FASHIONING CHASTITY:
BRITISH MARRIAGE PLOTS AND THE TAILORING OF DESIRE, 1789-1928

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

England has historically conceived of chastity in two ways: 1) virginity *prior to* marriage followed by continence—i.e., self-restraint from sexual intercourse—*within* marriage and 2) simplicity of clothing and ornamentation. This dissertation, *Fashioning Chastity: British Marriage Plots and the Tailing of Desire, 1789 and 1928*, focuses on a time when these two definitions coexisted. British marriage plots typically concentrate on two female characters: one who overvalues fashion and engages in pre-marital sexual activity (only to make a poor marriage or become a fallen woman) and another who favors conservative dress and guards her chaste reputation (for which she is rewarded with an affectionate marriage). While the fallen women’s scandalous sexuality attracts critical attention, the marriage plot’s heroines—perhaps because they appear to reify orthodoxy—tend to generate less analytical attention. This dissertation examines the latter group: the overlooked, chaste protagonists. By unpacking sartorial motifs in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859), Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928), I illustrate how these authors use clothing’s symbolic relation to contemporary issues to complicate the appearance feminine, chaste sexuality.
Ultimately, this dissertation draws upon and contributes to feminist and sexuality studies by helping us to better understand the complexity of female chastity throughout the long nineteenth century. While Enlightenment thinking led contemporary religious, marital, and sartorial discourses to back away from defining husbands as the undisputed rulers of their households, the Marriage Act of 1753 solidified the importance of female virginity, as verbal spousehoods were no longer legally binding. Concurrently, republican and capitalist belief systems deified the pursuit of happiness in marriage and promoted the interests of the rising middle-class, emphasizing women as the emotional and moral center of the home. In novels, then, the ascetically dressed virgin became idealized as the perfect emotional and economic partner for the modern, capitalist, upwardly-mobile man. This dissertation, though, illustrates how these sartorially and sexually chaste characters are not orthodox pawns that promote patriarchy but women whose chastity provides them with an unusual degree of autonomy when securing a marriage.
To Joe, for everything.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: THE FASHIONING OF FEMALE CHASTITY

. . . it is better to marry than to burn.

-- I Corinthians 7:9

The seed of this dissertation was planted in my first quarter as a doctoral student. I had elected to devise an independent study on pornographic and scandalous literature of the nineteenth century, and while I was developing the reading list—which included titles such as The Other Victorians (1966), Wicked Victorians (1970), and Poems and Ballads (1866)—my supervising professor suggested I include George Eliot’s Adam Bede (1859). Already a fan of Middlemarch (1871), I was intrigued that Eliot—this seemingly proto-“Victorian” author—had written an earlier, bawdier text. Disappointingly, however, the scandal of Adam Bede turned out to be rather, well, Victorian: a pretty but poor dairy maid is impregnated by the local heir apparent. Though many of Eliot’s contemporaries had been shocked by the novel’s sexualized plot, in my reading, almost one hundred and fifty years later, the characters’ sexuality seemed not only tame but also lacking true agency. Hetty was too callow. Arthur: too pliant, Adam: too emasculated, and Dinah: too detached.
Adding to my frustration was the irritating consistency with which the characters’ conversations kept returning to Dinah’s ugly Methodist cap. “Who cares?,” I often wondered, pressing the book shut in exasperation. But still, I needed a paper topic. So I would reopen the text and soldier on. As I neared the end of the book, panic set in. What perspective about the sexuality in *Adam Bede* could possibly be new and interesting enough to sustain a term paper? Then something about that infuriating cap on the epilogue’s first page hooked my attention. I grabbed a pen and paper and scribbled:

*What’s up with Dinah’s new cap? What was the big deal with the old cap?? Why does Dinah suddenly change her cap and only her cap??? Does this costume change have anything to do with her marriage??????* These questions served as the foundation for that paper and, ultimately, for this dissertation.

Previous to reading *Adam Bede*, literary characters’ clothing had never struck me as a worthwhile site of analysis. Occasionally a professor would mention off-handedly that a female character’s suggestive apparel foreshadowed her sexual fall, yet no one seemed to consider clothing a productive source of inquiry compared to, say, phallic symbols. Consequently, especially in the beginning, my research encountered many dead ends. Though many art, history, and psychology scholars and a few religious and literary scholars were writing about concepts near my topic, no one had synthesized a reading of fashion that could help me understand the significance of Dinah’s cap. Writing that first paper, I felt like a cultural theorist working virtually as a New Critic. It was not until after traveling to England, where I visited The Museum of Methodism, that my research started to take off, revealing that Dinah is not the paragon of chastity that other scholars purport she is. Following a tip from another scholar at a conference, I traveled to the
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and read through George Henry Lewes’s papers, where I learned how Eliot’s spouse and editor viewed Dinah’s cap. Still, as I spent months tracking down source text after source text, I became increasingly curious as to why so few scholars are writing about women’s religious clothing in literature. It seemed even odder that almost no one was writing about women’s clothing in the novels of the long nineteenth century. This lapse may stem from fashion’s being seen as a lesser language—a language of women and artists, a language that defies logic in an era defined by reform, repression, and, most of all, realism. But ultimately, there is a semiotic aspect to women’s chaste clothing which has its own rules and history, and it can change the way we understand female characters’ sexuality. Now, when I reread *Adam Bede*, I find that Dinah is not too detached from her sexuality for my tastes. In fact, she is firmly in control of her erotic chastity.

England has historically conceived of chastity in two ways: 1) virginity *prior to* marriage followed by continence—i.e., self-restraint from sexual intercourse—*within* marriage and 2) simplicity of clothing and ornamentation. The former definition, sexual chastity, is recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* as first appearing in 1225 and directed only at those intending to take religious orders. Gradually, though, chastity came to encompass any person who refrained from “unlawful” intercourse, which did not stop at illegal acts, such as sodomy, but also included activities that were simply unsanctioned, such as intercourse outside of marriage. Wetenhall Wilkes’s “A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady” (1746) goes into further detail, explaining that chastity for women is:
a Suppression of all irregular Desires, voluntary Pollutions, sinful Concupiscence, and of an immoderate Use of all sensual, or carnal Pleasures. Its Purity consists in Abstinence or Continence. The first is properly attributed to Virgins and Widows, the other to married Women. [. . .] Chastity is so essential and natural to your Sex. . . . An immodest Woman is a kind of Monster. (102-103, emphasis in original)

In the twenty-first century we associate chastity only with virginity before marriage, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Wilkes illustrates, women ideally were chaste throughout their lifetimes. Chastity meant not only restricting sexual activity to one’s spouse but also remaining “continent” by repressing sexual relations during marriage. Sexual chastity demanded that women’s desires be monitored, denied, and repressed before, during, and after marriage. Widows were encouraged never to remarry since their chaste “allotment” of one husband had already been fulfilled.¹ The latter definition, sartorial chastity, is recorded as having first appeared in 1760, marking the approximate time when chastity of dress came to be seen as expressive of class, religious, and sexual beliefs. Like sexual chastity, sartorial chastity increased the value of a virgin’s intangible dowry and could be leveraged on the marriage market. Political and ecclesiastic influences altered the semantics of chastity, in turn fashioning new archetypes for each era of the long nineteenth century—from the Romantic bride who abhors “merger” marriage, to the middle-class wife of the mid-Victorian era, to the emancipated yet romantically overwhelmed modern woman. An understanding of chaste sartorial semiotics is, thus, crucial to the literary scholar interested in marriage plots.

In The History of Sexuality, Volume I (1976) Michel Foucault rejects the hypothesis that sexual repression began in the seventeenth century and was perfected in
the nineteenth century. Instead, he posits that medical, pedagogical, psychoanalytical, and juridical discourses incited the populace to confess non-heteronormative desires to the “professionals” for one’s own “good,” in order to be “cured.” Therefore, these powers created “a new regime of discourses” (Foucault 27) on sexuality that are hierarchical and power-related. As sexual identities were being “discovered,” they were entered into our lexicon, most notably homosexuality and heterosexuality in 1892.

The Victorian concept of hierarchical sexual identities stuck. Writing almost one hundred years following the etymological discovery of heterosexuality, Gayle Rubin advocates in her influential “Thinking Sex” (1984) for increased rights for all non-heteronormative persons. Reflecting the politics of 1980s American sexuality, Ruben organizes her contemporary hierarchy of major American sexual identities as:

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<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Promiscuous Heterosexuals</td>
<td>Transvestites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masturbation</td>
<td>Transsexuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monogamous</td>
<td>Long-term, stable lesbian and gay male couples</td>
<td>Fetishists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reproductive</td>
<td>Lesbians in the bar</td>
<td>Sadomasochists</td>
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<td>At home</td>
<td>Promiscuous gay men at the park</td>
<td>For money</td>
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<td>Cross-generational</td>
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Because the impact of AIDS has been so significant that in the last twenty-odd years, promiscuous gay men and promiscuous heterosexuals have been downgraded to the “Bad” sex category, while unmarried but cohabitating heterosexual and homosexual couples have been promoted to the “Good” sex category. More important to this discussion, though, Rubin is arguing for rights for persons with sexual identities that the
Victorians would not have recognized. In *Overexposed* (1988), Sylvère Lotringer observes, “The attempt to establish a definitive catalogue of sexual aberrations throughout the nineteenth century testified that ‘sexuality’ was coming to the fore” (13). The Victorians policed the pleasures of talking about sex and of sex itself, which created a national model of prudish sexuality for both public and private behaviors. And they had their own complex categories of good, contested, and bad sexuality.⁵ A nineteenth-century sexual hierarchy would probably look something like this:


The above graph reflects the political, ecclesiastic, and literary discourses that rewarded “Good” sex, reclaimed penitential members of the area of contest, and punished persons who engage in “Bad” sex.

I am not invested in “outing” characters that embody non-heterosexual identities, especially since most of my material predates the time when heterosexuality and homosexuality came to be understood as *identities*. Instead, I focus on the gendered understanding of chaste sexuality that is implied but unspoken by the Victorians. For instance, the Victorians conceived of perpetual bachelorhood as a man’s unfortunate choice, whereas perpetual maidenhood was seen as a slight, since one becomes an old maid only if she has not been chosen by a man. The women I focus on have *chosen* to
take a vow of celibacy, which may be why they are understood to be non-sexual; however, as *The Monk*, *Adam Bede*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *Orlando* make glaringly clear, vowing to be celibate for life is quite different from being without sexual feelings. So how are we to understand the nineteenth-century characters that move up and down the hierarchy by breaking vows of celibacy, engaging in sexual activity, and/or remaining chaste? Lotringer notes, “Etymologically, the Latin *deviare* means turning aside from the correct path, departing from the media via, the middle way, the established standard, the prescribed course (or intercourse)—diverging from the practice or doctrine that is considered normal among a certain group or society” (11). While there is a rich conversation regarding deviant—or queer—heterosexuality in the Early Modern English and Renaissance Periods, this dialogue has yet to begin in earnest regarding British literature from the eighteenth century forward. My dissertation strives to spearhead this line of inquiry into the literature of the long nineteenth century.

As readers and scholars we participate in Foucault’s power-knowledge-pleasure paradigm every time we enjoy reading a book where the characters’ sexual attributes adhere to what we understand to be their “proper” social role. Foucault argues that governing bodies experience power-knowledge-pleasure in locating sexual deviants, forcing confessions, and granting absolutions (11). This pleasure—which does not involve bodily contact—thrives on “knowing” and, therefore, policing others’ dirty little secrets. We believe female characters with good sexuality should be rewarded with marriage. Some of the contested cases—unwed mothers, agnostics, rape victims—should be forced to confess and then be punished and/or reformed. Characters with truly “bad” sexuality should be banished (at least from the main plot). We feel pleasure when
characters are properly rewarded or punished; otherwise, we become confused over the novel’s message. The clothing worn by characters of good, bad, or contested sexuality may seem to be of little import in this power-knowledge-pleasure cycle. But in the nineteenth century, two factors came together to make clothing the primary language with which authors could discuss sexuality while maintaining the appearance of respectability: the French and Industrial Revolutions. As the British government struggled to control a post-French Revolution populace, the Industrial Revolution created an explosion of cheap textiles. These coincident conditions allowed English authors to use clothing to discuss the increasingly taboo subject of female sexuality. Foucault famously posits that the increasing pressure not to speak directly about sex in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries actually created alternative discourses in the nineteenth century, cautioning us to remain mindful to “the insidious presence [of sex] that speaks in a voice so muted and often disguised that one risks remaining deaf to it” (35). And as Maria Fitzwilliam observes, “If the needle, used for domestic rather than commercial ends, is assumed to be the ‘natural’ instrument of feminine creativity, then representation via this medium—fashion—might flourish, unchecked and almost unnoticed” (5). Women were supposed to be sartorially and sexually chaste both before and after marriage—behavior for which Dinah Morris is apparently rewarded in *Adam Bede* (1859). Admittedly, a woman could (and many did) lose her virginity before marriage only to be re-outfitted as chaste through marriage, as does Agnes in *The Monk* (1796). But if a woman refused to conform sexually or sartorially—even if she was monogamous yet never married—she was severely castigated, like Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* (1895).
Ultimately, this dissertation draws upon and contributes to gender and queer studies by helping us to understand the complexity of female chastity and its fraught relationship with religious, marital, and sartorial discourses throughout the long nineteenth century. Foucault’s theory of power on “the body” informs my approach to sexualized sartorial language. Foucault notes that starting in the eighteenth century, the kinship system (or system of alliance) was gradually replaced by a sexual system, whereby “the deployment of sexuality is linked to the economy through numerous and subtle relays, the main one of which, however, is the body—the body that produces and consumes” (106-07). In other words, the modern understanding of sexuality is defined by capitalism: not only must capitalists produce and consume products but one’s body is a product that is coerced to display the image of heteronormative sexuality. Because capitalist production is dominated by men, a proper woman should only produce the body that will display her father’s and then her husband’s purchasing power. Later, the woman verifies her sexuality through the production of legitimate heirs. Female characters who dress modestly deflect attention from their sexualized bodies and, therefore, have an uneasy relationship with heteronormative, capitalist culture. While a modest character’s clothing may symbolize her dedication to remaining chaste until marriage—enabling the prolonged courtship central to all marriage plots—it also symbolizes her rejection of capitalist and sexual agency. This denial of the female body as the site of capitalist exchange seems to confound both feminist and anti-feminist literary critics. What type of woman fails to covet the husband who will dress her in the most luxurious clothes? The conclusion most critics draw is that she is asexual, frigid, androgynous, or unworthy of critical attention. Yet the fact that these aesthetic—and sometimes ascetic—characters are
consistently the heroines of modern marriage plots teaches women to value affection over affectation. I will show that the sartorial discourse of these chaste heroines is illustrative of their active—and radical—sexuality.

Clothing’s relationship to gendered desire is distinctive—not only because clothing can be purchased, gifted, measured, and preserved but also because it can be written about without seeming to signify anything beyond the clothes themselves: dresses, shoes, earrings, etc. Therefore, clothing may in fact outperform other signifiers as the Rosetta Stone of queer (hetero)sexuality.\(^6\) Judith Butler famously outlined in *Gender Trouble* (1989) that gender is comprised of repetitive acts that subjects unconsciously perform. The subjects are then *recognized* as properly or improperly embodying their “correct” genders. Ironically, Butler then encourages her readers to disrupt these hegemonic conceptions by consciously performing drag, as if drag can magically free subjects from culturally dictated and constrictive recognitions of gender.

As Mary Douglas reminds us in *Purity and Danger* (1978), the body is a site that produces and reflects its society, where “the powers and dangers credited to social structure [are] reproduced in small on the human body” (115).

Though currently languishing in relative critical obscurity, the discourse of nineteenth-century sexualized fashion is a fruitful area of analysis. I believe that authors clothe their characters—consciously or unconsciously—to communicate to readers that a character’s gendered sexual desires are “Good” (heteronormative), contested (can become heteronormative), or “Bad” (beyond the pale of heteronormativity). As women were brought up to be the site of non-expression, fashion became a public way for them to communicate and participate in their own sexuality. And because women were
encouraged not to verbally admit to having sexual desires, their clothing communicated meanings they could not utter. Most literature shows that historically sexualization was the male’s prerogative: a male is bewitched by a woman’s beauty and then claims her as his wife. Indeed, a woman should only become sexualized by accepting a man’s declaration of desire. But in the nineteenth century, a strange thing happened: women began to propose, and marriage was not possible until the woman’s consent had been given once or twice.

Because it was considered indecorous in the nineteenth century to discuss private sexual acts, readers of nineteenth-century novels must interpret characters’ social and sartorial cues to establish sexual identities. But as with any other language, our (in)ability to recognize signification limits clothing as a mode of communication. For example, we understand that a woman who receives a jeweled ring from a man and then another solid band from the same man while in the presence of a clergy member is declaring: “I am (or want to appear) heterosexual and intend to have (may already have had) sex with this man.” But well into the nineteenth century the above sartorial signs had different signification from the meaning current readers would attribute to them. Today engagement and wedding rings seem virtually tantamount to marriage, but wedding bands—to say nothing of expensive and ostentatious engagement rings—were not commonly worn by women until the mid-nineteenth century. So how did authors dress women to communicate contemporary embodiments of (or departures from) heteronormative chastity? Who should properly wear a veil: brides, nuns, or widows? Does a Methodist cap have anything to do with a woman’s marital status? What does a Liberty dress have to do with prostitution? I will tackle these questions by discussing how
nineteenth-century authors wrote about women’s clothing, and I will illustrate how characters who wear these items reify or queer the appearance of chaste heterosexuality.

Marriage plots usually have a full cast of maidens and matrons, but the main plot and subplot tend to focus on two virgins: the female protagonist and her foil. From their initial descriptions, we recognize who will become our heroine and who will not, as their sexuality often follows archetypal paths: The heroine favors conservative dress, guards her chaste reputation, and is rewarded with both love and marriage, whereas the foil overvalues fashion, engages in pre-marital sexual activity, and makes a poor marriage or becomes a fallen woman. Consequently, delayed—or repressed—sexuality takes on a fairytale quality, standing in for the promise of an everlasting love unburdened by emotional, financial, or sexual conflict. Because the female protagonist of these marriage plots almost always maintains her virginity until marriage with the hero is secure, she is understood to reify orthodoxy and is frequently thought to be of less interest analytically. Although novels to tend close with the heroine’s romantic engagement or wedding scene, it is her foil’s improper sexuality that most often attracts scholarly attention. For example, article upon article is written about The Monk’s Matilda rather than Agnes, Adam Bede’s Hetty rather than Dinah, and Jude the Obscure’s Arabella rather than Sue. But since these novels’ marriage plots cannot be resolved without the lesser analyzed characters listed above, these women’s sexuality should not be brushed aside. I will illustrate how fashion semiotics complicate the (mis)understanding that these women are analytically uninteresting and / or lacking sexual autonomy.
Women’s fashion items signify a range of gendered religious, economic, and sexual ideals. Within the Christian tradition, ecclesiastic and lay women have adopted miscellaneous clothing items—such as veils—to represent chastity. But even when clothing is dictated by religious tradition, the symbolic value of the items changes over time, signaling, for instance, one thing to the Romantics but another to the Victorians (much less the modernists). In a more secular tradition, clothing has been understood as an expression of socioeconomic status. Because a woman’s class has historically been relational (i.e. dependent on her father’s or husband’s circumstances), sartorial chastity was used as capital on the marriage market. A woman’s clothing signified whether her father could provide a decent dowry—the largest influx of cash a middle- or upper-class man could expect during his lifetime. Gradually, women’s dress became not only metonymic of religious beliefs and class standing but also of her promise not to tax her middle-class husband’s financial resources with excessive clothing purchases or offspring production. This trend culminated in fashioning the sexually and sartorially chaste woman of the mid-nineteenth century Industrial England. Because a woman’s clothing speaks of her religious, economic, and sexual chastity, we can then extrapolate that clothing—even what is understood to be repressive, chaste clothing—undermines the idea of proper femininity by communicating information about women’s sexuality, even in polite company.

Foucault argues that “By placing the advent of the age of repression . . . after hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression . . . to coincide with the development of capitalism: it [the discourse of sexual repression] becomes an integral part of the bourgeois order” (*History of Sexuality* 5). Capitalism is invested in promoting
chaste, middle- and lower-class, reproductive sex partnerships because they create stable 
worker/family units that are dependable and have ever-increasing numbers of consumers. 
Capitalism, though, is not invested in sexual pleasure that neither creates new consumers 
nor new products; sexual pleasure only distracts the buying public from capitalist urges. But Foucault notes that “[i]f sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, 
nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the 
appearance of a deliberate transgression” (History of Sexuality 6). Like Foucault I am 
interested in how “sex is ‘put into discourse’” (History of Sexuality 11). And this 
dissertation analyzes how clothing can help us to understand that these “good” girls have 
queer sexualities that have either been overlooked altogether or mislabeled as exemplary 
chastity or its denigrated kin, frigidity.

Most people understand “queer” as a derogative adjective or noun to be used 
when referring to drag queens, trannies, fags, dykes, feminine boys, and masculine girls. 
But in the late 1980s and 1990s, homosexuals began to reappropriate the term, and it is 
now popularly associated with the Gay Pride Parade call to arms: “We’re here. We’re 
queer. Get used to it!” Although Queer Studies is now an established field in academia, 
most scholars misunderstand the field’s parameters, limiting it to the study of non-
heteronormative sexualities. In this project, I use queer as a verb—as in to queer heterosex
tual women’s sexuality—which begs the question: How can heterosexual 
women be queer? Because the sexual norm is constructed as heterosexual—and therefore 
invisible—characters can be queer not only for engaging in “Bad” sexual behavior but 
also for recognizing and articulating their own “Good” sexuality. As Michael Warner 
states in The Trouble with Normal (1999), “‘queer’ gets a critical edge by defining itself
against the *normal rather than the heterosexual*” (xxvi, emphasis mine). Nevertheless, I am not trying to promote the universality of sexuality as, ipso facto, queer. Nor am I trying to “expose” the historical equivalents of today’s supposed moralists who condemn “perverts” for homosexuality, feminism, etc. while privately engaging in pornography, sex toys, adultery, and so on.¹⁰ I do not seek to expose sexual hypocrisy. I do however, like Warner, find troubling and inherently hypocritical the idea that sexuality has only one normal expression. I am equally uninterested in promoting queer heterosexuality as an antidote for those who claim to be anti-queer. Instead, I want to illustrate that we have misunderstood the chaste characters of nineteenth century marriage plots as sexually proper, but this misunderstanding can be remedied through an analysis of the women’s clothing that queers the idealization of romantic, heterosexual marriage.

Fashion is one of the most expressive and constructible forms of human subjectivity. People use clothing to attract visual approval, just as they are attracted by the clothing they appreciate seeing on others. Although emotional love is most commonly associated with the heart and sexual love with the genitals, both types of love begin in the eyes. Sensual gratification—vexingly elusive in courtship—is rooted in the senses. Touch. Smell. Taste. While unmarried couples in the nineteenth century were not allowed to touch, sniff, or taste one another in private much less in public, they might freely indulge in sight during courtship. The long nineteenth-century marks the heyday of British marriage plots where lovers primarily view each other in their best clothing. In these texts—written in an age before compulsory coeducation or a sexually mixed workforce—the sexes primarily mingle at church or at home. Lovers gaze on each other during the quiet observation of religious beliefs or under the watch of family members.
Wit and clothing are displayed, and romance blossoms. Religion, sexuality, and clothing are crucial to marriage plots—both inside and outside the walls of a church—because women’s clothing combines religious and sexual discourses in its cut, fabric, and accessories.

Today many evangelicals exhort us to return to the roots of traditional, Christian marriage. Yet, following the rise of Christianity and through the Middle Ages, the Church of Rome preached celibacy as preferable to marriage because all worldly interests were considered sinful, including husbands and children. The Church did concede that sexual relations—if one must—should occur within marriage in order to save oneself and one’s progeny from hellfire. Theodora A. Jankowski notes that it was not until after the Reformation that marriage became the ideal. Celibacy, in turn, became increasingly viewed as unnatural. In rejecting what was coming to be seen as “natural” feminine roles, celibate women were considered self-indulgent rather than pious: “The queer virgins . . . are those who confound the sex/gender system not by trying to be men, but by not being ‘women’” (Jankowski 12). The newly established Church of England tried to shake off the Catholic mistrust of sexuality while continuing to view sexual relations between spouses not as mutually satisfying but rather as a means toward an end: the fulfillment of one’s obligation to family, state, and religion through the production of heirs. But the Authorized King James Version of the Bible, first published in 1611, retains a fair portion of Catholicism’s views of sexuality. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is understood as Christian reinterpretation of Mosaic law, Jesus exhorts his followers that man is guilty of adultery if he “looketh on a woman to lust after her” (Matthew 5:28).
Although the passage does not specify the type of woman one should not lust after (e.g., the tenth commandment specifies not to covet your neighbor’s wife), it can be interpreted to mean that sex becomes sinful whenever one feels lust; therefore, even if one desires one’s own wife, one has sinned. Unsurprisingly, the possibility that a woman may experience lust is not addressed.

While religious discourses argued that lust-less marital sex could protect men from sin, science asserted that both husbands’ and wives’ sexual drives were crucial to reproductive sexuality. Prior to the eighteenth century, the best medical opinion was that women were impure copies of men, and their sexual organs were simply inverted male organs. Therefore, throughout the early modern period (roughly 1500 to 1800 AD), women’s sexual desire and pleasure were cultivated within the marital bed, as many believed that female orgasm was as necessary for conception as male orgasm. Because reproduction was understood to be the primary reason for intercourse, it was common amongst the lower classes for sexual relations to commence at betrothal and for marriage ceremonies to take place after proof of pregnancy, if at all. Once the woman had proven herself capable of producing heirs, many poor couples simply avoided what was seen as the unnecessary expense of religious rituals and instead set up house together without the formality of a wedding ceremony. Cohabitation socially legitimized the union and their children, especially since the Church and state recognized the free exchange of consent as marriage. Isabel V. Hull notes that late into the Enlightenment period “the mature sexual drive was seen as crucial to the development of the useful citizen. Sexual maturity not only marked the completion of the individual, it actually caused it” (90). Note that she mentions only the mature sexual drive, not the marriage of two individuals. Similarly, the
OED still defines consummate as both “To complete marriage by sexual intercourse” and “To bring to completion or full accomplishment; to accomplish, fulfil, complete, finish.” Thus, consummate brings together not only the idea that valid marriages are sealed by (heterosexual) intercourse but also that once consummation has been achieved, the couple is complete. Their goal accomplished, they are independent adults.

Capitalism opened the possibility that a couple’s future wealth was independent of whatever land was passed to them from their parents. John Boswell observes in Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe (1994) that “heterosexual marriage . . . has been in most premodern societies primarily a property arrangement” (32). These marriages promoted the family’s interests through the acquisition of goods and heirs, meaning that acquiring a spouse whom one liked or even loved was more a happy accident than a realistic goal. Boswell observes that premodern marital love “was not conceptualized as romantic love in a modern sense, but was more like friendly, parental, or sibling relationships” (39). Leading up to the nineteenth century, people believed friendship between spouses—if there was any—should be developed after the wedding, not impel its inception. With capitalism came the possibility of creating one’s own financial future by bettering one’s prospects on the commercial market. As more and more Britons looked to speculative trade rather than inherited property as their main source of future income, couples gained greater freedom to choose their own spouses. They had less incentive to maintain obsequious family relations, much less wait around for their elders’ deaths in order to gain financial and, consequently, sexual independence. If land and wealth consolidation were no longer the sole route toward financial security, marriage
could serve other needs. E. J. Graff observes in *What is Marriage For?: The Strange Social History of Our Most Intimate Institution* (2004) that

> With capitalism, marriage stopped being the main way that the rich exchanged their life’s property, and that the rest of us found our life’s main co-worker. That change—the death of the ‘traditional’ marriage, which had dropped ill in the mid-eighteenth century . . . was so dramatic that it set off changes in every other philosophy of marriage: what makes sex sacred or even acceptable; . . . and how important it is to consult your own heart. (xiii)

With the diminishing emphasis on already established economic portfolios in favor of the promise of capitalist success, women began to gain romantic and sexual autonomy. These new social arrangements stressed emotional compatibility in marriage, creating questions for the couple and their families as to what route one should follow when seeking a marital partner. If marital decisions are based on personal desires, not on familial duty, how should a man choose the proper wife? Since women are not allowed to instigate courtship, how does a young woman market herself as a wife? If lovers are now inclined to base their marriages on specious “emotional” needs, how does the couple protect its future financial interests?

In the eighteenth century—as the legality of marriage was restructured to protect familial wealth against unsanctioned love matches—these questions were hotly debated in popular literature and in the courts. Although canon law had outlined practices that ensured ecclesiastic recognition of one’s marriage, few had the time, money, or desire to follow through with all of the dicta. To prevent what was perceived to be sexual depravity, the church and state recognized most marriages in which promise or mutual consent could be proven. Additionally, the Church lacked reliable records of citizens’
marriages. This lax state of affairs fomented political action following public pressure over fears of secret marriages, bigamy, and the rich being “preyed upon” by both male and female social climbers. Daniel Defoe dramatizes this lax state of affairs in *Moll Flanders* (1722), in which the title character knowingly enters into polygamous marriages to avoid penury. The novel highlights how the heroine exploits the value of clothing in order to impress upon eligible men that her wealth makes her a viable candidate for marriage. Moll can only “sell” her virginity once (making a rather poor trade with the perfidious elder brother), yet she is frequently estranged from her husband(s) and, therefore, needs to convince potential marriage partners that although she is no longer a virgin, she has nonetheless been chaste. Certainly Eva Maria Stadler’s assertion that “clothing in *Moll Flanders* is always viewed as property rather than fashion” (24) is valid. However, Stadler glosses over the fact that Moll uses clothing to create the appearance of chastity (i.e., widowhood), which is arguably the most valuable piece of property she owns in a patriarchal marriage market. So while Defoe never seems to consider Moll’s clothing as either fashion or as a tool to express her sexually scandalous behavior, by depicting Moll’s exploitation of the appearance of wealthy widowhood, he draws attention to everyone’s financial vulnerability on the marriage market.

Female characters’ multi-layered garments of rich materials reinforce how the upper-classes dress female virginity to preserve and consolidate wealth through marriage and legitimate heirs; lower-class characters’ dress symbolizes how they lack such protection. Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) critiques female servants’ vulnerability to squires waiting for their families to arrange their “merger” marriages by dramatizing how Mr. B feels increased license to molest Pamela when she dresses not in his mother’s
hand-me-downs but according to her own social class. The clothing of a lower-class, rural female connotes a sexually available woman, since a woman with a poor father may only marry a poor man. Without a patriarchal inheritance to protect, her virginity is understood by Mr. B as meaningless. But by protecting her hymen, Pamela (re)fashions herself as a potential marital partner. Pamela’s many costume changes reflect not only her desire to safeguard her chastity until marriage but also her anxieties about dressing properly in order to be considered eligible for Mr. B’s future spouse. Accordingly, a heroine’s clothing not only can improve as she rises to the upper-class through marriage, she can also be stripped of her finery following a loss of chastity. In Richardson’s Clarissa (1747-48), for example, the title character’s continued financial security is closely associated with her virginity. After being raped by Lovelace, Clarissa is forced to sell her petticoats, rings, etc. in order to secure a sanctuary for herself. Without a hymen or a husband, she cannot appeal to male protection and must provide for her own needs; therefore, she is forced to sell her clothes—the only wealth she owns independently. Clarissa’s increasingly plain and tattered outfit is directly tied to her loss of virginity, displaying sartorially her dwindling wealth and, thus, social standing.

Three decades after the publication of Moll Flanders, Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1753 established the following guidelines to protect the wealthy from social climbers such as Moll:

. . . [firstly, ] only the church wedding, not the verbal spousals, was legally binding, so that a prior oral contract was no longer a cause for the annulment of a later marriage in church; secondly, all church marriages had to be entered in the parish register and signed by both parties; thirdly, all marriages which occurred at times or in places defined as illegal by the 1604 canons were now also declared invalid; fourthly, no marriage of
persons under twenty-one was valid without the consent of parents or guardians; and fifthly, enforcement of the law was transferred from the feeble control of the Church courts to the secular courts, which were empowered to impose up to fourteen years transportation on clergymen who disobeyed the law. (Stone 35)

Opponents feared the Act would result in “flight from marriage, declining population, increasing fornication and illegitimacy” (Lord 8). Formerly,

[a]s the Anglican Church tightened its grip on society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both the laity and the clergy came increasingly to regard the wedding in church as the key ceremony, but the civil lawyers who ran the courts continued to recognize the spousals before witnesses. [. . .] If followed by consummation, . . . it was legally binding for life. (Stone 32)

A gradual rise and then sharp spike in illegitimacy at the end of the eighteenth century could be seen to validate these concerns. After 1754, once only those weddings that followed the Act’s guidelines were legally acknowledged, female premarital chastity became crucial to survival. A woman needed to secure marriage before she lost her virginity; otherwise, neither her family, nor the Church, nor the law could provide succor.

Fashion refers not only to clothing but also to changing social or cultural ideals. Following the French Revolution, the English dressed conservatively in an effort to distance themselves from aristocratic (and sexual) excesses and from the abuses of the ancien régime, or monarchical and patriarchal power. These democratic and rational ideals are reflected in the changing styles and signification of sartorial discourse within literature. Earlier romances typically involved an extravagant, courtly world where a chivalrous hero pines for and attempts to rescue a beloved who has already been
“promised” to another suitor or “given” to a husband by her father. I begin this dissertation with Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), because the novel, by conceding some sexual autonomy to the upper-class heroine, reflects a change in English post-Revolutionary ideals. In the late-eighteenth century, more and more novels work to democratize courtship by killing off the mercenary fathers (and mothers) who are angling for religious or capitalist power. Without a family to dictate the terms of her marriage, the heroine’s chastity becomes a “road block” that the hero must overcome with affection. Accordingly, the heroes and heroines in these marriage plots are frequently orphans, evidencing the increasingly popular idea that courtship and marriage should be less about familial obligations and more about love.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the English continued to distance themselves from expensive (and excessive) international fashion by adopting a relatively inexpensive national fashion. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism shifted the face of fashion from “expensive, exclusive and Paris-based, to . . . cheap, popular and London-based” (McKendrick 43). The plainness of British garments brought together the contradictory ideals of capitalist reserve and religious anti-materialism. “From the bourgeois point of view,” Erin Mackie observes, “good taste emphasizes modesty, restraint, practicality, and decorum in distinction to bad (aristocratic) taste corrupted by ideologically retrogressive qualities of personal ostentation, irrational excess, arbitrary election, and libertine abandon” (20). The subjective nature of clothing came to the forefront in the nineteenth century, when most middle-class women’s clothing was no longer primarily utilitarian. The middle-class was becoming larger and economically more competitive due to the drastic drop in the cost of textiles—especially since the
spinning and weaving of cotton cloth was one of the first industries to become mechanized, and the traditionally male trade was taken over by cheaper, female laborers. As cloth became less expensive, more people could purchase fabric of better quality and in greater quantities than homespun. Additionally, the English were intrigued by the German philosophers such as Johann von Goethe who were writing about how to quantify color and hypothesizing about the emotional cadence of the hues of the rainbow. With the improvement of dyes that could create more vibrant colors, it was also determined that these more colorful—and hence more emotional—clothing was more naturally feminine. These factors combined so that British women of all but the lowest classes were able to own more clothing, through which they could express—scientifically and philosophically quantified—subjective states.

While aristocratic ostentation no longer had the fashion market cornered, male capitalist prowess could be displayed on the female body, leading, ironically, to the stereotype that fashion was solely (clearly, defamatorily) a female pleasure. Although modesty, practicality, and decorum were ideals extended to middle-class women, in his seminal *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930), J.C. Flügel laments the “The Great Masculine Renunciation” when “Man abandoned his claim to be considered beautiful” (111). Flügel notes that following the French Revolution, a British man’s clothing “symbolize[d] his devotion to the principles of duty, of renunciation, and of self-control” (113) and argues that “the Great Renunciation was confined to one sex [male]” (115) because men were more affected by the “social and political influences” (116), overlooking a similar movement in women’s clothing. Although women continued to be *more decorative than men*, their clothing became significantly less ornamental than that of previous
generations. This “Great Feminine Renunciation” has been largely ignored, perhaps due to the popularity of discourses concerning the naturalness of women’s love of finery, and decorative clothing’s practical purposes for women. Mary Poovey in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984) argues that the “injunctions against finery in dress and the acquisition of feminine ‘accomplishments’ were unlikely to help any young girl (or her parents) compete in what had become a highly competitive marriage market” (xi). Flügel, therefore, fails to recognize the role of women’s clothing on the marriage market when he argues that English women evidence “(passive) exhibitionism to (active) scoptophilia (erotic pleasure in the use of vision)” (118), not considering the possibility of (actively) modest exhibitionism. Flügel argues that modest clothes erase differences not between all humans but *between men*, implying that only male modesty is negative (takes work) in its pursuit of social and political power. If modesty “is itself in all cases a negative rather than a positive impulse[, i]t bids us [sic] refrain from certain actions in which we might otherwise be prompted to indulge” (Flügel 54), then modesty in women could be a bid for a measure of social and political influence. Women are, perplexingly, (passive) exhibitionists even when (actively) dressing modestly. Although modesty is more commonly associated with women, Flügel’s argument reveals gendered biases that women are *always already* passive exhibitionists. Perhaps his assertion rests on the premise that, following the French Revolution, only women exhibited their clothing and only men gazed on female sartorial *display* for erotic pleasure. But, as women’s clothing became more and more modest over the course of the mid-nineteenth century, the increasing layers of petticoats, long sleeves, and shawls emphasized domestic investment
(through sewing and [re]production) and, paradoxically, the heightened sexualization of women’s clothing.

Up to and throughout the first decades of Queen Victoria’s reign, marital and political changes continued to affect the fashioning of women’s sexuality. Long seen as “tyrannical and oppressive” (Lord 8), Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1753 was largely repealed by the Marriage Act of 1823, which retroactively legitimized all clandestine marriages. Thirteen years later, The Marriage Act of 1836 established an exception for the growing numbers of Protestant non-conformists and Catholics to marry in their own churches. This Act removed the Church of England’s monopoly over religious services and provided that “purely secular marriages could now be performed in the registrar’s office. With this Act, citizens had a choice of religious or civil marriage” (Lord 10). The result was a leveling of the English marital playing field. Regardless of creed—or lack thereof—you could marry in your own place of worship, even if you “worshiped” the law. The Reform Act of 1832 widened the vote to include upper middle class men, highlighting gender inequality, especially once the 1851 census revealed that there were many more women than men in Britain, making the argument that women were represented by their husbands’ votes increasingly ludicrous. What to do with these “Redundant Women” was hotly debated as the “Woman Question,” catalyzing political and social reform for women. In 1859, the same year Adam Bede was published, the Langham Place circle was established, and the organized women’s movement began. Nevertheless, the natural role for a woman continued to be popularly conceived as wife and mother. To solve the Redundant Women “problem,” solutions such as polygamy and
forced emigration to the colonies were suggested. Married women were the only women welcome in England. So while progress was being made toward increased equality for religious followers, agnostics, and all men under secular law, women’s inequality seemed ineradicable, especially if she was unmarried.

While women of the mid-nineteenth century competed to secure a husband or tried to figure out how to survive without one, marriage became romanticized as an emotional refuge that could be achieved through careful dedication to chastity. Western culture’s apotheosis of love as the alpha and omega of marriage tends to obscure the historical fact that couples who married only for love (i.e., did not marry for mercenary, social, and political reasons) were understood to be lacking common sense, to be crazy or bewitched, or—possibly the most damning—poor. Couples surely hoped that love would continue to develop during marriage, but their primary consideration before marriage was pooling an appropriate amount of resources to establish their comfortable and profitable capitalist partnership. But capitalism also promoted the idea that successful men could afford to have their wives stay home and attend to domestic matters. The idealization of women as overseers of domestic concerns—material, social, and filial—highlights their financial, social, and familial vulnerability in mid-century England. Women were not only denied access to independent participation in the capitalist market, they also were no longer considered to be valuable contributors to the family economy through either dowry or remunerative work. Nevertheless, the family’s financial stability depended on female—not male—chastity. In The Language of Gender and Class (1996), Patricia Ingham observes that there is
a dominant or ‘core’ meaning for a ‘womanly’ or conventionally feminine Victorian woman as including middle-class status, sexual purity and selflessness. Secondary features are moral and emotional refinement, maternal and domestic skills, and submissiveness. By contrast the ‘fallen’ woman in this period suggests a combination of low-class status, sexual impurity and ineradicable guilt. (177)

We can deepen Ingham’s analysis by applying her categories to clothing. Chaste clothing illustrates a “womanly” capitalist performing in a sexual economy, while unchaste clothing represents “fallen” sexual and capitalist prodigality. Tied to the home and without the protection of their male partners (at least during the daytime), “womanly” women were responsible for the entire family’s respectability, both in deed and apparel.

Novels taught sexual and sartorial economy to middle-class women, stressing middle-class modesty as morality. As Anthony Trollope observes in “On English Prose Fiction as Rational Amusement,” eighteenth-century authors Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding “describe coarse things in coarse language, and are not in accordance with the tastes or with the sympathies of the [Victorian] age” (101). As tolerance for coarseness—or directness—diminished, understanding a novel’s subtext became more important. Proper Victorian women were promoted as being the chastely-dressed / sexually-chaste winners of love matches. This change is reflected in the semiotics of sexual and sartorial frugality that became de rigueur in the mid-nineteenth century—a woman’s clothing became metonymic for her marriageability. A character’s chaste or proper clothing (read: plain and simple) came to represent her physical chastity and, hence, moral superiority. To name just one example, in Charlotte Brontë’s 1847 novel Jane Eyre, Jane’s sartorial “plainness” is stressed as one of the most important reasons why she is a better marital partner for Rochester than Bertha Mason, Celine Varens, or
Blanche Ingram. This trope gained in popularity throughout the century as the attention to
detail in novels increased, culminating in the mid-nineteenth century marriage plot’s
dense descriptions of female sartorial and sexual repression. However, these marriage
plots paradoxically obscure women’s sexual agency while displaying their bodies to the
gaze of male characters and also—by serving as models of proper sexuality—to the
readers. George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859) was published at the apex of popularity for the
sartorially and sexually modest protagonist. But my reading of Dinah Morris’s plain and
simple clothing reveals how her sexuality is palimpsestic; her chastity is retroactively
established through marriage.

The mid-nineteenth century also saw the legal concretization and intensification
of chastity’s double standard. In *Marriage, A History* (2005), Stephanie Coontz recounts
a ceremony used in medieval times to establish grounds for divorce: “Wise” women from
the community were segregated with a man accused of impotency. If after several days
and nights the man failed to produce an erection, his wife could be granted a divorce
(Coontz 108). Leaping forward several hundred years, John and Euphemia (Effie)
Ruskin’s unconsummated marriage provides an excellent counter example of how sexual
politics had changed. As male sexuality and heterosexuality continued to be considered a
medical and political given, the female sexual body came under greater scrutiny. Ruskin
was not asked to prove his impotence by an inability to respond to erotic stimulation.
Instead, a professional medical doctor verified their unconsummated marriage by seeking
an intact hymen instead of an unresponsive penis. The cause-and-effect is obviously
flawed. Hymens can be broken by activities as commonplace as horseback riding;
therefore, verification which focuses exclusively on this one flap of tissue is dangerously
uninformed about women and their bodies. Astonishingly, Effie retained her hymen after six years of marriage and twenty-six years as an active woman on this earth (Rose 86), and the Ruskins were granted an annulment in 1854. If Effie’s hymen had been broken at some point in her life, the Ruskins, like any other English couple prior to 1857, would have had three options open to them by which to terminate their marriage. If you could prove your spouse to be too closely related, insane, impotent, etc., you could divorce a vinculo matrimonii and remarry, but your children became illegitimate. If adultery, sodomy, or cruelty was proven, you could divorce a mensa et a thoro, after which you were allowed to separate but not remarry. Hazel D. Lord, Senior Law Librarian at University of Southern California Law School, clarifies that the Church of England only dissolved those marriages deemed invalid from conception, since “[t]he ecclesiastical courts . . . had no authority under canon law to grant a divorce in terms of making a decree dissolving a valid marriage. Nonetheless, they could grant decrees of nullity, decrees for the restitution of conjugal rights in the case of desertion and decrees of legal separation” (13). Therefore, the third type of divorce available was a Parliamentary divorce, which combined separation via a mensa et a thoro plus a lawsuit to prove your spouse’s adultery. This type of divorce came with the added benefit that you could remarry and your children remained legitimate. But this divorce was very expensive and time consuming. One had to be well connected and wealthy, and after handing over their worldly goods at the altar, most women were neither. Daniel Pool, author of What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew (1993), acknowledges that “of the ninety parliamentary divorces granted before 1857, women obtained only four” (185). Even if a woman had enough funds to sue for divorce, gendered notions of propriety would have
dissuaded her from speaking about the matter, especially to the exclusively male members of Parliament.

The Marriage Act of 1857 widened access to divorce but extended the existing sexism of England’s marital system, contributing to the nation’s disillusionment with marriage itself. This Act decreed that in order to obtain a divorce, a husband need only prove that his wife had committed adultery, whereas a wife had to prove both adultery and either incest, bigamy, cruelty, or desertion. Thirty years later, citizens protested patriarchal privileges in marriage after a wife was forced to return to her husband because law had established that sexual access was unquestioningly taken to be part of the marriage contract, and in claiming his right, a husband might use such force as, but for the marriage, would have amounted to rape. A married woman could not prosecute a husband who forced her by the use of violence or intimidation to have sexual intercourse. Moreover, if she left her husband on these grounds she would be found “guilty of desertion and could lose all rights to maintenance and custody.” The law “could enforce cohabitation and a common residence, for if either party deserted the other without lawful cause, it was possible to force renewed cohabitation by an action for the restitution of conjugal rights.” Disobedience of such a writ was punishable by imprisonment until the guilty spouse promised to comply. The only recourse she might have was to sue in the ecclesiastical courts for separation on the grounds of cruelty. (Lord 47)

Following public pressure, the husband was ordered to release his wife. This verdict caused feminists to celebrate the end of coverture, while antifeminists lamented the death of marriage (Hall 58-59). The following year, the Westminster Review published a series of articles by feminist novelist Mona Caird, questioning “how and why contemporary marriage was a failure, and how this might be remedied” (Hall 35). Even mainstream publications like the Daily Telegraph responded to Caird’s query, publishing a series of
articles entitled, “Is Marriage a Failure?”, which drew “27,000 readers’ letters, the vast majority expressing negative feelings [about their marriages]” (Hall 35). Although much of England was unhappy with its marital lot, “By 1900, only .2% of all marriages ended in divorce” (Lord 17).

Since “irreconcilable differences” would not have been considered sufficient grounds for divorce, the late-Victorians set about finding a way to promote happiness within marriage. One strongly liberal approach looked toward improving marital happiness by promoting women’s sexual equality. Some reformers unabashedly argued that sexual activity need not be delayed for marriage, ironically relying on women being recognized as both sexually active and morally chaste. The Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF), established in 1881, promoted a new type of marriage between friends, which they called free unions. Free unions were seen to be women’s solution to a marriage industry that beckoned them with tales of romance yet represented social, legal, and sexual “slavery.” Although free unions were not illegal, they were viewed with extreme suspicion and fear. When Edith Lanchester suggested that she would like to form a free union, she “was kidnapped and incarcerated [in a lunatic asylum] by her middle-class family” (Hall 60). Although the physicians found her to be quite sane, this case “incited . . . widespread concerns about associating socialism with sexual unconventionality” (Hall 60). The Men and Women’s Club, founded in 1885, provided a forum where women and men could discuss sex together, but it also tried to avoid public opprobrium by being “rather staid in its attitudes to sexual nonconformity, and a little fearful of being connected to scandal” (Hall 41). At the other extreme, Edith Ellis, wife of Havelock Ellis, tried unsuccessfully to foment radical marital change with her
1892 pamphlet, “A Novitiate for Marriage,” in which she “explored a daring analogy between the novitiate nun, undergoing the probationary ordeal to test her sense of vocation for the church, and the young woman embarking on marriage” (Brome 83) and “suggested trial cohabitation to test compatibility and capacity for domestic cooperation” (Hall 59). Many Victorians referred to these marriages not as “free unions,” with the term’s emphasis on freedom or independence within unity, but as “free love,” disclosing a fear (or hope!) that sexual activity would spiral out of control once intercourse was no longer synonymous with marital procreativity. Even the most radical Victorians, though, never lost sight of the fact that “without marriages there would be no legitimate babies and the state (or religion) would collapse for lack of citizens or parishioners” (Graff 7). A woman’s fecund womb, which was celebrated within marriage, quickly became a bane if the she chose a “free union,” because negative social and economic repercussions were compounded once her children provided proof that she had been sexually active without benefit of traditional marriage. Since birth control was illegal, sexually active women—whether married or single—had few means to avoid pregnancy. A group of sexual reformers addressed this conundrum by founding, in 1893, *The Adult: The Journal of Sex*. The magazine eventually broadened its focus from the rights of illegitimate children to include free unions, marriage reform, women’s sexual rights, and the legalization of prostitution (Hall 56).22

Late-nineteenth century marriage plots reflect how reform shifted emphasis away from romanticized courtship and idealized marriage toward equal yet continent partnerships, both inside and outside of marriage. In 1870 Anthony Trollope hinted that Victorian writers were promoting marriage as a reward for female chastity: “That happy
ending with the normal marriage and the two children,—is it the lot of the good girl, who has restrained all her longings by the operations of her conscience, or of the bold, bad, scheming woman who has been unwomanly and rapacious?" (110). Ironically, a deafening silence enveloped the pregnant woman’s body in literature. For instance, in Charles Dickens’s “A Christmas Tale” Scrooge’s niece’s pregnancy is alluded to solely by the fact that she is comfortably seated while the others play blind man’s buff. Her pregnancy becomes present only in absence of activity. Another common “clue” that a character is pregnant is when she laments that she cannot be “seen” publicly. These women’s swelling bodies speak indecorously of allegedly sacrosanct sexuality—the production of legitimate children. Only after a period of “confinement” conducted off-stage may the woman proudly reenter the plot with her child, cleansed of the taint of female sexuality. It makes sense that a culture which denied female sexuality, yet fetishized the production of legitimate children, would have a fraught relationship with the overtly sexualized female body (i.e., the expectant mother).

Twenty years after Trollope’s comment, policing women’s “longings” for marriage had become less attractive to late-Victorian authors, as radical reformers had opened a space where proper women no longer had to deny their sexuality. Thomas Hardy’s Jude the Obscure (1895) focuses on the social and economic repercussions that could be suffered if a couple chose to have children outside of wedlock, since mainstream culture continued to endorse marriage as the proper outlet for sexuality. Nevertheless, Jude and Sue’s radical relationship mimics how, within free unions, “Promiscuity was reprehended and male and female sexuality were still envisaged as respectively active and passive” (Hall 59). Sue’s sexuality can only be understood as femininely passive to a
certain degree. Crucially, she must be the one who decides the couple can have sex but cannot marry; otherwise, their relationship would be just another tale of female sexual exploitation. Sue’s clothing prevents us from misreading her sexual nature as passive or frigid. Instead her fashion signifies that she is a sexual revolutionary.

It is tempting to write off clothing within literature as simply this: whores show too much décolletage, while prudes are demurely covered. Demure clothing = chaste sexuality. Revealing clothing = unchastity. Assumptions about this facile sartorial dichotomy run deep, and as we read we tend not to consider that the language of fashion may communicate something more complex. We continue to respect the illogical connection between dishabille and sexuality—especially in artistic media and even more so when the medium is fictional and, therefore, more easily understood as metaphorically divorced from “real life.” Part of the reason so much attention is diverted toward sartorial symbolism in the nineteenth century is that authors wanted to explore utopian sexuality while needing to avoid offending their reading audience. Fortunately, the sexual reformers had also taken on female dress reform, advocating healthier clothing that correspondingly reflected their more rational approach to sexual relations. Late-nineteenth-century authors relied on their more sophisticated readers’ being able to decipher the sartorial code of sexual “dialogue” that, probably, escaped Philistine contemporary readers but which is now virtually without significance to the modern audience. When we stop hinging meaning on the simple “reveal,” we can discover the complex language of written clothing. In The Fashion System (1967) Roland Barthes opines,
Is there any system of objects, a system of some magnitude, which can dispense with articulated language? Is not speech the inevitable relay of any signifying order? . . . can clothing signify without recourse to the speech that describes it, comments upon it, and provides it with signifiers and signifieds abundant enough to constitute a system of meaning?” (xi)

Take, for example, Flügel’s linguistically communicated belief that: “married women are accustomed to wear more clothes than those who are not married” (62). Given Flügel’s passion to reform men’s clothing by copying the lighter materials and healthier cuts of women’s clothing, it may appear that he is similarly advocating for the reform of married women’s clothes. But he posits that married women wear more clothing than single women, not because they fail to understand that lighter clothes are healthier, but because their “husbands are often not too anxious that their wives should attract attention through the audacity of their costumes” (62). Flügel surmises that these same husbands, though, “might quite well appreciate costumes of equal boldness when worn by other women” (62), revealing his belief that women’s bodies are scopically owned by men. Husbands may scopically devour unclaimed women’s bodies, whereas wives must become “accustomed” to being sartorially protected from men’s gazes other than their spouse’s. Flügel does not mention the items worn by the women; he simply states that the amount of their clothing is determined by what Flügel understands to be their husbands’ reasonable rights and fears. This passage begs the feminist and queer scholar to wonder: Why do husbands “appreciate” single women’s “bold” fashion? How do women dress for courtship and / or marriage? Does a woman’s clothing communicate her sexual desires to other people?
I engage with these questions and many more when discussing the texts in this dissertation. Although I tracked down many clothing artifacts, articles, photographs, etc. when researching this project, I do not refer to actual clothing in any significant manner. I establish the differences between historical clothing items such as veils and cowls, mob and Joan caps, and Liberty and mourning dresses because my goal is to explore how these items signify, not to establish any real knowledge about the clothing items themselves. I researched the signified items that stand behind these signifiers; nevertheless, like Barthes, I believe that “It . . . seem[s] unreasonable to place the reality of clothing before the discourse of Fashion: true reason would in fact have us proceed from the instituting discourse to the reality which it constitutes” (xi). You will not find images of fashion nor extensive discussions on what “real” women wore during these times. Instead, I will illustrate how clothing is the principal signifying language of female sexuality within courtship, and how sartorial chastity articulates sexual purity and marriageability.

My belief that clothing can communicate queer heterosexuality is at least partially rooted in personal experience. One night over drinks, a member of my dissertation committee asked me why a married woman was interested in queer theory. I explained that even though I am straight, I have always talked about sex, told sexual jokes, and unabashedly admitted to desires that may not be considered heteronormative. Now talk, of course, does not make me queer. Nevertheless, I was made to feel queer. I had “slut” and “whore” graffitied on my high school locker, even though at the time I was a virgin in a two-year monogamous relationship. It was not the sex I was (or was not) having that
raised eyebrows but the fact that I *talked* frankly about sex. Theoretical sex. Not the gory details of the latest experiment carried out in the bedroom or car, but the jokes, innuendo, and curiosity that I let leak out in blatant disregard for “proper” feminine silence. Silence always seemed silly to me. I had not yet had sex. But I wanted to know about it. And the quickest way to find out about a topic is to ask around and see if someone else already knows something.

I was not only made to feel queer because of what I said but also how I dressed. Although I sometimes wish I could successfully dress in a manner that communicates radical beliefs, the truth is my sartorial expression tends to be rather benign. I do not glam myself up, and I seem incapable of dressing in overtly political or (de)sexualized ways. I am not a blond, Barbie doll. Nor am I a tie-wearing, jean-cuffed butch. People say I look like a cross between Neve Campbell and Nancy Kerrigan. But one night, as I was pushing my grocery cart across the parking lot, a man asked me, “Are you a lesbian? Do you sleep with women?” As I hurried toward my car, he continued to advance, shouting, “Tell me! I just want to know!” His questions about my (homo)sexuality seemed strange since: 1) I was alone, and 2) I had not been talking aloud about having same-sex desires. Therefore, his comments were clearly not based on evidence I had communicated verbally or sexually. It seems to me, then, that he must have thought he could read my sexuality on my body. I was wearing jeans, a plain t-shirt, and flip flops. Although that outfit seems pedestrian, he must have interpreted it as a refusal to dress in a way that tempts men sexually. I believe I was chased through that parking lot, not because I was dressed sexually or provocatively, but because I was not. Since I appeared *not* to want to court heterosexual attention, this man could not rest until I assured him that I was a
lesbian. Apparently he had not noticed my diamond solitaire wedding band with Tiffany setting—a clear indicator that I am comfortable displaying my heteronormative relationship. But as this experience has taught me, one's intended communication does ensure another's perceived signification. People have the power to (mis)read sexuality according to cultural assumptions about sexualized sartorial semantics. My dissertation seeks to close the gap between intended signification and signified.

Although this dissertation deals with heterosexual women, I believe that one need not reject heterosexuality in order to be queer. Monique Wittig and Michael Warner remind us that, although heterosexuality is the yardstick by which we measure queer identities, by including gender performance it is possible to view queerness as coextensive with—not necessarily predicated on—non-heterosexual identity. Case in point, Warner argues that

Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. *Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time*, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. It means being able, more or less articulately, to challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means, or what the state is for, or what ‘health’ entails, or what would define fairness, or what a good relation to the planet’s environment would be. Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer. (*Fear* xiii, emphasis mine)

I am interested in the way heterosexuality has been largely overlooked as a site of queerness. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Christian belief system
purported that chaste women could be identified by their procreative capabilities and their sartorial modesty. Once fashion became accessible to the middle class during the Industrial Revolution, marriage plots show a fictional trend in which sartorially demure women are rewarded with marriage. These women appear to modern audiences as socially awkward (in their clothing), morally rigid (in their religion), and sexually frigid (and, thus, boring). I demonstrate that not all sartorially and sexually chaste characters are simply orthodox pawns in promoting patriarchy. Some women manipulate chastity to stall until they find a sexual partner with whom they will enjoy an unusual degree of personal agency. These women tend to be (mis)read as models of heteronormativity because their successful marriages obscure their quests for sexual agency as pandering to patriarchal norms. But by paying close attention to their clothing, I will elucidate how these women’s fashion choices slyly yet publicly express their search for sexual autonomy, hence complicating their reputations as analytically and / or sexually barren.

Ultimately, my dissertation draws upon and contributes to feminist and sexuality studies by showing how chaste women do not always represent orthodox religious, marital, or patriarchal ideals. I focus on the authors and female protagonists of four marriage plots: Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859), Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (1928). Although Agnes, Dinah, Sue, and Orlando discuss their sexuality with both their voices and their bodies, the denigration of fashion—because of its association with the feminine—has suppressed explorations of how sartorial semiotics enrich critical analysis. These texts are excellent examples of how sartorial symbolism can redefine interpretations of chaste sexuality.
Now that I have contextualized chastity within contemporary religious, marital, and sartorial discourses (Chapter 1), I will illustrate how each of the above protagonists struggles against sexual myths: Agnes refuses to accept that abstinence is the prerequisite for marriage (Chapter 2); Dinah illustrates how virginity does not equal a desire to become a wife (Chapter 3); Sue exposes how marriage does not save women from prostitution (Chapter 4); and, finally, Orlando critiques the idea that female chastity is natural (Chapter 5). Historical fashion explains how and why these characters grasp at and achieve types of sexual autonomy that may appear orthodox yet are queer.

In the second chapter, “Unveiling Chastity in The Monk,” I establish how Matthew Lewis demonizes, murders, or damns the Catholic nuns and monks that disguise their private sex lives with ecclesiastic garments. That is, until one nun, Agnes, is released from an escalating list of punishments after she publicly unveils her private sexual knowledge by undressing herself to care for her newborn. By ceasing to exploit society’s belief in the representational power of chaste clothing and by claiming responsibility for her sexual lapse, Agnes earns life, companionate marriage with the child’s father, and social acceptance. Her marriage presents the possibility that rational engagement, not repressed abstinence, defines chaste sexuality.

In my third chapter, “Deviant Celibacy in Adam Bede,” I explain why George Eliot’s characters continually wonder about and lament Dinah Morris’s choice to wear the aforementioned “ugly” Methodist cap. Although Dinah has publicly avowed that she wishes to follow a celibate life in the name of God, the townspeople continue to locate Dinah’s barrier to marriage less with her actual religious career than with its symbol—this unattractive headdress. While most critics argue that Dinah is a paragon of chaste
womanhood, my reading uncovers how fetishizing chastity threatens heteronormative ideals. Dinah’s cap illustrates that chastity can be a radical—if not clearly for marriage—choice for a woman.

In the fourth chapter, “The Limits of Fabrication: Free Unions in Jude the Obscure,” I illustrate how Sue’s power over her own sexual life is symbolized in her feminine yet revolutionary attire. By having her convince Jude to enter into a “free union” and live together without the benefit of a wedding ceremony, Thomas Hardy ensures that Sue falls of her own accord. Her sexual struggles show what can happen when civil law and superstitious religion smother affection and strangle reason within companionate marriage: Sue advances from an ideologically radical virgin to a chaste “fallen” woman, only to become a marital sex slave.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, “Conclusion: Pearls of Desire in Orlando,” Virginia Woolf’s title character accepts her magical transition during the eighteenth century from a he to a she “without showing any signs of discomposure” (102), until the moment she dons English women’s clothing. She suddenly “felt culpable; dishonoured; unchaste, which, for one who had never given the matter a thought, was strange” (120). Orlando ties together the changes evidenced in nineteenth-century marriage plots. Her male-to-female “sex change” forces her to adapt to sartorial, sexual, and marital trends, illustrating a radical twentieth-century understanding that these identities represent each time period’s ideological needs, rather than an individual’s desire. She openly critiques the importance of female chastity as fabricated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, yet finds and marries her greatest love during this period.
Within each chapter I will also discuss how the authors’ personal lives intersected with the sexual mores of their era. I believe it is time for literary critics to mitigate Barthes’s treatise in “The Death of the Author” (1968) that “Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (1466). Although I agree that authors speak only with a borrowed system of signs and that significance rests primarily in readers’ reception, we must recognize the interplay between the two. Matthew Lewis’s possibly homosexual—definitely private—orientation not only informs an understanding of why he could not abandon his mother after she bore her lover’s child but also explains in part why Agnes is reclaimed in *The Monk*. George Eliot’s insistence that she was married to a man whose wife was still alive informs her radical philosophies as conservative sexuality. Thomas Hardy’s discomfort with being touched physically, his unhappy marriage, and his intense social and epistolary flirtations, inform the glorification of unwed but restrained sexuality. And Virginia Woolf—long associated with a lesbian lover and the sexual freedoms of the Bloomsbury Group—needs to be reconsidered as an author for whom marriage was an experiment in sexual fulfillment.

Clothing signifies sexuality, both to the authors and their readers. Therefore, I draw on the authors’ personal writings and letters, family anecdotes, and professional articles to illustrate their understanding of how clothing works to highlight gendered sexual identities. While I do not try to argue that personal information is a stable or reliable source for reading literary texts, I believe the authors’ historical contexts and personal backgrounds can enrich our understanding of literary texts.
CHAPTER 2
UNVEILING CHASTITY IN THE MONK

But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry.

--I Corinthians 7:36

Many scholars feel comfortable asserting that Matthew Lewis was homosexual. Perhaps this is due to his reputation of being an effeminate, fashion-conscious macaroni, as Lewis was a mama’s boy who not only took an interest in women’s clothing but also dressed flamboyantly. His first biographer Mrs. Cornwall Baron-Wilson, a friend of his mother, recounts that when Lewis was a young boy, “the discomfited Abigail [Mrs. Lewis’s maid] often discovered . . . him parading before the mirror, arrayed in a long train, and loaded with all the gauze and feathers that lay within his reach” (1:12). And Montague Summers gossips that “Mat attended the mysteries of the toilet, and as she [his mother] recognized, so true was her little son’s taste that she would at once discard a turban, wrap round her a shawl, or alter a jewel upon his suggestion” (204). Lewis also apparently felt entitled to counsel young women outside of his own domestic sphere about how to dress. When his sister, Sophia, penned a mock journal written from Lewis’s perspective, she satirized his outspokenness, writing, “. . . I ventured to lecture
[Lady C——er] a little upon permitting her daughter to wear any dress but white—like to see girls in white—looks so appropriate” (Baron-Wilson 2: 141). It is said that Sophia’s observations of Lewis’s movements and “unspoken thoughts” were so astute that he became paranoid about being closely observed and about the possibility that his character was too transparently obvious to others.28 Since Lewis invested as much attention in the aesthetics of his own dress as he did in others’, he may have been concerned that strangers perceived his clothing as signifying some “unspoken thoughts” about his sexuality.

Before the French Revolution it would have been commonplace for men of Lewis’s class to dress in a decorative manner. Indeed, throughout most of the eighteenth century, the ornateness of both women’s and men’s fashion symbolized their higher class status—and sometimes inherited nobility. But with the rise of democratic sentiment following the French Revolution and during the Industrial Revolution, English masculinity became increasingly synonymous with plain clothing. J.C. Flügel’s coinage, “The Great Masculine Renunciation,” beautifully encapsulates this watershed moment in England.29 To this day, in Britain and elsewhere, men who have not “renounced” and dress “too” fashionably are understood to be feminized by their appreciation of fashion, especially when they wear items that seem too “decorative” or ornamental. People make the epistemological leap that fashionable macaronis, like Lewis, prefer to be sexually active with other men because fashion has become virtually synonymous with feminine sexual display for men. This signification was becoming ever more dangerous in the late-eighteenth century because, as Roy Porter and Leslie Hall point out, “Enlightenment sexual tolerance extended only to heterosexuals” (29).30 Donald Lorne MacDonald
concurs that Lewis’s sexual “discretion paralleled . . . an increasing persecution of homosexuals” (75) and that Lewis’s homosexuality “gave him a vivid sense of the pathology of his society” (59). Since Lewis did not leave any records of sexual relationships with men—indeed, Lewis would have been foolish to leave a written record of desires that could cost him his life—critics continue to read Lewis’s private homosexuality in his publicly flamboyant clothing.

Lewis’s most popular work, *The Monk* (1796), explores the growing divide between private and public sexuality that was compounded by the social imperative toward sartorial chastity developing at the turn of the nineteenth century. Although conduct literature promised that modest clothing signified pure, feminine chastity, most of Lewis’s characters’ clothing publicly cloaks their private sexual knowledge. After the public learns of their private sexual matters, Matilda, Ambrosio, the Bleeding Nun, and even Antonia are demonized and / or dead, while Agnes wins the promise of “happily ever after” through marriage and future procreation. But Agnes, like the Bleeding Nun, has conducted a private affair. Agnes, like Ambrosio and Matilda, has had sex within the grounds of her religious sanctuary. And Agnes, like Antonia, has been raped. Instead of trying to deny humanity’s private sexual nature or to create the illusion that all sexual indiscretions are demonic, *The Monk* uses Agnes’s marriage to radically but realistically legitimate her sexual desires. Agnes’s fate illustrates that Lewis is not a “prude” who advocates blanket punishment of all who engage in “veiled hypocrisy” or suffer from “sexual repression” (521), as Steven Blakemore has argued. *The Monk*’s commentary on contemporary British sexual mores advocates less for increasing punishments than for expanding personal agency in matters of the heart, especially within upper-class circles.
Though at times this message is overtly stated, its full import can only by unveiled through careful analysis of the novel’s subtext, in large part because *The Monk* was published only a few years after Robespierre’s Reign of Terror in France, when the British government was actively censoring and punishing authors who wrote texts critical of established hierarchies. In *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis* (1961), Louis F. Peck corroborates,

[Lewis] wrote in an atmosphere charged with political and religious conservatism and for a public frightened by the French Revolution. And whether or not the desire on the part of the public for purity and virtue was sincere, a revulsion from eighteenth-century coarseness was in progress. Societies for the promotion of morality were springing up; censorship and expurgation were being carried to a point that today seems prudishness. (26-27)³³

If it is impolite or even dangerous to speak directly about sexual activity, how do people avoid punishment or gain recognition for their sexuality—by their private actions or their public clothes? By looking at how characters’ sexual knowledge is unveiled—sartorially and verbally—I will show that although *The Monk*’s narrative seems misogynistic (e.g., “death was a blessing” to Antonia after she is raped), it radically rewards the raped and defiled Agnes with marriage.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his famous 1797 review of *The Monk*, asserts that “a romance [i.e., a novel] is incapable of exemplifying a moral truth” but can “provide pleasure during its perusal . . . To this praise, however, our author has not entitled himself” (186). Regardless of the novel’s questionable morality—and in many ways because of it—the public disagreed with Coleridge’s disparagement of *The Monk*. The mere fact that four legitimate—and an unverifiable number of counterfeit—editions of
The Monk were published within two years attests that the reading public found much pleasure in the novel. Lewis’s close friend, Sir Walter Scott, observed, “The Monk was so highly popular that it seemed to create an epoch in our literature” (qtd. in Maury 6). It was not until after Lewis was elected to Parliament (several months after The Monk’s publication) that the novel’s scandalous nature was “discovered.”34 In order to sidestep prosecution, Lewis “re-edited” the fourth edition (1798) so that “there are no mentions of sexual activity, no ‘on-stage’ seductions . . . , and gone are the descriptions of unclothed female bodies” (McEvoy ix). While these changes did not alter the novel’s plot, they did appease The Monk’s conservative critics.35 Regardless, as Montague Summers points out, “Even a hundred years after it had first appeared, at the end of the nineteenth century, I can well remember that The Monk was spoken of as a lewd book and still regarded with sternest disapproval. [. . .] The Monk definitely took its place with pornography” (213). Reflecting the more lenient sexual mores of 1960s, Peck huffs, “To class The Monk with deliberately pornographic literature is unjust and misleading” (35), and “[t]he charge of immorality . . . was as ironic as it was unjustified, for The Monk is carefully equipped with a two-fold moral lesson: pride is a sin and mercy a virtue” (41). Peck’s assertion draws on the words of Lewis’s sister, Sophia, who, in an effort to rectify her recently deceased brother’s reputation, wrote in 1819, “I think that the most prominent of his good qualities was Mercy. This was the moral of his Monk” (qtd. in Peck 268, emphasis in original).

Although Ambrosio, the Prioress, and Agnes all beg for the mercy to which Sophia refers, only Agnes receives mercy by being reinstated in her community. MacDonald states, “The tragic main plot of The Monk ends with the damnation of the
overreacher Ambrosio; the melodramatic subplot ends with . . . the liberation of a captive, Agnes” (181). Note that Ambrosio is described as an aggressive, cunning “overreacher,” while Agnes’s sexual history of twice plotting to elope with Raymond is erased to the point where she is remembered simply as a victim, “a captive.” Indeed, Agnes’s pregnancy is barely ever mentioned in critical analyses of the novel, even though she actively strives to conceal and belatedly rectify her pregnancy—which is the result of several scandalous and unchaperoned meetings within the convent’s garden—through marriage. And although both Antonia and Agnes lose their virginity against their will, Antonia “could never hope to be creditably established; She would be marked with infamy, and condemned to sorrow and solitude for the remainder of her existence” (387), while Agnes’s friends and family support her publicly, and she and Raymond marry. In this chapter, I will explore why Agnes’s unorthodox sexuality has been strangely overlooked by critics and how she becomes the unconventional female protagonist of *The Monk*’s marriage plot.

Written during the backlash against post-Enlightenment and post-Revolutionary dissipation, *The Monk* discloses Lewis’s distrust of conservative discourses on sexuality. To this day, though, debates over sexual immorality in *The Monk* reveal a misogynistic sympathy with and anger over Ambrosio’s inability to resist Matilda’s seductions. For instance, Lewis’s most recent biographer, David Lorne MacDonald, argues that *The Monk* “thematizes the principle of linear progression in the image of the striptease” (125), focusing on the scene where Matilda bares her breast to Ambrosio and where Matilda enables Ambrosio to spy on Antonia with a “magic mirror” as she undresses for her bath.36 MacDonald’s assertion that these two “striptease” scenes drive the narrative
negates male responsibility by suggesting men become powerless under female
enticements to sexual action, since “stripping” women inflame Ambrosio’s desire by
revealing their nakedness, even, perplexingly, when they think they are alone. The focus
on Ambrosio’s seduction by Matilda, which, it is implied, leads to the rape of Antonia,
seems to reveal an anxiety on the part of the male critics, publishers, and politicians that
they too could somehow be tricked or bewitched into sin by a woman like Matilda. But,
as MacDonald observes, “The victim of [Lewis’s] mob is not a sexual deviant [like
Matilda] but the Prioress, the agent of a repressive sexual orthodoxy” (80).37 Tellingly,
during the climactic impromptu trial of the Prioress, St. Ursula avows, “Mine is the task
to rend the veil from Hypocrisy, and show misguided Parents to what dangers the Woman
is exposed, who falls under the sway of a monastic Tyrant” (350, emphasis mine). St.
Ursula is popularly understood to be a uniquely British protector of female virgins;
therefore, Lewis’s own concerns about sexuality stem less from the critical obsession
with Matilda’s seductive attractions and more from a personal belief that Agnes is correct
to escape religion’s “tyrannical” advocation of chastity.38

*The Monk*’s condemnation of sexual hypocrisy reflects in part the lessons Lewis
learned from his parents’ unhappy marriage and his own—if not homosexuality—
intensely private sexuality. Lewis’s parents’ marriage, if it was “considered as a sort of
merger, as marriages often were in their class at this time, . . . was a suitable match.
Considered as the love-match sought by Gothic heroines, it seems to have been less
suitable” (MacDonald 3). By the latter half of the eighteenth century, an increasing
number of English citizens—not just Gothic heroines—believed marriages should have a
strong foundation of love and mutual esteem, diminishing marriage’s historical role as a
means to cement familial connections through wealth. Lewis’ mother, scandalously, did not remain quietly unhappy within her “merger” marriage; instead, she had an affair with a musician, Samuel Harrison, with whom she also had a love child. When Mr. Lewis initially discovered the affair, he appeared to be less upset by his wife’s infidelity than by the fact that her lover was a musician (MacDonald 4), illustrating that business-like, upper-class marriages tolerated affairs unless the paramour was of a significantly lower class. Following his parents’ separation, Lewis lived with and was supported by his father, but he remained exceptionally close to his mother, primarily through their voluminous correspondence. In a 1793 letter to his mother, Lewis condemns her desire to return to his father, writing, “I can make every allowance for your intentions and your heart, but that does not prevent my seeing that you have erred in practice, however right you[r] theory may be. […] If I were to declare your conduct blameless and justifiable, I should think the punishment deserved, if my [o]wn Wife [sic] and Sisters fell into the same errors” (Peck 204). Lewis’ mother’s affair seems to have impressed upon Lewis that merger marriages create immoral behavior by forcing one to seek affection outside of wedlock. Lewis’ continuous and close relationship with his mother illustrates that while he did not feel her affair warranted a permanent fall from grace, he also realized that there are social repercussions for sexual improprieties.

As a citizen of the late eighteenth century, Lewis would have been surrounded by conservative discourses promoting the idea that all women—though apparently not his own mother—are innately moral and have an affinity toward “erotic and emotional repression” (Stone 679). At the same time, fashion discourse was moving away from seeing decorative clothing as a universal class privilege and toward viewing ornate
fashion as a sign of vulgarity and femininity. Properly feminine women, though, repressed their desire for ornamental clothing by dressing chastely and modestly. Dr. John Gregory spells out, in his posthumous *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), a typical argument for simplicity in dress:

A fine woman shews her charms to most advantage, when she seems most to conceal them. The finest bloom in nature is not so fine as what imagination forms. The most perfect elegance of dress appears always the most easy, and the least studied.

Do not confine your attention to your public appearances. Accustom yourselves to an habitual neatness, so that in the most careless undress, in your most unguarded hours, you may have no reason to be ashamed of your appearance. – You will not easily believe how much we consider your dress expressive of your characters. (25-26)

While ostensibly trying to assist his female readers, Gregory’s threat is not subtle: “we [men] consider your dress expressive of your characters.”

The narrator of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762) also threatens that a woman’s moral purity, or lack thereof, can be read through her sartorial expression,

I should never praise her [any woman] unless simply dressed. If she only regards fine clothes as an aid to personal beauty, and as a tacit confession that she needs their aid, she will not be proud of her finery, she will be humbled by it; and if she hears some one say, ‘How pretty she is,’ . . . she will blush for shame. (335)

Rousseau implies that a woman should feel shame when her finery is praised *because* it proves that she has unfemininely courted sexualized attention. Similarly, Wetenhall Wilkes’s *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1746) warns young women against the allures of fashion. In the section entitled “A Dissertation on Chastity,” Wilkes posits, “My present Design is to caution you against all Levities of
Dress, Carriage, or Conversation, that may taint, or blemish the Purity of the Mind. […] Therefore be not industrious, to set out the Beauty of your Person; but . . . let your Dress always resemble the Plainness and Simplicity of your Heart” (104, 105). These sartorial discourses reflect a conundrum: Women must research and analyze clothing in order to learn how to dress in a way that appears “least studied” (Gregory 26). Rousseau, though, promises women will be compensated for their efforts, because chaste, “unstudied” fashion creates erotic pleasure for men:

No girl seems more simply dressed, but no one could take more pains over her toilet; no article is selected at random, and yet there is no trace of artificiality. Her dress is very modest in appearance and very coquettish in reality; she does not display her charms, she conceals them, but in such a way as to enhance them. When you see her you say, ‘That is a good modest girl,’ but while you are with her, you cannot take your eyes or your thoughts off her and one might say that this very simple adornment is only put on to be removed bit by bit by the imagination. (356-57)

Accordingly, conservative sartorial advice for women reveals a sexual paradox: Women who seek male attention by wearing revealing, ostentatious, or even expensive clothes and accessories are impure; whereas, women who inflame a man’s imagination and incite male desire by wearing plain clothes are pure.

Conservative clothing helped to establish the growing middle-class’s respectability, but the newfound power to create socioeconomic and sartorial identities also engendered a paranoia that women would use artificial means to entrap men in marriage and by so doing use sex to gain access to men’s money. This fear is manifest in the following Act of Parliament of 1770:
All women, of whatever age, rank, profession, or degree, whether virgins, maids, or widows, that shall, from and after such Act, impose upon, seduce, or betray into Matrimony, any of his Majesty's male subjects by the scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high heeled shoes, etc. shall incur the penalty of the law now enforced against witchcraft and like misdemeanors, and that the marriage upon conviction shall stand null and void. (James 318) 

While fashion scholar and History of Art professor Aileen Ribeiro posits that this Act was only “mockingly proposed” or satirical, Bartlett Burleigh James sneers in Women of England (1907), “the Solons who passed the act of 1770 to lessen the potency of woman’s charms appear to have been utterly oblivious of the important consideration that these do not rest in outward circumstance, but in inward grace” (318). James neglects the cultural importance of fashion during the late eighteenth century; as a relatively new vehicle of personal expression, women’s clothing was, and remains, an important element of sexual attraction and, ultimately, marital negotiations. Regardless of whether the Act was actually proposed, it is evident that women’s clothing is perceived as a means to sexually manipulate men.

Lewis’s disgust with women’s use of coquettish finery is reflected both in personal anecdotes and in his characterization of Antonia’s aunt, Leonella. Baron-Wilson recounts that one evening, Lewis “chose to dilate upon his unconquerable objection to the artificial means employed to heighten female beauty, within hearing of the [Princess of Wales], whose cheeks at the moment were glowing with the vivid tints of Parisian art” (2: 360). Here “Parisian art” refers to the Princess’s rouged cheeks, but the term could also refer to anything obviously contrived in color, complexity, or symbolism. In fact, makeup was not meant to look natural, and the vibrantly rouged cheeks of fashionable women
generated the sobriquet “red maid.” Arguably, the most derided character in *The Monk* is a “red maid,” Leonella, who indulges in make-up, has red hair, and writes in red ink. The prophetic Gypsy warns Leonella to “Lay aside / Your paint and patches, lust and pride” (37). But Leonella ridiculously “affected the airs of a love-sick virgin” over Don Christoval in that “Her fiery locks were always ornamented with a garland of willow” (223), signifying her forsaken love or pretension. Leonella, tellingly attired “in a pastoral dress, held ‘Dontemayor’s Diana’” (203), which, according to Emma McEvoy, is “not something Leonella would be capable of appreciating” (451, n203). Subsequently, Lewis creates the impression that Leonella’s reading materials, her choice of clothing and accessories, and her adoration for Christoval are all pretentious display. Damningly, by the end of the novel Leonella has been duped into a mercenary marriage. In Lewis’s world, women do not entrap men with their Parisian arts but expose themselves as foolishly unworthy of affection within marriage.

In *The Monk*, rather than wealth for marital alliances, clothing symbolizes the authenticity of each character’s sexuality. And while the principal characters’ clothing and headgear—veils and their male counterpart, cowls—deny class distinctions, they are saturated with religious and sexual significance. Capuchin monks, like Ambrosio and Matilda, wear robes girdled by white cords, tied in three knots to symbolize their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Nuns, like the Bleeding Nun and Agnes, wear habits that similarly connote poverty, chastity, and obedience. The characters’ headgear seems metonymic of their ecclesiastic vows. But the historical and critical significance of veils sheds light on how these religious clothing items have diachronically connoted sexual
chastity, marital sexuality, and seductively taboo sexuality. Boswell explains that western use of the veil can be traced to the Romans for whom

The veil . . . was associated either with virginity—a quality expected of the bride but not always of the husband, since marriages were often dynastic or property arrangements and lineage could be reliably traced only by strict control of motherhood—or with the woman’s arrival at a state mature enough to be married. [. . .] . . . the veil was denied to those who were not virgins. (207)

The veil confirms chastity through presence and unchastity through absence. But as long as the couple had exchanged spousals, the woman could retain her veil even after losing her virginity by claiming a priori marriage by consent. Only a non-virgin who had been abandoned by or refused to continue with the man who had biblical knowledge of her body would have been denied the veil, possibly preventing her from ever becoming anyone’s wife. In “The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel” (1981), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick posits that since “Gothic conventions about writing give primacy to surfaces” (260), “the flesh is [not] privileged over the veil as a carrier of sexuality” (261). Sexual experience in gothic novels can be read equally from one’s veil (representation) or flesh (experience). Therefore, literary veils are suffused with sexuality. This is true partly because of the other, apparently opposite set of meanings it hides: the veil that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it, both as a metonym of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified. (Sedgwick 256)

Veils which are derided for repressing female sexuality also call attention to and create desire for these sexually off-limits persons. The taboo intensifies desire.48
In the 1790s the English embraced simple, Greek-inspired clothing which symbolized their rejection of the *ancien régime*’s sartorial ostentation and sexual excesses. Flügel notes that “All artificiality was swept away; the ideal now was to follow Nature. The Empire costumes of the period are strikingly simple, and make no serious attempt to represent the human body as other than it is” (149). These neoclassical white, muslin dresses—worn by young and old, single and married women alike—signified English moral purity and industry (English cotton, not French silk). Yet the dresses’ pleated and loose-fitting high-waists gave all women a look of continuous pregnancy, making such “virginal” dresses perfect vehicles for delaying public recognition of both sanctioned and illicit pregnancy. Now that decorative clothing has become associated with vulgar femininity, undemocratic class consciousness, and homosexuality, plain clothing is promoted as the way to fashion the appearance of chaste (hetero)sexuality. *The Monk* confronts these paradoxes and reveals the era’s anxieties about being less able to read sexuality on the new, democratically clothed, nationally chaste body. While Lewis’s characters do not dress in Greek-inspired clothing, their plain, amply cut robes and habits are manufactured in a way that could enable the wearer to disguise pregnancy even as the clothing’s chaste signification denies the possibility of procreative activity. And the characters’ veils and cowls inflame desire despite—or, more tantalizingly, because of—the sexual taboo associated with and the secrecy promised by those garments. The gaps amongst the characters’ chaste clothing, their sexual activity, and their social identities underscore how appearance does not unequivocally signify chastity or celibacy.
The Monk fits within the Romantic era’s adoption of clothing—sometimes focusing on veils—as metonymic of both cultural fantasies and the boundaries of human knowledge. In a time of social unrest and epistemological quandary due to the French Revolution and the impact of Enlightenment thinking, conservative sartorial discourses stressed fears of democratic autonomy. Although The French Revolutionaries were recognizable by their republican pantalons (long trousers), they were popularly known as sans culottes (literally, without [aristocratic] knee breeches). And the English conservative press represented the sans culottes as indecently naked, literally pantless. In Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), for example, Edmund Burke uses similar sartorial imagery to lament the passing of the age of chivalry,

But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion. (Reflections 114, emphasis mine)

Burke strives to create sympathy and maintain the establishment’s powers by arguing that the logic of equality will only expose “our naked, shivering nature.” Although Burke was a Whig politician who had supported the American Revolution, he was appalled when the democratic fever fomented by the French Revolution seemed to overturn all traditional power and conventional morality. Burke wanted to maintain traditional hierarchies, along with “the decent drapery of life” and “[a]ll the pleasing illusions.”

Percy Bysshe
Shelley, on the other hand, uses clothing to symbolize universal anxieties about life and our seeming incapability to uncover “the truth.” In his sonnet, “Lift not the Painted Veil,” for example, Shelley argues that “painted veils” “mimic all we would believe / . . . behind, lurk Fear / and Hope” (3-5). Here Shelley posits that the things we believe we know are actually only pleasing illusions that reflect our own fears and hopes about what life should be. Unfortunately, we are trapped in this state of unknowing, since active striving for truth ironically highlights the paucity of human knowledge (“Sonnet” 7-14).

In *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) Shelley writes that true knowledge can only be gained through “death”—a kind of “sleeping” or transcendence through which the mysteries of life are revealed: “Death is the veil which those who live call life: / They sleep, and it is lifted” (3.3.113-14). However, Shelley provides a path for all persons seeking this transcendental knowledge, arguing that “Poetry lifts the veil . . . and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar” (“A Defence of Poetry” 517). Poetry—or literature—defamiliarizes the known world; therefore, literature empowers readers with a greater knowledge and understanding of their actual lives.

In *The Monk* Lewis examines clothing’s (in)ability to consistently signify chastity, exposing the limitations of reading clothing as metonymic of sexual desire, knowledge, or activity. Scenes in which the characters are unveiled deconstruct those discourses that suggest chaste clothing unequivocally signifies bodily chastity and protects women and religious figures from experiencing sexual desire or assault. By exposing the gap between public signification and private sexual knowledge, the characters’ veils and cowls trouble facile correlations between sartorial display and sexual knowledge or lack thereof. As Lewis uses the characters’ clothing to (un)veil their
bodies and their sexual knowledge, conservative sartorial discourse is shown to be
incapable of protecting a person’s physical virginity—much less preventing a person
from gaining sexual knowledge—which illustrates how chaste clothing is best understood
as an unstable signifier of sexuality.

In the novel, monks and women embody similar subject positions, as both are
bound by the imperatives of chastity and sexual ignorance and are socialized to wear
long, shroud-like robes and dresses; however, both groups attract increased scopic
attention despite their identity-obsuring cowls and veils. Women and religious men
were subjugated to moral and domestic surveillance, bound by the imperatives of
celibacy or chastity, and socialized to wear long, dress-like habits or robes. These
similarities may point to a fascination with and a fear of personal, non-procreative
desires. Paradoxically, the fact that lay women and persons who had taken holy orders are
both encouraged to undergird the assumed reality of their sexual chastity by wearing veils
and cowls to create the appearance of sartorial chastity exposes the simultaneous hope
and fear that it may be possible but that it truly is impossible to read private sexual
behavior on public bodies. In the late eighteenth century, “male and female
characteristics, came to be conceived as a basic functional element in the development of
capitalism. Moral balance came to be seen as the externalized union of two
opposites: of the active, aggressive, amoral, male principle, and the yielding, moral,
female principle—master and slave” (Dijkstra 66). If masculinity is “active,
aggressive, amoral” then religious men, like women, become feminized by their moral,
asexual profession. Their clothing ensures that we know sexual inactivity—even in the
name of religion—is not asexual but feminine. Religious men are dressed like women perhaps because “There seems to be . . . no essential factor in the nature, habits, or functions of the two sexes that would necessitate a striking difference of costume—other than the desire to accentuate sex difference themes; an accentuation that chiefly serves the end of more easily and frequently arousing sexual passion” (Flügel 201). Marjorie B. Garber argues in Vested Interests (1992) that “The permeable boundary of the cowl or veil becomes a borderline between denial or repression on the one hand and sexual fantasy on the other, projecting both desire and its interdiction in the same figure” (218). In The Monk, though, religious men and women illustrate how passion is aroused despite—and sometimes because of—the taboo associated with chastity. When Antonia hears that Ambrosio “is reported to be so strict an observer of Chastity, that He knows not in what consists the difference of Man and Woman. The common People therefore esteem him to be a Saint” (17), she exclaims, “Does that make a Saint? . . . Bless me! Then am I one?” (17). The citizens’ veneration of Ambrosio’s sexual ignorance establishes their culture’s fetishization of sexual repression, exposing how a person with “saintly” sexuality not only lacks experience but is also uneducated about basic biology. Antonia, though, becomes sexualized by promoting her sexual ignorance. This contradiction is underscored when the citizens of Madrid cram into the church not due to religious fervor but instead to witness the spectacle of one of Ambrosio’s “coming out” sermons. The narrator relates, “The Women came to show themselves, the Men to see the Women” (7), but all of the citizens gaze on the monk. And after Ambrosio’s sermon “[a] tear stole in silence down [Antonia’s] cheek,” and she laments, “‘Perhaps, I shall never see him more!’” (20, emphasis mine). Ambrosio embodies a similar social position as a
woman: cut off from society and normally shrouded from scrutiny, his public appearance attracts Antonia’s scopic gaze. Antonia’s desire to gaze on Ambrosio is heightened by the very taboo that demands he remain secluded from the world and dress in a way that insulates him from surveillance. Ambrosio’s chaste and isolated state possibly explains why Antonia admits to Lorenzo that she feels “such affection for him [Ambrosio], that I am astonished at the acuteness of my feelings” (20). Unable even to admit to herself that she is attracted to Lorenzo, she freely indulges in her feelings for the celibate monk because his seclusion allows her to view him as a social, visual, feminized entity and not with the masculine threat of sexual penetration.

Similarly, the veil that conceals Antonia’s body and codes her as sexually chaste exposes her for other’s scopic pleasure and even physical assaults. Earlier, when Antonia arrived at the Church of the Capuchins to hear Ambrosio’s fourth public sermon, she was so completely swathed in cloth that as she walks by her future love interest, Lorenzo, only the timbre of her voice establishes her sex as female (9). The narrator relates,

> Her features were hidden by a thick veil; But struggling through the crowd had deranged it sufficiently to discover a neck which for symmetry and beauty might have vied with the Medicean Venus. It was of the most dazzling whiteness, and received additional charms from being shaded by the tresses of her long fair hair, which descended in ringlets to her waist. [. . .] Her bosom was carefully veiled. [. . .] A chaplet of large grains hung upon her arm, and her face was covered with a veil of thick black gauze.

(9)

Her veil, which is noted at both the beginning and end of her sartorial introduction, underscores how chaste clothing sexualizes and, thus, feminizes her body, which was earlier understood to be neuter. Her “struggles” with the crowd have “deranged” her veil
and exposed her body, yet her “features” (i.e., her bosom and her face) remain “carefully veiled,” “shaded,” “hidden,” and “covered,” highlighting the public’s anonymous, scopic violation of her body. Antonia’s “thick black gauze” veil ensures she is essentially blindfolded; she cannot gaze back. Now Antonia’s clothing, which outlines “the delicacy and elegance of [her] figure” (9), inspires Lorenzo “with the most lively curiosity to view the face to which it belonged” (9). While Antonia’s veil ensures that “This satisfaction was denied [him]” (9), Lorenzo perseveres in his right to remove her veil, until she finally “was silent, but made no further opposition to Don Lorenzo's efforts, who . . . hastened to remove the Gauze” (11). Lorenzo removes her clothing in public and against her wishes. Here she is physically violated. But Lorenzo is not punished for his actions; instead, he is rewarded when “a Seraph’s head presented itself to his admiration!” (11). While Lorenzo ranks Antonia with the highest order of angels, she pays a price for his apotheosis by having no recourse from being publicly stripped of her chaste garments. Elvira’s efforts to prepare her daughter for the financially-driven marriage market actually prevent Antonia from achieving a marriage based on love and affection. After Elvira asks Lorenzo not to woo Antonia until he has secured his family’s approval of their marriage, Lorenzo acquiesces and (using Burke’s terms) with “obedience liberal,” obeys Elvira’s “power gentle” and “blandly assimilates” to her “moral imagination.” So Lorenzo waits, pines, and pursues Antonia in disguise:

Having thrown her veil over her face, [Antonia] ventured to look out. By the light of the Moon She perceived several Men below with Guitars and Lutes in their hands; and at a little distance from them Another wrapped in his cloak, whose stature and appearance bore a strong resemblance to Lorenzo’s. She was not deceived in this conjecture. It was indeed Lorenzo himself, who . . . endeavoured by occasional Serenades, to convince his
Mistress that his attachment still existed. His stratagem had not the desired effect. Antonia was . . . too modest to think herself worthy such attentions; and concluding them to be addressed to some neighbouring Lady, She grieved to find that they were offered by Lorenzo. (297)

Although Lorenzo respects Elvira’s command not to visit her daughter as a declared lover, his cloaked pursuit, while not protecting his identity, obscures his intentions, allowing Antonia to misread his actions. Elvira’s motivation is explained in that their current financial penury is the consequence of her active sexual desires for Antonia’s father, which culminated in their elopement. Elvira laments that following his death, she was “neglected by most of my own [i.e., her husband’s] Relations, who out of envy affect to doubt the reality of my marriage” (211-12). Prior to the Marriage Act of 1753 families could protect their wealth by exploiting the nation’s lax record keeping and withhold jointure from the widows of clandestine marriages. Consequently, Elvira tries to protect Antonia by teaching her that good female sexuality is ignorant and passive, not informed and autonomous. Accordingly, Antonia’s veil symbolizes her sexual and epistemological repression. She puts on her veil before she will even look out of her window at night (297); whereas, Leonella throws back her veil in public (9); the nuns of St. Clare remove their veils as soon as they enter the church (31); and the Bleeding Nun takes off her veil while alone with Raymond (160). Untutored in the ways of love, Antonia is unable to read or engage in the art of seduction, and she “thought of an Husband with all a Virgin's terror” (260). Because she has been taught that it is immodest to recognize her own sexuality, Antonia cannot allow herself to understand Lorenzo’s (cloaked) desire for her. Therefore, she cannot acknowledge—much less pursue—Lorenzo’s affection. In obeying Elvira, Lorenzo and Antonia unwittingly destroy their honest affection; the lovers’ veils
and cloaks symbolize the taboo against recognizing, much less acting on their reciprocal desires.

Antonia’s superstitious adherence to the veil, which prevents her from acknowledging her affection for Lorenzo, not only fails to protect her chastity but actually contributes to her sexual vulnerability and eventual death. Elvira’s conservative emphasis on chaste clothing and feminine innocence enfeebles Antonia, who cannot protect herself from the sexual dangers of which she is unaware and, therefore, cannot avoid. In addition to blocking Lorenzo’s suit, Elvira has kept Antonia femininely ignorant of sexual matters by making sure that Antonia’s Bible is “copied out with her own hand, and all improper passages either altered or omitted” (260). Ambrosio’s surprise in discovering that “Antonia reads the Bible, and is still so ignorant” (259) forces Elvira to confess that Antonia has not read the Bible, because she “was convinced, that unrestricted no reading more improper [than the Bible] could be permitted a young Woman. . . . Every thing is called plainly and roundly by its name; and the annals of a Brothel would scarcely furnish a greater choice of indecent expressions” (259). After Elvira explains to Ambrosio how deep Antonia’s biblical—and hence sexual—ignorance runs, he attempts to force himself on her sexually, astutely gambling that Antonia’s lack of knowledge will prevent her from articulating why she is “Terrified to the extreme, though at what She knew not” (262). Additionally, Antonia’s censored Bible exacerbates her belief that “the world was composed only of those who resembled her, and that vice existed was to her still a secret” (249). Her ignorance protects Ambrosio from being accused of sexual assault or sinfulness of any kind. Although Elvira is capable of recognizing that “the disorder of her Daughter’s dress” (263) signifies the monk’s
attempted assault on Antonia’s chastity, “[Elvira] was obliged to treat the subject with caution, lest in removing the bandage of ignorance, the veil of innocence should be rent away” (264, emphasis mine). Elvira believes that the veil of ignorance she “paints” for her daughter will prevent Antonia from gaining unfeminine knowledge about human sexuality. This quotation invokes the irresolvable paradox that is central to the veil; ignorance (bandage) and innocence (the veil) are not synonymous, even though Elvira understands them to be. She chooses not to explain Ambrosio’s actions to Antonia because she believes her daughter’s innocence—or ignorance—can only be ensured by the active suppression of knowledge. But since Antonia remains uninformed of the sexual dangers posed by the monk, Elvira’s conservative ideals actually assist Ambrosio in the realization of his salacious designs.53

Antonia’s fate underscores how conservative approaches to morality—which promote ignorance and chaste clothing—actually work to ensure that women can be sexually exploited by men. Upon waking alone and vulnerable in the sepulcher, Antonia tries to protect herself by wrapping her shroud “closely round [sic] her” (382). Yet no mention is made of the cloth impeding Ambrosio’s assault or that it becomes disheveled as he succeeds in “the dishonour of Antonia” (384). This is important because one of the six things required of a raped woman was for her to “exhibit her torn garments . . . to men of good standing” (Pistono 271). Garthine Walker extrapolates that sartorial evidence was privileged in rape narratives because “[t]he sullying of her clothes is itself indicative of a personal violation, for clothes were so often the outward signifiers of individuality as well as status” (Walker 13). No clothes. No identity. No rape. Antonia’s shroud, therefore, shows that by the time she is alone with a man, she is as good as dead; the rape
simply seals her fate. Her destiny is literalized when her body is again violently, phallically penetrated by Ambrosio as he plunges a dagger “twice into the bosom of Antonia!” (391). Ambrosio stabs Antonia because she is no longer ignorant and can now “publish[] his guilt and her own infamy” (387). Crucially, it is Ambrosio’s, not Antonia’s, clothing that is sullied: “the blood sprinkled upon his cloathes [sic], left no room to doubt his being Antonia’s murderer” (393). His stained clothing is both testimony and proof of his culpability, and Ambrosio is “accused of rape and murder” (423). In a culture that deifies the sexual repression of women, to confess to being raped is tantamount to social suicide. Perhaps then Antonia’s earlier promise not to publish being raped reveals less about her desire to return to society than that “knowledge—secret, sexual knowledge . . . was culturally perceived to be exposed by the use of conscious, sexual language—which implicated . . . women and, in its sexualization, would make them speak their own complicity” (Walker 7). Since Antonia does not confess the rape, she maintains a modicum of sexual purity. This is a small consolation. She is passively unveiled to Lorenzo one last time when “the quantity of fair hair fell back which till then had obscured her features” (392). Yet Antonia’s rape has been prefigured in Lorenzo’s dream, when “an Unknown rushes between them” and Antonia’s “white Robe was left in his [the Monster’s] possession” (28). The lovers are separated because the monster—who is, of course, Ambrosio—steals Antonia’s “white robe,” or virginity, not just from Antonia but also from Lorenzo. Since Ambrosio “possesses” her virginity, Antonia “could not have been [Lorenzo’s] Wife, and that hope being denied her, She resigned herself to the Grave” (392). Antonia learns too late—through being
completely unveiled both literally to Lorenzo and figuratively through rape and fatal stab wounds—the inefficacy of sartorial chastity and sexual ignorance.

On virtually the opposite end of the sartorial / sexual continuum from Antonia, Matilda purposely dons a cowl for its illusion of male celibacy in order to seduce Ambrosio. Since Matilda’s sex is initially established as male by both her body-disguising cowl and the male name she has assumed, Rosario, some critics argue that Ambrosio’s desires for Matilda represent Lewis’s own homosexual desires. Admittedly, the narrator reveals that, while still believing Matilda to be Rosario, Ambrosia could “not help sometimes indulging a desire secretly to see the face of his pupil” (43). But it is more compelling to think about how Matilda’s “pretense of celibacy offered the most titillating opportunity for inversion: the scandal of cross-dressing and the scandal of religious impersonation, when present in the same transvestic figure, intensified the libertinism of the masquerade” (Garber 219). But when Matilda’s monk robe and cowl have camouflaged both her sex and her identity, obfuscating whose body has been marked as chaste, Ambrosio feels desire only “sometimes.” Tellingly, it is not until after Matilda forcefully asserts, “I am a Woman!” (58) and unveils her breast to him that Ambrosio is bitten by a serpent. This scene draws on the tale of Christianity’s first fashion couple, in that after Eve convinces Adam to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, they adopt “good” clothes in order to hide their “evil” sex organs (Genesis 3:5-12). Conversely, Matilda stresses to Ambrosio that her education gave her the knowledge that “relieved me from the shackles of vulgar prejudice” (60), following which she “resolved to assume the disguise in which you see me. My artifice was fortunate: I . . . succeeded in
gaining your esteem” (61). After finally learning from Matilda’s unveiled breast “what consists the difference of Man and Woman” (17)—at least in part—Ambrosio is plunged into a battle between “good and evil.” Indeed, Matilda’s male clothing has not only gained her access to a situation where she can evade the injunction that “thy husband . . . shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16) but has also created the perfect opportunity for Ambrosio to embark on a sexual relationship that can never be made public. Therefore, Matilda’s clothing, which has publicly established her as male and celibate, both empowers her to seduce Ambrosio and enables Ambrosio to gain sexual knowledge. Matilda’s adoption of monkish clothing’s chaste signification, thus, creates the opportunity for them to engage in and hide their illicit affair.

Matilda’s pursuit of Ambrosio represents a fear that educated women might exploit the public’s faith in sartorial codes, and thereby emasculate men. In contrast to how Lorenzo removes Antonia’s clothing and exposes her features against her will, Matilda willfully unveils herself to Ambrosio a second time, stressing her seductive sensuality:

Her Cowl had fallen back-warder [sic] than usual: Two coral lips were visible, ripe, fresh, and melting, and a Chin in whose dimples seemed to lurk a thousand Cupids. Her Habit’s long sleeve would have swept along the Chords of the Instrument: To prevent this inconvenience She had drawn it above her elbow, and by this means an arm was discovered formed in the most perfect symmetry, the delicacy of whose skin might have contended with snow in whiteness. Ambrosio dared to look on her but once: That glance sufficed to convince him, how dangerous was the presence of this seducing Object. (78)

It is Ambrosio who passively, femininely, lies on his presumed deathbed as Matilda allows her cowl to fall backward. She draws her own sleeve back. Her lips are coral
colored and “melting,” and a “thousand Cupids” entice from the depths of her dimples. She is a “seducing Object.” Her cowl unveils to Ambrosio the extent to which she is not femininely passive in her sexuality. Flügel argues that disguising head coverings liberate persons to experiment with taboo sexual activity:

> When we wear a mask, we cease, to some extent, to be ourselves; . . . we do not feel the same responsibility as when our faces are uncovered; for it appears to us that, owing to our recognisability and the alteration in our personality \( \text{persona} = \text{mask} \), what we may do in our masked state cannot be brought up as evidence against us when we resume our normal unmasked lives. (51-52)

But Matilda becomes more sexualized as she unveils herself, illustrating that on some level she is neither fearful of detection nor ashamed of her active sexuality. She knowingly and successfully renounces cultural standards of chaste femininity in order to seduce Ambrosio. Other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female characters who willfully don male attire, even temporarily, are usually painted as overly philosophical, sexually promiscuous, lesbians, murderous, criminal, and / or crazy.\(^5\) Similar to revealing at the end that Matilda is a devil, Lewis both reflects and diffuses male sexual anxiety: Real women do not disguise themselves in order to seduce men. A woman like Matilda—who uses clothing to promote her own sexual desires and to cloak her sexual knowledge—is literally satanic.

Matilda’s and Ambrosio’s hidden affair additionally plays to English suspicions that monasteries and convents were hotbeds of licentiousness because it is easier to maintain the illusion of chastity than it is to keep “Unnatural . . . vows of Celibacy” (224).\(^5\) After Ambrosio violates his vows and gains sexual knowledge of Matilda’s
body, “He shuddered at reflecting, that a trifling indiscretion on his part, or on Matilda’s, would overturn that fabric of reputation which it had cost him thirty years to erect” (227, emphasis mine). The value of Ambrosio’s reputation is dramatized when his “Followers” “kissed the hem of his garment” (19), and “whoever became a possessor of a Bead [of Ambrosio’s rosary], preserved it as a sacred relic” (20). Ambrosio believes he “owns” their adulation as he has worked hard to “erect” it over the years with consistent behavior that has “cost” him dearly. After Ambrosio learns that no one is immune to falling to temptation, he chooses to hide this knowledge and protect the “fabric” of his reputation by exploiting the public’s faith in his monkish attire as metonymic of his continued celibacy. In fact, Ambrosio feels that since the “reality of virtue [had been lost], it appeared as if its semblance was become more valuable” (325). And Ambrosio is able to pursue Antonia only “By wrapping up his head in his Cowl . . . to keep Madrid in ignorance that He had broken his vow” (244). Ambrosio’s and Matilda’s sartorial duplicity is problematic because, as Sedgwick observes, “In the Gothic view . . . individual identity, including sexual identity, is social and relational rather than original or private; it is established only ex post facto, by recognition” (“Veil” 256). While Matilda’s devilishly cloaked sexuality is supernatural in origin, Ambrosio’s results from a flawed yet human pride in his chastity; nevertheless, both are equally effective at disguising and thwarting the public’s ability to read their sexual knowledge by virtue of their religious attire. Thus, the erroneous yet uncontested signification of Ambrosio’s cowl and habit make him equal to the devil in his capacity to deceive.

*The Monk* overtly critiques the belief that sartorial codes can reliably signify private sexuality, repeatedly showing “how unjustly public esteem was bestowed
indiscriminately upon all who wore a religious habit” (345) and how “a sanctified
exterior does not always hide a virtuous heart” (346). Matilda and Ambrosio’s cloaked
affair illustrates how conservative sartorial discourses are inefficacious in preventing,
identifying, or even punishing clandestine sexual activity. In the end, Matilda avoids her
greatest fear of “being exposed to all the mortifications of shame and infamy” (428) and
magically escapes her cell after habiting herself “in female dress, at once elegant and
splendid” (427). Stripped of her monkish disguise, the devilish woman now masks herself
as an aristocrat. Matilda’s decorative dress calls to mind the sexual excess associated with
the ancien régime; she escapes in clothing that will finally, and ironically, signify to her
community that she is unfemininely licentiousness.

In contrast to the “studied Coquetry of the Parisian Dames” (130) for which
Raymond only feels disdain, “the graceful simplicity of [Agnes’s] dress” is a crucial part
of what “was requisite to secure [his] affection” (130). But, like Matilda, Agnes has “too
much reason to lament superstition’s influence to be its Victim” (141) and disguises
herself as the Bleeding Nun to effect their elopement. Raymond recalls that when he
picked up his paramour outside the family gate, “[Agnes] was habited exactly as She had
described the Spectre. A chaplet of Beads hung upon her arm; her head was enveloped in
a long white veil; Her Nun’s dress was stained with blood” (155). Since Raymond
expects Agnes to have “provided [her]self with a dress proper for the character” (148)—
and even though “Agnes” remains uncharacteristically silent and motionless during their
dramatic escape—Raymond is unable to see past appearances, and he ecstatically
celebrates their success. However, when the Bleeding Nun visits his bedroom at the
stroke of one a.m., Raymond immediately recognizes that Agnes would never appear
unchaperoned in his private chambers. At that moment, Raymond realizes he has
“rescued” the Bleeding Nun instead of his lover.

Although the Bleeding Nun had flaunted her scandalous sexuality when alive,
Raymond cannot see past her ghostly yet pious appearance to decipher her past, which
prolongs her post-mortem tortures. He recalls that when the Bleeding Nun unveiled
herself to him, “She lifted up her veil slowly. [. . .] I beheld before me an animated Corse.
Her countenance was long and haggard; Her cheeks and lips were bloodless; The
paleness of death was spread over her features, and her eye-balls fixed stedfastly upon me
were lusterless and hollow” (160). Every adjective in the Bleeding Nun’s unveiling
stresses her barrenness. She is an “animated Corse” that is “bloodless” and “hollow.” The
Bleeding Nun unfemininely lifts up her own veil but does not bewitch Raymond with
concupiscent sensuality. Instead, her visage of emaciated death reveals how persons who
conduct concealed affairs increase their odds of eternal damnation. But because her
monastic habit signifies chastity, Raymond is thwarted from addressing and responding
to her sexual past.

The Bleeding Nun’s wound cannot heal—and she cannot be rescued from the
unconsecrated ground of the Lindenberg Hole—until the Wandering Jew closes the gap
between signifier and signified by explicating to Raymond how she acquired her chaste
but ghastly costume. Although Agnes claims “till after her death She was never known to
have existed” (139), the Wandering Jew relates that the Bleeding Nun had “lived at [her
lover’s] Castle several months as his avowed Concubine” (173). While Agnes’s
ignorance of their relationship illustrates how the community actively repressed
information about the Bleeding Nun’s scandalous sexuality, the Bleeding Nun did not
publish her plans to murder her lover in exchange for a marriage proposal from his
brother, Otto. Otto took advantage of her silence by plunging a dagger into her bosom,
creating the ineffaceable wound that stains her habit. Gothic scholar Valdine Clemens
argues that the Bleeding Nun’s gaping stab wound

suggests the universal female ‘wound’ from which menstrual blood flows, the vagina as a sign of women’s biological vulnerability and power. As well, the wound is located on the breast, another sign of female fertility. . . .
The nun’s costume is ‘stained’ with its mark, both in the sense of bearing its ineffaceable imprint, and in the sense of carrying the moral stain or fault that the Judeo-Christian tradition has associated with the female body. (80)

While Clemens’s argument is compelling, it is important to note that The Bleeding Nun’s death wound conspicuously and indelibly stains her habit in a way that Antonia’s similarly placed wound does not stain her shroud. Instead, like Ambrosio’s, the Bleeding Nun’s habit is described as being “in several places stained with the blood” (138). Perhaps the blood stains on the Bleeding Nun’s habit illustrate how, as with Ambrosio, non-monogamous sexuality is equivalent to murder. Their similar stains imply that fornication leads to and exposes one to mortal danger. The Bleeding Nun’s wound’s placement on her breast signifies how her punishment has resulted from the willful exchange of her heart and soul’s peace for transitory, earthly, sensual gratification. Her habit carries the blood stains of infidelity and murder. But because her relationship with Otto was clandestine, Agnes and Raymond cannot decipher why the Bleeding Nun haunts Otto’s house “[d]rest in her religious habit in memory of her vows broken to heaven” (175). The Bleeding Nun’s chaste garments again reveal the inefficacy of relying on clothing as a way to read another’s sexual knowledge. While the Bleeding Nun openly
engaged in a public affair while alive, she is damned to haunt her clandestine lover’s house in her nun’s habit. The ghostly habit provides only tangential proof of her sexual past. Her punishment continues because she hid her romance with Otto, uncannily warning Raymond about the dangers involved in secret affairs.

Agnes and Raymond’s attempts at achieving a socially sanctioned marriage have been blocked by Agnes’s parents, her aunt, the failed elopement / Bleeding Nun fiasco, and, eventually, by her taking the veil. But after meeting clandestinely in the convent’s garden, Raymond sets about securing their marriage by raping Agnes. Raymond recalls that following “the first burst of passion past, when Agnes recovering herself started from my arms with horror,” Agnes berated Raymond, “I looked upon you as my Friend, my Protector: I trusted myself in your hands with confidence, and relying upon your honour thought that mine ran no risque. And ‘tis by you, whom I adored, that I am covered with infamy!” (187). Even though Raymond confesses that he stole Agnes’s honor, her ability to conceive paradoxically brands her as a woman with sexual feelings and establishes the appropriateness of their marriage. Although science had by this time proven that female sexual arousal was unnecessary for conception, female orgasm continued to be linked to conception in the popular imagination. “[R]ape was conceptualized as the tragic antithesis of healthy, procreational sex” (Walker 18); therefore, “Whatever a woman might claim to have felt or whatever resistance she might have put up, conception in itself betrayed desire or at least a sufficient measure of acquiescence for her to enjoy the venereal act. This is a very old argument” (Laqueur 161). But this argument would have appeared legitimate to Lewis and his reading public. Agnes’s pregnancy legitimates her
and Raymond’s relationship according to eighteenth-century procreative theory. Like Antonio, Agnes loses her virginity against her will. And Agnes’s assertion that “I am covered with infamy” recalls Ambrosio’s observation, after he rapes her, that Antonio is “marked with infamy” (387). The difference between their situations is that Raymond wants to and is able to marry Agnes, which will retroactively erase Agnes’s “infamy.” “While it was the duty of a respectable man to refrain from abusing this power, [male] sexual aggression was perceived as normal, healthy, and inevitable. Judges often viewed sexual assaults as little more than regrettable lapses of self-control” (Conley 532); therefore, “Unless she had been the victim of a brutal public assault by a total stranger, judge and jury assumed that the incident had probably been a seduction and that she was to blame” (Conley 536).

One of the most popular sex manuals from the late seventeen through the nineteenth century, Aristotle’s Masterpiece or the Secrets of Generation, reflects the popular belief that “casual copulation and prostitution rarely resulted in pregnancies” (Porter 43).58 Laqueur notes, “The reasons given in late medieval and Renaissance literature for the barrenness of prostitutes are several: excess heat, a womb too moist, and slippery to retain the seed, and the mingling of various seeds, reasons very much like those given by nineteenth-century doctors” (231). Additionally, by the late eighteenth-century, conventional wisdom had come to believe that female sexual desire was oxymoronic, and “sexually aggressive women [were seen] not just as masculine but as hermaphroditic” (MacDonald 77).59 These belief systems illuminate the devil/transvestite Matilda exclamation, “Oh! Since we last conversed together, a dreadful veil has been rent from before my eyes. . . . I lust for the enjoyment of your person [Ambrosio]. The
Woman reigns in my bosom, and I am become a prey to the wildest of passions. [. . .] I must enjoy you, or die” (89). Because Matilda embodies an atavistic view that women have equal if not more developed sex drives than men (Porter and Hall 44, 76), even though she lives to “enjoy” Ambrosio, she does not become pregnant, fulfilling the misconception that casual copulation is sterile. Similarly, since the Bleeding Nun is a publicly avowed Concubine or “prostitute,” it follows that she does not become pregnant. Matilda’s and the Bleeding Nun’s sexual aggressions are realized as their inability to become pregnant, which, when disguised by their religious habits, cements their ability to pass as chaste.

Agnes also tries to avoid public persecution of her sexual past by continuing to wear her habit and veil, thereby “passing” as a chaste nun. But after Agnes has attended confession—where she failed to confess her sins—Raymond’s letter, which “[Agnes] carelessly permitted . . . to fall from her bosom” (45), exposes her carnal activity to Ambrosio and The Prioress. Proof of Agnes’s pregnancy proceeds from her clothing—much as the gaping wound in Bleeding Nun’s habit is metonymic of her perfidious sexuality and Antonia’s punctured shroud is metonymic of her rape. Raymond’s letter, though, is metonymic not of his phallic violation of Agnes but of their mutual “correspondence.” In fact, Agnes’s habit reveals his response to her written plea, “Procure a dispensation from my vows; I am ready to fly with you. Write to me, my Husband!” (190).

But Agnes cannot flee, and their marriage cannot take place, until Agnes takes social responsibility for her sexuality by renouncing the appearance of chaste sexuality. In opposition to Agnes’s earlier “conspicuous[ness] from the nobleness of her air and
elegance of her figure” (45), when Lorenzo discovers her in the dungeon, “He doubted to think her Woman. She was half-naked: Her long dishevelled hair fell in disorder over her face, and almost entirely concealed it. One wasted Arm hung listlessly upon a tattered rug, which covered her convulsed and shivering limbs: The Other was wrapped round a small bundle, and held it closely to her bosom” (369). Although Lorenzo’s use of feminine pronouns illustrates an acknowledgement of her sex as female, Agnes’s unfeminine, disheveled hair and ragged clothing prevents her brother from understanding that she is a “Woman.” Without the social register of elegant, feminine clothing, Agnes cannot perform the gender of “Woman,” and Lorenzo cannot recognize her as such. We later learn that upon awakening in the vault, Agnes originally “wrapped [her] winding-sheet closely round [herself]” (404). At this point, even though she is alone in the sepulcher, she still performs proper feminine modesty. But after she is unable to care for her child and it dies, she recalls, “I rent my winding-sheet, and wrapped in it my lovely [deceased] Child” (412). Not only does her changing relationship to the winding sheet signal maternal affection, it also marks the moment when she rejects clothing’s primary role as modest performance. Clemens argues, “Although Agnes emerges from her descent into this moist and oozing metamorphic tomb/womb to tell her tale, it is not before she herself has degenerated to an animalistic condition, signified by her ‘half-naked’ body” (78). Clemens emphasizes Agnes’s “half-naked’ body” as proof that Agnes regresses to an “animalistic,” non-human by her return to the womb. But this descent actually empowers Agnes to transcend the world of appearances. After learning that maintaining appearances allows sexual tyranny to be perpetuated, Agnes is overjoyed when Lorenzo breaks “the Staple, to which one end of the Chain was attached” (373).
The chain symbolizes the “umbilical cord” that had kept her “chained” to the world where feminine display matters more than reality. Dirty, virtually naked, and clutching the putrid remains of her child, who is the undeniable proof of her sexual activity, Agnes is publicly “reborn” to society. Once she has publicly unveiled her private sexual knowledge, she is released from an escalating list of punishments and earns life, marriage, and social acceptance. By eschewing appearances over truth, she neither dies, like Antonia and Ambrosio, nor is dehumanized, like Matilda and the Bleeding Nun, and is rewarded with marriage and its promises of social acceptance and new life. Agnes is brought forth from this figurative womb, a wiser woman who has rejected the fiction that chaste appearances negate the social responsibility of sexual activity.

Agnes’s voluntary unveiling of her sexual knowledge is integral to her establishment as the socially approved, sexually active wife. Although her marriage to Raymond seems thematically conservative in that it consolidates and ensures the continuance of aristocratic blood lines, it is ideologically radical in that she is neither murdered nor ostracized after gaining—and then trying to hide—illicit sexual knowledge. Agnes reflects how “In the eighteenth century . . . the spousals again became the generally accepted moment at which sexual relations could begin, the marriage ceremony occurring later, often when the bride was quite far advanced in pregnancy” (Stone 629).61 Agnes’s pregnancy legitimizes her relationship with Raymond by authenticating their sexual relationship as productive, not casually barren, and it reflects the reality that at the end of the eighteenth century there was a marked increase in both illegitimate conceptions and births. But, according to Stone, “The rise of pre-nuptial conceptions . . .
represents primarily a shift in community standards of honour; the rise of bastardy represents social disintegration and a collapse of all standards of honour, primarily among social groups too poor to afford or comprehend such things” (630). Therefore, premarital sexuality was understood to be the province of the poor, as classism relegated the preservation of “honour” and “community standards” to the rich. But Enlightenment thinking had led to increasingly liberal views about sexual dalliances, especially amongst the upper classes (Porter and Hall 22-32); nevertheless, the importance of premarital chastity increased along with the wealth of the couple (Stone 504). And, of course, the onus of premarital chastity focused on female virginity, as only her abstinence could ensure the continuation of rightful male inheritance. While Agnes’s rank is unclear, and presumably is not solidified until after she is married, she is related to both national and international aristocracy: her brother Lorenzo is the “heir of the Duke of Medina Celi” (206), and her aunt is the Baroness Lindenberg. Agnes’s relatives would not have condoned premarital sexuality, like lower-class bundling, yet she and Raymond earn a “ceremony performed with all possible splendour and publicity” (418). Therefore, as a wealthy and noble woman who has visibly, and thus unequivocally, lost her virginity, Agnes’s socially condoned marriage reflects a liberal approach to the treatment of upper-class, female premarital sexuality.

Reflecting both Lewis’s personal experiences and the era’s historical context, *The Monk* proposes a more humane approach to treating lapses in female chastity. Agnes’s premarital sexuality not only underscores the misconception that chaste clothing is related to sexual purity but it also reveals how Lewis does not view her sexuality as uninformed, like Antonia’s, nor demonic, like Matilda’s, nor damning, like the Bleeding
Nun’s, nor hypocritical, like Ambrosio’s. Agnes reflects the many women in the eighteenth century who *visibly* lost their virginity before being married, troubling contemporary notions of how sexuality should be rewarded or punished in literature and in life. St. Ursula, the protector of virgins, describes Agnes as “an Unfortunate whose offence was light and venial” (355). St. Ursula represents a voice of reason in a world populated by superstitious and ignorant authority figures, arguing that the most inhumane action is to deny a fallen woman succor if she is, at heart, chaste. In *Erotic Faith* Robert M. Polhemus muses, “with the spread of secularism since the eighteen century, erotic faith, diverse and informal though it may be, has given to some a center and sometimes a solace that were traditionally offered by organized religion and God. *By love we can change the situation*—that sentiment moves people” (1, emphasis in original). Agnes’s situation dramatizes the need for greater social acceptance of non-normative expressions of sexuality between persons who are emotionally compatible. Lewis’s parents’ unsuccessful marriage, his own questionable sexuality, and the political, marital, and industrial climate of the eighteenth century provides context for why the “chaste” character is an unwed mother. *The Monk*’s sexual politics are specific to this historical turning point when sexual politics were becoming more conservative. Agnes is reinstated to society after she stops exploiting society’s belief in the pure representational power of clothing by purposely undressing herself and, thus, taking responsibility for her sexual lapse. By rewarding Agnes with marriage after she removes her own clothing in order to mourn her dead child, *The Monk*’s romantically Gothic narrative celebrates the couple that is honest about their imperfect sexuality. Although some may argue that Agnes represents the fear that women entrap men by first sleeping with them and then appealing
to their honor, Agnes and Raymond’s nuptials were delayed by the antiquated superstitions and repressive attitudes of the adults in their lives. Lorenzo advocates for this interpretation when he assures Raymond, “The temptation was too great to be resisted. ‘Tis the superstition of my Relations which has occasioned these misfortunes, and they are more the Offenders than yourself and Agnes” (192). Agnes and Raymond’s relationship has violated the ideal that women abstain from sex before marriage, but the fact that she removes her clothing to honor their dead child symbolizes her understanding that sexuality has social as well as private consequences. Agnes’s sexuality is palimpsestic: Her marriage to Raymond erases and rewrites her premarital sexuality and subsequent pregnancy as chastity. Once their marriage rearticulates her sexuality as monogamous, not promiscuous, she is once again chaste. She assures Raymond that he “shall have no cause to repent our union, and that the more culpable have been the errors of your Mistress, the more exemplary shall be the conduct of your Wife” (417).

Nevertheless, Agnes and Raymond’s relationship reflects conservative, patriarchal discourses on female sexuality. The subtext of Agnes’s rape is that she allowed herself to be seduced by meeting Raymond alone in the garden. Additionally, Lewis probably believed the rape was the inevitable result of sexual repression, which prevents Agnes from fully claiming sexual autonomy. The Monk is not a feminist manifesto. Without a father, mother, or a husband (and a brother who has already forgiven her seducer) to provide for her, she must marry. And, ultimately, Agnes never attempts to break free from patriarchal control: she only rebels against her aunt’s and the Prioress’s abuses of power. These autonomous displays are repeatedly mitigated as her father’s, her brother’s, and her husband’s wishes are given precedence. Raymond says to
Lorenzo: “I trust, when you consider these circumstances, our youth, and our attachment, 
you will not only forgive our momentary lapse from virtue, but will aid me in repairing
my faults to Agnes, and securing a lawful title to her person and her heart” (191, 
emphasis mine). Raymond’s request that Lorenzo forgive “our momentary lapse from 
virtue” (emphasis mine) implicates both Agnes and himself. But the men’s conversation 
reflects, as Sedgwick observes, “it is crucial to every aspect of social structure within the 
exchange-of-women framework that heavily freighted bonds between men exist, as the 
backbone of social form or forms” (BM 86). Lorenzo decrees, “What has past [sic] 
between you cannot be recalled, but may yet be repaired by uniting you to my Sister” 
(192). Agnes survives her rape in no small part because her brother agrees to allow 
Raymond—the man who “stole” her virginity—to “repair” her reputation through 
marrige.
CHAPTER 3
DEVIANT CELIBACY IN ADAM BEDE

There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

--I Corinthians 7:34

In 1851, at the age of twenty-one, George Eliot wrote, “I am pronouncing a Commination on all dressmakers—cursed be they in their needles and pins, cursed in their hooks and buttons” (Haight Letters I 371). Although the editors of George Eliot’s Journals state that “There are notable reticences in the journals—about such mundane matters as . . . dress . . . and more generally about relationships and emotional reactions” (Harris and Johnston xx), Eliot’s personal, fictional, and non-fictional writings and critical and biographical accounts of her work and life illustrate her emotionally fraught yet scholarly productive relationship with clothing. Intellectually, she greatly admired two contemporary sartorial theorists: Thomas Carlyle and Herbert Spencer. Carlyle’s edited “biographical study” of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, author of “Clothes: Their Origin and Influence,” is aptly titled Sartor Resartus (1833-34), or The Tailor Re-tailored. Eliot would have been attracted to Teufelsdröckh’s anti-materialist theory of clothing as
semiotics: “All visible things are emblems; what thou seest is not there on its own account; strictly taken, is not there at all: Matter exists only spiritually, and to represent some Idea, and body it forth. Hence Clothes, as despicable as we think them, are so unspeakably significant” (Carlyle 56). Eliot comments to John Sibree that “You and Carlyle . . . are the only two people who feel just as I would have them . . . I feared that you lacked revolutionary ardour. But no—you are just as sansculottish and rash as I would have you” (Letters I 252-53). Eliot’s appreciation of the men’s sansculottish politics may reflect an observation by Spencer—her friend and almost husband—that clothing reflects philosophically revolutionary impulses: “whoever will number up his reforming and rationalist acquaintances, will find among them more than the usual proportion of those who in dress or behaviour exhibit some degree of what the world calls eccentricity” (3). Eliot must have found comfort in a social group where her unfashionableness and her unfeminine hatred of dressmakers would be praised as evidence of her intelligence and progressiveness. In Adam Bede (1859), which is set in 1799, Eliot mixes her historical knowledge of women’s fashion items with mid-Victorian fashion discourses about clothing’s non-material aspects to explore the role of religion in women’s sexual agency and pleasure.

Eliot’s sartorial project in Adam Bede can be understood as fundamentally opposed to those that she discusses in “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” (1856). She contrasts the lady novelists of the “white neck-cloth species . . . of . . . the Evangelical party” (1346) to the “mind-and-millinery type” (1343) who each, respectively, create a “doll” that is “dressed in a drab gown and a coal-scuttle bonnet” (1347) or “in gauze and spangles” (1347). In Adam Bede Eliot humanizes and improves upon these two “doll”
archetypes by creating a realistic yet romantic tale for the ascetically dressed character. The narrator explicitly states this goal, chiding the reader, “we can hardly think Dinah . . . beneath our sympathy, accustomed as we may be to weep over the loftier sorrows of heroines in satin boots and crinoline” (40). Ultimately, Eliot replaces the romantic ideal of wealth and decadence with thrift and plainness. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Eliot employs clothing in *Adam Bede* to explore the connections and tensions amongst religious fervor, women’s sexual desires, and heteronormative culture. Historical information on clothing (coupled with Dinah’s sexual behavior) helps to elucidate how Dinah uses fashion to publicly express her refusal of heteronormative ideals. Eliot’s dressing and redressing of Dinah’s sartorial and sexual identities illustrates how and why modern audiences need to rethink their perceptions of Dinah. Her marriage to Adam seems to mitigate Dinah’s earlier rebellion by inserting her into a marriage plot, erasing her radical celibacy, and redressing it as premarital chastity. Eliot’s sartorial semiotics illustrate that, ultimately, a woman achieves sexual agency by containing and repressing her sensual desires, including desires for sartorial decoration; therefore, Dinah’s plainness articulates her sartorial and, hence, sexual autonomy.

Accounts of George Eliot’s sartorial proclivities alternately stress her youthful asceticism or her more mature “failures” with decorative clothing. William Mottram, Eliot’s cousin, extrapolates that it was just after being caught up in evangelical enthusiasm that she “relinquished a proper regard to personal appearance” (295), and Marghanita Laski notes that Eliot, at the tender age of thirteen, “responded [to nonconformist dogma by] wearing a peculiarly unbecoming cap in token of renunciation
of the world’s vanities” (17). Gordon S. Haight concurs, “Though she had never cared much about dress and had no beauty to be proud of, she . . . neglect[ed] her personal appearance in order to show concern for the state of her soul” (Biography 19). But after rejecting evangelical Christianity, Eliot’s sartorial concerns move away from protecting her soul toward promoting her sexual desires. In her twenties, due to financial constraints, Eliot was forced to frequently and inappropriately wear black velvet (Haight, Biography 75, 103); consequently, she refused an invitation to a ball because “It would be a crucifixion of my own taste . . . to appear like a withered cabbage in a flower garden” (Letters II 138, emphasis mine). Here Eliot compares her inability to compete sartorially at a social function with the greatest tragedy in Christianity, underscoring how she experienced the fashion stakes of the marriage market corporeally. Edmund Gosse recalls in 1876—by which time Eliot was quite famous, wealthy, and known as Mrs. George Henry Lewes—that her “massive features . . . were incongruously bordered by a hat, always in the height of the Paris fashion. . . . The contrast between the solemnity of the face and the frivolity of the headgear had something pathetic and provincial about it” (1).

Eliot’s history of religious asceticism and sartorial awkwardness coexists uneasily with her reputation for scandalous sexuality. Eliot suffered social ostracism for living publicly as Mrs. George Henry Lewes, since Lewes’s legal wife was damningly alive and well—and living in England. As Dorothea Barrett points out in Vocation and Desire, Eliot “was both the female preacher and the fallen woman, both the soulful intellectual . . . and the woman with sexual needs who received the disapprobation of her community for gratifying them” (35). Eliot’s relationship with Lewes left an indelible imprint on her.
legacy. Mottram recalls that “[t]he Editor of the *Review of Reviews* told us, some years ago, that . . . women were discarding their marital obligations towards their husbands and their homes, excusing themselves for their unlawful connections, and calling it ‘living à la George Eliot’” (268). The Editor implies women are encouraged to leave their husbands and homes because Eliot did. In fact, it was Lewes’s first wife—not Eliot—who violated and abandoned her “lawful connections.” Eliot is unequivocal in that “Light and easily broken ties are what I neither desire theoretically nor could live for practically” (190), and she always maintained that “the legality of her marriage with Mr. Lewes was purely a matter of geography, that while it was illegal in England it was legal in Germany where a marriage ceremony had actually been performed” (Mottram 276). In other words, at best Eliot and Lewes were cohabitating and engaging in a sexual relationship; at worst Lewes was a bigamist. But Eliot never wavered—either publicly or privately—from her position that she was Lewes’s wife, even though she did grudgingly acknowledge, when forced, that the marriage was invalid according to the letter of the law. Sir Leslie Stephen postulates on how Eliot came to terms with the (im)morality of her and Lewes’s relationship:

It may be a pretty problem for casuists whether the breach of an assumed moral law is aggravated or extenuated by the offender’s honest conviction that the law is not moral at all. George Eliot at any rate emphatically took that position. She had long protested against the absolute indissolubility of marriage. She thought, we are told, that the system worked badly, because wives were less anxious to please their husbands when their position was ‘invulnerable.’ She held . . . that so close a tie between persons not united in soul was intolerable. (47)
The subtext of this quote is not only that Eliot felt her union was purer than the majority of legal marriages but that she also resented the laws that made Lewes’s wife “invulnerable” to divorce.\textsuperscript{72} Eliot loved Lewes, was faithful to the idea of their marriage contract, and treated his children as her own.\textsuperscript{73} By choosing to live her life with Lewes—therefore putting her own sexual desires before social propriety—Eliot essentially surrendered her social life to her personal pleasures. Although Lewes continued to be socially accepted, Eliot acquiesced to remaining at home and entertaining the select few who both recognized her marriage and refused to kowtow to the scandalized moralists. Consequently, as George Eliot’s pseudonym was unraveling in the months prior to the publication of \textit{Adam Bede}, she and Lewes must have been anxious that critical reviews of the novel would be affected if their relationship was publicized. If so, their fears are glaringly absent in both Lewes’s and Eliot’s personal correspondence and private journals. Lewes, writing to women’s rights advocate Barbara Bodichon, hedges, “that the object of anonymity was to get the book judged on its own merits, and not prejudged as the work of a woman . . . [T]hey can’t now unsay their admiration” (Haight \textit{Letters}, III 106, emphasis mine). Although he did not write the words, Lewes must have feared the public outcry would be less about sexism and more about using the power of sexual shame to destroy Eliot’s burgeoning career as a novelist.\textsuperscript{74} Ironically, Eliot’s literary legacy has been bolstered by her unconventional and scandalous life. Although she lived and loved chastely and restrainedly, she is better remembered for her scandalous reputation than her personal pleasures.

Eliot’s fiction exhibits this tension between the repression and expression of sexuality, and in \textit{Adam Bede}, she splits these divergent aspects of her personal life into
the altruistically chaste Dinah and her foil, the solipsistically sexual Hetty Sorrel. For example, Dinah’s “angelic” appearance and personality (110, 139, 394, 499) is the counterpoint to Hetty’s “coquettishness” (84, 86, 99, 228, 321, 353). In her seminal *Woman and the Demon*, Nina Auerbach discusses Hetty’s “demonic” sexuality at length and refers repeatedly to her “angel project” (4, 64, 71, 72, 108), but she fails to mention Dinah in the chapter, “Angels and Demons: Woman’s Marriage of Heaven and Hell” (63-108). This notable omission underscores how Dinah and her “angelic” sexuality have been critically ignored. Perhaps Auerbach overlooks Dinah because she appears to be so immaculate, so pure, so sexually “dead.” Note, for example, how differently Hetty’s and Dinah’s bodies are described in the chapter “The Two Bed-Chambers”:

> What a strange contrast the two figures made . . . ! Hetty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening from her imaginary drama, her beautiful neck and arms bare, her hair hanging in a curly tangle down her back, and the baubles in her ears. Dinah, covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love. (158)

Although they are both in the taboo and sexualized space of a young woman’s bedroom, Hetty’s flushed face, half naked limbs, and disordered hair embody her sexuality, while Dinah’s simple “white dress” connotes both the chastity and angelic non-sensuousness of her “lovely corpse.” But Dinah’s virginal if deathlike aesthetic reflects “the strange phenomenon of early 18th-century [sic] necrophily” (Thompson 370) that persisted within evangelical circles until the end of the nineteenth century. Tellingly, “death was often anticipated in the language of bride or bridegroom impatient for the wedding–night. Death was the only goal which might be desired without guilt, the reward of peace after a
lifetime of suffering and labour” (Thompson 374). Modern critics tend to dismiss Dinah as a paragon of chaste womanhood, but to her audience she would have been sexualized by the very “angelic” chastity that seems to divide her from the more overtly sexualized Hetty.

Although Dinah’s marriage establishes her as the female protagonist in the novel’s marriage plot, critics who have written on women and sexuality in *Adam Bede* tend to focus on Hetty. Anne Fremantle posits that Eliot punished Hetty Sorel for her beauty and her charm, and Hetty’s flesh suffers for what Marian’s failed to enjoy. Poor Hetty was punished for another reason too; Marian’s whole creed, first as an Evangelical, . . . later as a Positivist, was that the wages of sin are paid C.O.D. [. . .] So, when in her own conduct of life she deliberately ‘broke all the pledges made and implied for her by her parentage and education,’ and found herself not persecuted, miserable, broken and punished, but richer, better, happier, and in every way more comfortable and more content, her remorse crucified her heroines. (87-88)

Fremantle’s reading implies that Eliot’s punishment of Hetty is unusual or excessive, the product of Eliot’s sexual shame. This reading glosses over the widespread mid-nineteenth-century trend—to which Hetty’s demise adheres—for authors to ostracize, exile, or assassinate fallen women. In *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity*, Jill L. Matus posits that while Hetty’s physical loveliness belies the internal “beauty” of motherly instinct, Hetty is unable to develop maternal feelings because she must make the transition to motherhood “suddenly, alone and without support” (Matus 171). Matus’s theory emphasizes the community’s guilt in the death of Hetty’s child—and, hence, Hetty’s death—following the negative, communal force of social shame that only punishes women and children for illicit (hetero)sexual acts.
Although female sexual transgression is exemplified by Hetty’s illegitimate pregnancy, Auerbach notes that “Hetty is oddly devoid of erotic life. George Eliot reminds us constantly that she is ambitious, not passionate” (178). In contrast, Barrett argues that Hetty “acts simply and honestly from her true motives, and to a modern reader, she provides a welcome relief from the artificiality of Dinah’s forced selflessness” (46). Barrett muses,

There is something either unconvincing or unhealthy about Dinah’s indiscriminate and forced loving. Her love for Snowfield is like her loving treatment of Lisbeth. In both cases the object of love is distinctly unlovable, and the decision to love is just that – a decision, not a spontaneous emotional reaction. […] On the surface, this seems selfless to the point of masochism but beneath it lurks the egoism of the martyr. (Barrett 45)

Barrett seems to be grossly misreading Dinah, whose love is not “forced.” Her “indiscriminate” but asexualized love for Snowfield, for Lisbeth, even for Hetty and Seth, ensures that Dinah exemplifies the Victorian ideal that women provide care for persons and communities in need.77 Dinah’s goodness may actually be the reason she tends to be overlooked; Sir Leslie Stephen posits, “perfect characters in fiction have a tendency to be insipid” (70). But Dinah—the philanthropic, angelic, Christian—shatters Victorian gender and sexual roles by calmly yet defiantly refraining from fashion, heterosexual marriage, and the passive pursuit of the fairytale ending.

I am interested in how Dinah’s unfashionable clothing symbolizes her choice to be celibate, while Hetty’s sartorial obsession embodies her heteronormative belief that marriage is to be secured at any cost. Although it seems typical that Hetty, the fallen woman, is removed from the plot by transportation and death, while the angelic Dinah is
rewarded with marriage, Dinah’s premarital Methodist cap highlights how little she has conformed to the heteronormative ideal. In its association with celibacy, mourning, religious asceticism, and barrenness, Dinah’s cap represents her rejection of marriage and procreative sexuality. In fact, the townspeople locate Dinah’s barrier to marriage in this unattractive headdress—the symbol of her celibacy—rather than in her explicit avowal that “I desire to live and die without husband or children” (37). Even Seth understands that Dinah is different from other women, saying, “she’s neither for you nor for me to win” (10) when Wiry Ben threatens to woo Dinah away. Dinah’s clothing fulfills conduct literature guidelines by denying her sexual nature: “That girl, who endeavours, by the artifice of dress, to attract the admiration, to stir up languishing desires, and to provoke the wanton wishes of her gay beholders, is as guilty of breaking the seventh commandment, as the woman in the Gospel, that was taken in the fact. Therefore, let your dress always resemble the plainness and simplicity of your heart” (Wilkes 30). The seventh commandment condemns adultery; therefore, conduct literature equates the desire for male approbation as equivalent to actually engaging in sex, and even worse, adulterous sex.\(^7\)\(^8\) This quotation highlights conduct literature’s investment in (ad)dressing chastity through the religious endorsement of ascetic fashion. Dinah’s sexuality becomes palimpsestic when, at the end of the novel, Eliot erases Dinah’s deviant celibacy by phasing out her cap while simultaneously turning her into a heterosexually married and procreative woman.

Dinah is a more sexually transgressive character than Hetty because Dinah must renounce her decision to live celibately for life. As Lloyd Davis reminds us, “while set up to be a subjected body, the virginal also affords a social identity under the guise of which
apparently fixed social myths and institutions may be questioned, revised or even evaded. The veil works both ways” (15). Dinah’s cap represents her fidelity to God and her rejection of heteronormativity. By utilizing and expanding on Sigmund Freud’s theory of female fetishists, I will argue that the cap is an overdetermined symbol, marking her as sexually unavailable and taking the place of a human-to-human sexuality. By also reading Dinah’s clothing as an anthropological fetish, I call attention to the limits of Christian asceticism, which tends to promote rather than undermine heteronormativity as an ideal. Anthropological fetishes have been historically defined as items a person overvalues due to religious connotations. Dinah’s cap, though, blurs the line between anthropological and sexual fetishes and illustrates how religious beliefs can undermine heteronormativity. Likewise, Dinah’s fetish illustrates how too much religion, too much renunciation (in other words, too much femininity) can foment sexual rebellion in women.

Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen in Female Fetishism (1994) explain that “By the nineteenth century the term ‘fetishism’ had entered popular language and was being used . . . to refer to anything reverenced without due reason” (15). The phrase “without due reason” is especially important because until the rise of psychoanalysis at the end of the century, fetishism was understood in relation to research on non-European cultures, which effectively “othered” “savage” cultures by labeling their religious symbols as fetishes. Gamman and Makinen universalize the act of fetishization in that “the cherishing of objects associated with those we love . . . is the desire to maintain a link to an absent person. . . . The fetish . . . becomes invested with presence, and so symbolically ‘stands in’ for absence or loss in the same way that the religious totem . . .
represents a material presence of god” (27). Thus, anthropological fetishes can be any object seen to replace the physical presence of “an absent person” (human) or “god” (divine). In 1846, Elliot casually confesses to fetishizing a human into (sex) god status. Writing to her friend Sara Sophia Hennell, Elliot sneers, “If I ever offered incense to him [Dr. Brabant] it was because there was no other deity at hand and because I wanted some kind of worship pour passer le temps. I always know that I could belabour my fetish [sic] if I chose, and laughed at him in my sleeve” (Haight, Letters I 225). Eliot casts fetishism as a kind of sexual game. She is lonely. She needs companionship. She cloaks her jest with her “sleeve.” But this quotation also reveals how Eliot envisions love as a substitute for religion, complete with a personal “deity” (here Dr. Brabant) to “worship.”

It is more than a coincidence that Eliot creates fetish objects only in her pastoral novels written before 1864, as in the nineteenth century, anthropology was typically associated with simple or rustic communities rather than sophisticated or cosmopolitan circles. The word fetish is used in both Silas Marner (1861) and The Mill on the Floss (1860), and although fetish objects are not directly named in Adam Bede, Eliot associates Dinah’s Methodism with a more primitive type of religion than Hayslope’s pastor’s, Mr. Irwine’s, liberal Anglicanism. This distinction underscores how Eliot reflects the contemporary bias that fetishes are primitive in nature and more applicable to the characters of her pastoral novels than her novels of urban or sophisticated life.

In Silas Marner the eponymous character has three fetishes: an iron pot, leather bags, and brown earthenware pot. Early in the novel, Silas revels in how “the guineas shone as they came pouring out of the dark leather mouths [of his bags]!” and he thinks
“fondly of the guineas [. . .] as if they had been unborn children” (Eliot, SM 26). Silas’s excessive, parental love for the guineas reveals an unnatural worship of mammon over Christianity:

year after year, Silas Marner had lived in this solitude, his guineas rising in the iron pot, and his life narrowing and hardening itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction that had no relation to any other being. His life had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions tended. The same sort of process has perhaps been undergone by wiser men, when they have been cut off from faith and love. (Eliot, SM 25)

Silas’s obsession is to fill his fetishized iron pot “in no relation to any other being.” A more acceptable “pot” to fill would have been his wife’s womb; then his hoarding would have had the social purpose to supply for his family’s needs. But his unnatural solitude is again emphasized by his unnaturally emotional relationship to his brown earthenware pot:

It was one of his daily tasks to fetch his water from a well a couple of fields off, and for this purpose, . . . he had had a brown earthenware pot, which he held as his most precious utensil among the very few conveniences he had granted himself. It had been his companion for twelve years, always standing on the same spot, always lending its handle to him in the early morning, so that its form had an expression for him of willing helpfulness, and the impress of its handle on his palm gave a satisfaction mingled with that of having the fresh clear water. One day as he was returning from the well, he stumbled against the step of the stile, and his brown pot, falling with force against the stones that overarched the ditch below him, was broken in three pieces. Silas picked up the pieces and carried them home with grief in his heart. The brown pot could never be of use to him any more, but he stuck the bits together and propped the ruin in its old place for a memorial. (Eliot, SM 25-26)
Like a wife, Silas’s pot is a reliable, early morning “companion”; it serves him with “willing helpfulness” and “holds” his hand. When the pot breaks, he is left utterly alone, so his heart breaks as well. Although Silas continues to fetishize his pot by propping it up on the hearth, he is again heartbroken when his leather bags of gold are stolen. Soon after this theft, the orphan Eppie appears in his house, underscoring that Silas’s unnatural worship of the guinea vessels has been replaced with natural love for a daughter. Even though Silas never marries, he creates a family by adopting Eppie, which, similar to a (reproductive) marriage, ends his solitude and creates ties between himself and his larger community. Years later Silas reflects, “he loved the old brick hearth as he had loved his brown pot—and was it not there when he had found Eppie? The gods of the hearth exist for us still; and let all new faith be tolerant of that fetishism, lest it bruise its own roots” (Eliot, SM 160). Silas’s fetishes establish a historical link between fetishism and Christianity in that these primitive religious practices have provided the foundation and life source, or “roots,” of the “new faith,” Christianity.

In *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie Tulliver’s fetish also highlights the connection among sexuality, religion, and fetishes. Maggie finds release “hammer[ing . . .] nails into her wooden fetish [a wooden baby doll]” (Eliot, *MF* 367). Maggie’s fetish is introduced after her mother threatens,

> ‘I’ll tell your aunt Glegg and your aunt Pullet when they come next week, and they’ll never love you any more. Oh dear, oh dear! Look at your clean pinafore, wet from top to bottom. Folks ‘ull think it’s a judgment on me as I’ve got such a child,—they’ll think I’ve done summat wicked.’

Before this remonstrance was finished, Maggie was already out of hearing, making her way toward [. . . her] Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes. (Eliot, *MF* 78)
Maggie punishes her fetish to deflect the humiliation she suffers for being unfeminine by sullying her dress. Although she dies before the end of the novel, cutting off the possibility that she will ever reproduce, her fetish is surrounded by rhetoric that highlights her (un)natural inclination away from the maternal:

the trunk of a large wooden doll . . . was now entirely defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering. Three nails driven into the head commemorated as many crises in Maggie’s nine years of earthly struggle; that luxury of vengeance having been suggested to her by the picture of Jael destroying Sisera in the old Bible. The last nail had been driven in with a fiercer stroke than usual, for the Fetish on that occasion represented aunt Glegg. But immediately afterwards Maggie had reflected that if she drove many nails in, she would not be so well able to fancy that the head was hurt when she knocked it against the wall, nor to comfort it, and make believe to poultice it when her fury was abated . . . (Eliot, MF 78-9)

Since girls are given dolls in order to practice being a mother, Maggie’s treatment of her “fetish” illustrates the possibility that she would be as poor a parent as Hetty or that she never even wants to have a child, like Dinah. Maggie’s abused fetish, therefore, symbolizes her rejection of women’s culturally dictated, sexual and maternal duties.

Maggie’s abuse of her fetish has been “suggested by” the Biblical story of the female Jael killing Sisera, a strong male warrior. Feminist scholars have interpreted Jael’s murder of Sisera as evidence of women’s strength and defiance in the face of tyrannical patriarchal social systems; therefore, the nails that Maggie drives into her fetish symbolize women’s quest to be free of all types of sexual tyranny.

Because each item stands in for a lack in the character’s life (children), Silas’s pot and leather bags, Maggie’s doll, and Dinah’s cap resonate with contemporary notions of fetish items. Likewise, these items are associated with phallic symbolism’s under-utilized
kin: yonic symbolism, which symbolize female instead of male power. Maggie’s doll is the symbolic product of a woman’s vagina, and tellingly, both Silas’s leather bags and Dinah’s cap are replaced by the arrival of children. These rustic characters’ prized items represent how English culture fetishizes children as proof of harmonious sexuality. But while parenting feminizes Silas—his masculine avarice is replaced with feminine nurturance—“motherhood” enriches his life by connecting him to his community. And in the end, Silas must share his daughter with her husband. Maggie does not live long enough to reproduce or marry. Her sexuality remains “doll-like,” without expression or animation. If children are a fetish—a new god to replace religion—it is important that only Dinah’s tale ends with children that have been produced by her own body. She creates and produces her own family—her own personal religion “created” by her sexual pleasures—by choosing to renounce her religion’s advocacy of celibacy.

While Eliot always asserted that “Dinah is not at all like my aunt, who was a very small, black-eyed woman” (“History of ‘Adam Bede’” 297), Eliot’s, Lewes’s, and Eliot’s family members’ (auto)biographical works shed light on the anthropological aspect of Dinah’s fetishized clothing. Eliot’s aunt, Elizabeth Evans, who had died in 1849, was a lace mender. Writing in 1907, Mottram explains that “The lace-menders of Nottingham are a smart [sic] well-dressed and respectable body of female artisans. . . . I am not sure that the temptations to display in the matter of dress were not more potent a hundred years ago than they are to-day” (185). Aunt Elizabeth, though, after meeting some Methodists, quickly decided that religion was more fulfilling to her than the allures of society:
I had entirely done with the pleasures of the world and with all my old companions. I saw it my duty to leave off all my superfluities in dress; hence, I pulled off all my bunches, cut off my curls, left off all my lace, and in this I found an unspeakable pleasure. I saw I could make a better use of my time and money than to follow the fashions of a vain world. (qtd. in Mottram 182, emphasis mine)83

Elizabeth Evans is easily recognizable in Dinah. They both worked in the clothing industry. They both found solace in Methodism. They both were Methodist preachers. And based on their evangelical convictions, they both found pleasure in renouncing fashionable clothing. Mottram provides us with an expanded description of his and Eliot’s relative, focusing on her post-conversion clothing:

She adopted the Quakeress attire, which is by no means inartistic. Her public garb consisted of a black dress, a white shawl, a neat muslin cap, and a lofty coal-scuttle bonnet. Her modes never changed. . . . I well remember some other Methodist woman who wore the Quaker habit as a protest against the vanities of the time. Dinah Morris [i.e., Elizabeth Evans] took this position as to dress to mark her surrender of . . . worldly living. . . . (185, bracketed text in original)

Dinah is easily recognizable in Mottram’s description of Evans: the Quakeress attire, the black dress, the renunciation of vanity. The only marked difference is in their caps: Dinah wears a “net quaker cap” (25), Evans a “neat muslin cap.”84 In Dinah, Eliot creates a fetishized portrait of her aunt and, thus, establishes a link to the family who disowned her due to her relationship with Lewes.

Dinah’s cap also represents her desire to maintain connected to her family through her mother figure, the deceased Aunt Judith. Mrs. Poyser reminisces to Dinah,

You look th’ image o’ your Aunt Judith, Dinah, . . . I could fancy you was your Aunt Judith, only her hair was a deal darker than yours, and she was stouter and broader i’ the shoulders. [. . .] . . . [I]t made no difference in
her, as I could see, when she took to the Methodists, only she talked a bit different and wore a different sort o’ cap; but she’d never in her life spent a penny on herself more than keeping herself decent. (78)

Dinah’s fetish is “invested” with the presence of her aunt. Like Judith, Dinah is unmarried, a Methodist, and wore the same “different sort o’ cap.” Although the women have different hair colors and body shapes, Dinah’s “different sort o’ cap” makes her “th’ image” of her aunt. The cap marks a stronger connection than inherited features: beliefs transcend biology. It is implied Dinah rejected her mother’s ideals for her aunt’s, since Dinah’s mother “little thought as she’d have a daughter just cut out after the very pattern o’ Judith, and leave her an orphan, too, for Judith to take care on, and bring up with a spoon when she was in the graveyard at Stoniton” (78). Although Mrs. Poyser’s expression “bring up by spoon” is a bit of a mystery, I assume it means Dinah’s mother died when Dinah was around one or two years old, as by this age, Dinah would have progressed from breast- to spoon-feeding. My interpretation relies in part on the explanation that Pip in Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations is “brought up by hand,” or fed via handheld bottle rather than breast after he is taken in by his sister. While Pip’s upbringing “by hand” also implies that his sister beats him (with her hand), Dinah has been reared with Judith’s concave “spoon,” hinting at yonic nurturing. Dinah’s desire to maintain the link with her dead aunt—her mother figure—partially explains why Dinah is so attached to the cap that the rest of her community abhors. Her clothing turns her body into her own fetishized image of the aunt she mourns. She is her own fetish object.

Dinah’s cap not only symbolizes her attachment to her aunt’s memory, it also takes the place of human-to human sexuality. Sigmund Freud infamously wrote that for
men a fetish is “a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and . . . does not want to give up” (64). For women their child is the fetish, the substitute for the penis and the (heterosexual) resolution of castration anxiety. Feminist and queer scholars rightfully question and then reject Freud’s premise that only men can fetishize for sexual reasons. Ultimately, so did Freud. Although he never published on female sexual fetishists, minutes from a meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society illustrate Freud’s view that women can and do fetishize for sexual reasons. In fact, Freud argued that all women “must” be clothes fetishists: “All women . . . are clothes fetishists. [. . .] It is a question of the repression of the same drive [the scopic drive], . . . in the passive form of allowing oneself to be seen, which is repressed by the clothes, and on account of which, clothes are raised to a fetish” (qtd. in Rose 156). Freud implies that all women desire heterosexual love (to be looked at and desired sexually by a man). But women repress their desire to look at men sexually. Instead, in order to court the male gaze, women must also disavow their desire and displace it by overvaluing the clothing that covers their own nakedness as a means to court scopic attention from men. Freud admits there are women who fetishize clothing but attract only unsexualized scopic attention:

. . . the most intelligent women behave defenselessly against the demands of fashion. For them, clothes take the place of parts of the body, and to wear the same clothes [as other women] means only to be able to show what the other can show, means only that one can find in her everything that one can expect from women, an assurance which the woman can give only in this form. Otherwise it would be incomprehensible why many women, following the demands of fashion, also want to wear, and do wear, pieces of clothing which do not show them to their best advantage, which do not suit them. (qtd. in Rose 156)
By setting up clothing as a means to stereotype women, Freud exposes his own misogyny: intelligent women (unattractive) do not command the male gaze as fully as do unintelligent women (attractive). The implication is that the intelligent woman is the exception since most women look good in their clothes. The intelligent woman is singular. And even though she wears “the same clothes” as all the other women, she is the one who is “behaves defenselessly” against fashion. She is unattractive because, even though “one can find in her everything that one can expect from women,,” the clothes “do not suit” her. The intelligent woman is sexualized by fetishizing her clothing; yet, her efforts result in male ridicule, not appreciation. It may be that she is unappealing to men because she recognizes that “clothes take the place of parts of the body,” and by recognizing the power of clothing, she fails to be attractive, as passivity, denial, and repression define female sexuality to Freud.

In *Adam Bede*, though, Dinah’s deliberate adoption of the unfashionable cap attracts female, not male, derision. Lewes worries in his journal that most women will not like Dinah because:

> In Fiction readers love to see a reflection of their own egoism. They like to fancy themselves doing & feeling what the heros [sic] & heroines do & feel. Now in *Adam Bede* there can be but slender gratification of this desire. [. . .] Few women would care to be Dinah – they w[ould] like to have beauty & goodness, but not her Methodism & mob cap. *Nous verrons*. (Lewes’s Journal MS, 9 Feb. 1859)\(^8\)

A mob cap—which is a large cap that covers most of the woman’s hair, typically made of light cotton with a frilled edge and adorned by a pink or black band of ribbon—was the most common daily headgear among working women during the 1790’s. Its popularity
may explain why Lewes incorrectly remembers Dinah’s “net Quaker cap” as a mob cap. Eliot herself admitted to disliking the “ribboned, round caps worn by the servants in England” (Eliot, *Journals* 14). But only one mob cap is explicitly mentioned in *Adam Bede* (179), and not in relation to Dinah. Lewes was, nevertheless, correct that *Adam Bede*’s contemporary audience would not have been attracted by Dinah’s religiously ascetic style. A description of Dinah explains, “[her] hair was drawn straight back behind the ears, and covered, except for an inch or two above the brow, by a net Quaker cap” (24-5). The Quaker cap that Dinah wears was popular from roughly 1745-60. The Methodists were known for adopting Quaker clothing, which is why Dinah’s cap is described as both Quaker (the style) and Methodist (her religion). The cap clearly connotes her dedication to her religion and her God. Additionally, Dinah’s cap is described as “ugly” and “plain” (224). Mrs. Poyser even asserts, “If Dinah had got a bit o’ colour in her cheeks, an’ didn’t stick that Methodist cap on her head, enough to frighten the crows, folks ‘ud think her, as pretty as Hetty” (190). Mrs. Poyser reflects the understanding that Dinah’s cap is “Methodist” and represents, thus, her affiliation to a non-conformist religion; therefore, her cap sets her apart from her Anglican community and prevents “folks” from thinking she is “pretty,” or marriageable. Her cap marks her religious affiliation, unlike the mob cap which elides religious distinctions by emphasizing class.

But unlike the women, Adam prefers Dinah’s “plain clothing.” After he innocently exhorts, “If a woman’s young and pretty, I think you can see her good looks all the better for her being plain dressed. Why, Dinah Morris looks very nice, for all she wears such a plain cap and gown,” Hetty counters with a threat to “put one o’ Dinah’s
caps on . . . and you’ll see if I look better in it” (224). Although Hetty is not interested in Adam as a marital partner, she tries to keep him around as a backup husband, and she plots to achieve her goal by wielding fashion as her fiercest weapon. Auerbach argues that Eliot’s depiction of Hetty as a fallen woman exhibits “the dual perspective of th[is] work[]—an explicit narrative that abases [Hetty], an iconographic pattern that exalts her” (168). Although Auerbach does not delve into sartorial patterns, I believe this “iconographic pattern” also establishes that looks are weapons that are sharpened by attractive clothing. Hetty adroitly uses fashion to denigrate one of her rivals for Adam’s affection: Dinah. In order to show Adam the folly of his words: “The little minx . . . found a black gown of her aunt’s, and pinned it close round her neck to look like Dinah’s, . . . made her hair as flat as she could, and . . . tied on one of Dinah’s high-crowned borderless net caps” (228). The characters’ reaction to Hetty’s masquerade emphasizes the contrast between the women’s sexuality: “The thought of Dinah’s pale grave face and mild grey eyes, which the sight of the gown and cap brought with it, made it a laughable surprise enough to see them replaced by Hetty’s round rosy cheeks and coquettish dark eyes” (228). Hetty is a “coquette,” a flirt. She plays with male attention, while Dinah is “grave” and “mild.” Although Hetty’s adoption of plain clothing is a thinly veiled act of jealousy, Adam takes the bait and quickly reneges, “Nay, nay, I don’t want you to wear a Methodist cap like Dinah’s. I daresay it’s a very ugly cap” (224). Regardless of Adam’s tactical withdrawal, Hetty archly admits that she donned the facsimile of Dinah’s unattractive clothing because “Adam said he liked Dinah’s cap and gown better nor my clothes. . . . He says folks look better in ugly clothes” (229), to which Adam again gives her the response she desires, “Nay, nay” (229). Unfortunately, Adam cannot recognize
that he has been and continues to be manipulated by Hetty, who “once more in her own
dress, with her neckerchief pushed a little backwards on this warm evening, was seated
. . . where Adam could see her quite well” (230). By pushing back her neckerchief to
reveal more skin, Hetty seems to be brandishing all of her sartorial weapons to retain
Adam as a stopgap candidate for husband. But after Mr. Poyser gleefully predicts that “If
you can catch Adam for a husband, Hetty, you’ll ride i’ your own spring-cart some day”;
Hetty laments, “To ride in a spring-cart seemed a very miserable lot ” (231). A beautiful
but poor woman, Hetty aspires to become a leisured ornament to a rich husband, like
Arthur, and dreads becoming an equal, working partner of a poor husband, like Adam.

By being both aware of her looked-at-ness and by reveling in it, Hetty illustrates
that she is not a properly repressed woman. “Hetty is scorned,” Judith Mitchell argues,
“not for assuming so readily her position as viewed object, but for being aware of this
position in the first place” (93). Hetty is not passive about her sexuality. Nancy Anne
Marck posits that “Hetty dramatizes her role as object of male desire, using the male gaze
to reaffirm her power” (463). As a marketable commodity for marriage, Hetty displaces
her desire to appear attractive to men by fetishizing her clothing, and she covets
fashionable clothing that simultaneously cloaks and displays her sexuality. So while
Hetty’s corporeal sexuality is physically covered by cloth, the clothing functions to
highlight or accentuate her active search for a marriage partner. As with any package that
needs a buyer—or husband—desirableness of the package is a primary concern of both
the buyer and seller. Hetty wants fashionable clothing because “up-to-dateness” increases
her market value and attractiveness to potential suitors. Adam’s dislike of “Hetty’s love
of finery” (223-224) reflects his belief that there is a fine line between ornamentation and

prostitution (224). The argument follows that a woman who decorates her body must be doing so in order to attract male sexual attention—a hypothesis which culminates in the conclusion that a woman who does so might also sell her body in exchange for money or goods. Adam fails to recognize the similarities between marriage and prostitution: “Hetty’s dreams were all of luxuries: to . . . always wear white stockings; to have some large beautiful ear-rings, such as were all the fashion; to have Nottingham lace round the top of her gown. . . . She thought, if Adam had been rich and could have given her these things, she loved him well enough to marry him” (100). Hetty is more than willing to sell her body to someone she loves “well enough” in order to acquire the stockings, earrings, and lace “such as were all the fashion.” Hetty brings into focus that marriage has the potential to be little more than legal concubinage. Her dreams about marriage are driven by monetary concerns, which is not unusual for women who have been socially and economically induced to prize men’s superior earning potential. She muses that Arthur “couldn’t like her to go on doing work: he would like to see her in nice clothes, and thin shoes, and white stockings, perhaps with silk clocks to them; for he must love her very much—no one else had ever put his arm round her and kissed her in that way. He would want to marry her and make a lady of her” (150). Hetty wants to “sell” her body to Arthur Donithorne, the wealthiest, and hence, most capable of paying the best “price” for Hetty’s “wares.” By actively exploiting her looked-at-ness, Hetty illustrates that she has not “properly” repressed and then displaced her appetite for being desired.

Dinah also fails to repress her unfeminine indifference toward being looked at and desired. The elderly horseman on the square feels “surprise, not so much at the feminine delicacy of her appearance, as at the total absense [sic] of self-consciousness in her
“demeanour” (24). The horseman’s description highlights Dinah’s hyper-feminine “delicacy,” yet Dinah’s appearance subverts feminine performance because she “walked as simply as if she were going to market, and seemed as unconscious of her outward appearance as a little boy: there was no blush, no tremulousness, which said, ‘I know you think me a pretty woman’” (24). Since Dinah does not blush or act coy under the gaze of men, she is equated with a small boy. She’s not manly or masculine. She is pre-sexual, a child. And not just a child but a male child. In other words, a woman who neither courts nor cringes under the (un)wanted glance of a man is not a woman. Mr. Irwine asks Dinah, “And you never feel any embarrassment from the sense . . . that you are a lovely young woman on whom men’s eyes are fixed?” (92) to which Dinah replies, “No, I’ve no room for such feelings, and I don’t believe the people ever take notice about that. I think, sir, when God makes His presence felt through us, we are like the burning bush” (92). Dinah believes her corporeal body is hidden by the light of God.

Since Dinah does not court the heterosexual male gaze, she is able to be a discerning subject instead of simply a sexual object. While preaching, Dinah focuses her attention on Chad’s Bess and admonishes,

Ah, poor blind child! . . . think if it should happen to you as it once happened to a servant of God in the days of her vanity. She thought of her lace caps and saved all her money to buy ‘em; she thought nothing about how she might get a clean heart and a right spirit--she only wanted to have better lace than other girls. And one day when she put her new cap on and looked in the glass, she saw a bleeding Face crowned with thorns. That face is looking at you now . . . Ah, tear off those follies! (32).

Dinah wants Chad’s Bess to “tear off” her prized pair of earrings—not her cap. But Dinah uses a lace cap in order to verbally paint this allegory. The desire for a lace cap
will become a crown of thorns for Chad’s Bess, as her love of caps is a barrier to having a “clean heart” or a “right spirit.”

There is a clear dichotomy in the novel between single women who covet fine clothing and older, usually married, women who only value clothing’s functionality. The narrator gossips that if “Any one who could have looked into poor Bessy’s [Chad’s Bess’s] heart would have seen a striking resemblance between her little hopes and anxieties and Hetty’s” (276). In fact, Chad’s Bess “had been tempted to run the arduous race, . . . partly because of the prize. Some one had said there were to be cloaks and other nice clothes for prizes” (276). It is wonderfully Freudian that “the fluttering garments that were to be the prize” are displayed on “tall poles” (254). Chad’s Bess is distraught, though, when her prize turns out to be "an excellent grogram gown and a piece of flannel" (276). And Chad’s Bess’s “lip fell as she saw the ugly, heavy gown” (276). When Arthur tactfully queries, “You didn’t think the winner was to be so young, I suppose, Aunt? . . . Couldn’t you find something else for this girl [Chad’s Bess], and save that grim-looking gown for one of the older women?” (276), his aunt retorts, “I should not think of encouraging a love of finery in young women. . . . I have a scarlet cloak, but that is for the old woman who wins” (276). Arthur’s aunt obviously believes that older women are immune to sartorial charms, probably because they are already married. Seeing Chad’s Bess’s tears, her cousin, “Bess the matron,” asks, “What’s the matter wi’ ye? . . . they’n gi’en you lots o’ good grogram and flannel” (277). To which Chad’s Bess replies, “Ye may take it all, for what I care” (277), and Bess the matron “walk[s] quickly away with the bundle, lest Chad’s Bess should change her mind” (276-77). Tellingly, the two Besses are differentiated in this passage as “the maiden” and “the matron.” Bess the
maiden sees the unfashionable fabric as worthless to attract male attention, while Bess the matron covets the cloth’s utilitarian functionality.

Descriptions of Hetty’s clothing repeatedly stress her youthfulness, single-status, and sexuality. Eliot also draws on contemporary notions of fashion, contrasting Hetty’s maiden costume to her aunt’s matronly clothes: “Hetty was coming down-stairs, and Mrs Poyser, in her plain bonnet and shawl, was standing below. If ever a girl looked as if she had been made of roses, that girl was Hetty in her Sunday hat and frock. For her hat was trimmed with pink, and her frock had pink spots sprinkled on a white ground” (186). Mrs. Poyser and her “plain bonnet and shawl” fade into the background behind Hetty and her trendy clothing: a fashionable, patterned cotton dress and a straw hat lined with pink, to which “the female sex in youth is attached” (Goethe 328). And Hetty frets that she is not able to be as fashionable as the wealthier, and thus more eligible, maiden, Mary Burge: “[Hetty’s] straw hat trimmed with white to-day instead of the pink, which had become rather faded under the July sun. That hat made the drop of bitterness in Hetty’s cup to-day, for it was not quite new - everybody would see that it was a little tanned against the white ribbon - and Mary Burge, she felt sure, would have a new hat” (252). Although Hetty’s hat is freshly trimmed in white ribbon, a symbol of her purity at that point, the hat’s faded color indicates not only her relative poverty but also that the “fashionable” hat, like the illusion of her purity, is not the real deal.

Although Dinah fulfills the Victorian feminine ideal of being a plain, kind Christian woman, throughout most of the text she is paradoxically viewed as an undesiring and undesirable woman because her clothing is overly ascetic and unfashionable. Dinah fails to follow the founder of Methodism’s, John Wesley’s,
teaching on “avoiding extremes of ‘plainness’ and fashion, both of which attracted unwanted attention” (Ehrman 5). For while listening to Dinah preach, Chad’s Bess, “had shown an unwonted quietude and fixity of attention ever since Dinah had begun to speak. Not that the matter of the discourse had arrested her at once, for she was lost in a puzzling speculation as to what pleasure and satisfaction there could be in life to a young woman who wore a cap like Dinah’s” (30). The austerity of Dinah’s cap is synonymous for Chad’s Bess to a life without “pleasure” and “satisfaction” because it clearly articulates her desire not to be a feminine spectacle for men, not to entice heterosexual romance. Dinah is deliberately out of fashion and hence un-sexual. This paradox is set up when Wiry Ben exclaims, “An’ there’s the pretty preacher-woman! My eye, she’s got her bonnet off. I mun go a bit nearer” (24). At first, Wiry Ben is enticed by the chance to see the cap Dinah had previously concealed beneath her bonnet, but after he gets closer, “Wiry Ben wondered how Seth had the pluck to think of courting her” (25). What he expected was sexual display; what he got was a vision of sexual autonomy. Dinah’s desexualized fashion scares him because, although Wiry Ben “couldn’t help liking to look at her and listen to her, he dreaded every moment that she would fix her eyes on him, and address him in particular” (30). Dinah’s clothing illustrates that if a woman is too pious, too plain she is no longer sexually attractive to men. By not trying to court male attention, she is free to “fix her eyes” on him and have opinions, rather than simply be an object for his eyes, and hence his desire, to consume.

The narrative, though, works to trouble the idea that a woman who perceives instead of being perceived is without sexual desires. When Adam comes upon Dinah in his kitchen, the narrator observes, “Adam had seen Dinah several times, but . . . he was
not very vividly conscious of any woman’s presence except Hetty’s. . . . But now [Dinah’s] slim figure, her plain black gown . . . impressed him with all the force that belongs to a reality contrasted with a preoccupying fancy” (117). Note the use of the word “fancy” to describe Adam’s scopic attraction to Hetty: she is a fantasy while Dinah, physically, is “reality.” Dinah’s plain black gown makes her look more real than finery or false displays of attractiveness. Since stuff is a woven material, usually woolen, that was less fashionable around this time compared to the newer, softer, washable cotton cloth, Dinah’s dress is an unusual choice, as, like Bess the matron, Dinah is more interested in the cloth’s function than in its fashion. But in response to Adam’s “look,” “Dinah, for the first time in her life, felt a painful self-consciousness. . . . A faint blush came, which deepened as she wondered at it. This blush recalled Adam from his forgetfulness” (117). This moment marks Dinah’s sexual awakening. She is self-conscious. She blushes. And her blush awakens Adam from his reverie. While both Hetty’s and Dinah’s blushes are equated with a woman’s sexual awareness, it is Dinah’s innocent “wonder” that works to break, or disrupt, Adam’s sexually charged look.

As I have shown, Dinah’s fetish focuses attention on both her defiance of heteronormativity and her society’s discomfort with her symbolic sexual rebellion. Even after Dinah becomes sexually aware, she continues to wear the plain clothing that marks her dedication to celibacy. The perceived seriousness of Dinah’s sartorial fetish is underscored when her aunt laments, “I’d sooner cry nor laugh at the sight o’ that poor thing’s cap” (229). Mrs. Poyser’s emotional reaction to the cap is illuminating, especially since the Westminster Review reflects the nineteenth-century consensus that Mrs. Poyser has “sterling common sense, piercing insight” (506). And Mrs. Poyser believes that “If
Dinah . . . didn’t stick that Methodist cap on her head, enough to frighten the cows, folks ‘ud think her as pretty as Hetty” (190). By insisting on continuing to wear the offending cap, Dinah symbolically refuses to participate in marriage market, raising her cap to a sexual fetish. Unlike women who fetishize their clothing in order to attract men, Dinah fetishizes her cap in order to deflect male attention. Dinah’s “ugly cap” exposes her antipathy toward women’s “same clothes” and connotes her intellectual attachment to a specific form of stimulation—religion, which precludes courting male desire through the male scopic drive. Thus, her cap becomes a sexual fetish in that it takes the place of human-to-human sexuality.

Dinah’s fetish represents her unsophisticated impulse to remain in the past rather than move forward with modern England. Although Christian teachings emphasize women’s status as the helpmate of men in marriage, Dinah, like both Judith and Elizabeth Evans, queers her femininity by following John Wesley’s dictum for Methodist sexuality. According to Wesley, marriage was not to be prohibited or dissolved but was, nevertheless, “second-best” (Abelove 50). Wesley, therefore, advised every Methodist “believer [to] stay single and celibate” (Abelove Evangelist, 49). Wesley taught that single life was preferred because when one’s love was not divided, one did not need to worry about inappropriate levels of lust and desire, was without the distraction of children, and need not lay up wealth for one’s offspring (Abelove Evangelist, 52). This creed is made explicit in Eliot’s aunt’s writings when she recollects that “I used to work at my mending of lace till two or three o’clock in the morning, that I might be furnished with money and clothes that I might not be a burden to anyone. [. . .] . . I then believed I should never be married to anyone. No, Christ was ‘all the world to me’” (qtd in Mottram
209-210). Dinah echoes Elizabeth’s sentiments when she explains, “there’s many of God’s servants who have greater strength than I have, and find their hearts enlarged by the cares of husband and kindred. But I have not faith that it would be so with me” (511). Since Dinah’s religion advocates celibacy, her religious clothing rearticulates and reinforces her assertion that she wishes to remain single and celibate. Even though Dinah is young and of a marriageable age, she does not actively pursue marriage, nor does she want to be married. Eventually both Eliot’s Aunt Elizabeth and Dinah fall in love, marry, and bare children. Since she was raised by her aunt, not her mother, Dinah’s reproductive sexuality symbolizes the rejection of her maternal community (Aunt Judith’s Methodism), highlighting the personal and physical sacrifices she makes to join the larger Anglican community with its emphasis on maternal reproduction.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the English believed celibacy compromised not only one’s physical body and spiritual soul but also national welfare. So to contemporary readers, Dinah’s pregnancies would have signaled a return to health. Physically, celibacy was thought to make women susceptible to hysteria—a condition believed to be more prevalent in unmarried and childless women. Therefore, if a woman chose not to marry, she was implicitly choosing not to be sane. Spiritually, the Church of England’s distrust of celibacy was manifest in the elimination of nunneries and monasteries following the Reformation. The belief was that by denigrating marriage, whoredom would prevail. Marriage, by controlling and focusing sexuality, was morality. The choice to be celibate was construed not only as immoral but also dangerously papist and, therefore, heretical. Victorian novelist Charles Kingsley’s letter to his wife euphemistically illustrates how celibacy’s physical and spiritual risks extend to national
welfare: “a few self-conceited fools shut themselves up in a state of unnatural celibacy + [sic] morbid excitement, in order to avoid their duty, instead of doing it”” (qtd. in Maynard 103, emphasis in original). These “fools” avoid their obligation to produce the next generation of English subjects by selfishly indulging in self-love over communal procreation. Eliot also understood “marriage [not] as a function particularly of women, but as a function of society” (Calder 128). According to contemporary mores, Dinah’s nonconformist religion’s advocation of celibacy dupes her into placing her body, her soul, and her nation at risk.

Dinah’s heterosexualization is played out in Book Six not only by her relationship with Adam but also by phasing out her “ugly” cap and its associations with mourning, asceticism, and barrenness. While Dinah’s mother figure, her aunt Judith, presumably died a virgin, Dinah (like Eliot’s aunt, Elizabeth Evans) eventually renounces her celibacy in exchange for a husband. Perhaps this explains why, in the sixth book, there is a new emphasis on the bonnet Dinah wears to cover her cap. Unlike hats, which were considered quite fashionable in rural England, bonnets were seen as slightly antiquated. Therefore, it is reasonable that the unfashionable Dinah—unlike the fashionable Hetty and Mary Burge—wears a bonnet and never a hat. Although Dinah’s bonnet is mentioned several times over the first five books of the novel, it is not described. Instead, each mention of her bonnet relates to its functional properties; she puts it on before she goes out in public and takes it off when coming indoors or when preaching (35, 94, 109, 146, 447, 479, 481, 495). But in Book Six, as Dinah and Adam walk back to Hayslope, “they walked apart, though side by side, and the little close poke of her little black bonnet hid her face from him” (484). Dinah’s bonnet now has a color: black. Black, importantly,
connotes death, asceticism, and barrenness. Black is the color of mourning, known colloquially during the nineteenth century as “widow’s weeds.” Black connotes isolation. And it is not a bright color—like green or red—that symbolizes fertility or love. The black bonnet is also “close” and “hides” her face, so Dinah does not tempt Adam scopically. Not only does this bonnet fail to attract Adam’s gaze, it also prevents Dinah from looking out at him. She is closed in by the stark severity of her bonnet—and her celibacy. But the narrative hints that Dinah is no longer comfortable in her celibacy: her “grey eyes, usually so mild and grave, had the bright uneasy glance which accompanies suppressed agitation, and the blush in her cheeks . . . was heightened to a deep rose-colour” (485). Now, like Hetty, Dinah’s sexuality is coming to the forefront, as illustrated by the “rose-colour” blush of her cheeks. While Dinah pines for Adam, he persists in thinking of Dinah as Seth’s failed love affair (484). It is not until after Adam’s mother essentially commands him to woo her (501-02) that Adam “hunger[s] for the sight of Dinah” (529). And Dinah returns “a look of yearning love . . . on the strong dark-eyed man!” (532). Following this mutual scopic encounter, Adam decrees, “we’ll never part any more, Dinah, till death parts us” (532). This symbolic pledge is closely followed by their actual marriage, ending Dinah’s celibacy.

On her wedding day, Dinah’s costume change symbolizes both a capitulation to and a reticence toward change. The new costume underscores how marriage erases her former independence: “Adam led Dinah out of church. She was not in black this morning, for her Aunt Poyser would by no means allow such a risk of incurring bad luck, and had herself made a present of the wedding dress, made all of grey, though in the usual Quaker form, for on this point Dinah could not give way” (534). Dinah is now being led by her
husband. She is no longer a celibate Methodist preacher on the Green; her marriage is
consecrated by Mr. Irwine in Hayslope’s Anglican Church. Although Dinah insists on
maintaining “the Quaker form” in accordance with her Methodist beliefs, her aunt aspires
to create “good luck” for the marriage by replacing the stark black dress with one “made
all of grey.” Situated between the “bad luck” of the former celibate’s fetishized clothing
and the virginal chaste sexuality associated white bridal gowns, Dinah’s clothing
symbolizes the “grey zone” of her sexuality.

Dinah’s scopic relationship with the world also changes along with the switch
from the black bonnet to the grey Quaker bonnet she wears on her wedding day: “the lily
face looked out with sweet gravity from under a grey Quaker bonnet, neither smiling nor
blushing, but with lips trembling a little under the weight of solemn feelings” (534,
emphasis mine). The grey bonnet marks Dinah’s entry into heterosexual society. Her face
is compared to a lily—a symbol of love and virginal, bridal sexuality. She is both “sweet”
and “grave.” She does not smile or blush, but “trembles” under the “weight of solemn
feelings.” The physical manifestation of her feeling is fitting, though, because her
marriage is a “solemn” occasion. Dinah’s wedding day summons the memory of Adam’s
previous engagement to the already pregnant Hetty, which must remind Dinah that she
too may soon become a mother. She must say good-bye to her old ways. Her life of
celibacy is over.

The ending of the novel works to erase Dinah’s deviant celibacy and to
rearticulate it as premarital chastity, which is why the narrative does not end when Dinah
marries Adam. The ending runs against the “happily ever after” trope. Indeed, the novel
cannot close until we are shown an idyllic family scene: Dinah and her son and daughter
welcoming Adam home. The description of Dinah in the epilogue underscores how her cap has been rewritten hand in hand with her new, pure, procreative abilities:

> There is a figure we know well, . . . shading her eyes with her hands . . ., for the rays that fall on her white borderless cap . . . are very dazzling. [. . . ] We can see the sweet pale face quite well now: it is scarcely at all altered — only a little fuller, to correspond to her more matronly figure, which still seems light and active enough in the plain black dress. (536)

Here for the first and only time we see Dinah’s cap described as being white. Dinah’s “white borderless cap” may still be the previous net Methodist cap, but the change in the way it is portrayed corresponds with the completion of Dinah’s heterosexualization. Although she is not wearing the more common round cap, like Hetty, or a mob cap, like Lisbeth, the description of her cap now highlights the whiteness of the cloth instead of its unconventional net material or its high crown. The hat is no longer described as “ugly” or “Methodist” or “Quaker” but borderless and white. This whiteness symbolizes her sexual purity, which is reinforced by her matronly figure, the inevitable byproduct of two pregnancies. Even if the style of Dinah’s cap hasn’t changed, its significance has. The hat’s ugliness has been erased and rewritten, as has Dinah’s celibacy.

Although Dinah’s wedding establishes her as the protagonist of *Adam Bede*’s marriage plot, critics tend to think of Hetty when discussing marriage in the novel. Barrett argues that “The George Eliot heroine finds herself ambitious without vocational possibility and passionate without an adequate object of love” (27). Similarly, Sedgwick posits, “In a sense, none of the plots . . . is a sexual one: the marriage plots are about marriage, an institution, hence clearly economic and political, while the heroines of the ‘sexual’ plots are both clearly described as being sexually numb, but ambitious”
(Between Men 160). While both Barrett’s and Sedgwick’s assessments are easily applicable to Hetty, they do not explain Dinah, who is not ambitious, unemployed, or sexually numb. In part, this critical preoccupation with Hetty is situated in the feminist endeavor to recover, deconstruct, and redefine the dichotomies used to categorize female literary characters of the nineteenth century: angel/demon, Madonna/whore, and old maid/fallen woman. Hetty readily fits all three of the lesser-privileged terms. Her illegitimate pregnancy marks her as a whore, and her public trial and subsequent transportation to the colonies cements her role as fallen woman. Hetty is also demonic in that she disrupts and lays bare the cultural paradigm laid on the “angel in the house”: she dislikes housework and children and dreams of a life of privileged ease won by her good looks, not good deeds. But Hetty is “tried at the ‘sizes for murder” (416)—not heterosexual intercourse or even illegitimate pregnancy—and the relative unimportance of her death to the marriage plot is highlighted when it is passed over so quickly it is almost a footnote. It is plain that Hetty’s pregnancy results from what she believes to be a premarital indiscretion with Arthur. And her pregnancy reflects the marked rise in premarital conceptions in late-1700s England, especially amongst women, like Hetty, from lower-class, rural communities. Albeit scandalous by its cross-class parentage, Hetty’s community might realistically have viewed her pregnancy as an acceptable precursor to marriage. While disruptive, Hetty’s sexual “fall” reinforces the allure of heteronormativity, ultimately propping up the idea that marriage is so valuable it is reasonable to stoop to any means to secure the prize of a husband.

Even though over-sexualized and under-sexualized female characters disrupt the heteronormative ideal of the chaste woman, Dinah’s cap represents her celibacy,
exposing her attempt to remove herself from heteronormative culture altogether.

Celibacy, rather than chastity prior to marriage, is a radical and queer choice because it opens up the possibility that heteronormativity is not inevitable, an ideal that Hetty Sorrel paradoxically reinforces by falling sexually. Dinah is the angel, the paragon of chaste womanhood. But she is not in danger of becoming an old maid—nomenclature which implies one has desired yet failed to secure a husband.93 Instead, Dinah chooses celibacy. And since she is ideally angelic and chaste—she explodes heteronormativity by drawing attention to the fact that women have a choice. By refusing heteronormativity, she is turning her back on the hierarchy of civil society. By preserving her virginity, she claims a right to an independent sexual identity, and she gains access to classically male privileges, such as sexual, financial, and motive autonomy. This is why it is Dinah’s sexuality—not Hetty’s—that must be recaptured and rearticulated as heteronormative prior to the narrative’s resolution. While Hetty serves as a warning to heterosexual women: Do not have sex outside of marriage, both Hetty’s and Dinah’s fates reveal the novel’s ultimate moral: In order to live happily ever after, women should cultivate neither religious repression or capitalist obsession but rather seek emotional fulfillment through sexual love. Ultimately, Eliot conveys this message by redressing Dinah as a more English—rather than primarily Methodist—procreative wife.

Dinah’s unconventional sexual role is defined by a religious celibacy that is only resolved by turning her into the chaste protagonist of the novel’s marriage plot. Barrett adroitly observes that

at first glance the desire for a vocation seems to be an attribute of George Eliot’s soulful madonna-like heroines, and sexual desire seems
inextricably intertwined with the desire for gratified vanity and material wealth characteristic of her vain harlot-like characters. Yet the distinction between vocational and sexual desires is often blurred in George Eliot’s work, as indeed it must be when discussing women, for whom marriage has been the only readily available vocational option. (35)

Hetty’s obsession with becoming the wife of a wealthy man explicitly reveals her desire to be paid with clothing for her matrimonial, hence sexual, work. In many ways, Dinah is unconventional because she does not view marriage as a path for her ambitious desires. But it is Dinah who becomes the heroine of the marriage plot by acquiring a husband and a new vocation: wife. This change is crystallized when, after becoming a housewife, Dinah is forced to quit ministering but opts to cease working at the cotton-mill. Since a cotton-mill is an integral part of clothing production, this second abandoned career creates additional resonance when considered through my framework of fashion and sexuality. In fact, Dinah has two vocations. After Aunt Judith dies, Dinah splits her time between ministering in both Hayslope and Snowfield, where she also works in a cotton-mill. Sedgwick, though, like most critics, refers only to Dinah’s unpaid religious work when she notes that “The seriousness of [Dinah’s] vocation justifies her independence from her aunt’s family and her geographical mobility, and it also permits her to decline a very eligible offer of marriage without being subject to undue social pressure to accept” (Sedgwick Between Men 141). Sedgwick’s statement not only erases Dinah’s paid work at the cotton-mill but also the fact that Seth’s proposal is not viewed favorably by the community. Mrs. Poyser, the common-sense matriarch, archly observes to Dinah, “Seth Bede . . . is a poor wool-gathering Methodist and’s never like to have a penny beforehand” (78). Seth is not an ideal candidate for a husband regardless of Dinah’s
investment in her own careers. Yet Dinah is able to refuse his offer, not because she is a celibate minister but because she earns money and, thus, independence from her work at the mill. Although Dinah’s mill work is not mentioned in the Epilogue, it can be inferred that she also no longer works there. As a celibate, Dinah needed the income from the mill to support her bodily needs—just as she needed her ministry to feed her soul. Her occupations now seem to be caring for her children and watching for her husband, whom she will “catch[] sight of . . . if he’s anywhere to be seen” (537). The deviant celibate has been confined within the pale.

Sedgwick ignores Dinah in her assessment that “Eliot’s choice of the rural artisan class rather than representatives of urban industrialism as the vehicle for her genealogy of the English middle-class family was a shrewd one for her gentle defense of the status quo” (Between Men 145). As a cotton-mill worker, though, Dinah is a representative of industrialization. As Dorothea Barrett points out, “[d]esire of all kinds, sexual desire, . . . the desire for freedom, the desire of a new order, is submerged, but only just beneath the surface of [George Eliot’s] texts” (x). In Adam Bede I believe this “new order” includes women like Dinah, who choose, at least for awhile, to live life according to their own rules. At first, the only way Dinah can achieve freedom from patriarchy is to renounce her sexuality. Admittedly, by marrying in the end, Dinah appears to have capitulated to patriarchal ideals of female sexuality. But while Sedgwick argues that Eliot is defending the status quo, Eliot’s project also, as Barrett suggests, uses Dinah’s sexuality to “queer” English morality. Unlike most heroines, Dinah experiences a sexual awakening before, not in reaction to her lover’s desire. And she postpones marriage until it aligns with her ideals and desires. By the end of the novel, she no longer preaches—not because Adam
has forbidden her to but because the “Conference has forbid the women preaching” (598). Marriage does not change Dinah’s ministering ways, as Adam and Dinah were married in November of 1801, and the Conference did not ban female ministers until 1803, which means that Dinah probably preached for the first two years of their marriage. Regardless, Dinah continues to “talk[] to the people a bit in their houses” (598).

Like Eliot after committing herself to Lewes, Dinah does not change her ideals or alter her speech after becoming a wife. Although quietly outspoken and rationally adroit about their unconventional choices, both the author and her character refrain from outward signs of flagrant rebellion. But no one can accuse Eliot or Dinah of being hypocritical or even surreptitious about her lack of desire to conform to sartorial, sexual, or religious norms. In *Adam Bede* Eliot strives to reinstate woman’s sexuality within a Christian framework. In “The Two Bed-Chambers,” the narrator states, “The vainest woman is never thoroughly conscious of her own beauty till she is loved by the man who sets her own passion vibrating in return” (149). I have already illustrated that Dinah experienced this type of sexual awakening when Adam looks at her approvingly; Eliot must have experienced a similar sexual awakening in her relationship with Lewes. Although Eliot was a physically unattractive woman, Lewes loved her passionately, and she loved him in return. Some critics assume that Eliot and Lewes did not have a sexual relationship, but they were known to practice birth control (Haight, *Biography* 205). Although chaste for one another, they were not celibate. Instead, their “reproductive relationship” consisted of conceiving novels. Mottram states,

*Adam Bede* was produced under the affectionate censorship of one of the keenest literary critics [Lewes] of the time. He read the sheets as they
came from the writer’s hand. As the novel was approaching its concluding chapters his criticism was, that during the earlier portion Adam stood in the forefront, but now had receded into the background of the picture, while Dinah Morris had come to the fore. In order to restore Adam to prominence as the author’s proper hero, he must needs be wedded to the gentle Dinah, who had become the undoubted heroine. (218).

Mottram attributes Dinah’s prominence within the novel to the fact that she, by wedding Adam, can “restore” Adam to his “proper” role as hero. But Eliot ironically tended to write “books named for male characters [that] are focused on female protagonists; and these female protagonists are subjected to a more rigorous examination of the moral nuances of their behaviour” (Barrett 23). And in “History of Adam Bede,” Eliot confesses that

Dinah’s ultimate relation to Adam was suggested by George, when I had read to him the first part of the first volume: he was so delighted with the presentation of Dinah and so convinced that the readers’ interest would centre in her, that he wanted her to be the principal figure at the last. I accepted the idea at once, and from the end of the third chapter worked with it constantly in view. (297)

So while Lewes did influence Eliot’s decision to foreground Dinah within the novel, there is no evidence in her private writing that she did so in order to ensure Adam’s rightful place as male hero of the marriage plot. Instead, Dinah—and her Methodism and her “ugly” cap and her celibacy—was who “delighted” Lewes and, in turn, whom Eliot intended to be “the principal figure” of the novel.

Dinah has been woefully underappreciated as a complex character, especially in light of the admiration she inspired in both Eliot and Lewes. In part, this may be because we live in post-sexual revolutionary world, where
[t]o twentieth-century readers . . . objections to the end of the novel may appear to present themselves in moral terms simply – that Hetty suffers too much and Arthur too little, that Adam seems to move too easily from prostration to personal and worldly fulfillment. [. . .] . . . [W]hile we can see that the marriage of Adam and Dinah is inevitable, it only seems so as the completion of a design, not as the dramatically inevitable outcome of two people moving towards each other with convincingly portrayed complexities of feeling. And as the dramatic art thins, the didactic voice becomes more insistent. We have to feel that Adam’s suffering is sufficient for the situation, that his enlarged self is worthy of Dinah. (Gill xxxvi)

Gill’s analysis seems to rely too heavily on the idea that Adam is the real protagonist of the novel. Yet over the course of the novel, Adam does not greatly change. He advances in his job and becomes a husband and father, but his emotional and personal breakthroughs are nominal. Although Gill effectively erases Dinah’s growth into a person with (sexual) agency, Dinah develops much more than Adam over the course of the novel. She is refashioned from an independent celibate into an orthodox wife. Most analyses skim over the initial queerness of Dinah’s deviant sexuality, making her independence about her job not her celibacy. In some ways, Dinah’s switch from celibate to wife seems to undermine her agency; after all, she must stay home to watch the children that were produced by her sexual activity. But her husband and Seth clearly view her as an equal. And although she clearly is no longer able to contribute to the family’s income by working at the far-away cotton-mill, she still manages to preach or “talk to the people a bit in their houses,” most literally as a character in the novel that was read far and wide.

*Adam Bede* was by far Eliot’s greatest popular and critical success during her lifetime, in large part due to the perceived morality of the text. Since the novel was
published sixty-eight years after the founder of Methodism John Wesley’s death, it is probable that the span of time had erased many people’s memory of Wesley’s unconventional advocation of celibacy. And Eliot’s historical accuracy regarding Methodists and celibacy seems to have factored little in the public’s assessment of the novel. Even the normally phlegmatic Eliot betrayed surprise when Dinah failed to attract critical attention: “Laudatory reviews in the Athenæum, Saturday [Review], and Literary Gazette. The Saturday [Review] is characteristic: Dinah is not mentioned!” (Eliot, Journals 299). Eliot may have been trying to rewrite the current state of Methodists, as “In her calls on the miners near Foleshill, who were mostly Methodists, she was shocked at the apparent union of religious feeling with a low sense of morality” (Haight, Biography 39). Therefore, Dinah’s severe piety and celibacy may have appeared to Eliot and her audience as an idealized version of Methodism. But Eliot herself was perceived as a liberal and anti-religious person because she had abandoned the evangelical faith of her youth; nevertheless, she agreed to maintain public decorum by attending church with her father even though she had privately rejected Christian doctrine on rational grounds. As her father lay on his deathbed, Eliot’s paradoxical relationship with religion is manifest in her anguished query, “Where shall I be without my Father? It will seem as if a part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that purifying restraining influence” (Letters, I 284). Ironically, although Eliot rejected Christianity, “she had a strong religious sentiment which asserted itself the more as she abandoned the dogmatic system” (Stephen 68).94
Fortunately, Eliot—a former evangelical—embarked on her writing career in the 1850’s, when the English were peculiarly attentive to her brand of religion and rebellion. Following the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, Britons shifted their fear of and fascination with repressed sexuality from Catholics to Anglican Low- and High-Church factions. Like Low Church Anglicans, Evangelicals stressed personal conversion and biblical authority, whereas High Church Tractarians emphasized sacraments and apostolic hierarchy. In this adherence to personal morality over social pleasure, Evangelicals were closely identified with Methodists and with nonconformist branches of the Anglican Church. One hundred years after Eliot began writing fiction, G.M. Young decreed, “the evangelical faith in duty and renunciation[] was a woman’s ethic. George Eliot’s rank in literature has, perhaps, not yet been determined: in the history of ideas her place is fixed. She is the moralist of the Victorian revolution” (Young 23). Young’s comment deserves attention for several reasons. First, he strongly associates Eliot with evangelical religion even though she was agnostic for most of her life, and certainly during the years when she was known as George Eliot, not Marian Evans. Second, Young equates Victorian culture, and specifically Eliot’s fiction, with revolution, a paradoxical role for an era (and an author) that is remembered more for its emphasis on conservative retrenching than revolutionary abandon. And, finally, Young corroborates the idea that Eliot’s primary novelistic aim was morality, a seemingly peculiar didacticism considering Eliot’s nonconformist personal life. These contradictions point to why Eliot is best understood oxymoronically: she was a spiritual iconoclast, a conservative maverick, and a chaste fallen woman.
After Eliot’s true identity as the author of *Adam Bede* was discovered in 1859, “Readers felt they had been deceived, and what disturbed many people more than the author’s immorality was her morality. What they had supposed, in a moralistic writer, to be a conventional Christian ethic must, in the translator of . . . [Ludwig] Feuerbach, be nothing of the kind. . . .” (Laski 64). Eliot’s translation of Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* was published in 1854, the same year she met Lewes. Up to this time, she had been a young, single, intelligent woman who felt adrift without the moral restraint of her father or her earlier Evangelical beliefs. Therefore, she must have been attracted to Feuerbach’s assertion that “Love is God himself, and apart from it there is no God” (48). Feuerbach’s belief that religion is a projection of subjective mental and emotional capacities was exactly the heresy to which orthodox Christians objected. But Feuerbach’s radical, subjective take on religion which aligns God with love must have provided Eliot with a rational way to harmonize her spiritual needs with her emotional desires. And Haight argues that Eliot “agreed whole-heartedly with Feuerbach’s distinction between ‘self-interested love’ and ‘the true human love’, which ‘impels the sacrifice of self to another’” (Haight, *Biography* 137). Haight claims that this “sacrifice” is expressed sexually, relying on Feuerbach’s assertion that the only true marriages are those “spontaneously concluded, spontaneously willed, self-sufficing” (Feuerbach 271). The subject of this “spontaneous” conclusion is left unstated, but Haight assumes the passage is referring to sexual relations, as if sexual compatibility defines marriage. Admittedly, this interpretation of Feuerbach’s philosophy probably would have appealed retrospectively to Eliot, after she met Lewes and had to consider seriously what constituted a legitimate marriage and what did not.
Feuerbach’s chapter “The Christian Significance of Voluntary Celibacy and Monachism” seems also to have influenced Eliot’s characterization of Dinah. Feuerbach writes, “The true Christian not only feels no need of culture, because this is a worldly principle and opposed to feeling; he has also no need of (natural) love. God supplies to him the want of culture, and in like manner God supplies to him the want of love, of a wife, of a family” (167). This quotation underscores how “the true Christian” finds completion in God. At first glance, this theory seems positive. God supplies every human need. And Dinah seems to echo Feuerbach when she states, “everything we have comes from God. And he gave us our souls, and put love between parents and children, and husband and wife” (27). But even though Dinah recognizes familial love as being positive, she also dissents, “I seem to have no room in my soul for wants and fears of my own” (37). Dinah’s refusal to marry reflects Feuerbach’s discomfort that “true Christians” deny their own God-given nature as sexual beings:

Man and woman together first constitute the true man; man and woman together are the existence of the race, for their union is the source of multiplicity, the source of other men. Hence the man who does not deny his manhood, is conscious that he is only a part of a being, which needs another part for the making up of the whole of true humanity. The Christian, on the contrary, in his excessive, transcendental subjectivity, conceives that he is, by himself, a perfect being. But the sexual instinct runs counter to this view; it is in contradiction with his ideal: the Christian must therefore deny this instinct. (167)

This quotation illustrates how even the radical Feuerbach was opposed to celibacy. The “true Christian” is solipsistic: loving oneself as the manifestation of God, raising the self to the apex of “a perfect being.” Sexuality is what saves humanity from this blasphemy. Of course, Feuerbach also conceives of sexuality as male. Man and woman together
equal the “true” sexual man, who begets more of “other men.” The idea of *femme covert*
applies not just to a woman’s lack of identity under the law but also to her lack of a
sexual identity. A woman’s sexuality is only the byproduct of her husband’s sexuality,
and its only rightful expression is the production of more “men,” or male children.
Although Eliot did not overtly employ Feuerbach’s philosophy within the narrative,
Dinah’s Methodism follows some of the paradoxes outlined in Feuerbach’s indictment of
“true Christians.” Celibacy is a form of deviant sexuality instead of the feminine ideal of
chastity before, during, and after marriage. In the end, the novel ensures our
understanding that Dinah’s celibacy has been replaced by evident progeny. Dinah’s
celibacy must be renounced in order to establish the primacy of heteronormativity, the
“natural” state of reproductive womanhood.
CHAPTER 4
THE LIMITS OF FABRICATION: CHASTITY AND FREE UNIONS

But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

-- I Corinthians 7:11

In Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited (2004), Michael Millgate attributes a significant portion of Hardy’s displeasure with his wife, Emma Lavinia Hardy, to the fact that he “knew that she was perceived as plain, foolish, and overdressed, and that he himself was often scorned or pitied on her account” (288). And Ralph Pite, in Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life (2007), concurs that Emma tended to array herself in a manner “rather painfully flamboyant . . . , sporting large hats with feathers and the lacy frills that visitors found so eccentric” (328). Emma’s odd fashion sense may also explain why Hardy wrote to tell her that: “Lady Margaret was in black lace, with gloves between salmon & buff, & a dull red fan—& necklace of brilliants & black ornaments between—dress low” (Letters i 133). This piece of sartorial gossip could reveal Hardy’s innocent attempt to entertain his lonely wife, who would not be joining him in London until the following week, or, more pathetically, it could evidence Hardy’s serious effort to “school” his wife on how to dress in a way that was less embarrassing to him.
Near this time, Hardy met Mrs. Florence Henniker on a trip to Ireland, and it was, “for him at least, quite literally love at first sight” (Pite 329). At their first meeting, Henniker was “elegantly dressed—in sharp contrast to [Hardy’s wife] Emma, who is said to have appeared in Dublin in an outfit of muslin and blue ribbons ludicrously inappropriate to her fifty-one years” (Millgate *Biography* 308). His extant correspondence to Henniker reveals an unusually lighthearted and flirtatious side of the author, who believed “he had found in her . . . purity that did not mean chastity so much as purity of heart – [. . .] Because of their intuitive understanding, the relationship . . . would remain pure even if it were consummated – even if, that is to say, they committed adultery together” (Pite 331). And in 1893 Hardy exults on the “coincidence” that both he and Henniker were reading *Epipsychidion* in which Percy Bysshe Shelley condemns monogamous marriage (e.g., lines 149-159) in favor of “free love” (e.g., lines 160-173, 360-63, and 397-407). Later in the same letter, though, Hardy’s tone turns petulant as he laments that Henniker “who is pre-eminently the child of the Shelleyean tradition—whom one would have expected to be an ardent disciple of his school and views—should have allowed herself to be enfeebled to a belief in ritualistic ecclesiasticism” (*Letters* ii 23). Pite observes that “despite her affection for Hardy, . . . [Henniker] refused a sexual liaison directly; more slowly, she disappointed his hope of a friendship of real depth” (336). Hardy’s hopes for Henniker’s Shelleyean “free love” were never fulfilled, and Hardy remained unhappily married to Emma until her death in 1912.

While Hardy was pursuing this passionate flirtation with Florence Henniker, he was also writing *Jude the Obscure* (1895), in which he reengineers the codified marriage plot to push readers to question what constitutes proper, feminine sexuality. Instead of
splitting his main two female characters into the bad girl who falls sexually and the good
girl who remains a virgin until marriage, both Arabella Donn and Sue Bridehead willfully
engage in sex outside of marriage. Both are divorced. Both are twice married to the same
husband. Nevertheless, the women have very different sexual identities. On the one hand,
Arabella is a temptress who ensnares men and will even sleep with more than one
partner, regardless of her marital status. And she repeatedly and indifferently beds
husbands, approaching sex not out of obligation—or even for gratification—but as
something that one “shakes down to with comfortable indifference” (168). Sue, on the
other hand, advances from an ideologically radical virgin to a chaste fallen woman, only
to be enslaved by the philosophy of sacramental sexuality. Sue, the “ethereal” ideal
woman, runs from respectable conjugality but is chastely continent with her lover(s) until
marriage forces her into “fanatic prostitution” (283). As Ingham observes, Sue “evidently
acquires the status of a fallen woman willfully. What she has ‘fallen’ from of course is
proper femininity, yet she does so without diminishing the narrator’s sense of her as
‘pure’.[sic] When she transgresses, the two signs [‘womanly’ and ‘fallen’] collapse into
each other” (Language 182). Sue’s sexuality is both chaste and unchaste. The novel’s
classical fallen woman is Arabella, who falls in order to secure a marriage proposal. Sue,
however, is a new type of modern fallen woman: one who cannot consent to sexual
relations until the threat of marriage is withdrawn. Radically, by the end of the novel
neither the classical nor the modern fallen woman has been banished or eliminated by an
untimely death. In fact, they are both so firmly accepted by society that Arabella is well
on her way to securing Physician Vilbert as her third husband and Sue has been
“restored” as a respectable wife. By drawing attention to how Sue becomes a victim of
legalized physical, emotional, and cognitive rape, Hardy modernizes the stereotypical mid-Victorian “angel in the house”—the chaste fallen woman who is punished, not rewarded, with marriage.

Sue Bridehead has been misunderstood as being, alternately, asexual, frigid, or a deadly seductress. Focusing on Sue’s clothing, I will argue that Hardy, instead of pathologizing Sue’s sexuality, wishes to redefine the modern, sexually chaste woman. First, I will contextualize Hardy’s critical reputation with historical and biographical evidence to illustrate his awareness of clothing as a novelistic device in articulating sexual identity. Second, I will explore how the “ethereal” Sue appears to contemporary and modern audiences as disembodied and non-sexual. Third, I will illustrate how Sue’s clothing undercuts this transcendental reading of her character and establishes her as a physical being and a sexual woman. Finally, I will show that Sue’s failure to rewrite heteronormative ideals by using fashion publicly (and thus defiantly) to express her sexuality is tragic. By having Sue submit her body to marital relations with Phillotson as Jude concomitantly facilitates his own death, Hardy underscores the tragic nature of Sue’s failed effort to revolutionize Philistine sexual mores. Looking closely at the historical, biographical, and sartorial details of the text, I argue that Sue is neither ethereal nor frigid but a tragic paragon of autonomous female sexuality.

Jude’s contemporary reviewers emphasize Sue’s “proper” femininity by implying that she lacks lustful desires despite engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage. For example, Hardy’s friend Edmund Gosse posits that with Jude, Sue “can play at loving though she cannot love” (Review 269). Gosse’s use of “play” illustrates that he views Sue’s “love making” as immature, euphemistically erasing her choice to
be sexual without the civil, social, and ecclesiastic approval secured through marriage. A reviewer in the *Athenæum* callously decrees that while Sue “may have been right in [her] detestation and abandonment of the marriage tie[,] . . . the point is that if [she] act[s] as [she] did with [her] eyes open, it is absurd of [her] to repine” (252).99 The *Illustrated London News* focuses on Sue’s “restoration” to femininity via her marriage to Phillotson to argue that by the end of the novel most readers will perceive that “Sue is . . . truly feminine” (275). Even the sexologist Havelock Ellis, writing for *Savoy Magazine*, decrees that Sue is “very feminine, rarely with any marked element of virility” (306). Ellis implies that Sue remains feminine because—although she engages in unwed intercourse—she is lacking in carnal desires. In his posthumous *Study of Thomas Hardy* (1936) D.H. Lawrence similarly fails to view Sue as a sexual woman, arguing that since she “was not the virgin type, . . . [she] has no sex. Why should she be forced into intercourse that was not natural to her?” (496). Each of these reviewers relies on misogynist stereotypes either to erase, deny, or denigrate Sue’s sexuality. Only the *Westminster Review*, in keeping with its progressive politics, states that the “relations between Sue and her cousin will necessarily appear impure to those who see nothing but uncleanness in the relations of a married man and woman who is not his wife” (Hannigan 273).100 While this reviewer has failed to note that Jude is divorced by the time the cousins consummate their union, s/he at least recognizes that Sue’s relations with Jude are unequivocally—and consensually—sexual.

Perplexingly, modern feminist critics do not applaud Sue’s decision to conduct a sexual relationship with Jude only on her own terms, contending that Sue is either
pathologically frigid or murderously asexual. For example, in Sexual Politics (1970), Kate Millett argues that while Jude the Obscure is “a significant contribution to the literature of the sexual revolution . . . [in] its savage criticism of institutions—marriage and sexual ownership” (133), instead of hailing Sue as a critical component of this “savage criticism,” Millet decrees, “Sue is by turns an enigma, a pathetic creature, a nut, and an iceberg” (133). In Patriarchy and Its Discontents (2003), Joanna Devereux concedes that “Sue must be sexually . . . timid in order to maintain her social position: to do otherwise would be to ‘fall’ outside the margins of society” (125), yet finally concludes that Sue “cannot accommodate adult sexuality” (126-27, emphasis mine). Admittedly, Devereux refers to Sue’s unconsummated marriage to Phillotson—not her choice to delay having sex with Jude. But the manner in which Devereux, perhaps unconsciously, perpetuates the Victorian concept that wives should be sexually available to their husbands regardless of (a lack of) attraction is problematic, to say the least. In Decline of the Goddess (1995), Shirley Stave observes that while Sue “is loftily idealistic” (123), she is “finally even more destructive than the blatantly sexual one [Arabella]” (123), implying that Sue’s idealistic sexuality is at least partially responsible for the deaths of her University comrade, her children, possibly even Jude himself. J. Hillis Miller reiterates this Victorian belief, asserting, “Sue, who has caused the death of one of her earlier lovers by ‘holding out against him so long at such close quarters,’ resists Jude’s advances coolly when they are together” (D&D 166, emphasis mine). Similarly, Edward Neill argues, “tender-hearted Sue is tough on her lovers, something of a belle-dame sans merci even, much inclined to hold them at arm’s length until they die” (108), and Patricia Ingham concurs that Sue “prefers the masculine world of intellect and
friendship which overtly at least is not sexual. The disastrous end to her earlier platonic cohabitation with the undergraduate does not deter her from half inclining to the same asexual relationship with Jude” (Language 172). While there is a wealth of analytic potential in what Ingham labels as Sue’s “half inclining” nature, each of these critics emphasize Sue’s “coolness,” which refers to her deadly sexuality that “kills” not only her partners but her own children, promulgating the idea that Sue is—emotionally, sexually, maternally—noxious.

Sue’s misunderstood sexuality reflects a failure to recognize the late-Victorian movement that called upon women to lead a sexual revolution against becoming, as she observes, “licensed to be loved on the premises” (203). After contextualizing this historical fact, I illustrate that Sue has been misunderstood as a frigid anomaly within the very narrative that is driven by her radical sexual politics. Of course, Sue’s tortured recapitulation—following her emotional and sexual camaraderie with Jude—contributes to her being recognized as a negative sexual entity. Additionally, some critics who focus on Jude’s and the male narrator’s perceptions of Sue’s sexuality have created a critical discourse that has then been used to prove that Sue herself lacks sexuality. Ingham notes that Sue’s “bluntness over sexual matters” (Language 181) queers her as a sign for Victorian womanliness. The two instances Ingham examines are when Sue tells Jude about living with her “University comrade” and when she confesses, again to Jude, her lack of desire for Phillotson. While these examples are pertinent, Ingham and others fail to explore how Sue’s verbal and sartorial communications articulate her desires for Jude to Phillotson, Widow Edlin, Jude himself, and, most startlingly, perfect strangers. As a young woman who has been taught that sexuality robs
women of their individuality by subjecting them to the yoke of marriage, with its
tangential specters of paternalism and life-threatening childbirth, Sue is justifiably
reticent about sexual intercourse. Nevertheless, Sue exemplifies Hardy’s—and also a
segment of late-Victorian culture’s—definition of the radical chaste woman, who is
neither frigid nor asexual nor, oddly enough, virginal. By refocusing our attention on
Sue’s attempts to communicate her sexuality—both verbally and sartorially—and by
contextualizing her discourse with the fashion of that historical era, a very different
picture of Sue’s sexuality develops.

Hardy’s interest in fashion resides in his aesthetic appreciation of period detail,
historical fidelity, and symbolic potential. Simon Gatrell argues that Hardy’s
“reputation does not conventionally include a fascination with dress or an awareness of
its power in shaping or representing individual identity or personal relationships—but it
should” (120) because “Hardy was forced by conventions . . . to find indirect ways of
indicating, to readers who shared his view, what he saw as the inescapable sexual element
in love relationships. Hardy recognized that there is always somewhere a sexual
component in dress” (119). Millgate focuses on Hardy’s recollections of a woman being
publicly hanged, which had for him

a strong sexual component: ‘I remember what a fine figure she showed
against the sky as she hung in the misty rain, & how the tight black silk
gown set off her shape as she wheeled half-round & back.’ As it came on
to rain, Hardy recalled on another occasion, ‘I saw—they had put a cloth
over the face—how, as the cloth got wet, her features came through it.
That was extraordinary.’ (Biography 63, emphasis in original)

It seems, though, in the former example quoted by Millgate, that Hardy does not
sexualize his recollection of the encounter; instead, he seems almost overwhelmed by the
“tragic associations” he has toward “that unhappy woman . . . whom I am ashamed to say I saw hanged” (Letters vii 5). The sartorial details he dwells upon show an appreciation of clothing as a tool used to set mood or create tension. Additionally, Hardy’s correspondence and notebooks seem, in light of Millgate’s emphasis on Hardy’s voyeurism, oddly devoid of erotic occasions for gazing on women. What Hardy does exhibit, though, are signs of having an almost scientific desire to decode women’s clothing. For example, once when Hardy accompanied his wife shopping, he marveled at the saleswoman’s ability to match clothes to a woman’s personality (Life 144). But Hardy also distrusted clothing’s signifying power: after detailing the opulent clothing worn at a crush, Hardy retorts, “But these women! If put into rough wrappers in a turnip-field, where would their beauty be?” (Life 235). Even as Hardy expressed frustration over women’s ability to manipulate appearance with expensive clothing, he was appalled by the universal oppression of women, musing in 1885 that “Some wear jewels and feathers, some wear rags. All are caged birds; the only difference lies in the size of the cage. This too is part of the tragedy” (Life 178). To be part of the “tragedy” is to Hardy to be part of literature’s domain.

Arabella represents classic misogynistic fears that women exploit their clothing and their sexuality in order to trap men in marriage. Although Jude seems almost dazzled by Arabella’s “radiant walking attire” (38) and “felt himself honoured and glorified by” Arabella’s “agreeing to take a walk with him in her Sunday frock and ribbons” (39), Arabella fears that she will not succeed in securing Jude “as a husband” (42). She infamously declares to her friends, “I’ve got him to care for me: yes! But I want him to
more than care for me; I want him to have me—to marry me! I must have him. I can’t do without him. He’s the sort of man I long for. I shall go mad if I can’t give myself to him altogether!” (42). Most critics understand this passage to be Arabella’s admission of sexual desire for Jude, but the narrator is clear that at this point her “sensuousness” is only “latent.” In fact, Arabella believes the way to catch a husband is “by plain courting, and taking care he don’t go too far!” (42). She desires Jude as a potential spouse, not a lover. But Arabella’s friend activates her “latent sensuousness” by explaining, “he’s to be had, and as a husband, if you set about catching him in the right way” (42), and Arabella exclaims, “I own I didn’t think of that way!” (43). While most critics focus on the narrator’s statement that Arabella is “a complete and substantial female animal—no more, no less” (33), her clothed body complicates the symbolism of her “animalistic” sexuality. First, the narrator reinforces Arabella’s animality in that she has “the rich complexion of a Cochin hen’s egg” (33). Although this comparison shows that Arabella’s complexion is not ladylike or pale, the Victorian obsession with Cochin chickens was due in part to the exotically beautiful plumage that covered their ample bodies. Arabella feints with Jude, demurring, “Don’t touch me, please. . . . I am part egg-shell” (46), seemingly alluding to her feminine desire to protect her fragile, “egg-shell” thin hymen. But the false appearance of her chaste modesty is exposed when “She began unfastening the collar of her gown” (46), explaining as she draws from inside her shirt “An egg—a cochin’s egg. I am hatching a very rare sort. I carry it about everywhere with me, and it will get hatched in less than three weeks” (47). As a symbol of fertility, Arabella’s egg underscores her strategy to entrap Jude through pregnancy within three weeks—that is, when her period is due again. The inference is that Arabella,
like the Cochin, is good for breeding, especially due to her own excessive plumage and “inflated bosom” (247), where she stores the egg. While Jude wants to have sex with her, he does not want to become a father or a husband (47). But Arabella’s strategy foils Jude as she perseveres and dares him to approach her sexually:

“You should have caught me a minute ago when I had put the egg down! There!” she said defiantly, “I am without it now!” She had quickly withdrawn the egg a second time; but before he could quite reach her she had put it back as quickly, laughing with the excitement of her strategy. Then there was a little struggle, Jude making a plunge for it and capturing it triumphantly. Her face flushed; and becoming suddenly conscious he flushed also. (47)

This moment marks Jude’s sexual awakening, and he “consciously” goes to bed with Arabella. Unfortunately for Jude, Cochins are known as being “more fertile . . . than any other breed” (Smith and Daniel 209).

Arabella’s sexual goal, like an animal breeder’s, is profitable reproduction, not sexual satisfaction. Because Arabella is so blatantly sexually available, it is tempting to agree with H. M. Daleski’s assertion in *Thomas Hardy and Paradoxes of Love* (1997) that “Arabella [is] a female libertine” (186), but Arabella’s “loose” sexuality stems more from her business sense than from her dissipated lustfulness. Although for “some two months . . . the pair had met constantly[,] . . . Arabella seemed dissatisfied; she was always imagining, and waiting, and wondering” (48). Since we know that Arabella hopes to become pregnant, we can assume she is “dissatisfied,” “waiting, and wondering” about whether she has achieved her goal. It was not until “she began telling him [Vilbert] of her experiences” (47) that Arabella who “had been gloomy, . . . had grown brighter” (47). We recognize that because she and Jude had been meeting “constantly”—i.e., having frequent
intercourse—for two months, Arabella must not have menstruated during that time. Therefore, Vilbert must have informed her that her missed period meant she had conceived. Since it was considered improper for teachers, parents, or even medical doctors to discuss women’s sexuality, “quack” doctors like Vilbert oftentimes were women’s only recourse for information on sexual matters. These doctors tended to specialize in the treatment of venereal diseases and women “problems,” such as abortion. One critic postulates that Vilbert gave Arabella an abortifacient, but, since she wants to become pregnant, this theory seems improbable. In fact, after meeting with Vilbert, Arabella celebrates that “she had gained a husband; that was the thing—a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats” (49). By learning first from her friends how to secure Jude as a spouse and then from Vilbert how to tell if she is pregnant, Arabella embodies the fear that sexually educated women can exploit their sexuality to achieve a financial stability that is realized as sartorial display.

Jude and Arabella’s marital incompatibility is established through Arabella’s exploitative approach to clothing and accessories. Daleski argues that “the sexual attraction between them [Arabella and Jude] . . . is spontaneous, mutual, and genuine. . . . But from the start he [Hardy] is adamant that such passion is not a basis for anything else, certainly not for marriage” (191). Daleski purports that Jude’s “genuine” passion cools only once Arabella allows him to become satiated with her body, implying that she could have maintained his affection by being less interested in sex or by strategically withholding access to her body. But Jude’s desire for Arabella actually cools “at her first unrobing” (49) as he observes, “A long tail of hair, which Arabella wore twisted up in an enormous knob at the back of her head, was deliberately unfastened, stroked out, and
hung upon the looking-glass which he had bought her” (49). Jude bought the looking
glass for Arabella, thus encouraging her vanity, yet he objects to her efforts to improve
upon her image by following the current vogue for artificially enhanced chignons.
Lawrence sneers that although Hardy “lays stress on her false tail of hair. That is not the
point at all. This is only Hardy’s bad art” (489), yet he acknowledges, “few women dared
have been so open and natural about [the false tail of hair]” (489). While it is unclear
whether Lawrence approves of Arabella’s false tail of hair, he does imply that it is
“unnatural” for women to be open about the ways in which their appearance of public
beauty is privately and artificially constructed. Arabella’s “long tail of hair” creates the
impression that she is naturally more luxurious, more sexually attractive, than other
women. Once Arabella displays the artificial construction of her charms, Jude’s desire for
her is deadened, and a “little chill overspread him,” marked by “a sudden distaste for her”
and “a feeling of sickness” (49). Instead of relinquishing her accessories in deference to
her husband’s tastes, Arabella informs Jude that she will continue to wear the extra hair
because “in town the men expect more” (49). Perhaps even more damning than her
adulterous desire to entice men other than her husband, though, is her confession that she
first adopted the hairpiece when she “was barmaid at Aldbrickham” (49). Barmaids were
believed to be virtually synonymous to prostitutes due to both professions’ exploitation of
women’s bodies for financial gain. While Arabella’s emasculation of Jude has been
foreshadowed—when she throws a pig’s pizzle at him and by the “picture of Samson and
Delilah . . . hung on the wall” (39) at their first date—there is no evidence that it is
Arabella’s excessive sexuality that emasculates Jude. Instead, Jude is emasculated by
Arabella’s refusal to dress modestly and behave chastely, especially in public situations.
The marriage ultimately comes to an end when, in a frenzy of anger over their muddled pig killing, Arabella publicly humiliates Jude by going outside with her “bodice apart” (57) or, as she puts it, “my gown off my back” (57). As Arabella parades up and down in front of their house, Jude realizes that there is a “fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a lifelong comradeship tolerable” (57-58). Jude and Arabella’s relationship fails not due to an excess of private sexuality but because of her public, sartorial displays which highlight the couple’s incompatibility.

Later, when Jude recognizes Arabella working at the bar, her clothing underscores that she continues to exploit her sexuality for both legal and illegal forms of remuneration. Jude notes that Arabella “wore an ornamental ring set with what seemed to be real sapphires—which they were, indeed, and were much admired as such by the young men who frequented the bar” (145). The ring steals the notice of the bar’s patrons, illustrating that Arabella dresses herself in order to attract male attention for profit, both behind the bar and possibly in bed. That her ring is far too expensive for a barmaid to own implies that she has “sold” herself to patrons—like the aptly named Mr. Cockman (143)—for the bauble. When Arabella persuades Jude that they can spend the night together because “[s]ometimes . . . I sleep at the hotel where I am engaged, so nobody will think anything of my staying out” (146) and then coolly asks him, “What arrangement do you want to come to?” (146), she illustrates her capability to negotiate the financial and logistical terms of sexuality, i.e., prostitution. Although Jude is no longer aroused by her body, he is resigned to his conjugal role. He muses, “there was only one thing now to be done, and that was to play a straightforward part, the law being
the law, and the woman between whom and himself there was no more unity than between east and west being in the eye of the Church one person with him” (145). Miller’s argument that “Jude’s rapid disgust with Arabella, after his brief yielding to fleshly love, suggests that Sue is right not to give herself to Jude if she wants him to go on loving her” (Miller D&D 167) is flawed. Although Jude’s sexual relationship with Arabella is “straightforward” and, as Sue says about wives, he “shakes down to [conjugal relations] with comfortable indifference” (168). There is no evidence that Jude feels disgust toward Arabella prior to or following their night together until after she confesses her bigamous marriage, when suddenly Jude feels “a sense of degradation at his revived experiences with her” (148). Jude’s horror results from his feeling personally degraded; Arabella’s casual attitude toward marital relations makes his sense of conjugal duty seem effeminate. Although Jude is disgusted by her disregard for monogamy, he reflects that “His passion for Sue troubled his soul; yet his lawful abandonment to the society of Arabella for twelve hours seemed instinctively a worse thing” (154). His experiences with Arabella emphasize the paradox that society condones sexual desire only within marriage, yet it is one’s partner—not the church, not the state sanction—who poisons or purifies one’s sexual encounters.

Most critics agree that “Arabella is an embodiment of female sexuality” (Daleski 189); but if so, then Arabella’s black clothing motif emphasizes the fact that stereotypical “female sexuality” is deadly and exploitative. When Jude runs into Arabella at the tavern, she is dressed “in a black gown” (143), and, after Jude agrees to resume their conjugal relations, she adds “a hat with a black feather” (146). Later, when Arabella attends the Great Wessex Agricultural Show with her second husband, Cartlett, she is “dressed in
black material, and covered with beads from bonnet to skirt, that made her glisten as if clad in chain-mail” (228). This defensively opaque and dense black clothing draws attention to Arabella, especially since she is not in mourning. Her black “chain-mail” symbolizes that she feels her marriage to Cartlett makes her sexually unavailable—or dead—to other men. After she recognizes Jude, Sue, and her son, Arabella muses that she “did not care if they should recognize her . . . under her beaded veil” (232), implying that she is hiding from someone. Three years later at another spring fair, Arabella wears “the deep mourning of a widow” (244)—which differed from half mourning in that the cloth was not supposed to glisten or shine in any way—communicating that Cartlett has passed away only recently. The Victorian mourning etiquette dictated that women wear widow’s weeds for at least two and a half years following the period of deep mourning (Taylor *Mourning* 303), yet as soon as Arabella sees Jude, she wails, “I wish I had Jude back again!” (248). Arabella’s friend counsels her to “take a lock of your late-lost husband’s hair, and have it made into a mourning brooch, and look at it every hour of the day” (248). But Arabella scoffs, “twould be no good” (248), especially since she does not even own a lock of Cartlett’s hair. Arabella’s failure to procure this relic communicates how little she actually cared for Cartlett, as the “nineteenth-century passion for hair souvenirs” (Bury 44) had created a thriving business in sentimental jewelry denoting love, affection, and mourning. Shirley Bury notes that “the Queen was never without a lock of her beloved’s hair on her person. She put it in lockets, brooches, bracelets and other items of jewellery. After Albert’s premature death . . . the Queen clung ever more tenaciously to the relics of her husband” (44). Instead of fetishizing her deceased husband, Arabella cons Jude into their second marriage by wearing “shabby black” to convince Jude that
she is “lonely, destitute, and houseless” (291). She even threatens that “If you can’t take me and help me, Jude, I must go to the workhouse, or to something worse. [. . .] ‘Tis hard for a woman to keep virtuous where there’s so many young men!” (291). Arabella (ad)dresses her fiscal needs by wielding her deadly sexuality.

Arabella’s sexual lethalness contrasts with Sue’s desexualized ethereality. Sue’s corporal body has been misread as frigid or asexual due to Jude’s perception of Sue as “so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling though her limbs” (149). But Sue’s etherealness does not prevent Jude from feeling physical desire for her, nor does it mean Sue actually lacks “any sexual . . . dimension.” Devereux argues that “Jude constructs of Sue a ‘bodiless creature,’ one without any sexual—or indeed human—dimension. She is for him from the start a disembodied, spiritual being, the ideal essence of woman” (123, emphasis mine). But, after sleeping with Arabella at the Inn, Jude boards the train with Sue and “regarded the delicate lines of her profile, and the small, tight, applelike convexities of her bodice, so different from Arabella’s amplitudes” (149). By contrasting Sue’s small “convexities” to Arabella’s excessive “amplitudes,” Jude recognizes and sexualizes Sue’s body. It is important to keep in mind that “ethereal” denotes not only spirituality but also daintiness or refinement; therefore, Sue’s “etherealness” contrasts her slender body and middle-class refinement to Arabella’s corpulent bulk and low-class vulgarity. Arabella shares some of Hardy’s wife’s characteristics: she has an ample bosom, copious amounts of hair (albeit fake), and dresses in ways that attract (negative) attention. And, as Hardy “acknowledged in conversation with Edmund Clodd, Henniker was his most immediate ‘model’ for Sue Bridehead” (Millgate Biography 324). She, like Sue, was “petite and birdlike, almost
pinched . . . but she dressed beautifully” (Pite 329). Sue’s “ethereality” is not a decisive commentary on her (lack of) sexuality, but instead a reflection of Hardy’s ideal, feminine, corporeal woman.\textsuperscript{108}

The “nunlike simplicity of” of Sue’s training school uniform, which “was rather enforced than desired” (109), reinforces how Sue’s sexual identity can be misread. As a student of the “species of nunnery known as the Training College” (111), Sue must wear “a murrey-coloured gown with a little lace collar. It was made quite plain” (105). Since the color murrey combines the symbolic values of purple (royalty) and black (death), Sue’s school uniform elevates her sexuality to “royal” chaste status by “killing” the social communication of her sexual body through fashionable clothing. This “nunlike” clothing hides her “under-brightness” (105) from strangers, and consequently, “Nobody stared at Sue, because she was so plainly dressed” (109). Jude recognizes that Sue’s ascetic clothing prevents others from seeing her as a sexual object: “A matter of ten pounds spent in a drapery-shop, which had no connection with her real life or her real self, would have set all Melchester staring” (109). Nevertheless, Jude is “comforted . . . in the thought that only himself knew the charms those habiliments subdued” (109). Here Jude exhibits his patriarchal desire to possess Sue’s sexuality—right down to the ownership of scopic appreciation of her physical “charms.” But after “[t]he guard of the train thought they were lovers, and put them into a compartment all by themselves” (109), Sue feints, “That’s a good intention wasted!” (109), later admitting to Jude that “I had no feeling before that moment at the railway station,” from thenceforth “I meant to—love you” (133). In addition to the nunlike clothing blocking communication of her own sexuality to
the public, Sue has yet to claim authority over the articulation of her own desires—either verbally or sartorially—to Jude.

Sue’s first effort to communicate her desires to Jude occurs when she responds to the training school administrators’ false accusation that she has had indecent relations by “walk[ing] through the largest river in the county” (115) to reach him. By the time she arrives at his apartment, her “clothes clung to her like the robes upon the figures in the Parthenon frieze” (115), outlining the contours of her body for Jude’s scopic appreciation. The nunlike clothing, which has been imposed to protect Sue from the masculine gaze, now symbolizes her burgeoning desire to court Jude sexually. Although he quickly mitigates his suggestion that Sue “must take off all your things!” (115) by recommending she borrow some of his landlady’s clothing, Sue refuses, arguing, “Don’t let her know, for God’s sake! We are so near the school that they’ll come after me!” (115). So Jude offers her his Sunday suit, asking, “You don’t mind?” (115) to which Sue quickly replies, “Oh no” (115). By agreeing to wear Jude’s suit, Sue gains access to the masculine privilege of intimate privacy. When the landlady sees Sue in Jude’s clothing, she says, “I see you’ve a young gentleman” (116), and leaves them unsupervised in his room. Sue’s cross-dressing empowers her to break free from feminine silence surrounding sexuality, and she praises Solomon’s Song for its representation of “ecstatic, natural, human love” (121-22), after which Jude labels her “quite Voltairean!” (121). Miller argues, “Hardy shows great skill in imagining scenes which will dramatize concretely some form of obstructed relationship. An example . . . the scene in Jude the Obscure in which Jude has Sue Bridehead . . . in his room, dressed in his own clothes, and yet is forbidden to possess her” (Miller D&D 158). Miller sees Sue’s penetration of
Jude’s private space—especially once she cross-dresses in his suit—as granting Jude permission to engage in sexual relations. Jude, though, fails to exploit this opportunity because of “social convention” (158), presumably his adherence to chivalric codes of sexuality. Yet while dressed in Jude’s clothes, Sue is empowered to discuss biblical sexual ecstasy, which Jude understands as tantamount to French immorality. So while Jude has not yet gained “possession” of Sue’s body through phallic penetration, her appreciation of radical, amatory literature introduces an erotic element into their relationship.

After Sue dresses herself in Jude’s suit, her drying underwear causes her to “blush[] . . . but only for a moment” (115). Instead of lapsing into a culturally approved performance of feminine modesty, Sue challenges Jude: “I suppose . . . it is odd that you should see me like this and all my things hanging there? Yet what nonsense! They are only a woman’s clothes—sexless cloth and linen” (115-16). But Sue’s objection draws attention to the gendered nature of clothing. Late-Victorian dress reformers would have noted that Sue’s “thick woollen gown . . . held a deal of water” (116) illustrating the need for women’s clothing to be redesigned—like men’s clothing—to facilitate movement through the use of lighter materials and with fewer layers. And Sue’s clothing only absorbs these insalubrious quantities of water because she is trying to save herself from the sexual politics that focused on women’s sexuality. Sue confession to Jude that she chose to live openly with her “former friend” or “University comrade” (161) aligns her with Edith Ellis’s pamphlet, “A Novitiate for Marriage” (1892), which “explored a daring analogy between the novitiate nun, undergoing the probationary ordeal to test her sense of vocation for the church, and the young woman embarking on marriage” (Brome 83).
Ellis “desired to substitute the deliberate attempt to keep the two parties in sustained ignorance of one another’s true nature, by a period . . . of assessing their sense of vocation in marriage. It was unfortunate that she chose a nun for her analogy since a nun’s preliminary experience was full of the very sexual abstinence with Edith [Ellis] desired to remove” (Brome 83). While Sue and her friend did not engage in intercourse, she contends that she is not sexless, just “self-contained” (119), and she admits that she has sexual feelings: “People say I must be cold-natured—sexless—on account of it. But I won’t have it!” (119). Instead of being repelled by Sue’s confession, Jude hopes her unconventional ideas might also mean that she will consider a relationship with him even though he is still married to Arabella. But Sue is not that radical. She believes in monogamy. Unlike the scandalous New Woman who was identified by her masculine public attire, Sue changes back into her “nunlike” clothing prior to leaving Jude’s house. At this point, she can only wear male clothing—and explore masculine erotic and radical ideas—while alone with Jude. And she cannot live with or desire a man who is yet married to another.

Sue’s plan to marry Phillotson—thereby punishing Jude for having hidden his marriage to Arabella—temporarily blinds her to the fact that she will be expected to develop a sexual relationship with her husband. After Jude and Sue pantomime their own union by clasping hands in front of the altar, Jude purchases an “extra little wedding-present . . . two or three yards of white tulle, which he threw over her bonnet and all, as a veil” (139). This white veil symbolizes Jude’s belief that Sue is physically and morally pure, even though she lived with her “University comrade” and is on the verge of marrying another man. Sue decides that Jude’s veil “looks so odd over a bonnet . . . I’ll
take the bonnet off” (139), illustrating her preference for Jude’s romantic, non-functional
veil over her conservative bonnet. But Phillotson commands Sue to “let it stay” (139),
and Sue “obeyed” (139). The conflict over Sue’s sartorial display contrasts Jude’s
romantic feelings for Sue to Phillotson’s paternalistic desire to construct her as non-erotic
conjugality. Phillotson’s preference for Sue’s matronly bonnet foreshadows how, while
he may become her husband, he will never be her lover. Jude is “her lover” (139),
whereas Phillotson is and always remains—even on their wedding day, even when he is
technically the groom—“the schoolmaster” (139). Jude and Sue’s eventual romantic and
sexual relationship is foreshadowed when Jude accessorizes Sue for her wedding to
Phillotson; Jude will always be—like the veil—a ghostly presence hanging over their
marriage. Devereux argues that “The failure of Sue’s attempt at independence suggests
the contradictions in the Victorian view of the role of women. Women were expected
to be pure and virginal before marriage, then constantly available for conjugal sex
once married. . . . Sue does fulfill the first half of this rule; however, she at first
refuses to comply with the second” (124). While Sue abstains from intercourse before
and during her first marriage to Phillotson, Victorians would not have viewed her as
“pure and virginal” after having lived for fifteen months with the “University
comrade” before marrying one man despite loving another. Sue explains to Jude, “I am
called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that
name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone,
with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies” (163). Sue’s confession does not
reveal an innate lack of sexual desire; it instead suggests that she realizes the world will
find her “antipathy” toward her husband “unaccountable.” She understands that as
Phillotson’s wife, she is *supposed* to allow him full conjugal access. Lawrence articulates a common frustration with Sue’s sexuality: since the Widow Edlin knew “that there are some men no woman of any feeling could touch, and Phillotson was one of them . . . , why was Sue’s instinct so short?” (Lawrence 501). Lawrence’s query lacks sympathy for how little Victorian women—especially urban women like Sue who were removed from the breeding cycles inherent in farm life—would have known about adult sexuality. The Widow Edlin recognizes Phillotson’s physical repugnance because, as a widow, she has had sexual experience. Not only has Sue lacked a mother figure to educate her about sexuality, she has been duped by the ideology that affection will develop following marriage and that women naturally submit to their husbands’ desires. Compounding her “unaccountable antipathies” toward her husband, Sue articulates her “aberrant passions” as her sexual desires for Jude. These desires are “aberrant” because Sue should not long for *any man*, especially not a man who is not her husband. Sue’s unhappy marriage has taught her to move beyond jealousy over Jude’s failed marriage and to accept divorce as a release from both of their marital bonds. Now that they have both equally become victims of antiquated marital ideology—Jude to masculine chivalry and Sue to feminine submission—they are released from feeling obligated to those mores.

When Sue moves out of the home she shared with Phillotson, the manner in which her clothing is packed dramatizes Phillotson’s complete emasculation. Even though Sue has taken advantage of the new marriage laws by requesting a divorce, she accedes to traditional, gendered, marital economics by assuring Phillotson, “I have packed only a change or two of my own personal clothing” (185). Sue only lays claim to that which has been traditionally allotted women in marriage: their clothing. She even
encourages Phillotson to “look into my trunk before it is closed” (185), compliantly conceded to audit what she has packed to remove from their household. Even though Sue has taken advantage of her right to leave her unhappy marriage, she does not exploit this privilege by choosing to take all of the possessions she enjoyed as Phillotson’s wife. Phillotson’s decision to pack up the remainder of Sue’s possessions dramatizes how much a woman’s economic and juridical positions within marriage were changing at the end of the nineteenth century. Only slightly more than a decade earlier, Phillotson could have had Sue arrested for desertion and returned under threat of gaol (Hall 35). Instead, he packs Sue’s possessions “silently” (187), magnanimously “taking out all Sue’s things that she had left behind, and laying them in a large box” (186). The narrator relates that “When it was done Phillotson closed the box and turned the key,” exclaiming, “To adorn her in somebody’s eyes; never again in mine!” (187). Phillotson believes Sue’s clothing consists entirely of items which “adorn” her body or enhance her beauty for her lover’s enjoyment. He has never understood her clothing as an expression of her desires, only as a reflection of the man to whom she is connected. Phillotson believes that the man who possesses the “key” to a woman’s “boxes” also has the right to the scopic and sexual appreciation of her clothed body. His lament “that merely taking a woman to church and putting a ring upon her finger could by any possibility involve one in such a daily, continuous tragedy as that now shared by her and me!” (183) illustrates that he does not appreciate or love Sue as an individual. She is a merely a “woman” on whose hand he placed “a ring.” While Phillotson had hoped the ring would lead to the sexual realization of their union, their failure at waiting to marry a person whom they each loved has involved them in the...
“daily, continuous tragedy.” While some may argue that Sue only packed her most utilitarian clothing, she earlier withheld permission for Phillotson to scrutinize one “small parcel that will go into Jude’s portmanteau” (185). The package’s significance is that it will mingle with Jude’s possessions, seemingly like Sue herself. Nowhere in the text is there a hint as to what this parcel contains, but one can assume that it holds some personal or intimate clothing that symbolizes Sue’s love of Jude.

We can see the ways in which Sue is victimized by or controls the power dynamics of her relationships by looking at Hardy’s use of umbrellas. By the Victorian Age, walking canes and umbrellas had replaced swords in male attire. These sartorial substitutes for the phallic weapon symbolize the curtailment—but not elimination—of male privileges. Instead of having the right to run one’s sword through an enemy—or to claim a woman’s virginity (droit de seigneur), the Victorian male’s phallic umbrella unfolds to a yonic canopy that might foster romantic intimacy. In his private correspondence, for example, Hardy ruminates, “It rains a drizzle here today, . . . [b]ut the lovers walk two-&-two just the same, under umbrellas—or rather under one umbrella (which makes all the difference)” (Letters i 201).112 Yet the umbrella’s facility to create inappropriate intimacy becomes evident when Jude sees Phillotson “under one umbrella” (89) with Sue, violating professional decorum by “place[ing] his arm round the girl’s waist” (89). She attempts to resist by “gently remov[ing] it [Phillotson’s arm]; but he replaced it; and she let it remain, looking quickly round her with an air of misgiving” (89). Sue’s discomfort underscores that she does not desire increased intimacy with her schoolmaster. But Phillotson “was holding the umbrella over her head” (89) and forcing her to submit to his desires. He controls the parameters of their relationship; she is being
dragged along. Sue’s discomfort under Phillotson’s “umbrella” of sexual harassment contrasts to the sexually autonomous “sunshade” that she possesses within her relationship with Jude. When Sue runs into Jude at the museum, she carries a “simple cotton sunshade, her little thumb cocked up against its stem” (86). In this scene, Sue “impulsively seized his [Jude’s] hand, and leaving a reproachful look on the schoolmaster turned away to Jude” (87). At this point, Sue’s desire for Jude is merely “ornamental,” like her sunshade. It is not until much later, when Sue swears to Jude that she will be his as long as he does not sleep with Arabella again, that she picks up her own industrial umbrella, “letting Jude kiss her freely, and returning his kisses in a way she had never done before” (210). While Langland argues that “Sue . . . precipitously agrees to sleep with Jude to erase Arabella’s claims on him” (57), Sue’s umbrella symbolizes her autonomous desire to have control over an intimate relationship with Jude. She allows him to kiss her “freely,” which means that her affection is not only unreserved and uncoerced but also “freely” given and “returned.” Sue’s dedication to remaining “intact” up to this point in their relationship forestalls the conclusion that she has been duped or coerced by Jude into becoming “fallen.” Nevertheless, his inability to phallically penetrate Sue does not unequivocally reveal that they have lived a sexless life together, as intercourse is not the single value of a sexual relationship. Daleski’s assertion that Sue’s “virginity is . . . the prime value in its signification of [her] autonomy” (201) overlooks the extent to which Sue lacked autonomy most of the time she was a virgin: when she was a border, pupil-teacher, and Phillotson’s wife. Sue and Jude’s consummated relationship cannot erase her independence because, as a woman, she never has been truly independent.
It is not until after Sue receives documentation that her divorce has been finalized that she “acquired . . . cheerfulness at the sense of freedom, and . . . put[] on a joyful coloured gown in observance of her liberty” (202-03). Sue’s “gown . . . of . . . liberty” surely refers to the popular dresses designed by Arthur Lasenby Liberty that were favored by women interested in reform (Cunningham 126-27). While his eponymous colorful gowns were easily recognizable and “appealed to his artistic friends—Lord Leighton, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Whistler, Crane, Godwin, and others” (126), Liberty felt that “clothing should not be eccentric or bizarre” (Cunningham 126). Nevertheless, Liberty’s “ideas about dress were similar to other reformers. He believed that clothing . . . should reflect independent personal opinion” (Cunningham 126). Sue’s “independent personal opinion” mirrors the marriage reform ideology of the late-Victorian era. She enlists Jude in her radical sexual reform ideology when she states, “I . . . want and long to ennoble some man to high aims; and when I saw you, and knew you wanted to be my comrade, I—shall I confess it?—thought that man might be you” (122). Sue’s use of the word comrade aligns her with the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF), which was established in 1881 and promoted “free unions” by “rejecting bourgeois marriage and the interference of church or state” (Hall 59). Jude and Sue’s choice to nickname each other “comrade” alludes to both the SDF term “friend” (which was used by free unionists to designate their partners) and the group’s Marxist beliefs. Throughout the time spent writing *Jude*, Hardy had been flirting with the married Henniker by uncharacteristically addressing her as “my dear friend.” In a similar manner, Jude frets over Sue’s “former friend” (161), her “University comrade” (161) until his increasingly intimate relationship with Sue enables him to claim her as “my own
The narrator then corroborates that Jude and Sue are “true comrades” (212). Later, amongst the roses at the fair, Sue’s independence is reified by “her new summer clothes, flexible and light as a bird, her little thumb stuck up by the stem of her white cotton sunshade” (229). That her dress is “flexible and light” shows that she is probably wearing another Liberty dress, which did “not distort the natural form of the body with corsets” (Cunningham 126). Indeed, “One of the chief improvements made by artistic dress was the possibility of freeing women from wearing a corset” (Cunningham 146, emphasis mine). Sue’s “liberty” dress, therefore, represents that she has finally achieved independence through her dedication to sexual reform. And the virginal whiteness of Sue’s sunshade reveals that her sexual autonomy within her relationship with Jude is pure. Sue is “the sweetest and most disinterested comrade that [Jude] had ever had” (149). Jude and Sue are suitable free union partners because they are friends and comrades. Compared to Arabella’s extreme self interest, Sue’s disinterestedness attracts Jude as it shows that she has been captivated by his companionship alone, not the civil and financial benefits that she could acquire by marrying him in a state or church ceremony.

Sue hopes female “liberty” or independence will allow for the establishment of sexual compatibility, which will in turn prevent the couple from experiencing sexual “cooling.” Robert B Heilman argues that Sue “does give in to Jude, indeed, but immediately begins campaigning against marriage, and in terms so inapplicable—he repeatedly argues from the example of their earlier marriages, which are simply not relevant . . . but as a symbolic continuation of the resistance to sex” (215-16). But Sue
explains to Jude that her fears stem not from “an abhorrence of sexuality” (127), as posited by Stave, but because,

. . . it is foreign to a man’s nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person’s lover. There would be a much likelier chance of his doing it if he were told not to love. If the marriage ceremony consisted in an oath and signed contract between the parties to cease loving from that day forward, in consideration of personal possession being given, and to avoid each other’s society as much as possible in public, there would be more loving couples than there are now. Fancy the secret meetings between the perjuring husband and wife, the denials of having seen each other, the clambering in at bedroom windows, and the hiding in closets! There’d be little cooling then. (203-04)

Sue has extrapolated from her experience with Phillotson that it is not always possible for marriage to create sexual desire in wives; additionally, she fears social approbation will annihilate husbands’ erotic attachment to their spouses. Note how Sue’s use of the male singular pronoun delays and obscures the wife’s complicity in “clambering in at bedroom windows.” “Free love” is a bit of a misnomer because within free unions “Promiscuity was reprehended and male and female sexuality were still envisaged as respectively active and passive” (Hall 59). So, on the one hand, Sue adheres to the Victorian and reformist ideals of feminine sexual passivity. On the other hand, Sue, like other female protagonists of “pro-free union” literature, defines when and where sexual relations will commence; otherwise, her relationship would appear to replicate age-old male exploitation of a callow virgin. Sue waits until their “noviate” or “free union” proves that she and Jude can create and maintain desire for one another throughout a period of cohabitation. Her decision to authorize the consummation of their relationship may mitigate the threat that Jude would be tempted to sleep with Arabella; nevertheless,
that fact cannot negate or erase that Sue has chosen to instigate sexual relations. She defers sexual relations not because she lacks sexuality but because by controlling the pace of their sexual relations, she gains the time necessary to verify their compatibility and, hence, the purity of their relationship.

Sue’s success at establishing a mutually compatible and satisfying sexual relationship is verified by Jude and Sue’s erotic play amongst the roses, which emphasizes their “tender attention to each other” (229). Lawrence posits that “the real marriage of Jude and Sue was in the roses. [. . .] The rose is the symbol of marriage-consummation in its beauty. To them it is more than a symbol, it is a fact, a flaming experience” (507). Inexplicably, Lawrence goes on to argue, “They went home tremblingly glad. And then the horror when, because of Jude’s unsatisfaction [sic], he must take Sue sexually” (507). I find Lawrence’s statement strange, as there is no textual proof that either Jude or Sue is horrified by their sexual experiences. Sue’s sexual autonomy with Jude is shown in that Sue “adored roses” and “detain[ed] Jude almost against his will” (233), exclaiming, “I should like to push my face quite into them—the dears! . . . But I suppose it is against the rules” (233). Sue feels at liberty to communicate her love of “roses” to Jude, even though she knows it is against “the rules” for women to feel sexual desire. Sue’s pleasure with their sexual relations is shown when her “usually pale cheeks reflect[ed] the pink of the tinted roses at which she gazed” (233) and “she looked up at him, and smiled in a way that told so much” (233). This scene contradicts the common misperception that Sue “is independent and untouchable, until she eventually gives in to Jude’s demands and bears him three children” (Devereux 124, emphasis mine). This reading turns Sue into the victim of Jude’s sexual desires and
her fecund womb. But even though Jude “gave her a little push, so that her nose went among the petals” (233), Sue illustrates her agency when she cries, “The policeman will be down on us, and I shall say it was my husband’s fault!” (233, emphasis mine). Enamored with her erotic relationship, Sue plots to obscure their unsanctioned sexuality from authority figures in order to evade being caught up by juridical powers.

Unfortunately, Sue’s utopian vision fails to consider how unmarried but “loving” couples will explain to an unsympathetic world the children produced by their relations. Although Sue “openly adopted the name of Mrs. Fawley” (235), the women in church “critically regarded her person in relief against the white wall” (237). The women’s belief that she “ought to be someone’s wife” (237) cannot accommodate Sue’s unsanctioned pregnancy, causing Jude to lose his job. Sue’s dedication to Jude and their free union ends tragically because she cannot protect herself, her lover, or their children from the manner in which social forces conspire to make her and her family “bedraggled” (257). When Sue and her family attend the Remembrance Day celebration (also referred to as “Humiliation Day” and “Judgment Day”), “The rain came on more heavily, and all who had umbrellas opened them. Jude was not one of these, and Sue only possessed a small one, half sunshade” (257). Because of their continued financial hardships—hardships that have been compounded due to social disapprobation—Jude is completely emasculated, and Sue struggles to retain the inspiration that fueled her rebellion. Her “small” umbrella is meant for times of sunshine, and it is unable to compete with the constant “humiliation” which has been heaped upon their family. She maternally whispers, “‘Let us go on, dear,’ . . . , endeavouring to shelter him. ‘We haven’t found any lodgings yet’” (257). To which Jude petulantly replies, “Just a moment, and I’ll go!” (257, emphasis
mine). Later, when Sue’s once-again pregnant body reveals her sexual activity, she cannot secure housing for her family until she decides to “pull my cloak more round me” (259). And Jude reassures her, “Nobody would notice it now” (259). But because sexuality, and especially conjugal felicity, is almost always represented in Victorian novels as pregnancy, their public efforts to cloak the fact that Sue is with child ironically draw attention to their unmarried status. In response to the landlady’s suspicious query, “Are you really a married woman?” (259), Sue told the woman that her husband and herself had each been unhappy in their first marriages, after which, terrified at the thought of a second irrevocable union, and lest the conditions of the contract should kill their love, yet wishing to be together, they had literally not found the courage to repeat it, though they had attempted it two or three times. Therefore, though in her own sense of the words she was a married woman, in the landlady’s sense she was not. (259-60)

Although Sue gains her listener’s compassion, the landlady’s husband objects, “who wants such a woman here? and [sic] perhaps a confinement!” (260). Sue’s unwed sexuality exposes her to social pressures that she cannot control, and her confession gains her family only one night’s accommodation. Sue’s fears that marriage will complicate or spoil their relationship are realized time and time again, not in her and Jude’s personal happiness, but as they are prevented from providing for and protecting the welfare of their family.

In some ways we can understand the tragic results of Sue and Jude’s union as an indictment of Victorian prudishness that propped up marriage through the condemnation of birth control. Although Sue and Jude would have had recourse to “French letters,” or condoms, they probably would not have considered using birth control due to “its
persisting connection with illicit and promiscuous sex” (Hall 44) and the threat of incarceration. Husbands and wives were encouraged to practice restraint, as there was “a pervasive ideology of marital continence in reducing incidence of intercourse below optimum frequency for conception” (Hall 61). This context helps us to better understand why Hardy would argue, in a 1895 letter to Edmund Gosse, that there is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue’s nature. The abnormalism [sic] consists in disproportion: not in inversion, her sexual instinct being healthy so far as it goes, but unusually weak & fastidious. . . . One point illustrating this I could not dwell upon: that, though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even while they were living together (I mention that they occupy separate rooms, except towards the end). . . . (Letters ii 99)

One has to wonder what Hardy considers to be “more than occasional,” as that is a subjective measurement. The only socially acceptable method for controlling reproduction was continence, which may explain why Hardy describes Sue’s sexual activity as irregular or infrequent. Her repeated pregnancies seem to refute the efficacy of this approach to birth control. But since Victorians understood a lack of marital pregnancy as evidence that the marriage itself was flawed, Jude and Sue’s “occasional” relations ironically establish them as properly restrained and reproductive, as fecundity was understood to be an extension of chaste sexuality. Since the late-Victorian sexual reform movement advocated for women to be in charge of sexuality within the home, Sue’s “weak & fastidious” sexual instinct can be understood as an articulation of her properly feminine effort to keep their relations as unproductive as possible. But in response to young Jude’s query as to why she is once again pregnant, Sue sobs, “I can’t explain, dear! But it—is not quite on purpose—I can’t help it!” (262). Sue’s admission
that she “can’t help it!” can be read as both an admission of sexual desire and as a lack of access to birth control (she could not “help” getting pregnant). A more terrifying supposition is that Sue and Jude have no idea how to avoid pregnancy. Sue’s anguished “I can’t explain” sets in motion the sad set of tragic murders. If Sue had explained the in-and-outs of sexuality to little Jude, it is possible that he would have viewed of the immanent arrival of another baby differently. The very reproductiveness that Victorians understood to legitimate traditional marriage becomes tragic when young Jude—the product of Arabella’s fatal sexuality that Sue fails to reeducate—murders Jude and Sue’s children.

Sue’s sorrow over her children’s murders causes her to erase her radical identity by abandoning her reform clothing and redressing herself according to conservative Victorian ideology. Following the murder, the narrator notes that Sue’s “coloured clothing, which she had never thought of changing for the mourning he had bought, suggested to the eye a deeper grief than the conventional garb of bereavement could express” (267). Mourning was expensive and “remained beyond the means of many working class families until the end of the century” (Taylor Mourning 127), yet Jude feels greater obligation to maintaining appearances than to conceding the reality of their insufficient bank account. The severity of their financial straights is dramatized when “economy being so imperative she deprecated his [hiring transportation], and they walked along slowly, Jude in black crape, she in brown and red clothing” (268). Sue’s grief is underscored by the fact that she has enough sense to refuse a cab ride in spite of being physically weakened by pregnancy, yet she “never thought” to change into mourning.

Devereaux argues that Sue’s lament: “‘We are made a spectacle unto the world, and
to angels, and to men!’ The sense of becoming a spectacle, losing one’s position as the central informing consciousness of one’s world, terrifies Sue, perhaps even more than the prospect of remaining marginal, disappearing, or becoming obscure—even invisible” (128). Yet Sue’s “brown and red” clothing makes her a spectacle, makes her despair more visible. Sue grieves, “I was just making my baby darling a new frock; and now I shall never see him in it” (265). This never-to-be-worn garment is at once symbolic of the love she had for her children and evidence that she expresses love through first producing and then seeing her children dressed in the products of her labor. It is not until after Sue adopts her mourning clothes that her grief becomes less visible, and she is reduced to “a heap of black clothes” (274).

Once Sue returns to Phillotson, her altered sartorial display emphasizes how barren and cold her life is without Jude. While in the act of “placing her muff” (286) upon the bureau, Sue cries out in dismay at the sight of their marriage license, and “Her look was that of the condemned criminal who catches sight of his coffin” (286). Sue’s cold-weather clothing illustrates that sacramental marriage makes her frigid. Muffs are not only fur-lined garments for keeping one’s hands warm, but also slang, dating from 1699 (OED), referring to a woman’s pubic hair or, in this case, Sue’s vagina. She is being forced to sacrifice her sexuality on the altar of socially sanctioned marriage. While her grief has convinced her to renounce a union of fecund sensuality for a marriage of barren frigidity, the marriage license-cum-coffin emphasizes that her penance will not bring her the peace of mind she seeks.

Sue destroys her embroidered nightgown in a futile effort to force her rebellious sexual and sartorial identity into submission. After the Widow Edlin unpacks the
“night-gown tastefully embroidered” (286) that Sue “bought . . . long ago—to please Jude” (287), Sue exclaims, “Oh—I didn’t know that was put in! . . . I didn’t mean it to be” (286, emphasis in original). Since Jude packed and the Widow Edlin unpacked the nightgown, Sue is absolved both from plotting to seduce Phillotson (packing) and from desiring the consummation of her legitimate marriage (unpacking). Though impossible to prove, it is likely that the “small parcel” (185) Sue earlier forbade Phillotson from inspecting when she left their original marriage had contained this nightgown. Regardless, that earlier, private package revealed her anticipation of her future with Jude, whereas the garment Sue now produces illustrates the depth of her aversion toward her new life as Mrs. Phillotson. Sue’s active efforts to repress her desire for Jude are revealed when she admits that the nightgown “reminds me of what I want to forget” (287). She is “trying to forget” all the ways in she was invested in her sexual pleasure with Jude. Her embroidered nightgown is a reminder of the value of their private sexual relations, especially since embroidered items were expensive and prized.119 Additionally, Cunningham’s observation that “many aesthetic dresses featured art embroidery” and “could be procured from the Mssrs. Liberty and Company” (114) illustrates once again how Sue and Jude’s relationship was also a partnership dedicated to marital and sexual reform.120 Now that Sue is engaged in “fanatic prostitution” (283) as Phillotson’s “legitimate” wife, the nightgown “signifies what I don’t feel” (287), and Sue exclaims, “It must be destroyed!” (287). Sue tries to erase and repress her desires for Jude by claiming the nightgown is “adulterous!” and “rending it with all her might,” declaring it “an accursed thing,” that “is only fit for the fire” (287). But, after witnessing Sue’s treatment of the nightgown, the Widow Edlin recognizes that “You are in love wi’ t’
other [Jude] still!” (287). Wood reads this scene as proof that Sue “settles back into the compliant conformity of the ‘average’ woman who ‘never instigates, only responds.’ When she burns her embroidered nightgown and takes the calico shift, she adopts the Christian way of healing the mind of its ‘diseased’ recalcitrance” (213). But Sue’s frenzied destruction of the nightgown illustrates that she is not “compliant”; she works frantically to kill and erase her sexual desires. Nor does this scene dramatize, as Stave argues, Sue’s “thorough understanding and acceptance of Christian and Victorian views of sin, sex, guilt, and the position of women” (143) but that those views have tragic effects. In preparation for her new identity as Mrs. Phillotson, Sue has purchased “a new and absolutely plain garment, of coarse and unbleached calico” (286). The Widow Edlin’s observation that this garment “is no better than very sackcloth o’ Scripture!” (286)—which is worn as mourning garb—exposes Sue’s current and continuing despair over losing Jude and the sexual autonomy she enjoyed with him. Sue swears, “I am going to make my conscience right on my duty to Richard—by doing a penance—the ultimate thing. I must!” (307).

While Sue finds it impossible to “shake[] down . . . with comfortable indifference” (168) to sex with Phillotson, her insistence on delaying sexual relations with the University comrade, Phillotson, and even Jude does not mean she is universally “frigid” or asexual. Marjorie Garson’s belief that Sue’s “repeated pregnancies, which in view of her sexual skittishness and her intact and immaculate body-image are hard to visualize” (172-73) highlights how one can resist being receptive to the articulations verifying Sue’s active sexuality. Perhaps Garson and others find Sue’s sexuality difficult to “visualize” due to the discourses that have worked to construct chastity—both sexual
and sartorial—as inconspicuous or illegible sexuality. Michael Giffin, for instance, argues that “Sue is, of body, mind and spirit, the opposite of Arabella and appears in the text not as a physical woman, but as an angelic, ethereal, incorporeal, passionless fairy. *Her sexuality is not presented* in the novel because she is meant to be cerebral and pure” (96, emphasis mine). Because Sue is the chaste protagonist, critics choose to ignore or misread her articulations of desire because these articulations complicate the idea of what constitutes a proper sexuality for our heroine. For example, many critics argue that Sue’s confession to the Widow Edlin that “I find I still love [Jude]—oh, grossly!” (310) proves that Sue believes sex is bad or “gross.” However, Sue is actually confessing that she has sexual desires for Jude and that they originate in her “gross” or material body. Sue is quite clear that she has “gross” desires for Jude. In response to Jude’s query, “You do love me still?” (307), Sue replies, “I do! You know it too well! … But I *mustn’t* do this! I mustn’t kiss you back as I would!” (307). Sue knows she “mustn’t” desire him, however she implores Jude, “Kiss me, oh kiss me lots of times . . . —I can’t bear it!” (306-07). Sue’s request to Jude, “I want you to kiss me, as a lover, incorporeally” (222), has been picked up by critics to corroborate their understanding of Sue as an asexual, frigid woman, but Sue cannot be incorporeal (literally without a body) nor does she understand herself to be without sexual desires. She asks him to kiss her incorporeally, which she understands to be *the* expression of their love. Sue uses “incorporeal” to refer to the word’s definition as “of, relating to, or constituting a right that is based on property (as bonds or patents) which has no intrinsic value” (Merriam-Webster). This definition refers to Sue’s objection to any oversight by the state and church of her relationship with Jude. She adheres to the reformist ideal “to re-vision marriage to emphasize woman’s
bodily ownership of herself” (Hall 60). Jude assures Sue that he knows “there’s no evil woman in you. Your natural instincts are perfectly healthy; not quite so impassioned, perhaps, as I could wish; but good, and dear, and pure. And as I have often said, you are absolutely the most ethereal, least sensual woman I ever knew to exist without inhuman sexlessness” (271, emphasis mine). As Devereux notes, Sue “is continually described as bodiless and ethereal—a personification of pure spirit without ‘gross’ desires” (127, emphasis mine). By listening to what Sue communicates about herself, we can reenvision her sexuality as actively chaste, before forcing herself to become frigidly passive.

In contrast to the fiery kisses Sue seeks from Jude, she is repelled when her “sacramental” and soon-to-be legal husband tries to kiss her. In addition to having confessed to Jude that she still loves and desires him, when she does not hear Phillotson breathing as she stands outside of his bedroom wearing her penitential “garment,” Sue fantasizes, “Perhaps he’s dead! . . . And then—I should be free, and I could go to Jude!” (312). But as Sue knows, “The mournful thing is, that nobody would admit it as a reason for feeling as I do; so that no excuse is left me” (311). After he overhears not only that Sue would find his death preferable to sleeping with him but also her desire for Jude, Phillotson cannot but realize that Sue “still ha[s] an aversion to me!” (286), yet “desire was renascent in him” (286). As Sue struggles to perform her penance by submitting to him, Phillotson, “gloomily considered her . . . as she crouched before him in her night-clothes” (313). Sue fails to embody the image of proper feminine submission. Instead, as she “crouches” on the ground in her “night-clothes,” she dramatizes the abusive nature of conservative discourses surrounding female sexuality and marital sexual relations.
Tragically, he forces her to gratify his desires by reasoning, “With a lover hanging about, a half-marriage should be completed” (313). In contrast to Sue’s frenzied demands for Jude to kiss her, when Phillotson “kissed her. A quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry” (313).

Sue’s efforts to atone for her sexual rebellion not only destroy her active sexuality but also make Jude impotent. Although Sue wails, “my comrade, our perfect union—our two-in-oneness—is now stained with blood!” (265), her acceptance of being the primary sinner prevents her from protecting and supporting her “comrade.” Condemned to a life with Arabella, whom he does not love but who wears his wedding ring or “padlock” (302), Jude purposely chooses to leave his umbrella behind (304, 308) and to commit suicide by visiting Sue. Sue’s insistence that they both return to their sacramental partners emasculates Jude. He cannot live without their “perfect union,” their “two-in-oneness”; he cannot live without his comrade’s love and affection. Without Sue’s love, he lacks the will to live. As he lies on his deathbed, “Arabella was . . . curling her hair, which operation she performed by heating an umbrella-stay in the flame of a candle she had lighted, and using it upon the flowing lock” (316-17). After Arabella manipulates Jude into yet another marriage, his sexuality is just as broken as the umbrella from which she has procured this umbrella stay. As Phillotson observes, “taking a woman to church and putting a ring upon her finger [can] . . . involve one in such a daily, continuous tragedy” (183).

*Jude the Obscure*’s publication in 1895 directly proceeded the watershed moment in England when the sexual and marital reform movements were decimated by the legal
resistance of the late 1890s. The novel was published seven months after the word “feminism” appeared in print for the first time in the *Athenæum (OED)*. The virtually concurrent publication of *Jude* with the coining of the term feminism reflects the importance of debates on women’s roles and rights in the waning of the nineteenth century.  

Although Hardy apparently did not harbor radical political ideas, neither was he conservative. Hardy supported women’s suffrage, not because he felt women, as humans and English subjects, had an equal right to have a voice in governmental issues but because he felt that they would vote similar to himself on certain social issues.  

Hardy’s first wife Emma, an ardent supporter of women’s enfranchisement, grumbles, “His interest in the Suffrage Cause is nil. . . . He understands only the women he invents—the others not at all—and he only writes for Art, though ethics show up” (*Letters of Emma* 6, emphasis in original). But, of course, literature is political. Hardy confesses, “Sue is a type of woman which has always had an attraction for me” (*Letters* ii 99), and recalls having heard a story about a young woman “not caring to be ‘made respectable’ [that] won [my] admiration” (*Life* 162) because she illustrated the “eminently modern idea . . . of a woman’s not becoming necessarily the chattel and slave of her seducer—impressed [me] as being one of the first glimmers of woman’s enfranchisement; and [I] made use of it in succeeding years in more than one case in [my] fiction” (*Life* 163).  

And Hardy further delineates his project in *Jude* as “The marriage laws being used in great part as the tragic machinery of the tale, and its general drift on the domestic side tending to show that . . . the civil law should be only the enunciation of the law of nature” (*Hardy Postscript* 7). Sue’s dedication to the liberation of natural sexuality from civil and ecclesiastic law is corroborated by the marriage reform symbolism of her sartorial
performance. Ultimately, though, her capitulation reflects Hardy’s belief that the negative influence of conservative marriage ideology has the social power to destroy positive ideals. Therefore, Hardy’s assertion that “It is curious that some of the papers should look upon the novel as a manifesto on ‘the marriage question’ (although of course, it involves it)” (Letters ii 93) seems to be more than a bit disingenuous. As Havelock Ellis observes, “In Jude the Obscure we find for the first time in our literature the reality of marriage clearly recognized as something wholly apart from the mere ceremony with which our novelists have usually identified it” (314). Hardy’s depiction of Sue’s “enfranchised” sexuality as conflicted and conflicting offers instead of the “fairytale” ending the observation that marriage, even a “free union” based on the most personal of ideals, can be destroyed by the forces that try to prevent social reform.

Hardy cannot envision a realistic yet fairytale ending for the free union couple and uncompromisingly illustrates the harsh treatment society can inflict on reformers. Hardy recounts that

After the issue of Jude the Obscure as a serial story in Germany, an experienced reviewer of that country informed the writer [Hardy] that Sue Bridehead, the heroine, was the first delineation in fiction of the woman who was coming into notice in her thousands every year—the woman of the feminist movement—the slight, pale ‘bachelor’ girl—the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet; who does not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession, and boast themselves as superior people because they are licensed to be loved on the premises. The regret of this critic was that the portrait of the newcomer had been left to be drawn by a man, and was not done by one of her own sex, who would never have allowed her to break down at the end. (Postscript 8)
What this review neglects to concede, is that Hardy’s naturalism demands he explore the full brunt of circumstances that conspire against his protagonist’s ideals. Hardy’s project is not Lewis’s, whose Gothicism apotheosizes romance, or Eliot’s, whose realism depicts how communities reward “good” behavior. Millgate observes that in Jude Hardy strove to portray “without hesitation or compromise, [to] denounce, once and for all, those denials of . . . sexual justice” (Biography 346). Another late-Victorian male author, Grant Allen similarly chronicles the tragic results of a free union in his novel, The Woman Who Did (1895). Allen foregrounds his naturalist project with the epigraph, “Written at Perugia, Spring 1893, for the first time in my life, wholly and solely to satisfy my own taste and my own conscience.” Similarly, Hardy’s dictum for the writing of Jude illustrates his dark iconoclasm, “Never retract. Never explain. Get it done and let them howl” (Hardy, Life 286). And howl they did. Marital and sexual reformers faced increasing persecution after Oscar Wilde’s 1895 trial for sodomy, when free unions came to be seen as part and parcel of the evils associated with relaxed views on heterosexuality and marriage. Havelock Ellis had earlier sent Hardy a copy of Sexual Inversion in Women, which Hardy promised to “read with interest” (Letters 83). Just a few years later, in 1898, London bookseller George Bedborough was charged with selling literature that supported ‘free love’ after he sold a copy of Ellis’s book to an undercover cop (Hall 57). The Victorian “free union” sexual revolution was squashed before it had barely begun, and Hardy wrote to Henniker in 1898 that “I have been offended with you for some time . . . for what you said—that I was an advocate for ‘free love’. I hold no theory whatever on the subject, . . . & seriously I don’t see any possible scheme for the union of the sexes that w[oul]d be satisfactory” (Letters ii 122). Earlier, though, prior to the fallout over
Jude, Wilde’s trial, and the crackdown on “free union” literature, Hardy had found reason to hope that a satisfactory union between the sexes was possible, if couples like Sue and Jude were allowed to love freely.

Writing seventeen years after the initial publication of Jude the Obscure, Hardy maintains that “. . . a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties—being then essentially and morally no marriage” (Postscript 7). Hardy’s own unhappy marriage ended abruptly a mere seven months later with Emma’s unexpected death. Pite observes that “Emotionally and tonally, the germ of the book was Hardy’s experience in 1893-4, when his love for Florence [Henniker] was rejected. Yet most of the anger in the book is directed towards things that Emma held particularly dear: Church, . . . and the institution of marriage” (Pite 348). Emma’s knowledge of Hardy’s unhappiness and subsequent ideas on radical sexuality is evident in her response to a request for marital advice from a newlywed. Emma writes bitterly that “at fifty, a man’s feelings too often take a new course altogether. Eastern ideas of matrimony secretly pervade his thoughts, & he wearies of the most perfect, & suitable wife chosen in his earlier life. Of course he gets over it usually, somehow, or hides it” (Letters of Emma 15). But Hardy did not try to “get over” or “hide” his disgust with marriage as an institution. In his “Facts” notebooks, he culled scores of stories from local periodicals that focused on the more macabre aspects of marriage, such as wife sales, partners swapped at the altar, jilted brides and grooms, shotgun weddings, drunken grooms, etc. In 1895, Hardy writes, “the modern views of marriage are a survival from the custom of capture & purchase, propped up by a theological superstition” (Letters ii 92). Perhaps Hardy’s distrust of religion began early, as he was raised in a High Church family that understood
religion as a social obligation and did not believe the fundamental or literal interpretation of the Bible. The Widow Edlin’s assertion that marriage “concern[s] nobody but your own two selves” (287) embodies “Hardy’s conviction that . . . [e]arlier generations had enjoyed a simpler and more kindly way of being Christian. . . . Doctrinal controversies had eroded trust in ordinary, human affection” (Pite 86). Hardy shared his friend Edward Clodd’s belief that “there was simply no question of the marriage vow’s being binding, for instance, or divinely instituted. People must do as they felt. The sanctity of marriage was simply another superstition, which rational inquiry had exploded” (Pite 324). In a letter to Clodd, Hardy queries, “Did I tell you I feared I sh[oul]d seem too High-Churchy at the end of the book, where Sue recants? You can imagine my surprise at some of the reviews” (Letters ii 99). Sue’s “High Church” views emphasize marriage’s sacramental aspect over mutual affection. Jude tries to reason with Sue, “We’ve both remarried out of our senses. . . . I was gin-drunk; you were creed-drunk. Either form of intoxication takes away the nobler vision” (107). This nobler vision is of emotional, intellectual, and sexual compatibility. The novel ends with Arabella’s cruel yet divinely rational observation that Sue has “never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she’s as he is now!” (322). This final line of the novel could be read that Jude and Sue will one day be reunited in death. But without material proof of God, all we know is that Sue’s penance has ensured her and Jude’s earthly turmoil, which will only cease in death. Sue, tragically, will not find peace until she is dead, when all of her “gross” desires for Jude die along with her body. Sue “may swear that [she’s found peace] on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace . . . but it won’t be true” (322). Her talisman represents a false god of conjugal prostitution.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION: PEARLS OF DESIRE IN ORLANDO

But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none
-- I Corinthians 7:29

In 1926 Virginia Woolf was photographed for the international fashion bible: *Vogue*. This image is strange for many reasons. Hermione Lee, in her exhaustive *Virginia Woolf* (1997), posits that Woolf felt “contempt, as well as nervousness, at the world where hairpins mattered” (462) in no small part because “it was unbearable if other people . . . made jokes about her clothes” (462). And Woolf’s “The New Dress”—published in May of 1927, reflects her distaste for and discomfort with fashionable clothing. But Woolf seems only to have been afraid of having her *personal* clothing mocked. In 1910, the year Woolf identifies as the point when all “human character changed” (“Character” 421), she appeared at three separate events dressed in a manner designed to court attention, possibly even ridicule. At the “Artists Revels,” Woolf appareled herself as one of the greatest seductresses of all time, Cleopatra. And she “loved to tell” about her role in the Dreadnought Hoax, where she masqueraded as “Prince Mendax,” an Abyssinian who repeatedly says, “Bunga-Bunga” (Lee 279-83).
Alternately, she only expressed boredom about her costume for the Post-Impressionist Ball, where she appeared scandalously underdressed as one of the “‘indecent’ Gauguin girls” (Lee 287). Woolf’s seemingly incompatible behavior may be explained in that she understood her racialized masquerades—of the sub-linguistic male and the over-sexualized female—as social criticism and, therefore, separate from her personal sartorial and, thus, sexual, “failures” for which she so feared being ridiculed.128 Perhaps Lee’s uncharacteristic gush that in the *Vogue* photograph Woolf looks “ravishing in her mother’s dress” (Lee 463) can be explained by Lee’s desire to stroke, albeit posthumously, Woolf’s fragile ego. Or perhaps Lee’s perception has been obscured by the confused mess of sartorial sensibilities that are brought together by a biographer writing in the 1990s about a photograph taken in the 1920s of a woman wearing a gown from the late-1800s. But surely *Vogue* readers, well versed in the magazine’s “directives on the shorter, straight skirts, the feathers and fringes, the backless evening dresses in metallic colours, the capes and cloches” (Lee 463), would have perceived Woolf’s mother’s dress as antiquated and Woolf herself as woefully undersized for the full-bosomed, puffed-shouldered, lace-trimmed, Victorian gown. Indeed, Woolf seems to be dwarfed by her mother’s dress: the puffy sleeves overwhelming her shoulders, the neckline exposing collarbones instead of décolletage. Unlike the Victorian fecundity that Woolf parodies in *Orlando*—and which was realized by her mother’s seven pregnancies—the *Vogue* photograph paints a picture of Woolf as both sartorially and sexually insufficient.

Bloomsbury members started the rumors that the Woolf’s marriage was sexually barren. Virginia’s brother-in-law, Clive Bell, went so far as to postulate, Leonard Woolf’
“fucks her once a week but has not yet succeeded in breaking her maidenhead” (qtd in Lee 326). Bell’s questionable assertion that six years into marriage Woolf has retained her hymen in spite of Leonard’s frequent “assaults,” emasculates Leonard and mythologizes the superhuman impenetrability of Woolf’s virginity. Sproles contends that “For Woolf, heterosexuality was not particularly satisfying” (5); therefore, Woolf “experienced sexual pleasure predominantly through what she read and what she wrote instead of through her body—except during her affair with [Vita] Sackville-West” (57). Woolf’s personal biography and critical reception both delight in and are stymied by these sexual and sartorial paradoxes. She is the virgin who had survived being groped by one step-brother and the “lover” of the other. She is the frigid member of the sexually radical Bloomsbury group. She is the impenetrable wife who had a passionate love affair with a woman. She is the author who delighted in aesthetics yet could barely stand to think about clothing. She is sartorially awkward, but she socialized with the most fashionable people. But Lee gently chastises the critics who promulgate “the simple view of the Woofs’ marriage as asexual . . . , the product of child abuse . . . , with all her erotic feeling directed towards women . . . [which] doesn’t incorporate, or is embarrassed by, the deep tenderness of those references to ‘my inviolable centre,’ and the evidence of an erotic secret life” (327). A little over a month before their marriage, Woolf wrote to Leonard that “I want everything—love, children, adventure, intimacy, work” (qtd in Lee 305). Woolf’s references to her and Leonard’s “private fun” with their “marmots” (qtd in Lee 328) illustrate that their marriage “thrives on affectionate cuddling and play” (Lee 328). In light of Woolf’s expressed desire for intimacy with her husband, the couple’s childlessness may have resulted less from a lack of conjugal sexuality than from a desire
to protect Woolf’s mental stability and artistic productivity, combined with the threat of hereditary insanity. In fact, Lee speculates that in 1913, following 98 days without a period, Woolf’s menses were reinstated through abortion (331).

Because Woolf had no children to prove heterosexual activity—and because she took a verbose lesbian lover in Vita Sackville-West—*Orlando* (1928) has become something of an analytical darling for critics interested in queer sexuality and aesthetics. In “Orlando and its Genesis: Venturing and Experimenting in Art, Love, and Sex,” Jean Love argues that “*Orlando* was Virginia Woolf’s way of demonstrating that she preferred the role of the artist, of the truly fascinated observer and commentator, to the role of participant—in sexual as in other relationships” (213-14). And Karyn Z. Sproles asserts in *Desiring Women: The Partnership of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West* (2006) that Woolf and Sackville-West’s “literary dialogue—public and private—was bent on resisting the repression of women’s desires” (5). In Sproles’s opinion, “The climax of their partnership, *Orlando*, is an explicit call for the recognition of the instability of sexuality and subjectivity” (17). For Ralph Freedman, Woolf’s “ideological engagement took its meaning from its aesthetic incarnation, and . . . the aesthetic incarnations were fashioned by her ideological stance” (12). This ideological stance is understood by Karen Kaivola as impotent recognition: “the value of idealized androgyny might lie . . . in its ability to figure an egalitarian social ideal that remains contradicted by persistent social inequalities—inequalities that Woolf’s intermix may foreground but cannot change” (257). D.A. Boxwell argues in “(Dis)orienting Spectacle: The Politics of Orlando’s Sapphic Camp” that “The possibility that multiple identities can be adopted, donned, and even invented fuels much of Orlando’s strategies of
destabilization and denaturalization” (311). These analyses foreground pleasure in Woolf’s representation of Orlando’s deviant sexuality—a sexuality that, despite its deviance, cannot support positive identity politics because it eludes categorization.

Considering the importance of sartorial concerns in Orlando, surprisingly few critics have engaged with Woolf’s use of clothing. Boxwell notes that “Woolf has an acute understanding of clothing as a semiotic system” (319), and concludes that it primarily signifies “‘Fabrication’. This] is the mot juste [sic] for Woolf’s project, just as it is the foundation principle of camp and drag” (311). Christy L. Burns in “Re-Dressing Feminist Identities: Tensions Between Essential and Constructed Selves” in Virginia Woolf’s Orlando” decrees that “In Orlando fabric, fabrication, writing, sexuality, and clothing are all interwoven” (349) and ultimately argues the result mirrors Woolf’s interest in anti-essentialism. While most analyses either gloss over or ignore completely the historical/sexual context of Orlando’s sartorial transition, Sandra M. Gilbert’s “Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature” provides a succinct analysis of the Industrial Revolution’s impact on fashion and situates Woolf’s sartorial semiotics within gendered writing practices influenced by WWI and suffrage. Gilbert posits that “Orlando’s metamorphosis is not a fall; it is simply a shift in fashion (so that Woolf associates it with shifts in literary style, shifts in historical styles . . . which remind us that, like Orlando, all is in flux, all is appearances, no fixed hierarchy endures or should endure” (405). Barbara Fassler in “Theories of Homosexuality as Sources of Bloomsbury’s Androgyny” posits that for Woolf and contemporaries, “Transvestism was . . . a common mark of homosexuality” (243). Sproles develops a more nuanced reading of how Woolf fabricates Orlando’s sexual orientation:
Orlando’s heterosexuality is . . . a false front—sometimes literally. When dressed as a lady, Orlando pretends to be interested in the advances of male suitors. The gown of flowered taffeta is as much a disguise as any other costume, perhaps more so, since it effectively masks Orlando’s sexuality. She is possibly being even more misleading about her identity while dressed as a woman (which she is) than when passing as a man (which she no longer is). As a nobleman looking for adventure, Orlando openly represents her desires. As a lady, she courts proposals she has no interest in accepting. (79)

Ultimately, Sproles decrees, “Dressing the part of man or woman allows Orlando to behave as she pleases without openly challenging patriarchal Law. Regardless of the sex of her lover, she stages heterosexual desire” (78). While persuasive, Sproles, like many scholars interested in Orlando, seems determined to recognize only “Sapphic truth” in Orlando.

Critics interested in feminism and queer theory have been hard-pressed to find positive representations of female sexuality, much less female homosexuality. Modernist scholars especially are delighted that their era marks a divide from the apex of Victorian sexual stratification, when authors consistently divided women into two groups—fallen or pure. Additionally, modernist authors broke away from developing queer female characters that are demonized for not dressing in a feminine manner, for being too masculine. Therefore, Orlando provides one of the first examples of positive female sexuality, resisting the categories of fallenness, purity, and subhuman. Yet as female sexual pleasure in Orlando is communicated via a complex subtext, it seems specious to claim Orlando as a lesbian. In “Professions for Women” (1942), Woolf describes how in order to have an opinion as a writer, she had to kill the “Angel in the House” (2215). She then reveals how difficult it is, “To speak . . . about the body, about the passions which it
was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men . . . would be shocked. [...] She could write no more” (2217). Although Woolf argues that only women writers struggle to express female sexuality, I believe all writers experience difficulty communicating positive expression of female carnal desire, and this difficulty further complicates their readers’ understanding of female characters. In Orlando, Woolf alludes to how the sartorial subtext subverts—yet is complicit with—the policing of female sexuality:

nature . . . has further complicated her task and added to our confusion by providing not only a perfect rag–bag of odds and ends within us—a piece of a policeman’s trousers lying cheek by jowl with Queen Alexandra’s wedding veil—but has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stitched together by a single thread. Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. (58)

The wedding veil that marks the boundary of approved feminine conjugality lies (and lies) not next to her husband’s trousers but next to a policeman’s. Although contemporary audiences did not understand Orlando to be a lesbian novel, it is now commonly accepted that Woolf’s affair with Sackville-West inspired her to write Orlando, which Sackville-West’s son has declared to be “the longest and most charming love-letter in literature” (qtd in Sproles 135). But before her lover’s son verified their affair, Woolf had exposed—even as she encoded—her sexual pleasure with both men and women in the form of Orlando’s ubiquitous pearl necklace.

Returning to England in 1689, Orlando’s sex and gender changes precede the sexual openness allotted the upper-classes during the Enlightenment and the start of the Industrial Revolution, which culminated with backlashes against the liberal politics and
“The Great Masculine Renunciation.” The novel establishes how ornamental male dress was in the sixteenth century, showing how the youthful Orlando “tossed his stockings to one side of the room, his jerkin to the other. [. . .] . . . he . . . thrust on crimson breeches, lace collar, waistcoat of taffeta, and shoes with rosettes on them as big as double dahlias in less than ten minutes by the stable clock” (20). This list of clothing underscores how Orlando’s clothing is feminine according to modern standards. He wears stockings and lace, not to mention taffeta and rosettes. The Queen, by contrast, “had not changed her dress for a month—which smelt for all the world . . . like some old cabinet at home where his mother’s furs were stored. He rose, half suffocated from the embrace. ‘This’, she breathed, ‘is my victory!’—even as a rocket roared up and dyed her cheeks scarlet” (25). The sexuality of the passage (fur, orgasmic fireworks, flushed checks) points to how the Queen does not conform to modern concepts of feminine cleanliness and apparel. Following Orlando’s sex change toward the end of the seventeenth century, she spends the eighteenth century searching for “Life and a lover” (136). Flash forward to Orlando in the eighteenth century, and she shows a more recognizable picture of clothed femininity. Orlando declares she wants, ‘Life and a lover.’ Then . . . she went into her bedroom, stood in front of her mirror, and arranged her pearls about her neck. Then since pearls do not show to advantage against a morning gown of sprigged cotton, she changed to a dove grey taffeta; thence to one of peach bloom; thence to a wine–coloured brocade. Perhaps a dash of powder was needed, and if her hair were disposed—so—about her brow, it might become her. Then she slipped her feet into pointed slippers, and drew an emerald ring upon her finger. ‘Now,’ she said. (177)
Sproles notes that “Most of the female Orlando’s sexual activity occurs during the eighteenth century, in keeping with the broad depiction of history . . . During this period, Orlando is able to resist both internalized and external patriarchal Law” (78). Despite her feminine apparel, Orlando’s search for a lover is unfruitful. Her sex prevents her from engaging in sexual activity with a lover. Instead, she receives marriage proposals that she has no intention of accepting. Dressed as a woman, she is prevented from having a lover and, thus, from having a life.134 Repeating her vow to find, “Life, a lover” (178), Orlando “whipped her pearls from her neck, stripped the satins from her back, stood erect in the neat black silk knickerbockers of an ordinary nobleman” (178). Note Orlando’s new sartorial version of masculinity. Her women’s underwear becomes masculine pants. She strips and becomes “erect.” As a male, Orlando had acquired female lovers—the Queen, Clorinda, Favilla, Euphrosyne or Lady Margaret, Sasha, Archduchess Harriet, Rosina Pepita, not to mention scores of nameless women of the lower-classes—with no to little effort. As a female, though, Orlando immediately employs sartorial strategies for her quest:

. . . she found it convenient at this time to change frequently from one set of clothes to another. Thus she often occurs in contemporary memoirs as ‘Lord’ So–and–so, who was in fact her cousin. . . . She had, it seems, no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive; nor can there be any doubt that she reaped a twofold harvest by this device; the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied. For the probity of breeches she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally. (161)

Once the nineteenth century begins, though, Orlando “[s]uddenly . . . saw with a start that she was wearing black breeches. She never ceased blushing till she had reached her
country house, which . . . will be taken, we hope, as a signal proof of her chastity” (170). Although Woolf’s oft-cited quote cites 1910 as the year when “human character changed” (“Character” 421), in Orlando the nineteenth century marks the time when the expression of women’s sexuality and erotic pleasures changed. Orlando is dismayed that suddenly—and in keeping with the sentiment of the day—she must alter her quest from “Life! A Lover!” to “Life! A Husband!” (178).

Petticoats and crinolines become a metonymy for female sexuality as realized by nineteenth century reproductiveness. Through the beauty of historical biography, Woolf actually has Joseph Addison enter the text to expound on the “seductiveness of petticoats” by reading

the following passage from the “Spectator”:

‘I consider woman as a beautiful, romantic animal, that may be adorned with furs and feathers, pearls and diamonds, ores and silks. The lynx shall cast its skin at her feet to make her a tippet, the peacock, parrot and swan shall pay contributions to her muff; the sea shall be searched for shells, and the rocks for gems, and every part of nature furnish out its share towards the embellishment of a creature that is the most consummate work of it. All this, I shall indulge them in, but as for the petticoat I have been speaking of, I neither can, nor will allow it.’ (153-54)

In the actual article from The Tatler (Woolf may be forgiven for being slightly confused), Addison continues, “I would not be understood, that (while I discard this monstrous invention [the petticoat]) I am an enemy to the proper ornaments of the fair sex” (5, emphasis mine). He approves female ornamentation that reinforces (hu)man dominance over nature, and his dislike of the petticoat arises from, “the great temptation it might give to virgins, of acting in security like married women, and by that means give a check to matrimony, an institution always encouraged by wise societies” (5). The narrator asks,
Were they not all of them weak women? wearing crinolines the better to conceal the fact; the great fact; the only fact; but, nevertheless, the deplorable fact; which every modest woman did her best to deny until denial was impossible; the fact that she was about to bear a child? to bear fifteen or twenty children indeed, so that most of a modest woman’s life was spent, after all, in denying what, on one day at least of every year, was made obvious. (171)

Since petticoats and crinolines were used to disguise pregnant women’s expanding wombs, Addison’s condemnation of the garments reveals a desire to protect social jurisdiction over women’s sexuality. In the nineteenth century, The Widow Bartholomew, Orlando’s housekeeper, gossips that, “the Queen [Victoria, who had nine children], bless her, is wearing a what d’you call it, a—, ’ the good woman hesitated and blushed” (171). The Widow is unable even to utter the euphemism for female conjugal sexuality. Orlando immediately worries that

Tomorrow she would have to buy twenty yards or more of black bombazine, she supposed, to make a skirt. And then (here she blushed), she would have to buy a crinoline, and then (here she blushed) a bassinette, and then another crinoline, and so on. . . . The blushes came and went with the most exquisite iteration of modesty and shame imaginable. One might see the spirit of the age blowing, now hot, now cold, upon her cheeks. And if the spirit of the age blew a little unequally, the crinoline being blushed for before the husband, her ambiguous position must excuse her (even her sex was still in dispute) and the irregular life she had lived before. (225)

Here Orlando reveals that she has had, as some critics try to deny, heterosexual intercourse and plans to have more in the future. But once Orlando adopts the crinoline-supported dress that is supposed to authorize her heterosexual activity, “she stood mournfully . . . dragged down by the weight of the crinoline. . . . It was heavier and
more drab than any dress she had yet worn. None had ever so impeded her movements” (233). The weight of this dress—and the weight of her own sexuality—causes her to muse, “that each man and each woman has another allotted to it for life, whom it supports, by whom it is supported, till death them do part. It would be a comfort, she felt, to lean; to sit down; yes, to lie down; never, never, never to get up again” (233-34).

Orlando’s decision to marry marks the end of her independence. She decides to submit because, for the first time, it seems “that the whole world was ringed with gold. She went in to dinner. Wedding rings abounded. She went to church. Wedding rings were everywhere. She drove out. Gold, or pinchbeck, thin, thick, plain, smooth, they glowed dully on every hand” (176). So Orlando concludes, “There was nothing for it but to buy one of those ugly bands and wear it like the rest” (177).

*Orlando*’s chapter on the Victorian obsession with marriage and female sexual (re)production is, ironically, the shortest in the novel. This chapter, though, features the only overtly consensual sex scene from the literature analyzed in this dissertation. After meeting her future husband, Marmaduke, Orlando exclaims, “You’re a woman” (185), which creates “a scene of protestation” (185). Marmaduke’s verbal assurances are insufficient, so in response to Orlando’s query, “Can it be possible you are not a woman?” (189), “they . . . put the matter to the proof at once” (189). Since most analyses focus on Orlando’s androgynous or Sapphic sexuality, Sproles’s comment that “This playful scene evokes childhood exhibitions that stem from curiosity—and incredulity—about sexual difference. […] which has its charm, but lacks a certain erotic potential” (84) represents a common reticence against details that trouble a cohesive reading of the novel’s homosexual subtext. But Orlando takes her crocus “which to some people signify
that very word” (190) and her jay’s feather and “struck him [Marmaduke] where he sat”
(190) playing with his snail shells. Despite retaining her yonic crocus, she penetrates
Marmaduke with her phallic feather. This “penis” also alludes to the act of writing
with quills, as Orlando writes and, thus, penetrates the page with her own sex scene. The
couple’s sexual activity is revealed in the language of seafaring, of motion and release:
“heaving this way, heaving that way, nobly, indolently and rides over the crest of this
wave and sinks into the hollow of that one, and so, suddenly stands over you . . . with all
her sails quivering and then behold, they drop all of a heap on deck—as Orlando dropped
now into the grass beside him” (190-91). While Orlando succumbs to “the spirit of the
age” by marrying, her relationship with her “husband” positions her as the one who
controls their sexual pleasure—she is on top. At their wedding, “no one heard the word
Obey spoken or saw, except as a golden flash, the ring pass from hand to hand” (193).
She gains a wedding ring and a sexually satisfying partner, whom she is not compelled to
obey. Additionally, her husband’s immediate departure provides her with independence:
“Orlando, with her ring on her finger, went out into the court in her thin dress and held
the swinging stirrup . . . for her husband to mount” (193). Following her marriage, she
wears a ring and a new, lighter dress. Her husband’s absence gives her access to sexual
pleasure and physical freedom.

Orlando illustrates that the fixed relationship between gender and sex is
irrelevant; what is important is sexual compatibility. This sex scene, with its symbolic
writing of sex as sensuality itself, obscures and reveals the pleasures of indeterminate
sexual partners. Sproles argues, “Orlando marries not because she feels heterosexual
desire but because she feels coerced by Victorian society’s suspicions of single women”
(83) and that “there is no evidence of sexual desire for him” (83). But whether Orlando and Mar’s relationship is comprised of a man and a woman, or two women, or two men is both irrelevant and crucial to understanding the text. In his article, “The Forest Beyond the Frame: Picturing Women’s Desires in Vernon Lee and Virginia Woolf,” Dennis Denisoff celebrates that “Orlando has finally found a kindred spirit, somebody who possesses a similar disposition and willingly ambiguous sexuality” (264). Lee claims the ending of Orlando is utopian because “‘her’ marriage is more free adventure than a domestic bondage. And she doesn’t die” (520). I believe it is also utopian because Orlando writes her own sex scene, and, thus, “sires” her own pregnancy. Even following the birth of her son (217), she lives to enjoy and anticipate female sexual pleasure with Marmaduke, as symbolized through her pearl necklace. In the sixteenth century, Orlando mourns his, “desire of a woman in Russian trousers . . . and pearls about her neck” (70). In the seventeenth century, “With some of the guineas left from the sale of the tenth pearl on her string, Orlando bought herself a complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore” (147). In the eighteenth century, as she dresses to find herself “Life and a lover” (137), Orlando is “slung with pearls, a siren in a cave” (137). In the nineteenth century, not one pearl is mentioned prior to her marriage to Marmaduke. In his analysis of the images that accompany the text, Denisoff notes, 

The aesthetic construction of the subject in the last portrait differs radically from that of Orlando on Her Return to England. Gone is the noose of pearls around Orlando’s neck, the exposed, vulnerable flesh, the soft facial expression. In the penultimate portrait of Orlando, Orlando about the Year 1840, the heroine displays the satirically gaudy ring adorning her wedding finger, but the jewelry is absent from Orlando at the Present Time. Instead […] her walking stick connot[s] a boldness. (265-7)
But in the part of the novel set in the twentieth century, Orlando summons Marmaduke by crying, “‘Here! . . . here!’ . . ., baring her breast to the moon (which now showed bright) so that her pearls glowed—like the eggs of some vast moon-spider. The aeroplane rushed out of the clouds and stood over her head. It hovered above her” (241). The novel closes by zeroing in on the textual recreation of Sackville-West’s “signature ropes of pearls” (Sproles 67). As Marmaduke leaps to the ground “hale, fresh-coloured, and alert” (241) there appears “over his head a single wild bird” (241), which Orlando cries, “It is the goose! . . . The wild goose . . .” (241). The *OED* defines goose as “To poke, tickle, etc., (a person) in a sensitive part, esp. the genital or anal regions; sometimes, more specifically, = FUCK.” If the goose is what brings Orlando her ability to write, or “an inch of silver—six words” (229), Marmaduke is the one who can bring the goose to her when “Her pearls burnt like a phosphorescent flare in the darkness” (241). The *OED* also relates that a goose is “A tailor’s smoothing-iron” and “A game played with counters on a board divided into compartments.” Woolf’s coded loves illustrate the compartments of her affection. Orlando relates that when she refers to Marmaduke as Mar, she is in “a dreamy, amorous, acquiescent mood, domestic, languid a little, as if spiced logs were burning, and it was evening, yet not time to dress” (188). Woolf similarly employed euphemism when discussing her sex life with Leonard, as time spent playing with the “marmots” (Lee 327-28). Mar was also the nicknamed used by Nigel Nicolson for his wife, Vita Sackville-West. In this way Woolf’s textual love affair with Sackville-West and Leonard pierces through the darkness. As Orlando exposes her “breast,” “her pearls” to the sky, she eroticizes the arrival of Mar(maduke). Whether that erotic time spent
together is hetero or homosexual or something in between is unclear. But what is certain is that Orlando, the woman, has encoded or written of her own sexual desire.

Perhaps most interesting is how the nation’s health became in the nineteenth century utterly focused on women’s unlicensed, untaxed, unbought, thus, uncontrolled sexual pleasure. Women were told that their bodies had produced illegitimate children without rights. Their sexuality had destroyed men but never raised towers. Their bodies could cause wars but never stop them. This hysteria all comes back to property. Who is property and who is not? Who is allowed to pursue pleasure qua pleasure, who is angrily policed and condemned before, during, and after becoming sexual. Too much. Not enough. Critics attribute the cloistered sexuality of Woolf’s *Orlando* to Radclyffe Hall’s 1928 obscenity trial over *The Well of Loneliness*, arguing that it reveals much about the “spirit of the [modern] age.” Woolf’s understanding of sexual pleasure grew out of Bloomsbury. But the sexually radical group endorsed “buggery”—their preferred term for homosexuality—not sapphism (Sproles 5). Though it was certainly accepted, Sapphists’ or inverts’ sexual pleasure was not promoted within their circle. This opprobrium contributed to scholars’ failure to note the novel’s sexual subtext for decades. But Orlando—the wife, the author, the mother, the lover—continues to burn brightly in our imagination.

My dissertation spans the critical period in women’s political and sexual rights: Revolution to Suffrage. In 1928—the same year that Woolf published *Orlando*—the Representation of the People Act was passed and women were finally guaranteed suffrage on the same terms as men. Perversely, when John Stuart Mill was elected to
Parliament in 1867, he presented the Women’s Suffrage petition to Parliament. In *The Subjection of Women* (1869) he writes,

> Where liberty cannot be hoped for, and power can, power becomes the grand object of human desire; those to whom others will not leave the undisturbed management of their own affairs, will compensate themselves, if they can, by meddling for their own purposes with the affairs of others. Hence also women's passion for personal beauty, and dress and display; and all the evils that flow from it, in the way of mischievous luxury and social immorality. (94)

Mill offers women political power as an antidote to the allures of fashion. While limited suffrage was granted to unmarried women who were householders in 1869, married women did not earn the right even to vote in local—not national—elections until 1894, the year prior to the publication of Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*. Woolf briefly participated in the suffrage movement in 1910. In 1918, after women over the age of thirty were granted suffrage, the Woolfs attended a “Suffrage Rally.” But while Leonard participated in the suffrage movement (Lee 322), Woolf “was embarrassed . . . of being mocked for taking an interest in politics” (Lee 324). Hovey points out that between 1918 and 1928 there were fears that the political emancipation of women would also lead to their sexual emancipation (395) because universal suffrage “extended the English definition of the voting citizen beyond the boundaries of gender and state-sanctioned sexuality” (403). In the eighteenth century, philosophical movements opened up the possibility that women could be seen as rational humans, culminating in women’s suffrage. Mary Wollstonecraft notes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792),

> The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly; yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the
writers who endeavour by satire or instruction to improve them. . . .

strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to
the desire of establishing themselves, – the only way women can rise in
the world, – by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them,
when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act: they
dress; they paint, and nickname God’s creatures. – Surely these weak
beings are only fit for a seraglio! – Can they be expected to govern a
family with judgment, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into
the world?” (112-13)

Wollstonecraft’s observations seem oddly prescient of the novels I have included in this
dissertation. In slightly more than one hundred years, female literary characters have
passed from being legal ciphers with sexual appetites to moral paragons above earthly
desires to gender crusaders who talk incessantly about sex but are denied ownership of
their sexuality. Take, for instance, the characters I have discussed here: Agnes knows
how to dress yet cannot care for her child. Dinah renounces fashion in order to provide
maternal care for her husband and children. Sue fashions sexual reform that is fecund, yet
is hounded by her inability to educate others about sexuality. And Orlando seems to
achieve a balance: fashion, sexuality, and independence. Woolf’s concern with politics
can be seen in the commitment within her writing to the ideals behind suffrage: equality
means equal access to earning a living, getting an education, and experiencing a sexual
pleasure of one’s own.

While Revolution sparked the beginning of apprehending women as rational
humans and women’s suffrage finally recognized women as citizens, the real effect of
women’s increasing power—as illustrated in male wars and political acts—was being
played out in women’s clothes and bedrooms. Denied access to male dominated fields,
women lived in a parallel yet connected world. The words used to describe these worlds
have been silenced, not through lack of inscription (attempted communication) so much as lack of reception (perception of significance). In The Novel and The Police (1988) D.A. Miller takes this logic farther, arguing, “Based on an egregious disproportion between its assumed banality and the weight of revelation it comes to bear, the ‘significant trifle’ is typically meant to surprise, even frighten. For in the same process where the detail is charged with meaning, it is invested with a power already capitalizing on that meaning. Power has taken hold where hold seemed least given: in the irrelevant” (28). Miller’s theory of the “trifle” well illustrates how seemingly innocuous fashion items can reveal the complex sexuality of heterosexual brides.

I hope my dissertation has shown how to read women’s struggle for sexual autonomy—by how female literary characters throughout the long nineteenth century dressed before, during, and after courtship. In slightly more than one hundred years, the female literary characters discussed here indicate advancement in female sexual rights and freedoms. The characters have passed from being legal ciphers with sexual appetites to moral crusaders above earthly desires to marital crusaders that are denied their sexuality. This literary arc begs the question: Are modern women as liberated as we think? Or is it instead that even as society becomes more open about sexuality, women continue to deny and be denied their sexual autonomy? Perhaps this conundrum results from the disconnect between how authors represent female desires with a patriarchal language and what behaviors readers expect to encounter if they are going to understand a woman as sexual. This breakdown in communication is compounded by the way patriarchic language resists articulating female sexuality—unless it is of dystopian visions of heterosexual or GLBT desires.
Written language privileges masculine history of politics and murder; sartorial language foregrounds feminine history of sexuality and creation. Sensual pleasure is sexual pleasure, and this partly explains why fabrics and fashion factor so widely in the literature of marriage plots. Marriage for love demands a search for sexual pleasure. Sensual pleasure in the reveal, the cover, the removal, the sliding on, the caressing of fabric over skin, the pull of fabric as the act commences, the . . . well, I believe I have made my point. Fabric is a large component of our sexuality. But maybe the problem is that we still do not know how to recognize pleasure of all kinds. As the words of Bill Clinton taught us, “what is sex” and “what is is”? The point is not that there once was an American president who combined mastery of the English language with skill in ancient rhetoric, but that maybe we still need to think about what is the is in sexual pleasure. And who owns it. Is the only way to define sexual pleasure through the genitals? I think not. Sexual pleasure is a reflection of all of life’s pleasures. If we only focus on sexuality as vaginal-penile penetration, then we really are still in the throes of patriarchy.
ENDNOTES

1 Note that Wilkes clearly associates abstinence with chastity for widows, harking back to how the “Romans idealized and praised with the term univira (which means loosely, ‘one-man woman’) women who had only a single husband [i.e., sexual partner]” (Boswell 32). Although one might chafe against the cultural dictum that a woman should only have one sexual partner throughout her entire life, most women could only achieve social status and financial freedom through widowhood because of the unequal statuses of the sexes. Male and female sexual chastity is clearly differentiated by the sartorial rule that widows wear mourning for three years, widowers a scant three months.

2 Foucault avoids discussing heterosexual men, married or not, visiting prostitutes or having mistresses, a relatively accepted but hushed up pastime—perhaps because men are assumed to be naturally less monogamous.

3 Quoted chart can be found in Rubin, 14.

4 Admittedly, homosexuals are currently denied the right to marry one another throughout most of the world. I cannot, unfortunately, assert that monogamous homosexual couples are viewed positively by the majority of Americans, but, since homosexual couples can form civil unions in the United Kingdom, I hope we will see progress soon. For more on the modern increase in cohabitation in the western world, see Coontz 287, 289, 293, 296-97.

5 For more on this topic, see Foucault’s chapter “Repressive Hypothesis” in The History of Sexuality, 36-49.

6 While the intersection of these topics has been widely overlooked in the nineteenth century, literary theorists of contemporary cinema and television have written extensively about the intersection of fashion and sexuality. See, for example, Mary Ann Doane’s “Film and the Masquerade” (1982). “Makeover” movies, such as Not Another Teen Movie (2001), highlight the protagonist’s throwing away her glasses in order to become a viable sexual object. And Sex and the City draws on our preconceived notions of sexuality by styling Carrie Bradshaw as a woman adverse to marriage but not to sexual relationships who coincidentally loves her high-heeled Manolo Blahniks, while Charlotte prudishly angles for marriage in her pearl necklace. These shows did not invent this semantic connection between a woman’s clothing and sexuality.

7 My theory that there is a correlation between what a woman wears and her sexual desires does not mean on any level that I agree with the stereotype that women in the real world who “dress for sex” are “asking for it [rape/violence].” My analysis of sartorial discourse relates strictly to literary symbolism and signification within literature and should not be used to illustrate that I endorse sexual aggression toward women in any way.
Of course, capitalism became very interested in sexual pleasure as a profit industry once bans on the transportation and trade of contraceptives, pornography, etc. were lifted.

Neo-conservatives such as Bill O’Reilley, Rush Limbaugh, or Ann Coulter make the epistemological and entomological leap that people can “flaunt” their lives of sexual “abnormality” simply by not being publicly, procreatively heterosexual.

The argument of hypocrisy is made too easy by the conservative, “moral” vanguard. See for instance the scandals surrounding Jim Bakker, Bill O’Reilly, John Major, Bob Livingston, Strom Thurmond, Tim Haggard, Jimmy Swaggart, and Eliot Spitzer, just to name a few.

Jesus’s famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:27-32) outlines adultery as any contact with a woman.

For an extended discussion of the relation between the changing understanding of biological sex and corollary conceptions of gendered sexual pleasure, see Laqueur’s Making Sex (1990).

Boswell posits that since at this time the average couple was separated in age by about ten years, the paternal structure of their relationship was “more natural.”


Through the seventeenth century, efforts to control who wore what bespoke the threat of the merchant class trying to ape their betters’ class standing, not sexual purity, especially since sexual scandals were closely associated with the aristocracy. Even though more and more sumptuary laws were passed, these laws were too difficult to enforce as fashions changed and were, therefore, nearly impossible to describe accurately.

Clandestine marriages were those that were performed without banns or license or without parental consent for minors over the age of sixteen, yet under twenty-one. The clergymen who had officiated over these clandestine marriages were retroactively declared to be felons, punishable by fourteen years transportation.

For a time during the Commonwealth, marriages were solely the providence of the courts, not the church; therefore, the Act of 1836 marks the first time English citizens had a choice between court and church.

In 1884 a Matrimonial Causes Act made “aggravated assault” grounds for judicial separation.

The Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, respectively, enabled women to keep earnings or property that they had acquired after marriage and then permitted them to retain what they had owned at the time of marriage.

Even with the increasing emphasis on women’s rights and the impact of widened women’s suffrage, it was not until 1923—five years prior to the publication of Virginia Woolf’s Orlando—that both men and women could file for divorce on the same grounds: simple adultery.

This quotation’s internally quoted material is from William Blackstone’s “Commentaries on the Laws of England.”

Earlier, when the Contagious Diseases Act was passed in 1864—an act which targeted the women who violated the ideal image of domestic, chaste femininity—the Ladies National Association for
the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts also publicly advocated non-married, non-procreative women’s sexual rights.

23 While I do not believe that any woman “asks” to be spoken to inappropriately or aggressively when dressed provocatively, I am trying to call attention to how, unfortunately, culturally specific preconceived notions of women’s sexual propriety are read sartorially.

24 While not trying to create a parallel between my experiences and the real physical dangers that have been faced by queers, I am trying to draw attention to the way western culture believes sexuality can be read on the body through fashion choices.


26 Although Louis F. Peck disparages Mrs. Cornwall Baron-Wilson’s *Life and Correspondence of M. G. Lewis, With Many Pieces in Prose and Verse, Never Before Published* (1839) for allowing too many transcription errors in Matthew Lewis’s correspondence and for being insufficiently knowledgeable of Lewis’s work to meet current scholarly standards, he nevertheless recommends the biography since Mrs. Baron-Wilson “was still not too late to preserve anecdotes and biographical details which otherwise inevitably would have been lost” (v-vi).

27 There are several more surviving anecdotes about Lewis’s sartorial opinions. Baron-Wilson, for example, recalls that as a member of the upper-class, young Lewis was

Frequently present at portentous toilette debates, [and] he was always remarkably attentive to them, and often amused visitors by the impression which they made. On one occasion, Lady S——— . . . was ushered into the drawing-room . . . . ‘Well, Master Mat!’ said the lady, perceiving that the child gazed at her dress, ‘I hope, sir, you approve?’

The young gentleman shook his head in token of dissent, and . . . observed, ‘My mamma never wears a blue ribbon with a yellow head-dress. [. . . She] looks very pretty, with nothing on her head (remembering his mother’s words), but a simple fold of plain white tiffany.’ (Baron-Wilson 1: 11-12)

And while Lewis cannot be said to be responsible for this sartorial trend, his immensely popular ballad “Crazy Jane” (1812) inspired a vogue in “Crazy Jane” hats.

28 For more information on the fashion in white dresses, see Ribeiro, *Europe* 226-28, 234.

29 For more on the “The Great Masculine Renunciation,” see the Introduction to this dissertation, 24-25.

30 MacDonald notes that “In London and Middlesex, in the last half of the eighteenth century, about one man in a decade was hanged for sodomy; in the early years of the nineteenth, the average rose to about one a year” (75) and argues that there is a connection between Lewis’s homosexuality and his “insistence on repression” (67). The most concrete evidence of Lewis’s homosexuality seems to have been written by George Gordon, Lord Byron. Byron’s letters make references to social inquiries into Lewis’s “male-love this season” and hints at homosexual activity by stating, “Lewis is going to Jamaica to suck his sugar-canies” (qtd in MacDonald 60, 73). Whether Byron actually knew of Lewis’s homosexual activity or if he even liked Lewis, whom he publicly derided for being a “bore – a damned bore” (qtd in MacDonald 24) and an aristocratic sycophant, remains unclear. Summers quotes a few non-cited lines by Byron in which the poet laments, “Lewis was a good man. I would give many a sugar cane / Monk Lewis were alive again” (202).
31 See MacDonald’s discussion of Lewis’s repressed homosexuality as literary device in his analysis of the two stanzas cut by Baron-Wilson from Lewis’s 1798 poem, ‘Elegy, On the approaching Departure of a Friend’ (67). Lewis’s friend is Charles William Stewart.

32 The Monk’s setting during the Spanish Inquisition is tantalizingly unspecific. Ambrosio and Agnes are members of the Capuchin Order, which was formed in the 1520s, but the Spanish Inquisition took place from 1478-1834, which, taken collectively, means the novel could be set anytime from the 1520s to 1794, when Lewis finished writing the novel.

33 See also Margaret Anne Doody’s True History of the Novel, 375 and Joseph James Irwin’s M. G. “Monk” Lewis, 49.

34 The debate over The Monk was obviously affected by class and political assumptions and motives. See MacDonald 129-130, and for an extended discussion, see Andre Parreaux’s The Publication of The Monk; A Literary Event, 1796-1798. Paris: M. Didier, 1960.

35 The specific changes Lewis made to The Monk are outlined in Louis F. Peck’s “Variant Readings,” Appendix to M. G. Lewis’s The Monk. 1796. New York: Grove P, 1952.

36 Since The Monk is supposed to be set during the Inquisition, that Antonia 1) undresses completely for a 2) bath are anachronistic details of eighteenth-century European life. For more on the history of European hygiene, see Stone 257, 485-88.

37 Lewis’s decision to set the action in St. Clare’s convent incorporates hagiographic accounts emphasizing the order’s use of corporal chastisement. According to A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints, Clare of Assisi, [Virgin, was] foundress of the Poor Clares. [ . . . ] Won by Francis for the ascetical life, she took the vows from the Poverello on Palm Sunday, 18 March, 1212, when 18 years old. Francis provided a refuge for her, first with the Benedictine nuns of Paolo, then, when her relatives persecuted her there, at Angelo de Panso, outside the city gates. At last Francis brought her and her sister Agnes to a small house next to the church of San Damiano, where a rapidly increasing community gathered around her. [ . . . ] For 40 years Clare governed this community . . . . From Innocent III she obtained sanction for the privilege of extreme poverty, of living solely on the alms of the beneficent . . . . Gregory IX thought the rule unreasonable and offered to relax it, but Clare entreated that it be maintained in its full rigor. Clare is said to have practiced mortifications to such an extent that the Pope and Francis combined to insist on her moderating her passion for self-torture. (214)

38 According to A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints, The legend ‘Regnante Domino’ (980) relates: Ursula, daughter of King Deonotus, of Britain, was asked in marriage by a pagan prince. Desiring to remain a virgin, by divine inspiration she put to the prince the following conditions: a respite of three years, the building of eleven ships, ten noble virgins as associates, with one thousand companions each. [ . . . ] Having visited the holy places, they returned northward. When they arrived at Cologne, they found the city besieged by the Huns. Refusing to marry the leader of the Huns, Ursula, and with her all her companions, were slain by the barbarians. But legions of angels drove the Huns away; the citizens of Cologne buried the saints and built a church in their honor. (1000)


40 Mr. Lewis was ultimately unable to obtain a Parliamentary divorce (MacDonald 8).
Following the fall of Puritan leadership in the late seventeenth century, upper- and lower-class sexual mores were quite relaxed throughout the eighteenth century. A move back toward conservative beliefs by the advent of the nineteenth reflected the rise in and influence of Methodist and Evangelical beliefs throughout England. See Porter and Hall 32 and Stone 648, 678, and 679.

Mary Wollstonecraft, unsurprisingly, objects to and disagrees with Gregory’s advice to his daughters, arguing, “He advises them to cultivate a fondness for dress, because a fondness for dress, he asserts, is natural to them. [. . .] It is not natural; but arises, like false ambition in men, from a love of power” (137).

Wilkes’s pamphlet was quite popular. In the Preface to the fourth edition, he recounts, “The first Edition (in January, 1740) was favoured with uncommon Success, for a Pamphlet of that Size, being published at the Desire of above four hundred Subscribers. The Second was printed without any Knowledge of mine, Last Winter. The third had a few Alterations in it; but this Edition I have, with Pains and Study, revised, corrected, improved, and enlarged” (no pagination). Wilkes specifically dismisses from his audience the “aged” and the “experienced People,” presumably because they have cemented habits or, more likely, have already secured a marital partner. Since Wilkes asserts that “these imperfect Sketches of Morality [are written] for the benefit of young, improvable Minds, and of such alone” (no pagination), his implicit audience is young women, who, according to him, will benefit from such chapters as “Female Learning recommended,” “Directions in the Choice of a Husband,” and “The Duties of a Married Female.”

While many scholars in addition to James continue to write about the Act as fact, I have been unable to locate a primary resource establishing its existence. See, for example, Gummere (129) and Ribiero, Dress and Morality (109, 181n42). I contacted the United Kingdom Parliament archival staff and the United Kingdom Archives (A2A) and heard back from Dr. Caroline Shenton, Assistant Clerk of the Records at the Parliamentary Archives, HLRO. She could not find a record of the Act in the British Parliament and posited that this was a pre-Revolutionary American Act (hence, “his majesty’s subjects”). A search through OSU’s Law Library was unfruitful. I also contacted Professor Aileen Ribeiro at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and she acknowledged that the Act is probably apocryphal. Damningly, sumptuary laws in England died out in the seventeenth century, so it seems more than odd that the Act is attributed to 1770, and there is no reference to the Act in The Statutes of the Realm (1225-1713), Printed by command of His Majesty King George the Third. London, G. Eyre and A. Strahan, 1810-22.

See the introduction to the dissertation, 4, 13, and 27.

Baron-Wilson continues, “The princess, it seems, did not receive the lapsus quite so good-humouredly as was her wont; for, on a future scene of festivity being proposed, her royal highness passed round to her assembled guests, and gave a separate invitation to each individual present, pointedly omitting to extend it to Mr. M. G. Lewis” (2:360). Parisian arts such as make-up and beauty patches were especially popular in eighteenth-century France and Germany (Ribeiro, Europe 152-53), where Lewis studied in 1791 and 1792, respectfully. It was during this time in France that he began work on his unfinished satire, The Effusions of Sensibility; or, Letters from Lady Honorina Harrowheart to Miss Sophonisba Simper: a Pathetic Novel in the Modern Taste, being the first literary attempt of a Young Lady of tender feelings. This unpublished fragment farcically represents how single women exploit and deny how their garments and accessories are weapons for the marriage market.

Cowls are Capuchin monks’ distinctive, brown, pointed hoods.

See, for example, Lewis, Monk 30-31.

See, for example, James Gillray’s “Un petit Souper a la Parisienne: - or – A Family of Sans Culotts refreshing after the fatigues of the day” (Donald 145).
50 See also Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* 3.4.164-204.

51 See Marjorie B. Garber’s *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*.

52 While arguments about *The Monk*’s immorality primarily focus on Elvira’s blasphemously censored bible, Lewis explains in a letter to his father that “the passage [was not] meant to counsel any more than that the bible should not be read before a certain age, when its perusers would be capable of benefiting by its precepts and admiring its beauties” (Ba1ron Wilson 157). For more on this subject, see Parreaux’s chapter, “The Controversy on the Monk,” 79-143. Elvira’s censored Bible distorts late-eighteenth century pedagogical theory, such as Catherine Macaulay Graham’s advice that following the study of politics, mythology, and ancient metaphysics, when “the student has reached his [sic] one and twentieth year, it will be the season to peruse the sacred writings” (135). Graham was influenced by Rousseau and influenced Mary Wollstonecraft. But Graham, unlike Rousseau, believed that women and men should have equal educations. This may explain why Graham’s student is male but has the female name Hortensia, which means “garden,” an apt appellation for a developing (and disguised female) student.

53 See also Watkins 118.

54 See, for example, MacDonald 77-79. For more on nunneries and their impact on upper-class marriage, see Stone 43.

55 Examples include Elinor Joddrel in Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer* (1814), the title character of Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722), and Harriot Freke in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1811).

56 Convents and monasteries were nonexistent in England from the mid-sixteenth century though the mid-nineteenth century.

57 For more on the relation of veils to semblance, see Walter Benjamin’s 1919-1922 essay on Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* and John Quincy Adams’s “Letters on the Masonic Institution” (1847).

58 *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* has no relation to the philosopher Aristotle.

59 Conversely, male sexual desire was considered venial and virtually uncontrollable. See Stone 484, 501-07, 543-45, 616, and 637.

60 Marguerite’s tale represents the irony that exploitative or non-reciprocal relationships are not the sole province of couples who engage in sex without marriage; that state can just as easily be achieved in a spousal blessed by a “religious” marriage ceremony. After living together happily for eight years outside of wedlock and producing two children, her beloved seducer dies. Marguerite is then forced into an unloving marriage by her seducer’s comrades. This corrupt union fails to produce a pregnancy. The ceremony was fittingly performed by “A Robber, who had once been a Monk” (123).

61 The spousals are “(also called a contract), the formal exchange, usually before witnesses, of oral promises” (Stone 31).

62 For more on marriage and social class in *The Monk*, see Watkins.

63 According to Stephen P. Pistono, Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will* (1975) was the first to argue that rape is an act of violence and power rather than an overflow of repressed sexual desire.

64 A commination is a threat of Divine punishment.
I will use Marian Evans’s pen name George Eliot throughout this dissertation. Many sources provide in depth histories of the various spellings of Eliot’s first name and the last names she adopted over the course of her life. For example, see Haight Biography 3, Karl, and Laski 9.

It was around this same time that Eliot wrote a school essay, entitled “Affectation and Conceit,” arguing against spending too much time on the external fashions because intellectual pursuits tend to be neglected (Haight, Biography 553).

Eliot’s sartorial serious-mindedness coupled with her religious enthusiasm may have contributed to her inimical nickname, “saint” (Haight, Biography 67).

In a similar tale, Lady Gray recounts a young lady’s wonderment as to “why genius was so terribly homely. George Eliot wore a monstrous cross between a hat and a cap, and her dress [to this critical youthful eye] was not beautiful” (qtd in Haight, A Biography 502, bracketed text in original).

Eliot’s relationship with Lewes was not her first or last scandalous relationship. Prior to meeting Lewes, Eliot had engaged in several passionate flirtations and possibly one outright affair with the very handsome John Chapman, perhaps providing the sexual and moral foundation that persuaded her to flaunt public opinion in her relationship with Lewes. Eliot also indulged in sexual gender play: “her fervour was turned to Sara, to whom letters were signed, for a time at least, ‘your loving wife Mary Anne’” (Laski 26). Finally, eighteen months after Lewes’s death, Eliot married John Walter Cross, who was unorthodoxly twenty-one years her junior. Ironically, it was her devoted monogamy with Lewes that turned her sexual life into public fodder, not her seemingly equally scandalous—since indecorously passionate, atypical, transitory, and occasionally homoerotic—relationships.

Mottram justifiably observes that “Even if such a ceremony did take place abroad it was utterly wanting in the sanction of law at home” (276).

Stephen is paraphrasing Eliot’s often quoted remark that “Light and easily broken ties are what I neither desire theoretically nor could live for practically. Women who are satisfied with such ties do not act as I have done—they obtain what they desire and are still invited to dinner” (Letters II 214, emphasis in original). Conversely, writing in June of 1848 about Rochester in Jane Eyre, Eliot comments, “All self-sacrifice is good—but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcase [sic]” (Haight Letters, 1:268).

Lewes would have been unable to obtain a divorce because he acknowledged as his own his wife’s children by her lover, Thornton Hunt. Once he had tacitly set the precedence that he condoned his wife’s adulterous relationship, the courts would not favor his case. Regardless, divorce at this time would have been a prohibitively expensive undertaking for the financially strapped Lewes.

“Marian inscribed on the fly-leaf [of the Adam Bede manuscript] ‘To my dear husband, George Henry Lewes, I give this M.S. of a work which would never have been written but for the happiness which his love has conferred on my life. Marian Lewes March 23. 1859’” (Haight, Biography 278).

For more on how this kind of social pressure operates, see Warner’s “The Ethics of Sexual Shame” in Trouble (1-40).

Thompson argues, “The negation or sublimation of love was tending towards the cult of its opposite: death” (373). Thompson also focuses on how several Wesleyan hymns use yonic symbolism to sexualize death, such as “Yes, yes, I will for ever sit / There, where thy Side was split” (371).

For an historical overview of the nineteenth-century critical preference for Hetty, see Barrett 43.
This kind of Christian charity can be dangerous, as Charles Dickens’s Mrs. Jellyby’s intense interest in Africa illustrates. Mrs. Jellyby is so distracted that her own family—with her inert husband and endless stream of errant children—disintegrates around her. Thus, although Mrs. Jellyby is a poor wife and mother, she is, nevertheless, representative of heteronormative culture.

The woman accused of adultery in the Gospels is famously pardoned by Jesus. Jesus commands the woman’s accusers, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7), and after the men leave, Jesus states, “Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more” (John 8:11).

Stephen argues that “In the society of Lewes and his friends a scientific allusion, which might alarm the average reader of a magazine, would no doubt pass for commonplace. George Eliot’s environment was always so scientific and philosophical that it would have been difficult to be quite free from the taint” (Stephen 58). Eliot’s interests were broad; she read voraciously; and “Her mind absorbed a good deal of new scientific knowledge that was later to crop out in her novels” (Haight Biography 201).

The Sanskrit word \textit{yoni} is equivalent to the English words vagina or vulva, and yonic symbols are concave (such as a lake, a pot, or a cap).

This trend is replicated over several of Eliot’s novels, and Eliot scholars consistently emphasize that Eliot endorses characters who embrace their responsibilities to foster and nurture children.

Dinah has grey eyes.

The source of this quote is unclear (Mottram simply refers to Evans’s “memoirs” or “autobiography”) but is probably from Z. Taft’s “Biographical Sketches of the lives and Public Ministry of various Holy Women, whose Eminent Usefulness and Successful Labours in the Church of Christ have entitled them to be enrolled among the great Benefactors of Mankind: in which are included several Letters from the Rev. J. Wesley, never before published.” I have been unable to locate an extant edition of this text. Mottram also notes that Evans finished writing her autobiography in 1825, so it may be that he is quoting this (unpublished?) text.

Dinah’s cap is also referred to in the text as a Methodist cap, denoting the trend for Methodists to adopt plain or Quaker clothing. It is quite possible that a cap similar to Dinah’s was not popularly adopted by Methodists. I have been unable to find a specific example or description of a “net quaker cap,” even after an exhaustive search through both contemporary texts (conduct manuals, literature, critical) and modern scholarship. This is puzzling, as the realist author, Eliot’s fearful query, “Shall I ever write another book as true as ‘Adam Bede’?” (Journals 300) underscores her belief that this novel was her best work because of its faithful depiction of life. Consensus is that plain or Quaker dress varied widely during this time, so Eliot may be referencing a local variant that has not been preserved over the years and has thus faded away. This sort of disappearance is a common loss, since most clothing, aside from very expensive silks and embroidered fabrics, tended to be washed and worn as many times as possible, and then recycled in a variety of ways.

Fr: We will see.

The description of Lisbeth Bede’s headgear indirectly hints that she may wear a mob cap: “Her grey hair is turned neatly back under a pure linen cap with a black band round it” (41).

To further confuse matters, the Quaker cap is also known as a Joan cap.
The OED defines grogram as a “coarse fabric of silk, of mohair and wool, or of these mixed with silk; often stiffened with gum,” illustrating how functional this material would appear to a culture where light cotton dresses, red capes, and airy lace are all the rage.

Mr. Irvine recognizes, “I saw she was a Methodist, or Quaker, or something of that sort, by her dress” (59). Abelove states, Wesley “as an ordained clergyman, might wear gown, cassock, bands; they [the helpers] were unordained, and he urged them to stay unordained. They could under no circumstances dress canonically as clergymen. He might wear gold, silver, silk, brocade; for them such splendor was of course disallowed” (Evangelist, 13).

According to Abelove, Wesley based his conviction on celibacy on a biblical passage from Matthew 19:12. Abelove points out that most Methodists did not follow Wesley’s dictum to remain celibate (Abelove Evangelist, 58). Additionally, Abelove asserts that “there is some evidence to show that they [Methodists] found sanction in what Wesley said for devaluing and even breaking the family ties that troubled them; for releasing same-sex sexual feeling; and possibly also for practicing abstinence, within marriage, at the wife’s insistence, as a means of birth control” (Abelove Evangelist, 63).

John Wesley eventually recanted and reconfigured his discourse on matrimony after deciding he wanted to marry. First, he proposed to his servant Grace Murray in 1748. Alarmed, Wesley’s helpers intervened, squired Murray away from Wesley, and ensured that she married another suitor, John Bennet. Next, in order to prevent gossip about his private, sexual life, Wesley married Molly Vazeille, a woman of social and financial standing. The marriage proved disastrous; Vazeille left Wesley after seven years of marriage. For more information on Wesley and marriage, see Abelove’s Evangelist, 18-23, 36-37, 49-73.

In fact, Eliot believed marriages were practically arranged in England (Haight, Biography 56).

For more on the rise of premarital pregnancies at the end of the eighteenth century, see the second chapter of this dissertation, “Unveiling Chastity in Matthew Lewis’s The Monk” (79-80).

Auerbach posits that artistic and narrative depictions expose the “outsider” status of fallen women and old maids, as they embodied roles outside of the nuclear family and were “defined as essential strangers in England” (153).

Eliot’s religious beliefs were complex and closely documented, but for more on Eliot’s initial break with organized religion, see Haight’s chapter “The Holy War” in Biography, 32-67.

Haight elucidates the presence of religion in the unbeliever’s work: Mary Anne [i.e., Eliot] read the Bible over and over again during her four years at Mrs. Wallington’s. The vigorous prose of George Eliot is based on a thorough familiarity with the King James version. To those days can also be traced the bait of introspection, which led to the psychological analysis for which her novels are notable, and a profound concern with religion. (Biography 8-9)

Barrett points out that Eliot’s fiction was viewed by her contemporaries “as dangerously erotic and iconoclastic” (2) and specifies that part of her endeavor is to rewrite Eliot’s posthumous sibylline image by bringing it to our attention that it was not until “the century following her death in 1880” (1) that critics collectively described Eliot as didactic, “intellectual, sexless, and essentially conservative” (2). Barrett argues that Eliot was “passionate and prudish, radical and conservative, capable of an almost superhuman extension of sympathies and of the most corrosive disdain” (13).

Pite concurs that Henniker “was quite different from Emma – . . . she dressed beautifully” (329).
98 Hardy indecorously discussed other racy literature with Henniker: “I have made myself a present of [Henry Thorton] Wharton’s Sappho—a delightful book. How I love her—how many men have loved her!” (Letters ii 84).

99 Because this reviewer erroneously implies that Jude shares Sue’s marital politics and subsequent remorse, I have altered all references to “Sue and Jude” (and the respective plural pronouns and conjugated verbs) to reflect the singular “Sue.”

100 It is rumored that (like Jude and Sue) Hardy had a sexual relationship with his cousin, Tryphena Sparks, and some have gone so far to posit that she bore an illegitimate child. There is no substantive evidence of the cousins’ having either a sexual relationship or conceiving a child. For more on Hardy’s relationship with Sparks, see Pite 142-148. Like Sue, Sparks was also pupil-teacher and was “[h]er sexuality was not fiercely repressed, and . . . neither was it . . . an irresistible, insatiable power, ready to devour him” (Pite 147).

101 See, for example, Elizabeth Langland’s “Becoming a Man in Thomas Hardy’s Jude the Obscure.”

102 Millgate notes, “For descriptions of . . . dress . . . he could turn to his notebooks, take down books from his shelves, or undertake research into old newspapers and local records” (Biography 257). Hardy compiled information from old newspapers into his “Facts” notebooks, where, for example, he entitles a series of entries as “Fashions for August, of this period [1826]” (65). Although it is unclear for which text Hardy conducted this sartorial research, when discussing the illustrations for “The First Countess of Wessex” (1889), Hardy stipulates that “the artist . . . should have special skill in . . . the delineation of . . . the costume of George the Second’s reign—the date of the story being about 1740” (Letters i 181). For the illustrator of Far from the Madding Crowd Hardy notes that he made “sketch[s] in my note-book . . . . a few correct outlines of smockfrocks, gaiters” (Life 99).

103 Cochin eggs are known for their rich buff color (Smith and Daniel 12). This connection would have easily been made by the contemporary readers of Jude, as “poultry mania” marked the nineteenth century England after “the arrival of [Cochins] quite literally caused a sensation in England” (Smith and Daniel 205).

104 Smith and Daniel argue that since “they were presented to the Queen and that she took a queenly interest in them simply heightened the effect” (205). S. H. Lewer, a “nineteenth-century authority on chickens” declares that the English “crowded to see [the Cochins], and the excitement grew, . . . and Punch drew and wrote about the new birds; and before people knew where they were, they were in the midst of the curious ‘poultry-mania’ of the middle of the nineteenth century” (qtd. in Smith and Daniel 206). Unfortunately, I was unable to track down the primary source of this quotation from Lewer’s Wright’s Book of Poultry (1912), as it is not owned by any of my local library systems. Commercially sold copies are prohibitively priced at almost $300.

105 See Hall 31-2, 43, and 53. These “indecent” medical concerns are important to women’s health, especially if women are to understand how their sexual lives are connected to their reproductive lives; nevertheless, because these doctors operated outside of traditional medicine, they were commonly asserted to be predators.

106 The sexual double standard is evident even in mourning clothes: widowers were only required to dress in mourning for three months following the death of a wife (Taylor Mourning 303).

107 Emma typically appears in Hardy’s prose and poetry in a dress that is either blue itself or trimmed in blue ribbons, symbolizing her purity (like the Virgin Mary). The inception of Hardy and Emma’s relationship is partially immortalized in A Pair of Blue Eyes, which was written and published in
serial form during the Hardys’ four year courtship. Hardy’s first written mention of Emma was: “Received by young lady in brown” (Life 77). In this one line from his diary Emma is reduced to her age (young), her sex which is also classed (lady), and the color of her gown (brown). Emma was more specific: “I wore a soft deep dark coloured brown habit longer than to my heels, (as worn then)” (Life 71), and describing how she had to carry the gown she clearly adored. In Hardy’s fiction he rewrote Emma’s gown as blue or trimmed with blue ribbons, which, due to its associations to the Virgin Mary, was used to represent sexual purity. Hardy also remembers in his “youthful recollections of four village beauties” (Life 214), one “Rachel H——, and her rich colour, and vanity, and frailty, and clever artificial dimple-making. [She is probably in some respects the original of Arabella in Jude the Obscure.]” (Life 215, bracketed text in original).

108 Hardy dismissed a woman he met who “was a pretty young woman . . . but not quite ethereal enough, suggesting a flesh-surface too palpably” (Life 230). In contrast, Hardy wrote to Henniker in 1893 that “One great gain from that last meeting is that it revived in my consciousness certain nice & dear features in your character which I had half forgotten, through their being of that ethereal intangible sort which letters cannot convey” (Letters ii 44, emphasis in original).

109 Additionally, the Parthenon is a temple to Athena, a virgin goddess who was also associated with fertility.

110 Like Jude and Sue, Hardy and Henniker “clasped hands before the high altar” (Pite 334).

111 For a frightening example of a wife being forced to cohabit with her husband as late as 1887, see Hall 58.

112 Hardy was delighted when “A girl who had scrambled up [onto the bus] after me asked for the shelter of my umbrella, and I gave it,—when she startled me by holding on tight to my arm and bestowing on me many kisses for the trivial kindness. [. . .] She had not been drinking. [. . .] An affectionate nature wasted on the streets!” (Life 281).

113 Liberty “rejected the fashionable aesthetes, those Pre-Raphaelite beauties who followed the ‘Cult of Beauty,’ as being too eccentric” (Cunningham 126). Liberty’s dresses were also embraced by reformers that appreciated his use of “beautiful fabrics. He was celebrated for his ability to manufacture textiles in England” (Cunningham 126).

114 Hardy frequently began salutations to both his wife and his male and female friends with “my dear” followed by his correspondents’ proper names. For example, he most frequently addresses his wife as “my dear Em” or Emmie. Hardy reserved “My dear friend” for Henniker until 1897, when he began to use the phrase to address Lady Jeune.

115 See Neill’s argument that Sue only allows Jude sexual access in order to prevent him from “going after” Arabella (110).

116 The social stigma and legal danger of using birth control is made manifest in the 1891 trial of Henry Young, who was tried ‘for having unlawfully sent a postal packet, which enclosed a certain indecent and obscene printed book or pamphlet entitled “Some Reasons for the Prudential Limitation of Families”’, and also mailing ‘a certain Obscene article’ (presumably a contraceptive)” (Hall 49).

117 In the beginning, the Hardys were quite content, but differences in temperament and their continued childlessness plagued their happiness. Indeed, it is commonly asserted that Hardy’s family’s longstanding disapproval of Emma persisted because of their childlessness. Although it is now assumed that their difficulty was medical, not sexual, Hardy’s disgust with Emma may have resulted from his
displaced fear that as a “childless man . . . [he] was a failure in Darwinian terms. He had proved that he was not among the fittest and that he would not survive” (Pite 243).

118 In *Facts*, Hardy notes, “Nightdress – plain one, an ornamental one substituted by Mrs Bligh” (92), which may have provided inspiration for Sue’s nightgown scene.118

119 Hardy would have understood the importance of embroidered items as his mother Jemima “earned a little extra by glove embroidery, one of several local cottage industries that died out as the century drew on” (Millgate 31-32). Hardy also notes that his mother was “exceptionally skilled in . . . ‘tambouring’ gloves, also was good at mantua-making [dress sewing]” (Life 12).

120 Cunningham notes that “the gowns called artistic dresses . . . were similar in style to house gowns, which were variously named wrappers or morning gowns and meant for use only in the privacy of the home, especially the private areas of the home” (Cunningham 114).

121 These debates resulted in and reflected the Matrimonial Causes Acts of 1857 and 1884, the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, the Guardianship of Infants Act of 1886, and the women’s suffrage movement, all of which highlighted both advances achieved and the continuing paucity of women’s rights. For more on this topic see the Introduction to this dissertation, 30-31.

122 For example, he thought women would naturally be drawn to vote for measures to curtail the abuse of animals. For more on Hardy and women’s suffrage see Millgate Biography 413-14 and 420.

123 The story was told to Hardy by “Mrs Cross, a very old country-woman he met, of a girl she had known who had been betrayed and deserted by a lover. She kept her child by her own exertions, and lived bravely and throve. After a time the man returned poorer than she, and wanted to marry her; but she refused. He ultimately went into the Union workhouse” (*Life* 162).

124 Millgate gossips that Hardy’s “family sympathies were strongly High Church and the services had for Hardy a dramatic appeal which was soon reflected in his dressing himself in a tablecloth at home in order to play the parson” (*Biography* 41). Pite acknowledges that “Hardy’s loss of faith occurred gradually. In a sense, religious belief never left him completely – in old age, he was still loyal to the Church and never the enraged atheist of legend” (Pite 108). Millgate extrapolates, “Hardy, as an agnostic, would always retain his belief in the social function of the Church of England” (*Biography* 41).

125 Millgate shares that “Family tradition, characteristically emphasizing earthier aspects of the affair, has the young mason [Hardy’s father] catching sight of the young servant woman [Hardy’s mother] while working on a nearby building and promptly seducing her under the bushes by the river Frome” (*Biography* 20). Hardy’s parents continued having an affair for several years before their marriage was “arranged—rather against the inclination . . . of both the contracting parties—[and] took place . . . on 22 December 1839” (Millgate *Biography* 20). Hardy was born a little over six months later on June 2, 1840. Instead of adopting contemporary, industrial moral codes, Hardy’s parents’ community must have maintained allegiance to earlier, rural courtship rituals since “marrying because of pregnancy was fairly common . . . and not disgraceful” (Pite 36-37). Nevertheless, Hardy’s parents, by all accounts, had a happy marriage.

126 While there is no proof that Hardy tried to secure a divorce from Emma, he did attempt to convince Henniker that modern and logical persons were open to extramarital affairs: “I cannot help wishing you were free from certain retrograde superstitions: and I believe you will be some day, and none the less happy for the emancipation” (*Letters* ii 26). Hardy consistently attributed Henniker’s reticence toward becoming his “emancipated” lover to her High Church Anglican beliefs.
Lee recounts that in the 1896 Virginia and Vanessa “were struggling to make themselves presentable on the £50 a year which Leslie had been persuaded to allow them. One story Virginia tells in her memoir, illustrating George’s power over them, of appearing before him in a dress which she had had made from cheap fabric, and being told to go and take it off, is particularly humiliating. It would contribute to her ‘clothes complex,’ her horror of dressmakers, her fear of being laughed at for what she was wearing” (149).

Lee stresses how Woolf and her friends’ masquerades were aimed at poking fun at English imperialism, sexual hypocrisy, and bureaucracy. Woolf appears to have been unaware of or unconcerned with what we now perceive as the racist overtones of their disguises.

Love concurs, “no matter how Virginia Woolf may have characterized herself and her conduct during her affair with Vita Sackville-West, as long as the affair continued she was acting as a Sapphist” (Love 204).

Lee argues that “[t]here is now way of knowing whether the teenage Virginia Stephen was fucked or forced to have oral sex or buggered. Nor is it possible to say with certainty that these events . . . drove her mad. But Virginia Woolf herself thought that what had been done to her was very damaging” (156). For an explanation of Woolf’s appellation of Gerald Duckworth as her “lover,” see Lee 152-53.

Mary Hutchinson, with whom Woolf had a “teasingly affectionate, semi-erotic friendship” (Lee 378), tried unsuccessfully to “bring Virginia up to date with the new post-war fashions” (Lee 462), but Woolf’s lover, Vita Sackville-West wrote that Woolf “dressed quite atrociously, that at their first meeting she had worn orange woolen stockings and pumps. At their second, . . . she was slightly better dressed: at least she wore yellow silk stockings, although she still wore pumps” (Love 194). Sackville-West’s observations illustrate how Woolf’s everyday clothing violated their era’s fashionable dictates for both class and gender. A relatively well-off woman wears silk, not woolen stockings. And a sexually attractive woman should never wear sensible pumps.

Sackville-West “was notorious not simply because she had an affair with another woman but also because she had that affair openly and unashamedly. She acted on her desires at a time when for a woman to have desire at all was practically a scandal” (Sproles 67).

Woolf lover’s name Vita means life in Latin.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf uses the image of “a match burning in a crocus” (no pagination) to symbolize the eponymous character’s sexual desire for women in general and perhaps more specifically for her friend, Sally Seton.

Vita Sackville-West wrote to Woolf in 1938, “And to think how the ceilings of Long Barn [Sackville-West’s home] once swayed above us!” (qtd in Sproles 4, bracketed text in original).

Leonard also owned a marmoset (Lee 644, 701).
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