

THE UBIQUITOUS MISER'S PURSE

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For my sisters, Lisa and Crista

I. INTRODUCTION

In the nineteenth century, as today, there were many different ways for men and women to store coin money on their bodies. Carefully concealed pockets in men's jackets and women's skirts, for example, allowed members of each sex to safely secure coinage. Bags were also used, albeit solely by women, to hold coin money, as well as an array of other objects. Purses, though, of all shapes, sizes, and designs, were the preeminent Victorian monetary storage device for both sexes, and the miser's purse was perhaps the most ubiquitous in nineteenth-century culture. This small, highly decorative purse is a particularly compelling type of object because, unlike other Victorian purses, it was deeply embedded in Victorian popular culture. As seen in hundreds of contemporary sources, the crafting, giving, receiving, sale, and use of the miser's purse reflected specific social mores, and conveyed certain meanings, to the Victorians. This information, though, has remained largely unknown to present-day scholars as, to date, very little has been written about the miser's purse.

The three major sources of information about the Victorian miser's purse are Anne Buck's *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, Evelyn Haertig's *Antique Combs & Purses*, and Gwen Blakley Kinsler's "The Ingenious Miser's Purse."¹ As Buck broadly outlined the history of British Victorian costume in her book, she only devoted a few pages to the miser's purse. Her discussion primarily centered on the purse's stylistic changes over the course of the nineteenth century, with little attention given to how the purse was used. In my own reading of contemporary sources, I have found information that contradicts Buck's assertions. For example, she wrote that these accessories were "simply called purses until the 1860s."² In fact, miser's

¹ Anne Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories* (New York: Universe Books, 1970), 158-164; Evelyn Haertig, *Antique Combs & Purses* (Carmel: Gallery Graphics Press, 1983), 181-187; Gwen Blakley Kinsler, "The Ingenious Miser's Purse," *Piecework* 4, no. 6 (November/December 1996): 46-49.

² Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 161.

purses were concurrently referred to as “purses,” “long purses,” and “gentlemen’s purses” in fancywork guides, such as *The Hand-Book of Useful and Ornamental Amusements and Accomplishments*, since at least the 1840s.³ The term “miser’s purse” appears to be a twentieth century idiom to refer to this type of accessory; it dates from the nineteen-teens, near the end of the vogue for the purse. Buck also argued that miser’s purses were not made or discussed after the 1880s.⁴ While this argument appears true in Britain, in the United States, these purses remained in use into the early 1910s.⁵ This is evidenced not only by extant examples, but also in numerous contemporary discussions of miser’s purses found in American newspapers, women’s magazines, etiquette and fancywork guides, and works of fiction from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Extant examples suggest that Buck rightly maintained that there is “a clear [aesthetic] difference” between purses made before and those made after the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria in 1837; however, her claim that “it is not easy to date...or to distinguish” purses made between 1840 and 1870 may be proven otherwise.⁶ Technological developments in materials make it possible for modern scholars to date a miser’s purse. Many purses from the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, include steel. While steel has been made since antiquity, it was only mass produced starting in the late 1850s.⁷

³ A Lady, *The Hand-Book of Useful and Ornamental Amusements and Accomplishments* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1845), 199, 292.

⁴ Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 162.

⁵ During the course of my research, I did not find any British needlework guides that mentioned miser’s purses after ca. 1870.

⁶ Purses made before the reign of Queen Victoria have a longer, narrower shape than successive examples. Additionally, they are quite plain, and generally lack the intricate beadwork and fringe typical of Victorian miser’s purses.

⁷ While the steel making process has been known since antiquity, modern steel production did not begin until 1856, when Henry Bessemer invented the first inexpensive industrial process for the mass-production of steel. K. C. Barraclough, *Steelmaking Before Bessemer*, vol. 1, *Blister Steel: The Birth of an Industry* (London: The Metals Society, 1984), 7. As existing examples show, the metal was most heavily used to make beads, fringe and rings for miser’s purses after the 1850s; however, authors of purse patterns from as early as the late 1840s recommended steel accoutrements for purses. For an example, please refer to footnote 54.

Additionally, researchers may be able to date miser's purses by the presence of synthetic dyes.⁸ In 1856, the chemist William Henry Perkin discovered the first aniline dye, a pink-purple synthetic colorant called mauvine.⁹ Prior to his discovery, fabric dyes were extracts of organic products. These dyes were often expensive and laborious to make, and they generally lacked color-fastness to light and water. The color purple, which had been used to dye the garments of royals and aristocrats since the Roman era, was particularly expensive and difficult to produce.¹⁰ Around the same time as Perkins' discovery, similar hues – such as fuchsia and magenta – were also developed. These shades experienced a period of preference, and, from the late 1850s into the 1860s, were *the* colors of high fashion.¹¹ Thus, purses crafted in these colors may be dated to this so-called “Mauvine Decade.”¹² A great number of other synthetic dyes followed in quick succession after the invention of these colors. The presence of any of these dyes would suggest a date of the late 1850s or later, and would help scholars to narrow down dates for purses made within this thirty-year period.

While Anne Buck focused on the purse's stylistic attributes, Evelyn Haertig wrote a largely technical guide on the purse's construction. Haertig's book is one of the more detailed writings about this accessory; however, some of her information may be expanded upon as well. Haertig noted that these purses were used by both sexes, and argued that there was no distinction between purses made for men and women.¹³ By examining contemporary fancywork guides, it is apparent that, from at least the early to mid-nineteenth century, miser's purses may have been

⁸ Unfortunately, testing for synthetic dyes is beyond the scope of my current research. Dates for mauvine purses in this paper were based from my own observations of surviving Victorian miser's purses.

⁹ Philip Ball, *Bright Earth: Art and the Invention of Color* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 212.

¹⁰ Purple was often produced by using a combination of red and blue dyes. Select variations, such as Tyrian purple, were derived from the mucus of shellfish. Ball, *Bright Earth: Art and the Invention of Color*, 33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Haertig, *Antique Combs & Purses*, 185.

made gender specific. In *Lady's Manual of Fancywork: A Complete Instructor in Every Variety of Ornamental Needle-work*, Matilda Marian Pullan differentiates between “short” and “long” miser’s purses, which were intended for women and men, respectively.¹⁴ Other guides from the period note that the difference between men’s and women’s purses was based on size, with short purses typically using about half the number of foundation stitches as long purses.¹⁵

In “The Ingenious Miser’s Purse,” Gwen Blakley Kinsler reiterated many of Haertig’s assertions about the miser’s purse, and maintained that there was no way to distinguish purses made for men or women.¹⁶ Kinsler also co-authored a how-to guide entitled, *Magical Miser’s Purses: Crochet Patterns with Victorian Inspiration*, which does not include a single example of a traditional nineteenth-century miser’s purse.¹⁷ Kinsler’s misnomer ultimately speaks to the major obstacle in the discussion and classification of these accessories, namely, that the attributes of a miser’s purse have never been clearly defined. Traditionally, when miser’s purses have been referenced, a detailed explanation of their function has not been included.¹⁸ Further adding to this confusion, modern authors have also interchangeably referred to miser’s purses as “long purses,” “gentlemen’s purses,” “string purses,” “stocking purses,” and “reticules.”¹⁹ While “long purses” and “gentlemen’s purses” are apt alternate names – as they were used by the Victorians to refer to these items – “string purses” and “stocking purses” are not. As I will later explain, these names

¹⁴ Matilda Marian Pullan, *Lady's Manual of Fancywork: A Complete Instructor in Every Variety of Ornamental Needle-work* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1859), 199.

¹⁵ The author of *The Hand-Book of Useful and Ornamental Amusements and Accomplishments* notes that long purses have a foundation of one hundred stitches, while short purses have only fifty-six. A Lady, *The Hand-Book of Useful and Ornamental Amusements and Accomplishments*, 232.

¹⁶ Kinsler, “The Ingenious Miser’s Purse,” 48.

¹⁷ The purses featured in this book are examples of so-called “ring” purses as well as Victorian string purses. Kinsler and B.J. Licko-Keel, *Magical Miser’s Purses: Crochet Patterns with Victorian Inspiration* (South Kearny: The DMC Corporation, 1999).

¹⁸ For an example, see: Millia Davenport, *The Book of Costume*, vol. 2 (New York: Crown Publishers, 1948), 804.

¹⁹ Miser’s purses have also been referred to as “ring purses” by Haertig and Kinsler. According to both women, the ring purse was a miser’s purse variation that was worn on the finger. As I have not found any contemporary references to or patterns for this type purse, I have not addressed it in this paper. Kinsler, *Magical Miser’s Purses*, v; Haertig, *Antique Combs & Purses*, 183.

actually denote two distinct purse styles, which served the same personal function – to hold coin money – but were not nearly as ubiquitous as the miser’s purse in nineteenth-century life. A reticule was an entirely different type of accessory – a sac-like bag that was used throughout the Victorian period to hold various personal effects, and not strictly coinage.

Throughout this paper, the term “miser’s purse” will designate an oblong bag that narrows in the center, often measuring between four and sixteen inches in length, with a long slit in the middle, and a pair of rings in the center to help secure coins at each end.²⁰ While “miser’s purse” is a twentieth-century term for these objects, I have chosen to use it in my discussion because it is how these accessories are most commonly known and catalogued in museum collections. These objects will also be referred to as “purses,” “long purses,” “short purses,” and “gentlemen’s purses,” again to coincide with the alternative nineteenth-century names for these accessories. Extant examples from six major museum collections in the United States and abroad will be cited throughout this paper to further help classify these items by size, style, and materials.²¹

In this paper, I have related references to miser’s purses found in nineteenth-century literature and paintings to non-fictional accounts of these accessories found in fancywork guides, etiquette guides, and women’s magazines. These sources include important contemporary works, including the fictional writings of Charles Dickens, James Fenimore Cooper, Horatio Alger Jr., and William Makepeace Thackeray; paintings by James Collinson and Ford Madox Brown; the pre-eminent American magazines *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, and *Peterson’s Magazine*; as well as popular etiquette and fancywork guides by S. Annie Frost, Lydia Lambert, and the aforementioned Matilda Pullan.

²⁰ These measurements include the previously mentioned short and long miser’s purse styles.

²¹ These objects come from the respective collections of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York; the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Through this approach, I have attempted to draw out the artistic and literary interpretations of miser's purses in the Victorian era, as well as create a social framework for these accessories. Following the methodology of other historians, such as C. Cody Collins and Paolo Peri, who examined the use of gloves and handkerchiefs in literature, I have investigated the use of miser's purses in Victorian literature as well as paintings.²² By analyzing references to miser's purses found in these artistic mediums, I will show that this accessory appeared in fictional vignettes as an element in a larger moral lesson, a token of filial love or loyalty, a representation of marital duty, or, in its crafting, as a device for young women to capture the attention of male suitors. First, I have clarified the ambiguous personal function of the miser's purse, which was held, by some, to be a useful accessory and, by others, viewed as merely a decorative trinket. This combined exploration will attempt to contextualize this object and, finally, address what has long been ignored – the personal, social, literary and artistic functions of the Victorian miser's purse.

²² C. Cody Collins, *Love of a Glove: The Romance, Legends and Fashion History of Gloves and How They Are Made* (New York: Fairchild Publishing Co., 1945); Paolo Peri, *The Handkerchief* (Modena: Zanfi, 1992).

II. DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF FORM

In order to understand the role of the miser's purse in nineteenth-century culture, we must first examine its physical form and stylistic attributes. As previously explained, the Victorian miser's purse is an hourglass-shaped bag, often measuring several inches in length, with a long slit in the middle, and a pair of rings in the center to help secure its contents at each end (fig. 1).²³ These purses may end with squared or rounded sacs, or a combination of these two forms. Other fasteners, such as clasps, were occasionally recommended in Victorian magazines as an alternative to rings; however, extant purses with this feature are few, if any.²⁴

In her article, Kinsler maintained that the nineteenth-century long purse descended from the medieval tradition of carrying coins in the toe of a stocking, but this claim is hard to substantiate.²⁵ Many scholars have contended that the shape of the Victorian miser's purse derived from purses of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and existing examples appear to support this argument.²⁶ Like their Victorian successors, earlier purses were hourglass-shaped, single-element structures, which narrowed in the middle (fig. 2). Irene Emery explained that single-element structures are made of a single continuous element interwoven with itself.²⁷ Examples of these structures include techniques such as knitting, crocheting, and netting. Single-element constructions were preferred for purses because they can readily collapse and expand,

²³ Some extant examples feature only one ring. As nineteenth-century purse patterns always featured two rings, it is possible that these surviving purses are now missing one of their original pair.

²⁴ None of the six museum collections I examined, totaling approximately 200 purses, had a miser's purse with a fastener other than rings. For an example of a purse pattern with a clasp closure between its sacs, see fig. 27.

²⁵ Kinsler did not cite the exact source of this claim in her article. Kinsler, "The Ingenious Miser's Purse," 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47; Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 161; Haertig, *Antique Combs & Purses*, 185.

²⁷ Irene Emery, *The Primary Structures of Fabrics* (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1966), 27.

which enabled these constructions to slip through the purses' small rings (or single ring, as with earlier purses), and allowed the user to easily deposit coin money. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century purses were evocative of stockings, perhaps developing from Kinsler's stated medieval tradition. They were longer, narrower, and more tubular than the Victorian miser's purse, often with one narrow and one rounded purse end. In many of these purses, the structure differed between the rounded end and the main purse; the rounded portion being more tightly worked than the rest of the object. This may suggest that these items were used to hold coin money, as the end structure would have to be quite firm and yet flexible to secure these precious items. Unlike Victorian purses, which are known for their beaded and decorative metal finishes, early purses were decorated simply by changing thread colors or by weaving in images of stylized figures during construction (figs. 3 and 4). These purses were also sometimes inscribed with names (fig. 3). Eighteenth-century purses also differ from nineteenth-century examples, as they have only one ring to cover their thin center opening, which encouraged the user to only store coinage in the rounded sac (fig. 4).

Purses of the early nineteenth century bridge the stylistic gap between eighteenth-century purses and purses from the later, Victorian era. During this period, these accessories became more refined and developed many of the characteristics that are typical of the miser's purse. By the early nineteenth century, miser's purses had developed their signature form – an hourglass-shaped bag with a narrow body and ends of equal size, and a slit (to insert money) in the middle (fig. 5). These purses were significantly shorter than their eighteenth-century predecessors. Early nineteenth-century models also feature metal or wooden rings and tassels at each end. They differ, though, from later examples, as they lack additional beaded embellishments. Overall, these purses are, stylistically, more demure than their Victorian counterparts, and were usually executed in simple patterns, such as length-wise stripes, and understated color combinations (fig. 6). These purses complemented the austere women's fashions of the Empire period (1805 – 1815). Typical among these styles was the simple, unadorned columnar gown with occasional

touches of color (figs. 7 and 8). This style purse also appears to have remained in use as fashion styles changed in the late 1820s and early 1830s. An 1832 color fashion plate from the French journal *Petit Courrier des Dames: Journal des Modes* shows a simple, brown netted miser's purse tucked into a stylish young woman's belt (fig. 9). This purse seems particularly ascetic amid the folds of her sumptuous fur and velvet dress, and is perhaps the most functional aspect of her attire. The purse is not discussed in the accompanying issue, which may evidence the miser's purses' ubiquity in nineteenth-century society or perhaps underscore its mere functionality.

The miser's purse remained fashionable until the 1920s; however, the purse's popularity was not consistent throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. After the 1830s, there were a series of miser's purse "revivals." An exploration of various contemporary sources suggests that the first revival began in the late 1840s and lasted until the early 1860s; the second wave occurred in the late 1870s and continued throughout the 1880s; and the final vogue for the purse began at the turn of the twentieth century and lasted until the late nineteen-teens.

While the purse remained in use in the nineteen-teens, various sources suggest that the miser's purse was less familiar to the early twentieth-century maker. Several queries made to the *Boston Daily Globe's* "Household Department" for miser's purse guides perhaps best elucidate this point. One writer asked, "Will someone kindly send in directions for crocheting a 'miser's purse,' giving material to be used and quantity required?"²⁸ Another woman – "Miss K" – also requested "directions for crocheting a 'miser's purse.'"²⁹ Miss K went on to describe a purse, "made of crochet silk, two small pockets with flaps and crocheted chains between the two pockets."³⁰ She added, "It is very handy for small change."³¹ The purse Miss K actually inquired about was a string purse, which was also used in the nineteenth century to hold coin money. As

²⁸ Dublinite, "Household Department: Needlework Queries," *Boston Daily Globe*, January 22, 1914.

²⁹ Miss K, "Household Department: Needlework Queries," *Boston Daily Globe*, September 30, 1911.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

Miss K noted, the string purse has two small pockets with flaps, which are connected by a series of chains (fig. 10). The chains interlock, allowing the wearer to securely insert coin money into the flaps. The strings are either attached directly to the two flaps, or connected in the middle to a single ring (fig. 11). Miss K's inaccuracy reveals early twentieth-century society's lack of familiarity with the miser's purse's shape and form. Despite this confusion, the miser's purse appears to have remained important among more modern makers and users. The purse's continued value is underscored in "Lost and Found" ads from the early twentieth century, where unfortunate individuals offered rewards for lost miser's purses and, presumably, the money they contained.³²

As with earlier purses, Victorian miser's purses were typically made as single-element structures from silk thread.³³ Contemporary needlework guides often recommended certain materials for their various projects, and many authors noted – to varying degrees of specificity – what types of silks should be used to create a miser's purse. In *The Handbook of Needlework, Decorative and Ornamental, Inc. Crochet, Knitting and Netting*, Lydia Lambert noted that "coarse and fine" silks of "various sizes" were not only "well adapted for embroidery," but also well-suited for netting and knitting purses.³⁴ Lightweight silk fabrics were also occasionally recommended to line heavily beaded purses.³⁵

By the late nineteenth century, authors were recommending specific brands of silk threads and purse twists.³⁶ For example, the author of *Needles and Brushes and How to Use Them: A*

³² *New York Times*, "Lost and Found," July 10, 1919.

³³ Alternative materials, such as cloth and metal, were used to make purses, though extant examples are rare. Please see page 13-14 for more information.

³⁴ Lydia Lambert, *The Handbook of Needlework, Decorative and Ornamental, Inc. Crochet, Knitting and Netting*, 5th ed. (London: John Murray, 1846), 75.

³⁵ Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1884, 187; *Washington Post*, "The Old-Time Miser's Purse," April 20, 1919.

³⁶ A purse twist is "a three-cord thread of special spin and twist." According to the Nonotuck Silk Company, purse twists were "smooth working and of great durability," and ideal for "purses...and other crocheted articles." Nonotuck Silk Company, *Silk: Its Origins, Culture, and Manufacture* (Florence: The Nonotuck Silk Company, 1902), 60.

Manual of Fancy Work preferred to use “one-half ounce E. E. Corticelli Purse Twist or one-half ounce No. 300 Florence Knitting Silk,” to crochet or knit purses, respectively, as well as “two No. 18 needles.”³⁷ In the guide *Home Decorative Work*, a section called, “Hints to Purchasers of Material,” promoted E.E. Corticelli and Florence purse silks to the “prudent buyer” seeking “reliable goods.”³⁸ The companies themselves also issued pamphlets that promoted their own fancywork products. Among them, Nonotuck Silk Company published the series, *How to Use Florence Knitting Silk*, where they suggested using a half-ounce of Florence silk for crocheted or knitted purses.³⁹ Despite these brand preferences, the general consensus held that the “beauty of a purse depends on the extreme fineness of the silk employed for it.”⁴⁰

Victorian miser’s purses were frequently adorned with glass, metal, or marcasite beads and metal rings as they were worked, and with metal tassels once they were completed. As a survey of surviving purses and contemporary sources reveals, steel was most commonly used for purses after the late 1850s.⁴¹ The availability of steel components for these accessories is also evident in advertisements from the period. In the early twentieth century, the Los Angeles department store Hamburgers marketed its “cut steel beads” as ideal for “‘miser’ purses that look anything but miserly,” and – perhaps speaking to the deterioration of handicraft skills in early twentieth-century society – even offered the services of their on-site “expert instructor” to teach shoppers “the art of making purses.”⁴² Although steel was the dominant metal for miser’s purses made

³⁷ Jane Eyre, *Needles and Brushes and How to Use Them: A Manual of Fancy Work* (New York: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1887), 275.

³⁸ The Editor of “The Housekeeper,” comp., *Home Decorative Work* (Minneapolis: Buckeye Publishing Company, 1891), back matter.

³⁹ Nonotuck Silk Company, *How to Use Florence Knitting Silk*, no. 5 (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Company, 1883), 5.

⁴⁰ “Gentleman’s Long Purse in Netting,” *Peterson’s Magazine*, June 1854, 406.

⁴¹ This survey included purses from the respective collections of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution; the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁴² *Los Angeles Times*, “Display Ad 116- No Title,” April 20, 1919.

throughout the Victorian era, other metals appear to have been employed as well. A survey of extant examples suggests that these materials were more frequently used for purses prior to the 1850s (fig. 12). Matching silk-covered rings were also recommended and used as an alternative to plain metal throughout the century (fig. 13).⁴³ The first plastic, known as celluloid, also was used to make miser's purse accoutrements.⁴⁴ One extant purse, made from embroidered wool cloth, features pearl-colored celluloid rings and ornaments (fig. 14).

Miser's purses were typically made at home, although some sources suggest that ready-made miser's purses were available for purchase in the nineteenth century. References to pre-made purses found in contemporary publications show that these items were in circulation from at least the mid-1850s, if not earlier. As one example, *Peterson's Magazine's* editors provided detailed instructions on how to make a "gentleman's long purse" in imitation of the "latest [style] bought out of Paris" in an 1854 issue.⁴⁵ The availability of pre-made purses was mentioned in Martha Finley's (1828 – 1909) novel *Elsie Dinsmore* (1868).⁴⁶ When the young protagonist, Elsie, needs to replace a hand-crafted purse that was stolen from her by her aunt, her grandmother suggests that, rather than hand-crafting a new purse, she purchase a ready-made one in town.⁴⁷ A pink netted purse from the Cooper-Hewitt's collection may evidence this trend. This singular purse was stored in a matching, form-fitting box (fig. 15). The box's lid is decorated to resemble the purse's pink netted structure. The purse was also meticulously executed, with even netting and a perfectly uniform pattern. The purse and box's pristine appearance indicates that they were not crafted by an amateur maker. Lower middle-class and unmarried women were known to have

⁴³ For contemporary recommendations, please see: Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Crochet purse, with detail of fringe," *Peterson's Magazine*, November 1877, 368; Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1883, 80-81; *Washington Post*, "The Old-Time Miser's Purse," April 20, 1919.

⁴⁴ Celluloid, the first thermoplastic, was invented in 1869 in Albany, New York by John Wesley Hyatt. Robert Friedel, "The First Plastic," in *The Plastics Age: From Modernity to Post Modernity*, ed. Penny Sparke (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990), 25.

⁴⁵ "Gentleman's Long Purse in Netting," *Peterson's Magazine*, June 1854, 406.

⁴⁶ Martha Finley, *Elsie Dinsmore* (1868; repr., Nashville: Cumberland House Publishers Inc., 2000),

⁴⁷ Finley, *Elsie Dinsmore*, 47.

created fancywork articles to sell for profit, and this item may have been created by a professional craftswoman for sale.⁴⁸

Whether made by amateurs or fancywork professionals, most extant purses share single-element structures. While contemporary guides did try to persuade crafters to use different materials, these alternatives were not commonly used. The editors of *Godey's Lady's Book*, for example, once recommended making a purse from embroidered canvas, while Lucretia P. Hale and Margaret E. White suggested using leather to create a miser's purse.⁴⁹ Surviving purses with these materials are few, if any, as these materials would not have been flexible enough to move easily through a purse's miniature rings.⁵⁰ Purses were occasionally made from supple cloths, such as wool (fig. 14) and velvet (fig. 16).⁵¹ Another purse, currently in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was even made from chain-link metal mesh (fig. 17). This unique example also has only one large metal ring as its fastener.

Victorian miser's purses were typically made by netting, knitting or crocheting. Beadwork was also used for Victorian miser's purses, but as embellishment, rather than for structural integrity. As the century wore on, each technique experienced a period of preference. A survey of miser's purse patterns found in *Godey's Lady's Book* suggested that there was a chronological shift between these techniques over the course of the nineteenth century.⁵² *Godey's*

⁴⁸ John Boyd-Kinnear, "The Social Position of Women in the Present Age," in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays*, ed. Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan & Co., 1869), 345.

⁴⁹ Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, May 1852, 401; Lucretia P. Hale and Margaret E. White, *Three Hundred Decorative and Fancy Articles for Presents, Fairs, etc.* (Boston: S.W. Tilton and Company, 1885), 84.

⁵⁰ This observation was made after examining nearly 200 purses in the six aforementioned museum collections.

⁵¹ In my survey of six museum collections, I only found three purses not made from single-element structures. All of these examples are formerly of the Brooklyn Museum of Art's collection, and are now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These objects are accessioned BM57.146.20, BM65.184.41, and BM65.184.44.

⁵² *Godey's Lady's Book* was established in 1837 with the merger of Sarah Hale's *American Ladies' Magazine* and Louis Godey's *Lady's Book*. The publication was targeted to middle-class American women, and featured fashions and needlework sections, short stories, and information about women's education and proper conduct. The *Lady's Book* became a *Magazine* in 1892; it remained in circulation

examples are supported by additional patterns found in contemporary fancywork guides. A close examination of these sources revealed that netting was most frequently recommended during the 1840s and 1850s, while knitting was commonly suggested from the 1860s through the 1880s. Crochet was the dominant technique and was cited more regularly than its counterparts. Fancywork writers suggested this construction method recurrently from the mid-1840s through to the early twentieth century.

Godey's first and only netted miser's purse pattern appeared in the publication's January 1848 issue. This purse was to be made on a foundation of 42 stitches (thus making it a short purse), and accentuated with beads as it was netted (fig. 18).⁵³ The author advised that the purse be created with one round and one square end. The ends were to be finished "with a fringe of gold or steel beads at one end of the purse, and long bead tassel at the other."⁵⁴ These finishings were recommended to help the user distinguish between the ends, and became quite common for miser's purses as the century progressed.⁵⁵ As the writers at *Godey's Lady's Book* observed in 1859, "It is now the general plan to gather one end in, and leave the other square for the sake of distinguishing the gold [coins] from the silver, by any light, however dim...If the two ends are different...then there must be the fringe at one end and the tassel at the other."⁵⁶

Additionally, different color threads could be used in the purse's body to discriminate between ends. Lydia Lambert stated that red and green, or blue and brown, were ideal color

until 1898. Lawrence Martin, "The Genesis of *Godey's Lady's Book*," *The New England Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (January 1928): 41-70.

⁵³ See footnote 15 for information on the size difference between short and long purses.

⁵⁴ The Work Table, *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1848, 65. This is one of the few aforementioned examples of a miser's purse being made with steel parts prior to the late 1850s. For additional information, please see footnote 7.

⁵⁵ S. Annie Frost, *The Ladies' Guide to Needle Work. Embroidery, etc.* (New York: Adams & Bishop Publishers, 1877), 97.

⁵⁶ "Purse, in Crochet," *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1859, 358.

pairs.⁵⁷ Different colored beads were also used to further distinguish each purse end. Gold and silver beads most often decorated purse sacs and, respectively, demarcated which end held gold or silver coin money. Extant netted purses evidence these trends (fig. 19). After miser's purses were netted, they were secured on a purse stretcher for several hours to further develop their signature shape.⁵⁸ Authors recommended a diverse array of patterns, from "square beading" to "gold stars and zig-zags."⁵⁹ The vogue for netted purses coincided with a broader popularity for netted goods during this period. *Peterson's Magazine*, for instance, featured a variety of netted items, such as night caps and hair nets (also known as snoods), as well as guides to netting, in its issues from the 1840s and 1850s (fig. 20).⁶⁰

Godey's first knitted long purse pattern debuted in January 1860, but was not accompanied by an explanation of the technique (fig. 21). The purse's description briefly mentioned that the accessory should be made in "dark blue, white and lavender" colors, with "tassels to match" and "steel rings."⁶¹ An extant purse from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art evokes *Godey's* example (fig. 13). Both purses feature checkered patterns in shades of blue and purple, with nearly identical fringed tassels. *Godey's* first detailed discussion of knitted miser's purses appeared more than three years later in the October 1863 issue. Here, the author provided directions to create a blue and white purse with cone-shaped beaded accents, hexagon-shaped steel rings, and ornately beaded tassels (fig. 22), much like an existing purse

⁵⁷ Lambert, *The Handbook of Needlework, Decorative and Ornamental, Including Crochet, Knitting, and Netting*, 436.

⁵⁸ Mrs. Henry Owens recommended doing this when crafting a gentleman's netted purse of "seventy-six rows of stitches." Mrs. Henry Owens, *The Illuminated Ladies' Book of Useful and Ornamental Needlework* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847), 10.

⁵⁹ Lady of New York, *Ladies Work-Box Companion: A Hand-book of Knitting, Netting, Tatting and Berlin Work* (New York: Geo A. Leavitt Publishers, 1850), 42-43; "Gentleman's Long Purse in Netting," *Peterson's Magazine*, June 1854, 406.

⁶⁰ For examples, see: The Work Table, *Peterson's Magazine*, October 1849, 154; The Work Table, *Peterson's Magazine*, November 1849, 183; "Directions for Netting, No. 1," *Peterson's Magazine*, July 1850, 42; "Directions for Netting, No. 2," *Peterson's Magazine*, August 1850, 78.

⁶¹ "Articles for Presents or Fancy Fairs," *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1860, 70.

currently in the Metropolitan Museum's collection (fig. 23).⁶² Although Godey's last knitted purse pattern appeared in 1873, contemporary sources continued to feature knitted purses through the 1870s and 1880s.⁶³

While netted and knitted purses were suggested in contemporary guides, crocheted purses were most frequently recommended. References to crocheted purses first appeared in publications in the mid-1840s, and the technique remained in circulation into the early 1900s. The technique's long-lasting presence may be attributed to the perception that crochet was "the most durable style of work for purses."⁶⁴ Fancywork authors frequently advised women to crochet other types of bags and purses as well, perhaps because of the technique's associations with durability.⁶⁵

Godey's first guide for a crocheted purse appeared in 1856. The eponymously named, "Lady's Book' Purse," was to be executed in "emerald green" silk with a black and gold abstract pattern.⁶⁶ In addition to publishing their own crochet patterns, *Godey's* re-issued select purse designs made by competing magazines, which may have helped to perpetuate the trend for crocheted purses. In March 1858, for example, *Godey's* featured a "crochet purse, in colored silks," which was copied verbatim from *Peterson's Magazine's* December 1857 issue (fig. 24).⁶⁷ This blue purse featured bands of "flowers in crimson" and "leaves in green," with one round and one square end.⁶⁸

⁶² Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1863, 304, 365.

⁶³ For references, consult: Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1873, 177; *Needles and Brushes and How to Use Them*, 275.

⁶⁴ Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Ladies' Purse in Crochet," *Peterson's Magazine*, July 1862, 64.

⁶⁵ For an example, see: Henry J. Vernon, "Tobacco-Bag-Crochet," *Peterson's Magazine*, October 1876, 291.

⁶⁶ "Embroidery," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1856, 451.

⁶⁷ "Crocheted purse, in colored silks," *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1858, 202; Ann S. Stephens, "Crocheted purse in colored silks," *Peterson's Magazine*, December 1857, 429.

⁶⁸ Ann S. Stephens, "Crocheted purse in colored silks," *Peterson's Magazine*, December 1857, 429.

As the century progressed, *Godey's* crocheted purse patterns became more involved. Rather than simply suggesting colors and patterns, or reprinting other magazine's designs, *Godey's* now provided detailed construction techniques. For example, *Godey's* August 1877 Work Department featured comprehensive instructions that outlined how to crochet a purse with round, bullion stitches in blue and claret ombré (fig. 25).⁶⁹ This pattern may have been used by the maker of a bullion-stitched, blue and brown ombré miser's purse, currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection (fig. 26). *Godey's* writers also suggested ways to make these purses more functional. The publication's authors suggested avoiding certain color combinations, such as scarlet and gold, as it had "a tendency to tarnish and to suffer from that ill-usage which all useful purses are preordained to undergo."⁷⁰ They also recommended alternative fasteners, such as clasps, to create "two distinct purses in one," but the lack of surviving purses with this feature suggests that it was not commonly used (fig. 27).⁷¹ *Godey's* final miser's purse pattern appeared in December 1889, nearly ten years before the magazine's last issue. Crocheted purses continued to appear in newspapers and guides until the early twentieth century.⁷²

While these myriad examples evidence a chronological shift in preference for each technique, surviving purses cannot be assumed to be from a particular period based solely on their construction. Ultimately, the purse was an expression of the individual maker's (or intended recipient's) taste and abilities. Individual preference, rather than social norms, may have dictated whether a particular purse was netted, knitted, or crocheted, as well as determined how it was decorated. Contemporary guide authors, such as Mrs. Jane Weaver of *Peterson's Magazine*,

⁶⁹ Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, August 1877, 162.

⁷⁰ Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1859, 358.

⁷¹ It may also be argued that there are few, if any, surviving purses with this type of fastener because their clasp closure made them less durable than traditional miser's purses. A purse's single-element structure may have become more susceptible to breakage when affixed to a metal clasp. Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1879, 461.

⁷² For references, see: *Boston Daily Globe*, "Housekeeper's Department: True and Tried Recipes Contributed by the Women of New England – Fancy Work, Crocheting – General Correspondence on Home Topics," October 31, 1897; *Washington Post*, "The Old-Time Miser's Purse," April 20, 1919.

acknowledged that, “every lady will have to use her own judgment” when constructing and styling her purse.⁷³ Weaver’s observation is perhaps best seen in a comparison of two miser’s purses in the respective collections of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology (fig. 28) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 29). These nearly identical crocheted purses may have been designed from the same purse pattern. The purses’ similarly striped designs suggest that their individual makers modified a pre-existing pattern to their own taste by using differently colored threads, varying metal rings and, in the case of the purse from the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, electing to include beaded fringe at the purse’s ends.⁷⁴

Trends were not only evident in miser’s purses’ structures, but also in their stylistic attributes. While Victorian miser’s purses were made in a wide range of colors, blue, red and green were most frequently suggested and used for miser’s purses.⁷⁵ While blue and red do not appear to have been gender specific colors, green was the purse color *par excellence* for nineteenth-century men. Contemporary patterns often recommended this color for gentlemen’s purses, and the trend was also reflected in nineteenth-century works of literature, such as William Makepeace Thackeray’s (1811 – 1863) novel, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (1847 – 1848), and Caroline Lee Hentz’s (1800 – 1856) book, *Helen and Arthur, or, Miss Thusa’s Spinning Wheel* (1853).⁷⁶ As we will see in more detail later, in each book, women constructed

⁷³ Mrs. Jane Weaver, “Henry II Purse,” *Peterson’s Magazine*, October 1878, 295.

⁷⁴ Conversely, it could also be said that these purses were made by a professional fancyworker for commercial sale, as they are of the same design and have similarly executed crochet and beadwork.

⁷⁵ This is not only evidenced by surviving examples, but also in many contemporary patterns. For blue purses, see: The Work Table, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1843, 64-65; Work Department, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, October 1863, 304, 365; Work Department, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, August 1877, 162; Mrs. Jane Weaver, “Henry II Purse,” *Peterson’s Magazine*, October 1878, 295; Work Department, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, April 1879, 365-366. For red purses, see: Mrs. Jane Weaver, “Purse, in crochet,” *Peterson’s Magazine*, July 1859, 67-68; “Purse, in Crochet,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, October 1859, 356; Work Department, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, November 1879, 461; Florence Hartley, *Ladies’ Hand Book of Fancy and Ornamental Work* (Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1861), 112-118.

⁷⁶ For references in magazines and fancywork guides, please consult: A Lady, *The Hand-Book of Useful and Ornamental Amusements and Accomplishments*, 292-295; Lambert, *The Handbook of Needlework, Decorative and Ornamental, Including Crochet, Knitting, and Netting*, 205-206; “Articles for Presents or Fancy Fairs,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, May 1860, 456; “Embroidered Purse,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, May

green silk purses for male friends and family members, albeit with different reasons for their generosity. A plethora of green purses survive in the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, which may further attest to this preference. Other colors, such as magenta or mauvine, became fashionable for purses with the development of synthetic dyes in the late 1850s (fig. 30). This color, though, was generally not recommended in fancywork guides or women's magazines.

The purses' colors and patterns not only reflected technological innovations, but also broader stylistic trends and historical revivals. *Peterson's Magazine* detailed "Henry II" and "Henry III" purses, named after the respective eleventh and twelfth century kings (figs. 31 and 32).⁷⁷ Besides the explicit historical references in their names, it is unclear how these purse designs evoked the style of these medieval monarchs. Their names appear to have been inspired by nineteenth-century Gothic Revival architecture.⁷⁸ This movement not only influenced contemporary building designs, but also Victorian fashion, and the fine and decorative arts. For example, in 1880, *Peterson's Magazine* recommended women adopt so-called "Henry III round capes," which were made of "lace or thin net, edged with lace," and "lined with silk."⁷⁹ Other Gothic-inspired purses feature representations of medieval church architecture, such as windows and Christian iconography (figs. 33 and 34). Miser's purses also featured patterns common to

1852, 401; "Embroidery," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1856, color plate 1 and 451. For literary references, see: William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (1847-1848; repr., New York: Bantam Books, 2006), 35; Caroline Lee Hentz, *Helen and Arthur, or, Miss Thusa's Spinning Wheel* (1853; repr., Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2008), 77.

⁷⁷ Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Henry II Purse," *Peterson's Magazine*, October 1878, 295; Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Henry III Purse," *Peterson's Magazine*, January 1879, 80.

⁷⁸ The Gothic Revival architectural movement began in the 1740s in England. Its popularity grew in the early nineteenth century, when admirers of neo-Gothic styles sought to revive medieval forms in contrast to the Neoclassical styles, which were then prevalent. Megan Aldrich, *Gothic Revival* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 9-42.

⁷⁹ Fashions for August, *Peterson's Magazine*, August 1880, 162.

other historical revivals, such as Neoclassicism.⁸⁰ Classical influences are seen in the symmetrical motifs and Greek key-patterned rings and tassels found on this early nineteenth-century miser's purse, currently in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 35).

An unending variety of figural, floral, geometric, and abstract motifs also decorated Victorian miser's purses. Common among them were depictions of animals and insects, such as horses and butterflies, to varying degrees of realism (figs. 36 and 37). Floral designs were also frequently used, and typically appeared in either lengthwise or widthwise bands (fig. 38). Circles and zig-zags were also shapes regularly seen on miser's purses (figs. 39 and 40), as were abstracted paisley motifs (figs. 41 and 42).

In addition to exhibiting myriad patterns, miser's purses were frequently inscribed with men's names, like "Sam" (fig. 43), as well as adages. Inscribed initials were also quite common for purses. One purse from the Cooper-Hewitt's collection was initialed "A.C." and "J.C." (fig. 44). This purse is believed to have been made for a wedding, which may explain the inclusion of a pair of initials.⁸¹ Contemporary sources, such as literary works, documented the practice of giving and receiving miser's purses as wedding gifts. For example, in Anne Marsh-Caldwell's series, "Lettice Arnold," Mrs. Fisher, an unofficial matchmaker, habitually gave future brides "a white satin reticule or bag, drawn with rose-colored ribbons, with a pretty pink and white purse in it, with silver tassels and rings, and containing a nice little sum for the bride's pocket money."⁸² The Cooper-Hewitt's wedding purse, though, may have been a gift from a bride to a groom, as the purse's length (twenty-three centimeters or about nine inches) indicates that it is a long purse, which was a type of miser's purse commonly recommended for men. In comparison, an early

⁸⁰ Neoclassicism marked the revival of the art, architecture, and culture of ancient Greece and Rome. This style became popular in the mid-eighteenth century, and remained fashionable, at various intervals, throughout the nineteenth century. David Irwin, *Neoclassicism* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 249-259.

⁸¹ Textile dealer Benjamin Ginsburg called this white purse a "wedding purse" in his assessment for the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum. Benjamin Ginsburg, assessment to donor Mrs. Clara M. Blum, May 15, 1953.

⁸² Anne Marsh-Caldwell, "Lettice Arnold," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, June 1850, 362.

nineteenth-century red netted short purse, also in the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, measures eleven and one-half centimeters (four and one-half inches), or half the length of the aforementioned long wedding purse (fig. 45).

The size of the actual stitches and silk threads used also impacted the eventual size of a purse. Mrs. Jane Weaver of *Peterson Magazine* explained in a description of a netted “wallet-shaped work-bag,” “If it is wished to have the bag smaller, of course the meshes must be smaller and the [threads] finer.”⁸³ Existing purses show that, as the century progressed, the size of Victorian purses increased. At the beginning of the century, short purses measured four- to six-inches in length; by mid-century, most purses were sized between seven- and ten-inches.⁸⁴ By the twentieth century, miser’s purses had nearly doubled in length. As noted by *The Washington Post*, “The old-time miser’s purse, with the long slit through the middle and the rings to keep the contents from sliding out... now measures about sixteen inches long and four or five wide.”⁸⁵ This particular purse was to be executed in dark blue silk and accented with lighter colors. Also unique to the twentieth-century purse: “To keep the rings from sliding off the bag, attach them together by a length of cord, ribbon, a chain or crocheted cord.”⁸⁶ The described purse is comparable to a surviving example now in the collection of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, which is dated to ca. 1915, and is of the same size, color, and style as the aforementioned accessory (fig. 46). Another navy and light colored purse, currently in the collection of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, may also be attributed to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century based on its large size; the object is thirty-two centimeters (about twelve inches) long and eight centimeters (about three inches) wide (fig. 47).

⁸³ This bag was shaped like a miser’s purse (or “wallet”), but would have been quite large in size and held a woman’s fancywork tools. Mrs. Jane Weaver, “Wallet-Shaped Work-Bag,” *Peterson’s Magazine*, January 1887, 97.

⁸⁴ These measurements were ascertained through a survey of the holdings of the six aforementioned museums, as well as of private collections and art sales.

⁸⁵ *Washington Post*, “The Old-Time Miser’s Purse,” April 20, 1919.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

This gradual size change may reflect the impact of shopping or traveling bags on women's costume. In the late nineteenth century, these "carriage" bags were used by women to hold their necessities while traveling; to "place small parcels in" while shopping; "or if desired...to carry sewing or fancy work around the house (fig. 48)."⁸⁷ They were made "in the shape of a... purse," with a "slit...in the centre of the bag exactly in the same way as in a purse; two rings slipped over, and the slit further fastened by pearl buttons and silk loops."⁸⁸ These bags were made from wool, "silk, satin, or velvet, with or without embroidery," and lined with "pretty-colored silk or satin."⁸⁹ As the miser's purse's form clearly impacted the shape of these shopping bags, it may be possible that the bags' large size – which helped it to serve a variety of functions – may have influenced the size of later-made miser's purses. Contemporary makers may have hoped to make their purses more functional, in the vein of the carriage bag, by lengthening and widening them.

As explained in the introduction to this paper, since the early twentieth century, miser's purses have been confused with other types of Victorian bags and purses, such as reticules, string purses, stocking purses, and pence-jugs. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a purse refers to "a money-bag or – receptacle and its contents," and may appear as "a small pouch or bag of leather or other flexible material, used for carrying money on the person."⁹⁰ A bag, in comparison, is "a receptacle made of some flexible material closed in on all sides except at the top (where also it generally can be closed); a pouch, a small sack."⁹¹ Unlike a purse, which holds coin money, a bag is intended to hold an assortment of objects. Reticules, a type of Victorian bag, conformed to the latter definition and description. The *Oxford English Dictionary* classifies

⁸⁷ Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1881, 272

⁸⁸ Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, December 1864, 537.

⁸⁹ Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1881, 272; Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Carriage or Shopping-Purse Bag," *Peterson's Magazine*, June 1888, 571.

⁹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s. v. "Purse."

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, s. v. "Bag."

a reticule as “a small bag, usually made of some woven material, for carrying on the arm or in the hand, used by ladies as a pocket or workbag.”⁹² These small sac bags were indeed made of woven materials and were “closed on all sides except at the top,” where they typically had a drawstring tie closure (fig. 49). As the *Oxford English Dictionary* observed, reticules were typically made from woven textiles, though, some were made as single-element structures, and, as contemporary fashion illustrations reveal, they were worn around the wrist or held in a woman’s hand (figs. 50 and 51).

As Victorian sources evidence, reticules held an assortment of items, including miser’s purses. The editors of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* noted that reticules “are both dainty and useful, many small purchases being carried in them, besides handkerchief and purse.”⁹³ *Godey’s* writers further documented the trend of storing purses in these bags in 1893, when pockets were no longer a fashionable aspect of women’s dresses. They wrote, “The utter impossibility of placing a pocket invisibly in the fashionable skirt is responsible for the revised fad among Parisiennes of carrying bags or reticules of convenient size, in which are deposited the handkerchief, purse, pocket-mirror, and other accessories of *aristocratic femininity*.”⁹⁴

Contemporary works of fiction also reflect this mode of accessorizing. In “Anecdotes of Wild Beasts – Leopards and Jaguars,” a short-story published in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, a young woman was seized by monkeys at the zoo after antagonizing the animals with her parasol.⁹⁵ The woman was eventually rescued from their den, and “the contents of her reticule, her purse, gloves, and delicately scented handkerchief, were with difficulty recovered

⁹² *Ibid.*, s. v. “Reticule.”

⁹³ “Hand bags,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, February 1890, 178.

⁹⁴ “Novelties,” *Godey’s Magazine*, May 1893, 670.

⁹⁵ “Anecdotes of Wild Beasts – Leopards and Jaguars,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, January 1852, 227.

from out the cheek pouch of a baboon.”⁹⁶ Aside from reticules, miser’s purses were also stored in other types of bags in fictional stories. As we will see in more detail later, an anonymous elderly character in Adeline Dutton Train Whitney’s (1824 – 1906) novel, *A Summer in Leslie Goldthwaite’s Life* (1893), kept her “long, knit purse with steel beads and rings” in her “homemade carpet bag.”⁹⁷

The current confusion of reticules as purses may derive from alternative Victorian names for these accessories. While many sources referred to reticules simply as “bags,” some also called them “bag purses,” blurring the distinction between the two accessories.⁹⁸ Although reticules may have held loose coins, as stated, they could have also secured other items, including miser’s purses. Based on their definition, form and intended function, reticules were most definitely “bags” and not “purses.”

String and stocking purses are two additional Victorian accessories that have been interchangeably referred to as miser’s purses. As previously explained, string purses have two small pockets with flaps, which are connected by a series of chains. These chains interlock, allowing the wearer to securely insert coin money into the flaps. The strings are either attached directly to the two flaps, or connected in the middle to a single ring (figs. 10 and 11). They appear to have become fashionable sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1856, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* issued its one and only crocheted string purse pattern (fig. 52).⁹⁹ This purse had a single, sliding center ring to secure the middle strings. String purses became inaccurately known as “miser’s purses” in the late nineteenth century. Contemporary newspapers published

⁹⁶ “Anecdotes of Wild Beasts – Leopards and Jaguars,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, January 1852, 227.

⁹⁷ Adeline Dutton Train Whitney, *A Summer in Leslie Goldthwaite’s Life* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1893), 38.

⁹⁸ For examples, see: Mrs. Jane Weaver, “Fashionable Bag,” *Peterson’s Magazine*, May 1879, 403; Work Department, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1863, 191.

⁹⁹ “Crochet purse,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, May 1856, 455.

directions for making so-called miser's purses that were, in fact, string purses.¹⁰⁰ One reader even sent in her directions to help others make a "miser's purse," as she had "never seen them printed."¹⁰¹ This reader's pattern was also for a string purse, rather than a miser's purse. The reader's confession – that they had never seen a printed string purse pattern – may also attest to the general obscurity of string purses in broader society. The similarity between both purses' forms may have contributed to this long-lasting confusion. Interestingly, true miser's purses are never inaccurately referred to as string purses in contemporary sources, likely because they lack the other purses' center strings.

Stocking purses were also separate accessories from miser's purses, string purses, and reticules. As their name implies, these purses took their form from silk stockings. Each side of a single stocking was attached with thread to a metal rod, thus forming a sac (fig. 53). These rods were then attached to a single ring by metal chains. Like other Victorian purses, the stocking purse was "intended to hold small gold and silver pieces."¹⁰² The stocking purse was referenced even less frequently in contemporary newspapers, magazines, and fancywork guides than the string purse, which suggests that it was not widespread in nineteenth – or early twentieth – century culture.¹⁰³

In addition to the aforementioned examples, pence-bags were also used to hold coin money, and have also been mislabeled as miser's purses or miser's bags.¹⁰⁴ Pence-bags, also known to Victorians as pence-jugs, are jug-shaped pouches made from a single-element structure (fig. 54). A single ring would slide over the jug's handle and spout to tighten the top of purse and

¹⁰⁰ *Boston Daily Globe*, "The Woman's Hour: Last Suggestions for the Christmastide," December 19, 1886.

¹⁰¹ *Boston Daily Globe*, "Housekeeper's Department: True and Tried Recipes Contributed by the Women of New England – Fancy Work, Crocheting – General Correspondence on Home Topics," October 31, 1897.

¹⁰² Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1885, 233.

¹⁰³ To date, I have not found a single surviving stocking purse.

¹⁰⁴ The Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, for example, has recorded these purses as "miser's bags" in its collection database.

secure coin money. Patterns for pence-jugs circulated at various points in the nineteenth century, particularly in the 1840s, and later in the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁰⁵ Pence-jugs were less functional than miser's purses, as they had only one sac, which prevented users from readily distinguishing the coins they contained.

The miser's purse's unique form and stylistic attributes not only helped to distinguish it from other purses, but, as we will see in the next chapter, ultimately, impacted the way in which it was used and worn.

¹⁰⁵ For references to pence-bags, please see: Miss Watts, *The Ladies Knitting and Netting Book* (London: John Miland, ca. 1840s), 33-35; Lambert, *The Handbook of Needlework, Decorative and Ornamental, Including Crochet, Knitting, and Netting*, 203-204; *A Winter Gift for Ladies; Being Instructions in Knitting, Netting and Crochet Work* (Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber & Co., 1847), 45; Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1881, 464; Eva Marie Niles, *Fancy Work Recreations. A Complete Guide to Knitting, Crochet, and Home Adornment* (Minneapolis: Buckeye Publishing Company, 1884), 135; Miss E. J. Welsh, "Silk Purse," *Peterson's Magazine*, April 1888, color plate 1 and 384; The Editor of "The Housekeeper," *Home Decorative Work*, 131.

III. PERSONAL ADORNMENT AND FUNCTION

Although made exclusively by women, miser's purses are known to have been carried by both sexes, and the purse's unique form allowed it to be worn on the body in a variety of ways. To better understand how the purses' wear varied by gender, we must first address each sex's dress styles. Nineteenth-century men's fashions are known for their austerity and simplicity, and, in their time, were seen as the immediate indicator of a person's character. According to Samuel R. Wells, men's dress forms were to have "long, unbroken lines," which gave "dignity" to their person, and "straight lines and angles," to "indicate power and strength."¹⁰⁶ Typical among men's outfits was a well-fitting suit in somber tones (fig. 55). Many guides, such as *The Perfect Gentleman*, advised gentlemen to adopt "this suit, with well-made shoes, clean gloves, [and] a white pocket handkerchief."¹⁰⁷ Henry Lunettes, author of *The American Gentleman's Guide to Politeness and Fashion*, maintained that,

The essentials of a gentleman's dress...are – a stylish well-fitting cloth coat, of some dark color...white pants of a fashionable material and make; the finest and purest linen, embroidered in white...a cravat and vest, of some dark or neutral tint...an entirely fresh-looking, fashionable black hat and carefully-fitted modish boots, white gloves, and a soft, thin, white handkerchief.¹⁰⁸

Well-cut clothes, specifically the aforementioned suit, were vitally important to a man's wardrobe. *The American Chesterfield* noted that men were to "take care, always, that your clothes are well made and fit you; otherwise they will give you a very awkward appearance."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Samuel R. Wells, *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette, and Guide to Correct Personal Habits* (New York: Fowler & Wells, Publishers, 1857), 33.

¹⁰⁷ *The Perfect Gentleman, or, Etiquette and Eloquence: A Book of Information and Instruction; Containing Model Speeches for All Occasions; 500 Toasts and Sentiments for Everybody; to Which are Added, the Duties of Chairmen of Public Meetings, etc.* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1860), 231.

¹⁰⁸ Henry Lunettes, *The American Gentleman's Guide to Politeness and Fashion* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1857), 31.

¹⁰⁹ A Member of the Philadelphia Bar. *The American Chesterfield, or Way to Wealth, Honour, and Distinction; Being Selections from the Letters of Lord Chesterfield to His Son; and Extracts From Other*

“Cleanliness and neatness” were also considered vital to a gentleman’s personal appearance, and among “the invariable accompaniments of good breeding.”¹¹⁰ While men’s fashions were generally subdued, as Philippe Perrot noted, “bright colors did not totally desert the masculine wardrobe. Shamefacedly, they hid under collars, coattails, and lapels, or on linings still made of...brilliant materials.”¹¹¹ This style is seen in men’s fashion plates from the era, where male figures have added bits of color to their somber outfits with brightly-colored cravats and handkerchiefs (fig. 56 and 57). With these contemporary references in mind, it may be possible that the highly-decorated Victorian miser’s purse was also worn hidden inside the folds of a dark suit.

Although men’s fashion plates found in nineteenth-century publications did not include miser’s purses, etiquette guides from the period further suggest how these articles might have been worn. In *The Complete Hand-Book of Etiquette for Ladies & Gentlemen*, it was written that, “small articles for which there may be use,” were to be “carried in the waistcoat pocket. Nothing should be carried in the pockets of the pantaloons, as it is extremely inelegant to thrust the hand into them.”¹¹² While miser’s purses were certainly objects of great use, it is unlikely that they were stored in a waistcoat pocket. Generally speaking, waistcoats had small, flat pockets, which would not have afforded enough space to store a miser’s purse (fig. 58). Additionally, the waistcoat fit the male body snugly, and its close fit likely would have made retrieving a bulging miser’s purse from one of its pockets quite difficult. As miser’s purses could not be stored in a pant or waistcoat pocket, it may be supposed that these items were secured in men’s coat pockets. Men’s coats and overcoats typically had pockets that were larger than the pockets found in

Eminent Authors, on the Subject of Politeness: With Alterations and Additions, Suited to the Youth of the United States (1828; repr., Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot & Co., 1848), 78.

¹¹⁰ *The Perfect Gentleman*, 231.

¹¹¹ Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, trans. Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 33.

¹¹² *The Complete Hand-Book of Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen* (New York: Published by James Miller, ca. 1880s), 21.

waistcoats. Examples of such menswear include: frock coats, or fitted jackets, which were worn throughout the century, and had large skirted bottoms that concealed sizable pockets in their folds (fig. 59); overcoats, which had large flap pockets at the hips (fig. 60); and capes, such as the Inverness cape, which was commonly worn by men from the 1850s until the end of the century, and had large square pockets on its sides (fig. 61). Contemporary works of literature also indicate that men stored miser's purses in their clothing pockets. In Juliana Horatia Ewing's novel, *Jan of the Windmill: A Story of the Plains* (1876), a man removes a "silk netted purse" from his pocket, when going to pay a miller to look after his son.¹¹³ The specific pocket he removed the purse from, though, was not mentioned.

While men's plates did not show these purses on their models, a few women's fashion's plates, printed by various magazines, did feature women wearing miser's purses. According to Mrs. L. G. Abell, author of the etiquette guide, *Woman in Her Various Relations*, these plates were to "be to the mind of woman a picture, from which she may better cultivate a taste for *simple elegance*."¹¹⁴ These inspirational fashion images not only served as guides to contemporary readers, but they may also help modern scholars determine how miser's purses were worn.

Although miser's purses did not frequently appear in fashion plates featured in nineteenth-century women's magazines, a select few women's fashion plates show that miser's purses were typically worn during daytime.¹¹⁵ In the aforementioned 1832 color plate from the *Petit Courier des Dames*, the central figure draped a brown netted miser's purse over her belt (fig. 9). In American publications, miser's purses were often shown placed over a fashion model's hand. A

¹¹³ Juliana Horatia Ewing, *Jan of the Windmill: A Story of the Plains* (1876; repr., New York: Henry Z. Walck, Inc., 1960), 18.

¹¹⁴ Mrs. L. G. Abell, *Woman in Her Various Relations* (1851; repr. New York: J.M. Fairchild & Co., 1855), 308.

¹¹⁵ In a survey of all *Godey's Lady's Books and Magazines*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazines*, *Peterson's Magazines*, and *Petit Courier des Dames: Journal des Modes*, these were the only fashion plates which featured models with miser's purses.

black and white plate from the September 1859 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book* featured a fashionable woman in a rich black taffeta and velvet gown holding a small miser's purse in her gloved hand (fig. 62). While the plate's accompanying description detailed the figure's costume and other accessories, her purse was not mentioned. Like its competitors, in 1861, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* also showed a model draping a miser's purse over her right hand, but did not provide its readers with any information about the featured purse (fig. 63). These omissions perhaps speak to the purses' role as a functional accessory, rather than a fashionable item of dress, as a survey of women's magazines reveals that only stylish costumes were discussed in their respective fashion sections.¹¹⁶ As evidenced in these images, the purse's signature shape did allow it to easily drape over a belt or in one's hand; however, these fashion illustrations do not necessarily reveal how the purse would have been worn by an actual Victorian woman.¹¹⁷ As miser's purses only appear in plates with outdoor, daytime scenes, these purses primarily emphasize the fact that their respective female figures are out in public -- perhaps to go shopping -- rather than suggest how these purses would have been actually worn or carried.

Additional understanding of miser's purse wear may be gathered from fashion writings found in American women's magazines. Mrs. Jane Weaver, for one, advocated using miser's purses because they were "easily abstracted from the pocket."¹¹⁸ In the eighteenth century, the pocket was a separate accessory worn under the skirt. By the nineteenth century, pockets were sewn into women's dress skirts and became subject to the whims of fashion, with many Victorian

¹¹⁶ During the course of my research, I examined fashion writings from the following nineteenth-century magazines: *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Godey's Magazine*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *Le Magasin des Demoiselles*, *Peterson's Magazine*, *Petit Courrier des Dames: Journal des Modes*, and *Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufacturers, Fashions and Politics*. Miser's purses were not mentioned in any of these publications as fashionable articles of dress. When these items were discussed in the fancywork sections of *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Godey's Magazine*, and *Peterson's Magazine*, they were referenced for their technical attributes and functionality.

¹¹⁷ Although the string purse has a similar form, its chain-link center would have prevented it from easily draping over belts or hands.

¹¹⁸ Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Purse in Crochet," *Peterson's Magazine*, July 1859, 67.

magazines encouraging or discouraging their use throughout the period.¹¹⁹ Generally, pockets were not sewn into dresses when women's skirts were narrow, as with the aforementioned Empire dress styles.

From the Greco-Roman inspired gown of the early nineteenth century, skirts became wider and increasingly bell-shaped in the mid-1820s, and pockets were sewn into seams and easily hidden among skirt folds. The most common types of pockets used in women's skirts were the bag pocket and the watch pocket. As Eileen Collard explained, the bag pocket was made by leaving matching slits of fabric "open in both the dress and its lining; the pocket was then slip stitched between these two parts."¹²⁰ The watch pocket, instead, "required that a small slit be left unstitched between the bottom of the waistband [at] the top of the skirt; often to one side of...the bodice where it could be easily hidden (fig. 64)."¹²¹

The functionality of pockets waxed and waned with the fashionable silhouette; whenever pockets interfered with the preferred dress shape, they were not included in women's skirts. Side pockets were generally sewn into women's dress skirts from the 1830s until the early 1850s, during a period when padded cloth petticoats were used to fill women's wide skirts.¹²² In the late 1840s, women's skirts were stiffened with a petticoat of horsehair called the crinoline petticoat (fig. 65).¹²³ By the 1850s, horsehair petticoats were replaced with crinolines made from hoops of whalebone, which supported the then-popular bell shaped skirt; by the mid-1850s, steel had replaced whalebone as the preferred material for women's crinolines (fig. 66).¹²⁴ With the

¹¹⁹ For examples of these fads, see: Fashions for July, *Peterson's Magazine*, July 1861, 81; Fashions for January, *Peterson's Magazine*, January 1873, 90.

¹²⁰ Eileen Collard, *The Cut of Women's Nineteenth-Century Dress*, vol. 3, *Victorian Gothic, circa 1840-66*, (Burlington: Eileen Collard, 1983), 8.

¹²¹ Collard, *The Cut of Women's Nineteenth-Century Dress*, vol. 3, *Victorian Gothic, circa 1840-66*, 8.

¹²² Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 31.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹²⁴ C. Willett Cunnington and Phillis Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes* (London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1951; repr., New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992), 136.

invention of the crinoline, watch pockets were common for women's skirts from the mid-1850s until the early 1860s.¹²⁵ As the 1860s progressed, the bell-shape skirt flattened in the front, and women adopted half-crinolines to support the back of their skirts (figs. 67 and 68).¹²⁶ This shape eventually gave way to the bustle of the early 1870s, a half-crinoline which swelled at the top to create a skirt with narrow hips and a wide back (fig. 69).¹²⁷ Bustles remained popular until the late 1870s, when they fell out of use. At this point, flounces were added to the back hems of petticoats to give skirts an elongated shape.¹²⁸

During the periods when crinolines and half-crinolines were used, pockets were generally not included in women's skirts. Many contemporary women's magazine writers encouraged women to adopt reticules during these pocket-less years. *Peterson's Magazine*, for example, documented the increased use of reticules in the late 1840s, and again in the 1860s and mid-1870s.¹²⁹ When bustles were worn, bag pockets were added to back panel seam of skirts.¹³⁰ As *Peterson's Magazine's* writers lamented, this storage space caused women "the great inconvenience... [of] hunting for purse or handkerchief in the gathers at the back" of their dresses.¹³¹ When women's skirts became narrow and flared in the 1890s, small pockets became common on the outside of women's garments (fig. 70). In 1891, *Peterson's* editors praised the return of pockets on women's dresses, as they were particularly convenient in which to store purses. This return coincided with the decline of the bustle, which had become popular for a second time in the mid-1880s, and a shift to an unsupported skirt with fullness at the back (fig.

¹²⁵ Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 31.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹²⁷ Cunnington and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, 170-171.

¹²⁸ Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 87.

¹²⁹ For examples, please see: Fashions for June, *Peterson's Magazine*, June 1849, 220; Fashions for July, *Peterson's Magazine*, July 1861, 81; Fashions for January, *Peterson's Magazine*, January 1873, 90.

¹³⁰ Eileen Collard, *The Cut of Women's Nineteenth-Century Dress*, vol. 4, *The Rise and Fall of the Bustle, circa 1867-98*, (Burlington: Eileen Collard, 1983), 47.

¹³¹ Fashions for October, *Peterson's Magazine*, October 1891, 370.

71).¹³² The article's author expressed hope that these pockets would be "made more conspicuous" – and, therefore, more functional – before the end of the year.¹³³

In terms of personal utility, the perceived functionality of the miser's purse shifted over the course of the nineteenth century; however, Victorians throughout the nineteenth century generally recognized that the purse was intended to hold coin money. Early Victorians, for example, seem to have regarded the purse as a bewildering trinket. Lydia Marie Child claimed that the "miser's purse has neither beauty nor use; it is merely intended as a puzzle...When drawn up tight, it appears to be entirely without an entrance; and those who have never seen one would be sadly puzzled to get the money out."¹³⁴ Child's criticism unwittingly underscores the functionality of the purse, as she acknowledges that the purse does indeed securely safeguard coin money. Lydia Lambert mimicked Child's sentiments in her reflections on miser's purses, stating that they were "more curious than useful."¹³⁵

By the mid-nineteenth century, these somewhat dismissive comments were replaced by remarks that highlighted the usefulness of this accessory. Pattern makers, for example, recommended woven, rather than single-element, structures for the purses, as these textiles prevented the maker from "the consequences of a *dropped loop* in knitting," which "rendered [a purse] utterly useless."¹³⁶ Some fancywork authors reminded prospective makers to leave ample openings of "about three inches" in length "for money to slip in."¹³⁷ As stated in the last chapter, other guides also suggested alternating a purse's thread colors and beading to help its user

¹³² Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 74.

¹³³ Fashions for October, *Peterson's Magazine*, October 1891, 370.

¹³⁴ Lydia Marie Child, *The Girls' Own Book* (New York: Clark Austin & Co., 1834), 219-220.

¹³⁵ Lambert, *The Handbook of Needlework, Decorative and Ornamental, Inc. Crochet, Knitting and Netting*, 236.

¹³⁶ "Embroidered Purse," *Godey's Lady's Book*, May 1852, 401.

¹³⁷ Eyre, *Needles and Brushes and How to Use Them: A Manual of Fancy Work*, 275.

distinguish each sac and the coins it contained, as well as recommended using colored silks that would not fade or tarnish with continued handling.¹³⁸

Mid-century satirical publications also reflected the miser's purse's role as a monetary storage device. In George Augustus Sala's satirical guide to Britain's 1851 Great Exhibition, a coin-filled miser's purse with miniature legs, and tin rings and tassels, is listed alongside "A Grand Procession of Brummagem Buttons" and "The Original 'Little Dustpan'," as one of the many "fine" products that were manufactured by the city of Birmingham, or "Brummagem," as the city was then nicknamed (fig. 72).¹³⁹ The term "Brummagem button" not only referred to the city's prosperous button industry, but also to shoddy or counterfeit goods (which Victorian Birmingham was also known to have produced), and counterfeit silver money.¹⁴⁰ Likewise, "The Little Dustpan" was a term that was particularly relevant to Victorians. The title referred to a "general ironmongery shop in High Holborn" in central London, which opened in the 1830s.¹⁴¹ Ironmonger shops, as their name suggests, sold a wide variety of household items made exclusively from iron, and are considered the predecessors of modern-day hardware stores.¹⁴² These shops were most popular in the nineteenth century, when an abundance of iron commodities were produced as part of the Industrial Revolution. The phrase, "The Little Dustpan," not only referred to this specific London store, but also to the type of household goods that were sold in ironmonger shops.

¹³⁸ "Crocheted purse, in colored silks," *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1858, 202; "Purse, in Crochet," *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1859, 358.

¹³⁹ George Augustus Sala, *The Great Exhibition: "Wot is to be": or probable results of the Industry of all Nations in the Year '51: showing what is to be exhibited, who is to exhibit: in short, how it's all going to be done* (London: Committee of the Society for Keeping Things in Their Places, 1850), unpaginated.

¹⁴⁰ Eric Partridge and Paul Beale, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), s.v. "Brummagem."

¹⁴¹ Septimus Piesse, "The Little Dustpan," *Notes and Queries: A Medium of Intercommunication for Literary Men, General Readers, etc.* 9, no. 5 (January – June 1878): 357.

¹⁴² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s. v. "Ironmongery."

Under his illustration of the miser's purse, Sala sardonically notes that the purse's attributes demonstrate "the production of 'tin' in its most attractive form."¹⁴³ In the nineteenth century, "tin" not only referred to the metal of the same name, but also to coin money. The phrase is believed to have originated in the early nineteenth-century, when silver coins were small, thin, and "tinny" in appearance.¹⁴⁴ While "tin" may also reference the copper-toned metal accoutrements that decorate this particular purse, it also denotes the golden coins which fill the purse's top sac. By calling money the "most attractive" type of "tin," Sala acknowledges the purse's function and yet dismisses the aesthetic and technical beauty of this accessory. Sala's inclusion of the 'tin' filled purse also underscores the universality of the miser's purse, which, at this time, was at the beginning of its peak in mid-nineteenth-century culture.

In the 1870s and 1880s, many authors of American women's magazines and fancywork guides attested to the purses' functionality, and firmly moved away from the early Victorian perception of miser's purses as simply confusing devices. This definitive stance on the purses' utility directly resulted from the re-issuing of silver coin money in the United States in 1878. Before this time, silver coins had not been used in the United States since 1836.¹⁴⁵ In 1862, as a consequence of the American Civil War, American dollars were issued without the backing of precious metals or the so-called "gold standard."¹⁴⁶ At the same time, in an effort to stabilize international currencies and promote foreign exchange, many European countries began to back their currencies with gold and abandon silver coinage, causing silver to become a worthless metal.¹⁴⁷ In an effort to reduce their domestic silver supply and expand their currency, the United States government passed the Bland Allison Act in 1878, which allowed silver coins – known as

¹⁴³ Sala, *The Great Exhibition: "Wot is to be": or probable results of the Industry of all Nations in the Year '51: showing what is to be exhibited, who is to exhibit: in short, how it's all going to be done*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁴ Patridge and Beale, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, s.v. "tin."

¹⁴⁵ Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 114.

¹⁴⁶ Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1960*, 26.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

Morgan silver dollars – to be minted in the United States. The value of paper money was also reconnected to the gold standard in 1878.¹⁴⁸

Morgan silver dollars were the largest and heaviest coin produced since the American Civil War, and were nearly double the size of their gold counterparts, the Indian Head gold dollars (figs. 73 and 74).¹⁴⁹ Given their size, Morgan silver dollars required more storage space on or around the body. *Peterson's Magazine*, among others, took note of this monetary inconvenience in their articles, and argued for the revived use of miser's purses.¹⁵⁰ Jane Weaver explained that with the minting of silver money by the United States government, these purses were "almost a necessity."¹⁵¹ Morgan silver coins were produced in the United States without interruption until 1904, when the United States' available silver bullion supply was finally depleted.¹⁵² Interestingly, at the same time Morgan silver dollars were being phased out of American currency, the miser's purse was fading from popular culture.

These examples evidence the functionality of the miser's purse, and later Victorian society's acceptance of it as a utilitarian item. As we will see in the next chapter, like the miser's purse's personal function, its social roles were also very particular.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁴⁹ Silver coins had a 31.8 millimeter (3.18 centimeters) diameter, while Indian Head gold dollars, produced from 1856 to 1889, were about 14.3 millimeters (1.43 centimeters) wide. Coinfacts.com, "1878 Gold Dollar," Collectors Universe, Inc., http://www.coinfacts.com/gold_dollars/1878_gold_dollar.htm (accessed June 1, 2009); Coinfacts.com, "1878 Morgan Silver Dollar," Collectors Universe Inc., http://www.coinfacts.com/silver_dollars/morgan_dollars/1878_morgan_dollars/1878_morgan_silver_dollar.htm (accessed June 1, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Please see as examples: Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Henry III Purse," *Peterson's Magazine*, January 1879, 80; Frost, *The Ladies' Guide to Needle Work. Embroidery, etc.*, 97.

¹⁵¹ Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Henry II Purse," *Peterson's Magazine*, October 1878, 295.

¹⁵² Silver dollars were not produced in the United States from 1905 to 1920. The Morgan dollar was re-issued in 1921, before being replaced by the Peace dollar (1921 – 1935), which commemorated the end of World War I. The Peace dollar was the last silver dollar coin minted in the United States. Gold dollars were not produced in the United States after 1889. Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1960*, 114.

IV. SOCIAL FUNCTION: MISER'S PURSES AS GIFTS AND COMMODITIES

Miser's purses not only had specific personal functions, but they also fulfilled certain social roles. Specifically, miser's purses were given as thoughtful gifts, as well as sold at charity fairs, throughout the nineteenth century.

Women were encouraged by writers of women's magazines, such as *Godey's* and *Peterson's*, to make miser's purses as gifts for friends, family, and for various special occasions. In 1854, for example, *Peterson's Magazine's* editors suggested that a "gentleman's long purse" was a "suitable present to a brother, father or husband on his birth-day."¹⁵³ Likewise, Mrs. Jane Weaver of *Peterson's Magazine* instructed fancyworkers to craft miser's purses as gifts, noting that they made especially nice Christmas presents.¹⁵⁴ In 1889, Mabel Ware of *Godey's Lady's Book* mimicked Weaver's sentiments, noting that "a pretty purse is always a useful and handsome Christmas gift, for a lady to give either to a lady or gentleman friend."¹⁵⁵

Miser's purses may have also been given as charitable gifts. A plate from *Petit Courrier des Dames* may illustrate this situation of giving.¹⁵⁶ This image shows a woman giving a pale pink miser's purse to another woman (fig. 75). Although the exchange takes place in a domestic setting, the latter figure wears outdoor attire, while her friend, the giver of the purse, simply wears a light purple tiered gown. This woman is in the act of depositing a miser's purse into a small blue cloth bag, which her cloaked friend is holding in her outstretched right hand. While her right hand is extended, this woman clutches her left hand to her heart and looks at the first woman with a thankful expression. The pink miser's purse appears full, as if it has been filled

¹⁵³ "Gentleman's Long Purse in Netting," *Peterson's Magazine*, June 1854, 406.

¹⁵⁴ Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Henry III Purse," *Peterson's Magazine*, January 1879, 80.

¹⁵⁵ Mabel Ware, Work Table, *Godey's Lady's Book*, December 1889, 541.

¹⁵⁶ Modes de Paris, *Petit Courrier des Dames: Journal des Modes*, December 5, 1846, plate 2230.

with coins. The scene appears to illustrate of an act of charity, and may suggest that filled miser's purses were given as benevolent gifts. Unfortunately, like other fashion plates that featured miser's purses, this image was not accompanied by a description of the purse or of the reason for gift-giving. As mentioned previously, miser's purses may have been given as wedding gifts to brides-to-be, and may have even been filled with money for the bride's personal use.¹⁵⁷ With this in mind, it is plausible that coin-filled miser's purses were also given as charitable donations.

This societal preference for giving miser's purses may have related to their underlying cultural significance. Like many hand-crafted goods, miser's purses were seen as an extension and representation of their maker to their eventual recipient and user. To better understand how these accessories functioned, it is important to first examine Victorian codes of conduct, specifically, contemporary views on proper male and female comportment, and gift-giving mores.

On the most basic level, miser's purses were the physical embodiment of the ideologies of the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity. The turn of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of industrial capitalism, and, with it, the separation of the domestic and professional spheres. While men had once lived and worked in the same building, they were now physically separated from their domestic environments during daylight hours, working in different locations from where they lived. To coincide with this shift, a new "domestic ideology" developed.¹⁵⁸ This ideology was influenced by the writings of the English religious writer and educational reformer Hannah More (1745 – 1833) and the poet William Cowper (1731 – 1800). Ellen Jordan explains that, in the eighteenth century, these intellectuals argued that "quiet retirement in the home was the best way to live out a Christian life."¹⁵⁹ More also argued in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) that young women needed to be properly educated

¹⁵⁷ See pages 20-21 for details.

¹⁵⁸ Ellen Jordan, "'Making Good Wives and Mothers'? The Transformation of Middle-Class Girls' Education in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History of Education Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 443.

¹⁵⁹ Jordan, "'Making Good Wives and Mothers'? The Transformation of Middle-Class Girls' Education in Nineteenth-Century Britain," 443.

so they could excel in their natural sphere (i.e., the domestic environment) as good wives and mothers.¹⁶⁰ A proper education included learning how to maintain one's future household – a woman's natural sphere – and to make it a comfortable living space for one's husband and children. To develop the skills necessary to fulfill their call to care for their families and their homes, Victorian women were taught utilitarian needlework and decorative fancywork skills as young girls. As they developed their skill set, women learned to sew practical items, such as clothing and household linens, as well as more fanciful objects. Among the assortment of more decorative items they created for themselves, their families and their domestic environments were handkerchiefs, bags, lamp covers, wall pockets, and, of course, purses.

While women, as well as men, learned how to behave appropriately during formal education, both sexes also gained insight on proper comportment from contemporary etiquette guides. Among the rules outlined in these books were guidelines on giving and receiving presents. Ideally, presents were not to be valued for their monetary cost, but rather for their aesthetic and sentimental value. "Among friends," one author wrote, "presents ought to be made of things of small value; or, if valuable, their worth should be derived from the style of the workmanship, or from some accidental circumstance, rather from the inherent and solid richness."¹⁶¹ Similarly, Walter R. Houghton, author of *Rules of Etiquette and Home Culture; or What To Do and How To Do It*, argued that, "rich and costly presents should rarely if ever be made. A present ought to be valuable from what it signifies, rather than on account of what it really is."¹⁶² To women, he particularly advised that, "gifts by ladies should be of a delicate nature, usually some dainty product of their own taste and skill."¹⁶³ Miser's purses, which were

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 441.

¹⁶¹ Lady of New York, *Etiquette for Ladies; A Manual of the Most Approved Rules of Conduct in Polished Society for Married and Unmarried Ladies* (Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber & Co., 1845), 42.

¹⁶² Walter R. Houghton, et al. *Rules of Etiquette and Home Culture; or What to Do and How to Do It*, 10th ed. (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co. Publishers, 1886), 275.

¹⁶³ Houghton, *Rules of Etiquette and Home Culture; or What to Do and How to Do It*, 275.

advocated by many as excellent presents for an array of occasions, would have also conformed to this rule, as they certainly would have been a “dainty product” of a particular woman’s “taste and skill.” Moreover, as crafting a gift would have required a larger investment of free time than simply purchasing one, the item would also be valued by its recipient because of the dedication that was necessary to create it. John H. Young, author of *Our Deportment; or the Manners, Conduct and Dress of the Most Refined Society*, maintained that, “mere costliness does not constitute the soul of a present; it is the kind feeling it manifests which gives it value... To persons of refined nature, whatever the friend creates takes added value as part of themselves, part of their lives, as it were, having gone into it.”¹⁶⁴ Not to ignore the opposite sex, the authors of etiquette manuals also articulated specific guidelines for men. Men, for example, were told to, “never offer to a lady a gift of great cost: it is in the highest degree indelicate, and looks as if you were desirous of placing her under obligation to you, and of buying her good will.”¹⁶⁵ Women, likewise, were urged not to accept such gifts from men unless they were romantically interested.

In addition to being made as thoughtful gifts, miser’s purses were also sold at nineteenth-century fundraising fairs by middle- and upper-class women to help raise money for a variety of charitable causes.¹⁶⁶ As society’s moral authorities, women played an active role in charity, and fancy fairs, perhaps quite naturally, were a pre-dominantly female activity. As Beverly Gordon succinctly explains, these sales “involved the construction and decoration of complex booths, the preparation of fanciful costumes, and a general ‘dressing’ of the hall or fair environment, all in

¹⁶⁴ John H. Young, *Our Deportment; or the Manners, Conduct and Dress of the Most Refined Society* (Detroit: F. B. Dickerson and Company, 1885), 270.

¹⁶⁵ Lady of New York, *Etiquette for Ladies; A Manual of the Most Approved Rules of Conduct in Polished Society for Married and Unmarried Ladies*, 42. For additional references, see also: *The Complete Handbook of Etiquette for Ladies & Gentlemen*, 174; and Agnes H. Morton, *Etiquette* (Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, 1911), 206.

¹⁶⁶ For additional information, please consult: Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998); and Lori Ginzberg, “The Business of Benevolence,” in *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 36-66.

conjunction with an overall theme.”¹⁶⁷ Fancy fairs became more widespread as more problems arose from industrial and demographic change, which resulted from the Industrial Revolution.¹⁶⁸ At these fairs, as Addie E. Heron, author of the guide *Ladies’ Work for Pleasure and Profit*, explains, “articles of useful ornament” were to be “made up inexpensively but showily” by its hostesses for “quicker sale.”¹⁶⁹ Miser’s purses were frequently recommended among these “useful ornaments” by writers of fancywork articles found in contemporary magazines. *Godey’s Lady’s Book’s* editors, for example, suggested knitted long purses for “presents or [for sale at] fancy fairs” in several mid-century issues, along with other items, such as watch-pockets and crocheted jewelry.¹⁷⁰

As the miser’s purse was embedded in Victorian life, it may not be surprising to learn that the purse’s roles as a gift and commodity were adapted by contemporary writers and artists, who used the purse as a literary and artistic device in the works they produced. In the next chapter, we will see how these individuals used the miser’s purse in specific ways in fictional scenarios to express their respective characters’ personalities and those characters’ relationships with others.

¹⁶⁷ Beverly Gordon, “Aesthetic Meanings in Women’s Turn-of-the-Century Fundraising Fairs,” *Turn-of-the-Century Women* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1986): 16.

¹⁶⁸ F.K. Prochaska, “Charity Bazaars in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Journal of British Studies* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1977): 71.

¹⁶⁹ Addie E. Heron, *Ladies’ Work for Pleasure and Profit* (Chicago: The Home Manual Company, Publishers, 1894), 175.

¹⁷⁰ “Articles for Presents or Fancy Fairs,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1860, 70; “Articles for Presents or Fancy Fairs,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, May 1860, 456.

IV. THE MISER'S PURSE AS A LITERARY AND ARTISTIC DEVICE

The social functions of the miser's purse were adapted by Victorian writers and painters for use in contemporary artistic and literary works, and, through these creative adaptations, the miser's purse became a fictional device that served specific roles and conveyed certain meanings in these artistic contexts. These creative interpretations of the miser's purse are not unlike the artistic use of other accessories, such as gloves and handkerchiefs, whose own social connotations and functions have been widely adapted in works of literature. Dress scholars, such as C. Cody Collins and Paolo Peri, have cited such references in their own respective studies of gloves and handkerchiefs, to understand their particular object's social and symbolic functions.

Collins cited an array of literary works in his study, which traced the personal and social functions of gloves from antiquity to the mid-twentieth century. Among other authors, Collins quoted writings by the Roman poet Virgil (70 B.C.E. – 19 B.C.E.), and the English author and poet Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1343 – 1400), when discussing the protective use of gloves throughout the ages.¹⁷¹ Collins also referenced notable literary works when addressing the various social functions of gloves throughout the centuries. Collins, for example, cited William Shakespeare's (ca. 1564 – 1616) play, *Romeo and Juliet* (ca. 1594), when addressing the Renaissance practice of men and women wearing gloves at balls to prevent direct skin-to-skin contact while dancing.¹⁷² Likewise, Paolo Peri referenced several literary works in his study of handkerchiefs, including Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice* (ca. 1603).¹⁷³ In his discussion, Peri cited *Othello* when discussing the role of handkerchiefs as tokens of love and affection in the sixteenth century. As I will explore in more detail later, Peri wrote, "The

¹⁷¹ Collins, *Love of a Glove: The Romance, Legends and Fashion History of Gloves and How They Are Made*, 11, 35.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷³ Peri, *The Handkerchief*, 12.

social value...of the handkerchief in this period is underlined in Shakespeare's *Othello* where a handkerchief represents the starting point for the entire tragedy. A handkerchief...was given to Desdemona by the moor. In the play this triggers the envy of Jago [sic], causes the foolishness of Cassius [sic], [and] the jealousy of Othello."¹⁷⁴

Further understanding of my approach to the miser's purse as an artistic and literary device may also be gathered through an exploration of the literary interpretations of handkerchiefs and gloves. The handkerchief has been known to function as a stand-in for the self in literature, symbolizing everything from emotional states (i.e., the dropping of a handkerchief to indicate distress) to romantic relationships (i.e., the exchange of a handkerchief between a man and woman as a symbol of their devotion to one another).¹⁷⁵ Returning to Peri's literary example, the handkerchief's latter role was perhaps best utilized by Shakespeare in his play *Othello*.¹⁷⁶ During his courtship of his future wife, Desdemona, the Moorish Venetian General, Othello, presents her with a handkerchief that belonged to his mother.¹⁷⁷ Through a series of misunderstandings orchestrated by Othello's silent rival, the villain Iago, Othello becomes worried that Desdemona is in love with his new lieutenant, Michael Cassio. His worst fears are confirmed when Desdemona's handkerchief is stolen by Iago, who plants it in Cassio's bedchamber.¹⁷⁸ Cassio later uses the found handkerchief as a napkin, without realizing where the handkerchief came from or its significance to his General. After accusing her of giving his handkerchief to Cassio, Othello seeks his revenge on Desdemona by smothering her in her sleep,

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Helen Gustafson, *Hanky Panky: An Intimate History of the Handkerchief* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2002), xiii-7.

¹⁷⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice*, ed. Russ McDonald (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

¹⁷⁷ Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice*, 3.4.54-68. References are to act, scene, and line.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.3.287-888; 3.4.187-190.

and by enlisting Iago to murder Cassio.¹⁷⁹ (He fails.) At the play's conclusion, Othello learns of Iago's villainy, and, realizing the injustice of killing the innocent Desdemona, kills himself.¹⁸⁰

Throughout this tale, the handkerchief symbolizes Othello and Desdemona's love for and devotion to one another. Cassio's unwitting acquisition of the handkerchief serves to undermine their relationship, as it indicates to Othello that, just as Cassio is now owner of his handkerchief, he is also the "owner" of Desdemona. Iago conveys this information to Othello with the visceral remark that he saw Cassio "wipe his beard" with Desdemona's handkerchief.¹⁸¹ Harry Berger Jr. explains that the handkerchief is "fetishized by Othello as a token of Desdemona's love and fidelity, and loved by her for this reason. To learn this is to realize that, in the moment of Desdemona's...[misplacing] the handkerchief, an extraordinary event has taken place."¹⁸² Moreover, the handkerchief serves as a literary device that enriches the play's plot, since the accessory is used to create conflict between characters in the story.

The social uses of gloves have also been adapted in many fictional writings throughout the centuries. Gloves have long been viewed as representations of persons in ceremonies, and, as Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones explain, for hundreds of years, "were given and taken as the embodied form of social acts—the bonding of friend to friend, of lover to lover."¹⁸³ They add that by these exchanges, gloves "materialized the power of people to be condensed and absorbed into things and of things to become persons."¹⁸⁴ As is familiar to any American high-school student, the impious behavior of the adulterous Puritan Reverend Arthur Dimsdale from Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1804 – 1864) *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is alluded to in one scene with a

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.2.85-86.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.2.338-356.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3.3.436-438.

¹⁸² Harry Berger, Jr., "Impertinent Triflings: Desdemona's Handkerchief," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 236.

¹⁸³ Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, "Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 118.

¹⁸⁴ Stallybrass and Jones, "Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe," 116.

black glove.¹⁸⁵ In this passage, an old sexton offers Dimsdale a black glove “found this morning on the scaffold where evil-doers are set up to public shame.”¹⁸⁶ Dimsdale dropped his glove the night before, when he, his lover, Hester Prynne, and their illegitimate child, Pearl, stood on the scaffold together in the dark. Although Hester was forced to stand on the scaffold several years before, shortly after Pearl’s birth, and must wear the scarlet letter “A” everyday to atone for committing adultery, Reverend Dimsdale has yet to admit to or be punished for his wrongdoing.

While the reader might expect Dimsdale to deny that this is his glove, he admits that the glove is, indeed, his and accepts it thankfully from the sexton. Darrel Abel articulates in, “Black Glove and Pink Ribbon: Hawthorne’s Metonymic Symbols,” that this “trifling incident is loaded with meaning because of the equivocal symbolism of the black glove.”¹⁸⁷ Abel explains,

The black glove in its proper place on the minister’s hand is an unnoticed item in his customary suit of solemn black; but detached from this ensemble of conventional significance, and found in an unhallowed place after a night of supernatural doings, the black glove arouses suggestions which disturb piety. Black suggests evil and concealment; the use of a glove suggests concealment and perhaps gingerliness and caution.¹⁸⁸

These implications are evident to the sexton, who notes that, “A pure hand needs no glove to cover it...And, since Satan saw fit to steal it, your reverence must needs handle him without gloves, hence-forward.”¹⁸⁹ As Abel also noted, the glove also highlights the “supernatural doings” from the night before, when a red letter “A” was seen in the sky. Members of the town “interpret [the “A”] to stand for “Angel” because “our good governor Winthrop was made an angel this past night”; however, the reader is aware that this mysterious occurrence actually relates to the publicly unseen scaffold scene. Dimsdale, though, elects to ignore this supernatural incident, as well as the black glove’s connotations, at this point in the story. Shortly before his

¹⁸⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850; repr., Airmont: Airmont Books, 1962).

¹⁸⁶ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 136.

¹⁸⁷ Darrel Abel, “Black Glove and Pink Ribbon: Hawthorne’s Metonymic Symbols,” *The New England Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (June 1969): 163.

¹⁸⁸ Abel, “Black Glove and Pink Ribbon: Hawthorne’s Metonymic Symbols,” 163-164.

¹⁸⁹ Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 136.

death at the novel's end, Dimsdale does publicly confess his sin. In this scene, he calls Hester and Pearl forward to stand on the scaffold with him in front of their community and, by this action, finally publicly admits that he committed adultery. In this example, we see how the glove's symbolic role – as a signifier of the self – was adapted by Hawthorne to create a scenario in the novel.

Like the aforementioned authors and their respective accessories, several Victorian fiction writers used miser's purses as literary devices to represent particular Victorian ideals. With dozens of different purses available for in use in the nineteenth century, one may wonder why the miser's purse was frequently chosen to function as a literary and artistic device. To understand this preference for the miser's purse, we must first examine the specific ways the purse functioned in literature and paintings. In some novels, situations of miser's purse exchange – where these objects were made, given, and received by and for main characters – were used to reflect Victorian notions on proper behavior, to represent filial love or loyalty, and to foreshadow courtships and marriages. The purse was also representative of these same sentiments in contemporary paintings. The decision to use miser's purses, rather than the other accessories, may speak to the miser's purse's role as a popular Victorian gift and commodity. Moreover, the purse's personal function and unique design may have also encouraged writers and artists to adapt it for these creative uses. First, the purse's established role as a money holder allowed it to be easily made into an object that represented financial duty. Second, the purse's pair of rings is evocative of another pair of rings – wedding rings. This connotation, combined with the purse's role as an appropriate gift for women to give men, enabled it to be adapted for situations of betrothal. Lastly, the purse's signature slit opening served as a subtle reference to female genitalia, which, again, related to the concepts of marriage and courtship, chastity and fidelity.

The purse's role as a representation of Victorian social mores is witnessed in two previously mentioned Victorian novels – Martha Finley's *Elsie Dinsmore* and Adeline Dutton Train Whitney's *A Summer in Leslie Goldthwaite's Life*. Both Finley and Whitney were

American authors of books for young girls, and these respective novels are among their best known works. In Finley's *Elsie Dinsmore*, a miser's purse serves as the focal point for an argument about the value of handicraft. The novel's protagonist, eight-year-old Elsie Dinsmore, lives with her grandparents, aunts, and uncles at Roselands, her uncle's plantation in the American south. Elsie's mother died when she was a child, and her father abandoned her to his relatives shortly after his wife's death. Although she lives with her relatives, Elsie is neglected by her family and raised by nannies, who care for her physical and spiritual development. By their instruction, Elsie becomes morally righteous and intensely religious. For instance, despite constant verbal and physical abuse by her kin, she continuously "turns the other cheek" to their behavior, in an effort to be more like Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁰

In the novel, Elsie befriends the equally zealous Rose Allison, a young woman who stays at Roselands as a guest of the Dinsmore family. Prior to Rose's departure, Elsie knits her a crimson and gold purse, with "silk and beads," as a going away present.¹⁹¹ Elsie explains that she chose to make Rose a purse, rather than buy her a present, because she wished "to give her something which was the work of her own hands, knowing that as such it would be more prized by her friend than a costlier gift."¹⁹² As explained, Elsie's sentiments correspond not with the ideologies of the cult of domesticity, but also to contemporary gift-giving modes. Unfortunately for Elsie, as she is "putting on the [purse's] tassel," her Aunt Enna enters her bedroom and steals the purse from her.¹⁹³ When Elsie tries to recapture her purse, her grandmother, Mrs. Dinsmore, intervenes, and forces Elsie to give the purse to Enna, promising Elsie that she will buy her a new purse in the city the next day. Mrs. Dinsmore argues that Elsie should not be upset because there

¹⁹⁰ Finley, *Elsie Dinsmore*, 17.

¹⁹¹ As we have seen, Elsie's color choices correspond to popular purse styles from the period. *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

are “plenty of handsomer [purses] to be had in the city.”¹⁹⁴ Elsie maintains that she only wants to give Rose a purse made by her own hand, as the purse’s value does not come from its monetary cost, but rather from its sentimental and personal worth. To her remarks, Mrs. Dinsmore replies, “Nonsense! What difference will that make to Miss Rose?”¹⁹⁵

Mrs. Dinsmore’s flippant statements speak to her coarse nature, and highlight the immoral and abusive behavior she exhibits throughout the novel. By contrast, Elsie’s belief that the purse’s value is derived from its sentimental, rather than monetary, worth, underscores her morally upright character. Rather than buying a new purse, Elsie elects to finish another purse she had been working on, and gives it to Rose the next day. This “bead purse of blue and gold” was originally intended to be a gift to her absentee father.¹⁹⁶ Upon giving the purse to Rose, Elsie boasts to her friend, “It is all my own work, dear Ms. Rose. I thought you would value it more for that.”¹⁹⁷ She recognizes that the purse is an extension of herself, and a token of her affection for her friend. While Elsie may have been able to purchase a prettier purse in town, this item would not have been representative of Elsie or her character as, to paraphrase John H. Young, she would not have dedicated part of her life to make it.¹⁹⁸ Rose is impressed and touched by Elsie’s gift, and despite Rose’s departure from Roselands, the two remain close friends throughout the novel, with Rose continually providing Elsie with moral guidance and support. The purse also represents a transfer of parental duty from Mr. Dinsmore to Rose, as Mr. Dinsmore remains physically and emotionally detached from his daughter throughout most of the novel.

The miser’s purse appears again in a situation involving a moral lesson in Adeline Dutton Train Whitney’s aforementioned novel, *A Summer in Leslie Goldthwaite’s Life*. In this novel, the

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Here again, Elsie’s color choices correspond to popular Victorian miser’s purse colors and extant examples. Additionally, Elsie’s choice to give Rose a purse that was originally intended for a man shows that crafting a gender specific purse was an option, not a rule. *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁹⁸ For Young’s quote please refer again to page 40.

young Leslie Goldthwaite travels the United States with the wealthy Hadden family, and learns, often by their unfortunate example, lessons about life. In the first few chapters, while traveling by train, Leslie spots an elderly spinster, wearing an unfashionable “gray straw bonnet” decorated with “artificial grass.”¹⁹⁹ This woman passes by the group several times, but is ignored by the Haddens, who are always too self-absorbed to regard her. During dinner on the train, Elinor Hadden, a member of the family, “got a cinder in her eye; and though she had winked, and stared, and rolled her eyelid under...it seemed persistent,” and caused her pain and discomfort.²⁰⁰ The spinster notices Elinor’s affliction, and suggests Elinor come with her to get a remedy. The Haddens, though, are wary of her, and their fear appears to be largely based on her impoverished appearance. When the spinster offers Elinor an eyestone from her “long, knit purse with steel beads and rings,” to get the cinder out, Elinor shrinks away from her, visibly afraid.²⁰¹ Elinor eventually uses the eyestone, which does indeed remove the object from her eye. From this event, Leslie learns the valuable lesson not to judge others by their dress.²⁰² Interestingly, this spinster uses a miser’s purse in the 1890s, at a time when it was not recommended by or referred to in contemporary publications. This then unfashionable purse further added to her outmoded appearance. Additionally, the spinster uses the purse to store an unusual object – an eyestone – rather than coin money. This adaptive use of the purse not only conveys her eccentric personality, but emphasizes her poverty. In this scene, the purse accentuates the spinster’s strangeness, and serves as one element in Leslie’s larger moral lesson about accepting others for their inner character rather than their outward countenance.

¹⁹⁹ Whitney, *A Summer in Leslie Goldthwaite’s Life*, 31-32.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 39. An eyestone is “a small, lenticular, calcareous body...used to remove a foreign substance from the eye. It is put into the inner corner of the eye under the lid, and allowed to work its way out at the outer corner, bringing with it the substance.” Free Online Dictionary, “Eyestone – definition of Eyestone by the Free Online Dictionary,” Farlex, Inc., <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Eyestone> (accessed June 2, 2009).

²⁰² Whitney, *A Summer in Leslie Goldthwaite’s Life*, 44.

Miser's purses also served as a representation of familial love and loyalty in paintings and literature. Most notably, in the painting, *The Last of England* (1852-1855), by the English artist Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), a miser's purse may serve as a representation of the central character's familial devotion as he emigrates with his family from England to Australia (fig. 76).²⁰³ Madox Brown was known for his paintings of moral and historical scenes. According to Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, who presently owns the painting, "The subject itself – departure in desperate circumstances for a foreign land – has parallels with the biblical story of the Flight into Egypt."²⁰⁴ Madox Brown posed for the painting with his wife, Emma Hill, and their children – Cathy, the fair-haired girl in the background, and Oliver, the baby, who is concealed in Emma's cloak.²⁰⁵

In the foreground of the painting, Madox Brown and Emma huddle together, holding each other's hands for comfort and solace, on what appears to be a dangerous journey. As he holds Emma's hand, Madox Brown also rests his hand on a red and gold miser's purse. Interestingly, miser's purses were at the height of their popularity at the time when Madox Brown was painting *The Last of England*.²⁰⁶ This miser's purse appears to be full, as its visible sac is very round. In the relation to the painting's narrative, the purse may hold the family's life savings, which would also explain why Madox Brown safeguards it as he holds his wife's hand. Madox Brown's simultaneous touching of the purse and Emma could also speak to the purse's established social connotations. Firstly, as the purse may have been made by Emma, Brown may be clutching the

²⁰³ Interestingly, *Godey's Lady's Book* printed a black and white plate of *The Last of England*, with an accompanying fictional story, in 1873. In the tale, the central figures, named Terrence and Katie, emigrate from Ireland to England with their daughters in search of a better life. Many of the painting's original details, such as the miser's purse, were lost in the re-printed image. "Farewell to Home," *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1873, 252-254.

²⁰⁴ Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, "Oil Painting – The Last of England – Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery Information Centre," Birmingham City Council, <http://www.bmagic.org.uk/objects/1891P24> (accessed June 12, 2009).

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ My examination of various contemporary sources revealed that miser's purses are most frequently discussed and encouraged to be used in the 1850s and 1860s.

purse because it represents his relationship to his wife. Additionally, the purse is emblematic in the painting of Madox Brown's obligation, as a Victorian man, to provide for his wife and his children. In this painting, Brown appears to be visibly fulfilling his duty to care for his family by emigrating with his brood to Australia, likely with the intention of securing for them a better life than the one they had in England.

This portrayal of parental devotion, as represented by Madox Brown's miser's purse, may be contrasted to the use of a miser's purse in Juliana Horatio Ewing's (1841 – 1885) novel, *Jan of the Windmill: A Story of the Plains* (1876). Ewing was a late nineteenth-century English children's book author. In this story, a miser's purse serves as a representation of a father's failure to fulfill his familial obligations. The story opens with an anonymous man abandoning his newborn son, Jan, to a mid-Western miller, Abel Lake, and his wife. The Lakes have just lost their newborn child, and, in attempt to fill this void and make some extra money, are willing to care for Jan.²⁰⁷ To settle their deal, the unidentified man removes from his pocket a "silk netted purse," which is filled with his money.²⁰⁸ The stranger,

...was pulling back the rings of a silk netted purse, which he had drawn mechanically from his pocket and which, from some sudden start of his, fell chinking on the floor. Whatever the thought was which startled him, he thought it so sharply that he looked up in fear that he had said it aloud. But he had not spoken [and gave the miller] a quarter's pay in advance.²⁰⁹

During this exchange, the man never identifies himself to the Lakes, and, as the novel progresses, does not return to claim Jan. Most of the novel is centered upon the activities of other characters, who are interested in learning more about Jan's mysterious past. Before the story's conclusion, the reader learns that the man who abandoned Jan was his birth father, D'Arcy. D'Arcy was a spoiled, wealthy young man until he married Jan's mother, an impoverished artist, without his family's blessing. After Jan's mother dies in childbirth, D'Arcy abandons him to the

²⁰⁷ The stranger pays the Lake family ten shillings a week to care for his son. Ewing, *Jan of the Windmill: A Story of the Plains*, 17.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Lake family because he recognizes that neither his nor his wife's family will help him care for his son. Moreover, D'Arcy knows that if he returns home alone, unburdened by the child of a social misalliance, he will be restored to his family's favor, receive ample financial support, and essentially be able to begin life anew.²¹⁰ With these revelations in mind, D'Arcy's physical slip in the beginning of the novel may have been caused by his guilty conscience, and his internal shame for selfishly abandoning his son. The dropped purse represents D'Arcy's ultimate failure to fulfill his parental obligations to Jan. While D'Arcy eventually comes to be reunited with Jan and recognizes him as his son, he never financially provides for Jan, and, therefore, fails to fulfill his fatherly duties. For example, despite Jan's lawful right to be heir to his estate, D'Arcy refuses to give him an inheritance. Jan does not protest his disinheritance, but rather, follows in the example of his adoptive father, and chooses to support himself financially.²¹¹

The miser's purse's role as a representation of filial love and loyalty was also frequently intertwined with the purse's third literary and artistic function, namely, to prefigure courtships or marriages. James Fenimore Cooper's (1789 – 1851) first novel, *Precaution* (1820), may contain the earliest reference to a miser's purse in nineteenth-century fiction.²¹² Cooper was an American novelist, who is perhaps best known for his historical novels, such as *The Leatherstocking Tales*, a series of books published between 1823 and 1841, and *The Last of the Mohicans*, published in 1826. Both novels centered upon life on the American frontier in the eighteenth century.

In contrast to his later works, *Precaution* centers upon three British families - the Moseleys, the Jarvises, and the Chattertons – who each attempt to arrange respectable marriages for their own sons and daughters. While the other characters guide their children to suitors based on their suitors' appearances of wealth, Emily Moseley, the novel's heroine, is cautiously and wisely guided by her widowed aunt, Mrs. Wilson, to find a truly respectable husband and to make

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 236-240.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

²¹² James Fenimore Cooper, *Precaution: A Novel* (1820; repr., Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2006).

a sound Christian marriage. Emily's moral character is witnessed in her calm, temperate and level-headed behavior, which she exhibits in various situations throughout the novel.²¹³ Emily is also intensely loyal to her family, particularly her parents. This is demonstrated by her reactions to other girls' woeful romantic tales. For example, when Emily learns that her prospective suitor Colonel Egerton, a friend of the Jarvis family, finds the story of two lovers who betrayed their parents to be all together admirable, she questions his moral character and finds him, and his remarks, offensive.²¹⁴ Later in the tale, Emily's filial loyalty is underscored when she nets a purse as a gift to her father.²¹⁵ The purse embodies Emily's deep love and respect for her father. Her creation of this purse also corresponds with Victorian society's sentimentalizing of hand-crafted presents. As the editors of *Godey's Lady's Book* explained,

The affections of the heart find their exponents in the work of the fingers; there is a pleasure in working for those we love, infinitely beyond that which is felt in mere amusement. It were hard to say who experiences most delight in the work, the lady whose thoughts, and time, and labor have been devoted to the gratification of beloved friends, and the promotion of their comfort; or those friends, who, in the little gift, recognize the affection which suggested it, and cherish the hand that made it. It is always pleasant to find that we are remembered by those we love.²¹⁶

In addition to representing her filial loyalty, Emily's crafting of this miser's purse is used to create a scenario in the novel, and to prefigure her marriage later in the story. As Emily makes this purse, another suitor, her eventual husband George Denbigh, watches "her graceful movements," and inquires about her likes and dislikes.²¹⁷ In this situation, purse making serves to attract male attention. After watching and conversing with her for a bit, Denbigh eventually musters up the courage to ask Emily to dance with him later. (She accepts). It is only at this

²¹³ For example, while other characters gossip about friends and strangers, Emily remains withdrawn from the conversation and even offended by it. Cooper, *Precaution: A Novel*, 57.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

²¹⁵ Her choice to net, rather than knit or crochet, a purse coincides with society's preference for this technique in the early nineteenth century, as evidenced in the aforementioned contemporary examples. Her decision to make a purse, rather than some other fancywork article, may also suggest that the trend for giving miser's purses to family and friends was well-established by this time. *Ibid.*, 104.

²¹⁶ "Two Views of Fancy Work," *Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1856, 189.

²¹⁷ Cooper, *Precaution: A Novel*, 104.

question that Emily looks up from her work, “with some flutterings at the heart,” to look at Denbigh.²¹⁸ Her visual shift in focus – from her father’s miser’s purse to her prospective suitor – foreshadows her later marriage, and her consequential move from her father’s home and protection to her husband’s dwelling and care.

A miser’s purse also serves as a representation of familial and romantic love in Caroline Lee Hentz’s *Helen and Arthur, or, Miss Thusa’s Spinning Wheel*. Hentz was an American novelist and writer in the first half of the nineteenth century, who is most known for her book *The Planter’s Northern Bride* (1854), a pro-slavery tale written as a rebuttal to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Published in 1863, *Helen and Arthur* centers upon an elderly spinster, Miss Thusa, who helps care for the Gleason family and their children, Louis, Mittie, and Helen. Miss Thusa is locally famous for spinning luxurious thread on her wheel, and for telling frightening, cautionary moral tales to the children in her Northeastern town.²¹⁹ Throughout the tale, Helen is morally and spiritually guided by Miss Thusa, as well as the young town doctor, Arthur Hazelton. As a teenager, Helen lives at the Hazelton’s household in Parsonage, Connecticut, and helps care for and entertain Arthur’s blind younger sister, Alice.²²⁰ Among their activities, the girls spend an evening knitting miser’s purses as presents for Arthur.²²¹ Unlike Cooper, Hentz’s description of the purses’ construction and materials is quite detailed. Helen, for example, used “blue silken thread” and “silver beads” to make her purse.²²² Alice, in comparison, made an emerald green and gold purse, with a single tassel, added by Mrs. Hazelton.²²³

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

²¹⁹ Hentz, *Helen and Arthur, or, Miss Thusa’s Spinning Wheel*, 9.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 72.

²²³ As we have seen, the girls’ color choices correspond to common Victorian miser’s purse colors, particularly Alice’s use of green for a man’s purse. *Ibid.*

After giving the purses to Arthur, Alice challenges him to identify who made each purse. These purses, as seen in the other novels, are symbols of self-expression, and represent their respective crafters. Their value, again, is based not on their monetary worth, but rather, is derived from their emotional significance. Arthur confuses the purses' makers, attributing the green and gold purse to Helen, and the silver and blue purse to Alice. After being corrected by Alice, Arthur happily accepts the girls' gifts, and boasts that he is "the owner of these beautiful purses."²²⁴ His remark alludes to his possession of each girl, as the purses are extensions of them. The purses individually represent Arthur's role as caregiver and provider to his blind sister, Alice, and prefigure his marriage to Helen at the story's conclusion.

From Victorian society's perspective, Arthur's acceptance of Helen's purse was not only symbolic of their close relationship, but also part of their courtship. As stated, during the Victorian era, to give a gift to a non-familial member of the opposite sex placed certain obligations on the recipient, such as to offer, or accept an offer, of marriage.²²⁵ Perhaps to further emphasize this point to the reader, Arthur adds, "I fear it will be long...before I shall fill [the purses] with gold."²²⁶ His remark underscores his role as provider to his female dependents. Moreover, as it will be a long time before his purse is filled with money, and he is a self-sufficient man, it will also be a number of years before he is financially able to marry Helen. While, in this vignette, the crafting of a miser's purse does not serve as a way to attract male attention, it does underscore familial and romantic relationships, and foreshadows the marriage of two central characters.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

²²⁵ For additional information, please consult: Lady of New York, *Etiquette for Ladies; A Manual of the Most Approved Rules of Conduct in Polished Society for Married and Unmarried Ladies*, 42; *The Complete Hand-Book of Etiquette for Ladies & Gentlemen*, 174; and Morton, *Etiquette*, 206.

²²⁶ Hentz, *Helen and Arthur, or, Miss Thusa's Spinning Wheel*, 75.

This exchange is not unlike the presentation of a miser's purse in Horatio Alger Jr.'s (1832 – 1899) novel, *The Store Boy, or, The Fortunes of Ben Barclay* (1887).²²⁷ Alger was a prolific American author whose novels often centered upon impoverished children who rise from their stations to become respectable, successful, middle-class adults. Like many of Alger's writings, in this tale, the protagonist, Ben Barclay, leaves his hometown of Pendleton, New York, for New York City, in an attempt to earn a living and financially support his widowed mother. Upon his departure, his admirer, the wealthy Rose Gardiner, gives him a "small knit purse."²²⁸ Ben thanks her for her gift, and states that he "will value it for [her] sake."²²⁹ Before he exits, Rose adds that she "hopes [he] will fill it very soon."²³⁰ Her remark not only speaks to the intended function of the purse, but, like Hentz's *Helen and Arthur*, underscores Ben's masculine responsibility to provide for his impoverished mother, as well as his future wife and family. Also like *Helen and Arthur*, this purse exchange foreshadows Ben and Rose's marriage at the story's conclusion, after Ben has made his fortune and is, in fact, able to "afford" Rose.

The miser's purse's role as a device to prefigure marriages between fictional characters was not only used by Victorian novelists, but also by contemporary satirists, who used the purse to cast negative aspersions about female social climbers. These examples show that, within the realm of literary fiction, for a woman to make a purse to secure a marriage proposal from a romantic interest was acceptable; however, to craft a purse with the intention of "marrying up," or securing financial support, was not. The purses mentioned in the novels discussed above were given to men with no money, with the implied promise that their female crafters would wait patiently until their suitors were able to marry. As we will see, satirists negatively depicted purse-making women by making them appear anxious to marry. Thus, women who attempted to

²²⁷ Horatio Alger Jr., *The Store Boy, or, The Fortunes of Ben Barclay* (1887; repr., Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2006).

²²⁸ Alger, *The Store Boy, or, The Fortunes of Ben Barclay*, 83.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

secure for themselves a marriage proposal were wielding a double-edged sword. Based on their perceived intent, they would either be exalted as noble or defamed as connivers.

Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870), perhaps the most renowned English Victorian novelist of the period, satirized the practice of purse making to the latter effect in *Sketches by Boz*, a compilation of short stories published in 1839.²³¹ Dickens' works all have an underlying theme of social reform, and the passages in *Sketches by Boz* are largely caricatures of people and events that serve as contemporary social commentaries. In the tale, "Horatio Sparkins," Dickens mocked middle-class people who endeavored to "marry up," and cautioned his readers to not judge others based solely on appearances – lest they will marry someone who is actually poor!²³² The story opens with the bourgeois Maldertons discussing a certain Horatio Sparkins, who they believe is an aristocrat that is interested in marrying their eldest daughter, Teresa. Marianne, Teresa's younger sister, discusses this prospective suitor with her father and mother with "Juliet-like sighs," as she is "engaged in netting a purse, and endeavoring to look sentimental."²³³ Her behavior suggests that she is making a purse for her own love interest, and, although clearly satirical, it corresponds to one of the purses' literary functions, specifically, to be an expression of romantic feelings during courtship. Marianne's behavior, though, is not sincere, and she appears to be putting on airs by attempting to behave like a seriously sentimental lady, such as *Precaution's* well-bred Emily Moseley. In a surprising twist, Teresa and Horatio do not marry. During a trip to their local fabric shop, the Maldertons discover that Horatio Sparkins is really Samuel Smith, the shop owner's assistant.²³⁴ Dicken's concludes his story by noting that, years

²³¹ Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz*, ed. Dennis Walder (1839; repr., London: Penguin Classics, 1995).

²³² Dickens, "Horatio Sparkins," in *Sketches by Boz*, 409- 426.

²³³ Marianne's technique coincides with the popular purse construction method for the period. *Ibid.*, 409.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 425.

later, “the Miss Maldertons are still unmated...[and] have the same predilection for aristocratic personages, with an increased aversion to all things low.”²³⁵

The romantic use of miser’s purses was also satirized by the English novelist, William Makepeace Thackeray, in his mid-century novel set ca. 1815, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero*. Thackeray wrote several parodies of England’s aristocracy, and *Vanity Fair* perhaps best represents his satirical works. The novel begins with its central character, the orphaned Rebecca (“Becky”) Sharp, going to stay with her schoolmate, Amelia Sedley, after both girls graduate from finishing school. Shortly before joining the Sedley household, Becky decides to go “husband hunting,” knowing that, to live the affluent lifestyle she dreams of, she will need a wealthy mate.²³⁶ While staying with the Sedleys, Becky meets Amelia’s older brother, Joseph, who is rich, unmarried, and vain enough to think that her calculated seduction of him is really an expression of authentic romantic feeling.²³⁷ After one dinner with the Sedley family, Becky and Jos, as he is commonly called, are left alone “at the drawing-room table, where [Becky] was occupied in knitting a green silk purse.”²³⁸ Green purses, of course, were common gifts for men. As Jos “talked on, he grew quite bold, and actually had the audacity to ask Miss Rebecca for whom she was knitting the green silk purse.”²³⁹ Jos’ “audacity” relates to the purse’s intended function, namely, to serve as a gift for her unnamed love interest. Jos’ breach of etiquette suggests that the gifting of a miser’s purse to one’s fiancé was well-established by the mid-nineteenth century. Becky cunningly replies, “For any one who wants a purse...looking at him in the most gentle-winning way.”²⁴⁰ While her “gentle-winning” expression suggests that the purse

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 426.

²³⁶ Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero*, 22.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

is for him, her language indicates her true goal – to find *any* wealthy man to marry, and not specifically, Joseph Sedley.

The next day, Jos again encounters Becky with her green purse as she works on it in the drawing-room. To further lure Jos, she asks him to help her finish the purse. This, as the story later reveals, is simply an invitation for Jos to keep staring at her as she continues to craft her purse. As Thackeray describes, “Mr. Sedley...was actually seated *tête-à-tête* with the young lady, looking at her with a most killing expression; his arms stretched out before her in an imploring attitude, and his hands bound in a web of green silk, which she was unwinding.”²⁴¹ While she uses the silk threads to physically bind Joseph to her, the green silk also represents Becky’s attempt to entrap Joseph as her husband. Moreover, this passage is yet another instance where the crafting of a miser’s purse serves as a way to attract and hold male attention. Interestingly, etiquette guides from the period warned men not to be fooled by this kind of behavior. The author of *The Complete Hand-Book of Etiquette for Ladies & Gentlemen* wrote, “Women take advantage of every opportunity they can to convert an acquaintance into an ‘admirer,’ and they so often go beyond what is fair and true that it is necessary...to exercise a good deal of care.”²⁴²

Unfortunately for Becky, she does not successfully woo Jos into marrying her. (Her plans are thwarted by Amelia’s suitor, George Osborne, who feels that the orphaned Becky is of too low birth to be married to Jos.)²⁴³ The outcome of the green silk purse remains unknown to the reader after the conclusion of this vignette. Interestingly, another miser’s purse is mentioned in the context of a courtship later in the novel. When asking his wealthy father for spending money, George Osborne holds up his near-empty purse, which was “a little token [that] had been

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁴² *The Complete Hand-Book of Etiquette for Ladies & Gentlemen*, 174.

²⁴³ Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero*, 65.

netted by Amelia.”²⁴⁴ This exchange does indeed prefigure Amelia and George’s eventual marriage, though, unlike the other authors, Thackeray describes their union as less than blissful. After the Sedleys lose their fortune, the Osbornes forbid George from marrying Amelia. When the two do wed, George is disowned by his father. Unaccustomed to living on a budget, George is terribly irresponsible with the little money he makes as a soldier in the British army, and often gambles away his earnings. Without his father’s financial help, George is unable to properly support Amelia, and must often borrow money from his long-time friend, Major William Dobbin, to make ends meet. When George dies in battle midway through the novel, Amelia is left to live in poverty with her then newborn son, Georgy. In this twist on the purse’s literary role, the empty miser’s purse foreshadows George’s failure as a husband, as he does not care for Amelia financially during their marriage, and thus, does not fulfill his marital responsibilities.

While Amelia’s purse did not bring her the marital bliss she longed for, Becky’s green purse – which remains in play throughout most of the novel – does eventually get her what she wants – a wealthy husband. Becky’s green silk purse is mentioned again, later in the novel, when Becky encounters Jos while both are stationed in Brussels with the British army.²⁴⁵ Becky is accompanying her husband, Rawdon Crawley, an aristocratic cavalry officer. Jos is now in charge of the Sedley household, as Mr. Sedley has since died. Although she is married, Rebecca again tries to entice Jos, in an attempt to get protection from him while her husband is away. During her seduction, Jos remembers the “green purse which she had knitted for him.”²⁴⁶ As Jos begins to fall for her once more, his valet, Monsignor Isidor, enters. Since Becky is married, Jos is obligated to restrain his love for her in front of his valet.²⁴⁷ Moreover, as Agnes H. Morton, a contemporary etiquette guide author reflected, Becky’s behavior has to go unrecognized by Jos

²⁴⁴ Amelia’s choice to net a purse also coincides with the preferred purse technique in the late nineteenth-teens, when Thackeray’s story commences. *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 349.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 351.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.

because it was entirely inappropriate. Morton lamented that, “A *married flirt* [was] worse than vulgar.”²⁴⁸ Shortly after Monsignor Isidor’s entrance, Becky concludes that Jos cannot fulfill her immediate needs, and that Jos’ servant has prevented her from fully ensnaring his master. Thus, she takes her leave from the Sedley household once more, but, as we will see later, does not stop trying to “bind” Jos to her.

Becky again captures male notice with a purse later in the tale, after the failure of her marriage to Rawdon Crawley. While gambling at a ball held in honor of a royal marriage, a masked Becky encounters Georgy Osborne, Amelia’s son and Jos’ nephew, and encourages him to place bets for her after removing a purse from inside her bosom and retrieving a gold coin – “the only coin there” – from it.²⁴⁹ The empty purse, in this case, represents Becky’s complete loss of virtue, as she is attempting to corrupt a child. This extremely provocative gesture does entice the young Georgy to gamble; however, before he can lose any of his own money, Georgy is retrieved by Major Dobbin and his uncle Jos. While Dobbin and Georgy leave, Jos remains behind to gamble. After flirting with Jos for a bit, Becky un masks herself to him, and laments her bad fortune, which, she claims, is no fault of her own. Perhaps in fulfillment of the purse’s literary function, Becky does manage to “bind” Jos to her after this encounter. Becky convinces Jos that, despite having acted dubiously for her entire adult life, she is truly a good, virtuous woman.²⁵⁰ Without any family or friends around to prevent him from doing otherwise, Jos becomes enamored of Becky yet again. Jos eventually brings Becky to live with him in India, where he is stationed with the British army. Ever the opportunist, Becky swindles Jos of his money, and after Jos “mysteriously” dies, becomes joint heir to his estate with Amelia.²⁵¹ The

²⁴⁸ Agnes H. Morton, *Etiquette: An Answer to the Riddle When? Where? How?* (Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, 1899), 201.

²⁴⁹ Here again, we see a purse being used by an author to help a female figure capture the attention of male characters. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero*, 746.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 770.

²⁵¹ Thackeray alludes that Rebecca poisoned Joseph. *Ibid.*, 809.

novel concludes with Rebecca attempting to improve her station and her reputation in society by acting piously, attending mass, and “always having stalls at Fancy Fairs for the benefit of...hapless beings.”²⁵²

Thackeray’s sarcastic remark about fancy fairs relates to larger society’s criticisms of this method of fundraising and the women who frequented these fairs. These criticisms, as we will see, were reflected in contemporary artworks, and directly relate to the role of the miser’s purse as a foreshadower of marriage in literature and paintings. Although contemporary women’s publications, particularly of the mid-century, favored this method of fundraising, many writings by and for men criticized fancy fairs and the women who hosted them. Gary R. Dyer reflects in “The ‘Vanity Fair’ of Nineteenth-Century England: Commerce, Women, and the East in the Ladies’ Bazaar,” that “bazaars...became integrated with misogynistic notions of feminine corruption and duplicity, the discursive tradition surrounding them implies that lust, greed, and deceit are women’s essence.”²⁵³ Contemporary criticisms appear to evidence Dyer’s claim. The artist Richard Doyle, with the engravers, the Brothers Dalziel, reflected these notions in their satirical cartoon, *Birds Eye Views of Society*, published 1864. Doyle wrote,

The bazaar is held in a large marquee, which is furnished by stalls gaily decked out with ribbons, wreaths, and flags, and covered with merchandise; and numberless young ladies preside at the stalls, dressed in the height of fashion, and never cease to attract public attention to the goods with the most winning, coaxing, insinuating and if one may be allowed the expression, wheedling ways.²⁵⁴

These “fair” women’s overt seduction of the public speaks to the major criticism of women’s charity bazaars, namely, that by selling fancywork commodities, women were actually selling themselves. Indeed, contemporary critics of these fairs often noted how participating women dressed to coordinate with their stall and wares, which made them appear as yet another good

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 811.

²⁵³ Gary R. Dyer, “The ‘Vanity Fair’ of Nineteenth-Century England: Commerce, Women, and the East in the Ladies’ Bazaar,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46, no. 2 (September 1991): 197.

²⁵⁴ Edward Dalziel, George Dalziel, and Richard Doyle, *Bird's Eye Views of Society* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1864), 18, quoted in Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette, and the Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), 57.

available for purchase. This accusation, of course, had the underlying connotation of prostitution, and was also cited in arguments against women working in newly established department stores.²⁵⁵

While these criticisms may seem harsh to a modern audience, they were not severe to the Victorians. As explained earlier, the Victorians had rigid sexual codes, which, Jan Marsh notes, “were governed by religious and social moralism,” and were often formalized in contemporary etiquette guides.²⁵⁶ Broadly speaking, women’s sexual codes coincided with their roles as society’s spiritual and moral paragons, and women were encouraged to be chaste and pure, and to be sincere in all their thoughts and actions. As one author wrote, “Women must be pure, that is, they must possess that virtue which wins laurels in the face of temptation; which is backed by a mighty force of moral principle; which frowns on evil with rebuking authority; which claims as its right such purity in its associations...It is the purity every young woman should possess.”²⁵⁷ Women were encouraged to have a “complete knowledge of the laws of etiquette,” so to “preserve [their] own dignity in mingling with the world,” and many guide authors provided specific instructions to guide women in the public arena.²⁵⁸ These rules clearly articulated how women were to behave when being courted and in situations of male/female interaction. Agnes H. Morton, for example, stated that flirting was “a plebian diversion,” and that a “well-bred woman will resent as an insult to her womanhood any quasi-sentimental overtures *from a man who has not the right to make them.*”²⁵⁹ Young women were also instructed not to “pride themselves upon the conquests which they make,” as, by leading men on, they “sacrifice the

²⁵⁵ Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 86, 192-197.

²⁵⁶ Jan Marsh, “Votes for Women and Chastity for Men: Gender, Health, Medicine and Sexuality,” in *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*, ed. John M. Mackenzie (London : V&A Publications, 2001), 97.

²⁵⁷ An American, *Ladies and Gentlemen’s American Etiquette. With the Rules of Polite Society; to which is added Hints on Dress, Courtship, etc.* (Boston: G. W. Cothell, Publisher, 1850s), 178.

²⁵⁸ Lady of New York, *Etiquette for Ladies; A Manual of the Most Approved Rules of Conduct in Polished Society for Married and Unmarried Ladies*, preface.

²⁵⁹ Morton, *Etiquette: An Answer to the Riddle When? Where? How?*, 201.

happiness of an estimable person to their reprehensible vanity.”²⁶⁰ Additionally, and perhaps most importantly in light of the aforementioned criticism of “fair” ladies, women were told that, “attracting the attention of gentlemen is not the proper *role* for a lady to play; and an acquaintance formed in such a way, is not the thing.”²⁶¹ The author’s emphasis on the word “role” alludes to women acting in an unbecoming way. Much like courtesans who worked professionally to attract the attention of men, it could have been said that young women were acting like prostitutes by attempting to capture men’s notice.

In addition to expressing concern over women’s “immoral” behavior at fairs, male critics also claimed that the goal of these fairs was merely not to fundraise for charitable causes, but to aide socially aspirant young women in their search for respectable husbands. Charles Dickens wrote in *Sketches by Boz* that,

Aspiring young ladies, who read flaming accounts of some ‘fancy fair in high life,’ suddenly grow desperately charitable; visions of admiration and matrimony float before their eyes; some wonderfully meritorious institution, which, by the strangest accident in the world, has never been heard of before, is discovered to be in a languishing condition...and the aforesaid young ladies, from mere charity, exhibit themselves for three days, from twelve to four, for the small charge of one shilling per head!²⁶²

While these examples are certainly of evidence the negative opinion some Victorian men had of fancy fair saleswomen, the painting, *At the Bazaar, or, The Empty Purse* (ca. 1857), by the British genre painter James Collinson (1825 – 1881), vividly visualizes their criticisms (fig. 77). This painting, currently in the collection of the Tate Britain, is a replica of Collinson’s original painting, *For Sale*. In *The Empty Purse*, a well-dressed young woman stands in front of a stall at a fancy fair holding a miser’s purse in her hand. Her blue, red, and purple outfit coordinates with

²⁶⁰ *Etiquette, Social Ethics, and the Courtesies of Society* (London: Wm. S. Orr & Co.; Dublin: J. McGlashan, 1854), 30-31.

²⁶¹ Albert Cogswell, *Perfect Etiquette; or, How to Behave in Society. A Complete Manual for Ladies and Gentlemen, Embracing Hints on Introduction, Salutation, Conversation, Friendly Visits, Social Parties, On the Street, In Public Places, In Traveling, Driving and Riding, Letter Writing, At the Table, Making and Receiving Presents, Courtship, Wedding Etiquette, Christening, Funerals, Etc. With Suggestions How to Dress Tastefully* (New York: Albert Cogswell, Publisher, 1877), 34.

²⁶² Charles Dickens, “London Recreations,” in *Sketches by Boz*, 117.

her red stall, which is filled with an assortment of ornamental articles, including a hat with a red bow that matches the one at the base of her neck, and a vivarium with a blossoming white flower.²⁶³ Vivariums, known to the Victorians as ferneries, were used to grow plants and observe them under natural conditions indoors.²⁶⁴ This flower appears to be a metaphor for the young woman herself as, like the flower, she is being prematurely forced into bloom. Moreover, the vivarium may be likened to the fair itself, as both the object and the venue allow their audiences the opportunity to closely inspect their respective “flowers”.

The young woman’s brazen stare and elaborate attire have led some scholars to assume that she is a prostitute; however, in light of the aforementioned contemporary references to fancy fairs, it is likely that she is a middle-class woman.²⁶⁵ Additionally, Anne Buck cited this painting in *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, where she discussed the young woman’s attire as being particularly fashionable for the period, and not sexually suggestive.²⁶⁶ Collinson may have depicted his subject this way to reflect contemporary women’s fashion for and behavior at these events, or perhaps to show the way “fair” ladies were perceived to behave by critical male attendees. Regardless of Collinson’s reasons for portraying this young woman in such a manner,

²⁶³ In 1829, Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward invented the first portable glass case to transport plants. This “prototype was used throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century for further development of plant protectors.” These vivariums, also known as terrariums or ferneries, were “fabricated in various forms, sizes, and degrees of sophistication for use, from the garden to the parlor.” James R. Buckler and Kathryn Meehan, *Victorian Gardens: A Horticultural Extravaganza*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), 1-2.

²⁶⁴ Wordnet Search 3.0, “Wordnet Search – 3.0,” Princeton University, <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=vivarium> (accessed June 11, 2009).

²⁶⁵ The Tate Britain’s staff has argued that, “the showiness of the woman looking brazenly at the viewer suggests that she works as a prostitute.” Tate Britain, “The Empty Purse (replica of ‘For Sale’) by James Collinson,” Tate Collection, <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=2526&searchid=14373&tabview=work> (accessed June 11, 2009).

²⁶⁶ Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 43.

her behavior would have been considered inappropriate to a Victorian audience, who, as stated, believed that “attracting the attention of gentlemen [was] not the proper *role* for a lady to play.”²⁶⁷

The style of the young woman’s red and silver beaded miser’s purse is similar to purse designs from the period, as seen in its colors, which were used for contemporary purses (fig. 78), and by its differently finished ends (one rounded with a tassel and one squared with fringe). Contrary to the painting’s title – “The Empty Purse” – the purse’s rounded end appears full, as if it has been stuffed with coin money. The painting’s name, and its original title, *For Sale*, may be a moral criticism of her behavior, as she appears to be selling herself to the fair’s male attendants, and, therefore, morally and spiritually void. Collinson’s painting underscores the delicate balance between the virtue of making a good match versus the sin of attempting to “marry up,” as represented in the aforementioned works of literature and social commentaries.

While she holds the miser’s purse in her left hand, the young woman holds one of the purse’s rings in her gloved right hand. She grasps the ring as if she is going to place it on her finger, perhaps to a recall wedding ring and to allude to her hopes for a marriage proposal. The historical and symbolic significance of rings was a common subject at mid-century, as evidenced in contemporary magazine articles. *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, for example, featured half-a-dozen articles on the significance of rings in a three year span (1853 – 1856), around the time Collinson created this painting.²⁶⁸ *Godey’s* articles primarily focused on the historical uses of rings, but many also noted that, “elements of moral feeling are blended with the history of rings, and...from the earliest ages, religion, power, fear, hope, love, friendship, have made these mystic circles their

²⁶⁷ Cogswell, *Perfect Etiquette; or, How to Behave in Society. A Complete Manual for Ladies and Gentlemen, Embracing Hints on Introduction, Salutation, Conversation, Friendly Visits, Social Parties, On the Street, In Public Places, In Traveling, Driving and Riding, Letter Writing, At the Table, Making and Receiving Presents, Courtship, Wedding Etiquette, Christening, Funerals, Etc. With Suggestions How to Dress Tastefully*, 34.

²⁶⁸ These articles include: B.R. Haydon, “Finger-Rings,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1856, 11-12; B.R. Haydon, “Finger-Rings,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, February 1856, 107-110; B.R. Haydon, “Finger-Rings,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, March 1856, 203-206.

interpreters.”²⁶⁹ Discussions of wedding rings primarily centered upon this particular ring’s historical development; however, there were also romanticized accounts of specific types of wedding rings, such as the double-looped gimmel ring (fig. 79). On their use, one writer recounted, “the lover, putting his finger through one of the loops, his mistress through the other, were symbolically yoked together.”²⁷⁰ The symbolism of rings was likely a topic familiar to the painting’s mid-nineteenth-century audience, who may have understood the romantic undertones to this young woman’s gesture. Additionally, the removal of this ring from its purse may have had sexual connotations. The absent ring has left the purse’s slit exposed, making a subtle reference to female genitalia. As Perrot argued in *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, Victorian prudery concealed a societal obsession with sex, which was evidenced in their need to cover all exposed parts of the body and home.²⁷¹ (Perrot cites the trend of clothing “piano legs in pantaloons” as an example).²⁷² In sum, her general handling of the purse seems to suggest that her virtue is for sale to the highest bidder.

As we have seen, purse-making – as well as the physical miser’s purse– served specific artistic and literary roles in the Victorian era, and reflected contemporary moral codes, represented filial love and loyalty, and prefigured marriages between characters. These artistic adaptations derived from the purse’s personal function and design, and coincided with the purse’s social role as a sentimental gift and saleable commodity.

²⁶⁹ Mrs. White, “A Chapter on Rings,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, January 1853, 54-57

²⁷⁰ “The Wedding-Ring,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, October 1853, 321-322.

²⁷¹ Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 12.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

V. CONCLUSION

By the 1920s, the miser's purse, a once common dress accessory, had faded from popular culture. While the purse had served as a utilitarian and, at times, a fashionable item for almost three centuries, certain factors particular to the early twentieth century discouraged people from continuing to craft and use this accessory. First among them was societal shift in preference from coin to paper money in the early twentieth century. While paper money had existed in the United States since the Colonial era, in 1900, the United States government passed the Gold Standard Act, which ended bimetallism.²⁷³ The act "declared the gold dollar to be the monetary standard of the country and prescribed a reserve of \$150 million in the treasury for the redemption of paper money."²⁷⁴ With the passing of this act, paper money became preferable to gold and silver coin money, and the miser's purse, which was used exclusively to hold coinage, likewise became an outdated accessory to the billfold wallet.²⁷⁵

Secondly, the decline of the miser's purse in twentieth-century culture coincided with an overall decline in the creation of fancywork items, and a societal shift away from the ideologies of the cult of domesticity. This shift began in the late nineteenth century, when contemporary critics began to question these then prevalent ideas. Josephine E. Butler, editor of *Woman's Work*

²⁷³ Bimetallism is a monetary standard based upon the use of two metals, typically gold and silver, rather than one. In the nineteenth century, the "bimetallic system defined a nation's monetary unit by law in terms of fixed quantities of gold and silver (thus, automatically establishing a rate of exchange between the two metals). The system also provided a free and unlimited market for the two metals, imposed no restrictions on the use and coinage of either metal, and made all other money in circulation redeemable in either gold or silver. A major problem in the international use of bimetallism was that, with each nation independently setting its own rate of exchange between the two metals, the resulting rates often differed widely from country to country." Encyclopedia Britannica Online, "Bimetallism (monetary system)," Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/65494/bimetallism> (accessed July 12, 2009).

²⁷⁴ Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1960*, 119.

²⁷⁵ As stated, gold dollars were not produced in the United States after 1889, and silver dollars were not minted from 1905 to 1920. Please see footnote 151 for additional information on the minting of gold and silver dollars in the United States.

& Culture: A Series of Essays, reflected that, with society instructing women to remain at home, “their happiness [was always] to be dependent on a man.”²⁷⁶ These early feminists promoted educational reform, where girls would learn the liberal arts, rather than simply needlework skills, and encouraged young women to seek professional employment, and become autonomous. By 1924, when the miser’s purse had essentially disappeared from popular culture, American women had made great strides towards independence, working outside of their domestic spheres, and earning the right to vote. As they became self-sufficient and independent of men, women no longer needed to learn domestic skills that would make them suitable for marriage as “good wives and mothers”.

It should be noted that these feminist sentiments were not only promoted by a few reformers; indeed, these arguments were adopted by women’s magazines writers as well. Many writers argued the case for the “New Woman,” an independent and socially-useful female, “who demanded freedom from control and convention, and the same civil and social rights as men,” during the last years of the nineteenth century.²⁷⁷ *Godey’s Magazine’s* writers, for examples, documented the rise of “New” women to important professional positions during this period.²⁷⁸ Concurrently, the magazine discouraged women from engaging in fancywork. While once valued for its sentimental undertones, fancywork, they contended, was a useless activity. N. H. Snyder, author of “Woman’s Dainty Fingers,” wrote that, “Would it be too strong a statement to say that most of the fancy work which overcrowds my lady’s parlor and boudoir only represents so much wasted energy?... It does not seem right that women of wealth and leisure should spend their idle

²⁷⁶ Josephine E. Butler, “Introduction,” in *Woman’s Work and Woman’s Culture: A Series of Essays*, xxix.

²⁷⁷ Marsh, “Votes for Women and Chastity for Men: Gender, Health, Medicine and Sexuality,” 106.

²⁷⁸ E. Leslie Gilliams, “The Association for the Advancement of Women,” *Godey’s Magazine*, January 1896, 3-5; Joseph Dana Miller, “The New Woman in Office,” *Godey’s Magazine*, January 1896, 59-67.

moments in making marvelous creations of lace and ribbon.”²⁷⁹ Snyder added that only “women who are forced to earn their daily bread by doing needlework” should engage in the activity.²⁸⁰

Thus, with these societal shifts, the miser’s purse became an emblem of a bygone era, a representation of Victorian society and its particular views on men, women, and relationships between the sexes.

* * *

In this paper, I set out to explore the personal, social, literary and artistic functions of the Victorian miser’s purse by examining a diverse array of contemporary cultural media. Among these sources were etiquette and fancywork guides, women’s magazines, novels, and paintings. By this approach, I have dispelled long-held misconceptions about the miser’s purse. Additionally, I have clearly characterized and defined this previously ambiguous Victorian accessory by explaining how it is separate and distinct from other contemporary purses and bags, and by articulating its specific personal functions.

By following the examples of earlier costume historians, who studied the social and symbolic significance of gloves and handkerchiefs, I have explained the miser’s purse’s specific roles in contemporary works of art and literature. Not only was the miser’s purse emblematic of the Victorian era and its domestic ideologies, but it also embodied the culture’s gift-giving modes. Moreover, I have shown how the purses’ social functions were adapted by Victorian writers and artists into the works they produced. Both the crafting and giving of purses functioned as important literary and artistic devices, often to teach a moral lesson, to help young women to capture the attention of male suitors, to serve as a representation of filial love, or to foreshadow marriages between literary characters. The purse’s literary functions were also mocked by satirists from the period, who were critical of the purse’s highly sentimental undertones and wary of fortune-seeking women.

²⁷⁹ N. H. Snyder, “Woman’s Dainty Fingers,” *Godey’s Magazine*, January 1895, 112.

²⁸⁰ N. H. Snyder, “Woman’s Dainty Fingers,” *Godey’s Magazine*, January 1895, 112.

This exploration of contemporary cultural sources has also served to contextualize extant miser's purses from six major museum collections, and accurately attribute select purses from these collections to particular periods and styles, often by comparing them to surviving Victorian purse patterns.

Ultimately, this exercise has shown that the miser's purse was indeed an object deeply embedded in nineteenth-century popular culture, and, perhaps more importantly, how the making, giving, receiving, sale, and use of the miser's purse was emblematic of the Victorian era.

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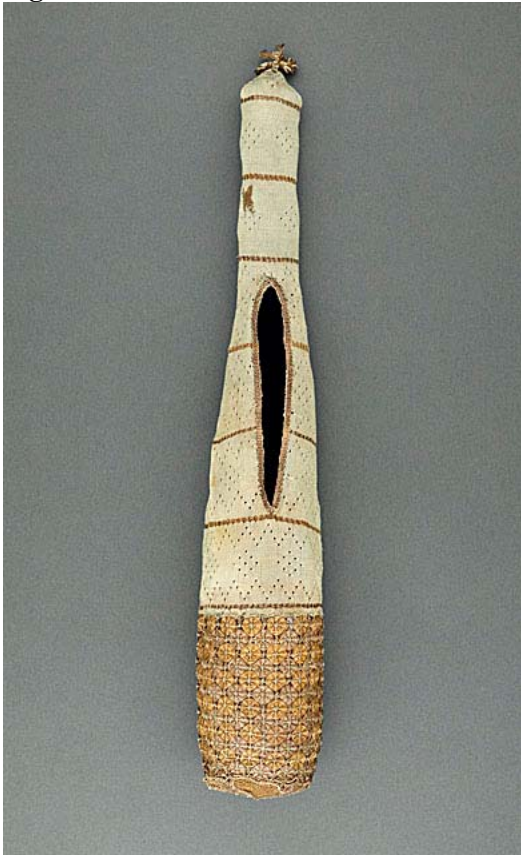
Illustrations

Figure 1



Purse, ca. 1880, American or French.
Silk, metal; Length: 31.8 cm.
Author's collection.

Figure 2



Purse, ca. 1620, Italian.
Knit silk, metallic thread; Length: 40.6 cm.
M.88.52
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

Figure 3



Purse, eighteenth century, Italian or Spanish.

No medium available; Length: 50.5 cm.

1931-40-54

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 4

Purse, late eighteenth century, European.
Silk; Length: 16.8 cm.
43.2417
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 5

Purse, 1800 – 1820, British.
Crocheted silk with carved wooden tassels and sliders; Length: 27 cm.
T.1325-1913
Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 6

Purse, probably early nineteenth century, European.

No medium or dimensions available.

C.I.38.23.130

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 7

Dress, ca. 1804, French.
Cotton; Length: 236.2 cm.
C.I.19.181.1
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 8

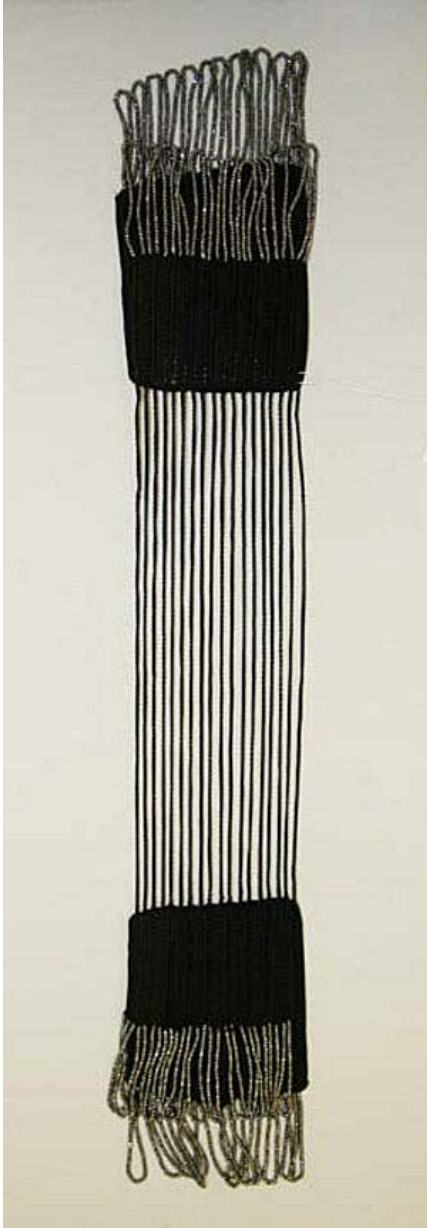
(Right) Dress, 1804 – 1810, American.
No medium or dimensions available.
C.I.59.35.1
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 9



Reprinted from Modes de Paris, *Petit Courrier des Dames: Journal des Modes*, December 10, 1832, plate 937.

Courtesy of Gimbel Library, Parsons, the New School for Design, New York.

Figure 10

String purse, early twentieth century, American
Silk, metal; Length: 45.7 cm.

1975.225.1

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

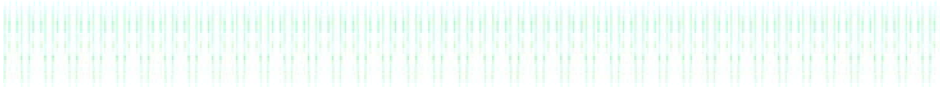
Figure 11

String purse, ca. 1875, American.

No medium available; Length: 19.1 cm.

79.223.8.

Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York.

Figure 12

Purse, early nineteenth century, French.

Silk, gilt metal beads and rings; Length: 22.7 cm.

41.871

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 13

Purse, possibly ca. 1860, American.
Silk; Length: 25.4 cm.
C.I.50.10.4
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

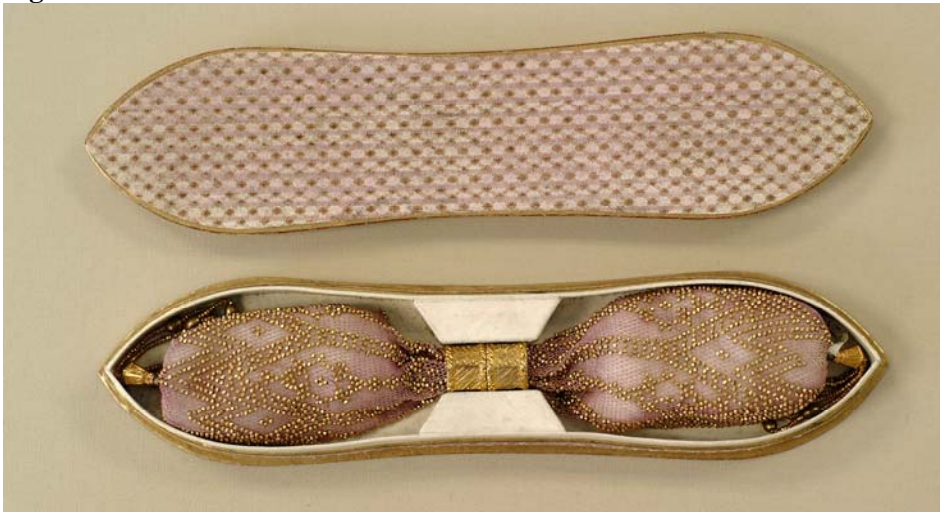
Figure 14

Purse, attributed first quarter of nineteenth century; probably second half of the nineteenth century, American.

Cashmere, satin embroidery, celluloid tassels and rings; No dimensions available.

BM65.184.43

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 15

Purse, attributed early nineteenth century, American or European.

Silk, gilt metal; Length: 29 cm.

1953-106-91-a/b

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 16

Purse, attributed second quarter of the nineteenth century; probably third quarter of the nineteenth century, American.

Velvet, cut steel embroidery; No dimensions available.

BM65.184.44

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 17

Purse, third quarter of the nineteenth century, American.

Silver metal; No dimensions available.

BM57.146.20

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 18

Reprinted from *The Work Table*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1848, 65.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

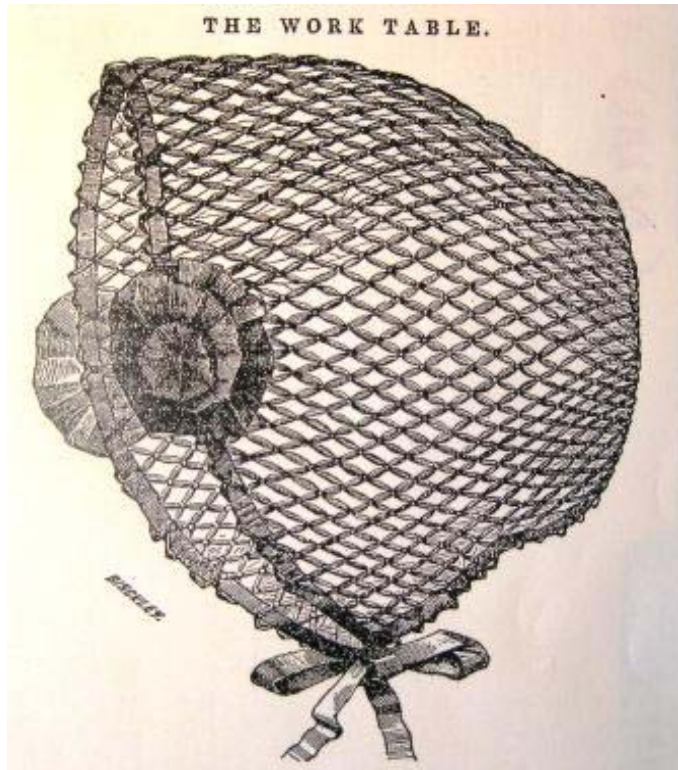
Figure 19

Purse, attributed 1810 – 1830; probably ca. 1840, American or European.
Netted silk; Length: 21 cm.

1953-106-70

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

Figure 20



Reprinted from The Work Table, *Peterson's Magazine*, November 1849, 183.

Courtesy of Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 21

Reprinted from "Articles for Presents or Fancy Fairs," *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1860, 70.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 22

Reprinted from Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, October 1863, 304.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 23



Purse, possibly ca. 1863, probably American.
Silk; No dimensions available.
C.I.46.50
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 24

Reprinted from "Crocheted purse, in colored silks," *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1858, 202.

Courtesy of Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

Figure 25

Reprinted from Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, August 1877, 162.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 26

Purse, attributed 1840 – 1860; possibly ca. 1877, American.
Silk, metal; No dimensions available.
BM32.480.17
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 27

Reprinted from Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1879, 461.

Courtesy of Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

Figure 28

Purse, ca. 1850, attributed American or French; probably American.
No medium available; Length: 32.4 cm.

U.166

Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York.

Figure 29

Purse, 1840 – 1860, American.

Silk, metal; No dimensions available.

BM65.184.41

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

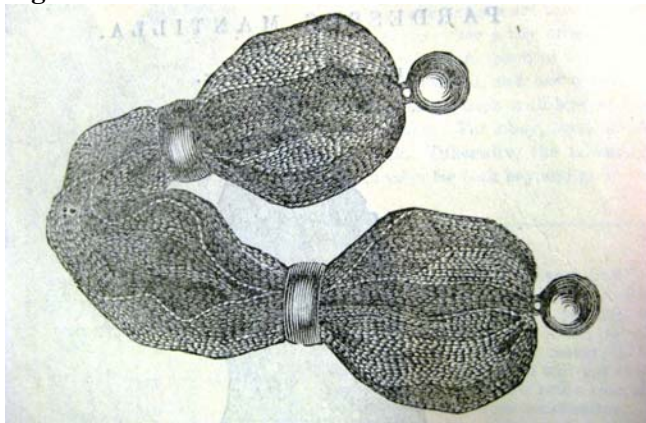
Figure 30

Purse, attributed 1840 – 1860; probably ca. 1856 – 1870, American.
 Silk, metal; No dimensions available.
 BM59.155.8
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 31

Reprinted from Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Henry II Purse," *Peterson's Magazine*, October 1878, 295.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution,
 New York.

Figure 32

Reprinted from Mrs. Jane Weaver, "Henry III Purse," *Peterson's Magazine*, January 1879, 80.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 33

Purse, probably 1870 – 1880, American.

No medium or no dimensions available.

C.I.38.49.7

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 34

Purse, attributed early nineteenth century, American or European.

Silk, metal beads; Length: 21.5 cm.

1953-106-102

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 35

Purse, early nineteenth century, French.

Silk, gilt metal beads, enameled and gilt metal rings and tassels; Length: 18.3 cm.

41.865

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 36



Purse, nineteenth century, American.

Silk, beads; Length: 44 cm.

1931-17-1

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 37



Purse, attributed 1810 – 1830; probably ca. 1840, American or European.

Silk, metal beads; Length: 24.5 cm.

1953-106-36

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 38



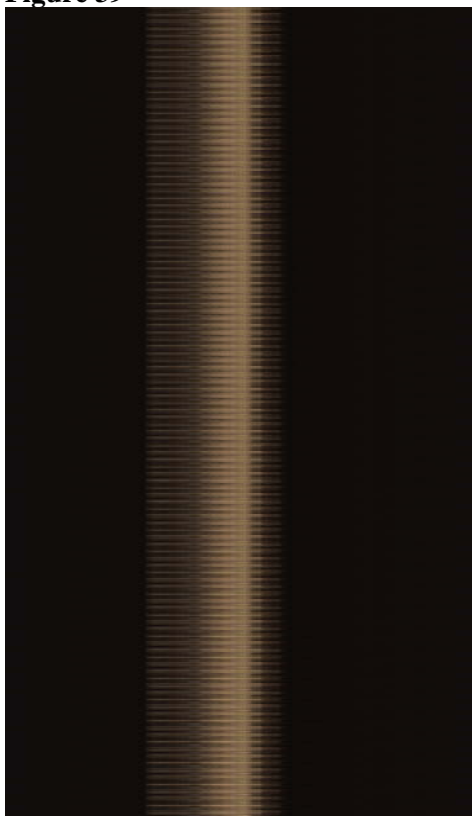
Purse, early nineteenth century, American or European.

Silk, metal; Length: 20.5 cm.

1951-106-67

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 39

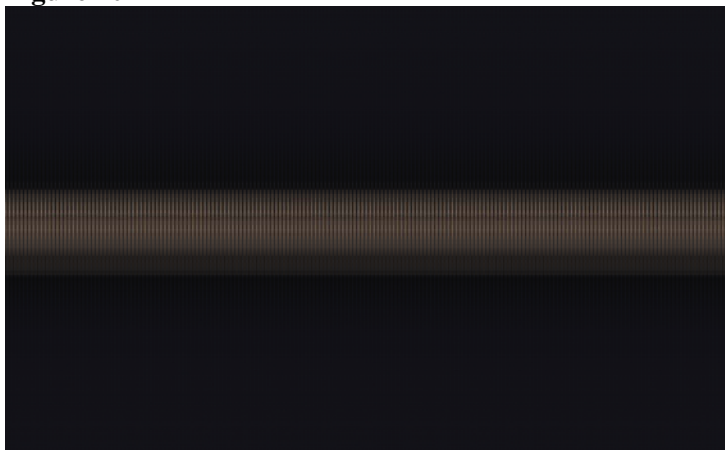


Purse, 1830 – 1880, French or Italian.

Silk, gilt metal beads; Length: 30.5 cm.

41.878

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 40

Purse, early nineteenth century, French.
Silk, gilt metal; Length: 19.3 cm.
41.876
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 41

Purse, 1810 – 1830, European.
Silk, metal; Length: 23 cm.
1953-106-57
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 42



Purse, 1840 – 1870, American or European.

Gold-wrapped silk, metal; Length: 26 cm.

1953-106-82

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 43



(Left) Purse, 1840 – 1880, British.

Silk, steel beads. No dimensions available.

T.1395-1913

Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 44

Purse, 1810 – 1840, French.

Silk, gilt metal beads; Length: 23 cm.

1953-106-94

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 45

Purse, early nineteenth century, American or European.

Silk, metal; Length: 11.5 cm.

1951-106-66

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 46

Purse, 1915 – 1920, American.

Silk; Length: 47 cm.

82.199.14

Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York.

Figure 47

Purse, 1890 – 1910, American.

Silk, marcasite beads; Length: 32 cm.

1957-180-19

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 48

Reprinted from Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, December 1864, 537.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 49

Reticule, ca. 1863, American.
Silk; Length at center: 64.8 cm.
1983.286a-c
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 50

Reticule, 1810 – 1830, probably German.
Silk, glass; Length: 26 cm.
1980.445.13
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

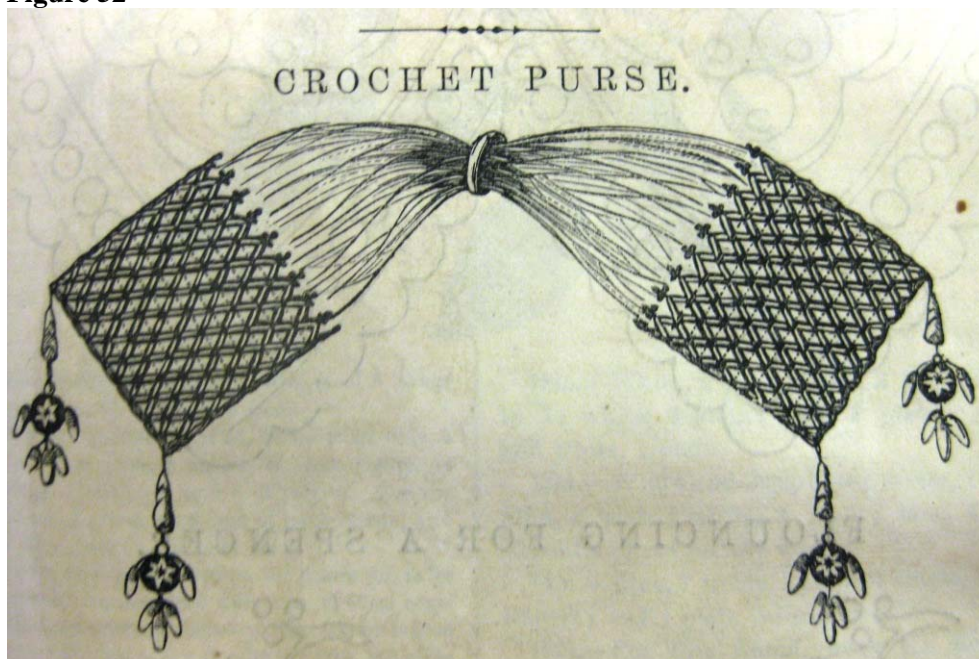
Figure 51



Reprinted from Modes de Paris, *Petit Courrier des Dames*, October 10, 1827, plate no. 504.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

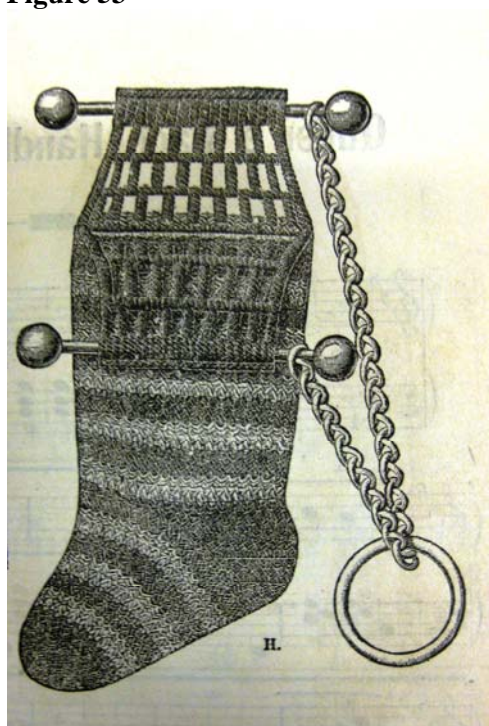
Figure 52



Reprinted from "Crochet purse," *Godey's Lady's Book*, May 1856, 455.

Courtesy of Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

Figure 53



Reprinted from Work Department, *Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1885, 233.

Courtesy of Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

Figure 54

Pence-jug, 1830 – 1860, American or European.
Silk, copper beads; Length: 10 cm.

1925-2-343

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 55



Modes de Paris, *Petit Courrier des Dames: Journal des Modes*, volume unknown, plate 724.

Courtesy of Judy M. Johnson, ed., *French Fashion Plates of the Romantic Era in Full Color* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1991), 12.

Figure 56



Reprinted from Modes de Paris, *Petit Courrier des Dames: Journal des Modes*, February 28, 1845, plate 2082.

Reproduced by permission of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

Figure 57



Reprinted from *Modes de Paris, Petit Courrier des Dames: Journal des Modes*, October 31, 1844, plate 2054.

Reproduced by permission of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York.

Figure 58

Waistcoat, 1840 – 1859, American or European.
Silk, cotton; Length at center back: 50.8 cm.
1978.477.27
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 59

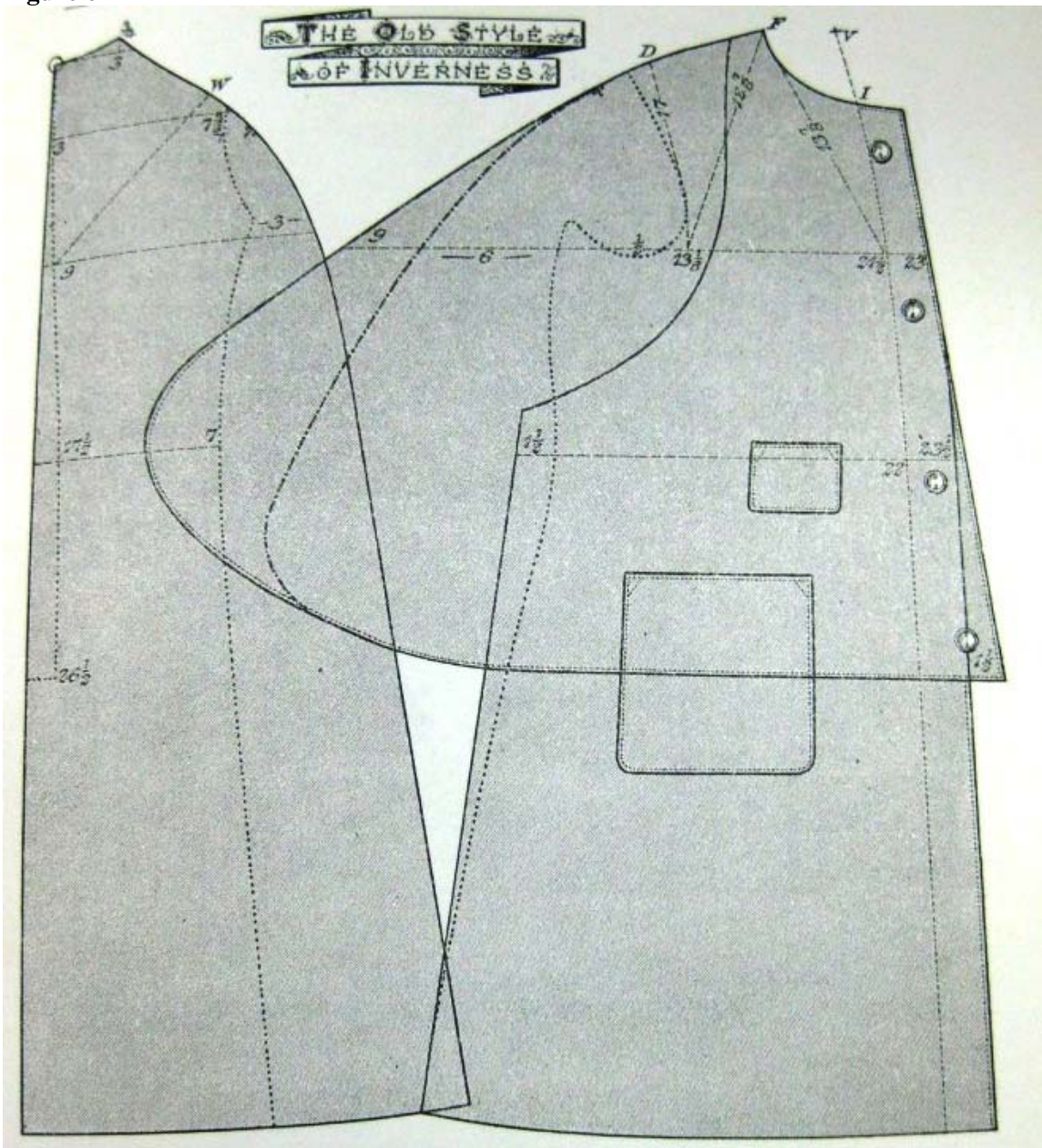
Frock coat, ca. 1840, American.
Wool; Length at center back: 91.4 cm.
C.I.60.22.6
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 60

Figures wearing a morning coat, an overcoat, and a Tweedside jacket with matching trousers, ca. 1859.

Courtesy of Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600 – 1900* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1964), plate 24.

Figure 61



Inverness cape, ca. 1888, W.D. Vincent, *The Cutter's Practical Guide* (London: The John Williamson Company, Ltd., 1898), page unknown.

Courtesy of Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600 – 1900*, 143.

Figure 62



Reprinted from "The Cordovan," *Godey's Lady's Book*, September 1859, 196.

Courtesy of Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

Figure 63

Fashions for April.

Furnished by Mr. G. BRODIE, 300 Canal Street, New York, and drawn by VOIGT from actual articles of Costume.



FIGURE I.—SPRING PELESE.

Reprinted from Fashions for April, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, April 1861, 719.

Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

Figure 64

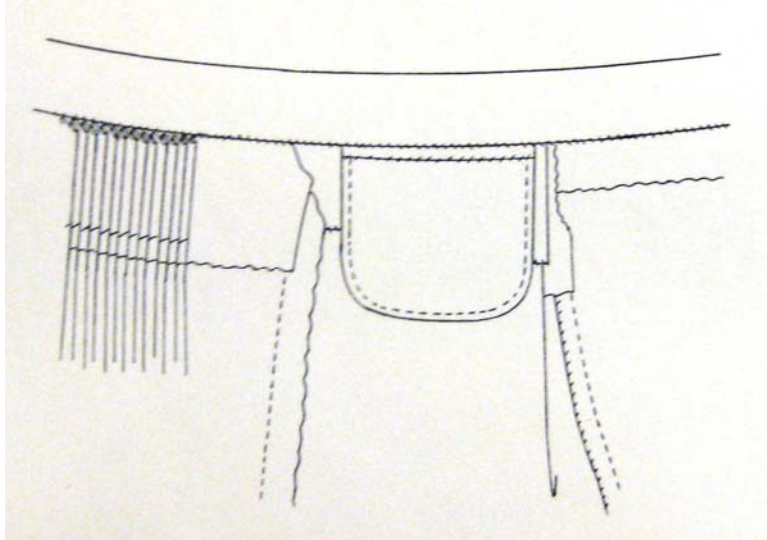


Illustration of a watch pocket at the waistband of a skirt.

Courtesy of Lucy Johnston, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion in Detail* (London: V&A Publications, 2005), 60.

Figure 65

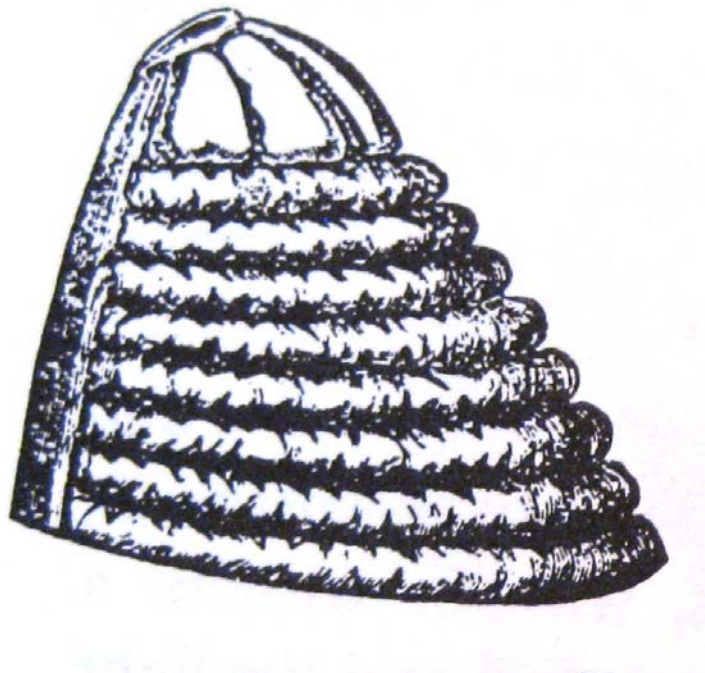
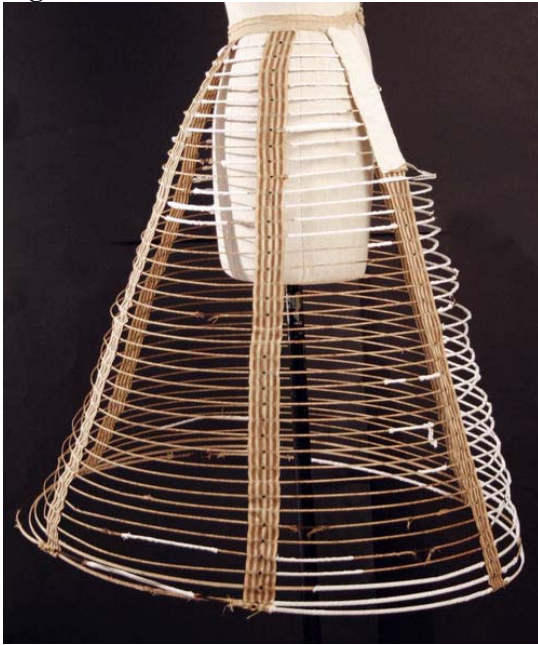


Illustration of a horsehair padded petticoat.

Courtesy of Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories*, 30.

Figure 66

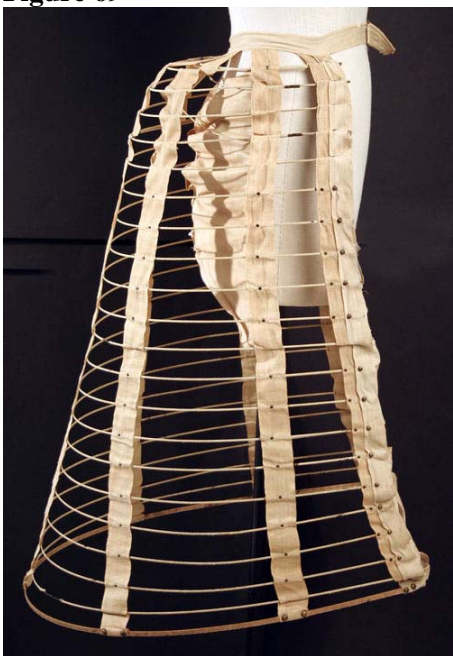
Crinoline, ca. 1850, American or European.
Steel wire; No dimensions available.
C.I.41.110.317
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 67

Crinoline, 1862, American.
Steel, cotton; Length: 86.4 cm.
C.I.53.72.13
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 68

Dress, 1868, British.
Silk, trimmed with braid, beads, hand-made Maltese-style bobbin lace and silk fringe; No dimensions available.
T.37-1984.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 69

Crinoline, ca. 1870 – 1875, American or European.
No medium or dimensions available.
C.I.43.126.43

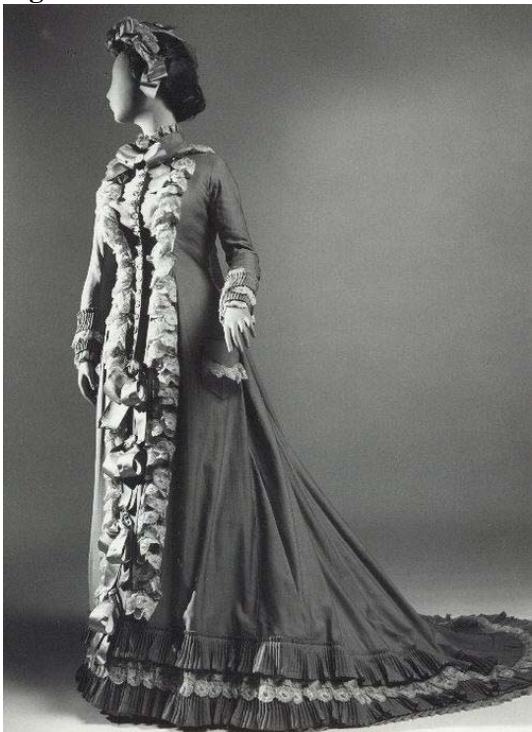
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Figure 70



Dress illustration developed from women's wool Reefer jacket, ca. 1892 – 1897, in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

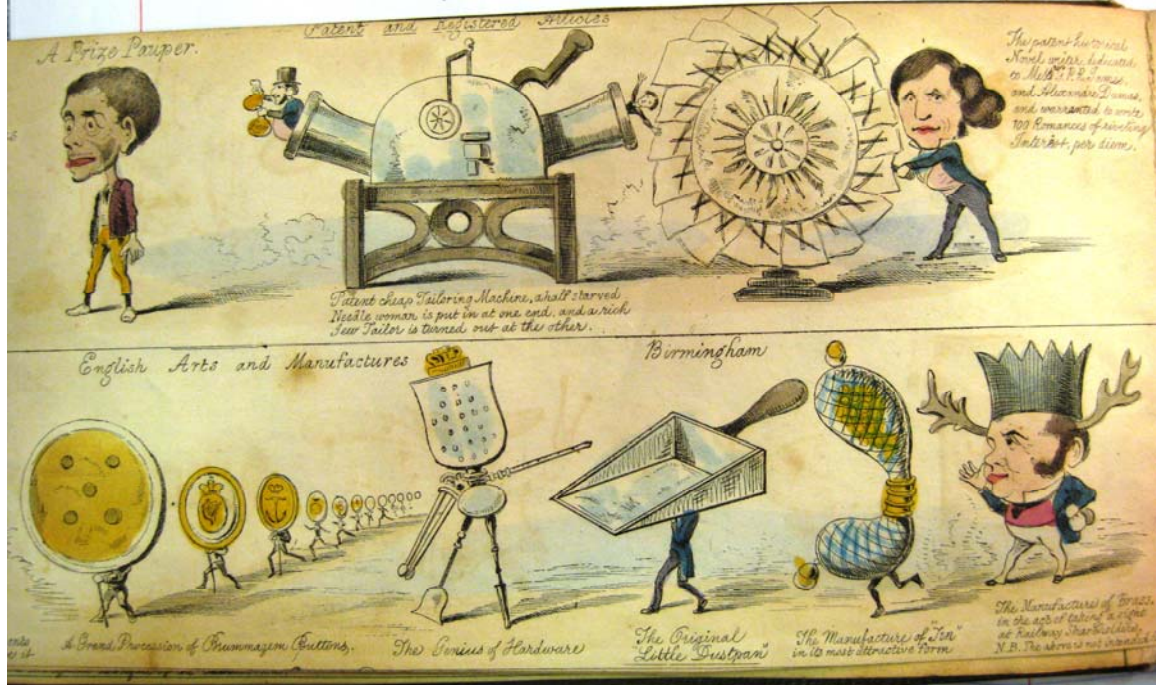
Courtesy of Johnston, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion in Detail*, 17.

Figure 71



Dress (Tea Gown), 1890, French.
 Silk, cotton; No dimensions available.
 C.I.44.122
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 72



Reprinted from George Augustus Sala, *The Great Exhibition: "Wot is to be": or probable results of the Industry of all Nations in the Year '51: showing what is to be exhibited, who is to exhibit: in short, how it's all going to be done* (London: Committee of the Society for Keeping Things in Their Places, 1850), unpaginated.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

Figure 73

Indian Head gold dollar, 1858, scaled to actual size.

Courtesy of About.com, "The 1858 Indian Head US Gold Dollar," The New York Times Company, <http://coins.about.com/od/uscoins/ig/U-S--Historical-Gold-Coins/us-gold-coin-one-dollar-1858.htm> (accessed December 8, 2009).

Figure 74

Morgan silver dollar, 1878, scaled to actual size.

Courtesy of MorganDollarCoin.com, "Morgan Silver Dollar: Add the Morgan Silver Dollar to your coin collection," MorganDollarCoin.com, <http://www.morgandollarcoin.com> (accessed December 8, 2009)

Figure 75



Reprinted from Modes de Paris, *Petit Courrier des Dames*, December 5, 1846, plate 2230.

Courtesy of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution, New York.

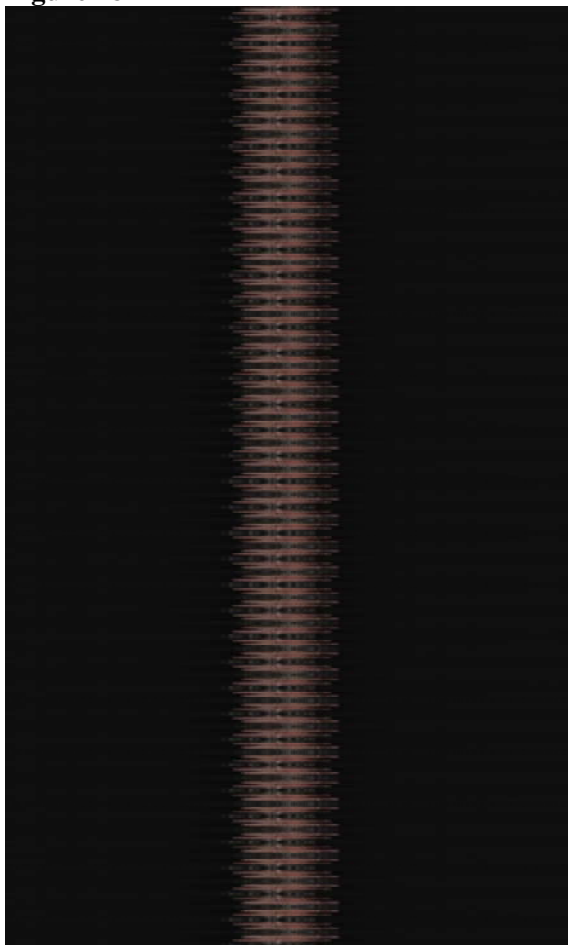
Figure 76



Ford Madox Brown, *The Last of England*, 1852 – 1855.
Oil on canvas; H x W: 82.5 cm x 75 cm.
Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham.

Figure 77

James Collinson, *At the Bazaar, or, The Empty Purse*, ca. 1857.
Oil on canvas; H x W: 77 cm x 66 cm.
Tate Britain, London.

Figure 78

Purse, attributed early nineteenth century; probably ca. 1860, French.
Red silk worked in cut steel beads and cut steel fixtures; Length: 31 cm.
41.860
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

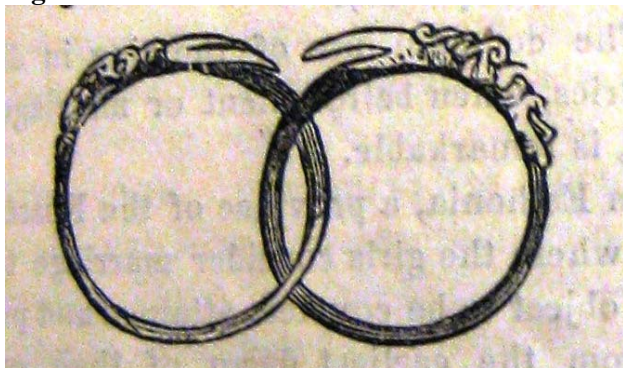
Figure 79

Illustration of a gimmel ring.

Reprinted from B.R. Haydon, "Finger-Rings," *Godey's Lady's Book*, March 1856, 203

Courtesy of Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.