

TO FASHION A LADY: IMPERIAL LANGUAGE OF (AD)DRESS
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S FICTION

THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

I like to mark the time, and connect the course of individual lives with the historic stream, for all classes of thinkers. This was the period when the broadening of gauge in crinolines seemed to demand an agitation for the general enlargement of churches, ball-rooms, and vehicles. (*Daniel Deronda* 88)

Historically, the domain of fashion refuses the exception of gender in its social determinacy. Men and women alike have been subject to the “‘despotism’ of fashion” whose rules “impose themselves with varying degrees of rigor on a specific social milieu” (Lipovetsky 29). Recall, for example, the European court’s costume of the seventeenth century, which required extensive pomp and elaborate ornamentation of dress from each gender, equally. However, while fashion traditionally encloses sex, the character of dress denotes class boundaries with uncompromising rigidity.¹ Each social class maintains its own dress codes, specifying a “look” which marks the wearer as a member. What fashion records, then, is the class containment of gender. In other words, social situations define what it means to be men and women.

¹ Within each historical moment the distinction between each class and its fashion expectations deserves (and has received) attention. For the purposes of this project, however, the focus is limited to the upper-middle class, which relied more on ornamental aspects of fashion.

However, with the rise of industrialism in the nineteenth century, an already growing separation of domestic/private and social/public concerns diverged into two discrete spheres with seemingly sharp boundaries, and a gendered shift in fashion reflected this division. Whereas they were once relatively balanced, levels of ornamentation during this period became inverted in respect to the sexes. Men rejected ornamentation on a large scale—a cultural event labeled, “The Great Masculine Renunciation”—and began dressing more business-like with the less ornate and more uniform suit (Wilson 30). Consequently, the idea that “woman and costume together created femininity” took precedence (29). In stage terms, fashion foregrounded women, while men receded to the background.

The allocation of ornamental responsibility to women falsely designated fashion as a primarily feminine concern. The proliferation of instructive fashion plate advertisements sprinkled throughout such nineteenth-century periodicals as the tellingly titled, *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, substantiates the myth of fashion as a feminine obsession. Fashion appeared to function on the surface level as a contest, whereby women contended in their ability to adapt to trends and men were complimented by their capacity to afford them the right to compete. However, woman in dress operated as much more than just a site of aesthetic frivolity.

As evidenced in the epigraph above from *Daniel Deronda*, fashion also serves as a historical marker, a public record. The rare narrative interruption in George Eliot's text utilizes feminine fashion to announce the historical moment of the 1860s, when cage skirts reached their maximum width. The epigraph indicates a function of fashion discernibly more public and political than previously thought. It suggests that a certain

amount of power endowed in fashion could “demand the agitation of” the literal structures of society. Fashion’s ability to *announce* the historical moment and *demand* structural accommodation speaks to a larger cultural investment in women’s dress than the mere matching of trends. Any assumption that fashion, particularly nineteenth-century women’s fashion, resides solely in the private, domestic arena misrecognizes fashion’s true function—that of a signifying language.

The Language of Fashion

Regardless of its coded and privileging nature, fashion performs as a universal language that all cultures (and subcultures) speak to represent themselves. Under a Barthesian semiotic scheme, the language of fashion exemplifies a second-order signifying system, which draws from the first-order signifying system of traditional language.² Therefore, fashion bears the identifiable marks of traditional language—a specific grammar, vocabulary, style and dialectical variation (Lurie 4). A careful study of historically specific fashion first considers the particular pieces (sleeves, petticoats, hats, belts, skirts, artificial flowers) and their “deemed appropriate” dimensions (length, width, height), and also how those items are arranged and embellished. These elements combine to create a syntactical message—a fashion statement, if you will. Investigating these fundamental elements of fashion in turn reveals the larger structural formation that determines them.

Traditional language, operating as an Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus, reinforces the composite structures and polices the parameters of culture, but in so doing, also draws attention to its very limitations, its lack of knowledge, its prejudices and

² For more on the specifics of semiotics, see Barthes, *Mythologies* 109-158.

biases.³ Functioning similarly, fashion provides yet another site for witnessing ideology at work.⁴ Attuning the eye to fashion-speak registers cultural vocalizations that are, in fact, neither silent nor subtle. Second-order signifying systems are both rich with examples of ideological coercion and resistance, and also fertile grounds for harvesting significant historical knowledge with a value that far surpasses the sheer noting of trends. Fashion analysis seeks to uncover the cultural means and ends to how “speaking properly” in dress is determined and the many-leveled costs incurred by the attired individual. More simply, we cannot focus on the form to the neglect of the content. Once we recognize that fashion speaks, we must interrogate *what* it is speaking.

Fashion’s Patriarchal Grammar

In Western society, the responsibility of the representation and reproduction of culture via the language of fashion falls primarily to women.⁵ However, because they are speaking a language in a culture which privileges men, it is unsurprising to find that in their coded and emblematic dress women convey very masculine messages. The fashion language of the West employs an inherently patriarchal grammar that reinforces and reproduces patriarchy in the structural code of fashion’s design and visual presentation, respectively. Explicating two descriptions of a bonnet from Alison Lurie’s *The*

³ Ideological State Apparati are cultural institutions that create and maintain subjects within that culture. For more on ISAs, see Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* 143-7.

⁴ If the very act of presenting, and thereby speaking, the language of fashion inevitably reproduces the culture that it represents, then any analysis that seeks to assess that culture should incorporate interrogations into this complex, yet less recognized, mode of cultural transmission.

⁵ For the purposes of this project, I am limiting my discussion to England and America, though a definition of the West, of course, extends beyond these borders.

Language of Clothes illustrates the inner workings of the patriarchal grammar. The first is an image of a British woman dating around the 1830s:

The sides of her hat descended and closed in on her face, becoming a poke bonnet that shut out the view on both sides like a horse's blinders. This inconvenient form of headdress graphically announced that its wearer was too delicate and sensitive to bear the gaze of the multitude. (Lurie 64)

This image illustrates a woman literally constrained by her fashion. The fact that it is "inconvenient" denotes ideology at work. The design of impractical and discomforting clothing implicates an ulterior agenda that extends past the feminine imagination and hints towards the realm of masculine imposition. Lurie's concluding sentence that "the headdress *graphically* announced that its wearer was too delicate" elides the indication of who *literally* determines this fashion statement, for surely the wearer does not seek out "inconvenience" unabatted (emphasis mine). The second passage, describing a similar image from the 1850s, illuminates these motivating forces:

The sides of the sheltering bonnet drew back from the face, as if allowing the maturing woman to see more of the world metaphorically as well as physically. The beauties of the fashion plates and popular illustrations of the time are now older and fuller of figure; above all, they take up more space. This was the age of crinoline, and later of the bustle, and the increased importance of women in the domestic and social sphere was signaled by their sheer bulk. The oversize fashions also allowed them to display their father's or husband's wealth to their fullest extent. (69)

The term “allowing” again indicates larger social forces at work that require attention. What happened between 1830 and 1850 that granted such a concession in women’s capacity to “see more of the world?” Lurie seems to suggest that this was a natural progression, as if the concept of “woman” matured by grace, and correspondingly the bonnet simply opened in response. Though Lurie’s analysis fails to acknowledge deeper connections, her observations remain instructive.

Lurie’s description features two important dynamics of a woman in dress and highlights some of the tensions that ideology creates in woman’s ability to embody her proper feminine role. In her display woman is simultaneously hailed into ideology as an Althusserian subject and crafted into an object for visual consumption. Problematically, her objectification creates her subjectivity. Fashion, then, accords with what Kaja Silverman terms the “cultural screen”—a locus for both masculine ideal/object projection and feminine real/subject identification (*Threshold* 78-9).⁶ Patriarchal ideology paradoxically circumscribes the role of the nineteenth-century woman, enacted visually in the containment and limitations of her body (in corsets, heavily layered petticoats, belts, bonnets, etc.) and the expansion of its presentation (in the size of the cage skirts and sleeves and the grandeur of ornamentation) as a showcase for masculine success. Comparing the descriptions of the two images underscores the predicament of women in conforming to both moral and economic agendas, for the same patriarchal forces which determined that women were “too delicate and sensitive to bear the gaze of the multitude” also required that she elicit that gaze to reinforce patriarchal success.

⁶ Silverman develops her definition of the cultural screen based on Lacan’s mirror stage, where the ideal and the real both converge and conflict.

Critiquing Lurie's assessment in the second passage identifies the factors that determine the shift between the expectations of women in the 1830's and the 1850's, as such a shift in history did not occur without motive. Whereas Lurie separates "the increased importance of women" and the "display of their father or husband's wealth" (indicated by her use of the word, "also"), truly, the two directly correlate. The foregrounding of women in fashion did not indicate a corresponding acquisition of power. Instead, women's function as the primary bearers of ornamental fashion left them with the sole responsibility of performing class—a task imposed.

While such display necessitates publicity and denies the confines of the domestic arena, the performance was not limited to the public sphere. Fashion codes penetrated the domestic arena, requiring an almost constant performance from women. Simone de Beauvoir suggests that for a woman "[t]o care for her beauty, to dress up, is a kind of work" and that her dress is "a uniform and an adornment" (589). The patriarchal function of the display of masculine wealth and prestige increased for women mid-century to the detriment of women's subjectivity, further solidifying her role as the "other."⁷ In England, these increased expectations of performance correspond with the rise of empire and the magnification of patriarchy through nationalism. Identifying woman as "the other" under patriarchy and as "the self" under empire problematizes her ability to properly recognize her subject position. The political truly intrudes on the personal.

Fashion's Imperialist Dialect

In late nineteenth-century England, the moment of High Empire, these patriarchal messages must inevitably entail imperialistic readings. More than an analogue, women

⁷ Simone de Beauvoir elaborates on the concept of "the other" in *The Second Sex*.

embodied the ideals and realities of empire in their dress, which expanded in direct correlation. This reverses the causal relationship in the *Deronda* epigraph, where “[t]he broadening of the gauge in crinoline” in fact signifies the expansion of the British Empire; the widening of doorways represents this metonymically. Women’s fashion held the two-fold job of reflecting the growth and filling the space that it created. This furnishes Lurie’s observation, that “[t]he beauties of the fashion plates and popular illustrations of the time are now older and fuller of figure; above all, they take up more space” with a more accurate meaning. The weighty mantle of imperialist expression necessitated a woman capable of bearing such a load. It also explains the widening of the bonnet’s aperture (at least metaphorically); if women were to represent nationalism, they must be permitted to view the scope of the national boundaries.

Imperialism succeeds in the ability of one nation to dominate another, to both incorporate it into its empire but also to subjugate it to a position of dependency and subservience. The subjugated peoples represent the “other” to the empire’s “self.” Women figured this cultural “othering” into their dress in two distinct ways: first, in the grandeur of their dress already described, and second, by incorporating elements of the exotic in their ensemble. Clichés like “a jewel in the crown” then become relay signifiers, positioning women through the cultural screen of fashion as a sign for empire and the “other,” impossibly conflating women with both categories. The effect on women and to what extent women perceived their position in this ideological bind informs my interest.

Colonial Resistance of the Body Feminine—A Literary Application

My interrogation of the language and discourse of fashion focuses on the idea that by promoting an imperialist agenda in women’s fashion, in effect, men are colonizing the

female; the female body becomes another extension of empire. This occurs either by the dominance of proscribed social codes, by indoctrinating women through gendered education (i.e. genteel schools), or both. A combination of these efforts pervades the feminine experience. External and internal pressures encourage woman to collude with her own objectification, and thus, enact a self-subjugation.

While the entirety of the fashion ensemble is worthy of intense investigation, I find the most compelling evidence of imperialist constructs in the use of jewelry. Peter Hinks claims, “[m]ore jewellery was made during these years than at any time previously or since” (52). As both the mark of inherited patriarchal authority and the fashion element that flourished during the nineteenth century according to imperialistic trends, jewelry is the most potent symbol available for investigating the external and internal effects of the empire of fashion. Jean Arnold affirms that fashion in the marketplace requires “beauty [to] collide yet collude with economic motives” (268). Understanding fashion as part of the colonial project reinscribes the Victorian female body in dress as a site of political contest. As Helena Michie explains, “the reading or interpretation of the heroine becomes a reading of the society in which she appears. The heroine is . . . the embodiment of a social or criminal problem, her body the clue to a mystery” (109). Fashion presents a moral predicament for women. By speaking imperial patriarchy through dress and becoming invested in ideology through the hail of jewelry, bejeweled women become *accessories* to the crimes of imperialism, regardless of their knowledge or agency.

Investigating how these ideas surface in nineteenth-century novels by women writers intuitively the levels of acknowledgment, challenge and acceptance of the fashion

language and its cultural ideals by women in general. In addition, considering the historical atmosphere identifies potential sources of both reinforcement and resistance. This thesis examines two British novels and one American novel in an effort to determine how Western women perceived their role as ideological ornaments. Because of those nations' former and unique position of colonizer/colonized, these novels demonstrate how positioning in relation to empire effects (and affects) subjectivity.

In Section One, *Resistance is Futile*, I examine these concerns in Charlotte Brontë's, *Jane Eyre* and George Eliot's, *Daniel Deronda*. The assertion of imperialist claims is no more evident than in nineteenth-century England, when England was at its height (and width) of empire, reflected quite literally in woman's fashion. Interestingly, each of the British novels addresses a cultural "other" for the protagonist to reconcile in terms of her own circumstance. The recognition of the literal colonial "other" in each text attempts to resist a linkage of recognition of the "other" in the self in an assertion of equality or individuality, which eventually culminates in failure. The historical moment that highlights the increasing difficulty to resist the colonization of the woman in fashion is The Great Exhibition of 1851. Demonstrating British superiority and successful dominance of the "other" through women's dress, and particularly through jewelry, becomes incorporated into national expectations and therefore, entrenched in social practice. The rigidity of these constricting codes threatens a reverse Pygmalion effect, muting their feminine voice and fixing them into the pose of display.

Section Two, *Resistance is Fertile*, contrasts the British woman's circumstance with that of the American woman exemplified in Elizabeth Stoddard's novel, *The Morgesons*. The primary factor which informs the relative levels of successful resistance

in this novel compared with its British counterparts is the atmosphere of American ideals, which tend to reject reform and promote revolutionary change and equality. Fully comprehending her “other” position, the American woman protagonist, Cassandra Morgeson, performs mimetic acts of revolution by rejecting masculine imperialist claims and chartering new female territories. Despite the circumscribed social pattern of female dress, Cassandra demonstrates that potential material exists in the margins that allows for an alternate configuration in the fabric of the body feminine.

CHAPTER I

AN EYE FOR FASHION: IRRESISTIBLE IMPERIAL AUTHORITY IN *JANE EYRE*

Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*, has been subject to a variety of critical undertakings since its publication in 1847, and certainly much of the recent research contests the problematic nature of positioning a feminist argument within a colonial one. However, it is imperative to recognize how *Jane Eyre* succeeds (even in its failures) by linking arms with the colonial other as a means to expose the ills that befall *all* underprivileged subcategories of a hierarchical order (i.e. lower-class workers, women, people of color). Criticism that misinterprets such linking as an attempt to conflate categories actually undermines efforts of social solidarity. Instead, analysis needs to reverse the focal point of such criticism towards the ideological enterprise that the shared position of oppression implicates. For instance, the practice of describing colonies in “feminized” terms and women’s bodies in “colonized” terms results not in the collapsing of the two categories but rather in the expansion of subjective positions, thus engendering a deeper understanding of imperialism’s objectifying, subjugating, and “othering” operations. By aggregating analysis in the body of critical work and combining that with a fresh mode of interrogation—the discourse of fashion—my intention is to isolate how *Jane Eyre* models resistance to what I term *imperial patriarchy* and to specify why and how the narrative ends in failure.

Fashion functions in the novel first by revealing the omnipresence of imperial patriarchy. Evidence of dominating forces surfaces in the text in a variety of male characters as well as female agents of patriarchy. However, they are most spectacularly exhibited through Jane's relationship to Rochester to which I direct the majority of my analysis. Brontë highlights the intersecting categories of race, class and gender and their problematic subject positions within the hierarchical order particularly through Jane and Rochester's struggle over Jane's adornment.

Secondly, Jane demonstrates resistance to her ideological interpellation symbolically via her refusal to accept the trappings of ornamentation. Jane's fashion-savvy form of resistance combines elements of an empowered obscurity, a promotion of equality through androgyny, a "call" to the other in fashion reform, and an attempt to "author" the self in dress. The strategies employed in the text correlate with contemporary dress reform, identifying Brontë's sociopolitical sense.

Finally, Jane's ultimate failure to resist her bodily colonization identifies the most potent element of fashion's symbolic power. Several critics observe Brontë's use of silks and satins (which remain essential in reading fashion's imperialist message); however, few note the more covert workings of ideology through jewelry. While continuing to highlight how ideology is written into the more overt and anticipated elements of dress, I pay particular attention to the way that jewelry reinvests the conclusion of the text, namely that it is the means by which Jane is ultimately "hailed" into the dominant ideology.

Imperial Patriarchy

Mary Poovey states that “[i]deologies exist not only as ideas,” explaining that “[i]nstead they are given concrete form in the practices and social institutions that govern people’s social relations and that, in so doing, constitute both the experience *of* social relations and the nature of subjectivity” (3). This is no more evident than in the “cultural screen” of fashion, where women constitute both the subject and object position in their display. Lacan’s “gaze” meets Althusser’s “hail” and is projected onto the screen of fashion, foregrounding the complexity of how women arrive at the idea of the “self.” The screen of fashion also magnifies social problems, evidenced by the proliferation of reactionary fashion regulations.

Fashion reveals the societal apprehension of alterations in the cultural fabric. For those in a position of power, change is often unwelcome. As Thomas Tracy notes, “[e]ncoding public and social concerns within private and domestic narratives” as Brontë does in *Jane Eyre* “is a long-standing tradition of the British novel” (75). In the historical moment in which both the novel and the autobiographical narrative of *Jane Eyre* were written (by Brontë and Jane Eyre, respectively), fashion reflects both the pervasiveness of the dominant ideology and reveals cultural anxieties such as those caused by class mobility, the threatening degradation of the public and private divide, and especially the importation of imperial practices into the domestic sphere. Tracy adds, “Brontë ‘nests’ characters, events and themes within intra- and intertextual webs that invoke multiple cultural codes in her complex signifying system” (64). Within the text Jane figures as the primary recipient of these cultural anxieties, which are played out in the signifying system of fashion.

Throughout the text, Jane's relationship to others illustrates the unequal distribution of power in England. For instance, addressing Rochester as "Master," Jane invokes a challenge about the position of household servants. The implied "slave" position within domestic servitude continues the metaphor of race first introduced into the narrative during Jane's residence with Reed family (Meyer 64). At Gateshead John Reed identifies her as an aberration in the domestic sphere and not fit to wear their clothes (Brontë 5). As a governess, Jane continues to complicate traditional ideas about women in the working world and, conversely, the intrusion of the servant into the home. Eve Lynch suggests that through class, Brontë demonstrates how "the servant's body collapses into the colonial body to suggest a class of domestic subalterns breaking down the boundaries of home and nation, of public and private" (92). The educational and fashion Ideological State Apparati (which I will now refer to only as ISAs) combined during Jane's tenure at Lowood, illustrating how ideology works to create these "domestic subalterns." Jane describes the girls as "uniformly dressed" and shortly claims, "my life was uniform," underscoring the ideological design of dress (Brontë 41, 84). Ideology fashions slaves as well as ladies.

Later, Brontë links slavery to marriage by "import[ing] a character [Bertha Mason] from the territories of the colonies . . . to give the metaphor a vivid presence," (Meyer 64). Meyers notes, "it is in the character of Rochester's wife, somewhat surprisingly, not one of his mistresses, that the metaphor of slavery is most vividly realized" (77). Brontë ultimately manages to illustrate the categorical contingencies of class, race and gender all through Jane, and the success of Jane's quest for equality hinges on her resistance to marriage, figured in the novel through the multiple categories

as a form of institutionalized slavery. What Jane ultimately resists is the complicity involved in “going to bed” with imperialism, namely the subjection of the underprivileged “other,” which, for Jane, also includes the self. Jane’s resistance materializes in her struggle to fashion herself outside of the dominant ideology.

Figuring the body feminine as a site of imperial colonization identifies both strategies of resistance and domination. Jenny Sharpe claims that Jane “requires a domestic form of resistance, a language that can bring the force of political insurgency into the ‘woman’s sphere’ of the home” (43). Interestingly, Bill Ashcroft, et al. identify “the key feature of colonial oppression [as] the control over the *means of communication* rather than the control over life and property or even language itself” and argue that it is, in fact, “the empowering factor in any colonial enterprise” (79). These two statements perfectly encapsulate the position of feminine fashion. The language of fashion is the very means by which Rochester seeks to “hail” Jane into colonial subject-hood and likewise how Jane struggles to “speak” a new position by refashioning herself on equal terms.

Ideological Interpellation

According to Silverman, “the subject can only successfully misrecognize him- or herself within that image or cluster of images through which he or she is culturally apprehended” (*Threshold* 18). Though one cannot escape one’s ideology, Silverman’s wording leaves room for imagining an alternative in the ability to avoid the image cluster’s hail. Chris Vanden Bossche, however, explains that “[i]nterpellation has been described through a range of overlapping metaphors that envision the cultural managing the social through *concealment, naturalization, mystification, masking*” (49). This

indicates that ideological interpellation operates covertly by veiling its actions, but also that it aspires to normalize its activities. The most effective strategy to ensure the reinforcement of ideology is not force but, instead, the audacity of convincing the subject that the “way things are” is a natural state of being (Althusser 150). For the nineteenth-century woman this means an intricately defined role, limited in mobility.

In fashion, the metaphorical activity that best defines how women become circumscribed in society is the pose. Silverman explains that “[t]he pose conjures into existence, first of all, that explicit or implicit frame which marks off all representation from the ‘real’” (*Threshold* 203). In this quote, Silverman refers to the screen of cinema, but it also explains the positioning of the Victorian woman in fashion. The nineteenth-century pose is not a still shot, but more simply a woman who embodies the constraints of fashionable attire. In such dress, she is captured in a pose; indeed, she is *always* posing. The design of the binding, constrictive, and awkward clothing ensures the pose by impeding mobility. In both a metaphorical and literal sense, fashion *frames* the woman.

This fixity enables ideology to fashion women into the role of “showcase” with little effort, and the framing ensures masculine superiority by providing the proper stage for the requisite gendered performance of women. Mary Poovey explains that performance was essential to maintaining “the artificiality of the binary logic that governed the Victorian symbolic economy” (12). Hyper-femininity ensures the hyper-masculinity that affords it. Esther Godfrey adds that “gendered performances become acts that are increasingly tied to material wealth” in *Jane Eyre*, and “the text suggests that

only the middle and upper classes can afford the costly performance of gender” (856).

This indicates not only the instability of gender, but also the idea that class *owns* gender.

Additionally, the showcase function took on greater importance in England at mid-century, and woman came to represent more than the localized level of her husband’s wealth. Poovey expands the dimensions by proposing that “the image of woman was also critical to the image of the English national character, which helped legitimize both England’s sense of moral superiority and the imperial ambitions this superiority underwrote” (9). Investing so much symbolic weight further estranges woman from her self, and imposes on her a rigidity that divests her of passionate expression. When Jane vociferates, “Do you think I am an automaton?” she is not only reacting to the idea that the “domestic subaltern” is a robotic slave without emotions, but unwittingly makes an oblique reference to the cold lifelessness of adorned women like Blanche Ingram, who performs femininity and reflects masculine success with unfeeling and mechanical precision (Brontë 268). Empire incorporates women’s bodies at every level.

Cloaking the colonization of the body feminine in the guise of the natural state of affairs occurs with great effort by agents of imperial patriarchy. Vital to its efficacy is the joy and pride that the majority of women of the dominant class express by their assumed position of power. Blanche claims to seek a husband who is not “a rival” but a “foil” and that she will “suffer no competitor near the throne” unless she can “exact an undivided homage” (Brontë 188). However, what Blanche identifies is the false binary promoted by such ideology. She is claiming imperial authority in an ideological system that grants her little to no power. In truth, Jane most accurately identifies her designated role,

commenting that Blanche is “as brilliant as her jewels,” (166). The wife is meant to be the jewel in her husband’s crown, an embellishment of his success.

Blanche is a foil for Jane, however, and is most effective in demonstrating imperial patriarchy’s effective endeavor to make woman complicit in crimes against her “self.” Helena Michie argues that “[w]hen Rochester makes the mistake of dressing Jane ‘in borrowed plumes’ for the first wedding he is committing the larger error of assuming her body is now like Blanche’s, to be dressed in the trappings of young ladyhood” (50). Observing the linking of Blanche synecdochally with her jewels in the exhibition of imperialism, Jane intuits the implications of ornamental investments and resists such ideological framing. Michie “suggest[s] that the distance between the heroine’s body and the words used to describe it are not simply *difference*, but an aggravated and deeply political instance of culture intervening between a subject and its representation” (84). The political instance of the nineteenth century is patriarchal imperialism, and it intervenes between woman and fashion.

The husband or father, whose imperial wealth necessitates display, represents the agent of intervention on the local level and also signifies nationalist agendas. In *Jane Eyre* Rochester successfully embodies the multiple categories of privilege in accordance with Jane’s multiple, underprivileged categories. During one of Jane and Rochester’s initial repartees, he claims, “The fact is, once and for all, I don’t wish to treat you like an inferior: that is (correcting himself), I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years’ difference and *a century’s advance in experience*” (Brontë 139, emphasis mine). More than a hyperbolic expression acknowledging their difference in age, the

“century’s advance” signals Rochester’s role as an agent of the established imperial power.

Rochester confirms the metaphorical connection of masculinity and expanding empire and also links femininity with domesticity and colonial insularity. He highlights the effective *difference*, emphasizing to Jane, “I am old enough to be your father [. . .] I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house” (Brontë 139). Rochester describes himself as the embodiment of roaming, warring, empire, and references his previous imperial crimes, though he attempts to reduce their impact by calling them “errors” (229). When Jane agrees to marry him, he repeats, “It will atone” (271). Whether he labels them “error” or crime, Rochester indicates an awareness of responsibility for his past actions. Any repentance, however, could only be viewed as superficial at best, for he begins to dominate Jane as an agent of imperial patriarchy at the moment of betrothal.

Many critics read Rochester’s attempt to impose adornment on Jane during their engagement as a flawed act of love, and neglect the political enactment of bodily colonization that underwrites the scene. Decades ago, Gilbert and Gubar observed, “Rochester, having secured Jane’s love, almost reflexively begins to treat her as an inferior, a plaything, a virginal possession” (355). As a “virginal possession,” Jane metonymically embodies the potential colonial territory. Sharpe makes a similar observation, noting, “Rochester may think that dressing his future wife in silks and expensive jewelry is an expression of his love, but in her eyes he is claiming ownership over her body” (49). While these are both astute observations, neither one acknowledges

the political undertones in Rochester's own language. Does love equal ownership?

Rochester's own words incriminate his attempt at domination. He intentionally claims ownership for the imperial pleasure of *his* eyes.

Rochester strives to hail Jane into her proper ideological role in this scene first by traditional language and then more aggressively by compounding his efforts and employing the symbolic one of fashion. He begins with the appellation of "Jane Rochester," which Jane resists immediately. "It can never be, sir," she claims, "it does not sound likely" (Brontë 274). The obvious patriarchal tag of surname is too overt for Jane's instincts. Rochester makes a second attempt with heirloom jewels "for the ladies of Thornfield" (274). Jane's resistance to the second attempt matches her language of resistance to the first, as she states, "Oh, sir! Never mind the jewels! I don't like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them." Jane links "jewels," "spoken," "sound," identifying the language of fashion and hinting at the spoken message contained in the jewels. The "sound" of the jewels recalls the "sound" of the patriarchal tag of "Rochester," indicating Jane's awareness of the larger investment in the jewelry.

If Rochester's intentions are not suspect before now, his words reveal the objective informing his desire to adorn his bride. He states, "I will myself put the diamond chain around your neck, and the circlet on your forehead . . . and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings" (Brontë 274). To these actions, he adds these words of explanation: "I mean shortly to claim you—your thoughts, conversation, and company—for life" (282). Rochester's description of the jewelry and his action in dressing her is unmistakably aggravated in its coercion and

suggestion of wifely servitude. Within the oft-quoted sultan/slave dialogue that ends this scene, Jane equates Rochester's acquisition of finery as "extensive slave-purchases," solidifying the identification of Rochester's imperial project (285). Rochester has placed his fashion trap(pings); he only awaits the ceremony to complete Jane's ideological interpellation into her role as the bride of empire. However, Jane has been struggling against domination throughout her journey and has strengthened her ability to defend herself, especially in her attire.

Resistance

Jane employs a variety of tactics in the effort to re-write her script in dress, all in opposition to the standards of conventional fashion. She contests the extreme exhibitionism of women like Blanche with the obverse approach of obscurity. As Beth Newman argues, "Jane embraces her obscurity and makes it not only a virtue, but a deliberate strategy" (25). In so doing, Jane makes the implicit assertion that obscurity's opposite is a vice. Additionally, Newman claims, "*Jane Eyre* makes obscurity and inconspicuousness not merely morally admirable but libidinally attractive" (27). Blanche's imperial command of the gaze is thwarted by Jane's unassuming acquisition of Rochester's. Newman argues, "Rhetorically, the contrast between Jane and Blanche reconfigures Jane's social insignificance as a lack of visible presence, and makes this inconspicuousness conspicuous—a sight worth seeing" (29). Compared to Blanche's "ample garments" which demand more space and literally force Jane out of the way, Jane takes pride in the fact that her "Quaker-like" dress "at least had the merit of fitting to a nicety" (Brontë 199; 101). Without all of the artificial embellishments, Jane's "plain"

dress conforms to her natural frame, subtly complimenting her figure. Jane reverses the convention of conformity in dress on a literal and figurative level.

Jane's fashion in the text endorses the larger discussion of dress reform that was in progress at the very moment of *Jane Eyre*'s publication. *The Lily*, a feminist journal created by Amelia Bloomer, began publishing in 1848 with particular attention to dress reform. Mrs. R. B. Gleason submitted an informal article to the journal about "the style of dress similar to that which Jane exhibits: "How much better some simple dress, fitted to the form, but so loosely as to allow of freedom of inspiration and motion" (Gleason 116). Combining the elements of "simple" and "fitted" to "freedom" and "motion" argues directly against the starched, constrictive, ornate, and immobilizing dress of aristocratic convention. It substitutes the fluidity of movement for the statue-like pose. Gleason adds an intellectual element to the attributes of the "Quaker-like" style:

The Quaker mode of dress is better than any other prevalent . . . its construction is more favorable for health than most other forms, and from being without change, it gives greater mental freedom, by saving a world of thought, as well as a world of work. Hence women of this sect, as a class, surpass others in general intelligence, and retain their youthful look and vigor longer. (114).

Gleason illuminates the *work* required in conventional gender performance and links reform to mental superiority to beauty. Women who dress "smart" are not only intellectually superior but exhibit a natural beauty they do not need to manufacture. Suzanne Keen adds, "Quakerish clothing on the outside of characters only enhances the impression of libidinal depth, even as it provides in an economical code the instructions

for dressing, and placing, a reforming female character in the mind's eye and in the domestic sphere" (232). Keen celebrates Brontë's achievement of reinvesting Jane's clothing with new value and thereby advancing the feminine text with a subversive strategy for sartorial resistance.

The line between asserting solidarity and co-opting or even supporting imperial patriarchy is dangerously fine. Another fashion tactic, which I term the "call to the other," is thus highly problematic in its enactment. During the nineteenth century, upper-class women often incorporated elements of the foreign into their dress signifying the sense of entitlement they derived from empire. For instance, Jane observes the Dowager Lady Ingram:

The dowager . . . had Roman features and a double chin, disappearing into a throat like a pillar: these features appeared to me not only inflated and darkened, but even furrowed with pride; and the chin was sustained by the same principle, in a position of almost preternatural erectness. . . . her voice was deep, its inflections very pompous, very dogmatical—very intolerable, in short. A crimson velvet robe, and a shawl turban of some gold-wrought Indian fabric, invested her (I suppose she thought) with a truly imperial dignity. (Brontë 180)

Jane's observation of Blanche's mother reveals her understanding of the political investment of dress. The dowager's fashion speaks imperial patriarchy with "dogmatic" "inflection." Her inclusion of foreign elements as an ornament to the foundational European style figures the literal activity of empire. Colonies embellish empire in fact and fashion.

Jane's aside, "I suppose she thought" indicates her awareness of women's delusional understanding of their position in empire. "Identification can take two forms," Silverman explains; "it can acknowledge that object's separateness, or it can seek to abolish it" (*Threshold* 71). Women in empire are caught in an ideological bind, existing paradoxically as "the other" in their gender, but are included in "the self" of the dominant nation as well. Jane exposes the false reality of women like the dowager by implicitly suggesting that women are not actually being "invested . . . with a truly imperial dignity." A woman who dresses in support of imperial patriarchy does not abolish the distance between her "self" and "the other" but rather solidifies it. Besides the obvious implications of the elder Lady Ingrams's "preternatural erectness" and "throat like a pillar," this passage describes the transformation of imperial women into fixed and rigid statues.

Alternatively, women incorporated foreignness in their dress as a means of associating with principles of progress. Daniel Purdy writes, "*The Lily* created a fashion scandal when in 1851 it began to run articles advocating that women wear shorter dresses and full-length 'Turkish pantaloons'," which, of course, became "bloomers" (109). In the opening scene of *Jane Eyre*, Jane takes her book to the window-seat and relates, "gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk" (2). While not specifying any article of clothing, the sitting position that Jane takes effectively imagines one. Sitting in this fashion (which we ironically refer to as "Indian style"), would be awkward, if not impossible, in conventional dress. It would also be considered lacking in feminine gentility. Although detractors initially accused the Turkish pantaloons of "unsexing the woman," *The Lily* countered with the claim that "Turkish women have always been

considered in physique and in costume as the embodiment of all that is effeminate” (111).

The fear of androgyny reacts to the liberating potential invested in such garments.

Sitting “like a Turk,” Jane subtly calls to “the other.” Shortly after, John Reed attacks her and she responds by equating him with “a slave-driver” and “the Roman emperors” (Brontë 5). When Jane stakes her ground contrary to that of the dowager, who is also endowed with “Roman features,” she associates the elder Lady Ingram with the same imperial forces that seek to dominate. In contrast, Jane’s style of dress adheres to the principle of rationality and equality, which seeks foreign style in efforts to effect change at the fundamental level of dress, and purposefully rejects incorporating foreignness as an artificial adornment that ensures imperial superiority.

The androgyny implied by the pantaloons introduces yet another strategy for resistance in fashion. As discussed earlier, ambiguous gender was a source of anxiety at this time. The dowager and Lady Ingram suggest the propriety of the unsexed servant in their commentary about governesses, which would again mark Jane as the best foil for Blanche, who exhibits hyper-femininity (Brontë 185-86). The agenda of the narrative, however, subverts the power structure of rigid binaries. As Sharpe argues, “Expressing both more and less than the female sex, *Jane Eyre* crosses and recrosses the gender differentiation that the doctrine of separate spheres safeguards” (36). Intriguingly, the class-centered gender conflict portrayed between Blanche and Jane manifested itself extra-textually, as well. In her famous review of the novel, Lady Eastlake berated the ambiguous author of the text (Currer Bell) for the fashion mis-speak committed in the description of Blanche. Eastlake asserts, “no woman attires another in such fancy dresses as Jane’s ladies assume” (qtd. in Fletcher 69). She argues that a woman—even a woman

of another class—would possess the knowledge of fashion appropriate to Blanche. Fletcher notes, “On the basis of the ‘signs’ of the dress in *Jane Eyre*, Eastlake concludes that the author cannot be a woman. A woman, she implies, would surely be sensitive to the small details of color, language and behavior that mark the lady” (69). The phrase “mark the lady” encapsulates the interpellating action of fashion’s ISA status; however, Eastlake’s comments also imply that Brontë has herself managed to elude these actions.

Extending her comments on the novel to the author of the text demonstrates the subversive quality of *Jane Eyre*. The novel was the emblematic vehicle of bourgeois ideology, but, as Eastlake unwittingly points out, Brontë was using it as a purveyor of ideological opposition. Eastlake’s insistence that “proper knowledge of dress was an indication of an individual’s natural possession of ‘culture’” designates a truncated *dominant* culture, “which for Eastlake was both classed and gendered,” (Fletcher 81). She reveals her anxiousness as a member of the dominant class with ties to the aristocracy (73). By criticizing the character of Jane Eyre in conjunction with the author of *Jane Eyre*, Eastlake identifies Brontë’s subversive project: Jane, the narrator of her story, attempts to rewrite the script of gender normativity. Though I am not suggesting that Brontë and the narrator should in any way be collapsed, I do think that Eastlake was responding to the progressive notions of authorship that Brontë pushed through Jane.

Whether or not Brontë’s use of fashion was “accurate” in actuality matters less than the fact that it is written into the text *as* accurate; thus, it erases Eastlake’s complaints with tautology and *becomes* accurate. As noted by Barbara Prentis, Brontë retained the “mis-speak” despite criticism (122). In doing so, she successfully illustrates the truth about feminine fashion: it is arbitrary, constructed, and thus, able to be re-

written. Lisa Sternlieb “celebrate[s] the capacity of a woman narrator to design, construct, and baffle while appearing to ingratiate with artless candor” (1). The fact that Eastlake cannot recognize Brontë’s gender says less about Brontë’s knowledge of the upper class than it does about the firmness of the imperial grasp on the definitions of femininity and also Brontë’s (semi) successful avoidance of that definition.

Brontë intentionally defined her writing as existing outside of the circumscription of patriarchal dualism. Barbara Prentis identifies Brontë’s view of art “as asexual, or androgynous, and the role of the author as rather like that of the Renaissance painter—that is, as truth tellers with special, enhancing powers” (122). In a letter to W. S. Williams, Brontë responds to criticism similar to that of Lady Eastlake’s: “To such critics I would say, ‘To you I am neither man nor woman—I come before you as author only. It is the sole ground on which I accept your judgment’” (qtd. in Prentis 122). Brontë intentionally cloaks her writing in ambiguity as a challenge. Writing the story of a female protagonist through a female narrator under the authorship of a male pseudonym not only disturbed her critics but also disturbs the binary. The fact that author is actually a woman, but is not recognized as such by some of her contemporary critics, is beyond ironic; it successfully antagonizes gender definitions. Because she *is* a woman means that dominant fashion codes, femininity, and imperial patriarchy are not mutually inclusive. Femininity can be redefined and fashion codes can be redesigned outside of the dominant ideological constructs.

Additionally, Brontë effectively illustrates the concentric circles of ideological subject formation and its exterior to interior action in her complex authorial and narrative structure. The male (Currer Bell) writes Jane Eyre (the narrator) who writes Jane Eyre

(the protagonist). In reality, Brontë imagines an ideological revision of that activity by the simple fact that she writes Currer Bell. As Elaine Showalter explains, “The self-centeredness implicit in the act of writing made this career an especially threatening one; it required an engagement with feeling and cultivation of the ego rather than its negation” (22). The negation occurs in actuality at the level of Brontë to Currer, the one cancelling the other out, and resets the novel as the narrative of Jane writing Jane. Newman suggests that the novel “represent[s] writing as a means by which ordinary feminine exhibitionism can be gratified” (56). This reverses the traditional exhibitionist action of the imposition of exterior culture onto the female body and demonstrates how the interior becomes legible as an exterior symbol. To authentically “read” a woman, she must write herself. Though Brontë’s efforts extend the imagination, the narrative reveals Brontë’s limits and Jane’s failure to escape the inevitability of ideology.

In (Half-)Full Disclosure

Though *Jane Eyre* has been hailed as a nascent feminist novel for fashioning an outspoken female protagonist who undertakes a journey of progressive resistance, the narrative ultimately fails to successfully overcome the ideology. I am not insinuating that the text itself fails (for the most part), but that Brontë writes failure *into* the narrative. As Chris Vanden Bossche notes, “The idea that *Jane Eyre* is a *bildungsroman* is misleading, because it suggests a process in which each stage of development subsumes and incorporates the previous one” (58). Instead, Bossche suggests “we see her making choices strategically, not solely on the basis of a continuous identity but also in relation to her changing circumstances.” This not only identifies the reactionary nature of Jane’s resistance to imperial patriarchy but also highlights the unequal power inherent in the

tensions between society and the subject. Jane never has the upper hand and her resistance at times is successful only in her ability to avoid, but not overcome, her circumstances by running away or mitigating the level of dominance. For instance, in fashion terms Jane is forced to compromise by accepting a few dresses and a pearl necklace instead of the more elaborate silks, satins, and diamonds. Sharpe also comments, “Brontë’s novel of development is structured less as a woman’s progress toward a final goal than as her negotiation of the narrow restraints of fixed gender roles” (43). As Bossche and Sharp show, the failure in this instance is not in Jane’s actions but in the structure of society. The narrative successfully exposes the ideological enterprise but struggles to imagine existence outside of it. Jane must marry to close the novel.

Jane’s quest for equality and resistance to the imperial project invested in marriage structures the novel. If she must marry, she will do so on her own terms. At the novel’s end Jane returns when Rochester finally “hails” her by the sole appellation of “Jane” (479). Sharpe claims that “what often passes unnoticed in feminist readings of Jane’s ascendancy into power is that her agency is underwritten by a male voice. She is able to refuse St John only after hearing Rochester call out her name; her future husband, in effect, names the new assertive female” (Sharpe 54). While I agree with Sharpe’s conclusion, that imperial patriarchy ultimately underwrites Jane’s subject-position, I would disagree that this is the “hail” which interpellates Jane. The emphatic call to the protagonist is the sole (soul) appellation: “‘Jane! Jane! Jane!’—nothing more” (Brontë 449). Repeating “Jane” three times signifies the dropping of the imperial “Rochester” and the patriarchal “Eyre” and seems to signify Rochester’s final acceptance of a unified

whole female subject and his relinquished attempt to “hail” Jane into her role as a subject under imperial patriarchy.

Rochester appears motivated to refashion his use of jewelry, as well. Indeed, he even gives Jane his old gold watch and chain because, he says, “I have no use for it” (Brontë 477). Rochester’s watch symbolizes the command of imperial authority, and by giving it to Jane he signifies his surrender of that authority. Jane can now reinvest the jewelry by putting it to practical use. Rochester also dons Jane’s pearl necklace, which is meant to show his attempt to mutually enact the subversive strategy of androgyny in effort to form an equal attachment to Jane. Additionally, when Jane accepts his marriage proposal he adds, “Never mind fine clothes and jewels, now: all that is not worth a fillip” (478). Rochester’s comment responds to his literal blinding but also identifies the metaphorical erasure that renders the imperial investment in the male gaze inert. As Meyer notes:

For Jane, who has never had beauty, and for whom the obligation of elaborate dress, the obligation to make herself into a showy visual object for Rochester, has itself made her feel like a slave, the blinding of Rochester is liberating: it takes from him any power of male visual evaluation of her. (92)

Strangely, Meyer’s astute observation, which identifies the source and method of Jane’s subject-hood, neglects to thoroughly assess the novel’s conclusion according to this theory in the effort (I suppose) to provide an optimistic reading.

If Rochester’s gaze and Jane’s fashion function together to subjugate Jane, Rochester’s partial recovery proves problematic. The blinding of Rochester as retribution

for imperial sin fails if he does not desire repentance or regret his past. Rochester's donning of Jane's pearl necklace does not, in fact, symbolize his acceptance of Jane as his equal. He tells Jane, "I have worn it since the day I lost my only treasure, as a memento of her" (478). He continues in his efforts to subjugate Jane by investing empire symbolically into her ornamentation. "Memento" does not relate a sentimental investment but rather designates that the necklace is a sign for Jane. The sign signifies his "treasure." Finally, when Rochester regains sight in one eye, he asks, "Jane have you a glittering ornament round your neck?" (483). Jane answers, "I had a gold watch-chain." Instead of reinvesting the watch with usefulness, the impotent chain hangs on Jane's neck like an albatross, evidencing the residual effects of the imperial sin and marking Jane symbolically as an accessory to imperial crimes. Rochester's eye for Jane's fashion finally interpellates her into her ideological role as his lawfully wedded accomplice.

Jane's abrupt statement of fact, "Reader, I married him" is truly a confession of guilt, regarding her collusion with the forces that subjugate her self and others (Brontë 480). Jane's wealth, which was also an attempt to place her on equal terms with Rochester, is derived from a colonial enterprise (Sternlieb 31; Meyer 93). Meyer expands Jane's inability to escape her hailing by incorporating Jane's unsuccessful attempt to write herself out of ideology into the narrative failure: "Specifically writing 'Jane Eyre,' the passage suggests, creating one's triumphant identity as a woman no longer oppressed by class or gender inequalities in England—or writing *Jane Eyre*, the fiction of a redistribution of wealth and power between men and women—depends on colonial ink" (94). For the novel does not actually enact a "redistribution of wealth and power," since

Jane received an inheritance. The equality she acquires is not a democratic equality but a shared position as a member of the ruling class.

Charlotte Brontë imagines a protagonist who speaks passionately against the ills of society. She effectively illustrates the many layers of indoctrination that encourage women to support an ideological enterprise that confines them to a role simultaneously against, under, and with their male counterparts in that scheme. By interpreting the language of fashion in the novel, we identify both an additional apparatus of the ideological state and a source of resistance. Though Jane never escapes her ideology, she envisions the possibility of dismantling the master's house using the master's tools. Though women at that time were already keen to the damaging effects of how clothing bound them to their restricted feminine roles, they needed to turn their own critical eye to the element of jewelry still escaped them. While dress styles change by trends, jewelry—inherited and passed down from generation to generation—has the ability to inculcate ideology deeply into its symbology.

CHAPTER II

MANUFACTURED CONSENT: FASHIONING THE IMPERIALISTIC 'YEA' INTO THE FEMININE NARRATIVE IN *DANIEL DERONDA*

George Eliot's last (completed) novel, *Daniel Deronda*, departed both from the norms of the Victorian realist novel and from Eliot's oeuvre, and consequently confused and disturbed its initial readers. Troubled by the text's refusal to reconcile the two separate narratives, critics draw attention to readers' thwarted expectations of the traditional marriage between the novel's competing protagonists, Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda. The two narratives not only resist this conventional integration, they are so disparate in their characterization and design that Eliot's contemporary critics suggested either a sequel or a vivisection, which would excise the Deronda plot and refocus the text solely on Gwendolen (Picker 363). Likewise, modern day scholars tend to focus only on one of the two plotlines to suit their particular agendas. However, all such criticism misinterprets the text's larger project in which narrative competition is the point, and the irresolution of Gwendolen's plot is *meant* to dissatisfy the reader. Clearly, Daniel's narrative prevails (he is literally *entitled* by the novel), but the more important points are the manner, method, and agenda that allow Daniel's plot to achieve primacy and relegate Gwendolen's plot to the background.

Though not one single, all-encompassing motive justifies the dichotomous construction of *Daniel Deronda*, I submit that Eliot interrogates a primarily gendered conflict in the formation of the double plot. As with Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Eliot writes failure into the feminine narrative, and in doing so, provides a tangible illustration of the privileging aspect of hierarchical binaries. For instance, though the two plot lines differ on many levels, they both rely on myth in the attempt to structure a cohesive narrative. However, while myth is embedded into Deronda's linear plotline organically and subconsciously, Gwendolen makes a discernibly deliberate effort to design her own story by weaving multiple myths elaborately into her narrative. The resulting kaleidoscope of images captures Gwendolen in the interpellating static pose of display and denies her the traditional progress that the linear plot line affords.

By emphasizing ornamentation in the novel, Eliot demonstrates that fashioning a gentleman during the mid-nineteenth century differs radically from the process of fashioning a lady. As discussed in the previous chapter, ornamentation became the sole responsibility of women. However, the expectation to display imperial success in their fashion increased after The Great Exhibition of 1851, which inculcated patriarchal imperialism into English mythology through the vehicle of spectacle. The unabashed extravagance of the imperialist narrative demanded the enlargement of the cultural screen, further divesting women from a unified interior and exterior self. Gwendolen's strategy of performing myth for decorative effect corresponds directly with this historical event and illustrates the estrangement of woman from an independent selfhood. This chapter investigates how Eliot (ad)resses the myth of the hero in each narrative with a

focus on manifestations of language, performance, and display, and particularly the powerful semiotics of jewelry.

Uninhibited Exhibitionism

In *Nineteenth Century Jewellery*, Peter Hinks asserts that “[j]ewels have no practical function at all. They exist to make people feel more beautiful [. . .] and for this reason no other object can speak to us more clearly of the tastes, pretensions and obsessions of the society that produced it” (15). However, jewelry does in fact serve a practical function as a symbolic investor of ideology. By attracting the gaze, jewelry fulfills both the desire to be seen and simultaneously hails the subject as the ideological signifier for imperial success. Jean Arnold explains that “[w]ithin this Victorian context, jewelry becomes a widespread, frequently worn symbol saturated with significance” (268). In effect, jewels make the woman.

The proliferation of jewels at mid-century functioned as publicity for a nationalist agenda by displaying cultural and economic superiority in the triumph over “the other.” No other historical event encapsulates this combination of ideology and display more effectively than The Great Exhibition of 1851, which exhibited the Koh-i-noor diamond in The Crystal Palace. As H       Gill attests, “[i]t would be hard to find a better example of an object, and of a *mise-en-sc      * to illustrate the concept of commodity fetishism” (160). As Hannah Arendt asserts, “everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves—constitutes reality” (50). Though fashion in general houses ideological messages, the most powerful

emblem of superior triumph resides in jewelry. Fashioning jewelry on the body feminine, then, colonizes her as an indexical sign.

The Great Exhibition advanced “myths, national narratives and power politics” through public display (Gill 152). Opening the exhibition to the public allowed the ruling elite “to enlist their public in an inclusive national and/or imperial narrative to which they surrender as the price of gaining membership of the citizenry” (154). Essentially, the onlookers are publicly hailed in their *spectatorship* into an imperial nationalism. The display features “captured exotic objects and peoples, the spoils of war and aggressive commercialism, [which] are explicitly or implicitly ‘reviewed’ by cheering metropolitan crowds,” and thus, legitimizes imperialist claims of superiority through nationalist support (155). The combination enforces a national mythology which asserts that “the means, the process by which existing power relations are made to appear as not simply the best possible but also the *natural* social formation” (Levine 13). The Great Exhibition literally structured national myth with the erection of the Crystal Palace, providing a concrete (or glass) model of how hierarchy builds the nation.

Paradoxically, at this level of display boundaries also become blurred. The Crystal Palace exemplifies a jewel-like sign in its ability to attract the gaze, but it also “convert[s] panoptical surveillance into consumer pleasure”—the mesmerized watchers are hailed in their watching (McClintock 59). The fluid overlapping and reversal of surveillance corresponds with the mutability of art and life occurring during this time. Linking the announcement, “[i]n 1844 the Queen presented a ‘richly jewelled turquoise serpent bracelet, value £25 as a prize in the lady’s archery contest at Prado’,” to the archery scene in Eliot’s novel evidences the pervasive effects of economic aesthetics in

culture (Hinks 43). Employing those same elements: turquoise, serpent, and archery contest, invests cultural cues into the text that identify jewelry's operative power as a thematic signifier for imperial ideology. Seeming acts of agency and individual expression may actually reiterate conformist messages.

Beth Newman argues that "George Eliot's omniscient narrators obviously lend themselves to the panoptic reading of the nineteenth century novel" (87). Ironically, this obscures the boundaries between reading, writing and being read. Much like the spectators of The Great Exhibition, the Victorian novel interpellates ideological subjects by fulfilling narrative expectations. However, because Eliot disturbs the circumscribed pattern, she creates an aporia not only in the text but also in the larger ideology. Unfamiliar with the script, readers encounter a mystery to be solved. By spotlighting Gwendolen's failed attempt to write her own heroic narrative within a larger patriarchal text, Eliot illustrates the entrenched and confining aspects of ideology on the feminine script. In addition, reading the language of dress in the text exposes both the colonizing forces that act upon Gwendolen, as well as her own implicit 'yea' by seeking the gaze and ornamenting herself.

Didier Coste identifies three functions that a character performs which characterize him or her as a hero: first, the "focal function" in which the hero is "the center of attention;" second, the "dynamic function" in which the hero is the agent of action; and last, the "panoramic function" in which the hero presents a wide view of the world (1178). Coste clarifies that the hero embodies the "subject," "catalyst," and "object" of the narrative (1179). Identifying how the text manifests these functions

illustrates the gendered *difference* in the narratives of Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda.

All Eyes On Me: The Focal Function

Gwendolen's narrative exemplifies the categorical "focal" function of the hero in its utilization of ornament. Newman asserts that "being seen has its pleasures as well as its perils; that its pleasure may themselves *be* its perils" encapsulates the feminine experience of fashion (88). Display at mid-century linked imperialist agenda with this increasingly overt exhibitionist pleasure. Hinks explains that "[t]he 1860's were years of almost reckless vanity" (53), demonstrated by a ball where "one lady appeared as the goddess of fire, incandescent with rubies; another, bespangled with diamonds, representing the sky" (52).

This description recalls Gwendolen's second appearance in Leubronn when she arrives in the dining room: "The Nereid in sea-green robes and silver ornaments, with a pale sea-green feather fastened in silver falling backward over her green hat and light brown hair, was Gwendolen Harleth" (Eliot 12). Interestingly, this depiction of Gwendolen as a sea-nymph is the first time the narrative names the female protagonist. Not only does the identification equate Gwendolen with a "Nereid," but it connects them with a lengthy description of her constructed image. Such displays of eccentricity signaled efforts to assert individuality and "were signs, too, of a reaction against the constraints and taboos of Victorian life" (Hinks 66). Andrew M. Miller attests that "[p]ersonality [. . .] enters into society, and dress, as one conduit for its entrance, becomes of great importance (195). This element of fashion indicates the possibility of managing the presentation of self but also the danger of investing the self in an object.

Gwendolen's attempt to align herself with myth in the sea-nymph scene proves problematic. Certainly she succeeds in making herself the center of attention, but the results do not reflect her intentions faithfully. Spectators misrecognize her playful sea-nymph sign, commenting, "Yes; she has got herself up as a sort of serpent now, all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual" (Eliot 12). The misrecognition becomes magnified when the spectators continue, "Woman was tempted by a serpent: why not man?" which collapses Gwendolen's image with that of Eve, the temptress. The final judgment, "It is a sort of Lamia beauty she has," converts Gwendolen into a half serpent/half woman, child-eating monster, and actually prefigures her impending dilemma with Grandcourt and Lydia Glasher.

Miller explains that the "interpellation of women in the world of self-admiring commodities was a general social phenomenon" during Victorian times (204). By fashioning themselves as a spectacle, women submit to a subjective gaze that commodifies them for visual consumption. Gilles Lipovetsky claims that "[f]ashion goes hand in glove with the pleasure of seeing, but also with the pleasure of being seen" (29). However, one apparent danger of such positioning, as Gwendolen's costume proves, is the misinterpretation of signs. Misconstrued readings overwrite original intentions and undermine the pleasure of being seen.

Dynamic Duo: The Divided Woman's Dynamic Function

Gwendolen is not alone in efforts to attach myth to her narrative. In fact, others around her attribute the majority of mythological characterizations to her persona. Throughout the first book and just into the second book of the novel Gwendolen is alternately referred to as a "sylph" (Eliot 10), a "Nereid" (12), a "Lamia" (12), a

“Calypso” (101), a “wood-nymph” (145), and finally, a “Diana” (161) all mythological figures. These characterizations are applied, however, as static images. Generally, they are episodic, resisting identification with the larger narrative. For instance, association with “Diana,” the hunter, aptly corresponds to the scene of the archery contest and her attempts to acquire the attention of Grandcourt, but they cannot be integrated into Gwendolen’s narrative as a cohesive plotline. The various allusions provide only a temporary portrait for convenience and change according to circumstance.

Gwendolen’s characterization suffers for the proliferation of such imagery. The series of imagistic replacements creates fissures in the cohesiveness of her heroine structure. She fashions herself as a “Saint Cecilia” (26, 28) and a “Rachel” (54), in an attempt to align herself with a vocation of performance. However, her attempts suffer either for passivity: “someone shall paint me as Saint Cecilia” (26), or for vanity: “her waking dreams and cogitations as to how she would manage her destiny sometimes turned on the question whether she would become an actress like Rachel, since she was more beautiful than that thin Jewess” (54). Gwendolen also fashions herself as Hermione in the *tableaux* that she performs with Rex. The irony of course is that Hermione was betrothed to her cousin—an event which Gwendolen resists. Interestingly, Gwendolen rewrites the script so that “instead of embracing her, [he] was to kneel and kiss the hem of her garment, and so the curtain was to fall” (59-60). She attempts to reverse the privilege of the binary by awarding herself a position of dominance. However, she undermines her endeavor by pursuing vain ends. Instead of aiming for agency, Gwendolen designs the whole *tableaux* according to her “desire to appear in her Greek dress” and to serve her “purpose of getting a statuesque pose in this favorite costume”

(58-9). Though these attempts fulfill her “focal” function of the hero structure by attracting the gaze, the static use of image problematizes her “dynamic” function, and induces an increasing inertia into Gwendolen’s narrative.

When Gwendolen pawns her turquoise necklace, she begins the perilous journey of entering herself into the exchange market, affixing a price on her body and soul. The pawn broker attributes no more significance than “the superior size and quality of the three central turquoises in the necklace she offered him,” but the narrator explains that “[t]hey had belonged to a chain once her father’s; but she had never known her father; and the necklace was in all respects the ornament she could most conveniently part with” (19). Daniel checks Gwendolen’s attempt to pawn the necklace, which threatens to divest it of substantive value. Nancy Henry comments, “The absence of touchstones such as parents and homeland threatens the integrity of individual and collective identity” (50). Daniel’s note, “*“A stranger who has found Miss Harleth’s necklace returns it to her with the hope that she will not again risk the loss of it,”*” reinvests meaning into the jewelry (20). “Self” substitutes for the final “it” in Daniel’s note, for Gwendolen was trading on her historical make up. By trading on her familial foundation, she becomes a free-floating signifier.

Recovering the necklace, Daniel provides an opportunity to reinvest an object with new symbolic significance. Knowing that Daniel was to be at the ball, Gwendolen uses of the necklace to signal Daniel:

When Gwendolen was dressing, she longed, in remembrance of Leubronn, to put on the old turquoise necklace for her sole ornament; but she dared not offend her husband by appearing in that shabby way on an occasion

when he would demand her utmost splendor. Determined to wear the memorial necklace somehow, she wound it three times round her wrist and made a bracelet of it. (Eliot 440)

Gwendolen attempts to commit a dynamic act of agency by converting her necklace into a bracelet. The act not only subverts Grandcourt's directive, but also reinvests the jewelry with a historical foundation, signaled by the terms "remembrance" and "memorial"—they are her "touchstones." The necklace transforms symbolically into her new desire for a clear conscience. What the passage also indicates, however, is Grandcourt's ultimate claim on her appearance. He intercepts the fashion correspondence between Gwendolen and Daniel and remarks to her "If you have anything to say to him, say it. But don't carry on a telegraphing which other people are supposed to not see. It's damnably vulgar" (Eliot 447). Grandcourt underscores the problem of display—it is always public—and, specific to Gwendolen's fashion expression, demonstrates his position as author of the final word.

Gwendolen's ultimate relegation to the position of mere object directly relates to her (albeit forced) acceptance of Grandcourt's diamonds. The diamonds bestow a threat of damnation onto Gwendolen's conscience because they recall her broken promise to Lydia Glasher. By wearing them, Gwendolen also becomes an accomplice in Grandcourt's disgraceful misdealing with Lydia and the illegitimization of his son. Similar to Jane's watch chain, the necklace symbolizes Gwendolen's albatross: "the cord which united her with this lover and which she hitherto held by the hand, was now being flung over her neck" (354).

By insisting that Gwendolen adorn herself with the diamonds, Grandcourt enforces his imperial authority to write her colonial body. It also reflects the historical circumstance of display. Hinks explains that “the Victorian woman . . . had become a kind of shop-window for the display of her husband’s wealth and success” (38). Armstrong agrees, citing that “[j]ewels from now on were mainly in the possession of women rather than men [. . .] their wealth was displayed on their wives rather than themselves; whether they cared for it or not women were to become the showcases of their husband’s achievements” (14). The terms “shop-window” and “showcase” hollow out the meaning of women as individuals in order to fill them with signifiers of men’s status. Women appear as mere mannequins in a sort of reverse Pygmalian effect.

In an attempt to mold a virtuous woman, Pygmalion carves a statue and

Now flatters her, now sparkling stones presents
 And orient pearl (love’s witching instruments),
 Soft-singing birds, each several-coloured flower,
 First lilies, painted balls, and tears that pour
 From weeping trees. Rich robes her person deck;
 Her fingers, rings; reflecting gems, her neck;
 Pendants in her ears; glittering zone her breast. (Ovid 523)

By ornamenting the statue, Pygmalion initiates life.

In Gwendolen, this metamorphosis occurs inversely. As a representative of stature, she is converted to a statue. Indeed, the narrator describes Gwendolen as hardening throughout the text. Though she initiated this process herself with her depiction of Hermione in the *tableau*, centering her performance solely on a pose and

denying herself speech, the engagement to Grandcourt truly activates the calcification process. When they take a walk together, he says something she finds ridiculous, but instead of laughing in her normal fashion, the narrator relates that “She was perfectly silent, holding up the folds of her robe like a statue” (Eliot 134). Consequently, after the initial encounter with Lydia, who figures as a Medusa (605), the narrator relays that “Gwendolen had certainly hardened in the last twenty-four hours” (155). Imprisoned as an object of display, Gwendolen is forced to “[sit] in her splendid attire, like a white image of helplessness” (448).

The deterioration of her agency directly correlates with her increased splendor as a bearer of aesthetic display. Daniel witnesses this transformation and the narrator employs a variation of the word “hard” in rapid succession (594, 602, 605) which relate to her image as “Mrs. Grandcourt,” in which she “was outwardly the same place, presenting herself as she was expected to do in the accustomed scenes, with the accustomed grace, beauty, and costume” (604). The imagery progresses from the process of “hardening” to the definitive and fixed effect of the “statuesque” shortly thereafter. Grandcourt enslaves Gwendolen with his claims on her conscience: “the husband to whom she had sold her truthfulness and sense of justice, so that he held them throttled into silence, collared and dragged behind him to witness what he would, without remonstrance” (669). The trends of mid-to-late Victorian jewelry reflect this language of enslavement. Hinks notes that “[i]t is a curious fact that over the past twenty years [the 1860s to 1880s] a fetter-like quality had become increasingly pronounced in certain types of jewellery [. . .] One cannot help correlating this trend with the status of women in society and in the family” (63). Though the imperial dress code of display subjugates

women to gain its ends, the narrator of this particular text, noting Gwendolen's complicity, implies that women share responsibility for their bodily colonization.

Gwendolen tries to reclaim a subjective position separate from display during a series of attempts at confession. Avoiding her image in the mirror, she spots "a large piece of black lace which she snatched and tied over her crown of hair so as completely to conceal her neck, and leave only her face looking out from the black frame," an act identified by the narrator as a "manifest contempt for appearance" (608). Her ability to speak had deteriorated, and Gwendolen lets out a "subdued sob [. . .] which was more and more veiled, till it was hardly above a whisper" (609-10). Attempting to recall her humanity, Gwendolen began "hurting herself with the jewels that glistened on her tightly-clasped fingers pressed against her heart" (610). By the time they arrive at Genoa however, Grandcourt and Gwendolen embody the quintessential English couple: "proud, pale, and calm, without a smile on their faces . . . it was a *thing* to go out and see, a *thing* to paint. The husband's chest, back, and arms, showed very well in his close-fitting dress, and the wife was declared to be like a statue" (681, emphasis added). Finally, after Daniel informs Gwendolen of his impending marriage to Myrah, feeling forsaken, Gwendolen "sat like a statue with her wrists lying over each other and her eyes fixed" (804). By the novel's end, her fulfillment of the "focal" function's object position literally traps Gwendolen in a state of fixity. Coste declares that "we deny the name of hero to non-anthropomorphized 'actants' because they cannot act as bearers of speech, and also, to implicit and unnamed *actants* read into the text by the receiver in order to complete text and give it meaning" (1177). Gwendolen is a bearer of speech, but it is not *her* speech. In

her display, she speaks an imperialist, masculine language, and in its visual vocalization, she complies with in her own domination.

Fish Bowl Lens: Panoramic Function

Gwendolen begins the novel with aspirations of fulfilling the mythically heroic role. The narrator relates, “[t]his delicate-limbed sylph of twenty meant to lead. For such passions dwell in feminine breasts also,” but explains that in Gwendolen’s case such desire “dwelt in among strictly feminine furniture, and had no disturbing reference to the advancement of learning” (39). Gwendolen lacks the intellectual capacity to fulfill the “panoramic” function of the hero myth, and this is chiefly the result of her feminine education. The narrator aptly identifies Gwendolen’s limitation:

She rejoiced to feel herself exceptional; but her horizon was that of the genteel romance where the heroine’s soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion, while her life moves strictly in the sphere of fashion; and if she wanders into a swamp, the pathos lies partly, so to speak, in her having on her satin shoes. (53)

Gwendolen reveals the types of books she reads, stating, “Mamma, I wonder how girls manage to fall in love. It is easy to make them do it in books. But men are too ridiculous” (78). The narrator adds, “if anyone had asked her why she objected to love-making speeches, she would have said laughingly, ‘Oh, I am tired of them in all the books’” (81). The popular romance novels ensure the reproduction of the dominant ideological constructs by indoctrinating readers to embody such narratives. Gwendolen’s comment indicates a rejection of this type of narrative, but with no other narrative available to replace it, she remains ignorant. Regarding her initial encounter with Lydia Glasher, the

narrator informs us that “Gwendolen’s uncontrolled reading, though consisting chiefly in what are called the pictures of life, had somehow not prepared her for this encounter with reality” (155). Gwendolen, quite literally, possesses only a narrow, surface understanding of the world. Daniel, in his attempts to aid Gwendolen forces her to acknowledge her lack of the “panoramic” function. Desiring to correct this fault, Gwendolen resources the library in her home with Grandcourt:

She wondered what books he would tell her to take up to her room and recalled the famous writers that she had either not looked into or had found most unreadable [. . .] and when she was safe from observation, carried up a miscellaneous selection—Descartes, Bacon, Locke, Butler, Burke, Guizot—knowing, as a clever young lady of education, that these authors were ornaments of mankind. (548)

Eliot ridicules the traditional “ladies” education indicated by Gwendolen’s use of the word “ornament” and by her defining the set as “miscellaneous.” The footnote provided by Terence Cave in the Penguin edition states that “Gwendolen unthinkingly gives herself a reading list of the father-figures of European rational thought and political humanism” (in Eliot 837). There is hope that Gwendolen will use her time wisely by the novel’s end and continue to self-educate, widening her panoramic vision to include the world outside herself and domestic pleasures.

Deronda Out Does Himself

Eliot highlights Gwendolen’s artificial appropriation of myth by contrasting it with Daniel’s narrative. In a more organic manner, evidenced by subtle subtextual cues, Daniel’s myth unfolds with an enigmatic birth, the compulsion toward a journey, the aid

of a guide, a task imposed, revelation of truth, the temptation, the crossroads, the incarnation, and finally, the reconciliation. Eliot applies myth to *Deronda* in a manner that illustrates the existence of archetypal potential in the subtext of every individual.

Eliot introduces her title character as a stranger in a strange land; his enigmatic birth places him uniquely outside of himself and his culture, posing the dilemma of limbo status. Without proper birth standing, he is denied worldly inheritance and therefore “is not of any consequence in the world” (Eliot 334) and exists “in a state of social neutrality” (180). Some view such marginalization as feminizing (Gates 709, Munich 23), but Eliot anticipates this on some level and clearly refutes this categorization with Daniel’s mother’s statement: “‘No,’ said the Princess, shaking her head, and folding her arms with an air of decision. ‘You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man’s force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out’” (Eliot 631). Society and ideology circumscribe women into conventional molds, complicating their capacity to extend beyond themselves—a circumstance unknown to even the more marginalized men.

Regardless, *Deronda*’s problematic birth places him outside his social milieu; however, it also enables him to gain certain outside perspective on his contemporary society. Living in the peripheries of this world of “antiquated elegance” (Eliot 125), he views it as “a puppet show” (148), and indeed, there is quite a lot of attention drawn to performance in the novel, as we have seen. Daniel is not content to remain stagnant and “most longed for [. . .] either some external event, or some inward light, that would urge him into a definite line of action” (324). *Deronda* rejects the romantic identification with

the forever-brooding Byronic hero, desiring to fulfill the “dynamic” function of a more universal hero. He substitutes acts of substance for surface acts of performance.

In his seminal work *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell organizes the quest as the departure, initiation, and return, and he employs birth and death metaphorically to describe the metamorphosis of the hero. He proclaims that the stagnant life will culminate in death, positing, “only birth can conquer death” (16). Deronda’s birth is a mystery to him; part of his quest lies in the discovery of his origin. This follows the theme of much of Eliot’s oeuvre—vocation—for origin and destiny are invariably linked. The question “what should I do?” is usually answered first by understanding “who am I?” Eliot neatly ties the quest for knowledge of the literal birth to the archetypal structure’s metaphorical birth. Cynthia Chase clarifies that “the event of Deronda’s birth, a genuine origin that took place in the past, and the disclosure of his birth, a retrospective account that takes place in the present [. . .] presents itself rather as the effect of the account of his vocation” (218). His birth inheritance is full of signifiers, all of which enable Daniel’s achievement of the “dynamic” function.

Mordecai guides Daniel toward agency, cueing him also toward fulfillment of the “panoramic” function. Campbell explains, “there is an atmosphere of irresistible fascination about the figure that appears suddenly as guide, marking a new period, a new stage in the biography” (55). Deronda’s path to wholeness requires the insight of Mordecai, a “preternatural guide seen in the universal legend, who suddenly drops his disguise and stands Manifest Power” (Eliot 494). He initiates Deronda on a bridge, a significant threshold, which Campbell identifies as “the entrance to the zone of magnified power” and Mordecai supports in the text, describing it as “a meeting-place for the

spiritual messengers” (Eliot 77, 494). The task imposed by this guide is doubly entailed: first, he must discover his roots so that he has foundation, a “spot of native land” as an individual (22), so that second, he may continue the mission of uniting the two spheres, giving spirituality a root in nationalism. Therefore, when Deronda discovers his origins, he fulfills all three functions of the hero simultaneously. He becomes the subject, catalyst and object, all at once.

Daniel’s entanglement with Gwendolen marks a narrative chiasmus in the novel’s organization. Gwendolen and Daniel’s “two lots had come in contact, hers narrowly personal, his charged with far-reaching sensibilities, perhaps with durable purposes [. . .] her words of insistence that he ‘must remain near her—must not forsake her’—continually recurred to him with the clearness and importunity of imagined sounds” (622). Gwendolen attempts to appropriate Daniel into her narrative, contemplating that “in some mysterious way he was becoming part of her conscience” (415) and that “without the aid of sacred ceremony or costume her feelings had turned this man, only a few years older than herself, into her priest” (430). Deronda resists this sublimation, thinking, “he was not a priest” (689).

Adrienne Auslander Munich’s text *Andromeda’s Chains* provides valuable insight into Daniel’s narrative quandary. He wants to help Gwendolen, but by doing so, he is enacting the rescue plot, which is essential to the romantic melodramatic novel that he resists as his narrative. The myth of “the chained woman waiting to be rescued responds to the challenges of a new kind of woman who will claim that she can unshackle herself [. . .] the myth counters feminist aspirations by telling the maiden that she needs the hero, she needs marriage” (33). Daniel’s empathetic tendencies problematize his desire to resist

the confining spaces of the traditional domestic novel: he genuinely wants to help her but ultimately must reject her. His need to “wrench” free will cause her growing pains, but it is necessary for him in order to fulfill his own decisive narrative (Eliot 771). Under structural definitions, this places Gwendolen in the categorization of the “Woman as Temptress,” realigning her with the attributed “Calypso” figure hinted at in the beginning of the novel (Campbell 121, Eliot 101). Deronda’s “forsaking” Gwendolen relegates her to a static role, an obstacle that he must overcome to move forward as a hero, thereby, making her “the victim of his happiness” (805).

The use of jewelry in Deronda’s narrative is minimal, if anything, instilling value in it only as it pertains to usefulness and the acquisition of knowledge. Daniel, too, pawns a family heirloom (although unbeknownst to him), but he does so not by entering himself in the exchange market as a commodity. The exchange gained knowledge about Mirah’s relatives; once gained, the ring is then redeemed. Once he learns from his mother that it belonged to his father, he dons it telling Mordecai “I have been wearing my memorable ring ever since I came home,” indicating that it functions as a symbol of his heritage (Eliot 789). However, when discussing his plans to travel abroad to found the New Jerusalem, Deronda announces: “‘Only I will not wear a cravat and heavy ring there,’ he ended emphatically, pausing to take off those superfluities” signifying that the ring functions as a symbol and not a vain ornament. Deronda’s conscience, soul, and values all exist internally not manifest on his body in display. When Mirah’s father steals the ring, it resumes its exchange value, but unconnected with Daniel; he does not lose anything which he truly values. He recognizes the ring as a symbol for an abstraction that

he retains protectively in his interior. This reverses the chain of cause-and-effect for ornamentation as seen in Gwendolen's narrative.

Likewise, the gifts given to Mirah and Daniel are emblems of genuine sentiment and purpose, vested with no other meanings of aristocracy or display. The Mallingers present Mirah with a locket inscribed "*To the bride of our dear Daniel Deronda all blessings*" (810). Armstrong claims that "Locketts pandered to the sentimental side of Victorians," but also that "it was equally a mark of respect to have the person's name clearly picked out, engraved or enameled" (39). Therefore, the jewelry symbolically represents the feelings of the Mallingers and is not infused with imposed ulterior meanings. The Klesmers also gave a gift to the newlyweds—"a perfect watch" (Eliot 810), which connotes a balance between a high level of artistry (as opposed to artifice) and usefulness.

The treatment of books and knowledge in *Deronda*'s plotline also highlights the value that Eliot wished to invest in the heroic narrative. The narrator relates that "[t]here had sprung up in him a meditative yearning after wide knowledge" (179). Eliot reveals her critique of higher education and the promotion of self-teaching via the narrator's insight:

He found the inward bent towards comprehension and thoroughness diverging more and more from the track marked out by the standards of examination: he felt a heightening discontent with the wearing futility and enfeebling strain of a demand for excessive retention and dexterity without any insight into the principles which form the vital connections of knowledge. (180)

True knowledge resides in expanding ideas. These ideas are available in books, in conversation, and in experience in *Daniel Deronda*. The culture of consumption and antiquated aristocracy clouded Victorian vision in a way that Daniel intuits: “he dreaded, as it were a dwelling-place of lost souls, that dead anatomy of culture which turns the universe into a mere ceaseless answer to queries (commentary that has contemporary relevance), and knows, not everything, but everything else about everything” (365). The *thinking* man is what is valued, and for this reason, Daniel’s narrative achieves primacy. He embodies “that young energy and spirit of adventure which have helped to create the world-wide legends of youthful heroes going to seek the hidden tokens of their birth and its inheritance of tasks [. . .] the track was one of thought as well as action” (515). This counters traditional gender assertions which privilege exteriority over interiority. Gwendolen’s narrative failure is embedded in her external display, whereas Daniel’s success lies in his refusal of society’s external claims.

If books “ornament” the mind with ideas, the novel’s ornamental epigraphs map a path to the best ideas. Critics in Eliot’s day disapproved of the proliferation of the epigraph in her works and her editor encouraged her to remove them, but they function beyond the display of her intellectual prowess (Higdon 129). They operate within the text as valuable clues, sutures between themes and ideas and plot, and elevate Eliot’s status. David Leon Higdon claims, “this lifelong concern [in Eliot’s work] indicates the use of epigraphs was no passing fad [. . .] but instead a practice that acquired increasing importance in her art” (132). No mere decorative piece, these fragments of wisdom navigate the focus of the text: “they are a foreshadowing of what follows, and to some

degree shape, control, and condition the reader's reaction to the chapter" (131). For instance, the epigraph, which introduces chapter 14, reads:

I will not clothe myself in wreck—wear gems
 Sawed from cramped finger-bones of women drowned;
 Feel chilly vaporous hands of ireful ghosts
 Clutching my necklace; trick my maiden breast
 With orphan's heritage. Let your dead love
 Marry its dead. (145)

This epigraph is placed in the chapter that introduces Lydia Glasher. No mention of the diamond necklace/albatross occurs until much later. This forewarns the audience of the impending doom threatening Gwendolen's fate. What she offers through the epigraph is a resource with which to self-educate. Knowing that she values the capacity to learn how to identify truth through reading books and not necessarily attending school, she is providing the reader with a fundamental reading list.

In the epigraphs, Eliot also "establishes a context and sense of literary community" (Higdon 131). What is important to notice in this context is Eliot's insertion of epigraphs she authored. Not only is it appropriate to place herself in this league, it is integral to the project of this book. The passing on of knowledge and the soul's progression is something that Gwendolen lacks, Daniel is afforded, and Eliot claims for herself. She places herself in the same community as Shakespeare, Aristotle, and Wordsworth, but she illustrates through the epigraph how she attained that level, by reading them. Eliot builds a soul/mind/value system by reading important authors, and by reading everything they have read.

Ideas of ornamentation dress the novel, *Daniel Deronda*. Eliot exposes the dangers of infusing value systems with fashion, a tendency that was magnified in the Victorian era, especially after The Great Exhibition. She warns against entering the self and the soul into the marketplace by misrecognizing or misunderstanding the symbology of fashion, for its aesthetic has a language, and the consumer should have an awareness of the language it speaks. Eliot provides a method for understanding, in self-teaching. The value she places on the text is evident within the narrative, as well as in the novel's very structure. Learning provides a wider lens within which to see the world and one's place in it. Insularity enforces inertia and recognizing "the other" resists atrophy (Kelly 522). Gwendolen's development models the progress of women in understanding the effects of their ornamentation on others and the self. Eliot critiques society's claim on the individual even while insisting on the possibility for the individual to gain agency within that society.

CHAPTER III

UNADORNED SPEECH: (RE)FASHIONING THE FEMININE

NARRATIVE IN *THE MORGESONS*

Elizabeth Stoddard's novel, *The Morgesons* (1862), was not particularly well received in its day, nor has it remained a staple in the contemporary literary canon. The novel escapes scholarly attention primarily because it resists identification with the standards of its day. Generally, critics agree about the novel's powerful portrayal of a rebellious young girl who develops into a passionate young woman, despite the constraints of the patriarchal order. Critics also tend to conclude that Stoddard's style, use of convention, time, and perspective were ultimately flawed and cite these as the cause of the novel's lack of success. However, the failures critics typically attribute to Stoddard's efforts actually identify the work as a proto-modernist novel. The success of Stoddard's work extends beyond the challenge of the dominant institutions of education, religion, and marriage as demonstrated in the narrative, to the reconfiguring of such concepts as form, time and space in the production of the text. In addition, Stoddard not only experiments with nascent modernist form, she also presents a new way of writing women. She consciously rejects the traditional masculine linear plot line and, instead, structures a cyclical, fluid, yet cohesive narrative.

Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot wrote failure into their feminine narratives, which served to condemn the larger ideological structures that limited the protagonists' ability to achieve liberty. However, as discussed in the previous two chapters, critics aptly note that it was impossible for Brontë and Eliot, writing under empire, to logistically imagine space outside of their ideology. This directly correlates with their respective protagonists' inability to fully comprehend their subject/object position and to properly recognize themselves as "the other." Because of America's unique position as a formerly colonized territory of the British Empire, however, Stoddard accesses a subject position unavailable to her British counterparts.⁸ America's "other" position in relation to the British Empire becomes a valuable resource for imagining successful strategies of colonial resistance in feminist terms. Indexically, this affords the novel's protagonist, Cassandra Morgeson, the ability to enact a more revolutionary rebellion (as opposed to the more conservative efforts of reform) and envision new spaces of feminine liberty. The atmosphere of humanist ideals creates fertile grounds for the embryonic New Woman to take root.

The cultural screen of fashion foregrounds the reconfiguring of form in the feminine narrative literally and figuratively in *The Morgesons*. Cassandra Morgeson journeys to the towns of Barmouth, Rosville, and Belem. The institutions represented in each town seek to exert imperial authority over Cassandra and interpellate her into an appropriately submissive feminine role. The overt designs of the traditional ISAs

⁸ This is not to overlook America's displacement of native peoples or deny America's own imperialist actions, nor to suggest that this subject position is unique to America. I merely want to suggest that individual liberty depends on accessibility to models of successful resistance to claims against liberty, and at mid-nineteenth century America embodied such a model.

combine with more furtive imperial efforts to write the body feminine in dress. Though the role of fashion in the text has received little critical attention, Stoddard clearly indicates an awareness of the undermining endeavors of the nineteenth-century fashion ISA. By writing Cassandra's resistance through fashion, particularly through ornamentation and jewelry, Stoddard demonstrates how to successfully reinvest the symbology of jewelry and rewrite the feminine narrative, simultaneously.

The Cycle of Autonomy

By re-conceptualizing time and space and identifying the true cycle of autonomy, Stoddard fashions a new form, giving voice to feminist philosophy. The historical relegation of women to the interior manifests in private physical space as well as a private internal space. As noted in the previous two chapters, dominant institutions of the nineteenth century require that "women maintain the status quo, preserving class distinctions, transmitting accepted morality, and insisting on order and decorum" (Weir 427). These codified requirements reinforced the separation of spheres, assigning women to that of the more restrictive domestic arena. The literal confines of women's sphere metaphorically represent the abstract imprisonment of women's voices to the interior. However, Stoddard "disregards the 'cult of true womanhood,'" creating for her protagonist a pursuit of total autonomy—a marriage of interiority and exteriority (Weir 430).

Stoddard acknowledges the link between experience and self-expression. Without experience women have no exterior means of expression, no perspective afforded by outside reflection. The true cycle of autonomy travels from experience to interiority to thought to voice to expression to exteriority. The many divisions that structure the lives

of women obstruct their ability to complete this cycle, and therefore women lack the capacity to express their desire or properly protest the dominant constructs that bind them. The narrative of fashion further emphasizes these individual and social divisions by illustrating both how women are separated from their bodies as subjects who are spoken for and also trapped inside their bodies as objects that are written upon. Stoddard structures three trips in *The Morgesons* to Barmouth, Rosville, and Belem, respectively, by which Cassandra experiences the exterior world. Each trip marks her progression into maturity by the rejection of the claims of the dominant social order on her body. By rejecting the norms of society, however, Cassandra realizes her position as an “other.” Pushed further into the periphery, Cassandra gradually learns to embrace her otherness and use it as a way to refashion herself as a powerful self-authored subject.

Forgetting *Auld Lang Syne* in Barmouth

The opening of *The Morgesons* parallels that of *Jane Eyre*. Cassandra seats herself oddly on top of a chest of drawers to read an adventure story. Her feet hanging over the edge draw her Aunt’s attention to her. Aunt Merce comments to Cassandra’s mother, “Mary, look at that child’s stockings” (Stoddard 5). This observation follows Aunt Merce’s initial comment: “That child [. . .] is possessed.” Cassandra’s Aunt associates Cassandra’s individuality and hunger for learning with wild behavior and the disarray of her appearance. As Lipovetsky notes, “Fashion is an original system for social regulation and social pressure” (29). Cassandra does not fit the proverbial mold, and the following narrative delineates attempts by to either force her into her conventional role or shun her for lack of conformity.

At school in Surrey, Cassandra indicates her awareness of the flawed educational system for young ladies. She states that she “went through [her] lessons with dignified inaccuracy, and was commended” (11). She then “punish[es] Mrs. Desire for the undeserved praise,” creating a disturbance, and subsequently is expelled from school. For resisting the empty speech of feminine education, she is branded a “pariah” (14). Resembling young Gwendolen, Cassandra describes her uninformed outlook on the world: “I was moved and governed by my sensations, which continually changed, and passed away—to come again, and deposit vague ideas which ignorantly haunted me” (14). Recognizing that she is full of potential but lacking in purpose, Cassandra’s parents send her to live with her rigidly religious Grandfather Warren in Barmouth. There she will attend Miss Black’s genteel school to be indoctrinated in the arts of domesticity.

When she first realizes her outside status at Miss Black’s School in Barmouth, Cassandra attempts to conform. Cassandra admires the aesthetic beauty of the clique of girls, exclaiming, “How spirited and delicate they were! The creatures had their heads dressed as if they were at a party—in curls or braids or ribbons” (36). The pleasing aspect of the girls causes Cassandra to consider her own presentation. She finds her wardrobe unsuited for their bourgeois display. The girls are adorned in contemporary French fashion, and Cassandra only has “a molasses-colored silk, called Turk satin” (37). When her father visits she declares to him, “I must have the pink French calico, with a three-cornered white cloud on it; it is the fashion” (39). Lipovetsky claims that “the diffusion of fashion has mimesis at its core” (30). Mimicking trends reinforces the bourgeois ideology that underwrites them. Silverman explains:

The subject who aspires to incarnate or embody the ideal most typically derives his or her definition of that ideal from normative representation. He or she thereby surrenders all negotiating distance with respect to ideality, and all agency within the larger field of vision. He or she is not only compliant with the dominant values of the screen, but also deprived of any capacity to put its images to new uses, or to work transformatively upon them. The subject can only passionately but passively reaffirm the specular status quo. (*Threshold* 40).

Cassandra falls victim to the indoctrinating aspects of the cultural ISAs in her attempt to speak properly in her dress and “fit into” the social pattern.

However, female agents of patriarchy, in efforts to secure their perceived position of power, thwart her efforts to conform. Weir notes that “throughout her stay, she remains the parvenu, sadistically teased by the snobbish girls whose fortunes were acquired through the slave trade, the whiskey trade, or false insurance claims (43). Illustrating the (ironically hypocritical) aristocratic resistance to the grand upstart, the girls criticize Cassandra for speaking out of turn (class). Cassandra reflects, “I thought I should like to prove myself respectable. How could I? Grand’ther *was* a tailor, and I could not demean myself by assuring them that my father was a gentleman” (Stoddard 40). The girls subsequently recode their dress, agreeing “don’t let’s wear our pink calicoes again.” The girls have a vested interest in retaining their status. Recognizing Cassandra as an “other,” they must distance themselves from her to retain the illusion that they are aligned with the powerful position of “us.”

Miss Black, also an agent of patriarchy, participates in the marginalization of Cassandra, reinforcing that the societal ill for women resides in the institution of the indoctrinating genteel school, when she reacts to Cassandra's "otherness" as a threat: "Miss C. Morgeson, we will call you," she said in our first interview; "the name Cassandra is too peculiar" (35). Crocker identifies such labeling strategies as a response to "the perceived potential for 'moral undermining' of the society," and so Cassandra is stripped of her powerful individualism—her identity relegated to a generic representation of one of "the Morgesons," an affiliation which is less than foundational (79).

When Cassandra's father first visits her in Barmouth, he took her "to a jeweler's, and without consulting me bought an immense mosaic brooch, with a ruined castle on it, and a pretty ring with gold stone" (39). The "ruined castle" recalls Cassandra's early definition of her family as part of a "profound darkness" of an "antiheraldic memory" as they "had no knowledge of that treasure which so many of our New England families are boastful of—the Ancestor who came over in the Mayflower." She refers, here, to the "spirit of progress" which her great-grandfather possessed. Now, she declares, "No tradition of any individuality remains concerning them" (8). As a model for her future suitors, Cassandra's father sets a destructive tone. His gift, which lacks significance and substance, threatens to void Cassandra of sign value. Andrew Miller notes that negligent symbolic attachment "register[s] the alienation of people from objects . . . [and] cause objects to circulate without relation to the individuals around them" (209). Much like Gwendolen, empty signification makes Cassandra vulnerable to the desire to claim her as virgin territory for masculine possession.

Collecting the Self in Rosville

Cassandra's next journey to Rosville to live with her cousin, Charles Morgeson, proves the danger of the imperial threat. Charles, a dark and brooding Byronic character, attempts to master Cassandra and tame her wildness as he does his hot-house flowers and horses. Under his influence, Cassandra "beg[ins] to see the beauty in order" and "conformed to the ways of the family" (76, 77). Seduced by the rewards of Charles' pleased gaze, Cassandra revels in her subject/ object position. Preparing for a party, she explains, "As I adjusted my dress, a triumphant sense of beauty possessed me; Cleopatra could not have been more convinced of her charms than I was of mine" (90). Cassandra, like Blanche Ingram and Gwendolen Harleth, confuses her object position as equivalent to that of the ruling party.

When Charles presents Cassandra with a diamond ring, however, he marks her as a possession and a symbol of his mastery of her will. The diamond speaks for Charles, who is characterized by his inability to express himself verbally, but also reflects Cassandra's pleasurable attachment to such an extravagant ornament. Cassandra exclaims, "What unsuspected tastes I find I have!" I answered. 'I am passionately fond of rings; this delights me'" (103). Cassandra's statement identifies ideology at work. Intriguingly, her "taste" forms *after* she receives the symbol that links her as a sign of her bodily colonization. Similar to Jane and Gwendolen, she describes the attraction between herself and Charles as a "chain between us" (115). Like Rochester and Grandcourt, Charles seeks to possess Cassandra and invest her as a symbol of his successes. The chain is not a link of equal positions but rather the privileging chain of mastery and servitude.

Cassandra's fate as a tamed object will lead to her eventual calcification. She, too, will be unable to speak.

Cassandra soon breaks free from this seduction, however, remembering that true beauty is wild and not contained. She recalls Surrey: "[t]he country is crazy with barrenness and the sea mocks it with its terrible beauty" (114). Cassandra, determined to leave this third indoctrinating academy of Rosville, declares that she is "going to set up for an independent woman" (115). As a symbolic gesture of this intention, she removes the diamond ring and shakes her hair loose from the design Charles prefers. By rejecting the favored fashion, Cassandra designs a new unmarked path for herself. In his final effort to harness her power, however, Charles convinces Cassandra to take that fateful ride on the carriage led by the yet-tamed horse, leading to his own death and scarring Cassandra for life. She will forever bear the mark of experience.

(Re)Marking on the Body in Belem

Ben Somers exposes the threat of the "independent woman," when he tries to rewrite Cassandra's colonial embodiment. He buys her an emerald ring, which Cassandra states, "he begged me to wear and tried to put on my finger, where he had seen the diamond" (126). Ben, a son of aristocracy, attempts to force her to conform to standards of propriety, but Cassandra's experiences allow her to more easily identify and therefore resist efforts to write her body. Knowing that the self is seen as an object to be written leads to awareness that the self is also read. Cassandra witnesses Ben in the library of his Belem home reading a book: "he began to walk about, taking up a book, which he leaned over and whose covers he bent back till they cracked" (226). Cassandra keenly comments, "You would read me that way."

Determined to rewrite her story, Cassandra redefines her scars as tattoos. As Jennifer Putzi explains, “the scars tell a story, reveal a text, that seems to have no place in ‘civilized society’” (169). Indeed, when she meets Desmond Somers and he asks, “How came those scars?” (Stoddard 172). Cassandra retorts, “I got them in battle.” By reconfiguring the scars as an emblem of triumph, she “embraces her mark and her experiences” (Putzi 169). Desmond, too, bears the mark of struggling against inheritance and conformity. In a semi-reversal of the penultimate scene of *Jane Eyre*, Cassandra spies a glittering object around Desmond’s neck. The necklace memorializes a past relationship, which did not meet standards of propriety. Identifying it as a “cursed sign,” he rips it off (Stoddard 199). Instead of a symbol of dominating imperial sins, he claims, “If there was ruin, it was mutual.”

Desmond matches Cassandra in his ability to express himself and his willingness to experience life despite struggles and downfalls. Instead of giving her a ring, Desmond gives Cassandra a watch, which she describes as “small and plain, but there were a few words scratched inside the case with the point of a knife, which I read every day” (227-28). As opposed to Rochester’s watch, Desmond’s gift symbolizes the achievement of true equality. When they are reunited, Desmond “took one exactly like it from his pocket, and showed me the inscription inside” (250). Cassandra never reveals the watches’ inscriptions, retaining a fragment of mystery, inscrutability, and personal, mutual value.

Readers can assume that the inscription relates to the correspondence sent at the time Desmond gave the watch—correspondence which symbolizes the value of the reinvested jewelry’s parity. “Intoxicated with the liberty the pen offered” Cassandra revealed to Desmond the name of her former almost-master. She describes Desmond’s

response as “the last link of chain between us” (227). Not a chain like Charles’ (or Rochester’s or Grandcourt’s), “Not a bright one at the best, nor garlanded with flowers, or was it metal, silver, or gold. There was rust on it, it was corroded, for it was forged out of his and my substance” (227). Finally, our feminine protagonist meets the imperfectly equal substance of a man who makes no claims of imperial patriarchal authority. Jane must write her confessions without Rochester’s knowledge, and Gwendolen seeks confession with Daniel in avoidance of Grandcourt’s gaze. However, because Desmond does not attempt to write her, he “is able to read her story only because she offers it to him” (Putzi 171).

Charting New Territory in the Body of Feminine Writing

Criticism in Stoddard’s time mainly characterizes the work as confusing, disjointed, clotted with dialogue, and lacking continuity; nevertheless, her work stood out for its brazen new methods. James Matlack explains that “her contemporaries were not sure how best to describe her novel or define its art [. . .] there was agreement about *The Morgesons* powerful effect, vivid style, and candor, and about its loose technique, a roughness which puzzled and pained its readers” (285). Matlack’s commentary actually highlights the innovativeness of the author and implicates the complacency of the readership as a reason for the novel’s lacking success. Stoddard stretched her authorial imagination beyond the scope of convention.

Other scholars criticize Stoddard’s use of time, perspective, and narrative interruption. Jessica Feldman comments on Cassandra’s self-referencing and retrospective future, stating that “time leaps rapidly from present to past or future, and back again” (207). However, she neglects to connect this with the form of the

protagonist's authorship. As a memoir, Cassandra's narrative inherently necessitates shifts in time, relying on present interpretations of memories about past events. In other words, it constitutes processes of revision and reevaluation that require the reordering of time into a cycle. Additionally, as an essential component of the confession of experience, self-referencing indicates not only self-awareness but also the achievement of self-authority. Considering the self as a subject from an outside perspective allows the subject to perceive other outside forces acting on the self and reinforces, in that awareness, the ability to resist those forces.

Sybil Weir argues that the first person point of view asserts "a refusal to let the reader know more than her heroine does, [and] creates a dismaying sense that one can never fully know another, that the other remains a mystery we can never decipher, and that another's experience is unavailable to us in our search for understanding" (438). What Stoddard actually denies the reader is a position of judgment. Witnessing Cassandra's trials in the first-person allows the reader not only to intimately connect with the protagonist but also to reap the benefits of her experience. Additionally, such criticism fails to acknowledge that confession implies an "other"—someone to confess to. The design of a memoir is to relate thoughts, feelings, and experiences to another subject. Though written, a memoir is still a dialogue. The remaining inscrutability between subjects is perhaps Stoddard's most salient achievement. Omniscient knowledge, as demonstrated in *Daniel Deronda*, often aligns with imperial motives of ownership. In her efforts to resist being adorned, read, known, or written by imperial patriarchal authority, Cassandra demonstrates an awareness that the ability to dress and write the self are congruent.

Finally, Feldman remarks on the “discomfiting oddness” that the text appears to be both autobiographical and modernist (208). She explains the quandary:

Modernist, too, is Stoddard’s creation of her novel as a series of planes that will not resolve into one. I use the word ‘plane’ to describe the sense of disjunction that the novel gives us, as it seems to move in different directions. Referring to the world, but also referring to itself and the process by which it came to be made, *The Morgesons* thrusts before us its own discontinuities and asks us to see its unsteady articulations as its content as well as its form. (222)

This, however, truly marks the genius of Stoddard’s style. Feldman fails to perceive that the planes “resolve” if you simply abandon traditional understanding of linear time and space. Stoddard’s use of time not only reflects how memoirs are told but also how memory works and the benefits of hindsight—that of foresight. A deeper investigation of *The Morgesons* reveals Stoddard’s more cyclical conceptualization of time and space, creating also a wider lens to consider more peripheral places.

While the journeys in and of themselves are valuable, Cassandra’s acquisition of knowledge occurs because of each *return*. Instead of trekking from Barmouth to Rosville to Belem, Cassandra travels from Surrey to Barmouth, then back to Surrey, and, likewise, to Rosville back to Surrey and to Belem and back to Surrey again. The success or failure of each trip matters less than the experience itself. Cassandra explains: “I must have made the visit, you know, or how could I learn that I should not have made it?”—logic that implies the necessity of incorporating reflection and experience. A linear journey, as you might see in a traditional male *bildungsroman*, limits the perspective gained and

tends toward the headlong adventure of a young man charging into the world and taking it by storm. Stoddard provides for Cassandra the time and space to reflect and internalize each journey. By internalizing her external experience, Cassandra develops the insight necessary to move in and out of these spaces and thereby gains personal agency. In her reflection, she discerns what is truly of value and discards what is not. The journey to a new place and the return sutures Cassandra's experiences into an intelligible and cohesive new fabric.

Ruth Salvaggio and Carolyn Burke articulate ideas about the problematic position of woman as the subject/object of discourse, and how women writers can alter and rework the paradigm from a marginalized position. Salvaggio illuminates the unique female space, defining it as "the marginal space, the space of the body, and liquid space" (273). She explains that women can inhabit space that seems paradoxical: "they can enter into discourse and at the same time retain their marginal space, which will allow them to revision rather than be (re)viewed in, the dominant discourse" (273). She asserts that these peripheral spaces "necessitate a continual 'crossing back and forth of the boundaries between what is represented and what is left out'" (273). Salvaggio testifies that for woman to "write her body, is to make boundaries of discourse permeable if not [. . .] to burst them altogether. And it is to make them permeable [. . .] so that we can begin to dissolve boundaries that enforce oppressive hierarchies" (275).

Stoddard conceptualizes female outside spaces that are fluid and permeable, and promotes the idea that women can alter perception by resisting the dominant social order and denying the rigidity of the prevailing structures and that they gain agency by writing. Stoddard: "I endeavored to make a plain transcript of human life—a portion as it were of

the great panorama [. . .] Perhaps I have failed. Indications are that it will be misunderstood” (qtd. in Matlack: 285). Cassandra is testament, however, to the embryonic new woman, who widens the scope of possibilities by resisting inclusion in the confines of societal norms. A poignant interruption in the text triumphantly acknowledges Cassandra’s successful departure from the dominant order, resounding, “Hail, Cassandra! Hail!” and describes the scene of her transcendence:

I sprang up the highest rock on the point, and looked seaward, to catch a glimpse of the flying Spirit who had touched me. My soul was brought in poise and quickened with the beauty before me! The wide, shimmering plain of sea—its aerial blue, stretching beyond the limits of my vision in one direction, upbearing transverse, cloud-like islands in another, varied and shadowed by shore and sky—mingled its essence with mine.
(Stoddard 214)

Stoddard rends the circumscribed mold of woman as an object and fashions a new text of feminine subjectivity by illustrating how experience and self-expression converge with fluidity. Additionally, by embracing the “otherness” of the self, Stoddard imagines the capacity of the self to write its own liberty outside the confines of the conventional pattern.

CONCLUSION

Literary Clues

Jane Eyre, *Daniel Deronda*, and *The Morgesons* demonstrate through their respective female protagonists—Jane, Gwendolen, and Cassandra—the damage that the fashion enterprise enacts on women’s subjectivity and the world at large. As a sign system, fashion incorporates social values into the coded structure of language. In the mid-nineteenth century, patriarchy informs these codes, which void an authentic feminine narrative and supplant women’s fashion speak with imperialistic messages. By naturalizing the promotion of imperialistic success in feminine ornamentation, ideology coerces women to subject themselves to domination and lend complicit support to the subjugation of cultural others in the process.

Mistaking their positionality within the hierarchy of the imperial patriarchal structure, women who take pleasure in the elaboration of imperial triumph in their dress further their external and internal division, denying themselves a cohesive feminine narrative. Gwendolen illustrates the particularly damning aspect of denying the link between the “other” and the “self.” Eliot artfully designed choice in Gwendolen’s narrative demise, proving that the power to enact change exists within the female protagonist. Eliot also critiques the larger ideological structure, which limits the protagonist’s choices and thereby denies her access to that power.

Likewise, women who acknowledge the “other” but resist identification as such make themselves vulnerable to the authoring claims of empire. It is not enough to see the “other” but necessary to see the “other” in the “self.” Though Jane literally sees Bertha Mason, this cultural other remains inscrutable because Jane never fully inhabits the “other” position. Her search for equality (partially) blinds her from the effects of her choice in accepting empire. Brontë also critiques the structure at large for prohibiting Jane from writing herself out of the ideological confines. The protagonist fashions her narrative only without her partner’s knowledge, underscoring the inherent inequality under imperial patriarchy and illustrating the impossibility of a true dialogue of souls.

Cassandra illustrates the power of the epiphany, “I am the other.” Only by recognizing their true subject position can women liberate themselves from the constraints of patriarchal endeavors and fashion their own narratives. Cassandra derives her power from the fertile atmosphere that founding American ideals cultivated. The power to thwart the oppression of empire by throwing off the colonial mantle exists as an integral part of the national rhetoric. Though these ideals do not necessarily provide concrete access to equality, they do allow imaginative space for enacting change, progress, and liberation. Cassandra illustrates the power that resides in the marginalized positions. To be able to forge new paths, feminine narratives must break from the conventional fashion accept the discomfort of nonconformity.

Larger Contexts

The modern fashion industry has strengthened itself as an Ideological State Apparatus since the nineteenth century. Fashion continues its efforts to hail women

bodily into ideological constructs that simultaneously subjugate them under a new form of imperial patriarchy and elicit their collusion to commit crimes against the other (and therefore the self). Modern day vernacular redefines imperialism as global corporatism. Part of my initial impetus in this project was informed by an encounter with one of Peter Singer's thought experiments. Equating drowning babies and fancy shoes at first seemed an absurd leap in logic. However, learning to connect in a very real way the idea that fashion never simply asserts individuality but rather *always* implies an "other" was an awakening experience.

Much like the imperialist narrative of the Crystal Palace, the modern fashion industry shapes hierarchy into a global narrative, including the women and children of factories in third world countries who make the clothes, the Fifth Avenue women who ornament themselves with Wall Street success, and the college student with the brand logo "Juicy" sewn across the seat of her pants. In all of these cases, fashion exhibits an ownership of the feminine body but an ownership, it is imperative to note, that is not distant and unrelated but intimately linked. Corporatism and patriarchy collude to reinforce a binary structure that continues to distribute privilege unequally. It is to the advantage of women to recognize their part in this ideological enterprise. Only then can women author their lives with authenticity.

VITA

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