazi regime was damning for obvious reasons: The idea that certain races are physically or intellectually superior gives credence to the idea that these races are also more desirable and ideally suited to pass on their genes, which in turn (as history shows us in the case of Nazi Germany) provides the horrifying political justification for the mass genocide of races deemed “unqualified” to pass on their genes. “Racial hygiene” is, after all, a discourse of death and breeding.

For (so-called “Aryan”) female athletes, the rhetoric that characterized the Nazi regime was complex and occasionally contradictory – especially as concerns the discourse of reproduction and the values that define “the ideal female athlete.” At the top levels within the realms of both German politics and athletics, Hitler and

¹⁶⁷ David Clay Large, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936*. (New York: Norton, 2007).

¹⁶⁸ In an ironic twist, the competitor Stephens beat out for the gold medal (and previous world record holder), Stella Walsh, was later discovered to have chromosomal qualities that led some doctors to retroactively categorize her as intersex (shot by a burglar in 1980, she was autopsied upon her death – an unexpected event with unexpected results). Her own achievements and medals have been consequently debated.

other high-ranking party members held the accomplishments of various female athletes in high regard, championing such individuals on the world stage and inviting them into the social circles of the Nazi elite. Hitler's favor extended to several non-German female athletes as well – some of whom seemed quite incongruent or at odds with the Nazi party's overt articulation of “proper” gender roles. French athlete Violette Morris marks one example of these seemingly mismatched alliances. Morris was a

...convent-educated, former boxer and javelin-thrower [who] had, in 1928, been refused a license to participate in the forthcoming Olympics by the Fédération Française Sportive Féminine largely because of complaints about her overtly public lesbian lifestyle. With her cropped hair, Morris had been dressing as a man since 1919 and was a heavy smoker, considered unacceptable in female society at the time.¹⁶⁹



(Fig. 33): Cigarette-smoking, racecar-driving Violette Morris.

¹⁶⁹ Anne Sebba, *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved, and Died Under Nazi Occupation*. (New York: St. Martin's, 2016), 14.

Morris was personally invited to the 1936 Olympics by Hitler, where, evidently, “she was treated to great fanfare.”¹⁷⁰ In consequent years, the Nazis successfully recruited Morris to work for the Gestapo. Perhaps recruitment was part of Germany’s intent all along, nonetheless, while Hitler made a public show of welcoming Morris, her lifestyle and image hardly lined up with the prescribed role for women according to the Nazi party. Morris was exceedingly strong and athletic, and won nearly every competition she entered – whether it be boxing, racecar driving, javelin-throwing, etc. – but given the values put forth by organizations such as the Bund Deutscher Mädel (League of German Girls, hereafter referred to as “the BDM”), physical fitness was a virtue only insofar as it was linked to a reproductive imperative under the Nazi regime (an ideal Morris blatantly and publically violated).

Young women were instructed that keeping themselves healthy and fit was a means of serving their country; the emphasis was on becoming wholesome wives and mothers. The BDM also lectured girls and young women on the need to produce more children, overtly claiming that this was the ultimate purpose of the female body. Unwed mothers – even teen mothers – were encouraged and supported by the *Lebensborn* “breeding program” and the “Cross of Honor of the German Mother” was awarded to mothers of multiple children (bronze for four to five children, silver for six to seven children, and gold for eight or more children). Morris – who wore men’s suits, started bar fights, and flaunted her affair with her French actress lover – was not the sort of female figure one might expect to be embraced by the German extreme right.

Hitler’s public approval of various celebrity athletes was, in a word, conflicted. While more in keeping with traditional taxonomies of femininity – at least in terms of superficial frills – Sonja Henie nonetheless marks another example of a celebrity athlete whose lifestyle did not fit with that prescribed by the BDM, yet was publicly embraced by Hitler. Glitzy, glamorous Henie skated up to where Hitler was seated during the 1936 Olympics, executed a hockey-stop, and raised her arm to say, “Heil Hitler.”¹⁷¹ Gossip that Henie later spent time with Hitler at Berghof, his

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Lara Jacobs, “Sonja Henie’s Ice Age,” *Vanity Fair*, February 2014.

home in the Alps, ran rampant. Henie biographers maintain that when the Germans swept through Norway, the troops caught sight of a personally autographed photograph of Hitler displayed prominently on the piano and consequently left Henie's properties undamaged.¹⁷²



(Fig. 34): Henie and Hitler shake hands at the 1936 Olympics, seeming to display mutual admiration.

Hitler was said to have admired Henie as the embodiment of the ideal Aryan woman, praising her physique, her beauty, and her robust athleticism.¹⁷³ And yet, in taking a closer look at Henie's overall lifestyle, Henie – like Morris – hardly exemplified the strict values set forth by the BDM. She was ambitious, and her hunger for fame and fortune eventually took her to America's Hollywood. According to biographer Laura Jacobs, Henie was also considered extremely "promiscuous" by her friends and family. A fellow skater in one of Henie's shows, Susan Strong Davis, was quoted as stating that Henie was "always in bed with someone."¹⁷⁴ Henie reportedly slept with most if not all of her skating partners. She married three times

¹⁷² Raymond Strait, *Queen of Ice, Queen of Shadows: The Unsuspected Life of Sonja Henie*

¹⁷³ Large, 116-121.

¹⁷⁴ Lara Jacobs, "Sonja Henie's Ice Age," *Vanity Fair* online, last modified February 11, 2014, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/02/sonja-henie-ice-skating-queen>

but never had children. In other words, Henie's version of the athletic aesthetic incorporated values that signaled as both extremely careerist and vampish. Henie bore much in common with the American flapper – a type that the Nazi government condemned. Furthermore, Henie styled herself in exactly the kind of makeup that Germany launched an active campaign to denounce. Historian Irene Guenther points out that

...proselytizers pounced on the “vamp” image, as they called it, which was denounced as totally un-German. It was a look, they asserted, that largely emanated from America and its Hollywood female stars. Heavily made-up eyes, bright red mouths, pencil-thin eyebrows, and the noxious vice of smoking that accompanied such ludicrous endeavors to emulate artificial American sexiness were destroying German women's natural beauty.¹⁷⁵

In many ways, Henie strove to please two different masters, with two very different aesthetics: Hollywood, and her Nordic/Germanic¹⁷⁶ compatriots.

In pleasing Hollywood, Henie's tactic was simple: Pump up the saccharine artifice dictated by traditional regimes of femininity, sprinkle in some glamour. Pop culture critic and fashion historian Lara Jacobs credits Henie for bringing “a huge visual shift – from masculine to feminine”¹⁷⁷ to the world of competitive figure skating. The established norm prior to Henie was black skates and baggy attire, Jacobs argues, but in 1927 Henie “delivered [her free skate] in a svelte costume of white velvet, its bell skirt hemmed to just above the knee. The audience was shocked... and delighted.”¹⁷⁸ Jacobs also points out that during this trendsetting free skate, Henie also performed the single axel, a jump that “had previously belonged to male skaters.” In those instances – such as when she performed the single axel – when Henie's athletic performances rivaled that of her male counterparts, she was in a realm apart from the kinds of suspicious accusations that, say, led to Helen Stephens having to endure “sex testing” during the 1936 Olympics. Even if Henie

¹⁷⁵ Irene Guenther, *Nazi Chic?* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 100.

¹⁷⁶ This conflation as encouraged by Hitler's public interpretation and lauding of eugenicist Madison Grant's (highly racist) manifesto, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916).

¹⁷⁷ Jacobs, “Sonja Henie's Ice Age,” *Vanity Fair*.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

skated better than the men, even if she could jump higher or demonstrate greater endurance, Sonja Henie's sex as a woman was so far from being in question the very idea is laughable. Henie's stylization helped to ensure spectators' impression of her as a ballerina on ice, a dainty figure in white boots, "redolent of fairy and folk tales."¹⁷⁹

This latter description – "redolent of fairy and folk tales" – holds the key to Henie's appeal in the eyes of her other target audience: her Nordic and Germanic compatriots. While in many ways – and especially as her career took her quite literally to Hollywood – Henie fashioned herself in the mold of Carole Lombard or Jean Harlow, her style within her skating routines was encoded with a nostalgic, pastoral aesthetic ascribed to the rapidly disappearing Nordic peasantry. These semiotic cues fit perfectly with the Nazi agenda, which actively circulated propaganda advocating an aesthetic return to Germany's pastoral Bavarian roots. "Tracht" or German folk costumes became a kind of patriotic, national costume, with the dirndl dress as its most recognizable component. Guenther writes that "[p]amphlets, books, journal articles and lectures that promoted a 'return to Tracht' linked the image with fertility, traditional gender roles, and 'true German values.'"¹⁸⁰ However, most historians agree that Tracht, and the dirndl in particular, was a very difficult sell to urban German women, who still coveted the latest fashions from Paris. Sonja Henie may have appeared to offer hope that this nostalgic agricultural costume could yet be resurrected (and that the clock be turned back on the "overly-modernized" women of Germany's major cities). While Henie was arrayed in the artifice of makeup and Hollywood costuming, she nonetheless affected a *style* – essentially a tribal encoding – of costuming that pointed back to pastoral Europe, which in turn reinscribed a conservative understanding of gender and gender roles predicated on the old binary. In many ways, Tracht posed a means to (re)link athletic prowess and domesticity – a link that seemed to be rapidly deteriorating within modern, non-German societies.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Guenther, 43.



(Fig. 35): German girls in dirndls at a Tracht gathering

(Fig. 36): Left, Henie in a dirndl for The Countess of Monte Cristo.

(Fig. 37): Right, Henie in costume for One in a Million. Her dress is not a direct replica of a dirndl but still retains nostalgic, pastoral/medieval details



References to a kind of tribalism is inherent to Tracht, which not only came to symbolize German patriotism under Hitler, but had previously been worn by farmers' wives and varied to reflect each woman's local region of origin. The pastoral values that inform this aesthetic bring us full circle – back to Willa Cather's *Ántonia*, described as a “rich mine of life, like the founders of early races.” Common to both is the renunciation of what is perceived to be artifice of modernity and the idea that “natural beauty” derives from one's immediate connection to exercise, hard work, and the outdoors. Guenther elaborates on the Nazi approach to a beautiful “glow,” stating that

[s]upporting the image of the “Aryan-Nordic” beauty as strong, healthy, natural, tanned, and fertile, Nazi headliners denounced cosmetics, alcohol, and cigarettes for women. It was suggested that sun and good health could and should take the place of makeup.¹⁸¹

This echoes Jim's description of *Ántonia*'s cheeks which – having exerted herself – shine with “a glow of rich, dark colour.”¹⁸² Differences exist, of course, between Cather's sensibility of primitivism and Hitler's political directive that Germany revert to a (largely fabricated, falsely mythologized) pastoral state. But the fact remains that both Cather's novel and the overwhelming majority of Nazi propaganda aimed at women advocate an athletic aesthetic that is inextricably bound to a reproductive imperative, and the idea that in being physically fit, women are training to be better helpmates.

Furthermore, to return to the semiotic mechanism that informs what I've dubbed the “borrowed golf gloves” aesthetic, Nazi propaganda marks a flow of steady iteration that is not unlike that of fashion magazines. Fashion magazines and Nazi propaganda both present a series of iterations that (can) serve to empty a particular style of its original referents. While fashion magazines tend to inflate, dwell on, and parse the abstraction itself, or else/also replenish the referents in the now-empty signifier with values of consumerism, Nazi propaganda ultimately presents a series of iterations that forcefully posit a referent or set of referents for

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 99.

¹⁸² Cather, 17.

political purposes. As images and descriptions of female athleticism circulated in Nazi Germany, specific accomplishments or athletes were translated into abstract patriotism (not unlike fashion's translation of Jordan into a "good illustration"), but then retranslated still into the prescriptive dictates of the BDM which doggedly linked the athletic female body to reproduction, subservient "wholesomeness, and the German pastoral. Through iteration, the Nazi propaganda machine (here I mean the organized network by which the Nazi party disseminated images, speeches, and other media) was able to simultaneously praise female athletes whose personal lives and sometimes even sexual preferences had little to do with reproduction, while at the same time disseminating an idea of the athletic female that was deeply encoded with values of state-controlled eugenics. The effect of this propaganda was to (re)equate athleticism with domesticity, whereas in other iterations – especially popular American/French iterations – female athleticism had increasingly signaled to a *break* with domesticity.

Returning briefly to Sonja Henie, while Henie had been friendly to Hitler, she was ambivalent about aligning herself with Hitler too closely, especially as she attempted to forge a larger career for herself in Hollywood. Henie quickly found that one of the easiest ways to distract from her affiliation with Germany's leader was to reproduce her own image more generically, and on a mass scale. In short, Henie became involved in various plans to sell "Sonja Henie" merchandise. It proved effective. Friend of Hitler or no, Henie managed to achieve incredible popularity in America. Consider, for instance, the fact that *The Countess of Monte Cristo* came out in 1948, and in the publicity photo (one of those included above) Henie wears a dirndl – the dress the Nazi party advocated as "national costume." 1948 is only three years after the armistice, and the atrocities revealed by the Nuremburg trials were undoubtedly still fresh in the public's mind, yet no one batted an eye. Instead, throughout all of the 1930s and '40s, Henie's fans happily read about her athletic achievements and social affairs in the newspapers, they watched her films and bought Sonja Henie dolls, sweaters, ski outfits and such. In merchandising herself, Henie was everywhere and nowhere at once – an abstraction of herself as well as a flesh and blood person.

Henie was not the only athlete to merchandise her image. Suzanne Lenglen, for instance, ordered the manufacture and sale of a line of Bermuda shorts she dubbed “Suzanne shorts.” The fashions that initially shocked spectators – because they were either too revealing, too tight, or too masculine – eventually found their way into mass production. In many ways, repeating an image through merchandising was a way to ease cultural reaction to the overall imagery posed by women’s increased participation in sports. Furthermore, repeating an image proves the most efficient method to diffuse a specific articulation of a female athlete, translating that specific image into a set of abstract values that prove far more mobile, slippery, and able to avoid direct cultural criticism.

In essence, the “borrowed golf gloves” aesthetic does not describe the specific iteration of Jordan Baker so much as it describes the range of genderings she (and female athletes like her) have the potential to signify. Moreover, it reveals the semiotic contradictions that have been ascribed to the physically-fit female body (domestic/careerist, heterosexual/non-heterosexual, reproductive/anti-reproductive, artificial/natural, subversive/patriotic, etc.). The scene during which Nick describes Jordan as “looking like a good illustration” marks a moment of transparency – a rare glimpse at the semiotic hinge that informs the athletic female aesthetic’s transmutability. Repetition of the image itself – that of the athletic female – facilitates the various shifts between the values the aesthetic implies, allowing contradictory values to coexist in a state of simultaneity awaiting the (temporarily dominant) emphasis enacted by each incumbent iteration.

Chapter Four: Borrowed Turkish Trousers and Gypsy Scarves

...Orlando had bought herself a complete outfit of such clothes as the women then wore, and it was in the dress of a young Englishwoman of rank that she now sat on the deck of the *Enamoured Lady*. It is a strange fact, but a true one that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought. Perhaps the Turkish trousers, which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts; and the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men.¹⁸³

— Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

Clothing plays a vital role in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. As the novel's eponymous character weaves in and out of love affairs and ultimately changes sexes, clothing facilitates these transitions while at the same time revealing fashion's own nature as a construct. Moreover, at various points in the novel, Orlando strategically uses clothing to signal his/her adherence to and participation in gender regimes, or alternately, to signal a break from these regimes. In the passage given above, the narration articulates three motifs, defining them with a heavy emphasis on clothing: Englishness, Turkishness, and a "gipsy" motif. Furthermore, the narration then proceeds to organize these three motifs according to a binary: West and East – and, in this specific case, a motif that signals to determinate gender and restrained sexuality, versus a motif that signals to ambiguous gender and unrestrained sexuality. While ambiguous signals pertaining to gender and sexuality may seem dangerous in that they threaten to violate social norms, in the case of the "exotic Eastern" or gypsy motif (sometimes treated as two different motifs in the examples

¹⁸³ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, New York: Harcourt, 1928, reprint ed. 2006), 113.

given here, sometimes intermeshed as one), fears of transgressions against gender and sexuality regimes are often translated into anxieties about racial identity and national allegiances – and, vice-versa, as this translation of fears may sometimes flow in the opposite direction. This translation does not necessarily diminish perceptions of dangerous deviance about gypsies and those who would embrace “gypsy style,” but it does allow anxieties to shift in their specific attachments, sometimes alleviating the focus on and condemnation of values relating to gender and sexuality via their elision. In other words: fears about an individual’s ambiguous sexuality (in certain instances) might be overwritten with fears about that individual’s political origins and allegiances, and vice versa. Insofar as the exotic Eastern/gypsy motif is transitory – constantly being negotiated between sex, race, religion, nationalism, etc, and is ultimately an imaginary composite of multiple hackneyed attributes – it sometimes provides unlikely shelter for an individual to act out fantasies that break with existing regimes of gender and sexuality.

At the time of his spontaneous sex change, Orlando finds himself in Turkey, sometime around the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The tone of the novel strikes a key tone that is both comical and highbrow. Orlando spends his mornings gazing over the city with a feeling of familiarity, wrapped in a “long Turkish cloak,”¹⁸⁴ convinced that he is possibly of Turkish decent (suddenly noticing a dark tint to his skin, Orlando considers that perhaps during the Crusades, one of his ancestors took up with a “Circassian peasant woman”¹⁸⁵). He bathes and afterwards is “properly scented, curled, and anointed.”¹⁸⁶ When Orlando wakes up a woman, she is neither shocked nor bothered by the change – the text reads: “Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath.”¹⁸⁷ The narration further claims that Orlando’s easy transition and lack of turmoil is facilitated by her lifestyle, and in particular, her Turkish fashion. She doesn’t have to vary her routine very much in her first days as a woman, continuing to dress “in those Turkish coats and trousers which can be

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 90.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 102.

worn indifferently by either sex.”¹⁸⁸ While presented in a comical yet highbrow manner, nonetheless the suggestion is, of course, that Orlando’s initial gender transition is eased by a kind of Orientalist ambiguity. The Turkish motif in *Orlando* presents itself as a floating signifier, delinked from any specific historical or cultural context. In other words, critics educated in Turkish culture have subsequently emphasized that the narrator’s assessment is not an accurate one; the novel’s point of view stands outside true Turkish culture, and that the aesthetic of a kind of genderless Turkish costume is either borne of ignorance or else deliberately employed with another purpose in mind. Indeed, the novel takes pains to present the reader with an idea of Orlando that is paradoxically unified and multiple; even the book’s images toy with signals of integral essence and perpetual transmutability.



(Fig. 38): Left, “Orlando” as ambassador to Turkey (actually a portrait of Sackville-West’s ancestor that both Woolf and Sackville-West thought looked like a slightly more male version of Vita).

(Fig. 39); Right, photograph of Vita Sackville-West as “Orlando” upon her return to England.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 103.

Orlando's paradoxical semiotic signals are helped along by the book's deployment of the Turkish – and later “gypsy” – style. Moreover, the novel taps into a larger set of fashions contemporary to the book's publication. The idea that “Oriental” and specifically “Turkish” clothing offered a more gender-neutral mode of dress circulated within Western culture during the 19th century, and in many ways the Victorian dress reform movement helped to popularize a version of this notion with its advocacy of “Turkish pants,” or Bloomers. However, the image of Bloomers and the idea behind them got around more than the actual garment, which were a hard sell to the general population. Also, Bloomers were *not* considered “high fashion”; most fashion historians blame their political nature and lack of aesthetic appeal. However, a second wave of “pants from the Orient” designed by Paul Poiret in 1911¹⁸⁹ proved more glamorous. Sexier than Bloomers, Poiret's Turkish pants toed a line that was both ambiguously gendered and erotic.

(Figs. 40, 41): “Jupe culotte” from 1911. Turkish or “harem” pants for a more formal occasion, 1914.



¹⁸⁹ Sarah Berry, *Screen Style*. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 148.

Good humor may have helped Poiret's fashion to enjoy greater popularity compared to Bloomers; Bloomers were presented to women with an air of political gravity, while Poiret's Turkish pants were articulated in a more whimsical manner, and offered its wearer an air of masquerade. Poiret's version of this fashion was alternately called "jupe culotte," "harem pants," or the "style sultane," and it added another layer to the (increasingly hackneyed) pastiche of "Turkishness" that captured the Western public's imagination.

Jean E. Kennard suggests that as an educated woman, Woolf may have been aware of Flora Tristan's coup in gaining access to Parliament by dressing as a Turkish dignitary¹⁹⁰ during the 19th century. In such a case, dressing as a "Turk" does not represent an accurate and honest engagement of Turkish culture's customs, but rather, a desire to stand outside of British culture, to occupy a space wherein gender rules are suspended – from a distinctly British point of view. Viewed through this lens, Orlando the man is already dressed much after the same fashion as Flora Tristan – the woman boldly walking into Parliament disguised as both Turkish and presumably male. (So, in other words, before his sex change, Orlando is a man dressed like Flora Tristan – a woman dressed as a man). As in many of Woolf's texts, *Orlando* offers a semiotic circularity that threatens to echo in eternal layers.

Of course, Flora Tristan's trick to gain access to Parliament bore a number of commonalities to Virginia Woolf's own participation in the Dreadnought Hoax, when in 1910 – along with her brother and several of his friends – she dressed up as a member of Abyssinian royalty and proceeded to make an ambassadorial inspection of the HMS Dreadnought. Woolf, dressed in long robes and blackface, "passed" for a Abyssinian man, with none of the officials and officers aboard the HMS Dreadnought catching onto the ruse – including Woolf's cousin, Commander Willie Fisher. Biographers have devoted a great deal of energy to parsing Woolf's intentions and point of view in her participation (with much time dedicated to her relative racism

¹⁹⁰ Jean E. Kennard, "Power and Sexual Ambiguity: The 'Dreadnought' Hoax, "The Voyage out, Mrs. Dalloway" and "Orlando," *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Winter, 1996) 149-164.

juxtaposed with her desire to disrupt the British colonial classes), and while these properties are essentially unknowable, one can look to the dynamics at play within the hoax itself and trace the ways in which – if nothing else – the Dreadnought Hoax serves to destabilize superior notions of whiteness, Englishness, and gender. “The Dreadnought hoax was indeed a power game in which the traditional emblems of superiority, masculinity, and whiteness were the counters,” Kennard writes.¹⁹¹ In mocking the navy’s fancy dress with “fancier” dress of their own, the perpetrators poked fun at the British military, effectively effeminizing the navy in turn, revealing its proclivity to take itself too seriously, and its reverence for costume – even when that costume is utterly devoid of any genuine signification of specific values.



(Fig. 42): *The Dreadnought Hoax, with Virginia Woolf (then Stephens) on far left.*

The hoaxers wore costumes that referenced a crude, not-necessarily-accurate idea of North Africa, and spoke to one another in a gibberish that was mainly derived

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 151.

from their studies of Latin and Greek (with the now-infamous phrase, “Bunga! Bunga!” as an affirmative flourish). They showed an intuitive grasp of the fact that they did not need to be politically or culturally accurate so much as they needed to play on their victims’ prejudices – as it was their victims’ prejudices that ultimately enabled the hoax.

Woolf’s participation in the hoax likewise marks her participation in the conceit of clothing as semiotics and of fashion as a semiotic system – the hoaxers dressed themselves in styles that directly signaled to values of non-white exoticism (no matter how hackneyed or ridiculous) and harnessed the power of these signals to gain access to a closed group (and in this case, the H.M.S. Dreadnought). In *Orlando*, clothing plays a similarly important role in moving the title character through the many social environments he/she encounters. As Woolf’s novels and essays so often do, the narration provides a thoughtful and somewhat self-reflexive analysis within the text – but in this case, the novel’s analysis of the role of clothing is full of contradictions (a reflection of the contradictions inherent to the subject). The novel insists on an integral sense of self that transcends mere garments, while at the same time occasionally producing a materialist reading that observes the ways in which clothing is capable of shaping one’s habits.

In general, Woolf’s *Orlando* is celebrated for the work it does to unmask the fabricated nature of gender and sex – again, often via the text’s ability to deconstruct traditions gender regimes by depicting characters and situations using a tone of highbrow comedy. Orlando experiences the various privileges and restrictions accorded to each sex with a sense of wonderment and detachment; she is the same person on the inside, and concludes that gender roles and sexualities are extremely arbitrary in the end.¹⁹² The narration maintains that there is an integral self that does not change, regardless of externalities, stating that “in every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that

¹⁹² Critics have long held that Woolf here is nodding to the fact that what bars Vita Sackville-West from inheriting her family estate is also utterly arbitrary.

keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is very opposite of what it is above.”¹⁹³ Clothing here is part of the (literally) “fabricated” semiotics of gender.

At the same time, the novel articulates its own awareness of clothing as it functions within a larger, inescapable cultural system. As long as the world around Orlando is limited by a semiotic binary, she is hard-pressed to slip her cultural constraints. Upon becoming a woman, it is not until Orlando finds herself aboard *The Enamoured Lady* and senses “the coil of skirts about her legs”¹⁹⁴ that she feels she has become a woman. Dressed as a 17th century Englishwoman, Orlando takes stock of a number of simple but significant changes: The captain who flatters her (not to mention spreads an awning for her, cuts her meat, etc.), the pretty but hampering clothes that would surely drown her if she fell overboard (leaving her dependent on a blue-coat to jump in and save her life), the pressure to cover herself in a counterintuitive “show” of chastity, and the pressure to carefully put together her appearance each morning. In these observations, the novel gives a materialist reading indicating that apparel has an immediate shaping effect on the individual’s actions and habits, stating that

...what was said a short time ago about there being no change in Orlando the man and Orlando the woman, was ceasing to be altogether true. She was becoming a little more modest, as women are, of her person. Certain susceptibilities were asserting themselves, and others were diminishing. The change of clothes has, some philosophers will say, much to do with it. Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world’s view of us.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, by stretching across (while remarking upon) a large swath of time, the novel also gestures to the ways in which culture itself marks a(n arbitrary, changing, sometimes absurd) matrix of fashionable decorum and mores that change from century to century (not to mention decade to decade), while humans themselves are

¹⁹³ Woolf, *Orlando*, 139.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

prone to the same follies, and society is prone to the same highs and lows. Orlando's interactions with the poet Nicholas Greene – who during the 16th century disparages his contemporaries only to later disparage the famous wits and poets of the Restoration and the 18th century, nostalgically referring to the Elizabethan poets as the great minds of a golden age, etc – even cynically points out how cynicism itself is nothing new (in other words, and using an anachronistic allusion: we are all Miniver Cheevy, born too late). The novel suggests that nostalgia is an illusory constant that underpins society throughout the ages. The difference between the sexes constitutes another illusory constant. The content of these constructs may change as the semiotics of fashion constantly rearrange themselves into new configurations (meaning: a garment or prose style, etc, may popularly signal to a changing set of values), but Western culture's determination to sort them according to a binary (golden era/now, man/woman) remains stubbornly entrenched. The moments in the novel during which Orlando is able to complicate a binary perception of gender are helped along by non-Western "exotic" tropes, such as the Turkish motif outlined above. Living in (a very imaginary) Constantinople, and dressed in (very imaginary) Turkish robes, Orlando finds that the change from male to female in fact changes very little – a fact that challenges essentialist ideas of difference between the sexes, and further suggests the majority of the "differences" that define the sexes are imposed by British culture.

In similar fashion to its deployment of a (fantasized, amalgamated, fictional) "Turkish" aesthetic, *Orlando* calls upon another motif in its effort to operate outside British gender norms: that of "the gypsy." Orlando, after serving as an ambassador in Turkey and waking up a woman, leaves the Ottomans to find her way in the world in the company of a group of wandering gypsies. Her time with the gypsies further perpetuates Orlando's ease in transitioning between the sexes, literally bringing it outdoors, into a pastoral scene of primitivism. Orlando only later confronts the consequences of her sex change once she is dressed as an Englishwoman, whereupon she blames her delayed reaction on her days spent in Constantinople dressed in genderless Turkish trousers, and on her exposure to the gypsy women,

who, “except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men.”¹⁹⁶

Again, as with the narrator’s glib description of Orlando’s genderless Turkish trousers, critics who have written about the gypsy trope in Woolf’s novel have been quick to agree that the book has absolutely nothing to do with the Roma people or their customs.¹⁹⁷ Instead, they look to the ways in which a Western perception of gypsy “Otherness” allows Orlando to temporarily operate outside British culture, and moreover, trace the ways in which, as Abbi Bardi puts it, “the Gypsy trope signals that gender has been destabilised.”¹⁹⁸ Bardi describes “Gypsy indeterminacy” (race, state, origin) as being analogous to gender indeterminacy, and so race and gender are lumped together in the Anglo imagination as similarly “ambiguous.” Under this view of the aesthetic, the gypsy motif extends the British/Other binary to notably *include* gender: British, adherent to normative gender regimes/Other, other.

Orlando is not alone in including “gypsy” characters, and in its deployment of a gypsy motif. Gypsies and (various imaginings of) the gypsy lifestyle have been represented in a number of other literary texts. Bardi rattles off the following list of earlier works:

Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1815), Sir Walter Scott’s *Guy Mannering* (1815), Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Matthew Arnold’s ‘The Scholar Gypsy’ (1853), and George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868).¹⁹⁹

Bardi also takes into account scholarship generated by the Gypsy Lore Society (founded in 1888) which, according to Bardi, largely chronicled the *gadže*, or non-Romani, literary “gypsy.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Woolf, *Orlando*, 113.

¹⁹⁷ Kirstie Blair, “Gypsies and Lesbian Desire: Vita Sackville-West, Violet Trefusis, and Virginia Woolf,” *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Summer, 2004), 141-166.

¹⁹⁸ Abbi Bardi, “‘In Company of a Gipsy’: The ‘Gypsy’ as Trope in Woolf and Brontë,” *Critical Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2007), 40-50.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

Pursuant to this tradition of depicting a literary version of “the gypsy” and more contemporary to *Orlando* (1928) is D.H. Lawrence’s *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (written in 1926 and posthumously published in 1930). Much as in *Orlando*, the gypsy trope portrayed in *The Virgin and the Gipsy* is employed mainly as a foil for a lifestyle predicated on sexual repression. Contrary to *Orlando*, however, *The Virgin and the Gipsy* appears to approach the gypsy trope in a very serious, non-comical manner. Critics Ashby Bland Crowder and Lynn O’Malley Crowder parse the novel in terms of symbolic polarities, the most obvious being the polarity given in the title – the sexually inexperienced virgin and the eroticized “gipsy.” These polarities, argue Crowder and Crowder, can be aligned with a series of other polarities. They propose that “Lawrence has set up an opposing dynamic between indoors (the rectory) and life outdoors (a wild and primitive landscape),”²⁰¹ and that this metaphor equally describes Yvette’s and Lucille’s inner lives (“shut up inside themselves”²⁰² but yearning to break free). The gypsy is a figure who embodies a kind of unregulated sexuality, and serves as the focus of Yvette’s sexual awakening.

Yvette first spies the gypsy on the road. The novel’s premier descriptions of the gypsy describe his clothing in detail, and the gypsy’s style is presented as an integral part of his character. The second time she encounters the gypsy – at his encampment – the narration gives details about his clothing a second time, and emphasizes his appearance in defining his character, describing him as:

A dandy, in his polished black boots, tight black trousers and tight dark-green jersey... He looked at Yvette as he passed, staring her full in the eyes, with his pariah’s bold yet dishonest stare. Something hard inside her met his stare. But the surface of her body seemed to turn to water. Nevertheless, she registered the peculiar pure lines of his face, of his straight, pure nose, of his cheeks and temples. The curious dark, suave purity of all his body, outlined in the green jersey: a purity like a living sneer.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Ashby Bland Crowder and Lynn O’Malley Crowder, “Mythic Intent in D.H. Lawrence’s *The Virgin and the Gipsy*,” *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 49. No. 2 (May 1984), 61-66, 61.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ D.H. Lawrence, *The Virgin and the Gipsy*. (New York: Vintage International, 1930, reprint ed. 1992), 40.

The gypsy's stare is described as "dishonest," while at the same time, his physical body is described in terms of its "purity like a living sneer" – this paradox of qualities suggesting that no matter what else, the gypsy lives an unapologetic life. The narration also describes him via his effect on Yvette, whose body seems to "turn to water" in his presence (foreshadowing the literal dam that breaks by the book's end and the flooding waters that ultimately push them together). And finally, the gypsy bears qualities that break with traditional regimes of masculinity – he is "suave" and "a dandy." A little later in the novel, the gypsy comes to the rectory selling his wares. He puts a "very quiet tenderness into his voice"²⁰⁴ when speaking to Yvette's aunt Cissie, and in doing this, saves himself from having Cissie slam the door in his face. The text reads:

Aunt Cissie saw how handsome he was, saw the flexible curve of his lips under the line of the black moustache, and she was fluttered. The merest hint of roughness or aggression on the man's part would have made her shut the door contemptuously in his face. But he managed to insinuate such a subtle suggestion of submission into his male bearing, that she began to hesitate.²⁰⁵

The gypsy is an object of admiration – or, at least, he is capable of transforming himself into one. In this manner, the gypsy exists in the novella mainly via the eyes of others; we are told that at times he gazes at Yvette with an expression that she takes for hungry desire, and at other times gazes at her with an expression that she takes for indifference and disinterest. His thoughts and feelings remain largely cloaked in mystery – along with his name, which we only learn in the second-to-last line of the novella, the final line being: "And only then she realised he had a name."²⁰⁶

Yvette's desire, on the other hand, drives the novella and commands the central focus of the plot. And true to the ambiguities evoked by the gypsy trope, the narration describes Yvette as being equally drawn to the gypsy's traditionally masculine qualities as she is drawn to his "suave" qualities that mark him a "dandy"

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 66.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 146.

in her eyes, and moreover, a dandy who is able to “insinuate a subtle suggestion of submission into his male bearing.” In essence: The man’s status as a gypsy allows him to adopt clothing and manners that are in keeping with both regimes of traditional masculinity *and* regimes of traditional femininity. And Yvette’s transgressive desire for his feminine flair is masked by a kind of misdirection, in that we are led to focus on the various other ways that the gypsy transgresses against normative society – his rootless, nomadic lifestyle, his “dark” and “ancient” mysterious race, his lack of Christianity, etc.

Yvette first admits her desire for the gypsy while visiting another couple, “the Jewess” and her young major. Hardly the standard for decorum (the crassly wealthy Jewess is not yet divorced, and yet has taken up with the Major anyway) the couple find Yvette’s revelation surprising. The Major finds no fault with Yvette’s desire, while the Jewess rejects it outright, claiming that the gypsy is a “vile fellow” who has “no right to look” at Yvette. Both of them agree, however that the gypsy is not a suitable candidate for Yvette to marry. The Jewess protests, “[a]s if she could possibly marry him and go round in a caravan!”²⁰⁷ In the short space of their group exchange, the focus shifts away from the nature of Yvette’s desire – effectively eliding her possible desire for the gypsy’s colorfully dressed, traditionally feminine, submissive qualities – and shifts instead towards the many other transgressions inherent to Yvette’s desire: The idea of marrying and having children with a man of “gypsy race,” and the idea of abandoning social order as Yvette knows it, adopting a permanently rootless and transitory lifestyle.

Woolf’s *Orlando* also addresses the issue of intermarriage between gypsy and non-gypsy (again – both “gypsy” and “non-gypsy” are non-Romani in this case). When she first enters their company, Orlando feels right at home with the gypsies, and the narrator describes the title character’s ability to “pass” among their tribe, writing that

[t]he gypsies... seem to have looked upon her as one of themselves... and her dark hair and dark complexion bore out the belief that she was, by birth, one

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 106.

of them and had been snatched by an English Duke from a nut tree when she was a baby... they were willing to help her become more like them... and were even prepared to consider letting her marry among them.²⁰⁸

The suggestion that they'd be willing to let her marry one of their own suggests that they do not consider it an act of miscegenation. Orlando passes as one of them, despite the fact that her only qualifiers are her "dark hair and dark complexion" – evidently swarthinness is the main component of the imaginary composite that defines this gypsy "race."

The Turkish and gypsy motifs described in *Orlando* both reference an imaginary population and a space wherein taxonomies of gender and sexuality may be rewritten, oftentimes these transitory spaces cannot hold, at least, not indefinitely. Insofar as she "passes," Orlando is not only transgender but transracial. And yet, this second transformation ultimately fails. The gypsies withdraw the honorary status they've bestowed upon Orlando when they grow increasingly irked by her incurable Englishness (signaled by her love of her estate and of nature). When she parts ways with the gypsies, the feeling of disharmony is mutual. The gypsy motif has run its course in terms of the novel's narrative; the pastiche, largely imaginary culture of the gypsies has provided Orlando a shelter to deconstruct (and to a certain extent, reconstruct) ideas of gender and Englishness. Orlando not only eases her transition from man to woman by embracing Turkish and gypsy fashions, but these periods in the novel also enable her to maintain a more lasting, fluid understanding of gender overall – which in turn ultimately enables her ambivalently-gendered union with Shelmerdine. Ostensibly sexed as a woman and a man respectively, Orlando and Shelmerdine *both* quickly suspect each other of secretly being oppositely sexed:

"You're a woman, Shel!" she cried.

"You're a man, Orlando!" he cried.²⁰⁹

By the time she meets Shelmerdine, Orlando has left the gypsies and much time has passed, and yet she seems to retain the gypsies' embrace of ambivalent genderings

²⁰⁸ Woolf, *Orlando*, 105.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

and greater sexual liberty as this aesthetic has been presented in the novel. In other words, Orlando's gypsy clothes and the trappings of her gypsy lifestyle may have changed to reflect her role as an Englishwoman, but the semiotic values referenced by her former gypsy clothes remain.

While *Orlando* was published in 1928, a trend had already emerged in the 1920s for women (especially among Hollywood stars) to dress in "gypsy fashion." Again, this look was not inspired by real knowledge of Roma people or culture, but cribbed instead from the fairytale tradition of the whimsical, mystical, fortune-telling gypsy-woman. Kirstie Blair traces the gypsy trend from its popularity among the upper classes (in the 1920s it was popular for the upper classes "to be painted or photographed in Spanish gypsy dress"²¹⁰) back to the gypsy motif as it first began to appear in Berlin cabarets (which "featured men dressed as female Spanish dancers" and for women performers established a kind of "female masculinity" and "unregulated sexual behavior" that suggested alliance with "lesbian sexuality"²¹¹).



(Fig. 43): Actress Doris Kenyon, and others, attired in trendy 1920s "gypsy" fashion.

²¹⁰ Blair, 144.

²¹¹ Ibid.

Gypsy style, which was already a floating signifier insofar as its initial appearance within early twentieth century fashion marked a jumbled, abstracted idea of the “exotic” that was not truly linked to real-life Roma culture, was rendered even more abstract via the motif’s repetition. The fashion industry’s knack for reproducing a particular aesthetic allows for the set of semiotic values attached to that aesthetic to be emptied out, reconfigured, and even replaced with other values (in this case, Blair suggests a tracing of female homoeroticism in particular).

Film critic Sarah Berry discusses the gypsy motif under the broader category of “Hollywood exoticism.” Berry points to various Hollywood studios’ attempts to glamorize starlets by casting them in various non-European roles, or styling them in various non-European fashions. Stars who could appear “Latin,” “Oriental,” or “Tropical” appealed to audiences.²¹² Berry notes that popular 1930s makeup lines developed “exotic” shades, sometimes with direct reference to a gypsy motif, such as Helena Rubenstein’s “Valaze Gypsy Tan Foundation.”²¹³ Berry emphasizes 1930s exoticism as a continuation of colonial appropriation, yet tries to pragmatically account for the ways in which this aesthetic may have ultimately challenged the “single, monochromatic ideal” that preceded it. She writes that

Hollywood’s exoticism of the 1930s was a product of centuries of Eurocentric representations and decades of racist production practices. But these films also popularized a form of exoticism as masquerade within an increasingly diverse market for both Hollywood films and associated goods like cosmetics, subjecting their images to an idiosyncratic process of consumer appropriation.²¹⁴

Berry locates instances of “masquerade” and uses them to unpack the viewer’s racism – a viewer who would accept, for example Loretta Young as “Sun Toya San” in the 1932 film, *The Hatchet Man* (movie still below).

²¹² Berry, 95.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 108.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.



(Fig. 44): Loretta Young as “Sun Toya San”

In films such as *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1932), wherein a white female character lusts after a Chinese general (played by Nils Asther), Berry argues that masquerade offers “an acceptable resolution of... desire for the exotic via fantasy and self-adornment.”²¹⁵ In other words, lust for clothes, cosmetics and exotic/Oriental commodities ultimately overwrites lust between white and non-white characters, keeping this latter, more “dangerous” lust carefully concealed.

While Berry identifies the racism of this concealment, another way to look at it might be to evaluate ways in which such concealment also provides a kind of shelter to certain desires – especially in those cases when the exotic illusion is *not* expected to be taken seriously (as in *Hatchet Man* and *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*), but rather, the tone of the fashion’s articulation strikes a comically absurd note (as in *Orlando*) or else a tone of simple charade. “Exoticism as masquerade,” for all its racist inaccuracy, presents its viewers with a kind of “Otherness” that remains abstract, nebulous, and perpetually shifting with each iteration. In this sense, the masquerade can provide a kind of misdirection. This exotic-masquerade-sleight-of-hand dynamic is explicitly legible in the 1931 Greta Garbo film, *Mata Hari*.

Much like the gypsy aesthetic, Garbo’s version of Mata Hari’s exoticism is a hackneyed cultural hodge-podge of an aesthetic that was already a concatenation (the real Margaretha Zelle having created concocted the exotic “Mata Hari” as a

²¹⁵ Ibid., 141.

stage persona, complete with fictitious backstory as a “Javanese princess of Hindu birth”). In the film, Garbo makes her first appearance onstage, dancing as the great Mata Hari. Her costume includes a revealing bodice and ends in what appears to be a very short skirt stitched together at the legs like a pair of shorts, in the manner of an early 20th century bathing suit. She wears a kind of Ram-thai crown (a headdress used in Thai dance) and dances around an enormous statue of the Hindu god, Shiva. Later she appears in an ensemble that Berry describes as “gold lamé from head to toe. With tight gold leggings and boots worn under a long jacket and turban.”²¹⁶



(Figs. 45, 46): Mata Hari dancing for Shiva. Right: Publicity still displaying one of Garbo's costumes.

Garbo's Mata Hari is a calm, cool, collected spy who is in constant command of her interactions and surroundings – until, of course, she is caught. And yet, even as she makes ready for the firing squad she remains somewhat in control of the situation,

²¹⁶ Ibid., 134.

compelling her jailors to pretend to be doctors and nurses in front of the now-blind Lt. Rosanoff, and showing no fear with regard to her impending death. Garbo's version of Mata Hari's stoicism is in keeping with both male gender regimes and the trope of the "inscrutable Oriental." In some ways, her violation of gender norms is obscured by her exoticism, which quite literally takes center stage (and whereupon she reveals her female body). "Shiva, I dance for you tonight," Garbo speaks her line to the statue. Shiva is, of course, a god that is depicted as being simultaneously both male and female in some forms. It is unlikely the average Euro-American viewer would know of Shiva's potential hermaphroditism – apart from in the sense Berry describes, as a dimly realized, racist generalization about "primitive" peoples having a much wilder relationship to sex and gender.

During the first half or so of the film, Garbo's deployment of the exotic trope works to her character's advantage, in that it keeps her desires shrouded in mystery. Presumably, she desires everyone and no one. She herself is an object of desire. "May a perfect stranger offer her appreciation?" Carlotta says to Mata Hari, masking their exchange with an air of flirtatious homoerotic admiration. Moreover, Mata Hari's exoticism masks her political desires; her national allegiances are likewise shrouded in mystery. Mata Hari is able to glide along as a spy undetected only as long as this sense of exotic mystery holds out. When her desire becomes fixed on Lt. Rosanoff (despite having betrayed him she consequently develops a deep and abiding love and loyalty for him), the jig is up, as it were, and she is unable to perpetuate the misdirection that formerly served to shield her from lasting accusation.

In a way, the trope of exoticism functions to translate the anxieties it provokes, keeping them in a shifting state. The transmutability of these anxieties can – in specific scenarios – provide a kind of shelter in that transmutability may keep any one fear from becoming the fixed focus. In other words, by adopting the trope of exoticism, one social anxiety (breaking with traditional gender regimes, homoeroticism, etc) may be overwritten by another (racial miscegenation, national allegiance, etc). This angle of examination doesn't seek to expose tropes of exoticism as racist (it is fairly plain that they are), nor does it seek to reframe exotic tropes as

normative or benign. It seems clear that Orlando is flirting with non-normative behaviors and genderings during her time with the gypsies. It also seems clear that “the virgin” in *The Virgin and the Gipsy* is flirting with unrestrained sexuality in her dalliance with the gypsy. And lastly, it seems more than clear that Mata Hari’s exotic aesthetic signals to an allure that flirts with values of “danger” in multiple capacities – social, sexual, political. The trope of exoticism doesn’t create a shelter by quelling social anxieties, but rather, by keeping them constantly moving, creating a sense of excitement and titillation yet postponing direct accusation. In other words, by shifting the focus of anxiety from one category of deviance to another, the motif serves to postpone a fully realized determinacy.

Returning to Woolf’s and Lawrence’s respective gypsies, one is comical, one is not, but either way, the gypsy figure is dangerous, but eternally unknowable – in part because the idea of the “gypsy” is already an endlessly concatenated fantasy. This endless concatenation, I would argue, is largely helped along by the web of misdirection implied by fashion’s semiotics, which point to an ill-defined iteration of Otherness that, in turn, is constantly shifting.

Chapter Five: The Borrowed Fisherman's Shirt

They sat there in their striped fisherman's shirts and the shorts they had bought in the store that sold marine supplies, and they were very tan and their hair was streaked and faded by the sun and the sea. Most people thought they were brother and sister until they said they were married. Some did not believe that they were married and that pleased the girl very much... People did not wear fisherman's shirts then and this girl that he was married to was the first girl he had ever seen wearing one.

- Ernest Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden*²¹⁷

Mary North and Lady Caroline, dressed in the costume of French sailors, lounged on a bench outside the two dingy cells.

...

"It was merely a lark," said Lady Caroline with scorn. "We were pretending to be sailors on leave, and we picked up two silly girls. They got the wind up and made a rotten scene in a lodging house."

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Ernest Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden*. (New York: Scribner, 1986), 6.

²¹⁸ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*. (New York: Scribner, 1934, reprint ed. 1995), 303.

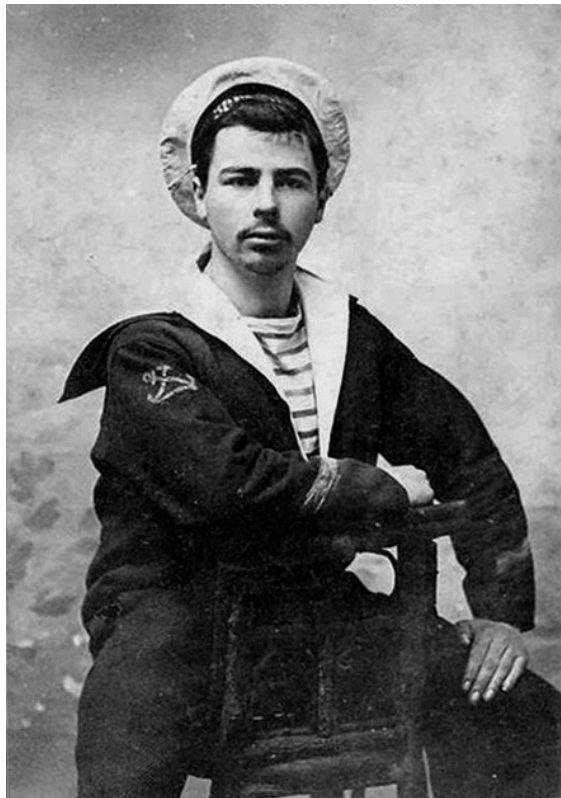
“The borrowed fisherman’s shirt” aesthetic – herein intended to refer to a themed set of nautical, maritime fashions – offer a layered semiotics that function to alternately undo constructs of traditional genderings (as I argue they do in *The Garden of Eden*), or underscore the transgressive nature of a kind of non-heteronormative hypersexuality (as I argue these fashions do in the case of Mary North and Lady Caroline in Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night*). Using nautical fashion and its cultural connotations as a central object of study while comparing *The Garden of Eden* and *Tender is the Night* reveals how the semiotics of maritime style shift within culture to signify different and even opposing sets of values. Moreover, such a study unpacks how these semiotic systems oppositely shelter or condemn particular genderings and sexualities that break with traditionally established regimes.

In those scenarios wherein maritime style “shelters” non-heteronormative genderings and sexualities, the relative success of this strategic elision largely depends on whether the aesthetic includes or excludes signals of infantilized androgyny. I argue that the borrowed fisherman’s shirt aesthetic evidenced in Hemingway’s posthumously published novel, *The Garden of Eden* (1986), incorporates these signals of infantilization (Catherine behaves in a playful manner and delights in how she and David are mistaken for brother and sister – and later delights even more in the suggestion that they might be mistaken for *brother* and *brother*), whereas Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* (1934) presents a more overtly sexualized and “dangerously” deviant version of this aesthetic (Mary and Lady Caroline dress as literal sailors and attempt to bed women) – a deviance which the text then moralizes against.

I’ve described the “borrowed fisherman’s shirt” aesthetic as having a *layered* semiotics. Nautical fashions may signal to different sets of values at once, resulting in a kind of pastiche wherein “layers” of semiotic sets may be combined or transposed. For instance, tracing the history of the striped fisherman’s shirt itself as a fashion reveals multiple tiers of references. The most common version of this shirt, “the Breton” – a white, long-sleeved shirt with thin navy stripes (sometimes with this color scheme reversed) – offers a look into the history of a garment that is more

specific and more complex than might be presumed at first glance. Most sources trace the Breton shirt back to 1858 and Napoleon's navy, the stripes even having a particular significance (stripes were thought to make men more visible if they fell overboard, and the original shirt mandated 21 stripes to represent Napoleon's victories²¹⁹).

(Figs. 47, 48): Examples of French navy uniforms from the early 20th century.



Eventually, the Breton went on to enjoy a far more widespread popularity beyond the French navy. While the shirt still often conveys “Frenchness” and French national identity, it does not necessarily always signal to its military roots.

Tracing the Breton's evolution reveals the garment's early borrowings (from a military context to a civilian one) were often executed with a sense of irony. Most sources credit Queen Victoria with igniting a new trend in children's fashion when she had a sailor suit (patterned after the British Royal Navy) tailored for a young

²¹⁹ Lindsey Tramuta, “The History of the Breton Shirt, from Sailors to Chanel.” *Condé Nast Traveler*, August 17, 2016, <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/the-history-of-the-breton-shirt-from-sailors-to-chanel>

Prince of Wales in 1846²²⁰ (see images below). The joyful appeal of this garment lies in the ironic contrast it strikes: An adorable child dressed in a very adult uniform (miniaturized to scale), the latter of which suggests an occupation he could not possibly be old enough to possess. The fashion is playful and charming, and – at its core – a joke. By the early 1900s, sailor suits for children were increasingly translated into women's wear, most often taking the form of bathing costumes and sailor "dresses" – a feminized iteration of a navy uniform (also see below). The fact that this particular wave of late 19th and early 20th century sailor-themed styles was incorporated into children's fashion and expanded to women's fashion suggests that the style's comic novelty²²¹ applied to children and women alike: The ironic conceit in both cases suggests that a child or woman is dressed as though preposterously employed in an occupation reserved for adult men – and often well-muscled men, at that.

(Figs. 49, 50): Prince Edward, 1846. Below right, bathing costume from 1913.



²²⁰ <http://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/origins-nautical-fashion-britain>,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sailor_suit

²²¹ The fact that this style was received as a novelty is well evidenced. For instance, according to the Royal Museums Greenwich, Queen Victoria recorded the first time Prince Edward wore his sailor suit in her journal, writing: "Bertie put on his sailor's dress, which was beautifully made by the man on board who makes for our sailors. When he appeared, the officers and sailors who were all assembled on deck to see him, cheered, and seemed delighted".

<https://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/origins-nautical-fashion-britain>

Below left, a sailor dress from 1914. Below right, a nautical sweater from 1917.²²²



(Figs. 51, 52)

Below: Hollywood starlet Colleen Moore in Synthetic Sin (1928).



²²² Images from Library of Congress and accessible online at https://www.bluevelvetvintage.com/vintage_style_files/2015/06/09/decked-out-nautical-fashion-through-the-ages/



(Figs. 53, 54): Louise Brooks in Motion Picture Classic Magazine, 1928.

These images showcase a wide variety of “borrowed” sailor suits, and a wide variety of degrees to which the fashion’s ironic elements are emphasized – an emphasis that tends to go hand-in-hand with comedy. The child and the infantilized flappers appear to be dressed more ironically (and hence, comically), while the fashion models appear to be wearing these fashions more subtly and seriously, as though to “naturalize” the familiar uniform shapes and colors within the expected spectrum of women’s wear.

Like the sailor suit, the Breton represents a military garment translated into a civilian context. It also took on similarly lighthearted, “playful” connotations as it migrated from sailors to fishermen, and ultimately to tourists. By the early 20th century, the garment had begun to turn up in fashion magazines and advertisements, and served as a kind of shorthand to denote casual “holiday” and “seashore” settings, not only signaling to values of the provincial fishing life, but moreover to values of travel and leisure. In other words, the original military context of the Breton was steadily being overwritten by signals of recreation and holiday.

In *The Garden of Eden*, the narration states that “[p]eople did not wear fisherman’s shirts then.”²²³ Hemingway began writing *The Garden of Eden* in 1946, and worked on the novel off and on until his death in 1961. It would be impossible to guess whether Hemingway simply didn’t know about this iconic shirt’s full history as a fashion or whether he purposefully ignored it, but one thing is certain: In claiming that “people did not wear fishermen’s shirts then,” the narrator’s assessment is patently inaccurate. In fact, during the time Hemingway was writing *The Garden of Eden*, Pablo Picasso was famously photographed in a wide variety of fisherman’s shirts, including the classic Breton. Even now, Picasso’s link to this garment persists, as a quick search of the Internet reveals a number of sites that sell striped fisherman’s shirts, touting the shirt as “the classic Breton top famously worn by Pablo Picasso,” a top that is “equally suited for men and women alike.”²²⁴

The latter statement broaches the subject of gender, and just after insisting that “[p]eople did not wear fishermen’s shirts then,” *The Garden of Eden* goes on to add that “this girl that [David] was married to was the first girl he had ever seen wearing one.”²²⁵ This claim also turns a blind eye to several iconic iterations of the striped fisherman’s shirt, including Coco Chanel’s early appropriation of the garment. Chanel had worn and even integrated fisherman’s shirts into her fashion collections – as early as 1927.

²²³ Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden*, 6.

²²⁴ This example as seen at https://www.thenauticalcompany.com/naval-breton-top/prod_83.html. Another site, <https://www.bretonshirt.co.uk/product/picasso/> begins its description, “You will have seen the photo of Picasso in his kitchen wearing one of his favorite French sailor shirts...”

²²⁵ Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden*, 6.



(Figs. 55, 56): Chanel, 1927. Picasso, 1952.

Given that the “fisherman’s shirt” had already made its way through a long chain of appropriation by the time Hemingway purportedly set to work on *The Garden of Eden* in 1946, the question arises: Why does *The Garden of Eden* take pains to frame Catherine’s appropriation of the fisherman’s shirt as an original act of borrowing? The answer – if there is indeed one to be had – appears to reside in understanding appropriation as a form of creativity, and understanding the nautical motif that Catherine appropriates as a pastiche of styles that ultimately helps the couple to occupy a shared imaginary space wherein traditional taxonomies of gender and sexual desire are unseated or destabilized.

David and Catherine – the couple at the center of *The Garden of Eden* – present one example of a kind of romantic partnership that became more visible during the 20th century: The creative, collaborative couple. These pairings typically involved one or both partners making art for a living, and in many ways also making “living an art” through aesthetically pleasing or uniquely eccentric lifestyle choices. Such couples tended to exhibit a merging of identities, and in *The Garden of Eden*, this merging begins to take a literal, external form, as Catherine insists they dress alike in striped fisherman’s shirts and espadrilles, that they tan their bodies to the

same hue, and that they cut and bleach their hair to match. Catherine very carefully and intentionally selects these styles (“the fisherman’s shirt” as I use it throughout this chapter serving as a kind of synecdoche to include the full list mentioned above – the tanning, the short, bleached hair, the espadrilles, etc). She makes an occupation of curating her image, David’s image, and – above all – their conjoined image. At its core, the Riviera aesthetic Catherine adopts proves to be a pastiche, a concatenation of cribbed fashions which point to a hazy and sometimes competing set of semiotic referents, a composite that at times signals privileged holiday leisure, other times signals to the blue-collar fisherman and Provençal peasantry around them, and still other times bears signals of youthful androgyny.

Moreover, the novel’s plot revolves around David’s ability to write while balancing his work with his new and very consuming marriage to Catherine. Of the two manuscripts he is authoring, one is inspired by hunting trips David took in Africa with his father, and the other is a description of his artistic life with Catherine, presumably a novelistic description that they’ve dubbed “the narrative.” Catherine is deeply invested in the latter, and just as deeply resentful of the former. She views herself as an active participant in David’s creation of “the narrative,” and her careful cultivation of their lifestyle and fashion largely represents her artistic collaboration. Indeed, while her partner is a writer by trade, multiple critics have noted²²⁶ that Catherine acts as a co-author of sorts, constantly pushing him to finish the “narrative,” which centers on their shared life together – a life she is helping create. (All the while, of course, she nags David to shelve his short stories about his father’s hunting trips in Africa). The novel’s insistence that David has never previously seen a woman wearing a striped fisherman’s shirt effectively positions Catherine as a kind of Coco Chanel, acknowledging her as a kind of *auteur* in her own right.

Between their matching outfits, their joint engagement in David’s creative career, and their willingness to appropriate items and motifs from the local culture as they see fit, David and Catherine bear similarities to another real-life couple,

²²⁶ Del Gizzo, Suzanne and Frederic J. Svoboda, eds. *Hemingway’s The Garden of Eden: Twenty-Five Years of Criticism*. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 2012. In particular, see Ira Elliot’s “In Search of Lost Time: Reading Hemingway’s Garden.”

Pablo Picasso and Françoise Gilot, and in particular the time they spent on the French Riviera near Antibes.²²⁷ They, too, tended to dress alike, often borrowing from local working class styles. Both also worked on their art, and jointly on an exhibition that was to become a permanent collection in Antibes.



(Figs. 57, 58): Picasso and Gilot dressed in similar outfits, going over his sketches.

Below: “Joie de vivre,” 1946, with Greek satyr and panpipe imagery on the French seaside.



During Picasso and Gilot’s time in Antibes, Picasso found creative inspiration in the area’s Greco-Roman history and incorporated a playful (and in many ways, appropriated) version of these motifs in his work that was meant to reflect the French seaside. Like Catherine and David, Picasso and Gilot borrowed from what was around them, appropriating whatever caught their interest, all in the name of art. They adopted similar “casual chic,” “holiday” fashions, including the striped

²²⁷ Françoise Gilot, *Life With Picasso*. (London: Virago, 1990).

fisherman's shirt. The trappings of their lifestyle – including their casual fashion – signal the desire to create the same kind of shared, bohemian, creative space that Catherine strives to create with David.

However, Picasso and Gilot stand apart in the sense that Gilot was considered a working artist in her own right, despite the enormous shadow her affair with Picasso cast upon her reputation and career. In this regard, the dynamic between Catherine and David more closely resembles another real-life artistic couple: Salvador Dalí and his wife Gala. While Gala acted as both a kind of inspiration and director, she didn't paint, yet Dalí was happy to credit her as a co-artist. He signed both his *and* his wife Gala's names to many of his paintings, and repeatedly attributed his success to Gala's influence over and management of his career.²²⁸ In this manner, Catherine and David's relationship to David's writing resembles Gala and Dalí's relationship to Dalí's artwork– despite the fact that David, by comparison, is not quite up to Dalí's level of acknowledgment. Indeed, in the course of the novel, he demonstrates widely vacillating degrees of comfort with Catherine's aggressive involvement with his work. Nonetheless – at least at the outset of the novel – David appears to depend on Catherine not only as his lover but also as his primary reader and only companion as he practices an otherwise solitary profession while traveling/living abroad in a foreign country. The characters that populate Hemingway's stories and novels, as well as his correspondence with his respective four wives, offer repeated iterations that showcase this model of co-dependent coupledness. In a 1926 letter to Hemingway, his second wife Pauline admonished him to “[r]emember especially that we are the same guy... I am only half without you.”²²⁹ *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) echoes similar sentiment as another Catherine, Catherine Barkley, says to her lover, Frederic Henry, “I want you so much I want to be you, too.”²³⁰ In many ways, *The Garden of Eden* takes up this relationship dynamic and plays it out to more extreme lengths than is manifest in Hemingway's earlier fiction or in narrative versions (also unavoidably fictionalized) of his “real” life.

²²⁸ Francine Prose, *The Lives of the Muses*. (New York: Harper/Collins, 2002), 197.

²²⁹ Bernice Kert, *The Hemingway Women*. (New York: Norton, 1983), 219.

²³⁰ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*. (New York: Scribner, 1929, reprint ed. 2014), 299-300.

Moreover, in *The Garden of Eden*, Catherine's "authorship" of their shared lifestyle escalates over the course of the novel. She begins with superficial details – their clothing, tanning, and haircuts – then proceeds to redesign the roles they play in bed, calling David "Catherine," and cajoling David to call her "Peter" while engaged in sexual activities. The novel only offers very limited, vague description of these activities, but it is implied that they are deviant in some manner (Catherine asks afterwards, "You don't think I'm wicked?" and David replies, "Of course not. But how long have you thought about that?" – leaving the reader to ponder exactly what is meant by "*that*"). Eventually Catherine also "authors" the company they keep, bringing a third party into their relationship: a woman whom they both share. The novel suggests that they sleep with the girl, Marita, separately as opposed to simultaneously, and that both Catherine and David play a male role in bed with Marita – the latter of whom is repeatedly referred to as "the girl."

Taking Catherine's stylized curation of their sex life into consideration in conjunction with her stylized curation of their identical wardrobes suggests that Catherine is not invested in *swapping* gender and sex roles, so much as she is interested in merging her identity together with David's, as though they might be two mirrored halves that make up a singular entity. The nautical motif she adopts (and requires David to adopt) shifts at times to accommodate this desire, thereby suggesting that Catherine selects the Breton shirts and espadrilles in part to undermine traditional gender taxonomies altogether. They are mistaken for brother and sister, and Catherine wishes to exacerbate this impression further, lessening the differences between them – to the point where they are mistaken for *brothers*. Meanwhile, the motif's lighthearted connotations that underscore youth by playing up the ironic contrast between the clothing (a sailor's uniform) and its wearers (a pair of blond, tanned, androgynous tourists who look like siblings) act as a sort of cultural safety valve that elides connotations of transgendering and homosexual desire.

It is a precarious balance that is only maintained when their androgynous fashions are presented as a joint project (as opposed to Catherine's emasculation of

David). Looking in the mirror, David talks to his new image, defending Catherine's style mandates:

"All right, you like it," he said. "Now go through with the rest of whatever it is and don't ever say anyone tempted you or that anyone bitched you."²³¹

The couple is painted as a happy one during the early days of Catherine's experimentation. David's musings indicate a need to adjust to the unorthodox stylizations and behaviors that Catherine introduces into their lives, but he repeatedly proclaims that she excites him and fulfills him ("You're lucky to have a wife like her and a sin is what you feel bad after and you don't feel bad," he tells himself²³²). During these early chapters, the couple lives in a state of Edenic bliss – hence, the book's title. They work in joint fashion on "the narrative," they drink and tan and swim in the sea naked. At night they experiment together in bed without shame or guilt; their sexual curiosity is depicted as natural, pure, and without malice.

Eventually, however, as the novel progresses it dismantles this tenuous harmony. Catherine is increasingly painted as the true architect of their sexual deviance together. The atmosphere of experimental refuge drops away and is supplanted by a tone of usurpation and a restless, relentless jealousy – a jealousy that is ascribed to Catherine alone. As David moves closer to Marita, his growing desire for her appears linked to an overall desire to reestablish a traditionally gendered lifestyle, one in which his work is no longer influenced and controlled by his partner. Catherine's feelings for David (like her predecessor, Catherine Barkley, who says to her lover that she "wants him and wants to be him, too") are so strong and so full of envy they ultimately destroy the relationship. Worse still, these potent feelings lead Catherine to very literally destroy David's African manuscript, which she views as a threat to "the narrative" and burns. As the couple falls from grace, the atmosphere of gender fluidity Catherine has forged falters (they are not twins, not brothers – she is merely a "Devil," as David calls her, and a bad wife), and her actions

²³¹ Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden*, 84.

²³² *Ibid.*, 21.

are increasingly cast as erratic and emasculating. Whereas earlier in the novel the borrowed fisherman's shirt aesthetic functioned to enact a space of gender fluidity/neutrality, in the latter half of the book it fails, and the transgression against traditional taxonomies of gender is doubled: Catherine has not only usurped the masculine role, she has feminized David.

Throughout the novel, Catherine seems to know she is playing with fire. Just after having her hair cut like a boy's, Catherine asks David to admire it and says, "You see why it's dangerous, don't you?"²³³ Yet again, Catherine and David's matching haircuts represent a scenario that Hemingway tried out several times over, both in real life and in fiction. At different points in their relationships with Hemingway, his first two wives, Hadley Richardson and Pauline Pfeiffer, both had their hair cut in "Eton crop fashion" to mimic their husband's own hairstyle. Hemingway's preoccupation with hair has been well documented, with biographers arguing that the savvier women in his life purposely invited Hemingway to the barber, knowing the effect it would have.²³⁴ But whatever the unknowable truths of Hemingway's biography may be, the fact remains that he wrote about women having their hair cropped to match their lovers on at least two significant occasions. Hemingway's feelings about or intentions in including these hair-centric scenes are unknowable, but if nothing else, the biographical versions of these haircuts leave his readership with a visual record of the style he might have been describing in his fiction (see below, Hadley on left, Pauline on right; note Hemingway's "striped fisherman's shirt").

²³³ Ibid., 15.

²³⁴ Mark Spilka, "Hemingway's Barbershop Quintet: 'The Garden of Eden' Manuscript," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Autumn, 1987), 29-55.



(Figs. 59, 60): Eton crops on Hadley, left, and Pauline, right.

The “other,” predecessor Catherine – Catherine Barkley of *A Farewell to Arms* – also fantasizes about having her hair cut short, but also expresses how she feels her pregnancy is an impediment to the ideal realization of this fantasy, stating to Lt. Henry:

“...You know, darling, I’m not going to cut my hair now until after young Catherine’s born. I look too big and matronly now. But after she’s born and I’m thin again I’m going to cut it and then I’ll be a fine new and different girl for you. We’ll go together to get it cut, or I’ll go alone and come and surprise you.”

I did not say anything.

“You won’t say I can’t will you?”

“No. I think it would be exciting.”

“Oh, you’re so sweet. And maybe I’d look lovely, darling, and be so thin and exciting to you and you’ll fall in love with me all over again.”²³⁵

²³⁵ Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 261.

Catherine aspires to be thin and exciting, to be reborn in a sense as a “different girl.” Grouping the short boy’s haircut with a “thin” body, she’s aiming for an androgynous aesthetic, one that deemphasizes the fertile, female body (hence why pregnancy poses an obvious contradiction).

But *A Farewell to Arms* pulls its punches in some ways; it never brings the characters to the point of an actual haircut, and even Catherine Barkley’s descriptions of the “exciting” role-play this stylization presents is tame by comparison to Catherine Bourne’s proposals and her actions in *The Garden of Eden*. In the latter novel, this second “Catherine” arrives at David’s café table, newly shorn, proclaiming, “I’m a girl. But now I’m a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything.”²³⁶ David responds with a mixture of shock and admiration, both emotions coming across as genuine, and in equal parts:

“I like it,” he said. “And you have such a beautifully shaped head that it is very beautiful with the lovely bones of your face.”

“Don’t you like it at the sides?” she asked. “It isn’t faked or phony. It’s a true boy’s haircut and not from any beauty shop.”

“Who cut it?”

“The coiffeur at Aigues Mortes. The one who cut your hair a week ago. You told him how you wanted yours cut then and I told him to cut mine just the same as yours. He was very nice and wasn’t at all surprised. He wasn’t worried at all. He said exactly like yours? And I said exactly. Doesn’t it do anything to you, David?”

“Yes,” he said.²³⁷

Catherine hopes and expects that her short hair will “do something” to her partner; David responds by admiring her while at the same time adopting a new habit of calling her “brother.” Again, this refers to the fact that the locals of Le-Grau-de-Roi have mistaken them for brother and sister. It is an assumption that tickles Catherine with its incestuous implications; but, again – according to David’s playful nickname,

²³⁶ Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden*, 15.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

now they may be mistaken for brothers, a possibility which adds an element of homoeroticism to the mix.

Haircuts make up a central component of Catherine's "borrowed fisherman's shirt" style, and she returns to the barbershop time and time again. The more she refashions herself (and David, to match), the happier she is, and more full of authority. But conversely, she's at her unhappiest when she feels this refashioning ability slipping away, or not taking its fullest effect. The happiness she feels over her initial short haircut wears off quickly and she complains:

"But it isn't even really a boy's haircut," Catherine said. "I wanted it the way we planned. Everything's going wrong."

"It couldn't be more a boy's haircut. You must believe me."²³⁸

Shortly after this exchange, Catherine insists she and David take a trip to the barber together, where they both have their hair cut even shorter, and have it bleached to match each other.

In "Hemingway's Barbershop Quintet: *The Garden of Eden* Manuscript," critic Mark Spilka draws out links between F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* and Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* with a strong focus on the heavy role that haircuts and barbershops play in both novels. Spilka argues that *The Garden of Eden* serves as Hemingway's "corrective" for *Tender is the Night* – a novel that provoked Hemingway in many ways, as evidenced by a 1934 letter he wrote to Fitzgerald, a letter Hemingway wrote upon reading Fitzgerald's manuscript for the first time, and in which he lectures Fitzgerald in detail about the novel's many flaws. Hemingway's chief grievance is with the novel's departure from biographical sources; the book begins as a roman à clef about Sara and Gerald Murphy, but in Hemingway's reading of it, the novel's characters morph into Scott and Zelda themselves.²³⁹ Furthermore, Hemingway complains in the letter that this morphing constituted a writerly

²³⁸ Ibid., 80.

²³⁹ Possibly swayed by Hemingway, Fitzgerald appeared to read his own novel in the same fashion. According to an interview Gerald Murphy gave *The New Yorker* in its July 28, 1962 edition, Murphy reports: "The book," Fitzgerald said, "was inspired by Sara and you, and the way I feel about you both and the way you live, and the last part of it is Zelda and me because you and Sara are the same people as Zelda and me."

“cheat.”²⁴⁰ *Tender is the Night* may have stuck in Hemingway’s craw, so to speak, but this is also to say that the manuscript remained on Hemingway’s mind during the years after Fitzgerald sent him the manuscript, as Hemingway reiterated his opinions about the book’s flaws (and allegedly admitting to Maxwell Perkins that there was more to like upon a second reading than he first noted²⁴¹). Spilka argues that Hemingway’s lingering awareness of Fitzgerald’s novel is unavoidably present in Hemingway’s own manuscript set on the Riviera, and that Hemingway’s strong opinions about the competitive dynamic between Zelda and Scott (again, two individuals who Hemingway certainly fictionalized in *A Moveable Feast*) bear similarities to Catherine’s jealousy of her husband’s career.

However, Spilka contends that above all “it was the curious late sequence from *Tender is the Night* – the ‘lesbian lark’ and the ‘barbershop showdown’ – that seems to have set [Hemingway] off”²⁴² in his authorship of *The Garden of Eden*. Spilka gives an overwhelmingly biographical reading that compares “Mary North’s emergent lesbianism after her husband’s death” to Pauline Pfeiffer’s sexuality after her divorce from Hemingway. While this kind of analysis often results in a reductive practice of drawing parallels between the author’s biography and speculating about authorial intent (both unknowable to greater and lesser degrees), the fact remains that Spilka’s criticism, at the very least, points up textual similarities between *Tender is the Night* and *The Garden of Eden*. I argue that both novels offer examples of what I’ve dubbed the “borrowed fisherman’s shirt” aesthetic, and that these *textual* similarities (and differences) illuminate the shifting nature of the semiotics deployed by this nautical motif.

In other words, this chapter takes into consideration some of the same elements that Spilka examines; the aesthetic I’m calling the “borrowed fisherman’s shirt” style refers in part to what Spilka calls the “lesbian lark” and the “barbershop

²⁴⁰ Hemingway scolded Fitzgerald for having “produced not people but damned marvellously faked case histories.”

²⁴¹ According to Spilka: “...as Arthur Mizener notes in *The Far Side of Paradise*, Hemingway would soon modify his original harsh [1934] judgment, and in 1935 would tell Maxwell Perkins of how strange it was that ‘in retrospect’ the novel ‘gets better and better.’”

²⁴² Spilka, 31.

showdown.” Whereas Spilka is invested in explaining these plot points in terms of Hemingway’s biography, this chapter aims to unpack how the maritime style operates in each novel in terms of the semiotics deployed – and moreover, how the motif functions to create a protective space for homosexual desire (that is, enabling it by strategically eliding it) or, oppositely, how the motif invites overt attention to “transgressive” desires, putting the wearer(s) in a position of scrutiny and condemnation.

When Mary North and Lady Caroline dress up as sailors and pick up a couple of women, their “lark” (as Lady Caroline puts it) ultimately results in their arrest. Dick Diver – positioned among his friends as a responsible, often paternal figure – is called to bail them out. At the jail cell, Dick listens to Lady Caroline’s dismissive, irritated account of how the Provençal girls “got the wind up” and ultimately got her and Mary North into trouble with the law. Revealed via the narration, Dick’s private reaction is one of judgment and condemnation:

Dick nodded gravely, looking at the stone floor, like a priest to the confessional – he was torn between a tendency to ironic laughter and another tendency to order fifty stripes of the cat and a fortnight of bread and water. The lack, in Lady Caroline’s face, of any sense of evil, except the evil wrought by cowardly Provençal girls and stupid police, confounded him; yet he had long concluded that certain classes of English people lived upon a concentrated essence of the anti-social that, in comparison, reduced the gorgings of New York to something like a child contracting indigestion from ice cream.²⁴³

Of Dick’s two reactions, one is to see the comedy in all of it, and participate in of Mary and Lady Caroline’s “lark” by laughing. In his tendency to acknowledge the humor, Dick acknowledges the irony of the visual image that Mary and Lady Caroline strike: They are women dressed up as sailors, behaving like horny men on the make. The humor depends on the understanding that, because they are women, these clothes, this pretense, and these behaviors are absurd.

²⁴³ Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, 304

However, Dick's second reaction indicates that Mary and Lady Caroline have failed to completely hide their transgression behind the humor of it all. Their outfits and antics have landed them in a jail cell, and Dick echoes the desire to punish them with "fifty stripes of the cat and a fortnight of bread and water." The fact that the two women are in a jail cell in the first place suggests that their "lark" has been deemed by the authorities – in this case, the literal police – to present a danger to the public in some way.

While they have dubbed it a "lark," Mary and Lady Caroline have demonstrated themselves to be extremely convincing – convincing enough to upset a pair of Provençal girls. This suggests that Mary and Lady Caroline wore their sailor uniforms in such a way as to genuinely simulate enrollment in the Navy – and hence, male sexuality. Whereas other iterations of borrowed nautical fashion emphasize the ironic "borrowing" at play, Mary and Lady Caroline's sailor uniforms elide this irony. In this way, the semiotic signals of, say, three-year-old Prince Edward dressed up as a member of the Royal Navy differ in an important way from the semiotic signals that inform Mary and Lady Caroline's borrowed uniforms. To put it bluntly: The ladies' costumes cease to function ironically, or even as "costumes" at all, when they are taken for genuine sailors. The girls they pick up aren't in on the joke, and hence, Mary's and Lady Caroline's fashion is received without humor.

Dick attributes Lady Caroline's lack of repentance – "the lack of any sense of evil" – to class privilege. Lady Caroline feels free to impersonate a navy sailor and usurp the power therein, and free also to indulge in whatever sexual "larks" she pleases, constituting a sense of privilege that Dick calls "anti-social." This label, anti-social, seems inaccurate, strictly speaking. After all, Mary and Lady Caroline are engaged in each other's company, and in the course of their lark, they have sought out the company of two additional women. Dick's label, "anti-social," does not describe their desire for company (or lack thereof) but rather, Mary's and Lady Caroline's *violation* of social norms. He is, in essence, condemning their desire and painting it as predatory.

In *The Garden of Eden*, Catherine's adoption of maritime style happens gradually and – at least in the early chapters of the novel – retains the air of

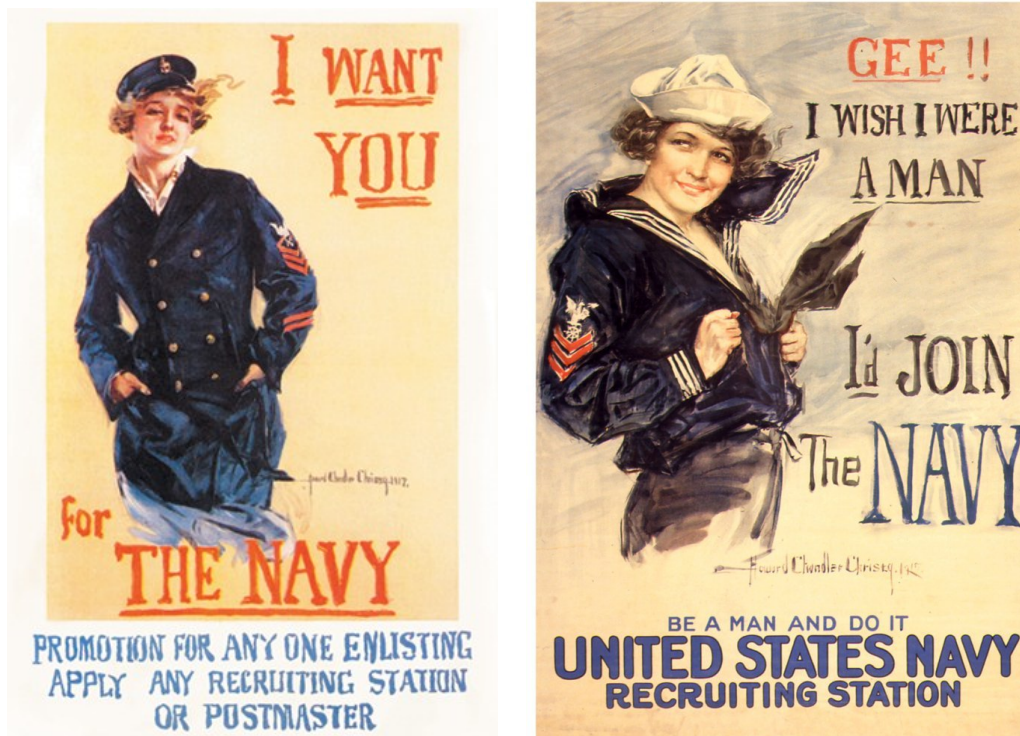
playfulness that Mary and Lady Caroline's "lark" loses when they find themselves arrested. David indicates that Catherine has purchased their espadrilles and "striped fisherman's shirts" as though she were not just playing the part of a fisherman, but rather the part of a giddy tourist. David believes his innovative wife is amusing herself, keeping herself entertained while he writes. Each time she returns from the barbershop the two discuss her increasingly cropped hair as though playing a game (and perhaps more specifically, a game of "dare"). Moreover, Catherine and David's sex life is concealed from public view. The fact that Catherine takes her impersonation of a boy into the bedroom is a private secret between Catherine and David (or, put another way, is a private secret shared by "Peter" and "Catherine"). While it's true that David and Catherine confuse the locals with their style and behavior, the locals guess that they are "brother and sister" or that they are simply eccentric American artists; Catherine is not arrested for her style and sexual experimentation, whereas Mary and Lady Caroline are.

The fact that the locals mistake David and Catherine for brother and sister suggests that their joint appearance potentially signals to youth – or, at least, to a state of infantilization insofar as one lives in close proximity to one's immediate nuclear family. Catherine capitalizes on this as she further refines their joint appearance. She wants them to look like "brother and brother," and the most efficient way to accomplish this is to exacerbate the impression of youth so that it becomes one of pre-adolescent androgyny. She arranges for them to get matching haircuts, and has their hair dyed the kind of platinum blond more common to toddlers whose hair has not darkened with the effects of puberty. The novel's narration frames their Breton shirts as "striped fisherman's shirts," a framing which emphasizes the shirt as a working-class, peasant garment, not as a kind of borrowed uniform. In these ways, Catherine's curated style remains far more nebulous than Mary and Lady Caroline's Navy uniforms. Catherine's style has an element of concatenation about it that makes it more difficult to pin down. While it's dubbed a "striped fisherman's shirt" in the novel, the Breton shirt Catherine wears may still bear signals that refer more specifically to its military past. At the same time, Catherine's maritime look still makes use of "layered" cultural references – the trend

of children's sailor suits and youth fashion that persisted into the early 20th century, Coco Chanel's glamorously-styled borrowed Breton, leisure and "holiday" wear.

Furthermore, Catherine's nautical style is filled with competing, contradictory signals. For instance: Hemingway elides the Breton's military references by emphasizing the striped shirt as a "fisherman's shirt." Again, this framing emphasizes the shirt as a blue-collar garment that Catherine is trying on for her own version of a "lark." And yet, Chanel's 1917 iteration of the striped Breton (and the way in which she wore it) serves as a reminder that this very same garment (a garment worn by Navy sailors, a garment worn by fisherman) may also bear glamorous connotations signaling to wealth – i.e. the wearer has money enough to own a boat, and enough leisure time to sail it. Catherine's wearing of the striped Breton signals (alternately, and at times simultaneously) to all of these values, despite their contradictory nature. The pivoting nature of the semiotics that inform Catherine's nautical style allows Catherine to modulate between classes – and more importantly, between genderings and sexualities without incurring the kind of punitive reaction that Mary and Lady Caroline suffer.

Insofar as they attempt to dress up in literal sailor's uniforms, Mary and Lady Caroline echo some of the imagery used in recruitment posters, such as the two images below that circulated in the United States in 1916.



(Figs. 61, 62): Navy recruitment posters, 1916.

“Gee!! I wish I were a man,” the poster on the right proclaims, and orders its viewer to “[b]e a man and do it.” On one level the images and words issue challenges to its viewer, compelling him to shore up his masculinity and sexual appeal (“I want you,” the poster on the left shouts as the woman levels an alluring gaze at the viewer). Both women depicted appear flirtatious. There are a number of ways to read these posters. The first and most obvious way is to unpack the traditional advertising conceits: These posters pander to the male heterosexual gaze. The women are sexy and presenting their male viewers with a challenge and an invitation. A second way to read the posters is to read *around* the sex of the woman in the illustration. (How do we know she is, in fact, a woman?). This reading taps into the cultural history of American and European navies that would suggest the naval branch of Western militaries often served to shelter homosexual behavior by encoding and translating it into a kind of subculture.²⁴⁴ In this reading, the woman in the recruiting image still

²⁴⁴ John Loughery chronicles this history, with particular detail regarding the 1919 Navy “sex scandal” that revolved around a sting operation in Newport, Rhode Island. Loughery reports the ways in which sailors had

signals to sex (and suggests that the Navy is a “sexy” environment), but is a stand-in for homoerotic love.

A third way to read the recruitment poster takes into account the female viewer. In this reading, the cross-dressing woman comes across as a more overtly transgressive figure. She’s accessing a realm thought to be closed off to her (the Navy). She’s saying “I want you” to her female viewership. Of course, in its mission of recruitment, the poster is not *intended* for a female viewership. The images and words are capable of potentially inciting and expressing homoerotic desire, but if the imprisonment and condemnation that results from Lady Caroline and Mary North’s “lark” is any indication, these motifs fall short in successfully sheltering specifically *lesbian* desire.

In *The Garden of Eden*, Catherine’s nautical style benefits from a sense of ambiguity. During the first few chapters of the book, the style she carefully curates signals to a perpetually shifting set of referents. Potentially transgressive desires are masked by desires that are more strongly presented in the novel’s foreground: Catherine’s desire to be close to her mate, David – much in keeping with other famous artist-couples – and the “Eden” she creates with David is one in which the two of them could pass for brother and sister, a pair of interchangeable tourists, or “innocents abroad.” Moreover, Catherine is able to achieve a safe space, however temporary, wherein she is able to become “Peter,” styling her body and behavior in a manner that is in keeping with traditional regimes of masculinity. Both Catherine and David are able to act out a kind of male desire, both with each other and with Marita. But much like *Tender is the Night*, *The Garden of Eden* eventually works to cordon off female ambition and specifically lesbian desire, ultimately painting it as a usurpation of masculinity. The novel – at least in the published form that Tom Jenks edited – rapidly dissolves any signals of true lesbian desire between Catherine and Marita, and refocuses the narrative on Catherine’s jealous desire to compete with (and ultimately destroy) David’s manuscript.

developed a kind of code to express homosexual desire. *The Other Side of Silence, Men’s Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth Century History*. (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

Overall, the borrowed fisherman's shirt aesthetic (that is, nautical fashions as appropriated by women's fashion) deploys a layered semiotics. The image of a woman in a sailor suit may signal to ironic infantilization, while at the same time posing a challenge to traditional gender regimes. That same image of a woman in a sailor suit may signal to the heterosexual objectification of women, while at the same time concealing carefully encoded signals of homoerotic desire. Unfortunately, however, in the two texts explored here, the "cultural shelter" provided by this motif falls short of sheltering lesbian desire, suggesting that nautical fashions within these two texts – as worn by female subjectivities – remain accountable to a *male* gaze, regardless of whether this gaze is heterosexual or not. Here I am counting Catherine-as-Peter's gaze as a kind of male gaze. Marita's gaze is largely ignored in *The Garden of Eden*, and we know that the Provençal girls who Mary North and Lady Caroline pick up are shocked and horrified to find that their "sailors" are in fact women. While in some ways, a woman dressed in a sailor suit might theoretically be able to incite and sustain the sort of double-gaze that Sarah Berry delineates in her discussion of Marlene Dietrich's suit,²⁴⁵ in these two novels at least, the nautical trope is pushed away from ambiguity and into a state of explicit transgression (Catherine seeks to usurp David's masculinity and destroy his manuscript, Mary North and Lady Caroline literally seek to bed women as sailors), the motif fails to shelter the other half of this double-gaze, and the narratives turn to adopt a stance of condemnation.

²⁴⁵ Again, as I cite in my introduction, Berry's discussion of Marlene Dietrich's 1930 tuxedo-clad appearance in *Morocco* argues that Dietrich's image appeals to "male voyeuristic interest" while at the same time engaging a wide range of women's desires to imitate Dietrich and perhaps even bed her, "enabling them to direct their erotic gaze at the female star without giving it a name."

Conclusion

In evaluating the relevance of using fashion to unpack genderings and desires evinced in modernist literature, one must first address what we talk about when we talk about gender. “Genderings” – as I use the word here,²⁴⁶ may be read, but gender is never fixed. Gender is constantly produced, and perpetually changing. Desire, too, is transmutable and contextualized by time.

While a large amount of criticism exists that addresses the role of style in modernist literature in terms of new/reshaped literary forms and movements within the visual arts (cubism, expressionism, primitivism), significantly less criticism takes up the role of fashion as described in literature and depicted in magazines and film. Given that fashion offers an endless multitude of stylizations of the human body, it poses a series of natural objects for inquiries regarding (also ever-shifting) figurations of gender and sexuality. Approaching fashion as Barthes does in *The Fashion System* – i.e. aligning fashion with language in the capacity of an “institution” – renders an astute forum to read genderings and desires in literature with an eye towards tracing larger trends in gender and sexuality. Fashion offers a means to isolate and evaluate a particular gendering and/or desire articulated during a specific moment in a text or film, while at the same time, fashion is capable of producing multiple and sometimes contradictory readings simultaneously. In other words, fashion signals simultaneously both specific genderings and gender ambiguities; we can read genderings in multiple ways. Gender transmutes and exists on an endless continuum.

Moreover, combining the study of fashion with literary accounts of fashion enables a negotiation between the semiotics of a given image as a cultural display, and the semiotics of the “written garment”²⁴⁷ as a more figurative cultural display

²⁴⁶ To reiterate a foundational point advanced in my introduction, this study handles “gender” and “genderings” in the manner these terms are defined in my mentor’s, Judith Roof’s book, *What Gender Is, What Gender Does* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2016).

²⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 3.

(words being approximations of images) with greater potential for ambiguity and transmutation. In this sense, the written garment presents an articulation of fashion in its least fixed state, so to speak – a garment already presented as a polysemous phenomenon in a linguistic imaginary with all the cultural subjectivities that inevitably exert influence on that imagination. The ability to modulate between given images and “written garments” as rendered by studying fashion in tandem with literature enables observation of how, say, a style that signals to transgressive genderings or desires (Radclyffe Hall’s riding jacket, for instance, worn to signal a break with traditional regimes of femininity and desire) may later be adapted to signal to conservative genderings or desires (the riding jacket as worn as part of a Bund Deutscher Mädel uniform, worn to signal solidarity with Nazi propaganda which espoused a heteronormative reproductive imperative) – and vice-versa (how a conservative fashion may be appropriated to signal to transgressive values; this iterative flow works both ways).

Reading fashion and literature together also enables critical observation of the transmutation of cultural values via a kind of rhizomatic iteration. Describing this iterative process as “rhizomatic”²⁴⁸ acknowledges the multiplicity of readings/values signaled by a single iteration of fashion, as well as the connectivity between fashion’s many iterations while also accounting for the ways in which these iterations tend to resist hierarchical organization. Each iteration of fashion may signal to a slightly (or not so slightly) different set of cultural values, and in so doing may reshape said values. Fashion resists linear organization in that styles are never born in a vacuum, they may be borrowed top-down, or bottom-up; styles can cycle in and out larger trends and are often chronologically layered, referring to past styles (which may in turn refer to styles even further in the past) while at the same time occurring within and referring to the present moment (and possibly even referring to a moment in the imagined future). We rehash and revisit styles, which are arguably different with each wearing.

²⁴⁸ Having worked on this study, and in thinking of a larger model to describe fashion’s iterative articulations, I began to feel that the “rhizome” as described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (*A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987) was fitting in terms of the model’s emphasis on connectivity that resists hierarchical or simple cause-and-effect organization.

Reading fashion and specifically *modernist* literature together also offers a means of resisting what I call “the bio-criticism trap” – i.e. the kind of biographically derived readings that previously dominated so much of the body of criticism written about the work of authors such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. Unpacking configurations of fashion in Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s fiction helps train critical focus trained on the texts themselves (reminding us, too, that mythic narratives about these author’s lives may also be approached as a kind of fictional text). Furthermore, reading the semiotics of fashion in novels like *Tender is the Night* and *The Garden of Eden* helps to suss out overlooked critical conversations. For instance, we can further parse Spilka’s reading which brings these two texts into conversation (with more emphasis on the texts themselves, as opposed to the authors’ biographies) when comparing the two novels’ respective nautical motifs and unpacking the semiotic signals therein. In his article-turned-chapter, “Hemingway’s Barbershop Quintet: The Garden of Eden Manuscript,”²⁴⁹ Spilka takes up issues of gender and sexuality by reading these texts against biography and the trope of “haircuts,” but stops short of addressing the fact that both novels utilize maritime fashion motifs that signal to transgressive genderings and desires, and shield/expose such transgressions to a varying degree.

There is yet more interpretation that might be accomplished in reading the semiotics of fashion in literature. This dissertation also centers around the context of *women’s* fashion, and more specifically, instances in which women “borrowed” styles ordinarily linked to other demographics (men, athletes, sailors, etc). The focus on women’s appropriation of non-traditional styles offered the opportunity to take a closer look at the function of irony in these particular styles, with an eye towards locating junctures when irony alleviates the public’s reactions of shock or scandal, and when this “cultural pressure valve” ultimately works to naturalize a fashion, thereby undoing its own value of irony. An ironic pairing that may start out as a lark – the flapper’s schoolgirl-length skirt, for instance, is forgiven as a mercurial costume (i.e. an ironic pairing that is purposely deployed), but through a process of

²⁴⁹ Mark Spilka, *Hemingway’s Quarrel With Androgyny*. (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1990).

relentless reiteration soon becomes an expected, ubiquitous fashion. Moreover, focusing on women's fashion offers a chance to examine some of the ways in which these styles functioned to empower women insofar as the semiotics of their borrowed fashions undermined binaries linking them to a heteronormative reproductive imperative and/or the domestic sphere. But what would a version of this study centered on men's fashion look like? Does a version of the semiotic mechanism that functions to elide (and ease resistance to) transgressive genderings and sexualities exist in men's fashion as it does in women's fashion? Do male characters in modernist literature have access to the same kinds of fashions that so often begin as ironic masquerade and become "naturalized" through a process of mass iteration?

A precursory look suggests that men's borrowings as manifest in the modernist texts I have discussed here take on a completely different tone, often depicted as cabaret performers or the effeminate men who accompany Brett to the bal musette in *The Sun Also Rises*. Or, alternately, Gatsby himself in *The Great Gatsby*; an imposter in a "pink suit," as Tom Buchannan points out. The mechanics of iteration are arguably different for men, too, as fashion magazines and society pages of the era are largely aimed at reproducing the *female* image. In order to understand the complexities of fashion's semiotics and what this system does in terms of gender and sexuality in a more holistic way, it would be necessary to survey those subjectivities left out here, seeking to locate ways in which the semiotic dynamics that this dissertation parses within women's fashion relates to and overlaps with those found in men's fashion in the literary text and beyond.

Perhaps the reason fashion is not used as a critical fulcrum in combination with literature more often resides in the perception of fashion as both superficial and ephemeral. But I argue just the opposite – that *because* fashion deals in surfaces, and *because* fashion's configurations are fleeting, fashion makes for a useful and efficient lens via which to observe the transient nature of gender and desire. In many ways, the institution of fashion offers an endless stream of semiotic constellations that lay claim to their own multiplicity, simultaneity, and

contradiction, while the “written garment” articulates the key ambiguity that enables shifting between such varied readings.

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