

Accessory to Murder: A Lesbian Masquerade

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ABSTRACT

Mabel Maney parodies Fifties-era "girl detective" Nancy Drew with lesbian Nancy Clue, mocking the original series' insistence upon heteronormativity while maintaining Keene's luxuriously white, upper class sanctity. This article explores Maney's comic structure from Freudian "dress-up" and professional disguise to lesbian masquerade, demonstrating their ideological difference from gay camp - one queer commentary has repeatedly confused. Maney's conflation of the disparate motives of lesbian masquerade and gay camp lead to her abandonment of lesbian feminist readers.

RÉSUMÉ

Mabel Maney fait la parodie de la "fille détective" des années 50 Nancy Drew avec la lesbienne Nancy Clue en se moquant de l'insistance que la série originale portait sur l'hétéronormativité tout en gardant la sanctité de la classe supérieure luxurieusement blanche. Cet article explore la structure comique de Maney du "déguisement" freudien et du déguisement professionnel à la masquerade lesbienne, en expliquant leur différence idéologique avec celle du camp gay - ce qu'un commentaire homosexuel a embrouillé à maintes reprises. L'assemblage que Maney a fait de la disparité des motifs de la masquerade lesbienne et du camp gay l'a porté à délaissier les lectrices féministes lesbiennes.

From what we have seen...in this double reading of lesbian/queer revolutionary activity in America, ... the real fear we face, as scholars and activists, is not that queers in America will have sex, but that ...queers in America will have politics.

Lauren Berlant

Many who saw lavender in the golden age of girl fiction desired lesbian recuperation of American adolescent female literature. But the mysteries seemed sacrosanct, girlhood relics resistant to reinterpretation - until Mabel Maney began the series "Nancy Clue."¹ Maney has opened Carolyn Keene's syndicate of innocent Nancy Drew girl adventures to a naive 1950s world of lesbian romance. Often names and behaviours are so slightly altered that the reader finds herself literarily entertained while intellectually stimulated to recall and re-examine Keene's insistence upon safely bourgeois heteronormativity. Ubiquitous butch/femme couplings and an Oedipal journey home through America's heartland drive this parody of the great girl stories to a classically comic end: marriage of two lovers, defeat of social order, and establishment of fresh youth. The identifications of

alienated girlhood are resurrected and reinforced by Maney's "world o' girls" (the series' fictional publishing house), positioning women as either lesbians or lawbreakers - thus subverting the traditional picture of lesbians as outlaw. Yet confusion of the disparate parodic motives of lesbian masquerade and gay camp leads to Maney's eventual abandonment of lesbian feminist readers.

Parody's relationship to camp is partly grounded in reader awareness:

Lesbian and feminist writers interfacing with masculine genres tend to estrange through using parody, which accentuates the reader's sense of superior distance. Parody addresses a highly knowing audience, through the use of style... It is analogous to that perversion of bourgeois norms, camp, an expression of the "gay sensibility." (Munt 77)

One difficulty in analysing lesbian camp arises from conflating lesbian and feminist (or lesbian feminist) readers and their desires. (Gay men are never expected to be feminist; the misconception

that lesbians are - or should be - feminists must obviously be corrected.) Fundamental differences between lesbian and gay readership, and lesbian and gay camp, are ignored in the academic outburst of queer theory in what is becoming a new tradition of female absence: the quest for lesbian/gay solidarity overlooks lesbian difference and its own affects. Eve Sedgwick's ground-breaking "epistemology" dealt and dwelt with gay men; gay (rather than lesbian or lesbian and gay) defines queer politics, revisiting male privilege. Distinctions between lesbian and gay voices become clearer in feminist readings (where hegemony is more specifically addressed) than in theory whose intention is to understate differences through political ellisions. My interpretation is thus lesbian, feminist *and* queer, but queerness does not subsume or speak for its other valences. To be queer in this context is not to be not-lesbian, but to utilise the possibilities of a queer vantage with its magnified empowerment while maintaining a critical lesbian awareness.

PATERNAL PLOT

Nancy immodestly confides her crime just pages into *The Case of the Good-for-Nothing Girlfriend* - she has killed her father - a vast improvement over Nancy Drew's insipid Elektra-love. Only Nancy's lesbian cadre - and one gay man - can accommodate this secret: the straight world pins gory hopes on housekeeper Hannah, who conveniently confesses. In the process of clearing Hannah, Nancy and crew uncover a mass of Freudian subplots involving stolen jewels, masculine decapitations and paternal corruptions; accidentally murder the Chief of Police; and destroy the reputation of River Depths' [River Heights'] most eminent men. Humour depends upon recognition of the parody - transparent to Nancy Drew fans - and finds comic resolution in a carefully disguised lesbian wedding of the novel's strongest butch and prettiest femme. Guided to sympathetically identify with lesbian characters, Maney's audience tacitly agrees to murder.

Nancy's motivation for patricide is subtly occluded by the race to beat Hannah's murder rap, making this tale a true mystery. All lesbian energies

are bent upon returning Nancy to River Depths to personally conduct the accused housekeeper from prison and certain death, electricity being the current trend in American justice. Maney does not describe the shooting and finding of the body, details lovingly depicted in detective novels; readers' initial awareness of the murder is due to the inconvenience it causes, necessitating a cross-country journey from San Francisco to Nancy's childhood home in Midwestern suburbia, with many minor disasters en route and days of moaning sexlessness for the story's most salacious dykes.

Maney's reproduction of Fifties' America is painted in broad white strokes, stressing the milk-and-cookie innocence commonly substituted for American post-World War II reality. But because the characters are lesbian, lesbianism itself becomes the central parodic feature of the text, as well as an iconic stand-in for other absent identities: race, ethnicity, poverty, old age, disability, physical unattractiveness. Colour is a problem only when it comes to accessories; Maney's queers are as homogenous as Keene's hets. The only non-white is San Francisco policewoman Jackie, whose blackness may really be "skin deep." In Jackie we briefly glimpse social inferiority; the character is also trite and reductive, black woman as violent butch. Jackie has lower status than the Clues' private housekeeper - despite Hannah's self-professed criminality. Intent upon maintaining a light tone and rolling plot, Maney neglects the irony that this woman alone has the fire power, training and legal authority to subordinate white "nobility."

While Maney's literary devices are couched in comic reminders of Keene's writing style - naive plot points, alimentary alliterations, emphatic punctuation!, odd illustrations and jarring stereotypes - the chief source of humour resides in lesbian characterisations: campy dependencies upon clothing as psychological props and economic signifiers, oversimplification of lesbian relationships as sharply dichotomous butch/femme, and presentation of a vast, direct and horny lesbian network. Camp defines this world, so shaping its relationships that camp becomes their essence rather than their utility. Judith Butler warns against overrating the effectiveness of parody in politicising difference:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. (1993, 139)

Most of Maney's parody is more *inversive* than *subversive*, realigning female sexuality as identity politics and lesbians as capable of re(en)visioning a world of choice beyond responsibility to/for male desire and masculine design. Although Maney successfully produces a comic lesbian experience - and often reproduces the memory of adolescent enjoyment - she does not turn parody to subversion, in part because the power of the Gaze is not dismantled in her novels but only displaced onto lesbian women. Gaze refers not merely to the physical, *ungendered* action of "looking" or "seeing," but to a patriarchal process of subordination and objectification by which that looking, typically controlled by a socially empowered male, implies possession. While lesbian masquerade often works to protect its female (both lesbian and straight) wearers and subvert the heterosexual (female and male) Gaze, Maney repositions the lesbian butch as owner of the Gaze without altering its customary selection and endorsement of the female body. Outwardly masculine, the butch therefore *visually* reinforces the Gaze as a symbol of patriarchal hegemony. Yet Maney makes progressive, sometimes transgressive strides. Her butches are not the traditional - and traditionally comic - "stone butches," deriving all sexual pleasure by controlling passive partners² - these butches are apt to be dominated by their own desires. Active control rests in accomplished femme hands, as when butch Midge expresses her desire for Velma and ends up bound by her femme to the bedpost. Maney refreshingly admits a "lesbian truth" - femmes "master" butches.

Despite binarism through butch/femme pairing, and parodic appropriation of every relationship in the original stories, Maney's interpretation of post-War queerdom shows restraint: not every woman is a good one; not all men are bad; Ned's namesake is named "Ted"

(instead of the tempting "Nerd"). Maney also defiles our nostalgic boundaries through post-modern import of serial contemporaries: mating Nancy Drew with Cherry Ames, Registered Nurse, Maney stage whispers, "If truth were known, Nancy and Cherry were more than just friends" (Maney 15). Nancy's new life is not only geographically different: she has killed her father; mother figure Hannah is locked away; the Fifties debbe "finds herself" in San Francisco, queer capital. (If Nancy ever goes to New York she is likely to meet Beebo Brinker - a hard-drinking, attractive butch in Ann Bannon's novels.) When Nancy realizes her selfishness she is willing to return, but not before she packs a few monogrammed suitcases. The sign of Nancy precedes the body, enscribed in class codes. Even murder cannot keep her from her greatest single identifier, the social display and lesbian masquerade which (with diamonds and occasional nuggets of gold) are a lesbian's best friend. Still, as close as Maney comes to lesbian self-sufficiency, she does not bring readers to utopic closure. Perhaps this final reversal is also more humorous, but as demonstrated later at the match-point of subversion, Maney gives away the advantage, and to a man.

DRESS-UP IN MOTHER'S CLOSET

Nancy Drew with her blonde hair and resourcefulness lacked what every hero lacks - a parent. Keene series' Hannah Gruen was mothering without smothering, a comfortably sexless woman of generous lap and floured hands, available for advice and clobbering. With Hannah representing both Great Mother and female domestic the adolescent Nancy could keep all doors open, catching dragons by day and coming home in time to change for the evening's *soirée*. In Maney's parody, the hypothetical difference of subordination to a lesbian boss is effaced by Hannah's humorous appropriation as Hannah Gruel, the one heroic het. Small wonder that, taking Nancy's place in prison, Hannah's heart breaks - presenting a comic opportunity to utilise Cherry Aimless (Ames) and later Terry Tickerson (Ted's lesbian sister) in their professional capacities as registered nurses. Nancy genuinely loves Hannah; this relationship is easily

the healthiest in Nancy's life. Free at last to explore her own sexuality, Nancy Clue arrives at lesbianism but not feminism, staying bound in her social clique and cliché. She is the least likely of the girl gang to burn a bra - particularly if it matches her panties.

The original Nancy's development ended at age eighteen with acquisition of a snappy convertible (blue to match her eyes and blood) and debut into a luxurious swirl of college dances, handsome escorts, and financial support. She occupied the center of a bright, binary universe where good guys have money and twinkling blue eyes, and villains rough names and lousy clothing. In Maney's parody, Nancy is emotionally immature and politically regressive, superficial lover and selfish friend - and the world nevertheless continues to revolve about her. Newspaper headlines coast to coast scream Hannah's murder trial (without mention of Hess, McCarthy, the Rosenbergs, a Korean "Conflict" or poverty); inequity is not so much accepted as it is not noticed. The country bemoans Carson Clue's murder by once-loyal servant Hannah (who confessed to shooting him to get him out of her kitchen).

Casually emphasising the freedoms of female friendships, Keene's series always managed to veer away from Nancy's sexual consummations with "good-looking athletic Ned" (Keene 1936), giving Nancy a mystery to solve instead. Neither Nancy nor Ned ever seemed particularly interested in "doing the deed," preferring elegant balls, spontaneous resort vacations and mysterious letters in hollow trees. (Hollow trees?) Bobbie Ann Mason reads the Keene series psychoanalytically, with sex as the greatest mystery of all:

[Nancy Drew] runs from sex but literally chases substitute forms of "evil"...thinks nothing of racing after a shadowy figure...It would never occur to her that he might shoot or rape her. This restraint on realistic violence has the effect of exaggerating Nancy's power. And it underscores the contradiction: Nancy both pursues sex and runs from it.

(Mason 86-7)

Nancy's ability to keep a boyfriend loyal without handing out sexual favours - for thirty

years - delivered her from the bitterness her own young readers inevitably faced: school drop-out; teen pregnancy and abortion or unwanted labour and adoption; unemployment, welfare and sexual harassment on the job; marriage, divorce, remarriage and adultery; domestic violence, random beating, sexual assault, incest and rape. These life events Keene genteelly ignored.

Despite her lesbian transformation in *The Case of the Not-So-Nice Nurse* and its sequel (1992), discussed here, Clue remains the least sexual of the gang, her sex drive replaced with the ultra self-consciousness of a woman who knows she is desirable to women and men, and whose quest is finding the right costume. As Maney claims:

Under normal circumstances, Nancy Clue...was the model of feminine decorum...[who] emerged from every escapade with nary a hair out of place. For Nancy was as well known for her attractive hairstyles as she was for her ability to remain unruffled during the most trying circumstances...the young sleuth was recognized wherever she went for her keen logic, upstanding behavior, and attractive outfits. (Maney 12-13)

Maney solves the mystery of Nancy's chastity with lesbianism, but because Nancy Clue continues to occupy Drew's unusually empowered social position, the solution can only be ridiculous or utopic. Maney depicts a lesbian Nancy whose financial privilege, political unconsciousness and egocentric autocracy support the very categories of capitalist white heterodoxy that political lesbianism purports to oppose.

The original books were formulaic, unrealistic and racist - early stories used terms like "darky" (Mason 88) - and despite veneration of girlhood became increasingly unfeminist as Nancy matured. The male villain (all real villains were male) expressed shock upon being thwarted by a "girl detective," but Nancy herself was inclined to let Ned and his fraternal buddies handle any physical difficulties while father Carson provided contacts, money and stewardship. In Keene's delicately contradictory way, the villains were gentlemanly however disenfranchised, never posing a threat to

the chastity which status itself tacitly guarded. Fashioned along fairytale lines, where good is physiologically manifest, Nancy Drew's disgusted appraisal of one villain's broken and dirty nails (Keene 1950) revealed a world where men and women were judged on outward appearances before actions, manners before meaning. Lawyer Carson Drew was tall, handsome, blue-eyed and successful, the kind of father girls dream(ed) of, faithful to his dead wife for the entire thirty years it took Nancy to leave puberty; Nancy's friends were drawn from her own social class, pretty girls who liked to dress, shop, dance, and be escorted by boys without financial worries or hormones.

Maney's femmes are nearly as select: young, attractive and upwardly-mobile, finishing school-reared and private school-educated; in contrast, the butches represent marginal professions including ex-convict, amateur rock-hound, and a host of garage mechanics. The nominally present Miss Mannish wears bandanas and chauffeurs her femme; only George Fey (George Fayne), "a girl with a boy's name" (Maney 31), is financially independent. With the sole exception of Jackie, all are young, white and Christian if only because they are nothing else. Butch and femme exhibit a solidarity based impurely upon physical attractions - they're *all* in heat - and prissy, sophisticated Nancy moves further and further from the cool, collected and extremely capable "girl" of the original series to brash judgment and bouts of hysteria:

"I'm afraid my summer straw bag isn't nearly fancy enough for this outfit," Nancy admitted ruefully....Imagine forgetting to pack a dressy purse! What must I have been thinking?"

Cherry tried to steer Nancy away from serious topics. (Maney 25)

Sally Munt notes a similar dependency in the detective novels of Sara Paretsky:

[Warshawski's] fetishization of clothes...implies the "draggish" imperative of femininity, signalling its artifice...Women, conditioned to efface their own personality

through dress, are expediently adept at...disguise. (Munt 47)

Fundamental to every detective, disguise is symptom and sign of homosexuality, a safety to which we at times take recourse, opting to "pass" by adopting dress codes and behaviours of a straight majority. It is also a burden we wear no matter *what* we wear, due to a mis/perception of shared hetero-normative experience. Scopability is culturally determined but sexually motivated; because male heterosexual desire predicates its power on the availability of women - all women, at all times, regardless of their desires - lesbians inhabit a social blind spot, either invisible to the masculine gaze or invisible as lesbians. Lesbians are frequently invisible to each other, blending into the consciousness of the Other by appearing to carry bonafide membership. "Lesbian culture, in some ways, is the ideal forum for playing out post-modernist fantasies...'performativity' has been acknowledged as a key lesbian/gay aesthetic" (171).

Like Paretsky's, Maney's dress-up incorporates gender, style and competence; disguise signifies class and a performance of identity to which only the monied have access. Issuing from identically furnished colonial manors, the full collection of Maney's femmes performs the masquerade. Maney magnifies female fetishisation of dress-up by staging it in myriad roadhouses, behind bushes, and on the backseat of Nancy's 1959 Chrysler convertible (when not in use by Midge and Velma); the fantasy of perfect appearance pervades character dialogue, revealing a bevy of young femmes living to accessorise. Even Nancy's car wears a disguise: Drew's robin's egg blue convertible has turned canary yellow.

Many young girls first experience adult dress in their mothers' closets, borrowing (from) Mother's identity; in the original adolescent girl series, notably conceived by a man,³ clothing served as a secret code for class and the sexual longing girls convey through fantasies of "dress up." Freudian psychoanalysis might infer that the girl's arrested fixation on apparel is due to her mother's early death and a continued need to dress like Mother in order to feel (like) her. Maney's humourous revelation is that Nancy is more like Mother than

Freud would think: the girls discover love letters exchanged between Nancy's mother and Carson's sister. The strange "case" that Nancy's mother was a closet lesbian unites dead mother and daughter, granting supernatural approval to Nancy's lesbianism. Knowledge of Mrs. Clue's unfulfilled marriage also acquits Nancy of real wrong-doing, patricide becoming a sort of maternal revenge. Nancy's mother's closet is therefore not only a metaphor for childhood's idle masquerade as the Mother but also a site for personal choice, life patterning and sexual identity. Transported to Maney's lesbian context, dress-up moves beyond female addiction to become synonymous with lesbian seduction. In Maney's work Keene's dress-up matures into two alternate female tracks: straight/detective disguise and lesbian social masquerade, the playing (off) of behavioural and material codes by lesbians in heterosexual society.⁴

THE POLITICS OF DRAG

An affect or symptom of a discursive process known as "gender," drag is not biologically-determined but a potent, multi-valent form of disguise; any critique of its practice must take into account its wearer, an audience (perceived or real) and, most problematically, intent. Butler writes:

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group...[but] constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation...there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original. (Fuss 21)

Without connoting femininity, the dynamics of gay male political discourse and camp may permit inversion of social signs, as when gay males utilise female dress to signal sexual inversion. In gay camp, gender is not altered but augmented by cross-dressing, and the typical conclusion to performances of female impersonation requires revelation of the actor's masculinity. This is not true of lesbian masquerade, which does not pretend to

replace man by out-performing male gender. Because it is no longer uncommon for Western women to wear trousers, it is difficult for women to cross-dress: even in butch drag our visual production does not read as inversion but "mannishness," masculinity gone amok, feminine denial and social failure. These are modifiers of *perversion*: "Male transvestism is an occasion for laughter, female transvestism only another occasion for desire" (Doane 25). Mistaking lesbians for heterosexual women, male spectators may believe that femme masquerade is directed at them. As Lynda Hart remarks, "What happens when a woman refuses to be a symptom of man? It is an impossible position to occupy within this sociosymbolic order" (Hart 153).

To politically announce sexual preference, lesbians radicalise the visual gesture, ironically leading to the deliberate performance of masquerade for non-lesbian audiences:

Camp,^[5] as specifically queer parody, becomes...the only process by which the queer is able to enter representation and to produce social visibility. This piggy-backing upon the dominant order's monopoly on the authority of signification explains why Camp appears on the one hand to offer a transgressive vehicle yet, on the other, simultaneously invokes the specter of dominant ideology within its practice, appearing, in many instances, to actually reinforce the dominant order.

(Meyer 11)

Devoted to the accoutrements of (traditionally-defined) femininity, with its increased attention to dress-up, femmes view their appearances as objects for scopic pleasure, taking pride in a condition endemic to women. Joan Nestle explains that femmes intentionally transgress through dress-up, translating masquerade into a continuum of lesbian narcissistic spectacle with lesbians as actors and audience. Femme masquerade is (however compelling for masculine gazers) a radical sign of lesbianism, subverting straight expectations; the femme may even be a purposeful decoy, provoking the Gaze protectively away from a butch partner. Butches once participated in lesbian masquerade by

parading as males rather than as masculine, and *if* parodic were not consciously comic. Whereas female impersonation enjoys its own performance of overt theatricality, female mimicry was always strategic at heart, placing butches as invisible outlaws in seemingly straight relationships.

DRESSING DOWN

Dressing "down" (adopting the masculine construct) typifies the butch, differentiating her from the femme's self-conscious performativity. Social repercussions among heterosexuals are serious: again mistaken for a man, Midge is not permitted to share a hotel room with Nancy, Cherry and her own long-time lover Velma. Rather than divulge the secret of her gender - now preemptorily conflated with identity - Midge accepts a cot near the hotelier's front desk. Her relocation with men and work thrusts her into the public gaze while not revealing Midge as a transgressive female able to pass for male. Though not obliged to guard her as they do femmes (accepting them as heterosexuals), the men are also less likely to harm Midge; in this respect butches, as long as they remain in drag, are safer than femmes.

Not understanding Midge's courageous identity politics (especially at bedtime), Cherry mediates for readers who want true lesbian love and true lesbian sex. Velma offers one of Maney's uncustomarily serious observations on lesbian reality:

"Midge could get into big trouble if she's found out," Velma said. "The manager would probably call the police in to run us out of town."

"You mean, there are places where it's against the law for a girl to wear slacks?" Cherry exclaimed.

Velma nodded.

"But you're wearing slacks," Cherry pointed out.

"They're girl's slacks," Velma explained. "Don't you see?" (45)

She doesn't. Cherry's own masquerade is queerly comic: respect for her profession translates into a love for the nurse's uniform itself as a form of

sensual self-gratification and fetishism. Until Cherry is goosed in Butch Wax and dressed in men's trousers (in *Not-So-Nice*), it has not occurred to her that women wear pants. When Midge follows Velma into a women's restroom, Cherry indicates new sophistication:

From the little shriek that came...Cherry knew that Midge had once again been mistaken for a boy. She saw the grim restaurant manager roughly escort red-faced Midge out to the parking lot. (57-8)

To know is not, however, to resist, but to become jaded: Cherry continues to eat her liver loaf.

Butches pass as men; femmes pass *for* each other: Velma bears an uncanny likeness to Cherry, proving an hilarious case of mistaken identity in the first book. "Passing" is a means to surviving in an adversarial universe, positioning ourselves in places to which entry is denied; as long as passing is used transgressively in opposition to heteronorms, its tactical merits can outweigh its many disadvantages. Negatives are self-evident: corruption and co-optation; collective poisoning; historical amnesia; the establishment's justification in maintaining status quo, of believing we are truly like them, or interchangeable (tokenism). We pass *by* each other, failing to correctly read the signs of lesbian desire. We pass *as* each other, accepting heterodoxical definitions and requirements. All lesbians endure cases of mistaken identity as queers, lesbians, or both, a condition exacerbated by popular readings of camp and appropriation of queer culture by the mainstream.

Maney backgrounds femme masquerade as transgressive politics, foregrounding femmes oblivious of politics; only Maney's butches openly depart from the behaviour prescribed for post-war women. Audre Lorde verifies the threat of non-conformance to heterosexual feminine standards as predicated on superficial concerns and deeply-felt retributions:

...among us there were always rumours of plainclothes women circulating among us, looking for gay-girls with fewer than three pieces of female attire. That was enough to get

you arrested for transvestism, which was illegal. Or so the rumours went. (Lorde 187)

Maney's rare admission of the violent world swirling about her fiction also functions to dress-down, stripping costumed pretenses of lesbian freedom and recalling the world that indeed existed for lesbian forebears. Nancy's friends do not want anything significantly different from their straight counterparts of the Forties and Fifties: homes, satisfying jobs (returning veterans replaced women workers), romantic love fulfillment and life-long commitment. Knowing nothing else, their relationships are likely to replicate the het model of role differentiation. By radicalising our butch/femme relationships we become what Elisabeth Probyn calls "perverts by choice" (Elam 1995). Maney's over-bright landscape dims for readers who contemplate the cost of one night gained with Velma if Midge were to "be a woman," against all the other nights she has as one who dares to pass as something else.

APPLES AND PAIRS

Lesbianism in Maney's texts is so prevalent as to become commonplace, while gender roleplay among couples wielding steam-irons or tire-irons becomes amusingly normative:

"[Midge] and Velma make an awfully attractive couple," Cherry thought dreamily. "Midge's masculine outfits, slicked-back hairstyle, and rugged good looks perfectly complement Velma's feminine frocks and movie star glamour. They're a perfect match."
(Maney 2)

Of the four primary lesbian relationships, three are butch/femme. Cherry also longs to be in such a relationship; with the sole exception of Nancy, Cherry is attracted to old-fashioned butches in traditional male roles (predominantly automotive mechanics). Portraying Cherry as a woman long hopelessly in love with the fictive Nancy, whose glowing career she zealously tracks in expensively-bound scrapbooks, Maney suggests she is an innocent at an emotional cross-roads, a woman who

meets her own desire only to discover it never existed, who learns that the beloved is a symbol, even a falsehood.

Cherry is symbolic of Fifties naïvety and a public sold on formica kitchens, *Leave it to Beaver* (of all things) and Coca Cola sans cocaine. Cherry knows she is in love with another woman, but doesn't recognise the signs of that other lesbian identifier - horniness:

Cherry had tried hard to concentrate but had suddenly become all light-headed when the handsome, husky girl with short gray hair, large expressive blue eyes, and a ready grin had slid into the booth next to her. Although potatoes were one of Cherry's favorite foods...she had suddenly lost her appetite! Not only that, she had noticed the most unusual feeling in the pit of her stomach. She had hoped the potatoes weren't spoiled. (33)

Only Cherry could mistake *au natural* for *au gratin*. Either Cherry doesn't have this feeling for Nancy, or she has been eating rotten potatoes for an entire week.

As we soon find out, her potatoes are just fine and Nancy's are fermented; Nancy's travels across America parallel the passage Nancy makes into alcoholism. Her rapid dissolution is a final parodic blow, another of Maney's few dark reminders of existence beyond the book and the world that really was. Nancy's alcoholic dependency relocates her in the real world of Beebo Brinker, where lesbians pursue other "animals" in dim gay bars, seeking to mate. Having come out to American readers, Nancy hides vodka bottles in her closet. Nancy's alcoholism moves swiftly into the background of the novel, tainting only the futures of those around Nancy, lovers and friends who came to life before pop jargon created drinking as a social disease. This haunting endnote of Nancy's transformation from favoured heterosexual to depressive lesbian is another stage in her descent from American sweetheart to tarnished princess - with a tiara, of course.

CROSSING CUNTRY

Despite Nancy's punishment at the hands of the major men in her life, and the capability and devotion of women around her, she turns to a man to solve her difficulties. Donald Beaman proves the most transgressive character in the book; that he is a transvestal gay does not mitigate the fact that these lesbians need gay men to speak for them. It takes no grand deduction to notice that Donald's last name rhymes with semen and encloses the instruction: "Be a man." Gay writers may wish to address how gay drag results in one's being a man, a subject outside this lesbian scholarship but not beyond the scope of gay camp vocabulary.

The jewel thief who followed the dyke car cross-country, stealing Nancy's jewelry en route, had the additional audacity (or good humour) to sell it to the upper-crust River Depths ladies; coincidentally each city matron wears her piece of Nancy's jewelry on the morning of Hannah's courtroom drama, unwittingly sharing the spectacle of lesbian chic. Intent upon scoping out other femmes with her binoculars, Cherry discovers the spectacle:

"Look at Mrs. Meek's bosom," she whispered urgently. Her chums looked perplexed. "I mean, look at the brooch pinned to her bosom. It's Nancy's; it's just got to be!" (Maney 258)

With this bosom Donald opens the door to the *deus ex machina* of farce, and Nancy's surprise acquittal on dropped charges; Donald subverts the heteronormative world of the courtroom. Pinpointing the matrons' bosoms, Donald implicates the Town Mothers in the display of Nancy's metaphoric "family jewels," the while convincing them that he knows what is *in* their breasts as well as over them.

Donald's real secret weapon is the promise to closet the womens' "little secret" (264), the assumption of lesbian chic by its straightest, most conservative opponents. Instead of making the women surrender the jewelry, presumably purchased unaware of its "heat" (or illegal provenance), and certainly ignorant of its lesbian value, Donald manipulates the matrons to

acknowledge Nancy's ownership. "Queer" is truly "hot," and in the courtroom semiotic the matrons legally adopt the language of jewel/lesbian/genital difference, becoming linguistic spokeswomen for (and in) lesbian drag. Ashamedly stuffing brooches into purses, the matrons transform from overt to covert display (the closet), becoming complicit in the creation of homosexual disguise and its public concealment. But as neatly as he wraps up Hannah's situation, the biggest problem in the book is Donald him (or her)self - Maney erects a platform for the butch/femme dynamic but exhibits gay male camp. Cynthia Morrill succinctly differentiates:

(D)efining camp as a type of ironic gender play through notions about mimicry and masquerade, and aligning its performance with a political critique of phallogentric ideology, often displaces the specificity of the queer subject, for this feminist operation requires the queer to desire phallogentrically. (Meyer 111)

After Mrs. Meeks runs off to the Ladies Room, Donald emerges in her clothing and jewelry; in her own guise he reverses Meeks' behaviour, altering her public identity not by "camping" as Meeks but by pretending to *be* her. Absent from the novel, the shameful, coercive scene of Donald's transformation into Mrs. Meeks can be imagined; at Donald's suggestion (albeit with butch help) the real Mrs. Meeks is not re-educated but stripped and bound, and as a symbol of her violation, her diamond-studded horseshoe pin is returned to Nancy. What luck.

The girls are party to other crimes which in context seem humorous closures, but Mrs. Meeks suffers imprisonment and abasement. True, she is a meddling, judgemental, over-dressed bitch who perjures herself before her own husband (coincidentally a court judge); but the Meeks masquerade, in its fussy complexity and shift away from female sufficiency is, unlike previous scenes of pay-back, a male violation of an older female with butch assists. Carole-Anne Tyler's reservations are *apropos*:

...if camp is a parodic distance from an identity theorists once thought it too nearly imitated,

what guarantees are there that such a distance is not a difference complicit with phallogocentric hierarchies? (Fuss 33)

Gay camp is here barely discernible from criminal behaviour, complete with a license to lie and make public use and display of women against their will. Donald's forgery moves beyond theatrics to brutality. When we formulate queer politics without insisting upon feminist principles, we risk privileging colonial and exclusionary ideals, continuing the historical gender hierarchy within queer lines. We therefore replicate Butler's "conflicted democracy" (Butler 1993, 4), a system wherein oppressions of various kinds can flourish. Despite "higher" motives, Donald's drag heroics are cheap and bullying; Donald perversely restores heterosexuality's dominant discourse, the privilege to define and constrict its enemy.

Be-a-man in name, body and spirit translates lesbianism through the gay male body, like Alexander Doty seeing lesbianism as something to which sensitive gay men aspire (Doty 50). If the heterosexual subject or "unqueer agent" (Ross 1989) is able to appropriate gay affect, effecting a

pop camp without need for queer signification (thus rendering queers even more invisible), then what prevents the *gay* man from appropriating *lesbian* camp and (paraphrasing Ross) deriving pleasure from erasure of *lesbians*? Even without this political overtone, male penetration in/to an essentially utopic lesbian odyssey violates Maney's carefully-built house of lesbian cards.

Only women can give to each other a new sense of self. Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backward toward our oppressors. [Women's] identity we have to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men... (Radicalesbians 245)

Ostensibly representing gay solidarity, the presence of a professional female impersonator suborns lesbians to male performance, rebuilding the heterodox hegemonies Maney parodically overturns. Lesbian power erases itself in the drama of gay male camp.

ENDNOTES

1. In Maney's parody almost all of character names have been changed: Nancy and Carson Drew become Nancy and Carson Clue, Bess becomes Beth, (Chief) McGinnis becomes Chumley (the greatest change), and Hannah Gruen -Hannah Gruel. In recognition of George's butchiness in the original series, Bess' cousin George Fayne becomes George Fey. Wherever possible, the name used in the original series will appear once in brackets following Maney's re-naming.
2. Comic stone butches may be found in, for instance, the novels of Lee Lynch, Lesléa Newman and Sarah Dreher. Most lesbian critics do not differentiate between butch types, although femme types have been more liberally treated, particularly by Joan Nestle, whose own political daring has been largely overlooked *because* of her femme aesthetic. Perhaps because of the unusual attention to Radclyffe Hall and Gertrude Stein, the campy *Killing of Sister George*, or *The Children's Hour* (which I address elsewhere), in which the idea of a self-denying yet dominant sexual partner becomes tragi-comic, many non-lesbians equate all butches with stone butches. The range of attitudes within butch-femme needs serious scholastic attention.
3. Edward Stratemeyer's series was taken over by his daughter Harriet S. Adams after the third book.
4. Because my reading of the lesbian girlfriends is that they are consciously, delightedly "femmes," I apply "camp" and "masquerade" as terms specifically referencing queerness and queer visibility, and "disguise" as a more fluid category including the activities of detectives, all women and some lesbians and gays.
5. Moe Meyer uses the upper case "C" in Camp to denote a politicised queer discourse, and a lower case "c" to infer popculture camp, or apoliticised discourse. I abide by Meyer's spelling and definition only in quoting him.

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