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***Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film*, Tamar Jeffers McDonald. London: I.B. Tauris, 2010. (240 pages). ISBN: 9781848850392.**

A Review by Rebecca Kambuta, Otago University, New Zealand

Over the past two decades, makeover programming has become increasingly popular. Today, transformation narratives dominate prime-time television schedules and, as a result, these programmes have become the subject of much scholarly debate. Recent works include Dana Heller's two edited collections, *The Great American Makeover* (2006) and *Makeover Television* (2007), and Gareth Palmer's *Exposing Lifestyle Television* (2008). Research in this field focuses on several key areas including the history of the makeover format (from Ovid's *Pygmalion* to the magazine and television makeover), the link between makeover programming and consumer culture, and the role of gender, class and identity within the makeover text. Unlike makeover programmes, filmic transformations have received surprisingly little attention. In fact, until now, to my knowledge, Elizabeth Ford and Deborah Mitchell's, *The Makeover in Movies: Before and After in Hollywood Films* (2004) is the only book-length study completed on the subject. Tamar Jeffers McDonald's book, *Hollywood Catwalk* (2010), is, therefore, a welcome and much-needed addition to this under-researched field. In *Hollywood Catwalk*, Jeffers McDonald examines the costume—an obvious, but often overlooked, aspect of the (filmic) transformation narrative. She explores the role costume plays in the transformation process; how clothes function as an index of one's identity; and how changing one's clothes can reveal one's "true" or inner character. *Hollywood Catwalk* is well structured, easy to read and informative. It includes much new material and serves as an excellent example of how to analyse film.

Hollywood Catwalk is divided into three chapters ("Costume and Film", "Tropes", and "Case Studies") and is, in many respects, a continuation of Jeffers McDonald's earlier work on the romantic comedy, such as her Wallflower "Short Cut" book *The Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Genre* (2007), in which transformation is a common theme. In Chapter One, "Costume and Film", Jeffers McDonald reviews the small bodies of literature on costume in film and on filmic transformation, respectively. Of particular interest for Jeffers McDonald as regards costume in film is Jane Gaines's idea that clothes act as an index of a character's personality or identity, an idea that is central to Jeffers McDonald study of transformation and costume. Jeffers McDonald also explores Gaines's arguments that clothes can operate in tension with the dominant narrative and that, in the melodrama, which is the subject of Gaines's work, "big" narrative moments are accompanied by "small" costumes. In addition to reviewing the literature on costume, Jeffers McDonald also investigates the literature on stars, in particular, the link between film stars and their audiences. The argument that audiences emulate their favourite film star(s), or that they go to the cinema in order to learn how to dress/behave, is, as I explain below, central to *Hollywood Catwalk*. In the

second half of the chapter, Jeffers McDonald discusses the historical antecedents of the transformation film, examining two key narratives: *Cinderella* and Ovid's *Pygmalion*. According to Jeffers, the main difference between these two narratives lies with the agent of change: in *Pygmalion*, it is a man who brings about transformation, while, in *Cinderella*, it is a fairy godmother (26). Jeffers McDonald shows how transformation films draw upon these two narratives.

Jeffers concludes the first chapter by reviewing the literature on the transformation film. Although *Hollywood Catwalk* inevitably covers some of the same material as Ford and Mitchell's *Makeover and Movies*, Jeffers McDonald is keen to distance herself from this earlier work. She argues that Ford and Mitchell's book has an apologetic tone to it and that their work fails to consider *why* these stories continue to resonate with audiences today:

> Since the pair set out on their endeavour wanting to declare the "makeover movie" a genre in its own right, the book's ending should be able to valorise generic material without apologising, yet Ford and Mitchell here seem to distance themselves from the mass of transformations in film—ones built around "familiar forms and predictable outcomes". (36)

What is interesting for Jeffers McDonald is the "continued currency" of these stories (36). The fact that these films use the same visual and thematic tropes to tell the story is "what makes them fascinating, not discardable" (36).

Another point of contention lies in the origins of the makeover. While Ford and Mitchell locate the birth of the transformation film with Irving Rapper's *Now, Voyager* (1941), Jeffers argues that the tale of metamorphosis goes back much further: "Because they [Ford and Mitchell] anoint *Now, Voyager* 'the mother of Hollywood makeover movies', the authors miss the prevalence of the metamorphosis theme in earlier decades of film" (35). According to Jeffers, similar themes can be seen in Cecil B. DeMille's *Why Change Your Wife* (1920). Unlike Ford and Mitchell, Jeffers McDonald argues that the transformation narrative is not limited to a single genre, but can be found in genres as divergent as the romantic comedy and the gangster film. In short, in Chapter One Jeffers McDonald establishes key arguments for debate in her study of transformation and costume.

In Chapter Two, Jeffers McDonald examines the familiar narrative of the transformation film, dismissed by Ford and Mitchell. She identifies and provides a thorough analysis of eleven thematic and visual tropes associated with sartorial metamorphosis. These are the visible transformation, the invisible transformation, the shopping sequence, the misrecognition moment, the false transformation, the true self, amelioration, the staircase motif, the catwalk moment, the pan up the body, and the use of slow-motion camera. This analysis sets the stage for the final chapter, in which Jeffers McDonald analyses three transformation films: *The Bride Wore Red* (1937), *Calamity Jane* (1953), and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006). Jeffers McDonald uses these films to demonstrate "the effects of costume changes on the identity, personality and sexual status of their central characters" (8). She examines how costume is used to signal the character's transformation, paying particular attention to the fabric and design of various outfits. She also provides individual costume readings for each of the films discussed. For example, in *The Bride Wore Red*, Jeffers McDonald examines the various outfits wore by Anni, the film's main protagonist. She charts Anni's sartorial transformation from unhappy showgirl/prostitute to happily married peasant

girl, arguing that Anni's final costume reveals her "true self". In this chapter, Jeffers McDonald locates the films within their cultural and historical context, acknowledging that beauty ideals are not static, but change over time.

Hollywood Catwalk sets out to answer several questions regarding the transformation narrative, which Jeffers McDonald articulates as follows:

> What is the assumed connection between the internal and external form? Is male agency always necessary to effect the transformation or can the woman change by her own volition? Can the woman ever change the man? How do these transformations themselves transform as time passes and cultural assumptions about female beauty modify? And most pressingly, what do these images of change and transformation, of improvement and transcendence tell *us*, the viewers about what we should be doing? (7)

While *Hollywood Catwalk* focuses on female transformation narratives as they are more predominant, in the conclusion she provides some insight into how male makeovers differ from this model.

The title of Jeffers McDonald's book provides a clear indication of her main argument. She contends that Hollywood cinema (and, more specifically, the transformation film) functions as a "catwalk" for clothes and services that we, as audience members, should buy: "I see these films offering a runway down which beautiful people move wearing beautiful clothes—in order to sell. Such films advance the idea of buying things—including movie tickets—to improve oneself" (13). While Jeffers McDonald's argument about the link between cinema and consumption is not new (as she readily admits in Chapter One, the potential of cinema to sell clothes and makeup was recognised early on), her notion of film as a catwalk is, which is one of a number of strengths of the book.

In addition to being well written and easy to read, Jeffers McDonald's work is noteworthy in several other respects. *Hollywood Catwalk* examines an impressive array of films (one only needs to look at her filmography for evidence of this) and, furthermore, includes several older, more obscure, examples that have not been discussed elsewhere. As she is one of only a few scholars to discuss filmic transformation, much of her work is new research. In addition to examining new material, she also makes several insightful observations about films that we might not, on first glance, associate with the transformation narrative. In Chapter Two, for example, she notes that in the classic gangster film, the mobster's rise to fame is often accompanied by a parallel change in his wardrobe (41). Jeffers McDonald challenges us to think beyond the usual list of "chick flicks", in which transformation is a common theme. Her analysis of the male makeover as presented in *A Place in the Sun* (1951) also provides some interesting ideas about gender and transformation that could be developed in future research. Jeffers McDonald's argument that male makeovers are often accompanied by a decline in morality—in contrast to the female model, in which the woman is frequently rewarded for her transformation—is significant and warrants further examination. Her description and analysis of individual films is exemplary and provides an excellent model for others wanting to embark on similar projects. Throughout the book, Jeffers McDonald also provides several "before" and "after" film stills that beautifully illustrate her arguments about the importance of clothing in transformation narratives. Finally, *Hollywood Catwalk* has broad appeal. Jeffers McDonald brings together

two different fields of research: those of costume and the transformation narrative. The book will therefore appeal to scholars interested in the makeover or transformation narratives and those who study fashion/costume. Beyond these more obvious groups, *Hollywood Catwalk* will also be of use to those interested in gender and identity, film analysis and genre.

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Rebecca Kambuta is a PhD candidate at Otago University, New Zealand. Her doctoral dissertation traces the figure of the unruly child through film and reality television. She has also written on the makeover genre in her MA thesis, "Televising Transformation: A Close Analysis of *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*".