

Journal of the Canadian Historical Association Revue de la Société historique du Canada



“If you want to get ahead, get a Hat”: Manliness, Power, and Politics via the Top Hat

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Volume 25, numéro 2, 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1032841ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1032841ar>

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Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association / La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Beaujot, A. (2014). “If you want to get ahead, get a Hat”: Manliness, Power, and Politics via the Top Hat. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 25(2), 57–88.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1032841ar>

Résumé de l'article

Le présent article met en évidence un phénomène historique et social important que les historiens ont largement négligé : la façon dont le couvre-chef a servi à l'affirmation de la masculinité en fonction des classes dans la société britannique victorienne. Les chapeaux étaient un baromètre de pouvoir social et un objet permettant de raconter une histoire. Ils ont aussi fait partie des signes et des symboles donnant une interprétation à l'espace public. Les coiffures ouvrent une fenêtre sur les processus de création et de maintien du pouvoir, du rang social et de la masculinité en Angleterre victorienne. La première moitié du présent article s'attarde au symbolisme entourant les chapeaux, notamment aux façons dont ils représentent et renforcent la masculinité et le statut de l'élite. La seconde moitié examine l'arène particulière de la Chambre des communes, où plusieurs questions vestimentaires ont été testées et résolues. L'article avance que la consolidation d'une masculinité hégémonique de l'élite se fait par l'entremise d'incidents en apparence mineurs entourant la mode.

“If you want to get ahead, get a Hat”: Manliness, Power, and Politics via the Top Hat

ARIEL BEAUJOT*

Abstract

This paper identifies an important historical and social phenomenon largely neglected by historians: the way in which headwear functioned as a site in the making of class-based masculinities in Victorian British society. Hats were an index to social power and an object from which a narrative could be read. They were also part of the signs and symbols that clarified the public landscape. By focusing on headwear we can assess one of the ways in which power, class, and masculinity were formed and maintained in Victorian Britain. The first half of this article explores the symbolism of hats by focusing on the ways in which they depicted and reinforced elite masculinity and status. The second half looks at the particular arena of the House of Commons where several sartorial issues were tested and resolved. This paper argues that the consolidation of hegemonic elite masculinity is done in what seemed like minor incidents concerning fashion.

Résumé

Le présent article met en évidence un phénomène historique et social important que les historiens ont largement négligé : la façon dont le couvre-chef a servi à l'affirmation de la masculinité en fonction des classes dans la société britannique victorienne. Les chapeaux étaient un baromètre de pouvoir social et un objet permettant de raconter une histoire. Ils ont aussi fait partie des signes et des symboles donnant une interprétation à l'espace public. Les coiffures ouvrent une fenêtre sur les

* I am grateful to those who have helped review, revise, and edit this paper: Frances Timbers, Barbara Todd, Len van der Meer, Wendy Pascoe, Lori Loeb, Tim Blackmore, Todd Webb, and Jennifer Levin-Bonder. Thank you also for the extensive and helpful suggestions of the anonymous readers from the *Journal of British Studies*, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, and the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*.

processus de création et de maintien du pouvoir, du rang social et de la masculinité en Angleterre victorienne. La première moitié du présent article s'attarde au symbolisme entourant les chapeaux, notamment aux façons dont ils représentent et renforcent la masculinité et le statut de l'élite. La seconde moitié examine l'arène particulière de la Chambre des communes, où plusieurs questions vestimentaires ont été testées et résolues. L'article avance que la consolidation d'une masculinité hégémonique de l'élite se fait par l'entremise d'incidents en apparence mineurs entourant la mode.

Why were hats so important to upper and middle-class men in British Victorian society? If fashion was supposedly such a trifling feminine concern, why is there extensive evidence in the periodical and parliamentary presses of men bothering themselves with the intricacies of hats? This article focuses on a certain type of hat — the top hat — variably called topplers, castors, silk hats, beavers, stove pipes, chimney-pots, and high hats. Though the names are diverse, they were all essentially the same thing, a felted and shellacked cylindrical high hat with a short brim.¹ Top hats were worn primarily with morning dress, which was the daytime formalwear sported by upper-class men.² The base materials used to felt top hats were beaver fur, rabbit fur, and wool.³ The best quality hats had a silk-like sheen. The high gloss look was achieved in the early part of the nineteenth century through well-polished fur, but, by the 1830s, many top hats were made of silk plush that was sewn over a stiff calico base.⁴ Silk hats were light and flimsy, faded in the sun, and got spotted in the rain. To keep hats looking smart they had to be brushed daily, occasionally taken to hatters for buffing, and regularly replaced. There was also an extensive second-hand market in top hats. A second-hand hat that was out of fashion could be re-blocked to fit the new owner's head, but as hats moved down the social scale their pile, colour, shape, and fit could indicate whether or not the man sporting it was or was not its original owner.⁵ Top hats were introduced to England as an elite fashion accessory at the end of the eighteenth century. They reached their peak of popularity in the mid-nineteenth century and were rivaled by

other sorts of hats by the end of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.⁶ Other elite hat fashions included deerstalkers for hunting, wideawakes for beach wear, and flat straw boaters for boating, but, in the city, the top hat was the norm. The bowler, a hard-felted hat with a shorter rounder crown that was invented for gamekeepers in 1850, was worn by progressive elites in the 1860s, and became acceptable day wear for gentlemen in the city by the 1880s, topping off the informal lounge suit.⁷ These hats were well known to be worn by men lower on the social scale; the bowler tended to be the best hat of the working man, while the top hat continued to distinguish middle- and lower-middle-class men with higher social aspirations.⁸ Always, a fashionable, shiny, well-maintained top hat was a marker of upper-class dress and status. The top hat continued to be the only acceptable accompaniment to frock coats and tail coats.⁹

If classes were definite, definable, and self-evident social categories, then men would not need clothing to make their status known. This was further complicated by a second-hand clothing market which allowed many, beyond the originally intended social group, to use elite fashions. But why would people want to represent themselves as members of a group they were not part of? One way to answer this question is to think of classes as fluid categories that were partially performed. Class has been understood and defined in many ways: as a relationship to the means of production,¹⁰ as a material category,¹¹ and as an identity.¹² I argue here that class was an ongoing accomplishment and that Victorians used clothing and consumption, along with social codes and signifiers, to perform their class roles on a daily basis according to the values albeit middle class, aristocratic, or working class.¹³ Class was defined by a man's choice of headgear and adoption of the mores that accompanied it; the antithesis of the urban elite top hat was the cloth cap worn by workers in the north. In this article we will see men's struggles to align their performed class status with their top hats. Some men proved oblivious to the hat's meaning to their peril; others tried to challenge the hat as a status marker, but to no avail; and still others used the top hat in an effort at class-passing.

It is worth considering how the top hat helped men consolidate their elite *gender* status as well as define their social class. Middle-class and aristocratic men were engaged in performative acts of gender construction; they chose and manipulated masculine objects as a way of creating their elite male identity.¹⁴ But they did this always in opposition and in fear of those outside of their class and gender status; they consolidated their hegemonic power by monitoring their own behavior. In other words, through surveillance of what other men wore and how they acted, “in groups” and “out groups” were formed. The maintenance of hegemonic masculinity was accomplished only partly through formal structures of force, wealth, and written rules.¹⁵ It was also through informal and unspoken rebukes that this type of power was consolidated and maintained. We will see this in the case of the top hat and its use in Parliament. Men who did not observe the hat rules were ridiculed until they conformed, or they were forever relegated to an out group separated from the elite masculinity and power in the house. The consolidation of hegemonic masculinity was accomplished through what seemed like minor incidents concerning fashion.

Victorians and early fashion theorists alike saw fashion as a women’s domain, a frivolous thing to which the more rational men paid little heed.¹⁶ In fact, men were obsessed with their own fashion. Men were constantly eyeing one another, able to detect subtle signals like the shape, fit, or nap, and the coded ways in which a hat was used to perform masculinity. With these signs men could decipher whether or not others were part of their group. Victorian men were reluctant to divest themselves entirely of decorative practices because clothing helped to reflect the amount of power certain men held in that culture. As such the top hat helped to create and reinforce elite identity in a period of democratization. Toppers also played a role in the performance of the values of hegemonic, gentry masculinity, such as intelligence, reason, professionalism, and moral uprightness.

It is difficult for the historian who exists outside of the sign system of the era to understand the meaning of Victorian clothing. Looking at photographs, *cartes de visite*, and fashion plates

gives few clues to the meaning of the fashion pictured. Reading memoirs is equally unproductive because people tended not to write about what they wore on a day-to-day basis, much less the meaning of what they were wearing. It is necessary to find some place where the meaning of dress is translated such as newspapers.¹⁷ Reporters often described violations of etiquette and noted exemplary behaviour when it came to hat etiquette. Newspaper articles were supplemented by work in Hansard (parliamentary debates transcripts) where violations in top hat protocol were often noted. The sources for this article span a 60-year period from the 1830s until the 1890s. The first half of this article explores the symbolism of hats by focusing on the ways in which they depicted and reinforced elite masculinity and status. The second half looks at the particular arena of the House of Commons where several sartorial issues were tested and resolved.

The Symbolism of the Top Hat: Status, Power, Masculinity

Men who wanted to get ahead in Victorian society had to wear a topper and yet they complained bitterly about this tyrannical accessory. Their main complaint was that hats were devices of torture that rendered men uncomfortable by squeezing their craniums and overheating their brains, resulting in headaches and allegedly contributing to baldness.¹⁸ Hats were accessories of bodily discipline and a prerequisite of elite Victorian masculinity, as corsets were for Victorian femininity. We might ask ourselves how the most powerful men in the world could be held hostage by something as insignificant as fashion. This article explains how and why fashion that was uncomfortable and difficult to manage became reinforced and socially ingrained.

Complaints that top hats were harsh, foul, hideous, repulsive, and ugly spanned the nineteenth century, but the outcry against hats reached a crescendo in the 1850s and again in the 1890s.¹⁹ Some, frustrated with their toppers, thought it best to do away with the accessory altogether. In 1849 and 1850 a series of letters to the editors of *The Freeman's Journal*, *The Caledonian Mercury*, *The Liverpool Courier*, *The Morning Herald*,

and *The Globe* called for a hat-reform committee to be struck. One idea was to have a hatless march; another was to call for new hat possibilities to be displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851; and, if that did not work, a writer jokingly proposed that men could adopt women's bonnets as a more comfortable headdress.²⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century, as the tyranny of the topper began to subside, readers were regaled with stories of brave men who attempted to throw off these hats, but whom social convention shamed into resuming the fashion.²¹ One man who, in 1886, admitted to having worn a "light Holland hat" in the city explained that strangers, who found his defiance of norms refreshing, congratulated him. But the disapproval he found in his boss "was too much for [his] courage" and he exchanged his straw hat for a topper once more.²² In another article entitled "Why I wear the tall hat" (1892), the author explained that conductors and page boys respected him less when he did not wear the proper attire.²³ The consensus was that if only a person of note would take up the cause, others would gladly follow. One of the people who suggested to address the top hat annoyance was Keir Hardie who, indeed, did contest hegemonic masculinity through his refusal to wear the top hat entirely.²⁴ Unfortunately for them, urban men of the upper and middle-classes were such slaves to the fashion that they shamed each other into wearing "unyielding towers of pasteboard"²⁵ even when most would agree that it was a nuisance — too hot to wear in the sun, sensitive to rain, heavy in the snow, and easily blown off in the wind.²⁶

Given that the problems of the top hat were so widely acknowledged, it is worth delving more deeply into the reason why the topper was worn throughout the nineteenth century. Historians can infer that there were three powerful influences that ensured that the top hat maintained its status as a symbol of upper-class masculinity: the meaning of the suit, the meaning of the head, and the opposition to the cap. If men threw off the top hat, they would be neglecting the powerful cultural symbols embedded in what clearly was more than just a head covering.

One way to answer why upper-class men had to wear top-pers, despite their dislike of the accessory, is to look at the rest of men's clothing in this period. The hat was, after all, designed as an accessory that complemented the larger and more prominent apparel that covered men's bodies. Fashion historians agree that men of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries underwent a change in dress style. Men's clothing became increasingly modest and subdued.²⁷ “The great masculine renunciation” was the term coined by J. Flügel in 1930 for this phenomenon. He asserted in *The Psychology of Clothes* that men began to reject brighter, more elaborate, and more varied forms of ornamentation and instead chose clothing that was plain, sober, and inconspicuous, leaving ornamentation to women. Using psychoanalytic theory, Flügel claimed that this change in clothing came from the bourgeois who believed simplifying dress was akin with the democratic spirit of the age. Rather than differentiating clothing based on class, the new sartorial representation was for men to dress alike.²⁸ Resultantly, men adopted the three-piece suit as the modest form of dress. And what better than a top hat to finish off the look of the long narrow frame covered in dark fabric?

Historian David Kuchta questions the validity of this proposed watershed moment in men's fashion.²⁹ He pushes the origins of the masculine renunciation back to the later seventeenth century and argues against Flügel's idea that the suit was used to represent the democracy of the age. Instead, Kuchta convincingly argues that aristocratic men donned the suit after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in order to show themselves as industrious, frugal, and able to properly run the nation.³⁰ Modesty in aristocratic dress came to represent independence from frivolous concerns about fashion, vanity, and luxury. This redefinition of upper-class masculinity and clothing came at a price for lower- and middle-class men and women who were labeled vain for their luxurious displays. They were supposedly under the controlling influence of their conformity to fashion and therefore were politically tainted, unable to see past their pursuit of luxury to do what was best for the nation. This same set of rhetorical devices, this time aimed at excluding the lower classes and

women, was later used by the middle-classes during the nineteenth century when they, in turn, began to wear the suit in order to claim political legitimacy. The move away from Flügel's thesis of the suit representing democracy is important to note. Here the suit became the physical embodiment of powerful hegemonic masculinity and was used as a way of excluding unworthy classes and women from Parliament. The top hat, being a part of the suit, could hardly have been changed without a major shift in the relations of power.

By looking at a single article of apparel and observing men's everyday interactions and thoughts about the top hat, we see that the renunciation of fashion was neither so thorough nor so sobering as scholars originally thought. Far from denouncing fashion as a show of democracy, men were acutely aware of their hats and what they signified about themselves and others. While men's apparel became more somber, men continued to be well informed and highly focused on fashion, insisting on conformity and on distinguishing themselves from the classes beneath them by means of attire. The details of their dress presented subtle forms of differentiation that elite and middle-class Victorians were taught to decipher. The material culturalist could conjecture that most men's clothing choices, while less conspicuous than women's fashion, were nonetheless designed to make a series of social statements that revealed to onlookers (or not) their elitism and unwillingness to share power.

So the top hat was the finishing touch on the much larger sartorial statement about masculine authority denoted by the suit. But the special place that the hat occupied — upon men's heads — assigned it further symbolic significance. And this brings us to the second part of the answer as to why the top-hat was so avidly worn by elite men in the nineteenth century. According to the theories of humoral medicine examined by Merry Wiesner in her survey of *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, men had more heat in their bodies than did women. Heat was considered the most positive of the humoral qualities. Male heat was the basis of reason and it rose towards the heaven and towards the brain, thus making men more intelligent.³¹ In the

nineteenth century the idea that men were brainier than women was solidified by the sciences of physiognomy and phrenology, which shared the belief that the head bore the outward signs of the mind contained within.³² According to Joanne Finkelstein's *The Fashioned Self*, all one had to do to prove men's superior rationality was to measure their larger skulls. The head held a special place in the economy of the body and, as a consequence, was imbued with powerful symbolic values.

Some argued that not only the head represented a man's brain, but his hat could as well. There was a belief that a man's hat could reveal significant details about his thinking; an act of character assessment that *Punch* jokingly termed “castor-ology” in 1849 (castor is another name for beaver, the base felting material for expensive top hats).³³ When George IV wore a new hat to the Ascot horse races in 1827, its shape was interpreted as a sign that his political affiliations were leading Britain down a dangerous path. The Ultra Tories and the High Churchmen blamed George Canning for forcing upon the ailing king a radical hat.³⁴ “Do not you observe ... how he has lowered the *crown*? ... Has he not, too, given [the brim] a curl never seen before, which indicates plainly the intention of turning over a new leaf? And then what does the size of the ribbon signify, but that the head of the State is encircled ... by the broadest of all bands — a people”?³⁵ Though this newspaper article was likely a spoof, it spoke to important concerns of the time. In the historical moment, eight years after the Peterloo Massacre and five years before the Great Reform Act of 1832, the idea of basing decisions on the will of the people was a radical suggestion. In this article, the Ultra Tories and the High Churchmen used the stylistic oddities of a hat to remind readers of what might be the intentions of the man who wore it. The hat had become a window into the mind of the king.³⁶

The idea that hats could be observed as a way of gauging the mind beneath it was so believable that Victorians even penned poetry about it. Consider for example, this poem, entitled “The Grand Old Hat” (1883), that poked fun at the growing size of Prime Minister William Gladstone's head:³⁷

When this old hat was new
 My head was smaller—yes!
 Now I'd have much ado
 To get it on, I guess.
 The cause I cannot tell,
 I only know 'tis true;
 My head has seemed to swell
 Since this old hat was new.
 Perhaps, as some maintain,
 My cranium may have grown,
 Owing to stretch of brain,
 Or thickening of bone.
 "The hat has shrunk?" eh? what?
 That nonsense will not do!
 My head has grown, a lot,
 Since this old hat was new.

This poem poked fun at the Grand Old Man of British politics who, by the end of his tenure had become quite dictatorial, especially with respect to issues like Irish Home Rule that ended up splitting his Liberal Party. In this case his too-small hat became representative of Gladstone's enlarged head/ego.

Henry Melton, a haberdasher from Regent Street writing in 1867, went one step further in his assessment of head shapes through hats, suggesting that the shape of a hat could actually change the phrenological makeup of the man who wore it. He argued that brains could be altered because of the fit of a hat. A politician might change his decision, a philosopher might switch his views, and a bishop might become a deist, all because of the shape of their hats.³⁸ The relationship of the brain to the accessories that sat on the head was not a new phenomenon to the nineteenth century. The predecessor of the top hat was the long white wig worn by elite men of the early modern period. Art historian Marcia Pointon demonstrates that wigs were used by men to construct their identities and were read as an index of their faithfulness to their wives as well as their social power and masculine authority.³⁹

The third reason why the top hat resonated with elite Victorian men was that there was a parallel object — the cap — that acted as a foil to the topper, giving it even more ideological meaning by presenting an opposing force. Fashion historian Fiona Clark convincingly argues that there had been a certain symbolism associated with low and high hats since the 1600s. She suggests that low-crowned, soft, and broad brimmed hats were allied with informality, unpretentiousness, rural life, artists, intellectualism, evangelicalism, and revolution. Tall stiff hats meanwhile were representative of formality, engagement with certain guilds, moral uprightness, professionalism, orthodoxy, and the bourgeois.⁴⁰ Indeed, the low hat, called a *bonnet rouge*, was adopted by the *sans-culottes* in France during the first French Revolution as a potent symbol of liberty, republicanism, and disregard for wealth and aristocratic privilege.⁴¹ As James Epstein tells us, the red cap re-appeared across the channel at Peterloo in 1819 as a revolutionary symbol.⁴² Eric Hobsbawm argues that by the 1890s the cap formed part of working class cultural representation.⁴³ In opposition to working-class caps, top hats were generally associated with upper- and middle-class urban men when dressed in formal day wear or evening wear. Certainly the black, erect topper gave the sense of earnest behaviour and staid respectability that was popularly understood as the prevailing attitude of bourgeois men.

In sum, elite men's consumption and wearing of top hats had specific effects for themselves and those around them. Upper-class men participated in a performance of masculinity in which they represented themselves as part of an in-group to the exclusion of women and other men who did not want to or could not afford to keep up with this demanding fashion. But the hat itself held meaning because of its associations with the three piece suit, which was the sartorial spectacle used to consolidate political power from 1688 onward; because of its association with the head that held cultural significance for men as the rational sex and was engrained in earlier understandings of medicine; and because it was part of an exclusionary matrix where the cap represented working-class radicalism and the top hat represented elite status-quo.

Bourgeois men suffered various indecencies for their headgear in order to prove that they had the self-restraint required of their class. Things that were difficult to wear required discipline, and this discipline was what was needed to be part of the aristocratic and bourgeois classes. Some of the troubles men went through to maintain the correct appearance were the humiliation of having to run after topplers when a stiff wind arose (with the alternative of attaching their hats to collars with a cord, were men risked being choked);⁴⁴ constantly having to preen and stroke hats to keep the nap flush and strait;⁴⁵ having to suffer its heat in the summer; leaving a red ring around the forehead when removed; having to risk losing it in coat checks or having it crushed at busy social occasions;⁴⁶ and having to carry it in a cumbersome box when traveling or moving. It was difficult to preserve and wear a toppler. This constant vigilance did the work of maintaining the necessary image of power and hegemony to distinguish one class from the others. "Without going to the extent of saying that a man cannot get on in the world without a silky, glossy, fashionable hat, there is little doubt that the pot hat rules as with a rod of iron." Explains the anonymous author of *Reynolds's Newspaper* in 1892:

When men begin to run down in the world they get seedy at the extremities. They become shabby as to the hat and boots. ... If his headgear is shabby and worn and battered, we harden our hearts and prepare to listen to a request for the loan of half-a-crown, or we expand our sympathies in anticipation of a tale of misfortune and distress ... If a man, on the other hand, beams upon us with a 'tile' of silk, black, glossy, and well brushed, we say that the world is going well with him.⁴⁷

The top hats served to communicate that those who wore them led a life of non-strenuous and non-manual labour. The more dysfunctional the hat, the more effective it was at creating class cohesion through conformity. Men were willing to suffer under this annoying and uncomfortable accessory rather than endure the humiliation of representing themselves as a part of the masses.

Now and again someone has the courage to wage war against the common nuisance [of the top hat] and to appear in a comfortable bowler or felt. If he is rich he is dubbed ‘eccentric’ and forgiven. If he be in indifferent circumstances he is called ‘vulgar,’ and is snubbed accordingly by the devotees of saint pot hat ... What a funny race of beings we are, when our social status depends upon the shape and make of our hat.⁴⁸

This no-pain-no-gain attitude was also self-perpetuating. Being aware of their own discomfort and the need for constant consciousness of the state and whereabouts of their hats, men came to regard each other’s headgear as an embodiment of character and rank. According to the *Yorkshire Herald*, hats are “the one feature of our clothing which, for more than any other, according to its shape, material, size, condition, colour, decoration, and style in which it is worn, indicates the rank, profession, social position and even age of the wearer.”⁴⁹ Within nineteenth-century newspapers, there are countless examples of men inspecting each other’s hats and making judgements based on their observations. Henry Melton, Hatter to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, explains that all can tell when a hat does not suit the man: “Wholesale hat-fitting leads to general unfitness and that snobbish inappropriateness in the hat which is observable, even to the uninitiated.”⁵⁰ The dual action of hat wearing and hat surveillance helped to hold the top hat’s place in society as an object that demonstrated to men whether or not they were in the same club and could handle the same responsibilities.⁵¹ “We instinctively go for the hat first in running our eye over a newcomer,” admitted an author from *Reynolds’s Newspaper* in 1892.⁵²

Given the cultural resonance of the topper, it is understandable that men who lost their hats or had them stolen felt it cost them their dignity. A man without — or with an improper — hat, could not appear in public. He was therefore unmanned, and this accounted for the extreme personal attachment men showed for their hats.

In 1843 an author from the *Preston Chronicle* mused that hats possessed an independent spirit that sought to embarrass their owners by forcing them to run after their toppers in public. These hats attempted to escape from their proprietors and behaved as if they had minds of their own:

Having made a rush of a hundred yards or so in a straight line, and with great regularity of movement, it suddenly bolts up against a wall, and there reposes, apparently as quiet and harmless as when on the head of its owner. ... Sometimes, too, it squats down with the same treacherous appearance of a willingness to allow itself to be taken, right in the mud over which it has been a moment before rolling with a mischievous delight; stopping suddenly in mid career, for the express purpose — as no reasonable person can doubt — of deceiving its pursuers into a belief that it has repented its conduct, and is willing to atone for it by submitting to capture.⁵³

On a more serious note, men sometimes risked their lives for their wayward hats. An attempt at regaining social status is one reason why men might have put themselves at peril for this simple accessory. Papers reported stories from the 1840s to 1900 featuring men drowning when they went after hats that fell into rivers, lakes, and quarries;⁵⁴ others were struck by trains, in pursuit of hats that flew off in stations.⁵⁵ The fact that men were willing to risk death for their hats reaffirms the fact that the topper held meaning beyond the simple accessory it first appeared to be. The top hat signified an elite social status and authoritative masculinity that seemed to many men well worth chasing.

At risk when a man lost his hat or had it stolen was his sense of self, his social standing, and perhaps his virility. Since top hats in any given decade looked similar, they were often accidentally exchanged. In some instances men were unmannered and ridiculed because they were in the possession of another's hat that did not suit them.⁵⁶ A story from the *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* explains the anguish of an older gentleman who accused

his young beautiful wife of having an affair upon observing a fashionable hat on his hat stand. He thought himself cuckold and therefore unmanned when in fact he had simply taken a younger man's hat from the cloak room.⁵⁷ Tales about hats taken by acquaintances demonstrate that having a top hat was not enough — men felt an attachment to their specific hats. The story of Mr. John Morley, a parliamentarian, proves this point. In this story, the “philosophical essayist” pulls off his hat and examines it, as “if he hoped to find in the nap or in the lining a solution of the problem that was vexing his brain.” He consults his friends Chamberlain and Gladstone who become embroiled in the controversy as well. After much speculation on the part of the press as to what might be the problem, the punchline of the story is revealed: Mr. Shaw-Lefevre had accidentally taken Mr. Morley's hat and Mr. Morley, so disturbed by not having his proper headgear, could not concentrate on the parliamentary proceedings: “Mr. Shaw-Lefevre looked guilty but the problem was solved, and to Mr. Morley's perfect content, for he sat at ease once more under his own hat. Thenceforward Mr. Morley was an appreciative, nay, even a radiant listener to the ponderous periods of Sir William Harcourt.”⁵⁸ From a material culture point of view, the idea that men might be attached to their particular hats makes a lot of sense: a man's hat was sized for his individual head and he often had his name inserted in the lining.⁵⁹

However, court cases show that men found hat-exchanges disturbing for other reasons as well: fears of dirt/shabbiness, insecurities about head sizes, and even a sense of sexual disruption drove men to the law to regain their hats. Cases of substituted hats appeared at Liverpool Borough Court in 1846, Shoreditch Country Court in 1857, City of London Court in 1883, and at Cardiff County Court in 1894. The stories were remarkably similar: gentlemen who had lost what they claimed were larger-sized and better-kept toppers sued others for allegedly stealing their hats and leaving less-desirable ones in their place.⁶⁰ The men in these cases argued that it was an affront to their sense of self to put on a hat other than their own, and they felt naked and vulnerable if their hats were damaged in ways that did not allow

the hats to be worn in public.⁶¹ The hat could be a loathsome object since it was not washable and therefore encapsulated human sweat, dirt, and was a carrier of lice. Understandably men were reluctant to wear the not-so-nice hat left behind for them.⁶² There could also be some underlying concern that if they wore the used hat, they might be interpreted by onlookers as having a debased social status. The constant reference to hat size in these cases is not surprising in a culture that prized a large head as the container of the fully developed mind, but it could also indicate a concern about male virility. Bare headedness has sexual implications according to historian Marcia Pointon. Writing about the wig of the previous century, Pointon suggests that the exchange or loss of a head covering was synonymous with exposure, causing a break-down of social order and the threat of sexual disturbance.⁶³ Artificial covering of the head was a sign of virility. The tall hat could certainly be interpreted as phallic and the hatless man exposed to the castrating gaze of public scrutiny.

The Top Hat in the House of Commons: Fears of Democracy as Seen through the Protocols of Parliament

All these general cultural meanings of the top hat could be observed at work in a particular environment: the House of Commons. Nowhere was the hat a more obvious index to social power than in Parliament. The solidarity of this particular group was emphasized by the standardized garb of politicians in top hats. There were many disturbances in the House concerning hats. These illuminate the concerns over the democratization of Parliament. No matter how radical an MP's views, in the nineteenth century, members had to subscribe to the norms of gentility and class represented by the top hat⁶⁴ or they suffered hazing and ridicule until they conformed. These gatekeeping devices were used to secure solidarity within the House and maintain an insider group of elite men.

According to the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc.*, the top hat played a leading part in the House of Commons. During the first session of the 1898 Parliament, a new member

walked out of the House in the ordinary way men did when leaving a building — fully dressed and with his hat securely placed on his head. To his confusion the men in the chamber jeered at him: “hat, hat.” He stopped in the middle of the floor and looked around “with a mingled expression of fright and perplexity.” But his fellow members persisted with their cries of “hat, hat,” rendering him all the more embarrassed. In response to these exclamations, and surrounded by his laughing brethren, the new MP checked his trouser pockets, coat tails, and even his feet but found nothing amiss. An Irish MP took pity on the discomfited man, perhaps because he was an outsider himself, politely taking off the hat of the baffled legislator and handing it to him “with a courtly bow.”⁶⁵

But what was the issue that caused all this fuss? This new MP was following the ordinary custom of men attending public assemblies — like the theater or a reception — where, one wore a hat when entering and exiting the premise, taking the hat off when seated.⁶⁶ The problem was that the custom in the House of Commons was *reversed*. MPs were expected to take their hats off when entering and exiting the chamber, and put their hats on when they sat down (although some members did not observe this last rule).⁶⁷ This was perhaps done to show the difference between law-makers and ordinary citizens: by placing their hats back on their heads only when they left the parliamentary complex, members were signifying the shedding of their political identity and a return to their ordinary identity as Victorian men.

Most MPs, having graduated from English public schools, would be accustomed to receiving and doling out hazings, such as the case of our unfortunate MP. As a protest about new unknown members, elected by the ever-expanding voting public, long-serving members often used the reversal of the ordinary rules of conduct particular to the House to embarrass and chastise newly elected MPs, as if they were at Eton with new boys. “In these more democratic times,” explained the anonymous author of *The Great Hat Question* (1882), “in an assemblage such as the House of Commons is, or is in the way of becoming, the barriers of ceremony cannot be guarded too carefully. For, once

they are swept away, the rules of good breeding will act as feeble restraint on those whose rough manners are even now becoming rather embarrassing.”⁶⁸ In other words, hats in Parliament had to be carefully regulated in the interest of the body politic. The hegemony of the ruling class was eroding, so they used hat etiquette to stop working-class attitudes from surfacing in the House. According to R. W. Connell, the masculine hegemony of the gentry appeared in the period between 1450 and 1650, and was formed alongside and because of the modern capitalist economy. This system of masculinity began to erode with the increasing bureaucracy of the state and the rise of the industrial economies characteristic of the nineteenth century.⁶⁹ The House of Commons was perhaps one of the last places that gentry masculinity was performed, enforced, and maintained.

In another example of gatekeeping by members of Parliament, reported by *The Morning Post*, *Preston Chronicle*, and *The Penny Satirist* in the later 1830s, an Irish MP was chastised for the state of his hat and made to buy a new one. In the story, an MP received a note allegedly from Lord Morpeth asking him to get a new topper as the state of his hat was sullyng the good Liberal name.⁷⁰ In this note, Morpeth encouraged his fellow MP to pay attention to his self-presentation and show that he was part of the (insider group of the) Liberal Party. One can see by the MP’s reaction that he had never given much thought to his hat and how it represented his participation in an exclusive club of parliamentarians: “Having read the letter with attention [he], took up his chapeau, ... he turned it over and over and carefully inspected it in all its parts. There was no denying that it was the worse for wear. There were sundry bruises in the crown; the brim was cracked in various parts; the pile was worn bare in several places; and it ... assumed a whitey-brown complexion.”⁷¹ The fact that this MP was Irish established him immediately as an outsider in the British House of Commons. The Irish had only become part of the institution in 1800 with the Act of Union. Furthermore they were forever seen as the backward group within the UK; the Irish were sometimes even seen as a different race, not as evolved as the Anglo-Saxon Englishmen. In this story and the previous

one, newer MPs were singled out as lacking sartorial, gentility, and institutional knowledge. Certain groups of men lacked the background and social education to recognize the distinctions of taste that acted as important distinguishing markers within certain communities.⁷² In the end the MP spent 32 shillings in an attempt to solidify his position as part of the in-group.⁷³

Hats appeared often in the Rules of Procedure of the House of Commons where no other item of clothing was mentioned. Whenever a member was speaking, he was on his feet without his hat. But to receive answers, he sat down and put it on.⁷⁴ And men came into the House and left the House with their hats off. So, in general the rule was to take one's hat off when standing in the House. But there was an exception: if a division was called in the assembly and a vote was therefore to take place, and a minister wanted to challenge the ruling of the chair, he had to sit with his hat on to make his statement. To the delight of the press, on 3 June 1881, Prime Minister William Gladstone found himself without his hat during a division and he wanted to make a point. Feeling that it was very important that his opinion be heard, Gladstone was forced to borrow the solicitor-general's hat “which was at once too small for him and too stylish.”⁷⁵ This delighted his fellow MPs, and journalists reported on the incident for the next decade, poking fun at the prime minister who had to balance the hat on his head while attempting to make a political argument.⁷⁶ Clearly, the proper uses of hats were tantamount to the proper conduct of gentlemen.

Another moment when the House of Commons was preoccupied with hat manners was on 21 March 1882.⁷⁷ On that day the speaker read a royal message from Queen Victoria asking for funds in support of the upcoming marriage of Prince Leopold and Princess Helen. Some controversy surrounded the message. Gladstone wanted to consider it and his fellow Liberal MP, Henry Labouchere, sought to oppose it. But this debate was not what preoccupied the House. After hearing the royal request, Charles Lewis, a Conservative MP, asked the chair if it was standard practice to take hats off out of respect when there was a reading of a royal message. He then accused “a cabinet minister” of having

left his topper on while the Queen's message was read. H. B. Samuelson, a Liberal MP, piped up that he had observed MPs frequently disobeying the proper decorum and accused Sir Assheton Cross and Sir Hicks-Beach, both Conservative politicians, of not having taken off their hats during a reading two weeks prior.⁷⁸ Eventually the chair put the issue to rest by explaining that MPs must take off their hats while royal messages were read, but could wear their hats as they responded to the issue.

As we have seen, hats held power because of their location on the head/brain/mind, so taking off one's hat to the queen's message was an opening of the mind, an acknowledgement of hierarchy, and a humbling of the listener all at once. Given that the queen had requested money from Parliament, not taking off one's hat at that moment could have been meant as a sign of republicanism. Journalists from *The Standard*, *The Newcastle Courant*, and *The North Eastern Daily Gazette* picked up on this point by suggesting it was radicals — John Bright and Joseph Chamberlain — who had tried to represent themselves at the same level as their monarch.⁷⁹ But because of the lack of discussion of the meaning of the gesture in Hansard, I would argue that this was more likely a case of politicians chastising each other to maintain the status quo. It is in this sort of political pettiness and gamesmanship that we come to see how hegemonic masculinity functioned and was maintained. While the top hat was the focus, here, the underlining issues were conformity, power, and the maintenance of an in-group. If men did not use this accessory properly, their status as parliamentarians and as elite men would be at risk. It is in these types of performances that class distinctions were "made real." It seems like all they were arguing about was their hats, but, in fact, they were reinforcing and reiterating the importance of their gender and class status.

But this reestablishment of the proper sartorial order was not to last long. Five months after the incident of the royal message, in August 1882, Keir Hardie entered Parliament as the first Labour member wearing a cap rather than a topper. Hardy was Scottish ethnically but had won his seat in the working-class constituency of West Ham South (which was then in Essex and

now in Greater London). By this time, some of the Lib-Lab MPs wore bowlers, but none were so brazen as to don a cap.⁸⁰ Hardie became known as “the man in the cloth cap” and his attire was heralded by the Conservative and Liberal presses alike as symbolic of the coming of a new era in British politics. When Hardie first entered Parliament in untraditional garb, the incident was reported by the *Daily Telegraph* in angry tones: “The House is neither a coal store, a smithy, nor a carpenter’s shop; and, therefore, the entrance of Mr. Keir Hardie ... left a painful impression which the workman’s tweed cap was powerless to subdue.”⁸¹ The cap resonated with his working class constituents and the tweed with Hardy’s Scottish roots. Regional differences lurked beneath press and MPs opinions on Hardie’s attire that likely had to do with both his political and labour associations. A Northumbrian writing to the editor of *Reynolds’s Newspaper* reported his delight in the coming change of clothing in the House:

I, for one, rejoice exceedingly that Keir Hardie has had the courage to make a pioneer effort to break down the caddishness of the House of Commons. That assembly is no longer the first club in Europe. It must henceforth be a meeting place for all sorts and conditions of men who may be chosen by the people to represent them. Working men candidates do not want to pose as country squires, and miners from the pit’s mouth do not want to undertake the *role* of men of fashion. Their mission should be made of sterner stuff. I, therefore, hail with unfeigned pleasure the advent of the cloth cap.⁸²

Here we see that the changes wrought by a series of acts to broaden the franchise were beginning to break down the hegemonic masculine control of the elite. The symbol that showed this shift more than any other was headgear.

In another letter to the editor, this time in the *Glasgow Herald*, Cunningham Graham argued that the top hat was an emblem of Liberalism: “Had Keir Hardie but adopted the hat, his fate were sure. I see him ... first getting stouter, then changing his corn-cob pipe for a two-penny cigar, [taking up a] black

frock coat, and then speaking of himself as being vested with a deep responsibility by his electors, and finally, [becoming] an inspector of factories ... For with the hat cometh honor, heritage, and humbug.”⁸³ Here the top hat represented the dishonourable Liberal MP who had little concern for his constituents and was more talk than action. The hat signified the mind underneath the headgear, and these quotes suggest that had Hardie taken up the top hat, his mind would surely have followed. At issue here was working-class manhood and its ability to withstand the pressures of Parliament that required conformity to an aristocratic and middle-class norm.

Hardie’s biographer, Fred Reid, tells us the behind-the-scenes story: while Hardie chose not to wear the high hat, he did not begin his political life in a worker’s cap either. Hardie’s hat was a deerstalker cap — a hat he had adopted during his open-air campaign in West Ham because it was practical in all types of weather.⁸⁴ The deerstalker hat would have been familiar to his fellow MPs. Nonetheless, journalists and MPs aggravated Hardie’s breach of etiquette by saying it was the peaked flat cap worn by industrial workers. In changing the imagined image of Hardie’s hat they implied the radical intentions of the new MP. When interviewed about it Hardy said: “I had always worn a tweed cap and homespun clothes and it never entered my head to make a change. My wife in Scotland had thought about it and had sent on a soft felt hat, but it had not arrived.” After the ruckus of having appeared in the House of Commons wearing a cap, Hardie “received eight or ten top hats from good-hearted people in the country.”⁸⁵ He wore none of them.

Once Hardie realized the cultural resonance of this headgear, he acquired a worker’s cap and was photographed with it in the *Labour Prophet* in 1893.⁸⁶ The author of the article, “The Worship of the Pot Hat,” summed up the situation nicely by saying, “so much attention has been attracted to Mr. Keir Hardie’s style of dress and headgear since the opening of the new Parliament that one would almost come to the conclusion that there must be some very intimate connection between politics and pot hats, and a close association of brains and broadcloth.”⁸⁷ And indeed there was.

In the story of Hardie’s headgear we see a culmination of the various layers of meaning of the hat in politics. First, as the last quote suggests, the head held the intellect and the hat, as an extension of the head, could be a phrenological object used to interpret the mind. Second, MPs and journalists focused on the hat as a way of gauging the results of increasing democracy — the cap represented, in particular, the coming of the working-class influence on the House. And thirdly, as Hardie found out, non-conformity to House attire was met with ridicule, chastisement, and exaggeration in the hopes of forcing MPs new to the House to maintain the status quo. Given the pressures Hardie had to endure for his hat, it is no wonder that many a powerful nineteenth-century man took to heart the idiom — “if you want to get ahead, get a hat.”

Top hats were far more than simple accessories; they were objects that demonstrated power embroiled in the controversies of the day. This accessory acted like a lightning rod for larger social issues, such as the weakening of elite masculinity in traditional locales of power, and the fear of an ever increasing consuming and voting public. At a time when the gentility was under siege, top hats allowed elite men to continue to perform their gender and class status thereby maintaining an impression that the old power structures remained alive and well. Along with wearing the top hat, elite men used the accessory to pressure those who strove for elite status to do the same.

An analysis of press accounts of men’s sartorial violations, and especially the use of headgear in the House of Commons, tells us about the delineations of power in the nineteenth century. Through clothing, seemingly so incidental, we find elite men obsessively watching one another in order to reinforce the parameters of elite status and masculinity. Despite claims about the democratic spirit of the age, clothing such as the top hat was used as an exclusionary device to both create an in-group of elite men who understood the distinctions in taste well enough to sport the hat properly, and to exclude those who were part of an out-group, in this case women and lower-class men. Those who came into the House without knowing the hat rules were unable

to wield these accessories or use them to their own advantage, and instead they were ridiculed until they towed the line, first through fashion, and then presumably by other means as well. It took a change of attitude in the new democratically-oriented parliamentarians, refusing to play by the old rules, in order to break the tyranny of the top hat bemoaned by elite and bourgeois men alike. In studying the top hat we see class struggle through a garment. The system of clothing examined here is constructed on top of the gender and class paradigms of the period. It is through the study of clothing that we see these intangible cultural phenomena become concrete, allowing us to make a study of the minute ways in which hegemonic elements of class and gender were performed and maintained.

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Endnotes:

- 1 Top hats changed shape and tallness depending on the decade. The "Wellington" had concave sides to the crown and was popular in the 1820s and 1830s, the "Cumberland" was tall and narrowing towards the top popular in the 1830s, the "Chimney Pot" and "Stove Pipe" had narrow brims and very tall crowns, the "Stove Pipe" had totally

- strait sides and the “Chimney Pot” slightly convex sides. Both these varieties were popular in the 1850s. In the 1890s the typical form of the top hat was slim and waisted. Fiona Clark, *Hats* (London: Drana Book Publishers, 1982), 39–40, 43. See also Hilda Amphlett, *Hats: A History of Fashion in Headwear* (Chalfont St. Giles, UK: Sadler, 1974), 143.
- 2 Nicholas Storey, *History of Men’s Fashion: What the Well-Dressed Man is Wearing* (Bransley, UK: Remember When, 2010), 73–84.
 - 3 Madeleine Ginsburg, *The Hat: Trends and Traditions* (London: Barrons Educational Series, 1990), 85.
 - 4 Colin McDowell, *Hats: Status, Style and Glamour* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 14; Ginsburg, *The Hat*, 86; Amphlett, *Hats*, 143.
 - 5 Ginsburg, *The Hat*, 86.
 - 6 Clark, *Hats*, 38.
 - 7 Storey, *History of Men’s Fashion*, 141; Clark, *Hats*, 42.
 - 8 Clark, *Hats*, 40, 43. Class status is much more complex than at first glance. Some working-class men wore toppers as well. Photographs from the 1840s and 1850s indicate that those engaged in working-class professions wore top hats when going about their duties, for example: railway engineers, funeral mutes, coachmen, policemen, and workmen atop the Crystal Palace.
 - 9 Clark, *Hats*, 43.
 - 10 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1963).
 - 11 Joseph Ambrose Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood: A Study of Family Planning among the Victorian Middle Class* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1954); F. Musgrove, “Middle-Class Education and Employment in the Nineteenth-Century,” *Economic History Review*, 2nd series XII (August 1959): 91–111.
 - 12 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Classes* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).
 - 13 Michael T. Gilmore and Wai Chee Dimock, *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 2-3. Ariel Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories* (London: Berg Publishers, 2012), 4.
 - 14 The theoretical framework that I am adopting was pioneered by Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
 - 15 R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 77.
 - 16 J. C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930).

- 17 Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, trans. Andy Stafford (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), 99.
- 18 Most top hats had some sort of airing device, usually consisting of a small mesh hole at the top of the crown to let out hot air. Suggestions were made to improve the ventilated hat: "A Ventilated Hat," *The Weekly Star and Vegetarian Restaurant Gazette*, 10 August 1889; "The Chimney-Pot Hat," *Daily News* (18 August 1886). There are a series of cartoons and funny articles about the policeman's ventilated hat: "The New Police Hat," *Punch* (20 April 1844); "The Policeman's New Ventilating Hat," *The Penny Satirist* (13 April 1844); "The New Ventilating Hat," *Punch* (16 September 1865); "The New Hat for the Police," *The Morning Post* (4 April 1844). The fact that men suffered for the sake of fashion may give pause to scholars who argue that uncomfortable fashion was just another form of *women's* oppression brought on by the patriarchy. For examples of this perspective see: Colin McDowell, *Dressed to Kill: Sex Power and Clothes* (London: Hutchinson, 1992); Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953).
- 19 "To My Hat," *Funny Folks* (21 August 1875); "What are you, Hat?" *Punch* (21 February 1863).
- 20 "The Hat Reform," *Punch* (12 October 1850); "The Hat Nuisance," *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (5 October 1850); "Hat Reform," *Caledonian Mercury* (15 January 1849); "Hat Reform," *Caledonian Mercury* (18 January 1849). In the sixteenth century and earlier, caps and hats were called "bonnets." This word became uncommon in English speech in the seventeenth century but was retained in Scotland. Penelope Byrde, *The Male Image: Men's Fashion in Britain 1300–1970* (London: Humanities Press, 1979), 172.
- 21 Newspapers indicated that men did not wear top hats in the country but only in the capital: "The Oppressive Tall Hat," *Fun* (5 February 1895); "The Chimney-Pot Hat," *Daily News* (13 August 1889).
- 22 "The Chimney-Pot Hat," *Daily News* (13 August 1886).
- 23 Nathaniel Gubbins, "Why I wear the Tall Hat," *The Sporting Times* (16 July 1892).
- 24 "A Revolt Against the Tall Silk Hat Has Again Broken out in London," *The Friend of India and Statesman* (7 July 1896); "The Top Hat Doomed," *Funny Folks* (23 March 1889); "The Oppressive Tall Hat," *Fun* (5 February 1895).
- 25 "The Hat Which Makes Bald-Headed Men," *The Ladies' Treasury: A Household Magazine* (1 August 1893).
- 26 "His New Hat," *Pick-me-up* (19 January 1889); "The Drowned Hat," *Melbourne Punch* (16 June 1859); "April: Or, the New Hat," *Punch* (16 April 1881); "A New Hat," *Funny Folks* (31 July 1875).

- 27 Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 154; Amphlett, *Hats*, 144.
- 28 Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, 111–2.
- 29 Historians other than Kuchta argue that the origins of the suit are in the seventeenth century. See also Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 65–66, 79; Hardy Amies, *The Englishman's Suit* (London: Quartet Books, 1994), 2–3.
- 30 David Kuchta, “The Making of the Self-Made Man: Class, Clothing and English Masculinity, 1688–1832” in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, eds. Victoria de Grazia and Hellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 55–62. See also David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity England, 1550–1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
- 31 Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 26–7. According to humoral theory, there were four humours contained within the body — blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. These regulated people's health and determined their gender condition. The humours had the qualities of hot, cold, wet and dry. Men were thought to be hot and dry. When men's heat was particularly strong, a rational attribute, they went bald, burning up their hair with their heat. This also could explain why the tall hat with ventilation was favoured by the elite, as its male members were considered to be more intellectual and needing more room for their heat to rise out of their heads than the laboring men who wore caps and generated less heat.
- 32 Joanne Finkelstein, *The Fashioned Self* (Philadelphia: Polity, 1991), 24–6.
- 33 “Look a-head! What ah! Your Hat!,” *Punch* (14 July 1849).
- 34 Canning had been appointed prime minister by George IV instead of the more obvious choices of the Duke of Wellington or Sir Robert Peel. When he accepted the position, the Tory party split. He was also a supporter of Catholic emancipation.
- 35 “The King's Hat,” *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (8 July 1827).
- 36 For another example of the connection of top hats with phrenology see: “The Murderer's Hat Band,” *Penny Illustrated Paper* (22 June 1912).
- 37 “The Grand Old Hat,” *Punch* (22 March 1890). See also “The Hat That Braved,” *Punch* (17 February 1883).
- 38 Henry Melton, *Hints on Hats: Adapted to the Heads of the People* (London: Hotten, 1867), 83.
- 39 Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre BA, 1993), 114, 122.
- 40 Clark, *Hats*, 9.

- 41 Jennifer Harris, "The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans, 1789-94," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 283-312. When King Louis XVI went to the Théâtre Français before the state's general met, George Danton refused to stand and remained with his hat on so as not to give the king honour: "The Significance of the Hat," *The Pall Mall Gazette* (5 June 1895).
- 42 James A. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 70-99. This meaning also appeared in a poem about a straw hat that reads: The cap of Liberty, forsooth!/Though art the thing to be in truth,/For slavish passion ne'er can break/Into the green paths where I take/My old straw hat. Eliza Cook, "The Old Straw Hat," *Huddersfield Chronicle & West Yorkshire Advertiser* (11 February 1860).
- 43 Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass Producing Tradition: Europe, 1870-1914" in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Roger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 287-8.
- 44 "The Hateful Hat-Guard," *Funny Folks* (31 July 1886).
- 45 Those who could afford it brought their toppers to hatters who could iron them, give them new lining, and ribbon, or even re-shape the body of the hat by putting it on a block and re-sewing. A new ribbon helped to keep the part of the hat between the brim and the crown looking neat as this was the most difficult area to keep trim once the nap was distorted. Those who were thriftier, or could not afford such a service, kept their silk glossy by sponging it with warm water and ammonia and carefully brushing with close-hard bristles in the direction of the nap. Hats lasted about three months before they "show incipient signs of shabbiness," but most men dry-brushed their hats as they shined their boots: daily. "The New Hat," *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* (1 August 1894); "The Vicissitudes of a Hat," *Fun* (15 December 1864); "Silk Hat Bands," *The Modern Man* (7 May 1910); "Felt Hat Renovating," *The Modern Man* (19 December 1908); "Keeping a Silk Hat Trim," *The Modern Man* (22 May 1909).
- 46 Many a true story, punchy poem, and quick joke were penned about the trouble men felt when they lost their hats at social functions. "The Churchgoer's Hat," *Isle of Wight Observer* (22 September 1894); "The Hat and Coat Scramble at St. George's Hall," *Liverpool Mercury etc.* (29 January 1859); "The Last Hat," *Judy* (18 March 1870); "The Inconvenience of Bringing One's Hat into a Crowded Party," *Punch* (9 September 1848).
- 47 "The Worship of the Pot Hat," *Reynolds's Newspaper* (28 August 1892). See also "The hat, which has always played so prominent a part in our social observances, is about to figure as the central feature of an American lawsuit," *The Standard* (10 December 1888).

“IF YOU WANT TO GET AHEAD, GET A HAT”:
MANLINESS, POWER, AND POLITICS VIA THE TOP HAT

- 48 “The Worship of the Pot Hat,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper* (28 August 1892); see also “The Chimney-Pot Hat,” *Daily News* (18 August 1886).
- 49 “The Hat in Politics,” *The Yorkshire Herald, and The York Herald* (1 September, 1892).
- 50 Henry Melton, *Hints on Hats: Adapted to the Heads of the People* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1865), 83–4; see also: “A Shocking Bad Hat,” *The Penny Satirist* (14 November 1840); “Look a-head! What ah! Your Hat!,” *Punch* (14 July 1849).
- 51 For an example of men judging one another based on their hats see: “The Worship of the Pot Hat,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper* (28 August 1892).
- 52 “The Worship of the Pot Hat,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper* (28 August 1892).
- 53 “Hat-Hunts,” *Preston Chronicle* (1 July 1843).
- 54 “Drowned in Recovering a Hat,” *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* (18 April 1892); “Fatality on the Humber,” *The Yorkshire Herald, and the York Herald* (18 April 1892); “A Swim for a Hat,” *The Derby Mercury* (6 June 1849); “Fatal Chase After a Hat,” *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* (4 January 1897). In what could be considered a tasteless joke, considering how many fatalities there were involving top hats, one newspaper suggested that one might use a hat as a life preserver: “The Use of a Hat,” *The Penny Satirist* (11 September 1841).
- 55 “A Life for a Hat,” *The New Zealand Graphic and Ladies’ Journal* (15 September 1900); “Near Kingsbridge-Road Station,” *The Standard* (25 May 1885).
- 56 See for example, “Mr. John Morley’s Hat,” *The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* (18 May 1892).
- 57 “The Story of a Hat,” *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* (25 August 1887).
- 58 “Mr. John Morley’s Hat,” *The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* (18 May 1892).
- 59 An amusing story from the *Penny Satirist* demonstrates that hats were personalized with the owner’s names: “a lawyer wrote ‘rascal’ in the hat of a brother lawyer who, on discovering it, entered a complaint in open court against the trespasser, who, he said, had not only taken his hat, but had written his own name in it.” “A Lawyer Wrote ‘Rascal,’” *The Penny Satirist* (8 December 1838).
- 60 “A Lawyer in a Dilemma — A Shocking Bad Hat,” *The Brandford Observer & Halifax, Huddersfield, and Keighley Reporter* (26 February 1846); “A Miserable Old Hat,” *Western Mail* (11 January 1894); “Claim for the Loss of a Hat,” *Berrow’s Worcester Journal* (28 April 1883); “Going to Law About a Hat,” *The Lady’s Newspaper* (17 January 1857).
- 61 Similar cases about damaged hats due to negligence on the part of some other person were brought to court: “A Damaged Hat,” *The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* (30 November 1887); “In the City of London Court,” *The Liberty Review: A Monthly Journal of Politics, Economics, and Sociology*

- (15 August 1897); "Amusing Action to Recover the Value of a Hat," *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* (22 July 1885); there is a similar story repeated in the press, though this one did not make it to court, about a man who brought his new hat to a bar and someone played a joke on him by placing some cheese in the lining. The man believed because of the smell emanating from his head that he was very ill and might soon die: "A Remarkable Hat Story," *The Preston Guardian etc.* (11 September 1880); "A Diseased Hat," *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (8 January 1881); see also: "Scandalous Scene in a Church: The Story of a Hat," *The Dundee Courier and Argus* (3 November 1896); "That Hat!," *Cycling Saturday* (2 February 1895).
- 62 An editorial cartoon demonstrates the hat exchange nicely: man down-on-his-luck exchanges his top hat with Colonel Swellings as he sleeps. Later that night people noticed the disparity of the hats and clothing of both the swell and the meanderer. "The Colonel's New Hat," *Illustrated Chips* (13 April 1895).
- 63 Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 117–122.
- 64 Zygmunt Bauman, *Between Class and Elite: The Evolution of the British Labour Movement: A Sociological Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 209.
- 65 "The M.P.'s Hat: And the Leading Part it Plays," *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc.* (26 February 1898). The fact that an Irish MP was the one that saved the new MP from further embarrassment is an important detail in this story. The Irish had only been part of the British Parliament since the Act of Union in 1800. From the 1870s until WWI, there was a strong Home Rule movement within Ireland, and most of the elected MPs from the region were Home Rule supporters by the 1880s when this episode took place. Furthermore the Irish were forever seen as the backward group within the UK; they were sometimes even seen as a different race, not as evolved as the Anglo-Saxon Englishmen. The fact the Irish MP, who did not care to be part of the British Parliament, knew the rules of the House better than a Britton was particularly embarrassing. A similar story was told by the *Weekly Gazette* of Middlesbrough England where Mr. Blumer, a member of the Town Council, wore his hat when speaking to the council. He was stopped from speaking with cries of "hat off" and he was prevented from having his say because he did not obey the etiquette of the assembly to which he is speaking. "Mr. Blumer and his Hat," *The Weekly Gazette* (26 May 1877). Similarly in Anthony Trollope's novel *The Way We Live Now*, Mr. Melmotte, the unscrupulous financier, got up to make his first speech in Parliament, but he did not know the proper etiquette. One of his fellow Conservatives told him that, "[y]ou should take your hat off." Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (Leipzig: Chapman and Hall, 1875), 220.

- 66 The rule in theaters was for men to take off their hats when seated. This caused some resentment as women, who according to fashion sometimes had quite large hats, were not required to take off their hats during a performance: “The Hat, which has Always Played so Prominent a Part in our Social Observances, is about to Figure as the Central Feature of an American Lawsuit,” *The Standard* (10 December 1888); “The Hat Problem Solved,” *Penny Illustrated Paper* (3 December 1910); “The Anti-Theater Hat League,” *The Era* (19 December 1895); “The Hat Difficulty Solved,” *Punch* (29 January 1887).
- 67 House of Commons, *Official Dress Worn in the House of Commons*, House of Commons Library Document No. 4 (London: 1978), 7. See also Peter Thorne, *Ceremonial and the Mace in the House of Commons*, House of Commons Library Document No. 11 (London: 1980). Some MPs treated the House not unlike a home and did not wear hats at all, preferring to leave them in the Member’s Cloak Room: *Member’s Cloak Room*, 1880, woodcut, Mary Evans Picture Library, London Picture No 10018648 (originally from the Illustrated London News). For further information on how the House of Commons was designed and the special rooms it contained see M. H. Port “‘The Best Club in the World?’ The House of Commons, c. 1860–1915,” *Parliamentary History* 21, no. 1 (2008): 166–199.
- 68 “The Great Hat Question,” *The Standard* (23 March 1882).
- 69 For more information about the shift of hegemonic masculinity away from gentry values, see Connell, *Masculinities*, 186–199.
- 70 “A Shocking Bad Hat,” *The Penny Satirist* (14 November 1840); “Curious Take Respecting the “Shocking Bad Hat” of an Irish Member of Parliament,” *Preston Chronicle* (2 June 1838); “The Shocking Bad Hat,” *The Morning Post* (14 July 1837).
- 71 “A Shocking Bad Hat,” *The Penny Satirist* (14 November 1840).
- 72 For information on how Gentlemen’s Clubs regulated the behaviour of their members see: Amy Milne-Smith, “Gentlemen Behaving Badly,” in *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in late-Victorian Britain* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 59–86.
- 73 “The Shocking Bad Hat,” *The Morning Post* (14 July 1837).
- 74 House of Commons, *Some Traditions and Customs of the House*, Factsheet G7 (General Series Revised August 2010), 10. Members raised their hats if they were alluded to in a speech by another parliamentarian and when another minister answered a question posed by a first. “The M.P.’s Hat: And the Leading Part it Plays,” *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc.* (26 February 1898).
- 75 “Gladstone Forgot his own Hat on Friday,” *Moonshine* (4 June 1881).
- 76 “The M.P.’s Hat: And the Leading Part it Plays,” *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc.* (26 February 1898); “Literary Extracts,” *Cheshire*

- Observer* (12 November 1892). This was not the only time that Gladstone made a stir with his choice of hat. On a particularly hot July day in 1900, the *Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury* reported that Gladstone appeared in the lobby of the House of Commons in a straw hat: "Straw Hat in the Lobby," *Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury* (21 July 1900). By the end of his tenure Gladstone's hat had become so famous that *Punch* jokingly reported that it had been put on display at the Museum of Curiosities in Nice, France: "The Hat that Braved!," *Punch* (17 February 1883).
- 77 Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 3d ser., vol. CCXCVII (1882), cols. 1442–3.
 - 78 Ibid. Another debate over hat etiquette appears in the Hansard records of 1837 when Lord John Russell read a Royal Message. Sir James Graham was reluctant to take off his hat, again inciting comment in the press and within Parliament. Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 3d ser., vol. 38 (1837) cols. 1581–2.
 - 79 "Hat Customs, Honours, and Worship," *The Newcastle Courant etc.* (31 March 1882); "The Great Hat Question," *The Standard* (23 March 1882); "The Hat Question," *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* (24 March 1882).
 - 80 Emrys Hughes, *Keir Hardie* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), 56. Lib-Labs were a group of parliamentarians that ran for Parliament with the support of the Liberal Party and the Labour Representation League. This non-formal arrangement fell apart when the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Representation Committee were formed.
 - 81 *Daily Telegraphy* (7 August 1892), quoted in Fred Reid, *Keir Hardie: The Making of a Socialist* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 211.
 - 82 "The Worship of the Pot Hat," *Reynolds's Newspaper* (28 August 1892). Similarly in *The Modern Man* it was stated "about a year ago, one used to associate the soft hat with the Socialist shouter ..." "Popularity of Felt Hats," *The Modern Man* (5 November 1910).
 - 83 "Letters to the Editor," *Glasgow Herald* (29 November 1893).
 - 84 Reid, *Keir Hardie*, 140–1.
 - 85 Hughes, *Keir Hardie*, 56.
 - 86 Reid, *Keir Hardie*, 140–1.
 - 87 "The Worship of the Pot Hat," *Reynolds's Newspaper* (28 August 1892).