



Project
MUSE[®]

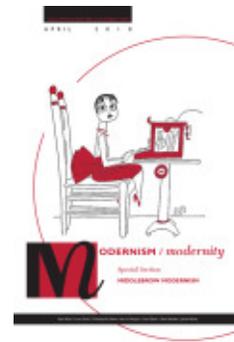
Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

Blondes Have More Fun: Anita Loos and the Language of Silent Cinema

Laura Frost

Modernism/modernity, Volume 17, Number 2, April 2010, pp. 291-311
(Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/mod.0.0213



 For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mod/summary/v017/17.2.frost.html>



Blondes Have More Fun: Anita Loos and the Language of Silent Cinema

Laura Frost

Anita Loos's bestselling 1925 novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* has been all but eclipsed by the voluptuous shadow of Marilyn Monroe. Any text would have trouble competing with Monroe's sugar spun hair, bursting bodice, and slick lipstick pout in Howard Hawks's 1953 film adaptation of Loos's novel. In its own time, however, few popular novels generated as much attention from both general readers and cultural critics of note. Well into the 1930s and 1940s, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* had considerable cultural traction and was adapted to nearly every medium imaginable—magazine, stage play, silent film, musical, sound film, comic strip, dress fabric, and wallpaper.¹ While the novel's superficial signifiers (champagne, diamonds, and dancing vamps) could be captured on film or paper a room, its most important characteristic, its voice, was paradoxically silenced with the coming of the sound film. This outcome is particularly striking given that Loos's novel is fashioned from a convergence of literature and film.

The narrator of *Blondes* is Lorelei Lee, a gold-digging ditz who spends most of her time wheedling jewelry out of her paramours, shopping, dining at fashionable clubs, or lounging in her "negligay." Lorelei is a sybarite who, when traveling in France with her sugar daddy, "Gus Eisman the Button King," and her sardonic best friend, Dorothy, frets that she can not "tell how much francs is in money," but decides that "Paris is devine" when she sees "famous historical names, like Coty and Cartier" along with the "Eyefull Tower."² She begins keeping a diary when one of her admirers urges her to put her thoughts down on paper. "It would be strange if I turn out to be an authoress," she muses. "I

MODERNISM / *modernity*
VOLUME SEVENTEEN,
NUMBER TWO, PP 291–311.
© 2010 THE JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Laura Frost, Associate Professor of Literary Studies at The New School, is the author of *Sex Drives: Fantasies of Fascism in Literary Modernism* (Cornell University Press, 2002) and articles on modernism and contemporary literature. Her areas of interest include twentieth-century literature and culture, gender and sexuality studies, visual culture, and narrative and 9/11. She is currently working on a book on modernism and pleasure (forthcoming from Columbia University Press).



292 mean I simply could not sit for hours and hours at a time practising just for the sake of a career. . . . But writing is different because you do not have to learn or practise" (B, 4–5). While writing appeals to Lorelei, she confides, "The only career I would like to be besides an authoress is a cinema star" (B, 6).

Critics of *Blondes*, from its initial appearance to now, have taken their cue from Lorelei's two aspirations (cinema and literature) and have tried to place the novel in the cultural spectrum from mass culture to modernism. For Q. D. Leavis, Cyril Connolly, and Wyndham Lewis, *Blondes* epitomizes popular culture's frivolity and idioms of idiocy. However, James Joyce, H. L. Mencken, Aldous Huxley, William Empson, George Santayana, Edith Wharton, and William Faulkner were positively giddy in their embrace of the novel. Mencken, Loos's friend whose predilection for dim-witted platinum beauties was said to have inspired *Blondes*, wrote in a review, "This gay book has filled me with uproarious and salubrious mirth. It is farce—but farce full of shrewd observation and devastating irony" (B, xi). Others who had no personal connection to Loos at the time were similarly enthralled. Huxley wrote that he was "enraptured by the book."³ In 1926, Joyce wrote to Harriet Shaw Weaver that he had been "reclining on a sofa and reading *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* for three whole days," an image that figuratively reverses Eve Arnold's 1955 photograph of Monroe in a bathing suit reading *Ulysses*.⁴ Subsequently, critics such as T. E. Blom, Barbara Everett, and Susan Hegeman have attempted to locate *Blondes* within conventional paradigms of modernism.⁵

Loos's "Blonde book," as Faulkner called it, has proven tricky to categorize. As Faye Hammill points out, "the primary difference between the admiring and the critical readers of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is that the former consider Loos as an ironic and perceptive commentator on mass culture and the latter see her as an emanation from that culture and a producer of its commodities."⁶ Hammill proposes that middlebrow is a useful term to describe Loos's work, which responds parodically to both modernist and mass culture. Rather than perpetuating the battle of the brows, however, I will suggest here that the significance of Loos's work lies not in its adherence to existing literary paradigms or in generating a synthetic third category of cultural classification, but rather in its more specific project of creating distinct forms of vernacular modernism.⁷

Lorelei's blonde "ambition" of intertwining literature and cinema reflects Loos's participation in one of the most radical aesthetic projects of early twentieth-century art from within popular culture. Loos herself was a star "authoress" of cinema, having written numerous one- and two-reelers, along with features for Douglas Fairbanks and D. W. Griffith, two pillars of American filmmaking, and screenplays such as *Red-Headed Woman* (1932) and the adaptation of Clare Booth Luce's *The Women* (1939). There has been a recent resurgence of interest in Loos, signaled by a series of trenchant articles on *Blondes* and by *Anita Loos Rediscovered*, which presents a selection of her extensive cinema writing; however, Loos's contributions to cinema and literary histories have not been formally connected.⁸ During the silent era, Loos was widely known as one of the most innovative writers of titles (variously called intertitles, subtitles, or leaders).

Film historians have presented the main story of early cinema as the controversy about the coming of sound, but there was also a passionate debate about titling, and Loos was an important part of this. Challenging the separation of literature and cinema as high and low culture, Loos develops a mode of writing in which literature and cinema together unmoor the conventional relationship of the image to the word. Taken together, Loos's titles and *Blondes* show a cross-genre relationship of exchange that has the effect of reconceiving language and image in a new way. Her novel borrows visual properties from film, and her films borrow textual strategies from literature. Both appropriations show how words exceed their contexts and signify not only through their meaning but also through their literal status as objects: letters printed on the page or projected on the screen. At a transitional moment when literary institutions were changing and the cinema was being born, Loos cross-pollinates the novel with the cinema to invent new forms of vernacular pleasure: the literary cinema, and the cinematic novel.

The Horrors of Modern Pleasure

Blondes appeared at a time when readers were highly invested in the exercise of cultural distinction and, in particular, distinctions about pleasure. The novel—like all of Loos's writing—draws much of its comedy from this discourse in which certain (feminine, bodily, visual, sensual, collective: “blonde”) pleasures are constructed as culturally corrosive and others (cerebral, individualized, written) are favored as edifying and worthwhile. Of course, this recapitulates what Andreas Huyssen calls “one of the most tired topoi of the modernist aesthetic and of bourgeois culture at large: there are the lower pleasures for the rabble, i.e., mass culture, and then there is the *nouvelle cuisine* of the pleasure of the text, of *jouissance*.”⁹ Tired, yes, but tenacious. From descriptions of the consumption of popular culture as a drug habit to the Frankfurt School critiques of “distraction factories” (“Fun is a medicinal bath,” Adorno grumbles),¹⁰ from Eliot to Greenberg, distinctions about pleasure undergird classic articulations of cultural hierarchy.¹¹ Yet to conclude, as Lionel Trilling does, in a 1963 essay called “The Fate of Pleasure,” that the modernist desire to destroy “the habits, manners, and ‘values’ of the bourgeois world” results in a fundamental “repudiation of pleasure,” is too simple.¹² Loos, for whom both kinds of pleasure are compelling, slyly demonstrates how acts of cultural classification (and their undoing) are themselves pleasurable.

Leavis's, Lewis's, and Connolly's readings of *Blondes* prove that conservative critics can be tone deaf to the charms of mass culture but also attuned to its fundamental elements. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) designates *Blondes* as representative of popular fiction published in 1925, asserting that the novel's “slick technique is the product of centuries of journalistic experience and whose effect depends entirely on the existence of a set of stock responses provided by newspaper and film.” The correlation of *Blondes* and cinema, intended as a slight, is an acute observation. However, Leavis's conception of mass culture—“crude and puerile,” “made up of phrases and clichés that imply fixed, or rather stereotyped, habits of thinking and feeling”—is willfully reductive: she could only wish that the attractions of mass culture were so nugatory. Leavis's

294 contrast between the pleasures of popular culture—bodily, auditory (music, voice) or visual (cinema)—and those of high culture—cerebral and textual (“the free play of ironical intelligence in *Passage to India* and *To the Lighthouse*”)—is the very paradigm around which Loos shapes *Blondes*.¹³ Leavis seems amazingly (conveniently?) unaware of the fact that Loos both indulges in and satirizes idioms of mass culture.¹⁴

Like Leavis, Wyndham Lewis describes Loos’s language as distinctively colloquial and verbal (spoken and heard rather than written) in his perverse yet inspired pairing of Loos and Gertrude Stein in *The Enemy*, in which he calls *Blondes* “the breathless babble of the wide-eyed child.”¹⁵ (In *The Long Week End*, Graves and Hodge also highlight the “artless pseudo-baby language” of *Blondes*.¹⁶) Lewis joins Leavis in emphasizing Loos’s affiliation with cinema, dubbing her, together with Charlie Chaplin, “revolutionary simpletons.”¹⁷ Continuing this taxonomy of body and cinema versus mind and text, Cyril Connolly’s *Enemies of Promise* (1938) places *Blondes* in the category of “Vernacular,” as opposed to “Mandarin” literature (for example, Eliot’s *Poems* and *Mrs. Dalloway*). Hemingway is “the outstanding writer of the new vernacular”; he writes in “a style in which the body talks rather than the mind, one admirable for rendering emotions; love, fear, joy of battle, despair, sexual appetite, but impoverished for intellectual purposes.”¹⁸

For all these critics, the distinctions between low and high, popular and elite, image and word, cinema and literature, are functions of the quality of *pleasure* produced. Leavis praises the “cumulative pleasures” of Puritan reading habits, and the “extremely subtle kind of pleasure” valued by the eighteenth-century reading public “prepared to take some trouble for its pleasures,” as opposed to the “immediate,” “cheap and easy pleasures offered by the cinema, the circulating library, the magazine, the newspaper, the dance-hall, and the loud-speaker.”¹⁹ One of the most explicit articulations of this formulation is Aldous Huxley’s 1923 essay “Pleasures,” in which he contrasts “old pleasures demanding intelligence” to “the horrors of modern ‘pleasure’”:

“Pleasure” (I place the word between inverted commas to show that I mean, not real pleasure, but the organized activities officially known by the same name) “pleasure”—what nightmare visions the word evokes! . . . To the interminable democracies of the world a million cinemas bring the same balderdash. . . . Countless audiences soak passively in the tepid bath of nonsense. No mental effort is demanded of them, no participation; they need only sit and keep their eyes open.²⁰

These polarized classifications of pleasure, in which cinema is inevitably the placeholder for cultural degeneration, are often so strict as to be farcical, and seem almost to beg to have their terms touselled, as was the case with Huxley, who loved *Blondes* and wrote to Loos in 1945 about how he was planning a film version of *Brave New World* that would “revolve around the person of a very clever but physically unattractive scientist, desperately trying to make a gorgeous blonde” suspiciously like Lorelei.²¹ For Loos, such ideological inconsistency, whereby those who claim to be most invested in cultural distinction are receptive to the voluptuous allure of denigrated pleasures, is a springboard to satire. Loos cannily named Lorelei after a mythological German

Rhine Maiden, a Siren, that figure around whom Horkheimer and Adorno shape their Enlightenment dichotomies (modernism versus mass culture, mind versus body, bourgeois intellectual versus proletarian laborer, and “‘masculine’ rationalization” versus “‘feminine’ pleasure”²²). Many intellectuals, lashed to the mast of cultural distinction, savored the giddy pleasures of *Blondes*. (It is a happy coincidence that, at least according to Heine, the Teutonic Lorelei was, like Loos’s siren, also a blonde.)

In a context in which approved pleasures are deliberate, complex, and cerebral, Loos’s novel is strategically lightweight. When Lorelei is traveling through “the central of Europe” (*B*, 75), she goes to Vienna and sees the great doctor himself for psychoanalysis. “Dr. Froyd” marvels at the fact that Lorelei has no inhibitions and does not seem to dream at night. She explains, “I mean I use my brains so much in the day time that at night they do not seem to do anything else but rest.” She appears to have no capacity for conflict, sublimation, interiority, guilt, self-consciousness, or depth: in short, none of the interests of intellectual modernity. Lorelei recalls that Freud “seemed very very intreeged at a girl who always seemed to do everything she wanted to do” (*B*, 90). Loos gives Lorelei virtually all of the fearsomely pleasurable characteristics of mass culture: female, seductive, ravenously materialistic, American, and cinematic.

Blondes looks quite different if, instead of reading it as symptomatic of the degraded idiom of cinema, we see it as based on historically specific cinematic effects. The novel is framed by Lorelei’s film career: when it opens, she has retired, and her triumphant return to the movies closes the book. In between, she flits among some of Hollywood’s major names, meeting “Mr. Chaplin once when we were both working on the same lot in Hollywood” and lunching with “Eddie Goldmark of the Goldmark Films,” based on the film mogul producer Samuel Goldwyn (*B*, 6, 16). More fundamentally, the language of the novel and its visual qualities are drawn from the distinctive voice Loos developed ten years earlier within silent film.

The Handwriting on the Screen

The story of literary modernity includes mass-produced texts such as newspapers and magazines, billboards, and other forms of advertising that inspired, for example, the skywriting in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and the skittering Hely’s sandwich-board men in *Ulysses*. However, the huge words that silent cinema routinely cast in front of audiences are rarely a part of this historical narrative. Titles were introduced into silent film as the functional heirs of the nickelodeon projectionist who read out information to the audience. In early Edison films, titles were explanatory devices that patched over gaps in the narrative; in the early 1910s, they started to include direct dialogue.²³ For the most part, titles were perfunctory, establishing only basic narrative facts; most filmmakers and critics regarded them as a crude but necessary tool indicating the technological limitations of silent film. In his influential *Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), Hugo Münsterberg opines that intertitles should be regarded as “extraneous to the original character of the photoplay;” they are “accessory, while the primary power must lie in the content of the pictures themselves.”²⁴ Manuals for aspiring photoplay

296 writers published in the 1910s insisted that “the use of a leader [title] is in most cases a frank confession that you are incapable of ‘putting over’ a point in the development of your plot solely by the action in the scenes—you must call in outside assistance, as it were.”²⁵ The vigorous discussion about titling in film magazines and newspapers in the 1910s and early 1920s, Laura Marcus observes, raised “fundamental questions about the nature of film language and, indeed, the extent to which cinematic images could be understood as elements of a language.” Captions and intertitles were understood as an “intrusion of the literary into what should be an essentially pictorial realm.”²⁶ They were not, in the early 1910s, considered an artistic form for individual authorship, but were anonymous and banal placeholders. Loos changed this.

Loos’s debut in cinema was precocious and auspicious. D. W. Griffith bought one of her first scenarios, which became a 1912 one-reeler, *The New York Hat*, starring Mary Pickford and Lionel Barrymore. Her early scenarios were fairly conventional, but she was already experimenting with the concept of words not just as representations of ideas but also as objects with their own material status. Loos’s 1914 one-reeler *The School of Acting* features Professor Bunk’s drama school in which thespians are taught to emote according to “large cards, about two feet square, [on which Bunk] has printed in big type the names of the different emotions”: “Anger,” “Jealousy,” etc. Comedy ensues when actors are shown the cards in inappropriate circumstances and cannot help but act them out. The cards suggest titles, which cinema audiences read in tandem with the actors in the film, causing a metatextual collapse of viewer/actor and word/image. In “By Way of France,” a young French woman is kidnapped upon her arrival in New York; she manages to drop a note pleading “au secours! au secours!” but efforts to save her are thwarted because the man who finds the note cannot read French. Finally he finds a French dictionary and rescues her; they exchange a note: “Je t’aime.”²⁷ Both films revolve around texts as concrete images—as material combinations of letters—and the complications caused by faulty readings of words. The titles do not just elucidate the plot but are themselves the plot. Both films express anxiety about literacy and cinema audiences’ ability or willingness to extend their attention to reading.

In the mid 1910s, Loos’s future husband, John Emerson, pitched some of Loos’s screenplays to Griffith, who pointed out that they did not follow the usual protocol: “most of the laughs are in the dialogue which can’t be photographed,” he said, and “people don’t go to the movies to read.”²⁸ Nevertheless, in 1916, Loos displayed her idiosyncratic style of titling in her first of many screenplays for Douglas Fairbanks, *His Picture in the Papers*. Loos led with a lengthy text: “Publicity at any price has become the predominant passion of the American people. May we beg leave to introduce you to a shining disciple of this modern art of ‘three-sheeting,’ Proteus Prindle, producer of Prindle’s 27 Vegetarian Varieties.” Parodying the Heinz Corporation with its “57 varieties” and the current fad for vegetarianism, Loos addresses her readers sarcastically (“a shining disciple of this modern art”) and peppers her sentences with alliteration, mixing precious locutions (“May we beg leave to introduce you”) with slang (“three sheeting”). A saucy title announces a scene in which Pete Prindle, the carnivorous son of Proteus Prindle (and brother of “PEARL AND PANSY . . . KNOWN AS “28” AND

“29”), kisses his girlfriend, who has previously received a “hygienic kiss” from a vegetarian: “Wherein it is shown that beefsteak produces a different style of love-making from prunes.” Late in the story, a title comments about Pete: “Ain’t he the REEL hero?” This punning voice establishes an autonomous level of commentary that self-consciously gestures at the film’s REEL medium and the title’s REAL textuality.

The film was considered a milestone in titling and Loos received widespread attention in industry and general interest publications. Louella Parsons declared in the *New York Telegraph* that Loos had “revolutionized” titling.²⁹ Fairbanks signed an exclusive contract with Loos in 1916 to write the titles for all his films. In an article for *Everybody’s Magazine* called “The Handwriting on the Screen,” Fairbanks told Karl Schmidt that “Time and time again . . . I have sat through plays with Miss Loos and have heard the audience applaud her subtitles as heartily as the lively scenes.”³⁰ Even an anti-titling critic such as Vachel Lindsay, who bemoaned that “‘Title writing’ remains a commercial necessity,” conceded that “in this field there is but one person who has won distinction—Anita Loos,” who was as “brainy” as anyone could be “and still remain in the department store film business.”³¹ Loos saw titling as a locus of linguistic creativity and authorial power in film. “Titling pictures had all the fascination of doing crossword puzzles but was a lot more fun,” she remarked (*GI*, 103). Loos’s titles, which film historian Kristin Thompson calls “the Loos-style title,” or the “‘literary’ inter-title,” instigated the recognizable shift to witty and prolix titles in films of the late 1910s.³² Fundamentally changing the concept of cinematic pleasure as passive vision (“they need only sit and keep their eyes open”), Loos’s titles presumed and even created an active audience to whom they offered a new kind of pleasure: *literary* visual pleasure. Loos did not just coax people to read; she taught them to view words as images. *American Aristocracy* (1916), another Fairbanks film, is an exemplary “Loos-style” script. The opening title asks,

Has America an aristocracy? We say yes! And to prove it we take you to Newport-by-the-Sea, where we find some of our finest families whose patents of nobility are founded on such deeds of daring as the canning of soup, the floating of soap and the boring of talcum.

Satirizing the insular Newport colony, where capitalism produces its own aristocracy (“patents of nobility”), the film’s titles include puns, euphemisms, mock Latin, and other fairly intricate jokes, along with written documents—letters, newspapers, ads—that were commonly used in films at the time. But while the interpolated documents are incorporated into the plot in the conventional way (in other words, the audience reads them as the characters read them), the intertitles are often detached from the plot, either commenting upon it or embarking on an entirely new conversation. Thompson refers to this aspect of Loos’s titles as “double functioning,” in which “almost every expository title that begins a scene also makes a verbal joke of its own”—a style quickly taken up by other comic writers, including Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd.³³

The hero of *American Aristocracy*, played by Fairbanks, is introduced by a title:

Now, Narraport Aristocracy possesses no interest for Cassius Lee of Virginia, amateur entomologist,^o who has arrived in these parts on the trail of the migratory caterpillar.

^oEntomologist—High-brow term for bug hunter

The footnote creates a level of diegesis two times removed from the cinematic plot (film diegesis: intertitle: footnote to intertitle). Moreover, the footnote splits the author's voice between one that uses a "high-brow" term (and a fancy flourish like a footnote) and another that undermines this pretension. Loos never missed an opportunity to set high and low against one another.

In "The Handwriting on the Wall," Loos told *Everybody's Magazine* that her "most popular subtitle introduced the name of a new character. . . . The name was something like this: 'Count Xxerkzsxxv.' Then there was a note, 'To those of you who read titles aloud, you can't pronounce the Count's name. You can only think it.'"³⁴ The title, as described by Loos, establishes a direct relationship between the audience and the writer that entirely excludes the film. It insists that this jumble of letters cannot be treated as an oral artifact. Language here is neither visual nor audible but rather located in an abstract realm of thought. Words don't just represent ideas: they are ideas in themselves. The fact that Loos considered this title—explicitly exclusionary, self-reflexive, and suggestively high modernist in tone—her "most popular" suggests how differently she imagined her audience from most critics of the time. Loos's cinema offered the pleasures of interpretation and irony—those "mandarin," "subtle," and "intelligent" pleasures that Leavis, Connolly, Huxley, and others claimed were the purview of literature. Loos assumes that audiences could *enjoy* the collision of different levels of cultural pleasure.

This was the single historical moment when film could be so clearly exploited for literary purposes, and Loos did just that. She did it by flouting current theories that film should strive to be a purely visual form, and the idea of cinema as a seamless illusion with invisible techniques. Ignoring the injunction of critics such as the *New York Dramatic Mirror's* Frank Woods that, "We the spectators are not part of the picture, nor is there supposed to be a camera there making a moving photograph of the scene,"³⁵ Loos's titles directly addressed the spectator, the cinematic equivalent of breaking the fourth wall. Against the idea of film functioning like hieroglyphics (promulgated by Vachel Lindsay) or as a universal language healing the linguistic fragmentation of the Tower of Babel (associated with Griffith), Loos crafted a highly idiomatic cinema that cultivated tension, rather than harmony, between text and image. In both her cinema writing and subsequently in *Blondes*, Loos employs a number of techniques to promote this pleasurable friction between word and image: visual and graphic subordination (subtitles, captions, footnotes), punning, homophones, phonetic spelling, a split voice, and a kind of artistic synesthesia (asking audiences to read images and see words).

Loos's 1919 short story "The Moving Pictures of Blinkville" dramatizes the process by which the pleasures of the text compete with the pleasures of the image. A trickster pretends to be a filmmaker. After the town's denizens pose for his camera, he takes an old parade film and transforms it "by long and labored work at scratching and cloud-

ing the film,” like a form of writing. The resulting movie “projected on the curtain was not a picture—it was a series of blurs and blotches.”³⁶ He shows it to great acclaim as “Scenes of Blinkville.” The word, which is supposed to be subordinate to the visual spectacle, is rendered concrete and assumes a starring role. Audiences, without realizing it, are induced to “read” a film.³⁷

At no other time in cinema history did the word exert so much power. Loos continued to capitalize on the battle between the image and the word, and the related disputes about hierarchies of cultural pleasure in *Blondes*. One film project was unexpectedly influential for Loos and for *Blondes: Intolerance*.

“A bathtub full of diamonds”: *Intolerance*

While Fairbanks’s films represent classic Hollywood cinema, Griffith was a figure caught between convention and innovation, pulling back toward the theater and forward toward cinema’s future with innovative techniques that inspired experimental filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein, and that have led more recent critics to view Griffith as an early modernist.³⁸ Loos was invited to collaborate with Griffith and Frank Woods on the titles of *Intolerance* (1916). The film, approximately three hours long, presents a sweeping metanarrative, the “history of how hatred and intolerance, through all the ages, have battled against love and charity.” *Intolerance* has a fugue-like structure that uses parallel montage to intercut among four narratives set in different eras (Babylonian, Biblical, seventeenth-century France, and Modern Day). Each narrative features characters (many of whom are given generic titles such as “The Dear One,” “The Boy,” and “The Friendless One”) who act out analogous scenarios of oppression or “intolerance.” In the Babylonian narrative, one priest violently represses a more hedonistic sect; in the Biblical narrative, Jesus is martyred; in the French narrative, Huguenots are slaughtered on St. Bartholomew’s Day; and in the Modern Day story, a workers’ strike is violently suppressed and a self-righteous group of female reformers destroy a family.³⁹

Loos claims that she was “the first viewer ever to see *Intolerance* [in the editing room]. I must be honest and say I thought D.W. had lost his mind . . . In that era of the simple, straightforward technique for telling picture plots, Griffith had crashed slam-bang into a method for which neither I nor, as was subsequently proved, his audiences had been prepared” (*GI*, 102). The dominant models of spectatorship—as intoxication or passive escape—fail to account for *Intolerance*, which requires its audiences to synthesize four widely disparate historical narratives and to relate allegorical images (the Book of *Intolerance*, the woman—Lillian Gish—rocking the cradle) to the stories around them. *Intolerance* calls upon its audience to construct its meaning, but it gives assistance through didactic titles, beginning with a sequence that addresses the viewer and explains how to watch the film—“you will find our play turning from one of the four stories to another, as the common theme unfolds in each”—and marking many of the bridges between the film’s different time frames. The titles are remarkably variable in their style and tone, reflecting, no doubt, the three different authors who worked

300 on them. Many titles are bombastic and heavy-handed, for example: “My Lord, like white pearls I shall keep my tears in an ark of silver for your return. I bite my thumb! I strike my girdle! If you return not, I go to the death halls of Allat”.⁴⁰

In most cases, we can only speculate which writer was responsible for which title, but the stylistic differences are suggestive. Loos was clear about her role. In her memoir, she recalls, “D. W. bade me put in titles even when unnecessary and add laughs wherever I found an opening. I found several” (*GI*, 103). Interspersed among the instructive and weighty inscriptions are lighter and more ironic captions that seem more reflective of the “Loos-style.” For example, in the scene in which *The Dear One*, who has jealously watched a woman’s undulating walk draw men’s attention on the street and decides to imitate her by tying her skirt into a hobble, a title dryly comments that “The new walk seems to bring results” as men flock to her ridiculous gait. In the marriage market in Babylon, when no one bids on the feisty *Mountain Girl*, she shouts at them, “You lice! You rats! You refuse me? There is no gentler dove in all Babylon than I.”

Some titles are more subtle, as when the repressive High Priest of Bel-Marduk is threatened by the rival cult of Ishtar. The title remarks, “He angrily resolves to reestablish his own god—incidentally himself.” The final modifier sarcastically comments from outside the action in a distinctly contemporary idiom. The tone does not match the image, and the title elicits a snicker where the image is aiming for sober drama. Later in the film, in the Modern narrative, when *The Boy* is framed and put in jail, the title remarks, “Stolen goods, planted on the Boy, and his bad reputation, intolurate him away for a term.” The verb form “intolurate” can be read as a teasing poke at Griffith’s tendentious insistence upon the word and the concept of intolerance, which often seems like an elaborate defense against criticism of his race politics in *Birth of a Nation*.

Griffith shared with Loos an interest in making films more porous to high culture, as reflected by his use of Whitman and other literary and artistic intertexts. However, while Griffith used this material in a fairly traditional style, as epigraph or thematic support, Loos’s literary intertexts are usually cheeky. The one title for which Loos routinely claimed credit—and also the most controversial title in *Intolerance*—is such a text. She recalls, “At one point I paraphrased Voltaire in a manner which particularly pleased D. W.: ‘When women cease to attract men, they often turn to reform as second choice’” (*GI*, 103). While it may seem odd that Loos would claim authorship for a quotation that is arguably misogynist, she never hesitated to distance herself from feminism. Loos’s idea of female empowerment is more *Sex and the Single Girl* than suffragette, and she was always at pains to emphasize her girlishness and insignificance even as she, like her titles, stole the spotlight. (Writing about how *Blondes* had been inspired by Mencken’s barbs aimed at his fellow Americans, she remarks that “My book was certainly an offshoot of Mencken’s point of view, just as a gadget can be produced by the important theory of a scientist” [*GI*, 217].) Loos flaunted superficial signifiers of cultural capital in her intertitles, not so much to make films “smarter” but to disrupt the expected relationship between the image and the word, vacuous mass culture and clever high culture. The epic complexity of *Intolerance*—its heterogeneity, didacticism and suggestion, melodrama and innovation—challenged Loos to be unusually resource-

ful and produce a subtle, insinuating voice for a film that defied current cinematic conventions and concepts of cinematic pleasure.

Vachel Lindsay writes, “Anita Loos once said to me that *Intolerance* was ‘a bathtub full of diamonds’ It was a humorous way of proclaiming that there were enough suggestions in *Intolerance*, to producers of imagination, to last the motion picture world for fifty years.”⁴¹ This is certainly the case, but here Loos speaks, significantly, in the dialect of Lorelei: “kissing your hand may make you feel very very good but a diamond and safire bracelet lasts forever” (*B*, 55). Loos explicitly connects *Intolerance* to the world of *Blondes* by giving Lorelei a cameo in the film. “I was doing quite well in the cinema when Mr Eisman made me give it all up,” Lorelei remarks at the beginning of *Blondes* (*B*, 6). Her “last cinema,” was *Intolerance*, in which she played “one of the girls that fainted at the battle when all of the gentlemen fell off the tower” (*B*, 8). The battle in question is the fall of Babylon, which indicates Lorelei’s definition of “gentlemen” (Fig. 1). Lorelei’s appearance in the film is preposterous but also has a particular logic to it.⁴²

As Miriam Hansen notices, one of *Intolerance*’s dominant themes is the dramatic “fate—and fatal power—of unmarried female characters throughout the ages” and how their environment thwarts or supports them; Michael Rogin adds that many of the narrative threads in the film promote female sexuality and public pleasure.⁴³ The Babylonian narrative in which Lorelei acts features open eroticism, feasting, and elaborate dance sequences (according to accounts from the set of *Intolerance*, some of the extras hired to appear semi-nude in the scenes were, as Lorelei would say, “not nice”⁴⁴). *Intolerance* sympathizes with women of pleasure who are the victims of intolerance: the temple prostitutes/“Virgins” in Mesopotamia, Mary Magdalen, and the women who are herded out of the bordello under the gleeful eyes of the Modern Day reformists (the subjects of Loos’s “female reformers” title). Both Griffith and Loos were fascinated by hypocritical reformers. Henry Spoffard, who becomes Lorelei’s husband, is a wealthy cinema “senshure” who likes to assemble the “riskay” scenes he has excised into a movie that he watches recreationally with other men, like a reformist stag film (*B*, 103). At one point in *Blondes*, Spoffard tells Lorelei that she “seemed to remind him quite a lot of a girl who got quite a write-up in the bible who was called Magdellen. So then he said that he used to be a member of the choir himself, so who was he to cast the first rock at a girl like I” (*B*, 93).

Loos leads her reader to infer a somewhat seamy quid pro quo underpinning the economics of Lorelei’s glamorous life, but critics are divided about exactly what goes on. Barbara Everett describes Lorelei as “a cherubic-faced nail-hard amateur whore” (254); Regina Barecca remarks that Lorelei and Dorothy are “closer to con artists than to whores . . . far from professional courtesans” (xvii); Katharina von Ankum states that Lorelei “preserves her virginity” until she marries Spoffard.⁴⁵ All these readings are technically plausible. “Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure” is as euphemistically apt a subtitle for *Blondes* as “The Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady,” which Loos, always taking advantage of structural subordination, subtitled her novel. What is certain is that Lorelei, like the profession to which she gravitates, the cinema, is in the



▲
Fig. 1. Babylonian vamps from D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916).

business of selling pleasure. Loos went on to exploit *Intolerance's* linguistic subtleties and thematics of pleasure in *Blondes*, where she plays Griffith's vast historical epic as local comedy.

Gentlemen Prefer Typists

According to Lorelei, she has "been" three careers. Back when she was still going by her given name, Mabel Minnow, her father sent her to "the business colledge" in Little Rock, but after just a week, a lawyer named Mr. Jennings hired her to be his new stenographer. She reports that she "stayed in his office about a year," doing exactly what, she does not say. Lorelei's first job links her to one of modernity's favorite female icons, the secretary or typewriter girl,⁴⁶ who embodies the paradoxes of female pleasure and technologies of writing in ways that anticipate the cinema spectatrix and the cinema writer. On the one hand, the stenographer/typist/secretary earns money and works in the public sphere. On the other hand, hers is a labor of automatism, Marx's "dead labor," regurgitating the words of others. She is connected to writing, but only in the passive sense of recording or transposing someone else's (usually her male boss's) thoughts. Her job is copying, transposing, correcting errors, and rendering her work transparent;

she has no distinctive authorial signature. She bears a remarkable resemblance to the cinema titler before Loos transformed that role.

The typist's primary identity is as a worker, but there is, as Christopher Keep notes, an "excessive, almost obsessional fascination . . . with the assumed promiscuity of the female typist."⁴⁷ As Lawrence Rainey remarks, "The typist, after all, is repetition personified," but she is also imagined as "repre[sen]t[ing] the promise of modern freedom: an allegedly new, autonomous subject whose appetites for pleasure and sensuous fulfillment were legitimated by modernity itself."⁴⁸ Eliot's robotic typist in *The Waste Land*, for whom sex is anhedonic, combines these features: "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over." The typist's sexuality is imagined as analogous to her production of language (anonymous, automatic). Loos wrote several secretarial screenplays exploring the misreadings accruing around this amanuensis of alienated words. Erik von Stroheim's *The Social Secretary* (1916) follows a stenographer who loses several jobs because she is harassed by her male employers, including a boss at the office of the New York Purity League who looks at "riskay" pictures—a forerunner of Henry Spoffard. *Virtuous Vamp* (1919) also features a talented stenographer who is fired because she distracts the men around her from their work. In *Red-Headed Woman*, Jean Harlow plays the stenographer as a "sex pirate" (K, 42). By giving Lorelei a brief past as a stenographer, Loos invokes all the narrative clichés associating debased writing and pleasure that surround this handmaiden of modern literature. Even more significantly, it is through this so-called career that Lorelei is "discovered."

Lorelei's stenography stint comes to an end when she catches Mr. Jennings with "a girl . . . who really was famous all over Little Rock for not being nice" (B, 24–25). Lorelei recalls that when she "found out that girls like that paid calls on Mr. Jennings I 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" (B, 25). Lorelei's revolver is part Hedda Gabler, part Mae West, but it is recast as an instrument that conveniently—like the typewriter—erases her agency. During her murder trial, Mabel Minnow seduces the jury with her damsel in distress routine and is acquitted. The judge, who appreciates her act, bestows upon her a ticket to Hollywood and the stage name Lorelei Lee. "It was when Mr. Jennings became shot," she remarks, "that I got the idea to go into the cinema" (B, 25). Never has the passive tense been deployed so tactically.

In making stenography the gateway to the cinema, Loos cannily invokes the popular discourse of the 1920s that associates the typewriter girl with cinema.⁴⁹ A classic formulation is Kracauer's 1927 series of vignettes "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies," which asserts that "Sensational film hits and life usually correspond to each other because the Little Miss Typists model themselves after the examples they see on the screen."⁵⁰ Iris Barry argues that one of cinema's key consumers is "The typist in search of a thrill."⁵¹ The typist and the spectatrix seem to support one another; as Freidrich A. Kittler puts it, "at night [women] are at the movies and during the day they sit at their typewriters."⁵²

The typewriter and the cinema are connected materially (both are American, individuality-flattening technologies that traffic in copies) as well as imaginatively.

304 Both are understood as feminized and offering paradoxical pleasures. Early film critics describe cinema going as an experience of fantasy and escape, but they also imagine cinematic pleasure as banal and standardized. (“That which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyer belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in the film,” Walter Benjamin remarks in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire.”⁵³) Even Iris Barry, one of early cinema’s greatest advocates, describes the “experience derived from the pictures” as “second-hand,” and “imitation excitement,” “almost as standardized as a church service or a daily newspaper”; “I wish that the public could, in the midst of its pleasures, ask for slightly better dreams.”⁵⁴ Cinematic pleasure is understood as a kind of false consciousness.

Loos turns to the typewriter girl to constellate—and also recast—the connection between mechanized writing, debased pleasure, and cinema writing. Lorelei, we can safely assume, is not much of a typist: she writes her diary in longhand, and not very well at that. And Lorelei is not a spectatrix, but a would-be actress. The cinema turns out to be the closest thing to a true profession to her. In making cinema a place of production rather than consumption, Loos alters the standard trope of passive celluloid just as her trademark cinematic style diverges from the paradigm of hypnotic spectatorship. The titler herself is historically positioned like the typist, alienated from her labor: Loos alters that by reinventing the form.

Loos fashioned not just Lorelei but also herself through the typist/cinema correlation. In her memoir *A Girl Like I*, a phrase taken from Lorelei (Loos often slips into such Loreleisms, as she does in her essays as well), Loos chose to reproduce a Ralph Barton sketch of herself, a well-known cinema writer, as a cutely infantile typewriter girl (Fig. 2). Antonia Lant suggests that the proliferation of publicity shots of female cinema writers in the 1920s shown at their typewriters was a way of solving the “awkwardness in efforts to signify women’s acts of film writing, given the cultural desire to make her an object of visual study.”⁵⁵ Loos uses the standard shot to render writing visual in a much more complicated way, adding a caption to the image in which she adopts the voice of Lorelei: “The only thing wrong with this picture is that an authoress like I never learned to type” (*GI*, unnumbered insert between 150 and 151). As in her cinema titles, texts that are supposed to be subordinate to and explain the image but instead upstage it, this caption undermines the image while purporting to support it. Ostensibly revealing Loos’s shortcomings, it in fact makes her superior to the typist. The sentence reflects the anxiety that cinema titling is regarded like typewriting: debased, anonymous, and subordinate, an inartistic stream of banal formulas rather than the individualized, scripted work of a legitimate writer.

On the same page of *A Girl Like I*, below Barton’s drawing, is a photograph of Loos sitting at a desk with a pen in her hand, a seemingly straightforward portrait of the artist at work. Yet Loos adds this caption: “My sole preparation for a career was to buy a fountain pen and a large yellow pad: no dictionary or grammar required. Some day I’ll give a course on ‘how to succeed in literature without any learning.’” This idea of producing literature without learning is as disingenuous as the usage of the words “education” and “literary” in *Blondes*. While Lorelei inflates these words and her own



▲
Fig. 2. Cartoon of Anita Loos at her typewriter by Ralph Barton. *Hearst's International-Cosmopolitan* (February 1927), 64. Courtesy of Yale University Library.

“literary” labor, Loos deflates them. Loos implicates these two means of writing—the typewriter and the caption (analogous to the subtitle as a text linked to an image)—to position herself between low and high cultural pursuits.

In her film writing, Loos routinely disrupts visual pleasure and puts in its place the pleasure of the text. In *Blondes*, she follows the same principles, but because of her medium, the effect is slightly different. Her cinematic language creates literary visual pleasure and her novelistic language creates visual literary pleasure. Lorelei, acting as authoress in *Blondes*, writes in a language that induces the reader to see words as images.

“Transparent negligays and ornamental bath tubs”

Blondes is a visual novel in several senses. Most obviously, it is illustrated by Ralph Barton, who was under contract with *Harper's Bazar: A Repository of Fashion, Pleasure and Instruction* (it became *Harper's Bazaar* in 1929), where *Blondes* first appeared in serialized form. Loos was not responsible for the images, but they are routinely included in editions of the novel, so they have become part of its textual apparatus. As it happens, they reflect Loos's preoccupation with technologies of writing. The first illustration shows Lorelei at her desk with a pen, writing in her diary: exactly the same pose as Loos's publicity photo. The humorous caption Loos appended to her own portrait is perfectly appropriate for this occasion: Lorelei has “succeeded in literature

306 without any learning.” Barton’s second illustration shows Lorelei on a couch with a stack of books scattered around her, looking perplexed. When a “literary” admirer (a novelist) gives Lorelei several Conrad novels in an effort to “educate” her, she asks her maid to read and summarize them; she comes to the conclusion that they are “all about ocean travel” (*B*, 8). Lorelei is only marginally literate, but her mistakes have the effect of calling attention to her writing with comments such as, “I have just noticed that I have written clear across two pages onto March 18th, so this will do for today and tomorrow” (*B*, 5).

Lorelei’s voice is reminiscent of other unreliable narrators—John Dowell, Nick Carraway, or Molly Bloom—but Loos adds a linguistic layer of textual play through Lorelei’s misspellings and malapropisms. Even as Loos constantly signals toward the textual production of *Blondes* through these mistakes, critics such as Leavis, Lewis, and Connolly take Lorelei literally (“But writing is different because you do not have to learn or practice”) and understand her voice as just that, a literal voice—oral, idiomatic, and “artless pseudo-baby language.” They focus on the verbal qualities of Lorelei’s narrative and perceive it as “uncrafted” bodily speech rather than scripted language. Lorelei’s phonetic spelling and punctuation errors, along with Loos’s innuendos, euphemisms, and double entendres, do lend themselves to this reading—for example, Lorelei’s explanation that “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,” or Dorothy’s suspicions about a girl in Paris who claims to be eighteen: “how could a girl get such dirty knees in only 18 years?” (*B*, 4, 66). However, most of the humor of *Blondes* depends upon visual word play.

Lorelei’s trip to Europe affords Loos an opportunity to make multilingual puns (for example, Lorelei’s adventure with the French con artists “Louie and Robber,” her visit to “Fountainblo” and “Momart” [*B*, 62]). Lorelei remarks that “French is really very easy, for instance the French use the word ‘sheik’ for everything, while we only seem to use it for gentlemen when they seem to resemble Rudolf Valentino” (*B*, 69). Loos frequently crafts homophone puns such as Sheik/chic or Hofbraü/half brow (*B*, 86), which, while based on words sounding alike, have to be seen to be perceived (as the “real/reel” pun in *His Picture in the Papers*). As with the cinema title about the unpronounceable Count—which looks like a vengeful secretary has pounded on random keys—Loos’s language in *Blondes* highlights the details of its construction.

Faulkner’s 1925 letter to Loos illustrates the many levels of voice and awareness in *Blondes*:

Please accept my envious congratulations on Dorothy—the way you did her through the intelligence of that elegant moron of a cornflower. Only you have played a rotten trick on your admiring public. How many of them, do you think, will ever know that Dorothy really has something . . . My God, it’s charming . . . most of them will be completely unmoved—even your rather clumsy gags won’t get them—and the others will only find it slight and humorous. The Andersons [Sherwood and Elizabeth] even mentioned Ring Lardner in talking to me about it. But perhaps that was what you were after, and you have builded better than you knew. . . .⁵⁶

It is no wonder that Faulkner prefers Dorothy, Lorelei's brunette sidekick who is the voice of overt irony, modernism's signature rhetoric, in *Blondes*. Faulkner divides the readers of Loos's novel into those aligned with Lorelei (the "admiring public") and those aligned with Dorothy (educated readers). Faulkner is not so sure where Loos herself falls. Mentioning Lardner, the acknowledged master of modern American vernacular, Faulkner then revokes the compliment by suggesting that the effect was not deliberate, but also jokes back at Loos by imitating Lorelei: "you have builded better than you knew." Faulkner assumes two separate and hierarchical audiences who experience two different reading effects (irony versus mere humor), two different levels of comprehension, and hence two different kinds of pleasure. Faulkner does not acknowledge the ways in which Lorelei (who is hardly "elegant"), as scripted by Loos, is an only half proficient writer but a master of strategy. Lorelei's voice is, in fact, more complex than Dorothy's sophisticated but straightforward irony. Her grasp of language is comical, but she is nevertheless skilled in dissimulation. She is a surreptitious editor of her own diary, expurgating all evidence that would contradict her carefully constructed image of herself and successfully manipulating everyone around her. Lorelei is not as dumb as she seems or as smart as she thinks she is. Making Lorelei a barely literate writer has the effect of estranging the reader from language. Loos makes sure we do not mistake these strategies for modernism—Lorelei is quick to dispatch the Conrad novels to her maid—but rather sustains the juxtaposition of mass and high culture.

At least Molly Bloom reads her own novels, even if they are "smutty." But while Molly's undulating run-on sentences are most intelligible when read aloud, Lorelei's language, if read aloud (the way Leavis, Connolly, and Lewis seem to have read it) would produce only a few laughs at the "rather clumsy gags" (for example, "A girl like I"; "champagne always makes me feel philosophical"). If we are fooled into thinking that we are hearing Lorelei's voice (à la Molly Bloom) rather than seeing her script, we are failing to see what is in front of us on the page. There is almost no descriptive imagery in *Blondes*, which is odd, given the "lookist" visual economy that rules the novel. Instead, Loos directs the reader to look at the words on the page, much in the same way that she scolds the cinema viewer who tries to pronounce 'Count Xxerkzsxxv.' One has to read and analyze the words on the page to *see* Loos's more intricate jokes. *Blondes* follows the principles of Loos's cinema writing and asks its audience to view language materially, as visual images.

One reader who paid close attention to the words on the page, despite his declining vision, was James Joyce. In the same 1926 letter in which Joyce tells Harriet Shaw Weaver that he has read *Blondes*, he describes his "Work In Progress," which he put aside to read Loos's novel. The next week (15 November), in a letter signed "Jeems Joker," he sends Weaver the opening paragraph of *Finnegans Wake*.⁵⁷ It is not difficult to imagine why *Blondes* would have appealed to Joyce. Lorelei's voice resonates with those of Joyce's own Sirens (who appear, like Dorothy and Lorelei, "bronze by gold"), his Nausicaa, and his Penelope. In Joyce's own exploration of a contemporary, uneducated woman's voice in the final chapter of *Ulysses*, he merely jettisons punctuation, while Loos toys with all levels of language except syntax. Lorelei's mangling of several

308 languages—French and German as well as “the english landguage” (*B*, 88)—corresponds to the riot of languages in *Finnegans Wake*. Lorelei’s felicitous phrases (for example, her “Eyefull Tower”) may have stayed with Joyce (“a waalworth of a skyerscape of most eyful hoyth entowery” [4.35]). More than specific puns, however, it is Loos’s comic choreography of concretized language that seems relevant for Joyce.

Loos was aware of modernist and avant-garde writing and art.⁵⁸ She visited Stein at the rue de Fleurus, but was less interested in her writing—which she describes through Sherwood Anderson’s summary: “one should look on it as one looks at the palette of a painter, appreciate the words merely as words”—than she is in finding Stein, among Hemingway and Fitzgerald, “the most manly of the lot” (*GI*, 228). Loos routinely calls attention to the surface of words like Stein or like Picasso’s *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912), in which the letters “JOU” are incorporated into the image as literary artifact (from a newspaper) and also as a pun. What is remarkable about Loos is that she deploys the “mandarin” mode of heightened textuality as the guiding principle of vernacular forms of culture without being gnomic, obscure, or inaccessible. For Loos, there was no inherent contradiction between these ostensibly different orders of pleasure, only systems of cultural classification that made this seem so.

When Lewis compared Loos to Stein, he argued that the former “intended to reassure the reader of the mass-democracy that all is well, and that the writer is one of the crowd . . . not a detested ‘highbrow.’”⁵⁹ But Loos had a much wider audience in mind, and she aims to disarm rather than reassure, always sustaining the tension of cultural hierarchy as she views distinction from the middle of the Great Divide. Lorelei eagerly asserts the ways in which she is “literary”; simultaneously, Loos targets the self-styled “intellectuals” (modeled on Mencken) who fall for Lorelei but attempt to maintain their vaunted values of distinction. At the end of the novel, Lorelei convinces Spoffard to become a producer of titillating “pure films” (*B*, 12). (Their first production, “founded on the sex life of Dolly Madison,” stars Lorelei [*B*, 114]). Simultaneously, she collaborates on scripts with her man on the side, Mr. Montrose, a frustrated screenwriter who “had quite a hard time getting along in the motion picture profession, because all of his senarios are all over their head. Because when Mr. Montrose writes about sex, it is full of sychology, but when everybody else writes about it, it is full of nothing but transparent negligays and ornamental bath tubs” (*B*, 115). Loos’s work found a wide audience precisely because of the way in which it allowed viewers and readers the pleasure of cultural distinction and its undoing: a testimony to general audiences’ capacity to embrace the pleasures of innovation, and to “high brow” audiences’ susceptibility to the less cerebral pleasures of “transparent negligays and ornamental bath tubs.” Loos’s success suggests that she produced her ideal audience: a consumer who could read images and see words.

The sound film put an end to the linguistic play of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Hawks’s film drastically revises the plot of the novel (Lorelei and Dorothy, now show-girls, sail to Europe for Lorelei’s wedding to Gus Esmond, and all but a few minutes of the film are set on the ship) and, most crucially, jettisons Loos’s first-person narration. What we gain in iconic sex appeal, we lose in textual complexity. Significantly, Dorothy’s jokes—broad irony—translated well to the sound film, while Lorelei’s did

not. The only witticisms retained in Hawks's film are obvious grammatical mistakes and malapropisms—for example, the phrase “A girl like I,” and Lorelei asking for directions to “Europe, France.” The pleasure of the text has dissipated. The disappearance of the text in cinema was strikingly marked within the film industry by the first Academy Awards in 1929, which gave the first and only Best Title Writing award to Joseph Farnham. (Gerald C. Duffy was posthumously nominated for his work on *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*, a film that sounds like a Spoffard production.) The same year, a special award was given to Warner Brothers for *The Jazz Singer*, signaling what was to come. Ironically, some viewers, such as Q. D. Leavis, complained that the sound cinema further distanced people from the written word: “the ‘talkie’ . . . does not even offer captions” (B, 56). While the particular kind of pleasure Loos developed—literary visual pleasure—disappeared from most films, her playful word images would become the stock in trade of the next literary generation.

Notes

1. Anita Loos, *Fate Keeps on Happening: Adventures of Lorelei Lee and other writings*, Ray Pierre Corsini, ed. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1984), 59. I am grateful to Cari Beauchamp for sharing her knowledge of “Anita” with me; my thanks as well to Allison Pease, Gregory Robinson, Victoria Rosner, John Paul Riquelme, and the Harvard Humanities Center Modernism Seminar participants for discussing these ideas.

2. Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes*, Regina Berreca, introd. (New York: Penguin, 1998 [1925 and 1928]), 44, 4, 53, 51, 52, 54. Henceforth abbreviated B.

3. Anita Loos, *A Cast of Thousands* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1977), 205.

4. Stuart Gilbert, ed., *Letters of James Joyce, Vol. 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 246.

5. See T. E. Blom, “Anita Loos and Sexual Economics: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 7:1 (Spring 1976), 39–47, Susan Hegeman, “Taking *Blondes* Seriously,” *American Literary History* 7:3 (1995), 525–54, and Barbara Everett, “The New Style of ‘Sweeney Agonistes,’” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 14 (1984), 243–63.

6. Faye Hammill, *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture Between the Wars* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007), 75. See also Sarah Churchwell, “‘Lost Among the Ads’: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and the Politics of Imitation,” in *Middlebrow Moderns*, Lisa Botshon and Meredith Goldsmith, eds. (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 135–66.

7. Miriam Hansen employs the phrase “vernacular modernism” to avoid “the ideologically over-determined term ‘popular.’” As she conceives of it, the term, which includes forms such as fashion, radio, and cinema, “combines the dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, with connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect.” See “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” *Modernism/modernity* 6:2 (April 1999), 59–77.

8. Cari Beauchamp and Mary Anita Loos, eds., *Anita Loos Rediscovered: Film Treatments and Fiction by Anita Loos* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003). Brooks E. Hefner’s “‘Any Chance to Be Unrefined’: Film Narrative Modes in Anita Loos’s Fiction,” *PMLA* 125:1 (January 2010), 107–120, which also explores the relationship between Loos’s film titles and her later fiction, appeared as this article was going to press.

9. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 211.

10. See Erica Weitzman, “No Fun: Aporias of Pleasure in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory,” *German Quarterly* 81:2 (Spring 2008), 185–202.

11. David E. Chinitz gestures toward the multivalent kinds of pleasure in Eliot’s criticism, and gives Gilbert Seldes credit for intuiting this as well. See *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 12. See also Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6:5 (Fall 1939), 34–49.

12. Lionel Trilling, *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 442, 439.
13. Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Pimlico, 2000 [1932]), 218, 255, and 76.
14. Mark Wollaeger notes that "Loos's idiot-savant narrator Lorelei has a lot of company in modernism, but probably no other managed to create, dismantle, and inhabit a stereotype all at once." "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Cliché, and Vernacular Modernism," a paper presented at the Modernist Studies Association's Ninth Annual Conference, Long Beach, CA, November 2007.
15. Wyndham Lewis, *The Enemy: A Review of Art and Literature* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), 79.
16. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918–1939* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 135.
17. Lewis, *The Enemy*, 67.
18. Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008 [1938]), 62 and 63–65.
19. Leavis, *Fiction*, 115, 134, 221, and 225.
20. Aldous Huxley, *Complete Essays: Vol. 1*, Robert S. Baker and James Sexton, eds. (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 355–56.
21. Grover Smith, ed., *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 535.
22. Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 7. See also Annegret Fauser, "Rheinsirenen: Loreley and Other Rhine Maidens," in *Music of the Sirens*, Linda Phyllis Austern and Inna Naroditskaya, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 250–93.
23. See Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York: De Capo Press, 1998), and Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991).
24. Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1916), 79.
25. Joseph Berg Esenwein and Arthur Leeds, *Writing the Photoplay* (Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School, 1913, rev. ed., 1919), 221.
26. Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing About Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 290. See also Kamilla Elliot, *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
27. Beauchamp and Mary Anita Loos, eds., *Anita Loos Rediscovered*, 16, 28–29.
28. Anita Loos, *Kiss Hollywood Good-by* (New York: Ballantine, 1975), 6 and *A Girl Like I* (New York: Viking, 1966), 98. Henceforth abbreviated *K* and *GI*.
29. Louella Parsons, "To Whom Hath Shall Be Given," *New York Telegraph*, 16 March 1919.
30. Karl Schmidt, "The Handwriting on the Screen," *Everybody's Magazine* 36 (May 1917), 622–23.
31. Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Liveright, 1970 [1922]), 14, 34.
32. Kristin Thompson, "The Formulation of the Classical Narrative," in David Bordwell, Janet Steiger, and Kristin Thompson, eds., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 174–93, 187.
33. Thompson, "The Formulation of the Classical Narrative," 186–87.
34. Schmidt, "The Handwriting on the Screen."
35. Frank Woods, quoted in Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 82.
36. Beauchamp and Mary Anita Loos, eds., *Anita Loos Rediscovered*, 110.
37. Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Our Own Movie Queen" (1925) demonstrates the effects of this new style of intertiting. When a small-town girl is all but cut out of a film in which she thinks she is going to be the lead, she and her boyfriend exact revenge by inserting new images and intertitles (set off from the regular text in the shape of the screen) in order to make her the star.

38. Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, Jay Leyda, ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949), 195–256. See Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 129–40.
39. For a detailed analysis of *Intolerance's* influences and production, see William M. Drew, *D. W. Griffith's Intolerance: Its Genesis and Its Vision* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1986).
40. See Scott Simmon, *The Films of D. W. Griffith* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 155.
41. Vachel Lindsay, "The Artistic Position of Douglas Fairbanks," in *The Progress and Poetry of the Movies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 167.
42. Loos's comment that Constance Talmadge's role in *Intolerance* (The Mountain Girl) was that of a "Babylonian flapper" suggests that she was imagining ways to associate *Intolerance* with her own contemporary interests (*GI*, 93).
43. Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 122; Michael Rogin, "The Great Mother Domesticated: Sexual Difference and Sexual Indifference in D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*," *Critical Inquiry* 15:3 (Spring 1989), 518, 520.
44. See, for example, Kevin Brownlow, *The Parade's Gone By* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 64.
45. Barbara Everett, "The New Style," 254; Regina Berreca, *B*, xviii; Katharina Von Ankum, "Material Girls: Consumer Culture and the 'New Woman' in Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and Irmgard Keun's *Das Kunstidene Mädchen*," *Colloquia Germanica* 27:2 (1994), 159–72.
46. Iris Barry remarks that the British "Typist" is equivalent to the American "Stenographer." *Let's Go To The Movies* (New York: Arno Press, 1972 [1926]), 277.
47. Christopher Keep, "The Cultural Work of the Type-Writer Girl," *Victorian Studies*, 40:3 (Spring 1997), 418.
48. Lawrence Rainey, "Eliot Among the Typists: Writing *The Waste Land*," *Modernism/modernity* 12:1 (January 2005), 55.
49. Fictional examples of this formulation include Ada Negri's 1928 story "The Movies," in which a friendless, orphaned typist whose only passion is film is run over after watching a movie—see Antonia Lant, ed., *The Red Velvet Seat* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 111–15—and Margaret Turnbull's *The Close-Up*, a more triumphant story about a woman who begins as a secretary in New York and ends up as a stenographer to the stars in California (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1918).
50. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, Thomas Y. Levin, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 292.
51. Barry, *Let's Go to the Movies*, 8 and 5.
52. Freidrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, trans. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 174.
53. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), 175.
54. Barry, *Let's Go to the Movies*, 5, 73.
55. Lant, ed., *The Red Velvet Seat*, 574.
56. William Faulkner, cited by John T. Matthews, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: Faulkner, Anita Loos, and Mass Culture," in *Faulkner, His Contemporaries, and His Posterity*, Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, ed. (Tübingen: Stauffenburg/Francke, 1993), 207–21.
57. Gilbert, ed., *Letters of James Joyce, Vol. 1*, 247.
58. Loos joked about the contrivances of cubism and the daffyness of Dada. See Loos's *Harper's Bazaar* story "Why Girls Go South," which includes a fictional playwright, Hans Pfeffer, "the important exponent of German Explosionism" (*Fate Keeps On Happening*, 289), and "the great futurist painter Art D. Stroyer" in the scenario "Where Does Annie Belong?" (Beauchamp and Mary Anita Loos, eds., *Anita Loos Rediscovered*, 97–99).
59. Lewis, *The Enemy*, 180.