

BREAKING THE BINARY: SEX POWER, SENTIMENT, AND SUBVERSIVE AGENCY IN
ANITA LOOS' *GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES*

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MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

Anita Loos' novel, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, first appeared in a 1925 issue of *Harper's Bazar* to commercial success. Often compared to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, as both depict the 1920s and were published the same year, *Blondes*, the novel, and Loos herself would fade into relative obscurity. What little scholarship there is reads Lorelei within a binary of "dumb blonde/gold digger. This perpetuates the patriarchal, sentimental binary construction of female characters (and women) which limits them. I aim to challenge that understanding through my work revealing that the dumb blonde/gold digger are both sentimental categories, and Lorelei's own "Professional Lady" is something else entirely. Lorelei works to explode the categories and redefine what it means to be female. Her "Professional Lady" positioning is one that is more powerful, more knowing, and more linguistically in control of writing herself as a woman who knows the game and wins.

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DEDICATION

For the women who came before me and the women who will come after.

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CHAPTER 1. “I DID NOT SEEM TO LIKE ALL OF THE FLAPPERS THAT WE SEEM TO HAVE NOWADAYS, BECAUSE I WAS BROUGHT UP TO BE MORE OLD FASHIONED”: CONSTRUCTING THE FLAPPER

In 1923, notable screenplay writer Anita Loos found herself on a train journeying from New York to Los Angeles accompanied by journalist H.L. Mencken and prominent figures in the film industry. This group included a blonde beauty who was to potentially play a leading lady in an upcoming film. In contrast to the striking blonde, Loos, with her small stature of 4 foot 11 inches, 100 pounds, and brunette hair, was often ignored. Upon noticing the way the men in the train car fawned over the blonde, but disregarded herself, Loos attempted to understand why she was overlooked. The blonde and she were of the same age and caliber of beauty, with Loos herself the smarter woman. It must be the hair, Loos reasoned, and began to write the beginnings of what would become her satirical novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady* (Loos 53-55).

At the time that Loos penned the beginnings of *Blondes*, the world was in the throes of vast cultural change. The First World War ended in 1918, women received the right to vote in 1920, more women were working outside the home¹, urban living was rising, automobiles were prevalent, and the film industry was roaring (Sagert 12-19). This fluctuating cultural landscape provided the breeding ground that produced the flapper figure and allowed flapper culture to flourish. The term “flapper,” which exploded on to the U.S. scene after WWI², referred to a different feminine beauty ideal for 1920s women. A flapper was often characterized by her

¹ Though the choices as to what types of jobs they could take part in were limited.

² Of British origin, though when it transferred to America is unknown.

boyish figure³, short bobbed hair, her public partaking of cigarettes and alcohol, her various revolving partners, and the short skirt she danced the night away in (Zeitz 5-6). The flapper epitomizes the cultural changes that took place in the 1920s and was a scandalous figure because her activities, her appearance, and her vices were fodder for public consumption. It is the flapper image that leads contemporary societies to believe that female freedom and agency were rampant at this time, however, considering that women just received the right to vote in August of 1920, that agency is likely exaggerated via media construction. In reality, this lifestyle was not the lived experience of many women in the 20s, but the flapper identity was one that was easily packaged and sold to the masses through cultural authorities. The flapper wasn't as free or accepted as contemporary audiences like to think. Loos' novel, with the central "Professional Lady" of Lorelei Lee, attempts to address this ambiguous figure of womanhood, but not all audiences accepted or embraced this portrayal, much like the culturally ambiguous figure of the flapper. There were those who attempted to curtail the flapper's activities, whether that was through legislation⁴ or simply by policing her behavior, and those who celebrated her. Joshua Zeitz explains that the tension surrounding the flapper stemmed from past Victorian ideals and the "new woman" figure. He says, "Given how new the 'new woman' really was in America, it's little wonder that she dominated the public debate in the 1920s" (Zeitz 6). Zeitz, in his endeavor to explain the precarious societal position of the flapper, references the numerous newspaper articles that either disparaged the flapper or accepted her. While some flappers were rebelling and working towards more independence and agency, society was not changing with them at the same rate. Residual Victorian attitudes continued to police flapper behavior. Gender expectations

³ A result from losing the corset and the shape it provided, loose clothing, and the illusion of flat-chestedness.

⁴ A Florida State Legislature considered banning the word "flapper" (Zeitz 6).

still held women back and breaking them is what made the flapper so radical; however, even the flapper identity had its own expectations and limitations.

In most women's everyday lives, they were pigeonholed by their gender and their socio-economic status, but so too were they pigeonholed regarding the flapper image. Their gender limited their choices in what profession they could hold and their socio-economic status limited the availability to which they could engage in the decadence of the flapper culture. Flapper culture was constructed by cultural authorities such as the film and magazine industry which limited who could take up this image, as flapper identity was limited to women of a certain class and body type. Engaging in flapper culture took a knowing access to taste and class; it took money, money that was not readily available to most women. Women have always worked, but, as Dorothy M. Brown explains in her text *American Women in the 1920s: Setting a Course*, the advancement of technology in the 20s resulted in a stream of clerical jobs and careers for women (Brown 77). However, the jobs women were likely to work were limited. Brown explains that work in the 1920s was "largely determined by gender" (Brown 81). Women's potential to attain financial agency was limited by the wage gap and potential for career advancement. In fact, "86 percent of the women employed toiled in only ten occupations..." (Brown 81). Some women could take part in flapper culture, they could become flappers, but because cultural authorities created what it meant to be a flapper, the identity came with its own financial burden in upholding a highly specialized and stylized beauty culture. Zeitz explains the complexity inherent in the flapper is that "She was distinctly real, the product of compelling social and political forces..." but that "... she was also a character type, fully contrived by the nation's first 'merchants of cool.' These artists... fashioned her sense of style, her taste in clothing and music, the brand of cigarettes she smoked, and the kind of liquor she drank..." (Zeitz 8). Cultural

authorities or the “merchants of cool” orchestrated the ideal flapper image through fashion, film, literature, and advertisements demonstrating the breadth of high and low cultural artifacts they turned to to sell her to the masses. Was it flapper dresses that started the phenomenon? Advertisements? Was it the film industry that clinched it? All these individual pieces were part of a system that confirmed and identified a distinction in being a flapper. The flapper was simultaneously a real person and a constructed identity. The flapper image haunts contemporary societies with its promise of agency; it contributes to this misunderstanding of women’s agency in the 1920s because people are unaware of the complexities that influenced and created the flapper. She is the leading example of feminine identity from the 1920s because cultural authorities such as film and literature depicted her as such, but she is not all encompassing. Loos engaged in the conversation surrounding the ambiguity of the flapper figure with her depiction of Lorelei Lee. Lorelei’s “professional lady” positioning reveals the highly material, cultural, and class based ambiguous spaces women could occupy or slip in and out of.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, the 1925 novel, is the diary narrative of Lorelei Lee as she navigates tensions surrounding the flapper within patriarchal society at home and abroad through mastery of the “dumb blonde” persona. After a gentleman friend encourages her to write down her thoughts, Lorelei proceeds to craft her story (along with her identity), replete with spelling and grammar errors, including her beginnings as a small town girl in Little Rock, Arkansas. Lorelei is discovered working in Hollywood by Gus Eisman, a button manufacturer, who explains that a girl like her should not be working in movies. To that end, he becomes her benefactor – installing her in an apartment and “educating” her by sending her abroad when gentlemen begin to show romantic interest in Lorelei. Once abroad, the diary details the encounters Lorelei and her friend Dorothy have with various partners, from getting an English

gentleman to buy Lorelei a diamond tiara and conning con artists sent to retrieve the tiara.

Lorelei knowingly uses the construction of the dumb blonde persona to succeed as a professional lady; she simultaneously engineers her desired outcome of an advantageous marriage to Henry Spoffard, a rich film censor, and her return to being a film star.

*Gentlemen Always Prefer Blondes*⁵ first appeared as a serialized magazine publication in a 1925 issue of *Harper's Bazar*,⁶ a women's fashion magazine, to commercial success. Later that year it was published in novel format with an initial run of 1200⁷. According to Loos, by noon of the day *Blondes* appeared, it sold out. While it succeeded commercially, bringing in a new audience in male consumers and advertisers and tripling *Bazar's* sales⁸, critics were of two minds. Some noteworthy authors, such as William Faulkner⁹, rejected its importance relegating it to simply female fiction believing Loos did not intend to produce so smart a work, while others, such as James Joyce¹⁰ and Aldous Huxley, exalted and praised Loos and the skillful creation of literary identity within *Blondes*. In the years following its publication, the text mirrors the very consumeristic politics of the novel with its transformation from serialization to novel, novel to Broadway production, Broadway production to film, and film to musical with the film being, perhaps, the most well-known due to Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell's roles as Lorelei and Dorothy. With this transformation, Loos as an author was to be eclipsed by other literary works

⁵ Serialized title differed from novelization.

⁶ In its early days, *Harper's Bazar* employed the single "a" in "Bazar" rather than the double that audiences may be familiar with today.

⁷ Accounts differ though the range was between 1200-1500.

⁸ Quoted from Carmel Snow cited in Loos' *Fate Keeps on Happening*.

⁹ In a letter Faulkner wrote to Loos, he said, "... you have builded better than you knew; I am still rather Victorian in my prejudices regarding the intelligence of women...But I wish I had thought of Dorothy first" (Preface to *Blondes*)

¹⁰ Joyce, who was losing his eyesight, saved his reading for *Blondes* (Loos 56.)

of the time and/or the famous actresses who played her characters in different iterations of *Blondes*.

Though often compared to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* – as both depict the decadence of the 1920s and were published in the same year – *Blondes*, the novel, and Loos herself would fade into relative obscurity. With the way Loos' work was eclipsed by other literary works or by big name actresses who would star in *Blondes*, one may think she wasn't producing work. In reality, Loos had a prolific career as a screenplay writer with over 100 of the screenplays she worked on produced; she also wrote numerous plays and produced many works of fiction and nonfiction over her lifetime. Loos was vastly productive as a screenwriter, but her literary or cultural value has been eclipsed by those who supposedly carry more cultural weight as authors or as women. Scholars turn to Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway, Wharton or sometimes Dorothy Parker as legitimate or worthy authors to analyze. They turn to the light-hearted and greatly different film adaptations of *Blondes* instead. The continued and varied adaptations of *Blondes* demonstrates the endurance of the story, but perhaps more specifically the endurance of a light-hearted version of the story that can't capture the cleverness Loos imbued her protagonist with. Instead, the false depiction of Lorelei as the "dumb blonde" within these adaptations distracts the audience from Loos' and Lorelei's awareness of language and identity construction within the novel.

Before analyzing Loos' character, Lorelei, I aim to understand the cultural moment in which she existed. To that end, I examine "high" and "low" culture, *Blondes* serialization in *Harpers Bazar*, and Anita Loos herself. By drawing on cultural materialism, feminist, and new historicist theory I work to excavate Loos and Lorelei out of the confines of literary history. "Gentlemen Always Prefer Blondes" refers to the serialization in *Harper's Bazar* and *Gentlemen*

Prefer Blondes refers to the novel as the “Always” was dropped with the novelization. I examine the ads surrounding the serialization to support my analysis of cultural capital, “high” or “low” culture, and the ways products and people navigated these cultural capital waters. I utilized Loos’ autobiographies for their depiction of 1920s gender politics and the ways in which society diminished women’s value. In my analysis of Lorelei, I rely on the novelization of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. In response to scholarship that analyzes Lorelei within a binary, I argue that Lorelei breaks out of the binary by rejecting sentimental constructions of herself and of women. When I refer to sentiment or sentimental construction I mean the perpetuation of limiting women to roles where they are either angels to be protected or monstrous women who must be scorned. Sentiment is key to this analysis as it is what keeps binary limitations in place and perpetuates patriarchal constructions of women. Lorelei actively writes against patriarchal constructs of women and of language when she creates herself through her diary narrative. The cultural moment and the systems that Loos and Lorelei existed in make it clear that both women are far more complex than scholarship credits them with.

CHAPTER 2. "...MY BRAINS REMINDED HER OF A RADIO...YOU GET DISCOURAGED AND JUST WHEN YOU ARE GETTING READY TO SMASH IT, SOMETHING COMES OUT THAT IS A MASTERPIECE": MISUNDERSTANDING *BLONDES*

Why then, when the famous film script and performances of the Marilyn Monroe adaptation bear little resemblance to the text, has there been little critical consideration of Loos as an author or on *Blondes* itself? Why have other authors of that era been considered critically in lieu of Loos? Susan Hegeman in her article "Taking Blondes Seriously" points to confusion over genre to answer this question explaining that, "... there is an impulse to see this book either as a satire of '20s morality, as a thinly disguised tragedy, or as a combination of the two..." (Hegeman 526). In addition to the reason Hegeman sites, Faye Hammill names several reasons why *Blondes* hasn't been considered critically, ranging from contemporary attitudes to female authorship to mass culture and the commercialization of literature ("One" 28). Like Hammill, I agree that contemporary attitudes impacted Loos, but specifically, contemporary attitudes regarding politics of taste and gender roles.

Whether it was film stars reproducing flapper culture or magazines telling consumers what type of cigarettes to smoke or what coats to wear, America was inundated with commercial culture in the 1920s. With this surplus of new media and culture, society learned which was considered elite or "high culture" and which was "low" in an endeavor to navigate these cultural capital waters. *Harper's Bazar* was born out of this cultural capital environment with the idea that "the industrial revolution had given rise to a new leisure class in the United States, and there was room... for a publication aimed at affluent women that operated as a kind of guide on how to live and live well in the modern world" (Bailey 9). *Blondes* had auspicious beginnings with

the success of the serialization in *Harper's Bazar*. The text navigated the politics of taste and culture with its placement in a magazine that while not high culture itself, sold the lifestyle of high culture. The people who consumed *Harper's Bazar* legitimized the message or belief that the lifestyle the magazine espoused was elite. As theorist Pierre Bourdieu says in *Distinction*, it is "...an involvement in the game that produces the game" (Bourdieu 86). By purchasing *Harper's Bazar*, consumers strengthened the hold that that lifestyle held on society. While consumers could not obtain the \$35.00 "Craiglegh top coat" pictured in the magazine¹¹, they valued it and the elite lifestyle that went with it. They could effectively "learn the signs of class" and while they couldn't purchase that particular coat (fig. 1), they could gain access to knock-offs and therefore perpetuate the "value" of that look for no other reason except it was positioned as "higher class" or had more cultural capital because it signaled taste. Not only were people navigating new places, spaces, and new definitions of "high" and "low" culture, so too were products like *Harper's Bazar* navigating, and valuing, these new spaces.

¹¹ At the time this was written, this commercial analysis of *Harper's Bazar* was limited to the first installment of *Blondes*.



MODEL #87 HAND SPUN AND LOOMED IN SCOTLEIGH FABRIC

Craigleigh

TOP COATS
FOR ALL YEAR AROUND
TOWN-COUNTRY TRAVEL WEAR

"The indispensable kind that know no season"

MAN-TAILORED IN THE NEW
HAND SPUN AND LOOMED

CRAIGLEIGH FABRICS

"LOCHLEIGH"	"SCOTLEIGH"
100% VIRGIN WOOL	100% PURE WORSTED

AND ARE EQUAL IF NOT SUPERIOR TO
THE SMARTEST ENGLISH IMPORTS

\$35⁰⁰ UP

Ask your local merchant about Craigleigh
Top Coats or send for our style booklet

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NEW YORK

Exclusive Dealer Franchise

GENTLEMEN ALWAYS PREFER BLONDES

Anita Loos's Story

(Continued from page 70)

I have not had time to more than glance through them. I have always liked novels about ocean travel ever since I posed for Mr. Christie for the front cover of a novel about ocean travel by Mr. McGrath because I have always said that a girl never really looks as well as she does on board a steamship or even a yacht.

The English gentleman's name is Mr. Gerald Lamson as those who have read his novels would know. He also sent me some of his own novels and they all seem to be about middle age English gentlemen who live in the country over in London and seem to ride bicycles which seems quite different from America except at Palm Beach. I told him how I write down all my thoughts and he said he knew I had something to me from the first minute he saw me. So when we become better acquainted I am going to let him read my diary. I told Mr. Eisman about him and he is quite pleased. Of course Mr. Lamson is quite famous and it seems he has read all of his novels going to and fro on the trains and he is quite anxious to meet him and take him to the Riz to dinner on Saturday night. Of course I did not tell Mr. Eisman that I am really getting quite a little crush on him which I really believe I am but he thinks my interest in him is more literary.

March 30:
AT LAST Mr. Eisman has left on the 20th Century and I must say I am quite tired and a little rest will be quite welcome. I do not mind staying out late every night if I dance but Mr. Eisman is not really a good dancer so most of the time we just sit and drink some champagne or have a bite to eat and of course I do not dance with anyone else when I am out with him. Mr. Eisman and Gerry, as Mr. Lamson wants me to call him became quite good friends and we had several evenings all three together. So this evening I am going out with Gerry and he said not to dress. I must say it will be quite a relief to go out in an old dress.

Mr. Eisman is going to Paris this summer on professional business and I think he intends to present me with a trip to Paris as he says there is nothing so educational as traveling. It did worlds of good to Dorothy when she went abroad last spring and I never get tired of hearing her telling how the merry-go-rounds in Paris have pigs instead of horses.

March 31:
LAST night Gerry and I had dinner at quite a quaint place where we had ham and cabbage and baked potato. I mean he always wants me to have food which he calls nourishing which most gentlemen never seem to think of. Then we took a hansom cab and drove for hours around the park as Gerry said the air would be good for me. It is really very sweet to have some one think of all those things that gentlemen never seem to think about. We talked quite a long time and I really know how to draw a girl out and I told him things that I really would not even put in my diary. He became quite depressed and we both had tears in our eyes. He said he never dreamed a girl could go through as much as I am and come out as sweet and not made bitter by it all. He thinks that most gentlemen are brutes and really hardly ever think about a girl's soul. It seems that he has had quite a lot of trouble himself and can not even get married on account of his wife. He and she have never been in love with each other but she was a suffragette and asked him to marry her, so what could he do. We rode until quite late talking and philosophizing and I finally told him that I really thought after all that bird life was the highest form of civilization. Gerry says he has never really seen a girl of my personal appearance with so many brains. He had really almost given up looking for his ideal when our paths seemed to cross each other. I told him I really thought a thing like that was nearly always the result of fate. He says that I remind him quite a lot of Helen of Troy who was of Greek extraction. The only Greek I know is a gentleman by the name of Mr. Georgopolis who is really quite wealthy and is what Dorothy and I call a "shopper" as you can always call him up and ask him to go shopping and he is really always quite delighted which very few gentlemen are. He never seems to care how much anything costs. He is also quite cultured as I know quite a few gentlemen who can speak in French to a waiter but Mr. Georgopolis can also speak in Greek to a bootblack which very few gentlemen seem to be able to do. Gerry calls me his little thinker and I really would not be surprised if my thoughts will give him quite a few ideas for his novels.

Apr. 1:
I AM taking special pains with my diary from now on as I am really writing it for

together some evening in front of the fireplace. Gerry leaves this evening as he has to lecture about his works in Boston but he will rush back as soon as possible. I am really going to spend all my time improving myself while he is gone. We are both going to a museum on 5th Ave. this afternoon as he wants to show me a very beautiful cup made by an antique jeweler called Mr. Cellini and he wants me to read his life which is a very very fine book and not dull while he is in Boston.

Low Sherman called up and wanted me to go to a literary party that he and some literary gentlemen are giving in Harlem but Gerry does not want me to go with Lew as he always insists on telling risky stories. Personally I am quite broad minded and I have always said that I do not mind a risky story as long as it is really funny. I mean I have a great sense of humor. But Gerry says, Lew does not always select and choose his stories and he just as soon I did not go out with him. So I am going to stay home and read the book. Willie Gwynn arrives from Europe tomorrow as I note by a cablegram just received. He is a sweet boy but he never gets anywhere and I am not going to waste my time on such as him after meeting Gerry.

Apr. 2:
I AM quite depressed this morning as I always am when there is nothing to put my mind to. Some one at the book shop played an april fool joke on Gerry and sent the wrong book by Mr. Cellini as it was really quite risky and I know that Gerry would not want me to read any such a book. So I did not waste my time on it. Lulu is not feeling so good this morning so she is going to take it easy and read a book entitled Lord Jim and then tell me all about it as I really want to improve my mind while Gerry is away. When I got her the book I nearly made a mistake and gave her a book by the title of The Nigger of the Narcissus which really would have hurt her feelings. I really do not know why authors cannot say Negro instead of Nigger as they have their feelings just the same as we have. I just got a telegram from Gerry that he will not be back until tomorrow and also some orchids from Willie Gwynn so I may go to the theater with him tonight to keep from getting depressed as he is really a sweet boy. I mean he never really does anything obnoxious. It is really quite depressing to stay home and read unless you have company.

Apr. 3:
I WAS really so depressed this morning that I really was glad to get a long letter from Mr. Eisman. Willie Gwynn came to take me to the Follies last night but he was quite intoxicated and I really had to telephone him to send around a taxi to take him home. So that left me alone with Lulu at nine o'clock with nothing to do so I put in a call for Boston to talk to Gerry but it never went through. Lulu tried to teach me how to play mah jong but I really could not keep my mind on it as I was so depressed. So I will go out and get some new evening gowns as I am sick of everything I have. I just have a telegram from Gerry that he will be in this afternoon but I must not meet him at the station on account of the reporters and he will come directly up to see me as he has something to talk about.

Apr. 4:
WHAT an evening we had last evening with me. All the time he was in Boston lecturing to the womens clubs he said as he looked over the faces of all those women in Boston he never realized I was so beautiful and that there was only one in all the world and that was me. It seems that he thinks Mr. Eisman is terrible and that no good can come of our friendship. I was quite surprised, as they both seemed to get along quite well together. It seems he never wants me to see Mr. Eisman again. And he wants me to give up everything and study French and he will get a divorce and we will be married. He really does not seem to like the kind of life all of us lead in New York and he wants me to go home to papa in Arkansas and he will send me love so that I will not get lonesome there. He gave me his uncle's Masonic ring which came down from the time of Solomon and which he never even lets his wife wear for our engagement and this afternoon a lady friend of his is going to bring me a new system she thought of how to learn French. Some way I do seem to be depressed. I could not sleep last night thinking of the terrible things Gerry said about New York and about Mr. Eisman. Of course I can understand him being jealous of any gentleman friend of mine and of course I never really thought that Mr. Eisman was Rudolph Valentino but he said it made me

Fig. 1. The first installment of "Gentlemen Always Prefer Blondes" depicted high class ads such as the "Craigleigh Top Coat."

From the conception of *Harper's Bazar*, the magazine aspired to greater heights or greater cultural capital through inclusion of intellectual material. While still product-driven, the magazine attempted to become a literary cache for those with higher tastes; it attempted to balance culture for the masses with culture for more "intellectual" crowds. In its debut issue, *Harper's Bazar* included their vision of the magazine explaining that, "The opinion is generally prevalent that a fashion journal is worth nothing as a literary authority. We hope to do something toward dispelling this prejudice..." (Bailey 12). The magazine recognized its limitations as a fashion magazine but wanted to overcome them. Bourdieu explains that, "... the value of the arts, genres, works, and authors depends on the social marks attached to them at any given moment" (Bourdieu 86). If *Harper's Bazar* only dealt in fashion instead of fashion and literature, their value would be reduced because they lack social marks that give them value. With the choice to include literature, *Harper's Bazar* demonstrated aspirations to become a literary authority in addition to the commercial cultural authority they already were. The magazine's content of fashion, art, literature, and commerce served as cultural immersion into a commercial world for women (and men) who aspired to be part of the elite, part of the crowd who could afford the "Del Monte-Hickey" coat (fig. 2), but most likely could not afford the lifestyle depicted. With the small, inconsequential 50 cent purchase of *Harper's Bazar*, consumers affirmed and perpetuated the system that promoted an elite lifestyle, but also affirmed the content and products within *Harper's Bazar*. *Blondes* fit in this magazine as it was intellectual material, but intellectual material that could be consumed by the masses. The placement in *Bazar* may have confirmed that *Blondes* was not Literature with a capital "L," but an accessible story for the masses who aspired to a higher literature, arts, and culture lifestyle but couldn't afford it.

**DEL MONTE-HICKEY
SPORTWEAR**



*The Coat of
HAND-LOOMED CLOTH
in gay design and soft, enfolding lines
answers the call of Spring for Sport and
Promenade. The deepest Fox gives just
the sought-for touch of Youth.* At your
favorite Shop!

DEL MONTE-HICKEY NEW YORK
246 WEST 38TH STREET



Abb. Paris.

Madame Spinely, a favorite actress of Paris and not unknown in New York, is shown above in the Chinese quarter of her apartment, wearing a delightful Louiseboulanger gown.

**GENTLEMEN ALWAYS PREFER
BLONDES**

Anita Loos's Story

(Concluded from page 132)

cringe to really think of a sweet girl like I having a friendship with Mr. Eisman. It really made me feel quite blue and depressed. Gerry really likes to talk quite a lot. I mean I always think a lot of talk is depressing and worries your brains with things you never even think of when you are busy. But Gerry does not mind me going out with other gentlemen when he is busy as long as they have something to give you mentally so I am going out to luncheon with Eddie Goldmark of the Goldmark Films who is always wanting me to sign a contract. Mr. Goldmark is quite in love with Dorothy and Dorothy is always wanting me to go back in the movies and says she will go if I will go.

Apr. 6:
I WROTE Mr. Eisman I was going to get married and it seems he is coming on at once as he probably would like to give his advise. Getting married is really quite serious and Gerry talks to me for hours about it. I mean he never seems to get tired of talking and he does not seem to even want to go to shows or dance or anything. Eddie Goldmark wants to give me five hundred a week to go out to Hollywood and play in the movies opposite Hal Hampton and I thought I might put in the time that way while Gerry is getting his divorce but I never did like the coast and it is quite tedious to get up so early every morning. Still if I don't

really have something to put my mind on soon I will scream.

Apr. 7:
MR. EISMAN and I have had quite a lot of talk and after all I think he is right. Here is the first real opportunity I have really ever had. I mean to go to Paris and broaden out and improve my writing and why should I give it up to marry an author where he is the whole thing and all I would be would be the wife of Gerald Lamson. And on top of that I would be dragged into the scandal of a divorce court and get my name smirched. Opportunities come to seldom in a girl's life for me to give up the first one I have really ever had and so I am sailing for France and London on Tuesday and taking Dorothy and Mr. Eisman says he will see us there later. Dorothy knows all the ropes and can get along in Paris just as though she knew French and she says nearly everyone in London speaks English anyway. And besides Dorothy knows a French gentleman who speaks like a native and knows Paris like a book. Mr. Lamson is lecturing in Cincinnati and will not be back until Wednesday so I can send him a letter and will be spared listening to any more of his depressing conversation. Mr. Eisman gave me really quite a nice string of pearls and Dorothy a diamond pin and we all went to the Colony and spent quite a pleasant evening.

It is in riding clothes that faults of taste are most conspicuous, perhaps, because here the laws are very rigid. As a complete and authoritative guide Marie-Lyons is preparing a portfolio of correct riding habits which will be published in next month's, the April, Harper's Bazar.

Fig. 2. The serialization of "Blondes" within *Harper's Bazar* depicted advertisements for products that revealed the value placed on high culture.

A secondary detractor in positioning *Blondes* as high class literature may have been Loos's profession as a screenplay writer – a profession that was associated more with low brow works. Faye Hammill explains, "... Loos' thirteen years' experience as a Hollywood screenwriter and film producer inevitably associated her with a materialistic, commodity-based culture" (Hammill 64). Even Loos participates in seemingly dismissing the critical, social, artistic value of screenwriting when she lets other men have credit for her screenplays. In her eyes, a movie plot wasn't significant to a girl "only impressed by great writing" (*Girl* 181) and society identified great writing as male driven literature, not screenplays. In her autobiography, Loos explained, "I had no pride in authorship because I never thought that anything produced by females was, or even should be important...The only authoresses I ever respected were women first of all..." (*Girl* 181). This again, demonstrates the societal belief that women weren't meant to be authors or the privileging male authorship of literature, but also demonstrates that, perhaps, Loos valued women writing as women first. She valued what women wrote as women and not women writing within the constraints of a male understanding of female characters or male understanding of what it meant to be an author. Loos recognized male vanity was the centerpiece of male-dominated literary tradition. Male authors needed recognition of their talent to affirm their talents. Without it, they were vulnerable. Loos valued female authoresses not because they wrote, but because they were women. The fact that they "happened to take up writing was beside the point" (*Girl* 181). While Loos might have said, at one time, females shouldn't write or couldn't be authors, her active writing life negates those statements. Loos, as a female writer, succeeded in a male-dominated Hollywood writing scene. The attitude regarding "great writing" speaks to societal value placed on high and low culture and the politics of taste, but also positions gender politics in the 1920s.

Because of prescribed gender roles, women in the 1920s were diminished, marginalized, and infantilized which impacted how consumers viewed women's work. In Loos' own life this can be seen best in interactions between husband John Emerson and herself. As "Blondes" closed its last chapter in *Harper's Bazar*, Emerson and Crownie (Loos' mentor) breathed a sigh of relief that it was over. Emerson could stop worrying about how successful Loos was and Crownie could stop worrying about the content of the story. Instead, when *Blondes* was in production to become a novel, they attempted to stop its publication citing concern over the effect it would have on Loos' reputation as a "nice girl" (*Girl* 271). It was Tommy Smith¹² who explained that at most it would create a "very small dent in my [Loos'] very unimportant reputation" (*Girl* 271). This exchange over Loos' reputation is indicative of the way sentiment creates splits in limited binaries for women. Loos can only be good/bad based on what she is allowed to write. There is no comparable binary affixed to male reputations which reveals the societal understanding of gender in that male reputations are not viewed through the same sentimental lens. Male authors can recover from and weather any critique of their work. The idea that Loos could be ruined by publishing about a "professional lady" diminishes Loos and forces her into a limiting binary. The men in Loos' life over talk her reputation and understand her through sentimental roles. If she is to be "good," her reputation must be protected – she must be protected from her own content which could force her into the "bad" side of the binary. To package *Blondes* for Emerson and Crownie, Tommy Smith utilizes this binary and diminishes Loos. Smith leans on patriarchal limitations in mentioning Loos' reputation, but diminishes her further by belittling her worth as an author. Emerson and Crownie's anxiety over the effect

¹² Loos' friend and a Liveright Publishing Company staff member.

Blondes would have on Loos' reputation demonstrates the sentimentality affixed to female reputations. Her reputation must be protected which is why Emerson and Crownie tried, but failed, to stop the publication of *Blondes*.

These futile efforts to stop the publication culminated with Emerson's request that Loos use the dedication he wrote which read, "To John Emerson, except for whose encouragement and guidance this book would never have been written" (*Girl* 271). Loos was rightfully stunned that her husband, who had attempted to stop publication at every turn, would request this. It struck her that, "... there remained only one way through which John could save face¹³: by pretending that he himself had been responsible for it" (*Girl* 272). Tommy Smith, who pioneered the production of *Blondes* into novel form, rejected the dedication and instead it simply reads: "To John Emerson" (*Girl* 272). John Emerson not only demonstrates a gendered attitude of entitlement to Loos' work but simultaneously a diminishment of it. This entitlement and diminishment was a common thread throughout their lives, so much that Loos often gave Emerson credit for projects he didn't work on. Loos recalls Emerson explaining "Buggie¹⁴, it's rather undignified for a man of my experience to take second credit as author of this picture. Do you mind if my names comes ahead of yours?" when editing one of Loos' films (*Girl* 181). With the choice to erase herself to assuage Emerson and other men's pride,¹⁵ Loos demonstrated performance of gender expectation that, perhaps, aided in diminishing and eventually erasing Loos from cultural consciousness and eventually from her role in *Blondes*. It was this gender

¹³ Since Emerson unsuccessfully attempted to stop the publication of the novel, this dedication was the only way to preserve his dignity.

¹⁴ Emerson's nickname for Loos.

¹⁵ She also gave sole credit for (Academy Award nominated) *San Francisco* to Robert "Hoppy" Hopkins (*Rediscovered* 130).

expectation that resulted in the need for the text and for Loos herself to be excavated out of the confines of history through scholarly work.

Just as Loos' reputation and life were policed to align with a sentimental construction of women, so too has her character, Lorelei, been policed in scholarship with the same understanding in place. Previous scholarship on *Blondes* and Loos doesn't tackle key binary conceits that affix Lorelei to stereotypes. Instead, what little scholarship there is available on the novel situates it within the cultural time period of capitalism (Blom) and etiquette manuals (Coslovi), examines the book's reception (Hegeman, Hammil) and its place in print culture (Churchwell), or analyzes the main character, Lorelei Lee (Cella, Pettitt). While some scholarship attempts to understand Lorelei's approach or how she was able to succeed, it doesn't address the problematic binary underpinning that sentiment engenders. It doesn't excavate Lorelei's own agency within the novel because it doesn't reject the patriarchal, sentimental binary construction of female characters (and women). In scholarship, Lorelei is read within the dumb blonde/gold digger binary or some variation thereof. If she is read as a gold digger, scholarship oftentimes attempts to excuse her behavior with the analysis which reduces her agency and limits her character. While T.E. Blom and Marina Coslovi provide well-argued analyses, they ignore the woman they are analyzing in favor of what "allowed" her to succeed. Blom aligns Lorelei with a gold digger but explains that she was simply a product of her time. Coslovi explains how Lorelei uses etiquette manuals to rise in station and works within a binary when she analyzes Lorelei as either "a hypocrite who deserves to be found out" or "a well-meaning optimistic girl who works to improve herself" (Coslovi 124). While the terms differ, the meaning stays the same. Lorelei is still analyzed within the binary of good/bad, angel/demon, or dumb blonde/gold digger. Coslovi does read Lorelei within the complex system of etiquette and

America's belief in individualism, but she comes back to the problematic binary limitation. Susan Hegeman and Faye Hammill both examine the book's reception with Hegeman situating *Blondes* through comparison to works by Gertrude Stein or F. Scott Fitzgerald in her endeavor to understand why *Blondes* gets left behind. Hegeman simultaneously analyzes Lorelei in binary opposition to Dorothy and within a gendered binary. Hegeman states, "This sidekick [Dorothy] is not only darker but smarter than the narrating Lorelei..." (Hegeman 529). Hegeman eventually settles on the binary of innocent seductress vs. sexual predator (Hegeman 534), another binary similar to dumb blonde or gold digger that other scholars have employed. Rhonda Pettit accepts the "dumb blonde"/gold digger binary and analyzes around it comparing Lorelei to Hazel in Dorothy Parker's "Big Blonde." While Laurie J.C. Cella works within the binary, she does acknowledge that Lorelei's "dumb blonde" identity is a construction. Cella is closest to breaking the problematic limitation of Lorelei in a binary, but because Cella focuses on narrative control rather than identity she falls short. Scholarship frames Lorelei in short-sighted terms which means sentimentality stays in place. The binary construction of women stays in place. I aim to challenge that understanding through my work revealing that the dumb blonde/gold digger are both sentimental categories, and Lorelei's own "Professional Lady" is something else entirely. Lorelei does not work within these limitations; she works to explode the categories and redefine what it means to be female. Her "Professional Lady" positioning is one that is more powerful, more knowing, and more linguistically in control of writing herself as a woman who knows the game and wins.

While scholars have analyzed, critiqued, and postured over the content and characters of *Blondes*, the scholarship lacks critical analysis in understanding Lorelei's agency within the text. While many of these scholars grant Lorelei some agency, they fail to account for the degree of

agency Lorelei truly has. These scholars often attempt to box Lorelei into a binary of either the “dumb blonde” or the gold digger much like Gilbert and Gubar’s Angel/Madwoman in the attic dichotomy. Hegeman discusses this binary when she asks “...is she (Lorelei) a sexual predator, or is she an innocent party; does she coax men into recklessness, or is she the passive object of their dangerous passions?” (Hegeman 534). These binaries (angel/madwoman or innocent/seductress) don’t work for Lorelei. Gilbert and Gubar point to the dichotomy of the angel/mad woman in the attic (monster) in their analysis of Victorian roles for women in literature. The angel in the house epitomizes the ideal female in that she was passive and, perhaps, willing stay in her box [home]. Alternatively, the madwoman in the attic was monstrous because she flouted patriarchal conventions of what it meant to be female. It is because she took part in “...assertiveness – aggressiveness – all characteristics of a male life of ‘significant action’...” that she is deemed monstrous (Gilbert and Gubar 28). Scholars align the “dumb blonde” identity with Gilbert and Gubar’s angel in that the “dumb blonde” is more passive – things just happen to her. The gold digger, then, possesses more monstrous qualities because she actively pursues her goals.

However, these roles are still constructed in the service of men. They work to diminish women to a pejorative term that helps them keep women in a place patriarchal society finds comforting. The angel/madwoman or “dumb blonde”/gold digger dichotomies don’t work in analyzing Lorelei because the reader isn’t meant to feel sorry for Lorelei. She is not a maiden in need of saving nor are readers meant to scorn her. Sentimentality has no place in constructing Lorelei nor does she have time for it. Like Loos, Lorelei writes herself as a woman not in service of such constructs. I argue Lorelei’s ability to read and manipulate people clearly demonstrates her intelligence and using a binary to understand her does a disservice to the complexities in her

character. In writing her story, Lorelei actively destroys the sentiments affixing such binaries in service of men's interest in keeping women categorized. Lorelei may be a product of the time, she may succeed because she understands etiquette, and she may be in charge of her narrative, but these readings fall short in representing Lorelei's complexity, diminish her agency, and cannot accurately represent the societal moment in which Lorelei exists. The flapper was both a lived experience and a construct. Lorelei's character was indicative of the ambiguity of the 1920s in that women had to navigate gender expectations, financial limitations, and societal dictates if they wanted to succeed in a patriarchal society that worked against them. Using Dale Bauer's text *Sex Expression and American Women Writers, 1860-1940* and her work with sex power, I contend that Lorelei uses sexist ideology to her advantage in that the "dumb blonde" persona is a form of sex power she uses to obtain material goods and success in life. Dale Bauer explains that:

...women writers affirmed their places in modern American culture –from 1860 to 1940 –not just by purveying sentiment but also by exploring intimacy and explicitness. In displacing sentimentality, they did not embrace sexology so much as contemplate how to use their sexuality as power. (Bauer 28)

Lorelei is neither just a "dumb blonde" or just a gold digger, and using a binary to frame her does a disservice to the complexities in her character. Lorelei positions herself as both innocent and seductress, both the "dumb blonde" and the gold digger in that she becomes what she needs to be in order to succeed in the patriarchal world in which she lives. It is by "displacing sentimentality" as Bauer says that allows Lorelei to position herself as such. Because she refuses to let sentiment have power over her, she is able to break the limiting binary. Sentiment keeps the "dumb blonde"/gold digger binary in place because it reinforces patriarchal concepts of

womanhood. It perpetuates the system that limits women's roles to be either protected/pitied or scorned. Lorelei breaks out of the system by writing herself and resisting sentiment. She doesn't let sentiment police her actions nor does she let it influence how she writes herself. She doesn't exist within the patriarchal limitation of what it means to be a woman because she does not write herself as a female who needs protection/pity or as a monstrous woman who must be scorned. With this move, Lorelei seizes control of her power as a writer and creates her own sex power. She writes herself out of the destruction of the binaries, laughing all the while when society attempts to construct her through these binaries. Like Hélène Cixous' "Laugh of the Medusa" advocates, Anita Loos brought her character to writing and Lorelei creates herself through writing and through her own language. She *chooses* to position herself as the "dumb blonde," to use that identity as a tool to succeed. However, she does so without perpetuating the system. She positions herself as the dumb blonde without constructing the need for pity, shame, or saving. She realizes these identities are constructs and only real in the way they operate. They have their own guidelines and can help her position herself to rise in class. She writes her identity into existence and uses not only manners to succeed, but the construct of what it means to be "refined" or upper class. Lorelei knows the rules of what refinement looks like in fashion, manners, and language etc. and is able to replicate it thus signifying her place through the rules of refined taste. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* will help illuminate the ways Lorelei navigates and earns cultural capital through the use of sex power in order to succeed. As Bauer explains above, it is the absence of sentimentality that is key to sex power. She is not an angel to be pitied or a madwoman to be scorned. Instead, she is a Medusa laughing at sentimentality and reclaiming her power through language.

Through her lack of sentimentality, Lorelei dismantles or explodes components that reinforce the binary of the “dumb blonde”/gold digger. While Lorelei articulates rejection of sentiment, she also actively does it through her writing and construction of herself. She does not pander to audience expectation or previous limiting female tropes. She does not write herself as victim or monstrous agent. Instead, she laughs when society attempts to read her that way. Because she rejects sentimentality the reader cannot diminish or demonize her; it is through this move that she can use sex power and succeed. Sex power is sex as capital or a way to attain social, material, and personal agency. Bauer explains, “A woman’s power, then, comes from purchasing and exchange, not from reciprocal intimacy. But sex expression is also about controlling a man’s feelings...” (Bauer 115). Sex power then, is a post-Marxist, capitalistic move for potential power or agency that begets more power or cultural capital. There are three ways Lorelei superficially *appears* to have internalized sexist ideology, however, I argue that these instances are where Lorelei uses sexist ideology, sex power, and lack of sentiment to succeed. It is these instances that demonstrate the way Lorelei dismantles the sentimentality that is inherent in the understanding of the “dumb blonde” or gold digger. I examine how Lorelei utilizes economic strategy to succeed, how she constructs her identity through passive language and actions, and how she polices Dorothy’s femininity as these reveal Lorelei’s own ideology more clearly. Dorothy is not just a foil to Lorelei, but the ways Lorelei attempts to construct Dorothy reveal the knowing sex power/sex capital architecture Lorelei employs. On the surface these appear to be ways Lorelei has internalized sexist ideology, but a closer analysis reveals how she takes advantage of the patriarchal constraints placed on her to further her aims. Combining a close reading of Loos’ novel with secondary scholarly readings and theory based framework will illuminate the complexity of women in the 1920s (and today), demonstrate that this idea of

female empowerment the flapper image extols is simply one option of femaleness, not the only option, and will afford Lorelei and women the complexity that is inherent as a social, economic, being during a cultural time period with its own rules and politics.

**CHAPTER 3. "...BECAUSE KISSING YOUR HAND MAY MAKE YOU FEEL VERY
VERY GOOD BUT A DIAMOND AND SAFIRE BRACELET LAST FOREVER":
LORELEI UTILIZES ECONOMIC STRATEGY TO SUCCEED**

With her “dumb blonde” persona, Lorelei is able to play on society’s limited expectations for her to reach her goals. Cella explains in her article “Narrative ‘Confidence Games’: Framing the Blonde Spectacle in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984)” that Lorelei is “aware of herself as an image, and she constantly adjusts this image to best ‘take advantage’ of the situation around her” (Cella 47). Lorelei uses performativity and her image as a desirable object to influence suitors to give her cultural signifiers which help her rise in class. She pretends to be a Presbyterian who is getting educated and attempting to reform Dorothy to connect with Henry Spoffard, a rich film censorer. Lorelei consistently looks to the future with the way she presents herself. She explains that she is reforming Dorothy because she knows Mr. Spoffard will meet her one day and as Dorothy does not follow societal rules of etiquette as Lorelei does, Lorelei needs an explanation of why they are together. Lorelei becomes what she needs to be in order for a man to get her what she needs. If the only way for Lorelei to succeed in this society is through these signifiers, but she cannot buy these objects herself as she is financially limited, then it becomes a question of how can she manufacture the conditions that will get her the signifier? Her beauty is the currency upon which she earns the tokens that allow her to navigate society; however, as she navigates society, she simultaneously dismantles the very sentimentality that limits female characters.

The three ways Lorelei uses sex power to simultaneously construct her identity and dismantle the “dumb blonde”/gold digger binary come to a head with the acquisition of and continued possession of a diamond tiara she first encounters at a London gathering. The events

surrounding the tiara are as follows: Lorelei encounters the diamond tiara that an English lady brought to a party to sell, identifies a man who has the means to purchase it for her, he eventually does so, his wife, Lady Francis Beekman, attempts to recover the tiara, and Lorelei and Dorothy do what they can to keep the tiara in their possession. The first time Lorelei sees the tiara, she immediately searches for a man to buy it for her rather than inquire how she could obtain it herself. As an ex secretary and ex actress, Lorelei does not have the money to buy it, but more than that, she realizes she can use society's sexist ideology and sentiment against it to persuade a man to buy the tiara for her through the agency of sex power and her "dumb blonde" persona. Superficial analysis of this may appear to demonstrate how Lorelei has internalized sexist ideology, however, Lorelei is simply aware of said ideology and uses it to succeed. By playing on typical female sentimentality, the belief that Lorelei is weak or lacks agency, Lorelei can eventually obtain the tiara (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Lorelei tries on the diamond tiara for the first time as Sir Francis Beekman and the tiara owner look on. This picture is from the 1925 edition of *Blondes*.

To that end, Lorelei commandeers an introduction to Sir Francis "Piggie" Beekman, a gentleman that was "quite well groomed" and "very, very wealthy" to begin the acquisition of the diamond tiara (*Blondes* 37). While waiting for this introduction to come to fruition, Lorelei

plays on her benefactors' fears that Lorelei will find a younger man to replace him and explains in a cable to him that she "hoped I would not have to borrow the money from some strange English gentleman, even if he might be very very good looking" (*Blondes* 38). Lorelei knows Mr. Eisman fears someone as beautiful as Lorelei will find someone new, and she exploits it. In this instance, the reader gets a glimpse into Mr. Eisman's perspective. He sees Lorelei's beauty as valuable because patriarchal constructs affirm that her beauty is a signifier of worth. Her beauty then reflects on Mr. Eisman's value with the idea that he can "get" a beautiful woman like Lorelei. Her beauty is conflated with the sentiments of love and value which play on Mr. Eisman's vanity. When Eisman reads Lorelei as beautiful it is with the belief that beauty affirms sentimental roles of the angel. If she is beautiful she is angelic. Lorelei works to disrupt sentimentality and rejects the sentimental reading Mr. Eisman places on her. Lorelei's "dumb blonde" persona is sex power in action in that the potential of sex power allows her to gain agency to leverage for the material goods she needs to succeed.

Lorelei uses the "dumb blonde" persona and the assumptions that go with it to gain material objects from her suitors, but she also needs to receive them to attain her place in society and maintain her rising trajectory. To reiterate, it is "an involvement in the game that produces the game" (Bourdieu 86). Lorelei plays the part that her beauty gives her, that of the dumb blonde. People underestimate Lorelei because she is cute, small statured, and blonde (fig. 4). A paramour explained that he has "... never seen a girl of my [Lorelei's] personal appearance with so many brains" (*Blondes* 11). Lorelei's appearance engenders diminishment of her mental capacities, however, Lorelei allows society to believe this since it works in her favor. Cella argues that allowing Lorelei to frame her performance through narrative control lets her alter how readers perceive her performance (Cella 48). Instead of a gold digger, Lorelei is a simple

woman getting things she needs. While that argument is valid, it does not fully explain why Lorelei needs the objects¹⁶.



Fig. 4. This picture, taken from the 1925 edition of *Blondes*, shows Lorelei's as cute, small statured, and blonde.

Lorelei desires material objects, like the tiara, because they signify her desired place in society. They are cultural capital. Through her negation of sentiment, Lorelei manufactures the situation that leads to attaining cultural capital. She explains that a kiss on the hand "... may make you feel very good but a diamond and safire [SIC]¹⁷ bracelet lasts forever" (*Blondes* 56). Lorelei cannot become a member of the upper class with a kiss, but she could navigate to that station with the jewels she receives from her suitors if they are the right caliber¹⁸. She knows what she deems "appropriate" for each situation and navigates it in such a way that she gets it. When Mr. Eisman gives Lorelei a smaller jewel than expected for her birthday, she tells him "...

¹⁶ Note: These are not *needs* as they only hold value in an elite system as cultural capital. It is more about what they represent than what they are worth.

¹⁷ Though I will note Lorelei misspellings, this is not meant to be a judgement. Lorelei's misspellings are indicative of how she creates her own language, how she takes part in women's writing (*écriture féminine*).

¹⁸ The suitors and the jewels.

it was quite cute, but I had quite a headache and I had better stay in a dark room all day and I told him I would see him the next day, perhaps” (*Blondes* 6). Lorelei deemed the jewel Mr. Eisman got her too small, took action, then Mr. Eisman gifted her a bigger one that met her standards. Mr. Eisman sees Lorelei as beautiful, as angelic. He sees her in a sentimental way and believes she deserves sentiment to affirm her angelic role. However, if she were to accept the sentimental jewel, then she affirms she is the sentimental angel/monster binary she so actively works against. Lorelei is able to manufacture the situation that leads to her receiving a bigger jewel because she lacks sentiment. The necklaces, bracelets, and tiara serve as signifiers to society that Lorelei is part of an elite group, the refined upper class. As Bourdieu explains:

A cultural product is ...charged with the legitimizing, reinforcing capacity which objectification always possesses...the logic of structural homologies assigns it to a prestigious group so that it functions as an authority which authorizes and reinforces dispositions by giving them a collectively recognized expression.

(Bourdieu 231)

Members of the upper class see the material objects that adorn Lorelei, like the tiara, and through them recognize that she belongs to the same elite group they do. Without a title or a married name to signal her place in “society,” Lorelei must rely on material objects to do the work. However, it is only because elite society deems the signifiers – a title, a married name, and jewels – to have “value” that they do. These objects become the cultural capital that allow Lorelei to climb the social ladder and succeed in a patriarchal, capitalistic society, and her presentation of the “dumb blonde” is her route to climbing that ladder and attaining financial security. Success isn’t a title for Lorelei, success is how much cultural capital one can acquire from somebody and how far one can rise in class. Lady Francis Beekman is unsuccessful in

Lorelei's eyes because she stopped. She got the ring, she became Lady Francis Beekman, identified through her husband, and she was stagnant. She was Lady Francis Beekman who "always comes to London every year to get her old clothes made over as she has a girl who does it very very cheap" (*Blondes* 48). She was a failure who didn't have the sex power to get new clothes through her husband, a rich, titled gentleman who bought a virtual stranger a diamond tiara. As stated, Lorelei needs the signifiers and rejects sentimental trinkets as they hold no potential trajectory for her. When Henry Spoffard decides to give Lorelei his class ring from Amherst College in lieu of a diamond because none of the "large sized diamonds" really had any sentiments, she tells him "it was very sweet of him to be so full of nothing but sentiment" (*Blondes* 105-6) then promptly attempts to figure out how to end the engagement without negatively impacting her reputation. It is only when she realizes her return to film is contingent upon her marriage to Spoffard that Lorelei acquiesces. This is not her affirmation of sentimental binary roles, but a strategic plan to get more cultural capital out of someone. When Lorelei decides to marry, she doesn't stop rising. She converts her cultural capital into socio-cultural capital through her marriage to Henry Spoffard, a rich film censor from an old family. While she, perhaps, doesn't earn jewels as cultural capital, she has the freedom to return to film and a larger network of people to utilize in her efforts to continue her rising trajectory.

Much like the "dumb blonde" is real only in the way society understands it, so too do the jewels work in that way. The jewels Lorelei requires are representative of higher class status in that they hold value only in an elite system of cultural capital. The value attached to them is not "real." Lorelei's requirement for jewelry mimics the politics of taste in that Lorelei's "need" for the jewels legitimizes the lifestyle of the upper class while simultaneously revealing the performative nature inherent in affirming distinction of that class. This is why Lorelei is initially

upset when she comes across a jewelry store that sells “paste” or imitation jewelry. When Lorelei encounters the paste items, the imitations jewels, she is upset that “. . . a gentleman could deceive [SIC] a girl because he could give her a present and it would only be worth 20 dollars” (*Blondes* 53). The imitation poses a threat to her way of life. If she needs cultural capital to rise in class station, what happens if she can’t tell the real thing from imitation? It isn’t until she has control of the imitation that her attitude towards it changes. Once she has the plan to swindle Lady Francis Beekman, she knows how to use it just as she uses cultural capital, manners, and language to succeed. Since Lady Francis Beekman is paying her solicitors, Robber and Louie, to take the girls out in an effort to steal the tiara back, Lorelei and Dorothy feel that they can only win in this scenario. In Lorelei’s words, “. . . what is 65 dollars [the price of a paste tiara] if Dorothy and I could . . . get some delightful presents that would even seem more delightful when we stopped to realized that Lady Francis Beekman paid for them” (*Blondes* 66). The paste tiara is representative of the way Lorelei navigates upper class society as someone without class or money but someone who knows the value of taste. She operates within societal understanding of what jewels signify and of what it means to be a “dumb blonde” without ceding her agency or knowingness of the performative nature of cultural signifiers and of the dumb blonde identity.

Lorelei knows the importance of the trinkets and what they signify by illustrating concern over the availability of trinkets for men to buy her and the caliber of the men that buy her trinkets. Lorelei doesn’t simply need gifts for the sake of gifts, she needs gifts that are worth social and cultural currency as evidenced by her frustration over the lack of a Cartier jewelry store on the ship. She says:

I mean I really do hope I do not get any more large size imitations of a dog as I have three now and I do not see why the Captain does not ask Mr. Cartier to have

a jewelry store on the ship as it is really not much fun to go shopping on a ship with a gentleman, and buy nothing but imitations of dogs. (*Blondes* 30)

Though the dogs signify Lorelei's class station because it is an attempt at gifting her a signifier of her class, she can't carry them around so they don't serve their purpose of letting others know her station like jewels do. Her requirement for jewels as signs of affection is simply another facet of her sex power. She knows she can rise in station through the jewels that demonstrate her cultural capital to others and it is problematic when she encounters situations that don't allow for this. That is why she either manufactures the situations or refuses to take part in them. For instance, when she ruminates on the differences between American and French gentlemen, she says:

I mean they [French gentlemen] take you to quite cute places and they make you feel quite good about yourself and you really seem to have a delightful time but when you get home and come to think it all over, all you have got is a fan that only cost 20 francs and a doll that they gave you away for nothing in a restaurant. (*Blondes* 56)

Social functions in which she doesn't receive an acceptable signifier are not worth it for her. Lorelei rejects the sentimental grounding of trinkets in that her relationships are not emotionally driven; it does not matter who gifts the trinket if it cannot be worn, projected, or shown to the people who matter. Cheap sentiment such as a 20 franc fan does not carry cultural capital therefore it is worthless to Lorelei. She needs to obtain a signifier so others know she is elite. Without that signifier, others will not provide opportunities for Lorelei to keep rising in class. The importance of gifts or jewels as signifiers is clearest when Lorelei learns about the spendthrift nature of the suitors in London. While Dorothy and Lorelei are on an outing with

their momentary partners, Lorelei discovers that English men are rather tight fisted with money. Dorothy suggests faking a headache to get out of associating with men so spendthrift; instead, Lorelei aims to teach Sir Francis Beekman (Piggie) the proper way of treating a lady – buying her gifts. Lorelei sends herself flowers and profusely thanks Piggie for the gift with a hug, thus giving him positive reinforcement over gift giving and using her sex power to navigate this interaction (*Blondes* 44). This escalates into Lorelei wanting a framed picture of Piggie in his “unaform” only because she wanted a gold picture frame (*Blondes* 47). They go shopping together for a picture frame and Lorelei claims she “did not think a silver picture frame was good enough for a picture of him because I forgot that they had gold picture frames until I saw them” (*Blondes* 47). This culminates with Lorelei declaring she “only felt fit to be with him in a diamond tiara” (*Blondes* 48) which he then buys for her. Instead of washing her hands of Sir Francis Beekman straight away, she teaches him how to gift the right, non-sentimental trinkets because the cultural capital of them is essential to her life and the life of other women who use their beauty as currency in order to rise in station.

3.1. “So here I am writing a book instead of reading one”: Lorelei Writes Her Identity

Through intentional errors, passive voice, and the content Lorelei chooses to include (and exclude) in her diary, Lorelei carefully crafts her “dumb blonde” identity and extends her power. Through these three moves, Lorelei never allows herself to be depicted as monstrous or in negative light. A diary is traditionally a personal item that only the author reads, however, Lorelei’s is fashioned like it will be discovered or published which demonstrates the degree to which she cultivates her identity. As Blom notes in the article “Anita Loos and Sexual Economics: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*,” “Lorelei’s record of her adventures and thoughts is not

the product of a freely associating stream of consciousness, but a document carefully couched in deceptive language” (Blom 44). The language Lorelei uses within the diary frustrates the reader into thinking she embodies the “dumb blonde” persona; however, she simply uses the diary to promote her identity. She simultaneously engages in what society deems “dumb blonde” behavior while not being dumb. She is a female writing her thoughts down in a typically feminine genre, a *sext* as Cixous would say. And with the *sext*, comes the sex cops who police women and their writing or attempt to force them to adhere to patriarchal understanding of writing ¹⁹(Cixous 422-23).

With the choice to write her diary, Lorelei disrupts the male literary tradition and the traditional construction of femininity. A beau encouraged her to write her thoughts down explaining that if she wrote all of them down it would turn into a book. Lorelei, indulgently explains to her reader that “This almost made me smile as what it would really make would be a whole row of encyclopediacs [SIC]” (*Blondes* 1). Before the reader dives in to the story, Lorelei speaks back to the audience with a wink and a nudge – letting the reader in on the joke. The beau acknowledges that Lorelei has thoughts that she might pen, but his understanding of the scale of them is wrong and Lorelei lets the reader know. She speaks her truth, she cues the reader in on her experience and understanding as a woman. The beau is limited by his patriarchal understanding of intelligence, women’s abilities to write, and the caliber of women’s thoughts. He constructs intelligence through his patriarchal lens. He even says that “...he ought to know brains when he sees them, because he is in the senate and he spends quite a great deal of time in Washington” (*Blondes* 1). In this instance, identifying intelligence is more about confirming his

¹⁹ Just as Loos’ husband/mentor policed her own writing of *Blondes*.

own understanding of what intelligence means or how it manifests. This demonstrates the insidious ways patriarchal constructions of intelligence (and gender) filter into the world. Men have written what it means to be female and they have decided what intelligence looks like only because they are the powerful and the privileged. They are the ones who have written females, who have written intelligence, and they are the ones who have the ability to retry a person's intelligence if you will. When Lorelei encounters Mr. Bartlett, the district attorney from Lorelei's past, she explains that ". . . he always thought that I only used my brains against gentlemen and really had quite a cold heart" (*Blondes* 27) but once he knows she has brains ". . . it seems that he has been looking for a girl like me for years" (*Blondes* 30). Mr. Bartlett is allowed to make a verdict regarding Lorelei's intelligence; as a member of the powerful group, he is the one who decides what intelligence looks like. Still though, the control and power are in patriarchal hands; men define women as passive which sentimentalizes their behavior which limits them. Mr. Bartlett frames or understands Lorelei through a patriarchal sentimental lens. If she uses her brains, she's cold (monster/gold digger) and if he decides she's worthy (angel/dumb blonde) it's a confirmation that she meets his definition of femininity which limits her. Without women writers writing female characters, readers don't get a woman that speaks back to this construction. In fact, sometimes women replicate the system that works to diminish them. In order to break free from this, Cixous explains that women must write themselves and they must do so in a way that differs from patriarchal constructions (414). Cixous explains that, "If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, it is time for her to dislocate this 'within' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, . . . to invent for herself a language to get inside of" (424). Patriarchal depictions of Lorelei attempt to frame her within sentimental boundaries, but through her writing she rejects that limited construction. Rather than being

limited by sentiment and the way sentiment writes women in a binary, Lorelei is neither angel nor monster. She is the laughing Medusa who rejects both limited roles and writes herself. Anita Loos brings Lorelei to writing. A female author writing a female author. The female author (Lorelei) then writes herself and explodes the discourse through her own language and misspellings.

The impetus behind Lorelei's misspellings are twofold. They serve to perpetuate the idea that she is a "dumb blonde," but also demonstrate her rejection of resistance to male constructions of language and of the dumb blonde identity. Lorelei has continued her rising trajectory via the dumb blonde identity in part because society underestimates her. Therefore, it only behooves her to reinforce the notion that she is the dumb blonde. With this belief in place, Lorelei then continuously benefits from her culture underestimating her power. The way Lorelei's diary is peppered with misspellings such as "riskay" (13), "eyefull" tower (55), "encyclopedia" (1), "deceeving" (56), and "landguage" (86), might be indicative that the "dumb blonde" she so seamlessly projects as truth. However, while Lorelei struggles to spell empty cultural signifiers such as the "eyefull" tower (55), "veecount" (56), or "Fountainblo²⁰," (64), she never once struggles in spelling words with "real" cultural capital such as "champagne" (21), "Cartier" (52), or words that potentially threaten her cultural capital such as "imitation" (53). While the Eiffel Tower may serve as the epitome of cultural value, it serves Lorelei no purpose. She can't wear it nor can she use it to continue to rise in station. Instead, through her misspellings, Lorelei demonstrates the tenuous hold of language and patriarchy over women.

²⁰ Fontainebleau. France

Through her misspellings, Lorelei demonstrates that language does not, cannot, will not master her. Lorelei creates her own “landguage” and in doing so creates herself as Cixous advocates. She does not write herself within the patriarchal limitations of sentimental roles such as the angelic woman who must be protected or the monstrous woman who must be scorned for her wrongdoings. In fact, when a beau (who is a writer, a traditionally patriarchal field) references Helen of Troy, a tragic figure who was confined to a patriarchal binary, Lorelei doesn’t have that frame of reference. She says, “...the only Greek I know is a Greek gentleman by the name of Mr. Georgopolis who is really quite wealthy...” (*Blondes* 11). Lorelei refuses to adhere to patriarchal binaries that limit women; therefore, she will not credit a woman who was trapped within the binary and used for patriarchal means. Furthermore, Lorelei cannot be read within a patriarchal system. When Lorelei encounters the patriarchal institute of psychology on her travels, the famous “Froyd” doesn’t know what to make of her (fig. 5). She recounts how after psychoanalyzing her, asking her about her dreams²¹, “Dr. Froyd [SIC] looked at me and looked at me and he said he did not really think it was possible” (*Blondes* 92). After consulting with his colleagues, he advised Lorelei to “cultivate a few inhibitions and get some sleep” (*Blondes* 92).

²¹ Of which she has none. (*Blondes* 92).

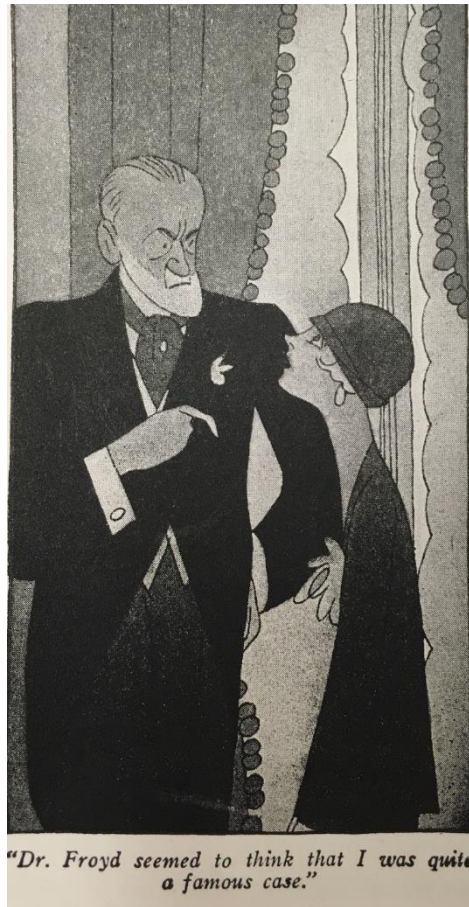


Fig. 5. “Froyd” doesn’t know what to make of Lorelei in this image from the 1925 edition of *Blondes*.

“Froyd,” the father of psychoanalysis – which was a patriarchal driven understanding of the psyche – cannot understand Lorelei because she does not, will not, exist in patriarchal constructs. She is not a helpless maiden to be pitied nor a monstrous woman to be scorned. She is the Medusa laughing at the way patriarchy attempts to construct her. Lorelei’s misspellings are evidence of how she has exploded patriarchal limitations of language and of femininity. With these misspellings, Lorelei rejects patriarchal limitations and writes as a woman for women. Cixous explains that “Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes...” (Cixous 423). As Lorelei writes, she does just that. She breaks through codes that regulate what it means

to be female and what it means to be a writer. Lorelei refuses to write in a patriarchal tradition because doing so perpetuates patriarchal constructions of women, writing, and the value of women writing as women. Writing as a woman is the best chance for Lorelei to dismantle sentimentality and the sentimental construction that limits women. It is because she writes in her own language and style that she is able to dismantle these limitations. She writes in a way to capture the lived life of Lorelei Lee.

Lorelei relies on ambiguity in her language to advance the idea that she lacks strategic thinking – that things just happen to her. Her interactions with Lady Francis Beekman, Piggie’s wife, demonstrate the way she uses uncertain words to paint herself in good light. By the time Lady Francis Beekman comes to confront Lorelei about the diamond tiara, Lorelei and Dorothy have moved on to Paris in their journey. Lorelei is quite surprised and apparently doesn’t know who Lady Francis Beekman is. Lorelei says, “Because it *seems* that Lady Francis Beekman is the wife of the gentleman called Sir Francis Beekman who was the admirer of mine in London who *seemed* to admire me so much that he asked me if he could make me a present of a diamond tiara” (*Blondes* 57; emphasis mine). Of course, the reader knows all the energy Lorelei invested into getting Piggie to buy her the diamond tiara. Therefore, this “seems” to be a way for Lorelei to negate the work she devoted to the situation. It doesn’t stop there either. The passage and novel is riddled with “seems” in Lorelei’s efforts to keep readers in a state of ambiguity. She says, “So it *seemed* as if his wife must have heard about it [the gift of the tiara], and it really *seemed* as if she must have come clear over from London about it” (*Blondes* 57; emphasis mine). Clearly this is all just one big misunderstanding according to Lorelei. Of course, Lorelei refuses to part with the tiara and Lady Francis Beekman resorts to using solicitors to deal with the situation. The ambiguity in Lorelei’s use of “seem” provides opportunities for her; it helps her

portray herself as innocent. Her language “does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible” (Cixous 426). Lorelei works outside the constraints of what language is and does. She uses ambiguity as well as passivity to solidify what people think is her identity.

Lorelei uses passive language to extend the identity of the “dumb blonde”; the language reads as though things just happen and Lorelei is not responsible for them. The best example of this is in how she recounts the story of shooting her old boss, Mr. Jennings. Mr. Jennings, a lawyer, hand-picked Lorelei to be his stenographer though she had only been in the program a week. After working for him for roughly a year, Lorelei learns he “was not the kind of gentleman a girl is safe with” and girls who were “not very nice” paid visits to his apartment (*Blondes* 24). While she does not explicitly state what happens, the reader can infer that Mr. Jennings was a sexual predator who picked Lorelei more for her looks than for her stenographer skills as her coursework was unfinished and he looked over the girls in the program before choosing. Furthermore, Lorelei uses “not nice” to infer that the women who visited Mr. Jennings were likely in a sexual relationship with him which is why they were “not nice.” When Lorelei finds out that Mr. Jennings is having an affair, she recounts that she “had quite a bad case of hysterics and my mind was really a blank and when I came out of it, it seems that I had a revolver in my hand and it seems that the revolver had shot Mr. Jennings” (*Blondes* 24). This passage shows the passive language Lorelei employs for her identity. Lorelei herself didn’t shoot Mr. Jennings, the gun did. In addition to Lorelei’s lack of agency in the passage above, she also subtly convinces the jury that shooting Mr. Jennings was no fault of hers. Her use of “case of hysterics” sells the lack of agency she demonstrates and hearkens back to a time where hysteria²² was a medical

²² Yet another type of female sentimentality (ill health/frail psychology) that keeps women in binaries.

condition. Though the passage of time between the prime of medically diagnosed hysteria and the 1920s is vast, the language choice cannot be overlooked. Hysteria was a medical and psychological diagnosis in its prime. If Lorelei does not exist within patriarchal constructs, “Froyd,” cannot understand her. Even though Lorelei does not exist within the system, she does not hesitate to take advantage of the jury’s patriarchal mind set. She knows they will sentimentalize her so she plays that hand. She does this without perpetuating sentimental, patriarchal, binary constructions of women. Lorelei uses medical terminology to drive her point home; she uses the word “case,” a term often used in reference to a disease or illness. How can a woman who clearly suffers from an illness such as a case of hysteria be found guilty? This event is referenced in other places throughout the novel with Lorelei utilizing equally passive language to distance herself from the act. She didn’t shoot Mr. Jennings, “Mr. Jennings became shot” (*Blondes* 108) or “the bullet *only* went in Mr. Jennings lung and came right out again” (*Blondes* 92; emphasis mine). The way Lorelei paints it, she didn’t do a thing and really the magnitude of the event is dramatized. The bullet came right out; no big deal. Through her passive language, Lorelei plays on societal expectations that women are weak in order to obtain a “not guilty” verdict for the court case. Lorelei’s utilizes the “dumb blonde” persona to succeed in court and crafts her diary so nothing in it can adversely impact her.

Lorelei’s awareness of others consideration of her reputation is why she is purposeful in the way she phrases goodbyes and makes her cognizant of the content in her diary. Like her life, Lorelei’s diary keeps her options open. For example, rather than cutting off ties with paramours – Lorelei keeps them open. Rather than breaking off a relationship before leaving for Europe, Lorelei simply says, “I have to go to Europe now but I will see him later perhaps” (*Blondes* 17). Additionally, three days after Lorelei received the diamond tiara as she is on her way to Paris.

She reflects that, “So Piggy does not know that we have gone but I sent him a letter and told him I would see him some time again some time” (*Blondes* 50). Each of these instances are crafted in such a way that it seems that they were out of Lorelei’s control or she’ll see them soon, not that she made the choice to go. Whoever reads her diary will still think of Lorelei in a positive, non-sentimental way; therefore, her sex power will still be a viable weapon of choice as she navigates patriarchal society. This is the way Lorelei crafts not only her identity, but also her diary. She knows a girl must keep her options open and knows her reputation is the currency upon which her future rests. Rather than limiting her effect, the diary creates and extends the impression of the “dumb blonde” persona through the language Lorelei uses. This awareness of reputation extends to the content included (and excluded) in her diary.

Lorelei carefully considers what content to include and exclude in her diary. For *The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady*, the content is quite respectable. There is not one utterance of sex in the pages.²³ Lorelei purposefully writes this way because sex is usually what creates sentimental binaries. If a woman engages in sex, she is monstrous; if she is pure she is angelic. Lorelei keeps the reader in the dark, so to speak, so Lorelei cannot be placed into those binaries. She refuses to write herself within even a hint of those sentimental binaries because she means to break them open; she means to redefine what it means to be female. The closest Lorelei comes to talking about sex is when she talks about Mr. Eisman educating her. She says, “So of course when a gentleman is interested in educating a girl, he likes to stay and talk about the topics of the day until quite late, so I am quite fatigued the next day...” (*Blondes* 2). The way

²³ Anita Loos said about Lorelei “So refined was she that she completely overlooked the basic fact of procreation and, like the true Christian Scientist she was, Lorelei pretended it didn’t exist. There isn’t a single line in her story that couldn’t be read aloud in a kindergarten” (*Girl* 270).

Lorelei constructs this utilizes ambiguity and the reader cannot definitively say *why* she is tired. Readers can conjecture, but they cannot find evidence of any culturally perceived wrong doings on Lorelei's part. Lorelei refuses to clarify content in the diary so the reader will not, cannot understand her through sentiment.

Lorelei knows the societal importance of reputation²⁴ and knows that society understands reputation through sentiment. This is why she constructs her diary without explicitness; she leaves the reader frustrated by utilizing ambiguity in the content within her diary. Lorelei knows how to play the game so to speak, but that doesn't mean she plays by societal rules. When she recounts the story of shooting Mr. Jennings, she explains that she went to visit Jennings and ". . . found a girl there who really was famous all over Little Rock *for not being nice*" (*Blondes* 24; emphasis mine). Rather than articulating what made this girl "not nice," Lorelei leaves it ambiguous so the reader doesn't associate that type of knowledge with Lorelei. Lorelei has always demonstrated an awareness of her reader; an awareness for the potential of someone reading her diary. While Lorelei refuses to be constructed in terms of a binary, she knows patriarchal society limits women by framing them through sentiment. She knows that her reader likely works within that understanding. In order to not be constructed this way, Lorelei leaves things ambiguous. She doesn't explain what made the girl "not nice" because that would demonstrate a knowingness regarding sex which as stated above invokes sentimental limitations. Lorelei must walk a tightrope of knowing societal binaries but not invoking a binary. In further recounting the tale, Lorelei talks about her experience with the district attorney who called her names. Lorelei demonstrates awareness of the societal important of reputations so much that she

²⁴ Just the word reputation (for women) invokes a binary construction.

doesn't say *what* names the district attorney called her as that has the potential to connect her to a binary. Instead, she says, "I mean a gentleman never pays for those things but a girl always pays" (*Blondes* 32). A gentleman never pays for slurs against his character because he is not framed through sentiment, but a woman is. Lorelei appears to work within the constraints of societal construction, but in reality she works to explode it.

Lorelei demonstrates forward thinking and a knowingness that reputation is a tool that can be used for or against her in climbing a social ladder. When Dorothy is assigned the task of getting Henry Spoffard to end his engagement to Lorelei (since that would look better and do less damage to her reputation), Lorelei tells her to, ". . . go as far as she liked, so long as she did not insinuate anything against my character, because the more spotless my character seems to be, the better things might turn out later" (*Blondes* 123). Lorelei is aware of how her "reputation" can impact her societal reach. She knows the rules of the game, but she's playing with a different set of cards, and the "dumb blonde" is the Ace up her sleeve. Lorelei cultivates the "dumb blonde" persona in order to utilize her sex power. Because society constantly sentimentalizes women and underestimates that the "dumb blonde," Lorelei can succeed. Superficial analysis of the way Lorelei economically uses men to succeed and her passivity in language and action read as internalized sexism, but closer analysis demonstrates that she uses these things to succeed. What then can be said of the way she polices her friend Dorothy's femininity?

3.1.1. "...because it might make Dorothy get some ambitions": Lorelei Critiques

Dorothy

While it would be easy to argue that Lorelei's policing of Dorothy's femininity demonstrates her internalization of sexist ideology, I argue that Lorelei's policing of Dorothy's

femininity demonstrates a desire to educate Dorothy on how to succeed in a patriarchal, capitalistic society –unburdened by sentiment. Lorelei’s “policing” of Dorothy differs from Cixous’ concept of sex cop style policing; it is more an advantageous critiquing that serves as an eye toward productive education for Dorothy. This attitude is not focused solely on Dorothy either. Earlier I referenced the way Lorelei worked to help bring Piggie to gift giving which helps women at large²⁵ navigate patriarchal society. Lorelei already knows how to “play the game” so to speak. She knows that if she acts a certain way and gets signifiers of cultural capital that she can climb the social ladder. However, Dorothy doesn’t have this knowledge; moreover, Dorothy doesn’t seem to care about cultivating it (fig. 6).

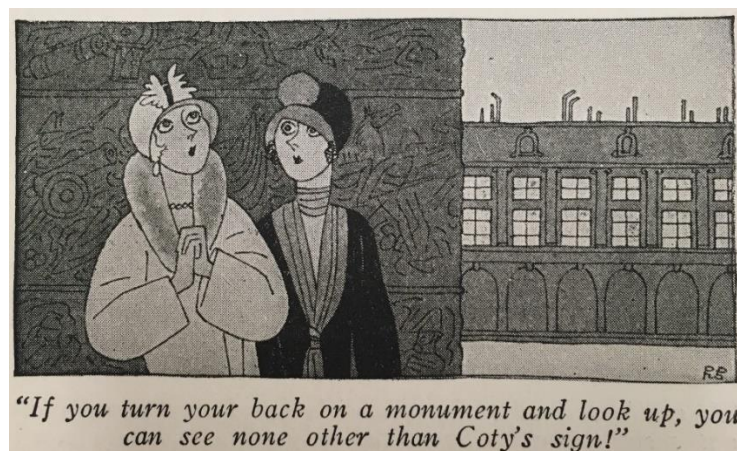


Fig. 6. A picture from the 1925 edition of *Blondes* shows Lorelei (L) and Dorothy (R) stand outside Coty, a perfumery. Dorothy is unimpressed.

Lorelei aims to help Dorothy and expresses the importance of female friendship when she says, “. . . I really think that there is nothing so wonderful as two girls when they stand up for each other and help each other a lot” (*Blondes* 58). Lorelei is helping Dorothy, but also standing up for Dorothy in a patriarchal, capitalistic system that diminishes women’s worth. Lorelei

²⁵ Who are in likely similar situations (financially and socially) as Lorelei.

attempts to educate Dorothy and provides chances for her to practice this navigation by conning men who attempt to con Lorelei out of the diamond tiara. Lorelei believes this will allow Dorothy to “get some ambitions” (*Blondes* 70). By that, Lorelei references the fact that Dorothy has not expressed interest in navigating patriarchal, capitalistic society by dating men who can help her rise in social standing either by the caliber of their standing or in the signifiers of that status, i.e. jewels. Dorothy is full of sentiment, and that sentiment will get her nowhere in a society that attempts to diminish women into a binary limitation. Lorelei wants to bring Dorothy to the knowledge of how to navigate this problematic construction of women; she wants to help her understand that sentimentality will not lead to success. In fact, sentimentality is what traps and limits women. Lorelei actively attempts to teach Dorothy that if women are to succeed, they must reject sentiment and reject binaries. They must create themselves in the aftermath of exploding the “dumb blonde” and the gold digger identities. It is time to blow the binary to bits, and lack of sentiment is the dynamite. Lorelei demonstrates her desire to educate Dorothy through critique of Dorothy’s choice in partner and expressing concern over Dorothy’s lack of refinement.

Dorothy is the foil to Lorelei in *Blondes* in that Dorothy’s choices in men and actions are counter to Lorelei’s. This may appear that Dorothy attempts to navigate a new space for herself in terms of the angel or monster categories, however, Dorothy fails to utilize that space to further her own agency and therefore fails in truly rejecting the binaries or the angel or monster by allowing herself to remain powerless. In contrast to Lorelei, Dorothy is ruled by sentiment. Lorelei is consistent throughout the novel in her disapproval of Dorothy’s partners. Throughout the novel, Dorothy chooses men who, according to Lorelei, do nothing for Dorothy. The men she chooses to spend her time with in the novel include a tennis player, an English ballroom dancer,

and a German named Rudolf. Lorelei notes that “Dorothy really does not care about her mind and I always scold her because she does nothing but waste her time by going around with gentlemen who *do not have anything*” (*Blondes* 19; emphasis mine). The tennis player, the ballroom dancer, and the German are not the type of men that can help Dorothy rise in status because they are not rich, thus, they cannot gift her signifiers of cultural capital, and they cannot help her succeed. When Dorothy and Lorelei quarrel over Dorothy’s partner, Gerald, the ballroom dancer, Dorothy explains that Gerald is a gentleman as evidenced by the crest on the letter he wrote her; however, Lorelei isn’t swayed and tells her to “try and eat it” implying that Gerald has no money and cannot help Dorothy rise in station (*Blondes* 46). Lorelei is proven correct in her assessment of Gerald when he only gifts Dorothy a bangle when they part (*Blondes* 50). According to Lorelei, a bangle is a bracelet “which is only gold and does not have any stones in it which American girls would really give to their maid” (*Blondes* 50). It serves no cultural capital and it only signifies that you don’t belong to the upper class.

The secondary reason Lorelei disapproves of Dorothy’s partners is because Dorothy is emotionally invested in them. Lorelei explains that “Dorothy is always getting to really like somebody and she will never learn how to act” (*Blondes* 42). Dorothy will not be able to use sex power with these men because she cares for them. Her sentiment is an obstacle in her navigation to a desirable outcome (jewels). As Bauer says, “A woman’s power, then, comes from purchasing and exchange, not from reciprocal intimacy. But sex expression is also about controlling a man’s feelings...” (Bauer 115). By removing the power feelings, sentiment, and real intimacy²⁶ have over her, by eschewing intimacy and “displacing sentimentality” (Bauer 28),

²⁶ Manufactured intimacy is fine.

Dorothy has a better chance of controlling a man's feelings and potentially cultivating a more desirable outcome. As is, Dorothy lacks the emotional distance to truly use sex power with these men which means she will be unable to benefit financially or socially from these relationships. Lorelei seems to know the various kinds of inevitable, overly sentimental ends relationships like these can come to if Dorothy (or women at large) is too romantically invested and she seeks to educate Dorothy on how to evade that end. Lorelei chooses men whom she is uninterested in sexually or emotionally because for her it is about control. If she is interested in her partner, she is unable to use the "dumb blonde" persona as sex power. Coslovi explains in her article "Why Blondes Need Manners? 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' and the Uses of Etiquette" that "Control, Lorelei knows, is the essence of a lady, and the reason for such control is that it protects and secures the material basis of the good life" (Coslovi 115). When Dorothy shows a disregard for this control and for the rules society abides by, she paves her own path outside of the potential for sex power.

Much like policing Dorothy's choice in men, Lorelei polices Dorothy's femininity through an attention to refinement and etiquette. Societal rules often reflect the time and its concerns regarding women. These rules are often used to reproduce a specific type of acceptable woman, however, these rules can also be used to climb the social ladder. Coslovi says:

Lorelei is determined to get what she desires, and not being troubled by deeper concerns, she studies the glittering surface of the best society and imitates it as part of a game which, if played successfully, may reward her with the rich prize of an advantageous marriage. (Coslovi 117)

Lorelei uses etiquette rules to her advantage, but Dorothy is unconcerned with said rules.

Throughout the whole novel, Lorelei constantly worries about how "unrefined" Dorothy is.

Though this is partly related to the effect this has on Lorelei's chances in society, it also reflects Lorelei's desire to educate Dorothy on navigating patriarchal society to her benefit using sex power and cultural capital. Lorelei is worried about Dorothy flouting societal rules because they can be used to further Dorothy's reach and could result in a better societal position or marriage. It is as Bourdieu explains, "The social sense is guided by the system of mutually reinforcing and infinitely redundant signs of which each body is the bearer –clothing, pronunciation, bearing, posture, manners – ...each of which only takes on its meaning and value within the system of its class variations" (Bourdieu 241). The "redundant signs" Lorelei attempts to get Dorothy to learn or embrace are ways to navigate to a higher class; they are ways to succeed by Lorelei's definition of success.



Fig. 7. From the 1925 edition of *Blondes*, Lorelei and Dorothy enjoy Paris.

When Dorothy uses slang²⁷, she gives away that she is not part of an upper class and will be unable to navigate to that class. Lorelei's concern often manifests in policing Dorothy's slang or Dorothy's actions. Lorelei explains that, "[Dorothy] really gives gentlemen a bad impression as she talks a lot of slang" (*Blondes* 21). Lorelei knows that a woman's reputation is the most important thing she has; therefore, it is clear why she worries over Dorothy's refusal to conform to societal expectations of the way a woman should speak and act. Lorelei is aware of the power dynamics that affect her success. She says, "... I always seem to think that when a girl really enjoys being with a gentleman, it puts her to quite a disadvantage and no real good can come of it" (*Blondes* 42). Lorelei specifically picks men that do not pose the potential for emotional engagement because her "dumb blonde" persona will not be as effective if she is emotionally invested. Her relationships must remain a staged performance which is why she utilizes etiquette rules, cultural beliefs regarding women's power, and signifiers of cultural capital to succeed and why she worries over Dorothy's refusal to do the same. Dorothy's choice to use slang could adversely affect her reputation and her refusal to follow societal dictates in her actions limits the range of people she could use to rise in society. The best example of Dorothy's refusal to follow societal dictates is when she tells Lorelei to "hold this [her fan] while I slip a new page into English histry [SIC]" before dancing with the Prince of Wales and teaching him slang words (*Blondes* 43). Both Dorothy's language and actions demonstrate her rejection of proper etiquette, and every time Dorothy transgresses, Lorelei is there to police her behavior, not because Lorelei has internalized sexist ideology, but rather because she wants to educate Dorothy on how to use that ideology to her advantage through sex power. In addition to policing Dorothy's behavior and

²⁷ Use of slang is different from *écriture féminine*; slang language play is more often a sign of class, not gender.

romantic partners, Lorelei also allows Dorothy chances to learn how to navigate patriarchal society.

While Dorothy hasn't embraced patriarchal society per se, she doesn't actively resist or dismantle patriarchal constructs like Lorelei. Dorothy isn't a writer the way Lorelei is²⁸ so the reader only gets to experience and understand Dorothy through Lorelei. Part of resisting patriarchal constructs or understandings of women is women writing themselves, women writing what it means to be women (Cixous 418). Since Dorothy doesn't do that, the reader can't know the degree to which she embraces or resists patriarchal constructions. Instead, the reader must analyze Lorelei's actions, Lorelei's words. In an effort to bring Dorothy to knowledge of how to navigate patriarchal society, Lorelei pushes Dorothy to practice conning the con men sent to retrieve the diamond tiara. Dorothy fails to create agency for herself in that because she does not write, she is imprisoned and defined within a patriarchal system. Her understanding of cultural signifiers demonstrates this. She understands a letter written by Gerald that has a crest on it as indicative of Gerald's status of gentleman, a member of the upper class. In truth, Gerald is unemployed. Lorelei wants Dorothy to see that even some "signs of class" require more active critical reading work. A crest isn't enough if it can't sustain you. A crest or a title cannot help women rise in status; however, \$3000 dollars²⁹ is enough to buy a jewel that can do so. More importantly, by taking part in this con, Dorothy takes part in standing up for Lorelei in a patriarchal system that works to limit women and steal their agency. This could serve to bring Dorothy to the knowledge of not only how patriarchal society works to limit women, but also how to navigate a system that works against you.

²⁸ Even Dorothy's story, *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* is authored by Lorelei.

²⁹ The amount of total money she will get from the con men for stealing the tiara.

CHAPTER 4. “AND SO, WHILE EVERYBODY IS SO HAPPY, I REALLY THINK IT IS A GOOD TIME TO FINISH...”: A CONCLUSION

Women's lives, both real and literary, are sentimentalized. Literary tropes anchor women, weigh them down, and overwrite them into stereotype and limitation. Through sentiment, women are constructed in a binary that limits them. Female characters are either the angel that must be protected or the monster that must be scorned; women are told to worry over their reputation, a concept that diminishes them and places an arbitrary judgement on a complex individual. So, how does one challenge this system that diminishes and belittles women and succeed without perpetuating this system? How does one challenge this system as a female writer, working as a writer, and writing in a “woman’s” magazine? Anita Loos was such a woman – working, writing, and challenging the system in subversive ways through her character Lorelei Lee in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

At the time that *Blondes* was published in 1925, America was flooded with commercial culture. With this excess of new media came new avenues for advertising and reinforcing categories of culture. There was culture for the elite, “high” culture, or culture for the masses, “low” culture. However, there was also an aspirational middle ground where imitation products mimicked the lifestyle of the elite while being affordable for the masses. Due to factors such as her work in Hollywood as a screenwriter, Loos’ work was seen as “low” culture and therefore not considered literary elite. Not only did Loos as an author have to navigate gendered expectations based on sentimental constructions of women, but she had to navigate the cultural capital waters of “high” and “low” culture through aspirational middle ground venues such as *Harper’s Bazar*. Loos’ value as an author has been overlooked in favor of other authors like Fitzgerald or, in looking at female writers producing similar works of the time, Dorothy Parker.

While not considered literary, Loos still managed to have a prolific and successful career with the novelization of *Blondes*, going through “twenty printings in a matter of months” (Beauchamp and Mary Anita Loos 45). Fitzgerald and Loos both published works in magazines, both wrote novels depicting the decadence of the 1920s (even published the same year), both wrote screenplays³⁰, and yet it is Fitzgerald who is lauded as the highbrow literary mind.

Dorothy Parker wrote a story similar to Loos’ *Blondes* in 1929 titled “Big Blonde” detailing the life of Hazel, a reformed flapper. Parker’s story was published in *The Bookman*, a literary journal, and won the O’Henry prize in 1929 (Pettit 53). Comparing the two authors and works, Parker has a more extensive degree of dedicated scholarship and “Big Blonde” was taken more seriously, as evidenced by the prize and placement of her story³¹. Parker’s story was published in a literary magazine, not a fashion magazine suggesting literary authority. The names often remembered from the roaring twenties are Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway, Wharton, or Parker, but there are other authors who are just as noteworthy, such as Anita Loos who produced complex work at the same time. Loos’ first edition of *Blondes* was a commercial success, and yet, she has been largely overlooked as worthy of critical attention. Her value as an author has been as misunderstood as her character, Lorelei. Most scholarship further fixes Lorelei within the same sentimental binary limitation that Loos was understood in; however, the way Loos wrote Lorelei breaks the binary.

Prominent scholarship on Loos’ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* dismisses Lorelei’s agency by reading her within the binary of the “dumb blonde” or the gold digger. To reiterate, these

³⁰ At one point Loos was called in to doctor a screen play for *Red Headed Woman* when, as Irving Thalberg, production chief, said, “Scott tried to turn the silly book into a tone poem” (“Talkies” 34).

³¹ Perhaps Parker’s story succeeded in literary circles where Loos’ did not as Parker’s character aligned more with traditional gender expectations.

identities are constructed in the service of male privilege and cannot accurately represent the complexities inherent in being a social, economic being during a cultural time period with its own rules and politics. Diminishing Lorelei to a limited interpretation of dumb blonde, gold digger, or even flapper does a disservice to her character and to women's lived experiences of the 1920s. Women of the 1920s had to navigate gender expectations, financial limitations, and societal dictates that worked against their success. Analyzing Lorelei within the confines of this binary reinforces patriarchal underpinnings of what it means to be a woman and obscures her (and women's) innate complexity in *Blondes*. Loos did not write a story about a woman worrying over her reputation; she wrote a story of a woman excavating herself out of the binary by writing her own story. *Blondes* is not a story about a dumb blonde, flapper figure who "fate keeps on happening" to so that she ends up married to a wealthy man. It is the story of how Lorelei Lee successfully navigates patriarchal society by positioning and writing herself as a dumb blonde without being a dumb blonde. Loos wrote the story of a woman who knew the cultural signifiers of class and refinement and used that knowledge to climb the social ladder. Lorelei is savvy to patriarchal, capitalistic gender expectations; she can appear to be the dumb blonde without perpetuating the system that diminishes and limits women. By rejecting sentiment, Lorelei breaks the binary and rejects the constructs of identity that serve men and diminish women. She positions herself as the dumb blonde while simultaneously dismantling the constructed identity. She knows the rules of society, culture, and capital, and uses it to succeed. As Bourdieu states:

Knowing that 'manner' is a symbolic manifestation whose meaning and value depend as much on the perceivers as on the producer, one can see how it is that the manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of

excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of ‘class’ and so the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction. (Bourdieu 66)

Lorelei knows the rules that surround refinement and knows how to appear as the dumb blonde; Lorelei uses that knowledge as a cultural, social weapon in navigating a system that attempts to diminish her value as author and woman.

Analyzing Lorelei (and Dorothy) through sex power and the necessary removal of sentiment drives for a broader understanding of feminist issues within the era and illuminates the complex agency of each character. Revisiting Lorelei’s personification through a feminist lens offers an alternative to the gap in the close reading of Lorelei left by popular scholarship on the novel. Lorelei is not a “dumb blonde” or a gold digger and therefore can exist in a liminal space where she artificially fashions herself within that binary – laughing at those who attempt to reduce her to sentimental interpretation. By writing [creating] herself and resisting sentiment, Lorelei breaks out of the system. She doesn’t exist within the patriarchal construct of what it means to be a woman because she does not write herself as a female who needs protection/pity or as a monstrous woman who must be scorned. She does not write within the patriarchal construct of language, she creates her own and thus creates herself. She is more powerful and more knowing because she writes with room for potential rather than limitation.

Because scholarship attempts to read female characters and authors through a patriarchal, sentimental, binary construction, we, as scholars, must continuously excavate female texts and authors out of the confines of history. We must excavate Loos and Lorelei out of literary history to understand why Anita Loos’ text was diminished to “female fiction” and why Lorelei is only read within the confines of the dumb blonde/gold digger binary. We must seek out, investigate, and celebrate female characters who make us uncomfortable. We must investigate and celebrate

female authors who write female authors writing a different type of “language.” Patriarchal constructions of women, language, and literature dominate women’s real and literary lives. When women create themselves, they must push back against patriarchal limitations of women, language, and literature. They must write themselves, and we, as scholars, must not apply a sentimental, binary on them. Give them room to (like Loos and Lorelei did) “...shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the ‘truth’ with laughter” (Cixous 425). We must allow women the potential to be. It is not a matter of whether a woman is an angel or a monster; it’s what can she be?

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