

American Couturier Elizabeth Hawes and the Feminine Mystique

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Fig. 1. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress and Jacket*, 1931–39, silk, cotton, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1992.125a-b.

In the 1930s and 1940s, fashion designer Elizabeth Hawes was a household name. Most people knew her work, having read her advertisements in *The New Yorker*¹, for instance, and having seen images of her in various newspaper articles and familiar magazines such as *Life* and *Look*.² Thousands read her best-selling, but controversial, book *Fashion Is Spinach*, published in 1938.³ It was a diatribe that denounced the fashion industry and its seasonal summons to women to purchase the newest Parisian-designed fashions. She was an outspoken critic of fashion and a proponent of style, and, once she closed her own design house in 1940, she continued to write and became involved in union work as a vocal advocate of women's rights.

Individualistic in everything she did, Hawes took a conceptual approach to designing clothing—an approach that led her to distinguish between style and fashion. In Hawes's mind, fashion had no rhyme or reason. Fashions changed because the fashion industry needed them to change. If fashions did not change, why would anyone need to buy another dress until the one they had wore out? In *Fashion Is Spinach* she states, "I don't know when the word fashion came into being, but it was an evil day."⁴ Hawes

compared fashion to spinach. Just as she saw the "objectional" vegetable being forced down the throats of children because it was good for them, so was French fashion forced upon American women because it was purportedly the only way they could look attractive. In *Fashion Is Spinach* and her other writings, Hawes exposed the sordid side of the French fashion industry and challenged American women to look beyond the label. Style, however, was another matter. Style had a logic to it. When a design was so perfect it needed no further change, then it had style. According to Hawes, style was the perfection of design expression.

Hawes's concepts about dress were rooted in psychology. In a subsequent book titled *Why Is a Dress?* (1941), she references J. C. Flugel's publication *The Psychology of Clothes*⁵ as well as Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, in which he equates clothing to "a warm movable House."⁶ Their theories coalesced with hers around the concept that to be successful, you must understand the psychology of your customers. She stated that "women want to wear what they do because of what goes on in their heads."⁷ Hawes felt it was imperative that designers know the women whom they were dressing. A designer must, in essence, *be* the woman for whom they were

making clothes, because only then can they be sure what their customer wants to wear.⁸ Because of this psychological concept, Hawes's designs were singular. She preferred dressing women who knew who they were and where they were going in life. In reality, this meant she dressed well-to-do White women, and she encouraged the wealthy socialites for whom she made couture to dress more individualistically, to dress for themselves rather than society. She helped them understand their own tastes instead of following fashion trends. In fact, those she dressed tended to be more independent, progressive women.

Four of her primary clients were anthropologist Diana S. Field, Brooklyn Museum trustee Hollis K. Thayer, fellow women's rights activist Elinor S. Gimbel, and Dorette Kruse Fleischmann, who was a stockholder in Hawes Inc. (Fig. 1). How they dressed, and the fact that they supported Hawes's philosophy, defined who they were. Hawes was certain that, when push came to shove, they would gladly give up discomfort and decoration on a garment to wear a design of hers that was functional and practical. Comfort was paramount above all. She was not interested in fashion over style. Her raised waistlines and loose full skirts were not fashionable or trendy in

the 1930s. Well before her time, she created clothes that were meant to flatter the individual rather than follow fashion trends.

Born in 1903 in Ridgewood, New Jersey, Elizabeth was influenced throughout her life by her mother, Henrietta Houston Hawes, who could be described as her driving force. Henrietta was born in 1870 and attended Vassar, then an all-women's college. There she was exposed to both members of the faculty and a founder who were interested in advancing the rights of women.⁹ Graduating in 1891, she emerged dedicated to women's rights. The fact that Henrietta settled into the conformity of her generation's respectable lifestyle by marrying John Hawes in 1897 was not unusual. Many suffragists felt it was important to dress well and maintain a respectable lifestyle. Rather than being too manly or forward in their dress, they resolved to be more prudent in presenting what was considered a proper demeanor, while still working outside the mainstream towards women's rights. However, Henrietta remained a socially conscious progressive who was attracted to the arts, the avant-garde, and the unorthodox. She was the first woman, for instance, to serve on Ridgewood's Board of Education and the first corresponding secretary for the Village Improvement

Association. She invested her own money in the stock market and, as the first licensed female plumber in New Jersey, became an honorary member of the Ridgewood Plumbers' Union. Henrietta served as the Bergen County Director of the Emergency Relief Administration during the Depression; she helped found the Bergen County Tuberculosis and Health Association; and in 1923 she developed a section of land known as Oakcroft, which offered affordable, cottage-like houses for families trying to move into the Ridgewood community.¹⁰ She was aware of how those less fortunate than herself lived, and she worked towards alleviating some of the more egregious inequalities.

Henrietta Hawes was also an early Montessori education enthusiast who taught her children to be independent thinkers.¹¹ Her offspring were encouraged to work independently, and they each had their own responsibilities. Despite societal prejudices that devalued women, Henrietta took on strong leadership roles. She engaged in this first wave of feminism with fervor during a transitional time in history when primarily White, upper-class women began to branch out of their traditional roles and find a new voice. Needless to say, she was a powerful role model for her daughter.

Elizabeth was the second of four children and by the age of ten was beginning to sew her own clothes. By twelve she was making and selling clothing for the children of her mother's friends. Undoubtedly, she was influenced by the facts that a dressmaker regularly called at the home to make clothing for the family, that she received a Paris-made dress from her grandmother annually, and that she took biannual trips to New York City with her mother to window-shop for fashionable outfits. Although Hawes described her upbringing as average middle-class, these events, and the fact that her mother had time for her numerous social reform activities, point to a higher annual income than simply middle of the road.

Elizabeth, like her sister Charlotte before her, attended Vassar College. With no program at the college for teaching dressmaking or design, however, she took a short course at Parsons School of Design in New York City after her sophomore year. The following summer she apprenticed at Bergdorf Goodman department store. But needing an appropriate theme for her thesis and having been exposed to economics earlier in her time at Vassar, she completed her essay on the British socialist and Labour Party leader Ramsey MacDonald. Economics was part of the

sociology department at the college at the time and was focused on the betterment of society rather than simply the production and consumption of wealth. This self-determined combination of fashion design with economics would prove a driving force later in her career and an approach that combined social reform and dress in a meaningful way.

Fashion, however, was Hawes's first love. Believing that Paris was where she must train to learn the trade, she sailed for France in July of 1925, shortly after graduating from Vassar. As an American in Paris, it was difficult to find employment, but, by 1926, she landed a position as a sketcher for a copy house—an illegal activity. Her job was to gain admittance to couturiers' fashion shows, take notes, sketch surreptitiously, and sometimes simply memorize the looks. These designs would then be duplicated and sold for a much lower price than the original. She subsequently became a full-time fashion correspondent, contributing regular articles that appeared in various US newspapers. This led to a regular column for *The New Yorker*, written under the nom de plume Parasite. Among various other positions, she finally found employment with fashion designer Nicole Groult, sister of the famed French couturier Paul Poiret.

Because it was a smaller house, she was permitted to develop her own designs. But after about six months, she decided that she had learned everything she needed to know about designing dresses and sailed for the US.

Hawes returned to New York and opened her own couture salon in 1928—about a year and a half before the stock market crash. There was only one other couturier working in New York at this time—Jessie Franklin Turner (1881–1956), who presided over a thriving business established in 1922.¹² Valentina Nicholaevna Sanina Schlee (1899–1989)—known simply as Valentina—opened a small couture house the same year as Hawes.¹³ Having been brought up with the concept that “all beautiful clothes are designed in the houses of the French couturiers and all women want them,”¹⁴ Hawes, like so many other women, believed this. But having seen how French clothes were designed and made, she realized that there was no reason this could not be done on American soil with a better outcome for the American woman. Prior to this, Paris was the acknowledged fashion capital of the world, and each season's fashion trends originated there. Garments designed in New York were copies—either pirated or licensed—or adaptations of French designs. Hawes, like Turner before her and



Fig. 2. Madeleine Vionnet (French, 1876–1975), *Dress*, 1926–27, silk, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.199, Photography by Rob Deslongchamps.

Fig. 3. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress*, 1938, silk, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.208.



Valentina, a Russian émigré, was one of the very first couturiers to produce original designs in America.

Influenced by the French couturier Madeleine Vionnet, whom she admired, Hawes's couture designs were ideal for the American woman, who was more active than her European sister and valued comfort and practicality above all else. Vionnet pioneered the bias cut, a construction that allowed a garment to mold to the body without requiring the usual tight, confining undergarments (Fig. 2).¹⁵ Following Vionnet's lead, Hawes used the bias cut to produce clothes that were smooth and form-fitting but not restrictive (Fig. 3). Most often the fabric around the bust was softly gathered to provide support without restrictive brassieres. Rejecting constricting girdles, she tailored the back with gored fullness over the hips, accentuating the *derrière*, and the sexuality, of the wearer (Fig. 4). Her clothes were soft and easy, flattering, and classic. They were so classic when created that at times she sent dresses from past collections down the runway in the midst of her new designs and challenged the audience to determine which was which. Modern in her thoughts about surface decoration, Hawes felt it was permissible only when integral to the design. Used

in any other way, she believed it was simply clutter. The majority of Hawes's clothing lack any surface embellishment at all—there are generally no frills, no bows, no sequins. She wanted her clients to look elegant but be comfortable doing so (Fig. 5).

Having become a successful couturier, Hawes was not interested in becoming inordinately wealthy. She paid her seamstresses, and herself, a good wage but did not wish to be greedy and found the idea of profit turned to avarice repulsive.¹⁶ As early as 1933, Hawes began working with Seventh Avenue manufacturers to create a line of mass-produced designs. She did so partly to afford her new E. 67th Street salon but primarily because she was interested in the democracy of clothing. She felt strongly that all women deserved to wear well-designed, well-made clothing whether they were paying \$400 or \$4 for a dress. Hawes believed that clothing, for those who needed to buy items off the ready-made rack, should be affordable and well-designed, and should fulfill the needs and ideals of the American middle-class.¹⁷ Drawing on the socialist ideology fostered at Vassar, Hawes was sympathetic to the possibilities of mass-production. Could she improve the glove? Could she design a better handbag? Could she create



Fig. 4. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress (detail)*, 1938, silk, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.208.



Fig. 5. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress*, 1930s, silk, cotton, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.202.

a stylish but inexpensive dress? She believed that a satisfactory life came from doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Ultimately, however, Hawes was frustrated by the fact that makers of mass-produced clothing were only interested in the bottom line. They cut all the wrong corners, ignoring her specifications—the colors were different, the sizing was wrong, the fabrics were inappropriate. Merchandisers cheapened her original designs to save a miniscule amount of money and then underpaid their workers, who were generally women, to produce profits for overpaid executives.¹⁸ In the end, Hawes decided not to engage with Seventh Avenue manufacturers, not only because they would not follow her design stipulations, but because they treated their female employees so poorly.

Although she got enormous artistic satisfaction designing custom clothing under the umbrella of Hawes Inc., her couture salon, by 1936 she was working on a plan to extricate herself from the business. She was feeling restless. Seeing war on the horizon, she felt uncomfortable making expensive clothes for the few who could afford them. Hawes realized she was working within a system she simply did not believe in. She also saw the politics of mass-manufacturing and the connection between class and

clothing. Low-cost clothing for the masses meant there must be high-volume sales, condemning the working woman to tasteless and poorly made clothing.¹⁹ Only the well-off could afford stylishness and quality. Classic, well-made clothes were not on the agenda of Seventh Avenue. This was an arrangement in which she refused to engage.

In January of 1940, she closed her shop, much to the chagrin of her customers. Her aim in doing so, however, was to see the greatest number of women happily dressed, not just those who could afford her custom-made, high-priced designs. She wanted to solve the “clothing problem” and see the world become a better place.²⁰ Hawes had been advocating clothing reform for both men and women as she wrote her second book, *Men Can Take It* (1939). She deplored the stiff shirt fronts, uncomfortable neckwear, and weightiness that made up men’s clothing, condemning them to a life of rigidity. Hawes encouraged the freedom that trousers brought to womenswear and created gender-crossing designs such as dresses with “suspenders” (Fig. 6). She also advocated for more colorful clothing and even skirts for men. In fact, in 1937 Hawes held perhaps the first all-male fashion show to focus attention on revising menswear.



Fig. 6. Elizabeth Hawes (American, 1903–1971), *Dress*, 1939, silk, linen, cotton, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dorette Kruse Fleischmann in memory of Julius Fleischmann, 1991.218a, Photography by Rob Deslongchamps.

Many of these ideas were ignored or ridiculed until the 1960s, when American designer Rudi Gernreich revived them, celebrating unisex clothing and more avant-garde concepts. Designing in California, Gernreich famously designed the monokini—the topless bathing suit—and the sheer No-Bra bra in 1964 and was an advocate of freedom in women’s clothing, working primarily for Harmon Knitwear (Fig. 7).²¹ Hawes and Gernreich were honored with a joint exhibition titled *Two Modern Artists of Dress* in 1967 at New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology.²²

In 1940 Hawes became an editor for *PM*, a New York liberal-leaning newspaper, which ran from 1940 to 1948. *PM* was advertisement-free and addressed the concerns of average citizens. Staff writers included Washington correspondent Isidor Feinstein Stone, theater critic Louis Kronenberger, and film critic Cecelia Ager. Contributors included authors, writers, and photographers such as Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss); Ad Reinhardt, one of the founders of Abstract Expressionism; photographer Arthur Fellig, better known as WeeGee; Mary Morris, one of the first female commercial photographers; and many other well-known luminaries. Hawes wrote for the most innovative section of the paper, called “News for Living,”

which offered articles on rent control, childcare, Food and Drug Act violations, and, of course, fashion. This section of *PM* gave Hawes the opportunity to reconfigure the traditional woman’s page as seen in the standard newspaper. Here she began to speak out more aggressively about the oppression of the fashion industry, gender issues, and the plight of women both at home and in the workforce. This venue also provided her with a forum for exposing the unnecessary expense and absurdity of fashion trends, for focusing on her ideas about the democracy of clothing, mass-production, and clothing reform for men and women. Some of her articles were titled, “Hats: Why Bother?,” “Girls in Slacks Have More Fun at Coney Island,” and “You Can Be Plenty Attractive in a \$2.00 Homemade Dress.”²³ She continued to write throughout her career, publishing nine books in all, advocating a new society built on feminism, equality between men and women, cooperative home management and childcare, and radical clothing reform.

Women spent the years during World War II patriotically performing what had traditionally been men’s work. Adopting a masculine look, they wore overalls, coveralls, and trousers while working in factories, and uniforms if they joined the military service. They



Fig. 7. Rudi Gernreich (American, 1922–1985), *Dress and Belt*, 1971, wool, leather, metal, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Kim Klosterman and Michael Lowe, 2006.145a-b, Photography by Rob Deslongchamps.

then spent the last years of the 1940s, after the war, readjusting to the kind of life they had lived beforehand—sometimes better. As husbands returned home from the front, government assistance in the form of the GI bill enabled couples to purchase a home, start a family, and begin to live the American Dream. Postwar Americans retreated to the security of an idealized homelife in suburbia.

Although women of the 1950s were encouraged to join the work force after marrying or after their children were grown, it was clear from messages in popular culture that a woman should not like her job too much. As Debbie Reynolds's character states in the film *The Tender Trap* (1955), a career is “no substitute for marriage.”²⁴ Fired, laid off, or willingly giving up positions they previously held in factories, after the war women were encouraged to accept employment in lower echelon positions. The hourly wages of men soared between 1947 and 1960, while those of women remained low. Nevertheless, women were warned not to earn more than their husbands, or they would emasculate them. Marriage was an attractive prospect for a woman who could then share in the wealth of her spouse. In the end, there were more full-time female homemakers supported by male breadwinners than ever before. The female sex

was viewed as fundamentally maternal and domestic to the point that no satisfying life, other than traditional motherhood and homemaking, was an alternative.²⁵

The change in women's clothing after World War II coincided with this concept and was undoubtedly desired by both women and men. Women of the 1950s wanted to look more feminine again after working in dirty, male-inspired factory clothes and wearing the rather “vanilla” fashions of the war years outside their jobs.²⁶ Parisian couturier Christian Dior acquiesced with his “New Look”—a term coined by Carmel Snow, then editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar*—in 1947 (Fig. 8).²⁷ Padded shoulders, cinched waists, and full skirts were introduced in this new, very feminine-looking line, flouting the fabric restrictions that were imposed during the war in Britain and the United States.

Introduced in April of 1942, regulations by the US War Production Board demanded the use of less fabric, regulating that skirts and blouses have a slimmer cut, suit jackets be shorter, and hemlines rise to the knee. As the war dragged on, there were also controls on the use of metal zippers and particular materials for buttons and buckles.²⁸ But Dior's feminine New Look was dependent on confining undergarments. In fact, corsets, or



Fig. 8. Christian Dior (French, 1905–1957), “*Bar Suit*” *Jacket and Skirt*, 1947, silk, wool, Gift of Mrs. John Chambers Hughes, 1958, C.I.58.34.30, 40; Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.

corselettes, last used in the nineteenth century, were revived. Structured brassieres and shoulder and hip padding were required to create this fashion. Because this was a couture creation, it was far too expensive for most women to afford, but US manufacturers copied the look, and women themselves created similar garments. Boxy jackets of the 1940s were nipped in at the waist by home sewers, skirts were lengthened,

and yards of tulle for self-fashioned petticoats made skirts look fuller, mimicking Dior’s creation. Pattern companies jumped at the chance to produce a fresh look in their offerings to boost their sales, as did department stores, which eagerly gobbled up the copies that Seventh Avenue created.

But this change in fashion also made women more impotent. Tight undergarments limited their ability to complete all but the

most basic tasks—a condition that Hawes ridiculed.²⁹ With men earning the household salaries, why would women need to be capable and hardworking? They slipped back into roles reminiscent of the nineteenth century’s separate sphere ideology, aided by the new labor-saving devices around the home—vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, and electric ovens.³⁰ But in this seemingly perfect setting, in which men brought home the bacon and women cooked it up on their sparkling new electric range, something was missing. This suburban ideal was the veneer concealing roiling unrest on many levels—culturally, politically, and ideologically. The Cold War was dawning, troubles in Southeast Asia were beginning to bubble up, the Civil Rights Movement was underway, and women were not content. They had tasted independence, they had worked to earn a real wage in order to support themselves and their families, and they chafed in this renewed and confining feminine role.

In the preface to her landmark book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan states,

I came to realize that something is very wrong with the way American women are trying to live their lives today. I sensed it first ... in my own life, as a wife and mother of three small children ...

almost in spite of myself... There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform.³¹

Women’s rights were at the forefront of change in the 1960s, alongside the Civil Rights Movement. The decade was a time of great social and cultural development, and many women and minorities were realizing the power they had. Friedan’s book presented an analysis of what she called “the feminine mystique.” She wrote not only about women having a real purpose in society and creating a new plan for their lives, but also about a revived set of values that literally turned the clock back to Victorian times.³²

In her first chapter, titled “The Problem That Has No Name,” Friedan describes this feeling as

a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning... Each suburban housewife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, and lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?”³³

These activities—limited to taking care of their husbands, children, and homes—left women facing a crisis

in terms of identity, self-development, and social expectations. Friedan's examination of women's silent dissatisfaction is recognized as the beginning of the second wave of feminism. As Daniel Horowitz discusses in his publication, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique* (1998), Friedan defined the issues, helped millions of women comprehend them, and empowered them to change.³⁴ Through her work, women recognized the roles assigned to them, which included sexual passivity, a limited career cut short particularly when they had children, restricted educational ambitions, motherhood, and housekeeping—an activity that certainly was not enough to fulfill them as human beings.

After closing her design house in 1940, Hawes fed her artistic appetite by continuing to create couture garments for close friends, family, and particular clients. But by 1941, Hawes became involved with the Committee for the Care of Young Children in Wartime. This group, which was composed of many of her friends and clients, campaigned for government-funded childcare centers—a much needed program with so many parents working away from home on the war effort.³⁵ This was an issue that particularly affected women, who not only worked outside the home but

were expected to maintain the household and take care of their children at the same time, as tradition dictated. In early 1943, Hawes took a position on the night shift as a machine operator at Wright Aeronautical in Paterson, New Jersey. Her intent was to engage with real people, to be part of the working world, and to see the average woman's problems close-up. Here she experienced hazardous working conditions, racism, sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and the issues that affected married working women and mothers. Who offered adequate childcare? How could a woman take time off to care for a sick child? How could they manage to work full time *and* be a traditional housewife?

Hawes left Wright Aeronautical in 1944 and took a position in Detroit in the education department of the United Auto Workers (UAW), writing for the *Detroit Free Press* at the same time. Here she again faced racism, anti-Semitism, sex discrimination, and sexual harassment, as did the women in the factories and unions with whom she had contact. She was confounded by the majority of women who needed to be convinced that they had rights at all and should therefore join the union.³⁶ Hawes addressed women's issues in her books *Hurry Up Please Its Time* and *Why Women Cry or Wench with Wrenches*. She

warned her male readers that there was a revolution brewing in their kitchen and proclaimed,

I have never met a contented housewife. But as there are such a vociferous bunch of people constantly preaching that woman's place is in the home—I must force myself to assume that somewhere there is a female who is perfectly contented with the lot of housewife.... Never does she feel like throwing all the dishes on the floor instead of re-washing them for the millionth time.... Never does she ask herself why she married this man.... There must be a woman like this somewhere—or how could intelligent, civic-minded people keep saying: "Woman's place is in the home!"... We've never seen such a female—we never hope to see one—and under no circumstances would any of us want to be one.³⁷

In the epilogue to *Why Women Cry*, she wrote a declaration that called on women and men to recognize that twentieth-century American household management closely resembled that of the seventeenth century. She suggested that instead of dividing labor, husband and wife should work together to demand fair housing and equal educational opportunities, and to practice cross-class and cross-gender cooperation in childcare and house-keeping.³⁸

Hawes titled her seventh book, published in 1948, *Anything but*

Love, focusing on the plight of women in the post-war era. She satirizes social expectations of women and states in the publication's introduction, "We are going to tell why women exist."³⁹ Successive chapters lead the reader from her teens to age 35, at which point, having fulfilled her mission as a wife and mother, "she is no longer worth a nickel."⁴⁰ The pre-teen girl, for instance, is lectured regarding the use of cosmetics to falsify her appearance—"because there are no naturally pretty girls in America"⁴¹—and she is reminded, "your Beauty Quotient is supposed to be twice your Intelligence Quotient."⁴² She explains how to relate to boys—"He wants your lips kissable so use plenty of lipstick"⁴³—and encourages girls to engage in meaningless consumerism.⁴⁴ Hawes tells them, "It is necessary for you to develop a deep sense of inferiority, so deep you will eventually never know it is there. Your inferiority, if properly developed, will blossom beautifully later in life."⁴⁵

Hawes insists that young women get a job with the express intent of meeting men they might marry.⁴⁶ She notes that women who never marry will suffer a dreadful fate and subsequently recounts the simultaneous suicide of three New York spinsters who shared an apartment.⁴⁷ Hawes encapsulates in two short sentences the very

nineteenth-century contemporary attitude about women: “Husbands, homes, and children are the only accepted sources of complete female satisfaction. Every American girl must get a husband.”⁴⁸ Of course, the most important years of a woman’s life, she says, are between the ages of 18 and 35, when her crucial responsibilities are childbearing, utilizing labor-saving devices, buying and preparing food, home decorating, and childcare. “If you throw yourself wholeheartedly into these things, nothing else will be necessary.”⁴⁹ Suzy—one of the fictional characters that Hawes follows throughout the book as a means of animating her points—innocently asks, “Do I gather, that now I’m 35 I am permitted to think?”⁵⁰ In the midst of this, Hawes mentions a “nameless fear” that women experience; Betty Friedan uses a similar phrase and alludes to this same dissatisfaction in women’s lives in *The Feminine Mystique*.⁵¹

Friedan’s work was, as she said herself, a coming together of all the pieces of her own life for the first time. Although she characterized herself simply as one of millions of unhappy homemakers, whose experiences in her marriage and as a mother had led to the writing of her book, Friedan was far more informed about important issues of the day, as her own past makes clear. In the early 1940s, she was a

journalist for leftist and union publications. From 1946 to 1952, she worked for the United Electrical Workers (UE) and wrote for the UE News. She had consistently championed social causes in her writing and was working as a freelance journalist when she wrote *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan, however, was not without her influences, and one of these was the largely forgotten Elizabeth Hawes, who recognized and articulated these same feminist issues long before Friedan put pen to paper.

Shortly after Hawes published *Why Women Cry*, Betty Goldstein (later Friedan) was writing a regular column about women’s wartime situations called “Wartime Living” for Federated Press, in which she mixed practical solutions and political analysis, much like Hawes’s work for *PM*. Like Hawes, she addressed issues relating to women. Forecasting Dior’s New Look, and the restrictive undergarments that went with it, Friedan told women to expect elastic to be re-introduced into girdles, brassieres, and garters. This coincided with the lifting of regulations on the use of certain materials during the war. In a 1944 article entitled “A Woman’s Place Is Where?,” she applauded the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) for including women in their community councils and raising the issue of childcare for working

mothers. And one of her articles was about Elizabeth Hawes and her recently published book, *Why Women Cry*. Friedan began her article with, “Men, there’s a revolution cooking in your own kitchens—revolutions of the forgotten female, who is finally waking up to the fact that she can produce other things besides babies.”⁵² These words mimicked Hawes’s own, with only a slight rewording, in her introduction to *Why Women Cry*.⁵³

These direct connections between Hawes and Friedan are not surprising. It was clear that Friedan thought highly of Hawes and the previous work she had done to promote feminist issues that concerned Friedan as well. While there were differences in their upbringings—Hawes came from an upper middle-class family with a very progressive role model, while Friedan grew up in Peoria, Illinois, the daughter of Jewish immigrants—in other ways their paths were remarkably similar. Both were active journalists, passionate union organizers, and progressive feminists and writers. They could have met at some point as Hawes traveled the country in her position in the education department of the UAW, frequently returning to New York where Friedan lived at the time. In addition, Hawes mentions the UE in both *Why Women Cry* and *Hurry Up Please Its Time*, noting that the UAW and the

UE joined forces to affect an equal pay for equal work decision from the National War Labor Board. But whether they met or not, Friedan was aware of Hawes’s writings and her political work and referenced them, almost literally, in some cases. Both recognized a problem in women’s lives. They both saw the issues with women combining employment with domesticity, racial and sexual harassment, lower wages for the same work, and non-existent childcare for women in the workforce.

Long before Friedan’s book, Hawes was debunking the myths of the happy American housewife. In fact, she addressed “the problem that has no name” in *Why Women Cry*, recounting the story of Lucinda, whose “work” is reduced to cooking and cleaning. Her husband states, “Something has come over my wife.”⁵⁴ Hawes spanned the gap between first-wave feminists who fought for the right to vote and the second wave that followed in the 1960s. Throughout, she was operating in the White, middle-class world that dominated both of those stages of the American feminism movement. Although she had closed her couture house and had given up on collaborations with Seventh Avenue manufacturers of well-designed, mass-produced clothing, Hawes continued to think about and make clothes until her death in 1971. Her

foray into factory work at Wright Aeronautical resulted in an attempt to make safer and more comfortable clothes for women in that setting. In *Why Women Cry*, she states, “Everything I’d ever been interested in, from child care to clothes, landed me up against the factory gate.”⁵⁵ During World War II, she was contracted by the US Army to construct a nurse’s uniform. Although it was attire designed to be easy to move in and practical for the work nurses needed to perform, it was rejected.⁵⁶ Hawes also designed garments that were based on the basic kimono shape, with deep armholes for comfort and using rectangles and squares of fabric to eliminate waste. She used the vernacular of clothing as a vehicle to espouse her ideas of female freedom both during and after World War II.

Both Friedan and Hawes, in their respective times, laid the groundwork for a struggle that continues still today. Each attempted to bring women’s issues to the fore. While Friedan’s work was primarily with White women—an aspect of first and second-wave feminism that continues to generate controversy—Hawes worked with and simultaneously advocated for Black and White women’s rights, while employed by both Wright Aeronautical and the UAW. Hawes feared that women’s concerns would fall

by the wayside once World War II was over. She pushed hard against the status quo with a rather acerbic tone in her writing that became more pronounced over time. In spite of some forward strides that her work accomplished, Hawes’s voice ended up being muted by the war and by the rampant fear of communism that ran throughout US society at the time. She saw the latter as a cover for attacking women activists and downplaying their concerns. In general, both Black and White women continued to be discriminated against and their issues were devalued. Hawes primed the pump for Friedan, whose volume, published twenty years later, was certainly better researched, took a calmer tone, and was less shrill than Hawes’s books. Society, no longer at war and experiencing a revolution in social norms, was more open to hearing the message in the 1960s than it had been in the 1940s, perhaps because of women like Hawes who raised the issues years earlier. Society had heard these cries before, and social change takes time.

The 2019 CAA session was titled “Elizabeth Hawes at the Cincinnati Art Museum and the Development of American Fashion,” tied to the 2019 MAHS meeting that was held in Cincinnati.

¹ See, for instance, *The New Yorker*, October 29, 1932 and June 3, 1933.

² See, for instance, *Life*, May 2, 1938, 2–3 and *Look*, August 2, 1938, 1–2, 7–8.

³ Elizabeth Hawes, *Fashion Is Spinach* (New York: Random House, 1938).

⁴ Hawes, *Fashion Is Spinach*, 5.

⁵ Elizabeth Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?* (New York: Viking, 1942), 44.

⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh in Three Books*, ed. Charles Frederick Harrold (New York: Odyssey, 1937), 42; cited by Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 38.

⁷ Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 44, 52.

⁸ Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 52.

⁹ “A History of Vassar College,” Vassar College, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.vassar.edu/about/history>; “More Than a Brewer,” Vassar Encyclopedia, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/matthew-vassar/more-than-a-brewer/>.

¹⁰ Bettina Berch, *Radical by Design* (New York: Dutton, 1988), 7–9; Alexandra Hoey, “Henrietta Hawes: A Pioneer in Ridgewood’s Education,” *The Ridgewood News*, September 2, 2016, accessed September 16, 2021, <https://www.northjersey.com/story/life/community/2016/09/02/henrietta-hawes-a-pioneer-in-ridgewoods-education/92985866>.

¹¹ Berch, *Radical by Design*, 8.

¹² Jan Glier Reeder, “Jessie Franklin Turner: An Intimate Affair,” in *The Hidden History of American Fashion: Rediscovering 20th-Century Women Designers*, ed. Nancy Deihl (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 7–22.

¹³ Kohle Yohannan, *Valentina: American Couture and the Cult of Celebrity* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009).

¹⁴ Hawes, *Fashion Is Spinach*, 333.

¹⁵ Betty Kirke, *Madeleine Vionnet* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2012).

¹⁶ Gavrik Losey, interview by Rebecca Arnold, September 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZkZTxWgMO8>.

¹⁷ Berch, *Radical by Design*, 56.

¹⁸ Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 3; Berch, *Radical by Design*, 59–60.

¹⁹ Berch, *Radical by Design*, 60–61.

²⁰ Hawes, *Why Is a Dress?*, 4–5, 8–9.

²¹ Peggy Moffit, *The Rudi Gernreich Book* (Cologne: Taschen, 1999).

²² Exhibition invitation at FIT Library, Special Collections and College Archives, US NNFIT SC.FITA.10.2.2.

²³ Paul Milkman, *PM: A New Deal in Journalism 1940–1948* (Denver: Outskirts Press, 2016), 78–81; “New York: *PM* New York Daily: 1940–48,” *The Eye of Photography*, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://loeildelaphotographie.com/en/new-york-pm-new-york-daily-1940-48/>; Berch, *Radical by Design*, 92.

²⁴ *The Tender Trap*, dir. Charles Walters (1955; Burbank, CA: Warner Archives, 2021), Blu-ray.

²⁵ Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 59–64.

²⁶ Jennifer M. Mower and Elaine L. Pederson, “Pretty and Patriotic: Women’s Consumption of Apparel During World War II,” *Dress: The Journal of the Costume Society of America* 39, no. 1 (2013): 50.

²⁷ *Dior: The New Look* (Chicago: Chicago History Museum, 2006), coinciding with an exhibition of the same title.

²⁸ For further information regarding fabric restrictions in the US, see Mower and Pedersen, “Pretty and Patriotic,” 37–54; for information regarding fabric restrictions in Britain, see Peter McNeil, “‘Put Your Best Face Forward’: The Impact of the Second World War on Dress,” *Journal of Design History* 6, no. 4 (1993): 283–99.

²⁹ Losey, interview.

³⁰ Cynthia Amnéus, *A Separate Sphere: Dressmakers in Cincinnati’s Golden Age 1877–1922* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2003), 10–15.

³¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 9.

³² Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 338–42.

³³ Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 15.

³⁴ Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

³⁵ Elinor Gimbel is designated as the founder or co-founder of the Committee for the Care of Young Children in War-time, depending on what source is accessed.

³⁶ Elizabeth Hawes, *Hurry Up Please Its Time* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946), 79–80.

³⁷ Elizabeth Hawes, *Why Women Cry* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943), xi, 3–5.

³⁸ Hawes, *Why Women Cry*, 219–21.

³⁹ Elizabeth Hawes, *Anything but Love: A Complete Digest of the Rules for Feminine Behavior from Birth to Death* (New York: Rinehart, 1942), 6.

⁴⁰ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 257.

⁴¹ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 22.

⁴² Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 14.

⁴³ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 24.

⁴⁴ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 72–73.

⁴⁵ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 14–15.

⁴⁶ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 43.

⁴⁷ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 71.

⁴⁸ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 69–72.

⁴⁹ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 135.

⁵⁰ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 272.

⁵¹ Hawes, *Anything but Love*, 232;
Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 33.

⁵² Horowitz, *Betty Friedan*, 107–9.

⁵³ Hawes, *Why Women Cry*, xi.

⁵⁴ Hawes, *Why Women Cry*, 167–70.

⁵⁵ Hawes, *Why Women Cry*, 56–57.

⁵⁶ Losey, interview.