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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Los Angeles

Fashionable Form: The Narrative Strategies of Silver-Fork Fiction, 1824-1848

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirement for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in English

by

Josephine Richstad

2012

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2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Fashionable Form: The Narrative Strategies of Silver-Fork Fiction, 1824-1848

by

Josephine Richstad

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Jonathan Grossman, Chair

Fashionable novels of the 1820s and 1830s pretended to offer an insider's view of England's fashionable exclusives. This dissertation unpacks the paradoxical structures of fashion on which the literary form was built in order to offer a new reading of the genre as articulating the representation of a fictional aristocratic subject position through acts at times of refusal and at others of abjuration or disavowal. At a time that saw the novel as offering middle-class interiority to all, the fashionable novel excluded everyone—including the very aristocrats it idolized—from representation.

Four narrative strategies in the categories of authorship, description, plotting, and characterization together underlie the making of a fashionable novel. First, these anonymous novels erect the illusion of a fashionable author through narrative moves that reject professionalism by enacting a structure of valuation in which truth can be assessed only internally rather than through the marketplace. Second, objects in the novels resist incorporation into the narrative project, refusing a relationship of utility between people and things that suggests political power comes through exclusion rather than inclusion. Next,

under the shadow of the First Reform Bill, calculated plot refusal becomes the only ethically sustainable option for the aristocrats whose natural exclusivity has been breached, and thus the fashionable novel writes the aristocrat (and itself) out of history. And finally, in these anti-plots, fashionable characters' flatness posits a radically independent subjectivity in which characters who act as narrators explicitly refuse to render up their interiority. They instead posit the existence of an inimitable and unrepresentable self as an alternative to a growing emphasis on the representation, both political and narrative, of a knowable interiority. The formal relations articulated in these four chapters ultimately offer new historical insights: into literary history in relation to copyright, into the increasing commodification of things, into the aristocratic view of the First Reform Bill, and into the economic individualism so often identified as a hallmark of the novel.

The dissertation of Josephine Sara Richstad is approved.

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Irene Tucker

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University of California, Los Angeles

2012

For Joseph Heikoff

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Acknowledgments:

A dissertation is a collaborative project. I am first grateful to those who have helped fund my graduate study: the UCLA English department and graduate division; the UC Society of Fellows, and the Young Research Library. I would also like to thank the supportive intellectual community at UCLA: the students in my English 88 seminar, who bravely soldiered through two very long early nineteenth-century novels in order to reach the reward of *Gossip Girl*; a supportive community of coevals, particularly Matt Dubord, Kate Bergren, Justine Pizzo, Alex Milsom, and Katherine Isokawa; and a generous and rigorous faculty, particularly my committee: Joe Bristow, Helen Deutsch, and, via the extended UC network, Irene Tucker. Special thanks to Jonathan Grossman: his practical support in moments of despair and triumph, his continued faith in my work, and his persistent, careful, and wholehearted reading of my work are both an academic and a personal inspiration. This would be a lesser work without his guidance. My family of birth, of course: my brother, whose courage inspires me; my parents, without whose many kinds of support I simply could never have finished; my sister, best roommate and best friend. Finally Aberdeen Sanchez, whose arrival midway through the dark wood of this dissertation considerably lightened the remainder of the journey; and Chris Sanchez, in whose company the best works of my life have begun.

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“Authority at stake in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*,” Nineteenth-Century Group, University of California, Los Angeles, October 31, 2006.

Introduction

In Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1837-38), Kate Nickleby, after being fired from a fashionable dress shop, takes a position as lady's companion to Mrs. Witterly, where one of her duties is to read aloud a novel entitled *Lady Flabella*:

[T]he door of the boudoir (artfully concealed by rich hangings of silken damask, the hue of Italy's firmament) was thrown open, and with noiseless tread two VALETS-DE-CHAMBRE, clad in sumptuous liveries of peach-blossom and gold, advanced into the room followed by a page in BAS DE SOIE—silk stockings—who, while they remained at some distance making the most graceful obeisances, advanced to the feet of his lovely mistress, and dropping on one knee presented, on a golden salver gorgeously chased, a scented BILLET.¹

This is quite obviously parody. Kate's slightly prudish response to Mrs. Witterly's blissful question if the passage is not "very soft" indicates as much: "Yes, I think it is," replied Kate, gently: "very soft."² But compare the following passage from Sydney Owenson Morgan's *The Princess* (1835), in a chapter called "The Dressing Room":

A *déjeûné* of French vermeil stood on a *guéridon* beside her; and her husband's letter ... was in her hands ... A beautiful paroquet, perched on the back of her chair, solicited her attention by the reiterated demand of, "*Aimes-tu Coco?*" to which she replied, in tones almost passionate, "*Où, je t'aime, mon petit Coco* ... then drawing her *peignoir* round her swan-like neck, and wrapping her fine form in a *robe-de-chambre*,

¹ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 359.

² *ibid*

which the Duchess of Abrantes would have described with truth to be ‘*mousseline d’Inde, brodée au jour, double rose de Mai*,’ she closed her heavy eyes.³

Although the scenes and affect are different—Dickens’s page seems to take the place of Morgan’s parrot, for example—the materiality, French phrases, and hyperbolic description of these two passages are nearly indistinguishable. Were it not for Dickens’s translations of the French phrases, a sly jab at a supposedly unsophisticated audience, it would be difficult to determine which is parody and which is not.

Dickens is mocking fashionable novels, the genre *du jour* of the 1820s and 1830s, and a category to which Lady Morgan’s *The Princess* might be assigned without much controversy. These novels pretended to offer an insider’s view of the English fashionable exclusives, a group marked by urban living, aristocratic allegiances, and ready command of the material goods and behaviors that were considered fashionable. As works both scandalous and celebratory, they engaged with popular trends and narratives. Early critical commonplaces, however, reflected their tenuous literary status: they were hack jobs, sometimes written by clever men and women but just as often by writers whose only claim, literary or otherwise, was a tenuous connection to the aristocracy. More, they idolized aristocratic life and offered it up as a model for the middle class to imitate; and, finally, they had no literary value, crafted (or not crafted, as the case may be) with empty character, slack description, and hackneyed plot.

More recent criticism has turned away from such dismissive attitudes to look at the novels as mapping class tension, operating in an “elegiac” rather than contemporary mode, and as forming a literary bridge between Scott’s novels of the 1820s and the realist novels of

³ Sydney Owenson Morgan, *The Princess*, 3 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1835), 1:105.

the 1840s.⁴ As these arguments have become the new critical commonplaces, scholars have allowed fashionable novels to give voice to a previously absent self-awareness. For example, Harriet Devine Jump's comprehensive introduction to a Pickering & Chatto series of six silver-fork novels, which explores the genre's satiric interest in social problems, ends with a quotation from prolific novelist Catherine Gore's character Lord Willersdale, in which he self-referentially labels the novels "the amber which serves to preserve the ephemeral modes and caprices of the passing day."⁵ Such self-awareness has led Dianne Sadoff, in a recent overview of the genre, to state that the novels are formally sophisticated and knowingly represent the cultural work they undertake.⁶ Cheryl Wilson has greatly elaborated on such critical gestures, in her recent monograph *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel*, the first full-length study of the genre since Matthew Rosa's 1936 *Silver-Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding*

⁴ For class tension, see Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (Longman: New York, 1989); for the "elegiac," see Winifred Hughes, "Elegies for the Regency: Catherine Gore's Dandy Novels," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50.2 (Sept 1995), 189-209; for the novels as a bridge between the 1810s and 1840s, see Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) and Vineta Colby, *Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974). Of these approaches, I have drawn most on Hughes's discussion of Gore's temporality.

⁵ Harriet Devine Jump, introduction to *Silver Fork Novels*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 1:xxii. The quotation is from *Mother and Daughters*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), 2:233.

⁶ Dianne Sadoff, "The Silver Fork Novel," in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820-1880*, ed. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 118. Cheryl Wilson's recent volume offers the first full-length study of the fashionable novel that devotes serious attention to form, *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012). Her work, however, tends to collapse social form into literary form, an approach that I see as offering a reading of the novels that only makes them secondary to and homologous with concurrent political and cultural events. Typical is her discussion of what she calls the "exclusive narration" of the novels: "their incorporation of exclusive narration demonstrates how the structure of the novel itself could become complicit in the broader social and cultural work of the text to expose the systems of exclusivity, reaffirm social boundaries, and develop a reading public" (121). Although my work proceeds from the same impulse, I maintain that looking at literary form *first* offers a better way of grounding further discussion of the genre.

Vanity Fair. Wilson resituates the genre in the literary and cultural context of the nineteenth century by exploring the novels as a point of reciprocal exchange between author and reader that shapes generic expectations. Such recent work focuses on the novels as sophisticated articulations of social concerns in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, particularly those of aristocratic privilege and political reform. My work begins from a similar premise but it hold back from collapsing literary form into social form. Instead, it attempts to comprehend the literary form by unpacking the paradoxical structures of fashion on which it was built—an attempt that has, so far, not been made. By looking first at form, I have come to see novels as articulating the representation of a fictional aristocratic subject position through acts at times of refusal and at others of abjuration or disavowal. At a time that, in typical narratives of literary history, saw the novel as offering a middle-class interiority to all, the fashionable novel excluded everyone—including the very aristocrats it idolized—from representation. I see this as first and foremost a literary act.

I began this project with four questions: First, to whom were the novels directed? The critical commonplace is that they were read primarily by the middle class, but I found that the way in which the novels imagined a community of readers was more complicated. The genre is strenuously moralistic about the decadence of the aristocracy, while at the same time insisting that the aristocracy contains the best that England has to offer. It at the least disdains and often heartily condemns fashionable society, yet also snidely mocks non-aristocratic social groups. T.H. Lister's *Granby* (London: Colburn, 1826), for example, sneers at a country wife concerned with her stillroom and balls of worsted at the same time that it mocks the effete participants of high society. To whom, then, were these novels directed? Whose behavior were they trying to modify—if anyone's—and why?

Second, how could these novels be considered both fantastical flights of upstart imagination and also pinnacles of documentary realism? Critics at the time generally dismissed the texts as unrealistic, written by those who could not possibly know about the worlds they portrayed, and yet they were presented to their audiences, and seem often to have been received by them, as records of contemporary life. Later criticism focused on them almost exclusively as documentaries, as, in Matthew Rosa's words, "mere transcripts" of life.⁷ It seemed to me that this contradiction could be a fruitful place for a sustained discussion of fashionable form.

Third, why were so many of the novels reprinted throughout the nineteenth century? Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham* (London: Colburn, 1828) was published regularly until 1902; *Granby* was printed for twenty years, until 1847; Robert Plumer Ward's *Tremaine* (London: Colburn, 1825) was published again in 1883; and Benjamin Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (London: Colburn, 1827) was published with some regularity throughout the twentieth century.⁸ These texts were widely considered the genre's best examples, but Catherine Gore's works, as well as less popular novels by writers such as and Lady Charlotte Bury, were published into the 1850s. Several even made their way onto Richard Bentley's *Standard Novels*, the inexpensive, one-volume reprints published from 1831 to 1857. If a novel was fashionable—*au courant*, about a society and material world that would pass by as soon as or even moments

⁷ Mathew Whiting Rosa, *The Silver-Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding Vanity Fair* (New York: Columbia, 1936), 5-13.

⁸ Many of the novels did come out in "second editions" that were no more than the first edition with a new title page, but those were generally released quite soon after the first edition. I am specifically speaking here of novels that were reprinted years after their initial publication.

before the novel was published—then something else must be at stake for a publisher to reprint these novels.⁹

Finally, what exactly was fashionable about these novels, and what does “fashion” mean in a literary context? Unlike other genre novels, say, society novels, or detective novels, or gothic novels, or sensation novels, fashionable novels are both about fashion—as society novels are about society, or detective novels are about detection, and sensation novels are about sensation—and they are also, themselves, fashionable. It is of the moment to prefer to read them. That these novels about the fashionable world became popular at a moment coinciding with a time that several scholars have identified as bringing a new sort of society to prominence seemed worth pursuing.

Fashionable society in the first half of the nineteenth century formed through the act of cutting, the move by which one acquaintance declines to recognize another.¹⁰ The practice of cutting, and other social forms that arose out of a newly privatized system of entertainments, enabled the rise of Exclusivism, the reigning social form of the 1820s and 1830s—”social” used narrowly, in the sense of Society.¹¹ I will argue that this exclusionary

⁹ Winifred Hughes discusses the “elegiac” mode of many of the novels, even at the time they were first printed. What she means is that the novels were often set at a time somewhat prior to their publication, and so their historical time is always already displaced.

¹⁰ Sumiao Li, “Fashionable People, Fashionable Society: Fashion, Gender, and Print Culture in England 1821-1861,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 41-42. The *OED* gives the definition of “refusing to recognize an acquaintance” as dating from 1798.

¹¹ This exclusivism is widely recognized in the genre. Contemporary commenter Captain Rees Howell Gronow noticed the “cliquism” of fashionable society in *The Reminiscences and Recollections of Captain Gronow, Being Anecdotes of the Camp, Court, Clubs, & Society, 1810-1860* 4 vols. (London, 1862), 1:31. Ellen Moers points out the importance of exclusion: “In no other society has the mechanism of exclusion been so prominent, elaborate and efficient ... Regency Society called itself exclusive, its members were the exclusives, and its ruling principle exclusivism,” in *The Dandy, Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 41. Frances Hart notes suggests that “the new social mode of fashionable aristocracy was an

act, a move of denial and disavowal, defines the fashionable novel at every level of its formal construction. Through the cut, the novels write themselves out of literary history by aligning themselves on the wrong side of cultural and political history. They develop a theory of the modern subject that, by being fashionable, looks very little like the modern subject of the nineteenth-century novel. This dissertation, then, suggests that fashionable novels have little to do with fashion as an accretion of details that distinguish the fashionable from the unfashionable. It is not overly interested in details of bonnets and court hoops, and mantuas, and gigot sleeves, and blonde lace, and grosgrain ribbon, although such details do occasionally arise and although as registers of the past they are certainly interesting and meaningful. More important, however, is that fashionable novels were already raising a literary critique of literary history by refusing middle-class interiority in favor of an aristocratic subject position that, despite its apparent political power, knew itself not to be an actor in a history of its own making. In this sense, the notion of the fashionable subject might, for modern readers, ring far truer than do mid-Victorian representations of the bourgeois individual.

I. What is Fashion

intricate and obsessive exclusivism” in a response to the democratizing power of fashion, in “The Regency Novel of Fashion,” in *From Smollett to James: Studies in the Novel and Other Essays*, ed. Samuel L. Mintz, Alice Chandler, and Christopher Murphey (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 94. Hughes calls “the code of exclusivism” key to preserving “a securely enclosed and self-selecting society” (“Elegies For the Regency,” 333). Cheryl Wilson writes about Exclusivism in her chapter “Being Exclusive,” suggesting that the novels use an “exclusive narration” to reproduce the ideology of Exclusivism (95). She, however, suggests that “their incorporation of exclusive narration demonstrates how the structure of the novel itself could become complicit in the broader social and cultural work of the text” (121), while I see the work of the text arising out of narrative form.

Sociologists tend to agree that fashion is characterized primarily by rapid and systematic change over time. Georg Simmel articulated a definition of fashion in relation to time that has unfashionably stood the test of time, saying that it alternates between “rapid and complete disintegration” and “the apparent claim to permanent acceptance.”¹² Later critics agree: René König has drawn attention to change over time in calling fashion a “periodic change of style,”¹³ while John Potvin says “the fashion system is always on the move ... never satisfied to stand still, always seeking out the new, that which is exciting and desirable.”¹⁴ Using the systems theory of Niklaus Luhmann in an attempt to view fashion as a social system rather than a phenomenon, Ingrid Loschek asserts that “fashion remains fashion, because the fashion does not remain the fashion.”¹⁵ Although worded in a more sophisticated way than previous definitions, this formulation still, by focusing on the way that the general notion of “fashion” relies exactly on the unimportance of the fungible specifics, makes change over time a definitional feature of fashion.¹⁶

¹² Georg Simmel, “Fashion,” *The International Quarterly* X (October 1904), 135.

¹³ René König, *A La Mode: On the Social Psychology of Fashion* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 54.

¹⁴ John Potvin, “Introduction: Inserting Fashion into Space,” in *The Places and Spaces of Fashion, 1800-2007*, ed. John Potvin (New York: Routledge, 2009), 13.

¹⁵ Ingrid Loschek, *When Clothes Become Fashion: Design and Innovation Systems* (New York: Berg, 2009), 26.

¹⁶ Loschek’s approach, however, has been useful in complicating Roland Barthes’s articulation of fashion as system in which fashion endlessly recurs in forms disguised by writing. She suggests Barthes’s *Fashion System* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), despite its use of the term “system,” treats its subject more like a phenomenon.

These explanations of fashion also implicitly evacuate agency, a lack that has long characterized discussion of fashion.¹⁷ In the novels, as I will suggest, this lack of agency is directly tied to the role of the aristocracy as leaders of a fashion system that by definition cannot be led.¹⁸ There is a certain slipperiness, then, between the non-synonymous terms “aristocratic” and “fashionable,” which arises in part because the definition of “aristocrat” is not always self-evident.¹⁹ The prevalent idea that England had an “open aristocracy,” advanced by but not originating with Harold Perkins,²⁰ appears throughout the nineteenth

¹⁷ This lack differentiates fashion from other modern systems. As Paul Scott Gordon says in *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640-1770* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), “Over the course of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, discourses such as political economy, economics, psychology, and even morality and ethics, install as their common starting-point “free, self-directing agents” (12). Gordon is using the terminology of “discourse,” but these might all equally be seen as systems.

¹⁸ What studies of the fashionable novel have not so far articulated is what, exactly, fashion means both at this time and for the novels. Before the late 1990s, the academy produced very little work on fashion and literature. Fashion, with the stigma of the frivolous and the feminine, seems entirely antithetical to the idea of a canon. The recent surge of criticism addressing fashion in literature alerts us to the fact that fashion is increasingly being recognized within literary studies—as it has been within sociology for well over a century—as a not-at-all driving force of modernity and democracy. It is not improbable to argue that a basic tendency of the last four hundred years has been away from monarchy and towards fashion as the organizing principle of society; certainly, the language of fashion—tyranny, despotism, caprice—evokes the dark side of absolute monarchy.

¹⁹ K.D. Reynolds points out that defining the aristocracy is more difficult than it might seem, since the networks of relationships crossed apparent class boundaries, in *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (London: Clarendon Press, 1998). For example, claiming aristocratic authorship for a novel could imply something like Marianne Spencer Stanhope’s *Almack’s* (Colburn, 1827). Not titled herself, Stanhope was sister-in-law to Eliza Spencer-Stanhope, the aunt of Lady Jane Digby, who became Lady Ellenborough and figured (disguised) in several scandalous *roman-a-clef* type narratives—including *Almack’s* itself. See Mary S. Lovell, *A Scandalous Life* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1995). Lady Ellenborough also makes an appearance as Lady Glenmore in Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury’s *The Exclusives*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1830).

²⁰ Harold James Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (London: Routledge & K Paul, 1969), 56, 66. This idea has been challenged by John Cannon in *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); also

century. In an review of a book on English history from 1836, for example, *The Quarterly Review* suggests that “England’s social system . . . was an open aristocracy, full of an infinity of shades and gradations, and containing a thousand avenues of advancement, so that the whole community was imbued with the spirit of emulation and the pursuit of distinction, while the jealousy of superior rank was disarmed by the feeling that its elevation was not inaccessible.”²¹

It is difficult to square this idealization of something innately “superior” in the distinctiveness and elevation of the aristocracy with the representations decadent aristocracy that were standard in fashionable novels from the same period. Scholars have pointed to the representation of such a decadent aristocracy as evidence that the novels are fundamentally written for middle-class audience; and yet, the endings of the novels suggest otherwise. In nearly all of them, one aristocratic couple survives the end of the novel to provide an example of true nobility in the model of some sort of mythic, feudal past.²² The problem,

Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995). Critics of Perkins’s argument believe that England’s aristocracy was actually not very open at all and saw little mobility, persisting throughout the nineteenth century. What’s important for my purposes is the apparent *sense* that it was true.

²¹ “History of England from the Peace of Utrecht to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. By Lord Mahon,” *The Quarterly Review* 57.114 (1836), 346.

²² This turn to a mythic feudalism helps establish the novels’ political interests, because it identifies them as predecessors to the political philosophy embodied in the Disraeli’s Young England novels. Robin Gilmour, in “The Novel and Aristocracy: Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, and Thackeray,” in *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (Baltimore: E. Arnold, 1986), suggests that “in *Coningsby*, the fashionable-novel-cum-*Bildungsroman* turns into the first political novel—the first example of that species, indeed, in English fiction” (18). Michael Flavin extends Disraeli’s political interests backward, finding them in *Vivian Grey*: “*Vivian Grey* is part of the gestation of Disraeli’s political vision, and the Young England trilogy is therefore the distillation of long-held thought, supplemented by a more empirical understanding of the problems of society through the first half of the nineteenth century,” in *Benjamin Disraeli: The Novel as Political Discourse* (Portland, Oregon: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 15.

then, is perhaps not aristocracy but specifically a *fashionable* aristocracy, because fashion gives the lie to apparently stable social formations. Frances Hart, for example, suggests that fashion is “associated with historic periods when new social alternatives are numerous and available and when traditional modes of social control—custom, name, title, even wealth—have lost their credibility ... Its availability encourages a democratic competitiveness, which in turn generates a reactionary mystique of exclusiveness.”²³ Or, as Luhmann has suggested, “The discovery of fashion begins to undermine the enduring validity of forms and thus the possibility of hierarchizing humanity.”²⁴ In both these quite different formulations, fashion becomes a new way of organizing people when apparently stable and traditional modes are no longer sufficient.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, traditional modes of hierarchy and rank appeared to many observers to be under attack by an influx of wealth stemming from England’s global interests. In the 1820s and 1830s, questions of social stability came to the fore with an increasingly autocratic notion of Society and the Season precisely as a reaction to the apparent entry of middle social classes into formerly high-society spaces.²⁵ Sumiao Li has argued that the 1820s and 1830s are specially characterized by the rise of a third category defined neither by money nor class but that borrowed something from both: “It was the decisive rule of fashion as an independent system that dissociated nineteenth-

²³ Hart, 85.

²⁴ qtd in Loschek, 21.

²⁵ As Lenore Davidoff has argued, “the system of organizing social and domestic life which began to be codified in the 1820s under the rubric Society and its accompanying calendar of events, the Season ... vastly expanded and infused with new authority in the second quarter of the century,” in *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm 1973), 14-16.

century fashionable society from the high society of *ancien regime*.²⁶ She sees fashion as figuring crucially into the story of the nineteenth-century novel:

The familiar story is that the Victorian novel ... stems from and contributes to the rise of the bourgeois modern individual. In this story, the bourgeois self is in direct opposition to the aristocratic body. As this bifurcation takes place, what I have termed a third Other—the fashionable person—seems to have become invisible or conveniently confused with the form, losing the name, the distinctive identity, and the remarkable importance it once had in the Victorian mind.²⁷

For Li, fashionable society differs from earlier “polite society” because of its “incivility” and “open exclusivity,” two qualities that led to what amounted to the privatization of fashionable society.²⁸ Over the first few decades of the nineteenth century, fashionable society discarded the late eighteenth-century mixed public life of Ranelagh and Vauxhall. Ranelagh Gardens, for example, were auctioned off in 1813, and Vauxhall declined into the 1840s, finally closing in 1859. Instead of mingling in public gardens, aristocrats shut themselves away at private events, most particularly represented in the rise of Almack’s, the dance hall founded by William Almack (or Macall) and ruled over by a cabal of seven women who tightly controlled access to the vouchers necessary to buy tickets. Low ticket prices emphasized that money could not buy exclusivity, but neither could family name. This is a

²⁶ Li, 13.

²⁷ Li, 28.

²⁸ Davidoff argues that, in the 1820s and 1830s, the new wealth and social aspirations created by industrialization and the Napoleonic War produced new crowds at public spaces. As such spaces became less exclusive than in 1820s and 30s, so aristocrats retreated to private spaces in aristocratic houses, dance halls such as Almack’s, and the gentleman’s clubs of White’s, Crockford’s, Boodle’s, and Brooks’s (22-4).

society, as Davidoff and other have argued, formed by acts of exclusion rather than inclusion. Incivility—the key behavioral practice that includes cutting as well as quizzing (the practice of looking at someone scornfully or mockingly)—turns being fashionable into a radically isolated state.

These changes in social structure can be identified as beginning toward the end of the eighteenth century, both with a rise in aristocratic anxiety about the French Revolution, and also because fashion self-evidently requires certain modern systems of print media and mass production to disseminate its styles. It is associated, in this time period, with the French word *ton*, generally qualified by either *bon* or *mauvais* (“good” or “bad”).²⁹ The *OED*’s first listed example from 1769 explains the word as “used at present to express every thing that’s fashionable.”³⁰ The word, however, was used in English much earlier, as in David Garrick’s 1700 play *Bon Ton: Or, High Life Above Stairs*, first printed in 1748. In the play’s prologue, attributed to George Colman, “bon ton” is described variously according to the speaker: a “buck” (wild young man) says it means to “swear, break windows, beat the watch,/ Pick up a wench, drink healths, and roar a catch”; a fine lady says it means “drinking tea on summer afternoons/ At Bagnigge-Wells, with China and gilt spoons!”; a young girl calls it “a constant trade/ Of rout, *Festino*, Ball and Masquerade”—and so on. The point here is that not only is the definition of “bon ton” contested, the word is associated with an inability to be fixed and

²⁹ Kent Puckett addresses something similar to *ton* in *Bad Form: Social Mistakes in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: OUP, 2008). For Puckett, literary form converges with social form precisely when etiquette’s good and bad form are at stake. He sees the silver-fork novel primarily as an etiquette book “coupled [with] the pleasures of the novel form,” a view with which I would disagree (22n25).

³⁰ Hart argues that the late eighteenth century “came ... to use the word *fashion*—and its cognates *ton*, *exclusive*, *the world*—in a sense and with an intensity that were significantly new” (84). Throughout this dissertation, I will be using *ton* interchangeably with *fashion*, and particularly to avoid, whenever possible, the infelicitous “fashionability” or periphrastic “quality of being fashionable.”

defined from the moment of its use. Somewhat like pornography, the *ton* may not know what it means—but they know it when they do it.

As the eighteenth progresses, these definitions become increasingly sophisticated about the term's definitional indefinability. In Dialogue XXVII in Baron George Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead*, when, replying to Mercury's confusion about *bon ton*, the fine lady Mrs. Modish says:

It is one of the privileges of the *Bon ton* never to define, or be defined. It is the child and parent of jargon. It is—I can never tell you what it is; but I will try to tell you what it is not. In conversation it is not wit; in manners it is not politeness; in behaviour it is not address; but it is a little like them all. It can only belong to people of a certain rank, who live in a certain manner, with certain persons, who have not certain virtues, and who have certain vices, and who inhabit a certain part of the town. Like a place by courtesy, it gets an higher rank than the person can claim, but which those who have a legal title to precedence dare not dispute for fear of being thought not to understand the rules of politeness”³¹

This long definition-that-isn't contains a footnote giving a supplementary and more concise definition: “*Du Bon Ton* is a cant phrase in the modern French language for the fashionable air of conversation and manners.”³²

³¹ Baron George Lyttelton, *Dialogues of the Dead* (London, 1760), 303.

³² The fact that this word entered the language at a specific time speaks to the peculiar modernity of fashion as distinct from consequence. Scholars may argue that fashion in the sense of rapid change of style existed in various places before the late eighteenth century, but the modernity of the word *ton* indicates an essential difference between that kind of fashion and the kind of fashion that does not depend on money, aristocracy, or monarchy although it certainly may be allied to it.

Neither Mrs. Modish's definition nor that of the "editor" actually defines the word. While the editor's definition seems unconcerned about the tautology by which *ton*, or fashion, is a word for that which is fashionable, Mrs. Modish sees *ton*'s indefinability as the definition in itself: *ton* it is a constellation of things that one lacks. This "lack" differentiates *ton*'s capital-that-isn't, the thing that cannot be acquired or measured, from other sorts of capital, like the social capital of rank, or the cultural capital of wit. In this way, I would argue, the notion of *ton* helps differentiate what the fashionable novel does from simply "generat[ing] a reactionary mystique of exclusiveness" or "mystif[ying] the world of *ton*."³³ I am using it here to historicize the fashion system, because it suggests that the period from approximately 1770 to 1840 was concerned with fashion in a singular and specific way.³⁴ In other words, *ton* is not simply a convenient fiction to keep soap-sellers out of Almack's. It is a cultural response to a particular moment in aristocratic history.

This historicization of fashion helps decide between two different generic terms at stake in this dissertation: fashionable novel and silver-fork novel. Early nineteenth-century usage tended to apply "silver fork" more specifically to authors rather than a genre, as in Francis Maceroni's condemnation of "the lisping impertinencies of the 'silver fork school' coxcombs,"³⁵ or *Fraser's* disgust for "the silver-fork school of novelists ... they should be

³³ Hart, 85; Wilson 10.

³⁴ The struggle over the authorization of fashion is part of what Simmel and Flügel see as the middle class's increasing control over fashion throughout the nineteenth century. See J. C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1950), 110ff. Joanne Entwistle challenges the thesis in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Maiden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), but many sociologists of fashion note that fashion historically moves from the court to a city aristocracy, and then to the bourgeoisie.

³⁵"The American Chesterfield," 2 vols., *Memoirs of the Life and Adventures of Colonel Maceroni* (London: John Macrone, 1838), 1:61.

called the steelprong authorhood.”³⁶ It was also fairly common to refer to people as belonging to the silver-fork school: “A lady, evidently not genteel—for she belongs most unequivocally to the silver-fork school”³⁷; or “there remains to be produced a much more useful class of novels than has yet emanated from the *silver fork school* [of authors]”³⁸; or North’s insistence in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, “Not that I belong, James, to the Silver-fork School.”³⁹ Muireann Ó’Cinnéide points out that the designation “silver fork” emphasizes the “materiality of the high society sociability.”⁴⁰ For her, however, this is reason to continue to use the term, while I have come to the opposite conclusion. I think it is useful to preserve the term “fashionable novel” and I will be using it throughout this dissertation with the intention to turn the focus away from the novels’ historical materiality—the silver forks of the title—to the structuring formal systems that underpin that materiality and that have not, to date, been thoroughly explored.

What, then, is a fashionable novel? My general criteria for calling something a fashionable novel is that at least part of it be set in London’s Season; that its main characters be of high rank; and that it be published between the mid-1820s and mid 1840s—the years during which contemporary readers seemed to be aware of fashionable novels as a distinct genre. Key to this dissertation, however, is the confusion between a “fashionable novel”

³⁶ *Fraser’s* 5.29 (June 1832), 518.

³⁷ “British Writers on America,” *Tait’s Edinburgh* 2 (May 1832), 232

³⁸ “The Public Journals,” *Mirror of literature* 20.576 (17 Nov 1832), 231.

³⁹ John Wilson, William Maginn, J.G. Lockhard, and James Hogg, *Noctes Ambrosianæ* LIX.30 (November 1831), 804.

⁴⁰ Muireann O’Cinneide, *Aristocratic Women and the Literary Nation, 1832-1867*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 46.

(which is fashionable to be seen reading) and “novel of fashion” (which is about the fashionable world). In the 1820s and 1830s, fashionable novels were, themselves, objects of fashion. This slippery and somewhat tautological condition is, to my mind, emblematic of fashion itself, as I have attempted to outline—but not define—it in this section. Rather than a deconstructed endpoint, this reluctance to define will be starting point of critical inquiry.

II. What is the Fashionable Novel

Criticism on the fashionable novel has lagged without a structural understanding of the genre’s literary form, because it has allowed cultural history to precede the novels and to determine the framework within which literary form is discussed. Early criticism of the novels established the dismissive, cultural-historical tenor that has persisted in conversation until quite recently. These early dismissals often took the form of railing against the novels’ failure to articulate an approved masculinity. William Hazlitt, for example, excoriates the novels’ interest in fashionable details by condemning their attention to the fact that certain men eat their fish with silver forks: the writer “gives you the address of his heroine’s milliner, lest any shocking surmise should arise in your mind of the possibility of her dealing with a person of less approved taste, and also informs you that the quality eat fish with silver forks.”⁴¹ This interest in fashionable details provokes him to propose the term “Dandy School” as a generic label for what critics tend now to see as the first wave of fashionable

⁴¹ William Hazlitt, “The Dandy School,” in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt* vol. 11 (London: J.M. Den & Co, 1904), 345.

novels, books centering around a dandy and written by men: *Tremaine* (1825), *Granby* (1826), *Vivian Grey* (1827), *Pelham* (1828).⁴²

Carlyle picks up on this notion of the dandy school, devoting an entire chapter of *Sartor Resartus*, initially published in the very anti-fashionable *Fraser's Magazine*, to a satire of the Dandiacal Body. For Carlyle, legibility itself is at stake. When Teufelsdröckh, having obtained some fashionable novels, attempts to read them, he finds that:

the tough faculty of reading, for which the world will not refuse me credit, was here for the first time foiled ... at the end of some short space, I was uniformly seized with ... a kind of infinite, unsufferable Jew's-harping and scrannel-piping there; to which the frightfullest species of Magnetic Sleep soon supervened ... till at last, by order of the Doctor, dreading ruin to my whole intellectual and bodily faculties, and a general breaking-up of the constitution, I reluctantly but determinedly forbore.⁴³

Sartor Resartus constitutes only one of the many attacks on the fashionable novel forwarded by *Fraser's*, which took as one of its founding principles the resisting of “Lytton-Bulwerism” and “Colburn-and-Bentleyism” on precisely the grounds that Teufelsdröckh and Hazlitt

⁴² Gilmour suggests that there are two waves of the silver fork in *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), 55. He expands on the idea in his later work by suggesting that genre consists of one frivolous wave in the 1820s and 30s and a second set of more serious political novels in the 1840s (16-18). Edward Copeland also divides the novels in two, based on their approach toward politics: “In the early 1820s, silver fork novels engaged in political reform only as a distantly wished-for good ... in the early 1840s, the last silver fork novels succumb to a reluctant acceptance of the realities of new social and political arrangements for the nation,” in “Opera and the Great Reform Act: Silver Fork Fiction, 1822-1842,” in *Romanticism on the Net* (2004), 6. These discussions mainly focus on the political aspects, but a survey of the genre suggests that the first set of novels was written almost exclusively by men, while the second set, beginning in the early 1830s, was written not exclusively but much more often by women, most especially Lady Charlotte Bury and Catherine Gore.

⁴³ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford: Oxford, 1987), 210.

outline, their unmanliness.⁴⁴ Such distaste for the fashionable novel thus stems in part from the novels' supposed allegiance with aristocratic authors, either women or effeminate dandies, who stole booksellers' space from professional men. Writers such as *Fraser's* editor George Maginn took the attack on fashionable novels not merely as a literary but as a moral imperative, demanding rhetorically, "What noble faculties are addressed in such works? Are they calculated to make readers in general better or wiser?-to brace up manly energy, and promote heroic virtue?"⁴⁵ Such early criticism set an early ground for studies of the fashionable novel in relation to the figure of the dandy. Ellen Moers's study of the dandy, for example, draws on the literature in order to trace the development of the dandy from Brummell to D'Orsay.

Moers's study is typical of criticism that reads the novels primarily as historical documents. She uses the novels to suggest, for example, that Giuditta Pasta's singing was fashionable or that the gentleman's club Crockford's was known primarily for gambling without necessarily interrogating the representational practices by which such information is transmitted. Alison Adburgham's study of the fashionable novel rests on a similar strategy; impressive in its breadth and interested in the relationship between publisher, writer, reader, and aristocracy, her discussion provides an exhaustive overview of the genre's history and decades, drawing a connection between the novels and the rising *nouveaux riche* who read the novels with the aim of discovering "in what London square it was stylish to rent a house for

⁴⁴ April 1830; qtd. in Moers 170. For a full discussion of *Fraser's* relationship to the dandy school, see Ellen Moers's chapter "England in 1830 and the Anti-Dandiacals," 167-192. In this case, "Colburn-and-Bentleyism" refers to the Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, publishers who released the vast majority of silver-fork novels and about whom more later.

⁴⁵ qtd. in Moers 172.

the Season, and *when* exactly the Season started; what shops and suppliers to patronise; at what time of day it was elegant to drive in the park, to make calls, to dine.”⁴⁶ Her work is enormously helpful in situating the genre in its historical and cultural context, but she is not interested in the novels’ place within a literary history, suggesting that the genre is a “phenomenon of the period, filling a lacuna in the sequence of English fiction writing.”⁴⁷ Harriet Devine Jump, although more interested in the novels’ self-awareness, is similarly interested in the local historical information that fashionable novels provide, suggesting that Bulwer-Lytton’s *Godolphin* (Colburn, 1840; Pickering & Chatto, 2006) remains “profoundly revealing both of the quirkily brilliant mind of its author and of the social, political and intellectual spirit of its age.”⁴⁸ By focusing specifically on authors and ages, such criticism brings the novels into focus but does not situate them in larger narratives of the novel or of the nineteenth century.

Critics who are more interested in the novels’ literary function tend to focus on taxonomizing the field in order to understand the novels in relation to a more standard literary canon, comparing the novels to realism as it developed in the eighteenth-century. Rosa, who accounts for the genre’s popularity in the social upheaval of the Napoleonic Wars and the Industrial Revolution, pinpoints the genre’s culmination in *Vanity Fair* (1847-48), but insists that the characters of the fashionable novel are “mere phantoms” in contrast with Becky Sharp or Jos Sedley, and that Thackeray draws his characters with a “sharp realism”

⁴⁶ Alison Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature From 1814 to 1840* (London: Constable, 1983), 2.

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ Harriet Devine Jump, “Introduction,” in *Godolphin* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), xxii.

absent from the fashionable novel: “They are not human beings first and pose and pretense second, but pose and pretense completely.”⁴⁹ Rosa’s criticism reads today as old-fashioned, but similar statements occur in later criticism. Vineta Colby, for example, who is primarily interested in Catherine Gore as a precursor of the domestic novelists of the mid-nineteenth century, searches fashionable novels for the roots of domestic fiction, differentiating between the “dramatic detail” of Richardson’s novels and the social documentation of the fashionable authors. She sees the latter’s detail-oriented narratives as “[preparation] for the selective domestic realism of George Eliot, Dickens, and Thackeray,” an attitude that locates the genre in a teleological narrative of novel history.⁵⁰

A similar teleological narrative informs Robin Gilmour’s discussion, in which he distinguishes between the genre as established by *Pelham* in 1828, which he regards as particularly silly, and a later group of more serious novels typified by Benjamin Disraeli’s “Young England” trilogy, which marry the fashionable to the political novel.⁵¹ While Gilmour’s division of the novels helpfully articulates a possible evolution of the genre, he treats the novels primarily as objects for Thackeray’s response and sees the silver fork’s interest in materiality only as a weakness, revealing a set of expectations similar to Rosa’s. He says of Disraeli’s *Coningsby*, for example, that “too much of the novel is in [a] high-flown vein. The Young England characters do not come to life: they are much less memorable than

⁴⁹ Rosa, 5-12,

⁵⁰ Colby, 53.

⁵¹ Copeland’s idea of fashionable novels’ political interest sees a promise of reform in their treatment of London’s streets as “fictions of space, not urban systems,” in “Crossing Oxford Street: Silverfork Geopolitics,” in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25.2 (2001), 116.

their houses.”⁵² While his accusation that the characters are less memorable than their houses may be perfectly true, the criticism relies on three assumptions that underlie a great deal of criticism of the nineteenth-century novel, each of which the fashionable novel challenges—and according to which it fails: first, that the novel bears an aesthetic, if not even moral, responsibility to shun the aristocracy; second, that bringing characters rather than places to life is the higher aesthetic aim; and third, that only a representation of middle-class interiority counts as novelistic “life.”

Feminist critics have also been interested in the novels’ literary function, and have therefore also suggested ways in which the novels might be understood within a narrative of novel history. Bonnie Anderson, for example, sees fashionable novels as “domestic romances whose central purpose was the depiction of fashionable, aristocratic life for a largely middle-class audience.” She argues that popular novels written for women spread a “non-feminist womanly ideology,” an ideology that still appears in fiction written for women today.⁵³ Thus Anderson is largely content to explore the cultural meaning of the texts, stating in her introduction that “one of the primary characteristics of documents of popular culture is that their social implications bear little relationship to their artistic merit.”⁵⁴ April Kendra usefully builds on this taxonomic line of criticism, suggesting that we differentiate between “dandy novel” and “society novel” in order to accommodate a wider variety of texts,

⁵² Gilmour, “The Aristocracy and the Novel,” 20.

⁵³ Bonnie Anderson, “The Writings of Catherine Gore,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 10.2 (1976), 405.

⁵⁴ *ibid*

particularly those written by women.⁵⁵ In her reading, the novels thus span the gap between Austen and Eliot to sustain a trajectory of women's writing. The problem with this sort of criticism, however, is that, just as the male-centered political readings neglect the literary form and contributions of female writers, such criticism does not properly situate the novels in the heated political debates with which I would argue they engage. The approach thus shows the limitation of approaching the novels from a cultural perspective: it collapses literary form into social form without specifically articulating the literary form that it attempts to read.

Most successful, to my mind, is criticism that sees the genre as a literary-historical bridge in readings that use class as a taxonomic determiner of form. Gary Kelly reads the novels as part of an important transition between the Romantic and Victorian periods, both disseminating Romantic culture and criticizing bourgeois utilitarianism, adapting, along with the Newgate novel, "established forms of the novel as social criticism in order to express, in the late 1820s, a deepening sense of social, cultural, and political crisis ... [taking over] the familiar Romantic examination of the social construction of the individual."⁵⁶ His Foucauldian approach to the novels' use of discourse smartly suggests that "the fundamental principle—and the scandal—of the silver-fork novel, as a specific type of the novel of manners, sentiment, and emulation, is that the intrinsic importance of the topic of discrimination matters less than the act of discrimination, the exercise of personal taste within a social discourse of discrimination and distinction."⁵⁷ Such an approach nudges

⁵⁵ April Kendra, "Gendering the Silver Fork: Catherine Gore and the Society Novel," *Women's Writing* 11.1 (2004), 36.

⁵⁶ Gary Kelly, 222-23.

⁵⁷ *ibid*

criticism away from an interest in the specifics of “duelling, interior decor, decorum, drinks” and towards the way those topics are addressed in the formal qualities of the narrative, and yet Kelly still sees the novels as “in effect later novels of manners, sentiment, and emulation, built on earlier fiction by such writers as Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth ... and many others.”⁵⁸ Ultimately, like Rosa, he accounts for the fashionable novel as an anachronistic rendering of an eighteenth-century genre.

The fundamental problem, again, is that criticism has been proceeding without a structural understanding of the genre’s literary form, and so, inevitably, historical social contexts seem to predetermine that form. That form, therefore, only emerges insofar as it homologously reflects the historical contexts, while literary history on every side provides the critical equivalent of mooring lines. These formal strategies were long overlooked by critics attempting to read the novels as historical documents. The acceptance of these novels’ transparency in the face of this tentative historicity then suggests the necessity of interrogating the narrative strategies. More recent criticism has looked at narrative form. Tamara Wagner and Winifred Hughes, however, have explored the novels’ formal elements. Looking at the genre’s place in the formation of a middle-class domesticity, Wagner argues that the novels form the first wave of fiction interested in re-evaluating Regency ideals: “Primarily built on recalibrated perceptions of aristocratic values, the silver-fork novel helped negotiate new ideals of the domestic by mixing class-climbing emulation with a sense of moral superiority.”⁵⁹ Wagner’s formulation highlights the paradoxical fact that these

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ Tamara Wagner, ““A Strange Chronicle of the Olden Time:” Revisions of the Regency in the Construction of Victorian Domestic Fiction,” *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History* 66, no. 4 (2005), 443.

novels of contemporaneity employ what Hughes called their elegiac mode, thereby emphasizing, perhaps inadvertently, that the novels use formal strategies to keep alive the fiction of contemporaneity and transparency.⁶⁰ Ó’Cinnéide also highlights formal matters, attending to the fashionable novel’s narratives of inclusivity and exclusivity, arguing that the “the novels’ focus on the display of socialised public spaces has a commercial and educative role, albeit a role that must remain unacknowledged by a genre founded on the premise if not the reality of exclusivity”; the “socialised rituals” of ballroom and dining room “constantly play off the *possibility* of further penetration, the hint that at any moment the narrative *may* admit its reader into the furthest reaches of individual intimacy.”⁶¹ By attending to apparent gaps and lapses, where the fissures of the novels become evident, these critics seek to articulate form through unexpected moments of apparent literariness.

In doing so, it seems to me, they depend on the pioneering formal analysis of Winifred Hughes. In several articles, Hughes attends closely to the fashionable novel’s form, accounting, for example, for the plotlessness of the novels by suggesting that “the silver fork school’s typically elaborate ‘construction of nothing’ came to be interpreted in social and political as well as literary terms.”⁶² Another formal complexity Hughes notes, which I will

⁶⁰ This temporal lag present even in the most insistently contemporaneous of the novel, insist upon the novels’ presentation of the most up-to-date fashion. On a more immediate level, perhaps, the temporal lag helps sustain the genre’s pervasive ironic tone. Wagner, arguing that the genre “was from the beginning essentially satirical even as it was driven by an escapist appreciation of an ambiguously romanticized past” (445-46), points out that, ironically, “that the silver-fork genre was marketed for the insiders’ insights ... given the growing prevalence of socially mobile members of the middle classes among its authors” (449).

⁶¹ Ó’Cinneide, 51.

⁶² Hughes, 205.

explore later in more detail, is the novels' temporal complexity. The easy association of fashionable novels with contemporaneity is complicated by what Hughes calls their "elegiac mode,"⁶³ which stems from the novels' frequent investment in "the already legendary period of the Regency." That is, the novels are written in the second quarter of the nineteenth century but often set in the first then they could not practically serve as a guide to the fashionable of day, thus losing their claim to contemporaneous transparency. For this breakthrough insight, I see Winifred Hughes as the pioneering voice in formal criticism of the fashionable novel, as opposed to more recent arguments that discover formal relations that primarily appear to reflect historical relations.

So, although recent criticism focuses on the fact that these novels are formally self-aware, it has not assayed first to understand the form of the genre before contemplating that form's possible historical functions. This study does. To that end, I have chosen to focus closely on a handful of carefully chosen, exemplary novels, approaching them with the methodologies of close reading that are more often applied to canonical realist texts. This approach is informed by earlier studies of minor genre, perhaps most immediately by Catherine Gallagher's *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, which argues that alleged critical flaws in the "condition-of-England" novels actually grew out of the limits of discourse around the problems of industrialization. In a similar way, as I will suggest, the supposed flaws that have so often been identified in these fashionable novels are not so much narrative failures as formal achievements that, once understood, can be seen to be negotiating the familiar novelistic issues of identity, subjectivity, and representation by positing an apparent ethical objection to the representation of middle-class interiority.

⁶³ Hughes, 191.

While the novels I have chosen to include are, to my mind, exceptional in various ways, they are also exceptionally typical. John Cawelti's discussion of formulaic fiction provides some basis for selecting individual texts to carry a representative burden, saying that "structures of narrative conventions" lay out principles for "the selection of certain plots, characters, and settings."⁶⁴ Margaret Cohen comprehensively addresses the problems of studying minor genre, not least the quantity of the "great unread" with which such studies must content. As in her recent study of sea fiction, I have chosen what she calls "the representative example," works "where the features under discussion emerge with particular force ... the text takes on its importance as the abstraction of a class rather than in its unique specificity."⁶⁵ I have also taken a cue from Maria Nikolajeva's *Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), which seriously and carefully applies narratological theory to its titular subject. Although her approach is more narrowly formal than mine, the way in which she uses an understudied and minor genre to articulate larger narratological categories has been a helpful model for the more formal portions of my work.

Through its analysis, this study expands upon and adds to the foundational narratives of novel history on which most criticism of the nineteenth-century novel is based. The

⁶⁴ John G. Cawelti, *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004) 12. Cawelti's focus, however, is more on the ritual and cultural function than the plots and characters, which, because they are formulaic, do not get close attention.

⁶⁵ Margaret Cohen, "Narratology in the Archive of Literature," in *Representations* 108 (Fall 2009), 59, 61. Cohen takes that stance that works not falling under the wide umbrella of "historical realism" are not particularly suited to "narratological models of character, plot, and description" (55). It is here emphasis on recovering the "poetic horizon" rather than individual works that I find compelling in this context (62). Both Cohen's *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) resituate minor genres within a larger narrative, although her approach relies more on far-reading than mine does.

fashionable novel rejects—or, considering chronology, might better be said to forestall—certain conventions of the typical nineteenth-century novel: professional authorship, descriptive realism, teleological plot, and the idea of character as the representation of a bourgeois individuality. The fashionable novel, I am suggesting, quite purposefully rejects these notions through its creation of a fashionable aristocratic subject. In this way, the novels seem to me to offer a complication to common understandings of literary history. The fashionable novel's interest in aristocratic groups complicates Ian Watt's seminal argument that the aristocracy disappears from the novel, an exclusion which Watt himself addresses in revisions of his thesis and which Michael McKeon expands upon in his discussion of the novel's dialectical form.⁶⁶ In fact, fashionable novels elevate the aristocracy, although generally a non-fashionable aristocracy, as the moral center of the novels.⁶⁷ In this way, the novel represents an aristocratic subject for a mixed audience, in a medium that is, as I have suggested above, neither clearly a middle-class nor an aristocratic form.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Watt particularly notes Richardson's resistance to aristocratic mores, saying "The epic's false code of honour, like that of heroic tragedy, was masculine, bellicose, aristocratic, and pagan: it was therefore wholly unacceptable to Richardson, whose novels are largely devoted to attacking this ideology, and replacing it by a radically different one in which honour is internal, spiritual, and available without distinction of class or sex;" see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Los Angeles: U of C Press, 2001), 243-44. McKeon lays out the grounds for the persistence of the aristocracy in *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1991), 4.

⁶⁷ The most thorough articulation of the connection between the fashionable novel and the aristocracy is Gilmour's chapter, "The Novel and the Aristocracy," in which he argues that the novels of the 1820s and 30s were the testing ground for a battle between aristocratic and bourgeois codes—battles that, by the 1860s, had been comfortably resolved in favor of the bourgeois.

⁶⁸ Leah Price argues that, "far from leveling class or gender distinctions (as hostile critics accuse in the eighteenth century, and as celebratory ones from Ian Watt to Margaret Anne Doody have more recently argued), the novel internalized and even reinvented them," in *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2000), 7.

Indeed, the fashionable novel apparently conceived of itself as a response to the valorization of middle-class virtue, a response that could manifest in both critical and laudatory ways. Theodore Hook's *Sayings and Doings*, first published in 1824, illustrated moral precepts through short narratives of fashionable life, spreading four or five stories across three fat volumes. The text was so popular that, after an immediate second edition of the first series, a second series appeared in 1825 and then a third in 1826. In one of the stories of the second series, a village schoolmaster's assistant, Welsted, moves to London, where he falls in with an aristocratic family grateful to him for saving their scion from drowning when he was a boy at Welsted's school. Welsted innately distrusts the middle classes, thanks to, as the narrator says, the:

perusal of works and public papers, whose writers have the worse of objects in endeavouring to ridicule and vilify the best of people, and who, without ever having had an opportunity of judging personally of good society, consider it part of their daily duty, as tending to the great end they have in view, to make it appear that every individual superior to themselves, is either a fool or a knave ... and that vice and dissipation (which in truth flourish more in the middling and lower classes, than any where else,) are the exclusive characteristics of the best-born and best-bred part of the British population.⁶⁹

This skeptical eye towards the valorization of the middle classes disrupts the common association of the novel, the middle class, and the individual, as in Armstrong's forceful statement that "the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite

⁶⁹ Theodore Hook, *Sayings and Doings, Or Sketches From Life. Second Series* (London: Henry Colburn, 1825), 3.74.

literally, one and the same ... To produce an individual, it was also necessary to invalidate competing notions of the subject—often proposed by other novels—as idiosyncratic, less than fully human, fantastic, or dangerous.”⁷⁰ This discussion, then, is part of a growing body of scholarship that explores alternate ways of thinking about the subject.⁷¹ It builds on earlier discussions of the role of the aristocrat in the fashionable novel to suggest that the fashionable aristocrat is not simply an anachronism but in fact, within the novels, a new subject creation.

While I would certainly agree that the portrayal of the fashionable aristocratic individual in these novels offers a competing notion of the subject, I do not see that subject as being either outdated or invalidated. What I see, instead, is this subject powerfully countering Reform-era political notions about class and individuality by working against capitalism and Utilitarianism through the articulation of the fashionable world in terms that insist it can neither be measured, valued, nor exchanged. These novels fight an emerging sense of market capitalism by articulating a withdrawal from a world in which everything—including the manner of the aristocracy—is measured by its ability to confer value. It is a common response to see these novels as consumerist and capitalist, because that is how we experience fashion today. As we will see, however, they are in fact anti-consumerist, anti-capitalist, and therefore also anti-Utilitarian. Fashion as it is represented in these novels

⁷⁰ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism From 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia, 2005), 3.

⁷¹ These alternate approaches to the self are, in the context of literature, typified by the work of scholars such as Deidre Lynch. Her *Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) argues that the early eighteenth century saw the self as created through surfaces.

offers an alternative to consumerist and capitalist modes of subjectivity at the moment that such subjectivities are coalescing.

Such an attack, however, takes place not at the level of content but at the level of form. The genre was conceived in an era of political turmoil by men whose political careers tended to be more distinguished than their literary careers. The politics of these novels, however, are scattered. References arise to the “issue of the day” or the “government of the day,” but we are left to speculate on the precise nature of the issues or makeup of the government. This intentional vagueness arises because what matters are the larger questions of independence and representation that parliament was debating in the 1820s and 1830s, as “the independent man’ ... became the preferred unit of political inclusion.”⁷² Where the typical nineteenth-century novel narrative focuses on the democratization of individual agency through representation of the domestic narrative, whether as a response to or enactor of similar political changes, the fashionable novel defends against democracy by imagining a nineteenth-century—a fashionable “now”—made up of radically independent figures operating in the world through exclusion that denies, rather than creates, a common humanity.

III. Fashionable Form

Form first: in organizing this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on what I see as four genre-defining narrative elements rather than, as previous studies have done, focusing on authors or chronologies. I have identified four narrative strategies in the categories of authorship, description, plotting, and characterization that together, I contend, underlie the

⁷² Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 189.

making of a fashionable novel. First is authorship (chapter one). The success of fashionable novels has long been taken to depend on inside information from alleged aristocratic authors. Some authors, such as Lord Normanby and Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury, certainly were titled. Yet the novels were typically published anonymously and they erect the illusion of a fashionable author through two narrative moves: the abjuration of authorship by the putative author that shifts the burden of fashion to the narrator; and then the narrator's abjuration of the work of authorship itself. This double move is fashionable in that it constitutes a rejection of professionalism, enacting a structure of valuation in which truth can be assessed only internally rather than through the marketplace. Second is description (chapter two). Contrary to the dominant critical model that focuses on the novels as describing fashionable commodities that can be adopted by any aspirant, the novels themselves actually quite clearly refuse to allow the goods and behaviors described in the novels to be fashionable, so that an object is fashionable insofar as it resists incorporation into the narrative project of representing fashion. This refusal of a relationship of utility between people and objects (and objects and narrators) codes the novels as fashionable, and illuminates the genre's take on political reform: power comes through exclusion, rather than inclusion.

I then turn to the paired categories of plot (chapter three) and character (chapter four). As I show, the often lamented plotlessness of silver-fork fiction—the *ennuyèd* Society plodding from Monday's coterie party to Wednesday's Almack's assembly, to Thursday's Opera, to Friday's *fête champêtres*—turns out to be a calculated plot refusal that arises most obviously from the exigencies of narrating a society in which nothing much happens and then transforms plot into a ground contested between narrator and character. In the successful fashionable novel, the characters who plot necessarily fail at being fashionable, so

that the narrator who plots this failure succeeds in their place. Such plot refusal becomes the only ethically sustainable option for the aristocrats whose natural exclusivity has been breached, and thus the fashionable novel writes the aristocrat (and itself) out of history. These non-plots are populated by characters that have long been dismissed as flat. In fact the fashionable character's flatness posits a radically independent subjectivity in which characters who act as our narrators explicitly refuse to render up their interiority, as the title character articulates in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*: "I have kept a veil over the darker and stormier emotions of my soul; all that could neither amuse nor instruct him *are mine!*"⁷³ Through this and similar abjurations, the genre offers a narrative and cultural alternative to a growing emphasis on the representation, both political and narrative, of a knowable interiority by positing the existence of an inimitable, unrepresentable, and unknowable self.⁷³

All together, these four narrative strategies provide a way to puncture the tautology by which the fashionable novel seems to guarantee its fashion by the circular logic that what is fashionable is fashionable because it is fashionable. As the texts grapple with these foundational novelistic problems through the rejection of professionalization, the rejection of contemporaneity, the rejection of plot, the rejection of interiority and action, they offer an alternative novelistic construction of the self, the aristocrat passed through a sieve of fashion. What emerges from these readings, I am arguing, is an alternative to narratives of history, of the self, and of the novel, and one against which—as in Nancy Armstrong's

⁷³ The interest of these novels in political representation has something to do with the concerns that Catherine Gallagher finds in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), in which she asserts that nineteenth-century writers "took representation as their subject matter and considered it in the light of a theory that encouraged them to seek homologies between political and literary representation" (188). But the novels she talks about are in general more directly about politics; in the silver-fork novel, politics are highly abstracted, there in form but not in content.

argument—mainstream novels fought. I end up, therefore, returning to a truism that I began this dissertation project by perhaps too blithely rejecting, that these novels are most important for what they teach us about other texts. Considering that many of the great nineteenth-century writers—Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës, Gaskell, and Eliot—reacted explicitly to and against fashionable novels, it is not too much to say that fashionable novels did in fact shape the course of nineteenth-century fiction. It is most fitting that they did so through acts of abjuration.

Chapter 1. The Professional Authorship of Fashionable Novels

But trifles make up the sum of earthly things—and in this instance this trivial circumstance affects the Princess of Wales’s interests, therefore it becomes of consequence for the true statements to be made known; and as I was present, I can and will tell the truth.

Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury,
Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth

But I bare no mallis—infamation is infamation, and it doesn’t matter where the infamy comes from; and whether the Dairy be from that distinguished pen to which it is ornarily attributed—whether, I say, it comes from a lady of honor to the late quean, or a scullion to that diffunct majisty, no matter: all we ask is nollidge; never mind how we have it.

William Makepeace Thackeray,
Yellowplush Papers

In the March 1838 number of *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, the fourth installment of Thackeray’s “Yellowplush Correspondence” offered a thoroughgoing parody of former lady-in-waiting Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury’s *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth*, released anonymously by publisher Henry Colburn in January of that same year. The book caused a brief sensation. It stirred up memories of Queen Caroline’s embarrassing trial for adultery while, presumably, reminding its newly Victorian readers of a very different sort of queen, court, and moral structure—and not only those of Caroline. More than one reader compared the *Diary* to the scandalous publications of Queen Anne’s time, the allegorical secret histories from the pens of, most notably, Delarivier Manley and Aphra Behn. In this essay’s first epigraph, *The Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth* lays claim to its writer’s possession of a specialized form of knowledge: “as I was present, I can and will tell

the truth.”⁷⁴ Inserted just after the diarist recounts a public, and publicly misinterpreted, interaction between the Prince of Wales and Princess Caroline, this passage promises that the preceding anecdote offers the truest account because a narrator with exclusive access assures the reader that it is so. The source with access to the Princess guarantees the knowledge, and the knowledge guarantees the source: transparency and exclusivity enter into a mutually constitutive, if not even tautological, relationship. But in Thackeray’s parodic reading of the *Diary*, quoted in the second epigraph, Yellowplush assumes that any eyewitness can produce an equally accurate account. Unable to discriminate either between a lady-in-waiting and a scullery maid, or between good information and bad “infamation,” he mistakenly believes that “how” does not matter. This chapter is about that “how.” What Yellowplush specially desires is “FASHNABBLE” knowledge, and the construction of a believable source for that knowledge is, despite his sweeping claim, no indifferent matter.

Fashionable novels claimed to offer exclusive insight into the material and behavioral world of the London *bon ton*, through access, as Thackeray’s Yellowplush puts it just before the second epigraph to this essay, to the “houses of the nobility, gentry, and rile family.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury, *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth, Interspersed with Original Letters from the Late Queen Caroline, and from Various Other Distinguished Persons*, 4 vols. (London: H. Colburn, 1838), 1:227.

⁷⁵ Contemporary discussions of fashionable literature often do not differentiate between “novels” and other publications. In a review of the *Diary* for *Tait’s Edinburgh*, Christian Isobel Johnstone admits not to be “innocent of fashionable reading,” in “Diary Illustrative of the Times of George IV., &C. &C. &C.” *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1838), 177. Yellowplush says the book “is clearly trenching upon my ground and favrite subjucks, viz. fashnabble life, as igsibited in the houses of the nobility, gentry, and rile fammly.” And even clearly fictional fashionable novels were released concurrently with alleged keys to their characters, such as “A new Key to the Characters of *Coningsby*” or “A Key to the Novel the Exclusives!!!,” two other novels published anonymously by, respectively, Benjamin Disraeli

Critics have often agreed. Typified by Matthew Rosa, they have argued that the novels aimed at “verisimilitude” that required them to above all else “appear correct”⁷⁶; that they have a snobbish preoccupation with “rituals and furnishings of ‘exclusive’ aristocratic life”⁷⁷; that they are “novels about commodities” that must contain “real people, real clubs, real shops and real tradesmen”⁷⁸; in sum, that they deserve “further reading and scholarship ... for what [they reveal] of culture, society, and women’s lives during the gap between the Regency and the Victorian era.”⁷⁹ Certainly my first epigraph would seem to support this reading: “As I was there,” the diarist says, “I can and will tell the truth.” In other words, her information is accurate, and disseminating accurate information is her narrative’s primary goal.

The circular relation by which the source guarantees the knowledge and the knowledge the source has been understood as almost denotive of the genre in which the *Diary Illustrative* was situated, and it has tended to inform the fundamental assumption on which criticism of these novels was long based: if they were not actually written by insider authors, they were at least written to appear to be so. While more recent scholarship attends to the formal innovation represented within this genre, it has not, as I attempt to do here, broken through

and Bury.

⁷⁶ Michael Sadleir, *Bulwer: A Panorama: Edward and Rosina, 1803-1836* (London: Constable & Co., 1931), 116.

⁷⁷ Robin Gilmour, in “The Novel and Aristocracy: Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, and Thackeray,” in *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (Baltimore: E. Arnold, 1986), 16-18.

⁷⁸ Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 110.

⁷⁹ Harriet Devine Jump, introduction to *Silver Fork Novels*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 1:xxvi.

what amounts to the genre's fundamental formal tautology—the notion that these authors' exclusive access guarantees fashionable knowledge, and vice versa.⁸⁰ This chapter refutes and re-examines the genre's supposed reliance on exclusive aristocratic authors in order to puncture that tautology and explicate the extra-diegetic, paratextual, and narratological means by which the novels came to be read as fashionable. My central argument is that fashionable authorship, rather than being the expression of real or imagined insidership, actually works—quite professionally—through crafting narratological acts that cohere around an abjuration of professional authorship. For historians of authorship such as Mark Rose, Clifford Siskin, and Catherine Gallagher, fiction writing develops (albeit in different ways) out of an eighteenth-century patronage system of authorship into the marketplace of capitalism, and such accounts rely on the notion that, especially after the copyright act of 1710, the specialized work of original fiction writing creates ownership of and in the text.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Most recently, Cheryl Wilson's monograph *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012) resituates the silver fork novel in the literary and cultural context of the nineteenth century by sampling a wide range of novels within in the literary marketplace of the 1820s and 30s (3, 20). My account of fashionable authorship, however, differs from Wilson's. She suggests that fashionable novelists claim "a degree of verisimilitude" that is "accomplished through authorial claims to accuracy" (6-7); this "authorial self-fashioning" then "enabled writers to position themselves as authorities on high society" (21). Therefore, her focus falls on the community of readers shaping generic expectations and on the novels as a point of reciprocal exchange between the authors and middle-class readers who are aping and aspiring to fashionability. In this essay, I am suggesting that in fact the genre is founded on authorial abjuration. I see this formal innovation, in contrast to Wilson, not as mattering for its homologous relation to cultural, political, or economic context. In this regard, I see Winifred Hughes as the pioneering voice. In analyzing the fact that the novels are "elegies" for past times, she opened up the genre for formal critique.

⁸¹ The bibliography on the relationship of copyright to authorship is quite large. Especially relevant here is Mark Rose's account of property in *Authors and Owners* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), in which he draws on Locke to explain that "A work of literature belonged to an individual because it was finally, an embodiment of that individual.

As I show, however, in the process of rejecting the notion of work as unfashionable, the fashionable novel explicitly, and professionally, rejects that notion of authorship. Situated between the reluctant authorship of Walter Scott and the calculated professionalism of mid-Victorian writers, the fashionable novel presents professionalization marketing a rejection of itself. This rejection codes the novels as fashionable. It enacts a structure of valuation that insists its truth can be assessed only internally, and not within a marketplace that would, through its professionalism, evacuate fashion.

I. Title Page

Fashionable novels court the ephemeral, asking to be read as trivial but accurate historical documents the authenticity of which rested in large part upon the assertion that the books' authors could claim first-hand knowledge of the fashionable world. Most of the novels, however, appeared anonymously or pseudonymously. This anonymity, while on the

And the product of this imprinting of the author's personality on the common stock of the world was a 'work of original authorship'" (114). The basis of literary property, in other words, was not just labor but "personality," and this revealed itself in "originality." Catherine Gallagher, moreover, emphasizes the co-creation of the terms "author" and "marketplace"—as well as "woman," although I am here setting aside the important gendered elements of her argument, in *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), xiii. In *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), Clifford Siskin also situates the professionalization of writing (and *in* writing) within capitalism, suggesting that authorship accelerates in the mid-eighteenth century because it both produces commodities (books) and relocates surplus value in the individual (via the notion of authors) (155-171). In the background of such theories is Ian Watt's placement of the identification of formal realism in strategies assimilable to capitalist marketplace. I will be suggesting that fashionable fiction purposefully makes nonsense of these formulations by actively disowning the notion of personality and originality through authorial abjuration.

one hand allowing readers to experience the *frisson* of inside knowledge through the suggestion of truths too scandalous to be acknowledged,⁸² also tasked the publisher with attesting to the author's qualifications. In a typical publication (Figure 1), the title page lists only the title and publisher. In this case, as in many cases, that publisher was Henry Colburn. Scurrilous bookseller of the early nineteenth century, Colburn is today remembered mostly for his imprint's prolific output of fashionable novels, a commercial success that rested on his ability, presumed or actual, to procure titled authors.⁸³ In the absence of an aristocratic name, which may anyway have been suppressed, anonymous publications sold as productions of an exclusive pen because Colburn's assurance guaranteed it.⁸⁴ That guarantee depended upon puffing, the self-written blurbs and proprietary reviews of his authors' books that seemed to many to constitute an attack on literary professionalization by supporting aristocratic amateurs through authorizing their writers' fashionableness at the cost of genius.

Such declarations of accuracy emerge in one of the puffs collected by *The London Magazine* under the heading "The Puffs of the Month; or Colburniana." In May 1826, under the mocking claim that its reprints were a matter of public service, of "making the world acquainted with the existence of good books," the compilation asserts the autobiographical

⁸² William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 174-75.

⁸³ John Sutherland, "Henry Colburn, Publisher," in *Publishing History* 19 (1986), 59-84.

⁸⁴ James Raven offers an array of helpful statistics about anonymous publication between 1750 and 1830. He pinpoints Colburn as being particularly invested in the mystique of anonymity and notes that, after declining around the turn of the century, the number of novels published anonymously actually rose sharply in the 1820s. "The Anonymous Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1830," in *The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publications from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Robert J. Griffin New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 141-166.

and fashionable nature of Benjamin Disraeli's then-anonymous *Vivian Grey* (Colburn, 1826): "The work announced for publication, under the title of 'Vivian Grey,' we understand to be the history of an ambitious young man of rank, who, by dint of talent, personal advantage, and audacity, became the dictator of certain circles in high life, some of the recent occurrences and actors in which he has taken the liberty to describe with great freedom."⁸⁵ Refusing to align itself clearly either with fiction or biography, this puff slyly insinuates but does not outright say that the work is actually written by the "young man of rank" himself. It draws attention to the observational power of the book and insists on its specially privileged insight into a world of fashion.

In context, however, these reviews actually tend to de-emphasize the book's observational accuracy—to a point. One review first notes that being the best of its class is praise "rather of an equivocal description," and then suggests that "A writer who pretends to such ultra-fashion as the author of *Vivian Grey*, should be less familiar with Ben Burn and the slang dictionary."⁸⁶ In other words, Disraeli's use of overly fashionable markers via slang ends up betraying the book's professional, rather than amateur, origins. Yet still, the reviewer continues, "His fictitious characters are drawn with extreme feebleness—it is only when he is personal that he shows any power." The still-anonymous Disraeli is thus sequentially lauded for his faithful scrutiny of the fashionable world; accused of overreaching socially—that is, of being not quite able to access Society's deepest recesses (which incidentally buoys the reviewer's credibility); and damned for his lack of creative powers, which in the particular language of the review seems to follow almost directly from Disraeli's nicety of observation.

⁸⁵ "The Puffs of the Month; or Colburniana." *The London Magazine* (May 1826), 31-33.

⁸⁶ [Anonymous]. *The Monthly Review* (July 1826): 329-330.

Circularly, Disraeli betrays his claim to fashionable origin by betraying his familiarity with fashionable personages. Invention is not his strength. Yet this attempted insult acts to sustain the novel's claim to fashion by invoking observation rather than creation. When a reviewer praises the fashionable novelist's creativity—that is, authorship—he backhandedly insults by undermining the novel's pretensions to observe fashion accurately. When a reviewer means to insult by calling out the “extreme feebleness” of a fashionable novelist's fictitious characters, however, he inadvertently bestows praise: the best parts of the novel are those that effectively seem to have been copied from fashionable life.

Out of a considerably confused response to the novel, then, Colburn chose to draw attention to exactly that which emphasizes the book's fashionability and accuracy. In reference to such a strategy, William Hepworth Dixon, editor of Lady Morgan's memoirs, asserts that “Colburn had always more faith in his own advertisements for the success of a work than in the genius of the author.”⁸⁷ Such a position not only trumped literary considerations of fresh plot, clever incident, or believable characterization but also “denied its producers a creditable professional identity.”⁸⁸ Ellen Moers goes so far as to call *Fraser's* passionate campaign against the fashionable novel “the resentment of the ill-paid and ill-respected man of talent against the tyranny of exclusivism”⁸⁹—and the tyranny of amateurism. Hence Thomas Love Peacock's satirical attack via the mouthpiece of Lady Clarinda in *Crotchet Castle*:

⁸⁷ Lady Sydney Morgan and William Hepworth Dixon, *Lady Morgan's Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries and Correspondence*, 2 vols., (London: Allen and Co, 1863), 2.74.

⁸⁸ Muirreann Ó'Cinnéide, *Aristocratic Women and the Literary Nation, 1832-1867* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 54.

⁸⁹ Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 169.

You must know I had been reading several fashionable novels, the fashionable this, and the fashionable that; and I thought to myself, why, I can do better than any of these myself. So I wrote a chapter or two, and sent them as a specimen to Mr. Puffall, the bookseller, telling him they were to be a part of the fashionable something or other, and he offered me, I will not say how much, to finish it in three volumes, and let him pay all the newspapers for recommending it as the work of a lady of quality, who had made very free with the characters of her acquaintance.⁹⁰

Echoing the language of “freedom” in the puff of *Vivian Grey* attributed to Colburn, this passage bitinglly condemns multiple fictions of amateur authorship: the idea that the amateur can produce better work than the professional; the flippant notion that one can just write “a chapter or two”; and the fact that Colburn (Mr. Puffall) solicits Lady Clarinda to finish the work rather than the other way around.

The reality, of course, is that many of Colburn’s authors—Lady Charlotte Campbell herself, for one, and his prolific author Catherine Gore—were professionals who wrote to support large families. And like Catherine Gore or Disraeli, many were also not aristocratic or had only tangential connections to the aristocracy or even to fashion, an open secret that reviewers pretended to assume no one understood, although the ferocity with which critics revealed it makes widespread ignorance more than unlikely. An exchange between two characters of John Wilson’s long-running *Noctes Ambrosianae* in *Blackwood’s* calls just such attention to puffing’s obfuscation of the author: “[P]uff after puff continues to excite fading curiosity, and Colburn, knowing all the while that the writer [of *Vivian Grey*] is an obscure

⁹⁰ Thomas Love Peacock, *Crotchet Castle* (London: T. Hookman, 1831), 96.

person, for whom nobody cares a straw, chuckles over the temporary sale.”⁹¹ This invective suggests the extent to which the authorization of a writer as fashionable could trump anonymity and a dubious critical reception. And if the fact that it was so widely talked about raises the question of whether or not anybody believed that dilettante aristocrats were writing the novels, it really seems not to have mattered. Disraeli’s authorship was exposed fairly quickly—*The London Magazine* was one of several periodicals to reveal his authorship in June with a snide comment about “hospitality to serpents, and stinging, and all that.”⁹²

Vivian Grey nevertheless found a ready audience. Even *Fraser’s* admits as much, claiming, in a retrospective of Disraeli’s work, that the novel “was eagerly read. The bold handling, and almost reckless power; the views of society, if often impudently false, still strikingly original and coherent; the graphic portraiture; the dashing satire and glowing sentiment with which its pages abounded, supplied an irresistible stimulus to the literary appetite of the day.”⁹³

Impudent falseness, however, does not negate the book’s “graphic portraiture” and “dashing satire.” Rather the reviewer’s characterization here is silently turning the narrative voice into a figure for Vivian Grey himself, who could just as easily be described as “bold,” “reckless,” “impudent,” “strikingly original,” “dashing,” and “glowing.” In fact, in Colburn’s puff he is described as having “talent, personal advantage, and audacity.” In the novel, we learn that even as a child:

⁹¹ John Wilson, William Maginn, J.G. Lockhard, and James Hogg, *Noctes Ambrosianæ* IV.XXVII (July 1826), 98.

⁹² Leigh Hunt, “Newspaper Chat,” in *The Examiner* (4 June 1826), 361.

⁹³ Francis, G.H. “Literary Legislators (No. I): Mr. B. Disraeli.” *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* 35 (January 1847), 82.

He had long ceased to wear frills, had broached the subject of boots three or four times, made a sad inroad during the holidays in Mr. Grey's bottle of claret, and was reported as having once sworn at the butler . . . the former advocate of straight hair now expended a portion of his infant income in the purchase of Macassar, and began to cultivate his curls.⁹⁴

Such passages enable the *Fraser's* review to identify narrator with character by characterizing the narrator in terms otherwise applicable to the character—and not incidentally tend to suggest Vivian Grey as a stand-in for the rather dashing Disraeli himself. It is not Disraeli's aristocratic access that makes him successful, but, ironically, his ability to create the fiction of that access by allowing the narrator's gaze, which here stands in for an anonymous insider author, to slip continually back to himself. This rather complicated network of identifications calculatedly collapses the difference between author, narrator, and character. In becoming "the dictator of certain circles in fashionable life," as Colburn's puff asserts, Vivian takes over the position of authoring fashion (its "dictator") while Disraeli produces the withdrawal from authoring the novel as a novel. The alleged author of the "history" is merely "describing" those arenas of high life in which he has circulated. He has no creative function; he asks for no literary praise. This failure of authorship turns out to authorize its author as fashionable, because it suggests that the anonymous author is actually the character whose experiences he is narrating. If Vivian is actually the narrator, who is the author on whom the character is based, then by disclaiming his authorship, the fashionable novel's narrator authors not a novel but fashion itself.

⁹⁴ Benjamin Disraeli, *Vivian Grey*, 3 vols. (London: H. Colburn, 1826), 1:3.

The consequences of this metaleptic collapsing of identifications were borne out by Edward Bulwer-Lytton's slightly later *Pelham* (Colburn, 1828). In *Pelham*, said to be inspired by and certainly very similar to *Vivian Grey*, the young dandy of the title rejects the blue-and-buff evening dress earlier instituted by Regency dandy Beau Brummell in favor of, on his mother's recommendation, the naturally exclusive black, which only suits people who are already "very distingué."⁹⁵ Pelham's black evening clothes are frequently said to have single-handedly made black fashionable for men's eveningwear. So while other novels have of course spawned imitative fashions (e.g. *Barnaby Rudge* and the "Dolly Varden" dress), Pelham—and Bulwer-Lytton—explicitly might be said to have created a fashion by seeming not quite to be authoring a novel.

II. Authorial Abjuration

Despite Colburn's strenuous marketing, what we get inside the novels is definitely no such pretension to accuracy.⁹⁶ Vivian Grey's "dictation" of circles of fashion and Pelham's creation of a new style arise from the texts' abjuration of exactly the kind of accuracy that Colburn's puffs claimed for them. This abjuration took the form of flippancy, a pose of insouciance and indifference that earned Disraeli, at least, "a reputation for insincerity" as

⁹⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Pelham*, (London: H. Colburn, 1828), 1.27.

⁹⁶ There certainly are fashionable novels that do claim some sort accuracy. Wilson points out several examples in her chapter "The World of Ton" (27-52). What I am suggesting here is that a majority of fashionable novels and particularly the handful of "dandy novels" that inaugurated the genre in the mid-1820s assert no such verisimilitude.

well as “egocentricity.”⁹⁷ In Lord Normanby’s *Yes and No* (Colburn, 1826), the fashionable character Fitzalbert more than once dismisses the so-called accuracy of fashionable novels, for example calling for beer as he insists that their authors always depict the elect as drinking wine. Later, he sums up the formula for a fashionable novel as being composed by “a gentlemanly man, with a gentlemanly style, take of foolscap paper a few quires; stuff them well with high sounding titles ... open the Peerage at random, pick a supposititious author out of one page of it, and fix the imaginary characters upon some of the rest; mix it all up with a quantum sufficiency of puff.”⁹⁸ No doubt the implication is that *this* fashionable novel is more accurate than the ones that it dismisses exactly because it dismisses the ability of the novels to be accurate. At the same time, the description accurately points to the fact that fashionable authors necessarily strike a pose of flippancy through which they abjure the work of authorship. This attitude of flippancy was widely—and pejoratively—understood as constitutive of the genre. Frederick Marryat indicates as much in a satire pointedly termed “How to Write a Fashionable Novel”: “There are three important requisites in the diction of a fashionable novel. The first ... is—flippancy; the second, flippancy, and flippancy is also the third.”⁹⁹ Flippancy can certainly be identified in the work of earlier writers; what is important here is the author-narrator’s specific position of flippancy toward his own act of literary creation.

⁹⁷ Robert O’Kell, “Disraeli’s ‘Coningsby’: Political Manifesto or Psychological Romance?,” in *Victorian Studies* 23.1 (Autumn 1979), 58, 65.

⁹⁸ Constantine Henry Phipps (Marquis of Normanby), *Yes and No: A Tale of the Day*, 2 vols., (London: Colburn, 1828), 1:135-37.

⁹⁹ Frederick Marryat, “How to Write a Fashionable Novel,” in *Olla Podrida*, 3 vols., (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1840), 1.204.

This flippancy, of course, is not casually flippant at all but is produced by the text's construction of an abjuring author. Following up the success of his *Vivian Grey* with *The Young Duke* (1831), a less ambitious but more formally self-aware novel, Disraeli reveals his control over the kind of crafted authorial abjurations that led to labeling a fashionable author flippant. Even the title's winking self-consciousness advertises its awareness of the genre's conventions, a consciousness that the novel's preface explicitly states:

The great mass of my readers ... will attribute the shades that flit about these volumes to any substance they please. That smaller portion of society, who are most competent to decide upon the subject, will instantly observe that however I may have availed myself of a trait, or an incident, and often inadvertently, the whole is ideal.¹⁰⁰

This narrator suggests that two different interpretive communities determine the novel's approach towards representation: it is a piece of realistic scandal fiction to the middle classes while, to London's fashionables, it registers as a social commentary on a fashionable world in general rather than particular. Here, the preface suggests that the author's position has nothing to do with the book's accuracy, which relies instead on the reader's own privileged information. Although this preface is certainly calculated as a response to the critical skewering that Disraeli received after the publication of *Vivian Grey*, it also self-consciously creates an author who openly and forthrightly disavows the assumption of inside knowledge. By destabilizing genre, it in fact makes such dismissive authorship a generic identifier.

The publisher's preface to *The Young Duke* further minimizes the author's importance: "In the absence of the author, who is abroad, the Publishers think it necessary to add, that

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Disraeli, *The Young Duke: A Moral Tale, Though Gay*, 3 vols., (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831), 1:iii. Further citations will be given parenthetically.

the present novel was written before the accession of his present majesty. The reader, as he peruses the volumes, will see the necessity of this explanation” (1:iii-iv). Not only is the author missing but the novel is also temporally dislocated, indeed not at all transparent window onto a present moment. The author’s preface also reinforces this distance and offers an excuse for the narrator’s inattention by abstracting himself not only from responsibility for the book but from England itself: “There is a partial distress, or universal,—and the affairs of India must really be settled; but we must also be amused. I send over my quota; for, though absent, I am a patriot” (1:iv). And in fact, Disraeli was not in England at the book’s publication, although he was touring the Continent rather than dealing with an Indian crisis.

These two prefaces explicitly absent the narrator from the text in both space and time and suggest an alignment between the narrator and author then confirmed by the use of “I” throughout the subsequent story. They also gestures to an interest in the narrator’s presences and absences that continues in the body of the novel, as for example the narrator’s announcement of his own impending departure: “And so, farewell, my country! ... I cast my fortunes on the waters ... My gentle reader!—gentle you have been to me, and ever kind—broad seas, and broader lands, divide us” (2:238). In contrast, the events of the thinly didactic plot—George Augustus Frederick, the Duke of St. James, sets out on a course of London dissipation until his uncle educates him into eschewing the extravagances of fashion for a sober political career, domestic marriage, and placid country life—rarely hold the narrator’s interest for long. Frequent first-person interruptions paradoxically bolster the author’s observations by locating the narrator’s perspective within the book’s diegetic world while they also abstract him from the scene. Diegetic physical absence becomes a studied

abjuration of the work of authorship as the narrator insincerely repents of his insouciant style: “in future, it is my intention to develop more, and to describe, and to delineate, and to define, and, in short,—to bore. You know the model of this kind of writing—Richardson, whom I shall revive” (3:38). In this figuration, Richardson achieves his narratological end—the fiction of recordation rather than creation, similar in that regard to a fashionable narrative—through sedulous labor, as opposed to the rapidity and flippancy of *The Young Duke’s* style. Early on, the narrator describes this style on as though the act of writing simultaneously calls into being a theory of authorship: “I see the only way is to rattle on just as you walk. The moment that you anticipate your pen in forming a sentence, you get as stiff as a gentleman in stays” (1:60).

Horror of such unfashionable authorship, the “imperturbable propriety” of the narrator’s “fellow-scribblers” (2:226), is consistent with the fact that work of any kind undermines the fashionable. It is through fashion that this genre differentiates its authorial strategies from the realism of Richardson and Defoe or, indeed, the studied spontaneity of Byron or Wordsworth (an important distinction between this more formally self-aware novel and the earlier *Vivian Grey*, which many reviewers noted as a prose *Don Juan*). Towards the end of a three-day gambling debauch, for instance, the Duke sits with several men who are trying to ruin him: “There they sat, ankle deep in cards. No attempt at breakfast now—no affectation of making a toilette, or airing the room” (2:71). Gambling becomes serious when a fortune rests upon the outcome, and at that moment it also ceases to be fashionable. In just this sense, the narrator preserves his fashionability by enacting through his authorship the logic of fashion as denial of work.

Nor should we be surprised that *The Young Duke's* narrator lays claim to a position outside of fashion.¹⁰¹ Wryly disavowing insidership, he pairs his flippant authorship with (quite fashionable) indifference to fashion, explaining of an earlier work (*Vivian Grey*, perhaps?) that “the cant of the clique was wanting, and the freemasons discovered I was not a brother. I am sure I had no wish, and no intention, to mingle in their ranks. I dressed some crude inventions in a thoughtless style, without any idea my page would live beyond the week that gave it birth” (2:223). On one level, the narrator’s position outside fashion excuses the ignorance with which reviewers and readers frequently charged Disraeli. But this supposed ignorance is consistent with the pose consistently adopted by fashionable characters and narrators within the genre. Pelham, for example, by the end of the novel has renounced his former desire to live in the fashionable eye and bides his time until he can assume a political position. This stance outside of fashion is consistent with the narrator’s insouciant attitude towards accuracy. A novel of fashion does not, Disraeli’s narrator suggests, bear a one-to-one relationship to the world of fashion. Belabored accuracy in fact would end up deauthorizing the novel, because clumsy avowals of insider knowledge reveal the narrator to be hopelessly unfashionable. Just so, Normanby’s Fitzalbert mocks would-be fashionable authors who diligently convey the information that “a fork, not a knife, should be the active agent in carrying food to the mouth ... young ladies should be dieted on the wings of boiled chickens, and fine gentlemen should quaff nought but hock and soda-water”

¹⁰¹ Many critical accounts accept the author’s claim to inclusion, as, for example, Ó’Cinnéide’s assertion that Thackeray’s satirical gesture of placing himself outside the doors of fashion shows him “deliberately [reversing] the foundation of silver fork authorship” (56). In the context of my argument, Thackeray would seem to be mimicking a common fashionable trope.

(1:135-37). And so the narrator's final abjuration is this suggestion that he is, after all, disinterested in fashion.

That disinterest may appear to sit uneasily with the novels' frequent invocations of fashionable details. *The Young Duke's* narrator, for example, refers to the "cotillion and the quadrille, the waltz, and the galloppe" (1:79); the fricandeau, fricassee, ragout, beafico, and condé soups of fashionable dinners; the dressmaker Maradan, singers Henriette Sontag and Maria Malibran; the popularity of blonde lace; not to mention his brief summary of new fashions in masculinity: "A new race of adventurous youths appeared upon the stage. Beards, and great-coats even rougher, bull-dogs instead of poodles, clubs instead of canes, segars instead of perfumes, were the order of the day. There was no end to boatracing; Crockford's sneered at White's; and there was even talk of reviving the ring" (3:96-95). As with Normanby's dismissal of the items of fashion, however, the shrugging off of fashionability elsewhere precisely authorizes Disraeli's extensive list of fashionable goods as fashionable. The narrator is interested primarily in himself: "a slight egotism," he says with wry understatement, "is my weakness" (1:199). By the second volume, this egotism has become "my vanity, my conceit, my affectation, my arrogance" (2:226), with a flippancy of style that, as we have learned, is exactly what authorizes him as fashionable despite his disavowals. By continually turning the mirror upon himself, *The Young Duke's* narrator constructs a model of authorship interested not in establishing his authority but in establishing a *lack* of authority, a coherent statement of the various expressions of amateur authorship ventured in earlier novels and in the publishing house that brought them to fruition. This trope of amateurism, which would seem to make the author's reliable access to a fashionable world an absolute condition of its epistemological claims to transparency, in

fact turns the access into a negligible qualification. By enacting in its narrative form the logic of fashion as abjuration, what he authors can be read not as a novel—but, as with Pelham’s black coat, fashion itself.

The way in which this affectation of authorial abjuration rested on a trope of the amateur appears to have been recognized as a feature of the genre. In a caricature of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, one of Disraeli’s contemporaries in the early days of the fashionable novel, *Fraser’s* offers an interpretation of the author’s role. Drawn by Daniel Maclise, the image (Figure 2) shows Bulwer-Lytton grooming himself before a mirror. Editor William Maginn’s accompanying text reads: “clothed in a *robe de nuit* far more flowing than the numbers of his *Milton, a Poem*, looks with charmed eyes upon the scene before him, and exclaims, with all the rapture of a satisfied editor, ‘What a charming article! Worth any thing per sheet!’ We have taken him just on the eve of publication, revising his last proof the moment before coming out.”¹⁰² On the surface, as Carol Brock notes, the drawing appears to identify Bulwer’s body with the fashionable novel as object. But the image can be read with another level of complexity: it is not the author’s body but the image in its entirety that constitutes the publication, and so the interest of a fashionable novel lies in watching the author watch himself, becoming the character who draws the narrator’s focus. It is a mode of authorship that, contrary to the expectations raised by Colburn’s puffing, does not depend on the author’s title or access but on style alone.

III. Idle Affectation, Authored

¹⁰² William Maginn, “Gallery of Literary Characters No. XXVII. Edward Lytton Bulwer, Esq,” *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* 31.6 (August 1832), 112-13.

By the time Bury was writing, or editing, *Diary Illustrative*, she had authored a small shelf-full of fashionable novels, including the highly self-conscious *Flirtation* (Colburn, 1828); *The Exclusives* (Colburn and Bentley, 1830); *The Separation* (Colburn and Bentley, 1830); and *The Divorced* (Colburn, 1837). Although *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth* may indeed be based on an authentic diary, repeated narrative moves within the diary suggest that the published version self-consciously conforms to the generic expectations of the fashionable novel. Early in the first of what would eventually come to be four volumes, the narrator claims that she wishes to abjure the fashionable world.¹⁰³ “I often say to myself in society, ‘*Ou trouverai-je ma place?*,’” she cries: “Total retirement, secondary intellect, secondary rank does not suit me—yet the world and the first circles, and the wittiest and the prettiest suit me not either—’tis no affectation, ’tis a melancholy truth” (1.39). *Au contraire*, as the Francophilic reader of fashionable novels might demur. Affected distaste for fashionable society is merely the genre’s conventional dismissal, and here it forms one of a set of conventions upon which *The Diary Illustrative* rest both its *ton* and its truthfulness, and to which I will now turn: the studied adoption of a tenuous pseudonymity; inaccuracies that guarantee the author’s fashionable inattention to her work; and the bewildering creation of the first-person fashionable narrator as a character who forms the third-person subject of narration. Through these devices, the professional authoress Charlotte Bury constructs an abjuring narrator who is identified with the amateur author. That amateur author is

¹⁰³ I use “she” and “her” throughout this discussion despite the text’s affectation of a male diarist, because there was apparently never even a pretense of believing that the diary actually stemmed from a male hand.

responsible for the text's flippancy, which in turn guarantees the author-narrator-character is fashionable, and truthful, rather than professional and creative.

Aided no doubt by Colburn's own insinuations (in fact, he published the book a year later with Bury's name on the title page), the book's provenance went largely unquestioned despite its ostensibly male narrator: "It were a piece of idle affectation," says Christian Isobel Johnstone, the *Tait Edinburgh's* reviewer, "not at once to recognize her [Lady Charlotte] as the author and editor of the work."¹⁰⁴ Although the *Diary Illustrative* is blithely unconcerned with dates, it runs from approximately 1809 to 1815, years during which, according to Alison Adburgham's account of her life, Lady Charlotte Campbell (later Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury), the widow of an indigent husband, took a position as lady-in-waiting to the disgraced Princess Caroline. Despite its title, the text has little to say about the former Prince of Wales instead choosing to devote the majority of its entries to anatomize Caroline's character and habits in a most unflattering way.

Although the publication opens with a claim that "[t]he authenticity of the following Diary and Letters is too apparent to be questioned," the numerous factual and linguistic errors might prompt incredulity. A reviewer in the *London Quarterly Review* execrates the text's apparent carelessness, particularly its insouciant—or perhaps flippant—misuses of gender: "Sometimes a German Philander, when making a civil speech, 'takes the hand' of the *soi-disant* lord, 'and presses it,'" the reviewer says, "or, when talking to *him* of religion, says—"Vows etes

¹⁰⁴ Johnstone, 177. Anonymity may not anyway have suggested actual ignorance, as Raven suggests: "The absence of a name on a title page is not quite the same as saying that a reader was kept in the dark about the identity of a novel's author. Our new research base offers a profile of varying levels of anonymous publication" (144).

*Protestante.*¹⁰⁵ Anne Hayman, also a lady-in-waiting, found the unsuccessful gender masquerade so distasteful that she referred to the diarist as “Hermaphrodite.”¹⁰⁶ The preface, however, explains away such apparent accidents, also evident in mix-ups around text’s chronology: “The reader,” it says, “cannot fail to notice certain discrepancies which occur in the work, and more particularly in the earlier portions of it, by which it would appear to have been the intention of the editor who first undertook to prepare it for the press, to disguise [it]” (n. pg). This note relocates the author in a position of authority in relation to the object of knowledge. For one, the author is firmly distanced from the text. And more, discrepancies that might otherwise cast the authorship of the text into doubt turn out to sustain the narrative’s claim to authenticity, creeping in only when the editor or author needs to disguise a truth so powerful that it might otherwise break through the *Diary*’s anonymity. Disguise becomes a virtue rather than a point of suspicion, error a register of truth rather than fiction. In the context of the narrative, these linguistic irruptions, which signal hack authorship to the—perhaps affectedly—outraged reviewer, reveal the text’s epistemological guarantee by underscoring the author’s need to signal her disguise.

The paradoxically secretive and revelatory structure continues throughout the entire diary, an ostensibly anonymous first-person record that has necessarily to depict its author in the third person. Referring to herself, the *Diary*’s narrator produces its supposed author as a character within the text. She writes, “I observed ... a great coldness between Lord Lucan and Lady C. Campbell. I asked her ladyship the reason of it, and she said, ‘It is perfectly true

¹⁰⁵ *London Quarterly Review* CXXI (1838), 83.

¹⁰⁶ in Graziano Paolo Clerici and Frederik Chapman, *A Queen of Indiscretions: The tragedy of Caroline of Brunswick, Queen of England* (London: John Lane, 1907), 342-43.

that he does avoid me; —but why I know not. I will ascertain the reason, however, and if I find it out, I will tell you” (2:75). Bury then reveals what “Lady C. Campbell” has discovered: Lord Lucan shuns her so he can also avoid the Princess’s society, to which revelation Bury “had not a word to say.” By casting “Lady C. Campbell” separately from herself, the diarist creates an authorial distance from the narrated event and undermines the generic expectations of the diary while at the same time silencing herself by substituting a different, authorial, and third-person limited narrator who does not comment on the revelations of her second self. Youngest daughter of the fifth Duke of Argyll, Bury gained the last name “Campbell” at her marriage in 1796 to the indigent John Campbell, while “Bury” comes from her second husband, the also fiscally imprudent Reverend Edward John Bury, whom she married in 1818 after leaving Caroline’s service. The name “Campbell” thus brings temporal distance to bear on this 1838 publication, instituting an authorial space between the Lady Charlotte Bury presumed to be the diary’s anonymous author, and the younger, widowed Lady Charlotte Campbell who is both the homodiegetic narrator and a separate character within the pages: another trick of the absentee fashionable author.

The separation between the *Diary*’s observing narrator and Bury’s additional fictional presence in these scenes creates an almost schizophrenic effect, not only in the at least partly fictional conversation related in the previous paragraph but also in such moments as when the narrator writes, “things, I trust, are going to change during Lady Charlotte Campbell’s and my reign, or else we shall be obliged to suffer much, and ultimately to quit her service” (2:191). Here, the author is refracted into the text, creating the narrator as a character within the novel in a move that recalls the authorial egoism of *The Young Duke*. References to Lady Charlotte Campbell become increasingly common in the second volume, and attention to

her position within the Princess's household comes to hold the text's primary interest. The split of author and character, an abjuration of the diarist's first-person authority, creates a narrating and retrospective voice that fashionably disavows interior knowledge, even when the consequences border on the absurd: "Lady Charlotte Campbell is a sweet-mannered person," the narrator says, but "I should not say she was a happy one" (2:190). At least one reader of the text understandably found such moments full of "smirking self-complacency."¹⁰⁷ More interesting, though, is that such a pretense of second-hand observation, which appears to disavow truly inside knowledge, contains a rather complex truth claim. The diarist, who in fact is Lady Campbell herself, does not aver knowledge of an interior truth about her third-person, but really first-person, subject, because to claim to know an interior truth about Lady Campbell would imply that the subject and object of the narrative were one. Such a work would no longer be anonymous and fictive—like a fashionable novel—but named and titled: open and grasping, and thus assuredly not fashionable. Anonymity guards not against libel, as with earlier modes of scandalous writing, but loss of caste.

The fear of lost of caste is one of several differences between this text and the genre with which it was frequently aligned, the scandalous writing identified with female scribblers of well over a century earlier. Such earlier scandalous tales often took the form of secret histories, and, given that Colburn's 1839 edition of the book inserted *Secret History of the Court* into the title, it is not surprising that contemporary readers pointed to these generic allegiances. According to Johnstone, the *Diary* was "the most scandalous publication that

¹⁰⁷ Clerici and Chapman, xlix.

ever disgraced English, or any other European literature, not excepting the works of Mrs. Manly [*sic*].”¹⁰⁸ More casual readers also saw similarities between the *Diary* and earlier scandal narratives, as in Lady Morgan’s entry in her journal: “The murder is out! There is the *Diary* in everybody’s hands, and since the publication of the *New Atlantis* by Mrs. Manley, in the reign of Queen Anne—a scandal, a libel on the queen, people, and court of that day—such a book has not been seen, written, nor read.”¹⁰⁹ The point of reference here is Delarivier Manley’s *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality of Both Sexes, From the New Atalantis, an Island in the Mediterranean* (1709). Variouslly called a scandal narrative, allegorical fiction, or amatory fiction, the text conveys political and sexual scandals—often one and the same—under the rubric of mythology. Scandal narrative is certainly the most obvious antecedent for the fashionable novel’s particular claim to tell the truth about aristocratic or royal life, and it is understandable why, a century later, readers might have identified *Diary Illustrative* with scandalous publications.

And yet important differences distinguish Bury’s *Diary* from Manley’s allegory. Manley, like Aphra Behn, whose earlier *Love-Letters* provided a model for Manley’s text, fictionalizes by turning the scandal into an “emblematic or mythic narrative,” a move that can be historically understood in the context of allegorical writing in the seventeenth century.¹¹⁰ The

¹⁰⁸ Johnstone, 82.

¹⁰⁹ Lady Sydney Morgan and William Hepworth Dixon, *Lady Morgan’s Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries and Correspondence*, 2 vols., (London: Allen and Co, 1862), 2:431.

¹¹⁰ Rosalind Ballaster, “Introduction,” *The New Atalantis* (New York: Penguin, 1991), ix. Catherine Gallagher and Rosalind Ballaster are two of Manley’s most important recent critics. In *Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740* (New York: Clarendon, 1992), Ballaster suggests that Manley resists male articulations of femininity by mixing categories—personal and private, truth and fiction, sex and sympathy—in order to reveal the

heterodiegetic narrator of *The New Atalantis* is a mythologized figure who participates in a dialogue about the text's scandals, so, while Manley's position in relation to the scandals is certainly crucial to the novel's claim to truth, the text itself does not make her authorship a condition of the narrative. Despite Manley's brief insertion of herself as a narrator within the text, the narrative perspective remains distinct from the scandalous world, and the narrating characters, as Michael McKeon observes, are "ontologically unique."¹¹¹ Lady Charlotte's scandalous diary, by contrast, constructs a narrator who inhabits the world she describes and who enacts the authorial conventions of fashionable fiction. These differences speak to changes in the mode of professionalization under which both texts operate.

First is the way in which the authors lay claim to ownership of their text. Catherine Gallagher sees Manley's work as operating in a mode of politics and patronage, designed to avoid censorship and libel charges in a publishing world that oriented around the Licensing Act of 1662. Her authorship, then, is created in dialogue with governmental agencies. *The Diary Illustrative*, however, already operates within the structure of a copyright mode of authorship that had developed after the Statue of Anne, passed in 1710, a year after *The New Atalantis's* publication. It is fully immersed in a marketplace in which authors rather than publishers are seen as the owners of the work, and it is precisely that link that the fiction of fashionable authorship pretends to sever by vesting authority in the publisher and denying the creation of value in the text through originality and personality. This rejection of ownership is coded as fashionable, a relationship that I will further explore in Chapter Two.

instability of such categories. I will treat Gallagher's argument more thoroughly in the following paragraphs.

¹¹¹ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2006), 589-97.

Second, as Gallagher has argued, Manley's work takes place in the context of the development of the category of fictionality itself that is arising through allegory. These writers, she suggests, used allegory to avoid libel, spawning imaginative scenarios that authors then use to escape allegorizing by applying fictive tropes to Nobody rather than Somebody. *The Diary Illustrative*, in contrast, operates within a context of already established fictionality. Bury, one of Colburn's regular authors, was an experienced writer of novels, and the *Diary Illustrative* occupied a genre that, whatever connection it might have to some sort of reality, was engaged with an audience and produced by authors well versed in the conventions of fictional realism. Its amateur authorship is a sophisticated play that already requires fiction as a formal category.

In the anecdotal episode that immediately precedes the epigraph with which this essay opens, the necessity of fiction as a formal structure within which the *Diary* operates becomes especially apparent. The diarist relates a night at the opera, inadvertently attended by both the Princess and Regent. The other attendees applaud the Princess, but the Regent, assuming they applaud him, bows to the audience. The direction of his bow suggests that he is bowing towards his estranged wife, which, as Bury (at this point Lady Charlotte Campbell) and the Princess know, he certainly is not. The Princess correctly does not return the bow, since she understands it to be directed not at her but at the people. Yet the Princess was widely believed to have refused to return the Regent's bow. The diarist reflects on the incident:

I believe she acted perfectly right throughout the entire evening—but every body tells a different story, and thinks differently.—How trivial all this seems ... But trifles make up the sum of earthly things ... therefore it becomes of consequence for the

true statement to be made known; and as I was present, I can and will tell the truth.

(1:333)

More important for us here than the familiar argument for the importance of trivialities is the passage's claim to truth: "it becomes of consequence for the true statements to be made known; and as I was present, I can and will tell the truth." As the semicolon marks a shift from tortured, passive to active, agented prose, the conditions of truth change as well. Truth, the opening clause of her last sentence suggests, exists as a "true statement" independent of any teller. But in the following sentence, the narrator modulates that initial passivity to "I will tell the truth." That is, she moves from an interior conviction based on interpretation, an "I believe" that could be as right or wrong as "every body" else's "different story"; to an ontological truth that needs no authorization; to finally an exterior truth based on presence. To be made widely known, that external truth must be relayed by a particular kind of narrator, one who has abjured her stake in fashion *qua* fashion and substitutes, instead, an insistence on truth: "as I was present, I can and will tell the truth." Fashionable authorship in this formulation becomes an ethical imperative, and the epistemological stakes of a fashionable novel require that esoteric truth be spread about through a particular kind of telling. So, while these scenes may at a glance bear a superficial similarity to a legalistic, eyewitness epistemology, the *Diary*, drawing from the generic conditions of fashionable authorship, offers a different sort of revelation, one that can be relayed only through a layered process of denial and disavowal, because fashionable knowledge can only ever be narrowly known and only professed when it is disavowed. If widely known and avowed, it is probably not true and certainly not fashionable—and truth, this novelist asserts, in kind with a long tradition of novelists, has an imperative to be told.

Curiously, the diarist's modulations within this passage end up equating her conclusion with her opening premise. "I believe," she says, and then "I will tell the truth." In this formulation, her belief becomes nothing more or less than the truth. In that small turn, the *Diary Illustrative* can be seen as something rather different than scandalous secret histories. It is a sophisticated fictionalization of events that, while historically and publicly true, lack narrative truth before they are couched within the fiction of a fashionable author, whose peculiar authority of disavowal legitimates her story. In this reading, the genre marshals a particular kind of professional authorship by a woman who, at this point, was quite the professional author—and whose success depended on that disavowal of professionalization not because she was a woman but because she was producing a fashionable novel. This creation within the text of an aristocratic subject disavowing ownership of her labor has the twin effects of producing truth, and also of situating the author outside of a marketplace within which her book is a commodity. It thus creates the author as fashionable and, by extension, the text.

In fact, her insistence in this episode on bodily presence is situated within a larger structure of abstraction from a capitalist marketplace. At the end of the *Diary Illustrative's* second volume are a number of letters circulated between various members of Caroline's court. These letters are so couched in anonymity that by the time the final letter opens—titled merely "from same to same"—it is quite difficult to identify lector and epistler, although it is, in fact, written by the diarist. It closes thus: "I hear unsatisfactory accounts of the poor Princess of Wales. I am afraid she is going to destruction; not an English attendant left, and the vile Italian cormorants are ruining her . . . Is there no hand can be outstretched to save her?" (2:307). Here, the writer informs the attentive reader that she herself has left

the Princess's company: she has only "heard" this news rather than experiencing it herself. While the letter may be accurate, she has now abdicated her claims to presentness and presence, the two conditions upon which the fiction of a titled author granting transparent access to a fashionable world would seem most to rely. Has, then, at the end of the book the author moved toward abstraction in a way that almost radically contradicts the structure of truth she has been building throughout?

She has not. This abstraction of the author from the text, along with the numerous errors and discrepancies, look very much like the sort of abstraction-as-inattention that Sharon Marcus identifies as working in *Jane Eyre*, in concert with other forms of abstraction, to produce professionalization by mediating between apparently contradictory categories of female authorship in a capitalist marketplace.¹¹² The *Diary Illustrative*, however, works both within and against this marketplace of authors. It offers a limit case of the abstraction of the self from writing, because it collapses apparent differences between author, narrator, and character by embodying abstraction. As in *The Young Duke*, the *Diary Illustrative* ends up physically abstracting the authoring body in a move that paradoxically re-inserts that body into the novel through the act of *not* authoring, sidelining writing as an incidental amateur activity rather than abstracted professional experience. These abstractions are unwittingly called forth by John Wilson Croker in *The Quarterly Review*, when he decides to "forget as much as we can" the authorship of the text, and "to deal with it merely as the production of

¹¹² Sharon Marcus, "The Profession of the Author: Abstraction, Advertising, and Jane Eyre," in *PMLA* 110.2 (March 1995), 207.

a *Lady-in-Waiting* on the late Queen Caroline.”¹¹³ Croker writes as though he is working against the text’s intent when in fact he is doing exactly what the narrator’s abjurations are supposed to effect: to forget that there is a professional author at work behind the curtain. When the narrative abstracts the diarist from the text, only Bury is left: the professional author who has managed these conventions in order to produce the fashionable author, constructing the absence of the fashionable body as the guarantee of fashion. The author is, indeed, nobody: a nobody who could potentially be anybody—but is not.

And so the tautology of fashionable authorship that I identified at the beginning of this chapter—that the source of fashionable knowledge guarantees its truth, and the truth its source—turns out in fact to be a paradox: fashionable novels rely on an abstracted authorial body that is re-inserted into the text in order to provide the fiction of embodied access. This paradox is fashionable in nature, and it is merely one of a set of carefully managed paradoxes that I am arguing constitute the formal innovations of fashionable novels and to which I hope this first chapter has helped call attention. In this contradictory way, fashionable novels—a genre professionals produced as by amateurs about amateurs—may be seen to be a crucial part of the larger story of the nineteenth-century novel. The fashionable novel insisted that fashionable authors were amateurs who in fact did possess specialized knowledge, not because they were professionals but because they were not. Through their rejection of professionalization, fashionable novelists created the a means by which the fashionable author alone could resist commodification.

¹¹³ John Wilson Croker, “Diary of the Times of George IV [by Lady Bury],” *The Quarterly Review* 61 (January 1838), 150.

GRANBY.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON

HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1826.

Figure 1 Title page of T. H. Lister's anonymously published *Granby*



Figure 2 Edward Bulwer-Lytton, drawn for *Fraser's* by Daniel Maclise

Chapter 2. A Matter of Time: Objects and Things in the Fashionable Novel

She was gifted with the kind of coolness that you can't acquire by buying the right handbag or the right pair of jeans.

Cecily von Ziegesar, *Gossip Girl*

Fashion remains fashion, because the fashion does not remain the fashion.

Ingrid Loschek

With their ungainly proportions—a high, narrow armscythe, voluminous midsection, and tightly cuffed wrists—gigot sleeves were execrated as “idiot sleeves” even during their stint at the height of fashion, from about 1825 to 1835.¹¹⁴ Constantine Henry Phipps, later 1st Marquess of Normanby, nods at both their popularity and their absurdity in a satirical moment of his fashionable novel *Yes and No: A Tale of the Day* (1827), when an imaginary country family comes to visit London. Squeezed uncomfortably into a carriage, sisters Selina and Georgina “[insist] upon ample space for their lower garments, and elbow room for their gigot sleeves.”¹¹⁵

Normanby’s scornful tone aside, the ability of fashionable novels to transmit information about fashion that can be taken as true, such as the popularity of gigot sleeves or the impossibly tight trousers that prohibit Selina and Georgina’s brother from bending his

¹¹⁴ Widespread in the seventeenth century, they resurged in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, then again lay at rest until the 1890s. For specifics of costume history, see Henry H. Hansen, *Costumes and Styles: The Evolution of Fashion From Early Egypt to the Present* (1973; E.P. Dutton, 1973). Also see Jane Ashelford, *The Art of Dress: Clothing and Society 1500-1914* (New York: Abrams, 1996).

¹¹⁵ Constantine Henry Phipps, Marquis of Normanby, *Yes and No: A Tale of the Day*, 2 vol., (London: Colburn, 1828), 2.2. All further references will be given from this edition and cited parenthetically.

knees, has often been taken to motivate the fashionable genre.¹¹⁶ Besides sleeves and trousers, both the narrator and the fashionable hero of *Yes and No* invoke Sevre's [*sic*] coffee cups, London dressmaker Madame Maradan Carson, and Parisian milliner Herbault. When the Comtesse Leinsengen in Lady Charlotte Bury's *The Exclusives* (1830) approaches Lady Tilney, the narrator notes her "still long petticoats" and then adds in an aside that they are "generally worn very much shortened."¹¹⁷ In Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826), the titular hero tells his host, after complaining that his wine is "not exactly from the favourite bin of Prince Metternich," to "decant your Johannisberg and ice your Marachino."¹¹⁸ The novels repeatedly present specific accounts of what to wear (short petticoats), whom to know (Prince Metternich), and both what and how to drink (Johannisberg, aerated; Marachino, cold). Such examples transcend the material goods of fashionable characters' day-to-day

¹¹⁶ The importance of these details is a critical commonplace. Richard Cronin calls the genre "novels about commodities" that must contain "real people, real clubs, real shops and real tradesmen" in *The Romantic Victorians* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 110, 116; Michael Sadleir says that the novels aimed at "verisimilitude" that required them to above all else "appear correct" in *Bulwer: A Panorama*, vol. 1 (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 1931), 116; Robin Gilmour condemns their snobbish preoccupation with rituals and furnishings of 'exclusive' aristocratic life" in "The Novel and Aristocracy: Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, Thackeray," *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (Baltimore: E. Arnold, 1986), 16-18; and Vineta Colby notes that "Because its concern was exclusively a way of life, it recorded almost everything about that way of life," in *Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 53. The importance of commodities in the Victorian novel more broadly is the subject of Andrew Miller's *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity, Culture, and Victorian Narrative* (New York: Cambridge, 1995); Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and John Plotz's *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹¹⁷ Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury, *The Exclusives*, 3 vol., (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830) 1:1.

¹¹⁸ Benjamin Disraeli, *Vivian Grey*, 3 vol., (London: Colburn, 1827), 1:45.

existence to comprehend their behavior and conversation, what Gary Kelly includes under his listing of the fashionable novel's manifold interests:

courtship, private emotion (ennui, melancholy, weltenschmerz), cookery (or cuisine), conversation (especially repartee), dress . . . duelling, interior decor, decorum, drinks, epistolary style, handling of servants and tradesmen, gambling (and gambling debts), choice of restaurant, choice of tailor, painting, music, architecture, gardening, travel, literature (including silver-fork novels), pronunciation, grammar.¹¹⁹

These interests have, in their turn, interested many of the fashionable novel's readers, who have considered such sociological detail the genre's *raison d'être*.

What I would like to account for here is why the novels have been read for their detail at the same time that they tend to eschew accuracy of description or specificity of insight. As such, this chapter takes a turn to the ontological: it interrogates the things that get to be known in the context of the epistemological framework that I outlined in the previous chapter. More specifically, it considers the relationship between things and objects in the context of fashion by suggesting that fashion is a means through which objects steadfastly resist becoming things.¹²⁰ I explore this relationship in the context of "fashion" both as a

¹¹⁹ Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (New York: Longman, 1989), 224-25.

¹²⁰ My use of "object" and "thing" is influenced by the large bibliography on thing-theory, but I have attempted to ground it specifically in the way I see objects being used in the fashionable novel, I am particularly influenced here by Marilyn Gaul's suggestion that objects are a "class of things that are made, manufactured, acquired, or inanimate; something stasis, or a commodity, a property or a form known by its structure or place rather than by its behavior or function" (10). She suggests that, after the Romantic period, objects become things "at a phenomenal rate," a trajectory that I see the fashionable novel as powerfully countering. See "'Things Forever Speaking' and 'Objects of all Thought,'" *Romanticism and the Object*, ed. Larry H. Peer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 12.

social system with a new organizational power in the 1820s, in which fashionable novels are incorporated, and as constructed within the novels as a transhistorical and translocational phenomenon that in turn allows the novels to be incorporated into the fashion system. This understanding offers a new perspective on the use of so-called “time-specific details” in realistic novels and provides a way of understanding the genre’s construction of its temporality.¹²¹ Further, the fashionable novel’s interest in the independence of people and objects suggests a way of approaching this genre in relation to the questions of political inclusion that occupied this so-called Era of Reform.

I begin by exploring the framing of description in fashionable periodicals new to the beginning of the nineteenth century, fleshing out the journals’ construction of a fashion system evacuated of character and agency in order to arrive at an understanding of how a new fashion system was coming to operate.¹²² In the second section, I examine the structural similarities in Lord Normanby’s *Yes and No* (1826) and Catherine Gore’s *Pin Money* (1831) to suggest that fashionable novels write against the fashion system by creating characters who are fashionable not because they enter the fashion system but because they remain independent of any system whatsoever. In the final section, I argue that the novels similarly

¹²¹ Richard Altick uses the term “time-specific details” in reference to topicality in Victorian novels. *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 3.

¹²² Sumiao Li has argued for the existence of a fashionable culture in, *Fashionable People, Fashionable Society: Fashion, Gender, and Print Culture in England, 1821-1861* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), which explores the construction of a fashion system that would eventually displace aristocracy in the first few decades of the nineteenth century: “It was the decisive rule of fashion as an independent system that dissociated nineteenth-century fashionable society from the high society of *ancien regime*” (13).

abjure the fashion system through a narrative indifference, which resolves the paradox of the genre: fashionable novels cannot proclaim their *ton* without losing it. Flaunting topicality through the meaningful deployment of fashionable goods, behaviors, and locations would betray them as unfashionable. And so they instead offer a formal innovation in the relationship of content to time, creating a genre-defining temporality not by being topical but by placing themselves in a knowing but distanced relationship to contemporaneity through a form of narrative indifference, steadfastly refusing to allow fashionable things to convey narrative information. Fashion, it turns out, is what allows one to remain independent of the systems that are rewriting the conditions for independence. And this in turn suggests not why but *how* the fashionable novel matters: it produces the conditions for independence by constructing an independent rather than time-dependent relationship to contemporaneity. In this analysis, fashion is no longer dismissible as “essence,” something that is, in the language of my first epigraph, “gifted” and therefore, like the genre of the fashionable novel itself, somehow resistant to criticism—because “gifted” begs more rigorous analysis. A gift is, after all, not essential. What is given can be taken away. And what this chapter ultimately suggests is that fashion is not an essence but an accident of time.

I. What is Fashionable

Despite the tenuous epistemological status of fashionable novels, scholars often claim either that the novels' fashionable content works didactically to teach the middle classes how to ape aristocratic life or that the genre acts as a fossil record of early nineteenth-

century material culture.¹²³ The novels have therefore frequently been associated with the conventions of newspapers and reportage, identified, in Matthew Rosa's term, as "transcripts" of a particular mode of life that can be trusted to purvey accurate detail. Publisher Henry Colburn, with a near monopoly on fashionable novels, targeted both novel readers and periodical readers with such publications as *The Court Journal*, a slim circular of fashionable news and publications that he started in 1828.¹²⁴ But a crowded field of journals competed for the fashionable reader's attention: *The Lady's Magazine, or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* (1770-1832), *La Belle Assemblée or Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine Addressed Particularly to the Ladies* (1806-1832, then as *Court Magazine & Belle Assemblée* until 1837, when it joined with the *Lady's Magazine* as *Court Magazine & Monthly Critic & Lady's Magazine & Museum of Belles Lettres* until folding in 1848), *Journal des Dames et des Modes* (1797-1803, then as *Costume Parisien* 1803-1839), *The Lady's Monthly Museum, or Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction; being an Assemblage of what can Tend to please the Fancy, Instruct the mind or Exalt the Character of the British Fair* (1798-1829, then as *Ladies' Monthly Museum* 1829-1832, when it incorporated with the *Lady's Magazine* and *La*

¹²³ *The Silver-Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding Vanity Fair* (New York: Columbia, 1936), 5-13. Alison Adburgham insists that the novels are meant to provide the newly rich with a means of discovering "in what London square it was stylish to rent a house for the Season, and *when* exactly the Season started; what shops and suppliers to patronise; at what time of day it was elegant to drive in the park, to make calls, to dine"; see her *Silver fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature From 1814 to 1840* (London: Constable, 1983), 2. In a more recent critical approach, Anne Hawkins and Jeraldine Kraver (2005) conclude similarly that Lady Blessington's *Victims of Society* deserves "further reading and scholarship ... for what [it reveals] of culture, society, and women's lives during the gap between the Regency and the Victorian era," in "Introduction," *Victims of Society*, Lady Blessington (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), xxvi.

¹²⁴ According to Sutherland, the *Court Journal* was "expressly designed to puff his books," "Henry Colburn, Publisher," *Publishing History* 19 (1986), 68.

Belle Assemblée as the *Lady's Magazine & Museum of Belles Lettres*), *The Ladies' Pocket Magazine* (1825-1839), *The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashion, and Politics* (1809-1829), and *Petit Courrier des Dames Annonces des Modes, des Nouveautés et des Arts* (1821-1868, later called *Petit Courrier des Dames, Journal des Modes*), the *Quarterly Selection of Parisian Costumes* (1823-1888), and *The London and Paris Ladies' Magazine of Fashion* (1828-1891).¹²⁵ Added to these is the rather more respectable *Morning Post*, which attended to the doings of the fashionable and political world in a regular column, distinguished by its typeset, entitled “The Fashionable World.”

By the second quarter of the century, readers expected to find in many of these journals two or more hand-colored fashion plates per issue, which were accompanied by a detailed description of fabric, construction, and trimming. Nicolaus Wilhelm von Heideloff's *Gallery of Fashion* (1794-1803), the first journal in English dedicated entirely to fashion and the first periodical to use color regularly, appended descriptions in several languages to its hand-tinted plates, claiming that the dresses were “not *imaginary* but really *existing* ones.”¹²⁶ The emphasis on the “really *existing*” nature of the dresses insists on the absence of fictionality. Ontological “realness”—the “really real”—is the primary distinguishing feature of these journals, and it is discursively constructed through the eviction of probability, a fixation on the seeable, and the grammatical features of passivity and atemporality.

¹²⁵ Much of this information, and a detailed discussion of the development of fashion magazines, can be found in Alison Adburgham, “Fashion Plates and Magazines of the 1790s,” in *Women in Print: Writing Women and Women's Magazine From the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd: London, 1972). More about periodicals of the early nineteenth century follows in her chapter, “Periodicals of the New Century.”

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, 204-06. *The Lady's Magazine* soon followed the *Gallery's* lead.

The conformity of description in the journals is striking. In 1831, a description in *The Ladies' Museum* offers the following:

Shawls are more seen than mantles in promenade dress, but neither are likely to be long worn. We, indeed, already see many ladies in high dresses with only a velvet pelerine or boa tippet ... Velvet hats are still fashionable in carriage dress; they will probably continue to be worn till the end of the month. A few spring bonnets have already a stripe at each side, and a light green fringe at the edges:¹²⁷

A few years later, the fashion has changed but the description has not. An 1835 example from Colburn's *Court Journal* asserts that:

Riding habits of black cloth are by far the most fashionable ... The buttons must be of silk, the same colour as the habit. The sleeves close at the lower part of the arm ... The *corsage* may be open or closed at pleasure, and with or without *revers*. This affords opportunity for the display of elegance in the *chemisettes*, which are the greatest luxury of equestrian costume. They are worn either small plaited, or ornamented on the bosom with needlework, and closed by a row of small cambric buttons ... The *chemisette* may have either a square falling collar, or a small plaited frill.¹²⁸

Fashions rest on absolutes: they “are” and “must be”; they “are worn” and “are closed,” predicate constructions that write fashion as ontologically determined and temporally located in a fixed present. Crucially, however, some distinction remains to present the illusion of

¹²⁷ “General Monthly Statement of Fashion,” *The Ladies' Museum* 2.194 (April 1831), 194.

¹²⁸ “London and Parisian Fashions,” *The Court Journal: Gazette of the Fashionable World* 334 (1835), 602.

choice, so important to modern social systems¹²⁹: plait or needlework; a corsage open or closed; a pelerine (short pointed cape) or tippet (stole).

At the same time that these descriptions fix fashion outside of probability or choice, they also direct attention to seeability by remaining at the level of the exterior. The cause may be simply that a periodical has no interest in interiority, but the effect is to summon the idea that these hats, and these hairstyles, exist somewhere in concrete form, to conjure the image—but not the flesh—as flesh. Phrases such as “are seen,” and “are worn” focus on the externalities of dress rather than on the wearers, who appear only once under the general term “ladies.” In the discursive world of the fashion description, dress exists independently of its wearer. The focus on the exterior shifts the eye from the representation to the real, the real being, in this context, the specific details of what is fashionable. In its passive present, fashion exists in an atemporal, unagented world. In this eternal present, time moves because of fashion rather than the other way around, and the passage of time has meaning only in relation to what is passing out, what is currently in, and what is about to be. The descriptions hint that a seasonal temporality underlies these changes—in the April 1831 *Ladies' Museum*, it is likely that shawls and mantles are passing out of fashion because the year is moving into summer—but the descriptions evade an awareness of the changing year.¹³⁰ The descriptions

¹²⁹ My use of the word “distinction” here would suggest a turn to Bordieu, and I will examine his arguments about taste later on in the chapter. The argument, however is more informed by “distinction” in the sense that a system creates itself by distinguishing between itself and its environment.

¹³⁰ In fact it is a staple of fashion writing that the truly fashionable will scorn external weather.

also circumvent the Marxist axiom that fashion exists only as a spur to production.¹³¹ In these periodicals, fashion has an ontological certainty: it is defined by its realness, which is linked with a temporal fixity that locates the moment of fashion in a continual present.¹³²

Barthes articulates a similar feature in his discussion of twentieth-century fashion writing, which is largely consonant with the nineteenth-century examples I have been exploring: writing “arrests the level of reading” of the image that accompanies it: “The image freezes an endless number of possibilities; words determine a single certainty.”¹³³ The image, in other words, might allow numerous possibilities and interpretations, but the accompanying words insist on a particular way of seeing. This journalistic insistence differs from literary descriptions of objects because the descriptions are not, as in literature, “brought to bear upon a hidden object” but rather actualize a “described object” fixed onto the image one of the multiple meanings that it offers.¹³⁴ Literary descriptions, Barthes suggests, bring to life a created world, while descriptions of fashionable dress in magazines

¹³¹ Marx, of course, put it much more starkly, calling the regulation of child labor the “first rational bridle on the murderous, meaningless caprices of fashion, caprices that consort so badly with the system of modern industry,” in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, 2 vols. (New York: Penguin, 1992), 1:609.

¹³² Hegel, according to Shlomo Avineri, states something similar: “But this plurality creates *fashion*, the versatility and freedom in the use of these things. The cut of clothes, the style of furnishing one’s home, are nothing permanent. This constant change is essential and rational, far more rational than sticking to one fashion, imagining to find something permanent in such particular forms. The beautiful is not ordered by one fashion; but here we have to do not with free beauty, but with luxury that attracts ... Hence it has accidentality in it.” Qtd in *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 96-97.

¹³³ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (Hill and Wang: New York, 1983), 12-13.

¹³⁴ *ibid*

bring to life a seeable, as in real, image.

But the seeable is only a first step in the functionality of these journals, which also suggest that fashion can be learned through the development of discrimination and ultimately taste. The April 1831 number of *The Ladies' Museum*, one of the longest-running journals, includes a plate on which are juxtaposed a strikingly similar dinner dress and ball dress (Figure 3). Both gather lace into a heart shape at the bust (blonde lace, particularly popular in the early nineteenth century because its soft ground—the net or mesh upon which the lace was knotted—allowed it to be gathered easily)¹³⁵; both liberally employ ostrich feathers; both are adorned with gold jewelry. There are certainly small differences. The ball dress is more liberal with its jewelry and feathers; the dinner dress has appropriately demure long sleeves, another implicit nod to the exigencies of clock-time, which has for centuries dictated that clothing comes off as the day wears on. But the shape of the neckline, the width and bell of the skirt, and the rise of the hemline are nearly indistinguishable. Even the hair and hat follow a similar shape and style, and the models stand in all but identical postures.

Happily for the reader, painstaking descriptions of both dresses make legible for discernment these minor differences that constitute fashion. The dinner dress is:

A dress of *Provins* rose-colloured *gase de soie*, over *gros de Naples* to correspond; the *corsage* sets close to the shape, is cut low, and trimmed round the upper part of the bust by a row of narrow blond lace, which stands up. A bias fold, trimmed with very broad blond lace, surrounds the bust, and forms a *demi couer* in front. Long sleeves of white

¹³⁵ Blonde lace also has the dubious distinction of being one of the first laces to be copied by machine. By 1840, its increased availability caused a dramatic drop in popularity. Pat Earnshaw, “Blonde,” *A Dictionary of Lace* (Courier Dover: Mineola, NY, 1999), 16-17.

figured gauze, over short full ones of rose-colored satin. The skirt is trimmed with a single fall of very rich blond lace. The hat is of rose-coloured satin, trimmed under the brim with *coques* of rose-coloured and white gauze riband. A bouquet of white and rose-coloured ostrich feathers, placed on the left side of the crown, falls over the brim. The jewellery is dead gold and cameos.

The description of the ball dress attends similarly to visual appearance and materiality:

A crape dress: the colour is a beautiful shade of French grey, the *corsage* is bordered with blond lace, draped at the upper part *à la Sevigné*, and formed into the shape of a heart at the lower part, by a blond lace trimming. *Béret* sleeve, surmounted by a row of points, also edged with blond lace. The skirt is trimmed with a wreath of white ostrich feathers, placed in opposite directions round the border. The hair is dressed in very high braids and bows behind, and parted in the Madonna style upon the forehead. A bouquet of white ostrich feathers is placed very far back, and ornaments of gold and pearls decorate the hair in front. Necklace and ear-rings of brilliant gold.¹³⁶

These descriptions were evidently so typical that the one corresponding to the ball dress was reprinted in one of the *Morning Post's* regular features, a column that reprinted several dress descriptions from other magazines. Typical is that the language of these descriptions focuses attention on the difference that makes a difference, the minor details that distinguish among standardized wearers.¹³⁷ The neckline's lace border "stands up" on the dinner dress and is

¹³⁶ "The Mirror of Fashion," *Ladies Museum* (April 1831), 194.

¹³⁷ As Stanley Lieberman says, fashion "is difference simply for the sake of difference," in *A Matter of Taste: How Names, Fashions, and Culture Change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 143.

“draped” on the ball gown; the hat, belonging to a dinner but not a ball dress, is lavishly described. Even single adjectives matter: the jewelry of the one is “dead gold,” while the other is “brilliant.” Because the prints do not transfer a difference in the shine of the jewelry, detail becomes meaningful in these journals when it is not visually apparent, when it must be described verbally to be legible at all.¹³⁸ That verbal description not only renders fashion legible but also educates the eye, teaching the journal’s reader to read the description of the dress like a fashionable insider who would mine the details of fabric and jewelry for clues about the wearer’s status. And indeed the descriptions were likely meant for the *modiste* who would be creating similar garments for the fashionables, who might have been interested in dress construction but certainly would not be making up the gowns themselves.¹³⁹

More, these descriptions insist on transferability as a primary feature of fashion, and thereby offer another way of distinguishing between fashion as an untransferable, “gifted” phenomenon and fashion as a system. The evacuation of bodily agency divorces fashion from the wearing bodies, allowing the reading body—the reader—to place herself within the clothing. Take, for example, the way that the hair and hat are described: “The hair is dressed in very high braids and bows behind, and parted in the Madonna style upon the forehead. A bouquet of white ostrich feathers is placed very far back, and ornaments of gold and pearls decorate the hair in front,” while the hat “is of rose-coloured satin, trimmed under the brim with *coques* of rose-coloured and white gauze riband. A bouquet of white and rose-coloured ostrich feathers, placed on the left side of the crown, falls over the brim.” Neither the hair

¹³⁸ Such details of trimming and material would be readily evident, perhaps even to the gold’s luster. It may be more accurate, then, to say that the descriptions make legible differences that would already be visible to someone who knows.

¹³⁹ Adburgham, 194.

nor hat rests upon an actual head. They exist free of women who, by arranging the hair or wearing the hat, might insert an embodied personal agency into the relationship and make the individual, or her taste, status, or wealth, part of any relationship by which the individual's "giftedness" matters. The hair might belong to any woman; any buyer might purchase the hat.

Ingrid Loscheck, drawing on the systems theoretical work of Niklaus Luhmann, has argued that fashion is "not a clever invention of capital for the purpose of constantly renewing individual attire" but is instead a self-referential system connected to the economic system only by structural linkage.¹⁴⁰ Luhmannian analysis, she says, enables theorists to "rescue fashion from its apparently inexplicable nature ... from the category of a unique phenomenon into something that can be defined and analyzed."¹⁴¹ In this system, the output of "new"—fashion's continual autopoietic reinvention—ends up producing fashion's stability as a system: "*Fashion remains fashion, because the fashion does not remain the fashion.*"¹⁴² As we have seen in the descriptions from the periodicals, the fashion system endows a detail with meaning only to permit the differentiation of what is within the system from what is without. One detail—a sleeve shape, a skirt length—becomes fashionable in preference to another only in order to maintain the system's differentiation. Insofar as a system is differentiated through continual discrimination, it is potentially open to all. When the journals put everyone in relation to fashion through a grammatical and syntactical structure

¹⁴⁰ Ingrid Loscheck, *When Clothes Become Fashion: Design and Innovation Systems* (New York: Berg, 2009), 21. Luhmann outlines his theory of autopoietic systems in *Social Systems*.

¹⁴¹ *ibid*, 28.

¹⁴² *ibid*, 26.

that enables imitation, their non-exclusivity ends up rendering their subject matter incapable of conferring fashion, although not, and this is important, essentially unfashionable. By putting everyone in relation to fashion, they put no one in relation to fashion. The idea of fashion as something that is “gifted,” then, is incompatible with an understanding of fashion as an autopoietic system. “Giftedness” implies a magical phenomenon that is not subject to understanding or analysis; it implies specialness and singularity. If fashion is a system, however, we must look elsewhere to untangle the tautology by which what is fashionable is fashionable because it is fashionable rather than unfashionable.

Fashionable novels depict characters that the fashion system fails to incorporate, and I want to turn now to investigate that failure. Selina and Georgina have the right objects of fashion—the gigot sleeves—but their relationship to the sleeves is wrong. My suspicion is that, by using the sleeves as an entrée to fashionable society, they endow the sleeves with an instrumentality and agency—a thing-ness with which they are in relationship—that immediately renders the sleeves, not to mention them, unfashionable. This moment of becoming unfashionable marks a crucial moment for understanding the way matter works in the fashionable novel. Unlike the object of the periodical, which is continually divorced both from body and time, and which is never generic because it is assigned an absolute ontological quality, matter in the fashionable novel is always in danger of becoming unfashionable by losing its generic quality and becoming singular.¹⁴³ Fashionable matter is by

¹⁴³ Leonard B. Meyer offers the following definition of style: “Style is a replication of patterning, whether in human behavior or in the artifacts produced by human behavior, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints,” in “Toward a Theory of Style,” in *The Concept of Style* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 21-71. Kendall Walton similarly suggests that “If there is only one, the style hasn’t yet been established; there is no such style,” in “Style and the Products and Processes of Art,” in the same

its nature barred from entering into a relationship with the novel's characters. They articulate an approach to fashionable matter that ensures it cannot be used by the fashionable character—or hence by the narrative.

II. Independence

Although both Lord Normanby's *Yes and No* and Catherine Gore's *Pin-Money* (1831) teem with material objects and fashionable behaviors, the novels continually prevent the reader from imagining a relationship with the objects by refusing to depict fashionable matter as existing in and for itself, and thus freely available for adoption. Instead, matter in these novels is fashionable only to the extent that it exists outside either an economic system, in which it could be bought; or a fashion system, in which it could be adopted. Both novels show objects continually resisting incorporation in the presence of characters whose fashion rests upon the ability to remain, through various means, unengaged with a world of things.

Yes and No makes no secret of its fashionable affiliations. Lady Flamborough, for example, refers to the real-life dressmaker Madame Maradan Carson's commendation of her daughter's figure (1:140), while the narrator first mentions the popular orchestra leader and flageolet player Hubert Collinet and then points out his own ability to muster contemporary detail by drawing attention to "the new idiom of the day" when a couple is being "danced up" (2:3, 2:11). But the narrator obliquely insists that aping such name-dropping and

collection (87). Drawing on these readings, Jeff Dolven defines one aspect of style "as something like fashion, the charisma, in an object or a person, that excites imitative desire within a community of onlookers, overhearers, and potential makers," in "Reading Wyatt for the Style," in *Modern Philology* 105.1 (August 2007), 65-86.

mannerisms is futile. When the formerly wealthy and fashionable Latimers declare bankruptcy, the novel's aristocratic protagonist Germain enters Latimer House on the day of the "execution," a fitting name for the sale that will remove the Latimers from fashionable existence by distributing their possessions to a hawkish group of buyers. Prominent among these buyers is Captain Wilcox, who has married the vulgar Fanny Dormer, daughter of Germain's first schoolmaster and object of Germain's youthful infatuation. The doors of Latimer House stand open. Germain walks in "without asking any question, and was met by a demand of a shilling for a catalogue ... The entrance within those walls had always been one of the few things money could not purchase ... and now a shilling's worth of catalogue laid it open to everyone" (2:219-20). The catalogue exposes Latimer House to a voracious rising class, whose ability to enter into proximity with the aristocrats could radically trouble the boundaries of rank. Goods, after all, can be bought, and the Wilcoxes purchase any number of the Latimers' possessions to furnish a house the captain is building in sight of Germain's ancestral hall. But social, or rather fashionable, order is never seriously threatened. As the goods pass into the Wilcoxes hands, they cease to be fashionable. Bankruptcy—a threat in many fashionable novels—might seem to expose the instability of the aristocratic hold on fashion, but in fact does the opposite: it exposes the instability of fashionable content and the insufficiency of exclusive goods or behavior to demarcate an exclusive circle. It thereby reformulates a threatened social order and undermines the notion that middle class readers can achieve fashion through their consumption of these novels. More importantly, it offers a critique of interested politics and a reimagining of independence not as disinterest—a later Victorian articulation—but as indifference.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Victorian disinterested is most famously articulated in Matthew Arnold's assertion that a

Yes and No does not at first appear to offer any sort of trenchant political critique. It follows a number of different strands, among others an inheritance plot (how will Oakley cope with his new money?), a political plot (who will win the open seat?), an illegitimacy plot (who is Helen's father?), a courtship plot (whom will Germain marry?), and even something of a plot concerning the rights of Catholic subjects (should they have them?). The novel closes with apparently trumped-up cohesion, when its main character Germain marries a Catholic heiress, Lady Jane. In its final line, the narrator asserts that "it is undoubtedly to be desired, that those who are to pass their lives together, should somehow concur in the suitable and timely alternate applications of those two most important monosyllables—YES AND NO" (2:269). This didactic lesson in conjugal felicity, surprising for a novel in which the courtship plot appears the least important of its several interests, bears little apparent relation to the narrative that precedes it, which begins as Germain issues an order to the keeper of a roadside inn: "And bring wax candles" (1:1).

The command introduces several pages of discussion between Oakley and Germain about whether or not it is right to prefer wax to tallow, wax being, in 1828, likely to mean either beeswax or spermaceti candles, both of which burned without the offensive odor of the animal-derived tallow. The conversation provides a characterological contrast between the striving Oakley and the effortless Germain, but their conversation more importantly situates the text as concerned, not with the different ways in which light can be produced,

critic must above all be disinterested, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*. Recent critical discussion of disinterestedness include Amanda Anderson, *the Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Elaine Hadley's *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), which is interested, among other things, in "the studied disinterestedness that looks like distracted indifference," 31.

but with the way in which moral order might play into such a preference. Oakley's political aspirations and misanthropy debar him from fashionable life, from which he is also thematically excluded by his stolid name, reminiscent of a country John Bull awkwardly come up to London. He complains to Germain: "You could not bear that even in an inn, you should be confounded with the common herd, and were impatient to buy distinction at the price of a pair of wax candles" (1:4). In return, Germain wonders "how the no very uncommon peculiarity of preferring wax candles to tallow, should subject one to have one's whole character discussed." Rather than the content (so to speak) of the wax candle, preference here becomes the distinguishing factor. Yet at just the same time that preference might come to mean lapse of moral character in the form of vanity, we learn that, in fact, preference—or what we might call fashionable discrimination, or taste—has nothing to do with character or morality at all. The suspect moral position is actually to make such preferences instrumental in determining a man's character.

In other words, to think that a thing such as preferring a tallow to a wax candle implicates one's character is quickly revealed to be quite a common—that is, both frequent and vulgar—misperception, when the narrator notes sardonically that the two visitors "had at first been considered as common-place guests, every-day sort of customers, but the wax candles threw a new light upon their characters" (1:9). The double meaning of "light" points out the error of assigning morality to preference: the narrator collapses the candles' actual light into their figurative ability to illuminate, but the snide mockery directed toward the innkeeper indicates that candles and character have nothing to say to each other. The candles, in their supposed ability to convey information about the guests, become unfashionable in relation to the innkeeper, but remain fashionable in their relation to

Germain. The failure of a fixed association between character and content recurs frequently. When Fitzalbert calls for beer, flouting his own assertion that fashionable novelists always depict the elect as drinking wine, not coincidentally removing himself from the genre he inhabits, he again insists that truly fashionable people do not worry about the fashionable. Whatever they require—beer or wine, wax or tallow, long petticoats or short—is fashionable simply because they call for it, and the point is not the thing, nor the places patronized, nor ontological status of the matter, but apparently the manner in which it is assumed.

By opening with the question of wax candles, *Yes and No* plunges itself into a consideration of what, precisely, fashionable objects can reveal about fashionable character. Lying behind this debate is the possibility that style can reveal something profound about an individual. Germain and Oakley quarrel over just this question, Oakley insisting that fashion speaks to morality and, implicitly, to class status; while Germain asserts simply that it is “no very uncommon peculiarity” to favor a clean, modern source of light. In fact, Germain’s position is curiously utilitarian: wax is just *better*. This argument about the consonance between a man and his style dates back to Early Modern notions of style, as in the phrase “the style is the man.” In its original formulation, Marjorie Garber claims, the phrase is most properly translated reflexively: “Style is the man himself.”¹⁴⁵ Such a phrase carries a profound moral obligation, because it indicates that style refers to the way a person exists in the world in its entirety, the way that his thinking and reasoning forms and reveals his very being. *Yes and No* thus seems quite modern in staging a rejection of this “old sartorial-symbolical

¹⁴⁵ Marjorie Garber, “Fashionable,” *Quotation Marks* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 33-46.

mechanism” by which things reveal character.¹⁴⁶ Germain’s response to Oakley points directly at the conflict between fashion as an index of morality and fashion as wholly separate from morality, particularly pertinent in a decade that saw an increase in fashionable culture.¹⁴⁷ In *Yes and No*’s articulation, style and morality—or fashion and character—have no essential link. The type of clothing or behavior that a character prefers tells us nothing about fashionable character or plot, because such details are structurally irrelevant.¹⁴⁸

While Germain’s sensible preference for clean light might indicate something about his class status, what matters for this discussion of fashion is his ability to express his liking in the right way, which is to say with the “imperturbable placidity” that marks his reply to Oakley (1:4): a manner that is no manner at all. While preferring particular goods or behaviors can mark a person as belonging to the fashionable and exclusive world, it seems to be the manner in which the preference is expressed through a particular relationship to objects that distinguishes both the individual and the object as fashionable. This may sound rather like the dismissive suggestion that fashion is simply an unanalyzable “essence,” but in fact I think it is something different: it is a relationship between people and objects that inheres in neither. It at first appears to take the form of “manner.” Germain, still discussing

¹⁴⁶ Li, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Both Lenore Davidoff in *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1973) and Li identify the 1820s and 30s as a particularly tense moment for aristocracy, and its concomitant symbolical mechanisms, precisely because of an increasingly influential fashionable world.

¹⁴⁸ They may then seem to be merely part of a reality effect, in the same way that Flaubert’s barometer matters to Barthes only insofar as it signals the presence of a reality effect. Yet the barometer, for Barthes, constitutes “some index of character or atmosphere.” Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Los Angeles: UC Press, 1989) 141-148.

the importunities of novelists who come to spy on fashionable dinner parties, complains to a friend that “Lady Boreton encourages these literary poachers on the manors, or rather the *manners* of high life” (1:135). The (fairly common) pun on “manors” and “manners” signals the unsteady boundary between matter and manner. Both manors and manners are objectified as the content of discourse, not only among the literary poachers but among fashionable people as well. During a country party, the company finds themselves at loss for conversation and, “As two long dusky hours yet remained before dinner, and they had already settled the local demerits of every thing by which they were surrounded, it was but natural that they should next occupy themselves with the personal qualifications of those who were about to be added to their number” (1:147-48). The slippage from manors to manners indicates a structural analogy between both possessions. Manners, in *Yes and No*, are ontologically identical to manors, a point driven home at the end of the novel when the upstart Wilcoxes build their upstart house that blocks a view on Germain’s estate: both their manners and manors obtrude.

The fashionable novel’s interest in “thingness,” its persistent sliding from fashionable people to fashionable objects, may seem to reach back the eighteenth century’s interest in it-narratives.¹⁴⁹ These narratives, however, consider the way in which the object

¹⁴⁹ Scholarship on it-narratives generally suggests that the eighteenth century was particularly interested in the way that such objects circulate in a permeable society, in which boundaries between classes, beings, and states could appear alarmingly fluid. Janine Barchas, for example, says that “The eighteenth century’s fascination with material culture and the material permeability of social class fed the growing popularity of books told from the point of view of an it-narrator,” in *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Cambridge, 2003), 50. Aileen Douglas ascribes the popularity to the same social forces that occupy the fashionable novel: “the it-narrators of later eighteenth-century fiction are emblematic of a burgeoning consumer culture which seemed, to contemporaries, to dissolve the marks of social class and to render the barriers between social order frangible and

progresses through the world in relation to human touch and human interaction, so that the circulation of the thing drives the narrative. But fashionable objects do not circulate.

Movement quickly renders them unfashionable, as when bankruptcy forces the Latimers to auction their goods, and so fashionable novels busily work to prevent the circulation of goods by making such circulation a condition of being unfashionable.

It is therefore insufficient to say that fashionable novels depict the growing importance of cultural capital in an age when wealth and title are no longer certain indices of power, suggesting a crucial complication to the question of manner. The awareness of something that Bourdieu might call cultural capital in the possession of a certain manner would be at once to assume an attitude of instrumentality, to acknowledge that certain goods and behaviors might be used to bring one into fashion.¹⁵⁰ If a manner can be a possession, then its circulation can render it unfashionable as well. And so what makes Germain fashionable is not his imperturbable placidity so much as it is, after all, his desire to use the candles because they are clean. He can conceive of no other reason to prefer them. In this

vulnerable,” “Britannia’s Rule and the It-Narrator,” *The Secret Life of Things*, ed. Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 68. Christina Lupton sees the texts as interested in oppositions between beings and objects: “Materiality provides the environment that allows these fictions to achieve their own status as thinking things; to sidestep the opposition between subject and object, or between literature and trash, by asserting more matter-of-factly their own objectification,” in “The Knowing Book: Authors, It-Narratives, and Objectification in the Eighteenth Century,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* (Summer 2006). Lupton’s formulation is particularly useful here, because it resonates with the fashionable novel’s treatment of branded details, which has commonly been used to assert its status as a commodity object, as an ephemeral text useful only to understand a particularly culture of commodities. But I will be arguing that the fashionable novel’s treatment of objects is particularly relevant in a post-Romantic world of things, the difference between the it-narrative and the novel of commodities as discussed by Miller, Plotz, and Freedgood.

¹⁵⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

way he surpasses even the novel's fashionable Fitzalbert, who knows too much about fashion to be truly fashionable. Fashion is consequently unmoored from both money and name. Oakley and Germain inhabit nearly the same economic and social worlds, but, while Oakley has money and an estate, only Germain can abdicate absolutely the awareness that anything he chooses, and any manner in which he chooses it, can have meaning. So fashion does not operate as a substitute for economic capital by offering an alternative route to power, because fashion utterly rejects the notion that anything in the world requires to be operated upon: it positions itself as completely independent from capital, culture, and even, as we shall see, from politics.

The first ten pages of *Yes and No*, then, sequentially reject both manors and manners (which it designates as simply another possession) as qualities that can establish a person's *ton*. The insufficiency of both, and the independence that remains, animates the major conflict of the first of *Yes and No*'s two volumes: the race for a seat in the House of Commons. At odds are the Tory Squire Stedman ("Stedman and the Constitution!," "Protestant Cause!," and "No Popery!"); the Whig Oakley ("Oakley and Liberty!," "Oakley and Reform!"), and Germain, whose "partisans shone in the brilliancy of their symbolic colouring, but ... were terribly in want of an appropriate watch-word" until they finally settle on the catchy, albeit meaningless, "Germain and Independence!" (1:279-80). Two days of vacuous speeches occupy most of the first volume. Squire Stedman "had not, as may be imagined, much to say," but "no one could deny that he looked 'the Agricultural Interest' to perfection" (1:283). Germain, on the other hand, does speak "sensibly," but poorly: "for moderation in language, though very distinct in character from mediocrity in intellect, is not unlike it in its deadening effects upon the spirits of a crowd" (1:285). Oakley is the evident

hero of the day: no one bothers much about what he says, but he has “great natural eloquence: that vehemence of manner, too, which in private often hazarded offence, in public carried conviction of his earnest sincerity, and the modulated intonations of his fine voice alone, seemed to challenge concurrence in his opinions” (1:287).

These rather lengthy quotations may seem to prove a different point than the one with which I began this section. The populace, Normanby’s narrator rather scornfully and unoriginally suggests, responds more to manner and tone than to content. But as it turns out, Germain—sensible rather than eloquent—triumphs in the election. And notice the intensity with which Oakley uses his fine speaking voice. It is an asset, something to be used, and thus by the logic of this novel apparently ontologically identical to a wax candle.

Germain’s utter lack of qualities ends up winning the day, and his election turns out to be the right choice. In Parliament, Germain “executed the business of his constituents faithfully and punctually ... but it was by no means an occupation of first-rate interest to him ... he would attempt sometimes to force his attention to a speech for a couple of hours, and wonder he did not understand the reply to an argument which he had not heard” (2:106-07). Germain may be bored, but he “faithfully and punctually” does his duty—because of, rather than despite his boredom. To Oakley, on the other hand (who ends up with a different seat) “the House was all in all” (2.109). In taking his seat, he is caught up in the Parliamentary system, pursuing politics for its own sake.

The lesson of Germain’s political career is that, in the fashionable novel, neither manors nor manners matter in quite the way we anticipate. Germain’s pleasantly empty slogan, “Germain and Independence,” indicates not simply that he is independent of either political party but that he is independent of the political system itself. He participates in it for

his constituents, not for himself and not for the system. And this political independence is a figure for Germain's ability to evade any instrumental relationship to the world at all. The fashionable novel works to circumvent market forces, even those like manner and taste that may at first seem to operate outside a system of exchange. It is a sophisticated move. The fashionable novel understands perfectly well the existence of different kinds of capital, that attitude and manner have an instrumentality just as much as a physical object, once incorporated into a human system. The fashionable novel thus appears prescient both of Marx's point that objects acquire value only through human labor and Bourdieu's point that taste is its own form of capital. The labor of maintaining *ton* is labor all the same, and labor produces value, and value evacuates fashion.

The fate of *Yes and No's* characters suggests the stakes of this independence. At the end of the novel, Oakley is dead, killed in a duel just after winning the love of the beautiful Helen Mordaunt (who also happens to be his illegitimate cousin). Oakley's death—and his bequeathal—fortuitously rescues Oakley from crushing death, freeing him to marry Lady Jane. Germain's independence is no cautionary tale, as Oakley's impassioned misanthropy is. Instead, disinterest in the matters of Parliament turns out to be the right path for this novel, just as Germain's light-hearted and rather naïve approach to political maneuverings turns out to be just the ticket for fashionable society. The fact that the sensible content of Germain's speech makes little difference to his constituents, just as the sensibility of preferring clean light makes little difference to the innkeeper, impresses the point: partisanship is a death sentence. As such, the novel has clear Whig affiliations. Leslie Mitchell describes the party as having a hybrid sort of politics, making coalitions with people rather than having a clear party identity; and pursuing a way of living, an attitude or a mindset, rather than a coherent

set of political principles.¹⁵¹ As I will suggest in Chapter Three, “Whig” and “fashionable” are to some extent seen as interchangeable: and so *Yes and No* implicitly approves a politics that may seem to be no politics at all—as its manners are no manner at all.

Yet the novel actually offers quite a strong political lesson, and it does so through the subtle alignment of Germain’s romantic with his political interests. Throughout the novel, Germain’s adventures in love form only a mildly interesting subplot. For many pages, Germain has pined after Lady Latimer, whose fashionable air makes her the focal point of any gathering. By the middle of volume two, however, he has shifted his attachment, almost imperceptibly, to her sister, Lady Jane. “She is not so brilliant as Lady Latimer,” he thinks, upon seeing Lady Jane reject an indifferently talented admirer, “and yet perhaps her taste is more correct” (2:61-62). Lest we imagine that Germain begins to prefer Lady Jane because he actually undergoes some sort of character growth, the narrator insists that he ends up with Lady Jane not exactly because he comes to prefer her but because she is unmarried and has the good sense to incline toward him. Again the narrator approves, noting that “there had certainly not been much romance in the attachment of the two; but there was much that was just as likely to tend to their mutual happiness” (2:190). And the engagement to Lady Jane does not even merit narration: Germain begins “seriously to turn over in his mind the intention of being ... happy with Lady Jane” (2:185); he gives himself up to “agreeable anticipations” when he decides to propose, since he figures that her acceptance is “certain” (2:189); and then, a few pages later, we learn that “the proposal had been made, and accepted” (2:194). Aside from the narrator’s evident lack of interest in the details of the affair, the shift from Lady Latimer to Lady Jane suggests that fashion renders even individual

¹⁵¹ Leslie Mitchell, *The Whig World, 1760-1837* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2005).

identity irrelevant. Germain apparently sees women as fungible objects, and his shift from Lady Latimer to Lady Jane indicates more about availability than actual attachment. So Germain's romantic indifference—he marries Lady Jane with the same “imperturbable placidity” with which he ordered wax candles—wins him an aristocratic wife, just as his political indifference wins him a parliamentary seat.

But perhaps this is all to judge Germain too harshly, because it is just possible to read his unpossessive attitude as enabling women to possess their own agency and interiority. After all, Germain does not seek to use Lady Jane for her money, for her looks, or for her position. His seeming indifference allows her, although more or less a cipher, the privilege of her own space. Lady Jane herself sees this: “Her natural good sense certainly led her to perceive that Germain's facility of temper caused him to be much too easily led, but at the same time she saw that he was most in the power of those with whom he lived the most, and this conviction was rather consolatory as to the advantages a wife might derive from that circumstance” (2:190). In other words, the disinterest in politics that makes him a successful politician is the same indifference that makes marriage to him attractive to Lady Jane.¹⁵² Conversely, and more simply, Germain's indifference to her makes him desirable, while Oakley's possessiveness of Helen would render him an unfit husband. The novel's articulation of this indifference in relation to women elevates the courtship plot from a distraction to a structural analogue to the political plot: Germain's Parliamentary politics are one and the same as his gender politics, which suggests that, for this novel, “politics” refers

¹⁵² This indifference and its desirability is a staple in parodies of fashionable marriages. In Lady Caroline Lucy Scott's *A Marriage in High Life* (London: Colburn, 1828), the heroine Emmeline is so oppressed by the idea that she must appear indifferent to her husband that she resorts to passing him notes in the garden.

to a way of managing the relationships between people and people—as well as between people and things.

Germain's indifference is ruffled only by a slight preference for Lady Jane, what we might, anticipating *Pin Money*, call an inclination—a curiously neutral word that maintains a separation between the incliner and the object to which he inclines. It suggests a noncontiguous relationship that, unlike the economic and political stance of independence, is a cultural quality disposing one to a fashionable sensibility.¹⁵³ It is an issue of class, because unlike money or manners, it cannot be taught; but it is not solely an issue of class, because membership in the class does not guarantee it. So the novel's odd title, which seems unmoored from its content, turns out to point exactly at its guiding stance. "Those who are to pass their lives together," the narrator concludes, "should somehow concur in the suitable and timely alternate application of those two most important monosyllables—YES AND NO." It is a matter of indifference whether the couple actually intends agreement or disagreement, because their language alone must agree both in utterance and alteration. What matters is that the speakers maintain an indifferent relationship to the utterance. *Yes and No* imagines a fashionable subjectivity unmoored from meaning and unconcerned with establishing an agented relationship to the world, even—especially—the fashionable world.

¹⁵³ This avoidance of metonymy is significant in light of Catherine Gallagher's argument that Gaskell's *North and South* rejects the metaphor of paternalism in favor of the metonym of domesticity, in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Gallagher sees Gaskell replacing one form of representation with another; I see the fashionable novel—which is set contemporaneously with the Gaskell's novels—as working to avoid representation all together.

III. Independence in Dependence

A list of all differences between *Yes and No* and *Pin Money* would be quite long, but here are a few: *Yes and No* ends with marriage, and *Pin Money* opens with it; *Yes and No* dismisses affect while *Pin Money* relies on it; *Yes and No* is more or less a dandy novel, while *Pin Money* is more or less a society novel¹⁵⁴; *Yes and No* is one of only two novels from an aristocratic author, while *Pin Money* is one of many productions from the pen of a careerist; *Yes and No* centers around a Parliamentary race, while *Pin Money* sees Parliament as the thing that keeps Sir Rawleigh from properly minding his young wife. What these quite different novels share, however, is an interest in the relationships between people and objects that I am arguing is constitutive of the genre of the fashionable novel.

In *Pin-Money's* first chapter, Lady Olivia Tadcaster, the aunt of heroine Frederica Rawleigh, narrates her upcoming day: “But I expect a man with silks from Harding’s at one;—at half-past, Mawe’s people are coming to clean my alabaster vases;—at two, Ridgway’s clerk will be here to see how many of the pamphlets I keep” (1:20). Lady Olivia’s list, which consists of actual shopkeepers working in London in the 1820s and 1830s, identifies her as participating in the proper rituals of fashion, if not, as we will see, in quite the right way.¹⁵⁵ But even before this rapid introduction to the commercial world of fashionable London, *Pin-Money* summons the economic system underlying all this fashionable content. In the opening

¹⁵⁴ In this I am following April Kendra’s suggestion that the fashionable novel be properly understood as containing two distinct subcategories, the male-authored dandy novel and the female-authored society novel. See “Gendering the Silver Fork,” in *Women’s Writing* 11.1 (March 2004), 25-38.

¹⁵⁵ James Ridgway was a radical London publisher-bookseller (1755-1838), and John Mawe (1766-1829) was a mineralogist who opened a shop in 1812. I have not been able to track down Harding.

conversation of the novel, Lady Olivia assumes Frederica's mother, her sister Lady Launceston, comes visiting motivated by a desire to discuss "terms." Lady Launceston misunderstands: "Terms?—surely I told you before, that Frederica acknowledges having always felt a preference for Rawleigh over the rest of her admirers; and that I entertain no doubt she will accept him at once" (1:4). Lady Olivia dismisses that: "Yes—yes! ... but what do you mean to ask for her?" (1:5). Cue Lady Launceston's mystified reply: "*Ask for her?*"

The obvious point here is that the two women speak in irreconcilable linguistic categories, the affective and the economic. To Lady Olivia, a fashionable marriage means the uniting of estates, a point raised by the epigraph to chapter one: "The gentleman's mortgaged lawn becomes enamoured of the lady's marriageable grove; the match is struck up, and both parties are piously in love—according to an Act of Parliament."¹⁵⁶ The quotation comes from Oliver Goldsmith's "Letters From a Citizen of the World to His Friends in the East," a mock travelogue published originally as "Chinese Letters" in *The Public Ledger* (1760-1761) and later collected into *The Citizen of the World* (1762). Satirically describing English customs, Goldsmith's mock-philosopher bemoans the mercenary state of English marriage, mixing a mercantile with a marital vocabulary: "The laws of this country are finely calculated to promote all commerce, but the commerce between the sexes ... A lady's whole cargo of smiles, sighs, and whispers, is declared utterly contraband, till she arrives in the warm latitudes of twenty-two, where commodities of this nature are too often

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Gore, *Pin-Money*, 3 vol., (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831), 1:1.

found to decay.”¹⁵⁷

Goldsmith’s conflation of linguistic categories prefaces what appears in Gore to be a similar technique. The novel’s interest in money and marriage has lead *Pin Money* to be read most often as a domestic novel of manners, as, according to Gore’s own preface, “an attempt to transfer the familiar narrative of Miss Austin to a higher sphere of society ... a Novel of the simplest kind, addressed by a woman to readers of her own sex.” Her writings are generally considered to be aimed, as one critic has written, at “redefin[ing] ‘proper’ femininity by adapting, or updating, Austen for her (proto-) Victorian readers.”¹⁵⁸ Gore’s preface has been frequently challenged, but critics both early and late often allow her to be an acceptable successor to Burney.¹⁵⁹ Such responses place Gore in a trajectory of women writing about marriage and money and thus in some ancestral relation to a genre of domestic fiction, although not a comfortably feminist one. Gore herself suggested in a preface to *Mrs. Armytage* that “a first-rate woman is still only as good as a third-rate man”—a surprising statement, perhaps, for a woman who supported her large family on her writing, but one demonstrated in her novels by a motley of ineffectual and foolish female characters.¹⁶⁰ (In

¹⁵⁷ Oliver Goldsmith, “Letter CXIV, from Lien Chi Altangi to Fum Hoam, First President of the Ceremonial Academy at Peking, in China,” *The Citizen of the World, or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, Residing in London, to his Friends in the East*, 2 vol., (London: J. Parsons, 1794), 162.

¹⁵⁸ Tamara Wagner, “The Decaying Coquette: Refashioning Highlife in Early Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing, 1801-1831, in *Refiguring the Coquette: Essays on Culture and Coquetry*, ed. Shelley King and Yaël Schlick (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2008), 96.

¹⁵⁹ Kendra details these responses, both from Gore’s contemporaries and from her own contemporaries, in “You, Madam, Are No Jane Austen,” *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 3.2 (Summer 2007), 21 pp.

¹⁶⁰ Catherine Gore, *Mrs. Armytage, or Female Domination*, vol. 1 of 3. (London: Colburn, 1836), n. pg.

Pin Money itself, the fatuous Sir Rawleigh, involved in politics beyond his ken, is not as absurd as his jealous, empty-headed wife.)

The opening conversation between Lady Launceston and Lady Olivia, however, does not simply substitute an affective for an economic lexicon, because the terms—both Sir Rawleigh’s and the women’s—do not matter so much as the attitudes. Lady Olivia’s speech focuses on her possessions: she talks about “my” vases and announces that Ridgway’s clerk comes see how many pamphlets she “keeps.” She incorporates fashionable objects and deploys them to carry information: we are supposed to know her by her things. This possessive (and rather modern) attitude contrasts with Frederica’s, expressed through proxy: she acknowledges to her mother that she has “felt a preference” for Rawleigh, in the same way that Germain appears to incline towards Lady Jane. Frederica’s innate, and properly feminine, inclination to “feel” a preference positions her to enter the fashionable world.

Lady Olivia’s unfashionable possession of these commodities undermines the way in which *Pin Money* has been made an example of the fashionable novel’s promiscuous interest in urban commodities, as *The Westminster Review* suggested: “A book like *Pin Money* is, in fact, a sort of London Directory ... We are not sure that the authoress of this work has made any bargains with her tradespeople; but we are very certain she might.”¹⁶¹ Although the *Review* considered *Pin Money* only one of a handful of novels guilty of similar commercial indiscretion, the book certainly includes an extensive list of goods and services: not only the ones Lady Olivia already mentioned, but also the shoemaker Melnotte, based at 23 Old Bond Street (1:20); Opera manager John Ebers and J. Delcroix, perfumer to George IV

¹⁶¹ [Anonymous], “*Pin Money*,” *Westminster Review* 15 (October 1831), 433-42.

(1:46); a Buhl clock and paté de Périgord (1:109); architect Lewis Vulliamy (1"126); singers Rossini, Fodor, Paganini, and Malibran (2"25-26); confectioner William Alix Jarrin and French chef Louis-Eustache Ude (2:182); and the actress Ellen Tree (3:109). Such an embarrassment of detail indeed suggests a novel about commodities, concerned with displaying its knowledge of the latest, most fashionable goods. Yet it soon becomes clear that the novel is using its fashionable detail in a highly ironized way. Its shopkeepers and tradespeople are not mentioned in full but rather gestured to: "Melnotte's bill," or an announcement of Frederica's having "paid her subscription at Ebers's ... [and] replenished her dressing-box at Delcroix" (1:46); of paper-weights of Vullimay's choicest bronze" (1:126) and the debate over employing Jarrin or Ude for the breakfast at Lady Olivia Tadcaster's *fête champêtre*. This list of truncated names presumes that its readers will be familiar with the shorthand, a presumption that emphasizes the apparent insidership that it offers. To readers who do not already know these names, *Pin-Money* does not precisely serving as a directory. The uninformed reader feels her own insufficiency, and that feeling—the knowledge that you lack a relationship to the goods—is what makes those goods fashionable. The novel offers knowledge not of goods but of fashion, that what you are reading is fashionable exactly because you have no relationship to it.

And this is not to mention the suspicion a good reader will adopt toward Lady Olivia Tadcaster, whose obsession with both saving and spending money marks her as vulgar, with a coarseness that inevitably infects the objects of her interest. Rejecting Frederica's choice either of "violet satin and *vert-bourgeon* velvet" to show up her former rival's "white crape and pearls," she says to her niece, who is choosing a dress for her Court presentation, "Positively I cannot allow you to be imposed upon with the purchase of such obsolete splendours; you

will look like last year's number of the *Journal des Modes*.—Mademoiselle, [to a dressmaker's assistant], these flowers are quite out of date;—I was with Herbault only last week, and—” (1:66-7). In light of the fashionable journals that I discussed in the first section, Lady Olivia's speech bears the linguistic markers of a periodical. The imperative statements she makes—”I cannot allow,” “you will look,” “are quite out of date”—suggest the inexorability expressed in the journals by their passive present. By invoking “last year,” dismissing Frederica's flowers as being “quite out of date,” and insisting that she “was with Herbault only last week,” Lady Olivia emphasizes the swift changes that are characteristic of material fashion, along with the concatenation of temporality, naturalness, and fashion summoned by the odd phrase “out of date” flowers. Turning naturalness into something that can be measured not by seasonal cyclicity, to which flowers might be supposed to belong, but to the temporality of fashion, the phrase “out of date flowers” uses a pretense of linearity to subsume of a natural temporality. Finally, her speech reduces Frederica to a textual representation, collapsing the difference between embodied and represented fashion in telling her, “you will look like last year's number.” In Lady Olivia's characterization, bodies are no more than pages upon which fashion can be illustrated. Either a body or a periodical can be rendered fashionable and unfashionable by the application of particular colors and shapes.

Lady Olivia's opening conversation with Frederica's mother also gives voice to the novel's apparent main preoccupation, whether women should have an independent financial status. But that question is almost self-evidently answered in the negative by the book's satiric tone. Instead, the novel offers a more sustained preoccupation with the pin money offers economic agency that is not quite agency. It overtakes the text's passing interest in sleeve length, fabric, or carriages (the new word and relatively new carriage type “britschka”

appears eight times in the novel) by acting as shorthand for the economic foundation that underlies the characters' potential to become fashionable. The novel thus exposes a contradiction: if women are to be fashionable, they must be able to acquire up-to-date goods in a marketplace—and yet they can neither be concerned about being up-to-date nor wield economic power. Pin money and its tenuous legal status become the focus of this contradiction.

An 1819 essay about the economic rights of married women calls pin money “an annual income, settled, or agreed to be settled, before marriage, by the husband on his intended wife, or allowed by him to her after marriage, gratuitously, for her personal and private expenditure, viz. for clothes and ornaments of her person.”¹⁶² An 1820 treatise, cited in discussions of marital property throughout the nineteenth century, expands upon that definition. Pin money is:

A Yearly allowance settled upon the wife before marriage, for the purchase of clothes or ornaments or otherwise, for her separate expenditure ... [also] gratuitous gifts, or payments from time to time made to the wife by her husband after marriage for such purposes. 2. Pin-money, however, is not to be considered as an absolute gift from the husband to the wife, nor like money set apart for the wife's sole and separate use during the coverture ... but as a sum allowed for the wife's personal expenses, and to deck her person suitably to her husband's rank, who has

¹⁶² James Clancy, *An Essay on the Equitable Rights of Married Women: With Respect to Their Separate Property, and Also on Their Claim to a Provision Called the Wife Equity: to Which is Added the Law of Pin-Money, Separate Maintenance, and of the Other Separate Provisions of Married Women* (Dublin: C Hunter, 1819), 2nd ed, 375.

accordingly an interest in its expenditure.”¹⁶³

These definitions insist on pin money’s difference from other financial settlements. A jointure, for example, gave a woman independent support after her husband’s death; a dowry was settled on a woman by her family and given to her husband upon marriage; and separated couples could establish a separate maintenance for the wife. Pin money, however, was specifically allocated to a married and cohabiting woman “for clothes and ornaments of her person” in the first definition and to “deck her person” in the phrasing of the second. Pin money gives a woman control over money that is not her own, offering a watered-down economic power that is trivialized by the sort of goods that power is supposed to purchase. More importantly, it is money that is unmoored from possession. The husband commits it to the wife, but he retains “an interest” in it; she does not possess it but lays it out on behalf of her husband’s position. The distancing is further emphasized by the fact that the money was usually given to the wife by a third party rather than her husband: when Frederica needs her next quarterly allowance, she “renew[s] her claims upon the Rawleighford agent, for the concluding hundred of the year” (2:230). The interest that the husband retains is detached, and the money—given as it is to a person who has no legal standing—ends up not belonging to anyone.

The pin money about which Lady Olivia frets at the beginning of the novel matters to her because she believes it will allow Frederica to purchase fashion by acquiring goods. She insists that, rather than sink Frederica to a level “with the butler or the dairymaid” (1:20), as Frederica believes, pin money will render her equal to her place: “Do you

¹⁶³ Roper Stote Donnison, *A Treatise of the Law of Property Arising from the Relation Between Husband and Wife*, 2 vol., (London: Henry Butterworth, 1820) 2.288.

suppose,” she asks, “the Duchess of Middlesex, or Lady Rosebank, or any other person of fashion of your acquaintance, condescends to go blushing to her husband for a twenty pound not, if she wishes to ... pay Melnotte’s bill?” (1.20). The novel as a whole, however, seems more interested in the economic system that underlies fashionable purchasing power, because the focus throughout is not on the goods themselves but the financial straits into which their acquisition casts Frederica. As a boon for the curious, and perhaps inattentive reader, the narrator, toward the end of the third volume, details Frederica’s purchases as a list (Figure 4) distinguished by formatting: an opera-box, a fountain, a horse, and a miniature; bills at the haberdasher, mantuamaker, and jeweler; her lady-in-waiting, Mrs. Pasley; and, of course, debts at the Hampton race track and, the largest bill of all, for the popular card game *écarté* (3:294).

This list of debts is once removed from the “clothes and ornaments of the person” for which pin money is intended. The first set evokes fashionable accessories and activities. Frederica needs a horse to ride in the park and an opera box in which to see and be seen; the miniature and fountain are fashionable accessories she acquires simply to participate in the consumer activities of her peers. The haberdasher, mantuamaker, and jeweler allow her to outfit and ornament herself in a way legitimized by the legal definition of pin money. Of all these debts, however, the entries for the race track (Hampton) and *écarté* are most important. Gambling separates money from its purchasing power, removing money furthest from any sort of utility, even the utility of ornamenting oneself.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Hence the love of gambling in novels featuring fashionable men: *Yes and No* contains a gambling scene, as does Disraeli’s *The Young Duke*. In his *Gambling in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel: ‘A Leprosy is o’er the Land’* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2003), Michael

Despite the affected shock of the narrator's three exclamation marks following the debt total, the problem with pin money is not the goods and services it underwrites nor even the staggering total. There is nothing wrong, Gore suggests, with objects of fashion in themselves, and indeed Rawleigh happily pays Frederica's bills to the extent he is able. (And one suspects that Gore would not have been so censorious of a thrifty middle-class housewife's outlay of pin money on actual pins, had she been interested at all in the middle class.) Pin money, rather, is problematic because it gives Frederica purchasing power, and consequently, if somewhat strangely, susceptibility to possession. Frederica's concern for her money and for the things it can and cannot buy ends up interfering with her position in the fashionable world. When she discovers that she has, naturally, outrun her income, she paces her room, sunk to the lowest financial need: "Money! ... what penalty would she not have endured, what sacrifice would she not have made for the secret acquisition of a few hundred pounds?" (3:207). Debt takes a bodily toll as well: "So haggard were her looks, her eyes so lusterless, her voice so tremulous" that her mother almost intervenes (3:209). Money, and the seemingly ineluctable want of it, permits things to inflict themselves onto Frederica's conscience and her body, possessing her as she has tried to possess them, in an early articulation of the truism that the things you own just end up owning you.

Pin Money resolves this situation by writing Frederica out of relationship to her money. Confessing her debts to her husband and relinquishing claim to her pin money, Frederica begs Sir Brooke to ignore the marriage contract, for "nothing has been, or ever shall be, legally specified between us!" (3:296). It would be easy to read this scene as fitting into

Flavin calls attention to a shift from Regency toleration and even encouragement of deep play to the moralizing alarm with which the Victorian period greeted it.

Nancy Armstrong's familiar narrative of the way in which novels depoliticized marriage in order to rewrite an economic contract as a sexual contract.¹⁶⁵ Yet the novel offers two challenges to such a narrative. First, it depends upon an understanding of the novel as a genre by, for, and about the middle class, a premise that, for the fashionable novel, is demonstrably untrue. Second, and more importantly, Frederica's handing over of her pin money is not simply an act that reinforces the gender-appropriateness of handling money but an act that feminizes fashion in the context of capitalism. Frederica relinquishes control of her money and in turn preserves her *ton*. Women thus occupy a privileged relationship to fashion not because they are innately drawn to decorative and frivolous objects, but because only women who are outside of an economic system, i.e., safely married, can maintain the indifference to the economic system that fashion requires. The narrator notes that Frederica, before her marriage, had been fairly unmemorable—but once married she became “one of the most admired and popular beauties of the day” and, in the free indirect discourse of the fashionable world, “an angel at once!” (1:220). Marriage allows Frederica to become fashionable and to maintain *ton* both because she no longer bears an instrumental relationship to the fashionable Season—that is, she is no longer an active agent on the marriage market—and because her husband controls her money.¹⁶⁶ So *Pin-Money*'s rampant commodities, which the *Westminster Review* dismissed as so much advertisement, turn out to

¹⁶⁵ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford, 1987).

¹⁶⁶ While aristocratic women may have maintained control of their money, what matters here is that in imagining a depoliticized marriage, Gore's novel does not thereby construct any sort of agency or subjectivity. Instead the construction of a femininity that need not handle money is a way for that femininity to become and remain fashionable by eschewing an instrumental relationship to fashionable things.

be a distraction from the fact that the novel is primarily interested in the construction of an indifference toward the fashionable object that permits both the object and the person to remain fashionable.

In *Yes and No*, political independence is a figure for the disavowal of an interested relationship to the world itself. In *Pin Money*, financial dependence turns out to guarantee fashionable independence, the distancing of the individual in relation to the fashionable world. What's more, both these novels situate their construction of an independent world of objects within a cultural moment at which aristocratic privilege is perceived to be under attack precisely because objects can no longer convey information as things. In *Yes and No*, that fear manifests as anxiety about money coming in from colonized properties, as we learn when Captain Wilcox begins to buy up aristocratic possessions and lands in sight of Germain's ancestral home. This foreign money brings objects into circulation that ought not to be circulated, a threat similar to that posed by London merchants in *Pin Money*: Frederica admires the graceful and cultured daughter of a wealthy soapboiler, but she trembles to think that her brother Lord Launeston might marry into the family. And in fact the soapboiler's lovely house completely fails to convey the information that his wife is hopelessly vulgar. Frederica finds herself "startled by the profusion and selection of the objects of *virtù* which met her eye on every side ... The saloon into which they were now ushered, was one of those luxurious retreats, which modern refinement delights to decorate with all the triumphs of human genius" (1:109-110). These luxuries stand in contrast with Mrs. Waddlestone's vulgar diction, full of "La!" "vast" and "sweet woman" as well as the more fashionable "*grande monde*," "*fete*," and "*point de jour*" (1:111-112).

Both subplots suggest an aristocracy under assault, a system that, at least in popular imagination, is rapidly becoming defunct. Sumiao Li takes on exactly fashion's role in relation to the relationship between the aristocracy and bourgeois, arguing that fashion is not just the "old sartorial-symbolic mechanism" through which, in Anne McClintock's phrase, the aristocratic body is a "theatre of sumptuary and sexual display" but is also a new organizing principle for a society in transformation.¹⁶⁷ The actual status of the British aristocracy in this period is a point of debate, but the periodicals—with their investment in the presence of a fashionable world—certainly see it as under attack.¹⁶⁸ In the July 1831 edition of *The Ladies' Museum*, the "Fashionable Intelligence and Chit-chat" makes two points: "For some reason, which we cannot divine, Almack's has fallen off during the present season; we never recollect seeing the rooms so deserted" and on the next page: "the Reform Bill, we think, may be considered as carried ... On this subject we can but echo the sentiment contained in the splendid resignation speech of Mr. Bankes, and say that we sincerely hope 'that the new Constitution which we are going to have may be as good and

¹⁶⁷ Li, 9; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 174.

¹⁶⁸ What Li does not address in full is the aristocracy's response to this new system. It is possible fears would have been relatively new. John Cannon suggests that, contrary to the familiar narrative of England's rejection of the aristocracy following the Glorious Revolution, a move that kept its aristocracy open and "dynamic," England actually had a firmly entrenched aristocracy that held political power until the last decade or two of the eighteenth century, in *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: University of Cambridge, 1987). Although he qualifies the number considerably, he quantifies the number of peers in the eighteenth century as 1,003. The mere fact that the aristocracy can be quantified at all gives some idea of the way in which "aristocracy" can be discussed and comprehended as a group with a specific size and limits. Being sized and limited, it follows that it might have some interest in preserving itself.

useful to us as the old Constitution which we are going to discard.”¹⁶⁹ The decline of Almack’s, the exclusive dance hall that was regarded as the “seventh heaven of the fashionable world,” walks hand-in-hand with the threat of a Reform Bill.¹⁷⁰

How justified were these fears that the aristocratic hold over fashion was declining? A review of the *Morning Post*’s regular “Fashionable World” feature shows a vigorous aristocratic presence at the beginning of the century that declines by the middle of the century and is nearly absent by the end: in 1825, the starting date of this dissertation, 222 of the Season’s events are given by titled people, 106 by people without titles, and 25 by institutions. In 1883, the final year that the feature “Fashionable Arrangements” appeared in the newspaper, titled individuals do not appear at all. Party-giving duties have passed to institutions and officials, as in the July 30th edition: the Lady Mayoress’s reception on Tuesday, a cricket match on Wednesday, Cup Day at Goodwood on Thursday, and the International Gun and Polo Club Shooting Meeting on Saturday. Whatever the political and systemic changes underlying the shift, it seems evident that the association of aristocracy and fashion had vanished by the end of the century.

Journals change with the times, as the front page’s changing time indicates. Their planned obsolescence guarantees their *ton*, and so they have a fairly uncomplicated relationship to market forces. Imitating or purchasing the fashionable items they describe

¹⁶⁹ “Fashionable Intelligence and Chitchat,” *The Ladies’ Museum* (July 1831), 322, 323

¹⁷⁰ Captain Gronow (Rees Howell Gronow), one of the few soldiers admitted to fashionable life, is often cited as referring to Almack’s as “the seventh heaven of the fashionable world,” *The Reminiscences of Captain Gronow formerly of the Grenadier Guards and member of parliament for Stafford, being anecdotes of the camp, the court, and the clubs, at the close of the last war with France, related by himself* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1861), 43.

can help readers attain a state of fashion. Fashionable novels, however, seem to show fashion as essence, not accident: free from capitalist rules of the market, it is something “gifted” rather than acquired. But as we have seen, the line between gift and purchase is actually quite slim, and anyhow that leaves us with an unhelpful statement—that fashion is an essence—and an unsatisfying tautology: a person is fashionable because she is fashionable. The difference between journals and novels *vis-à-vis* the aristocracy thus helps crack open this tautology. Journals don’t care who holds fashionable arrangements, so long as someone does. Fashionable novels, however, have a more complicated relationship with the aristocracy under threat, as new money brings goods into and bankruptcy takes aristocrats out of circulation. The novels’ thematic resistance to these forms of circulation is tied into their paradoxical and tautological resistance to criticism—which, in itself, has become part of their *ton*. I will now turn to a final circular relationship that has not been fully unpacked: these texts about fashionable society created themselves as objects of fashion within the fashion system that they represented.

IV. Non-Description

Both *Yes and No* and *Pin Money* articulate ways in which objects of fashion remain fashionable objects by resisting incorporation into relationship with characters; and in which fashionable characters remain fashionable by sustaining an independent relationship to a world of objects. Fashionable novels themselves, as objects of fashion, are always threatened by becoming unfashionable not simply because the temporality of fashion demands it but because their status as fashionable objects is threatened by their potential to be things that

confer fashion. It is a difficult because necessarily ephemeral position, as fashion continually has to try to defer the moment of the unfashionable at the same time that it requires the moment to be fashionable. The genre, I am arguing, approaches the problem through what might best be characterized as a version of the Heideggerian notion that the thing becomes an object at the point of rupture: the thing becomes—or rather remains—a fashionable object at the moment of narrative abjuration.

Ephemerality, fashion's aforementioned Achilles heel, is a weak spot not only for fashion but also for fashionable publishers, who must continually chase the moment of fashion. While the always-out-of-reach nature of fashion may boost sales of the *next* book, it calls into question the ontological status of the current book as an object of fashion. As I discussed in chapter one, Henry Colburn's puffs claimed for his books not fidelity of characterization to common life, or acuity of understanding, or freshness of plot, but the ability to offer accurate fashionable content through accurately depicting specific personages and goods. Colburn's cheerfully mercenary approach to publishing worked; the books sold widely, themselves becoming pieces of the fashionable ephemera they discussed.¹⁷¹ Pricing high but aiming explicitly at middle-class readers through libraries, Colburn became, as Sutherland says, "influential in the 1820s in fixing the standard first-form issue for fiction as the three volume, 31s 6d novel, designed to sell to libraries rather than direct to the reading public."¹⁷² Expense made ownership of the texts exclusive, but some did eventually come down in price. By 1836, nearly a decade after the initial publication of both texts, Colburn

¹⁷¹ According to John Sutherland, Colburn continued to expand at the time of the financial 'crash' in the book trade of 1826, more than doubling his output of fiction in that year.

¹⁷² *ibid*, 79.

was offering one-shilling parts of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham* (1828) and *Disowned* (1829).¹⁷³ The release of the novels in this new publishing form signals their continuing popularity, or at least the supposition that their re-release would prove profitable, despite the changes that would render them out-of-date. Publishing history, then, suggests that topicality is not the only measure by which the fashion of a fashionable novel is determined.

In *Yes and No*, the narrator specifically rejects fashionable topicality, even though Normanby's claim to fashionable knowledge was more supportable, and supported, than that of many other novelists. A reviewer in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, for example, says that *Yes and No* (along with Lister's *Herbert Lacy*) "may be taken as very faithful portraits of fashionable life. They owe the great interest they excite to the entire conviction of the readers, that the characters described have a real existence, and not to any intricacy of plot, or ingenuity of structure."¹⁷⁴ This despite a relatively new claim to aristocracy: son of the first earl of Mulgrave, a position created in 1812, Normanby himself became first marquess of Normanby on 25 July 1838, one of seven marquessates established under Queen Victoria.¹⁷⁵ Still, Normanby's credentials mean that no mere ignorance accounts for the unwillingness to commit his narrator to specifics of fashionable dress.

Describing the dressing of Lady Latimer and Helen Mordaunt, the illegitimate

¹⁷³ John Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers* (London: Macmillan Press, 1995), 89.

¹⁷⁴ "Review of New Publications," *The Gentleman's Magazine, and Historical Chronicle. From January to June, 1828* XCVIII (January 1828), 55.

¹⁷⁵ Richard Davenport-Hines, 'Phipps, Constantine Henry, first marquess of Normanby (1797–1863)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed, Jan 2008, accessed 18 Jan 2011, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/22187.

daughter of Oakley's uncle, the narrator says:

[A]ccording to generally-established precedent, a full and detailed account ought to be given of the successful result of their labours. But will my fair readers pardon a poor author who owns that it is the dread of their disgust which makes him shun an attempt by which some ignorantly suppose that their favour is easiest won? ... many months may yet intervene before this meets the public eye; and as he has, like other such ephemeral creatures, his own little unacknowledged hopes of a sort of indefinite immortality, he cannot bear the idea that if he should now so commit himself, when the next return of spring shall enable the universally admitted arbitress of taste to hold her annual court at Longchamp, even on that very day every pretty pair of Parisian eyes would be averted in contempt from this antiquated and old-fashioned page, and as a necessary consequence, as fast as the post could convey the *Journal des Modes*, that contempt would become universal, not falling alone, as it ought, on his devoted head, but what is of infinitely more consequence, being unjustly shared by the ladies whom he would have thus arbitrarily condemned still to wear the fashions of the bygone year. (1:176-78)

Normanby's narrator excuses himself from detailed description of fashionable dress because, he claims, such details would date his book and mislead his readers. The disavowal results in an effect similar to that of the narrative abjuration I articulated in Chapter One, but its structure differs. The narrator affects no exclusion from fashion. In another part of the passage, he insists that he will, "manage to avoid such glaring mistakes as those made by some self-constituted authorities on these subjects, who have ... volunteered a display of their own ignorance by a description of their heroine either by daylight in the dogdays in a

superb dress of rich black velvet, or shining amid December snows in flowing drapery of the finest white muslin.” Perfectly capable of describing fashionable dress at any particular moment in time, he refuses to condemn his descriptions to a necessarily ephemeral topicality because he cannot control the inevitable and rapid change of fashion. Instead, he excludes readers while pretending to include them, imagining his readership as ladies who would themselves be entering fashionable ballrooms: an open exclusivity that bars entrants precisely through the pretense of inclusion. Hardly didactic, the novel is actually designed to create new barriers to admission into the scenes that he describes.

Parodies of fashionable novels riff on the genre’s lack of specificity, as with Dickens’s imaginary interpolated text, *Lady Flabella* (in *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1838-1839), as I cited in the introduction: “*Mercie*—thank you,” said the Lady Flabella, as the lively but devoted Charizette plentifully besprinkled with the fragrant compound the Lady Flabella’s *mouchoir* of finest cambric, edged with richest lace”; when Lady Flabella’s page arrives with a letter, he hands it to her on “A golden salver gorgeously chased.”¹⁷⁶ We are supposed to find this fashionable narrative ludicrous for its hyperbolic language, its use of French and subsequent immediate English translation (indicating that its readers are not expected actually to understand that language), and its reliance on a set of superlatives or near-superlatives—”finest,” “richest,” “plentifully besprinkled.” Dickens’s turn away from the specificity of objects to the vacuity of adjectives (“gorgeously chased,” which, after all, tells us nothing about the plate’s actual appearance) is certainly funny, but there is more. The parody points out the way in which novelistic fashionable description, operating through adverbs and

¹⁷⁶ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 359.

superlative adjectives, contrives to conceal rather than reveal, because they do not convey observable information. Of the ten descriptors, only two convey exterior information: “golden” and “cambric.” The others—”Lively,” “devoted,” “plentiful,” “fragrant,” “fine,” “rich,” “gorgeous,” and “chased”—are what might be called adjectives of opinion, in contrast to those of size, shape, color, origin, or material. They cannot be objectively verified, and their resistance to verification permits their nouns to remain objects that cannot be owned, measured, quantified, or exchanged—and therefore, in the logic of fashion, cannot be things.

Although the style may certainly have something to do with Dickens’s lack of familiarity with fashionable goods, an equally non-descriptive description appears in many fashionable novels. The narrator in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Godolphin* (1833), for example, introduces his heroine Constance, widely taken to be a portrait of Lady Blessington, as a composite of generalities. She has: “a brow delicately but darkly pencilled ... an eye of the deepest blue, and a classic contour ... the short and curved upper lip ... the most dazzling teeth, and the ripe and dewy under lip ... a bust of the most dazzling whiteness, and the justest and most chiselled proportions: a foot, whose least beauty was its smallness; and a waist narrow.”¹⁷⁷ The excess of superlatives—”prettiest,” “deepest,” “most dazzling,” “justest,” “most chiselled” produce a composite description that produces not an individual but a genre of beauty. Both the parody and the original employ a descriptive style that has no necessary relationship to the matter under discussion—again, the adjectives are those of opinion, or perhaps effect, rather than objective matter. This descriptive independence, as

¹⁷⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Godolphin*, ed. Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 60-61.

we might call it, is markedly different from the description is deployed in the fashion writing we have already seen in the early nineteenth-century periodicals, in which the point of the fashion writing is to bring to light an object that is assumed to exist. Words in these texts are not, as Barthes described fashion writing, “brought to bear upon a hidden object,” but rather draw attention to unrevealed objects that resist incorporation into the narrative project of representation.

It is tempting here to suggest that the description of Constance might fall under a different rubric than a description of a dress. Bodies do not go in and out of fashion, after all, and the focus here is not on what is accidental to the body but what seems to be essential.¹⁷⁸ But Loschek argues that what distinguishes fashion from art is its continual reference to the body, that “clothing (also self-painting and tattooing) and the body are perceived as a single unit.”¹⁷⁹ And what the fashionable novel shows us here is that this description renders the body simply one more piece of fashionable matter, a homology evident in my earlier discussion of the hair and the hat, both of which are treated as exactly similar in specificity. As Oakley’s oratorical passion is ontologically identical to wax candles in *Yes and No*, Constance’s body is objectified—that is, made unable to be incorporated—through the narrator’s apparently non-objective description.

Godolphin is a rather serious novel, but Dickens’s parody belies the fact that many

¹⁷⁸ Although bodies do, in fact, go in and out of fashion. Bulwer-Lytton’s paean to Constance’s “short and curved upper lip” notes that it is a “necessary completion to all real beauty of either sex” (60), when, of course, one needs only look at the difference between Clara Bow’s cupid’s bow lips and the wide mouth of twenty-first century models to understand that fashionable bodies change over time.

¹⁷⁹ Loschek, 26.

fashionable novels knew perfectly well their own absurdity. *Yes and No* is typical in its arch self-consciousness. Mocking authors of fashionable novels who have been invited to a dinner party, and who have presumably accepted with the expectation that they can mine the party for research, Fitzalbert asks Germain:

Do you know the modern recipe for a finished picture of fashionable life? Let a gentleman^{ly} man, with a gentleman^{ly} style, take of foolscap paper a few quires; stuff them well with high sounding titles ... open the Peerage at random, pick a supposititious author out of one page of it, and fix the imaginary characters upon some of the rest; mix it all up with a quantum sufficiency of puff ... here at least they have an opportunity of observing the cut of one's coat, and the colour of one's hair. For instance ... a fork, not a knife, should be the active agent in carrying food to the mouth ... young ladies should be dieted on the wings of boiled chickens, and fine gentlemen should quaff nought but hock and soda-water." (1:135-37)

The satirically italicized "ly" of the opening adjective pokes fun at both fashionable novelists who think that they can convey any useful information and readers of these novels who imagine that they can glean that information. Rather than conveying objective information about, for example, a guest's origin, the adjective "gentlemanly" conveys the same non-specificity parodied in Dickens, employed seriously in *Godolphin*, and forwarded through elsewhere in *Yes and No*.

To be clear: we have known for some time that fashionable novels are self-aware, self-critical, and resistant to attempts to read them for detail. What I am doing here is articulating the way that such an attitude works formally, and suggesting the political and narrative ramifications of such an approach. In this case, although the passage appears to

undermine the ability of a novelist to convey fashionable information such as the superiority of the fork and the delectability of boiled chickens, *Yes and No* offers up those very same details exactly because it satirically disavows them. *Yes and No* is thereby able to purvey fashionable detail while still preserving the narrative's lack of relationship to its content. It can include the fashionable detail that forks, not knives, are the more proper utensils because it mocks the fashionable novel that it summons as satiric object, embedding the detail within a satiric structure that denies the ability of the novel to convey fashion and, importantly, its interest in doing so. By mocking its imaginary intertext, the narrative allows *Yes and No* both to contain the information that forks are fashionable and at the same time to preserve its own fashionability by disavowing any particular interest in forks. That structure keeps the forks, the boiled wings, the hock and soda-water from being incorporated into the narrative. They are not things conveying information about the characters; they remain objects, divorced from human touch.

Pin Money, too, uses a framing device to maintain distance between itself and the fashionable object. When the narrator comes upon the protagonist Frederica Rawleigh at the moment when Frederica has discovered (or so she thinks) that her husband is engaged in an affair with her mother's companion Miss Elbany, she is contemplating her supposed abandonment:

[She was] indulging in all the ruminative misery of her first widowhood ... In her hand was a volume of one of Madame de Souza's most touching novels; on the little marble table by her side was a scented taper, casting its pale reflection upon a bouquet of Colvile's freshest roses; at her feet the velvet ottoman brought home by Lord Launceston from his Turkish travels; behind her head the cambric pillow

embroidered with her own initials by her mother's hand ... and had Rochard seen her in that attitude, with the scattered tresses of her raven hair entangled round her beautiful hand and wrist, he would have presented a fairer Lady Rawleigh to the admiration of posterity. (2.242-43)

The narrator surrounds Frederica with the objects appropriate to a fashionable woman's boudoir, but misery has made her unable to maintain her relationship of indifference to these objects that surround her. The objects risk obtaining an objective correlative that would offer information about Frederica's interior state, and belief in her husband's infidelity risks casting her into another kind of novel all together, one in which the objects are absorbed into her misery to exteriorize her internal suffering. And so the narrator intervenes. Through reference to Rochard, a fashionable painter whom Lady Rawleigh has commissioned to paint her miniature,¹⁸⁰ the narrator thwarts the rising visual ekphrasis. The picture of Frederica "with the scattered tresses of her raven hair entangled round her beautiful hand and wrist" belongs to Rochard's viewpoint, not to the narrator's, and the invocation of Lady Rawleigh's portrait actually prevents the narrator from drawing a visual portrait. The narrator does not offer the image of Lady Rawleigh occupying a room filled with objects that meaningfully reflect on her interiority but rather provides the image of an image: Lady Rawleigh as a portrait, surrounded with symbolic objects that call attention to her isolation and sorrow: the touching novel, the pale candle, the fresh roses whose bloom implicitly contrasts with her misery, the pillow a reminder of her virgin state. The objects,

¹⁸⁰ The reference here is almost certainly to Simon Jacques Rochard (1788-1872), who painted miniatures for many members of London's high (and even noble) society. It is also possible that the name refers to a younger brother François (d. 1858), who had a fashionable but less celebrated career as a miniaturist and watercolorist.

made meaningful only in the context of the imaginary picture—like the imaginary fashionable novel of *Yes and No*—thereby avoid becoming externalized representations of an interior state. In this way, again, the narrative renders up the fashionable object while at the same time preventing its incorporation into a world of things by maintaining a narrative distance.

The curious muteness of Lady Rawleigh's objects offers another version of fashionable indifference in the context of narrative technique. It is simple enough to suggest that the vases, ottomans, and boiled chicken wings of fashionable novels are simply types of realist detail in the context of novel-as-anthropology: that they are Clifford Geertz and Gilbert Ryle's sociological thick description; that they are Jonathan Culler's "realistic description," which illuminates character and motivates theme¹⁸¹; that they are time-specific details that "authenticate a novel's characters and settings, ensuring the ready imaginative assent on the part of readers"¹⁸²; or that they are simply the way that novels work, the accretion of details that signify, but do not denote, the real.¹⁸³ But to my mind, something is

¹⁸¹ Jonathan Culler, *The Realism of Madame Bovary*, MLN 122.4 (207), 683-696, 689.

¹⁸² Altick, 1.

¹⁸³ Barthes asserts that "Semiotically, the 'concrete detail' is constituted by the *direct* collusion of a referent and a signifier; the signified is expelled from the sign, and with, of course, the possibility of developing a *form of the signified*, i.e. narrative structure itself." "The Reality Effect," 142. This technique is an alternative to the visual ekphrasis that Barthes discusses as a formal device that establishes the realism of a novel. The fashionable novel gives us branded detail that stands in for description. Rather than describe a vase's visual properties, for example, the narrator lists its maker; rather than narrate a dress, the narrator keys it to its maker and material. By including such visual description, the novel would enact exactly the wrong relationship to its things, rendering them either characterological tools that acted as external manifestations of interior states or, more simply perhaps, using them in the service of a novelistic realism.

missing in all the variations of this approach. Just as something formal is lost by explaining the novels as simply sociological thick description, something precise is lost by a turn to the formal that explains the detail as just realism, for the referent and signifier do directly collude: the teacup is not just a teacup but a Sevres teacup; the cap is not just a cap with red ribbons, it is an Herbault cap with ribbons of *feu d'enfer*, branded objects that could have been touched and held by the reader of a fashionable novel.¹⁸⁴ Such collusion might seem then to suggest “obsessive reference to the ‘concrete,’” the “weapon against meaning” that finalizes action and communication,¹⁸⁵ which also appears in the fashionable journals I looked at in this chapter’s first section: not “imaginary” dresses, states the journal, but “really *existing* ones.”

In *Pin-Money* and *Yes and No*, and I would argue for the fashionable novel more widely, realistic detail prevents rather than illuminates theme and character, as it does when Fitzalbert roundly dismisses the potential for candles to illuminate character; and as it does when the narrator insists that the objects of Frederica’s convey no information. Where Richardson, for example, describes Pamela’s clothes in order, first, to articulate her country innocence and, second, to arouse the desire to undress her, these fashionable novelists pointedly avoid description. Branding and generalizing work with generics of a specifically

¹⁸⁴ This specific cap is worn Herbault was a fashionable Parisian milliner mentioned in many novels of the time. Although I can find no account of a color called *feu d'enfer*, the specificity of color was important to fashion; in any case, *feu d'enfer* would have had topical meaning in reference to Napoleon’s use of a military tactic by the same name, the massing of artillery on specific points of an enemy line. The specificity of color is also important, considering that fashion magazines had a much richer vocabulary of color than common today: *coquelicot*, *jonquil*; Pomona green, puce, cerulean blue, and so forth.

¹⁸⁵ Barthes, *The Fashion System*, 143.

valued kind (Sevres teacups; Colville's roses) while avoiding detail that would take a meaningful place in the narrative. Fashionable matter is the stuff that is referenced as already known commodities. Their value, that is, is already encoded in a way that makes them only generic. What the fashionable novel ends up showing is that to read for the fashionable object is to fall into error by imagining that the object endows the novel, like the character, with its fashion. By remaining at the level of the generic through rejecting descriptive form, the novels adopt the fashionable relationship their characters inhabit. In another twist on the paradox of fashion in the context of temporality, matter becomes the fashionable object by remaining the object.

To return to the gigot sleeves: when *Yes and No's* Selina and Georgina wear gigot sleeves, their care for the sleeves, their desire to preserve them uncrushed within the confines of their borrowed carriage, renders those sleeves desperately unfashionable because the sleeves, by entering into a relationship with the wearers, become things. Yet abjuration enables the novel to preserve the sleeves as objects of fashion. By diverting attention from the content itself to the way in which content is held in place by their formal structure, the novels attempt to resolve the paradox of the fashionable and in the process constitute the genre not through topicality of detail, which would require a consonance between a diegetic and extra-diegetic world, but through an internal relationship to that detail, which may or may not be fully articulated or even currently fashionable. By rejecting the idea that meaning can be conveyed through fashionable detail defined as content, the novels construct a temporality defined not by topicality but by a relationship to contemporaneity that remains fashionable exactly because it does not care to. To paraphrase Loschek, the fashionable novel remains fashionable because its fashions do not remain the fashion. And acts of

prevention offer a key to understanding what these novels can tell us about the development of genre in the context of reform: if the fashionable novel's theory of the political is that which governs the relationship not only between people but between people and things, then the fashionable novel imagines an England in which political power comes not from inclusion but from exclusion: a state of being unincorporated that, like fashion, is potentially available at all times to all, but at any time only to some. In the next chapter, I will suggest the limits of that political position: a plot refusal that unwittingly writes aristocrats, and the fashionable novel, out of history.



DINNER DRESS.

BALL DRESS.

Engraved separately for The Ladies' Museum - New and Improved Series.

Figure 3 Dresses illustrated in *The Ladies' Museum*, April 1831

table with a list of her debts in one hand, and in the other the cheque forwarded to her acceptance by Lord Trevelyan.

Does any one wish to see the list of a lady's debts?—does any curious impertinent of the male sex desire to pry into the mysteries of female extravagance?—If so, he may be admitted into the secret on condition that the opinions he ventures to express on such an occasion, are as lenient as those which proceeded from the lips of the honourable member for Martwich.

	£	s.	d.
Opera-box	150	0	0
Fountain	94	10	0
Horse	80	0	0
Miniature	31	10	0
Hampton	15	15	0
Haberdasher	79	13	6½
Mantua-maker	112	10	6
Jeweller	43	7	0
Pasley's account	33	4	0
One year's pocket-money	75	0	0
Ecarté	280	0	0
	<u>994</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>0½ !!!</u>

Figure 4 List of Frederica's debts from Catherine Gore's *Pin-Money*

Chapter 3. The Tyranny of Fashion: Overplotting in Lady Charlotte Bury's

Exclusives

This then shall be a tale for future times, that in an age when the cry for liberty was loudest, when sovereignty was attacked, and all authority was contemned, there arose a secret junto, which alone reigned unopposed; which could alone enforce authority: a junto so mysterious, that none can penetrate its intricate arcana.

—*Almack's* (1827)

In Lady Charlotte Bury's *Exclusives* (1830), Lady Tilney, head of the novel's titular set of fashionables, mulls over the dilution of society's exclusivity.¹⁸⁶ "As to Almack's," she considers, in a moment of free indirect discourse, "that circle of exclusiveness had been polluted; its brief course was run, and its brightness on the decline."¹⁸⁷ This troubling loss of exclusivity prompts Lady Tilney to establish a super-exclusive society, a Society-within-Society that will prop up her tottering authority and consolidate a drawing-room control of what is supposed to be the Whig political party. The construction of this Society-within-Society, a set of Exclusives who are even more fashionable than the fashionables themselves, occupies the novel's entire first volume to the exclusion (as it were) of almost anything resembling plot or, in fact, even incident—a slender thread indeed on which to hang a novel.

¹⁸⁶ Unsurprisingly for novels considered even at the time of publication to be ephemera, the publishing history of fashionable novels is often murky. *The Exclusives*, for example, is generally considered to have been published in 1830, as its title page indicates. The first advertisements for it, however, come out in *The Star* on 4 August 1829, and the first reviews also come out in 1829. Royal A. Gettman, in *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), places the novel in 1829 (64; n2 *List*).

¹⁸⁷ The first instance that the *Oxford English Dictionary* records of "Exclusives" used as noun to mean an "exclusive person" is from Robert Plumer Ward's *Tremaine*, 3 vols., (London: Colburn, 1825): "She came out ... in full maturity of fastidiousness, a finished Exclusive" (2:24). The use of an initial capital to mark off a particular wealthy or fashionable group dates, according to the *OED*, back to the seventeenth century.

In the previous two chapters I have, by focusing on narrative problems, questioned popular conceptions of fashionable novels. In the process, I have relocated fashionability from a titled author to a sequence of authorial and narratorial abjurations that create fashion through rejecting the professionalization of the literary marketplace, and then from certain goods and behaviors to a narrative non-instrumentality of description. In this chapter, I will examine the critical commonplace that the fashionable novel suffers, as though diseased, from a deplorable lack of plot. In the first section, I will look closely at volume one, in which the novel anatomizes its genre at the same time that it details the setting up of Lady Tilney's society. It is my contention that the novel spends its first volume articulating the conditions through which the second and third volume's plot must be understood: after spending an entire volume on Lady Tilney, the novel nearly abandons her in order to relate a didactic tale concerning the evils of fashionable life and its differently detrimental effects on the fortunes and reputations of two protagonists, Lord Albert and Lady Glenmore.¹⁸⁸ In the second section, I will unpack the novel's complicated plot structure to articulate the way that its three nested levels of plot comment both upon each other and upon the novel's rewriting of a real-world scandalous plot. In the final section, I will turn to the novel's tacit political concerns, uncovering the way in which the resolution of the fashionable plot problematizes its political plot. My argument is that this novel's structure, built around a refusal of plot, turns politics into a matter of fashion because it can only make its point about politics through fashion. By refusing to plot, *The Exclusives* articulates not only an approach to its

¹⁸⁸ A seminal, although not comprehensive, book on the construction of nineteenth-century Society, capitalized, is Lenore Davidoff's *The Best Circles* (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 1973).

genre but also to the place of the fashionable and the aristocratic in its own concept of history.

I. Fashionable Structure

Vineta Colby sums up the fashionable novel as a genre in which “the best of them are those which are the most typical—therefore, the most mannered and artificial. The worst of them are unreadable.”¹⁸⁹ In some ways, *The Exclusives* is an unreadable book. It is tedious, schematic, and, right from its opening apology, resolutely typical: “However little such things in themselves might deserve to be handed down,” the narrator says, as she introduces Lady Tilney’s boudoir, “yet to chronicle them for the day would not be without its use. The sensible part of mankind would laugh at the follies, and wonder at the extravagance, which the page of such ephemeral history unfolded; while the actors in the scene might possibly view in the mirror held up to them their own lives, and their own actions, in a new and truer light” (1:1-2). This introduction, which both describes and conforms to its genre, levels a familiar critique of fashionable society as foolish and extravagant through the familiar trope of the novel as a mirror that reflects society the way that the mirror reflects the boudoir’s things, people, and events. The narrator’s use of the mirror signals her awareness of the cliché at the same time that it makes the cliché an operating condition of the novel. The

¹⁸⁹ Vineta Colby, *Yesterday’s Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974), 52-53. Colby is not the first to suggest that fashionable novels are unreadable: Teufelsdröck, too, insists that fashionable novels are unreadable: “at the end of some short space, I was uniformly seized with ... a kind of infinite, unsufferable Jew’s-harping and scrannel-piping there; to which the frightfullest species of Magnetic Sleep soon supervened ... till at last, by order of the Doctor, dreading ruin to my whole intellectual and bodily faculties, and a general breaking-up of the constitution, I reluctantly but determinedly forbore,” in *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 210.

mirror trope thus introduces the first volume's main point: form [the mirror, i.e. the novel] may mirror content [the boudoir, i.e. fashionable life], but content, mannered and artificial, also determines form. In other words, the mirror can only reflect what it is shown.

Significantly, the following 300 pages of the novel's first volume introduce fashionable society but not the novel's protagonists. Instead, it methodically anatomizes the genre in order to delineate the parameters for fashionable plot.

That anatomization identifies the genre of fashionable novel as didactic and moralistic, therefore providing an argument for its own typicality at the same time that, quite typically, it self-referentially models both good and bad readers. Lady Tilney rhapsodizes to Mr. Ombre about a novel she calls the "Male Coquet": "Do tell me, is it not exquisite? Among all the trash heaped upon people of fashion, this alone is well done. It must be confessed that, in spite of its severity, the whole is well drawn, and though highly coloured, not a daub" (1:59-60).¹⁹⁰ (Perhaps that severity explains Mr. Ombre's rejoinder that the "world don't" like it

¹⁹⁰ I have been unable to determine if this refers to a real novel. Several books called *The Male Coquet* or *Male Coquette* were published in the eighteenth century—one by Jane Timbury in 1788, one anonymous in 1770. A Garrick play was also called *The Male Coquette*. There is a reference to a *Male Coquet* by Lord March in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, issue 11, part 7, in a catalogue of books as part of a collection of manuscripts of Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, at Ford Castle Co. Northumberland (Google Books Search, 17 March 2011). The catalogue contains no reference to date, and I have been unable to locate the novel—if indeed it is a novel. One contender is *Victoria, or the Male Coquette and the Dupe* (London: Robins, 1828), although I find this unlikely, since the novel is set in sixteenth-century France. The phrase "male coquet" occurs in several fashionable novels of the period, including *Almack's Revisited*, 3 vols. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1828), T.H. Lister's *Herbert Lacy*, 3 vols. (London: Published for Henry Colburn by Richard Bentley, 1828), Robert Plumer Ward's *De Vere; or, The Man of Independence*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1827), and, without the adjective 'male' but in the masculine form, in Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1828). Based on the prevalence of the phrase and the suggestion that Lady Tilney and Mr. Ombre are talking about a recent rather than an eighteenth-century publication, I infer that the fictional title is meant to invoke a type rather than a specific title.

[1:59-60].) Lady Tilney's casual acknowledgment that there exists a whole pile of trash "heaped" upon people of fashion suggests she understands the genre to be aimed at fashionable people who ignore the didactic message—a danger, one supposes, that might visit *The Exclusives* itself. The novel models this improper reading when Lady Hamlet Vernon asks Lord Albert's opinion of *Tremaine*: "is it not charming?—Do you know I have thought the hero was like you" (1:220). A reader of *Tremaine* might justly echo Lord Albert's rejoinder that he suspects Lady Hamlet Vernon has "not quite" read *Tremaine* all through. The novel, if it is one—its narrator calls it a "treatise of moral philosophy" (1:247)—offers a character study of its titular Tremaine, a man whose over-refinement has made common amusements, and any number of what must generally be considered uncommon women, nauseous. His tender sensibilities are so finely strung that he "almost trembled" at the sight of a neighboring squire, whose primary offenses lie in that unfortunate's "single-breasted riding coat, narrow brim and high crown ... very long breeches with plentiful strings, and very short boots with plentiful straps" (1:68-69). In *The Exclusives*, by contrast, Lord Albert primly asserts his conviction that "false refinement [is] the most wretched of human possessions" and forces Lady Hamlet Vernon to confess that she thought the third volume of the novel "heavy" (1:220).

Truly it is heavy, being devoted to a lengthy dialogue between Tremaine and a Dr. Evelyn, during which the latter plumbs the theological and moral depths of the former before allowing him to marry his daughter. To impress its seriousness upon the reader, the third volume contains such footnotes as one advising the reader that "upon this subject" he

might “see Locke on our Knowledge of the Existence of God” (3:88). Charming, as Lady Hamlet Vernon might say, indeed. At this point, reflection upon the failure of *Tremaine* to effect its purpose—as Lord Albert says, those who “would be most likely to read it” are also those who “would be least likely to benefit by its perusal” (1:221)—might prompt the reader to remember the narrator’s opening dismissal of “a philosophical or moral discourse” as ineffective in tutoring its readers away from fashionable life. The novel’s brief discussion of *Tremaine* offers a generic identification: *The Exclusives*, the narrator implicitly suggests, similarly and perhaps more successfully contains an important moral lesson cloaked in appealing lightness. It identifies the genre of the fashionable novel as moral and didactic and provides a set of generic expectations that it will proceed to fulfill. *The Exclusives* defines itself as a fashionable novel by through generic identification, detailing the ways in which it conforms to its genre rather than distinguishing itself from other novels. In fact, by sustaining the fashionable tone throughout all three volumes, in implicit contrast to *Tremaine*, it might be said to be more typically typical than even that originary text.

The narrator does, however, distinguish fashionable novels from other genres, fortifying herself against charges of “indulgence of spleen, a silly gossiping espionage, which delights in prying into the faults of others, without any motive but that of the gratification of its own mean nature,” a claim that, considering the genre’s long association with Jane Austen, seems suspiciously like a gibe at Austen’s gossipy novels.¹⁹¹ The narrator continues in her own defense:

¹⁹¹ The fashionable novel as a genre is self-consciously aware of its possible relationship to Austen. Catherine Gore introduces *Pin-Money*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831) as an attempt to transfer the narratives of “Miss Austin” to a higher sphere, while in T. H.

there is an investigation into the habits and manners of the actors in the scene of fashionable folly, which, by dispelling the illusion, may preserve others from being heedlessly drawn into the vortex of so dangerous a career. A sermon would not, could not, descend from its sacred dignity, to effect this—a philosophical or moral discourse, would have as little chance of working such an end;—but a narrative of actual occurrences may perhaps give warning of a peril, which is the greater because it bears outwardly, and on a cursory view, no appearance of future evil. (1.33-34)

This novel, the apology points out, writes against other literary forms at the same time that it writes itself into the genre of fashionable novels. As such, it is resolutely typical not only of its subgenre but of its larger genre of the novel, the “protean genre par excellence,”¹⁹² which defines itself against other genres. This resolute typicality, in the context of this particular novel, is, I am arguing, part of the first section’s purpose: to outline methodically the construction of fashionable society and, in doing so, methodically outline the construction of a fashionable novel, reproducing in its outline the very errors that it warns against. The result is a volume without a plot, a volume that introduces us to a protagonist and antagonist—Lady Tilney and the narrator—who turn out not to be the plot’s principal actors at all.

The first volume’s methodical outlining of its genre is evident in the novel’s structural skeleton, of which a partial list of chapter titles from the first volume is illustrative: “The Boudoir,” “Characteristics,” “An Old-Fashioned Assembly,” “A Modern Coterie,”

Lister’s *Granby* 3 vols., (London: Colburn, 1826), one of the characters says to another that she hopes “you like nothing of Miss Edgeworth’s or Miss Austen’s” (1:148).

¹⁹² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 2:8.

“Newspapers—The Park,” “The Opera,” “The Dinner,” “The Contrast,” “A Fashionable Easter.” The locations and events evoked in the chapter titles suggest that the book is made up of discrete locations, linked scenes, and events that are not interconnected. Very few of the chapters suggest action, and when they do, as with, “The Bride’s Return,” the action is presented as a substantive rather than a predicate. The narrative cares little for the movement between places, omitting how its characters get from “An Old-Fashioned Assembly” to “A Modern Coterie” or what happens in the dull, domestic moments between the two. Rather than acting, the characters continually converse about what they just did, what they are doing, or what they are about to do. Reinforcing this narrative stasis, the narrator more than once moves from a narrative past tense into the present tense. She says of Lord Albert, for example, that “it is not probable that [he], philosophical as he has just appeared while discoursing with Lady Tilney, was altogether free from [vanity]” (1:130); later, describing a fashionable party setting off to Richmond in a boat, she narrates thus: “They take their places, and, a band of music following, glide down the stream, and are, or appear to be, in the most harmonious of humours” (2:150). When the novel switches to present tense, the effect evokes not action so much as a the living stasis of the *tableau vivant*, a form that was becoming popular at the time both on stage and in private entertainment.¹⁹³ In using these “living scenes,” the narrator controlling and presenting various unconnected scenes at specific locations, rather than allowing an interconnected plot to unfold.

Chapters Three and Four, which contrast an “Old-fashioned Assembly” with a

¹⁹³ Richard D. Altick discusses the *tableau vivant*’s early-nineteenth-century popularity in *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978). Here, it seems to emphasize the way in which these fashionable scenes are being presented as pre-existing, with already determined form and action.

“Modern Coterie,” show the narrator’s methodical structure of oppositions most clearly. The old-fashioned assembly earns narrative approbation. Lady Tilney rolls her eyes at the “heterogeneous multitude” (1:55) and a “tiresome eternity of royalty” (1:56), but must privately admit that “whatever London could boast as being most distinguished was present, and that the good and great predominated” (1:69). The major characteristic of the assembly is that

it was *not exclusive*—that is, it was an assembly constituted of almost all those whose rank entitled them to be on the list of Lady Feuillemerete’s visitors ... Here all met the society which best accorded with their tastes. The politician, the courtier, the man of fashion, found here their associates and their amusement, each in their different sphere, as they retired from the rest to discuss some present topic of public interest, or glided through the throng with that easy politeness which breathed of the atmosphere they inhaled in the presence of their Sovereign ... Here, too, amidst the younger and fresher forms, beauties of former days still shone in the dignity of their manners ... and might well have afforded a school of manners and propriety of outward bearing for the young who mingled with them ... Such, at least, were the external features of an old-fashioned assembly—in its moral characters the advantages were no less. (1:69-71)

These mixed societies, the narrator explains, can check themselves: “People, unless lost, sin not so blindly in mixed communities—one individual forms a restraint on the others—children stand in awe of parents, and these, in their turn, acknowledge a wholesome control in the presence of their offspring ... while the one and the other mutually afford examples

of imitation, or beacons of danger to be avoided “ (1:70-71). At the assembly, people move “through the throng with that easy politeness which breathed of the atmosphere they inhaled in the presence of their Sovereign” (1:70). The narrator further emphasizes the virtues of the mixed assembly through Lord Arlingford’s approbation: “I do not come often enough, or remain long enough in these places, to be sickened by the shew—and *as* a shew, it is a very splendid one, and I like to see so much beauty as is here tonight gathered together” (1:65). Lady Borrowdale, whose party Lady Tilney is about to undermine by holding her own society’s meeting on the same night, also merits Lord Arlingford’s praise: “And her manner, I think, is excellent; there is so much dignity in it, united with so much courtesy; and she is never, I am told, capricious, or forgetful of good-breeding” (1:66). This mixed society, of course, does not contain a mix of social classes, but rather ages, sexes, and the married and unmarried: one is admitted to this society through one’s rank. The difference is that this society is imagined as including everyone who merits inclusion. It is not designed to keep people out but to let them in.

In contrast, the narrator explains, “The ‘*société choisie*’ ... which Lady Tilney desired to form, was, in its nature, the very reverse of what has been described. Its exclusive character was to consist, not in the selection of what was amiable in nobility, or virtuous in talent; it was not to be the circle drawn within a narrower circumference, for a more perfect enjoyment of private friendship ... but it was to consist of those whose follies in the pursuit of pleasure, and whose weakness in the indulgence of all the empty toys of life, had given them a distinction above their fellows” (1:72-73). Lady Tilney’s avowed purpose is “social reform” (1:81), a heavily ironized phrase given the context of the political reform brewing in England at the time: “Closeted therefore with the leading characters in her own peculiar

circle, the final arrangements for that *société choisie* which was to eclipse courts and banish sovereigns ... were at length concluded. The lists were full—the doors were closed to all but the secret representatives of the system, and the anathema went forth” (1:82). When the party begins:

to a casual observer, Lady Tilney’s assembly presented no distinguishing external marks at variance with received habits or customs ... the company, however, was less numerous, and more scattered and divided into detached parties. The conversation ... was carried on in a low tone, scarcely audible but to the individual addressed; the different members of the coterie, when they moved about, seemed to do so under measured and stated paces ... Whatever was done or spoken ... appeared as if performed by rule ... This sentiment attached more particularly to the younger and newer novitiates, who felt than an unguarded expression, or a movement at variance with the prescribed forms of the circle, would render them the objects of the malicious remarks and sneers of the more experienced--an uneasy restraint therefore was often the consequences ... had it not been, that to form part of so chosen a society, and under Lady Tilney’s roof, was in itself an indescribable satisfaction—some who were there might have been suspected of suffering considerable *ennui*. (1:85-86)

The juxtaposition of these two parties emphasizes the novel’s interest in the contrast between homogeneity and heterogeneity. To the narrator, fashionable homogeneity is stifling: parties consist of “the usual nothings of common-place talk, the unmeaning greetings, and the self-same observations on singers and dancers which have been made a hundred times before” (2:127).

The characters, however, imagine homogeneity as purity, a comparison upon which

the first volume insists. When Lady Tilney notes that Almack's "circle of exclusiveness had been polluted; its brief course was run, and its brightness on the decline," she imagines exclusivity to be something pure, which is to say all of one kind. It is a circle closed off from the outside world, within which all elements are indistinguishable. As the head of this society, Lady Tilney is particularly troubled by the desire for uniformity. Broaching the plan for her society to the Comtesse, she outlines her intention for a society "for which we shall settle *d'avance* every particular and qualification of the persons who may be admitted of it ... we shall never do any thing but in concert with each other, and never invite any one but those who entirely suit us" (1:19). The narrator demonstrates the dangers of such homogeneity in Lady Hamlet Vernon, whose conduct excludes her from "those in her own sphere who were observers of religious and moral conduct." She is consequently "drawn into a society where the errors of her early conduct were, by the contagion of example, sure to be confirmed" (1:45). In a society that mirrors her sins back to her, Lady Hamlet Vernon modifies her behavior in a kind of fashionable feedback loop. While any other sort of gathering—for example, Lady Feuilletmerte's old-fashioned assembly—may contain a hodgepodge of political opinions, ranks, talents, and even occupations, fashionable society by definition does not. Bury's narrator remarks on the moral dangers of such exclusive society: "the persons composing it were under a compact of exclusion of all who differed from them in habit and opinions; and, thus deprived of the power of comparison, their own conduct wanted that useful touchstone of its rectitude" (1:46).

The homogeneity of fashionable society, and its relentless exclusion of any emotion that might trouble the surface of its assumed indifference, renders unsurprising the frequent lamentation of *ennui*. Lady Tilney replies to Lord Albert's saying he's going to dine with some

Miss D.'s "with great surprise": "And do you really visit them? ... are you not *ennuyé* to death at their parties?" Lord Albert replies, "*Ennuyé!* no—but then I must premise that I am never so under any circumstances" (1:119). Earlier, Lady Tilney was "considerably bored" by Lord Albert's polite excuses for tardiness" (1:92), but even at her party there were some who "might have been suspected of suffering considerable *ennui*" under the oppression that requires all that "was done or spoken" to be "performed [as if] by rule" (1:86). Examples abound throughout the three volumes: Lady Tilney finds "*un ennui à périr*" at "the Miss D's (1:120); the Comtesse is "perished with *ennui*" to think of being in a country house (2:160); in a letter to Mr. Foley, Lady Hamlet Vernon writes that "between ourselves, this place and its society is insufferably dull" (1:296); at the Drawing Room, Lord Baskerville complains that he is "always bored to death here" (3:115). Examples from other fashionable novels are also manifold: Tremaine, attending a fashionable party, finds himself almost "dead with *ennui*"¹⁹⁴; a "little French count" in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham* complains that all of English society "consists in standing on a crowded staircase, and complaining that you are terribly bored"¹⁹⁵; while the moralizing narrator of Julia Pardoe's *Speculation* asserts that "nothing is more aristocratic than *ennui*";¹⁹⁶ Lord Fitzharris, in Lady Charlotte Bury's *The Separation* fears that he shall "die of *ennui*" in the country¹⁹⁷; while Beaumont—the figure for Beau Brummell in W. Massie's *Sydenham*—claims that only the existence of fools keeps him from

¹⁹⁴ Ward, 1:52.

¹⁹⁵ Bulwer-Lytton, 314.

¹⁹⁶ Julia Pardoe, *Speculation* (New York: Harper's, 1834), 1:179. Curiously, this assertion does not appear in the original English edition, published by Saunders and Otley in the same year.

¹⁹⁷ Lady Charlotte Bury, *The Separation* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), 1:149.

dying of ennui and the titular character says that the lack of regular employment fills his days with “ennui or despondency.”¹⁹⁸ Boredom is a corollary of fashionable society: it signals the presence of fashion, and so it must be maintained even when it risks being fatal, or as in Beaumont’s case, sliding into despondency.

This description of fashionable life—and therefore fashionable novels—as boring is notable in context of Patricia Spacks’s writing on boredom. A foundational premise of her book is that “all writing—at least since 1800 or so—is ‘about’ boredom” because the act of writing resists boredom.¹⁹⁹ Importantly, however, Spacks differentiates between boredom and ennui, which “implies a judgment of the universe ... [and] belongs to those with a sense of sublime potential, those who feel themselves superior to their environment.”²⁰⁰ Ennui is sublime; boredom is trivial. But boredom does not register as trivial in *The Exclusives*. (And, in fact, Spacks does seem to slide between the two, as in her discussion of Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage*, a novel in which the Lady Juliana’s boredom or “ennui” leads her to give away one of her twin girls.²⁰¹) Fashionable boredom does not read at all as trivial. Perhaps no one has yet died of it, but many have been ruined—and many others, such as Lady Glenmore, have only narrowly escaped ruin at the hands of pack of extremely bored aristocrats.

¹⁹⁸ W. Massie, *Sydenham: or, Memoirs of a Man of the World* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), 1:411, 1:263.

¹⁹⁹ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). She suggests that speakers “first labeled the condition [of boredom] in the second half of the eighteenth century” (6).

²⁰⁰ *ibid*, 12.

²⁰¹ Spacks, 181-182.

Boredom is also a non-trivial narrative problem. Indeed, narrative boredom, and potentially narrative failure, signal the presence of fashion in the novel but also render the writing—and reading—of the genre problematic. The narrator evinces such apathy that she cannot even muster enough interest to describe the novel's events. When the fashionable world heads down to Lady Ellersby's estate for Easter, for example, the narrator sighs that "To give an account of [Restormel] in detail would be a work of supererogation; for it was a transfer of London to the country, only with this difference, that the post town and high road took place of the streets of the metropolis; and the shrubberies and gardens of Restormel, of those of Kensington and the Park" (1:285-86). There's simply no point, she says, in describing the estate, and because the homogeneity of fashionable society renders narrative description superfluous. Narrative disinterest prevents description again when Lady Glenmore travels to Spa, where she engages with her friends in pretty much the same activities as in London: "Allowing for change of place and difference of hours, the same desultory mode of life was pursued by them at Spa as in London, and at best the same vacuity of mind and intention became the result" (3:256). Consequently, the entire trip spans no more than a few pages and primarily serves to allow the narrator to fulminate against the Exclusives' lack of religion.

In fact, the novel's first volume establishes the plot's inaction so firmly that it is surprising, in the second volume, to encounter an incident, like Mr. Leslie Winyard's falling into the water:

As the ladies were gathering up their shawls and reticules, Lady Glenmore stooped down to arrange a part of her dress, and the lilies of the valley her husband had given her fell into the water. She made an exclamation, and attempted to catch them, but a

breeze bore them beyond her reach ... Mr. Leslie Winyard looking in her face, and seeing that she was eager in her wish to recover the flowers, hastily darted from another part of the boat; and in making an effort to catch them, lost his balance, and fell into the water. As they were literally on the shore, there was no sort of danger, besides that of getting a dunking; but he thought it might avail him something in Lady Glenmore's favour: nor was he mistaken. (2:157-58)

Winyard's spill stands out in a novel taken up almost entirely with conversation rather than action, yet the narrator buries the sudden exploit in the middle of a paragraph and immediately deflates any excitement or suspense attending it by pointing out right away that "they were literally on the shore." There is no danger; the plunge would not make any difference to the narrative except that Winyard himself recognizes the narrative potential of the accident. The narrator works busily to deflate any plot arising from the tumble, instead leaving the character to attempt his own plotting—which will, of course, fail. Narrative disinterest is always working against rising plot, as *ennui* at the level of the heterodiegetic narrator methodically produces a non-suspenseful story. And this non-suspenseful story allows the narrator to write her aristocratic characters out of the plot entirely.

The narrator creates that non-suspenseful story by systematically exposing the fashionable characters' plots as part of a didactic juxtaposition of fashionable secrecy and narrative disclosure. Concealment, for the Exclusives, is the watchword of the day. Lady Tilney withholds reports of her soirees from newspapers, because "such evidence, if it reached the public eye, would destroy at once all the sacredness of her select *coterie*" (1:110), and escape of a person's secret disbars her from fashionable society. Lady Tilney confers with the Comtesse Leinsengen about just such an event: "it is quite impossible to support

[Lady Mailing] any longer, for you are aware her secret is publicly known. So long as she was prudent, and observed appearances, it was all very well; but *now* it will be impossible for me to receive her” (1:12). Secrecy is not simply a socially exclusionary tactic: members of fashionable society also dissemble to each other. Mr. Foley and Lord Albert, mortal enemies in the quest for Lady Adeline’s affections, or at least her wealth, walk arm-in-arm, with “quiet composure ... each talking of one thing and thinking of another” (2:98). In the context of this novel, which continually argues for the importance of frank openness, even common privacy is code for the destructive secrecy of fashion and provides shorthand for the narrator to signal a character’s error. When Lord Albert forbears to unburden his heart to Lord Glenmore, the narrator bemoans his hesitation: “Alas! We may suspect, that when we shrink from confiding our sorrows to a friend whom we know to be good and true, we are ourselves under some fatal delusion” (3:200). Marked by concealment and deception, fashionable society consolidates its exclusivity by keeping secrets, and simple reticence is, to the narrator, one and the same with fashionable vice.

Throughout the first volume, the narrator describes the antidote to fashionable secrecy as an almost pathological candor. When Lady Adeline writes to Lord Albert, in a letter full of moralizing about duty, of the importance of reading serious works, and of fitting herself out to be a useful wife, she narrates an exchange with Mr. Foley: “[Mr. Foley] stared at me in return, and, looking at me incredulously, asked ‘do you really mean what you say?’ ‘Most assuredly,’ I replied; ‘can any one mean otherwise?’ (1:199). Adeline imagines a world in which language and meaning are absolutely transparent, a world in which deceit is linguistically and narratively impossible. Lady Glenmore, as the novel’s other satiric norm, suffers under a similar delusion (or aspiration), clinging to what Lady Tilney calls the

“infantine habit of saying always what you think” (2:164). These two women, who occupy the same fashionable space as the exclusive characters but who narratively inhabit a different representational world, cannot use language to conceal their thoughts—an infantine handicap indeed. Their language, non-literary to say the least, transparently reflects their interior states.

Fashionable language, by contrast, is definitionally artificial. Lady Tenderden, for example, speaks of the “impossibility” of leaving a dinner party in time to attend another engagement, and the narrator scoffs that the “impossibilities of a fine lady are to be understood with certain modifications and meanings which do not belong to the literal signification of the word” (3:63). But it is not only the narrator who sees through such double meanings. As the cabal sneers over Lady Tilney’s hypocrisies and the Comtesse Leinsengen’s re-definition of liberty, Lady Boileau notes that “we have all our own particular meanings for particular phrases; and Comtesse Leinsengen is not the only person who gives her own meaning to a phrase which, in its general acceptance, is of quite a different import” (3:162). This self-conscious usage of language that means more than it says or that occludes rather than reveals is, as I have suggested, a form of literary language, and the narrator is certainly culpable. Not only do her characters drop fashionable names and analogies—Sir William complains that a rival “might as well endeavour to persuade me that Ude is inferior to Doveton’s present man Mariné” (1:147); and the fashionable Lord Baskerville scoffs at his unfashionable host’s asking him what wine he will take: “he might as well have asked if one would try Chambertin after *Truites à l’Aurore*, or *Clos de Voguet* after *Bécasses à la Luculle*” (1:186)—but the narrator herself does. She further involves herself through free indirect discourse: “To be without an *attaché quelconque*,” the narrator explains, with something of the

fashionable world's address, "was as bad as to be without a hat from Herbot's" (1:228); and Lord Albert's mind possesses "a sweet and silvery tone of feeling analogous to a fine Wilson" (1:193). These analogies all rely on a fashionable vehicle, so that the point of likeness lies in the fashionable world. Comparing the French chef Louis Eustache Ude to the fictional Mariné, whose emblematic name plays on the culinary technique of marinating, is meaningless unless one knows both the French chef and the French cooking technique; Lord Baskerville's horror can only be shared if one knows Chambertin and *Clos de Vougeot* to be Burgundies, *Truites à l'Aurore* to be trout prepared with lobster sauce and *Bécasses à la Luculle* to mean woodcocks prepared in a certain way—and that following these delicate dishes with a heavy red wine would be gastronomically offensive.²⁰² Replicating fashionable speech in her characters' dialogue, and using fashionable references in her own description, the narrator mimics the exclusive language of fashionable society, amplifying the world's circularity at a linguistic level and aggravating the "unreadability" that Colby has identified in the genre.

Throughout this first volume, the novel argues that it must travel in the same parties at its satiric objects in order to convey its supposed didactic message. It must follow their "measured and stated paces" as it plods *ennuyéed* from assembly to coterie to *fête champêtre*, and constraining its dialogue to the "low tones" and an "uneasy restraint" of its characters (1:86). The novel even reproduces fashionable society's exclusivity by emphasizing the difference between those who know and those who do not, as its fashionable language acts as an exclusionary tactic to divide the readers into two groups, silently "reproduce[ing] the

²⁰² Most of these dishes are explained in Louise-Eustache Ude's *The French Cook* (London: J. Ebers, 1822).

same elaborate acts of situating, discriminating, and placing of people and signs which preoccupies [its hero].”²⁰³ Fashion as defined in the novel is implicitly written into the novel’s formal structure, from characterization to narration to language to, most importantly, plot, which so far has not appeared in the novel’s first volume: a volume without plot that delineates the parameters for the plot as we enter into the second and third volume, and as this chapter enters its second and third sections.

II. Discontinuous Plots

Writing about Catherine Gore’s *Cecil* (1841), Winifred Hughes sums up both the fashionable novel’s attitude towards plot and the critical discomfort with its expulsion:

Plot becomes less a vehicle of progress and desire than an intrusion to be repelled or contained. Cecil’s narrative carries out to its logical extreme the silver fork tendency to follow the repetitive rhythms of fashionable life—the seasonal migration from London to the country estates, the desultory passages of the grand tour, the arbitrary social rituals of idleness and pleasure seeking.²⁰⁴

This expulsion, Hughes suggests, was narratively and morally abhorrent to many of its readers: “William Maginn of *Fraser’s Magazine*, in his diatribes against Bulwer’s early fashionable novels, summarized the objections to a lack of conventional plotting ... seen as

²⁰³ Andrea Hibbard, *Victorian Cultural Fictions* (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2000), 186n12. This is what Wilson calls “exclusive narration,” a mode that she argues creates a readership by performing the same acts of exclusion as the novels’ characters, in “Being Exclusive,” in *Fashioning the Silver-Fork Novel* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 95-122.

²⁰⁴ Winifred Hughes, “Elegies for the Regency: Catherine Gore’s Dandy Novels,” in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50.2 (Sept 1995), 206.

symptomatic of a more pervasive social and moral laxity.”²⁰⁵ A reviewer of Disraeli’s *The Young Duke* offers another nineteenth-century perspective, claiming that its plot contains nothing that cannot, “be read in a paragraph of the ‘Morning Post’ every day in the week, and is composed of incidents that happen hourly.”²⁰⁶ A hundred and some years after these two contemporary condemnations, Matthew Rosa notes that in fashionable novels, “complexities of plot ... were avoided,”²⁰⁷ while even the more generous Gary Kelly suggests that the novels ignore plot in favor of philosophical concerns about the relationship of the individual to the social.²⁰⁸

As a category of critical inquiry, “plot” resists easy definition. One major strand of thought defines plot primarily as discursive, teleological, and causal. Hayden White, for example, thinks of plot as “a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole.”²⁰⁹ Peter Brooks, in a similar definition, defines plot as “the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning” and, in different words, “Plot is the principle of interconnectedness and intention which we cannot do without in moving through the discrete elements—incidents, episodes, actions—of a

²⁰⁵ Hughes, 205.

²⁰⁶ “Critical Notices. The Young Duke,” in *New Monthly Magazine* 33 (1 May 1831), 205.

²⁰⁷ Matthew Rosa, *The Silver-Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding Vanity Fair* (New York: Columbia, 1936), 8.

²⁰⁸ Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (New York: Longman, 1989), 222.

²⁰⁹ Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” in *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (Autumn, 1980), 13.

narrative.”²¹⁰ Applying these definitions to plots in fashionable novels certainly finds them wanting. As we have seen, *The Exclusives* meanders aimlessly from assembly to Opera, from boudoir to water party, from London to Spa and back again. Meandering plots may be episodic or picaresque, certainly, but this novel’s striking lack of incident or episode disbars it from such designations. Neither approach is particularly useful in reference to *The Exclusives*. Although old, the neo-Aristotelian theories of R. S. Crane are marginally more so: literary critics, he suggests, erroneously identify “plot” with “action,” and that the plot “is the particular temporal synthesis effected by the writer of the elements of action, character and thought that constitute the matter of his invention.”²¹¹ The effect of a novel, in other words—whatever leads the novel towards its end—is plot. But it is not wholly clear what the “end” of *The Exclusives* is. Is the novel’s plot the attempt to seduce Lady Glenmore and Lord Albert? Is it the attempt of Lady Tilney to control her society? Or is it the novel’s attempt to offer a caution to the participants in the real-life scandal that inspired some of the events of the novel?

Each of these three potential plots occurs at a different level of the narrative. At a characterological level, two pairs of characters—Lady Hamlet Vernon and Lord Albert; and Lady Glenmore and Mr. Leslie Winyard—engage in what turn out to be false adultery and seduction plots. At a narrative level, Lady Tilney and the narrator both attempt to manipulate and control the characterological level as they educate the characters either into or out of fashion. At an extradiegetic level, the novel as a whole presents a concurrent

²¹⁰ Peter Brooks, *Reading for Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), xi, 5.

²¹¹ R.S. Crane, *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: U Chicago, 1954), 66.

rewriting of a real-life scandalous plot that is underway in 1829 and 1830. Connected through the narrator, these plots act, albeit problematically, as a corrective both within the novel's world and extra-diegetically. By offering plot refusal as a solution to the problems of fashionable society, the novel cautions the real-world plot whose scandal comes to a head just months after the novel's publication. In other words, *The Exclusives* takes on plot and plotting as its matter of representation as a "discontinuous double-plot," a term Joseph Allen Boone uses to refer to the structure of *Daniel Deronda*,²¹² revolves around both the attempted seduction of Lady Glenmore by Mr. Leslie Winyard and the attempted seduction of Lord Albert by Lady Hamlet Vernon.

A table of characters (Figure 5) illuminates the highly structured nature of Bury's plotting, which pairs each fashionable character with a non-fashionable character that he or she is attempting to seduce. "Non-fashionable" here does not designate a person who is middle class or vulgar, who is "unfashionable," which is to say unable to be made fashionable, but instead those characters who are antithetically opposed to the fashionable.²¹³ Highly patterned structure is characteristic of Bury's other novels. *Flirtation* (1827), for example, published three years before *The Exclusives*, sets Lady Frances's fashionable affectations against Lady Emily's rustic simplicity, a straightforward dichotomy that is

²¹² Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: U Chicago, 1989), 3.

²¹³ The non-fashionable characters are titled and wealthy, and it is actually the fashionable Mr. Leslie Winyard and Mr. Foley who lack titles. It is important to note, however, that the absence of a title does not necessarily mean that a person is non-aristocratic. K.D. Reynolds points out that defining the aristocracy is more difficult than it might seem, since the networks of relationships crossed apparent class boundaries. In *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (London: Clarendon Press, 1998).

expanded by an intratextual periodical essay on the difference between “taste” and “fashion” that their uncle reads aloud. The layering recreates the novel’s didactic message as a moral treatise, the patterned structure attesting to the fact that the novel does not operate through naïve plot. And in *The Exclusives*, the simple schematic of characters belies a somewhat more complicated plot. Characterological pairing in fact works unevenly across the novel’s three volumes. As we have already seen, the first volume focuses mostly on Lady Tilney with the understanding that she figures as the fashionable world’s and the novel’s central character. Only in the tenth chapter, entitled “Fashionable Friendship,” does the reader meet Miss Melcomb, soon to be Lady Glenmore, who has previously appeared in the novel only briefly and at a distance. After narrating her marriage to Lord Glenmore, the volume’s two closing chapters focus on Lord Albert, who has joined the exclusive set for Easter at Lady Ellersby’s country estate Restormel. These final three chapters move the novel into the structure of discontinuous plots that organizes the remaining two volumes. Lady Tilney rapidly moves to the margins, a decentering evidenced by the fact that her name appears 99 times in Volume One but only 33 times in Volume Two and 42 times in Volume Three. In both the latter volumes, her occasional appearances are only anxious attempts to solidify her social standing. In a surprising upset, she turns out to be neither the novel’s protagonist—nor antagonist.

Volume Two might almost be a different novel. The second chapter inaugurates Lady Tilney’s increasingly peripheral role, as the narrative leaves her at the country estate Restormel to focus on the Glenmores’ arrival in London and initiation of the novel’s main characterological plot: “One of the earliest arrivals in the scene of *ton* was that of the Glenmores . . . London, however, was still empty; a considerable part of the *élite* remained at

Restormel” (2:29). Meeting Lord Albert by chance in a nearly empty London, Lord Glenmore advises the younger man on the choice of a wife: “You told me you would aim at diplomacy and at office,” he says, “Above all things, then, keep this principle before you; and in any alliance that you may form ... endeavour to remember my advice, and look round you before you take the leap ... and do not throw away the advantages which your situation (to say nothing of yourself) give you of selecting where you choose, and where you think your pursuits will best be promoted” (2:33-34). This advice echoes later in the chapter, when Lady Tilney and Lady Tenderden visit Lady Glenmore to advise her not to cling too tightly to Lord Glenmore. And finally, Lord Glenmore, at the end of the chapter, advises his new wife that Lady Tenderden is “a very useful acquaintance, and you may safely listen to her advice respecting your conduct in the world” (2:65). These three incidents structure the deceptions that set the plot in motion: Lord Glenmore’s advice that Lord Albert consider his career in selecting a wife; Lady Tenderden’s advice that Lady Glenmore not cling to her husband; and Lord Glenmore’s advice that his wife follow Lady Tenderden’s counsel. Lord Glenmore’s practical advice legitimates Lord Albert’s involvement in the fashionable world, and his advice to Lady Glenmore initiates the separation that leads to her near-seduction by Mr. Leslie Winyard. In other words, this chapter, in the near-absence of Lady Tilney, inaugurates the characterological plot of the novel, to the extent that, as far as these two plots are concerned, the novel might as well begin with Volume Two.

The Glenmores’ arrival in a vacated London emphasizes the two plots’ discontinuity, which is so careful that even when a chapter does visit both plots, it painstakingly guards against overlap. At one of Lady Tilney’s parties, just as Lord Albert is wondering whether he has not lost Adeline forever, Lady Hamlet Vernon draws him into a far corner of the

apartment. "At the same instant," the narrator says, "Lady Glenmore entered" (2:125). The precise, almost theatrical movement ushers the one couple off stage just as the actor of the other plot enters, instituting a visible and spatial separation between the two plots. Even when the actors do inhabit the same space, their interactions, if any exist, are not narrated. At the same party, Lady Glenmore sits for dinner at a table that includes Lady Hamlet Vernon and Lord Albert, but Lord Glenmore's arrival precludes any narration of conversation that might have ensued, because the narrator chooses that moment to enter a six-and-a-half page discourse on the nature of Exclusive society.

In fact, the narrator's heterodiegetic presence is so intrusive that she begins to function as a separate character, one who stands outside in order to manipulate the fashionable world as much as Lady Tilney does, and whose intrusive presence makes her an implicit antagonist to Lady Tilney's protagonist. The two forces work at opposite purposes. To achieve her desired exclusive society, Lady Tilney involves herself in plotting, secrecy, and manipulation. But the narrator undermines her contrivances by relentlessly unveiling her secrets. This activity is, in part, an answer to the potential plotlessness of fashionable society. "In this society," the narrator explains, "there was a general system of deceiving on the one hand, and detecting on the other, which constituted its chief entertainment and business" (2:28). The opposition of Lady Tilney and the narrator is just such a relationship. Lady Tilney's mortal enemy is not, as she fears, a Society figure who might topple her throne, but the narrator. Continually exposing Lady Tilney's plots, the narrative cancels out the fashionable plotting of its storyworld. Society is unaltered at the end of the novel: both couples are still together, both are still not integrated into fashionable society, and Lady Tilney still trembles at the head of her coterie. The supposed adultery plot and Lady Adeline

and Lord Albert's courtship plot are encased within a structure of what we might call non-plot, the function of which is more or less to disavow the plotting that is trying to happen at a characterological level as the narrator trails in Lady Tilney's footsteps to reveal the secrets she is trying to keep. The narrator, that is, undermines the super-Exclusive society to the reader at almost the moment she narrates it.

By insisting on truth through unveiling secrets as a counter to fashionable deception within the text, the narrator works outside the narrative to impose proper interpretation on the part of the reader both by offering her own instruction and by modeling correct understanding within the story. She corrects characters' interpretations, as when Lord Glenmore opines that the fashionable set is foolish but harmless: "whereas," the narrator interrupts, "the truth stood thus.—" (2:134-35). While agreeing that several possible interpretations of events—which is to say narratives—exist, the narrator, as opposed to fashionable society, offers the correct one. The conspirators, who perpetually offer deliberate misinterpretations and contrive situations that invite misconstrual, throw her rectitude into relief by using narrative to confuse their targets. Speaking to Lady Glenmore, Mr. Leslie Winyard counteracts a tale of his indiscretions by giving "a totally different, but very plausible, interpretation of the exact story, which Lady Glenmore had heard detailed half an hour before by Comtesse Leinsengen" (2:167). Examples of such misinterpretation, both deliberate and planned, occur throughout the novel. Near the beginning, when Lord Albert has arrived in town and set the fashionable world grumbling about his supposedly puritanical behaviors, Lord Tornerre charges his horse at him. Tornerre, an incompetent horseman, tumbles off his mount. At a party the next night, the circulating story reverses the motivations, so that Lord Albert is supposed to have charged at an innocent Tornerre. Lord

Glenmore corrects the account, telling the assembly that “*You* may have *heard* the circumstance only related, I *saw* them” (1:159). Glenmore’s insistence helps explain the narrator’s obsession with truth. Juxtaposition of fashionable rumor and narrative truth in relation to narrated events confirms the narrator’s perspective. Consonance between what the narrator shows to be happening through description and what she *says* to be true through intrusive narration insists that, because her account is diegetically true, it is also extra-diegetically true. That is, because the narrator is in the right within the novel, she is in the right outside of the novel—an important qualification for her nosy intervention into a real-life scandal.

By insisting that she is telling the true version of events, that narrator writes her didactic insistence on frankness into the novel’s formal structure, which is predicated upon the avowed accuracy of her narrative. We have already seen that secrecy is characteristic of the fashionable world, and that, in terms of the narrative, the plot unambiguously relays the fashionables’ secretive maneuvering in relation to the characters they would manipulate. Throughout the novel, the narrator suggests that Lord Albert suffers partly because he will not confess his troubles to Lord Glenmore, who “would have not only commiserated, but counseled; not only counseled, but aided” (2:200). His reticence indicates his error. In fact, the plot can only be resolved finally when Lady Adeline has made her “secret thoughts” known to Lady Glenmore (3:323). In this formulation, involvement in the fashionable world leads directly to the sort of dissembling and deception that nearly severs the Glenmores’s marriage. But the problem is that, if the narrator had her way and the characters never began to keep secrets, Lord Albert would have confessed to Lord Glenmore; Lady Adeline and Lord Albert would have spoken plainly to each other; and Lady Glenmore would have

confided in her husband. In other words, the novel would not exist. A world lacking secrets—an implicitly non-fashionable world—turns out, in this formulation, to be non-narratable.

Despite the narrator's control over the story, then, her plot depends on the fashionable world. The novel's two scenes of discovery are made possible through the keeping of secrets and confidences: Lord Albert accidentally receives a letter from Lady Hamlet Vernon directed to Mr. Foley, which reveals the whole conspiracy between the two concerning Lord Albert and Lady Adeline; and Lord Glenmore accidentally sees his wife's correspondence, including a portrait of Mr. Leslie Winyard. When Lord Glenmore confronts his wife about the impropriety of her receiving letters from Mr. Leslie Winyard, her body reveals an intensity of emotion:

Lady Glenmore shook her head in an agony of denial ... remained bathed in tears, apparently unable to give utterance to what was passing in her breast ... she raised her eloquent eyes, streaming with tears, full in Lord Glenmore's face ... Lord Glenmore was deeply affected; and as she clung to his knees, raised her in his arms, and pressed her convulsively to his heart ... Again Lady Glenmore flinging herself into those dear arms which no longer repelled her embrace, wept for some moments on his neck delicious tears of penitence and love. (3:299-309)

The Glenmores' "delicious" reuniting, integral to the narrator's portrayal of the affective nature of the non-fashionable world in contrast to the indurate bodies of the Exclusives, not only rebukes the fashionable world but also models the proper affective response to reading the novel and provides a narrative climax. Fashion allows the narrative to exist and it permits

its own undoing. This level of narrative, one step removed from the characterological, shows the narrator and Lady Tilney hopelessly entangled.²¹⁴

At a further level, the novel is entangled in attempts to straddle a diegetic and extra-diegetic world by including a readily decodable *roman à clef*, the scandalous details of which act as a cautionary tale both within and without the novel. The false adultery plot of Lord and Lady Glenmore echoes a real-world plot occurring almost simultaneously with the novel. In 1830, the house of Marsh and Miller, of questionable integrity, published a “Key to the Royal Novel of the Exclusives!!”,²¹⁵ although it is quite possible that Colburn himself promoted these identifications²¹⁶: the Duke of Wellington as the Duke of Mercinton; the

²¹⁴ This interdependence of the fashionable novel with the world that it satirizes is what Herzog calls the fashionable novel’s reliance on “conflicting demands of ideology and narrative” in *The Pleasure of the Flirt: Flirtation and Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (PhD dissertation, Columbia, 2003).

²¹⁵ A *London Literary Gazette* column defends its publication of Lady Noel Byron’s remarks under the heading “Sketches of Society” upon the grounds that the column was only a reprint of “a document in circulation,” and that therefore the journal was “not guilty of any inroad upon the privacies of life—an act of which, we trust, we are incapable.” The footnote claims that “publishers of the name of Marsh and Miller . . . immediately, without asking our leave, or consulting us at all, metamorphosed our four columns into a book, which they advertised and sold, just as if it had been their own . . . Other complaints have been made to us of the contents of Messrs. M. and M.’s publications not being such as they advertised.” In *The London Literary Gazette; and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c, Saturday 688212* (March 27, 1830).

²¹⁶ Gettman provides an anecdote recalled by Cyrus Redding, who saw “one of Colburn’s men leaving a printer’s shop with a yellow-covered pamphlet embellished [*sic*] with a wood-cut of a key. It not only listed the characters of *Vivian Grey* and their actual counterparts but contained extracts from the novel, puffs of praise from reviews, and a few bits of feigned censure to keep up the appearance of verisimilitude . . . the authors of the key to Lady Charlotte Bury’s *The Exclusives* (1829) made the prefatory statement that ‘believing in the good accruing from satirical personality, they have paid special attention to the remarkable novel . . . called *The Exclusives*, in order to extend the sphere of its usefulness by making the personality more apparent, and by supplying the real names of the characters who figure in

Comtesse Leinsengen as Dorothea Khristorovna Lieven (1784-1857), better known as Countess and then Princess Lieven; Lady Tilney as Lady Jersey (Sarah Sophia Child-Villiers, Countess of Jersey, 1785-1867); and Lady Glenmore as Jane Digby (1807-81), the daughter of Admiral Sir Henry Digby, future Lady Ellenborough, and leader of, as a recent biography terms it, a scandalous life that culminated in a decades-long marriage to a much younger Syrian sheikh.²¹⁷

Despite the document's dubious veracity, the association of Lord Glenmore with Lord Ellenborough and Lady Glenmore with Lady Ellenborough, née Jane Digby, rings true. In fact, Bury most likely borrowed the aliases from the earlier *Almack's* (London: Colburn, 1827), written by the sister-in-law of Eliza Spencer-Stanhope, herself a relation of the Digbys.²¹⁸ Only a few months after *The Exclusives* was published, the scandalous Ellenborough Divorce Bill proceedings splashed onto the front page of *The Times*—a break with the tradition of reserving the front page for classifieds that would not be repeated for another century and a half. Quite against expectation, Lord Ellenborough had filed for divorce on the grounds of adultery. In the transcript of the debates and the summary printed by the *Times*, public opinion seems as equally convinced that Lady Ellenborough was guilty of adultery as that Lord Ellenborough was guilty of neglect. The *Times* was quite explicit

its pages" (62-63, quoting Cyrus Redding, *Fifty Years' Recollections, Literary and Personal* London, 1858, Vol 2., pp 822-23). The collusion between publisher and key seems likely.

²¹⁷ These identifications suggest that Bury was not overly concerned with a one-to-one representation of a particular political moment. If indeed Lord Albert was supposed to represent Granville Leveson-Gower, she took great liberties with the timing; born in 1773, he would have been not a young man at all in the 1820s and did not seem to have particularly fixed political principles.

²¹⁸ Mary Lovell, *A Scandalous Life* (New York: Fourth Estate, 2010), 28.

about where the blame for the adultery lay:

Of an active promotion and furtherance of his wife's licentiousness, there is no ground, from aught that has been disclosed, for charging the noble Baron. But of negligence,—reckless, inconceivable negligence ... he cannot be acquitted so easily. Public opinion is, we believe, made up as to the name of one, we might say more than one, of the female profligates against whom Lord Ellenborough was warned by his lady's governess, and anxious and watchful friend ... because of her or their reputations; because their vices have been notorious, and their habits of life are understood in general society to have long been depraved and infamous. Yet Lady Ellenborough, who, in the bosom of her retired and virtuous family, had never had intercourse with or seen such persons, was made acquainted with them by her husband,—a man almost twice her age, who had always lived in the fashionable world of London, and to whom it was *impossible* that the moral character of any woman, occupying a very forward place in the community, should have remained unknown.²¹⁹

This lengthy quotation matters because it could almost as easily stand as a summary of the false adultery plot of *The Exclusives*: Lady Glenmore is introduced by her husband to a band of notorious women and left more or less to fend for herself.

²¹⁹ “The evidence on the Ellenborough Divorce Bill, printed by order of the house of Commons,” *The Times*, (Apr 6, 183) 3. Web. *The Times* even referred explicitly to the unfortunate couple's lack of cohabitation: “Here was a young wife of two or three and twenty, without having sexual intercourse with her husband for upwards of five or six months, and that at her own request. In any court of justice that circumstance would be considered one which ought to have excited great alarm, and increased vigilance and attention on the part of the husband (Apr 7, 1830), 3.

And in the transcript of the trial and debate, a Mr. Joseph Hume provides a defense of Lady Ellenborough that might have sounded familiar to readers of *The Exclusives*:

[I]f justice is to be done to Lady Ellenborough, can anyone overlook the gross neglect on Lord Ellenborough's part that has led to the unhappy events of the past couple of years? Ought not the charge to be read as one of criminality against Lord Ellenborough, who had permitted and even encouraged his wife's association with the persons responsible for her downfall, rather than one of marital infidelity against an unfortunate lady whose youth and immaturity ought to have been safeguarded by her natural protector?²²⁰

Only a few months earlier, *The Exclusives* offered a similar defense of Lady Glenmore:

He did not consider that the necessary consequence which must follow an official occupation, was his leaving his young wife without a natural protector, amid scenes that were any thing but safe; and he was desirous that she, too, should play her part ... He considered not how often he must leave her through the day, and the greater part of the night, to run this hazardous career, at an age when caution sleeps and passions are awake, and in the midst of a set which ... was yet, generally speaking, in its whole tendency perilous to the pure and domestic virtues—a woman's only true glory" (2:173-74).

Whether *The Exclusives* influenced the trial is difficult to determine, but the repetition of the phrase "natural protector" and the emphasis in both on the vicious nature of fashionable life and the duty of the lady's much older husband is certainly striking. It renders *The Exclusives*

²²⁰ Lovell, 65-66.

almost prophetic of the coming debate. Unlike the narrator's intervention in the novel, however, Mr. Hume's rebuke arrives too late for Lord Ellenborough's profit. By December 1829, when the book was published, Lady Ellenborough was already living in Basle with her one-month-old daughter, the child of Prince Felix Schwarzenberg.

Margaret Steele, Jane Digby's former governess who remained a confidant of the family, testified during the Parliamentary debate about the Lord Ellenborough Divorce Bill that she warned Lord Ellenborough about his wife's dangerous crowd:

Steely [Margaret Steele] was so concerned about Jane that she ... went to see Lord Ellenborough. Her case was that Jane was mixing too freely with associates who, she insisted, were 'gay and profligate'. ... he laughed and told Steely that he thought she was being 'too scrupulous', stating that he had unlimited confidence in Lady Ellenborough.²²¹

Even warnings from quite early in the scandal failed to effect change. The novel presciently anticipates several features of the trial, but it also offers a revision: its own Lord Ellenborough listens quite intently when the narrative warns him of his wife's danger..

In *The Exclusives*, that warning arises out of the narrative itself, which contrives to have Lord Glenmore discover the writing box within which he finds the letters from and portrait of Mr. Leslie Winyard, a stand-in for Lady Ellenborough's cousin, George Anson, with whom she most likely had her first affair. Although remorseful, Lady Glenmore reminds her husband of his own culpability:

Glenmore, did you not yourself tell me that I must look to the conduct of those with

²²¹ Lovell, 28.

whom I lived as the best guide for my own? did you not tell me that Lady Tenderden would be my best model? And if I have displeased you in my late conduct, think how much I have been led into the error by your own directions?" ... Lord Glenmore again sighed, as if in assent to the truth of these words; and blamed himself inwardly that he had ever suffered Lady Glenmore to mingle, unprotected by himself, in society which now, for the first time, appeared to him, in its full force, to be of such dangerous tendency, that he felt he ought to have known better (3:301-04).

Thanks to Lord Glenmore's timely recognition of fashionable society's depravity, Lady Glenmore steps off her dangerous course and is saved by her husband's realization that his political career is leading him away from his first duty to his wife. *The Exclusives* offers no mere recounting of a familiar scandalous tale. It is a re-plotting, the purpose of which is not to reveal scandals unknown to the public but to imagine the happy resolution of a widely known ruinous affair. Although its characters are based on real figures, it is not quite a *roman à clef* in form: its concern is not really to "test the self-sufficiency of [fiction and nonfiction],"²²² but to use fiction to effect real-world change by offering a plot that is similar to but discontinuous from the "narrative of actual occurrences" that it claims to be (1:33).

The novel's revision of its real-life adultery plot comes too late for the participants in that plot, but it does not come too late for the novel, either the Glenmore plot or the courtship plot of Lord Albert and Lady Adeline, the misadventures of which, chapter by

²²² Sean Latham, *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* (New York: Oxford University Press), 9.

chapter, consume the bulk of the novel.²²³ Their importance to the novel is evidenced by its position within the text: after the melodramatic and sensational denouement of the Glenmores' plot, the novel tramps on for thirty more pages to cover nearly two years of a Continental sojourn before resolving in Munich, where the unhappy pair reunite and the two plots, which have so far been kept apart by the fashionable world, unite.²²⁴ The one plot serves as a warning to the other. Lord Glenmore's neglect of his wife for political aims is reprimanded within the novel, and he ends up resigning from his post in order both to preserve his political feelings and his domestic harmony. Lord Albert resigns along with him, ostensibly for the same reasons of political feeling that Lord Glenmore does but more, in

²²³ It is also possible to read these two plots as representative of the basic plots of what April Kendra calls society novels and dandy novels, in "Gendering the Silver Fork: Catherine Gore and the Society Novel," *Women's Writing* 11.1 (March 2004), 25-38. Society novels—*Pin Money*, for example, or much of the next chapter's *Vanity Fair*—begin with marriage and end with reconciliation. Dandy novels—Benjamin Disraeli's *The Young Duke* (London: Colburn, 1826), for example, or *Granby*, or *Pelham* of the next chapter—are more likely to end with marriage and the establishment of a quiet domestic, rather than political career. In *Aristocratic Women and the Literary Nation, 1832-1867* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Muireann Ó'Cinnéide agrees with Kendra: "We may distinguish two main silver fork narratives. The first recounts the progress of a young man in fashionable society, a topic which allows for a range of adventures both sexual and political, and which tends to generate wittily cynical observation satire ... The second, more frequent silver fork narrative ... depicts the introduction of an innocent young woman to high society, often through marriage, and her gradual temptation, corruption, and either redemption or fall" (48). To be sure, many novels employ both plots, and it is certainly dangerous to claim that all novels in a diverse genre work in a particular way. Catherine Gore's novels, which Kendra tends to characterize as "society novels," often use both plots. In *Pin-Money*, Lord Launceston's courtship might seem to belong to a dandy novel, which Frederica's attempts to find marital harmony belong to a society novel. That novel, however, does not switch back and forth between plots; the courtship plot is funneled through Frederica's perspective. In *The Exclusives*, however, Bury brings together two almost entirely divergent plots, which touch only rarely.

²²⁴ In another possible moment of prescience for Bury, Munich happens to be the town to which Jane Digby repaired in July of 1831, as it happens, still waiting for her Prince to join her (Lovell 78-79).

terms of the novel, so he can resist the fashionable world's inevitable attempt to corrupt Lady Adeline. The resolution of Lord Glenmore's plot leads, albeit circuitously, to the resolution of Lord Albert's and prevents a repetition of the dangers that Lord Glenmore has encountered by preemptively ensuring that Lady Adeline will not succumb to the fashionable world.

Thus the "real" tale, which was heading towards scandal and divorce by the time Bury's novel was published, becomes a cautionary tale both for the doubled plot and, presumably, for the reading audience. Openness turns out to be the novel's main point. The narrative revises the scandal and, through the openness that the narrator has developed, reveals it in order to warn Lord Albert away from the fashionable world. Lady Glenmore points out to Lord Glenmore his error: her confession now makes that society appear to him "in its full force, to be of such dangerous tendency, that he felt he ought to have known better," and she speaks in "perfect openness" to win back her husband's affection (3:304). That openness ultimately permits Lord Glenmore's example to inoculate Lord Albert from a similar mistake. But fashionable society cannot caution or correct itself because it is structured in order to conceal. Lady Hamlet Vernon's downfall educates no one; Lady Tilney's existential terror about her uncertain future provides no minatory example. Only at the level of narrative, when the narrator's perfect openness invites in the reader, does society get a chance to correct itself—and that narrator, as we have seen, is troublingly involved with the problems of fashion. Her warnings come too late for the real-world plot and almost too late for the novel's plot. Fashion continually trips up the narrative, inhibiting the narrator's plotting for the formation of a proper aristocratic society. If the novel's first volume sets up plot as contested ground between the narrator and Lady Tilney, then what

we see at the end of the novel is the narrator triumphant: ennui turned into plot and used to shore up aristocratic privilege in response to fashionable encroachment. As we will see in the next section, however, the narrator's rewriting of fashion as aristocratic privilege turns out to be its own (unheeded) cautionary tale.

III. Politics

At the end of *The Exclusives*, the Glenmores have reached marital accord, and Lord Albert and Lady Adeline seem prepared for a lifetime of joy. But to secure their future, Lord Glenmore and Lord Albert must leave the ministry: they end up with happy marriages but no careers. Many critics have noted the relationship between the fashionable novel and political interests, despite the fact that the genre tends not to offer sustained political critiques.²²⁵ Although it is loosely unified by an overarching trope comparing fashion to tyrannical government and mocking Lady Tilney's pretensions of liberty, *The Exclusives*, for example, mostly gestures towards the relationship between government and society. But because resolving the fashionable plot means removing the political players from the fashionable world and leaving the novel without a resolution to the political difficulties it sketches, fashion turns out to be quite pertinent to politics. Although the novel's frequent

²²⁵ Frances Russell Hart, for examples, sees "novel of fashion as an exercise in the politicizing of society" and as having "articulated the consciousness of a growing divisiveness of caste in English society and ... envisioned new and socially responsibly ideas of aristocracy." In "The Regency Novel of Fashion," *From Smollett to James: Studies in the Novel and Other Essays*, ed. Samuel L. Mintz (Charlottesville, VA: U Press of Virginia, 1981), 129, 133. Robin Gilmour agrees: "The historical romance and the novel of fashionable life, or 'silver-fork' novel ... were forms which enshrined the patrician values of pre-industrial England," in "The Novel and the Aristocracy: Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, and Thackeray," *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (Baltimore: E. Arnold, 1986), 15. Hibbard, too, sees the novels as characterizing nobility as proper guardians of culture.

references to fashion's political form might suggest that political metaphors are tools through which the narrator levies a critique against fashion, this section suggests that the two terms ought to be reversed: political metaphors do not critique fashion so much as the fashionable metaphor critiques politics. Matthew Rosa dismisses Catherine Gore's *Hamiltons* (1834), which chronicles events leading up to the Whig ministry of the 1830s, as "not a true political novel" because it does not offer any sustained critique or alternative to the existing political system.²²⁶ He would undoubtedly level the same criticism at *The Exclusives*. But I am suggesting that calling *The Exclusives* a fashionable novel—that is, a novel that is in some way both about fashion and itself fashionable—turns out to be one and the same as calling it a political novel, in a relationship that I believe holds true for the fashionable novel more widely. As I suggested in chapter two, the fashionable novel sees politics as the managing of relationships between people and people, or people and things, and fashion as, therefore, a model of disinterested politics. What *The Exclusives*'s plot refusal shows is that the content that limits fashionable form—the content that makes the best fashionable novels the most typical—also turns out most dangerously to limit political form.

To Lady Tilney, government is an affair of party rather than of principle. That is, she conceives of government as an exclusive set to which one belongs through a network of allegiances rather than as a seat from which one can serve one's constituents. Such exclusivity means that the political plot, or what there is of one, turns out to be very similar to the fashionable seduction plots: Lady Tilney wants to "seduce" Lord Glenmore into her political party by seducing his wife into the fashionable world. When he takes a position in

²²⁶ Rosa, 126-28.

the ministry, she is disappointed: “so long as Lord Glenmore remained unconnected with party, she considered that he was yet to be gained over to that whose interests she espoused: and Lord Albert D’Esterre having likewise taken the same course, was an additional cause of regret to her” (3:21). But Lady Tilney does not reckon on the fact that Lord Glenmore has a very different understanding of the relationship between fashion and politics than she does. To Lady Tilney, fashion and politics are identical to the extent that, to say someone is in fashion is to say that they have the right politics.²²⁷ Lord Glenmore’s politics, however, are independent of party, precisely because of his wealth and power: his “situation was too independent to admit the surmise of his being influenced by motives of personal interest” (3:21). Lady Tilney explains: “you see what a vast field of interest the Glenmore himself includes ... *Some* of them may play a card in politics: *all* of them are good tools ... by making her *one of us*, we shall have a vast addition of strength added to our party” (2:44). Lady Jersey, Lady Tilney’s real-life counterpart, was one of the most successful Whig hostess in the early decades of the nineteenth century,²²⁸ but *The Exclusives* deflates that successes by aligning it with fashionable maneuvering and secrecy and exposing the hypocrisy that would result, by the 1830s, in Lady Jersey’s shifting allegiance to the Tory party.

Forbearing to represent these moves politically, *The Exclusives* names neither specific party nor minister but continually discusses fashionable life in governmental terms. Lady Dunmelraise, for example, says that the Exclusives “have a lawless form of self-government indeed, by which they keep up their own sect and set” (2:89), while Lady Tilney notes that “it

²²⁷ Leslie Mitchell discusses the overlap between the Whig party and the fashionable world, in *The Whig World, 1760-1837* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2005).

²²⁸ Reynolds, 161.

is the disagreement in the cabinet between their own members which always breaks up the administration; so society is, or ought to be precisely a type of the government of a state” (2:43). The Comtesse Leinsengen, a stand-in for the Latvian Countess, later Russian Princess Lieven, links Almack’s and an elected governing body: “Vat signify dat tiresome Almack, after all? It was good enough at first, when it put people in a passion ... but now that, somehow or oder, you liberals admitted every petite demoiselle vid her red elbows, and vulgar mama to take care of her ... de lady patronesses cannot even maintain a seat at de top of de room” (1:15). Repeated throughout the novel, these identifications between government and fashion are a familiar trope in the genre, although the point of reform—and the particular structure of government—is only ever implied.

As the Comtesse Leinsengen’s dismissal suggests, Almack’s offers the novel’s clearest link between exclusivity and tyrannical government. Although the fashionables in *The Exclusives* dismiss Almack’s as having outlived its day of exclusiveness, it was, for around half a century, the so-called “seventh heaven” of fashion, the sole arbiter of Society. Founded by William Macall, whom tradition holds reversed his name to avoid the stigma of his obviously Scottish origins, the rooms opened at the start of the Season in 1765 in King’s Street, St. James.²²⁹ Offered as an alternative to the popular all-male clubs of the time, it permitted men and women to mingle primarily for gambling. After 1800, however, the establishment became a more or less openly avowed marriage market. Access to its weekly balls, held every Wednesday throughout the London Season, was controlled by a shifting cabal of aristocratic

²²⁹ Cheryl Wilson writes more broadly on the representation of Almack’s in fashionable novels. She sees the novelists’ use of Almack’s as a way of negotiating female authority within both social and literary marketplaces (41-47).

women that, in 1814, comprised the Ladies Jersey (Sarah, Countess of, 1786-1867), Castlereigh, Cowper (later Lady Emily Palmerston) and Sefton, as well as the Princess Esterhazy and the Countess (later Princess) of Lieven.²³⁰ It is these women who populate Bury's exclusive society and many other novels.²³¹ Subscription fees were low, supposedly to emphasize the fact that wealth alone could not breach the hallowed doors. Indeed, rules of entry were so strict that an often repeated story has it that the Duke of Wellington himself was turned away for having arrived at the assembly rooms in trousers rather than the more formal knee-breeches still required—and then refused admittance when he returned a few minutes after the doors closed at 11PM.²³²

A reader of fashionable novels would likely have been familiar with Stanhope's *Almack's* (1827), which I have already discussed as a source-text for the Glenmore's aliases. *Almack's* announces itself as a critique of Almack's tyranny and exclusivity in a satirical dedication, and its critique is encapsulated in a newspaper notice inserted within the text, worth quoting at length:

We would call public attention to the daring boldness of a society, formed within the

²³⁰ Captain Gronow, *Reminiscences of Captain Gronow*, 2nd ed (London, Smith, Elder, and Co., 1862), 42.

²³¹ Fashionable novels definitionally include a scene at Almack's. Cheryl Wilson has argued that Almack's allowed novelists to think about issues of gender and women's power, particularly through the figures of the powerful Patronesses. "Almack's and the Silver-Fork Novel," *Women's Writing* 16.2 (August 2009), 237-252. More specifically, "it became a way for women authors to embed models of authority within their texts and to reflect on the nature of their authorial endeavors." [Web, 31 March 2011.] Jane Rendell discusses the architecture of Almack's in "Almack's Assembly Rooms—a Site of Sexual Pleasure," in *Journal of Architectural Education* 55.3 (February 2002), 136-149.

²³² Gronow, 44.

last few years, and which has lately stretched its power to a degree hitherto unknown in this once generous land of liberty. This society, formed, directed, and supported by six individuals only, embraces however, in its extent, persons of all ranks, professions, and political principles. It commences its operations soon after the meeting of Parliament, which the leaders re-elect their members ... Dangerous and fearful must be the designs of a body of persons, who, stifling their sentiments of enmity, enter into a mysterious league, subversive of the liberties of our countrymen. Nor is this alone confined to a coalition of Tories, Whigs, and Radicals; foreign powers are permitted, nay, invited to strengthen the combination ... They have the power of admitting into their association any person; but rank, talent, fortune, or political considerations, are insufficient ... Authority so arbitrary, it might be conceived, would be resisted; yet such is the importance attached to the society, that men estimate the consequence of others, only as they are, or are not, members of it ... no ties of consanguinity, no claims of tender affection, can avail ... The year is now drawing to the period, when the confederation open, the secret committee will again be carried on; the mustering, the enrolling, the enumeration of the confidential, be again connived at, by a government which calls itself FREE ... This then shall be a tale for future times, that in an age when the cry for liberty was loudest, when sovereignty was attacked, and all authority was contemned, there arose a secret junto, which alone reigned unopposed; which could alone enforce authority: a junto so mysterious, that none can penetrate its intricate arcane.²³³

²³³ Marianne Spencer Stanhope, *Almack's*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1827), 2:316-318.

Almack's here is imagined as a kind of doppelgänger for Parliament, perverting the function of that governing body by stripping people of their liberties rather than preserving them, and enslaving them to the power of an absolute monarchy rather than, as Parliament is supposed to do, protecting them from it.²³⁴ And yet Almack's is also imagined as a democratic institution. It admits "any person," but the criteria of admission is obscure and "arbitrary," ignoring traditional claims of rank, family, money, talent, and power. Its franchise is alarmingly broad, and, in the logic of the criticism, precisely that broad franchise leads to tyranny. In this context, Lady Tilney's society is dangerous not only because it destabilizes hierarchy by setting up a governmental body in opposition to Parliament but because the lack of clear criteria for admission means that anyone can potentially be admitted—or no one.

As the arbitrary admission policy suggests, *The Exclusives* presents liberty as a suspect ideology. Lady Tilney, the narrator says, is "one of those haughty liberals who affect to despise kings and courts; not because they dislike those necessary evils, as they call them, but because they are themselves, or would be if they could, the greatest of all sovereigns" (1:6). The narrator harps on this point continually. To Lady Ellersby, Lady Tilney insists that she would not

make any body do what he did not like to do: no one is more for perfect freedom, as you well know, than myself, but you must feel that not to belong to us, is in fact to be nobody, so that we are doing them a favour ... I would have you call upon Lady

²³⁴ It is worth noting that this association between Almack's and government is partly an issue of gender: Comtesse Leinsengen, for example, calls it the "Lady Parliament" (1:30).

Glenmore to-day, and you may tell her how she ought to dress, and to demean herself in public. And when she is in public, you may take care that no one speaks to her but those whom we approve of I like to persuade people for their good, and would have all the world act with a liberal and free exercise of their own rightful powers; the right of reason which every individual ought to exert and use in his own behalf. Ah, if all governments could but be persuaded of this, and be ruled in their determinations by this noble motive of action, how differently things in general would be managed from what they are! Kings would no longer be puppets of state, but be obliged in self-defence to become rational people. (2:45-48)

The narrator points out, in case the reader has not already understood the hypocrisy from the monologue, that “Lady Tilney ... never found out that the one part of her discourse generally contradicted the other ... for it was always herself who was to be the mover and law-giver” (2:48); and earlier, “under the shame dynasty of *ton*, caprice bears rule, and tyranny in its worst sense marks the conduct of those who sit on its ephemeral throne” (1:7). Later, Lady Tilney objects to the characterization of herself as a tyrant: “I have too much liberty in my heart to desire to tyrannize as you suggest” (1:21). In case the reader is still in doubt, the narrator insists that the *société choisie* is formed by “arbitrary power” (3:133), and that Lady Tilney is “gratified with this fresh accession of arbitrary power.” In fact, hypocrisy around the question of liberty is a national problem. The Comtesse tells Lady Tilney and Lady Ellersby that they are not truly free—that they “are all afraid in dis country to do vat you like best ... You talk freedom, but act in chains” (1:20). This continual linking of tyranny and liberty is a jab at the supposed openness of fashionable society, which the narrator suggests actually leads to tyranny and despotism: the fiction of open exclusivity that

fashion—and, in this book, also democracy—encourages.

The narrator also gestures at the political dangers of liberty. When Mr. Spencer Newcomb satirically praises the system of social organization in which the peasantry provides for the aristocracy's pleasure, he notes that "there came a time in France when these things were all changed ... and off went heads, and on went caps of liberty" (2:161). When Comtesse suggests that as long as the aristocrats "keep down *de canaille*" by keeping them ignorant, all will be well (2:161), Lady Tilney objects vociferously: "you must pardon me; but I think that every thing which has not freedom for its basis, must be wrong; let every body have a fair chance of becoming something ... there will always be ways and means of keeping people in their several stations" (2:162). Lady Tilney's hypocrisy has dangerous implications. The example of the French Revolution, in which liberty and democracy deteriorated, in British eyes, into a tyrannical government based on secrecy and deception, provides a strong counterargument to the agitation for political reform. Analyzing Lady Tilney's contemplation of the homogenous society that she intends to form, and meditating upon the dangers inherent therein, the narrator acknowledges that Lady Tilney, "blind to the demerits of her projected revolution of society," cannot see the risks: "It is thus, however, with all reforms, entered upon for private ends; the individual sees but the accomplishment of his own and his immediate associates' views, in what is to be overturned; and the fatal result accruing to the community, even if clearly distinguished, are at the moment but as dust in the balance of self" (1:75). The only safe way to reform, the implicit suggest goes, is to reform for the good of society at large. But the reform proposed by the fashionable world can only ever be exclusive, despite its claim to be democratic.

As this condemnation of coteries suggests, *The Exclusives*, in contrast to novels such as

Disraeli's *The Young Duke*, T.H. Lister's *Granby*, and Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*, is firmly Tory. In that way, it has clear political affiliations with *Tremaine*—as, indeed, it itself suggests. Its political leanings are clear in the scene it sets at the Drawing Room, the narrative argument for aristocratic and monarchical government. Despite its name, the Drawing Room is not a physical and ideological space so much as an activity: the monarch does not “have” a drawing room but “holds” a Drawing Room, or Court Presentation. The event figured importantly London Season; it could happen multiple times went through some periods of frequency interspersed with periods of irregularity. In 1717, for example, George I held drawing rooms several times a week, but most fashionable novels present the Drawing Room as a somewhat rare event held once a Season.²³⁵

Access to the Drawing Room was highly prized, but conceived along different lines than the exclusivity of Almack's. Leonore Davidoff suggests that “historically the Court was considered to be the greatest house among very many great houses. Because of this, access to the Court was essentially the same as for any private house.”²³⁶ That is, admission required visitors—those being presented—to have personal familiarity with the monarchy. For the aristocracy, that familiarity was easy to come by, because an aristocratic woman would already know someone who had been presented, either her a mother or another close female relative.²³⁷ This exclusivity is entirely different from the exclusivity of the fashionables, in

²³⁵ Nigel Arch and Joanna Marschner, *Court Dress Collection, Kensington Palace* (Department of the Environment, 1984), 2.

²³⁶ Davidoff, 24.

²³⁷ Although men were also presented and had their own Levees, fashionable novels exclusively, in my research, focus on the women's presentation.

which family matters not at all. (Beau Brummell, for example, claimed to have cut his own brother.) Middle-class drawing rooms—lower case—have been the subject of some critical attention as ideological spaces of femininity and domesticity, but the Royal Drawing Room is conceptually different.²³⁸ It is a place of permissible display where aristocrats perform their connection to the monarch, to each other, and to the crowd. It brings society together in a relationship of familial publicness that is diametrically opposed to fashion's exclusive privacy.

As the previous section noted, the female characters' discontinuous plots ensure that they are almost never in the same place at the same time, and interact only at the end of the novel in an off-stage friendship that is relayed through Lord Glenmore to Lord Albert. But they are both present at the Drawing Room, the central event of the novel's third volume and one to which the novel has been building since Volume Two. Lady Adeline has come to be presented as marriageable, and Lady Glenmore is being presented anew as Lady Glenmore, having been previously presented as Miss Melcomb. Publicness allows the circulation of gossip: while there, the crowd gossips about Lord Albert and Lady Hamlet Vernon (Lord Gascoigne says the affair was "quite settled long ago" [3:113]) and about the falling off between Lady Adeline and Lord Albert (according to Lord Baskerville, "looking very wise," the affair is "all off now. I know all about it" [3:114]). Similar gossip circulates about Lady Glenmore and Mr. Leslie Winyard, a pairing that is, according to Lord Gascoigne, "*une affaire arrangé* ... She never speaks to any one else now" (3:112). Despite these moments of gossip, the narrator approves of the Drawing Room, allowing Lady

²³⁸ For example, Andrea Kaston's "Redesigning Femininity: *Miss Marjoribank's* Drawing-Room of Opportunity," in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36 (2008), 163-186.

Adeline and Lord Albert almost to reunite. They see each other across the room and exchange a glance “as brief as it was powerful, and [Lord Albert] felt that at least she had seen, had recognized him, and in that single glance their souls had met and felt together” (3:111). This interchange leads to an impassioned conversation in which the sprig of myrtle Adeline wears earns its significance, as, restoring it to her hand, Lord Albert pleads that Adeline might receive him that night. Although this short-lived reconciliation collapses moments later when Adeline sees the myrtle in Lady Hamlet Vernon’s hand, the scene suggests that the Drawing Room, despite its highly public nature, permits more intimacy than the secretive coterie parties of the fashionable world.

Intimacy is only one of the Drawing Room’s public virtues: “A drawing-room,” Lady Dunmelraise remarks, “I hold to be one of those very few worldly pageants which are connected with some valuable and estimable feelings ... they uphold the aristocracy of the country ... and do in great measure, keep up those barriers in society, which prevent an indiscriminate admission of vice and virtue” (2:83-84). Later, Lady Delamere agrees with Lady Dunmelraise’s sentiment: “I do very firmly believe that, in far as society goes, a drawing-room does much moral good. There are certain lines drawn, which are useful to remind persons in general, that vice is contemned, and virtue honoured; and there is a distinction, too, of time, and place, and situation, which is not yet laid aside; I heartily wish there were many more drawing-rooms than there are” (2:232). In the same conversation, the Delamere’s daughter, Lady Mary, offers the following praise for the tradition: “she thought there was no occasion better suited to shew off real beauty to advantage than the splendour of a mid-day assembly, where every thing conspired to give people an air of decorative style which they could not possess at any other public meeting” (2:231-33).

These three opinions specifically praise the public nature of the event. The older women, the Ladies Dunmelraise and Delamere, both indicate that Drawing Rooms reinscribe social boundaries: they “keep up [] barriers in society” and act as “lines drawn” to remind people about proper behavior. The younger Lady Mary offers a surprising, but, in the context of her youth, understandable argument in support for the Drawing Room: Drawing Rooms required people to dress elaborately in the middle of the day, usually considered a disadvantage, and the Drawing Room was eventually moved back to the evening.²³⁹ Although *The Exclusives* spends little time on the details of court dress, it does focus on the Drawing Room’s enactment of display and visibility on a national, or at least a metropolitan level. Although convinced that Albert has deserted her, Adeline rallies for the presentation: “By the time they arrived at the entry of Buckingham House, her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes sparkling ... This is a noble sight. I am glad I came” (3:103). The word “noble” emphasizes the non-fashionable nature of the event: Drawing Rooms are not functionally equivalent to the rural excursions, water parties, modern coteries, and exclusive

²³⁹ The oddity was compounded by the fact that court dress was at all times low necked, even when changing mores and fashions called for high necks. (To wear a high neck at court, a concession often granted to older women, required special dispensation from the Lord Chamberlain.) As this example suggests, women’s court dress had to follow certain rules, some of which were maintained throughout the nineteenth century. Before 1820, a mantua was required. The mantua was the wide, flat hoopskirt of the eighteenth century; court dress required it even after fashion called for the long, narrow, high-waisted gowns of the Regency. In addition to the mantua, court dress required lace lappets, long hanging streamers of lace that dangled by the lady’s face; a plume of feathers, at times different according to marital status; and an unwieldy train. These three accessories persisted even after George IV, appalled by the monstrosity that had resulted from an attempt to combine a hoop with the high waist fashionable during the Regency, banned the mantua. After George IV’s accession, Court Dress began to align more closely with general fashions for evening dress, although a court dress would always be the most opulent—and most expensive—outfit in a woman’s wardrobe (Arch and Marschner, 3-6, 14-19).

boudoir gatherings among which the fashionable world circulates. Both the way that Lady Tilney describes her parties and the lengths to which she goes in order to insist that no word leaks out in the papers emphasize a fundamental difference. While fashionable parties are secret and mysterious, allowing the revelers to be visible only to those who are already invited, the Drawing Room's purpose is quite avowedly to see and be seen, and not only by those of one's own social world. Even the commoners enjoy the show. "When Lady Adeline arrived at her aunt's house," we learn,

[S]he had to undergo the gaze of the persons assembled to look at the dresses of those who were going to court ... They went slowly along in the splendid equipage, which, in the magnificence of old family state, attracted unusual attention ... the gaping crowd made no inapt observations as the glittering throng passed in array before them." (3:101-02)

The Drawing Room is exclusive in that only certain people qualify to be presented at it, but it is at the same time non-exclusive. Its dates were widely published and all sorts of people had access to the attendees. By bringing all of London together, it functions explicitly as a public sphere along eighteenth-century lines, as articulated by Jürgen Habermas.²⁴⁰

The crowded, public nature of the Drawing Room differentiates it from other locations represented in the novel, among which are Lady Tilney's boudoir, Hyde Park, the opera, a country house, and an outdoor breakfast, all of which figure prominently in the novel's events. Although the park and the opera are ostensibly public places, and certainly

²⁴⁰ Although Habermas describes the public sphere as based on a bourgeois public, the openness and inclusiveness that Bury emphasizes here resembles Habermas's "inclusive public of all private people," in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 37.

the point of a promenade was to see and be seen, it is worth noting that the opera-goers were more interested in pointing their glasses at neighboring boxes than at the stage, as evidenced by Lady Tilney's failed intention to be present "at the first scene of the Opera"—she arrives instead "before the conclusion of the third act" (1.142). During the whole "Opera" chapter, not one character notices or attends to the performance: they plot, gossip, and intrigue instead.²⁴¹ The park is also a place of public display, this with a nationalist bent: "Than the throng of Hyde Park, the narrator notes, "there is perhaps no promenade in Europe more dazzling; none where more magnificence of equipage, or more beauty of human form is displayed" (1.130-131). But in both public spaces, the order of the day is intrigue: the park permits private conversations, and the opera boxes form spaces of seduction and confusion. This fashionable version of public intimacy is not, according the narrator, a Habermasian hallmark of bourgeois citizens but an avenue to *mesalliance* and intrigue.

The Drawing Room offers a rather different model of public intimacy. When Adeline comes into the presence of the king, she finds herself "suddenly in an open space, from whence the monarch, and those persons attached to his household, could distinctly see every person separately who entered" (3.106). The space of the Drawing room reverses the boudoir dealings of fashionable society, because it is determinedly public in nature, designed to facilitate the royal gaze and to allow others to piggyback on the clear lines of sight. The

²⁴¹ Ed Copeland suggests that London's Italian opera became a space for novelists to explore political reform, in "Opera and the Great Reform Act: Silver Fork Fiction, 1822-1848" (*Romanticism on the Net*, 2004), while Jennifer Hall-Witt discusses the interrelation between fashionable society and the opera in *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (Lebanon, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007).

fact that most fashionable novels depict the Drawing Room in quite other terms makes this openness surprising. Contemporary accounts, both fictional and journalistic, emphasize the crowded nature of the events. In the anonymous *Hyde Nugent*, the narrator notes that “We have passed over the pageantry of the drawing-room, its glitter, heat, and crowd, sensible that such an undertaking is beyond our power of description. We merely state that Georgina Capel, who was presented the year before, and Louisa Nugent, who this year made her *début* on the court boards, created a great sensation by their extreme beauty and gracefulness, although it must be confessed there was but little room for the one to be seen, or the other displayed.”²⁴² In *Almack’s*, the court-goers get entangled with each other—“There again!” Lady D—complains, “another tug, quite destroying my trimming.” “Oh! pray, Lady D—, don’t move,” replies Lady H—: “my lappets are fast to your comb.” Following this jumble of trimmings and laces, the narrator comments that “Grace might perhaps have been in all their steps, if they had had space to show them off in.”²⁴³ In Catherine Gore’s *Pin-Money*, an old Duchess grumbles, with a concomitant animadversion on its lack of exclusivity, that the Drawing Room is “Crowded like the hustings at Covent Garden, and almost as noisy.”²⁴⁴

The contrast between the above scenes of confusion and *The Exclusives*’s suggestion that the Drawing Room offers an open stage for display indicates that the novel’s representation of aristocratic life privileges the importance of display, echoing the first volume’s insistence on affective openness. Early in the novel, Lady Tilney scoffs at the

²⁴² *Hyde Nugent* (London: Colburn, 1827), 2:237.

²⁴³ Stanhope, 3:304-305.

²⁴⁴ Gore, 1.299.

Duchess of Hermanton's jewels: "How vulgar to wear them in such quantities; she is like a walking chandelier" (1.62). But Lady Tilney scoffs because she fears the Duchess's superiority:

[T]hat that really amiable person, possessing the envied superiority of united rank and birth and talent, should assume her proper place in society, and overthrow the false rule to which Lady Tilney herself laid claim ... The simplicity of unquestioned superiority is one of its most sure characteristics; and the Duchess of Hermanton's mode of receiving this homage was unaffected and courteous. (1:68-69)

The Duke and Duchess also offer a model of marital felicity, although scorned by Lady Baskerville: "can any thing be more [ridiculous] in its way than that Duke and Duchess D'Hermanton [*sic*], who have been married I don't know how long, and are still *aux premiers amours*; one sees them eternally dawdling about together, as if persons came into company to be always setting a pattern of conjugal felicity" (1:237). The narrator's approbation indicates that the Duchess is a pattern of aristocratic behavior: although frivolous adornment may be reprehensible, adornment is not in and of itself to be shunned. Jewels are part of the aristocratic pageantry that is necessary to uphold the structure of society. It is not, in fact, vulgar for the Duchess of Hermanton to wear so many jewels: looking like a walking chandelier is part of her job, the "strict code of 'noble' conduct" by which "the staging of the publicity involved in representation was wedded to ... dress (clothing and coiffure), demeanor (form of greeting and poise) and rhetoric."²⁴⁵ Nancy Armstrong focuses specifically on the role of the woman's body in such sumptuary display: "people who were

²⁴⁵ Habermas, 8.

entitled to a privileged position were expected to display their wealth in certain highly prescribed ways” and sumptuary laws that made women into “an ornamental body representing the family’s place in an intricately precise set of kinship relations determined by the metaphysics of blood.”²⁴⁶ Fashionable novels are situated in a historical moment at which men no longer wore elaborate costume, and so this function of display became women’s province.²⁴⁷ The Duchess’s jewels are exactly this sort of sumptuary pageant: no vulgar show but a calculated and necessary exhibition of her position.

What matters here is that *The Exclusives* registers some ambivalence around aristocratic display: it wants both pageantry *and* conjugal, domestic virtues. Given the novel’s insistence on the importance of display, it is curious to note that Adeline goes to the Drawing Room adorned only in the utmost simplicity of “light, crisped hair” and a single myrtle branch. All remark it. A “singular-looking, fat man” follows her carriage to exclaim that “she wears all her diamonds and pearls in her eyes and mouth,” while the dwarfish and St. Vitus-afflicted Lady Honeyman sniffs to her “distorted daughters,” while urging them to care for their “diamond cestus” and “ruby aigrette” that “it is quite improper to come to court as if one was in one’s chemise!” (3:102-05). As the “singular-looking, fat man” suggests in his praise for Adeline’s sparkling eyes and smile, the absence of jewels redirects the gaze from any diamonds and rubies to the body itself. Lord Albert, catching sight of her, “moved away round the back of the circle, to get a more distinct view of the object so unexpectedly presented to him;—an object still dearer to his heart than any upon earth ... In the present

²⁴⁶ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 70.

²⁴⁷ The Great Masculine Renunciation stripped men of their finery; I discuss this historical development in more detail in Chapter Four.

instance she stood before him as the personification of innocence and truth” (3:106). In this case, putting off her jewels and going into the Royal presence unadorned—putting aside display—is the same as being innocent and truthful. On the one hand, Adeline’s aberrance is permitted because she is unmarried and thus not yet fully part of the aristocracy’s necessary display. On the other hand, her lack of jewels points to the novel’s tension around the proper role of the aristocracy *vis-à-vis* public matters. Adeline’s decision to go unadorned to the Drawing Room befits her to marry Lord Albert, who can only preserve his own innocence and truth by withdrawing from the political world, and it rewrites aristocracy into the unadorned body: the truly noble sight that the novel offers.

The Exclusives’s model of noble aristocratic fit to lead the nation anticipates the Young England movement of the middle of the decade, while the social problem novel of the following decade takes a distinctly negative view of aristocratic privilege.²⁴⁸ What *The Exclusives* offers, and what the fashionable novel offers more generally, is the aristocrat’s point of view, a perspective often absent from novels of and discussions of the nineteenth century. But that perspective leads the novel into a serious problem. Lord Albert, the Glenmores, and Lady Adeline—the novel’s “good” aristocrats—are all oppressed by a passivity, an unwillingness to plot, that renders them victim to fashionable society. Lady Glenmore, for example, is entrapped by Lady Tilney’s desire to make at least a “trial of Miss Melcomb’s aptitude for *ton*” (1:252), and then slyly removed from England by the same

²⁴⁸ Major studies of the social problem novel include Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2007), and Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). It is significant that Benjamin Disraeli, whose early fashionable novels helped define the genre, later turned to Young England novels.

group when the supposed liaison that the Exclusives have forwarded becomes too marked. Lady Adeline so slavishly conforms to her mother's counsel that she encourages Mr. Foley while discouraging Lord Albert; and Lord Albert allows himself to be taken in quite readily by Lady Hamlet Vernon. These characters are depicted as overwhelmed by the plotting of other characters: they speak and act wholly as the machinations require. It would be a curious aristocratic government that would behave thus.

But it turns out that passivity fortifies these characters against fashionable society. Lady Glenmore is so open to manipulation that does not even remember Mr. Leslie Winyard giving her a portrait. When her husband cries out, "But the picture, Georgina, the picture! Tell me, how came the picture of that man in your possession?" (3:306), Lady Glenmore is surprised: "His picture! ... Oh! I remember now; I had totally forgotten it ... I had declared my inability to recall any one, however intimate, to my memory, when I did not see them; and then he said he could not bear me to forget him, and he would put his portrait in my *porte-feuille*, which I conclude he did; but indeed, indeed I have never looked at it or thought of it since" (3:306). Passivity renders her mind incapable of maintaining the impression of her intimates: she is a profoundly blank slate. In fact, her attitude is almost pathologically inert, as she resists manipulation so absolutely that Mr. Leslie Winyard has to content themselves with the appearance of impropriety. When he speaks to Lady Glenmore on the perfectly innocent topic of the difference between Paris and London, "he had continued to move his chair nearer and nearer her own ... to appear to the public to be deeply engaged in the most interesting conversation" (3:62). When he later cannot engage her attention, he "leant back in his chair, and affected to be absent also, that he might appear to other to be occupied sympathetically with herself" (3:64). Abstraction from society armors Lady

Glenmore against it—a subject position that is very similar to the authorial abstraction (and inattention) that forms the subject position of the fashionable author, as I articulated in Chapter One.

Nor can Mr. Foley impress himself on Lady Adeline. He attends her at a party, “sometimes leaning on the back of her chair, and affecting to speak to her with the familiarity of intimacy; alluding to times and circumstances of which the present company were ignorant, and endeavouring, by this conduct, to wear the appearance of being an *attaché* of Lady Adeline’s” (3:170). Later he “continued to take every opportunity of affecting intimacy ... asking her opinion of the *fête*, of the arrangement, of the scene ... to all of which she replied naturally, saying, ‘They were perfectly different, and admitted of no comparison.’ In this manner he endeavoured to create an appearance of greater intimacy than belonged to common acquaintance” (3:171-72). Lady Adeline, like Lady Glenmore, is passive to the point that she practically has no opinion; she listens to Lord Foley with “complacency” (3:62) and speaks “naturally” (3:171), but he can hardly draw any actual conversation from her. When she finally sees Lord Albert in Munich after their mutual error has been revealed, she cannot even approach him directly: “In sounds almost inarticulate, she pronounced his name; and as her head was bowed down, overcome with the agitation of such a moment, Lady Dunmelraise approached, pressed their united hands together, and blessed them as her children” (3:326).

The extreme passivity of all these characters means that they fail to be affected by the plotting around them. Both women calmly receive the attentions of their cavaliers without evincing any awareness of the men’s intentions, and they pattern their behavior on the advice of others while their natural inclinations remain untouched. Through all the

surrounding machinations, both women are fundamentally unchanged. Their conversation is half-hearted and indifferent—Lady Glenmore is often “quite abstracted, and herself totally uninterested in all that was passing” (3:64), while Adeline speaks “equally to the different persons around” (3:17)—and neither can receive any lasting impression. Lady Glenmore only becomes wild with agony when she realizes that Lord Glenmore suspects her of adultery, and Lady Adeline mourns when she believes that Lord Albert has forsaken her. But both are essentially unmoved by their experiences within fashionable society. In contrast, those exclusives who actively plot come to bad ends: Mr. Leslie Winyard marries an heiress who wishes to exchange her money for access to the fashionable world, but she dies eighteen months later of a broken heart (3:331), Lady Hamlet Vernon ends up having to marry Mr. Foley in order to save her reputation, while he consents to save his fortune. Lady Tilney continues on, although she is “harassed” by the knowledge that her tenure as fashionable leader is always about to end.

Lest the examples of Lady Glenmore and Lady Adeline suggest that passivity is a women’s issue, it is important to note that the men who evince this almost pathological passivity also profit.²⁴⁹ Lord Albert allows himself to be manipulated and swayed by Lady Hamlet Vernon, and even Lord Glenmore is a bit of a trusting fool whose indifferent smile Lady Tenderden is glad enough to exploit, “willing that those around should consider

²⁴⁹ Lauren Gillingham finds a similar aimlessness in Gore’s much later *Cecil*, a self-conscious copy of earlier dandy novels: “Placing an aimless, comparatively innocuous coxcomb in the midst of a society congenitally plagued by that drive to distinction which is presupposed by its own core doctrine of selfless, endless industry, Gore makes clear that the kind of autonomous, self-regulating heroic agency to which her predecessors aspired exists only in fantasy, as the object of a novelist’s imagination,” in “History Suits the Dandy: Catherine Gore’s *Cecil* Novels,” *Women’s Writing* 16.2 (August 2009), 231.

directed to herself” (3.183). Both these men, who act only at the utmost end of the narrative and, in Lord Albert’s case, hardly even then, are rewarded with faithful, trusting wives and untarnished moral characters. But, as we have seen, this otherwise laudable passivity means that, faced with a government they cannot support, they must withdraw. Glenmore leaves the political world because he cannot support the minister’s politics, which, the narrative suggests, center around the question of political reform. The narrative pressures of form require that the characters take part in and simultaneously resist fashion; and they must leave the political world in order to preserve the narrator’s didactic message.

For some time, it has been fashionable to declare that the aristocracy persisted throughout the nineteenth century.²⁵⁰ Yet these studies have primarily looked at political influence, landownership, and wealth distribution. Records from the fashionable world point out a pronounced decline of aristocratic influence. Throughout the first half of the century, for example, *The Morning Post*—the newspaper that provided details of fashionable life to its readership through columns about the court and the Fashionable World—regularly printed notices of “Marriage in High Life.” A typical example reads:

Yesterday morning, at St. George’s Church, Hanover-square, by the Lord Bishop of Norwich, was married Colonel the Hon. Frederick Ponsonby, to the Lady Emily Bathurst youngest daughter of the Earl and Countess Bathurst. After the ceremony, Colonel and Lady Emily Ponsonby left London for Cirencester.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ For example, David Cannadine’s *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

²⁵¹ (March 17, 1825), 16923.

These notices were so much a part of fashionable life that they formed important plot points in some novels. Eleanor Maitland reads one about herself in Catherine Gore's *Debutante* (1846); T.H. Lister's *Granby* (1825) closes with one; and Lady Scott wrote an entire novel entitled *A Marriage in High Life* (1828), that opens with "Towards the end of a London spring, that is to say, about the middle of August, was married by special license, at her father's house in Harley Street, Emmeline Benson to Ernest, Lord Fitzhenry, only son of the Earl of Arlingford,"²⁵² language that, except for the satiric acknowledgment of the unnaturalness of a London "spring," sounds nearly identical to those included in *The Morning Post*.

These notices continued through the 1860s, although they became gradually less detailed and began to combine multiple announcements into the same paragraph. The last example *The Morning Post* contains reads quite differently from those of earlier in the century:

Marriages in High Life—A marriage has been arranged between the Hon Cecily Stuart Wortley, sister of Lord Wharnccliffe, and Lord Henry Scott, M.P., second son of the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch; also between the Hon. Emma Lascelles, Maid of Honour to her Majesty, and Lord Edward Cavendish, Rifle Brigade, youngest son of the Duke of Devonshire; also between Miss Sturt, daughter of Mr. Henry and Lady Charlotte Sturt, and Colonel the Hon. St. George Foley, C.B., the newly appointed Military Attaché at Vienna; also between Miss Block, sister of Mrs. Popham, and the Hon. Maurice Wingfield, brother of Viscount Powerscourt; also between Miss Constance Adeane, sister of Mr. H.J. Adeane, M.P., and Mr. Hugh

²⁵² Lady Caroline Scott, *A Marriage in High Life*, 2 vols. (London: Colburn, 1828), 1:1-2.

Smith, son of Mr. John Abel Smith, M.P., and between Miss Mary Sullivan, daughter of the Right Hon. Laurence Sullivan and niece of Viscount Palmerston, and the Rev. R.B. Baker, vicar of Fulham.—*The Owl*.

Although it certainly begins with quite spectacularly titled individuals, the announcement peters out to a succession of Mrs. and Hons. The announcement, too, is not interested in the individual marriages at all, instead lumping them all together in a list that, although organized by rank, does not differentiate between rank. And, in fact, these marriages not even merit direct transmission: instead, the notice is presented as a reprint from another periodical. After this announcement, “marriage in high life” (or “marriages”) becomes relegated to the classifieds, where purveyors of jewelry and antiques solicit the attention of those about to be married. When the phrase does show up again in the news, it’s as parody: “Marriage in Very High Life,” a headline proclaims, introducing a story about the marriage of “giantess” Anna Swan.²⁵³

What the comparison of these announcements across the century shows us is a diminishing interest in the aristocracy, even by that very same aristocracy and its mouthpiece of fashionable news, *The Morning Post*. The aristocracy, this brief example suggests, diverges from fashion at the very time that fashion is on the ascendant. Why, exactly, the aristocracy and fashionable world diverge is a question that is outside the scope of this literary study. But I believe *The Exclusives* shows that plot refusal—the withdrawal from plot evidenced by the narrator and characters of this particular fashionable novel but constituted, as boredom and *ennui*, in the genre as a whole—is not just a fashionable problem, nor a narrative

²⁵³ (June 19, 1871), 7.

problem, but also a political problem. As this section has suggested, the novel's overarching trope compares the fashionable world to the political world in such a way that it is not entirely clear which part of the analogy is being critiqued through reference to the other. Because the backdoor dealings of the fashionable are also taking place—in fact, are nearly the same as those—in the political world, the reformation of the fashionable world might point the political world towards reform. In the novel, however, the fashionable world is incapable of reform. Even *The Exclusives's* reactionary politics cannot save it. It can only be left behind. In the genre of the fashionable novel, of which *The Exclusives* is perhaps the most typically typical example, a political reform led by aristocrats that in the public imagination hints at a gradual lessening of aristocratic power turns out after all to be logical terminus of fashion. These aristocrats, the novel suggests, are writing themselves out of history because the open exclusivity that reform offers is in fact nothing other than the tyranny of fashionable rule. The response is withdrawal: withdrawal from plot, from politics, from fashion, and moreover from the mainstream trajectory of novel history. And so the final correction that *The Exclusives* offers is a correction to the genre of the fashionable novel as a whole. It turns out that the solution to the tyrannizing problem of fashion is fashion itself, the plotlessness of fashion amplified into a political stance that, in this reading, seems the logical terminus of both the genre and of the fashion system itself: an unreadable book in which nothing happens and according to the plot of which the rescued characters can only be redeemed to a life of fruitless rustication. It is no wonder that these aristocrats, and these novels, ended up on wrong side of history.

Fashionable	Non-fashionable
Lady Hamlet Vernon	Lord Albert
Mr. Foley	Lady Adeline
Mr. Leslie Winyard	Lady Glenmore

Figure 5 Table of characters from Lady Charlotte Bury's *Exclusives*

Chapter 4. The Man Whom Clothes Do Not Make: Character in the Fashionable

Novel

All things change; ours is the age of masses and classes,
the last was the age of individuals.

—*Blackwood's Edinburgh*, June 1844

In Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham* (1828), one of the few fashionable novels that has enjoyed any lasting critical or popular appeal, the titular hero (who would disclaim that designation) says near the end of his self-narrated adventures that "I have made no scruple of owning my errors and my foibles; all that could occasion mirth or benefit to the reader were his own."²⁵⁴ I have kept a veil over the darker and stormier emotions of my soul; all that could neither amuse nor instruct him *are mine!*" (342). This chapter interrogates that refusal to bare the secret self. It begins with the notion that the refusal stems from a disjunction between appearance and substance and ends by suggesting that fashionable characters enact

²⁵⁴ Pelham's insistence that he is not a hero speaks to a strand of criticism that looks at literature through its hero. Northrop Frye, reading Aristotle, classes fiction by "hero's power of action" in relation to us; "If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience ... On this level the difficulty in retaining the word "hero," which has a more limited meaning among the preceding modes, occasionally strikes and author. Thackeray thus feels obliged to call *Vanity Fair* a novel without a hero," in *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 200), 32. Novels in particular are often identified with a lack of heroes: "the novel distinguishes itself from the romance, in which the protagonist proves himself a hero, actually fulfills his heroic potentiality. *Vanity Fair*—"A Novel Without a Hero"—is rather an exemplary case than an exception," in Maurice Z. Shroder, "The Novel as a Genre," in *The Massachusetts Review* 4.2 (Winter 1963), 293. Finally, "Many a fashionable novel is, like *Vanity Fair*, a novel without a hero" (Rosa 26), by which Rosa seems to mean someone who is admirable and mature because he refers to many of the novels' young men as "silly." James Eli Adams sees the opposition of "the hero and the dandy" as an organizing principle not only of *Sartor Resartus* but also of Victorian masculinity, in *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 21, and Ellen Moers claims that Thackeray was unable to imagine a hero who could also be a Dandy, in *The Dandy, Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

a radical separation the self into narrator and narrated. This separation is situated within earlier conversations around self-fashioning, and the existence of a secret self is familiar from discussions of interiority in the nineteenth-century novel. This fashionable interiority, however, specifically resists a culture of imitation that was seen as contingent upon a growing mass market in an industrialized society, by positing, through social and narrative exclusivity, the existence of an inimitable self.

In general, the fashionable novel does not offer characters whose life-like animation inspires what David Brewer calls “afterlives,” the cultural appropriation of characters as common property²⁵⁵; nor do they revolve around characters whose rich emotional lives and finely narrated interiority enthrall their readers. Whatever the experience of individual readers, critics tend to agree: “The men and women in the fashionable novels ... are mere phantoms ... They are not human beings first and pose and pretense second, but pose and pretense completely”²⁵⁶; the characters “are much less memorable than their houses”;²⁵⁷ and they “come to life in these novels through external social representation, not through their reflections on an imagined interior life.”²⁵⁸ Spanning nearly 80 years, these judgments insist

²⁵⁵ *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825* (Philadelphia: University of Press, 2005). Brewer’s notion of “afterlives” is indebted to Franco Moretti’s notion of the “social canon”—the texts that readers chose to remember and pass along with “steady survival from one generation to the next,” in “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” in *MLQ* 61.1 (March 2000), 209.

²⁵⁶ Matthew Whiting Rosa, *The Silver-Fork School: Novels of Fashion Preceding Vanity Fair* (New York: Columbia, 1936), 13.

²⁵⁷ Robin Gilmour, “The Novel and Aristocracy: Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, and Thackeray,” in *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (Baltimore: E. Arnold, 1986), 20.

²⁵⁸ Edward Copeland, “Opera and the Great Reform Act: Silver Fork Fiction, 1822-1842,” in *Romanticism on the Net* (2004), 13.

that character in the fashionable novel lacks a necessary heft to inspire scholarly attention. All three shift attention from character as interiority to character as structure—“pose and pretense” in Rosa’s figuration; “external social representation” in Copeland; and, perhaps most tellingly, the “houses” in Gilmour. Copeland’s “external social representation,” of course, is merely a more sophisticated way of saying “pose and pretense,” one that credits the authors (and characters) with self-awareness, and the shift is understandable when one considers that nearly 70 years elapsed between them. And yet “external social representation” is not really any more illuminating than “pose and pretense.” It still remains an unarticulated formal feature that contrasts with the more familiar “reflections on imagined interior life.” All three of these critical approaches frame the novels’ characterization in terms of what it lacks: humanity, memorability, and interior life. They already expect to find something approaching a worthwhile object of narration, and therefore criticism. In particular, demanding a certain type of interiority—that is, measuring the characters by their quantity of lifelikeness, recognizing certain approaches to characterization as especially privileged to offer that quality, and what’s more, holding up the simulacrum of lifelikeness as an expected aesthetic end—ensures that the characters of fashionable novels have failed before they even form an object of study.

Here, however, I suggest that lack of reflection on an imagined interior life as signals not absence but presence. This chapter begins by briefly considering common approaches to talking about character, focusing in particular on the way in which meaning about characters is transmitted and turning to *Pelham* in order to see how the fashionable novel teaches its readers to understand its protagonist. It continues by examining two of the first fashionable

novels, Robert Plumer Ward's *Tremaine* (London: Colburn, 1825) and T.H. Lister's *Granby* (London: Colburn, 1826), to articulate two different versions of the fashionable character's *Bildung* in relation to a refusal to act that characterizes a fashionable subject position. Finally, after considering the opposing concepts of mechanization and independence that run through all three texts, I return to *Pelham* to situate the discussion in the historical and cultural context of a newly industrialized England, in which the threat and possibility of imitation became particularly pronounced. These novels occupy an apt position from which to comment. Peculiarly subject to imitation through their commodification as literary objects, fashionable novels insist that they are irreproducible at the same time that they operate within a publishing market that does not prize their originality. This paradox becomes a sort of narrative independence that has curiously armored the genre against criticism. I argue that, through the fashionable novel's articulation of a radical self, the genre offers a narrative and cultural alternative to a growing emphasis on the representation, both political and narrative, of a knowable interiority.²⁵⁹

I. Reading Character

Critical and theoretical discussions of character often lament the object of study: it is

²⁵⁹ The interest of these novels in political representation has something to do with the concerns that Catherine Gallagher finds in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), in which she asserts that nineteenth-century writers "took representation as their subject matter and considered it in the light of a theory that encouraged them to seek homologies between political and literary representation" (188). But the novels she talks about are in general more directly about politics; in the silver-fork novel, politics are highly abstracted, there in form but not in content.

the “most undertheorized of the basic categories of narrative theory,”²⁶⁰ or it has “always gotten too mixed up with discussions of plot or action.”²⁶¹ Narratologically, characters have been defined as “existents” and “actors,” an actor being, somewhat tautologically, an existent who is involved causally in a narrative’s events.²⁶² The relationship between the character and the story that it inhabits is a foundational bond, as Phelan’s observation about the inextricability of character and plot indicates. It is noteworthy, therefore, that fashionable characters tend to disrupt that bond by severing the relationship through which information about a character is relayed both through action and description. Ellen Moers’ discussion of *Pelham*’s plot exemplifies the tenuous relationship between character and the plot within which he finds himself: “The plot of *Pelham*—something to do with rape of another man’s mistress, a tortuous revenge, murder of the villain and suspicion falling on the innocent—concerns Pelham only as a bystander.”²⁶³ Moers’s summary decenters plot in critical discussion of the fashionable novel at the same time that it rehearses Pelham’s somewhat disingenuous decentering of himself as a character. At more than one point in the novel, he insists upon his lack of involvement: “I have always had a great horror of being a hero in scenes,”²⁶⁴ (1:135), he says, and later “I have always had an insuperable horror of being

²⁶⁰ John Frow, “Spectacle Binding,” in *Poetics Today* 7.2 (1986), 227.

²⁶¹ James Phelan, *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), ix.

²⁶² Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 12-13.

²⁶³ Moers, 75.

²⁶⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Pelham, or, The Adventures of a Gentleman*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1828), 1:135. All further citations will be given parenthetically. There is a question around which edition of *Pelham* to cite, as Bulwer-Lytton heavily revised it in subsequent editions—

placed in what the vulgar call a *predicament*” (1:262). Pelham continually defines himself as being not a hero by refusing to be—or claiming to refuse to be—the principal actor in a string of events²⁶⁵: he would rather draw attention to himself simply through *being*.

This refusal to act offers something of a challenge to dominant theories of individualism in the novel. Since Ian Watt, it has been popular to identify the novel, through its characters, with the rise of individualism, a point more recently made by Nancy Armstrong who asserts that the novel and the modern subject are coextensive, that their histories are “quite literally, one and the same.”²⁶⁶ Both Deidre Lynch and Lisa Freeman, however, countered that critical view’s dominance, asking “What happens if we do not assume that the history of character and the history of the individual are the same thing?” and challenging the assertion that “the subject as figured in the novel emerged inevitably in the eighteenth century, as the dominant discursive structure for modeling modern

primarily to remove some of the more offensive fashionable passages. I have chosen to cite the original edition, because it more fully (I feel) represents Bulwer-Lytton’s intervention in the genre. Jerome McGann’s edition of *Pelham* is based on the original edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972).

²⁶⁵ Although he then goes on to rescue the “female in distress” from her bolting horse, after which he revives the man who has collapsed “in a fit” at his feet. At both of these moments, when Pelham overcomes his supposedly natural hesitation, he enters deeply into the plot: with Madame de Perpignan, the woman he rescues who helps introduce him into fashionable society; and with Tyrrell, the villain whose undoing he helps to bring about. But this notion of fashionable character is immediately undermined by the fact that the whole narrative of *Pelham* revolves around just the fact that he moves from a position of being bystander into an actor, both in terms of acting in the plot and also, by adopting disguise and passing for a thief, quite literally “acting.”

²⁶⁶ Armstrong, Nancy. *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

identities.”²⁶⁷ This critical strand provides a framework for thinking about character in a way that does not depend on the mimesis of what we have come to understand as the self. It allows us to bracket questions of identity, of the individual, and of subjectivity, and to examine more carefully the way in which fashionable novels develop a theory of character in the context of evolving definitions of subjectivity in relation to independence.²⁶⁸

That theory of character depends in part on the rejection of visual description that I

²⁶⁷ Deidre Lynch, *Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Lisa A. Freeman, *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 2. Lynch turns to eighteenth-century notions of character to examine the way in which eighteenth-century readers changed from seeing character as material to expecting to be able to locate “round” characters in novels. Her book critically examines the stances taken in many of the fashionable novel’s critics that I have already cited, and thus forms an important theoretical ground to this chapter. Freeman similarly takes on received wisdom by turning to theater in order to contest the dominant idea that the rise of the modern subject is the eighteenth century’s most powerful narrative, and that the creation of a modern subject is the novel’s teleological goal.

²⁶⁸ The most frequent approaches to character have followed structuralist accounts such as those of Vladimir Propp and Tzvetan Todorov, which privilege action and see characters, in Jonathan Culler’s summary, as “sets of predicates grouped under proper names,” “Issues in Contemporary American Criticism,” in *American Criticism in the Poststructuralist Age*, ed. Ira Konigsberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 5. The problem with this approach is that fashionable characters are defined solely by one predicate—fashionable—which is necessarily indefinable, like fashion itself. The search for predicates prompts Thackeray’s parody in *Vanity Fair* of the fashionable novel as a “novel without a hero,” poking fun at the perceived absence in the novels that he mocks. Thackeray, like a structuralist account, somewhat misses the point: a fashionable character almost by definition has no predicate except that of fashionableness, and fashionableness is really no predicate at all.

What Phelan calls a rhetorical, or mimetic, account of character might be more useful, because it requires paying attention to the relationship among the synthetic and mimetic aspects of character and the way in which the fashionable character by definition has the synthetic elements of his characterization highlighted. But all novels use both synthetic and mimetic rhetoric in characterization, and thus it is not particularly illuminating to detail the relative forwardness of either approach. And the resistance to representation at which I have already gestured indicates the sketchiness of any particularly thematic approach.

discussed in this dissertation's second chapter. A character in Disraeli's *Henrietta Temple*, for example, observes that when a silver fork novelist describes a ball, "everything lives and moves," but "when the hero makes love, nothing can be more unnatural."²⁶⁹ This observation emphasizes the novelists' interest in visuality. And yet, as I have suggested in this dissertation's second chapter, the assumption that the genre is instead interested in visual description is mistaken. Visuality and surface cannot fully explain the characters, because the novels continually demonstrate the irrelevance of how they look, what they feel, and why they act.

Character in the fashionable novel then turns out not to be legible through visual description, which is curious if one agrees, as I do, with Richard Sennett's powerfully argued insistence that the nineteenth century increasingly expected a consonance between appearance and character: "People took each other's appearances in the street immensely seriously; they believed they could fathom the character of those they saw, but what they saw were people dressed in clothes increasingly more homogeneous and monochromatic. Finding out about a person from how he or she looked became, therefore, a matter of looking for clues in the details of his costume."²⁷⁰ The urban dweller, newly subject to the prying gaze of his fellow city-folk, shielded himself through homogeneity. Differentiation of costume provided information about character, as the Kantian "principle of immanence" forced clothes to acquire aspects of "intimate personality"; that is, clothes come to mean

²⁶⁹ Benjamin Disraeli, *Henrietta Temple*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1838), 3.136.

²⁷⁰ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 161.

something about the wearer through their association with the body.²⁷¹ The association between the commodity and character is almost taken for granted in our understanding of the nineteenth century: the commodity is, as Thomas Richards says, “the focal point, and increasingly, the arbiter of all representation in capitalist societies”²⁷²; and clothes “fashion identity as part of an interchange between people and things.”²⁷³ Novels, as scholars such as Andrew Miller, Murray Roston, and Christoph Lindner have argued, are particularly fruitful sites of negotiation for this association between things and interiority, manifesting anxiety “that their social and moral world was being reduced to a warehouse of goods and commodities, a display window in which people, their actions, and their convictions were exhibited for the economic appetites of others.”²⁷⁴

But fashionable novels, as I have already discussed in this dissertation’s second chapter, respond to an increasing commodity market through the affectation of sublime

²⁷¹ *ibid* 22, 20. The way in which clothing here both allows one to blend into an urban crowd and also distinguishes one’s individuality sounds very much like Jeff Dolvin’s discussion of style as both “the telltale mark of the individual maker” and “the charisma, in an object or a person, that excited imitative desire within a community of onlookers, overhearers, and potential makers,” in “Reading Wyatt for the Style,” *Modern Philology* 105.1 (August 2007), 66. Dolvin’s argument highlights fashion’s pull between individuality and communality.

²⁷² Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 13.

²⁷³ Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens’s Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 156. She further notes that scholarship tends to agree that “the development of commodity culture in the nineteenth-century is distinguished by the way in which objects, once detached from those who made them, come to represent qualities of the consumer” (145).

²⁷⁴ Andrew Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity, Culture, and Victorian Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6. See also Murray Roston, *Victorian Contexts: Literature and the Visual Arts* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) and Christoph Lindner, *Fictions of Commodity Culture: From the Victorian to the Postmodern* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

unconcern, cleaving narrative and character to deny that style is the man. In these novels, the commodity means *nothing*. This “nothing” constitutes a rejection of what Lukacs calls the “reified mind,” which regards commodities as “true representatives of [man’s] social existence.”²⁷⁵ As we have already learned, fashionable novels divorce clothes—or candles—from character. Because the commodity offers no representation of the inner being, critics have apparently taken that absence as the lack of anything to define. Certainly, fashionable goods are tied to a commodity market and depend on the ability of clothing to signal meaning. The novels, however, have a vexed relationship to the fashionable culture in which they are commodity-texts.²⁷⁶ Critics have very often noted the unusual way in which fashionable novels are commodities themselves within a commodity world that they describe.²⁷⁷ But the way in which their characters refuse meaning can untwine that paradox: although fashionable novels are signifying commodities in that the act of reading fashionable novels means something for a character or a person, the novels themselves propose characters who are illegible in the context of commodity signification.

I have already suggested, in Chapter Two, that fashionable objects are not meaningful registers of character. Neither, it turns out, are appearances. The novels generally avoid descriptions of appearance that might be mined for information about the characters of these characters. *Pelham’s* Lady Roseville, for example, is described in generic superlatives:

²⁷⁵ György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 93.

²⁷⁶ Casey Ellen Miller, “Silver-Forks and the Commodity Text: Lady Morgan and the Athenaeum,” in *Women’s Writing* 16.2 (August 2009) uses N. N. Feltes’s notion of the commodity-text to suggest that fashionable novels were produced as commodities in response to a reading market (254-62).

²⁷⁷ For example in Cronin, 125-26.

“Her eyes were of the deepest blue; her complexion of the most delicate carnation; her hair of the richest auburn: nor could even Mr. Wormwood detect the smallest fault in the rounded yet slender symmetry of her figure” (1:22). Except for a gesture at her coloring and symmetry, the description is non-specific and non-distinguishing: she’s a paragon, or a pattern. Bulwer-Lytton often employs this sort of description, as we have seen in the chapter two with the description of *Godolphin’s* heroine possessing “a bust of the most dazzling whiteness, and the justest and most chiselled proportions: a foot, whose least beauty was its smallness; and a waist narrow.”²⁷⁸ These descriptions empty out the character’s individuality, focusing not on what distinguishes her from other women but rather on what lifts her above other women: she is the most womanly of women. And many fashionable novels employ such conventionally abstracted description. In *Tremaine*, the narrator admits his own inadequacy: Georgina is portrayed mostly through her hand, which is “small, taper, white, and of velvet softness, it combined with an airy foot, and a general fineness of limb, to produce that lovely symmetry always so powerful in its effects . . . In truth, there was something in this young creature’s whole appearance not easily to be described.”²⁷⁹ In the anonymous *Hyde Nugent*, Louisa Nugent is described as possessing “carmine lips and pearly teeth,” which “admirably set off her Grecian cast of countenance; and the speaking eyes, glancing from under their long silken fringes, accorded well with the darkness of a profusion of glossy hair, which clustered over a forehead that might have served as the model for a

²⁷⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Godolphin*, ed. Harriet Devine Jump (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 20.

²⁷⁹ Robert Plumer Ward, *Tremaine*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1825), 1:104.

statuary.”²⁸⁰ Here again the woman’s body is presented as a model, something so perfect in its lack of distinguishing mark or flaw, that it is more like a museum-worthy statue than a living girl. The very formulaic nature of this description defies reading character into it at the same time that it quite literally objectifies the subject.

It would be easy to read these descriptions as exemplifying the fashionable novel’s disinterest in character, or as assuming that women, *pace* Pope, have no characters as all, or as satirically portraying the superficiality of fashionable women, or as following Helena Michie’s discussion of the codes by novels gesture at character.²⁸¹ But *Pelham* instructs its reader otherwise. When he meets Lady Roseville, that paragon of rich carnation and deepest blue eyes, Pelham assumes her typicality until better acquaintance re-educates him:

I was soon convinced that she was of a nature exactly contrary to what was generally believed—she was any thing but the mere mechanical woman of the world. She possessed great sensibility, and even romance of temper, strong passions, and still stronger imagination; but over all these deeper recesses of her character, the extreme softness and langour of her manners, threw a veil which no superficial observer could penetrate.” (35-36)

The opacity of Lady Roseville’s mind explains the nonspecificity of form and color in her physical description. She is distinguished by an interior that is not revealed through external form or habiliment and that cannot, consequently, be penetrated by a superficial observer—

²⁸⁰ *Hyde Nugent*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1827), 2:24.

²⁸¹ In her study of representations of the female body in Victorian literature, Michie suggests that “The body itself appears only as a series of tropes or rhetorical codes that distance it from the reader in the very act of description, in *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women’s Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5.

as by, for example, a reader of fashionable novels. Generalized superlatives “veil” the depths of Lady Roseville’s character. These depths do not exist despite Lady Roseville’s position as a leader of fashion. I am arguing, instead, that her position as leader of fashion hinges upon them. Fashionable novels write against a knotty problem: composing a narrative about fashionable characters who must seem to be merely mechanical in order to remain fashionable. In other words, the formal problem of the genre is that writing a novel about a fashionable character would tend toward evacuating that character’s *ton* either by filling its interior with feeling or by goading it into action. Thus, the problem of fashion is always already a problem of interiority, because the presence of interiority signals the absence of fashion.

II. Independence

A review essay in the *Quarterly Review* considers Robert Plumer War’s *Tremaine* (1825), Lord Normanby’s *Matilda* (1825), and T.H. Lister’s *Granby* (1826) together as a relatively new genre encompassing “novels of fashion.” The distinction of being the first fashionable novel sometimes rests with Theodore Hook’s short stories, but more commonly the title is bestowed upon Robert Plumer Ward’s *Tremaine*.²⁸² What distinguishes *Tremaine* from other

²⁸² Hazlitt eviscerates Hook in his “Dandy School” essay in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt* vol. 11 (London: J.M. Den & Co, 1904); while Ellen Moers calls *Tremaine* the first fashionable novel (52). Alison Adburgham doesn’t assign any one novel as the originator, but she calls Colburn’s the genre’s “conceptor” in *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature From 1814 to 1840* (London: Constable, 1983), 23. She seems to see Theodore Hook’s novels as the first truly silver-fork novels, although she begins her discussion with Lady Caroline Lamb’s *Glenarvon* (1816) and its peculiar mix of scandalous *roman a clef*, fashionable society, and the literary gothic. Rosa dismisses *Tremaine* as an anachronism and Hook as a copyist, calling *Granby* the first true fashionable novel (69). Winifred Hughes agrees with Rosa, calling *Granby* “the first full-fledged exemplar of the silver fork novel,” in

novels of the day, according to the reviewer, is that it “is not a novel of action, nor does it present any pictures of passion ... [And] Matilda is not, any more than Tremaine ... a novel of action.”²⁸³ This lack of narrative action pairs with the protagonists’ cultivated indifference: both pass as characteristics of protagonists who do not act or feel. Critics have tended to read such inactivity as a narrative flaw. In *Tremaine*, the inactivity is a characterological way of indicating Tremaine’s error; the novel takes great pleasure in educating him out of inaction. In *Granby*, however, the inactivity becomes a fashionable solution to the problem of subjectivity *vis-à-vis* political reform. And in that light, Tremaine’s inaction is tied to a narrative independence: he is idle because idleness is the only way to preserve his freedom of action. Such a reading offers a counter narrative within *Tremaine*, an anti-Utilitarian mode that Tremaine must be educated out of but that—according to the fashionable novel’s dual mode of educating and titillating—is also presented as a model for imitation.

Tremaine concerns the romantic adventures of its titular character, whose “editor” coyly suggests that “internal evidence, combined with a few other circumstances, induces the

“Silver Fork Writers and Readers,” in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 25.3 (Spring 1992), 337. Mark Booth, suggests that “the first Silver Fork novel, written in 1825, was Plumer Ward’s *Tremaine*, and Benjamin Disraeli wrote *Vivian Grey* in 1826,” but that “the two outstanding examples, however, were Thomas Lister’s *Granby* (1826) and George Bulwer-Lytton’s *Pelham: the Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828)”, in *Campe-toi! On the Origins and Definitions of Camp*,” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject—A Reader* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 72. Problems of definition make the absolute assigning of a “first” fashionable novel impossible and, in any case, the merit of such a designation is obscure. It seems sufficient to say that at some point by the late 1820s a genre of silver-fork or fashionable novels was identified as having come into existence within the last few years.

²⁸³ *The Quarterly Review* 33.66 (March 1826), 474, 486.

belief that he was a person once not unknown to the world,”²⁸⁴ and that “the scenes and persons represented may be considered as any thing but imaginary” (1:xi). “Jaded” and “self-absorbed” (1:2), Tremain dismisses the world as “dull and uninteresting” (1:4). But his primary characteristic is “a sort of natural or early acquired fastidiousness” (1:10-11), a fastidiousness that justifies the novel’s subtitle “a man of refinement.” This refinement is such that women, not to say politics, universally disappoint him. One love affair faltered by “the unhappy accident of a windy walk up Headington hill. It was not that the fair one’s lag was either thick or crooked: for it was even remarkably well shaped. But the scandal went on to say, that a garter, which happened to fall on the occasion, was considerably the worse for wear” (1:19). One by one, Tremain’s love affairs wither: “Another growing passion was reported to have been nipt in the bud, by the fair one being not sufficiently sentimental; a third, by her being too much so; a fourth, by his detecting her in reading Tom Jones; a fifth, by her having eaten her peas with a knife” (1:20). Even a girl who appears to be a true child of nature, possessed of a virgin yet confiding heart, leaves him sickened: her so-called natural constancy buckles when her soldiering lover returns from across the seas. Tremain’s abortive love affairs emphasize the refinement and fastidiousness that will lead to his withdrawal from the world and that have already led to his being unable to have “much mixture” with any but the highest of the world’s circles (1:11).

Most obviously, these descriptions of Tremain’s failed love affairs emphasize the fact that he is currently unsuited to participate in the world. Refinement is not itself a negative characteristic; it is “fastidiousness,” often allied with “false” refinement, that earns narrative

²⁸⁴ Robert Plumer Ward, *Tremain: or, The Man of Refinement*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1825), 1:ix-x. All further citations will be given parenthetically.

disapprobation. “Fastidiousness” is a constitutive feature of a fashionable world in which Exclusivism is a ruling passion.²⁸⁵ In Henry Luttrell’s *Crockford’s: or Life in the West* (1828), for example, the Marquis of Meadowdale “never tortured himself with any fastidiousness of fashion either bodily or mental, and therefore was the master, and not the child of circumstances.”²⁸⁶ The *Quarterly Review* comments that “a fastidious person can hardly ever succeed [in the House of Commons]” and asserts that the vice is “the folly of the age”²⁸⁷; while Pelham himself refers to his fastidiousness in matters of horses and clothes (2:59). In *Granby*, Trebeck dismisses “vile counterfeit finery”—false refinement, in other words—as “the national characteristic.”²⁸⁸ And in Samuel Beazley’s little-read and quite typical fashionable novel *The Oxonians*, a character despises the “silly regulation of affected fastidiousness.”²⁸⁹ Fastidiousness, then, is a defining element of fashion at this particular cultural and historical moment, as part of a society that, particularly after the Regency, saw itself in the process of refinement. Tremain’s love affairs signal, in fact, an admirable

²⁸⁵ As I have discussed elsewhere, “exclusivism” is a key feature of society in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Ellen Moers has suggested that “in no other society has the mechanism of exclusion been so prominent, elaborate and efficient” (41), while Frances Hart notes suggests that “the new social mode of fashionable aristocracy was an intricate and obsessive exclusivism” in “The Regency Novel of Fashion,” in *From Smollett to James: Studies in the Novel and Other Essays*, ed. Samuel L. Mintz, Alice Chandler, and Christopher Murphey (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 94. More comprehensively, Cheryl Wilson suggests that the novels use an “exclusive narration” to reproduce the ideology of Exclusivism, in *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 95.

²⁸⁶ Henry Luttrell, *Crockford’s: or Life in the West* (London: Saundres & Otley, 1828), 1:22.

²⁸⁷ “Novels of Fashionable Life,” *The Quarterly Review* 33.66 (March 1826), 475 and 482.

²⁸⁸ T. H. Lister, *Granby*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1826), 2:138-39. All further citations will be given parenthetically.

²⁸⁹ Samuel Beazley, *The Oxonians* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), 1:241.

refinement: although the narrator mocks him slightly, his rejection of these women turns out to have been right, when he marries the lovely and not in the least disgusting Georgina.

In *Tremaine*, however, the concept of refinement lacks an innate moral valence.²⁹⁰ What is also worth noting in these descriptions of Tremaine's liaisons is that habits of mind—sentimentality and improper reading—weigh equally with habits of the body, such as eating peas improperly and keeping untidy undergarments. On the one hand, the juxtaposition of reading habits with a dirty garter is absurd. On the other hand, Tremaine's redemption by the end of the novel, which permits eventual marriage to the paragon Georgina, signals that such stringent standards are, indeed, proper. Yet it is important to note here that a dirty garter does not disgust Tremaine because it signals a besmirched mind. The disparity between appearance and character is nowhere more obvious than in the apparently virginal Eugenia, whose name even suggests an untouched child of nature. She possesses, of course, a tainted heart, and Tremaine learns again not to trust “the simplicity of nature” (1:46). The dirty garter, then, says nothing about a dirty mind, just as the simplicity of nature written on Eugenia's countenance and in her name says nothing about the state of her heart. Instead, table manners and undergarments are assigned precisely the same weight as dissolute reading habits and an inclination towards deceit. Fastidiousness in dress turns out to be as legitimate

²⁹⁰ Refining of society here is taken to mean a dislike of the body, and so might be taken to mean “civilizing” in the sense in which Norbert Elias uses the term to indicate an increase in impulse-control and a tendency to remove bodily functions—and anything that might remind one of bodily functions—behind doors. Hence Tremaine's fastidiousness has to do with things of the body: *Tom Jones*, with its celebration of coarse appetites; a dirty garter, with its implications of a soiled leg; improper way of eating peas, once that in its inelegance might be supposed to draw particular attention to the act of eating. See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The Development of Manners, Changes in the Code of Conduct and Feeling in Early Modern Times*, 1939, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizon Books, 1978), 129-34.

as—although not necessarily corresponding to—fastidiousness of mind.

At the beginning of the novel, Tremaine's shrinking nature mires him in something very like Carlyle's Everlasting No—the “no” of atheism, but also the “no” of political disinvolvement, because his fastidiousness requires him to adopt a pose of indifference even towards “the fine woods and beautiful farms” of his ancestral home, including the “old battlements that were ‘bosomed high’ among them” (1:96). Disappointed in his political career (as Pelham will be in 1828), he resolves to withdraw to his country estate, where idleness sickens him. His doctor forces him to read his business letters, and he ends up repairing to his ancestral home in bracing Yorkshire, where Dr. Evelyn gradually involves him in the daily mix of fulfilling his country duties. Eventually he falls in love with Dr. Evelyn's daughter Georgina, whose Clarissa-like affection for her poultry yard Tremaine finds mystifying but invigorating. The two marry, but only after three volumes of trial and error, the third of which is almost entirely taken up by the rector's sounding out his prospective son-in-law on his theological convictions. Gradually Dr. Evelyn's reason works on him, and Tremaine concludes “that there was no contradiction, but on the contrary that every thing in natural [*sic*], led to the support of revealed religion” (3:376). Only after thoroughly converting him to Christianity does Dr. Evelyn allow his employer to marry his daughter.

From indifference to engagement, from rejecting the plummiest choices on the fashionable marriage market to allying himself with a rector's poultry-loving daughter, with an entire volume of abstruse theological argumentation along the way: *Tremaine* is a curious text to point to as an originary publication of the fashionable genre. It does not look much like the fashionable novels published even a year later, nor much like those I have already

discussed in terms of plot or even of description: the picturesque passages detailing scenery have more in common with many Romantic-era texts than with later fashionable novels. Tremaine himself, as Rosa points out, is a revival of “a well-worn literary type,” the man of feeling.²⁹¹ And yet *Tremaine* is continually at the time understood to be part of a burgeoning genre.

In part, that identification with the fashionable world comes through Tremaine’s vaunted involvement in the fashionable world. A room in his country house, says the narrator, “had lately received a considerable accession from an expensive new purchase, which had been ranged in the modern taste by a fashionable architect” (1:5); or “Now, amongst Tremaine’s weaknesses, we have not concealed his love of fashion . . . he was non-observant of that tyrannous power which certain springs of fashion, and certain men of wit, in the fashionable clubs, exercise over every body else, in all the points that are deemed legitimate objects of quizzing. Their despotism is so great, that not even *he* stopt to ascertain its real nature” (1:181-182); and Tremaine, in conversation with Dr. Evelyn, wonders how any country divine could possibly stand up under the weight of the “fashionable critics” at White’s or Boodle’s and admits that he himself would most likely laugh at such a figure (1:180).

And yet, by the end of the novel, Tremaine has abjured the fashionable world, resumed his place in county affairs, wholeheartedly converted to religion, and re-established a relationship with the world. Rather than withdraw, Tremaine in fact re-enters the world, albeit with a changed heart. This ending, no doubt, is what prompts the *Quarterly Review*’s

²⁹¹ Rosa, 65.

insistence that “The author of *Tremaine* ... is the champion of the Tories,”²⁹² while many more fashionable novels, including *Granby*, are politically affiliated with the Whigs. Rather than dismiss the novel as unfashionable, however, or malign its original readers and reviewers as poor readers, I would suggest that the example of *Tremaine* proves that fashion in these novels lies elsewhere than in details. *Tremaine* is not a fashionable novel because it is set in the fashionable world or because it is aligned with the Whig party or because it details the lives of a set of what Lord Byron called the 1500 fillers of hot rooms,” but because, as a character, Tremaine affects the indifference and independence of fashion, and because that indifference and independence are interrogated—and rejected—over the course of the novel. But not all fashionable novels reject such a pose.

Published only one year after *Tremaine*, T.H. Lister’s *Granby* is usually associated with *Vivian Grey*, *Tremaine*, and *Pelham* as one of the first set of fashionable novels. Certainly it makes use of its author’s apparent familiarity with fashionable society, including two characters widely recognized as quasi-scandalous figures: Lady Harriet Duncan, known to be Caroline Lamb; and Trebeck, easily recognizable as famous leader of fashion Beau Brummell. *Granby*’s narrator also affects an insouciant stance, tossing around *bon mots* and anecdotes, saying of the Brummellian Trebeck, for example that “He immediately *cut* an old school-fellow, because he had entered at a minor college” (1:107); he “scorned to share his fame with his tailor” and he “shone unrivalled” in the “art of cutting” (1.111). Aside from these superficial airs of fashion, the novel turns Tremaine’s negative traits of indifference and fastidiousness—those characteristics away from which Dr. Evelyn painstakingly

²⁹² *ibid*, 486.

educates him—into positive traits of withdrawal and refusal. In particular, it sedulously claims to avoid particularity of character and action. Lady Holland, leader of Whig society, thought that the novel was “evidently by a man who has seen London society,”²⁹³ while Sara Coleridge wrote the novel’s ease “is quite inimitable. It results from birth, breeding, and daily association with that sphere of thorough gentility where the inhabitants have little else to do than to be refined, and are cut off from all particular occupations that give a particular cast and impress to the manners. Dickens could as little give this air to this dialogue by letters or narrative as the author of “Granby” could have produced Sam Weller and his father.”²⁹⁴

It is a surprising comment for a book full of incident: a child switched at birth, a harrowing deathbed scene, a near-drowning subsequent to a hunting accident, a man-to-man confrontation, a duel, and a suicide. The novel revolves around the fortunes of Henry Granby, nephew of Lord Malton and aspirant to the hand of his childhood friend Caroline Jermyn, despite the rather higher sights of Caroline’s mother. Granby’s *soi-disant* cousin Tyrrel, heir to Malton’s fortune, turns out to be the illegitimate son of the laundress’s daughter, whom Lord Malton switched out for his own sickly child. Granby’s guardian reveals this story to Granby on his deathbed, and Granby assumes his rightful place upon Lord Malton’s quickly ensuing death. After a failed duel, Tyrrel slinks off to the London underworld, where he shoots himself. The horror of the suicide sends Granby into a decline, from which he recovers in time to claim Caroline’s hand from that of his best friend, Courtenay, whom the world expects Caroline to marry after he rescues her from drowning.

²⁹³ Moers, n23.

²⁹⁴ Sara Coleridge, “Letter to Miss Fenwick” in *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874), 325-26.

Yet the “inimitable ease” is here equated with a lack of narrative particularity. In other words, the most notable feature of the book is that it has no notable features. Its gentility lies in its homogeneity, and that homogeneity, by implication, cannot be copied precisely because it is featureless. When Granby’s love interest, Caroline Jermyn, attends her first London ball, she looks around eagerly for the famed dandy Trebeck. At first she mistakes the Hon. Mr. Tarleton for the man in question, because he is “distinguished by a very *recherché* attire, a profusion of chain work, several rings, a well curled head, and a highly scented handkerchief” (1:84-85). To Caroline’s chagrin, Trebeck turns out to dress entirely differently from “that numerous but decreasing tribe” of dandies, in that “he wore a dress in no respect distinguishable from that of ten thousand others; that he had neither rings nor chains, that his head was not fixed at any particular angle, and that the quiet and almost careless tie of his cravat, plainly shewed that he had neither studied “Neckclothiana,” nor believed in the axiom that “Starch makes the man” (1:88-89). Trebeck’s distinguishing element is his indistinguishability. The absence of remarkable dress—and the absence, therefore, of anything to be copied—marks him as fashionable. In other words, he is marked by not being remarked. And *Granby* notes a shift, in describing the difference between the Hon. Mr. Tarleton’s dress and Trebeck’s. Trebeck, it implies, represents a new kind of fashion, a fashion for being untouched by fashion. More, he cannot even be said to have initiated it, because it is a dress “in no respect distinguishable from that of then thousand others.” In other words, he has merely adopted the uniform of bourgeois masculinity.

Trebeck’s remarkable unremarkableness of dress disguises a piquant and idiosyncratic character. Granby, however, models a kind of featureless bourgeois masculinity in himself—and this featurelessness, I am arguing, is coded in the novel as fashionable. Surprisingly

passive, he continually refuses to act, turning *Tremaine's* rejected indifference into a primary formal feature of Granby's characterization. Tremaine's reluctance to perform his ancestral duties becomes, in the context of *Granby*, Granby's ability to perform them successfully through a similar kind of withdrawal. When he accidentally falls in with the tedious "squireen" Mr. Edwards who prosed on about "new grave—parish rates—appointment of sexton—robbery of his poultry yard" (1:28), the narrator points out that Granby has "one property, which was eminently serviceable at this crisis; he was a good listener" (1:28). Rather winning narrative (or social) acclaim through his wit or conversation, Granby boasts a compliant receptiveness. That docility elsewhere renders him all but inert. In town, when he wishes to ascertain whether the Jermyns were at a ball the previous evening, he visits his aunt Mrs. Dormer, who "fortunately proceeded to mention the Jermyns; a name which Henry longed to hear, but which, for reasons which we can easily understand, he scrupulously abstained from introducing ... Granby had in his composition a degree of reserve, a shrinking delicacy ... often productive of difficulties, which a more open disclosure might have prevented" (1:267-68). Like Tremaine, whose fastidiousness continually bars him from active participation, Granby refuses to act openly. On the one hand, this characteristic of "shrinking delicacy" is narratively necessary for the complications and delay that protract the novel into its required three volumes. On the other hand, it genealogically aligns Granby with Tremaine and models the fashionable protagonist as defined by his withdrawal.

Granby rewrites Tremaine's refusal to act within a Christian framework, a twist on

Tremaine's own theological condemnation of inactivity.²⁹⁵ After Tyrrel strikes Granby, Granby only narrowly avoids further physical contact: “God forbid,” Granby moans, as “turning away, he leaned against the chimney-piece, and covered his face with one hand ... ‘I will forgive’” (3:46). As a fashionable character, Tremaine neglects his duties, leaves London, and refuses to take a seat in Parliament. But in *Granby*, it also pairs with rewriting of aristocratic masculinity into a manliness characterized by such an extreme asexuality that Granby cannot even approach Caroline directly (Tremaine has no such problem); and by such a squeamishness around violence that Granby falls ill when he hears Tyrrel shoot himself (thus also conveniently abstracting himself from any need to act concerning the suicide). Granby’s naturally gentle manner acts as an implicit foil to the novel’s other masculinities: dandyism, represented in its early form by the effete Hon. Tarleton; and in its later form, by Trebeck, the Brummell-figure; and rakishness, represented by Tyrrel, whose low-born origins refigure Regency rakishness, characterized by aggressive action towards women, excess in drink, hotheadedness, and of course the loss of breathtaking sums at cards, as non-aristocratic behavior.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ This process of “civilizing” is a later stage of what Norbert Elias traces: a continuing refinement, in the sense of drawing away from aggression, a process of which the dandy represents an apotheosis: “The structure of society ... demands and generates a specific standard of emotional control ... This transformation of what manifested itself originally as an active, often aggressive expression of pleasure, into the passive, more ordered pleasure of spectating (i.e., a mere pleasure of the eye) is already initiated in education” (201-02). Also relevant here is Scott Paul Gordon’s discussion of the passive Christian self, in which autonomy and self-direction are undesirable traits. See *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp 21-22.

²⁹⁶ In *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth-Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), Erin Mackie argues that as the figure of the “gentleman” developed in the eighteenth century, models of “criminal” masculinity arose out of a nostalgia for an independent aristocracy. I see the fashionable novel’s model of

Although opposed themselves in many regards, Trebeck and Tyrrel both adopt stances characterized by strenuous activity. Trebeck loves to plot, apparently for no purpose other than to cause commotion. He has some intention of trying to marry Caroline Jermyn because she is rumored to have a large fortune, and a large fortune is desirable, but he also plots simply for the interest that it causes. As villain, Tyrrel, too, plots continually, although his plots have more point: he wishes to marry Caroline and discredit Granby, attempting to seduce Granby into gambling and to convince both Caroline and Granby that neither admires nor deserves the other. For all his casual villainy, Trebeck is a tangential figure and drops out of the third volume nearly entirely. Two moments of inaction, however, recuperate Tyrrel: when he decides not to fight the duel to which he has challenged Granby, and he decides not to flee England as Granby has suggested. Instead, after living in disguise for some time, he kills himself. Here, suicide is painted as inaction amplified: Tyrrel's final act is a resounding negative, a truly Everlasting "No."²⁹⁷

What's more, while Tremaine eventually learns to slough off his façade of indifference, Granby does not. In fact, the narrative itself continually withdraws from and defers action. The threatened duel between Tyrrel and Granby never happens; Granby reaches Malton too late to confront his uncle; Tyrrel's suicide happens off-stage. And the narrator takes this lack

independence as in part a way of retaining that self-authorization within a "gentlemanly" framework.

²⁹⁷ Tyrrel and Trebeck could be seen within a structural approach wherein the trickster (Trebeck) and villain (Tyrrel) work against the hero's end. What complicates a simply structural reading of these trickster and villain figures is Granby's inability to pursue his own aims. While Trebeck and Tyrrel's alternate masculinities help illuminate Granby's refusal to act within the context of the novel, in the context of the genre, his refusal to act is legible as a manifestation of the fashionability that inheres in the lack of either positive character traits or a progression through the narrative.

of incident as a point of pride. As Granby sets up to London, the narrator begins to bemoan the “happier times” in which a road journey opened up a wide field of “interesting incident,” when “the happy annalist of those times was not compelled to dismiss his hero with a dry announcement of departure and arrival” (1:231-2). The grousing, of course, is insincere. In the narrator’s formulation, lack of incident is a result of increasing civic order and refinement. It is therefore a desirable consequence of fashionable society. In the novel, lack of incident becomes what Sara Coleridge recognized as a lack of “particularity”: no rough edges. Aware of these requirements for fashion, the narrator repeatedly draws attention to what the novel is not going to do. As Granby writes a letter to Caroline, the narrator comments on the manner of its sending:

The letter was sent, but by no secret messenger, no light-heeled, ready-witted page; he had bribed no Abigail, or trusty steward, to cram it through a key-hole, or deliver it at midnight. He had read of such things in many romances; but he admired neither the principle nor the practice. He therefore enclosed it to the father, put “Free, M.P.” at the bottom of his direction, and dispatched it boldly by the post.” (1:31)

It also draws attention to what its characters are not: Granby’s aunt “was—but, after all, she will be best described by negatives. She was not a match-maker, or a mischief-maker; nor did she plume herself upon her charity, in implicitly believing only just half of what the world says. She was no retailer of scandalous ‘*on dits*.’ She did not ...” (1:244). And negative characterization extends beyond character and plot. Granby writes a letter to Caroline, the one that precipitates the break between the families, of which the narrator claims: “We shall only premise that it was not a proposal of marriage, or even a declaration of love; that it contained no expression warmer than ‘regard;’ ... that it was not *crossed* ... nor even closely

filled three sides; that it had no postscript; and that it described common-place topics in a common-place manner” (1:30). And when Granby figures out that Caroline is not engaged, the narrator further notes that “the removal of an evil of long continuance, is perhaps more delightful than the accession of many a positive good” (1:296).

The novel reflects so much on what it is not going to do that it hardly does anything at all, frequently deferring narration to other forms of writing. Granby and Caroline exchange hardly a word throughout the three volumes, conducting an entire courtship via blush and gaze. Wondering whether Caroline had been at a particular party, Granby considers that “one chance still remained—the list of the company in the *Morning Post*” (1:266). Later, he wonders whether she is out of town again: “No, that was not probable. They had but lately come up; and he read in a morning paper, in the report of the debates, the gratifying assurance ‘Sir T. Jermyn supported the Bill’ ... it was therefore plain that he was still in town (1:324). Towards the end of the novel, Caroline learns of Granby’s illness through the *Morning Post* (3:200-01). The novel itself participates in the remove. On the very last page, the narrator comments that

we cannot resist the temptation of inserting, for the benefit of those who did not see it, a passage which caught our eye a few days since in the columns of a *Morning Paper*. It ran verbatim thus:—”Expected Marriage in High Life.—It is confidently reported that Mr. Courtenay, grandson and heir of Lord Essendon, will shortly lead to the hymeneal alter Lady Emily Manvers, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the Earl of Allerdale.”—*Saturday, March 19th, 1825.*

This strategy allows the novel to defer Granby’s actions continually outside the narrative: picking up a newspaper constitutes the limits of his investigative activity, and the novel

hangs fire similarly. By ending with the newspaper announcement of the novel's B-plot marriage, the narrator implicitly approves Granby's strategy: actors are punished, while those who wait, defer, and shrink are rewarded.

This mode of narration recalls Anne-Lise François's discussion of novels in which "nothing happens."²⁹⁸ Although her analysis focuses on canonical novels and on an inaction that, like the passivity of Paul Scott Gordon's arguments, has a more overtly religious meaning, her argument "contests the normative bias in favor of the demonstrable, dramatic development and realization of human powers characteristic of, but not limited to, the capitalist investment in value and work and the Enlightenment allegiance to rationalism and unbounded progress."²⁹⁹ What I see as important here is a growing—or at least, steady—interest in reading novels that in some way fail to produce a subject within the expected framework of capitalist progress and Enlightenment history, and a continual interest in articulating the alternate frameworks by which people have always lived their lives. The fashionable novel presents one such alternative through the refusal of action. Although *Tremaine* and *Granby* offer alternate conclusions to their inactivity, they code themselves as fashionable in part because they formally enact what they have produced as fashionable within their characters: the negative act of refusing to act. I am suggesting, then, that the genre of the fashionable novel thus arises when narrative encounters the formal problem of

²⁹⁸ Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), xv. François's work challenges the hermeneutics of suspicion that sees literature as continually needing to be recuperated and recovered. While I am not taking that position here, her suggestion that, most simply, it is sometimes useful to accept works on their own terms is certainly harmonious with my own approach.

²⁹⁹ *ibid*, xvi.

representing fashionable characters who must both be fashionable and, through negative affiliations, resist fashion.

This formal refusal has political stakes. *Tremaine's* primary interest is what it repeatedly calls “independence,” a subject position that is opposed, in this novel and in the fashionable novel more generally, to mechanization. No mechanized man of the world, the fashionable character maintains his independence through the refusal of action. As a political concept, independence garnered a fair amount of discussion throughout the eighteenth-century.

Matthew McCormack sums the discussion up so:

The idealised figure of the ‘independent man’ was ... long held up as the epitome of manliness, citizenship, and national character ... ‘Independence’ connoted not just autonomy, but the condition in which self-mastery, conscience and individual responsibility could be exercised. Only in this situation of ‘independence’, it was argued, could an individual be disinterested, incorruptible and impartial.”³⁰⁰

In this reading, McCormack sees the First Reform Act as transforming the political idea of independence: the “[Whig] Reform Act marks the moment at which this formerly elitist oppositional idea became the official criterion for mass political inclusion.”³⁰¹

McCormack’s formulation here highlights what I think is the role of the fashionable novel in popularizing this notion of independence. In the eighteenth-century, independence was an exclusionary, isolating act—and it was seen as such in the 1830s, as Bulwer-Lytton suggests in his *England and the English*, seeing a “connexion between selfishness and

³⁰⁰ Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 1-2.

³⁰¹ *ibid*, 6.

independence.”³⁰² If this sort of independence gradually became offered to all through the passing of the First and then Second Reform bills, then what we see is the gradual extension of exclusivity to all. It is a political change, but it is also a cultural change. In fashionable novels, the opposite of independence is not, as it was in the eighteenth century, being in a system of “patrician patronage and deference structures.”³⁰³ It was being mechanized. Specifically fashionable independence must be articulated in relation to a newly industrial England that, like Pelham, is engaged with the classic Utilitarian doctrine of Jeremy Bentham and its implicit attack against the inutility of fashion. The fashionable refusal I have traced in the previous section constitutes a construction of independence not through hewing to a certain measure of property, the criterion of independence that informed debates about enfranchisement, but through refusing to measure one’s self at all: to refuse to enter into an economy in which the relative worth of anything—a sleeve shape, a skirt hem, a collar stand, a man—can be measured through external means.

In *Tremaine*, independence is an abstract ideal that Tremaine applies variously, and according to the novel erroneously, to his romantic, political, and financial entanglements. When he inherits his fortune, he is “disgusted” to find himself in the sights of the managing mamas who covet his fortune for their daughters, as well as the daughters who, no doubt, see his fortune as an escape: “At this . . . his self-love was alarmed. There was nothing he dreaded so much as the chance of not being beloved for his own sake” (1:19). And

³⁰² Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *England and the English*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), 1:11.

³⁰³ McCormack, 201.

Tremaine's political career is cut short when he is disgusted—again—to find that the minister he supported has “coolly appropriated to an upstart flatterer that which he had actually promised to the independent Tremaine” (1:54). Although not exactly independent of party—he calls himself a Whig and notes that, in parliament, he is in opposition—Tremaine is independent to the extent that he does not need a position to gain status or money. He adopts a pose of independence, fixing up one of his estates as “the elegant scene of his future studies, future independence, and future happiness” (1:58), failing to account for the magisterial duties of a great landlord to which Dr. Evelyn will later awaken him. He is independent of the power that politics can bestow on him, and, by the logic of this book, politics are independent of him. Because he refuses to submit to their system, they therefore do not need him. And yet, he is still surprised on his return to London to find that his departure has been quite unremarked.

The readiness of the world to declare itself independent of the independent man gestures at the limitations of this stance, which finds its illogical extreme when Tremaine tries to enact his desire to be free even of himself. Dismissing the virtues of a self-imposed regimen of early rising and studious application, he asserts to Dr. Evelyn that:

the early morning was a fine thing; but a rule upon it defeated the freedom ... he was often known to wonder at the general, but what he called the unreal, cheerfulness of many of his inferiors, who had ready-made rules for the employment of their time, and were forced to rise, eat, and sleep as others commanded. If there was a command in the case, he said, he knew no difference as to whether it was imposed by one's-self or by others. (1:59-60)

This extreme position is identified in the novel with Whig politics: as Tremaine puts it, “As I

am a whig in philosophy as well as politics, I am an enemy to all force upon one's actions" (1:135). The Whig criterion for independence, seen from this Tory extremism, results in the self-defeating desire for a man to be independent even of himself, an insupportable subject position that the novel topples. Tremaine laughs at Dr. Evelyn's advice: "You speak *ex cathedra* ... and almost persuade me to become a machine" (1:138). Tremaine fears that routine and his feudal duties will turn him into a machine, but the novel insists that a fantasy of total independence unmoors the individual from society. Dr. Evelyn regrets Tremaine's independence as a "misfortune" (1:138) as he gradually counteracts his pupil's radical independence by nudging Tremaine toward order and discipline, compelling him to lay claim to his ancestral social ties of landlord, husband, son, and parliamentarian. But before Tremaine settles down to Tory respectability, he models fashionability by imagining two selves, one that can be acted upon and one that acts. Where the respectable Dr. Evelyn, for example, achieves some sort of unified subject position by allowing one part of himself to enact force upon the other, Tremaine insists upon remaining independent even of himself.

The fashionable novel's obvious figure of detachment and disinterest is the dandy. More than one critic has pointed to the dandy as a figure for Victorian disinterestedness. As Ellen Moers argues, for example, the dandy evolved over the course of the nineteenth century but certainly originated with George "Beau" Brummell at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Grandson to a tradesman, Brummell emphasized the obscurity of his origins despite a healthy inheritance in order to forward the fiction of his arising from "nothing," from fashioning himself purely through the self and then resting there "on an

isolated pedestal of self.”³⁰⁴ Radically simplifying the outré costumes of earlier fashionable masculinities, Brummell introduced a standardized outfit that consisted of buff knee-breeches, a blue coat, a plain waistcoat, and very clean linen. Starkly simple, noteworthy only for its lack of adornment, this costume would, in only slightly altered form, “clothe democracy.”³⁰⁵ At the height of his fashion so powerful that he could cut even the Prince of Wales, whom he claimed to have “made,” Brummell ended in a way only possible to a man who had been living on credit: he fled to France in 1816 and died, impoverished and paralytic, in 1840. Brummell is so important to the fashionable novel that one might argue he is coterminous with the genre: not only does he arise out of the same culture that gave rise to the fashionable novel, he appears as characters in more than one: as Trebeck in *Granby*, as Russelton in *Pelham*, Henry Beauchamp in Lister’s *Arlington* (1832), Julius von Asslingen in Disraeli’s *Vivian Grey* (1826), and as Richard Beaumont in W. Massie’s *Sydenham; or Memoirs of a Man of the World* (1830).³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Clair Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction* (New York: Berg, 2006), 17.

³⁰⁵ Moers 33. Brummell is often talked about as a precursor to Oscar Wilde’s aestheticism, but what I’m interested here is a more political dandyism. Implicitly arguing that fashion actually does follow a kind of a logic and does not simply arise from nothing, Ian Kelly argues that Brummell’s outfit—which would, by allowing Brummell to put himself on a level with the Prince of Wales, mark the “death of kings”—arose from the “poleman” costume of Eton’s notorious Montem festival as well as in the uniform of the Light Dragoon regiment in which Brummell bought his coronet, in *Beau Brummell: The Ultimate Man of Style* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 7; 39-40; 60-63. Ian Kelly makes the novel claim that Brummell’s gambling addiction and subsequent physical degeneration were both signs of his tertiary syphilis, a disease that eventually killed him. What is particularly useful about Kelly’s book is his emphasis of the paradox of Brummell’s status, that he was a dandy who wasn’t. In one of Brummell’s famous epigrams: “If John Bull turns around to look at you, you are not well dressed.”

³⁰⁶ Note the repetition of “beau” in the last two, a clear reference to Beau Brummell.

But the dandy is never the fashionable novel's central figure. True, Tremain's disgust of a woman who ate her peas with a knife recalls Brummell's alleged cutting of a woman whom he saw eating cabbage, but Tremain's characterization is not primarily that of a dandy. Although the genre's protagonists do have affinities with the figure, the dandy's independence skews in the wrong direction. I see two reasons that the dandy ought not to be identified as the fashionable novel's typical character, beyond the simple fact that he is not generally the novels' protagonist. First, the figure of the dandy operates within a proto-aesthetic movement. He is thus situated in "several historical strands important to bourgeois modernity," including "the notion of taste as a detached and disinterested form of aesthetic judgment."³⁰⁷ As I have already suggested in Chapter Two, the fashionable novel works to avoid notions of taste and judgment through the concept of *ton*. When "taste" and "judgment" become part of the conversation, then concepts of cultural capital upset the fashionable novel's articulation of a mode of being that rejects capital entirely. Second, and perhaps more damningly, the fashionable novel demonstrates "the extent to which the Regency dandy was dependent for his identity on the gaze of others,"³⁰⁸ or in other words the dandy "is a fundamentally theatrical being, abjectly dependent on the recognition of the

³⁰⁷ Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 92. It has been common to see the fashionable novel as prefiguring Oscar Wilde, as, for example, Shelton Waldrep's assertion that Disraeli was "one of Wilde's favorite authors" in *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 12, or, as early as 1947, Roditi's suggestion in *Oscar Wilde* that *Vivian Grey* was one of *Dorian Gray*'s influences (Norfolk, CT: New Directions Books, 1947), 113-124.

³⁰⁸ Casey Ellen Miller, "The Aristocracy and Upholstery: The Silver Fork Novel," in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 22.

audience he professes to disdain.”³⁰⁹ The dandy, despite his disinterested pose, is insufficiently independent: he is too involved with the fashionable world’s approval. He submits himself to be measured.

In the context of the fashionable novel, independence is most strongly associated with the disinterested man of politics. The same political independence permits *Yes and No*’s Germain to win his Parliamentary seat and Lord Glenmore to remain free of Lady Tilney’s machinations in *The Exclusives*: Germain, as I discussed in Chapter Two, wins his parliamentary seat on a platform of “independence,” and Lord Glenmore, in *The Exclusives*, is “too independent” to be brought by Lady Tilney into fashion’s sway. This structure, nascent and ultimately suppressed in *Tremaine*, recurs more vigorously in *Pelham*. If *Tremaine* and *Granby* are, as I have argued, generically allied through their heroes’ refusal, then it is initially surprising to find *Pelham* grouped in their company. Despite his repeated disavowals of heroism. Pelham goes out of his way to be recherché, presenting himself as a “most egregious coxcomb” upon his first entrance into the world (1:62). What’s more, he casts himself into society, flings himself into politics, and, albeit unwillingly, dives into plot, repeatedly intervening in situations and finally going so far as to adopt a disguise in order to venture into the heart of a thieves’ den as the novel takes a turn toward the Newgate.

Although Pelham initially makes himself into an “egregious coxcomb” in Paris, wanting to be “remarkable among men, and therefore pleasing to women,” by the end of the novel he has renounced his dependence on popular opinion—rejecting, that is, the dandy pose—and retreated to live “quietly in the country, among [his] books, and looking forward

³⁰⁹ Adams, 22.

with calmness, rather than impatience, to the time which shall again bring [him] before the world” (3:359). For Pelham, fashionable independence is precisely what he imagines will eventually legitimate political involvement, because it provides a way to get out from under the necessity of political dependence: “My mind revolted at the idea of becoming dependent on any party” (2:160). But abject dependence also assures one’s position in a hierarchy: Pelham is betrayed because he has too much “*independence*” (2:336).

In this sense, independence as it is worked out in the fashionable novel has clear connections to what would later come to be termed Victorian disinterestedness, because, as this discussion of *Tremaine* and *Granby* has indicated, fashionable character is disinterestedly independent. What is different from later articulations of disinterestedness is that the fashionable novel sees disinterestedness coming out of but being not entirely a part of the fashionable world. And so I would suggest that the fashionable pose is not actually the bad detachment appears in the Wildean dandy, an updated Brummellian figure,³¹⁰ but instead what Elaine Hadley calls “studied disinterestedness that looks like distracted indifference.”³¹¹ This is the *Bildung* of what April Kendra has called the “dandy novel,” and what is interesting about it is that many of them end with withdrawal: *Granby*, *The Young Duke*, *Pelham*, *Vivian*

³¹⁰ Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4. Anderson interrogates various forms of Victorian detachment, both in their positive (the Enlightenment-aims of the doctor, writer and professional) and their negative forms (the alienation of the dandy, the Jew, and the fallen woman). Briefly, I would suggest that the fashionable novel articulates at an early moment the impossibility of a universal criterion or goal of detachment. It manifests a canny awareness that distance has always been an exclusive property, and it understand the dangers of the Enlightenment project to undermine the aristocratic pretensions that affect to support it.

³¹¹ Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 31.

Grey, Yes and No all end with a somewhat re-educated potential (but not actual) dandy who has withdrawn, somewhat, from the fashionable world, but also seems poised at any moment to re-enter it. Moers suggests that these novels rewrite of dandyism into the necessary preconditions for political service. I would add that what the fashionable world does is correct incipient dandyism into the proper form of independence—but because these novels are written at a time when the fashionable world matters, the characters must appear to be most fashionable by refusing to be measured by the fashionable world.

Pelham initially seems to mock the pose of fashionable indifference by drawing attention to Pelham's heightened awareness of fashionability. But Pelham's pose belies quite a different interest. As he says, for example, "In the main object of the evening I was not however solely employed. I should have been very undeserving of that character for observation which I flatter myself I peculiarly deserve, if I had not during the three hours I stayed at Madame D---g's, conned over every person remarkable for any thing, from rank to a ribbon" (1:69). Pelham does not want to be fashionable. Instead, his entry into society is predicated on his *performance* as someone wants to be fashionable, a performance he puts on in order to observe society. Paradoxically, that freedom from desire makes his performance successful. He acts like someone who is trying to be fashionable to observe society, not to enter it. By observing society through such a pretense, he becomes fashionable because becoming fashionable is not his aim.³¹² It is, in fact, the presence of that paradox that ensures

³¹² This idea of spectatorship is interesting in reference to Anderson's reading of the moral dimension of spectatorship in Mill's *Utilitarianism* or in the "calmer and more disinterested bystander" of *On Liberty* (18), particularly as Pelham's retreat to his country estate has generally been taken to involve the study of utilitarian writings although the earlier ones of Bentham. In *Pelham's* conception, utilitarian behavior in the fashionable world precedes Pelham's philosophical understanding of it.

his fashion. Hence the fashionable character must perform an abjuration of self: if he is not aware of himself at all, then he can hardly be aware of himself as fashionable.

Nor does Pelham's fashionability depend upon other's opinions. "I had far too good an opinion of myself to care one straw about his" (1:140), he says, quite typically, and in contrast to his foils who depend overmuch on what other people think. Fellow dandy Aberton is, for example, according to Vincent: "one who would not dare to have a new waistcoat till it had been authoritatively patronized, and who took his fashions, like his follies, from the best proficients" (1:149). Vincent says of Sir Lionel Garrett that

His friends in town were of that set whose members are *above ton*, whenever they do not grasp at its possession, but who, whenever they do, lose at once their aim and their equilibrium, and fall immeasurably below it. I mean that set which I call "*the respectable* ... he now knew that he was nobody unless he went to Lady G.'s and unless he bowed to Lady S. Disdaining all importance derived from himself, it became absolutely necessary to his happiness, that all his importance should be derived solely from his acquaintance with others. He cared not a straw that he was a man of fortune, of family, of consequence; he must be a man of *ton*; or he was an atom, a nonentity, a very worm, and no man. No lawyer at Gray's Inn, no galley slave at the oar, ever worked so hard at his task as Sir Lionel Garrett at *his*" (1.15-17).

The tricky business here is that *fashion* inserts a third term into a class system designed to take into account only money and name.³¹³ It is fashion—not mercantile fortunes or wastrel

³¹³ As Sumiao Li says: as the bifurcation between the "bourgeois self" and the "aristocratic body" takes place, a "third Other—the fashionable person" disappears, but it once existed.

aristocrats—that destabilizes society and degrades respectable men. *Ton* destroys the independence of the respectable by offering an alternate form of capital. The problem is that it offers a capital that is really no capital at all, because it is not fungible: it cannot be acquired, accumulated, or traded.

As I suggested in this dissertation’s introduction, *ton* is definable only in the negative. It is a constellation of things that one lacks, and a man of *ton* represents perfect absence. As I quoted in the introduction, Mrs. Modish says in George Lyttelton’s 1760 edition of *Dialogues of the Dead* that *ton* is not wit; in manners it is not politeness; in behaviour it is not address; but it is a little like them all.”³¹⁴ Defined through lack, *ton* is constituted differently from other kinds of capital, such as the social capital of rank or the cultural capital of wit. *Ton* is capital-that-isn’t, something that cannot be acquired or measured. Fortune, family, and consequence can be lost or gained relationally; wit and style—the particular material goods that are deemed fashionable—alter. *Ton*, however, depends entirely on a solipsistic self-regard, on being wholly self-contained and detached from the world in a way familiar from the dandy pose but, more, also detached from the worship of the self that Carlyle identifies in the dandy pose. In other words, as soon as the individual looks at himself at all—even with the worshipful eyes of the dandy—he finds himself outside of fashion. This move, although it is somewhat like the Romantic pose of individualism, and although it stands in marked contrast to the concept of relational subjectivity, is unique to the fashionable novel. Rather than individuality in relation to a Kantian noumenal world, this radical individuality is

In “Fashionable People, Fashionable Society: Fashion, Gender, and Print Culture in England 1821-1861,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 28.

³¹⁴ Baron George Lyttelton, *Dialogues of the Dead* (London, 1760), 303.

directed towards possessing the self, or self-possession, in a commodity culture that is coming to believe that you are what you own. *Tom* is a figure for the radical independence of the fashionable novel. It constructs itself by negating any quality that can be assessed or determined externally. Because it has nothing to do with family or fortune, or even learned behaviors such as manner or politeness, it conceives itself as utterly rejecting any “force upon one’s actions,” as Tremain would say: it is anti-mechanical, anti-deterministic, and above all anti-Utilitarian.

The timeliness of this model of fashion finds expression in what has been called an anti-fashionable novel, Carlyle’s bitter attack against certain forms of modernity in *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834).³¹⁵ Frequently discussed in relation to the fashionable novel, *Sartor Resartus* is in form a *Bildungsroman* that shares with Bulwer-Lytton’s early novels the adaptation of the German novel of apprenticeship into English. It also constitutes a direct attack against what he calls the Dandiical Body, the self-worship that he identifies as foundational to the dandy pose³¹⁶: “To my own surmise, it appears as if this Dandiical Sect were but a new modification, adapted to the new time, of that primeval Superstition, *Self-Worship* ... they affect great purity and separatism: distinguish themselves by a particular

³¹⁵ For Carlyle, fashion seems to be a figure for modernity. The association between modernity and fashion is strong: “fashion as a process comes in to play as a useful mechanism for interrogating the subjective experience of modern life”, here identified with self-reflexivity, in “Introduction,” in *Fashion and Modernity*, ed. Christopher Breward and Caroline Evans (New York: Berg, 2005), 7; or “Fashion is a process in two senses: it is a market-driven cycle of consumer desire and demand; and it is a modern mechanism for the fabrication on the self” (2).

³¹⁶ Cronin sums up Carlyle’s ambivalent response to the fashionable novel: “*Sartor Resartus* is a parody of the fashionable novel,” and it was part of *Fraser’s* war against the form (46), but “he also recognizes himself in them. They are, in however distorted a manner, a reflection of himself” (47).

costume.” Carlyle is writing against Utilitarianism and fashion, both of which, in his formulation, reduce the self to mere mechanics. But Teufelsdröck’s admitted inability to read any fashionable novels perhaps blinds him to an essential similarity: the dandy that Carlyle attacks, a figure like Hon. Mr. Tarleton with “*recherché* attire, a profusion of chain work, several rings, a well curled head, and a highly scented handkerchief” (1.84-85), is a figure of fun within the fashionable novel itself; it is part of the pose that disguises Pelham’s essential disinterest in fashion and that, apparently distressed by continual misreading, Bulwer-Lytton actually struck from later editions of the novel. *Pelham* knows perfectly well that to be aware of fashion is to be outside of it. And yet Pelham, its central character, must somehow conquer the fashionable world. Instead of narrating the interior, the narrator takes on the task of buttressing the paradox of this circular structure, which prevents access to the interior. Articulating this paradox offers a way of unpacking the tautology with which fashionable novels arm themselves. When the fashionable character abjures the self by rejecting any force upon his actions, including the force of self-worship (the dandy pose) or self-discipline (the Utilitarian pose) he performs an independence that, in these novels, is identified as fashionable.

III. The Fear of the Copy

A catalogue of ten circulating libraries from 1838 includes the following categories: “Novels by Theodore Hook, Lytton Bulwer, &c.,” “Fashionable novels, well known,” and

“Novels of the lowest character, being chiefly imitations of fashionable novels.”³¹⁷ The last category is by far the most numerous, totaling 1008 volumes where the next most populated category, the “well known” fashionable novels, contains a mere 439. This list has been frequently cited, both in studies of reading practices and by writers on fashionable novels.³¹⁸ Here I am interested in the fact that the list offers three categories of what I have so far, following general scholarly practice, been lumping under the category of fashionable novels: “Novels by Theodore Hook, Lytton Bulwer, &c.,” “Fashionable novels,” and “imitations of fashionable novels.” The catalogue does not specify which novels are which, but the very indeterminacy of the categories speaks to concerns around imitation and copying. Fear of the copy is certainly not unique to the nineteenth century, nor to the fashionable novel, but the thematic exploration of this fear in a narrative context is, I am arguing in this section, the foundation of the fashionable novel’s writing of character as a category that resists imitation through the construction of a radically independent self.³¹⁹

Although imitation of rare goods is in all likelihood coterminous with their rarity—pearls were being faked by at least the fifteenth century, for example—new technologies

³¹⁷ The information is from Edgell Wyatt Edgell, ‘Moral Statistics of the Parishes of St. James, St. George, and St. Anne Soho, I the City of Westminster’, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, vol. 1 (Dec 1838), 478-497.

³¹⁸ Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 218; Casey Ellen Miller, 15; Royal A. Gettman, *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960 (45); Anne Mellor, “A Novel of Their Own: Romantic Women’s Fiction, 1790-1830, in *The Columbia History of the British Novel*, ed. John Richetti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 327-351.

³¹⁹ Anxiety of originality is, however, particularly pertinent after the eighteenth-century, as literary culture moved from away from the bee-like Augustan model of gathering and toward the spider-like Romantic model of creating.

continually raise the bar for imitation. In the early nineteenth century, new machines enabled the imitation of fabrics and laces that eventually would become commodities in their own right, and the popularity of a certain material tended to vary inversely with its ability to be copied.³²⁰ True lace requires a thread to be looped, twisted, or braided to other threads independently from a backing fabric and was therefore fairly difficult to mechanize, until the invention of a widely praised technology that used chemical burning to burn away a backing on which lace could be embroidered. Blonde lace peaked in popularity in the 1830s, because its fine ground—the mesh upon which the lace was knotted—allowed it to be gathered easily into the complex fold that fashions of the time preferred. Its popularity provided incentive to create machine-made copy, and it was one of the earliest laces to be so created. Pat Earnshaw, giving the history of the Traverse Warp Machine invented in 1811, notes that in 1833 that machines produced a blonde lace that was successfully marketed as “real” lace for an entire season.³²¹ And mass production inevitably hollowed out its fashionable status, although not always:

[T]hat the hand- and machine-lace industries could exist side by side was due to the increasing size and scope of the market that followed the growth in population and the increase in world trade. The demand spanned virtually the full spectrum of society and the lace made to satisfy it varied widely in quality and price. At the top were the

³²⁰ From Mrs. Bury Palliser’s *A History of Lace* (London: S. Low, Son & Marston, 1865): “The year 1823 is memorable for the “bobbin net fever” ... Prices fell in proportion as production increased; but the demand was immense, and the Nottingham lace frame became the organ of general supply, rivaling and supplanting in plain nets the most finished productions of France and the Netherlands” (419-420).

³²¹ Pat Earnshaw, “Blonde,” *A Dictionary of Lace* (Courier Dover: Mineola, NY, 1999), 17.

expensive hand-made laces worn by the leaders of society, while below were various qualities of both hand and machine lace. The machine industry sought simply to imitate the classic styles and novelty laces of the hand-lace industry.”³²²

In an era marked by the proliferation of machine-made textiles and manufacturers invested in undercutting prices, it is not surprising that the elite manifested anxiety about imitation.³²³ Certainly, servants had often inherited their masters’ clothes, and various sources fulminate against the social confusion that arose out of a servant’s wearing her mistress’s cast-off garments.³²⁴ But when Pelham invokes the practice of bestowing cast-off clothes on one’s servants in his maxim, present in the disavowed first edition and scrubbed clean from the second, he rewrites the action as an act of preservation rather than

³²² Santina M. Levey, “Machine-Made Lace: The Industrial Revolution and After,” in *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, ed. David Jenkins, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 851.

³²³ As Anna Beatriz Chadour-Sampson says: “The effects of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the middle class [on jewelry] became particularly evident in Britain. The middle class imitated the jewelry of the aristocracy,” in “Jewelry,” in *The Berg Companion to Fashion*, ed. Valerie Steele (New York: Berg, 2010), 450.

³²⁴ Felicity Nussbaum discusses the potentially disruptive consequences of this practice *vis-à-vis* the state in, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 43. Amanda Bailey details the reaction to finely dressed servants in *Flaunting: Style and the Subversive Male Body in Renaissance England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 53-60. Pamela frets about the moral effects of the action, wondering to her parents “how should your poor Daughter look with a Silk Night-gown, Silken Petticoats, Cambrick Head-cloaths, fine Holland Linen, lac’d Shoes, that were my Lady’s, and fine Stockens,” in Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 44. One among many, *The Master and Mistress; or, Hints to the Heads of Families relative to their Servants* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1842) advises quite seriously that despite its practice “by many well-meaning ladies,” the habit of “giving cast off clothes to servants which are, either in make or quality, of an unsuitable kind for them to wear” (79-80).

destabilization: “If you wear a fine waistcoat, and see another person with one resembling it, forthwith bestow it upon your valet.” Pelham fears imitation not from the lower classes but from his peers. The solution to this, naturally, is to give the waistcoat to his valet—thus enacting the trickling-down of fashion that resulted in the homogenous character of men’s clothing. And so it is both a fear and an embrace of imitation, both a rejection and creation of singularity. This fear of imitation manifests throughout the novel, not only in Pelham but in other fashionable character. “Nothing is so plebeian as imitation” (1:120), Pelham asserts, a cutting blow at whatever plebes might be reading *Pelham* for the wealth of information about a fashionable original that it might provide. But the increasing availability of inexpensive fabric and mock trims heightened these anxieties in the early nineteenth century.

It is worth noting that male aristocratic quite suddenly abjured adornment, in what Flügel has termed the Great Masculine Renunciation. This renunciation can be, and has been, read as part of a rejection of aristocratic excess following the French Revolution at the very moment that improved technology dramatically increased the availability of fine, patterned fabrics and imitation trims.³²⁵ If ornament is available to everyone, then distinguishing one’s self through clothing no longer creates a valid subject position; if lace can be mass-produced, then wearing lace proclaims an involvement in a system of mass

³²⁵ By David Kuchta, Valerie Steele, Leonore Davidoff, and Catherine Hall. Kuchta sees it as having earlier roots. As James Laver says: “the whole world of men, aristocrats as well as merchant bankers, had settled down to a drab uniformity of attire in which every manifestation of personal eccentricity was condemned as bad form,” in *Dandies* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 80. Brent Alan Shannon suggests that men remained very interested in fashion in *The Cut of His Coat: Men, Dress, and Consumer Culture in Britain, 1860-1914* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006): “many middle-class men negotiated around the Great Masculine Renunciation, actively—even aggressively—pursuing fashion” (26).

production that evacuates privileged subject positions. Women did continue to wear fine fabrics and lace and trims, but what distinguishes men in this context is independence: women simply did not figure into the discourse of independence, because they were by nature dependent. Concern around imitation of women's clothing expressed itself in terms of rank and privilege, often mocked as foolish pride, but, unlike Pelham's concerns, not threatening to political identity.³²⁶

Pelham's Mr. Clarendon is quite concerned about the pernicious effects of imitation upon society, complaining at length about the effects of mixed company:

a more important [objection] may be found in the universal imitation it produces. The influx of common persons being once permitted, certain sets recede, as it were, from the contamination, and contract into very diminished coteries ... Now, the fastidiousness of these sets making them difficult of intimate access, even to many of their superiors in actual rank, those very superiors, by a natural feeling in human nature, of prising what is rare, even if it is worthless, are the first to solicit their acquaintance; and, as a sign that they enjoy it, to *imitate* those peculiarities which are the especial hieroglyphics of this sacred few. The lower grades catch the contagion,

³²⁶ *The New Monthly Magazine* 26 (August 1829) accounts for Bishop's sleeves through pride: "To Joan, indeed, it has been always conceded that she is as good as her lady in the dark, but it is only of late years that Joan has presumed to rival her mistress in the light. The high price of silks and satins protected the mistress against this usurpation of her servant in the broad day ... The new liberal commercial system has entirely changed the position of the parties. The cheapness of French silks, and other articles of dress, has places female finery within the reach of even moderate wages ... Invention is the first quality of genius, and to woman it is granted in a high degree. Thus gifted, the mistress, in a happy moment, conceived the idea of Bishops' sleeves, an article of dress which precludes all hope of chance of imitation in the kitchen. A muffled cat might as well attempt to catch mice, as a maid-servant to go about the business of the house in bishops' sleeves" (215-26).

and *imitate* those they imagine most likely to know the *propriétés* of the mode; and thus manners, unnatural to all, are transmitted second-hand, third-hand, fourth-hand, till they are ultimately filtered into something worse than no manners at all ... I remember well, when Almack's was first set up, the intention was to keep away the rich *roturiers* from a place, the tone of which was also intended to be contrary to their own. For this purpose the patronesses were instituted, the price of admission made extremely low, and all ostentatious refreshments discarded: it was an admirable institution for the interests of the little oligarchy who ruled it—but it has only increased the general imitation and vulgarity. (305-06)

In the process Clarendon describes here, a small coterie forms in response to the influx of common people. This coterie, however, is not based on rank but on the ability to be exclusive. Those higher in rank imitate what they imagine to be the signs of the coterie, and then the lower ranks imitate the higher ranks. The consequences, then, is that vulgarity actually spreads, and the problem is imitation, a word Clarendon repeats four times throughout this passage.³²⁷ In his reading, fashionable society lacks any true original, because the behaviors mimicked are not even those considered fashionable in the exclusive circle. They are only the most obvious markers that define the set. And so from the excluded upper ranks to the excluded lower ranks, fashion is a false imitation of exclusivity.

The inadequacy of imitation to produce anything that might read as an original is elsewhere invoked by the discussion of fashionable novels themselves as copies of society:

³²⁷ It's interesting to contrast this invective against "mixed company" with *The Exclusives's* praise of mixed company. The difference is that the mixed company of *The Exclusives* is mixed in age and stage of life, while Clarendon seems to be describing a company of mixed rank.

“*Mas, mon Dieu,*” said a little French count, “How is it that you can expect to find a description of society entertaining, when the society itself is so dull?—the closer the copy, the more tiresome it must be” (3:50). The problem here ostensibly is that fashionable society is tedious, but the greater implication is that the copy itself dull. One of the dowagers expresses surprise that, with so many novels of society at large, so few portray it accurately. Clarendon responds: “Most of the writers upon our little, great world, have seen nothing of it: at most, they have been occasionally admitted into the routs of the B’s and C.’s of the second, or rather the third set. A very few are, it is true, gentlemen; but gentlemen, who are not writers, are as bad as writers who are not gentlemen.” This outline denies the very existence a “real” fashionable novel, since there is no gentleman who is also a writer (except, one supposes, for Pelham himself). There is no such thing as a true fashionable novel, only poor copies. What *Pelham* understands is that imitation fails because fashion simply lacks an original, and the absence of the original is part of what constitutes fashion.

Pelham’s self-consciousness about this lack of the fashionable original manifests in advice that Pelham’s mother gives him: “our manners are better than low persons: ours are more natural, because they imitate no one else; theirs are affected, because they think to imitate ours; and whatever is evidently borrowed becomes vulgar. Original affectation is sometimes good *ton*—imitated affectation, *always* bad” (1:225). Even fashionable circles themselves lack an original, because even original manners are affected, and what’s natural in fashionable circles is no more than affectation. In fact, the presence of an original is, in this novel, by definition unfashionable, especially when one considers the definition of the word as “a singular, odd, or eccentric person,” a definition evoked by *Tremaine*’s condemnation of some rustic magistrates, who represent the only “stamp of originality ... not rubbed down

into general fineness by a general collision with the world” (1:162).³²⁸ These magistrates are “full of importance” in their “high-topped boots carefully tied over the knee, with garters of green ferret or wash-leather. Their uncouthness, and the expression of their formal civilities ... shewed that, except upon such occasions, they scarcely ever quitted their parishes” (1:162-63). In this description, originality shows only that one lacks knowledge of the world. It is one and the same with oddity, with the “sharp protuberances” that shows one to be unfamiliar with the urban center, with the “particularity” the lack of which Coleridge identifies as constituting *Granby’s ton*.³²⁹

Pelham’s concern for the inviolability of his waistcoat suggests that the matter of tailoring inspires particularly fervent anxiety around imitation. Russelton, for example rejects the popular tailor George Stultz precisely because of the visible mark that Stultz leaves on his garment: “Stultz aims at making *gentlemen*, not *coats*; there is a degree of aristocratic pretension in his stitches, which is vulgar to an appalling degree. You can tell a Stultz coat anywhere, which is quite enough to damn it: the moment a man’s known by an invariable cut, and that not original, it ought to be all over with him. Give me the man who makes the

³²⁸ The definition is from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

³²⁹ The lack of peculiarity associated with *ton* has French affiliations—and fashionable novels were often accused of being too in love with French forms. It is interesting to note the difference between Granby, say, and Laurence Sterne’s discussion of English originality: “should it ever be the case of the English, in the progress of their refinements, to arrive at the same polish which distinguishes the French, if we did not lose the *politesse du Coeur*, which inclines men more to humane actions than to courteous ones,— we should at least lose that distinct variety and originality of character, which distinguishes them, not only from each other, but from all the world besides.” See Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings* (New York: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008), 75. In Sterne’s subsequent coin analogy, the English are like “ancient medals, kept more apart, and passing but few people’s hands, preserve the first sharpness which the fine hand of Nature has given them.”

tailor, not the tailor who makes the man” (1:278).³³⁰ With this Brummellian *bon mot*, Russelton differentiates himself from these vulgar imitations of vulgar imitations by positioning himself as an originary source of fashion precisely in his disinclination to be perceived as the origin of anything.

But Russelton is, of course, merely an imitation himself: he is a copy of Brummell, who already in 1828 had fallen out of fashion. In 1828, in fact, Count Alfred D’Orsay, the so-called “butterfly dandy” whose egregious mop of curls Pelham copied, was the leading man of fashion in London, having married the step-daughter of his *inamorata* and fashionable novelist Lady Blessington the year before.³³¹ On the one hand, it would be easy to dismiss *Pelham* as an elegy, a wistful look back Regency splendor. But that dismissal fails to give credit to the novel’s interest in the question of imitation. Consider this curious footnote: “It will be perceived by those readers who are kind or patient enough to reach the conclusion of this work, that Russelton is specified as one of my few dramatis personae of which only the *first* outline is taken from real life: all the rest—all, indeed, which forms and marks the character thus briefly delineated, is drawn solely from imagination” (292). The author-figure, then—which this footnote suggests is someone other than Pelham himself—claims originality for himself. And yet, of course, *Pelham* is, as a fashionable novel, by definition not original: it was popular because it offered an apparent insider’s view of high life, and it has

³³⁰ Sir Willoughby says “I have always told my Schneiders to make my clothes neither in the fashion nor out of it; to copy no other man’s coat, and to cut their cloth according to my natural body, not according to an isosceles triangle” (1:60). These words indicate a shift in fashion away from clothes that give shape to the body to bodies that give shape to clothes, a move that men’s fashion stuck to but that women’s moved away from again until the beginning of the twentieth-century.

³³¹ Moers, 67.

clear references to the earlier *Vivian Grey*. By pointing out the Brummellian imitation as different from its other characters, this claim to originality only further destabilizes the difference between imitation and original.

By itself, the footnote might not create a compelling argument, but *Pelham* is elsewhere concerned with the tracing back of the copy to an absent original, as, for example, when he meets an itinerant con artist and notes that “Though his shirt was of a very unwashed hue, I remarked, with some suspicion, that it was of a very respectable fineness; and a pin, which might be paste, or could be diamond, peeped below a tattered and dingy black kid stock” (322). This uncertainly allows the gem and imitation to be co-present. By refusing to choose between them, Pelham suggests that even the presence of the diamond would be fundamentally meaningless. In a similar way, even “true” fashionable novels would fail to convey meaning: “Such . . . are the materials for all human histories. Every one who reads, will eagerly swallow this account as true: if an author were writing the memoirs of the court, he would compile his facts and scandal from this very collection of records; and yet, though so near the truth, how totally false it is!” (267). Novelists, in other words, base their scenes of fashionable life on accounts that are not accurate, thereby perpetuating misinformation and undermining the genre’s claim to present transparent accounts of fashionable life. What both of these formulations suggest, I am arguing, is that the very notion of an original or authentic fashionable novel is anathema to the genre. The original cannot be recovered, because an original indicates the presence of an active agent upon whose actions there is force, of whatever kind. Narrating this unrecoverable self is, as I have suggested, the peculiar formal task of the fashionable novel.

As a first-person speaker, Pelham performs narrative moves that resonate strongly with his fashionable moves. He rejects imitation, although he does not lay claim to originality, through the familiar rhetorical move of claiming that his “sketches have been taken rather as a witness than a copyist . . . forgive me, then, if I am not a fashionable hero—forgive me if I have not wept over a “*blighted spirit*,” nor boasted of a “*British heart*,” and allow that a man who, in these days of alternate Werters and Worthies, is neither one nor the other, is, at least, a novelty in print, though, I fear, common enough in life” (3:365). This rejection of “Werter” sets *Pelham* up to suggest the notion of an uncopiable self. It was not just the Romantic fashion of *Young Werther* that imitators copied but also the affect of tortured interiority, and so Pelham’s invocation of *Werther* suggested that novel to present interiority as transferable and able to be imitated and copied—that it is, in essence, able to be commodified.

What *Pelham* offers, then, is a definition of fashion in relation to this problem of the self: the fashionable novel, like the fashionable self, is inimitable and untransferable. That is not to say that the fashionable self is some version of premodern subjectivity that exists in a world without copies. In fact, it is relentlessly modern in its reliance on the imitations it pretends to scorn. Fashion depends upon the rapid proliferation of copies, so that as something becomes widely known and popular, it thereby clears the way for a new fashion.³³² It offers the fiction of an always retreating original, an ever-receding fashionable

³³² For example, “styles of clothing become fashionable by virtue of being copied and become unfashionable the moment they have been copied too often” (Cronin 49). In terms from fashion theory: “A Versace model is not the same as millions of its prêt-a-porter copies, but it is the copies that become fashionable; it is fashionable, by definition, because millions of copies have sold,” Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges, *A Theory of Organizing* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2008), 101. In Simmel’s terms: “Fashion is the imitation

subjectivity that is consolidated by the constant threat of imitation. That fashionable novels are implicated in mass markets and commodification has been suggested.³³³ But the novels, while they may as material objects be part of a mass market, are not thematically engaged in forwarding it. In fact, they define themselves as fashionable by fighting against the proliferation of fashionable copies.

Pelham's insistence on independence, then, turns out to be motivated by the need to fashion a radically independent subjectivity in a world of imitative commodities. We have already seen how that independence works thematically to define the fashionable world as defined only by itself. That independence also works narratively as a reluctance to divulge secrets, both political and personal. "I grieve much, my beloved reader," Pelham says, "that I cannot unfold to thee all the particulars of my political intrigue. I am, by the very share which fell to my lot, bound over to the strictest secrecy, as to its nature, and the characters

of a given example and satisfies the demand for social adaption; it leads the individual upon the road which all travel . . . on the other hand because fashions differ for different classes—the fashions of the upper stratus of society are never identical with those of the lower; in fact, they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepares to appropriate them," Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *The International Quarterly* X (October 1904), 133. Simmel and Veblen say that imitate spurs change in fashion, or, as Susan Hiner puts it, "The sartorial signs of distinction were ever changing because they could be co-opted and manipulated by social inferiors," *Accessories to Modernity: Fashion and the Feminine in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 15. Herbert Spencer also focuses on imitation, but a "competitive imitation" rather than a "reverential" kind, where inferiors attempt to assert their equality (*Principles of Sociology* v2 207). Flügel thinks fashion will end when democracy is absolute: "with attainment of complete democracy, the conditions become once again less favourable for fashion. When every man is as good as his fellows, there are no superior social strata left to imitate, and it would seem as though the race of fashion must end, once those behind have definitively caught up with those in front," *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: Hogarth Press, and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1950), 141.

³³³ Cronin is particularly insistent about this; he says that the silver fork, as both a commodity and a novel about commodities, allows us to explore the commodification of culture in the late Regency and earlier Victorian periods" (142).

of the chief agents in its execution” (2:195). And again, after he is betrayed: “if I suffered somewhat of the torments of baffled hope and foiled ambition, the pang is not for the spectator. My lighter moments are for the world—my deeper for myself; and, like the Spartan boy, I would keep, even in the pangs of death, a mantle over the teeth and fangs which are fastening upon my breast” (3:105). Lady Roseville understands fashionable secrecy as well: “How little,” said Lady Roseville, “can the crowd know of the individuals who compose it ... every one here will go home, and speak of the ‘*gay scene*,’ without thinking for a moment, how many breaking hearts may have composed it” (3:110). And again, when Pelham confesses love: “do you think that my love was the less a treasure, because it was hidden? Or the less deep, because it was cherished at the bottom of my soul? No—no; believe me, *that* love was not to be mingled with the ordinary objects of life” (3:211).

These statements of secrecy—the revelation of presence by accentuating a lack—are certainly not unique to fashionable novels. But in the context of characterization, they turn out, I am arguing, to be the primary formal feature of the fashionable character by revealing his carefully crafted independence. What makes *Pelham* atypically typical among fashionable novels is that its first-person narrator allows it to be self-aware about the lack. Toward the end of what he calls his “confessions,” Pelham insists again on the presence of hidden depths, the insistence that began this chapter: “I have made no scruple of owning my errors and my foibles; all that could occasion mirth or benefit to the reader were his own. I have kept a veil over the darker and stormier emotions of my soul; all that could neither amuse nor instruct him *are mine!*” (3:127). The formulation reveals the stake of narrative independence: nothing less than Pelham’s self-sufficiency, his lack of reliance on a narrator. This is not exactly the same as being a first-person narrator; in fact, I am suggesting, the

autodiegetic narrator is a result rather than a cause of this narrative independence. By acknowledging the presence of un-narrated emotions, the first-person narrator of *Pelham* splits the self into a narrator and a narrated that, like Tremain's self that acts and self that is acted upon, is so radically independent that it becomes independent of itself. Pelham more than once refers to himself in the third person: "A chair was called, and Henry Pelham was conveyed to the rooms" (2:12); "I little thought there was a being in the world who would stir three steps for Henry Pelham" (3:115); and then "A man at my feet in a fit—the cause of it having very wisely disappeared, devolving upon me the charge of watching, recovering, and conducting home the afflicted person—made a concatenation of disagreeable circumstances as much unsuited to the temper of Henry Pelham, as his evil fortune could possibly have contrived" (1:262).

These odd instances in which Pelham refers to himself in the third person stand out for the way in which they take place around the narration of action. The first, for example, occurs at the moment Pelham heads out to make his first splash upon the fashionable scene at Cheltenham: "I was soon dressed, for it is the design, not the execution, of all great undertakings which requires deliberation and delay. Action cannot be too prompt" (2:12). The second occurs after Lady Roseville has revealed to him that certain people are working against his achievement of a Parliamentary seat because he has too much "independence." And the third occurs after he is required to play the hero in reviving the malfeasant Tyrrell, who has just been confronted by a vengeful Reginald Glanville. At all three moments, Pelham is moved to action. His response is to shift that action onto a third person character, preserving the fashionability of his own first-person voice. In fact, these three moments might be said to be among the most important in the book: his arrival on the fashionable

scene, his disillusionment with politics, and the moment when he accepts his role in uncovering the truth behind Glanville's accusation for murder.

At times, the way that Pelham divides himself between a retrospective and unfashionable narrator narrating a fashionable character is eerily reminiscent—or perhaps prescient—of Lady Charlotte Bury's narrator/ character split in *Diary Illustrative of the Time of George IV*. In this dissertation's first chapter, I examine that text's similar narrative pattern whereby the first person diarist refers to herself in the third person, splitting herself into three: character, author, and narrator. Here, the first person author is the same as the third person character. But the extradiegetic author Bulwer-Lytton makes a point, in the second edition, of insisting that he is not the same as Pelham and thereby disclaiming any responsibility for the telling of the story or for the emotions or maxims conveyed within. The character of Henry Pelham, who is also his own narrator, gains a narrative independence that, within the context of the fashionable novel, is a logical extension of what constitutes fashion. At the same time, the narrator Henry Pelham gains independence by shifting the action, and thus consequences of his action, onto the character Henry Pelham.

The consequences of this radically independent self are evident in the relationship of Pelham, *Pelham*, and fashion—that is, fashion extant in the world outside the novel. In one of the several letters Pelham's mother writes to offer her son fashionable instruction, she says:

I did not like that green coat you wore when I last saw you—you look best in black—which is a great compliment, for people must be very distingué in appearance, in order to do so. (1:27)

This frequently cited passage is given credit for nearly single-handedly initiating the fashion for black evening wear, superseding the blue and buff palette instituted by Brummell in the early years of the nineteenth century. As Adburgham tells it:

When Lady Frances told her son he looked better in a black coat than blue ... a new fashion was born. From 1828 onwards, the tight-fitting, padded, sky blue coat with silver buttons which Beau Brummell had favoured, worn with high starched cravat, buff waistcoat, and buckskins, was no longer fashionable. During the twelve years that had passed since Brummell slipped over to Calais to escape his creditors, his sartorial dictates had continued to prevail. But with the publication of *Pelham*, the exiled beau was finally killed off, and a new dandy image made its début.”³³⁴

While it is certainly true that men wore black before *Pelham*, black was, in the years before *Pelham*, largely the province of the European middle-class and the English puritans (König 155-57). What is new in *Pelham* is that black becomes exclusive: it may be worn by everyone, but it is particularly appropriate to the fashionable.

Even more importantly, *Pelham*'s mother tells him not that the fashion suits him but that he suits the fashion: “people must be very *distingué* in appearance, in order to [look best in black].” It is not that wearing a black coat says anything at all about *Pelham*'s character; in fact, it is he himself who creates the color as fashionable. Yet at the same time, black is *naturally* exclusive because it suits only already distinguished looking people. When *Pelham* wears black, then, he forges an alliance between two things that are fashionable in and of

³³⁴ Adburgham, 127.

themselves: black, the color that is no color³³⁵; and Pelham, who is fashionable exactly in his abjuration of fashion. Those who are fashionable, then, are those on whom the fact of wearing something fashionable elides rather than exposes the character: a man, that is, whom clothes do not make. As Richard Salmon says of Bulwer-Lytton's later *Ernest Maltravers*, the author-narrator "aspires, ostensibly at least, to attain a state of anonymity, to become one of the 'ghost-like beings,' or 'airy and unsubstantial phantoms,' that constitute Bulwer's ideal conception of authorship."³³⁶ The fashionable author and the fashionable character turn out to be one and the same, both authoring fashion through their abjuration not just of fashion, but of their selves. By disappearing beneath the pose and pretense of shallowness, the fashionable character authors not so much himself, nor even the novel, but fashion itself.

The fashionable novel posits the existence of an inimitable self and offers a way in which that self might be represented. Consider Pelham's assertion: "Manage *yourself* well, and you may manage all the world" (2:251).³³⁷ Moers calls this Pelham's "dandy maxim" and suggests that this is a political statement.³³⁸ I am suggesting that it is also a narrative statement, and that managing one's self turns out to be first and foremost a narrative task. Managing one's self through, in the case of *Pelham*, a negotiation and a split of the self into

³³⁵ Interestingly, the contemporary color theory of Goethe and Schopenhauer did, in fact, suggest that black was not a color.

³³⁶ Richard Salmon, "The Genealogy of the Literary *Bildungsroman*: Edward Bulwer-Lytton and W.M. Thackeray," *Studies in the Novel* 36.1 (Spring 2004), 44.

³³⁷ Moers calls it the dandy Maxim. This is similar to Maria Bachman's argument that *Pelham* refigures cultural capital into a mechanism that disciplines reader to a "new (Victorian) moral order," in "Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*: The Disciplinary Dandy and the Art of Government," in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47.2 (Summer 2005), 167.

³³⁸ Moers, 76.

an author-narrator and a character, involves wrangling the presentation of a public self and the secreting of an unrevealed private self. That ability to keep a secret self in a society increasingly involved with commerce and the copy turns out to be the true index of fashion: that is, not the ability to purchase and wear accouterments considered fashionable, but, in the context of fashionable society increasingly constituted by fashionable goods, the ability to preserve a self that cannot be copied and, consequently, cannot be narrated. In this way, it is an part of understanding the relationship between the nineteenth-century novel and the nineteenth-century self, which is implicated in mass-production and commercialism. As the nineteenth century gives way to the twentieth, there develops an increasing anxiety about whether a self even exists to be represented.

Fashion, as we have seen, is always about imitation, the endless quest for the originary point of fashion, but the absence of the original, the irrecoverability of the moment of its production, is constitutive of fashion. Thus the fashionable novel is not fashionable because it takes place in a consumer society or because it endlessly peddles dresses, behaviors, goods, places, and activities that are considered desirable because they are employed by people marked as fashionable. In fact ,the fashionable novel is fashionable for a reason almost exactly opposite, a reversal and paradox that already alerts us that we are speaking fashionably. The fashionable novel lays its claim to fashion by being self-aware about the way in which fashion resists both representation and narration and by constructing an elaborate paradoxical structure in order to do so anyway. This series of refusals precisely explains the non-canonical status of the novels. Rather than be authorized by fashionable, aristocratic authors, fashionable novels abjure authorship and instead authorize themselves through the absent authorial body. Rather than being fashionable through descriptions of

fashionable goods, fashionable novels rupture the relationship between people and things in a disavowal of political interest. Rather than produce cyclical plot because fashionable society itself exists in an endless iteration of cycles, fashionable novels refuse plot in order to produce an open exclusivity that ends up writing them out of history. And rather than revolve around fashionable characters who have no self, fashionable novels body forth characters whose insubstantiality belies a radically inimitable interiority.

* * *

What this discussion has not so far resolved is why the secrets that Pelham keeps are, in a phrase dear to Bulwer-Lytton, dark and stormy: they are “teeth and fangs” that fasten upon his breast, or why, that is, the interior of the soul should necessarily be a place of negative emotions.³³⁹ In *Vanity Fair*, a novel often considered either the most successful parody of fashionable novels or the greatest of them, and sometimes as both, positions its parody as operating through the same mechanism for which the fashionable novel is generally dismissed, making shallow characterization a necessary part of its narrative strategy.³⁴⁰ Inasmuch as the avowed interest of a fashionable novel is not the inner workings

³³⁹ This secret self certainly resembles the secret self of the nineteenth-century novel more widely. As D. A. Miller says in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), “Perhaps the most fundamental value that the Novel, as a cultural institution, maybe be said to uphold is privacy, the determination of an integral, autonomous ‘secret’ self” (162), and “[T]he experience of the novel provides... subjectivity with a secret refuge: a free, liberalizing space in which [the subject] comes into [his or her] own, a critical space in which [one] takes [his or her] distance from the world’s carceral oppressions” (215). The difference, I am suggesting, is that this secret self is not a liberalizing space but an exclusive one.

³⁴⁰ Rosa rather eloquently describes the relationship between the fashionable novel and *Vanity Fair*: “Today, only he remains, but countless leaves, some of the delicate and lovely, drifted into the mold out of which grew the sturdy trunk of *Vanity Fair*” (209). Muireann O’Cinneide says that “the standard critical history of the silver fork novel tended to position

of the human mind but the exterior workings of human society, and a particular form of society at that, a fashionable novel depends upon characters that are not strongly marked, which *Vanity Fair* acknowledges when Becky Sharp enters the “best” society and finds that its inhabitants are not “the cleverest, or the stupidest, or the richest, or the best born, but ‘the best’—in a word, people about whom there is no question.”³⁴¹ With no question, there is no answer and nothing in particular to describe: a fashionable subject who has no story. But Thackeray gets the motivation behind this flat characterization wrong. He sees it as a limitation; I see it as a narrative choice. From within mainstream domestic fiction, *Vanity Fair* views the fashionable novel’s transparency effect as the genre’s disavowal of the modern subject of a domestic realist novel. The transparency effect depends on the fiction of a present narrator who, although unable to invent a story, or plumb the depths of the human soul, can narrate life as he sees and experiences it. In fact, Thackeray’s narrator says, interiority is no part of the fashionable world, and we have no right to overhear Amelia’s disappointed prayers, which are “secrets, and out of the domain of *Vanity Fair*, in which our

the publication of Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* ... as both the greatest product of the genre and as its final death knell,” in *Aristocratic Women and the Literary Nation, 1832-1867*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 55). April Kendra calls it a parody, saying that Thackeray “imitates and inverts ... the conventions of the genre,” in “Gendering the Silver Fork: Catherine Gore and the Society Novel,” *Women’s Writing* 11.1 (2004), 34; while Gilmour says that Thackeray questions “the assumption of aristocratic distinction and leadership which underlay the whole silver-fork genre, and put in its place his own notion of the gentleman” (22). All of these critical accounts give Thackeray’s interpretation of the genre prominence, discounting the self-awareness and formal control that most fashionable novelists manifested.

³⁴¹ William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (New York: Oxford World’s Classics), 636.

story lies” (262).³⁴² But Thackeray is in error. Secrets most certainly are part of the domain of *Vanity Fair*: in fact, *Vanity Fair* is constituted by, and sustained by, the alternate keeping of and revealing of secrets.

What Thackeray does get right, however, is his acknowledgment that we have “no right” to hear her prayers. As a character in a fashionable novel, or what passes for one, Amelia has a deep interiority, a place of secrets, disappointments, and even fangs fastened on her breast. The fashionable novel is fashionable because it preserves negative emotions—anything that might puncture the illusion of fashion—to an interior in which is constituted a self that, because it is kept secret, cannot be narrated and cannot be imitated. In this formulation, the novel of interiority—the typical nineteenth-century novel in which the characters’ secrets are plumbed by an all-seeing, all-knowing narrator—offers up its characters as sacrificial victims, teaching its readers empathy by allowing them to imitate the emotions its characters lay bare in an embarrassing and deeply unfashionable display of feeling. The fashionable novel thus positions itself as an alternative to the rise of the nineteenth-century novel, rewriting fashionable distance as an ethical detachment that is the exclusive property of a narrator who in these novels mounts an offense against an encroaching army bent on democratic access to the interiority of all. From that perspective, the idea that everyone has a voice and a story to be told is not simply a modern banality: it is an ethical failure.

³⁴² This narrative selection is part of *Vanity Fair*’s larger negotiation with narrative selection, evidenced in the narrator’s refusal to visit Waterloo as well as Amelia’s interiority.

Coda

Dickens revisits his condemnation of fashionable life in multiple novels. *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend* all contain portraits of some sort of high life. *Bleak House* (1852-1853) has perhaps his most famous revisions, in which he appears to have reached a new understanding of fashionable life. As Mr. Guppy is exploring the mystery of Esther Summerson, Mr. Weevle takes up residence with Mr. Krook. We soon discover, thanks to their shared interest in the fashionable world, that Mr. Weevle is none other than Mr. Jobling,:

But fashion is Mr. Weevle's, as it was Tony Jobling's, weakness ... To be informed what the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty is about, and means to be about, and what Galaxy marriages are on the tapis, and what Galaxy rumours are in circulation, is to become acquainted with the most glorious destinies of mankind.³⁴³

In a book at least in part about the use and misuse of information, Mr. Weevle's desire to know about the circulation of fashionable people might be seen as structurally similar to the obtrusive narrator's obsessive interest in a certain set of characters. But Mr. Weevle does not get his information from a narrator; he gets it from the "fashionable intelligence," an abstractly personified force that establishes what is knowable and, by extension, what is fashionable: "The fashionable intelligence ... knows all fashionable things. To know things otherwise were to be unfashionable."³⁴⁴ In *Bleak House*, fashion is at the same time an all-pervading force, like London's fog, and also a narrow "little speck ... a world wrapped up in

³⁴³ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: Oxford's World Classics), 306.

³⁴⁴ Dickens, *Bleak House*, Oxford World's Classics 2008, 17

too much jeweller's cotton."³⁴⁵

What is remarkable here is the fact that, in *Bleak House*, fashion is simply boring or stupid, like the foolish Mr. Turveydrop, the Regency dandy who “had found it necessary to frequent all public places of fashionable and lounging resort, to be seen at Brighton and elsewhere at fashionable times, and to lead an idle life in the very best clothes,”³⁴⁶ and who now minces about while performing an of out-of-fashion masculinity. Yet for all that the fashionable world has lost its edge, Dickens's representation in *Bleak House* shows a sophisticated understanding of how the fashionable world has transformed the world at large. Lady Dedlock may be trapped by her emblematic name, but Esther is her mother's child: she, too, is trapped in a cyclical plot that takes her from one Bleak House to another. Fashion in *Bleak House* is everywhere, and Lady Dedlock's death does not strike at its heart. In fact, fashion—and the peculiar type of knowledge that it offers—provides one of the novel's major clues, when Guppy sees Lady Dedlock's Gallery of British Beauty portrait hanging on Mr. Jobling/ Weevle's wall. The shift between *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Bleak House* shows that Dickens already understood what Bulwer-Lytton apparently knew, too: the fashionable novel, far from being marginal, is written into the structures of nineteenth-century fiction and thus largely in the way that individual identity is conceived. Like Esther, who is unwittingly a child of the fashionable world, we are all trapped in a story that is not of our own making; like Esther, the solution, as aesthetically displeasing at it may be—as it was

³⁴⁵ *ibid*

³⁴⁶ *ibid*, 209.

for the fashionable novel, and as many readers have found it to be so in Esther—is a radical interiority that we conceal precisely through a revelation of a constructed identity.

In describing my project to the many non-academic well-wishers with an interest in my progress toward the degree I would, rather than turning to the Regency romances that are often called the fashionable novel's heir, very often resort to examples from contemporary popular culture, such as the television show and book series *Gossip Girl* (“written” by Cecily von Ziegesar and various ghostwriters between 2002 and 2009) or modern *roman à clefs* such as Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003). Both these texts claim to offer an insider's view into elite and fashionable worlds, in the first case the privileged lives of Upper East Side adolescents and, in the second case, the cutthroat milieu of the high-fashion *Vogue*. Both books are (allegedly) fictionalized accounts based on first-person experience; savvy contemporary readers recognize that the accounts are fictionalized and yet still read them for the experience of gaining access to an exclusive world. Such knowingness is not the sole property of our generation.

Nor am I the only person to recognize contemporary examples of the genre. Diane Johnson, in a February 12, 2008 *New York Times* review of Alex Witchel's *The Spare Wife*, neatly sums up the genre:

The first question Alex Witchel's new novel, “The Spare Wife,” poses is one of genre: is it a “silver fork” novel? The silver fork novel is a subgenre that has been around almost as long as novels themselves, affording the reader the double pleasures of following the lives of the aristocracy and scorning its mindless snobbery, triviality and malice.

These have been written by talented novelists from Thackeray to Tom Wolfe, and also by the less talented, but in all of them the high-flying characters people a world most of

us can only participate in vicariously, and the endings, mostly by demonstrating the consequences of bad values, reconcile the rest of us to our more mundane lot.

I would suggest that the “mundane lot” to which fashionable novels reconcile us, however, is rather different than the bourgeois modernity that is fashion’s implicit contrast. I would argue that fashionable novels are most recognizable in that they contain the seeds of contemporary culture in which we are increasingly aware of ourselves as non-actors in a history that is continually being created, when character as articulated through social networking is a carefully planned performance of taste that functions to identify other members of your community. But these communities are not open to all. The internet, that great democratizer and toppler of tyrannies, turns out to revolve around passwords that provide access to communities—communities of potential mates, communities of “friends,” communities of commentators on newsblogs, and communities of bargain-hunting fashion-minded shoppers.

While writing this dissertation, I received an email from one of these shopping communities, Rue La La, of which I was (briefly) a member. “Happening now,” this email informed me: “Step inside. The Secret Suite. Limited Access. And you made the List.” This email lays the architecture of the brick-and-mortar store—an edifice from which the future has promised to free us—onto the digital structure of the internet. It informs me that I have privileged access to a room inside the vast structure that is the internet; that my name is one of the few to be joined in a community of others whose names have also earned a place on the List. In other words, the email invites me into a community that is constituted by the imagined—as it were—boundaries of a sheet of paper on which a group of names have been written, a fiction that obligingly glosses over the tenuous ontological status of the zeros and

ones constitutive of the internet. In exchange for my email address, I am offered exclusivity. Yet this exclusivity is offered to all: it is a profound amplification of the exclusivity that occupies the early nineteenth-century writers and readers of fashionable novels and it points out that we live in a culture whose vocabulary is rooted in the fashionable world of the early nineteenth-century and whose restless consumerism is thematically depicted in the popular literature, both written and visual, of our age. Hardly a relic of a past time, the fashionable novel was brilliantly prescient, not only of the general tendency of literature, against the tide of which it knowingly swam; but of the open exclusivity that is the most compelling fiction of fashion and, thereby, of democracy.

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