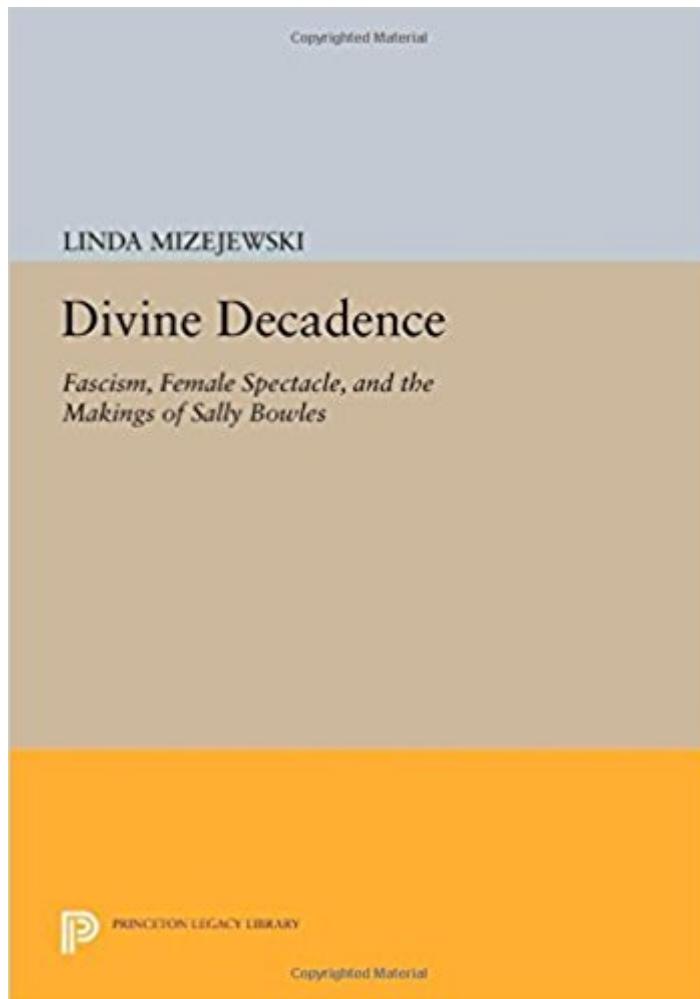


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# Divine Decadence



## Synopsis

As femme fatale, cabaret siren, and icon of Camp, the Christopher Isherwood character Sally Bowles has become this century's darling of "divine decadence"--a measure of how much we are attracted by the fiction of the "shocking" British/American vamp in Weimar Berlin. Originally a character in a short story by Isherwood, published in 1939, "Sally" has appeared over the years in John Van Druten's stage play *I Am a Camera*, Henry Cornelius's film of the same name, and Joe Masteroff's stage musical and Bob Fosse's Academy Award-winning musical film, both entitled *Cabaret*. Linda Mizejewski shows how each successive repetition of the tale of the showgirl and the male writer/scholar has linked the young man's fascination with Sally more closely to the fascination of fascism. In every version, political difference is read as sexual difference, fascism is disavowed as secretly female or homosexual, and the hero eventually renounces both Sally and the corruption of the coming regime. Mizejewski argues, however, that the historical and political aspects of this story are too specific--and too frightening--to explain in purely psychoanalytic terms. Instead, *Divine Decadence* examines how each text engages particular cultural issues and anxieties of its era, from postwar "Momism" to the Vietnam War. Sally Bowles as the symbol of "wild Weimar" or Nazi eroticism represents "history" from within the grid of many other controversial discourses, including changing theories of fascism, the story of Camp, vicissitudes of male homosexual representations and discourses, and the relationships of these issues to images of female sexuality. To Mizejewski, the Sally Bowles adaptations end up duplicating the fascist politics they strain to condemn, reproducing the homophobia, misogyny, fascination for spectacle, and emphasis of sexual difference that characterized German fascism. Originally published in 1992. The Princeton Legacy Library uses the latest print-on-demand technology to again make available previously out-of-print books from the distinguished backlist of Princeton University Press. These paperback editions preserve the original texts of these important books while presenting them in durable paperback editions. The goal of the Princeton Legacy Library is to vastly increase access to the rich scholarly heritage found in the thousands of books published by Princeton University Press since its founding in 1905.

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## Customer Reviews

There are actually two plays and two movies based on the stories of Christopher Isherwood, although Bob Fosse's film Cabaret is the most familiar version. For each production, this work analyzes the role of Sally Bowles comparatively, contextually (showing, for instance, how the politics and mood of the Sixties informed the Broadway musical), and with well-argued alternate readings. Using the vocabulary of literary criticism, the author discusses the character's frequently paradoxical female image (as child, mother, sexual being, and prostitute) as a metaphor for the decadence that was ostensibly linked to the rise of fascism. Iconography, cinematic predecessors, the notion of "camp," and gay/lesbian sensibilities are discussed at length. Of interest to humanities, gender, and film studies collections.- Janice Braun, Oakland, Cal. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Linda Mizejewski is Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the Ohio State University in Columbus. She is the author of Divine Decadence: Fascism, Female Spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles, Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema, and Hardboiled & High Heeled: The Woman Detective in Popular Culture. Her most recent book, It Happened One Night, is a study of the original romantic comedy film. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Mizejewski's Divine Decadence hails itself as a sort of history of the character development of Sally Bowles through her many incarnations. It is an accurate analysis, but the book is also a valuable resource for information on Weimar culture in general, and its chapter-by-chapter sections on each Sally Bowles may be taken one by one as individual "essays". For anyone reading Divine Decadence, I would highly recommend first familiarizing oneself with the works Mizejewski focuses

on, such as Isherwood's Berlin Stories, Van Druten's I Am A Camera, and the Broadway musical (and film adaptation) Cabaret. Divine Decadence begins by establishing a sense of Weimar Germany and the sociopolitical origins of Isherwood's Berlin, as well as acquainting the reader with an understanding of the Nazi Party's rise to power within the context of Weimar culture. Mizejewski then begins a direct analysis of the original Sally Bowles of the Isherwood stories and also explores Isherwood's motivations for creating her in the 1930s. The following two sections are focused on the Van Druten play and subsequent film adaptation of Isherwood's Sally Bowles, I Am A Camera, evaluating the evolution of Sally, and also the story in general, as it was tailored for audiences of the 1950s. Next, Mizejewski analyzes the 1966 Broadway musical Cabaret and its 1972 film adaptation, discussing them in delicious depth as the Sally character is displaced by other forces in the stage musical, and then returned in campy splendour by Liza Minelli in the film. Mizejewski's prose tends to be highly dense and academic; like wading through treacle. Novices beware. But what do you expect from Princeton University Press? With the new revival of the musical Cabaret taking Broadway by storm, many readers may want to explore its literary history and its sociopolitical evolution. If you are up for a mental exercise, practicing your concentration skills, seriously devoted to the subject matter, or just plain driven, I wholeheartedly recommend Divine Decadence.

Fabulous analysis -- this gives the film version of Cabaret, that everybody knows, a dozen more dimensions. You won't look at it the same way.

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