

Where and Why Miss Brooks Draws the Line

How the Pretty Former Chorus Girl Has Been Obligated to Change Her Standards of Modesty Since She's a Movie Actress

One of the dancing costumes which Miss Brooks wore in her chorus girl days and which she says she is not ashamed to have worn.

The modesty or immodesty of such a costume as this depends, according to Miss Brooks, on the time and the place of the wearing and the sort of woman who wears it.



NEWSPAPER readers go a shock of surprise the other day when they read that Miss Louise Brooks, a rising young movie actress, was demanding that John De Mirjian, the well-known photographer, stop selling or circulating in any other way certain photographs of her which he had made when she was a chorus girl on the Broadway stage.

This was certainly a very unusual stand for an actress and former chorus girl to take. Ordinarily such young women are delighted to have their portraits circulated just as widely as possible and their usual complaint is that they are not getting all the photographic publicity to which they think their beauty ought to entitle them.

But Louise Brooks made it plain that she was, in this respect, a most exceptional young woman of the stage. When Mr. De Mirjian did not pay proper heed to her written and spoken protests in the matter, she engaged a lawyer and had him bring suit to restrain the photographer from passing out any more of the pictures she had decided to be objectionable.

Mr. De Mirjian specializes, it should be explained, in what he is pleased to call "draped" photographs, but many would think they would be more accurately called "undraped." In these pictures the subject wears only a single piece of drapery that is flung carelessly about her, covering sometimes one portion of the body and sometimes another, but always leaving a liberal expanse of flesh quite unclad.

The easy grace with which the scarf is draped and the contrast between its dark folds and the pink and white of the flesh are thought by many connoisseurs to set off the beauties of a woman's face and figure to great advantage and to make the pictures real works of art. Consequently, they have been in great demand among famous beauties and also among the theatrical managers who exploit and glorify feminine charms.

Then why should Miss Brooks, herself

much admired as a beauty, object to these photographs?

Why should a former chorus girl who has repeatedly capered about the stage in very scanty costume object to the circulation of pictures of herself posed in the way Mr. De Mirjian and many others think so alluring?

And why on earth, if she feels such compunctions against these photographs now, did she ever pose for them in the beginning?

Louise Brooks has what she thinks very good reasons for her attitude. Some of them are ones of self-interest and others are based on high moral grounds which she feels should apply to every woman. Let Miss Brooks explain in her own words.

"My first reason for seeking to enjoin Mr. De Mirjian from circulating my photographs," says Miss Brooks, "is a purely selfish one. I am no longer a chorus girl. I have embarked on a serious career as a motion picture actress. And I fear it will injure my chances of success in my new profession to have those draped photographs of myself scattered about the country.

"In my new profession I am called upon to play many innocent young heroines, girls who are models of modesty and respect for all the time-honored conventions. In fact, my directors tell me that these are the roles for which I am preeminently suited.

"It would be too great a shock, I fear, for moviegoers who had admired me in one of these roles to come across a photograph of me as I looked when I posed before Mr. De Mirjian's camera wearing only a carelessly flung scarf, with sometimes a pair of sandals. The contrast would be pretty certain to destroy or weaken some of the illusions of innocence and unsophistication my acting had created on the screen.

"So I feel it my plain duty to myself to divorce my new career completely from the one I followed as a chorus girl by putting a stop to the circulation of these photographs.

"I do not think there is anything essentially immoral or immodest in the photographs of me or in many of the similar pictures of other young women which Mr. De Mirjian

has made. If I had thought so, I certainly never would have posed for them.

"But I do think that such photographs ought to be restricted to art lovers who can appreciate their esthetic qualities and to the legitimate purposes of theatrical exploitation. Because I fear that my pictures may be given a far wider distribution, because I am afraid they may be put indiscriminately into the hands of all sorts and conditions of people, is one of the main reasons why I want them taken out of circulation.

"I am not playing the hypocrite as many people seem to think. I am not the least bit ashamed of my chorus girl days and I do not think the often rather scanty costume worn in the modern revues and musical plays is the least immoral or immodest. They are in many cases necessary for dancers to do their best and they all help to heighten the beauty of these stage spectacles.

"But there would, of course, be shocking immodesty in wearing such costumes out on the street or into a drawing room. It was on this very principle that I was acting when I instructed my lawyers to bring suit against Mr. De Mirjian.

"Somebody has said that modesty is something that is continually varying with the time and the place and the person involved, and I think this is very true. A décolleté evening gown is perfectly all right at the dinner hour and after, but its wearer's modesty would be seriously questioned if she wore it earlier in the day.

"According to the conventions the one-piece bathing suit that is allowed on certain beaches can never be tolerated in the ballroom. And I have known many chorus girls who looked perfectly modest in certain very scanty costumes, while other girls, in precisely the same costumes, could not keep from appearing shockingly immodest.

"Since I have changed my profession I must change my standards of modesty. The standards that I had to conform to when I was a chorus girl will not do now that I have become a movie actress."

The line that separates modesty

with nothing on — with nothing on but bathing suits!

"They are climbing up on the porch rail and jumping head over heels into the snowdrifts. I was never so shocked in my life. It's positively indecent for them to be performing like that with nothing more on than they've got, and I think something ought to be done about it."

The college authorities investigated. They found the young men and the women doing exactly as the telephone report had said. They were taking the snow baths, they said, because they found them excellent fun and also because they thought them splendidly invigorating and the best possible preventives of colds.

But the college officials, seeing that the snow bathers were clothed in suits that would be regarded as ultra modest on any bathing beach in the country, allowed them to continue their unusual sport without interference.

The woman who telephoned the protest remains shocked and indignant. She is firmly convinced that the morals of the college and the town have gone to ruin. In her estimation bathing suits that are perfectly proper on a summer beach become scandalously immod-

est things when worn to dive from a fraternity house porch into 3-foot snowdrifts in zero weather.

Some champions of modesty carry their ideas to such extremes that they would bar from our art galleries the classic statues of ancient Greece or have them covered with concealing draperies.

"When the artistic value of a work of art is universally recognized as very high then those who would withdraw it from the public gaze reveal thereby their own state of mind," says Prof. Herbert Sidney Langfeld, of Harvard university.

"To insist on the draping of Greek statues of the classical period is not so much a crime against art as it is an insult to the community.

"On the other hand, it is even more reprehensible to appeal, as is frequently done, to the baser motives of the human race un-

der cover of art. Even when the object has some artistic value, it is very probable that the public will not respond as intended to the art form but rather to the suggestive content.

"It ceases to be an object of art and there exists then sufficient reason why it should be withdrawn from that particular community.

"Even the statue of the Venus de Milo or Praxiteles' Hermes would have no place in an environment where it was accepted merely as the representation of a naked human form."



One of the more delicately draped photographs like those for which Miss Brooks posed when she was a chorus girl and which she now objects to having kept in circulation.



Miss Brooks in a traveling costume that fulfills her ideas of modesty whether a young woman is in the chorus or a movie star.



Miss Louise Brooks in a portrait embodying the spirit of girlish innocence and maidenly modesty which she is anxious to have the public always associate with her.

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