



● NOVEL
MAKEOVER

When SAMANTHA WARWICK wrote a book about the flapper era, she discovered that when history repeats itself, sometimes the outcome is very pretty.

I was a creative-writing student when I decided to write a novel, *Sage Island*, based on events that happened during the flapper era. I was 24 and wore jeans and skateboard shoes almost exclusively; my hair was perpetually tied back or falling straight down both sides of my face. I was ambivalent about my femininity—resentful, even, toward the endless ways women are encouraged to pursue cultural “ideals.”

My thesis adviser said I had a whale of research ahead of me if I planned to write a historical novel. The psychology, jargon, beauty trends and obsessions

of the times would all need to become intuitive. “You’ll need to be so immersed in 1927 that when you look down, you think—*pants?*” So I dove into Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Parker, and scoured reference books, compiling notes on slang, spats, politics, powders, movie stars, fabrics and fads. Leafing through a 1920s *Vogue*, I ran my fingers over a tunic and caught myself thinking, *Now that’s cute.*

As I sank deeper into the archives, my mind began to open. The fact that flappers embraced a tomboy sensibility was in my favour. They rejected the corset;

wore men’s pyjamas to bed; bobbed their hair short; peeked out from under bell-shaped hats, suspiciously eyeing anything Victorian; and took up drinking and spouting off. They powdered their faces and knees and achieved “saucer eyes” with Vaseline and kohl. With heavy lids, wind-blown bobs, baggy sleeveless dresses and a brazen use of matte lip colour, they were making a political statement about women’s liberation. “Screw this,” the flappers said, “I can do what I want!”

The attitude I understood, but I had to feel the air against my knees »



COCO CHANEL AND
LOUISE BROOKS AT RIGHT



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if I wanted to dress my characters in frocks, so I started with skirts: denim and corduroy and cargo. I realized, as the wind cuffed my bare legs, that pants were confining. And as I experimented cautiously with dresses, boots, knee socks and Mary Jane shoes, I discovered giddiness for style I didn't know I had. Excitement is beautiful—and so often found in places we don't expect.

I admired the tousled look of the flappers when their heads weren't sealed under a cloche, so I let a stylist take six inches off my hair. Layers fell into my face—it was fabulously annoying at first, but the messier buoyancy of shoulder-length hair gave me energy and inspired some ridiculous dancing around my apartment. Still in the vein of “research,” I ventured to a M.A.C counter and cringed silently while a makeup artist dusted, lined and painted my naked face. “Oh!” I breathed when she held up her mirror; I was barely able to find myself under all the mascara and freckle-eliminating concealer. But as I

peered more closely at her handiwork, I noticed the way the sparkling shadows made the green in my eyes pop out.

So where did all of this lead? I still don't like fuss. Waiting for a manicure to dry is torture. My hair is long and layered, and doesn't cost too much time. I wear minimal makeup and silver hoops that go with everything. But! The exotic scent of ✪ Moroccan oil makes me feel powerful, and a little eye shimmer is brightening and fun. Wearing a tunic dress with leggings and high boots brings me intrepid confidence—knowing that I can chase after a bus or climb up a tree if I have to—and the way these dresses go with my trusty old jean jacket makes me smile. □

Born in Montreal, Samantha Warwick now resides in Calgary, where she is writing her second novel. Her first book, ✪ Sage Island (Brindle & Glass Publishing), is about a New York flapper who finds herself competing in the Wrigley Ocean Marathon.