

# Dossier : La mode et les modes dans la culture anglo-américaine

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## *Special topic: Fashion/Fashions in Anglo-American Culture*

### ***“Between bloomers and a divided skirt”: Kate Chopin’s “Charlie”***

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*Cet essai aborde la question du rapport entre habillement et identité. Dans une nouvelle de Kate Chopin – « Charlie » – écrite en 1900, la protagoniste porte un vêtement qui en rappelle deux autres : l’un créé cinquante ans plus tôt, l’autre porté à son époque. Dans l’imaginaire collectif, cependant, les deux vêtements désignent la femme émancipée, c’est-à-dire la « femme dragon ».*

*Au terme de la nouvelle, l’amour et les souffrances transforment la protagoniste – décrite au départ comme un garçon manqué – en une femme mûre, dont les vêtements soulignent la complexité des rôles qu’elle a choisis (ou qu’on lui permet) d’incarner.*

In an 1898 interview, a married woman was asked to describe the emergent feminine social type, “The New Woman,” and promptly answered, “A creature who smokes and wears bloomers and rides a bicycle and hates men and votes.”<sup>1</sup> This aphoristic sentence contains: a blatant error (at the time, not many women—old or new—could vote yet, although suffragettes had been struggling to attain this right as of the middle of the century)<sup>2</sup>; a misogynous misconception (not all “new women” hated the other sex, although they had to fight against it to be accepted as equals); a petty prejudice (the “New Woman,” conceived as perilously transgressive, was often depicted as a defiant smoker); and a patent anachronism (bloomers—thus called because popularized, if not invented,<sup>3</sup> by Amelia Jenks Bloomer<sup>4</sup>—dated from 1849<sup>5</sup>

and, by the 1890's, precisely because young women had been struck by the recently started bicycle fad, had been superseded by knickerbockers and the divided skirt).<sup>6</sup> Bloomers were trousers ruffled at the waist and at the ankles like those of the Turks—thus bearing (certainly in spite of their inventor's declared intention) an exotically voluptuous touch; they were originally worn either with an ample shirt hanging half way over them or with a skirt reaching below knees. Their most significant characteristic was that of allowing for the articulation of the leg: a part of a woman's body that conventional morality forbade even to mention. Signaling a break into the mystery that, for centuries, had surrounded the female body in polite middle-class society, glimpses of legs were considered an immoral lure. In effect, somewhat visible female legs marked the beginning of an aesthetic, ethical, and political move that would eschew hypocrisy, grant women mobility and, consequently, warn that male power might be taken over.

Bloomers came into fashion when the appropriate attire for woman—emphasizing the bell body shape—consisted of ground-sweeping dresses overdecorated with ribbons, frills, furbelows, laces. They were worn with tight corsets—that hampered breathing and blood circulation—and were made heavier by multiple layers of petticoats.<sup>7</sup> If this was the prevailing dress fashion, the model of true femininity extolled “the angel in the house”<sup>8</sup>—pious, innocent, submissive, totally and joyously devoted to the well-being of husband and children, never honored for her own merits, but only for her relatedness to the family. Derided as freakish by the great majority of both male and female population, for just a few years bloomers enjoyed considerable success among the most adamant suffragists, who loathed the fashion of the day. In the northeastern as well as in the southern States, however, the impact of bloomers on people's imagination had been so strong as to be remembered with exasperation for more than four decades. Indeed, as the above quotation shows, till the very end of the century, whenever a woman trod outside the social path laid down by the patriarchal code, she would be described as a wearer of bloomers. Her synecdoche would immediately designate her as rebellious, forthright, and strongminded—in a word, as masculine.

In the 1890's the “New Woman,” the very antithesis of “the angel in the house,” was independent, outspoken, creative, a lover of outdoor activities and full of zest for the things of the world. Often from the middle/upper classes, well-read in Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, French novels and medical textbooks, she questioned traditional ideas about gender, sexuality, and morality and struggled to achieve her own artistic, intellectual, and sexual fulfillment, although she did not endorse promiscuity and her sexual liberation consisted (mostly) of frank talks about her emotional life.<sup>9</sup> Even when she was not politically active, however, the “New Woman”—a definition overcast with eschatological forebodings—wished to counter the stereotype of the mannish “Wild Woman” or, worse, of the violent “social insurgent,”<sup>10</sup> perpetrated by anti-

feminists. She tried her best, therefore, not to seem unfeminine in appearance and manner. Often she would wear dresses that, in spite of the battles fought for decades by feminists and dress reform organizations, emphasized the hour-glass figure and were still cumbersome and overdecorated. As, echoing Veblen's theory of the leisure class,<sup>11</sup> Anne Hollander summarizes, "In the second half of the nineteenth century feminine dress made strong visual demands, and the elements of conspicuous consumption had a vigorously gaudy flavor and an imposing social importance."<sup>12</sup>

In the 1890's the bicycle fad did much to promote—besides woman's mobility and freedom, new conventions of courtship, chaperonage, and travel<sup>13</sup>—also a healthier and more comfortable dress fashion. But, although the "New Woman" was a reality in the whole of the country, there were still women—especially in the South—who would praise the more conservative type of femininity. In a correspondence from New Orleans which appeared in *The Woman's Journal* in 1899 one reads, "The New Orleans woman notably differs from her sister in any other leading city of the Union [...] She is domestic, winsome, looks askant upon *bloomers*, falters before ballot privileges, and prefers to address the public, if at all, by pen rather than by platform: rather cherishes the Old than embraces the New Woman [...] nowhere is there a sweeter womanliness and nowhere dantier tastes."<sup>14</sup> And it is precisely a young girl from Louisiana—from a traditionally conservative and Catholic culture—who will address the question of womanliness in a way that ostensibly differs from the one so sanctimoniously eulogized before.

Chopin<sup>15</sup> wrote "Charlie" in 1900, but she did not succeed in publishing it, although she submitted it to two magazines (*Youth's Companion* and *Century*).<sup>16</sup> For one thing, there was the scandal aroused by her newly appeared second and last novel, *The Awakening* (1899). More specifically, the plot of this long (it is subdivided into five sections) short story is interwoven with emotionally incestuous feelings. While the implications of the bond between the protagonist and her father would be well worth dwelling upon,<sup>17</sup> I will confine myself to her style of dressing, which should help us understand the story's significance—and ending.

The seventeen-year-old Charlie is one of the seven daughters of a plantation owner—the handsome and "preposterously young-looking"<sup>18</sup> widower, Mr. Laborde. Charlie differs from all her sisters: not only is she the most devoted to her father, but rather than pursuing, like all her siblings, her private tuition in dancing, painting, and piano playing (as befits the *cursus honorum* of the girls of her social class), she prefers to go riding, fishing, shooting, and, indeed, bicycling (a new bicycle arrives for her the day the story begins). In fact, as we learn from the narrator's voice, "In many ways she filled the place of that ideal son" that her father "had always hoped for and that had never come" (644). Not by chance, her nickname, Charlie, is epicene and her given name, Charlotte, derives from Charles, whose German root, Karl, means

“man”; the suffix “otte” thus feminizes “man.” But if Charlotte means womanly man (or manly woman),<sup>19</sup> Chopin strikes at the very core of the diatribe over the “New Woman” that broke out at the end of the century, when the great fear was that of a gender and sex roles reversal.<sup>20</sup>

When Charlie bursts into the scene of the story with her dark hair cut short (with no bang, however),<sup>21</sup> mounting her black horse and perspiring, she wears “a costume of her own devising, something between bloomers and a divided skirt which she called her ‘trouserlets.’ Canvas leggings, dusty boots and a single spur completed her costume.” (639) If her love for her father turns Charlie into a bourgeois Iphigenia, her dress makes her a Louisiana Artemis.

Curiously, Charlie is an original designer or, better, combiner.<sup>22</sup> Her attire—“of her own devising”—is somewhere “between” that of the suffragette going back four decades before<sup>23</sup> and that of her emancipated contemporary, the “New Woman.” Its in-betweenness—its being neither...nor, but also both...and—makes it look old-fashioned (Charlie, who lives in the country, is not up-to-date fashionwise) as well as a bit awkward (she is more interested in practicality than in aesthetic form). Besides, her single spur tells—among other things—of her disregard for *womanly* prettiness and tidiness. This costume (and the word “costume”<sup>24</sup> also indicates a dress used at performances)<sup>25</sup> is iconically not easy to visualize, because sketched out in its essential and imprecise outline (“something between”). Yet Charlie’s attire bespeaks her inventiveness, especially when compared with her sisters’ altogether conventional dresses: the eldest and beautiful Julia wears, first, “a soft white gown” (638) and, then, “a soft blue ‘jaconette,’” (651) while three of her younger siblings wear “ginghams” (638 and 653). Thus to focus attention on the cut of Charlie’s costume, contrary to the information we are given about her sisters’ dresses, we do not know either its color or its fabric. Furthermore, it is only the lower part of her attire which is mentioned: that is, the part that, while modestly covering her pelvis, cannot but emphasize her legs, therefore, her mobility and, metaphorically, her independence. Finally, the mention of the “divided skirt,” while obliquely referring to the female sex, may also point to the structural discontinuity<sup>26</sup> and hybrid nature of this garment: another “in-between” the regular female skirt and regular male trousers. As for leggings and boots, they were accessories that typically complemented this dress style, replacing customary long skirts and too light and, therefore, unhygienic slippers or high-topped buttoned (or laced) shoes. Furthermore, since we soon discover that Charlie writes effective poems<sup>27</sup> and is thus a master of the pen—a phallic-generative instrument *par excellence*—we are not surprised that, after creating her costume, she invents a new name for it (“trouserlets”). This time, the suffix, “lets,” is employed to reduce the size of the masculine garment which “trouserlets” resemble. But if denotatively the suffix points to a criterion of measure, connotatively it introduces—as Roland Barthes has shown<sup>28</sup>—an aura of economy (these “trouserlets” are presumably

home-made and, therefore, inexpensive), of simplicity (they are composite, but certainly not elaborate), of endearment (the reader is encouraged to look at them sympathetically), and even of seduction (as coquettish). And all of this in a costume that, according to its contemporaries' aesthetic, ethical, and social parameters, supposedly denied femininity.

The protagonist's nickname, her name, her behaviour, and her style of dress would seem to point to an androgynous character: traditionally, affectionately, but nonetheless disparagingly, called the tomboy,<sup>29</sup> who, from the second half of the century—and especially, after the extraordinary success of *Little Women's* heroine, Jo March—had often been an accepted and even coveted character in girls' literature. Dynamic, vigorous, and creative, tomboys were, however, generally presented in an age when "walking, running, climbing, battling, and tumbling are as normal female as they are male activities,"<sup>30</sup> that is, on the verge of puberty (Jo March is fourteen). At seventeen, Charlie is too old to be simply a tomboy. The need to portray her at that age must thus lie elsewhere; for instance, in allowing for the social metamorphosis which is in store for her and in giving her the opportunity to show that dress is a *language* that displays its wearer's ideas about and to the world, while revealing his/her affiliation or resistance to the society that nurtures him/her.

In the fourth section of the story, after Charlie becomes secretly infatuated with a young man, Firman Walton, she undergoes a "revolution" (656). In an attempt to attract and please him, she buys herself a new wardrobe and wears gowns which are so *à la mode* as to be grotesque, "She wanted lace and embroideries upon her garments; and she longed to bedeck herself with ribbons and *passementeries* which the shops displayed in such tempting array" (656). Her older sister, Julia, and her aunt Clementine, who assist her, are appalled by her "vulgar instincts," and, typically, come to the conclusion that "she's a little out of her senses" (657).<sup>31</sup> Charlie even resorts to curling irons to comb her short hair, with the only result, however, of giving her head the look of "a prize chrysanthemum" (657). The author's satiric reductionism emphasizes Charlie's masquerade<sup>32</sup>: in order to resemble (or outshine) all other women, she adopts a *language* of dress she does not know and thus disguises her true self behind the caricature of what a young woman should look like. As Georg Simmel argued, in her new gowns, she is conditioned by the law of their form,<sup>33</sup> but because they are excessive, she is reduced to a sort of transvestite or, better, given her biological sex, of homeovestite.<sup>34</sup> Not by chance, the narrator at this point calls Charlie—the generous, loyal, wholesome, and sporting girl—"young thing" (656) and "little thing" (658): turned into a submissive (she is now obedient and sweet) and gaudy maiden, she has become a pathetic and helpless non-person.

Charlie's model of femininity is Julia, who is fair, calm, amenable and wears gowns which are "quite too young-ladified; they touched the ground, often with a graceful sweep" (653). Julia also adopts a hairdo which winds her

long light-brown braid into a coil “as large as a dessert plate” (649)—the metaphor tellingly emphasizes Julia’s domestic qualities. Walton—whose Christian name, Firman, signifies his “firm” observance of tradition and the social code—quite expectedly falls in love with Julia.

In the fifth and last section of the story, upon hearing of their engagement, Charlie, in consternation and anger (a *masculine* trait she had previously manifested only when dressed like a tomboy), puts on again her “trouserlets, boots and leggings,” mounts her black horse,<sup>35</sup> and gallops “madly away” (666)—and out of her infatuation. Just a few months have gone by, but the return to her former garments would only be a sign of regression if, simultaneously, she would not stop being the “little child,” (644) the “little girl,” (667) or, at the most, the “little woman,” (668) her father had consciously considered her to be. Charlie matures both into a “woman” (667)—after riding away, she returns home and tells her father, “I saw the new moon” (667)<sup>36</sup>—and into the “mistress” of her father’s plantation (669). In fact, because he lost his right arm in a mill accident, Charlie demands and obtains to substitute him in the government of the property: a male role that will be rightly marked *by her costume*. At the same time, however, since she nurses her maimed father and acts as mother to her five younger sisters, *in spite of her costume*—which does not actually disguise her as a man—she fulfills the recognized feminine roles: nurse, and, vicariously, wife and mother. No longer the warm, but uncouth tomboy, and certainly no longer the ludicrously dressed up female, she commands respect *in her costume*, that simultaneously presents “both genders (with neither predominating),” while juxtaposing her femininity “with the dress, mannerisms, and societal position of a man.”<sup>37</sup>

While in the first three sections of the story Charlie/Artemis is only a huntress,<sup>38</sup> now she is both a huntress and, appropriately, the guardian goddess of women and of the family. Charlie resembles the virginal Artemis also because she eludes the marriage proposal made by her old-time suitor, Gus Bradley. Similar to Professor Bhaer—Jo March’s husband—Gus is both elderly looking—in spite of his youth—and *feminine* in his shyness and meekness. He seems indeed to be the kind of feminized man most people were haunted by<sup>39</sup> at the end of the century. As it happens, in this narrative all men bear castration signs: Mr. Laborde, who loves his daughters tenderly and looks after them with affection and care, loses his right arm; when Firman Walton first arrives at the plantation, he is shot by mistake in his arm by Charlie<sup>40</sup>; and Gus Bradley, the prospective bridegroom, may be impotently waiting for Charlie to marry him for ever. Contrary to Walton’s preferred standards of femininity, Gus never objected to Charlie’s style of dressing—indeed, when he first saw her in frills and furbelows, “He was so flustered [...] he could scarcely articulate” (655). Unconventionally, Gus likes what Charlie is and the way (s)he looks. Gus then seems the right match for this “New

Woman," or better, for this "New Girl."<sup>41</sup> In a real sense Gus incarnates the "New [feminized?] Man," who unselfishly offers to help Charlie and declares, "I'm always ready to lend a hand"(668). In spite of his untainted devotion, however, Charlie defers his marriage proposal to an indefinite future. Her newly achieved position of command and power clearly suits her well. She evidently enjoys the "provisional free space" granted by the "separate culture" which, during the years bridging the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, allowed a girl some freedom "between 'child at home' and the assumption of wholly adult responsibilities."<sup>42</sup> In other words, Charlie does not want to stop being a daughter just to turn immediately into a wife. She cherishes her in-between state as she is perfectly comfortable in her self-devised *in-between* costume. In order to keep the marriage option open, however, she cleverly exploits her newly acquired feminine roles. She first tells Gus, "I couldn't dream of leaving Dad without a right arm," and, immediately afterwards, "And then the twins [...] I'd have to wait till they grew up"(669). Dressed in "trouserlets," in charge of both the house and the plantation, Charlie secures the love of two men: her father and her suitor. Evidently, as Foucault maintained, "power [...] produces effects at the level of desire."<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps, then—borrowing from Marjorie Garber's analysis—rather than being androgynous, Charlie, thanks to and through her dress, embodies (and wears) the subversion of both gender categories and fixed social roles<sup>44</sup>: she shapes her own identity outside the constraints of the gendered codes imposed by her society. In so doing, she is a true daughter of her times. In fact, in the 1890's, "There was an active repertoire of conventions and norms [...] At the same time, a new sportiveness had entered into the relationships between the sexes, as well as greater leeway for experiments within the boundaries of gender identities."<sup>45</sup> Charlie may indeed be trying to become the human being that Charlotte Perkins Gilman would be invoking fifteen years later: someone who would "strike out for oneself [...] cultivate an original distinctive personal taste [...] invent for oneself [...] choose a special personal style and hold to it."<sup>46</sup>

Charlie intimates her purpose in life by mingling two already known pieces of garments socially characterized as disruptive (although they neither disguised their wearer's biological sex, nor were they actually items of men's attire). Stylistically and ideologically not incompatible, because both liminal<sup>47</sup> and characterized by discontinuity, they, however, hint that borderlines are thin, that they may be easily trespassed, and that a whole land of mutability, transformation, and change lies ahead. If, when a tomboy, Charlie does not follow the fashion of conventional young women, neither does she, when wishing to appear feminine, dress like orthodox "new women." By sampling and mixing,<sup>48</sup> Charlie succeeds in standing out among all her sisters, in having her way, and in disregarding the fashion of the day, while Chopin, unequivocally setting the story in the last years *between* two centuries, indirectly forces a redefinition of womanliness in far more complex terms.



Day Dresses of the 1850's.



Evening Dresses of the 1850's.



A Day Dress of the 1890's.



An Evening Dress of the 1890's.



A Tricycle Dress.

## Notes

1 *The Woman's Journal*, Oct. 1, 1898.

2 In 1920, all citizens of the U.S.A. were granted the right to vote by the 19th Amendment. In the 1890's, however, some western states had already extended suffrage to women.

3 According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, bloomers were invented by her cousin, Elizabeth Smith Miller, and only advertised by Amelia Jenks Bloomer (*The Woman's Journal*, Nov. 4, 1899).

4 In 1849 in Saratoga Amelia Jenks Bloomer (1818-1894) founded the feminist journal *The Lily*, through whose pages she outlined her feminist projects (temperance, suffrage, education and occupation for women) and sponsored "bloomers." According to one critic, bloomers quickly disappeared from the British scene because they were invented in the U.S.A. and not in Paris and because in London, during the Great Exhibition (1851), a Grand Bloomer Ball was launched, to which only ladies dressed in correct bloomer attire were admitted; unfortunately, however, they turned out to be, in the main, ladies of the town (Duncan Crow, *The Victorian Woman* [London: Allen and Unwin, 1971] 128). According to another critic, in Great Britain bloomers did not enjoy much success because a London brewery dressed all their barmaids in garments of this type and, therefore, made it unprestigious (John C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* [London: The Hogarth Press, 1930] 152).

5 More frequently, one finds 1851 as the date of their invention. In 1898, however, British feminists held a meeting in Reading to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the first appearance of bloomers. Significantly, the British feminists from London (among them there was Lady Randolph Churchill, Winston's American mother) reached Reading by bicycle.

6 Divided skirts were created in England by Lady Harberton, who was a determined advocate of "rational dress" (Crow, *The Victorian Woman*, *op. cit.* 129). In 1888 there were two types of divided skirts: "That known as the 'Harberton' is narrow [...] and has a narrow box pleat around it. This is usually not continued on the inner side, so as to avoid fulness between the ankles. The 'Wilson' is quite different. It is about a yard and a half wide round each leg. The pleats are carried up nearly to the waist, but so arranged as to fall outside the legs." (*The Rational Dress Society's Gazette* [April 1888]: 6).

7 As late as 1891, when fashion had reduced the number of petticoats, the clothing for the average woman was weighed: it amounted to seventeen pounds for her indoor garments and to about thirty pounds for her outdoor attire (Elizabeth B. Hurlock, *The Psychology of Dress. An Analysis of Fashion and its Motive* [New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1929] 198).

8 "The Angel in the House" (1854-56) is a famous poem by Coventry Patmore, celebrating the ideal woman and wife.

9 Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women. Feminism, Modernism, and the Edwardian Novel* (London: Virago Press, 1994) 14. In his introduction to *Herculine Barbin*, Foucault argues that as of the 1860's discussions of sexual identity and perversions were frequently carried out (Herculine Barbin, *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, intr. Michel Foucault, trans. Richard McDougall [New York: Pantheon Books, 1980] 21-3).

10 In England, Eliza Lynn Linton wrote a pamphlet entitled “The Wild Women as Social Insurgents” (Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers. The New Woman in the Popular Press* [Lexington, Ky: U. P. of Kentucky, 1990] 8).

11 Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* was published in 1899.

12 Anne Hollander, “Reflections on Little Women,” *Children’s Literature*, 9 (1981): 30.

13 Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, *op. cit.* 174.

14 *The Woman’s Journal*, June 24, 1899 (italics mine).

15 Kate O’Flaherty (1850-1904) was born and died in St. Louis. From 1870 (when she married Oscar Chopin) to 1882 (when she was left a widow) she lived in Louisiana. She published two novels, *At Fault* (1890) and *The Awakening* (1899), and two collections of short stories, *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acadie* (1897). When she died, she was working on a third collection of short stories that should have been entitled *A Vocation and a Voice*.

16 Emily Toth, *Kate Chopin* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1990) 377. “Charlie” was first published in 1969.

17 Cristina Giorcelli, “‘Charlie’: Travestimento e potere”, *Abito e Identità*, a cura di Cristina Giorcelli, vol. II (Roma: Edizioni Associate, 1996) 23-73.

18 Kate Chopin, “Charlie”, *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted (Baton Rouge, La: Louisiana U. P., 1969) 644. (Henceforth, page numbers will be given in parentheses in the text).

19 At the beginning and at the very end of the short story, the plantation servants call her “Miss Charlie”: the oxymoronic clash between feminine title and masculine nickname underlines the hybridity of her personality.

20 Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers*, *op. cit.* 206.

21 As the above title indicates, women who rode bicycles usually wore bloomers and adopted a hairdo that featured bangs.

22 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962) 36-46.

23 One should bear in mind, however, that in the 1890’s the name “bloomers” was also extended to baggy knickerbockers. In fact, as Baudrillard maintains, “the cycle of appearances is just its recycling” (Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* [1976], trans. Iain Hamilton Grant [London: Sage, 1993] 89). Bloomers should not be confused with “pantalettes” (also, “pantalets”) and “pantaloons,” which were long drawers having an attached or detachable ruffle at the bottom of each leg; they usually showed below skirts and were worn by women and girls mainly in the first half of the nineteenth century.

24 In *The Webster’s Dictionary* the word “costume,” at its third meaning, indicates “the distinctive dress of a particular period, locality or occupation worn in the drama, at fancy-dress balls, or for festivals or carnivals.”

25 In the above meaning, Chopin would consciously assign Charlie a role to *play*.

26 Roland Barthes, *Système de la Mode* (1967) (Paris: Seuil, 1981) 144-47.

27 “She was greatly celebrated for two notable achievements [...] One was the writing of a lengthy ode upon the occasion of her Grandmother’s seventieth birthday” and “one day it fell upon them [her companions at school] with the startling bewilderment of lightning from a clear sky that Charlie was a poet” (“Charlie”, *op. cit.* 641 and 658).

28 Barthes, *Système de la Mode*, *op. cit.* 50, 55, and 245.

29 *The Oxford English Dictionary* dates the usage of the word from 1592.

30 Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963) 130.

31 See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic. The Woman Writer in the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale U. P., 1979).

32 "Fashion, like language, is aimed from the outset at the social [...] But, as opposed to language, [...] fashion aims for a theatrical sociality, and delights in itself" (Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, *op. cit.* 94).

33 "a new piece of garment conditions our behavior more than an old one [...] a new garment [...] forces upon us the law of its form" (Georg Simmel, *La moda e altri saggi di cultura filosofica* (1911), trad. Marcello Monaldi [Milano: Longanesi, 1985] 34-5) (English translation mine).

34 Louise J. Kaplan, *Female Perversions. The Temptations of Emma Bovary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 237-83. These terms, however, are not used here to indicate a perversion that exists only when the aim of transvestitism or homeovestism is sexual arousal.

35 Diana was the protectress of wild animals. Charlie's black horse is not exactly a wild animal, but it wildly gallops away "as if pursued by demons" (639) and its color is traditionally ominous and, therefore, frightening.

36 Artemis—whose name means "the bright one"—is connected with the moon, which symbolizes the feminine principle. Here Charlie reminds us, *mutatis mutandis*, of Ibsen's Nora in *A Doll's House* (1879).

37 Elliott Vanskike, "Consistent Inconsistencies: The Transvestite Actress Madame Vestris and Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50 [1996]: 18.

38 One of Artemis' symbols is her quiver: Charlie does not handle a quiver, but, in these modern times, a pistol. Moreover, Artemis is also the protectress of servants and strangers: Charlie is the only member of the Laborde family to entertain amicable relations with black and Cajun servants.

39 See Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: A. Knopf, 1977).

40 The existing similarity/rivalry between Mr. Laborde and Firman Walton is indicated also by the meaning of their surnames: the former means a shingled house or a small farm, the latter a homestead in a wood (Elsdon C. Smith, *New Dictionary of American Family Names* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

41 Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl. The New Girls' Culture in England, 1880-1915* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1995).

42 *Ibidem* 3.

43 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Methuen, 1972) 59.

44 See Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests. Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992). It has been argued that the pantomine British actress Eliza Vestris, who in the 1830's and '40's had become famous for her roles *en travesti*, may have influenced Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) (Vanskike, "Consistent Inconsistencies: The Transvestite Actress Madame Vestris and Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*," *op. cit.*). Chopin may, at least, have heard of such American actresses as Charlotte Cushman (1816-1876) or Kate Bateman (1842-1917), who would often play *en travesti* in their tours around the country and abroad. Incidentally, whereas *Shirley*'s ending may satirize the gender role that the protagonist chooses, the ending of "Charlie" seems sympathetic to her composite gender appearance and role.

45 Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women. Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia U. P., 1987) 280.

46 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Dress of Women," *The Forerunner*, 1915 (New York: Greenwood Reprint Co., 1968) 331. In the same essay, Gilman perceptively wrote, "The coming change in the Dress of Women is not so much a change of costume as a change of mind [...] It means a different kind of women; women with a new kind of pride, a new dignity, a new honor" (*Ibidem* 333).

47 For a discussion of Chopin's propensity to depict liminal characters and situations, see Cristina Giorcelli, "Edna's Wisdom: A Transitional and Numinous Merging," *New Essays on The Awakening*, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge U. P., 1996) 109-46.

48 Ted Polhemus, "Sampling and Mixing," *Moda: Regole e Rappresentazioni*, a cura di Giulia Ceriani e Roberto Grandi (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1996) 121.