

The Power of Dress: Donning 1930s Hollywood Replication Gowns

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Abstract

During the 1930s, Hollywood enticed women to purchase film costume replicas and product tie-ins in their local department stores via a cooperative marketing campaign. Hollywood replication gowns were inexpensive, available to consumers of modest means, and offered a way to explore the glamour of stardom through dress. They were available in a variety of styles, but the Letty Lynton dress was the most famous of its genre, and its success solidified the wide-shouldered look of the 1930s. The prevalence of similarly designed gowns establishes it as a cultural sub-meme of Hollywood replications. One example, housed in the Alameda Historical Museum (AHM), was analyzed using the material culture methodology of E. M. Fleming. The study presents a case in which women of this era experimented with the percolating sense of self-determination through Hollywood dress replications, unique to how women express that today.

Keywords: Hollywood Replication Gowns, 1930s Gowns, Gilbert Adrian, Letty Lynton Dress

Introduction

Supplying fashionable apparel to consumers of moderate means has been a mainstay of the American fashion industry, often by translating higher-priced designer apparel for the mass market (Kidwell, 1975). These garments were sometimes labeled “American translations,” which legally or illegally took liberal inspiration from Parisian couture and American designers. This paper will cover one market niche of garment replication, 1930s film costume promoted as “Cinema Fashions,” “Studio Styles,” or “Hollywood Fashions.” The study relied upon the material culture methodology of Ewing McClure Fleming, outlined in the article “Artifact Study: A Proposed Model.” The model framed the analysis of a Hollywood replication gown housed in the Alameda Historical Museum (AHM). The study findings underscored ways women during the 1930s explored demonstrations of power by donning replicas of gowns designed for the silver screen.

Susan Kaiser explored how fashion allows individuals to play with temporal subject positions (2012). Through dress, one can express different aspects of one’s identity. Addressing the adaptation of film costumes for everyday dress, Lauren Boumaroun observed, “Through wearing replications, consumers can appropriate the visual identity of fictional characters for their own self-expression through dress:” a practice she calls “everyday cosplay (2017, p. 249). Boumaroun noted



Figure 1. Accession number 82.26.1: Hollywood replication gown, acquired from Mrs. Wm. Murray July 3, 1982. Image courtesy of the Alameda Historical Museum

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that women today choose to wear film costumes linked to a specific character, whereas, in the early 20th century, they emulated film stars generally (2017).

This phenomenon was evident in my analysis of the 1930s Hollywood replication gown featured in this study. The gown was worn by Mrs. William F. Murray, wife of the mayor of Alameda, between 1931 and 1935. Nearing the end of her life, Mrs. Murray donated to the AHM memorabilia made up of documents and ephemera associated with her husband’s political career, with the only personal item included in the donation a floor-length bias-cut evening gown. Reflecting its value personally, she kept the dress for more than 50 years before bequeathing it to the museum. She saved the tag as well: a cardboard cut-out star printed with, “Copy of dress worn by _____” and in the space, handwritten, *Lupe Vélez, in Fashions of 1934*. The museum accession record indicates that the dress had been “purchased at Kahn’s Movieland Shop, Oakland, Ca.” It stands out not only for its dramatic design elements but as the only garment in the collection retaining its original sales tag.

Research Method: E. M. Fleming Model of Artifact Analysis

The material culture framework of E. M. Fleming formed the outline of the study (see Figure 1). The *Model of Artifact Study* asks the researcher to analyze the object in four operations. These read from bottom to top, establishing the artifact as the foundation of the study and moving upward to identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, and interpretation.

Foundation: The Artifact: History, Material, Construction, Design, and Function

Elizabeth Murray purchased the gown featured in this study in 1934 from the “Movieland Shop” located within Kahn’s of Oakland, the local department store. It is a two-toned floor-length yellow and black bias-cut dress with a belted zig-zag waistline. It has two prominent design foci. Wide ruffles that extend past the shoulder frame the bodice along the princess lines, and an extended hem length folds and wraps around the feet of the wearer. The dress shows inexpensive manufacturing in rayon (a silk substitution) fabrics and the lack of a lining common in evening gowns.

Operation 1: Identification

The first of Flemings’ four operations calls for description as a means of identification. The researcher defines the artifact’s history, material, construction, design, and function through the operation. Description includes classifying the artifact by type, assuring its authenticity,

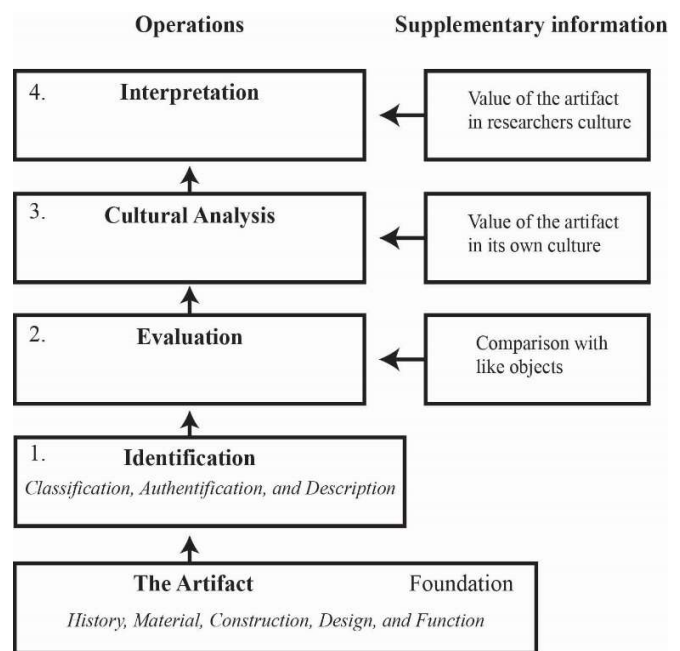


Figure 2: Adaptation of E. M. Flemings Model for Artifact study. Fleming, E. M. 1974. “Artifact Study: A Proposed Model.” Winterthur Portfolio 9: 153-73.

and describing it. A breakdown of the identification process conducted on Mrs. Murray's dress follows below.

Classification

The silver star tag attests that manufacturers produced this dress as a Hollywood replication gown. As early as 1925, fan magazines advertised "Screen Inspired Readymades," which readers could purchase through the publication (Berry, 2000, p. 11). They were either garments or patterns for garments made to reference the movie star who wore the dress in a recent film. Regrettably, few of these dresses exist today as the manufacturers used inexpensive, lower-quality materials and construction methods that reduced their longevity. The replicas were loose translations of the designer's original (Reyer, 2017) and quickly wore out. The Letty Lynton dress, produced in 1932 by the designer Gilbert Adrian for the film of the same name, was made famous by the alleged 500,000 reproductions sold through Macy's (See Figure 3). Well-known Hollywood costumers designed the original screen models, which were then contracted for reproduction by one of two intermediaries. The Modern Merchandising Bureau or Hollywood Fashions were middlemen who planned the garments consumer release with the film opening (Berry, 2000). Roger Eckart argued that this arrangement secured an agenda of product tie-ins between fashion and film and kindled a shift in the fashion industry where women looked to Hollywood for trend direction rather than Paris (Eckert, 1978; Berry, 2000; Richards, 1951).

In the 1930s, Hollywood costume designers like Gilbert Adrian and Orr-Kelly launched their careers designing for Hollywood stars like Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and Katherine Hepburn (Berry, 2000). The film company advertised replicas of the gowns to American female consumers by linking a marketable product to a celebrity (Eckert, 1978). Film production studios provided sketches of the costumed movie stars clothed in the original design to manufacturers through the Modern Merchandising Bureau or Hollywood Fashions, which assessed their sales potential (Eckert, 1978). Finding it satisfactory, manufacturers consulted the drawings and reproduced the gowns at lower costs, using cheaper materials and construction methods (Berry, 2000). The Hollywood replications were sold in separate cinema shops within department stores at price points that appealed to middle-class women.

During its "Golden Age," film production soared in the 1920s, with a slight downturn in attendance with the onset of the Depression (Warner, 2013). For example, movie-goers in the small community of Alameda could patronize more than six theaters within the six-by-one-mile city limits. Films were direct advertising methods linking female consumers with products to purchase. "Product placement joined overt merchandising tie-ins in the 1930s as a significant source of studio revenue" (Berry, 2000, p. 13).



Figure 3. The infamous Letty Lynton Dress worn by Joan Crawford in the film Letty Lynton. Released in 1932. Publicity photograph for MGM.

Authentication

Within the operation of identification, Fleming asks us to consider authenticity. In this case, whether the dress is authentic was complicated by its intentional reproduction. It raises the question of the legitimacy of garment translations. As the manufacturers of these dresses intended them for two different audiences, I assert they are authentic and legitimate. The original dress designed by Adrian was a singular creation intended for one user that doubled as a marketing ploy calculated to entice women to seek out the replication. The replication dress is also authentic. It is not a direct copy, and the garment producers intended to satisfy women of a specific demographic— not Hollywood stars but regular consumers. Viewing these designs in film, then in the press, and then locally, in a department store gave regular female consumers access to what had been deemed fashionable and up-to-date apparel.

Though the silver star tag establishes the genre of the dress as a legitimate Hollywood replica, several discrepancies exist. Fleming explains the authentication step as determining whether “the date, provenance authorship, material, and construction,” are accurate. (Fleming, 1974, p. 156). To complete this operation, I triangulated Mrs. Murray’s memory, the film the dress purportedly appeared in, and the actress who showcased it.

-Discrepancy 1: Mrs. Murray’s Memory

Mrs. Murray reported her memory of wearing the replication gown. The accession record reads:

Gown purchased at Kahns,’ Movieland Shop, Oakland, Ca., and worn by Mrs. Wm. Murray, wife of the Mayor of Alameda, 1931-1935, to a ball held at Neptune Beach, Jan 30, 1934. The dress is a replica of a gown worn by Lupe Vélez, famous movie actress of the time. Note: Mrs. Murray stated that she had worn black suede shoes with steel cut buckles to complete the outfit. (Murray 1980)

President Roosevelt’s Birthday Ball, a nationwide fundraiser for children with infant paralysis, occurred on January 30, 1934. The press reported: “Mrs. Murray led the parade, wearing a *light blue chiffon dress* (my emphasis)” (Fashion Creations, 1934). Due to the color and textile discrepancy, it is unlikely that Mrs. Murray wore the dress under study to this event. The date and occasion when Mrs. Murray wore the dress remains a mystery that would help clarify its significance to her: most likely, it was a similarly momentous affair.

-Discrepancy 2: The gown does not appear in *Fashions of 1934*

The silver star tag specifies that the replica dress appeared in the film *Fashions of 1934*, but a thorough review returned no link. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) released the film on February 14, 1934, after the occasion of the president’s birthday ball on January 30. Either the film star or the film was inaccurately attributed on the back of the cardboard tag.

-Discrepancy 3: Actress Lupe Vélez did not appear in *Fashions of 1934*

Fashions of 1934 exhibited a parade of Hollywood gowns, but none shared design similarities to the one housed in the AHM. Discrepancy 3 was the finding that actress Lupe Vélez also did not appear in the film. A salesperson error may explain this inconsistency.

A small hole pierced through a point of the star suggests that, at one time, a string threaded through it (See Figure 5). Today, during production, the manufacturer would affix a similar hang tag to the garment as a branding effort, but hangtags did not become common until the



Figure 4.
Lupe Vélez in a crepe dress with satin puffed sleeves by Adrian, 1934. Sketch of Publicity Photo from MGM's *Hollywood Party*.

mid-1900s. Could the stars have been used to tie the wrapped product post-purchase? Sealing the advertising link between consumer and product, the salesperson may have held the tags behind the sales counter and then penciled in the actress and film associated with the dress at the point of purchase.

As noted above, the cardboard silver star tag designated the original dress as worn in the film *Fashions of 1934*, but Lupe Vélez did not appear in that film. However, a press photo advertising the musical comedy *Hollywood Party*, released in the same year, exhibits the likely original gown (See Figure 4). Gilbert Adrian was the costume designer and the leading actress Lupe Vélez. In 1934, Vélez was well-known for two leading Hollywood roles and a Broadway performance. Typecast as the Mexican spitfire, her roles consisted of comedic scenes emphasizing her accent and fiery temperament.

With the prevalence of films, theaters, stars, and gowns produced in 1934, it is unsurprising that such an error could occur. This small error of inaccurate attribution underscores Bouraman's assertion that during the 1930s, the emphasis was less on defining and emulating one film character but on personifying stardom generally (2017). Less importance given to a particular movie star may have reduced the urgency of assigning the correct actress to the dress.



Figure 5. Silver star tag compliments of Kahn's Movieland Shop, 1934. Image courtesy of the Alameda Historical Museum.

The silver star references the silver screen and mythical movie star aura. Yet, a closer analysis of this cardboard star tag (Figure 5) reveals that it follows the shape of a six-pointed star: the Jewish star. Note that in Kahn's advertisement, above the star that appears under \$19.75 is the depiction of a five-pointed star. (See Figure 6). More research is needed to solidify the connection between Jewish designers, Hollywood, department stores, and the impact of direct Jewish symbolism during this time. However, Kahn's department store made a strategic link using the silver star as a visual reference of the silver star tag to the silver screen and, by extension, the film star with the replication gown. This move underscores the corporation's motivation to link Hollywood stars to consumer products at a local level.

Description

According to Fleming, the description of the object finalizes the operation of identification. The composition of this Hollywood replication dress is made of two fabrications: yellow taffeta- (labeled pink in the accession record) featuring a pattern of coin-sized dots- makes up the bodice, and black rayon crepe makes up the slim-fitting skirt. It features a matching black crepe belt with a gold clasp decorated with seed pearls to accentuate the waist. The bodice and skirt join at a raised waistline sewn together in a zig-zag style line. The dress is sleeveless with a high boat neckline and features wide parallel ruffles set in along the princess lines, beginning at the waist and continuing over the



Figure 6.
 “Big Week at Kahn’s-
 Wear the dress your
 Favorite Star wears.”
 Advertisement from
 The Oakland Tribune,
 November 24, 1933.

shoulders to the back. They extend to a dramatic width past the shoulders. The skirt is streamlined and bias-cut with a godet sewn into each side seam. The length spreads past the shoes to drape in a pool along the floor. A thorough analysis of the garment revealed it had been worn and enjoyed. The dress exhibits stains from perspiration and several rips and holes, suggesting the hem had been repeatedly trod upon- not surprising due to its length.

An analysis of the dress worn by Lupe Vélez in the press photo for the film *Hollywood Party*, seen in Figure 4, indicates the employment of superior design compared to the replication. Black satin ruffles catch light that transforms into radiating lines and directs the eye towards the wearer's features. In the replication, the shape of the ruffle appears more angular than circular (see Figure 1). In the original, the two fabrications create textural interest between the matte of the crepe and the smooth taffeta. It is unified in color and balanced between the upper body emphasis and the columnar element of the skirt. The replication, in contrast, presents discord by integrating opposing hues and values. Viewers

unfamiliar with the dress interpreted it as a separate bodice and skirt. While the gold buckle helps to unify the two colors, the designer added to the discord by creating additional visual statements in the trailing cloth at the feet and polka dots in the bodice.

The design composition establishes the original gown as a demonstration of superior design skills while recognizing the one-dimensional intent of the replication- sales. A review of published looks from the trade journal *Women's Wear Daily* from June of 1934 – the same month as the release of *Hollywood Party* and the replication dress – reveals the prevalence of both yellow and black as popular colors in “Color Contrast is Well Played Up in ‘While Parents Sleep,’” as well as the abrupt appearance of polka dots in “All the World Wears Dots.” Producers of replication gowns would have been keenly aware of these trends long before they emerged as such. Female consumers would have read the trendy design elements applied to the base silhouette approved by the Modern Merchandising Bureau as fashion-forward indicators.

Operation 2: Evaluation

In evaluation, the researcher judges the aesthetic quality and compares the artifact with others in the same genre. Fleming calls out two types of appraisals: the aesthetics of the artifact and its comparison to similar objects of the same genre. The operation of evaluation naturally leads to cultural authentication and then interpretation.

The dress worn by Lupe Vélez reflects similarities to the replication (see Figure 4). Both include exaggerated ruffled sleeves extending almost to the elbow, though Vélez’s dress is entirely black. Upon close analysis, the zig-zag style line at the waist is consistent in both gowns, with the crepe and taffeta fabrications. Both dresses feature a high neckline. The deep slit located at the center front and fastened at the top of the Vélez dress probably served the dual purpose of both style and functional closure. Transferring the slit to the back of the dress as a button closure in the replica would have appealed to a more modest consumer.

The original dress designed by Adrian and pictured in Figure 4 exhibits a sophisticated design not captured in the replica. Considering the head-to-toe analysis (DeLong, 1998), Adrian

directed the focus of the form to the face and upper body via the expansive ruffles. With hands clasped behind her head, the black ruffles expand to form an arced frame for the face. Vélez's dark hair follows the curve of the ruffles, and the arm gesture completes the circle. The dark dress and hair act as a background, contrasting her lighter skin. The light foreground is composed of forearms, face, and slit and takes on the shape of an upside-down triangle- the lower point of the Jewish star.

Operation 3: Cultural Analysis

The third operation put forth by Fleming leads us to cultural analysis- the relation of the artifact to aspects of its own culture. Fleming suggests that “in some cases functional analysis will indicate how the artifact became an agent of major change within its culture” (Fleming, 1974, p. 158).

The designs of Adrian influenced the styles of the 1930s, and historians speculate that he introduced the wide-shoulder trend- a feature of Mrs. Murray's dress. Adrian indicated that he intended, in these designs, to hide the narrow shoulders of Joan Crawford (Mindiak, 2017). However, even before designing for Crawford, his work shows broad shoulder emphasis through accentuating design elements at the shoulder level.

Marcketti and Angstmans analysis of fashion and trade periodicals of the 1930s found that the shoulder emphasis spanned the entire decade (2013). They point to the *Diffusion of Innovations* (See Figure 7) to catalog the channels of communication that influenced this change (Rogers, 2003). They argue that growth in women's sports initiated the advance in “mannish fashions” (Marcketti and Anstman, 2013) and define the four requirements for the cultural shift recognized with the mass adoption of a trend: innovation, a communication channel, time, and a social system (Rogers, 2003). According to Marcketti and Anstman, mannish fashions defined by a wide shoulder were the innovation; the popular press served as the communication channel; the social system was 1930s popular culture. (Marcketti and Anstman, 2013).

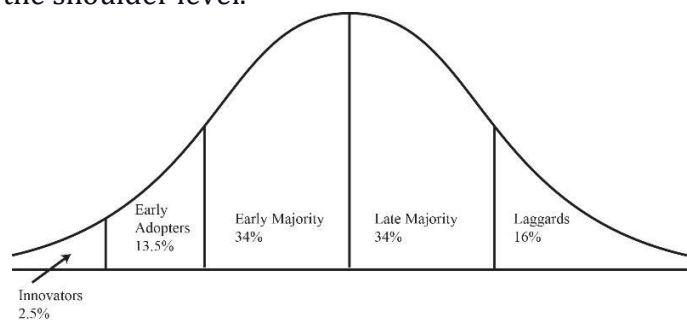


Figure 7: Adaptation of the Diffusion of innovations s-curve. Rogers, E.M. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations*. 5th ed. Riverside: Free Press.

Assuming the trend towards widened shoulders was percolating in the early 1930s, it is possible to assert that the Letty Lynton dress of 1934 was the catalyst that pushed the wide-shoulder style into mainstream acceptance. This dress featured a floor-length white organdy with ruffled pompom sleeves. Though quite different from the version worn by Lupe Vélez, the dresses share the wide-shouldered style that extends the fabric away from the body, the presence of ruffles, a slim waist, and a flared hemline.

Rogers expands on the dispersion of a trend through a social system, noting that an innovator- the initiator of change- often goes unrecognized (2003). In his graph illustrating the s-curve of adopter categories, the first introduction of an innovation is at the far left. Within a social system, the opinion leader (an individual who has exposure to all forms of external communication) is the one who propels trend adoptions forward. (Rogers, 2003). In support

of this theory, in 1930s fashion, Adrian played the role of an opinion leader. He did not invent the wide-shouldered look but propelled it forward. Multiple interviews on beauty advice by Adrian to average American women through fan magazines support this assertion. These articles take the tone of an advice column, “Adrian, famous studio style designer tells how you can acquire the distinctive chic of the stars” (Harrison, 1934, p. 43).

The wide-shouldered look represented by Mrs. Murray’s dress illustrates how some designs seem to catalyze trends and become social memes. Michael Schudson, in his article “How culture works,” (1989), contends with what conditions must be ripe for cultural memes to “take.” He finds that five conditions, retrievability, rhetorical force, resonance, institutional retention, and resolution, must be present for members of a society to alter their perception of cultural symbols.

Sometimes the media cultivate attitudes, sometimes not; sometimes music transforms or transfixes, sometimes not; sometimes ideas appear to be switchmen, sometimes they seem to make no difference; sometimes a word or a wink or a photograph profoundly changes the way a person sees the world, sometimes not. Why? What determines whether cultural objects will light a fire or not? (Schudson, 1989, p. 158)

The following table catalogs the presence of these conditions of the Letty Lynton dress and its replicas.

Table 1

The Five Conditions that Established the Letty Lynton Dress as a Cultural Meme

Retrievability How was the cultural object retrievable to the individual?	Through the media in the forms of movies and fan magazines, particularly <i>Photoplay</i> . Through product tie-ins with movie stars.
Rhetorical Force What made it unforgettable or remarkable?	Through the exhibition of extravagance post-depression. Presentation of iconic symbolism of the white wedding dress with visual reference to angels. A recognizable celebrity wore the dress.
Resonance What made the cultural object relevant to the audience?	As consumers, women were encouraged to elevate their style by copying movie stars in dress and makeup. Coming out of the Depression, there was a yearning for exuberance and elan. Women were beginning to explore more daring personas through work and sport.
Institutional Retention How was the cultural object sponsored institutionally?	Hollywood replications were a marketing strategy. Hollywood directed women to copy the styles of the stars seen in movies and newsreels (Berry, 2000).
Resolution How was the object a directive?	Media and advertisements directed women to purchase product tie-ins.

The availability of Letty Lynton Hollywood replications to middle-class American women of the 1930s satisfies Schudson’s five requirements to provoke cultural change and shifts the focus back to the meaning Mrs. Murray assigned to this dress. The meaning was so powerful that despite its torn hem and aesthetic discord, she held on to it until the end of her life. Did Mrs. Murray associate with the sassy character – Lupe Vélez – who wore the original dress? As noted above, Lauren Bourmoun (2017) found that though women today personify celebrities by wearing “screen-inspired ready-mades,” yet during the 1930s, the emphasis was more on the embodiment of “celebrity.” I assert that it is more likely that Mrs. Murray viewed her dress

as an extension of the cultural meme represented by the Letty Lynton dress. A dress composed of similar aesthetic elements dominated by a wide-shoulder silhouette and the representation of stardom. This point is underscored by the fact that the Lupe Vélez dress was never worn in the film.

Considering the artifact in its own culture necessitates a shift in thinking from today's emphasis on individuality towards the 1930s zeitgeist that stressed homogeneity (reflected in political movements of the time as well). The ideal of uniformity and conformity were cultural themes reflected in film production and set design such as the in the portrayal female models in synchronized sequences. In the opening scene of *Hollywood Party*, chattering phone operators materialize on the screen, multiplied into kaleidoscopic imagery. Known as Streamline Moderne, this era celebrated automation. Viewers considered uniformity as positive and tied to mechanization and modernity. The concept of multiplicity was underscored in the prevalence of dress replications, as was the lumping together of Hollywood stars under the general category of "celebrity." With this in mind, it is unsurprising that the dress Mrs. Murray purchased had been incorrectly labeled, enabling the mental links between Lupe Vélez and Letty Lynton dress to occur.

Operation 4: Interpretation

Fleming's fourth operation is interpretation and contends with assessing the artifact's value in the researcher's culture. In this study, the term "value" is critical. During the 1930s, the price of a replication gown was moderate, and the use of lower-cost materials and cheaper manufacturing resulted in a product easily thrown away, less valuable, and comparable to fast-fashion products today. Few of these dresses were kept, so finding one intact, with a story and a label, gives it great value. Alternatively, during the Depression, the availability of a fashionable product to a wide range of individuals imparted value, and today demonstrates the democratization of fashion (Kidwell, 1975). To Mrs. Murray, despite its ephemeral character, the dress represented something of great value as the only item in the donation that spoke to her identity.

Fleming suggests new themes may emerge through an intersectional reading of the object in an opposing culture. "Reading" the costumes featured in the film *Letty Lynton* in a modern context offers new insights. The protagonist, Letty, first appears in a white diaphanous dress with capacious shoulders. Second, she appears in a sleeveless black and white halter sheath cut on the bias (See Figure 8). The two costumes represent a duality that her character plays out in the murder of her abusive fiancé. Though unwittingly, the woman portrayed is "a woman to contend with." Letty's portrayal is as angelic and innocent, on the one hand, and on the other, a woman who takes the law into her own hands. Adrian often designed his costumes in black and white, and the second costume expresses the struggle evident in the film: the struggle between right and wrong/good and evil. According to Mircea Eliade, who wrote *The Sacred and the Profane*, portrayals of myths crop up repeatedly in contemporary media.

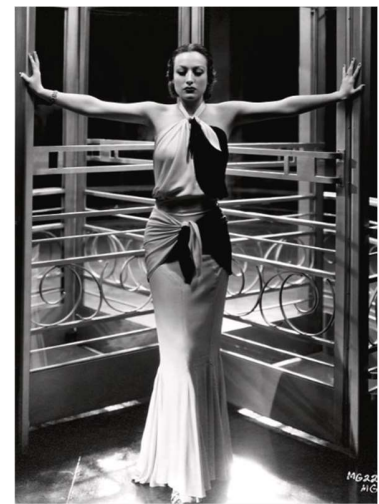


Figure 8.
Joan Crawford's
appearance in *Letty
Lynton*, 1932.
Dress designed by Adrian.
Publicity photograph for
MGM.

The modern man who feels and claims that he is nonreligious still retains a large stock of camouflaged myths and degenerated rituals... A whole volume could well be written on the myths of modern man, on the mythologies camouflaged in the plays that he enjoys, in the books that he reads. The cinema, that “dream factory,” takes over and employs countless mythological motifs—the fight between hero and monster, initiatory combats and ordeals, paradigmatic figures (the maiden, the hero, the paradisaical landscape, hell, and so on). (Eliade, as cited in Berger, 2016, p. 112)

Media presentations today suggest a similar cultural angst to the one expressed during the Depression – the feeling of powerlessness – and offer different routes for combating that emotion. The recent release of the movie *Cruella* is one example. Cruella's costume expresses power in extended shoulders and boldly demonstrates her moral struggle through divided hair color. Young people widely appropriated the style as an expression of their approval. Her wrestle for recognition plays out in the end as a turn toward action. Other media representations, such as the television show *Dexter* and Queen Latifah's *The Equalizer*, reflect a similar spirit to enact punishment outside the law. Contrast the blockbusters *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*, where the struggle exists, but virtue prevails.

Conclusion

Michael Schudson asserts, “the study of culture is equally the study of what meanings people choose and use from available meanings” (1989, p. 156). Viewers today don replication garments to explore for themselves specific characters portrayed in film. For Mrs. Murray, who in the records of AHM is only identified through her spouse, a stay-at-home mother of four, the Hollywood replication gown may have represented a moment when she could reimagine herself, like a movie star- in the limelight- a temporary hiatus from a hectic life mired in the Depression. The trend towards purchasing Hollywood replications may have offered opportunities for women to explore more daring, empowered roles through the embodiment of stardom. Films invited women to try new roles through dress (Bourmoun, 2017). As a subgenre of the Letty Lynton dress, Mrs. Murray's dress also alludes to the embodiment of authority and impact through the extension of the shoulder and evidenced through expanding opportunities in work and sports. The women in 1930s films demonstrate power through conformity and modernity- different from today's emphasis on individuality, but similar in the impetus towards action.

Though Mrs. Murray takes up little documentary space, the associations of her dress are glamour, celebrity, and impersonation. For many women, 1934 was an era of expanding female options. By purchasing and saving a copy of a gown worn by a Hollywood celebrity, Mrs. Murray is visible today through more than just the written records of her spouse.

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