

EN S2E16: Fashion Writing w/ Lauren Gillingham

Alex

Hello and welcome back to Endnote, a literary affairs podcast from the Hart House Literary and Library Committee at the University of Toronto. I'm Alexander Lynch. Before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the land on which Hart House and the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land. This is the sixth and final episode in our Dialogues series, where we speak with UofT academics about literary "big ideas." We're continuing our theme, "Pop"—that is, popular literary and para-literary writing—with an episode on Fashion Writing, which you'll hear me discuss with Professor Lauren Gillingham. Lauren Gillingham is the author of *Fashionable Fictions and the Currency of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, forthcoming with Cambridge University Press. Her book analyzes how fashion came to signify currency and contingency in the nineteenth century, and offered novelists an idiom with which to articulate transformations of identity, social change, and public life. *Fashionable Fictions* studies novels from the 1820s to 1860s, including work by Charles Dickens, Mary Shelley, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Letitia Landon, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Professor Gillingham also co-edited a special issue of *European Romantic Review* on *Romantic Life*, and has published articles on nineteenth-century fiction in *SEL*, *Studies in Romanticism*, *Women's Writing*, and *Victorian Review*. Her teaching and research more broadly focus on the history of the novel, melodrama, gender, sexuality, and affect, and she has recently developed a side interest in Twitter fiction. She teaches in the Department of English at the University of Ottawa.

[pause for music.]

Alex

I'm joined now by Professor Gillingham. Hello, Professor Gillingham, thanks so much for taking the time to speak with me. How are you?

Dr. Gillingham

I'm very well Alexander, thank you for inviting me to be here.

Alex

So I want to begin by talking about where fashion writing begins, or at least modern fashion writing and Rebecca Mitchell, a critic, has argued that it really begins late in the 18th century with the rise of fashion magazines, and more specifically with illustrations and magazines, because now, all of a sudden, large audiences across Britain have access to plates, the same plates. And that means that they can be speaking about the same things and styles can emerge this kind of Hypostases, if you like, and one of the curious intersections I think of the periodical fashion world and just periodicals more generally is Anderson and Anderson's discussion of imagined communities and what it means to produce a nation out of periodicals. And so it seems to me given that on the one hand fashion comes out of periodicals, on the other hand, nation comes out of periodicals, that there ought to be a linkage between fashion and nation, whether that's to do with fashion in abroad by sort of acting as an idiom of national change, and what that

might mean more specifically, whether it's talking about sort of capitalism and consumerism broadly. Or whether it's thinking about sort of specific relations to nation. And so I'm curious, just as an opening provocation, I suppose how you think about fashion and nation and how these are sort of arising together in some ways? And how might 19th century novelists or other kinds of writers deploy fashion to think about in Asia?

Dr. Gillingham

Yes, such a great question. And I completely agree that the force of fashion as an emblem of social change, a way of kind of embodying a collective consciousness, a sense of community is very much coming out of periodicals in the 18th century. And it's building a sense of history of historical consciousness of the nation moving together through history in time. And so I think, you know, very much along the lines of Anderson's argument, this is a medium through which the collective can come to, the community can come to understand itself as such. Right, exactly, as you said, by seeing the fashion plate the dress of the year, and that publication comes out, and everyone has access to it, who can afford to purchase the magazine, or who can see a reproduction of it. And so it is widely accessible. One of the things that's really interesting about dress fashion in the 18th century is that it's one of the very few commodities that's accessible to almost everyone. So it really does allow a kind of cross-station participation in commodity culture that no other commodity affords. And so there's a wonderful book by John Styles called *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in 18th Century England*, and he talks about how the development of commercial modernity was, you know, kind of preceded by it in fits and starts across the nation was very inconsistent from one part of Britain to another, but fashion was the one exception. And so even for folks who could only afford to maybe change the trim on a dress sleeve or alter some buttons, that still was a way of participating in the culture currently, right of marking your belonging, of marking your sense of what's in fashion, whereas our kind of collective aesthetic sense right now, and I belong to that I'm aware of that, and I can participate in that. So Styles argues that fashion, you know, we think of fashion as an elite form, that it would only be the people who could afford to purchase the dress of the year or who could afford to have something styled on that, who would be affected by fashion and fashion, fashionable change. But in fact, you know, plebeian culture is organized around fashion, you know, sense of belonging to a community, whether that's a very localized community or abroad national communities, grounded in how one styles one's belonging, right, like, how do you signify to your fellow community members that you're in the group, and that group can be broader or small, right. So I think fashion is working, really important, in really important ways, in the 18th century in that context, I think one of the things that fashion does, though, that's different from how Benedict Anderson is talking about national identity and national consciousness is that fashion isn't only imaginary, right? So he's thinking as you suggested in the question that you gave to me, he's thinking about how it's an imagined community, right. It's a community of I know that other people are reading the same newspaper as I am today and so therefore, I am part of something much larger than myself. That is very true of fashion. We consume images, we see things, you know, abstract styles that are circulating in the same periodical culture that Benedict Anderson is working with. But we also see things on the street. And we also see things in shops. And we also see the people next door wearing something new, and we think about that, and we can go into the shop and we can touch the fabric and, and have a material experience of something. And so fashion is images, it is imaginary, it is fantasy, but it's also material garments. And it's also all around us. And so it works in the imaginative register that Anderson is interested

in. But I think it works very differently because it is also material. So it's working that tension between materiality and materiality. And I would argue that that is fashion's force, right, that fashion's force comes from its hinge between the images that are provided for us as a kind of fantasy life of beauty and success and whatever our you know, whatever our fantasies, attractiveness, or something, whatever those might be. But it's also, you know, garments on the rack that we can touch and feel and things that we can put on and go out for the day and convey something about ourselves. So it's about self expression in this really material way. So I see it as it's connected to those broad movements, that are transforming British society in the late 18th century around the new the forging of a national consciousness around a sense of history and moving together in time as a nation, but its materiality and its individuality. Its function as a language of self-expression, a vehicle for self-expression seems to me to give it a different kind of communal force and significance than simply the periodical that it's being circulated through. Right, or it's sort of first vehicle I guess.

Alex

Yeah, I think that that binaries is really helpful actually, because where I want to move now is a couple of questions on these kinds of two scales of change, like the micro historical kind of individual change on the one hand, and the national change that to your point, Anderson is far more interested in and so there's an article you wrote called, "The Novel of Fashion Redressed: Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham* in a 19th Century-Context," in which you point out that precisely fashion does have this this strangely conflicted temporality because on the one hand, it's quote, understood to be immediately, irrevocably dated, and on the other, it's, quote, too fleeting to engage history meaningfully. And, you know, temporality was one of the kind of key stones for change in the 19th century, at the micro level, that that consisted primarily in the standardization of clocks via the attention to railway time and the regimentation of the working day. So given your point about sort of subjective expression in the way that subjective expression via fashion sort of cuts against this, these macro narratives, I'm curious, you know, first, I suppose, as an opening provocation, how the conflicted temporality of fashion at a micro level interacts with these other kinds of micro temporalities. And maybe we can talk about the contestation after?

Dr. Gillingham

You know, one of the things this connects back to what I was just saying, in response to your previous question is that my sense of fashion's importance in historical development and historical consciousness is that it has prepared Britons for that sense of standardization and routinization. And the kind of cyclical, repetitive change. That's a quotidian force, rather than a revolutionary force that we then come to associate with railway time later in the 19th century. So I would argue that fashion is preparing consumers for that sense of a kind of regular cyclical movement. But when it's always about the current moment, right, it's always about contemporaneity. Where are we right now? Am I in sync with what's happening right now and marking that movement from novelty to obsolescence, which is fashion's driving principle. And so I see a lot of consonance between the standardization of the factory day or railway time later in the century, obviously, much later than that a kind of standardization of international time. And we wouldn't usually think about fashion in in the same context as railway time or factory time. But I see it having really paved the way and that our sense of the modernity of railway time, for example, or, you know, the kinds of claims for modernity and modernization that we associate maybe with a sensation novel in the 1860s and its hyper consciousness of currency and

you know, the function of serialization in the sensation novels engagement with time, I see that very much as a path that has been paved by earlier novelists taking up fashion as embodiment of the present. That is the idiom for Bastion offers an idiom of contemporaneity of currency, of what it is to experience the present, right? Like we, we the present is the most fleeting of moments. And so how do we talk about that? How do we conceptualize it? And I think that fashion really provides a not just a language, but a very much a conceptual framework for that understanding or experience a way of articulating that experience of pleasantness. So I see fashion as on the one hand as consonant with those industrial forms of time that we wouldn't necessarily think about fashion as having anything we don't usually think about fashion in the context of industrialization. Or if we do, it's not usually to fashions benefit, right? We, we think about fashion as maybe one of the worst-off products of industrialization or something that's ephemeral and useless and, and trivial compared to the monumental transformations of industrialization and so forth. But I see in its temporality, that fashion actually has a lot that connects it to those later temporal measures. The other thing that I would point out that's interesting about fashion's cyclicity that it seems to have something to do something in common with railway time, because of their cyclicity and regularity that in the 19th century, in the late 18th century, the 19th century, fashion is nothing if not cyclical, right, it's totally seasonal. But, you know, first it's the dress of the year, and then it's the dress of the month, and you know that the new fashion is going to come out on such and such a date, and that the seasons will change on such and such a date. And you can set your clock by it practically, right. Obviously, our experience of fashion is completely different. There still are fashion seasons in the 21st century, but they don't dominate the way that they you know, they were exclusively the sort of dominant measurement of fashion's production in the 19th century. But the other element of fashion, that seems to me to connect to railway time in a different way, is to think about, you know, railway time brought in standardization, it brought in routinization, it allowed people to travel from one end of the country to the other with unprecedented speed. But it also bred a sense of tedium. Railway travel was all about boredom, right? So it's a hurry up and get to the station in order to make your train because your train is leaving at exactly this time. But then what are you going to do on the journey, you know, which compared to previous modes of travel is incredibly fast, but this sense of oh, I've, I've rushed, I'm rushing in my travel. But now I have hours that I'm sitting on this train. And so critics have talked about the way that a modern sense of boredom comes into being at exactly this moment of the standardization of time of speeding everything up, forces us to experience those lulls in time, that dead time that we have a consciousness of dead time. And, you know, this is of course, as you know, the birth of the railway bookstore, right, the railway bookstore where you can purchase a book to deal with the tedium of railway travel. And so I would argue that railway time has the same kind of contradictions in it that fashion time does, right that there's on the one hand fashion is all about ephemerality, it's all about the most contingent sense of the present. And then it is simultaneously, you know, littered with detritus fashion is all about what has been cast off, and we have all the material reminders around us of the movement of time. And, and, and the kind of accretion of obsolescence and that that material remainder. And so I love that there's that tension in both of them, you know, that we, we think about in the 19th century fashion is very standardized, and it is very cyclical, but it has that same tension of something that is both ephemeral, and absolutely residue, resolutely material. And railway time has a kind of similar temporal contradiction in it and or the experience of railway time, I guess, is what I would say.

Alex

It's an interesting point about the criteria. And one of the things that I was I was thinking about fashion, and I suppose maybe it's a different scale, and it fits in or it becomes blurred if you like when you get to seasonal time, but the quotidian diversity of fashion like one can wear different things every day and that produces or produces a kind of resistance to the temporal homogenization that railway and working time implement, but to your point to the extent that in fact, neither the railway nor in a different way, the working day induce this temporal homogenization. Maybe the next question is totally obviated, but I'll ask it anyhow. Is there in fact, a way in which the quotidian diversity of fashion cuts against these broader homogenizing forces, or does it finally kind of replicate at an even smaller level than the one we've been discussing the kinds of contradictions in the temporality of all three of these things are discourses.

Dr. Gillingham

Yeah, I mean, I think what I, for me what it gets out what fashions quotidian change gets out is, this is maybe taking your question in a slightly different direction, but is that hinge between individual identity and a kind of collectivity. So I'm sort of going back to the, to our first question a little bit, but, but it's that idea, as you were just suggesting that each day, you know, we can get up and put on a particular outfit in order to feel a certain way about ourselves or present a certain image in public. And so there's a sense of autonomy in that, right, there's an autonomy in our self-expression and autonomy in the identity that we present to the world. But we have that sense of autonomy only through the collective images, the collective aesthetic that we share in common with everyone else. And that binds us to a collective aesthetic regime that is imposed on us right, that we have a great deal of autonomy and how we take that up, which parts of it we draw from, what outfit I put on today. But the images that are available to me to express myself, to signify myself publicly or in just socially, are necessarily born of, you know, these structures that are so much larger than me, right and, and so, one of the things I love about fashion is precisely how it's right at that hinge of the individual and the collective the idea of autonomy and independence, I control how I present myself to the world, and belonging, which immediately makes me beholden to the images that are available to me, right. And so, I would argue that, you know, to come back to your question about time, that fashion does give us that illusion of you know, that the quotidian change of fashion gives us the feeling of being in control and cutting against those larger forces that are in which we are implicated. And that sort of false feeling. I'm not trying to suggest that some sort of false consciousness, but that it always is also reminding us that we are implicated in this larger thing, that it's not a question of just cutting against, you know, the larger structure the standardized time, say but it's always working both of those at the same time. It's always kind of structured by that tension in its you know, in its very functioning that is what drives fashions engine, right is that tension between autonomy and belonging that I can't express myself, but I can express myself in a way that will be meaningful to you, because you will recognize the images from which I have stopped myself.

Alex

So moving now to take the other side of the hinge and in particular, as it relates to individual variation producing collective change. I want to talk about Darwin and other kinds of macro-historical changes that are taking place, or narratives of macro-historical change that are that are being propagated in the 19th century. One of the interesting things I found while researching for

this episode, was that as Evelleen Richards observed fashion offered Darwin a powerful heuristic for understanding evolutionary pressures. Richard writes that Darwin found Victorian women “like pigeon, fanciers manipulated and improved printing nonfunctional anesthetic monstrosities, such as the crystalline in ways that in fact, Darwin used to explain or to figure the world of animals.” And so I'm curious then how fashion fits into this this for you this particular evolutionary narrative, or how it just interfaces with these other kinds of macro-historical narratives that are that are proliferating really quite rapidly, especially later in the 19th century.

Dr. Gillingham

Yeah. I loved your connection to Darwin and to think about how evolutionary biology is connected to these cultural frameworks that we have through the novel and through something like fashion. I mean, Gillian Beer and George Levine have done wonderful work on Darwin's indebtedness to the 19th century novel, right? And how novelistic and how culturally saturated his reading of evolutionary biology is, and, and his theory of both natural selection and also sexual selection. And, you know, if you've looked at *The Descent of Man*, you know, how fully steeped in cultural frameworks and you know, Victorian ideology, his understanding of sexual process of sexual selection is very much steeped in that, in that so that is absolutely the lens through which he is reading the natural world. And that's not to again, that's not to suggest that that is somehow an impoverished lens, but it's just such an interesting way to think about how available cultural discourse is, especially, you know, novelistic and literary more broadly is, is shaping and informing and providing him with a language with which to conceptualize the natural processes that he's identifying and interpreting. By way of an example one of the things that I find interesting in thinking of about the kind of larger processes larger evolutionary or natural or historical processes that fashion might give us a kind of language to think about and conceptualize is an example from a novel *East Lynne* by Ellen Wood. I don't know if you've read it, but it's a sensation novel. And it centers around a young woman named Lady Isabel vein who is the daughter of an Earl and her father dies. And much to her dismay, she discovers that he was completely indebted and she's left penniless and long story but the short version is that she comes to West Lynne, this little town that is close to her father's country seat, and she's going to come she and her father are going to come to church for the first time. And she's never been seen there before. But she's known for her beauty that she's been reputed to be absolutely the most beautiful woman you've ever seen. And so all of the women in West Lynne dress themselves up for church because they know that lady Isabel is going to be at church and they want to, they want to shine, right? They want to they want to dress themselves appropriately to be in the audience of a of an aristocrat and a fashionable aristocrat at that. And so they dress themselves to the nines, like, you know, feathers and trim. And it's all like they go to town, they buy new outfits, they do everything. And Lady Isabel comes to church, and she walks into the church and one of the other female characters who were sort of the narrative is focalized through, she sees this young woman come into the church who's quite striking, but it can't be lady Isabel, because she's wearing this very plain white dress. And of course, if it is Lady Isabel and contrary to everyone's expectation, instead of just seeing herself up and indulging in fashionable excess that would exceed anything that the women of West Lynne are capable of Lady Isabel has dressed down. And she's wearing this very simple white muslin dress that Barbara, this other character, thinks wouldn't even be, you know, appropriate for a kind of day dress. And this is what she's worn to church. And the thing that's most frustrating to all these fashionable women of West Lynne, is that lady Isabel is way more beautiful and way more fashionable than they are, that

they're all struck by how she is the embodiment of beauty and they just look ridiculous, right? They've totally overdressed. They've completely misread the cues. They've played it all wrong. And she is the epitome of beauty. But she has compared it down she has simplified rather than intensified and heightened. And I love that as a way of thinking about the complexity that Darwin is able to see in processes of natural selection, where he recognizes that sometimes evolution works through complexity, right, like increasing levels of complexity. So that species development gathers greater levels of complexity as it progresses, you know, in order as we all know, to increase chances of survival and reproduction, so forth. But sometimes it works in the opposite direction. It's not a unidirectional, and sometimes a species that can pare itself down, it can simplify, is the species that survive sometimes it's shedding the complexity and that that allows for greater signification of like, in the fashion sense of greater signification greater meaning, more beauty, but in Darwin's sense of success, that you know, survival, and, and so I love thinking about how fashion is capriciousness, its unpredictability, that seems to me to give the kind of language for thinking about the you know that what Darwin is interested in is the network of connections like the tangled bank, right of all of the light forms that are entangled and interconnected. And that to think about that only in terms of growing levels of complexity is to completely miss the picture of how that how evolutionary processes work. So it strikes me that fashion kind of offers us a way of thinking about that, right? That if we think it's only about greater levels of access, then we've sort of missed the meaning of how fashion works, because fashion is precisely its unpredictability that gives it power. It's that we don't know what's coming next. We don't know what will be meaningful next, we don't know what will succeed. And so yeah, I think that it offers us a kind of nice way to think about how change can be regular and unpredictable at the same time.

Alex

That's so fascinating. That's a really, well I haven't read *East Lynne*. I've been meaning to tell you the truth. I have a very thin knowledge of sensation fiction, which is relevant for, in fact, we're at where I'm hoping to turn because the one novel or one of the only sensation novels that I have read is *Lady Audley's Secret* and Eva Badowska argues in a wonderful article called "On the Track of Things: Sensation and Modernity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*" that sensation novels really are one of the kind of forms and epitome for thinking about change in aesthetics broadly, but also specifically in the literary. Badowska writes, "a sensation novel offends because as men sell into it, it is always on the brink of tumbling into ruins and littering the landscape with unusable carcasses of outdated literary trends. This is where the paradox of modern cultural production is located. To read this sensation novel is the embodiment of the new, simultaneously to discern in it the initial outlines of its impending obsolescence, which is a wonderful formulation." And one of the things of one the idioms in which *Lady Audley's Secret* thinks about Evanescence probably is precisely fashion and cosmetics. More specifically, I set an example in the questions that I'll summarize outline simply that Lady Audley points out to her maid, that it takes only a little bit of rouge, an effector, or hair dye to turn one woman really into another. There's a kind of eminent interchangeability that at some points Braddon's keen to insist upon and this seems to yoke several kinds of insubstantiality together I mean, none of the feminine for one but also that of sensation fiction or even literature such as cosmetics or feminine beauty more specifically, and also the advertisement and periodicals. So really a lot going on in that one quote, and I suppose to hone in really on the literary in turn in that direction. I'm curious to hear really in broaden or elsewhere how you think about fashion and literature and

literary fashion and really how literary trends work at all in the 19th century and this specific idea.

Dr. Gillingham

Yeah, I love that you quoted the Badowska article because I think that the such a fantastic article and I was so pleased to see it in your question. I just I want to speak to *Lady Audley's Secret*, but I'm gonna hold off on that just because I think it also your comment about cosmetics and the feminine I think we'll also work nicely to think about class instability. So I'll just record that for a second. But to think about fashion and the literary seems to me to raise all kinds of really interesting questions about the relationship between ephemerality and literary value and the Henry Mansell review that but Badowska quotes from. Henry Mansell was a pastor minister in the 1860s and he was writing this literary review of a whole bunch of sensation novels and but the one that he particularly took exception to was *Lady Audley's Secret*. Well, that and *Aurora Floyd* Braddon's other novel that was posted around the same time and he really was went to town on Braddon. And but he's particularly incensed by the sensation novel because of its ephemerality. And he compares it to fashion specifically, and he says, sensation fiction is, you know, it has the owner of the shop on it, that it's, it's too commercial, it's too market driven, it's pandering to the worst common denominator, you know, it's and that, that it is commercially conscious, like the serialization of it, it's hyper currency, the sensation novel is all about representing something as to the moment as possible within the new technological parameters that make that that currency, much, much more current than it could have been when one could only publish a three volume novel, right? If you're publishing in installments, people, you can write up until June of 1862 and it can be coming out in the next month. And so that consciousness of speaking to an audience right now is something that deeply offends Henry Mansell, but it opens up to these much larger questions about fame and celebrity and literary value and our understanding of the author and that was such a contested terrain in the 19th century. And it takes us back to fashion. Of course, at the turn of the 19th century, William Hazlitt wrote a series of articles on fashion and on what he called dandy literature, or what we might call the silver fork novel. And he was horrified by these novels for in very much the same language that Henry Mansell was horrified by sensation fiction, because he saw them as so cheap, right? That they were they were simply out there to sell and they weren't trying to teach us anything. And they weren't trying to transport the reader out of themselves and out of what they already knew to some sort of greater understanding human development, you know, self-improvement, the kind of civilizing influences that literature is supposed to have on us and Hazlitt complained that literature that's focused on fashion can't do that, right. It's a literature that's telling us, you know, when the season is, and when you should be in London, and when you shouldn't be in London, and where you should buy your hat literature that's telling us that can't be telling us anything that is of value to humanity. And so Hazlitt like Mansell wants to draw a hard and fast line between literature, or authors more specifically, who are aiming for posterity who wants to have a legacy who want lasting fame, not celebrity, right. And so he wants to draw that sharp distinction between something that lasts, that endures, that has value across an historical register, right? That that has trans-historical meaning, contrasted with literature that is ephemeral, that it plays to the moment, that speaks to the moment and this gets us right back to that conversation we were having earlier, but dual temporality, right? That fashion is simultaneously to historical because it's dated instantly. It's always in the moment, and that moment is instantly obsolescent and yet, it's not historical enough because it doesn't speak to

as Hazlitt would say all men and all times. Actually, that's Byron who says that but that anxiety I mean, it's a very Romantic anxiety but the idea of the author right and who is the author supposed to be speaking to and if the author is speaking to the peer, the peer group, their contemporary audience, the danger of that is that one immediately gets caught up in celebrity that one wants to write in order to please one wants to write in order to sell. And for the Romantics, that is anathema, right that the whole idea is that one should transcend commercial interests, one should transcend the pull of the marketplace, but of course, it's never that simple. And Hazlitt is a perfect example of that because Hazlitt was so invested in this idea of a literature that transcends, transcends, the marketplace, transcends history. But he was himself an astonishingly popular writer and speaker. And you know, when he was giving his series of lectures on the English poets, he was publishing the copy of that lecture series, literally to the moment that he was giving each of the installments of it. So he was correcting proofs with the publishers, you know, publisher at the door, in order that they could capitalize on his fame because he was so he was so celebrated for it. So it's a wonderful tension that runs throughout the 19th century. And the sensation novel is one piece of it. Dickens is another wonderful example of how do you navigate that tension between wanting to speak to your moment, right, wanting to speak to the contemporary and to be able to conceptualize contemporaneity as such, how do we figure pleasantness in narrative, that's what I argue novels that are engaged with fashion that is very much what they're trying to do is to give narrative form to an experience of contemporaneity. But that pulls at that idea that one, is has sold oneself out to the marketplace, right? That one is just publishing in order to sell and it doesn't matter what it is, it's interchangeable, one sensation novel could be interchanged, with another, they're all doing exactly the same thing. It's stale, its trade, its conventional. And so it's no accident, that fashion and celebrity culture come to, you know, kind of dominate modern Western society. At the same time, celebrity culture emerges at the turn of the 19th century, fashion becomes a kind of dominant organizing principle of Western society, certainly British society at the turn of the 19th century. And they're working hand in hand because they're both working with that idea of force of imagery, the force of fantasy, individual expression, collective aesthetic sense, a new media, the technologies that allow, that give us access to a kind of currency in our images, in our news, in cultural discourse, and that breed that sense of visibility, right? That consciousness of how am I being seen and as an author, as soon as you're thinking about how am I being seen, you can't not be thinking about the marketplace, you can't not be thinking about audience. So I think that fashion is you know, it's right at that tension between ephemerality and duration, or ephemerality, and that which transcends and lasts and, and so, that was a kind of long digression into celebrity culture, in the sensation novel brings it out, I think, really nicely.

Alex

Class change. Speaking of class, you know, the trite phrase to flag in thinking about class change is dress for the job you want, which is maybe a, you know, happy enough way to start the question, but one of the tensions that you've pointed to quite early in our conversation is the kind of need to be new with fashion and the need to kind of constantly escape the downward flow, if you like of fashion from the upper classes, who are kind of functioning to trend set to the lower classes who are kind of copying them. And that kind of movement, in fashion is cuts against precisely this class mobility point. Because if one has to kind of constantly crawl upstream even as one as being, you know, ceaselessly born backwards, and this tension I think comes out, in a lot of instances actually in bleak has been one of the ones that I'm interested in, are two of them

that I'm interested in have to do with Joe and sort of some of Joe's confusion with reading fashion. On the one hand, Joe, who for those who haven't read *Lakehouse*, is an adolescent crossing sweeper in the novel largely a marginal character, who becomes significant at various points. In the course of the detective plot that underwrites the novel. First, Joe leads to an upper class character, probably the highest class character in the novel called Lady Deadlock, who is in attempting to discover the grave of her or to see after her ex-lover has died, his grave and various other locations were where he lived and to do so, Lady Deadlock disguises herself as her maid, Hortense and wears her lower class garments, even as it's still all the while clear or seems to be clear at times to Joe, that this woman whom he's met is not a lower class character, not least because she has a lot of expensive jewelry, she has several rings that he remarks upon. Then, subsequently, Hortense is shown to Joe in a bid to determine who in fact Joe showed the grave of this man to. And Joe is confused by Hortense even though she's wearing solely her own clothes, so her fashion she's in a certain way, not dressed for the job she wants, perhaps, but certainly dress for the job she has and it doesn't make any sense to Joe precisely because of this kind of double movement. It's a somewhat tendentious jump double movement in the case of Lady Deadlock, because she's trying to disguise herself. But I think nonetheless, it does speak to a certain kind of incoherence specifically classed incoherence at the root of, of dressing really for jobs in general or dressing for, for one's class. And so I suppose I'm just interested to hear your thoughts in closing about how in fact fashion interfaces, how it how it maybe speaks this class incoherence, how it produces this class incoherence, or really just other ways in which fashion in class mobility, with or without, without these contradictions kind of interface, either in Dickens or really elsewhere.

Dr. Gillingham

Yeah, Dickens is so wonderful. And we could trace threads of this through many of his novels. But I'll take your example. And I think the thing that's so interesting about that encounter between Joe and Lady Deadlock and later Hortense, is that I mean, Joe functions in the novel as a kind of speaker of truth, right? That he's simple, and he's uneducated, but he's constantly represented to us as the person who really sees truly, precisely because he hasn't been corrupted by the, you know, social forces that other characters are susceptible to. And so I think that the fact that Joe can see something about Lady Deadlock through her disguise, Dickens is working fashion in a pretty predictable way. In the 1850s, in *Bleak House*, where fashion is fashion is understood as a form of disguise, right? It's whether one is intending to disguise oneself as Lady Deadlock does, or it's a, you know, a kind of the capacity for the potential of fashion to misrepresent who we are. And of course, that that opens onto all the class anxieties of the or mid-19th century of class mobility and the possibility that light like in *Lady Audley's Secret*, a young woman of the lower orders could potentially disguise herself as someone of higher station and marry her way up into a position to achieve in which she does not belong. And so one of the threads that Dickens works in *Bleak House* is a quite predictable, familiar way of thinking about fashion, as despise fashion is deceptive, and we must mistrust it. And that goes hand in hand with the idea that Jo can see the true character beneath the fashion. You know, he knows there's something wrong with Lady Deadlock, he knows that, like you say, there's an incoherence that the dress doesn't match the did innate gentility of the woman, that her somehow her true character shining through right that he can see her heart and as a fashion could just, if we could take the fashion off, we would see the true character. And that goes hand in hand with this suspicion I am suggesting. But Hortense is interesting. Hortense is not a sympathetic character at

all in that novel, she's quite horrible. But the fact that Joe can see something about her that makes her also look like a lady gets at a more complicated way in which fashion is working, which Dickens is also very conscious of that fashion isn't only disguise fashion isn't only deceptive fashion also allows us to, I mean, you talked about it as dressing for the job that you want, but allows us to express ourselves in a way in which we want to see ourselves right. And as a lady's maid, Hortense is a half-step below a lady, she's a servant, but she's a servant, who must dress appropriately for the lady for whom she works. And so there is something very ladylike about Hortense and that class ambiguity, she's a servant, but she's tired of highest in the, you know, echelon of servants, and she must hold herself as a lady, she must conduct herself in a way that's appropriate to the woman who employs her. And so that gets at precisely that incoherence of character that this society, which is suspicious of fashion, but also dependent on fashion, dependent on how we style ourselves and how we position ourselves socially through our self-presentation, we depend on that language, even if we are distrustful of it and Hortense I think much more even than Lady Deadlock gets at, at how fashion works in that more interesting way where it can be a kind of disguise. Hortense isn't a lady she's, she if she aspires to be she's not and she's not going to be. But Joe's right, there's something ladylike about her and it's that instability of class identity that Dickens is really seizing and he's using fashion, Joe's ability to read fashion, even though Joe thinks he's misunderstood, and Joe is presented to us as misunderstanding, at the same time as we're to understand that no, actually he's the one who sees truly. So I think Hortense is the kind of interesting character in that in that instance, because she's the one who's revealing the true instabilities, it's not the deception of fashion because true character will shine through. That's what the Lady Deadlock example gives us. It's the fact that individual identity is signified through fashion. And so there is something about Hortense that actually is true for her to, to her attire, not necessarily her ambitions, but you know, to her position at the moment that Joe is seeing her. And so I think Dickens, he doesn't want to find fashion interesting. He always wants to disavow fashion over and over and over again, in his fiction, he's suspicious of fashion. And yet he's constantly coming back to the fact that in the same way that Dickens is always coming back to his own audience and his consciousness of his role as a celebrity and his way of speaking to his, you know, contemporary moment. It's too powerful. You can't escape it. Like you can't just sidestep it and say, oh, yeah, we just have to get through fashion and we can get to the truth, right, and no fashion is bound up with it.

Alex

Well, with that Terrific, thanks so much, Professor. It's been really great to speak with you.

Thank you for your time.

Dr. Gillingham

Thanks so much, Alex.

[pause for music.]

Alex

Thanks so much again to Professor Gillingham for joining me! That's all for this episode—and, indeed, for our year. As I suggested at the top of the show, this is the final episode of Endnote for the 2021–22 year. So, I wanted to take an opportunity to offer some thank-yous. First, to all of our guests—Emily Hurmizi, Helia Karami, Matthew Lee, Hannah Koschanow, Antonia

Facciponte, Ryanne Kap, Vikram Nijhawan, Farah Ghafoor, Daniel Wright, Simon Stern, Adam Hammond, Aayu Pandey, Garry Leonard, Mina Ivosev, Subhi Jha, Jacky Yu, Anvesh Jain, and Lauren Gillingham. Thanks, as well, to the wonderful Endnote team: Sabryna Ekstein, Marta Anielska, Meixi Zhang, Athena Bucci, Rion Levy, and Roxy Moldovanu. And thanks, finally, to the listeners—I hope you’ve enjoyed our conversations (on writing, favourite books, and popular literature), and I’m looking forward to continuing Endnote’s journey starting this August. That’s all! As ever, Endnote is a podcast of the Hart House Student Literary and Library Committee, and I’d like to thank the committee for their ongoing support for Endnote. Our music is by Cameron Lee. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, you can subscribe to Endnote wherever you get your podcasts, or visit our website at hhlitandlib.ca/endnote! From the Endnote team, and me, Alexander Lynch, thanks again for listening; we’ll talk to you soon.