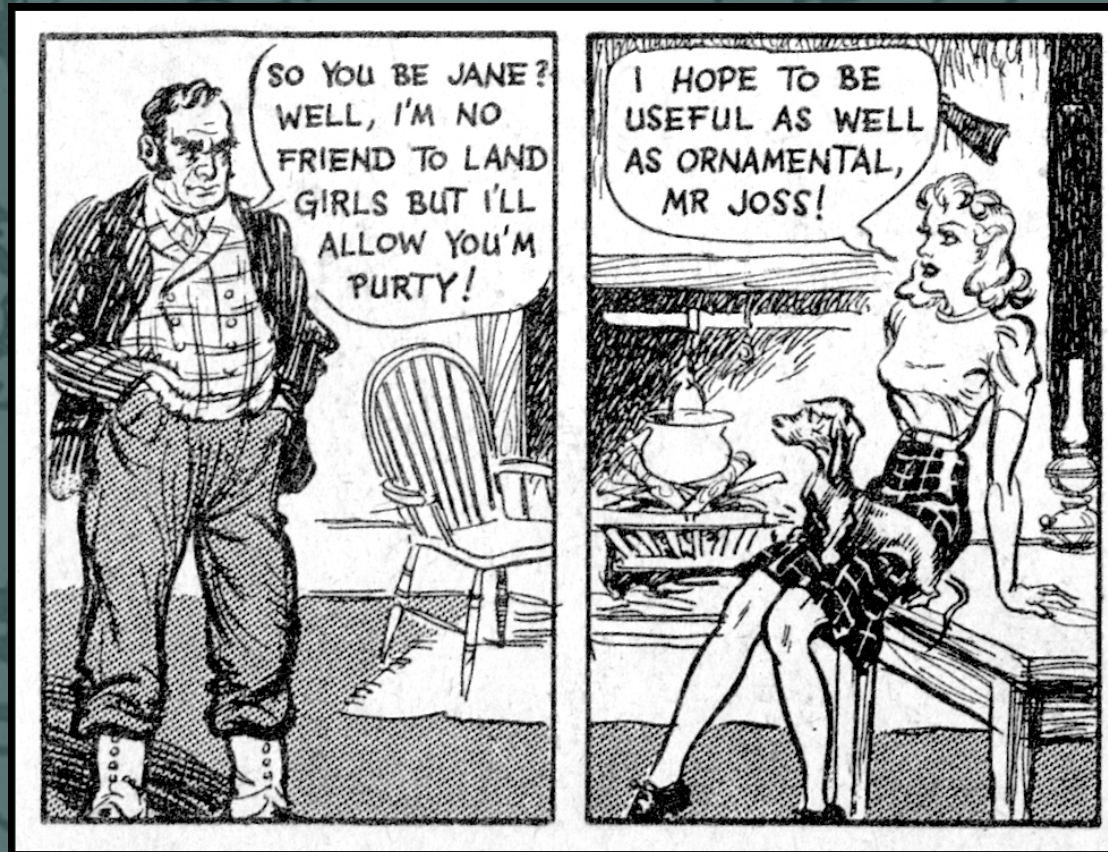


# More Than Mere Ornament:

Re-evaluating Norman Pett's *Jane*





## *Jane: The Popular Legend*

- Remembered as a straightforward 'cheesecake' strip, with Jane thought of as an archetypal 'dumb blonde'.
- Jane thought of as lacking control over herself and her situation- "a character whose clothes consistently fell off, in front of groups of men, for no apparent reason" (Levine 2015).
- The primary role of the series was to create an erotic spectacle for men.
  - The primary role of the character was to be a male fantasy figure.
- Her fame is framed by, and understood in terms of, the war years of 1939-1945 and *Jane's* popularity with allied servicemen.



## Jane: Chapman's View:

“Jane represents a conservative ideal of womanhood. For all that she has a tendency to shed her clothes, Jane is not promiscuous: she remains, at all times, virtuous, chaste and loyal to her fiancé Georgie. A recurring theme is of Jane gamely fending off the amorous attentions of other suitors”.

James Chapman, *British Comics*





When we actually read *Jane*, however, we start to find that things are rather different.

One of the reasons that Bakhtin's theories fit so well when looking at texts like this is their ability to accommodate the fluidity with which text, context and culture combine to create meaning.

“Texts continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation. . . . they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth.” (Bakhtin 1982).

*Jane* was creatively transformed many times during its decades-long *Mirror* career, and even during the war years, several distinct ‘eras’ can be identified.

*Jane*’s popular legend can be understood as a further creative transformation, albeit one that obfuscates and disguises the true nature of the series.



# Jane versus Miss Lace:

*Jane's* popular legend actually fits some other strips rather better than it does Jane itself.

First appearing in January 1943, and created exclusively for American service papers, Milton Caniff's *Male Call* featured a sultry, dark-haired American woman who lived on the edge of an unnamed, and therefore universal, "everyman's Army camp"

"Lace was clearly a sex object: as the principal character in the strip, she existed purely for the visual pleasure of the strip's male readers." (Harvey 2007).



During WW2, *Jane* was a continuity strip, whilst *Male Call* was a self-contained 'gag-strip'. Narratively devoid of the potential to grow as a character, Lace did very little in the war other than interact with- and be defined by- the men around her.



Jane was a very different character. During the war, she was variously a military chauffeur and spy. She worked on the land, in a factory, in the NAAFI, the WAAFs, and the EFI. She led a diplomatic mission, was torpedoed, shot at, thrown from roofs and beaten. She was marooned on a desert island, parachuted into occupied Europe, engaged in military operations at home and abroad, and ended the war deep in the shattered ruins of Nazi Germany itself.

Unlike *Male Call*, and contrary to its popular legend, *Jane* was also a strip that was aimed at women as much men.

When *Jane* first appeared in 1932, the *Daily Mirror* was “a paper with a definitely upper and middle class appeal... and only thirty percent of the readers were men” (PEP Press Report, quoted in Smith, 1975).

The London Press Exchange found in January 1947 that 80% of the *Mirror's* female readers read *Jane*. This made it the most popular *Mirror* strip with women.

By 1952 the percentage had risen to 82%, with *Jane* again the most popular series with female *Mirror* readers (Cudlipp, 1953).





# Beyond the Legend: Recurring Wartime Themes

Promotion of approved male/female conduct.

Page 12 THE DAILY MIRROR Wednesday, September 28, 1938

**BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE! ... the page that teaches you to be STRONG so that Britain will be STRONG too**

## HAVE YOU FOUND OUT HOW..

**TO USE THIS YET?**

**8 p.m. Frantic with headache**  
**8.30 p.m. At concert pitch**

**GENASPRIN**  
*act you through!*

GENASPRIN is sold only by qualified chemists



The advertisement features a large illustration of a hand holding a pill bottle labeled 'GENASPRIN'. The text is arranged around this central image, with headlines and sub-headlines in bold, sans-serif fonts. The bottom of the ad includes a small illustration of a man in a suit and a woman in a dress, with the text '8 p.m. Frantic with headache' and '8.30 p.m. At concert pitch'.

Thursday, September 29, 1938

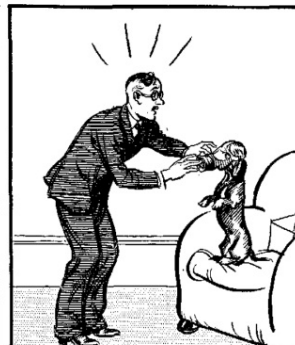
THE DAILY MIRROR

Page 9

## Jane . . .

(Copyright in all countries.)

## "A Fitting Subject"



# Beyond the Legend: Recurring Themes

Promotion of approved male/female conduct.

Monday, February 27, 1939

THE DAILY MIRROR

Page 7

## Jane . . .

All characters in this strip are fictitious and are not intended to represent any person living or dead. (Copyright in all countries.)



*Jane's Love Story* (1938-9) established the principle of articulating nobility of character through male attitudes to war service and national defence.



# Beyond the Legend: Recurring Themes

Promotion of approved male/female conduct.

“Supposing you are walking down the street and a lorry load of soldiers goes by. They wave at you, laugh and yell out ‘Hello, beautiful!’. What do you do? You do not turn a haughty head and show them a pair of indignantly raised shoulders. You laugh and wave back.... As gaily as you know how”.



“You don’t have to make yourself look cheap of common.... Every friendly gesture you make will be taken in the spirit it is offered. Our young men are a decent lot, you know.” (*Daily Mirror* 8 June 1940, p. 12)



# Beyond the Legend: Recurring Themes

Promotion of approved male/female conduct.

Chapman inaccurately suggests that Jane shunned all men other than Georgie.

In fact, Jane's actions promoted approved male conduct via a 'reward system'. Men who were actively engaged in war-work, and who acted in a courteous and gentlemanly manner as they did so, would be rewarded with Jane's attentions. Georgie fitted this bill, but so did many others:



# Beyond the Legend: Recurring Themes

Promotion of approved male/female conduct.

Men who were war profiteers, secretly enemy agents, or generally lacking in gentlemanly conduct, would be rebuffed:





# Beyond the Legend: Recurring Themes

Jane was neither defined by, nor subservient to, the men around her



Contrary to vacuous fantasy figure of popular legend, Jane was confident, assertive and independent in her dealings with men (and life in general).



# Beyond the Legend: Recurring Themes

Nudity used as an extension of the 'reward system'



This aspect of the strips refute the popular notion that Jane was a doe-eyed innocent who was continually losing her clothing by accident- in fact, she sometimes *chose* to remove her clothing for men.

## Beyond the Legend: Recurring Themes

## Nudity used as an extension of the 'reward system'



Within the diegesis, 'unworthy men' were not rewarded with Jane's nudity- instead, they spied on her unnoticed. However, at the level of text/audience, Jane's lack of clothing simultaneously facilitated the reward system by presenting Jane's body for the benefit of the servicemen who were becoming an increasingly important part of Jane's audience....



Differences between the wartime eras and Jane's changing cultural role:

### Phoney War (1939-40)

Continued the pre-war genre of lightweight comedy romance, albeit with a newly military setting.

### Defence of the Realm (1940-42)

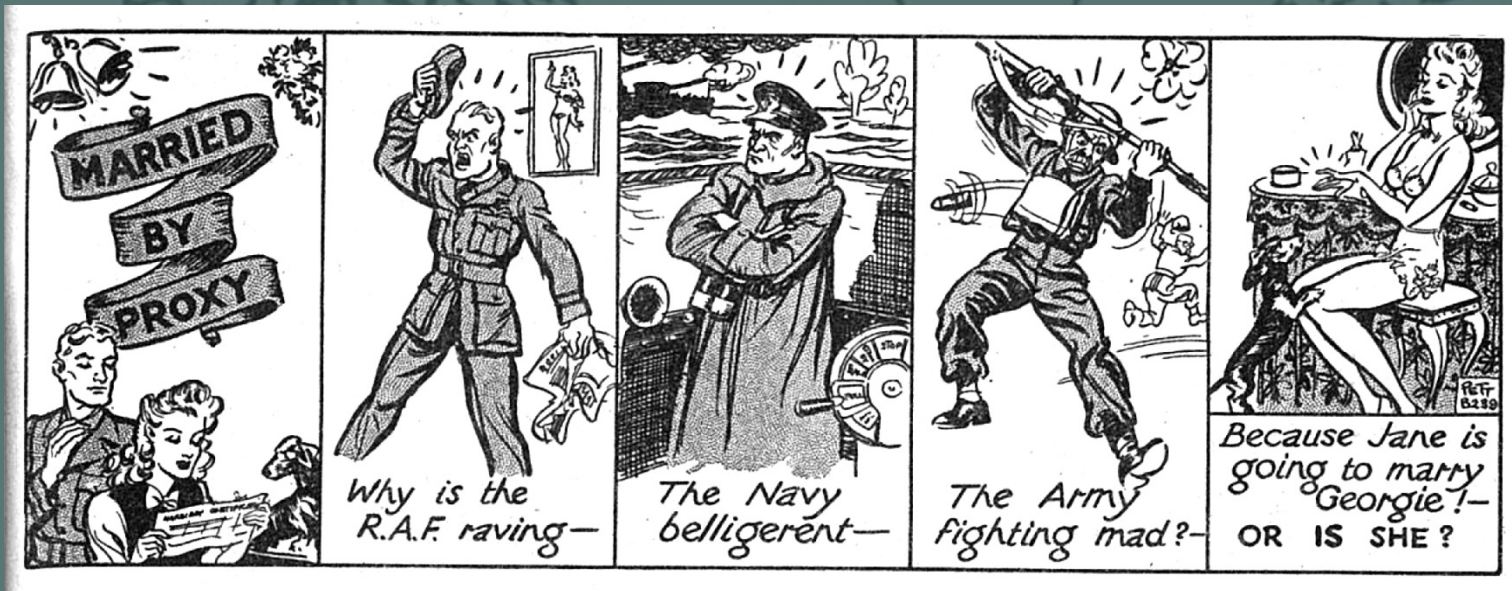
Became a rousing espionage-adventure, with Jane an MI5 agent. Reflecting the isolated and vulnerable position of the nation, all stories were set within Britain, with Jane battling 'the enemy within' - fifth columnists and saboteurs. The overall feeling was of a vulnerable nation and an enemy close at hand.

### International Engagements (1942-44)

Espionage adventure continued to be the main driver of narrative, but in keeping with Britain's improving military situation the series became more international, with stories set in the Caribbean and Europe as well as the home front. Romance also re-established itself as a key secondary theme (notable story titles include *Jane's Island Romance* and *Married by Proxy*).



The opening episode of the final International Engagements storyline, *Married by Proxy* (7/10/43), hinted for the first time at a major shift that had occurred in the series' cultural positioning as the war progressed.





Page 12 THE DAILY MIRROR

# THIS IS WHAT JANE IS REALLY LIKE!



**D**O you remember the girl in the picture in the picture?  
 You probably don't, but she's dead—  
 Jane of Norman Pett's famous Daily Mirror daily strip. That is, she is the model from whom Pett drew hundreds of his popular pictures.

In real life she's Charmel Leighton-Porter, beautiful twenty-two-year-old platinum blonde "artistic" model, recently chosen "Britain's prettiest woman."

Charmel told us how she became Jane.  
 "I was hairdressing operator in a Birmingham hotel," she said, "when Norman Pett came in and saw me. That was four years ago."  
 "He said I was the 'perfect model' and started to draw me right away."  
 "He would call for me in the hotel at 8.30 in the evening and we would go right along to his studio. He often worked till very late and would finish his drawing and put it on the lamp for London as he took me home."

"He drew me during a party—remember we were a fashion show on the evening when we—swimming, walking, swimming, driving, playing tennis and golf, swimming, driving, swimming, golf . . . in all sorts of complicated and difficult poses."

"When eighteen months ago he found I was leaving Birmingham, he did hundreds of sketches of me and sent them for future use."

"I leave the Daily Mirror every day and I always look in first to see what he's doing."

Charmel has been judged to have perfect proportions. She is 5'6", 110 lbs., weighs eight stone, has a 32in. bust, waist 23, hips 36, thighs 23, calf 15, ankle 7½.

Norman Pett, who draws a new Jane feature each day in the Daily Mirror, says that Miss Leighton-Porter was the ideal for Jane. Her proportions were perfect, she had a happy expression and a head of marvellous curls.

"There were models for Jane before Miss Leighton-Porter, but I wish for none 'than her' about," he says.

★

...and here's one of the rough sketches of Jane drawn by NORMAN PETT with Miss Leighton-Porter as model.



July 1939



July 1941

# Aston HIPPODROME

5-45 TWICE NIGHTLY 7-45  
Programme for week commencing Monday, March 23rd

ANGLO-AMERICAN STAGE PRODUCTIONS LTD.  
PRESENT THEIR FAMOUS  
**AMERICAN STYLE REVUE**



# HI DIDDLE DIDDLE

## PRESS OPINION

A SHOW THAT IS DIFFERENT — LIKE ITS TITLE. AN  
OUTSTANDING MODERN REVUE WITH ORIGINAL IDEAS,  
SPARKLING COMEDY, BEAUTIFUL SCENERY, CHARMING  
GIRLS—GOOD, CLEAN ENTERTAINMENT BY AN EXCELLENT  
CAST. IT IS A SHOW EVERYONE SHOULD SEE!

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ANGLO-AMERICAN STAGE PRODUCTIONS

Introducing

# JANE of "DAILY MIRROR"

fame

You have seen her  
amusing Cartoons in the  
"Daily Mirror," now  
come and meet her  
personally.



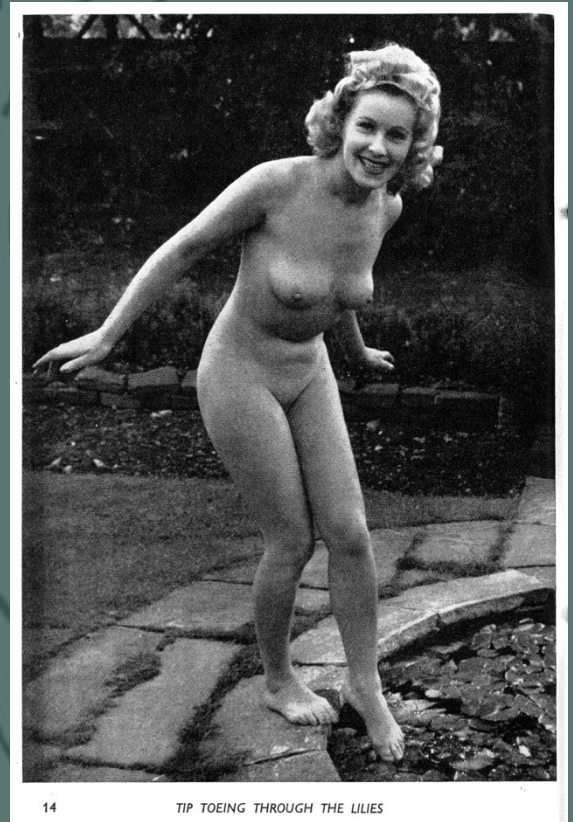
MILLIE JACKSON'S  
**ANGLO-AMERICAN  
LOVELIES**



See "Hi-Diddle-Diddle" and Laugh Your Cares Away



1942





## PAK WEEKLY PRODUCED BY PR2 TRUNK CALL

VOL. II, No. 9

27th DECEMBER, 1943.



### RETROSPECT

Every year the Nazi bosses tell the world just what is coming to it in the next twelve months. Will they do it this year?

Here are a few of the New Year pronouncements of the German propaganda machine a year ago: the battle of England only just beginning; the bombing of our cities just a preliminary to the real thing; invasion!

A boomerang, surely! For less than a year later it was German cities that were being bombed as cities had never been bombed before; the raids on England had become sporadic nuisance raids; any talk of invasion indicated invasion in the reverse direction.

Then their radio spokesmen commented on the "apparent advantage the Allies were having in North Africa"; spoke complacently of the "barrier of Sicily and Tunis still in Axis hands."

#### WHAT THE EYE SEES...

A map-strip that tells its own story of the falsification of Nazi New Year boasts.



That "apparent" advantage was very soon turned to reality. Tunis went in a very short time and long before the end of the year Sicily and a large slice of Italy had gone too.

And the Axis itself went with the defection of Italy and her declaration of war upon her former friend and ally.

The Mediterranean situation, screamed the German radio a year ago, was worse for Britain than ever. "England is unable to use the sea routes from Gibraltar to Suez. The Mediterranean is dominated by German and Italian air forces."

By June the German radio itself was forced to admit that things were not all they might be in "Mare Nostrum." They announced "There is no denying the fact that there has been another let up in the figures of enemy tonnage sunk."

By November we were able to announce that during the past three months no fewer than 60 U-boats had been sunk and that fewer Allied ships than U-boats had been lost.

Gauleiter Wagner in a recent speech said: "We have been compelled practically

to cease U-boat operations because the enemy succeeded in finding an effective means of defence."

Of the Russian campaign, too, German propaganda painted a rosy enough picture a year ago. It will be interesting to see what they make of it this time. The watchword of the German General Staff to-day is "strategic economy."

#### We Know the Answers

This economy technique was used for the first time in the German recapture of Kharkov last March. It consists of employing a number of crack divisions on a narrow front while the majority of the forces are used defensively along the rest of the front. At Kharkov it worked.

Then they tried it again in the battle of Kursk with disastrous results to themselves. The Russians had learned the answer.

And so it has been in every aspect of the war. We have learned the answers.

Just what will the German propaganda promise the doomed people of the Reich for 1944?

#### Keep Smiling!

—SIR J. GRIGG

THE following message has been received by the officiating C-in-C. from Sir James Grigg:

"Please extend to all ranks in your Command my warm thanks for their Christmas Greetings. Tell them from me to keep smiling and that their well-being is constantly in my thoughts."

12

### Paiforce people

FAR away in the north of Persia there is a British Staging Post run entirely by one officer and one N.C.O. Attached is a Persian lorry drivers' canteen, run by a British ex-C.S.M.

Large numbers of B.O.B. and I.O.R. drivers pull into the staging post every night. Until recently there was nothing for them to do, and practically nothing for them by way of amenities. Cinema shows have been practically non-existent, and the last time they had one the unit broke down, anyway!

Then a Workshops Section came on the scene—the only one for hundreds of miles, and the O.C. Staging Post, Captain Green, contacted the Workshops Officer, Captain Cosgrove, who is a musician, and they got together an orchestra.

Concerts are held regularly in the

Persian canteen, and are attended by large gatherings of British, Indians, Russians, and Persians. Although it is obvious that some of them will not understand what the talking parts are all about, the shows are enjoyed by all. This staging post is the only one on a very busy convoy route for over four hundred miles, and anyone on the route will tell you that they look forward to "Cossie's Concerts" just as much as they yearn for their infrequent days "off," especially in the freezing winter weather.

The staging post got as far as the building of the house walls, and the laying-out of the roads, less the surface, and then remained idle until the Sappers came along and finished off enough of the town to make a comfortable staging post and hospital. How necessary this was is

TRUNK CALL, 27th December, 1943

shown by the fact that in winter snow drifts up to fifteen feet deep are by no means uncommon. Gales and blizzards often last for days on end.

Though often isolated during last winter the post always managed to rig up something so that everyone could get something hot at meal-times.

### STOP PRESS

#### Second Front Appointments

GEN. EISENHOWER: Supreme Commander, Anglo-U.S. Expeditionary Forces

GEN. MONTGOMERY: C-in-C, British Armies under Eisenhower.

GEN. ALEXANDER: C-in-C, Allied Armies in Italy.

GEN. MATLAND WILSON: C-in-C, Mediterranean theatre.

GEN. SPAATZ: Commander, U.S. Strategic Bombing Forces operating against Germany.

### JANE:



### Count-ed Out!

Issued by British Army Public Relations. All communications to be addressed to The Editor "Trunk Call," British Army Public Relations, G.H.Q. Paiforce.





Jane also entered the wider iconography of the war through her adoption as unofficial mascot for a range of military vehicles (pictured is Avro Lancaster JB 138, aka 'Just Jane', who entered operational service in August 1943).



The shift to multiple methods of cultural dispersal created a parallel shift from monosemic to polysemic characterisation, allowing *Jane* to break free from authorial subordination to either Pett or the *Daily Mirror*.



Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony discusses how Dostoevsky’s characters are freed from subservience to an omnipotent creator, and are no longer simply “a vehicle for the author’s own ideological position” (Bakhtin 1984).

By the end of the war, Jane was exhibiting just such a polyphonic address, allowing the adoption of simultaneous and divergent cultural positions that were increasingly free from the authorial control of either Norman Pett or the *Daily Mirror*.

### Final Wartime Era: Pin-Up Queen (1944-45)

Reflecting changes to *Jane* that had occurred within wider popular/war culture, the daily strip abruptly switched focus in 1944 in order to fall in line with Jane's new fame as a glamour girl. Suddenly, within the diegesis Jane was famous as a 'forces pin-up', which creating humorous problems for her ongoing espionage duties.



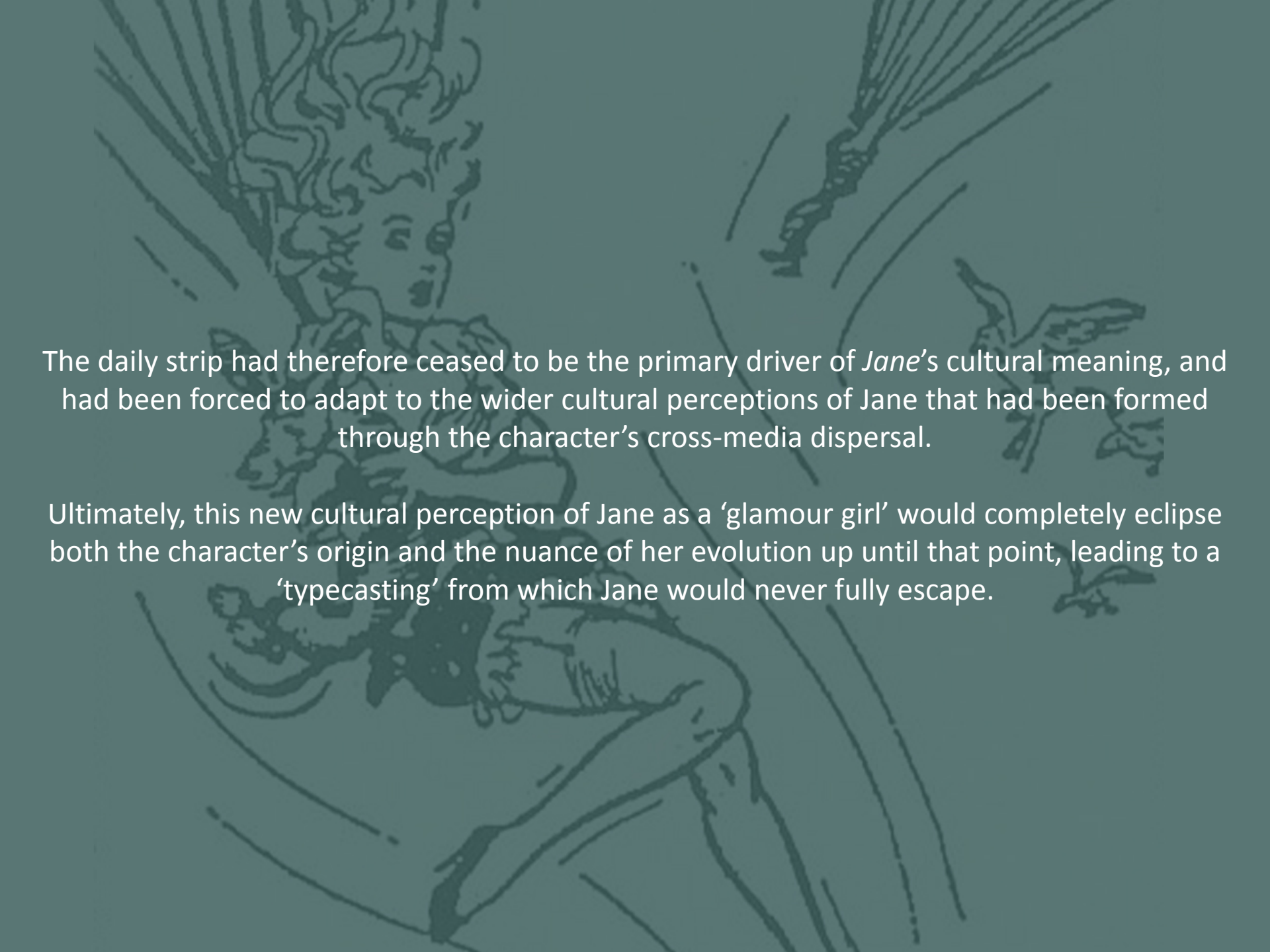
By the second story of the Pin-Up Queen era (*Behind the Front*) she had abandoned espionage work, and her adventures became based around the stage (although thwarting Nazi plots was still the main theme).





By May 1945 all reference to Jane's principal wartime role of espionage has been forgotten, and she even self-identified as a 'pin-up girl'...





The daily strip had therefore ceased to be the primary driver of *Jane's* cultural meaning, and had been forced to adapt to the wider cultural perceptions of Jane that had been formed through the character's cross-media dispersal.

Ultimately, this new cultural perception of Jane as a 'glamour girl' would completely eclipse both the character's origin and the nuance of her evolution up until that point, leading to a 'typecasting' from which Jane would never fully escape.



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