

Clothing as a Vehicle of Gender Stereotypes. The Case of Cary Grant

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Published: July 11, 2024

Abstract

The construction of a star's image is a complex process, and one element that plays a fundamental role in this is clothing. Cary Grant, a legendary actor of classic Hollywood cinema, is remembered not only for his acting but also for his impeccable style and elegant wardrobe. However, what sets Grant apart is the fact that his clothing choices, particularly those linked to his on-screen roles, often challenged traditional gender stereotypes, making new statements about the intersection of fashion, identity, and expectations. In examining Grant's filmography, we can observe that his on-screen wardrobe intentionally diverged from conventional norms, challenging not only the established notions of men's clothing but also the traditional associations with power and status. In movies such as *Holiday* (1938), directed by George Cukor, Grant often wore outfits that are in contrast with his character's actions. In this movie, Grant portrays a wealthy businessman who challenges the expectations of high society. He rebels against the norms imposed by his bride-to-be, engaging in childish activities with his future sister-in-law. The juxtaposition of his appearance and his rebellious personality challenges the expectation that men should always present themselves as serious and composed. In other movies, such as *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), directed by Howard Hawks, Grant wore female pieces of clothing. He plays a paleontologist who is forced to wear a woman's dress. While the initial use of cross-dressing serves a comedic purpose, it evolves into an exploration of gender identity. Initially, the act of wearing a dress is met with reluctance and awkwardness. However, as the character becomes more comfortable with this unconventional attire, a newfound confidence is reflected in both his demeanor and movements. The use of cross-dressing in movies has a rich history, often employed for comedic effect. However, in Grant's performances, it transcends mere humor to become a vehicle for exploring deeper themes of gender fluidity and identity. Cary Grant's public image was intricately tied to his personal life and clothing choices, making his style not only a personal statement but also a key component of the public imagery associated with him. Beyond the screen, his fashion sense became iconic, influencing the perception of masculinity and style during his time. This opens to new analyses of the role of clothing in gender expression and performance in cinema, as Grant's deliberate deviations from societal norms prompt a reconsideration of the relationship between attire, identity, and societal expectations. In view of this, it is possible to argue that Grant's on-screen sartorial choices challenged the status quo and, at the same time, invited the audience to question pre-conceived notions of gender roles. It is for this reason that the paper, using the methodology of fashion theories, focus on the actor's ability to seamlessly integrate unconventional clothes into his roles to demonstrate a blended understanding of fashion's potential as a tool for social expression and commentary. The aim will therefore be to demonstrate that Cary Grant not only left an indelible mark on film history, but also contributed to a broader conversation on the intersection of identity and style.

Keywords: Cary Grant; Classical Hollywood; Stardom; Masculinity; Cross Dressing.

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Acknowledgements

The present article is the result of full collaboration between the two authors. However, in order to distinguish the authorial contribution, it should be noted that Chiaia is the author of Introduction and Conclusion while Bariselli is the author of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3.

Exploring Alternative Masculinities through the Disparity of Attire and Acting

Introduction

The intersection of fashion, cinema and masculinity has been subject of profound exploration in the humanities, reflecting the intricate dynamics between societal norms, personal identity, and cultural representation.

In cultural dimension the definition of “masculine values”, usually fix in contrast to feminine ones, is also conveyed through clothing. The modification of the concept of masculinity itself in European and North American society occurs with the industrial revolution and, as a side effect, men’s fashion loses fantasy, reaching the standardization of the suit as a form of social supremacy. While biology delineates the physical disparities between man and woman, in fact, the delineation of masculine and feminine attributes emerges as a product of intricate cultural processes: already in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir highlighted the stark division between genders, grounded in both biological differences and culturally constructed perceptions. Classic cinema, under the stringent regulations of the Production Code, further cemented traditional ideals of masculinity, epitomized by the archetype of the white, heterosexual, economically stable man.

Stars like Cary Grant navigated these constraints, imprinting their own interpretations of masculinity onto the screen. Grant’s sartorial choices, meticulously curated even beyond the confines of production studios, served as a canvas for the expression of a nuanced masculinity, blending sophistication with charisma. Also, the roles played by Grant, from the suave gentleman to the bumbling protagonist, epitomized the fluidity of masculinity, often challenged by comedic circumstances and interactions with female counterparts. His on-screen persona, oscillating between confidence and vulnerability, mirrored the shifting landscape of gender dynamics in mid-20th century America.

From this starting point, the following reflection will examine, in particular, the relationship between masculinity and clothing in classic cinema epitomized by Cary Grant’s iconic roles. Through humour, wit, and sartorial expression, Grant in fact challenged societal norms, offering audiences a glimpse into a world where masculinity transcends rigid stereotypes, embracing vulnerability, authenticity, and self-expression. The analysis of the film *Bringing Up Baby!* (1938), wherein Grant’s character navigates comedic scenarios often involving cross-dressing, will serve precisely to demonstrate the revolutionary scope of such a *resemantization* that goes so far as to question traditional notions of masculinity. Grant’s characters, thrust into absurd situations that require them to wear women’s clothing, blur the boundaries of gender expectations, revealing the malleability of identity in the face of social conventions.

Thesis and Methodology

The portrayal of fashion in cinema has long captured the imagination of audiences and scholars alike, reflecting and shaping perceptions of gender identity and expression. Yet, fashion theories tend to analyze primarily female dress, somehow forgetting that male dress can also be a vehicle for different meanings

and identities. The intersection of fashion and masculinity in cinema is more than mere aesthetics; it embodies complex narratives of power, identity, and cultural discourse.

The overall goal of this study is to explore this fundamental yet often ignored field of male fashion and to deepen the understanding of how cultural perceptions of gender identity and expression can be woven into the costumes themselves.

Our research is focused on the iconic figure of Cary Grant, who has left an indelible mark on the entertainment industry. Specifically, we are interested in exploring the intersection between fashion theories and gender studies in his career. To achieve this, we plan to build on the work of several experts who have conducted similar studies in recent years. These scholars have produced valuable insights into the themes we wish to explore and we intend to utilize their research as the foundation for our analysis. By leveraging their findings and combining them with our own research, we aim to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how fashion and gender have influenced the legacy of Cary Grant.

In this article, we will examine Cary Grant's early years as an actor from 1931 to 1939 and how he utilized his personal wardrobe as costumes, contextualizing it within the pre-code era and then in productions made after the advent of the Code Hays. This paper also uses the off-screen image of Cary Grant to explore how the representation of different masculinities evolved from the actor's time on screen to his later work as a freelancer. To explore the correlation between Grant's outfits and his acting style, which helped him communicate a new form of masculinity after the termination of his Paramount contract, we have analyzed three films with his starring roles between 1937 and 1938: *The Awful Truth* (1937), *Holiday* (1938), and *Bringing Up Baby!* (1938).

Cary Grant, Cinema, and Costumes in the 1930s

Humor and laughter have been an essential part of human entertainment for ages. The roots of comedic entertainment date back to ancient Greece and Rome, where comedy was showcased alongside tragedy in theatrical festivals. Aristophanes, a renowned Greek playwright, was famous for his satirical comedies that often targeted politicians and societal norms.¹ Over time, comedy evolved and gave rise to various forms of comedic literature, satire, and theater, including *vaudeville*, *burlesque*, and pantomime.

According to Wes D. Gehring's book, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy*, scholars often use the terms Screwball Comedy and romantic comedy interchangeably. However, Gehring argues that the two genres are distinct from each other. The focus of Screwball Comedies is to make the audience laugh and showcase the theme of love. The romantic elements are not crucial to the interactions between the main characters, which gives the writers the freedom to experiment with different settings that may not be realistic. The characters' growth and development heavily rely on the conflicts they experience throughout the story since the main female lead appears to be in control of the game, often humiliating her male counterpart.²

This genre gained popularity during the 1930s, right after the Wall Street crash in 1929 and the beginning of the Great Depression, and many of the films that were produced in these years were linked to the impact the Depression had on American society. In 1932, Franklin Roosevelt was elected as the president of the United States and introduced the New Deal, an economic policy that rekindled the hopes of the American people.³ However, in the cinema industry, this policy resulted in a type of censorship. In 1934 the Production Code was drafted, binding all major US production houses to standardize film products and make a clear distinction between film genres. This censorship code led to the elimination of elements that had been prevalent in film narratives until then, such as violence, sex, and all deemed controversial themes, including homosexuality. Comedies often pushed the limits of these conventions with a heavy use of irony.

1. Christopher Olsen ed., *Acting Comedy* (Routledge, New York 2016), 58.

2. Wes D. Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2008), 1-4.

3. Wes D. Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2008), 4-8.

The definition of masculinity portrayed in classical cinema is linked to the traditional view of men in the 20th century. This view describes men as white, heterosexual, capable of supporting their families through work, and possessing good social standing. According to R.W Connell social constructs like class or race can be manifested in different kinds of masculinities.⁴ Connell also notes how the relationship between different masculinities is established through the hegemonic model of masculinity since she observes how the most powerful people often appear to refer to this specific category of masculinity in the Western world in the 20th century.⁵ The traits that define such masculinity, however, depend on the society in which it develops, acquiring different traits based on the gender it relates to or the social position it refers to.⁶ Different forms of masculinity, according to Connell, present among themselves not only a level of subordination or domination but also of “complicity.” She further observes that few men manage to fit into the prescribed canons for the “hegemonic masculinity” model; many manage, instead, to gain advantages through “complicity”.⁷

Masculine values, especially those which are hegemonic, are also demonstrated through clothing. The concept of masculinity in European and North American society was modified around the mid-19th century when men’s fashion lost colors and shapes, reaching the standardization of the suit as a form of assertion of social and economic dominance in society. The first form of masculinity that arises from this is that of the dandy, who combines clothing, elegance, and power. The male suit thus becomes a symbol of elegance and sophistication derived from the wealth of the owner. Towards the end of the 19th century, productivity became associated with masculinity, resulting in the male suit being seen as a symbol of masculinity.⁸ The jacket, waistcoat, and trousers are elements that serve to present a marked distinction between masculine and feminine gender, but at the same time, they are highly restrictive in movement because they tend to emphasize the shoulders, chest, and legs as central elements in the identification of the male gender.⁹

Attention to the history of fashion, as noted by Tim Edwards, has primarily focused on women’s clothing, indissolubly linking the concepts of “fashion” and “feminine” and consequently the idea of “frivolity,” which, in the case of male identity, initially becomes part of the phenomenon of dandyism and later classified as “effeminacy”.¹⁰ According to Connell, masculinity, or rather, the various forms of masculinity, are elements that change based on the era and geographical reference. According to the author, since the concept of masculinity is an ethnographic element, Western masculinity presents common features between Europe and North America, given the strong influence that European countries exerted in American territories. Moreover, the scholar notes that descriptions of what is masculine in one era might not translate in another.¹¹ Revathi Krishnaswamy, analyzing the origin of the term effeminacy in English, notes how it was initially used to describe the inhabitants of India and did not carry a negative value.¹² This transformation, coinciding with the creation of the modern masculinity imaginary, corresponds to the attempt, by Western countries, to demonstrate their physical and intellectual supremacy during the nineteenth century. At the time, masculinity in the West appeared as an element not defined by sexuality but opposed to effeminacy, which, in turn, began to be associated with homosexuality by the end of the nineteenth century.¹³

4. Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

5. Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 77.

6. See Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

7. See Connell, *Masculinities*.

8. Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross dressing, sex, and gender*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) 175.

9. Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus* (London: Routledge, 2010), 46.

10. Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus* (London: Routledge, 2010), 106.

11. Rachel Adams, David Savran, ed., *The masculinity studies reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 245–261.

12. Rachel Adams and David Savran, eds., *The masculinity studies reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 292–336.

13. Rachel Adams and David Savran, eds., *The masculinity studies reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 1–9.

Stella Bruzzi observes and analyzes the differences in meaning between the words drag, transvestism, and cross-dressing.¹⁴

With drag, the intention is to perform the opposite gender as a spectacle. Often these shows, featuring drag queens and drag kings, take place within gay communities and are not simply comedic performances but are embedded in a series of practices, including Vogueing and housing, to assert their identity in a heteronormative society. Transvestism is not part of a performance but instead is “erotic excitement induced by garments of the opposite sex”.¹⁵

Cross-dressing, on the other hand, is the practice of wearing clothing historically assigned to the opposite gender and is often used for comedic purposes. This form of performance is most used in cinema, especially in comedies like *Bringing Up Baby!* (1938) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959). In donning clothes assigned to the opposite gender, it is demonstrated how the cultural element is constructed and not innate, as theorized by Judith Butler.¹⁶ Within cinematic narration, this element is often used for comedic effect. In *Some Like It Hot*, the two male protagonists, on the run from the mob, are forced to dress as women to survive. When they wear the clothes, their movements change, their voices become higher, and even the activities they choose to engage in appear socially assigned to the female gender. Bruzzi observes how the sight of a man in women’s clothing can unintentionally instill fear in the viewer, who realizes that the fundamental rules governing society can be broken.

Through his roles, Cary Grant, in comedies during Hollywood’s classical era, conveyed an image of masculinity different from what the Hays Code had attempted to frame through censorship. His characters often appear insecure in front of their female counterparts, but this often changes through the story and especially through clothing as in *Holiday*, or through antisocial behaviors as in *Bringing Up Baby!*, where he engages in actions frowned upon by those around him. Between acrobatics and athletics in Cukor’s film, Grant finds himself breaking off an announced engagement to marry the sister of the woman to whom he had originally proposed. Grant’s characters reveal a deconstruction of the male image through their costumes on the screen. The characters appear quirky, unaware of the society in which they are embedded, referred to as *lunatics* but who are nevertheless a vehicle for discussion of social issues.¹⁷

The role of clothing in shaping the image of Hollywood stars cannot be overstated. Many costumes were tailor-made by top designers and costume artists to create a specific persona for each star. During the golden age of Hollywood, production studios meticulously crafted the personalities of their stars, carefully selecting actors and actresses who could convey a particular message or ideal and casting them in roles that accentuated their strengths. Richard Dyer’s analysis of Hollywood star personalities identifies several stereotypes, including the good Joe, the rugged hero, the rebel, and the pin-up. These roles often defined the entire career of a star, limiting them to portray only a specific type of character. In such a manner, Hollywood stars were created and molded to suit the needs of the industry, ensuring that they became icons of a particular era.¹⁸ Cary Grant’s star image from 1931 until 1936 was under the control of Paramount and was defined by a strong traditional masculinity. They assigned him roles in which his clothing mainly consisted of uniforms or tight-fitting suits to identify him as the romantic focus of the film’s leading lady, such as Marlene Dietrich or Mae West.¹⁹ In these roles, the character did not have much depth, but it was essential for him to be charming and demonstrate a defined social status, either as a military man or a wealthy businessman capable of satisfying every request of the woman he loves. However, this did not prevent Cary Grant from breaking free from production studios and conveying different forms of masculinity through his attire and comedic elements. Classic cinema reinforced the

14. Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing cinema: Clothing and identity in the movies* (London: Routledge, 1997).

15. Robert Stoller, *Sex and Gender, Vol.1: The development of Masculinity and Femininity* (London: Karnac Books, 1985), 176.

16. Judith Butler, *Gender trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990).

17. Giaime Alonge and Giulia Carluccio, eds., *Il cinema americano classico* (Roma: Laterza, 2006), 82.

18. Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI Publishing, 1998), 47–59.

19. Giaime Alonge and Giulia Carluccio, eds. *Cary Grant: L'attore, Il Mito* (Venezia: Marsilio 2006), 50.

traditional vision of masculinity while simultaneously opening spaces to explore and represent other nuances of the male gender.

His film career brought him success in 1933 alongside Mae West in *I'm No Angel*. In 1934 he got his first starring role in the comedy *Kiss and Make Up*, and in 1935 he was cast as the male lead opposite Katherine Hepburn in *Sylvia Scarlett*, a film that was not commercially successful but made Grant a star. With the advent of comedic roles, and especially Screwball Comedies, uniforms disappeared and male suits, with different fabrics and patterns, emerged as always consisting of three pieces: jacket, waistcoat, and trousers. Sometimes these were accompanied by female pieces of clothing. Through his clothing, Grant managed to embody a sophisticated and modern masculinity, different from the traditional model, even while wearing garments conventionally assigned to the male gender. His figure, like that of many actors of the time, represented a masculine ideal combining elegance, charm, and confidence.

After leaving Paramount in 1936, Cary Grant became one of the first freelance actors, signing non-exclusive contracts with Columbia and RKO, including a clause about clothing in each contract. For his roles, he would provide his wardrobe, refusing costumes designed by costume designers, thus gaining not only contractual freedom but also control over his image. Grant's attention to the tailoring of his clothing was crucial, especially for comedies where he had to perform acrobatics learned in vaudeville.²⁰ This clause demonstrates his knowledge of clothing and fashion, and his ability to define a character's image. Cary Grant, both on-screen and in everyday life, demonstrated an effortless elegance. His ability to dress with naturalness influenced the concept of fashion, highlighting that attention to clothing can be sophisticated without appearing contrived.

Comprising jackets, waistcoats, and trousers, the suit is what comes closest to the idea of men's fashion. Originally a symbol of elegance and social status, it has adopted different meanings depending on the social context in which it is worn. Since the 20th century, the impracticality of the male suit, especially in the workplace, symbolizes social and economic power. The emphasis on shoulders, chest, and legs as central elements in the identification of male gender simultaneously limits movements. The man in a suit, therefore, demonstrates not only his masculinity but also the elevated status derived from the stasis imposed by his clothing. However, the immobility resulting from this is disrupted by Cary Grant in several films where the actor's athletic abilities, learned in vaudeville, clash with clothing that makes movements complex and forces the body into plastic poses. Despite the three-piece suit being a distinctive form of attire in Grant's career, it is possible to observe elements that contrast the protagonist's personality in the film with the message communicated by formal clothing.

Analysis of Cary Grant's Clothes in 1930s Screwball Comedies

In both films *The Awful Truth* (1937) and *Holiday* (1938), Cary Grant's protagonists are presented as respectable, professional, and quite rich, but whose behavior is unacceptable to high society. The three-piece suit can be restrictive not only in a literal sense, concerning the possible movements enabled by the garment, but also in its associated image.

In *The Awful Truth*, when the protagonist Jerry Warriner, played by Grant, visits his ex-wife Lucy (Irene Dunne), his clothing appears to put him in difficulty for two reasons: it is not as elegant as that of Lucy's new suitor, a wealthy oil tycoon from Oklahoma, but at the same time, allows him to play with the dog the couple had adopted before marriage, causing him embarrassment.

Jerry's true acrobatic abilities, however, are showcased in the scene where he tries to find Lucy (Irene Dunne) in the arms of the presumed lover: the singing teacher. While trying to enter the room where he supposes the affair that led to their divorce is taking place, Jerry (Cary Grant) is greeted by a butler who tries to prevent his entry. A physical confrontation with the butler ensues, and the butler threatens Jerry (Cary Grant), claiming to be trained in the martial art of Jujitsu. Jerry (Cary Grant) pays no attention to the warnings and the butler is forced to intervene.

20. Richard Torregrassa, *Cary Grant: A Celebration of Style*. (London: Aurum. 2004), 95–98.

The scene consists of choreography of somersaults and feigned moves that recall the movements of martial arts that render the scene comical. Jerry's elegant appearance and the acrobatics he performs appear in contrast: the suit tends to limit the movements of the wearer, yet an expert acrobat like Cary Grant manages to create complex choreography. However, in the room where he had been prevented from entering, Jerry (Cary Grant) finds himself in contact with high society and appears out of place. He cannot behave appropriately, despite the suit easily making him blend in with the other people present.

While Lucy (Irene Dunne) decides not to marry the Oklahoma oil tycoon in the end, Jerry (Cary Grant) begins a relationship with a wealthy heiress. All gossip magazines bet on an imminent engagement and marriage between the two, but a few hours before the official divorce between Lucy (Irene Dunne) and Jerry (Cary Grant), they meet for a final farewell, triggering further misunderstandings. Grant's character must meet the young girlfriend's family, but Lucy (Irene Dunne) intervenes, pretending to be Jerry's sister, creating embarrassing situations through inappropriate clothing and behavior that contrasts with high society. Jerry (Cary Grant) decides to escort Lucy (Irene Dunne) home by car, but she breaks the radio by playing music too loudly and attracts two police officers who are forced to escort the couple home with difficulty, carrying them on the handlebars of their respective motorcycles. Arriving at Lucy's aunt's country house, the two decide to head to bed, in separate rooms due to the impending official separation. However, the two rooms are connected through a door that does not close properly, so with every gust of wind, they find themselves face to face. Grant wears an oversized nightshirt and uses this piece of clothing to try to ease the situation with Lucy (Irene Dunne) and get closer to her. Both realize they are still in love. Jerry's ability to accept and use clothing in which he is not comfortable demonstrates a different, self-ironic masculinity, free from social impositions.

As in *The Awful Truth*, the character played in the film *Holiday* by Cary Grant, John Case, is a self-made man with a profitable job and a good reputation. During a vacation, he meets and falls in love with Julia Seton (Doris Knox), the daughter of a wealthy banker and participant of high society. The two young people want to marry soon, but they do not yet know each other well enough. Upon returning from vacation, a meeting with the girl's father is organized to formalize the proposal. Still, when John (Cary Grant) arrives at the Seton house, he discovers that his future bride is an affluent member of high society, attentive to both aesthetic and social appearances. Julia's sister, Linda (Katherine Hepburn), on the other hand, appears more like John (Cary Grant); they are both carefree and have little interest in high society and its rules. John's jumps, laughs, and flips in the air introduce him in the opening scene and embody his joy for the upcoming marriage in front of a couple of friends who warmly accept such exuberance. However, the flip is repeated at the Seton house while waiting to meet Julia (Doris Knox). The spontaneity of Grant's character's behavior and movements is continuously suppressed by Julia (Doris Knox), who is frightened that such behavior is unsuitable for high society, but he restores his vivacity when he starts developing a deeper bond with Linda (Katherine Hepburn).

The witty responses and proud movements that had been temporarily suppressed by Julia (Doris Knox) reappear and become more visible as John (Cary Grant) spends more time with Linda (Katherine Hepburn), escalating in the "playroom". The only room in the entire house where they can be themselves, away from the judgmental looks of high society, where even adults return to have fun like children. John (Cary Grant) gets mocked by his old friend for the grease in his hair as they pretend not to recognize him at first. From here on the scene shows how Grant's character tries to fit in both the high society, that irrupts occasionally in the playroom, and his real self.

The room is filled not only with children's toys but also with instruments, and gymnastics equipment that the couple, Grant, and Hepburn, use to stage a real choreographic performance. However, the acrobatics of the two actors are not performed with clothing commonly associated with performances of such a physical and sporty nature, thus presenting a strong contrast between the image they need to convey to high society and what they want to be free to do.

The attire that one chooses to wear can often reflect their personality and the image one wishes to portray. This is exemplified in the character of John played by Cary Grant in the movie. John is a successful businessman who wishes to project an image of sophistication and success through his formal suit. However, despite his best efforts, certain elements of his personality shine through to expose his true

self. John's playful nature, which sets him apart from the upper-class society he enters when he becomes engaged to Julia, reveals his genuine character. Although he has managed to climb the social ladder, having grown up in a working-class family, he still feels out of place. Julia's insistence on changing his bow tie and his enjoyment in the playroom with puppets all show his true personality hidden beneath the contrasting attire. This demonstrates how one can dress to project a specific image while also revealing their authentic self.

Considering the censorship rules imposed by Hays, which implied a specific idea of masculinity, Grant's characters in comedies reveal a deconstruction of the male image through their costumes and in relation to the female counterpart on the screen.

The element of Slapstick Comedy, characterized by a strong use of gestures and the body, merged with elements of the sentimental genre to create Screwball Comedy. This new genre took up traditional elements of the plays with changes to the paradigm, resulting in either a woman belonging to a higher social class or a more classic mistaken identity.

Bringing Up Baby! is a 1938 film directed by Howard Hawks, starring Cary Grant and Katherine Hepburn, after the duo received positive reviews in *Sylvia Scarlett*. The paleontologist David Huxley, played by Cary Grant, is at the end of the reconstruction, lasting several years, of a brontosaurus skeleton and is about to marry his secretary. However, he must first convince an important investor to donate money to the museum. In the movie, David (Cary Grant) attempts to impress the lawyer who represents a donor during a golf game. However, his plans are disrupted when he meets Susan (Katherine Hepburn). Susan drags him on a wild journey to find her pet leopard, named Baby. Amidst chases, misunderstandings, and constant quarrels, the couple ends up falling in love and declaring their love just as the brontosaurus skeleton is finally complete, leading to its destruction. In *Bringing Up Baby!*, the mechanism that amuses the audience is that of classic comedy, composed of errors and misunderstandings. Hepburn appears strong and confident, constantly dragging Grant's character, who, in contrast, appears confused and awkward.²¹ However, this insecurity inherent in Cary Grant's character seems to diminish when, following a prank by Susan (Katherine Hepburn), David (Cary Grant) is forced to wear a woman's robe. As Bruzzi notes, David (Cary Grant) wearing women's clothes triggers various reactions. On the one hand, there is hilarity in the audience, seeing how the character found himself forced to wear a feathered robe out of necessity and not associating the absence of the male suit with a lack of masculinity. Then there is Susan's aunt, the woman with whom Grant's character is chasing the untamed leopard, who tries to understand who the man in her house is. After insisting on knowing, David (Cary Grant) responds, "I don't know, I'm not quite myself today." After answering the accusation of appearing like an idiot in the women's robe, Grant's character goes from anger to extreme euphoria, making a leap and declaring, "I just went gay all of a sudden," then sitting on the stairs pretending to be insane. The figure of the aunt serves to create an additional comedic gag but also to reassure the viewer that there is an attempt to restore social order. Finally, the arrival of the dog, which, as analyzed by Bruzzi, dominates the dialogues, represents the viewer who unconsciously fears seeing a man in women's clothes that will bring the collapse of the social structure, heteronormative and reassuring.²²

In *Bringing Up Baby!*, Grant's character reveals not feeling like himself on that particular day. From the early scenes of the film, the audience is informed that the man, an archaeologist working on the reconstruction of a massive dinosaur skeleton for the museum, must succeed on the same day in securing funding by playing golf. It is immediately clear that the success of the meeting will depend on the good impression he makes. The man appears awkward throughout the film in every garment he wears, be it the work smock or the tweed suit. The ability to suddenly become agile when wearing the women's robe and use the term "gay" simultaneously, which today appears as a clear definition of sexuality, is then re-established according to classical comedy criteria in the heterosexual relationship in the end. However, the use of the word "gay" was not associated with homosexuality by most of the American public during the thirties, except for those who were part of the LGBT community. Several scholars and bi-

21. Gaime Alonge and Giulia Carluccio, eds., *Cary Grant: L'attore, Il Mito*. (Venezia: Marsilio, 2006), 95–106.

22. Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing cinema: Clothing and identity in the movies*. (London: Routledge, 1997), 148.

ographers connect this choice by Hawks as a game played with Cary Grant in various films, making a veiled reference to the actor's alleged homosexual relationship with Randolph Scott. The queer imagery surrounding Grant, given his friendship and cohabitation with actor Randolph Scott, was exploited by some directors, including Howard Hawks, even under the Hays Code. Cary Grant's friendship with actor Randolph Scott and the discussion of their alleged relationship and homosexuality adds a layer of complexity to Grant's off-screen image, showing how the personal lives of actors can influence public perception and the interpretation of their roles on the screen.²³ Grant and Scott moved in together at the beginning of their film careers, but remained roommates even after Grant's first major successes and first marriage to Virginia Cherrill in 1934. The marriage lasted only a year, but Cary Grant remained in Santa Monica, living in what was called "Bachelor's Hall" by the newspapers, for many years.

In Alfred Hitchcock's films, however, Grant's gender identity is not questioned, and in both his clothing and behavior he seems to conform to the image of masculinity closest to the hegemonic one. In the four films that Hitchcock directed with Grant, he explored a darker and more mysterious side of the actor instead of using his comedic skills. These differences shape Grant's off-screen image for the public, making him oscillate between the acrobatic and queer figure in Slapstick Comedies and the more traditional image of the man in a suit in thrillers.

Through his roles in comedies during Hollywood's classical era, Cary Grant conveyed an image of masculinity different from what the Hays Code had attempted to frame through censorship. His characters often appear insecure in front of their female counterparts, and the situation changes, particularly through clothing, as seen in *Holiday*, or through antisocial behaviors, where he engages in actions frowned upon by those around him. Between acrobatics and athletics in Cukor's film, Grant also finds himself breaking off an announced engagement to marry the sister of the woman to whom he had originally proposed. In *Bringing Up Baby!*, aside from wearing a woman's robe, he gets incarcerated and, upon release, worries that Katherine Hepburn may not succeed in recovering the leopard without him. But in that same moment, she enters with a wild animal on a leash. Comedies often mock his virility, yet female co-stars find him captivating. This highlights the social construct of masculinity and femininity.

Cary Grant's masculinity evolves not only through acting but also clothing. From uniforms, he begins to wear male suits, and when his star image can no longer be questioned, following his exit from Paramount and a series of critical successes, he doesn't hesitate to wear women's clothing. The characters he portrayed were sometimes confident and strong, and at other times, uncertain and frightened. However, their masculinity was often questioned by their respective female counterparts, who were equally witty and often presented the same athletic agility. Comedy thus becomes a perfect vehicle to communicate the image of a different man, whose gender performativity does not correspond to social expectations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intersection of fashion, cinema, and broadcasting of "masculine values" is a rich and multifaceted subject. This exploration delves into the intricate interplay between societal norms, personal identity, and cultural representation, shedding light on how clothing and cinematic portrayals shape our understanding of masculinity. Throughout history, the definition of "masculine values" has evolved, influenced by cultural and societal changes. While biology delineates physical differences between genders, the delineation of masculine and feminine attributes emerges as a product of complex cultural processes. The Industrial Revolution marked a significant shift in men's fashion, leading to the standardization of the suit as a symbol of social supremacy. Classic cinema, particularly under the constraints of the Production Code, further reinforced traditional ideals of masculinity. However, stars like Cary Grant challenged these constraints, imprinting their own interpretations of masculinity onto the screen.

23. Gaime Alonge and Giulia Carluccio, eds., *Cary Grant: L'attore, Il Mito*. (Venezia: Marsilio, 2006), 45–59.

Grant's sartorial choices and roles have personified a nuanced masculinity that blended sophistication with charisma, navigating societal norms with humor and wit. His characters, often confronted with comedic circumstances and interactions with female counterparts, revealed the fluidity of masculinity, challenging traditional notions and embracing vulnerability and authenticity. The relationship between masculinity and clothing in classic cinema, exemplified by Grant's iconic roles, offers a window into a world where masculinity transcends rigid stereotypes, embracing self-expression and individuality. Many of the titles in Cary Grant's rich filmography blur the lines of gender expectations and reveal the malleability of identity in the face of social conventions.

Attention to the history of fashion and cinematic representation, highlights the evolution of masculinity and points out the role of clothing in conveying complex narratives of gender identity. Cary Grant's portrayal of characters that challenged traditional norms and expectations exemplifies the transformative power of cinema in reshaping cultural perceptions of masculinity. In essence, the exploration of masculinity in the intersection of fashion, cinema, and cultural representation is a witness to the fluidity and complexity of gender identity. Through humor and a careful choice of clothing, Cary Grant offered audiences a glimpse into a world where masculinity defies categorization, inviting society and culture to reconsider the preponderance of conventional notions by opening up to the power of individual expression.

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