

Introduction

Textile Orientalisms

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), factory girls in Manchester wear shawls as outdoor garments. "At midday, or in fine weather," Gaskell tells us, "it was allowed to be merely a shawl, but towards evening, or if the day were chilly, became a sort of Spanish mantilla or Scotch plaid, and was brought over the head and hung loosely down, or was pinned under the chin in no unpicturesque fashion."¹ Gaskell's description registers a number of uses for the shawl, ranging from the purely utilitarian to the glitzy trendy. Far from this working universe, though, a different scene comes into view in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). Lady Bertram is resting in her lush country home as she hears of her nephew's prospective travel to India. She lets her niece know promptly, "William must not forget my shawl if he goes to the East Indies; and I shall give him a commission for anything else that is worth having." With typical indulgence, she adds, "I wish he may go to the East Indies that I may have my shawl. I think I will have two shawls, Fanny."² Given her indolence and large confinement at home, a request for what was essentially an icon of high fashion might come across as slightly intriguing to her readers. But the scene, in fact, captures brilliantly the period's obsessive interest in that most incredible consumer object from India: a Cashmere shawl.³

The story of shawls is varied and fascinating, and this book will argue that it pertains as much to fashion as it does to social and cultural history. Indian shawls became fashionable wear from the last quarter of the eighteenth century: while elite women enjoyed these expensive accoutrements firsthand, women of lesser means were soon happy to purchase their *copies*, the British "imitations" manufactured in Edinburgh, Paisley, and Norwich, all of which, over the decades, came to be known

as “Paisley” shawls.⁴ In the last sixty years or so, design and textile historians have arduously studied the shawl. John Irwin, in his pioneering study *Shawls* (1955), emphasized their specific weaves and modes of production.⁵ “In adopting the Kashmir shawl, Europe took to herself something more than a new style or garment. She assimilated a new conception of textile design which was to stimulate and enlarge the scope of her decorative tradition,” Irwin opined (1). Subsequently, regional historians such as Valerie Reilly and Pamela Clabburn have explored the Cashmere-styled shawls woven in Paisley and Norwich.⁶ New research by Dan Coughlan has also given a rigorous focus to the loom technologies employed at Paisley.⁷ Many of the defining characteristics of the shawl were a direct result of the changing machinery and equipment, Coughlan argues, rather than the dictates of fashion or taste.

Alongside this material-oriented literature, scholars have traced the shawl’s aesthetic dimension to assert its key presence in art.⁸ Monique Lévi-Strauss in *The Cashmere Shawl* (1986) observes that Madam Vigée le Brun, the nineteenth-century French portrait painter accomplished in “the art of draping shawls,” had concluded how shawls were “a godsend for painters” (16). Relatedly, Aileen Ribeiro, in *Ingres in Fashion* (1999), discusses the ways in which portraiture borrowed from fashionable economies: focusing on the shawls depicted in Jean Ingres’s portraits such as *Marie-Françoise Rivière* (ca. 1805) and *Madame Panckoucke* (1811), Ribeiro argues that in order to “fully understand Ingres,” we must see him “in relation to the world of fashion” (1). Ongoing research by Jennifer Ann van Schoor and Sheilagh Quaille demonstrates further the suggestive place of shawls in aesthetics and design.⁹ The oriental wrap’s prominence in several museum collections has no doubt helped to prompt and fuel this investigative trend.¹⁰

The present volume, however, is based on the logic that even though we know a great deal about the tangible materiality of oriental shawls, their displaced, often abstract representation in wider social texts needs to be further identified and evaluated. Attending to this scarcity, this book explores a variety of historical knowledge and traditions around the textual and visual display of shawls. In particular, through a concentrated study of the evolution of wider practices and conventions, it aims to reveal the accoutrement not just as an article of fashion or clothing but as a resonant object grounded in contemporaneous politics, gender, and culture.

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Shawls were attractively imitated in Britain, but there were several distinctions between the imported Cashmeres and the domestic copies. The former, made of Himalayan goat's wool, were fine and warm; they were also, not surprisingly, immensely more expensive than were their imitations. An original shawl from India, for example, could cost a small fortune, almost equaling the annual wage of a working man in the early nineteenth century; in contrast, a variety of imitation shawls—often consisting of a combination of coarser wool and cotton or silk—was available to be bought for a fraction of that price. Given this wide economic disparity, literature of the period shows that the Indian shawl was often an easy byword for fashionable expenditure; “Paisley” shawls, on the other hand, were commonly associated with working- and lower-middle-class usage. Yet there can be little doubt that the latter were quite the rage across the country; indeed, as Paisley became a household name, the town also became synonymous with the instantly recognizable pine cone design.

As the taste for exotic shawls evolved and grew, there was a veritable explosion of popular writing on the subject. A glance at this wide and varied discourse reveals its unexpected reach and power: the shawl pertained to gender and fashion in a fairly direct way, but in its assorted description it also stimulated and provoked an array of commentaries on art, society, and, most importantly, the modern nation. A range of imaginative writing—including plays, poems, short fictions, and novels, for instance—depicted shawls. Inevitably, these forms were supported and qualified by public and ephemeral texts such as commercial advertisements, popular prints, and satires. Treating these as resonant and important contextual material, *Textile Orientalisms* argues that oriental shawls were popular dress accessories in Romantic and Victorian Britain, but their allure was not limited to fashion alone. Instead, as visible symbols for the subcontinent, for several imaginative writers they emerged as uneven sites to evoke the mottled experience of the British empire. As such, the values and significances attached to shawls in historical moments of relevance provide clues to understanding the psychological nature of an imperial society; furthermore, given shawls' extraordinary popularity, the discourse seems to have almost effortlessly intersected and overlapped the diverse realms of gender, colonialism, and aesthetics.

In its broad exploration, this study considers the works of Elizabeth Inchbald, Sir Walter Scott, William Thackeray, Wilkie Collins, and the

Scottish-Canadian author Frederick Niven. Specifically, it aims to show how the pageantry and display of shawls therein served not only as an explicit marker of fashionability and social hierarchy but also sometimes as an image that powerfully recalled the East and its ongoing history of colonization. Considering the period between the 1770s, a decade that was marked by a persistent criticism of British corruption in India, and the years around the 1930s, which witnessed Scottish politics being beset by doubts about Scotland's imperial past, the book illuminates how the vogue for shawls was incrementally more than a trend about personal or individual styles.

Broadly, this rich and complex narrative is organized according to three interrelated frameworks. First described is the intensive way in which a language of fashion was created by imaginative writers in order to provide a series of social commentaries pertaining to class, gender, and consumption. Second is an analysis of how the configuration of the Indian shawl was, in fact, strenuously developed and contested through a shifting ideal of "authenticity," in which the images of original and imitation were built on prevalent commercial and economic templates. Finally, the book presents an argument for the significant mode in which shawls evolved to discover and display as flexible terrains to register the pleasures and anxieties of global expansion. Indeed, as this book shows, the exotic wrap, as an intelligent and responsive icon of the British-Indian interface, underwent a series of revisions to shape its reputation and identity according to the changing ideologies of the empire.

To elaborate briefly on the first, shawls were traditionally used for protection against the weather, but the advent of the Indian variety, from around the second half of the eighteenth century, transformed this humble and practical garment into a fashion icon. Literature of the nineteenth century is replete with accounts of women dressing up in shawls, admiring them, and expressing a clear sense of disappointment if they fail to find a favored variety. In this context, very often, the craze for "real" shawls forms a source to outline wider anxieties about women's fashion and consumption. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 1, since shawls frequently came to metropolitan Britain as political gifts, concerns around gender and colonialism seem to have been almost habitually intertwined and complicated in their cultural representation.

Secondly, "authenticity" forms a central tenet in understanding the shawl's character in Britain and Europe. Although recent studies have

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contested the tight division of Indian- and British-made shawls, it is important to note that at the time of their custom, shawls were considered almost solely in terms of their provenance or place of origin.¹¹ Furthermore, the shawl's regenerative character—manifest in the structures of original and imitation—was an attractive feature to imagine social gradations. Indeed, the commercial invention of “real” and “imitations” present in retail advertisements also potentially unleashed an effect on midcentury discussions of art and design.¹² The concepts of imitation/authenticity have been, of course, evoked in a wide variety of contexts.¹³ Drawing upon some of these, I have employed Homi Bhabha's influential model of colonial “imitation” to interpret the exigencies of textile *imitation* in midcentury Britain.

Finally, this book contends that while shawls were obviously familiar and popular objects, they were nonetheless shaped by an insistent and unrelenting global imagination. A number of writers enjoyed writing about shawls, but very often, shawls loosely materialize as a shorthand template to recall the British empire in India. The cultural evolution of shawls was thus no simple or isolated phenomenon; in imaginative literature especially, they presented as a means of fashioning selves, but also as aids to imagine a faraway country governed by Britain. Indeed, it is the hidden and overt tension between these two discourses—founded on fashion and imperialism—that made the oriental shawl a capacious metaphor to observe the nation's changing character and organization throughout the nineteenth century.

The question of objects and their representation—or the wider relationship between materiality and narrativity—is important here. Traditionally, a distinction has existed between the human subject and its inert “others.” Yet recent studies under the aegis of “New Materialisms” have shown us how to rediscover “a materiality . . . that compels us to think of causation in far more complex terms; . . . to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for [object agencies].”¹⁴ In this respect, it is also true that objects and narratives are commonly seen as being oppositional, informed broadly by the idea that things come into existence via the use of language or words. Explicating the nuances of this complex economy in works of literature, Talia Schaffer's *Novel Craft* (2011) argues that objects might exist in their physical configuration and human use and contact, but an examination of their processes of narrativization can, in fact, help us to understand the varying values and circumstances of

an age.¹⁵ For Schaffer, the practice of handicraft, for instance, becomes a locus for critiquing contemporary aesthetic trends, with the novels putting forward an alternative vision of producing value and understanding art in alternative contexts.

Given these scholarly views and frameworks, how may we understand the worded description of shawls? These articles of dress were tangible materials and were celebrated as such, but we can hardly question how their varied textual description or *representation* contributed to their “aura,” their excesses and attributes, which went far beyond their physical configuration as solid objects. Thus, instead of producing a meaning dictated simply by their use or even exchange value, their contribution was to emerge as a “spectacle” in both senses of being an attractive display and as a reflector and informer of historical exigencies. The shawl, following this rationale, was a cultural artifact and also a *cultural practice*; and its grammar was located both within and outside the female body to evoke and participate in a variety of contexts and discourses. In *The Fashion System* (1967) Barthes showed us how fashion language can draw a veil around the fashion object and the way in which the evolution of “signs” could recall and refer to particular words or ideas.¹⁶ The present study, interestingly, runs counter to that project: it *recovers* the archival and historical backdrop to construct a new and more aware understanding of a fashionable discourse that also lent itself to a variety of other arenas and realms.

The shawl’s primary identity was as a fashionable dress accessory. Yet its literary manifestation, there can be little doubt, arose out of a variety of concerns associated with industry as well as gender and empire. An early, rather famous, scene in Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) comes to mind.¹⁷ The novel’s young protagonist, Margaret Hale, is at her aunt’s Harley Street residence when she is asked to convey some shawls from the attic. “Margaret went down laden with shawls, and snuffing up their spicy Eastern smell,” Gaskell tells us in memorable lines. The late general, Margaret’s uncle, had acquired these shawls presumably during his career in India, and they are now destined for her cousin Edith’s wedding trousseau. As Edith is asleep, Margaret is also required to model in them, and the narrative voice observes how she stood “quite silent and passive, while her aunt adjusted the draperies, [and] she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and smiled at her own appearance there” (11).

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The description seems to softly outline and resonate the biblical moment in which Eve sees her reflection in the water and smiles. The association is not entirely irrelevant: throughout the nineteenth century, women's obsession with Indian shawls was frequently interpreted as a sign of absorbed narcissism, as discussed in the chapters that follow. But Gaskell carefully distances herself from this parable, although she seems to be clearly aware of its existence; the text insists casually that Margaret expresses pleasure her appearance, "much as a child would do" (11). Marjorie Garson in *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Social Power* (2007) in this connection observes that Gaskell's young heroine "is simple in every good way," and that "the plainness of her dress becomes aligned not only with a virginal naiveté that guarantees sexual purity but also with a whole range of other moral qualities."¹⁸ Yet Garson is also fully alert to the organization of the scene: "The episode with the Indian shawl," she argues, "exemplifies Gaskell's neat solution to a perennial fictional problem. The heroine of a Victorian novel must not deliberately exhibit her own beauty. Margaret is displaying her cousin's shawls to her aunt's friends, not her own good looks to her potential suitor" (291). To be sure, Gaskell's narrative responsibility at this stage is by no means easy: Margaret is to be portrayed as a young woman unselfconscious of her beauty, but her class habitus is also required to be showcased so as to clearly outline and trace her immense ideological journey from an affluent middle-class setting to a hard, industrial society situated in the north of England.

Significantly, the shawl serves to connote wealth as well as taste. Tara Puri observes that "there are constant reminders of the economic worth of the shawl," and that its financial value is of particular significance in the novel as it assists in situating Margaret's class status.¹⁹ Puri's highlight is discerning, for the reader is soon made privy to a scene in which Mrs. Shaw is heard speaking with her neighbor Mrs. Gibson. The description is intriguing:

"I have spared no expense in her trousseau," were the next words Margaret heard. "She has all the beautiful Indian shawls and scarfs the General gave to me, but which I shall never wear again."

"She is a lucky girl," replied another voice, which Margaret knew to be that of Mrs. Gibson, a lady who was taking a double interest in the conversation, from the fact of one of her daughters

having been married within the last few weeks, "Helen had set her heart upon an India shawl, but really when I found what an extravagant price was asked, I was obliged to refuse her. She will be quite envious when she hears of Edith having Indian shawls. What kind are they? Delhi? With the lovely little borders?" (9)²⁰

The details about the shawls' authenticity ("What kind are they? Delhi? With the lovely little borders?") form an important cultural declaration. Indian shawls were coveted dress accessories, and during the middle decades of the century, it was considered a class privilege to be an expert on shawls. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), for instance, remarks that "the misses Osborne were excellent critics of a cashmere shawl"—the exaggeration typically bringing home the arriviste anxiety of the family.²¹ The way in which fashionability was linked to class can also be traced in a slightly later article published in the magazine *Once a Week* (1865). Titled as "Cashmere Shawls," its focus is sharp: "Every lady who counts amongst her accomplishment the art of shopping, can with unerring precision select a shawl of real Cashmere manufacture, out of a promiscuous heap of others, whether of British or foreign manufacture. Possibly, some partiality in taste as to design might induce her to prefer a shawl that had been woven at Paisley; but with instinctive perception she would recognise a certain special superiority—subtle though distinct—in the shawls from the valley of Cashmere."²²

Returning to Gaskell, the scene between Mrs. Shaw and Mrs. Gibson is actually quite complex and its significance is largely built on the fact that it is being overheard. Primarily, the moment exists to evoke the way that Margaret does not necessarily share the materialistic values of the Shaw household. Yet it is also an instant that recalls the young woman's position as a compliant subject, a *parente pauvre* who was transplanted to the affluent Shaw household as a small child, and who remembered, quite distinctly, "the tears shed with such wild passion of grief . . . as she hid her face under the bed-clothes, in that first night; and how she was bidden not to cry by the nurse, because it would disturb Miss Edith; and how she had cried as bitterly, but more quietly" (9). The moment of neighborly conversation is then intended to inscribe a comfortable lifestyle, to which Margaret is both a participant and an outsider. The setting is carefully crafted: the expensive trousseau shawls of Edith work to remind sensitively that compared with Edith, Margaret might have fewer

prospects in the marriage market. Yet having led the reader to think in a particular mode, the narrator subsequently reveals that Margaret desires something very different than marriage for most of the novel; crucially, she also rejects the suit of Henry Lennox, who observes the shawl scene and proposes soon afterwards.

To be sure, Margaret makes quite an impression displaying the gorgeous textiles when Lennox, the lawyer from the city, arrives. A conversation begins as Lennox remarks:

“I suppose you are all in the depths of business—ladies’ business I mean. Very different to my business, which is the real true law business. Playing with shawls is very different work to drawing up settlements.”

“Ah I knew how you would be amused to find us all so occupied in admiring finery. But really Indian shawls are very perfect things of their kind.”

“I have no doubt they are. Their prices are perfect, too. Nothing wanting.” (12)

There are several strands to this banter. Lennox’s description is underpinned by a number of assumptions: his playful orientation of shawls as a “ladies’ business,” for example, conjures a variety of connotations, ranging from domestic scenes of leisure, which he has directly in mind, to some that border tantalizingly on the prurient. His language also creates a troubling dichotomy, as it places men as creators and providers and women as reckless consumers.

Yet Margaret’s insistence on shawls as “perfect” objects dissolves this aspersion, shifting the argument to a new domain of taste. It is notable that the middle decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a debate on domestic and foreign shawls and their varying execution of design, whence the Indian shawl was frequently hailed as an aesthetic object, an “art manufacture.” In fact, so overwhelming was the support for the subcontinental variety that *Household Words* published a satirical fiction by Henry Morley that scathingly criticized elite taste, a piece that is discussed in more detail in the opening chapter.²³ Gaskell’s interest in the design reform movement is shown in her engagement with wallpapers in *North and South*; moreover, as the novel was serialized in the same weekly, she might have been assured that many of her readers would understand the hidden, aesthetic context.²⁴

Despite her simplicity and childlike delight in the early scene, Margaret is actually modeled as the flawless consumer typical of her class. She finds “pleasure” in the “soft feel” and “brilliant colours” of the “gorgeous” accoutrements; significantly, she also breathes in keenly their spicy scent, presumably of patchouli, which was said to be peculiar to authentic shawls. The olfactory discourse, while individual, can hardly be undermined for its concealed historicity: spice was one of the earliest commodities imported into Britain, and as Tim Morton reminds us in *The Poetics of Spice* (2000), capitalism frequently achieves its legitimacy by mobilizing desire and by promoting fantasies around objects.²⁵

The pressure of this tropical-imperial history is palpable in Gaskell’s descriptive language. We are informed that Margaret arrives “laden” with shawls, and the goods she brings are luxuriously odoriferous. Observed closely, the verbal account here mimics the transport of ships, evoking a long history of commercial trade that Britain enjoyed with the East. The way in which naval and shipping experiences are construed suggestively in *North and South* is already demonstrated by Deborah Morse.²⁶ Building on such criticism, the seemingly romantic reference to “spice” clinging close to the shawls then transpires as a veiled allusion to sequences of intercontinental trade and commerce in Gaskell’s fiction.

Margaret is moved by the fine, exotic shawls; but at this stage of the bildungsroman, she is not moved enough to think about the real “hands” behind their production. The scene thus establishes an early point of Margaret’s personal and spiritual journey, serving to evoke her simple naivete and early youth. The lack of concern—about the provenance of objects and their specific circumstances of production—is gradually altered and modified during the course of her experience. For Gaskell, then, the conversation about Indian shawls not only served to introduce Margaret’s gentility and sensitivity but also to skillfully inaugurate the novel’s central themes of class and labor.²⁷

Within the space of a few pages, however, the text becomes radically open and expansive to include the shawl’s global attributes. The shawls have now traveled to Egypt with Margaret’s cousin, Edith, from where we hear her irritated accents: “But you have no idea of the heat here! I tried to wear my great beauty Indian shawl at a picnic. I kept myself up with proverbs as long as I could; ‘Pride must abide,’—and such wholesome pieces of pith; but it was of no use. I was like mamma’s little dog Tiny with an elephant’s trappings on; smothered, hidden, killed with my

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finery; so I made it into a capital carpet for us all to sit down upon" (216). In this flustered description, Edith strives hard to present an approved version of womanhood even as she realizes the impossibility of such a task. Despite her privileged background, the demands of this performance culminate in her feeling "smothered, hidden, [and] killed," recalling proleptically the plight of Roseanna Spearman in Wilkie Collins's *Moonstone* (1868), who tragically perished under the pressures of class and gender at the "shivering sands." Edith's vocabulary is also shaped by a sense of cultural alterity: the reference to the "elephant," for instance, skillfully proposes a ready image of the Orient, which is further strengthened by the shawl's implicit association with the "magic carpet" of the *Arabian Nights*. In Gaskell's rhetoric, then, the East seems to have been condensed and summarized by the image of the Indian shawl. This core dialectic of staging a fashionable femininity alongside a self-conscious affinity with the Orient, one finds, obliged and propelled the shawl's literary career during the nineteenth century.

Emerging from such a critical perspective, the project underlying *Textile Orientalisms* is urgent; it builds on an older view of orientalist criticism to pave the way for a new persuasion where material culture itself becomes center stage. The title and rubric thus marks a nuanced shift from the Saidian tradition of "textual orientalism" to focus on *textiles* as a mode to illuminate global contexts and the British-Indian interface in particular. In this respect, the still-evolving and processual aesthetic of the term *orientalism*, embracing and ranging from the late eighteenth-century British-Indian project of William Jones and others, to the reparative postcolonial idiom evident in the works of Said and Bhabha (and influential literary critics such as Kate Teltscher and Nigel Leask), to the significant accounts of orientalism as a gendered and aesthetic category, as have been discussed by several scholars, is noteworthy.²⁸ The material curve in critical literature, this book will show, has given rise to a new kind of physical or embodied orientalism in present-day discourse.

Shawls as Literary Topics

There are several arguments for writing an entire book on literary shawls. Fashion and art historians have been long been interested in the way in which men and women have dressed themselves throughout history. In the last few years, we have witnessed a growing interest in framing

fashion as part of a wider social structure and as a narrative that reflects historical and contemporary realities. For literary critics particularly, the earlier preoccupation of reading fashion merely for character analyses now seems to have been supplanted by a much broader approach and methodology.²⁹

The “fashionable” direction of literary studies has also benefited from a critical material “turn.” Following Asa Briggs’s publication of *Victorian Things* (1988), scholars have rigorously explored the quantifiable experience of nineteenth-century life.³⁰ Andrew Miller, in *Novels behind Glass* (1995), for instance, examines Victorian display windows to argue for the way in which they generated broader anxieties about economic appetites.³¹ Embracing expansive backgrounds of social and cultural relations, Miller’s work powerfully shows how the study of the object has moved away from the dominant Marxian paradigm of viewing materials solely through the value of exchange. Scholarly debates about the materiality of a thing and its sociological interpretation have also been influential in this regard.³²

The mode in which mobile commodities engage with new spaces and contexts has also attracted important scholarship. John Plotz’s *Portable Property* (2008) argues that the “English book” traveled far and wide, and it maintained its resolute capacity to function as an individual and national marker during the colonial period. “Possessions fill Victorian novels . . . [but] they generally serve not as static deadweights, but as moving messengers,” he contends.³³ Interestingly, while Plotz is concerned to chart the centripetal movement of objects across the colonial world, critics such as Suzanne Daly, Catherine Waters, and Julie Fromer have found it fruitful to examine how subcontinental *imports*, including tea, textiles, spices, and jewels, came to embellish British homes during the nineteenth century.³⁴ In *The Empire Inside: Indian Commodities in Victorian Domestic Novels* (2011), Daly argues—rather provocatively—that despite the deluge of Indian commodities in Victorian fiction, their places of origin often remain unacknowledged.

Published in 2006, Elaine Freedgood’s *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* ushered in a new way of understanding material culture.³⁵ Freedgood argues that the individual histories of several raw materials and commodities referenced in nineteenth-century fiction need to be validated and interrogated precisely in order to understand their subtle impact on the aesthetics of the novel. Commenting on

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the mahogany panels that feature in several scenes of *Jane Eyre*, Freedgood suggests that the ideas of coercion and slavery contained in these materials also came to resonate in the treatment of Jane. For example:

The mahogany furniture in *Jane Eyre* requires that one learn about the history of the depletion of mahogany in Madeira and the Caribbean (the two major sources of wealth in the novel); about the subsequent vicissitudes of the cash crops—grapes and sugar—that were planted in its stead; about Madeira as the first site of the modern form of plantation slavery that would later be exported to the Caribbean; and about the history of furniture and properties of mahogany that allowed certain innovations in furniture style in the eighteenth century—and what those innovations signified, culturally speaking, in the Victorian period. (3)

Despite the scholarly rigor of Freedgood and others, it is possible to suggest that there are some aspects that still remain overlooked in the field. The works of Plotz and Daly, for example, consider the transport of Victorian objects from a fairly straightforward framework of global circulation. What is frequently obscured, however, is the fact that the British empire was not just about importing things but also about the large-scale *production* of objects, a substantial part of which was dedicated to making “copies,” as the familiar examples of Wedgewood pottery and cotton textiles testify. Given the relative absence of this model in critical literature, the specific mode in which the industrial project in Britain was actually based on a paradigm of “imitation” (or crudely put, “fakes”) remains undeservedly neglected and overlooked.

The wider question that is raised in this study, then, is the extent to which objects were singular and stable either in their meanings or in their physical forms during the nineteenth century, as industrialism worked very hard to discontinue and occlude lone meanings attached to objects. Like other commodities such as cotton cloth and Chinese pottery, shawls were brought over as exotic “luxuries,” to be soon regenerated in forms of industrially manufactured “imitations.”³⁶ This kind of transformation and mutation was welcome from a metropolitan view, particularly in the fact that fashion was no longer the sole purview of the elite classes. But, arguably, it also promoted and hardened a division in which the elite consumed the “real” and superior material, while the less privileged became inured to using affordable copies.³⁷ On many occasions, global material

culture thus left its imprint on Britain's class organization in visible and resonant ways.

Yet from a more inclusive perspective, although the distinction between Indian shawls and their imitations was considerable, their cultural valences were frequently similar. Indeed, despite the key fact that Paisley shawls were produced in Britain, their connection with the Orient seems to have been frequently taken for granted. In Walter Scott's Indian-themed novella *The Surgeon's Daughter* (1827), for example, the shawl appears as a product made in Scotland and beloved of Scottish women. But it also transpires readily as an object containing opportunities associated with the empire. Commenting on the tale, Scott's frame narrator is delighted that "like the imitative operatives of Paisley, I have composed my tale by incorporating into the woof a little Thibet wool."³⁸ The alignment of intellectual labor with industrial labor here is striking, but the deeply imperial mindset present in the lines is also revelatory. Viewed from a literary-historical perspective especially, it seems that just as raw materials from the colonies were utilized to make profitable commodities, Romantic-period fiction was also keen to employ Indian themes and resources in order to produce viable orientalist fiction. The subcontinental history of the shawl, in this case, clearly sets the stage for a broader discussion of Scotland's global ambitions.

Periodical literature reveals a similar ideological edge. Shawls were unquestionably entertaining and fashionable topics, but quite often anecdotes posing as interesting trivia harbored complicated motives. A short fiction entitled "The Story of a Cashmere Shawl" published in *London Society* (1870) offers an interesting case. In this retrospective piece, a group of expatriate Britons in India discuss their experience of purchasing authentic Cashmere shawls locally. As the story unfolds, however, it turns out that the subject is not as inconsequential as it is initially purported to be. Mrs. Welwyn is the only woman in the group, but her description is tinged with only a shade of irony, as the narrator reports: "In the course of conversation Mrs. Welwyn—who took a rather lady-like view of politics—suggested that as Cashmere is such a charming place the English government ought to take it. 'It would be so nice' she added. 'Why, shawls would come to us quite naturally.'"³⁹ The misogyny in the description is distinct, but the abrupt alliance of fashion and politics is more striking still. Here, the semantic logic borrows from a traditional *gendering* of commodities, showing aptly how its ideological re-creation

was very often committed to the “ends of empire” (as Laura Brown might have observed in her well-known study).⁴⁰ Likewise, the shawl’s hidden but clearly unambiguous link with expansionist aggression is also present in William Thackeray’s novel *The Newcomes* (1855), discussed in chapter 4.

Gathering these varied texts and contexts, *Textile Orientalisms* borrows from a cohort of methodological approaches to analyze the figure of the shawl. Specifically, it proposes a notion of “reflective materialism” that expressly validates literary objects in their embodied reality as well as their contextual bearing.⁴¹ The New Historicist School of the 1990s had emphasized the way in which literary works might be considered in the contexts of prevailing ideas and assumptions.⁴² In the current critical climate that celebrates material culture as a rigorous category of analysis, a registration of the dual nature of literary objects—as material and metaphorical artifacts—can be useful and seminal. Objects are traditionally defined by their efficacy and role in human society, as Bill Brown has remarked.⁴³ Consequently, a “reflective material” prescription can usefully employ a discursive *and* actual way of considering objects and bring material culture and cultural studies on the same plane.

An understanding of the shawl as a commodity and as merchandise also leads to the important question of its analogous association with authorship and writing. Recent studies agree that imaginative literature is largely shaped by the interests of the marketplace. As Miller notes, “Books are simply governed by the same facts that govern the production of objects.”⁴⁴ Walter Scott, mentioned earlier, had articulated this economy in *The Surgeon’s Daughter*.⁴⁵ For Wilkie Collins, who experimented with the newly emergent 1860s genre of sensation fiction, the agenda was slightly different: despite being a successful author himself, he believed that creative literature had become vulnerable to the dangers of an increasingly democratized readership. In Collins’s *Armada*, this sense of unease was communicated via his depiction of the cheap and easily available Paisley shawl, an object that also functioned as an icon for de-standardization of taste. As such, Collins powerfully drew together the disparate worlds of fashion and literacy to articulate his worries about a newly formed mass and popular readership. If we consider authors who in a sense stood at the crossroads of literary history, it seems that an interest in defining the parameters of “good” literature was sometimes propelled and articulated by a reference to the ongoing fashion for shawls.

Even for the twentieth-century Scottish-Canadian author Frederick Niven, the writerly dilemma about composing literature, in unfashionable hindsight, was still associated with a Paisley shawl that furnished his drawing room.

A Description of Chapters

In discussing these concerns and others, the following chapters analyze significant moments of British social history and their subtle absorption into the narrative of fashion. The first chapter on historical contexts explores the “prehistory” of the Indian shawl, prior to its introduction to Britain. In the subcontinent, the shawl’s seminal function and location in the *khilat*, or honorary gifts, conferred a homosocial and political aura on its use. The chapter presents an overview of how the famous Indian wrap maintained and broke away from its earlier connotations of masculine, courtly traditions, as well as the way in which it regenerated in Britain as “Paisley” shawls.

The second chapter examines Elizabeth Inchbald’s play *Appearance Is against Them* (1785), in which an Indian shawl is framed and identified within a series of comic sequences of stealing. The staging of these acts, and the real and pretend investigations surrounding them, is lightened by a variety of mocking allusions to women’s attachment to fashion. Nevertheless, while an account of feminine narcissism is steadily borne out by the shawl, its character and emphasis as a “gift” complicates the censure, recalling explicitly the contemporaneous narrative of the East India Company’s corruption in which many Indian “presents” had changed hands. Inchbald’s play thus draws on prevalent typecasts of feminine fashion in order to actually mount a veiled but scathing critique of company misrule in India.

Having established the fashion for shawls during the late eighteenth century, chapter 3 analyzes its description in two of Sir Walter Scott’s novels: *St. Ronan’s Well* (1823) and *The Surgeon’s Daughter* (1827). While the former criticizes the Paisley shawl as a cheap imitation of an exclusive textile, Scott—rather unexpectedly—launches a full-throated praise for the same shawl in his later novella. Taking this contrast of treatment as a starting point, I suggest that Scott’s characterization of original and imitation shawls represents and offers a commentary on the economic trajectory of colonial governance. Specifically, in placing the exotic luxury

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product in opposition to the mass-produced domestic item, his fiction replicates in microcosm a crucial transition in the British imperial policy, which witnessed a shift from mercantile trade to industrial capitalism. Scott's description of alternate topologies and climates is also significant in the context of recent ecological studies.

While a considerable part of the book highlights the fashion for shawls as a feminine craze, chapter 4 illuminates the Cashmere shawl as a masculine object. In *Vanity Fair* (1848), William Thackeray evolves and displays shawls as sites of domesticity as he describes Becky and Amelia's fondness for the fashion; however, the depiction also reveals how the shawl's global—as well as masculine—relations were contemporaneous and current. Scholars have variously examined the significance of the Napoleonic Wars in *Vanity Fair*. The period of the novel's composition and dissemination, however, was also dominated by two major Anglo-Sikh wars that took place in India between 1845 and 1849. There is evidence that popular culture made a ready connection between shawls and the "Punjab wars," particularly as the region included Kashmir at the time. Viewed from this perspective, Dobbins's undertaking to write *A History of the Punjaub*, as noted in the novel, is a significant marker of its contemporary currency and valance. The chapter argues that while the Indian shawl in the mid-Victorian years was popular as a romantic gift, Thackeray was also keen to draw attention to its imperial disposition and character.

Chapter 5 examines the symbolic import of the "red Paisley shawl" worn by Wilkie Collins's murderous heroine Lydia Gwilt in *Armada* (1866). As a relatively cheap imitation of an expensive article, the Paisley shawl was frequently identified with working- and lower-middle-class consumption. Drawing on and citing art-oriented writing about the industrial reproduction of oriental textiles, the chapter argues that Lydia's shawl is, in fact, a reminder of India, as well as its history of rebellion in the contemporary past. Lydia is a dangerous criminal planning a number of murders with ruthless premeditation; however, Collins is also careful to depict the way in which she has been a victim of class exploitation. In this respect, Lydia's case is similar to that of the Indian sepoy, whose demonized representation during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 obliterated his claims to justice. Citing Homi Bhabha's theory of colonial imitation, the chapter proposes that the concerns embodied in the *imitation* shawl pertaining to social structure and imperialism allowed Collins to represent and analyze rebellions both at home and abroad.

The concluding chapter discusses the Scottish-Canadian novelist Frederick Niven, whose writing was published during the early decades of the twentieth century. Niven's 1931 novel, *The Paisley Shawl*, describes the experience of Peter Cunningham, a writer in search of a subject for his fiction, which is to be either a Paisley shawl that drapes the piano in his drawing room or a particular view of the Scottish landscape that he sometimes visited. To spice things up, the period of his indecision also coincides with his physical and intellectual attraction to a woman outside of his marriage. The chapter contends that the inherited shawl plays a subtle but important role in the fictional writer's imagining of his home and homeland, and, in effect, its latent history of imperial engagement comes to undermine the concept of "home" as an organic and uncorrupted entity. Written during the early twentieth-century decades of the "yes" and "no" campaigns based on the role of the British empire in Scottish nationalist policies, the novel projects the Paisley shawl as a deeply fraught political metaphor to absorb nationalist anxieties and dilemmas.

In reinventing the nineteenth-century vogue for shawls as a suggestive terrain for locating domestic and imperial anxieties, these readings—stretching from the last quarter of the eighteenth to the first third of the twentieth century—raise questions about the way in which shawls created a "grammar" of consumption that was, at the same time, drawn into interconnected trajectories of national progress, art, gender, and social organization. Gathering them together, the book will examine how the history of the shawl can provide a resonant account of feminine empowerment and expression while also bringing into view the wider histories of marginalization and exploitation that made the shawl's literary and cultural invention possible and popular. The chronologically organized chapters that follow then explore and illuminate the way in which the vogue was created, contested, and imagined through the extended nineteenth century.