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Girls Will Be Boys:
Cross-Dressed Women and the Legitimation of American Silent Cinema

by

Laura Evelyn Horak

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Film and Media

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender, and Sexuality

in the Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Sandberg, Co-Chair

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Professor Linda Williams

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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Media

and the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Mark Sandberg and Professor Kristen Whissel, Chairs

Recent scholars tend to describe cross-dressing as inherently transgressive. Cross-dressing, they explain, shows us that there is no natural link between physical sex and social roles. It shows us that we cannot trust our own vision, or even, as Marjorie Garber argues, the very notion of categories. Furthermore, scholars argue that early-twentieth-century Americans viewed female masculinity as unattractive and pathological, associated with shrewish suffragettes and sexual inverts. It may seem strange then, that the emerging American moving picture industry produced over three hundred films featuring cross-dressed women during the silent era. More than seventy percent of these films were released between 1908 and 1919, American cinema's "transitional era," when moving picture makers struggled to "uplift" their products in order to win over middle-class audiences and avoid censorship. These films and their complex cultural functions are largely missing from existing film historical accounts of this period. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that the circulation of an interpretive strategy that would read cross-dressing or "mannishness" as a sign of sexual inversion was much more limited than scholars have acknowledged. In fact, cross-dressed women helped moving pictures secure greater respectability by evoking a range of established, socially privileged representational traditions, thereby expanding the medium's appeal to broad audiences.

Over the course of the transitional era, moving pictures developed strategies to make performers' gender more consistently legible, adapting techniques from police detection, protean artists, sister acts, and newspaper photographs of men discovered to be female-bodied. At the same time, filmmakers cast women and girls in boy roles such as *Oliver Twist* in order to align the medium with genteel Anglo-American children's theater and Victorian sentimentalism. Cross-dressed women in frontier films, in contrast, provided an opportunity to see a capable, usually white, female body interacting with—and triumphing over—varied American natural landscapes. Their presence also helped as defuse the homoeroticism between men cultivated in sex-imbalanced frontier spaces. The "innocent" readings of cross-dressed women were so prominent during the transitional era that critics received even a seemingly obvious depiction of sexual inversion like *A Florida Enchantment* (Vitagraph, August 1914) as wholesome, respectable comedy. Only in the 1920s and early 1930s did American moving pictures begin to connect cross-dressing and lesbianism, a shift that disrupted the practice's relationship to respectability.

To Betty, Erv, Don, Wanda, and Evelyn

**Girls Will Be Boys:
Cross-Dressed Women and the Legitimation of American Silent Cinema**

by Laura Evelyn Horak

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Introduction: “He, She, or It?”



0.1 Pearl Gaddis, “He, She, or It,” *Motion Picture Magazine* 13:6 (July 1917), 27.

In July 1917, Pearl Gaddis wrote in *Motion Picture Magazine*: “In these days of suffragets [*sic*] and long-haired poets, bifurcated skirts, and lispng ladies, it’s hard to know who’s who and what’s what. It’s getting to be quite the rage—this exchange of identities.”¹ The article, “He, She, or It,” was accompanied by sixteen photographs of moving picture actresses in men’s clothing, ranging from suits, to overalls, cowboy outfits, and uniforms (plus three photographs of male actors in dresses). Four months earlier, when Bluebird Productions released a film called *The Boy Girl*, a melodrama about a frontier girl raised as boy, the critic at *Wid’s Daily* complained: “I fear that it is rather a poor title because we’ve had so many boy-girl parts. That thought in itself will not strike your regulars as being particularly original.”² In fact, cross-dressed women had been a regular presence in American moving pictures since approximately 1908, in everything from “temporary transvestite” comedies, to thrillers, melodramas, and sentimental children’s stories.

Recent scholars tend to describe cross-dressing as inherently transgressive. Cross-dressing, they explain, shows us that there is no natural link between physical sex and social roles. It shows us that we cannot trust our own vision, or even, as Marjorie Garber argues, the very notion of categories.³ Furthermore, accounts of the early twentieth century United States have described how politically active women were parodied as shrewish and masculine and noted the rise of medical theories that interpreted female masculinity as a symptom of psychosexual deviance.⁴ Dressing in the clothes of the opposite gender was even illegal in many cities and counties at this time.⁵ This has led many to conclude that cross-dressed women and female masculinity were pervasively stigmatized and perceived as a threat to the established order in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁶

It may seem strange then, that the American moving picture industry produced more than three hundred films featuring cross-dressed women during the silent era, and probably many more. (It is difficult to get a more complete picture, as an estimated ninety percent of silent films produced are no longer extant and many of these films were never reviewed.) Only a small number of these films were parodies of suffragettes. In fact, the films are quite diverse, ranging from sentimental dramas to historical romances, raucous comedies, and thrilling adventures. More than seventy percent of these films were released between 1908 and 1919, with an average of twenty per year. This period coincides with American cinema's "transitional era," when the industry shifted from an artisanal "cinema of attractions" to a consolidated studio product.⁷ During this time, moving picture makers struggled to "uplift" their products in order to win over bourgeois audiences and avoid censorship. I argue that, far from being a force of destabilization, cross-dressed women helped moving pictures secure greater respectability by evoking a range of established, socially privileged representational traditions, thereby expanding their appeal to broad audiences.

Earlier accounts of female masculinity miss the fact that cross-dressed women were an established component of genteel modes of representation in the early twentieth century, including theater, vaudeville, opera, ballet, and literature, ranging from Shakespeare's disguise comedies, to mythologized accounts of female spies, cavaliers, and soldiers, to the gentlemanly male impersonations of Vesta Tilley and other popular vaudeville and music hall performers.⁸ While much male-to-female cross-dressing connected to "low" comedy by this time, cross-dressed women were often associated with genteel culture, as I will demonstrate. Moving pictures were produced and consumed within a vast horizon of visual representation, narrative conventions, and modes of performance, which they variously mimicked, adapted, and rejected. This horizon included live performance (from "legit" stage to "10-20-30" melodramas, opera, ballet, comic opera, burlesque, high-class vaudeville, variety, magic shows, Wild West shows, fairground entertainers, freak shows); mass-circulation newspapers, magazines, and serials; high-, middle-, and low-brow literature; and still images such as paintings, photography, postcards, *cartes de visite*, advertising, store displays. While the borrowings and territorial battles between moving pictures and stage performance are often quite overt, the medium was also deeply influenced by and had an influence over these other forms of representation.

Moving pictures adopted a selection of established, positively valued, cross-dressed female types from literature, theater, vaudeville, and popular culture in order to appropriate the prestige and the interest of these other media. These women were almost invariably young, white, and attractive, and moving pictures increasingly made their femaleness visually unmistakable. Films and star narratives alike posited the ability to pass as male, navigate all-male spaces, and perform "masculine" feats of strength and agility as essential to modern American

womanhood. In transition-era cinema, cross-dressing was not necessarily a political statement or expression of deviant identity but a valuable skill, portrayed as pleasurable for characters and observers within the film and appreciated by a range of critics. For a film industry struggling to attract bourgeois audiences without losing working-class viewers, the cross-dressed woman provided the perfect lure. She offered filmgoers familiar and culturally-valued characters, narratives, and modes of viewing, therefore appealing to traditionalists, while also speaking to those excited about women's increasing autonomy and authority. The device allowed moving pictures to display the female body in a novel and attractive but entirely "respectable" way. While the industry struggled with criticism and censorship throughout the transitional era, films with cross-dressed women were consistently praised for being wholesome—an aesthetic and moral step up from the usual run of films. In this dissertation, I will analyze the precedents and intertexts that allowed cross-dressed women to function in this way.

This dissertation analyzes cross-dressing films to understand their modes of address and the way they resonated within the social and cultural landscape of the early twentieth century. Contrary to many accounts, I argue that there was not a clear link between female-to-male cross-dressing and deviant sexual identity in 1910s popular culture; rather, the meanings of cross-dressed women varied significantly depending on the generic and narrative framework, the context of presentation and reception, and the previous interpretive experiences of the individual viewer. While select viewers (such as sexologists or sexual inverts themselves) could have interpreted these performances through the lens of inversion, these were not dominant ways of reading moving pictures during the 1910s, I will show. The final chapter acts as a coda and describes how American moving pictures in the 1920s and early 1930s did finally connect cross-dressing and lesbian identity, thereby destabilizing the practice's relationship to respectability.

In the first chapter—"A Chance to Do Some Little Detective Stunt": Gender Detection as Entertainment"—I analyze the relationship between the spectatorial practices cultivated by police detection, vaudeville protean artists and sister acts, newspaper photographs of gender masqueraders, and gender surprise films, as well as the impact of this gaze on transition-era "temporary transvestite" films. While some early moving pictures genuinely questioned the legibility of gender on the body, by the end of the transitional era moving pictures produced the face as the reliable site of gender truth. Gender indeterminacy became limited to brief sight gags. The second chapter, "Moving Picture Uplift, Cross-Gender Casting, and the Victorian Ideal of Boyhood," demonstrates that moving pictures featured women in boy roles to align this burgeoning form of commercialized leisure with genteel Anglo-American children's theater and Victorian sentimentalism in order to attract white, middle-class women to the cinema and circumvent censorship efforts. The practice declined in the late 1910s and early 1920s, I contend, not due to its inherent incompatibility with cinema's realist aesthetic, but because the androgynous ideal of boyhood exemplified in these roles became increasingly problematic, the films did not appeal to working-class and rural audiences, and filmmakers intentionally made the femaleness of the actresses so visually prominent that the narrative immersion required for the character to work in a serious drama was rendered impossible.

At the same time that the American moving picture industry was using young women in boy roles to connect to Anglo-American sentimental theater, it was also using representations of cross-dressing frontier women to connect moving pictures to culturally-valued mythologies of the American West, which I discuss in Chapter 3, "Range Romances: Landscape, Vitality, and Desire in the Frontier." These figures offered the pleasing spectacle of physically vital white American women interacting with rugged American landscapes, playing into ideologies that

linked the Western topography to white racial vitality. These films authorize and even celebrate white female masculinities, as long as these masculinities are confined to a particular, temporary time – girlhood – and a particular, temporary space – the frontier. By looking both forward and backward, and displaying female power while containing it spatially and temporally, the figure invokes ideals of proper working class and middle class femininity operative in the early twentieth century, while nevertheless appealing to nostalgia for the frontier.

A Florida Enchantment (Vitagraph, August 1914) would seem to contradict my argument that cross-dressing women in film were viewed as socially harmless, and were thus fit to align moving pictures with genteel ideology. The film seems to present characters that literalize the medical concept of sexual inversion—“the masculine soul in the female bosom,” as sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing put it—and lesbian desire. In Chapter 4, “Cross-dressing, Sexual Inversion, and Respectable Comedy: *A Florida Enchantment*,” I assert that the circulation of an interpretive strategy that would read cross-dressing or “mannishness” as a sign of sexual inversion was much more limited than scholars have acknowledged. When this film was released in 1914, the innocent readings of cross-dressing and even women kissing were sufficiently dominant that the film was received as a standard sex farce and a high-class, wholesome picture.

These four chapters analyze different kinds of narratives, characters, and representational traditions into which moving pictures fit cross-dressed women. As different as they may seem, critics at the time viewed these roles as variations on a theme. The article “He, She, or It,” for instance, does not differentiate between women in boy roles, gender disguise roles in romantic comedies, disguise roles in action-adventure thrillers, and even female characters that wear overalls with no attempt to disguise their sex. While production companies often specialized in one genre or another (Famous Players, for instance, made a number of theatrical adaptations featuring “female boys,” while Selig and Kalem made many films featuring cross-dressing frontier girls), many production companies produced cross-dressing films of multiple genres, and very few companies avoided the device altogether.

Some actresses, too, performed in several different types of cross-dressing roles. Edith Storey, for instance, played a male role in Vitagraph’s Shakespearean adaptation *Twelfth Night* (February 1910), a frontier girl raised as a boy in *Billy the Kid* (Vitagraph, September 1911), and a woman who swallows a sex-change seed in *A Florida Enchantment* (Vitagraph, August 1914). Likewise, the Chicago-based trade journal *Motography* praised Selig leading lady Betty Harte for her ability to play boy roles—“not a girly boy, but a real boy”—as well as the roles of a “cowboy girl” or “society heroine”—“a versatile actress indeed.”⁹ Similarly, Vivian Martin made a name for herself on Broadway in a series of boy roles (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* [1903], *Peter Pan* [1907] and *Father and the Boy* [1910]) before entering moving pictures, where she appeared in a series of cross-dressing and tomboy roles. She played a girl who disguises herself as a boy in *Her Father’s Son* (Oliver Morosco Photoplay Company, October 1916), an immigrant girl who disguises herself as a male newsie in *The Trouble Buster* (Pallas Pictures, October 1917), a Western tomboy sent East in *The Sunset Trail* (Jesse Lasky Feature Play Company, October 1917), and a rambunctious American girl sent to England in *The Fair Barbarian* (Pallas Pictures, December 1917). Although some actresses like Storey, Harte, and Martin made a number of cross-dressing films, many actresses made only one or two. In the transitional era, cross-dressing was a standard element of the moving picture actress’s repertoire. While each chapter of this dissertation focuses on a different way of reading the cross-dressed woman, it is important to remember that all these modes existed simultaneously—that viewers brought the skills and knowledge cultivated in one mode to their experiences of the others. This

suggests that the various ideological projects of these different kind of cross-dressed women interlocked.

Although cross-dressing women in moving pictures dropped off somewhat in 1920 and critics declared the device played out, moving pictures revived the practice only a few years later in a series of lavish multi-reel productions, often highly publicized costume dramas.¹⁰ At this same time, many off-screen women bobbed their hair and adopted ever more boyish fashions.¹¹ Even as masculine styles were entering the cultural mainstream, the moving picture industry began to use cross-dressed women in a fundamentally new way—to demonstrate their European cosmopolitanism and “sophistication,” by strategically referencing deviant sexual identities. In Chapter 5, “The Belated Convergence of Cross-Dressing and Lesbianism in American Cinema,” I trace the way moving pictures distributed visual and linguistic codes for signifying lesbianism to the American public in the 1920s and early 1930s through intertextual engagement with newspapers, plays, and novels. This development disrupted the association of cross-dressed women with genteel culture. When the industry tried to clean up its image in the wake of the strengthened Production Code in 1934, cross-dressed women were now considered part of problem, rather than the solution.

However, between 1908 and 1919, many kinds of cross-dressed women were associated with “wholesome” forms of entertainment and the moving picture industry was anxious to capitalize on this appeal. It is my hope that this study will shift not only accounts of the American moving picture industry, but our sense of the relationship between popular culture and female masculinity during this tumultuous time, and restore to cultural memory a vast corpora of moving pictures and performers that have been largely forgotten.

Chapter 1:
“A Chance to Do Some Little Detective Stunt”:
Gender Detection as Entertainment



1.1 Final image of “boy” detective in *The Boy Detective* (American Mutoscope and Biograph, March 1908)

This image is taken from the final frames of the 1908 American Mutoscope and Biograph film, *The Boy Detective*. In an emblematic coda, we see the title character in a close view for the first time and realize then that the boy we have been watching is in fact played by a young woman. The performer laughs and looks straight at the camera, seeming to delight in having perpetrated a successful gender trick upon the film’s viewers. Over the course of this final shot, the “boy” reiterates a key sight gag from the film—that the item s/he is holding, which looks like a pistol, is actually only a cigarette case. Here s/he pats the “pistol” with a grin, seeming to remind us: *See? Not everything is what it seems.*¹

Queer and feminist film scholars like Chris Straayer and Annette Kuhn have insightfully analyzed the dominant mode of cross-dressing in cinema today, what Straayer calls the “temporary transvestite” film.² (While I use the term “cross-dressing” instead of “transvestism” in this study due to the latter’s association with sexology, I retain Straayer’s label because it is so well established.) In these films, a character disguises her- or himself as the opposite sex for some practical, necessary reason, thereby enabling a fantasy of gender mutability that trades in homosexual visual innuendo. Despite such play, these films invariably make the “real” gender of the disguised characters singular, immutable, and visually unmistakable to spectators throughout.

Straayer's and Kuhn's separate analyses of the "temporary transvestite" film is perceptive, but directed primarily at classical Hollywood films.³ While they also explore the turns that cross-dressing cinema took in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. thrillers populated by murderous transsexual women and queer art films with convincing cross-gender casting), neither they, nor anyone else, have rigorously considered how cross-dressing functioned in silent cinema. The "transitional era" in particular (roughly 1908 to 1916) was a time when norms of gender and cinematic expression were both undergoing rapid and significant changes. Examining this earlier period reveals alternative meanings, conventions, and pleasures of cross-dressing in cinema that were eventually foreclosed, as well as processes of establishing and naturalizing conventions of gendered representation.

While many silent films from the transitional era adhere quite well to the conventions of the "temporary transvestite" comedy that Straayer describes, many others do not. Some transition-era films genuinely questioned the legibility of gender on the body and cultivated a skeptical "detecting" gaze toward gender. Ultimately, these films produced the face as the site of visible gender truth. "Temporary transvestite" films, in turn, incorporated elements of this detective game, although they usually preferred to give spectators the *impression* of detecting gender rather than a genuinely difficult visual puzzle. In this chapter, I analyze the relationship between the spectatorial practices cultivated by protean artists and sister acts on the vaudeville stage, newspaper photographs of real-life and theatrical gender masqueraders, and gender surprise films like *The Boy Detective*, and the impact of this gaze on transition-era "temporary transvestite" films.

Detective films and comedies, in particular, cultivated these modes of spectatorship, although they also eventually made their way into dramas and thrillers. They were not totalizing; in the next chapter I investigate an alterative, credulous form of spectatorship that prioritized performed gender that was more typical of dramas featuring cross-gender casting. These two chapters, taken together, put in place both sides of a dynamic push and pull that constituted the process of legitimation.

"Woman's best and chief qualities": Transformations in Gender

The structural changes of American society during the decades around the turn of the twentieth century produced profound changes in, and contests over, the meanings of manhood and womanhood.⁴ In the previous century, an economy based on agriculture and small businesses shifted to a "managerial" economy that was dominated by large corporations and relied on industrialized mass production and consumption. Middle-class Victorian values of thrift and sobriety were challenged by a consumerist culture of pleasure and gratification. Cycles of economic boom and bust, profound labor unrest, and waves of immigration and internal migration created a sense of social instability. The ideology of separate gender spheres that had so dominated the nineteenth century was increasingly challenged by women's dramatic entrance into public life. The number of wage-earning women jumped from 2.6 million in 1890 to 10.8 million in 1930, growing twice as quickly as the adult female population.⁵ Not only the number of women working, but the type and location of the work changed as well; whereas sixty percent of female employment was in domestic service in 1870, by 1920 this was down to eighteen percent.⁶ Working-class women increasingly labored in factories, offices, and shops, and college-educated women found positions in business, politics, social work, education, and journalism. Many campaigned vociferously for female "emancipation," striving to achieve

suffrage, equal wages, and more equitable marriage laws, as well as on behalf of other social causes such as temperance, economic justice, and social hygiene.⁷

A number of commentators worried that middle-class men, who were confined to offices, working under the thumb of managers, and subject to the stresses of city living, were becoming weaker and more feminine, while women, who were pouring into sports, politics, and business at an alarming rate, were becoming too masculinized.⁸ The editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Edward Bok, for example, wrote in 1893 that, "The number of women in business who lose their gentleness and womanliness is far greater than those who retain what, after all, are woman's best and chief qualities."⁹ He warned readers that a man "ceases to love his wife when she becomes masculine or rebellious." Many commentators turned to physiology to help them describe the ostensibly "proper" differences between men and women. "The problem of woman's sphere," argued physician Edward Clarke in his infamous *Sex in Education* (1873), "is not to be solved by applying to it abstract principles of right and wrong. Its solution must be obtained from physiology[.]"¹⁰ Woman's unique physiology (in particular, her reproductive organs), he contended, "limits her power, and reveals her divinely-appointed tasks."¹¹ Clarke's work had been reprinted twenty-six times by 1900 and remained influential in debates about women in higher education through the 1920s.¹² Physicians regularly warned that women who took up male intellectual tasks (particularly voting and higher education) would not only suffer nervous disorders, but also become "larger," acquire "heavier brains," and lose "their unique feminine mannerisms and features," gender historian Michael Kimmel writes.¹³ One warned that women who sought to "ape" men in the realm of sports or dress would become "monstrous."¹⁴

American moving picture culture exploited this intense interest in the meanings and possibilities of gender in a range of ways. As Kay Sloan and others have documented, many transition-era comedies ridiculed the alleged physical and mental masculinization of politically-active women by casting men in these roles (e.g. *A Busy Day* [Keystone, May 1914]) or showing unattractive women donning masculine styles of clothing to express their political ambitions (e.g. *A Lively Affair* [producer unknown, c1912], *A Cure for Suffragettes* [Biograph, November 1913]).¹⁵ Although these films mocked female activists, I suspect that viewers could also have harbored a secret appreciation for the chaos and carnivalesque inversion of hierarchy to which women's activism gave rise in these films, akin to the pleasures of the Keystone slapstick universe. While some films lampooned masculinized East Coast activists, others celebrated the "masculine" athleticism and bravado of young frontier and urban heroines like Kathlyn Williams, Pearl White, and Ruth Roland, who appeared in many short, feature, and serialized films, as Shelley Stamp, Ben Singer, Jennifer Bean, and Richard Abel have discussed.¹⁶ (The masculinized frontier heroine is the subject of Chapter 3.) Filmmakers took up gender anxieties in a wide range of ways: "white slave" films displayed women being horrifyingly drawn into the global traffic in commodities, while screen vamps like Theda Bara consumed interchangeable male suitors; rising stars like Douglas Fairbanks embodied an energetic boyish ideal of manhood, while others like Lon Chaney displayed abject forms of "freakish" masculinity.¹⁷ Cross-dressing provided yet another way to explore and perhaps clarify what the difference between the sexes was, could, or should be. As I mentioned in the introduction, the American moving picture industry produced at least three hundred films featuring cross-dressed women during the silent era, more than seventy percent of them between 1909 and 1919.¹⁸ The films are quite diverse in tone, address, and genre, and the cross-dressed protagonists were overwhelmingly celebrated in the films and praised by critics.

**“When men are like women and women are like men”:
A Brief History of Cross-Dressing in American Silent Cinema**

In early cinema, male-to-female cross-gender performance was much more common than the reverse—particularly the comic gags of a man observing or flirting with a woman who turns out to be a female impersonator (e.g. *Par la trou de serrure* [Pathé Frères, May 1902]), a man donning a dress for disguise (e.g. *La malle de la nourrice* [Éclair, 1910], *Les deux rendez-vous* [Pathé Frères, 1910]), and male actors playing old women and suffragettes (e.g. female impersonator Gilbert Sarony’s seven “Old Maid” films produced by Edison and Lubin between 1901 and 1903, *M. et Mme. Font du Tandem* [Pathé Frères, February 1908]).¹⁹ Unconvincing male-to-female cross-dressing was a reliable gag—it was spectacle-based and carnivalesque, displayed “women” with out-of-control bodies, and burlesqued men’s sexual desire and presumed visual mastery. Female-to-male cross-dressing was much less common during this period, essentially confined to “tights and tunic” roles in European dance and *féerie* films (e.g. *Gavotte* [Pathé-Frères, 1898], *Pierette’s Escapades* [Gaumont, 1900]) and women wearing men’s clothing without the intention to disguise their gender (e.g. *Joan of Arc* [Méliès, 1900] and *Girls in Overalls* [Selig, 1904]). These roles generally emphasized the spectacular display of women’s bodies, in exotic and sometimes revealing costumes; they did not emphasize misperception or comedy as did male-to-female cross-dressing. (Early films also displayed the distinctly gendered bodies of non-cross-dressing men and women, such as strongman Eugene Sandow and the “cooch” dancer Fatima.) It seems possible, though, that young girls played some of the young boys of early cinema (as they did in the transitional era), but, given the dearth of information about performers at this time, it is difficult to know. Because studios rarely revealed performers’ identities (with the exception of some famous vaudeville and theater stars) and performers usually stood at least twelve feet from the camera, the “real” gender of early cinema’s old maids and young boys remains ambiguous in many cases.²⁰

Between 1908 and 1920, filmmakers, distributors, and exhibitors sought to legitimize the moving picture business in order to expand their audience base and preempt censorship attempts. They adopted a wide range of strategies, such as adapting prestigious literary, theatrical, and historical works, luring established stage players to the pictures, integrating the stand-alone “attractions” of earlier films into a “narrator system” that positioned spectators in a comparatively stable position of vision and knowledge, creating bigger, fancier, and more strictly regulated theaters, and standardizing distribution to ensure print quality.²¹ Another strategy, as I will argue throughout this dissertation, was producing films featuring cross-dressed girls and young women. Whereas male-to-female cross-dressing was primarily associated with a burlesque aesthetic of inversion and the grotesque, many forms of female-to-male cross-dressing had a long-established genteel pedigree, arising from romantic accounts of female warriors and heroes and female performers assuming male roles in a range of theatrical forms, including serious dramas, musical comedies, opera, ballet, pantomime, and vaudeville. Furthermore, although some films portrayed women in men’s clothing as the grotesque, anarchic complements of men in dresses, most often women’s gender crossing allowed them to “rescue” an imperiled, white, bourgeois, heterosexual order.

The transitional era witnessed a dramatic upsurge in female-to-male cross-dressing of all kinds. Most common were “temporary transvestite” films, but unlike the fairly formulaic romantic comedies that Straayer and Kuhn describe, these were strikingly diverse in genre, location, and period, and many did not include a romantic component (and thus no same-sex

visual innuendoes). These included cross-dressing girl detectives (*The Rogues of Paris* [Solax, October 1913], *The Bridge of Sighs* [Broadway Film Company, March 1915]); suspenseful thrillers of the Civil War (*The Girl Spy Before Vicksburg* [Kalem, December 1910], *Molly the Drummer Boy* [Edison, July 1914]) and the frontier (*The Girls of the Range* [Selig, February 1910], *A Girl Worth Having* [Kinemacolor, 1911]); and melodramas of bourgeois families (*The House With Closed Shutters* [Biograph, August 1910]), aristocratic families (*The Ragged Earl* [Popular Plays and Players, October 1914], *Hearts and the Highway* [Vitagraph, June 1915]), and working-class orphans (*Poor Little Peppina* [Famous Players-Mary Pickford, February 1916]). However, there were also a number of romantic comedies adhering to the conventions Straayer has outlined. These could be set in contemporary bourgeois homes (*Know Thy Wife* [Christie, December 1918]); the American West (*A Range Romance* [Bison, December 1911], *Making a Man of Her* [Nestor, November 1912]); the urban working-class (*My Brother Agostino* [Lubin, November 1912]); the urban upper class (*The Danger Girl* [Keystone, August 1916]); or, quite often, the historical European aristocracy (*Taming a Husband* [Biograph, February 1910], *Mistress Nell* [Famous Players, February 1915]). Another distinct trend during this time was casting young women in the roles of young boys, often adaptations of famous children's plays such as *Oliver Twist* and *The Prince and the Pauper*, which I analyze in the next chapter. Suffrage comedies ridiculed women's masculinity without attempting to disguise their sex (*A Lively Affair* [production company unknown, c1912]) and women in the frontier adopted men's wear for practicality or pleasure (*The Cow Boy Girls* [Selig, May 1910]).

Male actors carried on playing some old maid parts (although less often) and male comedians continued to don dresses. While performers' identities remained unknown, the bodies of old maids and young boys remained somewhat indeterminate. Edna "Billy" Foster apparently passed as a boy in over eighteen films for Biograph and *Moving Picture World* argued that "Thanouser Kid" Marie Eline would not be recognizable as female when she appeared in boy roles. Films retained the ability to stage a genuine gender surprise.

The circulation of performers' identities by production companies—beginning in 1909 and becoming fully implemented by 1913—meant that the possibility for films to display bodies with an indeterminate gender, to reveal belatedly a performer's gender, or for a performer to pass successfully as another gender were restricted. American studios like Edison and Vitagraph began advertising the names of Broadway stars they had lured into their films in 1909, following the example of European *films d'art*.²² Gradually, performers' names began to circulate in studio publicity bulletins, trade journals, and, starting in 1911, fan magazines.²³ In 1909, the Edison Company was apparently the first American studio to include a full cast list on-screen and, in 1911, was the only studio that did this for every film.²⁴ Other studios did not consistently adopt the practice until around 1913. "[D]uring 1910, 1911, and 1912," writes film historian Eileen Bowser, "most films were released without any naming of the players on the film itself or even in advertisements."²⁵ Biograph was the last to relent, keeping performers' names secret until the spring of 1913.²⁶ However, the circulation of performers' names was paradoxically linked to a rise in female-to-male cross-gender casting, as I explain in the next chapter. Although girls and young women in boy roles were quite common during the transitional era, the practice basically disappeared after Mary Pickford's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in 1921 (with the singular exception of the 1924 *Peter Pan*). Although I have not researched male-to-female casting as closely, my impression is that it, too, was uncommon by the 1920s. The only cinematic cross-dressing practice to survive the transitional era was the "temporary transvestite" film, which continued to be extraordinarily varied in terms of location, period, and plot, although a romantic component

was increasingly incorporated. Unlike gender surprise films and cross-gender casting, “temporary transvestite” films were a mode with all the spectator knowledge and positioning necessary to ensure a consistent reading of the cross-dressed body built into it. This shift is consistent with the omniscient narration and visual mastery associated with the narrator system and also fits into the star system’s emphasis on actor recognizability and attractiveness.²⁷

Cross-Dressing and Spectator Knowledge

In “Sexual Disguise in Cinema” (1985), Annette Kuhn observes that the act of cross-dressing “sets up a play between visible outward appearance—in this case, gender as signified by dress—and an essence which may not be visible but is nonetheless held to be more ‘real’ than appearance[.]”²⁸ “What is at stake in this expression of the dualism of appearance and essence,” she continues, “is a fundamentalism of the body, an appeal to bodily attributes as final arbiter of a basic truth.”²⁹ This paradigm fits with the nineteenth century’s medico-scientific preoccupation with the body as locus of social identity. Although utterly naturalized even today, it has been challenged by gender theorists such as Anne Fausto-Sterling and Judith Butler, who argue that cultural ideas about gender produce the notion of binary, opposing, biologically-determined sexes, and by transgender commentators, who prioritize the psyche rather than the body as the grounds of gender “truth.”³⁰ In the case of many transgender people, clothing is not a form of disguise, but an expression of a deeply felt gender truth. Very few films produce gender along these lines. There is a certain connection, though, between the ways recent transgender movies authorize the claimed gender of their protagonists and the way a handful of early films produced young female bodies as convincing boys, although the strategies are used for different purposes. The vast majority of cross-dressing instances in cinema, however—including gender surprise films—is aligned with the “fundamentalism of the body” that Kuhn describes, in that it invariably lets spectators see the performers’ “real” body, which is taken to reveal their “real” gender.³¹ Films featuring sexual disguise, writes Kuhn, invariably strive to “lay bare the reality beneath the clothing and so settle the crucial question of who is male and who is female.”³²

“Temporary transvestite” films inscribe a body’s “real” gender in several ways. Firstly, they inscribe “real” gender by aligning the spectator’s perspective with that of the masquerader—we are introduced to the character out of disguise, we learn of their intention to don a disguise (and the narrative justification), and we see at least part of the process of transformation. Secondly, they visually confirm the “real” gender by making the disguise visually unconvincing to the film spectator although simultaneously convincing to at least some diegetic observers. The “real” gender is further confirmed thirdly by informing spectators of the performer’s identity before the film starts. Straayer emphasizes this extranarrative method of ensuring that “real” gender remain visible to the spectator in “Redressing the Natural: The Temporary Transvestite Film” (1996).³³ “While narrative construction allows film viewers to witness the transvestite’s adoption of disguise and various private moments when he or she drops the pretense,” Straayer writes, “even without such revealing shots provided by an omniscient camera/narrator, viewers would still know that the character is disguised.”³⁴ In the romantic comedies Straayer examines, this inadequate disguise permits viewers to make oscillating homo- and heterosexual readings of erotic encounters between disguised and non-disguised characters. Like Kuhn, though, Straayer agrees that these films posit the body as location of gender truth and as seemingly “self-evident” to the film spectator.

Sexual disguise comedies were popular on the turn-of-the-century American stage (*Charley's Aunt*, for example, premiered on Broadway in 1893) and drew on formulas from European baroque theater, including Shakespeare's disguise comedies (e.g. *Twelfth Night* [1623] and *As You Like It* [1623]), French romances (e.g. *Le Mariage d'amour* [1621]), *opera seria* (e.g. *Achille in Sciro* [1663]), and Italian *commedia dell'arte* (e.g. *A Servant of Two Masters* [1743]).³⁵ Like the films that Kuhn and Straayer analyze, these plays derived a comic effect from ensuring that spectators always knew better than diegetic observers the disguised character's "real" identity through narrative and visual means that were effective at a distance (such as exaggerated makeup, burlesqued forms of movement, and asides). These "long-range" techniques of producing the "real" gender beneath the disguise were picked up in early cinema, as we shall see.

With cross-gender *casting*, however, we usually do not see the character out of his or her disguise, nor do we get to see the transformation itself. Because there is no narrative package to guide the viewer's reading, this kind of cross-gender performance could potentially provoke a much wider range of readings. Straayer considers the fairly convincing cross-gender casting used in queer and art films of the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. *Hairspray* [New Line Cinema, February 1988], *Orlando* [Adventure Pictures, June 1993]) and argues that the effect depends upon when the spectator discovers the "true" gender of the performer—if it is during or after the performance, it can "provide a radical unmasking of culturally defined gender and sexual stereotyping" and also provoke "a shifting of sexual responses"; if the spectator is clued in before, they view the performance much like a "temporary transvestite" film.³⁶

However, in the early twentieth century, cross-gender casting was a mainstream practice in theater, vaudeville, and, for a short time, in moving pictures and it was generally not considered to have the kinds of radical effects that Straayer describes.³⁷ Many times, the gender performance was deliberately unconvincing. This was played for comedy when white men impersonated black "wenches," white "old maids," or mannish suffragists in theater and early cinema. Female performers often kept their gender visible, though, when playing dramatic male roles (e.g. Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet or Elsie Leslie as Little Lord Fauntleroy) in order to call attention to their acting skills and to create an idealized, androgynous character. Genteel male impersonators like Vesta Tilley likewise combined feminine and masculine qualities (Tilley, for instance, sang in a soprano register).³⁸ In comedic, "lower" theatrical forms like burlesque, comic opera, and extravaganza, women donned tight-fitting male costumes that served to display their decidedly female bodies in novel and attractive ways.³⁹ (This practice was mainly adopted by European rather than American filmmakers, although it also appears in the three Oz films directed by L. Frank Baum and released in 1914).⁴⁰ Many of these cross-dressing performance practices made the "real" body of the performer just as visible as the "temporary transvestite" mode and used the visible disjuncture to achieve an array of effects.

However, a subset of these performances employed a genuinely convincing style of gender impersonation, mobilizing a range of theatrical and everyday technologies of the body (including, for example, makeup, grooming, and posture) to present the feigned gender as utterly persuasive. In these cases, the way the body is read is much more contingent upon the extratextual information the viewer has, as Straayer notes, but also on the viewer's experience reading gendered bodies. In a way, moving pictures were better suited to gender detection, because film actors' identities were suppressed for so long, but it was also possible for little-known live performers to achieve this effect. Very convincing gender impersonation generates a range of spectatorial possibilities: a viewer could see one gender but know another; she could see

one gender but then be shown belatedly that it is not real; she could see two genders and not know which is real; or she could see a single gender and never realize that it wasn't real. Julian Eltinge, one of the most famous female impersonators of all time, is an example of this first case. His fame ensured that spectators knew his "real" gender but his performances were nonetheless considered absolutely convincing. He was celebrated for his virtuosity and for embodying an ideal of bourgeois womanhood.⁴¹ He even started a women's cosmetics line. Interestingly, in the Eltinge films I have seen or found descriptions of, he was always only in "temporary transvestite" roles.⁴² Although many male and female impersonators, like Tilley, made multiple levels of gender visible, others, like Annie Hindle and Tilton, were known for their realistic style.⁴³ Protean artists like Eduardo Fregoli were also praised for their utterly convincing disguises.⁴⁴

In pre-1913 cinema, however, convincing cross-gender casting risked being missed by spectators (as in the case of Foster). Although the mannish old maids were not particularly convincing women, we might count them in this category of spectatorship because women also frequently played these parts and a spectator might have had a hard time determining which was which. More often, however, there were just brief moments of convincing cross-gender performance within "temporary transvestite" films. In *A Woman* (Essanay, July 1915), for instance, Charlie Chaplin's tramp character shaves his trademark moustache and disguises himself as a woman in order to distract his girlfriend's father. Unlike most slapstick cross-dressing, which trades on the comic disjuncture between an obviously male body and outlandish female clothing (or vice versa), in this film Chaplin's disguise is utterly convincing for a single, lengthy close-up. Shot in a "glamour" style, with glowing white light, Chaplin's face is made up and posed to produce the visual impression of a beautiful woman, even as we can also recognize the star's distinctive features. When the film reverts to longer shots, Chaplin's expressions and awkward physicality make him appear once more as merely another slapstick comedian in a dress. Eltinge, too, looks startlingly convincing when disguised as a middle-aged woman in *An*



1.2 Publicity photograph for Julian Eltinge, circa 1906. From New York Public Digital Library.



1.3 Poster advertising Eltinge in 1914 play *Cousin Lucy*.

Adventuress (Fred J. Balshofer Production Company, April 1920) and *Madame Behave* (Christie Film Company, December 1925). (He appeared in at least seven feature films between 1917 and 1931, as well as Liberty War Bond promos.) While convincing cross-gender performance sometimes challenged spectators' visual mastery, it did not seem to provoke the kind of intense reactions that met later films that staged gender tricks on the spectator, such as the thrillers Kuhn discusses (*Psycho* [Alfred Hitchcock's Shamley Productions, August 1960], *Dressed to Kill* [Brighton Productions, July 1980]) or films about straight white men accidentally falling for transgender women of color (e.g. *The Crying Game* [Palace Pictures, November 1992], *M. Butterfly* [M. Butterfly Productions/Warner Brothers, October 1993]).⁴⁵

Although this study focuses on cross-gender performance, it is worth considering its relationship to cross-racial performance, which was just as (if not more) popular in theater, vaudeville, and cinema during this period. Gender surprise films are a variation on the much broader theme of the difficulty of accurately perceiving social identity in early cinema. Jacqueline Stewart, for instance, demonstrates that while early and transitional-era films "frequently foreground their ability to visually organize and manipulate signifiers of racial difference"—often making "black" characters, for instance, as dark as possible—a number of films staged scenarios of racial misrecognition and made visible the artificiality of cinema's conventions of racial representation (as when one man in blackface is meant to be "black" and another is meant to be a white man in disguise).⁴⁶ Likewise, in a section titled "Blind Old White Men," Susan Courtney argues that films such as *What Happened in the Tunnel* (Edison, November 1903) and *Mixed Babies* (June, AMB 1908) insist upon "the insufficiency of the white male look to the task of representing and enforcing a more abstract cultural gaze that sustains the dominant racial order."⁴⁷ And yet, as Courtney points out, we spectators can laugh at a character's mistaken perception because "we know"—that is, "because the camera and the cultural gaze it inscribes teach us the visual-racial 'truth' he fails to see." Unlike these racial misrecognition comedies, gender surprise films played their joke on the film spectator and only sometimes on the diegetic characters. And while the gag revealed cinema's conventions for producing visibly gendered bodies, it also paradoxically reaffirmed the camera's ability to reveal the truth through a closer view of the body, and of the face in particular.

Although these scenarios of racial and gender misrecognition are both part of a broader system of visually inscribing social difference, cross-racial performance as a structure is more complicated than cross-gender performance because race is not a binary system (despite attempts to make it such) and the grounds of a person's "race" are even less stable than their gender. While one's gender relies on myriad potentially contradictory factors, including various physiological indicators, psychological gender identity, and social recognition, "race" is even more fraught. Race is produced through a shifting triangulation of corporeal signs and ancestry, as well as language, religion, nationality, self-identification, and recognition by a racialized community. The "real" race of film actors (if there is such a thing) was less available to film viewers than their gender, as performers frequently changed their names and invented personal histories and family lineages. Light-skinned Chickasaw-American performer Jay Fox, for example, changed his name to the British/Welch "Edwin Carewe" when he entered show business and actor Noble Johnson identified variously as African-American or Native American throughout his fifty-year career.⁴⁸

In literature and history, narratives of racial passing were more well known than gender passing. Although these stories were occasionally adapted to film during the transitional era—Kalem and Vitagraph both released films entitled *The Octoroon* in 1913, for example, likely

based on Dion Boucicault's famous play—they were much more celebrated in later Hollywood films (e.g. *Imitation of Life* [Universal Pictures, November 1934] and [Universal Pictures, April 1959], *Pinky* [Twentieth Century Fox, November 1949]).⁴⁹ More common in silent film were comedic renditions of characters donning temporary racial disguises, such as *The Subpoena Server* (AMB, May 1906) and *A Close Call* (Biograph, May 1912), which Stewart analyzes.⁵⁰ Stewart argues that, “plots in which Blackness serves as a (temporarily) effective disguise seem to be few in number compared with those in which whites are blackened unknowingly or unwillingly (i.e., when they are drunk or asleep) with much more comic and negative consequences.”⁵¹ In a transitional-era comedy like *A Close Call*, however, which intends one blackface actor to be read as “actually” black and another to be feigning blackness, Stewart argues that, “preclassical cinema enables the viewer to confirm essentialist notions of Blackness even after it has exposed its own process of fabricating Blackness for the screen (i.e., showing whites apply the blackface mask).”⁵²

Cross-racial casting during the silent period was ubiquitous.⁵³ White performers regularly played black and “mulatto/a” characters (for comedic or ostensibly “naturalistic” effects), as well as Asian, Latino/a, and Native American characters. Non-white performers also played across race and ethnicity. For example, Japanese and Native American actors were “interchangeable” at the New York Motion Picture Corporation (NYMPC), argues Daisuke Miyao, noting that Japanese-American actor Sessue Hayakawa played Native American characters in films such as *Death Mask* (NYMPC, September 1914) and *The Last of the Line* (NYMPC, December 1914), while “some Sioux Indians played Japanese villagers in such films as *Wrath of the Gods*.”⁵⁴ Likewise, Spanish-American actor Antonio Moreno played not only “Latin Lovers” but also “white” characters (e.g. Frank Nelson in *Strongheart* [Biograph, March 1914]) and, once, a Native American (an “Indian” extra in *Iola's Promise* [Biograph, March 1912]). Non-white performers playing “white” characters were comparatively infrequent, however, and limited to light-skinned actors. Although Michael Rogin, Jacqueline Stewart, and Arne Lunde, among others, have done excellent work on cross-racial performance in cinema, there still has not (to my knowledge) been a thorough history of how these conventions shifted across the silent era.⁵⁵ My sense is that casting non-black actors in black roles became somewhat less common during the 1910s and 1920s. (Stewart, for instance, mentions a review from 1913 that asserted that, “the colored people are the best as real darkies”).⁵⁶ Eventually, non-white actors made up to look black became largely confined to nostalgic representations of stage minstrelsy (e.g. Fred Astaire in “Bojangles of Harlem” number in *Swing Time* [RKO, October 1936] and Judy Garland in “My Daddy Was a Minstrel Man” number in *Babes in Arms* [MGM, October 1939]).⁵⁷ “Yellowface” and what we might call “redface,” though, remained common until at least mid-century.⁵⁸

It was, however, fairly uncommon to combine cross-racial and cross-gender performance. Aside from blackface “wench” roles in vaudeville and film comedies, and a few cases of white women and girls playing black male roles, all the cross-gender performers and roles I have found in this period were “white.” People of color were, however, often depicted as having inappropriate gender expressions (Native American and black women were masculinized and Asian-American men feminized) but not disguised as the opposite gender. Racial stability would seem to permit the transgression of gender boundaries to be playful and harmless, and vice versa. Because this was a time in which civil rights and racial and ethnic conflicts were fairly intense, films that destabilized both race and gender might have been less able to transmute such conflicts into pleasurable entertainment. Additionally, perhaps the impression that people of color were already inappropriately gendered made it harder to achieve a comic, virtuosic, or idealized effect.

However, a more detailed history of the shifting styles of and attitude toward cross-racial casting could productively be put in dialogue with the history of cross-gender casting I trace in this study.⁵⁹

Silent cinema, drawing on contemporaneous performance practices, permitted a variety of pleasurable spectatorial positions regarding the cross-dressed body. Instances in which spectators did not have visual mastery over a performers' gender did not, however, seem to destabilize spectator conceptions of gender. In what follows, I will analyze the kinds of pleasures these particular performances held as well as the strategies cinema used to present gender "truth."

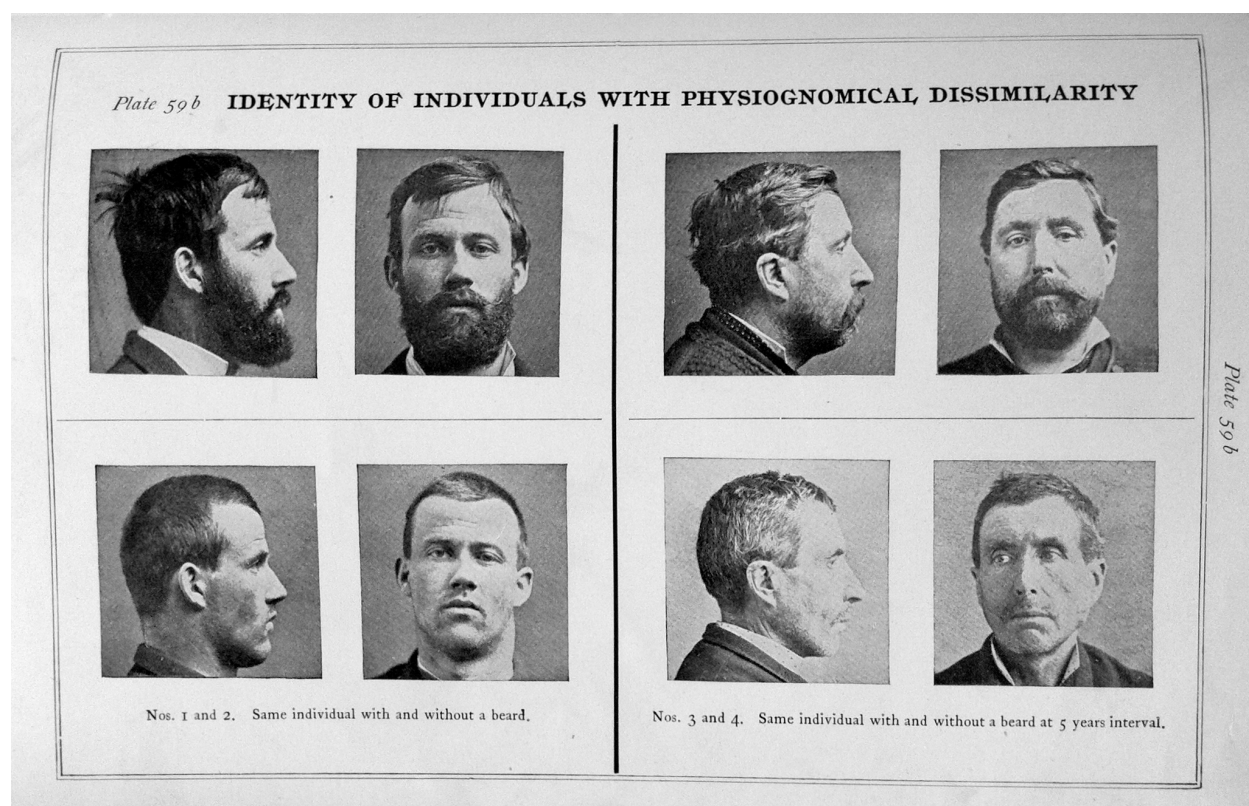
Detecting Gender

Popular entertainments such as protean artists, sister acts, and newspaper reports of female-bodied men offered spectacles of gender mobility but also invited spectators to scrutinize bodies for tell-tale signs that might point towards a performer's "real" gender. Trying to perceive the "real" body is only one of many possible responses to a cross-dressed performance, as I have suggested above, but is an important one to investigate, because it seems to have become a newly dominant response to changes in gendered identity in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, in line with a much broader cultural fascination with detection, and one that cinema's scopic regime was uniquely situated to exploit.

"The drama of modernity," film historian Tom Gunning notes in "Tracing the Individual Body" (1995), "creat[ed] new regimes of bodily discipline and regulation based upon a new observation of (and knowledge about) the body."⁶⁰ Gunning describes the way criminologists like Alphonse Bertillon turned a criminal's body into a series of signs (Bertillon calls it "signalizing"), in order to match reliably an apprehended body to an archive of previously incarcerated bodies (represented by frontal and profile photographs of the face and a series of facial and bodily measurements). Because criminals could change the length, color, and style of their hair, grow or remove facial hair, vary their facial expression, and scar or otherwise damage their skin, Bertillon instructed police to photograph and measure elements of the body that criminals would be "unconscious" of and unlikely to change—such as the size and shape of the nose and ears, the length of fingers and forearms, and the diameter of the head. Thus, says Gunning, "The body [becomes] a sort of unwilled speech, an utterance whose code is in the possession of a figure of authority rather than controlled by its enunciator."⁶¹ It is useful to think of the cross-dresser's body as "unwilled speech," although in cases of performative situations like theater, vaudeville, and cinema, this *seemingly* "unwilled speech" is actually often an effect that is consciously produced. Of police detection and detective fictions, Gunning remarks: "The drama of this new form of evidence lies less in stripping the criminal of his disguise [...] than in capturing the criminal in an act of unconscious revelation"—essentially seeing *through* the mutable elements to the fixed elements below.⁶² This is another important point that can be applied to cross-gender performance: the kind of visual evidence produced when an impersonator removes his or her hat or wig is a different level of revelation than the body observed *through* the disguise. In "temporary transvestite" films, for instance, diegetic characters invariably require the first kind of evidence, while film spectators rely on the second.

Bertillon illustrated the power of this mode of observation in a series of photographic plates at the end of *Signaletic Instructions*, an English-language guide published in Chicago, New York, and London in 1896. The mode of looking Bertillon encourages in this book was

becoming increasingly pervasive in modern culture and had application beyond the sphere of criminology; as the broad interest in detection suggests, such a scrutinizing gaze was simultaneously being mobilized for entertainment purposes by vaudeville performers and newspaper editors (although undoubtedly without knowing it). Using profile and frontal photographs of faces, Bertillon compares images of people who appear to be different from each other but are actually the same (often at different ages and with different facial hair) and images that seem to be of the same person but are actually of different people (identical twins, people with similar facial abnormalities, and people “of the same race”). Here is one example:



1.4 Plate 59b, from Alphonse Bertillon, *Signaletic Instructions: Including the Theory and Practice of Anthropometrical Identification*, Chicago, New York, and London: The Werner Company, 1896.

Although the men on top and bottom appear, at first glance, to be different people, if we look closer (and keep Bertillon’s instructions in mind), we can see the similarity of the eye shapes and brow ridges, the angles of the noses, and the shapes and sizes of the ears. The standardization of the position, framing, and distance between camera and subject makes it easier to see these similarities. Although Bertillon’s complete system required a series of anthropometric measurements, it was also intended to sensitize adherents’ powers of visual observation. These photographs invite readers to see if they can tell by looking whether the faces belong to the same individual or not.

Although Bertillon designed this system to identify individuals, this mode of reading the body was also relevant for the task of visually determining an individual’s “true” gender.⁶³

Cross-dressing, and its dynamic of “appearance” versus “essence,” is really a subset of disguise more generally (and was even prosecuted, in certain areas, under laws against public disguise more generally).⁶⁴ In fact, the link between cross-dressing and criminal disguise is explicit in an early female-to-male “temporary transvestite” film, *The Female Highwayman* (Selig, November 1906), in which a woman executes a series of robberies by donning and doffing a male disguise.⁶⁵ Typical of the “temporary transvestite” film, the spectator’s vision and knowledge is aligned with those of the masquerader, at least according to the film’s publicity bulletin, which assures readers that the protagonist’s transformations are “done in full view of the audience.” Just as Bertillon and scores of fictional detectives attempted to see *through* mutable, consciously-created appearances to an immutable, unconscious body, audiences could direct a detecting gaze toward cross-dressed performer, hoping to discern visually his or her “real” gender identity.⁶⁶ I don’t mean to imply that popular audiences would have been aware of Bertillon’s work, but that they were activating a similar mode of observation and interpretation that, as Gunning notes, emerged with the culture of modernity.

The chance to engage in sophisticated gender detection was the precise appeal of one touring vaudeville act described in a scrapbook at the San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design.⁶⁷ “This act,” announced one vaudeville critic, “has mystified even the sharpest-eyed Sherlock Holmeses.”⁶⁸ The performer, who went by the name “Lucille Tilton” or sometimes only “Tilton,” was a protean artist who impersonated a series of male and female characters in rapid succession, singing in alternately bass and soprano ranges. He or she appeared in vaudeville programs throughout the country between 1910 and 1917, primarily in small and medium-sized towns. Unlike most protean artists (such as Leopold Fregoli, the most famous protean artist of the late nineteenth century, whom Matthew Solomon has discussed), Tilton did not reveal to audiences or journalists what his or her “true” gender identity was.⁶⁹ “Man or Woman, Which?” questioned newspaper advertisements. Headlines announced: “Question of Sex Puzzles Patrons,” “Sex Problem to Solve at Lumberg,” and “One Act Has Them All Guessing and Nobody Can Solve It—See if You Can.”⁷⁰ This direct challenge to newspaper readers to “see if you can” solve the question of Tilton’s sex was common. Many reviews even featured a photograph of Tilton in male garb, thereby allowing readers to test their gender detection skills then and there. A version of the following photograph appeared in more than twenty newspapers across the country:



1.5 “Tilton—The Mystery—At the [??] Tonight.” From “Question of Sex Puzzles Patrons,” publication unknown, September 29, 1914. Lucille Tilton Scrapbook, San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design

Since photographic reproduction preserves unconscious details of a body, unlike earlier modes of newspaper illustration, this image allowed newspaper readers to inspect Tilton’s face and body for signs of his or her “real” gender. The ambiguity of the photographed body visually posed the “sex problem” that audiences were challenged to solve. If readers could not come to a satisfying conclusion by examining the still, black-and-white image, they could come to the theater and examine Tilton in person (where he or she would be in motion, in color, and in a shared space, although at a distance).

Although some reviewers tipped readers off to their own “solution” to this “sex problem” with their choice of pronouns (usually “she,” although some used only “he”), more common were reviews that struggled linguistically to maintain the gender ambiguity of the act. The following description is typical:

[T]housands who have seen him—or is it her?—at the Strand this week cannot make up their minds that she is a boy or that he is a girl; [...] in his opening number he appears in female attire, a marvelous achievement for a man, [...] in a flash she is on the stage again in male clothes, and she wears them perfectly [...] the climax comes just as Tilton is leaving the stage; off comes a hat disclosing the long hair and with relief you decide that he is a woman; with a wrench she pulls off the wig of long hair and you see a head of black hair, close cropped like a boy; and with a broad wink he, or she, is gone[.]⁷¹

The writer emphasizes the sense of masquerade by referring to Tilton as the opposite pronoun to the persona he or she was enacting at the time (“*he* appears in female attire,” “*she* is [...] in male clothes”) and switches between pronouns, mimicking the gendered to-and-fro of the act for the reader. Other journalists used similar tactics, switching pronouns, using the neuter pronoun “it,”

repeating “he or she,” or avoiding pronouns altogether.⁷² (One example of this verbal stuttering, from the *Hartford Courant*, is: “Then he—that is, she—well, whatever he (she) is [...].”)⁷³

Tilton intentionally confused the usual moment of revelation in impersonator acts, in which a male impersonator would remove a hat to reveal long hair, or a female impersonator remove a wig to reveal short hair, by combining them. This reviewer experiences what would seem to be the final revelation, the removal of a hat to display the performer’s long hair, as a “relief.” In this moment, the spectator feels that he has finally achieved visual mastery and established the gender of the indeterminate figure. We often assume that this anchor is what allows gender masquerading in popular entertainment to be pleasurable. In this case, however, Tilton pulls off a second revelation, removing a wig of long hair, a physical signifier that conventionally guarantees female identity in impersonation acts (as in so many “temporary transvestite” films), to reveal short hair. At this point, Tilton leaves the stage, leaving the spectator to wonder if, like a Russian doll, the layers might continue on indefinitely. This double reveal displays how artificial the conventional signs of “truth” are. The appeal of Tilton’s act was precisely this suspension between possibilities—the challenge to detect a body that continually exceeded these attempts.⁷⁴ We might wonder how an act that refused to anchor the performer’s “real” gender identity was received so positively—particularly when other forms of feminine performance like burlesque were so contentious. As gender impersonation and protean artistry was commonly perceived to have been played out by the mid-1910s, Tilton was likely considered a novel variation on very well established tropes. Unlike burlesque artists, Tilton avoided sexual innuendo or overly revealing, sexualized displays of his or her body. Furthermore, his or her white racial status was never in question. While these factors all placed Tilton within the sphere of genteel entertainment, the positive response to his or her gender instability supports Gunning’s more recent assertion that, “The detective story [...] participates in a modern visual culture aware of the attractions of hiding as well as seeking, of the failure of insight as well as its successes.”⁷⁵

In most live performance (unlike early cinema), it was relatively easier for audiences to determine the “real” gender of a performer. Programs and advertisements informed audiences of a performer’s identity before the show began; here that avenue is intentionally refused. However, because both performer and audience member were present in the same building at the same time, a curious viewer could wait for the performer at the stage door. This granted the audience member much closer proximity to the body in question, the opportunity to see and hear it up close and perhaps also touch or smell it. It also seemed to offer access to the performer when he or she was not performing. However, performers clearly manufactured their off-stage personae as carefully as their on-stage performances, so there was no guarantee of access to the “true” identity—although I have not encountered any other performers who managed to maintain such ambiguity about their gender identity. In Tilton’s case, “not even the stage hands are in on the secret,” wrote one critic. “Sometimes she issues forth from her dressing rooms in male clothes, and sometimes in female attire.”⁷⁶ The critic imagines that the stagehands, as occupants of “behind the scenes” space and instruments of stage illusion, would have unique insight into the “real” body of the performer—but in this case the assumption is not borne out.

However, cross-gender performances that provided an unambiguous solution to the “Sex Problem” presented by the act were more common (and perhaps more consistently pleasurable) than performances like Tilton’s. Most protean artists and gender impersonators made their real gender identity clear in publicity and ended their acts with a genuine de-wigging (or de-hatting) to confirm visually the gender that spectators already, at least in some sense, knew. Likewise, in

Tilton's earlier years, newspapers declared Tilton to be a woman and "America's Most Realistic Impersonator of Male Types."⁷⁷ (Although it seems likely that Tilton was female, as these early reviews proclaim, as historians we cannot actually determine Tilton's "real" gender.⁷⁸ But when Tilton was advertised as being unproblematically female, I will refer to him or her as such.) Many newspapers published a composite photograph of Tilton in male and female garb (Figure 1.6), inviting readers to compare the two faces, much like Bertillon's readers. The astonishing thing about the photograph is that the faces are so alike (emphasized by the similarity of the expression, posture, and lighting) but also signal opposing genders fairly convincingly. Informed by the caption that these figures are both female, we could read the softness of the boy's face and delicacy of his features and lips as "giveaways" of the performer's "real" gender, but without this extra-textual information the conclusion would not be as assured.

This composite photograph tests the gender mutability of the body in a way that was also exploited in some vaudevillian sister acts. Duos like *Tempest and Sunshine* and the *Duncan Sisters* played on the tension between genetically similar (if not entirely identical) bodies and performed difference (gender in the first case and race in the second) (Figures 1.7 and 1.8). In a live protean performance, opposing personae had to be presented sequentially and audience members had to compare the current persona with their memory of the previous ones. The composite newspaper photograph removed the time delay, allowing viewers to compare the two personae side-by-side, but only by arresting the image and evacuating color and co-presence. The sister act, on the other hand, allowed viewers to compare two live, moving bodies side-by-side, but the bodies could not therefore be actually the same one. Cinema, as we will see, had the unique ability to allow viewers to compare the same body, in male and female guises, and in motion.

Interestingly, newspaper readers were also encouraged to examine everyday gender performance with a skeptical eye through strategic publicity Tilton exploited in a number of towns during the first years of her act. One newspaper announced "A Chance to Do Some Little Detective Stunt."⁷⁹ Another described it as such:

The ladies, and the laddies, too, will have an opportunity at noon or thereabouts today, to exercise their ability to discern a girl's figure in male attire, when the petite Lucille Tilton, the little lady playing male impersonation roles at the Lyric vaudeville theater this week, will leave that playhouse garbed in her best rah-rah boy suit and meander down Main street unabashed to one of the dry goods houses. [...] So adept is she in the matter of makeup, and so closely is she able to ape the gait and manners of the average young man of today, she thinks, that she challenges anyone to call her bluff and tell her she's it. Lucille's to wear the real things—not the harem skirt, the theater management announced. Police won't interfere.⁸⁰

The stunt explicitly asked readers to test their "ability to discern a girl's figure in male attire." The implication is that game-players would examine *all* the young men on Main Street that day to try and detect a flaw in their performance of masculinity. The review frames the test as a temporary extension of stage performance and viewing practices to the street, but it actually reveals that the skills and pleasures of viewing gendered appearances skeptically could quite easily be transferred to real life.

Compounding this potential instability of real-life gender identity was the regular appearance of articles revealing that real-life "men" were sometimes discovered "actually" to be women.⁸¹ Typical headlines announced "Woman Who Lived Thirty Years as a Man" and



1.6 “Lucille Tilton,” publication and date unknown.



1.7 Florence Tempest (left) and Marion Sunshine (right), from ONE Gay and Lesbian Archive, Los Angeles.



1.8 Vivian Duncan (left) and Rosetta Duncan (right) as “Topsy and Eva,” from *Theatre Magazine* (July 1925).

“Amazing Double Life of Girl Who Lived For Years as Man.”⁸² These reports dated back at least to the nineteenth century, the most famous being prominent New York politician Murray Hall, who was discovered to have a female body when he/she died in 1901. Reports of women passing as men were also common in fictional and journalistic accounts of California and Alaska gold mining and ranch life.⁸³ Although it was against the law in many places to disguise one’s gender, these reports were usually quite admiring. Even the wives and girlfriends of these female men were not pathologized.

The gender uncertainty that these “masqueraders” must have produced for people who knew them could be adapted into a visual game for newspaper readers. Although most reports either were not illustrated or used hand-drawn illustrations, a series of articles in a Chicago socialist newspaper, *The Day Book*, in 1914 included photographs that, like those of Tilton, invited readers to test their gender detection skills. The newspaper sympathetically reported the story of Cora Anderson, who had been living for thirteen years as a Ralph Kerwinieo, pointing out the difficult economic situation of single women of color in Chicago and expressing admiration for his/her successful masquerade.⁸⁴ Anderson/Kerwinieo even wrote two articles providing “insider” information about men’s real attitudes toward women. These examples from newspapers and the vaudeville stage suggest that multiple sites of popular entertainment were encouraging audiences to adopt a skeptical, detecting stance toward gender, a skill that could be applied not only to explicitly cross-dressed performers, but individuals in everyday life. The mass reproduction of photographs in newspapers in particular encouraged readers to compare and contrast faces in a manner similar to the one Bertillon encouraged police detectives to adopt—although without the authority of the state behind them. Journalists and theater managers framed these gender masquerades as a playful visual game that viewers who cultivated their visual detective skills could ostensibly master, thus undercutting the potential anxiety of bodies becoming untethered from their assigned gender at a time when gender roles were becoming increasingly malleable in public as well as private life.



1.9 “Cora Anderson, from a photograph taken when she was acting the man,” from *The Day Book* (May 15, 1914).



1.10 “Cora Anderson as Ralph Kerwinieo; Cora Anderson in Real Life,” from *The Day Book* (May 13, 1914).

Detecting Gender in Film

Earlier “temporary transvestite” films, like films more generally, presented bodies in long or medium-long shots (keeping at least three quarters of the performer’s body in view). Like the plays that preceded them, many films made characters’ gender disguise unconvincing in ways that would register at a distance: clothes that didn’t fit, makeup that remained unchanged, exaggerated, burlesqued versions of gendered movement, and failing to perform the most basic of gendered tasks. This is typical of romantic comedies like *College Chums* (Edison, December 1907), *The Woman from Mellons* (Biograph, February 1910), *Taming a Husband* (Biograph, February 1910), and *Making a Man of Her* (Nestor, November 1912).⁸⁵ In the first three examples, the cross-dressed figure ensures that the “right” heterosexual couple gets together, unencumbered by fathers or rival suitors; in the final one, a young woman breaches the homosociality of Western ranch life, setting off a chain reaction of heterosexual coupling. The structure reassures spectators that “real” gender is obvious and does not engage a detecting gaze.


However, in dramatic uses of cross-gender casting, such as the ever-popular Civil War girl soldier (e.g. *The Girl Spy: An Incident of the Civil War* [Kalem, March 1909], *The Girl Spy Before Vicksburg* [Kalem, December 1910], and *The House With Closed Shutters* [Biograph, August 1910]), the disguise could be quite convincing. The point of these films was not to stop and examine the cross-dressed body for gender “tells,” but to admire the performer and character’s remarkable capacities—for achieving a male appearance, but also for running, riding, and swimming. These male skills allow the heroines ultimately to save the lives of an entire regiment, or at least (in *House*) their honor. These films, which I analyze further in Chapter 3, acknowledge the possibility of gender dissimulation, but do not ask spectators to “detect” the masquerader’s real gender. They rely on the narrative framing rather than the image to establish the figure’s gender. *A Range Romance* (Bison, December 1911) falls between these two poles; like those films, it consists only of long and medium long shots, but the relative convincingness of the disguised protagonists’ costume shifts. At first it is quite persuasive—she wears little makeup and loose-fitting clothes, but as her romance with the foreman develops, she becomes increasingly feminized, visually establishing the heterosexuality of this relationship (although the foreman still thinks she is a boy). For all these films, spectators “detect” the gender of the disguised characters only in the most elementary way. The analytic gaze cultivated by the entertainments discussed above was not engaged.

However, gender surprise films demonstrated that gender was not automatically readable and that the camera could produce a “false” gender as easily as a “real” one. Situations of mistaken perception were common in early cinema, as a number of scholars have pointed out.⁸⁶ In early cinema, belated gender revelation usually involved female impersonators. In *Par le trou de serrure* [*Peeping Tom*] (1901), for instance, a bellboy peers through a keyhole and sees what appears to be a middle-aged, highly made-up woman. Through a keyhole-shaped mask, we watch the “woman” wipe off her makeup, reach into her brassiere and remove two large pads, and then pull off a wig to reveal short, dark hair. This de-wigging, as I mentioned, was a standard gesture used to affirm maleness (although, as with we saw with Tilton, it was not always reliable). The film establishes the performer’s body as male by showing him systematically remove, in plain sight, corporeal signifiers of femaleness. In that sense it is akin to the first mode of visual evidence Gunning describes—the physical removal of the disguise. (Never mind that a “real” woman could conceivably have short hair, wrinkled skin, and small breasts.)


A fundamentally different mode of revelation occurs when the film spectator is guided to see *through* the disguise. In this case, the elements of the disguise do not fundamentally change—the spectator’s vision does. The most well known example of this occurs in *Meet Me at the Fountain* (Lubin, November 1904), a parody of Biograph’s *Personal* (June 1904) and Edwin S. Porter’s extremely similar *How a French Nobleman Got a Wife Through the New York Herald ‘Personal’ Columns* (August, 1904).⁸⁷ *Meet Me at the Fountain*, a typical chase comedy, shows a foppish French aristocrat pursued by a hoard of women hoping to marry him. Throughout most of the films we see these women—many of them tall, awkward, and ungainly—in a series of long shots. Only at the very end do we cut to a medium shot of the woman who has caught the aristocrat. In this closer view we can see that this woman is played by a middle-aged man wearing a wig and dress. Some spectators may have recognized this “woman” as Gilbert Sarony, a female impersonator who had appeared in at least five films for Edison and Lubin by this point.⁸⁸ Most of Sarony’s earlier films had consisted of a single, close shot of his face (the bulletin for *Goo Goo Eyes* [January 1903], for example, noted that the film was “[t]aken close so that the head covers the picture”), allowing viewers to see easily the performer’s wrinkled, gaunt face, flat chest, and arm hair, as well as his humorous facial expressions. Although in *Meet Me at the Fountain*, the viewer could have suspected earlier that a male-bodied performer played this woman, the close-up functions to confirm beyond a doubt that this is so. It is this mobilizing of the close-up as a tool of gender “truth” that I want to examine in more detail in a film that perpetrates a more elaborate gender deception, *The Boy Detective*.

In *The Boy Detective*, unlike these previous examples, the gender disguise is layered—the film sets viewers up to expect one spectatorial situation (the visual mastery typical of the “temporary transvestite” mode) and then, at the last minute, delivers another situation (a gender “reveal” through a medium shot).⁸⁹ This layering helps us see more clearly how film marks certain elements of gender as “performative” and others as “real”—and specifically how a gender initially presented as real could be undone by presenting another gender as “more” real. In a series of long shots, we first see a newsboy win what looks like a pistol from a friend in a dice game, but the friend shows him (and us) that it is really only a cigarette case. The newsboy notices two men plotting to kidnap a wealthy young woman. He runs across town to warn her and they agree to disguise him in her clothing. When the kidnappers attack the woman’s carriage, the disguised newsboy steps out and holds them at bay with his “pistol” until the police arrive and arrest them. In an emblematic coda, we see the newsboy from the waist up in front of a grey canvas backdrop. He mimes shooting directly at the camera (à la *The Great Train Robbery* [Edison, December 1903]), then to the left and right, and laughs. Looking directly at the camera, he opens the faux pistol, lights a cigarette, and continues to chuckle. Only during this final sequence do we realize that the newsboy is played by a young woman. While the narrative of the film revolves around characters’ misperception, the final shot reveals that the film spectators have misperceived as well. Viewers could have left the film astonished or chagrined that their own skills of detection were so easily deceived or they may have stayed to watch the film again to see if they could detect the boy’s female body in the earlier images. The unscheduled variety format of the nickelodeon allowed audiences to come and go as they pleased, making repeat viewings possible.

This additional layer of gender dissimulation is not mentioned in the publicity bulletin or the advertisement in *New York Clipper*, a weekly entertainment newspaper that was later absorbed into the entertainment journal *Variety*:



Biograph Films



Trade Mark. **A THRILLER** Trade Mark.

The Boy Detective

or, THE ABDUCTORS FOILED

With "THE BOY DETECTIVE" we start a series, which will be presented periodically, of film stories recounting the experiences of Swipesy, the newsboy, whose astute sagacity wins for him fame as a juvenile Sherlock Holmes. The first of the series issued this week, is *The Abductors Foiled*, and tells of the thwarting of a plan to abduct the daughter of a wealthy broker by a couple of villains. The scheme is well laid, and has every evidence of being carried out, but the ubiquitous Swipesy is on hand, and, disguised as the girl, is seized in her stead, and holds the infamous wretches at bay until the arrival of the police, with what appears to be a pistol, but nothing more harmful than a cigarette case.

LENGTH, 500 FEET.

1.11 Advertisement: Biograph Films, *New York Clipper* (March 14, 1908).

The synopsis describes the detective's temporary transvestism and the true nature of the "pistol," but the protagonist himself is described simply as a "newsboy." No hint of the cross-gender casting is given. This was common with girls playing boy roles, as the practice was quite conventional, but in a film about dissimulation and detection that absence is more striking. Likewise, a review of the film in *Moving Picture World* recounted the plot outlined in the publicity bulletin but did not mention the final emblematic close-up (nor did the critic cast judgment on the film).⁹⁰ Charlie Keil argues that the film's loose narrative structure, which relies heavily on a chase sequence, is typical of films at the beginning of the transitional era.⁹¹ Matthew Solomon, on the other hand, emphasizes the way the film uses tropes of the dime novel to appeal to working-class viewers and yet frames the working-class boy as a rescuer of white, bourgeois womanhood to appeal to middle-class viewers.⁹² Whereas films like *Meet Me At the Fountain* poked fun at anxieties over the ostensible masculinity of the new woman and the femininity of the modern male without providing any kind of resolution, in *The Boy Detective* cross-dressing facilitates the restoration of order and lawfulness even as the disguise destabilizes a secure sense of gender legibility.

Like many detective stories, the film revolves around mistaken perception. The criminals mistake the disguised Swipesy for the girl they hope to kidnap and the cigarette case for a pistol. The girl fails to notice the two men following her or to overhear their plotting. However, we the viewers and Swipesy see all of this. The film is set up to make us believe that we, like the detective, have uniquely privileged vision. Furthermore, the advertisement, the film's title, and the film image itself all leads us to believe that Swipesy—the character and presumably the performer—is male. The gender "reveal" at the end is more complex than the final shot of *Meet Me at the Fountain* because it occurs more gradually (at least in my experience) and it disrupts the visual mastery that had been so carefully established earlier in the film. I want to analyze here how this "reveal" actually works—what is it that we see that makes us "know" that this

body is female? What made us think that this female body was male in the first place? Kuhn and Straayer describe how unconvincing disguise allows a spectator to see a performer's "real" gender, but they do not discuss in any detail which specific corporeal signs spectators draw upon to determine this gender. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any contemporaneous reviews of this film, so I must speculate about what a historical viewer's experience of this film might have been like based on the intertexts outlined above and my own reactions to the film.⁹³

In its opening moments, the film uses *mise-en-scène* to encourage spectators to read Swipse as male. We judge the age, class, and gender of the figures—young, working-class, and male—based on their clothing (trousers, jackets and caps), location (an urban street), size (small), and posture and activity (crouched over playing dice). Because the camera is fairly far away, we cannot easily observe their physiognomy or facial expressions, but we can see that they both have short, dark hair and white skin. Although the film itself never tells us the characters' names, AMB's publicity bulletin identifies the messenger boy (the one in front) as "Swifty" and the newsie (the one in back) as "Swipse," and I will use these names for clarity.⁹⁴



1.12 and 1.13 Opening shot of *The Boy Detective*. Swifty (front) plays dice with Swipse (back).

On one level, the spectator reads these signs correctly—within the diegesis, both figures are supposed to be young, lower class boys. The question is: what conclusions does the spectator draw about the "real" body displayed onscreen? The audience invariably knows that the performers are actors and not a newsie or a messenger boy. Class and occupation could thus be donned and doffed through costume and performance style. Race is a bit trickier—cross-racial casting was common, but performers of color rarely played white characters. Richard Dyer has described the way that orthochromatic film stock of this period rendered red and yellow tones as black, so white skin appeared much darker on film.⁹⁵ This effect was "corrected" by applying thick, bluish-white makeup to actors' skin and by lighting them with painfully bright carbon-arc lamps. On film, whiteness was not naturally visible—it had to be self-consciously produced. This is even the case with later film stocks, as Dyer points out; getting white skin to look "right" is the index by which film stocks apparently continue to be gauged.⁹⁶ Thus, the whiteness of "white" performers had to be self-consciously manufactured in order to be visible on camera. This was also the case, as I will argue, with femaleness.⁹⁷ In this scene, we can see clearly the boys' shining white skin, an effect that was consciously produced, but that audiences likely read as an accurate index of the performers' race.

If we examine these images with the knowledge that Swipsey is a woman, we notice that her small stature is in fact produced by having her crouch over (even when her companion stands, in the right image) and by positioning her farther away from the camera. Her body is also partially obscured by his. Later, when Swipsey runs behind the villains, he stays somewhat crouched. This posture is narratively justified because he is “sneaking” behind them. Engaging in detection helps the female identity of the performer elude detection. Potential corporeal signs of femaleness are consciously obscured: the large shirt and jacket hides the actor’s breasts (which may also be bound); her hair is cut short (or else well concealed); and we can see no signs of feminizing makeup (such as lipstick or eyeshadow), although she is undoubtedly wearing white makeup on her face. Although the film shows us that the pistol that Swipsey wins from his friend is actually only a cigarette case, we have no cause to doubt the gender identity of either boy. Throughout the rest of the film, Swipsey is filmed only in long shots and generally in motion: excitedly eavesdropping on the villains, running through town to warn the endangered girl, and donning the girl’s clothing in order to impersonate her.

The scene in which Swipsey dresses in the girl’s clothes would seem to reassure spectators that we—unlike the villains—are not in danger of being fooled by a cross-gender performance. Like many “temporary transvestite” films, we see the character first in his “real” gender and then part of the transformation. Swipsey puts on the girl’s jacket and then gets his foot stuck in the skirt. He then exits the frame and returns wearing the complete outfit. His impersonation of femininity is exaggerated and unconvincing; he burlesques the movements of a



1.14 and 1.15 Swipsey dons the wealthy girl’s clothes and cavorts around the room.

fancy lady. All these elements help us see the boy beneath the disguise and are typical of “temporary transvestite” films. Interestingly, the female clothes are layered on top of the boy clothes (we even see the maid roll the boy’s pants up so that the cuffs are not visible beneath the skirt). Although this may be a nod to propriety (not wanting to depict two women alone in a house with a nude, working-class boy), it also establishes the male clothes as Swipsey’s base identity and the female clothes as an added layer of disguise. However, knowing that the performer is not actually male, we can see that displaying his femininity as explicitly performative in this scene functions to naturalize the character’s masculinity. The scene of self-conscious, diegetic cross-dressing reassures the spectators that cross-gender performance is comedic and unrealistic—that we are in possession of a detecting gaze that might readily see through such a performance even as we remain unaware that we have failed to see.

When the kidnappers open the carriage door, the disguised Swipsey holds them at bay with the “pistol,” until police arrive and arrest them. We then cut to a medium shot of Swipsey in

front of a canvas backdrop. As in *Meet Me at the Fountain*, the concluding view permits us to see suddenly through the character's costume to the incorrectly gendered body beneath. However, in *The Boy Detective*, this "reveal" does not necessarily happen all at once—the boy's body becomes increasingly feminized as the shot progresses. The actor progressively undoes all the film's visual scams for the spectator. I have reproduced six images from this final shot on the next page in order to give a better sense of this progression. In the first moments of this shot, Swipsey scrunches up his face, distorting "his" features. Although this expression may be meant to approximate a "tough outlaw," it also prevents us from seeing the facial features clearly (somewhat like the protagonist of *Subject for the Rogues Gallery* [AMB, February 1904] who makes grotesque faces to avoid having an incriminating photograph taken). As the shot begins, we might think that we are seeing a heavy male actor who playing younger than he is. However, by the second faux gunshot, we can more clearly discern the pencil-thin eyebrows and darkened lips. When he/she throws his/her head back and laughs (Figure 1.18), the face becomes fully feminized. (This laugh may also be intended to defuse anxiety by framing the gender fraud as a playful joke.) Makeup, lighting, and the actor's expression make her high, round cheeks visible. The roundness of her face, which had been apparent throughout the film, now becomes a sign of her femaleness. As Swipsey takes a cigarette and lights it, we continue to see the thin eyebrows and prominent cheekbones. The lapel of her jacket bulges out on her left side, suggesting the presence of a breast. This sequence is fairly quick and viewers would have interpreted these signs quite unconsciously, aware only that they suddenly saw a girl, where before they saw a boy. This sequence likely prompted viewers to question retrospectively their memory of the gender signs that prompted them to read the figure as male in the first place and, possibly, stay for the next show to see if they could hone their gender detection skills. In the very final image, the "boy" detective smiles and pats the "pistol," her round face, cheekbones, thin eyebrows, and ample chest clearly visible. Matthew Solomon takes this scene to indicate a shared joke between street urchin and spectator. But the joke here is *on* the spectator. Swipsey—or rather, the actress playing Swipsey—has deceived the spectator throughout and revels here in displaying her accomplishment. The fact that she pats a pistol is particularly significant, symbolic of phallic power—yet it need not be "real" to be effective.

The closer camera position seems to offer a "truer" vision of the human body—one that dramatically reveals our misperception throughout the film. Through a tighter framing and by evacuating all other visual information, the film focuses our attention on this particular body and forces us to look more closely. Emblematic final shots like this were common, as moving pictures shifted from attractions to narrative integration. These concluding views offered spectators a spectacle of a body (or bodies) in excess of narrative. Interestingly, however, the bodies in the final shots were not always the same as the ones in the earlier narrative section. In *Mixed Babies*, for example, a comedy in which a black baby and a white baby get switched and then returned to their parents, Stewart points out that, in the final shot of the reunited mothers and babies, the "white actress in blackface playing the character of a Black mother during the body of the film is replaced by a Black actress in the film's final shot [...] [and] it is not clear that the white mother in the closing shot is the same white actress who appears throughout the film."⁹⁸ Both *Mixed Babies* and *A Boy Detective* were released by the same studio in the same year and the final shot of each film seems to function according to a similar logic of display: the figures are closer to the camera than in earlier scenes, and stand or sit in front of a blank grey backdrop (the *same* background?). However, the actress in the final shot of *A Boy Detective* seems to be the same as the one who appears throughout the film. Both films revolve around



1.16 Swipsey mimes a shot toward the audience...



1.17 ...mimes two more shots, toward frame right and frame left...



1.18 ...laughs and opens the pistol...



1.19 ...revealing a case full of cigarettes bearing the words "Take One." Swipsey puts a cigarette in his/her mouth...



1.20 ...lights the cigarette and closes the case...



1.21 ...then pats the pistol while looking directly into the camera.

misperception, but in *Mixed Babies* racial difference is always visible to the film spectator whereas in *A Boy Detective* gender difference is not.

Film theorist Béla Balázs has famously argued that silent film re-taught the masses “the art of reading faces.”⁹⁹ Rather like Bertillon, Balázs hoped to inculcate a new way of seeing; he believed that the close-up could “teach[] us to see the intricate visual details of life as one reads an orchestral score.”¹⁰⁰ Although Balázs emphasizes the lyrical aspects of this process, he also asserts that: “one of the tasks of the film is to show us, by means of ‘microphysiognomics,’ how much of what is in our faces is our own and how much of it is the common property of our family, nation or class.”¹⁰¹ We could add gender to this list. Balázs even begins to sound like Bertillon when he asserts: “‘Microphysiognomics’ can show, behind the faces we can control, those other faces which we cannot influence because they have already hardened into anatomy.”¹⁰²

In *The Boy Detective*, a closer view of the body is proffered not as a way to access psychological or spiritual interiority, but to encourage spectators to read corporeal signs more precisely. Early film theorist Hugo Münsterberg noted that in theater, viewers had always had the option of examining a performer more closely through opera glasses.¹⁰³ But this kind of “close-up,” he explains, operates outside the structure of the work—the director, actor, or set-maker cannot ultimately control it. Furthermore, stage makeup and gestures designed to register at a distance break down when seen through opera glasses. Rosy cheeks, wrinkled foreheads, and shadowed jaws become only so much greasepaint. In theater, we could imagine the closer view offered by this self-directed visual technology made visible the artificiality of the actor’s appearance. In cinema, in contrast, filmmakers decided precisely how far the camera is from the actor and could guide the makeup, costume, and gestures accordingly.¹⁰⁴

Although the film seems to destabilize vision and the camera’s truthfulness, the final close-up ultimately supports the “fundamentalism of the body” Kuhn describes and the camera’s ability to see through appearances. According to this logic, the film camera can position spectators close enough to the performers’ body for us to see the “real” body beneath the misleading appearance. However, this logic obscures the fact that this body is *crafted*, both by film technology and by everyday and theatrical technologies of the body. In this case, for example, the actress’s eyebrows have been tweezed and penciled in, her cheekbones are accented by lighting, makeup, and expression and her lips darkened by lipstick.¹⁰⁵

It is worth taking a quick step back to consider how the face is crafted by a variety of conscious and unconscious technologies. Many people consider post-pubescent male and female faces to be naturally, visibly different. Male faces supposedly have a heavier brow ridge, bushier eyebrows, a larger and wider nose, coarser skin, and a squarer chin.¹⁰⁶ Female faces allegedly have fuller cheeks, more forward projection in their cheekbones, fuller lips, narrower jaws, smoother skin, and softer features. Although some of these qualities may very well occur naturally in some bodies, they in fact constitute an abstracted ideal of masculinity and femininity (with a white, Western-European bias) and most individuals must do some amount of work to achieve them. In order to be socially legible (and sexually attractive), individuals deploy a range of technologies to make their bodies visibly gendered.¹⁰⁷ Women of all classes increasingly adopted visible makeup in the early twentieth century, which had formerly been the exclusive reserve of performers, aristocrats, and sex workers, as social historian Kathy Peiss has documented.¹⁰⁸ Products ranged from skin lotions to paint, powder, mascara, eyeliner, eye shadow, eyebrow pencil, rouge, and lipstick. In silent films, women and men both wore makeup to lighten or darken their skin (depending on the role), and to accentuate their eyes and mouths,

but the shape and prominence of this makeup shaped their features in gendered ways. As important as what people put on their bodies was what they took off: cutting and styling head hair and removing or shaping body hair. Thin eyebrows were a particularly important mark of femaleness in cross-dressing films throughout this period.

In theater, performers are hyper-aware of these elements of bodily crafting. They mobilize them self-consciously to create a desired effect, and often stylize them to be read at a distance and to evoke particular emotional reactions. Although bodies have always been read for signs of identity (hence sartorial codes to prevent commoners from being misread as royalty), social historians argue that, in the early twentieth century, the rise of advertising culture and mass consumption, as well as higher-quality mirrors, plate glass shop windows, and technologies like photograph and cinema, encouraged individuals (and women in particular) to become increasingly conscious of themselves as visual objects.¹⁰⁹ This is a key reason, Peiss notes, why working- and middle-class women increasingly adopted visible makeup during this period.

The Boy Detective claims to give viewers a truer vision of the body through a medium shot. We could think of the title, in fact, as referring not only to the “boy” who acts as a detective, but also to the audience member, who is encouraged by the film to scrutinize the performer’s body for signs of boyiness or girliness. The film reveals that spectatorial vision was in fact easily fooled, because we can only see what we are shown (unlike everyday life and the theater where we control where to look and have the chance to catch someone unawares) and we only have access to surface. We cannot touch or hear the body; we cannot ambush it at the stage door. Although the film troubles the truthfulness of cinematic vision at a distance, it paradoxically offers cinematic vision (in the form of a closer view of the face) as the solution. It produces the face as the legible, immutable sign of gender truth, obscuring the fact that this visibility had to be constructed consciously.

After *The Boy Detective*, genuine gender surprise was generally restricted to an abbreviated sight gag. In *Railroad Raiders of '62* (Kalem, June 1911), for instance, a woman who faints in front of a train is revealed to be a raider in disguise and in *The Forbidden Room* (September 1916), the sixth episode of the *Beatrice Fairfax* serial, an old woman who runs a counterfeiting gang is eventually revealed to be a man in disguise.¹¹⁰ However, it seems that the trope began to register as problematic after the transitional era. In 1919, the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures requested that the Vitagraph Company “[c]ut out the short scene where the motorman kicks the veiled woman who turns out to be the man” from their two-reel comedy *Fares and Fare Ones* (May 1919).¹¹¹ I have not been able to locate a copy of this film to see if the elimination was in fact made; the Board noted at the time that it had not. This is the only case of I found of gender surprise being received negatively, though.

An even “tamer” version of the sight gag was also used to introduce women in men’s clothing (whether in disguise or not), although in these cases audiences were informed beforehand that the figure was female. This brief suspension and then revelation of gender is used to introduce visually cross-dressed and masculine women in films throughout the silent and into the sound period, such as *Mickey* (Mabel Normand Feature Film Company, August 1918), *Rowdy Ann* (Christie Film Company, May 1919), *The Clinging Vine* (DeMille Pictures Corporation, September 1926), and *Queen Christina* (MGM, December 1933). In *Rowdy Ann*, for instance, we iris out on a figure on horseback whose face is obscured by a hat and orientation away from the camera. We see that the person wears a plaid work shirt, mohair chaps, and a cowboy hat, and sits astride a horse surveying grassy hills. Based on this visual information, we might reasonably assume we are looking at a man. However, the figure turns toward the camera



1.22 In *Rowdy Ann*, we see a figure on horseback...



1.23 ...which we recognize as female when she turns toward the camera (Fay Tincher).

and lifts up its head so that light shines on its face. This face—soft and round, blazing white, wearing lipstick and eyeliner—immediately signals to us that the person is female. Additionally, the hint of breasts under the shirt and V of skin below the neckerchief add to our impression of femaleness. This gender surprise takes place only on the visual level—the shot is preceded by an intertitle that informs viewers that they are about see “Ann,” played by comedian Fay Tincher.

Although we do not move from a long shot to a close-up as in the previous films, the shot instead contrasts the body (which is deceiving) with the face (which is revealing). In fact, this same opposition has occurred in *Meet Me at the Fountain* and *The Boy Detective*—the closer shot in these cases is mostly a vehicle to allow us to look at the face better. (The ability to see the curve of breasts through the clothing additionally confirm that the body is “really” female.) The body, these films would have us believe, is easily clad in false clothing and placed in a misleading setting. The face, however, when sufficiently visible to the camera (through proximity, lighting, and a lack of visual obstructions) always reveals, as if unconsciously, the person’s “true” identity. Interestingly, considering film’s unique capacity to reproduce movement, it is *not* inauthentic movement that gives these cross-dressers away. (Nor, due to the limitations of the medium at this point, could it be the voice, which was often an intentional giveaway in vaudeville impersonation acts.) Obviously, the face could just as easily be falsified as any other part of the body, using makeup, facial hair, wigs, tape, and prosthetic skin, noses, or jaws (and actors like Lon Chaney interestingly played on the tension between facial disguise and star recognition). But, in the case of gender disguise, the face was always made up and groomed and lit to show spectators, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the performer’s “true” gender.

This use of the face to stage a “truer” access to a person’s identity fits into Balázs’s more poetic exultation of the face as granting film spectators access to psychological interiority and an almost ecstatic communion. It also fits strikingly well with the burgeoning star system, which traded in famous faces. It was during the late 1910s and particularly the 1920s when filmmakers increasingly paused on close shots of actors’ faces to encourage moments of direct erotic rapport between spectators and stars. More prosaically, these increasingly frequent face shots ensured that viewers would recognize actors and return again and again to see them in new movies. It makes sense then, that in situations of gender disguise, cinema would posit the face (which could easily be made misleading if they had wanted) as the invariable site for visible gender “truth.”

The Incorporation of the Detecting Gaze

When “temporary transvestite” films began to incorporate closer views of the body, spectators had the opportunity to examine performers’ faces and bodies more carefully, like the newspaper readers described earlier. However, films did *not* use these closer views as a chance to trouble gender-at-a-distance, as in the surprise films, or to cultivate a more skeptical gaze toward gendered appearance, but to establish actresses as recognizable and sexually attractive. While making the gender of disguised characters quite obvious, films in the early teens like *My Brother Agostino* (Lubin, November 1911), *Katchem Kate* (Biograph, June 1912), and *Making a Man of Her* (Christie, November 1912) did not position the camera any closer than the medium-long shot, showing the character’s body from the knees up. Because so many silent films have been lost (approximately ninety percent, by most estimates), it is impossible to identify film “firsts” with any certainty. However, of the female-to-male “temporary transvestite” films I have been able to view, the earliest examples of the camera being close enough to display the disguised character in a medium shot were films starring Mary Pickford—*Mistress Nell* (Famous Players, February 1915) and *Poor Little Peppina* (Famous Players-Mary Pickford, February 1916). Closer shots were part of a larger strategy of encouraging audience recognition of, identification with, and desire for these film performers. The closer view of the performers’ made-up, feminized faces made their gender “disguise” even more visually flimsy. In 1916, medium shots and medium close-ups became standard features of the “temporary transvestite” film. A number of films even incorporated a Bertillon-like detecting gaze more directly, as I will describe.

Cinema’s ability to re-photograph the same body twice using a “split-screen” effect made it, in a sense, a better mode for comparing and contrasting bodies than the composite photograph or photographic series in newspapers and Bertillon’s appendix. *Dollars and Sense* (Keystone, September 1916) displays two iterations of the same body (comedienne Ora Carew) side by side, in the guise of a country girl and her twin brother. This film brings the gender detecting gaze to bear on the practice of cross-gender casting, which required a certain “belief” in the performed gender; the result is that the gender detection takes priority and the attempt to perform another gender is rendered solely comedic. The “brother” also engages in temporary transvestism and here the detecting gaze complicates the genre’s usual way of organizing truth and falseness by adding a third layer. However, despite the more complex layering of gender disguises, the hierarchy of gender signs established in a film like *The Boy Detective* likewise sorts “performative” from authentic signs.

Like the protean artists and sister acts of vaudeville and photographs of gender masqueraders, the film stages an experiment in corporeal mutability and gender detection. But where sister acts relied on the presumed similarity of the performers, cinema was able to use the exact same performer. And where the identities of the protean artist unfolded over time, cinema could artificially eliminate the time of the performance by re-photographing the same body twice on the same film strip. Unlike the composite photographs found in newspapers (which could essentially do this process too), film could capture these bodies in movement. Split screen re-photography, which was developed in magic and “trick” films of the early period, reappeared with a vengeance in the early teens.¹¹² The technology allowed performers to demonstrate their acting ability and showed off the medium’s unique capabilities. It also—as Gunning argues of the introductory sequences of French detective films—helps audiences recognize an actor from role to role.¹¹³ Recognizing an actor, though, essentially consists of identifying the elements of

the face, body, and performance style that are consistent—it is a form of detection. Most dual roles display characters that are different in temperament or age (e.g. *Merely a Millionaire* [Selig, January 1912], *Stella Marais* [Pickford Film, January 1918]).¹¹⁴ When it is used to display characters of different genders, however, it encourages the gender-detecting gaze outlined above. Although *Dollars and Sense* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Mary Pickford Company, September 1921) are the only silent films I have found so far that center on gender differentiated dual roles, the device was used in an abbreviated form in a number of “temporary transvestite” films from this time.

Unlike the gender surprise films, *Dollars and Sense* always makes the viewer well aware of what the performers’ “real” genders. Title cards identify the actress Ora Carew in the roles of “The Proprietor’s Daughter” and “Her Twin Brother.” However, the film does not merely rely on the cast list to establish Carew’s female body beneath the male character. As in the “temporary transvestite” film, this film embeds gender revelation into the image as well. In the film’s first frame we are introduced to Carew in her female guise. After an intertitle (“Hetty Hobbs, a rustic belle”), we cut to a close-up of Carew. Although the figure faces away from the camera, the sex is immediately and unambiguously signified by hair falling in ringlets and tied with a large bow; the sheer white material of the top; and the long slim fingers with clean, white nails against the tree. When the figure turns, the close-up view of the face confirms the actress’s identity as well as her sex and race. Hetty’s femaleness exaggeratedly clear, through the pearl necklace, the low



1.24 *Dollars and Sense*: We see the back of a very feminine head...



1.25 ...that turns toward the camera to reveal the face of Ora Carew.

neckline and frilly collar, the halo of rim light around her hair, and her penciled-in eyebrows, clear white skin, black-lined eyes, and darkened lips. We get visual confirmation that she is both “rustic” (young and naïve, and situated by a tree) and a “belle” (an attractive, graceful girl). The film establishes this “Hetty” as the base identity that, comparatively, is closest to Carew’s sexed identity (but, not necessarily her class or regional identity).

The film then introduces a man, Hetty’s “cornfed sweetheart” (Figure 1.26). Motivated by Hetty’s gaze, we cut to a medium close-up of actor Joseph Belmont. Although the view of Belmont is not as close as the one of Carew, we immediately identify the actor as male, based on his costume (the straw hat, plaid shirt, and overalls) and physiognomy (wide face, square jaw, and thick eyebrows, which are enhanced by make-up). Although he wears eye shadow, it forms a large, sharply defined circle that connects his eyes to his eyebrows, whereas hers was blended, applied only close to her eyes, and drew out the tips of her eyes to make them more pointed. With the help of lighting and makeup, Baldwin’s skin appears darker than Carew’s, although still



1.26 “Her cornfed sweetheart” (Joseph Belmont).

racially “white.” Baldwin’s costume, setting, and props, also establish him as a country boy; his expression adds to the impression that he is amiable but not too bright. By moving from the shot of the hyper-female Carew to the clearly male Belmont, the film not only introduces a love story but also reassures spectators that—whatever may ensue—the sexes are in fact quite distinct and the differences are clearly visible on the body. These bodies, however, are already subject to the corporeal technologies of make-up, hair removal, hair style, and clothing, as well as the cinematic technologies of lighting, framing, and mise-en-scene.

The film uses a structure of gender dissimulation and revelation to introduce the brother. A title tell us to expect “Her twin brother, a mischief maker” and then we see a figure with short dark hair in overalls, turned away from the camera, sitting in the dirt and reaching into a dog house—all signifiers of young, rural maleness. However, when the figure turns toward the camera—and drags out not a dog but a baby goat—we can see his/her face—which we immediately recognize as both female (again, by the thin eyebrows, glowing white skin, prominent cheekbones, and feminine-style eyeshadow) and belonging to Carew, who we just saw her in “Hetty” guise. (Unlike Hetty, though, the brother does wear lipstick or mascara.)



1.27 and 1.28 First view of “Her twin brother, the mischief maker” (Carew).

Shortly thereafter we get a closer shot in which the disguise breaks down even further. The hair, which is extremely dark, choppily cut, and sits somewhat crookedly, looks increasingly like a wig. When Carew looks down she displays her eye shadow and thin eyebrows more clearly. As in *The Boy Detective*, laughter contributes to the dissolution of the disguise, as laughing makes the actress's cheeks fuller and higher and having an expressive face and open mouth are traits commonly associated with femininity. Again, it may also encourage viewers to



1.29 and 1.30 A closer view of the brother.

see this gender transgression as childish play rather than a threat to the social order. A central pleasure of the film is the opportunity to compare and contrast boy-Carew and girl-Carew. At first this is done through parallel editing (a dog runs between the frames to establish the spaces as continuous). At certain moments, the brother and sister briefly adopt similar poses, allowing us to compare the two bodies better (Figures 1.31 and 1.32). The next, more spectacular step, shows brother and sister together in the same frame, essentially displaying a moving composite photograph (Figure 1.33). In this shot, too, the brother and sister appear at the same distance from the camera and in similar poses.¹¹⁵ Like Bertillon's photographic sequences, we are encouraged to look through the costume to recognize the identical body beneath. Despite the difference in hairstyle and color, costume, backdrop, and color of the animal, we can nonetheless match the nose, smile, chin, and slender arms of the two bodies. Here we can already see the film positing the body of the actress as fixed and immutable, and the hair and costume as performative and mutable. However, included in this "static" body are elements that are clearly



1.31 The brother holds a black goat to his cheek.



1.32 In a similar position, Hetty holds a white dog to hers.



1.33 Brother and sister (both played by Carew).

mutable, such as eyebrows, eye shadow, and expression. The use of split-screen cinematography rather than editing allows viewers to compare the two iterations more carefully because they do not have to rely on their memory.

The film's most remarkable sequence collapses cross-gender casting and a "temporary transvestite" plot, like *The Boy Detective*, but with the added attraction of the split screen, which allows viewers to compare a single body engaged in multiple, contradictory levels of gender performance as never before (Figures 1.34 – 1.37). The brother agrees to impersonate his sister in order to save her from the ordeal of a carriage ride with an effete East Coast suitor. After the brother pulls a white dress over his overalls we witness a series of long takes in which sister and cross-dressed brother cavort side-by-side. Hetty demonstrates how to curtsy and her brother imitates her with exaggerated, burlesqued movements. In this scene, Carew performs "girl" on the surface, "boy" below that, and a "real girl" below that. To do this, Carew maintains a "boyish" movement style (large, blunt gestures and a square posture, often with shoulders pushed forward) but adds clichéd, coquettish, feminine gestures, like fluttering eyelashes, flicking eyes toward and away from the object of her gaze, and swinging her hips back and forth.

Within the narrative, the East Coast suitor finds faux-Hetty's combination of flirtatiousness and ungainly, muscularity unsettling—"she" is obviously more of a man than he. After a chaotic episode involving a bear, the suitor flees, leaving a note—"Mother raised me in the East. Keep your Mountain Maid—Bear and Fortune—Good-bye. Algy." Ultimately the cross-dressed woman ensures that the "right" heterosexual couple be formed. The film's final shot shows Hetty and her rural sweetheart embracing and an intertitle—"We win." Through cross-dressing, the brother figure restores the "natural," regionally segregated, heterosexual order.

The cross-dresser's enthusiastic delight at the new costume and the rendition of the feigned gender through exaggerated, parodic movements make the scene typical of "temporary transvestite" comedies. The cross-gender casting adds an additional layer of gender performance and detection, but where this was used to destabilize spectators' visual mastery in *The Boy Detective* (in line with the preoccupations of the detective genre more generally), here Carew's gender is signaled clearly throughout, so it works essentially the same way as the "temporary transvestite" comedic genre more generally—spectators are pleasurably secure in the superiority



1.34 The sister examines her double.



1.35 Brother and sister mirror each other.



1.36 Brother's large, exaggerated movements.



1.37 Brother in awkward but revealing position.

of their vision to that of the diegetic characters and are able to appreciate fully the disjuncture between the real and the performed. The film essentially levies the detective gaze against the dramatic tradition of casting young women in boy roles. Rather than encouraging spectators to believe Carew's performance of boyhood, the film prompts viewers to detect the body beneath the character by juxtaposing it against girl-Carew. It uses split-screen cinematography to encourage the form of comparative, analytical viewing cultivated by photographic series and composite photography.

We can also see an abbreviated version of this Bertillon-like structure in “temporary transvestite” films from this same period. *Her Father's Son*, a romantic inheritance comedy set in antebellum Virginia, is a sharp departure from the earlier Civil War films. Whereas earlier films had marveled at a young woman's successful adoption of male disguise and duties, in this, a young woman masquerading as a boy to inherit her uncle's estate is terrible at every male task she is set to (smoking, hunting, fighting, etc.) and her disguise is similarly unconvincing. We can see the detective gaze explicitly solicited in an introductory sequence. The lead actress, Vivian Martin, appears in a white lacy dress between two, full-length photographs of her. In one, she wears a Confederate army uniform and in the other a period dress. Each photograph comes to life, steps out of the frame, and walks toward the camera where Martin stands. Martin looks at the “male” version and bursts into joyful laughter, reminding us to read the male disguise as



1.37 and 1.38 Vivian Martin in the opening sequence of *Her Father's Son*.

playful rather than grotesque or disturbing. Each figure then snaps back into the photograph and Martin walks toward the camera with a knowing smile. The sequence resembles those of detective or criminal “masters” of disguise that fade from one disguise to another (e.g. *Fantômas* [Gaumont, 1913], *Protéa* [Éclair, 1913]), but here we have the opportunity to compare three iterations of Martin's body side-by-side. The juxtaposition forces a Bertillon-like gaze and invites us to see the “real” star beneath both characters. Of course, the middle Martin is just as performed as either of the images on the side, but that one is framed as “authentic” because it is costumed in modern dress, it appears first and in the center, and it does not issue from a framed photograph. Opening the film with this split-screen sequence guides viewers to deploy this detecting gaze throughout the film.

Other films incorporated this kind of juxtaposition into the narrative, either using optical effects or mise-en-scene. In *The Little Chevalier* (Edison, August 1917) the effect is motivated the attempt to depict a character's thought process. Henri Valdeterre (Ray McKee) thinks about Diane de la Roche (Shirley Mason), whom he loves, and her twin brother, the Chevalier de la



1.39 Henri Valdeterre (center) thinks of Diane de la Roche in her two guises.

Roche (actually Diane in disguise), whom he must duel. The two figures appear above his head. Although Henri's thought process motivates this image, he does not take advantage of the juxtaposition and fails to see that the two figures are the same person. As is typical of "temporary transvestite" films, the analytic gaze is the property of the film spectator alone. Only when the Chevalier takes off her cloak and hat to reveal long hair and a white dress at the end of the film does Henri realize his mistake.

A typical "temporary transvestite" romantic comedy from the year before, *The Danger Girl* (Keystone, August 1916), illustrates how a detecting gaze could be incorporated into the narrative more seamlessly, through mise-en-scene rather than visual trickery. A madcap socialite, Gloria (Gloria Swanson), disguises herself as a man in order to seduce away the "danger girl" who has stolen her friend's boyfriend. In one shot, for instance, we see a man, the danger girl, and the disguised Gloria in a row, allowing us to compare these three gender expressions—to what side does Gloria belong? As we are fairly close, we can see that her pencil-thin eyebrows and smooth white face match better with the girl than with the boy. The structure of the gender surprise also appears, albeit in an abbreviated form and contained by narrative information. In an earlier shot, we see two figures in tuxedos and top hats from behind and they look identical. Only when they turn do we see that one has a distinctively male face and the other female. These kinds of sight gags, operating within the continuous, diegetic space and without obvious camera effects, suggest that the genuine task of gender detection elaborated in early and transitional-era cinema was incorporated, in a tamer form, into classical cinema. However, this form of juxtaposition does not compare the same body, abandoning, in a sense, some of cinema's technological advantage over theater.

Whereas the detective gaze clashed with the credulous mode of spectatorship required by female-to-male cross-gender casting, it was a natural fit with the "temporary transvestite" genre. But unlike the gender surprise films, "temporary transvestite" films after 1911 made disguised performers' "real" gender visible to film spectators and was confirmed by close-ups of carefully groomed faces. The convention that diegetic characters believe an unconvincing disguise

produced, for the film spectators, the impression of detecting a gender that was in fact impossible not to see.

* * *

Like blackness, gender legibility was figured as a problem in some early and transitional-era comedies and detective films. Films increasingly used close views (from medium shots to close-ups) to make performers' gender unambiguously legible. In fact, these signs of gender, even in close up, were still constructed. Nevertheless, the star system's reliance on close-ups discouraged the potential pleasures of gender ambiguity. Between 1909 and 1916, cross-dressed women in moving pictures shifted from variably convincing disguise to consistently unconvincing disguise. The promotion of successful detection became more consistent, causing instances of gender ambiguity to become more isolated and contained. In the next chapter, I will consider how the detecting gaze, in concert with other cultural shifts, began to trouble the practice of cross-gender casting at the end of the transitional era.

Chapter 2: Moving Picture Uplift, Cross-Gender Casting, and the Victorian Ideal of Boyhood

“Girls will be Boys! are impersonations popular on the screen?” asked the *Los Angeles Times* in 1924.¹ Refuting the collage of images that would seem to answer in the affirmative, the journalist takes the opportunity to argue in the negative: “On the stage impersonations in trousers has [*sic*] long been a favorite means to amusement of audiences[,]” but “[t]he case has been much different on the screen.” “The films have been practically immune from such impersonations, except in rare and isolated instances,” he writes, because in cinema, “[t]he demand has always been for a perfect illusion of reality.” Two paragraphs later, he reiterates a claim that would be repeated by many in the years to come—that women did not play male roles in film because “The opinion prevails that the screen demands more reality [than the stage] in every respect.”

This writer lays out what is often the *de facto* account of female-to-male cross-casting in cinema: although girls and women played a variety of male roles on the early twentieth-century stage, filmmakers did not adopt this practice “except in rare and isolated instances” because it was fundamentally at odds with film’s realist aesthetic.² A French theater critic has even taken the claim one step farther, arguing that women in male roles on stage declined in the 1920s due to the appetite for realism cultivated by cinema.³ I intend to show, however, that female-to-male cross-casting *was* common in American silent cinema, that it performed a crucial function for the American film industry during the transitional era, and that it declined *not* due to cinema’s inherent “demand for reality” but due to historically-specific cultural, industrial, and aesthetic forces.

Of the approximately three hundred American silent films I found featuring cross-dressed girls and women, almost a hundred of them were female performers in male roles (rather than female characters who don men’s clothing). Almost all of them were released between 1909 and 1921. More than three quarters featured girls aged seven to thirteen playing boy characters like newsies and messenger boys, often in leading roles. Many of these were the work of Marie Eline (aka “The Thanhouser Kid”) and Edna “Billy” Foster at Biograph, although I also found examples at Vitagraph, Selig, Solax, and Fox. A handful of films also featured girls from the age of several months to five years playing male characters. Additionally, thirteen films—the most highly publicized of the bunch—starred women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-eight (average age twenty-seven) in the roles of young boys. These included two adaptations of *Oliver Twist* (General Film Publicity and Sales, May 1912) and (Lasky, December 1916) and *The Prince and the Pauper* (Edison, August 1909) and (Famous Players, November 1915), as well as *Treasure Island* (Maurice Tourneur Productions, 1920), *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Mary Pickford Productions, April 1921) and *Peter Pan* (Famous Players-Lasky, December 1924). I call girls and women in *young* male roles “female boys” to differentiate them from the broader phenomenon of “breeches” performance. I suspect that there are many more examples of infants and young girls playing male roles that I have not identified. The practice was so common that reviewers and, later, archivists, often did not note it. Even when viewing these films today, it can be difficult to tell the gender of the child actors or even what gender they are meant to be. This continuing ambiguity demonstrates that the gender of prepubescent bodies (particularly those

with androgynous pageboy haircuts) remained fairly illegible, despite the cultivation of gender detection skills described in the previous chapter.

The American moving picture industry adopted a range of strategies during the transitional era to improve their reputation, attract middle-class audiences, and preempt censorship efforts, including transformations in film form, distribution, and exhibition spaces and practices.⁴ One important strategy that has not received attention is the use of cross-gender casting to promote androgynous ideal of childhood. In this chapter, I argue that the female boy proliferated on the screen in a way that seems to have appealed to middle-class women and in the process contributed to the broader goal of uplifting the moving pictures. Furthermore, I contend that the practice declined in the late 1910s and early 1920s not due to its inherent incompatibility with cinema's realist aesthetic, but because the androgynous ideal of boyhood exemplified in these roles became increasingly problematic, the films did not appeal to working-class and rural audiences, and filmmakers intentionally made the femaleness of the actresses so visually prominent (in line with the impulse toward "detection" outlined in the last chapter) that the narrative immersion required for the character to work in a serious drama was rendered impossible.

"Women Who'd Play the Man": Controversies Around Women in Male Roles

The diversity of styles of cross-dressing on the turn-of-the-century stage established in the last chapter was also apparent in the subset of performances featuring actresses in male roles. On the legitimate stage, established actresses like Sarah Bernhardt took on dramatic adolescent and adult roles such as Hamlet and L'Aiglon (Napoleon II), whereas in comic opera, burlesque, and ballet, attractive young women wore revealing tights and tunics to play princes, troubadours, and pages. Girls and women of all ages also played comic, sentimental, or melodramatic young boys, often earning their stripes in the roles of Little Ford Fauntleroy or Oliver Twist. Given that all these modes were quite common and popular with audiences in theater, why did American filmmakers narrow in on the female boy when practicing their own cross-gender casting?

Unlike female boys, the practice of casting adult women in adult male roles was sharply contested at the turn of the century. In the past century, celebrated actresses had regularly played dramatic adult male roles in "benefit nights" meant to showcase their acting skill and some, such as Charlotte Cushman, achieved long-term success in male roles.⁵ This was less common, however, by the turn of the century. These male costumes did not disguise the actress's sex, but neither did they generally emphasize femininity or sexual attractiveness. Although, like many actresses, Bernhardt had played young pages and troubadours early in her career, she generated a wave of commentary in the 1890s—both positive and negative—when she played the title characters of *Lorenzaccio* (1896), *Hamlet* (1899), and *L'Aiglon* (1900) in her mid-fifties.

Although many lauded these performances, a significant backlash to women in dramatic male roles also mounted. Many argued that a woman could never successfully imitate the power and authority of a grown man and that, if she did, it would be grotesque. The tenor of the criticisms suggests that these women's impersonation of male authority on stage was being taken as a symbol of women's demand for male privileges off stage. "The nearer a woman gets to the veracity of male impersonation, the less attractive she grows," wrote *New York Herald* critic Alan Dale, in an 1898 full-page article titled "Why an Actress Cannot Wear Trousers Like a Man."⁶ "If it were possible to secure an actress who could infallibly present the eccentricities of the other sex," he continued, "we should have no use for her whatsoever. She would repel us,



2.1 Charlotte Cushman as Romeo (1858).



2.2 Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet (c1899).



2.3 Maude Adams as L'Aiglon (1909).

and we should insist that she was vulgar and objectionable.” Like the physicians cited in the first chapter, Dale insisted on the primacy of biological sex difference: “In real life sex is a distinctly dominant quality that is born and not acquired. It triumphs over clothes, wigs and caps. A baby girl in the cradle looks like a baby girl, and the least experienced nurse will never be deceived for a moment.” Of Bernhardt’s performance as Hamlet, he wrote: “Sarah was cornered, flabbergasted and utterly demolished by the inexorable deficiencies of her sex.” He argued that, while actresses hoped to showcase their ability to walk, speak, move, and think like a man, their performances were actually being received as little more than glorified “leg shows”: “Women play male roles because in this way they are enabled to be more graphically womanly than ever. And audiences go to see them because this is the case. They deceive none but the idiots in the cast, and managers don’t propose that they shall ever try to do so.”

Although Dale was perhaps the most hyperbolic of American critics on this issue, others echoed his sentiments. “The women of the stage are growing constantly more aggressive in their usurpation of men’s parts,” wrote a critic at the *American Journal Examiner* in 1901.⁷ The *New York Morning Telegraph* insisted, in 1903, that “roles written for men” could “be properly represented only with an attitude of authority which no womanly woman can assume.”⁸ Not far below the surface of these complaints were concerns about women’s real life incursions into the male spheres of politics, higher education, and business. The assertion that women were specifically incapable of embodying men’s “authority” implicitly critiqued the feminist movement.

The political volatility of these roles and their explicit association with feminist organizing explains why filmmakers on both sides of the Atlantic avoided them. The only exceptions I have found are a short clip of Bernhardt as Hamlet dueling with Laertes that was shown at the 1900 Paris Exposition and Asta Nielsen’s 1920 Hamlet performance in a film she and her husband financed and produced in Germany. The Bernhardt film was a one-off exploiting her infamous performance. Despite her professed love for male roles, she played a woman in all her subsequent film appearances.⁹ With the 1920 *Hamlet*, Nielsen was clearly

hoping to establish herself as a virtuoso actress in Bernhardt’s mould. However, unlike the female Hamlets of the stage, the film version makes Hamlet into a young woman disguised as a man (claiming to base this change on pre-Shakespearean Danish sources), which shifts the film into the more acceptable “temporary transvestite” register. While diminishing Nielsen’s appropriation of male “authority,” this change produces a host of homo/hetero romantic insinuations (Ophelia loves Hamlet, who loves Horatio), much like the cinematic romantic comedies Chris Straayer analyzes.¹⁰

In stark contrast to these dramatic male roles on stage were the intentionally frivolous performances of women in so-called “tights and tunic” roles. “Are tights and trousers to be,” one critic asked rhetorically in 1903, “for the sole feminine use of the beauty ballets and the girls of comic opera and burlesque, who snap their fingers at the dignity of the drama and do not bother their brains about the ethical question of reform?”¹¹ The critic implicitly contrasts these light, overtly sexualized, spectacle-oriented modes of cross-gender performance to more “serious” uses of breeches—as an expression of dramatic artistry, like Bernhardt, or as aligned with the feminist “dress reform” movement. In ballet, comic opera, and burlesque, there was no attempt to disguise the performers’ gender. On the contrary, the tight-fitting costumes usually revealed



2.4 and 2.5 Examples of “tights and tunic” roles in *Wizard of Oz* stage musical, from Mark Swartz, *Oz Before the Rainbow* (2000).

women’s legs and bodies more than female costumes did. Similarly, in nineteenth century ballet, dance historian Lynn Garafola has argued, “the *danseuse en travesti* [...] was the hussy of the boulevards on theatrical parade.”¹² By 1904, in fact, the *New York Herald* was complaining, “The appearance of actresses in male parts in the comic opera is common to the point of monotony.”¹³ These shows, which so explicitly put female bodies on display, and whose formulaic plots revolved around age-old romantic triangles or fairy tale adventures, were silly and light-hearted, a far cry, it would seem, from “the ethical question of reform” that was so prominent in viewers’ experiences of women in dramatic male roles.

In fact, theater historian Elizabeth Mullenix argues that it was this sexualization of women in male roles, spurred by the controversial 1860s successes of Adah Isaacs Menken’s *Mazeppa* (the actress, wearing only a flesh-colored bodysuit, was bound and strapped to a galloping horse) and Lydia Thompson’s ribald, all-female burlesque troupe in New York that trivialized the practice and eventually spurred its decline.¹⁴ When burlesque women’s

hypersexuality and “grotesque” forms of parody came under fire from critics and moralists, “breeches” performance was lumped in with burlesque, and all women in male roles assumed to be merely an opportunity to display the female body for male delectation. While Mullenix underestimates the potential for social critique in Menken’s and Thompson’s boundary-crossing performances (which Daphne A. Brooks and Robert Allen have analyzed, respectively), it is true that in the United States by the 1900s these genres of performance were apolitical and self-consciously frivolous.¹⁵

One would think that a frivolous, playful mode of cross-gender performance that displayed the sexualized female body would be well suited for cinema, particularly in its early period. Indeed, European filmmakers frequently used women in “tights and tunics” in dance and *féerie* films, such as *Gavotte* (Pathé, 1898), *Au bal de flore* (Gaumont, 1900), and *La sage femme du première class* (Gaumont, 1902), although the practice declined as the popularity of these genres waned. However, American filmmakers shied away from the practice. The only similar instances I have found in American film are girls playing boys and boy munchkins in L. Frank Baum’s 1914 Oz films, which drew heavily on the aesthetic of the Oz stage musicals, and child actress Violet Radcliffe’s performances as Aladdin and Long John Silver in Fox’s all-children renditions of these classic fairy tales in 1917 and 1918.¹⁶

It is certainly possible that American filmmakers did not produce films with tights and tunic roles because Pathé Frères and Gaumont had cornered the market and American studios could not compete with the extraordinary color processes that the French studios used to enhance many of these films. However, it is also conceivable that American filmmakers avoided the practice due to its association with the hypersexuality of burlesque or the libidinous attitudes of French comic opera. Richard Abel has documented the way American studios worked to push Pathé out of the domestic film market by complaining about the immoral influence of violent and sexually explicit foreign productions on American audiences.¹⁷ If American studios at first failed to capitalize on the stage popularity of women in tights and tunics by accident, they may have later shunned this “European” practice as part of their broader strategy of Americanizing domestic film exhibition. One might also be tempted to speculate that some audience members found scenes of courtship between female performers unsettling, but I have not found any evidence to suggest that this was the case.¹⁸ Although this style of cross-gender casting had shed the political implications of the dramatic roles, it was likely too sexualized for it to become a mainstay of American cinema.¹⁹ These two kinds of cross-gender casting—women playing either adult male roles or “tights-and-tunic” roles—while common in theater, were too controversial to be suitable for American cinema’s uplift project. However, rather than avoid cross-gender casting altogether, moving pictures turned instead to a more respectable version, the female boy.

Enter the Female Boy

Female boys were not political like dramatic roles or explicitly sexualized in the manner of tights and tunic roles. On an important level, they were therefore the “safest” form of cross-gender casting that cinema could adopt. Actresses had played boy roles in American theater going back to the mid-eighteenth century. Women’s smooth faces and high voices were imagined to approximate those of a pre-pubescent youth, so older actresses could play boys better than adult male actors. The heyday of the practice was the first half of the nineteenth century, as Mullenix has outlined.²⁰ This coincides with the height of stage melodrama’s popularity; frail, virtuous, and often deaf or mute female boys made excellent symbols of

imperiled innocence. Women also played the “petted boy of the Fauntleroy type” and the “fresh boy who helps make the comedy” (as Ethel Barrymore described the boy types of the stage in 1904), but they were most praised for their transcendent embodiment of sentimental boy victims.²¹ A new rage for children’s plays and child actors developed in the late nineteenth century and many young actresses got their start as Oliver Twist, Little Lord Fauntleroy, or in the dual role of the Prince and the Pauper.²² In 1905, the explosive success of the thirty-year-old dramatic actress Maude Adams in the role of Peter Pan generated waves of imitators.²³ The same year, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* remarked “It is so common for the stage heroine to turn herself into a stage hero that the sensation of seeing a favorite star in the role of a boy cannot any longer be called a sensation.”²⁴

Even critics who so vehemently denounced women taking adult male roles did not object to boy roles. The New York *Morning Telegraph*, for example, which had complained that women lacked the authority to play men, explained the key difference: “When a youth or boy is to be impersonated, the actress need not—in fact, she must not—sacrifice all of her femininity. This gives the suggestion of physical and mental undevelopment [*sic*] necessary, and which could not be furnished by a man of her own age.”²⁵ We can see here that while performing youth or adult male roles would work to support women’s claims to male authority, these boy roles could undermine them. Indeed, Mullenix argues that, “By creating a wider public awareness of the connections between femininity and immaturity [...], theatrical patriarchs attempted to launch a coup on petticoat government and to script gender upon the female body through boyish metaphor.”²⁶ Indeed the qualities that actresses playing boys were praised for, as Mullenix records—“‘fine,’ ‘sweet,’ ‘graceful,’ ‘slightly,’ ‘resign[ed],’ ‘noble,’ and ‘suffering’”—were not those that one would associate with an assertive, competent adult.²⁷ Similarly, in her recent study of masculine women in Weimar Germany, Katie Sutton argues that the boy role served to “reduce the threat of political emancipation by reinforcing women’s status as lesser political beings” and “reduc[e] the threat to heteronormative gender relations” because the characters were presumed to be too young to exhibit sexual desire.²⁸ Viewed within the spectrum of available female masculinities, I would agree with Mullenix and Sutton that the female boy could function as a reactionary response to women’s real world claims to male authority.

However, this is not the whole story. Even as these roles were scripting the qualities of immaturity onto womanhood, they were also scripting the qualities of femininity onto the boy. While this was fairly standard during the Romantic and early Victorian periods, it had become a controversial move by the turn of the twentieth century. As immigrant and working-class men as well as middle-class women increasingly challenged the political and economic authority of white, middle-class men at the end of the nineteenth century, white boys’ bodies became a battleground for contests over gender, moral authority, and American national identity.²⁹ Fearing that white men had become weak and effeminate due to city living, alienated white-collar labor, and women’s political gains, psychologists like G. Stanley Hall and politicians like Theodore Roosevelt urged Americans to cultivate “virile,” “masculine,” and even brutal qualities in their boys.³⁰ Schools, parents, and organizations such as the Boy Scouts and the YMCA actively took up this project.

However, this shift from Victorian sentimental ideals to an aggressive, masculinist ideology did not go uncontested. Even as people like Roosevelt ramped up efforts to reinvigorate the nation’s wilting boyhood, Anglo-American author Frances Hodgson Burnett conjured the fantasy of an American boy who, through sympathy, generosity, and inordinate beauty, had the ability to remake the world around him into one governed by enlightened empathy rather than



2.6 Little Lords Fauntleroy: Illustration from first edition of novel (1886),



2.7 Elsie Leslie (1890),



2.8 and Gertrude Homan (c1890).

selfish greed.³¹ This, of course, was Cedric Errol, better known as Little Lord Fauntleroy. Burnett published the story *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in 1885, the same year that Twain published *Huckleberry Finn*.³² (In fact, that continuing contest between these opposing forms of young masculinity determined the fluctuating fortunes of the female boy in American cinema, as I will show.) The novel, and the theatrical adaptation that premiered in London and New York in 1888, inspired a Fauntleroy “craze.” At its height, there were forty touring companies presenting the play across the U.S. and retailers sold Fauntleroy playing cards, chocolates, and even perfume.³³ Most infamously, though, were the legions of middle-class mothers who dressed their young boys in velvet “Fauntleroy suits,” modeled on aristocratic boys’ costumes of the eighteenth century.

To the champions of virile masculinity, this was precisely the female influence over boys that was leading to national decline, and many lashed out against the phenomenon. *The Playgoer* critic watching the 1903 revival, for instance, called Fauntleroy “the most unmitigated little prig that ever wore knickers” and expressed sympathy for the previous generation’s “luckless boy of eight or ten [who was] forced to wear his hair hanging down his back like the girl in the song.”³⁴ “[T]he soul of many a boy in the nineties seared by this weird pestilence,” wrote a particularly vitriolic critic two decades later.³⁵ “The proud matrons felt that the Fauntleroy scenery displayed their offspring to splendid advantage; other mothers effused over the unfortunates, and applied purely feminine adjectives to them; and no self respecting boy likes to be spoken of as ‘beautiful.’” Although this particular critic’s bitterness comes out of a later historical moment, it encapsulates the contest over boyhood that also occurred at the turn of the century, as proponents of sentimental and masculinist values fought over the bodies of young boys. Fauntleroy became a touchstone of this debate, as he seemed to embody either the power or the risk of white, middle-class mothers making their sons over in their own image.

Despite critic’s frustration with “kid dramas” like *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, they acknowledged the continuing appeal of female boy protagonists to middle-class women viewers.³⁶ When child actress Elsie Leslie, who had premiered *Little Lord Fauntleroy* on

Broadway in 1888, appeared in *The Prince and the Pauper* two years later, critics griped that the play merely extended the “Fauntleroy” craze, but noted its continuing popularity with women and children. Beside an illustration of a bourgeois woman peeking over an armchair to spy on a cute Fauntleroy type (Figure 2.9), *Life* magazine satirically noted that, “Such children as Elsie Leslie makes of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *Tom Canty*, and *Edward, Prince of Wales*, invariably die before they are ten years old, and hence the dramas of this school are absurdities. If they did live



2.9 “Drama: The Prince and the Pauper,” *Life* 15:370 (January 30, 1890).

through chicken-pox, measles, scarlet fever, and the other ills to which childish flesh is heir, their intense sweetness would become painful and insufferable.”³⁷ The critic parodies the frailty of these children and the illustration positions women as overzealous spectators of this spectacle of childish cuteness. Similarly, the *New York Times* wrote: “As a matter of fact, ‘The Prince and the Pauper’ is not a good play[,]” but seeing how “All mothers like to see pretty children exhibited to good advantage,” the critic concluded that, “what pleases mothers and children will prevail.”³⁸ Similarly, the *Washington Post* remarked that Leslie “makes a heavy draft on the sympathies of the audience—especially on the sensibilities of the ladies.”³⁹ When *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was revived in New York in 1903, *The Playgoer* not only called Fauntleroy an “unmitigated little prig,” as I mentioned, but affirmed “It was the mothers who made the little lord’s popularity” and that, “The horde of mothers and grandmothers at the matinee on Tuesday were loud in their applause.”⁴⁰

It was precisely such women, who were willing to spend their time and their family’s money to see “kid dramas” and dress their children like a character from a book or play, that filmmakers were so anxious to attract to moving picture shows. When moving pictures moved out of vaudeville palaces and educational lectures to urban nickelodeons (around 1905), they acquired a reputation for being a working-class entertainment, tainted by the dark, dirty, dangerously-flammable spaces of exhibition, and fears that they encouraged immoral sexual liaisons and glamorized violence and crime. Predictably, Progressive reformers, religious leaders, and community organizations proposed that the dangerous new medium be strictly regulated.⁴¹ But the first generation of American filmmakers, themselves largely issuing from

genteel, middle-class backgrounds, hoped to cultivate middle-class, white audiences, not only because this could expand the audience base and permit higher admission prices, but to establish the medium as legitimate and socially harmless, and thus circumvent incipient censorship efforts.⁴² As with stage melodrama and vaudeville a generation earlier, middle-class mothers were judged key to this effort, as they were likely to bring their children and husbands along with them, their presence could (at least in theory) raise the respectability of the exhibition space, and they were already being cultivated by department stores, illustrated magazines, and mail-order catalogues to become avid consumers.⁴³ Furthermore, it was precisely the sentimental, moralizing matrons who flocked to Fauntleroy who were likely to agitate against cinema's degenerate influence; by drawing these women to moving picture shows, studios could co-opt potential detractors.

Thus, by populating films with androgynous, sentimental female boys, filmmakers were in fact representing a fairly controversial version of boyhood, but one calculated to appeal to a particular constituency in the existing debate: white, middle-class mothers.⁴⁴ Thus, while the female boy may have undermined women's political projects by associating female bodies with social immaturity, they paradoxically supported women's domestic authority and political activism that was based on a Victorian, sentimentalist paradigm. The female boys of silent film ranged from vulnerable innocents like *Oliver Twist* to adventurous troublemakers tempered by an underlying moral quality. Casting established Broadway actresses like Cecil Spooner, Marguerite Clark, and Marie Doro in familiar boy roles also loaned a certain prestige to film productions and worked to establish film as a medium in which genuine dramatic "acting" could occur.⁴⁵

"Making visible our dreams": The Heyday of Female Boys in Film, 1909-1915

Between 1909 and 1915, the strategy of using female boys to improve cinema's reputation seemed to be effective, at least in the view of film critics. With the American successes of European *films d'art* such as *Un tuteur criminel* and *L'assassinat du duc de Guise* in early 1909, American film studios soon made their own forays into "high class" filmmaking. In August 1909, the Edison Manufacturing Company announced:

Miss Cecil Spooner was especially employed to enact the difficult role of Tom Canty, the pauper boy, and Edward, the boy prince of Wales in Mark Twain's celebrated story, *The Prince and the Pauper*. Graceful, effective and polished as an actress, her finished art has contributed much to the beauty and strength of this notable silent drama.

We hope to employ others as well-known [as Spooner] in the near future and meantime we are building up our own force with care and discrimination.

We intend from time to time (as we have in the past) to put out especially high class pictures, based on familiar themes or plots of well-known playwrights and literary producers, with actors of known reputation. And these special pictures, sold as they will be at the same price will, we believe, commend themselves strongly to the trade as an indication of what the Edison Company is willing to do to advance the interests of the business.⁴⁶

To the film Spooner contributes not only name recognition, but also "the dignity of drama" (as an earlier critic had put it) and gentility (she is "graceful" and contributes to the piece's "beauty and strength"). Edison frames the choice of Spooner for this role as advancing the film industry as a whole. Rather than the high culture but scandalous works that marked the European quality

film movement (e.g. *L'inferno* [Milano, 1911], *La dame aux camélias* [Film d'Art, 1911]), Edison chose a sentimental, Anglo-American children's story.

Critics judged the film—and specifically Spooner's performance—to have achieved the Edison Company's lofty aims. *Moving Picture World*, for example, called the film "perhaps the best work the Edison Company has ever done," "rivaling most of the foreign work [in quality]." ⁴⁷ Of Spooner, the critic wrote: "it is needless to say that little was left to be done to make the dramatic quality perfect." Unfortunately the film does not seem to be extant and I have not been able to find any publicity stills, so we cannot analyze Spooner's acting or the film's formal qualities, but it is revealing to see in what way Spooner's acting was appreciated. (There is no evidence to suggest that the film used a split screen to achieve dual casting; the identical boys were likely produced through editing alone.) Significantly, when discussing Spooner's achievement, the *Moving Picture World* critic did not assume that it would be challenging for a thirty-four-year-old woman to portray a young boy convincingly but rather that the challenge lay in characterizing intrinsic class identity. The critic wrote:

The real prince, even in his pauper rags, is always the prince, while the few glimpses of the pauper, even though in the palace, surrounded by courtiers and clothed in ermine and purple, is still the pauper. Their origin cannot be disguised by what they wear. [...] Perhaps in work of this sort lies the germ of all successful motion picture making.

In a sense, the critic describes a detecting gaze, but one attuned to the performance of class rather than gender. Orienting a dual role around the question of class may have helped draw attention away from the question of gender. *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, though less enthusiastic about Spooner's acting ("good but by no means exceptional"), agreed that the film "marks a long step upward by the Edison people." ⁴⁸ Here we can see the Edison Company mobilizing the female boy actress and sentimental children's stories to establish both the dramatic and cultural legitimacy of their product. While one might assume that female-to-male cross-casting would only thrive when performers' real identities were not widely circulated, this example shows that the appearance of female boys in cinema was linked to studios' desire to market recognized stage performers.

The Edison Company evidently considered Spooner's performance a success, because they cast her in the role of Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* (October 1909), released two months later. The 1893 opera by Engelbert Humperdinck set a high-cultural precedent for female Hansels that the film perpetuated, even though, as a silent medium, it had no issue of vocal range driving the decision. Again the *Moving Picture World* lavished praise upon the production, noting how the film camera seemed to give the impression of reality to this fairy tale: "And now comes the magic art, photography, which cannot lie because it can reproduce only those things that really take place; and we have positive proof that our belief in fairy stories has all the time been well founded, for here is one which has been photographed as the events took place." ⁴⁹ Although the remark is clearly made in fun, it nonetheless shows that the critic did not find the "realist" aesthetic of photographic reproduction to conflict with the imaginative qualities of the fairy tale or the performance of a woman in the role of a young boy. ⁵⁰ This same year the thirteen-year-old Gladys Huelette played Puck in Vitagraph's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Again, the female boy helped conjure a fantasy world populated by androgynous, ageless children. In the early teens, we can see this same desire to capitalize on sentimental children's theater in adaptations of *Oliver Twist*, *Dick Whittington and His Cat*, and the *Oz* series.

In May 1912, the same year that *Oliver Twist* was revived on Broadway, General Film Publicity and Sales Company produced a five-reel film version featuring Nat C. Goodwin, one of

the stars of the Broadway show, as Fagin and the twelve-year-old film actress Vinnie Burns as Oliver. A five-reel picture was unusually long for this time; *Moving Picture World* called the film a “Forerunner of What Is To Come.”⁵¹ At twelve, Burns was much closer in age to Oliver (who is nine years old in the book) than the actress who was currently playing him on Broadway, the thirty-year-old Marie Doro. Yet it would be a mistake to see Burns as film’s “correction” of this age difference, because Doro appeared in a much more publicized and celebrated film adaptation of the story four years later, produced by the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company. In 1912, *Moving Picture World* compared Burns to Doro almost defensively: “The part of Oliver Twist was beautifully played by Miss Vinnie Burns. She is easily the equal of Miss Marie Doro, who played the part with Mr. Goodwin at the Empire Theater.”⁵² This film does survive, so a closer examination is possible; like many of the Vitagraph quality films, it uses formal means to replicate the experience of theater going.⁵³ The camera keeps its distance from the performers, several locations are represented only by painted canvas backdrops, and visible make-up produces wrinkles and shadows on actors’ faces. The performers, for the most part, cycle through a series of Delsartean-type poses and long scenes pass in which the characters stand and speak to each other, though this dialogue is neither recorded nor conveyed in intertitles.⁵⁴ As Oliver, Burns sighs, faints, and pleads appealingly. Her gender and age are apparent.

Like Spooner, her performance must have been judged a success, because Burns played a very similar role the next year, the title character in Alice Guy-Blaché’s *Dick Whittington and His Cat* (Solax, 1913). The film was based on the popular British children’s pantomime of the same name. Like Oliver, Dick is a waifish young boy who goes to London, only to be used and abused by a cruel taskmaster (in this case a brutal kitchen maid). Dick’s luck turns, though, when he gives his only possession—his cat—to the master of the house to bring on a trading voyage to the “South Seas.” The trader encounters a wealthy Sultan whose palace is infested with rats. As cats do not exist in the kingdom, the merchant exchanges Dick’s cat for two chests of gold, which he passes on to the bewildered Dick upon his return. In an epilogue, we learn that Dick eventually marries the trader’s daughter and becomes “thrice Lord Major of London.” Burns’ performance recapitulates her wistful poses as Oliver and the story likewise displays the punishing treatment of poor children mitigated only by a *deus ex machina* ending. Both films seem calculated to appeal to audiences already consuming sentimental literature and melodramatic theater. The performance of the girl actor ensures that the boy protagonists are appropriately endowed with heavenly innocence and frailty.

Young girls in boy roles proliferated during the early teens, ranging from the kinds of delicate victims outlined above to more assertive, mischievous boys tempered by feminine charm and emotional expressivity. Marie Eline, “The Thanhouser Kid,” performed in at least thirty-eight boy roles between 1910 and 1914 at the ages of eight through twelve, although this was only a fraction of her total output; she appeared in 117 films over those four years. Eline played messenger boys, stowaways, lame boys, and even truant boys. Twice she played black boys, to critical acclaim.⁵⁵ In the films I have seen, Eline’s features are genuinely androgynous.⁵⁶ She wears little makeup and her dark hair is cut at her ears, as in the photograph above. Eline was “by far the most famous of all the Thanhouser players” between 1910 and 1912, one Thanhouser historian has written, and in November 1912 *Photoplay* called her “one of the greatest child actresses on the screen or the legitimate stage.”⁵⁷ Although often billed only as the “Thanhouser Kid,” her name (and thus her gender identity) circulated in trade journals and fan magazines. However, *Moving Picture World* suggested that her performance as a boy could be so convincing that it would fool audience members not informed ahead of time. “By the by, this same



2.10 Publicity postcard for Marie Eline, identified only as the “Thanhouser Kid.” Courtesy of Thanhouser Company Film Preservation.

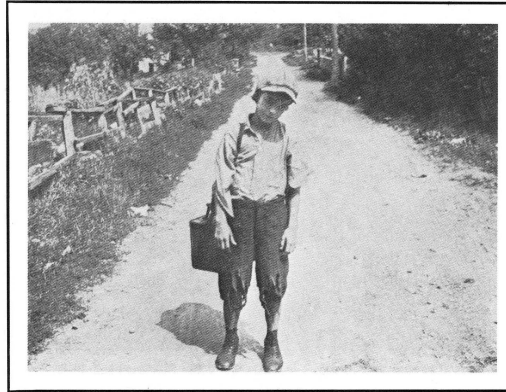
‘Thanhouser Kid’ renounces her girlishness and becomes a boy – an Italian boy – in the *Two Roses*, a drama released on June 14 [sic]. [...] Maybe you’d never recognize her if we did not tip you off. Don’t pass the tip to others in your place, but see if their little favorite doesn’t fool them completely in her masculine makeup.”⁵⁸ Although I have not seen *Two Roses*, I would tend to agree with this writer; it would be hard to identify Eline definitively as a girl based on her appearance on screen.⁵⁹ This review suggests that Eline’s performance would work equally well whether one realized that the performer was female or not. Although Eline left Thanhouser in 1914 and much of her subsequent career was in vaudeville, Helen Bagley, the “Thanhouser Kidlet,” played a handful of boy roles at Thanhouser between 1913 and 1917, at the ages of three through seven.⁶⁰

Like Eline, child actress Edna “Billy” Foster played a series of mischievous boys during the 1910s, but unlike Eline, it seems that viewers did not realize that Foster was female until the end of her career. Foster appeared as boys in at least seventeen films directed by D.W. Griffith at Biograph between 1911 and 1913, at the ages of eleven through thirteen. Reviews do not suggest awareness of Foster’s female gender until late in 1913. *The New York Dramatic Mirror* even praised “the appealing and lifelike presentation of the little boy” in *The Baby and the Stork* (Biograph, January 1912).⁶¹ In Foster’s first film, *Bobby the Coward* (Biograph, July 1911), she played a newsie on a Lower East Side street; the *Moving Picture World* wrote: “Real street scenes with slum crowds passing unconsciously were used as a background; nothing could be more realistic.”⁶² Although this praise was not directed at Foster specifically, her boy performance evidently did not detract from the impression of realism generated by the film. It is possible that some viewers, knowing the convention of young girls playing boys, could have suspected that Foster was a girl, but the films make no effort to make her femaleness visible.

Like a good actor of melodrama, Foster’s face and body are eminently expressive—her active body and mobile features transparently display her affection, hope, fear, or resignation.

THE ADVENTURES OF BILLY

Suggested By Press Comment on the Tramp Evil



2.11 Biograph Bulletin for *The Adventures of Billy* (October 1912) featuring Edna “Billy” Foster

She displays a much wider range of emotions than most boys of early cinema. Though she is adventurous and brave, she is also—again, like a good melodramatic victim—repeatedly placed in positions of peril. She is menaced by tramps (*The Adventures of Billy* [October 1911]), Native Americans (*Billy’s Stratagem* [February 1912]), gangsters (*A Terrible Discovery* [December 1911], *The Transformation of Mike* [February 1912]), a drunken father (*As in a Looking Glass* [December 1911]), and a sinking rowboat (*The Ruling Passion* [August, 1911]). Just as often, however, she serves as the means of communication between imperiled victims and potential rescuers: she is lowered down a dumbwaiter in *The Transformation of Mike* and out a window in *A Terrible Discovery* and delivers a letter summoning a spurned lover in *A Country Cupid* (July 1911). When a father observes his son (played by Foster) parodying his drunken misbehavior in *As in a Looking Glass*, the man is inspired to give up alcohol. In one case, another character’s temporary transvestism further naturalizes Foster’s invisible cross-gender performance—a gangster in *A Terrible Discovery* disguises himself as an old woman to gain entrance to the District Attorney’s house. Although Griffith obviously also cast male performers in boy roles, he repeatedly returned to Foster to play boys that balanced adventurousness and vulnerability, and to communicate these characters’ shifting interior emotional state.

I have found a handful of additional films from this period featuring girls between the ages of eight and thirteen in boy roles, including Foster’s older sister, Flora, who played the young David in Thanhouser’s *The Early Life of David Copperfield* (October 1911).⁶³ It seems likely that there were many more that I have not yet come across. Like Eline and Foster, these girls embodied an androgynous Victorian ideal of boyhood.

Thirty-two-year old Marguerite Clark’s virtuoso performance in Famous Players’ 1915 adaptation of *The Prince and the Pauper* could be considered the apogee of the female boy in American cinema. The extravagant five-reel production was widely hailed as a monumental achievement in film art and a triumph for the actress. One Hartford, Connecticut newspaper, for



2.12 Marguerite Clark in *The Prince and the Pauper*, from *The Evening Mail* (November 20, 1915)



2.13 and the *Los Angeles Times* (December 12, 1915).

instance, raved: “Without question ‘The Prince and the Pauper,’ in its photoplay form, is one of the most notable screen productions in the history of the new motion picture art and one of the few really artistic motion picture plays which has yet been shown” and *Moving Picture World* wrote that, “From all angles ‘The Prince and the Pauper’ ranks high.”⁶⁴ (Unfortunately the film does not seem to have survived.) Of Clark, the *New York Day* wrote: “In the dual role of *The Prince and the Pauper*, Marguerite Clark performs the most artistic work of her entire stage and screen career and renders an interpretation of characters containing at once so much poetry and power, so much force and beauty, that it will inevitably rank with the few greatest characterizations yet contributed to the screen.”⁶⁵ Critics also praised the film’s lavish sets and flawless split-screen cinematography. Whereas the split-screen examples from the previous chapter trained spectators’ eyes on the question of gender difference, in this case the device foregrounded Clark’s acting talents and, specifically, her ability to make class difference visible through movement and expression. Neither character was particularly aligned with Clark’s real-life identity (although her class status was likely closer to “prince” than “pauper”), so the split-screen juxtaposition would not have prompted audiences to determine which embodiment was more “real.” However, given the connection between composite photography and the detecting gaze, it is possible that the film inadvertently caused audiences to examine Clark’s performances of boyhood with a more skeptical eye.

Like rising screen star Mary Pickford, the diminutive Clark (reportedly only 4’10” tall) was known for her eternal girlishness. Although today she is best known for her 1916 film performance as Snow White (a reprise of her 1912 stage role), she also played more boyish roles, such as a girl disguised as a boy thief in a 1913 play *Are You a Crook?*, a barefoot tomboy in the film *The Crucible* (Famous Players, December 1914), and a young woman raised as a boy in the film adaptation of Arthur Pinero’s *The Amazons* (Famous Players, August 1917, unfortunately

also lost). Many considered Clark to be particularly well-cast in *Prince and the Pauper*. “A better choice for the portrayal of both the stripling royalty and the beggar boy,” wrote the *Philadelphia Ledger*, “could hardly be conceived than dainty Marguerite Clark, who is as winsome as a boy as she is in her natural estate.”⁶⁶ However, for the first time in the reviews I have been able to find, a critic called into question the ability of a female performer to enact a boy role. Despite his effusive praise for the film, the Hartford critic wrote: “The only drawback to a complete interpretation of the double role is that the part has to be played, not by a boy, but by a girl. Marguerite Clark is so thoroughly a charming little girl that she cannot completely lose her real character [...]. As a result the prince in the play is a trifle effeminate[.]” Perhaps, as I mentioned, the split-screen device, while intended to highlight Clark’s acting skill, inadvertently caused audiences to deploy the detecting gaze that had been cultivated by the entertainments discussed in the previous chapter. In this case, however, the critic justifies this effeminacy as being “realistic,” because “Prince Edward was a somewhat effeminate boy in a thoroughly feminized court and the type of good little boy who was doomed to die young.” Good femininity becomes bad effeminacy, in other words, which the critic must contain by projecting this characteristic onto England, the aristocracy, and sentimental melodrama.

This critic’s concern seems to have been in the minority. The New York *Evening Mail*, while noting that, “Hardly at any place in the film did Marguerite fool any one into believing she was a boy,” nevertheless affirmed that, “Miss Clark’s versions of the prince and the pauper have a faithful resemblance to exactly what our idea of the prince and the pauper has always been,” and that this was the reason for the film’s success.⁶⁷ *The Detroit News* wrote that besides Clark, “there are few film stars who could come so near idealism in personality alone,” and that, watching the film, “again we know that the little actress can be most satisfying in making visible our dreams.”⁶⁸ It is precisely this function of the female boy that I wish to highlight. The female boy performer was valued not for her verisimilitude to “real” boys but for her ability to make visible the *dream* of boyhood. Clark’s skill lay in her ability to embody this ideal.

The film’s place in the American film industry’s efforts to improve cinema’s reputation and win over middle-class audiences is also reflected in reviews. *The Detroit News* wrote: “It might be added that Miss Clark is building up a following of men, women and children whose enthusiasm for film attractions has been a matter of luke warm enduring [*sic*] until the elfin leading woman thrust her personality into their world while the enthusiastic fan is using her as proof of the superior points of his favorite entertainment.”⁶⁹ The critic posits Clark as a lure to middle-class audiences wary of cinema; this was surely Famous Players’ intention. We can also see the way the film was leveraged to “uplift” the industry as critics affirmed the film as a welcome change from standard film fare. Kitty Kelly at the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, for example, wrote that, “one goes away from the picture with a cheery feeling around the cockles of the heart that there is room and welcome for such thoroughly pleasant things in pictureland. Hectic melodrama and delirious triangles aren’t the whole field for film entertainment.”⁷⁰ Although today we associate melodrama only with moral dramas like Griffith’s Biograph films, the term was also used to describe sensation pictures, as Ben Singer has shown, such as the two-reel action-adventure serial films starring athletic actresses that were wildly popular at this time.⁷¹ By “delirious triangles,” Kelle certainly means love triangles. In this review, Kelly supports one kind of melodrama—the sentimental, genteel display of childhood innocence beset by a cruel world—as a welcome antidote to another kind of melodrama—the action-packed, sometimes sexually illicit thrills of popular cinema. *The Prince and the Pauper* and the wide-eyed, innocent

boys played by Clark formed a wholesome alternative to the sexual intrigue and violence that characterized much cinema of the period.

The New York Times concurred, observing that although a survey of film exhibitors had shown that, “modern society dramas were more popular than the costume plays,” “here is a costume picture that is infinitely superior in every way to the average photo drama.”⁷² A scene in which the young prince is rescued from a criminal gang, wrote this critic, “is much more thrilling than the familiar episode of the modern ‘society’ drama of the movies in which the husband comes home unexpectedly and discovers the third side of the triangle in the house.” The drama of imperiling and rescuing a vulnerable, asexual boy is contrasted with the more sordid appeals of morally questionable, explicitly sexual confrontations. The New York *Evening Mail* affirmed the *Times*’ stance that, while “experts” may have written off the costume drama, “there will always be plenty of room for pictures of this sort.”⁷³ Thus, the reception of Clark’s *The Prince and the Pauper*, articulates the cultural work of female boys in American moving pictures. Not only did female boys permit filmmakers to exploit the name recognition of a Broadway actress and establish cinema as a medium for dramatic acting, the figure also made visible a particular Victorian dream of boyhood. Films with female boys were designed to attract middle-class audiences skeptical of the cinema’s dubious moral and aesthetic qualities. Although male performers could also play sentimental boy characters (and indeed, boys played many of silent film’s *Oliver Twists*), the female boy acted as symbol of Victorian values and genteel theatrical traditions. Already in 1915, however, the dangerous aspects of this boy ideal had to be negotiated. In the *Prince and the Pauper*, this form of “effeminate” boyhood was projected onto a European, aristocratic past in order not to clash with new, more masculinist conceptions of the ideal American. After 1915, the female boy became less and less tenable and soon disappeared from American screens.

Questioning the Female Boy, 1916-1924

As the decade wore on, critics increasingly expressed qualms about the compatibility of female bodies with boy characters. The qualities of grace, charm, vulnerability, and beauty that female performers lent to boy roles were increasingly suspect. In the next few years, the qualms that the Hartford critic had raised about Clark’s boys became more widespread—although more positive valuations also continued to be expressed.

In December 1916, a year after *The Prince and the Pauper* was released, the Lasky Feature Play Company, newly consolidated with Famous Players, produced a new adaptation of *Oliver Twist* starring Marie Doro, the thirty-four-year-old actress from the Broadway show four years earlier (Figures 2.14 and 2.15). The film undoubtedly hoped to bank on the critical success of *The Prince and the Pauper*, as well as the positive reception of Doro in the stage play. Indeed, many film critics found Doro to be an ideal Oliver. “White and fragile as a snowdrop,” *Motion Picture News* called her approvingly.⁷⁴ Grace Kingsley at the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that Doro had “transferred to the screen all the pathetic wistfulness of that hapless little pawn of Fate, investing it with a thousand delicate shades of appeal.”⁷⁵ These reviews echoed the praise that had been showered on female boy performers since the early nineteenth century. Like past critics, a film reviewer in Milwaukee, Wisconsin argued that Doro’s femininity appropriately enhanced the character: “Not once in the course of the production does she forget the sex of the character she is enacting, and there is just the proper touch of the feminine to realize the shrinking timidity of the unhappy little workhouse runaway.”⁷⁶



2.14 and 2.15 Marie Doro in *Oliver Twist* (1916).

However, other critics expressed reservations about the ability of a female performer to play a boy part. For example, the critic at *Moving Picture World* conditioned his praise in an important way: “Miss Doro in her impersonation of the name role deserves high praise for her portrayal of the boy Oliver. She imbues him with the spirit of the book, as well as that need be expected of one playing a role of the opposite sex.”⁷⁷ This qualification (“as well as that need be expected”) is important because it implied that female performers could *never*, in fact, play male roles to complete satisfaction. The *Cleveland Leader* aired further doubts about Doro’s ability to play this role (Figure 2.6). “Still another star yields to the cry of ‘Into the breeches,’” the article announced.⁷⁸ Alongside a photograph of Doro in costume, the critic wrote: “This is Marie Doro as ‘Oliver Twist’ in the forthcoming picturization of Dickens’ story. Makes a charmingly girlish appearance as a boy, doesn’t she? Somehow these pretty feminine stars who pose in the costume of the male never find suits too large for them.” This commentary acknowledges that cross-dressed young women in moving pictures had become so common by 1916 that the trope became mundane (indeed, there were at least twenty cross-dressing films produced this year and thirty one the year before). Although with significantly less vitriol, he essentially recapitulates Alan Dale’s argument from almost two decades prior, suggesting that the only conceivable appeal of seeing a woman in a male role was the display of the female body in a novel costume. He further implies that prettiness, femininity, and a “girlish appearance” are fundamentally incompatible with boyhood. Interestingly, two drawings punctuate the column: on the top is a profile of a pretty, dark-haired woman looking left and on the bottom is a profile of the same woman looking right, but now sporting a tuxedo, monocle, and short, blond shingled haircut. Through this illustration, the article connects Doro’s performance as a sentimental young boy with a women imitating a roguish man-about-town, referencing vaudeville male impersonation acts and also cheeky modern girls who donned menswear in order to appropriate men’s sexual and social freedom. While these kinds of associations may have been present to some degree with earlier female boy performances, they did not appear in reviews until 1916, suggesting that these concerns were becoming more dominant at that time.

Another Star in Trousers;
It's Marie Doro This Time
Cleveland Leader Dec. 16, 1916



2.16 “Another Star in Trousers,”
from *Cleveland Leader* (December
16, 1916).

After *Oliver Twist*, only three more big-budget films starring female boys were made: *Treasure Island* (1920), with the twenty-year-old Shirley Mason as Jim Hawkins; *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1921), with the twenty-nine-year-old Mary Pickford in the dual roles of Fauntleroy and his mother; and *Peter Pan* (1924), with the eighteen-year-old Betty Bronson in the title role (Figures 2.17 – 2.19).⁷⁹ In each case, critics questioned the appropriateness of casting of a young woman in a boy part. *Moving Picture World* wrote, for example, that, “Shirley Mason’s only shortcoming in the character of Jim Hawkins is due to her inability to disguise her sex.”⁸⁰ *The New York Times* likewise complained that the “greatest weakness” of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was that “Miss Pickford does not maintain the illusion that she is a sturdy little boy,” and several critics campaigned to have the young actor Jackie Coogan play Peter Pan rather than a female performer.⁸¹ (Author J.M. Barrie, however, retained the power to chose who played Peter in the film and he apparently considered only female performers.⁸²) On the younger front, the nine-year-old Violet Radcliffe appeared in male roles in three 1917 fantasy films, but Marie Eline and Edna “Billy” Foster both left cinema in 1915, when they were likely hitting puberty. No other young female boy actors arose to take their place.⁸³ Only girls five and under continued in boy roles unabated.⁸⁴



2.17 Shirley Mason in *Treasure Island*



2.18 Mary Pickford in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*



2.19 Betty Bronson in *Peter Pan*

The standard explanations for why women in boy roles did not last in American cinema are that cinema abandoned theater's overtly artificial aesthetics in favor of realism and that decreasing the distance between the camera and the performer made convincing cross-gender performance impossible. While one might imagine that exposing performers' names (around 1913) or voices (around 1927) would impede cross-gender casting, the chronology outlined above refutes those explanations. Although cinematic acting did shift (somewhat haphazardly) from expressionistic to more verisimilar styles, plenty of non-naturalistic practices continued into the 1920s and beyond, such as cross-racial and cross-age performance. These visibly artificial conventions continued to be acceptable even in otherwise realistic films—why not cross-gender casting? While the increasing proximity of actors to the camera did play an important role in the shift, the production of the face as undisguisable was historically motivated by the needs of the star system, not an inevitable property of the medium, as I argued in the previous chapter. Rather than these ontological explanations, I argue that the female boy became less tenable in American cinema because moving pictures rendered female performers unmistakably feminine just at the time femininity was being evacuated from ideal boyhood. Furthermore, the slow pacing and moralizing sentiment of the films failed to attract working-class or rural viewers. Once middle-class viewership had been solidly established by the early 1920s, the direct appeal to these viewers was less essential.⁸⁵

We have already seen the antipathy expressed toward the Fauntleroy type of boy in the early 1900s. This movement away from Victorian, sentimental, “feminine” values toward virile, “masculine” values escalated in the mid-1910s as the European powers plunged into war and the stakes of nations’ “manhood” grew ever higher. In May 1915, a German submarine sunk the British passenger liner *Lusitania*, killing 128 Americans. Although President Woodrow Wilson declared the United States to be neutral, the war loomed large in American imaginations. Theater historian Lenard Berlanstein persuasively argues that breeches roles on the French stage declined in the 1910s because the body of young boys became increasingly politicized as a symbol of national potency and the same phenomenon can be seen in the United States.⁸⁶ At the same time, the U.S. worked to differentiate itself from “degenerate” Old World nations, asserting

its frontier-forged masculinity as the key to its success as an imperial world power. In July 1915, the U.S. expanded its imperial interests when it invaded Haiti, beginning what was to be a nineteen-year occupation.

November of that same year witnessed the screen debut of an athletic, comedic Broadway actor who quickly came to embody America's new ideal of boyhood: Douglas Fairbanks.⁸⁷ As Gaylyn Studlar has shown, the boy culture that had been championed by Theodore Roosevelt and Ernest Seton crystallized in the figure of Fairbanks, who became "the movies' most vigorous embodiment of a realized ideal of American character as perpetual youthfulness and uninhibited, playful physicality."⁸⁸ Fairbanks' first film, *The Lamb* (Triangle, November 1915), was a comedic coming-of-age story that showed the progression of an effeminate, East Coast "mollycoddle" into an athletic frontier hero. Following the film's unexpected success, Triangle released a new multi-reel Fairbanks film almost every month, many telling similar tales of feminized young men discovering a more physically powerful form of masculinity. Hyperbolic fears about women's influence over boys regularly expressed by previous generations remained potent. For example, in 1914, author Michael Monahan wrote in *The Forum*, a monthly general-interest magazine:

In other words, we abandon our children in the crucial, formative years to weakness, hysteria, inferiority and incompetence [...]. As a necessary result we are producing a generation of feminized men ("sissies" in the dialect of real boys) who will be fit only to escort women to poll or public office and to render such other puppy attentions as may be demanded by the Superior Sex!⁸⁹

Given the intensified suppression of "feminine" ideals of boyhood, we can see how criticisms of a female performer's ability to play a boy role that seems to be about "realism" are simultaneously delineating what qualities boys could or should have. Whereas a "charmingly girlish appearance" had been a valued quality, now it was highly stigmatized. Although female boys on screen were never subject to the vitriolic attacks that stage women in dramatic adult male roles were, changing ideals of boyhood—and raised stakes for virile masculinity—changed the ways that boys could be represented on screen.

Pickford's 1921 *Little Lord Fauntleroy* illustrates how one female boy tried to adapt to the new boy culture with only limited success. The contradictory project of trying to reconcile Fauntleroy, an emblem of feminized boyhood, with America's new standards of masculinity is manifest in the film's deviations from the novel and in its divided reception. In the novel, Cedric is introduced comforting his mother ("suddenly his loving little heart told him that he better put both his arms around her neck and kiss her again and again, and keep his soft cheek closer to hers") and the narrator soon elaborates his sentimentalist qualities: his sweet temper, remarkable beauty, and generous spirit.⁹⁰ His long, golden curls make visible his inner moral beauty. The film, however, incorporates the backlash to the Fauntleroy style and adds a great deal of exposition to justify Cedric's girly appearance and characterize him as a red-blooded boy nonetheless. We are introduced to Cedric as a blur on a fast-moving bike as he flees a bully. Only when both boys end up in the mud are we treated to a medium-long-shot of Cedric in which we can recognize the pale skin and trademark curls of Mary Pickford (Figures 2.20 and 2.21). The bully shouts "You curly headed sissy!" and Cedric throws mud at him. The mud lands astray and a mob begins chasing Cedric. He outsmarts the chasers, then pauses by a barbershop and looks wistfully at the advertisement for a haircut, shaking two locks of hair with his hand in frustration (Figure 2.22). Physical vitality and social stigma are the two characteristics defining



2.20 Cedric (left) and bully in the mud.



2.21 First medium shot of Cedric (Pickford).



2.22 Cedric longs for a haircut.

Cedric so far. His discontent with his sissy-ish curls places him in league with the young boys “plagued” by their mothers’ infatuation with the ostentatious aristocratic style.

The film soon explains why Cedric has these curls at all. At home, Cedric looks at a photograph of his father as a child, his hair in long brown curls, and then to his mother sitting sadly in the corner, mourning her husband’s death. With tears in her eyes, she concedes, “Cedric, I cannot bear to have you grow up, but if you insist upon having your hair cut - -.” Bracing himself, Cedric asserts “If father wore curls - - I’m proud of them.” He turns away from her, widens his stance, clenches both fists, rolls his shoulders back and stalks out of the house. When he finds the bully in a crowd of working-class boys, he shouts at them: “My father wore curls - - you insulted him - - apologize!” The boys only laugh, so Cedric leaps onto the pack, fists flying, launching a raucous, roiling fight (Figures 2.23 and 2.24). These scenes attempt to justify the curls as Cedric’s concession to his emotional fragile mother and to establish Cedric as a fearless, tough little boy who can throw a punch with the best of them. Of course, the visual spectacle of Pickford undermines this to some extent—even if Cedric is vigorous and assertive, he is at the same time pretty and feminine. For all her girlishness, though, Pickford had also established



2.23 Cedric bobs and weaves, preparing for a fight.



2.24 Cedric (left) leaps onto the crowd of bullies.

scrappiness as one of her characters' defining qualities. Quite a number of her previous characters had instigated fights in similar ways (e.g. *Rags* [Famous Players, August 1915], *Poor Little Rich Girl* [Mary Pickford Co., March 1917] and *The Hoodlum* [Mary Pickford Co., September 1919]). When Cedric goes to England, the film increasingly showcases his spectacular beauty and empathy, although a rough-and-tumble fight with an imposter (Frances Marion) once again displays Cedric's Fairbanks-type masculinity. While the novel described Fauntleroy as an androgynous, sentimental child hero, the film tries to portray him as simultaneously a sentimental hero and a red-blooded modern boy.

For some, Fauntleroy simply could not be reconciled with modern American boyhood. Furthermore, Pickford's performance of boyhood could not hope to compete with that of her new husband, Douglas Fairbank.⁹¹ Interestingly, this balance was negotiated between a single couple's film roles. *Exceptional Photoplays*, an organ of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, wrote:

Mary Pickford seems bent upon keeping pace with her energetic husband in presenting us with the past favorites of the library; she has matched Douglas Fairbanks in "The Three Musketeers" with herself as "Little Lord Fauntleroy." [...] The first picture, however, had the advantage of being based upon a story of indestructible excellence, whereas the second trades largely upon a name. "Little Lord Fauntleroy" is today curiously rococo. It was written for a particular time and generation and is now already far removed from modern childhood. To take it critically is to find it a little mawkish and most decidedly snobbish. [...] It is hard to imagine the book being much read at the camp fires of the American Boy Scouts, and there is no surer way to put a real boy into a rage than to rig him out in curls and sashes and to call him a little Lord Fauntleroy. [...] Miss Pickford rarely creates the illusion of being anything more than a girl dressed up as a boy, and makes matters worse by acting up in a manner that has long endeared her to the enthusiasts of the coy school.⁹²

The review reframes the sentimental values of the story as "mawkish" and "snobbish," fundamentally at odds with the "modern" boy who is busy building campfires in the woods with his fellow Boy Scouts, apprentice to Roosevelt's virile brand of masculinity. The athletic, playful masculinity of Fairbanks' D'Artagnan, the critic implies, is much more compatible with



2.25 Publicity photograph of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford on the set of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, from Anthony Slide, *Great Pretenders* (1986).

contemporary values. Furthermore, Pickford's visible femininity and cutesy mannerisms simply can not be reconciled with a boy identity. This kind of critique was reiterated in the 1924 "Girls Will Be Boys!" article that opened this chapter; Pickford's performance, that critic wrote, "was far from being satisfactory, because it lacked conviction"—that is, it did not convince viewers that the character was in fact a boy.

Other critics, however, praised the film and Pickford's performance. However, they did not praise Pickford for bringing feminine wistfulness or timidity to the part—as was typical of earlier reviews of female boys—but for her ability specifically to convey this new brand of vigorous boyhood. Grace Kingsley at the *Los Angeles Times* affirmed: "He's no sissy, this Fauntleroy of Mary's; there's real boyishness in him [...]; he has a boyish slant of thought as well as a boyish stride, and a boyish carelessness, too" and notes approvingly that, "Mary uses some of husband Fairbanks' athletic tactics!"⁹³ *Variety* articulated this position most precisely:

"Little Lord Fauntleroy" is a perfect Pickford picture. [...] Miss Pickford shows a range of versatility between the blue-blooded and somber mother and the blue-blooded but mischievous kid that is almost startling. [...] A strange and perhaps predominant factor is the influence of both Jack Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks in the finished product of their sister and wife, respectively.

Only Jack could have introduced the whimsical and always amusing touches of raw boyishness in the fighting, grimacing, scheming, lovable kid that Mary Pickford again turns out to be, but this time she is more boy than girl; heretofore her charm in boy parts has been her glorious girlishness; now it is her genuine youthful Tom Sawyer masculinity, a scrapping, two-fisted kid who tears off his laces and velvets and goes to it with the dirty-eared roughnecks.

At other times Doug's classic propensities are obviously exhibited. She jumps off high perches onto other boys' backs, she wrestles and does trick jiu-jutsus [sic], she dodges and climbs and leans and tumbles and hand-stands.

[...] [I]t is doubtful whether she ever made a finer picture or a more amusing, entertaining and charming one.⁹⁴

The *Variety* reviewer seems to be receiving the film in precisely the spirit it was intended to be received: as a showcase of Pickford's acting ability but also the production of a female boy in sync with modern ideals: an actress who successfully emulates the physical vitality of male stars like Fairbanks and Pickford's brother Jack.⁹⁵ The film, like all Pickford vehicles, was financially successful, but neither Pickford nor any other established actresses appeared in boy roles after this one. While female bodies were increasingly considered inappropriate for embodying the "universal boy," they were able to embody the "boy culture" values of vitality and daring by playing boyish girl characters, a phenomenon I analyze in the next chapter. The growing restriction of the range of acceptable boy identities led to an increasing reluctance to accept female bodies in boy roles.

The lack of interest on the part of rural and working-class audiences in the high-minded, slow-paced Victorian adaptations in which female boys appeared also seems to have contributed to the disappearance of this figure. This point, I must admit, is more speculative, because I have not been able to secure box office or sales figures for these films. Nonetheless, the way critics talked about the films is suggestive. *Variety*, for instance, warned exhibitors that Clark's 1915 *Prince and the Pauper* "is one of those pictures that will do a good week's business at the Strand in New York but will not hold up in the smaller towns[.]"⁹⁶ The critic reiterated, at the end of the review: "Exhibitors who are playing to the better classes of audiences will undoubtedly favor 'The Prince and the Pauper,' but those that have to rely on the masses rather than on the classes will probably be more or less disappointed in the feature." Whether the film performed well with "the masses" or not, it was perceived to appeal only to middle-class, urban viewers. Praise for the film often adopted a defensive mode. Critics acknowledged the popularity of "modern society dramas" and "hectic melodramas" but make a special effort to urge readers to support the film. The hyperbolic praise seems intended to generate an audience for a film that might otherwise appear to be old-fashioned and even boring. "The triumph of the Famous Players is all the more notable," wrote *Moving Picture World*, "when it is borne in mind that there is not a lover in the whole five parts."⁹⁷ More work on how these and earlier female boy films were received by different populations is needed, but the critical perception was that, by 1915, these films lay outside the most popular film genres and appealed too narrowly to a single segment of the audience.

The final, and most film-specific, reason for the decline of female boys in American cinema is that filmmakers made the female identity of performers so visually prominent that the narrative immersion necessary for the characters to work dramatically was made much more difficult. Here we can see how the detecting gaze outlined in the previous chapter comes into conflict with the mode of spectatorship suited for watching girls and women in dramatic boy roles. We can see these two modes conflicting most dramatically in the coda to Famous Players-Lasky's *Oliver Twist*, which adopts a split screen view that displays Doro in and out of costume (Figure 2.26).⁹⁸ As in *Dollars and Sense* (Keystone, September 1916) and the other entertainments discussed in the previous chapter, the viewer is invited to compare these two iterations of the same body and to find the traces of Doro's female identity in the image of her as a boy. The shot highlights Doro's acting skill by illustrating how different the "real" Doro is from the character she plays, and the unique capability of the film camera to allow spectators to compare two, moving versions of the same body. However, the analytic gaze that this shot invites interfered with the spectatorial mode that the body of the film had cultivated—an



2.26 Marie Doro as Oliver on the left and as “herself” on the right, from “Marie Doro as Oliver Twist,” *Motion Picture Magazine* (February 1917).

immersion that allowed the body of Doro to be taken for a “real” (albeit feminine) boy. *Moving Picture World* complained about precisely this problem:

As to the second growl, it lay in the fading from the close, where Oliver is at last pleasantly situated with his rags only a memory, into the picture of the bedraggled child on one side of the screen and on the other Marie Doro all fussed up in her best. It jerks the spectator out of the spell of the story into the realm of feminine vanity; it is unpleasant and it is inartistic.⁹⁹

This critic contrasted the display of the female body as sexually attractive and traditionally feminine with “the spell of the story.” But rather than fault “feminine vanity” as such, it seems more accurate to fault the demands of the star system, which was working to market film actresses as young, attractive women and to make them recognizable as such in every role. Indeed, this is a version of the same complaint that the *Cleveland Ledger* levied against Doro: “these female stars never seem to find suits that are too big for them.”

In a sense, this way of presenting female boys brought together the comic opera tradition of displaying the female body through tight-fitting male costumes and the melodramatic tradition of featuring young women in serious boy roles and the two modes of spectatorship did not lie easily together. Of course a member of a theatrical audience watching a female *Oliver Twist*, say, was well aware that the body on stage was female and might have appreciated the spectacular display of this body. However, this viewer’s distance from the performer and the possibility of reading feminine signifiers as expressions of a boy character meant that the fictional male persona was just as visible to spectators and that the spectator had to do a certain amount of visual and mental work to read the body as singularly female. In films of 1916, in contrast, performers were frequently shown in medium and medium-close-up shots and actresses were made up and lit to look unmistakably female.

Critics express the same concerns with Pickford in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and Bronson in *Peter Pan*. A critic for *The New York Times* wrote:

The present writer, at any rate, cannot deny that he finds [Pickford’s] Lord Fauntleroy delightful. But this admission does not mean that Miss Pickford’s performance is entirely

approved. It cannot be. It gives the spectator much pleasure, yet it disturbs him. It annoys him because it is always tempting him to lose himself in the story of which it is a part and at the same time forever forcing upon his consciousness the fact that it is Mary Pickford, a grown woman dressed and acting as a boy and not the boy himself whom he is watching. [...] In enjoying her you are enjoying Mary Pickford, not Little Lord Fauntleroy.¹⁰⁰

Unlike Doro, who was just entering the Hollywood star system in 1916, Pickford was already functioning as a fully developed star product in 1921. Pickford's prior films and publicity had made the actress so recognizable that the spectacular presence of her twenty-nine-year-old, female body made it impossible for this critic to believe in the boy character even for a split second. Furthermore, the use of split screen to display Pickford in a young male and an older female role, intended to show off her versatility and the capabilities of film technology, inadvertently invited viewers to adopt an analytic, spectacle-oriented mode of viewing that disrupted their ability to be immersed in the narrative. I say that the split screen is intended to show off her versatility because, unlike the split screen of the *Oliver Twist* coda or *Dollars and Sense*, the film very rarely poses Cedric and Dearest in similar, symmetrical positions that would facilitate easy comparison. Instead, the two characters are arranged asymmetrically, usually at different distances from the camera, in different poses, and expressing different emotions. Most impressively, the two characters demonstrate great affection for each other, seeming to play off each others' gestures and expressions. Admittedly, the point was still to see two versions of an identical body looking and acting differently at the same time, but the scenes are composed in such a way as to emphasize the real emotional exchange between these characters rather than simply the spectacular display of corporeal (im)mutability.¹⁰¹

Despite the campaign to cast Jackie Coogan in the role of Peter Pan, Bronson's performance in *Peter Pan* generated fewer complaints and quite a bit more praise than Pickford's. For one, Bronson was unknown, so spectators did not have to contend with the spectacle of a popular actress interfering with their immersive viewing. "She bring[s] to the screen a personality unfettered by the association with other roles," wrote *Motion Picture World*.¹⁰² For another, the film adaptation consciously maintained many self-consciously "theatrical" elements of the play. Full-grown humans in costume play the dog Nana and the crocodile. In the famous scene in which Tinker Bell drinks poison, Peter looks directly at the camera and asks the audience to clap their hands in order to save her life. As Peter, Bronson adopts the movement style of a dancer. She frequently pauses in dynamic poses, hovering on the tips of her toes like a balletic wood sprite. The film is so stylized, a cinematic version of pantomime mixed with ballet, that "realism" seems beside the point. *The New York Times*, though generally quite positive about Bronson's performance, had only one reservation: "Betty Bronson is a graceful, vivacious and alert Peter Pan. [...] In most of the scenes her hair seems to have a natural boyish curl, but in one close-up, which might be eliminated, one was strongly reminded of a marcel wave."¹⁰³ Again it is the close-up that causes trouble, this time by displaying too-feminine hair. Bronson's appearance in close-ups varies somewhat throughout the film—in some, she appears to wear more makeup and thus has a more feminine look and in others less so. Generally, however, *Peter Pan* is one of the few films to avoid excessively feminine makeup on its cross-cast star. Although Bronson wears eyeliner and a subtle eyeshadow and lipstick, her changing expressions continually shift her appearance between masculinity and femininity, visibly embodying Peter's status as "a Betwixt-and-Between."¹⁰⁴

While the standard explanation for the failure of cross-gender casting in cinema assumes that cross-gender performance is inherently unrealistic and that cinema is inherently realistic, I argue that filmmakers consciously chose to make women in boy roles visibly feminine in order to promote the performers as attractive, recognizable stars. Critics did not seem to find this particular lack of realism a problem when femininity was considered a valued attribute of boyhood, but it became unacceptable when a more masculinist ideal of boyhood achieved dominance.

“To put out of the way forever”: Disavowing the Female Boy

We have seen how, in 1924, a *Los Angeles Times* journalist claimed that “the films have been practically immune from [male] impersonations,” displaying a remarkable amnesia regarding the previous fifteen years of American cinema. This journalist frames male impersonation as a new trend hitting the screen, inspired by Bronson’s *Peter Pan* and Anna Q. Nilsson’s “temporary transvestite” role in *Ponjola* (Sam E. Rork/First National, October 1923). Similarly, when Maurice Tourneur cast Shirley Mason as Jim Hawkins in his 1920 *Treasure Island*, the film’s press book framed this choice as a novelty and unexpected caprice on the part of the foreign director. One article that the studio invited exhibitors to send to local newspapers wrote that Tourneur “searched far and wide for a boy actor to play the role of young Jim Hawkins” and “interviewed several youthful aspirants,” until “the thought flashed through his mind that a girl could probably lend more charm and piquancy to the part than any boy could hope to attain.”¹⁰⁵ Another wrote that, “Shirley Mason recently realized a life-long ambition. She has always wanted to be a boy so she could ‘go barefoot.’” This publicity obscures the fact that, in stage adaptations of this story (which had appeared in New York and Washington, DC in 1915), the role of Jim was always played by an actress. Furthermore, Shirley Mason had already appeared in two films in which she disguised herself as a boy: Theodore Marston’s *Sloth* (McClure Pictures, Inc., February 1917) and Alan Crosland’s *The Little Chevalier* (Edison/Conquest Pictures, August 1917). In fact, an article on *Sloth* in the general-interest magazine *McClure’s* had similarly claimed that, “When Shirley was a wee girl she wished that some day she could be a boy and ride in an airplane. And sure enough, in ‘Sloth’ she was—and did!”¹⁰⁶ By ignoring these precedents, the publicity for *Treasure Island* worked to contain female-to-male cross-casting as a novel, whimsical innovation of this particular production, and suppressed its status as a long-standing industry practice.

Filmmakers in the 1920s also began to associate cross-gender casting with an earlier, “primitive,” and therefore vaguely embarrassing era of film history. When the rising child star Jackie Coogan appeared in a new version of *Oliver Twist* in 1922, the studio apparently presented the film to the press after running “five hundred feet of a previous production of the same story—a rather notable production made ten or a dozen years ago with Marie Doro in the part of Oliver and the late Nat C. Goodwin in the part of Fagin,” according to a critic from *Theatre Magazine*.¹⁰⁷ It’s not clear whether this older version was the 1916 film with Marie Doro as Oliver and Tully Marshall as Fagin or the 1912 film with Vinnie Burns as Oliver and Nat C. Goodwin as Fagin (or even the Vitagraph’s 1909 version that would correspond better to the alleged date of the earlier film). These three productions seem to have blended together in this critic’s memory. Although he calls Doro (if it was her) “at least an acceptable actress,” he asserts that, “this old film now seemed ridiculous because of its technical deficiencies.” Though the critic may be referring explicitly to the static, distant camera, painted sets, muddy film stock, and

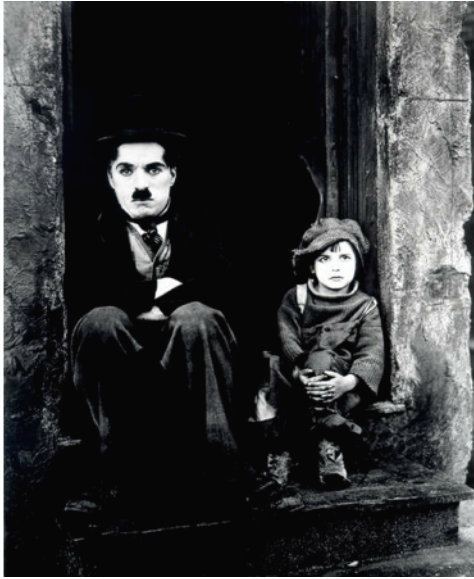
a non-naturalistic acting style, we can also see here how the practice of casting a young woman as a boy began to be relegated to a past, “primitive” film style.

Before the film was released, the *Los Angeles Times* announced, “Lesser Will Destroy Old ‘Twist’ Film.”¹⁰⁸ The article describes how producer Sol Lesser had spent \$50,000 to purchase the negative and all existing prints of a twelve-year-old version of *Oliver Twist*, which he intended to set ablaze. While the date of this ill-fated film would seem to be 1910, suggesting that it might have been the 1909 Vitagraph version (or less likely, a 1910 French version), the confusion of the critic just cited suggests that this old film could just as easily have been the Vinnie Burns or Marie Doro versions. Lesser explained that, “It was expedient to spend that much money to put out of the way forever this old picture that was threatened as a parallel production with ours. And when I say ‘put out of the way forever,’ I mean just that. We shall have a brief but glorious blaze and ‘Oliver Twist,’ as made twelve years ago [...] will join the elements.” Lesser justified the expense by arguing that, “such relics of the past [could] jeopardize new productions and [...] interfere with the normal progress of the art.”

On the surface, Lesser destroys this older film to prevent unscrupulous distributors and exhibitors from pawning it off as the new one, which could decrease his own profits and tarnish his reputation. However, if this were his sole purpose, this plan would be curiously ineffective, as there were already at least thirteen different film versions of *Oliver Twist* circulating internationally. Rather, this was a publicity stunt through which Lesser dramatically affirmed the modernity of his version against the crudeness of the previous one. The display of the old film at the press screening was designed to accomplish the same thing. (I hope that Lesser used one of the old films he bought for the press screening rather than burning them all, although neither the 1912 nor the 1916 film seem to be extant today.) Although I cannot tell whether the film Lesser planned to burn was one of the versions with a female Oliver, the role’s association with female performers makes it likely that this was one of film’s “theatrical” practices from which Lesser wished to distance himself. Whereas borrowing theatrical performers and aesthetics had helped “advance” the reputation of moving pictures, it eventually began to interfere “with the normal progress of the art.” Female boys, who had been so productive for filmmakers hoping to lure middle-class women viewers during the transitional era, were now consigned to the dustbin with other hopelessly “theatrical” practices like painted canvas backdrops and tableau staging.

Jackie Coogan became the new, reassuringly male version of the female boy. Like the female performers, he had soft, delicate features and performed an ideal of boyhood that balanced mischievousness and vulnerability. In December 1921, for instance, Grace Kingsley of the *Los Angeles Times* described Coogan as “a Raphael’s cherub of the tenement back yards, a Little Lord Fauntleroy of the alleys.”¹⁰⁹ Film historian Rob King perceptively argues that Coogan’s star image bridged late Victorian and modern consumer culture by integrating the discipline, filial piety, and dependence of the Victorian child with the spontaneity and playfulness of the modern child, and by interpellating children as consumers.¹¹⁰ King does not consider, however, that in balancing Victorian and modern ideals of childhood, Coogan also balanced the shifting gender norms of boyhood and that he was situated within an established tradition of cinematic boy performance.

Coogan’s first major film role was the title character of *The Kid* (Charles Chaplin Productions, February 1921), Charlie Chaplin’s first feature-length film. Coogan played a young boy abandoned by his mother and adopted by Chaplin’s Tramp. Coogan’s celebrated performance in this film set the template for Coogan’s roles to come. “In an obvious attempt to exploit the formula established by the *The Kid*,” King notes, “all but two of the sixteen films



2.27 Chaplin and Coogan in *The Kid* (1921).



2.28 Poster for Coogan's *Oliver Twist* (1922).

made during his period as a child star cast Coogan as an orphan and/or abandoned child.”¹¹ Like earlier female boys, Coogan's Kid oscillated between mischievous bad boy behavior (throwing stones at windows so that the Tramp could fix them and getting into fights with other boys), filial piety and affection, and expressions of grief and terror (as when state authorities take him away from the Tramp). His wretched entreaties while being taken to the orphanage are particularly reminiscent of the gestures and emotional impact of earlier *Oliver Twists*.

Only five years old when shooting *The Kid*, Coogan was much younger and significantly smaller than the girls and young women who had played boy roles. (Marie Eline was eight when she played her first boy role and Edna Foster eleven.) His smallness was accentuated by the too-large clothing he wore and by scenes in which the Tramp picks him up by the pants using only one hand (Figure 2.27). In *Oliver Twist*, too, adults lift Coogan in the air with one hand and sometimes throw him across the room. Coogan's remarkable smallness, as well as his



2.29 The Tramp (Chaplin) lifts the Kid (Coogan) with one hand.

comparatively unaffected acting style and the extradiegetic knowledge that his gender matched that of his character, set Coogan's performances apart from the female boys that preceded and somewhat overlapped with him. But the characters he played were entirely in line with the sentimental boys that had been the specialty of female performers and his appearance resembled theirs. Unlike the short styles that were the norm for boys at the time, Coogan always wore his hair in an old-fashioned pageboy.

That Coogan directly inherited the female boy legacy is apparent in the argument over whether he should play that most established of female boy roles, Peter Pan, in Famous Players-Lasky's 1924 production. Robert E. Sherwood at *Life* magazine, for instance, wrote:

I have already nominated my selection for Peter Pan, and I understand that Messrs. Zukor and Lasky are now seriously considering his name. He is Jackie Coogan, the perfect embodiment of Peter as Barrie described him [...]. Of course, the part has always been played on the stage by a mature woman; but the broad screen is not so trammled.

I earnestly urge all those who happened to read these remarks to write at once to their Congressmen and demand that the engagement of Jackie Coogan for Peter Pan be made compulsory.¹¹²

Edwin Schallert at the *New York Times* also called Coogan "the logical choice," as "he has many of the elfin qualifications that should highlight the portrayal," and noted, "There is, of course, no reason why Peter Pan should be played [by] a girl on the screen. Maude Adams made the part famous on the stage, but there is a possibility that a boy would give more reality to the screen interpretation."¹¹³ Both critics made the familiar argument that a male performer would be more "realistic" than a female performer and that the moving pictures should shed the theatrical convention of cross-gender casting. They also suggested that Coogan had the rare ability to embody the otherworldly androgyny that had been considered the province of young women.

Coogan's androgyny was actively recuperated, however, by assertions of his virile masculinity off-screen. In a March 1921 article, for example, Kingsley wrote that, "The kid star is a good sportsman. He is a fair shot, and owns his own rifle, and he can beat his dad playing golf." She affirmed "Jackie is a true boy in that he can pick up without a tremor any old worm that ever wriggled."¹¹⁴ Likewise, several reports noted Coogan's penchant for gambling—the *New York Times*, for instance, proclaimed, "Chaplin's Five-Year-Old Co-Star Likes to Play Poker and Rhummy and to Shoot Craps."¹¹⁵ In a published letter to his fans emphasizing good hygiene, Coogan assured readers: "You don't have to be a sissy to do these things. I'm not."¹¹⁶ This star discourse demonstrates the importance of establishing Coogan's masculinity. His off-screen interactions with girls became an opportunity for him to demonstrate his masculinity by mimicking adult, heterosexual, male privilege. These stories seem intended to display Coogan's fundamental difference from femininity and femaleness. One 1921 profile of Coogan in the *New York Times*, for instance, noted approvingly that Coogan "Treats Girls Rough":

"I've got a wife," [Coogan] burst out.

"What?"

"Sure I have: Patsy Marks," said Jackie. "She's my girl. She lives out in Hollywood. [...] One day I wanted Patsy to go out and play, and she said, 'I don't want to go out,' and Jackie mimicked a small girl's protest to the life. 'I looked at daddy and he motioned to me with his elbow, so I grabbed Patsy, like that and that, and she went out. That's the way to do, treat 'em rough."¹¹⁷

Similarly, in a syndicated article supposedly written by Coogan the next year, "My Girl, Patsy," Coogan stated: "Sometimes we play store; sometimes house. I pretend that I've been out late and

she scolds me like anything. I say I'm sorry. I'll never do it again. But I do. It's the game."¹¹⁸ These off-screen displays of virile, even misogynist, masculinity legitimates Coogan's on-screen performances of a decidedly androgynous ideal. Female boys, of course, would not have had access to this form of legitimization, because no one would have wanted a female performer to demonstrate that she was a "real boy" off-screen. Coogan managed to carry on the legacy of the androgynous Victorian boy that had been a speciality of female performers by frequently and repeatedly demonstrating the genuineness of his gender through displays of virile masculinity.

* * *

While the female boy offered American filmmakers a "safer" version of female masculinity than women in adult male roles or revealing "tights and tunic" costumes, the version of boyhood they presented was hotly contested. Nevertheless, filmmakers returned again and again to the female boy in order to attract middle-class women who would ordinarily be skeptical of moving pictures. The practice was not considered antithetical to cinematic "realism" until the mid-1910s, when femininity in boys became increasingly stigmatized and filmmakers went to greater lengths to make female performers unmistakably feminine and attractive. We can thus see that "realism" is not a universal standard, but one dependent on correspondence with acceptable social norms. This case study allows us to see a way in which cross-dressed girls and women contributed to the legitimation of moving pictures during its most contested years. In addition to operating as a force of social instability, as some gender theorists have suggested, cross-dressing can also operate as force of stability and even respectability. In the female boy, transition-era filmmakers found a way to bring a Victorian dream of boyhood to life, but this dream proved to be remarkably short-lived.

Chapter 3: Range Romances: Landscape, Vitality, and Desire in the Frontier



3.1 Ranch foreman (left) declares his love to disguised girl, Bessie (right) in *A Range Romance* (Bison, December 1911), actors unknown.

After working for weeks alongside a young, smooth-faced boy at a Western cattle ranch, a foreman inspects his friend's small hand and realizes for the first time that the boy is, in fact, a young woman in disguise. When the girl confirms this suspicion, the foreman throws his hat on the ground and turns the adolescent cowboy toward him. She turns glumly away, but the foreman presses his hands to his heart, professing gesturally his deep and abiding love—this is the image reproduced above. The foreman kisses the disguised girl and proposes marriage; she kisses him back in answer. The film soon cuts to “Three years later” and we see the foreman and the girl in a bourgeois interior back East, holding aloft their glowing white child. He wears a black morning jacket and she a floor-length white dress.

A Range Romance is a useful example of silent cinema's engagement with female masculinity and the frontier. To enter the frontier as a productive, wage-earning subject, a young woman must assume a male guise. When she exits the frontier, she leaves this masculinity behind. The spatial return to the East is simultaneously a return to female identity and to the duties of adult womanhood—namely, marriage and motherhood. Additionally, the fact that a boy turns out to be a girl legitimizes the intense affection between man and boy and offers the man a path out of the homosocial, communal, working-class life of the frontier and into the heterosexual, privatized, bourgeois life of a city-dwelling husband and father. Furthermore, the film's depiction of “real” Western horses, fields, corrals, dirt streets, and wooden buildings—

compared to the single cramped set the film uses to depict the “East”—illustrates the moving picture industry’s own romance with the “range.” The company that produced the film—Bison, a subsidiary of the New York Motion Picture Company (NYMP)—was one of the first to establish a permanent base of operations in Los Angeles, in late 1909, distinguishing itself from East Coast competitors through the use of real western locations in southern and central California.¹ In 1911, Los Angeles began to rival New York City as the nation’s film production hub and, in the next six or seven years, would supplant its East Coast rival completely.² During this transitional time, actors, directors, producers, and other personnel frequently shuttled back and forth between New York and Los Angeles (and other key film-producing cities, such as Fort Lee, New Jersey; Chicago, Illinois; Jacksonville, Florida; and Denver, Colorado). When shooting in California, Colorado, and Florida, production companies trumpeted their ability to allow audiences to engage imaginatively with the American outdoors.

At the same time that the American moving picture industry was using young women in boy roles to connect to Anglo-American sentimental theater, as I discussed in the previous chapter, it was also using representations of cross-dressing frontier women to connect moving pictures to culturally-valued mythologies of the American West. Previous scholars have described silent cinema’s “cowboy girls” and “young wild women” as emblems of modernity and new womanhood, but these figures also looked backward to established visual and narrative tropes of the American frontier.³ Frontier mythology appealed to Americans across class lines with a balance of sensationalism and nationalistic pedagogy. Although more attention has been paid to the production of male masculinities, literary and journalistic accounts of the West also circulated female masculinities, including stories about frontier men discovered to be women and rowdy frontier women who appropriated men’s clothing. By 1910, the moving picture industry was producing hundreds of western-themed films every year to meet audience demand, so stories of cross-dressed women provided a salutary variation that could appeal to female and middle-class viewers while retaining working-class men and boys in the audience.

These figures offered the pleasing spectacle of physically vital white American women interacting with rugged American landscapes, playing into ideologies that linked the Western topography to white racial vitality. These films authorized and even celebrated white female masculinities, as long as these masculinities were confined to a particular, temporary time – girlhood – and a particular, temporary space – the frontier. As many scholars have argued, the concept of “adolescence”—an extended, unique period between childhood and adulthood—was invented at the turn of the century, as the average age of puberty declined, the amount of training and education required for industrialized jobs grew, and the average age of marriage rose.⁴ A distinct “girl culture” also developed as young women’s purchasing power increased and girls’ serial fiction celebrated the period of relative freedom between childhood and marriage.

As in *A Range Romance*, many short stories, newspaper accounts, and moving pictures described a girl who entered or was raised in the frontier “as a boy” but inevitably exited the frontier in order to assume the duties of womanhood. At the same time, boy-girls offered frontier men a path out of homosociality into heterosexual “civilization.” By moving from unrestrained, working-class frontier life to rule-bound, upper-middle-class city life, cross-dressed young women recapitulated the frontier’s own imagined trajectory from untempered wilderness to civilized city. Symbolically aligned with adolescence, the frontier itself was only temporary—and, in fact, long gone by the 1910s. (American historian Frederick Jackson Turner famously declared the frontier closed in his 1893 address at the Chicago World’s Fair.) While psychologist G. Stanley Hall (who popularized the concept of adolescence) was recommending that white

boys go through a “savage” period in order to grow into physically vital adult men, moving pictures suggested that a frontier “boyhood” could allow white girls to become physically vital adult women.⁵ Thus, cross-dressed young women could mediate a social tension for women as well as for men. These films legitimized the white girl’s temporary assumption of masculinity, however, by contrasting it with more pathological versions such as the East Coast suffragette, whose appropriation of masculinity was too late in life and too politically-charged, and the effeminate Chinese man, whose ostensible gender abnormality was imagined to be an intrinsic racial characteristic and sign of primitivism rather than a stage of individual development. Mobility—between masculinity and femininity, between frontier and city, and between working- and middle-class—was a virtue of the modern American girl that racialized or old subjects could not share.

The female masculinities displayed in the cinematic (and real life) frontier extended far beyond gender disguise. In fact, Richard Abel suggests that the comparative openness of the West allowed women to shoot, ride horses, and stage dramatic rescues without the narrative excuse of male disguise.⁶ Indeed, most of the active young women in frontier films were not actually disguised as men. And yet many frontier women in moving pictures wore clothing that had been strongly gendered as male, such as trousers, chaps, and cowboy hats. Although one could defend trousers as a pragmatic choice for riding horse astride, Annie Oakley, one of the most famous female trick riders and sharpshooters, made a point of rejecting trousers in favor of a significantly more respectable dress and corset. Thus, the choice to adopt “male” clothing was always also a symbolic choice. Furthermore, as I will show, press accounts of cross-dressing in cinema often lumped women wearing overalls or trousers in with women disguised as boys. In this chapter, I will trace how the gendering of frontier clothing blurred and shifted over the course of the teens and will therefore include some films featuring women in men’s clothing who are not in disguise.

The use of cross-dressing women in frontier films of the transitional era can be broken into roughly three periods. Before 1909, the phenomenon was rare, with the exception of Selig’s *Girls in Overalls* (1904). Between 1909 and roughly 1912 there was a significant spike that included action thrillers and family melodramas with cross-dressed chase sequences, dramas and comedies featuring man-“boy” romances, and comedies in which women take over Western cattle ranches. Between 1912 and 1916, however, cross-dressing was increasingly decoupled from female heroism. Cross-dressing was largely confined to “temporary transvestite” comedies in which disguised women were shown to be incompetent at male tasks, while, in action thrillers, women in *women’s* clothing displayed daring and physical prowess. From 1916 to 1919, some studios returned to dramas of man-“boy” romance, but this time as a way to marry legitimate theater actresses with the spectacular scenery of more far-flung frontiers such as Alaska and Northern Canada. In profoundly varied ways, transitional-era moving pictures mobilized women in male clothing and American landscapes to appeal to heterogeneous audiences.

Landscape, Gender, and Nation

The American frontier played an important role in early twentieth century conceptions of manhood and American identity.⁷ According to commentators at the time, the repeated military confrontations between the “red” and “white” races had honed white American men’s physical potency, the apparently limitless amount of land had created a sense of optimism and a can-do spirit, and the sparse population and challenging conditions had made American men innovative,

independent, and self-reliant. Many commentators such as Theodore Roosevelt feared that the closing of the frontier and the country's shift from an agricultural and artisanal economy (in which most men were self-employed or worked on the land) to a managerial, industrial one (in which most men worked in offices or factories for other people) would rob white men, and hence, the nation as a whole, of physical vitality and authority.⁸ Many turned to the warfront as a new frontier in which American men could forge their masculinity; Roosevelt in particular promoted U.S. imperialistic endeavors as a way to maintain the country's frontier virtues. Roosevelt and others also encouraged men and boys to emulate frontier life through outdoor recreation such as hunting and camping, and tourism to majestic "wilderness" areas they strove to protect through a new system of National Parks.⁹

Many sought to remake American manhood by molding the characters and bodies of young boys. A host of institutions such as the Woodcraft Indians, the Boy Scouts, and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) sprung up to accomplish such goals. Hall, as I mentioned, postulated that in order for (white) men to avoid neurasthenia, they should individually recapitulate the stages of civilization as they grow up—that is, act like "savages" when young, so that they would become civilized, but physically powerful, white men as adults.¹⁰ In these discourses, as Gail Bederman has argued, the future of the American nation and the white race were both tied up in white men's ability to actualize a powerful form of masculinity. Many of these men also believed that racial attainment was linked to gender differentiation; thus, as they made men more self-reliant and physically powerful, they strove to convince women to remain physically and economically dependent.

However, many eugenics-minded feminists and physical culture enthusiasts also applied this "man"-making formula to young women. They feared that white women, beset not only by the physical and mental shocks of city life but also physical deformation from corsets and fashionable clothing, were also becoming weak and therefore unable to bear healthy, virile children.¹¹ Feminist writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for example, appropriated the masculine "West Cure" as the antidote to the punishing "Rest Cure" doctors regularly imposed on women, Jennifer Tuttle has shown.¹² Gilman attributed her own psychological and physical recovery to her eight years in California and wrote a series of short stories describing neurasthenic girls and women who grow tall, strong, and independent by riding horses, climbing hills, and working in gardens in Edenic California ranches.¹³ In *Women and Economics* (1898), she asserted that, "The most normal girl is the 'tom-boy,'—whose numbers increase among us in these wiser days,—a healthy young creature, who is human through and through, not feminine till it is time to be."¹⁴ "Put Girls In Overalls," ran a 1904 headline in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, conveying Mrs. Frances Crane Lillie's advice to Hull House women.¹⁵ "Make Buster Browns of lace bedecked, frilled and tucked little daughters; cut their hair short, put them in overalls, and do not let them realize that they are not of the same sex as their brothers[.]" Likewise, in one of Gilman's short stories, "Joan's Defender," a young girl from the city discovers that she cannot visually determine the sex of her Western cousins (all female, as it turns out): "There they all were in row, giggling happily, standing up to be counted, and to be introduced to their new cousin. All had short hair. All had bare feet. All had denim knickerbockers. And all had been racing and tumbling and turning somersaults on the cushiony Bermuda grass as Joan and her uncle drove up."¹⁶

The application of "boy making" techniques to girls was not limited to feminist activists. The early twentieth century enthusiasm for "physical culture"—cultivating corporeal fitness through sports, exercise, and strenuous play—swept up girls as well as boys. Furthermore, girls

themselves enthusiastically appropriated elements of “boy culture,” such as dime novels and Scouting handbooks.¹⁷ Groups of girls even formed their own “Boy” Scout Troops independently until the Boy Scouts organization agreed to form a women’s division. It may seem counterintuitive that people would apply the strategies developed to make boys more “masculine” to girls at the same time that American and European sexologists were identifying boyish behavior in girls as a potential indicator of sexual inversion. There were several things going on here. For one, feminists like Gilman re-signified, to a certain extent, the “masculine” qualities of health, strength, and independence as “human” qualities (or, more specifically, qualities of a vigorous white race, as Bederman points out).¹⁸ At the same time, the Victorian emphasis on self-restraint and gentility and the ideal of children as passive, beautiful and innocent (a “feminine” ideal embodied by the female boy, as I have argued) gave way, at least in part, to a modern emphasis on vigor and potency. Correspondingly, the new ideal child was boisterous, strong, and mischievous—and this ideal could be embodied, at times, by girls as well as boys. However, “masculine” physical and mental characteristics were permissible in girls so long as they did not interfere with their eventual entrance into traditional femininity—that is, heterosexual marriage and motherhood. Just as white boys could temporarily act the “savage,” white girls could temporarily act the “boy.” The spread of “tomboyism”—and the varying adoption of boys’ physicality, appearance, and clothing—conceivably made male disguise less necessary and also makes it more difficult to tell whether a girl in overalls would be considered to be “cross-dressing.” Lingering in boyhood beyond the appropriate age limit or rejecting entrance into womanly duties was where female masculinity became pathological. Indeed, rejecting the standard reproductive teleology of “adolescence–early adulthood–marriage–reproduction–child rearing–retirement–death” and extending “adolescent” ways of being beyond the usual time limits can be considered a “queer” temporality, as more recent scholars like Judith Halberstam have argued.¹⁹

The fictional and the real American frontier played host to female-bodied men, women disguised as men, and women who adopted men’s clothing, attitudes, and skills without disguising their gender. In her study “The Frontier Heroine in American Literature,” Patricia Heil argues that, “while male disguises were not common among Western heroines until the 1860’s, by 1880 they had become part of a standard formula.”²⁰ These disguised women include Eulalie Moreau in Frederick Whittaker’s *The Mustang-Hunters; or, the Beautiful Amazon of the Hidden Valley* (1871); Hurricane Nell in Edward L. Wheeler’s *Bob Woolf, the Border Ruffian; or, the Girl Dead Shot* (1878) (in which the narrator perpetrates a gender surprise on the reader like the films discussed in Chapter 1); and Dusty Dick (who appears only in male guise) in *Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, the Heroine of Whoop-Up* (1878). Calamity Jane, a reoccurring character in the Deadwood Dick dime novels based on the real-life Martha Jane Canary Burke, wore men’s clothing but did not disguise her identity. Burke, a hard drinker and former prostitute, was a sharp contrast to the respectably feminine Oakley, alongside whom she performed in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West for a short time.

Memoirs, newspapers, and magazines also regularly reported on frontier men who were revealed to be “women.”²¹ Horace Greeley, for instance, the *New York Tribune* editor who popularized the maxim “Go West young man!” wrote of peculiar Colorado encounter in his 1859 memoir:

A young clerk with whom I conversed at supper gave me a little less discouraging account; but even he, having frozen his feet on the winter journey out, had had enough of gold-hunting, and was going home to his parents in Indiana, to stick to school for a few

years. I commended that as a wise resolution. Next morning, after we had started on our opposite ways, I was apprised by the conductor that said clerk was a woman! I had not dreamed of such a thing; but his more practical or more suspicious eyes had seen through her disguise at once.²²

Interestingly, Greeley describes the conductor as a more astute gender detective than himself, due, we imagine, to his previous experience with disguised women and awareness of frontier cons more generally. This account, historian Peter Boag points out, accords with the narrative trope of women entering the frontier as men but eventually exiting it to become women once more.²³ Boag and other recent transgender studies scholars rightly point out that this narrative—and the assumption that these complex figures were “really” women—is often a projection by contemporary journalists, as well as by more recent feminist and lesbian scholars.²⁴ Many of the frontier men discovered to be female-bodied had a determined sense of themselves as men, were accepted in frontier communities as men even after being “outed,” and ended up married to women.²⁵ Although there is plenty of evidence that some female-bodied people were successfully and permanently recognized as men in the frontier, the dominant narrative in both fictional and “non-fictional” genres was of young women assuming male identities only temporarily and usually for pragmatic reasons (to get a high-wage job or exact revenge).

Dee Garceau, Clare Sears, and other historians of gender and sexuality have argued that rumors of frontier boys “really” being girls helped legitimize men’s same-sex desires. In one late nineteenth century cowboy song, for example, “The Stampede, or The Cherokee Kid from the Cimarron Strip,” the narrator describes his special affection for a young cowboy with a “lithe” and “slim” waist. When the “Kid” is run over in a stampede, the narrator discovers that the Kid is female and the Kid confesses her love for him. The narrator kisses the Kid passionately but she dies in his arms. As in many a “temporary transvestite” romance, the man is attracted to the Kid long before he realizes that she is female. The discovery leads directly to shared confessions of love and overt sexual expression. However, Clare Sears points out that while writers and politicians described the gender and occasionally sexual deviance of white frontier men and women as a quirky element of this “colorful” region, they used the ostensible femininity and gender illegibility of Chinese-American men to engender popular support for increasingly discriminatory legislation, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. While white men and women’s transgressive gender was seen as temporary, the femininity of Chinese men was “located in a racially distinct body” and thus both immutable and grotesque.²⁶ White writers also sometimes described the gender of Native Americans as illegible, due in part to Native men’s long hair and women’s horsemanship skills (although Native men and women could also paradoxically be conceptualized as hypermasculine and hyperfeminine as well).²⁷

Moving pictures thus entered a cultural field in which the landscape of the American West was believed to cultivate physical vitality and “masculine” qualities in young women as well as men and these qualities were deemed acceptable, and even valued, as long as they were only temporary. Frontier narratives regularly described young women who assumed male guise while traveling and working in the West and the rugged men who fell in love with them. Real-life frontier women showed off their “masculine” skills at traveling Wild West shows, although their gender expression varied widely. Stage productions such as *Peter Pan* (premiering in 1904) displayed the athletic antics of a female performer in male guise in a fantastical frontier, while others, such as David Belasco’s *Girl of the Golden West* (1905, adapted to opera by Giacomo Puccini in 1910) displayed a frontier tomboy against impressively naturalistic scenery using sophisticated new stage technologies.²⁸ However, motion pictures offered, for the first time, the

chance to see the heroic movement of women's bodies within real American landscapes. Before this, audiences could read about these women, see photographs of them in newspapers, and even see them in performing in Wild West shows. But they could not see them interacting with the very landscape that had mythically created them. Gender disguise, furthermore, heightened the emotional impact of chase scenes, offered the frontier man a path to bourgeois respectability without abandoning masculinist values, and had the potential to appeal to diverse audiences.

Of course, as Annie Oakley demonstrates, a woman need not don male clothing or a male identity in order to display "masculine" frontier skills. The forms of female masculinity cultivated in the frontier spanned a range of behaviors and appearances. A 1911 article in *Lippincott's Monthly*, "The Masculinization of Girls," described young women's changing physicality as a form of "masculinization" that was not tied to male clothing. Of "the 'Masculine Girl of today,' the article stated: "She tells herself exultantly that she is man's (almost) brother....She loves to walk, to row, to ride, to motor, to jump and run, not daintily with high heeled, silk-lined elegance, but as Man walks, jumps, rows, rides, motors, and runs."²⁹ This positive physical "masculinization" was also associated with the motion picture industry. That same year, a Vitagraph actress linked the physical vitality of California women performers to their apprenticeship to Western "men folks". An article in the New York theater magazine *Stage Pictorial* called "Why Many Players Come From California" reported:

Statistics for the past forty years show that California contributes more high-grade professionals [to the stage] than any other ten states--a fact which has been generally known and which seldom receives even a suggestion of an explanation. It remained for little Miss Margaret Gibson, the leading lady of the Vitagraph Company in Santa Monica, Cal., to offer the most unique explanation ever made for this remarkable condition of affairs.

In a recent interview, Miss Gibson declared that the men folks of California are primarily responsible for this condition, so far as girls are concerned. She said: "Before the Western girls are sent to school they are taught how to ride a horse. By the time they graduate, they can ride anything that has four feet and wears hair. Bathing parties all the year around means that swimming is like talking--every girl knows how. A girls' first ride in an automobile is the occasion of her first lesson in handling the car. Sailing a boat or handling a motor craft are two things that the men always insist upon teaching the girls. Camping in the mountains means self-reliance, and naturally they learn how to shoot, fish and 'rough it.' Throwing a lariat is equally as fascinating as tennis; golf in no way is superior to the 'cross-country hikes. Dancing, music, bridge, and all the other so-called girls' amusements are familiar to the lassies of California, so it looks as if the Western girl generally possesses the accomplishments of both the men and women of other sections."³⁰

Although these kinds of activities had been the cornerstone of Roosevelt and Seton's efforts to "masculinize" boys, they were also attributed to actresses in the burgeoning field of moving pictures. Although this is not "cross-dressing," per se, it is evidence that moving picture culture, in part because of its location in the West, helped construct a version of modern femininity that appropriated the skills and ways of being that had been claimed, quite vociferously, for men.

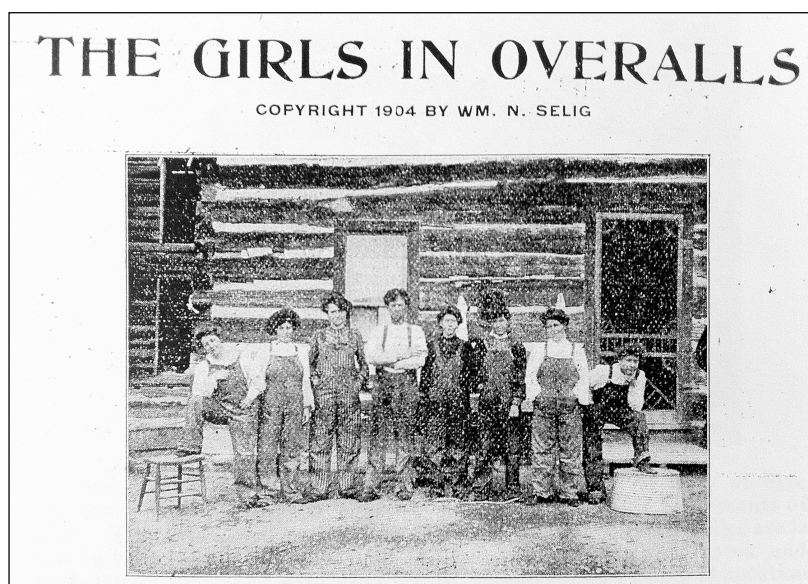
Furthermore, the fact of historical women adopting men's clothing in the West—with and without the intension of being read as men—and the mass media's circulation of these images helped expand the sphere of women's clothing in the early twentieth century to include items that had been reserved exclusively for men. While a number of films adopted the gender disguise

narratives that had been popular in dime novels at the beginning of the transitional era, this was eventually surpassed by representations of young women with the physical and mental characteristics of heroic frontier masculinity and only select items of male clothing, without the narrative justification of gender disguise.

Before 1909: The Novelty of Girls in Overalls

I found very few films featuring frontier women in men's clothing before 1909. The Edison Manufacturing Company filmed Annie Oakley exhibiting her rifle skills in 1894, but she wore her trademark fringed dress and corset. A notable exception, however, was Selig Polyscope's 1904 film *Girls in Overalls* (which unfortunately does not seem to be extant, although a six-page, illustrated publicity bulletin survives, Figure 3.2).³¹ William Selig, formerly a magician and minstrel show operator, founded Selig Polyscope Company in Chicago in 1897 and soon teamed up with commercial photographer and Colorado booster Harry H. Buckwalter.³² In 1902 and 1903, they made a series of films documenting Colorado railways, cowboys, and Ute Native Americans. The Selig publicity bulletin for *Girls in Overalls* promotes the film as yet another document of exotic Colorado life: "An Original Creation Made Direct from Life in the Mountains of Colorado." The film consists of a series of shots depicting eight young women (and one boy) wearing overalls, working and playing over the course of a single day. The scenes are titled: Going to Work, Chopping Wood for Winter, Lunch Time, A Little Game of Leapfrog, Raking Hay, Stacking Hay, and Fun on a Hay Stack.

The Colorado setting and demonstration of modern farm machinery ("go-devils" and an immense hay stacker) are attractions sold alongside the gender display: "Aside from the novelty of seeing girls dressed in overalls doing the heavy work men are supposed to perform the picture gives a very clear idea of how an immense Colorado hayfield is handled." Elsewhere, the bulletin asserts that the film is "not only unusual but is real and a touch of nature that is not seen



3.2 "The Girls in Overalls," Selig Publicity Supplement No. 18 (1904), from Margaret Herrick Library

every day.” However, the film is also obviously fictionalized. The bulletin explains the backstory, which presumably does not appear in the film itself, but was also apparently published in the New York, Chicago, Boston, and San Francisco *Sunday American* and the *Chicago Tribune*. A man and his wife move to a ranch in Gunnison, Colorado and beget “eight daughters and one son.” The man falls “into the clutches of a money-lending shark” and dies of worry; his wife soon follows. The children, however, “with true Western spirit [...] decided to work the ranch themselves.” This narrative justifies these girls’ appropriation of male clothing as a pragmatic necessity and the result of the father’s failure and demise (both economic and psychological). Young women stepping in for failed male relatives were common in later gender disguise films as well.

The bulletin describes the film as “clean” and “sentimental,” appealing to men and “ladies and children,” and plays on nostalgia for a vanishing, agricultural way of life:

This film is one that touches the heart. It combines crisp, clean comedy with a touch of pathos and a wonderful amount of sentiment that carries the audience back to the old days on the farm. [...] It is a film that will win encores from the ladies and children and ovations from the men. The idea is new and the effect great.

The girls’ outfits are presented as a novel aspect of farm life, but the disjunctive gender display is heightened for comic effect. These girls, we learn, could not “forego the habit of wearing high-heeled shoes while at work.” The scene descriptions also emphasize gender disjunction and described the effect as particularly appealing to “ladies”:

The sight of bright-eyed, smiling girls driving a horse hitched to a rake is quite amusing, but when the girls wear overalls and high-heeled shoes and even black lace waists under the bibs of the jeans is [*sic*] doubly interesting. Think of a girl carrying straps and buckles and pieces of wire in one pocket of her trousers and a box of cream candies in another! Is it not enough to touch the heart of every lady in the audience and cause almost any amount of favorable criticism?

Although this promotional writing undoubtedly exaggerated the film’s appeal in order to interest exhibitors, we can see that the company imagined this trope to be particularly attractive to women.³³ I suppose the wretched fate of having to do farm labor is the element imagined to “touch the heart” of ladies, but the gender disjunction was clearly also imagined to be “amusing” and “interesting.” In the final scene, the girls remain on the farm and in male garb (playing happily in the hay they have just stacked). The film does not speculate about their futures. I have not been able to find any reviews of the film to see how audiences may have received it, although this is not surprising, since individual films were rarely reviewed in these days.³⁴ The bulletin can reveal, however, how the production company imagined the potential audiences might make sense of the film and how they would respond. Ultimately, the bulletin frames the girls’ male garb as a novel and comedic spectacle as well as a stolen glimpse of Colorado farm life.

The Selig Company demonstrated particular interest in daring women. In 1906 they released *The Tomboys* and *Two Mischievous Girls*, each following the exploits of not particularly boyish girls perpetrating a series of tricks on people, as well as *The Female Highwayman* (which I described in Chapter 1), about a woman who perpetrates a series of robberies by going in and out of male disguise. This film takes place in an urban milieu, though, and was probably shot in Chicago. The next year, Selig released *The Girl From Montana* (March 1907). This film does survive, but the images, copied from a paper print, are only barely legible. A girl, played by celebrated horsewoman Pansy Perry, rides to the rescue of her lover as he is about to be lynched

by a mob. Sitting astride a horse, the girl shoots through the rope holding her lover aloft and they escape together on horseback. The girl wears split skirts and a short, fitted jacket with leg-of-mutton sleeves—not a particularly masculine outfit. Several elements of this film—the centrality of the female heroine, displays of physical prowess and daring, and her successful rescue attempt—would be taken up by a number of films during the teens, including the spectacularly popular “serials” in the middle of the decade. Although, as we will see, a number of films played with gender disguise between 1909 and 1912, an increasing number of action films eschewed this kind of narrative justification for women’s athletic heroism.

1909-1912: The Cross-Dressed Chase and the American Landscape

The vogue for cross-dressed action heroines in films actually began not on the frontier but on the Civil War battlefield. In both Civil War and frontier films, the trope of a disguised woman being chased through variegated outdoor locations added emotional stakes and the attractive spectacle of an athletic woman traversing synthetically combined, rugged American landscapes to the established “chase” structure. Stories of disguised women participating in military conflicts were common folklore and female characters often accomplished thrilling last-minute rescues in “10-20-30” American stage melodramas of the late nineteenth century.³⁵ The years 1909 through 1911 witnessed an explosion of cross-dressed women performing undercover Civil War missions. Although Vitagraph made a Civil War film about a male spy who exchanges clothing with his girlfriend in 1907 (*The Spy, a Romantic Story of the Civil War* [Vitagraph, March 1907]), the trend for girl spies took off in 1909, under the leadership of Kalem’s Gene Gauntier. Gauntier, a pioneering film writer, actress, and director, appeared in five films as a cross-dressing girl spy: *The Girl Spy: An Incident of the Civil War* (Kalem, March 1909), *The Further Adventures of the Girl Spy* (Kalem, April 1910), *The Girl Spy Before Vicksburg* (Kalem, December 1910), *The Little Soldier of ’64* (Kalem, June 1911), and *A Daughter of the Confederacy* (Gene Gauntier Company, March 1913). During this same period, Kalem made a girl spy film set in North Africa (*The Girl Scout; or the Canadian Contingent in the Boer War* [October 1909]) and D.W. Griffith produced two, significantly more melodramatic variations at Biograph, *The House With Closed Shutters* (August 1910) and *Swords and Hearts* (August 1911).³⁶ Selig joined the trend belatedly, with *Pauline Cushman, Federal Spy* (Selig, March 1913). During this same period, cross-dressed young women pulled off horseback rescues in frontier films such as *The Red Girl and the Child* (Pathé: American Kinema, August 1910), *A Western Girl’s Sacrifice* (Champion, September 1910), *The Sherriff’s Daughter* (Pathé: American Kinema, March 1911), *The Post Telegrapher* (Bison, May 1912), and *A Girl Worth Having* (Kinemacolor, March 1913). Girl heroics in Civil War and frontier films were considered so similar that when Champion released *A Western Girl’s Sacrifice* a month and a half after Griffith’s *House with Closed Shutters*, *Moving Picture World* wrote: “Whether it was merely coincidence, or whether one or the other producer was duped into accepting a scenario already used by another, one cannot say. But with location changed this is the same story as was told in ‘The House with the Closed Shutters,’ which was released August 8. The working out is through a Western story of horsethieves, and the girl falls while impersonating her brother to permit him to escape. [...] It was a sacrifice indeed, but it saved the family honor.”³⁷

In political discourse of the time, the battlefield functioned as a version of the frontier. In terms of gender and sexual organization, the two spaces were alike in many ways. Like the frontier, a battlefield is presumed to be all male, and women who enter this space as active

subjects likewise must take on male guise. Men live communally, outside of family structures, and courage and physical prowess are highly valued. “Civilization” must be defended against tricky, sexually rapacious foes (who are not limited to the enemy soldiers). Conflicts take place in picturesque outdoor locations. Even the way the two settings are filmed is often similar. To cite just one example, Griffith uses the image of enemy forces galloping in a circle around a vulnerable family home in both a frontier setting (*The Battle of Elderbush Gulch* [Biograph, March, 1914]) and a Civil War setting (*The Birth of a Nation* [Griffith Feature Films, February 1915]). Of course, there are important differences as well: in broad outline, the Civil War pits white men against other white men, whereas the frontier pits white men against non-white men (although Civil War films can reconcile “enemy” whites by uniting them against non-white men, and frontier films can frame evil white men as the instigators of the tractable non-white men). But as a bastion of men and military valor and an opportunity to set spectacular conflicts in American landscapes, the genres coincide.

These instances of cross-dressing share a number of characteristics, but not those of Chris Straayer’s “temporary transvestite” genre. Whereas Straayer’s films play gender disguise for comedy—emphasizing the humorous complications of disguising one’s gender, from entering the wrong bathroom to attracting the “wrong” sex, in these films the disguise—and the situation—is deadly serious. The films are either action thrillers (like *The Red Girl and the Child* and Gauntier’s *Girl Spy* films) or tormented family melodramas (like *The Sherriff’s Daughter* and Griffith’s films) with no leavening moments of humor. The disguised women are fairly visually convincing, usually positioned twelve feet or more from the camera, wearing little to no feminizing lipstick or eye shadow, and frequently in motion. Although the young women accomplish their mission, the enemy invariably spots their presence (but not their gender), prompting a full-scale chase through the countryside. They have no difficulty in their male roles and, on the contrary, prove themselves to be better men than the “real” men around them.

One of the key functions of cross-dressing in these films is to heighten the emotional impact of the chase. Becoming “male” gives the protagonist the opportunity to undertake a dangerous, thrilling mission, but being “female” makes audiences more fearful about the character being killed or captured. An endangered woman, at least according to the dominant logic of the time, inspires more empathy, fear, and anxiety than an endangered man. Certainly plenty of films showed men undertaking similar missions, but the trope of the cross-dressed woman offered a useful variation on this story with higher emotional stakes. While the oscillation of female protagonists between “power” and “peril” would become definitive of the serial-queen melodramas to come, as film historian Ben Singer has argued, these earlier cross-dressed rescuers embody both power and peril at once.³⁸

The narrative trope of replacing a failed man with a more “manly” woman had disturbing cultural resonances, which Griffith, in particular, exploited. Such substitutions played on contemporary anxieties that the economic and political gains of middle-class white women were conversely linked to the physical and psychological decline of white men. Susan Courtney argues that *The House with Closed Shutters* and *Hearts and Swords* illustrate a broader shift in Griffith’s work in which male failure is transformed into female suffering.³⁹ In *The House with Closed Shutters*, for instance, a young soldier, Charles (Henry B. Walthall), is too cowardly to deliver an important message from Robert E. Lee to the front and retreats to his house. Horrified, his sister Agnes (Dorothy West) cuts her hair, puts on her brother’s uniform and sword, mounts his horse, and delivers the message for him. She gets trapped on the battlefield, but runs into the fray to grab a fallen Confederate flag. As she lifts it, she is shot from behind and falls, the flag

still in her hands. To save the family honor, the mother maintains the fiction that it was her son who died in the war, and requires that the young man remain hidden at home, shut away from the world. Courtney writes:

Stepping into his uniform and the heroic image he cannot sustain, [the sister] takes on the role of masculinity he cannot bear to play. [...] [S]he does not just die in the likeness of her brother, but for him, taking on the risk and the pain from which he ultimately hides. Quite literally, then, the film thematizes what I suggest is a larger tendency at work in Griffith's films during this period in which the agony of male bodies and psyches is relocated onto female ones.⁴⁰

In *Swords and Hearts*, another heroine played by Dorothy West, this time the “poor white” girl Jennie Baker, leads Union soldiers away from the man she loves (a plantation owner's son paying court to another woman) by appropriating his jacket, hat, and horse, and galloping away from the house. She takes a wound for him—thus completing the transition, says Courtney, of relocating the white man's wounds to the white woman's body.⁴¹ In the second film, unlike the first, the gender order is eventually restored, when Jennie and the man marry. Courtney complicates the tendency to view these heroines as purely emancipatory by pointing out how they facilitate the shift of suffering and sacrifice from male to female bodies. Nonetheless, the women's success in completing these traditionally male actions destabilizes the “natural” connection between a male body and “masculine” characteristics like strength and bravery. While some viewers might read the films as cautionary tales about contemporary gender disorder, they were open to being read as feminist fables as well. Courtney rightly notes, too, that, “the flexibility of Biograph's representations of gender [was] regularly facilitated in part by the rigidity of its representations of race.”⁴²

In these films, the act of female cross-dressing is always linked to an extended chase sequence. The chase was one of the most popular film forms between late 1903 and 1906.⁴³ The fascination with this form, argues Tom Gunning, “lay in the spatial continuity it rehearsed, the possibility of stitching together a larger spatial whole from separate shots,” as well as, Jonathan Auerbach contends, “repeated movement [...] for movement's sake” and “the biomechanics of running itself.”⁴⁴ Building upon this, Charles Wolfe argues that one of the key appeals of “California slapstick” (i.e. the comedies of Sennett, Chaplin, Arbuckle, and Keaton shot in California between 1912 and 1928) was its use of the “longitudinal” chase, which linked the topographically and socially varied settings of Southern California in a way that highlighted “the incongruities and new continuities” engendered by modernization.⁴⁵ These films, Wolfe writes, gave “palpable form [...] to new ways of thinking about the ability to move and act intentionally and find a fit in the modern world.”⁴⁶

Chase sequences like those in civil war and frontier films are also longitudinal, but rather than make a humorous comment on modernization, they test the human body against a series of challenging, varied terrains. These sequences thus fit into the broader cultural claim that the American landscape had forged, and continued to forge, powerful “American” bodies. In these film chases, the victor is the one who can best navigate these difficult spaces. In *The Red Girl and the Child*, for instance, the disguised heroine crosses a sheer-walled canyon on a rope and arrives on the other side in time to cut the rope, sending her pursuers to their death. In *The Further Adventures of the Girl Spy*, Gauntier climbs a tree and hides as the enemy approaches, leaping from a branch onto a horse. Likewise, Gauntier sprints through tall fields of grass, down steep ridges, and across streams in *The Girl Spy at Vicksburg*, while one of her pursuers wobbles on a plank crossing a stream and falls in. Even when her movements become awkward as she

runs into a lake, with soldiers behind her firing and advancing, she uses the difficult terrain to her advantage. She ducks under water. The soldiers overrun the space where she went under and then exit the frame. Once they have disappeared, she pops back out of the water (wig still in place!) and races back to her mother's house. The topography is an active participant in these confrontations, helping and hindering both parties differentially depending on their outdoor skills. For the most part, the sequences cut between all different kinds of terrain--tall fields of grass, farmland, forests, country roads, and steep ridges, showcasing America's diverse natural landscapes. This topographic diversity is not actually confined to the West, as the films were in fact filmed all around the United States, from New Jersey (*The Red Girl and the Child*, *The House with Closed Shutters*, and *Swords and Hearts*) to Jacksonville, Florida (Gauntier's *Girl Spy* films).

The synthesis of diverse, formidable American landscapes and display of athletic women triumphantly navigating such terrain was a key attraction of the girl spy and frontier rescue films. While audiences could have seen skillful female trick riders and sharpshooters at Wild West shows, film was able to capture both these heroic movements and the landscape that cultivated and rewarded them. David Mayer argues that Griffith based *The House with Closed Shutters* and *Swords and Hearts* on "his 1904 tour in Edward McWade's production of [the Civil War stage melodrama] *Winchester*" and a brief comparison between that production and the films is helpful here.⁴⁷ While *Winchester* does not seem to involve gender disguise, it does include two thrilling horseback rides of a young Confederate woman trying to win a stay of execution for her Union lover. "In the initial run of this melodrama in 1897," Mayer writes, "Virginia Randolph's ride-to-the-rescue was staged using a treadmill apparatus and moving backcloth. In December, 1909, it was reported that 'the racing machine used in the last act has been cast aside and a vitascope [made by Edison] is now used to heighten the effect of Virginia's ride to Winchester.... A horse is also introduced, and with the combined use of the [film] machinery and horse, the audience is treated to something out of the ordinary in attempts at stage realism."⁴⁸ We can see in this description how stage productions like *Winchester*—as well as a host of "equestrian melodramas" capitalizing on the 1861 success of *Mazeppa*—struggled to present audiences with the captivating sight of a woman on horseback. As in *Winchester*, a woman on horseback did not necessarily need to be disguised as a man, but the prevalence of cross-dressed girl heroines in dime novels, theater, and historical accounts offered filmmakers an opportunity to exploit this particular spectacle. Furthermore, the skills these women exhibited were those that commentators like Roosevelt had deemed essential to masculinity—displays of outdoor prowess functioned as an appropriation of manhood, regardless of whether the woman actually wore men's clothing or not.

Generally this triumphant conquest of nature was accorded only to white bodies, but *The Red Girl and the Child* is a rare exception. The film stars Lillian St. Cyr, a Winnebago Indian who performed under the name Red Wing. This is one of the few films I have found in which a non-white woman disguises herself as a man.⁴⁹ More common were films that produced and then ridiculed Native women's ostensibly *innate* masculinity and compared them unfavorably to tomboyish young white women (e.g. *The Taming of Jane* [IMP, August 1910] and *Mickey* [Mabel Normand Feature Film Company, August 1918]). Perhaps the film's depiction of St. Cyr as an admirable, gender-flexible hero is due to the fact that it was directed by St. Cyr's husband, James Young Dear (born J. Younger Johnson, also of Winnebago ancestry). Yet Native women, like Native men, were imagined to have horsemanship and outdoor skills potentially exceeding those of white frontiersmen. Indeed, in 1912, *The New York Dramatic Mirror* praised the young,

white, Kalem actress Marin Sais (named for the California county of her birth) as “particularly good in Indian and boy parts.”⁵⁰ This comment suggests that the skills required to perform Indianness and boyness overlapped—presumably in horsemanship and outdoor athleticism. There was however, an important difference between the relationship between athletic white women and the American landscape and that of athletic Native woman—while the white woman, like her male brethren, was imagined to triumph *over* nature, the Native woman was presumed to be *of* nature. In films apart from *The Red Girl and the Child*, Native women’s masculinity was not a healthy phase ensuring them a vital body but a racial defect.

In 1912, an increasing number of films depicted women taking the place of ineffective men without necessitating gender disguise. These included Vitagraph’s two “quality” western melodramas starring Ann Schaefer: *How States Are Made* (March 1912), in which Schaefer races through forests on horsebacks to beat a claim jumper, and *The Craven* (April 1912), in which she single-handedly tracks and kills a notorious outlaw while her sheriff husband hides at home.⁵¹ Additional examples are Kalem’s Civil War thrillers *The Battle of Pottsburg Bridge* (February 1912) and *The Drummer Girl of Vicksburg* (June 1912). Women’s symbolic and narrative replacement of men is not visually emphasized through costume in these films, as it had been in the previous ones. Female Civil War spies also forego gender disguise in *The Darling of the C.S.A.* (Kalem, September 1912) and *Belle Boyd, Confederate Spy* (Selig, May 1913). In fact, this proved to be the way of the future, as the serial queens that followed Gauntier, West, and Schaefer only rarely adopted male disguise. Between 1909 and 1912, however, the cross-dressed chase sequence offered audiences a new opportunity to see the vital female body engaged with varied American landscapes with the complex message that woman could step into the void left by weak or cowardly men.

1909-1912: Range Romances

This same period also witnessed a series of “range romances,” films about young women who enter the frontier disguised as boys and the men who fall in love with them, such as the film that opens this chapter. These included *Billy the Kid* (Vitagraph, September 1911), *The Argonauts* (Selig, 1911), *A Range Romance* (Bison, December 1911), and *Making a Man of Her* (Nestor, November 1912). These films were quite different from the chase films. Where those films focused on the cross-dressed body moving through diverse terrain, these films maintained a tighter focus on the interior and exterior spaces of a single location (generally a Western ranch, but in the case of *The Argonauts*, a steamboat) and the intense interpersonal relationships of this virtually all-male, communal living space. In fact, these films can be considered a subcategory of Straayer’s classic “temporary transvestite” genre that is attuned to the particularities of frontier space. The frontier provided a space in which a young woman could experience a vitalizing “boyhood,” but only until sexual maturity, when she had to become female once again and accept the feminine duties of marriage and motherhood, which was often aligned with a return to the “civilized” East. These films acknowledged the homoerotic, non-bourgeois sexuality of the frontier environment and recast affective ties between older and young men as a path toward domestic, bourgeois heterosexuality.

Late nineteenth-century frontier literature, such as Horatio Alger Jr.’s novels of Gold Rush California, often idealized the relationships between frontier men and boys.⁵² Literary scholar Geoffrey W. Bateman argues that Alger, in particular, “re-imagines pederasty as a form of filial love on the frontier that legitimizes older men’s desire for their younger friends vis-à-vis

their adoption of a protective paternalism, using their affection to restrain [the boys'] adolescent appetites and discipline them into respectability."⁵³ Furthermore, by "deploy[ing] a colonial imaginary in order to see California as an untrammled paradise, they open up a space within which [boys] can cultivate sentimental bonds with older men who guide them on their journey through adolescence, the empty beauty of this paradise purifying their desire for each other."⁵⁴ The specter of degeneracy is cast onto the figure of the effeminate Chinaman, argues Bateman.⁵⁵ The homoerotic attachments ultimately prepare the boys to return East as respectable, self-reliant men.

Cinema's "range romances" tell very similar kinds of stories, but recuperate the pederastic relationships by turning the boy into a disguised girl. *Billy the Kid* depicts a romance between a "Western kid brought up as a cowboy" and her "chum," *The Argonauts* a romance between a disguised girl on a ship to California and an inveterate gambler, and *A Range Romance* and *Making a Man of Her* romances between a disguised girl working on a ranch and the ranch foreman.⁵⁶ Only the latter two survive.⁵⁷ In every film, the revelation of the heroine's female gender is met almost immediately with a kiss and/or marriage proposal from a male companion (as in "The Stampede" song). One could read the immediacy of these kisses/proposals as evidence either that the last-minute gender switch instantaneously transmutes the men's paternal affection into sexual desire or that the gender switch authorizes the expression of sexual desire that was already there. Chris Straayer calls a kiss between a gender-disguised character and another character a "paradoxical bivalent" kiss, because it suggests homosexual and heterosexual readings simultaneously.⁵⁸ "Although the narrative promotes one interpretation of the kiss," she writes, "an alternative interpretation is suggested visually to the viewer when the kiss interrupts the narrative as a spectacular pause."⁵⁹ In the case of *A Range Romance*, we—and the foreman—may know that the young cowboy is a girl, but the visual spectacle gives the impression of two men kissing. Although the narrative works to "correct" the impression of homosexuality, "heterosexual and homosexual readings in these paradoxical scenes are not separable," argues Straayer.⁶⁰ After this kiss, the foreman puts his arm around Bessie's shoulder, they look around nervously, and then walk off together. This guilty look around indicates that the characters fully realize that they appear to be enacting an illegitimate same-sex romance,



3.3 The foreman (right) leans tries to kiss Bessie (left).

acknowledging the homosexual appearance of the kiss.⁶¹ The bivalent kiss is actually less common in these films than in the ones Straayer describes. In *The Argonauts* and *Making a Man of Her*, men wait for the disguised women to change into feminine clothing before making a move.

In addition to male same-sex desire, *Making a Man of Her* also features “accidental” female same-sex desire—two young women ditch the cowboys trying to win their attentions in order to fawn over the young cook, actually a woman in disguise. When the cook faints, revealing long black hair, the two women look at each other with mouths wide, then instantly befriend the girl, help her get back into costume, and hug her between them. Reversing the emotional trajectory of men who admire their boy companions, the women’s interest in the cook apparently transmutes instantly from romantic to platonic. Later, the foreman’s marriage proposal to the no-longer-disguised girl sets off a chain reaction, and his two cowboy friends, overtly modeling their actions on his, propose to the other two girls and are happily accepted. Thus, the disguised girl acts as the catalyst for “fixing” the otherwise homosocial space of the ranch.



3.4 In *Making a Man of Her*, two young women fawn over the young cook...



3.5 ...the cook faints at the sight of blood, revealing her long hair...



3.6 ...the women help the cook get back in costume and then hug her.

Sears and Bateman, as well as Karen J. Leong, show that in both fiction and frontier politics, pathological gender expression was displaced onto the bodies of Chinese men, who were produced as intrinsically effeminate.⁶² This obscured the discriminatory policies and other factors that had pushed many male Chinese immigrants into domestic service and other “feminine” social positions. Many of the cross-dressing frontier films I examined avoided the depiction of non-white characters entirely—a conspicuous absence considering the interracial composition of actual frontier spaces and the centrality of racial conflict in many other frontier films.⁶³ The very brief appearance of a “Chinese” man in *A Range Romance*, however, falls into the pattern identified by Sears and Bateman. In one scene, introduced by an intertitle that reads “Bessie and the foreman become friends,” we see the foreman and the disguised girl converse flirtatiously—she smiles and looks away from him, he puts his hands on her shoulders and turns her toward him. She laughingly makes a muscle, but he chivalrously takes the saddle with which she had been struggling and they walk off together. Directly from this scene we cut to another intertitle—“The foreman goes to town for a new cook”—and an image of a caricatured Chinese man running out of a building carrying a bursting burlap sack. In a slapstick sequence, the



3.7 Bessie and the foreman flirt.



3.8 A “Chinese” cook runs out of a ranch house.

Chinese cook runs into a white cowboy. They both fall down and begin fighting. A group of boisterous white cowboys appears and forces the Chinese man onto a wagon with them and they drive off. Although the Chinese man is not so much effeminate here as comically grotesque (something like a Harlequin clown), his visible abnormality naturalizes, through contrast, the developing relationship between the two white ranch hands. The figure of the Chinese cook, a stock western character, automatically evoked discourses about Chinese men’s racialized femininity. Furthermore, the expulsion of the Chinese cook opens a space for Bessie’s mother, Mary, to be hired. Domestic caretaking work thus shifts from a racialized, degenerate wage laborer to a white wife and mother, who performs these tasks “naturally.”

In *Making a Man of Her*, in contrast, the ranch owner tries to avoid the constant transformation of his cooks into wives by hiring a male cook. Of course, the “male” cook turns out to be a young woman in disguise and she gets snapped up like all the others. In the film’s final scene, the ranch owner introduces his new cook—a large, mannish, middle-aged black woman apparently played by a white man in blackface. The cowboys protest, slamming their plates angrily on the table—this is finally a subject who cannot, apparently, be incorporated into white male sexual or domestic desire. This “joke” highlights the fact that the frontier was not



3.9 The final shot of *Making a Man of Her*, actors unknown.

lacking women so much as it was lacking the “*right kind*” of women. This figure illustrates the sharp disparity between female-to-male cross-dressing, which renders its subject attractive to both male and female observers, and male-to-female cross-dressing, compounded with white-to-black cross-racial caricature, which doubly exempts its subject from the film’s economy of desire.

Although these films accord with many of the generic conventions of the “temporary transvestite” genre that Straayer identifies—a narrative excuse for gender disguise, a disguise that is convincing to diegetic characters but not film audiences, confusion of heterosexual and homosexual desire, a dramatic unmasking, and closure achieved through heterosexual coupling—they also speak more specifically to the “problem” of sexuality in gender-imbalanced frontier spaces.⁶⁴ This was particularly acute in Gold Rush towns like San Francisco, in which, according to official estimates, women formed only two percent of the population in 1849 and fifteen percent in 1852.⁶⁵ The long-range cattle-herding of the 1860s through 1880s also cultivated an “all-male nomadic subculture,” historian Dee Garceau writes, and cowboys developed alternative structures of sociality, “pairing up as sleeping partners, or ‘bunkies,’ on the range,” regularly patronizing prostitutes, and cross-dressing at dances.⁶⁶ This culture diminished when open-range herding gave way to family ranches in the 1880s.

Refusing to acknowledge the presence of Native and Latina women and prostitutes of all races compounded the perceptions of gender imbalance. Spain had “instituted colonial ideologies,” Sears writes, “that literally did not count indigenous women as women when calculating gender ratios. [...] The problem of ‘too few women’ in gold rush California, then, was more accurately a problem of ‘too few women acceptable for marriage to Euro-American men[.]’”⁶⁷ Sexual relations between white men and Native or Latina women were increasingly condemned, “except for rape or prostitution,” and, Sears continues, “long-standing practices of land appropriation, violence, and ‘Indian Removal’ policies that had forcibly driven indigenous people from the area.” While real-life white frontier men had sex with prostitutes of various races, had families with non-white women, and formed partnerships with other men, in the sanitized mythology of the frontier, the lack of “respectable” white women meant that the frontiersman was consigned either to solitude or platonic friendships with men and boys. The

cross-dressed girl recuperated the hyper-masculine frontiersman for heterosexuality, racial purity, and therefore for (re)productive citizenship. And yet, the repeated cinematic elaboration of intimate relationships between men and girls disguised as boys made the possibilities for same-sex romance on the range visible.

Whereas later “temporary transvestite” comedies operated on a variety of timelines, in these frontier films, female masculinity is closely associated with adolescence and must be abandoned at the point of sexual maturity—associated, in these films, with an offer of marriage. The conflation of adulthood, femaleness, and heterosexuality is clear in a plot synopsis of *Billy the Kid* in the *New York Dramatic Mirror*: “‘Billy’ is a girl but the boys on the ranch don’t know it until she is sixteen, then she marries her pal.”⁶⁸ The synopsis implies that Billy’s sixteenth birthday (symbolic of her transition to adulthood), the revelation of her gender, and her marriage happen nearly simultaneously. In *A Range Romance*, Bessie enters the frontier as a boy when young (perhaps eight?) and works alongside her father as a cowboy for ten years. (This period is elided with an intertitle.) After she and the foreman fall in love, however, the film transitions quickly back to the East and we see them “Three years later,” wearing distinctly gender-differentiated clothing and holding up their small, glowing child.

In an interesting variation of the “West Cure,” this film frames the frontier as a space capable of restoring an entire bourgeois family. The film begins in a cramped shot of a bourgeois interior. A woman in an old-fashioned dress and hairstyle—Mary—throws down her sewing and argues with her husband, then retreats to her bedroom, crying. The film portrays Mary as a hysteric driven mad by her tedious feminine tasks—but the film takes the husband’s side. “After a quarrel Bob leaves his wife, Mary,” an intertitle tells us. Bob takes their daughter Bessie, dresses her as boy, and they go West. Bob and Bessie seem to have no trouble finding work as cowboys and we see them riding and walking confidently around the ranch where they work. Although Bessie has difficulty carrying an enormous saddle in one scene, she seems to be quite fit otherwise—later she shows off the muscles in her forearm to her mother. When we next see Mary, however, she has grown grey and hunched from her neurasthenic life in the East. She



3.10 Bob and Mary find work at Clark’s Ranch. From left to right, Clark (J. Barney Sherry), the foreman, Bob, and Bessie (other actors unknown).

makes her way West in search of her husband and daughter and coincidentally gets hired to be a cook at the very ranch where they work. Moments after Bessie and the foreman kiss, they enter the mess hall where Mary is serving food and the entire family is reunited in a dual-couple tableau reminiscent of musical comedy.

We are then shuttled back to the bourgeois living room, now revitalized and properly reproductive. Bob, his hair neatly combed, reads a newspaper while Mary fusses happily behind him. Bessie walks into the frame in a glowing white dress, her long hair displayed in large buns over her ears, and carries a blond toddler. The former foreman soon enters and the older couple moves away from the camera, ceding the foreground to the next generations. In the final image, we see three generations of a contented, bourgeois, heterosexual, white family. Where the



3.11 The bourgeois home restored: Bessie and the foreman holding child, in front of reunited parents.

Western ranch was communal, masculine, and mixed race, this interior is private, feminized, and white. A dysfunctional bourgeois family—a hysterical, dissatisfied wife and a short-tempered husband—is “fixed” through their temporary participation in Western life. Their daughter finds a virile man who is nonetheless content to return to civilization (his position as “foreman” suggests potential managerial ability). At the same time, Bessie’s disguise and then revelation allows the foreman to desire a white boy but end up, safely, with a white woman. Their child, according to eugenic philosophies popular at the time, promises to be particularly healthy. His parents’ physical fitness and vigor, acquired at the ranch, ensure his heartiness, but the child’s blond hair attests to his/her racial purity (although the hair of both parents is dark). Positioning the older couple in the background and the young couple and their child in the foreground suggests that these three point forward to a revitalized future. Although much of the film lingers on the apparently same-sex romance between the foreman and the disguised Bessie, this romance is ultimately framed as a phase that enables the rejuvenation of the enervated white bourgeois family.

These frontier version of the “temporary transvestite” film recast the decidedly non-bourgeois sexuality of the historic West as a revitalizing stage for women—as well as men—to pass through on their way to the respectable heterosexual family. Based on movie theater advertisements in local papers, *A Range Romance* seems to have played in North American

towns ranging from Fort Wayne, Indiana to Lethbridge, Alberta between its release in December 1911 and at least 1914.⁶⁹ However, there seems to have been few, if any “range romances” produced between 1912 and 1916—instead “temporary transvestite” romances were more often set in the aristocratic, European past or the working-class, urban present—but the genre re-appeared between 1916 and 1919. The merger of the “temporary transvestite” romance that had been around since baroque theater and the frontier setting created moving pictures that celebrated the masculine physicality cultivated by the West but recuperated the non-normative sexual organization of that space.

Feminist Ranch Takeovers of 1910

A cycle of films in 1910 parodically overlaid the ostensibly all-male space of the ranch with the all-female space of the women’s college in stories of East Coast college women taking over Western ranches: *The Cow Boy Girls* (Selig, May 1910), *The Cowboys and the Bachelor Girls* (Méliès, November 1910), and *Girls Will Be Boys* (Essanay, December 1910). Unfortunately, all three films are lost, but publicity bulletins and brief reviews remain. “We have seen girls dressed up as boys before, in fact it is quite a common stage expedient,” wrote the Chicago trade journal *The Nickelodeon* of *Girls Will Be Boys*, “but they usually do it as a matter of disguise, and not, as here, as a matter of principle. These swaggering damsels are proud of their men’s togs, and seem to be quite at home in them[.]”⁷⁰ The reviewer differentiates between women wearing men’s clothes for purposes of disguise versus for symbolic purposes. If we see women wearing trousers and chaps without hiding their gender identity, we may be tempted to label it something other than cross-dressing. However, this comment makes clear that, at least in this critic’s view, these women are appropriating “men’s togs,” not wearing some kind of masculine-styled women’s clothing, so they would count—like Selig’s *Girls in Overalls*—as cross-dressing.⁷¹

This remark also implies that it is less unsettling to see young women in disguise than to see women “swagger” in trousers without this pretext, because gender disguise was such a common theatrical trope. This is interesting, because contemporary scholars have a tendency to think of gender disguise as the most “transgressive” of cross-gender behaviors. Nanna Verhoeff, for instance, writes in her discussion of “young wild women” in silent Western films that cross-dressing is perhaps “the most powerful[.]” form of these women’s “transgressions” “because it is on the body of the gendered figure that the mobility is inscribed.”⁷² And yet the temporary assumption of a male identity for some limited, pragmatic purpose—and generally for the purpose of restoring social order—may not be as transgressive as women who show that physical prowess and a “swaggering” confidence could be features of an unquestionable female body. The potential transgressiveness of the disguised women comes out more strongly in the way she enables the visualization of same-sex romance, as in the films described above, although those women are invariably less physically competent than the ones here.

The ranch takeover films explicitly transpose East Coast college girls—associated with women’s professional and political ambitions but also with a pleasure-seeking, sporting, youthful energy—to a frontier setting. “‘Vassar,’ ‘Wellesley’ and ‘Bryn Mawr’ colleges have supplied almost every profession with intellectual young women, and now they have invaded the cattle herders’ trade,” announced the Selig bulletin for *The Cow Boy Girls*.⁷³ In *The Cowboys and the Bachelor Girls*, the women are more politicized: the president of a female “Bachelor Club” inherits a ranch and decides to run it, with her clubmates, “a la suffragette fashion.”⁷⁴ Although



3.12 “The Cowboy Girls, Selig Publicity Bulletin (1910), from Margaret Herrick Library.

the films can be read as burlesque inversions of the ranch life, they also visualize a feminist fantasy. Indeed, three years after these films, Charlotte Gilman Perkins published a short story, “Bee Wise” (1913) that described a group of college women buying land out West and founding a utopian women-run town.⁷⁵ In both “Bee Wise” and *The Cowboys and the Bachelor Girls*, the president of a women’s club receives an inheritance that allows her to fulfill this dream.

However, unlike Gilman’s story, these films can only envision the single-sex sociality of the ranch (male *or* female) as temporary. Although the films explicitly frame the *women’s* commitment to “bachelor” life as the problem the narrative must eventually solve, they also implicitly problematize the cowboys’ own (off-screen) homosociality. Unlike the seemingly effortless, inescapable movement of the young women in the range romances toward heterosexual coupling, these films frame the “winning” of women to heterosexuality as a battle. Of *Girls Will Be Boys*, the *Nickelodeon* writes: “presently some real male creatures appear on the premises, and our modern Amazons meet their Waterloo, succumbing to the darts of Cupid. The siege is a merry one and the final surrender proves a victory for all concerned.”⁷⁶ This militaristic language, although humorous, conjures up far grislier frontier battles such as Custer’s Last Stand and the Massacre at Wounded Knee. Unsettlingly, the women’s “surrender” is recast as their “victory.” In *The Cowboys and the Bachelor Girls*, the girls are repeatedly attacked—first by faux-desperadoes (actually cowboys in disguise), then by a faux-bear (another cowboy). In the end, a “real” Mexican assaults the most intransigent woman and she fights against him “for her life.”⁷⁷ Each time, one of the cowboys saves the woman, thus winning her love and submission. In these films, the racial and natural threats of the frontier (even when falsified) steer women back to normative heterosexual coupling and cure them of their desire to run a ranch. Although, these young women are a good match for the West in their energy and athleticism, their “swaggering” appropriation of men’s authority cannot withstand the assault of “real male creatures.”

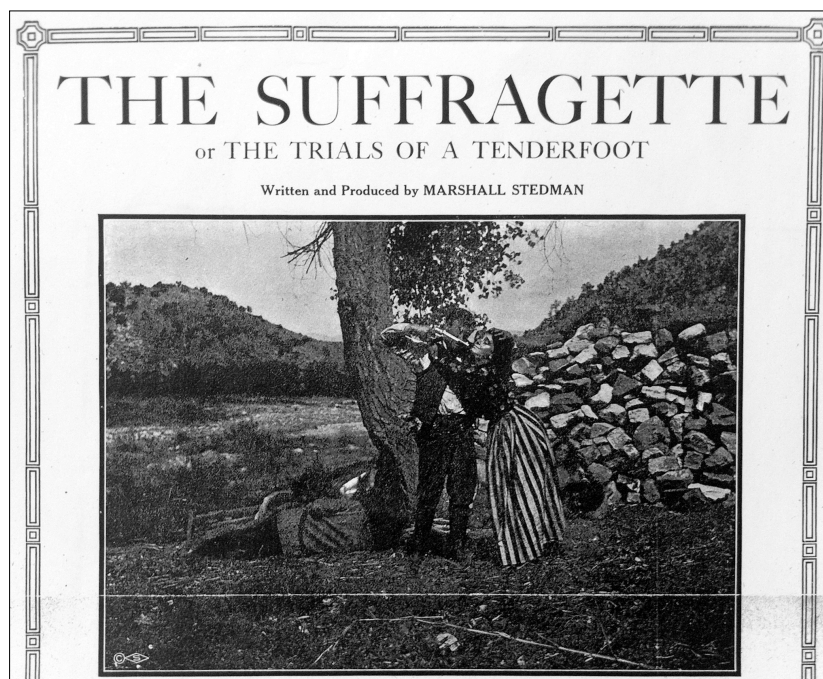
The Cow Boy Girls, however, is a bit more complex, although it ultimately fits into this heterosexual teleology. In this film, the women remake the ranch into a *de facto* women's college: they change its name from "L.Z. Ranch" to "Lizzie Ranch" and re-label the bunkhouse a "Dormitory."⁷⁸ These actions suggest that the ranch and the women's college, seemingly opposite spaces in every way (working class, masculine, vulgar, and a site of physical labor versus upper-middle-class, feminine, respectable, and intellectual) could actually be analogous structures—both cultivating boisterous camaraderie, fun, and a utopian communalism. Interestingly, a later comedy, *Rowdy Ann* (Christie, May 1919), shows a frontier girl remaking a women's boarding school along the lines of a Western ranch. The analogy could also be a way of reaching out to divergent audiences: Selig promised that *The Cow Boy Girls* would be "especially interesting to bachelor ranchmen," and we can also imagine East Coast women watching it as a form of vicarious Western tourism.⁷⁹ I agree with Richard Abel on this point, who has argued that "cowboy girl" Westerns like this one "strongly suggest that young girls, even middle-class white girls, could be attracted to the genre[.]"⁸⁰ Likewise, we might imagine all three films appealing to both critics and advocates of women's emancipation, depending on whether one interprets the comedic upending of ranch life as evidence of women's incapacity for rule or as a form of pleasurable social anarchy, akin to the way Charlie Chaplin's Tramp character undoes spaces of labor.

Like *A Range Romance*, *The Cow Boy Girls* includes a comedic Chinese male servant, "Hi Low." Fitting into the orientalist discourse of Chinese men as inherently feminine, the young women in this film evidently do not find Hi Low's presence to interfere with the ranch being an all-female space. When a white man tries to breach the feminine preserve, however, "The invasion does not meet with the approval of the fair co-eds and, accordingly, he is tied and relegated to the woodshed."⁸¹ Hi Low is portrayed as being on the same side as the women, against this "real" man. Much like the black(face) servant in *What Happened in the Tunnel* (Edison Manufacturing Co., November 1903), who is used to perpetrate a racist "joke" on an overly fresh white male admirer, the film uses Hi Low to contest Bud's white male authority. After the women have left Bud in the woodshed, "Hi Low relieves him of his chaps and substitutes Aunt Nellie's 'Mother Hubbard' [an old-fashioned women's dress]." In a comic inversion of gender and racial hierarchy, the white man is emasculated first by the college girls and then by the effeminate Chinese man. That a Chinese man removes a bound white man's chaps and replaces them with a dress seems to suggest a particularly sexualized form of assault—the degenerate, effeminate Chinaman manages to "unman" the white cowboy. In this way it resembles the transitional-era comedies of racial illegibility that Jacqueline Stewart analyzes, which generates humor through white failures of vision without resolving or fixing these failures, as later cinema would.⁸² Ultimately, though, Bud helps the young women capture a band of horse thieves and wins one of the women as a wife.

While we might imagine that these spectacles of college girls rejecting male authority and a Chinese servant unmanning a white cowboy would unnerve audiences, critics received the film positively. *Moving Picture World* described it as "A lively picture illustrating the general turmoil which results when a party of athletic New England girls take possession of a Western ranch. There is plenty of life and action, lots of fun and wholesome activities as the picture runs. It is done in the characteristic Selig way and maintains interest until the close."⁸³ The various pranks are described as "fun and wholesome." *The Nickelodeon* review of *Girls Will Be Boys* acknowledges, though, that the women's appropriation of masculine comportment could be received poorly: "Some moral precisionist will doubtless take exception to the swaggering and

perverse femininity displayed by these girls, but it all seems harmless enough and makes good fun.”⁸⁴ The comment suggests that the critic recognized multiple, contradictory ways of reading the film. Comedy, as a genre, was particularly adept at presenting questionable material within the framework of “harmless” fun—those who objected could be dismissed as humorless in a way not possible with other genres. While it is tempting to assume that “perverse femininity” may have alluded to sexual inversion or lesbianism, it is just as likely—particularly if we look at the way it is paired with “swaggering”—aimed at the women’s appropriation of male authority. In the next two chapters, I will describe in more depth the way American cinema belatedly connected lesbianism to cross-dressing in the 1920s. Similar to the review of *The Cow Boy Girls*, *The Nickelodeon* judges that this scenario of gender disruption facilitated by the frontier is “harmless enough and makes good fun.”

More generally, these films sell the West as a place for playful, athletic tourism. The threats are only playacted, like an on-location Wild West show. Just as Western travelogues domesticated “wild” frontier spaces by including tourists in the frame, as Jennifer Peterson has argued, the women in these films domesticate these “wild” spaces—but in this case even more literally.⁸⁵ Conversely, the frontier domesticates these “wild” women. Ranch life, these films show, offers a more productive channel for the energies of antsy East Coast women than fencing or “Bachelor” societies. This message is even more explicit in a Selig film released a few years later, *The Suffragette, or The Trials of a Tenderfoot* (1913). In this film, the dangers of the frontier (even if fabricated by white men) violently discipline an unattractive, masculine suffragist from the East. The film stars Myrtle Stedman, a Selig player who had already appeared as a suffragette in *When Women Rule* (Selig, February 1912)—“A Screaming Farce on the coming of Equal Suffrage”—and a cross-dressing cowgirl in *The Cowboy’s Best Girl* (Selig, September 1912). In this film, Stedman plays “Miss Samantha Roundtree, a Homely Old Maid



3.13 “The Suffragette,” Selig Publicity Bulletin (1913), from Margaret Herrick Library.

Suffragette.”⁸⁶ Samantha is typical of comedic renditions of the “mannish” suffragette that Kay Sloan and Shelley Stamp have described.⁸⁷ Unlike the cross-dressing frontier girl, whose masculinity is a developmental stage identified with physical fitness, the suffragette is politically ambitious and too old and plain for her masculinity to be found attractive.

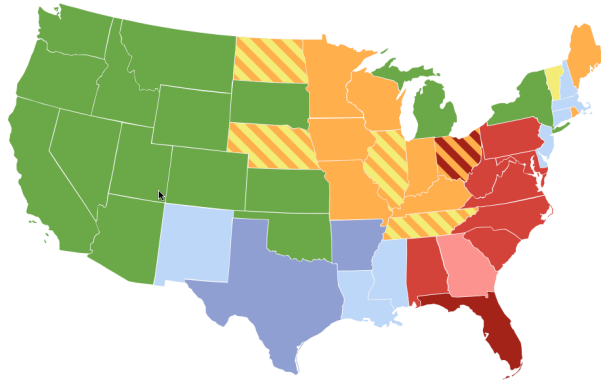
Like the bachelor girls, though, she is curable. According to the film’s publicity bulletin, a cowboy, Waggy Bill (William Duncan), and his friends disguise themselves as Native Americans and abduct Samantha, tie her to a tree and “pile brush about her as if to make a funeral baked feast.”⁸⁸ The Native Americans’ literal appetite for Roundtree stands in for the underlying threat of their sexual appetite. Waggy, however, changes back into cowboy clothing and “empties blank cartridges at the crowd with such effect that he decimates the Indians and rescues Samantha.” Samantha clings to her rescuer “like a leech” and “having gotten a man, forgets all about votes for women.” During this period white men commonly appropriated Native American costumes and rituals in an attempt to resuscitate their “primitive” masculinity and here we can see them playacting a scenario of racialized sexual conquest.

Comparing the portrayal of Samantha—and other East Coast suffragettes—to the frontier girls I have examined so far suggests that the “good” female masculinity of the West was produced in opposition to the “bad” female masculinity of the East. The “good” form of female masculinity is the young, attractive, physically active girl whose independence does not interfere with her incorporation into heterosexual domesticity when she comes “of age.” It is temporary and apolitical. The “bad” form is a woman who seeks to impinge on men’s political authority. Anti-suffrage films try to delegitimize these women’s supposed mental masculinity by portraying them as old and unattractive.⁸⁹ We can see this same polarization more explicitly in a brochure for the 101 Ranch Wild West show:

[The 101 Ranch cowgirl] is a development of the stock-raising West comparing with the bachelor girl and the independent woman of the East. She is not of the new woman class—not of the sort that discards her feminine attributes and tries to ape the man, simply a lively, athletic young woman with a superfluity of nerve and animal spirits, with a realization that in affairs where skill is the chief qualification she has an equal chance with her brothers....They can “rope” with horse running at top speed, swing gracefully from the saddle and pick a fallen handkerchief from the ground, mount and subdue “bucking” horses, and use gun or pistol with the nonchalance and proficiency of the most expert cowpuncher.⁹⁰

This publicist struggles to separate the physical skills of the cowgirl—which are comparable to those of her “brothers”—from the “new woman class” who “tries to ape the man.” Although some scholars have asserted that the proficient cowboy girls of cinema at this time emblemized the “New Woman”—and of course some audiences could have seen them that way—frontier women were often discursively constructed *against* East-Coast-identified, politically ambitious “New Women.”

This discourse obscures the politicization of actual Western women. Western states and territories were in fact the first places where women won suffrage: the Wyoming Territory (1869), the Utah Territory (1870, although the U.S. Congress rescinded this in 1887), Washington (1910), and California (1911). By the time the U.S. Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment, women already had suffrage in every Far West state (Figure 3.14). In fact, in 1912, the *Toledo Blade* even identified 101 Ranch Wild West riders in particular with suffrage activism: “Girls with Wild West Show to Help Women Gain Equal Suffrage.”⁹¹ The 1915 publicity was thus struggling to contest a connection that had already been forged. These films



3.14 Women’s suffrage laws in 1920, before passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Green indicates full suffrage. Courtesy of Lokal_Profil, Wikipedia Commons.

created a fantasy vision of the young frontier woman as a girl passing through a boyish phase that made her energetic and physically fit but happy to “surrender” her masculinity and independence to “real male creatures,” and who had nothing whatsoever to do with women’s desire for more permanent incursions into masculine political and economic spheres. Many films acknowledged the potential for women to take the place of men, but generally worked to restore the gender and social order through the sure-fire cure of heterosexual marriage.

1912-1916: Female Physical Prowess Becomes Untethered From Gender Disguise

Around 1912 and 1913, representations of disguised frontier girls backed off from displays of physical competence and gender disguise was increasingly cordoned off to romantic comedies. *Making A Man of Her* was actually the first example of this shift. Unlike the protagonists of the other films I have described, in this film the heroine fails each test of her “masculine” prowess: she coughs and grimaces when forced to smoke a cigar, she faints when she gets a small cut on her finger, and rips off her hat to display her long hair after several unsuccessful rounds in a boxing match. In a somewhat later film, *Her Father’s Son* (Morosco, October 1916), (which I discussed briefly in Chapter 1), the disguised protagonist is likewise forced to drink scotch, use snuff, and fire revolvers as “A test of her ‘manhood,’” an intertitle tells us—and she fails at every task. When she is then caught admiring a dress instead of the set of pistols she has received, her uncle exclaims: “What kind of a boy are you—fooling with flounces! Here! Take these, and train yourself to be a man!” In this film and many to follow (such as *Little Old New York* [Cosmopolitan, November 1923]) the disguised girl’s unsuccessful performance of masculinity makes her read as a “nance” or “sissy boy” rather than a fresh-faced frontier acolyte.

Instead of the American space of the frontier, cross-dressing is increasingly projected into an aristocratic, European past (e.g. *Nell Gwynne* [Sawyer Inc., June 1914], *The White Rosette* [American Film Co., February 1916]). When women temporarily don male disguise in these settings, it is often to make an escape rather than to rescue someone (e.g. *A Mysterious Gallant* [Selig, February 1912], *The Mystery of Richmond Castle* [Midgar Features, January 1914], *The Ragged Earl* [Popular Plays and Players, October 1914]).⁹² Alternately, a number of cross-dressing films are set in the urban present, sexual farces that fit largely into Straayer’s “temporary transvestite” genre: *The Subduing of Mrs. Nag* (Vitagraph, June 1911), *My Brother*

Agostino (Lubin, November 1911), *Cutey's Waterloo* (Vitagraph, October 1913), and *Mabel's Blunder* (Keystone, September 1914). Interestingly, *Lillian's Dilemma* (Vitagraph, July 1914) depicts a young woman adopting male guise to gain entrance to the all-male preserve of a boys' school. Some educators worried that single-sex schools would foster same-sex encounters. While Lillian is never disciplined, one young boy dresses himself in the clothing she has left in a male teacher's room (a vain man named "Cutey"). The principle punishes the boy and fires the teacher. While cross-dressing was still common in all-male theatricals, the film suggests that Lillian's presence has the potential to "queer" rather than recuperate this space. This possibility is ostensibly dissolved, though, in the film's final two images—a wedding invitation and then a heart made of flowers, inside of which Cutey embraces Lillian and kisses her on the cheek as she gazes virtuously heavenward. However, the hyperbole of these images suggests parody.

At the same time that disguised women were portrayed as incompetent, female action heroes continued to gain popularity, most notably in the "serial-queen" melodramas of the mid-teens. Edison's *What Happened to Mary* (1912-1913), a joint venture with the nationally-distributed *Ladies' World* magazine, was quickly followed by Selig's *The Adventures of Kathlyn* (1913), starring the "cowboy girl" star Kathlyn Williams. By 1914, many more studios had jumped into the fray, including Pathé's *The Perils of Pauline* with Pearl White, Kalem's *The Hazards of Helen* with Helen Holmes, and Thanhouser's *Million Dollar Mystery* with Florence La Badie. In April 1914, *Variety* wrote, "There's hardly a big concern now that isn't getting out a melodramatic series in which a young woman is the heroine and the camera has her having hairbreadth escapes by the score."⁹³ As scholars such as Shelley Stamp and Ben Singer have noted, these heroines displayed "masculine" qualities of mind and body like daring, independence, physical strength, and agility, "masculine" tastes such as "beefsteak and automobiles" or "boxing gloves and fencing foils," and took on "masculine" narrative roles, often rescuing the men around them or relegating them to passengers as the women took the drivers' seat.⁹⁴ "What Sort of Fellow is Pearl White?" *Photo-Play Journal* asked in 1919, playfully acknowledging the actress's "masculine" appropriations.⁹⁵

Perhaps surprisingly then, gender disguise is actually fairly rare in the serials. Ben Singer lists three instances: Pearl White "disguises herself as a mustachioed toughie" in an episode of *The Romance of Elaine* (Pathé, 1915), Ruth Roland "goes undercover as a messenger boy and a Gloucester fisherman" in *The Adventures of Ruth* (Pathé, 1920), and Mollie King plays a "masked stranger" in *The Mystery of the Double Cross* (Astra, 1917) who is presumed to be male until the final episode reveals that the "stranger" is actually the protagonist's twin sister in disguise. According to Jennifer Bean, Roland also dons men's clothing in an episode of *The Red Circle* (Balboa, 1914) called "In Strange Attire" and, according to Pearl Gaddis, Grace Cunard disguises herself as a "young lieutenant" in *The Broken Coin* (Universal, 1914-1915).⁹⁶ While five examples may seem like a lot, this number has to be weighed against the vast number of serials in the silent era—at least three hundred titles in the United States alone, each of them consisting of anywhere from ten to more than one hundred episodes. While serials often revolved around disguise and mistaken identity, gender disguise was surprisingly uncommon.⁹⁷

In *The Mystery of the Double Cross*, by far the most extended use of gender disguise, Stamp notes that, "the female lead is literally split in two [...] across the bodies of the twins, one conventionally feminine and passive, the other masculine and active."⁹⁸ She argues that the film "holds out the possibility that these two 'halves' of femininity might be combined in a single woman" through the persona of the actress herself, Mollie King. While Stamp is right that the scene illustrates the way serial queens balanced traits traditionally defined as feminine and

masculine, this example is actually one of the few serials that used men's clothing to convey this concept visually.

Instead, these women's "masculine" physical and mental qualities were offset by visual and discursive emphases on their attractive, feminine appearance. "In private life Kathlyn Williams furnishes a genuine surprise," wrote *Photoplay* in April 1914. "So closely associated has she been of late with deeds of daring and dangerous exploits that one expects to find a dashing, mannish woman arrayed in more or less masculine attire. So it is almost disconcerting to find a decidedly womanly lady."⁹⁹ This comment shows that there was a cultural link between "deeds of daring," a "dashing, mannish" personality or appearance, and "more or less masculine attire." But the serial queens continually subverted this link. Serials displayed not only the active female body but also the latest women's fashions. An advertisement for *The Adventures of Dorothy Dare*, Singer notes, marketed the clothing as prominently as the stunts: "A motion picture of thrills and excitement centered around a magnificent fashion display. [...] A splendid fashion show and a vivid drama."¹⁰⁰ Serial queens often piloted airplanes, scaled buildings, and leapt across moving train cars wearing silk stockings, chic dresses and skirts, fur stoles, and stylish hats. In 1915, a *Photoplay* journalist conceptualized Helen Holmes' "masculine" strength as an element of the body she kept hidden *beneath* her clothes. Holmes loved to wear elegant gowns, Alan Burden wrote, but equally loved the fact that "she can burst the sleeves of any of them by doubling up her biceps."¹⁰¹ The dress forms a "ladylike shell," Stamp argues, that "forcibly, but not always successfully contained" Holmes' "inner masculine strength[.]"¹⁰²

An exception to the feminization of serial queens' outward appearance was Kalem star Ruth Roland. Journalists frequently linked Roland's physical vitality not only to masculine pastimes and interests but to male clothing as well. A 1915 profile of the star in *Cosmopolitan*, for example, wrote:

Buckskin hunting dress, sombrero, and rough-rider's boots were the sort of modes and millinery [Roland] preferred—though she knows how to wear the other kind. [...] Equally at home driving an automobile or an aeroplane, throwing the lasso, or walloping a punching-bag in a gymnasium, dressed in men's togs as policeman, polo player, college-boy sport, or gunman of the plains, she would bewilder her admirers were it not for the unvarying blond beauty of face and the frank, winsome smile.¹⁰³

Roland's "blond beauty"—a gender *and* racial assertion—saves her "men's togs" from being strange or "bewildering." The journalist explains Roland's preference for men's clothing and behaviors by linking her to the American West. The article points out that Roland was "reared in the Golden West" and calls her "[a] distinct type of the American girl of the West" and "a buoyant, breezy, wholesome daughter of the California Sierras." Her connection to the West is so strong, in fact, that she "has never been East in her own alluring person." The frontier authorizes Roland's masculinity just as it had for the young women I have discussed.

Although other serial queens did not admit an affection for men's clothing, many did emphasize their frontier backgrounds—Helen Homes grew up "in a family of railroad workers," stays Stamp, and Kathlyn Williams "on a Montana ranch."¹⁰⁴ Even Pearl White, who was in many ways an emblem of fashionable, urban cosmopolitanism, stressed her upbringing in a log cabin in the Ozarks, Hilary Hallett points out.¹⁰⁵ Many serials focused on frontier girls and frontier settings, such as *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, *The Girl and the Game* (Signal, 1915), *The Girl from Frisco* (Kalem, 1916), *The Lass of the Lumberlands* (Signal, 1916), and *Carmen of the Klondike* (Selexart, 1918). Roland made a specialty of the subject, in *The Adventures of Ruth* (Ruth Roland Serials, 1919), *Ruth of the Rockies* (Ruth Roland Serials, 1920), *The Timber Queen*

(Ruth Roland Serials, 1922), and *White Eagle* (Ruth Roland Serials, 1922). A promotion for *Runaway June* (Reliance, 1915) even offered female fans the opportunity to take a train to California.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, toward the end of the decade, journalists sometimes conceptualized the moving picture industry itself as a new kind of Western “frontier,” in which women took on the roles formerly reserved for male migrants. A 1920 *Photoplay* profile of White, for instance, asserted:

The early years of the twentieth century brought to American women the same vast, almost fabulous changes that came to their grandfathers in the middle of the century preceding. What the expansion of the West and the great organization of industry opened up to many a young man, the motion picture spread before such young girls as were alert enough, and husky enough, and apt enough to take advantage of it.¹⁰⁷

Indeed, white women moved to Los Angeles in unprecedented numbers during the 1910s, as Hilary Hallett documents.¹⁰⁸

Although serial queens only rarely donned men’s clothing to disguise their gender, they did occasionally incorporate trousers and other masculine styles into their onscreen “fashion displays.” In “He, She, or It,” Gaddis includes a photograph of Helen Holmes in dark overalls, a black denim jacket, and a train engineer’s hat. Gaddis writes that Holmes “grew up in the railroad yards, almost, and now she likes to don overalls (the 75-cent-a-pair kind), clamber aboard the ‘tame’ engine which is maintained by Signal, and run it up and down its own track. Thus she gains inspiration for ‘The Hazards of Helen,’ ‘The Girl and the Game’ and so on *ad infinitum*.” Gaddis includes Holmes alongside more typical “temporary transvestite” roles, suggesting that she considered Holmes to be cross-dressing even though she did not disguise her gender. In contrast to this reading of overalls, however, the 1918 Sears catalogue had a whole page devoted to women’s overalls and noted that, “Women’s Overalls have met with such popular favor and are now worn so commonly that further recommendation is scarcely necessary.”¹⁰⁹ This shows that what counted as “women’s” wear was in flux during this time, such that one observer could call overalls an example of cross-dressing and another describe them as women’s wear.



3.15 Helen Holmes, in “He, She, Or It” (1917).

More often, tight-fitting jodhpurs proved to be the trousers of choice for serial queens. These leggings were associated with upper-class equestrian culture and emphasized the curvaceousness of the stars' legs. They were often paired with knee-high black boots and a long, fitted riding jacket. Roland wears this kind of outfit in *The Adventures of Ruth*, *The Timber*



3.16 Ruth Roland in first episode of *The Timber Queen* (Ruth Roland Serials, 1922).

Queen, and *White Eagle*, as does Edith Johnson in *The Fast Express* (Universal, 1924). White dons an army uniform in *Pearl of the Army* (Astra, 1916-1917); but whereas the men wear straight-legged trousers, she sports jodhpurs. In these examples, we can see the way elements of men's clothing became incorporated into women's fashion, such that an outfit that may have been considered cross-dressing was no longer understood as such. As early as 1914, in fact, the *Los Angeles Times* declared "Make Way for Male Attire," but noted, "the girl of today is cleverer than her mannish sisters of only a few years ago. Miss 1914-1915 has a fancy for togs masculine, but she adapted them and remodeled them and feminized them, and wears them with a finish and a flourish that we cannot but forgive and admire. And when she dons her new 'frock coat,' there comes an irresistible impulse to slap her pretty masculined [*sic*] shoulder and call, 'Bravo!'"¹¹⁰ Serial queens wore overalls and jodhpurs only occasionally in the 1910s, but it became much more common in the 1920s, particularly for frontier girls like Roland.

The period between 1912 and 1916 paradoxically witnessed a sharp rise of female heroism in the moving pictures but a contraction of gender disguise. Where earlier films had used male disguise as a narrative ploy to authorize displays of female physical prowess and daring, essentially the opposite strategy was instituted during this period—women's "masculine" physical capacities and interests were counterbalanced by a feminine, attractive appearance. Women who did wear men's clothing, conversely, were increasingly portrayed as incompetent "men" and even sissies. These trends suggest that audiences may have become less comfortable with the idea that a woman could truly pass herself off as a man in both appearance and movement. This concept was not intrinsically anxiety provoking, however, as the disguised frontier and civil war heroines of earlier films demonstrate.

The shift away from competent cross-dressed women in 1912 may have been related to the intensification of debate over the woman suffrage question that year, provoked by the presidential elections and activists' attempt to get Democratic challenger Woodrow Wilson to endorse a federal woman suffrage platform. On May 4, 1912, more than ten thousand women

(and a thousand men) marched in New York City demanding suffrage. Wilson, who beat Republican incumbent William Howard Taft by a landslide, did not endorse federal suffrage legislation at this time, but ballot initiatives in Arizona and Oregon successfully passed measures permitting women to vote in those states. The shift toward action heroines in women's clothing was also likely linked to the motion picture industry's increasing engagement with the fashion industry. While masculine styles of fabric, cuffs, and lapels had entered mainstream women's fashion, trousers had not. In any case, during this period the physical and mental "masculinization" of young women became increasingly disconnected from the visual rhetoric of cross-dressing, although elements of men's clothing eventually became incorporated into women's styles.

1916-1919: High-class Range Romances

Between 1916 and 1919, moving pictures returned to the cross-dressed "range romance," but this time in "high class," multi-reel dramas. Despite the spectacular global popularity of one- and two-reel serials, the moving picture industry as a whole was transitioning to "feature" length films of five or more reels. The one- and two-reelers described in this chapter so far may have striven to be "wholesome" and to attract wide audiences, but they did not have the class-based pretensions of the female boy theatrical adaptations described in the previous chapter. During the last years of the 1910s, however, prestige studios turned to stories of gender disguise on the frontier for five- and six-reel super-productions, often shot in spectacular natural scenery. These productions emphasized the stage pedigree of cross-dressing. The disguised protagonists looked much more like the cutesy "boy girls" of the last chapter than the tomboys of the early teens.

Critics' complaints about these films echoed their complaints about the female boy films. When Bluebird, a Universal subsidiary devoted to producing "high class" feature films, released a five-reel film called *The Boy Girl* in March 1917, featuring Violet Mersereau as Jack Channing, a girl raised as a "romping, harum-scarum lad" in the West, *Moving Picture World* wrote that the film's scenarist had "supplied [Mersereau] with numerous opportunities to run the whole list of 'cute tricks,' so dear to the heart of the fluffy-haired ingenue. Miss Mersereau can smile, pout and wear boy togs with the best of them[.]"¹¹¹ *Exhibitor's Trade Review* opined that, "One of the principal reasons for producing the film may have been that Violet Mersereau is the proud possessor of a boy's suit of clothes which had to be made some practical use of and around those recherché garments the able-minded director built his plot."¹¹² Just as critics had been complaining about female boys at this same time, this critic wrote that Mersereau's impersonation of maleness was laughable: "Jack' Channing, patronizing a public restaurant in male attire, as depicted on the screen strikes an unintentionally comic note, for in real life the lady's luxuriant mop of hair would have landed her in the nearest police station on a charge of masquerading as a man, before she succeeded in negotiating two blocks."¹¹³ In an unusual move, this critic uses real-life anti-cross-dressing statutes to condemn the unconvincingness of a fictional representation of gender disguise.¹¹⁴ While the critic evidently finds Mersereau's gender crossing worthy of policing, he seems more irritated at the conceit that an unconvincing disguise functions diegetically as a convincing one than at any potential public disorder that women dressed in men's clothing might pose.

Several critics complained that the film came off too much like a stage play. *Motion Picture News* wrote that, "There is much action in it, but it gives the appearance of having been derived from many stock plots" including "the girl brought up as a boy," while *Exhibitor's Trade*

Review asserted more caustically that, “all the old familiar wheezes which once excited the gallery gods to uproarious applause, are presented with a disregard for probability and generous outlay of ancient material.”¹¹⁵ Here the critic disparages stage melodrama and reverses the older tendency to hold the stage on a cultural pedestal above the movies. Most damningly for a film set at least partially in the frontier, *Motion Picture News* added that, “the profuse use of backdrops in this picture emphasizes its stiltedness.”¹¹⁶ Bluebird returned to the cross-dressing frontier girl with somewhat more success a year later with *The Dream Lady* (July 1918).¹¹⁷ Directed by Elsie Jane Wilson, the film adapted a 1915 novel about an heiress, Rosamond Gilbert (Carmel Myers), who decides to grant petitioners’ wishes. When Rosamond’s first client is a woman who declares that she would rather be a man, Rosamond dresses her in men’s clothing. The cross-dressed woman befriends an outdoorsy woman-hater and they eventually marry. The film, which used real outdoor exteriors, met with more success, although *Variety* similarly complained that the disguised woman “appear[ed] more feminine in [male] apparel than in her own.”¹¹⁸

The idea of filming a theatrical-style cross-dressed girl in a frontier setting was much more successful when the actress appeared in a real-life and particularly spectacular natural landscape, such as the Hudson Bay region of Northern Canada, as in *The Snowbird* (Rolfe/Metro, May 1916), or the Alaska Territory, as in *The Girl Alaska* (Al Ira Smith/World, August 1919) (both of which survive). This search for ever more remote frontiers in which to shoot films reproduces, in a compressed and delayed manner, the quest for new real-life frontiers that had occurred decades earlier. Both films describe girls who leave Eastern cities and don male disguise to enter a wild frontier space— in *The Snowbird*, Loris Wheeler (Mabel Taliaferro) goes to the Northwoods to finagle a stolen deed from a “woman-hater,” Jean Croteau (Edwin Carewe), and in *The Girl Alaska*, Molly McCrea (Lottie Kruse) heads North simply to make her fortune. As in *A Range Romance*, the girls soon become boy companions to older men—Loris to the primal Jean Croteau and Molly (aka “Alaska”) to the more genteel Phil Hadley (Henry Bolton). Interestingly, in both cases the male leads are also the film’s director. The girls’ gender is eventually revealed and each couple marries.

Critics lavishly praised the location shooting on each film. Of *The Snowbird*, the *Washington Post* wrote that, “the scenes are laid in an unusually picturesque locality, that of the Hudson bay district of Canada, which has afforded opportunity for really wonderful photography.”¹¹⁹ *The Girl Alaska* was billed as “The First and Only Photoplay Ever Made on Alaskan Soil” (which may have been true, if short, non-narrative travelogues are discounted). The opening titles proclaimed: “The stage of this story is the real Alaska.”¹²⁰ Critics waxed poetic about the location shooting. *The Exhibitor’s Trade Review*, for instance, which was so caustic about *The Boy Girl*, wrote:

[F]rom a photographic standpoint, [*The Girl Alaska*] must be conceded a separate niche in the hall of camera fame. [...] The stern beauty of Alaskan scenery defies adequate description. We are confronted with rugged snow-crowned heights, huge glaciers, desolate gorges, ice-choked rivers, tangled stretches of forest, one can feel the loneliness and majesty of Nature over which broods the silent Spirit of the frozen North, a veritable triumph of realism achieved by the camera’s art.¹²¹

Likewise, an exhibitor in Twin Falls, Idaho declared: “There have been several photoplays of the North that have endeavored to reproduce the wondrous beauties of this mysterious country with the aid of the builder and scene painter’s art, but have fallen far short of the mark. The stage of this story is Nature-Alaska as she is today and has been for centuries.”¹²²

The cross-dressed girl adventurer could form an imaginary anchor with which viewers could identify when entering these imposing settings. One exhibitor in Ironwood, Michigan, invited the female readers of the *Daily Globe* to consider whether they themselves would have the gumption to disguise their gender and go to the Yukon as the film's protagonist did: "Suppose your father had left you alone in the world to make his way up in Alaska and you had grown tired of a monotonous existence and proceeded to follow him. Would you do as Lottie Kruse did in 'The Girl Alaska'--that is don boy's clothes and start out? See 'The Girl Alaska' at the Rialto tomorrow."¹²³ The advertisement offers Kruse's adventures as vicarious replacements for the viewer's inability to set off to Alaska herself. However, whereas cross-dressed girls expertly navigated the natural landscape in the chase films discussed, in these later pictures the girls are largely helpless in the outdoors. Although Loris's athleticism serves her well in the East—she beats her fiancé, Bruce Mitchell (James Cruze) at tennis, leaps into a sailboat, and bounces around her father's mansion—she is ill-equipped for the challenges posed by frontier life. First she faints in a snowdrift and then she grumbles when Jean makes her fetch water from a stream. Neither Molly nor Phil seem particularly cut out for the formidable Alaskan landscape either: they meet on the boat while seasick and, once in Alaska, they are almost crushed by a glacial avalanche. Phil is slightly less hearty than "Alaska," though, and she nurses him through a mysterious illness.

The strategy of combining the potentially divergent attractions of location shooting and a cross-dressed Broadway actress seems to have worked in *The Snowbird*. The film shifts skillfully back and forth between exterior shots of thrilling dogsled rides and interior shots of Jean's cabin, where a complex psychological drama between Jean and Loris unfolds. Reviews praised Taliaferro's performance and the scenery on equal terms and *Variety* critic Joshua Lowe called the film "One of the best Rolfe pictures ever released, full of vim, vigor and class."¹²⁴ Lowe only huffed a little about the "minor inconsistenc[y]" that Jean would surely have discovered Loris's gender much earlier than he did, but added that, "this is more than counterbalanced by the excellent acting of Miss Taliaferro and Mr. Carewe in the principal roles." Other critics like *Motion Picture News* found the story a bit worn: "Unusual scenery in this subject adds attractiveness to a commonplace story and familiar handling," suggesting that the man-"boy" romance was a thoroughly familiar plot.¹²⁵

Critics found the cross-dressing device and the man-"boy" romance in *The Girl Alaska* disappointing in comparison to the location shooting, however. *The New York Morning Telegraph* wrote that: "The plot is as old as it is implausible, but the feature offers so much from a pictorial standpoint that the narrative becomes the least important factor in the production" and went so far as to suggest that "Quite regardless of a story the film might be presented successfully as an Alaskan travelogue."¹²⁶ *The Exhibitor's Trade Review*, which was so effusive about the photography, questioned: "Just how a man could be deceived into accepting the alluring curves of Miss Kruse's dainty figure as the outlines of a mere male for any great length of time does not seem clear," although the critic concluded that, "the picture will afford satisfaction to all admirers of films exploiting romantic adventure."¹²⁷ The actors and the producers of *The Girl Alaska* had neither the name recognition nor the experience of Carewe and Taliaferro and the players' performances are significantly flatter. This is the only film in which Bolton ever appeared and turned out to be Kruse's last. While the filmmakers may have intended the cross-dressed romance plot to add "class" and a theatrical pedigree to the film, as well as fitting it into the legacy of disguised girl miners, critics, at least, considered the trope old-fashioned and overt theatricality less attractive than it had been.

Although we may expect a film with class ambitions like *The Snowbird* to be in line with more traditional bourgeois morality, like *A Range Romance*, the film in fact produces forms of frontier sociality that are significantly more deviant than the earlier films and refuses to recuperate this deviance through a concluding return to “civilization.” (The romance in *The Girl Alaska* is much tamer, but there too the couple decides to stay in the frontier.) Jean Corteau is described early in the film as a “beast” and a man who “hate [*sic*] all woman.” But when he finds the disguised Loris in a snowdrift outside his cabin, he is eager for this form of companionship and immediately declares Loris “his” boy. To the shivering figure in his cabin, Jean says (in an intertitle): “Like a wounded snowbird you have dropped from the sky to share my loneliness—here you can stay and be my boy!” This is the only reference in the film to the film’s title, so the declaration has significant weight. The boy and Jean are destined for each other, Jean seems to think, and is the answer to Jean’s sense of emptiness. We could consider Jean’s nomination of Loris as “my boy” as a paternal move, but, as we have seen, the language of father-son relations was often used to describe affective bonds between men and boys in frontier literature. The subsequent scenes also suggest that Jean considers Loris “his boy” in another sense, that is, as his male servant, a relationship that comes to be freighted with sexual as well as physical domination.

After declaring Loris his boy, Jean’s eyes rove over the boy’s body. “Not much muscle but I’ll soon fix that. I will put you to work and soon you will be big and strong,” he tells her. Jean then shows off his own muscular biceps and the boy puts “his” hand on them appreciatively. Jean wraps an arm around his boy. The possibility that Jean might make sexual demands on the boy is tacitly acknowledged; Jean smiles a little to himself when he hears the boy lock the bedroom door. The next day, the two play out a sadomasochistic, pederastic scenario. Jean makes his boy fetch water, scrub the floor, and even polish his tall, black, leather boots (“Here boy, oil my boots”). Leather boots were already a charged sexual symbol in Victorian S/M fantasy.¹²⁸ Jean watches Loris work, towering over her crouched figure, lazily smoking a cigarette, and laughing at any signs of resistance. When Loris rebels against Jean’s command to oil his boots, Jean pushes her toward the fireplace, locks the door and grabs a whip, shouting: “You are my boy now and you are going to do as I say!” As Loris scrabbles against the door, trying to get out, Jean whips her until she passes out. Her hat falls off, revealing her long hair—and hence, her “real” gender. Stunned, Jean carries Loris to his bed, her blonde hair fanning out angelically around her face. Although at one level this whole interaction can be read as an authoritarian man imposing profoundly misogynistic discipline on a willful woman (à la *The Taming of the Shrew*), the hyperbolic nature of the boots and whip, and Jean’s continual designation of Loris as his boy, pushes it into homoerotic S/M fantasy. The complete isolation of the snowbound cabin means that no one (but the film’s spectators) need know what goes on there. Jean can dictate the terms of sociality in this space completely.

The physical and sexual threat that Jean poses to Loris is compounded by hints that he may be part Native American. Carewe himself was part Chickasaw, which at least one local newspaper noted in a review of the film. The Hagerstown (Maryland) *Daily Mail* linked Carewe’s Native American identity to his ability to portray the character’s “elemental” passions—presumably his short temper and sexual aggressiveness:

[Carewe] is especially fitted for the part, as the role is that of a French-Canadian reared in the woods in a primitive state. Mr. Carewe is half Chickasaw Indian, and he gives a fine characterization of this typical man of the great outdoors, whose impulses and passions are elemental in their simplicity and force.¹²⁹

Reviews in the major national dailies and trade journals did not note Carewe's Native American heritage, however, and the information did not seem to become a significant part of Carewe's persona until he directed *Ramona* in 1927.¹³⁰ *The Snowbird* is somewhat coy about the character's ethnicity. He is introduced only as "Jean Corteau—A French Canadian." French fur trappers and traders in the Hudson Bay region had long intermarried with local Algonquin women, though, so the "French-Canadian" designation could hint at mixed blood. Jean's temperament fits into stereotypes of the mixed-race French-Canadian fur trapper. Furthermore, the town magistrate describes Jean as "a type of the bold French Canadian, possessing a good education that makes him shrewd and cunning." Usually, in films of this era, when a "good education" makes a character "shrewd and cunning," that character is of mixed race and has outsized social or sexual ambitions. The coded suggestion that Jean could be part Native American adds a racial dimension to his domination of Loris, but one visible only to the "wise."

Upon the revelation that Loris is female, the scene veers into a bizarre Oedipal fantasy in which Jean venerates Loris as his "mother" and then, just as abruptly, threatens to punish the "guilty" woman with sexual and physical assault. When Jean realizes that his "boy" is actually a girl, he has her put on his mother's wedding dress, ostensibly the only female clothing a single man like him would own. When she appears in his mother's dress in the doorway to the bedroom, Jean smiles, looks her up and down, and says "You are beautiful, Madame" (not the more age-appropriate "Mademoiselle"). Enthralled to this girl/mother figure, Jean offers Loris the contract she seeks. But when he discovers that she has already taken it, he becomes enraged—"There is no mercy in my heart for a thief! And now you are going to pay the price!"—and kisses her brutally on the mouth. In a flashback, we see Jean's memory of a Parisian coquette who broke his heart and then we return to the present, where Jean kisses Loris again. She fights him off and grabs a knife, but he keeps advancing toward her until she presses the tip of the knife into her own chest—threatening to commit suicide to avoid being raped. The scene evokes many in which a "savage" man advances on a white woman—most famously Gus running the young Flora Cameron off a cliff and Silas Lynch advancing on Elsie Stoneman in *The Birth of a Nation*. But where, in that film, the white women were either rescued or killed and the potential rapist punished, in this case the predator experiences a last-minute conversion at the sight of Loris's "good" womanhood. "[Y]ou—you are the first good woman I have ever known," Jean admits, as he kneels, hands her the whip, and cries at her feet. This moment of conversion, a common device of stage melodrama, was restaged for one of the film's publicity stills (Figure 3.17).¹³¹ The whip represents and enforces Jean's domination over Loris; by giving it to her he abdicates this position. Furthermore, this scene focalizes the social position of erotic and physical dominance in a prop, which can be handed back and forth between partners, suggesting potential flexibility in the erotic performance of dominant and submissive positions.

The next morning, the couple somewhat tentatively playacts pioneer domesticity. Loris, still in the wedding dress, fries eggs on a cast iron skillet and Jean goes himself to fetch water from the stream. After all of this, the film presumes that it is clear that Jean and Loris are in love. Once Loris's former fiancé Bruce Mitchell is peremptorily disposed of, Jean and Loris marry, with the blessing of Loris's father. On one level, this film, like all the others, uses heterosexual marriage to recuperate the decidedly perverse sexualities enabled by the isolated, apparently single-sex space of the frontier. On another, the bulk of these two people's relationship takes place within scenarios of extreme oscillation between domination and submission, compounded by same-sex and incestuous fantasies. Their ultimate rejection of "civilization" shows that even a wedding cannot entirely recuperate their relationship for bourgeois normalcy.



3.17 In *The Snowbird*, Jean Corteau (Edwin Carewe) prostrates himself to Loris Wheeler (Mabel Taliaferro), who holds his whip. Courtesy of Robert Birchard.

Where in films like *A Range Romance* the newly formed couple returns to the East and regenerates the bourgeois, racially pure, heterosexual family—complete with glowing blond child—the couple in *The Snowbird* refuses this kind of ending. At the end of the film, we see Loris and Jean “Back in the land of so-called civilization.” Loris wears a fashionable black dress and Jean stands awkwardly in a suit. Glumly he asks her “Are you happy here?” She leans toward him and whispers in his ear: “I want to go back to the land of the whispering pines—to the great Northland with you!” The Northwoods is evoked as a private memory that they share together. In the final image, we see the couple in matching fur coats on a dogsled in the woods. Jean gestures to the space around him and says “There is our cabin—and there are the hills—here is the land we love.” What, we wonder, will their relationship look like in this isolated cabin? Although they may fall into the pioneer domesticity they playacted the morning after their traumatic night together, this ambiguous ending also allows us to imagine the couple enacting any number of perverse relationships in the privacy of their cabin. While most narratives cordoned off the frontier as a temporary stage on the way to civilization, *The Snowbird* lingers in the perverse pleasures of the frontier.

Remarkably, critics seemed to have no objections to Jean’s decidedly perverse courtship of Loris or even to the scene of sexual assault. *Motography* declared that the scene where Jean gets angry at Loris for taking the contract was the film’s “best dramatic situation” and the *Lowell Sun* said that the film was “bound to please all.”¹³² To some extent, this may have been because the trope of the man-“boy” romance was so thoroughly conventional and associated so closely with the stage. Critics may also have read the psychosexual drama as evidence that the film was “art,” and accepted the film as evidence of their sophisticated cosmopolitanism. Despite the general enthusiasm for the film and Taliaferro’s performance, we can perhaps detect a hint of discomfort around these S/M seduction scenes in the way the reviews repeatedly elide the details of what happens in the cabin in favor of the end result—the redemptive heterosexual marriage. In

a paragraph-long plot summary, for instance, the *Motography* critic described the central dramatic conflict of the film in two short sentences: “Masquerading as a boy, [Loris] is taken into Corteau’s cabin. The result is that both are attracted to each other and in the end, after Mitchell has been disposed of, they marry.” The description jumps quickly from Loris’s arrival in the cabin to Jean and Loris’s marriage, breezing past the extended scenes of perverse domination and submission. Even more briefly, the *Moving Picture World* summarized: “In the wilds [Loris] meets a dominating man and the result is according to precedent.”¹³³ While the summary alludes to the common trope of a willful young woman falling for a man she cannot push around, it is striking how thoroughly the review evacuates the potentially problematic aspects of their encounter. In this “high class” version of the range romance, the frontier is a far more perverse place that the protagonists refuse to leave. Although it ends, as the others do, with a heterosexual marriage, there is little to suggest that the sexual dynamics of this potentially interracial relationships will accord with “civilized” sexual norms.

Taliaferro went on to do two more cross-dressing roles for Metro after this one, *Peggy, the Will o’ the Wisp* (Rolfe/Metro, July 1917) and *The Jury of Fate* (Metro, August 1917). *The Jury of Fate*, penned by June Mathis and Carewe’s brother Finis Fox, even re-visited similar themes, as Taliaferro plays a French-Canadian girl who impersonates her dead brother for the sake of her blind father and is repeatedly helped by a “half-breed” who loves her (although in this film she eventually marries a respectably Anglo-sounding man, Donald Duncan). The repetition suggests that Metro considered *The Snowbird* a success. The far more conventional *The Dream Lady* and *The Girl Alaska* followed upon this film and their cross-dressing romances met somewhat less enthusiasm. Although a few more films exploited the romance between a “woman-hater” and a disguised girl (e.g. Oscar Apfel’s *Phil-for-Short* [World, June 1919] and Apfel’s *The Trail of the Law* [Producers Security Corporation, December 1923]), many more films went the way of the serials and depicted the alliance of a “woman hater” and a spunky tomboy (e.g. *The Tomboy* [Fox, April 1921], *The Wild Party* [Paramount, April 1929]).

Between 1916 and 1919, though, we can see some production companies returning to the “range romance” as a way to marry theatrical prestige with spectacular location photography. Although the most polished attempts like *The Snowbird* were judged successful, audiences seemed more interested in physically-accomplished but feminine frontier girls like Ruth Roland than cutesy but incompetent girls in boys’ clothing. Films like *The Snowbird* and *The Girl Alaska* troubled the developmental logic that permitted the gender and sexual deviance of the frontier so long as it was temporary developmental stage, which may have appealed to those female viewers who deviated from the bourgeois norm (or wished to), although the films once again offered heterosexual marriage as a solution to this disorder.

* * *

Previous scholars have described capable frontier heroines, cross-dressed or not, as emblems of a new sense of female independence and physical capacity. Actually, these women were coming out of a long tradition of frontier women, from Wild West shows to dime novels and “10-20-30” melodrama. They offered both a vision of female emancipation and a confirmation of American imperialist frontier mythology. Furthermore, the fantasy of the pleasingly “masculinized” young frontier woman was often produced in answer to the more threatening, politically ambitious, urban New Woman. Moving pictures offered audiences the first opportunity to see the capable, usually white female body interacting with—and triumphing

over—varied American natural landscapes. Gender disguise plots linked this new kind of display to much older literary and theatrical traditions. Gender disguise also gave moving pictures a way to display the homoerotic attachments that had been central to accounts of the nation’s colorful frontier past, while narratively recuperating this desire to normative heterosexuality. While gender disguise was a popular narrative excuse for displays of female physical prowess, it soon gave way to a visual rhetoric that emphasized the femaleness and attractive femininity of women’s bodies. At the same time, however, women’s fashion began to incorporate previously “male” items of clothing like overalls and trousers, so that the same outfit could be considered cross-dressing by one observer but not another. The moving picture industry used cross-dressing as a tool to connect their product to the storied American past as well as the traditions of Anglo-centric theater during the transitional era but soon pushed these “boy girls” aside in favor of intrepid but decidedly female tomboys.

Chapter 4:
Cross-dressing, Inversion, and Respectable Comedy:
A Florida Enchantment



4.1 Lawrence Talbot (née Lillian Travers) (Edith Storey) kisses Bessie Horton (Jane Morrow) before offering her an engagement ring in *A Florida Enchantment* (Vitagraph, August 1914).

How could cross-dressed women help legitimize the moving picture industry when, at that very moment, people were ostensibly reading female masculinity as a sign of “sexual inversion” or lesbianism? *A Florida Enchantment*—the most “lesbian” of surviving transitional era films—offers a useful test case for answering this question. The film, adapted from an 1891 novel by Archibald Claverling Gunter and 1896 Broadway play of the same name, revolves around a set of magic seeds with the power to change one’s sex.¹ First Lillian Travers, a wealthy, young, white woman, takes one and wakes up the next morning with a shadow of hair on her upper lip, a short temper, and an insatiable lust for women. Surprisingly, her best friend, Bessie Horton, and a beautiful young widow, Stella Lovejoy (Ada Gifford), reciprocate Lillian’s overtures; the women kiss tenderly on several occasions. Lillian soon forces her black(face) maid, Jane (Ethel Lloyd), to take a seed too, and later offers one to her philandering fiancé, Dr. Fred Cassadene (Sidney Drew). Lillian and Jane, changing into suits and straw boater hats, become “Lawrence” and “Jack,” and Lawrence gets engaged to Bessie. The film ends, though, with a shot of Lillian asleep on a chair. She jerks awake and exclaims to her fiancé (in an

intertitle), “Oh Fred, I’ve had such a horrible dream!” The two laugh together over a letter proclaiming the seed’s alleged magical properties.

Sime Silverman, founder of the weekly New York vaudeville and film trade paper *Variety*, reviewed the film four days after it opened in New York and complained:

The “fantasy” is of a young woman who swallows a seed and becomes a man, and not so much a man in this instance as just mannish. To make it “funnier,” she gave a seed to her colored maid, and the maid became mannish. Then the white “man” in woman’s clothes made love to the women about, repulsing her own sweetheart, and so forth and so on. [...] The picture should never have been put out, for there’s no one with any sense of humor whatsoever, or intelligence either, who can force a smile while watching this sad “comedy.” It wound up the worst program that the Vitagraph theatre has yet presented.²

R. Bruce Brasell and Siobhan Somerville, who have written insightfully about the film, and lesbian and gay film surveyist Richard Barrios have used Silverman’s review as evidence that audiences read the film as representing homosexuality and that the film was excoriated on this basis.³ Indeed, as Lee Grieveson documents, illicit sexual content in films was coming under fire during this period—police had raided a New York movie theater in December 1913 and seized their print of *The Traffic in Souls*, a controversial film about sex trafficking, and there was widespread debate over whether a federal board of film censorship should be instituted.⁴ Brasell further points to the fact that when the play opened in New York eighteen years earlier, critics called it “nauseous” and “shameful in its suggested meaning,” clear evidence, he argues, that these critics (and everyone else) disapproved of the play’s overt portrayal of homosexuality.⁵

But Silverman was not the only critic to review the film. The *New York Dramatic News* came to a very different conclusion in a review published three weeks later:

[T]he comedy picture of the programme, A Florida Enchantment, by Archibald Clavering Gunter, is just as entertainingly funny [as the other film on the programme, The Painted World, was dramatic]. Although in five parts, which is unusually long for a comedy, it sustains the interest throughout and is replete with ludicrous incidents and comical situations. [...] An almost perfect cast, which includes Sidney Drew; a background of beautiful scenes, showing world-famous bits of St. Augustine, Fla., and its environments, and an interesting story stamp A Florida Enchantment a fascinating picture.⁶

In fact, the *Dramatic News* was not alone in its warm response to the film. *The New York Dramatic Mirror* noted that “Edith Storey made quite an attractive man” and called the film “satisfactory Summer entertainment,” while *Motography* praised the “large and competent cast in which Edith Story easily takes the stellar honors, although Sidney Drew is also seen to good advantage.”⁷ After an exclusive four-week run at the new Vitagraph Theatre on Broadway, the film traveled to Vitagraph-booking theaters across the country, from Atlanta to Ogden.⁸ Over the next two and a half years, the film received positive press in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Williamsport Gazette and Bulletin* (Pennsylvania), the *Rushville Daily Republican* (Indiana), and the *Racine Journal* (Wisconsin).⁹ In fact, the Bijou theater in Racine told readers: “Mothers Send the Children / THIS IS A GOOD WHOLESOME COMEDY THEY WILL ENJOY” (Figure 4.2). While previous scholarship argues that mass audiences at the time would have been familiar with the scientific concept of the sexual invert and that viewers therefore were likely to have read Lillian, and perhaps Jane, Bessie, and Stella as inverts or lesbians, I have found most reviews to be less negative than these scholars suggest.¹⁰ Once one reads a broad range of reviews from newspapers around the country, it becomes less credible to map negative reactions to a reading that links cross-dressing to homosexuality. I regard this film as evidence that this

4.2 Advertisement: Bijou Theater, from *Racine Journal-News* (August 16, 1916).

was a transitional moment when several very different readings of cross-dressing were available for audiences, depending upon a range of factors (geographical, socio-economic, cultural, etc.). While there is evidence that some critics did conflate cross-dressing with lesbian desire, others clearly did not. In this chapter, I attempt to reconstruct ways audiences could have read Lillian, Jane, Bessie, and Stella, using reception material and potential intertexts. Ultimately, I argue that the dominant reading at the time was that the film was merely an unremarkable variation on the “temporary transvestite” romantic comedy, a genre familiar from comic opera, the legitimate stage, and other moving pictures, not an allusion to real-world pathological identities. Thus, this film too fit into Vitagraph’s strategy of moving picture “uplift.”

Before I continue, though, several quick historiographic notes are in order. Whereas the other chapters investigate a large number of films, this chapter focuses on a single film. I do this because this one film is a central piece of evidence in claims that cinematic cross-dressing during the silent era was predominantly a visual strategy of representing lesbianism. If general audiences genuinely linked cross-dressing to notions of sexual pathology in the 1910s, it would be very difficult for cross-dressing to be an effective strategy of industry uplift—the central claim of this dissertation. Therefore, it is worth taking the time to look more closely at how this particular film was understood during its time. Additionally, I want to state upfront that the scholars I critique in this chapter are pioneers without whose contributions my work would not be possible. My hope is that this research will build on the foundations they have laid, and nuance and adjust their conclusions using newly available evidence and a slightly different approach.

A variety of terms for female gender and sexual deviance circulated in the first decades of the twentieth-century, including, but not limited to, *invert*, *lesbian*, *sapphist*, *homosexual*, *tribade*, *tommy*, *dyke*, *man-woman*, *hermaphrodite*, and *virago*. Oftentimes these terms were used to refer to historically specific ideas of gender and sexual organization, thus they cannot merely be reduced to early names for present-day identities like *lesbian*, *transgender*, or *intersexed*. As interlocutors in various times and places adopted these terms, the definitions shifted and were contested—therefore, there is in fact no single “correct” term for the present-day historian to use when describing historical gender and sexual deviance. What we now think

of as “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” were not conceptually separate during this period (in fact, Laura Doan argues that the notion of having an “identity” at all was not common until the twentieth century) and some scientists at the time considered same-sex desire to be a symptom of a broader psychological (and perhaps physiological) gender inversion.¹¹ And yet, in various other accounts (including medical reports, French literature, rumors, and real life), many individuals who had sex with and were attracted to others of their gender displayed no other signs of gender inversion. When it came to women, two of the most common terms – amongst the comparative few who spoke openly of the subject – were the quite old *lesbian* (dating back at least to the sixteenth century, and preferred in discussions of literature and French actresses and prostitutes) and the quite new but perhaps more “respectable” *sexual invert* (dating back to 1878, and preferred in medical writing).¹² Although these terms quite frequently overlapped, for purposes of clarity I will use the word *lesbian* when I wish to prioritize same-sex desire and *invert* to prioritize cross-gender identification.

In *Queering the Color Line* (2000), Siobhan Somerville makes a rigorous and important argument about the ways that *A Florida Enchantment* participated in broader social processes whereby “the formation of notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality emerged in the United States through (and not merely parallel to) a discourse saturated with assumptions about the racialization of bodies,” and, in particular, “the formation of notions of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness.’”¹³ She shows that, in adapting the novel to film, Vitagraph changed the origin story of the sex-change seeds from one involving slavery, violence, and exploitation, as well as interracial desire and white sexual disempowerment, to one of consensual exchange and interracial friendship. “The new allegory,” she argues, “reasserted the film’s, and by extension the film industry’s, desired position of innocence in relation to African Americans”—even while the industry and many exhibition venues were highly segregated by race and filmmakers “eagerly appropriated African American labor and cultural forms.”¹⁴ This analysis is entirely correct, in my view.

She also describes Vitagraph’s multiple claims to “respectability,” through adapting famous plays, hiring well-known Broadway players like Sidney Drew, proclaiming the moral spotlessness of their actresses (by, among other things, eliminating couches from the women’s dressing rooms!), and trying to avoid subjects that might offend portions of the audience. The film *A Florida Enchantment*, she says, bolsters this claim to respectability by removing the novel’s references to the dime museum freak show and the association of the blackface character Jane/Jack with the stage tradition of blackface minstrelsy. The endeavors to display respectability that Somerville points out support my argument that this film, like the ones discussed in previous chapters, used the cross-dressed women as a strategy of achieving social legitimacy. I diverge from Somerville’s conclusions about Ethel Lloyd’s blackface performance, however. While Somerville asserts that the film attempts to distance itself from the stage minstrel tradition and reinforce racial distinctions by naturalizing Lloyd’s performed “blackness,” I will argue that Lloyd’s performance aligns with the purposefully exaggerated and comedic tradition of minstrel performance and that the audience’s awareness of Lloyd’s “actual” whiteness allowed the character to function as a fantasy projection for white female audiences—the “id,” to Lillian/Lawrence’s “ego.” This does not change Somerville’s conclusion that the film troubles the gender and sexual order while leaving racial hierarchy in place, but offers an alternative explanation for how cross-racial performance may have been read by film audiences at the time.

Like Brasell before her, Somerville argues that Lillian and Jane would have been legible to audiences as instances of the sexual invert (although she acknowledges that critical responses to the film were much more positive than one would expect).¹⁵ It is this claim, one that pervades existing scholarship on this film, which this chapter will contest and complicate.

Reading Gender and Sexual Deviance

Brasell and Somerville rightly point out that sexologists described cross-dressing as a key symptom of inversion. In an influential compendium of non-normative gender and sexual practices, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892, first English edition), Viennese sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing wrote, for example:

In the inclinations of the amazon for manly sports, the masculine soul in the female bosom manifests itself; and not less in the show of courage and manly feeling. The female urning loves to wear her hair and have her clothing in the fashion of men; and it is her greatest pleasure, when opportunity offers, to appear in male attire.¹⁶

Krafft-Ebing uses the term “urning” (coined in 1864 by German activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs as a non-pathological way to describe men who were attracted to other men) more or less interchangeably with the term “invert.” The phrase “masculine soul in the female bosom” became common in sexological writings about inverts. Likewise, in *Sexual Inversion* (1897), British sexologist Havelock Ellis wrote:

“The chief characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity. [...] There is [...] a very pronounced tendency among sexually inverted women to adopt male attire when practicable. In such cases male garments are not usually regarded as desirable chiefly on account of practical convenience, nor even in order to make an impression on other women, but because the wearer feels more at home in them.”¹⁷

American sexologists had similar theories, as George Chauncey and Lisa Duggan have documented.¹⁸

Brasell and Somerville further argue that the concept of the invert and the association of cross-dressing with inversion were not limited to medical or professional circles, but circulated in the general public. To support this, Brasell cites Steven Seidman, who had written that, by World War I, “European texts on homosexuality were translated and widely discussed; [...] [and] the basic concepts of these discourses surfaced regularly in newspapers, popular magazines, literature and plays. In short, the scientific-medical discourse on homosexuality had achieved such a level of public authority that the everyday meaning of same-sex love began to reflect some of its basic concepts.”¹⁹ Somerville cites Lisa Duggan’s study of the 1892 trial of Alice Mitchell and Sharon Ullman’s study of early twentieth century female impersonators to support her claim that female masculinity had been tainted by the suspicion of sexual inversion by the 1910s (in fact, Mitchell argued that it became widespread in the aftermath of the 1892 trial).²⁰

Esther Newton’s “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman” (1984/1989) and Carol Smith-Rosenberg’s “The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis” (1985)—foundational works of gender and sexual history that continue to be cited regularly—make similar claims.²¹ Countering lesbian-feminists’ denigration of female masculinity, Newton claimed that in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Radclyffe Hall seized upon “mannishness” as a strategy of making women’s active sexual desire for other women legible.

Smith-Rosenberg argued that conservative U.S. physicians used Havelock Ellis's concept of the sexual invert to discredit suffragist and activist women in the 1910s. More recently, as well, scholars have pointed to female masculinity as a common strategy of making lesbian identity visible, to the chagrin of lesbian-feminists like Teresa de Lauretis, who strove in "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" (1988) and other works to theorize a form of female sexuality that did not use male sexuality as a starting point, but also transgender studies scholars like Judith Halberstam, who persuasively argues in *Female Masculinity* (1998) that the diverse array of historical female masculinities should not be collapsed into proto-lesbianism, nor should female masculinity be reduced to a strategy of expressing something else, that is, same-sex desire.²²

One would imagine that a viewer who had encountered the concept of sexual inversion could easily read many of the characters in *A Florida Enchantment* as examples of the female invert. The morning after Lillian takes the sex-change seed, for example, she seems physically the same, with the exception of a dark shadow of hair on his/her upper lip (Figure 4.3). However, in attitude, gesture, and behavior, Lillian performs, to the best of Edith Storey's ability, a "masculine soul in [a] female bosom." When supplied with a straight razor, she shaves with



4.3 In *A Florida Enchantment*, Lillian (Edith Storey) examines the first sign of her magical sex change.



4.4 Lillian winks at Jane (Ethel Lloyd).



4.5 Jane jerks back in surprise.

ease—suggesting, oddly enough, that this is not a learned but a “natural” male skill. Lillian displays a short temper and significant physical strength; when he/she is irritated with Jane’s curiosity, he/she punches her through a curtain and knocks her down. Lillian alternately abuses and flirts lasciviously with his/her black maidservant.²³ After sitting down to breakfast, Lillian turns to Jane and gives her a big, raunchy wink (Figure 4.4). Jane recoils with surprise and flinches again when Lillian cracks an egg with a swift, confident rap (Figure 4.5). In her brusque movements and newfound lust for women, Lillian would seem to embody quite literally the sexologists’ conception of sexual inversion.

Bessie and Stella’s evident pleasure at Lillian’s sexual advances toward them would also seem to suggest these characters’ sexual deviance. When Lillian meets up with her friends and family—her fiancé Fred, her aunt Constanica, her best friend Bessie, and her rival Stella—the two young women welcome the changed Lillian and eagerly return her advances. Whereas all three women had been fawning over Fred moments before—eagerly offering him their handkerchiefs to mop his sweaty brow—Bessie and Stella immediately turn their attention to the jovial, confident Lillian when he/she arrives on the scene. Lillian arrives and surveys the group



4.6 Lillian surveys her friends, Stella, Constanica, Fred, and Bessie...



4.7 ...Stella stands to greet Lillian with a handshake...



4.8 ...but Lillian pulls Stella into a kiss. Seeing this, Bessie approaches...



4.9 ...and Lillian kisses her too.



4.10 Lillian sits and wraps her arms around Stella and Bessie's shoulders.

with arms akimbo. Stella rises and offers Lillian her hand in greeting. In one smooth motion, Lillian leans toward Stella and places an arm on the woman's elbow, pulling her closer, until the women's lips touch in a tender embrace. Stella eventually pulls away and looks at Lillian with a big grin, then at Bessie, and at the ground, seemingly pleased if slightly embarrassed. Lillian turns toward Bessie, who stands expectantly, and slides an arm around her shoulder, pulling her in close. Bessie tilts her head upward and leans forward to receive the kiss. She grins and her eyes—and Stella's—never leave Lillian's face throughout the rest of the scene. Lillian then pushes Fred and Constancia backward onto the bench and chivalrously ushers the two girls to the bench, then sits between them, stretching his/her long arms around their shoulders with a happy smile. Fred and Constancia stare at the three women in shock, and Fred gestures disapprovingly to the way Lillian has crossed her legs at the knees like a man. The scene seems to provide an overt, public display of sexual desire between women—and not just by Lillian, the magically produced man in a woman's body, but also by Stella and Bessie, ostensibly "normal" women. We could read Stella and Bessie as the feminine women to which the invert is typically attracted and who sometimes returned the affection. Fred and Constancia's shocked response indicates that this behavior is out of the ordinary, although they do not respond with disgust or outrage, nor do they intervene.

When Jane swallows the sex-change seed, she experiences similar changes in temperament and behavior as Lillian, but in a much more exaggerated fashion. Jane swallows the seed not by choice, like Lillian, but under physical and economic duress, as Somerville also notes (Figures 4.11 and 4.12). Jane begins drinking heavily (Figure 4.13). When Lillian pulls the glass away from him/her, Jane storms to the back of the room and pushes objects wildly off a small table. He/she struggles with Lillian and forces Lillian onto the divan, hitting him/her with pillows (Figures 4.14). When Constancia's maidservant, Malvina (Lillian Burns), appears, Jane throws a pillow at her and chases her downstairs. Malvina escapes out the front door and Jane directs his/her anger at Bessie's father, Major Horton (Charles Kent), smothering him against his chair with a pillow (Figure 4.15). Only when Lillian smothers Jane with a chloroform-soaked rag does the commotion finally stop (Figure 4.16). While Jane lies passed out, the Major belatedly raises a long sword above her to slice her in half, then thinks better of it and loads his revolver, before Lillian finally stops him.



4.11 and 4.12 Lillian forces Jane to swallow a sex-change seed.



4.13 and 4.14 Jane gulps down alcohol and starts attacking Lillian with pillows.



4.15 and 4.16 Jane attacks the Major (Charles Kent) until Lillian subdues her with chloroform.

Jane also exhibits an aggressive sexual appetite for women. A few scenes later, Jane sidles up to Malvina with big, meaningful eyes and seizes the girl roughly in his/her arms. Malvina fights Jane off and flees; this time Jane runs after. When Malvina hides behind her faint-hearted, black(face) boyfriend, Gus Duncan (Frank O'Neil), Jane starts attacking him, punching him and battering his head against the ground until he passes out. Malvina runs and tells the constable, and Jane runs away. Like Lillian, Jane's experience of "masculinity" consists of a



4.17 Jane grabs the unwilling Malvina (Lillian Burns).



4.18 Malvina runs to Gus (Frank O'Neil) for help and Jane threatens to beat him up.

aggression, physical strength, and lust, but unlike Lillian, Jane's emotions are completely out of control. As Somerville points out, by paralleling Lillian and Jane, the film "calls on asymmetrical cultural constructions of black and white masculinity, reinforcing stereotypes of the aggressive black male and seeming to justify drastic measures to control his violence."²⁴ While Lillian's racial and class status insulates her from disapproval, Jane's violations are swiftly punished—first by Lillian's forcible chloroforming and then through the threat of the Major and the pursuing constable. As in the frontier films described in the previous chapter, *A Florida Enchantment* distributes community response to the violations of social norms racially—allowing Lillian, Bessie, and Stella their caprices while doling out punishment to Lillian's racialized counterpart.

From our perspective today, Lillian and Jane seem to embody the concept of the female sexual invert, and Bessie and Stella's desire for Lillian seems only legible as lesbian desire. Sime Silverman's review of the film in *Variety* would seem to confirm the suspicion that audiences at the time viewed the film the same way. So what's the problem?

The Problem with Reading *A Florida Enchantment* Through the Lens of Inversion

The widespread, positive critical response to the film troubles the assumption that audiences were reading Lillian and Jane as examples of the sexual invert and the kisses between women as lesbian. The Racine exhibitor's encouragement of children to attend the show particularly contradicts this reading. After all, reformers across the country were concerned about the influence of moving pictures on "susceptible" audiences (e.g. women, children, immigrants, and the working-class).²⁵ Many feared that children might imitate the violent antics of slapstick

comedians or find gangster films a “school for crime.” When the New York police seized the film *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* (Moral Feature Film Company, 1913), as Lee Grieveson documents, the producer Samuel H. London challenged the legality of the police action but ultimately lost the case on the grounds that the film could “deprave and corrupt the morals of those whose minds are open to such influences.”²⁶ If critics or censors had found sexual inversion or lesbianism in *A Florida Enchantment*, they may not have named it outright—for fear that word of the phenomena’s existence might allow it to spread—but they certainly would not then have endorsed the film with such warmth.

I searched the files of the National Board of Censorship, a New York-based organization founded in 1909 that worked to regulate the content of moving pictures in order to preempt state and federal censorship and there was no evidence that *A Florida Enchantment* had come to their attention.²⁷ Nor did I find any evidence of controversy or concern in periodicals indexed online, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Defender*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *San Francisco Chronicle*, the hundreds of local U.S. newspapers indexed by NewspaperArchives.com, or the more than one thousand magazines indexed by American Periodical Series Online (including *Life*, *Scribner’s*, *McClure’s*, *Puck*, and *Ladies’ Home Journal*). Of course this does not prove that no viewers disapproved of the film but rather that, compared to proliferation of discourse around certain kinds of illicit “sexual themes” in moving pictures at this time, *A Florida Enchantment* did not make much of a dent.

Incredible as it may seem today, this evidence suggests that most audiences did not read the cross-dressing, girl-kissing characters in this film as inverts, or even the fact of two actresses kissing on the mouth as a *de facto* representation of lesbianism. I should be clear here—a central part of the appeal of “temporary transvestite” romantic comedies, dating back at least to baroque theater, has always been the spectacle of same-sex flirtation and inappropriately gendered behaviors.²⁸ I do not dispute that *A Florida Enchantment* gives audiences these same kinds of pleasures—essentially, a temporary, highly conventionalized, carnivalesque reversal of the sexual and gender order. I contest, however, the claim that 1910s audiences saw these gender-inverted behaviors and same-sex encounters on screen and interpreted them through the lenses of sexual inversion or lesbianism. Although existing scholarship suggests that the “mannish woman” was widely associated with lesbianism in popular culture by 1914, the reception of *A Florida Enchantment* suggests that the situation was more complex.

The link that sexologists like Havelock Ellis made between cross-dressing or “mannishness” and sexual inversion, while strong, has been somewhat overstated. Sexologists, as Lisa Duggan points out, “equivocated and at times flatly contradicted themselves.”²⁹ The women who partnered with “actively” inverted women, Ellis writes, were “always womanly,” creating an impression of gender difference within the same-sex couple.³⁰ Thus, fully one half of the women in same-sex partnerships were imagined to act and look traditionally feminine. Furthermore, Ellis also qualifies the link between masculinity and the “actively” inverted woman:

The actively inverted woman differs from the woman of the class just mentioned [the “womanly” ones] in one fairly essential character: a more or less distinct trace of masculinity. She may not be, and frequently is not, what would be called a “mannish” woman, for the latter may imitate men on grounds of taste and habit unconnected with sexual perversion, while in the inverted woman the masculine traits are part of an organic instinct which she by no means always wishes to accentuate. The inverted woman’s masculine element may in the least degree consist only in the fact that she makes

advances to the woman to whom she is attracted and treats all men in a cool, direct manner[.]³¹

Ellis paradoxically admits that while “masculinity” was be an “essential” characteristic of the actively inverted woman, that “masculine element” could consist solely in women’s sexual attraction to women (and sexual indifference to men), i.e. not in her gender expression. He also differentiates between the “mannish woman” and the invert, acknowledging that a range of women was adopting masculine clothing and behaviors for diverse reasons. He reiterates this point several pages later and also divorces inversion from the pragmatic cross-dressing of “woman adventurers”:

As I have already pointed out, a woman who is inclined to adopt the ways and garments of men is by no mean necessarily inverted. In the volume of *Women Adventurers*, edited by Mrs. Norman for the Adventure Series, there is no trace of inversion; in most of these cases, indeed, love for a man was precisely the motive for adopting male garments and manners.³²

These are precisely the kinds of cross-dressing stories often adapted to film, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Much older than these sexologists was a tradition of interpreting sexual encounters between women as a sign of decadence or over-indulgence, rather than a state of being. Krafft-Ebing and Ellis note the commonness of “Lesbian love” amongst the aristocracy, Paris and Berlin prostitutes, Moulin Rouge dancers, and French actresses—a phenomenon they considered quite separate from sexual inversion.³³ This kind of lesbianism was not generally associated with masculinity, although the two could coincide, and it continued to exist alongside discourses of inversion well into the twentieth century. The point I want to make here is that, even according to the sexologists, not all masculine women were inverts and not all inverts/lesbians were masculine.

Furthermore, and even more importantly, the link between female masculinity and the female sexual invert was nowhere near as established in the public imagination as scholars like Newton, Smith-Rosenberg, Ullman, and Seidman have argued. While a number of scholars have persuasively made this point about female masculinity in England during this period (such as Laura Doan in *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* [2001]; Alison Oram in *Her Husband was a Woman!: Women’s Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* [2007]; and Deborah Cohler in *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* [2010]), there has been much less new historicist work on female masculinity and lesbianism in early twentieth-century U.S. popular culture.³⁴ The most significant study is Lisa Duggan’s analysis of the Alice Mitchell murder trial.³⁵ In 1892, a young, white, Tennessee woman named Alice Mitchell killed her lover, Freda Ward, whom she had planned to run away with and to marry (while posing a man). Reports of the murder and the subsequent trial in the local and mass-circulation U.S. press, Lisa Duggan argues, spread discourses of female perversion drawn both from French fiction (the degenerate lesbian) and medical writings (the invert) to a much wider readership. Although Duggan claims at times that the “mannish lesbian” emerged as a recognizable social identity in the mass-circulation press of the 1890s, she clarifies that the “attempt to fix a negative portrait of the violent lesbian’s deviant desires” was “always contested and unstable” and existed alongside much more positive narratives of (white) female masculinity and same-sex desire, such as “the unpathologized Female Husband” and the idealized romantic friendship.³⁶ At one point, Duggan claims

“counterpoints” to the lesbian love murder story issued exclusively from the theatrical press, but in fact they were much more widespread than that.³⁷

Newspaper accounts of “men-women” and “female husbands” in a variety of national and local general-interest newspapers often portrayed these figures positively, as upstanding, respectable husbands and contributing members of the community. On May 13, 1914, for example, only three months before *A Florida Enchantment* was released, the *Chicago Day Book* had this to say about Ralph Kerwinieo/Cora Anderson, whose case I discussed in Chapter 1:

AMAZING DOUBLE LIFE OF GIRL WHO LIVED FOR YEARS AS A MAN

Milwaukee, Wis., May 13.—“Did this woman, as far as you know, wear male attire for immoral purposes? Did you ever see her do anything vulgar?” asked the judge in the case of “disorderly conduct” brought against Cora Anderson, who, until last week, as Ralph Kerwinieo, had worn men’s clothes and posed as a man for thirteen years.

“No.”

“While in male attire how did she act?” the judge continued.

“Like a PERFECT GENTLEMAN,” was the policeman’s answer, much to the amusement of the spectators who filled the police courtroom in Milwaukee.

And this is the verdict of almost every third man in the city who knew Ralph Kerwinieo well and never for a moment suspected that “he” was a woman.³⁸

Kerwinieo’s wife, Dorothy Klenowski, defended her husband (“I did not know until just before ‘Ralph’ was arrested that he was not a man and it almost broke my heart, but I determined to stand by ‘him’ and be ‘his’ chum if I couldn’t be his wife”) and the article sides with Kerwinieo and Klenowski against Kerwinieo’s vindictive ex-girlfriend who turned him/her in. Kerwinieo/Anderson him/herself even penned two articles offering helpful insider information about men’s true feelings toward women.

Another case that was likely as widely reported as the Mitchell trial was New York Tammany politician Murray Hall, who was discovered to have a female body when he died in 1901. In a series of articles, the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post* and *San Francisco Chronicle* recounted Hall’s accomplishments and expressed amazement that he could “fool” so many prominent people for so long.³⁹ One headline in the *New York Times* stated, for example: “MURRAY HALL FOOLED MANY SHREWD MEN – How for Years She Masqueraded in Male Attire. – HAD MARRIED TWO WOMEN – Was a Prominent Tammany Politician and Always Voted—Senator Martin Astonished.”⁴⁰ Follow-up articles about cross-dressing civil war soldiers and additional men discovered to be women showed Hall’s case to be part of a wider phenomenon.⁴¹ Although the articles consistently express surprise at the fact that Hall and others like him had wives, they do not use the kind of pathologizing discourses Duggan describes, nor did they mention the Mitchell case. These kinds of articles appeared in newspapers with a certain regularity and they accord with Alison Oram’s findings regarding “men-women” in the British popular press.⁴² These articles show that Duggan’s lesbian love murder story was only one of several narratives about masculine women (and female-bodied men) and that figures we would assume to correspond quite neatly to the discourse of sexual inversion were not, in fact, interpreted that way.

Furthermore, Newton, Smith-Rosenberg, and Brasell all imply that the word “mannish” was a widely recognized code for invert or lesbian. Ullman states this claim outright: “The mannish woman, not to mention the ultra mannish one, was a very specific term applied to describe what Havelock Ellis called a female sexual invert – or lesbian.”⁴³ While certain limited communities may have used “mannish” that way, I contend that this was not a dominant

meaning. While “mannish” women certainly had their detractors, the trait was also often a positive one. An article in the *Chicago Tribune* less than a week after *A Florida Enchantment*’s premiere, for example, celebrated “America’s Leading Out-of-Doors Girl,” Marion Hollins (Figure 4.19). The journalist notes that, “In her mannish togs [Hollins] makes a most attractive picture.”⁴⁴ A short story in the *Grand Rapids Tribune* (Wisconsin) a month later described the “Business Adventure of Emma McChensey,” a traveling saleswoman who bests the misogynist men she encounters in a new town.⁴⁵ The narrator, after describing Emma resting her “neat tailored sleeve” on the desk of an impertinent hotel clerk, says in an aside, “[D]on’t you get a little picture of her—trim, taut, tailored, mannish-booted, flat-heeled, linen-collared, sailor-hatted?” (Figure 4.2). In newspapers ranging from the *Cedar Rapids Republican* (Iowa) to the *Oakland Tribune* (California), hundreds of stores used the adjective “mannish” to describe a wide range of women’s and girls clothes, from women’s suits in “fine mannish diagonals,” “mannish serges,” or “mannish tailored models,” to girls’ coats in a “gray mannish cheviot,” “Tan Street Gloves, a very satisfactory wearing mannish style Fall glove,” and “White Pique Mannish Waists [i.e. shirtwaists].”⁴⁶ The Greater San Francisco Cloak Company even combined the adjectives “mannish” and “cute” in an advertisement that read: “A THIRTY DOLLAR SUIT IN EVERY RESPECT, IN THE PRETTIEST OF BLUE SERGE WITH A CUTE MANNISH WHITE PIQUE VEST, WHITE PIQUE COLLAR.”⁴⁷ These examples all occurred between July



4.19 Marion Hollis, “America’s Leading Out-of-Doors Girl”, *Chicago Tribune* (August 16, 1914).



4.20 Emma McChesney, in “Representing T.A. Buck, A Business Adventure of Emma McChesney,” *Grand Rapids Tribune* (September 16, 1914).

14 and September 16, 1914—the two months surrounding the release of *A Florida Enchantment*—but similar ads can be found throughout this entire year. It's not that “mannishness” wasn't controversial in the 1910s—it was. Many serial queens and some male impersonators were careful to demonstrate that they were not “mannish” in real life. But the adjective “mannish”—like female masculinity in general—could not be reduced to a stand-in for inversion or lesbianism, or even a strong allusion to these identities.

Furthermore, as I mentioned before, the National Board of Censorship was quite concerned about representations of illicit female (hetero)sexuality such as prostitution and adultery, but did not take issue with *A Florida Enchantment*. Furthermore, after going through the Board's collected “Policies and Standards” between 1912 and 1916 and lists of the changes to specific films they recommended during that time, I found that, while they took issue with women wearing insufficient clothing, and, in some cases, men acting like sissies or cross-dressing, they displayed no concern about female masculinity, female-to-male cross-dressing, or insinuations of women's same-sex desire. Policies around clothing were specifically geared to prevent male spectators' arousal. For that reason the Board specified that “Women's gowns should not be cut below the small of the back or in front in a manner unduly to expose the breasts” and that corsets, drawers, or “a lavish amount of lingerie” were not to be shown. However, no policies addressed male or female cross-dressing or inappropriately gendered apparel. In fact, the Board even held up two films featuring cross-dressed women from the 1920s as examples of “Exceptional Photoplays”—the historical “temporary transvestite” comedy *Little Old New York* (Cosmopolitan Productions, August 1923) and *Peter Pan* (Famous Players-Lasky, December 1923). Both films, adapted from famous plays, were promoted as “high class” motion pictures and were evidently recognized as such.

Of the numerous things the Board told motion picture producers to avoid, same-sex eroticism had a relatively small place, but it did register. Although it did not appear in any of the Board's policy handbooks, the Board addressed the subject a few times in special bulletins. One “Special Bulletin on Motion Picture Comedies” that listed nineteen pitfalls to avoid, including “suggestive rolling on women” and “loose pants not properly fastened and ready to fall or actually falling” (and virtually every other trope of slapstick comedy), stated: “Sexual degeneracy as comedies based on the antics of a pervert and invert or any picture which involves degeneracy will be condemned all together.”⁴⁸ Another bulletin explained this recommendation in more detail and, because it has not been published elsewhere, it seems worth reproducing this document in full:

Special Bulletin to Motion Picture Producers

The National Board calls your attention to the inadvisability of presenting on the Motion Picture screen characters which burlesque the type of person known as the **sexual pervert**. We are making criticisms of certain pictures which have lately come to our attention the basis for issuing this Bulletin. All of these criticisms reflect the abhorrence with which society in general regards people of this class. These criticisms further indicate that there is a growing tendency on the part of directors who are in search of comedy elements to make use of characters portraying sexual perversion as groundwork for comedy situations. To continue to do this is a positive step in the direction of incurring well-founded criticism of the moral tone of the Motion Picture. Such a course can only result in awakening hostility toward the industry from intelligent people to whom representation of this element in humanity is rightfully bound to be offensive.

In accordance with a resolution passed by The National Board, you are hereby notified that any picture given over entirely to the comedy presentation of the sexual pervert will be condemned and that any part of a picture in which such a character is shown with intention to burlesque will be eliminated.

This bulletin is sent out in a spirit of co-operation to save you money by correcting at the source of production the tendency toward this sort of photoplay comedy. It is clear that the better part of the public do not derive entertainment but disgust from this sort of thing and that for Motion Picture producers to attempt its presentation on the screen is to court loss of prestige as well as time and money.

The National Board of Review of Motion Pictures [boldface in original]

Unfortunately, the Board never specified what specific behaviors or appearances counted as “degeneracy” or “antics of a pervert and invert,” and whether women as well as men were held under suspicion. Nor was the bulletin dated, although it seems likely that it was from approximately 1916, as the bulletin was located in a file ostensibly containing material from 1912-1916 and the Board had changed its name from the National Board of Censorship to the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures in 1916.⁴⁹

However, correspondence about films that had failed to make the changes advised by the Board suggests that this policy was exclusively aimed at male “perverts.” Although the correspondence files do not seem to be complete, my sense is that this policy began to be enforced (although not rigorously) in 1916 and 1917.⁵⁰ For example, one correspondent was pleased to report, of Selig’s *A Trip to Chinatown* (August 1917), that the “incident where the swordsman puts his finger in his mouth as a degenerate” had been eliminated. In Chaplin’s *Behind the Screen* (Lone Star, November 1916), a theater manager finds Chaplin kissing a “boy” (who is really a girl in disguise) and shakes his finger at Chaplin and then sticks out his butt and prances back and forth across the room until Chaplin kicks him in the butt. This scene usefully demonstrates that there *was* a clear connection between the lip-wristed, prancing sissy and the male homosexual during this period. For this film, the Board recommended that a subtitle be cut—“Oh! Mercy”—and the elimination of “the action of the fat man imitating a sissified character. This cut should be made from the point where he shakes his finger at Chaplin and the girl doing away with that pat where he switches [*sic*] up and down the room and where Chaplin kicks him out.” Although the correspondent noted that the recommended eliminations had been made in the print he or she viewed, the print of the film that is available today includes the manager’s swishy behavior.

Between 1916 and 1919, the Board recommended cutting or shortening scenes in a handful of comedies depicting men “of effeminate type” or with an “effeminate manner” as well as several instances of male-to-female cross-dressing.⁵¹ Although correspondents generally reported that the changes had been made, these devices remained central gags in slapstick comedy throughout the silent era. Nowhere in this correspondence—which also recorded eliminations of scenes of violence, crime, and suggestive dancing—did female-to-male cross-dressing or women’s same-sex eroticism come up. The only two female-to-male cross-dressing films that appeared in this correspondence were *Oliver Twist* (Lasky, December 1916), in which the scene where Bill Sykes beats Nancy to death was shortened and *The Girl Alaska* (Al Ira Smith/World, August 1919), in which two shots of Molly bathing in the nude were shortened. These reports provide additional evidence that male cross-dressing and female cross-dressing were viewed quite differently during the silent period. While male cross-dressing (and

effeminacy more generally) was associated with sexual inversion, it was also part of a “low” culture comedy tradition; for representatives of genteel culture like the Board, it was yet another of slapstick’s many sins. Female-to-male cross-dressing, on the other hand, while it too created the opportunity for “accidental” same-sex eroticism, was associated with genteel culture and therefore a welcome alternative the lower body humor of slapstick or the sexualized display of female bodies in erotic melodrama. In fact, another Board memo even used Sidney Drew, *A Florida Enchantment’s* director and star, and his wife (who incidentally played the role of Bessie) as the standard of “clean” comedy at which moving pictures should be aiming: “The Board has achieved much in eliminating exhibitions of immorality and crime. Are we to stand still? Can we not progress further and protest against the senseless and unnecessary vulgarity displayed in the ‘Slapstick’ Comedy? It can be done! The Drews prove that we can have clean comedies and the comedies of George Ade prove it also.”⁵² Surprisingly to us today, *A Florida Enchantment*, despite all its sexual and gender upheaval, seems to be just the kind of “clean” comedy the Board was championing.

The disjuncture between previous claims that female masculinity was associated ineluctably with sexual deviance in the 1910s and these three sets of evidence—the positive press about female-bodied men, the widespread use of the adjective “mannish” in women’s fashion advertisements, and film censors’ unconcern with female cross-dressing—can be explained as a problem in the way one generalizes from a part to the whole. Just because one set of people thought a particular way, or read signs according to certain codes, did not mean that everyone else did too. Furthermore, even if someone was aware of this potential interpretation did not mean he or she deployed it in every possible circumstance (even connotatively). In fact, there were profound differences in the way information about deviant sexuality circulated, depending on geography, class, taste, interest, education, and many other factors. This was particularly true of lesbianism or sexual inversion. Because the idea of the sexual invert circulated so differentially, we cannot make assumptions from one circle (say, U.S. physicians or modernist writers) to others (such as film viewers in Racine, or even New York or San Francisco). Despite the “imagined community” created by mass-circulation periodicals, when it came to deviant sexuality this information spread unevenly and revelations did not always stick.

Smith-Rosenberg and many others analyze works by sexologists and U.S. physicians as if they were widely available and discussed, but in the 1910s at least, this does not seem to have been the case. (These ideas circulated more broadly in the 1920s and early 1930s, as I discuss in the next chapter, but never fully displaced other readings of female masculinity.) Smith-Rosenberg also discusses modernist novelists of the 1920 and 1930s, but these works were only read and recognizable to a fairly small set of people as well. Reading only the discourses of a particular social circle, people located in a particular place, or even the combined works of a particular medium cannot tell us very much about what people in other social circles or other places were thinking. While the rise of moving pictures spread certain styles, values, and modes of viewing more widely throughout the country than previous media, certain amounts of geographic and cultural difference remained. Duggan persuasively demonstrates that newspapers in varied locations reported on Alice Mitchell’s and related cases, but she does not attend sufficiently to alternative narratives of female masculinity that occurred at the same time.⁵³ Newspapers and films provided different discursive frameworks for representing and interpreting female cross-dressing. The spreading of sexual knowledge was not a cumulative process, such that something discussed in public in the 1890s was therefore equally, if not more, widely known

in the 1910s. Pieces of information and ways of reading, just as they were not spread out equally over space, appeared unevenly over time, even resubmerging after periods of relative visibility.

A Florida Enchantment and Respectable Comedy

Rather than a reference to sexual inversion, critics read *A Florida Enchantment* as a standard gender-switch fantasy/farce in the tradition of European theater (think *Twelfth Night* meets *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and recent female-to-male “temporary transvestite” films. Although this genre relies on the humor of gender disguise and accidental same-sex desire, it was so thoroughly conventional that it did not provoke anxieties about gender or sexual pathology. As Somerville points out, the combined use of “magic” plus the “dream” framing device further distanced the film’s world from “real life” and excused the carnivalesque inversions encountered there.⁵⁴ Moreover, the film accords with established practices of female cross-dressing and moving picture uplift. Vitagraph took a long-running, but almost two-decade-old, Broadway sex farce and combined it with a well-known, high-class Broadway comedian, Sidney Drew. In fact, the *New York Dramatic Mirror*’s praise for Drew’s contribution echoes the comment made by the National Board of Censorship: “The screen would welcome more comedians of the type of Sidney Drew. Never touching even the border of slapstick, if we may except such burlesques as have demanded that form of humor, he nevertheless manages to crowd laughs with amazing skill into every foot of the film in which he appears.”⁵⁵ Again, Drew’s form of comedy is framed as the respectable alternative to slapstick.

Vitagraph promoted the film as a “Broadway Star Feature” and this designation appeared in almost all advertisements and reviews. The film opened at the recently acquired Vitagraph Theatre, a spectacular movie palace on Broadway and 44th Street, the heart of the New York theater district, and it played there exclusively for a month. Patrons were given thick programs in the style of a Broadway playbill. When the Library Theater in Warren, Pennsylvania showed the



4.21 *A Florida Enchantment* Program (1914), from Robinson Locke Collection, New York Public Library for Performing Arts.

film a half year later, they noted in their advertisement: “As produced at the Vitagraph Theatre, New York.”⁵⁶

The film’s length was also significant. While slapstick comedy thrived in one- and two-reelers, the multi-reel format, Rob King writes, “was initially exploited as a format for adapting literary and dramatic works from the genteel cultural tradition.”⁵⁷ “One of the very first multiple-reel comedies,” King continues, was the Ramo Company’s three-reel *This Is the Life* (July 1914), which was released only a month before the five-reel *A Florida Enchantment*. Advertisements and reviews never failed to mention *A Florida Enchantment*’s “5 Act” length, but critics expressed doubt that comedy could be successful in longer formats. Of *This Is the Life*, *Variety* had complained that, “the comedy is too long drawn out to get very far with any audience [...] The fewer of these ‘comedies’ of more than one reel the better.”⁵⁸ This antipathy for multi-reel comedy likely contributed to the magazine’s poor review of *A Florida Enchantment* a month later.

Like the “high class” range romances of the previous chapter, Vitagraph placed their Broadway star in exotic and spectacular American scenery—St. Augustine, Florida. Shooting on location, as Bowser has shown, was one part of the industry’s attempt to “refine” their product.⁵⁹ Vitagraph had already experimented with “high class” plays shot out-of-doors with the Shakespearean gender-disguise comedy *As You Like It* (October 1912), which looks like it was shot in a park on a very windy day, as well as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (December 1909), shot in another forested park, and *Twelfth Night* (February 1910), which was partly shot on a beach. In a sense, *A Florida Enchantment* extends and improves upon this existing strategy. Florida had a reputation as both a dream world where anything could happen (the characters stay at the Ponce de León Hotel, invoking the legendary fountain of youth), as well as an upscale tourist destination, as Somerville notes.⁶⁰ In the film, Lillian and Jane shed their female identities in favor of male ones while on a steamboat cruise down the Ocklawaha River. The film crew apparently shot this sequence on a real cruise on the Ocklawaha. The film includes several lingering shots of lush, tropical shorelines swathed in Spanish moss behind Lillian and Fred on the boat. This otherworldly place makes a fitting stage for this final, dramatic stage of the characters’ gender transformation. The majority of the on-location shots occur at the Ponce de



4.22 *A Florida Enchantment*: Lillian on the Ocklawaha River cruise.



TOURISTS ON THE OKCLAWAHA RIVER, FLORIDA.
4.23 Illustration of Ocklawaha River in James Cox, *Our Own Country* (1894).



4.24 *A Florida Enchantment*: “Lawrence” in front of Ponce de León hotel fountain.



4.25 The same site in 2007 (now Flagler College), courtesy of Heather McCurdy.

León Hotel, an exclusive resort opened in 1887 by Standard Oil millionaire Henry Flagler. Many of the characters’ interactions take place amongst the manicured gardens of the hotel, in front of its distinctive Spanish Renaissance style buildings and fountains. These shots offered moviegoers a vicarious peek into this upper-class resort. The appeal of the Florida scenery was emphasized in almost every film review and many of the advertisements. “If you want to feel warm these cold days,” advised the *Williamsport Gazette and Bulletin* (Pennsylvania) on December 28, 1914, “drop into the Hippodrome theater and see this wonderful picture of the sunny southland.”⁶¹

Edith Storey was also a sensible choice for the studio. Storey had already appeared in Vitagraph’s *Twelfth Night* as Sebastian, the twin brother that the protagonist, Viola, had been impersonating, who appears just in the nick of time to marry the Countess who has fallen in love with his disguised sister. Thus, Storey had already appeared in a Vitagraph film romantically partnering with a woman while in a male guise (although that time through the trope of cross-gender casting). She had also appeared, as I mentioned in the last chapter, as a frontier girl raised as a boy in *Billy the Kid* (Vitagraph, September 1911). When Vitagraph opened a second Broadway movie palace in May 1914, they premiered an Edith Storey film, *The Christian*, on opening night. As both Brasell and Somerville have noted, Storey had the persona of an athletic, capable cowgirl.⁶² In December 1914, four months after *A Florida Enchantment* opened, *Motion Pictures* wrote: “[Storey] has a most loveable personality, is broadminded, loves the great out-of-doors and also hard work. [...] She can ride anything that has hair and four legs, can throw a rope and shoot, loves to hunt and is absolutely fearless in crowds, in the dark or in Jericho.”⁶³

While *A Florida Enchantment* does not display Storey’s athleticism the way frontier films did for their female protagonists, the film does offer the spectacle of a confident, jaunty woman in an exotic American landscape. Her performance recalls the *Nickelodeon*’s assessment of Essanay’s feminist ranch take-over comedy, *Girls Will Be Boys*, four and a half years earlier: “These swaggering damsels are proud of their men’s togs, and seem to be quite at home in them.” Pearl Gaddis also fit Storey into the landscape of film cross-dressing in her 1917 article, “He, She, or It.”⁶⁴ After describing Helen Holmes’s overalls in *The Hazards of Helen*, Irene Boyle’s performance as a “delectable young soldier,” and Mary Pickford playing a cavalier in *Mistress Nell* and a disguised immigrant girl in *Poor Little Peppina*, Gaddis adds: “There remains one remarkable change of sex—Edith Storey in ‘The Florida Enchantment.’ She not

only changed her sex before her audience, but was compelled to be a man in girl's clothes—a most difficult bit of acting.”⁶⁵ Gaddis suggests that the sex change trope—particularly the scenes *before* Storey dons male clothing—was unique, but only as a variation upon the other diverse kinds of cross-dressing going on. Gaddis praises Storey's acting skill and displays no particular anxiety that this case went beyond the limits of respectability.

Neither Gaddis nor most other reviews mentioned Ethel Lloyd's performance as Jane/Jack, although Lloyd played across both race and gender (which was very unusual for female performances, as I mentioned in Chapter 1). Drew and Storey were the only cast members included in advertisements. Only the *New York Dramatic Mirror* mentioned Lloyd by name when they wrote that, beyond the two leads: “Most of the roles make slight demands upon the players, though the work of Ada Gifford [as Stella] and Ethel Lloyd may be granted mention.”⁶⁶ The blackface performances in the film provided brief slapstick counterpoints to the more genteel (if still exaggerated) situation comedy style of the white performances. This slapstick comic business was a key ingredient if the film was to sustain interest through all five reels.⁶⁷ Although Somerville argues that, “the goal of many white movie actors in blackface was to ‘pass,’ to act ‘black’ in a mode believable to white audiences” and that, “Ethel Lloyd's portrayal of Jane [...] attempted to achieve precisely this naturalistic effect in blackface,” to me Lloyd's performance fits much more clearly into the non-naturalistic comedic tradition of stage blackface.⁶⁸ Lloyd provides an anarchic energy otherwise associated with popular comedy studios like Keystone. But rather than a disreputable Keystone comedy in which virtually all the characters, regardless of race, fight, drink, steal, ogle women, and ridicule the police, *A Florida Enchantment* uses a racist logic to confine this anarchic excess to the “black” body. This allowed the filmmakers to include these crowd-pleasing scenes but at the same time disavow them as fundamentally separate from the genteel, white world of the film's “central” characters. Thus, the scenes displaying Jane's unbridled aggression and lust function as interludes of energetic slapstick anarchy limited to the “black” body, as well as an illustration of threatening “black” masculinity and an opportunity to punish vicariously the whole group's social violations.

Yet because both Lillian/Lawrence and Jane/Jack are played by white actresses, we can also read the two characters as two sides of a white female fantasy of power and abandon—the ego and the id, or Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Lawrence provides a fantasy of swaggering, wealthy, white male privilege within a chivalric, genteel façade, while Jack is free to act out completely unrestrained aggression, lust, and greed, responding immediately to every impulse. Obviously an extremely racist logic maps these two poles onto white and black masculinity. (We can see a similar dynamic at work in the practices of white men acting like “Indians” in order to go beyond the constraints of their class and race during this same period.) Somerville argues that the film tries to naturalize the “color line” by making the discrepancy between Lloyd's “white” identity off-screen and her “black” appearance on-screen invisible, but I argue that Lloyd's whiteness and the racial discrepancy of the performance remained visible, in order to offer white female viewers a captivating fantasy that nonetheless retained its hold on respectability. This does not alter Somerville's conclusion that the film, and the film industry more generally, participated in producing racially segregated social spaces and obscured histories of racial violence and exploitation, but offers an alternative explanation of the way viewers may have read white-to-black cross-racial performance.

The conventions of the “temporary transvestite” film can explain the lack of opprobrium regarding Bessie' and Stella's enthusiastic responses to Lillian's advances and the repeated, non-narrative spectacle of two women kissing on the lips. In fact, the women's response to Lillian is

not that different from the men who are drawn to boys in “temporary transvestite” films who turn out to be young women in disguise. According to the logic of those films, Bessie and Stella somehow sense Lillian’s fundamental “maleness” without knowing it consciously. This is the implicit argument used to explain the countless men in film history drawn to effeminate young boys, from the foreman of *A Range Romance* on down to King Marchand (James Garner) in *Victor/Victoria* (MGM, March 1982).⁶⁹ The important difference, though, is that in those films, the men’s instincts aligned with the viewer’s awareness of the performer’s “real” gender, whereas in *A Florida Enchantment* it does not. While we may know, narratively, that Lillian is now a man, we always know, extradiegetically, that Edith Storey is “really” a woman.

This kind of thing does not happen in mainstream “temporary transvestite” films nowadays, because the sight of two characters who we know to be “really” women kissing intentionally and enthusiastically (unlike the “accidental” same-sex kisses endemic to the genre) is too overtly lesbian. While viewers at the time may have been aware of lesbianism as described in French literature, they apparently did not read these kisses as references to that particular perversion. In 1914, it was still possible to read women’s passionate affection for each other—including kissing, dancing together, forming exclusive attachments, writing “mash notes,” and “spooning” in bed—as a schoolgirl “smash” or a “romantic friendship.”⁷⁰ “Smashes” or “crushes” between girls had long been part of “normal” girlhood. In general, smashes were considered good practice for dating and marriage, although some women ended up with female partners their whole lives. This kind of behavior in girls’ schools, reformatories, and colleges was just beginning to generate concern during this period, but the flurry of reports amongst psychologists and educators had not yet shifted general opinion. Gunter’s 1892 novel, in fact, explains that Bessie and Lillian, “having known each other from childhood, kiss at sight in the careless, easy way particular to girls.”⁷¹ While this could have seemed old-fashioned by 1914, it would not have been unfamiliar. Just like the newspaper stories of lesbian love murders and respectable female husbands, the narrative of Parisian degeneracy (which general audiences may or may not have been aware of) existed alongside a “respectable” narrative of passionate, idealized same-sex affection. There were undoubtedly other variations and many shades in between these poles—I have highlighted the two most divergent and dominant strains to make the point that an entirely legitimate reading of kissing women did exist.

Furthermore, just as Straayer points out about *Victor/Victoria*, the reactions of diegetic spectators to the kisses in *A Florida Enchantment* mediates them for the non-diegetic spectator.⁷² When Lillian appears for the first time after her transformation and kisses first Stella and then Bessie, Fred and Aunt Constancia watch with disbelief, tinged with shock. When Lillian kisses Stella and Bessie once more before bidding them goodbye, Fred and Aunt Constancia stare blatantly, their mouths an open “O” of surprise (Figure 4.26). Their surprise does place Lillian, Bessie, and Jane’s actions beyond the boundaries of mere friendly, girlish kissing. And yet it is a fairly mild reaction. They do not display anger or disgust, nor do they separate the women, which would register that something truly obscene was going on.⁷³ Fred seems just as nonplussed by the masculine way Lillian folds her legs as by the fact that her arms encircle the shoulders of two women. Nor do any other members of the St. Augustine community register disapproval. Fred and Constancia are not merely stand-ins for the extradiegetic spectator, however. They also occupy the position of the diegetic dupe typical of “temporary transvestite” comedy. The spectator can congratulate herself for knowing more than they do. This disjuncture distances viewers from Fred and Constancia’s response. Because we know more than they do, we understand that we should not even be shocked like they are—even though, in this case, our



4.26 Fred (Sidney Drew) and Aunt Constanica (Grace Stevens) watch Lillian kiss Stella and Bessie goodbye.

narrative knowledge does not align with our extradiegetic knowledge, as it would in a typical “temporary transvestite” film.

In contrast, when the spurned Fred starts dancing with a young man in order to spite Lillian and Bessie, an older man quickly intervenes to break them up (Figures 4.27 and 4.28). Fred’s post-sex-change flirtations are also met with much harsher measures. When he embraces the Major, the Major yells for the police, who start chasing Fred. Likewise, when a group of young men realize the woman whose leg they were admiring is actually a man, they and soon a group of twenty or so men chase Fred through town and off a pier. While Fred’s behavior is marked as that of a “pervert,” Lillian, Bessie, and Stella’s—and even Jane’s—is not.

It is worth returning to Silverman’s review of *A Florida Enchantment* with this more innocent way of reading the film in mind. The lines I quoted at the beginning of this chapter—



4.27 Fred dances with Bessie’s former dance partner.



4.28 An unidentified older man intervenes and leads the young man away.

pieces of which appear in Brasell, Somerville, and Barrios' analyses—have been taken out of context. If we read the entire review, we can see that Silverman objects as much to the film's dreary pretentiousness and the incapacity of the moving picture medium to do justice to the comic opera as to Lillian and Jane's "mannishness":

"A Farcical Fantasy" eh? Yes, it is, and besides that it is the most silly inane "comedy" ever put on the sheet. The thing started off like a comic opera, but it lapsed into a weary, dreary, listless collection of foolish things that drove several of the few people at the Vitagraph Tuesday night out of the theatre before the third reel had been run through. There was plenty of "paper" among those present, so the "paper" stuck it out maybe.⁷⁴ Before the stereotyped picture audience, groans would have greeted the futile attempts at humor in this film. There is as much fun in it as there is at a Continental battle. The "fantasy" is of a young woman who swallows a seed and becomes a man, and not so much a man in this instance as just mannish. To make it "funnier," she gave a seed to her colored maid, and the maid became mannish. Then the white "man" in woman's clothes made love to the women about, repulsing her own sweetheart, and so forth and so on. Five reels wasted. The Florida landscapes do not help. Nobody's fault but the Vitagraph's, although giving the author, Archibald Clavering Gunter credit at least for expecting it to be worked out as intended. Even so, however, it is not for the sheet. As a comic opera with the late Della Fox in the principle role, maybe yes, but cold and dispirited before the camera, it is only a senseless mass. None of the actors gained distinction in it. Sidney Drew did as well as he could. Edith Storey played the dual role, and the others were in the cast. The picture should never have been put out, for there's no one with any sense of humor whatsoever, or intelligence either, who can force a smile while watching this sad "comedy." It wound up the worst program that the Vitagraph theatre has yet presented.⁷⁵

Overall, Silverman does not give the impression of being offended by the obscene content of the film but rather annoyed by the acting, the pacing, and, most of all, the film's deadening pretension. His complaint that the film "lapsed into a weary, dreary, listless collection of foolish things" echoes *Variety's* complaint only a few months before about the folly of trying to drag moving picture comedy into a multi-reel format—it becomes boring. Silverman contrasts the imagined response of the "stereotyped picture audience" (e.g. the working classes)—groans—with the response by the "paper" (e.g. the moneyed classes) present in the screening he attended—who stuck it out. Silverman prefers the honest, voluble response of a working-class audience rather than the polite, regulated behavior of a middle-class audience.⁷⁶ His remark also suggests that the picture was aimed at elite viewers, not working-class audiences.

Furthermore, much of his grievance seems to be directed at the medium of moving pictures itself. "As a comic opera with the late Della Fox," he says, "maybe yes," but on film the story becomes "cold and dispirited."⁷⁷ A cross-dressing comic opera on stage would have included singing, dancing, suggestive dialogue, and impudent asides to the audience. While the film would have been presented with live music, it has none of the musical energy or innuendo that a synchronized sound performance would have had.⁷⁸ The film's complete lack of dialogue (even the intertitles are only used for description) reduced the opportunity for innuendo and the film has little of the tongue-in-cheek self-consciousness that marked the comic opera. Despite the novelty of being able to show "Florida landscapes," Silverman declares that the story is "not for the sheet," that is, not suited for cinematic presentation. A favorite theatrical tradition has been transferred to moving pictures and lost everything in the translation. Silverman's remarks also

indicate that he read the film as part of this theatrical tradition—not as something radically new. While it remains perfectly plausible that Silverman uses “mannish” to hint at sexual inversion to readers in the know, the word would not have leapt out to all *Variety* readers. The presence of the word in this review does not indicate that the discourses of sexual inversion circulated widely in the American public at this time, or that they formed a dominant framework for audiences’ interpretation of this film.

When Vitagraph decided to make a feature-length comedy in 1914—an ambition that amounted to an experiment in moving picture form at this time—they chose a series of elements that seemed most likely to produce a genteel comedy that could sustain interest across five reels. They combined a Broadway hit from almost two decades prior, a Broadway comedian with a reputation for “high class” humor, a cowboy girl who also did Shakespeare, some blackface comedians for the “comic business,” and an exotic but also classy location. To align the film with theater, they released it on Broadway for an exclusive month-long run, with printed programs, before releasing it to the rest of the country. All these strategies align with the broader use of cross-dressed women for moving picture uplift that I have been tracing throughout this dissertation. The film is different in so far as its images converge with new discourses that had been operating in parallel—the description of real-live women who think of themselves as men and/or who desire women the way men do. People who were familiar with these concepts (including, perhaps, Silverman) could read the film through this lens. Certainly in the wake of the changes that began during this period, audiences today can’t help but read it in this way. But at this transitional moment, the conventions of the film were familiar enough that the film did not generate controversy or condemnation.

New York and Everywhere Else: Reading the Stage Production

The 1896 stage production of *A Florida Enchantment* provides an important intertext for understanding the reception of the film. The play debuted at the Park Theater in Boston in April 1896, where it ran for two weeks, starring Sibyl Johnstone as Lillian and established blackface comedian Dan Collyer as Jane. Seven months later, on October 12, 1896, the play opened on Broadway at Hoyt’s Theater, with Marie Jensen now playing Lillian. It ran there for six weeks before the cast and crew moved to the Columbia Theater in Washington, D.C.. Brasell notes that critics called the play a “strange study of bad taste,” “shameful in its suggested meaning,” and “the most singular of all offenses that have been committed upon our stage.”⁷⁹ He writes that the production “opened to unanimously hostile reviews” and argues that this negative reaction was due to the play’s representation of sexual inversion and same-sex desire.⁸⁰ These reviews would seem to demonstrate that these perverse identities were clearly readable to audiences in 1896. But, again, these snippets do not tell the whole story. The *Galveston Daily News* (Texas), for instance, reported from afar that: “There has been a succession of large audiences since the opening night, and as the ‘comedy frolic’ does not impress people as being nearly so shocking as they anticipated after reading the newspaper notices, a favorable reaction has set in for the play. The audiences evidently find the play amusing, and there are an abundance of uproarious laughter and curtain calls after each act.”⁸¹ I argue that the New York theater critics’ outrage at the play was not fully, or even primarily, directed at the obscenity of representing inversion or same-sex desire, although they did consider “sophisticated” audiences capable of detecting these meanings, and that their response was quite distinct from that of other regions of the country. Furthermore, like the Alice Mitchell trial of 1892, the circulation of newspaper stories deploying

discourses of inversion at this point did not guarantee that those discourses would be mobilized later on. It is worth noting that the reviews of the stage adaptation are much longer and more detailed than reviews of the film, because theater criticism was quite developed by the 1890s, whereas film criticism was only just getting off the ground in 1914.

The New York theater critics' outcry was not fully, or even primarily, directed at depiction of inversion or same-sex desire so much as to the play's aesthetic failings, its endorsement of libidinous, anti-sentimental sexual desire, and its solicitation of male audience members' lust. The New York-based periodical *The Critic*, for instance, wrote that, "The stupidity and dreariness of the whole affair were even more conspicuous than the vulgarity of it" and *The New York Times* wrote, "Sensible folks in the wearied and disgusted audience yearned for some kind of a magic seed that would transform an inept, ill-equipped writer into a dramatist."⁸² Furthermore, the play celebrated a "masculine" approach to sex at a time when many moralists hoped that men could be persuaded to adopt a "feminine" approach—sublimating sexual desire in service of sentimental attachment, which should be directed toward marriage.⁸³ In the book, Lillian swallows the seed in order to "love in the selfish, careless way men do, and be happy!"⁸⁴ The *New York World* wrote that after her sex change, Lillian "develops Mormon tendencies, and kisses everything feminine in sight."⁸⁵ The critic writes that she "is seized with a sudden passion for her former girl friend" and noted "I say passion advisedly, since Mr. Gunter has carefully excluded anything so mawkish as sentiment from his playful little physiological study."⁸⁶ These comments focus on the excessive masculine lust Lillian displays, comparing it to the male sexual Other of the period, the polygamous Mormon man.

The New York Times likened the play to *La timbale d'Argent* (The Silver Cup) and *La marjolaine* (The Sweet Marjoram), "hitherto, to be the nastiest things theatrical ever inflicted on New-York."⁸⁷ These French comic operas had no hint of same-sex innuendo, but, rather, ridiculed those who would hold male honor or female virtue above the satisfaction of healthy heterosexual desire.⁸⁸ New York theater had undergone a process of gentrification during late nineteenth century, as Richard Butsch has shown. Richard Allen further demonstrates that burlesque's bawdy grotesquerie, which had played to all audiences, was increasingly confined to a working-class male sphere.⁸⁹ When the *New York Times* critic complained, then, that, "Theatricals have never before sunk quite so low in New-York--on a decent stage," he is commenting as much on the appropriateness of the venue as on the content of the play itself.⁹⁰ *The Critic* underscores this same point: "That such stuff could have been presented at all in a respectable house is a sad illustration of the depths to which some of our theatres have fallen under the prevailing system of ignorant and speculative management."⁹¹

While it may seem obvious that critics' objections to a scene in which Bessie tries to convince Lillian to share a bed with her were due to their condemnation of same-sex eroticism, a closer reading of the objections suggests that they were at least equally concerned about the scene's display of excessive heterosexual desire and the potential for physically arousing men in the audience. One unidentified critic wrote: "One scene, in which the unsuspecting maiden companion of the woman-turned-man begged her, or him, to come to bed, was not only shameful in its suggested meaning, but it was carried in action to the extent of introducing the night-gowned girl in a dance, while the supposed woman restrained with difficulty the lust of her new nature."⁹² While the "meaning" could indeed refer the women's apparent sexual desire for each other, it could also refer to the notion of an unmarried virgin inadvertently luring a "man" to her bed. Equally objectionable was Bessie's scantily clad, seductive dance and Lillian's display of

barely controllable sexual desire. The danger of this scene, the *New York World* critic suggested, was not that it was pathological but that it was potentially pornographic:

[Bessie] begins to pour out a flood of ice-creamy affection, and begs her once bosom friend to share her virgin couch. More physiological studies! After this the management very considerably arranges to have seven boys walk smartly around the theater with ice-water. I would respectfully suggest that fans be given away as souvenirs as soon as possible.⁹³

Whereas the first critic disapproves of Bessie's dance, this critic evidently appreciates the opportunity to inspect an undressed female body in motion ("More physiological studies!"). The need for ice water and fans suggests that audience members were not disgusted by what they saw but aroused. Although the *World* critic does not seem perturbed by an aroused audience, it seems likely that this is one of the effects the first critic feared.

The hyperbolic language used by the play's critics is less notable when viewed in the context of New York journalism at the time. Only a year earlier, William Randolph Hearst had acquired the *New York Morning Journal* and took on Joseph Pulitzer's popular *New York World*, recruiting much of Pulitzer's staff. The two publications entered a circulation war and used a blatantly sensationalistic style of reporting to build readership. The competition reached a fever pitch in 1896, when the *Journal* dropped its price from two cents to a penny to stay ahead of Hearst's burgeoning sales figures. "Real American Monsters and Dragons," read one *Journal* headline in the fall of 1896 in an article about dinosaur fossils.⁹⁴ "Henry James' New Novel of Immorality and Crime; The Surprising Plunge of the Great Novelist in the Field of Sensational Fiction" greeted the arrival of James' *The Other House*.⁹⁵ Thus, the diatribes and hyperbole surrounding *A Florida Enchantment* were not unique to this play, but in line with New York journalism at the time.

And yet there is some evidence that these New York critics did read lesbianism into the play. *The World*, for instance, wrote:

Unsophisticated people may see humor in complications based entirely upon differences in sex. They may consider that double entendre revolving around the natural laws of sexual attraction and their violation is comic. But metropolitan audiences are not unsophisticated. They have read their Gibbon, and recent criminal records are not unknown to them.

It is impossible to believe that the author has willfully sought to be fin-de-siècle in this respect. He must have played with fire without knowing it.⁹⁶

The critic postulates divergent insider and outsider interpretations of the play. He uses a series of allusions to suggest what the insider, or "sophisticated," reading might be, mentioning "Gibbon," "recent criminal records," "fin-de-siècle," and the violation of "the natural laws of sexual attraction." "Gibbon" seems to invoke Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1777) and the notion that sexual perversity contributed to the fall of the ancient empire.⁹⁷ "Recent criminal records" is more ambiguous, but it could refer to the 1892 Alice Mitchell trial, or perhaps the Oscar Wilde trials in 1895, or to local execution of anti-cross-dressing or anti-sodomy statues ("sodomy" at that time included virtually any sexual act between that strayed from heterosexual sexual intercourse). "Fin-de-siècle" evokes the contemporaneous European cultural movement that celebrated perversity and decadence as a counter to the deadening effects of bourgeois culture. The phrase "natural laws of sexual attraction" seems to allude to Darwinism, which had turned heterosexual coupling into a "natural law" driving evolutionary

progress, and the reference to a “violation” of this “natural law” could indeed be invoking sexological discourses.

These cascading allusions fit a rhetorical pattern that had been developed to discuss lesbianism in other contexts. For example, British literary critics of the nineteenth century, Sharon Marcus writes, “were unable to condemn sapphism [in French novels] outright, as they did novels of adultery, because to do so would have required demonstrating and purveying knowledge of sexual practices and desires of which everyone, they believed, should be kept ignorant. To resolve the conflicting demands of censure and censorship, British critics short-circuited meaning and made their discourse circular, repeatedly using negation, ellipsis, periphrasis, and metonymic allusion to indicate without actually explaining why *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and *Nana* made them so indignant.”⁹⁸ “Intended as veils that would conceal sapphism,” she writes, “the proper names *Juvenal*, *Sappho*, *Catullus*, and *Swinburne* became instead veils that outlined it.”⁹⁹ In the U.S. context, the allusions are different, but the effect is similar. Several decades later, as I discuss in the next chapter, a film title like *Maedchen in Uniform* would perform the same function. Marcus writes that, in the nineteenth century British context, this kind of “prose creates a community based on the very thing [it] intended to suppress: shared knowledge of *La Fille aux yeux d’or* and the lesbianism it represents.”¹⁰⁰

In late nineteenth-century American theater criticism, however, the creation of a shared community around secret sexual knowledge seems much more intentional. The critic at the *World* invokes a community of readers who are “sophisticated” like him, capable of detecting the perverse implications of a work of which the work’s author is not even aware. The critic identifies this as a “metropolitan” quality, associating it with the education and worldliness of New York’s social elite. “Metropolitan” does not refer to all New Yorkers—one wouldn’t expect New York factory workers or tenement-dwellers to have “read their Gibbon.” Although perhaps we could count these people out because they could not afford an expensive Broadway show, I suspect this critic also would also exclude *nouveau riche* industrialists from the “sophisticated” category. While, according to this logic, the unsophisticated viewer is unfamiliar with elite discourse, reads only the surface of texts, and cannot comprehend connotation, the sophisticated viewer has been exposed to literature on Antiquity, criminal proceedings, and scientific writings, and can triangulate multiple texts to grasp subtexts and implications. The *New York Times* critic postulates a similarly divided viewing public:

While there are a few of the most indecent ideas in the piece that mortal man has ever tried to communicate to his fellow-beings, the manner of the playwright is so bungling that none but very sophisticated persons catch his drift.¹⁰¹

Again the critic imagines that only “very sophisticated” viewers could detect the production’s indecency.

Dividing audience members into sophisticated and unsophisticated camps gave critics a model with which to explain heterogeneous audience response and to privilege their own interpretations. It was also a way to create social distinction, given the breakdown of older hierarchies in the face of social changes including political demands by laborers, immigrants, and women; the rise of a *nouveau riche* class, populist sentiment, consumer capitalism, and a commercial entertainment culture.¹⁰² As William Urrichio and Roberta Pearson write, “the emergence of a mass consumer culture that cut across all social formations [...] subverted the vested cultural authority of traditional tastemakers.”¹⁰³ The way critics were using the term “sophisticated” here was actually quite new. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the

first recorded instance of “sophisticated” being used to describe a person “free of naïvety, experienced, worldly-wise; subtle, discriminating, refined, cultured; aware of, versed in, the complexities of a subject or pursuit” was in 1895 (in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*).¹⁰⁴ Before this, “sophisticated”—derived from “sophistry”—was exclusively a negative quality, meaning “falsified” or “adulterated.” One earlier meaning of the verb “to sophisticate,” for example, was “To corrupt or spoil by admixture of some baser principle or quality; to render less genuine or honest.” New York critics were recasting “sophistication” as a positive quality in the 1890s as a way of clarifying cultural hierarchies that had become murky in the face of the country’s economic and social restructuring. It is worth noting, however, that in these 1896 reviews, the “sophisticated” viewer responds to sexual deviance with moral indignation, but in later decades—as we see in the next chapter—sophistication would come to imply a blasé attitude toward sexual deviance.

Gunter responded to these criticisms with “*honi soit qui mal y pense*,” a French expression used to imply that any obscenity found in a work comes from the mind of the viewer.¹⁰⁵ This strategy proved a popular one with all who sought to defend elliptical artistic works from censorship, and would be deployed by the distributors who sought to bring *Maedchen in Uniform* to the United States decades later. Apparently it worked in this case, because *A Florida Enchantment* was never subject to censorship. In fact, the negative publicity in the New York newspapers was reprinted across the country in papers including the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Denver Evening Post*, *Morning Oregonian*, *San Francisco Call*, and the *Galveston Daily News* and the show sold out for weeks and weeks—which likely contributed to Vitagraph’s later decision to adapt the play into a film.¹⁰⁶ In a sense, Gunter was not disagreeing with these critic’s assertions that a subset of viewers would find perversion in his play, he just placed a different value on that subset. Where critics saw these interpretive strategies as a positive mark of “sophistication,” Gunter implied that these readings only indicated the “sophisticated” viewer’s own degenerate mind.

Critics in Boston and Washington, D.C., who saw the play did not read it the same way as New York critics. When the production previewed in Boston, the review was lackluster but displayed no signs of offence: “the play is not so rollicking as might have been expected from the book; the situations are funny, of course, but there is a painful consciousness of straining for mirthful effects throughout.”¹⁰⁷ After the show moved to D.C., the two reviews printed in the *Washington Post* were quite positive, a direct rebuff to the New York critic’s hyperbolic condemnation. The first review stated:

“A Florida Enchantment” has been prepared for the stage solely as a bit of fun. It is not intended to discuss or solve any modern social problem, as affecting the sexes, but simply endeavors to show that young men have a great deal better time than young women in the social environment of modern civilization. The story is an interesting one. [...] The play is full of novel features and comical situations, and is presented upon a magnificent scale.¹⁰⁸

The second review, after the play had opened, concluded that, “‘A Florida Enchantment,’ if not taken seriously, is a very amusing and entirely innocuous affair.” Essentially this critic takes the same stance as Gunter. New York critics, he implies, are taking the play too “seriously,” reading it according to a framework that was “not intended.” The critic seems to be aware of the nature of New York critics’ objections. Of the performer who plays Lillian, the critic writes that, “It is due to her tact that the delicate situations are skated over with such ‘*honi soit qui mal y pense*’ grace that the occasionally very thin ice does not even crack.”¹⁰⁹ But where the New York critics

seem eager to break this “thin ice,” the *Post* reviewer is content to leave it intact, privileging the innocuous reading. From afar, newspapers in Western frontier towns—the *Galveston Daily News*, *San Francisco Call* and *Morning Oregonian*—weighed in as well. *The Daily News*, as we saw, contrasted the audience’s “favorable reaction” to the critics’ outrage. Likewise, the *Call* noted that, “The [New York] newspapers were very curt and bitter in their criticisms of the play when it opened, but the public like the ludicrous side of the unique story, and in consequence Hoyt’s cozy little theater is filled every night.”¹¹⁰ The review contrasts the “curt and bitter” critics to the jovial general public, which cozies up together in a friendly mass. After reprinting the *New York Evening Sun*’s condemnation of the play on October 19, the *Morning Oregon* noted three weeks later that, “The judgment of managers evidently does not coincide with that of the newspaper critics in regard to Archibald C. Gunter’s ‘A Florida Enchantment’” and noted that a Brooklyn manager was trying to book the show after its Broadway run.¹¹¹

There are two ways of explaining this geographically differentiated response to the play, and I suspect that both are operating simultaneously. The first is that New York theater critics were familiar with discourses on sexual perversion, whereas critics in Boston, Washington, San Francisco and Galveston were less so. Illicit sexuality and even degeneracy were common themes in New York theater and in the New York presses, which would have kept these notions at the top of critics’ and audiences’ minds.¹¹² Also, as George Chauncey has demonstrated, sexual subcultures were particularly visible on the streets of New York, particularly in the theater district, and many scholars have shown that metropolitan theater communities of the time supported distinct sexual subcultures in which homosexual behavior was not uncommon.¹¹³ Frontier cities like Galveston and particularly San Francisco also had cultures of sexual license and homoeroticism, but they often rejected the discourses of degeneracy occasionally applied by moralizing reformers, except when it came to Chinese-American or other racialized inhabitants.¹¹⁴

The other explanation is that theater critics in all these places had the ability to detect perversion, but that the New York critics were inclined to make this reading while critics outside New York were not. It seems likely that New York critics strategically played up this reading in order to demonstrate their own knowingness and produce a similarly smug in-group of readers, while critics in other locations resisted the “New York” reading in order to produce an “imagined community” of wholesome, down-to-earth readers defined in opposition to elitist, humorless, and possibly even perverse New Yorkers. The Galveston and San Francisco newspapers in particular played up the good-humored, convivial response of the “public” as a populist rejection of high-culture elitism. Thus, while there is clearly evidence that some viewers read the sexual and gender play of the production as lesbian, many others did not – either intentionally or by default. In the next chapter, I trace how, in the 1920s, some American filmmakers and many different newspapers adopted the “knowing” stance of these New York theater critics, but combined it with a much more blasé attitude, thus bringing a wider set of readers into the in-group that read cross-dressing as a sign of lesbianism.

The critical response to the stage production of *A Florida Enchantment* in 1896 demonstrates that knowledge of lesbianism played a part of New York theater critics’ creation of an elite, “sophisticated,” in-group, but that critics outside New York either lacked or consciously rejected these reading strategies. Furthermore, the fact that the film was not received in the same manner as the play shows us that the sexual knowledge and interpretive strategies of one set of people in one time and place did not automatically translate to another set of people in another time and place (even if it was eighteen years later). That is, sexual knowledge in the public

sphere did not simply accumulate, so that “inverts” became more and more recognizable over time. Rather, “deviant” identities emerged and submerged and they always contended with a host of other long-established ways of reading female masculinity.

It is difficult, though, to determine conclusively why, in this specific case, New York theater critics read the play through a “perverse” framework in 1896, while film critics—with the possible exception of Sime Silverman—so consistently read the film version through an innocent framework in 1914. After all, New York-based film critics could have remembered the earlier production and critics at any major newspaper could have recalled the surrounding controversy. *The New York Dramatic Mirror* even reviewed both play and film. (In fact, their assessment of each was rather similar. Of the play, they wrote: “Taken as a comedy frolic Mr. Gunter's conceit is not devoid of cleverness,” and they judged the film, as you may recall, “satisfactory Summer entertainment.”)¹¹⁵

One explanation is that the play was more suggestive than the film. The play included an extended sequence not present in the book in which Bessie tries to lure Lillian to bed through a “night-gowned dance” and Lillian “restrained with difficulty the lust of her new nature.” In the film, there is no dance, neither woman appears in nightclothes, and Lillian manages her “lust” fairly discretely, for the most part merely appearing uncomfortable when Bessie asks for help unzipping her dress. Furthermore, if the play followed the novel, it had no “dream” framework and concluded with Lawrence and Bessie’s marriage. The film, on the other hand, recuperated the gender and sexual upheaval of the “enchantment” more strongly by dismissing the main action of the film as a dream and concluding with a shot of the (non-transsexual) heterosexual



4.29 The final image in *A Florida Enchantment*.

couple reestablished and doubled over in laughter. The laughter establishes the impossibility of the seeds’ promise and assuages potential anxiety by framing the prior spectacle as entertainment.

The stage version also included dialogue, song, and dance, which would have allowed the performers to include all kinds of sexual innuendo, additional meanings that were much more difficult to touch upon lightly in a silent film.¹¹⁶ And yet, when filmmakers adapted novels and plays with homosexual themes in the 1930s and 1940s and intentionally obscured the homosexual content (as in the 1934 film adaptation of Lillian Hellman’s *The Children’s Hour*, for example), the reputation of the original works framed critical readings of the film, Chon

Noriega has shown.¹¹⁷ Yet this did not seem to happen with *A Florida Enchantment*—perhaps because the play’s reputation was not sufficiently well known in 1914.

Another explanation could be that critics had deemed moving pictures too “low” an art form to deal with female sexual inversion, which was often considered to be part of high-culture, educated discourses (such as French literature, European sexology, Greek and Roman literature, etc.). This was quite different from the male invert, as I noted, who had a prominent place in “low” comedy. Perhaps film critics in 1914 were aware of these perverse frameworks, but felt that it was inappropriate to apply them to the ostensibly working-class, undeveloped medium of moving pictures. And yet, just as theater critics in 1896 endeavored to banish “nastiness” from the “respectable” stage, moving picture critics in the 1910s, particularly those at trade journals like *Motion Picture World*, hoped desperately to “elevate” film content. To these critics, with the exception of Silverman, *A Florida Enchantment* seemed to aid, not obstruct, this goal.

Sexual perversity may have actually been more present in the critical imagination in 1896 than in 1914. The year 1896 was only one year after the Oscar Wilde trials, which had highlighted the link between homosexuality, dandyism, and the decadent cultural movement, and only four years after the Alice Mitchell trial, which had circulated discourses of perversion drawing on French literature and recent sexological writings.¹¹⁸ In August and September of 1914, in contrast, the European powers were entering World War I and women in those countries were being called upon to help the war effort by taking posts formerly held by men on both the home front and the battlefield. Female masculinity thus became tied to heroic nationalism, as Deborah Cohler has argued in the British context.¹¹⁹ Fashionable women’s clothing also incorporated “mannish” elements during this time and commentators praised the healthy “masculinization” of girls’ bodies, as I described in this chapter and the last one. So, rather than female masculinity becoming continually more perverse over the first decades of the twentieth century due to the increasing circulation of sexological discourses, I argue that certain kinds of female masculinity (namely young, white, attractive, and temporary) were increasingly condoned and even celebrated.¹²⁰ The prevalence of attractive cross-dressing women in moving pictures starting in 1909 contributed to this shift.

Furthermore, the profusion of female-to-male cross-dressing films released before *A Florida Enchantment* would have guided viewers’ interpretation of this film. The previous chapters show how frequently this figure appeared onscreen at moving picture shows. As I mentioned in the introduction, American production companies released more than two hundred films featuring women in men’s clothing between 1908 and 1919; twenty of those films appeared in the year 1914 alone. The cinema provided a rich context for interpreting this figure in ways that did not necessarily signify lesbianism. Furthermore, Florida in this film functions like the frontier space of the West—as a kind of fantasy space that affords a certain play with gender. Where a return to the East provides the corrective in those films, waking up in this film functions to undo the temporary gender and sexual disorder. While the device of magically switching bodies is unique to *A Florida Enchantment*, the film is similar enough in style, costume, and plot to other films of the period that its deviations from the more typical “temporary transvestite” film did not apparently stand out.

What about Fred?

As scholars have noted, Dr. Fred Cassadene’s gender change is treated quite differently from Lillian’s.¹²¹ Whereas Storey is made to look appealing in men’s clothing, Fred is made to

look grotesque. The *New York Mirror* even noted that, “while Edith Storey made quite an attractive man, Sidney Drew is a far from handsome woman.”¹²² Lillian’s changed nature is met with only mild disapproval from Constancia and Fred – and real enthusiasm from the objects of her attentions – but Fred’s displays of simpering effeminacy are met with disgust and his overtures toward a group of boys are met with violent retaliation. In fact, these overtures prompt a prolonged chase sequence in which Fred is pursued by a growing mob of townspeople right off a pier into the water where he struggles and appears to drown, as the townspeople apparently watch.¹²³ His death is only avoided by Lillian waking up from her dream.

The opprobrium that Fred faces accords with my earlier claim, based on the National Board of Censorship’s attention to male sissies and cross-dressers, that the link between male effeminacy and sexual inversion was much stronger at this time than the link between female masculinity and inversion. George Chauncey’s study of the gay male world in early twentieth century New York and Sharon Ullman’s investigation of female impersonators during this same time likewise suggests a fairly broad familiarity—at least in New York City—with the existence of, and codes for recognizing, various sorts of men who had sex with men.¹²⁴ This is not to say that a “sissy” was always and only read as gay—some were portrayed as vain ladies’ men or hen-pecked husbands with an eye for young women. The growing importance of a powerful, “masculine” ideal of maleness during the 1910s, which I described in Chapter 2, also likely contributed to Fred’s denigration in this film, quite aside from any sexual meanings.¹²⁵

However, it would be a mistake to conclude that *A Florida Enchantment* only condemns this character—Sidney Drew, after all, was by far the film’s biggest star and also its director. Indeed, the *New York Dramatic Mirror* wrote that Drew’s scenes were the most successful in the film.¹²⁶ While the narrative expels the male cross-dresser from the community and even tries to kill him off, Drew’s beloved star persona meant that audiences were likely to have affection for this character and empathize with his plight, even as they laughed at his undoing.

* * *

Historians familiar with the existing scholarship on *A Florida Enchantment* would assume that using cross-dressed women to “legitimize” moving pictures would be a very poor strategy indeed, given the ostensible infiltration of the “mannish lesbian” or sexual invert into the public imagination. I have shown here, however, that the circulation of an interpretive strategy that would read cross-dressing or “mannishness” as a sign of sexual inversion was much more limited than previous scholars have acknowledged. In 1914, the innocent readings of cross-dressing, and even women kissing, were sufficiently dominant that *A Florida Enchantment* was received as a standard sex farce and a high-class, wholesome picture. This is not to say that some audience members couldn’t read the film through a perverse lens as well, as *Variety*’s Sime Silverman apparently did. Like the “temporary transvestite” comedy more generally, *A Florida Enchantment* allowed viewers to have it both ways—to delight in the illicit thrills of women appropriating male sexual freedom and erotic exchanges between women—but take comfort in the familiarity of generic conventions and the eventual restoration of heterosexual norms. There is little evidence, though, to suggest that this film would have informed viewers ignorant of sexual inversion about the existence of this phenomenon or that it played a part in generating a “sophisticated” in-group capable of detecting perversion, as the play had been. American filmmakers did not take up those tasks until the 1920s, as I describe in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The Belated Convergence of Cross-Dressing and Lesbianism in American Cinema



5.1 Christina (Greta Garbo) kisses Countess Ebba Sparre (Elizabeth Young) in *Queen Christina* (MGM, December 1933).

The image of Greta Garbo in men's clothing kissing the actress Elizabeth Young full on the mouth in *Queen Christina* has become an iconic image of lesbian visibility in early film.¹ Scholars such as Terry Castle and Judith Mayne have argued that queer fans seize still images like this one in order to construct moments of positive visibility against the grain of narratives that restore heterosexuality "with a vengeance."² Others, like Andrea Weiss, Marcia Landy, Amy Villarejo, and Patricia White, have shown that these moments are not merely queers' "naïve fetishizations of the image," but conscious elaborations of Garbo's sexually ambiguous star persona.

In the last chapter, I argued that the images of women kissing and cross-dressing from *A Florida Enchantment* did not seem to resonate as lesbian to most audiences in 1914. In contrast, I argue that this image of Garbo and Young was indeed legible as lesbian in 1933—and not only to sexually deviant or elite viewers, but to mass audiences as well. In this chapter, I trace the way a range of mass media (newspapers, plays, novels, and moving pictures) distributed visual and linguistic codes for signifying lesbianism to the American public in the 1920s and early 1930s. Whereas the American moving picture industry had mobilized cross-dressed women to secure

social legitimacy during the transitional era, in the 1920s and early 1930s it increasingly used cross-dressed women to align itself with worldly European cosmopolitanism—one that was often at odds with American respectability. These developments, I argue, made it both possible and desirable to construct a star such as Garbo as lesbian.

In my initial approach to historicizing the cinematic association of cross-dressing with lesbianism, I sought to examine cross-dressing films for signs of lesbianism and films featuring lesbianism for their use of cross-dressing. However, if we cannot assume *a priori* that cross-dressing signified lesbianism, how are we to tell when it did have this association? I argue that we can read cross-dressing as a signifier of lesbianism with reasonable confidence when it occurred alongside other formal, narrative, and extra-textual strategies that independently signified lesbianism. Identifying these strategies requires closely analyzing the texts themselves, comparing the texts to other images circulating at the time, and examining reception material, when it exists. In fact, these contextual clues are not only necessary for the scholar of today trying to read images of the past. Even at the time viewers required the triangulation of multiple signs, both within and between texts, in order to recognize lesbianism reliably.

By examining reviews from a range of sources, I have been able to gain more insight into how certain historical viewers interpreted these films (although admittedly still a select set of viewers). In the process I discovered that critics were quite clearly reading lesbian-themed films through the lenses of other, non-filmic texts.³ For example, nearly all the initial American reviews of the German film *Maedchen in Uniform* (Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft, November 1931; U.S. release September 1932) discuss the film in relationship to *The Captive* (1926), a French play that had played on Broadway five years earlier.⁴ And once *Maedchen in Uniform* was released, its title became the new euphemism for lesbianism.⁵ It became clear that plays, novels, and films were all participating together in the process of refashioning the public into “insider” readers of lesbianism. Furthermore, mass-circulation newspapers and magazines publicized works to those who wouldn’t have had access to them, made lesbian meanings more explicit than the original texts did, and popularized terminology to discuss the subject.⁶

Previous histories of lesbian representation during this period have focused on a single medium (modernist literature, say, or American theater) or else a single important work like *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), often concentrating on the sexual subcultures of Paris and London.⁷ Quite a bit of scholarship analyzes texts in isolation from their reception material (due, in part, to the difficulty of accessing some of this material until recent years).⁸ These approaches, while yielding valuable insights, obscure the way that diverse texts and forms of media were created and received in dialogue with each other. By reading films alongside theatrical performances, novels, and journalism, we can see how these disparate texts became meaningful in relationship to each other. It was this broad horizon of popular media, I argue, that made it possible to construct a movie star like Greta Garbo as lesbian—possible in that the lesbianism was legible to mass audiences and was permissible to represent.

The construction of Garbo as lesbian was part of Hollywood’s broader strategy of exploiting the public’s interest in taboo subjects while forestalling censorship by deliberately encoding sexual meanings (such as abortion or sex between unmarried partners) so that “sophisticated” viewers could understand while maintaining deniability, which Ruth Vasey has documented. While some have argued that stars such as Garbo could only be associated with lesbianism so long as this identity was not legible to mass audiences, I contend that—based on the distribution of lesbian codes through mass-circulation periodicals beginning in the late 1920s—these insinuations would have been legible to mass audiences, though still deniable. Just

as the Garbo phenomenon was made possible by these others texts, her celebrity continued to distribute codes to ever-wider audiences.⁹

Cinema is curiously absent from much scholarship on the development of the lesbian identities during the early twentieth century, which instead tends to examine more high-brow cultural production. Accounts of lesbianism in American film history identify the importance of Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, and *Maedchen in Uniform* but often base their readings on retrospective accounts, a limited set of contemporaneous articles, or close readings of films in isolation, rather than using a wide range of reception and star material from the period.¹⁰ Retrospective accounts can be misleading, for once certain sexual paradigms and reading practices are in place, it is incredibly difficult not to use them; therefore, accounts generated at the time are much more revealing of the reading practices that were in use at that point.¹¹ Contemporaneous periodicals can reveal how some historical viewers interpreted these works, which others works informed their readings, how audiences' varied semiotic tools were conceptualized, and journalism's role in defining these works' cultural impact.

Therefore, in this chapter, I investigate how extensive press coverage of a series of major works in different media—*The Captive* (1926, play), *The Well of Loneliness* (1928, novel), and *Maedchen in Uniform* (1932, film)—introduced concepts of lesbianism and strategies for reading it to mass audiences. While acknowledging the profound impact of *The Well of Loneliness*, I complicate historical narratives that position *Well* as a singular force popularizing the concept of sexual inversion. In fact, a number of American films released before the publication of *Well* had already used cross-dressing to signify sexual inversion or lesbianism. Moreover, films made after *Well* did not necessarily characterize lesbianism as gender inversion; neither did cross-dressing always signify sexual deviance. I situate these well-publicized, influential works alongside a handful of minor films and minor moments in well-known films that took up questions of lesbianism but did not receive much press comment. These films are suggestive stand-ins for a vast horizon of material that is largely lost to us today, because it has been destroyed, is inaccessible, or its lesbian significance has not been recognized.¹² These minor texts are not agents of change in the way the major texts were, but, en masse, they demonstrate the pervasiveness of these themes and the variety of ways they were treated.

In this chapter, I argue that for a lesbian meaning to be produced, audiences needed to be aware of visual and linguistic codes, which—because they could not be stated explicitly in film—were communicated by other forms of mass media (a review of a play, for instance, might give spectators the lens through which to read a film scene).¹³ Furthermore, a text needed to layer multiple signs in order to shift the meaning of individual signs from innocent to sexual. Cross-dressing, due to its visibility and the presence of competing meanings, was a particularly useful code for cinema. But despite the connection between cross-dressing and lesbian sexual identities in scientific writing, cross-dressing continued to require multiple signs within the text and outside of it in order to connote lesbianism reliably. Whereas I demonstrated in the last chapter that the kissing and cross-dressing in *A Florida Enchantment* generally did not signify lesbianism to audiences beyond a small cadre of “sophisticated” viewers, I will show in this chapter how a variety of media alerted mass audiences to the lesbian meanings of cross-dressing throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.

Spotting Lesbians Before *Well Of Loneliness*

In the 1920s, as Lucy Fischer notes, Americans demonstrated a broad fascination with Europe and urban “sophistication.”¹⁴ Men and women of the armed forces had experienced alternative sexual and social mores in European cities during the First War; one popular song published in 1919 worried “How You Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Farm (After They’ve Seen Patee?).”¹⁵ Paris, in particular, became a symbol of cosmopolitan modernity. American writers and artists flocked to the city during this decade and the 1925 Paris *Exposition des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* popularized the “moderne” style in fashion, architecture, and design (later known as “art deco”). In the United States, Prohibition (which lasted from 1920 to 1933) drove middle-class Anglo-Americans into illicit speakeasies, where they came into contact with urban sexual subcultures, as George Chauncey demonstrates.¹⁶ A sense of disillusionment following the war, Chauncey writes, led many “to reject the moral certainties that had fueled both the war and the Prohibition campaign.” “Displaying sophistication,” he continues, “became one of the ways New Yorkers distinguished themselves from the ‘narrow-minded’ folk whom they blamed for the passage of the Prohibition and whose moral fervor now seemed dangerously constraining” and they displayed this sophistication by demonstrating familiarity with and appreciation of the “double entendre of gay male repartee,” as well as African-American music and dance.¹⁷ At the same time, women’s fashion incorporated masculine styles to an even more pronounced degree, including controversially short haircuts. In an observation typical of the time, the *Los Angeles Times* noted in 1925 that, “The boyish bob, which is getting more and more in vogue every day, helps along the transition from femininity to masculinity [...], as do the swagger cane and flat-heeled shoe which complete the outfit. [...] [S]o far as sex distinction in wearing apparel goes[,] one hardly will be able to tell, at a little distance, which is which.”¹⁸ Masculine styles became widely popular and were often associated with the flapper’s “devil-may-care” attitude.¹⁹ At the same time, Americans began to discover urban sexual subcultures in which women used masculine styles to signify their deviant sexual identities.

The increasingly consolidated moving picture industry, now marketed as the larger-than-life “Hollywood,” was an important force in these social changes. Hollywood positioned itself as a locus of cosmopolitan modernity and became a symbol of the new social mores of a leisure-oriented consumer culture. Films and exhibition spaces incorporated “moderne” design and studio heads imported actors, directors, and technicians from Europe to lend prestige to their productions. Studios rattled out grandiose historical epics and “sophisticated” modern comedies that made light of drinking, smoking, adultery, and divorce. After a few years of relative absence, cross-dressed women returned to American moving pictures in 1923. Studios released fifteen pictures featuring cross-dressed women that year, ten the next, and nineteen the year after that, producing an average of thirteen a year between 1923 and 1928. “Almost every [movie] star is taking to knickerbockers on and off location,” the *New York American* noted in September 1923 and the *Los Angeles Times* observed the next year that cross-dressed women seemed to be “having a vogue now[.]”²⁰ Most instances of cross-dressing occurred in fairly innocent “temporary transvestite” romantic comedies, which were often extravagant historical costume dramas (e.g. *Little Old New York* [Cosmopolitan Productions, November 1923], *The Dangerous Maid* [Joseph Schenk Productions, November 1923]). Women also donned men’s clothing to pass in urban underworlds as thieves, apaches, and newsies (e.g. *The Humming Bird* [Famous Players-Lasky, January 1924], *The Lawful Cheater* [B. P. Schulberg Productions, July 1925]). This prevalence is likely tied to the rise in boyish fashions associated with the flapper. At the

same time, however, Hollywood films and fan magazines, as well as general interest newspapers, increasingly interpellated viewers and readers as cosmopolitan urbanites. One way to demonstrate urban “sophistication,” as Chauncey notes, was through familiarity with the codes of sexual subcultures. During the 1920s, some films began to use visual and intertextual cues to render certain instances of female-to-male cross-dressing something more than an irreverent flapper affectation.

Many scholars have pointed to the publication and highly publicized censorship trials of *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928 as the impetus for masculine styles becoming publically associated with lesbianism, particularly in Britain.²¹ However, lesbians in masculine clothing appeared in at least two American films before 1928, the prestige productions *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Metro, March 1921) and *Wings* (Paramount, August 1927).²² In both cases the lesbian couples appear only briefly and as an attribute of a Parisian dance hall—a pre-war “tango palace” in *Four Horsemen* and a dance hall providing respite for Allied soldiers in *Wings*. The films use a number of formal techniques to make clear that the two women are a couple, which allows us to read the masculine styles as a signifiers of lesbianism.

The films establish women as romantic couples by depicting them in parallel with heterosexual romantic couples. In *Four Horsemen*, we cut from a medium long shot of Julio



5.2 *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*: Julio (Rudolph Valentino) and Marguerite (Alice Terry) sit at table...



5.3 ...we cut to unidentified female couple...



5.4 ...and cut back to Julio and Marguerite.

(Rudolph Valentino) helping Marguerite (Alice Terry) to a seat at a cabaret table to a shot of two women seated at a similar table together. In a visual rhyme, both couples are shot from the same height, in virtually the same framing, with the masculine figures on the left and feminine figures on the right. On the left (in Julio's position) is a woman in a tuxedo with a monocle, top hat, and cigarette in a long holder. She gazes fondly at the woman beside her (in Marguerite's position), who wears a white, chiffon dress and gazes happily back at her. As the monocled woman begins to place a hand over her partner's, the camera cuts back and Julio's hand seems to complete the movement as he adds sugar to Marguerite's cup. In the background of both images are other couples seated at similar tables, establishing the couples as specific instances among a multitude. This way of framing the female couple in parallel to heterosexual couples makes the romantic and sexual nature of their relationship clear.

The explicitness of the framing allows us to read the women's costumes as supporting signifiers of lesbianism more confidently than we could do otherwise. The women wear upper-class, gender-differentiated clothing that fits with sexological models that describe female couples as conjoining a masculine, sexually-assertive "invert" and a feminine, more passive partner. Alone, the woman in a tuxedo could be read as a fun-loving modern girl disguised as a playboy out on the town and the woman on the right as a feminine, heterosexual woman. But, together, the two women make each other visible as lesbians and turn their clothing into signifiers for their sexual identities. While scholars have emphasized the way masculine women make their feminine partners recognizable as lesbian, in this case the masculine woman also requires a (feminine) partner to become recognizable as lesbian.

Wings similarly establishes two women as a couple by framing them in parallel to heterosexual couples, but compares the couples through a dramatic track forward rather than through cuts. Inside the orgiastic "Folies Bergere" nightclub, the camera tracks forward through a series of couples seated across from each other at cabaret tables: an officer and his date, an older woman handing a roll of cash to a younger man, two women, a young couple looking at the female couple in surprise, and a woman tossing her drink in the face of the man across from her (Figures 5.5 – 5.9). The camera finally rests on a champagne glass in the hand of the drunken young protagonist.



5.5 *Wings*: In a long track forward, we see an older woman giving cash to a man...



5.6 ...a female couple...



5.7 ...a young couple looking at the female couple in surprise...



5.8 ...a woman throwing her drink on a man's face...



5.9 ...and end with Jack Powell (Buddy Rodgers) staring at his champagne.

The female couple's clothing in *Wings* differs from the couple in *Four Horsemen*, however. Rather than gender-differentiation, both women wear somewhat masculinized clothing: loose jackets, white collared shirts, and neckties. The one reaching across the table wears a white felt hat and the other wears a black bolero hat. These women do not fit the masculine/feminine model of sexology. However, they do resemble something else—the cutting-edge styles adopted by lesbian artists and writers who congregated in Paris during the first decades of the twentieth century.²³ Although Doan has described the general popularity of the bolero hat for British women, the posture and clothing of woman on the right quite strongly resembles a photograph of Radclyffe Hall taken the year before (Figures 5.10 and 5.11).²⁴ Even if the filmmakers had not actually seen this photograph of Hall before posing the actress in this shot, the similarity of the two images suggests that there was a particular style and pose that already signified lesbianism to a range of media producers, not merely those in a select artistic circle. The shift in clothing style between *Four Horsemen* and *Wings* indicates the increasing visibility of these transnational lesbian social circles and suggests that lesbian couples could be made visible without relying on the gender differentiation of many models. Although Doan has argued that these clothing styles would not necessarily have connoted female same-sex desire in England, it is clear that they could function as markers of this “Parisian” sexual identity in American film. If a viewer was not



5.10 Woman wearing bolero hat in *Wings*.



5.11 Portrait of Radclyffe Hall in Spanish hat by the photographer Douglas (1926).

familiar with these codes before seeing the film, it is possible that their use here—though brief—would have taught her to recognize them.

The particular setting of the Parisian dance hall makes the representation of lesbian couples possible. Paris had a reputation for unbounded sexuality and became a Mecca for a transnational community of lesbian artists and writers. The young American heiress Natalie Barney, for example, had moved to Paris at the turn of the century and her sometime lover, Liane de Pougy, had publicized their affair in her bestselling autobiography, *Idylle Saphique* (1901). In the next decades, Barney's salons attracted a robust community of sexually deviant artists and writers.²⁵ The female couples, then, authenticate this exotic setting for American audiences.²⁶

Furthermore, the couple helps establish the dance hall as a space in which sexual desire exceeds middle-class social boundaries. In *Four Horsemen*, it is here “Paris succumb[s] to the mad rhythm of the Argentine tango,” an intertitle tells us, and here that Julio and Marguerite begin their adulterous affair.²⁷ In *Wings*, the Parisian dance hall is a place of manic, unrestrained heterosexual coupling but also of topsy-turvy gender codes. In one of the first shots of this space, a low camera tracks forward behind two pairs of legs walking in sync—one clothed in knee-high socks and a pleated, plaid skirt and the other in silk stockings with a tight satin dress (Figure 5.12). In a classic sight gag “reveal,” the camera tilts up to show that the plaid skirt belongs to a masculine Scottish soldier with a French girl on his arm (Figure 5.13). Similarly, the bleary-eyed young protagonist, Jack Powell, later mistakes his uniformed childhood friend, Mary Preston (Clara Bow), for a male officer due to her masculine WAC uniform.

The tracking shot of the couples portrays a dizzying succession of “exotic” relationships—from the “kept” man and his patroness to the female couple and the passionate public fight. As in *Four Horsemen*, these configurations receive little attention from others within this Dionysian space—with the exception, in this case, of the young couple. They cling to each other nervously and stare at the same-sex couple and the revelry around them. This couple functions as a visible stand-in for the innocent spectator exposed to urban “sophistication” for the



5.12 We see two sets of skirts...



5.13 ...but tilt up to reveal “real” gender.

first time—much like “Uncle Josh” and “Rube and Mandy” characters in early film—coaching film spectators through their negative example to adopt a more cosmopolitan attitude. In contrast to these two, the film’s American protagonists join the fun and pay little attention to the chaos around them.²⁸ The film viewers are invited to be tourists in this space like the American servicemen. Both films model a blasé attitude toward deviance that was associated with European cosmopolitanism. Unlike the “sophisticated” viewers of the 1896 stage production *A Florida Enchantment*, who were uniquely able to detect deviance but responded to it with outrage, these films present the “sophisticated” viewer as faintly curious but not scandalized or moralizing. They have already “seen it all.” By portraying these couples so neutrally, the films adopt this “sophisticated” attitude and invite spectators to do the same.

The Parisian dance hall makes these rare moments of lesbian visibility possible by implicitly containing the women within this space. They are an attribute of this particular setting, a kind of prop. If they are only imaginable within this one setting—a setting that they cannot leave, unlike the viewers, who are only visiting—they cannot threaten the “normal” sexuality of other spaces.²⁹ For American audiences, the women represent a sexual other unimaginable within the borders of their own nation, an exotic sexual type symptomatic of the decadent Old World. Furthermore, the shots are so brief that viewers might not register them. Indeed, I found no reviews that mentioned these particular moments. This brevity made it possible for the film to represent lesbianism much more explicitly than usual. Masculine styles functioned as useful visual shorthand confirming the lesbianism indicated through editing and mise-en-scene. Although I have not found any other American films of the 1920s that show lesbian couples so explicitly, it seems plausible that there were other instances that have not yet come to light (either because the film was one of the eighty percent of silent films that are lost or because the film exists but no one has drawn attention to it). These brief moments suggest that lesbians were part of Hollywood visual vocabulary in the 1920s and that different masculine styles were used as a shorthand to indicate this exoticized sexual identity.

Finding Inverts in Gender Inversion Comedies

In these two 1920s films, masculine clothing styles were quite explicitly attached to lesbian identities. Can we then detect lesbian meanings in masculine clothing styles in 1920s films that are not as explicit as these two examples? Gender inversion comedies, portraying a

world in which men and women occupy the opposite social roles, offer a useful test case.³⁰ In Chapter 4, I analyzed one example, *A Florida Enchantment* (Vitagraph, August 1914), which seemed to illustrate sexual inversion, but was only read as pathological by select viewers. I want to argue here that another film made more than a decade later, Hal Roach's two-reel comedy *What's the World Coming To?* (January 1926), did use specific masculine styles to evoke lesbianism. But before I do, it is helpful to look quickly at another counter-example: an earlier film, with a similar conceit, that does not associate female masculinity and lesbianism.

A 1912 gender inversion comedy, *A Lively Affair* (director and production company unknown), ridicules women's political organizing by depicting zealous suffrage activists in masculine riding jackets, ties, and tweed harem pants.³¹ These women abandon their children to sissified husbands in order to attend a suffrage meeting that devolves into gambling and fist fighting. Their clothing is a symptom of their "masculine" political ambitions but—despite the warnings of a few conservative sexologists who linked sexual pathology and women's activism—this film never imagines that two of these women could be sexually interested in each other.³² Desire, in this film, requires an active/passive combination, in accordance with dominant Victorian paradigms.³³ In this case, desire is only possible between a masculinized woman and a



5.14 *A Lively Affair*: Suffrage activist with small child and henpecked husband.



5.15 Mob of women at political meeting.

feminized man—there are no feminine women in this world. The film's mise-en-scene never frames two women together: they are only pictured with their husbands or in a riotous mob. Their cross-dressing signals their threat to public order, not any kind of private sexual predilection. This film demonstrates the way that cross-dressing was strategically used to delegitimize women's political organizing, without necessarily making insinuations of lesbianism.

However, *What's the World Coming To?* focuses on the sexual rather than political implications of a gender-inverted world. The film depicts a world "One hundred years from now—when men have become more like women and women more like men—," according to an opening title. We see a wedding between a blond girl in a tuxedo, Billie (Katherine Grant) and an effeminate man, "Claudia" (Clyde Cook). Billie's rival, Lieutenant Penelope (Martha Sleeper), interrupts the ceremony.³⁴ After the wedding, Claudia and his effeminate father lament Billie's late nights at the club, Penelope courts the dissatisfied Claudia, and Billie fights her rival. Harmony is restored through the arrival of a stork.

The masculine styles in this film likely resonated with lesbianism because the styles and poses of the women resemble photographs of prominent lesbians of the time and because the mise-en-scene so frequently frames these women in pairs. The film parodies three kinds of masculinized women. Billie, with her dark lipstick and eyeliner, fitted jacket, and short but feminine hair evokes the “modern girl” of the 1920s—the fashionable type of young woman who adopted male styles to signal her rebellion against the status quo, described by Laura Doan and others (Figure 5.16).³⁵ Lieutenant Penelope dresses as a female “rake” or dandy, with her cane, slicked-back cropped hair, imperious demeanor, and satin smoking jacket (Figure 5.17). Her outfit and pose looks strikingly like a portrait of Radclyffe Hall (Figures 5.19 and 5.20).³⁶ The female best “man” (or best woman, in this case) wears a tailored jacket, vest, collared shirt and narrow tie (Figure 5.18). Her style is the most “mannish” and she looks quite like Jane Heap, editor of *The Little Review* (Figures 5.21 and 5.22). Although Doan reminds us that these masculinized female types were not necessarily read as lesbian at this time, the film seems to be referencing styles that were being worn by prominent lesbians.



5.16 Billie.



5.17 Penelope.



5.18 Best “Man.”



5.19 Penelope upon entering.



5.20 Hall and Troubridge.



5.21 Best “Man.”



5.22 Jane Heap (Spring 1929).

Like *Four Horsemen* and *Wings*, *What’s the World Coming To?* uses mise-en-scene to enframe pairs of women. However, where those films showed the female couple in parallel with heterosexual couples, this film shows pairs of women as potential alternatives to the heterosexual couple. First, Billie and her best “man” are framed together as Billie waits for her future husband Claudia to approach the altar (Figures 5.23 and 5.24). Although this pairing reflects the traditional configuration of a wedding (groom and best man together, as the bride approaches), the film opposes their homosocial relationship to the heterosexual relationship about to be ratified by alternating between shots of the two camps.

The shot of the two women together invites the audience to compare the best woman’s jocular masculinity with Billie’s comparative femininity, perhaps suggesting a gender-differentiated couple as depicted in *Four Horsemen*. When Billie asks for the ring, the best woman accidentally produces a pair of dice—implying that they are close friends who spend their evenings together in the homosocial world of the “gentlemen’s” club. When Billie wavers, her best woman elbows her and whispers: “Buck up, old Pal, think how lucky you are---you’ve got the sweetest little man in the world!” Billie looks toward the groom with wide, dubious eyes.



5.23 Billie and best “man.”



5.24 “Claudia” with his father and entourage.

She is clearly ambivalent about leaving her homosocial world for the comforts of heterosexuality. Though the film does not construct these two women as a romantic couple, it offers their friendship as an alternative to the heterosexual couple.

The film also establishes a love triangle in which Billie and Lieutenant Penelope vie for husband Claudia's affection. Though Claudia is the focal point, the film visually pairs the two rivals, Billie and Penelope, in a climactic fight at the end of the film. When Billie sees Penelope courting her husband, she seizes a halberd from the knight standing in the hallway, kicks down the door, and runs into the room. Penelope stands and grapples with Billie, pushing her down on the couch, forcing her backward with the handle of the halberd, almost lying on top of her.



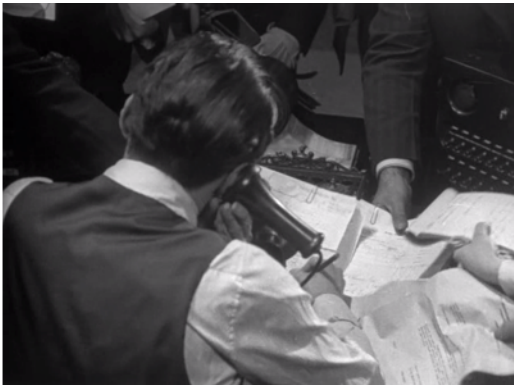
5.25, 5.26, 5.27 and 5.28 Billie and Penelope fight over Claudia.

Claudia does little but bounce up and down in the corner. At one point, the two women, linked together, drive him out of the room with the tip of the spear. The women are locked together almost as if dancing; the man is the third term as their bodies grapple intimately. Though the film narratively frames the women as fighting over the man, the image encourages the audience to consider what kind of pair the two women would make. Their physical intimacy is more sustained and more physically proximate than any intimacy that occurs between Claudia and either of the women. The repeated visual coupling of these new kinds of masculinized women—the modern girl, the female rake, and the masculine woman—invites viewers to consider these types as possible romantic couples. Whereas the 1912 gender inversion comedy shows little

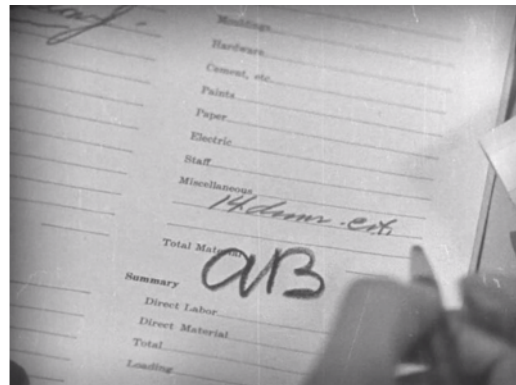
interest in potential female couples, *What's the World Coming To?* uses gender inversion to parody Parisian lesbians.³⁷

Slapstick commonly offered the opportunity to see women's bodies in awkward positions and for bodies of all kinds to slam into each other in intimate ways.³⁸ Comedies were often able to get away with homosexual innuendo (i.e. Laurel and Hardy repeatedly caught with their pants down in *Liberty* [Hal Roach, January 1929]), cross-dressing, and anti-social behavior (adultery, assaulting police officers, etc.) because they contained these social violations by subjecting them to ridicule and by re-establishing the normative social order in the film's conclusion (however flimsily).

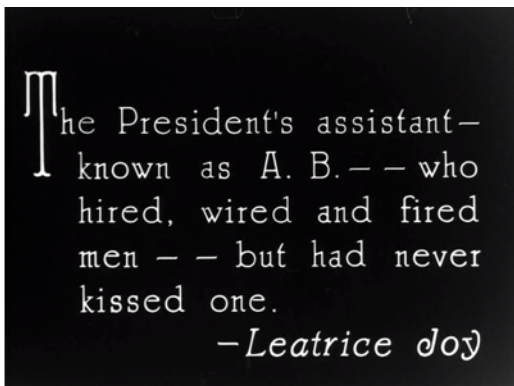
Masculine female styles were suggestively deployed in a feature-length comedy released the same year, *The Clinging Vine* (DeMille Pictures Corp., September 1926). However, because the film does not establish any female couples, it is harder to determine the extent to which the protagonist was legible as lesbian. Nevertheless, given the films discussed already, it seems plausible that the protagonist's masculine style suggested lesbianism to at least some audiences. The film introduces the protagonist in such a way that the viewer is led to expect that the character is a man. First, we see the back of a head with short, slicked-back hair, a white, collared shirt, and a grey pinstripe vest, sitting at a crowded desk (Figure 5.29). Next we see a close-up of a hand signing documents with the initials, "A.B." (Figure 5.30). An intertitle reads:



5.29 We first see A.B. from behind...



5.30 ...then A.B. signing a document...



5.31 ...an intertitle...



5.32 ...an indirect view of A.B.'s face



5.33 ...and finally a medium shot of A.B. from the front.

“The President’s assistant – known as A. B. – – who hired, wired and fired men – – but had never kissed one. –Leatrice Joy” (Figure 5.31) The intertitle simultaneously alerts us that this person is a woman (as A.B. is played by actress Leatrice Joy) and that this woman has never kissed a man. An unspoken question that the intertitle seems to pose is: well, then, whom has she kissed?³⁹ Only then do we see a reverse shot of A.B. with thick, dark eyebrows, cropped hair, and a necktie (Figure 5.32). Her face is partially obscured, as she is hunched over a phone. She is portrayed as a no-nonsense, highly capable businesswoman in the following scenes, but the majority of the film follows her hyperbolic efforts to act feminine and dim-witted in order to win the affection of her boss’s manly son. A flapper-grandma (Toby Claude) teaches her to be a



5.34 Hyperfeminine A.B.

“clinging vine”: tweezing her eyebrows, curling her hair, caking on makeup, and showing her on how to walk and drape herself on a man, learning the only two phrases a woman needs to know: “Oh, aren’t you wonderful!” and “Do go on!” On the narrative level, the film suggests that A.B. has become masculine in order to fit into the business world, which has stunted her personal life.⁴⁰ However, this logic could be reversed: perhaps A.B. has been successful in business because masculinity comes so easily to her. In contrast, the film displays femininity as “work” for A.B., a difficult, unnatural form of performance, unlike her confident, unself-conscious masculinity. (In the play upon which the film is based, however, the protagonist is not masculine and she goes by her full name, “Antoinette.”)⁴¹ The film does not give us enough information to determine whether A.B.’s masculinity is merely a pragmatic choice or whether it signifies sexual inversion.⁴² Like *A Florida Enchantment*, most reviews saw the *Clinging Vine* as a light, if not very successful, comedy.⁴³

However, *Variety* reviewer Fred Schrader was discomfited by both A.B.’s effortless masculinity and her effortful femininity. Schrader wrote: “Rather pleasant entertainment that might have been a much better picture had there not been too much stress laid on the masculine side of the heroine early in the picture.”⁴⁴ He suggests that A.B.’s masculinity overstepped the bounds of “pleasant entertainment,” although he doesn’t specify how. Like the critics of *A Florida Enchantment*, he does not find this kind of gender play funny. In fact, he finds A.B.’s hyperbolic femininity even uncannier than her masculinity: “An impression lingers as one views the picture that cannot be fought off, that a female impersonator is playing the girl. It persists in the mind as the picture unreels, despite one [*sic*] knows to the contrary. [...] Miss Joy is charming enough at times, but one cannot, while looking at the picture, disassociate the idea that she is doing an ‘Eltinge.’”⁴⁵ As I wrote in Chapter 1, Julian Eltinge was a female impersonator in vaudeville and one of the most popular vaudeville performers of the early twentieth century. Although Eltinge was praised for the naturalness and glamour of his performances, he was also occasionally suspected of sexual inversion, rumors he attempted to dispel by emphasizing his off-stage masculinity.⁴⁶ By describing Joy’s performance of A.B. as “doing an Eltinge,” Schrader falls back on an older, more recognizable version of gender impersonation to try to articulate his vague impression that something is off. He does not seem to have the language to describe the butch A.B. in either of her gendered states. If Eltinge is associated, at least by insinuation, with male homosexuality, it is possible that Schrader is pointing, if subtly, to A.B.’s potential sexual deviance. Furthermore, as A.B. eventually gets the boy (Jimmie Bancroft, played by Tom Moore), the “lingering impression” that she is a female impersonator queers this ostensibly heterosexual resolution. Schrader’s distaste for A.B.’s “masculine side” and his reference to Eltinge hints to readers that there’s something queer going on. Like the critics of *A Florida Enchantment*, he refers to an external text (Eltinge’s celebrity, in this case) to re-frame Joy’s performance. But his reference to this more established mode of cross-gender performance suggests that he does not quite have the language to describe the unsettling import of Joy’s gender-deviant performance.

The Clinging Vine signals a turning point in the way cross-dressed women were read in American moving pictures. The film’s knowingness—from the way A.B. is visually introduced to the suggestive intertitle—and this reviewer’s “lingering impression” suggests that A.B.’s style could have been read by some as lesbian. And yet, A.B. could only be so overly masculine (and her femininity so parodic) because she would not have been widely read as lesbian. (No other reviews suggest that they read her mannishness as sexually deviant.) Women as masculine as A.B. do not appear in later films because the style soon became too explicitly connected to

lesbianism. Ranging from explicit to implicit, some American films produced before *The Well of Loneliness* used cross-dressing to signal lesbianism, reinforced through mise-en-scene and editing that depicted female couples in parallel or opposition to heterosexual couples. However, reviews of these films (when they exist) never discussed or named lesbianism explicitly. This was not the case with two works released in 1926 and 1928.

**“The circumlocutions of Lombroso and Freud were not enough”:
*The Captive and The Well of Loneliness***

The incorporation of lesbian insinuations into a major Hollywood star persona like Greta Garbo’s would not have been possible without the nationwide media attention to Eduard Bourdet’s play *The Captive* in 1926 and Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928. Although critics at the time insisted that the general public was not familiar with the concept of lesbianism or savvy enough to understand the codes used to reference it, by writing about *The Captive* and *Well* in the national news media and naming lesbianism explicitly, these critics paradoxically acquainted their readers with these concepts and codes. The critical and popular success of these works, in spite of (or indeed because of) their legal difficulties launched a lesbian vogue that did not escape the notice of Hollywood studios. The different strategies these works used to represent lesbianism popularized various verbal and visual codes for implying lesbianism without stating it directly.

The Captive, originally called *La Prisonnière*, first opened in Paris on March 6, 1926, to rave reviews. That same season, Max Reinhardt staged the play in Vienna and Berlin, where it broke attendance records, and it went on to play in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.⁴⁷ The Charles Frohman Company (which had produced *Peter Pan*, but was then being managed by the Famous Players Lasky film studio), decided to bring the play to New York that fall. The theatrical press described the play as a “lesbian love drama” and women’s and religious groups registered their disapproval.⁴⁸ *The New York Morning Telegraph* reported: “Rumors are about that women’s organizations and ministerial associations may try to halt the production or emasculate it, basing their actions on reports of persons with the reforming complex who have seen the play in Paris.”⁴⁹ Gilbert Miller, the producer bringing the play to New York, was “flatly told by Mrs. Henry R. Loomis that she intended to use all her influence as former president of the Colonial Dames of America to prevent such an affront to American womanhood as would be involved in the unmolested production of this unsavory drama,” wrote the *New York World*.⁵⁰ Whereas 1896 New York critics had condemned Gunter’s *A Florida Enchantment* for vulgarity, 1926 critics showed disdain for the parochial attitude of women’s organizations and other “persons with the reforming complex” who criticized these productions.

On September 26, 1926, *The Captive* opened on Broadway, with seats selling for five dollars, one of the most expensive tickets on Broadway. Five months and more than 150 performances later, police raided the show and arrested the actors and managers on charges of being a “public nuisance” and “tending to corrupt the morals of youths and others.”⁵¹ Although the Broadway show was closed (and “sex degeneracy” added to the New York obscenity code regulating theater), a touring company presented the play in Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.⁵² References to the play—both its success and its dramatic closing—appeared in newspapers throughout the country.⁵³

The play depicts a young woman, Irene de Montecel (Helen Menken), who tries to fight her attraction for an unseen female friend, Madame d’Aiguines, by marrying Jacques, a

childhood friend who is in love with her. Jacques and the audience only discover that Irene's mysterious crush is on a woman at the end of the second act, when Monsieur d'Aiguines explains that Irene is not in love with him but his wife: "[I]t is not only another man who can be dangerous to a woman...in some case it can be another woman." He warns Jacques, "remember—she can never belong to you no matter how you try. They're not for us." Jacques marries Irene anyway and she cuts off all contact with Madame d'Aiguines. But Irene can't help but find her husband's touch repulsive, so he takes a lover, to which Irene responds with indifference. In the end, Jacques gives up on reforming Irene and she leaves him.

The play communicates Irene's lesbianism primarily through Monsieur d'Aiguines' testimony and Irene's behavior (pining for an unnamed lover and then recoiling from Jacques' touch). These strategies are strikingly different from the ones we saw in the film examples. The play specifically does *not* present the women together. Madame d'Aiguines never appears on stage. In fact, because the play was so narratively focused on lesbianism, it may have used formal strategies to dampen this meaning, perhaps in order to counter potential accusations of vulgarity. Showing both women on stage together may have made the possibility of physical contact too present, even if they never touched. Indeed, many critics defended the play by pointing to its subtlety, arguing that this made it into art rather than sensationalism. *The New York World*, for example, noted that, "Bourdet has made the venture with infinite tact and reticence."⁵⁴ Although direct about its subject matter, the play could be considered subtle in that it withholds the identity of Irene's lover until end of the second act, avoids terms like lesbian, and refrains from showing Madame d'Aiguines and thus the lesbian couple.

Neither does the play use masculine styles. Monsieur d'Aiguines describes his wife as possessing "all the feminine allurements, every one."⁵⁵ Publicity stills of Helen Menken as Irene



5.35 Helen Menken in *The Captive* (1926)

reveal her to be pretty and feminine, with bobbed hair, a low-waisted flapper dress, and several long necklaces (Figure 5.35). The choice to portray both women as feminine may have been made for several reasons. For one, the model of lesbianism that the play uses is not based on gender difference, but sameness.⁵⁶ Monsieur d'Aiguines characterizes desire between women as "a secret alliance of two beings who understand one another because they're alike, because they're of the same sex, because they're of a different planet than he, the stranger, the enemy!"⁵⁷ This model co-existed with the paradigm of the masculine invert and her feminine partner and was particularly prevalent in French literature. Furthermore, Bourdet, who claimed sympathy with Irene, may have felt that masculinizing one of the women would have pathologized her and alienated the audience's sympathy.⁵⁸ Or perhaps the play avoided masculine styles because they were unnecessary—since dialogue and behavior signified lesbianism so clearly, there was no need for this visual shorthand. And, indeed, there is something potentially threatening about audiences not being able to detect these women's sexual deviance visually. Monsieur d'Aiguines warns Jacques to be suspicious of any close relationship between two women:

Don't say "Oh, it's nothing but a sort of ardent friendship—an affectionate intimacy...nothing very serious...we know all about that sort of thing!" No! We don't know *anything* about it! [...] Friendship, yes—that's the mask. Under cover of friendship a woman can enter any household, whenever and however she pleases—at any hour of the day—she can poison and pillage everything before the man whose home she destroys is even aware of what's happening to him.⁵⁹

This warning sought to re-signify the physical intimacy between women that was considered normal in the nineteenth century.

Although masculine styles were not used, the play established a different visual code for lesbianism—the exchange of violets. Inspired by one of Sappho's poems in which the narrator and her lover wear violet tiaras in their hair, some lesbian writers and artists had begun to use violets as a coded signal.⁶⁰ It seems likely that Bourdet was aware of this pre-existing subcultural code, although Kaier Curtin claims the playwright got the idea from his own reading of Sappho's poetry.⁶¹ In the first act, Irene enters wearing violets on her dress. She lays them on the table, but acts strangely possessive when her sister picks them up. At the end of the act, she looks at the violets, touches them delicately, and picks up the phone (to call her lover, we assume). At the end of the final act, Irene accidentally runs into Madame d'Aiguines in a flower shop off-stage and, soon after, a large bunch of violets arrives for her at the house. Irene picks up the flowers, caresses them, and then runs out of the apartment, implying that she is abandoning Jacques for Madame d'Aiguines.

Even those who didn't see the play had the opportunity to read about violets in the press. Some reviews of the play were titled "They Say It With Violets" (*Brooklyn Citizen*) or "The Message of Violets" (*New York World*).⁶² Violets were also prominent in some of the play's publicity. In a publicity photograph (Figure 5.35), Helen Menken reaches out and touches a bouquet of violets. Although the American public was probably not aware of the significance of violets before the play, this press coverage would have taught them the meaning of this code. Five years later, in fact, O.O. McIntyre wrote, in a syndicated column printed in newspapers ranging from the *Salt Lake Tribune* to the *San Antonio Light*: "Florists believe the continued slump in the sale of violets is due solely to Helen Menken's play with a Lesbian theme, "The Captive." Violets symbolized perversion throughout the drama."⁶³ Newspaper coverage of *The Captive* circulated the formerly local code of violets as a symbol of lesbianism and suggested

that obsessive devotion could lurk beneath seemingly innocent female friendships. These two tropes would return in fan discourse about Garbo.

Although *The Captive* depicted Irene's desire for Madame d'Aiguines quite explicitly, many New York reviewers imagined that viewers less sophisticated than themselves would not understand the play—like critics of *A Florida Enchantment* thirty years earlier. For example, one reviewer wrote: “The audience wondered and wondered and the most sophisticated understood.”⁶⁴ Unlike critics in 1896, who declared that metropolitan audiences were “not unsophisticated,” this critic alleges that most of the New York audience found the play's depiction of same-sex desire incomprehensible. Another reviewer wrote that the play's subject could only “be whispered [...] to those who are on the inside.”⁶⁵ This quote is telling, as it illustrates how the knowledge of lesbianism was presumed to be restricted to insiders—and that most audience members did not qualify. Alexander Woolcott at the *New York World* wrote: “I think the average playgoer straying within [the Empire's] doors (remembering, perhaps, that this is where he saw *Peter Pan* and dear Mr. Drew's comedies) would sit through the three engrossing acts without once suspecting the true nature of the Bondage which is the very sum and substance of *The Captive*.”⁶⁶ Strikingly, Woolcott refers to two examples of “innocent” cross-dressing—Maude Adams's *Peter Pan* and Sidney Drew's comedies (recall that Drew was director and co-star of the film *A Florida Enchantment*). In contrast to the critics who use intertextual references to establish a “sophisticated” framework that revealed sexual deviance, Woolcott uses these references to establish the “innocent” framework for reading cross-dressing—childhood fantasy and society farce. Woolcott was worried that this new show will contaminate those that came before it, concerns that would be justified by precisely that kind of retrospective reading.

Despite Woolcott's declarations that most audience members would be unable to understand the play's lesbian subject matter, I could find no example of a critic admitting that he himself did not understand the play or any review that did not explicitly reference lesbianism. These writers always project the “unsophisticated” readings onto others. The New York *Sun* reviewer, for example, wrote that he had overheard two girls saying after the show that although they understood the play, they didn't think their mothers would.⁶⁷ And yet these girls—whom a New York reviewer might assume to be unsophisticated viewers—affirmed that they themselves understood the lesbian meaning. The ostensibly differentiated access to “sophisticated” meanings was key to the principle of “deniability.”

If, however, there was any doubt as to the nature of Irene's “Bondage,” press coverage and publicity made it even more explicit. “Lesbian love walked out onto a New York stage for the first time last night,” wrote the *New York Morning Telegraph*.⁶⁸ This critic evidently found the play's theme to be self-evident and had no trouble naming it explicitly. *Vanity Fair*, on the other hand, wrote that, “[Bourdet's thesis] is developed entirely by suggestion, which might lend itself to other interpretations, were not rumors of the play's evil implications flying thick and fast about town.” The press dutifully reported the nature of these rumors. Critics at a range of newspapers including the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Washington Post*, *Oakland Tribune* and *Syracuse Herald* explicitly named the women's relationship “Lesbian.”⁶⁹ Although at least one Broadway play had already portrayed an erotic affair between women (Sholom Asch's 1922 *The God of Vengeance*), some critics framed *The Captive* as the first ever treatment of lesbianism in New York theater. Several objected that the subject was only fit for scientific study, not aesthetic contemplation. *Theatre Magazine*, for example, lamented “Until now, however, that form of sexual perversion known to physiologists as Lesbianism has not appealed to dramatists as a fit

subject for the stage.”⁷⁰ Whatever their opinion of this development, newspapers and magazines informed readers across the country that a play dealing with “Lesbianism” was in New York.

Many reviewers, though, used some kind of (still quite explicit) euphemism, a timidity that reviewer George Jean Nathan ridiculed:

The very critics who are perfectly willing to consider *Oedipus Rex*, for all its perversion, as a drama pure and simple seem to be indisposed to consider the present play in a like manner. [...] Thus, we encounter in the *Times* such evasions as ‘twisted relationship with another woman,’ and ‘warped infatuation;’ in the *Evening World* such equivocation as ‘the poisonous serpent’s spell of a decadent woman;’ and in the *Daily News* such phrases as ‘a cancerous growth.’⁷¹

This coverage was not limited to New York newspapers. O. O. McIntyre’s column “New York Day by Day” played an important role in spreading this information throughout the country. McIntyre’s column was syndicated to more than 500 newspapers, ranging from the *Salt Lake Tribune* to the *San Antonio Light*.⁷² In a November 1926 column, McIntyre lamented the “psychopathic studies” flooding the New York stage that season, including a play with a “Lesbian theme,” and complained that, “The circumlocutions of Cesare Lombroso and Sigmund Freud were not enough—the dregs of psychological depths are revealed.”⁷³ McIntyre’s reference both assumes familiarity with the scientific writing of Lombroso and Freud and shares these names with those who were not already familiar with them. Interestingly, he finds their writings—which discuss sexual pathology quite directly—to be more discreet than the play, which acts out the “pathology” more vividly. By referring to specific scientists and using terms like “psychological depths,” journalists like McIntyre brought these scientific texts further into the mainstream.

Despite reviewers’ claims that the average person did not have the knowledge to understand *The Captive*, the extensive press coverage in large- and small-town newspapers throughout the country ensured that a wide range of readers were exposed to terms like “Lesbian” and “sexual perversion,” and the names of Lombroso and Freud. Indeed, the title of the play became one of the most common journalistic euphemisms for lesbianism going forward, and appeared frequently in reviews of the 1931 German film *Maedchen in Uniform* (e.g. “There are some who profess to see, in the picture’s compelling story, a hint of that neuroticism which forms the basis of ‘The Captive.’”)⁷⁴ Though press coverage of *The Captive* had catapulted lesbianism dramatically into the spotlight—casting suspicion on physical intimacy between women—it did not relate this sexual condition to gender inversion. Despite the sexological model of same-sex desire as a symptom of psychological masculinity, the play did not associate lesbianism with cross-dressing.

Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* elaborates a quite different concept of lesbianism—or female inversion, in fact—and sets up different ways of recognizing it. Unlike *The Captive*, the novel used cross-dressing as a key sign of deviant sexual identity. But like *The Captive*, the news media’s attention to the novel and its legal troubles spread its codes for reading lesbianism throughout the country. The book received little notice when it was first published in London, until a British newspaper editor began campaigning against it and succeeded in having the book banned in England.⁷⁵ The controversy catapulted the novel onto the international stage. Despite the ban, English-language versions continued to be published in France and, after some legal wrangling, New York courts allowed it to be published in the United States (after six runs had already been printed). The novel sold twenty thousand copies in the first month and one hundred thousand copies that year.⁷⁶

Whereas *The Captive* describes same-sex desire as an affliction that could happen to any woman, regardless of her gendered appearance, *Well* articulates a model of same-sex desire largely in line with sexological descriptions of the female invert.⁷⁷ As I described in the previous chapter, this model considers sexual desire for the same sex to be a symptom of a broader psychological gender inversion. As Laura Doan has shown, Radclyffe Hall combined paradigms from sexology (Richard von Krafft-Ebing's and Havelock Ellis' concepts of the female invert), homophile activism (Edward Carpenter's utopian evolutionary model), and her own experience to describe the life of a fictional female invert, Stephen Gordon.⁷⁸ Stephen Gordon's account of her childhood—her androgynous body, natural athleticism, crush on the maid, and fantasies of being a young Lord Nelson—are similar to the case studies of female inverts in Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Ellis's *Sexual Inversion*. Masculine clothing is important to Stephen: "She would go to Malvern that very afternoon and order a new flannel suit at her tailor's. The suit should be grey with a little white pin stripe, and the jacket, she decided, must have a breast pocket. She would wear a black tie—no, better a grey one to match the little white pin stripe."⁷⁹ In sentimental language, the novel depicts Stephen's love affairs with the unworthy Angela and then the idealized young Mary, who she meets while serving in the women's ambulance corps. The women set up house together and discover a loosely fictionalized version of Natalie Barney's social circle in Paris. Throughout, Stephen points out the injustice suffered by inverts and tries to demonstrate their social worth. Although the novel includes appearances by inverts with a range of gender presentations, the masculine Stephen is the primary case study and her masculine habits and clothing are a key symptom of her condition.

In writing this novel, Hall adapted concepts from medical and activist writing that had previously only been available to limited audiences in order to educate and persuade the public. She put this information into a popular form, a sentimental, accessible *bildungsroman* novel. Although the names of sexologists like Krafft-Ebing and Freud had circulated, few people would have read the works directly. Hall aimed to share this insider information with the general public, in order to win understanding and sympathy for people like her. Unlike the texts she drew upon, her book was published with general-interest presses and could be bought by anyone.

The novel consciously aimed to reach the broadest possible audience, turning outsiders into sympathetic insiders. This differentiated *Well* from the other English-language novels treating same-sex desire and gender inversion released that year: Compton Mackenzie's *Extraordinary Women* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. Mackenzie's novel parodied Natalie Barney's Sapphic circle living in Capri after WWI and Woolf's novel described an androgynous boy who becomes a woman, inspired in part by the life of Woolf's lover Vita Sackville-West.⁸⁰ Both Mackenzie's satirical and Woolf's modernist novel required the reader to already have considerable insider information in order to appreciate them. Works that primarily spoke to those already on the inside were not considered such a threat as those—like *Well of Loneliness* and *The Captive*—that introduced the public to their insider perspective.

Again, the news media spread the impact of *Well of Loneliness* much farther than its readership alone. As Laura Doan has demonstrated, photographs of Radclyffe Hall circulated with sensationalist accounts of the novel and its trials, making Hall's distinctive style into an iconic, publicly-recognized "dress code" for the invert. Doan says that, "The presence of Hall's novel and photograph in newspaper reports encouraged the reading public to associate a particular clothing style with a particular sexual preference, hitherto the knowledge of a discreet, private circle."⁸¹ Although the films discussed earlier had already associated masculine dress with same-sex desire (and Hall's style with Parisian Sapphism), *The Well of Loneliness* affirmed

this connection even more strongly. Although the shift was not quite as clear-cut in the United States as Doan has described in England, the publicity around *Well* significantly impacted the set of meanings associated with the cross-dressed woman.

The media furor around *The Captive* and *Well of Loneliness* established both a vogue for lesbianism and codes that could be used to communicate it. It would not be long before Hollywood found a way to take advantage of these two developments.

“Her favorites are pansies and violets”: The Construction of Greta Garbo

We have seen, so far, how texts across a variety of media began consolidating and sharing codes for detecting lesbianism. Now we can see how these codes were put to work in the construction of Greta Garbo’s star persona. A number of scholars have observed that Garbo’s stardom “teased” the public “with the possibility of lesbianism” and many note that “foreignness” was used to both excuse and amplify the notion that Garbo’s sexuality was not bound by American norms.⁸² In this sense, we can see the mythologized space of the Parisian dance hall expand to encompass “Europe” more generally as a space in which sexuality operates according to different rules. However, whereas many scholars refer to Garbo’s persona as essentially coherent and self-evident, I will investigate the process through which Garbo became readable as lesbian—how written discourses (from local newspapers to fan magazines and trade journals) struggled to make sense of the star’s private life and the point at which lesbianism became one of the proffered explanations.

Marketing Garbo as potentially lesbian was part of studios’ broader strategy of offering sexual meanings to “sophisticated” viewers while avoiding censorship that Vasey describes. And yet, although executives claimed that “unsophisticated” viewers would not understand these meanings, the repeated use of these codes ensured that ever-larger numbers of viewers were inducted into these systems of indirect signification. Just as certain cinematic codes—like the camera panning away from a couple to look at rain on a windowpane in order to suggest a sexual encounter—became broadly legible, the codes indicating lesbianism were expanded from a small set of viewers to mass audiences.⁸³ Garbo’s stardom relied on codes that had been established by literature, drama, and the press and she, in turn, helped distribute these codes further.

Just as *The Captive*’s theme could only be “whispered to those on the inside,” fan discourse on the stars promised readers insight into the secret lives of their subjects. Garbo, more than perhaps any other star, was defined by the sense that she was keeping secrets. Journalists described her as a “sphinx” and a “Mona Lisa”—“the riddle of Hollywood.”⁸⁴ The drive to uncover these secrets—and offer readers insider information—motivated hundreds if not thousands of articles about the star and endless cycles of tell-all biographies, which continue to be published with surprising regularity.⁸⁵ Richard deCordova has argued that a “play of surface and depth characterized all discourse on the stars” and that, in a culture that “equates identity with the private and [...] accords the sexuality the status of the most private,” the sexual was figured as “the ultimate secret.”⁸⁶ Thus, rumors about a star’s illicit sexual activities (from adultery, divorce, and assault, to homosexuality), far from being inconsequential gossip, were key to the operations of fan discourse and stardom. For a star like Garbo, rumors of lesbianism did not merely circulate amongst queer fans or Hollywood insiders, but were consciously constructed with the tacit sanction of the studios through the mass-circulation press. The process was similar to the one Ronald Gregg documented, in which MGM exploited insinuations of “wisecracking” star William Haines’ homosexuality in the late 1920s and early 1930s to

capitalize on the “pansy craze.”⁸⁷ Although Garbo’s popularity receded after 1933, she never faced the dramatic backlash that Haines received when conservative groups caught on to this strategy.

Although Garbo arrived in Hollywood from Stockholm in 1925, media accounts did not begin constructing her as lesbian until 1930. MGM seemed uncertain of how to “type” Garbo when she arrived. Likely due to the athletic, tomboyish roles of fellow Swede Anna Q. Nilsson, MGM took publicity photos of Garbo in serial-queen-like situations, posing with the USC swim coach and sitting beside the MGM lion. Soon abandoning this tactic, they cast her as a dark-



5.36 Garbo with USC track coach.



5.37 Garbo with the MGM lion.



5.38 Garbo as a Latin vamp in *The Torrent* (1926).

haired Latin vamp in her first three films, essentially reprising the persona established in her breakout performance in the Swedish film *Gösta Berlings saga* (Svensk Filmindustri, March 1924; U.S. release October 1928). Garbo wrote to a friend in Sweden “They don’t have a type like me out here” and a 1926 *Los Angeles Times* article seemed to agree, writing “No one seems quite to understand Greta—her type or her personality.”⁸⁸ Most often, articles characterized her as a timid Swedish immigrant girl, adrift in fast-paced Hollywood.⁸⁹ On-screen she played aristocratic European femme fatales and off-screen journalists recounted a highly publicized romance with co-star John Gilbert. Soon, though, journalists began to describe her as “the Hollywood hermit” and noted that she rarely socialized with her Hollywood peers, declared no interest in marriage or romance, and wore dowdy sweaters, trench coats, and flat-heeled shoes in her private life.⁹⁰ Journalists proffered a variety of explanations for her evident eccentricities: Was she “an introvert and a neurotic”? In mourning for her dead lover, the (gay) Swedish director Mauritz Stiller? A Swedish peasant girl ill-equipped for modern city living? A melancholy Nordic? A canny publicist? Or merely anemic?⁹¹ However, during these years, she was not described as particularly masculine nor was she ever photographed in pants. She continued to play the Continental vamp on-screen, beautiful, feminine, and irresistible. Her ability to communicate her own ineffable suffering while nonetheless luring men to their destruction endeared her to women and men alike.⁹²

However, in 1930 journalists began to suggest a new explanation for Garbo’s oddities: lesbianism. The timing coincided with Hollywood’s turn toward illicit sexuality and criminal behavior in the so-called “pre-Code” films.⁹³ It followed upon the “pansy craze” that George Chauncey has documented and was two years after the *Well* trials.⁹⁴ It also coincided with Garbo’s reported relationship with Mercedes de Acosta, a woman at the center of international

lesbian artistic circles. However, unlike coverage of *The Captive* or *Well*, journalists could never explicitly name “lesbianism” or “sexual perversion” in reports of Garbo. As cinema was deemed more accessible to impressionable audiences like children and immigrants than literature or theater, it was held to stricter moral standards. William Hays of the Production Code Administration, for example, told a Philadelphia women’s club in 1925: “There is a grater degree of responsibility on motion picture producers for the effect that their product will have upon the minds of those who view it than there is on either the novelist or the dramatist.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, Hollywood studios were not willing to risk the significant financial loss that they could incur if they were to release a film or promote a star that strayed too far into taboo territory, the way that authors, publishers, playwrights, and theater producers sometimes were.

In order to suggest that Garbo might be lesbian, then, journalists mobilized codes that had been circulated by *The Captive* (e.g. close female friends visiting at all hours, the exchange of violets, and references to Sappho) and *The Well of Loneliness* (e.g. masculine clothing, behavior, and physiology, combined with a melancholy preference for solitude). Newly circulating photographs of Garbo in pants, as well as her trademark sweater and trench coat, became meaningful as they were constellated with other bits of data.⁹⁶ One condition of Garbo being constructed as lesbian, however, was that it remained deniable—suggested but never confirmed. Throughout the early 1930s and after, journalists struggled to explain Garbo and provided layers of contradictory explanation, but after 1930, lesbianism became one of the dominant, though not explicit, explanations.

In *The Captive*, Monsieur d’Aiguines urged husbands to be suspicious of close friendships and late night visits between women. Beginning in 1930, the press began to comment on Garbo’s friendships with women—particularly Lilyan Tashman and Fifi d’Orsay—using increasingly suggestive language. Tashman was a lesbian Broadway actress who had married gay actor Edmund Lowe in 1925. Her lesbianism was an open secret and she was known for her “sophisticated” parties.⁹⁷ D’Orsay was a young, French-Canadian vaudeville performer who had invented a Parisian past. In February 1930, one article reported:

Greta Garbo and Fifi Dorsay [*sic*] have become inseparable friends. Everywhere that Greta goes, Fifi is sure to tag along and vice versa. [...] Fifi is Greta’s first pal since Lilyan Tashman and Greta parted company. [...] Just how long it will last no one knows, but the two “gals” are certainly a colorful pair—so different and both so foreign.⁹⁸

Garbo and d’Orsay’s relationship, though labeled a “friendship,” is nonetheless described in terms often used for romantic relationships—Tashman and Garbo “parted company” like a couple breaking up, people wonder “how long” the next one “will last.” The women are described as “colorful,” “different,” and “foreign.” We have already seen how some American films characterized same-sex eroticism as an attribute of exotic Parisian nightlife. Describing the two women as “so foreign” suggests that their relationship may play by a different set of more cosmopolitan rules.⁹⁹ The fact that d’Orsay was constructed as Continental rather than French-Canadian (which had the association of the wild “Northwoods,” as we saw in *The Snowbird* in Chapter 3) contributes to this insinuation.

Later that year, a *New York Times* interview with d’Orsay illustrated the intimacy of their friendship. The journalist explained that “Geegee” was d’Orsay’s “pet name for Miss Garbo.”

“One night Geegee called me up,” Miss d’Orsay exclaimed, “and she said to me: ‘Baby, I mus’ come over and see you for dinnaire tonight.’ But I tell her I have people come to my house for dinnaire. So she say, ‘T’row them out.’ So I throw them out and Geegee come over.”¹⁰⁰

This story, although reported without any kind of consternation on the part of the journalist, recalls Monsieur d'Aiguines' warning that a woman can enter another's household "whenever and however she pleases—at any hour of the day."¹⁰¹ This kind of reporting about Garbo played with the kind of suspicion that *The Captive* cast on close female friendships.

Garbo's most famous friendships, however, were with screenwriter Salka Viertel and the flamboyant bisexual playwright Mercedes de Acosta. In 1931 and 1932, journalists began to describe Garbo's close friendships with Viertel and de Acosta. A gossip column in *The Hollywood Reporter* circulated coded information about Hollywood lives, sharing private whispers with a larger circle of industry professionals. As a gossip columnist, the Rambling Reporter was licensed to say more than other journalists and yet its frequent omission of names and use of codes rendered these allegations deniable. Shortly after Garbo and de Acosta had first met, the Rambling Reporter noted coyly that, "Greta Garbo has a new love" (August 21, 1931).¹⁰² In December of that year, another source observed: "Maybe Mercedes de Acosta is giving Greta good advice. The two girls are inseparable companions."¹⁰³ Like the phrase "inseparable friends" that had been applied to Garbo and d'Orsay, "inseparable companions" suggests that the two women were some kind of couple. One month later, the Rambling Reporter associated Garbo, her "pal" d'Orsay and Hollywood producer Joe Schenck with the New York "pansy" scene: "Despite the 'law' against nance entertainers, the hottest speakeasy spot in N.Y. is on Sixth Avenue, with fifty lavender boys serving the likker—Greta Garbo, Fifi Dorsay and Joe Schenck amongst its patrons."¹⁰⁴ The allegation associated Garbo with the illicit activities of the New York nightlife—illegal alcohol and "pansy" performers—and a space, like the Parisian dancehall, where normal rules of sexual propriety did not apply.

Later that month, the Rambling Reporter intimated that Garbo's two masculine-clad companions were interchangeable. After Garbo's New York trip, the Rambling Reporter noted that the only person meeting Garbo at the station was Viertel. But other reporters were apparently so convinced that it would be de Acosta, given the women's "inseparability," that they thought Viertel was de Acosta:

This is supposed to have happened when Mrs. Berthold Viertel went to the Pasadena station to meet Greta Garbo who was arriving from New York a few weeks ago. Mrs. V. came into the station in a very tailored attire, flat-heeled shoes, etc., and was immediately swamped with reporters [...] When it was all over the reporters said, "Thank you very much, Miss D'Acosta." (!) [parentheses and exclamation point in original]¹⁰⁵

This anecdote constructs a rivalry between Viertel and de Acosta for the position of Garbo's sole companion. It pays particular attention to the mannishness of Viertel's attire and suggests, somewhat ridiculously, that on this basis the two women would be indistinguishable. (De Acosta was noted for her extravagant costumes; Viertel's style was far more understated.)¹⁰⁶

Although *The Hollywood Reporter* was aimed at people in the film industry, a range of national newspapers also linked Garbo and de Acosta. In May 1932, the *Los Angeles Times* referred to de Acosta as "fond friend of Greta Garbo" and in July they noted that Garbo was accompanied, upon her arrival in New York, by "her close friend, Mrs. Mercedes De Acosta Poole, poet, playwright and traveling companion."¹⁰⁷ A brief profile of Garbo in the *Chicago Tribune* in August 1932 recounted: "Mercedes de Acosta became the great Garbo's chum."¹⁰⁸ "Chum," like "pal" and "companion," was used to suggest a singular relationship between the two women.

The savviest alignment of Garbo with codes of lesbianism at this time came from fan-magazine writer Rilla Page Palmborg. She published two articles in *Photoplay* in 1930 and an

unauthorized biography in 1931, all entitled “The Private Life of Greta Garbo.”¹⁰⁹ Selections of the biography were also printed in general-interest newspapers such as the *Milwaukee Journal*.¹¹⁰ After apparently spending a summer with Garbo and her friends, Palmborg promised readers the most intimate coverage of Garbo to date. Although she had no Swedish background or language skills herself, Palmborg had married a Swede, which, she implied, gave her special access to and insight into Garbo’s life.¹¹¹

Palmborg uses a kind of bait-and-switch rhetoric to suggest that Garbo had male love interests and then to reject this possibility, thus puncturing a misleading “surface” with her unique insight into the “depth,” in deCordova’s terms. Palmborg introduces the first article by noting that Garbo had been seen around town with a “tall, blond, handsome young Swede,” but she then reveals that this young man “is infatuated with Garbo, but he knows that here is not a chance for him.”¹¹² Like other reports, Palmborg notes that Garbo’s only exclusive relationships are with women. She writes that, “Lilyan Tashman was reported to be Garbo’s pal. Then Fifi Dorsay was supposed to be her chum. Others declared that Nils Asther was the only person she invited to her house.”¹¹³ Palmborg seems to give Tashman and d’Orsay a title—Garbo’s “pal” or “chum”—that implies that each relationship is exclusive. Garbo only has one “pal” at a time and the appearance of one means the disappearance of the other. In case a reader might mistake Asther for a love interest, Palmborg explains: “Hollywood never has taken the friendship between Nils Asther and Greta Garbo the way Hollywood usually takes friendship.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, Palmborg said, “In the summer of 1929, Garbo did not seem to be devoted to any particular man.”¹¹⁵ Palmborg thus dismisses rumors of Garbo’s relationships with men and affirms instead the truth of her intimate, exclusive friendships with women.

Palmborg also used one of *The Captive*’s most famous codes for lesbianism. In one of the *Photoplay* articles and the book, she writes, “Garbo has always been fond of flowers. Her favorites are pansies and violets. [...] A bunch of violets was almost always to be found at the head of her bed.”¹¹⁶ Palmborg does not say whether the violets were a gift, but positioning the flowers at the “head of her bed” is particularly suggestive. “Pansy,” too, was an established term for an effeminate gay man.¹¹⁷ If this weren’t enough, Palmborg mentions at the end of the book that, “Word got out in Hollywood that Garbo’s next picture was to be *Sappho*.”¹¹⁸ Although Palmborg is likely referring to an adaptation of Alphonse Daudet’s novel *Sappho*, which describes an entirely heterosexual affair between a young man and an aging Parisian courtesan, the name Sappho was also affiliated with “Sapphism.” The connection between violets, Sappho, and same-sex desire had circulated in the press through coverage of *The Captive* and it seems quite likely that interested readers would have recognized these codes.

However, far more common than these accounts of Garbo’s female friendships or affinity for violets were the descriptions of her masculinity and her obsessive privacy, which were much less stable signifiers. As I have shown, some films of the 1920s and the *Well of Loneliness* provided audiences with the framework to interpret these traits as signifiers of lesbianism, although alternate meanings continued to co-exist. Journalists described Garbo as “a tall, lanky, mannishly attired woman” or report “She wears a mannish walking-suit of brown, with leather jacket.”¹¹⁹ Palmborg’s description of Garbo’s attire even resembles Stephen’s careful lists in *The Well of Loneliness*¹²⁰:

[S]he always wore heavy, low-heeled slippers. Oftenest these were the smallest size obtainable in men’s low shoes. [...] She wore men’s tailored shirts. She owned dozens of men’s silk ties, in all colors. At night she wore men’s pajamas, in soft shades of silk and

in stripes. Her hats were of soft felt in mannish style. When her manservant brought her shoes, she would laugh and say, “Just the kind for us bachelors, eh?”¹²¹

Palmborg’s repetition of “men’s” in describing Garbo’s shoes, shirts, ties, and pajamas seems to go beyond androgynous women’s fashion to a kind of obsession for masculinity. Garbo’s reference to herself as a “bachelor” was repeated in several interviews and even appeared in the dialogue of *Queen Christina* in 1933. Her jaunty declaration, interest in upper-class men’s fashion, and even decision to have a “manservant” constructs Garbo as somewhat of a male dandy—a persona common to artistic European lesbians such as Romaine Brooks, Gluck, and Bryher.¹²²

Garbo’s physicality was also described as masculine. “Garbo strides along like a man and fairly races across the ground,” “She plays tennis like a man, too,” attested two of her friends.¹²³ Another journalist reported—somewhat suggestively—that Garbo “swings a stick with masculine effort.”¹²⁴ Describing Garbo as behaving naturally “like a man” aligns her with sexological descriptions of the invert. These kinds of descriptions have become so much a part of Garbo’s persona that we no longer find them surprising, but they in fact made an important intervention into her on-screen persona. Though the way she walked or stood could be seen as somewhat androgynous, Garbo was considered at the time to be an idealized *feminine* type. The problem with her sexuality on-screen was always that her love or lust for a man exceeded social norms or was insufficiently restricted to her husband. Only in her private life—and thus only in print sources—was Garbo constructed as being so man-like. At this point, there were not very many photographs illustrating this masculinity (likely due to studio policy) and so for several years, her masculinity was primarily constructed through written discourse.

Journalists frequently described celebrity homes, using furnishings and décor as clues to a star’s inner life. Coverage of female stars at home often reasserted that even these ambitious career women were suitably domestic at home.¹²⁵ Garbo’s home, however, revealed only a deeper level of masculinization. One *Photoplay* reporter, Katherine Albert, wrote that Garbo “likes solid substantial furniture and hates feminine geegaws” and the *Detroit Free Press* asserted that, “Her home contains no feminine appointments. The furnishings are solid and mannish.”¹²⁶

Journalists scrambled to offer explanations for Garbo’s appearance and lifestyle. Many called her “eccentric,” implying that her deviations from the norm were merely personal oddities, and thus not interpretable as indicators of a particular, say, lesbian identity. And yet it seems likely that they knew quite well toward what kind of identity these clues pointed. Journalists struggled at times to find language to describe Garbo. Adela Rogers St. Johns, for example, wrote in 1929: “It is misleading to call Garbo mannish. Or masculine. But it is difficult to find exactly the right word to describe a certain something about her which calls those words to mind.”¹²⁷ To this dilemma, she awkwardly suggests: “Perhaps bigness will do. She is a big person, mentally and physically, and she likes bigness.” On one level, St. Johns’ difficulty in describing that “certain something” recalls Schrader’s attempt to describe the “lingering impression” A.B. gives him—perhaps there is something “queer” that these critics cannot put their finger on. And yet, given the national furor over *The Captive* and *Well of Loneliness* in recent years, it seems quite likely that journalists such as St. Johns were well aware of words that could describe that “certain something which calls [the words mannish and masculine] to mind” but they could not write these words in print. And so St. Johns asks her readers to imagine what words could be used instead of “mannish” to describe Garbo, only to suggest an evocative but insufficient word, “bigness.”

Garbo's masculinity could be freely discussed because it did not have any singular meaning. Although audiences could triangulate her masculinity with the accounts of her intense friendships with women and fondness for violets to read her as lesbian, journalists just as often presented these clues and then turned to alternative explanations. One of the most common cover stories was that her masculinity and obsessive privacy were symptoms of her working-class or peasant background. She was fit both into the stereotype of the timid immigrant girl and the mannish Swedish peasant (exemplified by Wallace Beery's comedic "Sweedie, the Swedish maid").¹²⁸ In fact, Garbo was born to a working-class family in a Stockholm suburb, but she had trained at the Swedish Dramatic Academy and worked as a model in a department store, hardly the qualifications of a "peasant." This strategy attempts to displace Garbo's gender deviations onto her class identity and "foreignness." Whereas masculine styles might signify lesbianism in the sophisticated, urban locale of the Parisian dance hall, say, in the Swedish peasant girl they might indicate only country bumpkin backwardness, or an overgrown nature-loving tomboy.

Whereas Garbo's masculinity seems to be a hypervisible sign requiring explanation (if primarily made visible to readers through texts rather than images), one journalist speculated that Garbo may have been using men's clothing to achieve a kind of social invisibility. A 1931 *Los Angeles Times* article recounted: "Her boon companions are the caddy boys at a golf course in her neighborhood; she shoots craps with them. Once, in a boy's coat and boy's shoes, she attended an afternoon tea at a house on the hills above Beverly. They saw her come in; then they missed her. Again she had escaped."¹²⁹ On one level, this account fits Garbo into the long-standing tradition of women disguising themselves as men for purely instrumental reasons—to escape capture, go on the road, or infiltrate an all-male preserve. And yet the suggestion that she relates best to the "caddy boys" implies not only her preference for working-class sociability but also that she fits in best as "one of the boys"—she is more like them than anyone else. This account attempts to shift her masculinity from being a hypervisible symptom of an unnamable "certain something" to the older explanation of female cross-dressing as a strategy of invisibility. And yet as testimonies of Garbo's preference for men's clothing persisted, the idea that she would don masculine clothing as an instrumental disguise seemed increasingly flimsy.

In these years, journalists' proliferating explanations for the swirl of signs around Garbo—her masculine stride and men's jackets, her heavy furniture and simple taste—were contradictory and also at odds with her glamorous on-screen persona. However, *Queen Christina*, Garbo's star vehicle of 1933, written by Viertel with input from de Acosta, changed this. The film brought together Garbo's on- and off-screen persona to an unprecedented degree and offered a new framework for interpreting Garbo as simultaneously Swedish and lesbian. However, it was the American success of a certain German art film, *Maedchen in Uniform*, that made this possible.

"Just full of Lesbianism and all that sort of thing":

Maedchen in Uniform

The reception of *Maedchen in Uniform* demonstrates how public lesbianism had become in the years since *The Captive*. When this film was released, journalists did not imagine any viewers to be outside the system of lesbian signification, even though the film was less explicit, in many ways, than *The Captive* or *Well of Loneliness*. Even through most American critics argued that *Maedchen* was not in fact about lesbianism, by repeatedly making this argument they ensured that American readers knew that this was the film's alleged subject and revealed that this

interpretation was common amongst the film's censors and others. Furthermore, the film's critical success seems to have emboldened MGM to adopt specific narrative and visual techniques from the film in order to suggest Queen Christina's desire for her lady-in-waiting with sufficient "delicacy" that it could be considered art.

Maedchen in Uniform, based on a German novel and play by Christa Winsloe, describes the affection that develops between a young girl, Manuela Von Meinhardie (Herthe Thiel), and a teacher, Fräulein Elizabeth von Bernburg (Dorothea Wieck), in an oppressive girls boarding school. All the schoolgirls have crushes on the kindly, beautiful von Bernburg, but Manuela insists that she loves her. Von Bernburg takes a special interest in the lonely girl, kissing her on the lips before bed (rather than on the forehead, as she does with the other girls) and loaning her a petticoat. After playing the role of Don Carlos in a school play, Manuela announces to her fellow students that she is sure that von Bernburg loves her best. The headmistress witnesses this declaration and isolates Manuela and chastises von Bernburg. Manuela runs up the school's staircase in order to commit suicide, but is rescued by her classmates.

Like *The Captive*, the affection between Manuela and von Bernburg is based on gender sameness rather than difference, but with a more explicit power differential: a student's adoration for a teacher who functions as a maternal stand-in and a teacher's motherly affection for her student. Same-sex desire is figured as an intensification of the homosocial bonds between women in an all-female environment and the eroticization of a mother/child dynamic. B. Ruby Rich has written an insightful analysis of the film, identifying, in particular, the way the film shifts from "repressive tolerance" (von Bernburg encourages the girls' unrealizable crushes on her in order to "make her charges more comfortable in their oppression") to "erotic liberation" (when Manuela breaks the rules by asserting, in private and then in public, her passionate desire for von Bernburg and her classmates rally around her).¹³⁰ Rich's reading of the film is compelling, particularly when watching the film today and also in its original Weimar context. However, the American reviews suggest that when the film played in the U.S, the nature of Manuela's declarations was somewhat more ambiguous, given the complicated, contested understandings of intimate relations between women during that period.

As Rich points out, the film communicates the women's feelings through lingering shots of each looking at the other (the first time we see von Bernburg, she is looking at Manuela), by superimposing the women's faces on each other when they think of or look at each other, and through a succession of highly-charged encounters.¹³¹ The first of these key scenes takes place when von Bernburg kisses each girl goodnight on the forehead. When she comes to Manuela, the girl throws her arms around her and looks up adoringly. Von Bernburg leans slowly in, takes Manuela's chin in her hands, and kisses the girl full on the mouth (Figures 5.39 – 5.42). Rich notes that: "The extreme fetishizing of the kiss by the nature of the teacher's gestures and the film's style is emblematic of the unspoken codes of repressive tolerance. The kiss is permitted, to each alike, but it is at once the given and the boundary. [...] The entire equilibrium is founded upon this extreme tension, which is snapped when Manuela, overwhelmed by the atmosphere and her feelings, breaks the rules."¹³² I agree with Rich that the kiss, as distributed equally to each girl, ritualizes and contains the girls' affection for von Bernburg, and that Manuela disturbs this equilibrium with her desire for more intense, more exclusive erotic contact with her teacher. Yet I want to look more closely at what this kiss might have communicated to audiences by comparing it to Linda Williams' recent study of heterosexual movie kisses.

In many ways, the kiss looks like a classic Hollywood kiss: in a tight frame, one partner, lit so that her skin glows white, tilts her head back expectantly. The other partner, face somewhat



5.39, 5.40, 5.41 and 5.42 Fraulein von Bernburg leans in to kiss Manuela.

in shadow, places a hand below her partner's cheek and leans down to deliver a tender, close-mouthed kiss. At this point, we cut to a three-quarters length shot and see both partners in this posture, their touching lips obscured in shadow. A stark, white rim light separates the couple from their shadowy background. In light of Freud's writings on sexuality, Williams has argued that movie kisses before the 1960s can be understood as sex acts "infantile in their orality" and "adolescent in their way being permanently poised on the brink of carnal knowledge."¹³³ Although the kiss can be thought of as "an act of sexual intimacy in which the mouths prefigure the later joining of other body parts"—and thus, an "adolescent" anticipation of "a more advanced, adult stage of genital sex"—it is also "an act of intimacy that recalls the earlier act of maternal breast-feeding in which one erotogenic zone—the mother's nipple, her milk—excites another—the infant's mouth."¹³⁴ Within this paradigm, Manuela and von Bernburg's kiss is even more "infantile" than the heterosexual kisses Williams examines because it so thoroughly confounds the boundaries between "adult" and "infantile" pleasures—is von Bernburg kissing Manuela like a mother, or like a lover? Or perhaps like both at once? As I demonstrated in the last chapter, kissing and other forms of physical intimacy between women were in the process of being resignified in the decades after the turn of the century. This kiss raises the question of whether it should be considered "adolescent" at all—does it anticipate "the later joining of other body parts"? It is not important for my argument that Freud considered homosexual genital

sexual activity to be a form of arrested development. I am interested, instead, in how this kiss functions in relationship to the heterosexual kisses that Williams investigates.

During the era of Hollywood's Production Code, as Williams notes, the length of movie kisses was often restricted to approximately three seconds.¹³⁵ Filmmakers, however, often had the camera "look away" in the middle of a kiss (panning to the ever-popular "rain on a windowpane" or cutting to a different scene, for example). This had the effect, Williams points out, of suggesting that the kiss continued on longer than we were allowed to see and, perhaps, that more intimate sexual encounters had occurred. This is the kiss as "ellipsis." In *Maedchen*, however, the camera is careful to record the conclusion of the women's kiss and von Bernburg's exit from the scene. The kiss lasts only a moment and von Bernburg straightens up and walks away. Manuela scoots down in bed and snuggles under the covers, grinning. Unlike the kisses in *Casablanca*, say, the film is careful to show that no further physical encounter occurs between Manuela and von Bernburg. The kiss functions as a full stop, the limit, as Rich notes, of what can occur between these women.

However, it is precisely this full stop to which Manuela objects. "When you say goodnight and leave, and shut the door to your room...I stare at the door in the darkness. I want to get up and come to you...but I know I can't," Manuela later tells von Bernburg, when the two are alone in von Bernburg's office. (Von Bernburg has called her there to lend her a petticoat, as the girl's only underclothes were full of holes.) Manuela longs for the kiss to be a prelude to something else, something perhaps less articulate than sexual intercourse, but nonetheless sees the kiss as an "adolescent" act, on the verge of a more satisfying intimate encounter. Yet it is precisely this possibility that this movie kiss—unlike its heterosexual counterparts—is at great pains to circumvent. Manuela continues on to confess her jealousy of von Bernburg kissing other girls and proclaims "I love you so much!" Von Bernburg attempts to constrain her ("What thoughts you have!") and explains "You know I can't make exceptions or the other girls will be jealous," but the girl is inconsolable until her teacher admits "I think of you often, Manuela." Now all smiles, Manuela leaves, new petticoat in hand.

Whereas Williams argues that movie kisses are anatomized sex acts that can function in a variety of ways, from anticipatory "itch" to concluding "scratch," the question that Manuela and von Bernburg's kiss raises is whether it should be considered a sex act at all.¹³⁶ Visually, it imitates a Hollywood (heterosexual) kiss, contributing to the sense that Manuela and von Bernburg's feelings for each other are erotic, just as the female pairs in *Four Horsemen* and *Wings* become "couples" through visual analogy with the male-female pairs around them. Yet this kiss is more precisely ended than most, a choice that attempts to cut it off from a teleology that might lead to "the joining of other body parts." Yet Manuela's expressed desire to go to von Bernburg's bedroom after the kiss and the lively debate over the nature of their relationship in the press suggests that the film nevertheless broached the possibility that the kiss could lead to additional sex acts and that many of the film's audiences recognized this possibility.

Although the film does not portray Manuela or von Bernburg as particularly masculine, Manuela's temporary assumption of a male persona in a school play allows her to declare her desire for von Bernburg publicly, both within the play and, more consequentially, afterward. In the scene of Schiller's play we see performed, Don Carlos declares his forbidden love to Elisabeth, the woman his father has recently married. Whereas the girl playing the queen requires the prompter's help to remember her lines, Manuela declares her lines with conviction. She falls to her knees and kisses the Queen's hand, who reproves her: "Know you, it is the Queen, your mother, whom you address in such presumptuous strain?" Don Carlos replies passionately: "Let



5.43 Manuela, as Don Carlos, kisses the Queen's hand.



5.44 Von Bernburg watches intently from the audience.

them come here, and drag me to the scaffold! A moment spent in paradise like this is not too dearly purchased by a life.” In the audience, von Bernburg leans forward and watches intently. The play-within-a-film authorizes the characters to speak emotions that cannot otherwise be spoken. The parallels between Don Carlos and the Queen and Manuela and von Bernburg are clear—Don Carlos/Manuela each declare their forbidden love to a woman who protests by re-asserting her ostensibly maternal position. As Rich notes, the Queen and von Bernburg even share the name Elizabeth.¹³⁷ The film thus uses the *hosenrolle* as a vehicle for a woman to express publicly her desire for another woman. This device has been used to communicate lesbian desire, says Terry Castle, at least since Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*.¹³⁸ However, *Maedchen* goes one step further.

After the performance, Manuela giddily drinks spiked punch and all the girls dance with each other in an explosion of happy emotion (something like the freewheeling eroticism of *Wings'* Parisian dance hall). But when Manuela notices that the girl she is dancing with has tattooed a heart with the initials “E.v.B.” on her arm, she stops the festivities and gathers all the girls around her. She announces to the girls that von Bernburg has given her a petticoat and proclaims “Now I know for sure – she loves me! [...] Nothing else matters. She is there. She loves me! I'm not afraid of anything” (Figure 4.45). When the headmistress, who has quietly entered the room, advances upon Manuela, the girl shouts: “Yes, everyone should know about it!” Although Manuela does not precisely declare her own feelings toward von Bernburg, she asserts that her relationship with von Bernburg is intimate and exclusive—that it is fundamentally different from the diffuse homosocial eroticism of the school. The headmistress's reaction, however, isolating Manuela in the infirmary and threatening von Bernburg, pins down the significance of Manuela's declaration. Rich argues that the film's conclusion—in which von Bernburg resigns, Manuela tries to throw herself off the staircase, her classmates rescue her, and the headmistress retreats down a long, dark hallway—depicts a rupture in “the patriarchal order [...] within the school by the liberation of eros among the women.”¹³⁹ This is a compelling reading, but I am more concerned here with the way the film uses the playful performance of masculinity as a conduit for the public expression of one woman's desire for another. In a way, this example illustrates de Lauretis's point that the lesbian can only become visible through “male body drag,” but this example is more playful than de Lauretis's account, bringing to mind



4.45 Manuela, still in her Don Carlos costume, announces: “Now I know for sure - she loves me!”

instead the masquerades that Natalie Barney and her circle staged in Paris at the turn of the century.¹⁴⁰

The film premiered in Berlin in November 1931 and was successful in Paris, London, Sweden, Spain and Switzerland.¹⁴¹ When two young artists tried to bring the film to New York, the New York Board of Censors rejected the film, on the basis that it treated the same theme as *The Captive*, which had been banned in that state four years earlier.¹⁴² The distributors appealed and the film was approved, opening in New York City on September 21, 1932. It played for five weeks at top prices (\$1.65 a ticket) in New York and then road-showed in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, Oakland, Los Angeles, and small towns in Iowa, Indiana, and Texas.¹⁴³ According to *Motion Picture Daily*, *Maedchen* beat the three-week earning records set by *The Covered Wagon*, *Wings*, and *Beau Geste* and MGM entered negotiations to distribute the film but the deal fell through because MGM refused to roadshow it.¹⁴⁴ By the time the film began its national tour, a reviewer in the *New York Sun* asserted that the film’s “fame has already reached to many large cities of the country. Likewise, the touch of scandal inherent in it has also been blown nationwide.”¹⁴⁵ Like *The Captive* before it, the film’s title soon became a euphemism for lesbianism.¹⁴⁶

Virtually all the film’s initial reviews in the U.S. repeated the refrain that despite the rumors that *Maedchen* explored the same subject as *The Captive*, it does not. Al Sherman at the *New York Telegraph* wrote, for example:

There are some who profess to see, in the picture’s compelling story, a hint of that neuroticism which forms the basis of “The Captive.” If that is true, then every adoring friendship of a youth for his elder becomes perversion while the frantic crushes of adolescent schoolgirls prove no more nor less than a Freudian descent into Lesbianism.¹⁴⁷

This kind of defense was typical.¹⁴⁸ Bland Johaneson at the *Daily Mirror* also defended the film from “whisperings” that it was a “celluloid ‘Well of Loneliness.’”¹⁴⁹ Instead, the critics argued that the film describes the feelings of a lonely child for a substitute mother or else an innocent adolescent crush. Whereas intimate, passionate friendships between schoolgirls had been considered a normal part of adolescent development, these relationships were increasingly viewed with suspicion in the decades after the turn of the century.¹⁵⁰ The significance and

implication of schoolgirl “smashes” were contested and thus the debates over Manuela and von Bernberg’s feelings for each other landed in the midst of these on-going contestations. According to most reviewers, the rampant rumors that preceded the film (“the whispered words that ‘Maedchen in Uniform’ was ‘just full of Lesbianism and all that sort of thing, old chap’”), were merely a publicity stunt.¹⁵¹ However, by continuously countering the rumors of lesbianism, these critics indicated that this was the most prevalent opinion of the film. The act of mentioning lesbianism in every review (often through the euphemism of *The Captive*) encouraged audiences to read the film through this lens.

In this case, it was not the “sophisticated” viewers who detected lesbianism, but the “unsophisticated” viewers. Although critics indicated their familiarity with lesbianism by dropping references to *The Captive*, *Well*, Freud, and Krafft-Ebing, they insisted that the people who saw lesbianism in this story were moralists who “peer[ed], with fanatic eyes, for a hint of perversion” or sensation-seeking audiences hoping for a glimpse of exotic sexuality.¹⁵² Just as Ron Gregg notes with William Haines, moralists had been sufficiently clued in to codes of deviant sexuality by this point that they became quite sensitive to these meanings. Other reviews described the two ways of reading the film as equally valid possibilities. *The Baltimore Sun*, for instance, wrote: “Film Made in Germany Meets Two Schools Of Thought, One Seeing It As Tender Story, Other As Pathological Study” and another critic said: “You may, as we wrote in our original estimate of ‘Maedchen in Uniform,’ read into these events a certain pathological or sex-psychological significance. But permit us to report again that whichever way you interpret it, the picture at the Criterion is an always intelligent and never offensive exhibition.”¹⁵³ These critics describe the two ways of interpreting the film as equally valid. Lesbian meanings are not assumed to be restricted to “sophisticated” readers but available to all. However, it is worth noting that when a Roman courtesan tried to seduce a Christian girl through a lascivious dance in Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Sign of the Cross* this same year, a reviewer wrote reassuringly: “the average adult will not understand that it is a Lesbian dance, and hardly any of the adolescents will know what is happening.”¹⁵⁴

A few reviewers argued that *Maedchen* was indeed about lesbianism but, compared to *The Captive*, it was done with such taste, dignity, and understanding that it should qualify as “art” and thus transcended moral judgment. For example, Richard Watts, Jr. of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, wrote that, “there is [...] no use denying that ‘Maedchen in Uniform’ does hint at pathological matters,” but insisted that the film, “is that rare and surprising thing, a motion picture so distinguished in its manner that, as much as you may long to avoid the term, you are forced to end by describing it as a Work of Art.”¹⁵⁵ Many critics hailed the film as one of the best of the year, an example of the cinematic artistry possible only in Europe, and unexpected proof that the medium of film could produce something of worth. For example, *The New Yorker* reported:

Nothing has ever been done like it in the movies, and I do not expect that it will ever be duplicated, for in its making there was involved [...] a directly creative instinct of the sort generally seeking its expression in the written word, in painting, in music, and for which the elaborate mechanism of the cinema would seem least favorable. [...] [T]his picture is, in fact, that ‘step forward’ in the movies so often heralded[.]¹⁵⁶

Although these critics often used *The Captive* as a sensationalistic foil to *Maedchen*’s artistry, they—like *The Captive*’s defenders—argued that subtlety was the key characteristic that qualifies a work as art and that art should not be bound to the same moral standards as other forms of cultural production.

As explicitly lesbian as *Maedchen* seems to us now, kisses and crushes between women had long been considered perfectly normal, so the public debate over the meaning of the women's affection for each other should be considered genuine. And yet this very debate put the subject of lesbianism (and terminology for it) before thousands of readers. It also demonstrated that the ability to see lesbianism in a film was not limited to a small cadre of "sophisticated" viewers. In fact, as I said, "unsophisticated" viewers like local censor boards—seemed to occupy the role formerly occupied by the "sophisticated" viewers—uniquely predisposed to see and object to codes representing deviant sexuality. The film blurs the distinction between maternal affection, schoolgirl crushes, and lesbian desire. It displays Manuela's kiss in the style of a Hollywood heterosexual kiss, suggests visually that nothing more was possible, but then reveals through dialogue Manuela's longing for something more. Although the film eschews masculinity or any other hint of inversion, Manuela uses a self-conscious male masquerade to declare her own feelings within the pretext of a play and then to assert von Bernburg's presumed feelings after the play. Despite the public debate over the women's relationship. The film quickly became a euphemism for lesbianism in much the way that *The Captive* had. "The title *Maedchen in Uniform* and the story associated with it have thus become symbolic, as it were, of Lesbianism, as far as motion pictures are concerned," wrote one of the PCA's personnel in 1936 when the distributors applied to rerelease the film.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, the film's critical success encouraged MGM to adopt new strategies to elaborate Garbo's previously off-screen lesbian persona.

"A tinge of lesbianism": Greta Garbo as Queen Christina

The 1933 film *Queen Christina* marks a high point in lesbian visibility and the consolidation of female masculinity as a publicly recognizable code for lesbianism. Unlike most of the works I have examined so far (a German art film, a play, a novel, and independently-produced film comedies), *Queen Christina* was a big-budget, prestige picture by a major Hollywood studio (MGM). Unlike *Four Horsemen* or *Wings*, the gender-deviant character was at its center. The film used female masculinity and intimacy between women to signify explicitly the protagonist's deviant gender and sexual identity, even though the narrative attempts to recuperate her as heterosexual and feminine. As a star text, this film reconciled contradictory explanations of Garbo and put her formerly off-screen "lesbian" attributes onto the screen. All of this was made possible, I argue, by the earlier works that had established a public vocabulary for lesbianism and promoted public interest in the subject. *Maedchen*, in particular, demonstrated that lesbianism could be addressed in film quite explicitly if it was done "artfully." We can detect in *Queen Christina* important narrative and visual borrowings from this work.

Queen Christina purports to tell the life story of Kristina Vasa, the woman who ruled Sweden from 1626 until 1654, when she abdicated the throne, converted to Catholicism, and moved to Rome. She was famous for wearing men's clothing, refusing to marry, and bringing European artists and scholars to court. Biographers had long debated the nature of her intimate relationships with women, including Countess Ebba Sparre. The film, however, frames Christina's life as a tragic love story revolving around a relationship between the Queen and a fictional Spanish ambassador, Don Antonio (John Gilbert). The film starts with the death of Christina's father and the six-year-old girl's coronation. At the ceremony, her counselor Axel Oxenstierna (Lewis Stone) announces to the court: "Our king is dead, but his spirit still lives, in us, and in his child, Christina. Her father, our king, brought up this child as a boy, accustomed her ears to the sound of cannon fire and sought to mold her spirit after his own." The film then

introduces the adult Christina (Greta Garbo), who dresses in elegant menswear and complains about her burdensome duties as monarch of a nation eternally at war, preferring to hunt and go on weekend retreats with her lady-in-waiting, Countess Ebba Sparre (Elizabeth Young).

While disguised as a man, Christina encounters Don Antonio in a village inn. The two hit it off and Don Antonio suggests that they share a room. They maintain this arrangement even after Don Antonio discovers Christina's true sex. A love affair begins. Afterward, Christina is torn by her duties to her country (which include marrying a Swedish military hero, Prince Charles Gustavus) and her desire for Antonio and a life of peace. She decides to abdicate the throne in order to follow Don Antonio to Spain, but at the last minute, her former lover Count Magnus (Ian Keith) kills Antonio in a duel. Christina sails away from Sweden alone.

I argue, as Patricia White does, that the film suggests that Christina is an invert (or perhaps lesbian or bisexual) through both her relationship with Ebba and her masculine clothing and behavior. However, I want to draw attention to the ways that *Maedchen* informed the way Christina's relationship with Ebba is conceptualized and visually presented. In fact, Salka Viertel, one of the film's screenwriters and one of Garbo's "inseparable companions," recalled a conversation with MGM Vice President Irving Thalberg that makes this connection clear:

[A]bruptly he asked if I had seen the German film *Mädchen in Uniform*, a great success in Europe and New York. It had been directed by a woman, my former colleague at the *Neue Wiener Bühne*, Leontine Sagan, and dealt with a lesbian relationship. Thalberg asked: "Does not Christina's affection for her lady-in-waiting indicate something like that?" He wanted me to "keep it in mind," and perhaps if "handled with taste it would give us very interesting scenes." Pleasantly surprised by his broadmindedness, I began to like him very much[.]¹⁵⁸

This account illustrates that *Maedchen* had become part of the vocabulary of not only an Austrian-Polish writer like Viertel but also of an American studio executive like Thalberg. Just as *The Captive* had become the preferred euphemism for lesbianism five years earlier, *Maedchen* quickly assumed this position.

However, in this case, the "something like that" to which Thalberg refers is not merely lesbianism, but a particular model of same-sex eroticism—the adoration of a girl for an older, more worldly woman who occupies a position of authority. Indeed, Ebba's admiration for Christina is initially portrayed in a similar vein as Manuela's devotion to von Bernburg. We first see Ebba when she runs into the queen's chamber in the early morning. Ebba curtsies deeply and approaches, then kneels and kisses the queen on the hand. When she stands, the queen takes Ebba's head in her hands and kisses her on the lips. Ebba proposes that the two women go on a sleigh ride together. Christina defers, reminding Ebba of all the "ambassadors, treaties [and] councils" to which she must attend. Their dynamic—Ebba's bubbly enthusiasm and the Queen's more measured display of interest—seems close to *Maedchen* thus far. Additionally, the way the film visually presents these physical interactions is strikingly similar to *Maedchen*. The framing and staging of the kissing scenes in each movie mirrors the other. In the first set of shots—the genuflection—the queens both stand on the left side of the frame and look down at the girls in front of them (Figures 5.46 and 5.47). Manuela and Ebba each kneel and tenderly kiss the left hands of their monarchs. The camera is at virtually the same distance in both shots, revealing the women's full bodies. The curtains around Christina's bed to echo the curtains of the stage in *Maedchen*. In *Queen Christina*, however, the gender of the costuming is reversed—the queen wears a man's tunic and trousers and the girl wears a dress. *Maedchen* uses the darkened stage and glowing spotlight to emphasize visually this encounter whereas in *Queen Christina*, the



5.46 Manuela, as Don Carlos, kneels and kisses the Queen's hand.



5.47 Ebba kneels and kisses Queen Christina's hand.



5.48 Von Bernberg and Manuela kiss in the girls' dormitory.



5.49 Christina and Ebba kiss in the Queen's chamber.

women do not stand out from the bright, evenly-lit bedchamber. In this, *Maedchen* draws from a German Expressionist tradition of expressive lighting whereas Queen Christina falls neatly into an MGM/Hollywood style.

In the next set of images (Figures 5.48 and 5.49), the full-mouthed kiss, we again see the older women positioned on the left, now tilting their heads down and grabbing the faces of the younger women, who tilt their heads up to receive the kiss. Again the camera is at the same distance—in this case, we see the women from the waist up—and again we see the contrasting lighting styles. In *Maedchen* we know that Manuela is kneeling on her bed, which is out of frame, and in *Queen Christina* we see the queen's bed in the background. However, despite these marked similarities, there are important differences. In *Maedchen*, the genuflection and the full-mouth kiss are separated by time and space and they occur in the opposite order. In the full-mouth kiss Manuela kisses Fräulein von Bernburg and in the genuflection Manuela kisses the hand of a fellow schoolgirl. Furthermore, in *Maedchen* a medium close-up of the two women precedes the full-mouth kiss image I have excerpted here, producing a sense of enhanced intimacy. In *Queen Christina*, on the other hand, the genuflection leads directly into the full-

mouth kiss (there is a cut on the action of Ebba standing); it takes the two scenes from *Maedchen* and welds them together. Also, we never get a closer shot of the two women together. The bright, even lighting avoids the romantic intimacy of the dormitory kiss in *Maedchen*. Although *Queen Christina* replicates the visual presentation of the *Maedchen* kiss in many ways, the bright lighting and camera distance dampen the distinct eroticism of the earlier version.

Furthermore, in *Queen Christina*, we soon discover that the dynamic of the women is actually quite different from that in *Maedchen*—Ebba is no longer in love with Christina. When Christina proposes to Ebba that they spend two or three nights together at an isolated inn, the girl flinches. Christina and the audience soon discover why—Ebba is engaged to a male guardsman and is afraid to tell Christina. When Christina overhears the couple’s conversation about this issue, she confronts Ebba about her duplicity and breaks off their relationship. The PCA worried that this scene would be “interpreted as indicating that there is a tinge of lesbianism in the relationship between Christina and Ebba.”¹⁵⁹ (The PCA never brought up Christina and Ebba’s kiss, so far as I have been able to determine.) In a letter to Eddie Mannix at MGM, James Wingate of the PCA recommended that, to the guardsman’s complaint that Ebba was afraid to tell the queen “that you love me and that you want to marry me,” MGM add “and leave Stockholm,” in order to “change the implication of this speech so that it could be interpreted to mean that Christina opposes Ebba’s marriage because it would take her away from the city.” MGM did not add this line. Additionally, Wingate recommended that MGM delete a number of lines from Christina’s angry speech to Ebba, including “Your smiles, and your cooing voice and your sympathy” in the list of things Christina declares to be “all lies!” Instead, MGM re-wrote and shortened the queen’s accusations, but her jealousy still registers clearly. After these specific recommendations, Wingate reiterated: “Even with these changes we assume that you will be careful to avoid anything in the portrayal of this scene which might be construed as lesbianism.” Despite Wingate’s admonition, the film’s portrayal of Christina and Ebba’s relationship—from the kisses presented in the style of *Maedchen in Uniform* to Christina’s jealousy—is clearly meant to be “construed as lesbianism.” In fact, when the completed film was submitted to the PCA, it was rejected and only managed to get a seal by appealing to a “Hollywood Jury.” However, the PCA primarily objected to Christina and Antonio’s relationship, not the film’s depiction of lesbianism.¹⁶⁰

These scenes show how *Queen Christina*, a big-budget MGM film, borrowed the visual vocabulary of *Maedchen*, a film with much more limited distribution but a national reputation, to depict an erotic relationship between two women. *Maedchen*’s critical success likely encouraged MGM to include this aspect of Christina’s life without too much fear of reprisal. Even though *Queen Christina* narratively recuperated Christina’s sexuality, the nature of her relationship with Ebba seems clear.

Christina’s relationship with Ebba furthermore invites audiences to read her masculinity as not merely the trappings of a female monarch or a personal idiosyncrasy, but as a signifier of her sexual orientation. Reciprocally, her masculinity confirms the “tinge of lesbianism” apparent in her relationship with Ebba. Her masculinity and her kisses with Ebba thus rebound upon each other to signify the character’s possible inversion or lesbianism. As in *The Clinging Vine*, we are introduced to the adult Christina through a series of shots that suggest that the figure is a man—first we see two figures on horseback from a high overhead shot, then we cut increasingly closer to the backside of a figure in an elegant tunic, trousers, and wide-brimmed black hat, and finally we cut to a close-up of said black hat, which is eventually lifted to reveal Garbo’s face. Just as Manuela’s playful assumption of historical menswear in *Maedchen* allows her to declare her

desire for another woman, Garbo's assumption of similar garb functions as a vehicle for her to express homoerotic desire more candidly.

The Well of Loneliness also seemed to inform the film's representation of Christina, as Patricia White has pointed out. Of *Well* and *Queen Christina*, White observes: "Both heroines are raised as boys amid wealth and social prominence and dogs, horses, and books; they experience strong identifications with dead fathers and are fastidious about the men's clothing they favor. After their first female lovers jilt them, the two protagonists find great love, which causes them to be exiled from their birthright. They each end up as solitary expatriates who strongly resemble Christian martyrs."¹⁶¹ White goes so far as to suggest that we could read *Queen Christina* "as the closest thing yet to a film version of what remains the quintessential lesbian novel [i.e. *Well of Loneliness*]."¹⁶² While *Queen Christina* was equally informed by intertexts such as *Maedchen in Uniform*, Garbo's pre-existing star persona, and historical accounts of Christina, the parallels between the film and *Well* are significant.

As in the previous cases, written discourses external to the film also invited audiences to view Christina as lesbian. Rumors concerning Christina's affairs with women dated back to the 1660s, when a series of pamphlets appeared in Paris calling Christina "one of the most ribald tribades ever heard of," writes Sarah Waters.¹⁶³ The pamphlets claimed, too, that, "respectable women refused to take their daughters to visit Christina because she'd been seen putting her hand up ladies' skirts." Although nineteenth-century biographers downplayed Christina's sexuality, Edward Carpenter fit her into developing notions of the invert in 1906 when he offered her as an example of the "intermediate sex" in a footnote of *Love's Coming-of-Age*.¹⁶⁴ In the years that followed, Christina's biographers tussled over how to categorize the queen (a 1913 account, for example, portrayed her as a "New Woman and sexual neurotic").¹⁶⁵ However, Margaret Goldsmith's "Psychological Biography" of Christina, published shortly before the MGM film was released, asserted plainly that, "many contemporary documents, and Christina's own letters, make it quite clear that she was attracted by her own sex."¹⁶⁶ Just as White argues about the film, Waters argues that Goldsmith re-tells Christina's story through the framework of Stephen Gordon's life ("Over-influential father, distant mother, inappropriate education, boyishness, self-discovery and exile"). Goldsmith, who wrote a series of biographies re-inscribing homosexuality into the lives famous figures (including Sappho and Frederick the Great), may have done this intentionally, argues Waters, in order to "reopen a space for the articulation of lesbian desire" in the face of the British ban on Radclyffe Hall's novel.¹⁶⁷ Although MGM based their adaptation on another biography (Faith Compton Mackenzie's *Sybil of the North*), Goldsmith's novel may have prompted some viewers to look for signs of inversion in the film. This point is underscored by a *New York Herald-Tribune* review of Goldsmith's book, which reflected: "The one persistent love of Christina's life was for the Countess Ebba Sparre[.] [...] [T]he evidence is overwhelming, but will Miss Garbo play such a Christina?"¹⁶⁸

The film was marketed as an exposition on Garbo herself. In a review included in the film's press book, the *New York Journal* wrote that, "Queen Christina is entirely Garbo, and Garbo is entirely Queen Christina."¹⁶⁹ This kind of claim was typical. Press coverage described the historical figure of Christina as an astonishing double of Garbo. In an article in *Photoplay*, "Two Queens Were Born in Sweden," Helen Dale described Christina and Garbo in alternation, using the same language to describe each ("moody," "headstrong," "distinctly masculine taste in clothes," "refuses to marry," "strong and virile" hands, "eyes might have belonged to either sex," etc.).¹⁷⁰ Each time she described Christina, Dale would then suggest: "You could substitute the name of Garbo anywhere in this paragraph" or "It would be difficult to find a more exact

description of Garbo.” Of course, as Landy and Villarejo remind us, the apparent “coincidence” of Garbo resembling Christina is “not a coincidence at all” but rather “selected and painstakingly constructed.”¹⁷¹ Garbo’s reference to herself as a “bachelor” in Palmborg’s 1930 *Photoplay* article, for example (“Just the kind for us bachelors, eh?”) returns in the film as Christina’s assertion “I shall die a bachelor!”¹⁷²

The project was developed specifically as a vehicle for Garbo and thus it was shaped to fit and also elaborate Garbo’s existing persona.¹⁷³ Remarkably, the film built upon and extended press stories about Garbo’s private life—her preference for men’s clothing, desire for privacy, and intimate friendships with women—and put them, for the first time, on the big screen. Whereas Garbo’s persona had been marked by a sharp dichotomy between the “visible” Garbo, a glamorous, European femme fatale, versus the comparatively “invisible” Garbo, the masculine, secretive introvert of journalistic accounts, the film incorporated and reconciled both Garbos. Christina offered a solution to journalists’ confusion about how Garbo could appear so glamorous and feminine onscreen and dowdy and androgynous off-screen, by gliding effortlessly between the men’s hunting gear of her private life and the glittering bejeweled gown of her court appearance. Plus, while journalists had offered Swedishness as a competing explanation for Garbo’s masculinity, the film’s version of Christina showed that these explanations were not at odds—one could be simultaneously Swedish and lesbian. Rather than being a singular oddity, Garbo was fit into an historical lineage marked as Swedish.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, by aligning Garbo so closely with Christina, the film argued against understanding Garbo’s oddities as attributes of her class status.

Lesbian scholars have expressed disappointment that the film seems to “undo” Christina’s lesbianism by focusing on her romance with Don Antonio and clothing her in increasingly feminine garb. Waters, for example, complains that the film “employs the impressive authority of a visually encoded ‘history’ to demonstrate the inexorability of the heterosexual denouement.”¹⁷⁵ It is true that Christina’s affair with Ebba is framed as a prelude to the “real” love story, and thus it becomes, for both women, an adolescent stage on the way to “normal” adult sexuality (which accords with some psychoanalytic models of human development). And yet, several factors prevent us from merely writing off Christina’s lesbianism in this way. For one, Chris Straayer points out that although “temporary transvestite” films often progress from a stage of “unstable gender and ambiguous sexuality” to the “(re)institutionalization of heterosexuality,” “the fact that the plot is generic strongly suggests that this process is never finished and that the generic system fulfills the viewer’s desire to return again and again to a less closed situation.”¹⁷⁶ Although the heterosexual ending may provide heterosexual viewers some reassurance, it does not negate the pleasures that both hetero- and homosexual viewers may have experienced watching these earlier scenes. Furthermore, the visual spectacle of watching a kiss between two women operates independently of the narrative that tries to contain it. Of *Queen Christina*, Straayer notes that, “Although the film’s narrative later assigns heterosexuality to both women, it never really ‘corrects’ the kiss.”¹⁷⁷ In other words, the strong visual and narrative signs of Christina’s lesbianism early in the film linger beyond the narrative’s attempt to contain them.

Additionally, although Christina and Don Antonio’s relationship is “really” heterosexual, it is initiated in a decidedly homoerotic way. Don Antonio is taken by the lively and intelligent youth he meets at the inn, Count Dohna (actually Christina in male disguise). As the inn is overfull, he suggests that they share a bed. The chambermaid offers her “services” to the Count (“If you should need anything, my room is at the end of the hall”), but the Count demurs. The sexual

tension between Don Antonio and the Count thickens as the Spaniard undresses while quizzing the Count about his/her “sword arm” and other things. Only when the Count takes off his/her jacket, revealing the outline of breasts against a blouse, does Don Antonio realize that the Count is a woman. With wide eyes, he walks up to her and voices what seems to be his relief that the young person to whom he was attracted is in fact female: “Of course... It had to be. I felt it! I felt it! A presence. Oh, life is so gloriously improbable!”

Although men sharing beds would not have been uncommon during this historical period, the next scene underscores the fact that the shared bed implied homosexuality for the film’s audience. Don Antonio’s servant Pedro (Akim Tamiroff) enters the bedroom the next morning and sees only the bed, with curtains tightly drawn around it, and no sign of either gentleman. In a voice emanating from behind the curtains, Don Antonio tells Pedro that he has no plans to leave the bed and he is glad that the snow will keep them there for another three days. Disconcerted, Pedro asks Don Antonio, “Will you take chocolate?” Receiving an affirmative reply, Pedro turns to leave but then turns back and asks, carefully, “Will, uh, the *other* gentleman take chocolate?” After a pause, Don Antonio says “Yes.” Pedro replies “Very good milord, two chocolates.” As Landy and Villarejo point out, “The banter serves to call further attention to the bed, [...] names obliquely a variety of sexual and gender positions and refuses to curb playfulness by solidifying heterosexual union.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, Christina becomes “heterosexual” only by emulating a male homosexual encounter. Furthermore, the film steadfastly avoids displaying kisses between Christina and Don Antonio. While this was likely due to censorship concerns (the fact that Christina goes to bed with a man shortly after meeting him worried the censors far more than the film’s tinges of lesbianism), this also diverted the film’s erotic display from heterosexuality to a peculiar kind of auto-eroticism. This is most evident in a scene in which Christina roams around the room she shares with Don Antonio, touching a series of objects in order to memorize them. Eventually, she pauses in front of a mirror. While the narrative frames the scene as a meditation on her romance with Don Antonio, the image displays the eroticism of Garbo alone.

Even more importantly, discourses about Garbo worked against the recuperation of Christina as heterosexual and feminine. Journalistic accounts of Garbo repeatedly argued that the masculine, solitary Garbo was the “real” one and that the feminine woman in love with a man was the “performing” Garbo. Thus viewers could read the film as enacting a progression from the “real” Garbo (who wears men’s clothes, kisses girls, etc.) to the fictional, cinematic Garbo (the sensual, suffering diva of a typical Garbo film). Garbo herself pointed out both the conventionality and fictionality of the film’s focus on the Don Antonio romance in a letter to a friend, when she complained: “Just imagine *Christina* abdicating for the sake of a little Spaniard.”¹⁷⁹

Viewers could also read the film as an inversion of Garbo’s own biography. The actress had started out in Hollywood with a more feminine style and a highly-publicized romance with Gilbert and then progressed to an increasingly masculine style and rumors of romance with her female friends. Thus, while the film itself points from “adolescent” lesbianism/masculinity to “adult” heterosexuality/femininity, viewers could reflect that Garbo herself seemed to be going in the opposite direction. In fact, it was Garbo’s romance with Gilbert that was only a temporary stage in her young life. Press accounts of Gilbert’s participation in the film make this clear. In a *Photoplay* article, “‘Now I Help You,’ Says Garbo to Gilbert,” for example, Martin Stevers notes that, “Garbo and her friend, Mrs. Berthold Viertel, had worked on the story—had, in fact, a well-organized scenario to present—before Jack was even mentioned for the part.”¹⁸⁰ This description positions Viertel as Garbo’s primary companion and Gilbert as an afterthought. This film created

a newly coherent and more recognizably lesbian star persona for Greta Garbo, whose homosexuality was therefore in no way undone by the film's stock romance plot.

As many scholars have pointed out, *Queen Christina* truly is an unusual example of positive lesbian visibility. It was made possible, however, by the series of works in the decade preceding it that raised the subject of lesbianism and established masculinity as a sign of sexual inversion but also as a strategic conduit for the expression of same-sex desire. These works provided audiences with the intertexts they would need to read Christina as potentially inverted or lesbian, and thus organize Garbo's own off-screen oddities to point to lesbianism as well. The fact that this film was made and the shape it ultimately took was a result of Garbo and Viertel's activism in combination with MGM's own desire to elaborate the persona already partially constructed by the fan and industry press.¹⁸¹ Although Landy and Villarejo argue that, "reading the film as a coded revelation of Garbo's off-screen sexuality [...] attributes too much power to the star herself and slights the ensemble effects that are central to Hollywood and particularly MGM production of the time," I contend that the film *was* a coded revelation of Garbo's off-screen sexuality, but that this was a strategic part of MGM's exploitation of the lesbian signs they had already, at least tacitly, allowed the press to attribute to Garbo.

* * *

Almost one year after *Queen Christina* premiered, Lillian Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* opened on Broadway. The play revolves around the whispered accusation by a young girl, Mary Tillford, that her female schoolteachers are lovers. It only occurs to Mary to mention the "strange noises" that her teachers allegedly make at night, the play suggests, because she has been reading Theophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, an 1836 novel infamous for the polymorphous sexual exploits of its cross-dressed heroine.¹⁸² The novel provides Mary with the framework to interpret her teachers' relationship as potentially lesbian. The play thus demonstrates how exposure to a new system of sexual signification can change the lens through which one reads previously innocent signs. The works discussed in this chapter—*Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *Wings*, *The Captive*, *Well of Loneliness*, *Maedchen in Uniform*, and *Queen Christina*—and their extensive press coverage functioned for many people like the French novel did for Mary. They re-signified certain acts, gestures, objects and clothing to have potentially lesbian meanings. Works that addressed lesbianism prompted the press to talk openly about the subject, lent their name to the phenomenon, and initiated audiences into a variety of signifying codes.

Moving from the brief moments highlighting female couples in *Four Horsemen* and *Wings* through popular cultural texts both large and small, this chapter demonstrates the key role that film and media played in shifting the concept of and codes for recognizing lesbianism from elite and local spheres to mass audiences during the 1920s and early 1930s. Although signs such as female masculinity remained ambiguous by themselves, particular texts sometimes invited viewers to see them as signifiers of lesbianism through triangulation with signs within and outside the text. Whereas these intertexts had been fairly restricted discourses like sexology or Roman history (as we saw in the previous chapter), in the 1920s the texts offering spectators the lens through which to see lesbianism became popular novels, plays, and films, as well as their increasingly widespread press coverage. These texts articulated various models of same-sex desire, from sexual inversion to the intensification of homosocial bonds, which implied differing

sets of codes to detect.¹⁸³ Nonetheless, in a visual medium like film, female masculinity became an important tool for rendering deviant sexuality visible.

Conclusion

The present study ends where many accounts of cross-dressing in American film begin: in the early 1930s, with the iconic cross-dressing of Greta Garbo, as well as Marlene Dietrich, Josephine Baker, and Katharine Hepburn. Many existing histories of American film imply, through omission, that there were few instances of cross-dressed women before the 1930s.¹ Even Rebecca Bell-Metereau's *Hollywood Androgyny* (1985/1993), previously the most thorough study of cross-dressing in American film, includes only seven silent films in the chapter "Male Impersonation Before 1960."² In *Great Pretenders: A History of Female and Male Impersonation in the Performing Arts* (1986), Anthony Slide lists thirteen examples of cross-dressed women in silent film and, in *What a Drag: Men as Women and Women as Men in the Movies* (1982), Homer Dickens identifies thirty seven.³ In this study, by contrast, I have found over three hundred.⁴

More recent histories of American film that do include cross-dressed women, such as the excellent, new *Screen Decades* series, only consider select instances of cross-dressing and explain the device as either a reflection of the New Woman or an anachronistic vestige of the theater.⁵ They do not consider the astounding breadth and diversity of cross-dressed women in film or the multiple traditions they engaged. Studies on early twentieth century female masculinity more generally tend to use a small selection of primarily elite sources to argue that masculine women and women in men's clothing were overwhelmingly read as shrewish suffragettes and/or diseased sexual inverts.⁶ In contrast, I have demonstrated that between 1908 and 1919 a vast array of representations of cross-dressed women helped the moving picture industry establish itself as a wholesome, "socially harmless" form of entertainment in line with genteel cultural values. While films from the beginning of the transitional era acknowledged the contingency of gender visibility, by the end of this period even the most elaborate of gender disguise films produced gender as continually, apparently "naturally" visible on the face of the performer. White female performers could embody both the angelic, androgynous "girl boy" of Victorian sentimental literature and theater and the physically fit, rough-and-tumble "boy girl" of masculinist American frontier mythology, who were capable of fixing the anti-bourgeois, non-normative sexuality of sex-segregated frontier spaces. Cross-dressed women could connect moving pictures to esteemed representational traditions of the past—such as sentimental literature and theater, European farce, and American frontier mythology—while displaying the fitness of modern, white, American girls. Moving pictures regularly positioned these figures against racialized, political, and/or aged versions of female masculinity (such as the mannish Native American woman or the white East Coast suffragette) as well as the feminized Asian-American man. Female masculinity was accepted only so long as it marked a developmental stage or pragmatic necessity in service of the bourgeois, white, heterosexual home.

The release of at least three different films called *Girls Will Be Boys* during the silent era illustrates both the popularity and the diversity of female-to-male cross-dressing during this time.⁷ The first was Essanay's comedy western released in December 1910, which I discussed in Chapter 3, about women taking over a ranch. The film posits the real and exaggerated dangers of the frontier as corrective to these women's audacity, although it also displays the social adjacency of the women's college and the all-male ranch and the anarchic fun to be had by blending the two. Three years later, the Crystal Film Company released a "temporary transvestite" romantic comedy called *Girls Will Be Boys* (November 1913), in which, according

to *Moving Picture World*, “Pearl White and Chester Barnett and two others appear as a quartet of sweethearts in a short comedy wringing most of its fun out of some disguises which the girls assume.”⁸ Based on this description (which seems to be all that survives), the woman don men’s clothing in order to corral men’s unbounded sexual desire and direct it toward a singular object. In 1921, Town and Country produced a film called *Girls Will Be Boys* as an episode of “The Sport Pictorial: A Magazine of Outdoor Life.” The film displayed young white women hiking, camping, riding horses, playing sports, and rowing canoes at an idyllic summer camp. It celebrates the girls’ independence, physical vitality, and camaraderie and they wear matching uniforms consisting of sailor-style tops and gym bloomers or jodhpurs. Similar to the earlier frontier films, an intertitle frames this world as a prelude to and preparation for the eventual entrance into heterosexuality and traditional gender roles. Right before we see a girl frying eggs over a campfire, a title tells us that this activity is: “Good training for a few years hence when the Debutantes of the Open will be turning over the early egg for friend husband.” These three different *Girls Will Be Boys* films illustrate some of the varying ways in which moving pictures made women’s appropriation of masculinity visible and pleasurable.

However, cross-cast “girl boys” and disguised “boy girls” receded in the late-1910s, in favor of active, athletic, but unquestionably female heroines and disguised women who were incompetent at male tasks. In 1917 critics complained that cross-dressing had become a hackneyed device. Female-to-male cross-dressing films continued to be produced for another couple years, though, until 1920, when the number of films dropped from twenty-four in 1919 to eight in 1920. The reasons for this decline are various. On the one hand, female boys disappeared due to the increased visibility of performers’ female bodies in combination with a cultural shift toward a more virile model of boyhood. On the other hand, cross-dressed frontier girls appeared to recede because women increasingly incorporated “masculine” clothing and physicality into the female repertoire. As the serial queens had demonstrated that women could perform male tasks without the excuse of gender disguise, the device may have become less necessary.

Female-to-male cross-dressing reemerged, however, in the mid-1920s—bolstered, in part, by the popularity of prestigious historical pictures. American studios released an average of thirteen films a year featuring female-to-male cross-dressing between 1923 and 1927, many of them big-budget, multi-reel features. While most of these films were variations on the “temporary transvestite” romantic comedy and were received as “wholesome” entertainment, some films, in tandem with fan magazines and the general-interest press, began to cultivate a “sophisticated” set of viewers who could interpret female masculinity as a potential sign of sexual inversion or lesbianism.

Unfortunately, though, the connection of cross-dressing and lesbianism occurred just as the industry was besieged with complaints from religious and reform organizations and threatened with federal censorship. In response, William Hays replaced the more lenient Joseph Breen and the Production Code Administration (PCA) began enforcing its strictures more rigorously, including the infamous 1934 prohibition against “sex perversion or any inference of it.” The National Board of Review of Moving Pictures had already discouraged the depiction of “perverts” around 1916 and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America’s (MPPDA) 1927 list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” had included “inferences of sex perversion” as a “Don’t.” However, the year 1934 marked a new era of tightened content regulation and, as we saw in the PCA’s correspondence about *Queen Christina*, these prohibitions were now applied to female, as well as male, “sex perversion.” Whereas moving pictures had used cross-dressed

women to rebut charges of immorality during the 1910s, in the 1930s they became part of the problem.

After 1934, cross-dressed women became significantly less prevalent in American film. They also became more narratively contained, more homogenous, and more visibly female. Synchronized sound permitted the incorporation of the vaudeville practice of singing and dancing male impersonation and most instances of female-to-male cross-dressing in the sound era occurred within the confines of a musical number, such as Judy Garland as a boy in *Babes on Broadway* (MGM, December 1941) and a tramp in *Easter Parade* (MGM, June 1948).⁹ Studios released female-to-male “temporary transvestite” films only a few times per decade, and in each case the films firmly established the women’s heterosexuality, as in *Sullivan’s Travels* (Paramount, December 1941).¹⁰ Cinematic renditions of historically masculine women, such as George Sand in *A Song to Remember* (Columbia, December 1944) and Martha Jane Canary Burke in *Calamity Jane* (Warner Bros., November 1953), were markedly feminized and brought in line with bourgeois heterosexuality.

The increasing circulation of “sophisticated” readings of cross-dressed women just at the moment that sexual deviance was forced off screen likely contributed to the decline of cross-dressed women in American cinema. However, I suspect that this decline was also due to another, almost paradoxical force—the increasing incorporation of elements of men’s clothing into women’s fashion. Stars like Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell, and Barbara Stanwyck, for instance, cultivated a certain kind of “mannishness” in their on- and off-screen personae without ever taking a cross-dressed role. Frontier women and tomboys continued to display “masculine” athleticism and toughness, although they were often visualized as quite feminine and their independence cut short by the entrance of an eligible man.¹¹ The ambiguous, protean middle ground of women in men’s clothing was thus sifted and divided into lesbian and (at least apparently) heterosexual camps, and the male disguises of the remaining few women were positioned even more carefully as temporary and in service to heterosexual coupling.

During the transitional era, cross-dressed women were more prevalent, more popular, and more heterogeneous in American cinema than any time since (although limited primarily to young, white, attractive women). Imagine, for a moment, if every major movie actress today had one or more cross-dressed roles, or if Hollywood produced an average of twenty female-to-male cross-dressing films a year. At this earlier historical moment, when many felt that women were becoming increasingly like men, moving pictures seized upon cross-dressed women as a way to acknowledge and render pleasurable these profound social changes. Female-to-male cross-dressing cannot be reduced to any one effect—even now—and particularly not during this earlier period when the rules of gender, work, play, and desire were so much in flux. Cross-dressed women were able to hold many meanings for many different people and were intricately woven into long-standing cultural narratives of heroism and vulnerability, of desire and confusion, of comedy and tragedy. In this moment of social and industrial transition, the cross-dressed woman—seemingly a figure of inherent instability—paradoxically helped the moving picture industry legitimate its social standing and become one of the world’s first mass entertainment industries.

End Notes

¹ Pearl Gaddis, “He, She, Or It,” *Motion Picture Magazine*, July 1917.

² “The Boy-Girl. Beautiful Star as Tom Boy In Terrible Meller,” *Wid’s Daily*, March 8, 1917.

³ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (Routledge, 1992).

⁴ Typical examples of this include: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985). Kay Sloan, “Sexual Warfare in the Silent Cinema: Comedies and Melodramas of Woman Suffragism,” *American Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1981): 412–436. Kay Sloan, *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), chap. 5.

⁵ Clare Sears, “‘A dress not belonging to his or her sex’: Cross-Dressing Law in San Francisco, 1860-1900” (Santa Cruz, CA: University of California, Santa Cruz, 2005).

⁶ Carol Smith-Rosenberg’s influential essay “The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936” (1985) advances this position and continues to be cited regularly. Laura L. Behling’s *The Masculine Woman in America, 1890-1935* (2001) similarly argues that American literature and periodicals “unapologetically attempted to generate a disparaging social judgment of the masculine woman, proscribing the parameters of her character and existence and, the hope was, eradicating her” (9). Kay Sloan follows this same line of reasoning in her analysis of anti-suffrage films. While these scholars rightly show that some commentators tried to delegitimize politically active women by impugning their femininity, this negative view of female masculinity was not shared by everyone, nor was it applied to all forms of masculine women, as I will demonstrate throughout this dissertation. The association of female masculinity with sexual inversion, in particular, was not in general circulation during the 1910s, as I show in Chapter 4. Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, chap. 11. Laura L. Behling, *The Masculine Woman in America, 1890-1935* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001). Sloan, “Sexual Warfare in the Silent Cinema.” Sloan, *The Loud Silents*, chap. 5.

⁷ The “transitional era” has received significant attention in recent years, although the boundaries remain somewhat fluid and the label has been contested. A selection of key works on this period includes: Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Charlie Keil, *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907-1913* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001). Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Rob King, *The Fun Factory: The Keystone Film Company and the Emergence of Mass Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). Charlie Keil and Ben Singer, eds., *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

⁸ Important work on these precursors includes: Lawrence Senelick, “The Evolution of the Male Impersonator on the Nineteenth-Century Popular Stage,” *Essays in Theatre* 1, no. 1 (1982): 29-

44. Lesley Ferris, ed., *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). Corinne Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, eds., *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Lenard R. Berlanstein, "Breeches and Breaches: Cross-Dress Theater and the Culture of Gender Ambiguity in Modern France," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 1996): 338-369. Martha Vicinus, "Turn of the Century Male Impersonation: Rewriting the Romance Plot," in *Sexualities in Victorian Britain*, ed. Andrew H. Miller and James Eli Adams (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 187-213. Evelyn A. Schlatter, "Drag's a Life: Women, Gender, and Cross-Dressing in the Nineteenth-Century West," in *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West*, ed. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan H. Armitage (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997). Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag, and Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches: Gender on the Antebellum Stage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Peter Boag, "Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman: Searching for the Trans in Western Gender History," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 477-497.

⁹ "Wonders of the 'Diamond-S' Plant," *Motography* 6:1 (July 1911): 7-19 (11), as quoted in Nanna Verhoeff, *The West in Early Cinema: After the Beginning* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 390.

¹⁰ In September 1923, the *New York City American* announced "New Films Find Feminine Stars in Male Garb / Marion Davies, Anna Q. Nilsson and Dorothy MacKaill All Don Pants in Feature Production." The journalist, Rose Pelswick, noted, "Four feature films find feminine stars donning trousers. During this costume complex, male masquerading seems indispensable, and almost every star is taking to knickerbockers on and off location." Davies appeared in *Little Old New York* (Cosmopolitan Productions, November 1923), Nilsson in *Ponjola* (Sam E. Rork Productions/First National, October 1923), MacKaill in *The Fighting Blade* (Inspiration Pictures/First National, September 1923), and Talmadge in *The Dangerous Maid* (Joseph M. Schenck Productions/First National, November 1923). Three years later, *Photoplay* wrote that, "After Anna Q. [Nilsson] put on the pants with such terrific success all the actresses in Hollywood furtively tried male attire. [...] So now, after watching Gloria Swanson, Colleen Moore, Bebe Daniels, Leatrice Joy, Olive Borden, Vera Reynolds, and Marion Davies, who trousered again in 'Beverly of Graustark,' Anna Q. is going to show them all how to impersonate a lady tramp [in *Miss Nobody*]." Davies and Nilsson, as well as Bebe Daniels, Dorothy MacKaill, Clara Bow, and Leatrice Joy, appeared in a number of cross-dressed roles during the 1920s. Rose Pelswick, "New Films Find Feminine Stars in Male Garb," *New York City American*, September 9, 1923. Madeline Mahlon, "On with the Pants," *Photoplay*, July 1926, 63.

¹¹ During this period, articles and comics in a series of publications repeated declared that "Girls will be boys!" These headlines had been running since at least 1900, but they grew more frequent in the 1920s. Here is a selection: J. R. Shaver, "Girls Will Be Boys," *Life* 79, no. 2061 (May 4, 1922): 3. Al Posen, "Them Days Is Gone Forever-'Girls Will Be Boys'," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 29, 1922. "Girls Will Be Boys!," *Los Angeles Times*, August 27, 1924. "Girls Will Be Boys," *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1925. Edmund J. Kiefer, "Girls Will Be Boys," *Life* 86, no. 2229 (July 23, 1925): 6. "Comic: Girls Will Be Boys," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, April 24, 1928).

Chapter 1: “A Chance to Do Some Little Detective Stunt”: Gender Detection as Entertainment

¹ Only seven months later, Ellis Island immigration authorities detained a man named Frank Woodhull who was discovered to be female-bodied. The case received sensationalistic coverage in New York papers. While most accounts agreed that the authorities had discovered Woodhull’s bodily sex by accident, because his sunken cheeks suggested tuberculosis, an account two weeks later asserted that, “the keen eye of the Federal Government [had] pierced the disguise[.]” “Trouble That Clothes Make: Strange Adventures of Women Who Have Masqueraded as Men,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, October 25, 1908). Woodhull’s case, which Erica Rand analyzes in *Ellis Island Snowglobe* (2005), illustrates the public awareness of gender illegibility and the high stakes of gender detection in this historical moment. Erica Rand, *The Ellis Island Snow Globe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), chap. 2.

² Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-orientations in Film and Video* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

³ The only exception is *A Florida Enchantment* (Vitagraph, August 1914), which Straayer discusses as a variation on the temporary transvestite film. Indeed the film shares many of the generic characteristics that Straayer identifies, but she does not consider how the film would have been received within its historical context. I take up this question in Chapter 4.

⁴ On changes in the American economy, see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in The Gilded Age*, 25th ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). On the impact of political and economic change on definitions of manhood and womanhood, see Michael S. Kimmel, “Men’s Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century,” *Gender and Society* 1, no. 3 (1987): 261-283. Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996). Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Peter Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁵ Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, xvii.

⁶ D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 189.

⁷ On women’s political activism, see: Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct. Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981). D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*.

⁸ Kimmel, “Men’s Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century.” Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, chap. 3. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, chap. 1.

⁹ As quoted in Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 97.

¹⁰ Edward Hammond Clarke, *Sex in Education; or, A Fair Chance for Girls* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1875), 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹² Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 403, footnote 45.

¹³ Kimmel, "Men's Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century," 267.

¹⁴ Alfred Stille, "Address to the American Medical Association" (1871), as cited in *Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁵ Sloan, "Sexual Warfare in the Silent Cinema." and *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 99-124; Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, chap. 4. Gretchen Bataille, "Preliminary Investigations: Early Suffrage Films," *Women and Film, I* (1973): 42-44. Martin Norden, "A Good Travesty Upon the Suffrage Movement: Women's Suffrage Films as Genre," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 13, no. 4 (1986): 171-177. Virginia Wexman, "Suffering and Suffrage: Birth, the Female Body, and Women's Choices in DW Griffith's Way Down East," *The Velvet Light Trap* 29 (1992): 53-65.

¹⁶ Ben Singer, "Female Power in the Serial-Queen Melodrama: The Etiology of an Anomaly," *Camera Obscura* 8, no. 1 & 22 (1990): 90. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, chap. 8. Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, chap. 3. Jennifer M. Bean, "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body," *Camera Obscura* 16, no. 3 & 48 (2001): 9. Richard Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences, 1910-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), chap. 2-4.

¹⁷ On the "white slave" sensation: Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*. Kristen Whissel, *Picturing American Modernity: Traffic, Technology, and the Silent Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). On "vamps": Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). On Fairbanks and Chaney: Gaylyn Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade: Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ I suspect that there are many more films than the approximately 300 that I have identified. It is difficult to get a more complete picture, however, as an estimated 90% of silent films are no longer extant and many films were not reviewed. There were also hundreds of silent films featuring cross-dressed women produced in Europe, many of which may have also played in the United States. Although I have viewed many of these films, the study focuses on films produced in the U.S. and their reception there.

¹⁹ While several of these examples are European and from the beginning of the transitional era, it is my sense that these gags were common in American films and pre-transition-era films as well. At this point I lack additional U.S. examples because my research focused on female-to-male cross-dressing. It is likely that these French-produced films played in the U.S., though.

²⁰ For example, I cannot visually determine the "real" gender of the performer playing the "Old Maid" in American Mutoscope and Biograph's *How the Old Maid Got a Husband* (May 1900) or the performer playing a young boy in Pathé Frères' *Le langage des fleurs* (1904). Note that even when we believe our visual assessment of a performer's "real" gender to be correct, we

cannot assume that this matches an individual's felt gender identity or biological indicators of bodily sex, such as chromosomal status, genitalia, or hormone levels.

²¹ William Uricchio and Roberta Pearson, *Reframing Culture: The Case of the Vitagraph Quality Films* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*. Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*. Tom Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*.

²² Staiger, *Bad Women*. Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*, 107.

²³ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁴ Richard DeCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 53. Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*, 118.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁷ There are occasional examples of cross-gender casting after 1920 and before the 1980s such as George Marion in *A Gypsy Romance* (Samuel Bischoff Productions, December 1926), Elspeth Dudgeon in *The Old Dark House* (Universal Pictures, October 1932), but they are quite exceptional. On the rise of the narrator system and the production of an omniscient viewer: Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*. David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*.

²⁸ Kuhn, *The power of the image*, 53.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁰ It has also been challenged by gender scholars like Judith Butler who has famously argued that gender an a kind of “impersonation and approximation” that “produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself” (313) and Anne Fausto-Sterling, who investigates strategies through which the medical profession literally and symbolically “sexes” the body. Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination (1991),” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 313. Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

³¹ Marjorie Garber argues that when we see a cross-dresser (at least when we recognize one as such), we do not see “really” a man or “really” a woman, but a specifically a “transvestite”—a kind of “third term.” I appreciate Garber’s effort to keep the transvestite as such in view, but I don’t think that our seeing a transvestite means that we don’t also read that body as “really” this or that gender. Garber, *Vested Interests*, 7-13.

³² Kuhn, *The Power of the Image*, 62-63.

³³ Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*.

³⁴ Ibid., 56-57.

³⁵ Senelick, *The Changing Room*, chap. 8.

³⁶ Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, 74-75.

³⁷ Perhaps other experimental forms of gender performance (say, drag shows in Berlin?) had these more radical effects.

³⁸ Gillian M. Rodger writes that, “Of the English performers active [between 1870 and 1885], only Vesta Tilley sang in the soprano range. [...] Later in the century soprano male impersonators became more common.” Gillian M. Rodger, “Male Impersonation on the North American Variety and Vaudeville Stage, 1868-1930” (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 1998), 86, footnote 26.

³⁹ Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches*, chap. 5. Robert Clyde Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). Mark Swartz, *Oz Before the Rainbow: L. Frank Baum’s The Wonderful Wizard of Oz on Stage and Screen to 1939* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), chap. 3-4.

⁴⁰ *The Magic Cloak of Oz* (Oz Film Manufacturing, September 1914), *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (Oz Film Manufacturing, September 1914), and *His Majesty the Scarecrow of Oz* (Oz Film Manufacturing, December 1914).

⁴¹ Sharon Ullman, *Sex Seen: The Emergence of Modern Sexuality in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), chap. 3. Senelick, *The Changing Room*, 307-312.

⁴² I have seen *How Molly Malone Made Good* (Photo Drama Co., November 1915), in which Eltinge makes a brief cameo while out of costume, *An Adventuress* (Fred J. Balshofer, April 1920), held at the George Eastman House, and *Madame Behave* (Christie Film Co., December 1925), held at UCLA and the Library of Congress. *Maid to Order* (Jesse Weil Productions, September 1931) is held at the BFI. Eltinge seems to have appeared in nine other films, plus two war relief shorts.

⁴³ On Hindle and other “realistic” male impersonators, see: Rodger, “Male Impersonation on the North American Variety and Vaudeville Stage, 1868-1930.”

⁴⁴ Matthew Solomon, “‘Twenty-Five Heads under One Hat’: Quick-Change in the 1890s,” in *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ There are important differences between the early gimmick and the later ones. Many of the later films used genre (the murder mystery) to intensify the threat of these figures. In the earlier films, a man passing as a convincing woman was assumed to be a professional female impersonator, whereas in more recent decades they are presumed to be transsexual or transgendered.

⁴⁶ Jacqueline Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 52.

⁴⁷ Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903-1967* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25.

⁴⁸ On Carewe: Rosalind Shaffer, “Princely Toys Amuse Hollywood Grownups---,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 18, 1927. “Miss del Rio is Sole Star of ‘Ramona’,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1928. Carewe’s Chickasaw identity was not mentioned frequently in publicity material until he directed an adaptation of *Ramona* in 1927. On Noble Johnson: Allyson Field, “‘You Wouldn’t Want Him as Your Next Door Neighbor’: Ethnic Coding in American Cinema and the Cross-racial Casting of Noble Johnson” (presented at the Archiving the Future, Mobilizing the Past, Los Angeles, CA: Society for Cinema and Media Studies, 2010).

⁴⁹ From IMDb.com: *The White Slave; or, The Octoroon* (Vitagraph, May 1913) and *The Octoroon* (Kalem, December 1913). From AFI: *The Octoroon: The Story of the Turpentine Forest* (Kalem, January 1909). An Australian version had also apparently appeared the year before: *The Octoroon* (Australian Film Syndicate, February 1912). None of these films are listed in the FIAF database.

⁵⁰ Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵³ Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*. Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). David Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker: D.W. Griffith and the American Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009). Charles Musser, “Ethnicity, Role-playing, and American Film Comedy: From Chinese Laundry Scene to Whoopee (1894-1930),” in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed. Lester D. Friedman (University of Illinois Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 77.

⁵⁵ Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*. Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, chap. 1 and 2. Arne Lunde, *Nordic Exposures: Scandinavian Identities in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2010), chap. 5. Others include: Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000). Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). On “yellowface” and “redface,” see note 68.

⁵⁶ Review of *Mixed Colors* (Pathé, January 1913) in *Moving Picture World* (February 7, 1913), as quoted in Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, 90.

⁵⁷ Beyond the practice of casting white actors in non-white roles that I consider here, many commentators name any exaggerated or caricatured performance of race and identity an example of “blackface” or “yellowface,” regardless of the race of the performer. Spike Lee makes this argument in *Bamboozled* (New Line, October 2000). On “yellow yellowface” performances, see note 58.

⁵⁸ Yiman Wang provides a list of “yellowface” performances by white actors in American moving pictures: “Some of the most notable yellowface actors include Norma Talmadge as San San in *The Forbidden City* (dir. Sidney Franklin, US, 1918), Richard Barthelmess as Yellow Man in *Broken Blossoms* (dir. D. W. Griffith, US, 1919), Lon Chaney as Mr. Wu in *Mr. Wu* (dir.

William Nigh, US, 1927), Boris Karloff and Myrna Loy as Fu Manchu and his daughter in *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, Paul Muni and Louise Rainer as the Chinese peasant couple in *The Good Earth*, and Warner Oland in the Charlie Chan series (US, 1935 – 41).” Yiman Wang, “The Art of Screen Passing: Anna May Wong’s Yellow Yellowface Performance in the Art Deco Era,” *Camera Obscura* 20, no. 3 & 60 (2005): 187, footnote 39. Gina Marchetti’s *Romance and the “Yellow Peril,”* while foundational, does not address the cross-racial performance in films she analyzes such as *Broken Blossoms*, *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*, and *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*. On “white yellowface” performance, see: Karla Rae Fuller, *Hollywood Goes Oriental: CaucAsian Performance in American Film* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010). Lunde, *Nordic Exposures: Scandinavian Identities in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, chap. 5. Mark Winokur, *American Laughter: Immigrants, Ethnicity and 1930s Hollywood Film Comedy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), chap. 4. Christine Claire Chun, “Yellowface: Alterracial Cross-Dressing and the Constructed Character of Authenticity” (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, 2004). On “yellow yellowface,” see: Wang, “The Art of Screen Passing.” Hye Seung Chung, *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross-Ethnic Performance* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006). Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s-1920s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

There has been a significant amount of scholarship on cinematic representations of Native Americans and on the various ways that white people have produced and appropriated conceptions of the “Native American,” but very little analysis of the cross-ethnic performance of “Native American-ness” that was so pervasive in film. The closest I have found is Joanna Herne’s insightful analysis of racial legibility in “The Cross-Heart People: Race and Inheritance in the Silent Western” (2003). Hearn argues that, “In the visual world of the silent Western, Indian identity becomes an uncertain negotiation between appearance and blood quantum, between the self-referential play-acting of film’s costuming and the ‘real’ threat posed by racial mixture” (185). She does not specifically address non-Native performances of Native Americans, though. “The Cross-Heart People’: Race and Inheritance in the Silent Western,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 30 (Winter 2003): 181-196. In *Making the White Man’s Indian* (2005), Angela Aleiss notes that, “many non-Indian actors can easily pass themselves off as Native Americans both in front of and behind the camera [and,] conversely, Indians can pass easily in roles that demand conventional portrayals without regard to race” but she does not interrogate this state of affairs any further. Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man’s Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), xvii. On the representation of Native Americans in American silent film, see: Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre’s First Half-Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Andrew Brodie Smith, *Shooting Cowboys and Indians: Silent Western Films, American Culture, and the Birth of Hollywood* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003). On the white cultural production of the “Native American” more generally, see: Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian, from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). S. Elizabeth Bird, *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996). Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural*

Imagination (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). Philip Joseph Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

⁵⁹ It seems plausible that the declining acceptance of women in boy roles occurred in tandem with the declining acceptance of blackface as a “naturalistic” practice, but I’m not sure if this was actually the case. Also, why and how did “yellowface” and “redface” persist when other practices deemed “unrealistic” (e.g. blackface and cross-gender casting) did not?

⁶⁰ Tom Gunning, “Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema,” in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, 1995, 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶³ In fact the techniques of anthropometry were initially developed by anthropologists to categorize and then detect “race.” Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, chap. 1.

⁶⁴ Clare Sears writes that while many cities U.S. criminalized cross-dressing “as part of broader prohibitions against public indecency [...] Other cities, such as Los Angeles and New Orleans, passed laws prohibiting ‘indecent dress’ or wearing ‘disguises’ that did not mention gender or sex, but encompassed cross-dressing when they were enforced. [...] [T]wo states—California and New York—did pass laws that criminalized public ‘disguise’ or ‘masquerade’ for the purpose of avoiding identification. As with local disguise laws, the state statues were not specifically aimed at cross-dressing practices, but were nonetheless used to arrest people for wearing gender-inappropriate clothes.” Sears, “A dress not belonging to his or her sex,” 4.

⁶⁵ The films do not seem to be extant, but there is a two-page publicity bulletin with a series of stills and an elaborate plot description in the Selig papers at the Herrick Library. *The Female Highwayman*, Selig Polyscope Publicity Bulletin, Supplement No. 47, November 1906. William Selig Papers, 25.f-552 Releases 1903-1907, Margaret Herrick Special Collections. A number of films also featured male criminals disguised as women (usually old women), such as *The Raiders of '62* (Kalem, June 1911).

⁶⁶ This gender detecting gaze was also taken up by sexologists like Magnus Hirschfeld, who published photographic series of transvestites shown in female garb, male garb, and nude. However, audiences of popular entertainments could not look performers’ nude body, they had to try to discern this (allegedly) immutable body *through* the disguise.

⁶⁷ Unidentified “scrapbook on theater and vaudeville,” which covers approximately 1910-1917, San Francisco Museum of Performance and Design. The scrapbook seems to have been compiled from a clippings service. Many of the clippings lack a title, date, location, or publication name. I will refer to it as Lucile Tilton Scrapbook in citations.

⁶⁸ “Goat Walks Clothes Line At the Strand,” Lucile Tilton Scrapbook.

⁶⁹ Tilton is the only example I have come across of a gender impersonator who did not reveal her or his sex to audiences at the conclusion of the act or in publicity, but it seems somewhat unlikely that she or he was the only one. On Fregoli, see: Solomon, ““Twenty-Five Heads under One Hat’: Quick-Change in the 1890s.”

⁷⁰ I will list the information I have for each of these articles: “Question of Sex Puzzles Patrons, September 29, 1914; “Sex Problem to Solve at Lumberg”; “Fine Play Tonight At the Central / One Act Has Them All Guessing and Nobody Can Solve It—See if You Can.” Lucile Tilton Scrapbook.

⁷¹ “At the Strand,” Lucile Tilton Scrapbook.

⁷² Switching pronouns: “Mystery at the Strand Theatre”; Using the pronoun “it”: “Gayety—Burlesque, Detroit Times (September 3, 1914); Repeating “he or she”: “Amusements – Garrick Theatre”; Avoiding pronouns: “Mt. Park Casino,” *Transcript Holyoke* (July 12, 1916). Lucile Tilton Scrapbook.

⁷³ Untitled, *Harford Courant* (May 9, 1916). Lucile Tilton Scrapbook

⁷⁴ Tilton’s act thus aligns with the French detective stories Tom Gunning analyzed more recently, which “participate[] in a modern visual culture aware of the attractions of hiding as well as seeking, of the failure of insight as well as its successes.” Tom Gunning, “Lynx-Eyed Detectives and Shadow Bandits: Visuality and Eclipse in French Detective Stories and Films before WWI,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 108 (January 1, 2005): 74-88.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁶ “At the Strand.” Lucile Tilton Scrapbook. The claim that “even stagehands” did not know Tilton’s gender was repeated in several reviews: Untitled, *Harford Courant* (May 9, 1916); “Theater Goers Enthusiastic Over the Strand Show,” Halifax (May 23, 1916); “Lucille Tilton at the Hippodrome,” Pennsylvania (February 17, 1915). Lucile Tilton Scrapbook.

⁷⁷ The ad reads: “Nicholas High Class Vaudeville 5 BIG ACTS 5 / Lucille Tilton, the Julian Eltinge of the Weaker Sex, / America’s Most Realistic Impersonator of the Male Type.” Lucille Tilton scrapbook.

⁷⁸ Erica Rand persuasively describes the stakes and pitfalls of retroactively assigning a gender to a historical subject in *The Ellis Island Snow Globe*, chap. 2. The case of the Chevalier d’Eon also offers a warning. D’Eon, an eighteenth century French spy, lived the first half of his/her life as a man and the second half as a woman. Different medical examinations over the course of his/her life returned different results. Gary Kates, *Monsieur D’Eon is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

⁷⁹ “A Chance to Do Some Little Detective Stunt.” Lucile Tilton Scrapbook.

⁸⁰ “Lucille Will Wear ‘Em Right on Main Street.” Lucile Tilton Scrapbook.

⁸¹ Jonathan Ned Katz and Clare Sears list several examples. A quick search on digitized historical newspaper databases reveal many more. Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Crowell, 1976). Sears, “A dress not belonging to his or her sex,” 5. Alison Oram has undertaken a rigorous study of these reports in the British popular newspapers *News of the World* and *The People* from 1900 to 1960. The American articles I have read seem very similar to the British ones, although a more thorough examination of the phenomenon in the U.S. context would be helpful. Alison Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!: Women’s Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁸² “Woman Who Lived For Thirty Years as a Man,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 18, 1901. “Amazing Double Life of Girl Who Lived for Years as a Man,” *The Day Book* (Chicago, IL, May 13, 1914), Noon edition.

⁸³ Sears, “A dress not belonging to his or her sex.” Albert Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).

⁸⁴ Kerwenieo/Anderson’s intimate relations to women, including one posing as his/her “wife” was noted but not treated as pathological, a point I will investigate further in Chapter 4. The racial dynamic of Kerwenieo/Anderson’s performance is also deserves additional attention, but unfortunately falls outside the scope of this study. “Amazing Double Life of Girl Who Lived for Years as a Man.” Idah McGlone Gibson, “Cora Anderson was a Good Man to Both Her Wives--How She Fooled Second One,” *The Day Book* (Chicago, IL, May 14, 1914), Noon edition. Cora Anderson, “Man-Woman Says Man Out in the World is a Hunter of Women,” *The Day Book* (Chicago, IL, May 15, 1914). Cora Anderson, “Will a Man Kiss and Not Tell?--No, Says Cora Anderson, the Man-Woman,” *The Day Book* (Chicago, IL, May 16, 1914).

⁸⁵ While a range of studios, including Biograph, Edison, Lubin, and Selig made temporary transvestite comedies in the early 1910s, only Biograph’s and Edison’s have been comparatively well preserved. Publicity bulletins, advertisements, and reviews can tell us relatively little about how these films visually administered gender, so my examples skew toward Biograph and Edison. Examples include: *He Joined the Frat* (Lubin, January 1910) from Anthony Slide, *Great Pretenders: A History of Female and Male Impersonation in the Performing Arts* (Lombard, IL: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1986), 98 and *The Argonauts* (Selig, January 1911) from the Selig Collection at the Margaret Herrick Library.

⁸⁶ Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998). Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*.

⁸⁷ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 46. André Gaudreault, “1904–1905: Movies and Chasing the Missing Link(s),” in *American Cinema, 1890-1909: Themes and Variations*, ed. André Gaudreault (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009). According to the FIAF database, Lubin’s *Meet Me at the Fountain* was also advertised under the titles *A New Version of “Personal”* and *How a French Nobleman Got a Wife through the New York Journal “Personals”* (versus the *New York Herald* in the Porter film).

⁸⁸ These include: *The Old Maid Having Her Picture Taken* (Edison, March 1901), *The Old Maid in the Horsecar* (Edison, March 1901), *Goo Goo Eyes* (Edison, January 1903), *Old Maid’s First Visit to a Theatre* (Lubin, January 1903), *The Old Maid’s Lament* (Lubin, January 1903), and *The Lost Child* (AMB, 1904). There is no consistency to the way Sarony is spelled: it appeared in publicity as Saroni, Sarony, and Saroney.

⁸⁹ Although this shot would today be called a medium shot, it functions as a “close-up” even though more of the body is in view.

⁹⁰ “The Boy Detective,” *Moving Picture World*, March 14, 1908.

⁹¹ Charlie Keil, *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907-1913* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 176-178.

⁹² Matthew Solomon, "1908: Movies and Other Media," in *American Cinema, 1890-1909: Themes and Variations*, ed. André Gaudreault (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

⁹³ Because legibility is so important to my analysis, a historiographic note about print quality is in order. The celluloid versions of *The Boy Detective* available today are fairly muddy and indistinct, as they have been generated by re-photographing the "paper print" AMB submitted to the Library of Congress in 1908 to secure their copyright. Paper prints have a lower image quality than the original exhibition prints would have had, although many prints at the time were scratched and damaged by repeated exhibition. I have seen 16mm prints of this film at the Library of Congress and at MOMA, as well as UCLA's video transfer, and, while not perfect, they are better quality than the twenty-year-old VHS tape I am using for frame enlargements here. It is possible, then, that when the film was viewed in its original condition, audiences could have suspected that Swipsey was played by a woman before the final shot. However, I nonetheless contend that the film works to display this performer as male throughout the film, until changing tactics in the final scene reveal the boy to be female.

⁹⁴ The bulletin does not name the performers, although film historian Kemp Niver has identified Swifty as Robert Herron, but not the woman who played Swipsey. Kemp Niver, *Biograph Bulletins, 1896-1908* (Los Angeles, CA: Locare Research Group, 1971), 341. AMB did not make any more films in this "series," although Biograph later made a series starring Edna "Billy" Foster in plucky boy roles.

⁹⁵ Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 89-92.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 92-94.

⁹⁷ Dyer shows how women were consistently lit to look lighter-skinned than men in "classical" Hollywood cinema, but these conventions were not quite in place during the transitional era. Dyer's first examples are from 1921 and 1922: Alla Nazimova and Rudolph Valentino in *Camille* (Nazimova Productions, September 1921) and Erich von Stroheim and Maude George in *Foolish Wives* (Universal, January 1922). *Ibid.*, 132-135.

⁹⁸ Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, 58-59.

⁹⁹ Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 75.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 83-84.

¹⁰³ Hugo Münsterberg, *Hugo Münsterberg on Film: The Photoplay--A Psychological Study, and Other Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 88.

¹⁰⁴ Of course there was trial and error and also sometimes a conscious decision to go for a "theatrical" look, as I will explore in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁵ The dark lips could also be the effect of orthochromatic film stock. If this is the case, the lips could have been made lighter with makeup, if desired.

¹⁰⁶ Useful compendiums of gender differences can be found on “Sex differences in humans,” *Wikipedia*, n.d., http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_differences_in_humans. and “Facial feminization surgery,” *Wikipedia*, n.d., http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facial_feminization_surgery.

¹⁰⁷ Wendy Chapkis explores the labor of female-bodied people to become recognizably female in *Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance* (1986). Chapkis writes: “Despite the fact that each woman knows her own belabored transformation from female to feminine is artificial, she harbors the secret conviction that it should be effortless. A ‘real woman’ would be naturally feminine while she is only in disguise.” Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1986), 5.

¹⁰⁸ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Susan Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986). Rabinovitz, *For the love of pleasure*. Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

¹¹⁰ This continued into the 1920s and later with *Chasing the Chaser* (Hal Roach, July 1925) and the two versions of *The Unholy Three* (MGM, August 1925) and (MGM, July 1930). Eventually it transmuted into the “thriller” genre that Kuhn discusses.

¹¹¹ Report of Correspondence to the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, circa May 12, 1919. From National Board of Review of Motion Pictures Collection, Box 156, Reviews and Reports of Correspondents. New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division.

¹¹² Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*, 245-249.

¹¹³ Gunning, “Lynx-Eyed Detectives and Shadow Bandits.”

¹¹⁴ Bowser mentions a number of examples between 1912 and 1914 in *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*, 245-249.

¹¹⁵ This is distinct from Pickford’s dual role in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. That film exploited forced perspective to make the mother (played by Pickford) nearly twice as tall as the young Fauntleroy (as played by Pickford). Of course Pickford’s instant recognizability meant that viewers were fully capable of recognizing her regardless of her size, costume, or performed gender.

Chapter 2. Moving Picture Uplift, Cross-Gender Casting, and the Victorian Ideal of Boyhood

¹ “Girls Will Be Boys!”.

² This is a view expressed to me in conversation with other silent film scholars. Film reviews of girls and women disguised as men also complain about the lack of “realism” in the male performance. However, most studies of acting in theater versus silent cinema do not acknowledge the practice of cross-gender casting at all. This includes otherwise helpful works such as: Roberta Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*. Ben Brewster, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). David Mayer, “Acting in Silent Film: Which Legacy of the Theater?,” in *Screen Acting*, ed. Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer (London and New York: Routledge, 1999). Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*. There are no entries in the important *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* concerning cross-dressing, transvestism, *travesti*, or *hosenrolle*, although men in female roles are occasionally noted in other entries (e.g. “facial expression films”), as are women in tight-fitting sailor suits (e.g. “costume” and “féerie”). Richard Abel, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005).

More substantial scholarship has been devoted to cross-gender casting in theater alone, including: Senelick, *The Changing Room*. Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches*. Ferris, *Crossing the Stage*. Blackmer and Smith, *En Travesti*. Berlanstein, “Breeches and Breaches.” Lynn Garafola, “The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet,” *Dance Research Journal* 17/18 (October 1, 1985): 35-40. Anthony Slide is one of the few scholars to consider cross-gender casting in both theater and cinema, but his enthusiastic and very helpful book on the subject is a survey rather than an analysis: Slide, *Great Pretenders*. Marjorie Garber considers cross-dressing in film and theater, but does not contrast the forms. Garber, *Vested Interests*.

³ In a section of his 1946 history of French theater titled “The End of *Travesti*” (“La fin du travesti”), René Peter writes: “Do not doubt it, the poor *travesti*, who has barely been surviving since the appearance of writers and directors enamored with realism, has been killed for good by cinema. Before the screen, the crowd has contracted optical habits that have degenerated into needs. [...] Whether one approves or deplors these new tendencies, the moving picture has nevertheless imposed a sense of aesthetics, which from now on is restricted to certain narrow limits that have become perilous to transgress, even in theater.” (Original: “N’en doutez pas, le pauvre travesti, qui déjà ne battait plus que d’une aile depuis l’apparition d’écrivains et de directeurs épris de réalisme, a été définitivement mis a mort par le cinéma. La foule a contracté devant l’écran des habitudes optiques qui ont dégénéré en besoins. [...] Que l’on approuve ou que l’on déplore ces tendances nouvelles, il n’en demeure pas moins que la photographie mouvante a imposé une esthétique désormais enclose dans certaines limites étroites qu’il est devenu périlleux de transgresser, même au théâtre.”) René Peter, *Le théâtre et la vie sous la troisième république: deuxième époque* (Paris: Marchot, 1947), 143-44. Thank you to Althea Wasow for help with this translation. Berlanstein’s “Breeches and Breaches” (350) drew my attention to Peter’s account.

⁴ Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*. Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*. Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*. Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*. Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*.

⁵ Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches*, chap. 1, 2 and 4.

⁶ Alan Dale, "Why an Actress Cannot Wear Trousers Like a Man," *New York Journal* (New York, NY, February 13, 1898).

⁷ "Actors Not Needed?," *American Journal Examiner*, 1904.

⁸ "Fascination of Masculine Garb for Ambitious Actresses," *The Morning Telegraph*, July 5, 1903.

⁹ Although Bernhardt, when she was later called upon to justify her desire to play male roles, argued that, "a woman can only interpret a male part when it represents a mind in a feeble body," she performs Hamlet in this clip with an energetic vitality. I think this argument is a retrospective justification that her recorded performance contradicts. Sarah Bernhardt, *The Art of the Theatre*, trans. H. J. Stenning (New York: Dial Press, 1925), 141-142. As quoted in Berlanstein, "Breeches and Breaches," 361.

¹⁰ Chris Straayer, "Redressing the 'Natural': The Temporary Transvestite Film," in *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-orientations in Film and Video* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Although Katie Sutton argues that Nielsen's performance as Hamlet in this film was merely a "safe" trouser role because it "functioned to confine female-to-male cross-dressing and acting to strict times and places," I contend that the film, Nielsen's performance, and her star persona (she had done a number of "temporary transvestite" roles by this point and had been parodied as having the body of a man) are much more rich and complex than Sutton allows for. However, Asta Nielsen and Weimar cinema unfortunately fall outside the scope of the present study. Katie Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 140.

¹¹ "The Woman Who Won Fame in Trousers and who will Never Wear Them Again, Believes Every Woman Should Wear Them," *The World(?)*, August 30, 1903.

¹² Garafola, "The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet," 37.

¹³ "Stage Arts Adamless Eden. Are Men Actors Really Needed?," *New York Herald* (New York, NY, July 10, 1904).

¹⁴ Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches*, chap. 5.

¹⁵ On Menken, see: Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), chap. 3. On Lydia Thompson and burlesque in America, see: Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*.

¹⁶ Twenty-nine-year-old Violet MacMillan plays Ojo the Munchkin Boy in *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (Oz Film Manufacturing, September 1914) and Timothy "Bud" Noland in *The Magic Cloak of Oz* (Oz Film Manufacturing, September 1914). Thirteen-year-old Mildred Harris plays Button Bright in *His Majesty the Scarecrow of Oz* (Oz Film Manufacturing, December 1914), while MacMillan plays Dorothy. Violet Radcliffe's male parts include Prince Rudolpho in *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Fox, July 1917), Al-Talib in *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* (Fox, October 1917), Long John Silver in *Treasure Island* (Fox, January 1918), and the Chief Executioner in *Fan Fan* (Fox, November 1918). Today the most well-known examples of this short-lived "baby burlesque" genre are Shirley Temple's sound shorts of the early 1930s. In *Polly Tix in Washington* (Jack Hayes Productions, June 1933), for example, Temple plays a high-priced prostitute who is hired to corrupt a baby senator.

¹⁷ Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Susan Potter delivered a talk at SCMS that considered the lesbian possibilities of the 1898 dance film *Gavotte* (Pathé Frères), in which an actress playing a nobleman pays court to a woman, but, in my opinion, this practice was so conventional that this reading would have been an unusual one at that time. Susan Potter, "Traces, Specks, and Glimmers: Early Cinema's 'Lesbian' Archive" (presented at the Archiving the Future, Mobilizing the Past, Los Angeles, CA: Society for Cinema and Media Studies, 2010).

¹⁹ I have not studied the European reception of women in "tights-and-tunic" roles common in early European cinema, but I imagine that these roles were less controversial there because the stage practices were more long-standing and because European audiences may have been somewhat less sensitive to the sexualized display of the female body.

²⁰ Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches*, 51.

²¹ "Stage Arts Adamless Eden. Are Men Actors Really Needed?"

²² On the rage for child actors and the "kid" drama, see: "Stage Tones," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, August 25, 1890). "The Prince and the Pauper," *Life*, January 30, 1890. "Elsie Leslie in 'The Prince and the Pauper' at the National," *Washington Post* (Washington, DC, January 20, 1891). Also, in the British context, see: Jim Davis, "Freaks, Prodigies, and Marvellous Mimicry: Child Actors of Shakespeare on the Nineteenth-century Stage," *Shakespeare 2*, no. 2 (December 2006): 179-193.

²³ "Maude Adam's Success in Boys' Parts May Have Inspired Others to Follow," wrote a critic at the New York *Sun* in 1909. "Women Who'd Play the Man," *The Sun* (New York, NY, March 14, 1909). In 1905, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* featured a photo spread with a large photograph of Maude Adams as Peter Pan on top and four actresses in a male costume down below: Madge Lessing in a tuxedo, Cheridah Simpson in *Babes in the Woods*, Maude Lillian Berri in *Humpty Dumpty*, and Sylvia Clark in *Happiland*. "Girls Who Are Boys," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, December 24, 1905).

²⁴ Grace R. Clarke, "Girl Boys of the Stage; Actresses Love to Play Them," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, March 14, 1909).

²⁵ "Fascination of Masculine Garb for Ambitious Actresses."

²⁶ Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches*, 129.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany*, 183.

²⁹ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*. Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Kimmel, *Manhood in America*. E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993). David Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

³⁰ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, chap. 1, 3 and 5.

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- ³¹ Anna Wilson expands upon this point in her perceptive essay, “Little Lord Fauntleroy: The Darling of Mothers and the Abomination of a Generation,” *American Literary History* 8, no. 2 (1996): 232.
- ³² Burnett first published the story as a serial in *St. Nicholas Magazine* (November 1885-October 1896) and then as a novel by Scribner’s (1886).
- ³³ Wilson, “Little Lord Fauntleroy,” 235. Angelica Shirley Carpenter and Jean Shirley, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: Beyond the Secret Garden* (Twenty-First Century Books, 1990), 67.
- ³⁴ The Playgoer, “Little Lord Fauntleroy at the Casino,” *Unknown*, 1903.
- ³⁵ John Nicholas Beffel, “The Fauntleroy Plague,” *The Bookman; a Review of Books and Life*, April 1927.
- ³⁶ “‘Kid’ drama” from “The Prince and the Pauper.”
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ “Amusements,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, January 26, 1890).
- ³⁹ “Elsie Leslie in ‘The Prince and the Pauper’ at the National.”
- ⁴⁰ The Playgoer, “Little Lord Fauntleroy at the Casino.”
- ⁴¹ Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*. Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*.
- ⁴² Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*. Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*. Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*.
- ⁴³ Shelly Stamp problematizes the assumption that women would necessarily gentrify the space of exhibition. She describes the ways theater management disciplined women who did go to the movies. Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, chap. 1. On the earlier gentrification of theater and vaudeville, see: Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- ⁴⁴ Additionally, female boys enacted by women in their twenties allowed some spectators to engage “safely” in a pederastic erotic fantasy, one devoid of the troubling sexual assertiveness associated with the “modern girl,” as Gaylyn Studlar has argued of Mary Pickford. Gaylyn Studlar, “Oh, ‘Doll Divine’: Mary Pickford, Masquerade, and the Pedophilic Gaze,” in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002). See also: James Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Vicinus, Martha. “The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 1 (July 1994): 90-114.
- ⁴⁵ On the discourse of “acting” in film, see: Richard DeCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), chap. 1.
- ⁴⁶ *The Edison Kinetogram*, August 14, 1909, p. 14, and *Moving Picture World*, August 28, 1909, p. 277, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁴⁷ “The Prince and the Pauper,” *Moving Picture World*, August 14, 1909.
- ⁴⁸ “The Prince and the Pauper,” *New York Dramatic Mirror* (New York, NY, August 14, 1909).

⁴⁹ “Hansel and Gretel,” *Moving Picture World*, October 9, 1909.

⁵⁰ Once again the *New York Dramatic Mirror* was less impressed, writing: “There is some interest in this picture, but it is too long drawn out and weak in pantomime and scenic backgrounds. One noticeable defect seems to be that the action frequently occurs at too great a distance from the camera.” “Hansel and Gretel,” *New York Dramatic Mirror* (New York, NY, October 23, 1909).

⁵¹ “Nat C. Goodwin as Fagin,” *Moving Picture World*, June 1, 1912.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*.

⁵⁴ It is possible that when the film was exhibited live actors stood behind the screen and spoke, but I have found no evidence of this. Only twice does this film do something uniquely “cinematic”: it uses a medium close-up to reveal Fagin’s haunted face when he decides to betray Sykes and it shoots the final chase scene outdoors in a “real” location. Two police officers pursue Sykes into a ramshackle wooden house. Sykes slips on the roof and accidentally hangs himself.

⁵⁵ Eline plays the part of a “little black boy” in *The Judge’s Story* (Thanhouser, August 1911) and *Washington in Danger* (Thanhouser, February 1912). Unfortunately neither film appears to be extant. A Thanhouser historian writes that Eline’s performance in *The Judge’s Story* engendered “critical acclaim.” “Marie Eline (The Thanhouser Kid),” *Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc.*, n.d., <http://www.thanouser.org/people/elinem.htm>.

⁵⁶ Based on viewing *The Tiniest of Stars* (Thanhouser, January 1913) and *The Evidence of the Film* (Thanhouser, January 1913).

⁵⁷ “Marie Eline (The Thanhouser Kid).” *Photoplay* (November 1912), as quoted in “Marie Eline (The Thanhouser Kid).”

⁵⁸ *The Moving Picture World* (June 4, 1910)

⁵⁹ *Two Roses* is held at the Deutsches Kinemathek.

⁶⁰ Based on reading cast lists, these films include: *The Runaway* (Thanhouser, June 1913), *Frou Frou* (Thanhouser, January 1914), *Which Shall It Be?* (Thanhouser, June 1915), *Little Bobby* (Thanhouser, March 1915), and *Fires of Youth* (Thanhouser, June 1917).

⁶¹ *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, as cited by Ben Brewster, *The Baby and the Stork, The Griffith Project*, p. 168.

⁶² “Bobby the Coward,” *Moving Picture World* (July 29, 1911), p. 209, as quoted in Paolo Cherchi Usai, ed., *The Griffith Project* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 88.

⁶³ These include: Gladys Huelette as Puck in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Vitagraph, December 1909), Flora Foster as David in *The Early Life of David Copperfield* (Thanhouser, October 1911), Maud Potter as Jack in *Jack and Jingle* (Selig, May 1912), Mildred Harris as Button Bright in *His Majesty the Scarecrow of Oz* (Oz Film Manufacturing Co., December 1914). Violet Radcliffe seems to have appeared in thirteen male roles between 1915 and 1918

⁶⁴ “Prince, Born Here, Back in Hartford,” *Unknown* (Hartford, Connecticut, December 1915). George Blaisdell, “The Prince and the Pauper,” *Moving Picture World*, December 4, 1915.

⁶⁵ “Motion Pictures-Amusements,” *The Day*, December 11, 1915. Other positive reviews of Clark’s performance include: Kitty Kelly, “Marguerite Clark in Double Role,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, October 29, 1915). “Mark Twain Story Filmed,” *Philadelphia Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA, November 30, 1915). “The Prince and the Pauper,” *Variety*, December 3, 1915.

⁶⁶ “Mark Twain Story Filmed.”

⁶⁷ G. F. W., “The Prince and the Pauper,” *New York Evening Mail* (New York, NY, December 4, 1915).

⁶⁸ “Washington--The Prince and the Pauper,” *Detroit News* (Detroit, MI, December 6, 1915).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kelly, “Marguerite Clark in Double Role.”

⁷¹ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, chap. 8. For more on serial queens, see: Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, chap. 3. Jennifer M. Bean, “Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body,” in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 404-443.

⁷² “Mark Twain Story a Movie Thriller,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, October 29, 1915).

⁷³ G. F. W., “The Prince and the Pauper.”

⁷⁴ “Oliver Twist,” *Motion Picture News*, December 23, 1916.

⁷⁵ Grace Kingsley, “‘Oliver Twist’ Vivid,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, December 27, 1916).

⁷⁶ “Oliver Twist,” *Evening Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, WI, 1916).

⁷⁷ “Oliver Twist,” *Moving Picture World*, December 23, 1916.

⁷⁸ “Another Star in Trousers; It’s Marie Doro This Time,” *Cleveland Leader* (Cleveland, OH, December 16, 1916).

⁷⁹ There are a handful of exceptional cases of women cast in male roles in later films, but often for comedic effect (e.g. Mathilde Comont as the Persian Prince in *The Thief of Bagdad* [Douglas Fairbanks Pictures, March 1924] and Elspeth Dudgeon as Sir Roderick Femm in *The Old Dark House* [Universal, October 1932]).

⁸⁰ Edward Weitzel, “‘Treasure Island’ Is Finely Produced By Maurice Tourneur for Paramount,” *Moving Picture World*, April 24, 1920. *Variety*, although generally praising Mason, noted that at times “she is more a girl than the boy she is supposed to be.” “Treasure Island,” *Variety*, April 16, 1920. One Los Angeles Times editorialist sharply critiqued Mason, but his criticism seems directed toward the unconvincingness of Hollywood films more generally. “Treasure Island,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, May 16, 1920).

⁸¹ On *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, see: “The Screen,” *New York Times*, September 16, 1921. On Jackie Coogan for the role of Peter Pan, see: Edwin Schallert, “Right from the Front,” *Los*

Angeles Times (Los Angeles, CA, March 30, 1924). Robert E. Sherwood, “The Silent Drama,” *Life* 83, no. 2173 (June 26, 1924): 26. *The Los Angeles Times* article that opens this chapter, “Girls Will Be Boys!” also implies that Coogan would have made a better Peter than Bronson.

⁸² “Betty Bronson, 17, Gets Peter Pan Role,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, August 16, 1924).

⁸³ Although Eline appeared in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for the World Producing Company in 1914 and worked for National in 1919, she mostly toured in vaudeville, often under the name “The Original Thanhouser Kid.” Foster essentially disappears from the record after leaving Biograph in 1915. There is an “Edna Foster” credited in the German film *Ehe man Ehemann wird* (Nordkap-Film, 1920) but I have not been able to determine whether this is the same person. According to IMDb, Foster married Vitagraph producer Rollin S. Sturgeon, but I have not been able to confirm this.

⁸⁴ Examples include: “Baby” Ivy Ward in *The Silent Woman* (Metro Pictures, September 1918), *A House Divided* (J. Stewart Blackton Productions, April 1919), and *As a Man Thinks* (Artco, April 1919); Marian Stewart in *La Belle Russe* (Fox, September 1919), Muriel Frances Dana in *Hail the Woman* (Thomas H. Ince Productions, November 1921), and Yvonne Day in *Don Juan* (Warner Brothers, February 1927). Interestingly, in *As a Man Thinks*, Ward was credited as “Bobby” Ward.

⁸⁵ There were still “high class” productions in the 1920s, of course, but they tried to appeal to a more diverse audience.

⁸⁶ Berlanstein, “Breeches and Breaches.” He also argues that in France, boys’ sexual development was increasingly defined as a problem, under the influence of Freud but also studies of all-male educational institutions. These concerns did not seem as pressing in the U.S. as they were in France.

⁸⁷ Studlar, *This Mad Masquerade*, chap. 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸⁹ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹⁰ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd, 2000), 4-5.

⁹¹ Pickford married Fairbanks on March 28, 1920, twenty-six days after divorcing her previous husband, Owen Moore.

⁹² “Little Lord Fauntleroy,” *Exceptional Photoplays*, October 1921.

⁹³ Grace Kingsley, “Flashes / Portrays Dual Role,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1921.

⁹⁴ “Little Lord Fauntleroy,” *Variety*, September 23, 1921.

⁹⁵ I suspect that Fairbanks’ light-footed, playful style of performing the “eternal boy” owes much the female Peter Pans of the theater, particularly Maude Adams, who originated the role in the US and toured the country with it. The sets and acting style of *Robin Hood* seem particularly indebted to *Peter Pan*.

⁹⁶ “The Prince and the Pauper.”

⁹⁷ Blaisdell, “The Prince and the Pauper.”

⁹⁸ Although the *Moving Picture World* critic describes this scene coming at the end of the film, the *Motion Picture Magazine* photo series on the film includes it second, after an introduction by “Charles Dickens” (W.S. Vandyke). Perhaps exhibitors had the option of placing this extradiegetic scene before or after the film (indeed, including it first would be consistent with other films of the time that used elaborate sequences to introduce the players). It is also possible that the *Motion Picture Magazine* photo sequence was not intended to match the film itself. “Oliver Twist,” *Motion Picture Magazine* (February 1917), p. 117.

⁹⁹ “Oliver Twist.”

¹⁰⁰ “The Screen,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1921.

¹⁰¹ Critics found the mother role more of a stretch for Pickford than the boy role and praised her newly-revealed ability to play a grown-up.

¹⁰² Charles S. Sewell, “Newest Reviews and Comments,” *Moving Picture World*, January 10, 1925.

¹⁰³ Mordaunt Hall, “The Screen,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, December 29, 1924.

¹⁰⁴ J. M. Barrie, *The Little White Bird* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), 166.

¹⁰⁵ “Treasure Island Press Book”, 1920. Margaret Herrick Library.

¹⁰⁶ “Shirley Mason,” *McClure’s*, May 1917. From Robinson Locke Scrapbook, NAFR+ Ser. 2 v. 275, p. 45. Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

¹⁰⁷ Clayton Hamilton, “The Screen,” *Theatre Magazine*, January 1923.

¹⁰⁸ “Lesser Will Destroy Old ‘Twist’ Film,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, May 21, 1922).

¹⁰⁹ Grace Kingsley, “Flashes / Kid Actor Scores / Jack Coogan is Fautleroy of Back Yards,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1921.

¹¹⁰ Rob King, “The Kid from The Kid: Jackie Coogan and the Consolidation of Child Consumerism,” *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television*, no. 48 (Fall 2001): 4. Coogan made the idea of children as consumers more palatable, King argues, by showing off his own conspicuous consumption to journalists, lending his name to “a range of commercial products for children, including shoes, school writing tablets, dolls, and ‘fancy sailor suits[,]” and by aligning play with consumerism in films such as *Peck’s Bad Boy* (Associated First National, June 1921) (14).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹² Robert E. Sherwood, “The Silent Drama.”

¹¹³ Schallert, “Right from the Front.”

¹¹⁴ Grace Kingsley, “With Jackie on a Holiday,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, March 6, 1921).

¹¹⁵ “Jackie Coogan Coming for \$300,000 Contract,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, April 9, 1921). See also: “Infant Film Star Dotes on Casino,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, April 10, 1921).

¹¹⁶ “Jackie Coogan Gives Tips on Keeping Neat,” *Sacramento Union* (Sacramento, CA, May 2, 1922). As quoted in King, “The Kid from The Kid,” 12. King uses this example, plus a supplement in the book tie-in for Coogan’s *Little Robinson Crusoe* offering daily exercises “to keep your boy fit” to show the way “Coogan’s popularity among the young was exploited for explicitly didactic ends regarding the rearing of children” (12). Again we can also see that these examples also align Coogan with the explicitly gendered discourse of “boy making.”

¹¹⁷ “Infant Film Star Dotes on Casino.”

¹¹⁸ “My Girl, Patsy,” *Santa Ana Register* (Santa Ana, CA, July 29, 1922). As quoted in King, “The Kid from The Kid,” 11.

Chapter 3. Range Romances: Landscape, Vitality, and Desire in the Frontier

¹ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*. Steven Higgen, “New York Motion Picture Company,” ed. Richard Abel, *The Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 472. NYMP hired Thomas Ince to manage Bison in November 1911, but I am not sure if he was involved in this film, which was released in December.

² In April 1911, *Moving Picture World* noted that Los Angeles “has reached a position in the moving picture manufacturing field where it is second only to New York.” Richard V. Spencer, *Moving Picture World* (April 8, 1911), 768, as quoted in Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*, 160. Richard Koszarski writes that, “Southern California was clearly recognized as the major American production center by 1915” (99), producing between 62.5 and 75 percent of total American production. Although studios such as Goldwyn and Famous Players continued to make films in New York and Fort Lee, New Jersey, “problems with coal rationing [in the winter of 1918-1919] forced nearly all the companies then operating in the East to consolidate operation in their West Coast facilities” (102). Richard Koszarski, *An Evening’s Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

³ Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914*, 118-119. Verhoeff, *The West in Early Cinema: After the Beginning*, 390-403. Scott Simmon, “1910: Movies, Reform, and New Women,” in *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations*, ed. Charlie Keil and Ben Singer (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009). Rebecca Bell-Metereau, *Hollywood Androgyny*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 69.

⁴ Jeffrey P Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 15. On the invention of adolescence, see: Kent Baxter, *The Modern Age: Turn-of-the-Century American Culture and the Invention of Adolescence* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008). John Neubauer, *The Fin-De-Siècle Culture of Adolescence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁵ For an excellent analysis of Hall's theories on boyhood, see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, chap. 3.

⁶ In a footnote, Abel writes:

Although disguise, including cross-dressing, played a significant role in early Civil War films [...], it did not in early westerns, perhaps for historical reasons: 'The West...was relatively unstructured and allowed a certain freedom [and] most women there did not have to play games to express their adventurous spirit or to move ahead.' See Kathleen De Grave, *Swindler Spy Rebel: The Confidence Woman in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 35."

Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences, 1910-1914*, 306, footnote 97. While it may be true that a higher percentage of Civil War heroines than Western heroines cross-dressed in films between 1909 and 1912, the trope was quite widespread in Westerns as well, as this chapter seeks to demonstrate. Part of the difference is that cross-dressing also occurred in Western films that were not "school of action" films. *Ibid.*, footnote 97.

⁷ A significant amount of scholarship has been devoted to this subject. The works that most inform my analysis are: Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1996). Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992). Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*. Alexandra Stern, "California's Eugenic Landscapes," in *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*.

⁸ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, chap. 5.

⁹ Stern notes that, "Wilderness is the greatest of contradictions: we can enter and relish it only because we have construed it as untamed and untrammled. [...] Even though Native Americans had interacted for centuries with the Western landscape—burning controlled fires, for instance, to ensure the longevity of mature oak trees—many European Americans insisted that what eventually became Yosemite and Big Basin were unspoiled territories they alone had discovered and were compelled to defend, at times with army scouts." Stern, "California's Eugenic Landscapes," 124-25.

¹⁰ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, chap. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 4. Geoffrey Bateman, "The Queer Frontier: Placing the Sexual Imaginary in California, 1868-1915" (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado at Boulder, 2010), chap. 4. Jennifer S. Tuttle, "Rewriting the West Cure: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Owen Wister, and the Sexual Politics of Neurasthenia," in *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Catherine Golden and Joanna S. Zangrando (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 103-121. Jennifer S. Tuttle, "Introduction," *The Crux: A Novel*, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002).

¹² Tuttle, "Rewriting the West Cure: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Owen Wister, and the Sexual Politics of Neurasthenia."

¹³ Bateman, "The Queer Frontier," 4. Gilman's Western fiction includes the novels *What Diantha Did* (1910) and *The Crux* (1910) and the short stories "Bee Wise" (1913), "Dr. Claire's Place" (1915) and "Joan's Defender" (1916). Bateman also argues that Herland, although ostensibly placeless, is geographically and meteorologically similar to California in many regards.

¹⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard, & Co., 1898), 56.

¹⁵ "Put Girls In Overalls," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 12, 1904.

¹⁶ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland and Selected Stories* (New York, NY: Signet Classic, 1992), 332.

¹⁷ Nancy Tillman Romalov, "Unearthing the Historical Reader, or, Reading Girls' Reading," in *Pioneers, Passionate Ladies, and Private Eyes: Dime Novels, Series Books, and Paperbacks*, ed. Larry E. Sullivan and Lydia Cushman Schurman (New York: Haworth Press, 1996), 87-101. Lauren Tedesco, "Making a Girl into a Scout: Americanizing Scouting for Girls," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998). For additional examples in England, see: Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England, 1880-1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), chap. 5.

¹⁸ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, chap. 2.

¹⁹ Judith Halberstam, in Carolyn Dinshaw et al., "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2-3 (2007): 182. See also: Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Patricia Heil, *The Frontier Heroine in American Literature*, 1985, 84.

²¹ San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project, "'She Even Chewed Tobacco': A Pictorial Narrative of Passing Women in America," in *Hidden from History*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: Meridian Books, 1990), 183-194. Numerous additional examples can be found in: Schlatter, "Drag's a Life: Women, Gender, and Cross-Dressing in the Nineteenth-Century West." Boag, "Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman." Sears, "A dress not belonging to his or her sex." Clare Sears, "All that Glitters: Trans-ing California's Gold Rush Migrations," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 2-3 (2008): 383.

²² Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey, from New York to San Francisco, in the Summer of 1859* (New York and San Francisco: C. M. Saxton, Barker & Co., 1860), 85.

²³ Boag, "Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman."

²⁴ Sears, "All that Glitters." Rand, *The Ellis Island Snow Globe*, 82-92.

²⁵ Boag, "Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman."

²⁶ Sears, "All that Glitters," 394.

²⁷ On the illegibility of Native American men's gender, see: Dee Garceau, "Nomads, Bunkies, Cross-Dressers, and Family Men: Cowboy Identity and the Gendering of Ranch Work," in *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West*, ed. Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, and Dee Garceau (New York: Routledge, 2001), 156-7.

²⁸ On the U.S. staging and reception of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, see: Patrick B. Tuite, "'Shadow of [a] girl': An Examination of Peter Pan in Performance," in *Second Star to the Right: Peter Pan in the Popular Imagination*, ed. Allison Kavey and Lester D. Friedman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 105-131. On Belasco's and Puccini's celebrated scenic effects in *The Girl of the Golden West*, see: Helen M. Greenwald, "Realism on the Opera Stage: Belasco, Puccini, and the California Sunset," in *Opera in Context: Essays on Historical Staging from the Late Renaissance to the Time of Puccini*, ed. Mark A. Radice (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1998) and John L. Fell, "Dissolves by Gaslight: Antecedents to the Motion Picture in Nineteenth-Century Melodrama," *Film Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (April 1, 1970): 22-34.

²⁹ Minna Thomas Antrim, "The Masculinization of Girls," *Lippincott's Monthly* 88, no. 526 (October, 1911): 564. As quoted in Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 242.

³⁰ "Why Players Come from California," *Stage Pictorial*, not dated. Although the article was not dated in the scrapbook I found it in, it describes the Vitagraph Company as being located in Santa Monica. Vitagraph opened a studio in Santa Monica in 1911 but moved the next year to Prospect Street in Hollywood, so it seems likely that this article appeared in 1911. Scrapbook *ZAN-T213 reel 56: Billie Burke; Billy Rose Theater Collection, New York Public Library for Performing Arts.

³¹ "Girls in Overalls," Selig Publicity Supplement No. 18 (1904), Selig Bulletins, Margaret Herrick Library. All subsequent quotes from the bulletin will refer to this copy.

³² Smith, *Shooting Cowboys and Indians*, 10-20.

³³ The description of the girls' shapely figures, however, seems to imagine their appeal to heterosexual men. It also reassures exhibitors that the femaleness of the girls remains visible at all times (unlike the gender surprise films of Chapter 1). The description of the first scene, "Going to Work," states: "They walk past the camera and each girl appears more than life size and perfect portraits of the rustic French beauties can be seen. This gives and intimate idea of the shapely forms in overalls and the characteristics of each girl. Some have hands in pockets and others walk with queenly grace, but all are modest and attractive." In the images in the bulletin, however, the camera is quite far from the girls, their entire bodies taking up about a third of the height of the frame.

³⁴ David Mayer writes: "Active and regular reviewing of motion pictures in the daily and weekly press didn't begin until around 1910 and didn't become a function to be taken seriously until 1913—about the time that films began to appeal to middle-class spectators and to increase in length from one to two reels to what might be described as 'feature length,' that is, anywhere from five to fifteen reels. Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, 25.

³⁵ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 243-246. Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, 3, 72-74, 133. For an overview of women who disguised themselves as men in military conflicts stretching from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, see: Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military*

Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness (London: Pandora, 1989). JoAnn Chartier and Chris Enss describe a Civil War soldier, Charley Hatfield, whose war exploits remarkably live up to the Girl Spy films. Hatfield, who lived first as a woman and then as a man, joined the Colorado Cavalry in the guise of a man in 1862. He/she took on the guise of a woman to sneak into enemy territory, but continued to operate as a man in the battalion, even after a physician had discovered his/her female body. *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon: Women Soldiers and Patriots of the Western Frontier* (Guilford, Conn: TwoDot, 2004), 79-82. For additional analyses of female soldiers in the Civil War, many of whom disguised their gender, see: Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War* (New York: Paragon House, 1993). Elizabeth D Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1999). DeAnne Blanton, *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002). Laura Leedy Gansler, *The Mysterious Private Thompson: The Double Life of Sarah Emma Edmonds, Civil War Soldier* (New York: Free Press, 2005). Richard Hall, *Women on the Civil War Battlefield* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

³⁶ In 1910, Griffith produced two other films with cross-dressed women, *Taming a Husband* (Biograph, February 1910) and *Wilful Peggy* (Biograph, August 1910). Unlike the Civil War films, these were both romantic comedies of mistaken identity set in an aristocratic, seventeenth-century milieu.

³⁷ “A Western Girl’s Sacrifice,” *Moving Picture World*, October 22, 1910.

³⁸ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, chap. 8.

³⁹ Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation*, 40-49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 49. In Griffith’s Civil War films at Biograph (unlike the later *Birth of a Nation*), Courtney says, “the solidity of the racial order is ever present as dutiful black slaves, in addition to white women, see white men through their phallic crises: these slaves close the shutters that hide the white man’s wounds, rescue him from burning buildings, and safeguard his fortune to ensure his economic recovery. [...] [T]he openness with which the early Civil War films embrace white male lack is correlative to their refusal to cast black men as anything but loyal Uncle Toms.” *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴³ Jonathan Auerbach, “Chase Films,” ed. Richard Abel, *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), 110.

⁴⁴ Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*, 67. Auerbach, “Chase Films,” 110.

⁴⁵ Charles Wolfe, “California Slapstick Revisited,” in *Slapstick comedy*, ed. Tom Paulus (New York: Routledge, 2010), 185.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴⁷ Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, 133.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 74. Mayer quotes the *New York Dramatic Mirror* (December 13, 1902) here.

⁴⁹ Another example that has recently come to my attention is *The Death Mask* (Kay-Bee, September 1914), in which the Japanese-American actress Tsuru Aoki plays a Native American princess who disguises herself as one of the three ruling brothers of a tribe. Daisuke Miyao describes this film in *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), chap. 5. In the only other cases I have found, a young white actress plays a black boy (Marie Eline in *The Judge's Story* [Thanhouser, August 1911] and *Washington in Danger* [Thanhouser, February 1912], which I discuss in Chapter 2), and a white actress plays a “mulatto” woman who becomes a man (Ethel Lloyd in *A Florida Enchantment* [Vitagraph, August 1914], which I analyze in Chapter 4).

⁵⁰ “Ten Famous Kalem Beauties,” *New York Dramatic Mirror* (January 31, 1912), 53.

⁵¹ Strangely, Nanna Verhoeff lists these two films as examples of “cross-dressing.” Verhoeff, *The West in Early Cinema: After the Beginning*, 392. While Schaefer’s outfits are indeed influenced by masculine styles, she wears ankle-length split skirts throughout both movies and does not attempt to disguise her gender. In *The Craven*, the coloring and long black moustache of the husband suggests that he is not entirely “white”—perhaps part Native American or Latino, or maybe Italian. There is therefore a racist explanation for his unmanliness.

⁵² Horatio Alger Jr.’s Western stories include *The Young Miner; or Tom Nelson in California* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1879), *Ben’s Nugget; or, A Boy’s Search for Fortune* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1882), *Joe’s Luck; or, A Boy’s Adventures in California* (New York: A.L. Burn, 1887), *Digging for Gold; A Story of California* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1892), and *A Debt of Honor; The Story of Gerald Lane’s Success in the Far West* (New York: A.L. Burton, 1900).

⁵³ Bateman, “The Queer Frontier,” 136.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 132.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 141-150.

⁵⁶ *Billy the Kid* quotes from “Brief Newspaper Squibs for Vitagraph Life Portrayals,” *Vitagraph Bulletins*, July 31, 1911.

⁵⁷ Both films are held by the Library of Congress. *Making a Man of Her* is also held by the EYE Film Institute Netherlands.

⁵⁸ Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, 54.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 55.

⁶¹ Interestingly, the first time the foreman leans in to kiss the disguised Bessie, the film abruptly cuts to a new shot just before their lips touch. This second kiss occurs after Bessie has accepted the foreman’s marriage offer. It’s not clear whether the cut was made by local censors, an exhibitor, or the filmmakers, but it suggests a certain squeamishness around pre-marital kissing, and perhaps the bivalent kiss itself.

⁶² Karen J. Leong, “‘A Distinct and Antagonistic Race’: Constructions of Chinese Manhood in the Exclusionist Debates, 1869-1878,” in *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West*, ed. Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, and Dee Garceau (New York: Routledge, 2001), 131-148. Sears, “All that Glitters.” Bateman, “The Queer Frontier.”

⁶³ This choice is akin to Griffith’s Civil War films at Biograph, which, as Courtney points out, “represent the Civil War as having virtually nothing to do with [race].” This absence could have to do with the desire to avoid inciting racial sentiment, although plenty of other films of the period have non-white characters, often in stereotypical villainous or comedic roles. Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation*, 48.

⁶⁴ Straayer lists eleven key characteristics of the “temporary transvestite” genre. *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, 43-44.

⁶⁵ Sears, “All that Glitters,” 383.

⁶⁶ Garceau, “Nomads, Bunkies, Cross-Dressers, and Family Men,” 154.

⁶⁷ Sears, “All that Glitters,” 385.

⁶⁸ “Advertisement: Vitagraph Company,” *New York Dramatic Mirror* (New York, NY, August 9, 1911).

⁶⁹ “Advertisement: A Range Romance,” *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* (Fort Wayne, IN, December 8, 1911). “Advertisement: A Range Romance,” *Mansfield News* (Mansfield, OH, December 15, 1911). “Advertisement: A Range Romance,” *Lethbridge Herald* (Lethbridge, Alberta, July 26, 1913). “Advertisement: A Range Romance,” *Daily Courier* (Connellsville, PA, July 25, 1914). It is possible that some of these listings were different films with the same title, but I have not found evidence to suggest there was another film with the same name at this time.

⁷⁰ “Girls Will Be Boys,” *Nickelodeon*, January 7, 1911.

⁷¹ It would be helpful to see what clothes these women were actually wearing, but I have not been able to find any images from the film.

⁷² Verhoeff, *The West in Early Cinema: After the Beginning*, 398.

⁷³ “The Cow Boy Girls,” *Selig Polyscope Bulletin*, 1910. In William Selig Papers, Margaret Herrick Special Collections.

⁷⁴ “The Cowboys and the Bachelor Girls,” *Moving Picture World*, November 26, 1910.

⁷⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Bee Wise (1913),” in *Herland, The Yellow Wall-Paper, and Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 263-271.

⁷⁶ “Girls Will Be Boys.”

⁷⁷ “The Cowboys and the Bachelor Girls.”

⁷⁸ The word “Lizzie” could perhaps evoke the word “lezzie,” a colloquial abbreviation of “lesbian.” The *Online Etymological Dictionary* dates the origin of the word “lezzie” to 1929, so it is not clear whether “Lizzie” would have had this connotation earlier. Douglas Harper, “lezzie,” *Online Etymological Dictionary*, n.d., <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/lezzie>.

⁷⁹ On Western tourism and film, see Jennifer Lynn Peterson, “‘The Nation’s First Playground’: Travel Films and the American West, 1895-1920,” in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 79-98. and Jennifer Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

⁸⁰ Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare*, 172.

⁸¹ “The Cow Boy Girls,” *Selig Releases*, April 29, 1910.

⁸² Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies*, chap. 2.

⁸³ “The Cow Boy Girls,” *Moving Picture World*, May 14, 1910.

⁸⁴ “Girls Will Be Boys.”

⁸⁵ Peterson, “‘The Nation’s First Playground’: Travel Films and the American West, 1895-1920.”

⁸⁶ Interestingly, in addition to the photograph of Stedman as an old maid hanging on Waggy Bill, the publicity bulletin also included a small photograph in the lower left corner of Stedman as an attractive young woman. These small star portraits seem to be standard features of Selig’s bulletins in 1912 and 1913 and encouraged star recognition. As I discussed in Chapter 1, they also help readers try to discriminate visually between the performer’s “real” and “false” appearances (although the “real” photo is obviously consciously produced as well).

⁸⁷ Sloan, “Sexual Warfare in the Silent Cinema.” Sloan, *The Loud Silents*, chap. 5. Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, chap. 4.

⁸⁸ “The Suffragette; or, The Trials of a Tenderfoot,” *Selig Polyscope Bulletin*, 1913.

⁸⁹ Despite the connection between suffragettes and mannishness, suffragettes are only rarely portrayed as donning men’s clothing—I think because this trope was considered fairly cute. More often, their masculinity is corporeal, which is achieved by casting adult men in these roles.

⁹⁰ “The 101 Ranch Cowgirls, Bless ‘Em,” in Miller Brothers and Arlington 101 Ranch Real Wild West (Wild West show program), 8-9 August 1915, Marland’s Grand Home, Private 101 Ranch Collection, Ponca City, Oklahoma. As quoted in Nancy Floyd, *She’s Got a Gun* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008), 97.

⁹¹ “Girls with Wild West Show to Help Women Gain Equal Suffrage,” *Toledo Blade* (17 Aug 1912), 7, from Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914*, 307, footnote 106. See also Gertrude Price, “Western Girl You Love in the ‘Movies’ is a Sure Enough Suffrager,” *Des Moines News* (Des Moines, IA, February 11, 1913). As quoted in Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914*, 307, footnote 104.

⁹² Nell Gwynne cross-dresses for matters of state, but the film revolves around her romance with the king while she is out of costume.

⁹³ *Variety* (April 10, 1914), as quoted in Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 105.

⁹⁴ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 224-231. Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 146, 149-152.

⁹⁵ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 146.

⁹⁶ Jennifer Bean, in conversation. Gaddis, “He, She, Or It,” 30.

⁹⁷ I suspect that there are at least a handful of other examples that have not come to light yet, but it was not a distinctive trope the way trains, guns, automobiles, and even secret, long-lost twins were. I have also consulted Ben Singer, Shelley Stamp, and Jennifer Bean on this question and they know of no additional examples. There are a few more instances in European serials, such as the female master of disguise Protéa, but in Feuillade’s famous crime serials, gender disguise is fairly rare and taken up only by men.

This absence is particularly notable given that many of the actresses who appeared in serials had played cross-dressing roles previously, such as Ruth Roland in *She Would Be a Cowboy* (Kalem, 1915) and Pearl White in *The Dress Reform* (Crystal, October 1913), *Girls Will Be Boys* (Crystal, November 1913), and *The Girl in Pants* (Crystal, May 1914).

⁹⁸ Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 152.

⁹⁹ Richard Willis, “Kathlyn the Intrepid,” *Photoplay* (April 1914), 43, as quoted in Jennifer M. Bean, “Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body,” in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 426.

¹⁰⁰ Advertisement in *Motion Picture News* (October 21, 1916), 2490, as quoted in Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 224.

¹⁰¹ Alan Burden, “The Girl Who Keeps the Railroad,” *Photoplay* (July 1915), 91, as quoted in Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 146.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ “A Daughter of the Sunlands,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1915.

¹⁰⁴ Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, 144.

¹⁰⁵ Hilary A. Hallett, “Based on a True Story: New Western Women and the Birth of Hollywood,” *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 2 (May 2011): 194. See also: Hilary-Anne Hallett, “In Motion-Picture Land: A Cultural History About the Making of Early Hollywood” (New York, NY: City University of New York, 2005).

¹⁰⁶ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 223.

¹⁰⁷ Julius Johnson, “The Girl on the Cover,” *Photoplay*, April 1920.

¹⁰⁸ Hallett, “Based on a True Story,” 198.

¹⁰⁹ As reproduced in *Everyday Fashions, 1909-1920, as Pictured in Sears Catalogs* (New York: Dover, 1995), 101.

¹¹⁰ “Make Way for Male Attire,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, September 6, 1914).

¹¹¹ Edward Weitzel, “The Boy Girl,” *Moving Picture World*, March 3, 1917. The phrase “romping harum-scarum lad” from “Clune Play Ends at Savoy Sunday,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco, CA, March 15, 1917). Unfortunately only a fragment of the film seems to survive (a section of the third reel), at the Library of Congress.

¹¹² “‘Boy Girl’ Funny When It Is Meant to Be Sad, and Sad When Meant to Be Funny,” *Exhibitor’s Trade Review*, February 24, 1917.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ For more information on anti-cross-dressing statues and how they were mobilized to produce governable public space, see Sears, “A dress not belonging to his or her sex” and Sears, “All that Glitters.”

¹¹⁵ Peter Milne, “The Boy Girl,” *Motion Picture News*, March 3, 1917. “‘Boy Girl’ Funny When It Is Meant to Be Sad, and Sad When Meant to Be Funny.”

¹¹⁶ Milne, “The Boy Girl.”

¹¹⁷ Thank you to Mark Cooper for bringing this film, which is held at the Archives Françaises du Film, to my attention.

¹¹⁸ “The Dream Lady,” *Variety*, August 9, 1918.

¹¹⁹ “Masonic Auditorium -- ‘The Snow Bird.’,” *The Washington Post*, June 11, 1916.

¹²⁰ “Advertisement: The Girl Alaska,” *Reno Evening Gazette* (Reno, NV, October 22, 1919).

¹²¹ George T. Pardy, “‘The Girl Alaska’ is Unique Production,” *Exhibitor’s Trade Review*, August 23, 1919.

¹²² “Advertisement: The Girl Alaska,” *Twin Falls Daily News* (Twin Falls, Idaho, January 22, 1920).

¹²³ “The Screen,” *Daily Globe* (Ironwood, MI, January 23, 1920).

¹²⁴ Joshua Lowe, “The Snowbird,” *Variety*, June 16, 1916.

¹²⁵ Harvey F. Thew, “The Snowbird,” *Motion Picture News*, June 17, 1916. Similarly, *Motography* wrote: “The company and an interesting production are superior to the story, which seldom grows real or impressive through any force of its own.” “Current Releases Reviewed: The Snowbird,” *Motography*, June 17, 1916.

¹²⁶ “The Girl Alaska,” *The Morning Telegraph* (New York, NY, August 17, 1919).

¹²⁷ Pardy, “‘The Girl Alaska’ is Unique Production.”

¹²⁸ Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs* (Waiheke Island: Floating Press, 1870). Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), chap. 3.

¹²⁹ “Mabel Taliaferro has achieved...,” *Daily Mail* (Hagerstown, MD, May 12, 1916).

¹³⁰ It is not clear the extent to which the broader public was aware of Carewe’s Chickasaw identity at this time. It became highly publicized, however, in 1927, when he directed a film adaptation of *Ramona* penned by his brother, Finis Fox. *The New York Times*, for example, reported: “Edwin Carewe is himself a Chickasaw Indian, so that unusual interest attached to any film produced by him and concerned with an Indian theme. [...] According to Mr. Carewe, his Indian father was a full-blooded Chickasaw and the representative at Washington, D.C., of the Chickasaw reservation.” “Miss del Rio is Sole Star of ‘Ramona’.” However, the actor changed

his name from Jay Fox to the British “Edwin” and Welsh “Carewe” when he was working in vaudeville. Fox apparently chose the name “Edwin” in honor of the famous Shakespearean actor Edwin Booth, according to Hollywood historian Allan R. Ellenberger. “Director Edwin Carewe’s grave is marked after more than 69 years,” *Hollywoodland: A Site about Hollywood and its History*, September 12, 2009, <http://allanellenberger.com/book-flm-news/edwin-carewe-marked-at-hollywood-forever/>.

¹³¹ On men’s last minute conversion through recognition of a woman’s innocence, see: Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 25.

¹³² “Current Releases Reviewed: The Snowbird.” “The Snowbird,” *Lowell Sun* (Lowell, MA, May 15, 1916).

¹³³ “The Snowbird,” *Moving Picture World*, June 17, 1916.

Chapter 4. Cross-dressing, Sexual Inversion, and Respectable Comedy: *A Florida Enchantment*

¹ Archibald Clavering Gunter, *A Florida Enchantment* (New York, NY: J. J. Little & Co., 1891).

² Sime Silverman, “A Florida Enchantment,” *Variety*, August 14, 1914.

³ R. Bruce Brasell, “A Seed for Change: The Engenderment of ‘A Florida Enchantment,’” *Cinema Journal* 36, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 3-21. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, chap. 2. Richard Barrios, *Screened Out: Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 21-22. Gay and lesbian festivals and screening clubs also often claim the film as one of the “first” lesbian films, as Somerville records. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 40-42.

⁴ Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, chap. 5.

⁵ Brasell, “A Seed for Change.”

⁶ “Final Week of A Florida Enchantment,” *Dramatic News* (New York, NY, September 5, 1914).

⁷ “A Florida Enchantment,” *New York Dramatic Mirror* (New York, NY, August 19, 1914). “Pleasing Variety at Vita Theater,” *Motography*, August 29, 1914. *Moving Picture World* only published a plot summary without any critical assessment, but they did not use negative language when describing Lillian romancing the other women: “Joining her friends, [Lillian] proceeds to make love to every female in sight, much to the discomfiture of the male members of the party.”

⁸ I found advertisements for local screenings of the film in the following papers: *Syracuse Herald* (Syracuse, NY, October 18, 1914); *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, NY, November 5, 1914); *Middletown Daily Times-Press* (Middletown, NY, December 16 and 17, 1914); *Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA, November 1, 1914); *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI, November 21, 1914); *Gazette and Bulletin* (Williamsport, PA, December 28, 1914); *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI, January 7, 1915); *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, January 10, 1915); *Warren Evening Times* (Warren, PA, February 3, 1915); *Fort Wayne News* (Fort Wayne, IN, March 18, 1915); *Altoona Mirror* (Altoona, PA, August 10, 1915); *Eau Claire Leader* (Eau

Claire, WI, September 11, 1915); *Daily Republican* (Rushville, IN, January 22, 1915); *Daily Fayetteville Democrat* (Fayetteville, AR, April 11, 1916); *Racine Journal-News* (Racine, WI, August 16, 1916); *Ogden Examiner* (Ogden, UT, December 9, 1916). Undoubtedly the film appeared in many more places as well.

⁹ “Mrs. Wiggs at Clunes,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1915. “Among the Movies,” *Gazette & Bulletin* (Williamsport, PA, December 28, 1914). “Amusements,” *Daily Republican* (Rushville, IN, January 22, 1915). “At the Bijou,” *Racine Journal-News* (Racine, Wisconsin, August 16, 1916).

¹⁰ Brasell, “A Seed for Change,” 15-16. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 54-55. Barrios, *Screened Out*, 21-22. Chris Straayer notes that *A Florida Enchantment* and other “transbody” films “literalize in the image a gender inversion theory of homosexuality that collapses homosexuality with transsexualism via the notion of ‘a woman in a man’s body’ or vice versa,” but she does not make an argument about historical reading strategies. Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, 71. Andrea Weiss is the only one to reject lesbian connotations, but she does not consider Bessie and Stella’s interest in Lillian or contemporaneous notions of the sexual invert at all. Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 17.

¹¹ On the belated invention of the concept of “identity” as it relates to “sexual identity,” see: Laura L. Doan, “Topsy-Turvydom: Gender Inversion, Sapphism, and the Great War,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 4 (2006): 517–542.

¹² On early uses of “lesbian,” see: Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 200 and 427, footnote 29. Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 5-7. In 1869, the German neurologist Carl von Westphal coined the term “Die conträre Sexualempfindung” (literally, “contrary sexual feeling”), in a paper of the same name. Although this term remained common in German writing, the word “inversion” came into play when Arrio Tamassio translated von Westphal’s term into Italian as *inversione dell’istinto sessuale* (“inversion of the sexual instincts”) in 1878. “Inversion” became the preferred term for Italian, French, and English speaking sexologists after this and the term became widespread after Havelock Ellis published *Sexual Inversion* in 1897.

¹³ Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 4, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57. She relies on the work of historians such as Lisa Duggan, Sharon Ullman, and Esther Newton to support this claim.

¹⁶ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock, 7th ed. (Philadelphia: F A Davis Company, 1925), 280.

¹⁷ Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (London: Wilson and Macmillan, 1897), 95.

¹⁸ George Chauncey Jr., “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance,” *Salmagundi* 58, no. 59 (1982): 1983. George Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female

‘Deviance’,” in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss, Christina Simmons, and Robert Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), chap. 6.

¹⁹ Steve Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 109-110. Brasell offers an abbreviated quotation of this passage in “A Seed for Change,” 8-9.

²⁰ Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 54-55. Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*. Sharon Ullman, “‘The Twentieth Century Way’: Female Impersonation and Sexual Practice in Turn-of-the-Century America,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 4 (1995): 573–600.

²¹ Esther Newton, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman,” *Signs* 9, no. 4 (July 1, 1984): 557-575. Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*. Both works apparently originated in a paper the two women co-wrote and co-presented at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Vassar College, July 16, 1981.

²² Teresa de Lauretis, “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 2 (1988): 155–177. Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). On female masculinity as a strategy of lesbian visibility, see: Newton, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian.” Sherrie A. Inness, *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), chap. 1. Richard Dyer, “Seen to Be Believed: Some Problems in the Representation of Gay People as Typical,” in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). An important branch of lesbian scholarship has also begun to analyze the way “femme” lesbianism achieves visibility, such as the work of Patricia White and Lisa Walker. Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). Lisa Walker, *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

²³ Somerville claims that the film disavows the possibility of desire between Lillian and Jane, but I argue that this desire is clearly visible in this scene. Furthermore, the scene in which Lillian forces a sex-change seed down Jane’s throat is akin, in many ways, to a rape, illustrating Lillian’s assumption of white male privilege when it comes to black female bodies. However, it is true that once Jane changes sex, the potential eroticism of the relationship is diminished.

²⁴ Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 65.

²⁵ Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 14-15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁷ These files are held at the New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division.

²⁸ In fact, using the word “transvestite” to describe these earlier instances of gender disguise is anachronistic, since the word was only coined in 1910, by German sexologists and activist Magnus Hirschfeld. These earlier works had nothing to do with the scientific project of inventing new gender and sexual categories that gave rise to this word. Still, I retain it here because Straayer’s term “temporary transvestite” is so well established.

²⁹ Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*, 162.

³⁰ Ellis and Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, 87.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

³² *Ibid.*, 94-95.

³³ Krafft-Ebing notes that, "Lesbian love does not seem to approach urningism in frequency." Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 428. Ellis and Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, 100-102.

³⁴ Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*. Deborah Cohler, *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Katie Sutton also makes this point of Weimar Germany in *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany*.

³⁵ Lisa Duggan, "The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology, and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Signs* 18, no. 4 (1993): 791-814. Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 153, 155, 148.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁸ "Amazing Double Life of Girl Who Lived for Years as a Man."

³⁹ Here is a selection of these articles: "Woman Lives as a Man," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, January 18, 1901). "Masqueraded for Years as a Man," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, January 18, 1901). "Amazed at Hall Revelations.," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, January 19, 1901). "Murray Hall Fooled Many Shrewd Men," *New York Times* (New York, NY, January 19, 1901). "Murray Hall's Funeral," *New York Times* (New York, NY, January 20, 1901). "Murray Hall Still In Demand," *New York Times* (New York, NY, January 26, 1901). "Hid Sex in the Army," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, January 27, 1901). "Murray Hall a 'Lady'," *New York Times* (New York, NY, January 29, 1901). "Murray H. Hall's Will," *New York Times* (New York, NY, March 20, 1901).

⁴⁰ "Murray Hall Fooled Many Shrewd Men."

⁴¹ "Hid Sex in the Army." "Heirs with a History," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, April 12, 1901). "Dies a Woman, Lived as a Man," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, October 1, 1901). "Sex Disclosed by Ill Health," *San Francisco Chronicle (1869-Current File)*, October 1, 1901.

⁴² Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, chap. 1 and 2.

⁴³ Sharon Ullman, "Broken Silences: Sex and Culture in Turn of the Century America" (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, 1990), 109. In her dissertation, Ullman uses a single *Los Angeles Examiner* article about male impersonator Kitty Doner in 1917, which reassures readers that although Doner "struts about the stage in the most ultra mannish clothes, [she] doesn't ignore any of the feminine attributes," to argue that male impersonators were suspected of sexual deviancy just as female impersonators were. She repeats this claim in a footnote of her article, "The Twentieth Century Way" (1995) (page 587, footnote 8), and points

readers to her dissertation for evidence. Siobhan Somerville cites this footnote to support her claim that cross-dressed women were read as inverts and pushes Ullman's claim slightly farther than Ullman does, suggesting that Ullman's periodization regarding female impersonators (that suspicions of homosexuality occurred as early as 1906 and was "widespread" by 1913) also applied to male impersonators. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 55.

⁴⁴ "America's Leading Out-of-Doors Girl," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, August 16, 1914).

⁴⁵ Edna Ferber, "Representing T.A. Buck, A Business Adventure of Emma McChesney," *Grand Rapids Tribune* (Grand Rapids, WI, September 16, 1914).

⁴⁶ "Advertisement: Hecht and Company," *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, August 9, 1914). "Advertisement: Hawisher-English Company," *Lima Daily News* (Lima, OH, September 28, 1914). "Advertisement: Greene's," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, August 9, 1914). "Advertisement: J. W. Robinson Co.," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, August 13, 1914). "Advertisement: Denecke's, the Big 'Style' Store of Iowa," *The Evening Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, IA, September 15, 1914). "Advertisement: New York Racket Store," *Lock Haven Express* (Lock Haven, PA, July 14, 1914).

⁴⁷ "Advertisement: The Greater San Francisco and Oakland Cloak Companies," *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco, CA, August 9, 1914).

⁴⁸ "Special Bulletin on Motion Picture Comedies," Subjects Papers: Policies of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures Concerning Sex Motion Pictures, National Board of Review of Motion Pictures Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library. All material from the NBRMP cited is from this archive.

⁴⁹ I found only one other overt reference to homosexuality in the NBRMP files. "Bulletin 10," dated October 1, 1914, although dedicated primarily to white slave films, also condemned "scenes of action between men and women or among members of the same sex which disregard, make undue display or make light of the human person or which stimulate sexual thoughts[.]" I want to thank film historian Rob King for hunting down this bulletin for me.

⁵⁰ Reviews and Reports of Correspondent to the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, Boxes 156-158, National Board of Review of Motion Pictures Records

⁵¹ The Board recommended cutting sequences of male effeminacy from *Film Exposure* (Triangle, March 1917) and *Maggie's First False Step* (Keystone, March 1917), and sequences of male-to-female cross-dressing in *Fares and Fair Ones* (May 1919), *A Gambler's Gambol* (July 1916), and *Turks and Troubles* (Vitagraph, April 1917). Reviews and Reports of Correspondent to the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, Boxes 156-158.

⁵² Unfortunately this memo is not titled or dated, but it was also in the 1912-1916 folder. Subjects Papers: Policies of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures concerning sex movies, Box 171.

⁵³ Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers*, chap. 5.

⁵⁴ *Queering the Color Line*, 58.

⁵⁵ "A Florida Enchantment."

⁵⁶ “Advertisement: Library Theatre,” *Warren Evening Times* (Warren, Pennsylvania, February 3, 1915).

⁵⁷ King, *The Fun Factory*, 105.

⁵⁸ Review of *This Is the Life*, *Variety*, July 17, 1914, 17, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁹ Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*, 162-165.

⁶⁰ Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 47.

⁶¹ “Among the Movies.”

⁶² Brasell, “A Seed for Change,” 14-15. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 56-57.

⁶³ “Edith Storey,” *Motion Pictures* (December 1914), not dated. From Billy Rose, Locke Envelope #2185.

⁶⁴ Gaddis, “He, She, Or It.”

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁶ “A Florida Enchantment.”

⁶⁷ See Rob King on these two comedy styles and the difficulty of balancing “comic business” and narrative in multi-reel comedies. King, *The Fun Factory*, chap. 3.

⁶⁸ Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 64.

⁶⁹ Straayer, “Redressing the ‘Natural’: The Temporary Transvestite Film.”

⁷⁰ On “smashes,” see: Nancy Sahli, “Smashing: Women’s Relationships Before the Fall,” *Chrysalis* 8 (1979): 17–27. Martha Vicinus, “Distance and Desire: English Boarding-School Friendships,” *Signs* 9, no. 4 (1984): 600–622. Sherrie A. Inness, “Mashes, Smashes, Crushes, and Raves: Woman-to-Woman Relationships in Popular Women’s College Fiction, 1895-1915,” *NWSA Journal* 6, no. 1 (1994): 48–68. Rona M. Wilk, “‘What’s a Crush?’ A Study of Crushes and Romantic Friendships at Barnard College, 1900–1920,” *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 4 (2004): 20. The classic works on romantic friendship are: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1, no. 1 (1975): 1–29. Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981). Sharon Marcus has recently mounted an important critique of these works based on her study of nineteenth century British women’s sociality that can usefully be extrapolated to the U.S. context: Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁷¹ Gunter, *A Florida Enchantment*, 81.

⁷² Straayer writes: “[T]he reactions of diegetic audience members suggest to the film audience appropriate responses to the performance as it progresses.” Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, 65.

⁷³ Twenty years later, Hollywood’s Production Code Administration believed that on-screen reactions offered audiences a key clue to whether the same-sex behavior on-screen was perverse or innocent. When Maudie (Dennie Moore) kisses the disguised Sylvia (Katherine Hepburn) in

Sylvia Scarlett (RKO, December 1935), the PCA insisted that there should be “nothing suggestively emphasized by any horrified reaction on the part of Sylvia.” Joseph I. Breen to B. B. Kahane, August 12, 1935, PCA/MPAA Files: *Sylvia Scarlett*, Margaret Herrick Special Collections. Ironically, this means that Sylvia responds quite neutrally to the kiss, which today reads as secret enjoyment. If in fact Vitagraph was concerned that these women’s behavior could be construed as lesbianism, they may have used these mild reactions to counteract that reading.

⁷⁴ Today, “paper” is a common slang term for “money” and I suspect that this usage is much older. I therefore read Silverman’s use of “paper” as a reference to the moneyed classes. Richard Spears, “paper,” *McGraw-Hill’s Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, September 23, 2005). However, Silverman could also conceivably be using “paper” to refer to journalists. With either reading, his point is the same—only pretentious viewers sat through the whole film.

⁷⁵ Silverman, “A Florida Enchantment.”

⁷⁶ On class-based struggles over audience behavior, see: Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*.

⁷⁷ Senelick writes that, “Della Fox made no effort at masculine authenticity in the *travesty* leads of musical burlesque which grew increasingly fewer.” Senelick, *The Changing Room*, 338. Photographs of Fox in men’s clothing can be found online in the New York Public Library Digital Gallery, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

⁷⁸ This was not impossible in silent film, though—Ernst Lubitsch achieved a “comic opera”-style musical energy in films such as *Die Austernprinzessin (The Oyster Princess)* (Projektions-AG Union, June 1919).

⁷⁹ Brasell, “A Seed for Change,” 11. The first quote comes from “Mr. Gunter Playfully Wrestles With a Question of Sex,” *The World* (New York, NY, October 18, 1896) and the second two from a review included in the Billy Rose Theater Collection clipping file that does not have a publication or date listed. The first line of this review is “Readers of A.C Gunter’s novel, ‘A Florida Enchantment,’ will never be able to forget that its theme is the transformation of women into men.”

⁸⁰ Brasell, “A Seed for Change,” 11.

⁸¹ “A Florida Enchantment,” *Galveston Daily News* (Galveston, TX, November 1, 1896).

⁸² “A Florida Enchantment,” *The Critic (New York)*, October 17, 1896. “A Silly and Vulgar Play,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1896. *The Critic* also wrote: “In some respects this was, perhaps, the worst play ever produced in this city--a most evil distinction, won not only by the abominable nature of its motive and apparent purpose, but by the extraordinary, almost inconceivable, slovenliness and general foolishness of its construction.”

⁸³ On the crusade to align men’s sexuality with “feminine ideals,” see: Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 109-128. Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 620–647. David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900* (Greenwood Press, 1973). D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 140-145. Daniel S. Wright,

“*The First of Causes to Our Sex*”: *The Female Moral Reform Movement in the Antebellum Northeast, 1834-1848* (Routledge, 2006).

⁸⁴ Gunter, *A Florida Enchantment*, 46.

⁸⁵ “Mr. Gunter Playfully Wrestles With a Question of Sex.”

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “A Silly and Vulgar Play.”

⁸⁸ Léon Vasseur, *La timbale d’argent (The Silver Cup)* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Printing and Engraving Establishment, 1874). Charles Lecocq, *La marjolaine (The Sweet Majoram)* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Job Printing Establishment, 1877).

⁸⁹ Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*.

⁹⁰ “A Silly and Vulgar Play.”

⁹¹ “A Florida Enchantment.”

⁹² “A Florida Enchantment,” *Unknown*, 1896.

⁹³ “Mr. Gunter Playfully Wrestles With a Question of Sex.”

⁹⁴ As quoted in Michael C Emery, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 169.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “An Ill-Advised Effort. Gunter’s Dramatization of ‘A Florida Enchantment’ a Mistake,” *The World* (New York, NY, October 13, 1896).

⁹⁷ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols. (London: Electric Book Co, 2001), originally published between 1776 and 1789. On the ostensible relationship between deviant sexuality and the decline of the Roman Empire, see: Norman Vance, “Decadence and the Subversion of Empire,” in *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945*, ed. Catharine Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁹⁸ Sharon Marcus, “Comparative Sapphisms,” in *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*, ed. Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 255-256.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 259.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 257.

¹⁰¹ “A Silly and Vulgar Play.”

¹⁰² On hierarchies of taste, see: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). On hierarchies of taste in relation to American popular and mass media, see Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*. Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*. Bederman

usefully summarizes many of the social pressures experienced by bourgeois American men in the 1880s: Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 12-15.

¹⁰³ Uricchio and Pearson, *Reframing Culture*, 17. Note that New York arts critics were not necessarily the same as middle-class moralizers that Uricchio and Pearson describe, who wanted to impart genteel bourgeois values.

¹⁰⁴ “sophisticated,” *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, November 2010), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/184763?redirectedFrom=sophisticated>. Interestingly, by 1915 the adjective could also be applied to cultural works that were presumed to appeal to the “sophisticated” viewer.

¹⁰⁵ “Mr. Gunter Can’t See It,” *New York Herald* (New York, NY, October 14, 1896). Here is a selection of articles featuring the “honi soit qui mal y pense” defense from this period and after: “Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, March 9, 1891). Batterman Lindsay, “Extracts from Mrs. Lofty’s Diary. IV. Sister Bettina’s Method,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, June 1895. “Vague as a Sketch,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, September 15, 1895). “‘The Geisha’ at Daly’s,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, September 10, 1896). “At the Theaters,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, December 1, 1896). “The New Dancing Mania,” *Current Opinion* 55, no. 3 (September 1913): 187. “Writers Turn Out for Book Trial,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, February 7, 1914).

¹⁰⁶ Excerpted New York criticism was reprinted in: “Archie Gunter’s Failure,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco, CA, October 13, 1896). “A Florida Enchantment,” *The Morning Oregonian* (Portland, OR, October 19, 1896). “At the Theatres,” *The Denver Evening Post* (Denver, CO, October 31, 1896). Articles in the *San Francisco Call*, the *Galveston Daily News*, the *Morning Oregonian*, and the *Washington Post* disputed the New York criticism: “A Florida Enchantment,” *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA, November 1, 1896), 80:154 edition. “A Florida Enchantment.” “The Drama & the Stage,” *The Morning Oregonian* (Portland, OR, November 8, 1896). “Coming to the Theaters,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, November 26, 1896). On the show’s box office success, see: D. F. Verdenal, “Verdenal’s Chat From New York,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco, CA, November 29, 1896).

¹⁰⁷ “A Florida Enchantment,” *Unknown* (Boston, MA(?), April 1896). This reviewer even praises Gunter’s tact: “But he must be given credit for one thing--dangerously near to the boundary line of propriety as the plot is, he very rarely oversteps it in dialogue or suggestiveness.” Although the date and source of this review is not identified in the clipping file where it is held (A Florida Enchantment [play], Billy Rose Theatre Collection, NYPLPA), the identification of Sybil Johnstone in the leading role (rather than Marie Jensen, who played the role in New York and Washington, DC) indicates that the critic was viewing the early run of the production in Boston, in April 1896.

¹⁰⁸ “The Stage,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC, November 29, 1896).

¹⁰⁹ “At the Theaters.”

¹¹⁰ “A Florida Enchantment.”

¹¹¹ “A Florida Enchantment.” “The Drama & the Stage.”

¹¹² Sharon Ullman, *Sex Seen: The Emergence of Modern Sexuality in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹¹³ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic Books, 1995).

¹¹⁴ Sears, "A dress not belonging to his or her sex." Sears, "All that Glitters." Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹¹⁵ "Hoyt's: A Florida Enchantment," *New York Dramatic Mirror* (New York, NY, October 17, 1896). "A Florida Enchantment."

¹¹⁶ Again, Ernst Lubitsch demonstrated that it was possible to saturate a silent film with sexual innuendo, often through the use of pans and cuts, as in *The Marriage Circle* (Warner Brothers, February 1924). *A Florida Enchantment* has a much more staid visual style.

¹¹⁷ Chon Noriega, "'Something's Missing Here!': Homosexuality and Film Reviews during the Production Code Era, 1934-1962," *Cinema Journal* 30, no. 1 (1990): 20-41.

¹¹⁸ On the impact of the Wilde trials: Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Towards a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁹ Cohler, *Citizen, Invert, Queer*.

¹²⁰ Much more research on the differential circulation of sexual knowledge and interpretive strategies beyond the rarified circles of medical professionals, elite writers and artists, and inverts who desperately sought out this information on their own is needed. The digital scanning and indexing of periodicals from across the country (including regional and minority newspapers) has opened up vast new possibilities for tracing this process in more nuanced, rigorous ways. This chapter and the next are preliminary steps toward a better understanding of how moving pictures participated in this process.

¹²¹ Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 13. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 56. *Ibid.*

¹²² "A Florida Enchantment."

¹²³ Brasell argues that the chase sequence, by harkening back to early cinema, makes the film a formally "hermaphroditic" text. Brasell, "A Seed for Change," 5. In fact, it was common for narrative films at this time to incorporate discrete "attractions" from early cinema or vaudeville, so this element does not differentiate the film from others of the period. In fact, male performers dressed as women were also common in early cinema, so this kind of chase would have been very familiar. Many other slapstick chase sequences also ended by plunging the protagonists a large body of water (e.g. *The Scarecrow* [Joseph Schenck/Metro, December 1920]), but *A Florida Enchantment's* ending is more punitive than most.

¹²⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York*. Sharon Ullman, *Sex Seen: The Emergence of Modern Sexuality in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), chap. 3.

¹²⁵ Although male-to-female cross-dressing played a rich and important role in silent film comedy, I am not aware of any sustained studies of how audiences interpreted these performances. A full treatment of the subject unfortunately lies beyond the reach of this dissertation.

¹²⁶ “In the course of ‘A Florida Enchantment’ we see a great deal of Sidney Drew, and to that fact may be ascribed whatever success it obtains.” “A Florida Enchantment.”

Chapter 5. The Belated Convergence of Cross-Dressing and Lesbianism in American Cinema

¹ This image is central to the film *The Celluloid Closet* (Telling Pictures, March 1996), for example, and appears at the beginning of many surveys of lesbian and gay film. Images of Greta Garbo as Queen Christina also appear in the first chapters of many academic books on lesbianism, even when film history or stardom is not their central concern. Terry Castle, for instance, calls the first chapter of her book on literary images of lesbianism, “A Polemical Introduction; or, The Ghost of Greta Garbo” and features two images of Garbo as Christina. Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

² Judith Mayne, “Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship,” in *How Do I Look?: Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 103. Mayne says: “Depending on your point of view, lesbian readings of isolated scenes are successful appropriations and subversions of Hollywood plots, or naïve fetishizations of the image.” Castle wondered, while watching *Queen Christina* in 1990, whether she and Garbo were the only ones to recognize how “uncanny” it was to subject Christina/Garbo to a heterosexual love scene. Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 1-2.

³ Film scholar Patricia White has also pointed out critics’ use of intertextual references in order to discuss lesbianism in the 1930s but she does not analyze this commentary in depth, as her study focuses on films from the 1940s and after. In an influential 1979 article, Elaine Marks observed the use of intertextuality in French literature on girls’ boarding schools. More recently, Sharon Marcus has traced this same strategy in British reviews of Sapphic French literature. White, *Uninvited*, 17. Elaine Marks, “Lesbian Intertextuality,” in *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts, Critical Texts*, ed. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 353-377. Marcus, “Comparative Sapphisms.”

⁴ For example, the *Brooklyn Eagle* wrote: “‘Maedchen in Uniform,’ it seemed, was based upon a theme which some of the ladies and gentlemen of the Censor Board may possibly have thought was a bit reminiscent of ‘The Captive.’” *The Baltimore Sun* wrote: “The consensus of opinion is that it handles with tact and understanding the equivocal theme that first came to attention as a subject of dramatic treatment when Bourdet’s ‘La Prisonniere’ was produced in Paris and later in this country as ‘The Captive.’” Martin Dickstein, “Slow Motion,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (Brooklyn, NY, September 1932). “Maedchen in Uniform,” *Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD, October 1932). Many reviews in the *Maedchen in Uniform* clipping file in the Billy Rose Theater Collection at the New York Public Library for Performing Arts repeat this comparison.

Marcel Proust also published a novel dealing with lesbianism called *La Prisonnière* (aka *The Captive*) in 1923. Proust's novel and Bourdet's play both center on a man's frustration at his inability to win a woman who has been seduced by another woman. Beyond this, the details of the plot are quite different. I have not found any scholarship linking the two works, however, and it is not clear whether Bourdet was directly inspired by Proust's work or whether they were both operating within a set of established narrative and linguistic conventions. American newspaper references to *The Captive*, however, seem to refer exclusively to Bourdet's play.

⁵ For example, when *Maedchen*'s distributors applied to the Production Code Administration to re-release the film in 1936, the PCA denied the film a seal; a memo in the PCA files about the film stated: "The title *Maedchen in Uniform* and the story associated with it have thus become symbolic, as it were, of Lesbianism, as far as motion pictures are concerned." As quoted in White, *Uninvited*, 8. In a more public setting, a *Variety* review of the 1937 French film *Club de femmes*, wrote: "Picture develops the love-lives of several inmates of the club. One is mischievously romantic. The second goes on the loose. A third, a la 'Maedchen in uniform,' is attracted to a girl friend. All of them get in trouble." "Club de femmes," *Variety*, October 13, 1937.

⁶ Chon Noriega has described the way film reviews sometimes "spoke" the obscured homosexual meanings of films adapted from queer source material during the period after my study. Noriega, "'Something's Missing Here!'"

⁷ On lesbians in modernist art and literature, see: Sandra M. Gilbert, "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1980): 391-417. Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 2: Sexchanges* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), chap. 8. Shari Benstock, "Expatriate Sapphic Modernism: Entering Literary History," in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, ed. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York University Press, 1990). Andrea Weiss, *Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995). Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2004). Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005). Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). On lesbianism and early twentieth century American theater, see: Kaier Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians: The Emergence of Lesbians and Gay Men on the American Stage* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1987).

The impact of Radclyffe Hall and *The Well of Loneliness* is central to a range of studies, including Laura Doan's excellent *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Doan and Jay Prosser offer a useful overview of historical and recent scholarship on *Well* in the introduction to *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on the Well of Loneliness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). See also: Katrina Rolley, "Cutting a Dash: The Dress of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge," *Feminist Review*, no. 35 (Summer 1990): 54-66. Sonja Ruehl, "Inverts and Experts: Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Identity," *Feminism, Culture and Politics* (1982): 15-35.

Recent histories of female same-sex desire in the early twentieth century that draw from a wider range of sources include: Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*. Marcus, *Between Women*. Laura L. Doan and Jane Garrity, eds., *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Cohler, *Citizen, Invert, Queer*. Although Sherrie Inness draws attention to the importance of popular culture in producing the “lesbian” in her classic study, *The Lesbian Menace* (1997), she considers only *The Captive* and *The Well of Loneliness* in her analysis of 1920s lesbianism, does not refer to any contemporaneous reception material, and blends sources from the 1920s and the 1930s without regard to the changes occurring throughout these decades. Sherrie Inness, *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), chap. 1.

⁸ Examples include Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man’s Land*. Inness, *The Lesbian Menace*. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). My research has benefited from the increasingly diverse range of periodicals that has been digitized and indexed in recent years on services such as ProQuest and NewspaperArchive.com, although print and microfilm collections, including clippings files, scrapbooks, and non-digitized periodicals, remain essential.

⁹ As Ron Gregg has modeled with William Haines, this method of analysis could also be applied to Hollywood celebrities rumored to be gay, such as Marlene Dietrich, Katharine Hepburn, or Cary Grant. Ronald Gregg, “Gay Culture, Studio Publicity, and the Management of Star Discourse: The Homosexualization of William Haines in Pre-Code Hollywood,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 81-97. In contrast to these 1930s-era performers, it would be instructive to analyze the press around earlier stars rumored to be lesbian, such as Alla Nazimova and Lilyan Tashman. Press accounts may have followed the example of theater stars like Maude Adams, whose erotic relationships with women were occasionally reported without apparent impact on her popularity.

¹⁰ Studies of lesbianism in American film that consider *Queen Christina* and *Maedchen in Uniform* include: Weiss, *Vampires and Violets*. Shameem Kabir, *Daughters of Desire: Lesbian Representations in Film* (London and Washington, DC: Cassell, 1998), chap. 7. White, *Uninvited*. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), chap. 1. Jamie Stuart, *Performing Queer Female Identity on Screen: A Critical Analysis of Five Recent Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), chap. 1. For popular surveys and film guides that include these two films, see: Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*. Jenni Olson, *The Ultimate Guide to Lesbian & Gay Film and Video* (New York: Serpent’s Tail, 1996). Alison Darren, *Lesbian Film Guide* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000). Barrios, *Screened Out*.

For additional accounts lesbianism in American film history, see: Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). Tamsin Wilton, *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). Clare Whatling, *Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press and St. Martin’s Press, 1997). Judith Mayne, *Framed: Lesbians, Feminists, and Media Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Kelly Hankin, *The Girls in the Back Room: Looking at the Lesbian Bar* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Amy Villarejo, *Lesbian Rule: Cultural*

Criticism and the Value of Desire (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Christine Coffman, *Insane Passions: Lesbianism and Psychosis in Literature and Film* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006). Lee Wallace, *Lesbianism, Cinema, Space: The Sexual Life of Apartments* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

On *Maedchen in Uniform* in its original German context, see: Richard Dyer, “Less and More than Women and Men: Lesbian and Gay Cinema in Weimar Germany,” *New German Critique*, no. 51 (1990): 5–60; reprinted in Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), chap. 2. B. Ruby Rich, “Maedchen in Uniform: From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation,” *Jump Cut* 24 (1981): 25; reprinted in B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), chap. 11. Sutton, *The Masculine Woman in Weimar Germany*, chap. 4.

¹¹ Clearly we cannot get outside of our current moment and dominant paradigms entirely, but we can at least open ourselves to the alternative modes of reading and intertexts of a historical moment by taking reception material seriously and questioning readings that may seem “obvious” to us now. Chon Noriega emphasizes the usefulness of reviews for understanding historical frameworks of viewing films featuring deviant sexuality. Noriega, “‘Something’s Missing Here!’,” 21.

¹² Around 80-90% of silent films are presumed lost and many that survive are unidentified or in pieces. Of the films that survive, many are in archives that require one to be on-site in order to view them and many of those do not have viewing prints.

¹³ As I wrote in the previous chapter, the National Board of Review of Moving Pictures discouraged the depiction of “perverts” beginning around 1916, although the designation was not apparently applied to women. In 1927, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America’s (MPPDA) list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” included “Any inference of sex perversion” as one of the “Don’ts,” alongside prohibitions on such things as “licentious or suggestive nudity,” “white slavery,” and “miscegenation.” While these guidelines had few mechanisms of enforcement, a broader cultural taboo evidently kept representations of explicitly lesbian behaviors and identities from moving picture screens. For a full list of the “Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” see: Gerald Mast, *The Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 213-214. On the production and implementation of this list, see: Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 47-49.

¹⁴ Lucy Fischer, “Introduction: Movies and the 1920s,” in *American Cinema of the 1920s: Themes and Variations*, ed. Lucy Fischer (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 23-45.

¹⁵ Words by Joe Young & Sam M. Lewis. Music by Walter Donaldson. New York: Waterson, Berlin & Snyder Co., Music Publishing, Strand Theatre Bldg., Broadway at 47th St., 1919.

¹⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, chap. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹⁸ “Girls Will Be Boys.”

¹⁹ “The flappers latest flap to folly is to cap the climax with a boyish haircut,” wrote Edmund J. Kiefer at *Life* magazine. “Now they not only drink like men, smoke like men, swear like men; they even look like men.” Edmund J. Kiefer, “Girls Will Be Boys.”

²⁰ Pelswick, “New Films Find Feminine Stars in Male Garb.” “Girls Will Be Boys!”

²¹ Including: Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*. Weiss, *Vampires and Violets*. White, *Uninvited*.

²² So far these are the only two really explicit examples in American film I have been able to identify but it seems probable that there were others. It is difficult to find moments like these because they are so brief and therefore do not show up in reviews of film indexes and so many silent films have been lost. Not surprisingly, there are somewhat more examples in European silent film, including *Anders als die Andern* (Germany, Richard Oswald-Film GmbH, May 1919), in which same-sex couples dance together at a bar; *Moulin Rouge* (UK, British International Pictures, March 1928; U.S. release January 1929), in which one woman flirts with another at a bar in the opening scene; and *Die Büsche der Pandora* (Germany, Nero-Film AG, January 1929; U.S. release December 1929), in which the Countess Anna Geschwitz falls for Louise Brooks’ Lulu. There are many more suggestive moments (such as women dancing together), but they are not as explicitly marked as “lesbian” as these examples.

²³ Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*. Weiss, *Paris Was a Woman*.

²⁴ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, 113.

²⁵ Weiss, *Paris Was a Woman*. Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*. Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart*.

²⁶ Films like these were also aimed at international markets and it would be interesting to see how they were received in other contexts, although this question falls outside the scope of my study.

²⁷ Although Argentina is identified as the origin of a dangerous “tango” sensuality, the female couple marks this particular “Tango Palace” as authentically Parisian. In the Buenos Aires tango club seen earlier in the film, for instance, we see prostitutes, Native Americans, and working-class people, but no same-sex couples.

²⁸ Only Betty Lou reacts judgmentally to the French girls’ sexual frankness but, being a pragmatic girl, she responds by trying to impersonate a show girl in order to win back her childhood sweetheart. Although he falls asleep in the bedroom before anything happens, she is punished for her presumed sexual misconduct and sent back to the U.S. Her male partner is shipped back to the front.

²⁹ This is similar to upper- and middle-class “slumming” in Chinatowns, Greenwich Village bars, and Harlem jazz clubs. As long as the “exotics” stayed in their designated place, they offer a titillating spectacle, rather than a racial and sexual threat. The notion that Americans considered the lesbian to be confined to fiction or at least to the space outside American borders was articulated in an 1892 article on the Alice Mitchell trial: “Judge DuBose, of Tennessee, will have cited to him [...] the creations of French writers whom he and all his associates have looked upon as perverted creatures, dealing with matters outside of real life, or at least outside of American life.” “Alice Mitchell’s Crime,” *New York World* (New York, NY, January 31, 1892). As quoted in Duggan, “The Trials of Alice Mitchell,” 24.

³⁰ This conceit was popular both in vaudeville and silent film, particular within anti-suffrage and anti-temperance sketches. Film examples include *Why Mr. Nation Wants a Divorce* (Edison, March 1901), *When Women Vote* (Lubin, 1907), *Her First Flame* (Bull's Eye, May 1919), *Years to Come* (Rolin Films, January 1922), *Last Man on Earth* (Fox, November 1924), and *The Chaser* (Harry Langdon Corp., February 1928). Vaudeville sketches include "In 1999" by William C. DeMille and "The Woman of Tomorrow," performed by Iza Hampton Co. (*Variety*, June 28, 1912, 16, as quoted in Ullman, "Broken Silences," 104. Parodic articles also forecast a gender-reversed future, such as the *Toledo News-Bee's* "Here Is Peep into Future When Women Will Wear Mustaches" and Billy Gould's "original hints for Suffragettes" in *Variety* (which include "B.V.D.s are stylish, especially in the summertime" and "CIGARS should be carried in the left upper hand pocket of your waistcoat"). Margrete Daney, "Here Is Peep into Future When Women Will Wear Mustaches," *Toledo News-Bee*, 11 October 1924, Colleen Moore scrapbook #2, AMPAS, as quoted in Kristen Anderson Wagner, "*Comic Venus*": *Women and Comedy in American Silent Film* (Dissertation. University of Southern California, 2009), 310. Billy Gould, *Variety* (May 20, 1911, 19), as quoted in Ullman, "Broken Silences," 106-7.

³¹ The film is included in the National Film Preservation Foundation's DVD set "Treasures III: Social Issues in American Film." NFPF estimates that the film was shot circa 1912 and that the production company may have been Warner or Selig.

³² As George Chauncey has pointed out, some sexologists theorized a connection between sexual inversion and women's political ambition. William Lee Howard, for example, wrote in 1900 that, "the female possessed of masculine ideas of independence; the viragint who would sit in the public highways and lift up her pseudo-virile voice, proclaiming her sole right to decide questions of war or religion, or the value of celibacy and the curse of women's impurity, and that disgusting anti-social being, the female sexual pervert, are simply different degrees of the same class—degenerates." However, Howard's opinion was clearly polemical and did not, I believe, reflect mainstream opinion, which viewed women's incursion into the public sphere as troublesome in itself without any necessary suspicion of deviant sexual practice. William Lee Howard, "Effeminate Men and Masculine Women," *New York Medical Journal* 71 (1900): 687. As quoted in Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female 'Deviance'."

³³ *Ibid.*, 89-92.

³⁴ The opening credits of the film list Katherine Grant, Jimmie Finlayson, Martha Sleeper, and Laura de Cardi in the cast but do not specify which roles the actors play. I have used IMDb and AllMovie.com to match actors to roles, thus, these identifications should be taken with a grain of salt. Billie's best "man" seems to be either Helen Gilmore or Laura de Cardi.

³⁵ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, 102-110.

³⁶ The photograph was taken the year following the film so there was no direct influence, but their striking similarity suggests the presence of a third term that both may be emulating—an iconic pose and style of the female dandy. The prominence of Radclyffe Hall's look in these films suggests that the connection between Hall's style and lesbian was already at least partly established by 1926, before Hall published the *Well of Loneliness*. Either Hall was known as an invert before *Well* (which is possible, since she had been openly dating women since 1907 and

had published *The Unlit Lamp*, about a female romantic friendship, in 1924) or else the style that Hall adopted was already identified by some as a lesbian look.

³⁷ Unfortunately, two-reel comedies like this one were rarely reviewed so it is difficult to know precisely how audiences read a film like this. The reception of *A Florida Enchantment* reminds us that even filmic strategies that seem to reference lesbianism explicitly were not always read as such. Yet, given the circulation of other texts linking cross-dressing and lesbianism in the 1920s, audiences would be more inclined to read lesbianism here than they had been in 1914.

³⁸ The fascination of female bodies running into each other was a key attraction in early chase films as well.

³⁹ In addition to this innuendo, the intertitle more overtly suggests that A.B.'s business success comes at the expense of love life, as Heather Addison points out. Heather Addison, "'Do Go On!': Performing Gender in *The Clinging Vine* (1926)," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 25, no. 4 (2008): 34.

⁴⁰ Heather Addison and Karen Ward Mahar both see the film in these terms, as solely a commentary on the difficulty of being both a woman and a successful businessperson, without any lesbian insinuations. Addison, "'Do Go On!'". Karen Ward Mahar, "Working Girls: The Masculinization of American Business in Film and Advice Literature in the 1920s" (presented at the Women and the Silent Screen V, Stockholm, June 13, 2008).

⁴¹ Johanna Schmertz, "'Who Dressed A.B. Like a Girl?' Leatrice Joy's Performances of Gender in *The Clinging Vine* (1926)" (presented at the Women and the Silent Screen VI, Bologna, Italy, June 24, 2010).

⁴² An anecdote in *Photoplay* is suggestive but ambiguous on this issue. One day, while still disguised as a boy for her role in *Eve's Leaves* (deMille Pictures Corp., June 1926), Joy boarded a streetcar: "Believing that when in Rome be a Roman, Leatrice gave her seat to a pretty girl, received the award of a dazzling smile, and carefully tipped her hat. Then she retreated to the back platform and got into a brisk flirtation with two high school girls and to add the artistic touch to her masquerade she winked at them as she got off at the corner where her motor [car] was waiting for her." Richard Lamparski, "The Lark of the Month," *Photoplay*, July 1926. As quoted in Addison, "'Do Go On!,'" 338. One on hand, there had long been reports of male impersonators taking their disguise to the streets in order to prove its effectiveness. On the other, the anecdote shows the dangers of same-sex attraction that this kind of behavior opens up. However, the fact that *Photoplay* viewed the story as a "lark" suggests that it did not automatically signify lesbianism to most of their readers at this time. There is an important difference, though, between Joy's attempt to pass as a boy here and her mannish but identifiably female look in *A Clinging Vine*.

⁴³ *Photoplay*, for example, wrote: "Here, once more, is the goofy plot about the efficient young business woman who gets sex appeal the moment she tucks a couple of ruffles on her tailor-made. The satire of it completely escaped Paul Sloane, the director. Leatrice Joy gives a flat, mechanical performance as the girl. Tom Moore does what he can with the sappy hero. Trite and tedious." "The Clinging Vine," *Photoplay*, September 1926. *Picture Play Magazine* concurred: "The story [...] was trifling though fairly plausible entertainment on the stage, by reason of dialogue and music. But on the screen it is reduced to sheer silliness, and dull silliness at that."

“The Clinging Vine,” *Picture Play Magazine*, October 1926, <http://www.silentsaregolden.com/clingingvinereview.html>.

⁴⁴ Fred Schrader, “The Clinging Vine,” *Variety*, July 21, 1926.

⁴⁵ Ibid. The observation mirrors a remark in *Well of Loneliness* about a woman at Valérie Seymour’s salons: “if she dressed like a woman she looked like a man, if she dressed like a man she looked like a woman!” Radclyffe Hall, *Well of Loneliness* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1928), 353.

⁴⁶ Ullman, “‘The Twentieth Century Way’.”

⁴⁷ Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 50.

⁴⁸ Curtin 44. *The Syracuse Herald*, for instance, announced “Play Jury [...] Approves Lesbian Love Drama”: Percy Hammond, “‘The Captive’ Draws Not Guilty Verdict, And Rialto Rejoices,” *Syracuse Herald* (Syracuse, NY, November 21, 1926).

⁴⁹ “‘La Prisoniere’ [sic] To Be Put On By Frohman Here September 29,” *New York Morning Telegraph* (New York, NY, August 28, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 44.

⁵⁰ “Gilbert Miller Preparing To Defy Mrs. Loomis By Producing ‘The Prisoner’,” *New York World* (New York, NY, August 20, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 44.

⁵¹ The raid occurred on February 9, 1927 and two other shows were also raided: *The Virgin Man* and Mae West’s *Sex*. See: “Sex Plays Are Raided,” *New York Daily Mirror* (New York, NY, February 10, 1927) and Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 93. For an analysis of the political factors behind the raid and the key role of Mae West’s previous show, *The Drag*, see: Ibid., chap. 4.

⁵² *The Captive* ran for five weeks in Cleveland and had two two-week runs in Baltimore, but police raided the shows in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Detroit. *The San Francisco News* reported, however, that, “even the ridiculous spectacle of a squad of decidedly unaesthetic looking policemen trampling about the stage, trying to prevent people from saying things couldn’t lessen the tremendous dramatic effect of Edouard Bourdet’s fascinating drama.” As quoted in Ibid., 112-113.

⁵³ *The Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post* followed the raids and trials in detail. *The Chicago Daily Tribune* and *Life* magazine also discussed the controversy repeatedly. For example: “Police Squad Begins Theater Clean-Up,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC, February 10, 1927). “Theatrical War Rages,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, February 11, 1927). Burns Mantle, “Theater Fans Turn from Stage to Court,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, February 20, 1927). Robert Benchley, “Drama,” *Life*, March 10, 1927.

⁵⁴ Alexander Woollcott, “The Stage,” *New York World* (New York, NY, September 30, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 55. Additionally, the *New York American* wrote: “[The Captive’s] author has dealt with its subject splendidly, reverently, and without the least ribaldry, or ridicule, or contempt, or any of the childish and quite ignorant moods of a small town community.” Robert Benchley at *Life* magazine called the play “as

dignified and inoffensive a piece of dramatic writing as has appeared in New York for many seasons[.]” Alan Dale, “One Tragic Phase of Human Nature Frankly Staged,” *New York American* (New York, NY, September 30, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 54. Benchley, “Drama.”

⁵⁵ Édouard Bourdet, *The Captive*, trans. Arthur Hornblow, Jr. (New York, NY: Brentano’s, 1926), 150.

⁵⁶ Likewise, Alison Oram finds that the British popular press did not associate the lesbian with the cross-dressed or passing woman in the 1920s. Alison Oram, “‘A Sudden Orgy of Decadence’: Writing about Sex between Women in the Interwar Popular Press,” in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture*, ed. Laura . Doan and Jane Garrity (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 165-180 and Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, chap. 1 and 2.

⁵⁷ Bourdet, *The Captive*, 149-150.

⁵⁸ Bourdet told one reporter: “[A] playwright must not be the judge of his character. [...] It was not for me to absolve or blame anyone.” “The Captive,” *New York Telegraph* (New York, NY, November 28, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 51.

⁵⁹ Bourdet, *The Captive*, 149.

⁶⁰ In *The Sappho Companion*, literature scholar Margaret Reynolds writes that violets were associated with Sappho “because she mentions them in Fragments 94 and 103, and because she describes the Muses as ‘violet-haired.’ So a gift of violets spelt out a private message between women in the nineteenth century’s language of flowers; so they make an appearance in Robert Appleton’s *Violet: The American Sappho* (1894) [and] in Renée Vivien’s *Dans un coin de violettes* (1910)[.]” Sappho, *The Sappho Companion*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), 362.

⁶¹ Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 45, 51.

⁶² “The Premiere,” *Brooklyn Citizen*, September 30, 1926 and Woolcott, “The Stage.” As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 51.

⁶³ O. O. McIntyre, “New York Day by Day,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT, November 4, 1931). O. O. McIntyre, “Once Overs,” *San Antonio Light* (San Antonio, TX, November 4, 1931).

⁶⁴ “‘The Captive’ At Empire,” *Brooklyn Standard* (Brooklyn, NY, September 30, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 53.

⁶⁵ Percy Hammond, “The Theaters,” *New York Herald Tribune* (New York, NY, October 10, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 55.

⁶⁶ Woolcott, “The Stage.” As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 57. Along these same lines, the *New York Graphic* wrote: “among the first-nighters there was much speculation as to whether the extraordinary theme would be comprehensive to that coddled fellow, the man on the street” and the *Brooklyn Citizen* opined: “I really think that a good percentage of the audience will fail to ascertain what it is all about.” Kelcey Allen, “Amusements,” *New York Graphic* (New York, NY, September 30, 1926). and Ray W. Harper,

“Footlight Reflections,” *Brooklyn Citizen* (Brooklyn, NY, October 3, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 56.

⁶⁷ Gilbert W. Gabriel, “‘The Captive’ From Paris,” *New York Sun* (New York, NY, September 30, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 56.

⁶⁸ Burton Davies, “Much Talked Of ‘Captive’ Opens,” *New York Morning Telegraph* (New York, NY, September 30, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 43.

⁶⁹ “Odds-and-Ends of Stage-News,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL, September 26, 1926). Robert Bell, “Echoes of the New York Stage,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC, October 17, 1926). Wood Soanes, “Curtain Calls,” *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA, January 18, 1927). Hammond, “‘The Captive’ Draws Not Guilty Verdict, and Rialto Rejoices.”

⁷⁰ Arthur Hornblow, “Mr. Hornblow Goes To The Play,” *Theatre Magazine*, December 1926. As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 56.

⁷¹ George Jean Nathan, “The Week In The Theatre,” *New York Morning Telegraph* (New York, NY, October 10, 1926). As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 55.

⁷² The only estimate I could find of newspapers running McIntyre’s column is from Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O._O._McIntyre). Charles Driscoll, McIntyre’s biographer, does not say how many total newspapers McIntyre’s column ran in, but he lists seventy-six newspapers by name over the course of the book and estimates McIntyre’s readership at 104 million (a number he produces by adding together the circulation of each newspaper McIntyre contributed to and multiplying the total by 4.8, apparently “the number of readers usually allotted to each copy of a newspaper when advertising agencies figure readership”). According to Driscoll, then, McIntyre’s column appeared in approximately twenty-two million papers per week (presumably at the height of his career in the 1930s). Charles B Driscoll, *The Life of O.O. McIntyre* (New York: The Greystone press, 1938), 20.

⁷³ O. O. McIntyre, “New York Day by Day,” *Piqua Call* (Piqua, OH, November 16, 1926).

⁷⁴ Al Sherman, “Unjust Whispering Campaign on ‘Maedchen’ Points a Needed Moral,” *New York Telegraph* (New York, NY, October 1932).

⁷⁵ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, chap. 1.

⁷⁶ Leslie A. Taylor, “‘I Made up My Mind to Get It’: The American Trial of ‘The Well of Loneliness’ New York City, 1928-1929,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 2 (April 1, 2001): 261.

⁷⁷ Though Stephen usually refers to her own condition using euphemistic language (e.g. “one of those whom God marked on the forehead,” 301), the narrator labels Stephen and others like her as “inverts” (e.g. 271, 387, 390, 404, 406). Furthermore, Hall aligns her work with Havelock Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* using his testimonial as a preface. Hall, *Well of Loneliness*.

⁷⁸ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, 144-163.

⁷⁹ Hall, *Well of Loneliness*, 163.

⁸⁰ Louise A. DeSalvo, “Lighting the Cave: The Relationship between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf,” *Signs* 8, no. 2 (December 1, 1982): 204.

⁸¹ Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*, 123.

⁸² Andrea Weiss, for example, writes (regarding Garbo and Marlene Dietrich): “[T]he public could be teased with the possibility of lesbianism, which provoked both curiosity and titillation” Weiss, *Vampires and Violets*, 32. Ruth Vasey points out the importance of foreignness to Garbo’s sexual persona: “Foreigners, whether they were peasantry or aristocracy, were particularly liable to be eroticized through the implication that they operated according to alien and unknowable sociosexual norms. This contributed to the air of dangerously heightened sensuality associated with performers like Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo[.]” Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, 218.

⁸³ Vasey describes the way a variety of cinematic techniques for suggesting off-screen sex “hardened into clichés with repeated use,” requiring filmmakers to develop newer, more subtle codes that censors and the PCA would not object to. In 1935, says Vasey, “the PCA objected to a scene of rain falling on a closed door in the script of *The Devil is a Woman* (Paramount, 1935) on the grounds that such shots ‘are established over many years as the set up in motion pictures for an illicit relationship.’” *Ibid.*, 206.

⁸⁴ On Garbo as a sphinx, see: Belle M. M., “The Voice of the Movie Fan,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 20, 1928. and George Shaffer, “Ann Harding Adopts Sphinx Role of Garbo,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 1, 1932. On Garbo as Mona Lisa, see: Edwin Schallert, “Greta Magnetic,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, October 18, 1926). On Garbo as “the riddle of Hollywood,” see: Harry D. Wilson, “Why Garbo Plays Dumb,” *Motion Picture*, August 1931.

⁸⁵ Rilla Page Palmborg, for example, told *Photoplay* readers, “Dozens of stories have been written about the Swedish actress. Not one, until now, has told the real story of the real Garbo as she lives her life[.] [...] Here, for the first time in American journalism, is told the story of Greta Garbo’s home life—the life that is strictly and completely her own.” Rilla Page Palmborg, “Chapter Two of The Private Life of Greta Garbo,” *Photoplay*, October 1930.

The endless production of Garbo biographies suggests that the desire to determine the “truth” about the actress continues to dominate her stardom. Since at least the 1960s, an average of four Garbo biographies have been published every decade (peaking in the 1970s and 1990s, with five and eight biographies, respectively). Additional books are devoted to photographs of Garbo and to her films. Garbo is also a central player in accounts of lesbians in early Hollywood. Two interesting although not very credible accounts are Axel Madsen, *The Sewing Circle: Hollywood’s Greatest Secret: Female Stars Who Loved Other Women* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1995) and Diana McLellan, *The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood* (New York: LA Weekly Books, 2000). More credible are: William Mann, *Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969* (New York: Viking, 2001). Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay LA: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (Basic Books, 2006) and Brett L. Abrams, *Hollywood Bohemians: Transgressive Sexuality and the Selling of the Movieland Dream* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).

⁸⁶ DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 131, 140.

⁸⁷ Ronald Gregg, “Gay Culture, Studio Publicity, and the Management of Star Discourse: The Homosexualization of William Haines in Pre-Code Hollywood,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 81-97. Gregg argues that Hollywood studios “used a rich set

of codes [...] to communicate Haines' homosexuality to sophisticated urban movie audiences. When moralists finally caught on to the strategy, criticized the studios' efforts to sell homosexuality, and mobilized so effectively that they threatened box office receipts, Hollywood pulled back, not just by strengthening its production code, but by imposing new limits on advertising and fan discourse" (82). The backlash against Haines, as a homosexual man, was far stronger than any that would be levied against homosexual female stars.

⁸⁸ "They don't have..." cited in Alexander Walker, *Garbo: A Portrait* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 42. and Barry Paris, *Garbo: A Biography* (New York: Knopf and Random House, 1995), 99. "No one quite seems..." from Katherine Lipke, "Greta Garbo Most Alluring," *New York Times* (New York, NY, October 17, 1926).

⁸⁹ Mordaunt Hall, "Hollywood Surprises New Swedish Actress," *New York Times* (New York, NY, February 28, 1926). Lipke, "Greta Garbo Most Alluring." M. H., "The Hollywood Hermit," *New York Times* (New York, NY, March 24, 1929).

⁹⁰ Lipke, "Greta Garbo Most Alluring." H., "The Hollywood Hermit." Elza Schallert, "Famed of Europe Frolic in Cordial Party Circle," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, November 22, 1931). "Greta, Incognito, Plays Tag With Reporters", December 28, 1931.

⁹¹ Here are examples of articles that make each of these arguments. a) "An introvert and a neurotic": Katherine Albert, "What Garbo Thinks of Hollywood," *Photoplay*, August 1930. b) Mourning for Stiller: Adela Rogers St. Johns, "Great Love Stories of Hollywood, part III. The Tragic Love of Greta Garbo," *unknown*, April 1931. c) Ill-equipped for city living: "The Reason Why Greta Garbo Will Not Talk," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, August 9, 1931). d) Melancholy Nordic: "Greta Garbo, The Woman Nobody Knows," *The Living Age*, June 1931. e) Canny publicist: Wilson, "Why Garbo Plays Dumb." f) Anemic: Madame Sylvia, "Garbo's Glamour--Mystery or Misery?," *Photoplay*, December 1936.

⁹² Lipke, "Greta Garbo Most Alluring."

⁹³ Mick LaSalle, *Complicated Women: Sex and Power in Pre-Code Hollywood* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2000). Mark Vieira, *Sin in Soft Focus: Pre-Code Hollywood* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999). Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁹⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, chap. 11.

⁹⁵ Hays continued: "The man who publishes a book or the man who produces a stage play appeals to a more or less limited group. Not everyone can or will pay \$2 for a novel. Not everyone can pay that much or more to attend a dramatic performance. But everyone can—and nearly everyone does—pay the small price that grants admittance to the motion picture theater....The book stalls and the dramatic theaters appeal it might fairly be said, to the 'sophisticates.' But this is not the case by any means with motion pictures." *Federal Motion Picture Commission* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1926), 355. As quoted in Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, 102-103.

⁹⁶ Patricia White, "Black and White: Mercedes de Acosta's Glorious Enthusiasms," *Camera Obscura*, no. 45 (2001): 227.

⁹⁷ Tashman's lesbianism and parties appear in virtually every account of homosexuality in early Hollywood. These accounts, however, usually lean quite heavily on rumors and hearsay. Slide, Mann, Faderman and Timmons seem to be somewhat more careful than McLellan and Madsen. All these works provide fascinating insight into the queer fan culture that has developed around silent-era stars in the last century, but their assertions about the "facts" of stars' lives should be taken with significant grains of salt. Anthony Slide, "The Silent Closet," *Film Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1999): 24–32. Mann, *Behind the Screen*. Faderman and Timmons, *Gay LA*. McLellan, *The Girls*. Madsen, *The Sewing Circle*.

⁹⁸ Herrick clipping file, February 16, 1930, source unknown.

⁹⁹ Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, 217-218.

¹⁰⁰ "Young Star's Rapid Rise," *New York Times* (New York, NY, October 5, 1930).

¹⁰¹ Later profiles of Garbo allege that Garbo cut off all contact with d'Orsay after an interview with her about Garbo was published, possibly this one. An article in 1935, for example, stated: "At the house of a mutual friend Garbo met Fifi D'Orsay and took an instant fancy to the vivacious French girl who made her laugh so heartily. [...] In natural delight over her new acquaintance Fifi mentioned it aloud. It is related in awed whispers in Hollywood that she never heard from Garbo again after this episode." Dorothy Calhoun, "Why Garbo's Friends Dare Not Talk," *Motion Picture*, July 1935.

¹⁰² "Rambling Reporter," *Hollywood Reporter*, August 21, 1931.

¹⁰³ Herrick clipping file, December 22, 1931, source unknown

¹⁰⁴ "Rambling Reporter," *Hollywood Reporter*, January 7, 1932. Schenck was the president of United Artists, but he left to found Twentieth Century with Darryl F. Zanuck in 1933. The company merged with Fox Film Corporation in 1935.

¹⁰⁵ "The Lowdown," *Hollywood Reporter*, January 27, 1931.

¹⁰⁶ White, "Black and White."

¹⁰⁷ Alma Whitaker, "Celebrities Overflow Cinemaland's Rosters," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, May 1, 1932). "Garbo, Going Home, Leads Wild Chase in New York," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, July 26, 1932).

¹⁰⁸ Nancy Randolph, "Debut Party on Eve of Race at Belmont Park," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 21, 1932.

¹⁰⁹ Rilla Page Palmborg, "The Private Life of Greta Garbo," *Photoplay*, September 1930. Palmborg, "Chapter Two of The Private Life of Greta Garbo." Rilla Palmborg, *The Private Life of Greta Garbo* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday/Doran and Co., 1931).

¹¹⁰ *Milwaukee Journal*, Green Sheet daily feature, October 26, 1931 – November 1931.

¹¹¹ Palmborg had married a Swede, which, she insinuated, gave her an advantage in getting close to Garbo, though the journalist had no Swedish background or language skills herself. Palmborg, "The Private Life of Greta Garbo," 38. Many of the most in-depth reports about Garbo were written by Swedes or Swedish-Americans. These reporters suggested that only fellow Swedes

could understand her and also that she only allowed Swedes to get close to her, although it appears that the interviews were conducted in English.

Another Swede, Sven-Hugo Borg, who MGM apparently hired as an interpreter and companion for Garbo during her first years in Hollywood, wrote a tell-all account of his time with Garbo for *Film Pictorial* in 1933. Borg did not suggest that Garbo had relationships with women, although he was quite explicit about Mauritz Stiller's homosexuality.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 38, 92.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹⁴ Palmborg, "Chapter Two of The Private Life of Greta Garbo," 102. Although he later married Vivian Duncan, Nils Asther wrote in his autobiography (published in Swedish in 1988) that, one evening when he was a young actor in Stockholm, "Mauritz Stiller came up [to my apartment] and initiated me into the art of loving and enjoying my own sex," although he noted that, "there was no anal sex." He also denied the rumor that Stiller and Garbo were lovers. Original: "En kväll kom Mauritz Stiller upp till mig och invigde mig i konsten att älska och njuta av mitt eget kön. Det var inte analsex. Att han dompterade och gjorde Greta Garbo till sin älskarinna är inte sant." Nils Asther, *Narrens Väg* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1988), 31. Thank you to film scholar Arne Lunde for pointing this passage out to me.

¹¹⁵ Palmborg, "Chapter Two of The Private Life of Greta Garbo," 143.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 142. Palmborg, *The Private Life of Greta Garbo*, 164.

¹¹⁷ Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

¹¹⁸ Palmborg, *The Private Life of Greta Garbo*, 275.

¹¹⁹ "Greta, Incognito, Plays Tag With Reporters," source unknown (28 Dec 1931); Herrick clipping file; Harry D. Wilson, "Why Garbo Plays Dumb," 27, 93; Herrick clipping file.

¹²⁰ Patricia White connects Stephen Gordon's and Garbo's fastidious interest in male clothing in "Black and White," 253.

¹²¹ Palmborg, "Chapter Two of The Private Life of Greta Garbo," 36-9, 142-3.

¹²² Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*. Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart*.

¹²³ Palmborg, "The Private Life of Greta Garbo," 40.

¹²⁴ Wilson, "Why Garbo Plays Dumb."

¹²⁵ Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls*, chap. 3.

¹²⁶ Albert, "What Garbo Thinks of Hollywood." "Call Quiet Swedish Star 'Portrait of a Recluse'," *Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, MI, May 4, 1930).

¹²⁷ Adela Rogers St. Johns, "Garbo, the Mystery of Hollywood," *Liberty*, July 27, 1929.

¹²⁸ I explore the way Swedishness was used to recuperate Garbo's gender deviations in another article, "Garbo's Queer Crossings," in "Garbo's Queer Crossings," in *Border Crossings: Silent Cinema & the Politics of Space*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean, Anupama Kapse, and Laura Horak (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, under consideration).

¹²⁹ “The Reason Why Greta Garbo Will Not Talk.”

¹³⁰ B. Ruby Rich, “From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation,” in *Chick Flicks* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 185.

¹³¹ “The extent to which [von Bernburg] begins to identify her own desires and sensitivities with Manuela’s takes the shape of a literal superimposition. [...] [W]hile struggling vainly to retrieve a memorized passage from a mind gone blank in a beloved teacher’s presence, Manuela’s vision begins to blur. Fräulein von Bernburg’s sight, subjectively rendered, blurs as well, as her face becomes superimposed and fused with Manuela’s staring back at her.” *Ibid.*, 186.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 26.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³⁶ Williams borrows Leo Bersani’s terms “itch” and “scratch”: “Bersani beautifully describes Freud’s two forms of sexual pleasure as, on the one hand, an itch that can be satisfied by a scratch, and, on the other, an itch that does not seek to be scratched, that “seeks nothing better than its own prolongation, even its own intensification.” *Ibid.*, 48.

¹³⁷ Rich, “From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation,” 189.

¹³⁸ Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian*, 43.

¹³⁹ Rich, “From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation,” 193.

¹⁴⁰ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928*, chap. 7.

¹⁴¹ Colette translated the intertitles for the French release. These intertitles are reprinted in Colette, *Colette: Au Cinéma*, trans. Alain Virmaux and Odette Virmaux (Paris: Flammarion, 1975).

¹⁴² Explanations that link the censor board’s disapproval of the film to *The Captive* include: Wood Soanes, “‘Maedchen’ in English Shown in Berkeley,” *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, CA, November 1, 1935). Dickstein, “Slow Motion.” Marguerite Tazelaar, “Uncensoring ‘Maedchen in Uniform’,” *New York Herald Tribune* (New York, NY, September 18, 1932). Mordaunt Hall, “The Screen: ‘Girls in Uniform,’ a German-Language Picture Concerned With Life in a Potsdam Girls’ School,” *New York Times* (New York, NY, September 21, 1932).

¹⁴³ On the film’s U.S. destinations, see: “Maedchen in Uniform Still a Hit,” *New York Herald Tribune* (New York, NY, November 9, 1932).

¹⁴⁴ “M-G-M Drops Out of ‘Maedchen’ Picture,” *Motion Picture Daily*, October 19, 1932.

¹⁴⁵ John S. Cohen Jr., “The Talking Pictures: Europe Redivivus,” *New York Sun* (New York, NY, October 1932).

¹⁴⁶ “The title *Maedchen in Uniform* and the story associated with it have thus become symbolic, as it were, of Lesbianism, as far as motion pictures are concerned” wrote one of the Production Code Administration’s personnel in 1936, when distributors tried to rerelease the film. Memo with initials “K.L.,” February 12, 1936, PCA File on *Maedchen in Uniform*, Margaret Herrick

Library. In 1936, *Variety* used the title to describe a character in a French film, *Club de femmes*: “A third, a la ‘Maedchen in uniform,’ is attracted to a girl friend.” “Club de femmes.”

¹⁴⁷ Al Sherman, “Maedchen in Uniform,” *New York Telegraph* (New York, NY, September 1932). John S. Cohen at the *New York Sun* also mentioned *Well of Loneliness*, only to dismiss the comparison. John S. Cohen Jr., “The New Talkie,” *New York Sun* (New York, NY, September 1932).

¹⁴⁸ Additional examples include: Dickstein, “Slow Motion.” Bland Johaneson, “‘Maids in Uniform’ in Exquisite Diction Tells a Wistful Story,” *New York Mirror* (New York, NY, September 21, 1932). “New Films: Maedchen in Uniform,” *New York Bronx Home News* (Bronx, NY, September 21, 1932).

¹⁴⁹ Johaneson, “‘Maids in Uniform’ in Exquisite Diction Tells a Wistful Story.”

¹⁵⁰ Jeanette Marks, “Unwise College Friendships” (South Hadley, MA, 1908). Anne MacKay, *Wolf Girls at Vassar: Lesbian and Gay Experiences 1930-1990* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1993). Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men..*

¹⁵¹ “Whispered words” from Sherman, “Unjust Whispering Campaign on ‘Maedchen’ Points a Needed Moral.” Other examples include: Kauf., “Maedchen in Uniform,” *Variety*, September 27, 1932. Johaneson, “‘Maids in Uniform’ in Exquisite Diction Tells a Wistful Story.” When the film was revived at the World Theater, it was described as “The Story of a Strange Love” and accompanied by a “Special Lecture Daily 3:15 and 9:15 PM by Prof. John B. Schamus, Explaining the psychological aspects of this type of love.” Advertisement from *Maedchen in Uniform* clipping file, Billy Rose Theater Collection.

¹⁵² *The Dallas News*, for example, mentioned both Freud and Krafft-Ebing. “Notes on The Passing Show: Another Cinema Epic From Abroad...,” *Dallas News* (Dallas, TX, October 5, 1932). “Fanatic eyes” from Sherman, “Maedchen in Uniform.”

¹⁵³ “Maedchen in Uniform Still Brings Sharp Discussion,” *Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD, October 1932). Martin Dickstein, “The Screen: ‘Maedchen in Uniform,’ a Brilliant German Film, Makes Brooklyn Debut at the Majestic,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, NY, November 22, 1931). *The Washington News* also noted that, “Two schools of thought have surrounded “Maedchen in Uniform” with brisk and prolonged discussion.” Eleanore Wilson, “‘Maedchen in Uniform’ Offers New Possibilities in Style and Form,” *Washington News* (Washington, DC, October 2, 1932).

¹⁵⁴ “‘Sign of the Cross’ with Frederic March, Elissa Landi and Claudette Colbert,” *Harrison’s Reports*, December 17, 1932.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Watts Jr., “On the Screen: Maedchen in Uniform,” *New York Herald Tribune* (New York, NY, September 21, 1932).

¹⁵⁶ J. C. M., “The Current Cinema: The New German Picture,” *The New Yorker*, September 17, 1932.

¹⁵⁷ Untitled memo on *Maedchen in Uniform*, February 12, 1935, Production Code Administration file.

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- ¹⁵⁸ Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 175.
- ¹⁵⁹ James Wingate to E. J. Mannix, "Queen Christina", August 7, 1933, MPAA/PCA Collection: Queen Christina File, Margaret Herrick.
- ¹⁶⁰ Marcia Landy and Amy Villarejo, *Queen Christina*, BFI Film Classics (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 24.
- ¹⁶¹ White, *Uninvited*, 13.
- ¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 14.
- ¹⁶³ Sarah Waters, "'A Girton Girl on a Throne': Queen Christina and Versions of Lesbianism, 1906-1933," *Feminist Review* (1994): 43.
- ¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 45-46.
- ¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ¹⁶⁶ Margaret Goldsmith, *Christina of Sweden: A Psychological Biography* (London: Arthur Barker Ltd, 1933), 67.
- ¹⁶⁷ Waters, "'A Girton Girl on a Throne'," 57.
- ¹⁶⁸ Lewis Gannett, *New York Herald-Tribune*, as quoted in Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 64. After the film was released, the *Herald-Tribune* remarked: "What do facts and theories matter? Christina, to all those who see Garbo's film, will always be the lovely girl who fell in love with the Spanish Ambassador in the snow, and no amount of professional research will ever change her." As quoted in *Ibid.*, 66. Although the critic notes that the movie downplays the historical Christina's relationship with Sparre, mentioning the omission encourages audiences to read the cinematic Christina as lesbian. Incidentally, Faith Compton Mackenzie was the wife of Compton Mackenzie, who had written about the Sapphic colony on Capri in his 1928 *Extraordinary Women*, after the couple had lived there between 1913 and 1920.
- ¹⁶⁹ As quoted in Landy and Villarejo, *Queen Christina*, 21.
- ¹⁷⁰ Helen Dale, "Two Queens Were Born in Sweden," *Photoplay*, October 1933.
- ¹⁷¹ Landy and Villarejo, *Queen Christina*, 73.
- ¹⁷² This same thing happened when Garbo's character in *Grand Hotel* (MGM, September 1932), the moody ballerina Grusinskaya, repeated one of Garbo's trademark lines "I want to be alone." The inclusion of the "bachelor" line in *Queen Christina* suggests that it may also have been a kind of trademark, although not as ubiquitous as "I want to be alone."
- ¹⁷³ Viertel says that Garbo brought the idea to her and set up a meeting with Thalberg about it, although de Acosta and others also claim to have come up with it. Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers*. Mercedes de Acosta, *Here Lies the Heart* (New York: Reynal, 1960). Landy and Villarejo, *Queen Christina*, 14-17. Press accounts emphasized that Garbo had done research at Swedish archives before returning to Hollywood to make the film. *Ibid.*, 17.
- ¹⁷⁴ Although Christina does not fit in the Sweden of her time (she cannot be reconciled to her country's demand for war and appropriate reproduction), she seems to align with a new sense of

“Swedishness” concurrent with the film’s release. Elements that audiences may have associated with Sweden include: snow (she starts her day by rubbing snow on her face), athletic engagement in nature (hunting on horseback), intellectualism, and pacificism.

¹⁷⁵ Waters, “‘A Girton Girl on a Throne,’” 51.

¹⁷⁶ Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, 55.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷⁸ Landy and Villarejo, *Queen Christina*, 24.

¹⁷⁹ Garbo continued, “I managed to believe for ages that it would look as though she did it because she was weary of it all and from a boundless desire to be free. But I’m not strong enough to get anything done so I end up being a poor prophet.” Greta Garbo to Hörke Wachtmesister, January 1934. As quoted in Sven Broman, *Conversations with Greta Garbo* (New York: Viking, 1992), 119.

¹⁸⁰ Martin Stevers, “‘Now I Help You,’ says Garbo to Gilbert,” *Photoplay*, October 1933.

¹⁸¹ Betsy Erkkila, “Greta Garbo: Sailing Beyond the Frame,” *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (1985): 602.

¹⁸² The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice initiated a case against Raymond Halsey, a bookseller who sold John Sumner an English-language version of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in 1917. Halsey was acquitted and even successfully sued the Society for “false arrest and malicious prosecution,” a decision affirmed by the New York Court of Appeals. Taylor, “I Made up My Mind to Get It,” 273. Like Lillian in *A Florida Enchantment*, de Maupin is interested in experiencing men’s sexual freedom firsthand.

¹⁸³ While the articles and reviews in newspapers and magazines offer us insight into the language and frameworks that were available to audiences during this period, it would be valuable, in a future study, to find private accounts of viewing experiences of the time—by queer and straight audiences alike. Although retrospective accounts by queer subjects, like the ones Weiss provides, can be illuminating, they cannot tell us very accurately what the subject was thinking at the time, because once one has entered a certain paradigm, one tends to fit even one’s memories into it. It would also be worthwhile to investigate how these works, most of which circulated internationally, were received in non-U.S. contexts, where viewers would have fit them into different sets of discourses and intertexts. Furthermore, there remains a great deal of lesser-known films, novels, plays, and press accounts, like *The Clinging Vine* or even the brief moment in *Wings*, that articulated shifting concepts of same-sex desire and female masculinity that have still never been written about. I hope that this study can provide a jumping off point for further investigations into this fertile period.

Conclusion

¹ For example: Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003). David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film*, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

Wheeler W. Dixon and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *A Short History of Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008). Virginia Wright Wexman, *A History of Film*, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2010).

² Bell-Metereau, *Hollywood Androgyny*. Of the seven examples she does give, I would not count six of them as cross-dressing, much less “male impersonation,” because they feature women in masculine-influenced women’s clothing rather than women disguised as men, women playing male characters, or women wearing clothing specifically marked as men’s. The silent films she mentions are: three serials in which the protagonists wear jodhpurs (*Pearl of the Army* [Astra, 1916], *White Eagle* [Ruth Roland Serials, 1922], *The Timber Queen* [Ruth Roland Serials, 1922]), two westerns with no gender disguise (*The Fighting Shepherdess* [Louis B. Mayer/Anita Stewart Productions, March 1920] and *The Sky Pilot* [Cathrine Curtis Corp., April 1921]), a film with an androgynous protagonist (*Kiki* [Norma Talmadge Productions, April 1926]), and a film in which Gloria Swanson does a brief Chaplin impersonation (*Manhandled* [Famous Players-Lasky, August 1924]). In her account of sound era films, she also includes a number of films in which women inhabit masculine positions of power regardless of their clothing.

Bell-Metereau rightly points out the diversity of styles and genres of film in which cross-dressed women appear and that films often portray these women sympathetically. The wide range of titles she brings together from the sound era is an important contribution. However, by focusing almost exclusively on narrative, she leaves out the films’ cinematic syntax and visual style, their status as products in a commercial entertainment industry, their engagement with non-cinematic representational traditions, and the operations of stardom and fan discourse. She attends only sporadically to the films’ specific cultural and industrial contexts and how they were received at the time. Furthermore, she frequently describes the appeal of cross-dressing in universalizing, humanistic terms (for example, “[a] film that defies society’s codes of dress and sex roles implies that we can be liberated from superficial restrictions and sexual limitations, for in truly exploring androgyny the work taps the most profound psychological and mythic sources of art—the genderless human psyche,” 65) and privileges the “true androgyne,” for which Judith Halberstam justly takes her to task. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 207, 351.

In the entire history of American film through 1993, Bell-Metereau identifies only two hundred instances of cross-dressing, including both cross-dressed men and cross-dressed women (1). While Bell-Metereau’s claim was an important corrective to scholarship at the time, I suspect that the total number is well over a thousand. Jaye Kaye’s Transgender Movie Guide, an excellent fan website, for example, lists 1,184 American films featuring cross-dressing between the 1890s and 1989 and another 800 films between 1990 and 2010, bringing the total number to almost 2,000. Because the site is comparatively weak on silent films (although much better than almost any published work), I suspect that there are a good deal more than this. Jaye Kaye, “Jaye Kaye’s Transgender Movie Guide”, August 6, 2010, <http://members.fortunecity.com/jayekayetv/tmovies/>.

³ Slide, *Great Pretenders*, chap. 10. Homer Dickens, *What a Drag: Men as Women and Women as Men in the Movies* (New York: Quill, 1984). *Great Pretenders* is a loose narrative of cross-dressing in both theater and cinema and *What a Drag* is a collection of publicity photographs and frame enlargements. Both are important contributions, but neither one attempts to provide an analytical account of the material they present.

⁴ I found these films with the help of on- and off-line communities of transgender and queer cinephiles, silent film collectors, archivists, programmers, and scholars—as well as by searing through paper, microfilm, and digitized versions of periodicals, clippings files, and scrapbooks.

Cross-dressed and effeminate men in silent cinema beg for further study. Male-to-female cross-dressing was pervasive in moving picture comedies across the silent era, in Europe as well as the United States. While male-to-female cross-dressing was largely confined to comedy and crime films, the phenomenon was much more complex than many assume. Male-to-female cross-dressing has an important place in low, burlesque comedy traditions, but is also used in also middlebrow situation comedy, such as the oft-remade *Charley's Aunt*. The styles and intended effects of men in dresses varied widely, particularly when comparing professional female impersonators such as Gilbert Sarony and Julian Eltinge to slapstick comedians like Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel, and Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle. Unlike cross-dressed women, the question of deviant sexuality was very much present when viewing men in dresses, but this did not reduce their appeal. More research is needed to account adequately for the way these figures were read at the time.

⁵ Excellent recent histories that mention cross-dressed women, but do not do a sustained analysis of how these figures functioned more broadly include: Charlie Keil and Ben Singer, eds., *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009). André Gaudreault, ed., *American Cinema, 1890-1909: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009). Abel, *Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences, 1910-1914*. Keil and Stamp, *American Cinema's Transitional Era*.

⁶ The most influential scholars to make this claim are Newton, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian” and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936,” in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985), 245-296. Laura Behling reiterates this argument in her study of selected early twentieth century American literature, *The Masculine Woman in America, 1890-1935*.

⁷ Although Greg Pierce at the Orgone Archive (Pittsburgh, PA) told me that they have a *Girls Will Be Boys* released by Sports Pictorials from 1929, this could be a re-release of the 1921 Town and Country *Girls Will Be Boys*, which is also labeled “The Sports Pictorial.” There are also two sound films with this title—a 1931 short comedy from Educational Films Corporation of America in which, according to the IMDB, “[a] wife demands that her husband take over the household responsibilities, while she does his job, unaware that he is a piano mover” and a 1934 musical comedy from Britain starring German actress Dolly Haas. Of the second film, *Film Daily* wrote that: “The production should go well in the top houses, for its class and atmosphere of nice people and manners will appeal to the best people. For the mob, there is a love story with plenty of comedy highlights that will appeal to them.” “Girls Will Be Boys (1931),” *IMDb: The Internet Movie Database*, n.d., <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0021912/>. “Girls Will Be Boys,” *Film Daily*, June 7, 1935.

⁸ “Girls Will Be Boys,” *Moving Picture World* (November 1, 1913): 497. The film was released only four months before White's first appearance in *The Perils of Pauline* (Pathé-Eclectic, 1914), which would catapult her to international stardom, and was directed by Lois Weber's husband, Phillip Smalley.

⁹ Other examples include: Mary Pickford in *Kiki* (Feature Productions, Inc., March 1931), Shirley Temple as an old man in *Curly Top* (Fox, July 1935), Paulette Godard as a male dancer in *Pot o' Gold* (Globe/United Artists, 1941), June Haver as a male lead in *Irish Eyes Are Smiling* (Twentieth Century Fox, October 1944), Betty Grable imitating Vesta Tilley's famous "Burlington Bertie" number in *Mother Wore Tights* (Twentieth Century Fox, August 1947), Betty Hutton as a cowpoke in *Let's Dance* (Paramount, November 1950), Doris Day as Al Jolson in *I'll See You in My Dreams* (Warner Bros., December 1951), Carol Haney in the "Steam Heat" number in *The Pajama Game* (Warner Bros., August 1957), and Mitzi Gaynor as a sailor in the "Honey Bun" number in *South Pacific* (Twentieth Century Fox, March 1958).

¹⁰ Additional examples include: *The Return of Sophie Lang* (Paramount, June 1936), *Rosalie* (MGM, December 1937), *Sullivan's Travels* (Paramount, December 1941), *Zorro's Black Whip* (Republic Pictures, November 1944), *National Velvet* (MGM, December 1944), *Beauty and the Bandit* (Monogram, November 1946), *Cloak and Dagger* (Warner Bros., September 1946), and *How to be Very, Very Popular* (Twentieth Century Fox, July 1955).

¹¹ On frontier women, see: Bell-Metereau, *Hollywood Androgyny*, 80-95. On tomboys, see: *Ibid.*, 95-99 and Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 187-193.

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