Archaically Modern: Rethinking the Detective Look in the *Knives Out* Film Series

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Abstract

This article focuses on Rian Johnson's murder mystery films *Knives Out* (2019) and *Glass Onion* (2022) to explore the chameleonic sartorial choices of their detective protagonist, Benoit Blanc played by Daniel Craig. While in the first film, *Knives Out*, Blanc displays a conservative look with relaxed tweed suits, in *Glass Onion*, he showcases a more flamboyant look, with a striped blue and white tan suit, beige linen safari-styled suits and Breton striped sweaters. In this article, I explore how costume designer Jenny Eagan playfully rethinks the detective look, drawing inspiration from films by Jacques Tati and Alfred Hitchcock, to address issues of capitalism, privilege and class combining humour and social commentary. Benoit Blanc's attire, classic and yet bordering period fashion from the 1940s, presents a vintage dandy sensibility, taking the audience back to a past time. His look, I argue, not only deliberately helps differentiate Craig from his most famous role of James Bond, but also functions as a comforting tool for audiences in relating better with the masculinity of this down-to-earth detective. Despite presenting occasional camp features, Benoit Blanc performs a traditional, rational and intellectually reassuring masculine heroism.

Keywords: Detective; Male Costumes; Whodunnit; Daniel Craig; Suit.

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Introduction

In a particularly notable moment early on in *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* (Rian Johnson, 2022), Benoit Blanc, an astute and quirky detective, played by Daniel Craig appears from the horizon, seemingly emerging from an infinity pool and wearing a blue-and-white striped two-piece swimsuit. The sun of the Mediterranean location irradiates the scene and nearly blinds the camera, positioned at the surface level of the pool, as it tracks the man making an entrance and finding an available deck lounge chair. His body is fit, but covered in comfortably loose seersucker cotton and establishes Blanc as a middle-aged easy-going individual. The intertextual reference to the seashore scene early on in *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, 2006) cannot be ignored. On that occasion, the latest incarnation of James Bond played by Craig himself emerges from the waves, showcasing his sculpted muscular body in a swimsuit that would set him up as a new sex symbol.[1] Nearly twenty years apart, the short sequence in Johnson's film is significant, not only for creatively making an intertextual reference to Craig's most notorious role, but it also illustrates and opens up a way into thinking about how costumes ultimately construct different cinematic characters and contribute to the production of different representation of masculinity.

Drawing on foundational work of scholars such as Stella Bruzzi, Sarah Street and Drake Stutesman, who have probed the complex layers of meaning embedded in cinematic costumes, this article considers the sartorial metamorphosis of detective Benoit Blanc in Rian Johnson's murder mystery films *Knives Out* (2019) and *Glass Onion*. Focused on unravelling the intricacies of Blanc's chameleonic wardrobe, this analysis reveals the changes from the detective's conservative appearance in the former film to the flamboyant ensembles adorning him in the latter. The article, therefore, raises a set of questions. In what ways do costumes contribute to the redefinition of the detective archetype? And what do this representation might suggest in terms of masculinity? My aim here is to make some provisional suggestions about the traditionally male-centred detective genre, which has undergone transformation in its representation of masculinity, shifting towards a more cerebral depiction and suppressing the sexual appeal of its interpreters. This is an opportunity to unearth the strategic role of costumes in conveying character attributes, reflect on societal norms and challenge notions of masculinity. In fact, the cinematic detective under scrutiny, Benoit Blanc, deploys his attire not merely as a means of self-expression, but as a calculated tool to disarm, freely investigate, and underline his intellectualism. Ultimately this exploration seeks to unveil the complex co-presence of archaic and modern garments in the detective's wardrobe, transcending mere nostalgic sartorial aesthetics in order to delve into the symbolic, societal and narrative dimensions of male costumes in cinema and beyond.

Studying Suits: Costumes and Masculinity

Prior to an in-depth analysis of the costumes in the Knives Out film series, it is imperative to survey the burgeoning discourse on cinematic costumes within the broader academic context. The literature on costume and film has, over recent decades, undergone substantial expansion, offering insights into the intricacies of labour within wardrobe departments, creative agency, authorship dynamics, and the multifaceted contributions of cinematic costumes to character development, narrative, and audience reception. However, it is discernible that such research has exhibited gendered bias, with a predominant focus on the female dimension of costume design and its scholarly exploration. The ensuing discussion navigates through these gendered dimensions, highlighting the lacuna surrounding male costuming and positing its relevance within the broader cinematic discourse. According to Llewella Chapman, the scholarship at the intersection of film and fashion and/or costume is unsurprisingly gendered.[2] The issue is however multifaceted: first there is the concern that the costume design profession is often seen

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1. The vignette of the male or female figure emerging from the water occupies an iconic status in the Bond films, having appeared in multiple versions for instance in *Dr No* (Terrence Young, 1962) when Ursula Andress in a white bikini and hunting knife gets out of the water. For more details see John Mercer, "The Enigma of the Male Sex Symbol." *Celebrity Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (2013): 81–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2013.750125.

2. Llewella Chapman, *Fashioning James Bond. Costume, Gender and Identity in the World of 007* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 1.

as as a female profession; secondly, costume scholarship has often been conducted by women.[3] Thirdly, the literature has tended to privilege women and feminine identities on the screen, because as Stella Bruzzi succinctly put it, there is the perception that "dress is an inherently feminine trait".[4]

Consequently, male costuming remains an under-explored subject. In *Undressing Cinema*, Bruzzi has demonstrated the relationship between gangster genre, costumes and masculinity revealing the inherent "instabilities" of the genre.[5] Male costumes reinforce a character's status, background and money, and more specifically in the gangster film, suits and formal attires underline the narcissistic nature of the criminals and conceal the threat of their violent male body. While writing about film costumes designed by Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani, Bruzzi also defines male costumes as a more ambiguous object of study: they function in a spectacular way whilst at the same time not being "agents of display". This ambivalence represents both a rejection and a reference to the function of the spectacular, clearly affecting the representation of masculinity.[6] This is particularly relevant for the analysis of the first film, *Knives Out*, as the dark grey suits worn by Blanc do not want to draw attention. The private detective does not want to be on display or engage in a competition with the official police force: the anonymous suit is therefore the perfect armour to freely observe clues and investigate.

In her analysis of *Plein Soleil* (*Purple Noon*, René Clément, 1960) and *The Talented Mr Ripley* (Anthony Minghella, 1999), Sarah Street continues this path of reading films and male identity through clothes, illustrating how costumes paradoxically uncover many layers of meaning: as signs of personality, as tools for the creation of a cinematic look and as instrument of plot development.[7] Debates about masculinity are once again centre-stage within cinema studies since the publication of the pioneering article by Steve Neale on masculinity as spectacle nearly forty years ago.[8] And yet, many of them sadly underplay the role of fashion and dress more generally, because they often remain visually unextravagant.

The suit is however the single fashion garment that has gained significant attention, because historically its wearer was a man of wealth, or belonging to the rapidly growing professional middle class. The suit, as the modern armour, has had aspirational associations since its inception. For Pamela Church Gibson, the suit "both sheaths and conceals. But above all, surely, it renders the male body totally inaccessible [...]. Zippered in, buttoned up, it is thus presented to the world as a monolithic, even phallic, block".[9] This psychoanalytical reading of the garment is also supported by Tim Edwards who traces the history of male fashion, arguing that the suit is universally both "a symbol of masculine sexuality, in terms of broadening shoulders and chest and connecting larynx to crotch through collar and tie" and "a symbol of respectability".[10] For the purpose of this article it is important to make distinctions among different types of suits; they are not all the same and as ambiguous sartorial symbols, to borrow Bruzzi's definition, they stand for different attributes.[11] As we shall see in the textual analysis of the costumes in *Knives Out* and *Glass Onion*, the male suits present this duality: they can be elegant and yet asexual, concealing the muscular body, or exuding sensuality.

3.   This thesis is espoused by Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *Film Craft: Costume Design* (Lewis: Ilix, 2012), 12.

4.   Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1997), xv.

5.   Bruzzi, 67–95.

6.   Bruzzi, xvi.

7.   Sarah Street, *Costume and Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2001), 53.

8.   Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema", *Screen*, Vol. 24, no.6 (1983): 2–16.

9.   Pamela Church Gibson, "Brad Pitt and George Clooney. The Rough and the Smooth: Male Costuming in Contemporary Hollywood," in *Fashioning Film Stars Dress, Culture, Identity,* ed. Rachel Moseley (London: BFI, 2005), 68.

10.   Tim Edwards, *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (London: Cassell, 1997), 3.

11.   See also Stella Bruzzi, "Gregory Peck: Anti-fashion Icon," in *Fashioning Film Stars Dress, Culture, Identity,* edited by Rachel Moseley (London: BFI, 2005), 42.

Dressed to Detect: Crime and Costumes

The intersectionality of fashion and crime, seemingly disparate cultural domains, merits examination due to their inherent dichotomies. According to Nilgin Yusuf, fashion and crime are rarely associated as they represent opposite cultural spheres: "fashion is about the right and acceptable way to dress", whereas "crime is about the wrong, unacceptable way to behave".[12] When media technologies frame these two different worlds, new meanings emerge promoting new icons, hegemonic ideals, and disciplining bodies, compelling and repelling in equal measures. Navigating the interplay between crime as a cinematic or televisual genre and its manifestations through costumes necessitates a nuanced understanding of their symbiotic relationship.

The Knives Out film series, while adhering to established whodunit genre conventions, ingeniously manipulates these tropes. Notably, the detective's attire emerges as a significant aspect in this exploration, evoking traditional detective archetypes and their symbolic role in narrative unraveling. For example, *Knives Out* plays with the typical interview structure, where possible suspects are interrogated of their whereabout. It shows the recollection of the evening before the murder from different perspectives and introduces the detective character only at the very end. In her overview assessment of the genre, Philippa Gates summarises the core characteristics of the genre and draws the link between genre and gender:

> the detective genre has traditionally been a male-centred one based on the social assumption that heroism, villainy, and violence are predominantly masculine characteristics. Although there has been a proliferation of the female detective in recent decades in films, television series, and literature of the detective genre, the vast majority of protagonists throughout the history of the genre, the vast majority have been male. Not only is the genre male-centered, it is also hero-centred, tending to adhere to a structure of binary oppositions — good/bad, civilized/uncivilized, law/crime, order/chaos, and heroes/villains.[13]

What this definition leaves out is that the whodunnit is also a genre about disguise and the ability to unmask the disguise, a feature that sometimes is represented by the presence of clues in character's costumes. When one considers the costumes of the detective, their costumes need to be effective and utilitarian, rather than drawing attention to their bodies. The detective is seen as mind rather than body and costumes reflect this new form of heroism. This is in line with the shift to the "cerebral detective", a man or woman of action smarter and more sensitive which emerged in the 1990s to reflect a new gender sensibility.[14] Therefore, it is difficult to imagine them wearing spectacular extravagant clothes and the utilitarian overcoat or the trench coat has quickly become an iconic symbol of the profession from 1940s film noirs to 1980s television detectives.[15] In truth within the crime genre, flamboyant attire typically aligns themselves with perpetrators rather than the costumes of defenders of order, thereby establishing a correlation between ostentatious clothing and deviant conduct. An illustrative example is provided in the British television drama *Killing Eve* (2018–2022), wherein a confrontation between spectacular costumes worn by assassin Villanelle (Jodie Comer) and efficient anti-fashion garments worn by investigator/ agent Eve (Sandra Oh) stands out.[16] This paradigm extends to various contemporary television series featuring female detectives, where meticulous wardrobe curation renders these protagonists instantly recognisable through their distinctive style. Noteworthy examples include the brown leather trousers of Saga Noren (Sofia Helin) in *Bron/Broen* (*The Bridge*, 2011–18), or the Faroe knitted jumper of Sarah Lund (Sofie Grabol) in *Forbrydelsen* (*The Killing*, 2007–2012).

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12. Nilgin Yusuf, "Caught on Camera. The Fashioned Body and The Criminal Body," in *Fashion Media. Past and Present*, eds. Djurdja Bartlett, Shaun Cole and Agnès Rocamora (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 96.

13. Philippa Gates, *Detecting Men: Masculinity and the Hollywood Detective Film* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), 7–8.

14. Gates, 158–159.

15. For a comprehensive analysis of the enigmatic role of this garment see Jane Tynan, *Trench Coat* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022).

16. Sarah Gilligan and Jacky Collins, "Fashion forward killer: Villanelle, costuming and queer style in *Killing Eve*," *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, Vol. 10, no. 2 (2021): 353–376, https://doi.org/10.1386/ffc_00030_1.

When discussing costumes and male detective it is impossible to avoid the crucial role played by Tv detective Columbo (Peter Falk) and its unique sartorial style. Clad in a full suit, Columbo establishes an inseparable connection with his trench raincoat, which metaphorically becomes an extension of his muddled mind. This bond is underscored in the episode "Candidate For Crime", where he explains that "every once in a while I think about getting a new coat, but there's no rush on that. There's still plenty of wear in this fella!".[17] Columbo's raincoat is more than a decorative piece of costuming, more than a symbol of the detective's eccentric image. Although this attire might seem impractical in sunny Los Angeles weather, its tattered, wrinkled, and stained appearance serves as a calculated stylistic element intrinsic to Columbo's character and his unassuming presence and dishevelled look. The rundown appearance helps Columbo catch suspects off guard, as murderers are misjudging his look and underestimating his detective skills; they are ultimately caught thanks to his "just one more question". Acquired in New York City around the time of his casting in the NBC show, Falk's insistence on incorporating this trench coat, despite initial screen tests setbacks, eventually garnered approval from producers. The raincoat, thus, became an emblematic piece of armour, emblematic of Falk's growing familiarity and comfort in his role as the iconic detective Columbo.[18]

Knives Out: Reshaping Masculinity Through Attire

The critical acclaim garnered by *Knives Out* in autumn 2019 is inextricably linked to its outstanding performances, satirical humour, and incisive social commentary on class dynamics within an affluent American family. Writing in *The New York Times*, Manohla Dargis praised the ensemble cast and the "kinked and amusing" twists, whereas Mark Kermote, the *Observer* film critic, claimed that "*Knives Out* retains a beating human heart into which daggers are regularly plunged".[19] As a clever adaptation of the whodunnit genre, Johnson's film deals with the investigation of the apparent suicide of bestselling novelist, Harlan Thrombey (Christopher Plummer), led by private detective Benoit Blanc who arrives at the victim's Massachusetts mansion to examine clues and the strained family relationships. Set around three days, the film employs an ensemble cast of well-known actors, who provided exaggerated but not caricatured performances of peculiar characters: the flamboyant and wealthy writer, his entitled and avaricious children and respective spouses, his privileged and narcissistic grandchildren, and the strong and virtuous private nurse, Marta (Ana de Armas).

Integral to the film's success, attested by a plethora of online articles,[20] is the meticulous attention given to costumes, designed or sourced by costume designer Jenny Eagan and her team, who received a very clear task by director Rian Johnson, namely "to make each character as distinct as a Clue [Cluedo] character but with some version of modern dress".[21] Eagan's resultant creations serve not only as visual markers of individual characters but also as communicative tools conveying gender and class; she explains that she "wanted to make sure that they are separated, but still maintain some sort of unity as a family. It was really important to individualise them". In this film costumes function as characterisation tools providing important information about a character's gender, class and attitude. Despite having their own personalities, the *Knives Out* characters are bound together by their blood relationships and

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17. Columbophile, "Episode review: Columbo Candidate for Crime," *The Columbophile Blog*, October 17, 2017, https://columbophile.com/2017/10/15/episode-review-columbo-candidate-for-crime/.

18. David Martin-Jones, *Columbo Paying Attention 24/7* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

19. Cf. Mark Kermode, "Knives Out review — a deliciously entertaining whodunnit," *The Observer*, December 1, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/dec/01/knives-out-review-rian-johnson-superior-whodunnit-agatha-christie and Manohla Dargis, "Knives Out Review: Murder Most Clever," *The New York Times*, November 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/26/movies/knives-out-review.html.

20. Among them Cf. Rachel Smyne, "The Curious Case of Chris Evans's Sweater in Knives Out," *The New Yorker*, December 18, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/on-and-off-the-avenue/the-curious-case-of-chris-evanss-sweater and Giselle Gauthier, "Knives Out: The Quirky Style of Benoit Blanc," *The Kavalier,* June 8, 2020, https://thekavalier.com/blog/2020/4/21/knives-out-the-quirky-style-of-benoit-blanc.

21. Gabriella Geisinger, "Unpicking the secret code of Knives Out's clothes with the movie's costume designer," *Digital Spy*, November 30, 2019, https://www.digitalspy.com/movies/a30055798/knives-out-chris-evans-sweater-costume/.

most of all, their avarice and clinging to their status. The privately hired detective brought in to solve the mystery of Harlan's death had to be distinct from these family members, but also the official police force. Blanc did not have to stand out, in order to investigate, observe and freely move without drawing too much attention to his presence. At the same time, his costumes make him unique and distinguishable from the greedy Thrombeys. It is significant how the detective dispels Marta and the family's fears in Harlan's library, declaring that "My presence will be ornamental. You will find me a respectful, quiet, passive observer of the truth". Blanc's costumes reflect this apparent bland ornamental function: the suits are discrete and blend in without drawing too much attention. In a similar way as Columbo and his wrinkled trench raincoat, Benoit Blanc dresses to disarm his suspects, to make them conformable in his presence and thus in the hope of catching them off guard. The tweed suits and floral ties are not part of a power-dressing attire to overpower the Thrombeys, nor they are a direct threat to the official police force, Detective Lieutenant Elliott (LaKeith Stanfield) and police officer Trooper Wagner (Noah Segan) who wears similar but even blander attires. Channelling Columbo's strategy, Blanc wears these garments to put at ease his interlocutors or to avoid antagonising law enforcement officials. Nonetheless, small sartorial details make his costumes unique, playing two main functions: distinguish him from the other characters, particularly the wealthier Thrombeys, and, extratextually, differentiate Daniel Craig from his most famous role of James Bond. In doing so, the costumes contribute to reinforce a restrained masculinity whose heroism lies not in a muscular physicality, but rather in the sagacious intellectual capabilities of the detective.

While Benoit Blanc's drawl makes him immediately recognised as having a Southern US heritage, his wardrobe does not allude to this background. Avoiding the Southern Gentleman film archetype with its stereotypical striped seersucker suits, Eagan prefers dark grey tweed suits to blend better the character with the cold Massachusetts setting in late autumn. In comparison, Harlan, the mature patriarch of the family, possesses a contained eccentricity displayed not only through the costumes — he wears a pink shirt, a plaid coat and paisley silk scarf — but also in his house décor, which is in fact a reflection of the complicated plots of his mystery novels. *Knives Out* was shot in multiple locations, using primarily two mansions: a neogothic revival villa built in 1890 and located just outside Boston, and the Ames Mansion which is located at Massachusetts's Borderland State Park. Harlan's personality is conveyed through some bold aesthetic choices in terms of props: a collection of automata, doll houses, crime-scene dioramas and other odd paraphernalia contribute to depicting a portrait of a curious, intelligent, and bizarre mature man.

Solving the mysterious death of Harlan is an endeavour that takes place over the course of three days, and on each of them Benoit Blanc has a distinct different look, wearing three different combinations of suits, shirts and ties. More specifically, he is wearing two-button jackets with narrow notch lapels and the sleeves have three non-functional buttons matching the front two, thus following typical patterns used for tweed sport suits. The jackets are quite unstructured, and shoulders have no padding, giving a more relaxed and looser fit to Craig's body. This fitting is, therefore, rather different than the typical slim fit look of his James Bond's suits. While discussing the costumes of *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012), Chapman notes how Daniel Craig started developing his own agency over the choice of suits and shirts as he gained more confidence with his character.[22] Jany Temine, the film's costume designer, had to rely on Tom Ford as tailor of choice and in a *GQ magazine* interview, she reported Craig's preferences "a slim fitting suit tailored very near the body [...] Daniel wanted a suit you could forget — a suit that wasn't on top of his body, but moving with his body". In this quotation, Temine underlined the importance of the fitting for the overall look of the character, but more importantly for the comfort of the actor involved in many choreographic action scenes. Given Craig's athletic physique, one could argue that the Bond's suits merge with body and become one singular identity. Conversely, the ensemble of garments employed in *Knives Out*, I argue, functions to hide his physicality, keeping at bay his muscular body, without threatening and drawing attention to it. These costumes suggest that the display of masculinity is controlled, reassuring, non-threatening, and to some extend asexual. It is after all Blanc's brain and his astute sight that puts together the clues to solve the mystery, not the use of force, his sex appeal or muscles.

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22. Llewella Chapman, *Fashioning James Bond. Costume, Gender and Identity in the World of 007* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 257.

It is interesting to note how even the most action-packed scenes position Blanc in a secondary role. For example, in the car chase sequence, when Marta is at the stirring wheel, trying to reach a rendezvous with a mysterious blackmailing individual, or when she evades from the arson at the medical examiner office, Blanc is depicted with panache and a calm authority, urging the young woman to stop.

The look of Benoit Blanc is completed by classic items, such as a light brown herringbone wool topcoat, two pairs of honey turtle glasses, one with clear lenses and the other with amber lenses. As far as the trousers are concerned, they sit rather high held up by a pair of navy silk braces. Blanc' shirts, whose colour varies from light blue to white and light grey, all have a soft, long point collar; the fabric seems thick, reminiscing the style of the 1940s. As the film is reaching its conclusion, and Blanc is ready to reveal the culprit, he removes his jacket, rolls up his sleeves and tucks in his flower-motif tie, revealing the shirt's close fit and crinkles. The action of making his own body more visible, and yet still hidden behind the thick shirt, encapsulate the climax of the film as Blanc exposes the truth.

Overall, Benoit Blanc's style in *Knives Out* is reminiscent of the 1940s and exudes a conservative masculinity. He does not look quintessentially archaic, the costumes could be used nowadays, but they hark back to a classic time, which is perceived as reassuring and safe if not anonymous. Jackets, shirts, trousers, and accessories were all chosen carefully to make Blanc a little more rumpled than the wealthier Thrombeys. With his crease-free trousers but worn-out and wrinkled shirts, Blanc appears more approachable, relatable at least in the audience's eyes. If Blanc's classic but relaxed tweed suits give a pleasant look to the detective and at the same time tame Craig's masculinity, the cosiness of the white sweater worn by Ransom, the grandson of the victim and culprit of the crime, controls his exuberant body in a similar manner. Much of the discussion about the costumes of *Knives Out* on social media centre around this wool, Aran-knitted crew neck jumper worn by the character played by Chris Evans. In her analysis of the garment in *The New Yorker*, Rachel Syme concludes that the jumper became an internet phenomenon and spectators searched for similar items, making it a favourite Christmas gift that year.[23] In the film, and particularly in the scene set in the diner where Marta and Ransom discuss, the jumper symbolises Ransom's attire and reveals all his privilege. Eggshell is considered the colour of leisure, and the perfect shade for a man who has never worked a single day in his life. The pampered look is however ruined by tiny holes in the sleeve and the neckline, along with wearing some ragged Guggi loafers. The jumper conveys cosiness and soften the appearance of this wild character, but most importantly the stains, the holes and the ruined shoes indicate how Ransom is imbued with entitlement and does not care about his expensive clothes.

In short, Blanc's costumes in *Knives Out* represent a professional uniform: his appearance increasingly emphasises intimations of intellectual competence, utilitarism and detachment from desire. In the film his look expresses authority, but also represses sexual appeal, thus portraying an asexual masculinity, even paternalistic towards the character of Martha. This suppression of sexual desire, which the body of Craig has been for so long associated with, is reminiscent of Flügel's notion of the 'great masculine renunciation'. When discussing male fashion in relation to functionality and repression, Flügel ultimately argued that

> Modern man's clothing abounds in features which symbolise his devotion to the principles of duty, of renunciation and of self-control. The whole relatively 'fixed' system of his clothing is, in fact, an outward and visible sign of the strictness of his adherence to the social code.[24]

Adopting Flügel's terminology, Bruzzi has considered the function of bland, anonymous suits in the films starring Gregory Peck, who has renounced his desirability and submerged his attractiveness into uninteresting clothes. For Bruzzi, these suits connote a "reduction of male sartorial decorativeness" and therefore the rise of the professional middle class man. While the suit became a democratic uniform,

23.   Rachel Smyne, "The Curious Case of Chris Evans's Sweater in Knives Out," *The New Yorker,* December 18, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/on-and-off-the-avenue/the-curious-case-of-chris-evanss-sweater.

24.   John Carl Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth, 1930), 113.

"male fashions became more inhibited, more moral, more functional and less expressive".[25] Similarly this is also what happens in *Knives Out* where Craig's attractiveness is hidden behind tweed hopsack suits, the only mannerism still present are the floral ties. This masculine renunciation is operated to elevate the intellectual abilities of the detective, rather than drawing attention to physical strength and sexual prowess and more significantly, to distinguish this character from Daniel Craig as sex symbol in the Bond saga.

While in *Knives Out* Blanc dresses as an old-fashioned American detective with his tweed hopsack suits and soft-collared shirts, thus projecting the idea that he has a traditional, very conservative, sense of style, in the second film his outfits become much more peculiar, flashier albeit still reminiscent of old times.

Glass Onion: Artful Evocation and Sartorial Distinction

Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery marks Daniel Craig's first post-James Bond cinematic venture, and maintains a distinctive narrative trajectory while continuing its sartorial demarcation. Set against a Grecian backdrop, this second iteration playfully integrates motifs reminiscent of the iconic British spy, and classical Hollywood cinema. Costume designer Jenny Eagan seizes the opportunity to craft looks that channel a Golden-Age Hollywood aesthetic. This divergence, exemplified by Benoit Blanc's varied outfits, not only reinforces the character's evolving persona but also contributes to a broader discourse on archaic yet contemporary masculinities embodied in the sophisticated detective archetype. In *Glass Onion*, Blanc's look is reminiscent of costumes worn by Cary Grant, a film icon who encapsulates 1940s stylish masculinity. In "His Story of Fashion", fashion and cultural historian Tim Edwards identifies Grant as the most important 1940s' model because of his elegant suits, crisp white shirt and impeccable silk ties.[26] In contrast to the more restrained wardrobe of *Knives Out*, where Blanc's attire was characterised by shirts and hopsack suits, *Glass Onion* amplifies the detective's sartorial repertoire, showcasing four complete outfits: for his arrival on the island a tan suit with the jacket removed; a seersucker swimsuit made by Anto Beverly Hills for the pool and garden sequence; a beige linen safari-styled suit and a more casual evening look composed of a striped jumper, neckerchief and trousers.

Similarly to many individuals who endured boredom and the limitations imposed by prolonged Covid-19 restrictions, the film masterfully illustrates Blanc's ennui in spring 2020 as he languishes in a bathtub, smoking cigars and adorned in a smoking cap, an emblematic Victorian headpiece designed to prevent hair from smelling of tobacco. The detective is playing Among Us in a video call with some friends, all of whom are celebrity cameos. Among them, we see the late Angela Lansbury playing herself in a funny reference to the murder mystery genre and her notorious role of Jessica Fletcher in *Murder, She Wrote* (CBS 1986–1996). Blanc remains relaxed yet bored, yearning for a mission or a mystery to unravel. Despite the naked bust, the film avoids sexualising Blanc's body, rather the whimsical smoking cap and later, a blue-and-maroon striped rope he wears in his penthouse terrace, contribute to a dandy and even comedic aesthetics. In fact, in the bathroom scene, a yellow rubber duck and the cap itself strategically counter the potential intimacy of the setting and the naked physicality of Craig. Jenny Eagan, in an *Entertainment Weekly* interview, elucidates the nuanced stylistic choice, emphasizing Blanc's attire as a fusion of period aesthetics and contemporary details: "it borders on period and old-fashion, but yet contemporized a little bit. He's a character dressing for where he's going and what he's getting into".[27] The tasselled smoker's cap is instead the result of negotiations with the actor, since Eagan originally proposed a deerstalker cap as a nod to Sherlock Holmes, but eventually they agreed on the Victorian

25.   Stella Bruzzi, "Gregory Peck: Anti-fashion Icon," in *Fashioning Film Stars Dress, Culture, Identity*, ed. Rachel Moseley (London: BFI), 43.

26.   Tim Edwards, *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (London: Cassell, 1997), 3.

27.   Maureen Lee Lenker, "Dressed to kill: How costume designer Jenny Eagen [sic] brought the *Glass Onion* ensemble to life," *Entertainment Weekly*, November 24, 2022, https://ew.com/movies/costume-designer-jenny-eagen-glass-onion-knives-out-story-interview/.

headpiece. This supports Drake Stutesman's claim that costume designers consider the character not only in terms of what suits the storyline but also in terms of what complements the actor.[28]

Transitioning to Blanc's residence at 770 Park Avenue, New York, where his partner played by Hugh Grant also lives, the film introduces a dichotomy in Blanc's domestic appearance. Welcoming clients wrapped up in a dressing gown, Blanc presents a carefully curated image of a professionally poised individual, featuring an immaculate white shirt and a floral tie. This peculiar blend of quirkiness within the confines of a bathroom and conservative elegance on the terrace exemplifies the nuanced projection of masculinity. The juxtaposition of intimate and public-facing moments manifests a complex masculinity narrative that invite interpretation.

The film then jumps to the sunny Mediterranean Sea, where in May 2020 Miles Bron (Edward Norton) organises a murder mystery game in his private Greek island and invites a group of friends. Blanc joins the eclectic company, claiming he received a wooden puzzle box with an invitation inside like all the other guests. They travel to Greece and Blanc appears on a port quay in a beige linen safari-style suit, made of a heavy plain weave linen which is perfect for the climate and reminds the audience of his Southern heritage. The four-pocket front of the jacket provides a casual and sporty look, and the overall appearance is relaxed, even a little sloppy, since the chosen material, linen, does not stay crisp for long. The costumes are reminiscent of the 1940s, with trousers constructed without a separate waistband. Harking back to the look of Grant in *To Catch a Thief* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1955) or Frank Sinatra in Palm Springs, Blanc, as a laid-back detective, wears a light-blue shirt, slim-fitting but not too tight to the body.

Whereas *Knives Out* highlighted floral ties and suspenders as expressive touches, *Glass Onion* pivots to neckerchiefs as central motif in Blanc's outfits. These accessories, in alternating pink, light blue, or yellow hues, appear under the open collar of his shirts or banded around the top of his crew-neck sweater, serving both utilitarian and stylistic purposes. The bandana or neckerchief is worn either knotted at the front of his throat, to ultimately aim to catch sweat and protect the garment's neckline, or as a cravat in a more smart elegant manner. Drawing inspiration from French actor and filmmaker Jacques Tati, Blanc's choice of shoes further underscores the nuanced homage to old cinema: he wears different shoes with each outfit, starting with white sockless loafers at the port, Settat sandals from Manolo Blahnik by the pool and then some soft khaki canvas, similar to the style worn by Monsieur Hulot in Tati's *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953). Craig specifically cited Tati as a direct influence on this part of Blanc's costume, in addition to the yellow socks and his pointy bucket hat.[29]

Whereas in Bond movies the shoulders take central stage to underline Craig's muscular physique, here emphasis is put on the high waist and the trousers pleats. Once again, the archaic nature of the looks is rendered via a classic high rise suit trousers, without belt loops or braces. Blanc places his hands in side pockets stretching out the fabric between the trousers front pleats and in doing so he stereotypically draws attention to the groin. Along with the close-up shots of cocktail cuffs, this can be read as a display of virility and phallic power as seen plenty of times in the James Bond franchise.[30] In its meticulous attention to period-specific details and deliberate archaism, *Glass Onion* emerges as a cinematic ode to past fashion eras, a cinephile homage to costumes from the past. However, despite the detective's archaic styling distinguishes himself from other mainstream trends, it neither rebels against societal norms or subverts expectations. Instead, it navigates a nuanced exploration of masculinity through the lens of attire, adding layers of complexity to the character of Blanc and enriching the broader thematic discourse of the film.

In stark contrast to *Knives Out*, where Ransom's chunky knit jumper attained iconic status, *Glass Onion* prominently features the striped bathing suit set as a sartorial height. In recounting the creative process,

28. Drake Stutesman, "Costume Design, or, What is Fashion in Film?" in *Fashion in Film*, ed. Adrienne Munich (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 23.

29. Anne Cohen, "So, You're Obsessed with Benoit Blanc's 'Glass Onion' Bathing Suit," *Tudum Netflix*, December 23, 2022, https://www.netflix.com/tudum/articles/benoit-blanc-daniel-craig-glass-onion-costumes-bathing-suit.

30. For a discussion of pockets in relation to power and female suits see Gillian and Collins, "Fashion-forward killer", 362–365.

costume designer Jenny Eagan recalls the genesis of this distinctive ensemble from a directive inscribed by writer and director Johnson within the script: "He was in the pool with a shirt on." This translated into Daniel Craig's portrayal of Benoit Blanc donning an old-fashioned two-piece swimsuit comprising a loose short-sleeved shirt and thigh-length shorts, both fashioned from a white-and-blue striped cotton fabric. Eagan elucidates her design rationale, envisioning Blanc exclusively attired in a 1960s loungewear set, reminiscent of terrycloth material and characterized by vibrant, bold hues. The collaborative effort with a tailor, whose father used to design Frank Sinatra's Palm Springs ensembles, underscores the meticulous craftsmanship in creating Blanc's poolside attire.[31] This specific attire encapsulates a nuanced interplay between the utilitarian role of costumes in supporting the narrative and their capacity to transcend it, assuming the role of spectacle and temporarily suspending the narrative progression. Blanc's emergence from the infinity pool, alluded to in the introduction of this article, not only serves as a playful nod to the visual pleasure associated with bodies emerging from water, as constantly reproduced in the 007 saga, but also functions as a strategic cross-media promotional endeavour and commodification of costumes.[32] The deliberate choice to infuse a moment of aesthetic delight into the storyline not only aligns with the film's narrative objectives, but also underscores the multifaceted role that costumes play in the broader context of visual storytelling, seamlessly merging cinematic narrative with promotional considerations.

Conclusions

Knives Out and *Glass Onion* are particularly interesting in terms of contemporary costuming and its scholarly study. The costumes cannot be distracting in the whodunnit genre, especially for the detective; there is a lot of dialogue and other visual clues to pay attention to and solve the mystery. In *Knives Out*, Blanc's attire encapsulates a vintage dandy sensibility manifested in relaxed tweed suits that echo 1940s charm. The costume designer's deliberate choice not only serves to distinguish Craig from his iconic James Bond persona but also beckons the audience to a bygone era, imbuing the detective with a comforting, timeless allure. In this film, the costumes also become an opportunity to discuss broader socio-economic themes, weaving threads of capitalism, privilege ad class and creating a visual dialogue that transcends mere costuming. Conversely, *Glass Onion* sees Blanc embracing a more exuberant wardrobe given the Greek location. This departure from the conventional detective look prompts an examination of who Blanc is. I content that despite the more flamboyant accessories such as the bandana or the two-piece swimsuit, Blanc's attire aligns with traditional, rational and reassuring masculine heroism, offering audiences a relatable, more down-to-earth male hero.

The evolution of Blanc's attire across the two films encapsulates the malleability of costume design, not only reflecting narrative and character development, but also serving as a testament to the impact that costumes can have on audience engagement. In conflating past and present, the films celebrate the timeless power and creativity of fashion and the archaically modern detective is the pivot of this trend.

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31. Gillian and Collins, 362–365.

32. Pamela Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (London and New York: Berg, 2012).

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