

City University of New York
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Fashion in Film Assignment

Bringing Up Baby

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ARTH1204 - 20th Century Dress & Culture

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30 Sept 2020



Released in 1938, *Bringing Up Baby* follows zoologist David Huxley (Cary Grant) as he attempts to finish his dinosaur skeleton at his local New York museum. He is due to marry his assistant Alice Swallow and needs a donation of \$1million to complete his project at the museum from society matron Mrs. Random. Right before the day he is set to wed his fiancée, Huxley meets Mrs. Random's enthusiastic niece, Susan Vance (Katherine Hepburn), who owns a pet leopard (Baby) and a hyperactive dog (George) that, of course, loves bones. As their relationship progresses, David and Susan go on multiple adventures in hopes of finding her escaped but beloved pet leopard from Brazil as well as the intercostal clavicle bone that George has grown a liking to. The film tells the tale of the adventurous yet budding relationship between the two.

The film's many outfits and their intended effect varies by scene and plot outline, the male cadence of the 40's time period was very much evident in their fedoras, bowlers, and a variety of zoot suits and single/double breasted suits that tailored the male protagonist, secondary characters and supporting roles. This common theme was less eloquent in comparison to the female protagonist's wardrobe which included a variety of distinctive dresses, robes, and gowns.

This scene in particular is a great showcase of the type of unique outfits that were presented in the film, a silk robe with a light veil which was being used as a night out outfit. This outfit showcases a glamorous and elegant style and the potential reason for the curation of this garment was for Susan to gather David's attention at the bar, Susan's intention in the film was to help David convince the matron investor which happened to be her Aunt in investing into his museum but also make

David fall in love with him. The loose silk robe was meant to look sexually appealing and attempt to break David's serious demeanor about his work. David's clumsy



nature also helped Susan get closer to him because a new problem caused by this clumsiness had consequently pulled Susan towards the problem in an attempt to help resolve it but just lead to a never ending cycle of conflict creation. The veil piece can be perceived as an attempt to foreshadow the plot as veils are worn at weddings, the outfit was supposed to give the viewer insight into the eventual outcome of our two main character's alignment. The importance of this loose robe lies in its role in the plot of the movie which was to rip and start the beginning of Susan and David's adventures.

This next outfit's highlight is the long transparent dress which Susan was wearing as she was on the phone with David trying to convince him of coming over to her apartment. David,



still locked in on his potential meeting with the investor matron's lawyer, had declined so she decided to stage a distress call and say the leopard attacked her.

This damsel-in-distress act had attracted David to her apartment and

started the cycle of eventual misadventures which bind our two characters at the finality of the film. This dress helped convey and illustrate Susan's elegant as well as wealthy background, ownership of a leopard and relations to a millionaire matron also contributed to this upper echelon portrayal. This dress was ripped and attributed to the heightening of David's concern for Susan's well being once he got to her home.

She not only wears elegant and feminine styles in the movie, but also styles inspired by men's clothing. This is the scene where Aunt's dog, George, ran away with David's bones and embarrassed them. Susan's outfit contrasts with David, who was wearing a robe with the feathers, describing her bold and free character. She matched wide and high-waisted pants with a wrinkled blouse. Also, she wears hoofless loafers and hats to show a more comparable look to women of the time. This coat represents Susan's confident and adventurous character in the play, showing a new type of



woman. It has been shown well through her dress that Susan Vance was a woman from a wealthy family and lifestyle. Silky dresses and fancy decorations were enough to express it, and effectively. Her volume and see-through dress, which at first felt a little too much, seemed to fit well with her exaggerated and imposing character in the play after watching the film. The unexpected element was the scene in which David wore her robe, which seemed to have likened the case of his bones being taken away by George to a loss of his masculinity. Also, his personality and attire were so contrasted with Susan that he emphasized their opposite role, and the fashion in the movie played a big role.



The wardrobe of Susan Vance (Katherine Hepburn) throughout the movie situates itself within the time period of the late-30s and early-40s in the sense that fashion was beginning to see the reinforcement of the feminine silhouette; hemlines were long (below the knee or lower),

flowy and graceful, fabric along the torso seemed to be tighter as well. Another thing noticed in this film was that although skin was shown, it was done in a very elegant manner. Fashion remained quite modest at this time. It is also important to keep in mind that although there is enough fabric to make a dress flow with the wind, in reality, this is minimal to the previous decade. Due to World War II, just about everything had to be rationed and that of course included fabric. That is why dress had become much more simple, subdued, not as flamboyant or even decadent.

In an overall sense, *Bring Up Baby*, was breath of fresh air to watch in comparison with today's Hollywood and usually erotic trends. It was comical, emotional, and everything in between. The film's close attention to style and its likeliness to fashion trends of the time it was produced was also quite enthralling to see to anyone from style enthusiasts to fashion professionals.

