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Gillingham, Lauren. *Fashionable Fictions and the Currency of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2023. 310 pp.

Reviewed by Amy L. Montz, University of Southern Indiana

<1>Lauren Gillingam's *Fashionable Fictions* begins with a reading of *Jack Sheppard* as both a novel and a person, interested in the concerns of celebrity. Gillingham argues that the novels of the silver-fork school, the Newgate novels, and sensation novels (1820s-1860s) are relevant texts not in spite of their seemingly-trivial focus on fashion and contemporaneity, but in fact because of it. Gillingham sees these novels as separate from the 19th-century's push for the *Bildungsroman*, and argues that fashion was "the cultural phenomenon that informed their generic innovations" of these schools of writing (3). Through a reading of the major theorists of fashion of the 19th as well as the 20th and 21stcenturies, including Benjamin, Hazlitt, Hollander, and Lipovetsky, among others, Gillingham sets her theoretical framework to see fashion as Roland Barthes would argue, as a system, and argues that the authors "rarely focused on garments themselves but rather on the ideas and values with which the fashion phenomenon was associated" (9). Fashion, as a system, informs these three schools of novels making fashion both temporary and permanent (12). This allowed for a new way of thinking in the nineteenth century (16) that we see thanks to novels by writers such as Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, in that their uses of fashion represent "modernity and the cycle of novelty and obsolescence which produces it" (17).

<2>Chapter One, "'All This Phantasmagoria': London, Shelley, and the Texture of Contemporary Life," begins by arguing that the use of fashion in silver fork novels was not, as Hazlitt deemed it, concerned with tableware (those silver forks) but rather with fashion as a "social phenomenon transforming British society" (51). Gillingham places fashion at the foundation of such concerns as modernity, community, and history, belying beliefs of fashion merely as a catalogue of dress and clothing. The silver fork novels' use of what Richard Altick called "'the presence of the present'" (52) allows for narratives that use the fashionable to access the zeitgeist of the age. Through the fashion presented on the pages of novels such

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as *Lodore* (Shelley) or *Pelham* (Bulwer-Lytton), we see not triviality of historical resonance but rather an important relationship with the history of the moment, something Gillingham calls fashion's "dual temporality" (52). Gillingham commends the silver-fork novels for doing real work in the literary marketplace, despite any rejections they've received as being "frivolous," and walks the reader through a history of silver-fork publication, including the genre's most prolific publisher, Henry Colburn.

<3>Chapter 2, "Picaresque Movements: *Pelham, Cecil*, and the Rejection of *Bildung*," sees the silver-fork novels such as *Pelham* and *Cecil* as inheritors of the picaresque genre, noting Scott's Waverley novels as a narrative form used by silver-fork novelists such as Landon for characters to explore the fashionable society rather than a nationalist and politicized landscape (100). Through narrative techniques such as dialogue and conversation, Gillingham understands silver-fork fiction as "fundamentally interested in what people are talking about" and that all conversations, from the trivial to the significant, are equally important to understanding the period's society (102), as "change might be effected by everyone and no one in particular" (104). This equality of importance belies the *Bildung* belief that a character must learn to become herself through experiences (108) and commodity culture (114).

<4>Chapter 3, "Spectacular Objects: Criminal Celebrity and the Newgate School," sees the Newgate school coming into its own at the same time as the rise of celebrity culture. Looking at criminal protagonists such as Jack Sheppard and the Artful Dodger, Gillingham argues that "Newgate authors upcycle the potent eighteenth-century low-born criminal" (131) into a fashionable trend of its own. Gillingham uses the term "upcycle" throughout this text and its clever usage points to understanding of how the novels and themes of the eighteenth century were reconfigured in these novels for nineteenth-century audiences much like fashion upcycles the past to make new in the present (160). Her argument that the criminal protagonists of these novels are elevated in the public eye not through "social-climbing" but through "code-switching" (132), shows that class functions as a performance rather than an innate sense of self, something concerning for the ruling classes. Using Godwin's *Caleb Williams* as an exemplary text of the earlier approaches to criminal-as-celebrity and Bulwer's *Paul Clifford* and Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* as exemplary texts of the Newgate novel school, Gillingham argues that the concept of "demotic celebrity" is dependent on innovations in print and media of the 1830s and 1840s (148). Further, she argues that fashion "has bred a consciousness of visibility that permeates public life" which allows for "self-styling and performance" (157) of these criminal protagonists.

<5>A companion chapter to the previous chapter on Newgate novels, Chapter 4, "After Criminality: Dickens and the Celebrity of Everyday Life," reads *Barnaby Rudge* as a Newgate novel (as *Oliver Twist* is), and sees how the conventions of the novel allow the movement from the Newgate novel school to Victorian realist fiction through Dickens's writing (190). With *Barnaby Rudge*, Gillingham sees the push for criminal-as-celebrity with the "sympathetic self-regard of the gentleman-in-training" (191) and argues that Dickens develops celebrity in *David Copperfield* as well, which "enables to the more fundamental structures of visuality and spectacle that characterize modern subjectivity in an image-saturated culture" (191). However with *David Copperfield*, Gillingham argues that David self-consciously styles himself as "a figure to be seen" (216) with his awareness of spectacle and performance (217). This self-styling allows for David to script his own fame within the fashionable strictures Gillingham has set forth as essential to public image. Ultimately, Gillingham argues that Dickens creates a new type of celebrity, moving away from the scandalous celebrity of Byron and the criminality of the Newgate hero (232).

<6>The final chapter, "Affective Distance and the Temporality of Sensation Fiction," explores sensations novels, particularly Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, as the culmination of the silver-fork's obsession with contemporaneity and modernity (242), and Newgate's obsession with celebrity (244). Gillingham argues that "The sensation novel is a genre at once up-to-date and recycled, modern and regressive" (245), seeing it as that inheritance of the two schools of novels she discusses previously. Further, she sees the serialization of the sensation novel as tied to its sense of fashionable modernity (247), and that fashion of dress as "*the* signifier of the present" (249). Her readings of *Aurora Floyd* and *Lady Audley's Secret* approach fashion of dress as well as fashionable ideals—domestic women versus corrupting temptress (262)—as representing the sensation novel's interest in such things. For *Lady Audley's Secret's*, for example, "interest in matters of gender, performance, and power cannot be separated, however, from its attention to matters of matter" (260). This attention to the objects surrounding fashionable life, including dress, author the sensation novel and its heroines in the moment of time of their publication.

<7>Gillingham ends her work with a Coda discussing the "in the moment" Twitter-novels (273) and concludes her larger discussion with other contemporary attempts at serialization, namely television series. Throughout this study, Gillingham supports her larger thesis that these three schools of novels build upon each other and all are concerned with the fashionable present, the "in the moment" modernity that comes as part of both present-time and celebrity culture. An enjoyable read and

an informative text, Gillingham's *Fashionable Fictions* is breaking ground with scholarship on novels and ideas usually dismissed as arbitrary for their very connection to fashion and modernity.

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