Cosmopolitanism, Trousers, and Lesbians in the 1920s

[F]eminine stars now soliloquize—breathlessly—“to pant or not to pant.”

—“NEW FILMS FIND FEMININE STARS IN MALE GARB,”
New York American, September 9, 1923

In the 1920s, the American fashion world embraced female trouserers for the first time. Perhaps surprisingly, the film industry released fewer films featuring cross-dressed women than it had in past years, but they were longer, more expensive, and received more attention. During this same period, lesbians and inverteds appeared in a succession of high-profile movies, plays, and novels, including the infamous play The Captive and the novel The Well of Loneliness. Around the United States, newspapers and magazines avidly discussed these works, spreading awareness of lesbianism and inversion, the codes to recognize them, and the terms to name them. Reading strategies that had been the purview of “sophisticated” elites became available to anyone who read the daily paper. Journalists, gossip columnists, and fan magazine writers invited general readers to be part of the in-crowd by spreading the “lowdown” on lesbians far and wide. Hollywood’s first representations of lesbians and inverteds coincided with a second wave of cross-dressed women, but the two trends were largely kept apart during this period.

Part II of this book investigates how American cinema helped make lesbianism legible to American audiences and how this process related to women’s
cross-dressing. While the nascent star system had put a damper on cross-gender casting and cross-dressed heroism, the star system of the 1920s and 1930s used other forms of cross-dressing to inflect attractive femininity. Female-to-male cross-dressing shifted from associations with wholesome Anglo-American traditions to alignment with cosmopolitan European decadence. One of the key points Part II will make is that men’s clothing was neither necessary nor sufficient to suggest lesbianism during the 1920s and 1930s. Some scholars have argued that, in American cinema, lesbians could become legible only through masculinity, particularly in the early twentieth century, the heyday of inversion theory. However, as we will see, there were many models of same-sex desire in circulation during this time, some of which involved no gender inversion at all, and they showed up in movies, plays, and films just as frequently as the masculine invert. Masculinity was not necessary for suggesting lesbianism, although it was sometimes used.

Conversely, some lesbian and gay scholars consider almost all masculine women in early films to be proto-lesbians. Though it is seductive, we should be wary of this approach. On the one hand, it instrumentalizes female masculinity as a temporary strategy for lesbian visibility, rather than considering it as viable and compelling in itself. On the other, it flattens the complexity of cross-dressing and obscures the varied appeals cross-dressed women had for audiences of the time. As we have seen, women in men’s clothing had wide-ranging meanings, evoking everything from Victorian nostalgia to American imperialism. British scholars like Laura Doan have shown that in England in the 1920s masculine styles worn by women connoted modernity rather than lesbianism—until the censorship trial of The Well of Loneliness in 1928. My research suggests that this perception was also widespread in the United States, until the censorship battles over The Captive that began in 1926.

Some works mobilized intra- and extra-textual signs to suggest that the men’s clothing was intended to be a code for lesbianism, but others left the meanings of women’s cross-dressing deliberately open. Rather than claiming all cross-dressed women to be inverted or proto-lesbians, I recognize them as belonging to a wide-ranging genealogy of gender nonconforming people. They were not necessarily politically radical (as Part I makes clear), nor should they be reduced to proto-transgender or genderqueer identities. I will show that some movies, plays, and novels explicitly connected cross-dressing to same-sex desire during this period, but cross-dressing alone was not sufficient to suggest lesbian identity.

We get a better sense of the emergence of lesbianism into popular culture by looking across multiple media, rather than at film alone. Works in one media relied on codes popularized in others. For example, fan magazine writers used codes established in the play The Captive and the novel The Well of Loneliness to describe Greta Garbo and to explain the German film Maedchen in Uniform.
(Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft, 1931). New works exploited the publicity generated by previous works in other mediums. Ultimately, sexology was less important than popular culture in shifting public understandings of sex and gender identity.

Newspapers and magazines brought lesbianism and inversion into the public eye. In the 1920s, American households purchased an average of 1.3 newspapers every day. Daily papers typically cost two cents and magazines between five and fifteen cents, far less than a novel, play, or even a ticket to a movie (which averaged twenty-five cents). Furthermore, newspaper reviews made lesbianism far more explicit than movies or plays did. Thus, periodicals taught American readers the representational codes of lesbianism and provided a vocabulary to name it. They created a public, accessible discourse about same-sex desire. Newspapers and magazines also provide insight into how some audience members read these works. Although critics do not capture viewers’ diverse responses, their reviews were often syndicated to hundreds of newspapers around the country and probably influenced many readers. The mass digitization of American newspapers in recent years has allowed me to trace the ways that discourses on lesbianism reached into even the smallest towns during this period.

In this chapter, I analyze the advance of female trousers in American fashion, cross-dressed women in the movies, and lesbians in public discourse between 1922 and 1928. For the first time, journalists invited general readers be part of the sophisticated in-crowd. While some works used cross-dressing alongside other signs to suggest lesbianism or inversion, the practice retained its semantic openness.

MODERNITY, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND LA MODE GARÇONNE

In the 1920s, many Americans felt that they were experiencing a uniquely modern age. The First World War had created the sense of a radical break with the past. Traditional values and religious faith were on the wane, while consumerism, leisure, and pleasure were on the rise. Contributing to the feeling of modernity was the spread of electricity and new consumer goods, such as automobiles, radios, telephones, and refrigerators. Advertising encouraged Americans to abandon the thrift and sobriety of the past, and the rising economic tide allowed many Americans to spend freely on new goods and experiences. Big cities became the symbolic centers of American culture. Looking back in 1931, Frederick Lewis Allen wrote that the 1920s had witnessed the “conquest of the whole country by urban tastes and urban dress and the urban way of living.” The educated sophistication that critics in the 1890s had assumed to be characteristic of a select few spread throughout the country. Aspiring sophisticates could subscribe to
magazines like *Smart Set* and *The New Yorker* to learn the latest urban trends. Unlike the attitudes of elites in the 1890s, sophistication in the 1920s included disregard for traditional morality. These sophisticates often clashed with moral guardians, whose concerns were voiced by women’s clubs, religious leaders, and district attorneys. Where traditionalists worried about the immoral influence of art and commerce, moderns insisted that artistic expression had a duty to take on every subject, no matter how distasteful. These arguments were often brought to bear on works that represented lesbianism and inversion.

The new cosmopolitanism also engendered a more international outlook. The city of Paris, in particular, became a symbol of cosmopolitan modernity. Of the servicemen and women stationed in Europe during the war, a popular song wondered “How’ya Gonna Keep ’Em Down on the Farm? (After They’ve Seen Paree).” American artists and writers of the “Lost Generation” flocked to Paris, intersecting with international networks of lesbian writers and artists, which included Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, Radclyffe Hall, and Romaine Brooks. The 1925 Paris Exposition des artes décoratifs et industriels modernes popularized the *moderne* style that was later dubbed Art Deco.

One part of moderne style was *la mode garçonne*, the slim, boyish look. The ideal female silhouette changed from emphatic curves to straight lines. Corsets were abandoned, and women donned tubular dresses, skirt-suits, and yachting pants. Reversing their resistance to previous attempts to introduce trousers into women’s clothing, mainstream Parisian fashion designers like Coco Chanel now endorsed the trend. Women cut their hair short in bobs, shingles, and Eton crops. Young women who adopted these styles were called *garçonnnes* in French (a feminized version of the word for “boy”) and “flappers” in the United States, where headlines repeatedly announced “Girls Will Be Boys!” One such article, from the *Los Angeles Times* in 1925, proclaimed, “Girlish figures clothed in boyish costumes are seen with greater frequency in these days than ever before. Jane and Dorothy love to come out in white duck trousers and mannish shirts, collars and ties. . . . The boyish bob, which is getting more and more in vogue every day, helps along the transition from femininity to masculinity and greatly heightens the general effect. . . . [S]o far as sex distinction in wearing apparel goes one hardly will be able to tell, at a little distance, which is which.” During the 1920s, masculine-styled women’s clothing was separated from the women’s movement and associated instead with fashion, modernity, and social freedoms. While many lesbians adopted these styles in the 1920s, the fashion was broadly popular and should not be read simply as a sign of lesbianism.
THE SECOND WAVE OF CROSS-DRESSED WOMEN IN AMERICAN MOVIES, 1922–1928

The vogue for women in trousers was as strong in cinema as in the fashion world, though many journalists seemed to forget that cross-dressed women had already populated American screens for more than a decade. During the first wave of cross-dressed women (1908–1921), American film companies had released an average of twenty-six films featuring cross-dressed women per year. During this second wave (1922–1928), they released an average of ten films per year, three-quarters of which were feature-length. While the cross-dressed women of the 1910s ranged in age and acting style, the cross-dressing actresses of the 1920s were almost universally young, slim flappers. Stars like Clara Bow, Marion Davies, Anna Q. Nilsson, Bebe Daniels, and Leatrice Joy all cross-dressed in three or more movies during this period. Many of their compatriots also cross-dressed in at least one film or wore masculine-styled clothing in publicity photos. The films were often costume dramas adapted from books or plays and designed to show off lavish budgets, like the Marion Davies vehicle *Little Old New York* (Cosmopolitan, 1923). Historical dress allowed actresses to dress as men while continuing to look very feminine.14 Costume dramas also strengthened film’s association with upper-class culture. Other films were set in the urban underworld. Actresses donned blazers, trousers, and golf caps to play thieves, gang leaders, and hobos in films like *Parisian Love* (Schulberg Productions, 1925) and *Going Crooked* (Fox, 1926). While less than half of the cross-dressing films of the first wave included romance, two-thirds of the films from the second wave did. The films increasingly adhered to the conventions of the “temporary transvestite” genre perfected in baroque theatrical comedy and emphasized the apparent homoeroticism of men and boys falling in love.

Articles in the *New York American, Los Angeles Times, Photoplay*, and *Picture-Play* all commented on the “new” popularity of women donning men’s clothing in the movies, again asserting that cross-dressed women were appearing for the first time on American screens. “The films have been practically immune from such impersonations, except in rare and isolated instances,” the *Los Angeles Times* observed in 1924, “but it is to be inferred from the assemblage herewith that there is quite a chance of their having a vogue now.”15 Under the headline “Girls Will Be Boys,” *Picture-Play* displayed photographs of “pretty actresses” in “boy’s clothes” in July 1926 (fig. 20).16 *Photoplay* also highlighted the trend that month and credited it to Marion Davies: “She was the first girl on the screen to disport in pantaloons [in *Little Old New York, 1923*].”17 These journalists were quick to forget the more than three hundred American films with cross-dressed women released before *Little Old New York*.18 Their amnesia may have been a marketing strategy, but it erased the many films that had come before.
While cross-dressed women in the films of the 1910s evoked stage conventions and frontier living, in the 1920s observers connected cross-dressed women to the era’s jazzy attitudes and women’s new physical and social freedoms. The *New York American* attributed the popularity of female trousers to “golf,” “feminine freedom,” and “the psychology of the times—whatever it is.” A critic for the *Los Angeles Times* agreed that “[v]ariety in entertainment, and a lighter, jazzier tone in the screen features” contributed to the new wave of cross-dressed
women but lamented that the trend was “overrid[ing] the persistent call for naturalness in film acting.”

LESGIAN CAMEOS IN FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE (1921) AND MANSLAUGHTER (1922)

During this new enthusiasm for cross-dressed women, the film industry also undertook a few, tentative forays into representing lesbian and inverted women. Before the 1920s, most Americans could encounter representations of female same-sex desire in only a few, limited venues: Greek and Roman texts, French novels, medical journals, and pornography. However, during the 1920s, flourishing networks of lesbians and inverts in Paris, Berlin, New York, and Chicago became more visible to outsiders and entered American popular culture. Wealthy white lesbians and inverts patronized exclusive Parisian salons. Black lesbians and gays attended rent parties and nightclubs in Harlem and Chicago. Formerly law-abiding citizens everywhere came into contact with sexual subcultures when they snubbed Prohibition to frequent speakeasies.

At the same time, movies, novels, and plays began to feature explicitly lesbian and inverted characters. Daily newspapers reported on these works extensively, especially when they involved censorship battles. Movies and newspapers were the most accessible of these media forms. By 1926, 50 million movie tickets were sold each week. By 1929, weekly ticket sales were up to 95 million (the equivalent of three-quarters of the population, had each person attended only once). People of every race, class, and age went to the movies. Because moving pictures needed a mass audience to recoup their costs, they could not be as overt in representing lesbians as printed works, but they were sometimes more explicit than we would assume.

Hollywood films presented sexual desire between women already in the early 1920s. The first few cases were brief but remarkably direct. Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Metro’s 1921 super-production adapted from the best-selling novel by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, was one of the highest-grossing films of the year, even beating Chaplin’s The Kid. In a sequence in a Parisian tango palace on the eve of the First World War, editing and framing establish two female extras as a lesbian couple. We first see a medium long shot of Julio (Rudolph Valentino) helping his married love interest, Marguerite (Alice Terry), to a seat at a cabaret table (fig. 21). We cut from this table to two women at another table. In a visual rhyme, both couples are shot from the same height, in virtually the same framing, with the masculine figures seated on the left and the feminine figures on the right. The woman on the left wears a tailcoat, top hat, and monocle, and holds a long cigarette holder. The woman on the right wears a white chiffon dress. They gaze fondly at each other. As the monocled woman starts to place her hand on her
FIGURE 21. In *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, we see Julio (Rudolph Valentino) and Marguerite (Alice Terry) seated at a cabaret table, a female couple at a similar table, and then Julio and Marguerite again. Courtesy of UCLA Film and Television Archive.
partner’s, we cut back to the first couple, and Julio’s hand seems to complete the masculine woman’s movement as he adds sugar to Marguerite’s cup. Framing the female couple in parallel to the male-female couple makes the erotic nature of their relationship clear.

The explicitness of the framing allows us to read the masculine-styled clothing as a signifier of lesbianism more confidently than we otherwise could. If we were to see only a woman wearing a tailcoat, top hat, and monocle, we could read her as simply a modern girl disguised as an upper-class playboy, like Gloria Swanson in *The Danger Girl* (Keystone, 1916). However, pairing a cross-dressed woman with a feminine woman and representing them as analogous to a male-female couple makes clear that they are lesbians or invertes. The couple conforms to sexologists’ model of same-sex desire as occurring between a masculinized, sexually assertive partner (the “congenital invert”) and a feminine, sexually passive partner.25 While scholars have explored the ways that butch women make their femme partners visible as lesbian, in this case each partner makes the other visible.26

Such an explicit representation of a lesbian couple was made possible by both the setting and the shot’s brevity. Paris, as mentioned earlier, had a reputation for unbounded sexuality and a visible community of lesbian artists and writers. The female couple authenticates this exotic setting for American audiences; the women are an attribute of this particular space, a prop. They also help establish the dancehall as a space in which sexual desire exceeds normative, middle-class boundaries. It is here that Julio and Marguerite begin their adulterous affair. For American audiences, the women likely represented a sexual other unimaginable within the borders of their own nation, an exotic sexual type of the decadent Old World. The shot of the female couple is only two seconds long. An inattentive viewer could miss it entirely. No reviews from the time seem to have mentioned it. Given this brevity, masculine styles functioned as a useful shorthand to confirm the lesbianism suggested by the editing and mise-en-scène.

The film’s scenarist, June Mathis, was likely responsible for this early lesbian cameo. Mathis chose the source novel and director, wrote the scenario, and persuaded the producers to cast the then-unknown Valentino. Film historians Thomas Slater and Gavin Lambert both attribute the shot to her influence.27 Slater writes that Mathis became acquainted with non-normative genders and sexualities through her work in vaudeville and through close friendships with Julian Eltinge, Alla Nazimova, Rudolph Valentino, and Natascha Rambova. It seems likely that she wrote in the lesbian couple, as well as a scene in which cross-dressed German soldiers attend a party. Mathis later told Katherine Lipke of the *Los Angeles Times* that films should encode sensitive meanings so that children and Midwestern audiences would not be able to understand them:
Personally my idea is to portray life in such a way that children can’t understand it. . . Not only does this have to be done for the child, but for hundreds of people in the Middle West whose life is most narrow and constricted. In the German banquet scene in the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” I had the German officers coming down the stairs with women’s clothing on. Now to hundreds of people all over the country, that meant nothing more than a masquerade party. To those who had lived and read, and who understood life, that scene stood out as one of the most terrific things in the picture.28

Mathis suggested that “those who had lived and read” would understand the men’s cross-dressing as a sign of sexual perversion, though she does not say so explicitly. She did not mention the female couple at the tango palace, but we can imagine that she would make a similar argument about them. Though the editing makes their relationship explicit, the shot’s brevity protected “innocent” viewers. However, the shot may have prompted some viewers to reevaluate their understanding of women in men’s clothing.

The lesbian cameo in Cecil B. DeMille’s Manslaughter (Famous Players–Lasky, 1922) used another common setting for the depiction of same-sex desire—the Roman bacchanalia—and represented a female couple with no connection to masculinity or men’s clothing. In the film, a reckless society girl, Lydia (Leatrice Joy), runs over a police officer. Her fiancé, Daniel (Thomas Meighan), likens Lydia’s social circle to ancient Rome, and the film cuts between a 1920s ladies-only pogo race to an ancient “Feast of Bacchus.” The sequence was choreographed by Theodore Kosloff, inspired by his days with Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, a Paris-based company notorious for erotic, Orientalist spectacles.29 The scene begins with hundreds of women dancing, while a scantily clad queen, attended by oiled black slaves, watches with delight. The queen throws coins at the dancers, and the film cuts to a bare-chested man squeezing grapes onto the face of a reclining woman. Eventually, a gladiator enters the space through an open door. To the right of the door, two women sit on stairs, clutch each other, kiss, and laugh (fig. 22). One sits on a lower step and presses her head to the other’s bosom. Both wear togas and have long, dark, curly hair piled on their heads. After two gladiators start fighting, we see another woman, this time with curly blond hair, who clutches the hair of a woman in front of her in seemingly orgasmic delight.

This depiction of same-sex desire is more explicit than in Four Horsemen: the women actively touch each other in a sexual way. But where the previous example used the sexological model of the invert, this one conceptualizes same-sex desire as a symptom of decadence. Both women on the steps are very feminine, indistinguishable from other women in the scene. The film suggests that they are so inflamed by passion that they will choose almost any sexual object.
Their desire is similar to the “Lesbian love” observers attributed to actresses and prostitutes, which carried no particular expectation of masculinity. We may not even want to label these women lesbians, because the film suggests that their desire does not arise from an innate identity but is instead an expression of omnidirectional lust. In the case of the woman who grabs another’s hair, it is even clearer that she expresses her passion by using the body of whomever happens to be closest.

The Roman orgy had long furnished a setting for painters to represent deviant desires. In silent films, depictions of orgies often featured beautiful slave boys, effeminate eunuchs, and women draped on top of each other. However, *Manslaughter* seems to be the first in which female participants actively touched and kissed each other. The film’s director, Cecil B. DeMille, made a career out of films that combined didactic moralizing with erotic spectacle, including quite a few Roman orgies. His later film, *The Sign of the Cross* (Paramount, 1932), featured an even more explicit lesbian seduction using a similar model of same-sex desire, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

As in *Four Horsemen*, the shot of the women embracing in *Manslaughter* is brief—nine seconds in total. Although the women are placed to the side of the main action, it is impossible to mistake the nature of the encounter. Like the
previous film, *Manslaughter* uses a female couple as a prop to authenticate a setting characterized by sexual excess. This setting was removed from American moviegoers not only in space but also in time. Furthermore, the film frames the orgy as a negative example, one that encourages Lydia to give up her freewheeling ways. These two lesbian cameos helped establish their films as cosmopolitan and knowing. However, these brief scenes did not catch the attention of critics or censors. These two examples show that men’s clothing could be used as visual shorthand to suggest one half of a same-sex couple, but that movies did not always portray woman-loving women as masculine.

RUMBLINGS ON BROADWAY:  
*THE GOD OF VENGEANCE (1923)*

According to theater historian Kaier Curtin, the English-language stage’s first lesbian character appeared on December 20, 1922, three months after *Manslaughter* was released. The play was *The God of Vengeance*, a translation of Sholem Asch’s Yiddish-language play *Gott fun nekoma*. It is set in a small Polish town, where the owner of a Jewish brothel, Yankel, strives to keep his daughter, Rivkele, respectable; but she is seduced by Manke, one of the prostitutes. Like *Manslaughter*, the play represents desire between two very feminine women. Rivkele and Manke frolic in the rain, snuggle on a sofa, and spend the night together pretending to be bride and bridegroom. When Yankel finds out, he drags Rivkele by the hair into his brothel and offers her to his patrons. Though the play’s narrative punishes Rivkele, some critics found the women’s scenes together poetic and lyrical.

*The God of Vengeance* suggests several models for same-sex desire: first, the omnidirectional passion of a woman who has sex for a living (in Manke), and, second, the vulnerability of any girl to same-sex seduction (in Rivkele). Asch himself suggested that the two women played out a third model, a sensual mother-child relationship. When asked about this aspect, Asch argued that the play portrays “the love of the woman-mother, who is Manke, for the woman-child, who is Rivkele.” The metaphor of mother-daughter love was a powerful one for some female couples, as Martha Vicinus has shown, and appeared again in the film *Maedchen in Uniform* (1932). The play avoids the model of the invert and any use of men’s clothing.

A German-language version of *God of Vengeance* premiered in Berlin, produced by Max Reinhardt, in 1907. In the following years, it played throughout Europe, in twelve different languages, and on New York’s Lower East Side in Yiddish. The Russian office of Pathé Frères even adapted the play to film in 1912 (now presumed lost). Throughout this time, the play was controversial but widely acclaimed. In December 1922, it appeared for the first time in English at

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http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/product/Girls-Will-Be-Boys,5637.aspx
the Provincetown Playhouse, an avant-garde theater in Greenwich Village. Many critics applauded the play, though one confessed that the seduction scene “made us a little sick.”\textsuperscript{37} \textit{God of Vengeance} definitely upset the \textit{Wall Street Journal} drama critic, James Stetson Metcalfe, and a conservative rabbi, Joseph Silverman, and these men began to campaign against it. Around February 10, 1923, civil liberties attorney Harry Weinberger took over the production and moved it to the Greenwich Village Theatre and then, on February 19, to the upscale Apollo Theatre on West Forty-Second Street. The play’s move to the theater district gave traction to Metcalfe and Silverman’s campaign against it. Someone, perhaps the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, lodged a complaint. On March 6, 1923, the producer, actors, and theater owner were indicted for presenting a play that was “obscene, indecent, disgusting, and tending to corruption of the morals of youth.”\textsuperscript{38} Two months later, a jury trial was held.\textsuperscript{39} Weinberger, who was associated with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and had previously defended Emma Goldberg and Jacob Abrams, represented himself and the others. They were found guilty, but the sentences were minor: Weinberger and the lead actor were fined $200 each, and the other players received suspended sentences.\textsuperscript{40} The trial set a precedent that would haunt future attempts to represent lesbianism in New York.

However, the production also set a precedent for the spirited defense of these works by a burgeoning anti-censorship movement. Many of the leaders of this movement were Jewish civil libertarians. In the coming years, American Jewish men played a major role in presenting lesbian books and plays to the American public and defending these works in court. Critics, however, lost no time in connecting the representation of “perversion” with the greed and immorality of immigrant Jews. Some complaints were veiled, others not at all. When \textit{God of Vengeance} moved to the theater district, for example, Metcalfe compared its backers to “sewer rats” “bringing their filth into contact with cleanly people.”\textsuperscript{41} In another editorial, he wrote, “As a people we are healthy enough to be fairly immune to [managers’] excursions into the problem and sex dramas of London, Paris and the other capitals. When it comes to draining the ghettos of Central Europe of their filth and turning it loose here, it seems about time to call a halt.”\textsuperscript{42} Sholem Asch was a Jewish immigrant to the United States from Poland, and Weinberger was the son of Hungarian Jewish immigrants. It is no stretch to see Metcalfe’s comments on the play as direct anti-Semitic attacks on them.\textsuperscript{43}

Although New York newspapers noted the play’s troubles only briefly, papers throughout the country reported on the trial and verdict. However, their coverage described the play’s sins only vaguely as “immorality” and “obscenity.”\textsuperscript{44} The usual brief plot summary noted that the play revolved around a brothel but made no mention of the lesbian seduction. This reticence was likely intended to keep lesbianism out of public discussion. Given
that Metcalfe had complained that the play showed some spectators “vivid illustration of practices they had never even heard of,” journalists evidently decided not to advertise them to readers outside New York.45 (This stance did not last long.) Similarly, the proprietors of the New York theater journal Billboard made a policy of not naming plays they disapproved of, particularly “the so-called serious drama which attempts to deal with problems more fitted for the clinic than the stage.” Billboard would not “cater to the smut purveyors.”46 Though the trial of The God of Vengeance generated a lot of press, journalists seem to have forgotten it completely when another play featuring lesbianism appeared on Broadway four years later.

The God of Vengeance shows that inversion was not the only, or even dominant, model of same-sex desire in the early 1920s. It also shows that plays venturing into this subject courted condemnation and censorship. Finally, in 1923, journalists were still wary of spreading the knowledge of lesbianism to their readers.

INTERTEXTUAL LESBIANISM: WHAT’S THE WORLD COMING TO? (1926)

In January 1926, the Hal Roach Studios’ two-reel comedy What’s the World Coming To? evoked real-world inverts and lesbians through intertextual visual codes. The film parodies contemporary social trends by picturing a world “One hundred years from now—when men have become more like women and women more like men.” Earlier gender inversion comedies never suggested that two women could be interested in each other, but this film plays with that possibility. The film portrays the wedding of Billie (Katherine Grant), a blond girl in a tuxedo, to Claudia (Clyde Cook), an effeminate man. A Lieutenant Penelope (Laura De Cardi) interrupts the ceremony, to no avail, and later courts Claudia, who is feeling abandoned by his playboy wife. The (literal) arrival of a stork restores harmony. The actresses in the film conform to the 1920s female masculinities that historian Laura Doan has described.47 Billie, with her fitted blazer, dark lipstick and eyeliner, and short but feminine hairstyle, evokes the “modern girl,” while Lieutenant Penelope, sporting a satin smoking jacket, cane, and slicked-back Eton crop, evokes the female rake. Billie’s unnamed best “man” prefers the ultra-mannish look, with a brilliantined Eton crop, tailored jacket, vest, collared shirt, and narrow tie. These actresses evoke not only generalized types, but also specific, prominent lesbians. Lieutenant Penelope, in particular, looks strikingly like Radclyffe Hall (fig. 23).48 Furthermore, the best man Lyle looks like Jane Heap, editor of The Little Review (fig. 24). The reference to real-life lesbians via clothing, hairstyle, and posture was precisely the sort of code that could be picked up only by the “wise.”
The film strengthens the inference of lesbianism by pairing women in the frame. First, the film shows Billie and her best “man” standing close together as Billie waits for her future husband to approach the altar. The two women resemble the sort of gender-differentiated couple depicted in *Four Horsemen*. When Billie asks for the ring, the best “man” accidentally produces a

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**Figure 23.** Lieutenant Penelope (Laura De Cardi) in *What’s the World Coming To?* (1926) (right) resembles a portrait of Radclyffe Hall (left, standing). Frame enlargement courtesy of Oddball Films/Jenni Olson Queer Film Archive; portrait courtesy of Getty Images.

**Figure 24.** Billie’s best “man” (Lyle Tayo) resembles a portrait of modernist publisher Jane Heap. Frame enlargement courtesy of Oddball Films/Jenni Olson Queer Film Archive; portrait courtesy of Getty Images.
pair of dice—suggesting that they have spent their evenings together in the homosocial world of the gentlemen’s club. Billie is ambivalent about leaving the world of the club for the ostensible comforts of heterosexuality. The best “man” elbows her and whispers, “Buck up, old Pal, think how lucky you are—you’ve got the sweetest little man in the world!” Billie looks toward the groom with wide, dubious eyes. Indeed, even after the wedding, Billie spends long evenings at the club, presumably with her best “man.” Though the film does not explicitly declare these two women a couple, it offers their friendship as an alternative to heterosexual pairing.

The film also visually pairs Billie and Penelope, though they are rivals. When Billie spies Penelope courting Claudia, she seizes a halberd from a nearby suit of armor, kicks down the door, and runs into the room. Penelope grapples with Billie, pushing her down on the couch, forcing her backward, almost lying on top of her. Claudia does little but bounce up and down in the corner. At one point, the two women drive him out of the room with the tip of the halberd. The women are locked together almost as if dancing; their bodies tussle intimately as they expel the man from the frame. Though the film narratively frames the women as fighting over a man, the visuals encourage the audience to consider the kind of couple the two women would make. Their physical intimacy is more sustained and physically proximate than that of any male-female couple in the film. The repeated visual coupling of these new kinds of masculinized women invites viewers to consider them as possible romantic couples. Whereas the earlier gender inversion comedies showed little interest in female couples, What’s the World Coming To? uses gender inversion to parody Parisian lesbians.

MANNISHNESS ON THE VERGE: THE CLINGING VINE (1926)

The Clinging Vine, a feature-length romantic comedy released by DeMille Pictures later in 1926, also presents a woman who dresses and acts like a man, but it is more ambiguous about whether this mannishness suggests lesbianism. The thirty-two-year-old Leatrice Joy (of Manslaughter) had developed a persona as a self-confident, elegant Southern woman. However, in 1925, in a fit of pique at either her ex-husband, John Gilbert, or her producer, Cecil B. DeMille, she marched into a barbershop and asked for a man’s haircut.49 She came out with what the British would call an Eton crop, but which was dubbed in Hollywood the “Leartrice Joy bob.”50 DeMille, who had Joy on contract at his new independent company, was livid. An actress’s hair was contested terrain during this time, and several actresses had clauses in their contracts prohibiting them from bobbing their hair. Fan magazines largely took Joy’s side in her dispute with DeMille and associated her new look with Parisian
Joy’s haircut added a new androgynous, even butch, aspect to her persona. She appeared in five De Mille Pictures Corporation films with this ultra-short cut in 1926 and 1927. In two of these films her characters are mistaken for male: in *Eve’s Leaves* (1926) she plays the tomboy daughter of a ship captain, and in *The Clinging Vine* (1926) she is a hardnosed businesswoman. Additionally, according to film scholar Johanna Schmertz,
Joy regularly imitated DeMille’s “long mannish stride” to entertain people on the set, and DeMille often called her “young fellow.”53

A month after Eve’s Leaves was released, Photoplay ran a remarkable “Lark of the Month” describing an evening when Joy, still disguised as a boy, took a streetcar home from the film shoot: “Believing that when in Rome be a Roman, Leatrice gave her seat to a pretty girl, received the award of a dazzling smile, and carefully tipped her hat. Then she retreated to the back platform and got into a brisk flirtation with two high school girls and to add the artistic touch to her masquerade she winked at them as she got off at the corner where her motor was waiting for her.”54 This remarkable “lark” suggests that Joy’s male disguise was persuasive enough to fool several young women and that she enjoyed flirting with them under cover of her disguise. News items in which naive bystanders mistook cross-dressed actresses for boys were fairly common. But by linking female masculinity to possible same-sex desire, the Joy story seems to tread on dangerous territory—or, conversely, it shows that this territory was not yet dangerous enough to provoke concern. The connection between mannishness and deviant sexual identity was evidently not strong enough in 1926 for the “lark” to be considered anything more than that. Perhaps it also helped that Joy had been married, that she had a child, and that she was an upper-class woman from the South. Joy’s androgynous look during this period foreshadows the stardom of Garbo and Dietrich, but she did not carry the dangerous sexual frisson that those European imports did. Fan magazines highlighted the fact that Joy’s haircut was merely a variation on a popular fad, though they sometimes teased that her gender was becoming illegible. An August 1926 Photoplay article jokingly drew sideburns onto Joy’s cheeks, warning, “Side whiskers are the newest peril from Paris.”55 The next month, Motion Picture Magazine captioned Joy’s photograph “It’s a Girl!” and added, “You cannot be sure these days . . .”56

The Clinging Vine exploited Joy’s new androgynous persona, but also the pleasures of undoing it. The film was adapted from a popular 1922 Broadway musical by actress-playwright Zelda Sears.57 Joy plays A.B., an executive at the T. M. Bancroft Paint Company. The film introduces A.B. with a series of close-ups that encourage us to believe that the character is male, until her face is finally revealed. She sports a brilliantined Eton crop, thick eyebrows, and a tailored suit and tie. Worried that she will never experience romance and hurt that her boss’s vapid son Jimmie (Tom Moore) thinks so poorly of her, A.B. allows Jimmie’s grandmother (Toby Claude) to give her an ultra-feminine makeover (fig. 26). In the end, a very girly A.B. wins Jimmie by hiding, but not losing, her business smarts. In the play, the protagonist starts out messy rather than mannish and goes by Antoinette, but in the film—perhaps to capitalize
Figure 26. A.B. the businessman and A.B. the coquette in *The Clinging Vine* (1926).
on Joy’s new persona—the protagonist is neat but masculine and adopts a gender-neutral nickname.

The film explores the presumed contradiction for women between authority and desirability. On the narrative level, the film “fixes” the ultramannish businesswoman by training her to be properly feminine and sexually desirable to men. In fact, the film trains A.B. to be precisely the type of woman that psychologist Joan Riviere profiled a few years later in “Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929): she uses hyper-feminine coquetry to mask her appropriation of masculine authority. At the same time, elements of the film satirize this trajectory. Joy’s performance of femininity is comically exaggerated, while her performance of female masculinity is naturalistic, as Schmertz has pointed out. The title cards adopt a tongue-in-cheek style, and the film shows Jimmie to be so simple-minded that A.B.’s satisfaction with him hardly feels credible. It could be that the film parodies not the mannish businesswoman per se, but the conventions of businesswoman makeover stories. Indeed, the review in Photoplay suggested that the story was already a cliché: “Here, once more, is the goofy plot about the efficient young business woman who gets sex appeal the moment she tacks a couple of ruffles on her tailor-made.” In the critic’s opinion, “The satire of it completely escaped Paul Sloane, the director.”

Film historians Heather Addison and Karen Mahar have described the film as a commentary on women’s participation in the business world. Abandoning femininity, they say, is the symbolic price A.B. must pay to succeed in business. Schmertz, on the other hand, argues that the film troubles gender essentialism by demonstrating that, for A.B., femininity and masculinity are equally performative. These scholars do not consider whether A.B.’s ultra-mannishness had any connection to lesbian identities, though. In contrast, Richard Barrios claims that “repressed mannish spinsters” like A.B. “spell out a simplified distillation of Well of Loneliness Lite,” that is, sexual inversion. As these varied accounts suggest, it is difficult to know what exactly A.B.’s masculinity meant at the time.

To what extent did A.B.’s ultra-mannish style suggest lesbianism or inversion? A.B. is more masculine than most cross-dressed women in American film, and her masculinity seems to come more naturally. Might this mean that she is psychologically male and, thus, an invert? The intertitle introducing A.B. reads: “The President’s assistant—known as A.B.—who hired, wired and fired men—but had never kissed one.—Leatrice Joy.” Does this intertitle imply that A.B. had perhaps kissed someone other than a man? The only woman with whom she has any kind of relationship is the jazzy granny who performs the makeover. However, there is no physical intimacy between the women, and their relationship is largely instrumental, with the goal of preparing A.B. to attract Jimmie. If the film
intends A.B.'s mannishness to be a sign of potential lesbianism or inversion, it is more reticent than other films of the period.

Reviews suggest that most critics did not take A.B.'s mannishness to be a sign of lesbianism. *The Educational Screen* hailed the film as a “Delightful comedy” and declared it “wholesome” for children. Given that lesbianism and inversion were considered the most scandalous of sexual subjects, it seems clear that this reviewer did not see any sexual implications in A.B.'s mannishness. Likewise, *Film Daily* concluded that the film is “[a]musing and gets away from the beaten path.” The critic praised Joy’s performance of the masculine protagonist, though he or she preferred Joy’s more feminine look: “As the masculine ‘A.B.,’ secretary to the big boss, Leatrice gives a pleasing performance but she looks far more lovely in fussy frocks.” Other critics panned the film for a variety of reasons. *Photoplay* found the story clichéd, while *Picture Play* objected to A.B.’s transformation into “a dumb Dora.” The critic lamented that “[o]ne of our most interesting and gracious actresses again is strangled by a story . . . unworthy of her talents.”

As with *A Florida Enchantment* a decade earlier, only *Variety* found something unsettling about A.B.’s mannishness. Critic Fred Schrader wrote that the film was “[r]ather pleasant entertainment that might have been a much better picture had there not been too much stress laid on the masculine side of the heroine early in the picture.” Schrader suggested that presenting such an unapologetically masculine woman interfered with the film’s ability to entertain. Later he called A.B. “frightfully masculine appearing.” He is the only critic I have found to criticize A.B.’s masculinity specifically. Schrader’s biggest concern, however, was with Joy’s performance of femininity: “An impression lingers as one views the picture that cannot be fought off, that a female impersonator is playing the girl. It persists in the mind as the picture unreels, despite [what] one knows to the contrary. . . . Miss Joy is charming enough at times, but one cannot, while looking at the picture, disassociate the idea that she is doing an ‘Eltinge.’” The allusion is to Julian Eltinge, the most famous female impersonator of the early twentieth century. Eltinge had in fact just starred in a gender disguise comedy for DeMille’s company the previous year, *Madame Behave* (1925). Schrader was likely responding to the sense of artificiality in Joy’s performance of femininity. I had the same feeling when watching the film, but Schrader found Joy’s satirical performance of femaleness disconcerting, whereas I see it as a clever critique of feminine norms. Although Eltinge was praised for the naturalness and glamour of his performances, he was also occasionally suspected of sexual inversion, rumors he attempted to dispel by displaying his masculinity offstage. If Eltinge was associated with male homosexuality, it is possible that Schrader was subtly pointing to potential sexual deviance. As A.B. eventually gets the boy, the “lingering impression” that she is a cross-dressed man queers the ostensibly
heterosexual resolution. Schrader’s distaste for A.B.’s “masculine side” and reference to Eltinge may hint to readers that there was something going on, but this insinuation, if intended, was more oblique than others at the time.

The publicity around Joy’s haircut, her flirtations with women while in disguise, and her performance in The Clinging Vine show just how far female masculinity could go in 1926, on the cusp of the nationwide discussion of lesbianism that began at the end of that year. After her five “haircut” films, Joy grew her hair out and resumed feminine roles, but her popularity declined. Perhaps the public punished her for her brief flirtation with androgyny or preferred her shorter style, or perhaps she simply got older or did not cope well with synchronized sound.

A.B.’s look was also the look of a young woman hired to direct at Famous Players–Lasky three months after The Clinging Vine premiered. Like A.B., Dorothy Arzner worked in a male-dominated profession and sported an Eton crop, thick eyebrows, and flat-heeled shoes. While today Arzner looks the picture of a butch lesbian, journalists of the 1920s called her “one of those modern college girl types” and praised her combination of masculine and feminine traits. Only in the 1930s and beyond, when women’s fashions changed but she did not, did commentators suggest that there was something odd about Arzner. As film historian Judith Mayne points out, journalists described Arzner’s appearance in contradictory ways that reveal their struggle to grasp her look (much as journalists would do with Garbo). However, Mayne neglects the way these descriptions changed over time, as Arzner’s look increasingly deviated from the norm.

Overall, The Clinging Vine and publicity about Joy and Arzner show just how mannish one could be in 1926 without being suspected of lesbianism or inversion. However, Hollywood’s ability to portray such a mannish woman without worrying about censors was about to end.

LESBIANS TAKE CENTER STAGE:
THE CAPTIVE (1926–1928)

Édouard Bourdet’s play The Captive brought lesbianism before the American public eye. Moralists and civil libertarians alike seized upon the play as a battleground in the fight over censorship. Two publicity hounds, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst and publisher-producer Horace B. Liveright, faced off over the play, generating a huge amount of coverage. Newspapers coast to coast followed the production from its New York opening in September 1926 to its forced shuttering in February 1927, and from February to August 1928, when it played in six American cities, inciting legal battles in three of them. All in all, The Captive generated far more publicity in the United States than the controversy over Radclyffe Hall’s novel The Well of Loneliness in 1928. Producers of
The Captive lost almost every legal battle they faced, and opponents successfully enacted new, more restrictive censorship laws; but the play laid the groundwork for lesbianism to have a place in American popular culture.

The Captive’s model of lesbianism does not involve masculinity or inversion. Instead, it represents lesbianism as a nervous condition, detectable through behavioral clues. Because of this play, anyone who could read a newspaper could become informed about women who loved women, learn terms for discussing them, and pick up codes for recognizing them. Though some critics continued to speculate that only the “sophisticated” could understand the play, the extensive coverage ensured that every adult had access to these ways of reading. The play’s title even became a euphemism for lesbianism in the film press.

The Captive, originally called La Prisonnière, first opened in Paris on March 6, 1926. Max Reinhardt staged it in Berlin and Vienna that same season, where it broke attendance records, and it went on to play in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. In New York, producer-director Gilbert Miller announced that he would bring an English-language adaptation by Arthur Hornblow Jr. to Broadway that fall under the aegis of the Charles Frohman Company, which was owned and operated by the Famous Players–Lasky film company. Women’s clubs and religious groups registered their disapproval. The ex-president of the Colonial Dames of America, for example, told Miller that she “intended to use all her influence . . . to prevent such an affront to American womanhood.” On September 26, 1926, The Captive opened at the Empire Theatre, with seats selling for five dollars, one of the most expensive tickets on Broadway. New York’s playboy mayor Jimmy Walker attended the premiere, as did many film luminaries, including Adolf Zukor, Edgar Selwyn (co-founder of Goldwyn Pictures), screenwriter Anita Loos, writer-actor Ruth Gordon, director Malcolm St. Clair, director Herbert Brenon (Peter Pan), and actors Robert Ames, Billie Burke, Florence Vidor, Norma Talmadge, and Fannie Ward. The film industry was thus well aware of the play from its opening night. The play’s star, Helen Menken, had recently married the then-unknown actor Humphrey Bogart.

In the play’s first act, a young society woman, Irene de Montecel (Menken), convinces her childhood friend, Jacques Virieu (Basil Rathbone), to pretend that they are engaged to each other so that she can stay in Paris when her family moves to Rome. Jacques agrees to help, but tries to discover who is really keeping her in the city. He suspects she is having an affair with the married Monsieur d’Aiguines (Arthur Wontner). But when confronted by Jacques at the end of the second act, d’Aiguines reveals that Irene is not in love with him but with his wife: “it is not only another man who can be dangerous to a woman . . . in some case it can be another woman.” He warns Jacques that “she can never belong to you no matter how you try. They’re not for us.” Jacques confronts Irene, and she swears she will give up Madame d’Aiguines. They agree to marry. The third act starts a
year later. Jacques has grown tired of Irene’s indifference and, in the end, despairs of reforming her. She leaves him for Madame d’Aiguines in a dramatic exit scene recalling the famous door slam concluding Ibsen’s A Doll’s House.

The Captive does not show same-sex desire to be a symptom of gender inversion, as in Four Horsemen, or the product of excessive desire, as in Manslaughter; rather, it is a mysterious nervous ailment that can strike even the most respectable young woman. In publicity photographs, Menken’s Irene is pretty and feminine, with a finger-waved bob and an array of fashionable dresses and skirts (fig. 27). Likewise, although we never see Madame d’Aiguines, her husband tells Jacques that she possesses “all the feminine allurements, every one.”75 Attraction between women is described as a kind of feminine narcissism, not complementary opposition. Monsieur d’Aiguines characterizes desire between women as “a secret alliance of two beings who understand one another because they’re alike, because they’re of the same sex, because they’re of a different planet than he, the stranger, the enemy!”76 Thus, the play presents a different model of lesbian desire than the ones we have seen so far.

According to the reviews, Menken portrayed Irene as a nervous wreck—sobbing, hysterical, with constantly twisting hands. One critic wrote that Menken “brooded through the play, a jerky puppet, dangled on taut nerves upon the very verge of madness, a hunted, terror-eyed puppet, fearful of prying and strung to the last limits of endurance.”77 Heavy white makeup made her face resemble a death mask. The play thus presented same-sex desire as a neurosis aligned with hysteria. This model was indebted to sexology and Freudian psychology, though it rejected inversion theory. At the same time, critics also drew upon older models of lesbianism as unnatural, or even supernatural, seduction. These critics described Madame d’Aiguines as a “mysterious sorceress” who holds Irene in thrall through some dark power.78 (Pushing even further in this direction due to censorship, the San Francisco production rewrote d’Aiguine’s monologue so that he claimed a “mystic power,” rather than “another woman,” had Irene in thrall.)79 Another critic described Irene as a shadow.80 There is a long tradition of aligning female same-sex desire with witchcraft or ghostliness.81 This older model coexists in the play with the newer, medical model. Where d’Aiguines cast the women’s attraction to each other as narcissistic, critics emphasized the differences of age and power between the two women, shifting the model from mirroring to seduction.

Rather than using mannish clothing as in Four Horsemen or What’s the World Coming To?, the play presents lesbianism through behavioral clues: anxiety, frigidity, secrecy, late-night visits between women, and the exchange of violets. In the first two acts, Irene is unreasonably secretive and mysteriously unhappy. She caresses a corsage of violets while talking to her sister and becomes angry when asked about the flowers. Monsieur d’Auguines provides the key to unlock her
behavior when he explains to Jacques that Irene has been coming to his house late at night to visit his wife. He warns Jacques (and the audience) to view close friendships between women with suspicion:

Don’t say “Oh, it’s nothing but a sort of ardent friendship—an affectionate intimacy . . . nothing very serious . . . we know all about that sort of thing!” No! We don’t know anything about it! . . . Friendship, yes—that’s the mask. Under
cover of friendship a woman can enter any household, whenever and however she pleases—at any hour of the day—she can poison and pillage everything before the man whose home she destroys is even aware of what’s happening to him. [italics in original]82

D’Aiguines’s warning recasts as pathological the intimacy between women that was considered normal in the nineteenth century. In a sense, he “outs” the homosocial relations of the Victorian era. Not everyone was willing to go along with this resignification of women’s friendship, though. Eleanor Barnes, a Los Angeles critic, complained that the play “has a tendency to discourage healthy friendships between persons of the same sex through fear of public opinion.”83

In the third act, Irene’s behavior confirms D’Aiguines’s allegations. Despite her best efforts, she continues to be indifferent toward Jacques. A bouquet of violets delivered to the house provides her with the impetus to leave him.

The violets given by Madame d’Aiguines to Irene in the first and third acts become a key signifier of lesbian desire. Using flowers to convey particular messages was popular in the nineteenth century, and blue violets generally meant faithfulness or that the giver’s thoughts were occupied with love.84 However, by the end of the nineteenth century, violets had become a special code for women who loved women because fragments of Sappho’s poems describe violets in the hair, bosoms, and laps of beautiful women believed to be Sappho’s lovers.85 While violets initially served as a secret code for insiders, the play introduced their meaning to the general public, and those who could not attend the play could learn the code from newspapers. The New York World’s review was subtitled “The Message of the Violets,” and the Brooklyn Citizen’s “They Say It with Violets.”86 Another review noted that violets were “a symbol of Lesbianism, they say.”87 Journalists even observed that the play had caused a drop in the sale of violets.88 Five year later, New York columnist O. O. McIntyre reminded readers, “Florists believe the continued slump in the sale of violets is due solely to Helen Menken’s play with a Lesbian theme ‘The Captive.’ Violets symbolized perversion throughout the drama.”89 At its height, McIntyre’s “New York Day by Day” column appeared in 22 million individual papers per week, so anyone who had failed to catch “the message of violets” in 1926 would have been reminded in 1931.90

Some New York critics doubted that playgoers would understand the nature of Irene’s affliction. The reviewer in the Brooklyn Citizen, for example, believed that “a good percentage of the audience will fail to ascertain what it is all about.”91 These critics maintained the distinction between sophisticated and unsophisticated audiences elaborated by 1890s critics in their response to A Florida Enchantment. Most people, they assumed, had never heard of lesbianism. For example, the critic at Variety wrote, “There are millions of women, sedate in nature, who never heard of a Lesbian, much less believing that such people
exist. And many men, too.” In a review published in the *Kansas City Star*, New York critic Percy Hammond assumed that his Midwestern readers would not be familiar with Irene’s condition: “[*The Captive*] will disclose to you in a skillful manner considerable light upon a phase of woman’s life of which, no doubt, you are in the dark.” Hammond refers to a “phase” because it was common to consider passionate attachments between women as a developmental stage.

While many Americans may not have been aware of lesbianism, no critic seems to have found an actual playgoer who did not understand the play. In fact, although Hammond assumed that his Midwestern readers would be “in the dark,” a playgoer from Kansas City named Ann Peppard White saw the production in New York and wrote forthrightly in the same paper that *The Captive* represented “Lesbian love.” She even proposed that “the part [of Irene] is played with a heightened abnormality in deference to the censors,” suggesting that New York censors were more easily offended than she and that she was well aware of how “normal” lesbians acted. Likewise, Gilbert Gabriel of the *New York Sun* remarked that he had “overheard two sweet young things in the lobby deciding that few persons would really get what it is all about. ‘Well, my mother wouldn’t,’ said one of them.” These “sweet young things” are precisely the type of playgoer that critics might assume to be innocent. Not only do they comprehend the play’s subject, but they repeat the critics’ projection of ignorance onto someone else.

Some reviewers tried not to name the play’s subject directly, in order to preserve the innocence of readers unacquainted with lesbianism. British literary critics had long employed this strategy when reviewing French novels with Sapphic themes, as Sharon Marcus has shown. Hammond, for example, was relatively forthcoming when he reviewed *The Captive* in the *New York Herald Tribune*, but much more discreet when he discussed it two weeks later for the *Kansas City Star*: “All that [the reviewer] can do is to hint, and by the sly winking of his wicked eye, convey the news that ‘The Captive’ treats of a dilemma suitable only to the consideration of sex post-graduates. . . . It may be whispered, however, to those who are on the inside, that ‘The Captive’ deals with a class of women whose joys and sorrows are both to be pitied and censured.” While Hammond announced his inability to name what *The Captive* was about, he simultaneously invited Kansas City readers into his in-group. Gabriel, the *New York Sun* critic, also claimed to be conflicted about how much to say, but decided to come out with it after observing the “wise” girls in the lobby: “This is a late paragraph in which to specify the problem of the plot of ‘The Captive.’ It is a paragraph I have rewritten and crossed out ten times over for the tender benefit of those who know enough—and not too much—about Sappho, Havelock Ellis, et al. And I give it up with the satisfaction of having overheard two sweet young things in the lobby deciding that few persons would really get what it is all
Gabriel did not directly name the “problem” at the heart of The Captive. Instead, he used code words—the poet Sappho and the British sexologist Havelock Ellis—that would be recognizable to those who already knew something of the subject. However, by suggesting that these names hid a secret knowledge, he helped to circulate them.

Most of the time, journalists were explicit about the play’s subject. Their extensive coverage of the play’s productions and legal battles likely alerted many readers to the concept and gave them terminology to name it and codes for detecting it. Articles in New York publications (for example, New York Morning Telegraph, New Republic, Theatre Magazine, New Yorker) and publications outside New York (for example, Kansas City Star, Charleston Gazette, Oakland Tribune) named the play’s theme as “Lesbian” or “Lesbian love.” Variety even undertook to explain the term to its readers: “The Captive’ is a homosexual story, and in this instance the abnormal sex attraction of one woman for another. ‘Ladies’ of this character are commonly referred to as Lesbians. Greenwich Village is full of them.” Cultural historian Chad Heap argues that press comments like this one alerted readers not only to the existence of lesbians but also to the Greenwich Village speakeasies where lesbians performed, jump-starting New York’s “pansy and lesbian craze.”

Despite his disapproval of the play, O. O. McIntyre played an important role in publicizing its theme. In a column printed in the Charleston Gazette (and probably elsewhere), he declared The Captive to be “a morbid play of sexual abnormality [that] deals with a congenitally Lesbian French girl.” The next week, he complained in his widely syndicated column that “a Lesbian theme dominated” a new play on Broadway. Even outside New York, journalists described the relationship between Irene and Madame d’Aiguines in a variety of fairly explicit ways: “the attraction of woman for woman” (Wilmington Morning News), “a woman’s unfortunate entanglement with one of those strange creatures of her own sex” (Detroit Free Press), “complicated and suggestive psychopathic relations between women” (Boston Herald), and “a twisted relationship with another woman” (Davenport Democrat). Reviews of The Captive also circulated the names not only of Sappho and Havelock Ellis, but also of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Cesare Lombroso, and Sigmund Freud. In the middle of a plot synopsis, one review noted, “The case of a married woman leaving her husband for another woman is recorded in Krafft-Ebing’s [sic] book Psychopathia Sexualis. There are other recorded instances.” McIntyre grumbled in one of his syndicated columns that the “circumlocutions of Lombroso and Freud were not enough—the dregs of psychological depths are revealed.” While the Associated Press’s coverage avoided the play’s subject, one of its widely reprinted stories noted that the theme of The Captive was similar to the “psychopathic theme” of The Drag, Mae West’s controversial transvestite comedy. Overall, The
Captive inspired a flood of writing on lesbianism in the daily press, likely introducing terms and concepts to readers who were either unfamiliar with them or had never talked about them in public.

“Sophisticated” New York theater critics were divided over whether lesbianism was a fit subject for the stage. Unlike the critics who decried A Florida Enchantment in 1896, many now sided with The Captive. J. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times called it “a genuine achievement in dramatic producing,” and Frank Vreeland of the New York Telegraph wrote that it “exudes an aura of pity and terror that comes close to the Greek ideal.” The production played into the cultural clash between sophisticates and traditionalists. It was associated with European cosmopolitanism and the modernist movement’s determination to represent contemporary social problems. Some reviewers likened the play to Ibsen’s Ghosts and Georges Brieux’s Damaged Goods, two social problem plays dealing with syphilis. The Captive’s defenders argued that it should be judged on aesthetic grounds, while detractors countered that it should be judged on moral grounds, given the damage it could do to vulnerable theatergoers, particularly young women. Detractors maintained that lesbianism was a subject fit only for medical studies and definitely not for art or entertainment, falling back on earlier reasoning to restrict the knowledge of lesbianism to elite professional circles.

Responses to the play also shed light onto the cultural debate over sexual identity. Even those who championed the play called Irene’s condition horrific. Some argued that it delivered an important warning to young women. Other defenders claimed that evolution would naturally rid the world of “defectives” like Irene: “The most charitable view one can take of such persons is that they have a defective nervous organization. One thing evolutionary theory makes plain—that species which survive always rid themselves of defectives, of abnormal beings who do not carry on the species. After all, the instincts of the race are right. Whatever you or I may think of such arrested persons, history will dispose of them in the immemorial fashion. Life has a way of taking care of its own.”

Likely this critic, Frank Vreeland of the New York Telegram, considered his view to be very modern—based on science rather than religious judgment—so we should not conflate modernity with acceptance of homosexuality; rather, modernity ushered in a willingness (even a compulsion, as Foucault argues) to talk about homosexuality. William A. White of the New York Herald Tribune took a scientific approach to homosexuality that was more sympathetic than Vreeland’s, but still called for the eradication of this pathological condition.

However, other critics found the play’s treatment of lesbianism decidedly old-fashioned. Like Kansas City play enthusiast Ann Peppard White, Stark Young of the New Republic, a progressive monthly, argued that Menken played Irene as far more “insane, neurotic, [and] strange” than the “average instance” of
The New Yorker’s critic went further: “I resented . . . the hypothesis that the intimate circle of a worldly French diplomat would regard [Irene’s] idiosyncrasy as so unique and dumbfounding. For all its virtues “The Captive” uses the abracadabra of an hitherto forbidden theme to create an atmosphere more stifling than that of life. Now that the field has been opened I should like to wager that in five years “The Captive” will sound as old-fashioned as ‘Mrs. Dane’s Defence.”114 (Mrs. Dane’s Defence was a 1900 play in which a woman is exiled from her village when she reveals that she once had an affair with a married man.) For this critic, modern sophistication entails a blasé tolerance of sexual deviance. Reviews of The Captive not only spread awareness of lesbianism and terms to discuss it, but also a wide range of attitudes toward it.

The circulation of knowledge about lesbianism was helped along by attempts to shut down the play. The Captive became a rallying point for both pro- and anti-censorship forces. It opened in New York in the midst of a broader crisis over “sex plays,” aggravated by Mae West’s risqué productions.115 Hearst led the charge against immoral plays in part to damage the progressive governor of New York, Al Smith, who had lambasted Hearst in a 1919 speech and was preparing to run for president.116 Though Smith opposed censorship, he could not afford to veto censorship legislation for fear of alienating some of his constituents. The debate over controversial New York plays sometimes intertwined with the similar debate over censoring moving pictures, particularly since The Captive was being produced by a film company.

The Captive was challenged several times throughout its five-month run in New York. A month and a half after it opened, New York District Attorney Joab H. Banton charged the play with being “salacious and objectionable to civic morals,” but on November 15, a “Play Jury” of twelve citizens acquitted it.117 Worried that West would bring The Drag to New York, Mayor Walker warned Broadway producers on December 28 not to open any more “sex plays.”118 Two days later, Hearst published an editorial in his New York American, “The Best Treatment For Unclean Spoken Plays Is to Apply the Methods Which Protected Motion Pictures.”119 Hearst pointed out that the very same firm that “produces many of the best and cleanest and highest class of moving pictures in the United States is responsible for one of the most vicious and obscene plays that has disgraced the stage.” “Without the influence of censorship,” he warned, “this firm might have produced moving pictures as demoralizing as its stage play.”120 It is ironic that Hearst held up Hollywood, which was busy defending itself against charges of immorality, as a model for cleaning up the stage. In fact, Hearst was looking to the six state moving picture censorship boards that had legally binding decision-making powers at this time; he hoped to wield this state power on Broadway. Broadway plays had more leeway in their treatment of taboo subjects.
than moving pictures, because they were more closely aligned with “Art” and attended primarily by upper- and middle-class adults, whereas cinema was commerce and available to all. Arguing that moving picture censorship standards be applied to plays implied that they were commerce, too, and that they had influence beyond the metropolitan elite.

Despite Walker’s warning, another sex play, *The Virgin Man*, opened on January 20, 1927. On January 26, State Senator Abraham Greenberg wrote a theater censorship bill, and Hearst ran another editorial urging the mayor to “Wipe Out Those Evil Plays.”121 When Mae West announced that she would bring *The Drag* to New York, top Broadway producers met on January 28 to establish a system of self-censorship and keep West’s play out of the city. However, their efforts were too little, too late. Governor Smith encouraged the mayor and D.A. to use existing laws to close objectionable plays, in order to forestall additional censorship legislation. On the evening of February 9, the D.A. and his officers raided *The Captive*, Mae West’s *Sex*, and *The Virgin Man*. They arrested forty producers, stage managers, and actors, including Menken and West. (Mayor Walker, who had attended *The Captive*’s premiere, chose this moment to take a vacation in Cuba, leaving Acting Mayor Joseph McKee in charge.) The Associated Press’s report of the raid appeared on the front pages of newspapers throughout the county. However, Miller secured an injunction against future raids, and *The Captive* played five more very successful days, until Zukor and Lasky decided to shut it down to avoid going to trial. On the condition that Miller close the show and the actors agree not to play in it, the judge let them off with a warning.

However, Horace Liveright, a firebrand publisher of modernist literature with the firm Boni & Liveright, bought the rights to the play and vowed to reopen it in New York. He retained ACLU attorney Arthur Garfield Hays, a member of the defense team for John Scopes in the Scopes Monkey Trial, to defend his case and sue the authorities for an injunction against future raids. Hays told reporters, “This is another Scopes case. . . . Exactly the same issue is involved—the belief that if you keep people ignorant you would save their souls. Here in New York some people think that if you keep people ignorant you will save their morals.”122 However, the case failed to ignite broad public support, and the New York Supreme Court denied the appeal.123 Liveright gave up his plans to reopen the play in New York, but announced that he would publish a book on the subject of *The Captive* by Warner Fabian, author of *Flaming Youth*.124 Hays, for his part, described the persecution of *The Captive* as a major encroachment upon American civil liberties, similar to the Scopes and the Sacco and Vanzetti trials, in a book called *Let Freedom Ring*, published by Boni & Liveright the next year.125 In the meantime, the New York legislature amended the obscenity code to prohibit plays “depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy, or sex
perversion.”

State lawmakers also passed the “Wales Padlock Law,” so that a theater could be padlocked for an entire year if a jury found one of its plays to be immoral.

Hollywood, too, was fighting a reputation for immorality during this period, following the sensational trials of Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle and complaints about “sex pictures.” The industry was determined to avoid legally binding national censorship. Because the National Board of Review of Moving Pictures had little sway over the industry, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) had appointed former U.S. Postmaster Will Hays in 1922 to lead a new effort at self-censorship. Throughout the second half of the 1920s, Hays and his colleagues tried to clean up moving pictures and convince community groups of the industry’s sincere intentions. The moving picture industry took a more conservative approach to representing lesbianism than the Broadway stage and American book publishers. This conservatism extended, as some New Yorkers noted with disgust, to the Famous Players–Lasky Company’s decision not to fight the charges against _The Captive_ in 1927. Liveright, for example, told a reporter, “Mr. Lasky and Mr. Zukor brought pressure to bear on Mr. Miller and forced him to close the play because they were afraid of what their small town public might think of their producing a play like ‘The Captive’ in New York. I don’t like to think the legitimate stage is dominated by motion picture interests.”

_The New Yorker_, too, took umbrage that Broadway theater had to adhere to Midwestern standards: “It seems that the [theater] industry is quailing before women’s clubs of Dubuque and other places in the hinterlands, and it was Mr. Adolph Zukor whose inverted thumbs brought ‘The Captive’ to a close. . . . When the police descended on the play Mr. Miller announced his intention of fighting the case out . . . [but] Mr. Zukor, fearing the effect that court action in defense of so peculiar a story might have upon the provinces, would have none of the defiance.” These sentiments outline a perceived clash between urban and rural values and show how some observers aligned the willingness to represent lesbianism with urban cosmopolitanism.

On the flip side, the editor of _Photoplay_, James Quirk, applauded the movie industry’s uprightness compared to the excesses of Broadway. He argued that the two industries had switched places in terms of cultural legitimacy: “It is significant that while the theater mogul of a decade ago turned up his nose at the motion picture producer, we now see Adolph Zukor force the closing of ‘The Captive’ because the motion picture cannot be contaminated by any suspicion that it has the slightest connection with the legitimate producer of that perfume sprayed piece of parlor filth.” Reversing the accusations aimed at Hollywood, Quirk framed Zukor and the movies as moral crusaders against the decadent theater industry.
That Hollywood would never adapt a story as explicit as *The Captive* to screen, despite the play’s economic success, was plain. In 1928, Ralph Wilk of *Film Daily* noted the unlikeliness that an actress playing Irene in a regional production of *The Captive* would ever repeat her part on screen “for the good and sufficient reason that Will Hays will never allow the piece to be picturized.” At the same time, several of the people involved in the New York production also worked in Hollywood. Norman Trevor played in several films before accepting the role of Irene’s father in *The Captive*. After only a month, however, he returned to Hollywood to appear in several new Paramount films. After the play closed, Samuel Goldwyn hired its translator, Arthur Hornblow Jr., to be his general production executive. *Film Daily* noted that Hornblow “will have complete charge of production under Goldwyn’s direction.” Hornblow had a long and successful career in Hollywood, during which he produced films for Paramount, MGM, and independently, including *The Asphalt Jungle* (MGM, 1950), *Oklahoma!* (Magna Theatre Corp., 1955), and *Witness for the Prosecution* (Edward Small Prod., 1957). In 1959, Hornblow announced his intention to revive *The Captive* on Broadway and produce a film adaptation starring Kim Novak with Columbia Pictures, but neither project materialized.

**MOVIES IN THE WAKE OF THE CAPTIVE’S NEW YORK RUN**

Hollywood reacted almost immediately to the increased awareness of lesbianism spread by *The Captive*. The MPPDA included “sex perversion” on its list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” the biggest film of the year featured a lesbian couple in a Parisian dancehall, and, for the first time, critics wrote that an actress’s masculine clothing could have “pathological suggestions.”

In 1927, the MPPDA stepped up its self-policing. At the beginning of the year, Hays sent Jason Joy to Hollywood to form a Studio Relations Committee that would work directly with producers to prevent objectionable films from being made. Joy and his team drafted guidelines for the studios called “Don’ts and Be Carefuls,” which listed eleven subjects to avoid and twenty-five subjects to handle with care. “Any inference of sex perversion” appeared as the fourth subject to avoid. The Association of Motion Picture Producers adopted Joy’s resolution on June 8, 1927. Although the National Board of Review had warned producers in 1916 against “the comedy presentation of the sexual pervert,” state moving picture censorship codes, which were intentionally vague, never mentioned perversion directly. Neither did the industry’s previous self-censorship guidelines, the “Thirteen Points” put out by the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry in 1921. Producers were well aware that sex perversion was taboo, but Joy may have felt that the proscription needed to be spelled
out because of *The Captive*. However, the resolution did not prevent Hollywood films from including plenty of inferences of sex perversion in the coming years.

The most notable lesbian cameo appeared in *Wings* (Paramount, 1927), one of the top-grossing films of the 1920s. The film, which won the first ever Academy Award for “Outstanding Picture,” premiered at the Criterion Theatre in New York on August 12, 1927, and roadshowed around the country with a twenty-five-piece touring orchestra for more than a year. The lesbian cameo in *Wings* is similar to the one in *Four Horsemen*, but suggests a greater familiarity with real-life lesbians. In both films, wartime and a Parisian nightclub are the key factors that allow (or even demand) the representation of a lesbian couple. In *Wings*, American aviators “on furlough from Death” go to Paris to drink champagne and flirt with showgirls. The Folies Bergère nightclub is a Dionysian orgy of frantic pleasure—something like DeMille’s Feast of Bacchus—justified by the men’s perilous service to their nation. The film establishes the nightclub as a space of gender disorder from the moment we enter. A low camera follows two pairs of legs walking in sync—one in a plaid skirt and the other in a satin dress. The camera then tilts up to reveal that the plaid skirt belongs to a Scottish soldier and the satin dress to a sexy French girl. Later on, the bleary-eyed young protagonist, Jack Powell (Buddy Rogers), mistakes his friend Mary Preston (Clara Bow) for a male officer due to her military uniform.

Although the nightclub is a space of exuberant heterosexual desire, a dazzling track forward exhibits the odd couples of the war at a series of cabaret tables, including one lesbian couple (fig. 28). We first see an officer and society woman toasting each other, then a rich older woman handing cash to a young “kept” man, then a woman caressing the cheek of a woman across from her. Next is a young couple who look back at the two women with wary surprise, then a woman who throws her drink in the face of an officer, and finally, a table of American servicemen and French showgirls, including a very drunk Jack Powell. As in *Four Horsemen*, positioning the two women analogously to heterosexual couples makes it clear that they are a romantic couple. The surprise of the young male-female couple marks them as unsophisticated country folk and the lesbian couple as the most odd of the couples portrayed. The American servicemen, on the other hand, act like true cosmopolitans and pay little attention to the sexual disorder around them. The trauma of war, the film suggests, justifies this amoral, pleasure-seeking attitude.

Unlike the female couple in *Four Horsemen*, the female couple in *Wings* does not wear gender-opposed clothing. Instead, both women appear in masculine-styled women’s clothing: loose jackets, white collared shirts, and neckties. The one on the left wears a white felt hat, and the one on the right a black bolero hat. These women do not fit the masculine/feminine model of sexology. Instead, they resemble the styles adopted by European lesbian
FIGURE 28. In Wings, a track forward reveals a rich woman with a young man; a female couple; a shocked male-female couple; a woman throwing a drink into her date's face; and a close-up of Jack (Buddy Rodgers) mesmerized by his champagne. Courtesy of UCLA Film & Television Archive.
The Emergence of Lesbian Legibility

writers and artists. Although Laura Doan has shown that the bolero hat was popular with a range of British women at this time, the posture and clothing of the woman on the right strongly resembles a photograph of Radclyffe Hall taken the year before (fig. 29). Either the filmmakers consciously modeled the woman on this portrait, or this particular style and pose already signified lesbianism to some. The shift in clothing style between *Four Horsemen* and *Wings* suggests that the increasing visibility of these transnational lesbian networks had put pressure on what a lesbian was imagined to look like. Lesbian couples could thus be made visible without gender polarization. Although Doan has argued that these clothing styles would not necessarily have connoted female same-sex desire in England, it is clear that they could function as markers of this “Parisian” sexual identity in American film.

Like *Four Horsemen*, *Wings* gets away with representing lesbians not only because of the setting but also because of the brevity of the shot. We see the female couple for only three seconds. An inattentive viewer could easily miss them. However, attentive viewers had the opportunity to encounter a lesbian couple, learn the dress codes of some European lesbians, and see characters model a blasé attitude toward lesbianism.

![Figure 29](image-url)

*Figure 29.* One member of the female couple in *Wings* resembles a portrait of Radclyffe Hall. Frame enlargement courtesy of UCLA Film & Television Archive; portrait courtesy of Getty Images.
Although no critics mentioned the lesbian couple in Wings, several mused on the mannish man-hater at the center of First National’s The Crystal Cup, which opened two months later. For the first time, film critics suggested that masculine dress could be a sign of sexual deviance. California author Gertrude Atherton had published her novel with Boni & Liveright in 1925, and First National acquired the screen rights in May 1926. Moving Picture News described the novel as “a searching, analytical study of sex psychology.” The film itself is unfortunately lost, and descriptions of its plot are contradictory. Due either to her father’s mistreatment of her mother or her own experience of brutal seduction, the wealthy heiress Gita Carteret (Dorothy Mackaill) develops an enmity toward men and adopts an extreme masculine style to prevent any amorous advances (fig. 30). She eventually agrees to marry a novelist, John Blake (Rockliffe Fellowes), in name only, but then falls in love with his friend, Dr. Geoffrey Pelham (Jack Mulhall). When the frustrated John enters Gita’s room at night, she mistakes him for a burglar and shoots him. Dying, John “realizes that Dr. Pelham is the only man who can awaken the feminine in her nature,” and he instructs his friend to marry her after his death.

**Figure 30.** The man-hating Gita Carteret (Dorothy Mackaill) ignores the advice of her grandmother (Edythe Chapman) in The Crystal Cup. Courtesy of Photofest.
Gita's childhood trauma, hatred of men, and adoption of an ultra-mannish style fit an armchair etiology of lesbianism, even though the film never suggests that Gita is interested in women. This fact was not lost on critics. *Photoplay* noted, “There are spots in the picture where one’s memory might hark back to ‘The Captive’ through the suggestion of Dorothy’s clothes.” Several aspects of this comment deserve attention. First, for this reviewer, Dorothy’s masculine clothes are the sign that points to lesbianism, not her hatred of men. Second, the title of *The Captive* is already being used as a euphemism for lesbianism. Third, it does not seem to matter that neither woman in *The Captive* wears masculine clothes. The play has made Gita’s masculine style newly suspect and emboldened journalists to talk about their suspicions. In its capsule review published in subsequent issues, *Photoplay* was less specific about the film’s deviance: “Dorothy Mackaill in the drama of a man-hater that sometimes approaches the weird. Only for the sophisticated.” Rather than using the title of *The Captive*, this synopsis relies on the code words “man-hater,” “weird,” and “sophisticated.” This comment also demonstrates the connection between being “sophisticated” and being interested in watching representations of lesbianism. *Moving Picture News* argued that the filmmakers had played down the pathology of the original story in order to appeal to a broad audience, but that there was no way of eliding it completely: “Had [the story] been treated honestly it might have stirred up some agitation. But the idea was developed with half an eye on the box-office, consequently its pathological suggestions are but faintly indicated.” To these reviewers, the film suggested with one wink that Gita was a lesbian, but denied it with another.

Remarkably, critics around the country praised the film and Mackaill’s performance of female masculinity. *Film Daily* wrote, “Dorothy Mackaill handles the role of a swaggering man hater in fine style” and admired her manner of igniting a cigarette lighter with “one flick of her nail.” Even *Educational Screen* praised Mackaill: “Fairly original story but chief interest is Dorothy Mackaill’s fine portrayal of the would-be ‘mannish’ girl.” It deemed the film unsuitable for children and youth but “interesting” for “intelligent adults.” Suitability for children is a useful gauge of whether critics associated female masculinity with sexual deviance; in this case, it seems they did. Critics’ appreciation of Mackaill’s masculinity contrasts with their preference for the hyper-feminine Leatrice Joy in *The Clinging Vine*.

One New Orleans exhibitor noticed that “[b]usiness was good during shopping hours but not so after dark,” suggesting that middle-class married women were the film’s primary demographic. The eventual romance between Gita and Dr. Pelham likely helped the film. Mackaill had played opposite Mulhall in four romantic comedies by this point, so audiences expected them to get together, thereby dampening the suggestion that Gita was actually a lesbian. (The actors
went on to co-star in seven more films after this one.) Just before mentioning *The Captive*, the *Photoplay* review welcomed “that admirable co-starring combination of Dorothy Mackaill and Jack Mulhall.”149 Framing the film as a Mackaill-Mulhall picture diminishes the suggestion of lesbianism. The review continued, “Dorothy plays the role of a man hater with all the touches of the masculine in her attire, but you are going to love her just the same.” This sentence balances the potentially unsettling fact that the protagonist is a masculine-looking “man hater” with the assertion that she is still charming and empathetic. This strategy—balancing out a protagonist’s early, lesbian-like behavior with a later heterosexual romance—would be repeated in Greta Garbo’s *Queen Christina* six years later, as I discuss in the next chapter. *The Crystal Cup* was evidently considered a success, as Mackaill cross-dressed in another film the next year, *Ladies’ Night in a Turkish Bath* (Asher-Small-Rogers, 1928), and wore men’s-style pajamas while comforting a female friend in *The Barker* (First National, 1928).

With *The Crystal Cup*, film critics stated for the first time that masculine clothing could suggest lesbianism. Perhaps to our surprise, they did not therefore condemn Mackaill’s performance, even with its “pathological suggestions,” but praised her swagger and skill. Even so, the number of actresses cross-dressing in American movies declined dramatically over the next several years and never returned to the heights of the 1910s and 1920s. It seems likely that new public awareness of “pathological suggestions” was part of the reason.

In the months after *The Captive* was shut down in New York, Hollywood paradoxically condemned inferences of “sex perversion” and yet released films featuring a lesbian couple and a masculine man-hater. The play had raised the profile of lesbianism to the extent that Mackaill’s masculine clothes became suspect—even though *The Captive* never connected lesbianism with female masculinity. But that connection grew stronger over the next year.

**THE CAPTIVE BEYOND NEW YORK**

*The Captive*’s reputation continued to spread in 1928, when Liveright sold the rights to regional producers across the United States. Historian Daniel Hurewitz has shown that audiences around the country were much more open to the play than moralizing entrepreneurs like William Randolph Hearst, whose disapproval dominated public discussion.150 Critics in industrial cities like Baltimore and Cleveland saw the production as a way to prove that their communities were culturally on par with European metropoles. As in the past, a particular attitude toward the representation of lesbianism demonstrated one’s cultural standing; but now, it was blasé unconcern that signaled one’s sophistication. In February 1928, Edwin Knopf Jr. (brother to book publisher Alfred Knopf) co-produced *The Captive* in Baltimore, with Ann Davis as Irene. It ran for two sold-out weeks.
Knopf argued that the production “is not only affording Baltimoreans an opportunity to see one of the really remarkable plays of our time” but also “is definitely ranking Baltimore with New York, Paris, Vienna and other great centers of dramatic art.” A Baltimore critic scoffed at the play’s New York detractors, positing Baltimoreans as more sophisticated than New Yorkers: “Just what the pure Prunellas of New York objected to, unless it be the theatre’s recognition—certainly not new—of matters so taboo, is not clear. If they ask in horror can such things be, they need only open their eyes.” In March, producer S. W. Manheim launched a production at the Little Theater in Cleveland that ran for six weeks and broke the city’s theater attendance records. Critics praised the play and noted with satisfaction that Clevelanders seemed to know more about lesbianism than Hollywood executives.

The real showdown came when theatrical producers Ed Rowland and A. Leslie Pearce brought the play to Los Angeles. Its fate there suggests that Hollywood producers, directors, and actors were already well aware of the production. Six months previously, Hearst had declared in Variety that “he would not stand for them staging ‘The Captive’ in Los Angeles,” but Rowland and Pearce were not cowed. The Los Angeles Times printed daily updates during the ten days prior to the play’s opening on Wednesday, March 21, 1928, at the Mayan Theater, with Ann Davis again playing the lead role. Goaded by Hearst, city prosecutor Ernest Lickey sent two vice officers (and two Hearst reporters) to raid the play and arrest the producers on Thursday evening. However, the producers paid their bail, returned to work, and got an injunction against further interference on Friday. Lickey immediately overturned the injunction, and his men arrested the producers and cast two more times on Saturday. The producers agreed to stop the show until they could have their day in court. Two thousand Angelenos signed a petition declaring that they “could see nothing lewd, obscene or indecent in the play.” A week later, as the jury was being selected for the trial, the producers arranged a private performance of the play, ostensibly for the benefit of Lickey, who had never seen it. Although Lickey did not show up, “such screen celebrities as Dolores del Rio, Edmond [sic] Carewe and others” attended. The jury found Rowland and Pearce not guilty of obscenity; but before the producers could reopen the show, Hearst and Lickey convinced the city council to ban portrayals of “sex degeneracy or sex perversion.” Once more, fights about The Captive led to stricter censorship laws, despite largely positive responses from critics and audiences.

Another civil liberties skirmish occurred when Manheim, the play’s Cleveland producer, tried to stage the play in Detroit. In May 1928, Manheim booked the Schubert Theatre for a three-month engagement, but Detroit’s mayor threatened to revoke the theater’s license the day after the play opened. Rather than
risk its license, the Schubert kicked the show out. Civil liberties attorney Clarence Darrow, who had defended Leopold and Loeb as well as John T. Scopes, contacted Manheim to offer his support: “We believe that the fight for ‘The Captive’ is a showdown on the whole censorship problem.” Darrow’s support was not enough to reverse the Schubert’s decision, but Manheim brought the play to Pittsburgh in July, where it ran for two weeks without interference. Another production opened in San Francisco in July, again starring Ann Davis, but the police closed the show on opening night. The San Francisco News reported that “even the ridiculous spectacle of a squad of decidedly unaesthetic looking policemen trampling about the stage, trying to prevent people from saying things couldn’t lessen the tremendous dramatic effect of Edouard Bourdet’s fascinating drama.”

The more emphatically moralists tried to shut down The Captive, the more widely its reputation spread. While detractors managed to enact stricter censorship laws in New York and Los Angeles, they inadvertently helped spread the “message of violets” far and wide. Sophisticates and defenders of civil liberties defined themselves, in part, through their support of artists’ right to represent lesbianism. The film industry was well aware of the play, as many Hollywood luminaries attended the New York and Los Angeles productions, and debates over the play both praised and denigrated Zukor’s decision to shut it down in New York. Although movies could not be as explicit as the stage, the play provided a set of codes to journalists, filmmakers, and readers that could insinuate lesbianism without stating it outright. Film journalists seized upon the play’s name as one of these euphemisms for lesbianism and began to discuss the potentially lesbian implications of movies from 1927 onward. Although the play never associates lesbianism with masculinity, actresses in ultra-mannish clothing came under new suspicion.

**THE WELL OF LONELINESS AND THE LESBIAN BOOKS OF 1928**

At the same time that The Captive was playing around the country, a host of novels treating lesbianism and inversion were published in the United States and England. These included Warner Fabian’s Unforbidden Fruit, Wanda Fraiken Neff’s We Sing Diana, Compton Mackenzie’s Extraordinary Women, Virginia Woolf’s Orlando, Djuna Barnes’s Ladies Almanack, and Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness. Some were intended for a small circle of readers already in the know, but others aimed to reach the general public. The books ensured that lesbianism and inversion stayed in the public consciousness even as The Captive disappeared from American stages. By far the most discussed of the bunch,
Radclyffe Hall’s *Well of Loneliness* promoted a model of the invert that would have important repercussions for cross-dressing in moving pictures, as we will see in the next chapter.

Before *Well* came the trashy *Unforbidden Fruit* and sedate *We Sing Diana*, both about life in women’s colleges. The two books were aimed at a mass market: *Unforbidden Fruit* cost $2.00 and *We Sing Diana* $2.50. Educators had begun to view relationships between girls at women’s colleges as potentially pathological, rather than a normal part of female development. When it became clear in February 1927 that Liveright would not be able to remount *The Captive* in New York, he announced that a “study of attachments between girls at Radcliffe, Vassar, Wellesley and other women’s colleges has been made by Warner Fabian, who wrote ‘Flaming Youth’ four years ago. . . . It deals with the same theme in a novel as ‘The Captive’ does on the stage.” Smart Set printed the first five chapters of Fabian’s novel between February and June 1928, and in July, Boni & Liveright published the book. Fabian’s novels were famed for capturing the devil-may-care attitude of modern girls, and *Unforbidden Fruit* was no different. However, despite Liveright’s declaration, the *Captive* theme was only peripheral. On three brief occasions, the protagonists mention a girl who takes men’s roles in campus plays, sings double-alto in the glee club, and shows untoward interest in a freshman girl. However, we never see this girl directly, nor does anything happen between her and another girl.

Houghton Mifflin published Wanda Fraiken Neff’s *We Sing Diana* in February 1928. In contrast to the nonstop partying in Fabian’s novel, *We Sing Diana* shows women’s communities as sterile and stifling, but the book takes a similar attitude toward lesbian activity. The narrator, a student at an East Coast women’s college, observes, “Intimacies between girls were watched with keen, distrustful eyes. Among one’s classmates, one looked for the bisexual type, the masculine girl searching for a feminine counterpart, and one ridiculed their devotions.” (At this time, “bisexual” usually meant possessing two sexes, as mentioned in chapter 3.) These intimacies remained firmly at the margins of the story, and one female book critic even complained that “Mrs. Neff touches only superficially the inescapable problem of perversion.” Both novels adhered to a model of gender inversion.

The summer and fall of 1928 witnessed a small boom of British lesbian fiction. In July, Mackenzie’s *Extraordinary Women* and Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* were published in London. *Extraordinary Women* was a satirical look at Natalie Barney’s coterie in Capri after the First World War, whereas *Well* was a serious depiction of an upper-class congenital invert, inspired by Hall’s own experiences. Mackenzie’s book was published in the United States that September and Hall’s in December. In October, Woolf’s *Orlando* came out in England and the United States simultaneously. *Orlando* is a novel about an androgynous boy who
becomes a woman and lives for centuries. The character was allegedly inspired by Woolf’s lover, Vita Sackville-West. Sometime that same year, Djuna Barnes privately printed 1,050 copies of *Ladies Almanack*, a parody of Barney’s social circle, including Hall and her partner Una Troubridge. Most of these British books were written by insiders for insiders, with little attempt to make them accessible to broad audiences. Readers could best appreciate Mackenzie’s and Barnes’s books only if they were already familiar with Barney’s coterie. However, while Barnes’s book was known to only a few, Mackenzie’s was published by the left-wing Vanguard Press for $2.00 and became a New York bestseller the week it came out. Still, it generated few reviews and was judged inferior to Mackenzie’s previous novels. *Orlando* was exclusive in another way. While the basic narrative is easy enough to understand, it uses an enigmatic, modernist style and numerous references to historical people, places, and events. It was published by the respected Harcourt, Brace & Company for $3.00 (with a limited first edition going for $15.00). As literary critic Fanny Butcher wrote in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, “‘Orlando’ is the most cerebral novel of the year. That it is, therefore, the most alluring to some and the least to others is also true beyond a doubt.” What idea Orlando actually is, no one, of course, can say,” she went on. “You can read into it anything that you want.” *Orlando* is not specifically about lesbians or inverts, but the protagonist’s gender and sexual fluidity generate a nebulous eroticism that exceeds heterosexuality. No critic explicitly linked Woolf’s book with the discussions about lesbianism at the time.

*The Well of Loneliness*, on the other hand, uses a straightforward, sentimental narrative and elements of tragedy to educate the public about inverts and build sympathy for them. It was written by an insider for outsiders. As Laura Doan has analyzed, the novel translates sexology, activist writings, and Hall’s own experience into an accessible, compelling narrative. Hall even secured an endorsement from British sexologist Havelock Ellis that was printed in the book’s preface. *Well* is far more sympathetic to its protagonist than *The Captive*. Though many models of same-sex desire circulated at the time, Hall primarily articulates one: the female invert. In the book, masculinity of mind, body, and dress become key symptoms of an inverted identity. The early sections read like a case study from a sexological report. The parents of the protagonist, Stephen Gordon, yearn for a boy. The baby is born female but “narrow-hipped [and] wide-shouldered.” Stephen develops a crush on the family’s working-class maid, dresses up like British imperial heroes, and declares herself to be a boy (“I must be a boy, ‘cause I feel exactly like one”). Her father notices “the curious suggestion of strength in her movements, the long line of her limbs . . . and the pose of her head on her over-broad shoulders.” When Stephen grows up and falls in love with a married American actress, she becomes particularly fastidious about her male clothing: “The suit should be grey with a little white pin
stripe, and the jacket, she decided, must have a breast pocket. She would wear a black tie—no, better a grey one to match the little white pin stripe.”

Stephen is kicked off her ancestral property, serves in an ambulance corps in the First World War, has a loving relationship with a young Welsh woman, Mary, meets other inverts in Paris (another take on Barney’s social circle), and tricks Mary into marrying a man so that she can lead a “normal” life. While Mary and some of the Paris inverts are quite feminine, the masculine Stephen is the novel’s primary case study, and her masculine habits and clothing indicate her condition. At the end of the novel, a dying Stephen is surrounded by a throng of ghostly, sad-eyed inverts. They possess her and she cries out, “Acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!”

Hall’s novel became well known because of the furor over its publication in London. Although British literary critics largely praised the novel, journalist James Douglas wrote a scathing editorial in the Sunday Express, declaring, “I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel.” The British Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, agreed and instructed the director of public prosecutions to bring action against the novel. Despite the protests of acclaimed authors such as Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and T. S. Eliot, the court ruled Well obscene in November 1928, and an appellate court affirmed the decision the next month. British authorities destroyed as many copies as they could lay their hands on. Laura Doan argues that the extensive circulation of photos of Hall during the trial established her look as a recognizable uniform of lesbianism in England. While Hall’s look was already associated with lesbianism in What’s the World Coming To? and Wings, the publicity undoubtedly solidified this interpretation.

In the United States, the New York Times and Publisher’s Weekly reported on the British trial and the book’s U.S. prospects. Historian Leslie A. Taylor has traced the book’s complex publication history in the United States. Although Hall originally signed a contract with Alfred A. Knopf, the company balked when British courts declared the book obscene. A bidding war then broke out among less reputable U.S. publishers. In the end, Covici-Friede won the rights to the book. The firm was managed by Pascal Covici, a Romanian Jewish immigrant, and Donald Friede, the well-off son of a Russian immigrant and former vice president of Boni & Liveright. Covici and Friede published the book on December 15, 1928, for $5.00, twice the price of a usual novel. A $10.00 limited edition sold out overnight. Within the first month, the firm had sold 20,000 copies. U.S. literary critics greeted Well warmly, only occasionally taking issue with its unrelenting seriousness and loose structure. Although the book was expensive, book rental companies in small towns like Hutchinson, Kansas, and cities like Chicago offered it to readers by January 1929. By the end of the first year, more than 100,000 copies had been sold in the United States.
Covici and Friede counted on efforts to suppress the book to boost sales.\textsuperscript{185} On the advice of their lawyer, they notified John Sumner, president of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, of their intent to publish the book and sold Sumner one of the first copies.\textsuperscript{186} Friede also traveled to Boston to give a copy to the Watch and Ward Society, which had banned hundreds of books in Boston.\textsuperscript{187} Although Watch and Ward did not take the bait, Sumner did. On January 11, 1929, he delivered a court summons to Friede for selling an “obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent, or disgusting book,” and the police seized 865 copies.\textsuperscript{188} The \textit{New York Times} noted that, at this point, the book was already at the top of the bestseller list, with 20,000 copies sold. On January 22, District Attorney Joab H. Banton (of \textit{The Captive} fame) brought the case against Friede. On February 21, after reading the book, the magistrate recommended the case to the Court of Special Sessions, arguing that, given the recent addition of “sex perversion” to the code governing theater, community mores were united against the representation of lesbianism.\textsuperscript{189} Two months later, on April 19, the court gave its decision: “the book in question is not in violation of the law.”\textsuperscript{190} The U.S. Customs Court declared the book obscene a month later, but that decision was overturned in July.\textsuperscript{191} The constant legal wrangling kept \textit{The Well of Loneliness} in the papers well into the 1930s—surely Covici and Friede’s intention.

A sea change had taken place since the coverage of \textit{The Captive}. In discussing \textit{Well}, journalists around the country did not hesitate to name the book’s subject. They used a range of terms, including “urning,” “intermediate sex,” “inversion,” “homosexuality,” and “lesbianism.”\textsuperscript{192} The word “invert” seems to have been least familiar. A critic in Decatur, Illinois, called it “a baffling word,” and literary critic Mary Ross defined it for readers of the \textit{New York Herald Tribune}.\textsuperscript{193} Many journalists assumed that the existence of inverts was common knowledge. “Of course there are inverts,” the Decatur critic wrote. “It is true that coterie of them gather in every acknowledged rendezvous in Paris, New York, Chicago.”\textsuperscript{194} Overall, literary critics were far more sympathetic to the novel’s protagonist and inverts in general than theater critics had been to \textit{The Captive}’s protagonist. This acceptance was not limited to metropolitan papers. A reviewer for Mississippi’s \textit{Hattiesburg American} wondered why the book had been suppressed: “Genuine homosexuality is not a vice, but an endowment. About three out of every hundred are abnormal in this fashion.”\textsuperscript{195} A critic for Iowa’s \textit{Cedar Rapids Tribune} agreed: “The Radclyffe Hall book deals with inversion, which is perhaps commoner than most folks realize, and which is by most folks little understood. The subject is neither obscene nor abstruse. It ought to be as possible to read an authentic work on this subject as on ingrowing toenails.”\textsuperscript{196} Reviews published in Galveston, Texas, Charleston, West Virginia, and Appleton, Wisconsin, similarly praised the book and criticized the efforts against it.\textsuperscript{197} Unlike earlier journalists, the reviewers of \textit{Well} did not seem concerned that their articles
might inform young women of a vice they had never thought of. Inversion had gone mainstream.

Many communities hosted discussions and lectures relating to the book. In Baltimore, two different African American women’s clubs read the book and organized events around it.198 One club scheduled a lecture by Dr. Carla Thompson, a well-known Johns Hopkins psychoanalyst, on “Homosexuality, what it is and its causes.” The Baltimore Afro-American presented the topic as entirely respectable: “The club sent Dr. Thompson a plant as a token of appreciation for the address.”199 In Chicago, a progressive Jewish community center invited a psychiatrist to discuss the book.200 At a bookstore in San Francisco, Dr. Clement H. Arnold considered the book “from the medical standpoint” and offered “suggestions as to how such situations may be met in everyday life.”201 English professors at two Midwestern universities assigned the book to their composition classes.202 These communities evidently received the book as the serious undertaking it was intended to be.

However, not everyone approved. Three weeks after Dr. Thompson’s address to black women in Baltimore, a commentator in the Baltimore Afro-American objected:

In the old days effeminate men were shunned as degenerates. Not so today, since psychoanalysts have had their say, and books like the “Well of Loneliness” have built up toleration for the men who wish they were women and the women who long to be men. . . . As expected, tolerance for the persons of twisted sex has resulted in the establishment of a fad, and an openly defiant attempt to draw recruits from the ranks of normal young people. . . . There is nothing more dangerous to the growth of a race and nothing more disgusting than this group of atypical men, whose minds should be centered on wholesome exercise and recreation, clean living and hard work, instead of devoting their time and their talent to the use of the skirt, the lipstick and the powder puff as a means of physically attracting others of the same sex.203

It is interesting that the commentator complained that books like Well were increasing the numbers of effeminate men rather than masculine women. Effeminate men were evidently considered more threatening, particularly to reformers hoping to establish the black community’s respectability. It is clear that The Well of Loneliness prompted public discussions of inversion in diverse communities throughout the country.204

By the 1930s, the book was used as a sign of not-quite-achieved sophistication. It was simultaneously middlebrow and scandalous, but not too scandalous. For example, The Living Age, a weekly general-interest magazine, reported that an Italian journalist had observed:
[Upper-class American women] are not satisfied with having imposed on their husband the terrible task of keeping up with the Joneses; they have also had the leisure to acquire a culture that is of course superficial yet is sufficient to enable them to cut a figure in the world. . . . When a big executive returns in the evening . . . they assail him on all sides with a shower of questions . . . :

“What do you think, Mr. Jones, of Dr. Bunk’s new system of psychoanalysis to cure girls of the Œdipus complex?” . . .

“What do you think of the Well of Loneliness? Don’t you agree that it’s one of the greatest novels of the century?”

For this writer, familiarity with Freud and *The Well of Loneliness* was an empty signifier of class distinction. Knowledge of and a blasé attitude toward inversion were again used to establish oneself as worldly and cosmopolitan. The notion that the book was only slightly titillating was also reflected in a September 1930 article: a forthcoming $2.00 edition will “make it available to those countless suburban matrons who have been whispering about it for the last eight months or so.”

The book is scandalous enough that middle-class women talk about it in whispers, but not so scandalous that they will not buy it.

In Hollywood discourse, *Well* was used to indicate a certain cosmopolitanism. In one anecdote, a young woman proved to be more sophisticated than the book’s anticipated readers. Jim Tully, who reported to *New Movie Magazine* about his experience acting in the movie *Way for a Sailor*, encountered a young woman on the set reading *Well*. When asked whether she liked the book, she replied, “fairly well,” but qualified her answer: “A person has to wade through a whole book to get what Havelock Ellis would give in a chapter.” The young woman’s familiarity with inversion exceeded Tully’s and the reader’s expectations. The anecdote is similar to that of the “sweet young things” who were sure that their mothers would not understand *The Captive*. On the other hand, the Columbia Pictures detective film *The Secret Witness* (1931) offers a comic example of someone who is not quite up to the book’s sophistication. Zasu Pitts plays a flustered telephone operator. While talking to her boyfriend on the phone, she mentions that she is reading “something about a well . . . I don’t really understand it.” The film cuts to the book’s cover—*The Well of Loneliness*. As Richard Barrios points out, the gag suggests that producers expected audiences to be sufficiently familiar with the title to know what the book is about. These anecdotes show how the novel was incorporated into structures of social distinction and that it had become broadly recognizable to general audiences.

Overall, the reception to *The Well of Loneliness* helped spread a broader range of terminology to American readers and publicized a model of same-sex desire as gender inversion. It also suggested a different set of codes than *The Captive*.

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http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/product/Girls-Will-Be-Boys,5637.aspx
for detecting inversion: mannish physiology, men’s tastes in furniture and leisure activities, and, in particular, men’s clothing. Publicly connecting masculine styles of clothing to inversion added another dimension to the reception of cross-dressing women.

In the midst of a second wave of cross-dressed women in American movies, lesbians and inverts entered popular consciousness through a series of movies, plays, and novels. The widespread coverage of *The Captive* and *The Well of Loneliness* did the most to circulate terms and concepts of same-sex desire, but they were accompanied by a range of lesser-known works. Even though movies could not be as explicit as plays or novels, they still managed to include a surprising amount of lesbian content, either in brief cameos (as in *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *Manslaughter*, and *Wings*) or through intertextual insinuations (as in *What's the World Coming To?* and *The Crystal Cup*). The growing familiarity with lesbianism and inversion over the course of the 1920s is evident, as journalists moved from vague words like “obscene” or “indecent” to specific words like “lesbian,” “invert,” and “homosexual.” A knowing, blasé attitude toward lesbianism became a signifier of worldly cosmopolitanism. Codes established by *The Captive* and *The Well of Loneliness* in the 1920s would be picked up by fan magazine writers and moviemakers in the 1930s. Although masculinity was not necessary for signifying lesbianism in the 1920s, it became more tightly connected to same-sex desire in the late 1920s, as the model of inversion was popularly embraced. This connection had a significant impact on cross-dressed women in the movies.
CHAPTER 4 ENTER THE LESBIAN

2. Barrios, Screened Out; Benshoff and Griffin, Queer Images.
3. This objection has also been raised by Judith Halberstam and Nan Boyd. See Halberstam, Female Masculinity; Boyd, “Materiality of Gender.”
10. Though Paul Poiret introduced “harem pants” into Parisian haute couture in 1913, they did not become part of mainstream women’s fashion.
11. The term “garçonne” was popularized by Victor Margueritte’s 1922 novel of that name.
13. Laura Doan makes this point in the British context in Fashioning Sapphism.
14. This convenient coincidence was noted by journalists at the time; see Rose Pelswick, “New Films Find Feminine Stars in Male Garb,” New York City American, September 9, 1923, Little Old New York scrapbook, MFL n.c. 1664, BRTC.
15. “Girls Will Be Boys!”
18. Mahlon also forgot that Marion Davies had cross-dressed in Runaway Romany (Ardsley Art Film, 1917), six years before Little Old New York.
20. “Girls Will Be Boys!”
30. Alexandre Jean Baptiste Parent-Duchatelet, De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris consideree sous la rapport de l’hygiene publique (Brussels: Hauman, Cattoir, 1836); Ellis and Symonds, Sexual Inversion.
31. See, for example, Cabiria (Itala, 1914), Intolerance (Triangle, 1916), and The Ten Commandments (Paramount, 1923).
32. Curtin, We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians, 25.
34. As quoted in Curtin, We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians, 29.
38. Ibid., 33.


46. Geoffrey F. Morgan, “Must the Theater Be Censored?” The Billboard, July 12, 1924.


48. This photograph of Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge was taken after the film came out, so there could not have been a direct influence, but the similarity of the two images suggests that the connection between Hall’s style and lesbianism was already at least partly established by 1926. Either Hall was known as an invert before Well or her style was already identified by some as a lesbian look.


51. For example: “Leteatrice Joy,” Photoplay, August 1926.

52. Made for Love (1926), Eve’s Leaves (1926), The Clinging Vine (1926), For Alimony Only (1926), and Vanity (1927)


55. “Going, Going, Gone!” Photoplay, August 1926.

56. “It’s a Girl!” Motion Picture Magazine, September 1926.

57. Sears had also written the book and lyrics for a Broadway musical, The Lady Billy (1920), in which a woman singer passes herself off as a boy soprano. Schmertz, “The Leatrice Joy Bob,” 403.


62. Barrios, Screened Out, 33. See also Benshoff and Griffin, Queer Images, 26.

63. “Film Estimates,” The Educational Screen, November 1926.

64. “The Clinging Vine,” Film Daily, August 8, 1926.


68. Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way.”
70. For example, “Woman Among the Mighty,” *New York World Telegram*, November 21, 1936, Arzner scrapbook; R. Ewart Williams, “Film for Women Made by Women,” *Film Pictorial*, March 6, 1937.
71. Mayne, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner*.
76. Ibid., 149–50.
77. Source unknown, ca. September 1926, *The Captive* clipping file, BRTC.
83. Eleanor Barnes, “‘The Captive’ Good Play for Medical Student,” *Los Angeles Illustrated Daily News?* March 22, 1928, MWEZ+ n.c., Ann Davis collection, BRTC.
87. Ibos, publication unknown, 1926, *The Captive* clipping file, BRTC.
88. Ibid.; Edwin Schallert, “Bourdet Play at the Egan,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1928; Barnes, “‘The Captive’ Good Play for Medical Student.”
89. This column appeared on November 4, 1931 in many newspapers, including *The Day* (New London, CT), *the Salt Lake Tribune*, and the *San Antonio Light*.
94. Ann Peppard White, “Gotham Plays in Resume,” *Kansas City Star*, January 9, 1927. The article introduces White as “a Kansas Citian who takes a deep interest in the theater,” suggesting that she was not a professional critic.
95. Marcus, “Comparative Sapphisms.”
96. Hammond, “Hammond and the Ladies.”
105. Ibid.
111. Vreeland, “Marble Bride.”
113. Young, “Three Plays.”


120. Ibid.; as quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 61.


126. As quoted in Curtin, *We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*, 100.


137. *Wings* won “Outstanding Picture” of 1927/1928 and *Sunrise* won “Unique and Artistic Production.”


141. “‘The Crystal Cup’ with Mackaill,” *Motion Picture News*, May 1, 1926.


145. *Film Daily*, October 9, 1927; Phil M. Daly, “And That’s That,” *Film Daily*, October 11, 1927.
149. “The Shadow Stage.”
150. Hurewitz, “Banned on Broadway but Coming to a Theater Near You,” 46.
151. Baltimore American, February 1928; as quoted in Hurewitz, “Banned on Broadway but Coming to a Theater Near You,” 46.
152. Baltimore News, February 1928; as quoted in Hurewitz, “Banned on Broadway but Coming to a Theater Near You,” 46.
154. Ibid.
155. Ibid., 48.
156. Ibid.
157. Ibid., 50.
158. “‘Captive’ Given Private Exhibit,” 1928, MWEZ+ n.c. 18.866, Ann Davis collection, BRTC.
159. Hurewitz, “Banned on Broadway but Coming to a Theater Near You,” 51.
160. Ibid., 52.
161. Ibid., 52–53.
162. As quoted in Curtin, We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians, 112–13.
164. Unknown publication, 1928, The Captive clipping file, BRTC.
166. Wanda Fraiken Neff, We Sing Diana (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 199.
171. See, for example, “Title Deceiving in Mackenzie’s Latest Offering,” Mansfield News, September 13, 1928.
173. Doan, Fashioning Sapphism, 144–63.
175. Ibid., 20.
176. Ibid., 26.
177. Ibid., 163.
178. Ibid., 437.
It is not clear how widely Hall’s photograph circulated in the United States. The only U.S. newspaper with a photograph of Hall I have found is the *Chicago Tribune*, which printed it at least three times: Frank Swinnerton, “New English Novel Is Writers’ Picture of Publisher’s Idea,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 11, 1928; Fanny Butcher, “Radclyffe Hall Book Written in Fine English,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 29, 1928; Fanny Butcher, “Another Book by Radclyffe Hall Out Today,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 25, 1932.


Ibid., 261.

*Hutchinson News*, January 25, 1929; *Southtown Economist*, April 24, 1929.

Taylor, “I Made Up My Mind to Get It,” 269–70.

Ibid., 260–61.

Ibid., 269.

Ibid., 270.

As Taylor points out, the book was not actually ruled obscene at this point, contrary to the reporting in “Novel ‘Loneliness’ Is Ruled Obscene,” *New York Times*, February 22, 1929.


D.S.O., “This Is Book That Baffles and Repulses.”


C.M.W., “The Cherry Tree.”


“Dr. Thompson Addresses Book Club.”

“Meetings and Lectures,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 8, 1930.


For more on homosexuality in communities of color in the 1920s, see Garber, “A Spectacle in Color”; Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality.”


208. Barrios, Screened Out, 1–2.

CHAPTER 5 THE LESBIAN VOGUE AND BACKLASH


6. As quoted in Heap, Slumming, 236.


8. Ibid., 237.

9. Ibid., 239.


12. Ibid., 206.


21. DeCordova, Picture Personalities, 131, 140.