THE PERFORMANCE OF PRIVACY: DANDYISM IN W.M. THACKERAY'S *PENDENNIS*

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Abstract

This article draws on Thackeray's appropriation of the apparatus of theatrical culture in order to examine the complex negotiation of public performance and private life engendered by the practices of dandyism in the period. In *Pendennis*, the figure of the dandy appears inherently artificial in its reliance upon spectacle and display, yet it also enables self-creation and the maintenance of privacy. Different types of the dandy are isolated in the novel as forms of masculine performance to be variously emulated or rejected in the formation of individual identity.

While Thackeray is often considered to be sceptical of dandyism, his sustained employment of dandiacal personas in this novel suggests that his view of such performative practices was more ambivalent. Costume here offers the allure of display to both fictional characters and actual readers, while retaining a potentially impenetrable barrier between self and society. In a society that seems at once to foster a culture of surveillance and spectacle, and to retreat from such theatrical practice as inauthentic and artificial, such close attention to dress may be considered as simultaneously suspiciously vulgar or effeminate, and cautious or protective. In the novel examined here, Thackeray charts the development of his hero with an emphasis on the role of costume in the experience of masculine identity. In doing so, this article suggests, the text engages in an exploration of performance as privacy.

Through an exploration of the dual influences of privacy and performance, W. M. Thackeray's *Pendennis* (1848-50) identifies the ways that male youth is able to create and sustain authenticity by means of negotiation between public indulgences or physical pleasures, and the moral values of the day which emphasised the primacy of interiority. Loosely adhering to the generic form of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel charts the fortunes of its eponymous hero from his university years, to dubious success as a writer for the periodical press. The text narrates Pen's various forays into love and friendship, concluding with his marriage to Laura Bell, who exerts a stabilising influence over the young man. *Pendennis* may be seen variously to draw on, or set itself against, popular and theatricalised performances of masculine types governing masculine development and the socialisation of young men in the mid-Victorian era. Thackeray's novel may be seen as an example of a growing acceptance in this period of the male body at its most obviously sexually fraught epoch. The physiological changes of puberty hold an obvious appeal for the emotional and psychological response elicited, and for the move towards social integration and participation that such a process may herald, particularly for male youth of the middle classes.

Pen's narrative development represents a growing awareness of a social cohort

that gains increasing visibility in mid-Victorian writing: adolescents. His youthful body is manipulated by Thackeray to indicate the precarious balance between public and private in youthful male experience, as adolescence emerges in the novel as a discrete age group responding to newfound freedom, a result of the move away from the parental home, and to the difficulties in forging an adult male identity in the wider world. Contemporary attempts to understand the ways that adolescence was constructed in this period placed a greater emphasis on its evolution as a social and cultural response rather than just a biological imperative, leading to recent observations that nineteenth-century adolescence 'was the response to an observable *fact* – the fact of a youth culture', that it was a 'social role', or 'a socio-cultural construction', rather than a period of purely physical change heralded by puberty and experienced in the same way by each generation.[1] This 'social role' or 'youth culture' is clearly gendered in *Pendennis*, producing coded types of masculinity through examples of the clothed male body on display.

Thackeray charts the history of his protagonist, Arthur Pendennis, with careful attention to both the individual and cultural significance of his physical presentation, and the reader is introduced to the different social functions of the male body. Pen's body is variously represented as a cover or screen, a highly visible source of pleasure, a means of self-display and ornamentation, or even as a disguise. Costume, as a visual indicator of the body beneath, therefore becomes a crucial part of Thackeray's interrogation of male development and exploration, drawing attention to the performances of masculinity in the social arena.

The novel draws frequently upon theatrical genres and tropes recognisable to a mid-Victorian reader. This extends from the use of pantomime imagery in the vignettes at the start of chapters and references to real contemporary figures of theatre and melodrama such as James Quin and Sarah Siddons, to fictional characters associated with the stage, such as the musician Bows and the provincial actress with whom Pen falls in love, Emily Costigan or "the Fotheringay". While much of the allure of theatre is later exposed in the novel as sham and artifice, forms of performance and theatrical suggestion remain a source of apparent fascination for both the young hero and for the author.[2] In particular, costume, or dress, features as a persistent reminder that the theatricalising gaze exists in polite society beyond the stage, and that flamboyant costume serves a cultural purpose in the formation of identity in everyday life, as well as for the dramatic purposes of play or production.

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1 John Demos and Virginia Demos, 'Adolescence in Historical Perspective', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 31 (1969), 632-8 (p. 638); Jenny Holt, *Public School Literature, Civic Education and the Politics of Male Adolescence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008*)*, p. 8; John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain, 1860-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), p. 8.
2 Critics such as John Carey have noted Thackeray's interest in theatrical forms of entertainment, from plays and pantomimes to ballet and opera. See John Carey, *Thackeray: Prodigal Genius* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), particularly chapter 5 on 'Theatre'.

As Emily Allen has outlined, 'theater provided the novel with an unstable opposite that served both to repel and attract.'3 Costume or clothing is isolated in Pendennis, especially in relation to masculine performance and development, as not merely functional, but as enabling a complex negotiation of the boundaries between social spectacle inviting the public gaze, and interiority or privacy. The binary of public and private evinced in the discussion of dress in this text may be seen as a response to this tension between the individual, isolated practice of novel-reading, and the collective, communal experience of theatre-going and public performance.[4]

In each stage of his career, whether first love, his time at Boniface College, or his forays into the bohemian London of the literary man, Arthur Pendennis is provided with a new opportunity for self-creation, both in the visual terms of his self-fashioning and in terms of his experience and subsequent (it is to be supposed) character development in the novel, as he learns from each new scene of his life:

> Mr Pen said that anthropology was his favourite pursuit; and had his eyes always eagerly open to its infinite varieties and beauties: contemplating with an unfailing delight all specimens of it in all places to which he resorted […] And, indeed, a man whose heart is pretty clean can indulge in this pursuit with an enjoyment that never ceases, and is only perhaps the more keen because it is secret and has a touch of sadness in it; because he is of his mood and humour lonely, and apart though not alone.[5]

Pen, as an occasional student of 'anthropology', observes those around him with the same interest and amusement as that of the reader when studying him. The process of observation or spectatorship, however, necessarily creates a distance between subject and object, and Pen finds that this 'pursuit', while enjoyable, is nonetheless isolating. By creating for his young hero this literary world full of other fictional people, however, Thackeray allows Pen to create an identity not just through his own

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3 Emily Allen, *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003), p. 7.

[4] Thackeray's reliance upon the theatre as a source of material for his journalistic work in particular, has been noted by Ann Horn in 'Theater, Journalism, and Thackeray's "Man of the World Magazine"', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 32:3 (1999), 223-238. Horn draws attention to Thackeray's self-conscious performance as author-editor for the *Cornhill* Magazine, although the relationship constructed between the theatre and periodical press may also be read into *Pendennis*. Richard Salmon has also noted the 'wilfully superficial and theatrical aspect of Thackeray's representation of fashionable society', in his book *William Makepeace Thackeray* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2005), p. 57.

[5] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis: His Fortunes and Misfortunes, His Friends and His Greatest Enemy*, ed. and intr. by John Sutherland (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 588. All subsequent references are to this edition, incorporated in the body of the text.

experiences, but also by distinguishing himself (and his body) in relation to other characters, or by imitating the physical presentation of those around him: Pendennis was a 'clever fellow, who took his colour very readily from his neighbour, and found the adaptation only too easy' (p. 476).

Pen's mimetic capacity for 'adaptation' figures his self-conscious presentation in terms of theatricality or performance. The constant possibility of comparison or contrast is what Peter Brooks in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* identifies as an erotic dynamic. He states that:

> The relation to another body is repeatedly presented in visual terms, and the visual as applied to the body is often highly eroticised, a gaze subtended by desire. The desire can be a desire to possess, and also a desire to know; most often the two are intermingled.[6]

Through a process of coveting, emulating, or distinguishing himself against the bodies of the men that surround him in his fictional society, Pen creates a complex web of display and appropriation, in which he is regarded by the reader as 'apart, though not alone' (p. 588), and alienation becomes a positive, formative force. The interchange between desire and knowledge that Brooks identifies develops as Pen matures, and the resulting self-consciousness allows Pen to see his physical self as both a private and a public body. By regulating his image, and adapting the presentation of his body through dress, occupation, location and company, Pen learns confidence in both how he sees himself and how he is perceived by those around him.

Balanced against Pen's scopophilic urge, or eroticised desire to see those around him, is his developing awareness of himself and the figure that he presents to any chosen audience. Pen's initial, and hesitant, attempts to make himself a more noticeable figure in his community, are often associated with the theatre, or with different forms of theatrical display and performance such as burlesque or harlequinade. It is a typical of Thackeray's fiction that dress frequently indicates character, or reveals an individual's characteristics. In an echo of the significance accorded to dress in Thomas Carlyle's esoteric philosophy of clothes in *Sartor Resartus* (1838), J. C. Flugel writes in his work on the history of fashion:

> Apart from face and hands […] what we actually see and react to are, not the bodies, but the clothes of those about us. It is from their clothes that we form a first impression of our fellow-creatures when we meet them.[7]

Thus, in *Pendennis*, Blanche's pale costume, Foker's outlandish clothing,

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6 Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press,1993), p. 11.
7 J. C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, (New York: AMS Press, (1950, reprinted 1976), p. 15.

Warrington's jacket and Major Pendennis's cane, become emblematic of themselves as individuals, or symbolic of elements in their character. Blanche, who wears 'a dove colour, like a vestal virgin', is blankly white, her clothing providing a carefully chosen screen of impenetrability, and Major Pendennis's cane and corset declare both his age and his reliance on *la mode* of an outmoded and bygone era (p. 270). Both declare the body's presence, and obscure it. Clothes hold various functions, and as well as obscuring the body, they also ornament the body; costume transmits information about the person wearing it (such as class, wealth, occupation, gender, age), allows for the symbolic use of items of dress, and also provides crucial opportunities for self-creation.

Thackeray's novel, filled as it is with morally dubious men staking claims to fashion, is often cited as an example of the writer's disapproval of dandyism.[8] Pendennis's consciousness of his apparel and general adornment do seem to suggest that such concern for appearance is a corrupting vice. However, Thackeray's focus on clothing suggests a more ambivalent attitude towards dandyism. Pen's friend and mentor Warrington gently teases Pen about his excessive concern over his appearance. In comparison, Thackeray apparently set great store by the jacket as worn by Warrington, so much so that Ellen Moers has suggested that, 'the rough, manly, unadorned jacket was becoming a moral symbol to Thackeray; it was the costume of a gentleman.'[9] The value of the jacket, for Thackeray, was its simplicity and functionality as an everyday garment.

Warrington, as Pen's mentor, is often seen as more practical, steady, and honest than his young companion, all of which may be glimpsed in his lack of fine tailoring. This is in contrast with the moral ambiguity of Major Pendennis, who is often cited as suggestive of Thackeray's dislike of dandyism. In comparison with the honest, jacket-sporting Warrington, it is not only the previous generation in whom signs of foppish appearance suggest a suspect character. The Major and his superannuated friend Viscount Colchicum represent an older and outmoded form of dandyism, and provide Pen with examples of a style of masculinity affected in his father's time, complete

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8 This is an idea touched upon by, for example, Juliet McMaster in *Thackeray: The Major Novels* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), who states that 'the society satirized in *Pendennis* is that of the dandy' (p. 65). More recently, however, Thackeray critics are becoming sensitive to the complexity of the author's attitude towards dandyism, such as Robert P. Fletcher, in 'The Dandy and the Fogey: Thackeray and the Aesthetics/Ethics of the Literary Pragmatist', *English Literary History*, 58:2 (1991), 383-404, who suggests that 'the young dandy stands as individual, independent of the social conventions of family and work, and, in the metaphors of Thackeray's universe, as the figure of self-creation', (p. 401); and Claire Nicolay in 'Delightful Coxcombs to Industrious Men: Fashionable Politics in *Cecil* and *Pendennis'*,   *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30:1 (2002), 289-304, who observes that 'dandyism served as a nexus for the declining aristocratic elite and the rising middle class, a site where each was transformed by the dialectic interplay of aristocratic and individualistic ideals.' (p. 289).
9 Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p. 203.

with corsetry, padded shoulders, and multi-layered great-coats as well as other, more ornamental *aides de toilettes*.[10] The Major, as explicit guardian of the young man, may be seen as occupying a paternal position in relation to Pen, as he takes on the role of father to his nephew, providing Pen with inflated ideas about his position in polite, aristocratic, society. For Clair Hughes:

> The Major serves as both role-model and warning to Arthur Pendennis, the novel's unheroic hero, whose career across the novel is charted in a series of exquisite outfits which throw no very favourable light on his character.[11]

Major Pendennis's dandyism provides one representation of manliness, which contrasts with that of Warrington, and offers one mode of performance for Pen to follow or reject in the text as 'both role-model and warning'. Being close to Pen in familial terms, he is naturally a significant influence in Arthur's life-choices and general code of conduct.

Henry Foker also turns out to be an influential figure for Pen. Initially styled as possessing a 'loud and patronising manner,' Foker is an old schoolfellow of Pen's, who has changed markedly in the course of a year:

> A youth […] now appeared before Pen in one of those costumes to which the public consent […] has been awarded the title of 'swell.' He […] wore a fur waistcoat laced over with gold chains; a green cut-away coat with basket buttons, and a white upper-coat ornamented with cheese-plate buttons […]; all of which ornaments set off this young fellow's figure to such advantage, that you would hesitate to say which character in life he most resembled, and whether he was a boxer *en goguette*, or a coachman in his gala suit. (pp. 38-9)

Even to Pen's untutored eye, his former acquaintance is vulgar, brash, and overly loud in his appearance. The colloquial appellation of 'swell' suggests that Foker appears as a person of rank, although his behaviour may be insolent or ungentlemanly. Nonetheless, his family's wealth and connections on his mother's side make Harry Foker a suitable friend in the eyes of Pen's uncle, who encourages the alliance. Pen's initial reaction is soon forgotten, too, in the potential for personal reinvention that he recognises in Foker. For all its vulgarity, Foker's performance of dandyism suggests a

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10 Major Pendennis encapsulates the style of dandyism made popular by King George IV, both during his period as regent and in his reign. For more specific examples of the evolution of fashion between 1810 and 1850, see C. Willett Cunnington and Phyllis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959). Although rather dated, this text still provides a detailed account of dress in the period, as does Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600-1900* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965).
11 Clair Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), p. 7.

social prominence that Pen envies. The excessive accoutrements which adorn the person of this young visitor signify to the reader Foker's aspirations of dandyism:

> It was in vain that Pen recalled to his own mind how stupid Foker used to be at school – how he could scarcely read, how he was not cleanly in his person, and notorious for his blunders and dullness. Mr. Foker was not much more refined now than in his schooldays: and yet Pen felt a secret pride in strutting down High Street with a young fellow who owned tandems, talked to officers, and ordered turtle and champagne for dinner.[12]

It is this brand of dandyism, the loudly-dressed, artificial, consciously performative form of dandyism, with which the modern reader is perhaps most likely to be familiar, rather than the understated elegance and stark simplicity of the early regency period with which George "Beau" Brummell's name has come to be associated. Foker, like a younger version of Major Pendennis, favours the more flamboyant, ostentatious costume typified by the latter years of the regency and of King George IVs reign which, in Thackeray's eyes in particular, was more morally ambiguous.[13]

Thackeray's ambivalence about the vulgarity of foppishness which, partly as a result of the influence of Pen's friend Foker and his uncle, is frequently adopted by young Pen, becomes visible throughout the novel. While it remains a largely innocuous vice in itself, Thackeray nonetheless tends to attach moral stigma to such excessive concern with adorning the body, a theme which occupies several entries in his *Mr Brown's Letters to a Young Man About Town* (1849) and is recurrent in his essay 'Men and Coats' (1841), among other contributions to contemporary journals. Ellen Moers states that:

> In the course of describing his own youth as the history of Pendennis, Thackeray came to the conclusion that dandyism was nothing more nor less than selfishness raised to the *n*th degree.[14]

Such selfish concern can bode ill for other areas of life, and Pen is frequently accused of selfish and narcissistic tendencies. Thackeray's final reduction of dandyism to 'nothing more nor less than selfishness', however, seems unconvincing, as the articulation of dandyism in the novel appears to be more subtle than the simple

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12 Ibid., p. 39.
13 See Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 77-226. In addition, Anne Hollander and Clair Hughes have both distinguished Brummell's style of dandyism as emphasising simplicity, cleanliness, and impeccable behaviour. Claire Nicolay has similarly commented that Brummell was 'the primary architect of dandyism' and that he 'developed not only a style of dress, but also a mode of behavior and style of wit that opposed ostentation.' ('Delightful Coxcombs', p. 289).
14 Moers, *The Dandy*, p. 212.

equation of modishness with self-obsession and anti-social behaviour. Thackeray's dandy is invested with an admirable sense of self-awareness, although the difficult balance between confidence and egotism in such performance is what draws Thackeray's attention.

As indicated above, the gaudy dandy is the type of dandyism which is most well-known, although the spirit and elegance of dandyism were more accurately embodied in the style of Brummell, whose emphasis on nature rather than artificiality may be perceived by Thackeray as a more masculine, rigorous enterprise that seeks to discipline theatrical culture, and therefore more respectable and worthy of emulation than louche foppery. Brummell emphasised the natural lines of the body, and demanded that tailoring should fit the body in its natural form (without the aids of devices such as buckram-wadding or lacing), and advocated sobriety in both colour and cut, favouring navy blue or other dark colours in his coats. His idea of sartorial sophistication valued the body and, above all, its cleanliness. While Thackeray is more severe on the theatrics of "butterfly" dandyism, the vigorous manliness of Brummellian dandyism was a form of attire and attitude towards the body that he does not entirely disparage. Thackeray muses in his essay 'Men and Coats', that:

> A man who is not strictly neat in his person is not an honest man. […] A man who wears a dressing-gown is not neat in his person; his moral character takes invariably some of his slatternliness and looseness of his costume.[15]

It is this element of neatness, honesty, and strictness that is of such value to Thackeray in Warrington's jacket. Care in dressing, if not taken to excessive lengths and applied to vulgar costume, may be a positive element reflecting good character. Pen's dandyism, then, is not necessarily indicative of moral laxity, as due attention to one's self-presentation may be beneficial during adolescent development, both as a means of self-creation, and as an expression of character.

The position of the male adolescent as regards the public and private spheres of Victorian society is fluid and unspecified. Pen spends the first half of the novel firmly attached to his family home of Fairoaks, where he lives a relatively quiet country life. On moving to London, however, Pen leaves his childhood home, and instead lives with George Warrington in shared accommodation in the Upper Temple. While Lamb Court provides Pen with a space to work and sleep, it is referred to as two sets of 'rooms' rather than "home", and Major Pendennis is shocked at his nephew's new and distinctly humble abode in the city (p. 359). Pen never entirely moves away from his home and family. He remains throughout most of the novel belonging to neither the external social sphere or to the private domestic realm, suspended between the two and occupying the liminal position of bachelor along with Warrington.

Pen's isolation echoes similar experiences of other young men in the process of

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15 Thackeray, 'Men and Coats', Vol. XIII, *Works*, p. 334.

social assimilation, before finding a suitable role as social participant. His psychological separation from those around him, as well as his choice to distinguish himself from others through his dandified dress, magnify this lack of involvement in others' lives:

> Neither did society, or that portion which he saw, excite him or amuse him overmuch. […] He was too young to be admitted as an equal amongst men who had made their mark in the world, and of whose conversation he could scarcely as yet expect to be more than a listener. And he was too old for the men of pleasure of his own age; too much a man of pleasure for the men of business; destined, in a word, to be a good deal alone. (p. 606)

Pen, who is 'destined to be alone', being both 'too young' and 'too old', belongs to none of the social groups identified as appropriate for male youth in this period and is therefore cast in the role of an observer. This maintenance of a psychological distance from those around him, however, is in fact its own kind of participation in a community of experience felt by similar youths in the same situation. A separation of self from others, especially by means of clothing, from those to whom the individual (such as Pen) is attached, (for example Helen or Laura), 'resolves an uncertainty as to who or what we are'.[16] Pen is able to sympathise with, for example, Foker's sense of loneliness and isolation in his infatuation with Blanche Amory, as well as his choice to distinguish himself from his fellow youths through the screen constructed from his dandyish clothes, and each is able to recognise in the other an emotional detachment from the world around them as they strive to create their own identity.

    As a means of developing a greater sense of involvement with others, Pen attends various social occasions, firstly in his role of eager youth, and later as the disengaged dandy. Such social events, Pamela Gilbert has suggested, bridge the gap between the privacy of the home and the unchallenged gaze of the public:

> The social produced, mystified, mediated, and monitored the split between public and private: it produced it by providing an arena in which privacy was performed; in so doing, it mystified the tenuous and unstable nature of the distinction; thus, it mediated between public and private by providing a "buffer domain" in which the shifting distinction could be continually elaborated and affirmed; and therefore it provided a stage upon which demonstrations of privacy could eventually be publically monitored.[17]

Pen's social engagements, such as his visits to his Uncle, the Bungays, and the

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16 John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997 [1995]), p. 14.

17 Pamela K. Gilbert, *The Citizen's Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), p. 76.

Clavering family provide opportunities for Pen to move between private and public, which have been typically conceived as gendered either feminine or masculine by Victorian writers.

Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey have argued that the both the Victorian and the modern home:

> cannot be seen as a space which is beyond the gaze of the public world. However determinedly we police the boundaries of our "private" space, it is difficult to ignore or exclude the possibility of incursions into that space. The visit of outsiders […] brings into sharp relief the fragility of the boundary between the public world and the private domain.[18]

This problematic privacy of the typically "private" space, it has been suggested by Peter Brooks, is made doubly unstable through the presence of bodies within it.[19] In the same way that the interior of the home at this period is carefully constructed so as to separate public from private, then, the young male body in Thackeray's novel is comprised of both an interior, private sense of self, and of a more contrived, accessible or immediate version of the individual as perceived by society. Clothing or costume creates its own boundary between the secret, inner self and the exterior presentation of the individual consciously available to public scrutiny. Quiet, sartorial elegance, which in *Pendennis* resides somewhere between the 'rough and ready', yet honest Warrington, and Pen's attempts at fashionable smartness, provide an opportunity for continual individual privacy even while on display. As Thackeray discusses in 'Men and Coats', the right kind of tailoring may provide a sense of comfort, self-containment, propriety, and thoughtfulness so that, in effect, the private self may be legitimately performed in public situations.

The male body in *Pendennis* is inscribed as meaningful for its revelatory ability to project developing selfhood in social environments. It is also, however, valued for its facility in misleading and deflecting public scrutiny. The capacity for private agency and individual choice in carefully-constructed attire suggests the potential for authentic self-creation and interiority in Thackeray's representation of the youthful dandy. Judith L. Fisher in *Thackeray's Skeptical Narrative* writes of *Pendennis* that:

> The dandy-phase of the protagonist is the public version of his private search for self through love; the costume and mannerisms are performances of status.[20]

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18 Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey, 'The Ideal Home as it is Imagined and as it is Lived', in Chapman & Hockey, (eds.) *Ideal Homes?*, pp. 1-13, (p. 10).
19 See Brooks, *Body Work*.
20 Judith L. Fisher, *Thackeray's Skeptical Narrative and the 'Perilous Trade' of Authorship* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 115.

Pen's dandification results in a projection of this 'public version of his private […] self' by means of self-consciously adopted 'costume' and 'performance'. In the novel, Thackeray's emphasis on neatness and cleanliness in dress implies a hesitant sympathy with the austerity and simplicity, as distinct from the gaudy trappings of, for example, the dandyism of Byron, Bulwer and Disraeli. The preoccupation over dress and character in 'Men and Coats' (1841), *The Snobs of England* (1846-7) *Pendennis* (1848-50), and *Mr Brown's Letters to a Young Man About Town* (1849), coupled with his friendship around this time with the Count D'Orsay, Lady Blessington and the fashionable set at Gore House, Thackeray seems to have been intrigued by dandyism and its devotees, suggesting a fascination that went beyond absolute repugnance. Rather, Thackeray's interpretation of raiment and the dandy-ethos, – in *Pendennis*, evident in what Fisher has termed Pen's 'dandy-phase', informs the creation of an acceptable male identity during youth. Jessica Feldman has similarly commented on the dandy that:

> He is the figure who practises, and even impersonates, the fascinating acts of self-creation and presentation. He is the figure of paradox created by many societies in order to express whatever it is that the culture feels it must, but cannot, synthesize. This dandy is neither spirit nor flesh, nature nor artifice, ethical nor aesthetic, active nor passive, male nor female. He is the figure who casts into doubt, even while he underscores, the very binary oppositions by which his culture lives.[21]

The ability to 'synthesize' both private choice and public spectacle establishes a significant role for dress in the creation of adolescent identity in *Pendennis*. Pen is certainly seen to 'practise […] the fascinating acts of self-creation and presentation', first at university, where Pen himself becomes a figure to be 'admired' and even imitated (p. 224). Foker, for example, 'was exceedingly pleased at the success of his young protégé, […] admired Pen quite as much as any of the other youth', and 'it was he who followed Pen now, and quoted his sayings' (p. 224). Pen becomes his own text to be read or 'quoted', and creates himself as an object of fascination, leading other students to 'admire and obey' despite Pen's lack of commitment or academic advancement (p. 222). Pen's performance of the dandy, dressed exquisitely and removed from any emotional commitment, becomes both an acceptable display, but also a source of scandal and anxiety, which played on contemporary fears about the potential delinquency of juvenile behaviour.

The idea that the body is a legible text is similar to the discussion of the dandy as a fundamentally 'Clothes-wearing Man' in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, in which a

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21 Jessica R. Feldman, *Gender on the Divide: The Dandy in Modernist Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993)

language of 'Symbols' represents 'Articles of Faith', which combine to illustrate 'the essential nature of the British Dandy, and the mystic significance that lies in him'.[22] Clothing is conceived, for Pen, in a similar manner, as a means of both concealing and displaying selfhood. As Anne Hollander has suggested:

> Nothing is more common than the metaphorical mention of clothing, first of all to indicate a simple screen that hides the truth or, more subtly, a distracting display that demands attention but confounds true perception. These notions invoke dress in its erotic function, as something that seems to promise something else.[23]

Envisaging Pen's clothes as both a 'screen' and as a 'distracting display' indicates 'the promise of something else' behind the immaculate layer of costume and ornament. In *Pendennis*, privacy is revealed as this 'something else' that is concealed from the gaze of the casual observer, protecting the youthful individual at the same time as advertising the self by means of theatrical spectacle and display.

Pen's production of his own autobiographical novel *Walter Lorraine*, and its publication, further complicates his dual attempt at self-concealment and self-presentation. As well as emphasising Pen's tendency to respond to external sources to prompt his development (in terms of literary style, but also his desire to emulate first Harry Foker, and then Warrington), *Walter Lorraine* nonetheless reflects much of Pen's early emotional development:

> There was not the slightest doubt, then, that this document contained a great deal of Pen's personal experiences, and that *Leaves from the Life-Book of Walter Lorraine* would never have been written but for Arthur Pendennis's own private griefs, passions, and follies. […] the young gentleman had depicted such of them as he thought were likely to interest the reader, or were suitable for the purposes of his story.[24]

In this fictional account of his 'personal experiences', Pen is able to regulate the exposure of his 'private griefs, passions and follies' for the consumption of the reader. *Walter Lorraine* reveals Pen to his readers in a carefully modulated light (which Warrington finds amusing, and Fanny Bolton finds romantic and attractive), without revealing all of Pen's 'private' experiences so that he is still in control of this 'private' self. The appeal of the fictional narrative is that it seems to reveal more of Pen than it

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22 Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Times of Herr Teufelsdröckh*, intr. By Alasdair Gray (Edinburgh: Canongate Classics, 2002), p. 279; p. 223; p. 281.
23 Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp.445-7.
24 Ibid., p. 521.

does, as it is written in the sentimental style of the 'fashionable novel', and so, because Pen's tales of heartbreak at the hands of 'Leonora' and 'Neaera' fall so neatly into a burlesque of the typical narrative exploits of the hero of such novels, Pen's 'private' experiences are effectively disguised as those of a 'youth' who 'will fetch some price in the market' for, as Warrington comments, 'the rubbish is saleable enough, sir' (p. 511, p. 519, p. 523).

  '*Fashionable Novels*' are similarly employed to reflect the egotism of the dandy in *Sartor Resartus*, and are denounced as 'Sacred Books' in which the 'true secret' and 'physiology of the Dandiacal Body' may be glimpsed.[25] Pen's promotion of himself, among his own social acquaintance as a dandy, and in the public at large as both Walter Lorraine, the sentimental young hero, and the author of *Walter Lorraine* the novel, emphasise his text as revelatory, but also as a means of deflecting the public gaze away from Pen himself. Herbert Sussman, in his informative work *Victorian Masculinities*, has noted that, 'For Carlyle, the interior space of the male body, or, more accurately, of the male self […], is characterized by unstable fluidity.'[26] Sussman's analysis of Carlyle's use of such language raises the 'unstable' boundaries of the 'hydraulic' male body as a cause of concern (p. 19). Pamela Gilbert has similarly observed a tendency of anxiety in Victorian narratives of embodiment:

> The pulpiness within the dangerous body was always threatening to burst the bounds of the skin, which defined and disciplined individual embodiment. Disease, lack of self-control, femininity, and madness were all aligned with liquidity, liquefaction, and perhaps putrefaction as well – those who lacked self-control and possessive individualism were liable to melt back into a primal flow of dangerous ooze.[27]

In *Sartor Resartus*, this 'primal flow of dangerous ooze' is described as 'watery, pulpy, [and] slobbery'.[28] Thackeray's figure of the dandy in *Pendennis*, raising as it does fears about the effeminacy of the male body on display, does not, however, define Pen in terms of either 'liquidity' or 'pulpiness'. Instead of expressing concern about the 'pulpiness [...] threatening to burst the bounds of the skin', the integrity and fixity of Pen's body is tested by images of water and 'liquidity' as an external rather than an internal threat. His early emotional attachment to Blanche Amory, for example, is reciprocated by means of Blanche's ability to 'compassionate other susceptible beings like Pen, who had suffered too' (p. 280). Pen's 'susceptib[ility] is assaulted by Blanche's 'plaintive outpourings' in the literary endeavours of *Mes Larmes*, her

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25 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 285.
26 Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 19.
27 Gilbert, *The Citizen's Body*, p. 134.
28 Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 68.

reflective diary and volume of sentimental poetry (p. 280):

> It was a wonder how a young creature […] should have suffered so much –
> should have found the means of getting at such an ocean of despair and passion
> (as a runaway boy who *will* get to sea) […]. What a talent she must have had
> for weeping to be able to pour out so many of *Mes Larmes*! (p. 281)

Pen is eventually able to withstand the effect of 'Miss Blanche's tears', although other images of water in the novel threaten to thwart Pen's advancement as a young man (p. 281). On being 'plucked' from Oxbridge, to the 'terror of Pen's tutor and tradesmen', Pen's hat is found 'near a mill-stream; and, for four-and-twenty hours, it was supposed that poor Pen had flung himself into the stream' (pp. 242-3). Major Pendennis, when hearing the news that Pen has been rusticated, states angrily 'You are of age, and my hands are washed of your affairs' (p. 246). The language of washing, drowning, or being swept away suggests that Pen must learn to fight against the 'liquidity' or 'pulpiness' of the social world around him, and to differentiate himself from the fluidity and instability of others on 'the voyage of life' (p. 767). Pen must struggle to retain his authentic interiority as distinct from the corrupting theatrics of the social stage.

In the process of self-definition outlined by Pen's adolescent development, however, Pen aligns himself with other, successful young men whose maturation appears more fully advanced, as well as using characters such as the vulgar Sam Huxter or foppish Mirobolant against whom to define himself. Peter Brooks, in *Body Work*, contends that this process is frequently articulated in the novel:

> In modern narrative literature, a protagonist often desires a body (most often
> another's, but sometimes his or her own) and that body comes to represent for
> the protagonist an apparent ultimate good, since it appears to hold within itself
> – as itself – the key to satisfaction, power, and meaning.[29]

In this way Pen is initially drawn to his friend Harry Foker as emblematic of a kind of sophistication and polish that he himself lacks. His affair with Fanny Bolton provides, on the other hand, an example of auto-erotic desire, as Pen's desire is for 'his own […] body', and such narcissism is at the root of Pen's subsequent illness. The body which is constructed as the most desirable to Pen is that of his friend and mentor George Warrington. The dynamic of their relationship is distinctly homoerotic, and Pen's reactions to his older friend are frequently phrased with a feminine inflection. Warrington is most frequently cited as an example of vigorous heterosexual masculinity in Thackeray's novels, as a gentleman without pretensions who chooses to wear a manly jacket rather anything more ornamental, who claims 'I

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29 Brooks, *Body Work*, p. 8.

like to talk to the strongest man in England, or the man who can drink the most beer in England […] I like gin-and-water better than claret', and who likes the company of such men 'better than that of his own class, whose manners annoyed him' (p. 376). In comparison, Pendennis's own dandyism marks him out as exhibiting contrary indicators about the extent of his own manliness (such as the rigours of self-fashioning in the persona of the dandy, but also the effete connotations of such attention to both dress and to self).

Fig. 1 *Illustration from Pendennis, 'Pen pursuing his law studies'*

Warrington is one of the very few characters in the text who is able to penetrate past Pen's carefully-constructed, dandified, protective clothing, to the private body and personality beneath this exterior shell. This is signified through the private life that they share by living together at Lamb's Court, and by means of their shared history as Boniface men and occupation as professional men of letters. The dynamic of their friendship, and their physical occupation of these rooms, are clarified in Thackeray's accompanying illustrations to the novel. In the two illustrative plates that show Pen and Warrington in their rooms, Pen is clearly feminised not only through his softer features, but also through his posture (see figures 1 & 2). In both pictures Pen is on a lower level than his friend, and is more self-conscious of his body as he crosses it or partially obscures it from Warrington, who is more upright and who takes an aggressively masculine stance, with his legs apart, and who observes Pen from his higher vantage point.

Warrington's assumption of authority in their friendship is conceived of as natural, and it allows Pen to view Warrington's body, reciprocally perhaps, in terms of desire. In the suggestive terms outlined by Brooks, Warrington becomes the symbolic 'key to satisfaction, power, and meaning,' so that Pen is both drawn to Warrington and wishes to emulate him, adopting his mannerisms and occupation, and, towards the end of the novel, even by plagiarising his interest in Laura Bell (of whom he displays little awareness prior to Warrington's expressions of esteem). [30] Pen's admiring response to his friend draws on both Pen's immaturity (and so as a natural reaction to Warrington's 'rough and ready' performance of masculinity), and on his own pursuit of manliness through his attempts to negotiate the blurring of gender boundaries involved in dandiacal project. Pen's physical answer to Warrington's touch, for example, parallels the hetero-normative love affairs of youth:

> "I think [the manuscript of *Walter Lorraine*] is uncommonly clever," Warrington said in a kind voice. "So do you, sir." And with the same manuscript which he held in his hand, he playfully struck Pen on the cheek. That part of Pen's countenance turned as red as it had ever done in the earliest days of his blushes: he grasped the other's hand, and said, "Thank you, Warrington," with all his might. (p. 524)

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30 Brooks, *Body Work*, p. 8.
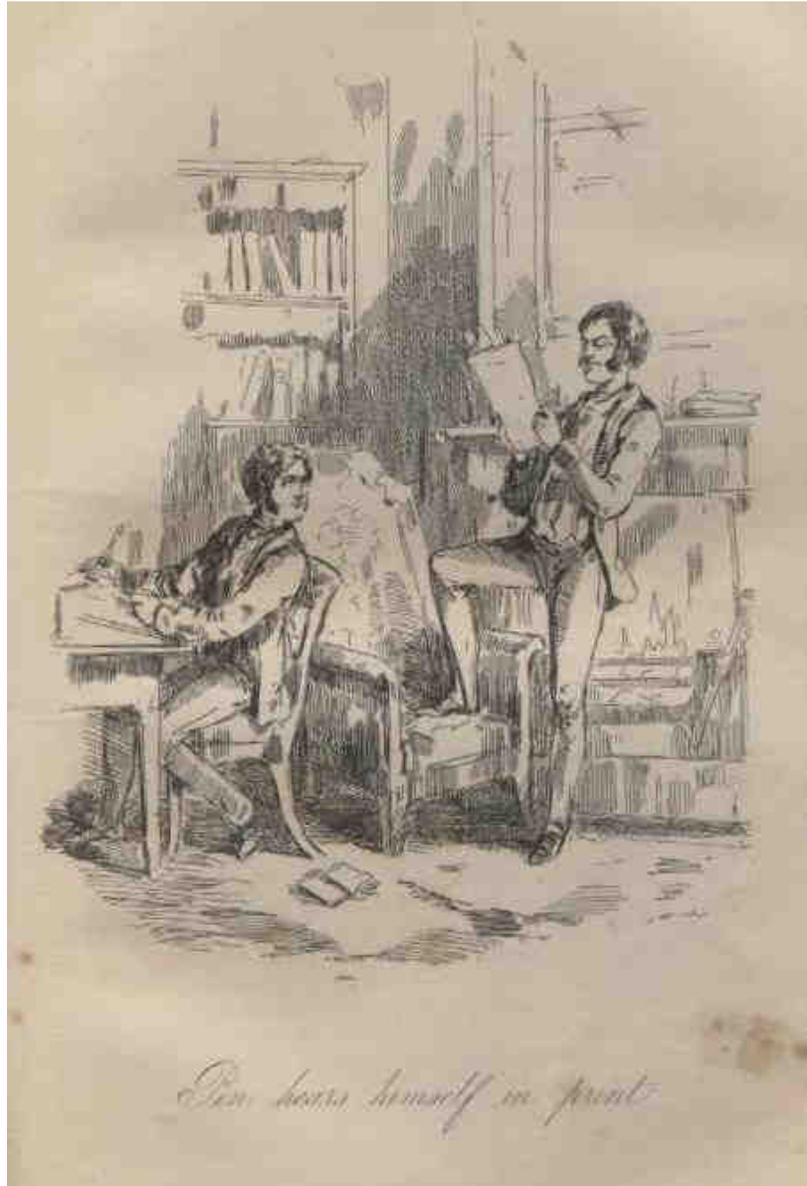
Fig. 2 *Illustration from Pendennis, 'Pen hears himself in print'*

The homoerotic subtext of their friendship, including Warrington's theatrically staged mock-chastisement of Pen, who 'blushes' and thanks his friend, informs Pen's adolescent development and his struggle to find a suitable, masculine identity to display to the world. Warrington's cynicism and apparent bachelor status provide Pen with a steady and responsible role-model. The functional and unfashionable jacket, simple shirt, and humble pipe of tobacco which become associated with Warrington, are emblematic of a new brand of honest, and manly Englishness, which led one reviewer for the *Spectator* to claim that:

> A 'healthy animalism' is still a prominent characteristic of our better classes of young men; and in spite of much dissipation, much dandyism, and much pseudo-philosophy, it is no very rare thing among that class to find the best scholars and the truest gentlemen neither too fine to drink beer and smoke short pipes.[31]

This friendship with Warrington, the wearer of the honest jacket, in conjunction with the value for privacy established in the text and with the potential for dress as a means of both self-creation and defence, is a crucial part of Pen's experience of maturation.

The theatrical and dandified body is central to Thackeray's discussion of masculine identity in *Pendennis*, as an isolated individual and as part of a wider community. Joseph Litvak has suggested that, despite being renowned for their emphasis of privacy, nineteenth-century novels are founded 'in a widespread social network of vigilance and visibility – of looking and of being looked at – [that] renders them inherently, if covertly, theatrical.'[32] This 'network of vigilance and visibility' is translated in this text to emerge as a society conscious of constant impact of spectacle and surveillance, which is therefore, as Litvak suggests, 'inherently […] theatrical'. To engage in the theatrical presentation of one's own body to society, Thackeray implies in *Pendennis*, enables the necessary balance between privacy and display required for healthy individual development, and in a manner which may be both liberating and socially legitimate.

Thackeray's novel, responding to a cultural environment in which masculinity could be defined in terms of physical presence, energy, ability and healthfulness, emphasises the social value placed on performances of manliness. While the potential merit of sexual exercise forms part of the novel's discussion, the moral necessity for physical awareness develops the erotic functions and uses of the costumed body to focus on forms of display as informative for masculine development. Dandyism,

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31 R. S. Rintoul, from 'Thackeray's *Pendennis'*, *Spectator* xxiii (21 Dec., 1850), 1213-5 (pp. 101-2).

32 Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p. x.

while remaining an ambivalent subject for Thackeray, nonetheless holds a fascinating appeal for the author in its combination of anti-theatrical austerity and theatrical display. The use made of dress and costume in the novel, as part of the apparatus of theatricality, is used not only to signify personality or traits of character but also to enable self-projection as well as the deflection of the hurtful public gaze on the vulnerable private self, which allows Thackeray to create a complex representation of masculine identity in mid-Victorian society. Self-conscious performance, by means of adaptation, emulation, or rejection of the different styles of masculinity on offer in the novel, serves to enable and sustain an essentially private identity from the onslaught of intrusive public life.

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