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978-1-009-29656-4 — Fashionable Fictions and the Currency
of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel
Lauren Gillingham
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FASHIONABLE FICTIONS
AND THE CURRENCY OF THE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH NOVEL

Revealing how a modern notion of fashion helped to transform the novel and its representation of social change and individual and collective life in nineteenth-century Britain, Lauren Gillingham offers a revisionist history of the novel. With particular attention to the fiction of the 1820s through 1840s, this study focuses on novels that use fashion's idiom of currency and obsolescence to link narrative form to a heightened sense of the present and the visibility of public life. It contends that novelists steeped their fiction in date-stamped matters of dress, manners, and media sensations to articulate a sense of history as unfolding not in epochal change, but in transient issues and interests capturing the public's imagination. Reading fiction by Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens, Letitia Landon, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, W. H. Ainsworth, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and others, *Fashionable Fictions* tells the story of a nineteenth-century genre commitment to contemporaneity that restyles the novel itself.

LAUREN GILLINGHAM is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Ottawa. Her work focuses on nineteenth-century British fiction and melodrama and their contemporary afterlives. She was the recipient of the Monroe Kirk Spears Award for Best Essay in volume 49 of *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*.

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 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
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 a department of the University of Cambridge.

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 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009296564

DOI: 10.1017/9781009296540

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First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Gillingham, Lauren, 1968– author.

TITLE: Fashionable fictions and the currency of the nineteenth-century
 British novel / Lauren Gillingham.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge
 University Press, 2023. | Series: Cambridge studies in
 nineteenth-century literature and culture | Includes bibliographical
 references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2022048198 | ISBN 9781009296564 (hardback) |
 ISBN 9781009296540 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: English fiction – 19th century – History and criticism. |
 Fashion in literature. | Literature and society – England – History – 19th
 century. | LCGFT: Literary criticism.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PR868.F34 G55 2023 | DDC 823/.809–dc23/eng/20230207
 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022048198>

ISBN 978-1-009-29656-4 Hardback

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Acknowledgements

This is a book about the intersection of fashion, temporality, and narrative in the nineteenth-century British novel. Focused on how a modern notion of fashion transformed the novel, this study takes its cue from authors who aimed not to transcend their historical moment but rather to develop narrative forms commensurate with the ephemerality and contingency of their age. If transience is one of the book's keywords, there has been, paradoxically, nothing fleeting about the process of writing it. This project has lived with me long enough that the only style I might claim for it is "timeless classic," though that runs at odds with my argument that, from the late eighteenth century on, the fashion system makes "timelessness" as date-stamped a style as this year's trends. The benefit of my *longue durée* writing practice is that I have profited from the excellent scholarship that has emerged in the interim, and drawn on the friendship and generosity of a great many people whose support has helped me and strengthened my book in innumerable ways.

I am fortunate to work with some wonderful colleagues in Ottawa whose support and conviviality have provided much needed sustenance. Special thanks to Tom Allen, Jennifer Blair, James Brooke-Smith, Victoria Burke, Frans De Bruyn, Ian Dennis, Ina Ferris, Paul Keen, Sara Landreth, Barbara Leckie, April London, Jennifer Panek, Mark Salber Phillips, Anne Raine, Geoff Rector, Janice Schroeder, Robert Stacey, and Keith Wilson. I am grateful to the members of the Montréal-Ottawa Romantics Working Group for their comments on early sections of the project. I received invaluable feedback on my plans for the book from Ina Ferris, April London, Deidre Lynch, Danny O'Quinn, and Jonathan Sachs. I have also benefitted over the years from generative conversations at many conferences, with particular thanks for thought-provoking questions that helped me clarify the project's argument to Tim Campbell, Lauren Goodlad, Shelley King, Anna Kornbluh, Beverly Lemire, and Tabitha Sparks. I owe a debt of gratitude to the two readers for Cambridge University Press,

whose astonishingly generous, incisive reports on the manuscript helped to bring its longer lines into much sharper focus.

I began developing this argument under the guidance of Kim Michasiw, who honed my narrative sensibilities and encouraged my love of quirky novels. A group of excellent friends, many of whom have been in my life even longer than this project, have kept me grounded throughout: heartfelt thanks to Judy Barton, Katherine Binhammer, Jenn Blair, Keith Denny, Craig Gordon, Jennifer Henderson, Elska Malek, Peter Sinnema, Robert Stacey, Jolanda Turley, and Jan Wesselius. My parents, Jack and Marion Gillingham, have provided encouragement, respite from work, and more than a few games of Scrabble.

Finally, to my beautiful family, Julie, Benjamin, Samuel, Alex, and Wade – for farm weekends and farther-flung travels, Datsun dinners and movie nights, my never-ending love and gratitude. None of this would have been possible without you. My deepest thanks go to my partner, Julie Murray, who has been with me and this book from the beginning, has read every word, and cheered me on over every hurdle. For her impeccable critical instincts, unflagging patience, and irrepressible laughter, and everything else that has kept me going for so many years, I am forever indebted. This book is for her.