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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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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.

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