

## ABSTRACT

AMBER BROOKE WOOLSEY. Bodily Disorders: Spectacle and Self-Abnegation in *The Blazing World*, *Roxana*, and *Great Expectations*. (Under the direction of Dr. Deborah Hooker.)

The protagonists of the texts that I will focus on here, Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century; Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century; and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, each deals with the sense of being on display as well as the obsession with extreme bodily control. But because of their varying class positions, their responses to spectacle are marked by different forms of bodily control. As a 17<sup>th</sup> century aristocrat, Cavendish uses *Blazing World* to represent the intentional use of the female body as an aristocratic spectacle in order to gain power and an audience in one context, but in another, she casts off the female body as a hindrance to intellectual recognition. *Roxana* represents the dilemma of the new middle-class ideal for women in 18<sup>th</sup> century England. While this new ideal disparaged the display of aristocratic wealth via the body of the woman, it also supported the idea of an idle middle-class woman with servants to perform most labor. Thus, *Roxana* relies upon the display and allure of her body as her source of self-provision while constantly worrying about her true identity being revealed. Thus, *Roxana* must view her body as a spectacle in a positive light while still fearing the negative effects of public revelation. In Dickens' novel, Miss Havisham, a member of the upper middle-class, uses the display of Estella's body as a kind of vengeance on the male race because she is a jilted bride, denied the domestic dream of happiness emphasized by the upper middle-class. Informed by the theory of Susan Bordo, this project seeks to connect 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century ideals of bodily control and public display with earlier British novels.