

A Study of Literary Characters Who Knew How to Dress Up

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Abstract

Fashion and Literature are two primarily different mediums though they do intersect each other and deviate in their own historic and contemporary times. Fashion in fiction is explanatory, illuminating, symbolic and full of visualization. Some of the best scenes in the literature are braced with fashion. It is assumed that fashion is only about clothing and although it can be considered true to some extent, fashion is far more complex and inclusive. Fashion has been intrinsically connected to leisure for centuries – especially through mediums such as the literature and theatre. This paper discusses the classic icons and muses from the world of literature who continue to catalyze as inspiration in the fashion world. This paper is based on review of literature and takes a case study approach. It is observed that fashion and literature both offer shape, structure and guide each other. This study extents to apprise the iconoclasts that were first fashioned with a pen.

Keywords: Fashion, Literature, Icons, Muse

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Introduction

Fashion is a sociocultural phenomenon in which a specific garment or style is embraced by a significant number of individuals within a specific location and timeframe. Throughout history, clothing has held significance due to its association with both safeguarding and embellishment, eventually evolving into a symbol of modesty. Not all clothing items are considered fashionable, hence fashion can be regarded as a dynamic process. Hence, the concept of fashion can be extended to encompass several categories and services beyond the realm of the clothes sector.

The portrayal of clothing in literature is inherently authentic, hence reflecting the existence of fashion in literature. Utilizing clothing signifiers to situate characters within their distinct social and historical milieu is quite effortless. Both fashion and literature captivate the minds of many individuals with a shared fixation on fantasy, and they intertwine to mutually influence one another in various ways. Literature has bestowed upon the realm of fashion a collection of enduring icons, such as Miss Havisham, Holly Golightly, Jane Eyre, Anna Karenina, Orlando, Gigi, and others. These fashion icons were initially conceptualized by an author using a pen, but they still serve as a source of inspiration for several stylists, designers, and readers. Roland Barthes used the term "written clothing" in 1967 in his research, *The Fashion System*, which explores the connection between visual photographs and written descriptions of apparel in fashion magazines. The individual addresses two core concepts: the profound capacity for change inherent in even the minutest aspect of attire, and the conflict that arises from the coexistence of historical and contemporary elements.

Sigmund Freud, the pioneer of psychoanalysis, explicitly acknowledges clothes as a dynamic symbol of social identity due to their intimate connection with the human body. The era of Freud was characterized by the prevalence of cravats and corsets, which were widely worn throughout that period. This indicates that fashion trends may have had a considerable influence on the visual representation of that time. In his work "The Psychoanalyst of Clothes," psychoanalyst J.C. Flugel explores the connection between dress, fashion, and identity, posing the topic of how fashion is associated with one's sense of self. Flugel's focus is on the motives of modesty and decorating. He believes that humans appreciate their bodies and exhibit them to others in order to allow others to partake in their adoration.

In her book "Fashion and Psychoanalysis," Alison Bancroft used Lacanian psychoanalysis to illustrate how fashion may serve as a platform for women to engage in confrontational experiences. She argues that fashion is an invaluable cultural commodity that is consistently associated with the feminine domain. She asserts that fashion photography, specifically the work of photographer Nick Knight, portrays women in an overly simplistic or even malevolent manner. She argues that fashion photography can establish ideological principles and norms for the analysis of fashion imagery.

George Simmel, a theorist of social reason, questions the advocates of traditional disciplines like literature and history. Simmel posited that fashion is marked by a simultaneous interplay of individualism and conformity, and that there exists a robust correlation between fashion and image culture. Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumerism delved into the potential for fashion to progress towards an ideal state. In contrast, Simmel focused on interpersonal relationships rather than quantitative metrics to comprehend how goods acquire worth. Simmel did not explicitly employ the term 'trickle down', but, he has been associated with it. In his 1904 article 'Fashion', he formulated this concept and posited that it was inherent for

the lower social strata to emulate and aspire towards the higher echelons of society. The fashion trends of the top echelons of society are always distinct from those of the lower class. The former promptly discard these trends as soon as the latter begins to embrace them.

Barthes acknowledges the importance of dress descriptions in "literature proper," but he excludes them from his semiotic analysis because he considers them too incomplete and subject to change over time to be valuable. Nevertheless, there is a growing fascination among literary scholars and fashion critics with analyzing the intricate ways in which imaginative writers employ complex systems of clothing symbolism in works of fiction. In his work 'Dandyism and Fashion', Barthes focuses on the technical aspects of male clothes and highlights the significance of details as indicators. He suggests that the dandy would approach his attire like a contemporary artist, skillfully arranging the available materials to create a well-composed ensemble. He asserts that maintaining individuality is unattainable and that the proliferation and dissemination of fashion is a result of the availability of ready-to-wear garments.

Writings from periods with limited mass literacy do not include literary investigations, as they primarily focus on real-life events. Literary works started targeting broader audiences who were acknowledged as engaged and receptive readers of literary materials. Only at that moment did the concept of illiteracy begin to form and public discussions on the topic could start. In England, whereas printing thrived during the Renaissance in the 15th century, literary excursions unexpectedly flourished in the 19th century. In the early 18th century, illiteracy was not yet recognized as a social issue. Ultimately, reading for enjoyment was not a common habit in the society of that era, reading for practical purposes was not obligatory, and reading religious texts did not appeal to a large number of people. At that time, letter writing was a recently developed mode of communication, and there was no official or practical need for people to be literate in order to vote or hold public office. The research conducted by Terry Belanger, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Carey McIntosh substantiates this claim, demonstrating that "England in the 1790s had achieved a highly advanced print society," while a hundred years previously, in 1695, "print culture was still in its nascent stage."

Research Methodology

An in-depth analysis is conducted on the historical context of certain prominent characters from ancient novels, as well as a comprehensive assessment of literature on the portrayal of clothing in written works of fiction, revealing complex systems of clothing depiction. This text discusses the aspects in the context of fashion that portray these literary characters. In order to comprehend the evolution of characters and the connection between literature and fashion, this study examines six famous literary characters by analyzing their clothing and fashion choices in both written novels and their adaptations. The discourse revolves around the significance of fashion narratives and the deliberate utilization of fashion consciousness by authors to depict characters.

The study encompassed the subsequent novels:

1. The character Anna Karenina from the novel "Anna Karenina" written by Leo Tolstoy.
2. Scarlett O'Hara, a character from the novel "Gone with the Wind" by Margaret Mitchell.

3. Miss Havisham, a character in Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*, is the subject of discussion.
4. Holly Golightly is a character from the novel *"Breakfast at Tiffany's"* written by Truman Capote.
5. Jane is a character in the novel *"Jane Eyre"* written by Charlotte Brontë.
6. The novel *"Orlando"* written by Virginia Woolf is set in the city of Orlando.

Exemplary literary Characters With a Keen Sense Of Fashion

1. Anna Karenina, the protagonist of Leo Tolstoy's renowned novel *"Anna Karenina"* published in 1876, became a fashion symbol as a result of her meticulously designed attire. Anna Karenina's fashion exemplifies the characteristics of the late Victorian age, including the evolution of crinolines, petticoats, and bustles that added significant volume to the posterior of the dresses. The story's setting is in Russia, during a time when the dominant fashion trend was French-inspired, characterized by exaggerated details at the rear. Women also had a strong affinity for fur. Anna Karenina's attire is featured in various film adaptations of the novel, including the *"Love"* 1927 film with costumes designed by Gilbert Clark, the 1935 film *Anna Karenina* with costumes designed by Adrian, the 1947 film *Anna Karenina* with costumes designed by Cecil Beaton, and the more recent 2012 film *Anna Karenina* with costumes designed by Jacqueline Durran. The phrase *"Anna Karenina"* finally evolved to represent the design of elegant and romantic figures embellished with fur. Tolstoy employs clothing as a means of concealing his characters' true identities, conveying their self-perception, and influencing our emotional response towards them. He oversees the entire process, from measuring a cuff link to ensuring that a man's coat is prepared, without the need for a tailor.

Tolstoy saw clothing as illuminating in a manner that is distinct from other eminent authors of the 19th century, such as Dickens. In *"David Copperfield,"* David briefly mentions the malevolent Mr. Murdstone lounging in his robe, without providing a clear explanation. However, in the initial pages of *"Anna Karenina,"* when Oblonsky is promoted, his grey dressing gown with a blue silk lining serves as a critical observer of his actions. Tolstoy had previously informed us that Oblonsky is an adulterous spouse; his opulent gold morocco slippers serve as evidence of his hedonistic nature. Tolstoy's intense preoccupation with dress parallels his preoccupation with ethics. Tolstoy, like numerous other artists, transmuted his anxieties into art. The protagonist in the author's novels consistently endeavors to derive moral coherence from his existence. Tolstoy, a young nobleman, openly displayed the typical associations of his social status, including ladies and gambling. Tolstoy evaluates his characters based on his pursuit of absolute moral excellence. Throughout his lifetime, he developed a philosophy that combined the principles of moral excellence and his unwavering belief in nonviolence, while simultaneously rejecting all forms of artistic expression, including his own. The activities and subjects he focused on during his final years generated much controversy, but many of his ideas were traditional. Within his works of fiction, he advocated for the virtue of sexual abstinence in women and held great admiration for acts of bravery in the military.

"War and Peace" exemplifies Tolstoy's overarching theory of history through the inclusion of numerous subordinate theories. One theory pertains to the relationship between dress and Tolstoy's success in persuading people that fashionable warriors are not always skilled fighters. During a particular incident, a sophisticated officer, adorned with a diamond ring on his forefinger, reprimands an artillery captain for removing his boots during a moment of

leisure. This scene highlights the moral disparity between sophisticated dandies of high social status and soldiers serving on the front lines. The artillery captain thereafter emerges as the protagonist of a minor yet pivotal encounter, for which he receives no acknowledgment. During our final encounter, he is situated in a medical facility, having suffered the loss of one of his limbs. However, Tolstoy's well-dressed officers, described in great detail, never get injured.

2. Despite its premiere many years ago, *Gone with the Wind* continues to offer new discoveries. The film features a collection of exquisite garments, designed by Walter Plunkett and John Frederics, among other outfits. The coveted item that we all desire is the crimson gown donned by Scarlett O'Hara, portrayed by the remarkable Vivien Leigh, during the scene depicting Ashley Wilkes' birthday. Vivien Leigh dons a crimson velvet dress adorned with glass beads in the moment where Scarlett O'Hara attends Ashley Wilkes' birthday party unaccompanied. Instead of wearing a corset and large petticoats, she is dressed in a form-fitting garment that contrasts with the attire of the other ladies in the room, exuding sensuality and presenting a stark contrast. Scarlett O'Hara captivates the audience with her low-cut sweetheart neckline and luxurious burgundy ostrich plumes. This scene is set in the 1870s, which corresponds to the Golden Age of America, also referred to as the Gilded Age. During this period, women's fashion transitions from ruffles, big hoop skirts, and airy fabrics to more fitted patterns crafted from luxurious materials such as velvet. In this period, there are stringent regulations dictating the attire for women, which Scarlett defies by appearing at a family gathering in a remarkable yet audacious clothing. Compelled by Rhett Butler, the character portrayed by Clark Gable intentionally selects a provocative attire. Scarlett O'Hara maintains her composure and confidence despite the response of others.

3. Miss Havisham, a character in Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*, is undeniably one of the most remarkable figures in literature. She is a woman who was deserted by her fiancé on their wedding day. Consequently, she remains motionless in a state of temporal suspension and has an overwhelming sense of profound sorrow, prompting her to don her bridal attire on a daily basis, in anticipation of the eventual reunion with her cherished partner. Miss Havisham's character does not thrive. She languishes in her attire and in her own residence, a dwelling that has grown dim with little joy except for the affection she harbors for Estella. The white dress transcends its role as a mere bridal attire. It serves as a perpetual symbol of Miss Havisham's bereavement. It involves a dynamic struggle or contradiction. The demise of romance and the idealized notion of marriage coincides with Miss Havisham embodying the Victorian gothic archetype and being deeply entrenched in domesticity.

The portrayal of Miss Havisham and her bridal attire is revered in gothic literature that focuses on female characters. Miss Havisham's clothing has transformed into her burial garment, yet there is an obvious elegance in the relentless sorrow she experiences every day of her existence. Miss Havisham adamantly refuses to move over her heartbreak. Upon discovering Compeyson's absence, she promptly halts all the clocks throughout Satis House at precisely twenty minutes to nine. She wears a single shoe, as she had not yet placed on the other shoe when she discovered his betrayal. Miss Havisham adopts Estella with a fervent and obsessed malice, raising her as a means to achieve her own vengeance against men.

4. Audrey Hepburn achieved widespread popularity for her portrayal of the character in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which resulted in the widespread recognition of the little black dress she wore. This, in turn, created one of the most memorable and influential fashion moments

in the history of cinema. Audrey Hepburn is renowned for the opening sequence of the 1961 iconic film, in which the youthful socialite Holly Golightly has a croissant and coffee while positioned in front of a Tiffany & Co. boutique. She is wearing a modest black dress from Givenchy, paired with a pearl necklace around her collar. This design ensemble has become iconic throughout history. One may argue that the accessories elevated the appearance from basic to iconic. In her book *Audrey Style*, Pamela Keogh Clarke explains that the collaboration between Hepburn and Givenchy reached its pinnacle of sophisticated elegance with Holly Golightly's fashionable yet disheveled look, which led to a surge in demand for triple strand faux pearl necklaces, sleeveless dresses, and oversized dark sunglasses that persists even today.

While Givenchy and Audrey Hepburn had successful collaborations in *Sabrina* (1954) and *Funny Face* (1957), it was *Breakfast at Tiffany's* that ultimately became their style masterpiece, revolutionizing the concept of chic in Hollywood. Holly's remarkably refined interpretation of the Greek Toga or Indian Sari, which she ingeniously crafted using an ancient yet splendid curtain, rivals Aphrodite's elegance. The film's most iconic moment occurs within the first 30 seconds, when Holly Golightly is observed stepping out of a taxi in an elegant, floor-length black dress. She is simultaneously holding a Danish pastry in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. Out of the two black dresses, only one is exclusively crafted by Givenchy for the film. The original design was deemed excessively 'revealing' by Paramount Pictures. Edith Head proposed transitioning to the current iteration of a gown that extends all the way to the floor. The dress was accessorized with Oliver GoldSmith sunglasses, long black gloves, and Robert Scemama pearls, which draw attention to the frock's neckline. Hence, the overall appearance was a collaborative effort between the two designers. The dress exuded exceptional magnificence and significantly contributed to the portrayal of Holly Golightly's persona.

5. The novel "Jane Eyre" was released in 1847, although the exact timeframe of the plot remains somewhat ambiguous. The majority of cinematic adaptations often situate the narrative either in the same decade as the book's publication, specifically the 1840s, or slightly earlier in the 1830s. The movie wonderfully captures the silhouette of the 1830s. Mrs. Reed, Jane's aunt, dons a brown dress adorned with exquisite, voluminous sleeves. The horizontal neckline and ruched detail on the front of her dress are mutually enhancing. This dress bears a striking resemblance to a particular purple dress depicted in a fashion plate found within a magazine from the 1830s. During the 19th century, it was customary for individuals to adorn themselves with jewelry that incorporated or was crafted from the hair of their deceased loved ones. It is presumed that Mrs. Reed is donning a black locket, potentially a mourning locket, due to her widowhood. Young Jane's attire is less trendy. Her cousins wear voluminous skirts that are enhanced with multiple layers of petticoats, accompanied with oversized sleeves. Jane's fashion is not emphasized since Mrs. Reed intentionally avoids providing her least favored niece with the most stylish garments.

6. Virginia Woolf skillfully incorporated her passion for fashion into her body of work, which encompassed novels, short stories, diary entries, and articles for *Vogue*. Fashion enables her to articulate two significant concepts: the female perspective and the progression of time. During the initial decades of the 20th century, fashion was predominantly perceived as a domain exclusively appealing to women, encompassing activities such as clothing selection, garment production, shopping, and engagement with fashion publications. The modernist authors frequently employed fashion's perpetual fluctuations as a compelling

metaphor for the passage of time. Woolf was fascinated by what she referred to as 'frock consciousness,' and the idea that clothing has the ability to influence our emotions.

Orlando is a British poet of noble lineage who lived from the 16th century until 1928, the same year in which Woolf released the book. Orlando's character naively time-travels in their sleep, waking up in a different century each time, and acquiring a new clothing that reflects the fashion of that specific day. Orlando consistently changes his attire, wearing extravagant clothing and fancy shoes to meet Elizabeth I, dressing in cloaks and robes as Charles I's ambassador to Turkey, adjusting the draperies of the skirts on a boat back to Georgian London, purchasing Victorian crinolines, and ultimately switching into whipcord breeches and a leather jacket.

Sasha is depicted as an exceedingly alluring character, with a gender that is quite ambiguous. Orlando characterizes the individual as 'the individual, regardless of their name or gender', attributing the biographer's uncertainty about their gender. The loose tunic trousers concealed the individual's gender, arousing a great deal of curiosity. Examining her attire to ascertain her gender underscores the notion that clothing serves as a representation of underlying aspects. Regardless of Sasha's androgynous appearance, Orlando is deeply infatuated with her, highlighting Woolf's assertion that an individual's worth should be evaluated based on their inherent qualities rather than the gender they choose to present themselves as.

Upon Orlando's return to England, he anticipates meeting the Archduchess Harriet. However, he is instead introduced to a towering person dressed in black, who goes by the name of Archduke Harry. Although both characters experience a transition in gender roles, they energetically and naturally engage in a ten-minute performance as both a man and a woman upon reuniting. This implies that the attire that modifies their gender does not determine their identity. When their garments are placed on the fender, individuals are permitted to express their authentic identities. Woolf asserts that clothing often serves as the sole indicator of gender, while the true essence of an individual's gender lies under the surface, contradicting the outward appearance. This highlights how clothing symbolizes the malleability of gender.

Findings

Just as a designer may engage our senses, a proficient writer can craft characters that strongly resonate with our cognitive faculties, compelling and fascinating us. They metamorphose into characters that we create, dress, and envision in our imaginations, or enduring personalities arise with vibrant excitement within our consciousness and imagination autonomously. These iconic characters have served as a source of inspiration for numerous imaginative individuals and have withstood the test of time to retain their status as true masterpieces. Hence, there exists a profound and intrinsic correlation between literature and fashion. The portrayal of attire in literature can reveal the prevailing styles and designs of the times. The degree of snugness or looseness in clothing silhouettes, the measurement of skirts, the inclusion of pleats, and the utilization of corsets all play a crucial role in comprehending the character under scrutiny. Authors often depict the hues and designs that were fashionable during a specific era. This can offer valuable understanding into the color schemes and design patterns that were considered fashionable throughout that period. Literature typically depicts classic accessories alongside clothing. These items may encompass jewelry, headwear, gloves, shoes, as well as parasols and fans. These accessories are essential for understanding the fashion of a certain era in its whole. Written works often portray not only clothing, but also haircuts and grooming routines. These literary works provide

documentation of changes in hairstyles, including the adoption of wigs and variations in hair length and style. Tracing the evolution of fashion can be accomplished by closely examining literature from different time periods.

Thus the attire of a character provides valuable insights into numerous facets of their existence. Readers can assume several aspects about a character based on their attire:

1. Clothing serves as a reflection of an individual's personality. Readers can understand a character's style and personality based on their choice of attire.

2. Clothing is indicative of a character's affluence. If the protagonist of a novel hails from a lower socioeconomic class, it is highly probable that they will opt for a casual attire such as a t-shirt and jeans, rather than donning extravagant and costly garments. Similar to real life, clothing serves as a visible representation of one's social standing and financial prosperity.

3. Clothing reflects a character's perspective on the world. Apparel can serve as a manifestation of a character's perspectives on the world. Wearing a sleeveless graphic t-shirt suggests a complete disregard for the potential offense it may cause to others. Meanwhile, a character donning a formal button-down shirt paired with a single-breasted plaid blazer appears to have a traditional and classic style.

4. Clothing serves as an indicator of the specific time and location in which a character is situated. During the world building phase, it is crucial to ensure utmost precision on the place and time period of your book. This principle is not limited to historical fiction, but rather it is applicable to all genres of writing. When creating a fight scenario that takes place during the Revolutionary War, it may be necessary to research the specific characteristics and details of britches and pantaloons. Merely by altering the outfit depiction, the author can establish a significant contrast between these two accounts of conflict.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is significant that dress and fashion serves as a potent instrument in the art of narrative. It has the ability to communicate a character's personality, social standing, convictions, or even their progression over the narrative. The selection of attire, including its fashion, hues, size, and accompanying embellishments, might convey significant information about a persona without necessitating explicit explanations. The presence of a character dressed in a well-fitted suit may indicate professionalism and authority, whilst an individual wearing informal, bohemian clothing could reflect a relaxed and artistic disposition. It is the favored method of conveying the personality traits of characters through their attire.

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