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Heidi Brevik-Zender, ed., *Fashion, Modernity, and Materiality in France from Rousseau to Art Deco*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018. ix + 215 pp. Contributors and index. \$90.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-4384-7235-5; \$ 44.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-4384-7234-8.

Review by Sima Godfrey, University of British Columbia.

Heidi Brevik-Zender's edited volume on *Fashion, Modernity, and Materiality in France from Rousseau to Art Deco* is a timely contribution to the study of French literature and art in the long nineteenth century and to the burgeoning field of fashion studies. Organized chronologically, the book contains many beautifully reproduced illustrations that remind us that fashion is built around visual cues to the social self, the sexual self, the creative self, etc. The study of fashion as an index of social reality, sexual identity or aesthetic principle in nineteenth-century French literature is, of course, not new. Early on Balzac was dressing Eugène de Rastignac in finery he could not afford so he could enter Parisian high society, Baudelaire was theorizing about "une toilette savamment composée," Gautier was writing a playful erotic poem to a pink dress ("À une Robe rose") and most impressively, perhaps, Mallarmé was editing an entire fashion journal, *La Dernière mode*. It is hard, in fact, to avoid reference to fashion in French literature and art of this period, particularly against the backdrop of the newly conceived and highly visible industry of *haute couture* in mid-century Paris and the subsequent development of the *prêt-à-porter* industry.[1] Accordingly, literary historians of the nineteenth century have long been sensitive to the importance of fashion. Nevertheless, with the critical focus on fashion and cultural studies we have come a long way from descriptive readings such as Rose Fortassier's *Les Écrivains français et la mode de Balzac à nos jours*. [2] Brevik-Zender's book offers more proof of that.

"Fashion" and "modernity" are by now a very familiar couple, inextricably linked in nineteenth-century French literature, art and cultural history thanks largely to Baudelaire's essay on "The Painter of Modern Life" and Walter Benjamin's work on the *Arcades Project*. [3] It is the third term in Brevik-Zender's title, "materiality," that speaks to the particular interest of this collection, reminding us that fashion studies as a field spans the spectrum from fashion history, fashion theory, fashion and art to fashion design, fashion production, and textiles. Recent books in the Fashion Studies series published by Bloomsbury Press, for instance, include titles such as *How to Read a Dress* (Edwards, 2019); *The Artificial Body in Fashion and Art. Marionettes, Models and Mannequins* (Geczy, 2016); *The Erotic Cloth. Seduction and Fetishism in Textiles* (Millar, 2018). Without direct reference to any of these books, essays in Brevik-Zender's volume offer complementary reflections on the material nature and significance of fashion. As she states, "the material-object turn implicit in the realist literary project of the period...invites engagement

with scholarship focusing on material garments as themselves primary objects of study” (p. 112).

Susan Hiner’s excellent article on “Fashion Animation: Heads, Hats and the Uncanny Work of Fashion,” for instance, focuses on what Adam Geczy calls “artificial bodies” and examines the use and significance of inanimate fashion dolls, headless mannequins, and bodiless *marottes* (dummy heads for women’s hats) in producing, displaying and selling women’s hatwear. The widely used *marotte*, in particular, represented women from the neck up like something of an uncanny guillotined head. Similarly, in fashion plates illustrating or selling the latest fashions in women’s headwear, behatted women’s heads appear floating on the page. As Hiner notes, “the *marotte* was an unwittingly uncanny object, promoting the commodification of women and simultaneously betraying the underlying violence of fashion’s play for women as consumable and consuming objects” (p. 46). Hiner goes on to explore the erotic connotations of the *modistes* (hat makers) in literature and lithographs, noting the erasure of the female labor that went into the production of the lacy, feathery, flowery, beribboned luxury objects that defined femininity in the world beyond the atelier: exemplary representations of Marx’s commodity fetish. Hiner’s essay is also exemplary in its intertwining of fashion, modernity and materiality.

Similarly, Anne Green’s essay, “Gloves in Nineteenth-Century France,” is grounded in the material production of fashion: in this instance the history of glove-making in nineteenth-century France and its expansion into “one of France’s most important industries” (p. 57). The production of gloves is matched by the production of their varied meanings in *physiologies* and treatises on elegance as well as in realist novels. Nineteenth-century gloves could connote, among other things, social distinction or erotic fantasy. One need only think of *L’Éducation sentimentale* and the impoverished Frédéric Moreau’s despair over his shabby black gloves that may prevent him from ever seeing Madame Arnoux again, or Emma Bovary’s careful observation of the way aristocratic ladies place their evening gloves in their wine glasses, or the woman’s glove Emma’s callous lover Rodolphe keeps in a tin of old love letters. Green notes that “in their journey from artisanal to industrial mass production, nineteenth-century French gloves resonate with meanings that transcend their materiality” (p. 80).

Not all the essays in the volume turn to the external world of material fashion. Some, like Heidi Brevik-Zender’s “Fashion’s Trace: The Material Eternal in Sand’s *Indiana*, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, and Maupassant’s *Bel-Ami*,” focus instead on fictional objects of fashion and their relation to bodies in realist novels. She considers examples of clothing that contain traces of past bodies or past history: the dressing robe that bears the lingering presence of Madeleine’s deceased husband in *Bel-Ami*, the borrowed dress of her mistress that Noun wears in a seduction scene in *Indiana* (a nineteenth-century “erotic cloth”). Most poignant, perhaps, is the “fashion trace” (p. 125) of yellow wax on the soles of Emma’s shoes that she wore to the unforgettable ball in *Madame Bovary*. “Clothing” Brevik-Zender notes, “is an exceptional carrier of traces...traces that we and others leave in [garments] and on them: holes worn into fabrics, spots and stains, perfumes of the body or from adjacent sources are records of our histories” (p. 115). While her reading of the fashion trace is utterly compelling, less convincing, perhaps, is her hypothesis that the trace, which represents authorial presence in the narrative (p. 132), corresponds to the “eternal” that Baudelaire’s painter of modern life seeks to distil from the transitory. That the material trace adds up to the “eternal” would seem to run counter to the arguments by Derrida and Benjamin that Brevik-Zender makes good use of in her readings.

Marni Reva Kessler, in her essay “Beyond the Shadow of the Veil: Claude Monet’s *The Beach at Trouville*,” looks at different kinds of traces and different kinds of materiality in the depiction of a veil in a Monet painting that may in fact not be a veil at all, but the trace of a shadow on a woman’s face. The charm of the material object, the veil, comes from its transparent immateriality and Monet plays with the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in that image. Focusing on the optical and conceptual experience of seeing and being in the world (p. 147), Kessler looks to the transparency and opacity of material as emblematic of representation in Impressionist art.

From this brief summary of just a few of the essays in the volume, one might conclude that, like so many books on nineteenth-century French fashion, it is devoted to the world of women, but that is hardly the case. In the final essay in the volume, “Expanding Consumer Landscapes: Exhibiting French Men’s Fashion in the Interwar,” John Potvin explicitly challenges the scholarly attention paid to women’s *haute couture* to the exclusion of men’s fashion, and questions the narratives that paint a “simplified picture of the intersection of materiality and modernity” (p. 197). Between the hats, gloves and veils, four essays in the volume reference male fashion and gender confusion from the *petit-maître* in eighteenth-century theater, to homosocial men in uniform in Émile Zola’s *La Débâcle*, to the clothing and livery of servants in Marcel Proust’s *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, to men’s elegant tailoring in Paris after World War I. The book is, in fact, framed by two essays on men’s dress, both of which speak to the role fashion plays in blurring or redefining gender.

Pierre Saint-Amand opens the book with his essay on “Petits-maîtres and Fops in the Eighteenth Century.” He offers a colorful overview of eighteenth-century literary representations of the foppish *petit-maître*, often compared to a coquettish automaton, marionnette or *poupée* with his make-up, perfume and exaggerated gestures. (Back to the “artificial body”). From the start the essay problematizes fashion and gender confusion. Many, including most notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau, condemned the “effeminate” *petit-maître* for his transgressive transposition of feminine attributes. Saint-Amand turns the argument on its head with quotations from the *Encyclopédie* that condemn instead the *petit-maître*’s negative influence on women who follow his example: “flighty, vain, capricious, self-serving women, in love with their looks” (p. 16). The prototype for the feminine, he notes, is in fact “the man, tricked out from head to toe” (p. 17). Adding to the gender confusion, Saint-Amand notes the (possibly subversive) racial confusion produced by fashion as the *petit-maître* is exported to the colonies. Writers comment on the “dandys nègres” in Saint-Domingue with their black skin and white gloves. In short, fashion and the much satirized narcissistic fop confound all categories and compound differences. Saint-Amand concludes, “the *petit-maître*...is a creature of changing and unstable identities, exposed to the flash of the evanescent” (p.30). Therein, one might add, lies his modernity.

In the closing essay John Potvin argues for the importance of men’s post-World War I Parisian fashion which, rather than blurring gender lines, asserted a modern vision of refined masculinity. Focusing on the 1925 Paris *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* that proclaimed France the “international arbiter of taste, style and luxury,” Potvin demonstrates the role men’s consumerism and fashion played in the narrative of a postwar return to order. To this end, he emphasizes the *Exposition internationale*’s representation of France’s newly defined preeminence in tailoring.[4] French men’s fashion--the work of men who had returned from war--linked “the industrial and the fashionable, modernity and

materiality,” somewhere between feminine glamor and a masculine ethos of industrial progress. Nowhere is this so well illustrated than in a 1926 ad campaign for *Au Chapeau Mossant* that features a dapper fedora perched atop the Eiffel Tower. If, as Hiner demonstrated, women’s luxury hats in the nineteenth century were displayed on female bodiless heads, the coveted men’s Chapeau Mossant sits not on any head, but atop Paris’s most notable phallic icon, the Eiffel tower. Gustave Eiffel, in defense of his tower, had spoken of its usefulness for future communication and meteorological observations and indeed, by 1928, Potvin notes, the “fedora-topped Eiffel Tower served as a beacon of French industrial and fashionable luxury” (p. 214), communicating France’s potency in the field of fashion—both female and male—and taking the temperature of modernity’s link to fashion in all its materiality.

Other essays in this volume ask equally important questions about modernity’s link to material fashion. As such Brevik-Zender’s book on *Fashion, Modernity and Materiality* provides a welcome addition to the growing list of works on materiality and modern French literature, art and cultural history. Students and scholars alike will learn much.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Pierre Saint-Amand, “Petits-mâtres and Fops in the Eighteenth Century”

Susan Hiner, “Fashion Animation: Heads, Hats and the Uncanny Work of Fashion”

Anne Green, “Gloves in Nineteenth-Century France: Materiality and Metaphor”

Cary Hollingshead-Strick, “Gautier’s Modern Spin on Fashion”

Heidi Brevik-Zender, “Fashion’s Trace: The Material Eternal in Sand’s *Indiana*, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, and Maupassant’s *Bel-Ami*”

Marni Reva Kessler, “Beyond the Shadow of the Veil: Claude Monet’s *The Beach at Trouville*”

Nicholas White, “Style Wars: The Uniform and the Polymorphous in Émile Zola’s *La Débâcle*”

Áine Larkin, “Climbing in Paris: Stairways, Social Class, and the Sartorial in Proust”

John Potvin, “Expanding Consumer Landscapes: Exhibiting French Men’s Fashion in the Interwar”

NOTES

[1] If fashion was an important mechanism in French society at the start of the nineteenth century, by the end of the century it was an engine in the economy, as Émile Zola well understood. In his 1883 novel *Au Bonheur des dames*, the eponymous department store that grows and prospers over the course of the novel is devoted to selling women’s clothing and accessories.

[2] Rose Fortassier, *Les Écrivains français et la mode de Balzac à nos jours* (Paris: PUF, 1981).

[3] In the realm of art see, for instance, Gloria Groom, ed., *Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2012), the catalogue for the record breaking exhibition at the Musée D'Orsay in Paris, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

[4] Hitherto, excellence in men's tailoring had been the purview of the British. The elegant woman went to Paris; the elegant man to London.

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