

Title: Get the London Look: Anna Neagle as the Emblem of British Fashion and Femininity in *Maytime in Mayfair* (1949).

Between 1947 and 1952, the top British female star at the domestic box office was Anna Neagle. She had displaced Margaret Lockwood, who had achieved the top position during the war years with her turns as dangerous and subversive women in Gainsborough pictures such as *The Man in Grey* (Arliss, 1943) and, most famously, *The Wicked Lady* (Arliss, 1945). In both films Lockwood co-starred with James Mason, the brooding, somewhat sadistic idol to a legion of female fans. Mason, mirroring Lockwood's popularity, was the top male star of 1945 and his appeal was a 'combination of romantic allure and Sadean fascination' (Evans 2001: 108) – an appeal that meshed with Lockwood's 'unity of transgression and sexual appetite' (Babington 2001: 94). Aimed at a largely female audience, the Gainsborough melodramas provided escapism and the danger and sexual allure of the characters and stars resulted in a skewing of 'moral logic' (Leach 2004: 67), which Jeffrey Richards reads as revelatory of the wartime dislocation of moral values (Richards 1985: 292). With the end of the war, however, there came a reclamation of traditional values, not least in British cinema. In the years immediately following the war, there was a distinct pattern in British films that foregrounded 'the British people' as hero, a pattern following the wartime work of Humphrey Jennings in providing images of a united Britain; and the idea image of a Briton was a figure of restraint, good-humour and self-deprecation. The essential characteristic of a Briton was, as J B Priestly and George Orwell identified, 'decency' (Richards 1997: 130). Mason and Lockwood were, on screen, mad, bad and dangerous to know; 'decency' was embodied by two very different performers: John Mills and Anna Neagle. While the films in which Neagle starred tended to focus on characters who were higher up the social scale than those depicted in the people-as-hero films – *Holiday Camp* (Annakin, 1947), *A Boy, a Girl and a Bike* (Smart, 1948) and *Dance Hall* (Crichton, 1950), for example – her star persona by the 1940s was clearly fixed as denoting an admirable, even aspirational, British resilience and decorum.

Janet Thumim quotes a *Picturegoer* review from 1951 that celebrates Anna Neagle as being as much a part of Britain as Dover's white cliffs (Thumin 1992: 56). The image is an arresting one: it suggests permanence, grandeur but also a kind of purity and, most

importantly, a specific and iconic Britishness. Neagle's importance as signifier of Britishness and British femininity has been discussed by Sarah Street (2009; Dolan and Street 2010), with specific attention given to her star persona; what is notable in any consideration of Anna Neagle is the way in which she is discussed not just as a British actress, but also as a performer who embodies ideals of nation, of Britishness, at a specific time. The films in which she starred are far removed from the hedonistic excesses of the Gainsborough pictures and her star persona was set relatively early and largely in two genres in which Margaret Lockwood played no part: historical biopics (*Victoria the Great* [Wilcox, 1937]; *They Flew Alone* [Wilcox, 1942]) and musical comedies (*No, No, Nanette* [Wilcox, 1940]; *Irene* [Wilcox, 1940]). The characters in Neagle's repertoire were predominantly royalty, middle or upper class and almost uniformly embodied the image of British womanhood that was hard-working, professional and strong-willed but also demure and ladylike. These were the admired qualities of restraint and resilience that would become increasingly desirable as national characteristics during World War Two and even more so in the years that followed.

Christine Gledhill argues that a film star functions as 'an emblem of national celebrity' (Gledhill 1991: xiii) and it is through this linking of a star with a specific national context that their popularity and significance can be assured; or, as Bruce Babington puts it:

British stars, like those of other indigenous cinemas, give things to home audiences that Hollywood luminaries cannot – reflections of the known and close at hand, typologies of the contingent, intimate dramatisations of local myths and realities.

(Babington 2001: 10)

Myth and reality – or, at least, an idealised, mythic version of reality – are central to the Neagle canon, certainly in terms of the genres with which she is most frequently associated. Her roles in historical biopics playing national heroines – the eponymous monarch in *Victoria the Great*, aviatrix Amy Johnson in *They Flew Alone* – consolidated her star persona and the associations of resilience and natural grace, especially when under pressure, also transferred to her lighter roles. The characters in the light musical comedies may be fictitious, but, in Neagle's hands, they too become the image of the national heroine. There is, therefore, a consistent engagement with notions of patriotism embedded in Neagle's star persona; this overt linking of her image with a specific and

ideally constructed Britishness is singularly well-suited to films where ideas of Britishness – national character, social structure and ideologies – are showcased and Britain's commercial goods are displayed to the audience in its role as spectator/consumer. This is most noticeable in *Maytime in Mayfair* (Wilcox, 1949), a musical comedy that revolves around dress-shop rivalry in the heart of London's fashion district but, crucially, creates a spectacle around the clothes from the leading London designers of the day. The film is at once a vehicle particularly suited to Neagle's talents and a love-letter to post-War British fashion. Margaret Lockwood may have been foregrounded as Britain's most glamorous star and the Gainsborough films made a fetish of the extravagant period clothing of her films – she was the pre-eminent representative of British fashion (Babington 2001: 95) – but her roles, so often rooted in psychosexual preoccupations and figuring as the outsider, lent her an exoticism that did not always sit comfortably with constructions of ideal British womanhood. For the designers showcasing the best of British fashion in *Maytime in Mayfair*, there could be no better star to be associated with than Anna Neagle and those White Cliffs of Dover.

Maytime in Mayfair itself is the final instalment of the London Films (a.k.a The Mayfair Cycle), a series of four films in which Neagle was directed by her husband, Herbert Wilcox, and starred alongside Michael Wilding: the melodramas *Piccadilly Incident* (1946) and *The Courtneys of Curzon Street* (1947) were commercial and critical successes but the most popular by far was the musical comedy, *Spring in Park Lane* (1948). The film was an early example of a wholly British-made light comedy and was, by his own admission, Wilding's favourite role (Wilding 1954: 80). Here, Wilding plays a footman, Richard, who romances his employer's niece-cum-secretary, Judy (Anna Neagle). Richard's insouciance and evident enjoyment of contravening the bounds of the master-servant relationship – he smokes his master's cigars, plays his piano and pursues his niece – is in strong contrast to the redoubtable Judy, a woman who lives a few doors down on Park Lane but still puts in a long day as a professional and efficient secretary. No idle lady of leisure here: Judy is hardworking and grounded despite her privileged upbringing and the splendour of her surroundings. While the film does delight in mocking stereotypes of Britishness, the aristocracy in particular and class relations more generally, the film is deeply conservative in that it maintains the traditions and social order that it mocks. The love across the boundary of the green baize door is legitimated when the footman turns

out to be an aristocrat in disguise. The political landscape in post-war Britain had changed radically with a Labour government in power, the introduction of the welfare state and nationalisation of key industries. Socially and culturally, however, little had changed: 'The war [...] disturbed merely the surface of social relations and allowed the enduring structures of society to reassert themselves powerfully after the war.' (Cronin 1984: 137). It is no surprise, then, that some of Anna Neagle's most popular roles were in 'nostalgic, fairytale celebrations of the class system' (Richards 1997: 132). *Spring in Park Lane* was an unprecedented hit; a BFI survey in 2004 placed it still as the fifth-most watched film in Britain.¹ With the film's success, a follow-up was inevitable. This time, however, *Maytime in Mayfair* was filmed in Technicolor and had at its heart contributions from the most recognised names in British fashion.

The personae that Wilding and Neagle exhibit in *Spring in Park Lane* are replicated in *Maytime in Mayfair*: Neagle as the manageress and designer of a Mayfair boutique, Wilding as the man-about-town who inherits the shop. Mayfair was the home of British couture: Worth and Molyneux had relocated to London after the German occupation of Paris and established themselves as leading London designers alongside Charles Creed, Norman Hartnell and Hardy Amies – and all had their salons in Mayfair, establishing the borough as the heart of British fashion. In *Maytime in Mayfair*, Anna Neagle's image as the hardworking professional is once again showcased in her role as Eileen Grahame; but Eileen is also a creative powerhouse, as she is the designer whose creations are the lifeblood of the business. Through the person of Eileen, Neagle is presented to the audience as embodying the ideal characteristics of British femininity but she is simultaneously the ideal of feminine desireability. Throughout the film, attention is drawn to her physical attributes, culminating in the closing sequences, with a police inspector rhapsodising over Eileen's beauty: 'Blue eyes, a complexion like a peach, a nice trim little figure and hair like honeyed sunshine rising over the hills of Connemara.' 'You wouldn't happen to be Irish would you, Inspector?' Eileen enquires in response. The Technicolor stock certainly captures the blue eyes and the strawberry-blonde hair, but Eileen's (and so Neagle's) attractiveness is bound to ideas of self-restraint and decorum even more than it is to her beauty – a representation far removed from the overt, subversive

¹ The survey, conducted for Channel 4, analysed British box-office figures to determine which films recorded the most cinema admissions.

sexuality of Margaret Lockwood in *The Wicked Lady*. Eileen is desirable not just because she is beautiful, but because she embodies the virtuous characteristics of the British woman in the post-war era. Neagle's career had flourished in the 1930s and 40s: as Jeffrey Richards points out, she was one of the few British stars who was created by the cinema, rather than being a star of the West End or the music hall who crossed over to cinema (Richards 1997: 112). It was during the 1940s that the home-grown British film star became a dominant presence and much of this was due to the Gainsborough studios, whose output largely catered for the growth of the female cinema audience during the war years. Films such as *The Wicked Lady* and *The Man in Grey* revolved around the sexual allure of their stars – Mason and Lockwood in particular – and the escapism that these films afforded incorporated 'Spectacular costumes, conspicuous consumption and extravagant goings-on' (Richards 1997: 111). Richards makes a careful argument that escapism is one answer, but not the only one, to the question of why the Gainsborough films were so popular in the war and post-war years; the changing audience demographic resulted in a rise of female-led and female-centric narratives and with women entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers, and enjoying the relative freedoms that entailed, there was more sympathy for non-conformist characters such as Lockwood's Barbara Skelton – the titular wicked lady – who railed against the conventions that repressed them simply because of their sex. Post-war Britain, then, became a time of flux. As previously noted, there was political change but there was also a resurgence of pre-war social and cultural conditions that included the return of women from the workplace back into the home and subversive characters such as those played by Lockwood in the Gainsborough melodramas became less visible. Fashion and dress would also be an important component of this re-appropriation of cultural identity in the immediate aftermath of the war:

'In conjunction with the image of woman as consumer of the new household durables, dress played a powerful role in redefining woman as wife and mother rather than paid mother.'

(McNeil 1993: 283)

If there was a sense of women sacrificing their new-found freedoms in favour the returning menfolk, then this was something that would fit with the image of ideal British womanhood and is a fit with the characteristics shown in so many of Anna Neagle's films,

where she created 'an image of British womanhood that was well-bred, patient and resolute, finding fulfilment in a life of service and sacrifice' (Richards 1997: 132). These characteristics are, to a certain extent, imprinted on Eileen through Neagle's star persona. In self-referential and intertextual jokes that are used in both this film and its predecessor, *Spring in Park Lane*, the boundaries between character and performer are elided. As the smitten Michael Gore-Brown (Michael Wilding) tells his cousin (Nicholas Phipps as Sir Henry Hazelrigg) after meeting Eileen for the first time, Eileen is a dish – who reminds him of Anna Neagle.

Her physical beauty is put to further use throughout the film where she is arrayed in a series of gorgeous costumes and most obviously in the three dream-like, fantasy sequences that punctuate the film. The one of the most interest here is the first: a fashion parade that showcases the designs of the leading London couturiers. It was not the first time that British designers had been involved with costume design for film productions: Norman Hartnell had designed costumes for the cinema since 1930's *Such is the Law* (Hill) – a relationship that would continue into the 1960s – and dressed young British stars including Merle Oberon and Anna Neagle. Film productions in wartime saw an increase in the involvement of British designers with providing costumes. As Elizabeth Leese points out (1991: 17) given the strictures of rationing that also affected the costume departments, it was sensible to make use of the facilities already in place in the couturiers' salons. It was also not the first time that a variety of designers had all contributed to a single film: *Ships With Wings* (Nolbandov, 1941), an Ealing production, used the services of Digby Morton, Norman Hartnell, Molyneux, Maison Arthur, Victor Stiebel and Peter Russell. Where *Maytime in Mayfair* differs is that the clothes are not simply worn as costumes by Anna Neagle as the leading lady: they are presented as a formal fashion parade with the individual designers given equal credit and focus. Lasting 2 minutes 35 seconds, this wordless sequence serves only to show off the clothes. The models step down from mock-ups of covers for *Vogue* and *Harper's* – starting with Eileen herself, who is arrayed in a strapless evening gown of silver-grey satin with a large bow-bustle, off-set by duck-egg blue trimmings and accessorised with a large ostrich-feather fan in matching blue. The fan was not a popular accessory by 1949, something that is highlighted three years earlier in *Fashion Fantasy*: but as that film shows, it was still used to instil in mannequins 'poise, grace and charm.' These qualities are certainly displayed by

Eileen both in this fashion sequence and throughout the film; these are arguably, qualities seen as desirable in a woman and ones that women should aspire to having, if they do not possess them already. Eileen shows the dress alongside the house models from the assorted salons. Ten designers² are shown and the clothes range from *négligées* to evening gowns to day dresses and suits. This sequence foregrounds the very different styles of the British couturiers; yet, despite the differences the overall result is one that celebrates a style that is resolutely and almost deliberately British. The designers contributing to the film were core members of the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers (IncSoc) and as such were presenting a unified vision of British fashion and British design that, retrospectively, could be viewed as British fashion as a brand. At the time that the film was released, the fashions and fashion houses were not generally discussed in terms of a brand: articles on branding and the use of wide advertising in order to differentiate wares from different competitors began to appear in Britain in the mid-1940s – ideas that had been imported from America (Boydell 2010: 113). The unified presentation of disparate styles and designers was identified as the British Look – or, even more specifically, the London Look. The differentiation here is not between the individual designers who comprised IncSoc, but rather maintaining and promoting British fashion as distinct from offerings from Paris and New York. British fashion had a specific style and ethos that had been shaped first by the glamour of the 1930s and then by the austerity of Second World War rationing. By the late 1930s the British look was defined and consolidated by designers who could ‘present to the world a London look stronger than anything seen previously. It was a look based on well-tailored tweeds and romantic evening gowns – ingredients which have been the basis of London fashion ever since’ (McDowell 1997: 18). The centrality of textile and tailoring to the British aesthetic, and to the configuring of British femininity, was emphasised by Norman Hartnell who in 1951 claimed that British women look their best in classic tweeds (‘The British Look’). The cover from the March 1949 edition of British *Vogue* showcases this, with a model wearing a Hardy Amies coat and the issue’s sub-titles highlighting ‘London Collections’ and ‘Fabrics’. The collections revolve, naturally, around the members of IncSoc and, with the exception of Digby Morton, all of the couturiers whose work features in *Maytime in*

² Hardy Amies, Norman Hartnell, Peter Russell, Worth of London, Charles Creed, Bianca Mosca, Mattli, Digby Morton, Molyneux and Victor Stiebel.

Mayfair are showcased in this edition of *Vogue*. The Hardy Amies coat of the cover (wool, with a fine brown-and-cream check and a shawl collar) certainly fits the mandate of good tailoring, while the feature articles focus on the stiff silks of evening dresses by Worth, Molyneux and Victor Stiebel. The London Collections showcase the best of British fashion. This, however, is a very specific Britishness: upper-class, London-centric, traditional and conservative in every sense. These are ideas that are easily transposed to the narrative and characters of *Maytime in Mayfair* itself. Despite the decency of Anna Neagle/Eileen Grahame, the film focuses on the privileged sections of society. Michael may be able to afford only the smallest bunch of violets from a florist's and gleefully helps himself to the petty cash (simply putting 'the lot' in the ledger to record how much he has taken), but he still resides in a luxurious West End flat, complete with manservant. Apart from a brief inter-title referring to Sir Stafford Cripps 'confounding' Mayfair in 1948 (a reference to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer's austerity budget of that year) the film provides an escape from the social reality experienced by most British people in favour of exclusive restaurants and nightclubs – and the haute-couture wardrobes that that lifestyle incorporates. Yet, while the way of life depicted in the film would be sheer fantasy for the majority of the audience, the ideals of resourcefulness and level-headedness exemplified by Eileen would be recognisable as ideal British characteristics. And through the work of the fashion designers on display, there is also an idea of British glamour that is extremely attractive.

The film was not the first time that the London couturiers had showcased their work en mass; the sequence in *Maytime in Mayfair* represents a cinematic version of a project that had united the British designers since the late 1930s. With the increased popularity and influence of British fashion, particularly in America, the British Board of Trade took interest in the growing output of the London couturiers and invited them to unite themselves, which they did.³ The houses formed the Fashion Group of Great Britain, initially led by Molyneux; this group was rechristened as IncSoc in 1942 and under this new title, the designers exhibited joint collections in London and New York (Amies 1996: 8). London fashion had a history of consolidation and of showcasing work collectively – unity was something foregrounded during the war years (McDowell 1997: 40) and these

³ This interest would extend to the involvement of IncSoc with *Maytime in Mayfair*; the Board's then-president, Harold Wilson, was frequently on set to observe how British couture was being shown (Harper 2000: 55).

acts of solidarity would have been appealing both during the war and in the years that followed. This also points to the role of fashion in the construction and dissemination of national identity and national myth. This aspect of fashion in relation to reproducing national ideologies is explored by Alison Goodrum, who argues that 'fashion is a far more potent tool in the construction of national fields of vision than has previously been imagined' (Goodrum 2005: 67). The notion of individual designers working in conjunction and presenting a unified vision of British design and talent is an appealing one, especially at a time of hardship, when solidarity and communality are paramount to boosting morale and maintaining a sense of national cohesion. The designers of IncSoc were also central to the Utility Clothing Scheme, launched in 1942. The scheme set controls on the amount of fabric permitted in a garment, the number and types of trimmings that were allowed. IncSoc took on the job of creating a prototype range using 'minimal material and labour resources [...] [t]he look was simple but stylish, with good proportion and line. It incorporated padded shoulders, a nipped-in waist and hems to just below the knee' (Laver 2002: 253). The focus on quality and tailoring for the Utility lines was what had been instrumental in defining the 'London look.'

Clothes rationing had been relaxing slowly in the years after the War and had finally ended in March 1949: in time for the showcasing of the Spring collections for the London fashion houses and only a few months before *Maytime in Mayfair's* release in the May of that year. The end of rationing meant that for the first time since the 1930s, designers were able to take advantage of the availability of fabrics and, consequently, their designs in the fashion parade sequence are opulent and luxurious. The swathes of eau-de-nil satin in a Molyneux robe would have been unthinkable only a year earlier; and the cinched waists and flared skirts reflect the influence of the New Look that Christian Dior had launched in Paris in the February of 1947. The French influence also points to something else: the beginning of the decline of Britain's Golden Age of couture. During the German occupation, France and French designers had been largely isolated and French style had developed with its own ideological function: an excessive, idiosyncratic approach to adornment that acted as a defiant assertion of French identity in the face of the occupying forces. Once the war was over, there was a brief period where British design once again was a dominant influence on Continental fashion; but this changed with Dior's *En Huit* and *Corolle* lines that defined the opulence and playfulness of the New

Look. The exaggerated style was the antithesis of the British and American designs and was viewed by some as a sign of hope and prosperity and by others as a reckless waste. Nevertheless, within two years the New Look silhouette had revolutionised fashion and would be the key design ethos for women's fashion until 1954. British couture, however, was not to go quietly. Post-war, there was a concerted effort to re-establish London fashion as a driving force, the position it had been in pre-war and with the eyes of the world fixed on first the Prince of Wales and then Queen Elizabeth. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, newsreels, cine-magazines and documentaries provided insights into the work of fashion designers. The government sponsored *Fashion Fantasy* (Grey, 1946), for example, tells the story of a recently de-mobbed Wren who falls asleep and dreams of her post-war job as a mannequin: she is spotted by none other than Norman Hartnell who selects her to model his creations to his clients and the film finishes with a parade of Hartnell's designs. The links between fashion and film are also shown through the presence of popular film stars at fashion shows (to this day the front row at a fashion show is often of equal interest as the collections being shown). The British-Pathé feature *She Walks in Beauty* from 1951 shows the work of the IncSoc designers at an event at the Savoy Hotel. Shot in Technicolour, the feature opens with the titles and credits against ripples of fabric and to the accompaniment of lush orchestral strings – so far, very in keeping with the opening of a romantic film. The background fabric is revealed to be the skirt of a floor-length banana cream dinner dress by Worth, embroidered, we are told, with topaz, peals and diamante. The fashions progress through a Hardy Amies day suit in fine purple wool and velvet, a tailored three-piece suit in wool jersey from Digby Morton and various pieces from Peter Russell, Charles Creed and Mattli. Cutaway shots to the audience focus on Norman Hartnell and Lady Rothermere in their capacities as Chairman and President of IncSoc, but also the presence of stars Richard Todd, Derek Farr, Dennis Price and Valerie Hobson. As with *Maytime in Mayfair*, *She Walks in Beauty* would largely have been showing beautiful things to an audience who could not purchase them. However, both texts act as showcases of British talent and glamour; the return of glamour to a wider public after the austerity of the war years is a recurring theme in the 'Fashion Features' that Pathé routinely put out. One example from 1947 (1947a) focuses on new shoe designs by Edward Rayne, reminiscent, the narrator tells us, of the lovely things available before the war. The shoes look glamorous and expensive but due to price control are within the reach of all – provided you can get the coupons. The feature ends

on the cheery note that ladies can soon forget the wartime Utility models. Apart from emphasising glamour in clothing, shoes and accessories, the 'Fashion Features' also emphasise a move back towards pre-existing notions of femininity. As Peter McNeil argues, the entry of women into workplaces that had been traditionally the preserves of men had resulted in 'a suspension of social conventions regarding dress and the adoption of sex-typed garments such as trousers and overalls' (McNeil 1993: 283). A 1946 Pathé item entitled 'Day Wear Gay Wear' looks at a new collection from Kitty Foster – the designer for the majority of Anna Neagle's costumes in *Maytime in Mayfair* – in which the designer stresses that smart women no longer wear trousers in the home and not anywhere else, we can surmise. True to this diktat, Eileen is never in trousers, reaffirming through both her persona and the visuals the ideal of womanhood and femininity; and although she works, and there is not hint at any point that she will give up her work upon marriage, her career within the world of fashion is, arguably, a more acceptably female-oriented job. The fashion parade of *Maytime in Mayfair*, in which Eileen is the first model, presents an image of womanhood that is the height of glamour and femininity.

The fashions are shown in their full Technicolor glory, and at a time that was still heavily marked by post-war austerity, the effect of this luxury on screen must have been intense for the audience. Even with the end of clothes rationing, the clothes shown in the film would have been beyond the reach of the majority of the women watching. But it highlighted the talent of British designers, acting as an advert for both the domestic market – for those who could afford them and for women who would emulate them through their own local dressmakers – and for the international market: the film was widely distributed across Europe and USA, albeit only released in America in 1952. Viewers could see the glamour of Hardy Amies alongside a creation from Digby Morton, a designer who favoured pared-down silhouettes, sharp tailoring and an emphasis on British tweeds, wools and craftsmanship. Across the works of the ten designers, the emphasis lies on the tailored suits and evening gowns that MacDowell (1997) highlights as being key to the London look, but the sequence also displays the individual strengths of the designers. Eileen hands over to a Hardy Amies model, and the coat in fine beige wool has the same shawl collar as that on the *Vogue* cover as previously discussed. The cinched waist and full skirt show the influence of the New Look. Molyneux, Hartnell and Worth provide the more extravagant pieces. Hartnell's lilac satin evening gown with its full,

floor-length skirt is made spectacular by an over-dress of violet organza that is heavily embellished on the bodice and sleeves with beads and sequins in the same colour violet. An evening coat in eau-de-nil satin from Molyneux makes the most of the fabric, with its very full skirt, shawl collar and deeply turned-back cuffs, while the close fitting bodice and narrow waist again points to the influence from Paris. Worth's blush-coloured *négligée* makes use of tiered layers of chiffon, edged in black chiffon, with cowl draping at the front and back and wide sleeves; it is a look that is intensely romantic. By contrast, Bianca Mosca's ensemble in bronze silk is restrained, an off-the-shoulder gown with a matching bolero jacket. Mattli presents a characteristic softly-tailored, fluid cocktail dress in muted violet silk-taffeta: the shawl collar is balanced here by layered and pleated fabric that creates a bustle effect over a pencil skirt. Morton and Creed both present tailored day-suits (both houses specialised in tailoring) but with different emphasis. Creed's suit in soft tan wool, with its elongated lines in the slim pencil skirt is enhanced by the stylistic flourish in the peplum effect of the jacket. The Digby Morton suit in brown wool also has a pencil skirt and the cinched waist is emphasised by the slightly rounded flair of the hem. The dark colour is offset by a central panel of pale yellow that incorporates the fastenings, lapels and collar and is matched the turned-back cuffs. The contrasting textile and the skill in pared-down tailoring that is foregrounded in Morton's offering shows the ethos behind his approach to British tailoring:

Morton's philosophy was to transform the suit from the strict *tailleur*, or the ordinary country tweed suit with its straight up and down lines, uncompromising and fit only for the moors, into an intricately cut and carefully designed garment that was so fashionable that it could be worn with confidence at the Ritz.

(Amies 1954: 54)

The overall impression from the fashion parade is a combination of opulence and elegant restraint: British style is certainly on display, but it is a style that allows for variation and individuality even within the collective ethos of British fashion.

The sequence is a spectacular intervention in the film, nearly three minutes where the narrative is suspended and the purely visual is celebrated. This does not mean, however, that the sequence is isolated from the overall narrative of the film; as Sarah Street argues: '[U]nlike the "frozen" text of a magazine, the study of film fashions invites consideration of their role in the overall narrative' (Street 2001: 5). The parade is a

fantasy show: within the film's diegesis it is the visualisation of Eileen's attempts to explain to Michael what is entailed in designing and creating fashion. As a film that has as its protagonists people whose lives are bound up with the fashion world, it is not unreasonable to place within the narrative framework a display of that world – albeit, one that is taking place on a temporal and spatial locus far removed from Eileen and Michael's conversation in her studio. However, the sequence also provides the function that Louise Wallenberg identifies as being inherent to cinema: the screen that operates as a shopping window (Wallenberg 2010: 496). The spectator, then, is positioned both as viewer and also as consumer. Jane Gaines has similarly drawn links between the function of grand emporiums and cinema, especially in the early twentieth century, that they are all 'designed as exquisite containers for opulence and excess' (Gaines 2000: 101). For Wallenberg, film in relation to fashion can be viewed in two linked ways:

Cinema may be seen as a seductive shopping window, displaying fashion and fashionable goods to its spectators and would-be consumers, *and* as a fashion show or fashion spread in which its stars are involved in displaying fashionable costumes.

(Wallenberg 2010: 496)

For *Maytime in Mayfair*, these two aspects are overtly linked. With the ideological implications of the inclusion of the IncSoc designers, the film is actively promoting specifically British design and encouraging the consumption of British fashion. This ties in with the focus of Pathé's 'Fashion Features' and their various spots on fashion: while magazines such as Vogue looked at both British and international designers (the March edition showcased the London collections, April the Paris collections), the Pathé features are almost exclusively British, whether showing the latest dresses and coats from Digby Morton (1947b), or the 'Window Fashion Parade' (1948) in the window of the department store Peter Robinson on Oxford Circus. The narrator reminds us that ordinary women such as those making up the crowd outside of the window would not normally see a true mannequin display: that was the preserve of upper class clients and haute couture. Similarly, the majority of women watching *Maytime in Mayfair* would have been unable to afford the prices of London couturiers. But, with home dressmaking common for most working- and lower-middle-class women, and with patterns made readily available from haberdashery departments, emulating the looks and styles showcased in the film would have been achievable, albeit not on so grand a scale. The

spectator is actively constructed as a consumer, both of the film text and also of the goods on display. With fashion designers providing costumes for film as early as the 1930s, the relationship between film and fashion is a longstanding one and the bridge between clothes and their designer, and the viewers of the film is the film star who wears them (Wallenberg: 2010 496). In the case of *Maytime in Mayfair*, it is Anna Neagle in the person of Eileen who forms that bridge.

However, Eileen's place within the narrative of the film is not simply determined by how she looks and her ability to wear clothes: the fashion parade sequence does indeed begin with Eileen modelling a silver-grey satin evening dress. She is also a fashion designer in her own right, with the implication that the dress she is modelling is one of her own designs. Eileen, therefore, is cast as being part of the company of notable British designers and as someone who, like her fellow couturiers, champions British design and expertise. Eileen is constructed as the ideal woman – and, most importantly, the ideal *British* woman. Patriotism is subtly rendered through her association with the specifically British fashion industry of Mayfair, a hardworking professional, but also dressing in and showing off British fashion. In terms of the film's narrative, she quite literally creates the look that she then displays.

The placing of Eileen as a designer – as this creator of the look – aligns with Neagle's star persona and this is further consolidated through Eileen's costumes throughout the film. The 'romantic evening gowns' of the London look are evident in numerous scenes – accompanied by the obligatory fur stoles and coats – but in her day-to-day wear, Eileen's wardrobe is largely functional: austere black satin dresses for her role as manageress and well-tailored suits that are simultaneously business-like and feminine. Eileen's livelihood and her creative prowess might be geared towards fashion but, the film seems to assure us, she is not frivolous. In fact, the wearing of British fashion, the showcasing of it as glamorous and the equal of anything from Paris, is constructed as an act of patriotism. Nothing less could be expected from the woman who had previously played Amy Johnson, Edith Cavell and Queen Victoria. This transposes to real life: Hartnell designs were worn by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret; and outfits by Hartnell (again) Amies, Creed and Molyneux were routinely worn by British film stars.

In her exploration of the relationship between fashion and the film star, Rachel Moseley asks, 'Does star dress "disappear" against the body as "clothes", or speak out performatively as "costume" or "spectacle"?' (Moseley 2005: 1). In a film such as *Maytime in Mayfair*, the function of costume is, arguably, both. Our initial introduction to Eileen is a medium close-up that gives the spectator a clear, unobstructed view of her face. The ensuing two shots reveal her manageress' black satin but the dress itself is not foregrounded and so does, to an extent 'disappear' in favour of the focus on Eileen herself. When clothes are made the emphasis of the scene, they are often bound to Eileen herself, either as part of celebrating her role as the ideal British woman or to indicate the change in her circumstances. The two further fantasy sequences in the film are not as concerned with emphasising specific British designers, but the links between clothing and the star body that bears them are made manifest. The second of the fantasy sequences, which plays out as a wordless ballet, is from Michael's point-of-view as, after a day spent at the salon, dreams of dressmaking and Eileen. The stylised set is centred on a low rostrum on which Eileen is standing. As the dream-ballet unfolds, a series of dressmakers converge on Eileen, wrapping her in billowing silvery satin that eventually becomes the dress that she modelled in the fashion parade. While the dancers move around her, offering her the necessary accessories to complete her ensemble – gloves, fan, decorative comb – Eileen herself remains in place, on display yet simultaneously the architect of the activity around her. It is a romanticised, idealised version of her day-to-day work, but here informed by Michael's admiration and romantic longing. The scene holds a tension between distancing and intimacy. The vast space of the staging with its cool blue hues and symmetrical lines presents Eileen as an unobtainable figure; but this is at odds with the undoubted sensuality of the fabric and the sight of her being dressed in it. At this point in the narrative, Michael's relationship with Eileen has progressed to a not-quite-romance: she is the object of his desire and while she is (cautiously) responsive to his overtures she maintains a certain professionalism between them: she is desired and potentially desiring but still slightly out of reach. As a metaphor for the spectator's relationship with a performer it is an apt one; yet it can also be read as specific to Neagle herself. With her star persona as being regal, elegant yet capable of fun and lightheartedness, and through Eileen's construction as the ideal woman, Neagle is presented as embracing both decorum and desirability – a combination of restraint and excess that mirrors the clothes showcased in the fashion parade.

The final intervention of spectacle in the film comes close to the end and is markedly different from the preceding two in that it is from Eileen's perspective: it is a daydream, a romantic reverie of herself dancing with Michael. A misunderstanding with Michael has resulted in a parting of the ways and Eileen has left both him and the business, joining forces with D'Arcy Davenport, her business rival whose unique selling point is his mellifluous singing voice that he unleashes on his impressionable middle-aged female clients. D'Arcy is also a potential romantic rival for Michael and his ultimate goal is to win both Eileen and the dress shop. The framing for Eileen's daydream is a highly stylised French Riviera where she has accompanied D'Arcy for a business trip – although for D'Arcy this is taken as an opportunity to woo her, despite her reluctance to hear him sing. Josephine Dolan and Sarah Street (2010) have noted that Eileen's costumes are only saturated with colour, overt in their femininity when she is not working and this aspect is clearly demarcated in the French Riviera sequence: as Eileen arrives with D'Arcy she is arrayed in a frilly, floral concoction of organza and chiffon. After the establishment of Eileen's business-like persona, this extravagant costume seems at odds with the defining mode of her presentation up until this point; it is as though her removal from her business and Michael has resulted in a loss of her true self. While she is the object of desire for Michael, his attitude towards her has always been defined through a combination of personal attraction and professional admiration – despite their differences in personality and approach to the fashion business, they appear as a partnership of equals. While D'Arcy does, ostensibly, value Eileen as a fellow designer he treats her more as a romantic trophy. The excessive femininity of Eileen's dress could be viewed as a masquerade, that she is 'dressing-up' in order to negotiate the terms of her new role as D'Arcy's partner – however that will manifest itself. However, the romantic daydream that forms the focus of this sequence places Eileen as the actively desiring subject, rather than the object; the extravagance of her dress can be read as an expression of her suppressed romantic yearning for Michael and her longing to be reunited with him; this longing is made overt as she slips into a daydream of herself dancing with Michael. This sequence, shot in slow-motion 'emphasises the excess of her desire' (Dolan and Street 2010: 46) and once again her costume plays a central role in the scene.

The low-key lighting leaves most of the terrace in shadow, Eileen's pale-coloured dress and skin are luminous against it and the couple are more often shown in silhouette,

adding to the sensuous, dream-like quality. With most of the scene filmed in a long two-shot, it is Eileen's imagined experience of dancing with Michael that is foregrounded, rather than her being presented as the object of desire. The cinematography and choreography also serve to emphasise the material of the dress, rather than the dancers' skill. The dress itself is an example of the 'romantic evening gown' that forms part of the London look: a tight, strapless bodice and a voluminous skirt of chiffon, augmented with sequins, over layers of tulle. As with many of Eileen's previous costumes, the dress is pale – more in keeping with her style when seen in London and with Michael – but in its swathes of material it maintains the connotations of romance evoked by the floral pinks in her Riviera day dress. The colour pink is echoed in the flowers that decorate the terrace where the couple's fantasy dance is performed and is seen again in the deeper shades of the tulle underskirts that are shown off during the lifts and turns of the dance. Fashion and costume here is not simply a spectacle, but becomes an active component in expressing female desire.

Once Eileen's disagreement with Michael has been resolved – and D'Arcy Davenport's role as the villain of the piece has been revealed – Eileen returns to London and to the style that we have become accustomed to. As she walks along the city street to the salon she is dressed in the sort of well-cut tweeds that Norman Hartnell advocated as being the most suited to an Englishwoman ('The British Look' 1951). With Eileen's professionalism re-established she is in the position to rescue the business at the point that Michael is about to sell it. The couple are aligned once again, professionally and romantically and the film concludes in the traditional manner, with Eileen's marriage to Michael. However, there is no implication that she will give up work as a result of her marriage – the film establishes that Michael, though charming and wholly supportive of the salon as an enterprise, is a hopeless businessman and it is Eileen's creativity and professional expertise that is needed to carry the business. With both Michael and Eileen devoted to working at the salon, their marriage is constituted as a partnership – an aspect that reflects Neagle's own relationship with her husband, Herbert Wilcox. Once again, her star persona is consolidated through the characteristics of the hard-working, desirable and ideal Eileen.

The final scene shows Michael and Eileen's wedding and one final showcase dress to end the film, the one that traditionally caps a catwalk show: the wedding dress. It is

initially seen as a sketch: Michael's sole creative contribution, he draws it on the wall of the police-cell after his arrest for giving D'Arcy his well-deserved come-uppance. It also forms something of an extra-textual joke (one of the many that pepper both *Maytime in Mayfair* and *Spring in Park Lane*): 'Animal or vegetable?' Eileen enquires; 'Hartnell,' Michael tells her. The scene dissolves to the day of the wedding and the dress, now real and worn by Eileen, is indeed a Norman Hartnell creation of silk, tulle and lace. Of the designers who formed part of IncSoc and whose designs are showcased in this film, Hartnell and Hardy Amies were the only two whose names and houses survived beyond the 1950s and the Golden Age of British couture; and were also the only two IncSoc designers who continued to design costumes for film productions. Hartnell's last credit was on *Never Put it in Writing* (Stone, 1964) while Amies's final (and arguably most notable) screen credit was for the wardrobe for *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968). The 1950s saw a decline in the fortunes of the British designers and the rise of the Paris salons to the pre-eminent position as fashion leaders. The 1950s also saw the growth in popularity, and the improvement in quality, of ready-to-wear fashion, with Horrockses Fashions being the prime example. Horrockses patterns were available to all and their fashions were worn by all sections of society – even Queen Elizabeth II wore Horrockses, notably during the Commonwealth tour in 1953 (Boydell 2010: 133-4). But even while the British salons were in decline, there was still status and glamour to be associated with British haute couture and that can be seen in the way that Horrockses Fashions positioned themselves: their headquarters were situated between New Bond Street and Regent Street in Mayfair; they used the sleek, pared down aesthetics in their publicity shots that could be seen in the pages of *Vogue* and *Harper's* and even used some of the same models, such as Barbara Goalen (Boydell 2010). As with the IncSoc designers, Horrockses also provided costumes for British stars both off screen and on: Dinah Sheridan's wardrobe for *Where No Vultures Fly* (Watt, 1951) was provided entirely by Horrockses. The company also commissioned Victor Stiebel and Mattli to design for their children's lines. That would not be the first time that a British couturier produced ready-to-wear items: Norman Hartnell had formed a partnership with Berketex as part of the Utility scheme and continued to work with them into the 1950s. Yet, despite this ongoing activity, many of the British design houses never fully recovered from the impact of the originality and opulence of the French New Look. If there were hopes that showcasing the work of IncSoc through a vehicle such as *Maytime in Mayfair* would enhance their

reputation and win new clients, especially in the all-important American market that had been so profitable before and immediately after the war, they would be unfulfilled. The film was not released in America until 1952 and it is revelatory of how far British fashion had fallen in the estimation of the export market that critic Bosley Crowther sneers that 'these fashions are not only British but old' (Crowther 1952). He is dismissive of the film overall and the fashions and Anna Neagle in particular. As with the British fashion houses, Anna Neagle enjoyed domestic success in the post-war years, but her career also began decline from the mid-1950s. The cultural changes that were had been so slow to come in the aftermath of the war developed with increasing rapidity as Britain approached the 1960s and the style of performance and the characters portrayed by Anna Neagle became less popular. However, her image as a stable signifier of Britishness was an enduring one. As Jeffery Richards points out, it is notable that while neither James Mason nor Margaret Lockwood were given honours for their contributions to cinema, John Mills was knighted in 1977 and Anna Neagle was made a Dame of the British Empire in 1969 (Richards 1997: 132). National identity and national mythmaking, then, foreground a specific idea of Britishness that is characterised by the decency identified as a fundamental component by George Orwell. *Maytime in Mayfair* is a fantasy and one that shows an image of Britain as contentedly fixed in its class hierarchies, alongside an idealised representation of British femininity. It also displays, through the fashions on show, a British glamour that, in the case of Hardy Amies and – even more so – Norman Hartnell would transcend the work of IncSoc. Hartnell's status was further boosted by his royal connections: he had been the Court designer since 1938 and had designed gowns for Queen Elizabeth, as well as the wedding dress for the then Princess Elizabeth in 1947. With these credentials linking specifically British institutions of royalty, fashion and film, it seems fitting that his dress should be the one for the on-screen wedding of the Queen of British Cinema.

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