

Fig. 1. Boudoir Cap, ca. 1900s.
Toronto Metropolitan University
FRC1986.09.017. Photograph by
Madison Schmidt, September 24, 2019.



ANALYSIS OF A 20th CENTURY BOUDOIR CAP

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The nightcap or breakfast cap was not a new concept in the early twentieth century, and women had been wearing updated versions like this boudoir cap since the nineteenth century (@LucieWhitmore). In the 1900s to 1920s women's hairstyles were towering and voluminous. These substantial hairstyles required plenty of length and often women went without cutting their hair, indeed, "most of the great coiffeurs...had never actually laid a scissors against a head of hair" (Zdatny 369). The boudoir cap as a practical garment, served to protect hair done in pins and curlers during the night as well as protect hair from dirt and dust and while dressing (@LucieWhitmore).

More than just a practical accessory, the boudoir cap could be quite ornate and into these caps are woven a history of femininity and conventions of gender relations. The boudoir cap was evolving and by the twentieth century, though still deeply tied to notions of femininity, the allegiance to strict rules of decency seemed to loosen. Though caps were still worn they no longer completely concealed the hair (Webster 170). Discourse shifted from decency to daintiness and so in the early twentieth century the boudoir cap was secured as a marker of femininity and all that entailed. In a 1912 article from *Vogue* the case for the cap is made; "The boudoir cap has become an accepted accessory for the fastidious woman who at all times, especially in that trying morning period before the careful coiffure is arranged, preserves feminine daintiness." ("Seen in the Shops" 41).

WOMAN IN AN APPEALING RÔLE

ONE ceases not to marvel at the versatility of modern woman. Though none dare challenge her ability to shoot straight and to serve a tennis ball with disconcerting swiftness, though she is competent and prone to discuss "isms" and "ologies" with entire authority—even to Egyptology—and eugenics—yet when the hour between tea-time and time to dress for dinner comes, then, without so much as the flutter of an eyelid or the turning of a hair, this amazing modern woman assumes her most ancient and appealing rôle. In the fastness of her boudoir modernity is laid aside and coquetry reigns—at least so far as externals are concerned.

With the donning of a robe of shimmering satin or cobwebby lace, she becomes a creature of a hundred dainty arts and graces; the eternal feminine asserts itself once more. Under the frills and ribbons of her boudoir cap, hard-earned wisdom and the logic upon which she plumes herself are alike determinedly concealed. It is, perhaps, a rôle astonishingly well played—for as with all other things that woman does to-day, she does this thing supremely well—but in it is relaxation for tired nerves and perhaps an explanation of why, after a day of shopping and calls, of clubs and settlement work and study, of athletics and dancing, which would tire to the point of exhaustion the average sturdy male, woman can appear in all her pristine freshness for the functions of the evening.

THE SETTING OF THE COMEDY

Upon the setting of this pretty comedy infinite pains are expended. No Madame du Barry or Madame de Staël was ever more fastidious about the fur-

Donning Femininity with Her Silken Negligée, and Firmly Concealing Wisdom under the Frills of Her Boudoir Cap, Woman Seizes the Witching Hour between Tea-time and Dinner-time to Practise the Ancient Arts of Coquetry



To a woman of stately, oriental type ropes of pearls dropping from the laces of her cap low over her ears are vastly becoming

nishings of her personal apartment than is the hyper-modern woman of to-day. Whenever it has pleased her fancy she has purloined boldly, from the storied boudoirs of the past, decorations and designs for the fitting of her sanctum, and it is not unusual to see an entire chamber à la Pompadour, for instance.

But in this, as elsewhere, women now prefer the things of to-day to those of yesterday, and recently they have shown a tendency to press into service the colorful art of Léon Bakst, and the intensely modern effects of the Vienna school of decoration in the furnishing of the favorite apartment. One sees also fascinating bandbox effects attained in these rooms by means of Poiret's vivid Martine productions.

FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

It is not always, however, that some special style of decoration is followed. Perhaps the most usual, and certainly the most characteristic, method of fitting the boudoir is the assembling of unrelated but harmonizing furnishings, each chosen for its individual beauty—a rug from the orient, old Chinese porcelains and embroideries, a rare French print here and there, and some wonderful Belgian laces.

Pictured on the page opposite is a corner of a charming boudoir decorated after this fashion. The *chaise longue* is upholstered in velvet of a soft gray-blue shade and heaped high with many cushions of creamy lace. Here and there a pink bow or a garland of delicate French roses catches the lace of the pillows. In keeping with such pillows is the lingerie coverlet trimmed at each corner with knots of ribbon twisted into

Fig. 2. Image from *Vogue* magazine, "Features: Woman in an Appealing Role." *Vogue*, vol.44, no. 10, Nov 15, 1914, pp. 36-36, 37, 38. *ProQuest*

VISUAL ANALYSIS

This skillfully delicate crocheted boudoir cap from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection (see fig. 1) balances precariously at the crux of practicality and flirtatious frivolity. Crocheted from a natural ecru cotton, this boudoir cap consists of a floral motif band and netted cap. It features additional crocheted rosettes over each ear which have been added on to the completed cap with a simple hand stitch. The cap has some discolouration and signs of wear, mainly around the edges of the frontal portion of the band, but is otherwise in excellent condition. There is little to no stretch in the cap, the circumference of the band measuring 52 cm, however the netted crown is loose and would allow for the added bulk of a hairstyle underneath. The item is seamless, common in crocheted garments, and the bulk of the netting gathers at three points on the cap, one at the front in the centre of the forehead and two at the sides which are covered by the addition of the rosettes at the sides but visible at the front-middle.

"Donning Femininity With Her Silken Negligée, and Firmly Concealing Wisdom under the Frills of Her Boudoir Cap, Woman Seizes the Witching Hour between Tea-Time and Dinner-Time to Practise the Ancient Art of Coquetry"

- 'Woman in an Appealing Role,' *Vogue*, 1914

THE FEMININE ESSENTIAL

The overwhelming model of the feminine ideal as being dainty or coquettish in popular media and fashion magazines of the time alludes to this often puzzling space wherein modesty and eroticism existed in exchange with one another. In this way a woman was to be both modest, composed, and all at once flirtatious. The assertion was that though the boudoir may be the space of relaxation and intimacy the woman in the boudoir must still retain "her pristine freshness for the functions of the evening" ("Woman in an Appealing Role" 37) as asserted by an article in Vogue from 1914 shown in fig. 2. The boudoir in this period was understood as a uniquely female space dedicated to the personal pursuits of a woman. The concept coming from France in the 17th century was as "a tiny recess, a very narrow cabinet near the chamber one occupies, for pouting unseen when in a bad mood" (qtd. in Webster 167). Although not everyone was so privileged as to have a space of their own for the particular labour of pouting in private, the bedroom, therefore, becomes an extension of the boudoir as a space that is understood as inherently feminine (Webster 167).

As the lead of the article in fig. 2 states, the woman is "firmly concealing wisdom under the frills of her boudoir cap... to practise the ancient arts of coquetry" ("Woman in an Appealing Role" 37). In this case, the woman in the boudoir engages in a series of performances where she must simultaneously conceal the reality of her wisdom and the exhaustion from the exertions of her day, while engaging in the dalliances of flirtation in her carefully constructed nighttime attire. Lingerie in this context was virtually a requirement of femininity and could "serve to reassure a woman or her intimates that underneath it all a 'real' woman exists at her core." (Fields 501). In the pages of Vogue, even during wartime it was asserted that:

There is nothing more truly feminine than charming lingerie, Mademoiselle. It is well enough to be simple, to be practical, to be even severe in one's frock, in times like these...But underneath, Mademoiselle, if one is a woman, one has emotions. And under one's frock, one has something that is soft and fluffy. It is not for the kind of woman who wears ugly lingerie that a man fights.

- "Keeping Up the Morale of French Lingerie," Vogue, 1918



Fig. 3. Image of a Boudoir Cap modelled after a helmet, "Features: Tempting the Paris Shopper." *Vogue*, vol. 42, no. 2, Jul 15, 1913, pp. 46. ProQuest

THE BOUDOIR CAP IN WW1

Incidentally, in Britain during the German bombing raids in 1914 - 1918, boudoir caps experienced an increase in popularity (Whitmore, 00:01:09 - 00:01:24) The caps in this context were hailed as a way of preserving decency and maintaining fashionability in case one was to run into one's neighbors on the way to the bomb shelter. Certainly not everyone hailed the boudoir cap as being of utmost importance in the instance of an air raid as one writer in the *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* put it, "as protection against bombs most boudoir caps leave something to be desired and a shrapnel helmet or coal bucket would be more useful if somewhat less becoming" (Whitmore, 00:01:55 - 00:02:07). Perhaps the boudoir cap in the style of a helmet as shown in fig. 3. would serve a woman better, the design taken from a 1913 *Vogue* article "fails to conceal its femininity even under the warlike design of a helmet" ("Tempting the Paris Shopper" 46).

Although an alarming image, that of the woman concerned with maintaining her feminine appearance over the reality of imminent demise, this does reveal the anxiety many felt towards the undressed or unkempt natural body in public which permeated the private realm of the bedroom through popular media and fashion magazines espousing feminine ideals as inherently dainty and essentially coquettish. With innovations in display and distribution of fashion post-war and the upending of gender roles during the post-war "crisis of domesticity" (Roberts 661) which saw women entering the workforce in droves, attitudes towards the delicately crafted convention of the boudoir cap changed.



Fig. 4. Model holds a Boudoir Cap in the image for The Six Worst Christmas Presents Feature in *Vogue* magazine, "Features: The Six Worst Christmas Presents." *Vogue*, vol. 68, no. 12, Dec 15, 1926, pp. 49-49, 50, 51. ProQuest

BOUDOIR BORE

With the rise in popularity of the short bobbed hairstyle came the rejection of the 'necessity' of a boudoir cap to protect one's hairstyle while sleeping or dressing. Finally, by 1926 one *Vogue* article named the boudoir cap one of the Six Worst Christmas Presents deeming it "colossally fatiguing" ("The Six Worst Christmas Presents" 49) (see fig. 4). Given the title of "The 'Gosh' Present," the boudoir cap finds its company among the well-intentioned but blundered "Gift 'That Will Do,'" like hairpins for the "bobbed-haired lady," the "Dull Useful Gift" of a toothbrush or pocket Bible, "The Ostentatious Gift," a "patronizing donation" made by "someone you have forgotten to remember," or "The Bromidic Gift," alluding to the terribly uninspiring options of socks or ties for men, a warning to the thoughtless shopper, and finally "The Puzzling Gift" which "by the very force of its presence shrouds in eternal mystery its meaning" ("The Six Worst Christmas Presents" 49, 50, 51).

This one time seemingly ubiquitous symbol of nighttime attire met its eventual end, as most trends do. As the boudoir cap morphed into an essential wardrobe item in the early 1900s, patterns and instructions to make your own were readily available. A Richardson's Mercerized Crochet Cotton advertisement from *Vogue*, 1917 boasts "you can have exquisite underwear, waists, etc., designed by Fashion's foremost authority, at the mere cost of materials and your own time." (Richardson Silk Co. 154) And just as it was then, so it is now, an almost identical pattern to the cap in the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collections costs a total of \$2.04 CAD on Etsy today (see fig. 5) and the materials for its construction a mere \$6.60 CAD. If you have the time and the skill, you really can have it all, mastery of coquetry not included.



No. 38. AUTO OR BOUDOIR CAP.

No. 38

Use size 30 Ecu T. B. C. Cordonnet Special Crochet Cotton, No. 4½ Duchess Steel Crochet Hook and proceed as follows:

Band is made first.

Ch. 12 and join, ch. 3, turn and make 14 d. s. c. into ring, ch. 3, turn, 3 d. c. s. in first 3 d. c. s. of previous row. Ch. 3, 1 d. c. s. in each of next 3 d. c. s. Ch. 3 and repeat until there are 4 spaces and 5 clusters of 3 d. c. s. Turn,* 1 s. c. s. in second d. c. s., 5 s. c. s. in space of 3 ch. 1 s. c. s. in second d. c. s., 5 s. c. s. in space of 3 ch. Repeat from * until all spaces are filled, ch. 8 and join over last 3 d. c. s. This forms first fan. Make second fan same as first to end of second row; fasten in center of first fan. Last row like last row of first fan. After the second fan all others should be fastened between the first and second scallops of the last fan on the same side of the work. Make 18 double fans and join. Front of cap is made first. Start over joined section, ch. 10, catch in each space over 11 double fans, catch in first stitch of twelfth fan, turn; ch. 5, catch in center of chain of 10, then chain 10, catch in center of next chain of 10 of previous row and so on to end of row. Turn, ch. 5, catch in center of chain of 10, then chain 10, catch in center of each chain of 10 loops of previous row; continue back and forth in this manner, catching in each chain of 10 and in each stitch of first and thirteenth fans until 41 rows are made. This leaves 5 open fans in the back. Ch. 5, catch in chain of 10. Ch. 5, catch in space of fan, ch. 5, catch in chain of 10, ch. 5, catch in space of fan, continue over 2 fans. In the third fan catch the chains in each stitch and in the next 2 fans catch the chains in spaces.

ROSES.

Make Irish crochet roses as follows and sew over fullness on each side of cap. Chain 7 and join 1st row—10 d. c. s. 2nd row—5 ch., 1 t. c. s. in 1 d. c. s., 2 ch., 1 t. c. s. in next d. c. s., repeat. 3rd row—7 ch., miss 1, 1 d. c. s. and repeat. 4th row—1 d. c. s., 7 t. c. s., 1 d. c. s. in 7 ch. 5th row—chain 9, 1 d. c. s. in d. c. s. between each leaf; repeat. 6th row—1 d. c. s., 9 t. c. s., 1 d. c. s. in 9 ch. and repeat. 7th row—chain 11, 1 d. c. s. in d. c. s., repeat. 8th row—1 d. c. s., 11 t. c. s., 1 d. c. s. in 11 chain, repeat. 9th row—chain 11, 1 d. c. s. in d. c. s., repeat. 10th row—1 d. c. s., 3 t. c. s., 4 d. t. c. s., 3 t. c. s., 1 d. c. s. in ch. 11, repeat. 11th row—chain 5; miss 2; 1 d. c. s. and repeat.

PENDANTS.

Chain 6 and join; make s. c. s. around until there are 70 of them in all; fill with cotton and narrow off. Ch. 12, catch back in 6th stitch and make 2nd pendant. Ch. 6 and break thread. Make 3 pendants for each side of cap.

Fig. 5. Crochet pattern for a Boudoir Cap, "No. 38 Auto or Boudoir Cap," 1910s, Author's personal collection.



Fig. 6. Image of boudoir cap from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection. 24 Sept. 2019. Author's own image.



Fig. 7. Image of crocheted netting with rosettes in the style of the boudoir cap. Schmidt, Madi. 8 Nov. 2019, Author's own image.



Fig. 8. Detail of crocheted netting with rosettes. Schmidt, Madi. 8 Nov. 2019, Author's own image.



Fig. 9. Detail of process work including materials and crochet hook. Schmidt, Madi. 18 Nov. 2019.

CREATIVE COMPONENT

I was able to find a pattern for a crocheted boudoir cap almost identical to the one from the Fashion Research Collection (see fig. 5). I wanted to explore the crocheting techniques and engage with this practice despite having never used crochet before. I was initially determined to find the exact materials called for in the pattern but quickly realized this would present a challenge. The specific cotton used in the pattern is no longer manufactured and even then I could not find an exact size and color match despite searching at a knitting and crochet specialty store. I decided to prioritize finding a material that would be easier to learn with and forgiving of mistakes. To keep this project manageable, I used the pattern to work a sample of netting which formed the crown of the cap and I also made rosettes of varying sizes. I spent an hour or so studying the pattern and researching the shorthand which presented a particular challenge for me as I found the pattern was written for an audience with a certain amount of experience with crochet. I relied heavily on internet beginner guides and a couple of YouTube videos which demonstrated the specific techniques I thought were closest to those in the pattern. After about an hour of learning and making a few samples I had a good handle on the basics and was surprised by how quickly I was able to pick this up.

I was struck by the versatility of the crocheted netting as a textile and was inspired by the interwoven quality of the mesh which is echoed in some of my favourite artworks like Ruth Asawa's metal sculptures and Louise Bourgeois's *Knots* 2006. Although I was not able to complete a full cap I still enjoyed the catharsis of crafting this piece and I have acquired a new skill I intend to develop.

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