

MAYA CANTU

Mint Theater Company

‘Clothes make an awful difference in a girl’: *Mlle. Modiste*, *Irene* and *Funny Face* as Cinderella fashion musicals

ABSTRACT

The world of fashion has been a frequent setting for the many Broadway musicals inspired by Charles Perrault’s Cinderella (1697). Using two Broadway musicals and one Hollywood musical as cross-historical case studies, this article examines how the American musical has variously adapted and interpreted themes of ‘clothes make the woman’ by posing Cinderella as a shop girl or model in fields of consumer fashion. The 1905 Victor Herbert/Henry Blossom operetta Mlle. Modiste, and the 1919 Cinderella musical Irene (by James Montgomery, Harry Tierney and Joseph McCarthy) both assert the democratizing power of fashion. In Mlle. Modiste, the resourceful title character uses both her singing talent and her access to stylish clothing to rise in the world as an opera diva, as well as a viscount’s wife. Irene emphasizes themes of masquerade and meritocracy, as the eponymous Irish American shop girl models dresses for couturier ‘Madame Lucy’, fools high society as a pedigreed lady and marries her Prince Charming. By contrast, the 1957 Paramount movie musical Funny Face problematizes its heroine’s fashion-world makeover. While Funny Face’s narrative depicts the transformation of Jo Stockton

KEYWORDS

Cinderella
fashion
femininity
self-invention
American dream
Mlle. Modiste
Irene
Funny Face

(Audrey Hepburn), a bookish 'Greenwich Village Cinderella', into a glamorous Paris mannequin, *Funny Face's* musical numbers, use strategies of camp and parody to undercut the concept of 'The Quality Woman'.

From the nineteenth century through the present day, Charles Perrault's *Cinderella*, or *The Little Glass Slipper* (1697) has inspired dozens of Broadway musical adaptations as the definitive female rags-to-riches tale. Using strategies of adaptation that predominantly treat Cinderella as a model translatable to American settings and contexts, rather than literal adaptations of the fairy tale, this 'Cinderella paradigm' (Hecht 2011: 104) has appeared in such classic musical adaptations as *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), *My Fair Lady* (1956) and *Hairspray* (2002), as well as more traditional examples, such as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella* (1957) and Sondheim's *Into the Woods* (1986) (which drew from the darker 'Aschenputtel' of the Brothers Grimm). The Cinderella narrative, with its intersecting focus on class, social mobility and gender, has been particularly suited to the Broadway musical – at once, a populist genre and a feminine form centralizing 'visually and aurally dominant' (Wolf 2002: 22) female characters and performers.

While the Broadway musical has adapted seemingly endless variations of the Cinderella story, the world of fashion can be counted among its most frequent adaptive settings, changing the fairy tale heroine into a shop girl or model, for whom clothing – mirroring the magical bejewelled silver and gold gown (Perrault [1697] 1988: 18) of the original fairy tale – functions as a means of her transformation and ascent. Fashion has traditionally conjured elite connotations, as the haute couture province of the aristocracy. In contrast, the American musical – as a genre of democratic myth-making – has portrayed consumer fashion as a modern urban vehicle of self-expression. These musicals evoke the themes of self-invention in Horatio Alger's novels: transposing ideas of 'clothes make the man' onto predominantly female protagonists. Influenced by the earlier British Gaiety musicals, Broadway's Cinderella fashion musicals proliferated in the first six decades of the twentieth century, in dialogue with the assimilation of first- and second-generation Jewish Americans (among other immigrant groups). For these immigrant Jews – many of whom worked in the famous Garment District of New York's Lower East Side – fashion served as the means of 'playing the part right' (Hecht 2011: 58). At the same time, these musicals evoked the professional and romantic conflicts of women in the work force, of whom the shop girls of the Cinderella musical served as models and reflections.

Mlle. Modiste (1905), *Irene* (1919) and the Paramount movie musical *Funny Face* (1957) can be considered exemplary among fashion-themed Cinderella musicals. While all three echo the observation of *Irene's* title character, 'Clothes make an awful difference in a girl' (McCarthy et al. 1919: 1: 23), the three musicals vary in their adaptive strategies, contexts and interpretations. Blending Perrault's tale with the Horatio Alger narrative, the operetta *Mlle. Modiste* depicts the Americanization of its French shop girl heroine through a self-made fairy godfather. In contrast, *Irene*, a modern fable of American meritocracy, reimagines Cinderella as a shop girl turned fashion mannequin, while modelling its own sartorial fairy godmother, Madame Lucy, after the real-life couturier Lucile, Lady Duff-Gordon. Finally, *Funny Face* recounts the transformation of 'Greenwich Village Cinderella' Jo Stockton (Audrey Hepburn) into a

top Paris model. At the same time, the musical uses self-reflexive camp tactics and alienation effects to undercut Jo's makeover as 'The Quality Woman', as well as its underlying basis in the feminine mystique.

Mlle. Modiste: THE 'ALGERIZATION' OF THE CINDERELLA STORY

With music by Victor Herbert, and book and lyrics by Henry Blossom, the operetta *Mlle. Modiste* can be considered among the earliest of the Cinderella fashion musicals, as set in a 1905 Parisian millinery and starring the fashionable Austrian-born opera diva Fritz Scheff as ambitious shop girl Fifi. Opening on 25 December 1905 at the Knickerbocker Theatre, where it ran for 202 performances, *Mlle. Modiste* produced hit songs such as 'Kiss Me Again'. *Town and Country* praised a book that 'treated the whole story comprehensively' (Anon. 1906: 21), while *The Chicago Daily Tribune* compared Charles Dillingham's lavish production of the musical to artfully assembled millinery, 'trimmed with rare taste and skill' (Hubbard 1905: 8).

Mlle. Modiste also followed in the British tradition of George Edwardes' musical comedies, which transposed Cinderella stories onto modern middle-class settings of leisure and commerce (particularly drawing upon the burgeoning industry of the department store, which provided the settings for both 1894's *The Shop Girl* and 1906's *The Girl Behind the Counter*; Kaplan and Stowell 1994: 103). Yet whereas the plots of the Edwardes shows usually culminated with the heroine's engagement to a young aristocrat, *Mlle. Modiste* portrayed its title shop girl both marrying a young French nobleman and successfully pursuing an operatic career, after the serendipitous intervention of American millionaire Hiram Bent. *Town and Country* noted the musical's mixture of an Old World operetta milieu and New World sensibility: '(*Mlle. Modiste's*) humor is thoroughly American, but somehow suits well the Parisian setting' (Anon. 1906: 21).

Mlle. Modiste unfolds in the fashion district of the Rue de la Paix: a luxurious shopping destination known for its jewellery stores and fashion salons (including the original 1858 couture house of Charles Frederick Worth). The modern fairy tale follows Fifi, the most efficient hat-seller at Madame Cecile's millinery shop. As counterpart to Cinderella's wicked stepmother, Madame Cecile hopes to marry Fifi off to her wastrel son Gaston, in order to keep Fifi working in the store (Cecile's daughters, Nanette and Fanchette, in contrast, are portrayed as vain but not spiteful toward Fifi).

Reflecting Progressive-era themes,¹ *Mlle. Modiste* parallels the drudgery of Perrault's Cinderella with the labour of female shop assistants in Madame Cecile's hat shop. The musical draws upon the popular early twentieth-century icon of the shop girl: women working long hours and 'providing a cheap source of labour', while straining to present the appearance of 'middle-class respectability' (Kaplan and Stowell 1994: 102). Prior to Fifi's entrance, a chorus of female shop assistants – shown assembling hats – contrasts the luxury of the shop with the oppressive toil that supports it:

Furs and feathers, buckles, bows! ...
.... Hard work! Very little pay!
Ten hours every single day!

(Blossom and Herbert 1905: 1–1)

Unfulfilled with her work at Madame Cecile's, Fifi dreams both of becoming a famous opera singer and of marrying the show's Prince Charming, Captain

1. The American Progressive era, which spanned from the 1890s through to the end of World War I, encompassed large-scale reforms in labour and workers' rights, government, finance, education and public health, as well as the increasing acceptance of women's suffrage (culminating in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1919).

Etienne de Bouvray. Though enamoured with Fifi, Etienne is forbidden by his father, Henri de Bouvray, the Comte de St. Mar, to marry beneath his station. Over the course of the operetta, the proud and strong-willed Fifi progresses from selling hats to accepting the proffered hat of the Count himself: 'Don't you worry! If ever I marry your nephew, it will be when you come to me with your hat in hand and beg me to do so' (Blossom and Herbert 1905: 2-1-13)! While Fifi sings that 'Hats Make the Woman' (Blossom and Herbert 1905: 1-41), Scheff's shop girl moves through a series of increasingly elaborate gowns in the original production, from modest modiste uniform, to glittering masquerade regalia at the second act's Charity Bazaar, where she performs under her stage name: Madame Bellini (Figure 1).

The Irish-born Herbert and the American-born Blossom reimaged Cinderella's fairy godmother as Yankee promoter Hiram Bent, who has tagged along with his spendthrift wife to Madame Cecile's. In lieu of the magical pumpkin-patch transformation of Perrault, Hiram passes on to the French shop girl his American credo of pluck and luck. Impressed by Fifi's determination (as well as her vocal talent, which she demonstrates to him in the musical sequence 'If I Were on the Stage'), Hiram emboldens Fifi to leave the shop and pursue her operatic dreams, though she is reluctant to accept



Figure 1: Charity Bazaar scene from *Mlle. Modiste*, with Fritzi Scheff (centre) as Fifi; photo by Joseph E. Hall (David S. Shields Collection).

Hiram's help (of a few thousand francs and two hats of her choice): 'See here! I want your advice! The little girl who's going to get these hats is in a position much like yours. She's pretty and she's talented, but she's as proud as she is poor' (Blossom and Herbert 1905: 1–27). Fifi soon relents, when Hiram offers a loan: 'She could pay it back if she likes – when she becomes successful' (Blossom and Herbert 1905: 1–28).

While adapted from Cinderella, *Mlle. Modiste's* rags-to-riches themes demonstrate strong similarities to the paradigmatic 1869 Horatio Alger novel, *Ragged Dick, or Street Life in New York with Boot-Blacks*. The work emphasized the relationship of self-presentation and social mobility, as Mr Whitney's gift of a new suit to the street urchin Dick enables the latter's eventual transformation into Richard Hunter, Esquire. In the following exchange in *Ragged Dick*, Mr Whitney establishes himself as a self-made man in whose shoes Dick might follow:

I hope, my lad, you will prosper and rise in the world ... there was a time when I was as poor as you Yes, my boy, I have known the time I would have obliged to go without my dinner because I didn't have enough money to pay for it.

(Alger [1869] 2012: 58)

In an earlier part of the novel, Alger established Dick's rags-to-riches tale as a masculine adaptation of Perrault's story, as the boot-black stares in awe at his reflection: 'It reminds me of Cinderella', said Dick, 'when she was changed into a fairy princess. I see it [*sic*] one night at Barnum's' (Alger [1869] 2012: 19).

By contrast, *Mlle. Modiste* reverses the adaptive process back to a female Cinderella, while incorporating themes from *Ragged Dick*. *Mlle. Modiste* refers directly to scenes in the novel, as Hiram Bent becomes an updated Mr Whitney to Fifi's shop girl Cinderella:

Hiram: ... I've seen the time when I'd o'fought a dog in the street for his bone – and I couldn't find the dog But I kept my nerve 'till I got a start, and I won. My motto is 'Never give up'.

Fifi: That's the motto of lots of rich men.

Hiram: Yes, that's a joke, but it's true nevertheless – and that's the way to get rich.

Fifi: Ah, but you are a man, Monsieur. You can go out into the world, but a woman – what can she do? Do you think I have not one ambition; do you think that I'm content to sell these things and wait on a lot of people that I despise? What chance have I for a future here? What chance to marry a man whom I could love and respect?

Hiram: Then what would you do?

Fifi: I've a voice, monsieur, and I know I can act, but without either money or influence – I am helpless.

(Blossom and Herbert 1905: 1-24–1-25)

Mlle. Modiste adapted the Cinderella story to the context of the Progressive era during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. During this time, Alger's novels were at the height of their popularity, as both symbols of rags-to-riches mobility and antitrust reform (laws prohibiting corporate monopolies). Roosevelt echoed Alger in 'advocating "clean living and decent politics"', and

2. Roosevelt attended a Washington, DC performance of *Mlle. Modiste* during its out-of-town tryout. According to *The New York Times*, the president, who was 'in a jovial humor' 'laughed heartily, led the applause (and) started all the encores' (Anon. 1905: 5).
3. A nostalgic Broadway revival of *Irene*, starring Debbie Reynolds as Irene and George S. Irving, was also a hit at the Minskoff Theatre in 1973. The production included interpolations by Charles Gaynor and Otis Clemens, as well as a revised book by Hugh Wheeler and Joseph Stein, who changed Irene's profession from shop girl to piano tuner.
4. As produced by George M. Cohan and Sam Harris, Montgomery's *Irene O'Dare* (1916) closed out of town, only for the author to rework it three years later as *Irene*.

the use of material wealth for ideal ends' (Nackenoff 1994: 130).² Through its eponymous heroine – a shop girl who readily absorbs Hiram's lessons of pluck, luck and hard work – *Mlle. Modiste* validates the Protestant work ethic that also underpinned Alger's nineteenth-century works, in which 'energy and industry are rewarded, and indolence suffers' ([1869] 2012: 6). As Hiram tells the Count, 'Well, you know what the poet Tennyson said – "Tis only noble to be good!" I say the girl who earns her living is good enough to be noble! Calling her "Countess" wouldn't help a bit' (Blossom and Herbert 1905: 2-1-8).

At the same time, *Mlle. Modiste* places its Algeresque values not in the story of a young man, but of a fashionable working girl with a strong voice. As a Parisian Cinderella who epitomizes values coded as 'American' (when asked if Fifi is American, Hiram replies, 'No, she ought to be. I found her in a shop' [Blossom and Herbert 1905: 2-1-6]), Fifi is presented as a 'clever saleswoman' (ibid: 1-11), with a 'self-possessed and impudent' spirit (ibid: 1-48), as she outwits the Count to win Etienne. In this sense, *Mlle. Modiste* can also be interpreted not only as a feminization of the Alger myth, but as an early feminist musical that celebrates women's contributions to the labour force (though within the complementary traditional context of marriage). In its resourceful shop girl heroine, and fashionable setting, *Mlle. Modiste* anticipated the Cinderella musical *Irene*.

IRENE: THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF FASHION, LADY DUFF-GORDON, AND THE MASQUERADES OF MADAME LUCY

From *Mlle. Modiste*'s Rue de la Paix millinery, *Irene* resets the Cinderella story in modern New York. Among the most commercially successful musicals of its era, *Irene* – with a libretto by James Montgomery, music by Harry Tierney and lyrics by Joseph McCarthy – opened on 18 November 1919, eventually becoming the longest-running show up until that time, at 675 performances.³ The musical juxtaposes WASP Fifth Avenue and immigrant Ninth Avenue, while portraying fashion as the bridge between the two worlds. Like *Mlle. Modiste*, *Irene* asserts myths of American democracy, but further accentuates the value of clothing as a means to its realization.

Irene launched an early 1920s subgenre of musical comedies, such as *Sally and Mary* (1920), that Gerald Bordman (1982: 106) terms the 'Cinderella musical' (as distinct from the many shows throughout musical theatre history that utilize Cinderella narratives). At the same time, *Irene* both drew upon the example of earlier shows like the Gaiety musicals and *Mlle. Modiste*, while anticipating the 1956 Lerner and Loewe classic *My Fair Lady*. In fact, *Irene* may also have drawn inspiration from *Pygmalion*, which had played on Broadway in 1914, shortly before its legendary West End debut. As *Variety* observed of *Irene*, 'The basic idea of the story is [...] the same as Shaw's *Pygmalion*, except in this case [...] featuring] the efforts of a designer instead of a professor of English' (Meakin 1919: 18).

As with *Mlle. Modiste*, critics regarded *Irene* as an unusually integrated show. Montgomery too described his intentions with *Irene*: 'Being more of a "play" than most musical comedies', the director should focus upon 'the development of the characters' (Montgomery 1919: 1). Originating as a play called *Irene O'Dare* (1916),⁴ *Irene* reveals the influence of P. G. Wodehouse, Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern's intimate Princess Theatre musicals. At the same time, the musical, as staged by Edward Royce, won acclaim for its sartorial

glamour: 'The chorus was a wonder and the gowns worn were exquisite', noted *Variety* (Meakin 1919: 18).

Once again, Cinderella is recast as a shop girl longing for an expanded range of opportunities. Irene O'Dare (originally played by Edith Day) lives in a tenement in Manhattan's Ninth Avenue, while working in the furnishings section of a department store (and serving as the breadwinner for her widowed Irish mother and younger brother). As with *Mlle. Modiste*, *Irene* features a fairy godfather figure: Madame Lucy, the trade name of a male British couturier, who transforms Irene as well as her Ninth Avenue friends Helen Cheston and Jane Gilmour into exquisitely gowned models who pass in high society as ladies (Figure 2).

To *Mlle. Modiste*'s nobly born Etienne de Bouvray, *Irene* featured as its Prince Charming counterpart, Donald Marshall, a young Fifth Avenue scion and steel magnate, who becomes intrigued by Irene when she visits the Marshall estate to fit chair cushions. At once Irene's love interest and an intermediary fairy godfather (along with his friend Bob Harrison, who has brought Madame Lucy to London, and to whom the latter is indebted), Donald



Figure 2: A New York Herald-Tribune photo, captioned 'Edith Day and the \$5000 ermine wrap she wears in that new and tuneful musical comedy, Irene, which seeks to prove that woman is made by her gowns'. Photo by James Abbe. Courtesy of the Historical Ziegfeld Group. <http://historicalzg.piwigo.com>.

5. Lucile was listed as the costume designer of *Irene*, along with another designer billed as 'Finchley'.

arranges for Irene to serve as a model for the couturier, who needs attractive young women to publicly advertise his designs. Under the impression that Madame Lucy is a woman, Donald assures Irene that she will dazzle society: 'Wait, in two days she will transform you, wait until you see what she will do for you. Frocks and gowns, hats and boots and slippers, she'll make you a little princess, a little Cinderella' (McCarthy et al. 1919: 1–31).

Whereas *Mlle. Modiste* mixed Perrault and Alger, *Irene* reframed Cinderella as an immigration narrative, resonating with Irish American mobility. As Joseph Curran notes, 'Most Irish Americans were now second or third generation [...]. By 1920, more and more Irish were moving up into middle-class jobs and middle-class neighborhoods' (Curran 1989: 30). *Irene* asserts Ellis Island as equal to Plymouth Rock (McCarthy et al. 1919: 1–3), as Irene, under Madame Lucy's metamorphosis, contradicts the statement that a 'lady must have style, breeding inborn' (McCarthy et al. 1919: 1/3–56) by impressing high society as 'the real thing' (McCarthy et al. 1919: 1/3–59). Donald's mother, who belongs to a scam Genealogical Society, is quickly taken in, exclaiming, 'Ask her to pardon the apparent presumption on my part, but the first time I saw her, I knew she was an aristocrat!' (McCarthy et al. 1919: 2-2-11).

Irene's themes reflect the democratization of fashion that swept American culture at the turn of the twentieth century. This era increased the accessibility of stylish ready-to-wear clothing, and its persuasiveness as a copy of the haute couture 'real thing'. As Marlis Schweitzer describes, these developments in consumer fashion interconnected department stores, theatres (where female spectators took notes on copying up-to-date gowns) and magazine culture. At the same time, they 'foregrounded the performativity and fluidity of class as a cultural construct' (Schweitzer 2009: 98) and allowed 'working-class women [to take] pleasure in disrupting social hierarchies through fashion' (Schweitzer 2009).

The British-born Lucile, Lady Duff-Gordon, loomed as a significant figure in the democratization of fashion. Both metatheatrically the source of Madame Lucy, and one of the costume designers of *Irene's* original production,⁵ Lucile was among the most famous fashion designers (and taste arbiters) in America. In 1919, Lucile presided over a syndicated column in Hearst's *The New York American*, showrooms in both London and New York, and a flourishing career in stage costume design.

Cinderella motifs heavily informed Lady Duff-Gordon's career in fashion. For her famous 'mannequin parades', Lucile recruited beautiful young women from the working class suburbs of London and transformed them into 'gorgeous, goddess-like girls' (Duff-Gordon 1932: 69) with mysterious personas and glamorous names like Hebe, Gamela and Dolores (the latter, born Kathleen Rose, became famous through her later 'glorification' in *The Ziegfeld Follies*, for which Lucile designed the costumes from 1915 to 1920). As Lucile recounted in her autobiography:

Is there a woman in the world who will not respond in her own personality to the influence of lovely clothes? I realized that here was a complete metamorphosis [...]. With amused eyes, I watched them develop a hundred little airs and graces, watched them copy the peeresses and famous actresses who came into my salons, until it became second nature to them to look and behave like women whose existence had been unknown to them a few short weeks before.

(Duff-Gordon 1932: 71)

Lucile's daringly sensual 'personality dresses' (with such names as 'A Frenzied Song of Amorous Things') were pricey luxuries consumed by the social elite and theatrical celebrities. Nevertheless, Lucile's coaching of her working-class mannequins – prototypes of the Ziegfeld showgirl, whom she drilled intricately in posture, movement and carriage (Schweitzer 2009: 199) – resonates with the democratization of fashion informing the plot and themes of *Irene*. Indeed, the female Pygmalion Lucile viewed herself in the role of a 'fairy godmother' (Duff-Gordon 1932: 77) to her mannequins, as her protégées (such as Dolores) went on to marry 'the fairy prince, or rather an American millionaire' (Duff-Gordon 1932: 245).

Irene demonstrated numerous similarities between the 'dapper, effeminate' (McCarthy et al. 1919: 1-3-47) Madame Lucy and the character's satiric source in Lady Duff-Gordon, despite the twist of a female trade name for a male designer.⁶ Like Lucile, Madame Lucy comes to New York from London, while Montgomery's descriptions of Madame Lucy's designs ("bizarre" if it were done by any other than a master of dressmaking' (McCarthy et al. 1919: 1/3-57)) resemble the signature style of Lucile with her light fabrics and bold hues (Kaplan and Stowell 1994: 39). Like Lucile with her mannequins, Madame Lucy meticulously drills Irene, Helen and Jane:

Head proud and high, haughty sigh, twinkling eye,
One must learn – how to turn,
Lending charm to your gown.
If in society, high society, one would seek improvement,
Use propriety, great propriety, in each little movement.

(McCarthy et al. 1919: 1/3–54)

Another number in *Irene*, 'We're Getting Away With It' – sung as a sextet by Madame Lucy, Donald, Bob and the three women – celebrates fashion as meritocratic masquerade and disruptor of social hierarchy, as Irene and her newly glamorous Ninth Avenue friends fool the Fifth Avenue elite:

The Regibilts and the Dintymoorees
Have made us several overtures
But we're getting away with it,
Whoops! They'll never know.

(McCarthy et al. 1919: 2/2–23)

Prior to her metamorphosis, Irene discusses her awareness of fashion as social perception. When Donald apologetically asks Irene to stay for dinner with him at the Marshall mansion (after Irene has been harassed by a visiting male business associate of the former), Irene loquaciously unfolds her story to Donald. She recounts years of harsh poverty and low wages – 'Oh, it was terrible, I was hungry all the time' (McCarthy et al. 1919: 1–21) – while working at a Philadelphia department store. Irene charms Donald with her candour and drive, while asserting her philosophies: that only her appearance and not her speech (in contrast to Eliza Doolittle) prevents her from obtaining better opportunities, including the chance to marry out of her poverty:

Irene: Well, you're interesting too, even if you don't talk as much as I do. We girls don't meet many men like you, we don't get the chance. I know girls who are lots of fun, pretty, beautiful

6. Montgomery's contradictory depiction of Madame Lucy's 'effeminacy' is notable. Described as 'not a Nance', and 'manly under his femininity' (1919: 1-3-47), Madame Lucy nevertheless elicits homophobic reactions from *Irene*'s male characters: when Madame Lucy tries to embrace Donald in gratitude, the latter asks him, 'Why don't you thank Bob?' (Montgomery 1919: 2/2–21).

7. 'Alice Blue Gown' referred to the shade of pale azure preferred by, and named after, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the daughter of the former president.

I bet you there are a lot of men who would like to meet them, but even then we couldn't go out with them because we ain't got any decent clothes to wear. Clothes make an awful difference in a girl, and just because we ain't got them, don't think we don't know about them. We can't help seeing what other girls have, and in the shop windows and evening papers. Gee, I talk careless, we all talk that way – but you wouldn't know us when we put on airs, honest we can talk and act like real ladies.

Donald: You can?

Irene: Honest, it's not as difficult as it sounds. We take off [on] the swell customers who come to the store and you can't tell the difference ...

(McCarthy et al. 1919: 1–23)

Elaborating upon her ideas, Irene recounts the story of her 'Alice Blue Gown':⁷ the \$85 frock given to her by a newly affluent female friend:

In my sweet little Alice Blue Gown,
When I first wandered down into town,
I was both proud and shy,
As I felt every eye,
But in every shop window I'd primp, passing by.
Then in manner of fashion, I'd frown,
And the world seemed to smile all around.
Till it wilted I wore it,
I'll always adore it,
My sweet little Alice Blue Gown.

(McCarthy et al. 1919: 1–24)

On one level, *Irene* enacts what Joseph Roach has described as 'Cinderella's elevation from utensil to ornament' (Roach 2007: 182) as Irene moves from a self-sufficient shop girl to fashion mannequin to the eventual bride of Donald Marshall. Yet the 1919 musical also focused upon a strong-willed heroine who simultaneously transforms and democratizes her prince. As Stuart Hecht notes, 'By accepting Irene and acknowledging her as Irish, Donald Marshall and his ilk transform both the makeup and definition of their own beliefs. This in turn similarly redefines the constitution of their social class and, in a sense, of exactly what is "American"' (Hecht 2011: 116). Like Fifi in *Mlle. Modiste*, the title character of *Irene* is not presented as a passive Cinderella, but a young woman who shrewdly intuits identity as a fluid social construct, and uses her ability to manipulate the codes of fashion to achieve her ambitions. In contrast, fashion's relationship with beauty rather than with class, immigration and assimilation informs the themes of *Funny Face*.

FASHION, SATIRE AND THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE IN *FUNNY FACE*

Starring Audrey Hepburn as book clerk Jo Stockton and Fred Astaire as fashion photographer Dick Avery, *Funny Face* also transposed Perrault's fable to a fashion world milieu. Bosley Crowther observed of the film:

This is major magnificence – appropriate decor and visual style that lend to the Cinderella story a modern-Cinderella atmosphere. The gentlemen

have figured, probably rightly, that there is nothing more illusory in our times than the costly adornment of females. And from that they have taken their cue.

(1957: 16)

Though produced at Paramount (due to Hepburn's contract with the studio), the film drew much of its creative team from MGM, including director Stanley Donen, co-star and vocal arranger Kay Thompson, and producer Roger Edens, who also wrote new songs to accompany existing standards by George and Ira Gershwin.

Based on the unproduced play *Wedding Day* by Leonard Gershe, who also wrote the film's screenplay, *Funny Face* drew inspiration from the real-life relationship of fashion photographer Richard Avedon (who also served as creative consultant on the film) and his wife Doe Avedon. Avedon had transformed the latter, a bookish and beautiful young woman, into an unlikely fashion model in the pages of *Harper's Bazaar*. At the same time, *Funny Face* satirizes the two primary cultural exports of 1950s Paris: hyper-feminine 'New Look' couture, exemplified by such designers as Christian Dior and Hubert de Givenchy, as well as Existentialist philosophy (spoofed as 'Empathicalism').

Reflecting the prosperous consumerism of 1950s America, *Funny Face* drew upon the conventions of earlier Cinderella fashion musicals.⁸ Like *Mlle. Modiste*, the film takes place within a Paris fashion setting, and like *Irene* it recounts the transformation of a shop assistant into a mannequin. In its preoccupation with gender myths, however, *Funny Face* occupied a different context from the earlier musicals. Anticipating Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), the film draws upon the world of 1950s women's magazines and their imperatives of feminine loveliness. In fact, *Funny Face* premiered the same year that Friedan – a veteran of magazines such as *McCall's* – started researching her landmark study by conducting a survey with alumnae at Smith College, eventually defining the plight of the white, middle-class housewife as 'the problem that has no name' (Friedan [1963] 2001: 13) with the 1963 publication of *The Feminine Mystique* (Coontz 2011: 146).

Funny Face was by no means produced or received as a feminist manifesto. As with *Mlle. Modiste* and *Irene*, audiences consumed *Funny Face* as an 'extraordinarily stylish' (Crowther 1957: 16) spectacle full of glamorous fashion parades, with costumes by Edith Head and Givenchy. Yet while *Funny Face*'s narrative recounts a modern Cinderella story of an unconventional beauty who marries an older Prince Charming, the film works on multiple and complex levels, using camp strategies (as well as two of Roger Edens' songs – 'Think Pink' and 'On How to Be Lovely') – to undercut the essentialism of the feminine mystique, as well as the traditional ornamental progression of the Cinderella narrative.

As a Cinderella story, *Funny Face* also drew upon the gamine persona of Audrey Hepburn, who frequently embodied variations of Perrault's heroine. Having also appeared as the title character of *Sabrina* (1954), the Belgian-born movie star would later play Eliza Doolittle in the 1964 film adaptation of *My Fair Lady*, the stage version of which opened a year before the production of *Funny Face*. Both the period-set *My Fair Lady* and the modern *Funny Face* blend a Cinderella makeover narrative with a Pygmalion/Galatea relationship,

8. A Hollywood tradition of fashion-themed Cinderella musicals also spanned the 1930s–1950s, including *Cover Girl* (Columbia, 1944) and *Lovely to Look At* (MGM, 1952), based on the 1933 Jerome Kern-Otto Harbach musical *Roberta*.

with Dick Avery corresponding to a sartorial Henry Higgins. As Hecht notes of the Pygmalion motif:

... unlike in the case with Prince Charming, the woman's outward appearance is itself a direct creation of the man and hence oddly narcissistic. It is really all about him, not her, and functions to fill his needs, though she herself may benefit from it.

(Hecht 2011: 118)

Along these lines, *Funny Face* transforms Cinderella/Galatea into Jo Stockton, a brainy young woman who works at the Embryo Concepts bookshop. Through the course of *Funny Face*, Dick Avery engineers Jo's metamorphosis from a 'Greenwich Village ugly duckling' (Scheuer 1957: F2) to a swanlike fashion mannequin who represents the 'Quality Woman' in the eponymous magazine. While Dick serves as Jo's Pygmalion-like Prince Charming, *Funny Face* features a *Quality* trio of fairy godmother figures: not only Dick, but fashion editor Maggie Prescott (a brassy satire of *Harper's Bazaar's* Diana Vreeland), and couturier Paul Duval, who introduces a ravishingly gowned Jo to Parisian fashionistas: 'My friends, you saw enter here a waif, a gamine, a lowly caterpillar. We open the cocoon, but it is not a butterfly that emerges ... it is a bird of paradise' (Donen et al. 1957).

As played by Kay Thompson, Maggie Prescott represents a complex female Fairy Godmother. *Funny Face* portrays Maggie as a dynamic trend-setter and brilliant businesswoman spreading 'pizzazz' through the pages of *Quality Magazine*. In fact, *Funny Face* allies the anti-intellectual Maggie and the bookish Jo as unusually accomplished women who defy 1950s gender myths. Maggie profits immensely from exploiting a feminine mystique she clearly does not subscribe to herself. Charging through the hyper-stylized, visually flamboyant landscape of 'Think Pink', with its succession of magenta-clad models captured in Avedon's freeze frames, Maggie proclaims the colour the new fashion gospel, with her satiric musical ad slogan: 'Think pink when you shop for summer clothes/Think pink, think pink if you want that *quelque chose*'. Maggie appears at the end of the number wearing a severe grey-green dress suit: 'Me [wear pink?]. I wouldn't be caught dead' (Donen et al. 1957).

Even as the number indulges in over-the-top glamour, 'Think Pink' satirizes the conformist consumerism of the fashion magazine industry. The number implicitly criticizes what Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique*, would later call 'the sexual sell': the advertising industry's manipulation of women's identity and self-esteem into consumption, particularly the purchasing of beauty and fashion products. Friedan indicted advertisers for 'persuading housewives to stay at home, mesmerized in front of a television set, their nonsexual human needs unnamed, unsatisfied, drained by the sexual sell into the buying of things' ([1963] 2001: 326).

With 'Think Pink', *Funny Face* depicts Maggie Prescott – and *Quality Magazine* – as a persuasive agent of the sexual hard-sell, as she sings, 'Now I wouldn't presume to tell a woman/what a woman ought to think/But tell her if she's gotta think, think pink' (Donen et al. 1957). In the elaborate fantasy sequence at the middle of the number (choreographed by Bobby Connelly), director Donen not only shows beautiful women modelling gowns, furs and jewellery, but extends their consumerism into recreational and household commodities: pink beach balls, toothpaste and shampoo, satirically demonstrated by Avedon's models. As Friedan noted in *The Feminine Mystique*, the

sexual sell targeted women, and *Funny Face*'s co-creators Edens and Gershe ironically illustrate both the power and the danger of this technique, as Hepburn's Jo, throughout *Funny Face*'s narrative, increasingly buys into it, shedding her bookworm identity, and finally becoming fully commodified – as both fashion model and bride – by the film's end.

Similarly, another number in *Funny Face* – Jo and Maggie's duet 'On How to Be Lovely' – draws upon camp satire to send up and destabilize the feminine myths enshrined in the movie's narrative. The number occurs roughly two-thirds of the way through *Funny Face*, after Hepburn's Jo has reluctantly agreed to become the 'Quality Woman'. At this point, Jo has accompanied Maggie and Dick Avery to Paris, where she is interested less in modelling the special collection designed for her by Duval than the chance to meet the 'Empathicalist' philosopher Emile Flostre. Jo has also begun to fall in love with the middle-aged Dick. After a long day of modelling, Jo and Dick conclude the shoot at a small pastoral chapel, where Jo is to pose as a bride on her wedding day. Surrounded by foliage, and flocks of doves and swans around a glistening pond, Jo and Dick affirm their love through singing and dancing to the Gershwins' 'He Loves and She Loves', creating a heightened mood of fairy tale romance (Figure 3).

'On How to Be Lovely' occurs after this scene, as Maggie prepares Jo to meet the press. The placement of the song after 'He Loves and She Loves' is strategically significant, through the film's use of song placement and dissolve editing (Figures 3–5). The idyllic romanticism of the country chapel dissolves, with almost Brechtian irony, into a stage set constructed for Jo's press debut: a painted backdrop, with a fake gazebo, fountain and autumnal trees, as well as a ladder and stagehands. Here, the film-makers pull the curtains apart – both literally and figuratively – to reveal the feminine perfection conveyed by



Figures 3–5: Pulling the curtains apart: *Funny Face* dissolves from 'S'Wonderful' to 'On How to Be Lovely'.

Jo/Audrey Hepburn in 'He Loves and She Loves' as an illusion – a mirage that Jo and Maggie continue to lay bare in the song 'On How to Be Lovely'. The number anticipates Friedan's description of the July 1960 issue of *McCall's*:

The image of women that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home.

(Friedan [1963] 2001: 83)

'On How to Be Lovely' wittily critiques these tropes of frivolous contentment. The performance of the song, diegetically on a stage, frames the women's femininity as a deceptive construction. In the dialogue introduction to the number, Maggie, instructing Jo on how to handle the paparazzi, tells her 'Just be charming and answer all of their questions' (Donen et al. 1957). Converting small, fringed table settings into kerchiefs and aprons, Thompson and Hepburn, both 'ladies' wearing blouses and slacks, proceed to satirize the icon that Friedan called the 'happy housewife heroine' ([1963] 2001: 79). As Jo and Maggie sing of 'the life delirious, nothing's serious', they muse:

I give you a guarantee,
You don't need dough,
You don't need a college degree.
Make sorrow incidental,
Let joy be monumental,
And you'll be lovely as can be.

(Donen et al. 1957)

Jo's lack of conformity to her Quality Woman persona is further accented by a scene that follows the number. As Maggie prepares to introduce Jo to the press, Jo and Dick argue behind the curtain about Jo's flirtation with Professor Flostre. The two get into a hushed but heated argument, as the camera cuts back and forth across the curtain, and to a well-heeled audience of fashionistas. Finally, Jo shouts to Dick, 'leave me alone', and knocks down a fake tree. A chain of disasters ensues, as the backdrop and the *Quality Magazine* sign both fall down, and the fountain topples and splashes everywhere, drenching Jo in her white ball gown. At that moment, as Maggie gushes about Jo's 'grace, charm, and ineffable poise' (Donen et al. 1957), the curtain opens, and the fountain drenches Maggie and the stunned audience, mordantly exposing the deceptions of 'On How to Be Lovely' along with the *Quality* set.

As 'On How To Be Lovely' demonstrates, neither Jo nor Maggie represents conventional 1950s femininity, though *Funny Face's* Hollywood ending enforces it upon Jo, after Hepburn's character embraces new roles as a star fashion model, Dick Avery's muse and, ultimately, his wife. The ending of *Funny Face* has troubled feminist critics: the film concludes back at the country chapel, with Jo having run from a triumphant runway debut, once again dressed in bridal fashion. Here, Dick and Jo reunite, romantically duet on 'S'Wonderful', and imply their incipient marriage, as well as Jo's renunciation of her earlier, intellectual identity.

Yet viewers can discern an alternative interpretation to *Funny Face's* final scene, through considering it in context with the rest of the film, and through its element of visual irony. The bucolic scene of the country chapel refers back not only to where Jo and Dick first danced to 'He Loves and She Loves', but

to the artificial stage set destroyed by Jo after 'On How To Be Lovely'. The final shot, of an embracing Dick and Jo, with the latter dressed in her bridal gown, shows the two floating on a piece of driftwood, towards the vision of a distant gazebo that looks quite similar to that in the *Quality Magazine* stage set. Here, the film-makers slyly seem to suggest that, just as Jo's 'Quality Woman' femininity has been meticulously constructed by the fashion industry, so has the Hollywood romantic ending been constructed by the Dream Factory: a *trompe l'oeil* romantic illusion that has no more basis in reality than the elaborate fantasies in the pages of *Quality Magazine*.

The camp aesthetic and its strategies of 'achieving ironic distance from the normative' (Cohan 2005: 1) play a key role in *Funny Face*. As Steven Cohan notes, MGM – throughout the 1940s and 1950s – consistently produced movie musicals that, with stars like Judy Garland and Gene Kelly, placed androgynous women and men at the centre of the frame, in elaborate production numbers steeped in subversive gender artifice. Despite its production by Paramount Studios, *Funny Face* is essentially an MGM musical in form and spirit, and the key members of its creative team – Donen, Edens and Thompson – were part of the fabled MGM 'Freed Unit', with its unabashedly queer population of 'Freed's fairies' (Cohan 2005: 1). Edens, a central creative force in the Freed Unit, was openly gay, and Thompson, while heterosexual, was a fashion innovator famous for her 'masculine' style, marketing her own 1950s fashion line of Kay Thompson's 'Fancy Pants' at Saks Fifth Avenue (Irvin 2010: 239).

Funny Face draws attention to its own ambivalence about the construction of femininity through the artifice of fashion. After Dick shoots Jo posing as a series of feminine archetypes – Anna Karenina at the train station, Isolde at the Paris Opera – he shoots her posing in front of a fountain, dressed like a regal ballerina, holding a dove. Previously, Dick had given Jo narrative set-ups for her modelling poses, but this time she supplies the story: 'I know I'm the princess at the ball, and the bird is really Prince Charming, turned into a bird by a wicked sorcerer, but we've decided not to let it spoil the ball, and to go right on dancing, as if nothing has happened'. Dick is surprised that Jo sees through the narrative: 'You've outgrown me. Alright, now give him a kiss, he's your Prince Charming, isn't he? Well, get happy!' (Donen et al. 1957). *Funny Face* displays the same ironic double vision towards Cinderella's feminine beauty and marriage to Prince Charming, even as the movie musical goes right on dancing.

CONCLUSION: CINDERELLA STORIES, BROADWAY MUSICALS AND 'MANNERS OF FASHION'

While adapting and interpreting the Cinderella myth to distinct contexts and eras of fashion, the three musicals overlap in a variety of ways. *Mlle. Modiste*, *Irene* and *Funny Face* adapted Perrault's tale to fashion world settings while interpreting American democracy as connected to the individualistic narratives of consumer fashion: as an 'art form and symbolic social system' which 'makes possible the exploration of alternatives', as described by Elizabeth Wilson ([1985] 2003: 245). While *Mlle. Modiste* does so explicitly, all three musicals simultaneously feminize the assimilationist rags-to-riches motifs of Alger novels like *Ragged Dick*, though the performance of class is less a prominent motif in *Funny Face*, which focuses on the gender myths of the 1950s.

At the same time, while playing upon themes of 'clothes make the woman', none of the three musicals depicts its Cinderella figure as merely defined by

feminine glamour or by a fairy tale marriage, as the Cinderella narrative has been traditionally conceptualized (an interpretation entrenched by the 1950 Disney animated film). In interpreting Cinderella's labours within modern American contexts, these musicals reimagine her as an active member of the work force. Though she may renounce work upon marriage (as in the case of *Irene*, and implied in *Funny Face*), Fifi, Irene and Jo are all represented as spirited, assertive and resourceful characters, with sharply articulated goals and ambitions.

While the Cinderella fashion musical appeared with less frequency after the 1960s, the genre finds analogies in an omnipresent convention of the Broadway musical: the dressing song. Feminine-themed examples of the dressing song include 'My Strongest Suit', Amneris's showstopper from the 2000 Elton John-Tim Rice musical *Aida*, demonstrating that, 80 years after *Irene*, clothes still 'make an awful difference in a girl'. The song suggests the 'ambiguity of capitalism' replicated in the fantasies of fashion, which simultaneously 'lays waste' and 'manufactures dreams and images' (Wilson [1985] 2003: 14). Celebrating fashion as both consumer luxury and flamboyant expression of identity, Rice's lyrics cycle back to numbers like *Mlle. Modiste*'s 'Hats Make the Woman': 'Whether hat or wig or turban/Whether clad boudoir or urban/Not to strut your stuff outrageously is a crime' (John and Rice 2000).

In this sense, one might speculate that the contemporary inheritor of the Cinderella fashion musical, in the tradition of *Mlle. Modiste*, *Irene* and *Funny Face*, are not only such productions as Douglas Carter Beane's camp-flavoured 2013 revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella* (with its dazzling quick changes of gowns by William Ivey Long), but such various GLBT- and drag-themed shows as *La Cage aux Folles* (1983), *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (1999), and, in place of Perrault's 'little glass slipper', *Kinky Boots* (2012). These musicals transpose themes of 'clothes-make-the-woman' to stories about the performance of gender and sexuality. At the same time, they expand the musical's paradigm of Cinderella, her gender identities and the diverse ways in which she imagines attending the ball. While contrasting sharply with earlier models, these musicals suggest that 'manners of fashion' (to quote *Irene*'s 'Alice Blue Gown') continue to pervade the Broadway musical, and are likely never to go out of style.

REFERENCES

- Alger, Horatio ([1869] 2012), *Ragged Dick, or Street Life in New York with Boot-Blacks*, New York: Start Publishing LLC.
- Anon. (1905), 'President has good laugh', *The New York Times*, 10 October, p. 5.
- (1906), 'The theater', *Town and Country*, 4 May, p. 21.
- Blossom, Henry and Herbert, Victor (1905), *Mlle. Modiste* (original Broadway libretto typescript), Scherer Library, Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, CT.
- Bordman, Gerald (1982), *American Musical Comedy: From Adonis to Dreamgirls*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cohan, Steven (2005), *Incongruous Entertainment: Camp, Cultural Value, and the MGM Musical*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Coontz, Stephanie (2011), *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, New York: Basic Books.
- Crowther, Bosley (1957), 'Funny Face Brings Spring to Music Hall', *The New York Times*, 29 March, p. 16.

- Curran, Joseph (1989), *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen: The Irish and American Movies*, New York: Greenwood Press.
- Donen, Stanley, Edens, Roger and Gershe, Leonard ([1957] 2001), *Funny Face*, DVD, Los Angeles: Paramount.
- Duff-Gordon, Lucile (1932), *Discretions and Indiscretions*, New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company.
- Friedan, Betty ([1963] 2001), *The Feminine Mystique*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co.
- Hecht, Stuart (2011), *Transposing Broadway: Jews, Assimilation, and the American Musical*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hubbard, W. L. (1905), 'News of the theaters', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 December, p. 8.
- Irvin, Sam (2010), *Kay Thompson: From Funny Face to Eloise*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- John, Elton and Rice, Tim (2000), *Aida*, Original Broadway Cast Recording, Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Records.
- Kaplan, Joel H. and Stowell, Sheila (1994), *Theatre and Fashion*, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, Joseph, Montgomery, James and Tierney, Harry (1919), *Irene*, (original Broadway libretto typescript), Scherer Library, Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, CT.
- Meakin, Hardie (1919), 'Legitimate: *Irene*', *Variety*, 13 November, p. 18.
- Montgomery, James (1919), 'Note to stage director', *Irene* (original Broadway libretto typescript), Scherer Library, Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, CT.
- Nackenoff, Carol (1994), *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Perrault, Charles ([1697] 1988), *Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper, Cinderella: A Casebook* (ed. Alan Dundes), Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Roach, Joseph (2007), *It*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Scheuer, Philip K. (1957), 'A town called Hollywood: *Funny Face* lens magic, yet uses no new tricks', *The Los Angeles Times*, 7 April, p. F2.
- Schweitzer, Marlis (2009), *When Broadway Was the Runway: Theater, Fashion and American Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wilson, Elizabeth ([1985] 2003), *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, rev. and updated ed., London: Virago Press Ltd.
- Wolf, Stacy (2002), *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Cantu, M. (2015), "'Clothes make an awful difference in a girl": *Mlle. Modiste*, *Irene* and *Funny Face* as Cinderella fashion musicals', *Studies in Musical Theatre* 9: 1, pp. 13–30, doi: 10.1386/smt.9.1.13_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Maya Cantu is a recent graduate of Yale School of Drama, where she received her Doctor of Fine Arts degree in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism in 2014, and her MFA in 2010. Maya is Dramaturgical Advisor at Off-Broadway's Mint Theater Company, where she has worked on Ferenc Molnár's *Fashions for Men*, George Kelly's *The Fatal Weakness* and *Philip Goes Forth*, and John Van Druten's *London Wall*. Her book, *American Cinderellas: Imagining the Working*

Girl on the Broadway Musical Stage, from Irene to Gypsy, will be published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Maya Cantu has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.
