Fashionable People, Fashionable Society:

## Fashion, Gender, and Print Culture in England 1821-1861

by

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Introduction

> The *New World* [. . .] is called the *Beau Monde,* or Fine World [. . .] [by which] we do not mean the world itself but the inhabitants of this world. [. . .] The *Beau Monde,* like *Swift's Island* of *Laputa*, is for ever changing its place. It is now at *London*, now at *Bath*, now at *Bristol*, now at *Brighton*: wherever the Emperor is, say the Civilians, there is *Rome*; wherever fashion resides, there is the *Beau Monde*. [. . .] It has been the boast of modern times to have discovered one new world, that of *America*, and it might inflame our vanity to flatter ourselves that we have discovered two.
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> —"The Beau Monde," *La Belle Assemblée* 1.1(February 1806):5

The *beau monde*—which the 1806 *La Belle Assemblée* author sarcastically termed a "New World"—bore various other names in the nineteenth century: the world of fashion, the fashionable world, the World, the (*bon/haut*) *ton*, fashionable society, or simply Society. The social institution designated by these various names was, of course, not a nineteenth-century invention. OED's record of the earliest use of the term "*beau monde*" in the seventeenth century is backed up by sundry assertions that the corresponding social entity emerged in the same time. The *Court Journal* editing group, for example, remarked in 1829 that the origin of fashionable manners and "that portion of society, whose domain is now distinguished by the name of the West End of the Town," should be fixed no earlier than the reign of Charles II (1630-1685).[1] Likewise, the German scholar Norbert Elias writes that Society in England, with its practice of seasonal migration to London, "had begun intermittently in the early seventeenth century and become a regular institution by the eighteenth" (96).

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[1] "Omnipotence of Fashion," 3.

Nonetheless, the *La Belle Assemblée* author was far from alone in feeling that the world of fashion was a "new" phenomenon in his time. Like this writer, countless people registered the *beau monde*—with remarkable interest, insight and accuracy even if not without satire, sarcasm and direct criticism—in their diaries and journals, letters and family papers, essays and poems, stories and novels, news reports and visual arts. The sheer width and abundance of this registration suggest that fashionable society had been strengthened, expanded, and brought to bear on English life to such an unprecedented degree by the early nineteenth century that it could be perceived as new.

It is just this world of fashion as a refreshed cultural realm that constitutes the focus of my dissertation. To affirm the obvious, what follows is not a study of fashion in its commonest sense, namely the prevailing mode of dress and/or change in dress styles, even as I draw on an enormously rich set of scholarship on nineteenth-century clothing and other objects.[2] Instead, what I am concerned with is another and no less important

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[2] Since the end of the nineteenth century and especially with the rise of (material) cultural studies in the 1980s, historians and sociologists have made extensive exploration of the period's fashion in terms of its relationship to the socioeconomic development of society, human psychology, gender, sexuality, morality, and culture in general.

Chief among those who study fashion from a socio-economic point of view is Thorstein Veblen. His *The Theory of the Leisure Class* elaborates on how the woman of the "leisure class" served as an instrument of Vicarious Consumption and how this Vicarious Consumption functioned to express and solidify the social status of the "leisure class" in the transition from feudal aristocratic society to bourgeois capitalist society. German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel, Veblen's contemporary, also ties fashion to class competition: "Fashions are always class fashions, by the fact that the fashions of the higher strata of society distinguish themselves from those of the lower strata, and are abandoned by the former at the moment when the latter begin to appropriate them" (189). Differentiation and imitation are, for Simmel, the bedrock of fashion.

A number of scholars have applied Sigmund Freud's theories of sexuality and the unconscious to the study of dress and fashion. Chief among them are J. C. Flügel's *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930), Edmund Bergler's *Fashion and the Unconscious* (1953), and Lawrence Langner's *The Importance of Wearing Clothes* (1959). More recent scholarship that explores nineteenth-century fashion's relationship not only to human sexuality but also to gender formations includes David Kunzle's *Fashion and Fetishism* (1982); Valerie Steele's *Fashion and Eroticism* (1985) and *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power* (1996); and Christopher Breward's *The Hidden Consumer* (1999). Breward's 1995 *The Culture of Fashion* purports to offer a "new history of the fashionable dress" from the medieval time to the twentieth century while his 2004 *Fashioning London* explores fashion and urban culture.

sense of fashion in the nineteenth century: fashion as what ruled the *beau monde*, which in turn was tautologically perceived to be the *people* whom fashion brought together and/or the *place* where fashion resided, as is suggested by the *La Belle Assemblée* author. This circularity—Society as fashion, fashion as Society—is what I am to investigate in the following chapters.

Fashionable society, or rather London Society—a designation preferred in twentieth-century scholarly works—has often been referred to in British historiography. F. L. Thompson, for example, mentions it from time to time in his work on English landed society and points out, from an economic viewpoint, that it was an effective means to the assimilation of new wealth into the existing elite.[3] W. L. Guttsman suggests the same only from a political perspective.[4] Yet book-length devotion to the subject has been rare.[5] Leonore Davidoff's 1973 monograph *The Best Circles*: *Women and Society in Victorian England* has been one of the few books that focus quite exclusively on Victorian fashionable society. Davidoff frames the main topic of her work as "the system of organizing social and domestic life which began to be codified in the

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Scholars exploring fashion's relationship to culture in general favor the Zeitgeist theory which takes fashion to be a reflection of the prevailing spirit of the time. French writer Louis Octave Uzanne's *Fashion in Paris* (1898), German historians Oskar Fischel and Max von Boehn's *Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century* (1909), and James Laver's *Taste and Fashion* (1937) exemplify this theory.

[3] Thompson 8, 25-6, 99-100, 99-100, 104-8, 299-302, 328-9, 339-40.

[4] Guttsman, 158-9, 251.

[5] Some sketchy but valuable profiles of nineteenth-century fashionable society can be found in a set of nostalgic works brought out at the dawn of the twentieth: Charles Whibley's *The Pageantry of Life* (1900), Lewis Melville's *The Beaux of the Regency* (1908), and Lord Lamington's *In the Days of the Dandies* (1908) chief among them. In their remembering of the man of fashion in the early decades, these books make judicious comments on the fashionable world from time to time. However, these are largely collections of anecdotes, reminiscences, and/or biographical sketches of particular fashionables rather than studies of the beau monde as a whole. The same can be said of Ralph Nevill's *The World of Fashion 1837-1922* (1923), even as it includes fashionable women in its narrative and speaks of the Victorian beau monde in even stronger nostalgia since World War I is said to have swept away any remnant of *bon ton* in its nineteenth-century sense.

1820s under the rubric Society and its accompanying calendar of events, the Season" (14).

For her, the system stemmed from an earlier Society centering around the court but was

"vastly expanded and infused with new authority in the second quarter of the century";

moreover, it was "formalized" with upper- and middle-class women as the "specialized

personnel" carrying out its "special functions" (14-16). In many ways, Davidoff's book

informs my interrogation of nineteenth-century fashionable society. However, something

that she merely mentions in passing becomes my point of departure: i.e. the rule of

fashion. It is my contention that Victorian fashionable society found its running principle

in that rule and discovered its "specialized personnel" not just in upper- and middle-class

women in general but in a special set of people named "fashionables" including men of

fashion, as I elaborate in chapters 1 and 3.

The emphasis on fashion also differentiates my dissertation from other books

focusing on nineteenth-century Society, chief among which are Stella Margetson's

Victorian High Society (1980), and Venetia Murray's *High Society: a Social History of

the Regency Period, 1788-1830* (1998). Both provide valuable data that I make use of,

but neither makes the distinction that I deem worthy: fashionable society should not

simply be taken as part of aristocratic high society even as it might be constituted mainly

by the nobility. While "high society" suggests an entity formed along class lines, the

fashionable world in the nineteenth century was, as I argue in my first chapter, a social

institution cutting across conventional class distinctions, especially between the

aristocracy and the haute bourgeoisie. As a *mobile* entity, the beau monde constantly

reshaped itself by negotiating between aristocratic values embedded largely in land, birth

and kinship relations *and* bourgeois norms such as emphasis on money, professional

expertise and individuality. What regulated the negotiation was no other than the rule of fashion. To study nineteenth-century Society without a closer look at this rule, I contend, is to miss the institution's most fundamental running principle.

The Rule of Fashion

Nineteenth-century people's understanding of what was fashion and how it ruled the *beau monde* was as many-faceted as the rule itself.   The multi-various nature of both invites us to rethink the "dominant sociological tradition" that extends "from Bernard Mandeville through Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, and Thorstein Veblen, up to Roland Barthes and the early works of Jean Baudrillard" (Purdy viiii).   In this tradition, fashion is almost always associated with consumption while both are taken to be "a secondary manifestation of capitalism, a material surplus of industrial production" (Purdy viiii). This association and devaluation of fashion should look narrow and shallow when nineteenth-century people's rich and varied thinking about it is recovered. As a beginning of this recovery, I want to pull out four major strands of that thinking and put them in dialogue with twentieth-century theories of fashion and society so as to flesh out the running principle of nineteenth-century Society.

A chief way in which Victorians conceptualized fashion was to connect it with magical power, as is expressed by a *Court Journal* author:

> Enchanting Fashion! Tell me which
> Art thou, a will-o'-wisp, or witch,
> Or one of those delightful things
> That poets deck with stars and wings
> Sent down with brilliant spell and wand,
> To turn the earth to fairy land.[6]

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[6] "The Court Day," 8.

For the anonymous poet and many of his contemporaries, fashion comes close to what

Gilles Lipovesky has recently termed the "system of aesthetic fantasy" (25). Such words

as "witch," "spell," and "fairy land" vividly convey the idea that fashion enchants by

mythic powers; and like poetic art, it is capable of rendering plain earth into a fantastic

world. In this sense, fashion could serve as a tool for what Walter Benjamin would have

taken to be the "*re*enchantment of the social world" in the industrial age (Buck-Morss

253). It would footnote the so-called triumph of Enlightenment rationality, which

disenchanted the social world in the eye of Max Weber's followers.[7] Was this

enchantment a source of false consciousness in the eye of nineteenth-century Britons as it

would have been to Adorno and Horkheimer? It might have been so to some, but there is

certainly evidence for a pragmatic acceptance of mysterious fashion as an inevitable

regulator of one's views and conduct. As is put by the anonymous author of *The*

Handbook of the Man of Fashion:

> Fashion, like Sir Fopling Flutter, is a thing "not to be comprehended in a few
> words." Its empire is one of the darkest mysteries of life. [. . .] We should accept
> Fashion, in the way that Sir Robert Peel accepted the Reform Bill, as a fact, —an
> actual and settled circumstance, in reference to which our views and conduct must
> be regulated. (8-9)

This author's empiricism on fashion was certainly not his alone.

Another major strand in nineteenth-century people's conceptualization of fashion

lay in their realization of its self-constitutive nature as a form of power. An example of

which can be found in an 1829 *Court Journal* article:

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[7] My view here is based on Buck-Morss's interpretation of Walter Benjamin's theory of mass culture (253-254).

> It is certainly not without reason that we sometimes complain of this power, called Fashion, being somewhat arbitrary in the exercise of its self-constituted authority, the control it arrogates, and the capricious forms it assumes.[8]

Here, the anonymous author clearly anticipates what we now take as a distinguishing feature of fashion: its self-constructing gesture, that is to say it always refers back to itself as the only source of authority. This self-reflexivity of fashion was expressed more clearly by the German prince Pükler-Muskau—a one-time favorite of English fashionable society—according to whom fashion in England was not "influenced by rank, still less by riches but [found] the possibility of its maintenance only in this national foible [of believing in fashion]" (34). Antedating Roland Barthes by more than a hundred years, the German prince realized the circuitous nature of fashion; he saw that fashion was a "normative whole" which could contain only one variation: "Fashion/unfashionable" (Bathes 23).

Yet another strand in nineteenth-century Britons' thinking of fashion manifests in their identification of its pursuit of novelty. An 1823 *New Monthly Magazine* author, for instance compared fashion to protean figures in Greek mythology, albeit in a very critical tone:

> To catch "the Cynthia of the minute,"—to depict the ever-shifting Proteus universally worshipped by the most ardent of votaries, to define with fidelity its multiform transmutations, and the flickering hues that sparkle around the idol, coming and going like the ebb and flow of the ocean, would be a vain task for pen and pencil united. ("The Philosophy of Fashion," 238)

Despite this commentator's negative view of fashion as an "idol" of "fools," he shared with his contemporaries, not just a sense of its seductiveness—it attracted "the most ardent of votaries"—but also the insight that constant and uncertain change was fashion's

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[8] "The Omnipotence of Fashion," 2.

major way to function (238). Even the ocean metaphor was a common device. Another

person, for example, would write of the "shifting sandbank" of fashion which maintained

its interest by the "incessant production of new varieties."[9] About a hundred and fifty

years later, scholars would take this "incessant production of new varieties" as a

fundamental built-in mechanism of Western "hot societies"; these societies "willingly

accept, indeed encourage, the radical changes that follow from deliberate human effort

and the effect of anonymous social forces," as Grant McCracken puts it in summarizing

the views of Fernand Braudel, Neil Mckendrick and others (80-81).

Still another major thread of nineteenth-century people's conceptualization of

fashion comes out in their recognition of its capacity to synthesize contradictory trends

and impulses. As put by William Hazlittt, "FASHION is an odd jumble of contradictions,

of sympathies and antipathies (148). In this sense, fashion resembles Walter Benjamin's

"dialectical image" in its dynamic aligning of antithetical elements such as the artistic

and the technological, the mythical and the historical, the old and the new.[10] If for

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[9] "Men and Women of Fashion: No.I," 337.

[10] As interpreted by Susan Buck-Morss, Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image is very complex and
has "as many levels of logic as the Hegelian concept" (Buck-Morss 210). Relevant to my project, however,
is the following two levels. One, as a historiographical method, the dialectical image is "a way of seeing
that crystallizes antithetical elements by providing the axes for their alignment" (Buck-Morss 210). In
other words, this historiographical method demands recognizing the mythical power or the dream images
the imagination of a collective unconscious has set in historical objects and realizing that we are still being
held in the same mythical dream. In this sense, historical knowledge is synonymous with awakening
(Buck-Morss 261); and in the moment of awakening, the past is actualized alive into the present, which is
simultaneously experienced as performed in the past. In this new historiography, a task of the historian is
precisely to construct as historical objects of interpretation those ephemera and trivia of a culture that have
been ignored in traditional historical narratives. Two, ephemera and trivia that can be used as historical
objects of interpretation are themselves dialectical images because they are also constellations of
antithetical elements, such as the new and the old, the mythic and the historical, the artistic and the
technological, etc. For example, the Paris arcades were dialectical images because they combined the
continuous glass roofs, which were technologically advanced constructions, with the interior "walls" of the
"most derivative ornamental facades, replete with neoclassical columns, arches, and pediments that were
the epitome of architectural 'good taste'" (Buck-Morss 126). According to Benjamin, this intermingling of
antithetical elements in historical objects has to do with the image-making imagination of a collective
unconscious. "Paradoxically, collective imagination mobilizes its powers for a revolutionary break from

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Hazlitt, fashion is nothing but "the prevailing distinction of the moment" (149), there is, for Benjamin, a "darkness" to this moment which is embedded in the "dream consciousness of the collective" (*The Arcades Project,* 393). To this, one might as well add that the dark unconscious that makes the moment of fashion also contains what Ernest Bloch terms the "not-yet-conscious"—"a content of consciousness which has not yet become wholly manifest, and is still dawning from the future" (Bloch 1.116). Although fashion only bespeaks the present, it aligns, I would say, both the past and the future in the current.

While the four major strands do not exhaust nineteenth-century people's conceptualization of fashion, they should be enough to demonstrate that what Victorians had in mind was the modern system of fashion quite different from what is best termed the "old sartorial-symbolic mechanism." As discussed implicitly or explicitly by scholars ranging from Habermas to David Kuchta,[11] the old mechanism featured the display of the manorial lord; at its center was the aristocratic body functioning as a theatre of display, sumptuary and otherwise.[12] In this symbolic system, the crown and its court

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the recent past by evoking a cultural memory reservoir of myths and utopian symbols from a more distant ur-past," interprets Buck-Morss (116).

[11] In his introduction to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas makes some implicit statements about the old sartorial-symbolic mechanism. According to Habermas, in the feudal society of the High Middle Ages, "lordly" and "*publicus*" were synonyms; lordship by definition was "something publicly represented"; and representation in this context meant exactly to make "something invisible [i.e. the manorial lord's status as an "embodiment of some sort of 'higher' power] visible through the public presence of the person of the lord": hence the "*publicness* (or *publicity*) *of representation*" (6-7). "The staging of the publicity involved in representation," Habermas further writes, "was wedded to personal attributes such as insignia (badges and arms), dress (clothing and coiffure), demeanor (form of greeting and poise) and rhetoric (form of address and formal discourse in general)—in a word, to a strict code of 'noble' conduct" (8). David Kuchta devotes a chapter to what he calls the "old sartorial regime" (1550-1688) in his 2002 book *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity*. My explication of the distinction between the old and the new systems is an extrapolation of various ideas presented by Kuchta, Habermas, and other scholars mentioned in the text.

[12] Anne McClintock, for example, speaks of the "aristocratic body as a "theatre of sumptuary and sexual display" (174).

used material and linguistic signs such as insignia, dress, demeanor, and rhetoric to *indicate* their naturally/divinely given high status and ruling positions. The public/private division was not relevant because things, including abstract virtues, had to be publicly represented to have meaning. While this system of representation had to have a crowd of spectators before whom it took effect, the crowd itself, usually constituted by dependents, neighbors and tenants, was excluded from the representation and did not have much bearing on it. The crown and its court decided fashion via sumptuary laws, the patronage of art, religious ceremonies and other means.

Different from the old sartorial-symbolic mechanism, the modern system of fashion starred, not clothes, but the *fashionable* body, which was neither aristocratic nor bourgeois though overlapping with both, as I shall argue. In the new symbolic frame, material and linguistic signs no longer *indicated* but *produced* the social status of their users. Whoever was able to manipulate the latest set of signs got the distinction; and competition was horizontally—rather than vertically—stretched: one competed with one's equals, i.e. other fashionables, for leading the world as opposed to one's social inferiors who were by definition already failures. A leader of fashion, of course, also needed a crowd of viewers—such as those coming to the drawing room painted in the graphic satire "A-La-Mode-At Home" (Fig. 1)—in order to succeed. But these viewers were no longer mere passive spectators of the leader's magnificence and grandeur; they were also partial makers or destroyers of them. The relationship between the performer and the viewers was no longer simply one of a powerful ruler acting before an inert audience as in conventional royal and aristocratic entertainments. Instead the two sides became mutually dependent and defining. The boundaries between them were collapsing:

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one's guests today might become one's hosts tomorrow; and during the same party time, both were performers subjected to fashion which, instead of being defined by the court, was an independent force that could originate from outside and exert influence upon the court.

While one might say this system of value existed as long as a society had some minimal commercial development, various scholars have demonstrated that it could not have been influential earlier than 1700. Fernand Braudel, for example, highlights the turn of the eighteenth century as a watershed: "One cannot really talk of fashion becoming all-powerful before about 1700….From then on fashion in the modern sense began to influence everything" (316). Like Braudel, Grant McCracken also thinks that the new system of fashion in which things were valued not for their patina but for their fashionability occurred in the eighteenth century (1.31-43). Neil McKendrick likewise regards the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the point when modern fashion *truly* triumphed over the old symbolic system.[13]

To triumph over, however, was not to replace. From its inception the modern mechanism of fashion coexisted and competed with the old sartorial-symbolic mechanism to shape society. Not only could the old system always be re-invoked locally and strategically for particular purposes, as in the early nineteenth century when aristocrats claimed themselves or were proclaimed to be the true and legitimate people of fashion; when old nobility still entertained their laborers and local associates; and when a fashionable gathering was made *visually* accessible to one's servants, neighbors and mere passers-by via drawn-up blinds, blazing lights, the spilling of guests into the street, and sometimes the admission of mere spectators whose sole purpose was to see the

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[13] McKendrick, "Introduction: The Birth of a Consumer Society," I.

fashionable world enjoying themselves.[14]   Meanwhile, the new mechanism could also

declare old institutions like the court as fashion, capitalizing on the power of tradition and

people's deep-rooted desire for accessing a higher world. A solid proof of this is the

popularization of court and aristocratic life as "fashionable" in nineteenth-century

commercial print: two major fashion-centered periodicals were named suggestively as the

Court Journal (1829-1924) and the *Queen (*1861- present*).*

Nonetheless, for reasons that I will elaborate in my first chapter, the modern

system of fashion had definitely got the upper hand over the old sartorial-symbolic

mechanism by the 1820s and 30s and was becoming a fundamental running principle of

London Society.   Nineteenth-century people widely recognized the rule of fashion not

just in the beau monde but in English society at large. If Thomas Gillet, a fashionable

writer in the early decades, felt like writing about "the tyrant that most widely reigns" in

1819, Letitia Landon, the poet, was still lamenting "Fashion, that tyrant" in 1829.[15]

While in 1832 the English lady Harriet Pigott framed Britons as "the greatest slaves" to

fashion, the German prince Pückler-Muskau observed similarly in 1833: "Where fashion

speaks, the free Englishman is a slave."[16]   Another foreign observer Flora Tristan made a

similar comment in 1842:

> The Londoner has no opinions or tastes of his own; his opinions are those of the
> fashionable majority, his tastes whatever fashion decrees. This subservience to

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[14] For example, when the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough were entertaining a group headed by the
Prince of Wales in 1859, they allowed hundreds of spectators to enter the grounds and watch the guests
amusing themselves (Margetson 38).

[15] Gillet 1. In her poem "Fantasies," Landon writes: "I'm weary, I'm weary,—this cold world of
ours;/…/Where the beauty of night, the glory of dawning,/Are wasted, as Fashion, that tyrant, at
will/Makes war on sweet Nature, and exiles her still (128; l.1-8).

[16] Pigott 74; Pückler-Muskau 309.

> fashion is general throughout the land; there is no other country in Europe where fashion, etiquette and prejudice exert such monstrous tyranny. (26)

The French feminist and socialist's seeming generalization was only confirmed by the author of *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion* who wrote in 1846: "[fashion] is, in and for itself, a thing so greatly valued and craved by every class of persons, that the mode of winning it becomes an interesting consideration to all men" (12).

It was the decisive rule of fashion as an independent system that disassociated nineteenth-century fashionable society from the high society of *ancien regime*, rendering it a miniature and experimental form of modern consumer society. No doubt, some aristocratic values were carried on to nineteenth-century fashionable society; no doubt, landed nobility still dominated it at least for the first half of the century; and no doubt, it was still confused with aristocratic high society in some people's mind. Yet in nature and by definition, it was a new and discrete social institution.

Nineteenth-century people were quick to recognize the discreteness of the refreshed world of fashion. One author described it as "that fourth estate of the realm"; another termed it "this fourth estate of the body politic"; yet another claimed that the beau monde was a new caste of "nobility created neither by patent nor by writ, but whose titles are nevertheless acknowledged by general assent."[17] To retrieve this new cultural estate is the purpose of this dissertation. I assert that its recovery will engender a fuller understanding of nineteenth-century social, gender, literary and cultural formations.

Fashion and Nineteenth-Century Social Structure

As a social entity that cut across conventional class lines, fashionable society

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[17] "Sketches of Real Life: No. I," 8; "Where is the Fashion," 113; "The Omnipotence of Fashion,"3.

would provide a wonderful site for recent scholarly effort to dismantle the paradigm of class analysis that has long dominated British historiography. Under the influence of the "linguistic turn" initiated by such historians as Gareth Stedman Jones, William Sewell, Jr., and Joan Scott, some scholars of nineteenth-century political history have begun to challenge the established grand narratives of the triumphant rise of the working and middle classes. One of the major factors that have made this challenge possible is the realization of the relative autonomy of politics and the role of political language in constructing political subjects and social identities, including those of class. Thus for Stedman Jones, the language of Chartism did not reflect some pre-existing working-class experience of industrialization or proletarian consciousness; instead, Chartist "language"—drawing on the language of eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century radicalism—spoke to the politically excluded people as a class (90-178). For Patrick Joyce, politics is an effort to put the de-centered subject back again through the narrative forms of its languages (1-20). More recently, Dror Wahrman furthers this line of scholarship in his 1995 book *The Imagining of the Middle Class*. He argues that political configuration is a key factor in deciding what representation will triumph over others in the "space of possibility between social reality and its representation" (8). For him, political configurations around the French Revolution, the Massacre of Peterloo and the Reform Bill of 1832 played a significant role in producing the notion that nineteenth-century English society was centered on the middle class.

These revisions raise challenging questions: If the ever rising middle and working classes were a mere political invention, and if there were no such classes that gradually became the focus of social and political power, how did nineteenth-century power

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distribute itself? What did nineteenth-century social segmentation look like? And if, as

J.C.D. Clark, F M. L. Thompson, Walter L. Arnstein and other historians have claimed, a

resilient Anglican, aristocratic and monarchical *ancien regime* was persistently present in

the nineteenth century, what made this presence possible? [18]

I want to argue that fashionable society constituted a considerable way in which

nineteenth-century England restructured itself and redistributed power among different

interest groups outside the paradigm of class antagonism. It has been noted that there

was continuity between English aristocratic and bourgeois manners and that this alliance

played some role in nineteenth-century social stability. Robert Newsom sums the point

well by referring to the Edwardian G. K. Chesterton:

> G. K. Chesterton notes that the alliance of manners between aristocracy and
> middle class and their mutual regard for respectability was peculiarly strong in
> England and that it was a factor in saving England from the more violent class
> conflicts that occurred on the Continent, for what he called "the Victorian
> Compromise" extended from manners to politics, and therefore "the most
> important event in English history was the event that never happened at all—the
> English Revolution along the lines of the French Revolution." (*Charles Dickens
> Revisited* 163)

Although one does not necessarily agree with Chesterton that something like the French

Revolution would have been the "most important event" in English history, his notion of

"the Victorian Compromise" as a force preventative of more violent class conflicts

deserves further attention. One way to focus that attention is to examine fashionable

society, an important venue for the aristocratic-bourgeois alliance that "extended from

manners to politics." As the following chapters (especially 1 and 2) make clear, the

micro-political regulation of fashion had a role to play in producing social cohesion even

as it was invented for social exclusion; and even though fashionable living was

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[18] Clark 200-231; Thompson 1-24; Arnstein 203-257.

sometimes singled out as a possible threat to social stability. Queen Victoria sounded

such a note in a letter to her son the Prince of Wales:

> Many with whom I have conversed tell me that at no time for the last sixty or
> seventy years was frivolity, the love of pleasure, self-indulgence, and idleness […]
> carried to such excess as now…that it resembles the time before the French
> Revolution. [. . .] [Those] who do not live *in* the gay circle of fashion, and who
> view it calmly, are greatly, seriously ALARMED. [19]

Such alarming remarks—certainly not the queen's alone— are quite typical of what Jean

Baudrillard terms the "moral vision of waste as dysfunction" (43).

To retrieve fashionable society's role in effecting social cohesion in the

nineteenth century, we must challenge this moralistic vision and take Baudrillard's and,

for that matter, Bataille's seemingly decadent views of waste more seriously. For

Baudrillard, wasteful consumption—done in compliance with the "whims of prestige and

fashion"—functions to maintain and manifest the difference between the necessary and

the superfluous, which in some way "orientates the whole system" (136). He further

states that it is in the "consumption of a surplus, of a superfluity that the individual—and

society—feel not merely that they exist, but that they are alive" (43). Baudrillard's views

are confirmed by George Bataille. Society, in Bataille's understanding, is defined, not by

the production of wealth—as it is framed in classical economics—but by the

consumption of "the Surplus, the cause of social agitation":

> On the whole, a society always produces more than is necessary for its survival; it
> has a surplus at its disposal. It is precisely the use it makes of this surplus that
> determines it: The Surplus is the cause of the agitation, of the structural changes and
> of the entire history of society. But this surplus has more than one outlet, the most
> common of which is growth. And growth itself has many forms, each one of which
> eventually comes up against some limit. Thwarted demographic growth becomes
> military; it is forced to engage in conquest. Once the military limits are reached, the

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[19] Quoted in Margetson 50.

surplus has the sumptuary forms of religion as an outlet, along with games and spectacles that derive therefrom, or personal luxury. (1.106)

For Bataille, as for Baudrillard, it is the consumption of wealth that constitutes a domain of "sovereignty"—a life beyond "servile use" (3.198). In such theoretical light, fashionable society can be viewed as a socially unifying system of representation, as I will flesh out in Chapter 1.

Just as fashionable society served as a space where vertical social alliances could and did take place, it also had a role to play in the mapping of social spheres on the horizontal level. Fashionable society was frequently referred to as the "fine mob", the "fine rabble," the "glittering mob," etc. in the nineteenth century. Such oxymoronic designations point towards fashionable society as a special collective identity, a unique public, I would say, that cannot be easily accounted for in the existing terms of current studies on the crowd and the public. Nonetheless fashionable society's resemblances to and differences from the Habermasian rational-critical bourgeois public (detailed in Chapter 2) suggest that the two bore a mutually obligate symbiotic relationship. That the bourgeois public could differentiate and divide itself from the private partly because fashionable society had been invented as an independent third realm in which the very division was re-melded and the differentiation blurred. Meanwhile, it was also due to the existence of the public/private division that fashionable society could claim its uniqueness as neither the public nor the private and yet enjoy all the freedom of ambiguity. In this sense, fashionable society functioned, I shall argue, as a condition of possibility for the public/private division even as it destabilized the separation at the same time. That this mapping of social spheres was a complexly gendered process should not be a surprise to us since scholarship on nineteenth-century women and men has so much

popularized the notion of gender as an underlying force for the separation of social

spheres. [20]

Fashionable Society, Fashionable Gender

If it is nothing new that nineteenth-century social spheres were mapped in tune

with the ideology of gender, it might be something unfamiliar that the bifurcation of the

male public/female private spheres was simultaneously made possible and destabilized by

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[20] Studies of nineteenth-century British women and gender have come a long way over the last three decades or so. In the 1970s, under the influence of second-wave feminism, there occurred the intellectual impulse to restore Victorian women to history. Pioneering works published at this time—such as *Hidden from History* by Sheila Robotham, *Suffer and Be Still* and *A Widening Sphere* by Martha Vicinus (ed.)— not only brought to light various aspects of Victorian women's lives but also helped open up women's history as a promising and creative academic field. The field expanded in the 1980s by the introduction of gender analysis, i.e. the examination of men besides and beside women, or rather gendered social relations and structures. Exemplary of this new energy was Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's work *Family Fortunes,* which put forward the powerful argument that gender relations were central to the emergence of the English middle class. The 1980s also saw the expansion of the field in its absorption of the poststructuralist emphasis on the complexity of the signification process and the multiplicity of identities. By their research into the constructions of "woman" across a wide variety of cultural discourses, scholars like Joan Scott, Denise Riley and Mary Poovey argued for the instability of the category of "woman" whose meanings diverged over time and place. In harmony with the rise of Black and Third-World Feminisms, these scholars also warned about the dangers of making a new canon of "women's history" that could essentialize "woman" and ignore gender's underpinning by class, race, nationality and sexual orientations.
    In spite of their differences, a prominent theme linked the 1970s' and 1980s' studies of nineteenth-century women and gender: their reliance on the explanatory power of the rhetoric of "separate spheres." As a prevailing ideology of the nineteenth century, this rhetoric was said to assign the public world of business, work and politics to naturally strong, wise, rational men and the private domain of home and family to inherently weak, morally superior and yet emotional women. If in the 1970s scholars successfully built on this model to reveal the patriarchal oppressions Victorian women had suffered, in the 1980s historians paid more attention to its role in producing social change and to the power it accorded to women. Besides Davidoff and Hall's influential argument, there was Nancy Armstrong who convincingly demonstrated how the construction of the domestic woman contributed significantly to the making of middle-class subjectivity and of a non-political political power: domestic surveillance.
    Since the 1990s, however, scholars have begun to challenge the separate-sphere model. With the publication of Amanda Vickery's *The Gentleman's Daughter* (1998), Harriet Guest's *Small Change* (2000), and other works on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women and gender came the insights that the notions of the public and private were historically complicated; that the supposedly "separate spheres" were more muddled than generally imagined; and that "the presiding hearth angel of Victorian social myth, actually performed a more significant and extensive economic and political function than is usually perceived" (Langland 19): hence the more recent academic coinages: "nobody's angels" and "the angel out of the house" that constitute the titles respectively of Elizabeth Langland's 1995 book and Dorice Williams Elliot's 2002 one. Caroline Levine in her 2006 article discusses the impasse the separate-sphere model has run into but asserts that what she calls "strategic formalism" may still find some use for it (627-31). Meanwhile, men's studies scholars like John Tosh, Michael Roper and others have begun to uncover how the notion of domesticity bore on middle-class men in the nineteenth century.

a third realm's complicated engagement with gender. As I shall argue, fashionable society—as such a third realm—enacted a complex gender politics under its gender-free façade. A retrieval of the gender politics of fashion, to my mind, can be a way out of the dead end that the separate-sphere paradigm has run into after its domination of nineteenth-century women and gender studies for over three decades.

As Caroline Levine has recently pointed out, the separate-sphere paradigm is now at an "impasse" after much revisionist work on it (627). Scholars such as Elbert, Davidson and Hatcher, have even suggested its dismissal altogether for its being "simply too crude an instrument—too rigid and totalizing—" for understanding the complexity of nineteenth-century gender, society and literature (Davison 445). Yet we might still have some need for an "analytic approach to the separate spheres," in the words of Levine, "unless we wanted to argue that men and women were absolutely equal in the period, or that the cultural distinction between masculinity and femininity was non-existent or irrelevant" (628). I agree with Levine on the need to still engage with the rhetoric of separate spheres but wanted to suggest other ways for its use. Levine's way out is to see, on the one hand, that however reductive they were, binary distinctions had ideological work to perform. For various discourses of separate spheres functioned to keep up a field of contestation from which the notion of a bifurcation of genders was continually produced, thus making heterosexuality "obvious, necessary and natural" (629). On the other, Levine argues for viewing the separate-sphere paradigm as one among many "ordering principles" that "compete and interlace and overlap" to shape the cultural-political field (634, 629)

I suggest that we go beyond asking if the separate-sphere rhetoric could or could not explain nineteenth-century gender and society, how and to what extent it affected nineteenth-century men, women and society. As important as these questions are, we also need to ask how the perceptual field of such a binary as the public man/private woman was established, sustained, and made to yield hegemony in the first place. I would like to propose that a binary distinction frequently involves a third Other as "a structure of [its] perceptual field, without which the entire field could not function as it does," to appropriate Deleuze (307). That a binary can be maintained exactly because some third Other opens up a space in which all the crudeness and rigidity of a binary distinction can be loosened and its totalizing gesture weakened in tandem with local circumstances.

In the case of the public man/private woman division, a third Other was found in the fashionable person, which filled up the space of possibility between the two ends of the separation. Regulated by fashion, this space sustained a series of new gender roles: the chaperone of fashion, the fashionable patroness, the woman of the world, etc. donned by the woman of fashion; as well as the leader of fashion, the dining-out man, the gent, etc. donned by the man of fashion. These roles said neither yes nor no to the public man/private woman division but simply enacted highly flexible versions of domesticity that were not domesticity and of publicity that did not go in that name, thus invalidating the separate-sphere norm in reality. Paradoxically, the actual flexibility and invalidation might have just made possible the continual existence of the norm. In this sense, the space of possibility opened up by the fashionable Other between the gender binary was also that between gender norms and gender realities.

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To illustrate my theorization here, I would like to take a closer look at the drawing "A-La-Mode-At Home" (Fig. 1). Brought out by the London publisher T. Mclean in 1829, it paints a file of gorgeously dressed people parading through an open door that reveals to street viewers a fancy light and a fabulous ceiling. In this scene, outside and inside flow seamlessly into each other; domesticity and publicity become the same thing even as their distinction is still kept in the very naming of the event. The fashionable hostess does not discard the norm of domesticity; yet she can stage—in the name and for the sake of fashion—a particularized version of it that suspends or negates it in reality. It is via this logic of implicit incongruity that fashion constantly transforms long standing and often essentialized gender norms into multifarious gender realities that better answer current exigencies.

A retrieval of the fashionable person—i.e. a retrieval of the series of roles donned by this character—then, will allow us to rethink, not just the separate-sphere paradigm, but also two other models attendant with it. To the class ascendancy model that assumes the eventual replacement of aristocratic gender norms by bourgeois ones, the man and woman of fashion portray figures incorporating both and yet remaining discrete identities. To the interiority theme that favors the notion of the emergence of a modern male/female subject centered in the core of a universal, trans-historical inner self, the man and woman of fashion provide protean subjects that are always on display.

On another terrain, to retrieve the gender roles held up in the space of possibility between binary distinctions will also allow us to see fashion as a key facilitator among different kinds of identity categories: gender, race, class, nationality, trans-nationality, etc. One of the key moments in contemporary American feminism has been the discovery of

the intersectional theory, which promulgates that gender, class, race, sexuality, and other organizing orders intersect to shape a person's life or a socio-cultural field. This strong hypothesis nonetheless leaves much to desire as to what drives different orders to intersect in particular ways in particular circumstances. A retrieval of fashionable gender suggests that fashion—as a category cutting across rather than parallel to other organizing orders—serves as an important facilitator of these orders' specific interactions in specific situations. The narratives I provide in Chapter 3 of the fashionable lady patroness, the woman of world, and the dining-out man should well illustrate the point; still it can be helpful to take another look at the caricature by the T. Mclean artist. At the back left corner, there is a fashionably dressed but vulgar looking woman. Her fat body and tense facial expression—so different from others' smirks—suggest that she is a "new woman" just getting into Society because of her recent fortune. In this light she is socially disadvantaged: coming from outside the conventional elite classes, she does not know much about Society norms. Nonetheless, she is getting the attention of one of the proudest dandies, which would make her the envy of other girls. In other words, her class disadvantages are compensated—via the fashionable way—by an envious courtship even as this is underwritten by the power of money. While the artist is satirical of both sides—of the woman's fashionable pretensions and of the man's mercenary concern— there is no denial that theirs are interactions happening in the space of fashion and facilitated by it. It is just in fashion-facilitated social interactions—instead of her class or her womanly qualities alone—that the woman finds her way and derives her sense of being in the world. The same can be said of the dandy. Historically, exchange like theirs did take place and did not necessarily assume such a bad shape—literalized in the

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woman's thick waist and the man's upturned nose in the graphic satire—as will be brought to light in the following chapters.

Yet if fashion facilitated interactions that largely shaped a man or a woman's life, it was also fashion that often became the target of satire. The T. Mclean artist was far from alone in turning a satirical eye towards the fashionable way. From William Hogarth to George Cruickshank and Richard Doyle; from Henry Fielding to Thomas Carlyle and Charles Dickens, one can trace a solid tradition of fashion satire, both graphic and verbal. To recover nineteenth-century fashionable society one must look, not just *over* this satirical tradition, but more carefully *into* it and *into* the general problem of fashion representation in print culture and especially in the Victorian novel.

Fashion, Representation and the Victorian Novel

From its inception as an autonomous force, modern fashion bore an inseparable relationship with the technology and the culture of print. While fashion largely depended on the penetrating and pervasive force of the press to spread its word and image, the latter also relied heavily on starring fashion for its own sustenance. As fashion added new forms of representation, such as fashionable intelligence, fashion plates, fashion descriptions, advertisements in its name, etc., it did no less than bringing to print culture the showman function. Simultaneously, there arose graphic and verbal fashion satires, mock fashionable intelligence, mock fashion descriptions, etc. *Punch*, for example, regularly featured all of the above. Here are typical pieces of the last mentioned two columns in this popular journal:

FASHIONS FOR MARCH

It is expected that the flowers worn in the bonnets will be full blown and the shawls will be sometimes carried over the back of the head, so as to come down in a point between the eyes, and occasionally into one of them, and not a few will also be taken a-back.

[…]

FASHIONABLE INTELLIGENCE

Mr. Jones had a friend to dine with him at his lodgings in Amwell-street. Covers were laid for two. In the evening, Put was played until a late hour.[21]

What form of artistic representation is this intelligence in which truth—a real evening social act by a member in *Punch*'s intimate author circle— is presented as a fake one by a fictional character – Mr. Jones being the main figure in the *Punch* series the "Physiology of the London Medical Student" (November 1841)?   What art is the mock description in which ridicule at the absurdity of observed fashion is crafted in the predictive mode so commonly seen in real fashion descriptions? If these forms invite laughter, provide its readers with a sense of discursive control over fashion, and tie readers and authors together in an anti-fashion bond, don't they also do so by conjuring up the face of fashion and selling its appeal? In any case they suggest the extent to which the culture of fashion shaped the fashion of culture. Indeed, modern print culture was inseparable from the deployment of an entire problematic of fashion representation in which fashion satire sat comfortably with fashion-propagating intelligence, plates and/or descriptions even on the same page; in which what began as a mock of fashion frequently metamorphosed into a propagation of fashion; and in which the representation of fashion tested the fashion of representation.

As a major cultural form in the nineteenth century, the Victorian novel crystallized this problematic. On the one hand, Victorian novelists betrayed a tangible fashion consciousness conveyed in at least one of the following ways. First, there is the employment of fashionable society as the main, secondary, or complementary setting.

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[21] *Punch* 2.34 (1842):97.

An obvious example of fashionable society as the main focus can be found in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* while in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* the beau monde headed by Lady Dedlock complements the bourgeois world of domesticity led by Esther Summerson.

Second, there exists the meticulous attention to details of fashion. Illustrating this attention is the treatment of the dinner party in the novel. Few Victorian novels can go without a couple of chapters devoted to party scenes. While these scenes can be used for various purposes—plot development, characterization, and thematic complication—one of its most obvious and direct functions is to serve as a focus of display of current fashions in dress, food, interior design, etiquette, intellectual and spiritual developments, etc. Such a function underlies, for example, Mrs. Proudie's grand party in Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857). Extending over two chapters, this party scene not only makes a good presentation of such characters of fashion as Madeline Stanhope and Bertie Stanhope, whose entrance complicates the plot line and furthers the theme of power struggle in the religious community; it also contains many fashionable details that stand alone: the London street from where Mrs. Proudie sends out her invitation; decoration knowledge for small and large rooms; Mrs. Proudie's proper use of "a huge gas lamp with a dozen burners hanging from each of the ceilings"; every object on the body of the fashionable signora including the color of her lace and the material of her shawl; the food desired by that lady of fashion, and the fashionable tittle-tattle initiated by Bertie about German professors, the Roman Church, etc. (87-109). Having little to do with the novel's larger concerns, these details nonetheless add to a reader's fashionable knowledge and provide them with the opportunity to embrace fashion on the page.

Next to the attention to details of fashion is the creation of various types of fashion-driven characters. The aristocratic lady of fashion—whether she is named Lady Dedlock, Lady Eustace, or other—is only one figure in the remarkable caste of Victorian fashionable characters.[22] Beside her stands the following: provincial community fashion leaders such as Mrs. General, Mrs. Proudie and Madeline Stanhope; middle-class society belles, like Ginevra Fanshawe, Miss Majoribanks, and Rosamond Vincy; fashionable upstarts represented by the Veneerings and the Merdles; men of fashion or dandies including Mr. Turveydrop, Mr. Pendennis, Mr. Cavendish, Bertie Stanhope, and Stephen Guest, among others; and shabby-genteel men of fashion exemplified by Richard Swiveller, Mr. Micawber, Tony Jobling, etc.[23] Despite their many-faceted differences, these characters share a prominent quality: they all live more or less according to the rule of fashion. While it is worthwhile to explore how the creation of such fashion-driven characters is important for the novel's participation in Victorian cultural constructions of class and gender norms, suffice it here to say that their presence permeates Victorian novels with the taste of fashion.

Finally, there is the painting of the "fashionable mind" of various figures that cannot otherwise be taken as characters of fashion.[24] Illustrative of this is Trollope's

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[22] The first character appears in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3) and the second in Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873).

[23] While Mrs. General is a character in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), Mrs. Proudie and Madeline Stanhope are both in Trollope's *Bachester Towers* (1857). Ginevra Fanshawe, Miss Majoribanks, and Rosamond Vincy respectively occur in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Majoribanks* (1866), and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872). The Veneerings appear in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5); the Merdles occur in his *Little Dorrit*. Mr. Turveydrop, Mr. Pendennis, Mr. Cavendish, Bertie Stanhope, and Stephen Guest are respectively present in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3), Thackeray's *The History of Pendennis* (1848-50), Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Richard Swiveller, Mr. Micawber, and Tony Jobling are all Dickens's creation, respectively in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), and *Bleak House*.

[24] The phrase is coined by *The New Yorker*'s fashion reporter Kennedy Fraser. Discussing fashion in the

drawing of Dr. Proudie in *Barchester Towers*.   Proudie is not a usual dandy figure, like

Bertie Stanhope, but Trollope gives him a very "fashionable mind." Here is how he

describes the new bishop coming down to Barchester:

> Dr. Proudie had always felt it necessary to his position to retire from London
> when other great and fashionable people did so; but London should still be his
> fixed residence, and it was in London that he resolved to exercise that hospitality
> so peculiarly recommended to all bishops by St. Paul. How otherwise could he
> keep himself before the world? How else give to the government, in matters
> theological, the full benefit of his weight and talents? [. . .] Dr. Proudie had to
> maintain a position in fashionable society. (29-30)

By quietly going into Proudie's mind, Trollope vividly reveals how fashion marks his

way of thinking. For this highly-positioned man in the church, to cut a figure in the

world of fashion is placed before anything else; mixing in fashionable society becomes

his way both to govern his subjects and to be responsible for the government. This

fashion-dominated way of thinking is of course not Dr. Proudie's alone, but can be found

in many other characters in many other novels; its registration constitutes yet another way

in which the consciousness of fashion is manifest in the Victorian novel.

Yet in spite of the tangible fashion consciousness, Victorian novelists distanced

themselves from fashion via satire, sarcasm, and/or direct criticism, all of which are

present, for instance, in Dickens's portrayal of the fashionable world in *Bleak House*.

While I will elaborate further on this pose of critical detachment in Chapter 4, suffice it

here to say that it *seems* to have done its cultural work over time: twentieth-century

intellectuals *seem* to have directly inherited this critical gesture, belittling the world of

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1980s, Fraser laments its going beyond the limits of lifestyle trends and material pursuits to "seep down
into the realm of those profundities, verities, and values which used to be called moral and spiritual" in the
late twentieth century. Within that context, Fraser proposes the idea of the "fashionable mind" and defines
it as that which sees every aspect of life through the looking-glass of fashion (146). While Fraser does not
track the origin of this mentality, one can certainly see earlier versions of it among Victorian fictional
characters.

fashion as superficial, trivial, and decadent, as their Victorian predecessors *seemingly* did; and they have all too easily expelled the world of fashion, or rather fashionables, from the field of literary criticism. The familiar story is that the Victorian novel, representing a high-stage development of the genre, stems from and contributes to the rise of the bourgeois modern individual.[25] 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 former or the latter, losing the name, the distinctive identity, and the remarkable importance it once had in the Victorian mind.

I have used "seem" all along because the case can be that what occurs as inheritance may just have been the recurrence of similar impulses that have only been confirmed by prior experiences; and that the bifurcation may have taken place exactly because some third Other was already in place even as it was belittled and rendered invisible on the discursive level. To argue for this case, we need to, among other things, go beneath and beyond the satirical façade of the Victorian novel to explore what the satirical/critical modality does to the very novelistic form. I would suggest that we situate the novelistic satire on fashion within the entire problematic of fashion representation and interrogate how this problematic affects both the narrative form and the ideological constructions of the Victorian novel.

The chapters that follow elaborate further on the main concerns I lay out here. In Chapter 1, I sketch the various factors that might have led to the transformation from

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[25] For this view and studies of the novel in general see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*; Georg Lukacs, *Studies in European Realism* and *The Historical Novel*; and Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* and *How Novels Think*.

eighteenth-century *polite society* to nineteenth-century *fashionable society*, summarize the major characteristics distinguishing the latter from the former, and argue for the rise of the beau monde as a socially unifying system of representation in the reform era. Chapter 2 examines fashionable society as a unique public that both resembles and differs from the mob and other crowds; I contend that this new collective entity blurred public and private boundaries by privatizing the former and publicizing the latter even as it served as a condition of possibility for their separation. Chapter 3 views fashionable society via the prism of gender: I first look at the complex gender politics underneath the gender-free façade of fashionable society and then examine the series of roles that fleshed out fashionable femininity and masculinity in the nineteenth century; my overall argument is that fashion functioned as a key facilitator in the space of possibility between such binary distinctions as the public and the private, the aristocratic and the bourgeois, and the inner and the outer. The final chapter provides a case study of the problematic of fashion representation by reading Charles Dickens's novel *Bleak House* in light of Victorian fashion culture.

Roughly speaking, the time span under discussion is from 1821—when George IV was crowned—to 1861, the year of Prince Albert's death.[26] Although the period saw three coronations, three important bills (Catholic Emancipation, the Reform Act, the repeal of the Corn Law), and several Parliamentary changes, fashionable society developed without interruption. Having emerged as a distinctive and dynamic entity incorporating bourgeois and aristocratic values in the reform era, it kept growing as such, reached its zenith in the Great Exhibition of 1851, and did not change *remarkably* until

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[26] My decision on the particular years is influenced by Jennifer Lee Hall who uses the same for her dissertation on opera-going and sociability in Britain; my reasons for the choice are nonetheless different from hers (15-16).

after 1861 when Queen Victoria withdrew from Society for the mourning of her husband.

About the relative stability of fashionable society for the period covered, Mrs. Gore, for

one, has left us evidence:

> You see the same people waltzing, fiddling, and serving the refreshments, and
> hear the same phrases exchanged among them, at every fête given at the west end
> of the town between May and August. May and August?—Rather say from A.D.
> 1835 to A.D. 1850. (*Sketches of English Character* 1.4)

Of course one does not see the same people in a decade and half as one does in a season;

nonetheless, Gore's sudden jump to a longer durée vividly conveys the rough stableness

of fashionable society in the early half of the nineteenth century—even as it was, by

definition, a mobile world.

It is mainly for this relative stability that I choose not to trace the nuanced

changes in fashionable society for the period surveyed and instead to focus on the

qualities that make it feel the same over time to Gore and others—until about the 1860s.

After that, bourgeois influence became more decisive in it. Yet it was not until after the

1880s that fashionable society was fundamentally transformed and began to look like

what contemporaries termed "Smart Society."[27] The following remark made by Nevill

and Jerningham in 1908 is illustrative of late Victorians' recognition of and feeling

towards the shift Society underwent over the turn of the century:

> Smart Society, as it exists at present, is not in any sense representative of the
> country as a whole. [. . .] Society, in the old sense of the word, has ceased to exist.
> [. . .] [Meanwhile] societies (that is, small coteries of individuals who are
> constantly meeting for amusement and pleasure) flourishes as they never
> flourished before. In former days there were [. . .] social leaders [. . .] who really
> did excise considerable social sway. [. . .] [Now] the so-called leaders of Society

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[27] It is suggestive that various historians have pinpointed the 1880s as the time when English society
witnessed fundamental changes. Harold Perkin, for example, uses 1880 as the starting date for a new era
characterized by what he terms the "professional ideal" (*The Rise of Professional Society* 1-26). Likewise,
David Cannadine takes the 1880s as the beginning of the "dilution of select society (341-387).

[. . .] lead no one at all, being as a rule, either wealthy aliens or ladies who hail from across the Atlantic, where their husbands' dollars are made. (10-11)

If Society was dead, or rather falling into numerous "smart" sets, for people like Nevill and Jerningham at the dawn of the twentieth century, its rule of fashion was nonetheless kept alive in all of the small pieces. When these "smart sets" finally broke up, and when the world of fashion dwindled into the fashion world—a synonym for the business of haute couture—the rule of fashion did not shrink but became a fundamental mechanism of modern western society. Only now its workings remain implicit, implicit not because it is not substantial as before the eighteenth century but because it is so pervasive that, like air, it is no longer seen. In this sense, a study of nineteenth-century fashionable society can be a means to revelation—should we desire that.

Figure 1 A-La-Mode At Home

Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

<http://130.132.81.116/WALPOLEIMG/size4/D0752/lwlpr13252.jpg>

Chapter 1

The Rise of Fashionable Society

Indeed the old-fashioned *politeness* of what was formerly called a well-bred gentleman pleased him better than the indolent, or insolent, selfishness of modern men of *ton*. (Emphasis mine)

—Maria Edgeworth, *Absentee*, 3.118

The elegant and unaffected politeness of the *ladies* and *gentlemen* of England is, or was—I must sometimes confound the past and the present—as superior to the wretched mannerism of the highest society in France and Italy.

—"On Manners, Fashion, and Things in General," 98

Maria Edgeworth and the anonymous *Fraser's Magazine* author were just two among many who registered this change: the dawn of the nineteenth century saw the loss of currency of "politeness" as the master metaphor for what supposedly captured or governed the conduct and the interpersonal relationship of ladies and gentleman in the eighteenth century. Despite the unsettled meanings it might connote over time and across social groups,[28] "politeness" was a key concept for people who sought a social reputation or who claimed to understand the mysteries of modern genteel living from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth century (Carter 22).[29] This, however, was no longer the case by the early nineteenth century. Instead of "politeness," "ton," i.e. fashion,

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[28] The French conduct writer De Bellegarde, for example, listed the following as the maxims for polite society: "politeness of manners," "modesty of sentiment," "discretion and prudence," "moderation and disinterestedness," "complaisance," "liberal and courteous behavior," and "sincerity."

[29] For the emergence of politeness and polite sociability in the eighteenth century, see also Brewer, Klein, Langford, Pocock, and Trentmann.

became the rule. Meanwhile, the beau monde which had been merely a part of the polite

world began to stand, not just on itself, but for the whole field. By the 1820s and 30s,

politeness had so definitely given the ground over to fashion that those seeking a social

reputation started to talk about entering *fashionable* rather *polite* society. Illustrating this

point is an 1820 *Times* advertisement:

> A FRENCH FAMILY of distinction [. . .] would be happy to increase their domestic
> circle, RECEIVING a LADY or TWO SISTERS, who would return the regard and
> attention, with which they would be treated, and who would be entitled to an
> introduction into fashionable society. [30]

What strikes here is the French Family's use of "an introduction into fashionable society"

as an allurement to and reward for worthy female companions. In this case, fashionable

society is not only a cultural norm shaping individual desires but also an actual social

entity with particular contours, which the advertising agents assume that their audience

knows. Indeed, fashionable society as a significant social norm and traceable reality had

emerged by the 1820s; from then on, it continued to gain strength and authority to such

an unprecedented degree that it could be regarded as a new cultural field.

What led to this transformation from eighteenth-century polite society to

nineteenth-century fashionable society? How did fashionable society look in the early

decades of the nineteenth century? What social significance did it have? These are

questions largely ignored in the studies of nineteenth-century British culture.   By

addressing them, this chapter aims to retrieve fashionable society as a new cultural realm

fusing aristocratic and bourgeois interests in a socially unifying system of representation.

As such, fashionable society, I would argue, was neither completely an ideological ruse

of the old nobility, taken as its last attempt to affirm the rule of aristocracy; nor was it

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[30] *The Times* 1 July 1820: A1.

completely a democratizing force exerted by the rising bourgeoisie. Instead, it integrated both in the name and for the sake of fashion but actually in tandem with the anonymous forces present in particular circumstances. In this way it played an important role in the peaceful redistribution of power in the mobile reform era.

From Politeness to Fashion

The transformation into fashionable society actually began in the later decades of the eighteenth century with the modern system of fashion triumphing more definitely over the old sartorial-symbolic mechanism that I have discussed in the introduction. As Neil Mckendrick puts it, the late eighteenth century saw the "first full efflorescence of the new fashion and consumer patterns."[31] However, as Mckendrick explores the rise of modern fashion mainly to account for the late eighteenth-century consumer revolution, he does not highlight how it was transforming the polite social sphere itself. Yet "an apparently limitless desire for new sensations," wrote Paul Langford, marked polite society in the 1770s (575). The fashionable quality of upper-class gaming, the air of exclusiveness and extravagance presented by social events, and the excess in dress and behavior demonstrated by the macaronis all suggest that modern fashion was shaping the polite world in significant ways. But fashion's influence on Society was not that decisive at this time, and so the realm was still taken to be polite rather than fashionable; and various social practices that resembled those in early nineteenth-century world of fashion were taken as "polite vices" rather than fashionable ones (Langford 574).

The ascendancy of fashion over politeness, however, greatly sped up during the years of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. First, the rise of the Romantic

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[31] Mckendrick et al. 41.

Movement around this time enhanced the development of modern system of fashion; as Colin Campbell forcefully argues, the movement's restless spirit, its indulgence in dreams and fantasies, provided ethical support for modern fashion (173-201). Second, these decades saw not only a fashion-pursuing Court headed by the Prince Regent but also the rise of dandyism practiced by a group of men who had little claim to aristocratic lineage and yet made Society their major stage, conducting a life of play and display on it.[32] These two socio-cultural phenomena greatly solidified the rule of fashion in social life.

Meanwhile, the existence of contradictory cultural ideals called for the singling out of fashion as a socially unifying system of representation. On the one hand, the Revolutionary ideals of liberty and democracy were retained in such radicalism and activism as practiced by William Godwin and William Cobbett. On the other, fear about the contagion of violent social change also initiated a re-affirmation of the aristocratic ideal and a justification of aristocratic power—as done by Edmund Burke. Few systems could better unify these contradictory ideals than modern fashion. That was so because as a dialectical socio-cultural form, modern fashion was a constellation of antithetical elements, as I have elaborated in the introduction. "Tied to no rule" and having "no other foundation or authority than that it is the prevailing distinction of the moment," fashion—with its built-in mechanism for novelty—was potentially democratic and egalitarian.[33] In this sense, fashion appealed to those beyond the old nobility. However, fashion's elevation of taste, refinement and elegance—qualities traditionally associated with and

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[32] For major scholarship on the dandy and dandyism, see Moers, *The Dandy;* Campbell 138-160 (Chapter 7: "The Ethic of Feeling"); and Lane, "The Drama of the Imposter: Dandyism and its Double."

[33] Hazlitt 149, 150.

affordable to the aristocracy—also rendered it an easy tool for the affirmation and justification of the aristocratic ideal. These factors combined to make fashion's rule in the social sphere and contributed to the rise of fashionable society in the twenties and thirties.

That fashionable society fully emerged during these decades also had to do with the particular social milieu of the reform era. As the Industrial Revolution reached its full momentum in this period, the question of how to distribute surplus wealth became increasingly acute. Meanwhile, a series of legal and political events such as the passage of the Corn Law (1815), the Peterloo Massacre (1819) and the Queen's Trial (1820) also enhanced antagonism among different orders of society and led to what Harold Perkin has termed the "Great Reform Crisis."[34] Such economic and social issues demanded not only political solutions but also socio-cultural ones. The rise of fashionable society can be regarded as one of the socio-cultural responses toward these issues.

Last but not least, the rise of fashionable society was closely related to the popularization of the idea of fashion via mass printing. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, and especially between 1830 and 1860, print culture underwent great transformations. According to British historian Patricia Anderson, "new advances in printing technology, reductions in the newspaper tax and paper duty, and widening demand for reading matter" made possible not only "the low-cost, high-speed dissemination of the printed word" but also the "profitable, mass reproduction of diverse imagery" (1-2). For Anderson, the pictorial character became "the hallmark of a transformed and expanded popular culture," and "the printed image more than the word

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[34] Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society,* 216.

represented a cultural break with the past, for it demanded neither formal education nor even basic literacy" (2-3). The "pictorial character" that Anderson identifies in popular print was actually a defining quality of early nineteenth-century print culture in general; and in many cases this pictorial preoccupation came out via the column of fashion. The column usually included a fashion plate, a description of the plate, and a statement of the general movements of the fashionable world. As a system combining visual and linguistic representations, the column was not only a key feature of fashion magazines like the *World of Fashion and the Continental Feuilletons* (1824-51) and the *Ladies Gazette of Fashion* (1834-94). It also became an indispensable element and a selling point for most women's magazines ranging from the high-culture *La Belle Assemblẻe* (1806-1832) to the middling *English Women's Domestic Magazine* (1852-1877) and to the low-order *Maids', Wives' and Widows' Penny Magazine and Gazette of Fashion* (1832-33, later called the *New Monthly Belle Assemblẻe*, 1834-70).

At the same time, another column—fashionable intelligence—was seen in newspapers and other popular periodicals, such as the *Morning Post*. As a brief report of the activities of the fashionable world, this column was in close dialogue with visual representations of the same, such as the copperplate prints of the "Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty" mentioned in Charles' Dickens's *Bleak House* (ch.20; 340). Although fashionable intelligence and the column of fashion did not occur in more conservative papers such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, these periodicals nonetheless published sociological and philosophical essays on fashion and the fashionable world. There were also keepsakes and annuals that perpetuated the idea of fashion. Fiction was another source in which the concept of fashion prevailed and got fleshed out; both the

silver-fork school and the domestic novel employed and engendered the language of fashion in complex ways. Frequent and extensive representations of fashion raised it to a socially visible level, strengthened its discursive force, and thus contributed to the emergence of fashionable society.

Fashionable Society in the Reform Era

Emerging out of the eighteenth-century polite world, fashionable society was fundamentally different. Six major characteristics defined and distinguished it from "polite society."

Fashionable Society as a Transnational Entity

A major characteristic of fashionable society in the reform era was its strengthened transnational nature. While polite society was mainly located in the city of London with its scope largely falling within the boundaries of the nation (Carter 1-2), fashionable society was based on various urban and country sites in different nation-states even if London was still one of its major locales. There was a continuum between English Society and Continental Society, and the mingling of fashionables from both sides of the Channel was a common occurrence. In the eighteenth century, the sons of nobility and gentry who went on the Grand Tour also mixed with Continental Society, but this mixture presupposed a return to nationally defined gentlemanliness. With fashionables, the Grand Tour became a domestic journey within an internationally extended fashionable society. For Lady Dedlock in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3), for example, Paris, London and Chesney Wold are only different stops on her continuous fashionable trip.

Of course, the number of people who could actually do as Lady Dedlock was still small. The Yorkshire gentlewoman Ann Lister, for instance, found it both expensive and difficult to sustain life in the fashionable world of Paris; when she traveled to the city in the 1820s, she was "fully aware of her unpreparedness for the *haut ton* lifestyle" and had to stay in a small pension house which was "hardly a passport to the highest circles of fashionable French society."[35] Nonetheless, as the century went on, increasing number of people mixed in the transnational sphere of fashionable society; and the sphere itself was constantly expanding. After the mid century, more and more fashionable people wandered off the usual route of London-Paris-Rome into Lisbon, the Rhine, St. Petersburg, and even to Jerusalem, New York, and Niagara Falls. Parallel to the outgoing movements was of course the incoming of people from various corners of the globe, visiting and looking up to London as a world capital and England as a major station in the empire of fashion.

Traveling together with people were styles, manners and values. The anonymous *Fraser's* author quoted at the beginning of the chapter was not alone in complaining of French and Italian influence on English etiquette. Yet despite much anxious teaching like his, Frenchification became an important aspect of English fashion; at about the same time, all that was associated with the English dandy was imitated in France. While a German Prince (Pükler-Muskau) would run to shine in London Society, English fashionables would go to bathe in German spas. Fashion simply doted on and survived well in transnational exchange.

Print culture added another dimension to the transnational nature of fashionable society. Newspapers like the *Morning Post* and weeklies such as the *Court Journal*

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[35] Whitbread, "A Parisian Prelude," 10.

recorded fashionable arrivals and departures across countries just as if there had been no national boundaries at all. The flow of fashionable goods, manners and styles across states were also presented as smoothly as if there had been no customhouses. So long as fashion liked it, Indian muslin, China crape and *gros de Naples* were equally accessible in the global land of fashion. Furthermore, via printed fashion plates and statements, a country girl from the west coast of Scotland—like Susan Ferrier's Isabella in *The Inheritance* (1824)—could be brought face to face with fashionable belles parading the Champs Elysees just as if they were her very housemates. For those who could not afford to travel internationally, printed fashion provided an effective way of participating in the global society of fashion not just vicariously but materially. When Ferrier comments that Isabella, "from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, might have stood for the frontispiece of *La Belle Assemblée*," she does more than satirize the girl's vanity in pursuing fashion (610). She also points out, albeit unintentionally, how, via the medium of print, Scottish country girls, like Isabella, embody, transform and ultimately expand the scope of fashionable society: after all, a girl from a remote place can stand very well for a prestigious magazine that promotes cosmopolitan fashion.

Incivility

Whether having to do with transnational influence or not, a characteristic quite different from polite sociability started to manifest in English fashionable society: incivility. Contemporary documents repeatedly pointed out how, instead of displaying "generosity and accommodation to one's companions"—important aspects of eighteenth-century politeness—cutting and quizzing characterized social contact in fashionable society (Carter 21).

Cutting meant pretending not to know one's acquaintance and was a widely accepted practice, even though there were delicate lines to follow as to who could cut whom, when and where. For example, unmarried women should never cut married ones; servants should not cut their masters. Women could cut men while men should never cut women, as is suggested in the following etiquette teaching:

> If you meet a lady of your acquaintance in the street, it is *her part* to notice *you first*, unless, indeed, you are very intimate. The reason is, if *you* bow to a lady first, she may not choose to acknowledge you, and there is no remedy; but if *she* bow to *you*, you, *as a gentleman, cannot cut her.*[36]

While this norm gave women some freedom to shape their own social circles and the general tone of society, it was very hard to tell how many women could actually use this freedom and to what extent—given the pressure to marry or marry one's daughters well. Nineteenth-century people left behind little evidence of how women cut men; instead there were considerable caricatures of women as men-trappers and manipulators on the marriage market. Bulwer-Lytton's 1829 poem "English Manners" serves as a good example:

> I wish we could conjecture why
>   Maids are so bold and men so shy
> In slender note and pasteboard square,
>   Why spinster smiles like boards appear,
> That warn us off with "men-traps here!"
> [. . .]
> This boon and bolus of a wife,
>   Is England's most peculiar evil,
> Where loss of happiness for life
>   Rewards the man who dares be civil! (329)

Far from cutting men, women under Bulwer-Lytton's pen are "bold" adventurers who use their bodily and sexual charm to trap men into the life-long misery of marriage that is often based on monetary terms. More tellingly, Bulwer-Lytton views women's

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[36] "Codes of Manners and Etiquette," 418.

manipulation as a major cause for men's incivility: men have to be uncivil in order not to be caught. Despite his unfair treatment of women and exaggeratedly satirical tone, Bulwer-Lytton captures the highly charged relationship between men and women in fashionable society; its uncivil character is a far cry from "sociability between the sexes"— a crucial sign of men's refinement in polite society (Moron 77).

Along with cutting, there was quizzing which meant treating with scorn, applicable to both things and persons—such as in "ogling or quizzing everything they meet,"[37] and "guests quizzing their host and hostess, and quizzed and hated by them in turn."[38] "Quiz" could also mean a ridiculous or unfashionable person. Writing in the 1840s about social life a decade earlier, Charlotte Brontë made Jane Eyre observe: "Young ladies have a remarkable way of letting you know that they think you are a 'quiz,' without actually saying the words." [39]

With the prevalence of cutting and quizzing, civility lost its valence and could even connote impropriety in this period. For Bulwer-Lytton, civility was one of the "three most glaring improprieties" or "sins" in society, the other two being poverty and eccentricity: "Civility is 'making free,'/And Ease 'a monstrous liberty.'"[40] Despite the author's sarcastic and exaggerated tone, these lines suggest people's awareness of incivility as a norm in fashionable society.

Why this norm? Part of the reason could be found in the fact that new wealth from the Industrial Revolution enabled a widening circle of people to enter social

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[37] Egan 21.

[38] "English Fashionable Life," 234.

[39] *Jane Eyre* 229; Vol. 2, ch.6.

[40] Bulwer-Lytton, "English Manners, or Satiric Sketches," Verses 5 & 6: 330-331.

stratums higher than their original ones; the need to maintain social distinctions then became augmented. Meanwhile, the town and country difference brought about by urbanization might be another relevant factor. As a reflection of this difference, there occurred the practice of cutting country cousins. Whether having to do with the weakening of kinship norms rooted in landed society, or the ascendancy of bourgeois individualism, or both, the practice was widely accepted in fashionable society. Yet another reason for the rise of incivility can be found in urban expansion and the increasing crowdedness in the city. In a wild land of strangers, competitors and hidden criminals, it was simply impractical to observe such polite rules as "generosity and accommodation to one's companions" (Carter 21).

In this context, incivility became a multi-edged tool that could be wielded by different people for different purposes. First of all, it served as a means for the aristocracy to affirm their class distinction. A contributor to the *New Monthly Magazine* claimed that the "union of insolence with economy" was the latest measure the "legitimate leaders of fashion" took to heighten their superiority.[41] For this author, the "legitimate leaders" were aristocrats; and their insolence could maintain their "natural preeminence."[42] However, incivility could also be used by those outside the aristocracy to affirm their superiority to it and cut a figure in fashionable society. Writing in 1829, William Hazlitt related a story of Beau Brummell:

> Sitting one day at table between two other persons, Mr. Brummell said to his servant, who stood behind his chair—'John!' 'Yes, sir.' 'Who is this at my right hand?' 'If you please, sir, it's the Marquis of Headfort.' 'And who is this at my left hand? 'It's my Lord Yarmouth.' 'Oh, very well!' and the Beau then proceeded to address

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[41] "Revolution in Fashion," 363. This author uses the example of a highly fashionable ball's asking only for a seven-shilling subscription to illustrate the "economy" part of his argument.

[42] Ibid.

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himself to the persons who were thus announced to him. Now, this is surely superb, and 'high fantastical.' (160)

Sticking to what he thought was the ideal behavior for a man of fashion—for example, a perfectly straight posture that did not derange one's cravat —Brummell asserted his superiority by being uncivil and even rude towards his social acquaintances—titled aristocrats in this case. Yet ironically, by this very insolent assumption of superiority, he actually made it. Hazlitt's satirical comment on the "superb" and "fantastical" quality of such performance is also a half-hearted expression of admiration at the dandy's version of romantic individualism, and at "the art of making something out of nothing" (161). This admiration is shown again in his discussion of Theodore Hook, a prominent man of fashion and letters of his time. Although Hazlitt regards Hook's attending an aristocratic lady's party without invitation as mere impudence, he acknowledges the "piquant" quality involved in such an act. Furthermore, incivility could also allow a person of fashion to manipulate financial credit by assuming superiority to the commercial classes. Hook again serves as a good example of this. According to Hazlitt, Hook once said to a city business man who asked him to dine: "Yes, if you do not mention it to anyone"; in another situation, Hook indicated to the same person: "Do you count my having borrowed a thousand pounds of you for nothing?" (161). Insolence enabled Hook to perform his social distinction and thus gain credit.

Incivility, then, was a complex gesture engendering complicated social effects. If it defied traditional social hierarchies and conventional proprieties, it also simultaneously re-inscribed the necessity for social differentiation and mannerism. This inherent ambiguity might just have formed its attraction in an age when social mobility was both an object of ambition and a source of anxiety; when bourgeois individualism clashed with

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aristocratic paternalism; and when the new credit system was shaping the old structure of capitalism.

Open Exclusivity

In addition to its norm of incivility, fashionable society in the reform decades was also characterized by what I would call an "open exclusivity" in contrast to the limited inclusiveness of polite society. In the words of Philip Carter, "a principle function of politeness" was to ensure the inclusiveness of a Habermasian public, even though in reality only a small proportion of the population could enter polite society (37). Different from that, the fashionable world was supposed to be exclusive, its other names being "exclusive society" and "select society." An important way in which fashionable society channeled its exclusivity was what Captain Gronow called "cliquism" (1.131). Cliquism not only suggested that certain persons who had attained an eminent position in a certain line formed an exclusive circle around themselves and their followers. It also meant that persons in the clique could assume the power of evaluating those on the outside and in society at large. Fashionable society's exclusivity, together with its cliquism, can best be seen in the case of Almack's.

Originally a club in King Street, St. James Square, Almack's became "the seventh heaven of the fashionable world" after a clique of lady patronesses started a set of subscription dances there at the beginning of the century (Gronow 1.131). This coterie of patronesses —including Lady Castlereagh, Lady Jersey, and Lady Cowper, among others —applied extremely strict criteria for admission. According to one saying, "three-fourths

even of the nobility knock in vain for admission." [43] Another anecdote goes that even the

Duke of Wellington was turned away for being improperly dressed, or for being five

minutes late. No matter whether they were accurate reflections of reality, these sayings

suggest Almack's exclusivity.

However, Almack's exclusivity—or fashionable society's— was paradoxically an

"open exclusivity." Although the patronesses were sure of what disqualified a person for

admission—say, being later than 11 p.m. and wearing black trousers—they were not at

all settled on what qualified a person for a ticket. Rank, fortune, and birth did not

necessarily qualify one. As Captain Gronow related, "very often persons whose rank and

fortunes entitled them to the *entrée* anywhere were excluded by the cliquism of the lady

patronesses, for the female government of Almack's was a pure despotism and subject to

all the caprices of despotic rule." [44] The designation of despotism (or female oligarchy, or

tyranny) betrayed male shock at female power instead of shedding light on what formed

the rule. In fact, Almack's rule was the rule of fashion: despotic, capricious, tyrannical

but also volatile and indefinite. It was just such volatility and indefiniteness that rendered

it open to people beyond those who claimed the traditional entitlements of rank, fortune,

and birth. A *New Monthly Magazine* author unhappily recognized this:

> Do any of the Lady Patronesses assembled at Willis's [Willis was the proprietor
> of Almack's] ever inquire […] if Mr. So-and so is a man of talent or good
> principles? "He is a handsome and gentlemanlike person," is a recommendation
> that procures him his ticket without a murmur. Even the old-fashioned notions
> about "family" are worn away. [45]

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[43] "Almack's on Friday," 292.

[44] Quoted in Chancellor 210.

[45] "Society," 441.

This author might be exaggerating when he suggests that mere appearance can secure a young man a ticket, but he does point to the loss of validity of such conventional entitlements as "family" with the lady patronesses. As the qualities that make one "handsome" and "gentlemanlike" are not just superficial but subjective and indefinite, this author also ironically testifies to the openness of Almack's exclusivity which he criticizes. Indeed, rather than consisting exclusively of aristocrats, Almack's was mixed in its composition. A contributor to *Littell's Living Age* provided proof of this in 1827:

> Neither his Majesty nor his Lordship […] have any voice in the government of this privileged spot, hallowed from the intrusion of temporal and spiritual power, except in the person of an exquisite parson, or a city officer, subsidized—for what, we pray ye? — to keep the peace among rival dowagers, rival widows, rival wives, rival maids, and rival chasseurs, hussars, horse grenadiers, and ferocious dandies.[46]

While the author's sarcastic naming of the people who obtain entrance should be taken with a pinch of salt, his listing tells on Almack's mixed composition. Pückler-Muskaw confirmed this by writing in an 1827 letter that "Money and bad company (in the aristocratical sense of the word) have, however, forced their way" (142).

As with Almack's, the rule of "open exclusivity" also functioned in fashionable society's major social practices such as the rout (a large evening party), the dejeuner, and the grand dinner party. As these usually took place in the private spaces of dining rooms and drawing rooms— unlike polite society's chief venues —coffeehouses, pleasure guards, public walks, etc.— they presupposed an air of intimacy, closeness and exclusivity. However, these were indeed large public gatherings whose participants did not necessarily know each other, or even the host and hostess. The rout's collapsing of public and private boundaries, for instance, is expressed vividly by a *Tait's* author's

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[46] "English Fashionable Life," 225.

comparing the caricatured hostess Mrs. Ogle's house to a public institution—the

"Covent-garden Theatre at a royal bespeak."[47] To further ridicule the party's blurring

public and private boundaries, the *Tait's* author goes on to parody how it is usually

reported in fashionable newspaper:

> On Thursday next the Hon. Mrs. Ogle will entertain a large party of the first rank
> and distinction at her house in Sackville-street; *all* the beauty and fashion of the
> metropolis are invited."[48]

Except for the hostess's caricature name and the italicization of the word "*all*," the

author's parody reads exactly like an actual piece of fashionable intelligence.

Nonetheless, by these alterations, the author does not just suggest the indecency and

impropriety such a large social gathering might breed; he also criticizes the absurd

exaggeration contained in this kind of news. What the author does not see, however, is

that such news, no matter how exaggerated, catches well the open exclusive character of

fashionable practices. It advertises the exclusivity of the party by making clear that only

people of the "first rank and distinction" can come. Yet it simultaneously works to attract

a large crowd for the rout first by the use of the inclusive "all" and then by the

deployment of such indefinite categorizing terms as "beauty" and "fashion." No wonder,

then, a private drawing room often metamorphosed into a public theatre.

The Politics of Vision

Side by side with its "open exclusivity" sits another major characteristic of

fashionable society, namely that much of its exclusivity was based on a visual politics. In

order to be within the exclusive circles of fashionable society, "one must be seen

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[47] "The Philosophy of Fashion," 241-242.

[48] Ibid 241.

everywhere, and known to every body," i.e. to acquire "an admiring public," which was not sure of its expectations and requirements.[49] This is the visual politics of fashionable society: to be exclusive one must be seen—not really "everywhere" but at all fashionable sites. The indispensability of being seen can be illustrated by a look at three of fashionable society's major venues—the Italian Opera House, the clubhouse, and public promenades in Hyde Park—as well as at the spirit of display hovering around major fashionable social gatherings.

While the playhouse had been favored by the polite world and identified "as a popular social space and as a site for occasionally tasteful and instructive cultural activity," the Italian Opera House was more favored by the world of fashion in the early nineteenth century (Carter 38). Located in the exclusive district of St. James and set in operation in 1790, the Italian Opera House was not only a place for the fashionable entertainments of Italian opera and French ballet; it was also a highly complex site for visual pleasure, sexual exchange, and social ostentation.[50] For fashionables, its boxes provided an important venue to flaunt their fashion and exclusivity. Partitioned and curtained into enclosed spaces with heavy decorations, these boxes conveyed their owners' or renters' prestigious social status, fashionable position and distinction from others. Sitting in these boxes, one could have the privilege of being gazed at from elsewhere in the house, in addition to good views of the stage and other parts of the

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[49] From an 1823 contributor to the *New Monthly Magazine*. In the article entitled "Select Society," this author cynically relates what he thinks are the indefinite rules that govern society. If in the past a man could be sure to "figure among men" if he had physical strength and sexual boldness, he is no longer certain now. Nonetheless he lists the following as prevailing in "Select Society": the necessity of being seen "everywhere," having an air of fashion, being selective, ostentatious gatherings without real hospitality, and the use of society as a marriage mart (91-96).

[50] For an illuminating and detailed study of the Italian Opera House, see Rendell 104-125.

auditorium. This double visual advantage was just what fashionables favored most. C.

M. Westmacott illustrated this well in *The English Spy* published between 1825 and 1826:

> The Earl of F—has a grand box on the ground tier, for the double purpose of admiring the *chaste evolutions* of the sylphic daughters of Terpsichore, and of being observed himself by all the followers of the chameleon-like, capricious goddess, Fashion. (227)

That the upper-class fashion leader chose the exclusive box both to admire the dancing

female body better and to be observed by fashion followers betrayed how much his

exclusivity required the gaze of others. Without this observation, his exclusivity lost its

meaning. His was a vision-based exclusivity.

This vision-based exclusivity was also seen in fashionable society's use of the

clubhouse. With more clubhouses being built, the early nineteenth century saw an

expansion of club life and a general loosening of control over entry.[51] But "a tightening

of control over entry" took place in the most fashionable clubs (Rendell 74). At White's,

for example, certain members even "refused to give out new memberships in order to

emphasize the principle of exclusiveness which was being undermined by the emergence

of new clubs" (Rendell 74). However, the newly-introduced bow windows in such

exclusive clubs allowed occupants to display their exclusivity, and by display, to enhance

it. The image of Beau Brummell at the famous "Bow Window at White's" epitomized

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[51] Talking about Brooks's, a contributor to the *New Monthly Magazine* claimed in 1827: "Twenty years ago, the Club was select, and by no means numerous: a citizen or merchant could seldom or never obtain admission; and wealth alone, without high blood or transcendent talent, was generally excluded." However, "the present members of the Club are not so rigid as to the character, quality, and fortune of candidates, as their fathers were"; "the number of members has been extended to fifteen hundred"; and "wealth, or a seat in the Opposition, has been a pretty certain passport for admission" ("The Clubs of St. James," 129). Men with slender purses also had their 'Clubs' consisting of five or six thousand members, as Theodore Hook pointed out in his 1824 *Sayings and Doings* (quoted in a review). In Hook's view, "innumerable societies [clubs] where cheap chops, and brandy and water, may be had *by subscription*" in the 1820s; [and they] "have robbed the metropolitan coffee-rooms of their visitors," turning them into "vulgar places" (389).

this vision-based exclusivity. Being seen by the public in the street became a fundamental means of affirming the existence and validity of one's exclusiveness.

Vision-based exclusivity also found its way into Hyde Park promenades. Public promenades had their origins in the public walks of the eighteenth century. According to Philip Carter, public walks located at the Inns of Court and Moorfields or in St. James and Hyde Park were eighteenth-century Londoners' major sites for outdoor sociability. "As discreet locations removed from the bustle of the street, such venues were associated with higher standards of social behavior" (Carter 38). But by the early nineteenth century, nearly all the public walks except those in Hyde Park were abandoned by the fashionable world. Walking, carriage driving, or horse riding in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoons from approximately three o'clock till six became fashionable practices, and they served other purposes than polite sociability. Westmacott made a good summary of these purposes in *The English Spy*:

> In cockney land, the seventh day
> Is famous for a grand display
> Of modes, of finery, and dress,
> Of cit, west-ender, and *noblesse*,
> Who in Hyde Park crowd like a fair
> To stare, and lounge, and take the air,
> Or ride or drive, or walk, and chat
> On fashions, scandal, and all that. (188-9)

For Westmacott, movements in Hyde Park serve the purposes of "grand display" and pleasure seeking. While these purposes were already part of polite sociability on public walks, they remained implicit then and were subsumed under the alleged objective of the presentation of refinement. By the early nineteenth century, they were openly indulged in the name and for the sake of fashion. Meanwhile, fashionable socializing started to be marked by "trivial" conversations about fashions and scandal, and uncivil acts of staring.

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Since various kinds of people—"cit, west-ender, and *noblesse*"—mixed in the public space of the park, promenades were open institutions. Anyone who could afford a fashionable appearance was free to join this world of fashion and display. However, lines of exclusion were drawn. There were actual rails dividing the plebian walks from the aristocratic Ring which in turn was separated from the exclusive "royal road." However, not only could the aristocratic Ring be used by non-aristocrats who had managed to get carriages and enough fashionability; physical marks of exclusion were also undermined by visual transgression. The bold, free "stare" of the promenading plebian knew no rails, and the patrician equestrian could also easily and safely direct his or her voyeuristic look down at the plebian. If plebeians needed the presence of patricians to affirm their being close to or within the exclusive circle (literally the aristocratic Ring), patricians also depended on the presence of the former for the validity of their exclusivity. Visual politics was important to both.

Apart from these three venues, visual politics also found expression in the spirit of display surrounding fashionable society's major forms of social gathering. A dinner party, complained a *New Monthly* author in 1821, was no longer held for the "enjoyment of our friends' society" but the display of the host's "superior magnificence." [52] "Superior magnificence" was of course demonstrated by the grandeur of the mansion, the splendor of the interior, the quantity, quality and variety of food, etc; but the excessively large number of invited guests was part of the picture as well. A dejeuner or fashionable breakfast, for example, was held on an unusually grand scale. Lady Lyttelton, an eminent figure in the upper circles, recorded in a letter how she once wrote down six hundred

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[52] "English Pride," 139.

people for a Breakfast, and yet had not started on men yet (20). A gathering of so many people could be nothing but a spectacle, and the spectacular crowd played an important role in the circulation of "fashionable currency."[53] While it confirmed the hostess's fashionable status, being seen at her house added to the guests', which increased their qualifications for being invited elsewhere. "Fashionable currency" circulated via the work of vision.

The Logic of Space

The visual politics of fashion had yet another crucial aspect: one should avoid being seen in improper places at improper times. After all, one could lose one's "fashionable currency" if one did not follow the intricately-drawn map of fashionable society and was not familiar with its logic of space.

This logic involved, first of all, that one should live, or rather be *shown* to live — since so much depended on card exchange— not just on the fashionable west end of London, but in a proper neighborhood in it. By the 1840s, the west end was already minutely divided into the "exclusive," the "ultra-fashionable," the "fashionable," the "quasi-fashionable," the "mixed," the "East Indian," the "high genteel," the "low genteel," the "equivocal," and the "decidedly low" neighborhoods.[54] According to an 1841 *Blackwood* author, the "exclusive" referred to the area around Hyde Park and Green Park, including Piccadilly, Arlington Street, Park Lane, and, in a lesser degree, Grosvenor Square.[55] One's fashionable currency would be immeasurable if one could manage to

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[53] This term is frequently used in fashionable novels by Mrs. Gore, Theodore Hook and others.

[54] "The World of London, Second Series, Part III," 69.

[55] Ibid 68-71. My following discussion of west-end divisions is based on the same source.

stay, or seen to stay, in this district. Next to the "exclusive" came the "ultra-fashionable"

neighborhoods represented by Portman, Cavendish, and Belgrave Squares. They were

followed by a profusion of merely "fashionable" streets—such as George's Street,

Hanover Square—which looked very well on one's own or a friend's card. Further down

the scale lay the Portland Place, where the colonial returnees and other wealthy people

gathered and where it was respectable, if not definitely fashionable, for one to be seen.

Meanwhile, one should avoid "quasi-fashionable" sections, like the highly populated

northern parts of Marylebone, the new squares and streets to the north of Hyde Park,

locations around Pimlico, and even May Fair and Spring Gardens which were said to

have acquired a "quasi" nature in the early forties. One should definitely not put on one's

card names like George's Street, Bloomsbury, or Baker Street or Russell Square; such an

address would permanently outlaw a person from fashionable society. Apart from these

neighborhood divisions, one must also pay attention to one's numbers, especially in a

mixed area. For instance, while one side of Piccadilly was considered "exclusive," the

other side was taken as vulgar; any figure below fifty would ruin a person's fashionable

credit. Such spatial differentials would of course change with time, but fashion's decree

on the use of space was to remain.

The logic of space also demanded that one should use particular spaces at

particular times. On macro-levels, this meant that a fashionable person was not supposed

to be seen in London when the Season ended but instead should be residing in watering

places, hunting and partying in the country, or traveling outside England. Those who had

to remain did well to avoid being detected, since detection would tell on one's lack of

means or fashion to go or be invited elsewhere. When Mrs. Marcus Hare borrowed her

aunt's house in Hertford Street for use in August, the latter made the special point that the front shades should never be raised; when asked why, the lady of fashion disclosed that she did not want people to infer, from signs of inhabitation, that she was still in town in such an unfashionable month.[56] Pükler-Muskau had a similar story. When he arrived at London on August 15, 1827, he found that "London is deserted by the fashionables" and that "many who are obliged to remain on business positively conceal themselves" (171).

On micro-levels, the logic of space demanded that different hours of the day be associated with different places. An 1833 *Court Journal* author made a good point of this when he described the typical day of a fashionable man as follows:

> He is visible, *en robe de chamber, or toilette de bain,* to his intimates, any time after one. At three, he walks to Lady R—to receive her commands for the day. At four, his cabriolet conveys him to the clubs; at six, he mounts his pony to stand still at the furthest extremity of the park, or to communicate the news of the day to Lady B—, whose britshka is always stationary somewhere towards the bridge beside the Serpertine.[57]

Descriptions like this vividly convey how fashionable use of space required a strict management of time as well as a meticulous deployment of poses and paraphernalia.

A further aspect of the spatial logic was that acquaintanceship made at one place did not necessarily obtain at another. The story of George Selwyn cutting a former associate illustrates the point. Once, Selwyn came to Bath at an unfashionable time and found it almost empty, so he cultivated the acquaintance of an elderly gentleman for the purpose of killing time. When he saw this gentleman again in St. James's Street in the height of the following season, he tried to ignore him. But the latter called out and reminded him of their acquaintanceship at Bath. Upon this, Selwyn remarked: "I

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[56] This story can be found in W. H. Mallock's *Memoirs of Life and Literature* (4. 72-73).

[57] "Men and Women of Fashion, No. 1," 337.

recollect you perfectly, and when I next go to Bath I shall be most happy to become acquainted with you again."[58] Change in spatial milieu called for change in the company one kept; without knowing this tactic, a person was sure to be kicked out of fashionable society.

From different angles, all of the above dimensions suggest that the logic of space was characterized by an inherent ambiguity. On the one hand, there manifested an attempt to put the urban space to an exclusive, orderly use. The minute subdivisions of the west end, as well as the increasingly tightened correspondence between time and space, spoke of efforts to impose order and thus create a desirable human geography out of the unstable London when it was quickly expanding in the early nineteenth century. On the other, the existence of micro-distinctions betrayed in itself how vain such efforts were. Not only was the west end deflected by other ends such as the "quasi-fashionable" northern parts; even the "exclusive" circle could also be penetrated by newly rich people from the east end. The choice of fashion as the norm of order smartly addressed this ambiguity, since fashion both inscribed order and rendered it a matter of change and infinite differentiation in response to local circumstances. A Bath acquaintance that was not acknowledged in St. James Street might very well be picked up in another congenial situation. So much depended on where, when, and how a person was positioned.

The Centrality of the Body

The positioning of a person inevitably leads to the issue of the body and bodily performance, a stress on which formed another major characteristic of fashionable society in the reform era. In fact, that emphasis served as a base for its other major qualities. Its

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[58] My narrative here is based on the *Quarterly Review* article "Codes of Manners and Etiquette," 419.

visual and spatial politics, for example, relied heavily on the individual body's being on view in a proper place at a proper time and with proper people. Its rule of incivility also required particular bodily gestures. To cut somebody virtually involved pretending not to see the person you disliked, moving quickly away, or saying something that put him or her at a social or physical distance. To quiz meant, in many cases, actually putting on a special kind of glasses and posing one's body in a way that suggested one's vain effort at seeing. The one being quizzed would often involuntarily assume special bodily expressions like blushes and downcast heads, as are vividly conveyed by the graphic drama "Ton" (Fig. 2). Of course, dressing one's body in proper (and not necessarily ostentatious) clothes was essential for admission to such prestigious circles as Almack's. Finally, physical mixing with Continental Society was fundamental to the maintenance of one's status in the transnational sphere of fashionable society.

Nineteenth-century Britons were quick to recognize the centrality of the body in the making of fashionable society and attempted to use the image of the body to capture its general spirit. Bulwer-Lytton uses "a Body Politick" to refer to the English *ton*. He borrows this phrase from seventeenth-century Joseph Glanvill's writing on witches:

> The Devil is a name for a *Body Politick,* in which there are very different Orders and Degrees of Spirits, and perhaps in as much variety of Place and State as among our Selves. [59]

In Glanvill's text, the Body Politick paradoxically connotes the disembodied World of Spirits. Bulwer-Lytton appropriates the paradox to suggest that the English ton, saturated with "different Orders and Degrees of Spirits" of Fashion, is actually a devilish *Body Politick*— a collection and collision of rude bodies; it is a site where

All gibe and splutter, grin and chatter,

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[59] As quoted in Bulwer-Lytton, "English Manners," 327.

> And deems you in your different shape
> More odious than a tail-less ape. ("English Manners, 331)

By a concentrated use of onomatopoeia, Bulwer-Lytton vividly expresses the point that

the English *ton* is constituted by a group of aping bodies violently cutting each other.

The animal imagery here is by no means singular. It was a common practice in the early

nineteenth century to compare various types of fashionable people to various animals. A

"lion," for example, meant a social star; and a "boar" was used for a social bore. George

Cruickshank caricatures this usage by turning a star of fashion into a large lion head set

on a rigid, fashionably-dressed human body (Fig. 3). His point is also Bulwer-Lytton's:

in place of the mind, the English *ton* has set in motion an animalistic thing, the body.

This emphasis on the body ultimately differentiated fashionable society from the

polite world. While politeness, of course, could not express itself via bodily gestures, it

was supposed to originate from the heart and be governed by the mind and the reason.

As De Bellegarde put it:

> It is a virtue springing out of the heart. It is the offspring of a well directed mind,
> possessing itself, and being master of its own sentiments; that loves to do justice
> to every one, and to sacrifice its own interest rather than to injure that of others.
> [. . .] To become truly polite much reason is necessary. (1-2)

For De Bellegarde and many other advocates, politeness was a moral issue; it was a

"summary of all the moral virtues" (1). Fashion changed that. Even as one might not be

able to become truly fashionable without "much reason," "a well directed mind" and even

proper expressions of the heart, moral concerns such as justice to others did not constitute

issues for fashion. Different from conduct books' moral reasoning, fashionable etiquette

merely prescribed a series of dos and don'ts in particular situations, presenting manners

simply as a matter of amoral bodily performances suited to local circumstances. With

such highlight of the body, fashionable society was becoming an important mechanism

for the redistribution of power, wealth, and prestige in the mobile reform era.

Fashionable Society as a Socially Unifying System of Representation

Throughout the nineteenth century but especially in the early decades, fashionable

society was often confused with aristocratic high society. An example of this can be

found in an 1834 *Court Magazine* article's lamenting the "absurd idea called 'getting into

society'":

> This expression does not precisely imply […] a desire of increasing the number of
> their acquaintance, but a longing after people of condition and rank. [. . .] It means,
> in short, that when by the possession of wealth, obtained by industry or good fortune,
> people might extend their own circle, and be the center and support of such society
> as all their previous habits of life have suited them for, they are voluntarily to fly
> from it [. . .] in order to seek admission in the **skirts of fashionable life**. [. . .]
> Though this malady is deeply seated in the hearts of my countrymen, I think, if I
> could relate with proper power and effect all the mystifications I have seen practiced
> by what is called "**high society**" [. . .] I might effect, if not a general, a partial cure.
> (Emphasis mine) [60]

Like many other documents of the early decades, this article uses interchangeably

"society," "high society" and "skirts of fashionable life" (i.e. fashionable society). The

looseness in using these terms suggests an important paradox of fashionable society: it

was both aristocratic and not. For this author, as for many others, fashionable society had

to do with "people of condition and rank," i.e. the aristocratic world of lords and ladies.

But it was not really the high society of the nobility. It was the qualified, the quotation-

marked "high society," which was made up of, among others, "fashionable but poor

young men of family [and] very fashionable and very poor men of no family," as the

same *Court Magazine* author frames it (37). One should read this author very carefully,

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[60] "Getting into Society," 35.

however. Given the cost and the subtle etiquette of mixing in fashionable society, a poor man of no family could not possibly enter it unless he was either very talented, witty, amusing, or all of the above—which allowed him to manipulate social and/or financial credit and thus gain "fashionable currency." Being fashionable redundantly decided one's access to fashionable society—a point conveyed exactly by the author's sarcastic repetition of the word "fashionable": people of different origins gathered via the route of fashion, rendering fashionable society a cross-class rather than a purely aristocratic entity.

Like the *Court* author, Sir Egerton Brydges both associated and disassociated the modern Beau Monde (fashionable society) from aristocratic society:

> It affects to consist of persons of the highest rank, birth, and wealth, who therefore are entitled to give the *ton* by the elegance of their manners, accomplishments, and habits. But, in fact, all who are acquainted with the world can prove that it does not answer *any one* of these ingredients. It has, perhaps, some persons of the higher titles of nobility mixed up with it; but these very sparingly; and even then *almost* always of equivocal origin and character; and without exceptions, of frivolous minds; all the rest are bubbles of forward usurping vanity. (512)

Sir Egerton Brydges's aristocratic bias certainly plays into his criticism of the Beau Monde as a pseudo aristocratic circle constituted by vain and usurping pretenders to fashion — something only a real aristocrat is "entitled to give" in his view. In other words, fashionable society should be constituted by pure aristocrats. In reality, however, it is not. Since persons of dubious status can enter and even lead the Beau Monde, it must act on other principles than the mere rule of aristocracy.

In quite different contexts, numerous advertisements in the early nineteenth century also perpetuated and even made use of fashionable society's paradoxical relationship with aristocratic high society. For example, on March 15, 1831, *The Times* featured this appeal:

—To the Fashionable World. —The progressive improvements in the state of society generally call loudly for a corresponding alteration to its wants from the commercial and trading classes. Low prices are not always synonymous with cheapness. Quality and price combined can alone prove the integrity of the trade, and justly satisfy the wants of his customers. On this basis alone Henry L. Cooper solicits the continuance of the patronage of the nobility, his friends, and the public, to his *Upholstery and Looking-glass Establishments*, 57 Conduit-Street, Regent Street, and 93, Bishopsgate-Street-within, and entreats them, by personal view, to satisfy themselves of this fact, —as to the quality, splendor, and fashion of every article submitted by him to their notice.[61]

The dealer in this advertisement presents the fashionable world as both related to and differentiated from the nobility. On the one hand, he seems to be saying that the fashionable world is a social group led by the nobility; and as such, this group can be called on to buy his goods because they have the noble virtue of being rational and wise in trade and consumption, knowing how to judge "by personal view" the appropriateness of "price and quality." On the other hand, the fashionable world he addresses is a fluid entity. Constituted by "the nobility, his friends, and the public," it virtually contains all consumers. Whoever buys the trader's goods becomes a member of the fashionable world. The "quality, splendor, and fashion" of his goods will help make it. "Fashion" here does not just mean the style of his goods, but also that indefinable something that makes them fashionable. Conceived of as some quality intrinsic to his goods, fashion is disassociated from the nobility and becomes what can raise the consumer to the fashionable world. The paradoxical relationship between the nobility and the fashionable world is not only what the dealer consciously and unconsciously perpetuates, but also what allows him to call on the largest possible circle of consumers for his goods.

Fashionable society's paradoxical relationship with the high society of the nobility, however, had other social functions than mere commercial use. On the one hand,

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[61] *The Times* 15 March 1831: D4.

the association of fashionable society with aristocracy helped maintain the former as a social ideal. That was so because this association catered to people's impulse to evoke ancient symbols of leisure and plenty in the mobile era of reform. As the aristocracy had been the embodiment of leisure and plenty so far back in history, fashionable society's confusion with the aristocratic world helped maintain it as an ideal of high life—an irresistible object of desire and ambition. Even if the quoted *Court Magazine* author thinks ill—in both its senses: "bad" as well as "diseased"—of getting into fashionable society, he admits to its attraction to his countrymen. One might criticize fashionable society, but one cannot resist getting into it: the author's discursive power—his capacity to criticize this "absurd mania" and to argue for each staying in one's own circle— is based upon his having been in fashionable society himself.

On the other hand, the disassociation of fashionable society from aristocratic society also rendered unstable the aristocracy's once taken-for-granted high position. Since fashionable society acted on a rule of fashion that was not an equivalent of the rule of aristocracy, getting into fashionable society could be a lord or a lady's object of ambition just as it was with a *nouveau riche*. As a *New Monthly* author put it, "Now everybody knows that fashion is above nobility; mere rank cannot give fashion."[62] According to the same author, "fashion has nothing to do with externals, either of rank, person, or dress," and instead it expresses "an abstract and intangible idea" that takes on different forms with different persons and things (88-89). It is the very intangibility, uncertainty and changeability of fashion that opened up fashionable society to various non-aristocratic people even as it destabilized the aristocratic circle and divided it into the

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[62] "Fashion in 1826," 89.

"fashionable" and the "unfashionable." While Lord Byron could be kicked out of "the world of fashion," the middle-class Brummell could become its king.[63] Although Edward Bulwer-Lytton tried in vain to become "a denizen of 'the fashionable world,'" Mrs. Gore and Theodore Hook were active members in it.[64] Fashionable society cut across conventional class lines.

Such a cross-class arena was important for both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. For declining aristocrats, the beau monde provided a space for them to exchange fashionable currency for new wealth, participate in what Mary Poovey calls the "credit economy" in an increasingly industrialized and financial society, and thus maintain their power in the social and political field (9). Contemporary literature was filled with poor aristocratic young men who tried to cut a figure in fashionable society and by doing so live happily on other people, or borrowed money, before they secured a wealthy marriage that could allow them to settle down and even enter parliament. The *Court Magazine* article "Getting into Society" satirically presents how when the Manchester cotton-spinner's wealth is affirmed by his banker, fashionable young men of family or no family immediately force themselves on him, attend his parties, and make "schemes on the girls' fortunes" (37). Even as they are doing so, they treat the family uncivilly as people of no fashion. The author sarcastically comments that "people with ten thousand a year to spend, in London as elsewhere, are pretty sure to find those who will assist them in spending it" (37). Ironically, while the family mistress is proud of the fashionable intelligence that her parties are attended by "three baronets, two ladies, a General, and a Major," these people are making a fashionable living on the wealth of

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[63] "On the Decline and Fall of the Empire of Fashion," 55.

[64] Ibid.

such families as hers (37). Colonel Delmour in Susan Ferrier's *The Inheritance* provides

another example of scheming aristocrats. Being a poor soldier from an ancient Scottish

family of title, the colonel uses his fame as a man of fashion to solicit the hand of the

heiress Gertrude. His scheme falls short only because he wrongly understands that

Gertrude might lose her fortune and so begins to pursue another wealthy woman. Such

literary representations are backed up by real-life events. Lord Morson in Warwickshire,

for example, was constantly urging his son to fend for himself in fashionable society and

by doing so "find a girl with a fortune to rescue the house of Morson from its

predicaments" (Thompson 99).

A daughter of a declining family could use the marriage mart of fashionable

society to stage another version of alliance between title and wealth. Lord Shaftsbury's

daughter, for example, married the rich nephew of the late Rundell the Jeweller, who had

an income of forty thousand a year (Jekyll 258). To some extent, there was nothing new

in this; England had long boasted of an open elite characterized by both upward and

downward mobility, as is widely recognized. What was new at this time was that with

the increased mobility came the strengthened role of fashionable society as a space in

which fashion facilitated and eased the alliance. For instance, if a newly rich young man

had obtained the stamp of fashion by going to Amack's, he became quite eligible for a

daughter even of the highest nobility. In this case, there was far less chance for such a

union to be taken as a mercenary misalliance than if the young man had not been marked

out by fashion.

For the bourgeoisie, fashionable society provided more than a chance for alliance

with title. It was also a space where they could learn aristocratic manners and solicit

aristocratic patronage, both being important in a country where aristocratic biases were still strong. That might partly account why some newly rich industrialists, merchants and colonial returnees got into society as soon as the money was made, leading to the emergence of the "new man" and the "new woman" as Society figures in the early nineteenth century. Mary Berry, one of the fashionable hostesses over the turn of the century, wrote about this in an 1844 book:

> These persons now came forward in society. To the young and dissipated they offered entertainments they could no longer afford themselves, for no other remuneration than the honor of receiving them in their house, and being in return admitted into their society. (19-20)

Being admitted into the society of the fashionable great, however, was no small "remuneration." Apart from the sense and sometimes effect of gentility by contiguity, such society could indeed add to the nouveau riches' respectability and raise their social status. That was so because higher connexions and acquaintanceship had important roles to play in England's finely graded social system. Bulwer-Lytton succinctly put the point in this way:

> You see two gentlemen are of the same birth, fortune, and estates—they are not of the same rank, —by no means!—one looks down on the other as confessedly his inferior. Would you know why? His *connexions* are much higher! [. . .] Acquaintanceship confers also its honors: next to being related to the great, is the happiness of knowing the great: and the wife even of a *bourgeois*, who has her house filled with fine people, considers herself, and is tacitly allowed to be, of greater rank than one who, of far better birth and fortune, is not so diligent a worshipper of birth and fortune in others. (1.27)

In terms of Bulwer-Lytton's cynic observation, the nouveau riches' going into society would produce more than the "happiness of knowing the great"; it could also tacitly increase their social distinction.

Moreover, fashionable entertainments in themselves could be important to both the bourgeoisie and the nobility. Seemingly the partying, gourmandizing, the promenading, and the lounging of fashion were all wasteful, dissipate, idle activities that ran counter to social productivity. Yet on a deeper level, the opposite could be true. When a person indulged in fashionable play and display, his idleness and his squandering of money launched him into what Bataille understands as a "state of sovereignty"—a realm away from servile labor including eating for necessity, walking for business, etc. (3.197). While for an aristocrat this sense of sovereignty might soothe the pressing anxiety about the declining power of his social class, for one outside the old nobility it might confirm, even for a brief moment, his or her participation in a world glorified by leisure and plenty. This psychological sense did not do away with the more obvious and direct social functions of fashionable practices, such as the demonstration of one's "superior magnificence" via a luxurious dinner party. Instead, it explains why grand dinner parties, routs, balls—some of which were given on borrowed money and rented furniture—became fashionable in the first place.

To some extent, the sense of sovereignty exuding from fashionable practices might also explain why something like fashion's spirit of play and display was not limited to Society per se but affected society at large. The point can be illustrated by a look at the ways in which Sunday was spent among different social orders in the early decades. J. Wight's *Sunday in London* (1833), for example, argues that fashionable follies have taken the place of Sabbath observation in all the three portions of Sunday he marks out. During the first portion, i.e. from the close of the King's Theatre at midnight till the fourth hour, men in the higher orders spend their time in the splendidly furnished

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"hells"—fashionable clubs —in the courtly Parish of St. James. The middling orders go

through the same bustling of leaving the theatre like the higher ones, but then have to

push their way through a rout of pimps, prostitutes and pickpockets before reaching home.

At the same time, men in the lower orders are amusing themselves with alcohol. In the

second portion, namely in the grey of Sunday morning, men in the lower orders either

haunt the gin shop, gossip, recreate themselves with a cat-hunt, a dog-fight or a man-fight

in the fields, or just lark and lounge in the royal park of St. James. While some middling-

order men may take their families out for a carriage country tour, others stay in the

counting house when their wives and children go to church. At the same time, the higher

orders are still in bed, but their servants are laboring to prepare for the grand Sunday

dinner party. By Sunday afternoon, the higher orders promenade and exhibit their taste in

Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens before they roll away to dinner parties, soirees,

conversaziones or "hells." The middling orders take the omnibus to suburban tea gardens

where they drink spirits stronger than tea. At the same time men in the lower orders

amuse themselves in bull-bitches, cat-hunting or horse racing in the fields all around

London. While there might be some exaggeration in Wight's satire, the wide existence of

satirical pieces like his suggests that he might not be too far away from the truth:[65]

English society as a whole was penetrated by a spirit of play and display like fashion's;

people of different stations all indulged themselves in idling, gourmandizing, displaying,

etc. albeit to different degrees, on different scales and in different manners. Such

activities, instead of being taken as trivial and frivolous, should be seen as closely tied to

one's sense of being a master of the world, as Bataille would say. Interestingly, Bataille

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[65] See, for example, "English Genealogy. —Sunday," 403-410; Bulwer-Lytton, "English Manners," 327-340; and "Fashionable Eclogues," 498.

does use the example of a lower-class man drinking to illustrate his idea of sovereignty. "Into the wine he swallows," Bataille writes, "there enters a *miraculous* element of savor, which is precisely the essence of sovereignty." That is so because "the glass of wine gives him, for a *brief moment*, the *miraculous* sensation of having the world at his disposal" (3.199). In light of the Bataille theory, the lower orders' seemingly irrational imitation of upper-class manners and practices were no longer servile and lowly mimicry but sovereign acts embedded in psychological truth. Furthermore, as means of expending excessive energy of English society, of disposing what Bataille would call its "Surplus," these acts as conducted among different orders of society could have contributed to its maintenance in non-violent ways.

Not all nineteenth-century people recognized this, however. Some people—such as Queen Victoria whom I have quoted in the introduction—would criticize fashionable practices as irresponsible, frivolous activities that might stir envy, hatred and consequently social agitation. Others would take fashionable acts as crucial in mobilizing the circulation of wealth and labor, as was an 1832 *Court Journal* author's view in describing a ball of fashion:

> Yet hence the poor are clothed, the mean are fed; and the philosophy of the ball-room compels us to acknowledge, that of the persons thus occupied, very few are capable of employing themselves to better purpose.[66]

This writer, representative of others, took fashionable entertainments as means to clothe the poor and feed the mean.

In fact, it was not just fashionable acts but also the very idea of fashion or fashionable society that were so constantly debated that they became fertile fields for

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[66] "The Philosophy of a Ball-Room," 274.

discursive power on a variety of issues—gender, sexuality, gentility, intellectuality, and even literature—throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1820s and 30s, for instance, the definition of fashionable society or rather the incoherence in its definition across social groups allowed both conservative and radical intellectuals to redefine the norms of gentility versus vulgarity, the high versus the low, among other binaries that were crucial to the re-formation of the social structure.

The conservative use of fashionable society for discursive power can be illustrated by a look at the Tory aristocrat Glengall's play *The Follies of Fashion: A Comedy in Five Acts.* [67] It opens with Lady Mary Fretful, a gay widow and a leader of fashion in London, talking to her maid Flimsy about the impudence of a "vulgar citizen's wife" in wearing the same style of dress as hers. This "vulgar citizen," Mr. Counter, and his wife come to live in the fashionable world in order to marry their daughter to a lord, but the daughter Emily falls in love with George Foster, the fashionable but poor son of a country gentleman. By pretending to be his friend Lord Henry, George is accepted by the Counter family as Emily's fiancé. Meanwhile, Lady Mary Fretful's plan to solicit the hand of Lord Splashton falls short; Lord and Lady Splashton are reconciled and decide to give up fashionable life in the metropolis and retire to the country. At the same time, an Irish Captain, who wants to marry Emily, is tricked into marrying Emily's maid. The play ends with the comment that husband and wife should study to please each other.

Even from this simple plot sketch, one can see that the play is trying to put everybody in his or her "right" place. While the aristocratic people of fashion are gently satirized, they are mainly scrutinized on the basis of gender. Women's attention to fashion and dress are put to ridicule, as can be seen in the following dialogue:

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[67] It was first performed on November 29, 1829 and published by Henry Colburn in 1830.

Lady Mary: Well, never was anything so provoking! I positively have not patience to survive such an event—I, who thought my gown would have been the admiration of the whole room last night, to find that vulgar citizen's wife, Mrs. Counter, in precisely the same style of dress. A French embroidered tissue! The last novelty from Paris! Life is too short to bear such torments; but thank heaven, I have one consolation left; mine was gold, hers was only silver: otherwise I must have fainted.

Flimsy: It's quite disgusting, my lady; such doings ought not to be allowed by law. Could not your ladyship have a bill brought into parliament to prevent the eastern ladies from adopting the new French Fashions, until the western belles of quality have laid them aside, under a penalty of the offending creatures being confined to their own side of Temple Bar for the season?

By letting Lady Mary talk in an exaggerated way, Glengall amusingly satirizes fashionable ladies' silliness in attaching such great importance to so "trivial" a matter as an embroidered tissue. In an equally amusing manner, the maid's employment of political language tugs at the social fear of fashionable women's political influence: a saying went that the lady patronesses of Almack's controlled 23 votes in the House of Commons, and they, like other fashionables, had very strict definitions of which streets and districts of London were fashionable and which not. However, politics, when taken up by such caricature figures as Fretful and Flimsy, is trivialized. Despite the very light tone, Glengall is suggesting that fashionable ladies, instead of meddling in politics, should go back to the domestic sphere, just as the country gentleman had better retire to the country. A country gentleman, like Lord Splashton, will expose his wife to seduction and other follies if he brings her to the fashionable world of London.

The play's real butt of satire, however, is the middling order of trade and commerce, as embodied by the Counters. The Counters' vulgarity and ridiculousness are revealed throughout the play, but come out most visibly in their inability to distinguish a real lord from a fashionable imposter. As "vulgar" imitators in the world of fashion, they

put their daughter in the clutches of the scheming Irish Captain, whose race certainly plays into the negative portrayal of him and his downward marriage.

Glengall's ideal is apparently the mythic Old England where the landed gentleman indeed sticks to the land and where everybody else stays in his or her right place. To affirm such an ideal, however, is itself a betrayal of anxiety about the cross-class nature of fashionable society, and about the leveling spirit—the democratic potential—of fashion. Who can indeed tell a fashionable imposter from a real lord, except the aristocratically biased writer who *determines* the *essential* qualities of an aristocrat? Fashionable society serves as a discursive tool via which the Earl of Glengall re-traces the lines of social boundaries and clarifies such cultural notions as gentility versus vulgarity, when they seemed to be blurred on the eve of reform.

Like the conservative aristocrat Glengall, bourgeois radical intellectuals also employed fashionable society as a means for discursive power. The 1834 *Tait's* essay "On the Decline and Fall of the Empire of Fashion" well illustrates the point. Written soon after the Reform Bill, this article has an urgent political agenda to build a bourgeois ideal. To call into existence a healthy, strong and intellectual bourgeois culture, this article turns on its head the structure of the high and the low in the Regency period. What has been regarded as *haut ton* (high society) in that period becomes *bas ton* (low society) now and acquires the qualities of vulgarity. After a brief laudatory note about the Reform Bill's work in securing the decline of the empire of fashion, this article proceeds to equate "the fashionable" with the vulgar:

> In fact, the beauty of all pretensions to what is understood by "Fashion," in its moral, personal, and intellectual sense, is, that there is nothing else in the world so

essentially *vulgar,* and that whatever is true of "The Vulgar" *par excellence,* is especially true of "The Fashionable."[68]

Notice the quotation marks on both "The Vulgar" and "The Fashionable"; they ostensibly call attention to the fact that the speaker is writing against a discourse that uses these phrases in different senses. That discourse is the literature of fashion Carlyle, among others, has satirized. In that literature, it is the rising bourgeoisie that is labeled "The Vulgar" in opposition to the supposedly aristocratic "Fashionable." The Earl of Glengall's Counters serve as good examples of these vulgar fashion-following people. As this vulgarization of the middle class is pervasive in the literature of fashion, the 1830s anti-dandyism—a bourgeois movement—makes a particular point of reversing the trend. Ironically, however, it employs the same vulgarizing technique: it vulgarizes "The Fashionable." To be coarse, ignorant, awkward, and ill dressed—all the shame the middle-class character bears in fashionable literature—is no longer vulgar. What is vulgar is to be ignorant, coarse, etc. and yet affect to be delicate, refined or graceful. Affectation is the essence of vulgarity. This debasement of affectation fits nicely into the bourgeois ideal of an essential self-hood. In tune with bourgeois men's competition for cultural authority, the greatest vulgarity is defined as the "want of all intellectual refinement" in "The Fashionable."[69] The binary between "The Fashionable" and "The Vulgar" is retained rather than dismantled; change only lies in who lines up on which side. The definition of the fashionable with regard to vulgarity has served exactly as a site of contest between aristocratic conservative and bourgeois radical intellectuals for discursive power.

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[68] "On the Decline and Fall of the Empire of Fashion," 54.

[69] Ibid 56.

Discursively, psychologically, and sociologically, fashionable society appealed to both the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie in the era of reform. However, to say that fashionable society emerged as a new cultural field capable of fusing aristocratic and bourgeois values and interests is not to say that both had equal valence in shaping fashionable society over time and place. Rather, it cannot be emphasized enough that while the tension between the two made the attraction of fashionable society across classes, each side frequently had more valence over the other in a particular social milieu. For example, before the Reform Bill, aristocratic values bore more on fashionable society either as a discursive site or as a sociological entity, which Lord Glengall's play attests to. However, after the Bill and as the century went on, bourgeois influence in fashionable society went up gradually; and its discursive use changed accordingly. If the 1834 *Tait's* author debased aristocratic fashionables, a *Punch* intellectual would single out in 1843 the "Spangle Lacquers"—the representative of the middle class—as figures in fashionable society that needed to be satirized.[70] When it came to the mid century, Charles Dickens, for one, would feel it necessary to include a poor legal clerk, such as Tony Jobling in *Bleak House* (1853), in his sketch of fashion, reflecting yet another picture of fashionable society and its discursive use. Despite these changes—or maybe because of them—fashionable society remained, at least till the 1860s, an important social mechanism not only in re-structuring English society vertically as discussed here but also horizontally across the public and private spheres, as will be explored in the next chapter.

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[70] "The Side-Scenes of Every-day Society: No. I, "14.

Figure 2 Ton

Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

<http://130.132.81.116/WALPOLEIMG/size4/D0732/lwlpr13109.jpg>

A horrible Bore, in the Company.

The Lion of the party!

Figure 3 The Bore and the Lion

George Cruickshank's Table-Book. Ed. Gilbert Abbot Beckett. London: Bell and Daldy, 1869.

Chapter 2

"Fashion's Gay Crowd"

And some they were waltzing, and others quadrilling,
"All pair'd, but not match'd,' young and old, short and tall:
While some in sly corners were cooing and billing
Notes at sight, and of hand, at my Lady Blue's Ball.
Thus **Fashion's gay crowd** goes on flirting and whirling
As they mingle together, the great with the small. (Emphasis Mine)

—Mrs. C. B. Wilson 380

It is the custom here to take your friends to parties of this sort and to present them, then and there, to the mistress of the house, who never thinks you can bring enough to fill her small rooms to suffocation, the more the better; and for the full satisfaction of her vanity, a "bagarre" must arise among the carriages below; some must be broken to pieces and a few men and horses killed or hurt, so that the 'the Morning Post' of the following day may parade a long article on the extremely fashionable soirée' given by 'Lady Vain,' or 'Lady Foolish.'

—Pückler-Muskau 66

In 1829, Mr. T. Mclean, a major London publisher, brought out a graphic satire "Mrs. Crowdem's Rout" (Fig. 4). The picture diagrammatically captures "Fashion's gay crowd" as Mrs. C. B. Wilson—editor-in-chief of the highly popular *The World of Fashion* (1824-1891)—describes in verse, and as the German prince Pükler-Muskau records in letters.   Although none approach their subject without reservation conveyed either by dramatic exaggerations, ironic distances or satirical tones, all three—representative of innumerable others—betray a strong fascination with the crowd of

fashion as a new collective identity. In terms of the sound and fury it causes, or rather as far as its massiveness and messiness are concerned, the fashionable crowd resembles a motley mob in all three different representations; and yet it is not one in its usual debased sense but a "distinguished" heterogeneous unit homogenized under the rubric of "the fashionable." In its mingling of the "great with small," "young and old," men and women, domestics and foreigners; in its constant bustling and hustling to and from the domestic space; in its "foolish" "cooing and billing"; it defies our usual understanding of the public in the Habermasian tradition and otherwise, challenging the prevailing nineteenth-century discourse of "separate spheres." Indeed, what we have here is a unique entity that can only be termed, as it was in the nineteenth century, the "fine mob," the "fine rabble," "the mob of fashion," or "fashion's gay crowd."

This chapter takes a closer look at fashionable society as a *crowd* to investigate what it did to conventionally-understood public and private domains. I argue that as an embodiment of a unique public, the fashionable crowd enacted and led a new sphere that destabilized the public/private division even as it also served as a condition of possibility for the division. Occupying the vast realm that extended seamlessly from the home to the outside world, the world of fashion set in motion a system of social activities that publicized the domestic domain and privatized the public sphere.

Fashionable Society as a Crowd, a Unique Public and a Third Sphere

When nineteenth-century people termed fashionable society as a "fine mob" and such like, they called attention to the fact that a chief way in which it presented itself was in the form of a crowd— i.e. a " 'face-to-face,' or 'direct contact' group"—as George

Rudé defined the term(3).   As such, fashionable society seemed to conform to but actually challenged the crowd form and its common types found in crowd studies extending from Taine, Tarde, Le Bon and Park via Canetti and Rudé to Nye, Harrison, Thompson, McClelland, Tilly, Rogers, Plotz, and Schnapp and Tiews.

Like other contemporaneous crowds—the Chartist assembly, for instance, which got 200,000 men together—fashionable meetings found security in numbers.   The larger the crowd, the more fashionable a gathering was. The overflowing feature of Mrs. Crowdem's rout seemed to prove Elias Canetti's essentialist claim that a "true crowd," i.e. an "open crowd," has a "natural urge for growth" and "wants to consist of *more* people" (20, 16).   What complicates the situation was that while this tendency for expansion was prevalent among fashionable society, there simultaneously existed the trend for the "fine mob" to close itself up: fashion and only fashion could entitle one to be a member of the group.   In this sense it was also a "closed crowd" which, in the words of Canetti, "renounces growth" by setting up a boundary and "puts the stress on permanence" that comes from repetition or rather reassembly of its members like a group in a church (17). The paradoxical nature of fashionable society in this aspect was vividly conveyed in Almack's simultaneous enactment of both an open crowd and a closed one. Each Wednesday evening only a limited number was admitted for the highly fashionable ball; yet to make the closed group within there must always exist an open throng of applicants pushing each other in front of the club the whole afternoon for admission or denial notices.   The "permanence" of Almack's as the pinnacle of fashion depended, not so much on the reassembly of its members—which varied each meeting according to fashion's arbitrary draw from the outside pool—as on the openness of the latter that

recurred every week. What made Almack's then was the continuum between an open

and a closed crowd.

As with its size, the fashionable crowd both liked and defied density. Seemingly,

the beau monde loved density, an attribute Canetti claims for "all crowds" (29). The

more fiercely one pressed upon another and the more sharply one's belongings and

bodily parts pushed against another—see how the woman's hat protrudes onto the man's

chest right in the middle of "Mrs Crowdem's Rout" —the more fashionable currency

there was in the field. In this density, all social hierarchies and physical distinctions

including sex lost sense; everyone became equal members of the crowd—as Canetti

would say—each being a fashionable in this case. In Canetti's view, the loss of all social

as well as physical distinctions in a dense crowd is a chief reason for the existence of the

crowd form (15-17). With the fashionable crowd, however, this equality was no sooner

achieved than it was betrayed. What signaled the betrayal was the quizzing glass

literalized on the man's head at the left central corner of "Crowdem" but virtually on

everybody's faces. All joined the crowd to see or *not* to see who was there and why and

how— as well as to be seen. The gathering *should* and *could never be too dense* for what

I have termed the "politics of vision" to lose validity. The presence of the quizzing glass

pit one fashionable against another: not all were equal representatives of fashion.

This dynamic between equality and discriminative ranking led to another feature

of the fashionable crowd: the indulgence of individuality within the collective being.

Early crowd psychologists such as Sighele and Le Bon have argued that the essential

characteristic of a crowd is the merging of individuals into one entity, into a "new

sentient individual, a collective being different from its component members," as Robert

Park summarizes (15).   The new collective being would assume these characteristics:

"heightened emotional sensitivity, impetuosity, and capriciousness"; "increased

suggestibility and credulity"; "exaggerated and one-sided opinions"; "personal

disinterestedness or unselfishness"— in short the crowd would take on an "expectant

motor attitude" and stay in a state of high suggestibility "that has been compared with

that of hypnosis" (Park 15-16). Conceptualizing the crowd in quite different terms,

Gabriel Canetti nonetheless draws similar conclusions about the suggestibility of the

crowd. For Canetti, a crowd—for its fear of disintegration, its desire for growth, and its

love of density and the sense of equality engendered therein—would take on "*any* goal"

common to all that "drives underground all the private differing goals which are fatal to

the crowd as such" (29); and in moving towards its goal, a crowd can be very destructive

(19).

In many ways, the "fine mob" defied the individual-collective dynamic described

above. First of all, the crowd of fashion allowed room for individual goals, actions, and

distinctions. On the most obvious level, members of a fashionable crowd did not need to

act as if they were one individual. As Wilson's poem presents, some could waltz and

quadrille while others bill and coo. All could quiz, quizzing being the most

individualizing act via which the self was differentiated from the other. One was

supposed to gain individuality rather than lose it in a fashionable group, even as a

seeming loss was momentarily crafted in the density of a crowd; being seen in a most

dense pack added on to one's fashionable currency which in turn led to one's social

distinction.   Furthermore, fashion might hypnotize a crowd of followers, but it was

obviously different from an ordinary mob leader.   Unlike the latter, fashion did not rely

on personal whims or interests even as it might seem to; instead it enacted an unspecified combination of the anonymous forces of a local circumstance. Thus even as its variations over time might look capricious, fickle and irrational, fashion within a given situation was as fixed as a given. Having already the goal of fashion in mind, individual members joined the group to pursue the same; the collective being they formed was no more capricious, fickle, irrational and no less intelligent, reasonable, cautious than its component members when they were alone. Alone or together, the denizens of fashion observed as intensely as possible the call of fashion. For the same reason, the fashionable crowd did not become more violent than its component members when not in the group. Neither was it more likely to go out for destruction. Although there would arise the sound of carriages clashing into each other as suggested by Pückler-Muskau, the noise, like that of fireworks, only added to the atmosphere of gaiety.

Just as fashionable society challenged the crowd form, it also defied the usual typology in crowd studies. To begin with, the "fine mob" differed from the ceremonial or special-event crowd in the sense that it was an everyday occurrence even as it could become part of the latter, for coronations or on Derby Day for instance. Then, the "mob of fashion" was not a spontaneous crowd that filled up urban streets day in day out and constituted a refuge for the flâneur from time to time, as Walter Benjamin presents.[71] Nor was it an organized crowd in the usual sense. For example, when fashionables crowded into Hyde Park each afternoon, there were no human organizers; yet it could be as punctual, as regular, as if there were: the call of fashion was as good an organizer as any. When fashionable society did gather in a host or hostess's name, he or she functioned at best as a deputy rather than a real organizer; for what brought people in,

[71] Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, 66-96.

what shaped their manners of participation, was no human voice but fashion. Organized or unorganized, the "fine mob" was obviously different from the crowds in riot, strike, protest, or demonstration that have engaged much scholarly energy from Rudé through Plotz. Apart from its "distinguished" components, the "mob of fashion" was not political or politicized; it made no *explicit* collective claims on other people, even as it did speak via its bodily presence—as will be examined in the next two sections. Nonetheless, it undoubtedly shared the nineteenth-century public space with other crowds and constituted a formidable public presence in the metropolitan area during the season and in the country, at seaside resorts, etc. out of the season. What social functions did it have? How did it impact the overall mapping of British social spheres? These questions can be better answered after some scrutiny of a larger and less visible collective entity—the fashionable public—of which the crowd of fashion served as the most conspicuous embodiment.

When "fashion's gay crowd" dispersed and when its members scattered over the globe, fashionable people were still connected by their common belief in fashion; and the idea of fashion—spread not just by physical contact but by print—became the bond that tied them into a public, at least in Gabriel Tarde's understanding. For Tarde, a public is differentiated from a crowd exactly in the sense that the former is a virtual gathering of physically distanced people who nonetheless share the same idea, conviction or passion as they are reading the same book, magazine or newspaper (277-94). In tune with Tarde's theorization, the fashionable public was a *larger* collective entity than the "fine mob" as it should also include those who never had chance to be members of the actual crowds of fashion but participated in fashionable exchange exclusively via print. What

qualities did this fashionable public have? How did it compare with the Habermasian public?

Since Habermas's seminal work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was introduced into the English world, many scholars—Benhabib, Fraser, Jameson, Warner, Negt and Kluge for example—have rethought and revised his idea of the rational-critical bourgeois public (sphere).   Their essays—largely collected in Robins (1993) and in Calhoun (1997)—opened up a rich variety of possibilities for interpreting the concept of the public. Nonetheless no proposed model can fully account for the fashionable one.   Geoff Eley, for instance, identifies a "variety of publics" existing in the nineteenth century mainly as voluntary, associational societies (306). Voluntary association, however, cannot really capture the formation principle of fashionable society: *willingly* subjected to the *despotic* call of fashion, participants in fashionable society were neither voluntary nor non-voluntary members. Besides, fashionable society cannot simply be taken as one society among, or parallel to, many others in what Eley terms the "age of societies" if just for its much larger scope—national at least and increasingly transnational as I make clear in Chapter 1. Nor can fashionable society be simply regarded as one of the "competing counterpublics" of the official bourgeois public (Fraser 7). As the phrase is currently used, the "counterpublic" often indicates a socially subordinate group who invents oppositional discourses to mainstream/official ones. This does not describe fashionable society which frequently doubled on the social elite and which had a more complicated relationship with the rational-critical bourgeois public— whether as a normative ideal or as a flawed reality in the nineteenth century—than what the word "counter" could convey.

Indeed, I want to argue for a "mutually obligate symbiotic" relationship between the bourgeois public and the fashionable one. By that coinage, I mean each served as a condition of possibility for the other. It was exactly with the invention of the fashionable double into which the bourgeois public jettisoned what it still desired but had to hide for a proper image of itself—the body for instance—that it could enjoy the division from the private. In other words, the public/private division could only start to function when a third realm was invented—a realm in which the division was re-melded. Meanwhile the fashionable sphere could stand as it did—neither public nor private but with all the freedom of ambiguity—exactly because there existed the public/private division. All this can be illustrated by a detailed comparison between fashionable society and the bourgeois public in the Habermasian sense which still obtains despite all the revisions.

The world of fashion resembled the Habermasian public in four major ways. First, it was a unit formed by private individuals gathering together, if not simply to discuss matters of public concern, for a series of activities that could have public relevance. All the people who filled the home spaces of "Lady Blue," "Lady Vain," or Mrs. Crowdem were supposed to be private individuals rather than on behalf of some higher authorities like the state. Although there would frequently be parliamentary members or other officials at fashionable gatherings, they appeared in their personal rather than their public capacities; for fashionable society was supposed to be social rather than political. Then, just as the Habermasian public was inseparable from the press, the world of fashion also relied on print culture; however "vain" or "foolish" a lady's use of periodicals like the *Morning Post* might have appeared to her male contemporaries, hers was not a personal feminine whim but a popular practice in fashionable society at large. Furthermore, the

world of fashion also provided occasions for the articulation and negotiation of social values via its various politics of play and display. Finally, the two publics emerged together and with overlapping memberships when state authority was challenged by the emergence of civil society; and when the modern system of fashion as I have discussed in the introduction was quite in place in the eighteenth century. These resemblances located them on the same plane of civil society and thus prepared their symbiosis. But what really sustained their symbiotic relationship were their differences which rendered them complementary to each other.

A foremost difference between the bourgeois public and the fashionable one lay in their class connotations. Although the former contained aristocratic members especially at its early stage, it was generally taken as bourgeois in nature. In contrast to that, the world of fashion could not be regarded as either bourgeois or aristocratic, as I have discussed in detail in Chapter 1. Indeed a most distinguishing feature of fashionable society was its refusal to be pinned down to any conventional social ranks but must constantly shape itself in tune with the uncertain rule of fashion. If birth or blood had been a major element in making the old aristocracy, and if wealth or talents served as a prominent parameter in defining the new bourgeoisie, none of these alone entitled one to the world of fashion. As a *Court Journal* author framed it in 1829:

> In fact, it is neither high birth, nor great wealth, still less is it the possession of talents, however generally recognized, which alone can give an individual or family a claim to admission into the society of those who are properly called People of Fashion. [72]

Following a rule of formation that in theory defied any ranking according to definite factors, the fashionable public could only be redundantly called the "fashionable world"

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[72] "The Omnipotence of Fashion," 2.

or "fashionable society." Nineteenth-century people were not just being particular in using "fashionable" rather than a mere "bourgeois" or "aristocratic" to characterize the new public; they were aware of its distinctive and discrete nature even as their own writings might have contributed to the distinction.

Besides class connotations, the world of fashion and the bourgeois public were also different in the extent to which they were open in theory and in practice. As Habermas frames it, the bourgeois public was "in principle inclusive":

> However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who—insofar as they were propertied and educated—as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion. The issues discussed became general [. . .]: everyone had to *be able* to participate." (37)

But in reality, as Fraser, Eley and others have made it clear, the bourgeois public was actually founded on gender, class and other exclusions; it kept many sexually, economically and racially disadvantaged people from its arena. The bourgeois public, and especially the political public (as opposed to the literary public that contained women and dependents), was largely a male domain. Different from that, the fashionable world, as I have detailed in Chapter 1, was supposed to be exclusive: *only* those with the passport of fashion could enter the *clique*; yet it was actually an open circle due to the porous boundaries of fashion. Besides, however small the group actually was in any given case, the world of fashion was gender inclusive: it was constituted by both men and women acting in hetero-social places like dining-rooms, ball rooms, drawing-rooms, public promenades—the exception being the clubs, which were a distinctively male space.

The world of fashion also differed from the Habermasian public in its relation to the press. If the latter used print to communicate with itself so as to attain "clarity about itself" as a source of authority separate from state power, the former bore a many-faceted relationship to the world of letters.[73] As Pückler-Muskau has hinted, a practical use the world of fashion made of the press was to obtain publicity and fashionability; and this practice—whether positive or negative— foreshadows the celebrity system that would become common in the twentieth century when the mass media widely circulated society and entertainment news. By popularizing it, the world of fashion prepared the way for the occurrence of the commercial press in which the published word, deriving its meaning from fashion, also became a sign of fashion. The arrival of the commercial press was signaled by the emergence of fashion magazines, such as *The Gallery of Fashion* (1794-1803) and *La Belle Assemblée* (1806-1869) at the turn of the century (roughly from 1770 to 1820); the literature of *ton* including scandal sheets like the *Age*, annuals as edited by Lady Blessington, and salon verses such as those by Thomas Moore and Henry Luttrell; and of course, the silver-fork school of novels from 1825 on.

Around the commercial press, a new "fashionable" reading public was understood to have emerged: Instead of being just rationally critical, readers of fashion related to the published word and image in multiple ways. Some of them, those actually acting in the World, read modish literature for the curiosity and pleasure of seeing themselves represented; put stylish prints in ostentatious places to demonstrate their fashionability; and appropriate fashionable images to cut an even bigger figure in Society. Others, usually bourgeois intellectuals, read to criticize, willfully ignoring the pleasure they experienced in the process of reading. Still others, those moving beyond the pale of *ton*,

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[73] Habermas 51.

perused to enjoy fashion vicariously and to learn about fashionable manners and ways of living.[74]   The last group was said to be "a large community" constituted by the "wives, sons and daughters of half the minor gentry and tradespeople," i.e. of the newly literate people from the lower-middle classes, who were often said to have treat their reading materials with "an unworthy and degrading eagerness."[75]   Indeed, it was not just the last group but the whole fashionable public that started to be distinguished from the bourgeois critical one.   Although this differentiation might have happened earlier—as when the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* attempted to regulate taste and fashion—it came to be more urgently, stringently and clearly articulated in the early nineteenth century, when it began to model, more substantially, modern mass readership.[76]   In writing "The Dandiacal Body" (1833), Thomas Carlyle was already complaining of "an undiscerning public, occupied with grosser wants," who passed through a series of "wonderful wonder of wonders" "with hasty indifference."[77]   In 1834, an anonymous *Tait's* author further wrote about the readers of fashionable literature:

> But the "reading public" are no longer what they were when Mr. Coleridge invented the phrase. [. . .] They are now, not an empty and conceited few, but a great and a mighty multitude; not a PARTY, but a PEOPLE, and they read not as before, to amuse themselves, for they have something else to do, but to "mark, learn and inwardly digest" the purport and bearing of what they read, (whether the writers intend them to do so or not,) and to think, and resolve, and act accordingly.[78]

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[74] This is widely recorded in contemporary documents; see for example, the *Quarterly Review* "Codes of Manners and Etiquette," 397

[75] Ibid.

[76] For the two journals' treatment of fashion, see Erin Mackie, *Market á La Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in* <u>The Tatler</u> *and* <u>The Spectator</u>.

[77] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus,* 273-274.

[78] "On the Decline and Fall of the Empire of Fashion,"57.

In this writer's imagination, as in the mind of Carlyle, the fashionable public began to

have the characteristics of the masses as summarized by Raymond Williams: "gullibility,

fickleness, herd-prejudice, lowness of taste and habit" (298). Nonetheless it was largely

overlapping with the bourgeois public: a member in the former at one time might become

a constituent of the latter at another.

The ultimate difference between the two, however, lay in their respective means

and ends, as well as the power dynamics they presented. In Habermas's frame, the

bourgeois public resorted to critical debate to form public opinion and thus compete with

the state for the control of social life. The scenario was that of a newly rising social

group trying to grapple some power from an old institution by appealing to a human

faculty that was embedded in the body and yet transcending it. The world of fashion,

however, did not have a set of clearly defined means and ends; nor did it present a simple

power dynamic. The point can be illustrated by an analysis of a typical gathering of

fashion:

> When the men have drunk as much as they wish, they go in search of tea, coffee,
> and the ladies. [. . .] To-day, for instance, I observed the company was distributed
> in the following manner. Our suffering host lay on the sofa, dosing a little; five
> ladies and gentlemen were very attentively reading in various sorts of books [. . .]
> two old Members of Parliament were disputing vehemently about the 'Corn Bill';
> and the rest of the company were in a dimly-lighted room adjoining, where a
> pretty girl was playing on the piano-forte and another, with a most perforating
> voice, singing ballads.[79]

Described by Pückler-Muskau, Lord and Lady Darnley's 1827 country house meeting

fulfilled not one but many purposes for both hosts and guests. For the former, the

gathering could materialize the following ends, to say the least: the doing away of their

own loneliness, the demonstration of their wealth, and the solidification of their local

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[79] Pückler-Muskau 116.

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influence via the proof of their association with a nationalized, and even internationalized, group.   However, none of these needed to be said; the name of fashion alone was enough reason for getting together a large group of people.

On the side of the guests, different persons could get different things; the range of aims could be as wide as the spectrum of the participants: while the two MPs used the gathering as an extension of Parliament, others could find it an occasion for the enjoyment of life, the building of higher connections, the cultivation of the mind, the acquisition of social education, or search for a marriage partner— the single most important purpose of the German prince's entering English fashionable society was to find a rich woman to marry. Of course, each person could realize more than one purpose: while performing their political business, the MPs could also conduct the pursuit of pleasure and social networking, to say the least. But again, all could remain unspecified: the fashion of staying in a well-known country seat out of the London Season was significant enough for a person to manipulate for an invitation.

The means to all these ends did not consist in rational debate alone, though it could be part of the scene as enacted by the Corn-Bill discussants; instead, they could vary from person to person and from time to time. Generally speaking, however, fashionable society relied on the following major means to or techniques for its variegated goals.

The first was the art of sociability. This was essentially a technique of keeping oneself in Society rather than being open and friendly to others. Of course, in order to keep oneself in, one should have some minimum skills of pleasing others. That was why various persons of fashion from Count D'Orsay to Lady Cowper were all said to have the

tact of making others feel at home. But sociability could not be reduced to being agreeable and kind. Cutting and quizzing, which I have examined in great length in Chapter 1, were equally part of the mechanism.

The second technique was the science of the surface. Appearing beautiful, magnificent, and dignified; arranging the house in grand ways; providing gorgeous foods and drinks; inventing family histories; being thrift on family dinners and yet holding luxurious fashionable reunions; etc.—all belonged to this science of the surface.   In 1843, *Punch* published a series "The Side Scenes of Society" which caricatures the middle-class fashion-following family as the Spangle Lacquers, ostensibly pinpointing spangling and lacquering, or more generally coating, casing, and adorning, as part of the surface art of fashionable society. Two decades later, Charles Dickens would create the characters of the Veneerings in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), confirming in satire the pervasive presence of the science of surface in Victorian society.

The third means was the art of eroticization. Lady and Lord Darnley's creation of a dimly-lit romantic ambience in which a pretty girl entertained others was just one expression of this art.   Numerous documents recorded how fashionable dowagers, who invited beautiful young men to please themselves, had to invite sweet young ladies to please the latter. Indeed, flirting or coquetting was openly indulged in fashionable society.   Alexandre Baudouin's 1820 *New Dictionary for the Fashionable World* listed "coquette" and "coquet (male)" as noticeable character types in the beau monde.   Part of the reason that Almack's became the summit of fashion was, in some contemporaries' view, its being a good space for flirting:

> Would you flirt?—take that dark-eyed Houris, with the beaming eye and thickly-braided hair, among which the pearls shine like snow on the raven's back, into the

largest of the two tea-rooms, and in the corner of that sofa behind the door as you enter, plant yourselves: fear neither listeners nor lookers on—they are too busy with their own *petites affaires,* to trouble themselves with yours.[80]

As "Fashion's gay crowd goes on flirting and whirling" in Mrs. Wilson's words, sex was simultaneously evoked, suspended and made a relay stick in the general exchange of fashion.

The fourth was the politics of transnational exchange. This politics did not just underlie the German Prince Pückler-Muskau's, the Russian Princess Madame Lieven's, and the Austrian Ambassador Esterhazy's immense popularity in English fashionable society. It also accounted for why speaking French, and later also German and Italian, became a matter of fashion. What made this politics was not just that foreign people and objects constituted an external point around which certain people in a national group could unite themselves as an exclusive circle against others.[81] There was something else: one national group's exotic desire for, lack of knowledge of, and general tolerance of, or rather condescension to, international elements could all be used to affirm local power, achieving local ascendancy and other gains. One of Almack's lady patronesses was recorded to have said to another: "everything will be justified by your being a foreigner; it will legalize all your caprices."[82] What is it that legalizes a foreigner's caprices: British people's desire for the exotic, or their pleasure of tolerating her ignorance of English customs, or both? Whatever it is, the comment suggests that within the world of fashion local changes could be initiated via the politics of transnational exchange.

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[80] "Almack's," 497.

[81] Here I am rephrasing a point made by George Simmel (191).

[82] Stanhope 2:341.

Finally, there came the technology of enchantment, which was in fact a partial or complete combination of the other techniques for the effect that everything seemed to have happened by magic, i.e. without the contamination of labor and commercial transaction. As I will deliberate on this in the next section, suffice it here to say that enchantment—or rather a momentary suspension from the mundane world—was regarded both as what the "magic circles of fashionable society" could produce and as a means to its variegated goals.

When all or parts of those techniques were put to special uses on special occasions in the name of fashion for small, localized, unspecified changes that simply went as the vicissitudes of fashion, they became what I would call "fashionable agency"—the prevalent form of power in the world of fashion. A most important characteristic of this agency was that it was de-centered: it did not have a personal figure like the monarch or an institution such as the prison to centralize the power; instead it could have different centers at different times and in different situations. Fashionable agency functioned holistically rather than analytically. As I mention earlier, fashion did not like to specify but just preferred to blur everything together in its own name for its own sake. By being holistic rather than analytical, fashionable agency could address better the messiness, the irregularity of life situations on the one hand; on the other, it left room for change: it could be everything—sociability et al. and still be itself—just fashion. In the sense that so much depended on bodily play and display, fashionable agency should be taken as a form of bio-power, but once again it differed from the Foucauldian concept in the sense that it was not carried out by any particular institution. As far as it was not institutionalized, fashionable agency resembled what De Certeau terms the

"tactic"— "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional) localization" but has to insinuate itself "into the other's place" and be "always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'" (xix). Yet unlike De Certeau's "tactic" which is perceived as the tool of the weak, fashionable agency was also employed by the ruling classes. It is the presence of this agency so different from reason, I argue, that fundamentally differentiated the world of fashion from the bourgeois public and rendered it complementary to the latter in a symbiotic relationship.

As a complement to the bourgeois public, fashionable society did not have a designated domain but poached wherever fashion directed. It could make frequent use of what was generally termed a private space: the home. Yet it could also employ the Parliament, the Court of Chancery or other alleged public places. In the vast realm that stretched from the hearth seamlessly to the outside world, fashionable society enacted a system of social activities ranging from family entertainments to national Drawing-Rooms. These activities—neither public nor private and yet having resonances in both ways—destabilized the public and private spheres even as the existence of fashionable society had served as a condition of possibility for their separation.

Publicizing Private Life

It is generally accepted that the early nineteenth century—especially the 30s and the 40s—witnessed a stress on the public/private division. In Leonore Davidoff's words, "new importance was placed on privacy for upper-and middle-class family and social life."[83] What is often ignored, however, is that even as this privatization process was going on, the world of fashion was opening up the domestic sphere. Roughly from the

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[83] Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 22.

end of the Napoleonic war, home became a major site for Society events ranging from

morning and evening calls; to tea and dinner parties; to balls, routs and *conversaziones*;

and to musical *soirées*, literary salons and private theatricals. Insofar as all these events

happened under the domestic roof, followed a theoretically strict selection process, and

were supposed to be voluntary actions of free individuals, they could all still be

considered private and did not challenge the status of family and home as a private

domain. Nonetheless, these events undoubtedly publicized private life.

First of all, the scale of these activities rendered them public spectacles. Except

for morning/evening calls which brought in the fashionable world piecemeal, all other

activities demanded the simultaneous presence of a large number of people, i.e. a real

crowd. A gathering "without this crowd," wrote Pückler-Muskau in 1827, "would be

despised and a visitor of any fashion who found the staircase empty, would probably

drive away from the door" (122). The German prince was of course remarking about the

highest circle of fashion in the early decades. As the century went on, however, large- if

not grand-scale home entertainments were becoming increasingly common among the

middling ranks. As Gordon and Nair have recently uncovered, Victorian and Edwardian

middle-class homes were equipped for large-scale and lavish entertaining; while an upper

middle-class household, the Houldsworths, had 184 wine glasses in 1854, another more

modest home owned by James Watson had about 1,478 assorted bottles in his cellar (122).

The presence of a large crowd turned the "intimate sphere" inside out, rendering it

into something like a fair. [84] Richard Doyle's 1849 comic drawing "Socyetye' Enjoyinge

Itselfe at a Soyrée" vividly conveys the thoroughfare nature of the domestic space when

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[84] Habermas 55.

used by the fashionable world (Fig.5). Describing a popular lord's "at home," the picture highlights the uncontainable size of the crowd, part of which has burst out of the sketch zone; and the collapse of inside/outside boundaries as the crowd stretches continually from outside the doorway into the dining room and then onto the staircase leading up to the drawing-room. A great variety of people engaging in a wide spectrum of activities; the not very decent manner of gentlemen grabbing for food; and the inevitable pushing, gasping and bustling—all of these further flesh out the idea of the home as a fair. If Doyle's deliberately slippery and light sketches mildly suggest that there might be something wrong with such a practice, its popularity—first among the aristocracy and nouveau riches and then among the middling ranks—demonstrates that nineteenth-century Britons did not care too much to find out what was wrong; or if they found it out—some did criticize and complain—they would still accept it. It was the fashion, and they knew too much or too little not to follow it; and by following it, they transformed home from its ideal status as a safe haven away from the outside world into an actual site for the performance of private life as public spectacle."[85]

Meanwhile, the fashionable crowd, far from being an occasional intruder, was a regular presence in the privatized sphere; the frequency of social gatherings rendered domesticity a matter of constant interaction with the outside world. During the London Season, social events occurred on a daily basis; if one did not host a party, one had to go out to attend gatherings at other houses or in public places. In recording social changes between 1760 and 1818, Lady Susan O'Brien wrote that there used to be very few great assemblies and balls, and that "one place in an evening was an engagement, & sufficient

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[85] The phrase is by Jean-Christopher Agnew who uses it to discuss the American case in the late nineteenth century (157-189).

amusement." "Now," wrote the same person, "assemblys are become so numerous that two or three of a night it is common to go to….Balls extremely numerous."[86] A decade later, social gatherings were as many, if not more. In the late 1820s, Pückler-Muskau often went to three to four parties in one evening in high season. Likewise, an 1833 *Court Journal* issue published an anonymous person's fashionable arrangements for the week beginning on May 4 as follows:

> *This Day*.—The Marquis of Clanricarde's dinner party.
> —The Marquis of Salisbury's party.
> —The Earl of Westmorland's dinner party.
> *Monday.*—Lady Des Vaeux's assembly.
> —Mrs. T. Chaplin's assembly.
> *Tuesday*.—Mrs. Holden's ball.
> *Wednesday.*—The King's levee.
> —The Duchess of Kent's dinner party.
> —Mrs. Colonel Heathcote's grand fancy ball, Chandos street.
> —Almack's ball.
> *Thursday*.—Mrs. Thistlewaite's ball.
> *Friday*.—Mrs. Oddie's ball.[87]

This schedule vividly fleshes out how frequent, numerous and various social gatherings could be during the London Season in the 30s.

But even out of the Season, or for those families who did not participate in seasonal migrations, fashionable social events could still be remarkably many and frequent. The point can be illustrated by a look at the Carlyles' involvement in Society. As bourgeois intellectuals, and poor ones at that, Jane Welsh and Thomas Carlyle's participation in fashion was very limited. Yet even for them, the pressure for social events was quite heavy. In 1843, Thomas Carlyle thought of hosting musical soirées once a fortnight. Although this idea was taken as crazy by his wife and never put to

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[86] *The Life and Letters of Lady Sara Lennox*, I.291.

[87] "Fashionable Arrangements for the Week," 268.

practice since they only had one maid servant, his toying with it betrayed how often and important social activities could be to a bourgeois intellectual family. Even if without a regular social night—a fashionable family usually had a formalized event such as Wednesday "at home" or Thursday evening for which the World needed no invitation—Jane Carlyle was still complaining in 1842 of "so much 'receiving,'…so much obligatory writing, so many other-people's business devolving on poor me."[88]

Things got more complicated when the fame of Carlyle as a writer rendered him a lion in Society, especially in the circles around the fashionable Lady Ashburton. For complex reasons including the wish to find practical channels for his social reform ideas and the pleasure of being caught by fashion, Carlyle followed Society more closely and often urged his wife to do so, too. Conflicts arose consequently.   In writing to her close female relations and friends, Mrs. Carlyle voiced them from time to time:

> Babbie I *could* not write to you while my husband was there, because I could and would and needed to write to *thee* more confidentially than to *him* even. [. . .] Not that I have had any mysteries of iniquity to communicate—but all my bits of household troubles…all my amusement at their *planlessness*—their *lionizing* &c. &c [. . .] all *that* it would have puzzled you to repeat to *them*. [. . .] Carlyle seems to have been rather charmed with Mrs. Paulet and not displeased with Geraldine—indeed with all his hatred of being made a lion of he seems to tolerate those who make him so marvelously well. (To Babbie, 6 August 1843; p.144)

What Jane Carlyle paints here is not a picture of domestic peace and harmony; instead the letter vividly conveys how family privacy and conjugal intimacy are shadowed by such social events as lionizing (more on this in the next chapter). The domestic woman has to seek seclusion and solitude in writing letters to female friends. But even that is a tenuous means to privacy since the receivers sometimes have to "repeat" the letters to a larger circle, to "the public" in Jane's words (144).

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[88] To Jeannie Welsh, 5 November 1842; p.37.

In 1845, after Jane was brought into the fashionable circles centered on Lady

Ashburton, she complained of depression:

> The fact is I have been in a sad way for a long while. [. . .] I was ashamed to talk
> of illness which had taken the form chiefly of frightful depression of spirits. [. . .]
> He [Carlyle] was not a little horrified at my revelations and immediately declared
> that I must get away into the country as far as possible. [. . .] But where—To
> Dumfriesshire with him or before him?—impossible. [. . .] —many places were
> spoken of—but in everyone a lion was in the way. [. . .] I had to dry my eyes and
> go off with the Lady Harriet to Addiscombe for four mortal days! Fancy it!—in
> such a state mind—having to get up fine clothes and fine "wits"! having to
> proceed with my *first season* of *fashionable life* while I was feeling it the
> dreadfulest problem to live at all. (To Jeannie Welsh, 9 July 1845; p.248)

While many factors might have contributed to Jane's "sad way," the stress of

"fashionable life" certainly bore on her sensitive nerves. Yet in spite of Jane's

complaints, it was largely social events—rather than domestic scenes—that she recorded

in detail and sent out in letters. For after all, these events not only gave material

expression to her legal relationship with a man of genius but also seemed really to hold

their life together. Without doing away with the allocation of the domestic space as one

of human intimacy, frequent social rounds gave and shifted the meanings of such

concepts as "domesticity" and "conjugal love" by involving the family in a whirlpool of

fashion-driven activities.

To frequently stage a spectacular ritual would, of course, involve much

commercial transactions, domestic management, and household work. As Gordon and

Nair assert, entertaining in wealthier middle-class families was expansive and demanding:

> it could be on a scale requiring the time, planning, and organization of a military
> campaign. Entertaining not only added to the normal burdens of managing a
> household, it swelled the numbers of servants to be instructed, supervised, and
> reprimanded and often involved the hiring of additional servants. Furthermore,
> the problems attendant on securing the services of workmen, ensuring that the
> task was carried out to specifications, completed within the specified time, and

with minimal upheaval to the household, are easily recognizable to the modern reader." (149)

Performed on an even larger scale, gatherings in ultra-fashionable families could demand more than that.

Yet a most important characteristic of private entertainments in the first half of the nineteenth century was the erasure of any trace of work and even of commercial exchange. As I mentioned earlier, the technology of enchantment structured fashionable events. A good illustration of it can be found in Jane Carlyle's description of Lady Ashburton's ball:

> [It] is an additional idea of life to have seen such a party—all the Duchesses one ever heard tell of blazing in diamonds, all the young beauties of the Season, all the distinguished statesmen, etc. etc. were to be seen among the six or seven hundred people present—and the room hung with artificial roses looked like an Arabian Nights entertainment. (To Helen Welsh, 4 July 1850; p.343)

"Arabian Nights entertainment"—that was what a truly fashionable family wanted to achieve via its hospitality; that was what an average participant generally felt, or thought they felt, on such occasions: early nineteenth-century documents were filled with the metaphor. The sparkling diamonds of the ladies and the artificial roses did not speak of the necessity of fair commodity exchange based on social labor; instead, the arrangement and presence of these objects were meant to create an enchanting ambience in which all traces of social labor were erased, leaving behind a world of leisure and non-utility, and thus a universe of "sovereignty" in George Bataille's sense.[89] An important standard enacted by the brilliant crowd in brilliant movements for the public sphere of commerce and work was not fair trade in the market place but the magic ideal of zero work, zero

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[89] Bataille defines the state of "sovereignty" as one "beyond utility" (3. 198).

utility and therefore zero trade. Although that magic ideal did not do away with the work

ethic and the spirit of commerce, it rendered them incomplete and lacking.

Of course, not many people could reach the extent of enchantment Lady

Ashburton was capable of with her wealth and position; nonetheless, many were not short

of familiarity with the technology. Jane Carlyle once used it to engender some

"magnificent improvements" at "such small cost" to their less-than- satisfactory London

house largely by the means of casing:

> The upstairs room is now a really beautiful little drawing-room with a sofa—easy
> chair—ottoman-cushions—stools—every conceivable luxury!—all covered—and
> all the chairs covered also—with a bluff and red chintz made by my own
> hands!!![90]

Without a large number of servants at her beck and call, the genius's wife did not mind

using her own hands to beautify the house; unable to afford artificial roses, she resorted

to casing to achieve some sort of enchanting domestic comfort. But what needed

covering was, not just some shabby sets of furniture, but the female laboring hands as

well as the noise and disturbance any manual labor might cause: the whole job of the

refurbishment was conducted while Thomas Carlyle was away on his "journeyings in

quest of health."[91] If Jane had elicited from the returning master "'a certain

satisfaction'…and some meed of praise" via her magic transformation, she was also

doomed to disappointment: only two or three days later, Thomas Carlyle started to

complain about the upstairs room.[92] The technology of enchantment did not work the

same in a moderate bourgeois house as in an affluent aristocratic one. But it connected

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[90] To Jeanie Welsh, 2 October 1843; p.153.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

them in the same system of fashion in which private life must be simultaneously sensual

and ethereal; commodified and de-commodified; depending on and kept away from work,

especially the work of servants and women: in short it was both public and private.

This paradox of fashion-ridden private life was materially written in the domestic

interior of the English house in the nineteenth century. Among the upper circles, the

trend to refurnish the interior and/or to rebuild the ancestral house to catch up with the

current fashion was already seen in the 1760s and 70s. According to Neil Mckendrick, a

"crescendo of building" occurred at that time to substitute many magnificent houses for

Elizabethan and Jacobean mansions; and for these new houses, furniture, pottery, fabrics,

cutlery, wallpaper, plants, and even animals were all bought with some deliberation to

match the day's standard of fashion.[93] The trend was still going on in the Victorian

period. Stella Margetson puts it well:

> A desire to show off and 'to command attention spread through the upper classes
> like an epidemic and many a country house of elegant Georgian proportions was
> done over in a more elaborate and ostentatious style or torn down and rebuilt
> altogether. Architects were willing to design whatever 'effects' their rich clients
> required [. . .] and it did not much matter if the overall effect was impure,
> pompous and extravagant so long as it did 'command attention. (40)

According to the architectural historian Julienne Hanson, a distinctive

characteristic of a typical nineteenth-century English country house was the increase in

transitional lobby spaces that were thoroughfares themselves but were on the way to or

from a dead end (173). In other words, a Victorian country home had more spaces that

were both public and private compared with its counterparts in the three centuries before.

Mark Girouard confirms this by identifying a revival of the medieval hall—a

thoroughfare— in the late Victorian country house (78-79). Although neither Hanson nor

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[93] Mckendrick et al.10.

Girouard specifies, such transitional spaces as the grand staircase, the boudoir, and the hall speak of nineteenth-century Britons' simultaneous accommodation for privacy and publicity, or rather publicity in privacy. Dedicated to fashion, they were most visible sites where the fashionable world came in under the domestic roof, linking private life to the outside world.

The grand staircase in a great house was not only highly decorated to the current taste but also reserved for Society people; it was distinguished both from the backstairs for servants and from the special stairs for business transaction. It was to be frequently occupied by a fashionable crowd to and from the family showrooms: the dining room, the drawing room, or the boudoir; and it was "inconceivable," according to Girouard, "that servants could go up the main staircase, except to clean it" (30). When Pückler-Muskau' pointed out the fullness/emptiness of the staircase as a sign of a family's fashionability or lack of it, he did not accidentally set eye on a piece of architectural ornament. The conduit caught the English imagination, not in spite of its transitional status, but exactly because of it.   One of the greatest women of fashion Lady Londonderry liked to greet the fashionable world on the landing of the splendid stair in the family town house remodeled by Philip Wyatt in the late twenties.   Often, the extraordinary beauty of the staircase met with that of the hostess and her guests to send forth circles of brilliance.

Another conspicuous transitional space was the boudoir, which usually had two doors: "a private door, ingeniously contrived, leads to the sleeping rooms, while a public one leads to the grand staircase."[94]   While this description did not portray all boudoirs—some of which, like Lady Cowper's, could also open to a garden—it captured their spirit:

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[94] "Letter on Dress," 67.

they were Janus-faced—with one side looking inward and one side outward. As an exclusive space usually but not always of the mistress's, it was the private within the private. Yet it was also one of the most important places from which the family derived its public image. What bridged the public and the private tendencies here was fashion, which not only filled the boudoir with various goods from its global land of objects but also opened it up for visitors from time to time. Pückler-Muskau was once shown around Lady Londonderry's boudoir which he described as follows:

> The whole boudoir was full of perfumes, flowers and rarities, the 'clair obscur' of rose-coloured curtains and the Marchioness herself in a dress of yellow gauze, reclined on her chaise longue 'plongée dans une douce langueur':—it was a pretty picture of refinement. Diamonds and pearls, pens and ink, books, letters, toys and seals, and an unfinished purse lay before her. (152)

What was striking about this feminine space was not really the profusion of luxury, affluence, and sumptuousness it contained. Aristocratic houses had boasted of these in the past. What was new was that all of these had to be expressed in the highest style of the present mode. The "yellow gauze," the "rose-coloured curtains," and the lady's "langueur" all spoke of her knowledge of and adept use of current fashions, which, more than anything else, presented to the world the family's durable status as one of the elite. The boudoir, like the grand staircase, materially footnoted fashion's role in publicizing domestic life.

A middle-class house could not boast of a ceremonial staircase or a luxurious boudoir; but it also had its special transitional space of fashion: the parlor. Although it could not be as magnificent as the boudoir or the drawing-room in a grand house, middle-class parlor was equally written in the language of fashion. William Cobbett provided an

example of this in 1825 when talking about the decline of agriculture as the backbone of

the nation:

> Everything about the farmhouse was formerly the scene of *plain manners and plentiful* living. Oak clothes-chests, oak bed-steads, oak chests of drawers. [. . .] Some of the things were many hundred of years of old. Now everything was new: 'some showy chairs and a sofa (a *sofa* by all means): half a dozen prints in gilt frames hanging up: some swinging book-shelves with novels…many *wine decanters* and *wine glasses* and '*a dinner set*' and '*a breakfast set*' and '*desert knives*'[. . .] and worst of all a *parlour*! [. . .] One end of the front of this once plain and substantial house had been moulded into a 'parlour'; and there was the mahogany table, the fine chairs, and the fine glass. (226)

Not all farmhouses underwent this change, of course; still, the example was suggestive of

the mark of fashion on a prosperous farmer's home interior, which was not only seen in

the decor: Old, inherited stuff such as "oak chests" must be replaced by new, fashionable

objects like the "mahogany table." It was also seen in the architectural structure itself:

"plain and substantial house" must be remodeled to contain a "parlour," something that

tied the family synchronically to the outside world rather than diachronically to the past

and something that showcased the domestic fief as a place of refinement fully in tune

with the latest trend of fashion.

This bourgeois conflation of newness and refinement was also identified and

satirized by Charles Dickens who describes the newly rich Veneerings' house in this way:

> Mr. and Mrs. Veneering were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new. [. . .] They themselves were new, they were as newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a bran-new baby. [. . .] For, in the Veneering establishment, from the hall-chairs with the new coat of arms, to the grand pianoforte with the new action, and upstairs again to the new fire-escape, all things were in a state of high varnish and polish. (*Our Mutual Friend*, p.8; vol. 1, ch.2)

Despite Dickens's critical tone, he vividly captures how the modern system of fashion

that substitutes novelty for patina is transforming the whole domestic arena of the

bourgeois new people from the house to the interior and to the people enclosed in it. The

"new fire-escape" of a nouveau riche—like the remodeled boudoir and grand staircase in

an ancient family—writes in stone an important aspect of English private life: penetrated

by fashion, it was neither absolutely private nor completely public but highly fashionable.

Privatizing Public Life

While the world of fashion was publicizing the domestic sphere, it also privatized

life beyond it, i.e. in the realm of politics, market place and social labor. As I have

touched on the fashionable public's relationship with the latter two and as it is not

practical to elaborate on all of them in a short space, my focus here is the most visibly

public sphere of politics. The world of fashion's privatization of political life was seen

primarily in its channeling of some governmental functions into its own domain,

producing a special kind of politics that did not go in that name and yet made possible

highly effective social governance.

A remarkable form of this special politics came in Society's transformation of

royal receptions. As it is generally known, when the court was turned into "the great

house among very many great houses" after the Glorious Revolution, royal balls, dinner

parties, levées, drawings rooms were no longer mere state events representing the power

of the crown before its subjects.[95] They were also, and primarily, private matters of a

quasi-family subjected equally to the new symbolic system of fashion. The royal

Drawing-Room, for example, was initiated as a form of private amusement when George

II and Queen Caroline brought together their household members every evening to play

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[95] Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 24.

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at cards in that special domestic space—just as other fashionable families did. After the queen's death, the king still held drawing-rooms twice a week for a few years and then laid them aside. George III and his queen offered drawing-rooms for a long time, and theirs began to resemble nineteenth-century ones in their openness to people beyond the royal palace. But their receptions were still conducted on a small scale and considered private. According to Lady Susan O'Brien, until the late 1810s, royal drawing-rooms were held once a week, seldom got crowded, and generally had "a well-regulated & elegant assembly of the best company."[96]

By the 1820s, however, royal drawing-rooms were re-publicized. First of all, they were synchronized with the London Season; and held only three or four times, they became the highest points of fashion for people coming from all over the country and even abroad. Meanwhile, they also became more accessible to those outside aristocratic circles. Even as early as 1818, Lady Susan O' Brien was complaining their loss of exclusivity:

> every body man or woman that assumes the name of gentleman or lady go to it. The crowds are so great & so little decorum attended to, that people's clothes are litterally [sic] torn to pieces.[97]

The lady seems to be exaggerating since as late as 1841, only about 10 percent of the women presented at court came from non-titled and non-landed classes.[98] But she is sharp in seeing the change in admission principles and the tendency of growth; for as the century wore on, royal drawing rooms as well as other forms of entertainment were

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[96] *The Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox,* 290.

[97] Ibid.

[98] This percentage and the following two are based on David Cannadine's account of the "dilution of select society" (346).

increasingly crowded and filled with more non-aristocrats: by 1871 the above percentage had risen to 32 and by 1891 over 50.

As they grew, royal receptions became important sites for a unique kind of politics—unique because they could no longer be definitely framed as public or private. On the one hand, they still had some private tints because they continued to happen in the living vicinity of the royal family rather than in such obviously official places as Westminster Hall and parliamentary houses; because they did not have definite state issues to address apart from the recognition of one's civil service, another's coming of age, still another's marriage, a diplomatic group's arrival and so on; and because strict measures were taken as to who could be present. On the other, they were inevitably public state events that often involved the work of royal servants and specialized state officers like the Lord Chamberlain, the presence of a large domestic crowd, and the spectatorship of foreign guests in many cases. Neither absolutely public nor totally private, they became Society events, exuding political function via a special language of fashion on both international and national levels.

On the international level, royal receptions became increasingly a way of creating national identity. As the *Court Journal* author noted about George IV's drawing-room in 1829:

> The belles of the Court of France may possibly boast a more refined grace of *tournure*—a more unvarying elegance of attire. Vienna may affect a more exclusively aristocratic dignity; St. Petersburg, a brighter blaze of jeweled splendor, and semi-barbarian gorgeousness;—but in point of pure, animated, blooming personal beauty, —of dignity of demeanor, clothing like a diadem the matron-brows of the wives and mothers of our statesmen and heroes, —of the beaming intelligence of intellectual cultivation, —and—far, far, above all—in the sweet and chastened simplicity of the young daughters of many a noble house—

there exists not throughout Europe—throughout the world—a land that can match with the rich superiority of the Court of George the Fourth. [99]

This author, representative of many others, was re-endowing royal receptions with public importance. However, it was no longer the crown and its absolute power that these events served. Rather, they were to flesh out national distinction on an international stage occupied by similar actors; and for that purpose, the knowledge of fashion was indispensable, since all points of comparison were under the baton of fashion: *tournure*, attire, jewelry, personal beauty, demeanor and decorum, personal cultivation.

Within the national boundaries, royal drawing-rooms, levees and other events materialized a number of social functions, as they became ritual-like, i.e. when they turned into formalized, regularly repeated events over the century. Recent political and anthropological studies have discovered that the *emotional* force of participation in civic ceremonies and rituals—as opposed to consensus or shared values—is a major factor in binding modern liberal society together. [100] Rituals can do so, not because they express collective norms but because they provide occasions for common *emotional* participation in symbols which are inherently ambiguous and multi-vocal. In this theoretical light, the royal drawing-rooms and other fashionable events probably had a bigger role to play in Britain's transformation into a liberal society than we have usually thought. Indeed, I would argue that the emotional involvement a variety of people underwent via a variety of activities at these gatherings was an important means to the solidification of national

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[99] "The King's Drawing-room," 6.

[100] For theorization on ritual see John Street, *Politics and Popular Culture*; Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*; David Kertzer*, Ritual, Politics, and Power*; Don Handelman*, Models and Mirrors*; and Don Handelman and Galina Lindquist (eds.) *Ritual in Its Own Right*.

unity in the early nineteenth century. The point can be illustrated by an analysis of the process of Queen Victoria's Drawing-Room in the 40s and 50s.

Before the Drawing-Room, those to be presented usually had to go through weeks of preparation and training often directed by a special deportment master.   The practices one had to commend were, not just what to wear, but also what cards to leave and with whom, how to climb in and out of a carriage gracefully, how to carry and drop the train of one's gown, how to walk in and out of the drawing room, how to curtsey and so on. [101] To go through these seemingly trivial practices—also enacted on a smaller scale for other fashionable events—was not just to learn that self-discipline of the body was crucial to one's membership in a community. It was to acquire a particular "habitus," that set of socially acquired, embodied habits and dispositions that largely made social distinctions in Pierre Bourdieu's understanding. [102]   It was also to have the excitement that one was already or just about to be initiated into a circle of greatness. This complacency was of course girded by an ineradicable anxiety at whether one could make it or whether one was soon to lose it; for this was an open elite group whose rules of conduct were not settled but had to vary with fashion even though some larger rules such as curtseying and leaving one's card obtained over time.   Still, the sensation of eventfulness affirmed one's belonging to a national community where one was free to achieve grandiosity.

On the court morning, the one who was to be presented—especially a young girl coming of age—became the center of the whole household. After the (usually) French hairdresser made up her coiffure, after the perfect court dress was put on, all the members

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[101] Etiquette books of the nineteenth century usually contain sections on court presentations.

[102] For Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," see his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* and *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

under the family roof including servants were to admire her from head to foot, giving her a real sense of importance.

In the afternoon, when her carriage came onto St. James Street filled with other similar vehicles, marching navy and army officers, pedestrian on-lookers, fashionable club bow-window spectators, street peddlers—all vividly represented by Richard Doyle's pencil drawing (Fig. 6)— it was no longer she alone who felt the sense of being in a great national community. Those currently excluded from court circles could also be similarly elated. For those prospering onlookers, the scene titillated their ambition that someday they would be presented. For those less prosperous, the spectacle could be an occasion for trade; for a feeling of greatness by contiguity; for the pleasure of commenting on some dress and demeanor that could be made better in the viewer's idea; and for the visual carnival of vicariously enjoying fine horses, fine carriages, and fine clothes. Besides, the "waving field of feathers," hoops and diamonds could also withdraw both participants and observers temporarily from the prosaic everyday world, embracing them in a moment of miraculous being.[103] "Arabian Nights fiction" was just one expression contemporaries frequently used to describe the scene.[104] They also repeatedly employed "magnificent," "enchanting", "delightful," "brilliant" and "joyous," among others; "wasteful" or "conspicuous consumption" that Thorstein Veblen helped popularize in the twentieth century were not part of their vocabulary.[105] The frequent repetition of those emotive phrases suggest that nineteenth-century Britons were far more

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[103] Rush 103.

[104] The phrase was used, for example, in *The Book of Fashionable Life*, 23.

[105] Veblen's idea was mainly presented in his *The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899)*.

attracted, than objected, to the St. James Street scene on the court day.   Although there were occasional criticisms or complaints as when a small trader was forced to move on and make room for the great, the drawing-room afternoon was largely an event that excited the whole nation. By getting a large number of people to be at the same place at the same time and by making an even larger social body—namely those outside St. James Street and the metropolitan space—hang on to it via the column of fashionable intelligence, the royal drawing-room functioned to enhance the sense of national unity just like Benedict Anderson's ritual of newspaper reading, albeit in a more viscerally and materially diversified manner.

When one finally arrived at the palace around 3 p.m., the long wait in the ante room, the difficult stepping onto to the grand staircase filled with long trains, the eventual making into the crowded drawing room, the actual kissing of the queen's hand or being kissed by her on the forehead (if one was a peer's daughter, for instance), and the final going out backward further gave one a feeling of belonging to a great community. This sense of integration was especially important for those disenfranchised such as women and for those professional or financial upstarts, who could enjoy a real feel of the constitutional spirit of liberty that allowed them closeness to the crown and its court.

People who had successfully undergone this "fashionable christening" could materialize a number of social gains.[106] The debutante now had one of the biggest stamps of fashion that allowed her to enter Society, which might end in a proper marriage. A nouveau-riche man could use a successful court presentation as a passport to more distinguished circles. A military officer was able to tell a story about his royally

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[106] "Adventures of a First Season," 505.

confirmed glory, which might function as social capital as well as psychological force.

There were, of course, also those who, largely due to their "bad" performances, did not

find much use for court presentations. Constance Weld from a prominent Roman

Catholic landed family in Dorset, for example, remembered her first court experience as

nightmarish, with a lot of "pushing and shoving & want of order"; but this bad memory

had much to do with the fact that she "did all sorts of wrong things—seized hold of the

Queen's hand for one thing." [107] However "fearful" a day that was, she did not object to

a second presentation after her marriage to a younger son of the Duke of Devonshire; and

with this one, she could pleasantly recall how she "went in gorgeous array of white lace

(my wedding lace) and white moiré train, with my beautiful diamond tiara on my

head." [108]

Indeed, as a collectively created ceremony, court presentation's political function

did not lie so much in the individual purposes one might derive from it as in the

emotional bonds it created among varied citizens. In a country with relatively loose

central administrations, court events served as one of the important foci around which

people from all over the islands and even abroad could bind themselves emotionally.

Richard Rush, the American Envoy to England from 1818 to 1825, touched on the point

when he wrote about the fantastical spectacle of moving hoops and plumes at one of

Queen Charlotte's drawing-rooms: "Like Old English Buildings, and Shakespeare, it

carried the feelings with it. It triumphed over criticism" (105). The court was becoming

a major site for the making of Englishness via the emotional force it released, as Rush

suggests; and because it was largely regulated by fashion, this nation-building project

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[107] Quoted in Pamela Horn, *Ladies of the Manor,* 61.

[108] Ibid.

simultaneously allowed diversity, originality and individuality. It was union in

diversification that a fashion-ridden court effected and sustained in an increasingly liberal

society.

As with the court, the world of fashion also intersected with parliamentary houses.

The intersection was first of all physical. Because the London Season doubled with the

parliamentary session, many MPs were also key figures in the world of fashion.   Before

and after they came to "rational debate" in the House, these members lived in fashionable

balls, breakfasts, and dinner parties. Then, fashionable and political capital merged with

each other.   In the words of an American observer, "Society in England is intimately

connected with the government, and the distinctions in one are the origin of gradations in

the other." [109] If one shone in politics, one would easily become a star in the world of

fashion: great political figures like Canning and Wellington were also fashionable

celebrities. Part of the reason why nouveau riches and younger sons from aristocratic

families wanted to be in parliament was that doing so had the advantage of keeping "in

the sacred legion of the somebodies" (which meant fashionables in nineteen-century

social lexicon), as a man of the world succinctly wrote. [110] Conversely, if one had

fashion, one could very well turn it into political capital. The patronesses of Almack's—

the summit of the fashionable world—were said to control 23 votes in the House of

Commons in the first two or three decades; although that might be an exaggerated saying,

it still reflected the popular consciousness of the transferability of fashionable capital into

the political. Indeed, for a talented but not rich young man, an important route to

greatness was first to mix in fashionable society to obtain desirable connections and a

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[109] *The Gentleman's Handbook of Etiquette*, 9.

[110] "Memoirs of a Man of the World," 257.

proper/rich marriage, and then to start an expensive political career. That was exactly the

path taken by Benjamin Disraeli: both his marriage to a rich widow and his relationship

with two grand ladies of fashion were indispensable to his parliamentary development.

William Thackeray touched on this social wisdom satirically in his 1849 novel when he

made Major Pendennis lecture to his nephew Arthur:

> You are heir to a little independence, which everybody fancies is a doosid deal more. You have a good name, good wits, good manners, and a good person—and, begad! I don't see why you shouldn't marry a woman with money—get into Parliament—distinguish yourself, and—and, in fact, that sort of the thing." [111]

"That sort of the thing" was no other than the interchangeability between fashionable and

political creditability in making a young man's career.

As a result, politics became socialized and theatrical. Dickens mocks the social,

informal nature of Parliament by calling the House of Commons "the best club in

London." [112] Richard Doyle draws a vivid satire of this "club" in his 1849 series (Fig. 7).

The informal social-gathering quality of parliamentary meetings is highlighted by a

number of members lounging on the bench either drowsing off or quizzing others; the

central figure (Robert Peel) who is speaking poses as if he were performing a fashionable

Polka. Indeed, men performed in Parliament as if they were acting in Society; and those

persons of fashion who went to watch parliamentary proceedings spoke of them as if they

were stage vicissitudes. As Lady Morgan took down in her memoirs in 1833:

> Yesterday we went to the House of Lords to hear the last debate on the Church Temporalities Bill. We sat in the Peeress's box. The first thing that struck me was the theatrical set out of the place. The stage below, the galley above, the dropping of the actors. (3.136)

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[111] Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis,* 1.287.

[112] Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 237.

Likewise, Thomas Creevey compared Parliament to a playhouse:

> Yesterday I spent a very amusing hour with Sefton at the Opera House, seeing the *maitre de ballet* maneuver about 50 figurantes for the approaching new ballet of *Alfred*. This done, we went to our *own* playhouse, where we saw 1st a *pas de trios* between Wilson, Hobhouse and Canning, and then a *pas de deux* between Brougham and Canning. [113]

If Creevey and Lady Morgan saw a continuum between the theater and Parliament, and if they use the language in one to describe happenings in the other, that was because the two were indeed melded together via fashion: they were the two sides of the same coin of fashionability.

Due to the intervention of fashion, politics also became diffused and channeled via a wide spectrum of Society events. Fashionable balls, dinners, concerts, social calls, Italian operas, and country house parties could all become occasions for political discussions and maneuverings. Mrs. Arbuthnot, the Duke of Wellington's favorite lady of fashion, recorded innumerable cases in which the latter came to her with national and international issues at the dinner table, around the Hyde Park Ring, and/or in the opera box. Likewise, the Russian Princess and ambassadress, Madame Lieven, in her 1820s letters and diaries recorded how great political figures like George IV, Castlereagh, Canning, Wellington, Grey and Aberdeen all came to her dining and drawing rooms to talk about serious political issues and solicit her opinions on them. Lord Grey as prime minister, for example, was said to have taken Lieven's proposal to have Palmerston as Minister for Foreign Affairs. Indeed, women's input, advice and secretarial assistance were not just taken, but often pleasantly so, in the frequently eroticized and sensual ambience that the agency of fashion was capable of providing and sanctioning. As a third sphere, the fashionable world did not challenge the validity of politics as a male public

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[113] Creevey, *The Creevey Papers,* 190.

domain, and yet it served as a convenient locale where politics went on in a diffused but by no means less effective way.

In fact, because of the agency of fashion's holistic nature, fashionable gatherings could be more exhilarating sites for political debates. "The Cabinet's Dinner" published by S.W. Forres vividly, albeit satirically, conveys how, without the admiring eye of a fashionable crowd and without a romantic ambience of a hetero-social mixing, political VIPs can lose their vehemence to talk business (Fig. 8). What a contrast this picture of a dull, sleepy, homo-social group stands to the scene of the meeting at Lady Darnley's drawing room where the two MPs debated vehemently within the hearing of other fashionables, both male and female. Outside Parliament and other specifically political sites, politics could be boosted by factors other than lofty ideals and commitments such as love of the country, concern with the future of the nation, and so on.

The diffusion of politics via fashionable channels nonetheless went together with a fusion of party lines. Just as the world of fashion mediated between public and private domains, it also served as a third sphere between the two parties of Whig and Tory, adjusting partisan politics from a fresh angel. This mediation was especially important during the years from roughly 1832 to 1852, when party politics in its modern sense was beginning to take solid shape, i.e. when the king's government most visibly gave way to party government. According to the political historian Robert Steward, the year of the Reform Bill witnessed the following transformation: "Government *limited* by parliament gave way to government *carried on through* parliament. As the crown withdrew at an *andante* pace from active politics, party grew into an institution capable of replacing it as the foundation of governments" (2).

As this change could not have taken place without some anxious sense of being factious and disloyal and an inevitable desire for the old order, there arose fashionable society soothingly blurring party lines and yet leaving the division itself intact. However fiercely they quarrel in Parliament, different party members mingled nicely at fashionable sites, such as at Almack's and in the St. James's clubs. When commenting on Crockford's as a pleasant resort in the early nineteenth century, Lord Lamington nostalgically noted in 1902:

> Politics, literature, art, fashion, rank; the wit, the courtier, the poet, the historian, the politician, were found at the table. It was frequently a tilt of freshest wit and clever repartee. There every night after the House of Commons might be heard the sparkling epigrams and wit of the party whips, Henry Baring and Ben Stanley, rivals in social as in political life. [. . .] There the great leaders, who, like Charles Fox, "in retreat laid their thunder by," would meet on neutral ground, forgetful of all party objects in the good-fellowship of mutual enjoyment.[114]

No doubt, in this "good-fellowship of mutual enjoyment," new party policies could be conceptualized, new parliamentary views conceived, and new party alliances initiated that might be less partial than those forged when one must declare sides.

It seemed that in the eventful 1820s through the 50s, gatherings of fashion could best achieve political efficacy only when they were not politicized but instead remained distinctively fashionable. For instance, the 1823 Spanish Ball led by the archetypical woman of fashion Lady Jersey did not succeed like other Society events largely due to her politicization of it. Originally from a Tory family, Lady Jersey nonetheless stood on the Whig side both during the Queen's trial and on the Spanish issue. When she headed a group of Whig ladies to organize a ball to collect money for arms for the Spanish Constitutionalists, her party could no longer be regarded as a charity meeting but became

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[114] Alexander, *In the Days of Dandies*, 33-34.

highly political. Not only did the Tories refuse to attend; some Whigs hesitated also.

Lady Jersey tried in vain to make it a success by wielding her power as a leader of

fashion. As Lady Arbuthnot noted in her journal entry dated July 5, 1823:

> The Radical ladies had their Spanish ball last night. They say it was beautiful but
> not crowded. [. . .] They were excessively furious with the Tories for not going,
> said *we* had made a party business & had set *John Bull* at them. [. . .] They did all
> they could to *trap us* by saying the money was for the sick & wounded…but all
> would not do, & Lady Jersey got so angry that she refused tickets to Almacks to
> men who wd not promise to go, tried to persuade the D. of Devonshire to ask
> nothing but Whigs to his breakfast, & said she had a great mind never to ask a
> Tory into her house again. (1.244)

Lady Jersey failed, not because she was no longer fashionable, but because she had

turned her project into a "party business" and thus defied the overtly non-partisan nature

of social events. Her attempt to grant invitations to such archetypical gatherings of

fashion as Almack's and the Duke of Devonshire's breakfast along party lines was

doomed to be ephemeral.

   In decades to come, and as long as fashionable society was a close adjunct to the

political arena, it stayed a cross-party entity; in other words it continued as a distinctively

third sphere, a non-partisan unit. Paradoxically, only by being fashionable and societal

was Devonshire House able to collect the greatest number of followers for the Whig party

and win it a good deal of public approval in the 20s through the 40s. Similarly, Lady

Palmerston could obtain many wavering votes for her husband's party in the 50s and 60s,

not because she distributed invitations along party lines, but because hers were Society

events regulated by the agency of fashion. Likewise, the Whig Lady Waldegrave became

one of the greatest political hostesses in the 1850s-70s only because her receptions were

open to Tories, Whigs and Radicals alike, and to eminent journalists and literary figures

as well. According to the same logic, Tory ladies like Londonderry and Jersey best

promoted the party's interests when their entertaining remained cross-party. Indeed, until the 1880s when fashionable society had transformed into something quite different from its early nineteenth-century model, blurring fashion worked better for the formation of partisan politics; and the fashionable world—in order to have political efficacy—had to remain a third realm crossing but not confounding the two parties, just as it stood to the public and private domains in general.

Was this social configuration a matter of gender? Indeed, I want to suggest that the emergence of fashionable society as a third sphere and as an entity cutting across conventional social classes was a gendered process. In the next chapter, fashionable society will be re-examined via the prism of gender.

Figure 4 Mrs. Crowdem's Rout

Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

<http://130.132.81.116/WALPOLEIMG/size3/D0760/lwlpr13342.jpg>

Figure 5 "Socyetye" Enjoyinge Itselfe at a Soyreé by Richard Doyle

Manners and Customs of Ye Englishe in 1849. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1849.
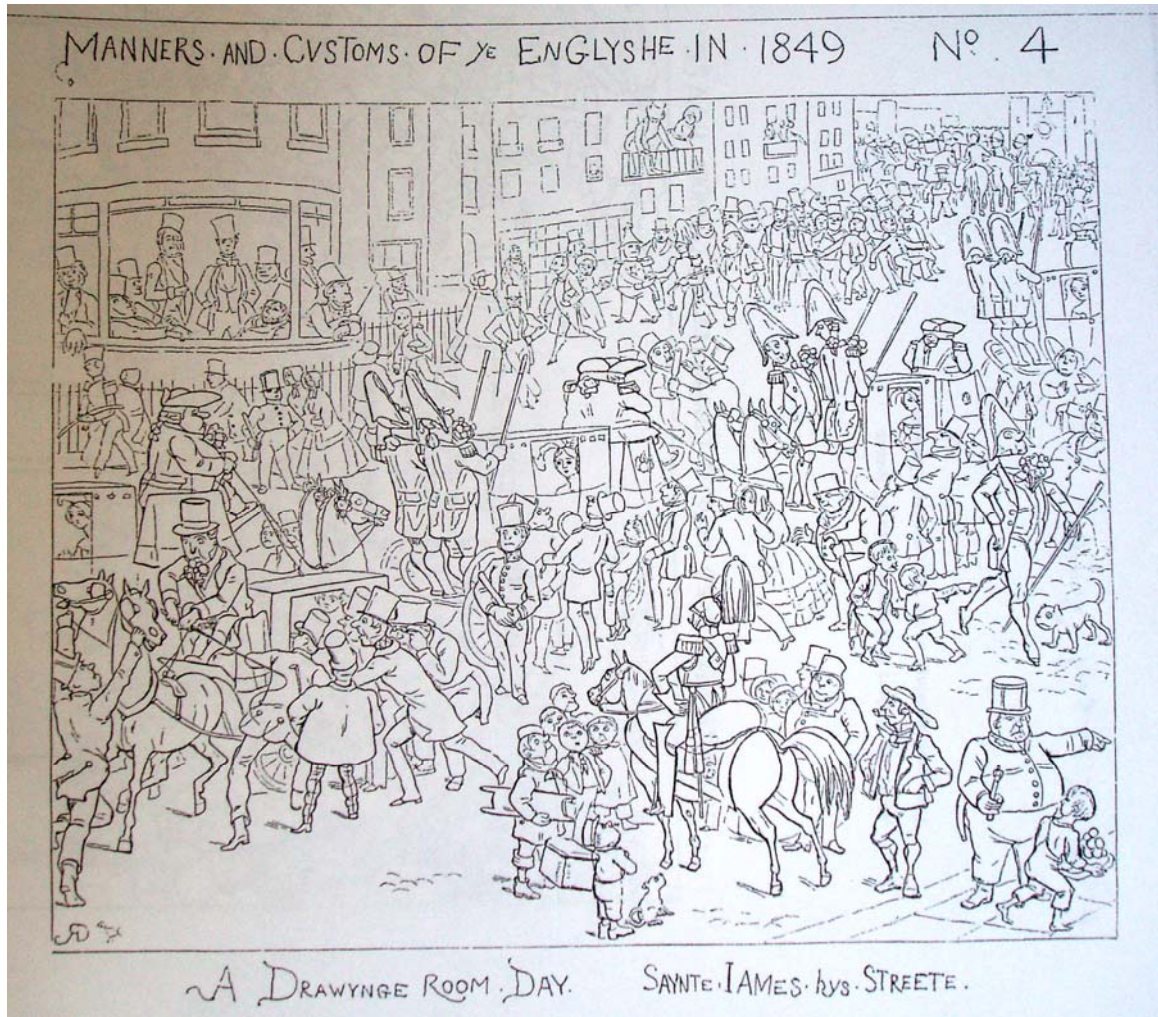
Figure 6 A Drawynge Room Day by Richard Doyle

Manners and Customs of Ye Englishe in 1849. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1849.

Figure 7 Ye Commons Ressolved into a Commyttee of Ye Whole House by Richard Doyle

Manners and Customs of Ye Englishe in 1849. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1849.

Figure 8 The Cabinet Dinner

Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

<http://130.132.81.116/WalpoleIMG/size4/D0545/lwlpr10526.jpg>

Chapter 3

Gender Matters in Fashionable Society

When fashionable society emerged as a discrete social entity cutting across conventional class lines and as a third sphere that both made possible and destabilized the public/private division, it did so in a complexly gendered manner. This chapter aims to flesh out this complexity in two major ways. I will first examine how fashionable society took on a gender-free façade only to enact a complicated, if less visible, gender politics. Then I will move on to the series of new roles the world of fashion held up: the chaperone of fashion, the fashionable patroness, the woman of the world, etc. under the general rubric of the woman of fashion; as well as the leader of fashion, the dining-out man, the gent, etc. donned by the man of fashion. Although these roles did not subvert, I shall argue, the public man/private woman division, they led to practical versions of femininity and masculinity that invalidated the separate-sphere norm. If these roles still spoke the language of social distinction, they also challenged conventional class lines by starring the fashionable body that was neither bourgeois nor aristocratic even as it could enact, in tune with the anonymous forces of a given situation, gender norms pertinent to both social ranks. Furthermore, these roles presented a subject that emphasized exteriority and changeability in contrast to the so-called modern female/male subject centered in the core of a universal, trans-historical inner self; yet the fashionable subject

was by no means less modern and indeed could be ostensibly so, since often times the "fashionable" were equated with the "modern."

A retrieval of these roles, then, will allow us to rethink, on the one hand, these prevalent models in nineteenth-century gender studies: the separate-sphere theory, the class ascendancy paradigm, and the interiority theme. On the other, it will also manifest the much neglected role of fashion as a key facilitator in the space of possibility between binary distinctions. As such, fashion functioned to transform conventional gender norms into multifarious gender realities in tandem with current exigencies, including the imperatives of class, imperialism, trans-nationalism, etc. For these roles spoke frequently of how, *in the name and for the sake of fashion*, gender advantages were transformed into class privileges; colonial wealth into imperial power; international edge into national distinction; etc. and vice versa. To retrieve these roles that will flesh out fashion as a facilitator in the exchange of different kinds of capital, however, a brief look at the overall gender politics in fashionable society is necessary.

Gender Politics in Fashionable Society

Countless studies of nineteenth-century women and gender have attested to the pervasive presence in English culture of the separate-sphere ideology which assigned the private domain of home and family to women and the public arena of politics, commerce and work to men. In contrast to these ostensibly gendered spheres, fashionable society appeared not to be gendered even as its gender-free façade was underpinned by a complicated politics of gender.

First of all, going into society was taken to be a legitimate concern for both men and women. In his voluminous journal, the Irish poet and singer Thomas Moore took

down countless details of his mixing in fashionable society, and yet nowhere did he betray any feeling of trespassing in a non-masculine field; instead, he presented being in Society as the expected, if not natural, right of a man of fashion and celebrity. Illustrative of this is an 1831 entry:

> Breakfast with Lord John & Lord William very agreeable—The latter proposed that we should go together to the Duchess of Bedford's Dejeune—Lord Lyndhurst took us—The day fine & the assemblage of pretty women in those green flowery grounds (Camden Hill) very charming—Lady Cowper gave me her arm & we walked together to have strawberries & cream—a delightful person. [115]

It is noticeable that Moore is equally at home whether on an all-male social occasion or at a female-dominated gathering; described in the same language of pleasure and sentiment, one Society event leads naturally to the other, both being part of the fashionable routine that a person of the world is entitled to and can truly enjoy.

Like Moore, the writer Thomas Carlyle's wife Jane did not view fashionable society as distinctively gendered. When brought into it in the forties, Jane—unlike Moore—felt ill at ease. But her sense of being in a "false position"— as when she lived with the highly fashionable Ashburtons in 1846—did not come from any recognition that the world of fashion was not for women; instead it had much to do with her own "natural shyness and over-modesty"; her reluctance to accept "all the idle restless people"; and her apprehension "that my toilette might look defective, that my manner might look *gauche*—that my speech might sound flat—amongst sumptuous, self-possessed, brilliant people." [116]   Jane could have wished to shun the world of fashion, but she was not viewing it in what now has become commonsensical gender twists: because fashionable society was idle and sumptuous, it was emasculated and feminine; and because it was

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[115] Entry for 23 June 1831, *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, 4. 1417.

[116] To Jeannie Wesh, 30 October 1846; p.289.

female-dominated, it was sumptuous and idle. Instead, she saw this group of mixed sexes as it was: a combination of contradictions: idle and sumptuous but also self-possessed and brilliant.

Jane Carlyle and Thomas Moore's lack of a clear sense of whether fashionable society was a male or female domain was indeed quite typical of the late Georgian and early Victorian ages which witnessed the first popular use of the word "fashionable" as a neutral noun referring to any person of fashion regardless of sex. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in 1800 the *Sporting Magazine* began to use "Our fair fashionables" (XV. 265); and in the same year the Romantic-age author Helena Wells wrote in *Constantia Neville*: "That he was merely a fashionable, she could not believe" (I. 240). In the 1820s lexicon, *fashionables* were drawn as "every lady's *lady*, every gentleman's *gentleman*, all the shop people you meet with" (Baudouin 60). From then on, the gender-neutral nature of the word "fashionable" was kept throughout the century. If in 1829, an anonymous *Court Journal* author felt comfortable enough to refer to both men and women of fashion as "the English fashionables," in the late 1840s the novelist William Thackeray could still frame one of his most memorable characters—Becky Sharp—as "a very pleasing and witty fashionable" (*Vanity Fair* ch.69; p.616); and in the 1880s the essayist E. Lynn Linton would still write: "She will probably end her days as a frantic Fashionable" (*Girl of Period* II. 11).[117] All these uses suggest that "fashionable" had yet to be gendered.

In tandem with this usage was a strong sense that the "beau monde" was a "new world" of new people, whose sense of identity depended on the rule of fashion above anything else, including conventional gender expectations. This prioritization of fashion

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[117]"Paris," 20. My use of Thackeray and Linton here is an expansion of the OED's examples.

was most visibly manifest in the way in which an event was presented in the World. Dinner parties, balls, routs, breakfasts, musical soirées, dancing tea parties could all be given either as the host's or the hostess's or the couple's depending on various localized factors, chief among which was the fashionability of the entertainer. The Blessingtons' parties were often presented as the Countess's because she was far more attractive than her husband; but the Devonshire House gatherings were always in the name of the duke—not only because he did not have a charming wife to show off, but also because he was a great symbol of fashion himself. As the *Court Journal* reported in 1829:

> The present week has afforded nothing to efface the impression made by the first splendid fête of the Duke of Devonshire; which, in point of **magnificence**, of **beauty,** and **fashion**, exhibited an attraction that renders the common routine of balls insipid and indifferent. His Grace opens his house for the second time on Monday next, and with the same reunion of **enchantments**. Lady Londonderry, who can alone attempt a rivalship with Devonshire House, gives her first party on the 18th.[118] (Emphasis mine)

What brings the Duke of Devonshire and Lady Londonderry together here is their rivalry in leading the world of fashion. Being a man or woman does not in any way affect his or her legitimacy in doing so. What really matters is one's capacity to **enchant** the world by staging "**magnificence**," "**beauty,**" and "**fashion**"; none of these qualities seem distinctively gendered.

Nonetheless, fashionable society was not free from the rule of gender. Instead, subtle, unstable and often circumstance-based gender politics underwrote its seemingly gender-free facade. The story of Lady Blessington will illustrate this. She was born Sally Margaret Power in an Irish village with a "savage-tempered," "snobbish," and

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[118] "Gaieties of the Week,"28.

"stupid" corn-chandler as her father.[119] At the age of fifteen, she was forced by the latter into marriage with a "sadistic brute" Captain Maurice Farmer whose cruelty made her creep back to her parents' house three months after the wedding.[120] Enduring the miseries of home for about three years, Mrs. Farmer finally ran away from her father's increasingly menacing violence to the protection of Captain Thomas Jenkins. The two lived peacefully in Hampshire for a few years before Lord Blessington used ten thousand pounds to get her off Jenkins's hand, set her up in London and eventually married her in 1818 shortly after Captain Farmer died in an accident. With such a background, Lady Blessington was of course vulnerable when she entered fashionable society. Immediately, the norms of female purity and sexual morality were invoked: no lady of fashion was to visit her. Interestingly, however, what disturbed the women of *bon ton* was not really Lady Blessington's transgression of gender and sexual norms; as her biographer Michael Sadleir put it:

> Ladies of fashion were not necessarily averse to sexual irregularity, and willingly tolerated such frailty as did the transgressor social credit. Peeresses known for their accessibility to royalty could give parties to which their less ingenious sisters crowded eagerly. Even non-royal intimacies could be so contrived as to give great satisfaction to toadies and gossip-mongers.[121]

What was truly disturbing was the fact that "an Irish nobody" had "snatched a titled wealthy husband from under the very noses of matchmaking mammas" and was now acting "the smart London hostess."[122] In other words, Lady Blessington's beauty, intelligence, and natural sweetness made her a strong rival to other fashionable women,

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[119] Sadleir, *The Strange Life of Lady Blessington,* 1-2.

[120] Ibid 7.

[121] Ibid 27.

[122] Ibid.

stirring personal jealousy as well as class and racial anxieties. All of these found their way into an exigent gender politics: she was not a decent woman for "us" ladies of fashion. Ironically, this attempt to ostracize her did not really succeed. Men were only too ready to crowd into her agreeable salon of "fashion, "beauty," and "magnificence." All kinds of political, literary, and artistic celebrities—including Lord Palmerston, Samuel Rogers and Thomas Lawrence—were her visitors. Her salon became a feature in London, and she became the fashion. Those women who shunned her at first could have wanted to visit her later, as Sadleir argues, if she allowed them; but by then her assumed indifference to them had turned real, and she saw no reason to have them (28). If they had invoked conventional gender norms in the name of fashion, she made the invocation fall short equally for the sake of fashion. Gender politics was never far from the scene, but it was not only intertwined with but also subsumed under the politics of fashion, which could produce the appearance that gender did not matter when it did: Lady Blessington could achieve fashionability and partly loosen conventional sexual restrictions exactly because English men had long enjoyed the freedom of accessing "indecent" women including prostitutes.

To deploy and yet simultaneously downplay the role of gender was just one of the tactics widely practiced in fashionable society. This can be further illustrated by the use of space in the world of fashion. On the one hand, fashion favored a gender-neutral policy in terms of space accessibility: except for the exclusive St. James's clubs, almost all other fashionable sites were accessible to both women and men: the Hyde Park Ring, the Italian Opera House, the Epsom race watching stations, seaside resorts, and even the Yachting Club at Cowes, to name but a few. On the other, fashion often demanded that

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men and women used these sites differently. Illustrative of this is the Italian Opera House.

The House itself was a neutral sign of fashion both men and women could claim; in other words, fashion made no gender discrimination in the accessibility of the House; it was one of the most important meeting places for fashionable people regardless of sex. But there was a nuanced allocation of what was male and what was female within the House. The boxes were generally associated with women and largely understood as a female domain. Men could certainly own boxes or stayed in those of women owners; but it was the custom to have female proprietors' names tagged above the doors to the boxes, which were, in the words of Thomas Duncombe—one-time M. P. for Finsbury—"a most attractive exhibition of female beauty" in the 1830's and 1840s (1.175). Their capacity for female exhibition was furthered by the fact that within the boxes, women usually occupied the front rows of chairs while men stood behind them. Due to the size of female dress and headdress, this arrangement frequently rendered it inconvenient for the people behind to see the stage, as numerous drawings of the time humorously and satirically conveyed (Fig.9). Nonetheless, the convention highlighted the boxes as spaces for feminine display.

In contrast to the boxes, the stalls, though private, were generally tied to men. Although occasionally women were brought into them by some male companions, it was men who usually subscribed to them. The Yale graduate Jennifer Lee Hall's study of the subscriptions lists from 1845 and 1856 reveals that "all of the subscribers to stalls were men" (95). Similar to the stalls, the omnibus boxes on the pit tier was all-male spaces. In terms of the privacy and exclusivity hovering over them, they were comparable to the

clubs in St. James-street. Captain Gronow indeed made the comparison as he described

the dandies as those who "would sit together at White's bay window, or the pit boxes at

the Opera" (1.227). While the pit were not exclusively occupied by men, during the first

four decades or so, it was largely unfashionable for women to sit there not only because

of its being frequented by courtesans but also due to its general crowdedness and the

special crushing caused when the doors to it were opened.   Thus, while both men and

women enjoyed accessibility to the Opera House, men certainly had more choices in the

use of its overall space. Men also had greater freedom to move within it. During the

performance, men could walk back and forth among the boxes, the stalls and the pit while

women were largely fixed in their seats. Men could also go backstage to the green room

to meet with actresses when women generally remained still in their boxes, accepting

visitors there. If women wanted to have personal contact with the performers, they

invited them to the boxes or to their homes later on. [123] Fashion gendered the Opera

House in numerous ways even as it opened it up to both sexes.

Furthermore, in tune with the inherent instability of fashion, the gendering of the

House remained unstable. For example, while the pit was generally an unfashionable

place for women until the late 1840s, there were some seasons when women could sit—

respectably—there due to the inexpressible whims of fashion. As Lady Blessington

noted in the early 20s:

> During the last season it became customary for ladies of respectability to sit
> occasionally in the pit, and its less reputable female frequenters were rarely seen
> there, or, if visible, were dressed, and conducted themselves with a propriety that
> rendered their vicinity innoxious. This was a point long desired, and afforded a
> great relief to the occupiers of pit boxes, who were often shocked at the conduct
> to which they were unavoidable witnesses. (65)

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[123] Jennifer Lee Hall provides a much more detailed study of how the Opera House was gendered in the early nineteenth century in her dissertation chapter "Opera as Social Drama" (96-105).

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Yet if the men of fashion were reluctant 'witnesses' of the conduct of courtesans and prostitutes in the pit in the 1820s, they were not shy from showing them off in their very private pit boxes in the 1830s. A *Times* author expressed in 1833 of the "more glaring and offensive" modern introduction of "some of the most notorious and publicly known old procuresses, who, with unblushing fronts, exhibit themselves nightly, accompanied by their young victims, in the most conspicuous of the pit boxes."[124] This fashionable change was succeeded in the late 1840s by the pit's becoming an acceptable place for women. The mixed nature of the audience in the pit even started to distinguish the English Italian Opera House from foreign ones at that time. Sedgley Marvel, a historian of the opera, noted in 1847, "The Pit, instead of being filled, as at Paris, with a miscellaneous company of men, here admits persons of both sexes always becomingly dressed" (16). Like the pit, the gendering of the stalls was also subjected to fashion-regulated changes; according to Hall, stall seats gradually lost their maleness as the century went on: "By at least 1870, women had even achieved an equal presence with men in the stalls" (145).

Of course, all these gendered transformations never happened without some readjustments of various social elements including relations between different classes of people, but what cannot be emphasized enough was the role of fashion-leading and fashion-following in both facilitating and yet covering up the intertwining of complex social factors. In the early three decades, for example, the deployment of the space of the Opera House along gender lines had much to do with the fact that it had a relatively small and stable audience, a large part of which attended it by subscription and could

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[124] "Letters to the Editor," *The Times* 13 May 1833: E 4.

perceive itself as a homogenous group: the beau monde. As I argue earlier, this group

was by no means made up of old aristocrats alone but instead contained new peers,

bourgeois nouveau riches like the East-End banker Lionel Rothschild, and bourgeois

intellectual celebrities such as Samuel Rogers and Thomas Moore, who were frequently

invited to the boxes of grand ladies and Society leaders even as they themselves could not

afford boxes.   Nonetheless, as the size of the World was comparatively small, and as its

members were often related in one way or another, each individual's status in it was quite

visible, and there was no desperate need for internal distinction within the comparatively

homogenous World. Therefore, the use of space was drawn more along gender lines.

By the mid-century, however, the World had expanded, and the Opera audiences

were enlarged and varied.   As Benjamin Lumley—manager of Her Majesty's Theatre

from 1842 till 1858—wrote in 1864:

> The Opera House—once the resort and the 'rendezvous' of the *elite* of rank and
> fashion, where applause received its direction from a body of cultivated,
> discriminating 'cognoscenti,' and the treasury of which was furnished beforehand
> by ample subscriptions in reliance upon the provision to be made by the
> manager—now mainly depends for support upon miscellaneous and fluctuating
> audiences; audiences composed in great part of persons who, in hurried moments
> of visits to the metropolis, attend the opera as a kind of quasi-duty, in order to
> keep pace with the musical chit-chat of the day. (viii)

 These and other changes, such as those in the material arrangements of the theatre and

the adoption of the ascending scale of admission prices, bore on the spatial dynamics in

the Italian Opera House. Although it was still a key site of fashion, there arose a greater

need for the use of its space to accommodate the so-called "true" fashionables' social

distinction from those "vulgar" fashion followers. Gender therefore became a lesser

concern compared to the desire for class superiority; just as more women from the

middling ranks started to enjoy the pit together with their male family members, the

richer and the more fashionable people withdrew increasingly into the private boxes: according to Hall, noblemen "fled the pit" and started to dominate the "lists of subscribers to the boxes for the first time by 1856" (148). Fashion stratified the audiences even as it combined them all together within a single site under one common rubric; for both the middle-class women's occupation of the pit and the noblemen's fleeing from it could simply be done in the name of fashion and for the sake of it; neither needed to be conscious of the larger social effects of their fashionable acts. Fashion facilitated the interactions between gender and other social factors without explicitly doing so.

However, if in the real social space such as within the Opera House, fashion was a primary yet implicit facilitator of gender dynamics, in the discursive domain of press and print fashion was so *explicitly* associated with the female gender that the shadow of a feminized fashionable world is still upon us nowadays. While this tendency to feminize fashion could have been there all along, it was much strengthened in the nineteenth century when the influence of fashion expanded and deepened. The satiric pen of the anti-dandy intellectuals gathered around the *Fraser's Magazine* in the 1830s not only played an important role in feminizing the Regency world of fashion; it could also have affected the ways in which fashion was represented in general. Throughout the century, it became increasingly difficult to tie men's images with fashion in print. Although in actual life, men continued to figure largely in the World, it was becoming more and more feminized on the discursive level as the century went on. The fact was conveyed not only in the increasing use of such terms as the "Goddess Fashion," the "Empress Fashion" and "the Dame Fashion" but also in the sustained circulation of the image of the fashionable

woman via fashion plates. Attempts were indeed made to use images of men in such

magazines as *Le Beau Monde* and the *Fiddle Faddle Fashion Book*, but they were not

successful: both of these men's fashion magazines were short-lived while female ones,

such as *La Belle Assemblée* enjoyed decades of success; and fashion plates of female

images were selling points for periodicals throughout the century.

The increasing discursive association of the world of fashion with women had

profound implications. One of these was the gradual narrowing down of the meaning of

fashion: it was more and more equated with mere changes in dress styles.   Together with

that came the trivialization of fashion as an insignificant, superficial aspect of life. The

strong feminist urge to depreciate fashion that might still be seen even today has much to

do with this trivialization. As the cultural critic Joanne Finkelstein puts it, "feminist

readings of fashion have often portrayed it as a kind of conspiracy to distract women

from the real affairs of society, namely economics and politics [. . .] [and] seen as a

device for confining women to an inferior social order" (56). Lost is the nineteenth-

century sense of fashion as an important ruling force in society; gone is the Victorian

notion of fashionable society not only as a socially important arena but also as a less

gendered sphere that shored up special kinds of femininity and masculinity.

Fashionable Femininity

In the early half of the nineteenth century, fashionable femininity was centered on

the figure of the woman of fashion. This figure, far from being simply an ideal image

animating fashion magazines month in and month out, was actualized in life as a

profession that women of money, ambition, and/ or talents could and did pursue. In the

early half of the nineteenth century, the profession was largely concretized in a series of

roles, chief among which were the chaperone of fashion, the fashionable patroness, and the woman of the world. None of them fell along conventional class lines, or was fully in tune with the separate-sphere ideology, or emphasized interiority. Each revealed a different aspect of fashion as a major facilitator in the space of possibility between long-standing gender norms and circumstance-shaped gender realities; as well as in the transformation of one kind of capital such as gender into another—class for example—in tandem with current exigencies. The chaperone of fashion particularly fleshed out how the agency of fashion allowed a woman to suspend domesticity without really subverting the norm. The fashionable patroness provided a good case of how fashion facilitated the transformation of gender advantages into social privileges and vice versa while the woman of the world demonstrated the facilitating role of fashion in transnational exchange.

The Chaperone of Fashion

The chaperone or the female leader of fashion occupied the highest position in the World, moving among the "August, the Illustrious, the Distinguished, and the Select" Circles of high life.[125] Also called the *Merveilleuse*, especially in the early two decades, she embodied the very "first class" of fashion and did the job of ruling the beau monde.[126] Although a leader of fashion usually came from the upper-layers of society,

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[125] "Geometry of High Life," 244. In this article, the anonymous author divides the "form of society among the superior classes" into four circles: The August Circle is centered on the monarch with sovereigns or princes for its radii. The Illustrious Circle has a royal duke for its center and peers and nobles of high rank for radii. The Distinguished Circle organizes itself around some great statesman or warrior with its radii "consisting of ambassadors, leading politicians, generals, and bishops." The Select Circle is one "whose center is some highly aristocratic individual, and whose radii consist of persons of fashionable notoriety and correct repute" (244).

[126] George Cruickshank, for example, used "the Merveilleuse" to refer to a fashionable who could say, when asked what she did, "Je rĕgne" (*Fashion*, 82). The reference to the "first class" comes from a *Court*

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class status did not necessarily confer, and was even not absolutely indispensable for, the position. In the cross-class fashionable society, rank, birth, wealth and fortune might all be necessary for one to achieve leadership, but they were not enough if a woman did not have other qualities that fashion favored. Chief among those were sociability, tact and taste.

Sociability largely referred to one's capacity to mix frequently in society. Whether she enjoyed socializing, a chaperone of fashion had to be familiar with the rules and politics of Society and participate in its wide range of activities. When portraying Lady Peel as a leader of fashion in 1845, the *Court Journal* particularly pointed out that although her Ladyship had a "natural taste" for "quietude and retirement" and "every strong domestic feeling in her heart," she knew fully well the need to "mix much in the world."[127] It was exactly this mixing much in the world that secured her pre-eminence in fashionable society, which did justice to her position as the wife of the Prime Minister, according to the same authority. Sociability was fundamental to a leader of fashion, even though it must be supported by other qualities.

Tact, for instance, was also indispensable. Although there was no settled definition of it, tact was largely understood as the ability to adjust to and make the best use of whatever circumstances presented; it was a sort of power to grasp the tone of the

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Journal article entitled "Caste." This essay asserts that fashion has four major grades or classes: The first class are embodied by such grand ladies as the Duchess of Northumberland, the Marchionesses of Londonderry and Bristol, Almack's Patronesses, and a few others. The second class is constituted by the "daughters and wives of our most ancient families," some of which might rebel against the first class and join it by wit, spirit and other qualities. The third class is made up of "maiden ladies of rank and widows of small fortunes and high connexions, who serve as "aristocratic ambassadors and ushers of ceremony" to those wealthy pretenders to fashion. The fourth are "those, who, by dint of wealth and magnificent entertainments, have established a footing for themselves, and can just venture to give a party without soliciting some friend of the third class to superintend either the arrangements or invitations; but in doing this, they have much to struggle with"(713).

[127] "Chaperons and Leaders of Fashion: II," 546.

day. An 1829 *Court Journal* author came closest to giving a definition of tact when he wrote about the "quality, which, in the fashionable world, is appreciated above every other—namely, the power of instantaneously seizing the proper tone in all places, at all times, and under all circumstances."[128] As such, tact had different expressions in different situations and might pervade "every thought and movement of a real gentlewoman."[129] It could very well include the "ready wit and great talent in conversation," qualities which such a great fashion leader as the Duchess of Devonshire was said to possess abundantly.[130] It might also entail the wisdom and skill to sit one's guests properly and arrange one's parties in splendor and brilliance; the highly fashionable Lady Londonderry was regarded as excelling in this aspect: "There are so few persons who so fully understand the duties of hospitality" [. . .] [and] none understand so well how to arrange the intricacies of so weighty affairs" as a fête or other gatherings.[131] Tact could also cover the ability to please others and make others feel at home; conspicuous figures in the World, such as Lady Palmerston and Lady Grandville, were all remembered to have this capacity.[132] Furthermore, tact suggested the capability of "appearing to possess more power, and even more knowledge," than one really had, as

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[128] *"The Omnipotence of Fashion,"* 3.

[129] Chaperons and Leaders of Fashion: I," 529.

[130] "Chaperons and Leaders of Fashion: II," 545.

[131] Ibid 546.

[132] Lord Lamington, in recalling the days of the dandies, said that Lady Grandville knew how to please others by always having "not only a word, but the word, to say to all her guests"; and that Lady Palmerston "possessed the power of making each visitor feel that he was the guest she delighted to honour." See Alexander 52, 54.

Princess Lieven did. [133]   In short, tact could come out differently on different occasions; but no truly fashionable woman could do without it, just as she must have another quality highly valued in the beau monde: taste.

Like tact, taste was an unstable characteristic that could be associated with different things. For some, it was tied to the art of toilette. A woman who did not follow fashion like a slave but could dress in a way that was "most advantageous to her" was thought to have "the best taste." [134]   Yet one could equally be considered to have "the most perfect taste" if one was never seen to wear anything that was "in the least degree *outré*, or liable to criticism," as was exemplified by the toilette of Lady Palmerston. [135] Sometimes, good taste might also involved experiments with "little eccentricities" of fashion; the Marchioness of Ailesbury was known for such oddities in her dress and yet was still admired and enjoyed a "reputation for beauty and fashion." [136]   Besides toilette, manner was another way to demonstrate one's taste. It did not really matter what one actually had: amiability or haughtiness, suavity or coldness, severity or playfulness; so long as one's manner befitted one, it was considered good taste and doted on by fashion: the haughty Lieven and the affable Palmerston figured equally large in fashionable society. Yet another way in which taste manifested itself had neither to do with one's toilette or manner; it was simply an abstract quality of beauty, elegance, or charm, or rather some unnamable nature that hung over a person and lent a sort of artistic enchantment to the whole atmosphere around her. A woman who had this quality was

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[133] "Chaperons and Leaders of Fashion, II" 545.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid 546.

[136] Ibid.

often awarded with the highest praise of being a real "ornament" to society—ornament not in the sense of being superficial as we tend to understand the word now, but resembling the twentieth-century sociologist George Simmel's adornment. For Simmel, adornment intensifies and enlarges the sphere of society, adding to its mundane and trivial "precinct of mere necessity" another limitless one exuding the "free and princely character of our being."[137] Various chaperones of fashion had been given or strived for this honor of being a mere ornament to society; Lady Ashburton, for instance, succeeded in being an "ornament to Society [. . .] to perfection," according to Jane Carlyle's satirical but also sour-grape account.[138]

Taste, tact and sociality were of course only part of the arts of society that a woman had to possess in order to excel in the profession of fashion. Nonetheless, they were enough to portray a figure different from the cultural ideal of the domestic woman whose major characteristics various nineteenth-century scholars have identified as submissiveness, purity, piety and domesticity with invisibility underwriting them all.[139] Indeed, if the hallmark of the domestic woman was invisibility, she stood in exact contrast to a leader of fashion. If the former "cannot be seen at all" as under the pen of Mary Poovey, the latter made it her first task to see and to be seen at various sites of

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[137] Here I am appropriating Simmel's theory of adornment. Simmel argues that the radiations of adornment, such as emanating from dress and jewelry, "supply the personality with an enlargement or intensification of its personality" to the extent that the personality "is *more* when it is adorned" (207). Simmel further states that adornment has such enlarging function, "not *although* adornment is something 'superfluous', but precisely *because* it is" (207). That is so because the superfluous, in Simmel's view, "flows over" the "the precinct of necessity" and because the "free and princely character of our being increases in the measure in which we add superfluousness to our having" (207).

[138] To Helen Welsh, 26 June 1846; p.277.

[139] See, for example, Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 21-33; Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 74-76; Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 116-118; Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, 3-35; and Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, 3-12.

Society. [140] For example, to be seen regularly in the Opera House with a considerable

number of admirers was an important measurement of one's leading position in the beau

monde. When the *Court Journal* described the Marchioness of Ailesbury as a leader of

fashion in 1845, it particularly mentioned that her box was "ever the *rendezvous* of all our

elegants, who come by turns to amuse its fair tenant with the *on dits* of the day." [141] The

picture here is a far cry from a woman "who fulfils her role by disappearing into the

woodwork to watch over the household," as Armstrong describes the domestic

woman. [142] The chaperone of fashion was much more of an embodiment of what Beth

Newman has recently termed "subjects on display" than of the domestic ideal. [143]

The differences between the two figures would suggest that the leader of fashion

posed a great challenge to the ideal of domesticity promulgated by the separate-sphere

ideology. This was indeed an idea seemingly strengthened by the existence of large

quantities of fashionable literature that often portrayed the domestic woman as the

heroine and the leader of fashion as the anti-heroine, such as in Mrs. Gore's *Mothers and

Daughters* (1834); and by the presence of numerous conduct books that frequently

deprived the subjectivity of the woman of fashion in order to set up the desirability of the

domestic ideal, as argued by Nancy Armstrong. [144] Yet the relationship between the

domestic ideal and the leader of fashion in the nineteenth century was far from being this

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[140] Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer,* 22.

[141] "Chaperons and Leaders of Fashion: II," 546.

[142] Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction,* 80.

[143] Newman's book is titled *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity*.

[144] Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction,* 77.

simple: one was positive and the other negative. Instead, the two bore a more dynamic

relationship both on the level of representation and on the ground of reality.

On the level of representation, there not only existed a considerable amount of

literature—such as the highly popular fashion magazines and newspapers like the *Court*

Journal and the *Morning Chronicle*—that often apparently and affirmatively portrayed

the leader of fashion as the center of Society activities and as a desirable ideal for

anybody who could afford fashionable life; there were also numerous pieces whose

apparent devaluation of the fashionable woman and elevation of the domestic ideal were

undercut by complex undercurrents of reverse attitudes. The point can be illustrated by a

look at the 1806 *La Belle Assemblée* series "Letters to a Young Lady: Introductory to a

Knowledge of the World." The series figure two siblings. Eliza and her elder sister have

been brought up like twins—with only the difference of a year between them—and

educated by their mother, who used to be the "Angel in the House" but has been dead for

a while (18). The two sisters, ever affectionate towards each other, are now separate for

the first time as the elder one enters fashionable life in the metropolis while Eliza, stays

to take care of their father, an invalid country gentleman. Eliza asks her sister, now a

fashionable lady, to write about the world of fashion and in this way to teach her "the

science of duty and the arts of life" (18). While her sister constantly praises Eliza as the

better one performing "calm, innocent, and dutiful occupations"—i.e. as another

embodiment of the domestic angel—she nonetheless admits to her own susceptibility to

the power of fashion and her enjoyment of social calls, balls and parties in the *beau*

monde. What's more, she gives Eliza immensely-detailed descriptions of her new

fashionable activities and encounters, which constitute a great source of delight and

knowledge—and a means of education—for Eliza. This recount of the series, though

brief, should have allowed one to see that these letters—like countless other pieces of

advice literature—set up a highly complicated dynamic between the domestic woman and

the fashionable lady. First, the two were closely related like two sisters, two cousins, or a

mother and her daughters. Second, although the domestic ideal should be continued

through generations, each generation has to transform it via the fashionable ideal. Finally,

although stemming from the domestic woman, the fashionable ideal nonetheless assumed

more importance in shaping current life, which was obviously suggested by the fact that

the fashionable lady took the position of a major speaker and a desirable teacher to the

domestic woman. Demanded by current exigencies, the fashionable lady rose to

transform and meanwhile retained the ideal of the domestic woman.

Such a complex dynamic between the two, as conveyed by the letters, was not

ungrounded in the intriguing social vicissitudes in life. Because a chaperone of fashion's

sphere was Society, which, as I argue in the last chapter, was neither public nor private

but dynamically intersected with both, a fashion leader did not necessarily dismantle the

validity of the public/private division; instead, she simply provided a particularized

version of the forms that norm could take in real life. As in the case of Lady Ailesbury,

the public/private division was kept in the analogue contemporaries saw between private

boxes and private drawing-rooms. The former were private not only because they could

be reserved and privately owned for the season but also because they could indeed

provide some degree of privacy for the occupants due to the partitions between them and

the curtains at the front. Contemporaries indeed had a sense of their private nature, as the

fashionable paper *The Town* made it clear in 1838:

[Opposed] as we are to the unrestraint private intercourse of young ladies and gentlemen, in a moral point of view, yet we confess that we should think it next to sacrilege to break in upon a [couple of] sweethearts' tête-a-tête in a private box at the theatre.[145]

Nonetheless, the privacy was extremely tenable since it not only existed in public but was also largely designed for the purpose of display. George Cruickshank made fun of such tenable privacy as well as the absurdity of people using the opera boxes as temporary dormitories when lodgings were difficult to find during the Great Exhibition (Fig.10). The illusion of the boxes as private drawing rooms is adeptly revealed by a man's peeping through a ventilator at the young woman in the next box, by two gentlemen exchanging tea, and by people trying to hide behind and yet look over the curtains. Still, a woman in her box was supposed to behave as she did in her house; only the fact that she acted under the gaze of a public and for that particular purpose rendered the expression of that division much more complicated in life than on the ideological level. This complication, or rather a leader of fashion's subtle bridging of the gap between a specific norm and the actual form it took can be further illustrated by a leader of fashion's another act of sociability: the practice of being "at home."

As an open invitation for fashionable society to crowd onto her staircase, being "at home" allowed a chaperone of fashion both to affirm the ideal of domesticity and to turn it into something else. The affirmation was self-evident: the very naming of the practice suggested that she was not abandoning the domestic sphere: she was "at home" to cultivate friends and to network for the family, which was in tune with conventional gender expectations. Yet, when one, following fashion, brought a huge crowd under one's roof, domesticity metamorphosed into publicity. In fact, due to the oxymoronic

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[145] *The Town* 1 December 1838.

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qualities the practice of being "at home" exuded, a woman of fashion could actually

make use of it sometimes to break through the confinement of domesticity. An

illustrative—though skewed—example of this can be found in the existence of large

quantities of literature satirizing the fashionable woman's running away from her own "at

home" to meet with a lover, since, in the gaiety of a large gathering where one guest did

not necessarily know another or the hostess, the latter was least likely to be missed! Less

exaggerated and more positive portrayal of fashion leaders' "at home" also abounded. In

her letters to the Austrian Prince Metternich, Madame de Lieven frequently mentions

how her "drawing-room becomes stifling" during the London season and how it serves as

an invaluable site for her to stay in touch with such important figures as the Duke of

Wellington, Lord Castlereagh, Lord Liverpool to keep track of European politics; and to

have a sense of her own importance in that world.[146] Likewise, Lady Jersey "made her

house the center, of attraction to the then Tory Party"; and Lady Palmerston's "dinners

and receptions kept the [Whig] party together," according to Lord Lamington.[147] Via

fashionable events, these Society leaders broke into the public arena without deserting the

domestic sphere.

By converging with and yet diverging from the domestic ideal, the leader of *ton*

rendered femininity a matter of constant negotiation between long-standing essentialist

notions of gender difference and the ever recurring demands of current exigencies. For

as scholars have noticed, the public man/private woman division was not a nineteenth-

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[146] Lieven *102.*

[147] Alexander (Lord Lamington) 48, 52.

century invention but could date back at least to the fourteenth century.[148] By the early

nineteenth century, reemphasis on this conventional ideology did not just bear on middle-

class life, as elaborated by Davidoff and Hall and many others.[149] It also penetrated into

upper-class life as various scholars have pointed out.[150] Yet this ideological re-

solidification never fully monopolized the landscape of gender as it materialized in daily

life. Early nineteenth-century social exigencies—the presence of "social groups faced

with the consequence of increased population and urban growth, industrial development

and political realignment"—that led to the strengthening and expansion of Society itself

also called for new roles that rewrote conventional gender ideologies for new needs.[151]

Society hostess or the leader of fashion was just one of these roles. Besides her there was

another important one: the fashionable patroness.

The Fashionable Patroness

In the *Court Journal*'s classification of the beau monde, fashionable lady

patronesses occupied the "third class" and were said to be "composed of the maiden

ladies of rank and widows of small fortunes," who were employed as "aristocratic

ambassadors and ushers of ceremony " in consideration of "their families and

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[148] Amanda Vickery, for one, argues for the longevity of the rhetoric of separate spheres and thus its
incapacity to "capture the specificities of gender relations in a particular social group, country or century"
(7). Her view is unwittingly confirmed by the fact that scholars of both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century
women and gender have picked up the same rhetoric.

[149] See, for example, Davidoff and Hall 13-35.

[150] Pamela Horn, for instance, discusses the influence of the separate-sphere ideology on upper-class
women in her book *Ladies of the Manor: Wives and Daughters in Country-House Society 1830-1918* (1-
23).

[151] Davidoff 15.

connexions."[152]   But in fact, those were not the only people who could fill the role of a

fashionable patroness. The position could be taken up by anyone who moved around the

World and possessed fashionability. Great leaders of fashion would serve as patronesses

from time to time, just as fashionable women of less distinguished circles. The

fashionable lady patroness differed from the chaperone of fashion in the sense that she

did not have the general work of ruling over the World but was assigned a specific duty,

namely introducing new members into it. In that capacity she performed a considerable

range of work, best exemplifying how fashion facilitated the exchange between gender

and class capital.

The first and foremost duty of a fashionable lady patroness was godmothering the

"new man" and "new woman." The latter two referred to those who aspired to enter into

Society due to their newly obtained wealth, position, and/or rank. Different from the

debutante, they did not have relatives and relations who were already established in the

World and could chaperon them: hence their need for godparents. The fashionable lady

patroness consequently came into being. In the early half of the nineteenth century, the

people she chaperoned included but were not limited to:

> some recently-inheriting baronet's wife; or perhaps, some unexpected peeress,
> newly smuggled like illicit whiskey, from the bogs of Ireland; or the wife of a
> President of the Council from Calcutta; or millionary, emancipated by miraculous
> speculations, from the chrysalis of a city alley. [. . .] Some boy Viscount, fresh
> from the University, or half-bred man endowed by the caprice of fortune with the
> hoarded millions of a miserly uncle.[153]

Despite the author's satirical posture, one can still see that some kinds of the new woman

and new man listed here—for example, the nabobs and theirs wives from the colonies

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[152] "Caste," 713.

[153] "London Mysteries Developed by an Old Stager: A New Man and a New Woman," 457.

and the East End of London—were overlapping with the bourgeois new woman and new

man as discussed by various scholars such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall: both

belonged to the emerging middle class. But if the latter embodied a new cultural force

that defined itself in antithesis to the old aristocracy, made its debut in society, started to

police its boundaries and asserted its hegemony in the 1830s and 1840s—as Davidoff and

Hall put it—the former provided a quite different profile to the "emergent class."[154] The

characterizing quality of this profile was merging or integration. Assimilation to the

upper-class culture via the route of fashion and fashionable society was the key note here.

Although this note has not been taken seriously in British historiography, recent studies

of middle-class consumption patterns and life-style in general suggest that the string of

assimilation might very well have vibrated together with that of antagonism and was

equally important.[155] The debut of the "emergent class" in society at large involved, to a

considerable extent, some of its members' debut in Society in particular. The fashionable

lady patroness played a significant role in that debut.

The role was actually dual. On the one hand, the fashionable lady patroness

recruited new blood for Society by refining the new woman or new man's manners,

directing her or his expenses, inviting proper guests to her or his parties, etc. As the wife

of the American Ambassador wrote from London in 1841:

> These things are managed in a curious way here. A nouveau riche gets several
> ladies of fashion to patronize their entertainment and invite all the guests even if
> he has a wife. Lady Parke entertained for Hudsons [the railway "king" and his
> wife] whose guest list included the Duke of Wellington. Lady Parke stood at the

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[154] Davidoff and Hall 75.

[155] See for example, Newman, *Subjects on Display*; Gordon and Nair, *Public Lives*; McKendric et al., *The Birth of a Consumer Society* and McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, Vol.1.

entrance of the splendid suite or rooms to receive the guests and introduce them to their host and hostess. [156]

By literally standing at the door of the new man and the new woman, the fashionable patroness like Lady Parke ensured that Society was accessible to the newcomers including such nouveau riches like the Hudsons and that it did not become a site at which "vulgar" wealth ran rampant at the same time.

On the other hand, however, because the major rule the fashionable patroness followed in policing the door of Society was that of the indefinite, circumstanced-based fashion, she could not fully control the effect of her policing. One of its paradoxical functions in the long run was that she lost the role of social doorkeeper. As many people recollected, Society at the end of the century was so expanded that it lost its quality as a distinctive unit whose boundaries could be policed; instead, fashionable society started to take on the meaning that is still alive today, namely the totality of modern consumer society in which business overrides everything else. As Ralph Nevill and Charles Edward Jerningham—two nostalgic late Victorian gentlemen—put it in 1908:

> Business before pleasure is its [Society's] watchword to-day, when the chief concern of the majority is to extend an eager welcome to any wealthy nobody who may seem likely to be of use.

> Woman it is rather than man who has brought this state of affairs about—women [. . .] caring at heart nothing about social differences; to many of them, one man is as good as another, and better—if he is rich. (45)

Despite their generalization about women's nature, these authors retrospectively pinpointed the role of the fashionable lady patroness in effecting change in Society by challenging, consciously or unconsciously, established social boundaries. This challenge could have to do with her attempt, not necessarily conscious, to exchange her class

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[156] Bancroft-Davis 114.

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advantages for gender disadvantages. If as a woman she was restricted in accessing

power, privilege and property compared with a man in the same rank, she also enjoyed

the social prestige of high birth, fine breeding, good social network, and simply the aura

of being a fine lady. The latter could be used to make up for the former, and fashionable

society provided a perfect site for this exchange. As the *Court Journal* and various other

sources documented, the fashionable lady patroness often had at her disposal her

protegés' "houses, carriages, and country seats," and could borrow money from them

which were "never repaid."[157] Similar exchange could be found in another important

kind of work the fashionable lady patroness conducted: lionizing political, literary and

intellectual, musical and theatrical stars.

Lionizing, or making a literary, political, artistic, musical or theatrical figure the

fashion of a time was a usual practice in the beau monde, and the fashionable lady

patroness played a key role in accepting and placing lions and lionesses in Society. In the

early decades of the nineteenth century, for example, Thomas Moore, Samuel Rogers and

Henry Luttrell were great lions of Society, and they were patronized by the Tory

fashionables like Lady Jersey as well as by the Whig grandees such as Lady Lansdowne

and Lady Holland. Later on, Thomas Carlyle became a lion mainly through the

introduction of Lady Ashburton; meanwhile Countess Blessington served as the

fashionable lady patronesses of young Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, and Edward Bulwer-

Lytton among others. By being Society lions, these bourgeois intellectuals could gain

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[157] "Caste," 713. In writing about the fashionable lady patroness in her *Sketches of English Characters* (1848), Mrs. Gore gives a similar picture of the figure: "But the fashionable Lady Patroness obtains solid pudding in exchange for *her* empty praise. The fashionable Lady Patroness has a corner kept for her at the dinner-table for which she has engaged the French cook, and invited the English guests. She is implored to come and meet the duchess whom she had maneuvered into gracing the feast with her presence. She is assured that she must be at hand to do the honours of the ambassador who is to do her particular friends the honor of eating their turtle and venison" (14).

much benefit which their social and economic status would otherwise deprive them of: access to prominent political figures who often moved in the same circles; networking with other literary and intellectual people; enjoyment of conspicuous consumption, which they might not be able to afford as illustrated by Thomas Moore's frequent use of his patronesses' opera boxes; some special privilege as in the case of Moore's son being pensioned by the Whig government largely via his friendship with William John Russell and Lord Lansdowne built up in Society; and indulgence in a sort of pleasant sociability and aesthetic enchantment that wealth, rank and taste combined to produce.   The last point can by illustrated by Thomas Carlyle's attraction to the Ashburton circle. Carlyle's being drawn by the coterie could certainly have to do with his alleged desire to "get his strenuous ideas of reform into practical currency"— as the editor of Mrs. Carlyle's letters Leonard Huxley put it (xiii); but it was also deeply intertwined with his private enjoyment of the enchanting society a wealthy fine lady with tact, taste and sociability was capable of providing. According to his wife's letters, Carlyle took "a vast of pleasure" in Harriet Ashburton's company, visited her house at least "one evening in the week," went to see her family at their "'farm" on Sundays" in 1843, and joined their company in Paris in 1851. [158]   Nonetheless, this was not a usual man-woman affair—as Samuel Rogers and other acquaintances tried to insinuate by making fun of Jane about her husband's frequent meetings with the lady—however eroticized the relationship between them might be. [159]   He approached her more as a lively ideal, a symbol of something beyond his usual bourgeois intellectual life, something that had to do with

[158] To Jeannie Welsh, 28 May 1843; p.127-128; and 15 October 1851; p.352.

[159] To Jeannie Welsh, Holy Thursday 1949; pp.326-7.

what Simmel would call "the free and princely character of life." [160] As Carlyle himself

wrote to Ruskin, for him she was "a very high lady both extrinsically and intrinsically,"

and her parties had the usual elements [of luxury and taste] in their highest perfection that

were simply irresistible. [161] This kind of enchantment characterized other intellectual

figures' relationship with their fashionable lady patronesses as well. Lord Lamington, for

instance, recorded how Lady Blessington enchanted many men as she "presided over the

nightly reunions of all that was most eminent in literature and politics and social

distinction." [162]

Just as a bourgeois intellectual could make up for some of his class disadvantages

by associating with a fashionable lady patroness, the latter could also exchange some of

her social privileges for her gender disadvantages via the route of fashion. Restraints

upon women in the nineteenth century were many, chief among which was the fact that

they were not supposed to address public meetings or even publish under their own name.

As Peter Mandler frames it, the whole spectrum of the public sphere was perceived as a

male arena bolstered up by men's classic education (which took place increasingly away

from home), by the fraternities of the Houses, and by the male arts of public oratory,

debate and meeting. [163] Against the backdrop of such gender ideologies and realities, the

fashionable lady patroness's lionizing opened up a space where they could legitimately

express their intelligence and realize a certain degree of intellectual development. For

instance, as a major means of lionizing, *conversazione* not only allowed a lady patroness

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[160] Simmel 207.

[161] Gate 76.

[162] Alexander 30.

[163] Mandler, "From Almack's to Willis's: Aristocratic Women and Politics, 1815-1867," 157

to gather the best minds available within her drawing room and thus keep herself in touch with the latest intellectual development; it could also satisfy her desire to demonstrate wit and manifest intelligence. According to Jane Carlyle, although people who gathered around Lady Ashburton had to "get up fine clothes and fine 'wits', sometimes there could be "no strain on one's wits" because Lady Ashburton did "all the wit herself." [164] Similarly, a musical soirée or a private theatrical that a lady patroness organized to bring to the World a new star could also be equally important to the lady artistically and psychologically as she lessened her gender disadvantage in the wielding of her social privilege.

In addition to lionizing and god-mothering new members, the fashionable lady patroness had another significant form of work, namely to promote charity via her fashion and fashionability. In this respect, the fashionable lady patroness should be distinguished from the conventional model of patronage. Upper-class women, like the lady of the manor, had the tradition of presiding over charitable events, at which their role as patroness was largely determined by their ranks and by their families' alleged prestige in the local communities; and often, the patroness knew the participants—usually her dependents, tenants, neighbors, etc.—who gathered together for a known purpose such as collecting money for the repair of the community church. In this case, patroness-ship was "a thing of inheritance," and the great lady became "as a matter of course of whatever attempts" to be made "on the indulgence of the provincial public," as Mrs. Catherine Gore put it. [165] However, by the early nineteenth century, and especially from

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[164] To Jeannie Welsh, 9 July 1845; p248 and 4 December 1845; p.259.

[165] Gore, *Sketches of English Characters*, 7.

the second decade on, a new role of fashion emerged: the fashionable lady patroness differed from the old figure in four major ways.

First of all, she used metropolitan London as her major site of charitable activities, and her patroness-ship became "a matter of election."[166] Only those who were well-known in the beau monde were likely to be chosen, and fashionability was the chief criterion for choice. Then, the procedure of her patronizing also changed. While the final effect might be charity, the event itself was often presented as one of fashion. Long before the event, advertisements about it appeared in magazines and papers, hinting at what fashionables were to patronize the event and soliciting as much participation as possible throughout the metropolis if not all over the country. For example, news about the ball to raise funds for Polish refugees in 1841 occurred in *The Times* months before hand. In that duration, various other pieces announced the musical star Miss Adelaide Kemble as the lioness and Lady Palmerston and Count D'Orsay among the patronizing fashionables.[167] Related news also frequently hinted at the limited number of tickets available so that the general public would buy as soon as possible. The mechanism worked not only due to the pervasive power of the press but also because the public wanted to watch, be close to, and get to know the fashionables via a charitable gathering. Indeed, as Nevill and Jerningham recalled, "charity, which includes the organizing of bazaars, to which fashionable people can be induced to come and sell, is not bad" in launching the newly enriched people into Society.[168] *Punch* pointed to the same practice,

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[166] Ibid 6.

[167] "The Polish Ball and Concert in Guildhall," *The Times* 13 November 1841: C5.

[168] Nevill and Jerningham 22.

albeit with a highly satirical tone, in 1841:

> But the fair [by the newly rich Spangle-Lacquers] was expected to be fashionably attended—fashionable families gave it their countenance—the very circumstance of young aristocratic ladies lowering themselves to trade, and playing shop-girls, was fashionable—and very fashionable company were to be admitted the first day at half-a-crown a piece for the mere privilege of entrance. [169]

The frequent repetition of the word "fashionable" vividly conveys the deep intertwinement between charity and fashion.

As fashionable events, fancy fairs, bazaars, and balls were often organized with special attention to novelty and even Arabian-night other-worldly enchantment, a third characteristic of the new model of patronage. As Mrs. Arbuthnot wrote of the 1822 ball for the relief of the Irish in the Opera House:

> The House was beautifully done up, the center boxes to the top of the house were turned into a large sort of tent beautifully decorated for the King, & on each side were boxes for the Lady Patronesses & the Foreign ambassadors. [. . .] Everybody was in full dress and it was a most brilliant spectacle. [170]

A "most brilliant spectacle" was exactly what characterized charitable events in the early decades of the nineteenth century; patronized by fashionables, they were becoming increasingly occasions for seeing and being seen. While they might not be less—and indeed could be more—effective in terms of raising the necessary funds, the incomparability between the fashionable motive and the charitable effect challenged the conventional Christian meaning of charity and caused social anxiety, which might account for the existence of considerable amount of satirical literature targeting the fashionable lady patroness—and especially those from the middling ranks—as *Punch* did.

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[169] "The Side-Scenes of Every-day Society," 91.

[170] 31May 1822, *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot*, 164.

Nonetheless, the role prevailed and expanded the scope of charity; international rather than merely local concern started to catch charitable attention.

As with charity, the fashionable lady also served as a patroness of commerce in three major ways. First of all, belief in the productivity of luxury consumption led to the idea of the fashionable entertainer as an activator of economic circulation indispensable to the welfare of the country. This idea was widely perpetuated in various fashion magazines like the *Court Journal*. For instance, at the approach of the season in 1832, rumor went that there would be a great cut-down on balls, parties, soirées, etc. Upon this, the *Court Journal* editor made a call to fashionable ladies:

> We cannot but entreat the ladies of the creation to consider the matter wisely […]; we beg them to reflect on the serious injuries which so sudden a fit of sobriety on *their* parts would produce, among the manufacturing classes, and the innumerable tribes who are clothed and fed by the re-action of those splendid orgies. [171]

The editor was far from alone in this view; the Mandevillian notion that private vices could be public benefits was accepted widely in the early decades, and thus the *idle, vane and dissipate* lady entertainer was one and the same as the benevolent promoter of social and economic circulation. [172] Apart from that, the fashionable lady could also be called on to preside over specific events—including bazaars, fairs, fancy balls, etc. — that were understood to be trade-enhancing. For instance, in 1842 when the silver-weaving business was down, related people asked Queen Victoria to give costume parties to promote it. "The Queen yielded to the supplications of the tradesmen to give a fillip to trade, so had the Fancy Ball," wrote Lady Holland in a letter to her son. [173]   Yet another

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[171] "Cogitations on the Aspect of Fashionable Affairs," 155.

[172] See Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Public Benefits*.

[173] 3 May 1842, *Lady Holland to Her Son 1821-1845*, 201.

way in which the lady of fashion served as a patroness of commerce was simply to let her name be used for advertising. It was becoming acceptable for a fashionable lady to allow her name to be attached to a particular event or product. For example, the silver-fork novels popular in between 1825-1845 usually went in the name of fashionable ladies even if they were not the actual authors. Here, one can see an earlier version of modern-day commercial technique of using the visibility of a celebrity to sell, not just a particular product, but a special way of life. With the lady patroness, what was being sold in addition was the life of Society or the World, that unique sphere bridging not only the public and the private but also the national and the international. In this sense, she, as well as the leader of fashion, became the woman of the world with its newly acquired meanings.

The Woman of the World

OED dates the use of the "woman of the world"—indicating not just a woman experienced in the ways of life or conventions of society but also one knowing and having her way in the beau monde—only to the late eighteenth century. By the second and third decade of the nineteenth century, however, the woman of the world had become a role any woman of wealth, talents and taste would like to take up; and it began to acquire some new meanings, chief among which was what the present-day term the "world citizen" or the "cosmopolitan" would convey. Being a woman of the world no longer meant just to be able to mix in London Society—which was becoming more internationalized of course—but also to have considerable capacity to move freely in the trans-nationally stretched world of fashion, if not overseas, cross the Straits at least. One of the first things Margaret Power did after her marriage to Lord Blessington was to

travel on the Continent and accrue the glory of having lived among Parisian and Roman fashionables. Another major figure of fashion, the Marchioness of Londonderry, was said to have "traveled much [. . .] and brought back with her all that was good and worthy of admiration at the foreign courts." [174] Given the fact that the woman of the world also needed to migrate seasonally between town and country, the demand, ideological and actual, upon her to move was quite considerable. This remarkable movement across space as well as the inherent need to reinvent herself constantly over time turned her into a kind of what Daniel Lerner terms the "mobile person"—a figure "distinguished by a high capacity for identification with new aspects of his environment" and "so adaptive to change that rearrangement of the self-system is its distinctive mode" (50). Lerner, however, has nothing to say about fashion and the woman of the world; his "mobile personality" is gendered male and embodied by the bourgeois man. Nonetheless, if this "mobile personality" is vital to the passing of traditional society and the establishment of modernity, as Lerner argues, a closer look at the paradoxical functions the woman of the world performed in the early nineteenth century will reveal how the mechanism of fashion wrote gender deeply into and out of the process of western modernity.

The first set of paradox around the woman of the world was that she had to have an international body with a national face on it. On the one hand, the woman of the world embodied cosmopolitanism because her way of living defied the cultural or political boundaries of nation-states. She was endowed with a strong desire for cultural otherness and a sense of being at home everywhere in the world—both being necessary,

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[174] "Chaperons and Leaders of Fashion: II," 546.

for scholars like Ulf Hannerz and John Tomlinson, in defining a cosmopolite.[175] She

loved, like Miss Crawley in *Vanity Fair*, "French novels, French cookery, and French

wines."[176] As exemplified by Lady Blessington and the Marchioness of Londonderry,

she went abroad and mixed in Continental Society from time to time and brought back

the latest European gossip and Parisian fashions. She would defy any country's customs

and have fashionable goods smuggled via the ambassador's bag among other means. As

the 1833 *Court Journal* poem goes:

> A dozen of gloves,—a silk shawl,—
> Some *croquis* engraved upon stone,
> To forward to Lady Bengall,
> With four boxes of Eau de Cologne
> What can an unfortunate *man* do?—
> I dare not affront the old hag,
> Who fancies that, like a portmanteau,
> We pack THE AMBASSADOR'S BAG! [177]

The embassy boy can complain but should not be surprised by the woman of the world's

desire for foreign goods; he ought to know that she should wear the whole world's

products on her body. This is the language so widely used in fashionable literature:

> The Parisian chemise is trimmed round with plain French net; and the Turkish
> wrap is formed like the flowing pelisse, and composed chiefly of striped colored
> muslin, plain jaconet, French cambric, or Indian long-cloth. The Spanish hood,
> the Parisian nightcap, the Curacao turban, the long lace veil, forming both cloak
> and head-dress, are variously adopted. [178]

Via frequent use of the passive voice, the magazine conveniently erases its prescriptions

for whoever wants to be a woman of fashion and presents her as already there gracefully

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[175] Hannerz 237-251; Tomlinson 3-55.

[176] Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 112.

[177] "Songs of the Belle and Beau Monde: No. III: 'The Ambassador's Bag,'" 673.

[178] "General Intelligence of the Most Elegant Spring Fashions," 219.

putting the whole world's products on her body. But whether she is already there or about to come into being by following the printed image and teaching, the woman of the world should make no distinction among objects from different nation-states but treat them as equals in the empire of fashion. Only by being international could she be fashionable.

On the other hand, however, the internationally moving and mapped body of the fashionable woman had a national face. She, as a British fair, was supposed to combine "Fashion's magic art" with taste to present national grace to the whole world.[179] Having global resources at her demand and having traveled internationally, she should make London society a source of national pride. That means, as the 1832 *Court Journal* essay "Chronicles of the West End" put it, if a foreign, say French, fashionable visits the English metropolis, she should

> be greeted with a spectacle equaling, if not surpassing, any scene of festivity in any capital of Europe; that she would perceive at once the high tone of refinement, breeding, and grace, which result from a combination of the lighter elements of the French character, with the mental cultivation, more sober dignity, and more cordial warmth of England. (353)

Not only so. The woman of the world should know that London society, although part of the internationally expanded empire of fashion, would always have different rules than Continental society. A parvenu social climber, like Becky Sharp in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, might make herself the fashion in high Parisian society, and yet she ought to know that she would be cut by London Society unless she strived hard for admittance, following its special principles. Uncannily resembling this fictional character, Lady Londonderry—despite all her cosmopolitan efforts—was unable to enter the very first

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[179] Ibid.

circle of fashion and become "really and truly fashionable" in London society, leaving

the German Prince Pückler-Muskau to sigh that "this aristocracy of fashion is more

difficult to attain to than the highest rank of freemasonry."[180] Ultimately, a woman of

the world should also know that she could go fashionably abroad to avoid expensive

entertainment at home and once there, eat the dinners of such "vulgar" fashionables as

George Osborne and the Longman Thompkinsons.[181] But back in London, she must cut

these vulgar people. This is the paradox of the woman of the world in the early decades:

she needed to be international so as to be fashionable, and yet to be fashionable was after

all to be English.

In a time when both the spirit of free trade and that of protectionism were equally

valid, the paradoxical function of the woman of the world was not just understandable but

also highly powerful. If her wearing the whole world on her body physically manifested

the idea of free trade, her British face exuded the necessity of protectionism; and either

side of her could be singled out as a convenient container into which social anxiety found

its way. For example, anxiety about foreign invasion, commercial, political or

otherwise, was often turned into a matter of the woman of the world's opening the door

of English society to international swindlers due to her irrational and licentious subjection

to fashion. A considerable amount of satirical literature in the nineteenth century was

built upon this assumption about fashion and women. Before Charles Dickens dramatizes

the figure of the international swindler in the character of Rigaud—alias Blandois, alias

Lagnier—in *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), the image of such a cheat running free in fashionable

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[180] Pückler-Muskau, *Tour in England, Ireland and France*, 153.

[181] Osborne is a character in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*; and the Longman Thompkinsons occur as the nouveau riche followers of fashion in Gore's *The Woman of the World*.

society already loomed large in British consciousness. He occurs frequently in early

nineteenth-century fashionable literature and usually together with a woman of the world

serving as an accomplice in three typical ways.

First, a first-circle woman of the world would let spies into the country due to her

whimsical desire for "procuring admiration and good report of foreigners."[182] *La Belle*

Assemblée uses Lady Cowslip to stand for this kind. This lady is said to be "possessed

with some absurd notion of what she calls *belle spirit*, or wit, and has an idea that it is no

where to be found but in the nobles and gentles of the German and French old courts";

thus "any one who will talk to her about the king of Prussia, and Potsdam, and *Sans Souci*,

may make a fool of her."[183] As a result, "her routs are like an aviary; there is an animal

from every part of the globe"; for this author, parties like Lady Cowslip's routs should be

watched by the police because "if there be any places where we should really seek for the

spies and emissaries of the enemy, it is in these citadels of fashion."[184] Second, a

nouveau riche woman of the world might also open British gates to Continental swindlers

due to her snobbish desire for aristocratic connexions, whether foreign or domestic.

Punch dramatizes this in its 1843 series "The Side-Scenes of Society," in which the

newly rich Spangle Lacquers allow dubious foreign counts and barons to glitter in their

drawing rooms; one of the daughters would have married herself off to a foreign genteel

swindler if the latter did not find out that the girl could not have much money until her

father died.[185] Finally, a mercenary woman of the world, such as Mrs. Grace Gripley in

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[182] "Hymenea in Search of a Husband,"177.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid 178.

[185] "The Side Scenes of Society," 119.

the 1832 *Court Magazine* article "My Cousin Winifred," would go in complicity with a foreign deceiver. As the fair proprietor of the fashionable boarding-house in Jermyn-street, St. James, Mrs. Gripley asks her paramour, a Russian black leg, to make love, as an ancient potentate, to her boarders and in this way steal away their jewels and other treasures.[186]

No doubt there were indeed international swindlers, and some women could intentionally or unintentionally be an accomplice in international swindling; but to transfix transnational deception onto a specific role of women had complicated historical implications. On the one hand, this transfixing betrayed much social anxiety about some elite women's increasing cosmopolitan way of affirming power in the name of fashion; that is to say they knew very well how to achieve local fashionability and ascendancy or other special gains by making use of one national group's desire for and lack of knowledge of another nation-state. Almack's lady patronesses, for example, were said to be very skillful in using foreign alliances to strengthen their fashionable hold on the world; according to a popular novel, one of the patronesses once said to another: "everything will be justified by your being a foreigner, it will legalize all your caprices."[187] Whether or not the novelist is accurate, such a representation itself attests to contemporary recognition of elite women's capacity to deploy fashion-facilitated transnational agency for localized purposes. The wide circulation of the image of the woman of the world opening doors to foreign deceivers could be an anxious backlash against this agency. Then, if this trans-nationally defined agency posed a threat to a

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[186] "My Cousin Winifred,"34-37.

[187] Stanhope 2:341.

British person's sense of power and control over national boundaries, the transfixing would subtly win part of that sense back via its very emphasis on fashionable women's improper desires or their stupidity and absurdity as embodied by Lady Cowslip.

Another paradoxical function of the woman of the world lay in her complicated role in the imperial project. For one thing, she, as a fashionable lady patroness, did not just function as an actual guide to English society for the colonial returnee, especially the nabob and/or the nabobess, as discussed earlier. She was also to embody the dream life a colonist or returnee could imagine of the metropolitan life in the home country. As the *Court Journal* editors put it in 1832, "the panting nabob…looks to our European chronicles of the march of luxury, as an incitement to those labors that promise him a niche hereafter among the verdant villas of the Thames, or the glittering coteries of Portland place."[188] The journal's self-puffing strategy aside, the passage still attests to how the portrayal of fashionable life and the circulation of images of women/men of fashion ("the glittering coteries of Portland place") hold up the luxury and advanced civilization of European metropolises as an ambitious object for the colonial to labor for; they give meaning to the nabob's drudge by promising him a glamorous life ahead and back home. It was not unusual for a returnee to imagine a "'fashionable crib" near Hyde Park, in which he could have a "shake-down,"' just as Dickens's Magwitch talks about. [189] Of course, the actual number of nabobs who made it into fashionable society must have been small. Nonetheless, the door was open with the woman of the world nearby to lead, or rather police, the way. Lady Holland once wrote in a letter that it was

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[188] "Our Policy," 482.

[189] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 341.

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"an occupation to amuse & keep" a rich 50-year-old nabob Mr. Courtenay Smith, who just came back from India, "from forming any matrimonial engagement."[190] One way to prevent him from any so-called inappropriate matrimonial engagement would be to lionize him and keep him in the exciting vortex of fashionable life. It might be that by thus mixing in fashionable society some nabobs actually went bankrupt; for instance, Pückler-Muskau recorded the auction of "an Indian cabinet, the property of a bankrupt Nabob" in 1826 (65). Nonetheless the intricate dynamics between the nabob and the woman of the world should not be overlooked but be taken as an indispensable way in which power, wealth, and social status were distributed in the imperial project.

Nonetheless, just as the woman of the world did her policing of the colonial man in the name of fashion and via fashionable means, her work and even her very role was so easily trivialized and ridiculed for the very same association. The remarkable quantity of satire targeting the woman of the world as a vampire on colonial wealth played into this trivialization. A typical piece of this satire can be found in William Thackeray's dramatization of Becky Sharp's drawing on the life insurance of Jos Sedley, whose property comes from being a tax collector in India.   Even if Jos is not wealthy like a nabob, he tries to lead a luxurious life like one. Unfortunately, he is never wealthy or witty enough to get into real London Society and is actually never comfortable in English society at large.   That is why he is so attracted to Becky Sharp who, without money and family, has shone in Paris and London fashionable societies, and can, even in exile, bring to Jos second- or third-circle fashionables if not the first. Jos is truly fascinated by her even as he sees through and is fearful of her.   Jos's fascination with the fashionable

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[190] 28 April 1828, *Elizabeth Lady Holland to Her Son*, 83.

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woman, or rather his desire to get into fashionable society, however, only ends in his property and whole life energy being gradually drawn away, which is vividly conveyed by his having to insure his life, mainly, for the fashionable Becky. Jos's use of life insurance is a symbolic act of dual importance: by turning the woman of the world into a vampire, it alerts nabobs to stay away from fashionable life. It did not take much jump in the imagination to know that this kind of negative and satirical portrayal had much to do with people's anxieties about the loss of social distinction that the integration of nabobs into high society might have caused; it might also have to do with bourgeois intellectual's conscientious effort to work for an independent middle-class culture. Nonetheless, it should not hinder us from seeing the woman of the world as a vital female role simultaneously made possible and invisible (for late comers) for the sake of fashion. To recover that role and others like the leader of fashion and the fashionable lady patroness would be one way in which fashion's importance to gender formations in nineteenth-century England can be relocated. The work of relocation, however, cannot be complete if one does not look at fashionable masculinity as well.

Fashionable Masculinity

Just as fashionable femininity was centered on the woman of fashion, fashionable masculinity was largely conveyed via the figure of the man of fashion—a far more neglected one than his female counterpart. Partly due to the anti-dandyism set in motion by the *Fraser's Magazine* in the 1830s and epitomized in Thomas Carlyle's well-known satire on the dandy, and partly because of the long-enduring feminization of fashion, the man of fashion has long been ignored as a serious academic subject. In our commonsensical understanding, the male fashionable is somehow associated with

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effeminacy, emasculation and even homosexuality. In any sense, he cannot be used to represent the so-called natural manhood as conveyed by what Robert Brannon has summarized in the four tenets: "Be a Sturdy Oak," "No Sissy Stuff," "Be a Big Wheel," and "Give'Em Hell." [191] These commonsensical notions have precluded us from seeing that the man of fashion embodied an important version of nineteenth-century masculinity: the "social man." Like the woman of fashion, the "social man" of fashion was fleshed out in a series of roles ranging from the dandy to the gent. He complicated the conventional male images underwritten by the separate-sphere ideology: the private patriarch and the public man. He could not be accounted for in either bourgeois or aristocratic gender terms alone. He presented a different figure from the interiority-oriented trans-historical male subject via his elevation of exteriority and changeability. Defined by the pursuit of fashion, the "social man" spoke eloquently of fashion as a key facilitator in the circumstance-specific exchange of different kinds of capital.

The Man of Fashion as the Social Man

The "man of fashion" was the general name for a variety of others. Depending on the angles from which he was looked at, the figure went by various designations. In terms of the positions he occupied in the World, he could be a leader of fashion or simply a fashion follower. Given his knowledge and actual experiences in worldly—in its dual sense—matters, he became a man of the world. In light of his dressing styles and bodily gestures, he was called the exquisite, the elegant, or the dandy. With regard to the female sex, the man of fashion could be a man of pleasure or a roué, a new name for libertine in the nineteenth century. Judging from his particular role at a party, a man of fashion could

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[191] Brannon 1-45.

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be a lion—the star guest to be honored—or a dinning-out man, a fashionable who did not

have to pay back the food he ate except by witty conversations and/or other special

means to enliven a gathering. Geographically, the man of fashion could be a Regent-

street lounger, a St. James-street clubman, or a Continental idler. If his social or

economic background was considered, he could be either a gentleman of fashion or

simply a gent—a shabby man of fashion without much wealth at his disposal and with

some sort of minor professional work like clerkship for living. When authenticity was

taken into account, the man of fashion was divided into the truly fashionable and the

vulgar fashionable man, or the real/true man of fashion and the pretender to fashion. The

latter was further categorized into the 'Sheenie," a rich Jew who had cut his religion "for

the sake of dangling at the heels of fashionable Christians"; the "heavy swell"—either

"military," "civil," or "foreigneering" —who was poor but nonetheless tried his best to

lead, and most importantly, boast about fashionable life as if he knew and was in all of it;

and finally, the gentility monger who spent his money from trade for all kinds of

ostentation and extravagance which were perceived as fashionable and meant to cover up

his origins in trade. [192]

As all these names and categories suggest, the man of fashion was a versatile

figure that could not be reduced to a simple identity based on his economic class,

nationality or sexuality; nonetheless one quality underlay all different designations: the

character of the social man.   Whatever his class origins, regional or national identities,

and/or sexual characteristics, the man of fashion must act in the third sphere of Society

and be social.   The "social man," as a Blackwood author—representative of many

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[192] "The World of London, 2nd Series, Part II," 327-8.

others—put it, was clearly distinguished from the public man on the one hand: "Society marks the line between the *public* and the *social* man; and this line no eminence, not even that of premier minister of England, will enable a public man to confound."[193] On the other, the social man of fashion was also differentiated from the private patriarch in the sense that being the head of a family was not essential to his masculine status: the first and foremost requirement was that he maintained a prominent presence in Society rather than simply moved directly in between the public and the domestic realms. Using the third sphere as his main stage, the man of fashion fleshed out some distinctive characteristics.

Above anything else, the man of fashion blurred the line between sociability and domesticity instead of opposing them—unlike what the class ascendancy model has presented. As John Tosh summarizes, the "grand theme" in this framework is the "transition from a genteel masculinity grounded in land ownership to a bourgeois masculinity attuned to the market"; the former is said to be embodied by the "old Adam" and characterized by sociability, luxury, and sexual license in relation with rent-receiving and stock-trading while the latter is conceived of as the "new man" distinguished by domesticity, economy and respectability associated with steadiness in business or the professions (61-78). Neither an old Adam now a new man—since he could come from either the landed and/or titled gentry like the Duke of Devonshire or from the middling ranks like Beau Brummell—a leading fashionable could enact domesticity as sociability, using his home as a site for publicity like the chaperone of fashion. When Brummell opened his apartment in Chesterfield Street each morning for the World to watch him go through the ritual of toiletry, his "at home" was simultaneously an effort to socialize in

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[193] "The World of London, Second Series, Part III," 391.

and control the world. Similarly, when the Duke of Devonshire contrived a series of

dinners, breakfasts, balls and parties in his London house—whether for the coming out of

his female relations or simply for the entertainment of fashionable society—he could

have both the honor of being "home-loving" or domestic and being sociable.

The man of fashion also complicated the binary distinction between luxury and

economy. If luxury means, as John Tosh puts it, "the unbridled desire to acquire and

spend," it was indeed frequently associated with a parvenu or a nouveau riche pretender

to fashion's ostentation and excessive consumption; but with a leader of fashion in

Society, the case was not that simple. Luxury—meaning elegance, grandiosity, brilliance,

richness—was certainly part of the leader's person and surroundings, but it went together

with a sort of economy and restraint distinguished from the haute bourgeoisie's "vulgar"

showiness—at least in name. As the 1846 *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion* put it:

> Those who are leaders in the gay world and have sense enough to value *economy
> in expenditure*, are often behind the example of people of less *ton*, who have not
> courage enough to resist the institutes of their tradesmen; and the former often
> struggle to retard the entrance of a new fashion, until their coats are ready to be
> laid aside.[194] (Emphasis mine)

The handbook author might be right that even if it could be very costly for leaders of

fashion, like Count D'Orsay and his predecessor Beau Brummell, to sustain their way of

life, unrestrained expenditure was not their goal. Instead, they relied on other means,

such as originality, inventiveness, and appropriateness to lead rather than follow fashion.

Beau Brummell, for instance, was never showy in his appearance. The revolutionary

change in dress he ushered in with his cravat and suit was indeed part of what J.C. Flügel

terms the "Great Masculine Renunciation" that had been going on from the eighteenth

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[194] *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion*, 29.

century (110-3). Elegance, neatness, good sense, simplicity—all carefully studied to appear natural rather than eye-catching—was his style: "If John Bull turns round to look after you, you are not well-dressed; but either too stiff, too tight, or too fashionable," said the Beau. [195] The head of the dandy classes was to don restraint even if it was no less costly.

Yet, a most distinctive characteristic of the man of fashion was his fluidity; his was a character or identity of becoming rather than being in three major senses. First, like his female counterpart, he must constantly invent and reinvent himself over time as new situations arose. As Disraeli wrote of the fashionable youngster Vivian Grey: his change of character was "the most wonderful of all evolutions—a revolution which precept or reason can never bring about, but which a change of circumstance or fortune may." [196] Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton made his man of fashion Pelham proclaim: "On my return to England, with a new scene and new motive for conduct, I resolved that I would commence a different character to that I had hitherto assumed." [197] Second, even more than the woman of fashion, the male fashionable was a mobile personality, following a movement-prominent schedule including daily jostling from home to the tailor/milliner's, fashionable gatherings and other sites; seasonal migrations between town, country and seaside resorts; and considerable traveling abroad. One, of course, did not need to perform all these activities, and not all could afford to do everything. But one must be mobile to be fashionable; in Pückler-Muskau's words, "one must once in a while travel

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[195] Quoted in Melville 1.149.

[196] Disraeli, *Vivian Grey,* 144.

[197] Bulwer-Lytton, *Pelham,* 107.

[so as to be] like a fashionable Englishman" (119). Perceival Leigh gave this mobile

personality another name: "the Peripatetic"—one who "employed his leisure in going

about everywhere, peeping into everything, seeing all that he could."[198] Finally, a

fashionable man did not have any absolute and abstract moral principles; instead, he

followed a circumstance-based ethics of conduct. The point is illustrated most visibly by

the contents of various etiquette books flourishing from 1834 on. While these books

frequently claimed that good breeding was essential to one's admission into fashionable

society, they frequently understood it as a series of "dos" and "don'ts" in particular

situations.   Such abstract principles as "politeness of manners, modesty of sentiment,

discretion and prudence, moderation and disinterestedness, complaisance, liberal and

courteous behavior, sincerity"—often found in eighteenth-century conduct books— did

not disappear completely from etiquette books.[199] But they no longer appeared as ethical

norms; instead, they became what could or could not make particular cases. Fashionable

morality was situational, and the man associated with it could not be universal but only

historical.

The historical man of fashion had another unique quality: he enacted an unusual

relationship between the internal and the external, challenging an influential strand in

nineteenth-century masculinity studies—one that emphasizes the gradual replacement of

"masculinity as reputation" negotiated among peers by "masculinity as interiority"

hinging on the strength of the inner self over the century.[200] As widely known, the

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[198] Leigh, Preface to *Mr. Pips: His Diary*.

[199] The Abbé de Bellegarde, contents page.

[200] Tosh 72.

interiority theme was mainly proposed by evangelicals and other moralists.   The Earl of

Shaftsbury, for example had this view:

> [Eton] makes admirable gentleman and finished scholars—fits a man, beyond all
> competition, for the drawing-room, the Club, St. James's street, and all the
> mysteries of social elegance; but it does not make the man required for the
> coming generation. We must have nobler, deeper, and sterner stuff; less of
> refinement and more of truth; more of the inward, not so much of the outward
> gentleman.[201]

Here is a typical notion that manhood should be founded on the solidity of inner

principles, the strength of the mind and heart, rather than on "external trappings and

extraneous circumstances such as fortune, connections and reputations."[202]   The catch

was that the inward and the outward could never be separated; the difference only lay in

which side one wanted to lean to and value. The man of fashion chose to stress the

outward without doing away with the division itself.

Attention to appearance and surface characterized the man of fashion. As the

German Prince recorded in 1829:

> An 'élégant,' then, requires per week: Twenty shirts; twenty-four pocket-
> handkerchiefs; nine or ten pair of 'summer trousers;' thirty neck-handkerchiefs
> (unless he wears black ones); a dozen waistcoats; and stockings 'à discretion.'
> (155)

Such meticulous attention to dress and accessories was of course only part of the

emphasis the man of fashion put on surface. For him, surface also meant surface that

enclosed the messy mass of raw flesh; surface that polished the rough stone of a staircase;

surface that turned conjugal dissatisfaction and frustration into a presentation of domestic

harmony and prosperity. In teaching the concept of "perspective" in painting to young

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[201] Quoted in Morgan 62.

[202] Morgan 65.

ladies, an author with the pseudonym Uncle Mathos Le Bon emphasized the importance of the surface in this way:

> Not that a surface or plane can ever exist independent of substance, but the substance or thickness may be of no consequence in comparison with the surface. Thus, when I commend the beautiful polish of a mahogany table, the idea of its solidity is not in my mind: the plane surface alone occupies my attention.[203]

The fashionable man knew very well this artistic way of relating to the real: in order to present to the world a three-dimensional, solid-looking object (oneself) one must first learn to care about the surface. At the core of the male fashionable subject was the painter's perspective that made art, although the art the man of fashion wanted to make was life itself. Some eulogist did not hesitate to articulate this philosophy of surface enacted by the man of fashion: "The notion which is formed of the interior qualities is insensibly influenced by the exterior show"; "in human life, trifles are often of immense importance."[204] Thomas Carlyle might be literally right when he sarcastically proclaimed the dandy to be the prophet of the age. What the dandy prophesized was exactly the age's discovery of the surface: "men have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe, and hope, and work only in the Visible."[205] Via the dramatic expressions of his body, the man of fashion did not just prophesize but also actually enacted this belief in visible identity in a series of seasonal events. He activated a form of masculinity that was disturbing and nonetheless highly attractive.

As with his emphasis on the surface, the man of fashion also stressed impersonality or theatricality. A major way in which this quality expressed itself was the

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[203] "Letters To a Young Lady, Upon the Subject of Perspective," 106.

[204] *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion*, 14, 3.

[205] Carlyle, "Signs of the Times," 193.

suppression of real feelings. According to *The Gentleman's Handbook of Etiquette*, nothing was so "decidedly de *mauvais ton* than any expression of delight"; a man of fashion must never laugh [. . .] nor even smile; for he might by ignorance smile at the wrong place or time" (36). It was much safer to avoid all real emotions and put on a mask of quietude. In the words of Bulwer-Lytton's Pelham:

> The distinguishing trait of people accustomed to good society, is a calm, imperturbable quiet [. . .] they eat in quiet, move in quiet, live in quiet, and lose their wife, or even their money, in quiet.[206]

This suppression of feelings suggested a manhood that was not based on an authentic expression of the inner self nurtured in the domestic realm. However, avoidance of real feelings often went together with the staging of emotional gestures suited to occasion in light of fashion. For example, the "liveliest feeling may be exhibited upon the death of a poodle-dog."[207] Thus the impersonality of the man of fashion did not point toward the somewhat essentialized dichotomy of sexual difference—rational, energetic, constant, active and taciturn man versus emotional, weak, volatile, passive and talkative woman— that has been with us since the replacement of the one-sex paradigm by the two-sex model.[208] What it suggested was that personality, whether male or female—could simply become a matter of performance in tune with the baton of fashion. A man could be rational or emotional; energetic or languid; taciturn or talkative—all depending on the

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[206] Bulwer-Lytton, *Pelham*, 3.

[207] *The Gentleman's Handbook of Etiquette,* 36.

[208] More about this replacement can be found in Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, 1990). According to Laqueur, roughly in the late eighteenth century, there occurred in the western culture the transition from the one-sex Galenic continuum—in which the female body, as an underdeveloped version of the male one, was inferior to but not fundamentally differentiated from the latter—to the two-sex model in which men and women were perceived as essentially different. Three major dimensions of such polarization manifested in the nineteenth century: the configurations of separate spheres; the dichotomized conception of personality; and the emphasis on penetrative sex, the enforcement of heterosexuality as the norm, and the further demeaning of homosexual acts.

tone of the day or the ambience of the place. For instance, a fashionable man had to

appear languid in certain places in the 20s.   Pückler-Muskau wrote in 1826:

> The practice of half lying instead of sitting, sometimes of lying at full length on
> the carpet at the feet of ladies, of crossing one leg over the other in such a manner
> as to hold the foot in the hand, of putting the hands in the arm-holes of the
> waistcoat and so on, are all things which have obtained admission in the best
> company and the most exclusive circles. (45)

Here is not a picture of an energetic man conducting tough business; nonetheless,

transactions that simply went in the name of fashion but might range from social capital

to political networking could all be achieved in a seemingly weird masculine posture.

With the man of fashion, manhood became fundamentally a masquerade just like

womanhood; impersonality seamlessly merged into impersonation or theatricality

following the director of fashion. At its worst, impersonality or impersonation suggested

deception or lack of sincerity; but at its best, it could also mean the "versatility of

intellect and feeling" that was necessary to render the social realm harmonious and

congenial to all who entered it; it was then part of the art of pleasing others that the man

of fashion had again to bridge the gap of sexual difference to share and compete with his

female counterpart. [209]

Impersonation or theatricality might have played into another major characteristic

of the fashionable man: his lurking in between sexual license and sexual respectability,

another binary often invoked to discuss the distinction between the old aristocratic and

the new bourgeois values in the class ascendancy model. The man of fashion

complicated this distinction in two major ways. First, not aligning on either side, he

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[209] *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion*, 56.   In exploring nineteenth-century etiquette books, Marjorie
Morgan also made a wonderful discussion of the quality of impersonality as a necessity for creating a
"harmonious atmosphere" in the social realm; see Morgan 96.

simply embodied a new sexual code. In the early decades, this code was expressed by a

sort of proclaimed indifference towards the other sex. In 1834, a *Court Journal* author

wrote about London dandies "lounging away their evening at their clubs, voting 'women

a bore.'"[210] By 1860, the *Gentleman's Handbook of Etiquette* still voiced the same: "At

the present time it is considered dangerous to a man's pretensions to fashion, in England,

to speak to women at all. Women are voted *bores*, and are to be treated with refined

rudeness."[211] Whether influencing or being influenced by the sexual code of fashion,

some major men of fashion, such as Beau Brummell and the Duke of Devonshire, were

never married. The roué or the man of pleasure's licentiousness served as an extreme

case, rather than a disruption, of this culture: for him, women were not just bores but

mere objects to be conquered and then discarded. Nonetheless, the acceptance of the

roué in fashionable society drew a second line along which the distinction between sexual

license and sexual respectability was complicated: by making licentiousness a form of

respectability and respectability a precondition for licentious sexual pursuits, this type of

the man of fashion rendered the most intimate human act just another stage prop for

social performance.

Seemingly, the prevalence of the roué as a fashionable figure attested to the

continuation of old aristocratic libertinism especially when he, as often conceived of,

came from an upper-class family; yet the fact that he was tolerated in the beau monde

only because his libertinism had incorporated the bourgeois code of respectability

complicated the case. Under the façade of respectability, a young man of fashion could

not only sow the wild oats outside the establishment of the family but also go without

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[210] "Camera Obscura of the Great World (No. IV): Men and Boys, or Seven Ages of Modern Times," 167.

[211] *The Gentleman's Handbook of Etiquette*, 37.

severe punishment even if he ruined somebody's wife.   The tolerance must have been

tangible enough for an 1806 *La Belle Assemblée* author to draw the cynical conclusion

that the early nineteenth-century fashionable spirit could be illustrated by a Julius Caesar

anecdote. When asked the question of what he thought of the man being caught with his

neighbor's wife, Caesar was said to have replied calmly: "Why I think him a very

careless fellow."[212] According to the author in point, this was exactly the sexual

morality that went at large in fashionable society. Adultery was not a real problem; the

catch lay in carelessness. Outrageous sexual liaison was tolerated so long as one was

careful enough to maintain the surface of decency and respectability. Indeed, an almost

commonsensical understanding of "fashionable marriage" was that it was one of

convenience and indifference via which the two sides brought together everything—

money, land, rank and/or fashion—except love for each other.   After this marriage, it

was not unusual for husband and wife to go separately into society where each might take

on an openly secret lover or mistress. In her 1822 sketches of the metropolis entitled *The

Magic Lantern*, Lady Blessington wrote about the Lover's Walk—a specific place for

illicit rendezvous in Hyde Park; she recorded how she witnessed six pairs of lovers in a

very short duration and was shocked at "finding the delinquents to belong to some of the

most respectable families in the kingdom" (32). Indeed, some great figures in the world

of fashion were not free from adultery; Lord Holland, for example, impregnated Lady

Holland when she was still a wife of another man; and Lord Blessington (as Mountjoy

during the early 1800s) made the wife of a brother officer bear two children for himself

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[212] Quoted in "The Beau Monde; Or A History of the New World," 6.

before he married her.[213] "Good breeding demanded that outward conventions should not be violated," wrote the Countess of Airlie, "but asked few questions as to what went on beneath the surface. Scandals were glossed over by the decent acquiescence of wife or husband" (xv).   In the case of an exposure, a woman might face serious consequences including ostracism from the World, but a man could uncannily obtain fashionable currency for his predatory sexuality.   That might be why some dandies would intentionally seek exposure in order to demonstrate their sexual mastery. As Lady Blessington put it, they were "more desirous to draw observation to their gallantries than to screen their guilty mistresses" (32). Predatory sexuality solidified itself as a badge of manhood via the route of fashion.

It might be that this sexual performance of masculinity was not absolutely new in the nineteenth century but part of what John Tosh terms the "enduring masculinity"; but it is important to realize the role of fashion in resuscitating an old form for new occasions.[214]   How enduring it might be, sexual mastery was pursued as a kind of currently fashionable badge of masculine status instead of owing to some innate male nature that had long been there and cut across social ranks. When men from lower-walks of life resorted to sexual mastery to affirm their manhood, they often did so with the idea of fashion in mind. For instance, when the shabby man of fashion—the gent—attempted "gallantry to an unprotected girl" in the street, he would act "as if he was 'upon town'—'a fast man'—'up to a thing or two'—'a roué'—or some other such epithet."[215]   All the

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[213] The Hollands' anecdote is mentioned in much contemporary literature but also documented by Ellen Moer in *The Dandy* (590; the Mountjoy story is recorded in Michael Sadleir's *Blessington – D'Orsay: A Masquerade*, 17-19.

[214] Tosh 67.

[215] "Physiology of the London Idler, Chapter VI: Concerning the Gent," 60.

categories that passed over the gent's mind suggested that he had fashion—even as it was often confused with aristocracy in his view—in consideration when he set out as a sexual master.

When sexual mastery was constantly resuscitated as a badge of manhood via the voice of fashion, it affirmed male power over women; it destabilized but did not really subvert the heterosexual family as a fundamental social institution. Adultery and other irregular sexual liaison could indeed reveal the monogamous family as a sham, but they did not really dismantle the institution since they were often nudged into the respectability regime that valorized penetrative sex and reproductive heterosexuality. That might be why the man of fashion was not associated with homosexuality, in Mackie Erin's view, even if "modishness in men" began to "be darkened with those suspicions of gender treachery that persist to this day in Anglo-American bourgeois culture" as fashion possibly started to "turn queer " in the eighteenth century.[216] Indeed, during the large part of the nineteenth century, the man of fashion was not queered and marginalized but stood for a highly visible form of masculinity against which men from various walks of life tried to measure themselves.

Fashion as a Social Ideal and a Male Profession

The author of *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion* might not be totally exaggerating when he wrote: "There is not in existence a person under thirty years, and not many of a greater age, who would not rather be a man of fashion, than be the most distinguished man of a distinguished age" (12). The wide existence of this kind of

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[216] Mackie 202. Mackie records in detail how in their papers Addison and Steel condemn the modish men as effeminate and dubiously, though not certainly, associate them with the homosexual molly-house culture (189).

remarks attested to the man of fashion as a desirable social ideal. The reason why that was the case must be found in the man of fashion's versatile combination of aristocratic and bourgeois values for the social exigencies of the early nineteenth century: many of his distinctive qualities mirrored conventional courtly, noble culture and yet best reflected the needs of an increasingly industrialized, urbanized and commercial society, rendering his very person an embodiment of a preferable profession for those who could afford it and of a desirable ideal for those who could not.

The man of fashion's fluidity and impersonality, for example, exuded aristocratic courtly values and yet spoke to the new conditions of early nineteenth-century English society. As Majorie Morgan puts it, the "central monarchical courts which emerged in the sixteenth century were … anonymous social environments" where much fluctuation of one's position took place and where courtiers had to hide their real private emotions and concerns behind an impersonal "repertoire of stylized behaviors" for one's own interest and the good of court society at large.[217] When the man of fashion donned an impersonal, fluid character in Society, he seemed to have revived this old court nature, but actually his was also a response to the needs of modern urban industrial capitalism which uncannily resembled the court in its volatility, anonymity and fierce competition.

With the expansion of the Industrial Revolution, social hierarchy was becoming more volatile; new wealth could be more easily gained, and old wealth was facing greater challenge. As both upward and downward social mobility were increased, the old parameters of gauging one's self and worth—birth, rank, and fortune, for example, had to compete with an unspecified and yet widely acknowledged—among both the aristocracy

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[217] Morgan 95.

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and the bourgeoisie— fickle force: fashion. The man of fashion, via his very fluidity, came to capture this new volatile spirit.

Meanwhile, increasing urbanization turned people more and more into anonymous dwellers in large cities. In a strange land of strange people, one did not have much chance to impress others with deeper, inner qualities; external trappings such as dress and address necessarily took on more importance. Also, when one was so likely to sit next to a stranger in one's club or at a dinner party, it could both protect oneself and avoid hurting others if one hid one's feelings and emotions, assumed a reserved manner, talked general things, or simply kept silent. Flora Tristan recorded such a view from an English man when she asked him why a London club member did not converse:

> What [. . .] would you have us speak to a man we do not know, about whom nothing is known; when we have no idea whether he is rich or poor, Tory, Whig or Radical; you would have us risk wounding his pride or his feelings without regard for the consequences! (246)

With his impersonal and theatrical characteristic, the man of fashion was exactly a figure who knew how to handle difficult cases like this. In fact, he was the one who used his tact, talents, and taste to pose and please so well as to shed off his anonymity. By becoming a star in the fashionable sky, he threw light on the thorny roads of social interaction in the urban jungle, setting an example for myriad followers in actual life or via etiquette books, which were often written in the name of fashionables. That was another major reason why the man of fashion became a cultural ideal, even if it was a status few men could really realize to the full and certainly none could embody for long.

Furthermore, severe competition in industrial capitalism made a necessity of one's constant self-fashioning and refashioning to satisfy the unpredictable and frequently changing taste of an impersonal public, or rather the capricious call of the

market place. Techniques for excelling in this place included not only self-packaging, self-imaging, and self-pushing but also a quick recognition and anticipation of the public's needs to set up the next trend. The man of fashion was supposedly the one specialized in all these techniques; for a man of fashion was by definition a man of art and artifice, lived for an audience, and had the rare quality of being tactical.

Capturing the spirit of the urbanizing, industrializing capitalist society and wrapping it in the glorious aristocratic culture, the man of fashion, like his female counterpart, became a major representative of the profession of fashion. With his special arena—Society—materially substantial and psychologically important, this profession provided men with various positions, both full time and temporary: the leader of fashion, the dining-out man, and the gent chief among them. Located respectively on the top, in the middle and at the bottom of the caste of fashion, these three positions fleshed out a solid profile of the profession.

The leader of fashion, like the chaperone of fashion, occupied the highest position in the World. His major duty was to cooperate and compete with his female counterpart in leading Society. Family and rank might help but were not pre-conditions for the position. To achieve it, he also needed tact, taste and sociability, like the woman of fashion; besides, he must be a person of wit and wisdom. There was a strong sense that only a well-rounded, holistic genius who had left behind all "professional peculiarities of mind and manners" could really be granted this job. [218] In the memory of Lord Lamington, Beau Brummell was the "possessor of great gifts of tact, knowledge, of memory, and keenness of perception"; and the Beau's successor Count D'Orsay

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[218] *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion*, 145.

combined the accomplishments of a "sculptor, an excellent artist, and the possessor of a happy faculty of seizing the expression and drawing an admirable likeness in a remarkably short time."[219] According to the same source, those two and other men of fashion "took great pains with themselves—they did not slouch and moon through life," and they "understood the value of employing some hours to make the remnant worth enjoying."[220] Likewise, Charles Whibley—another nostalgic late Victorian gentleman—eulogized the Beau as the greatest "Artist in Life," a "hero" and a greater conqueror than Napoleon: "When Byron said he would rather be Brummell than Napoleon, he did not merely pay a deserved tribute to the genius of dandyism; he acknowledged that the Dandy was distinguished by rarer qualities than those which achieve the conquest of the world," wrote Whibley.[221] The same author would describe D'Orsay as "a Dandy among Dandies [. . .] a gentleman of incomparable wit and fancy."[222] Indeed, to be a leader of fashion needed not only many exceptional qualities but also full-time devotion as D'Orsay and the Beau had demonstrated. The reward, however, was equally remarkable. A leader of fashion enjoyed great power and prestige; and in the eyes of many contemporaries, the leader of fashion was no less, if not more, powerful than a man of distinction in politics. The following description was representative of contemporaries' perception of the comparable importance of fashion and politics:

> There are *parvenus* who will put up with a great deal of contempt, and will even run the risk of offending the person concerned, in order to be observed walking

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[219] Alexander 23, 25-26.

[220] Ibid 26.

[221] Whibley 1, 26, 3.

[222] Ibid 30.

half a square or talking intimately with some one of distinction in *fashion* or *politics*.[223]   (Emphasis mine)

Of course, it was not merely parvenus who would like to hang around the leader of fashion.

Much less important than the leader of fashion was the dining-out man or simply the diner-out, a position that could be taken up temporarily. In 1831, the *Court Journal* listed the following as those who might be diners out:

> New M.P.s who have a season's claim to be fed, in consideration of some cast-iron political pamphlet, as dry as deal shavings; younger brothers of the aristocracy, whose Meyerian coats and small nothings entitles them to the smiles of the hostess and her female guests; secretaries and under-secretaries, whose comprehensive government franks demand the requital of an occasional slice of haunch; and above all, the minnows of Helicon, and small literati.[224]

Although these men had very different public or private roles, for the season they shared a point: they all had to make the frequent transition into the role of the "social man."   As such, he might need to learn the "Hints for a Dining-out Man" prescribed by such a fashionable periodical as the *Court Journal*—hints including the tenet of never repeating "a good thing after Lord Alvanley, Lord Normanby, Lutrell, Copley, or any of the established wits who give the tone to the cuckoo-clocks of May Fair dinners."[225]   One of the drawbacks of being a diner-out was the effect of late dinners upon his health. Henry Luttrell, an insider, made a cynical epitaph for the dining-out man: "He dined later"—"died early."[226]   Being a diner-out could also conflict with one's filial or other domestic duties. Jane Carlyle wrote of how the new M.P. Charles Buller constantly disappointed

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[223] *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion,* 145.

[224] "Hints for a Dining-out Man,"97.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Quoted in *The Journal of Thomas Moore,* 4.1628.

his parents for failing to come dine with them as promised; although Jane—indignant for the parents' sake—would wonder about the benefit of the "poor frivolities of *flirtations* and *fine dinners*," much was to be derived from them: besides the currency one obtained from mixing with fashionable and political great, there was also that tangible sense of manly buoyancy Charles involuntarily acquired from the "extravagant homage which he is used to receive from all people, especially women" for being a "political town-wit and diner-out."[227]

Among the temporary diners-out, one might stand out and become more permanently (for more than three seasons) attached to that position. As a "professional wit," one's job was studying to be "unstudied" in his wit so as to perform excellently his task of providing *bon mots* (good conversation or gossip) at parties.[228] In order to be perfect in his "calling," he would have to work hard to collect conversation material from various newspapers and clubs and would not hesitate to go to the City of London to fish for what the fashionable world did not know. Performing the art of giving the proper talk to proper people at the proper time, he often had to let his stomach go unfilled with the excellent food he, as an epicure, had lauded. But he would be rewarded with the prize of being the life and soul of the party and thus earned the credit to be invited everywhere.

Further down the scale came the gent, which could not really be regarded as a position *in* Society since a gent could only participate in it vicariously via reading and talking about it, as well as by imitating its way of life in its very outskirts. Charles

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[227] To Jeannie Welsh, 8 September 1842; pp. 20-21

[228] "Diary of a Dinning-out Man," 283. My following elaboration is largely based on this source. This essay by Catherine Gore was first published under the pseudonym of Albany Poyntz in *Bentley's Miscellany* 9 (1841):280-292. It was later collected in her book *Sketches of English Characters* (1848). I cite from the magazine.

Dickens provided a very good portrayal of the gent in his creation of Tony Jobling in

Bleak House. A sacked clerk in a legal office, Tony Jobling had no means to mix in the

world of fashion led by the Dedlocks; nonetheless he was related to them by his

possession of the lady's copper-plate portrait, by his visiting of their country seat as a

tourist, and by his reading about fashionables like them in newspapers. Via all of this, he

was—in his own mind—much more in the "fashionable way" of life than in anything

else.[229]

     As perceived and pursued by the gent, the "fashionable way" of life had several

characteristics. First of all, luxury and leisure were his dream and pursuit, even if real

luxury at his disposal was scarce. As *Punch* satirically portrayed the Gent in 1842:

> This species is possibly a clerk, who is scribbling in an old coat all day at his
> office, and now puts on a cheap Taglioni, or one of the "Gent's new horsecloth
> envelopes," dons a cheap pair of gloves, sticks a cheap cigar in his mouth, and
> imagines that he is "rather the Stilton than otherwise"—"Stilton," or "cheese"
> being terms by which Gents imply style or fashion.[230]

However "cheap" the gent's outfit was in the satirical *Punch*'s point of view, it by no

means affected his sense of donning a higher version of manhood than his occupation

could provide. When he walked into the world in his "cheap" version of fashionable

outfit, he had the sense of being as fashionable as Taglioni; he was away, albeit

momentarily, from the dull realm of laboring utility and launched into the world of

princely leisure and sovereignty. Then, there was an air of excessiveness—as opposed to

economy—exuding from the gent's' toilet. As the *Punch* author put it:

> They like fierce stocks, out-of-the way cravats, large pattern handkerchiefs,
> staring trousers, and the like articles. They think it grand to sit on the box of a

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[229] Ibid 333.

[230] "Physiology of the London Idler, Chapter VI: Concerning the Gent," 60.

coach, and are hurt if they cannot do so. They would imagine they lost *caste* if they did not know something about the horses and odds of an approaching race. They affect thick sticks and queer superfluous pockets and buttons to their great coats.[231]

Inexpensive as his things might be, they suggested conspicuousness and excessiveness. Lastly, the gent's major stage was the town space rather than home. Having put on his outfit, he would venture into the street, performing gallantry at a girl like a roué; he would also go together with his companions into a tobacco-shop, leaning on the counter, lounging on a chair, passing hours enjoying the conversation with the shop girl. After that, he very probably would go to a theatre and during the play assumed "a negligee attitude" thought to be 'imposing and aristocratic."[232] When the play was over, he would walk to a nearby tavern for supper and singing. This way, the gent reenacted what he understood to be an aristocratic and for that matter, fashionable, way of life; and his, however satirized, was a major way in which many urban young men of little means materialized a sort of fashionable manhood.

In spite of their differences, the gent, the diner-out and the leader of fashion shared a suggestive point: none of them was an easy position to toy with; the last two especially required much attention and exertion. Thus they pinpointed a distinctive quality of fashion as a profession for men: it both relied on and subverted the work ethic as a major foundation of bourgeois manhood.

Although this "profession," centered on social and leisure activities, was different from land-managing, stock-trading and rent-collecting as well as from business, law,

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[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid 61.

religion and letters, it was no less strenuous. As the author of *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion* put it:

> A man of fashion ought to congratulate himself upon the difficulties of his profession, and upon the thorny hedge of etiquette by which it is encircled and guarded; they add to the glory of his success, and prevent others from coming in and diminishing the distinctness and separateness of his position.[233]

To excel in this difficult "profession," a man had to toil and labor. Numerous etiquette books taught men how to succeed by using a language resembling that of the work ethic as it was preached by both evangelicals and Thomas Carlyle. These were just a few examples from the above handbook: "Dress is the livery of good society; and, all the world over, no one can get practice in his *profession* who does not wear the badge of his *calling*" (15). "Respect the profession which you have undertaken,—to be persuaded that it is worthy of your best powers, and that your best attention must be applied to its *duties*" (45). "Let him never go into society with a lazing and droning mind. The intellect must be *excited* and *strained*, and then it will do great things" (45). "For prevailing with people, one must be *continual and persevering*" (49). "The pleasures which it [society] holds out, must be tasted with the utmost *temperance and control*, if they would not be found fatal" (51-52). "It is only by *discipline and effort* that we can attain to that elevation of character"; "and every man may take home to himself the assurance that *time and toil* will enable him to reach the last and loftiest conclusions in that department" (33). Words like "calling", "discipline," "temperance," and "toil," as well as the general rhetoric these quotations employ, suggest that, to be a man of fashion, one has indeed to enact what James Eli Adams has termed an "ascetic regimen" or "self-discipline" as a

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[233] *The Handbook of the Man of Fashion*, 63.

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form of masculine performance.[234] Fashion as a male profession was underwritten by the bourgeois work ethic.

Yet just as fashion was not a simple bourgeois profession, the work it demanded was not work in its usual sense, and fashionable work would ultimately challenge the validity of the bourgeois gospel of work. For eventually any traces of fashionable work must be erased, as exemplified by the diner-out's studying in order to appear unstudied; and its ultimate goals were not profits, material production, the answering of divine purposes, etc. Instead, fashionable work was to produce what Georg Simmel would regard as the core of social life based on human "impulse to sociability": the "pure essence of association," a state of "free-playing, interacting interdependence of individuals" when all concrete objective aims of life fade away.[235] It was not that no objective aims were to come out of the profession; in fact practical objectives were many and varied in tandem with local circumstances, as I have pointed out all along. But the ultimate end of the profession was simply what Simmel terms the fundamental "sociable values": "joy, relief, vivacity" (123). In contemporary language, it was simply "gaiety," gaiety that kept at bay what Alexander Pope describes as the Mighty Mother "Dulness" of life.[236] Numerous early nineteenth-century documents equated "fashionable life" with "gay" life and took the importance of gaiety for granted. For example, the *Court Journal* and many other periodicals used "Gaieties of the Week," or something like that, as a

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[234] Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints*, 1-19; 20-60.

[235] Simmel 121-122.   Simmel makes an analogy between the human impulse to sociability to "a play impulse or an artistic impulse"; as he states: "And as that which I called artistic impulse draws its form from the complexes of perceivable things and builds this form into a special structure corresponding to the artistic impulse, so also the impulse to sociability distills, as it were, out of the realities of social life the pure essence of association, of the associative process as a value and satisfaction" (121).

[236] Pope, *The Dunciad*, I, 9-18.

regular column reporting on fashionable society and its activities; and Lady Holland would complain about a Parisian house for being short of gaiety: "I can hardly think people were serious in describing this house among *the gay ones* of Paris. No balls, fêtes or soirées, which are what constitute gaiety."[237]

It was exactly via gaiety production that the man of fashion seamlessly combined bourgeois work and aristocratic leisure, just as he did with bourgeois interiority and aristocratic display, as well as with the public man and the private patriarch. In doing so, he enacted a form of masculinity that developed itself in the space of possibility between binary distinctions, just as his female counterpart did.

Facilitated by fashion, masculinity and femininity became a matter of constant negotiation between the seemingly trans-historical universal and the currently exigent. Fashionable gender roles did not do away with the ancient division between the inner and the outer; nonetheless, they rewrote new versions of their relationship to best accommodate nineteenth-century's discovery of the "surface effects." Fashionable gender roles did not dismantle the long-standing and essentialized public man and private woman division; but they constantly suspended it in reality. Fashionable gender roles did not discard horizontal class association as one of its bases—the gent could mix only with other people of similar social and economic means for most of the time, for example. Yet they made much of the vertically stretched social aspiration, penetration and emulation— a well-established duke, a new M.P. from the middling rank, and an obscure legal clerk could be bound together by a common sense of fashionable manhood, for instance. In the space of possibility between various binary distinctions, fashionable gender roles

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[237] 24 December 1825, *Lady Holland to Her Son, 1821-1845*, 41.

provided their enactors with considerable agency in regulating social exchange. For this agency, fashionable men and women were admired, followed, satirized, caricatured, criticized but never stopped being engaged with in the nineteenth century.

Was this agency that rendered fashionables such a bugbear for Victorian intellectuals and led to an entire problematic of their representation in Victorian literature, and especially in realist fiction? This question will be picked up in the next chapter.
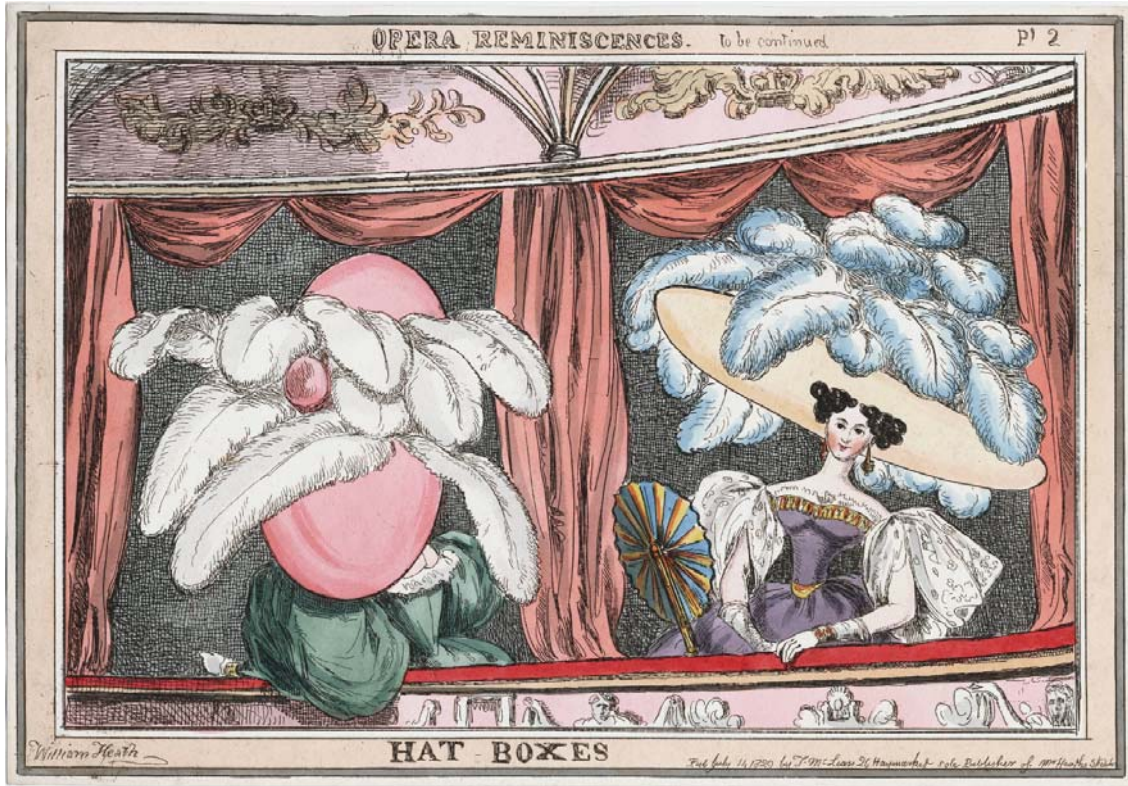
Figure 9 Hat Boxes by William Heath

Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

<http://130.132.81.116/WALPOLEIMG/size4/D0758/lwlpr13318.jpg>

Figure 10 Opera Boxes during the Time of the Great Exhibition by George Cruickshank

Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

<http://130.132.81.116/WALPOLEIMG/size4/D0841/lwlpr14407.jpg>

Chapter 4

Fashionable Intelligence and the Victorian Novel:
The Problematic of Fashion Representation *in Bleak House*

ANTI-BLEAK HOUSE
A BLEAK HOUSE that is indeed, where the north winds meet to howl an ignoble
concert, and bitter blasts mourn like tortured spirits of rebels [. . .] where the
whirlwind and the hurricane vow their vengeance. [. . .] Woe to the inhabitant of
the Bleak House if he is not armed with the OVERCOAT and a SUIT of
FASHIONABLE and substantial Clothing, such as can only be obtained at E.
Moses & Sons Establishments. [. . .] Who would covet a Bleak House in the
month of March, when the old winds take out a fresh license [. . .]

—Advertisement for E. Moses & Son from Inner Back Cover of *Bleak
House* (No. 1, March 1852) [238]

That an advertisement on fashionable clothing should initiate a novel which

ostensibly satirizes the world of fashion is not as striking as it seems. It is quite typical of

what I have termed the problematic of fashion representation in which contradictory

impulses sit comfortably together to make up a field of tension conducive to the

maintenance of modern fashion. Particularly illustrative of the point is the polemic

device employed here: a seeming attack on a given product like *Bleak House* is meant to

increase its chances of being discussed and thus its fashionability, which in turn will add

on to the visibility of that which is associated with the product—the anti-Bleak House,

for example, that E. Moses & Son boldly proclaimed itself to be.   As a device widely

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[238] Spec. Coll. Hepburn 186, University of Glasgow:
http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/nov2004.html (page viewed on 12/01/2007).

employed in the system of fashion, it lay at the core of the problematic of fashion

representation, bespeaking strongly of fashion's transformation of print culture.

For Dickens and many other Victorian novelists, fashion's transformation of print

culture raised a series of questions: How could one's own writing compete with other

representations of fashion that were not only changing the shape and the function of print

culture but also turning perception itself into a peripatetic visual business? How could

one's novelistic project engender desirable social effect without resembling other

representations of fashion—without becoming a showroom or a self-perpetuating

mechanism, for instance? What if fashion's transformation of print culture was a mere

sign of a more fundamental social problematic that was deeply rooted in collective

psychology? And if that turned out to be the case indeed, how could one's novelistic

project address it?

These questions, among others, were pressing ones for Victorian novelists and

bore heavily on their thematic and formal experiments. Quite illustrative of these

experiments is Dickens's *Bleak House* which both replicates the problematic of fashion

representation and seeks to address it. A chief way in which these contradictory impulses

come out is Dickens' parodic treatment of fashionable intelligence, a popular form in

Victorian print culture. A closer look at this treatment reveals a Dickens highly anxious

to differentiate his novelistic/omniscient project from such a popular form of fashion

writing, and yet what starts as an anxious attempt at differentiation—his experiment with

the double narrative—only ends in partial differentiation and partial replication. It is in

this duality, or rather incomplete differentiation, that we must find, I argue, Dickens's

intuition of a more profound social problematic—which fashionable intelligence only

signals—intuition that directly bears on his dubious proposal of such bourgeois ideals as the domestic woman, the entrepreneur ideal, and the professional man.

Fashionable Intelligence and the Omniscient Narrator

As a major representative of popular fashion writing, fashionable intelligence calls Dickens's attention. Throughout *Bleak House*, Dickens ostensibly parodies and satirizes the column as a node of Victorian print culture. Yet, his satirical energy this way is underpinned, I argue, by a strong anxiety about the omniscient narrative's resemblance to the popular column in terms of knowledge-claiming, formal rhetoric, and affect on the reader.

Stemming from "court news" in early newspapers, "fashionable intelligence" became in the 1820s and 30s a discrete cultural form parallel to if not always subsuming the former. Even as it still covered the news of the court, fashionable intelligence highlighted a new group of people—namely the exclusive and yet open fashionable world—as distinguished from, albeit still including, the crown and the nobility. Reporting on what this constantly changing yet seemingly fixed (in the sense of always bearing the mark of fashion) unit was doing and using, fashionable intelligence held up fashion as an irresistible new form of power and rendered itself its single most important authority. A typical piece of fashionable intelligence may read like this one from the *Court Journal*:

> On Saturday night there were small parties at the houses of Lady Canning and Lady Frances Leveson, on Sunday, a *petite réunion* at Lady Salisbury's, and on Monday the week was brilliantly opened by a juvenile fête at Ashburnham House, in honour of Princess Lieven's youngest son. [. . .] On Wednesday night Mrs. Scott Murray gave her second ball for the season; and Mrs. Gally Knight had a

numerous assembly. The *soirée dansante* at Ashburnham House was more than usually brilliant [. . .] ("Fashionable Gaieties of the Week," 214-5)

I will soon come to the rhetoric of fashionable intelligence; suffice it here to point out that the column propagates the idea of fashion by collecting all kinds of social events under the general rubric of fashionable gaieties and in doing so presents itself as a chronicler of and an authority on fashion.

By the early Victorian period, fashionable intelligence had become a considerable presence in English social life. As I have documented in Chapter 2, Society hostesses were so eager to have their parties reported in papers that it seemed as if they had organized social gatherings just for that purpose. Like these hostesses, fashionable guests also attached great importance to being registered.   It seemed as if merely being in the world of fashion was not enough or not real enough; one needed the medium of print to authenticate one's fashionable existence. Major Pendennis in William Thackeray's *The History of Pendennis*, for example, reads fashionable intelligence specifically to see that his name is "down among the guests at my Lord So-and-so's fête" (3). Thackeray himself cherished the desire to have his name printed in the *Morning Post*'s "fashionable intelligence." Once at the Marquis of Lansdowne's, Thackeray carefully pronounced his name to the newsman Mr. Forster, who, however, deliberately skipped it because Thackeray had attacked fashionable reporters in the *Punch* serial "Jenkins."[239] Thackeray's anecdote, representative of many others, spoke of the role of fashionable intelligence in Victorian social life.

Meanwhile, fashionable intelligence was also becoming a prominent figure in Victorian print culture. The column was employed not only in fashion journals like the

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[239] The story is quoted in Spielmann 319-320.

La Belle Assemblée and the *Morning Post* but also in more general and far-reaching

periodicals such as *The Times*.   Moreover, it was frequently used as a selling point in

various papers. For example, the *Court Journal* in the 1850s always gave priority to

"fashionable intelligence" in its self-advertising pieces.   A typical one of these runs as

follows:

> The *Court Journal* of this day will contain all the fashionable intelligence of
> London, Paris and the Continental Courts, with the literature, fine arts, the
> musical review, and chit chat, and miscellaneous news of the week; also original
> articles by distinguished writers" (*The Times* 16 April 1853, Col A:10).

Here, "fashionable intelligence" does not merely go together with literature and so on but

takes precedence over others. Being comprehensive in its coverage of fashionable

intelligence was one of this journal's main strategies to attract readers and remain

competitive when all forms of print culture were mushrooming.

Dickens's is fully aware of Victorian readers' attraction to fashionable

intelligence and satirizes their susceptibility via Tony Jobling's addiction to the column:

> But, fashion is Mr Weevle's, as it was Tony Joblings' weakness. To borrow
> yesterday's paper from the Sol's Arms of an evening, and read about the brilliant
> and distinguished meteors that are shooting across the fashionable sky in every
> direction, is unspeakable consolation to him. To know what member of what
> brilliant and distinguished circle accomplished the brilliant and distinguished feat
> of joining it yesterday, or contemplates the no less brilliant and distinguished feat
> of leaving it tomorrow, gives him a thrill of joy. 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. Mr Weevle
> reverts from this intelligence, to the Galaxy portraits implicated; and seems to
> know the originals, and to be known of them. (340; ch.20)

Frequent repetition of "brilliant and distinguished" and "Galaxy" helps produce what

Bakhtin would have termed a "parodic stylization" of the language of fashionable

intelligence, revealing the ridiculousness and absurdity of Jobling's—for that matter, a

common Victorian reader's—accepting, or rather *devouring*, that language as it is in a cornered lodging that is far from "brilliant and distinguished."[240]

Yet as shown here, Dickens's target is not just the addicted reader but also the addicting column itself. Apart from the distinctive language fashionable intelligence employs, Dickens satirizes several other aspects of this popular mode of print culture. First of all, he targets its claim to fashionable knowledge and its self-constituted authority on that. This attack starts from the second chapter where he initiates a pattern that is to recur constantly throughout the novel: an omniscient narrator tells about the world of fashion by seemingly quoting "fashionable intelligence" only to satirize this newly strengthened mechanism found in Victorian print:

> My Lady Dedlock has returned to her house in town for a few days previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks; after which her movements are uncertain. The fashionable intelligence says so, for the comfort of the Parisians, and it knows all fashionable things. To know things otherwise, were to be unfashionable. (57; ch.2)

Here Dickens first ridicules fashionable intelligence's claim to omniscience—"it knows *all* fashionable things"—by revealing it as one that, by definition, is limited, albeit willfully so: fashionable omniscience entails a willful neglect of whatever is deemed unworthy of knowing. The self-perpetuating self-reflexive logic employed by the column is another point being targeted. In writing about the fashion system, Roland Barthes sums up one of its distinguishing features:

> Fashion can be defined only by itself, for Fashion is merely a garment and the Fashion garment is never anything but what Fashion decides it is; thus from signifiers to signified, a purely reflexive process is established. (287)

For Barthes, what most characterizes Fashion is its self-reflexivity, which he further elaborates by its analogy to "formal logic" (288). Like the latter, "Fashion is defined by

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[240] For Bakhtin's discussion of the "parodic stylization," see *The Dialogic Imagination*, 301-331.

the infinite variation of a single tautology"; in other words, it has a "stable form and unstable content" like "the ship Argo, of which each piece is gradually replaced, which nonetheless remained Argo" (288).   This "variation of a single tautology" seems to be exactly what fashionable intelligence enacts, in Dickens's view, by proclaiming to "know all things fashionable" and discrediting whatever is beyond its scope as "unfashionable" and therefore unworthy of knowing.   This is its self-perpetuating logic: either follow fashionable intelligence or be unfashionable.   Dickens further ridicules the column's self-reflexive self-perpetuation by inserting at irregular intervals in the novel various pieces of mock fashionable intelligence that parody the popular form's "infinite variation of a single tautology."   For although one piece is different from another in content, they all convey the same sense of fashionable intelligence as a form of authority on fashion.

Another aspect of fashionable intelligence that Dickens touches on is its seemingly scientific manner in conveying information to its readers.   As can be seen in the piece from the *Court Journal* I quoted above, fashionable intelligence never specifies a reporter to any of its news.   It simply presents the information as if it came directly from the transcendent eye of a transcendent being that moves everywhere (fashionable), sees everything (fashionable), and passes the news on without mediation.   Dickens gives lie to this scientific posture by capping the column with a human head that "says so" and so.   The figure of personification is used throughout the novel: "fashionable intelligence" is sarcastically said to be "eloquent" in country-house and London drawing-room hospitality (ch.2); capable of finding things out and communicating "glad tidings" (ch.12); "weak in English, but a giant refreshed in French" (ch.12); and able to experience "confusion" and shock (ch.16).   This figuration portrays a force that is very much alive,

sinister, and pervasive but not as powerful as it seems; for "like the fiend, [it] is omniscient of the past and present but not the future" (ch.2).

Yet another aspect of fashionable intelligence Dickens focuses on is its sensationalism. In spite of its overall scientific posture, fashionable intelligence deploys a verbal rhetoric that appeals to the senses and especially the eye. It favors detailed flowery descriptions of clothing. It frequently uses highly emotional and sensual words like "amusing," "attractive," "charming," "brilliant," "distinguished," "enchanting," etc. It prefers news of elopement, marriage, divorce and scandal. It seeks to detect the inmost secrets and spread them out to a larger audience, thus blurring the public and private boundaries that Victorians sought to observe. Dickens attacks this feature of the popular column by portraying it as a sadistic pursuer that dogs Lady Dedlock so closely that the woman has to disguise herself for activities—such as looking for her former lover Nemo—that are natural to her feeling self. While seemingly starring her, fashionable intelligence places her under voyeuristic surveillance and severe discipline. By presenting each of Lady Dedlock's major occurrence in the novel with a piece of news that fashionable intelligence has found out of her, Dickens vividly conveys the persistence of this control; for it is not until at the close of the novel when the lady's scandal is out that fashionable intelligence relinquishes her and "persists in flitting and chattering about town" (842; ch.58).

Last but not least, Dickens also targets the mobile view presented by fashionable intelligence. In catching fashion, the column has enacted a new perceptual mode that is crystallized in the image of a peripatetic eye in a peripatetic body. The seemingly transcendent eye of the fashionable reporter keeps moving, first of all, over time. As the

Court Journal piece illustrates, each day from Sunday to Monday is a new day with new excitements. The fashionable eye also moves over space from Ashburnham House to Dorchester House, from London to Brighton, from England to overseas. Furthermore, it keeps changing focuses: today it is the Jones and tomorrow the Moses.

Without specifying any simple causal relationship, Dickens pinpoints this peripatetic perceptual mode also in the fashionable reader and satirizes it via both Tony Jobling and his double William Guppy. As Dickens's passage on Jobling's addiction to fashionable news suggests, what Jobling embodies is not a rational-critical reader who uses print to gain clarity about the self, as Habermas would say of the bourgeois reader. Instead, his is a mode of reading that literally involves the eye moving quickly through lines to catch the latest vicissitude of fashion. With him the act of reading is that of observing meteors "shooting across the fashionable sky in every direction"—the metaphor nicely evokes the image of a fast moving eye following even faster movements. This eye, instead of turning inwards for thoughts and reasoning, looks outwards; it will move constantly from the verbal representation of fashion to the visual, to the Galaxy portraits, for instance, from which the fashionable reader derives a carnival on the page:

> [As] the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty wears every variety of fancy dress, plays every variety of musical instrument, fondles every variety of dog, ogles every variety of prospect, and is backed up by every variety of flower pot and balustrade, the result is very imposing. (340; ch.20)

Here the fashionable eye turns into a fondling one, moving busily, even if uncertainly, among a huge assortment of commodities, including bodies of fashion. The fashionable reader is highly susceptible to visual materiality; his is a mode of visceral reading.

As far as fashionable reading is mobile, visual and visceral, it is also hedonistic, and coldly so. Fashionable reading yields "thrills of joy" no matter what human fate is

represented on the page; for Jobling, news of people falling from the fashionable sky is just as enjoyable as those rising up in it. Furthermore, a fashionable epistemology is coming to existence with fashionable reading. For Jobling, fashionable information is equated with "knowledge of human destiny." Meanwhile to have fashionable knowledge amounts to be alive and to have one's way in the world. Epistemology and ontology collapse into each other in the act of fashionable reading, or rather seeing.

Dickens further dramatizes this peripatetic vision in the scene of Guppy contemplating the portrait of Lady Dedlock:

> [He terminated] his survey with the portrait of Lady Dedlock over the mantelshelf, in which she is represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on her arm. (503; ch.32)

Here are eyes that move from one thing to another after taking in each fully. By their movements, they turn a dead portrait into a parade of fashionable objects. Echoing the earlier scene of Jobling's deriving delight by diving into visual materiality, this one highlights a perception process that goes upward, not just from terrace to bracelet, but endlessly. Endlessly because although Dickens has to stop somewhere, his presentation of Guppy's comment on the portrait's likeness to the original suggests that Guppy's eyes actually go further from the arm to the hand, from the hand to the ring, and from the ring to the face; and from there he may go on re-viewing—in his mind's eye— how everything fits on the original, how the original is going to react to his scheme, and so on.

It is worthwhile to point out that Dickens was not alone in targeting the peripatetic mode and fashionable reporter. About ten years earlier, William Thackeray started an attack on the same figure that bore the name of Jenkins. In a series of small essays that

came out in *Punch* (1843)*,* Thackeray satirized Jenkins's reporting techniques, many of

which were similar to what Dickens identified later. For example, Thackeray also

targeted the fashionable reporter's pretension to scientific objectivity by pointing out

Jenkins's habit of "writing the *copy* before the event."[241] Like Dickens, Thackeray

attacked the sensational rhetoric of fashionable intelligence by calling Jenkins a rogue

who does "spy into the hearts of virgins, as jackdaw peeps into the recesses of a marrow-

bone."[242] A few years later, Percival Leigh picked up this ridicule of fashionable

reporting in his "Mr. Pips His Diary"—a series of verbal descriptions accompanying

Richard Doyle's graphic satire *Manners and Customs of Ye Englyshe in 1849* (also

serialized in *Punch*). In his preface, Leigh frames Pips as the spirit of a seventeenth-

century peripatetic, journalist, philosopher and epicure conjured up to comment on

present-day events, but Pips's diary vividly reveals him to have the peripatetic vision of

the modern day:

> THIS Day to the Ring in Hyde Park for a walk to get me an Appetite, and look at
> the fine Folks and people of Fashion riding in their Carriages, which it do much
> delight me to behold. [. . .] Did see many mighty pretty young Ladies; and one
> sitting in a Landau with a Coronet on the Panel, upon whom I did smile, but
> perceiving that she did turn up her nose at me, I did look glum; howbeit, another
> comely Damsel that I smiled at did blush and simper, which gave me Joy. It was
> as good as a Play to watch the young Guardsmen, with their Tufts and Mustaches,
> riding straight-legged, and them and the other bucks taking off their Hats and
> kissing their Hands to the Charming Belles as they passed them by. But it was
> rarer still to behold a Snob that strove to do the same Sort of Thing, and did get
> laughed at for his pains.[243]

In "going about everywhere, peeping into everything, seeing all that he could, and

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[241] "Jenkins at the Royal Wedding," 13.

[242] Ibid 13.

[243] This piece of Leigh's fictional diary is dated March 27th, 1849 and goes with Doyle's drawing "Ye Fashonable Worlde Takynge its Exercyse in Hyde Parke. See Doyle No.3.

chronicling his experiences daily" (Leigh, Preface), Pips resembles the fashionable

reporter. Yet his diary also reads like something that flows directly from the mind of the

fashionable reader Tony Jobling, a mind that does not think about the things that appear

before him but simply moves quickly from one object to another after toying with each

briefly. Pips is a fashionable reporter, reader, and spy merged into one.

Whether these earlier satires on fashionable reporting had direct influence on

Dickens is another matter; their existence demonstrates that Dickens's engagement with

fashionable intelligence was not peculiar but part of a larger intellectual concern. What

was special about Dickens, however, was his weaving of this concern into a novel and

thus raising questions of a predominant mode of realistic fiction: the omniscient narrative.

By doubling his omniscient narrator on the fashionable reporter, he ostensibly calls

readers' attention to the resemblances between them. This doubling can be illustrated by

a closer look at one of the many pieces of mock fashionable intelligence Dickens crafts

throughout the novel:

> It has left off raining down in Lincolnshire, at last, and Chesney Wold has taken
> heart. Mrs. Rouncewll is full of hospitable cares, for Sir Leicester and my Lady
> are coming home from Paris. *The fashionable intelligence has found it out* and
> communicates the glad tidings to benighted England. (Italicization mine) (203;
> ch.12)

Without coming to the italicized part, a reader would of course assume that all that goes

before originates from the omniscient narrator; the italicized sentence, however, suddenly

wakes up the reader, calling his attention to the fact that there is another voice which the

omniscient narrator is mimicking. If the omniscient narrator does not like the fashionable

one's servile and eulogistic report and mocks him by a satirical tone and tongue-in-cheek

manner, he nonetheless uses the fashionable intelligence as part of his own narrative. For

his own story line continues seamlessly from where fashionable intelligence stops: the expected homecoming of the Dedlocks stirs up Chesney Wold to prepare for their arrival. In this way, the omniscient narrator confirms that the fashionable intelligence was, after all, true. This pattern of doubling followed by differentiation followed by confirmation occurs not infrequently in the novel, suggesting Dickens's awareness of the difficulty in absolutely differentiating the omniscient narrator from the fashionable reporter.

Indeed, the omniscient narrative shared many techniques with fashionable intelligence. Like the latter, the omniscient narrative claims an objective, scientific point of view that seems to come from a transcendent, God-like being. The omniscient narrative also blurs the boundaries between public and private spheres. "For it is precisely by invading privacy, as Audrey Jaffe puts it, "that omniscience defines the boundaries of privacy for nineteenth-century readers" (9). A biggest fantasy of narrative omniscience is that one can go to another's heart and find the tunes that will touch a larger audience. How is this different from fashionable intelligence's sensational secret-finding? The omniscient narrator of course also relies on mobility to achieve the effect of comprehensiveness. Furthermore, given the monthly serial form of the novel, the omniscient narrator can also be said to resemble a fashionable reporter in his periodical coming in and out of a reader's life, announcing each month the latest arrivals/ins and departures/outs of the characters he seems to describe but actually controls. If fashionable intelligence is understood to have set in the reader the peripatetic mode, won't the omniscient narrator's monthly coming and going perform the same work? How different is the longing for the next novelty of fashion from the longing for the next installment of the novel—the two often arriving in a same volume any way? As for

appealing to the eye, what work do the illustrations in an omnisciently narrated novel perform beyond that purpose?

These resemblances, among others, make it indeed very hard for one to whip fashionable intelligence without thinking of how one's own novelistic project makes its truth claims.   This thinking was indeed in the forefront of the Victorian mind and underpinned various novelists' attempts to experiment with different narrative forms. Dickens's double narrative was such an attempt. Knowing fully well that a satirical posture is not enough to differentiate his omniscient narrative from fashionable intelligence and thus sustain his truth claims, he resorts to another strategy: the first-person narrative.

It is quite noticeable that Esther's narrative *appears* to be what fashionable intelligence is not. To fashionable intelligence's all-knowing posture Esther poses a narrative of negativity:

> I am not clever. [. . .] I have not by any means a quick understanding. .. .I was not charming. [. . .] I never loved my godmother. [. . .] I had never heard my mama spoken of. I had never heard of my papa either. [. . .] I knew none of them [school girls] at home. [. . .] I never went out at all.   (63-65; ch.3)

To fashionable intelligence's scientific, objective, certain facade, Esther sets up a narrative of uncertainty, hesitancy, selective memory, and partial revelation. She would, for instance, holds back the information about Allen Woodcourt's love until she feels secure to reveal it, as is often pointed out. To fashionable intelligence's invisible, disembodied presence, she has a face that can be scarred and indeed must be scarred in order to mark out her difference from the world fashionable intelligence holds up.

These differences, although not exclusive, should be enough to demonstrate that Esther is a strategy partly set up to differentiate Dickens's novelistic/omniscient project

from fashionable intelligence and to kill the anxiety about the inevitable collisions between the two. The point is further confirmed in the fact that Esther's narrative is initiated as a response, in a dialogic manner: "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever" (62; ch.3). This is strange because Esther speaks as if she knew of the third-person omniscient narrator, whose existence, "by the rules of his profession," as Robert Newsom puts it, "cannot be known to Esther."[244] This strange beginning, however, would sound less so, if we understand Esther as being called on—virtually—by the omniscient narrator to assist in his own differentiation from the fashionable reporter: they definitely address a common problem—Dickens's anxiety about the novelistic/omniscient project in a culture that is increasingly shaped by fashionable intelligence.

How successful is Esther's narrative in this way? With Esther, omniscience is not done away with. One can count numerous times when she seems to have lost her "little body" and become something like an audio-video camera, taking down events and conversations in such verisimilitude and such detail that she metamorphoses temporarily into an omniscient narrator. But with her, omniscience is not only limited but humanized; it has an altruistic, soft, and feminine face.

Esther is a little peripatetic, too, both as a character and as a narrator. As a character, she has housekeeping responsibilities that keep her constantly moving within Bleak House, but her care for others also brings her, not infrequently outside it to London, Lincolnshire and other places. These movements add on to her mobility as a narrator. Yet again, her mobility is properly restrained and has humanistic care and concern as its proclaimed objectives.

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[244] Newsom, *Dickens: On the Romantic Side of Familiar Things*, 14.

Even a bit of self-constitutive gesture is retained in Esther's world as well; for Esther is, in the words of Richard Skimpole, "intent upon the perfect working of the whole little system of which you are the center" (587; ch.37). But her self-centered system is really "little" and called on by the necessity for a conscientiously self-enclosed domain that expels the rottenness in the larger society.

These comparisons, far from exhausting the possibilities, are enough to illustrate that with Esther's narrative Dickens achieves a dual end: on the one hand, he has "paradoxically proscribed" omniscience, to appropriate Audrey Jaffe, and limited it "to one half of the novel," and thus differentiates his novelistic project from a runaway omniscience as enacted by fashionable intelligence (128). On the other hand, he retains, if only to contain, what fashionable intelligence holds up, in proper boundaries— boundaries which coincide with those of Esther's domestic world—so that they become socially productive.

That Dickens's anxious attempt to differentiate his novelistic project from fashionable intelligence should end in partial differentiation and partial replication does not indicate a failure in his logical reasoning. Instead, this incomplete differentiation speaks of his intuition that fashionable intelligence is a mere sign of a more profound social problematic in which what he has targeted in fashionable intelligence is shared by other major social institutions. Appealing to the eye, peripatetic vision, self-perpetuating self-reflexivity are not the exclusive mechanisms of fashionable intelligence, as Dickens is quick to demonstrate. The whole society from the ancient Court of Chancery to the new detective police seems to be bent on a "polite show" business that betrays characteristics which fashionable intelligence only embodies more explicitly. In

registering this polite show business, Dickens not only leaves us a unified view of English society but also suggests that the surface world—the world fashionable intelligence appeals to—is what one must look more carefully at for solutions to Victorian social problems.

The Polite Show Went on

With the double narrative, Dickens portrays three major institutions—the Court of Chancery, the world of fashion, and the detective police— with the supplements of religion, philanthropy, and politics for a panoramic sketch of mid-century England. A major thread that ropes all these institutions together and unifies the panoramic view is Dickens' portrayal of their shared qualities, qualities fashionable intelligence eloquently voices.

That the Court of Chancery bears family resemblance to the model of fashion is a point Dickens makes early on in the novel. At the beginning of Chapter 2, he states explicitly that the world of fashion "is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the crow flies" (55). To solidify this idea, he pinpoints three points of comparison.

First, both have a regard for "precedent and usage" — that is to say, suit or fashion following is a basic pattern for two. Then, both strive to shut out a turbulent reality as symbolized by "a deal of thundery weather" by attending to strange games of their own, just as Rip Van Winkle sleeps through the American Revolution. If in the world of fashion, this attention to play and neglect of reality are partly achieved by wrapping itself up in "too much jeweler's cotton and fine wool" and guarding itself with "Mercury in powder," they are similarly achieved in Chancery by a deployment of

material props—maces, seals, silk-gowns, purses, wigs, and its conspicuous waste of

paper. If fashionable objects seduce—as Jobling's susceptibility to visual materiality

indicates—legal props might also have helped in making up the "dreadful attraction in

the place" as Miss Flite speaks of it (553; ch.35). In giving both characters names that

are derivatives from words indicating the lack of weight—Jobling possibly from jobbing

and Flite Flight—Dickens wants his readers to see more connections between them:

Jobling's attraction to fashionable objects finds an echo in and elucidates Miss Flite's

subjection to the "Influence of the Mace and Seal" (554; ch.35), neither being mere

weakness or madness but having to do with what Bloch would term as the "enticing

image" that arise between men and objects (1:343).   In Esther's narrative, Richard

Carstone's attraction to "bright buttons" footnotes his being easily taken in by the "blue

bags" of the Court.   Phantasmagoric qualities of material fashion help illuminate the

attraction of court paraphernalia.

Finally, both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery have an unusual

running pattern in which deathlike inactivity and dullness are sometimes succeeded by

dazzling animation that resembles the process of the knight's waking up the sleeping

beauty but goes together with an effect as disturbing, and even threatening, as a whirling

whirl of animated "spits."   With the former, the fashionable lady's hospitality in season

is what produces the animation. Multiple descriptions of an out-of-season Chesney Wold

soaked in rainy monotony—with even the horses in the stables dreaming of the days

when it "shines out awakened"—emphasizes how much the aristocratic world depends on

its women's participation in fashion to render "a black frame" into a brilliant residence

for visitors in season and "Fairy-land" for tourists out of season (457; ch.29; 210; ch.12;

58; ch.2). This emphasis provides a fun mirror image of the similar process in the Court of Chancery: fun because there is no woman of fashion's hospitality here. What brings it into animation is chance happenings as when a suitor like Gridley calls naively for the Chancellor's attention or defies the court, thus "furnishing some fun, and enlivening the dismal weather"; or when some circumstantial evidence brings back a monumentally suspended case like Jarndyce and Jarndyce, which is capable of amusing professional gentlemen as well as a large crowd of spectators (52; ch.1). That these people would come out of the court just as they would from a "Farce or Juggler" further conveys how Chancery proceeding is a show business not that different from fashionable play and display, as I have described in earlier chapters (922; ch.65).

In addition to these explicitly stated points of comparison, Dickens also sets up some more hidden connections between the two institutions. Like fashion, the Court of Chancery also relies on incessant and indifferent movement for its self-perpetuation. While a case is profitable, the court will drag it on in its never-ending ritualistic tangling and detangling, disputing and agreeing, diving and re-diving for evidence, caring nothing about the individual who comes to it. As Esther phrases it, "while the sickness of hope deferred was raging in so many hearts, this polite show went calmly on from day to day, and year to year, in such good order and composure" (399-40; ch.24). In Chancery, as it is in fashion, replacement and/or displacement is the mode of movement; it never aims at any final move or ultimate change that settles things down. For both, ensuring the "eternal recurrence" of the alternation of "in" and "out" is all in all—who/ what is in and out being a matter of little concern. The Court of Chancery ruthlessly throws out

Jarndyce and Jarndyce when the money is exhausted just as fashion soon forgets Chesney

Wold after Lady Dedlock's death.

Another tie between the two institutions lies in the legal profession's tacit

enactment of a veneering spirit similar to fashionable intelligence's emphasis on the

surface. Tacit because the law is purportedly all about deep truth and justice, and thus it

is supposedly against veneering. Indeed, its major representatives assume an appearance

of serious respectability that is seemingly far from the veneering mode. Mr. Guppy's

resorting to another body—Jobling—for fashionable interest and knowledge, Mr.

Vholes's "undoubted respectability," and Mr. Tulkinghorn's old-fashioned and old-

schooled person all suggest that the legal representative is to appear as the opposite of the

fashionable (605; ch.39):

> One peculiarity of his [Tulkinghorn's] *black* clothes, and of their *black* stockings,
> be they silk or worsted, is, that they *never shine*. Mute, close, irresponsive to any
> *glancing light*, his dress is like himself. (59; ch.2)

> [. . .]

> Three feet of knotty floored *dark* passage bring the client to Mr Vholes's jet *black*
> door, in an angle *profoundly dark* in the *brightest* mid-summer morning,
> encumbered by a *black* bulk-head of cellarage of staircase, against which belated
> civilians generally strike their brows. (Emphasis mine) (603; ch.39)

With no "blue coat with bright buttons always buttoned" like Sir Dedlock's, the legal

representative—whether it is Tulkinghorn higher up on the professional and social ladder

or Vholes relatively lower down the scale— is black all over and never to shine. His

black office has "no Mercury in powder" to show the client around; structured like a

tomb, it is to ward off light. On the surface, the legal representative cannot be more

different from the fashionable. Yet the bright-dark contrast — highlighted in many more

places than I have mentioned — and the persistent use of the same visual language for

both only put to relief the deeper connection between the two: they belong to the same visual order; their relationship is that between the dark film and the brilliant picture. Never to shine on the most visible level is just to ensure that one shines on another and more profound plane—as a prominent and indispensable lawyer in the world of fashion, as Tulkinghorn is; or as an example to be cited before parliament, as Vholes is. The veneering spirit underlies the legal system as well as it does in the beau monde. Only here, the veneering business is conducted in secret and behind the mask of respectability, trustworthiness, and objectivity. The more impenetrable the mask is, the more successful the veneering business is made and hidden. Tulkinghorn's "impenetrabilities" well illustrate this paradox (639; ch.42).

Furthermore, the veneering business in the legal profession is intricately intertwined with the veneering business of fashion. A striking thing about Tulkinghorn as a chief representative of the law is that one never sees him conducting legal business. He is said to represent Lady Dedlock on the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case and Sir Dedlock on his dispute with Mr Boythorn, as well as take care of Dedlock leases and other estate issues; but all these aspects of his legal business are merely mentioned. What is given in great detail is how he goes secretly to find out the hidden history of the fashionable lady. To some degree, the whole novel can be said to be centered on how the legal eyes of Tulkinghorn—and on a smaller level, those of William Guppy—go astray and turn into a digging gaze on the fashionable lady, or rather on how the lawyer starts to veneer paradoxically as a "rusty black" "foil"—i.e. like the dark film—in the bright world of fashion (527; ch.33). The real story line begins, not *in Chancery* but *in Fashion*, at the moment when Tulkinghorn scents something unusual about Lady Dedlock's swoon and

then starts to appropriate his legal advantages to search for what should not have been his

legal business: the fashionable woman's secret. The climax of the story comes ironically,

not with the revelation of the secret, which is a long process beginning with Esther

Summerson's first narrative, but with Tulkinghorn's request that the lady should keep her

secret rather than do anything that might cause suspicion, speculation and scandal. The

secret has become *his*; he alone has the right, and of course, the expertise to dispense with

it in a way in which the family name will not be compromised and its brilliant façade

maintained. In this transference of the secret lies a most tight joint between law and

fashion: fashion depends on law's going astray to keep up its veneering business; and law

draws on the attraction of fashionable veneering for the upkeep of its members. What is

at stake in this transaction is the surveillance and control over the body of the fashionable

woman. The power and pleasure to let it shine or not underlies the lawyer's effort to be

the black foil. All of Tulkinghorn's engagements with secrecy—his joining the

fashionable party in silence, his talking in caution, his living alone without even the

observation of family members, and his attempt at mystifying things and acquiring

secrets— ultimately have to do with the secret pleasure of this surveillance and control.

Thus Dickens is being ironic when he writes, "it may be that my Lady had better

have five thousand pairs of fashionable eyes upon her [. . .] than the two eyes of this rusty

lawyer" (457-8; ch.29). The irony is that the lady cannot have "fashionable eyes" upon

her without the "two eyes" of the lawyer being there too. For the lawyer's power and

pleasure come exactly from putting the lady high on the "gaudy platform" of fashion and

knowing that she will fall at a slight "notice" from him; the more pairs of fashionable

eyes upon her, the greater the lawyer's sense of power and pleasure. It is ironic that legal

eyes, in penetrating the disguise of fashion, seek not to reveal it but to maintain it, and in maintaining it, perpetuate the profession. It is a pity that the fashionable great, like Sir Dedlock, cannot see through this all but assume that they themselves are in control: for the baronet, Tulkinghorn is "a faithful, a zealous, a devoted adherent" to people like himself who "assist in making the laws" (775; ch.53). This pomposity and ignorance of reality certainly connive at the doubling of fashionable and legal eyes, but they are not the sole or even the major factor for the doubling, which is actually indulged in, unconsciously if not conscientiously. For fashionable eyes, like those of Sir Dedlock's, do depend on the doubling for the pleasure of watching the show business of fashion going on smoothly, which in turn can lead, not just to the illusion of their being in power, but also to the reality of their being believed in to some degree—as the model of Deportment is among his circles. That Tulkinghorn bears many secrets in his bosom and grows rich and successful suggests that Lady Dedlock's flight is an exception rather than the rule: if everything had gone as usual and if there were no return of emotion on her part, the doubling would have been profitable to both sides.

That Dickens does not allow the usual way to take place in the space and time of the novel demonstrates his belief in the power of fictional intervention. For by crafting an exceptional case, he reveals what is usually hidden: the alienating effect of fashion does not just come from the mechanism itself but also and more importantly from other social institutions' conniving with it. That might be why with the fashionable lady Dickens crafts a most detailed and concrete illustration of the "trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration" of Chancery: Tulkinghorn's quiet and inauspicious appearance in fashionable society physically manifests the evasion of

Chancery while his being "at home" there expresses the effect of that evasion; Tulkinghorn's successful collection of information from Jo by staging, with Mr. Bucket, the scene of a veiled woman effectively performs the trickery of Chancery; the going astray of Tulkinghorn's legal eyes—i.e. their becoming fashionable eyes— embodies a way in which the procrastination of Chancery is incurred; Tulkinghorn's digging gaze on the fashionable lady frames the botheration of the law; and his last conversation with her leads to a most vivid portrayal of the spoliation of Chancery in the picture of "the woman pacing her own rooms with her hair wildly thrown from her flung back face, her hands clasped behind her head, her figure twisted as if by pain"(638; ch.41). By strategically alternating scenes in Chancery and in fashion as in the first two chapters, he invites the reader to see hidden connections between the two institutions. In this light, the critical view that Dickens commits a fault in the novel in not tying together Lady Dedlock's "fall from virtue" to her being a party to the Jarndyce lawsuit — becomes a fault itself, i.e. a failure to see that they are in fact tied together tightly via the route of fashion.[245] Unlike another claimant Richard Carstone whose death is a direct comment on the corruption of the court, Lady Dedlock's functions to provide an important way in which that corruption is forged: law's intertwining with fashion. It is in the intersection of the two institutions—in fashion's appropriation of law, in law's going astray into fashion, and in their joint effort at polite show business—that Dickens largely sets the figure of the fashionable lady and by doing so makes a most poignant statement about Victorian society.

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[245] In his much quoted introduction to the novel, J. Hillis Miller discusses Angus Wilson's argument about the fault and asserts that the seeming fault is actually in tune with the novel's thematic concern over mystery and interpretation (21).

Like the law, the newly established police department shares some of the qualities and mechanisms of fashion. In tune with fashion's spirit of play, its major representative Inspector Bucket stages scenes and is the most successful actor of all. He can play everything to everybody. For ladies like Esther and Hortense, he serves as a man of gallantry as suits the occasion. In the Bagnet household, he is an amiable, sociable and musical man all combined. To Mercury in powder, he turns up the head and eye of an artist. He transforms himself into a physician in order to catch Gridley. When playing those roles, he is of course always tracking, tracing and detecting information for his business; nonetheless, he also seems to enjoy these parts truly and merge himself completely in them—so much so that, "beneath all these disguises," as John Kucich puts it, "there is never any real Bucket" (76). Indeed, Bucket is no more and no less than an empty receptacle—like the form of fashion—that will take on the weight of whatever is being thrown in and yet still remains Bucket. It would not have been difficult for a Victorian reader to associate this chameleon-like inside hollow character with the image of fashion, and this association Dickens's text solidifies by registering his resemblance to the fashionable figure: when he first appears in the novel in chapter 22, Bucket does so as a "composed and quiet listener" with a "face as unchanging as the great mourning ring on his little finger" (364; ch.22). The composure, indifference and inscrutability he puts on remind one of Lady Dedlock's assumed "placidity" and "equanimity" (57; ch.2). Bucket also takes after the model of Deportment in his pure externalization of personality, all being performed; and echoing Tony Jobling's vivacious speaking manner and occasional use of French, Bucket also assumes a sort of mannerism in speech that includes the use of French and fashionable slang sometimes. Yet the most apparent association is made

when Bucket says that he must be "a swell in the Guards" when he is searching Lady

Dedlock's rooms (821; ch.56).

All these similarities invite the reader to think about the implications of Bucket

the detective turning Bucket the masquerader. There is a highly illuminating scene for

this purpose:

> Opening and shutting table-drawers, and looking into caskets and jewel-cases, he
> sees the reflection of himself in various mirrors, and moralizes thereon.
> 'One might suppose I was a-moving in the fashionable circles, and getting myself
> up for Almack's, says Mr Bucket. I begin to think I must be a swell in the Guards,
> without knowing it.'

> Ever looking about, he has opened a dainty little chest in an inner drawer. His
> great hand, turning over some gloves which it can scarcely feel, they are so light
> and soft within it, comes upon a white handkerchief.
> 'Hum! Let's have a look at you,' says Mr Bucket, putting down the light. 'What
> should *you* be kept by yourself for? What's *your* motive?   (821; ch.56)

 This scenario is melodramatically funny and highly disturbing. Funny because like an

arch devil in melodrama, Bucket makes light of a severe situation and solicits laughter by

his playful manner as when he addresses the handkerchief like a child talking to his toy;

and it might not be totally coincidental that he should make use of a handkerchief for his

scheme—as Iago does. Funny also because Bucket's moralization about his "a-moving

in fashionable circles" and so on is meant to be funny: he wants to call attention to the

fact that he is merely playing the role of a swell for his "duty"; to the difference between

the very traditional role of the guard in the Guards and the brand new one in the detective

police; and to the ridiculousness of his playing one while being the other, or rather

doubling one on the other. Yet it is also here that the scene starts to be disturbing.

Bucket is so merged in the role he is playing that one can indeed take him to be "a-

moving among fashionable circles" and with Almack's stamp of fashion on him; after all,

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he is accessing freely—with keys—a very fashionable country seat as well as a top lady of fashion's boudoir. Privilege like that would have made others say—just as Tulkinghorn has said of Guppy—"You are to be congratulated. [. . .] Mr Guppy, there are people in London who would give their ears to be you" (617; ch.39). What is ironically upsetting, though, is that he is here neither for fashionable calls nor for common tourism. For his "duty," he has the freedom to touch, turn and take from the inmost of "an inner drawer"; his action here borders on indecent transgression and violent penetration as suggested by the incompatibility between his big insensitive hand and the daintiness of the chest as well as the softness and lightness of the gloves. Even without the insight of Freudian psychoanalysis, a careful Victorian reader would not have missed the implication of such "a sight" of a stout man locking himself in a lady's boudoir, "opening and shutting table-drawers, and looking into caskets and jewel-cases." By presenting such subtle details, Dickens solicits questions: what is in his "duty" that allows him such freedom and gives him such authority? What is his business as a detective policeman after all?

D. A. Miller argues that Dickens reveals a "historical ambiguity" concerning the question on behalf of whom or what the detective police does its policing (79). This is very well put since in Dickens's text, the pieces of duty Bucket performs vary in nature, of which Miller has a concise summary: he is a private detective when working for Tulkinghorn; becomes a public official when catching Gridley or moving on Jo on behalf of the law or the state; turns into something in between when he is pursuing a murder suspect simultaneously on behalf of Sir Leicester Dedlock and society in general; and emerges as a private detective once again when he chases Lady Dedlock and then

represents Mr Smallweed on the Jarndyce Will (79). Yet what is not ambiguous at all is

that no matter whom or what Bucket works for, he makes a game of the job and derives

pleasure from the very process of hustle and bustle, chase and chisel. In this sense, one

piece of duty means about the same to him as another, all engaging him to about the same

degree. He has no moral concerns, caring little about the social and personal implications

of his pursuits, which is particularly conveyed in his moving Jo on to death. The only

principle he follows in performing a piece of duty is, tautologically, if duty permits or

"forbids it" (774; ch.53). This self-referring gesture aligns the detective police

seamlessly with the system of fashion. Like the latter, whatever it takes up for the

moment according to the tone of the day, its ultimate aim is its own self-perpetuation. In

other words, Bucket's duty as a detective lies ultimately in detecting duty to fill himself

up: he would look "languishing for want of an object" (768; ch.53). Just as fashion must

move on to keep itself as fashion, Bucket must go from one piece of duty to another to

remain Bucket the Inspector. His random choice fulfills as well as reflects this purpose.

Although randomly chosen, most of his work falls in tune with the "polite show"

business conducted in respectable society, which might be part of the reason why he is

trusted and given the freedom to have his own way. His treatment of Jo, for example, is a

veneering effort that will "put a glaze on the world and keep down its realities" (210;

ch.12). Moving Jo on, or rather out of the sight of "respectable people," exemplifies a

prevalent Victorian approach toward poverty or other social problems—displacement

rather than eradication—an approach also embodied in Mrs. General's habit to "cram all

articles of difficulty into cupboards" in *Little Dorrit* (450; bk.2; ch.3), and in Mr.

Podsnap's waving behind as non-existent all "disagreeables" in *Our Mutual Friend* (124;

bk.1, ch.11).   Similarly, Bucket's securing Gridley for the court helps resume Chancery's

polite show that has been disturbed by the latter's defiance; and his first impulse at

finding out Mademoiselle Hortense and all about Lady Dedlock is, like Tulkinghorn's, to

make a quiet business of it:

> Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don't you say a word, nor yet stir. There will be
> no noise, and no disturbance at all. I'll come back in the course of the evening, if
> agreeable to you, and endeavor to meet your wishes respecting this unfortunate
> family matter, and the nobbiest way of keeping it quiet. (792; ch.54)

Exactly resembling the lawyer, the detective policeman would use his expertise to keep

up the fashionable facade of the aristocratic family without really caring for it.

Finally, Bucket's work for Tulkinghorn does not just assist in the "polite show"

business that law and fashion, each for its own self-perpetuation, connive at staging; it

also reiterates mystification and secret-managing as a crucial part of it. The scene Bucket

stages in Tulkinghorn's house in which Madame Hortense poses as Lady Dedlock for Jo

to identify dramatizes, not so much Bucket's insight into what is going on and his

adeptness in directing the whole drama, as his skill in and effort at ensuring secrecy from

Mr Snagsby, both as a witness and as a confused player in the act. Via his capacity to

turn "constatives" into "perfomatives — as J. Hillis Miller frames it — he forcefully

interpellates him into being a "man of the world", "business" and "sense" who will

naturally "keep little matters like this quiet" (362; ch.22). [246] This effort, combined with

Tulkinghorn's equally skillful attempt, is so effective as to produce in Mr Snagsby

> that he is a party to some dangerous secret without knowing what it is. And it is
> the fearful peculiarity of the condition that, at any hour of his daily life, at any
> opening of the shop-door, at any pull of the bell, at any entrance of a messenger,

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[246] Miller's argument is this: 'Bucket [. . .] has an odd way of speaking constatives in such a way that they
become performatives, as when he orders Snagsby not to tell of their visit to the slums by stating Snagsby's
ability to keep a secret as a fact: "what I like in you, is, that you're a man it's of no use pumping, that is
what you are" (22).' See Miller, "Moments of Decision in Bleak House," 54.

or any delivery of a letter, the secret may take air and fire, explode, and blow up
— Mr Bucket only knows whom. (409; ch.25)

It is ironic that the detective—the secret finder and mystery clarifier—should turn into a

secret producer and a mystery maker who is capable of saturating the whole of a petit

bourgeois man's working and living space—from the door to the delivered letter, i.e.

from outside to inside—with a sense of secrecy. Yet this is exactly what the detective

wants most: to create an ambience or space that is fully permeated with mysteries that

will legitimize his work and render it endless. Here mystification is not just demanded

for the veneering business of fashion that he works directly or indirectly for; nor is it

merely driven by the power and pleasure exuding from the surveillance and control of the

fashionable body: it is largely an act of play performed for no other important motives

than the performance or the engagement itself. That Bucket is echoed by a whole galaxy

of amateur detectives—from Tulkinghorn to Krook, from Guppy to Smallweed and to

Mrs Snagsby, who all act in a "confidential manner impossible to be evaded or declined"

and/or make a business of constant "digging, delving and diving"— suggests that modern

veneering society is also a *secret* society. That is so not because it abounds in secrets like

Lady Dedlock's that need to be managed for the maintenance of a proper social order but

because it is bent on making and believing in secrets. Herein lies an ultimate drive for

the "polite show" business: the necessity not to cover up but to produce what is not there:

i.e. the illusion of depth.

It is mainly for this illusion that the whole Victorian society makes so much of the

surface. For in Dickens's view, the "polite show" business is far from limited to the

tripartite of law, fashion and police. Quite early on in the novel, the outside narrator

comments directly on the existence of dandyism in major Victorian social fields ranging

from religion to politics.   Although it might sound strange now that Dickens should term

the Oxford movement "a Dandyism - in Religion" set up by "some ladies and gentlemen

of the newest fashion," he is not alone in this opinion (210; ch.12).   Just two years before

Bleak House came out, *Punch* published a satirical drawing titled "Convent of the

Belgravians" in which a Puseyite lady's devout posture is made ridiculous by the

presence of her maid who complains behind her back:

> I tell you what it is, Parke, I shall be very glad when Missus has got tired of the
> Pusey-ism. It may be the Fashion; but, what with her coming home late from
> parties, and getting up for early service, and then going to bed again, we poor
> servants have double work almost. [247]

For *Punch*, as for Dickens, the latest religious reform seems a veneering whim

underwritten by the rule of fashion; and the Tractarians' attempt to "make the Vulgar

very picturesque and faithful" is driven by the reformers' very lack of emotion in

Dickens's opinion (210; ch.12). In Esther's narrative, Dickens targets the Puyseyite lady

just as *Punch* does: Mrs. Pardiggle is said to "make, in this, as in everything else, a show

that was not conciliatory, of doing charity by wholesale, and of dealing in it to a large

extent" (159; ch.8). The ultimate aim of such charitable work in Dickens's view is, like

fashionable intelligence's self-constitution, self-aggrandizement. This is vividly

conveyed in the very dramatic act of her sweeping the brick-maker's house with her skirt

and knocking down objects that are "quite a great way off" (151; ch.8). Bringing to life

Hans Gumbrecht's idea of power as the "potential of occupying or of blocking spaces

with bodies," Mrs Pardiggle's room-occupying person brings forth in flesh and fabric her

self-enlarging aim in charity (114). No wonder, her charitable act is offensive to the

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[247] Quoted in Adburgham 32.

brick-makers just as the *Punch* lady's pious performance elicits complaint from the servant.

As in religion, there is Dandyism in politics as well, which expresses itself in some "ladies and gentlemen of another fashion's — i.e. the governing group's — agreement to "put a smooth glaze on the world, and to keep down all its realities"; in the same group's careful effort "not to be disturbed by ideas" and "not to be earnest"; in the superficial administrative shifts between Lords Boodle, Coodle, Doodle, etc. and William Buffy, Cuffy, Duffy, etc.; in parliamentary elections' becoming farces in which a couple of clans of actors are hoorayed by "a large number of supernumeraries" from time to time (211-2; ch.12). Apparently, politics constitutes an important part of the polite show business with the veneering spirit saturating all of its major aspects.

As with social institutions, the polite show business is widely conducted on the individual level. In the third-person narrative, the point is largely conveyed by the character of Mr Snagsby —representing the small shopkeeper as well as a small cog in the legal profession—who is described as a "shining man" and whose pet phrase "not to put too fine a point upon it" betrays his effort at refinement; by Mrs Snagsby who, in imitating fashionable manner, insists on the ceremony of announcement for her tea parties; and by Mr Chadband who describes himself as a "vessel"— echoing Bucket not just literally — "in the ministry" and who consumes and gorges only to pour out currents of slippery nonsense (315; ch.19). In Esther's narrative, there are a whole bunch of characters who strive in the "polite show" business. Besides Mrs Pardiggle and the Jobling/Guppy double, there stands Mr. Turveydrop who lives solely on his "Model of Deportment; Mr Skimpole, the artistic dandy who plays the role of a child; Mrs Jellyby

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who has the "shining qualities" of making a big show of telescopic philanthropy(83; ch.4); Mr Quale whose "shining lumpy forehead" matches well with his shallow and showy character(96; ch.5); Mrs. Badger who does everything "a little" and shows off her three dead husbands so much (224; ch.13); and Mrs Woodcourt who has a "sparkling and pretty" face and who, "being so upright and trim," talks so much of her son's real or fake royal lineage (467; ch.30). A society made up of individuals like these, as well as trades like "Blaze and Sparkle the jewelers" and "Sheen and Gloss the mercers," is a fit soil for fashionable intelligence and the polite show business (59-60; ch.2).

In reviewing Dickens's works, Henry James stated that "it is one of the chief conditions of his genius not to see beneath the surface of things" (52). Although James meant to satirize, his insight is acute: it *is* Dickens's genius to see that surface matters in Victorian England and to realize intuitively that the surface world—the world fashionable intelligence loudly propagates—needs to be taken more seriously for any solutions to Victorian social problems. This intuition bears directly on his dubious proposal of bourgeois ideals via the mediation of fashionable characters which turn out, from time to time, to possess what the ideals lack.

Fashionable Characters and the Bourgeois Ideals

With the characters of Esther Summerson, Allen Woodcourt, and Mr Rouncewell, Dickens no doubt wants to hold up the bourgeois domestic, professional, and entrepreneur ideals. Yet different from the familiar story twentieth-century critics have often told of the Victorian novel, his bourgeois ideals are not directly opposed to the aristocratic lady or gentleman. Instead, he presents them as mediated by a third figure:

the fashionable.   In between the domestic woman and the aristocratic lady stands the woman of fashion; in between the aristocratic old Adam and the bourgeois new man—embodied by both the professional and the entrepreneur — is the middle-class dandy. The presence of the fashionable figure destabilizes the bourgeois ideals Dickens tries to set up, engendering in the novel an uncertainty as to where ideal social values should be located.

With the creation of Esther Summerson, Dickens can indeed be said to participate in the historical project of the "empowering of the middle classes in England through the dissemination of a new female ideal"—the domestic woman—as Nancy Armstrong has influentially recovered (9). He does not just try to portray Esther as a domestic ideal but also to naturalize domesticity as something a sensible and sentient woman like her would naturally want. He does this largely by the convenience of the first-person narrative: a grown-up Esther goes out to the world, observes and experiences types of non-domestic womanhood, and decides for herself that they are not desirable. Particularly illustrative of the point is Esther's encounter with the Jellybys. In their household, Esther demonstrates her capacity for love and housekeeping for the first time. Via the contrast between Mrs Jellyby's disorder and the temporary order Esther's affection and housekeeping effort help bring about in the house, Dickens suggests—and virtually states through Esther a few pages later —that a woman's mission lies first and foremost in the domestic sphere. A woman can perform charitable work, which, however, should be a natural extension of her domestic mission and is to be done quietly with love rather than made a polite show business. This idea is further strengthened in the difference between Esther and Mrs Pardiggle in treating the brick-makers. While Esther wins the heart of the

poor by her quiet and affectionate manner, Mrs Pardiggle only repels by her self-righteous, showy and noisy way. Via this contrast, Dickens suggests that if a woman needs to venture outside for charitable purposes, she should duplicate her domestic mission and make a home wherever she goes. In this sense, domestic mission is no longer "such a mean mission" as Miss Wisk—a caricature representative of mid-century feminism—frames it; instead it is noble work a good woman will naturally do for the sake of love(479; ch.30). This is exactly what Esther—or rather Dickens's ideal woman—does: she not only makes a home out of Bleak House but also helps with home-making elsewhere—with Mrs. Jellyby, the brick-makers' wives, Caddy Jellyby, Richard, Ada, and Charley before she starts a new turn of homemaking with a new Bleak House.

Yet this domestic ideal is not set up in a simple, direct opposition to the aristocratic lady; instead both have to wrestle with the image of the fashionable woman. Although following different trajectories, both Lady Dedlock's and Esther's are largely stories of struggling with a visual order of which fashionable intelligence is the most explicit maintainer and articulator. To use the language that has faded in twentieth-century criticism but that is quite prominent in the original text, one might say this is an order in which only two kinds of people are admitted: "Fashionables and Nobodies" as the German Prince Pückler-Muskau once wrote of the world of fashion (154). Dickens must have this distinction in mind when he lets Captain Hawdon—whom Tulkinghorn calls a "rake," i.e. a dissolute man in fashionable society—choose Nemo as his identity out of fashion and in poverty; when he allows Richard and Mr Kenge to present Mr Jellyby as a "nonentity" "merged—Merged—in the more shining qualities of his wife" (82-3; ch.4); and when he writes that while Sir Leicester Dedlock is "stately in the

cousinship of the Everybodies, he is a kind and generous man, according to his dignified way, in the cousinship of the Nobodies" (446; ch.28). In this light, Lady Dedlock's story in the space and time of the novel is that of falling down from the position of a fashionable somebody, of her slipping out of the dress of fashion and dying, literally, in the clothes of a working-class nobody and by the side of Nemo, whom Christopher Herbert even agues as "the story's central character" (134). In contrast, Esther's is that of rising up and working herself into the visual order—but in a way that rewrites the Fashionable-Nobody dynamic. Hers is a story of realizing the dream she had—the first night she entered the world—in Mrs Jellyby's house with the sleeping Caddy on her lap:

> As first I was painfully awake. [. . .] At length [. . .] I began to lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me. Now it was Ada, now one of my old Reading friends. [. . .] Now, it was the little mad woman worn out with curtsying and smiling; now *someone in authority at Bleak House*. Lastly, it was no one, and I was *no one*. (Emphasis mine) (94; ch.4)

The trajectory Esther makes in the novel is exactly one of transformation from "no one" to "someone in authority at Bleak House," from a social non-entity to a dangerously visible person and then to a properly visible social being who, though not fashionable, holds her own in the new bourgeois system.

Esther's was born—literally and virtually—out of a depressive conflict between bourgeois sexual mores and the "fashionable way," as registered in the dispute between Lady Dedlock and her sister (ch.20; p.333). Equally haughty and handsome, the two sisters go into society together in a social circle abroad — doing so being a fashionable move favored by those who have money but no family (the Barbarys should belong here) or those who have family but not enough money as a springboard for acceptance into the world of fashion. They soon go "their several ways," however, and the immediate

occasion seems to be the illegitimate birth of Esther fathered by a young captain (310; ch.18). Dickens says so little and so vaguely about this history that one wonders: what has exactly happened at the moment of Esther's birth that allows one sister to take away the supposedly dead baby without the knowledge of the other? How has the one who has been cast off by the other managed to re-enter society, get married and become a lady of fashion? Has there been no other way to raise Esther than what Miss Barbary has chosen? Has she really needed to give up Boythorn for the sake of Esther? Cultural restraint on what can be said about illicit sexuality might be a major reason for Dickens's vagueness on these issues. Yet in some sense he does not need to say much about them: These details matter little to him since he is using them quite symbolically—with Miss Barbary being an embodiment of the rigid, religious and bourgeois sexual mores and her sister the impulse to reject them. In this symbolic landscape, the two sisters fight but also function as each other's alter ego; or rather one might just say they are two selves of one woman, and this interpretation is supported in Dickens's text: they are said to be extremely alike in person and in temperament; Boythorn would pay tribute to Lady Dedlock as if he were to her sister while his dispute with Sir Dedlock over the right of way sounds like a slant expression of their rivalry in courtship: Boythorn never understands what can "have induced that transcendent woman to marry that effigy and figure-head of a baronet" and would not mind having a dual with Sir Dedlock to solve the problem between them (310, 299; ch.18). It would not be too far off to say, then, that while one self of the woman has gone along the "fashionable way" and tried to build a character in the brilliance and splendor of fashion, the other, unable to get over bourgeois sexual mores, stays behind in isolation to foster the mark of sin as a vengeance on the one who has moved on; and

neither is truly able to rid herself of the other and get over the split. Lady Dedlock's emotional poverty in the world of fashion is as much a consequence of her fashionable but loveless (on her part) marriage as of her inability to really enjoy fashion, a disability stemming in part from the fear of her own alter ego embodied in her sister, from her internalization of the bourgeois mores the latter stands for. Meanwhile, Miss Barbary, who must sustain the illusion that she is right in casting off her other self—i.e. her sister and what she stands for: fashion, society and passionate love— resorts to fervent religious labor for that sustenance. Her overwrought pious acts — going to church three times on Sundays, having morning prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays, and attending lectures whenever offered — betray not so much piety as desperation to keep away the emptiness exuding from a life not lived. This desperation also comes out in her way of bringing Esther up. She deprives the girl, not only of parental care and love, but also of the pleasure of society, self esteem and knowledge of the qualities the daughter has inherited from the mother, qualities that will enable her to shine in fashionable society if given the chance: cleverness, quick understanding, and personal beauty and charm. That is to say Esther must be brought up as a proof of the bourgeois self and a critique on the fashionable one.

Ironically, albeit logically, what is staged as a vengeance on the latter turns unwittingly into an attack on the former, as is dramatically conveyed in the scene of Miss Barbary dying at little Esther's reading out loud Jesus Christ's forgiving remarks towards the adulterous woman (66-7; ch.3). Here again Dickens's vagueness as to what exactly causes Miss Barbary's death invites symbolic rather than literal reading of the drama. No matter what has actually gone through the aunt's body and mind at the moment of her

stroke, Esther's intuitive grasp of the Christian spirit of tolerance and forgiveness will be a deadly blow to the older one's rigid interpretation of Christianity and narrow-minded embosoming of bourgeois morality, which in turn serves as Esther's first step to address the psychological split in the mother's generation and her own non-entity. By silently changing her aunt's tenets of "submission, self-denial, diligent work" into a resolution "to be industrious, contented, and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could" — which is less extreme and leaves more room for the happiness of the feeling self — Esther is finally able to become "someone in authority at Bleak House" (65; ch.3).

Yet for Esther to achieve proper visibility, she has yet to go through the trying stage of being dangerously visible. It is remarkable that Esther's entrance into the world is partly initiated by her encounter with a seemingly ordinary object: a little looking-glass hanging on the chimney-piece in Mr Kenge's room, to which Guppy calls Esther's attention since she is to appear before the Chancellor and with which he pays her the compliment that her good looks do not need any adjustment. This scene is very suggestive. It initiates the visual motif in Esther's narrative, highlighting the fact that Esther is getting into a society where surface matters and where all business boils down to a veneering business. It also proves that Esther indeed has her mother's beauty and handsomeness, qualities that allow Guppy to fall in love with her at first sight even though she is not aware of them. These qualities are nonetheless double-edged for Esther. As far as they increase her value on the marriage market, they are also dangerous in terms of their signification of her hidden relationship with a sinful mother, or rather with the original sin of the fleshly woman western culture has so long been pinning women down

to; and this fleshly woman bears another name in this novel and many others: the woman of fashion. As it turns out, the mother-daughter likeness indeed sets Guppy on his road to clear the mystery of Esther's birth. In a society when bourgeois sexual mores are gaining currency, the discovery of her illegitimacy can not only threaten the mother but also ostracize the daughter. It is in this sense that Esther must go through a purgatory ritual that cleanses her of her inherited shame, which is no other than women's improper sexuality. The disease she gets from Jo fulfils this purpose. Launching her into a horrible state between life and death, the fever deprives her of her good looks but also frees her from all the impurities her illegitimacy has written into her body. The scars on her face now are the sign of her cure morally as well as physiologically. In this light Dickens's seemingly cruel stroke of adding yet another piece of bitterness onto the poor girl makes sense: Esther's disfigurement is also the reward her charity towards Jo and good work in general earn her—reward that will enable her to re-enter the visual order as properly visible, i.e. sexually unattractive.

The point is confirmed in the fact that only after her disfigurement Esther starts to get worthier proposals than Guppy's—worthier in bourgeois terms, of course. Guppy is an unworthy suitor not only because he is vulgar and calculating but also because his proposal entails putting Esther back into an old system of alliance in which illegitimacy matters mainly in terms of the transmission, distribution and circulation of wealth rather than as an index to one's character: by proving Esther's kinship with some grand family, he hopes to advance her "interests" and hence his own; for him, then, Esther's scarred face, is doubly humiliating since it speaks to him, not only of the loss of her charms, but also of the disappearance of the proof of her high connections. In contrast, both Jarndyce

and Woodcourt value Esther as an individual independent from her birth and blood. In their system of evaluation, one's personal qualities and capacities that allow one to become a socially useful person are elevated above one's lineage and connections. For them, then, Esther's scarred face manifests her inner goodness that has driven away her "inheritance of shame" and thus signifies her eligibility for marriage in the bourgeois world (667; ch.44). Via her marriage with Woodcourt, she achieves a properly visible social identity as the "doctor's wife" and as someone in charge of a new Bleak House— not without loss, however, loss of the self identified with a woman of fashion and a natural mother.

Although Esther's entrance into the visual order challenges the Fashionable-Nobody dynamic, it is quite noticeable that she can reach this goal only after much exposure to a series of veneering institutions and individuals, as discussed in the second section; to the "fashionable way" as enacted by William Guppy who has an "interest in the fashionable great" and observes the world of fashion closely(ch.39; p.618); and to the middle-class man of fashion Turveydrop who never stops teaching Esther the importance of veneering: "We do our best to polish – polish – polish" (ch.14; p.246). Esther is exposed and immunized. But how? Without addressing this simple question, Dickens's portrayal of the domestic ideal remains "caricatured, not faithfully rendered," as Charlotte Brontë put it (Quoted in Collins 273).

As with the domestic ideal, the bourgeois new man Mr Rouncewell is mediated by a fashionable character: the middle-class dandy Turveydrop. The ironmaster comes close to what Carlyle proposes as a new manly ideal: the "Captain of Industry" (*Horoscope* 270). He has "a perfectly natural and easy air" and is "responsible looking,"

"portly enough, but strong and active" (450; ch.28). He is punctual and always on the flight to manage his "so many workmen in so many places" and "so many great undertakings" in progress in "these busy times" (450; ch.28). By rejecting the patronage system which his mother sticks to with "love, and attachment, and fidelity," he has risen to be the Ironmaster who is as famous in his county as Sir Dedlock is in his (451; ch.28). He is also quite worldly, "not in the least embarrassed by the great presence into which he comes" even as he apologizes for his lack of knowledge of the polite world (450; ch.28). Dickens brings all these points up quite positively to portray the bourgeois entrepreneur ideal.

Nonetheless, Dickens makes it clear—via the mediation of the model of Deportment—that this new man falls short of his gentlemanly ideal. The very first time Mr Turveydrop occurs in the novel, he sounds a note that must have resonated with a good proportion of English people:

> England – alas, my country! – has degenerated very much, and is degenerating every day. She has not many gentlemen left. We are few. I see nothing to succeed us, but a race of weavers. (ch.4; p.246)

Different from the usual satire around Turveydrop, there is poetic pathos here in his voicing a general social anxiety about the rising of new social forces and the leveling of social distinction in tandem with the Industrial Revolution—suggested here by "a race of weavers." About ten chapters later, Dickens makes him repeat this note with a little variation:

> 'Again you find us, Miss Summerson,' said he, 'using our little arts to polish, polish! Again the sex stimulates us, and rewards us, by the condescension of its lovely presence. It is much in these times (and we have made an awfully degenerating business of it since the days of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent—my patron, if I may presume to say so) to experience that deportment is

not wholly trodden under foot by mechanics. That it can yet bask in the smile of Beauty, my dear madam.' (381; ch.23)

Echoed by Sir Dedlock's constant thinking and talking about the rise of "Wat-Tylerism," of the "obliteration of landmarks and opening of floodgates," Turveydrop's speech registers a longing for and subtly endorses the old order and its gentlemanly ideal that are threatened by the leveling age. A most distinguishing characteristic of this ideal is, as Turveydrop suggests, a polished art of politeness towards the other sex at the center of the social art in general. The compliments Turveydrop pays to Esther, whether true or false, are pleasantly flattering and politely subjugating: although Esther sees through him, she never fails to be flattered at the moment. Interestingly, this is an art the model of Deportment shares with the aristocrat rather than the ironmaster. Even as Dickens is satirical about Sir Dedlock's pompous pride in his family and his blind belief in the rule of aristocracy, he nonetheless honors him as a man who has a strong sense of honor, personal integrity, coverage to stand up for what he believes in, and, above all, real gallantry and politeness towards his wife. The last two points come out most explicitly in his readiness to fully forgive Lady Dedlock, affirm his unaltered terms with her, and think of her personal misery in flight instead of what her crime might do to his family name: "His noble earnestness, his fidelity, his gallant shielding of her, his generous conquest of his own wrong and his own pride for her sake, are simply honorable, manly, and true" (850; ch.58). In contrast, Mr Rouncewell's handling of Rosa puts his gentlemanly qualities to test. Mr Rouncewell, unable to appreciate her expression of gratitude to and sorrow at leaving Lady Dedlock and taking it as an indication of her lack of spirit, checks her by saying, "Out, you silly little puss" (713; ch.48). The vulgarity and rudeness involved in Rouncewell's remark betrays his lack in the polite art towards

women. Furthermore, by taking Rosa away from Lady Dedlock's patronage which is filled with mutual attachment and affection, he nudges her into a system that is characterized by bourgeois conformity: he will send her to Germany for a more polished education, not according to her personal will, but because it has become a popular, or rather fashionable, practice for families in his class to do so. If Sir Leicester's view of Rosa's departure as injustice towards the girl betrays his pomposity and blindness to reality, Mr Rouncewell's seemingly well-reasoned proposal for her also reveals his blindness to particularities and his systematic way of thinking. While he is "equally class conscious and proud of a superiority of achievement" in comparison with Sir Leicester, he does not have the latter's "delicacy of feeling and chivalry to women," as the Leavises put it (142-3). In this light, Sir Dedlock's apparently proud and unmindful mistake of turning the Ironmaster into the "iron gentleman" unwittingly betrays the truth: he is after all a "ferruginous person" and does not live up to Dickens's gentlemanly ideal (ch.48; p.709).

Dickens furthers his dubious portrayal of the bourgeois new man with the character of Mr. Woodcourt. Woodcourt is one of the most positively portrayed professional men in Dickens's novels. He has an admirable sense of vocation and commendable perseverance in his career choice as opposed to Richard's dabbling nature. He also demonstrates wonderful "humanitarian classless feeling" in his treatment of Miss Flite, Jo, the brickmakers' wives, and at Nemo's deathbed, as the Leavises point out (139). Nonetheless, this new professional ideal is shown to be dependant on the old patronage system rather than capable of independent self making. Like Skimpole, he has to rely, to some extent, on Jardyce's protection and financial support in spite of his pride

in and desire for autonomy. Here Dickens reveals a vulnerable point in the new

professional. For it is explicitly suggested in the text that Jardyce's money comes

ironically from the inconclusiveness of the lawsuit named after his family; once it is

settled, his interests will be cut down greatly in Bucket's words. In this sense, what

Woodcourt partly depends on for his professional development is actually, albeit

indirectly, the complicity of law, fashion and police in conducting the "polite show"

business as opposed to getting things done; consequently he is implicitly aligned with

other negatively portrayed professionals like Tulkinghorn and Vholes.

However, it is the presence of Guppy that most explicitly suggests what would

make him a low figure in the *world's* view. He is not just too shy—as opposed to the

audacious legal clerk—to pursue Esther; he simply does not have the worldly means

which the latter lays claim to: a reliable income that comes steadily from one's profession

and a decent dwelling place to marry in. Although Guppy's mention of these things

sounds vulgarly funny, it nonetheless shows what the world values. While Guppy's

fashionable taste indicates his desire and capacity to mix and shine in the world,

Woodcourt seems only comfortable with the poor and his art of healing and is a mere

shadow in respectable society: we seldom hear him talk (except to the poor patients) as

we enjoy Guppy's amusing mix of different discourses: sentimental and worldly,

professional and poetic. In contrast to Guppy's having his own legal office at the end of

the novel, Woodcourt only manages to become a public doctor, a form of service noble

but unrewarding in worldly views; and different from the latter's moving westward (like

Caddy Turveydrop) in London, Woodcourt is merely *presented* with a new *Bleak House*

in a remote area which also has to contain a Growlery and in which his patron divides

with him the attention of the domestic ideal from time to time. In short, Guppy can shine

in this world while Woodcourt only in another: the fictional world of literature. His

being rewarded with marriage and family happens not so much in the space-time of the

novel as in the ever-after, the most visible sign of literary intervention. To say this,

however, is not to say that we should doubt the value of that intervention or suspect the

importance of Dickens's "synthetic attitude" via which he "affirms moral and social

values even as he demonstrates their manipulable, or even dangerously double nature"

(Kucich 4). Yet we may need to see to what extent that affirmation works and how the

presence of a worldly fashion-driven figure may destabilize his assertion of social values.

   In relation to his dubious portrayal of the bourgeois ideals, Dickens is ambivalent

about the bourgeois adherence to the public/private division, or rather to the middle-class

emphasis on domesticity and family values; and this ambivalence is again partly crafted

via fashionable representation, though this time it is not the presence of any particular

fashionable but various systems that function very much like fashion. Even as he

believes that the ideology of the gendered public-private division must be held up—as his

elevation of Esther as the domestic ideal suggests—he is far more concerned with what

Walter Benjamin frames as the "porosity" of the public and the private rather than with

their separation(39). He registers this porosity in three main ways.

   One is various institutions' penetration of the family. If the Court of Chancery

"has its worn-out houses and blighted lands in every shire," the police department also

has agents that can access freely both the middle-class households like the Bagnets' and

aristocratic ones like Chesney Wold (51; ch.1); and the penetration is so pervasive and

seamless that one doubts if there is still a private sphere. The second is individuals'

effort to replicate in miniature various systems that resemble the self-constitutive

fashionable intelligence, as is suggested in the fact that even Esther is the center of some

sort of system that both takes in and excludes others in a self-constitutive manner.

Whichever way, the public and the private flow into each other to render man a dual

animal: public and private—or rather a border being in between—that is ready to

transform upon the call of the day. No wonder, Dickens's characters live so much in the

transitional space of the window. There are simply too many cases of its versatile use in

the text. Here is just one example of how Dickens captures the window as a symbol of

modern human condition traversed by fashion:

> Then lights are brought in, discovering Mr. Tulkinghorn still standing in his
> window with his hands behind him, and my Lady still sitting with his figure
> before her, closing up her view of the night as well as of the day. (714; ch.48)

Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock—the two greatest window watchers in the novel—

silently wage a window war. For him, to stand in the window is not only to take the

advantage of watching everything without being intrusive; it is also to occupy a position

of power that allows him to darken "all before her"—the star of fashion—and to control

if she should continue to shine or not (709; ch.48). For her, who has long have the habit

of having the window to herself either to display a fashionable profile or to hide an

emotion-distorted face, not to ask him to leave but to hold herself in that disadvantaged

position as long as possible is to refuse defeat and to block any imaginary windows that

might allow him to see through her. Although each might think that the winner of the

war might be able to shade the color of the day and to affect the flow of fashion, none

comes out a winner: the current of fashion just goes on indifferent to the death of both.

Dickens portrays the porosity of the public and private in yet another way, namely through registering the instability of home and family in the modern world. Indeed, in this novel and others, Dickens seldom presents the so-called normative nuclear family, i.e. one with two parents and healthy children. Among the bourgeoisie, the Turveydrop's household is incomplete; the Jellyby's has an uncaring mother and a "non-entity" father; the Badgers, the Buckets, the Chadbands and the Snagsbys have no children; a group of men from Boythorn to Jardyce and from Krook to Tulkinghorn are old bachelors; Richard Carstone dies before seeing his child, while the young Turveydrop can only have a deaf and dumb daughter; both Guppy and Woodcourt have widowed mothers; the Skimpole family is a group of adult children with an invalid mother; the Vholes and the Smallweed families are "horrid parodies of family life," as Robert Garis puts it (91); and to cap it all, Bleak House collects orphans including Charley and Jo for a while. Aristocratic families are no better. While the Dedlocks have no children, Volumnia, who marries in her sixties, is not going to have any; and those nameless cousins of Sir Dedlock's are "women [with] no husbands, and men [with] no wives (446; ch.28). In addition to such dysfunctional quality, home in Dickens's text is constantly on the move; and it is especially the case with those more positively presented characters. While Esther has to move four times before she settles down in marriage, Ada shifts her home four times only to remain a widow and a ward. George Rouncewell, the trooper, cannot be said to have a home until he returns to Chesney Wold. Mr Bagnet's family, which names the children after the places of their birth, already has Quebec, Malta and Woolwich and is threatened with another move due to his susceptibility to the influence

of vagrant George and his involvement in the latter's insecure financial dealing in, ironically, security.

It is this structurally, geographically and financially unstable nature of the modern family that renders the ancient country house with its inherited green land, old oaks and elm trees, and old royal servants somewhat more desirable than the self-made new man's home town. Dickens makes the point most explicitly via George's view of and choice between Chesney Wold and Mr. Rouncewell's dwelling place. In the chapter entitled "Steel and Iron," Dickens presents the iron country via George's eye:

> As he comes into the iron country farther north, such fresh green woods as those of Chesney Wold are left behind; and coal pits and ashes, high chimneys and red bricks, blighted verdure, scorching fires, and a heavy never-lightening cloud of smoke, become the features of the scenery. Among such objects rides the trooper, looking about him, and always looking for something he has come to find. (901; ch.63)

The contrast between fresh green and a motley collection of colors continues the visual motif present throughout the text, and Dickens obviously stands on the green side, i.e. the side of the natural, the self-renewable or the organic, as opposed to the constructed, the "blighted" or the mechanic. Yet the differentiation here is more complex than a stark white and black contrast, say, between the fashionable lady and the rusty lawyer. Although red bricks and scorching fires are discomforting visually and sensually, they are not "dark, cold" objects associated with death—as Tulkinghorn is described—but instead serve as means to human life and warmth, which exude from the Rouncewells' reception and acceptance of George (632; ch.41). Still, "black pits and ashes"; "blighted verdure"; "never-lightening cloud of smoke"; and iron everywhere in every shape, color, and stage is enough to make George say, 'This is a place to make a man's headache, too!'(902; ch.63). It is not coincidental that George, who likes to polish and puff, blow and bluff

calls himself Steel in a place full of iron dust, iron views and iron ideas. George's seemingly improvised name suggests Dickens's insight into what the iron country lacks: something the refined and sparkling surface of steel can provide, i.e. something that stimulates imagination, tickles fancy, and allures irrationally like fashion; iron perseverance and sense, iron discipline and order, though admirable on their own, are not necessarily desirable to a free rolling stone. Ultimately it is "to the green country" that George turns and "rides on with imaginary clank and jingle of accoutrements under the old elm-trees" (908; ch.63). The bachelor George's return to the widower Sir Leicester's Chesney Wold ostensibly destabilizes Dickens's project of constructing an ideal bourgeois family centered on the domestic woman.

Yet that project is only part of Dickens's novelistic concern. In presenting Esther's constant necessity for housekeeping not just in Bleak House but outside it, Dickens seems to be considering the problem of what Hannah Arendt over a hundred years later would term the "rise of the social" (38). According to Arendt, the rise of the social or society per se in the modern world means exactly the "admission of household and housekeeping activities to the public realm," thus blurring the boundaries between, changing the meanings of, and initiating the gradual disappearance of the public and private realms in their ancient Greek senses (45). By the nineteenth century, the public realm had been transformed into a "very restricted sphere of government"—"a nation-wide 'housekeeping'—and meanwhile the private realm had been liquidated; permeating everywhere is society with its inescapable socialization of man (Arendt 60-61). Interestingly resembling Arendt, Dickens uses the image of the house as a metaphor for society in general and pinpoints housekeeping as a key to social problems. If with Arendt,

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society is ruled by the "invisible hand" of nobody (39), Dickens's novel makes clear how

fashionable intelligence, the world of fashion, the Court of Chancery, the detective police,

etc. and a wide range of individuals all try to turn the "rule of nobody" into the *rule of*

somebody, albeit often in the name of somebody or something else (44). Would he

parallel his own omniscient/novelistic project with the other institutions?

Conclusion

No matter how Dickens would situate his own novelistic project, the ostensible satirical move he makes towards fashion, fashionables and fashionable intelligence is certainly not his alone but shared by many other men of letters, Victorian or otherwise. In the words of Gilles Lipovetsky, the "question of fashion is not a fashionable one among intellectuals" (3). This is, of course, understandable. For, after all, the body-centered, superficial, volatile, fluid aspects of fashion constitute a real source of anxiety for academicians and pose a considerable threat to what intellectuals—especially post-Enlightenment ones—have tried to hold up: rationality, depth, and profound truth. As long as we take the just mentioned to be the aims of our intellectual pursuit and portray an interiority-oriented transcendental self as our intellectual ideal, the fashionable subject embodied by the man/woman of fashion will continue to be satirized and jettisoned rather than embraced as part and parcel of our own beings in the modern world. Who would like to be called a fashionable nowadays? As Kennedy Fraser, the *New Yorker'*s fashion reporter puts it:

> The word "fashion" (with "fashionable") isn't heard much anymore, and even its successors "trend" and "style" have come to seem a little tasteless and passé. But fashion is everywhere around us just the same. It's there wherever political strategies are planned, movies made, books published, art exhibits mounted, critical columns turned out, dances danced, editorial policies formulated, academic theses germinated: wherever people think, speak, or create our shared forms of self-expression. Fashion is usually neither named nor noted but is simply the lens through which our society perceives itself and the mold to which it increasingly shapes itself. (145)

I would agree with Fraser that the fashionable mind is an important part of our modern mentality and fashionable living a fundamental aspect of our modern life. In any case modern consumer society is a fashionable one.

What I have done in the dissertation is no more than historicize this pervasive, albeit not openly claimed, fashionable living of ours by going back to an earlier period when it was conducted on a smaller scale and in ways both resembling and differing from ours. Simply put, my thesis is a retrieval of an earlier, miniature, and experimental form of modern consumer society: the world of fashion or fashionable society as a "new" cultural realm in England in the early half of the nineteenth century. Rectifying the predominant view that confuses fashionable society with the aristocratic high society of the *ancien regime*, I argue that it was a discrete, dynamic social institution that cut across conventional class lines, especially between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. As a mobile entity, it was neither absolutely aristocratic nor absolutely bourgeois: it constantly negotiated the values and interests of both in the name and for the sake of fashion but actually in tune with the anonymous forces of local circumstances. As such, it played an important role in restructuring English society, regulating gender configurations, and shaping nineteenth-century print culture and especially the novelistic form.

Compared with the eighteenth-century polite world from which it emerged roughly in the 1820s and 30s, fashionable society was characterized by a strengthened transnational quality, a rhetoric of incivility, an open exclusivity, a special politics of vision, a unique logic of space, and a centralization of the body. In response to the very many social problems and conditions of the mobile reform era, fashionable society

emerged as a socio-cultural mechanism redistributing power in a socially unifying system of representation.

As a special crowd—a "fine mob" and a "mob of fashion" in nineteenth-century terms—fashionable society constituted a unique public that bore a mutually obligate symbiotic relationship with the bourgeois public. In the vast realm stretching seamlessly from the home to the outside world, fashionable society enacted and embodied a third sphere. As such, it destabilized the public and the private spheres even as it served as a condition of possibility for their very division. It publicized the private and privatized the public via a system of social activities ranging from family musical soirées to royal drawing-rooms. In this way, it had a role to play in the mapping of social spheres in early nineteenth-century England.

The emergence of fashionable society both as a cross-class identity and a third sphere was a gendered process. Enacting a complex gender politics under its gender-free façade, fashionable society engendered a series of new gender roles ranging from the chaperone of fashion to the dining-out man. Donned by the woman and man of fashion, these roles brought to life a highly flexible femininity and masculinity that took shape in the realm of possibility between such binary distinctions as the public man/private woman, the inner and the outer, the bourgeois and the aristocratic. While fashionable gender did not dismantle these and other binaries, it nonetheless enacted versions of womanhood and manhood that virtually invalidated their distinctions in reality. As a major regulator of the new realm, fashion transformed long-standing and often essentialized gender norms into gender realities in tune with the exigent needs of local circumstances. In this process, fashion facilitated the exchange between different kinds

of capital: gender, class, racial, imperial and colonial forces. In other words, fashion—as a special category cutting across rather than parallel to other organizing orders—facilitated these orders' specific interactions in specific situations.

The emergence of fashionable society as a new cultural realm and the rise of fashion as an autonomous form of modern power were tightly related to the culture and the technology of print. While fashion added new forms of representation to the press such as fashionable intelligence, fashion plates and descriptions, etc., it also engendered an entire problematic of its representation. The problematic was crystallized in the dynamic in which fashion-propagating forms of representation sat comfortably with fashion satires and other anti-fashion writing—even on the same page—to form a field of tension that turned out to be sustaining to fashion. While this problematic of fashion representation constituted a source of anxiety to Victorian men/women of letters, it also urged them to experiment with new narrative forms. In that sense, the culture of fashion shaped the fashion of culture.

In retrieving these general qualities of fashionable society, I have strategically followed the clue—left by Victorian authors such as Mrs. Gore—as to the relatively stability of fashionable society in the period surveyed. It is worthwhile here, though, to look at some of the changes it went through—major ones that led to its transformation into "Smart" Society in the late century rather than the nuanced fashions it witnessed in the forties years or so. For the latter was too many: the coming into vogue of *Thé Dansantes* in the forties, the replacement of waltz by polka by the mid century, the craze for crinolines from mid fifties to mid sixties, etc.—these constituted only a tiny part of fashion's infinite variation. Beneath the kaleidoscopic vicissitudes staged in the beau

monde, however, one can discern four substantial trends that might allow one to say that the mid-Victorian fashionable society felt different from the Regency world of fashion and had moved some real steps on its way to smartness.

One trend that was visible by the mid century was the improved morality in the beau monde. According to an anonymous *Fraser's* author, "there is less of inebriety and gambling among the better classes now [1860] than in the days of George IV., and it must also be admitted that female purity stands much higher."[248] Meanwhile, there were fewer fast clergy men and more fashionables going to church; and "profane swearing and obscene conversation, common enough in 1824, have ceased among the better classes," wrote the same author (130). These and other changes allowed the *Fraser's* contributor to declare confidently:

> The age of successful roués, and triumphant gamblers and seducers, has passed away, never, it is hoped to return. That there may be more solitary sensuality and more intense selfishness now, is a very arguable question. But there is not the grossness nor the ostentatious frivolity and extravagance of forty years age. (116)

Unfortunately, by the 1870s and under the leadership of the pleasure-loving Prince of Wales, English fashionable society once again saw the "ostentatious frivolity and extravagance" that some Victorians had conveniently taken to be the signs of a loose Regency morality. Yet, fully in tune with the uncertain spirit of fashion, the beau monde turned serious again by the first decade of the twentieth century. According to Nevill and Jerningham, the man of pleasure as a distinctive figure in Society in the last quarter of the nineteenth century had disappeared from the social scene at the dawn of the twentieth; and the "smart" set became more "decorous" in its amusement while people turned more "serious" as a rule (54, 13-14).

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[248] "Social and Political Life Five-and-Thirty Years Ago,"116.

Another trend that became quite tangible by 1860 was, as I mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, the increased number of bourgeois or new-people elements in its membership. In the words of the *Fraser's* author mentioned above:

> The number of merchants, bankers, and traders, living in fashionable streets five or six and thirty years ago, could be counted by scores; now they may be counted by hundreds if not thousands. The wealthy Jews, with half-a-dozen exceptions, such as the Rothchilds, Montefiores, &c., then lived in the city or suburbs; whereas now Jews muster strongly in all the fashionable West-end quarters, and are seen in the parks in well-appointed equipages, and on thoroughbred horses. [. . .] Judges and barristers mix now more in the beau monde than they did in 1824-5, and infinitely more than they did in 1811. (124, 127)

While this writer was right in noticing the enlarged proportion of commercial and professional people in fashionable society, he should not have been surprised by this; for as I have argued earlier, due to the open exclusive nature of fashion, the bourgeois element was constitutive of fashionable society from its very inception as a discrete and distinctive entity. What changed was not its formation principle but the ratio between its different components. It should be pointed out that the proportion of the non-landed part kept on increasing for the rest of the century, and so much so that by the eve of the First World War, Lord Lamington, for one, would thus complain:

> Now there is the same idea of a season and of society, but *quanto mutatus* thousands of people crowd into the West End; the publican and Jew have jostled the aristocracy off the stage of London life. It is the hour of the speculator, the schemer, the stockbroker. They reign supreme.[249]

Echoed by many similar remarks, this late Victorian gentleman's nostalgic and somewhat exaggerated observation nonetheless points towards the strengthened role played by wealth, commerce, and speculation in Society. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was not just that financiers and speculators invaded fashionable society. The latter itself,

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[249] Alexander, *In the Days of the Dandies,* 46-47.

according to Nevill and Jerningham, started to "go in for trade" from the 1880s on: some well-known Society ladies opened up flower, curiosity or other shops and advertised themselves as chaperones; meanwhile the "conversation in the West End clubs soon began to deal with nothing but stocks, shares, and 'swindlers'" (71-74, 77).   Here was indeed a picture far different from what fashionable society portrayed in the early decades of the century when a leader of fashion concerned himself or herself with little beyond shining in Society and ruling it.

In relation with these changes in composition and membership, fashionable society was also felt to be more cosmopolitan from the 1860s on. Again this was not a new addition but a strengthening of its transnational feature, as I have discussed. What was new in the later nineteenth century was that English fashion was sustained—to a considerable extent—by wealth made outside the British Isles. Leonore Davidoff has identified two waves of introduction of, not just new, but foreign wealth into English Society from the 1880s onward: "First were South African and European based families, many of them Jewish, the second wave mainly American" (59).   Unlike in the early decades when foreign grandees such as the German prince Pückler-Muskau was lionized in English fashionable circles, these people, via whole or partial family immigration as well as marital alliances, moved in and became prominent hosts and hostesses in Society. As Lady Jeune put it:

> If we take up a society paper which chronicles the fashionable doings of the week, the list of the smartest and most magnificent entertainments are not those given by the haute noblesse of England, but by a host of people whose names are foreign, and who thirty years ago would not have been heard of outside their provincial homes; and to their houses flock princes and princesses, and the acknowledged leaders of what was once, and that not long ago, the most exclusive society in Europe.

While the wealthy aliens—crystallized in the figures of the Jewish tycoon and the American bride—added a tint of cosmopolitanism to the English World, they—via their very conspicuous consumption—also made it more plutocratic than patrician.

Yet another trend in fashionable society after 1860 was its heightened publicity. I have already documented fashionable society's reliance on the press for the spread of fashionable currency as well as the emergence of a print-driven fashionable epistemology and ontology of sorts by the mid-Victorian period. In the latter half of the century when the expansion of Society made it harder to exchange information by the word of mouth, the relationship between fashion and the press was even more stressed. First of all, there arose some more Society papers, chief among which was *The Queen* whose regular column "The Upper 10,000 At Home and Abroad" had longer lists of fashionable events and people than the usual early-century fashionable intelligence. Two another Society papers *The World* and *Truth*—both sixpenny journals emerging after the phenomenal success of the fashionable weekly *Vanity Fair* (price a shilling)—were able to entertain their own professional journalists instead of relying on Society participants and amateur writers for news. The emergence of Society journalism further increased the publicity of the beau monde. In the words of Nevill and Jerningham:

> when the newspapers give so much publicity to the doings of the obtrusive, there are many who imagine that these sort of people are the arbiters of the manners of the age, and in their ignorance follow them, the consequence being a marked deterioration in the general tone. (*Piccadilly to Pall Mall*, 13)

The heightened visibility of fashionable life meant that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw more people like Tony Jobling who followed the "fashionable way" vicariously and virtually. Meanwhile, the development of photography in the 1860s and 70s also contributed to the increase in visibility of Society life. As soon as the

technology became mature enough, there emerged the craze for having Society events photographed. According to Leonore Davidoff, professional photographers would be employed as semi-upper servants, following the country house season to document important social gatherings; and when photography was cheaper and quicker later in the century, photographers started to use "professional" beautifies and personalities in Society, quickening the transformation to publicity (62).

With its heightened publicity, expanded membership, and changed composition, fashionable society was not just "diluted" by the 1880s, as many contemporaries pointed out; it also lost its role as an "essential adjunct to political life" (Cannadine 344). Even as "Smart" Society still served as a marriage market, its balls, dinner parties and other gatherings were no longer comparable to parliamentary or cabinet meetings in importance. If Lady Palmerston wielded a political power via her fashionable parties "very little less than that of her husband" in the words of Lady Jeune (604); if the Almack's patronesses controlled 23 votes of the House of Commons; and if George IV cared nothing for the mob but had to entertain the dandy class in order to have a successful coronation;[250] "Smart" Society leaders at the dawn of the twentieth century was to "lead no one at all" in the words of Nevill and Jerningham (11).

For all these changes, Society was still run by the rule of fashion just as it was in the early nineteenth century. The point can be illustrated by comparing two comments made respectively at the mid and the end of the nineteenth century. In 1860, an anonymous *Fraser's* author looked back at Almack's, the summit of fashion in the early decades, and commented:

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[250] The story of George IV's honoring of the dandy class was widely told in various memoirs and reminiscences. See, for example, Alexander, *In the Days of the Dandies*, 38-38.

> The ladies patronesses [. . .] only gave vouchers for the balls to men of what was called *supreme bon ton*. [. . .] To be a fast guardsman, to be a roué with £12,000 a-year, and £50,000 of debts, were successful recommendations; to be the best dresser, the best driver, the greatest gambler, or the most successful profligate, were irresistible passports to the great ladies of fashion who were the patronesses.[251]

In 1894, Lady Jeune complained of Society in this way:

> There never was an age where fame of any kind was more of a cult, or where notoriety was a surer passport to social eminence. [. . .] [Society] now runs mad after anyone who can get himself talked of. [. . .] To have a good cook; to be the smartest-dressed woman; to give the most magnificent entertainments, where a fortune is spent on flowers and decorations; to be the last favored guest of royalty; or to have sailed as near to the wind of social disaster as is compatible with not being shipwrecked;—are a few of the features which characterize some of the smartest people in London society. (610).

Whether at the beginning or the end of the century, Society—while underwritten by the power of money and a snobbish aspiration for the aristocratic all the time—enacted an admission principle that made much use of fashionable distinction, currency, or visibility. While late Victorians often looked back to the early days for a more homogeneous, purer, and nobler Society, many of the things they complained of the smart sets—such as the indiscriminate cult of fame of any kind, the packing of one's drawing room with a "fashionable mob," the stress on wealth, the resort to the novel and the exotic, etc. — were already there in early nineteenth-century fashionable society. What changed was the size, the scale, the people who constituted major actors, the people who served as observers, etc. What obtained throughout the hundred years or so was the rule of fashion. In this sense, the words "degenerated" and "deteriorated," while commonly used by late Victorians to describe the fin-de-siècle Society, might not be the right terms to account for the evolution of the beau monde in the past era. In fact, they might even be misleading for later scholars to realize the micro-political functions of Society as it

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[251] "Social and Political Life Five-and-Thirty Years Ago," 114-5.

existed and to notice the spill over of the rule of fashion into society in general when various smart sets finally broke up in the early twentieth century. No doubt, this rule still obtains now even as it remains largely invisible, invisible because it is so pervasive like air.

A retrieval of nineteenth-century English fashionable society, then, has much to reveal about contemporary western world; yet its importance does not seem just to lie in historical revelation. While working on the dissertation, I frequently came across electronic articles describing the rise of fashionable groups in the "west end" of Beijing in recent years. As these articles present, fashionable societies in present-day Beijing resemble uncannily those in nineteenth-century England: they eat fashionable foods (which often means foreign ones), use fashionable phrases (English terms as opposed to the French language favored by British fashionables), read fashionable literature, and pursue fashionable sports. I experienced moments of shock when I read those articles, not at the changes that were taking place in my country of birth but at the uncanny historical resemblances; for a while I did not know whether I was reading about nineteenth-century Britain or twenty-first-century China. Was I in a dream? Was I stricken by the uncanny repetition of history across geographical boundaries? What was that which whispered to me simultaneously from the foggy London of Dickens and from the smoggy Beijing of my recent memory? In any case, I believe that a study of western fashionables in a past age of industrialization will lead to insight into those countries that are getting increasingly industrialized now—like China.

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