Dress, Distress and Desire: Clothing and Sentimental Literature

Jennie Elizabeth Batchelor

Queen Mary, University of London

Submitted for the Degree of PhD

July 2002
Abstract

This study explores representations of the adorned female body in sentimental literature. In particular, it addresses the intersection of the discourses of dress, fashion and sensibility and the political anxieties such intersections expose. These concerns are located within current critical debate upon the implications of the feminine sentimental ideal for women readers and writers. Building upon recent scholarship, the introduction argues that sensibility was predicated upon a concept of the body as an index of feeling. This argument is subsequently complicated, through a reading of More’s ‘Sensibility’ (1782), which points to the potential of dress to function as both an extension of the corporeal index and metaphor for sensibility’s propensity to lapse into affectation. Dress, as More implies, not only exposed but embodied the paradox status of sensibility as a symbol of selfhood externally expressed, and possibly affected mode of display. The opening chapters explore, in greater depth, the perceived antagonism between dress and the sentimental body. Chapter One centres on Pamela (1740) and the heroine’s contentious appearance in her homespun gown and petticoat. Chapter Two explores textual representations of dressmakers and milliners, whose damning association with fashion ensured that they became personifications of and further justifications for critiques of dress as a form of social and moral encryption. Subsequent chapters on ladies’ magazines and Fordyce’s Sermons to Young Women (1765) discuss how writers, across various genres, responded to this antagonism by suggesting ways in which the adorned female body might become a synecdoche of sentimental virtue. Such texts, however, reveal the fault line upon which they and, by extension, sensibility rest. In analogising appearance and worth, writers had to uncomfortably acknowledge that, once
outlined in print, such ideals became accessible to readers, potentially rendering virtue as
easy to put on as a gown or petticoat. The final chapter addresses the escalating
synonymy of fashion and sentiment in the 1790s, as critics argued that the distinction
between genuine feeling and its performance had blurred to obscurity. Edgeworth's
Belinda (1801) is read, in this context, as a counter-sentimental novel, which attempts to
divorce the two through the rehabilitation of the woman of fashion as a woman of 'true'
sensibility: a wife and mother.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Seeing Through Pamela's Clothes: The Meanings of Dress in Richardson's Novel</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Living Upon the Spoils of Virtue: Dressmakers and their Shops in the Novels of Eliza Haywood and Frances Burney</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Re-clothing the Female Reader: Dress and the Eighteenth-Century Magazine</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Realising the Morally-Transparent Fashion System: Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women and the Magdalen House for Penitent Prostitutes</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The cambrick handkerchief sensibility: Re-figuring Sentiment in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Illustrations

1 Frontispiece illustration to the 1780 *Lady's Magazine* 203

2 Frontispiece illustration to the 1776 *Lady's Magazine* 204

3 Frontispiece illustration to the 1782 *Lady's Magazine* 205

4 Frontispiece engravings to *The Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book for 1762* 206

5 Memorandum Table from *The Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book for 1753* 207

6 Frontispiece to Jonas Hanway's *Reflections, Essays and Meditations on Life and Religion* (1761) 260

7 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, 6th edn (1742). Engraving by Hubert Gravelot. 307
Acknowledgements

This research has been informed by discussions with many friends and colleagues. Queen Mary has provided a lively and stimulating environment in which to work and I would like to thank, in particular, Annette Ashley, Giles Bergel, Vincent Carretta, Colette Guldimann, Megan Hiatt, Peter Howell, Anne Janowitz, Maeve Pearson, Chris Reid, Gwee Li Sui and the members of the Queen Mary Eighteenth-Century Reading Group for their advice and support. I would also like to thank Claire Brock with whom many of the ideas explored in this project have been fruitfully discussed and debated. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to the A.H.R.B. for providing financial support without which this research would not have been completed, as well as for funding an overseas trip to the 2002 A.S.E.C.S. Conference in Colorado Springs which helped to shape and refine the overall argument of this thesis. A still greater debt is owed to Markman Ellis whose guidance and scrupulous, though good-natured, attention to my work always exceeded my expectations. On a more personal note I would like to thank Wendy, Paul and Louise Batchelor for their encouragement and, most of all, David Motton who has lived with this project as long as I have, and for whose unfailing support and enthusiasm I will always be grateful.
Introduction

Sweet Sensibility! thou keen delight!
Thou hasty moral! sudden sense of right!
Thou untaught goodness! Virtue's precious seed!
Thou sweet precursor of the gen'rous deed!
Beauty's quick relish! Reason's radiant morn!
Which dawns soft light before Reflexion's born!
To those who know thee not no words can paint,
And those who know thee, know all words are faint.

(Hannah More, 'Sensibility', 1782)

Sentimentalism, and its concomitant term sensibility, are deceptively malleable expressions to describe multifarious cultural and social phenomena that emerged in the mid eighteenth century, associated primarily with the privileging of feeling, moral principle and the sanctification of the bourgeois domestic household. In recent decades, critics have sought to pin down these elusive terms through linguistic archaeology and by analysing their origins in contemporary medical discourse on the nervous system as well as in late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century philosophical writings on the self and sensory perception. The semantic instability of these terms concerned contemporaries as much as modern critics. Hannah More's 'Sensibility', a poetic epistle written for Frances Boscawen after her husband's death, attempts a definition of this abstract quality through a combination of personal examples — including bluestockings Elizabeth Carter and Elizabeth Montagu, Garrick, Johnson and Boscawen herself — and impassioned argument. Troubling this lengthy encomium to sensibility, however, is More's acute sense of the evasiveness of

1 Hannah More, 'Sensibility: A Poetic Epistle to the Honorable Mrs Boscawen', Sacred Dramas Chiefly Intended for Young Persons To Which is Added Sensibility, A Poem (London: T. Cadell, 1782), p. 282. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.

this most prized of virtues: 'Thy [sensibility's] subtile essence still eludes the chains/
Of Definition, and defeats her pains' (p. 282). The term's resistance to definition lies,
in More's reading, in its double connotations of both natural impulse ('untaught
goodness') and active improvement (a 'taste refin'd'). For More, sensibility's elusiveness is a virtue in itself, attributing it with a degree of self-promotional exclusiveness within a hierarchy of feeling. Though sentiment is a natural impulse, it is only those who actively seek to divert feeling 'to its proper course' who can be truly said to possess this 'finely-fashion'd' virtue. More's work is not meant for the eyes of the 'vulgar', whose 'jests [its] tender anguish wou'd profane' and '[w]hose low enjoyments never reach'd the mind' (p. 277).

The poem's argument that sensibility is both suggestive of innate virtue and an attainable, refined morality that can be cultivated by emulation, self-reflection or appropriate reading, places it in something of a semantic and philosophical cul de sac. If sensibility can be cultivated, then by whom? Might not poems such as More's, rather than affirming sensibility's exclusiveness, pierce the 'insulated souls' of 'vulgar' readers by extolling the virtues and benefits of the 'kindred [sentimental] mind'? On a more troubling note, might the poem's efforts to articulate and define this most prized and elusive of human qualities make the sentimental disposition accessible to a wide literate public, allowing its characteristics, as defined by More, to be affected where they are not truly felt? In response to these difficulties, the poem goes to great lengths to distinguish between those who possess and those who merely affect this virtue. True sensibility can only be felt by those who, like the widowed Mrs Boscawen, have experienced genuine emotional distress. It is not felt by she who 'mourn[s] because a sparrow dies' or those who 'rave in artificial extasies' (p. 282). Rather, sensibility's
virtue lies in its power to emotionally bind people within a society whose affective links enable it to more effectively heal its wrongs. In this sense, the grief of Frances Boscawen is both the trigger for More's poem and the proof of its argument: the example of Boscawen's genuine personal grief, when made public in the form of the poem, will awaken readers to the depth or superficiality of their own sensibility. For More, authentic sensibility can only be demonstrated through active and pragmatic gestures rather than in the self-gratifying and self-indulgent imaginative exchanges experienced by the reader of sentimental literature at the fictional distress of its heroines: she whose 'ready eye o'erflows/ At Clementina's or Clarissa's woes' (p. 283).

In order to further distinguish genuine from feigned virtue, More proceeds by reworking Clarissa's famous epithet, 'what are words but the body and dress of thought':

As words are but th' external marks, to tell
The fair ideas in the mind that dwell
And only are of things the outward sign,
And not the things themselves, they but define;
So exclamations, tender tones, fond tears,
And all the graceful drap'ry Pity wears;
These are not Pity's self, they but express
Her inward sufferings by their picturd dress;
And these fair marks, reluctant I relate,
These lovely symbols may be counterfeit.
(pp. 283-284)

Just as words are extrinsic to that which they define, imperfect and arbitrary verbal signs, so the language of sensibility ('exclamations, tender tones, fond tears', 'graceful drap'ry') is but the outward and potentially unreliable expression of inner moral essence. The inherently contradictory status of dress as a potent symbol of self-expression or facilitator of false self-creation makes clothing a resonant metaphor for More's argument. Dress, as many contemporary writers suggested, exposed the
fundamental paradox of sensibility as both a genuine moral response externally expressed ('graceful drap'ry'), and as a cultivated, possibly fictitious, mode of display ('pictur'd dress') worn by the covetous and the immoral. But if dress is a synecdoche for the false, affected, and quite literally 'put on' sensibility the poem so vehemently condemns, it functions also as a powerful diagnostic tool through which to distinguish authentic from feigned sentiment. Visually, the poem suggests, the man or woman of feeling can differentiate between the 'untaught goodness' that is sensibility and the counterfeit gestural and physical symbols of affected virtue, just as the trained eye of the sentimental observer can see through the surface of a woman's dress to the moral depth (or its lack) beneath.³ This research focuses upon the intersection between fashion and sentiment and the inextricability of the languages of dress and sensibility highlighted by More's poem; the extent to which dress, as many contemporary writers sensed, not only exposed but embodied the fundamental paradox of sensibility.

Although most obviously inspired by Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-1748), the poem's cross-pollination of the languages of expression, text and dress evokes an enduring strain in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century literary and aesthetic theory, closely associated with Pope.⁴ In his *Essay on Criticism* (1711) Pope deploys the sartorial metaphor, in a manner that anticipates More's work, as a diagnostic tool through which to distinguish good poetry from 'False Eloquence':

---


⁴ This strain is, in turn, the legacy of debates upon the relationship between language and ideas raised in Book III of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689).
Poets like Painters, thus, unskil'd to trace
The naked Nature and the living Grace,
With Gold and Jewels cover ev'ry Part,
And hide with Ornaments their Want of Art.
True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest,
Something, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,
That gives us back the Image of our Mind
(lines 293-300)

Pope's well-known 'drest/exprest' couplet evokes a literary ideal in which the garb of poetic language and form exists as the finest and most appropriate expression of the thought it seeks to convey. However, on closer reading the fallacy of this ideal marriage of thought, wit, Nature and expression is soon apparent. Laura Brown, in her evocative reading of Pope's Essay on Criticism, the Rape of the Lock and their importance in the context of early eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, argues that these lines are 'systematically uninformative'. At the very least, they present a deceptively confident expression of the power of poetic language and its relationship to the thoughts and originary objects it articulates; a deception created in no small part by the unity of the rhyming couplet itself. In Pope's formulation, the role of 'Wit' raises deeply problematic and unresolved issues. As Brown argues, 'Whether "Wit" fundamentally alters or merely embellishes this "Nature", to what extent "Nature" maintains it significance apart from "Wit," and how the inconclusive "Advantage" operates to arbitrate their connection, these questions are raised and kept open, rather than laid to rest. These interpretive difficulties are rendered all the more complex by the description of 'Wit' as a form of verbal dressing. As in 'Sensibility', dress serves

---

8 Brown, p. 106.
here as both an appropriate expression of an originary essence (‘Nature’, or, as in More's poem, moral refinement), and as the metaphor for the power of language to conceal, falsely embellish and fundamentally obscure that essence.

Rather than denying the possibility of poetic corruption implied in the 'drest/exprest' couplet, Pope's Essay actively develops this theme, if only to suggest the transparency and futility of such attempts to substitute rhetorical flourish for genuine wit:

Expression is the Dress of Thought, and still
Appears more decent as more suitable;
A vile Conceit in pompous Words exprest,
Is like a Clown in regal Purple drest;
For different Styles with different Subjects sort,
As several Garbs with Country, Town, and Court.
(lines 318-323)

As 'Sensibility' later would, Pope's Essay betrays here a conviction in the ability of dress to communicate the worth of the individual (be that worth social, as in the Essay, or moral, as in More's poem). Just as clothes should be fitted to the rank of the wearer and the social circle in which he is currently engaged, so there exists, the poem argues, a fit poetic language and style for different forms of poetry. A failure to match the dress to the circumstance, or the substance to the form will be unconvincing and vulnerable to ridicule. While the dress of poetic language may be deployed to compensate for the literary or philosophical impoverishment of a text, such affectation will appear so obvious to the trained eye of the literary critic, the poem argues, that it will appear as incongruous as a 'Clown in regal Purple drest'.
The poem's reliance upon the motif of dress ultimately damages rather than consolidates its argument, however. Pope's couplet, as Brown argues, evokes a plethora of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century misogynist texts that focus upon the surface and depths of the adorned woman, who is in turn marked out as both the product of and scapegoat for mercantile capitalism. The inevitable disjunction between surface sartorial beauty and an underlying moral and corporeal corruption persistently recapitulated in the satires of the likes of Rochester, Swift and Pope, fatally undermines the harmony of the Essay's 'drest/exprest' couplet. Influenced by the inextricable association of dress with deceit created, in part, by such works, Aaron Hill later characterised Pope's tenet that 'Expression is the dress of thought' as a 'very lively imagination' rather than an incontrovertible truth. While sharing with his friend a sense of the abuse of expression amongst modern writers who disregard the 'distinct and popular tendency' of words in favour of a more generalised 'representation of the idea as it strikes in the whole', Hill finds dress an inappropriate metaphor for the desired marriage of text and idea: 'I call it your [Pope's] imagination, because, I believe, the idea must have shape not dress of thought; dress, however, an ornament, being a concealment, or covering; whereas expression is manifestation and exposure'. Hill proceeds by re-writing Pope's couplet, by writing out the sartorial metaphor to suggest the inseparability of thought and expression: 'Expression is the birth of thought --- grows round, / Limbs the loose soul, and shapes it into sound'.

---

9 Brown, pp. 109-133.
10 The importance of this figure and its re-working in the sentimental novel is considered in more depth below in the final chapter on Maria Edgeworth's Belinda (1802). See also Felicity Nussbaum, The Brink of all we Hate, English Satires on Women, 1660-1750 (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984) and Ellen Pollak, The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
12 Hill, I, p. 251.
Hill's letter is of interest not only because of its antagonistic reading of Pope's influential work, but in its almost pivotal contrast to the literary-critical discourse Hill would enthusiastically embrace only two years later, following the publication of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). In a letter that would subsequently be prefixed to the second edition of the novel, Hill, one of the text's most notable and vocal champions, praised *Pamela* in terms that strikingly rehearse the 'drest/exprest' model of literary perfection. Responding to Richardson's fears that the novel's 'Style want[ed] Polishing', and fending off reader criticism directed towards the heroine's lapses into linguistic vulgarity, Hill highlights the text's 'natural Air [...] Simplicity, and measur'd Fulness'. His spirited and subtle defence of the novel is worth quoting at some length:

[The author] has reconciled the *Pleasing* to the *Proper*. The *Thought* is every-where exactly *cloath'd* by the *Expression*; And becomes its *Dress* as roundly, and as close, as *Pamela* in her Country-habit. Remember, though she put it on with humble Prospect, of descending to the Level of her Purpose, it *adorn'd* her, with such unpresum'd *Increase* of *Loveliness*; sat with such neat *Propriety* of Elegant *Neglect* about her, that it threw out All her Charms, with tenfold, and resistless Influence. --- And so, dear Sir, it will be always found. --- When modest Beauty seeks to hide itself by casting off the *Pride* of *Ornament*, it but displays itself without a *Covering*: And so, becoming more distinguished by its *Want* of *Drapery*, grows *stronger*, from its *purpos'd Weakness*.13

Recapitulating Pope's couplet where he had previously condemned it, Hill marks Richardson's achievement as a perfect unity of thought and expression mediated by the dress of language. In order to emphasise this harmony, and the appropriateness of his literary-critical stance, Hill subtly draws evocative connections between Pope's 'drest/exprest' model, the novel's language, style, thematic interest in dress, and most subtly of all, between this literary model and the character of the novel's heroine. In Hill's reading Pamela is both the product of and metaphor for the seamless marriage of

---

text and moral design. Just as the simple language of the novel's epistolary exchanges allows its didactic overtones to shine all the more brilliantly, so Pamela's decision to wear clothes appropriate to her servile status elevates her in the mind of the reader and attests to her moral superiority. By disregarding the false 'Pride of Ornament', symbolised by the suit of clothes she acquires after her mistress's death, Pamela appears more, rather than less lovely, since her dress is a more appropriate articulation of her humble social self yet elevated moral self.14

Hill's assessment of Pamela (the character's) dress and Pamela (the novel's) rhetorical dress mediates the tensions evoked by Pope's 'drest/exprest' couplet by suggesting that the kind of dressing the novel engages in is a dressing down rather than a more suspect dressing up. Rather than seeking to embellish, transfigure and transform, the dressing down of the heroine and the language of the novel into a 'native Simplicity' as opposed to ornamental extravagance, renders it transparent rather than vulnerable to accusations of affectation. While the novel may humbly seek to conceal its moral and literary excellence, as Pamela apparently seeks to hide her beauty from her master, these attempts merely make both the text and character's virtue more apparent for the humble garb they don. Where in Pope's Essay the body of the adorned woman is only implied as a spectral shadow that undermines its poetic ideal, Richardson's novel brings her to the fore as a literal embodiment of the unity of the 'drest/exprest' motif — Pamela even stitches her letters to her underskirts — and in the process formulates what would become one of the most fundamental yet

---

14 The important and much-contested scene in which Pamela appears in her homespun gown and petticoat is central to this research, and is examined in greater depth in Chapter One, pp. 40-89.
problematic ideals of sentimental literature: the transparency of the morally-legible body.

In a significant shift from the status-oriented model of dress implied by Pope's distaste at the 'Clown in regal Purple drest', clothing here becomes the signifier of one's moral rather than social self. The absence of forms of sumptuary legislation through which the social hierarchy could be both preserved and visually articulated was a recurrent theme in eighteenth-century attacks upon fashion in countless novels, periodicals, essays, pamphlets and travel writing. Defoe's argument in *Every-body's Business is No-body's Business* (1725) that 'It is a hard Matter to know the Mistress from the Maid by their Dress' became a rarely questioned commonplace in counter-fashion argument and satire of the period.\(^\text{15}\) Juxtaposing contemporary society with images of a Golden Age in which an individual's social character was instantly intelligible, society had become encrypted, many writers argued, by the very tool that had traditionally enabled it to be read. In the February 1785 edition of *The Lady's Magazine* a concerned contributor began a serial on 'One of the leading Causes of Prostitution, The Dress of Servant Girls above their Station' with a nostalgic view of former times in which 'some distinction was observed, and it was possible to judge of people's rank by their exterior'. Now the author laments, however, 'all propriety is banished, and one is momentarily in danger of mistaking a modern mop-squeezer for a capital tradesman's wife'.\(^\text{16}\) The implications of the supposed blurring of the distinction between ranks extended beyond the merely embarrassing faux pas of perceiving a maid as her mistress, however; rather, they struck deep at the social and moral heart of eighteenth-century culture. As Neil McKendrick has influentially

argued, the eighteenth century witnessed an unprecedented growth in the marketing of fashionable clothes as commercial entrepreneurs exploited new technologies (including the widely expanding print culture) and sites (such as the shop window) to advertise and promote their goods to a mass consumer market. Such technological innovations, coupled with the practice of bequeathing items of clothing to servants in wills, and the growth of popular second-hand clothing markets in urban centres, alarmed many writers, who argued that the streets bore witness to a kind of real-life masquerade.

As Terry Castle argues in her study of the masquerade in eighteenth-century literature and culture, dress was perceived in this period as a powerful signifier of self — a visual indication of gender, social position and occupation or lack of occupation. Anticipating the characterisation of clothing by modern fashion theorists informed by the study of semiotics, many eighteenth-century commentators argued that dress constituted a form of language and discourse through which meaning was generated by the wearer and interpreted by the reader/observer. Critics of fashion frequently inverted Pope's 'drest/exprest' paradigm, by suggesting that just as dress provided a metaphor for the appropriate form of fit poetic expression, so language was an appropriate metaphor for the way in which dress should properly function within society. As an article in the London Magazine for March 1737 argued, 'Dress should

---

16 The Lady's Magazine: or, Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex, 16 (February 1785), p. 96.
18 For an account of the growth and role of the second-hand clothing trade in pre-industrial England see Beverly Lemire, Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade Before the Factory, 1660-1800 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).
be properly adapted to the Person, as in Writing, the Style must be suited to the Subject.²⁰ But as the masquerade so vividly and alarmingly demonstrated, the language of clothes and their meanings are often arbitrary, vulnerable to manipulation and misinterpretation. In the world upside-down of the masquerade individuals subverted the supposedly incontrovertible distinctions of rank and gender as aristocrats dressed as shepherdesses and chimney sweeps, men as women and women as men.²¹ But the power of dress to subvert and encrypt the sartorial code could be more subtle than the sweeping inversions enacted and celebrated in the masquerade. Often the meanings of dress are not in the control of the wearer, even when a specific garment is worn for a specific function; rather, meanings are generated and qualified by complex context-specific circumstances, from the social status of the wearer to the environment in which a garment is worn and the individual prejudices and moral predilections of the observer.²²

Maintaining an appropriate form of sartorial display was thus a tricky balancing act which took into account these multiple and often conflicting considerations. As the July 1775 instalment of The Lady's Magazine's serial 'Mrs T-SS's Advice to her Daughter' opined:

In matters of dress, never be the first in the fashion, and when you do conform to it, let it be in the most moderate degree: and, even in this, much depends; first, on the situation is placed in; secondly, their fortune; and thirdly, their own persons are to be considered: for a beautiful woman will not be so much condemned for entering into the extravagancy of fashion, as a plain or deformed woman would be. But the essential point in dress is to consider what is really and truly becoming.²³

²⁰ London Magazine, 6 (March 1737), p. 129.
²¹ The eighteenth-century masquerade has attracted the interest of several recent literary critics and fashion historians. Among the best of these studies see Terry Castle, Masquerade and Civilisation, and Aileen Ribeiro, The Dress Worn at Masquerades in England, 1730-1790 and its Relation to Fancy Dress in Portraiture (London: Batsford, 1984).
²² This argument is developed in more depth in Chapter One, which is, in part, concerned with the irony that Pamela's appearance in her homespun gown and petticoat (a dress appropriate to her servile status) is often perceived by the novel's critics to be the heroine's most conniving and manipulative gesture.
²³ The Lady's Magazine, 16 (July 1775), p. 350.
As innumerable periodical articles, conduct books and novels proclaimed, the consequences of failing to negotiate these considerations appropriately were potentially damning. Even with the best of intentions, a woman's dress could speak out against her. For if dress is a language, then it can be read against the grain and between the lines; a fact vividly evidenced in the multiple readings of Pamela's servant dress in the critical backlash following the novel's publication.\textsuperscript{24} The implications of such misreadings provided fertile ground for novelists of the period, who used such encounters for dramatic, tragic and comic effect. While prostitutes could be mistaken for respectable women in such works as Clarissa (1747-1748) and Haywood's Anti-Pamela (1741), respectable women such as Betsy Thoughtless and Evelina could be taken for prostitutes when their appearance, situation and behaviour conspired against them. These examples, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, bear witness to the extent to which the fine line between a respectably fashionable and ostentatiously disreputable appearance placed women in an apparently irresolvable double bind. Though fashionable display could be interpreted by the observer as a symbol of moral impoverishment, the rejection of fashion offered no immunity from hostile readings either. The woman who dressed modestly was both commercially and sexually suspect. Moreover, the persistent appeals made to women throughout the period to dress simply, as Rousseau implied in Emile (1762), ultimately served to eroticise the modestly dressed woman, whose

\textsuperscript{24} This theme is the subject of Chapter One, 'Seeing Through Pamela's Clothes: The Meanings of Dress in Richardson's Novel'.

'simple adornment', like that of Sophie 'is perceived to be 'put on to be removed bit by bit by the imagination'.

In response to the seemingly vertiginous powers of dress to encrypt the social hierarchy and generate false or multiple meanings, many writers suggested the return to some form of sartorial legislation. A contributor to the *Universal Magazine* of 1772, for example, displayed ample disgust at the fact that 'the master is not to be discerned from the servant, and Joan, with her flaunting dress and flags of pride, not only passes for a Lady in the dark, but also in the light'. In response to such travesties, the author demands the reinstatement of 'a sumptuary law' to ensure that all persons 'live and dress according to their station in life'. The *Universal Magazine* article is of interest not only for the vitriol of its attack upon the accessibility of fashionable dress to the lower orders — the butcher who wipes his 'greasy paws' over a waistcoat of lace, and the kitchen wench with 'double ruffs' — but for the way in which this attack is implicitly gendered. Women may all be the same in the dark, the author misogynistically argues, but in the light, some visual distinction between rank should be maintained. While sartorial emulation is viciously condemned across the board, here, the apparently ruinous consequences of the socially transgressive behaviour of female servants is compounded by an apparently inextricable connection with moral and, more particularly, sexual transgression. The anonymous contributor's attack upon the dress of the female labouring classes is indicative of the extent to which dress was both a cause and symptom of anxieties surrounding social and moral disorder. As a symbol that can variously connote wealth, social status, sexuality and moral probity,

---

dress is, as it always has been and probably always will be, a site around which multiple and often competing social, religious, moral, aesthetic and cultural impulses and anxieties are simultaneously focused. Thus, while the blurring of social distinction was undeniably a genuine and prevalent eighteenth-century concern, arguments in favour of a return to some form of sumptuary legislation often thinly veil other motives, more closely aligned with sexual regulation, rather than social control.

That sartorial legislation could effect such forms of sexual control has been implicit since the earliest efforts to regulate female costume. While the recurrent attempts to regulate the dress of prostitutes from Roman times to the Early Modern period constitute the most obvious examples of such modes of regulation, sumptuary law has restricted female sexuality in more subtle ways throughout history. As Nancy Armstrong has argued, aristocratic dress in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries served to designate the female body, 'like that of a male, [as] an ornamental body representing the family's place in an intricately precise set of kinship relations determined by the metaphysics of blood'. But where such forms of female adornment had stood as a supposed symbol of female sexual restriction by connoting a woman's social, moral and marital status, they had become distasteful by the early eighteenth century. This period bore witness, as Armstrong argues, to a paradigm shift away

---

29 The question of the extent to which sumptuary law was unfairly biased towards the restriction of women as opposed to men is a contentious issue amongst historians. Some feminist historians such as Diane Hughes and Harianne Mills have argued that sumptuary laws were implicitly gendered: for men, sumptuary regulation was an issue of class or pecuniary status, for women, a question of moral regulation. See Hughes, 'Invisible Madonnas? The Italian Historiographical Tradition and the Women of Medieval Italy', in Women in Medieval Society, ed. by Susan M. Stuard (Philadelphia: University of.
from such forms of ornamentation, which had become tainted by associations with aristocratic excess and financial and sexual license, in favour of a form of 'inconspicuous consumption' centred around the bourgeois domestic household.\(^{30}\)

In Armstrong's intriguing reading of this shift her conception of 'inconspicuous consumption' remains an abstraction, associated with the intangible moral and economic virtues championed in the conduct book: virtues of modesty, financial restraint and prudence. One of the concerns of this research is to examine the theoretical and material forms in which inconspicuous consumption is envisaged in eighteenth-century writings on dress. For while Armstrong's reading of this ideological movement away from ostentatious to more modest forms of display is located within the context of the eighteenth-century conduct book, her argument has ramifications which extend beyond this limited textual sphere. Recently the application of Nancy Armstrong's and Mary Poovey's arguments concerning the domestic woman to literary genres beyond the eighteenth-century conduct book and novel has been criticised by Harriet Guest, whose study of periodicals in the period detects little trace of the 'parsimonious domesticity' evidenced in these critics' readings. Instead, Guest highlights the extent to which this ideal was satirised in literary attacks upon women whose failure to consume enough, and whose withdrawal from commercial exchange was deemed symptomatic of a 'hard-hearted lack of

---

Pennsylvania Press, 1976) and Mills, 'Greek Clothing Regulations: Sacred or Profane?', Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik, 55 (1984), pp. 255-265. More recently Alan Hunt has questioned these arguments, by suggesting that both men and women were variously targeted by sumptuary law, as governing bodies responded to changes in fashionable dress, although he concedes that sumptuary laws 'were a component of wider processes in which women were the targets of regulation and control'. See Hunt, pp. 214-254.

\(^{30}\) Armstrong, pp. 110-111.
sensibility. As Guest's work makes clear, the domestic model of economic frugality and restraint was but one of several models of femininity in the period. This research is concerned, however, with the ways in which the domestic woman inflects and qualifies various models of ideal femininity in the period. It conceives of the domestic woman as an ideal yet potentially unstable and contested figure, constructed to negotiate the fine line between the socio-economic need for an appropriate display of familial wealth and fashionable politeness against the ever present dangers of financial excess and moral dissipation.

The paradigm shift from aristocratic ostentation to modest displays of wealth and economic and moral probity gained a particular currency in sentimental literature, which, as several critics have noted, frequently substituted the traditional social hierarchy based upon worth as connoted by birth with the mutedly revolutionary alternative of a hierarchy of feeling. If sentimental literature suggested the possibility of a meritocracy, in which worth was not merely characterised by social but moral character, then the fashionable, urban world represented its antithesis. Dress, as both the most immediate signifier of this world and most vivid symbol of its corruption thus accrued a potent symbolism in sentimental discourse, in which dress variously functioned as a rebuttal of the moral and financial excesses attributed to the fashionable upper reaches of society, and as a positive assertion of the moral probity of the wearer. While much literature of the period was deeply concerned with the extent to which dress could encrypt the social and moral order, many writers of the

32 The extent and limitations of the revolutionary implications of a sentimental meritocracy, and the self-regulatory efforts of writers to guard against its moretransgressive implications is explored by Robert Markley in 'Sentimentality as Performance', pp. 210-230.
period offered an alternative model of dress, in which the modestly adorned body restores that order by acting as a kind of diaphanous veil through which, to borrow Tristram Shandy's phrase, the soul could be viewed 'stark naked'. Such accounts posit an ideal in which dress is both morally responsible and morally communicative.

As Thomas Marriott wrote in *Female Conduct* (1775):

> [...] your Apparel [should] manifest your Mind,
> Not ostentatious, simple, yet refin'd;
> The Neatness of a Female wakes Desire,
> Alluring, as her Smile, is clean Attire;
> Simplicity of Dress a Maid becomes,
> Beyond the Pride of Persia's costly Looms. 34

Rather than a threat, Marriott presents dress as a cohesive and valuable social tool, here. Not only does the consumption of the fashionable products of British manufacture support the national economy, but dress can restore society's moral fabric, he argues, by providing a legible sartorial index through which the worth of the individual is connoted.

The near fetishistic emphasis placed upon the body in sentimental literature is well documented by recent critics. In perhaps the most notable of these studies, John Mullan describes sensibility as a kind of speechless language, communicated via the (usually female) body 'in a repertoire of conventionally involuntary signs — tears, sighs, palpitations [—] that are registered and read by the sentimental observer. In Marriott's idealised image of the adorned female body, in Hill's reading of Pamela's

---


character, and the examples I will explore in subsequent chapters, clothing serves as an extension of the speechless communication of feeling articulated by the sentimental body. Dress functions as a kind of meta-language, succeeding and transcending verbal forms of communication, in which clean, modest attire can function as a smile, and the simplicity of a gown corresponds to the wearer's simplicity of heart and mind. But as More warns in 'Sensibility', these 'lovely Symbols may be counterfeit'. If the sentimental ideal of moral legibility rested upon a belief in the female body as an involuntary 'mediator of sentiment'\textsuperscript{36} then dress acted as a potentially wilful barrier to that moral index. Moreover, as writers sought to articulate the sentimental body's most appropriate dress, they increasingly had to face the alarming prospect that sensibility was being reduced to a set of codified gestures, actions and appearances, which effectively rendered virtue as easy to put on as Pamela's homespun gown and petticoat. The inherently contradictory status of dress as both a potent symbol of self-expression and the possible facilitator of false self-creation ensured that attempts to analogise dress and the sentimental body frequently collapsed in on themselves and proved, to some of sentimental literature's most hostile critics, the specious and affectatious nature of the genre. In short, dress became, as More implies, paradigmatic of the paradox of sensibility, as both an innate quality and one that can be artificially nurtured or contrived. Ultimately the sentimental ideal of moral legibility — the presumption of what John Mullan terms 'the indubitable correspondences between internal and external' —\textsuperscript{37} is no less problematic than the supposedly inexorable correspondences between wit and Nature asserted by Pope in the \textit{Essay on Criticism}.

\* \* \*

\textsuperscript{36} John Mullan, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{37} John Mullan, p. 113.
The fine line between genuine and socially beneficial forms of sentimental exchange and solipsistic, affected displays of emotion calculated to disguise or promote motives of self-interest, outlined by More, continued to haunt the critical reputation of sentimentalism well into the twentieth century. Through its deployment of sartorial metaphors, More's poem further implies, albeit obliquely, another damning indictment of sensibility, the legacy of which can still be felt in contemporary criticisms of sentimental literature: that sensibility was little more than a fashion, with all its attendant connotations of ephemerality, impermanence and arbitrariness. As Lady Bradshaigh famously wrote in a letter to Richardson, the increasing synonymy of fashion and sentiment eroded the meaning of the term 'sentimental' to such an extent that it ceased to have any meaningful signifying power at all:

What, in your opinion, is the meaning of the words _sentimental_, so much in vogue amongst the polite, both in the town and country? [...] Everything clever and agreeable is comprehended in that word, but am [sic.] convinced a wrong interpretation is given, because it is impossible every thing clever and agreeable can be so common as this word. I am frequently astonished to hear such a one is a _sentimental_ man; we were a _sentimental_ party; I have been on a _sentimental_ walk. And that I might be reckoned a little in fashion, and, as I thought, show them the proper use of the word, about six weeks ago, I declared I had just received a _sentimental_ letter.38

Fashion, the apparently inexplicable force which rendered sentimental literature so popular so quickly, Lady Bradshaigh implies, stifled the very thing it had given life to. Hannah More would later make Lady Bradshaigh's argument explicit in her _Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education_ (1799): 'Fashion then, by one of her sudden and rapid turns, instantaneously struck out both real sensibility and the

---

affectation of it from the standing list of female perfections'. The vehement condemnation of sentimentalism in the *Strictures* as foolish, unprincipled, even immoral, seems at odds with the earlier 'Sensibility' which exalts this heightened emotional sensitivity for its ability to affectively unite people for the greater good of society. Hannah More's writing on sensibility is as complex and intriguing as Mary Wollstonecraft's equally ambiguous but better known literary relationship with sentimentalism, though it is rarely treated as such. While an analysis of More's understanding and treatment of sentimentalism is necessarily beyond the scope of this study, it might be noted in light of the present discussion, that More's arguments surrounding sentimentalism in 'Sensibility' and the *Strictures* are not as irreconcilable as they may, at first, appear. Rather, More's attack on affected sentiment in the later work reveals a marked respect for and even deep-seated faith in what she cursorily terms 'real sensibility' which is congruent with the ideals espoused in her poetic encomium. The *Strictures* objection is not to sensibility itself, but to the extent to which fashion has superseded principle as the filter through which sensibility is displayed within society. Collapsing under the intolerable burden of the semantic and behavioural confusion caused by the apparent inextricability of sentiment and fashion, More argues, fashion is responsible for the death of true sensibility.

In recent decades apologists for and critics of the genre have sought to erode the pejorative association of fashion and the literature of sensibility, whilst still

---


40 Recent work which examines the often strikingly similar discourse deployed in the works of More and Wollstonecraft, if only to throw into greater relief their ideological differences, goes some way to redressing this omission. See particularly, Mitzi Myers, 'Reform or Ruin: "A Revolution in Female Manners"', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 11 (1982), pp. 199-216 and Harriet Guest, *Small Change*, pp. 271-289.
acknowledging the genre's enormous contemporary popularity, by demonstrating sentimentalism's centrality to eighteenth-century literary, philosophical, aesthetic and political culture. R. F. Brissenden's *Virtue in Distress* (1974) constitutes one of the earliest attempts to assert the sentimental novel's substantiality as both a product of and adjunct to the philosophical inquiries on the self, sensory perception and the interaction between the individual and society debated in the works Locke, Hume and Smith.\(^{41}\) Writing about *Clarissa*, Brissenden argues that the sentimental novel was an early example of what we now term 'the novel of ideas', characterised by a narrative which resembles 'something like a programmed experiment'. The personal trials and inner conflicts endured by Richardson's characters serve metonymically, in Brissenden's reading, to test 'to destruction certain notions [...] which are basic to sentimental morality' and fundamental to contemporary philosophical writings on the self. Almost as a 'spin-off from this experimental process', authors such as Richardson produced a new species of writing which 'for dramatic, psychological vividness and minuteness of detail is new in English fiction'.\(^{42}\) While we might question Brissenden's model of cause and effect here, *Virtue in Distress* marks an important moment in the study of sentimental literature, both in its conception and definition of the parameters and character of the novel of sentiment, and in its assertion of the extent to which sentimental discourse is implicated by and actively participated in mainstream contemporary cultural discourses.


\(^{42}\) Brissenden, p. 35.
Taking their lead from Brissenden's work and Jean Hagstrum's influential *Sex and Sensibility* (1980), a study of sensibility's importance as a literary and aesthetic discourse which served as the expression of and testing-ground for a new emotional, intellectual and philosophical consciousness, recent critical accounts have sought the influence of sensibility in an ever widening range of issues, thoughts and practices. While sensibility is often associated with a private sphere of feminine or feminised emotion, recent work on the genre questions the increasingly inadequate binary distinctions drawn between public and private spheres. In *Small Change* (2000), Harriet Guest explores how sensibility became implicated in a wider discourse of patriotism, particularly during the American Revolution, which allowed women to imagine themselves as public, patriotic citizens. Sensibility's privileging of affective ties within the private realm of the household made it a particularly resonant discourse through which to analyse the body politic, against whose values the man or woman of feeling sought to define him or herself. Markman Ellis' *Politics of Sensibility* (1996) argues that sentimental discourse served in the public sphere as an influential tool through which debates upon political, economic and moral issues from slavery, prostitution, canal building to the French Revolution found expression. Similarly Gillian Skinner's *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel* (1999) convincingly demonstrates how the sentimental novel actively participated in contemporary debates upon economic policy. Like these recent studies, this research is concerned with the intersection between superficially inimical discourses: in this instance sentiment,

---

44 For a useful survey of recent critical contributions to the public/private debate see Harriet Guest, pp. 4-15.
45 See, in particular, Guest, pp. 155-175.
fashion and commerce. More particularly it is concerned with the ways in which sensibility sought to appropriate and reform commercial culture, one of the key cultural processes against which sentimentalism defined itself, by appropriating its most resonant and pertinent symbol for the female consumer: dress. But where the sentimental novel's engagement with issues such as prostitution, slavery and economic policy outlined by Ellis and Skinner enabled it to gain a certain cultural and political significance, sentimentalism's engagement with consumer culture in the texts explored in the following chapters weakened rather than consolidated its status as an influential social tool. Sentimental literature's frequent attempts to appropriate dress within its formulation of a feminine ideal which married moral, physical and economic desirability fatally undermined sensibility's efficacy by associating it with a series of values (or rather a lack of values) that had always threatened to push sentimentalism to the margins of literary and cultural significance: fashionableness, speciousness, impermanence and insincerity.

The comparatively recent critical interest in sentimentalism as a distinct as well as culturally and generically significant body of literature is in large part due to the rise of feminist criticism. The literature of sensibility is particularly responsive to such readings on several counts, not least because the sentimental novel afforded women writers a legitimate sphere of fictional literary activity, as opposed to the morally-suspicious practice of authoring romances. The genre's significance to feminist studies is much more broad-ranging than the fact that so many women were

---

drawn to it as writers and readers, however. As the social historian G. J. Barker-Benfield has argued, sentimentalism prescribed feminine ideals which seemed to empower women by privileging those characteristics which traditionally precluded them from various forms of homosocial and heterosocial exchange: in particular, the capacity to feel with a heightened degree of emotional sensitivity. These 'feminine' virtues would in turn, it was hoped, reform and redefine male behaviour and 'heterosocial politeness' along female lines. This gendered transformation of manners, as critics such as Barker-Benfield and Terry Eagleton have argued, was symptomatic of a much wider phenomenon we now identify as the feminisation of eighteenth-century discourse and culture, which seemingly permeated every aspect of that culture, from art, literature and religion to eating, shopping and tea drinking.

It is somewhat ironic (though utterly symptomatic of the discourse's inherent instability) that sensibility's empowerment of women, highlighted in such feminist studies, and one of the most important factors in the literature's emergence from the critical abyss in the 1980s and 1990s, is now one of the most contentious issues within feminist criticism of the genre. Barker-Benfield's celebration of the pervasive influence of sensibility in women's lives seems particularly optimistic. His somewhat glib argument that 'the immediate purpose of sentimental fiction was to persuade men to treat women with greater humanity\(^49\) seems a woefully inadequate appraisal of the sexual and political implications of the feminine sentimental ideal, particularly in a work which devotes so much attention to the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft. For as Wollstonecraft — still one of the mode's most incisive critics — argued in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), sensibility gave with one hand what it
took with the other. If sentimental discourse told 'girls that they resemble angels', it was only that it might more effectively 'sink them below women', marginalising and fetishising the female mind and body at the expense of reason, intellect and true emotional integrity.\(^{50}\) When Wollstonecraft called for a 'revolution in female manners' she was, in part at least, calling for a reaction against sensibility's gendered transformation of manners, identified and celebrated by critics such as Eagleton and Barker-Benfield. As several recent critics have importantly argued, sensibility's reification of female manners was attendant upon a more sinister attempt to colonise the feminine; to oppress female sexuality and intellect by channelling these potentially unstable characteristics into socially acceptable behavioural norms.\(^{51}\) The fine line between empowerment and oppression, power and subjugation, reification and restriction highlighted in current feminist criticism of sentimental literature is both the context of this research and, in many ways, its subject.

*   *   *

In exploring the representation of dress in eighteenth-century literature, this research draws upon and aims to contribute to recent scholarly work across a wide range of academic disciplines. In their exhaustive and fascinating studies of eighteenth-century clothing, costume historians such as Anne Buck and Aileen Ribeiro recognise literature as an important site through which dress and fashion

\(^{49}\) Barker-Benfield, p. 227.


could be disseminated and condemned. While their work provides a useful historical context for the present discussion, this research, as a work of literary criticism, is much more concerned with the extent to which texts seek to discursively construct and prescribe attitudes to taste and dress, rather than acting as a true barometer of taste and cultural opinion. In its effort to locate and explore the meanings created by and imposed upon fashion, this work has more in common with fashion theory than fashion history.

For as long as fashion has exerted its sway over society, questions surrounding its origin, dynamics and meanings have preoccupied writers and social commentators. However, perhaps because fashion has been persistently deemed ephemeral and insubstantial, the development of fashion theory as a wide-ranging and multidisciplinary field of academic study, encompassing psychology, sociology, anthropology, semiotics, gender studies and history, is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Repudiating these claims of triviality, theorists have sought to recuperate fashion by attesting to its status as a symbol of, and mirror to, various societal, cultural, economic, aesthetic, psychological and historical values and impulses.


The earliest sustained theory of fashion was propounded by Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), in which the economist argued that the prime function of dress was as a symbol of social and economic status. By virtue of being 'always in evidence', Veblen writes, fashion serves as 'an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at first glance'. This form of sartorial communication is effected through three modes of expression: conspicuous consumption, conspicuous leisure and conspicuous waste. Subverting the notion that changes in taste and aesthetic sensibility influence fashion, Veblen states that it is the need to conspicuously display wealth and reputation through the sumptuous quality and quantity of materials that shapes 'the canons of taste and decency'. Veblen's argument, that fashion functions as a kind of self-imposed sumptuary legislation designed to connote wealth and reputation is a model that has a particular resonance for a study of the eighteenth century during which period, as previously argued, writers frequently asserted that fashion should serve precisely this kind of social regulation, though many more lamented that it failed to do so.

Veblen's theory has been highly influential, though its inadequacy to fully explain the dynamics of fashion, particularly outside the nineteenth century, is noted by many contemporary theorists. Economic considerations alone seem inadequate to explain both the characteristics and phenomenon of fashion. As Quentin Bell points out, Veblen's theory fails to account for periods in which simplicity rather than

54 Veblen, p. 104.
55 Veblen's influence is felt most notably in Quentin Bell's, *On Human Finery*, 2nd edn (London: Allison and Busby, 1976). While Bell's work contains a chapter pointing out some of the deficiencies of Veblen's arguments, particularly when applied to fashions outside the nineteenth century, his work
sumptuousity becomes fashionable. Similarly, his economic reading of specific garments seems rigidly deterministic. Writing of the corset, Veblen asserts that this 'mutilation' of the female form was designed for 'the purpose of lowering the subject's vitality and rendering [a woman] permanently and obviously unfit for work'. Such a reading of the corset fails to account for the psychological, aesthetic and sexual imperatives which subsequent writers such as J. C. Flügel have sought to place at the heart of fashion theory. In his *Psychology of Clothes* (1930) Flügel argues that garments satisfy not merely the human need for protection against the elements but the need to harmonise two conflicting human impulses, modesty and decoration, which are an extension of the impulses of display and shame experienced by the naked body. While clothes serve to harmonise these oppositional motives, they too are subject to the dictates of fashion, which itself is subject to powerful individual and class motivations. Apparently drawing on the earlier work of sociologist Georg Simmel, Flügel perceives fashion as the product of a man's paradoxical desire to be both 'like, and to be unlike his fellow-men'. Where Simmel describes the progress of fashion in terms of the fulfilling of the social needs for 'social equalization [...] the desire for differentiation and variation', Flügel analogously describes fashion in psychological terms as a 'competition of a social and sexual kind' fuelled by the 'fundamental human trait to imitate those who are admired or envied'. Despite their methodological differences, Simmel and Flügel construct a strikingly similar

draws freely upon the earlier text, and is, in many ways, an attempt to assert Veblen's importance as a theorist outside the field of economics.

56 Bell, p. 183
57 Veblen, p. 106.
59 Simmel's *Philosophie der Moden* had first appeared in print in 1905.
60 Flügel, p. 140.
Mandevillian model of fashion's progress in the early twentieth century, in which social imitation fuels the lower social ranks to appropriate the fashions of those among higher social strata, which in turn necessitates that these class groups abandon the current fashion and assume new styles in order to preserve class integrity and social distinction.63

The work of these three early theorists shares a fundamental conviction that has remained both the focal point and most contested issue amongst fashion theorists to the present day: that clothing and fashion communicate and signify meaning. This conviction has led many subsequent theorists to argue that fashion and clothing operate through a kind of language that possesses a unique vocabulary and grammar. In the most significant of these readings, Barthes' *Fashion System* (1967) applies the principles and methodologies of structuralism and semiotics to an analysis of late-1950s French fashion magazines in order to analyse the structure of the fashion system's method of signification. For Barthes, language and dress are inextricably linked: clothing cannot 'signify without recourse to the speech that describes it, comments upon it, and provides it with signifiers and signifieds abundant enough to constitute a system of meaning'.64 More recently, Alison Lurie has developed Barthes' sense of the ineluctable connection between language and clothes to suggest that 'if clothing has a language, it must have a vocabulary and a grammar like other languages'. As in human speech, Lurie suggests, clothing has different intonations and

62 Flügel, p. 138.
63 For Mandeville's description of fashion as the product of 'a continual striving to outdo one another', see *The Fable of the Bees* (1723), reprinted in *The Fable of the Bees and Other Writings*, ed. by E. J. Hundert (Indianapolis [IN]: Hackett, 1997), pp. 75-77.
dialects, some of which are unintelligible to 'members of mainstream culture'. Most fancifully of all, Lurie suggests that as a language, different articles of clothing function as different parts of speech in which clothes function as the subject, trimmings and accessories as adjectives or adverbs.

While Lurie's study offers some intriguing and entertaining readings of particular items and styles of clothing, her development of Barthes' theory is a misreading rather a logical extension. For Barthes' study deals exclusively with the 'written system of Fashion' rather than 'real clothing [which] cannot exist at the level of language, for, as we know, language is not a tracing of reality'. The structure of clothing, Barthes proceeds, cannot be determined simply by 'seeing' it, as we may determine the structure of written clothing through reading text: 'in order to analyse the real garment, [...] we should have to go back to the actions which governed its manufacture'. Following Barthes' logic that 'the structure of real clothing can only be technological' (pertaining to its cut, seams, method of stitching), the meanings of real clothes and fashion must exist independently of its underlying technological structure. The meanings of dress, in other words, lie beyond the physical garments themselves, but are rather determined by various context-, social- and historically-specific factors. Rather than a language, therefore, Fred Davis has argued that clothes and fashions approximate a code or 'quasi-code' whose key terms, 'fabric, texture, color, pattern, volume, silhouette, and occasion', are 'forever shifting or "in process"'. Furthermore, as John Harvey has argued in his study of the colour black in men's costume from the

---

66 Lurie, p. 10.
67 Barthes, pp. 4-5.
nineteenth century onwards, these shifting terms are open to perpetual reinterpretation and re-evaluation, and therefore do not constitute not meanings as such, but rather function as constructions.\textsuperscript{69}

Fashion theory is, in some senses, fashion's victim too: as styles and societies change, the work of various theorists soon appears outdated and inadequate. Veblen's, Simmel's and Flügel's highly class-conscious works may have a particular resonance for a study of fashion from the eighteenth to mid-twentieth century, but their applicability to society today seems very limited. Perhaps in response to these concerns, fashion theory has become more pluralistic over the last two decades, recognising the rise of capitalism, social change, changing gender roles, aesthetic standards, psychological and class motivations, and the significance of particular historical moments as influences which produce fashion in conjunction with each other rather than in isolation. While this research shares a conviction that clothing and fashion are imbued with meaning, it attempts no explanation of the phenomenon of fashion itself, for, as the wide range of fashion theory attests, fashion's meanings are diffuse, diverse and resist conclusive interpretation. Rather this work is concerned with the dialectic between meaning and unintelligibility, communication and encryption, that inflects, intrigues and troubles virtually all writing on fashion to the present day. Through a study of the representation of clothing and fashion in eighteenth-century literature this research explores how writers, long before the development of fashion theory, attempted their own readings of the meanings of clothes and fashion, which both reflected and constructed particular ideals regarding the social and moral order of the time.

While anxieties surrounding dress were by no means new or exclusive to the eighteenth century, these concerns take on a specific character in the literature of sensibility which dominated the mid to late eighteenth-century literary market; a character that was distinct even from anxieties surrounding dress expressed earlier in the century or in other literary genres. Since beginning this work, two important books exploring eighteenth-century debates on dress and fashion as important tools of European cultural criticism have been published. As Erin Mackie has demonstrated in her illuminating study of fashion and the commercial marketplace in *The Tatler* and *Spectator*, fashion, located 'at the intersection of the present with the future', became 'a way of thinking about social reform, a way of expressing progressive desires for a better future'.

Fashion, in Mackie's study, represents more than simply apparel, material objects or manners; rather, it stands as a more abstract cultural imperative whose tautological structure mirrors the tautological structure of capitalism. As such, eighteenth-century discourse on fashion, she argues, became a way of 'isolat[ing] and criticiz[ing] certain consumption patterns that accompan[ied] the intensification of capitalism in England'. In response to these threats, Mackie demonstrates, Addison and Steele developed a complex discourse which aimed to prescribe and regulate fashion and taste 'not simply to regulate costume, but to institute modes of social relations as well, not simply to arbitrate, but also to institute specific ideas about nature, law and humanity to advance "modern standards of middle-class culture"'. In championing internal integrity over external display, the periodicals' debates upon dress anticipate many of the mid-century concerns outlined in the following chapters.

---

71 Mackie, p. 7.
72 Mackie, pp. 2-3
The nature of these debates and their articulation differ fundamentally, however. Where *The Tatler* and *Spectator* sought to reform their readers through the cultivation of a 'widespread consensus garnered through the free assent of each individual', sentimental literature's prescription of the adorned female body was much more coercive and repressive. My discussion of women's magazines in Chapter Three, since its subject is closest to Mackie's, throws this strategic difference into stark relief. While women might be free to negotiate literature's dictates upon dress at their own will, the consequences of not heeding its advice (which ranged from the inability to find a husband, to poverty and prostitution) were so disastrous that women seemed to have no choice at all. Most striking of all, however, is the extent to which critiques of commerce and capitalism are happy by-products of debates on fashion articulated in the literature of sensibility, rather than the main imperative of these discussions. Driven primarily by anxieties regarding female sexuality and morality, sentimental literature seemed less concerned about reforming commercial culture, or female morality for that matter, than in sartorially codifying female morality or its lack.

Where Mackie's study focuses upon efforts to reform fashion in order to establish 'modern standards of middle-class culture', the interdisciplinary collection of essays *The Clothes that Wear Us* (1999) explores the 'anxious discourse' propagated in eighteenth-century literature, art and society that 'adumbrates the power of clothing to alter appearance'. While the collection acknowledges this anxiety was counteracted by 'a complementary rather than contradictory discourse that seeks to neutralize and
contain that power.

The Clothes that Wear Us, like much recent work upon fashion and culture, focuses predominantly upon and celebrates the attractive propensity of dress to transgress social, moral and sexual norms through such modes of display as the masquerade and gender and cultural cross-dressing. Much less attention is given to the attempts to contain and neutralise dress's power to encrypt selfhood. In one of the most intriguing articles of the collection, Helga Schuhe Watt examines the role of dress in Sophie La Roche's sentimental novel The History of Lady Sophia Sternheim (1771). The body, Watt argues, was imbued with a particular significance in sentimental literature as a text that could 'be read and misread'. In Sophia Sternheim, Watt argues, dress serves as an extension to the body, speaking 'an implicit language as clear and forceful as ordinary speech or actions': Sophia's plain, modest dress testifying to her virtue.

Soon, the discussion of dress in the novel turns into a discussion of the novel's rhetorical dress, as Watt draws an analogy between Sophia's natural beauty and the contemporary reception of the novel as 'an unreflected act of nature, an outpouring of sentiment' from a female author rather than 'an artistic process'. While Watt's essay is predominantly concerned with establishing La Roche's text as an important contribution to the development of the epistolary novel, it fails to fully develop its most intriguing argument: that beneath La Roche's narrative artlessness, a strategy deployed to gain acceptance of her novel as a female author, lies a well-crafted, though scarcely visible, artfulness. This dichotomy powerfully undermines the fictional sentimental argument that the language of dress is 'as clear and as forceful as ordinary speech or actions'. It suggests — although Watt does not

---


74 Helga Schuhe Watt, 'Sophie La Roche's History of Lady Sophia Sternheim: Who is Dressing and Writing the Heroine?', in The Clothes That Wear Us, p. 144.
explore the connection — the extent to which the eighteenth-century ideal of dress as a clear and forceful language of sentiment could be manipulated by the intelligent or the unscrupulous: in which modest dress could serve as a further disguise for women's thoughts and desires. It is precisely with this complex and intricate interplay between the discourses of anxiety and containment surrounding dress, rather than with the sweeping acts of sartorial repression and transgression explored by other critics, with which this work is concerned.

* * * * *

The structure of this research is broadly threefold: an exploration of the perceived antagonism between dress, virtue and the morally-legible body, the attempts made to contrive solutions to resolve these tensions and analogise body, character and appearance, and finally an analysis of the way in which these antagonisms are both affected by and fundamental to the increasingly critical anti-sentimental discourse at the close of the century. Chapter One takes as its starting point Samuel Richardson's Pamela (1740) and the controversy it spawned. In both the text itself and the literary debates surrounding it, Pamela's dress and virtue became inextricably linked in a literary-critical discourse as readers used sartorial language as metaphors through which to condemn or champion the novel. Pamela's rejection of her deceased mistress's clothes in favour of her homespun gown and petticoat is a focal point of my analysis, as it was for many of the novel's most admiring and critical readers. This scene constitutes an attempt by Richardson to create a sentimental ideal of moral transparency, in which Pamela's dress acts as a visual signifier of her virtue, like the letters she sews to the underside of her petticoat. This effort, however, is fatally undermined by the fact that this articulation of virtue is uttered through the
notoriously unreliable and suspicious vehicle of dress and, as such, becomes archetypal of the fallacy of the sentimental ideal of the morally-legible body. *Pamela*'s immense popularity and its status as the first sentimental novel also provides an opportunity to explore a recurrent theme of this research: the extent to which sentimentalism, problematically, became a fashion.

Much of the anxiety provoked by Richardson's novel stemmed from the social outrage it provoked in marrying an aristocrat and a servant, and the sizeable body of writing concerning servant dress in the early eighteenth century is an important context for this debate. While diatribes against fashion frequently implicated women from all social ranks, the increasing accessibility of fashion to the labouring classes caused profound and alarmist concern. Chapter Two explores this anxiety more fully, examining both its roots and articulation in the literary and dramatic representation of dressmakers and milliners throughout the century. While representations of labouring women in the period are frequently inflected by a discourse which renders prostitution paradigmatic of all female labour, the eighteenth-century dressmaker, unlike her nineteenth-century counterpart the 'distressed needlewoman', becomes indistinguishable from the commodities she produces: a personification of, and further justification for critiques of dress as a dangerous form of social and moral encryption.

The second part of this research focuses upon the way in which individual writers, institutions and genres attempt to resolve the tensions and antagonisms outlined in the previous two chapters, to conjure ideals of femininity in which the adorned female body becomes a synecdoche for sentimental virtue. As a genre which sought to create expedient ideals of femininity, the women's periodical and magazine
provided a powerful vehicle for channelling reader desires for information on the latest fashions into forms of sartorial imitation that were socially desirable and compatible with, rather than antagonistic to, the role and duties of a proper wife and mother. Chapter Three explores the changing role of dress in the eighteenth-century periodical and magazine as the genre's function emerged as a repository of information upon matters concerning the day-to-day lives of women. As dress became increasingly unavoidable subject matter for periodicals and magazines, the genre, in which traditionally some of the period's most vehement criticisms of fashion and dress had been voiced, had to learn to incorporate dress into its primarily didactic design. Nevertheless, as I argue through a reading of the role of dress in the period's most successful periodical for women, *The Lady's Magazine*, the lengths to which the publication goes to contain and manage its coverage of fashion reveal profound uneasiness regarding the efficacy of its project.

Chapter Four examines Fordyce's immensely successful *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) as a blueprint of ideal sentimental femininity. Structured around St. Paul's demand that 'women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety', the *Sermons* attempts to construct a morally-transparent fashion system in which a woman's dress can unequivocally communicate her inner worth. Analogous to this rhetorical fashion system, I argue, are the attempts made by philanthropic institutions — in particular the Magdalen House for Penitent Prostitutes — to create uniforms which are intended to both precipitate and symbolise the moral rehabilitation of the wearer. The very articulation of such fashion systems, in print or material fact, however, left these systems vulnerable to misappropriation as available models for imitation, effectively reducing virtue to a set of external signs that could be affected.
My final chapter concludes with a reading of the extent to which the inextricable connections between dress, fashion, sentimentalism, affectation and deceit, born to a large extent with the publication of Pamela and fostered by a plethora of sentimental novels, essays, conduct manuals and periodicals, converge in the anti- and counter-sentimental discourse that reaches its height in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. The fashionableness of sentimentalism was persistently evoked by writers such as Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft to attest to both the term's and the literature's emptiness, affectedness and corruption. Located within the context of the complex and well-documented debates chronicling and precipitating the decline of sentimentalism in the 1790s, this final chapter focuses more closely upon one of the mode's less obvious critics, Maria Edgeworth. Through an exploration of Belinda I argue that Edgeworth's 'moral tale' constitutes an attempt to write a counter-sentimental novel, simultaneously working within and against the mode's conventions, through a condemnation and rehabilitation of a woman of fashion.
Seeing Through Pamela's Clothes: The Meanings of Dress in Richardson's Novel

[Richardson] has reconciled the *Pleasing* to the *Proper*. The *Thought* is everywhere exactly *cloath’d* by the *Expression*: And becomes its *Dress* as roundly, and as close, as *Pamela* in her *Country Habit*. (Aaron Hill, Letter prefixed to the second edition of *Pamela* [1741])

'Tis true, the Sentences are artfully wrapt up, but [...] the Ideas divested of their Tinsel Trappings and Coverings are too gross to entertain, much less capable of instructing the Youth of either Sex. (Anon., *Pamela Censured*, [1741])

Dress and sartorial metaphors permeate Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and the *Pamela* phenomenon. Not only does the text chart the heroine's progress from servant to wife of Mr B., precipitated by the inheritance of her deceased mistress's clothes, but the novel rendered sentiment and sentimental literature fashionable commodities. Contestations of the meaning of *Pamela* were and are frequently located in the alternately perceived analogy or disjunction between the heroine's physical gentility and inner self. In these competing narratives Pamela's appearance, first in the garb of her late mistress and subsequently in her homespun gown and petticoat, becomes variously symbolic of her nobility of sentiment or propensity for manipulation. The heroine's body (and her analogous body of letters) constitute powerful signifiers of selfhood which Mr B. must divest Pamela of before he can fully possess her. Readers and critics of the novel persistently recapitulate B.'s trials of the servant girl by engaging in what James Grantham Turner has described as an apparently 'endless circle of enclosing and displaying, divesting and investing, an imaginary body'. Dress and its uncontrollably fluid metonymic possibilities thus play a key role in what has so appropriately been labelled the *Pamela* vogue — the fashion for numerous anti- and

---

alternative Pamela, spurious sequels, illustrations, paintings (some semi-pornographic), and ephemera including waxworks and a Pamela fan. For, according to many of these contemporary responses, the art of reading Pamela and judging the efficacy of its moral project lies in reading Pamela's clothes and their relationship to her inner character correctly.

Through their deployment of sartorial metaphors, Pamelists and anti-Pamelists alike elide the heroine with the novel that bears her name. If the truth of Pamela's unclothed character can be exposed, so too will the purity or impurity of the novel's moral; likewise if Pamela is revealed to be a sham romance disguised as a didactic novel, so too is the pretence of the heroine's virtue. Critics of the text, like the aristocratic B. they so vehemently condemned, repeatedly sought to undress Pamela in order to expose both the heroine's and Richardson's hypocrisy. Champions and admirers of the work, on the other hand, took pride in their ability to recognise the exemplary status of the heroine and Richardson's literary project, as opposed to those less virtuous critics whose negative readings of the work merely reflected their own moral impurity. In these competing narratives clothing takes on a troubled and troubling duality that reflects the profoundly ambiguous deployment of dress in Pamela itself: where dress represents both that which is external, even antithetical, to

---

3 Reference to the phenomenon as a 'vogue' has been common in criticisms of the novel since Alan McKillop's Samuel Richardson, Printer and Novelist (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), p. 45, although this is only one of many terms used by McKillop to describe the events following the novel's publication. The phrase was popularised by Eaves and Kimpel, who devote a chapter of Samuel Richardson: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) to the Pamela Vogue, pp. 119-153. More recently, this term has been criticised by William B. Warner who argues that the popularity and controversy surrounding the novel were 'more than a shift in taste a mere "vogue"', referring instead to the phenomenon as a 'media event'. William B. Warner, Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750 (Berkley [LA] and London: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 176-230. While the word 'vogue' may appear to trivialise the complex history of the novel, I wish to recuperate the resonance of the term in highlighting both the centrality of
moral sentiment, or functions as a powerful material articulation of inner worth. This chapter will explore the importance and duality of sartorial detail and metaphor in *Pamela* and the literary debates fuelled by its publication. In particular, it is concerned with the extent to which the novel's attempt to analogise the sentimental and adorned body in the figure of the heroine undermines the text's moral coherence and therefore becomes archetypal of the sentimental fallacy of the morally-legible woman.

In their persistent use of sartorial imagery, Pamelists and anti-Pamelists strikingly deploy a shared critical vocabulary; a vocabulary that is paradigmatic of the profoundly vexed status of dress and fashion in eighteenth-century culture. Pamela's dress, or *Pamela*’s rhetorical dress, is used both to condone the essential virtue of the heroine and narrative, and to condemn their pretensions to an artificial semblance of virtue. In a prefatory letter to the second edition of the work published in 1741 Aaron Hill praised *Pamela* for confounding readers' low expectations of the novel through a telling inversion of sartorial language: 'who could have dreamt, he should find, under the modest Disguise of a Novel, all the Soul of Good Religion, Good-breeding, Discretion, Good-nature, Wit, Fancy, Fine Thought, and Morality'.4 In Charles Povey's anti-Pamelist *Virgin in Eden*, also of 1741, 'disguise' is deployed in its more traditionally negative usage as emblematic of the novel's immorality and duplicity: 'those Epistles are only Scenes of Immodesty, painted in Images of Virtue; Disguises in Masquerade'.5 The dyadic and multi-layered Pamela created by such readings is

---


5 Charles Povey, *The Virgin in Eden: or, the State of Innocency, To which are added, PAMELA’S Letters proved to be Immodest Romances painted in Images of Virtue: Masquerades in Disguise*, 5th edn (London: J. Roberts, 1741), p. i.
symptomatic of the duplicity and hypocrisy associated with the female body in Restoration and eighteenth-century literature, and which Tassie Gwilliam has located at the heart of Richardson's formulation of gender in his novels. The 'duplicitous body of femininity', as Gwilliam argues, metaphorised women in terms of surface and depths, body and soul, clothing and body, in a strategy that reassured readers of the existence of a true and recoverable female self even while it suggested women's propensity to disguise or conceal that self through the artifice of appearance.6

While an emphasis upon female bodily and sartorial duplicity has been crucial to anti-Pamelist readings of the heroine's character since that of the original anti-Pamelist, Mr B., the critic of Richardson's novel who stresses these insinuations and accusations is in danger of misreading, or failing to read at all, the apparently intended function of dress in Pamela out of which enthusiasts such as Hill made so much creative rhetorical use. Rather than a suspect 'Covering' designed to conceal her underlying duplicity, Pamela's dress is intended to function in the novel as a diaphanous veil, a symbolic 'Want of Drapery', that analogises body, soul and mind by rendering the heroine's inner virtue unequivocally transparent.7 In this context,

6 Tassie Gwilliam, Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender (Stanford [CA]: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 15-49. Gwilliam's reading of Pamela's gender fictions is one of comparatively few modern critical readings to devote specific attention to the role of dress in Richardson's novel, in stark contrast to the prominence given to dress and sartorial metaphors in the critical furore following the novel's publication. Notable exceptions include Carey McIntosh, 'Pamela's Clothes', ELH, 35 (1968), pp. 75-83, Caryn Chaden's 'Pamela's Identity Sewn in Clothes', in Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts, ed. by Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch (New York, West Point [CT] and London: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 110-118 and William B. Warner's chapter on the 'Pamela Media Event' in Licensing Entertainment, which will be discussed in more detail below. More recently, Patricia Brückman has brought a material culture perspective to an understanding of the role of dress in the novel, by examining the specific garments worn by the heroine, the process of manufacture and acquisition, and the function of these garments as a symbol of the new social and commercial revolution wrought by the commercialisation of fashion in the period. Patricia Brückman, 'Clothes of Pamela's Own: Shopping at B-Hall', Eighteenth-Century Life, 25: 2 (2001), pp. 201-215.

Pamela's appearance neither in her aristocratic garb nor in her homespun gown and petticoat is inconsistent with the virtue the novel seeks to reward. Pamela's inherited clothes are not a fictional identity in which she vainly parades, but, to borrow a phrase used by Michael McKeon in a different context, constitute 'an enabling identity' that reveals, through its grandeur, the social position which Pamela's virtue and education merit.\(^8\) Similarly her servile homespun attire serves to elevate the heroine and attests to her moral superiority by throwing into stark relief the inner gentility that lies beneath.

The desirability as well as necessity of manifesting Pamela's virtue in such external forms as dress is alluded to in the *Preface* to the novel. In order to 'Improve the Minds of the YOUTH of both Sexes', *Pamela* will 'paint VICE in its proper colours, to make it deservedly Odious; and [...] set VIRTUE in its own amiable Light to make it truly Lovely'.\(^9\) While the Preface expresses a belief that virtue and vice have their own unequivocal character, Richardson simultaneously suggests that these moral characteristics can be misconstrued by the reader. The task of the 'editor' of the Pamela letters is thus to ensure that vice is demonstrably painted and virtue actively and unequivocally lit. The paradox of moral qualities that are both essential yet demand active improvement, highlighted by the Preface, mirrors the inherent problematic of sensibility as an innate virtue that must simultaneously be cultivated.

---

\(^8\) Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1660-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 224. McKeon uses the phrase in a discussion of the sixteenth-century text *Jack of Newbery* (1597) to describe a draper who has fallen upon hard times, but who increases his wealth and eventually becomes sheriff after receiving the charitable gift of a suit of new clothes from the hero Jack.

\(^9\) Samuel Richardson, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded. In a Series of Familiar Letters from a beautiful young Damsel to her Parents* (1740), ed. by T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston, New York, Atlanta, Geneva [IL], Dallas, Palo Alto: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 3. All quotations will be
The metaphors of artistry deployed in the Preface (scarcely less problematic than the sartorial metaphors Pamela's critics would seize upon) pre-empt those deployed in More's equally fraught poem 'Sensibility' (1782). More's descriptions of this artless virtue as a 'taste refin'd', a quality 'finely-fashion'd' and 'fine-wrought' like an intricately created objet d'art, render the poem's conception of sensibility vulnerable to accusations of artifice and duplicity. The persistent mixing of metaphors of artlessness and artistry renders the poem's statement that '[Sensibility's] subtle essence still eludes the chains/ Of definition and defeats her pains' determinedly prophetic. Richardson's analogous desire to reconcile what he asserts as the predominantly visual signifiers of virtue and vice — colours and light — to their moral essence, and its attendant difficulties, is a vital context for an understanding of the deployment of dress in Pamela and its importance in subsequent contestations of the novel. Dress is used by Richardson as a material tool through which to make virtue lovely. Though we are told in the novel's frontispiece that the heroine is a 'beautiful young lady' the text conveys little sense of Pamela's physical appearance. The heroine's moral and physical beauty are instead conveyed to the reader through her letters and the details of her clothing meticulously catalogued in her correspondence. In choosing to represent a servant's virtue through her dress, however, Richardson projected his novel into a long-standing and thorny political and social debate, in which Defoe's voice was perhaps the most virulent, and in which Richardson had himself participated in his Apprentice's Vade Mecum (1734). In order to perceive the political significance of Pamela's clothes it is vital to place Richardson's novel in the context of the debates taken from this edition, which is a reprint of the two volume first edition, unless otherwise stated. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.

10 The sixth (octavo) edition which was illustrated with engravings by Francis Hayman and Hubert François Gravelot did not appear until 8 May 1742. See Eaves' and Kimpel's introduction to Pamela, p. xx.
surrounding dress and the working classes which dominated in the 1720s and 1730s, but which persisted with varying degrees of urgency throughout the eighteenth century.

* * *

PAMELA AND THE DEBATE ON SERVANT DRESS

The practice of providing or bequeathing second-hand clothes to servants during life or upon death was commonplace by 1740, although it was expected that the clothes would be subsequently and suitably altered.11 Clarissa Harlowe, for example, determines to leave a 'brown lustring gown' to her servant Mabell after her death when it 'would be of no use to any-body' any longer. But Clarissa's benevolence does not overshadow her sense of propriety. Mabell is instructed to 'make it more suitable to her degree' before allowing it even to form part of her 'Sunday wear'.12 The designs of many fashionable items of costume, particularly the cumbersome and fabric-wearing hoop, as well as the flimsiness of many popular materials such as silk, rendered the majority of upper- and middle-class garments unsuitable for domestic duties. Indeed, as Diana De Marly argues in her study of working dress, the symbolic function of many eighteenth-century fashions was precisely to 'discriminate between the idle rich and the labouring classes' through the relative impracticality of the garments to labouring domestic tasks.13

---

12 Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa: or, the History of a Young Lady*, 7 vols (London: Samuel Richardson, 1748), V, p. 371.
Yet according to writers such as Defoe, conventions of dressing garments down and issues of inconvenience were not impinging upon the dress of servants. In *Every-Body's Business is No-Body's Business* (1725) he voices perhaps the most prevalent counter-fashion argument of the eighteenth century: the increasing indistinguishability of rank. The blame for this disturbing phenomenon is located in the vanity of the female servant:

> our Servant Wenches are so puff'd up with Pride, now a Days, that they never think they go fine enough: It is a hard Matter to know the Mistress from the Maid by their Dress, nay very often the Maid shall be the finer of the two. Our woollen Manufacture suffers much by this, for now, nothing but Silks and Sattins will go down with our Kitchen Wenches, and it is to support this intolerable [sic.] Pride, that they have insensibly raised their Wages to such a Heighth, as was ever known in any Age or Nation but this.\(^\text{14}\)

Defoe's attack on women servants and their undeservedly high wages is criticised on every level from the comparative banalities of 'add[ing] more to House-keeping' costs by requiring more soap to wash their garments\(^\text{15}\) to the serious political and economic consequences of wearing imported 'Silks and Sattins' rather than supporting the homespun products of British woollen manufacture.\(^\text{16}\) The unrestrainedly emulative society that Defoe envisages here would have been familiar to a contemporary readership following the publication of Mandeville's controversial *Fable of the Bees* (1723). Yet where in Mandeville's *Fable* the 'continual striving to outdo one another' through sartorial display sets 'the poor to work, [and] adds spurs to industry' in Defoe's

---


\(^{15}\) Defoe, *Every-Body's Business*, p. 11.

\(^{16}\) The importance of servants in potentially securing the future of the English textile industries in face of the influx of comparatively cheap and fashionable imported cottons and silks was a recurring political argument in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In 1689 a bill demanding that servants should wear felt hats of English manufacture was only narrowly defeated. For a full account of the hostility towards imported fabrics see Beverly Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), particularly 'Popular Fashion and East India Trade', pp. 3-42.
account the moral and socio-economic consequences of such forms of emulation are irreparably damaging:17

By their Extravagance in Dress, they put our Wives and Daughters upon yet greater Excesses, because they will (as indeed they ought) go finer than the Maid: Thus the Maid striving to outdo the Mistress, the Tradesman's Wife to out-do the Gentleman's Wife, the Gentleman's Wife emulating the Lady, and the Ladies one another, it seems as if the whole Business of the female Sex, were nothing, but Excess of Pride, and Extravagance in Dress!18

Rather than a catalyst for economic growth, Defoe's society is stagnating under the economic pressures of undeservedly high wages and the social pressures exerted by the emulation amongst female servants.

An altogether more alarmist perception of servant emulation is suggested in Defoe's *Behaviour of Servants in England* (n.d.). Here the inappropriate dress of female servants is placed in the broader context of the 'abuses of Liberty among the servant classes', both male and female, and the moral degeneration of the nation:19

the miserable Circumstance of this Country is now such, that, in short, if it goes on the Poor will be Rulers over the Rich, and the Servants be Governours of the Masters, the *Plebeij* have almost mobb'd the *Patricij*, and [...] so the Cannaille of this Nation impose Laws upon their Superiours, and begin not only to be troublesome, but in time, may be dangerous; in a word, Order is inverted, Subordination ceases, and the World seems to stand with the Bottom upward.20

In order to impede the progress of the forms of social reversal outlined here and in the less overtly propagandist *Every-Body's Business is No-Body's Business* Defoe demands the regulation of servant dress. Since 'Charity Children', he argues, are

---

distinguish'd by their Dress, why then may not our Women Servants'. Disappointingly, but in a characteristic strategy of counter-fashion argument in the period, Defoe stops short of describing the composition of this projected dress-code, only insisting that women servants should not wear 'Silks, Laces, and other superfluous Finery'. In *The Behaviour of Servants*, however, Defoe goes further by looking back to Athenian, Spartan and Roman models of service, conjuring an ideal vision in which 'the Masters [...] feed their Servants sufficiently, that their strength might be supported for their Labour and [...] the Servants [...] wear a Badge of their Servitude, that they might be known, upon all Occasions [as] Servants'. Defoe imbues dress (here in the form of a badge) with a powerful ordering facility to sartorially codify society. The badge constitutes a double form of recognition: in order to avoid embarrassment, the middle and upper social ranks will be able to discern servants upon sight, and servants, by wearing the badge, will acknowledge their own social inferiority and their respective duties to their masters and society as a whole. In this way, dress is deployed by Defoe to neutralise its own transgressive potential.

*Pamela* is both written out of and implicitly questions the moral, political, economic and social issues raised by such debates on servant dress. On one level, Richardson's novel — culminating in a cross-class marriage — could be read as the realisation of Defoe's worst fears. Letters six and seven of *Pamela* are dominated by lists of the heroine's newly acquired 'Silks, Laces and other superfluous Finery'; the kind which Defoe had so vociferously condemned. The length and exhaustive detail

---

21 Defoe, *Every-Body's Business*, p. 16.
with which Pamela describes her clothes is so vital to readings of her character that
these lists are worth quoting in full:

My Master has been very kind [...] for he has given me a Suit of my old Lady's Cloaths, and
half a Dozen of her Shifts, and Six fine Handkerchiefs, and Three of her Cambrick Aprons,
and Four Holland ones: The Cloaths are fine Silks, and too rich and too good for me, to be
sure. I wish it was no Affront to him to make Money of them, and send it to you: it would do
me more good. (p. 30)

Since my last, my Master gave me more fine Things. He call'd me up to my old Lady's Closet,
and pulling out her Drawers, he gave me Two Suits of fine Flanders lac'd Headcloths, Three
Pair of fine Silk Shoes, two hardly the worse, and just fit for me; for my old Lady had a very
little Foot; and several Ribbands and Topknots of all Colours, and Four Pair of fine white
Cotton Stockens, and Three Pair of fine Silk ones; and Two Pair of rich Stays, and a Pair of
rich Silver Buckles in one Pair of the Shoes. I was quite astonish'd, and unable to speak for a
while; but yet I was inwardly ash'md to take the Stockens; for Mrs Jervis was not there: If she
had it would have been nothing. I believe I receiv'd them awkwardly; for he smil'd at my
Awkwardness; and said, Don't blush, Pamela: Dost think I don't know pretty Maids wear
Shoes and Stockens? (p. 31)

Although it is clear that Pamela's new clothes are not typical of a servant, it is easy to
forget in an age of mass textile production like our own that each of the fabrics she
alludes to had specific social connotations. The aprons that Pamela receives, for
example, reveal her dual status within the B. household. Aprons were a characteristic
feature of both working and middle-class women's clothing in the first half of the
eighteenth century, as well as of labouring men's attire. For the labouring classes, the
apron was, according to Phillis Cunnington, a 'symbol of menial rank': 'Everyone
needs protection from the cold, therefore it is not infra dig to wear an overcoat, but
protection from dirt is another matter. It suggests undignified activity [...] it was
demeaning to need protection from the dirt of manual work'.23 Though their protective
function was important, aprons were also used in middle class attire as an attractive
feature of dress in their own right. As with many contemporary items of clothing the
purpose and therefore social significance of a particular apron was delineated by the

---

23 Phillis Cunnington, Costume of Household Servants From the Middle Ages to 1900 (London: Adam
fabric it was made out of. Pamela receives both aprons that are suitable for her employment, and others which suggest her 'privileged' position within the B. household. While holland linen was an appropriate fabric for a working apron, the superior quality French cambric aprons that she receives are much more suitable for the decorative dress of her social superiors.

Potentially more concerning than the gift of these fine clothes, however, are the ambiguous terms in which Pamela responds to these items, coupled with the fact that they are given to her by her master. The seemingly unequivocal resignation with which Pamela claims that she cannot sell the clothes in letter six is transformed into a more opaque form of moral confusion when she receives the 'Stockens' from Mr B. The source of Pamela's embarrassment is unclear and at risk of the kind of diametrically opposed readings that characterise the literary critical debate following the novel's publication. Much of this interpretive difficulty stems from the ambiguity surrounding the extent to which Pamela feels that she is customarily entitled to the array of fashionable items she receives. In *The Behaviour of Servants* Defoe warned that the customary practice of giving clothes to servants led to misplaced notions of entitlement based upon (potentially false) merit. Defoe argues that when presented with fine clothes the servant, here a male servant, will be led to believe that 'his own Merit has procur'd him all that; this exalts him in his own Opinion, and in a Word ruins him; for Pride and a good Servant are as inconsistent, as Darkness with Light'.

Pamela's shame in receiving the stockings is of course merited and meritworthy, particularly since she is given the stockings by Mr B.; this would seem to obviate accusations that Pamela feels she has a right to the garments. But following such a
lengthy and detailed list of the rest of her fine wardrobe Pamela's lack of shame in receiving so many other garments from her master including other undergarments ('Two Pair of rich Stays') is conspicuous. Reading the novel in the context of Defoe's arguments on servant dress, it is possible to argue that Pamela's alleged 'virtue' has already been rewarded by this juncture in the novel in the material form of clothing. It is only when this system of reward seems to demand something in return, suggested here by the erotic symbol of the stockings, that Pamela's acceptance of these material rewards for her servile virtue is shaken.

Eliza Haywood reinvents Pamela's reluctant acceptance of this gift in her Anti-Pamela: or, Feign'd Innocence Detected (1741). When Syrena Tricksey meets her future lover Vardine in a haberdasher's shop, he purchases a pair of stockings for her which, unlike Pamela, Syrena refuses to accept. Syrena's motives are, as always however, more openly questionable than those of Richardson's heroine. She refuses the stockings not from shame, but because she feels her acceptance might compromise her efforts to both conquer Vardine and fulfil her social aspirations to becoming his mistress or perhaps his wife by revealing all too clearly her moral corruptibility. Learning soon after the incident that Vardine's fortune is not what she had anticipated, Syrena is 'vex'd [...] that I did not take the Stockings, for as there is nothing to be done with him, 'twould have been clear Gains; but I did not know then, his fine Cloaths deceiv'd me'. Later Vardine tries once more to give the stockings to Syrena. Her refusal and eventual acceptance create a scenario that imaginatively and

---

25 [Eliza Haywood], Anti-Pamela: or, Feign'd Innocence Detected (London: J. Hugginson, 1741).  
26 Anti-Pamela, p. 23.
characteristically incorporates both Pamelist and anti-Pamelist re-inventions of the original scene:

I have had your Stockings in my Pocket all Day, and now I desire you'll take charge on them yourself [...] My Stockings, said she, indeed they are none of mine [...] may be you think they won't fit [...] I can tell in a Moment, by grasping your pretty Leg: — Here he made an offer of doing as he said, but she resisted with all her Strength, crying out at the same time — hold! hold! I will have them — they will fit; and glad enough she was to take them, tho' in reality a little frightened at the manner in which he forced them upon her.

This comic altercation draws attention primarily to Syrena's vanity and weakness for fashionable items of clothing. But in a novel which highlights, even while it seems to attempt to subvert, the complex financial and sexual restrictions society exerts upon women, this scene also highlights the untenability of Syrena's and, by implication, Pamela's position. Though Syrena seeks to conquer Vardine, the tables have been turned here. As a female servant Syrena must accept the stockings if she is to rebuff Vardine's sexual advances and maintain the control over her financial and sexual affairs she so ardently desires. Haywood's novel thus offers a critique of Pamela's acceptance of the stockings which is far more sympathetic than many other anti-Pamelas, in its emphasis upon the unenviable position of the female servant in a world of male sexual threat. Haywood would return to this theme in her 1743 advice manual *A Present for a Servant-Maid*. Whilst advocating the 'vigorous Resistance' which the female servant should counter her master's advances, Haywood acknowledges the labouring woman's vulnerability: 'Being so much under his Command, and obliged to attend him at any Hour, and at any place he is pleased to call you, will lay you under Difficulties to avoid his Importunities, which it must be

---

27 *Anti-Pamela*, p. 33.
confessed are not easy to surmount. In the earlier text, however, this insight into the untenability of the female servant's situation is qualified by the fantasy of female empowerment and sexual manipulation the *Anti-Pamela* celebrates. Since Syrena succeeds in acquiring the stockings she has wanted all along, even in circumstances largely beyond her control, the novel ultimately privileges Defoe's conception of the ambitious, morally-bankrupt female servant rather than Richardson's passively ashamed and reluctant beneficiary.

Richardson's own contribution to the debates on servant dress offers an equally damaging context to those of Defoe and Haywood in which to place Pamela's acceptance of her deceased mistress's clothes. In his *Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1734), an advice manual concerned with the regulation of male servants and apprentices, Richardson sought 'to prevent or reform [depravities] in the Servant, who when he comes to be Master, in his Turn, may contribute to amend the Age'. One of the depravities which Richardson condemns is 'Pride in Dress', 'one of the epidemick Evils of the present Age, immers'd from the Highest to the Lowest in Luxury and Sensuality'. Richardson's hostile vision of a society in which a vanity for fashion 'has inverted all Order, and destroy'd all Distinction' is more reminiscent of Defoe's pamphlets than *Pamela*, in which social inversion becomes the reward for exceptional merit. Richardson proceeds with a lengthy description of a foppish shop-worker concluding in 'a more serious Air' that 'this Apish Affectation and Vanity of Dress'

makes such an individual 'despis'd by the sober Part of Mankind, and valued by no
one living but himself.\textsuperscript{31}

Given the vehemence of Richardson's attack on the dress of male apprentices
and servants here, there seems little reason to doubt that he would extend these
arguments to women servants also. Buried within the Forster Collection of
Richardson's correspondence is an intriguing hand-written set of instructions written
by Lady Bradshaigh entitled 'Some Rules which are expected to be observed by the
women servants, and some advice, which it is hoped, they will think their interest to
follow'.\textsuperscript{32} The 'Rules', which clearly seems to be directed to Bradshaigh's own
servants, reads as a highly-concentrated servant advice manual that eschews the length
of works such as Haywood's \textit{Present For a Servant-Maid} as well as their concern for
the servant's practical day to day tasks. Rather, the 'Rules' comprises a concentrated
list of twelve instructions which are predominantly concerned with the moral and
spiritual character of servants rather than their menial labours. Only by having the
'fear of God before [their] Eyes', Bradshaigh argues, will her servants be able to
perform their duty to God and to 'those [they] serve'. Self-discipline is central to
Bradshaigh's conception of duty here. Servants must attend church and pray regularly,
rise and retire at designated times and keep an orderly house. In addition to these
forms of self-regulation Bradshaigh demands propriety of dress as a guarantor of
propriety of character: 'your dress may be plain and neat, and so not aim at things
above you, your money will be much better in your pocket than on your back'.
Unfortunately any correspondence that may have accompanied the 'Rules' is lost and it

\textsuperscript{31} Richardson, \textit{Apprentice's Vade Mecum}, p. 35.
cannot be assumed that Bradshaigh's views on female servant dress reflect Richardson's own. Yet it seems likely that Lady Bradshaigh's rules would have met with her correspondent's approval. In 1755, two years before the date attributed to the 'Rules', Richardson published *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Cautions, and Reflections Contained in the Histories of PAMELA, CLARISSA, AND Sir CHARLES GRANDISON* in an attempt to retain control over the frustratingly diverse readings projected upon novels. Included within the moral maxims, alphabetically linked by theme and text, are some remarks upon the morality of dress in *Pamela*, though the numbers of entries are conspicuously sparse given the frequency with which dress is discussed in the novel and its criticism. Only three maxims on dress in *Pamela* are cited, two of which are purportedly evidenced in the fourth volume of the continuation. (To place this in context, two pages are devoted to the moral issues of fashion in *Clarissa*.) The only maxim upon dress relating to the first two volumes of *Pamela*, however, lends support to the view Richardson had earlier expressed in the *Vade Mecum* and Lady Bradshaigh would later express in her 'Rules'. Somewhat defensively and tersely, Richardson asserts that 'DRESS suited to Degree, or station, gives a high instance of prudence'.

* * *

THE 'TRICKING SCENE'

---

32 Forster Collection, MSS XI (National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum). The item was not dated by Bradshaigh, although it is has been later inscribed 2 October 1757.

This maxim is extracted from one of the novel's most divergently interpreted episodes: Pamela's appearance in her homespun gown and petticoat. This scene has been variously subtitle by its critics and, for the purposes of convenience, I shall subsequently refer to it as the 'tricking scene'. In particular this phrase is intended to counterbalance that used by William B. Warner in his intriguing reading of the novel in Licensing Entertainment, throughout which he refers to the episode as the 'disguise scene'. By referring to this episode as the 'tricking scene' I hope to remove the insinuations of wilful sartorial deception made by Mr B., countless anti-Pamelists and implicitly endorsed in Warner's term. Rather, I am concerned to maintain the ambiguity and inextricable duality of Pamela's appearance and its significance here by using her own term: 'tricking' (p. 60). Though the term was seized upon for its obvious implications of deceit by countless anti-Pamelists, most obviously in the creation of Haywood's Syrena Tricksey, tricking could simply describe the act of dressing. Much early criticism of Richardson's novel suggests that the meaning and moral imperative of Pamela could be proven exclusively from this scene. But in seeking to read Pamela through the external and notoriously cryptic signifier of dress, these critics merely expose the extent to which the episode dramatises the novel's inability to resolve the Pamela/Shamela debate.

These contestations over sartorial and, concomitantly, moral meaning originate in and rehearse B. and Pamela's disputes over the import of her dress in the 'tricking scene'. While Pamela struggles to assert her rights to self-possession and self-

34 See the section entitled 'Pamela in Disguise: or, the Novel of Amorous Intrigue appears beneath its over-writing' in Warner's Licensing Entertainment, pp. 192-199.
35 In the eighteenth century, 'tricky' (or 'tricksey') could mean to be 'artfully trimmed or decked, spruce, smart, fine' or to be 'full of tricks of deception' (OED).
expression through her letters and physical appearance, here, Mr B.'s (mis)readings of his servant reveal Pamela's lack of control over these forms of self-representation. Pamela's 'Project' to make clothes 'that will be fit for [her] condition' occurs at a crucial moment of potential narrative closure: the moment when she is expecting to return to her parents. This early 'short circuit of [the] story' is prevented only by Pamela's appearance in her homespun clothes. Rather than an impudent gesture of defiance, Pamela claims, she purchases the flannels, Scots Cloth and 'sad colour'd Stuff' spun by local farmer's daughters to make a new suit of clothes out of concern for the embarrassingly 'tawdry Figure' she will appear to her parents' neighbours in the garb of her late mistress (p. 52). (Ironically her efforts are not enough to prevent the accusations directed against 'A Lady's Fav'rite in a taudry Gown' made in the anti-Pamelist Pamela: or, the Fair Imposter [1743].) The only vestige of the heroine's former, grand attire in her new homespun attire is the 'pretty Bit of printed Calicoe' she trims her gown with.

While Pamela's dressmaking is preparing her for her return home, however, she is engaged in another act of needlework which is prolonging her stay in the B. household, and which suggests a potential narrative progression that resists closure. Pamela has been asked to embroider a waistcoat for Mr B., which although not inconsistent with the domestic duties of service, when enacted whilst wearing her fine gown, serves to ambiguously relocate Pamela within a higher social sphere. In the hierarchy of eighteenth-century needlework, the predominantly middle-class pursuit of

embroidery was ranked far above the menial tasks of dressmaking.\textsuperscript{38} As such, Pamela's embroidery anticipates the more genteel, leisured pursuits she will enjoy later as the wife of Mr B. rather than the less elevated needlework tasks she would undertake should she return to her parents. Sheila C. Conboy has developed this argument still further by arguing that the flowering of the waistcoat 'adumbrates the method with which Pamela' will break down the social barriers between B. and herself by 'tailoring his internal life' and reformation.\textsuperscript{39} Pamela's servile status is soon reinforced, however, when Mr B. criticises the length of time she has spent on the waistcoat, blaming her letter-writing for the neglect of her duties: 'you mind your Pen more than the Needle' (p. 55). In fact Pamela's extended stay in her master's house in order to complete the waistcoat has afforded her the opportunity not merely to write, but also to engage in analogous acts of self-expression and construction through her new suit of clothes that will anger and intrigue Mr B. as much as her letters.

Casting off the 'disguise' she has had to wear since she acquired her mistress's clothes, Pamela claims that in her homespun gown she can now appear to Mr B. as her true self and regain possession of that 'self:

I went, and lock'd myself into my little Room. There I trick'd myself up as well as I could in my new Garb, and put on my round-ear'd ordinary Cap; but with a green Knot however, and my homespun Gown and Petticoat, and plain-leather Shoes; but yet they are what they call Spanish Leather, and my ordinary Hose, ordinary I mean to what I have been lately used to; tho' I shall think good Yarn may do well for every Day, when I come home. A plain Muslin Tucker I put on, and my black Silk Necklace, instead of the French Necklace my Lady gave me, and put the Ear-rings out of my Ears; I took my Straw Hat in my Hand, with its two blue Strings, and look'd about me in the Glass, as proud as any thing. — To say Truth, I never lik'd myself so well in my Life. (p. 60)

\textsuperscript{38} For a discussion of the hierarchical implications of needlework see Rozsika Parker, \textit{The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine} (London: The Women's Press, 1996). The social implications of needlework will be discussed more thoroughly below, pp. 121-123.

The obvious 'Pride' Pamela takes in her 'Poverty and Meanness' proved more damning to many of her critics than the implied pride she takes in her fine clothes (p. 166). The anonymously published *Pamela: or, the Fair Imposter* (1743), a five canto anti-Pamelist poem, revels in the chess-like deceptions of Pamela and Mr B.'s reincarnation, Blunder, that culminate in an ill-fated though deservedly unhappy marriage. The chameleon-like Pamela of *The Fair Imposter* is both lambasted and curiously celebrated for the pride, persistence and ingenuity with which she seeks to obtain Blunder. When the couple's respective stratagems 'To win, and to betray' each others' hearts reach a temporary stale-mate, Pamela settles 'for a Master-piece of Female Art':

\begin{verbatim}
T'alarm his Love, and yet secure his Heart:
Last Night has furnish'd me with just Pretense,
I'll change my Dress, and seem to go from hence;
What Habit best will do? a Quaker's Stuff
Will shew my Shape, and is genteel enough.40
\end{verbatim}

*The Fair Imposter* leaves little doubt of Pamela's misplaced and thoroughly immoral pride where Richardson's novel merely implies it. The reference to the heroine's homespun garments as a 'Quaker's stuff' imaginatively and resonantly links the 'tricking scene' to the ironic and embarrassing masquerade guise that the pregnant Pamela will wear in volume four of Richardson's continuation of the novel.41 The reference to Quaker dress serves also to emphasise the disjunction between Pamela's appearance and her motivation for wearing the clothes. Unlike Quakers, who with varying degrees of commitment, wore plain dress as part of their testimony to

---

40 *Pamela: or, The Fair Imposter*, p. 27.
simplicity, the 'fair Imposter' sports 'this Disguise,/ To fire Sir BLUNDER'S Heart
with new Surprize'.

Still more important to contestations of the 'tricking scene' than the particulars
of Pamela's dress, or the ambiguity of her response to her new appearance, however, is
the curious insistence that Pamela's clothes have a meaning which can and indeed
must be interpreted and divulged. In a scene that reinvents and anticipates many
contemporary novelistic accounts of masquerades, neither Mrs Jervis, Rachel nor Mr
B. recognises (or at least admits to recognising) the newly self-fashioned Pamela.
When the servant eventually divulges her identity, she is surprised with questions over
the meaning of her appearance. Mrs Jervis asks 'What can all this mean?' (p. 61) while
Mr B. begs 'what do you mean then by this dress?' (p. 62). These interrogations in
search of the meaning of Pamela's dress seem to invite the meta-textual interrogations
that play a vital part in the energy of the Pamela vogue. As each of the numerous pro-
or anti-Pamela writers re-articulates and seeks to answer the questions voiced by Mrs
Jervis and Mr B. in the original novel, they re-invent a subtly different version of the
Pamela narrative. In Pamela: A Comedy (1741), the dramatic and comic potential of
Pamela's dress, here in her fine clothes as the wife of Mr B. (renamed Tom Belvile), is
realised in a prolonged series of reflections over the meaning of Pamela's clothes:

LADY DAVERS [...] thy Understanding, Child, as well as thy Person, is in Masquerade.
SMATTER Dear Lady Davers, you never were so more out in your Life—the Design of
Masquerades is to conceal Persons, you know—Now Pammy's Dress is quite the contrary;
for it very plainly discovers who she is, and what she is—Ha, ha, ha!
PAMELA Why, Sir, what am I?
SMATTER As fine a Woman as e'er my Eyes beheld; by all that's exquisite, Tom Belvile's
a most happy Mortal, or may I suffer Annihilation [...] I never saw Cloaths more
Alamode in my Life; the Colour, the Silk, and Trimmings, quite genteeel—white, white,

42 For the history of Quaker dress see Joan Kendall, 'The Development of a Distinctive form of Quaker
43 Pamela: or the Fair Imposter, p. 32.
you know, is quite apropos for Pammy, and emblematical — ha, ha, ha.

LADY DAVERS  Ay, ay, the Virgin Colour — I always thought Pamela would die a Vestal — she's a very Martyr to Virtue, and the very Picture of Purity.44

Speculations upon the various meanings of the heroine's white dress are ended only after her father arrives to confront Pamela, who he believes has become Belvile's mistress. Andrews' only evidence for this supposition are the stories, circulating in the local community, of Pamela's changed appearance and newly acquired fine clothes. Like Mr B. and Mrs Jervis in the original novel, Andrews demands that his daughter 'View thy own sumptuous Dress — and tell thyself thy meaning'. Unlike her Richardsonian ancestor, however, and perhaps uniquely amongst Pamela literature, the play's heroine can account for the meaning of her dress unequivocally here, since she has the incontestability of the law behind her: 'Oh, my lov'd Father, banish you Fears, nor think your Daughter's Innocence the hateful Barter for this costly Habit; 'tis made the Purchase, not the Exchange [...] I am his Wife'.45

The insistence that dress can convey moral, social and sexual meanings that can be divined by the observer or may be deployed by the wearer to generate false meanings is a concern that Pamelists, anti-Pamelists and many earlier and subsequent novels, conduct books and sermons in the period vacillate over and deliberate upon. Though Pamela's dress was debated with a seemingly unprecedented fervour in the critical backlash following the novel's publication, several prior literary contexts had been established, in which dress took on particular and usually particularly damning meanings and in which Pamela's appearance in her homespun clothes could be variously explained. Of these contexts, perhaps the most troubling is the ubiquitous

44 [Anon.], Pamela, A Comedy. As it is Perform'd Gratis at the Late Theatre in Goodman's Fields (London: H. Hubbard, 1741), pp. 57-58.
disguise scene popularised in romance novels such as Defoe's *Roxana* (1724) and Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725). In *Licensing Entertainment*, William Warner argues that Richardson's failure to completely eradicate and re-write the romance tradition in *Pamela* rendered the novel vulnerable to the hostile reception it received in anti-Pamelist literature. In her homespun clothes Pamela becomes, in Warner's reading, 'ambiguously complicit with the codes of love, disguise, and manipulation fundamental to the novels of amorous intrigue', in which dressing up or dressing down is almost irrevocably associated with a sexual frisson. Many readers, including B. himself, were unable to see beyond the limited scope of the romance novel to read the heroine's clothes as anything other than a wilful and characteristic act of female sartorial deception, designed simply to allure. As the indignant B. expounds: 'Who is it you put your Tricks upon? I was resolved never to honour your Unworthiness, said he, with so much Notice again; and so you must disguise yourself, to attract me, and yet pretend, like an Hypocrite as you are' (p. 62). The anonymous writer of *Pamela Censur'd* develops B.'s outburst into a sustained critique of the novel as a whole. He too perceives the heroine as another Roxana or Fantomina; a woman whose morally-suspect character is exposed through a series of identities and guises adopted at will. In trying to ascertain the moral of the 'tricking scene' the writer ironically determines that,

*PAMELA* is now become a beautiful young Rustic, each latent Grace, and every blooming Charm is called forth to wound, not in affected Finery, but in an artful Simplicity; nor is your Conduct less, Sir, in introducing her to the Squire: Beauties that might grow familiar to the Eye and pall upon the Passion by being often seen in one Habit, thus varied take a surer aim to strike. --- The Instruction here then is to the Ladies, that by altering their Appearance they are

45 *Pamela: A Comedy*, p. 66.
46 Warner, p. 193. Warner develops his argument further by suggesting that Pamela's appearance in her homespun gown is a metaphor for the novel itself: 'disguise in fact epitomizes the fundamental communicative posture of Richardson's text. In this scene, the novels of amorous intrigue [...] circulate like parasitical foreign bodies within *Pamela*. Richardson's "new species of writing" becomes its host', pp. 196-197.
more likely to catch their Lover's Affections than by being always the same; and that [...] with a Straw Hat in her Hand may allure, when perhaps a pale faced Court Lady might be despised; and I dare say, that no young Gentleman who reads this, but wishes himself in Mrs Jervis's Place to turn Pamela about and examine all her Dress to her under Petticoat.47

In a common anti-Pamelist argument, which is at its most familiar and damaging in Fielding's Shamela, dress is read by the author of Pamela Censur'd as part of the heroine's artillery, strategically deployed to win over her master. The title of Fielding's parody likewise symbolically links Pamela's duplicity with the duplicity of dress in his double pun on 'sham' as both a travesty of the novel's pretensions and an allusion to an item of clothing: a sham, which along with a few other items of costume and Manley's New Atalantis are amongst Shamela's few possessions,48 was a 'set of false sleeves to put on over a dirty shirt, or false sleeves with ruffles to put over a plain one'.49

Given the prior, and almost uniformly disparaging, contexts in which Pamela's deployment of dress could be placed, the sentimental ideal of the morally-legible, adorned body that Richardson sought to inculcate in Pamela was dismissed by many of his readers. Aaron Hill was one of only a handful of published voices to extol Richardson's ability to unify Pamela's (and Pamela's) dress with her (and its) underlying virtue: 'in her neat country Apparel, such as she appear'd in on her intended Departure to her Parents; [...] such best becomes her Innocence [...] Such a Dress will best edify and entertain'.50 This ideal analogy between the adorned and sentimental body contrived in Richardson's vision of Pamela in her homespun gown and petticoat is reminiscent of the premise of sumptuary legislation: that worth (the

47 Pamela Censured, p. 36.
worth connoted by virtue rather than rank in this instance) could be rendered externally legible in sartorial display. While, as argued earlier, a return to sumptuary legislation was widely pronounced in counter-fashion diatribes in the period, Richardson's understanding of worth as moral rather than social crucially qualified this model and undermined its efficacy. Herein lies what Robert Markley perceives as the underlying ideological problem of Pamela: though Pamela 'is a "natural" aristocrat raised to her "rightful" place as a lady of demonstrated virtue [...] without advocating an explicit form of socio-economic validation (worth equals birth) he has no other way of assuring the Fieldings among his readers that his heroine is what she seems'.

Furthermore, the demonstration of this virtue through dress, one of the most notoriously ambiguous signifiers of self, rendered the validity of Richardson's claims still more suspect. The notion of demonstrated virtue to which Markley alludes is central to the contestations of Pamela and points to the inherent paradox of sensibility. If virtue is to be recognised, as Richardson suggests in the Preface to Pamela, it must be demonstrated or at least demonstrable. Yet the necessity of demonstrating virtue seems to obviate its innateness, potentially reducing sensibility to a set of external gestures and signs that can be affected where they are not instinctively enacted.

Pamela's decision to demonstrate her own status and virtue in the 'tricking scene' thus stages a conflict between self-ownership, self-representation and performativity which exposes the complex relationship between dress and sensibility: the extent to which dress obscures or elucidates the sentimental body; the extent to which dress serves as

50 Aaron Hill, 'To my worthy Friend the Editor of PAMELA', prefix'd to the second edition of Pamela, p. xiii.
a material articulation of inner worth or as material reminder of the ease with which sensibility could be 'put on' for personal gain.

Ann Louise Kibbie has argued that *Pamela* exposes a tension between 'two ideas of female character, represented by two versions of property': an economic conception of character as a commodity of exchange, and a sentimental ideal in which character is fixed and virtuous.\(^{52}\) Pamela's use of the word 'Virtue' is perceived, in this context, as an expression of her belief in 'the inviolable property in herself. This belief is compromised, however, by the encroachment of 'the language of the marketplace and the narrative of currency' which runs throughout the novel and leaves Pamela and Richardson vulnerable to charges of 'hypocrisy and crass materialism'.\(^{53}\) The materiality of Pamela's virtue, which Kibbie sees crystallised in Andrews' reference to his daughter's virtue as a 'jewel', commodifies virtue and thus 'Richardson's heroine is haunted by an analogy between the woman and tradesman'.\(^{54}\) This schizoid self is qualified still further by Pamela's decision to project her 'self' onto the external, material commodity of dress. When the heroine appears before Mr B. in her servant garb, she is introduced by Mrs Jervis as Pamela's sister. In this momentary masquerade B. takes Pamela 'about the neck':

Why, said he, you are very pretty, Child; I would not be so free with your Sister, you may believe; but I must kiss you.

O Sir, said I, I am *Pamela*, indeed I am: Indeed I am *Pamela, her own self*! He kissed me for all I could do. (p. 61)

---


\(^{53}\) Kibbie, p. 562.

\(^{54}\) Kibbie, p. 563.
Pamela's attempt to articulate 'her own Self' through her homespun attire constitutes, as Tassie Gwilliam has argued, a potent blocking of B.'s designs: 'If she can choose to represent herself in her "round-ear'd cap," she can define her clothing's use rather than being defined by it'. Similarly, in a more recent article on Pamela's clothes, Patricia Brückman argues that Richardson's heroine becomes B.'s wife not simply because 'she is verbally adept', but because she possesses the 'practical talents' of purchasing and manufacturing goods, has been 'formed in the essentials of choice and taste', and because she is 'educated in the critical materials and signs of costume'. Pamela's rise from servant to aristocrat is no fairy-tale in Brückman's reading: rather, it is a portent signalling the possibilities of the new social and commercial revolution wrought by the commercialisation of eighteenth-century fashion and the marketplace.

While Pamela's homespun clothes certainly function as a symbolic rebuttal of B.'s designs, as argued by Gwilliam and Brückman, the readings imposed upon the heroine's dress by B. and other critics expose the fantasy of Pamela's — and by extension any woman's — attempt to manipulate 'the critical materials and signs of costume'. Indeed these readings implicitly question the very existence of costume's unequivocal signs and inviolable meanings. Though Pamela has purchased the fabrics for her gown herself, and stitched the garments with her own hand, her dress reveals the fallacy that belies her attempt at self-ownership through costume. As the anonymous author of the ten line mock-lament 'To the Author of Shamela', published in the July 1741 London Magazine, wrote, Pamela only ever appears to the reader in

55 Gwilliam, pp. 32-33.
56 Brückman, p. 201.
'borrow'd light'. After the publication of Fielding's parody, he argues, it had become impossible to see Richardson's Pamela's beauty and virtue as anything but artifice:

But now, the idol we no more adore
Service a bawd, and our chaste nymph a w-
Each buxom lass may read poor Booby's case,
And charm a Williams to supply his place;
Our thoughtless sons for round-ear'd caps may burn,
And curse Pamela when they've serv'd a turn.57

Pamela's symbolic reduction to a 'round ear'd cap' exposes how her attempts at self-definition through dress conversely leave her at risk of being defined solely by these forms of external display, rather than by the virtue and the virtuous identity her dress is tailored to express. It is further symptomatic of the extent to which Pamela's decision to articulate her 'Self' in the external, material object of dress renders that 'self' a commodity to be traded, used and abused by others. As such, this scene, which draws so much attention in the Pamela debates, becomes a metaphor for the phenomenon itself.

The meanings of dress have become so encrypted by this point in Richardson's novel that the natural act of a servant appearing in a servant's garb has become an ambiguous and suspect act of representation. Having been formerly represented in the garb of her dead mistress, Pamela's self-representation in her native dress has been irrevocably politicised: to appear in anything other than the garments she has been given to wear will appear a dramatic gesture of defiance, no matter how virtuously motivated. Mr B. seeks to counter this form of self-representation in a performative

57 'To the Author of Shamela', London Magazine, 10 (June 1741), p. 304.
and defiant gesture of his own status only a few pages later in his courtly 'Birth-day Suit':

_Pamela, said he, you are so neat and so nice in your own Dress, (Alas! for me, I didn't know I was!) that you must be a Judge of ours. How are these Cloaths made? Do they fit me! — I am no Judge, said I, and please your Honour; but I think they look very fine [...] Why don't you wear your usual Cloaths? Tho' I think every thing looks well upon you. For I still continue in my new Dress. I said, I have no Cloaths, Sir, I ought to call my own, but these: And it is no Matter what such a one as I wears!_ (pp. 70-71)

Pamela's remark upon B.'s suit is restricted to its quality; a response no doubt conditioned by her consciousness of the master/servant relationship, but which also plays into the hands of critics who stress her apparent love of finery. But B.'s performative backlash is more important for the final response that it provokes in Pamela: her ironic, yet profoundly insightful sense that what she wears doesn't matter. Of course, it should not matter what Pamela wears, particularly when she wears a homespun gown entirely suitable to her servile status. But when placed in the context of pamphlet debates on servant dress, the literary tradition of the disguise scene and the more immediate context of the many alternative and anti- _Pamelas_, the question of what the heroine wears is precisely the issue that is at stake in Richardson's novel. Simultaneously, though, it _really_ doesn't matter what Pamela wears, for once she discards her mistresses clothes, and with them any vestige of command over her self-representation, her appearance can be interpreted in vertiginously divergent ways.

For much of the rest of the novel Mr B. will try Pamela's virtue in ways designed to unequivocally prove the truth or falsehood of her virtuous and modest appearance in the homespun gown and petticoat. While Patricia Brückman has cast doubt on the fairy-tale qualities of Richardson's narrative, the story of Pamela's social ascent from young rustic to aristocratic wife through a series of near inhuman trials, is
reminiscent of Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, based on Petrarch's adaptation of the last book of Boccacio's *Decameron*. The story of the 'patient Griselda' offers some suggestive parallels to *Pamela* and offers a further context in which to place Richardson's novel: the fairy-tale relocated in a world in which social distinctions are not so easily or magically eradicated.\(^{58}\) A 'modernised' version of *The Clerk's Tale*, translated by George Ogle, appeared in 1739, a year before the publication of *Pamela*, under the title *Gualtherus and Griselda: or, the Clerk of Oxford's Tale*. Anticipating the association made between the duplicity of dress and the inherent duplicity of the female character rehearsed in anti-Pamelist literature, Gualtherus determines that

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{For Woman is at Best a pleasing Cheat;} \\
\text{Her look is Counterfeit. Her Heart Deceit.} \\
\text{All She affects, to catch our Ears and Eyes,} \\
\text{Is meer Delusion, Virtue in Disguise.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Despite Gualtherus' unflattering perception of women, he is in search of a wife. It matters not whether this future spouse will be 'Of Rich or Poor, of High or Low Degree' (p. 12) as long as she is the virtuous exception that proves the rule to his presumption of woman's inherent immorality:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nor Vice nor Virtue, rightly understood,} \\
\text{Descend like Titles, running with our Blood.} \\
\text{Was Honor but intail'd upon our Kind,} \\
\text{No well-born Prince could show a slavish Mind.} \\
\text{Nought cou'd the Seeds of Infamy rechim,} \\
\text{No Vulgar Progeny cou'd rise to Fame. (p. 12)} \\
\end{align*}
\]

---

\(^{58}\) The possible analogy between Pamela and Griselda is briefly suggested by Margaret Anne Doody. Doody writes that Pamela's appearance in her bridal array 'is in keeping with the folktaile tradition, like Griselda's joyful reunion with the marquis in the castle from which she has been cast out, when she is stripped of her rude array and dressed in cloth of gold'. Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 64.

\(^{59}\) George Ogle, trans., *Gualtherus and Griselda: or, the Clerk of Oxford's Tale from Boccace, Petrarch and Chaucer* (London: R. Dodsley, 1739), p. 10. Subsequent references given, parenthetically, in the text. George Ogle (1704-1746) translated other sections of *The Canterbury Tales* which were published alongside other translations by Dryden, Cobb and Pope. He had also translated some Sappho, Homer and Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles* (*DNB*).
The politics of *Gualtherus and Griselda* mirror those of *Pamela*: while both texts seem to suggest an idealised sentimental meritocracy based upon a hierarchy of virtue rather than rank, both are also concerned not to explicitly question aristocratic authority and privilege. As such, both Griselda and Pamela's exemplary status, and thus their entitlement to the positions they acquire, is justified, even while the inhuman cruelty of their husbands is implicitly condoned.

Like Mr B., Gualtherus is driven by a desire to fully know his future wife. One of the conditions upon which he marries Griselda is that

> [her] Soul be painted on [her] Face.  
> No reason's giv'n, and no Pretences sought,  
> To swerve in Deed or Word, in Look or Thought. (p. 32)

Knowing that 'Dress improves the Face', Gualtherus rewards Griselda's compliance with a new suit of clothes 'as Princely Rites require', so that Griselda is not left 'one Remnant of her own Attire' (p. 34). Throughout the lengthy description of the robing of Griselda, the heroine remains silent:

> Patient, beneath their Hands, GRISELDA sits,  
> And to their various Wills her Limbs submits;  
> But secret wish'd, less Pomp had been prepar'd. (pp. 36-37)

In her new robe 'beset with costly jewels' Griselda's inner and outer gentility are effectively analogised. Griselda, like Pamela in her fine clothes, is 'Not transform'd but known!' in her new garb.

---

60 Richard Gooding identifies the politics of *Pamela* as lying somewhere between 'a desire to appropriate aristocratic prestige' and a reluctance to enter into 'too serious [an] examination of the nature of aristocratic authority'. See Gooding, *Pamela, Shamela, and the Politics of the Pamela Vogue*, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 7 (1995), p. 122.
Though her virtue is now outwardly displayed for all to see, Gualtherus cannot trust Griselda. Her social status and gender both contrive to persuade her husband that her merit cannot be as exemplary as he once believed. Consequently Gualtherus repeatedly puts Griselda's yielding and ever-patient virtue on trial, even leading her to believe that her children are dead. Only when Griselda has fully proven her virtue to her husband are her children and position restored to her and the analogy between her beautiful outward appearance and inner virtuous self can be re-aligned in the mind of Gualtherus. No longer determined by the meanings her husband has unjustly placed upon her, Griselda now adorns the Palace and position she holds within it:

She gave (not borrow'd) Lustre from the Throne.
So form'd her Speech, so fashion'd washer Mein;
So just but Mild! So aweful but Serene!
Not Envy in her Look or Soul could trace,
Her low Condition or ignoble Race [...]
No Daughter of a Cottage humbly born,
But sprung a Princely Palace to adorn;
Not only to adorn but to support,
Not only fill, but dignify a Court. (pp. 38-39)

The obvious analogies between the stories of Pamela and Griselda are emphasised still further by some suggestive parallels in the language of both Richardson's novel, the innumerable texts it spawned, and the 1739 'translation' of The Clerk's Tale. Pamela appears to her readers in her own 'amiable Light' (p. 3), Griselda in 'the fairest Light'. Griselda's 'Lustre', like Pamela's 'too strong [...] Lustre' embellishes the position she acquires. Griselda 'adorns' and dignifies the Court and her position within it; the sympathetic, fairy-tale like dramatic revision of Pamela, The Maid of the Mill (1765) similarly moralises upon the moral rectitude of raising a

'deserving woman' like Pamela 'to a station she is capable of adorning, let her birth be what it will'. 62 Yet despite these obvious parallels (of which these linguistic analogies are but a few), the two texts produce perhaps two of the most divergently perceived heroines in literature: the much-maligned Pamela and the almost universally pitied Griselda. This interpretive divergence seems to lie in the texts' disposition of agency. Griselda is pitiable because she is passive. She bears the robes she is embarrassed to wear as well as the inhuman trials she is forced to suffer with the same degree of unerring patience. Pamela, on the other hand, refuses to be passively represented by the clothes given to her by Mr B., or to passively accept the trials made upon her virtue. Instead, she seeks to counteract these attempts with active demonstrations of agency in her epistolary and sartorial self-representation.

Indeed, Mr B. can only marry Pamela once she has relinquished this agency and become a near reincarnation of the patient Griselda. His determination to know Pamela culminates in a scene which symbolically links her adorned body with the body of letters it conceals and suggests the troublingly ambiguous status of dress and letters as potential expressions or fictional constructions of self. Pamela's correspondence has been stitched beneath her clothing. Fearing that Mr B. may intercept her correspondence she recognises the potential of dress (even, as here, in its most honest manifestation as 'homespun gown and petticoat') to encrypt and conceal. The sheets are sewn into her 'Under-coat about [the] Hips' (p. 198). 63 Here the fabric would be at its bulkiest and her letters, therefore, the least conspicuous. In order to

fully possess the heroine, Mr B. must physically and metaphorically undress Pamela, 
divesting her of the two signifiers of her social and moral self, as well as the material 
property of her self:

I will now begin to strip my pretty Pamela; [...] For I will see these Papers. But may-be, said he, they are ty'd about your Knees with your Garters [...] I fell on my Knees, and said, What can I do? what can I do? If you'll let me go up, I'll fetch them you [...] I took off my Under-Coat, and, with great Trouble of Mind, unsew'd them from it. (p. 204)

Having once attempted to stitch her own identity and resilient virtue into her 
homespun clothes, Pamela is now forced to 'unsew' in a symbolic act of self-
dissemination. Though letters and dress function analogously in the novel, Pamela's 
letters, in B.'s eyes at least, prove a less objectionable material articulation of the 
heroine's virtue than the objectionable materiality of her dress. B. accepts Pamela as 
his future wife after reading the letters, claiming that 'I do assure you, my Pamela's Person, all lovely as you see it, is far short of her Mind; That first impress'd me in her Favour; but that only made me her Lover' (p. 335).

In relinquishing her letters Pamela concomitantly relinquishes her right to self-
fashioning. Mr B. spends much of the novel's final pages re-clothing Pamela and her relatives in order to render them suitable to their newly-acquired status. Pamela is given gowns and extravagant jewellery upon the condition she will obey her husband's 'Rule' that she will not, 'like so many other married women', grow 'careless in her Dress'. According to B., such a wife 'looks as if she would take no Pains to secure the Affection she had gained, [...] So, my Dear, I shall expect of you always, to be dress'd by Dinner-time, except something extraordinary happens; and this whether you are to

63 An under-coat was a petticoat beneath and concealed by the overskirt, not meant for decorative
go abroad or stay at home' (p. 307). In what would later become a familiar argument in fashionable conduct books such as Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), B. is seeking to make Pamela a permanently public figure, denied a private subjectivity. In order to be the proper wife of Mr B. Pamela must always *look* the proper wife of Mr B. As Richardson would later moralise in his *Collection of Moral and Instructive Sentiments*: 'Women owe to themselves, and to their Sex, to be always neat, and never to be surprised, by accidental visitors, in such a dishabille as would pain them to be seen in'. Pamela, as the wife of Mr B., is passively 'dress'd out' by her husband, 'only to be admir'd' (p. 407).

However, Pamela's re-clothing in her aristocratic garb as B.'s wife, like Griselda's at the hand of Gualtherus, is insufficient to ward off accusations of duplicity and immorality. Indeed, as countless Syrena Trickseys and Shamelas demonstrate, this material reward for her virtue may well be what Pamela has been striving to obtain since her mistress's death. Part of the difficulty in re-clothing and thus re-writing Pamela's more ambiguous, former self, is that Pamela's dress becomes a 'story' in itself within Richardson's novel, that gathers a momentum of its own and accrues meanings which diverge from the moral intentions proclaimed in the Preface. This narrative within a narrative is suggested by Mr B. who requests that his future wife should appear to some guests in her homespun costume:

> pray be only dress'd as you are; for, as they know your Condition, and I have told them the Story of your present Dress, and how you came by it, one of the young Ladies keeps it as a Favour, that they may see you just as you are: And I am the rather pleas'd it should be so, because they will perceive you owe nothing to Dress, and make a much better Figure with your own native Stock of Loveliness, than the greatest Ladies do in the most splendid Attire, and stuck out with the most glittering Jewels. (p. 233)

---

Here, Mr B. attributes Pamela's dress and its 'Story' with a far less ambiguous reading than that with which he inscribes it in the earlier 'tricking scene'. Having dispelled all associations of the masquerade, B. now presents Pamela's clothing as a tale of prudence, humility and modesty that he feels will educate and improve his guests. But *Pamela* is a novel in which narratives, plots, tales and stories have a profoundly ambiguous status. And as Mr B.'s persistent debunking of Pamela's 'plot' as a fictional romance reveals, no one in the novel is completely in control of their own narrative. In this context, to refer to Pamela's dress as a 'Story' is to suggest the lack of control Pamela, B., even Richardson himself, have over the meanings of the heroine's appearance. As a story, an item in a marketplace, the meanings of Pamela's dress can never be unequivocally pinned down or understood, but will instead be endlessly fashioned, re-fashioned and circulated in the currency of critical exchange that is so ironically labelled the 'Pamela vogue'.

* * *

RE-FASHIONING *PAMELA*: KELLY'S *PAMELA'S CONDUCT IN HIGH LIFE* (1741) AND HAYWOOD'S *ANTI-PAMELA* (1741)

Soon after the publication of *Pamela* it became clear that Richardson's novel, which had encouraged so many debates about social and sartorial emulation, was becoming a fashionable, emulated commodity in its own right. As Anna Laetitia Barbauld relates in her collected edition of Richardson's letters,
All that read were his readers. Even at Ranelagh, those who remember the publication say, that it was usual for ladies to hold up the volumes of Pamela to one another, to shew they had got the book that every one was talking of.

The *Pamela* vogue even infiltrated the church when Dr Slocock famously recommended the novel from his pulpit. The fashionableness of the novel was a concern for many anti-Pamelists. The 'epidemical Phrenzy' that raged following the novel's publication is, for example, attributed as the motivation for setting the record straight in *Shamela*. The product of an author with 'the worst and most fashionable Hearts in the World', *Pamela* instructs servants to

> look out for their Masters as sharp as they can. The Consequences of which will be, besides the neglect of their Business, and the using of all manner of Means to come at Ornaments to their Persons, that if the Master is not a Fool, they will marry him.

In lavishing such detail upon the heroine's dress and its effects upon Mr B., *Pamela* is perceived in Fielding's parody as an instructive fashion manual, teaching girls how to get a good husband by manipulating their appearance. In another *Pamela* spin-off, a novella entitled 'Jenny, or the Female Fortune Hunter', the eponymous heroine reads Richardson's novel as she does the farming manuals that adorn her father's book cases: as an educative set of instructions to be learnt and applied. In an effort to emulate Pamela's example, as she sees it, Jenny goes to London twice in search of a husband, narrowly avoiding prostitution before returning home to marry a local farmer.

The increasing fashionableness of the novel was no less a concern for Richardson than it was for his critics. As the 'Story' of Pamela's dress was endlessly

---

65 Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, Author of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison. Selected from the Original Manuscripts, bequeathed by him to his family, To which are prefixed, A Biographical Account of that Author, and Observations on his Writings*, 6 vols (London: Richard Phillips, 1804), I, p. lviii

66 *Shamela*, p. 319.
circulated and refashioned by the novel's critics and admirers, Richardson felt an increasing lack of control over his work. He thus sought to re-gain control of the 'Story' of Pamela's dress by re-shaping and re-writing it in illustrations, revisions to the text and the two-volume continuation of the novel that appeared in 1741. But these revisions did little to restrict the range of meanings ascribed to the heroine's dress circulating in the ever-growing numbers of alternative- and anti-Pamelas. The 1801 edition, posthumously compiled by Richardson's daughters, includes the following telling insertion to Pamela's rebuttal of Mr B.'s proposals to make her his mistress:

When I come to be proud and vain of gaudy apparel, and outside finery, then (which I hope will never be) may I rest in my principal good in such trifles, and despise for them the more solid ornaments of a good fame and a chastity inviolate.68

This highly conscious piece of defensive dialogue with critics who emphasised Pamela's pride, vanity and love of finery is ultimately unconvincing, however. The uncertain conditional implied in the phrases 'which I hope' and 'may I' reveals the extent to which Pamela refuses to be reduced to the kind of reassuring legibility outlined in the Preface to the novel. Similarly, the illustrations in the octavo, sixth edition of the novel by Francis Hayman and Hubert François Gravelot did little to strengthen Richardson's didactic aims, as much recent work on the engravings and other artistic representations of Pamela has demonstrated. Interestingly, the 'tricking scene' is not represented in the engravings, perhaps to de-emphasise its damming theatrical and performative qualities. Yet in other engravings, Pamela's dress frequently seems to blend seamlessly into the drapery of the B. household thereby

---

67 Shamela, p. 324.
68 Samuel Richardson, Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded, ed. by Peter Sabor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 229. This edition is based upon a facsimile reprint of the 1801 edition.
highlighting the reader's sense of Pamela's self as a theatrical performance. Finally, the novel's continuation failed to fulfil its 'covert ideological project' to, in Terry Castle's words, 'decarnivalise' Pamela by proving that quality is 'more than just a matter of fine clothes'. When the pregnant Pamela is challenged at the masquerade she reluctantly attends as a Quaker, she justifies her obviously uncomfortable presence by claiming that she attends 'merely out of Curiosity to look into the Minds of both Sexes; which I read in their Dresses'. Pamela's faith in the moral legibility of the adorned body is, at best, unconvincing in the light of the debates upon dress raised by the first two volumes and, at worst, utterly ridiculous when voiced by the grotesque masquerading body of a pregnant Quaker.

Richardson's were not the only attempts made to control and restrict the meanings of dress in his original novel, however. Given the importance of clothing in apotheosising or encrypting the morality of Richardson's text, many alternative- and anti-Pamela writers were forced to engage with and re-invent the debates about clothing provoked by the original novel. John Kelly's *Pamela's Conduct in High Life* (1741), a 'sequel' published before Richardson had time to complete and publish his own, pre-empts some of the defensive dialogue that Richardson engages in in his continuation and revisions of *Pamela*. Kelly's most overt defence of *Pamela* is his

---


70 Castle, p. 137.


72 John Kelly, *Pamela's Conduct in High Life. Publish'd from her Original Papers, to which are prefix'd Several Curious LETTERS written to the Editor on the Subject* (Dublin: Geo. Faulkner and Oli. Nelson, 1741). Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.
most perverse: in a manoeuvre that refuses to engage with some of the thornier criticisms of the original novel, Pamela is revealed to be of noble descent, with a genealogy that can be dated back to the Norman Conquest. The family's loss of fortune and position is explained as the result of some unfortunate business decisions on the part of Pamela's father and the even more unfortunate dissipated characters of her two elder brothers, who create debts which ruin the whole family (p. 114). Yet Pamela's now incontrovertible nobility is still, it seems, insufficient to ward off anti-Pamelist readings, and, as a result, Kelly's heroine is persistently engaged in active demonstrations of her virtue. Much of this self-conscious dialogue with *Pamela*'s critics in Kelly's sequel is veiled (albeit thinly) in reflections upon various subjects that seem, on first reading, to have nothing to do with Pamela's virtue. Such a defence masquerading as a passing conversation occurs when Mr B. and Pamela discuss the art of preaching. B. tells Pamela that she will be 'agreeably entertained at Church, for our young Curate is admired by all who hear him'. Though B. is talking of the curate's celebrated and entertaining method of delivering sermons, the reader is immediately reminded of Pamela's much-besmirched relationship with Parson Williams in Richardson's original novel which Fielding pounced upon with such delight in *Shamela*. Quickly these implicit anti-*Pamela* insinuations are countered by the heroine, who retorts that she is only entertained by doctrine not by the man or the manner of delivery. B.'s subsequent challenge to his wife rehearses further anti-Pamelist accusations of the heroine's love of finery, by couching his argument on rhetoric in sartorial metaphors that rehearse the dialogue of the *Pamela/Shamela* debate:

But, my dear Critick, won't you allow that sound Doctrine deserves to be deck'd with all the Flowers of Rhetorick: Is a fine and virtuous Lady less engaging if richly dress'd? In Answer,
Sir, I must say, sound Doctrine does not want these Ornaments, these Flowers of Rhetorick. It's [sic.] sublimity sets it far above all Embellishments as Truth is most beautiful when naked. There is a majestic Loftiness in the plain Diction of the holy Scriptures, which none of your florid Orators can come up to: Your Similie I think is a very good one; for as the Glare of Jewels and rich Cloaths will attract the Eyes if such as are suprized by their Lustre, in Prejudice to naked Charms; so the Jingle of Words will draw the Attention of the Ignorant, who regarding the Smoothness of Stile overlook the Instructions of the Doctrine convey'd in it. You have turn'd the Similie against me; I find you are for a plain discourse. (pp. 47-48)

By articulating his argument in sartorial imagery, Mr B. plays into the hands of Pamela — this notorious manipulator of dress — and his 'Similie' is truly turned against him. Furthermore, in a manoeuvre much more successful than those deployed by Richardson to regain control over the morality of his novel, Kelly's Pamela manages to turn the sartorial simile against anti-Pamelists more generally. A 'fine and virtuous Lady', she argues, is not necessarily less virtuous when 'richly dress'd'; by the same token, Pamela implies that she is no less virtuous in her rich dress as B.'s wife than she was in her homespun gown and petticoat. The difference is not one of essence, Kelly's Pamela implies, but one of perception. If people interpret, misinterpret or simply fail to interpret the essence because their eyes are prejudiced by the 'Lustre', then the lack of virtue is theirs and not that of the object of their interpretation. In his deployment of sartorial metaphors, Kelly implicitly locates this episode within the context of the Pamelist/anti-Pamelist debates, thereby bestowing it with a significance that extends well beyond its obvious parameters. The bedazzled ignorants who Kelly's Pamela condemns for overlooking the 'Doctrine' because they cannot take their eyes away from the 'Glare' of such trivial effects as 'Jewels and rich Cloaths' thus becomes a broader condemnation of the anti-Pamelists who fail to see the heroine's exemplary morality because they are all too concerned with what she is wearing.
Despite such thinly veiled diatribes against the original novel's critics, Kelly's Pamela is no less elusive than her namesake. As in the former work, the anti-Pamelist case remains an implicit subtext throughout *Pamela's Conduct in High Life* that emerges in the novel's intriguing yet frustrating moments of amnesia and contradiction. The disdain for 'Jewels and rich Cloaths' and faith in the transparency of 'Doctrine' Pamela demonstrates in the earlier conversation are problematised towards the close of the novel, when Pamela looks at herself in a mirror and reflects upon her own character. These reflections inspire the heroine to write a poem and a letter to Mrs Jervis. In these writings the mirror takes on a duality no less troubling than that of Pamela's dress in Richardson's novel:

Here's an Inanimate will show  
What, possibly, few care to know:  
For, void of Flattery it tells,  
What mortifies our Beaux and Belles.  
Tho' dumb it is, and motionless,  
It speaks Defects in Face or Dress  
And every Motion does express.  
Tells you your Features, shews your Shape.  
And each affected Grace will ape:  
Seems what-e'er you do, to do,  
Frown you at this? Why, that frowns too.  
But shou'd you laugh at what you see,  
That seems to laugh as heartily.  
If you put on an Air of State,  
That stately Air will imitate. (pp. 307-308)

The mirror is perhaps the ultimate symbol of truth: as letters and dress would in an ideal world, it serves as an inanimate object that 'speaks Defects' and reflects character without bias or prejudice. Yet, the mirror can only reflect what is placed before it, and therefore mimics falsity and artifice too. As such it becomes part of the lie, an unquestioning reflection of an image that may not exist other than in feigned gestures and appearances. Dress, Pamela goes on to suggest in the accompanying letter, is part of such forms of deceit. In an anticipatory inversion of Clarissa's faith in 'words' as 'the body and dress of thought', Kelly's Pamela reflects that 'our Minds were as much
disguised by our Words and Actions, as our Bodies are by our Cloaths: People very seldom appear what they really are' (p. 309). Pamela's conception of dress is very different here to that expressed in the conversation on rhetoric. In the earlier implicit snub to anti-Pamelists, the meaning of dress appeared to be created solely by the observer. But here, as if to confirm the anti-Pamelist case, Kelly's heroine assigns the meaning of dress to the wearer, who can manipulate meaning to the extent that even an honest mirror is powerless to expose the underlying deceitful truth. Having problematised the relationship between outward decoration and inner meaning articulated in the debate on rhetoric, Pamela's Conduct in High Life concludes with a Pamela scarcely less resistant to hostile readings than Richardson's.

The flawed attempts made by Richardson and Kelly to re-write Pamela's dress and regain control over its meanings suggest the impossibility of resolving the Pamela/Shamela binary. Yet in perhaps her most unequivocally immoral reincarnation, with the exception of Shamela, Eliza Haywood's Anti-Pamela succeeds in containing, or at least managing, the vertiginous significations of dress. The Anti-Pamela is often read as a text written to cash in on the success of the Pamela vogue as opposed to a detailed critical engagement with, or parody of, Richardson's novel; a scandalous narrative, more akin to the romances that Haywood produced in the 1720s and 1730s than the kind of novel envisaged by Richardson. But this is to do

---

73 Eaves and Kimpel have argued that the Anti-Pamela was an effort to 'capitalize on Pamela's popularity [but] had little connection beyond the title' (Samuel Richardson, p. 130). Mary Ann Schofield divorces The Anti-Pamela from Richardson's novel entirely, by placing it in a discussion of prostitution in Haywood's romance fiction. Mary Anne Schofield, "Descending Angels": Salubrious Sluts and Pretty Prostitutes in Haywood's Fiction', in Fetter'd or Free?: British Women Novelists, 1670-1815, ed. by Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens and London: Ohio University Press, 1987), pp. 186-200. A recent exception to this dominant account is given by Catherine Ingrassia in Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), in which Ingrassia reclaims Haywood's work as one
Haywood's entertaining and intriguing novel a disservice. In fact, as already suggested in the discussion of the episode with the stockings, Haywood's work offers a systematic critique of Richardson's novel through its deployment of dress. The terms in which the *Anti-Pamela* engages with the original novel are evident in the very name of Haywood's heroine: Syrena Tricksey. As suggested earlier, Syrena's surname associates this anti-Pamela with the issues of self-representation and sartorial duplicity raised by the 'tricking scene'. The *Anti-Pamela* persistently responds to, echoes and subsequently counters the central problem of Richardson's novel: the extent to which the text uses clothing to cultivate an ideal symbiosis between the adorned and sentimental body and yet is unable to contain dress's meanings to create a reassuring analogy between a woman's moral character and physical appearance. For even while Haywood's work propagates and even celebrates images and instances of sartorial duplicity, the *Anti-Pamela* offers a much more reassuring and intelligible relationship between inner and outer self than that created in Richardson's novel or Kelly's 'sequel'.

The *Anti-Pamela* begins with an open confrontation of the central issue in contestations of Richardson's novel: the potential disjunction between Pamela's outer self (as expressed in her dress and letters) and inner virtue or lack of virtue. This disjunction is figured, in the first instance, not in terms of sartorial duplicity, but in terms of the 'duplicitous body of femininity' described by Gwilliam:

> what was most to be admired in her [Syrena] was, that the Innocence which is inseparable from Infancy, and which is so charming, even in the plainest Children, never forsook her Countenance; but continued to dwell in every little Turn and Gesture long after she came to Maturity, and had been guilty of Things, which one would think should have given her the boldest and most audacious Air.\(^{74}\)

--

which seeks to question the didactic and generic conventions Richardson's novel established. See pp. 111-116.

\(^{74}\) *Anti-Pamela*, pp. 1-2. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.
This opening debunks the sentimental ideal that 'the soul' could be viewed 'stark naked' in gestures, deportment and appearance. Syrena's supposedly natural innocence is simultaneously self-fashioned and moulded by her socially-ambitious mother into a semblance of innocence to be deployed for personal gain. It seems entirely appropriate in this context that Syrena should become a seamstress: a manufacturer of appearances. Re-inventing Pamela as a needle-woman firmly associates Syrena, and by implication Richardson's heroine and her own acts of needlework, with the accusations of ruthless social ambition which abounded in representations of dress-makers throughout eighteenth-century literature. Syrena's relatives want her to become a mantua-maker because they feel it is a 'proper' occupation for a young girl, and, more importantly, because it requires no 'Stock' (p. 4). Furthermore, as a seamstress, Serena will be forced to 'deal only with Persons of her own Sex' making her 'exempt from those Temptations, her Youth and Beauty might expose her to in the Millinary Way' (p. 4). In finding a position for Syrena as a seamstress in a private household, however, the heroine is nonetheless exposed to 'Temptations' which she and her mother hope will further her bid for social advancement.

Syrena uses dress as she does 'turns and gestures', to attract and deceive. The meaning of clothes in the Anti-Pamela, as in Richardson's novel, appears uncontrollably fluid. Syrena uses her trips to buy linens and lace for her work as

---

76 The figure of the needlewoman, mantua-maker and milliner and her association with moral corruption and social ambition will be explored more fully in Chapter Two, 'Living on the Spoils of Virtue'.
opportunities for sexual liaison. Her mother uses the pretext of sending fabrics to her daughter, supposedly to 'run up [a dress] at a leisure Time', to conceal a correspondence between them that, were it found out, would reveal their financial and social ambitions. Where it is only implied in Richardson's novel, there is no doubt in the *Anti-Pamela* that dress always covers or conceals something else, be it letters or immoral motives. Even the act of dressing itself becomes, here, an opportunity for sexual conquest, as Syrena carefully positions herself so that she can be seen by the gentleman of the house whilst secretly observing him watching her: 'I put the Window-Shutters a-jar, so that I could see him through the Crack, without his distinguishing me' (p. 13).

Syrena's life is a persistent struggle to attain what Pamela does in her marriage to Mr B.: money, fine clothes and position. But unlike Pamela, Syrena's character is repeatedly exposed for the sham it is. The serial identities that Haywood's heroine is forced to assume as each of her stratagems is exposed as counterfeit, make Syrena's life into a permanent masquerade. Her sexual conquests begin to take on a familiar pattern that begins with the creation of an air of wealth and virtue through her appearance. This is, in turn, rewarded in the form of money and clothes offered by temporarily conquered lovers. Subsequently, as her wealth and virtue are exposed as fictions, Syrena is forced to relinquish her assets and devise new stratagems to regain the tools necessary to facilitate her next scheme. After one episode in the series of mortifications that constitute her life, Syrena finds her fortunes are 'almost exhausted in Cloaths, luxurious Eating, and Chair-hire' purchased to attract another victim. The tawdry, grotesque figure that Syrena has been reduced to can only now be at ease in the false world of the masquerade: 'The Masquerade was the only place where she
could go without fear of being exposed, and even there was in Danger of being accosted' by a previous, disgruntled lover (p. 145).

The staging of Syrena's life as a masquerade presents interpretive difficulties. For while the *Anti-Pamela* offers a damning indictment of the ambiguous significations of dress and its propensity to deceive, it simultaneously celebrates, like the masquerade itself, the power of dress to trick and the comic propensity of men to be tricked by it. But the novel offers a competing view of Syrena's clothing in which the meanings of dress are far less fluid and more contained than they are in Richardson's original. For though the novel's narrative dynamic is largely driven by an exploitation of the potential of dress to encrypt virtue, the *Anti-Pamela* also insists, in what will become a common device in sentimental novels and sentimentalised prostitution narratives in particular, that, to the initiated reader, dress can connote moral progress and regress.\(^77\) The moral legibility that the *Anti-Pamela* seems to debunk at the beginning of the novel is increasingly supported and confirmed as the narrative progresses, and the heroine's clothes and general physical appearance increasingly expose her true character. Syrena's life embodies the world upside-down spirit of the masquerade by turning the tables of sexual conquest to make men her victims. But while they are hoodwinked by her, the reader is never left in doubt that Syrena is not what she appears. As she walks through Covent-Garden 'disguised [...] in Lace and Embroidery', the reader can clearly see what her targets cannot until too late: Syrena is a 'Hussy' (p. 145). Eventually, however, her appearance fails even to convince her male victims. Syrena's comparatively lengthy and financially successful

---

\(^77\) This theme will be returned to in a discussion of Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, see below, pp. 98-112.
relationship with a married mercer ends because of her clothes. Syrena, who is exhorting sums of money from the mercer that he cannot afford, is also having an affair with the friend who is lending the mercer money to support his mistress. The mercer finds Syrena at his friend's house, and though she 'pluck'd up her Hood pretty much over her Face [...] Her Cloaths, however, being the same he had just left her in, and which had come from his own Shop [...] discover'd Syrena too plainly' (pp. 167-168). Syrena's moral impoverishment increasingly becomes legible in the impoverishment of her dress and her body. In a common device of prostitution narratives, the heroine's appearance is systematically ravaged by her misconduct. When she contracts a venereal disease, Syrena is forced to sell many of her Clothes to pay her medical expenses: 'she had scarce a change of Garments to appear in [...] she grew much mortify'd, and began to fear she had lost the Power of Pleasing, tho' not yet seventeen' (p. 180).

While representing opposite ends of the Pamela/Anti-Pamela divide, both Richardson's and Haywood's novels share a fantasy in which character is legible to the observer. But where the Anti-Pamela is ultimately reassuring in its assertion that vice is externally manifest and therefore ultimately punishable, Richardson fails to universally convince his readers that moral goodness will shine through appearance. Reading Haywood's work against Richardson's presents a somewhat depressing picture of representations of dress and female sexuality in eighteenth-century literature. Clothing, it seems, can be read as a signifier of character, so long as it only communicates female immorality. The gendering of dress as feminine ensures that it is inextricably associated with all that is suspect in the female character; with insinuations of deceit, hypocrisy and sexual unruliness. Furthermore, the meanings of
dress are never constant, but are rather altered by factors such as social position and circumstance. At another time, in another household, in another novel, Pamela's homespun clothes would barely have been noticed. But in the context of social subversion instigated by her inheritance of her mistress's clothes, in the atmosphere of sexual threat the novel creates, and in light of contemporary concerns about the morality of servants, the potential significations of her clothes multiply beyond her control and Richardson's grasp. The controversy caused by *Pamela* is archetypal of the perceived antagonism between dress and moral character in the mid to late eighteenth century. These debates surrounding dress have ramifications that extend well beyond their immediate context, by setting out the parameters of an argument that is re-invented and re-staged throughout the eighteenth century in various forms and with varying degrees of seriousness, but nowhere with the same sense of urgency and anger as in the *Pamela* vogue. Concerned with female virtue, female sexuality and, above all, the legibility of character, these debates lie at the heart of the concerns of the sentimental novel for which *Pamela*, despite or perhaps because of its intriguing paradoxes, set a fashion. What is of interest, is that neither Pamelists nor anti-Pamelists deny that dress communicates inner character. Where they differ is in their interpretation of these sartorial signifiers. The task faced by subsequent writers of sentimental novels, sermons, conduct manuals, magazines, and tracts and essays on female virtue is how to cultivate a morally-transparent fashion system in which character can be unequivocally communicated and universally determined.
'Liv[ing] Upon The Spoils of Virtue': Dressmakers and their Shops in the Novels of Eliza Haywood and Frances Burney

In The London Tradesman: Being a Compendious View of all the Trades, Professions, Arts, both liberal and mechanic, now practised in the Cities of London and Westminster (1747) Robert Campbell juxtaposes the powerful yet pitiable figure of the gentleman's tailor against his corrupt and corrupting female counterparts, the milliner and mantua-maker:

No Man is ignorant that a Taylor is the Person that makes our Cloaths; to some he not only makes their Dress, but, in some measure, may be said to make themselves. There are Numbers of Beings in and about this Metropolis who have no other identical Existence that what the Taylor, Milliner and Perriwig-Maker bestow upon them: Strip them of these Distinctions, and they are quite a different Species of Beings [...] and as insignificant in Society as Punch, deprived of his moving Wires, and hung upon a Peg.¹

Manufacturing not merely outfits but social identity, Campbell's tailor is cast as a godlike, life-giving puppet-master. But the process of making men is not without personal cost. In creating 'identical Existence[s]' for his clients, the tailor gradually effaces his own: though he need not have a 'robust Body', the physical contortions of 'sitting cross-legged, always in one Posture, bending [his] Body, makes [the tailor] liable to Coughs and Consumptions [...] You rarely see a Taylor live to a great Age' (p. 193).

The ambivalently deployed, though nonetheless sentimental rhetoric of Campbell's representation of the tailor anticipates reformatory nineteenth-century

¹ Robert Campbell, The London Tradesman, being a Compendious View of all the Trades, Professions, Arts, both liberal and mechanic, now practised in the Cities of London and Westminster (London: T. Gardiner, 1747), p. 191. Subsequent references given, parenthetically, in the text.
writing on the figure of the distressed needlewoman, yet this sympathy is not extended to the tailor's eighteenth-century female counterparts. Indeed, their complete lack of genuine and disinterested feeling render the milliner and mantua-maker incompatible with contemporary notions of sentiment and sensibility. The mantua-maker whose business it is to 'make Night-Gowns, Mantuas, and Petticoats, Rob [sic.] de Chambres, &c. for the Ladies' must 'be a perfect Connoisseur in Dress and Fashions': 'She must learn to flatter all Complexions, praise all Shapes and, in a word, ought to be compleat Mistress of the Art of Dissimulation' (p. 227). Where the tailor's creation of (often fictional) sartorial identities is construed as a tacit and harmless activity catering to the clownish pretensions of his clients, the mantua-maker's and milliner's deceit is far more deep-seated and damaging. Content not merely to manipulate the female form into 'as many different Shapes in one month as there are different Appearances of the moon in that Space', milliners exploit their female workers both financially and sexually (p. 207). Once an apprenticeship has been paid for, young girls arrive at the milliner's shop, that 'vast Resort of young Beau's and Rakes[, which] exposes young Creatures to many Temptations, and insensibly debauches their Morals before they are capable of Vice' (p. 208). In the apprentice's ruin lies the milliner's gain: encouraging her wealthy male clients in their advances towards her workers excites business and thus greater profits. Campbell concludes:

the Title of Milliner [is] a more polite Name for a Bawd, a Procuress, a Wretch who lives upon the Spoils of Virtue, and supports her Pride by robbing the Innocent of Health, Fame, and Reputation: They are the Ruin of private Families, Enemies to conjugal Affection, promoting nothing but Vice, and live by Lust. (p. 209)

Recent scholarship concerned with the extent to which anxieties surrounding new patterns of consumption informed the construction of femininity in eighteenth-century literature has tended to privilege the female consumer over the female retailer.

In the studies of Laura Brown, Erin Mackie, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace and Deidre Lynch, the female consumer emerges as an ambivalent figure marked out as both the product of and scapegoat for mercantile capitalism. On the one hand, the female consumer was constructed as a disruptive and empowered agent 'capable of subverting the retail scene' by refusing to yield to its seductive charms or by engaging in the sphere of commercial exchange as a potent means of self-fashioning. On the other hand, the shopper was persistently commodified as a spectacle to be consumed by the predatory gaze of the retailer, other shoppers and the reader. In Consuming Subjects, Kowaleski-Wallace exemplifies this process of metonymic displacement, whereby the female shopper becomes a site upon which society projects anxieties regarding consumerism, in a chapter on china. In the textual examples explored by Kowaleski-Wallace women become living breathing synonyms of that which they consume: like china, women are designed for display, potentially flawed, delicate, attractive and, in their raw form, malleable. While these recent studies recognise the extent to which the female shopper was constructed in relation to the goods she purchased, this process of displacement is identified almost exclusively with the consumer. The retailer's relationship to the goods she traded in, by contrast, seems much less commodity specific, as male writers sought to exclude all women from a 'vision of business and

---

business practice as a masculine realm, where man, disciplined in habit, passionless in effect, controlled the flow of commerce in an orderly, predictable fashion.⁵

As the litany of misogynist entries in Campbell's text suggests, no female employment was immune from accusations of misconduct or exploitation since female trade was inherently suspect. As he writes of the journeywoman seamstress:

> If a young Creature, when out of her Time, has no Friend to advise with, or be a Check upon her Conduct, it is more than ten to one but she takes some idle, if not vicious Course, by the many Temptations to which her Sex and narrow Circumstances subject her. It is a Misfortune to the Fair Sex, when they are left young to their own Management, that they can scarce avoid falling into the many Snares laid for them by designingMen. (pp. 227-228)

In light of the apparent blanket association of female trade and moral corruption evidenced in such accounts of female labour, Kowaleski-Wallace, writing of the death of Richardson's Mrs. Sinclair, argues that the 'actual kind of business [a woman] engages in [in the period] is less significant than the fact that she engages in business at all'.⁶ Through an examination of textual representations of mantua-makers and milliners in the period, this chapter argues that the relationship between the female retailer and her goods was much more commodity specific than such studies have suggested. Just as the female consumer was constructed in relation to the goods she purchased, so female retailers became a site upon which anxieties surrounding the specific items they sold could be projected. As women who not only traded in but physically produced the commodities they sold, dressmakers became irretrievably tainted by the products of their labour — articles tailor made to deceive and seduce. It is precisely their connection with fashionable costume that marked dressmakers as

⁴ Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 87.
⁵ Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 112.
⁶ Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 112.
some of the most suspicious female workers, and blinded writers and readers to the harsh conditions of their labour.

A comprehensive account of the individual occupations within the eighteenth-century clothing and textile industries is necessarily beyond the scope of this study, which is predominantly concerned with issues of textual representation. But the difference in terminology and greater fluidity between the retailer/manufacturer demarcations than exist in these industries today necessitates some explanation. Milliners (also known as *marchands de modes*) were both shop keepers and manufacturers. Usually, though not exclusively female, they essentially sold linens and lace to male and female customers to trim garments. Their role became increasingly important in the latter half of the eighteenth century when the increased simplicity in both the cut of gowns and styles of fabric was compensated for by elaborate trimmings. In addition, milliners sold accessories often made upon the premises such as caps and hats, a role with which the profession is now exclusively associated. Many milliners also employed seamstresses or journeywomen who worked in their shop to make up these accessories, as well as to make dresses from the fabrics they sold. Mantua-makers (the word for dressmakers until the nineteenth century), by contrast, often, though not exclusively, worked from home, sometimes employing

---
7 Although the term 'milliner' was introduced in the eighteenth century to differentiate this female profession from the male-dominated tailoring trades, there are some examples of 'man-milliners' referred to in contemporary literature. The comic potential of men entering this predominantly female line of business is exploited in John O'Keeffe's play *The Man Milliner, in Two Acts. Performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden in 1787*, in John O'Keeffe, *The Dramatic Works of John O'Keeffe, Esq.*, IV (London: T. Woodfall, 1798). The hero of O'Keeffe's play is an effeminate, French milliner who sets himself up as an unsuccessful matchmaker to his male clients in hopes of financial reward.
their own apprentices, and made dresses from fabrics bought elsewhere by their clients.\footnote{For a comprehensive account of the various trades in the clothing industry and their interaction see Aileen Ribeiro, Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715-1789 (London: Batsford, 1984) particularly chapter 2, 'Getting and Spending', pp. 43-65.}

Significantly, the terms milliner and mantua-maker were relatively new in the eighteenth century since they described occupations that until the latter years of the seventeenth century were commonly undertaken by male tailors.\footnote{As L. D. Schwarz has argued, the fear that women were taking over traditional tailoring jobs was an important impetus in the movement to set up unions for male tailors in the mid-eighteenth century. Schwarz further argues that one of the unions' principle aims was to keep men out of dressmaking professions. L. D. Schwarz, London in The Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 190.} The tailors' animosity towards these women, who had usurped a significant share of their livelihood, certainly influenced the mistrust which taints virtually all depictions of milliners and mantua-makers in the period.\footnote{Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850 (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1930), pp. 287-290.} While this historical context informs a reading of hostility to milliners and mantua-makers in eighteenth-century literature, however, textual representations are often at odds with histories of female employment. Ivy Pinchbeck's unsurpassed Women Workers and The Industrial Revolution stresses, for example, the relative gentility of millinery, even citing Campbell's description of the milliner as source material.\footnote{Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850 (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1930), pp. 287-290.} Pinchbeck is, of course, primarily concerned to excavate the material circumstances of female employment rather than the discursive construction of the labouring woman, but even Deborah Valenze's recent study of attitudes towards the labouring women does little to bridge the gap between historical and textual evidence. In The First Industrial Woman Valenze argues that the labouring woman was perceived as a positive symbol of
industriousness in the early eighteenth century; a view which was superseded in the latter half of the century by a hostile construction of the labouring woman as immoral. Yet the representative examples explored below suggest an inverse paradigm shift in literary depictions of the dressmaker, who, like the prostitute, is increasingly sentimentalised throughout the eighteenth century until she emerges as the 'distressed needlewoman' in the early nineteenth. This study aims to contribute to and complicate the familiar literary-critical and historical accounts of the eighteenth-century dressmaker in order to explore how her association with the commodities she trades in blights her reputation, until this association can be unwritten by a sentimental discourse which allows authors to look beyond her trade to the circumstances that produce her.

* * *

By the time the London Tradesman was published in 1747 there already existed a rich literary tradition associating dressmaking with sexual transgression. The milliner's shop, in particular, as a site that opened its doors to male and female customers, was vulnerable to accusations of impropriety. As a setting of potential sexual misconduct and a site in which the manufacture of appearance is the stock in trade, the milliner's shop provided ripe fruit for playwrights who exploited the analogy between the stage and the theatricality of the shop floor. Robert Drury's The Rival Milliners: or the Humours of Covent-Garden, a Tragi-Comi-Operatic-Pastoral Farce

---

(1737) presumes and relies heavily upon stereotypical perceptions of milliners as promiscuous for comic effect. Sukey, one of the women of the title, laments the conditions of her employment which keep her and her fellow workers 'Behind a Counter, like our Cambrick Hem'd' under the watchful eye of their 'haughty angry Mistress'. Rather than eliciting sympathy, however, Sukey's objections to her work merely confirm her shallowness:

SUKEY We to eternal Labour are condemn'd:
And if, as sitting at our work, by chance
Our Eyes on some spruce Passer-by should glance;
An haughty angry Mistress, at whose beck
We're forced to be, gives us a sawcy check;
Or, sent on Business, if we chance to stay,
Her tongue reminds us of it all the Day [...]
Could I my sad, my curst Condition change
With any Seamstress of the New-Exchange,
For they can unsuspected, cast an Eye
On spruce Gentleman — with, what d'ye buy?

Displaying higher principles that many of their literary sisterhood, the milliners of Drury's play look to marriage as an escape from the drudgery of millinery. After a series of misadventures, as each milliner vies for the attention of the same man, all three are married off, much to the relief of the original object of their affections, Mr. Pleadwell. Marriage, he suggests, while the men are not the social catches they initially hoped for, will rid the milliners of the moral pitfalls and financial hardships they face in their work: 'Marry at once and be,/ From Scandal, Mistress, and Indentures free'. The audience leaves the play feeling that the milliners will probably be no more happy than they were before their marriages, but really this is all they deserve.


A year after *The Rival Milliners* was staged followed the anonymous *Intriguing Milliners and Attornies Clerks* (1738), which also explored the amorous affairs of three milliners, one of whom exchanges millinery services for the sexual favours of an attorney's clerk. But even the relative virtues of her two companions provide ammunition with which the profession as a whole can be attacked. In the published play's preface, the anonymous author remarks that 'Out of three Milliners [the playwright] has made but one frail! which we think, is an extraordinary Compliment to Ladies of that gay Profession'.16 Far from questioning the association of millinery and immorality, the play merely confirms what the audience 'knew before,/ A Clerk's a Rogue, A Milliner's a Whore'.17 While these early plays made serious allegations regarding the probity of dressmakers, the sting of their critique is all but completely anaesthetised by the fact that their humorous and salacious adventures fail to impact outside the shop floor and beyond their limited working-class circle. Outside these contexts, however, the consequences of the milliner's and mantua-maker's deceit is more dangerous. Where the intriguing and rival milliners only deceive themselves and men who should know better, other figures in the literature of the period practice a more alarming kind of millinery deception.

* * *

**THE HISTORY OF MISS BETSY THOUGHTLESS**

---

15 *Rival Milliners*, p. 46.
17 *Intriguing Milliners*, p. 59.
From the opening pages of Eliza Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) the reader is introduced to the milliner's shop as an illicit site of seduction. At school Betsy becomes the confidante of the older Miss Forward who uses her younger companion to cover up her affair with Mr Sparkish. Flattered by the friendship, Betsy 'set all her wits to work, to render herself worthy of the trust reposed in her. Sometimes she made pretences of going to the milliner, the mantua-maker, or to buy something in town, and begged leave that Miss Forward should accompany her' so that she can meet with her lover. Miss Forward is vain and coquettish, loving only men more than a 'new gown' (p. 82). Though her relationship with the 'boyish, insipid' Sparkish is found out and stopped, her assignations with him mark the beginning of her moral decline, culminating in her seduction (or possible rape) at the hands of Mr Wildly and eventual prostitution. Though from the outset dress and millinery are conceptually associated with sexual transgression, it is in Betsy that the full threat of the dress-maker's shop to female virtue is realised.

Upon the death of her father, Betsy leaves her country boarding-school for the house of her guardian (Sir Goodman) and the luxuries of London life: soon 'dress [...] engrossed [her] whole conversation' as she abandons her academic pursuits for the more fashionable 'study [of learning to] set off, to the best advantage, the charms she had received from nature' (p. 39). But Betsy is an innocent abroad (albeit a coquettish one) and unversed in the city's deceptively dangerous rituals of shopping and

---


19 As Deborah J. Nestor points out the novel is significantly ambiguous on this question. Though Miss Forward meets Wildly of her own free will, and is clearly attracted to him, the physical force he exerts over her in the seduction/rape scene is stressed in the account Miss Forward gives to Betsy. See Nestor, 'Virtue Rarely Rewarded: Ideological Subversion and Narrative Form in Haywood's Later Fiction', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 34:3 (1994), p. 582.
courtship. Visiting a mercer's shop shortly after arriving in the metropolis, Betsy is disappointed by Lady Mellasin's choice of a 'rich [though] not well fancied' silk for her in contrast to the 'genteel new-fashioned pattern' selected for her own daughter Flora:

but Lady Mellasin said so much in praise of it, and the mercer, either to please her, or because he was desirous of getting it sold, assured Miss Betsy that it was admired by every body, that it was the newest thing he had in his shop, and he had already sold several pieces to ladies of the first quality. (p. 39)

Though still disinclined, Betsy is 'over-perswaded' by the mercer's flattery to purchase the silk (p. 39). When she returns home to review the fabric, she realises her dissatisfaction: 'the more she looked at it the worse it appeared to her' (pp. 39-40).

Betsy's experience of silk-buying anticipates a similar episode in Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* (1760). Intending to buy silk for a night-cap, the Chinese citizen Lien Chi Altangi leaves the mercer's shop with a silk he knows to be of inferior quality to that of his own country as well as silks for a morning gown and waistcoat he does not need. Leaving the circus-like bustle of the shop, Altangi realises that he has been tricked:

I knew he [the mercer] was only answering his own purposes, even while he attempted to appear solicitous of mine; yet by a voluntary infatuation, a sort of passion compounded with my good nature, I walked into a snare with my eyes open, and put myself to future pain in order to give him immediate pleasure.20

The sexual language in which this commercial exchange is clothed — of passions, infatuations and pleasures — identifies Altangi as the feminised, seduced victim of commercial exchange. Shopping is familiarly represented, here, as an unreasonable
and unmanly activity, leaving the consumer vulnerable to the predatory instincts of the shopkeeper.

Like Altangi, Betsy too has been foiled by the seductive rituals of shopping. Having been flattered into buying something she does not want, Betsy realises that she has relinquished the power of self-fashioning, allowing others to 'direct me in what I shall wear' (p. 40). Flora is furious that Betsy has called her mother's 'judgement [upon the fabric] into question', particularly since Lady Mellasin's position and place in fashionable urban Society ensures that she 'knows better than [Betsy] what is fit for [her]’ (p. 39). But unlike Goldsmith's Citizen, Betsy realises that she can redress the exchange in the mercer's shop. Sir Goodman overhears the argument between the two girls and gives Betsy twenty guineas to purchase alternative silks. When Betsy returns to the shop she finds the retailer 'unwilling to take [the original silk] again; but on her telling him, she would always make use of him, for every thing she wanted in his way, and would then buy two suits of him, he at last consented' (p. 41). The description of Betsy's choice of fabrics is particularly, and characteristically, detailed:

As she was extremely curious in every thing relating to her shape, she made choice of a pink coloured French lustring,\(^{21}\) to the end, that the plaits lying flat, would shew the beauty of her waiste to more advantage; and to atone for the slightness of the silk, purchased as much of it as would flounce the sleeves, and the petticoat from top to bottom: she made the mercer also cut off a sufficient quantity of a rich green Venetian sattin \([sic]\), to make her a riding habit; [...] all which, with the silk she disliked in exchange, did not amount to the money she had received from Mr Goodman. (pp. 41-42)

The novel's attention to the particularities of Betsy's dress damned, trivialised and feminised the novel according to an anonymous critic of The Monthly Review:


\(^{21}\) A particularly glossy silk.
The *Insipid* chiefly marks the character of this work [...] Indeed, the minute detail of particulars, and circumstantial descriptions of every thing relating to dress and equipage, and other little exteriors that but too much attract the eye and heart of a woman, sufficiently confirm the voice of the public, as to the sex of our author.\(^{22}\)

Betsy's weakness for fashionable self-display becomes, in this reading of Haywood's work, a symbol of the weakness of female authorship and a weakness in the novel as a whole, inspiring in its readers the coquettish feelings for which Betsy will later be punished. But dress, here, is working much more subtly than the critic of *The Monthly Review* allows. The lengthy description of Betsy's purchases from the mercer's does not merely emphasise and symbolise her coquetry: rather, it reveals her subversive command over commercial exchange. Betsy transforms what Kowaleski-Wallace outlines as the traditional shop dynamics of the masculine, controlling retailer and passive vulnerable feminine (or feminised) consumer by deploying her own financially attractive and seductive offer to the mercer.\(^{23}\)

Betsy's mastery of the shop floor is short-lived, however. For like Altangi, she too is a vulnerable mixture of passion compounded with an essentially good nature which nearly leads to her ruin in the house of Mrs Modely. As Betsy's mantua-maker, Mrs Modely is well-known within her household, so much so that she 'always ran up without any ceremony [rather] than asking if Miss Betsy was home and alone' (pp. 370-371). Arriving unannounced one morning, Modely breathlessly relates the effect of Betsy's last visit to her house upon her lodger Sir Frederick Fineer:

'Heyday, Mrs Modely,' cried she, 'what brings you here thus early?' — 'Indeed, madam,' answered she, 'I could not well come out; — I have eight or nine gowns in the house now, which should all have been finished, and sent home to-day: — the ladies will tear me to pieces


\(^{23}\) Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 87.
about them, but I left all my business, and run away to acquaint you with a thing you little dream of [...] you were yesterday at my house, — Sir Frederick Fineer, who lodges in my first floor, — the sweetest and most generous gentleman that ever lived, to be sure; — but that is nothing to the purpose, — he saw you from his dining-room window [...] and, would you believe it, was so struck, that he immediately fell down in a swoon [...] 'Oh! Mrs Modely,' said he to me, 'what angel have you got below? — Tell me who she is?' [...] I was so much amazed, that I had not the power of speaking; and he, I suppose, interpreting my silence as a refusal of answering his demands, fell into such distractions,— such ravings, as frighted me almost out of my wits [...] I told him,— I hope you will forgive me,— your name, and where you lived, and that you were not married.' (pp. 277-278)

Modely's business constitutes a travesty of the sanctity of the domestic household, which critics such as Nancy Armstrong have located at the heart of bourgeois identity and morality in the period. Her trade gives her access to the private rooms of her socially-superior clients just as her own 'house' blurs the distinctions between public business and private household — although it is not explicit in the text, this appears to be a residence from which Modely works rather than a shop. This spatial and moral imperfection facilitates the subversion of the traditional gender dynamics of retail. Watching from his private rooms as Betsy goes about her business 'to consult on some matters of her dress' (p. 277), Fineer appears as the feminised, seduced victim of the scene, swooning upon the sight of Betsy and, in a parodic post-seduction sentimental trope, ranting and raving upon her departure.

Once on visual display in the mantua-maker's house, Betsy is transformed from the traditional 'gender-marked position' of 'yielding and compliant' consumer, to borrow Kowaleski-Wallace's terms, into an available (though empowered) commodity herself, like the dresses and trimmings she purchases, capable of seducing the

24 For Armstrong's account of the way in which labour threatened domestic sanctity and the discursively-constructed figure of the domestic woman in the form of the governess see Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 78-81.
25 Though the OED cites the first usage of the noun shop in the thirteenth century, it was still
vulnerable window-shopper. Fineer's unobserved viewing of Betsy intriguingly re-invents earlier, and by this time infamous, scenes of voyeurism in Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). Mr B's repeated violation of the privacy of Pamela's closet (vociferously objected to in much anti-*Pamela* literature) is here reconstructed in the more public location of the mantua-maker's house. Yet, the publicness of this site does not lessen the sense of violation or repression of the scene. Rather, the reader of *Betsy Thoughtless* is made to realise that in a society in which neither private nor public sites offer sanctity from male intrusion, women have little room for manoeuvre. As Beth Fowkes Tobin writes, 'Betsy is repeatedly denied mobility. That she cannot go just anywhere is symptomatic of the repressive regime of bourgeois respectability'\(^6\)

After having satisfied her curiosity in a meeting with the pompous Fineer in Modely's house, Betsy writes to the mantua-maker requesting that she terminate the acquaintance. Though she thanks her for the 'good I believe you intended me' in introducing her to Fineer, Betsy asks Modely to 'confine your conversation to such matters as befits your vocation, for as to others I find you are little skilled' (p. 361). But Betsy's dressmaker, like the predatory milliner of *The London Tradesman*, is infinitely more skilled in these amatory affairs than the day-to-day running of her business. In fact, the true nature of her business is increasingly unclear. Modely returns to Betsy's dressing-room soon after her rejection of Fineer to inform her that he has attempted suicide and is dying with a dagger in his breast, desiring only to see her once more. Buying Modely's story as readily as she purchases her goods, Betsy goes to Fineer, who, apparently consoled by a parson and doctor, proposes marriage.

\(^{6}\)common in the eighteenth century to refer to shops as 'houses', especially since most shops consisted of a converted room within a private household.
Before hastily departing, the mantua-maker remarks, 'Lord, madam [...] you would not be so mad to refuse:— what two thousand pounds a year, and a ladyship, with liberty to marry who you will?' (p. 373). Modely's interjection once more relocates her house outside the private, domestic concerns of pity, love and marriage to a world of commercial exchange in which marriage, like her own business, facilitates economic gain and possible social advancement. Without 'knowing what she said or did' Betsy is 'married' by the parson, upon which Fineer 'jumping off the bed, and throwing away the sword' demands that the now evidently fake marriage be consummated. Once more, the complex and unstable power relations of commercial exchange are exposed. Having accepted, she believes, the economic terms of a fictional marriage, Betsy has relinquished the position of powerful seducing subject she appeared to enjoy when Fineer first saw her in Modely's house. Now purchased herself, Betsy is the property of her fictional husband and, like the silks she bought from the mercer earlier in the novel, can be used and traded as the purchaser sees fit. Throughout her ordeal, Betsy calls for Modely, who had earlier promised not to leave the young woman alone with Fineer, but is only rescued when her once admirer and future second husband Mr Trueworth arrives. Distressed, Betsy confronts Modely before leaving her house. The mantua-maker replies to her accusations of betrayal with 'I know not what you mean' (p. 376).

The dominant critical account of *Betsy Thoughtless* characterises the novel as a conventional mid-century 'reformed heroine' narrative which allowed writers to, as Janet Todd writes, 'enact the replacement of the power-seeking woman with the new feminine one, to transform the coquette into the sentimental sign' thereby catering for

---

26 Beth Fowkes Tobin, 'Introduction', *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, p. xxxii.
a moral-hungry readership cultivated by the publication of Richardson's *Pamela.*

Betsy's first marriage to the cruel and adulterous Munden is placed at the heart of this development from 'thoughtless' coquette to woman of 'true worth', signified by Betsy's maiden and second married names. Yet the episode in Modely's house and Betsy's reactions to it suggest that the heroine's reformation is far more complex and multifaceted than such readings suggest. Rather, it is a lengthy, gradual process of increased introspection, accelerated by the incident in Modely's house and precipitated by Betsy's increasing recognition that true worth cannot be ascertained or measured by the visual signifiers of fashionable dress and appearance. Shortly after her ordeal, Betsy reflects:

> All her pride, — her gaiety, — her vanity of attracting admiration; — in fine, all that had composed her former character, seemed now to be lost and swallowed up in the sense of that bitter shame and contempt, in which she imagined herself involved, and she wished for nothing but to be unseen, unregarded, and utterly forgotten, by all that had ever known her. (p. 390)

Betsy's lesson is so salutary because of the quarter from which it comes. Though her brothers outwardly treat her with tenderness after the incident, they privately reproach her for 'encouraging the pretensions of a man, whose character she knew nothing of, but from the mouth of a little mantua-maker' (p. 379). Like Clarissa Harlowe, condemned by some for her inability to recognise the women in Mrs Sinclair's equally suspect 'house' as prostitutes, Betsy too is castigated for her inability to differentiate between outward respectability and underlying, immoral truth. Like Clarissa Harlowe, condemned by some for her inability to recognise the women in Mrs Sinclair's equally suspect 'house' as prostitutes, Betsy too is castigated for her inability to differentiate between outward respectability and underlying, immoral truth. Betsy's probity would have appeared all the more doubtful to a contemporary readership well-versed in the widely-assumed analogy between millinery,

---

dressmaking and prostitution: a literary stereotyping to which Haywood had herself contributed in the Anti-Pamela (1741). Betsy Thoughtless reaffirms this damning connection between social advancement and dressmaking in Modely's exploitation of the heroine, for which we assume she expects some financial reward, as well as in the novel's subplot in which Betsy takes upon herself the education of her deceased seamstress's daughter. Believing the child to be Betsy's own, Trueworth visits the girl, who is in the care of a country nurse. The nurse proudly tells Trueworth that her charge is to learn to 'read, write and work' with a view to becoming 'prentice to a mantua-maker, or to a milliner [...] and then who knows, sir [...] but some great gentleman or other may fall in love with my little Betsy, and I may live to see her ride in her coach?' (pp. 244-245). Dressmaking, the nurse implies, uniquely privileges the child for social advancement, since it allows women to enter fashionable circles by virtue of the very circumstance that in other spheres of social exchange would exclude them: their status as labouring women. Even in this romanticised, Pamela-esque vision of the child's apparently natural progress from millinery to genteel marriage, however, the novel recapitulates its mistrust of mantua-makers and milliners — a mistrust that Betsy's coquettishness and vanity blind her to. Dressmaking, it seems, always conceals and masks an underlying sexual, financial or social motivation. If Defoe's argument that 'It is a hard Matter to know the Mistress from the Maid by their Dress' would become a commonplace in counter-fashion argument and satire of the


29 One of the most hostile representations of a milliner in a work predating Betsy Thoughtless, beyond those cited above, is that in Laetitia Pilkington's scandalous Memoirs, published some three years before Haywood's novel. Here Pilkington describes a milliner, who she misguidedly and briefly lodges with, as the only 'Person [I met] in my Life who did not possess one good Quality'. Memoirs of Mrs. Laetitia Pilkington, Wife to the Rev. Mr Math. Pilkington. Written By Herself: Wherein are
period, so too would his sense that such social corruption inevitably masked an equally insidious sexual corruption as women fuelled their passion for fine clothes by theft, seduction and prostitution.\(^{30}\)

In light of the prevalent assumption of the milliner's socially and sexually suspect character, the reader of Betsy Thoughtless was likely to share her brothers' harsh responses to the heroine's vulnerability to Modely's deceptions. Certainly the only extant contemporary critical response to Haywood's novel in *The Monthly Review* perceives little in Betsy's character to redeem her. Though the critic acknowledges that the novel may have pretensions to the kind of reformation narrative later identified by Jane Spencer and Janet Todd, the *Monthly* 's critic is concerned that its 'lessons of prudence' may be lost upon the reader for 'how can we interest ourselves in the fortune of one, whose character and conduct are neither amiable or infamous, and which we can neither admire, nor love, nor pity, nor be diverted with'?\(^{31}\) But if the episode in Mrs Modely's house testifies to the dangerous extremity of Betsy's coquettishness it also crucially signifies her potential for reformation. For here Betsy realises that her need to captivate and control men through her appearance (upon which she bases her feelings of self-worth) is a potential catalyst for her self-destruction. After the incident, Betsy significantly rejects trivial matters of 'how to ornament her dress, or place the patches of her face with the most graceful art' in favour of new stratagems to gain possession of Trueworth in the form of a miniature likeness of him (p. 394).

---


Throughout the rest of the novel Betsy is stripped of the sartorial trappings that emblematise her vanity and coquettishness. She marries Munden after a pre-nuptial contract has been drawn up allowing her one hundred and fifty pounds per annum pin-money, a figure that Betsy resignedly greets with a sigh, claiming 'I have had better' (p. 392). Soon after her marriage Betsy finds that Munden's allowance given to her to run their household is insufficient to 'support her character'. When she asks for more money he demands that she deduct the sums required from her pin-money:

'I know not,' said he, 'what fool it was that first introduced the article of pin-money into marriage-writings, — nothing certainly is more idle, since a woman ought to have nothing apart from her husband; but as it is grown into a custom, and I have condescended to comply with it, you should, I think, of your own accord, and without giving me the trouble of reminding you of it, convert some part of it, at least, to such uses as might ease me of a burden I have indeed no kind of reason to be loaded with.' (p. 442)

In relinquishing her pin-money, her sole form of financial independence as a married woman, Betsy would once more lose the power of self-fashioning as she earlier did at the hands of Lady Mellasin and the mercer. But, here, there is no simple redress. For the right of self-fashioning has been transformed, by this point in the narrative, from the simple desire to wear what she likes and feels will make her most attractive to potential suitors to an issue of fashioning one's agency and autonomy. The only action Betsy can now take is to leave her husband. When Betsy eventually does leave Munden, Trueworth finds her a totally different creature from that he had previously known. Where once Betsy's 'handsome — well-shaped, — genteel' figure had but thinly veiled a 'rather disfigured native elegance of [...] mind' (p. 189), Trueworth now envisages a different Betsy, whose informal, 'genteel' external appearance is in

32 Pin-money offered women a small form of financial independence after marriage in the form of an allowance for expenses, particularly for fabrics and dress from whence the name derives, often secured
keeping with her more modest, sentimental character. Trueworth finds Betsy sitting under an arbour lost in reflections upon her life and indiscretions:

the extreme pensiveness of her mind had hindered her from perceiving, that any one was near; but the little covert under which she was placed being open on both sides, he had a full view of every thing she did: — though she was in the most negligent night-dress that could be, she seemed as lovely to him as ever; all his first flames rekindled in his heart, while gazing on her in this uninterrupted freedom [...] till observing she had something in her hand, which she seemed to look upon with great attention, and sometimes betrayed agitations he had never seen in her before, he was impatient to discover if possible the motive. (p. 543)

The scene parallels other literary acts of voyeurism (particularly those in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*) in which plotting male protagonists view their heroines in states of undress. Furthermore, the scene echoes and re-invents two earlier episodes in Haywood's novel: the ambiguously depicted seduction or rape of Miss Forward and the imagined seduction of Sir Frederick Fineer by the appearance of Betsy in Mrs Modely's house.

The account of Wildly's seduction or rape of Miss Forward is ambiguously phrased. Though Miss Forward relates that Wildly's 'strength was far superior to mine' she also acknowledges that 'my own fond heart too much consented'. Miss Forward's dress, 'the [...] loose dishabille' that she wears when she meets Mr Wildly, emblematises this interpretive ambiguity. Miss Forward relates that she was only dressed thus because the 'maid having put me to bed that night, as usual, I had no time to dress myself again after I got up' (p. 86). The flimsiness of her 'loose dishabille' simultaneously signals Miss Forward's weakness, and therefore vulnerability when placed in the arms of the strong Mr Wildly, as well as her possible willingness to be seduced. Betsy's appearance under the arbour in a 'negligent night-dress', coupled with the feelings this vision excites in Mr Trueworth, signals a possible narrative in a pre-nuptial contract. For the political implications and contestations of this allowance see Susan
development in which Betsy's fate would mirror that of a Miss Forward or Clarissa Harlowe. But this eroticised scene is disturbed when Mr Trueworth sees that an object is engrossing the attention of Betsy. As in the earlier episode in Mrs Modely's house, Betsy is observed here without knowing she's being watched. But where Betsy's apparent empowerment in the earlier scene in causing Fineer to swoon was revealed to be a sham conjured to give her a false sense of advantage whilst Modely and Fineer plotted the fake marriage, here Betsy is far more in control of her self-representation and its effect. Where, previously, Betsy's appearance in Modely's house effectively rendered her a commodity to be bought by the schemes of Fineer, here she is in possession of a commodity that will secure Trueworth's affection and lead to their eventual marriage: the miniature likeness of him that she had earlier purchased. Her attachment to this possession signals Betsy's moral refinement: her interest in it is far more sincere and worthy than the interest in fashionable dresses which earlier caused her to visit the mantua-maker.

The selfless purity of emotion evidenced in Betsy's handling of the miniature is mirrored in a changed physical appearance which testifies to the heroine's heightened sensibility. At first, Trueworth cannot make out the physical features of the figure he sees under the arbour, but he is driven by a desire to ascertain 'what sort of face belonged to so genteel a form' (p. 543). As Trueworth draws in closer to the figure he now realises is Betsy, he notices her 'night-dress' and then draws in closer so that he 'heard her sighs [and] saw her lovely hand frequently put up to wipe away the

33 Clarissa is viewed by her eventual rapist Lovelace in a state of undress whilst escaping a feared fire Samuel Richardson, Clarissa: or the History of a Young Lady (1747-1748), ed. by Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 722-728.
tears' (p. 543). Rather than an outward signifier of coquettishness, Betsy's dress and physical appearance now encourage Trueworth to seek her affection and ultimately reveal that she is truly worthy of it. The propriety of Betsy's corporeal gentility is corroborated by the 'admirable presence of mind' that she shows in dissuading the advances of her true love as her husband is still living (p. 544). Her reformation is now complete, paving the way for her second marriage and the novel's conclusion:

Thus were the virtues of our heroine (those follies that had defaced them being fully corrected) at length rewarded with a happiness, retarded only till she had render'd herself wholly worthy of receiving it. (p. 568)

The function of dress and the preoccupation with appearance in *Betsy Thoughtless* is far more complex and resonant than the mere natural effusion of a female pen and lure to weak-minded female readers to which it is reduced by the critic of *The Monthly Review*. Though Betsy's reformation comes from within, it is one that is demonstrated without in the changing guise of her physical appearance, as the fashionably dissipated Betsy in Mr Goodman's house is transformed into the genteel figure under the arbour. The disjunction between the attractive physical appearance of Betsy early in the novel and the unattractive vices which her dress thinly encoded is replaced by the end of the novel with a reassuring analogy between external and internal gentility, more stable than that envisaged by Richardson's vision of Pamela in her homespun gown and petticoat.

* * *

Forty years after the publication of *Betsy Thoughtless*, and some fifty after the appearance of *The London Tradesman*, a scandalous and salacious prostitution narrative thinly disguised in the form of a homiletic advice manual entitled *The Cherub: or, Guardian of Female Innocence, Exposing the Arts of Boarding Schools*,
Hired Fortune-Tellers, corrupt Milliners and apparent Ladies of Fashion (1792) still felt the need to warn young girls and their parents of the dangers of dress and dressmaking. The early acknowledgement by the Cherub's author that 'there are many very respectable and amiable females, who have made that profession [millinery] the medium of independence' is soon qualified by an assertion that many more are victim to a 'sort of lightness and frivolity' of mind (p. 47). The author's reproach of these women is indicative of the extent to which criticisms of the milliner frequently become indistinguishable from criticisms of dress and fashion in the period. 'Lightness and frivolity' are terms which not only undermine the milliner's respectability but, because of their frequency in contemporary counter-fashion discourse, equally disparage the fashionably ephemeral products of her labour and the trivial concerns and insignificant characters of her customers. These merely foolish women, however, are not the prime target of the text. Rather, The Cherub warns its vulnerable female readers of another, altogether more dangerous, 'species' of milliner:

that which, in general, consists of repudiated, cast off, and superannuated punks, who make little more of the profession than finesse, and a gloss for the trade of seduction. Oft has our anxious CHERUB observed the secret scenes, the nocturnal orgies of sensuality, the midnight immolations of female virtue, which are made, and celebrated, behind the folding shop doors of a millinery deception. (p. 47)

Like Campbell's milliner, these women are not merely content to trade in seductive items of costume: the milliner trades in seduction itself. The subsequent narrative tells of two girls, whose doting father, Mr Firman, is determined to send them to some 'reputable seminary of industry'. After seeing a 'flourishing' advertisement in a newspaper for two milliner's apprenticeships, he instructs a friend to inquire into the  

---

34 [Anon.], The Cherub, or Guardian of female Innocence Exposing the Arts of Boarding Schools, Hired Fortune-tellers, corrupt Milliners, and apparent Ladies of Fashion (London: W. Locke, 1792).
business. The friend returns satisfied with what he sees: 'a large house, in a grand
neighbourhood [...] receiv'd by a smart woman, and to his shallow capacity, that
appeared sufficient' (p. 49). Unable to see through the artifices of manufactured
appearance, the friend is taken in by the visual evidence of the neighbourhood and the
proprietress's 'smart' character and approves the shop to his friend. Soon Firman's
daughters too become completely taken in by the fashionable effects the reader
believes they have been apprenticed to make and sell. They write to their father 'only
when they drew upon him for money to purchase fine cloaths, and that they did
oftener than his circumstances conveniently admitted of' (pp. 49-50). As the narrative
progresses we learn of the milliner's (Mrs Tiffany's) chequered sexual and economic
history. After being prostituted herself to an aristocrat, crucially by another (French)
milliner, Mrs Tiffany became the mistress of a West Indian merchant who
subsequently gave her the capital to 'set up the affected business of a Milliner that, she
might the more unsuspectedly carry on that [role] of Baud and Seducer' (p. 52). The
outward respectability of millinery provides a veil to, and an economic catalyst for, a
tragically perpetual cycle of sexual transgression: the sexually corrupted Mrs Tiffany
becomes the corrupter of the Firman daughters, who are both prostituted before their
fifteenth birthdays.

The Pamela-esque rise of the virtuous female to genteel marriage through her
industry envisaged by the young Betsy's nurse in Haywood's novel has become a
cautionary, grim parody in The Cherub. Seduced first by the lure of fashionable
costume furnished by their father, Firman's daughters are in turn seduced into a world
of prostitution by their more 'genteel' though morally and physically disfigured clients:

Subsequent references given, parenthetically, in the text.
one of the sisters is prostituted 'to a Sharper and Gambler, for the sum of £200; and the other for 500 to an old debilitated Viscount' (p. 52). The girls' secret is revealed only when their brother visits them before leaving for the country. The spectacle that greets him upon his arrival at the house is very different from that perceived by his father's friend earlier in the narrative. He is greeted by the sight of 'three other young ladies in the house, highly dressed out, and painted like toy-shop dolls, more than with the humble and respectable appearance of business' (p. 50). The line between humbly respectable and ostentatiously disreputable business has been reduced to a matter of appearance and perception, here. The fact that the milliner quite literally trades in and manufactures appearances and visual display makes her all the more astute in concealing her activities from her vulnerable observers. The clothes which her 'young ladies' wear both reveal and encrypt the true business of Mrs Tiffany: they are construed by Firman's friend as a proper, fashionably smart form of product advertisement or, more accurately by the young Firman, as a visual indicator that the true commodities on sale in the milliner's shop are not the dresses but those who wear them.

* * *

THE WANDERER AND THE WITLINGS

Reading these texts in isolation suggests little resistance to the enduring narrative associating dressmaking and prostitution throughout the eighteenth century, rendering the emergence of the distressed needlewoman in the nineteenth century a curiously pivotal phenomenon. As I will argue through a reading of Frances Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814) and unproduced play *The Witlings* (1778-1780), however, an
important counter-narrative developed alongside this account which drew heavily upon the tradition of the corrupt dressmaker, not in order to condemn her, but to deflect condemnation away from her person to the conditions which produce her. Though the stereotypical tropes associating millinery and dressmaking resisted sympathetic representation (largely because of their association with dress), writers such as Burney (though crucially reluctant to totally abandon these tropes) enabled the reader to perceive the social biases and prejudices out of which such attitudes were constructed. Burney's final work *The Wanderer: or, Female Difficulties* (1814) is in many ways a romantic novel, written out of and reflecting the anxieties of English society in the aftermath of the devastating events across the Channel. As such, the appropriateness of analysing it against earlier, eighteenth-century sentimental literature may seem questionable. However, *The Wanderer* was written and re-written periodically over some fourteen years (placing its conception in the 1790s) and is set in the earlier era of 'the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre' (p. 11). Indeed, much of the novel's singularity lies in its curious blend of the dual influences of romanticism (embodied in the eponymous figure of 'The Wanderer') and the Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novels of the 1790s (reflected, in part, in the feminist politics of Elinor Joddril). The novel's ideological dualism is reflected in its representation of the numerous labouring women 'The Wanderer' is forced to encounter and work with.

Juliet's progress from her anonymous arrival on the English shore in the guise of a 'creole' to her eventual acceptance as the daughter of Lord Granville first takes her

---

on a journey of relentless down-ward mobility indicated by the various millinery employments she undertakes. Initially rejoicing 'in the blessing bestowed upon her, by that part of her education, which gave her the useful and appropriate female accomplishment of needle-work' (p. 78), Juliet finds that her talent is insufficient to provide stability in a world of female difficulties. After sewing and singing in the house of Mrs Maple, the Incognita becomes a music teacher and then falls back on her needle skills by taking in embroidery, working in a milliner's shop before subsequently working for a mantua-maker, dishearteningly employed solely to make one dress. The Wanderer's subtitle (Female Difficulties) coupled with the volume of the novel set in places of work and chronicling Juliet's hardships as a labouring woman, leads critics such as Margaret Ann Doody to read the novel as prototypical of the work-conscious novel of the 1830s and 1840s:

Burney transcended the customary middle-class attitudes to work as something for which the members of the lower classes should be grateful, as she escaped from condescending workers as given to idleness [...] Other writers, like Lennox or Hays, had shown their young lady workers as pitiable because put in false situations or doing work beneath them. Burney examines the nature of the work itself, asking not if her heroine is to be pitied for so having to descend, but whether the work as at present organised is something which is right to ask of other human beings.37

Throughout Burney's novel runs a vociferous anti-luxury argument, implied by the economic hardships of Juliet and explicit in the verbal outbursts of Giles Arbe, which emphasises the human cost of material possessions such as dress. When Arbe fails to exact the sums owed to Juliet for her music lessons by fashionable ladies, fashionably reluctant to deal with or even discuss monetary matters, he cries:

36 For a discussion of the complex gestation of The Wanderer see Doody's introduction to The Wanderer, pp. viii-xiii.
you should neither eat your meat, nor drink your beer, nor sit upon your chairs, nor wear your clothes, till you have rewarded the industrious people who provide them. Till then, in my mind, every body should bear to be hungry, and dry and tired and ragged! For what right have we to be fed and covered, and seated, at other folks cost? [...] We ought all of us to be ashamed of being warmed, and dizzened in silks and satins, if the poor weavers, who fabricate them, and all their wives and babies are shivering in tatters. (p. 324)

Luxuries, Arbe argues, are not such to those who produce them. Neither is value intrinsic, objective, or universal: rather, it is rigidly and ruthlessly demarcated along consumer/producer lines. Where dress is valued by ladies of fashion only to indulge their 'love of dissipation [and to] lounge in [the] box at operas' (p. 325) it is a necessity for its manufacturers, providing warmth and subsistence. In attacking the inequality of a society in which some live in a state of luxury whilst others merely survive, Arbe paradoxically highlights the futility of his argument, however. For luxury and meagre subsistence are, in the minds of those whose consciences he is trying to awake, mutually dependent. As the ironically named Mr Scope retorts: 'the morals of a state require, that a proper distinction should be kept up, bet ween the instruments of subsistence, and those of amusement' (p. 324). Luxury commodities, in this logic, can only be produced in a society in which some individuals need to produce such objects in order to eke out a subsistence.

Despite falling upon deaf ears, Arbe's argument has important implications for the reader's perception of the labouring women throughout The Wanderer. The 'proper distinction' Scope perceives at the heart of the morally-functioning state is revealed through Arbe's impassioned pleas to be an arbitrary distinction, artificially 'kept up' by the negligence with which women in particular treat the facilitators of their ease and dissipation. As an earlier satirical writer remarks, to be a Woman of Taste (1733) it is necessary
To give oneself a thousand charming airs,
Rant from your chamber, bully down the stairs;
To call your mercer wretch, your sempstress whore;
Pay nothing --- and then bid Richard shut the door.38

Treating your 'sempstress' or daughter's music teacher with contempt is a means of affirming your status as a financially independent woman of taste and fashion as Juliet finds out to her cost.

In highlighting the arbitrary social constructions dictating attitudes to labour, Arbe's sentiments offer a possible account for the discourse associating dressmakers with moral corruption, as individuals seek to privilege consumers above manufacturers to maintain and justify a society of material inequality. Such representations also enact a crucial displacement. Just as the milliner becomes a screen upon which anxieties surrounding dress (as a facilitator of social and sexual transgression and symbol of female vanity and excess) are projected, so too, by an ingenious sleight of hand, is she a scapegoat and focal point upon which customers can displace concerns regarding their own attachment to dress. Such a strategy, as argued earlier, is vital to our acceptance of the reformation of Betsy Thoughtless. Many of the attributes that condemn Betsy in the eyes of Mr Trueworth — her vanity, her love of finery (of which Sir Frederick Fineer's name appears to be a telling corruption) and the associated desires to attract and deceive — are revealed as merely a naïve, innocent coquettishness when thrown into relief by the schemes of her manipulative and corrupt mantua-maker Mrs Modely. Burney too had adopted an

analogous strategy in *Camilla* (1796), in which the heroine's virtue is both exploited and thrown into relief by the manipulative Mrs Mittin, a former milliner turned semi-gentlewoman who plunges the heroine deep into debt by procuring innumerable fashionable dresses to deck her out for the season, thereby forcing her into a state of mental and physical collapse and damning her irreversibly, she believes, in the eyes of her beloved Edgar.

Arbe's speech is not merely striking for the insight it proffers into the necessity to condemn labouring women or for the potency of its anti-luxury argument, however. His outburst bears a close affinity to a letter which Frances Burney wrote to Samuel Crisp, whilst working on her unproduced play *The Witlings*. In a previous letter, Crisp had teased Burney about her new-found fame following the revelation of her authorship of the anonymously published *Evelina*. Her life now, he remarked, appeared to consist solely of 'incessant and comique engagements' leaving little time for work on her new project. Burney's piqued reply anticipates the argument she would voice more seriously in *The Wanderer*:

'Fact! Fact!' I assure you — however paltry, ridiculous, or inconceivable it may sound. Caps, hats and ribbons make, indeed, no venerable appearance upon paper; no more do eating and drinking; — yet the one can no more be worn without being made, than the other can be swallowed without being cooked; and those who can neither pay milliners, nor keep scullions, must either toil for themselves, or go capless and dinnerless. So, if you are for a high-polished comparison, I'm your man.\(^39\)

Burney, as a working female writer, seems to align herself here with milliners and maids, exploited by those who do not understand the true value of the work invested in the services they provide and the ephemeral goods they produce. It was a view that

would be uncomfortably confirmed by personal experience when Burney became the 'Second Keeper of the Robes of Queen Charlotte' in 1786. As someone who hated sewing, the weekly task of stitching caps and restoring petticoats for the full-court dress worn on Thursday afternoons as St. James's Palace was a particularly trying experience for Burney. Burney's self-alignment with milliners in this letter is still more intriguing given that the first act of The Witlings, which she was working on at this time, is set in a milliner's shop and it too, like The Wanderer, explores the personal devastation faced by a woman whose fortune is lost. This letter and its complex re-working in the sentiments of Giles Arbe in The Wanderer would seem to lend support to Doody's argument that the novel questions the ethics of the female labour market. Yet the tone of both the letter and The Wanderer is more complex and ambivalent than such a reading would suggest. Whether Burney truly aligns her writing with such trivialities as caps, hats and ribbons, or merely evokes the comparison to expose the inappropriateness and unfairness of Crisp's criticisms is unclear. Equally, Arbe's sentiments raise expectations that will later be compromised rather than confirmed by the milliner's and mantua-makers shop's that Juliet will be forced to work in. As a closer reading of The Wanderer will demonstrate, what is of interest is not that Burney examines here the nature of work in order to excite pity and concern for the conditions of female workers, as Doody argues, but rather that the very nature of this millinery work prevents Burney from bestowing her pity and concern more liberally and effectively.

In her essay 'Penelope's Daughters', Cecilia Macheski has argued that needlework was a shared and therefore binding experience for eighteenth-century women, capable of transcending class boundaries:

Only if we remember that needlework was a shared experience between women of all classes and ages in the eighteenth century will we understand how natural it is to find it used as imagery in novels and poetry. From the spinners and silk winders who worked in Spitalfields for as little as three shillings a week to wealthy women and their servants who employed idle hours embroidering silk flowers on waistcoats and firescreens, the needle was a common denominator. 41

But if needlework was a common denominator of female experience it was one that many writers sought to erode by emphasising the divergent physical conditions in, and economic conditions out of which, the work was produced. The question of necessity and motivation was vital in establishing a hierarchy of needlework which was assumed to both mirror and maintain social stratification. In such a hierarchy, the type of needlework being practised took on, as Rozsika Parker demonstrates, an essential symbolic function. Embroidery, the prime focus of Parker's study, connoted gentility, femininity and leisure and thus stood at the pinnacle of this hierarchy:

[B]ecause embroidery was supposed to signify femininity — docility, obedience, love of home, and a life without work — it showed the embroiderer to be a deserving, worthy wife and mother [and] played a crucial part in maintaining the class position of the household displaying the value of a man's wife and the condition of his economic circumstances. 42

The socially destabilising consequences of a labouring woman practising such refined forms of needle-work had long since been realised in Pamela. When Richardson's heroine embroiders her master's waistcoat, she is rehearsing an activity more in keeping with the genteel, leisured pursuits she can hope to enjoy later as the wife of

---

Mr B than the more mundane tasks of domestic service. Equally subversive and
damaging to the hierarchy reflected and enforced by needlework, as Mary
Wollstonecraft would later argue, is the woman who makes her own clothes for any
other reason than necessity:

when a woman in the lower rank of life makes her husband's and children's clothes, she does
her duty, this is her part of the family business; but when women work only to dress better than
they could otherwise afford, it is worse than sheer loss of time. To render the poor virtuous
they must be employed, and women in the middle rank of life, did they not ape the fashions of
the nobility, without catching their ease, might employ them, whilst they themselves managed
their families, instructed their children, and exercised their own minds.43

Dressmaking, here, is at the heart of Wollstonecraft's own vision of a morally-
functioning, class-bound society. Not only does it provide the poor with financial
means and a disincentive to idleness, it safeguards the moral integrity of middle-class
women, by distancing them from fashionable concerns and affording them the leisure
to cater to their more important familial duties.

In The Wanderer, Juliet faces the personal devastation of having to transform
her needlework from a private, genteel accomplishment into a public commodity.
When she begins work in Miss Matson's millinery shop Juliet begs 'leave to return
with it [her work] to her chamber[. S]he was stared at as if she had made a demand the
most preposterous, and told that, if she meant to enter into business, she must be at
hand to receive directions, and to learn how it should be done' (pp. 425-426). It is not
merely Juliet's work which is open to the public gaze. Working in a shop, on display
to all of Miss Matson's customers, Juliet faces the unfaceable prospect of public

42 Rozsika Parker, The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine (London: The
43 Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), ed. by Miriam Brody
scrutiny which she has persistently tried to evade since her arrival, in disguise, upon
the English shore. Miss Matson's shop is far more salubrious than many of its literary
counterparts. Though the leisure of her workers 'is devoted to clandestine coquetry,
tittering whispers, and secret frolics when the town is full of officers, they must first'
elude the vigilance of Miss Matson' (p. 428). Nevertheless, the very nature of Miss
Matson's business ensures that it is, as Doody points out, 'tainted with a flavour of
prostitution' as the workers sit in shop windows to entice customers inside.44 Like
other less scrupulous milliners and seamstresses in eighteenth-century literature, Juliet
too becomes elided here with the objects of her creation. Able to arrange items in the
fashionable style of her French homeland, Juliet becomes a valuable asset to Miss
Matson: the milliner markets Juliet's works as 'specimen[s] of the very last new
fashion, just brought over by one of her young ladies from Paris' (p. 429). Soon
customers become less interested in Juliet's creations than her own character, as she
finds herself the object of a painfully embarrassing 'inquisitive examination' (p. 430).

We pity Juliet here precisely because of, rather than in spite of, the pitiable
situation which she has been forced into. Nothing in the conduct of her fellow-
workers suggests that they deserve such consideration from the reader. Though Juliet
is appalled by 'the total absence of feeling and of equity, in the dissipated and the idle,
for the indigent and laborious' she finds that her companions' notions of 'probity were
as lax as those of their customers were of justice' (p. 427):

it soon became difficult to decide, which was least congenial to the upright mind and pure
morality of Juliet, the insolent, vain, unfeeling buyer, or the subtle, plausible, over-reaching
seller. (p. 428)

44 Doody, p. 354.
Both customer and worker are tarnished by the millinery business they are involved in. In their interest for luxurious self-display buyers are vain and unfeeling; their retailers affected facilitators of social transgression. The function of the milliner's shop, here, as a site which exposes the essential characters — the weaknesses, vices and pretensions — of all who come into contact with it from customer to worker had been innovatively experimented with by Burney some three decades earlier in *The Witlings* (1778-1780). A reading of *The Wanderer* through this play enables the reader to trace more accurately the extent and limitations of Burney's deployment of the labour market in the later novel: the way in which she finds new ways to excite pity for the figure of a particular species of labouring woman, as embodied by Juliet, and yet is tied to a literary tradition in which the world of business and the world of sentiment are antithetical. The first act of *The Witlings* is, unusually, set in the milliner's shop of Mrs Wheedle, a named shared with Drury's shop owner in *The Rival Milliners*. In *The Witlings*, the milliner's shop, belonging to a new generation of Mrs Wheedle, takes on a more complex and subtle function than as (literal) backdrop to sexual intrigues. Here, the shop's potential as a site which can not only expose the weaknesses of workers (as it had done in *The Rival Milliners* and *The Intriguing Milliners*) but of their customers and society at large, is exploited for character exposition, comedy, and as an illuminating mirror to Lady Smatter's drawing room which hosts the pretentious 'Esprit Club' of Act Two. Many of the tropes of earlier

46 Although *The Rival Milliners* was written some forty years earlier than *The Witlings*, it is possible that Burney was aware of the play. Though it was mainly performed in 1736 and 1737 (being played some eleven times in fifteen months) a one-off performance was given at the Haymarket on 27 December 1779, the time at which Burney was writing *The Witlings* and living in London. *Index to the London Stage*.
47 The close affinity of the 'Esprit Club', which bears the brunt of *The Witling's* satirical jibes, to the Johnsonian and Bluestocking Circles in which Burney mixed after the publication of *Evelina* is often
millinery representations are abandoned here. There is no hint of Mrs Wheedle's or her seamstresses' sexual misconduct and no suggestion that her business is anything other than it appears. Indeed, as if to emphasise this point, the stage directions for Act One establish the character of the business in what Margaret Doody refers to as 'a striking piece of stage naturalism for the period': 'Scene, A Milliners Shop. A Counter is Spread with Caps, Ribbons, Fans and Band Boxes. Miss Jenny and Several young Women at Work'. When Beaufort arrives at Mrs Wheedle's to meet his beloved Cecilia, the shop is in danger of being perceived as another front for sexual intrigues. But the threat is momentary: Cecilia, in a dramatic gesture of propriety, refuses to meet her lover, because her chaperone, Beaufort's aunt, Lady Smatter, cannot accompany her. Abandoning many of the tropes of prior literary representation, Burney broadens the satirical potential of the milliner's shop to encompass all who enter this 'Region of Foppery, Extravagance and Folly' (p. 35). The only exploitation here is financial. When the vain and easily flattered Mrs Sapient enters the shop to look at some caps, none of which she appears to like, she begs Mrs Wheedle not to 'shew me such flaunting things for in my opinion, nothing can be really elegant that is Tawdry' (p. 39). Knowing that Mrs Sapient's opinion is no stronger than her character, the milliner flatters her client into buying a cap which has been made so badly by one of her seamstresses that is unfit for a 'Christian Land' (p. 31):

MRS W. But here, ma'am, is one I'm sure you'll like; it's in the immediate Taste,—only look at it, ma'am! what can be prettier?
MRS S. Why yes, this is well enough, only I'm afraid it's too young for me; don't you think it is?
MRS W. Too young? dear ma'am no, I'm sure it will become you of all things: only try it.
(Holds it over her Head.) O ma'am, you can't think how charmingly you look in it! and it sets so sweetly! I never saw anything so becoming in my life!
MRS S. Is it? well, I think I'll have it, — if you are sure it is not too young for me [...]

attributed as a prime motive for the suppression of the play by Crisp and Dr. Burney. See, for example, Clayton J. Delery's introduction to The Witlings, Kate Chisholm, pp. 87-92, and Doody, pp. 92-98.

48 Doody, p. 78.
MRS W. O I'm sure, ma'am, you'll be quite in love with this Cap, when you see how well you look in it. Shall I shew you some of our new Ribbons, ma'am?
MRS S. O, I know, now, you want to tempt me; but I always say the best way to escape temptation is to run away from it: however, as I am here — (p. 40)

From the play's opening lines we are encouraged to see the shop floor as a microcosm for society at large: a society rife with snobbery, affectation and pretension, in which personal value is reduced to a matter of economic means. When Mrs Wheedle asks her apprentices 'Has any body been in yet?', her seamstress Jenny replies 'No, Ma'am, nobody to Signify;—only some people a foot' (p. 31). The shop reflects, as Barbara Darby argues, a world in which 'everyone has something for sale, the price varies with availability, and the ability to pay monopolises others' attention'. Mrs Wheedle's exploitation of her customers, however, does not condemn her in the way in which the sexual exploitation meted out by Mrs Modely vilifies her. The clients of Mrs Wheedle are exploited because their vices leave them vulnerable to and deserving of exploitation: if Mrs Sapient was not so easily flattered by Mrs Wheedle's sales patter, she may well have looked in a mirror and decided not to buy the cap at all. What is more, as The Witlings demonstrates, this particular species of commercial exploitation is mutually beneficial: Mrs Wheedle earns a living while the egos of her clients are massaged.

The success with which Mrs Wheedle manages her finances and supports herself is juxtaposed with the financial dependence faced by the play's heroine Cecilia. When Cecilia loses her fortune, and subsequently her prospects of marrying Beaufort, due to her banker's mismanagement of her affairs, she faces, like Juliet, an uncertain future. As Lady Smatter proclaims,
Nothing is so difficult as disposing of a poor Girl of Fashion [...] She has been brought up to nothing, — if she can make a Cap, 'tis as much as she can do, — and, in such a case, when a Girl is reduced to a Penny, what is to be done? (p. 66)

Devastated and humiliated, Cecilia seeks a cheaper lodgings at the house of the aptly-named Mrs Voluble who regularly entertains Mrs Wheedle and her seamstress apprentice Jenny. The new residence offers no sanctuary for Cecilia as the heroine has outstanding debts with the milliner. The resulting exchange between the two women brings the worlds of business and sentiment into stark contrast:

MRS W. Ma'am, as I did not know when I might have the pleasure of seeing you again, I took the liberty just to make out my little account, and bring it in my Pocket; and I hope, ma'am, that when you make up your affairs, you'll be as good as to let me be the first Person that's considered, for I'm a deal out of Pocket, and should be very glad to have some of the money as soon as possible.

CECILIA Dunned already! good Heaven, what will become of me! (Cries) (pp. 128-129)

This juxtaposition of a world that privileges money above compassion and another that prioritises emotion above all else is left uneasily, and unexpectedly, unresolved here. Though millinery appears to be heartless and inhuman, sentimentalism appears affected, unrealistic and impractical. It is difficult to align our sympathies exclusively with either Cecilia or Mrs Wheedle here. It is, after all, precisely because Mrs Wheedle manages her finances so effectively and responsibly, as we witnessed in the opening act, that she is immune from the dangers that have beset Cecilia. Though, as Barbara Darby argues, all of the women in The Witlings are 'confined in various ways' (either by financial constraints or fear of exposure to ridicule) it is only Mrs Wheedle who is able to make a virtue out of necessity. Further problematising our response to this scene, are Cecilia's reactions to the misfortunes she experiences.

49 Barbara Darby, Frances Burney Dramatist: Gender, Performance and the Late-Eighteenth-Century Stage (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), p. 27.
50 Darby, p. 40.
Before she learns of the loss of her fortune, Cecilia is largely, and strangely, as several critics note, silent and absent within the play. She does not, in fact, appear until Act Two; an absence which is so conspicuous that it has led Margaret Doody to assert that the first act of *The Witlings* could be dubbed 'Waiting for Cecilia'. Cecilia's over-inflated, sententious outpourings, whilst attesting to the depths of despair she has been plunged into, simultaneously suggest an unworldliness which is not merely pitiable but humorous and inappropriate. When Mrs Wheedle (no doubt out of concern for her own finances as much as Cecilia's) finds the heroine a position with a family in which she will look after the children and perform a 'little [Needle]work', Cecilia's reply is as tactless as it is tragic:\[^52\]

> Oh heavy Hour! — down, down, proud Heart! [...] I must submit to my fate, not chuse it; and should servility and dependance [sic.] be my lot, I trust, at least, that I shall not only find them new, — not only find them Heart-breaking and cruel — but short and expeditious. (p. 133)

Cecilia's servility is short-lived, however. Unlike Juliet, she does not face the humiliations of labour; Censor provides her with an allowance which restores the heroine's standing and enables her to marry his friend Beaufort. The interpretive problems that *The Witlings* poses anticipate tensions that would evolve with more complexity in *The Wanderer*: the extent to which and seriousness with which Burney criticises the insufficiencies of female education, middle-class attitudes to labour, or the inhumanity and harshness of a world of business. As Barbara Darby argues,\[^53\]

Burney walks a very thin line with her satire here. Cecilia's language is exaggerated and her suffering does not endure, but her situation is, for her, severe; she is truly shocked by this sudden change in her prospects and she desperately begins to seek a job. She has, however, [...] fewer options for self-reliance than her working-class female counterparts. We must feel some sympathy for her, though her own sense of sorrow for herself is comically exaggerated.\[^53\]

\[^51\] Doody, p. 79.
\[^52\] 'Work' was a common short-hand synonym for 'needlework' throughout the eighteenth century.
\[^53\] Darby, p. 39.
The sympathy the reader feels for Juliet is far less ambivalent than that towards Cecilia. Juliet greets the employments she is forced to undertake with hope, determination and an integrity that Cecilia cannot sustain in face of even the notional threat of having to work for a living. As such, the reader may expect *The Wanderer* to resolve the ambivalence towards female labour (as both necessary yet unsentimental) expressed in the earlier play. But Juliet's character, virtue, and integrity merely augment the interpretive difficulties of the novel rather than clarify them: for this moral singularity *distances* Juliet from rather than aligning her with the people around her and the tasks she faces. Early in the novel, we become aware that Juliet is both socially removed from the female labourers she will be forced to work with and morally removed from the fashionably-dissipated clients she serves. Significantly, Juliet's moral singularity is demonstrated in her attitude to dress. When Miss Arbe gives the Incognita a deliberately ostentatious and expensive pink sarcenet (fine silk) gown to perform in at a musical concert before a backdrop of the white uniforms worn by the other 'lady-artists', Juliet is embarrassed that she will be so vividly singled out before the audience: 'The gown was a sarcenet of a bright rose-colour; but its hue, though the most vivid, was pale to the cheeks of Ellis' (p. 313). In allowing Miss Arbe to dress her, Juliet realises that she will lose the few powers of agency and self-representation she has left. In the ensuing conversation between the other performers over her gown, the Incognita is compared to the figure of a 'wax-doll, when she's all so pinky winky' (p. 314), a human version of the costume dolls that were used to disseminate fashions beyond the confines of the royal courts of Europe. Valuing her anonymity and integrity much more than the dresses and fashionable pursuits that command the attention of the other ladies, Juliet secretly rejects the sarcenet in favour
of a 'plain white satin [dress], with ornaments of which the simplicity shewed as much
taste as modesty' (p. 358). In her new garb, Juliet, paradoxically, stands out far more
than she would in the rose-coloured gown chosen by Miss Arbe. But now she is
distinguished instead by the singular modesty and virtue of her character. Juliet's
appearance in the morally-transparent attire of a virtuous woman renders her an
incarnation of the female ideals evoked in Pamela, Betsy Thoughtless and conduct
manuals such as Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women (1765). This image of ideal
womanhood is further distinguished by the contrast between Juliet's appearance and
that of her rival to the affections of Harleigh, Elinor Joddril. Elinor arrives at the
concert in male dress (a 'large wrapping coat, [a] half mask, [a] slouched hat, and
embroidered waistcoat') and attempts suicide as a response to Harleigh's obvious
affection for Juliet. This public and dramatic gesture, performed in the duplicitous
guise of a man, emphasises the ideological conflict between these women and the
chasm that exists between their moral sensibilities.54 Furthermore, Juliet's appearance
at the concert is a public demonstration of her moral superiority both to the women of
means, who will later exploit her as a music teacher and seamstress, and the
fashionably-affected labourers — who share a dangerous 'spirit for secret cabal and [a]
passion for frolic and disguise' (p. 454) — she will later work with.

The moral and social chasm between Juliet and her fellow workers is
emphasised in the novel's lack of interest in the characters of these women. In 'the
midst of [the] various distastes and discomforts' she endures in the milliner's shop,
Juliet (and therefore the novel which is told largely from her perspective) is only

54 For a discussion reassessing the importance of the conflict between Elinor and Juliet to Burney's
novel and its politics see Andrea Austin, 'Between Two Women: Frances Burney's The Wanderer',
concerned with only 'one of her young fellow-work-women', Flora Pierson (p. 430). Like the younger Betsy Thoughtless, Flora is naïve and coquettish though 'innocent and inoffensive, and, as far as she was able to think, well meaning, and ready to be at every body's command' (p. 430). Her sole desires of 'looking well' and attracting the attention of officers are facilitated by her employment in the shop of Miss Matson, who requires her girls to be suitable advertisements for her business. When Flora is later forced to leave the milliner's shop she is distressed at the effects upon her physical appearance:

'I'm obliged to wear all my worst things, now, to save my others, mamma says, for fear of the expence. And it makes me look not half so well by half, as I did at Miss Matson's. I looked well enough there [...] But I go such a dowd here, that it's enough to frighten you.' (p. 464)

Flora's vanity for fashionable display renders her an inappropriate object of sentiment and pity and an inappropriate companion for the novel's heroine. Juliet's concern for Flora is 'not indeed, that warm interest which is the precursor of friendship; its object had no qualities that could rise to such a height' (p. 430). The friendship between these two women is a corruption of the model of sentimental exchange in which 'sensibility [is] a fundamental responsiveness that must be activated' by gazing upon suffering. Juliet's 'warm interest' for Flora is felt in spite of her companion's condition rather than because of it, and as such, serves merely to further prove Juliet's probity and Flora's unworthiness as sentimental object.

The function of the milliner's shop and its workers in The Wanderer is deeply problematic and clearly indebted, in part at least, to hostile labour and counter-fashion

---

55 This is one of the models of sentimental exchange explored by Ann Jessie Van Sant in Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel, p. 51.
discourses prevalent throughout eighteenth-century literature and culture. On one level, the milliner's shop is used, as it is in *The Witlings*, as an effective metaphor for a heartless, luxury-ridden society of appearances, which has lost sight of the ties that bind humanity:

> The good of a nation, the interest of society, the welfare of a family, could with difficulty have appeared of higher importance than the choice of a ribbon, or the set of a cap; and scarcely any calamity under heaven could excite looks of deeper horror or despair, than any mistake committed in the arrangement of a feather or a flower. (p. 426)

But in order to conjure such a view of society through the shop-floor, everyone who comes into contact with it — from manufacturer to consumer — is implicated in its corruption. As such, many of the tropes deployed in earlier literary representations of milliners, mantua-makers and seamstresses, and which Burney had so assiduously and successfully rejected in *The Witlings*, are rehearsed here. The exception is Juliet. If indeed, as Doody suggests, *The Wanderer* seeks to challenge middle-class attitudes to labour, then the novel's insistence upon the moral singularity of its heroine places it in something of an ideological quandary. Nancy Armstrong identifies an analogous reluctance to sentimentalise female labour in the eighteenth-century conduct manual. Though, as Armstrong demonstrates, it 'represented aristocratic behavior as the very antithesis of the domestic woman, [it] never once exalted labor'. Finding such women morally bankrupt too, the conduct manual envisaged an alternative model of labour in the domestic economy of the bourgeois household. The process of defining oneself in opposition to aristocratic excess and, in turn, labouring-class moral impoverishment, is dramatised in the narrative structure of *The Wanderer*. Denied an identity until *The Wanderer*’s closing pages, Juliet's story reads up to the novel's conclusion as the formation of a bourgeois subjectivity: the Incongita is as ill at ease
in the company of Mrs Maple as she is with the ladies of fashion she meets under Miss Arbe's guidance and the workers in Miss Matson's shop. Through Juliet's eyes, which mirror the middle-class sensibilities of her readers, *The Wanderer* offers a view of millinery which, by virtue of its heroine's goodness, is uniquely unsullied by the desires for social advancement and fashionable commodities that characterised so many of her scandalous literary ancestors. Yet in relying upon the milliner's shop and its workers as expository contrast to Juliet's worth, the novel qualifies and limits the impact of its representation of the female labour market. Nevertheless, *The Willings* and *The Wanderer* mark a significant shift of sensibility in the literary representation of dressmakers, which was itself attendant upon the rise of sentimentalism. Where early eighteenth-century writers failed to question women's motivation for entering millinery professions, deeming a love of dress and possible social advancement sufficient reward, Burney's works highlight necessity as motivation and expose the social inequalities and prejudices which uphold a system of material inequality.

The tension *The Wanderer* dramatises between a concern for the plight of labouring women and a bourgeois sensibility which in part identifies itself in opposition to such models of labour gained significant momentum in the early nineteenth century, and is intriguingly worked out in Mary Lamb's essay 'On Needlework'. The article which appeared in *The British Lady's Magazine* for 1815 was written in the same year that *The Wanderer* was published, 1814. Lamb, who had helped support her mother, father, and brothers Charles and John for eleven years as a mantua-maker, writes here under the pseudonym Sempronia to warn ladies that 'needlework and intellectual improvement are naturally in a state of warfare'.

56 Armstrong, p. 78.
advocates that 'it would prove an incalculable addition to general happiness, and the domestic comfort of both sexes, if needle-work was never practised but for a remuneration in money' thereby liberating women's leisure for more intellectual pursuits. In order to achieve this state, all needlework must be left 'to the milliner, the dress-maker, the plain-worker, the embroidress, and all the numerous classifications of females supporting themselves by needle-work, that great staple commodity which is alone appropriated to the self-supporting part of our sex' (p. 258).

Lamb's criticism of the existing hierarchy of needlework is confined to the question of remuneration. Given her status as a former mantua-maker and in light of the accounts of the plight of seamstresses made evident only a few years later in the novels of Mrs Gaskell and the articles of Henry Mayhew, Lamb's argument is frustratingly limited. By the time Lamb wrote her article, there was some evidence of a growing consciousness of the dangers of millinery and dress-making employments to the health and sanity of women, but it is evidence that Lamb seems to ignore. Ironically, perhaps the most interesting example of this increased sensitivity to the dressmaker's plight occurs in the account of Lamb's murder of her mother that appeared in the Morning Chronicle for 1796. The article reports that Mary 'seized a case knife [...] and in a menacing manner pursued her apprentice, round the room'. When her mother begged her to stop, Mary stabbed her. Whether the events described are accurate or not, it is intriguing that Mary's 'lunacy' is described, almost justified in the Chronicle, as an uncontrollable consequence of 'the harassing fatigues of too much

57 The British Lady's Magazine (1815), p. 257. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.
business'. Perhaps the devastating consequences of a life of millinery employment were too close to home for Mary Lamb to discuss them more directly than she does in 'On Needlework'. But it seems ironic that a woman once claimed to have been harassed by 'too much business' should so vociferously argue here that labouring women should be given even more business. Equally limited is the predominantly middle-class perspective from which the article is written. Though Sempronia cites her former employment as a signal of the authority and authenticity with which her argument should be treated, the erudition of her prose and the very fact that she has been published in a prestigious magazine aligns her more with her readers than the classes of labouring women amongst whom she once belonged. Yet Lamb may have felt strategically compelled to limit her concerns to the issue of payment in order for her argument to be taken seriously. As Jane Aaron argues:

if her affluent female audience had been reminded more graphically of the sufferings of those who earned their living by the needle, they might well have preferred to force the penurious of their sex into situations 'filled wholly by men' rather than to perpetuate through their commissions the sweatshop trade.

Despite its limitations, Lamb's article marks an important departure from the predominant attitudes towards milliners and seamstresses. Rather than a threat to the virtuous domestic woman and the sanctity of the household, Lamb argues that labouring women can contribute to 'the domestic comfort of both sexes' by affording middle-class women the leisure to become more intellectually refined. Crucially, however, the act of valuing needlewomen more highly is only to be achieved by

58 The Morning Chronicle, 26 September, 1796.
59 Jane Aaron, 'On Needlework: Protest and Contradiction in Mary Lamb's Essay', Romanticism and Feminism, ed. by Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 171. Here Aaron argues that Lamb may have felt compelled to affirm her own middle-class status through the article's tone and acceptance of social norms due to her history of mental illness. Aaron argues that the discrepancies in treatment between pauper and private patients in asylums, coupled with
allotting them the more genteel modes of needlework practised in the domestic household, which did not usually include dress-making skills. Although plain-work (particularly the making of shirts for male relatives) was often part of the needlework duties in middle-class eighteenth-century households, dressmaking was undertaken only rarely and treated as an eccentric novelty. The shift in emphasis that Lamb's article enacts offers a crucial key to our understanding of the inextricable association of millinery and dressmaking occupations with deceit and moral impoverishment, and its rethinking in the more sympathetic and sentimentalised depictions of 'needlewomen' in the nineteenth century. Earlier eighteenth-century writers did not see the need to question the motivation for women entering millinery professions. Love of dress and the forms of social advancement the garments themselves afforded coupled with the contact they would gain with socially-superior male and female clients appeared to be reason enough to be suspicious of these women. Increasingly, however, through the works of the likes of Burney and Lamb, necessity as motivation became an important element in representations of milliners and mantua-makers. As these arguments gained momentum in the early nineteenth century, it became possible to perceive dressmakers as victims of social corruption rather than corruptors themselves; to divorce dressmakers from the highly-contested commodities they produced and to focus upon the conditions that produced them. Only then, it seems, is a vision of unthreatening, virtuous female industry possible.

the increased risk of permanent institutionalisation for labouring classes rendered the affirmation of Mary's middle-class status of vital importance. See pp. 178-179.

Re-clothing the Female Reader: Dress and the Eighteenth-Century Magazine

In June 1786 The Fashionable Magazine made its first appearance in the lively though precarious eighteenth-century periodical and magazine market. Despite its abrupt disappearance after only seven issues in December of the same year, the publication is of interest as one of the first English magazines in which fashion plays a central role. Identifying dress as a 'leading trait in the national character', the Fashionable Magazine marketed itself to readers as a wholly innovative project, responding to a huge chasm in the literary market:

THE dominion of Fashion having been long universally established in this kingdom, a Magazine issuing it's [sic] decrees, and confirming it's sway, must be allowed to appear with singular propriety. Indeed, it seems astonishing that, in an age of literary adventure, this eligible plan should have been hitherto overlooked. (my emphasis)

The editor attributes this commercial oversight to a general lack of ambition among fellow publishers and writers in the face of such challenging subject matter as fashion and dress. The difficulty, he suggests, is not so much in writing about fashion — many successful late-eighteenth-century publications, such as The Lady's Magazine, had included fashion reports after all — but in writing about such sartorial matters appropriately:

The task, indeed, is arduous; and the extreme difficulty of executing it with any sort of propriety might well have deterred the less aspiring from making any attempt, even had the idea occurred to them.

---

2 The Fashionable Magazine, 1 (June 1786), p. iii.
The magazine's claims for originality are, typically, overstated. In fact, *The Fashionable Magazine* strikingly resembles another short-lived periodical called *The Magazine à la Mode: or, Fashionable Miscellany* which ran monthly throughout 1777 and was probably the first English magazine to prioritise fashion. The earlier publication's brief history seems to support *The Fashionable Magazine*'s claims for the difficulty in writing and reporting on dress. As Minna Thornton has argued in her research on the development of the English fashion plate in the late eighteenth century, *The Magazine à la Mode* increasingly withdrew from its original intentions to be the purveyor of the latest fashions.³ While early issues typically included one or two engravings of ladies' and gentlemen's full dress or undress, with accompanying commentary, the later issues shun fashion plates in favour of engravings of such figures as Elizabeth the First, Anne Boleyn and Mary Queen of Scots, and reduce the descriptions of the newest fashions to a mere half page engulfed in the middle of the publication. Thornton attributes the magazine's withdrawal of the engravings to a 'moral panic' surrounding dress and luxury stirred by the proliferation of fashionable images through such forms as the fashion plate. There is, however, little sense of this panic evidenced in the magazine itself. Indeed issues of practicality may have been as pressing than concerns surrounding unregulated consumption. Engravings were expensive to produce, and depended upon reliable engravers to produce plates to strict, monthly deadlines. The April 1777 issue of the *Magazine à la Mode*, for example, was forced to include a plate of 'A Country Woman' and 'Citizen's Wife of Wotiac' (a province in Siberia) instead of the promised plates of 'spring dresses as worn at

Ranelagh' due to an artist's illness and subsequent failure to meet the publication deadline.\(^4\) Equally problematic was fashion's sporadic failure to live up to the magazine's expectation of monthly sartorial innovation. The July issue includes no plate or commentary on men's fashions because, it claimed, 'No alteration worth notice has taken place in the gentlemen's dress'.\(^5\)

The short, apparently troubled life of the earlier publication may well belie the *Fashionable Magazine*'s introductory comments. Beneath the thick layer of self-promotion that smothers its Preface lies a genuine concern shared with many other late-eighteenth-century magazines: how to write upon dress with propriety. The *Fashionable Magazine*'s solution was to marry a keen interest in current fashions with a more traditional magazine format, epitomised by the *Lady's Magazine*, of stories, letters, moral discussions and domestic and foreign news reports. While the magazine claimed it would stand out in the literary marketplace for its 'gay descriptions of dress, fashion and amusements', it also promised 'literature of every species'. Though a publication devoted solely to dress and fashions may have been desirable, such a publication would be doomed to failure, the editor argues, unless it were able to 'command esteem' in its readers through morally improving and elegant literature.\(^6\) In its efforts to marry the two, the *Fashionable Magazine* claimed to be all things to all people, a truly 'universal' magazine of interest to 'the manufacturer and the artist; the

---

\(^4\) The Magazine à la Mode, 1 (April 1777), p. 196.

\(^5\) The Magazine à la Mode, 1 (July 1777), p. 244.

\(^6\) Indeed it was not until the publication of Nicolaus von Heideloff's *Gallery of Fashion* in 1794 that a magazine devoted solely to fashion was attempted.
man of pleasure, and the man of business; the old and the young; the serious, and the gay', adding that 'it will perhaps be even more [acceptable] to the LADIES'\(^7\).

The compensatory rather than central function of literature in the *Fashionable Magazine* signals the ambiguous status of dress in the eighteenth-century periodical publication. The necessity of tempering fashionable images with supposedly edifying letters, narratives and poems implies that fashion might not be an appropriate subject for a magazine at all. Equally, if literature elevates a fashionable magazine, then concomitantly, an interest in fashion in other, more literary publications may devalue them. The *Fashionable Magazine* addresses this problem simply by denying it: fashionable images and supposedly morally improving tales simply sit side by side within the publication. The glib confidence of this juxtaposition of material thinly veils, however, a deep-seated problem faced by the eighteenth-century periodical and magazine market, particularly by publications aimed predominantly at female readers: the incompatibility of fashion with an ideal of virtuous womanhood.

Many of the ideological quandaries faced by magazine publications which reflected reader interest in dress and fashion whilst marketing themselves as champions of female morality are demonstrated in the frontispiece to *The Lady's Magazine* of 1780 (fig. 1). The engraving of a young, modishly dressed woman, torn between a life of fashionable folly and virtuous wisdom, marks a significant departure from many of the annual frontispieces that had adorned and would adorn the

\(^7\) The *Fashionable Magazine*, 1 (June 1786), p. iii.
publication throughout its near eighty-year history. This is not to suggest that the 1780 engraving does not share many symbolic components with other annual frontispiece illustrations. On the contrary, the goddess Minerva, represented on the right of the engraving, is frequently deployed in the publication's frontispieces as a symbol of the virtues the Lady's seeks to inculcate. Often she is figured imparting wisdom, frequently in the material form of the magazine itself, to young, well-dressed women, who are entering, or have entered a temple, of knowledge or virtue (see figs. 2 and 3). Whilst undeniably sharing this iconography, the 1780 frontispiece re-figures these symbolic elements to construct an alternative, less confident vision of both female virtue and the powers of the Lady's Magazine: the journey to virtue, wisdom and knowledge is disturbingly no longer a fait accompli here. Rather, the 1780 engraving suggests an active conflict between wisdom and folly in the minds of young women, which the magazine seems unable to successfully arbitrate. Crucially the 1780 Minerva figure is placed behind and is partially obscured by the young woman at the centre of the engraving. The observer's attention is rather drawn towards the elaborately dressed symbol of Folly at whom the young woman is also, emphatically, looking. As such the battle the illustration stages seems already to have been won. The girl's ardent gaze upon Folly seems to anticipate her rejection of the Lady's Magazine's wisdom in favour of a life of fashionable dissipation.

---

8 The Lady's Magazine ran from 1770 to 1832 before joining with the Ladies' Museum to form The Lady's Magazine and Museum of Belles Lettres. This title, in turn, ran until 1838 when the publication combined with the Court Magazine to form The Court Magazine and Monthly Critic and Lady's Magazine and Museum of Belles Lettres. This title ran until 1847. Alison Adburgham, Women in Print: Writing Women and Women's Magazines From the Restoration to Accession of Victoria (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972), p. 280.
Recent work on the *Lady's Magazine* has stressed the multiple and potentially subversive readings the publication seems to promote in the gaps and slippages of logic, conviction and philosophy that exist between various articles and between fictional narratives and their accompanying engravings. In his study of the illustrations and short fiction of the *Lady's Magazine* Edward Copeland argues that the 'negotiable ground' of interpretation opened up by the magazine allowed the reader ample space to create readings 'unanticipated by either the editor or the designer of the plate'.

Similarly, Jacqueline Pearson argues that the 'double-think' of the *Lady's* constructed 'contradictory' readers who could be both compliant or resistant to the morality of the publication. The functions of the 1780 frontispiece can be best understood through these models of negotiable reading, of compliance and resistance. On first glance the engraving's moral may seem as obvious as it is in so many other frontispieces — that true virtue is achieved through the wisdom that can only be gained by eschewing folly in all its fashionable guises and embracing the lessons of *The Lady's Magazine*. This is certainly the moral lesson stressed by the 'Explanation of the Frontispiece' which appears a few pages after the plate:

On the fore-ground is the genius of the Lady's Magazine addressed by Wisdom on the left hand and by Folly on the right; at a distance are the Temples of both deities; that of Folly is resorted to in crowds [...] the Temple of Wisdom is almost empty, and the votaries who are going to it are carrying in their hands the Lady's Magazine, as a kind of ticket to obtain their Entrance.

Yet the engraving encourages other readings that reveal potentially fatal fault lines in the publication's overriding agenda to 'improve the Understanding in useful

---


Knowledge, to cherish in the Mind a Love of Virtue, and to adorn the female Character with elegant Accomplishments'. The sartorial adornment displayed and apparently admired by the woman in the engraving is far removed from the elegant adornments of intellectual accomplishment envisaged by the magazine's editor.

Though Folly is holding some playing cards, suggesting both the unsuitability of this particular fashionable pursuit and the gamble a young lady takes with her reputation and character by following such diversions, the attractiveness of Folly to the young woman and potentially to the magazine's readers is a problematic feature of the engraving. Perhaps Folly's attractiveness is a deliberate strategy to force the reader to recognise her own weakness in that of the young woman of the engraving, thereby making her more responsive to the magazine's lessons. But this manoeuvre, if it is intentional, represents something of a gamble in itself. A choice between sartorial splendour and virtuous austerity may represent no choice at all in the minds of many potential readers. Further interpretive difficulties are raised when the illustration is read against the Lady's Magazine itself, which partially elides the binary, either/or oppositions — of folly versus wisdom, fashion versus virtue — the engraving seeks to affirm. While dress and fashion are frequent sources of derision and debate throughout the publication's history, the magazine openly recognised the desirability of fashion to its female readers and, more importantly, the necessity of cultivating an appropriate sense of how to dress and what to wear if a woman is to be physically and morally desirable. This chapter will focus upon the conflicts caused by the inclusion of

11 *The Lady's Magazine*, 11 (January 1780), p. 4. All quotations taken from the bound annual issues of the magazine which shall be abbreviated to *LM* in future references.
information on and discussions about dress and fashion in women's magazines — conflicts between internal character and external show, between consumption and 'oeconomy', vanity and selflessness — and the strategies with which such publications sought to alleviate these oppositions. An exploration of the genre's negotiation of this complex terrain will highlight the perceived volatility of fashion, its centrality to issues of female morality and the magazine's importance as a site in which dress could be both disseminated, contested and managed.

***

THE LEGACY OF THE EARLY PERIODICALS

References to the latest fashions and discussions upon the moral issues surrounding dress enlivened periodicals from their inception in the late seventeenth century. In Market à la Mode Erin Mackie demonstrates the centrality of fashion (as a term signifying not merely clothing but various economic and social trends) to The Tatler and Spectator. Perceiving fashion (irrational, feminine and unrestrained) as antithetical to the rational, bourgeois, critical sphere championed by the authorial personae of the papers, The Tatler and Spectator, Mackie argues, recognised the potential to reform their readers through a reformation of fashion in the periodicals' pages. As such, the essays persistently pit external modes of self-representation against those of a more authentic subjectivity. Ironically, however, these periodicals sought to

\[12LM, 16 \text{(Supplement to 1785), reverse of the frontispiece.}\]
\[13 \text{Erin Mackie, Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity and Gender in The Tatler and}\]
regulate fashion not 'by retreating to a realm that transcends the superficial ephemera of the mode but by entering — if in a mystified way, the fashion market itself'. Not only did the periodicals indulge in scenes of fashionable life and images of unrestrained consumption, the papers were themselves the offspring of the fashionable periodical market.\textsuperscript{14} This curious blend of immersion in yet condemnation of fashionable pursuits and commodities left a legacy that continued to inform periodicals and magazines throughout the eighteenth century. The generic innovations wrought by subsequent publications, jostling for their own niche and audience in the burgeoning and at times over-populated periodical market, had further marked effects upon the representation and management of dress in the serial publication.

Kathryn Shevelow cites the emergence of the gender-specialised periodical as one of the key transitional processes through which the authoritative essay-periodical of the early eighteenth century evolved into the decentralised, miscellaneous magazine format adopted in the latter.\textsuperscript{15} The emergence of serial publications by and for women was also vital in establishing new modes through which dress and fashion (so frequently associated with unruly and irrational femininity in the period) could be represented, contested and reformed. Eliza Haywood's \textit{Female Spectator} (1744-1746) adopted an authorial persona keen to moralise through anecdote and narrative upon all manner of female immorality and frequently alluded to the 'dangerous Diversions in

\textsuperscript{14} Mackie, p. 27.
Fashion [...] which have been the ruin of so many. But unlike Mr Spectator, whose engagement with society is paradoxically predicated upon a critical disinterestedness, the authority of Haywood's Female Spectator lies, perhaps more paradoxically, in prior transgression:

I never was a Beauty, and am now very far from being young [...] I have run through as many Scenes of Vanity and Folly as the greatest Coquet of them all. — Dress, Equipage, and Flattery, were the Idols of my Heart. — I should have thought that Day lost which did not present me with some new Opportunity of shewing myself. — My Life, for some Years, was a continued Round of what I then called Pleasure, and my whole Time engrossed by a Hurry of promiscuous Diversions. — But whatever Inconveniences such a manner of Conduct has brought upon myself, I have this Consolation, to think that the Public may reap some Benefit from it.  

As Shevelow argues, Haywood's rhetorical strategy of establishing expertise on the grounds of past misdemeanour was certainly unconventional in the realm of the periodical. Intriguingly, The Female Spectator anticipates a novelistic strategy — and one which Haywood would herself practice — in which female transgression is exemplified and subsequently resolved through the narrative of the reformed coquette. The Female Spectator appears to us as one of the heroines of Haywood's own novels. Rather than a Fantomina, however, this persona is that of a Betsy Thoughtless — a woman who has made the transition from coquette to woman of true worth.

Speaking, it seems, from personal experience and to her own gender, the Female Spectator can warn her readers against the temptations of fashionable society in a tone distinct from many male-authored periodicals. Publications such as The London, Universal, Town and Country and Edinburgh Magazine included articles on

17 The Female Spectator, 1 (1744), pp. 4-5.
18 Shevelow, p. 170.
dress, many of which were directed at female readers in attempts to persuade them to
disregard the latest fashions or to avoid the dangers of too ardent a love of dress. 19

Often these articles are coated in a thin layer of mock-gallantry, which seeks to flatter
women into rejecting the current fashions for a more moderate and socially acceptable
garb. An article on 'the Influence of external Ornaments' in The London Magazine for
July 1766 is typical of this chivalric condescension:

I know not whether I shall be believed, when I say I am a friend to the ladies, and at the same
time presume to find fault with any part of their conduct. But the truth is, I am so much their
friend and well-wisher, that I cannot bear to see them run into errors which may lessen them in
the esteem of the most valuable part of the male world, I mean men of sense and probity. 20

The author suggests, here, that the efficacy of his attack upon the 'inferior
accomplishments of dress, dancing and diversions' may be compromised by his
gender. 21 The magazine's female readers may be quick to conclude, he argues, that the
letter is the product of 'some formal old batchelor [sic]', whose opinions are irrelevant
since he is the last person their fashionable appearance is intended to attract. The
author proceeds by rebuking these potential insinuations by establishing himself as a
marriageable prospect and therefore pertinent critic: thirty-five years old, of modest
'fortune and expectations' but possessed of sufficient education and powers of
observation to only consider a woman of 'good-nature, good-sense, and purity of
manners' as a wife. The logic of the letter, so characteristic of many of the
predominantly male-oriented periodicals and magazines of the mid-eighteenth century,
is straightforward. Perceiving a woman's attention to dress as a strategy to ensnare

19 F. W. Fairholt, a nineteenth-century historian of dress, compiled articles on dress from these and other
eighteenth-century periodicals and magazines under the title Collections on Costume which are in the
collection of the British Museum Prints and Drawings Department. BM 169*c.12-14.
future husbands, men must regulate this form of commercial and moral excess by persuading women that probity is a far more attractive marital proposition. In short, writers seek to persuade women that in endeavouring to attract men by following fashion's dictates they are simply engaged in 'a kind of conspiracy against themselves'.

Devoid of the mock courtship rituals rhetorically enacted in such articles, the *Female Spectator* develops alternative strategies to warn against the dangers of fashion. Virtue and wisdom are espoused above fashion, here, not simply as a means to an end — getting a husband — but as an end in itself. In an essay upon the misguided education of young women, Haywood argues,

> [It] is not enough, that we are cautious in training up Youth in the Principles of Virtue and Morality, and that we entirely debar them from those dangerous Diversions in Fashion, and which have been the Ruin of so many, in order to make them remember that Education we have given them, and to conduct themselves according to it when they come to be their own Managers; we should endeavour to make them wise, and also to render Virtue so pleasing to them, that they could not deviate from it in the least Degree without the utmost Repugnance.

A woman cannot be educated against the 'dangerous Diversions in Fashion' by being removed from them, for once of age and part of the world she has been guarded from, she will be ill equipped to deny the force of such temptations. Immunity can only be achieved through the wisdom gained by 'Reading and Philosophy' which will enable women to identify these 'dangerous Diversions' as precisely that. Perceiving the potentially fatal connection between innocence and ignorance reinforced by contemporary educational theory and practice, the *Female Spectator* educated its readers by vicariously bringing them into contact (often somewhat lubriciously) with

---

the dissipated, scandalous world of rakish men, masquerades and pleasure gardens through the periodical itself. These potentially scandalous narratives are superficially contained, however, within the text's essentially moral and moralising framework, mediated by a woman whose own reformation lays claim to unique insights into the predicaments of young women.

The emphasis placed upon reading and philosophy as antidotes to the temptations of vice and fashion increasingly became characteristic of periodicals directed at women throughout the mid century. But as the opening of Charlotte Lennox's *Lady's Museum* (1760-1761) suggests, a magazine first had to persuade its readers of the value of the virtues it sought to promote, if such tenets were to be well received. The *Lady's Museum* presented its readers with what Kathryn Shevelow terms a 'feminine curriculum', designed to 'explicitly or implicitly [establish] the boundaries of feminine thought and behaviour'.24 Its design could only be effected with a participating and responsive readership, however, and unlike Haywood, Lennox was not satisfied to simply extol the virtues of wisdom and learning as ends in themselves:

There is no reason to fear that the ladies, by applying themselves to these studies, will throw a shade over the natural graces of their wit. No; on the contrary, those graces will be placed in a more conspicuous point of view: what can equal the pleasure we receive from the conversation of a woman who is more solicitous to adorn her mind than her person? [...] The delightful art of saying the most ingenious things with a graceful simplicity is peculiar to them: it is they who call forth the powers of wit in men, and communicate to them that easy elegance which is never to be acquired in the closet.25

24 Shevelow, p. 142.
Like the author of the *London Magazine* article, Lennox seeks to devalue the false and artificial virtues of the closet in favour of the more permanent charms of mental accomplishment by appealing to a female desire to please and attract men. This strategy of channelling a woman's desire to please away from the shallow deployment of dress to the display of learning is reinforced throughout the *Lady's Museum*. Nowhere, however, is this concern more imaginatively reinforced than in Lennox's serialised fiction 'The History of Harriot and Sophia'.

Although the *Lady's Museum* included articles on such diverse subjects as geography, history, philosophy, education and etiquette, 'Harriot and Sophia' is in many ways the core of the publication. Whether by design or coincidence, the magazine opens with the first installment of the fiction and closes with its last. The narrative deploys what Patricia Meyer Spacks has observed as a common device deployed by eighteenth-century women novelists: the 'absolute separation of virtue and vice by evoking a pair of sisters, one good in every respect; the other utterly reprehensible'. Harriot, the elder sister, is beautiful yet dissipated, while the younger Sophia is less conventionally attractive in the eyes of 'common judges'. Harriot has received the dubious 'improvement of a polite education' under the guidance of her equally dissipated mother; Sophia, by contrast, has been left to educate 'herself as well as she could'. Where the elder sister wastes her day in 'dress, company, and gay amusements', Sophia devotes hours to reading and fulfilling the familial duties of

---

27 Charlotte Lennox, 'The History of Harriot and Sophia', *The Lady's Museum*, p. 18. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.
domestic 'oeconomy' neglected by her mother and sister (p. 19). Lennox's 'History of Harriot and Sophia' is comparatively little known. When the text is read by critics, it is usually in the novelised form of the work, re-titled Sophia, published in 1762, a year after the last installment of the magazine serial had appeared. On the rare occasion that the narrative is read as a magazine serial it is perceived as something of a failure. Robert Mayo argued that 'though in its day, as a magazine story, it was nearly as surprising as "Sir Launcelot Greaves"', no effort was made by Lennox to 'adapt her work to the special conditions of serial publication'. In Mayo's reading, Lennox simply published in serial form a novel without chapter divisions. Mary Anne Schofield's short reading of the novel form of the text also perceives Lennox's work as flawed. Reader interest in the novel is not great, she argues, because of the characters' extreme 'black or white identities'. Neither entirely consistent with the expectations of a novel or a romance, Schofield characterises Sophia as 'an allegory in eighteenth-century form'.

Yet if we are to read Lennox's fiction as an allegory (in which the text's protagonists function not merely as characters but as moral exempla), then the narrative needs to be perceived in its original context if the full range of its symbolic possibilities is to be unlocked. 'Harriot and Sophia' is a fiction occupied with issues of female conduct, morality, false taste, affectation and the nature of true female beauty.

While these concerns are undoubtedly shared with many eighteenth-century novels and romances, their presence in a serial publication so explicitly concerned with the dissemination, even prescription, of femininity subtly alters the way in which we read and digest the text's moral overtones. Schofield argues that *Sophia* presents a binary 'picture of the eighteenth-century world and its inhabitants', in which society is divided into those who dissemble and those that do not 'need to hide or disguise true feelings under the cover of a masquerade'. While the narrative is certainly driven by such ethical divisions, the *Lady's Museum* itself seeks, in part, to elide such binaries. In the first installment of the publication's serial 'The Trifler', for example, Lennox asserts that a single passion forms a common bond between the poet, patriot, courtier, orator, coquet and herself: the desire to please.

But for this active principle, the statesman would be no politician, and the general no warrior. The desire of fame, or the desire of pleasing, which, in my opinion, are synonymous terms, produces application in one and courage in the other. It is the poet's inspiration, the patriot's zeal, the courtier's loyalty, and the orator's eloquence. All are coquets, if that be coquetry, and those grave personages and the fine lady are alike liable to be charged with it. (p. 3)

The 'thunder of eloquence' and 'the glitter of dress in the drawing-room', Lennox argues, are equally the products of a desire to please others (pp. 2-3). The key to managing this 'predominant passion' is the cultivation of an understanding of when to be silent and when 'negligence is the most becoming'. The implicit promise of 'The Trifler' is to provide precisely this education in self-management through the magazine's pages. 'Harriot and Sophia', a story which enacts the triumph of self-regulation and selflessness over financial, moral and sexual excess thus allegorises the magazine's aims.

---

31 Schofield. p. 142.
Both Harriot and Sophia are driven by a desire to please: Harriot to please men and herself, and Sophia to please her father (Mr Darnley) and undeserving mother by being a dutiful daughter. What distinguishes the two sisters, beyond their unequal physical beauty, is Sophia's 'habit of constant reflection' cultivated by her assiduous reading and practised in her drawing, writing and running of the family household. The virtue that Sophia has acquired aids her through a series of trials that ensue following the death of her father, leaving his family in considerable debt. Sophia learns to become a good 'oeconomist' only to find her mother and sister squandering the little money they have in fashionable pursuits. Finally their debts force Sophia to relinquish her only independent income, the one hundred pounds given to her by a young woman whom the heroine had cared for until she 'died in her arms' (p. 23). Rather than alleviating their situation, Harriot squanders her sister's money by 'mak[ing] as shewy an appearance as her mourning would permit [...] and laid baits for admiration'. The elder sister's beauty, combined with the poverty her dress cannot quite conceal, renders her vulnerable to 'a great number of lovers' in whom she 'encouraged the most licentious hopes, and [who] exposed her to the most impertinent addresses' (p. 26). Among these lovers is the wealthy Sir Charles Stanley. Motivated by a less than scrupulous desire for Harriot, Sir Charles provides an annuity for Mrs Darnley which further sinks mother and daughter into a life of dissipation. Upon meeting Sophia, however, Sir Charles, like his rakish predecessor Lovelace, soon turns his attention to the younger sister. Charles repeatedly visits Sophia, much to Harriot's anger, and simulates 'a behaviour so respectful and delicate, as removed all [Sophia's]
apprehensions of insincerity', although whether he was truly awed 'by the dignity of her virtue, or [judged] it necessary to secure the success of his designs' is unclear (p. 111). Uneasy with the attention Sir Charles bestows upon her, and the anger it produces in her sister, Sophia goes into rural retirement. Her decision fills Harriot with delight at the prospect that 'her charms would regain all their former influence over the heart of Sir Charles' in her sister's absence (p. 247).

Harriot's wishes are thwarted, however, as Sir Charles begins to see through the older sister's showy shallowness in favour of Sophia's genuine 'virtue and wit'. The turning point in the narrative occurs when Sir Charles visits the heroine's room in her absence. Her closet appears exactly as Sophia had left it, untouched by her sister who resents the 'many monuments of her sister's taste and industry' it contains. It comprises a 'fire screen' of Sophia's own workmanship, 'several drawings, neatly framed and glassed' a 'little library' evidencing 'many proofs of her piety as well as of her excellence of taste', compositions of her own and a miniature water colour of Sir Charles 'which was evidently the performance of Sophia herself'. Upon these sights Sir Charles reneges upon his former designs upon Sophia:

he felt in himself a detestation of those depraved principles which had suggested to him a design of debasing such purity! he wondered at the hardness of his own heart, that could so long resist the influence of her gentle virtues, and suffer such sweet sensibility to waste itself in anxious doubts, and disappointed hope. (p. 582)

Sir Charles' sudden and pivotal reformation jars, and indeed Sophia and Charles must face several more trials and misunderstandings until they can eventually marry. But this crucial moment in the narrative and the extent of its symbolic resonance can perhaps be best understood when read in the immediate context of the magazine in
which it appeared. When read in the framework of the *Lady's Museum*, Sophia's room becomes a metaphor for the magazine in which her narrative appears. Like the magazine, the heroine's room is a compartmentalised repository of female diligence and wisdom which offers lessons to the observer. Within its walls it displays a variety of virtues and female accomplishments that emblematise the 'natural graces of [...] wit' championed by the magazine above the artificial pretences of the closet. Lennox's fiction thus realises the implicit promise made in the opening 'Trifler' — that an application to the study of virtue through the magazine's pages makes women more, rather than less, attractive. Sophia, indeed, calls forth the 'powers of wit' in Sir Charles, educating him by the example of her cultivated virtues where Harriot's shallow, *closet* virtues communicate only her dissipation. In learning to value substance more than appearance, Charles realises he has had a lucky escape:

> had my passion for my Sophia been founded only on the charms of her person, I might probably e'er now have become a mere fashionable husband; but her virtue and wit supply her with graces ever varied, and ever new. Thus the steadiness of my affection for her is but a constant inconstancy, which attaches me successively to one or other of those shining qualities, of which her charming mind is an inexhaustible source. (p. 826)

In continuing to jiattempt to live off her looks, Harriot cannot escape the consequences of her former dissipation as Charles does. She begins a short-lived affair with a Lord, only for him to marry someone else leaving her with a 'distemper very fatal to beauty': 'All her anxious hours were now employed in repairing her complexion' (p. 824). Harriot's efforts to restore her lost beauty are rewarded by marriage to a former peruke-maker turned ensign who secures a commission and leaves London with his new wife much to her utter disgust.
'The History of Harriot and Sophia' works upon several literal and symbolic levels in the *Lady's Museum* and attests to the potentially reformative role of literature in a serial publication. On one level 'Harriot and Sophia' is a straightforwardly didactic narrative in which moral goodness is rewarded and fashionable dissipation punished. As Haywood had in the *Female Spectator*, Lennox does not deny her reader's access to the 'dangerous Diversions of fashion' but rather contains and mediates this access within a fictional, allegorical framework. The narrative's pedagogical project operates both to exemplify Sophia as a model to be emulated and to educate her readers further in the art of perceiving true virtue in the face of more fashionably dressed artifices, as Sir Charles belatedly learns. The narrative is thus both an education in itself, like the many articles and essays that accompanied it in the publication, and fictionalised proof of the magazine's promise to render its readers more charming. Although we do not see her reading magazines within the narrative, Sophia is a woman whose life internalises and exemplifies the periodical's curriculum of virtue and knowledge through which she reforms her rakish lover. 'Harriot and Sophia' thus becomes an intriguing, perhaps even self-promotional, allegory for the power of the magazine in educating women against the shallow adornments of beauty, dress and fashion.

* * *
FASHION AND FRUGALITY: POCKET-BOOKS FOR WOMEN

Beyond the emergence of the gender-specialised periodical, the single most significant factor in the changing role of dress in serial publications was the genre's increasing emphasis upon the dissemination of information which had a direct bearing upon the day-to-day lives of women, rather than the more abstract concerns of philosophy and learning. As Kathryn Shevelow argues, the magazine's emphasis changed from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, as 'the acquisition of "learning" as an indirect means of regulation gave way to the provision of other forms of knowledge more directly relevant to female lives'.32 Dress, as one of the primary signifiers of gender distinction, became an ever more unavoidable subject for magazines and periodicals targeting female readers. Furthermore, as dress delineated gender, so an attention to fashion allowed magazines to identify and advertise themselves as gender specific. But in responding to the apparently growing market for information on fashion, periodicals for women were forced to bring the temptations of the fashionable world into the very pages that had traditionally warned against them.

The emergence of the pocket or memorandum book in the 1750s was both a product of and instrumental in the increasing emphasis the late-eighteenth century serial publication placed upon its role as a disseminator of femininity through practical advice and example. As a generic hybrid, however, the pocket book suffers from a taxonomical indeterminacy and, as such, its significance is rarely documented in histories of eighteenth-century print culture. Kathryn Shevelow's excellent study of
women's periodicals does not refer to pocket books at all, and they are only briefly discussed in Alison Adburgham's detailed overview of serial publications for women from the Restoration to the nineteenth century. Costume historians Anne Buck and Harry Matthews' survey of pocket books, their publishers and illustrators is the only article length publication on the subject to date. Buck and Matthews seek to reclaim these texts from critical obscurity by asserting their value as sources for fashion historians interested in the details of fashion's gradual evolution rather than its sweeping revolutions. Yet the pocket book's significance is much greater than Buck and Matthews allow: its value lies less in its plates, than in the strained relationship between the text's interest in fashion and fashionable life and its construction of a feminine ideal built upon a foundation of frugality, modesty and social and economic restraint.

Pocket books for women appeared under numerous and bewilderingly similar titles throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These duodecimo books (approximately twelve by eight centimetres) were published annually and generally comprised one or two fashion engravings, information upon the rates of hackney-coachmen and watermen, marketing tables, dates of public holidays, royal birthdays and instructions upon the latest dances. These sources of information prefix a short literary miscellany commonly consisting of poetry, enigmas, songs, and essays

---

32 Shevelow, p. 188.
33 Adburgham's interest in pocket books seems to derive less from the intrinsic value of the texts than in their importance as one of the various publishing activities of William Lane, better known for establishing the Minerva Press. Adburgham, pp. 159-164.
34 Anne Buck and Harry Matthews, 'Pocket Guides to Fashion: Ladies' Pocket Books Published in England, 1760-1830', Costume, 18 (1984), pp. 35-58. Buck and Matthews provide a useful appendix of
on subjects such as manners, child-rearing and domestic management. The bulk of the publications, however, is given over to a combined diary and account book (the 'memorandum table'); a structure that distills the binary value system the pocket book creates. For the woman the pocket book seems to both appeal to and implicitly construct in its strange, janus-faced character is a sufficiently modish individual to take an interest in the lavish fashions the pocket book displays, yet who possesses sufficient sense and virtue to manage her finances with care and consideration. As Harris's Complete Ladies Pocket Book for 1792 declared, its editor's not inconsiderable task was 'all of fashion and dress, / With oeconomy's dictates [...] to express'.

The memorandum table typically comprised four columns designated by terms such as 'Money receiv'd', 'Money paid', 'Appointments' and 'Memorandum', designed to encourage women to be daily accountable for both their social and financial selves. The triple imperative of self-discipline, self-regulation and accountability upon which the pocket-book's ideal of unimpeachably virtuous femininity is based is stressed in an explicatory preface to the memorandum table in John Newbery's 1753 Ladies Compleat Pocket Book. Not content to let the table speak for itself, the editor insists upon the book's indispensability and the disastrous consequences attendant upon failing to follow its dictates:

---

pocket books and their locations based on their research. However, since the publication of this article more examples of pocket books and different editions have emerged.

35 Harris's British Ladies Complete Pocket Memorandum Book For the Year 1792 (London: H. Goldney [1791]), p. 2. Pocket books were printed in the autumn prior to the year for which they were designed. This fact had important implications for the pocket book's depiction of fashion as I will later demonstrate.
[T]here is nothing more necessary to make Life easy and comfortable than to keep an exact, plain, and explicit Account of our daily Expences, that we may be able to regulate them in Time, and not run blindfold into Errors which are not to be retriev'd, but with the utmost Danger and Difficulty. To prevent this fatal Precipitancy, you have here a Column appropriated to every Day in the Year for setting down your casual Disbursements [And] as there cannot be a greater Affront given to a Friend or Neighbour [...] than to fail in our Promises, or neglect Meeting them at certain Places previously agreed on; you are furnisht with a Column for Appointments and Promises, and another for Memorandums [...] by only looking into this little Book, you will be capable of transacting Business punctually, of preventing the irksome Expectations of your Acquaintance [...] and of keeping your Credit with Mankind.36

The editor's warning borrows the economic language which characterises gentleman's and tradesman's pocket books of the period. *The New Memorandum Book Improv'd: or, the Gentleman and Tradesman's Daily Pocket Journal*, also of 1753, refers to 'the mortifying Consideration' a gentleman might feel when perusing his journal and witnessing his 'own uselessness and insignificance to the Public for the Year past'.37 The *Ladies Compleat Pocket Book* transposes this notion of public credit away from the business world and wider social community into the feminine, private world of the household. Intriguingly, though the gentleman or tradesman's failure to transact business in a publicly spirited and useful manner is described as a 'mortifying Consideration', the pocket book proclaims that it can recuperate his reputation by inspiring in its possessor 'a generous Emulation to become more worthy' than he appears in the pages before him. A woman's failure to conduct her financial and social duties appropriately, by contrast, is deemed a 'fatal Precipitancy', irrevocably negating her 'Credit with Mankind'. As such, ladies' pocket books fashioned themselves as preventative safeguards of female reputation rather than curatives, since a women's credit, once weakened, was irrecoverable.

37 *The New Memorandum Book Improv'd: or, the Gentleman and Tradesman's Daily Pocket Journal For the Year 1753* (London: R. Dodsley [1752]), no page numbers. B.L. catalogue number P.P.2490.cc.
Maintaining one's 'Credit with Mankind' appears to have been a double burden for pocket book readers: a prudent attention to social engagements to preserve personal reputation and a duty to preserve one's creditworthiness by a judicious management of personal and household allowances. In preserving a woman's financial and social transactions, the pocket book is designed to act as a permanent testimony to her social, moral and economic character. As the editor of the 1762 *Ladies Compleat Pocket Book* argues, 'it may not be improper to recommend the careful preserving of these Books', since they were designed to 'be of Use even Years after' they had been published. In completed form, he argues, they 'enable any Lady to tell what Monies she has Receiv'd and Paid; what Appointments, or Visits, she has made and had return'd, during any Period of her Life'.\(^38\) The economic language of credit, accountability and oeconomy locates the pocket book within a wider civic humanist discourse circulating in eighteenth-century literature and moral philosophy, directed against self-interest and corruption. As Gillian Skinner argues, this discourse gained particular currency in the sentimental novel, which frequently charted a woman's fall as an economic crisis.\(^39\) If the pocket book fashioned itself as a preventative for the financial misfortunes met by characters such as Cecilia and Camilla, it was, however, blind to its complicity with the pressures and temptations to be fashionable that precipitate the ruin of even the most virtuous sentimental heroines.

\(^{38}\) *The Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book For the Year of Our Lord 1762* (London: J. Newbery, [1761]), no page numbers, B.L. catalogue number c. 136.bb.30.

The *Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book* displays no explicit awareness of the potential incongruity between its annual fashion plates and the emphasis upon financial control it advocates in its text and ruled memorandum table. Rather, it seems confident in its ability to cater to its readers' sartorial desires, whilst teaching them how to manage these disruptive appetites. Concerned with women's day-to-day lives, the pocket book is too practical to ignore dress, which may well have constituted the most significant proportion of its readers' personal expenditure. The 1762 *Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book* offers an example of how the 'Money receiv'd' and 'Money paid' tables should be filled in, which highlights its recognition of dress as a significant financial consideration for its readers. Of the ten pounds ten shillings received by an imaginary woman on an imaginary day, by far the greatest proportion is devoted to dress: one pound, thirteen shillings and sixpence to Mrs Muslin the milliner, and four pounds five shillings for fabrics from Mr Spruce the Mercer. Significantly smaller sums are paid 'in market for provisions' (9s 7d), 'to the cook' (11s 5d) and for 'sundry articles' (3s 4d).

But it is not simply as its readers' primary financial consideration that a woman's ability to negotiate the fine line between a prudently genteel and an imprudently fashionable appearance is placed firmly at the heart of the pocket book's conception of virtuous femininity. A woman's dress, as commonly lamented, reflected

---

40 The 1753 *Lady's Compleat Pocket Book* is the earliest copy of a pocket-book I have found. It contains no fashion plate, although this may have been removed. Often plates were cut from pocket books to place in private collections and scrap books, the most famous example of which is Barbara Johnson's 'Album' held by the Victoria and Albert Museum. A facsimile of the textile book has been published as *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics*, ed. by Natalie Rothstein (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987). The earliest plate in the 'Album' exhibits the dress for 1754, although its source is unknown.
not merely upon her character but that of her husband. As the author of an essay 'On Female Oeconomy' writes in the 1789 Ladies Miscellany, there are many 'professions, in which a man's success greatly depends on his making some figure, where the bare suspicion of poverty would bring on the reality'. Should a reader marry such a man, the writer advises that it is her 'duty to exert all [her] skill in the management of [her] income' to render her body and household as outwardly respectable as is financially prudent.42 As Harriet Guest has argued, the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of a counter-image to the satirical figure of the fashionable woman who consumed to excess. Equally undesirable, Guest argues, was the woman who failed to consume enough and whose withdrawal from commercial exchange indicated her 'hard-hearted lack of sensibility'.43 A notable example of this figure in relation to the present argument appears in Paul Jodrell's play A Widow and No Widow (1780).44 The entrance of Peg Pennyworth, a female money-lender, is preempted by a comic discussion of her miserliness: 'she keeps the door of her coach in her parlour, lest the coachman should let it out as a hackney [...] she always goes to market herself, and carries her fish in her pocket — she is always slip-shod — and her cloaths hang about her like a weeping willow'.45 When Pennyworth eventually appears upon the stage her miserly self-interest is dramatised as she reads out the money lending transactions documented in her pocket book:

41 The Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book for 1762, p. iii.
42 The Ladies Miscellany, or, New, Useful and Entertaining Companion For the Year 1789 (London: J. Brown, [1788]), p. 122.
44 I am grateful to Claire Brock for alerting me to the existence of this text.
45 Paul Jodrell, M.A., A Widow and No Widow. A Dramatic Piece of Three Acts. As it was performed at the Theatre-Royal in the Haymarket in the Year 1779 (Dublin: G. Bonham for the United Company of Booksellers, 1780), p. 41.
PEG (untying a pocket-book and reading) ‘Lent to Hap Hazard, Esq. five hundred pounds, from his advertisement to Y.Z. age doubtful.’ — That was the worst bargain we ever made [...]’Lent to the Reverend Mr Saygrace, my cousin, five hundred pounds, upon his living in the Fens.’ — Tis a bad security, and I don't like it — besides too, he has got nine children, and the Fens are unwholesome.46

Pennyworth's penny pinching and extortionist tactics render her the 'abstract of avarice', a woman whose miserliness divorces her from the sphere of commercial exchange as well as from her femininity and humanity. Despite A Widow and No Widow's use of the pocket book to satirise Pennyworth, pocket books themselves judiciously attempted to steer a middle course between the polarities of unrestrained consumption and a failure to consume at all. Neither encouraging nor dissuading women to consume, the pocket book seeks to encourage women to regulate their consumption in order that they may be better equipped to fulfill the 'duties of a wife and mother':

In your table — as in your dress, and in all other things, I wish you to aim at propriety and neatness, or if your state demands it, elegance — rather than a superfluous figure. — To go beyond your sphere, either in dress or in appearance of your table, indicates a greater fault in your character than to be too much within it.47

Rather than superfluiity or austerity, a woman should aspire to 'propriety', a social, moral and economic golden mean which balances the need for an appropriate display of familial wealth and fashionable politeness against the ever present dangers of 'poverty' and 'unhappiness'.

This triple emphasis upon oeconomy, propriety and display places the pocket book in the same ideological continuum as the conduct book, in which, as Nancy

46 A Widow and No Widow, p. 44.
Armstrong has argued, 'the model domestic household [is placed] in opposition to the excesses of aristocratic behavior [...] in order to insist upon a discrete and frugal household educated in the practices of inconspicuous consumption'. In demanding that readers keep day to day records of their personal accounts, and translate this economic prudence into the materiality of their dress and table, the pocket book's brand of 'inconspicuous consumption' is curiously paradoxical; a kind of conspicuously inconspicuous consumption, through which women declare their financial transactions and, in so doing, their restraint and prudence as consumers. Pocket book owners, like conduct book readers, were bombarded with images of the dangers of overspending and the contentment that frugality alone could provide in the form of essays, poems and moral maxims. Women were urged to see through the 'gilt chariot, the gaudy liveries, the supernumerary train of attendants, the great house, and the sumptuous table, the services of plate, the embroidered cloaths, the rich brocades, the profusion of jewels' and all the trappings of aristocratic wealth which tempt women to marry or live above their station, in favour of matrimonial stability based upon judicious frugality. Just as conduct books and educational treatises suggested that 'without the domestic woman the entire domestic framework would collapse', so the pocket book identifies women as the fulcrum upon which the success or failure of marriage, the household and, by extension, society rests. Indeed a woman's virtue and the stability of her marriage could be measured against the degree of financial

47 'On Female Oeconomy', The Ladies Miscellany, or, New, Useful and Entertaining Companion, For the Year 1789, p. 124.
49 The Ladies Miscellany, or, New, Useful and Entertaining Companion For the Year 1787 (London: J. Brown [1786]), p. 10.
50 Armstrong, p. 122.
control she exerted upon familial expenses. Anticipating arguments that 'the setting [of] the general scheme of expenses is seldom the wife's province', the author of an essay 'On Female Oeconomy' asserts that it is 'a very ill sign for one or both parties, where there is such a want of openness in what equally concerns them'. In such a situation a woman can only be 'answerable to no more than is entrusted to her', the writer argues, and through 'exact calculation' in her limited financial transactions hope to earn the trust of her husband and therefore more control over the household in future. As an 'art as well as a virtue', however, the skill of oeconomy can only be acquired through learning, and as 'it is too often wholly neglected in a young woman's education' women must look to the pocket book to supply the defects of this system.51

The feminine ideal constructed by the pocket book is thus imbued with a double-edged power as the moral and economic centre of the family household. The middling sort, socially content and self-sufficient character of this woman is affirmed in a (presumably unironic) poem in the 1787 The Ladies Miscellany entitled 'Contentment':

FEW are my wants, clean wholesome food,  
And raiment's all I claim;  
Nor mourn for robes I can't afford,  
That clothe the courtly dame [...]  

Four floors above the street I sit,  
Contented, read or sing;  
And can in this exalted state,  
Look down on court and King.52

51 The Ladies Miscellany, or, New, Useful and Entertaining Companion For the Year 1789, pp. 121-123.  
52 The Ladies Miscellany, or, New, Useful and Entertaining Companion For the Year 1787, p. 126.
The sartorial vestiges of superfluous wealth are dismissed here as a legitimate form of social stratification, albeit with a recognition that they cannot be totally overhauled, in favour of a meritocracy based upon the more valuable stock of feeling. Other pocket books were more explicit about the readership they assumed and targeted. The 1786 *Ladies Daily Companion* included 'Extracts from several Acts of Parliament passed last Session, relative to the Duties on Gloves, Male and Female Servants, and Retail Shops'. The extracts note the stamp duties payable by manufacturers for various types of gloves at various prices as well as the cost of the annual licence fee payable by glove makers, thereby implying a readership comprised of skilled working women.\(^5\)

By contrast *The Ladies Most Elegant and Convenient Pocket Book*, as its name suggests, had marked aristocratic, whiggish aspirations. Its title pages proudly announced that the book was 'Compiled at the Request of Several Ladies of Quality', and the pocket-book displayed a keen interest in society's upper reaches as evidenced by a fold-out engraving in the 1784 edition of a 'View of the Prince of Wales's Fete at Carshalton House Garden in honor of Mr Fox's Election' opposite its plate of 'Ladies in the Dress of the Year'. The *Ladies Most Elegant and Convenient Pocket Book* rigidly reinforced the social hierarchy within a carefully delineated 'Table of Precedency among Ladies' and in the publication's literary miscellany. An essay 'On Female Education' soon turns to the subject of emulation and misguided social ambition: 'Whilst we are in this world [...] some by birth and others by fortune, will have the

---

superiority over the rest of mankind, but let us be great or let us be little, decency requires we should play the part allotted'.

The essentially conservative social and domestic values espoused by the pocket book, however, are necessarily problematised by the presence of fashion plates. These engravings compromise the pocket book's opposition to the artificial consumer value systems symbolised by 'embroidered cloaths', 'rich brocades', a 'profusion of jewels' and the 'fatal Precipitancy' of unregulated consumption. Recognising an interest in and an attention to dress as integral to its readers' lives, yet fashioning itself as a moral and economic guide, the pocket book anticipated a conflict of interest which would colour so many periodical publications for women in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, from the short-lived *Fashionable Magazine* to the *Lady's*. Like the *Lady's*, pocket books implicitly defended their interest in fashion by apparently subordinating this interest to a dominant moral and economic framework. Fashion, so often associated with excess and limitless innovation at this time, was disseminated yet contained within the isolated plate or two appended to the front of the publications. The memorandum table subsequently re-compartmentalises dress by encouraging women to document their purchases and thereby subordinate their consumption of fashionable commodities to an overriding principle of financial management.

While the ever increasing numbers of fashion plates may have fuelled anxiety that fashion was becoming less exclusive, more accessible to wider social groups and

---

ultimately beyond control, the impact of pocket book plates was considerably weakened. Not only were they published annually, and therefore immune from accusations that targeted fashion's wasteful and endless cycles of renewal and revision, pocket books were outdated by the time they were sold. Issues were compiled in the autumn prior to the year for which they were designed. Thus the *Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book's* 1762 fashion plate (fig. 4) displays a gown fashionable in the previous year. The pocket book's attendant inadequacy as a purveyor of fashion left it vulnerable to ridicule. The first issue of *The Magazine à la Mode* eagerly distinguished its own project from that of its nearest 'Precedent', the pocket book. The 'futility of [the pocket book's] pretensions' were, it claimed, 'obvious to every one, who gives himself time to reflect, that [...] any one mode of dress is so far from being likely to continue a whole year, that, very probably, it may not last a month'. So divorced from the reality of fashion, pocket books are 'deficient in point of information, or in point of taste', and their plates 'the very reverse of what they should be'. The pocket book's sartorial insufficiency was more famously satirised in *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), when Mrs Hardcastle's pretensions to fashionable urban life are ridiculed as the product of unreliable gossip magazines and even more unreliable reports from unfashionable women and outdated pocket books:

MRS HARDCASTLE I take care to know every tête à tête from the Scandalous Magazine, and have all the fashions, as they come out, in a letter from the two Miss Rickets of Crooked-lane. Pray how do you like this head, Mr Hastings.

HASTINGS Extremely elegant and dégagée upon my word Madam. Your friseur is Frenchman, I suppose?

MRS HARDCASTLE I protest, I dressed it myself from a print in the Ladies Memorandum

---


56 *The Magazine à la Mode*, 1 (January 1777), p. 3.
Rather than simply modelling her appearance upon the engravings in an annual pocket book displaying fashions of the previous year, Mrs Hardcastle displays her rustic ignorance still further by referring to a pocket book already a year old, and therefore aspires to fashions potentially two years out of date.

While the fashion plate may not have posed an overwhelming threat to the moral authority of pocket books, these texts are far from unproblematic in their efforts to assimilate fashion into publications concerned with restraint and frugality. Without the plates, pocket books would be completely different texts: conduct books in another guise. With the plates, however, pocket books could be accused of encouraging women to value themselves not upon their modesty and prowess in the skills of domestic management, but upon their appearance. The potentially mixed messages presented to pocket book readers were not lost upon contemporaries. The Christian-Lady's Pocket Book for 1792, for example, vehemently disassociated itself from other pocket books. In a letter to the editor, a contributor outlines his hopes that this will prove a more morally responsible text than the innumerable others which saturate the pocket book market. The reader of The Christian-Lady's Pocket Book, it is hoped, will not fill the engagements column with 'visits of a trifling (not to say culpable) kind', or the expences column with 'sums laid out in masquerade-tickets, subscription concerts, wax-lights for routs, birth-day suits [or] losses at the card table'. Her memoranda

---

should not consist of 'the lye of the say, topics of scandal, names and abodes of milliners, descriptions of the new fashions, and a hundred other circumstances of equal importance', but with an account of 'those blessed seasons, when the writer was privileged with some sweet visits from a gracious GOD'. Given the success of ladies' pocket books throughout the late eighteenth century, signalled by the sheer number of titles, The Christian Lady's Pocket Book's outrage at the content of pocket books is by no means representative. Nevertheless, its attack exposes the perceived threat that fashionable images posed to the works and the extent to which pocket books might have encouraged readings against the grain.

The models of negotiable reading highlighted by Edward Copeland and Jacqueline Pearson in their work on the Lady's Magazine have a particular resonance for pocket books too, as texts which not only presented their readers with two potentially divergent value systems (the fashionable and the frugal), but provided a literal and metaphorical space in which their readers could choose to embrace or reject these systems: the memorandum table. Sadly, few memorandum tables exist in pocket books held within non-private collections, and still fewer are completed. Those that have been completed represent a wealth of responses to the books' encouragements and dictates. A 1774 edition of William Lane's Ladies Museum held by the British Library possesses a complete memorandum table documenting the day-to-day life of an unknown woman. Not only does she use the table to note appointments and memoranda documenting her travels on land and around the British coast, but she responds to the pocket book's emphasis upon accountancy by listing clothes and

haberdashery purchased by and for her, as well as details of coach and dinner expenses incurred on her travels.\textsuperscript{59} Many more pocket books apparently failed to have the desired effect upon their readers. A copy of the \textit{Ladies Most Elegant and Convenient Pocket Book} for 1785, held by the Corporation of London Guildhall Library, has been completed by man who is evidently of the legal profession and who uses the accounting columns solely to document his small losses and even smaller gains at cards.\textsuperscript{60} The incongruity of the memoranda, listing his comings and goings around Pall Mall, St. Paul's and Mansion House, against the content and plates of the pocket book is comically startling. More significant than such startling responses are the inappropriate responses of some women to the pocket books they owned. The 1753 \textit{Ladies Compleat Pocket Book} held by the British Library is complete with notes from a woman whose identity is unknown. Apart from the intrinsic interest of her brief but meticulously completed daily memoranda detailing people she dined, danced and drank tea with, the manuscript is of interest for what it omits. The only column completed is the memorandum column (fig. 5). Whatever her reasons, the owner has not heeded the text's warnings of the dire consequences attendant upon not rigorously accounting for personal expenditure in the book, preferring instead to use it as a diary.\textsuperscript{61} Such anecdotal information does not substantiate claims that pocket books failed to inculcate the desired financial and domestic values in their readers, but it does suggest that far from allowing the pocket book to fashion her character, its reader could fashion the pocket book to tailor it to her own concerns.

\textsuperscript{59} The Ladies Museum, or Complete Pocket Memorandum Book For the Year 1774 (London: William Lane [1773]), B.L Catalogue Number c.115.n.68.

\textsuperscript{60} The Ladies Most Elegant and Convenient Pocket Book, For the Year 1785 (London: E. Newbery [1784]). Corporation of London Guildhall Library Reference Store 1277, Almanacs 36.
An essay in *Harris's Original Memorandum Book* for 1782 implicitly makes this recognition. A few pages after its plates appears an 'Essay on Dress', condemning those who 'pay a blind obedience to fashion'. The essay notes that it is a lamentable truism that without an attention to fashion 'there [is] no admittance to places of polite resort', since other personal characteristics, 'not being so visible, none can distinguish a person's abilities at first sight'. To display politeness, therefore, it is necessary to be fashionable, yet to be unquestioningly fashionable is to display one's lack of propriety and prudence. To negotiate this fine line, the essay argues, a woman must consider her social position, age and physique when dressing, but admits that it 'would be endless to lay down rules for dress'. The writer is satisfied, however, that the pocket book has noted the 'prevalent fashions [...] in their proper place'. In its insistence that dress can be contained and managed by being kept in its 'proper place' (plates and short written descriptions), the essay offers an implicit defence of the inclusion of fashion information into texts self-professedly concerned with a woman's moral well-being such as pocket books and ladies' magazines. The conclusion to this essay is far less assured than this justification suggests, however. Ultimately, the writer surrenders, 'it is to her own *judgement* that [a woman] must at last be indebted for the ELEGANCE of her appearance'. A reader's judgment is, however, an unknown quantity, and despite its efforts to contain dress within an ideological framework that subordinated fashion and fashionable life to an overriding principle of domestic management, there could be no assurance that its readers would espouse the same principles. The very structure of

---

61 BL Catalogue number c.136.bb.30
the pocket book, demanding reader participation more than any kind of publication of its time, ensured that 'Oeconomy's dictates' could never be absolute.

* * *

THE LADY'S MAGAZINE

In its dual role as a disseminator of both fashion and domestic morality the pocket book represents an important context for the Lady's Magazine. Despite its prioritisation of mental accomplishments, the Lady's Magazine sought to cultivate and address a female reader who combined moral with personal and physical refinement. The Preface to the first issue of August 1770 places this analogising of internal and external charms at the heart of the publication:

The subjects we shall treat of are those that may tend to render your minds not less amiable than your persons. But as external appearance is the first inlet to the treasures of the heart, and the advantages of dress, though they cannot communicate beauty, may at least make it more conspicuous, it is intended to present the Sex with most elegant patterns for the tambour, embroidery, or every kind of needlework; and, as the fluctuations retard their progress in the country, we shall by engravings inform our distant readers with every innovation that is made in the female dress. As this is a branch of information entirely new, we shall endeavour to render it more worthy of female attention, by an assiduity which shall admit of no abatement [...] In this we consult not only the embellishment but likewise the profit of our patronesses. They will find in this Magazine, price only sixpence, among variety of other Copper-plates a Pattern that would cost them double the money at the Haberdasher.

The subtle twists and turns with which the Lady's introduces, justifies and qualifies its assiduous interest in fashion and external appearance pre-empt the Fashionable Magazine's concerns about the role of dress in a serial publication. On the one hand, dress is cast as secondary to mental accomplishment; external appearance is powerless

---

63 To consolidate this claim further, George Robinson published both The Lady's Magazine and a successful pocket book entitled The Ladies Own Memorandum Book, or Daily Pocket Journal which ran from as early as 1769 well into the nineteenth century.
to communicate internal worth, and can merely 'make it more conspicuous'. Yet in a society in which external appearance is so highly valued, women who wish to communicate inner worth must first, it seems, cultivate a sufficiently appealing exterior in order to subsequently divert the observer's attention to 'the treasures of the heart'. The lack of an identifiable subject in the sentence on 'external appearance' as the 'first inlet to the treasures of the heart' suggestively imbues the role of dress, as outlined here, with a double meaning. First, dress is justified as a suitable subject of interest for the publication's readers as a conduit to demonstrating moral goodness: through a cultivated dress-sense a woman can captivate onlookers with ephemeral, sartorial attractions that she may subsequently demonstrate the more permanent allures of moral goodness and mental accomplishment. Through the inclusion of 'elegant patterns' and reports on 'innovations in female dress', the Lady's Magazine thus implicitly promises to make its readers more desirable women. Beneath this superficially selfless assertion lies a far less selfless subtext, however. If as the magazine suggests, women can attract the attention of potential friends and suitors through attractive dress, then by implication a magazine could hope to attract a wide female readership with the allure of embroidery patterns, elegant plates and reports of the latest fashions. In short, the magazine's sartorial attractions could act as bait to lure readers to the moral and didactic treasures at the heart of the publication itself.

As the 1780 frontispiece implies, however, the desirability of such fashionable images may divert readers from, rather than attract them to, the moral core of the publication. Like the pocket book, the very structure of the magazine as a

---

64 LM, 1 (August 1770), p. 3.
compartmentalised assortment of articles and fiction on various subjects, helpfully indexed to guide readers to items of particular interest, potentially allowed women to prioritise in their reading concerns which the publication itself did not. Edward Copeland, in a rather unflattering vision of the magazine's reader, likens the experience of reading the *Lady's* to window-shopping, in which the female reader flicks through its pages 'to glance at the illustration of the month's story, skips to the end [to] see if there is perhaps an illustration of a Paris Dress or some sheet music or a pattern for an apron'.\(^{65}\) Between this initial, and predominantly visual, consumption of the magazine and her reading of the rest of the publication exists a 'wide arena', Copeland argues, 'for negotiating the contemporary social discourse inevitably embedded in the magazine's style and presentation'.\(^{66}\) While this concept of the *Lady's Magazine*’s negotiable interpretative spaces highlights many of the publication's ideological incongruities, it masks, perhaps, the extent to which the magazine sought to manage these spaces through various strategies seemingly designed to temper and control the interpretation of its more contentious offerings. As the Preface to the first issue indicates, the publication was acutely aware that it could not simply disseminate fashion to its readers in the form of engravings, reports or embroidery patterns. This information had to be assiduously tailored to 'make it worthy of female attention' and worthy of inclusion in the publication. In a strategy which seeks to elide the potential antagonism between its subjects, the Preface suggests that dress and female virtue can be mutually reciprocal: women will be afforded the opportunity to make their virtue more conspicuous through the appropriate deployment of dress, and dress, by virtue of

\(^{65}\) Copeland, p. 117.

\(^{66}\) Copeland, p. 117.
its inclusion in a morally-improving periodical, will become a more appropriate subject matter for female attention.

Yet the intricate negotiations forced by the publication's aims to satisfy a desire for fashion reports while cultivating female morality set expectations which, as several critics note, the publication failed to live up to. 67 Although embroidery patterns were published monthly in the unbound issues of the magazine, fashion plates were scarce and fashion reports at best sporadic. As early as November 1770, the magazine was forced to explain that it had 'not lost sight of [its] promise to the Fair Sex, of giving them the most early intelligence of the revolutions that shall be made in fashions'. 68 Increasingly, however, it became apparent that this was a promise the magazine was ill-equipped to meet. In a study of the Lady's Magazine and the reader participation it encouraged, Jean Hunter assessed the percentage of the magazine devoted to specific subjects in four-year periods over the publication's history. Morals and manners unsurprisingly form the bulk of the sampled issues, whereas beauty and fashion rarely exceed five percent of the magazine's pages. 69 Hunter's study, though thorough, is somewhat misleading however: for dress relates to and frequently emblematises so many concerns of eighteenth-century culture, from issues surrounding luxury, gender, education and the social order, to general issues of morality. Though the percentage of articles devoted exclusively to fashion is comparatively small, dress is thus however an implicit, or often explicit, subtext of countless articles, letters and fictions on

67 See, for example, Adburgham, p. 204.
various subjects throughout the magazine's history. The association of dress with so many contemporary social, economic and political anxieties ensured that the reader of the *Lady's Magazine* was inundated with images of the dangers of the immoderate consumption of fashionable commodities on a monthly basis. Discussions of dress feature in serials such as 'The Rambler', 'The Female Reformer' and the long-running 'Matron', in letters, poems and short moral maxims as well as in essays on such diverse subjects as modesty, education, taste, 'oeconomy', beauty and prostitution; a diversity which highlights the perceived centrality of dress to issues of female morality in the magazine. Indeed, dress lies at the very core of the *Lady's* ideology: as antagonist to the publication's aims to champion the virtues of knowledge, wisdom, benevolence, moral propriety and 'oeconomy' over those of vanity, foolishness, selfishness and excessive consumption.

Almost all of the annual Addresses prefacing the January publications allude to this opposition. The January 1777 issue outlines the 'arduous' task faced by the magazine in its endeavours to 'turn away the female eye from the glitter of external parade, to fix it upon [the] more permanent and more brilliant objects of mental acquisitions'. Some ten years later the annual address promised to 'improve the Understanding in useful Knowledge [...] and to adorn the Female Character with elegant Accomplishments'. Likewise in 1788 the magazine expressed its hope to emulate the periodical precedents of Addison and Steele by making 'Polite Learning',

---

rather than physical beauty, one of 'the most fashionable Ornaments' a woman could wear. The use of sartorial imagery in these 'Addresses' enacts a subtle semantic displacement. Initially dress is identified as antithetical to the virtues of morality and intellectual refinement for which the publication stands. Subsequently, sartorial metaphors are assimilated into the publication's moral framework by suggesting that accomplishment, learning and a virtuous character are the only truly desirable fashionable ornaments. The project of the Lady's Magazine is thus a dual process of re-clothing: re-clothing women in a garb of probity and learning to make them more attractive and appealing wives, mothers and friends, and re-clothing probity and learning to render these virtues more attractive propositions to the magazine's female readers. Dress is thus imbued with a profoundly ambiguous status in the Lady's Magazine. In light of the publication's moral agenda, fashion and clothing are trivial subjects, the inclusion of which seems always to demand justification. Yet as a commodity which emblematises so many economic, social and moral concerns, dress is frequently represented in the magazine's pages as the very crux upon which female virtue, various social institutions and the social structure itself rests.

The social institution most vulnerable, it seems, to an injudicious deployment of dress is marriage. The importance of an appropriate sense of how to dress before and during marriage is a recurrent theme in the Lady's Magazine, dubiously privileging women, as did the conduct and pocket book, with a double-edged responsibility for maintaining the stability of the domestic household. The

70 In February 1785 The Lady's Magazine published an article on 'One of the Leading Causes of Prostitution', the 'Dress of Servant Girls above their Station'. See p. 96.
susceptibility of marriage to the dangers of fashion is deemed so great since the function of dress changes when a woman marries. In an argument that rehearses the mock-chivalric techniques deployed in many male-authored periodicals which attempted to reform female clothing, many of the Lady's contributions on this subject seem unable to perceive dress as anything other than a bait to attract lovers or future husbands. The first installment of 'The Female Rambler', for example, opens with the typically convivial assertion that the writer is 'far from wishing to deprive the youth of its seasonable gaiety, or to deny beauty the tribute of admiration'. The article proceeds with a less generous warning against the 'delights in finery', questioning whether 'women would delight so much in finery, if it did not heighten their own charms, and attract the notice of men'. Despite the admonitory and condemnatory tone of the article, however, the writer partially exempts unmarried women from such criticism, provided their desire to be fashionable has marriage as its goal. Once married, however, a woman's appearance must be more circumspect and subdued, since it is no longer necessary for her to dress 'to please her husband, and it will be unnecessary for her to dress to please any one else'.

But if a woman's fashionable appearance after marriage leaves her open to suspicion, negligence in dress offers no guarantee that she will be free from gossip and unfavourable conjecture. For, as pocket books reminded readers, a married woman's dress is a testimony to both her character and that of her husband, as well as to the state of their marriage. As an anonymous writer contributed in a 'Letter to the Editor' in April 1773:

It is well known that ladies are apt after marriage to grow careless and negligent with regard to their dress: this very thing has been the cause of much misunderstanding between married couples. The husband thinks himself slighted, and finding no satisfaction or pleasure at home, seeks it abroad, and thus brings himself into a bad habit, which is often attended with fatal consequences.  

Rehearsing a disturbingly prevalent argument made by novels and conduct books in the period, the writer argues that a woman who does not care for her appearance cannot care for her marriage, and effectively licenses her husband to commit adultery through her sartorial neglect. A 1775 conduct-book style serial entitled 'Mrs T—SS's Advice to her Daughter' takes these arguments one step further by advocating a fashion system in which there would be a 'distinguishing difference between the dress of married and single women'. In an installment upon 'Dancing in Public and Dress' Mrs T—SS argues that history proves the effectiveness of fashion systems in which 'young unmarried women [were allowed] every liberty, in respect to dress' but married women 'were not allowed to shew the least part of their neck or arms, and their face always was veiled'. Mrs T—SS rehearses the sartorial double standard articulated in the aforementioned contributions on this subject. Though dress is an acceptable means through which unmarried woman can 'allure and captivate' a future husband, married women who dress fashionably, the writer concludes, may justly be accused of 'committing adultery'. The association of dress with sexual transgression is one of the most enduring critiques of clothing, but what is of interest here is that men, rather than women, are depicted as the seduced victims of fashion. If a woman throws such sartorial 'allurements before the eyes of men' she may force them to 'become bold enough to take unbecoming liberties', the possibly 'criminal' effects of which will be of

---

73 LM, 6 (November 1775), p. 604.
her own making. Giving with one hand what she takes with the other, Mrs T—SS bestows her female readers with a certain power acquired and exercised through the deployment of dress, only to argue that if women want to fully maintain this power they must regulate their dress in order to preserve them from the dangers of male 'liberties'.

The strategy of empowering women only to argue that true power must be regulated in order to remain effective is a frequently deployed trope in contributions to the *Lady's Magazine* which partially disguise their projected reformation of women through the promise that their good conduct will reform men. Such is the tactic of 'The Reasoner' number XXVIII which argues that women 'have no small influence on men, [and] consequently on them must, in great measure, depend the characteristic mark of every age; so that in proportion as they are vicious or virtuous, the men will be so too'. While '[v]anity and dissipation, love of pleasure and artfulness will be sure to lead the other sex to superficial knowledge, to profligacy, to effeminacy, and the highest extravagance', 'men will be found generous, open, sincere, frugal and temperate' if women are 'modest, mild, steady, domestic, and moderate'. As his name suggests, 'The Reasoner' shares the *Lady's* overriding conviction in rationality as the antidote to female immorality. In a later issue he argues that 'Consideration alone is necessary to convince us how amiable goodness is [...] Consideration alone is necessary to convince you of the ugliness of vice'. But where it may be possible to reason with women upon the evils of various female vices, fashion, as an inexplicable and

---

74 *LM*, 6 (July 1775), pp. 353, 354.
characteristically irrational social dynamic, poses particular problems to those who seek to warn against it. In April 1773 a writer on 'The Education of the Fair-Sex' gave the following description of the contagious spread of fashion:

Caprice and fantasticalness are the parents of fashion, which is a great prejudice in its disfavour. [...] If a lady of elevated rank, or of a remarkable fantasticalness, should take it into her head to dress herself in a particular manner, all the rest of the sex would adopt her ton of dress, however ridiculous, or uneasy it should appear. The contagion commences from those who are familiar with the person who introduces a new mode; after which it communicates itself to their acquaintance, or those who hold them in the theatre or private walks. The city adopts it after the court; from the city it spreads into the country, and foreign parts.76

Fashion is cast here as a disease: a biological organism that affects those biologically determined by their gender to be vulnerable to contagion. Though its progress may be predictable — from individual to community, to city, to country, to the fashionable world — containment of the epidemic seems impossible. As the offspring of 'Caprice and fantasticalness' fashion is both fickle, inconstant and irrational and therefore immune to the inoculating power of rational reflection. As the contributor resignedly argues, 'women of this age picque themselves on account of their reason and judgement more than ever they did; but they shew very little of either in their conduct with respect to fashions, with which they are more infatuated than ever'.77 To attempt to reason women out of a love of fashion is essentially to reason against something, by nature, unreasonable. And as the Lady's 1780 frontispiece uneasily explores, merely juxtaposing folly and wisdom may have sufficient weight to persuade its readers to take the right metaphorical path.

A 'Letter to the Editor' in the same issue is more explicit about the problems the Lady's Magazine faces in rationalising with its female readers on the folly of fashion:

To comply with the fashions of the age in which we live, is a maxim so universally received, that I much doubt whether the most rational arguments would lessen its influence. It is a maxim we adopt from the cradle, and sometimes carry with us to the grave. There is little hope of removing what is so strongly riveted to our nature; to attempt, however, to remove an evil, if not impossible, is a laudable, though perhaps an arduous undertaking.  

On a more hopeful note, the contributor proceeds that for those that are 'determined not to give up their darling follies, there may be others, whose prejudices are not so strong, who only want to be made sensible of their errors, in order to renounce them'.

The anonymous letter anticipates modern critical accounts of the Lady's which stress its tendency to promote both compliant and resistant readings. Some readers, the letter argues, have too strong a predilection for vice and folly to listen to the lessons of the magazine, no matter how rational and forceful the arguments it makes. Others may be more yielding readers. The magazine's ideal reader, it implies then, lies somewhere between the two: a woman who is neither wholly prejudiced nor entirely perfect and therefore will be open to the self-reflection and reformation prompted by the publication's articles, letters and fictions.

Reader participation was vital to the Lady's Magazine, both in providing the content of its pages and as a reformatory tool, which encouraged its readers to engage with various moral and social issues through the critical forum of the publication itself. Notably, however, most contributions on dress by readers are apparently written by

---

men or male personae such as 'The Reasoner' or 'The Trifler'. Women's attitudes to fashion are primarily heard indirectly through the requests for reports on the latest fashions indicated in the prefatory 'To our Correspondents' columns, and in the editorial comments which accompany some articles. From the magazine's first issues it appears that articles on fashion were popular with readers. In the issue for November 1770 the editor remarks upon the great 'satisfaction' the first edition's fashion plate had given its readers, so much so that he finds 'it imitated by most of the annual pocket-books for the use of the ladies'. But the magazine's emphasis upon reader contributions hindered as much as encouraged its coverage of fashion. Audience participation may have been the key to the success of the Lady's Magazine, but it was also a system that left it vulnerable to the whims and inclinations of readers. Just as readers were, from time to time, disappointed by fictional serials that were simply left unfinished by their contributors, so they were frustrated by the unreliability of the magazine's volunteer fashion reporters. The 'To Our Correspondents' column of the May 1779 issue, for example, cites the complaint of a reader who signs herself a 'humble servant of the Wou'd-be-Fashionable' and who laments the 'want of articles on dress'. Her criticism spurs the editor to 'request some of our correspondents, residing in the metropolis, to assume the task', promising other dissatisfied readers that 'so important a department in etiquette' will not remain 'unnoticed'.

80 Of course pocket-books had published fashion plates since the late 1750s, long before the first issue of The Lady's Magazine.
81 See Hunter, p. 106.
82 LM, 10 (May 1779), no page number.
Even when fashion was reported, however, it was not without difficulty. In 1777, 1783 and 1784 the magazine was forced to entreat its fashion reviewers to produce reports more regularly, and in 1780 the magazine was evidently experiencing difficulty in finding anyone to report on fashion at all, despite its readers' demands for more regular reporting. The inability to provide regular accounts of fashion was a recurrent source of embarrassment for the magazine, yet when fashion was reported, the publication was still reluctant to simply let fashion speak for itself. Rather, through editorial comment and the judicious placement of articles, the magazine persistently arbitrated and policed the images it disseminated. Part of the difficulty in representing fashion seems to have been the lack of an established language through which it could be disseminated. In his study of twentieth-century French fashion magazines, Roland Barthes analysed the relationship and interaction between the three structures of clothing: the image, the written and the real garment. Despite forming a generic object (the 'garment of Fashion'), Barthes argues that the structural distinctions between these forms of representation demand that each garment be studied individually. While the eighteenth-century magazine could deploy the visual imagery of the fashion plate and the linguistic content of the written report to communicate fashion in distinct ways, the relationship between these two structures was still very much under negotiation and thus difficult to study in isolation. 'A Description of the Newest Dress' submitted under the pseudonym 'Patronessa R.' to the May 1775 issue expresses anxiety about the communicative ability of the written description of fashion. Fearing that her description may not be 'quite intelligible' Patronessa accompanies her description with

---

83 Hunter, p. 107.
a drawing which she hopes may more clearly 'illustrate my meaning'. The editor shares the contributor's fears, referring to the article as 'somewhat obscure', forcing him to commission the accompanying engraving despite considerable expense. But the editor does not dismiss written reports on fashion out of hand, however, perhaps because the expense of engravings dictated that written descriptions were the only viable option for regular features on dress. After slighting the obscurity of the Patronessa's description, the editor proudly announces a subsequent article inserted to convey 'a more general description of the fashions, from a fair hand, who has for some time reigned unrivalled in [t]his department.'

Even so 'unrivalled' a writer upon fashion does not escape editorial comment, however. Following the very matter-of-fact description of 'Ladies Dress for May' the editor remarks,

'We are obliged to this correspondent for resuming her pen, and we hope she shall watch every minute alteration in the female dress, and transmit her observations as early as possible in the month, that our patronesses at a distance from the capital, may have their curiosity satisfied without being tortured by suspense or rendered uneasy by too long expectation.'

Similarly in 1780, the editor comments that he is 'not a little obliged to our correspondent for assuming her pen, in favouring us with an account of the variations in female dress', but tempers this obligation by adding that he hopes 'he shall have no cause to lament her want of punctuality'. The editor's fears were clearly justified. Several months elapse before the fashion reports resume; a silence which the

---

contributor argues has been occasioned by 'the little alterations in dress for these last four months'. Her argument apparently carries little weight with the editor, however, who with a characteristic blend of graciousness and admonition entreats that since the correspondent's 'silence is a great mortification to our readers, her punctuality in future must add much to their pleasure and improvement in this necessary department'. The mixture of flattery and criticism that colours the editorial comments accompanying such fashion reports characterises the approach of the magazine to fashion in general: at once yielding to its attractions and attacking its unreliability and inconstancy; praising its charms yet presenting itself as sufficiently discriminating to avoid becoming fashion's victim. Thus even while the magazine reports on the latest styles of dress and undress, it implicitly criticises, and through criticism regulates, the images it gives to its readers.

In the absence of editorial comment, editorial decisions may have affected how fashion reports were read. A report on 'Fashionable Dresses for April 1783' immediately follows an installment of 'The Female Reformer' entitled 'Fashion's The Word', and which criticises the 'great absurdity, for ladies to follow the fashions'. The next month's report, which comments that 'riding habits [are] much worn in the morning', is likewise preceded by 'The Matron', which includes a reader's condemnation of the fashion for wearing riding habits, a trend which the reader argues masculinises women. Precisely whether such strategies were directly deployed to temper the impact of fashion reports is unclear, as is the effect of such editorial

88 LM, 11 (January 1780), 'To Our Correspondents', no page number.
decisions. They would, however, seem to support Jacqueline Pearson's assertion that the *Lady's* constructed alternative female readers and supported divergent readings.\textsuperscript{90} For those 'determined not to give up their darling follies', the magazine would allow its readers to indulge their love of all things fashionable; to those whose 'prejudices were not so strong', it might provide women with access to the fashionable world whilst offering a cautionary reminder of its dangers.

Perhaps most importantly, the magazine constructed a third reader, one who did not simply passively accept or reject fashion's dominance in the privacy of her own reading, but who would actively take part in the debates set up by the magazine in her own contributions. An article entitled 'Fashion', a purportedly true account written by a grocer attacking the ridiculous and financially devastating efforts his family make to be fashionable, attracted a vehement response from a female reader. A 'Reply to Artichoke Pulse', the pseudonym of the author of 'Fashion', was published one month after the original article in September 1782:

\begin{quote}
I have taken up my pen to entreat your aid and assistance, to repel [sic] the number of attacks made on different parts of our dress. It appears a subject of sufficient consequence, for every mortal that can hold a pen. I have often heard the haughty masters of the creation declare, 'it is a matter the most trifling, for the ladies to have a knowledge of writing.' — And pray Madam, had we ever so glorious an opportunity of retorting on them; when alas! their eloquence, — their abilities, can be applied to no nobler purpose, than ridiculing those they ought to protect from it?\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

The anonymous writer offers a perceptive reading of many of the contradictions that characterise criticisms of dress in the *Lady's Magazine* and the periodical press at large. Male writers on dress frequently ridicule fashion's inconsequentiality, yet the

\textsuperscript{90} Pearson, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{91} *LM*, 13 (September 1782), pp. 475-476.
vehemence of their arguments, and the sheer number of articles on fashion, attest to its perceived significance. The reader also sees through the chivalric strategies through which many male writers on fashion claimed to educate women against a misplaced love of fashion. Such criticisms insult the intelligence of women readers, the writer of the 'Reply' argues, particularly 'when the wits' assume the 'characters of Green Grocers' to 'insult us, and speak of our hoops, and other parts of our dress, as freely as they exercise their authority over the hostlers at a country inn'. If men decry fashion, like female writing, as 'trifling', then women must counter these insinuations by using the magazine as a forum in which to express written justifications of their 'partiality' to dress.

The 'Reply' constitutes a radical attempt to play men at their own game, and an implicit acknowledgement on the part of the Lady's Magazine that its readers can be both 'partial' to fashion, yet rational, accomplished women. Ultimately, however, the writer's attack upon critiques of female dress is frustratingly muted by a more conservative anti-fashion argument. While the writer clearly reproaches the attacks made upon female dress in the original article, she also has some sympathy with the class concerns the article also raised. Despite championing a woman's right to the 'attainment of dress', she confines this attainment 'to those whose fortune and connections have a right to assume it', concluding that she hopes 'never to see them [hooped-petticoats] arrive at such a pitch, as when servants in the country used to attend the tea-tables in as large ones as ever graced the heroine of a tragedy'. Just as fashion plates and reports are qualified by condemmatory articles and editorial
comment, so here too fashion is restrained at the moment it is allowed to justify itself. Though the writer questions the tactics and perverse logic of many of the criticisms of female dress evidenced in contributions to the magazine, she concludes with an assertion that rehearses one of the most prevalent criticisms of dress both within the *Lady's Magazine* and beyond: fear of social emulation.

The magazine, it seems, always has the last word on fashion, even in contributions by its readers. For though the magazine's simultaneous dissemination and condemnation of fashion essentially offered its readers a choice, as exemplified by the young woman in the 1780 frontispiece, the magazine persistently suggested through editorial strategy that there was only one choice if women wanted to preserve a stable and happy home, family, even nation. If the magazine presented itself as a discursive forum for issues of female morality, then it was one in which the conclusions were pre-given and already known. This argument is perhaps best illustrated by a two-part article in the July and August issues of 1789, 'On Dress, A Conversation Piece'. The article is presented as an overheard conversation between the fashionable Clarinda, 'an elderly philosopher, with a portion of the cynic in him' called Mr Darnley, and the rational gentleman Charles. The conversational debate between the three principal protagonists voices many of the arguments surrounding fashion which had appeared in the publication's pages since its first issue. The most hostile condemnations are voiced by Darnley, who perceives fashion as a danger to health, 'a trespass on the symmetry of nature', and fashionable women as 'the slaves of mantuamakers and milliners, who impose any thing upon you as new, that tends to the

---

92 *LM*, 13 (September 1782), p. 476.
consumption of an article they may have on hand too long.93 The pomposity of Darnley's comments makes both himself and his criticisms seem ridiculous. As Charles points out, the logical conclusion of Darnley's comments would be the banishing of all articles of clothing which are not 'absolutely necessary', and with this the banishment of luxury, a necessary social evil which acts as a spur to industry. By contrast, Clarinda's arguments against condemnations of fashion seem altogether more reasonable than the counter-arguments of the elderly cynic. Like the writer of the earlier 'Reply', Clarinda notes the flaws of fashion's critics. Fashion may be irrational, but very few of its critics have countered it with the same kind of 'rational method [...] that is applied to other subjects'. Writers caution against 'excess in dress' yet fail 'to lay down rules for dress [...] rather telling us what we ought not, than what we ought to do'. Dresses may at times appear 'fantastic', but since fashions are continually changing it is not possible they 'should always change for the better'. Inevitably 'disproportions' occur, she argues, but fashion repairs itself: the fickleness which so many of its critics condemn also ensures that fashion swiftly replaces its errors. To Charles' comments that fashion should not simply be adopted 'because it is new' but rather because it accords with 'true taste', Clarinda points out that 'true taste' is as 'variable, uncertain [and] inconstant' as fashion itself. True taste also presumes, she argues, some 'supreme judges of taste' whose opinion represents the true standard. But to whom can society look for a universal standard in dress when critics often condemn the styles of 'People of rank' and the interested views of 'milliners and mantua-makers alike'.

Clarinda's arguments in favour of fashion win through in the first article. Charles concludes that without variations in taste there would be no variations in female appearance, effectively forcing women into an undesirable uniformity. But just as the 'Reply' to Artichoke Pulse justifies fashion only to subsequently limit and qualify this justification, so the concluding part of 'Dress: A Conversation Piece' tempers the positive images of fashion voiced in the first. The 'Conversation' ends with the rational, arbitrating voice of Charles, who, having addressed the individual pro- and anti-fashion arguments, draws them together to conservatively pronounce that while 'the ornamenting of a person is no crime, it ought to be done with that eye to simplicity which is the chief ornament of all the works of nature and art'. Charles concludes:

> beauty is not a permanent possession, that age and ugliness will come on in spite of all our art, and that nothing can prevent the decrepitude of the one, nor the appearance of the other, but that virtue which never dies, and that sweetness of temper which for ever gives beauty. It may be necessary to comply with the fashions, as not to discover the pride of singularity, but to be the slave of foppery in dress, to consider it as the great duty of life, in a word, to value ourselves upon it, is unworthy of a rational creature.⁹⁴

Like the magazine itself, the 'Conversation piece' affords fashion a voice only to mute that voice by an overwhelming commitment to rationality, reason and restraint.

Superficially antithetical to the ideals of virtuous femininity periodicals, pocket-books and magazines sought to construct, dress and fashion are imbued with a profoundly vexed status in eighteenth-century serial publications. Dress is frequently placed at the periphery of a woman's charms, while elsewhere an appropriate

perception and deployment of dress is determined an essential characteristic of the morally desirable woman. Dress is decried as trivial, yet is a sufficiently vital subject to occupy a startling proportion of the pages of periodicals and magazines throughout the eighteenth century. No matter how many articles on fashion and dress appeared in the periodical press there always seemed to be more to be said upon the matter. Like fashion itself, arguments on dress were endlessly re-invented in different forms and guises ranging from the practical to the fantastic. Amidst the mixed messages the magazine sent its readers regarding fashion, one thing apparently remained certain, however: dress could not simply be disseminated, but had to be contained and managed through a variety of covert and overt strategies. In its increasing emphasis upon the everyday lives and concerns of women, the Lady's Magazine, like the pocket book before it, privileged fashion in a way its periodical predecessors had not. While it simultaneously satiated and created a desire for information on fashion the Lady's Magazine developed innovative editorial strategies to contain dress within an ideological framework which privileged the mind above the body, the restrained over the unruly and reason above the irrational. In the process it sought, like the sentimental novel, to redefine morality as the new fashion. However, the magazine had to resignedly accept that for those readers whose 'prejudices [we]re not so strong', there are others whose 'ears [we]re shut against conviction'. In its containment of fashion, exercised through the choice of published contributions and through editorial interpolation and juxtaposition, magazines had at their disposal specific strategies to regulate fashion and dress which the novelist or conduct book writer did not. Their attempts to analogise the virtuous mind and virtuously adorned body were, however,
no less predictable than those made by novelists such as Richardson. If periodicals, pocket-books and magazines essentially offered readers a choice between folly and wisdom, like the woman of the 1780 frontispiece, they could but hope that she might be guided to make the right choice.
Figure 1 Frontispiece illustration to the 1780 *Lady's Magazine*
Figure 2 Frontispiece illustration to the 1776 Lady's Magazine
Figure 3 Frontispiece illustration to the 1782 *Lady's Magazine*
Figure 4: Frontispiece engravings to *The Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book for 1762*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appointments</th>
<th>Memorandum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money receiv'd</td>
<td>Money paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 Memorandum Table from *The Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book for 1753*
Realising the Morally Transparent Fashion System: Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* and the Magdalen House for Penitent Prostitutes

On this article [of your dress] your judgment [sic.] will be seen in joining frugality and simplicity together; in being never fond of finery; in carefully distinguishing between what is glaring, and what is genteel; in preserving elegance with the plainest habit; in wearing costly array but seldom, and always with ease [...] Were a system of this kind to prevail, I cannot help thinking, that the effects would be beneficial and happy. (James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* [1765])

Dr. Fordyce's sermons have long made a part of a young woman's library; nay, girls at school are allowed to read them; but I should instantly dismiss them from my pupil's if I wished to strengthen her understanding [...] In declamatory periods Dr. Fordyce spins out Rousseau's eloquence; and in most sentimental rant, details his opinions respecting the female character, and the behaviour which woman ought to assume to render her lovely. (Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [1792])

Blending the rhetoric of the pulpit with the paternalistic prose of the conduct manual, Reverend James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) was an acknowledged success. Written out of a professedly 'unfeigned regard for the Female Sex; [and] a fervent zeal for the best interests of society' (p. iv), the *Sermons* outlines, at considerable length, a feminine ideal which, in established conduct book tradition, promises to improve the female character and concomitantly repair the nation's moral fabric. Unlike countless other conduct manual writers, however, Fordyce disregarded the form of the familiar letter as a mode of address and instead turned to the heart-felt sentiments and grand rhetorical flourishes characteristic of the sermon. In addition to its more noble aspirations, the *Sermons* constituted an intriguing generic and literary experiment designed to satisfy the author's 'secret desire [...] of trying whether that style

---

1 James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), 3rd edn, 2 vols (London: A. Millar and T. Cadell, J. Dodsley and J. Payne, 1766), I, pp. 73-74. All quotations are taken from the first volume. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.

of preaching, which to him appears, on the whole, adapted to an auditory above the vulgar rank, might succeed on a subject of this nature' (p. iv).

The success of the Sermons was unquestionable. It received lengthy and ecstatic appraisals in both the Monthly and Critical Review of 1766 and ran to fourteen editions by 1813. But the Sermons, like its author, was not without its detractors, and is perhaps best known to modern day readers through the filter of some its fiercest critics. An anonymous riposte entitled Fordyce Delineated: A Satire (1765?) followed swiftly on the original publication's heels in order to object to the 'love sick priest[s]' 'flimsy long epistle'. Less virulent, yet no less pointed criticism was expressed by Jane Austen's Lydia Bennet, who suffers just three pages of the work from its sanctimonious and solemn mouthpiece, Mr Collins, before desperately interjecting with some Meryton gossip. After expressing his amazement that so 'advantageous' and instructive a text should arouse no interest in his young cousin, Mr Collins tacitly concedes defeat in his pedagogical project by leaving 'the girls to their trifling amusements' while he plays backgammon with their father. The most vehement and sustained critique of the Sermons, however, appears in Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). Significantly, Wollstonecraft's various objections to the Sermons fall under the

---

4 Despite the popularity of his work, Fordyce's personal popularity appears to have waned later in his career. The circumstances of his decline are obscure, but the ruinous financial speculations of his brother Alexander, which affected some of James' acquaintance, as well as a quarrel with Thomas Toller who preached at the same chapel in Monkwell Street as Fordyce, and which effectively split the congregation, seem to have played significant roles. DNB.
single umbrella term 'sentimental'. The text is characterised as a pernicious 'sentimental rant', composed of 'mellifluous precepts' and written in an 'affected style' (p. 194). Like Rousseau, whose flawed sensibility led him to become 'impassioned' in *Emile* 'when he should have reasoned' (p. 192), Fordyce is condemned in the *Vindication* for his 'love-like phrases of pumped up passion' calculated to cajole women 'into virtue by artful flattery and sexual compliments' (p. 196). Worse still, Wollstonecraft laments, the sentimental affectation of Fordyce's prose encouraged female readers to mirror the falsity and artificiality of its rhetoric in their own characters. Adopting the sentimental strategy of appealing to its readers' feelings — 'as if they had only feelings' (p. 196) — Wollstonecraft fears that the *Sermons* would become a self-fulfilling prophecy, encouraging women to aspire to a feminine ideal which privileges feeling, denies reason and in which the highest aim is the assumption of characteristics and behavioral traits which will merely 'render [them] lovely' to men.

As Syndy McMillen Conger has argued, the characteristics of Fordyce's ideal woman appear the very antithesis to the feminine virtues championed in the *Vindication*. Where Fordyce emphasises physical grace, Wollstonecraft extols mental grace; where he encourages women to aspire to a uniform feminine ideal, she stresses female individuality; where he perceives an 'angel', she sees an 'ass' (p. 198). Yet despite these antagonisms, Wollstonecraft's text betrays a shared fundamental conviction with Fordyce's work: that women can only ever command regard and esteem from sincere

---

7 More detailed accounts of Mary Wollstonecraft's complex relationship to sentimentalism can be found in Syndy McMillen Conger, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Language of Sensibility* (Rutherford, Madison and Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1994)
virtues that come from within, rather than through superficial physical and sartorial graces displayed without. Though 'beauty, gentleness, etc., etc., may gain a heart', Wollstonecraft writes, 'esteem, the only lasting affection, can alone be obtained by virtue supported by reason' (p. 199). In his second sermon 'On Modesty of Apparel' Fordyce similarly argues, though without Wollstonecraft's faith in female rationality, that mere 'splendor will strike [men] at first; but on reflexion they will soon discover, that splendor of itself, like every other idol, is nothing. On the other hand, where Simplicity, the sister of Truth, appears, the attraction is eternal' (p. 70). Wollstonecraft too, extols 'simplicity' as one of the hallmarks of unaffected virtue and grace:

> This mental grace, not noticed by vulgar eyes, often flashes across a rough countenance, and irradiating every feature, shows simplicity and independence of mind. It is then we read characters of immortality in the eye, and see the soul in every gesture, though when at rest, neither the face nor limbs may have much beauty to recommend them: or the behaviour, anything peculiar to attract universal attention. (p. 195)

Here the *Vindication* is closest to the rhetoric of the text it condemns, only for Wollstonecraft to swiftly emphasise the ideological dissonance between the works in the following sentence:

> The mass of mankind, however, look for more tangible beauty [...] But, to have done with remarks that are in some measure desultory, though naturally excited by the subject. (p. 195)

Given Wollstonecraft's partial dismissal of her comment on man's search for tangible beauty as a 'desultory' digression in what is a notoriously digressive work, it is easy to overlook the pertinence of this argument to her criticism of Fordyce's text. Far from deviating from the concerns at hand, however, this sentence epitomises Wollstonecraft's critique of the *Sermons* and identifies the crux of its objectionable sentimentalism.

---

Despite his superficial championing of inner virtue over external charm, Fordyce, like the 'mass of mankind' Wollstonecraft suggests, looks upon women with 'vulgar eyes', searching for 'tangible beauty'.

Structured around St. Paul's demand that women should 'adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety' (*I Timothy ii* 9-10), Fordyce's *Sermons* privileges dress in a way in which no other contemporary conduct manual did. In his repeated encouragement for women to dress in such a manner as to join 'frugality and simplicity together' and to preserve 'elegance with the plainest habit', Fordyce effectively attempted to prescribe a morally transparent fashion system, in which dress and outward appearance could tangibly and unequivocally communicate moral character. Fordyce's emphasis upon the legibility of the body (in this instance the adorned body) firmly locates his work, as Wollstonecraft implies, within the ideological and literary tradition of sentimentalism and its proponents' attempts to find sentiment's most appropriate dress. Yet in its systematic prescription of femininity, the *Sermons* constitutes a more explicit attempt to analogue the sartorial and sentimental body than Haywood's vision of the virtuously adorned Betsy Thoughtless, or Richardson's flawed vision of Pamela in her homespun gown and petticoat. Furthermore, in unequivocally analogue worth and appearance, Fordyce implicitly promises to eliminate the kind of moral confusion caused by a woman's deployment of dress witnessed in the backlash against Richardson's work. Subsidiary to its desire to educate women in the appropriate articulation of their moral character, Fordyce's *Sermons* will dispel such errors of judgement and perception by educating readers in the act of correctly discerning the

\*McMillen Conger, pp. 121-122.*
genuineness of a woman's character in the light, or in spite, of her dress. In Wollstonecraft's reading, the Sermons realises precisely the opposite of its professed intentions. In seeking to analogise physical appearance and moral essence, Fordyce, like Rousseau and Dr Gregory, has further divorced the two, reducing women to mere outward show and denying them a rational, virtuous soul. Rather than reforming women from the inside out, as Wollstonecraft would, Fordyce's assertion of the need to cultivate a virtuous appearance futilely attempts, she suggests, a reformation from the outside in. This chapter will examine Fordyce's discursive construction of the morally transparent fashion system in relation to the literary, ideological and theological contexts out of which it emerged, before turning to the question of how the text's very assertion of a tangible system of morally-legible femininity rendered it suspect and vulnerable to precisely the kinds of corruption Fordyce sought to eradicate. After a detailed exploration of the nature and character of this fashion system in the abstract and strictly rhetorical sphere of the Sermons, this chapter will examine how such concerns achieved a practical, though no less problematic, manifestation in the charitable institution of the Magdalen House for Penitent Prostitutes.

* * *

---

9 My use of this term is not accidental. It is intended to operate on a literal level, evoking Fordyce's telling description of his sartorial blueprint as a 'system', but also to evoke Barthes' sense of the tripartite structure of clothing as the image, the written and the real. Fordyce's system, I argue, hovers precariously between written articulation and the real, both structures refusing to translate fully into the other.
Reminiscent of the fevered rhetoric deployed in countless pamphlets circulating during the Reformation of Manners campaigns at the beginning of the century, Fordyce introduces his *Sermons to Young Women* as a response to the 'fashionable' 'contagion of vice and folly' infecting the 'characters and manners [of] the Gay of this metropolis' (p. vii). Though Fordyce deems the problem of immorality widespread, his solution is localised in the figure of the female reader. In order to satisfy 'the best interests of society', Fordyce looks to the 'Female Sex', 'whose dispositions of deportment will ever have a mighty influence' upon the social fabric (p. iv). The thirteen sermons that follow set out a detailed blueprint of virtuous femininity, which, if adhered to, promises both the spiritual rewards of a life guided by Christianity and the earthly rewards of a happy marriage. In its emphasis upon the domestic woman as the locus of moral and societal reform there is little to distinguish Fordyce's *Sermons* from innumerable conduct books and advice manuals for women published from the late seventeenth century onwards. What distinguishes the work, however, is its programmatic and pragmatic prescription of female character based upon the Pauline ideal of the morally-adorned woman: 'I will — that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works' (p. 3). Apparently fearing that this overt condemnation of elaborate apparel might alienate female readers, Fordyce is at pains to point out that 'the passage of St. Paul which I have selected for my text is not to be understood strictly and absolutely, where it seems to condemn female ornament in general' (p. 6). Instead, Fordyce offers his own paraphrase of the Pauline epistle:
I would exhort, and even enjoin christian women, always to dress with decency and moderation; never to go beyond their circumstances, nor aspire above their station, so as to preclude or hinder acts of mercy; not to value themselves on their dress, or despise others more meanly habited; never to spend too much time or thought on the embellishment of the body, but always to prefer the graces of the mind, modesty, meekness, prudence, piety, with all virtuous and charitable occupations, all beautiful and useful accomplishments suited to their rank and condition. These are the chief ornaments of their sex; these will render them truly lovely Women; and as Christians, these will peculiarly become them. (p. 7)

Fordyce's amelioration of St. Paul's pithy tenet expands significantly beyond the parameters of the original text. Modesty is understood here not merely as moral 'decency', but as a social responsibility to exist within the economic and class boundaries of one's station. Shamefacedness and sobriety encompass a catalogue of mental graces, here, including prudence, piety and, most objectionable of all in Wollstonecraft's reading, 'meekness'. Perhaps the single greatest departure from the original doctrine, however, is Fordyce's attempt to demystify and de-problematise the elusively symbolic image of a woman whose clothing acts as a signifier of her moral worth. Though he opines that women should dress with equal modesty and decency to that in their hearts, Fordyce appears to read St. Paul's epistle metaphorically rather than literally here: it is better for women to seek to adorn their character with 'beautiful and useful accomplishments' than to adorn their bodies with beautiful yet ornamental trivialities.

Despite such attempts to underplay the mystically symbolic analogies between dress and virtue implied in the original epistle, Fordyce proceeds to re-inscribe these correspondences by repeatedly evoking tangible, external incarnations of female morality:

'Were Virtue,' said an ancient philosopher, 'to appear amongst men in visible shape, what vehement desires would she enkindle!' Virtue exhibited without affectation by a lovely young person, of improved understanding and gentle manners, may be said to appear with the most
alluring aspect, surrounded by the Graces; and that breast must be cold indeed which does not take fire at the sight. (p. 21)

Whilst the *Sermons* warns women who seek to 'captivate [men] by an outside only' that they can only ever attract the most superficial and base of lovers, it does not deny the importance of physical appearance. If conduct books taught women, as Vivien Jones has argued, to 'create themselves as objects of male desire', clothing was something of a double-edged sword. To be marriageable a woman had to be desirable, but to seek admiration through the artifice of dress was to risk contempt. Fordyce's resolution of this double bind lies in seeking to persuade women that virtue is the 'most alluring aspect' they can wear. This strategy of regulating appearance by appealing to a woman's desire to cultivate 'Honourable Love' and a happy marriage is largely rhetorical, however. Elsewhere the text seems far less concerned with safeguarding the happiness of its female readers than in securing that of their potential suitors, duped by the surface veneer of physical and sartorial beauty.

The *Sermons* remains unclear whether society's moral decline is to blame for the lack of sartorial distinction between the moral and the immoral, or if clothing's power to level the good and the bad is responsible for this moral decline. What is certain, however, is that dress plays a particularly pernicious role in a vicious circle that perpetuates vice: moral laxity allows women to dress is such a way as to distort their character and falsely compensate for their moral ugliness, while sartorial encryption precipitates widespread immorality. In order to reverse this process of moral decline, enacted and facilitated by dress, Fordyce evokes an ideal vision of a sartorially codified society:
according to every rule of duty and decorum, there ought ever to be a manifest difference between 
the attire of a Virtuous Woman, and that of one who has renounced every title to the honourable 
name. It were indecent, it is unnecessary, to explain this difference. In some respects it is 
sufficiently discerned by the eye of the public; though I am sorry to say, not sufficiently attended 
to by the generality of women themselves. If, in other respects, it be not seen, or do not strike; the 
cause I apprehend, must be that declension from the strictness of morals, which was hinted at a 
moment before; a declension that would have shocked pagans themselves, in the purest state of 
ancient manners, when prostitutes were compelled to wear a particular garb, by which they were 
distinguished from women of virtue. (pp. 46-47)

Epitomising the Sermons' vision of the morally-legible society and the power of sartorial 
signification, here dress acts not as cover for the female body but rather as a veil, 
diaphanously revealing the soul — a 'comely habit [...] worn as the sober, yet transparent 
veil of a more comely mind' (p. 76).

In analogising the adorned and sentimental body, here, the Sermons effectively 
denies female subjectivity by rendering women's bodies, and concomitantly their minds 
and hearts, perpetually available for interpretation:

You will be always ready to receive your friends, without seeming to be caught, or being at all 
disconcerted on account of your dress. How seldom is that the case amongst the flutterers of the 
age! I wish we could say, amongst them only. For young ladies of more sobriety to be found so 
often slovenly, I might have said downright squalid and nasty, when no visitors are expected, is 
most peculiarly shameful. I cannot express the contempt and the disgust I feel, when I think of it. 
I will not think of it. (pp. 76-77)

The Sermons' proposed fashion system seeks to render women permanently public beings 
whose clothed bodies are tailored to be read by the observer. In such a society clothing 
offers no protection from the male gaze; on the contrary, it acts as a conduit to penetrate 
the surface of the body to the soul that lies beneath. As such, though undoubtedly born of 
a desire to suppress and regulate female sexuality, Fordyce's system is implicitly sexual. 
The Sermons' representation of women as essentially squalid, nasty and slovenly echoes

10 Vivien Jones, ed., Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity (London and New
late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century misogynist satire — particularly that of Rochester and Swift — with its characteristic blend of pathological disgust and sexual fascination aroused by the sight of the female body. As in Swift's 'Lady's Dressing Room' (1732), contemplation upon a woman dressing in the *Sermons* inextricably excites a mental undressing of the woman that is both repugnant yet titillatory. Like Rousseau's Sophie, whose 'simple adornment is put on to be removed bit by bit in the imagination', the *Sermons* seeks to clothe women only that their bodies may be stripped of duplicity and artifice to their essential purity or baseness.

Unlike Rochester and Swift, however, Fordyce is concerned primarily not with the squalid depths that lie beneath the surface beauty of women — even while his text dwells on such images — but with the squalid surfaces that deck the bodies of virtuous, sober young women who follow fashion's dictates. Rather than seeking to reform all female readers, the *Sermons* tacitly accepts that there will always be immoral women, and, as such, predominantly targets those females possessed 'of worth and sense', rather than those already lost to reason and moral redress. A more feasible proposition than simply eradicating female immorality, Fordyce suggests, is the sartorial codification of society in such a manner that virtue may be unmistakably discerned and communicated, while vice is rendered unambiguously manifest. This emphasis upon the visible signs of social morality locates the *Sermons* within a long tradition of eighteenth-century reformist writing, which stressed the palpability of vice in the streets and public places of

---


11 This satirical tradition has important ramifications for the representation of women and dress throughout eighteenth-century literature, as I will explore in more detail in the following chapter on Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*. See below, pp. 272-285.
the city. In his *Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments* (1755) drawn from his own novels, Richardson justified the necessity of his work on the grounds that it is but 'too visible, that immorality and irreligion still obtain in the lives of many, and, perhaps, (dreadful thought!) of the majority'.

Perhaps the most visible, and hence most pernicious, symbol of immorality in the period was the figure of the prostitute, who acted as a walking reminder of the corruptibility and corrupting influence of the female body. It was precisely the prostitute's manifest availability and her transformation of the 'private world of sexuality and domesticity' into the 'public world of commerce' that made her, as Vivien Jones argues, such a disturbing figure.

In 'almost every street', Saunders Welch sensationally wrote in 1758, visitors and residents of London were greeted with the sight of 'women publickly exposing themselves at the windows and doors of bawdy-houses, like beasts in a market for publick sale, with language, dress, and gesture too offensive to mention'.

When philanthropic attention turned to the figure of the prostitute during the mid-eighteenth century, various individuals professed, superficially at least, to look beyond the mere surface of her corrupted body to the complex social, familial and economic circumstances which produced her.

---

16 In fact, as I will go on to argue, rather than seeing beyond the corrupted body of the prostitute, these individuals problematically focus intensely upon the body in order that it may be reformed and re-codified.
compelling prostitutes to wear a particular dress by which they could be known, suggested in his call for a 'manifest difference between the attire of a Virtuous Woman, and that of one who has renounced every title to the honourable name', recalls an earlier, less sympathetic, view of the prostitute, perhaps best exemplified by Defoe. In *Some Considerations upon Street-Walkers* (1726[?]) Defoe suggests that prostitution is, as Bradford Mudge argues, a 'necessary evil — an evil that must be controlled because it will never be eradicated'. Pre-empting Fordyce, Defoe looks back approvingly to attempts made to regulate prostitution by the Jews and Greeks:

> they [Jews] took a just and political Care, that the Women who were to continue their Race down to Futurity, should never be a Shame or an Obliquy to their Posterity: But yet to satisfy unruly Appetites which could not be restrained, we find them tolerating Captive Women and Foreigners in the Exercise of a Scandalous Vocation; and therefore, all Harlots among them, were distinguish'd by their Habit, which was Foreign; and if any of their own Women fell into this infamous Way, it was under the Disguise of a Stranger.  

Likewise, 'Grecian Harlots were [...] distinguished by their Garments from the Modest', and ordered 'in Contradistinction to their Virtuous Women, to wear Gaudy and Flower'd Apparel [...] as a slave by her Stigma'. The symbolic analogies between the 'Harlot' and her clothes established by such state regulation were apparent for all to see. Jewish prostitutes wore the 'Disguise of a Stranger' to symbolise their strangeness to prescribed ideals of femininity and conventional morality as upheld in the institution of marriage. Similarly, the gaudiness of the Greek prostitute's 'Flower'd Apparel' connoted her no more than superficial beauty and the gaudiness of her soul.  

---

19 Defoe, pp. 11-12.  
20 While Defoe's proposal for a system of sartorially codifying prostitutes is designed to designate women of low moral status, the original systems in Greece and Rome may not have worked in this way. As Hilary Evans has argued, in the more permissive ancient Greece prostitutes were perceived as socially rather than
condemnation of prostitution, Defoe's *Considerations*, likes Fordyce's *Sermons*, finds a curious reassurance in the offensive appearance of the prostitute: the visual manifestation of her vice ensures that she can be avoided by the virtuous. Unlike Defoe, however, Fordyce is more concerned with the codification of moral rather than immoral women, since, he argues, the 'discerning eye' will always be able to see through the 'gaudy apparatus of female vanity' to the immodest desires it masks (p. 16). Virtue, by contrast, remains more elusive, as women's blind adherence to fashion ensures that they may appear 'butterflies one day, and slatterns the next' (p. 76).

Since immodest women are lost to moral redress, and since their self-evidently slovenly appearance offers an expedient indication of their moral status, the *Sermons* puts its energies into reforming the dress of virtuous women. At various points in the text, such a system seems as unnecessary as returning to the sartorial legislation of prostitutes outlined in Defoe's work. Sharing, with much sentimental literature, a conviction in the body as a faithful communicator of moral character, the text sporadically reassures readers that a woman's virtue or vice is inevitably inscribed upon her physical appearance:

supposing a young lady to be deeply possessed with a regard for 'whatsoever things are pure, venerable, and of a good report,' it will lead to decorum spontaneously, and flow with unstudied propriety through every part of her attire and demeanour. (p. 55)

Here appearance and virtue appear to exist in complete symbiosis as virtue naturally effuses out of the female body to inhabit a woman's dress and demeanour. Elsewhere, however, the text offers a far less assured account of the relationship between body, morally inferior. See Hilary Evans, *The Oldest Profession: An Illustrated History of Prostitution* (London; Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1979), p. 35.
character and appearance. The *Sermons*’ ideal formulation of the morally-legible body is fraught with unresolved tensions. The text’s proposed system of sartorial legibility rests uneasily upon a conditional ‘ought’. Though there *ought* to be a visible difference between virtuous and immoral women, 'according to every rule of duty and decorum', in the real world, where fashion stands as one of the delineators of social status, and where financial, rather than moral, assets are the stock in trade, such distinctions, the text implies, are eroded. As such, the task of the *Sermons* is to dissociate dress and fashion, or, more accurately, to develop an anti-fashion (rather like Pamela's homespun clothes) whose virtue lies in its rejection of the wastefulness, vanity and instability for which fashion stands.

In its attempt to find virtue's most appropriate dress, Fordyce's *Sermons* contributed to an important subtext of eighteenth-century literature evidenced in the works of writers such as Richardson, Sarah Scott, Frances Burney and Goethe.²¹ Sarah Scott's *History of George Ellison* (1766), since it was published only one year after the first edition of Fordyce's popular work, offers a particularly intriguing counterpoint to the *Sermons to Young Women* in its outline of a morally improving and communicative dress code. Amongst her various philanthropic projects, Lady Ellison devotes attention to the dress of the women in the local community. She entreats women to 'substitute waistcoats' for the confinement of stays during pregnancy and 'distribut[es] dresses for newborn infants that did not require one pin' in order to prevent children's bodies becoming their parents' 'pincushions', displaying 'more [...] wounds than the anatomical figure in an
Lady Ellison extends her program of dress reform to the local young women. Each girl 'who at fifteen was sober, modest, industrious, and cleanly' is given a scarlet ribbon, to be worn on Sundays as a visible testimony to her moral character. This system of reward soon becomes a 'badge of great honour' to which all females aspire, and the wearing of which encourages women to keep a perpetual check upon their behaviour:

If youthful levity at any time led these girls to be too free in her conduct, if she appeared slatternly in her dress, was remiss of her business, or neglected going to church, if her friend asked her what was become of her ribbon, the recollection never failed producing amendment.23

As in Fordyce's Sermons this form of moral and sartorial regulation is made more palatable for the young women by the assurance that their more modest appearance makes them more desirable wives. Lady Ellison's dress code becomes so trusted and reliable a system of connoting moral fibre that if 'a young man was inclined to marry, he was directed more by the top knot than by the face of his choice of wife, that being the first object of his attention'.24

While the Sermons to Young Women advocates a system of moral and sartorial codification comparable to those outlined by Defoe, Richardson and Scott, when read against these works, the Sermons' complete absence of specificity is conspicuous. Eschewing the detailed description of Defoe's Considerations, Richardson's Pamela and Scott's George Ellison, Fordyce neither provides details of how such a system might have

24 Scott, pp. 197-198
operated in the past, or any concrete sense of how it might be realised in the present or future. Instead, the text's sartorial ideal is expressed through a series of abstract and elusive metonymies: of humble, plain, elegant and simple dress. Though, by the text's own admission, it might be 'indelicate' and 'unnecessary' to explain the difference between a virtuous and dishonourable woman, it might be necessary, and at the very least prudent, to articulate the manner in which these abstract characteristics might be made manifest and concrete in the tangible property of dress. This lack of material particularity appears symptomatic of what Nancy Armstrong has described as the conduct book's 'emptiness — a lack of what we today consider "real" information about the female subject and the object world that she is supposed to occupy'. When the conduct book focused upon the relationship between the female subject and the world around her, one of the most prevalent symbols of that 'object world', and the economic and moral threats it posed, was dress. Though writers such as Mary Astell, The Marquis of Halifax, Wetenhall Wilkes, Thomas Marriott, John Gregory, Sarah Pennington, Hester Chapone, Hannah More, Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft, to name but a few, include sections on dress in their advice to their readers, none offer a concrete sense of how virtue can be materialised in clothing. Part of the difficulty in conceiving of such a morally-communicative garb, immune from the taint of fashion, lies, Fordyce suggests, in the stranglehold fashion had taken upon social mores and manners:

'I will - that women adorn themselves in Modest Apparel' — in Modest Apparel, as opposed to that which is Indecent, and to that which is Vain: distinctions, whereof the theory, I must confess, it is in many cases not easy, and in some perhaps not practicable to settle with precision; such a powerful influence in those matters have custom and the opinion of the world. (p. 45)

Terms such as modesty and sobriety whose meanings were once solely prescribed within the context of Christianity have, the Sermons argues, been re-figured by the transient trends of fashion. So inverted has the moral system become, that true modesty can be construed as mere affectation. Indeed, it is precisely because fashion constantly redefines moral attributes, prizing certain behaviour and appearances one moment and others the next, that new and revised conduct books are perpetually needed to counter fashion's effect. As Thomas Marriott wrote in Female Conduct: Being an Essay on the Art of Pleasing (1775), 'Changes of Times, and Fashions, still demand/ New Lessons to instruct the Female Band'.

The challenge faced by Fordyce and other writers seeking to combat fashion's sway, is thus to divorce fashion from clothing in the minds of his readers; to establish a mode of dressing which can withstand the pressures and temptations to be fashionable and can be admired simply for its utility, rather than because it is à la mode. The hallmark of this ideal model of dress is 'simplicity': a recurrent though oblique ideal frequently deployed in counter-fashion attacks in the period. Simplicity, according to the Sermons, is 'the inseparable companion both of genuine grace, and of real modesty' (p. 55), the 'sister of Truth' and that 'which above every thing else touches and delights' (pp. 69-70). In its attempts to extend this moral imperative to incorporate a visual aesthetic of beauty to which women will aspire, Fordyce's Sermons strikingly rehearses arguments made in Wetenhall Wilkes' 1740 A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady. Adopting a more traditional conduct book format, Wilkes' work is presented as a letter

written to his niece, intended to safeguard the young woman's virtue during his travels abroad. Should his niece suspect that his concern for her future happiness stems from anxieties surrounding her 'future Conduct', Wilkes entreats that his advice is intended only as 'an affectionate Caution' (p. 14). Should she doubt this any further, the content of the letter, he suggests, will dispel her fears, for when such 'advice comes from the Heart, it is delivered in a certain Dress which cannot wear Disguise' (pp. 14-15). The sartorial metaphor, which appears on only the second page of the Letter, resonates throughout the rest of the text. Repeatedly images of appropriate and inappropriate dress are metaphorically evoked as symbols of desirable or unacceptable womanhood, or deployed, on a more literal level, in prescriptive advice on what women should and should not wear.

Dress operates upon three key levels in Wilkes' Letter: as a source of social and sexual anxiety, as a language through which to metaphorise and distinguish between genuine and affected female virtue, and, in anticipation of Fordyce's Sermons, as a potential resolution to the anxieties the text raises in its assertion that dress can render virtue visibly manifest. The Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice persistently warns against the raging fashion for vanity and the vanity inherent in contemporary fashion:

That Girl, who endeavours, by the Artifice of Dress, to attract the Admiration, to stir up languishing Desires, and to provoke the wanton Wishes of her gay Beholders is as guilty of breaking the Seventh Commandment, as the woman in the Gospel, that was taken in the Fact. (p. 78)

---

27 Wetenhall Wilkes, A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady. In which is digested into a new and familiar Method, a System of Rules and Information, to qualify the Fair Sex to be useful and happy in every State (Dublin: E. Jones, 1740), p. 14. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.
Wilkes' conception of female sexuality, like Fordyce's, is firmly located within a Christian tradition of original sin. The work opens with a description of the material world as a 'System of Bodies', but it is specifically the female body, as both cause and symptom of social and moral corruption, with which the text is concerned. Woman, born of Eve, is 'Dust and Ashes; her Body is weak and infirm, subject to Diseases, Decays, Death and Corruption' (p. 72), 'to human Frailties [and] Temptations' (p. 110). Anticipating the Sermons, the Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice attempts to reform this corrupt female body through re-clothing it in a garb of naturalised virtue. Just as Wilkes' epistolary sentiments are dressed in a language so pure that their morality cannot be disguised in the reader's eyes, so a woman should dress her body in such a manner as to transparently articulate her underlying virtue. As 'Tenderness, Friendship and Constancy drest in a simplicity of expression, recommend themselves by a more native Elegance', so is virtue best displayed by a dress which 'resemble[s] the Plainness and Simplicity of your Heart' (p. 110). Expensive dress is not, in itself, a 'Crime' since there is no inherent 'Harm in good Apparel'. Rather, the fault lies with the wearer who transforms the human and social need to be warmly and decorously clothed into an 'Extravagance, Pride and Folly' (p. 74). As such, Wilkes concludes, a woman who cultivates a fashionable exterior 'can never have an upright Mind [...] nor is it possible for a gawdy Outside [...] to have any thing wise or sedate within (p. 74).

Crucially, Wilkes cites St. Paul's epistle as a final authority for his attack upon 'vanity in dress', and as a justification for his proposals in favour of more simple, modest female attire:
A just, reasonable Modesty and native Simplicity of Looks, triumphs over all artificial Beauties [...] Women, adorn yourselves (says St. Paul) in modest Apparel, with Shame-facedness, &c. By this Word we are not to understand awkward Bashfulness; for that bespeaks the want of Good-Breeding and Politeness, but such a conscious Modesty as with becoming Assurance may very well meet in the same Person. (pp. 78-79)

Simplicity, Wilkes implies, is a more palatable and appropriate term for the biblical concept of 'shamedfacedness'. Freed of the original term's connotations of a virtue born of awkward innocence rather than studied politeness, 'simplicity' signifies a virtue that is both modest and conscious of its modesty. Like sensibility, 'simplicity' is a virtue that is both instinctive and refined. Yet despite Wilkes' assertion of a sartorial model in which simplicity of 'Dress resembles the Purity of [a woman's] Soul' (p. 75), the Letter, like Fordyce's Sermons, fails to articulate how such a system of correspondences might operate in material terms. Rather, the author's concept of a 'native Simplicity of Looks' is obliquely metaphorised as 'the Shades in Painting' which 'make those Colours look beautiful which without them would be too glaring' (p. 78). The apparent synonymy of sensibility and simplicity offers a suggestive reason for Wilkes' and Fordyce's failure to characterise their concept of simplicity beyond the level of abstraction. As Hannah More would suggest in her equally fraught characterisaton of sensibility, the need to textually define such instinctive virtues tacitly acknowledges that the reader does not possess them. If she does not instinctively harbour such characteristics, no amount of definition will suffice to instill these moral qualities: 'To those who know thee not no words can paint/ And those who know thee, know all words are faint.' To define simplicity would be to counter its effect, to reduce it to a set of artificial principles or traits which would undermine the artlessness which is its most fundamental and visible characteristic. In this

context, Wilkes' and Fordyce's failure to define simplicity's character seems less a flawed oversight than a judicious and conscious refusal.

If the character of 'simplicity', as outlined in these works, is to be ascertained, it must be judged by its effects rather than by a definition of its substance. Though the material characteristics of Fordyce's ideal of sartorial simplicity remain elusive, its consequences are clear. Were such a system of morally responsible and communicative fashion to hold sway, the Sermons argues, 'the effects would be beneficial and happy':

What sums would be saved, where they ought to be saved for more valuable ends! What sums would be kept at home, that now go abroad to enrich our most dangerous rivals! French gewgaws would give place to British manufactures. The ladies of this island, inferior to none in beauty would be the apes of none in dress. They would practise that species of patriotism, which is the most proper for their sex; they would serve their country in their own way. How many evils to the community, to private families, and to individuals would be prevented! If in some of the most expensive parts of female decoration fewer hands were employed, a much greater number on the other side would find exercise in cultivating an elegant propriety, and a beautiful diversity, through all the rest. (pp. 74-75)

In its attempt to reform female manners the Sermons assaults its readers on all rhetorical flanks. The consequences of eschewing fashion and embracing simplicity range far beyond the confines of the family household, since dress is an issue of national importance. In her recent study of representations of women in eighteenth-century commercial, political, domestic and literary life, Harriet Guest examines Fordyce's sense of the incompatibility of models of classical patriotism and feminine sensibility. Barring women from ancient, public forms of patriotic display, Fordyce proffers instead an image of patriotism which is properly feminine since it is enacted within the confines of the private household, though its effects will be felt in the national economy. By embracing

---

the simplicity of dress produced by British manufacture, rather than the elaborate 'gewgaws' produced across the Channel, women can serve 'their own country in their own way', through a kind of mercantile patriotism that would consolidate the nation's wealth. But it is not simply the national economy that will benefit; this particular form of patriotism will impact upon society's moral fabric in the peculiarly feminine strain of nurturing morality. The social and economic consequences of unemployment amongst those no longer needed to create elaborate costume under this new system will be more than offset, Fordyce suggests, by the general improvement in female morality attendant upon the adoption of simple, British attire.

Modest, virtuous, patriotic and British, sartorial simplicity seems to correspond to Nancy Armstrong's conception of 'inconspicuous consumption' as a defining characteristic of eighteenth-century bourgeois, domestic virtue. Like the conduct books she writes about, Armstrong's essay shies away from determining how inconspicuous consumption would have been materialised in the day-to-day lives of eighteenth-century readers, choosing instead to describe it in terms of abstract moral and economic qualities. If inconspicuous consumption, like 'simplicity', is difficult to connote in material terms, it is perhaps easier to describe in terms of what it is not. Although conspicuous consumption is a late nineteenth century concept, as formulated by Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), this mode of display offers illuminating insights into the social functions of dress dating as far back as the middle ages. Economic and social status can be connoted in various forms of display, Veblen argues, but none have, nor ever have had, the immediacy and efficacy of dress, since 'our apparel is always in evidence and
affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance'.\textsuperscript{30} The significations of dress, however, range far beyond the mere evidence of wealth. Clothing can connote the taste and leisure of the wearer as well as his/her relationship to society's prevailing aesthetic and political standards.\textsuperscript{31} If 'conspicuous consumption' is characterised by degrees of wastefulness which signify degrees of wealth, status and taste, then inconspicuous consumption, by contrast, is determined by moderation, utility and restraint. The fundamental paradox of inconspicuous consumption, however, is that in order to communicate the social and moral status of the consumer, the inconspicuousness of his/her consumption must be overtly apparent. This notion of a form of self-display which is both artless and calculated to convey one's artlessness lies at the heart of the paradox of Fordyce's morally transparent fashion system and once more aligns his work with the discourse of sensibility. As indicated by the metaphors of artistry deployed in Wilkes' definition of a 'native Simplicity of Looks', simplicity appears a disturbingly fragile and corruptible ideal in the \textit{Sermons}. Like sensibility and the concept of inconspicuous consumption, simplicity seems both to evoke an innate and natural moral reponse, as well as a refined and potentially artfully contrived set of external signifiers.

These paradoxes were clearly felt by Fordyce, and are evident in anxieties voiced sporadically throughout the \textit{Sermons to Young Women}. Though, on the one hand, the text posits an ideal correspondence between the sentimental and sartorial body, elsewhere the \textit{Sermons} offers a less optimistic view of the power of dress to connote character:

Is the mode then in question to be considered as inconsistent with the character of a Virtuous Woman? By no means. May not dispositions the most unchaste often hide under the mask of an attire the most modest? Who can doubt it? But what follows? That such attire is not the properest covering of Virtue, or what, if left to pursue undisturbed the dictates of delicacy and prudence, she would not readily fly to in a state of civilized society? (p. 51)

In suggesting that virtuous women can be found under the most fashionable and potentially immodest guises, and that immoral women may hide under the mask of respectable attire, Fordyce reveals the fault line upon which his text and, by extension, sensibility stand. In articulating a model of female respectability that can be affected without, he potentially offers the unscrupulous the means to feign virtue. As such, his system played into the hands of critics of sensibility, who, as G. J. Barker-Benfield has argued, feared '[t]hat sensibility could be false, assumed like a dress or a masquerade costume'.

* * *

'I WILL THAT WOMEN ADORN THEMSELVES WITH GOOD WORKS': QUAKER AND METHODIST DRESS

In their insistence upon a distinctive form of dress tailored to convey the wearer's spiritual purity through its simplicity and resistance to the luxury and excess believed to taint contemporary fashion, Quakerism and Methodism offer further contexts for the systems of sartorial signification envisaged by Wilkes and Fordyce. To both Quakers

Veblen, pp. 104-105.
G. J. Barker-Benfield, pp. 268-269.
While Quakerism and Methodism did encourage particular styles of dress, widely condemned in contemporary novels, plays and periodical literature, the question of how widely such modes of dress were adopted remains a matter of conjecture. As Marcia Pointon argues, for example, there is considerable evidence from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century that Quakers were divided between those who rejected fashionable costume and those who did not. Indeed, the persistent repetition of arguments against superfluity in dress suggests that sartorial asceticism was not universally adhered to. Marcia Pointon, 'Quakerism and Visual Culture, 1650-1800', Art History, 20: 3 (1997), p. 412.
and Methodists, simplicity of mind, heart and body was a key concept. This concept had a particular resonance for Quakers whose plain dress constituted the most visible symbol of their testimony to simplicity. Methodists were similarly entreated to embrace simplicity, understood, in this instance, as a single purpose to please God. In his *Advice to the People Called Methodists with Regard to Dress* (1745) Wesley entreated his followers to forsake costly array as 'utterly inconsistent with simplicity': 'Whoever acts with a single eye, does all things to be seen and approved of God; and can no more dress, than he can pray, or give alms, to be seen of men.' Quakerism and Methodism further correspond with Wilkes' and Fordyce's conviction in the sentimental ideal of the body as an index of feeling. G. J. Barker-Benfield has drawn some suggestive analogies between Methodism and the cult of sensibility. Both, he argues, were demonstrated by the capacity to feel and signify feeling through external signs. Both rejected excessive consumption and identified themselves with the interests of women. Finally, both sensibility and Methodism were decried by their critics as affected. Analogous arguments could be deployed to assert the relevance of Quakerism to the concerns of sensibility. Like sensibility, Quakerism focused intensely upon, indeed revered, the body. As Marcia Pointon has argued, the Quaker belief that God inhabits the heart of the individual placed immense significance upon the body and its powers of signification: the 'actions of the body are isolated for scrutiny and, no longer assumed as merely part of social practice (like curtesying to the Queen) or part of a natural process (like walking), are exposed as systematic and therefore semiotic'. Sartorial asceticism played a crucial

---

34 John Wesley, *Advice to the People Called Methodists with Regards to Dress* [1745] (London: G. Paramore, 1795), p. 7. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.
35 Barker-Benfield, pp. 268-269.
36 Pointon, pp. 400-401.
role in the corporeal semiotics of Quakerism. In a sermon that remained influential throughout the eighteenth century entitled 'To Such as Followed after ye Fashions of ye World' (1654) George Fox lamented how the 'ye devill garnish himselfe & how obedient are people to doe his will & mind that they are altogether carryed with fooleryes & vanities both men & women that they have lost ye hidden man of ye heart'. So far had fashions encroached upon the world that men feel 'they shall not be respected else, if they have not Gold & silver upon their backes, or his heire bee not powdered, or if he have a Company of ribions hunge about his wast'. Such a man, however, is 'noe Quaker' since 'this is the aray of the world [...] ye lusts of ye eye, ye lusts of ye flesh & ye prid of life'. Women, in particular, are condemned by Fox, for their failure to realise the Pauline ideal of the modestly adorned woman. Women who 'haveinge their gold, their spots on their faces [and] rings on their fingers' are 'noe Quaker[s]':

this is ye adorning of ye heathen not of ye Apostle nor ye saints, who said not wareinge of Gold nor playtinge of ye hayer, but of a meeke & quiet spirit, which was of ye Lord, of great price, here was ye Sobriety and good ornament, which was of ye Lord accepted, this was Pauls exhortation.8

Echoing the tone and language of Fox's attack against fashion, Wesley's Advice cites the Pauline epistle (amongst other biblical references) as an authority for his work and its proposed system of sartorial reformation. In the sermon Wesley elucidates a vision of 'a visible body of people, who are a standing example of this wisdom; a pattern of doing all things, great and small, with an eye to God and eternity' (p. 9). Concerned that the desire for earthly, material rewards had fatally succeeded the desire for spiritual

---

38 Fox, p. 176.
recompense, Wesley urged his followers to let 'a single intention to please God prescribe, both what cloathing you shall buy, and the manner wherein it shall be made, and how you shall put it on and wear it' (p. 5). Unlike Fordyce, however, Wesley was concerned that his projected dress reform be embraced by both men and women: if women should adorn themselves in 'modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety', then 'by parity of reason, men [should] too' (p. 6). Unsurprisingly given their shared doctrinal basis, the characteristics of Wesley's prescribed dress code have much in common with those of Fox, Wilkes and Fordyce. In perhaps a prudent appeal, given the sensibilities of his notoriously lower class congregation, Wesley argues that Methodist dress should be characterised by neatness, plainness and simplicity; it should not be 'gay, glistening, showy' or fashionable. Yet the dress code advocated in the Advice is much more explicit than the series of abstract metonymies which characterise the sartorial system of the Sermons to Young Women. Wesley insists that followers should '[b]uy no velvets, no silks, no fine linen, no superfluities, no mere ornaments'. Women should not wear 'rings, earrings, necklaces, lace (of whatever kind or colour), or ruffles'. Men are advised not to wear 'coloured waistcoats, shining stockings, glittering or costly buckles or buttons, either on their coats, or on their sleeves, any more than gay, fashionable, or expensive perukes' (p. 5). Fashionable attire is deemed self-indulgent, worn only to gratify personal pride and vanity at the expense of charitable feeling. Those that already possess costly clothes are urged to 'sell them, and give the money to them that want', enabling followers to 'clothe the naked, relieve the sick, the prisoner, the stranger'. Unlike Fordyce's female readers, promised a happy marriage and a self-gratifying sense of fulfilling their 'patriotic duty' in exchange for their more modest appearance, Wesley promises those followers
who divest themselves of sartorial trappings eternal reward: 'Then shall God clothe thee
with glory and honour, in the presence of men and angels: and thou shalt "shine as the
brightness of the firmament, yea, as the stars for ever and ever"' (p. 16).

The consistency of Fox's, Wesley's and Fordyce's criticisms of dress is striking.
Despite their divergent ideological and theological backgrounds and the period of more
than a hundred years that separates their works, all three figures express startlingly
similar anxieties about dress, articulated in a startlingly similar language. Furthermore,
their works betray a shared rhetorical strategy: all three writers are more ready to
condemn fashion than to provide detailed accounts of what the public should wear.39
Perhaps more intriguing given the similarities between their works, however, is the extent
to which the proposed anti-fashion systems envisaged by Fox, Wesley and Fordyce
vehemently define themselves in opposition to one another. Although Wesley admits in
his Advice that he has been influenced by the 'practice among the people called Quakers'
(p. 3), he is keen to point out that he does not wish his followers to imitate Friends 'in
those little particularities of dress, which can answer no possible end but to distinguish
themselves from all other people. To be singular merely for singularities [sic] sake, is not
the part of a Christian' (p. 4). Fordyce too is keen to distinguish his propositions in favour
of modest attire against those of religious sects:

The neat appearance of many females belonging to a sect well known, has been frequently
remarked, and greatly admired. It would be much more agreeable, could it be disjoined from the
stiffness that accompanies it; a defect utterly inconsistent with the rules of taste. But those people
are taught to despise every thing of this kind, and to understand literally such passages of scripture
as seem to prohibit sumptuous apparel. In short, they plead religious principle for the form of their
attire. We should believe them, but for the richness of the materials, and the fineness of the
texture. Many of that sect are very intelligent: can they persuade themselves, that through all their
affectation of plainness the world does not perceive the utmost pride of expence. (pp. 72-73)

39 For a discussion of the specific characteristics of Quaker dress and its evolution see Joan Kendall, 'The
Both Wesley and Fordyce object to the 'simplicity' of Quaker dress; a dress intended to signify a 'pre-lapsarian, anti-metropolitan condition'. In contrast to their own conceptions of simplicity, both writers determine Quaker simplicity a form of artfulness. According to Wesley, 'simplicity' masks a desire for singularity, while Fordyce perceives the superficial simplicity of Quaker dress as a dogmatic gesture through which Friends affect a neatness which thinly disguises their desire for valuable fabrics.

While Fordyce's dismissal of Quaker dress was undoubtedly born of a prudent desire to dissociate his proposed reforms of female clothing from potential accusations of religious enthusiasm, his critique of Quaker dress — a mode of dress which appears to share much in common with his own system of sartorial signification — implies further anxieties which have important ramifications for the limitations of his project. An article in Goldsmith's Lady's Magazine for June 1760 offers an illuminating context for this issue. In 'Observations on Dress', an anonymous contributor criticises 'religious uniforms', such as those adopted by the Quakers, in which 'these worthy people act as if they thought the wearing of a button to be a great crime, and the putting on a ruffle to be a sin against the Holy-Ghost'. Since there is no inherent 'virtue or vice in dress', every man and woman should be free 'to follow the customs of their native country' with regard to fashion. Rather than promoting uniformity of dress, the writer argues, 'Christianity very strongly enforces a uniformity in the motive to dress, as well as in every other civil or religious act'. Every one should dress in such a way as to avoid all that is 'childish and

40 Pointon, p. 411.
41 This criticism of Quaker dress was widely held in the eighteenth century. As Archenholz remarked, Quaker women compensated for the fact that they could not 'use fancy colours, nor wear powder, feathers, ribbands, nor jewels' by wearing clothes made out of the 'dearest stuffs'. M. D'Archenholz, A Picture of
extravagant' and aspire to a 'pleasing propriety'. Such universality of motive does not necessarily encourage a uniformity of appearance, however, as these moral qualities may be realised in a variety of guises. Here the article offers a possible justification for the *Sermons*' lack of sartorial specificity in its projected dress code: since modesty, sobriety and shamefacedness may be displayed in a variety of guises, Fordyce is predominantly concerned to reform women's motivation for wearing particular items of costume, rather than to prescribe specific items of morally-communicative clothing. However, despite the author's conviction that moral character will be apparent in an individual's choice of clothing, the *Lady's Magazine* article also reveals the impracticability of its faith in the communicability of morally motivated fashions, which has important implications for Fordyce's work. Though prompted by good intention, Quaker dress fails to communicate the moral and spiritual virtue of Friends, the writer suggests, since it reduces all 'ranks and stations in life' into 'a kind of uniformity' which disguises (and therefore renders suspect) individual merit.

Contrary to its intentions, the article argues, Quaker dress reveals the extent to which the sartorial and the moral operate upon distinct and incompatible value systems. Fordyce's objection to the 'richness' of Quaker dress further serves to expose the futility of seeking to translate the moral into the sartorial. On the one hand, the simplicity of the cut of female Quaker dress, and its lack of elaborate ornamentation do not go far enough for Fordyce. He demands that the sartorial metaphor (in which purity of heart corresponds to simplicity of appearance) be extended to incorporate not merely the cut of

---

a gown, but the simplicity of the fabric out of which it is made. On the other hand, Quaker dress goes too far in Fordyce's eyes. Once abstract morality becomes an object of display, once an individual chooses to demonstrate his or her rejection of society's increasingly commercial character through conspicuously external gestures, these values are translated into a visual statement that can be deemed as affected as the value system it rejects. So powerful has fashion's influence become, that to reject its all-pervasive dictates is even more morally suspect than embracing them. As Fordyce acknowledges, should 'a young woman now a days, from a peculiar sense of the sacredness and refinement of virtue, to appear with any very singular severity in her dress, she would hardly, I fear, escape the charge of affectation' (p. 46). Furthermore, such prescribed models of dress (like those models of conduct propagated through sentimental literature) render these modes of display accessible to all who wish to abuse them. Quaker dress, not coincidentally, was a popular form of masquerade guise throughout the eighteenth century, and satires directed against Friends frequently pointed to the hypocrisy and moral diversity masked by their sartorial uniformity. An installment of 'Mrs T-SS'S Advice to her Daughter', for example, a serial conduct book that appeared in the Lady's Magazine for 1775, relates an anecdote about a plain 'artful, but judicious' girl who 'found she looked incomparably well in a quaker dress and therefore turned quaker'.

As in Pamela, the Sermons' assertion of a tangible system of morally-legible femininity renders it vulnerable to precisely the kinds of corruption Fordyce seeks to eradicate. The author's acknowledgement that fashion cannot be rejected without suspicion, that even the most virtuous garb can hide the most immoral of women, coupled

---

42 The Lady's Magazine; or Polite Companion for the Fair Sex, 2 (June 1760), pp. 458-461.
with his suggestively problematic condemnation of Quaker dress, suggest that the Sermons' ideal of a tangible system of morally-legible femininity is precisely that — an ideal that can only ever exist in the notional, rhetorical sphere of the text itself rather than in society. The characteristics of the morally-adorned woman cannot be articulated beyond the level of mere abstraction, for fear that such modes of display might encourage women's blind obedience to a prescribed mode of dress rather than a thoughtful adoption of modest garb for its own sake, allowing women to affect virtue through such forms of display. The system would collapse because, ironically, it would become vulnerable to those accusations leveled against fashion itself: corruptibility, affectation, disguise and artifice.

Wollstonecraft's sense that the Sermons divorces rather than analogises physical appearance and moral essence by problematically reducing women to mere surface, offers a perceptive reading of Fordyce's work and its limitations. It also signals the limitations of the sentimental ideal upon which the text rests. In a 1777 diatribe against sentiment, that 'varnish of virtue', Hannah More complained that the meaning of sentiment had become so 'diametrically opposite to [its] original signification', that the term connoted both genuine virtue and its affectation. Amongst 'women of breeding', she lamented, 'the exterior of gentleness is so uniformly assumed, and the whole manner is so perfectly level and uni, that it is next to impossible for a stranger to know any thing of their true disposition by conversing with them'. More makes explicit what The

---

43 The Lady's Magazine; or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex, 6 (June 1775), p. 350.
44 Hannah More, Essays on Various Subjects, Principally Designed for Young Ladies (London: J. Wilkie and T. Caddell, 1777), pp. 77-78.
45 More, p. 111.
Sermons can only imply in its paradoxes, contradictions and omissions: in articulating a model of female respectability that can be affected without, the text offers the unscrupulous the means to contrive its effects. The conditional 'ought' upon which Fordyce's morally transparent fashion system rests but thinly veils, perhaps, his sense that the articulation of the sentimental body's most appropriate dress merely afforded women another (dis)guise in which to contain and encrypt their thoughts and desires.

* * *

'THE SIGNS AND FRUITS OF REFORMATION': RE-FASHIONING THE PROSTITUTE IN THE MAGDALEN HOUSE

Though Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women implies that a sartorial system of ethical legibility can only work in the rhetorical framework of the text itself, its concern for a visible signification of female moral status was a pressing and practical consideration for institutions which enforced dress codes as a reformatory tool and sign. Proposals by leading proponents of the Magdalen House for Penitent Prostitutes, including Robert Dingley, Saunders Welch, Jonas Hanway and Joseph Massie, refer to the importance of establishing a uniform dress code for the institution. The necessity for providing uniforms was partly an issue of practicality. Literary and artistic representations of prostitutes throughout the eighteenth century frequently alluded to their slovenly, offensive clothing. But the re-clothing of the prostitute's body enacted a complex symbolic process too, analogous to that aspired to in Fordyce's Sermons, which served to simultaneously precipitate and express the reformation of the Magdalen's character. These arguments can, perhaps, be best elucidated with reference to the
frontispiece of Jonas Hanway's 1761 *Reflections, Essays and Meditations on Life and Religion* (see fig. 6). The accuracy of the engraving's depiction of the Magdalen uniform is a matter of debate. While Robin Evans uses the frontispiece as evidence of the institution's uniform, Miles Ogborn has cast doubt on the veracity of the illustration, determining it a further example of the mythologising of the Magdalen through pictorial representation. Whether the depiction of the penitent's attire is accurate or not — and it certainly bears a strong congruity with Horace Walpole's account of his visit to the Magdalen chapel quoted below — Ogborn is correct to suggest that the symbolic ramifications of the illustration are almost more significant than the actual evidence it may or may not provide. The pre-reformation prostitute (in the background of the engraving) lies slumped under a tree, her clothes typically ragged and tattered. She looks vacantly above, her thoughts elusive. The reformed Magdalen, by contrast, stands bare-faced before the spectator, a symbolic open book like that she holds in her hand, her penitence evident in her humble demeanour, upright pose and, above all, in the simple, modest attire that covers all but the top of her neck and blushing face: a powerful visible symbol of the sentimental ideal of moral legibility.

Much recent critical work has focused upon the Magdalen House as an institution which embraced the emergent discourse and ideology of sentimentalism to refigure the prostitute as an object of pathos and sympathetic identification, and, as part of this trend,

---

to formulate and contest contemporary constructions of femininity.\textsuperscript{48} In sentimentalising the prostitute, as argued earlier, philanthropists and social reformers professed to look beyond her corrupted body to locate the economic and social sources of that corruption. In sharp contrast to the punitive measures of sartorial codification, whipping, workhouse labour and transportation proposed by Defoe in his \textit{Considerations upon Street-Walkers}, the Magdalen House was established upon the premise of a process of benevolent rehabilitation, designed to reclaim the prostitute's corrupted body for a life of virtuous and productive industry. Above all, as Donna Andrews argues, the institution owed its 'establishment to the recognition that young girls often faced insurmountable difficulties, and that good fortune as much as rectitude separated the innocent from the fallen'.\textsuperscript{49} Rather than a cause of social corruption the prostitute was re-figured as its symptom. In his \textit{Proposals for Establishing a Public Place of Reception for Penitent Prostitutes} (1758) Robert Dingley rehearsed the traditional association of dirt, disease and contagion with sexual corruption in his representation of prostitutes as 'the common dregs infesting our Streets', only to subsequently invert this representational tradition by referring to their trade as a 'fatal necessity':

\begin{quote}
Surrounded by snares, the most artfully and industriously laid, snares laid by those endowed with superior faculties, and all the advantages of Education and fortune, what virtue can be proof against such formidable Seducers, who offer too commonly, and too profusely promise, to
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{49} Andrew, p. 120.
transport the thoughtless Girls from Want, Confinement, Restraint of Passions, to Luxury, Liberty, Gaiety and Joy?\textsuperscript{50}

The economically voracious appetite of the early eighteenth-century prostitute has been transformed, in Dingley's account, into an understandable human desire to be free of the shackles of poverty.

Other writers, however, though still prepared to cast the prostitute as victim rather than instigator of social corruption, were less sympathetic to the fatal vanity perceived to lead women to seek social advancement through prostitution. Saunders Welch's \textit{Proposal to Render Effectual a Plan, To remove the Nuisance of Common Prostitutes from the Streets of this Metropolis} (1758) highlights the irresponsible conventions of the mistress-servant relationship as one of the key causes of prostitution. Significantly, it is the practice of giving second-hand clothes to servants which Welch determines the fatal catalyst in the process of moral decline. Ruined 'by the false good-nature of their superiors', lady's women are frequently 'seen flaunting in [their] mistress's left-off clothes, and ridiculously affecting the airs of a woman of quality.'\textsuperscript{51} As a result of their mistresses' generosity servants' minds become 'puffed up by vanity', while the 'respectful distance which should always subsist' between a mistress and her servant is fatally weakened (p. 5). The wearing of costly apparel causes servants to falsely prize themselves and their labour and 'induces them to insist upon high wages'. Once higher wages are acquired, ladies' maids enter a vicious circle of fashionable dissipation as they spend 'the whole of their wages [...] in cloaths', only for them to require higher wages to

\textsuperscript{50} Robert Dingley, \textit{Proposals for Establishing a Public Place of Reception for Penitent Prostitutes, &c.} (London: W. Faden, 1758), p. 4. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.

\textsuperscript{51} Saunders Welch, \textit{A Proposal}, p. 5. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.
purchase more clothing. Valuing their fashionable appearance more highly than their labour, these women are left with nothing to trade in but their appearance once they lose the positions they have secured: if 'they are thrown out of place, what recourse have they for support, but first to pawn or sell their cloaths, and then to prostitute their persons?' (p. 5). Once entered upon a life of prostitution, dress acts no longer as a form of temptation for the former servant, Welch suggests, but as a form of regulation and imprisonment imposed by brothel keepers:

she is hired; and from that moment the unhappy wretch is a prisoner [...] her cloaths are taken from her as not elegant enough to see gentlemen in; and the bawd procures a flimsey suit of either second-hand silk or linen, for which a sufficient price is set down; and if the wretch, tires of her wicked course of life, even but attempts to depart, a Marshalsea-Court writ for the cloaths and board is directly executed upon her, and a prison is her portion, where she is kept until the bawd releases her. (p. 12)

Dress, once perceived as a means of evading and escaping economic and social confinement, has now become the manacle of an altogether more repressive and abhorrent form of servitude.52

The role of dress in Welch's account of the harlot's progress adds an additional dimension to the 'seduction-into-prostitution' narrative which Markman Ellis identifies in the fictionalised Magdalen texts, published as fundraisers for the institution, and which closely resemble the 'seduction-into-prostitution narratives typical of the sentimental novel'.53 According to the Proposals women are seduced by the lure of fashion and its attendant promise of social advancement, and are in turn seduced. The fine line

---

52 Ironically, the enforcement of a uniform dress code within the institution served a similar function to that in bawdy houses. Jonas Hanway remarked that the penitents should 'be informed, that if they shall find means to leave the house, in a clandestine manner, and carry away the cloaths, or anything which is the property of the Treasurer or any other person, as the cloaths and furniture, &c. shall be deemed, they will be considered as robbers in any similar case.' Jonas Hanway, A Plan for Establishing a Charity-House for the Reception of Repenting Prostitutes to be called the Magdalen Charity (London: [n. pub.], 1758), p. 22.

53 Ellis, see particularly pp. 177-189.
separating seduction by fashion and physical seduction, and inversely, between selling clothes and selling the body, is a recurrent theme in eighteenth-century prostitution narratives. As argued earlier, much early eighteenth-century writing on servants expressed concerns that the customary practice of giving or bequeathing second-hand clothing to maids would inevitably lead to a disintegration of the social and moral order. In perhaps the most famous example of this narrative (albeit in inverse form), Richardson’s *Pamela* maintains narrative suspense by playing with, and ultimately subverting, its readers’ expectation that Pamela’s all too willing acceptance of her deceased mistress’s clothes signals her openness to seduction by Mr B. The fictional progresses depicted in sermons and novels inspired by and written for the Magdalen House alarmingly extended such seduction narratives to include, not merely servants, but members of the middling sort. ‘The Real History of a Magdalen’, an essay in William Dodd’s collection *The Visitor* (1764), for example, relates the story of a tradesman’s daughter whose mother encourages her to live above her station: ‘With this view she always followed the fashion: her dress was ever in the mode’. The Magdalen, who relates her own narrative, explains that she means not to ‘dishonour [her] mother by repeating these things, which may appear trifling’, but rather because they were ‘the inlets

---

54 This narrative has endured to the present day. Emma Donoghue’s *Slammerkin* (2000) is a fictionalised account of the life of Mary Saunders, based upon a broadsheet that documents her vicious murder of her mistress with a cleaver, purportedly for the sake of a suit of ‘fine clothes’. *Slammerkin* traces the short life of Saunders, a seamstress’s daughter, from her seduction by a peddler for the sake of a single ribbon, through her pregnancy, life as a prostitute, her reluctant stay in the Magdalen House, her ‘rehabilitation’ as a servant in Monmouth and eventual murder of her mistress. Donahue transforms this conventional eighteenth-century association of female transgression, social aspiration and a voracious appetite for fashion into a novel which examines the de-humanising financial, social and emotional entrapment of the female labourer and yet which reinforces and rehearse many of the prejudices which characterise eighteenth-century depictions of the female labourer as unshakeably ambitious, unwilling to repent and fatally drawn by a desire to be fashionable. Emma Donoghue, *Slammerkin* (London: Virago, 2000).

of [her] ruin. The Magdalen's mother dies, leaving her daughter ill-equipped to run the family household since she had 'been initiated into all the fashionable diversions and amusements' at the expense of an education in the skills of domestic management. The Magdalen's seduction by the lure of fashionable life leaves her vulnerable. She is subsequently seduced by a merchant before turning to prostitution.

As a catalyst of female corruption frequently cited in Magdalen fiction, dress was given a particular importance in the Magdalen House itself. In order to reverse the causal prostitution narrative of sartorial seduction, physical seduction and prostitution, women had to be re-clothed in a modest garb which both signified their return to a life of virtue and demonstrated their repentance for their life of sin. Although proponents of the Hospital differed in their analyses of the causes of prostitution, they were united in their calls for a uniform for the institution's inhabitants. Jonas Hanway proposed that 'THEY shall wear an uniform of light grey of a durable, but soft and agreeable manufacture, and in all their whole dress, be as plain and neat as possible'. Dingley's proposal mirrors Hanway's almost word for word: 'they [shall] wear an uniform of light grey, black, or sky blue; and in all their Dress, be as plain and neat as possible' (p. 13). Such uniforms were intended to have a leveling effect, to convey the status to which the women had reduced themselves and to signal their uniform desire to repent and rehabilitate. As Dingley proposed, 'the Objects [should] be cloathed and fed meanly'. Only those judged by their 'Behaviour and Education' to be worthy of preferable treatment could expect to be

---

56 The Visitor, I, p. 60.
57 The Visitor, I, p. 62.
58 Hanway, p. 22.
'clothed and fed accordingly' (p. 13). 59 Despite the charity's emphasis upon rehabilitation rather than punishment, the regulation of the Magdalen's dress was designated a vital tool in the disciplinary regime of the Hospital. Although Hanway argued that all of the penitents should be treated 'with such regard and civility, as shall convince them that nothing more is meant than their own happiness', he emphasised the importance of not 'showing any such indulgence as shall tempt the evil-minded to abuse the charity' (p. 1). Unlike the case of the Marine Society, in which Hanway was also a leading proponent, where the promise of a uniform was treated as an incentive to encourage boys and men to sign up for sea service, Hanway is concerned that dress in the Magdalen House should be as austere as possible, in order to avoid replicating the dangers of seduction by costume which take place outside the institution and precipitate the Magdalen's fall. 60

If clothing was a necessity for the impoverished men and boys of the Marine Society, then to the women of the Magdalen House it could act as a fatal indulgence. Such forms of indulgence, Hanway felt, could 'disqualify those who are really penitent, from procuring a maintenance by virtuous industry' — the cornerstone of the institution's process of rehabilitation — by encouraging women to value themselves upon their appearance rather than their labour (p. 2). As Miles Ogbor argues, women's 'sexuality — and what they chose to do with it — was understood within [eighteenth-century] political

59 Among the proposals, Joseph Massie's Plan is unique in its advocation of a dress code that would reflect the social standing of its wearer rather than level the inhabitants: a logical extension of his proposal to erect several houses for the charity at various distances from the city, each containing women of a different 'class'. Joseph Massie, A Plan for the Establishment of a Charity-House for Exposed or Deserted Women and Girls, and for Penitent Prostitutes (London: T. Payne, W. Shropshire, W. Owen and C. Henderson, 1758), p. 41.

60 In a 'Letter to the Society on Occasion of their Clothing and fitting out for Sea-Service 3,097 Men and 2,045 Boys' Hanway argued that the 'gift of clothings are a means of inducing many stout land-men to enter
arithmetic as the foundation of national and imperial strength and wealth. Their private activities had public consequences, and therefore had to be regulated. One of the most devastating of these consequences was the weakening of the nation's labouring capacity as women turned to illegitimate forms of labour that were both non-productive and non-reproductive. The process of rehabilitation initiated by the Magdalen House was a process of re-integrating women into society by re-integrating them into the labour market. Joseph Massie's *Plan for the Establishment of a Charity-House for Exposed or Deserted Women and Girls, and for Penitent Prostitutes* (1758) — a proposal which extended the charity's remit to include women who were simply unable to find work as well as prostitutes — advocates linen spinning as a form of female labour that would improve the women's character as well as the national economy:

> as Linen Cloth is a common and very great Necessary of Life, there is a Certainty that it will always be in Fashion and very much wanted; so that if those Women and Girls should annually spin Linen Yarn as aforesaid, to the value of Four Thousand Pounds exclusive of the Materials, this Kingdom would probably gain £4000 a Year: because the Ballance [sic] of Trade between Great Britain and Russia, as well as some other Northern Countries from whence we have coarse Linen Cloth, is well known to be much against us.

The importance of textile manufacture and dressmaking in several key proposals for the charity imbues dress with a curiously paradoxical role in its concept of 'virtuous industry'. As previously argued, dressmaking and millinery had a suspect reputation throughout the eighteenth century as trades which encouraged women to seek social advancement and introduced them into a fashionable world which almost inevitably led to their moral decline. Yet, as one of the few avenues of female employment open to women in the period, such trades were encouraged in the Magdalen House.

---

61 Miles Ogborn, p. 48.

Proponents such as John Fielding perceived existing systems of apprenticeship as a key element in society's widespread dissipation, especially where numbers of women work together:

it has been observed, that those Manufactures, in which Women are employed and Numbers of them are collected together, are apt to produce Tea and Gin-drinking; this is very evident among the Lace-makers in Buckinghamshire.\textsuperscript{63}

Fielding's \textit{Plan for a Preservatory} (1758) highlights the paradoxical status of female labour during this period as both a promoter and curative of vice. Only three pages before Fielding condemns the immorality of female lace makers, he lists trades which the penitents could learn in the institution. The majority of these trades, which include mantua-making, stay-making, the making of cloaks, petticoats and children's coats, fall under the categories of millinery or dress-making.\textsuperscript{64} Fielding's text fails to satisfactorily address the paradox it exposes. What distinguishes these trades from those such as lace-making is unclear. What is certain, however, is that simply entering into a purportedly legitimate trade is insufficient to protect women from vice and immorality. Rather than facing the insurmountable task of reforming the world of female labour, therefore, Fielding's text emphasises the reformation of the female labourer herself.

But like Fordyce's readers, who cannot simply be virtuous but must parade their virtue, it is not enough for the prostitute to merely repent: her penitence must be evident. The Magdalen's House's status as a charity, dependent upon voluntary contributions and open to public scrutiny, demanded that its rehabilitative success was manifest to the


outside world. As Ann Jessie Van Sant argues, the charity's reliance upon contributions 'implied that the relief of distress should be a moral obligation, to be voluntarily assumed, rather than a legal provision on which the distressed could depend'. In his *Proposals*, Robert Dingley persistently refers to the charity's prospective inmates as 'Objects' — a term which serves at once to divorce the women from their profession as prostitutes and to suggest the extent to which the charity needed to transform its inmates into worthy recipients of benevolence. Like the sermons and self-promotional fictionalised narratives published as fundraisers for the charity, the women accepted by the Magdalen House served as spectacles to elicit sympathy and admiration from the public. A sermon delivered by William Dodd in the Magdalen Chapel and subsequently published, explicitly acknowledges the charity's need to publicly demonstrate its efficacy. At a time, he argues, when 'Vice is, in some respects, become fashionable' and immorality visible on the streets of the city, it was necessary to counter these trends with a visible incarnation of virtue and reformation. Despite being ill received by 'the gay [and] the grave [...] the thinking [and] the thoughtless', the charity had amply provided 'proof, that the reformation of [prostitutes] is nothing ideal, their behaviour, in the general, hath been excellent and exemplary; and all the signs and sights and fruits of reformation, which could be fancied or formed, have and continue to shew themselves'.

Dress played a vital role as one of the 'signs and fruits' of the Magdalen's repentance. Giving up her clothes upon entrance to the Hospital was a symbolic rejection

---

64 Fielding, p. 20.
65 Ann Jessie van Sant, p. 21.
66 William Dodd, *A Sermon on St. Matthew, Chap. IX. Ver. 12, 13. Preach'd at the Parish Church of St. Laurence, near Guild-Hall, April the 26th 1759, Before the Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and
of the prostitute's former, corrupt self, and signaled her acceptance of her new life. According to Robert Dingley's *Proposals* the process of admission to the hospital should begin with making the women 'clean'; subsequently, they should 'have their Names registered, and take on them some other name, by which Name only they shall be called and known, when entered into the House itself. The final component of this tripartite reformatory process is the women's rejection of their own clothes and adoption of the institution's 'uniform' (pp. 12-13). On one level, the adoption of the uniform is simply a logical conclusion to the sanitising process that begins when the women are admitted. But the connection Dingley makes between the women giving up their names and giving up their clothes suggests that the Magdalen's dress served a much more symbolically loaded and potentially unsettling function. As *Pamela* makes clear when the heroine sews her letters to her family into the folds of her petticoat, self-narrative and costume are irrevocably intertwined — both serve as potent signifiers of self. In giving up their names, the former prostitutes effectively rejected their former identity and the narrative of their life. The women became generically known as 'Magdalens', which, as Ann Jessie Van Sant suggests, superimposed upon the prostitute's individual story that of the life Mary Magdalen. This effacement of identity was re-inforced by the plaques that appeared in the charity's wards reminding the women to 'Tell your story to no one'. Not only should the women themselves reveal nothing about their past life, but, as Jonas Hanway recommended, those overseeing the charity should 'not divulge anything relating to the persons or characters of the women who are admitted, nor any of their family, nor of the

---

*Governor of the Magdalen House for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes* (London: W. Faden [for the charity], 1759), p. ii.

67 Ann Jessie van Sant, p. 36.
persons who debauched them'. To leave the reader in no doubt on this issue, Hanway adds an emphatic note that 'No enquiry shall be made into any such circumstances' (p. 7).

Hanway's comments betray a deep-seated anxiety about the power of personal narrative to propagate immorality. The Magdalens cannot relate their own stories for fear, perhaps, that they may have insufficient control over the moral implications of their tales to ensure that they would function as reforming narratives. In order to be related, the prostitutes' narratives, like their bodies and characters, have to be reformed by a third party. Although the charity produced purportedly true sentimental narratives of the lives of the penitents, these often anonymous works were clearly not penned by the women themselves, and, given their role as fundraisers, may have been entirely fictional.\textsuperscript{68} While these narratives sought to give the Magdalens individual identities, the charity itself sought to erase that identity. Wearing the uniform was key to this effacement of self. Dress acted as a symbolic covering which erased the prior narrative of the prostitutes, a blank canvas upon which observers could project their own versions of her narrative. As Dodd wrote, the charity's success was plainly evident in the bodies of the Magdalens, which revealed that 'the nobleness f virtue, and the delicacy of sentiment, have been canker'd over, then blotted out: and upon the first remove of the filth, have shewn themselves in particulars, which would do honour to that most exalted state of ideas'.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{68} These narratives include [Anon.], \textit{The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen-House, As Supposed to be Related by Themselves}, 2 vols (London: J. Rivington and J. Dodsley, 1760), William Dodd, \textit{The Visitor}, 2 vols (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1764), Hugh Kelly, \textit{Memoirs of a Magdalen: or, the History of Louisa Mildmay}, 2 vols (London: W. Griffin, 1767)

\textsuperscript{69} Dodd, \textit{Sermon}, p. ii.
Dodd's suggestion that in cleansing the Magdalen's body the charity cleansed her soul offers an intriguing insight into his conception and public representation of the penitents. Prostitution is cast, in familiar terms here, as a disease, a filthy canker that eats away at the prostitute's body and soul. Like a brass ornament, however, whose filthy coating can be removed to reveal its natural shine, the prostitute's trade is a tarnish which can be removed to reveal her true honour. Rather than requiring women to erase their former, immoral selves, therefore, Dodd suggests that the penitents must simply reveal their true and innately virtuous selves. The anonymously published *Magdalens: An Elegy* (1763) enacts a similar process of stripping the prostitute of the sartorial trappings of her immorality to reveal her 'inborn Virtue'.

Are These the Fair who wont with conscious Grace
Proud Ranelagh's resplendent Round to tread?
Shine in the studied Luxury of Dress?
And vie in Beauty with the high-born Maid? [...]

For sober Weeds they change their bright Attire,
Of the Pearl Bracelet strip the graceful Arm,
Veil the whole Breast, that lately heav'd Desire,
And thrill'd with tender exquisite Alarm:

Unbraid the cunning tresses of the Hair,
And each well-fancied Ornament remove,
The glowing Gem, the glitt'ring Solitaire —
The costly Spoils of prostituted Love! 70

In both Dodd's sermon and the 'Elegy' the re-clothing of the prostitute functions analogously to the fashion system advocated in Fordyce's *Sermons*: where once her offensive garb and demeanour blinded spectators to the 'honour' of her person, the penitent's newly adopted modest uniform analogises her reformed appearance and innately virtuous character. As a demonstration of her repentance and a symbol of her...  

---

merit, the Magdalen's dress was part of the spectacular proof of the charity's success. As Dodd wrote in his 'Ode Occasioned by Lady N—D's being prevented by illness from coming to the chapel of the Magdalen-House', the sight of the women betrayed 'Tokens sure of virtue's reign', that would satisfy even the most cynical of onlookers and inspire 'Drops of melting charity':

The decent throng, in modest guise array'd,
With humbled heart, and humbled eye,
The decent throng, so lately lost and dead,
Wrapt in foul woe, and cloath'd with infamy?

The sight of the humbled and modestly-adorned women is, in itself, a humbling sight, functioning, as in Fordyce's morally transparent fashion system, as a symbol of the women's reformation and itself capable of reforming the spectator.

The charity's insistence that private reformation should be publicly displayed left it vulnerable, however, to the same taint of insincerity and deceit undermining Fordyce's *Sermons*. As Sarah Lloyd argues, the charity was founded upon a fundamental paradox in which 'the inmates' virtuous reformation was confirmed through external display and intended to dazzle in public.\(^71\) If dress is frequently figured in prostitution narratives as a catalyst of the prostitute's moral decline, a symbol of her duplicity and propensity to be duped by the appearances of those around her, then the prostitute's adoption of a dress designed to make manifest her repentance could be construed as suspect: a guise worn to seduce the eyes of those around her into believing that she is worthy object of charity.

\(^{71}\) William Dodd, *Poems by Dr. Dodd* (London: Dryden Leach, 1767), p. 149.

\(^{72}\) Sarah Lloyd, p. 63.
The difficulty of establishing the genuineness of the prostitute's penitence was an issue which concerned critics and proponents of the charity alike. Prospective inmates of the Hospital had to prove their penitence in a petition to the committee of the institution: 'being thus examined, if approved, to be wrote on, "Found proper," and so preserved, as a Proof of the Petitioner's Sincerity'. Dingley suggested that the House guard against the possibility that these petitions could be falsified by empowering the charity to dismiss Magdalens should an 'apparent imposition [in their Petition] should be discovered'. Women who had lied could expect to be released 'never more to be re-admitted to the care of the institution' (p. 11). Dingley further advocated that 'Persons to be admitted produce, if possible, a Certificate of their Place of Settlement, real Name, Age, &c.' (p. 12). Such documentation could not be unquestioningly relied upon, however, as many women would be unable or unwilling to produce it. And, as the charity suggested in its refusal to allow the women to tell their narratives once housed in the institution, such petitions might be equally suspect; calculated to contrive penitence to secure lodgings and subsistence. Dingley's imaginative linking of clothing and personal narrative uneasily suggests that the Magdalen's adoption of her modest uniform might act in the same manner as a false narrative, created to mask true intent and character beneath an affected display of penitence.

An exploration of the practices and ethos of the Magdalen House reveals the extent to which spectacle and sentimentalism are inextricably, and potentially fatally entangled. That the Magdalen House was cynically staged to excite the pathos and support of the public was not lost on at least one of its visitors. Horace Walpole's
frequently quoted account of his visit to the chapel in Goodman's Fields wryly notes the theatricality of the scene he witnessed. He describes the sight of the sisterhood 'all in greyish brown stuffs, broad handkerchiefs, and flat straw hats, with a blue ribband, quite pulled over their faces'. As Walpole and his party entered the chapel 'the organ played', right on cue, 'and the Magdalens sung a hymn'. The women's austere appearance dramatically contrasted with the elaborate decoration of the chapel in 'orange and myrtle'. These components provided the perfect backdrop for the flamboyant Reverend Dodd who 'apostrophised the lost sheep, who sobbed and cried for their souls so did my Lady Hertford and Fanny Pelham, till I believe the City dames took them both for Jane Shores'. Walpole's account betrays a certain degree of humility provoked by the sight of the women and the words of the preacher, and a humorous enjoyment of the excessive sentimental effusions of his female companions. What makes the scene so touching yet so artificial to Walpole is its pervasive sentimentalism: the demonstration of feeling and remorse dramatically staged against a backdrop of emotional intensity. Dress played a vital role in this spectacle as a visible signification of penitence and reformation. In his Advice to the Magdalens, Dodd emphasised the importance of the women's manifest adherence to the rules and ethics of the institution. Notably the first rule of the Advice is that with 'regard to your external behaviour, the most exact compliance with the Rules of the House will be required'. Though Dodd proceeds to extol the importance of industriousness and personal salvation, the charity's insistence upon transforming its inmates into spectacular sentimental objects in order to excite pity from potential contributors ran the risk of reducing penitence to a set of visible effects. Since, as

Caroline Gonda has recently argued, 'female virtue is coded as that which is private and silent', women's public virtue is something of 'a contradiction in terms, something which cannot be proved as true'.

Though the Magdalen House distinguished itself from institutions such as the Lock Hospital for venereal disease, since it was concerned not merely with 'the miseries that oppress [women's] Bodies', but those 'far more afflicting' maladies 'which must oppress their unrepenting Souls', the charity placed considerable emphasis upon the bodies of its inmates. This emphasis upon external behaviour in pamphlets and sermons pertaining to the charity suggests that one of the penitents' most important functions was to play out the characteristics of virtue and reformation, as outlined by the institution, just as Fordyce's ideal woman should sartorially perform female virtue as outlined by St. Paul. In their insistence upon dress as an immediate signifier of virtuous femininity, however, both the Magdalen House and Fordyce's Sermons reveal the fallibility of their projects and the sentimental ideals upon which they both rest. In light of these arguments, the Magdalen displayed in the frontispiece to Hanway's Reflections no longer appears the unequivocally modest and humbled woman she at first appeared. Rather, her blushing gaze directed straight into the eyes of the spectator, suggests a possible air of defiance, a certain knowingness and refusal to be restricted to the reassuring symbol of genuine penitence the charity persistently sought to make her. Even displayed in the sartorial 'signs and fruits' of her reformation the spectator must accept that we can never know

---
74 William Dodd, Advice to the Magdalen (London: W. Faden [for the charity], [1759/1760(?)]), p. 2.  
75 Caroline Gonda, 'Misses, Murderesses, and Magdalens: women in the public eye', in Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 66.
precisely what she is thinking, and must acknowledge that her narrative may be a far cry from the symbolic open book she carries in her hand.

---

Figure 6 Frontispiece to Jonas Hanway's *Reflections, Essays and Meditations on Life and Religion* (1761)
5

'The cambric handkerchief sensibility': Re-figuring Sentiment in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*

The preceding chapters have sought to demonstrate that anti- and counter-fashion arguments gained a particular currency in eighteenth-century sentimental discourse, in which the figure of the adorned woman functioned alternately as a paradigm for the sentimental ideal of moral transparency, or as a disturbing symbol of the extent to which a literary fashion had rendered virtue accessible to a wide literate public. During the 1780s and 1790s sentimentalism came under increasing attack from critics who argued that the fine line between genuine moral feeling and its mere performance had blurred to the point of virtual obscurity. In her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), Hannah More lamented that the reification of feminine sensibility had encouraged women to place excessive significance upon their 'nerves' where sensibility could be 'easily found or feigned'. Privileging 'a false and excessive display of feeling', sensibility had brought into 'question the actual existence of that true tenderness'. In its turn, 'true' sensibility had become both elusive and unfashionable until the fatal moment when 'Fashion [...] by one of her sudden and rapid turns, instantaneously struck out both real sensibility and the affectation of it.' By becoming increasingly synonymous with sentiment, More suggested, fashion had killed off true sensibility. It is tempting to read More's usage of the term 'fashion' here as analogous to its function in her earlier work

---

'Sensibility' (1782): not simply as an allusion to the discourse's damaging fashionableness, but to 'the pictur'd dress' of sensibility, those potentially contrived external gestures and sartorial displays problematically championed by many of the mode's most ardent proponents. More's *Strictures*, thus, realises the fears articulated in her poetic epistle and implied in the paradoxes and contradictions of Richardson's *Pamela* and Fordyce's *Sermons*: that the very articulation of the sentimental ideal potentially reduced it to a set of codified and imitable gestures and appearances, striking out real sensibility.

The demise of sentimental literature during the 1780s and 1790s is a complex phenomenon which has engaged the attention of many critics. As the literary debates surrounding *Pamela* reveal, sentimental literature had always been subject to intense scrutiny and critical debate. Indeed, as Markman Ellis argues, while anti-sentimental discourse may well have been more prominent than support for the mode at the close of the century, 'debate was always central to the hybrid power of sentimentalism'. Yet the intensification and politicisation of these debates in the 1790s irrevocably undermined and damaged sensibility in a way in which earlier criticism had not. Perhaps the most straightforward explanation for the demise of sentimental literature, as Chris Jones has argued, is that the mode had simply run the course of its natural life. Outdated and increasingly removed from the moral and philosophical contexts out of which it developed, sentimentalism simply became a parody of itself that irreparably eroded the foundations upon which it had stood. Jones is swift to dismiss the declining literary and

---

aesthetic merit of sentimental literature as a fully viable explanation for sensibility's decline, however, arguing that the critical backlash of the 1790s was informed predominantly by 'political, social and moral' rather than aesthetic factors.\(^3\) While from its inception sensibility had appeared to appeal to 'unconditioned natural feelings', its critics increasingly pointed to the extension of the sentimental argument to state politics, in which sensibility functioned as 'a social construction, which translated power-based relationships into loyalties upheld by "natural" feelings'.\(^4\) In the politically volatile climate of the 1790s, the naturalness of these relationships, which rendered subjects loyal to their monarch and women to their husbands, came under an intense scrutiny which ultimately the sentimental mode failed to withstand. In addition to serving as a justification for the imposition of supposedly 'natural' power-based relationships, as Claudia Johnson has argued, sensibility was deemed responsible for another unnatural and increasingly critiqued displacement of gender roles. Though the literary productions of influential writers such as Sterne, Goldsmith, Rousseau, and Burke championed the traditionally feminine virtues displayed by the man of feeling, as Johnson argues, sentimentalism promised no 'socially productive parity between the sexes'. While this literature validated the sentimental virtues of men of feeling, female displays of sensibility were increasingly perceived as 'inferior, unconscious, unruly or even criminal'.\(^5\)


\(^4\) Jones, p. 7.

Sensibility's superficial reification of female or feminised virtue troubled eighteenth-century writers as much as it concerns modern critics such as Johnson. Rather than empowering women through a validation of female virtue, as critics such as Terry Eagleton and G. J. Barker-Benfield have argued, Hannah More and her traditional political opposite Mary Wollstonecraft argued that sentimental literature adopted such strategies only that it might render women intellectually weak. According to their critiques of sensibility, this intense focus upon feminine behavioural traits and emotional (as opposed to intellectual) response had the further undesirable effect of encouraging moral laxity and dissipation. As More argued in her *Strictures*:

[A] class of contemporary authors turned all the force of their talents to excite *emotions*, to inspire *sentiment*, and to reduce all mental and moral excellence into *sympathy* and *feeling*. These softer qualities were elevated at the expense of principle; and young women were incessantly hearing unqualified sensibility extolled as the perfection of their nature; till those who really possessed this amiable quality, instead of directing, and chastising, and restraining it, were in danger of fostering it to their hurt, and began to consider themselves as deriving their excellence from its excess. (I, pp. 73-74)

Rather than advocating that women refine moral sensibility by 'divert[ing] feeling to its proper course', as More had herself directed in her 1782 'Sensibility', sentimental novels, the *Strictures* argues, encouraged women to allow their sensibility to override their moral principles and reason. Once the hallmark of virtuous femininity, sensibility had devalued virtue, the *Strictures* suggests, by rendering morality a fashion to be sported and displayed like a new gown. More's attack upon sentiment here was by no means unique. Some seven years earlier Mary Wollstonecraft had also attacked sensibility for debasing true moral principle through a deployment of the imagery of fashion and dress. In *A*

---

6 The philosophical and linguistic parities between More's *Strictures* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* have been explored and critiqued more extensively in the work of Mitzi Myers and Harriet Guest. See Mitzi Myers, 'Reform or Ruin: "A Revolution in Female Manners"', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 11
Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), Wollstonecraft contrasts true love as traced by 'the glowing pen of genius' with the dangerous romantic fictions produced by sentimental writers:

Love, such as the glowing pen of genius has traced, exists not on earth, or only resides in those exalted, fervid imaginations that have sketched such dangerous pictures. Dangerous, because they not only afford a plausible excuse to the voluptuary, who disguises sheer sensuality under a sentimental veil; but as they spread affectation, and take from the dignity of virtue. Virtue, as the very word imports, should have an appearance of seriousness, if not of austerity; and to endeavour to trick her out in the garb of pleasure, because the epithet has been used as another name for beauty, is to exalt her on a quicksand; a most insidious attempt to hasten her fall by apparent respect. Virtue and pleasure are not, in fact, so nearly allied in this life as some eloquent writers have laboured to prove.

As in More's work, the discourse of sensibility is inextricably linked here with a discourse upon fashion, duplicity and deceit. The language of sentiment is nothing more than a veil, tailored to seduce readers into espousing romantic hopes and delusions that weaken and corrupt their minds and which, in turn, mask the mode's essential sensuality under a superficial guise of virtue. Virtue, in turn, is reduced to the insubstantiality of a metaphorical fashion doll, presented to the reader in 'a garb of pleasure' designed to attract and dupe. Intriguingly, Wollstonecraft's elision of the discourses of dress and sentiment on the eve of the genre's virtual collapse strikingly rehearses the dialogues and debates surrounding the publication of Pamela, discussed earlier, that engendered and encouraged the explosion of sentimental literature during the 1740s. Wollstonecraft's insistence upon divesting sentiment of its artificial drapery rehearses the act of stripping Pamela's adorned body to reveal her essential corruption in criticisms of the novel. Wollstonecraft's depiction of sentimental virtue as a disguise, her pun on the double meaning of 'tricking' as both dressing and deceiving, and her sense that virtue's

appropriate dress is not one of pleasure but of seriousness, echoes critiques made by anti-Pamelists who objected to the heroine's apparent delight in wearing her deceased mistress's clothes, her pleasure in 'tricking' up in modest attire, and Richardson's attempts to dress what was deemed a titillatory narrative in the guise of a didactic novel.

The fatal synonymy of sentiment and fashion was also perceived and articulated by one of sensibility's less obvious, yet no less incisive and condemnatory critics, Maria Edgeworth. Edgeworth's opposition to and mistrust of sentimentalism is a recurrent theme in her educational works. The Julia and Caroline epistolary dialogue of Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) traces a correspondence between a woman of sense and a woman of sensibility, ending in the death of the fashionably dissipated and sentimental Julia. Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (1798), co-written with her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, contains a chapter on 'Sympathy and Sensibility' which warns against an emulation of 'the extraordinary sensibility' displayed in the novels of Rousseau and Sterne. While a heightened emotional sensitivity and sympathy for those in distress might be considered the characteristics of a virtuous citizen, Edgeworth argues, literary sentimental exchanges offer a highly undesirable 'model for imitation' since they are usually experienced by 'persons of an abandoned character'. The dangers sentimental literature posed to children, and young women in particular, was a recurrent theme in Edgeworth's fiction too. *Angelina*, published in her *Moral Tales* (1801), wittily and scathingly satirises sentimental literature's propensit

---

seduce readers, and fill their vacant minds with romantic fictions and delusions. The tale relates the story of the eponymous young heroine who embarks upon a correspondence with a professional sentimental novelist writing under the pseudonym Araminta. Persuaded that Araminta is the only true friend she has, Angelina leaves her home and embarks upon a lengthy journey to find her correspondent. When the young girl finally locates her idol, her sentimental ideals are shattered by the recognition that the mannish Araminta is vulgar, partial to alcohol and a young male Quaker. In the same year that Angelina was published, Edgeworth also produced Belinda, a three volume 'Moral Tale', which follows the heroine's progress through her induction into fashionable life, her growing mistrust of its artificial conventions, to her eventual marriage. Although the novel is perhaps best known for its depiction of diseased motherhood, symbolised by Lady Delacour's diseased breast, Edgeworth's moral tale offers one of the most strikingly nuanced critiques of sentimental literature. In Belinda, as in the works of Wollstonecraft and More, the worlds of sensibility, fashion and affectation collide with devastating (and somewhat fantastic) consequences in order to expose the weak and pernicious character of the sentimental novel.

* * *

BELINDA: A COUNTER-SENTIMENTAL NOVEL

---

9 Maria Edgeworth, 'Angelina; or the Fair Inconnue', in Moral Tales for Young People (London: Joseph Johnson, 1801).
10 Throughout this chapter I will be referring to the 1802 second 'Corrected and Improved' edition of the novel. More substantial revisions were later made when Edgeworth prepared the text for publication in Anna Barbauld's British Novelists series in 1810. These revisions were re-affirmed in the third edition of the text in 1811.
Edgeworth was so anxious to dissociate Belinda from the innumerable fictions saturating the contemporary literary market that she refused to acknowledge her work as a novel. In the text's 'Advertisement', Edgeworth instead designates Belinda a 'Moral Tale — the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel' since 'so much folly, error, and vice are disseminated in books classed under this denomination, that it is hoped the wish to assume another title will be attributed to feelings that are laudable, and not fastidious'.

As Mitzi Myers has argued, Edgeworth's assertion that her writing is a different species of literary endeavour constituted an 'ambitious claim for her fiction's philosophical and moral significance as opposed to what contemporary reviewers recurrently call ordinary novel manufactory — the commodification of unchallenging amusement'. Sharing the concerns of the likes of More and Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth's rejection of the term 'novel' expresses an anxiety regarding the propensity of fiction, and particularly of sentimental fiction, to produce romantically deluded and intellectually weakened readers. One of the key strategies through which the text seeks to counteract the 'folly, error and vice' of the contemporary novel is its attempt to expose the potentially fatal extent to which sensibility and fashion, paradigmatic of the novel in the minds of many of its fiercest critics, corrupt femininity by encouraging women to live outside the domestic household both imaginatively and in fact.

11 Maria Edgeworth, Belinda (1802), ed. by Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 3. Subsequent references will be given, parenthetically, in the text.
13 The importance of dress to Edgeworth's novel has recently been explored by Eleanor Ty. While Ty focuses upon dressing, and particularly cross-dressing, as a festive and potentially empowering act of transgression of the stifling socially and culturally imposed gender distinctions of the time, this chapter is concerned more with the extent to which dress reaffirms these gender stereotypes by exposing how a love of fashion and disguise subjugates women by preventing them from exercising their true power and duty as wives and mothers. See Eleanor Ty, 'Freke in Men's Clothes: Transgression and the Carnivalesque in Edgeworth's Belinda', in The Clothes that Wear Us: Essays on Dressing and Transgressing in Eighteenth-
These meta-textual concerns are persistently dramatised throughout Edgeworth's text, but are concentrated most intensely in the figure, and indeed the body, of the novel's most compelling character, Lady Delacour. Lady Delacour's decision to send her daughter Helena to be brought up by the Percivals is a subject that draws the attention of many characters in the novel, as it has literary critics. Discussing the rejection of Helena, Margaret Delacour (Lord Delacour's aunt) refers to her niece-in-law as 'a monster' who 'hates her daughter' (pp. 102-103). In the mother's defense, her admirer Clarence Hervey remarks that 'lady Delacour [is] a woman of great sensibility' (p. 103). Margaret Delacour's swift and angry riposte intriguingly equates sensibility with fashion in a manner which echoes similar arguments made in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and More's *Strictures*:

'Sensibility!' exclaimed the indignant old lady, 'She has no sensibility, sir — none — none. She who lives in a constant round of dissipation; who performs no one duty; who exists only for herself [...] O, how I hate the cambrick-handkerchief sensibility,¹⁴ that is brought out only to weep at a tragedy! Yes, lady Delacour has sensibility enough, I grant ye, when sensibility is the fashion.' [my emphasis] (p. 103)

Margaret Delacour's characterisation of sensibility as a fashionable prop to be displayed as the scene demands is no less resonant than Wollstonecraft's description of sentimentalism as a veil. While Wollstonecraft's arguments evoke — whether intentionally or not — the literary debates on Pamela's contentious appearance in her homespun gown and petticoat, so Mrs Delacour's comments may be read as a critical allusion to one of the most well-known scenes of sentimental literature. Although the handkerchief is a frequent emblem in scenes of sentimental exchange, nowhere is it more

---

central than in Yorick's meeting with the widowed Maria in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768). The narrative of Maria's personal tragedy inspires a speechless exchange of emotion between the two protagonists, emblematised by the exchange of Yorick's soon saturated handkerchief:

> the tears trickled down her cheeks. I sat close by her; and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell with my handkerchief. — I then steep'd it in my own — and then in hers — and then in mine — and then I wip'd hers again — and as I did it, I felt such indescribable emotions, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion. I am positive I have a soul.¹⁵

Mrs Delacour's attack upon Lady Delacour offers a further, fictional justification for Edgeworth's critique of Sterne's sentimental fiction in *Practical Education* as one of the most influential yet inappropriate behavioural models. No matter how noble the sentiments of the original scene, Lady Delacour's imitation of such literary examples translates these metaphysical 'combinations of matter and motion' into physical props and posturing that constitute the semblance rather than the substance of virtue. Following fashion rather than maternal instinct, Lady Delacour is the most unnatural and fickle of mothers, a woman who breast feeds her second child because it 'was the fashion [...] for fine mothers to suckle their own children' (p. 42), only for her to subsequently abandon her proper familial duties to nurture her family by rejecting her daughter.

The apparently inextricable tripartite connection between fashion, sensibility and moral impoverishment explored throughout the previous chapters — and emblematised in the resonant image of the 'cambrick handkerchief' — is further suggested in the very title of Edgeworth's work. *Belinda*, of course, alludes to the heroine of Pope's *Rape of the

¹⁴ Cambric is a very fine white linen.
Lock (1714), the beautiful nymph whose lock of hair is responsible for 'the Destruction of Mankind'. As Anne Mellor has argued, Edgeworth's allusion to Pope's heroine is indicative of her attempt to paint 'the portrait of the new Belinda, the woman who will replace Pope's "fairest of mortals" as the envy of her age'. Yet if the novel's title is expressive of Edgeworth's hope for the future literary representation of women, as Mellor implies, it is also suggestive of the extent to which authors struggle to rewrite prior literary tradition and women struggle to unwrite the narratives inscribed upon their characters by their names, gender and birth. Like Burney's Evelina, Belinda has been 'educated chiefly in the country [and] been inspired with a taste for domestic pleasures'. She is 'disposed to conduct herself with prudence and integrity' and possesses a character 'yet to be developed by circumstances' (p. 7). Despite the suggestion that Belinda's character is a tabula rasa, yet to be formulated and refined by circumstance, and although she displays little in common with her Popian predecessor, Edgeworth's heroine is forced to persistently counter the efforts of others to inscribe upon her character the traits of her literary antecedent. When Lady Delacour summons Belinda to her dressing room she compares her companion to Pope's heroine even whilst she acknowledges Belinda's essential difference:

Let me see you in my dressing-room, dear Belinda, as soon as you have adored [quoting from Pope's work] 'With head uncover'd, the cosmetic powers.' But you don't paint — no matter — you will — you must — every body must, sooner or later. (p. 34)

Lady Delacour's belief that Belinda will become more and more like her namesake establishes a recurrent theme in Edgeworth's novel, concerning the difficulty women face in maintaining control over their public representation and the narrative of their own lives.

In order that Belinda may become a virtuous wife rather than a mere 'puppet' paraded in fashionable society (p. 10), she must first undergo a series of personal trials and embarrassments through which she demonstrates sufficient strength of character to avoid the fate prescribed by her name. As Belinda's actions progressively dissociate her from her namesake, she becomes a more attractive marital prospect to Hervey. However, the couple is unable to marry until another fictional identity is exposed, and the truth of Virginia's name (Rachel Hartley) and birth are revealed. Like Belinda, Virginia is a victim of a fictitious identity imposed from without. In the text's Rousseauvian subplot, Clarence Hervey undertakes the education of the apparently orphaned girl and seeks to instil within her the characteristics he considers most desirable in a future wife. Crucial to the creation of his ideal wife is Hervey's decision to name the girl after the heroine of St. Pierre's romance *Paul et Virginie* (1788), in which the text's two protagonists are educated outside society, in accordance with nature's laws. The creation of Virginia's fictional identity, however, imprisons both Clarence Hervey and herself, constituting a near contractual arrangement between both parties in which Virginia feels bound to Hervey, and Hervey feels bound to care for Virginia. This barrier to the happiness of both

---

18 Several such experiments to educate a young woman as a future wife were inspired by Rousseau's *Emile*, including Romney's 'education' of Emma Hamilton. Belinda's subplot was inspired more specifically, however, by the experiment made by Thomas Day, a family friend of the Edgeworths, to create a real-life Sophie by educating Sabrina Sidney to become his wife. Sidney and Day did not marry, however. Eight
characters places the subplot in a virtual stasis that can be lifted only when Virginia's fictional identity is unwritten by her reconciliation with her father. Once this pseudo-contractual bond is broken, Hervey is free to marry Belinda and Virginia to marry Captain Sutherland.

The original title of Edgeworth's moral tale suggested something of the dual identities of Belinda's principle female protagonists. The work was initially entitled 'At Home and Abroad', a phrase intended, as Susan C. Greenfield has argued, to demarcate 'an opposition between the public, or artificial, female self and the private or genuine one'. Edgeworth had previously used this phrase in her Letters for Literary Ladies to describe women's unachievable desire to dominate both the social and domestic spheres. In the epistolary exchange between Julia and Caroline, the latter warns her sentimental friend against a possible marriage to the aristocratic Lord V. While V.'s 'easiness of temper and fondness' may cause him to give Julia 'ascendancy over his pleasures [and] entire command at home and abroad', Caroline warns that such tyranny comes at a price. The ensuing cautionary description of high life can be read as an early sketch for the narrative of Lady Delacour. High life, Caroline warns, places 'restraints upon your time, upon the choice of your friends and to your company'. Such dissipation leads to an intolerable 'ennui' and a constant round of 'mortifications of rivalship in beauty, wit, rank

---

19 In addition to Belinda and Virginia, Lady Delacour's character is split between her spirited public self, and private, tragic identity, while Harriet Freke's appearance in various disguises and dress signals an equally fluid identity.  
and magnificence'. In short, to lead such a life of fashionable 'pleasure', one must sacrifice the more genuine and rewarding 'pleasures of the heart and the imagination'.

Lady Delacour, whose name indicates her propensity to live life by following her heart (le coeur) rather than her head, is similarly engaged in a powerful and dangerous act of self-delusion. In following the false pleasures of the heart she relinquishes the genuine, heart-felt pleasures of familial life. This loss of essential selfhood, precipitated by the abandonment of the nurturing characteristics that define femininity to Edgeworth, also entails a loss of control over one's personal narrative. Once abroad, living in the public sphere, an individual's life simply becomes a commodity to be exchanged and refashioned in the social marketplace. Ironically it is Lady Delacour's highly visible role in this marketplace that leads both Belinda and her Aunt Stanhope to judge her a fitting guide for the heroine's launch into the marriage market:

The newspapers were full of lady Delacour's parties, and lady Delacour's dresses, and lady Delacour's bon mots [...] every thing her ladyship wore, was imitated as fashionable. Female wit sometimes depends on the beauty of it's [sic] possessor for it's reputation; and the reign of beauty is proverbially short. Fashion often capriciously deserts her favourites, even before nature withers their charms. Lady Delacour seemed to be the fortunate exception to these general rules. (p. 10)

Initially, Belinda sees no reason to challenge her view of Lady Delacour as the fashionable, carefree and compelling woman famed in newspapers and society. The older woman appears to Belinda the 'most fascinating person she had ever beheld' (p. 10). Soon, however, she realises that her friend's public image is a far cry from the reality of her character and situation. Not long after her arrival at the Delacour home, Belinda

---

begins to perceive the truth behind the Delacours and their marriage, as she awakens from her delusions 'to see through the thin veil, with which politeness covers domestic misery' (p. 10). The choice of the word veil, here, is significant. Not only does it imply the extent to which society demands that people mask their true selves in order to immunise themselves from slander and reproach, but it further suggests the extent to which dress and fashionable effect are integral to Lady Delacour's attempt to gain control of her public self and personal narrative.

Her desire to maintain the secret of the cancer she imagines is killing her — later revealed to be a bruise caused by a pistol misfire in a duel fought over the rakish Colonel Lawless — imprisons Lady Delacour, leaving her vulnerable to the tyranny of Marriott, Harriot Freke and Mrs Luttridge. 22 As much as she is in fear of her cancer, Lady Delacour is anxious that her story will become known within society. Reflecting upon her impending mastectomy and possible recovery, Lady Delacour is concerned that her withdrawal from society will be perceived as a 'forced retreat'. Anxious that her rivals will believe she has set 'up for being a prude, because she can no longer be a coquette', Lady Delacour expresses dread at the thought of losing control over her public image:

> It would just be the very thing for the odious Mrs Luttridge; then she would revenge herself without mercy for The Ass and Her Paniers. We should have Lord and lady D—, or The Domestic Tête à Tête, or The Reformed Amazon, stuck up in a print-shop window! (p. 293)

Fearing a loss of control over her public representation more than her possible death during the operation, Lady Delacour humorously remarks that such an abuse of her

---

22 Falls and bruises were deemed one of the possible causes of breast cancer in the eighteenth century. For a discussion of the medical understanding of the disease in the period see Ruth Perry, 'Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 16:1 (1992), pp. 185-213.
character would cause her to 'die with vexation, and of all deaths that is the death I should like the least' (p. 293). Until this crucial moment in her narrative, Lady Delacour has assiduously sought to manipulate and control her public self by moving from one identity to another as the situation demanded. As Heather Macfadyen argues, Lady Delacour 'uses texts to provide her with a series of nondomestic identities'. Not only is her speech liberally interspersed with literary quotations, Lady Delacour expresses her personal narrative through a variety of literary modes which signify the extent to which she aestheticises her life in an attempt to escape its harsh realities and to hide from society's watchful eye beneath a social mask. During the confessional narrative of her past misdemeanours to Belinda, Lady Delacour refers to herself as Sheherazade (p. 51), revealing perhaps the faintest hope that by telling her story she feels her life may be spared. At other moments in the narrative she self-consciously speaks of herself 'in the style in which the newspaper writers speak of me' (p. 43) and describes her confessional as 'The life and opinions of a Lady of Quality' (p. 35).

Lady Delacour's literary self-fashioning is complemented by her literal self-fashioning via the medium of costume and cosmetics, through which she seeks to conceal her loss of beauty, passing age, disfigured breast and guilt. As Susan Greenfield has argued, although Edgeworth's Belinda is named after the mock heroine of The Rape of the Lock, Lady Delacour more nearly resembles Pope's character in her elaborate 'dressing ritual' and her concentration upon physical appearance. Her use of dress as a

---

24 For a more detailed analysis of this theme, see Macfadyen, pp. 423-439.
25 Greenfield, p. 216.
form of false self-projection is intimated early in the novel during the masquerade scene. As Terry Castle has noted, *Belinda* contains one of the last masquerade scenes in English literature. By the end of the eighteenth century, the masquerade had become an 'emblem of the past', de-institutionalised and displaced in an era of 'intensified subjectivity' and a largely redundant literary trope in the world of the realist novel.\textsuperscript{26} The masquerade may have fallen out of popular fashion by the time *Belinda* was published, but it is central to Edgeworth's argument, voiced here and in *Letters for Literary Ladies*, that women's attempts to secure an artificial, fashionable public image lead to a potentially irrecoverable loss of essential selfhood.

In a richly woven episode containing multiple narrative strands and layers of meaning, Marriott encourages her mistress to attend the masquerade in the guise of the 'tragic muse', following the logic that people 'always succeed best when they take characters diametrically opposite to their own' (p. 19). Of course, as the reader later learns and the spiteful Marriott already knows, however, tragedy is in fact the most appropriate guise for Lady Delacour. Dressed as the tragic muse, she is no longer able to hide beneath the fiction of a fashionable and attractive exterior. Aware that in donning this costume she will be effectively masquerading as herself, Lady Delacour becomes increasingly uneasy. She becomes still 'more out of humour' (p. 21) when she sees Belinda in the more becoming costume of the comic muse and determines to exchange outfits with her companion. This exchange of costumes has a complex dual effect. For Belinda, in a common trope of literary masquerade scenes, donning the guise of the tragic

muse is both a revelatory and distressing experience during which she is exposed to other
people's true opinions of her for the first time in her life. Sharing Marriott's logic that
people masquerade most successfully in clothing that is 'diametrically opposite' to their
own characters, Hervey believes the tragic muse to be Lady Delacour rather than her
young companion. Unaware to whom he is talking, and in an episode which strongly
anticipates Mr Darcy's unfavourable comments upon the Bennet women within
Elizabeth's hearing in *Pride and Prejudice*, Hervey expresses his disdain for the
matchmaking tactics of Mrs Stanhope, and refers to the silent and embarrassed Belinda as
a dangerous 'composition of art and affectation' (p. 26). While the masquerade reveals
painful truths for Belinda, it affords Lady Delacour a further opportunity for self-
delusion. Dressing as the comic muse, Lady Delacour can indulge in and propagate the
fiction of her happiness and her disregard for the opinions of others. This effect, however,
is short-lived, and ultimately the incongruity between her guise and inner self forces Lady
Delacour to contemplate the tragedy of her own life:

Now you know what a multitude of obedient humble servants, dear creatures, and very sincere and
most affectionate friends, I have, in my writing-desk [...] do you think I'm fool enough to imagine
that they would care the hundreth part of a straw, if I were thrown into the Red, or the Black sea!
(p. 29)

Paradoxically, the world upside-down of the masquerade offers more genuine truths than
the 'real' world of society. Belinda's painful recognition of Hervey's true perception of her
character and that of her family affords a valuable lesson, Lady Delacour suggests, in
revealing to her naïve friend that life is a masquerade in which every gesture, every
comment and each and every appearance is calculated for effect. The only way to
succeed in such a world, she asserts, is to 'elbow your way through the crowd' and play society at its own game by showing the world 'you've no feeling' (p. 29).

* * *

LADY DELACOUR'S DRESSING ROOM

The disjunction between Lady Delacour's inner and outer self, laid bare by the masquerade, slowly begins to erode the fiction of her fashionable identity. After returning from the masquerade, she confesses to Belinda that she is dying. In order to expose her true self to her friend, Lady Delacour invites her to the scene of the construction of her fictional identity: her dressing room.

Lady Delacour [...] looked from side to side of the room, without seeming to know what she was in search of. She then, with a species of fury, wiped the paint from her face, and returning to Belinda, held the candle so as to throw the light full upon her livid features. Her eyes were sunk, her cheeks hollow — no trace of youth or beauty remained on her deathlike countenance, which formed a horrid contrast with her gay fantastic dress. (p. 31)

If Lady Delacour's make-up hides the truth of her age and lost beauty, then her clothes hide an even greater secret. In a characteristically melodramatic and theatrical gesture, Lady Delacour finally unveils her breast. But still the 'truth' of her character is not fully revealed. For beneath the pitiful surface disfigurement of her body, Lady Delacour indicates, lie further and more wretched depths.27

"Yes, pity me, for what you have seen; and a thousand times more, for that which you cannot see — my mind is eaten away like my body, by incurable disease — inveterate remorse — remorse for a life of folly — of folly which has brought on me all the punishments of guilt." (p. 32)

27 The recurrent discourse of surfaces, depths and female duplicity is explored in more detail in Tassie Gwilliam's Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender (Stanford [CA]: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 15-49.
Edgeworth's description of the unveiling of Lady Delacour's body recalls earlier textual representations of the dressing room, particularly in early eighteenth-century misogynist satire. Dark, lit only by a candle, full of 'a confusion of linen rags — vials, some empty, some full', and filled with a 'strong smell of medicines', Lady Delacour's boudoir recalls Celia's in Swift's 'Lady's Dressing Room' (1732):

Here Gallypots and Vials plac'd,
Some fill'd with Washes, some with Paste,
Some with Pomatum, Paints and Slops,
And Ointments good for scabby Chops.28

As in the earlier satire, Lady Delacour's dressing room is a site in which female duplicity is unmasked, as the layers of her artificial self are stripped away, little by little, to reveal her inherent sexual and corporeal corruption.

Edgeworth's deployment of the dressing room in Belinda is of interest both in the context of her literary project to create a new form of fiction that transcends the 'folly, errour and vice' she condemns in the novel's 'Advertisement', and as an important moment in the teleology of an eighteenth-century literary trope. As Felicity Nussbaum has explored, the dressing room scene, indebted in large part to Juvenal's sixth Satire, was a powerful trope in Restoration and early eighteenth-century satires against women. Within the confines of the dressing room, poets could expose and contain the essential corruptibility of woman, her 'pride, lust, and inconstancy'. As 'the site of woman's preparation for attacking and destroying men' through the skillful use of cosmetics and

28 Jonathan Swift, The Lady's Dressing Room To which is added a Poem on Cutting down the Old Thorn at Market Hill (London: J. Roberts, 1732), p. 5.
dress, an *exposé* of the dressing room armed and empowered her otherwise hapless victims by allowing them to vicariously 'penetrate the disguises of women in order to protect themselves'. 29 If the dressing room dispelled the myth of ideal femininity before the eyes of the male onlooker, it also offered women the opportunity to see the extent to which their efforts to aspire to an artificial ideal of femininity eternally imprisoned them in a position of subservience. As Nussbaum argues, the dressing room satires of Rochester and Swift reveal that 'if women create myths for themselves, as they do at the dressing table, they are also subject to the myths men create for them'. 30 To aspire to a form of feminine beauty that can only be achieved by the deployment of cosmetics and dress is to tacitly admit that such beauty is but an illusion that can only ever reveal the essential baseness and superficiality of womankind. The only wonderment to be found in female beauty, as Strephon finds in the 'Lady's Dressing Room', is that from 'Washes, Slops and every Clout,/ With which she makes so foul a Rout' should 'Such Order from Confusion spring,/ Such gaudy Tulips rais'd from Dung'. 31

While dressing room satires sought to reveal all that is repugnant and nauseating about female sexuality by divesting women of their clothes and make-up, these satires implicitly imbue the dressing room with a sense of compelling mystery. As Nussbaum argues, the dressing room is 'morbidly fascinating [...] a living metaphor for a woman's mystery [since a] woman standing before her dressing table is engaged in exploring her sexual and psychic independence as she creates a separate, private and self-glorified

30 Nussbaum, p. 113.
identity'. Though this self-glorified identity is exposed as a travesty in these early satires, the concept of the dressing room as a room of one's own, in which a woman could create personal identity, became an important symbol of female power in later sentimentalised accounts of the dressing room. In *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, Richardson sought to reclaim the dressing room from the earlier literary tradition as a site which emblematises the inner substance and moral worth of its inhabitants, rather than their shallowness and artifice. The act of reclaiming the boudoir necessitated, however, a concomitant shift in the sexual dynamic of the dressing room, no less misogynist than the views expounded in the satires. Rather than a site in which women seek to tyrannise over men through cosmetic and sartorial arts, the dressing room is recast in Richardson's fiction as a site in which men tyrannise over women. Like the earlier voyeurs in the verse of Rochester and Swift, Mr B and Lovelace seek to undress Pamela and Clarissa physically, by stripping away their costume, and metaphorically, by reading their correspondence. For them both, the dressing room holds a kind of mystic power as a site which promises access to the thoughts and bodies of the two women. As Simon Varey argues in his study of the deployment and configuration of space in eighteenth-century novels, rooms in *Clarissa* provide 'a metonymic spatial vehicle that express [...] Lovelace's desires [and] Clarissa's opposition, and her isolation'. Similarly, rooms serve in *Pamela* to re-inscribe the young servant's vulnerability and confinement as Mr B persistently seeks to underline his position as master of the household by an unrelenting violation of the personal space of Pamela's dressing room. Yet, both Pamela and

---

31 Swift, 'Lady's Dressing Room', p. 12.
32 Nussbaum, p. 105.
Clarissa's deployment of their rooms ultimately constitute powerful acts of defiance over their male aggressors. Mr B's voyeuristic desires to know Pamela by watching her in her closet serve only to prove the young woman's worth. When Pamela separates her clothes into bundles for her return to her parents' home, only to find that she has been watched by Mr B, Mrs Jervis remarks that her master was moved to 'wipe his Eyes two or three times' at the sight of Pamela's humble refusal to take her deceased mistress's fine clothes with her.\textsuperscript{34} Even at the moment of her most extreme violation, Pamela's untacking of her correspondence from her petticoat in her dressing room acts as a powerful gesture that eventually proves the servant's worth to Mr B and precipitates their marriage. Similarly, Clarissa's chosen retreat into confinement and isolation after the repeated physical, spatial and emotional violations she has suffered at the hands of Lovelace, constitutes, as Simon Varey argues, 'acts of radical self-determination'.\textsuperscript{35}

Despite Richardson's efforts to reconfigure the dressing room, however, the early misogynist satirical tradition continued to be influential throughout the century, and is a subtext of almost any counter or anti-fashion argument made throughout the period. In the case of Pamela, Richardson failed to convince readers of his heroine's moral purity. Unable to eradicate the taint of salacious voyeurism and the anxiety that 'every woman is at heart a rake' informing early dressing room satires, the scenes in which Pamela dresses and undresses became focal points for some of the fiercest criticisms of the novel. The sense that Pamela might be using her dressing room as a backdrop upon which to perform staged virtue to secure an aristocratic husband is a recurrent theme in anti-Pamelist

literature. Perhaps the most extreme of such views was expounded by Charles Povey in *The Virgin in Eden* (1741), in which the author argued that if Pamela was truly virtuous she would never have 'undress[ed] till every Avenue in [her] Room' had been first searched. Even the novel's engravings in the 1742 octavo, sixth edition of the novel did little to help the heroine's case on this point. The scene in which Pamela 'humbly' separates her three bundles of clothes in her dressing room is presented as a theatrical gesture designed to win over her audience (Mr B), who observes Pamela from behind what looks suspiciously like a stage curtain (see fig. 7).

Edgeworth's deployment of the dressing room in *Belinda* plays with and subverts the significations with which it was traditionally associated to expose the shallowness and superficiality of the early satires as well as the fictionality of the sentimental ideal of moral legibility formulated by Richardson and his successors. The mystery surrounding Lady Delacour's dressing rituals intrigues Belinda from her arrival at the Delacour home. At first, Belinda is herself unable to see beyond the parameters of the misogynist dressing room satires and imagines that her companion's odd behaviour arises from her dreading 'the discovery of her cosmetic secrets' (p. 20). She soon dismisses this thought, however, with the realisation that since 'her ladyship's rouge was so glaring and her pearl powder was so obvious [...] there must be some other cause for this toilette secrecy' (pp. 20-21). Nevertheless, as in the earlier poems, Belinda finds that Lady Delacour's cosmetics and clothing are symptomatic of a much more deep-seated physical and moral corruption than

---

33 Varey, p. 189.
36 Charles Povey, *The Virgin in Eden: or, the State of Innocency, To which are added, PAMELA'S Letters proved to be Immodest Romances painted in Images of Virtue: Masquerades in Disguise*, 5th edn (London: J. Roberts, 1741), p. 70.
they at first appear to suggest. The 'horrid business of [Lady Delacour's] toilette', she finds, is designed to conceal the 'hideous spectacle' of her breast, which is, in turn, symptomatic of her moral weakness and dysfunctional femininity.

While, on the one hand, Edgeworth's depiction of Lady Delacour appears to dispel the myth of ideal femininity as Swift and Rochester had done, by exposing the extent to which woman's surface veneer merely masks the rot and canker that lies beneath, Lady Delacour simultaneously constitutes a powerful symbol of archetypal womanhood. The synecdoche of her diseased breast rehearses the sentimental ideal of moral legibility, in which the body acts as a physical index to the mind. Try as she might to conceal her past transgressions, Lady Delacour's breast acts as indelible testimony to her life and character. As with earlier attempts to analogise appearance with inner self, dress plays a complex and problematic role in the formulation of this ideal. On one level, Lady Delacour seems to support the anxieties of the likes of Richardson and Fordyce by proving that she can successfully encrypt her true self by a judicious deployment of dress. Fashionable costume and the assumption of an air of careless levity act as barriers to Lady Delacour's physical disease and to her emotions. This act of containing and masking feeling gives her a strange kind of personal pride, yet it is also one of the sources of her painful unhappiness. Throughout the novel Lady Delacour remarks upon her impenetrability, even when she appears to be at her most truthful and open. After she has nearly completed the lengthy confessional narrative of her life to Belinda, Lady Delacour

37 The representation of physical deformity and disfigurement in eighteenth-century literature is necessarily beyond the scope of this study. While writers often made a connection between physical and moral deformity (such as Mrs Sinclair in Richardson's Clarissa) many other writers, such as Sarah Scott and Burney, often used 'ugliness' or physical abnormalities as symbols of moral purity. For a detailed analysis
admits that her young friend can never really know the whole truth of her character and emotions: 'You stare — you cannot enter into my feelings' (p. 65). Drawing upon the sentimental tradition of Richardson, Sterne and Mackenzie, Lady Delacour suggests that feeling is beyond words. As such, it can only be expressed by physical gestures and signs — what John Mullan has termed a 'repertoire of wordless meanings'. But where the bodies of Clarissa and Maria unwittingly communicate via this idealised speechless vocabulary, Lady Delacour’s life is driven by exhaustive efforts to conceal and encrypt these corporeal indications of feeling, and in so doing exposes the fragility and corruptibility of the sentimental ideal of virtuous femininity.

Elsewhere in the text, however, Belinda appears to support the sentimental fantasy that women’s bodies are always accessible and legible to the eye of the discerning observer. Paradoxically, the more desperately Lady Delacour seeks to demonstrate the opacity of her feelings, the more accessible these feelings become to those closest to her. Fearing that her maternal feeling for Helena renders her vulnerable to future pain, Lady Delacour cruelly recoils from her daughter:

'Dear mamma, I never was so happy in my life; for you never looked so very, very kindly at me before.'

'Do not judge always of the kindness people feel for you, child, by their looks; and remember that it is possible a person may have felt more than you could guess by their looks. Pray now, Helena, you who are such a good judge of physiognomy, should you guess that I was dying, by my looks?' The little girl laughed, and repeated 'Dying? O no, mamma.'

'O no! because I have such a fine colour in my cheeks — hey?'

'Not for that reason, mamma', said Helena, withdrawing her eyes from her mother’s face.

---


'What, then you know rouge already when you see it? You perceive some difference, between miss Portman's colour and mine? Upon my word you are a nice observer. Such nice observers are sometimes dangerous to have near one'. (p. 289)

Since Helena is able to see through her mother's cultivated, cosmetic veneer, Lady Delacour fears that her daughter will discover the supposed truth of her cancer. Rather than a danger to her mother, however, Helena's observations offer her salvation. Helena's innocent and instinctive response to her mother's appearance allows her to see through the layers of fiction in which she is shrouded (her fashionable appearance and her fictitious cancer) to reveal that her mother is not dying. Lady Delacour's efforts to mask her illness further betray her in the eyes of another 'nice observer', the physician Dr X—.

In one of her most elaborate disguises, Lady Delacour decides to entertain her company by dressing 'in the character of queen Elizabeth' in an old masquerade outfit 'with a large ruff, and all the costume of the times' (p. 114). The show she puts on enlivens the company and Clarence Hervey praises his hostess's 'charming spirits' (p. 115). Hervey's older, rational companion, however, sees through Lady Delacour's disguise. Such displays, Dr X— remarks, 'incline me more to melancholy than mirth':

These high spirits do not seem quite natural. The vivacity of youth and of health, miss Portman, always charms me; but this gayety of lady Delacour's does not appear to me that of a sound mind in a sound body. (p. 115)

Dr X— cannot ascertain whether the fever from which Lady Delacour is suffering is of the 'mind or body', although he is confident that this matter could be easily settled by 'having her pulse felt' (p. 115). Where Harriot Freke's deployment of costume and disguise affords her a certain kind of power and authority (albeit briefly exercised and harshly punished) Lady Delacour's dress subjugates and imprisons her. Without any
medical examination, and in spite of the exaggerated costume she wears, Lady Delacour's body speaks loudly to the rational physician through her clothes, providing, to borrow John Mullan's phrase, 'an ever-visible corpus of signs given over to the practice of interpretation'.

This simultaneous ridiculing and rehearsal of the sentimental ideal of the transparent and legible body is rendered all the more complicated in Edgeworth's multi-layered text by the fictionality of Lady Delacour's illness. Once her disfigured breast is revealed not to be cancerous but merely displaying the signs of severe bruising, aggravated by the treatments of a quack doctor, the satisfying analogy between inner and outer self contrived in the first part of the novel (between Lady Delacour's fashionable appearance and corrupt body) is exposed as a sham. Dr X—'s remark that Lady Delacour's fever may be of mental rather than physical origin proves far more insightful than it at first appears. Rather than a mere physical symbol of her moral disfigurement — what Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace terms 'the appropriate synecdoche for her failed maternity' — Lady Delacour's mutilated breast is symptomatic of her sensibility, which encourages a near pathological self-regarding fetishisation of her body that, in turn, convinces her that she is dying. The real danger illuminated by the comments of Helena and Dr X— is not the possibility that they might discover Lady Delacour's supposed cancer, but that her guilt and flawed sensibility render her unable to see herself and her fictitious illness through the eyes of such nice observers. Initially ignoring the 'warning twinges' she felt in her breast after the pistol misfire, Lady Delacour eventually becomes

---

39 Mullan, p. 221.
consumed by the thought that she must be dying. As the novel progresses and the truth surrounding her imagined cancer is revealed, it becomes clear that her diseased breast is not one of the 'punishments of guilt' (p. 32) meted out by a vengeful god. Neither is Lady Delacour, as Marriott believes, simply the victim of 'a villainous quack' (p. 313) who deceives his patient into believing she has cancer and encourages her reliance upon laudanum in order to exact a high fee. Rather, Lady Delacour falls victim to her own sense of guilt, her tendency to dramatise and exaggerate her life, and to a belief in a sentimental ideal that the surface of the body speaks truths about inner character. After all, it is only long after she has convinced herself that 'it was in vain to doubt of the nature of my complaint' (p. 65) that Lady Delacour consults the quack physician who merely exploits his patient's unshaking and deep-seated belief that she is terminally ill.

Lady Delacour's internalisation of 'a specific image of womanhood' of which motherhood is the apotheosis, as Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has argued, manifests itself in a 'sense of maternal guilt and obligation' that is in turn manifest in her disfigured breast. Lady Delacour's decision to accept a life of fashion over a life of domestic happiness by marrying Lord Delacour, who seemed 'in love with [her] faults', rather than Mr Percival, who clearly was not, is a crucial junction in her life. Having decided to live in the 'fashionable world' and 'to be as be as extravagant as possible' (p. 37), Lady Delacour has sacrificed the 'natural' pleasures of domestic happiness and sealed her fate. In this way, Lady Delacour's dressing in expensive and often theatrical costumes makes her as unfeminine and 'unnatural' a figure as Harriot's Freke appears in men's clothes,

---

since it symbolises her rejection of feminine, domestic duties. As she makes clear in her confessional narrative, Lady Delacour's choice of a life of coquetry and fashionable dissipation left no room for the fulfillment of the duties of a wife and mother. Her children are mentioned in her confessional autobiography only as an apparent afterthought: 'I forgot to tell you, that I had three children during the first five years of my marriage' (p. 42). But rather than an example of her unfeeling motherhood, the way in which Lady Delacour strategically incorporates her children into her life narrative serves as a further example of the extent to which her attempts to mask her true sentiments merely display them all the more openly:

The first was a boy; he was born dead; and my lord, and all his odious relations, laid the blame on me; because I would not be kept prisoner half a year by an old mother of his, a vile Cassandra, who was always prophesying that my child would not be born alive. My second was a girl, but a poor diminutive, sickly thing. It was the fashion at this time for fine mothers to suckle their own children — so much the worse for the poor brats [...] at the end of about three months my poor child was sick too — I don't much like to think of it — she died. If I had put it out to nurse, I should have been thought by my friends an unnatural mother — but I should have saved its life. (p. 42)

Fashion, associated from the beginning of the novel with performativity and affectation, accrues altogether more disturbing connotations at this point in the narrative. Lord Delacour's mother appears in little doubt that her daughter-in-law's pursuit of fashion was to blame for the death of her grandson. In spite of the casual manner in which Lady Delacour relates and rejects this accusation it is soon evident that she too has internalised the connection between fashion and infanticide, blaming the death of her second child upon her desire to follow fashionable society's dictates and breast-feed. When her third child is born, Lady Delacour no longer possessed 'the barbarity to nurse it [her]self' and

41 Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 110.
gives the child out to nurse before sending her to live with the Percivals (p. 42). While Lord Delacour's aunt, as quoted earlier, deems the relinquishing of Helena proof of Lady Delacour's fashionable sensibility (at the expense of a genuine maternal sensibility), this act can be read as symptomatic of a marked sensibility, masked by a fashionable appearance designed to conceal the depth of this feeling.

After the death of her second child, Lady Delacour retreats into fashion to hide her personal pain, leaving her vulnerable to accusations of emotional sterility:

I couldn't or wouldn't shed a tear, and I left it to the old dowager to perform in public, as she wished, the part of the chief mourner, and to comfort herself in private, by lifting up her hands and eyes, and railing at me as the most insensible of mothers. (p. 42)

While others condemn Lady Delacour for her public composure and levity following her child's death, it is the dowager's public performance of grief which she determines distasteful: 'All this time I suffered more than she did; but that is what she will never have the satisfaction of knowing' (p. 42). For Lady Delacour, sensibility seems to constitute a raw vulnerability which must be hidden, for to expose it would be to expose herself to the hostility and tyranny of others. Yet in masking and internalising her emotions, she becomes the victim of her own sensibility which convinces her that she must die to pay for her sins. As a space devoid of reason, the dressing room becomes the focal point of this fetishistic self-delusion. The connection between sentimental fetishisation and the boudoir is made in explicit by Dr X—. When rumours about the secrets contained in Lady Delacour's dressing room abound within her society and in her household, Dr X— praises Belinda for her efforts to quell these suspicions. If Belinda acted 'like all other
heroines, [...] that is to say, without common sense' she could exploit the suspicions of others by turning Lady Delacour's life into a 'nine volume' specious romance entitled 'the Mysterious Boudoir' (pp. 132-133). Unlike the early eighteenth-century misogynist satire in which the dressing room functions as a site in which women seek to tyrannise over men, or the sentimental tradition in which men enter the dressing room to tyrannise over women, Belinda re-imagines this space both as a locus for the self-tyranny that women exercise over themselves and as a stage upon which to enact fantasies of personal guilt. In this subtle re-imagining of the dressing room, Edgeworth uses the sentimental trope against itself to expose, as More and Wollstonecraft had done, how sensibility's emphasis upon women's bodies corrupted their minds.

* * *

LADY DELACOUR'S REFORMATION

The inextricability of fashion and sensibility resonates upon three key levels in the narrative of Lady Delacour's life. Fashion is, on one level, the cause of her deformity, propelling her into a life of dissipation which leads her away from the possibility of domestic happiness she could have enjoyed with Mr Percival. Fashion further becomes symptomatic of her deformity in the eyes of her most vehement critics, proof of her alienation from genuine maternal feeling. Finally, fashion is a tool used by Lady Delacour to conceal her deformity (quite literally as a supposedly impenetrable barrier to
the disease that lies beneath her clothes, and metaphorically as a barrier to her emotions) which she feels renders her vulnerable to the manipulation and hostility of others. But, in what would become a key argument in the emergent feminist discourse of the late eighteenth century, Lady Delacour's disguise has become her trap:

> Ambitious of pleasing universally, I became the worst of slaves — a slave to the world. Not a moment of my time was at my own disposal — not one of my actions; I may say, not one of my thoughts, was my own [...] every day it was the same dull round of hypocrisy and dissipation.' (p. 41)

Lady Delacour's characterisation of her life of fashion as one of slavery is resonant within the context of *Belinda*'s colonialist discourse. While an exploration of the text's depiction of the West Indian Creole Mr Vincent and his black servant Juba are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is interesting to note that Lady Delacour's self-characterisation implicitly connects her with the black servant. Juba's superstitious nature renders him too vulnerable to the manipulation of others, particularly Harriot Freke, who disguises herself as an Obeah woman to frighten the young man, and who also dresses as a ghost to terrorise the equally superstitious Lady Delacour.42

Lady Delacour's self-characterisation as a slave is also significant in the context of late-eighteenth century proto-feminist writing. Iain Topliss' article on Edgeworthian feminism marked a significant moment in Edgeworth studies by recognising the importance of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* to Edgeworth's work.43 While Harriot Freke,

42 For a detailed discussion of the novel's colonialist discourse see Susan C. Greenfield's article.
Belinda's cruel and misguided cross-dressing champion of the rights of woman, may well represent Edgeworth's anxieties regarding Wollstonecraft's more extreme views, Topliss argues that the Vindication also provided an influential source for Edgeworth's project to 'make individual behaviour explicable by social causes'. Topliss highlights three main points of comparison between the two writers: as well as betraying a shared interest in Wollstonecraft's conception of 'the present degraded state of women' and the relationship between understanding and virtue, the work of both writers analysed marriage. Many other philosophical and linguistic echoes might be added to Topliss' list. Most significant for the present discussion, however, is the conviction shared by both writers that sensibility, fashion and reputation are interrelated factors which force women into a state of self-tyranny that is destructive both of personal morality and of the integrity of the domestic household. For Wollstonecraft, as Sydy McMillen Conger has argued, the language of sensibility represented one of 'men's primary agent[s] in the oppression of women'. As Wollstonecraft writes in the Vindication, '[a]nother instance of that feminine weakness of character [...] is a romantic twist of mind, which has been very properly termed sentimental:

Women subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice.

45 Topliss, p. 15.
47 Wollstonecraft, p. 313.
In an arbitrary attempt to delineate gender difference and proscribe female character, society encourages women, like Julia in Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies*, to feel rather than think. However, this construction of a feminine ideal based upon emotion rather than reason, according to both writers, does little to guarantee female emotional purity and promote domestic happiness. Rather, this reification of emotion encourages women to aspire to romantic and fictional identities which further divorce them from reality and their true duties as wives and mothers, just as Lady Delacour's aestheticisation of her own self narrative as 'The life and opinions of a Lady of Quality' elides her self-narrative as a mother.

For both Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth sensibility and dress are indelibly related factors in the oppression of women, encouraging them to aspire to fictional and arbitrary feminine ideals, which further remove them from truly feminine virtues. Dress, Wollstonecraft argues, imprisons women by reducing them to mere surface appearance, by suggesting that their value lies only in the extent to which they can attract and please men, and by denying them a rational virtuous soul:

> outwardly ornamented with elaborate care, and so adorned to delight man, 'that with honour he may love,' the soul of woman is not allowed to have this distinction, and man, lm ever placed between her and reason, she is always represented as only created to see through a gross medium, and to take things on trust. 48

Like Wollstonecraft's fictional woman, Lady Delacour's fashionable exterior causes others to disregard her soul and condemn her as irrational and unfeeling. Yet rather than the victim of male conceptions of beautiful femininity that Wollstonecraft describes

---

48 Wollstonecraft, p. 143.
above, Lady Delacour's deployment of dress is a deliberate attempt to conceal and mask her feelings and thereby preserve her strategically, if unconvincingly, created reputation. Such misplaced notions of female reputation are also central to Wollstonecraft's argument surrounding the 'present degraded state of women' in the *Vindication*:

> It has long since occurred to me that advice respecting behaviour, and all the various modes of preserving a good reputation, which have been so strenuously inculcated on the female world, were specious poisons, that encrusting morality eat away the substance. And, that this measuring of shadows produced a false calculation, because their length depends so much on the height of the sun, and other adventitious circumstances.49

If *Belinda* is inspired by Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* at all, this description of reputation as a man-made poison 'encrusting morality [while] eat[ing] away the substance' would seem to be of key importance. Read literally, this description seems to anticipate Lady Delacour's diseased breast which eats away at the mind and spirit of the woman and poisons her relationship with her daughter Helena, from whom she literally recoils because of the physical and psychic pain its causes. Here, Lady Delacour appears as a victim of society and the false and absolute notions of respectability it constructs. Read in light of Wollstonecraft's arguments against 'good reputation' in the *Vindication*, however, Lady Delacour appears her own victim. 'Encrusting' her body with thick layers of cosmetics and clothing, Lady Delacour's attempts to preserve her reputation in society slowly render her incapable of fulfilling her proper duty as a mother.

Lady Delacour's seduction by fashion launches her into a life over which she feels she has lost control. Analogous to the seduction narratives projected upon the fictional

49 Wollstonecraft, p. 245.
inmates of the Magdalen House, Lady Delacour feels that her seduction by a life of fashionable dissipation precipitated a narrative of inevitable moral decline:

my object [...] is to conceal from the world, what I cannot conceal from myself, that I am a dying woman. I am, and I see you think me, a strange, weak, inconsistent creature — I was intended for something better — but now it is too late — a coquet I have lived, and a coquet I shall die. (p. 64)

Like the Magdalen narratives, however, Belinda offers the possibility of reformation through a process of domestic rehabilitation. Despite the innumerable similarities between Belinda and the earlier Letters for Literary Ladies, one crucial point of difference distinguishes the two texts. Julia, the fashionable, sentimental heroine of the latter dies whereas Lady Delacour, contrary to Edgeworth's initial intentions, is allowed to live. Both characters suffer from an illness whose cause is both physical and mental. Although Lady Delacour's injury has an undeniable physical cause, her guilt seems to precipitate this physical condition, causing her to shy away from orthodox medical treatment and thereby prolonging her physical pain and emotional trauma. Julia dies from an unspecified illness, which has an emotional origin. In the final moralising words of Letters for Literary Ladies Caroline writes of her friend that 'the sense of her own ill conduct, was undoubtedly the immediate cause of her illness, and the remorse which had long preyed upon her mind, at length brought her to the grave'. 50 Though the illness which kills Julia is unnamed, its cause is implied in the correspondence between the two women. Following her separation from her husband, Caroline begs Julia to

Retrace, then, dear Julia, in your mind the course of your thoughts for some time past: discover the cause of this revolution in your opinions; judge yourself; and remember, that in the mind as well as in the body, the highest pitch of disease is often attended with an unconsciousness of its existence. 51

50 Edgeworth, Letters for Literary Ladies, p. 62.
51 Edgeworth, Letters for Literary Ladies, pp. 56-57.
Caroline describes this mental illness as 'a confusion of your ideas [...] which convinced me, that from secret cause the powers of your reason had been declining, and those of your imagination rapidly increasing'. Although it is never made explicit, Edgeworth leaves her reader in little doubt that it is Julia's sensibility which precipitates her illness. Her tendency to feel rather than think, the romantic delusions which lead Julia to marry Lord V—rather than Caroline's brother, her immunity to the reasoning arguments of her friend and the piercing regret she later feels are the symptoms of a sentimental character which ultimately kills her.

In contrast to the Julia and Caroline correspondence in *Letters for Literary Ladies*, *Belinda* offers a more optimistic, if not altogether convincing, conception of femininity. As Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace suggests, by reclaiming Lady Delacour, Edgeworth implicitly argues 'that all women have an important place in the new domestic order and that every woman, no matter how conflicted her sense of herself, can find a meaningful role in the patriarchal family'. This didactic resolution is made possible, as Kowaleski-Wallace argues, by the healing of Lady Delacour's breast which signifies the restoration of her mental health. Like Pamela, Betsy Thoughtless, Fordyce's feminine ideal and many other female figures in eighteenth-century sentimental discourse, the truth of Lady Delacour's character, it seems, can only be exposed once she is divested of the artificial trappings of fashionable dress and coquetry. Yet in her deployment of this sentimental trope, Edgeworth makes the novel's most vehement counter-sentimental argument. As

---

53 Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 104.
Wollstonecraft had in the *Vindication*, Edgeworth transforms the male fantasy of the morally-legible and communicative female body into a feminist argument by exposing the sentimental ideal as a fiction of bodily and emotional self-fetishisation. Lady Delacour's disfigured body reveals no truth, but rather a self-composed fiction born of her excessive sensibility and which, despite its emotional origin, prevents her from exercising her 'natural' sensibility as a wife and mother.

Crucially in the context of Edgeworth's didactic purpose and counter-sentimental stance, Lady Delacour's reformation can only be effected from without rather than within. Unlike Betsy Thoughtless who, in the tradition of the eighteenth-century *Bildungsroman* progresses from coquette to woman of 'true worth' through a lengthy process of increased introspection and self-criticism rewarded by social integration through an appropriate marriage, Lady Delacour is incapable of instigating her own reformation.\(^55\) As Ruth Perry argues, Lady Delacour's 'body is never her own, as its health is beyond her capacity to understand or maintain'.\(^56\) In addition to lacking the privileged medical knowledge necessary to determine the true nature of her condition, Lady Delacour has become so embroiled in the assumption of a fashionable façade, and is so committed to a sentimental conception that her body speaks truth about her interior essence, that she has become deceived by her own fictions. Her attendant inability to reason leaves her unable to facilitate her reformation without the external, rational influences of Belinda and Dr X—.

\(^54\) Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 127.

Like *Letters for Literary Ladies*, therefore, *Belinda* argues for the redemptive power of reason over the fatal flaws of unbridled sentiment. However, while the earlier text convincingly champions reason over feeling, *Belinda* is a more complex and ultimately more unsatisfactory text. In both works fashion and sentiment are exposed as shallow, unnatural pleasures through which women seek to attract and tyrannise over men, but which merely encourage them to tyrannise over themselves and alienate them from the true pleasures of domestic life. Yet where Edgeworth succeeds in containing fashion and sentiment in the *Letters* by all but excluding Julia's voice from the text, her generosity in giving so much of the early part of *Belinda* to Lady Delacour weakens and undermines the moral efficacy of the woman of sentiment's recovery and rehabilitation. While the correspondence between Julia and Caroline gives the impression of an epistolary dialogue it effectively constitutes a didactic monologue. Only one of Julia's letters is printed in the text, the rest are merely implied in and inevitably mediated by Caroline's responses. By contrast, the highly vocal Lady Delacour has almost two whole chapters of virtually uninterrupted monologue through which to explain and justify her life and actions. When presenting her seduction by a life of dissipation, Lady Delacour is a far more seductive, and satisfyingly complex character than she appears in the latter part of the novel. As a critic wrote in the 1802 *Monthly Review*:

Lady Delacour, while she continues to appear as the votary of vanity and fashion, and heroic under excruciating corporeal suffering, is a Being who interests and even commands some respect: but Lady Delacour reformed, (however favourable to the moral effect of the work this reformation may be), and unexpectedly rescued from bodily pain, is a comparatively flat and vapid creature.\(^{57}\)

\(^{56}\) Ruth Perry, p. 206.

This early response to the novel is typical in its sense of the attractiveness of Lady Delacour, and the extent to which she inevitably detracts from the novel's heroine. If Lady Delacour possesses too much sensibility, then Belinda displays insufficient feeling for the reader to warm to her. Anticipating Kowaleski-Wallace's assertion that 'In short Belinda is not about Belinda', the 1802 Monthly Review critic argued that 'the heroine herself creates so little interest, that she appears to have usurped the superior right of Lady Delacour to give the title to the work'. In similar vein, a writer for the Critical Review (1802) argued that Lady Delacour is 'the prominent character in the work [...] she is the primary planet, and Belinda but a satellite'. In particular, the critic objects to Belinda's stoicism and lack of passion in contrast to her older companion's warm, if theatrical, sensibility:

She can love without passion, and transfers her affections from Mr Hervey to Mr Vincent, and from Mr Vincent back again to Mr Hervey, with as much sang froid as she would unhang her cloak from one peg and hang it upon another.

Such criticisms have endured to the present day. As Caroline Gonda argues, for 'a young lady making her entrance into the world, [Belinda] has too little to learn, learns it too quickly and thereafter is too level-headed and prudent for most readers' tastes'. Alan Richardson has tried to reclaim Edgeworth's heroine from charges of insipidity by suggesting that her lack of evident feeling is symptomatic of the intensity of her feeling. Rather than personal coldness, he argues, 'Belinda's silences and ellipses signify the

---

58 Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 110.
62 Gonda, p. 211.
vacancy at the heart of domestic ideology, its failure to comprehend female desire. Indeed, Belinda's common sense paralyses and victimises her as profoundly as Lady Delacour's sensibility confines and restricts her. Though Lady Delacour believes that 'the prudent Belinda is more capable of feeling real permanent passion, than any of the dear sentimental young ladies, whose motto is "All for love, or the world well lost"' (p. 472), Belinda is as incapable of translating that feeling into genuine domestic happiness as the youthful Lady Delacour was. Superficially at least, the prospect of seeing 'Belinda in love' is, Lady Delacour suggests, as improbable as seeing 'Pamela married' (p. 472).

While the novel, as many critics note, lacks a convincing and appealing positive feminine ideal, its conclusion implies such an ideal in its suggestion that sense and sensibility, possessed in moderation and qualified by each other can produce domestic happiness. The narrative dynamic of Belinda is propelled by an alternating current of reason and sentiment. Lady Delacour, the woman of flawed sensibility, can only be reunited with her husband under the guidance of the rational Belinda, while Belinda, for all her reasoning, needs the intervention of her older, more passionate companion in order that she may marry Hervey. This reciprocal exchange between sense and sensibility is ultimately unconvincing, however. In large part, this dissatisfaction stems from the implausible reformation and repentance of Lady Delacour. Despite Edgeworth's attempt to reintegrate the woman of sensibility into the patriarchal family, Margaret Delacour's accusation that her niece-in-law parades feeling like a cambric handkerchief resonates through to the novel's conclusion. Like Pamela in her homespun gown and petticoat, the reader can never be sure that Lady Delacour, so practised in the art of sartorial and

---

63 Richardson, p. 193.
emotional disguise, is not merely 'tricking' up to create a desired effect upon her unwitting audience. Lady Delacour's comments upon her resolve to reform, should she survive her cancer, are crucially ambiguous:

'If I survive this business,' said she, 'it is my firm intention to appear in a new character, or rather to assert my own character. I will break through the spell of dissipation – I will at once cast off all the acquaintance that are unworthy of me – I will, in one word, go with you, my dear Belinda! to Mr Percival's." (p. 292)

On one level, Lady Delacour suggests that the 'curing' of her illness will effect a spiritual return to her essential self. Her illness, her love of fine clothes and a life of fashionable dissipation have been, she argues, a veil to her true character. Yet the truth of Lady Delacour's 'own character' is no less elusive at this point in the narrative than it has been throughout. By stripping away the outer layers of her fashionable façade, Lady Delacour claims she can assert her emotional purity. Yet once stripped of these layers, her disfigured body reveals the truth of her past misdemeanours, and the corporeal symptom of her guilt as a failed mother and wife. Cutting out the cancer seems to represent for Lady Delacour a surgical removal of her immorality that divests her of the disease of her excessive sensibility. However, the procedure is unnecessary and never performed, and therefore her 'cure' not effected. Even before it is revealed that she is not in fact dying, the future reformation of Lady Delacour is put in doubt. Her prime inclination, it seems, is that she will 'appear in a new character' after her operation, and her conviction that she will be able 'to assert my own character' is mentioned almost as a dramatic afterthought in a characteristically theatrical speech. Given Lady Delacour's persistent deployment of dress throughout the text, the reader senses that her new character may have no more
genuine moral substance than the masquerade dresses she dons or even a delicate cambric handkerchief.

*Belinda* constitutes an important attempt to re-write and reform the sentimental novel from within. Deploying, yet subtly challenging many of the tropes of earlier sentimental works, from the use of the dressing room to the sentimental ideal of the morally-legible body, Edgeworth exposes the extent to which sentimentalism had become nothing more than an artificial sham, threatening the sanctity of the domestic household by encouraging romantic, potentially life-threatening delusions and the pursuit of artificial pleasures. Through her characterisation of Lady Delacour, Edgeworth, like More and Wollstonecraft before her, exposed sensibility as little more than a fashion, the latter proof of the former's insubstantiality, artificiality and vulnerability to corruption. The prospective death of Lady Delacour thus reads as a fictionalised account of More's argument that 'Fashion [strikes] out real sensibility' as the woman of fashionable sensibility is tormented by her false self-aestheticisation and self-fetishisation to such an extent that she is unable to display her 'real sensibility' as a wife and mother. The rehabilitation of Lady Delacour, however, reverses this process of sentimental decline to advocate a distinct form of 'real sensibility', divorced from what More had called sensibility's 'Pictur'd dress': the affected poses, gestures and emotional indulgences of sentimental literature. Systematically stripped of the false layers of fashion and sentiment in which she has adorned herself, Lady Delacour's sensibility is re-channelled, in a manner which anticipates the 'angel in the house', into her role as wife and mother.
Belinda's multi-layered and generically hybrid character (a counter-sentimental moral tale that deploys many of the tropes of sentimental literature) ensures, however, that such an unproblematically teleological reading of Edgeworth's text is unconvincing. Such a reading fails to take into account the extent to which the text's assertion of the inextricability of fashion and sensibility, so vital to its counter-sentimental stance, threatens to undermine its moral efficacy, as it had undermined the literary and moral coherency of Richardson's Pamela, Fordyce's Sermons and the Lady's Magazine. Having successfully created a fictional self through dress and cosmetics that duped the undiscerning eyes of society, who is to say that the 'reformed' Lady Delacour could not as easily put on a guise of domestic sensibility? In this light, her character is, like Pamela's, no less elusive at the novel's conclusion than it is at the beginning, rendering its final couplet less than convincing: 'Our tale contains a moral, and, no doubt. / You all have wit enough to find it out' (p. 478). However, though the text's rehabilitation of the woman of fashionable sensibility fails to fully convince, its failure concretises the text's most satisfying and persuasive counter-sentimental argument. Split between a false public image of gaiety and fashionable sensibility and an equally fictitious private self tormented by guilt and thoughts of death wrought by her excessive sensibility, Lady Delacour's character is persistently at home and abroad. Each of the guises in which she appears to the reader is subsequently revealed as fictitious: the socialite careless of the world's opinions, the uncaring mother, the dying woman and the hateful wife. In the text's exploration of Lady's Delacour's manipulation of her public image of fashionable sensibility and her sensibility's false manipulation of her self-conception, Belinda
exposes, beyond doubt, the ultimate sentimental fiction that is the morally-legible woman.
Figure 7 Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, 6th edn (1742). Engraving by Hubert Gravelot.
In *Sensibility as Transformation* (1990), a collection of essays exploring the transformations sensibility exerted and was subjected to in eighteenth-century culture (and still exerts and is subjected to in eighteenth-century studies), Stephen Cox examines how the argument of sensibility was necessarily compromised by the discourse's peculiarly 'capacious and highly flexible' character.\(^1\) The argument of sensibility — loosely defined by Cox as the equation of 'intellectual authority with the power to display or elicit emotional susceptibility' — was so far-reaching and widely applicable that it is difficult, Cox argues, to imagine a 'context in which the argument of sensibility could not [have] be[en] used'.\(^2\) Semantically, imaginatively and philosophically overburdened with meaning and value, the argument of sensibility proved so malleable that the substance of its argument was in persistent danger of dissolving into meaninglessness, rendering sensibility an empty, 'artificial rhetoric [displaying] very little "heart," but a great deal of manipulative "language"'.\(^3\) Cox's essay has significant ramifications for the study of sentimental literature, even while it does not directly address the issue. While the wide-ranging application of sensibility as argument in the eighteenth century may have weakened this very argument, so the reader senses that a critical willingness to identify the permeation or taint of sensibility in so many aspects of eighteenth-century culture might dilute, even utterly dissolve, the substance and character of sensibility itself.

---


\(^2\) Cox, p. 64.

\(^3\) Cox, p. 63.
In extending the scope of sensibility’s argument to a discussion of dress and fashion this study has not sought to further overburden this already overdetermined discourse. Rather, its aim has been to reveal the extent to which sensibility’s self-definition and self-idealisation through its condemnation of fashion and reification of the emotionally-transparent adorned female body is axiomatic of its propensity to expose the fundamental fragility of its own principles, values and ideals. If dress, promoting self-interest and a delight in external display, posed a threat to the sentimental ideal of virtuous and legible femininity, then the attempts to appropriate dress within the sentimental argument in magazines, pocket-books, texts such as Pamela, Fordyce’s Sermons and Edgeworth’s Belinda and real-life institutions such as the Magdalen House merely elucidate that argument’s essential instability and paradox. The attempts to analogise the sentimental and sartorial body in these texts is, in short, paradigmatic of Cox’s claim that the discourse’s character was so many sided and value laden that ‘the argument of sensibility was constantly turning into an argument about sensibility’.\(^4\) Paradoxically, while sentimental literature championed the ideal of moral legibility, its projection of this ideal upon the equally overdetermined and morally elusive symbol of dress revealed the essential corruptibility of sensibility as a behavioural mode that could be affected as easily as Pamela dons her homespun gown and petticoat or the Magdalen her uniform of penitence.

In the introduction to this study I contended that the fine line between empowerment and oppression, reification and restriction highlighted in current feminist
criticism of sentimental literature is both the context and subject of this research. As Foucault's *History of Sexuality* has demonstrated, discourses of power pertaining to sexuality are neither monolithic nor stable. Discourse both produces power and exposes its fundamental weakness, allowing opportunities for resistance and opposition even while it seeks to exclude, restrict and prescribe human behaviour. Inherent in the desire to subjugate is an implicit acknowledgment of power; a power so potentially destabilising that it demands subjugation in the eyes of the fearful or condemnatory. Paradoxically, sentimental literature's attempts to recast female dress as an index of moral purity afforded women the seeds of liberation from sentimentalism's prescriptive dictates. Through an analysis of the representation of dress in sentimental literature, therefore, this work has aimed to contribute to and problematise the debate on the political and moral implications of the feminine sentimental ideal. In its representation of dress, this literature formulated an ideal which fails to sit easily with the current feminist critical divide in studies of the genre, represented on the one hand by Mary Poovey's persuasively pessimistic characterisation of the 'proper woman' and G. J. Barker-Benfield's attractive, if ultimately unconvincing conceptualisation of sensibility's reification of the feminine. Once made discursively available, the sentimental ideal of femininity became a model which women might reject, accept, or, most worryingly of all, deploy as a device through which to gain approval and conceal moral imperfection or transgression. This undesirable fact was not lost upon the writers explored in this study, whose works persistently signal the limitations of the ideals they evoke. The 'distress' referred to in the title of this research alludes not merely to the torments of the sentimental heroine, as in Brissenden's

---

4 Cox, p. 71.
Virtue in Distress, but to the distress of writers who failed to unequivocally pin down and contain the heroine's or female reader's sexual and moral character through their formulation of the ideal of the morally-legible adorned body.

---

Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES (ARCHIVAL)


Fairholt, F. W., Collections on Costume. Part 2. Extracts Illustrative of the Peculiarities of Fashion Chronologically Arranged from 1732 (1845), British Museum Prints and Drawings, 169*c.14

Forster Collection (Correspondence of Samuel Richardson), Victoria and Albert Museum, Forster MSS XI, XIII, XIV, XVI

PRIMARY SOURCES (PERIODICALS AND POCKET BOOKS)

The Annual Present for the Ladies: or, a New and Fashionable Pocket-Book (London: Printed by L. Wayland and sold by T. Willis)

The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly (London: Thomas Dutton, 1791-1796)

The Christian-Lady's Pocket Book (London: J. S. Jordan and G. Terry)


The Female Spectator (London: T. Gardner, 1744-1746)

Harris's Original British Ladies Memorandum Book (London: Printed for J. W. Pasham, Blackfriars and sold by J. Scatchard and I. Whitaker, Ave-Marie Lane and Alex. Hogg)

Harris's British Ladies Complete Pocket Book (London: Printed for H. Goldney, and Sold by Scatchard and Whitaker; Norwich: Crouch and Stevenson; Exeter: Shirley Woolmer)

The Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book (London: J. Newbery)

The Ladies' Diary: or, Woman's Almanack (London: Stationer's Company)

The Ladies Daily Companion; or useful and entertaining Pocket Book (Rochester: T. Fisher)

The Lady's Magazine: or Polite Companion for the Fair Sex (London: J. Wilkie, 1759-1763)

The Lady's Magazine: or, Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex (London: J. Wheble, 1770-1771)

The Lady's Magazine: or, Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex (London: G. Robinson and J. Roberts, 1771-1832)

The Ladies Mirror: or, Mental Companion (London: S. Chapple)

The Ladies Miscellany: or, New, Useful and Entertaining Companion (London: J. Brown)

The Ladies most Elegant and Convenient Pocket Book, Compiled at the Request of Several Ladies of Quality (London: J. Wheble)

The Lady's Museum (London: J. Newbery, 1760-1761)

The Ladies Museum: or, Pocket Memorandum Book (London: W. Lane)

The Lady's Own Memorandum Book; or, Daily Pocket Journal (London: G. Robinson; Newcastle: T. Slack)
The Ladies Pocket Journal: or Toilet Assistant (London: S. Bladon)

The London Magazine: or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer (London: C. Ackers; T. Cox; J. Clarke and T. Astley, 1732-1783)

The New Memorandum Book Improv'd: or, the Gentleman and Tradesman's Daily (London: R. Dodsley)

The Norfolk Ladies Memorandum Book; or, Fashionable Pocket Repository (Bury St. Edmonds: J. Rackham)

The Sentimental Magazine: or, General Assemblage of Science, Taste etc. (London: George Kearsley, 1773-1777)


The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure (London: J. Hinton, 1747-1803)

PRIMARY TEXTS


[Anon.], The Art of Dress (London: R. Burleigh, 1717)


Burney, Frances, Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778), ed. by Kristina Straub (Boston and New York: Bedford Books, 1997)

Burney, Frances, *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, ed. by Charlotte Barrett (London: Bickers and Son, 1876)


Campbell, Robert, *The London Tradesman being a Compendious View of all the Trades, Professions, Arts, both liberal and mechanic, now practised in the Cities of London and Westminster* (London: T. Gardiner, 1747)

[Anon.], *The Cherub, or Guardian of female Innocence Exposing the Arts of Boarding Schools, Hired Fortune-tellers, corrupt Milliners, and apparent Ladies of Fashion* (London: W. Locke, 1792)

Defoe, Daniel, *The Great Law of Subordination Consider'd. The Behaviour of Servants in England Inquired into, with a Proposal containing such HEADS or CONSTITUTIONS as would effectually Answer this Great End, and bring SERVANTS of every Class to a just Regulation* (London: H. Whittridge, [1726])

Defoe, Daniel, *Every-Body's Business, is No-body's Business; or Private Abuses, Publick Grievances: Exemplified in the Pride, Insolence, and Exorbitant Wages of our Women-Servants, Footmen, etc.* (London: T. Warner, 1725)

Delany, Mary, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany With Interesting Reminiscences of King George III and Queen Charlotte*, ed. by Lady Llandover, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1861)

Dingley, Robert, *Proposals for Establishing a Public Place of Reception for Penitent Prostitutes, &c.* (London: W. Faden, 1758)

Dodd, William, *Advice to the Magdalens* (London: W. Faden, [1759/1760(?)])

Dodd, William, *Poems by Dr. Dodd* (London: Dryden Leach, 1767)

Dodd, William, *A Sermon on St. Matthew, Chap. IX. Ver. 12, 13. Preach'd at the Parish Church of St. Laurence, near Guild-Hall, April the 26th 1759, Before the Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Treasurer and Governor of the Magdalen House for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes* (London: W. Faden [for the charity], 1759)

Dodd, William, *The Visitor*, 2 vols (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1764)

Drury, Robert, *The Rival Milliners: or, the Humours of Covent-Garden, a Tragi-Comi-Pastoral, FARCE, as it is acted at the New Theatre in the Hay-Market* (London: G. Spavan, 1737)


[Anon.], *Fashion, an Ode with Other Poems* (London: J. Dodsley, 1783)

[Anon.], *Fashion, A Poem* (London: J. Williams, 1778)


[Anon.], *Fordyce Delineated, A Satire Occasioned by His Sermons to Young Women*, 2nd edn (London: J. Dixwell, [1765(?)])


Giffard, Henry, *Pamela: A Comedy. As it is Perform'd Gratis at the Late Theatre in Goodman's Field* (London: H. Hubbard, 1741)


Hanway, Jonas, *A Plan for Establishing a Charity-House for the Reception of Repenting Prostitutes to be called the Magdalen Charity* (London: [n. pub.], 1758)


[Haywood, Eliza], *Anti-Pamela: or, Feign'd Innocence Detected* (London: J. Hugginson, 1741)

Haywood, Eliza, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), ed. by Beth Fowkes Tobin (Oxford: World's Classics, 1997)


[Anon.], *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen-House, As Supposed to be Related by Themselves*, 2 vols (London: J. Rivington and J. Dodsley, 1760)

Holt, Mrs. Dorothy, *An Address humbly offered to the Ladies of Great Britain; Relating to the most Valuable part of Ornamental Manufacture in their Dress* (London: A. Millar; J. Whitson, B. White, R. and J. Dodsley, 1757)
[Anon.], 'Innocence in Distress: or, Virtue Triumphant', in The Theatre of Love, A Collection of Novels (London: W. Reeve, 1759)

[Anon.], Intriguing Milliners and Attorney Clerks (London: J. Hughes, 1738)

[Anon.], The Importance of Dress (London: M. Sheepy. M. Cooper, J. Swan, 1752)

[Anon.], 'Jenny: or the Female Fortune Hunter', in The Theatre of Love: A Collection of Novels (London: W. Reeve, 1759)

Jerningham, Edward, The Magdalens: An Elegy; by the Author of the NUNNERY (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1763)

Kelly, Hugh, Memoirs of a Magdalen: or, the History of Louisa Mildmay, 2 vols (London: W. Griffin, 1767)

Kelly, John, Pamela's Conduct in High Life. Publish'd from her Original Papers, to which are prefix'd Several Curious LETTERS written to the Editor on the Subject (Dublin: Geo. Faulkner and Oli. Nelson, 1741)

[Anon.], The Life and Intrigues of the Late Celebrated Mrs. Mary Parrimore: The Tall Milliner of Change-Alley (London: A. Moore, 1729)

Mandeville, Bernard, The Fable of the Bees and Other Writings (1723), ed. by E. J. Hundert (Indianapolis [IN] and Cambridge: Hackett, 1997)


More, Hannah, Essays on Various Subjects, Principally Designed for Young Ladies (London: J. Wilkie and T. Caddell, 1777)
More, Hannah, 'Sensibility: A Poetic Epistle to the Honorable Mrs. Boscawen', *Sacred Dramas Chiefly Intended for Young Persons To Which is Added Sensibility, A Poem* (London: T. Cadell, 1782)


Ogle, George, trans., *Gualtherus and Griselda: or, the Clerk of Oxford's Tale from Boccace, Petrarch and Chaucer* (London: R. Dodsley, 1739)


[Anon.], *Pamela Censured, in a Letter to the Editor* (London: J. Roberts, 1741)

[Anon.], *Pamela: or, the Fair Imposter. A Poem in Five Cantos, By J---- W----, Esq.* (Dublin: Thomas Chrichlow, 1743)


Povey, Charles, *The Virgin in Eden: or, the State of Innocency, To which are added, PAMELA’S Letters proved to be Immodest Romances painted in Images of Virtue: Masquerades in Disguise*, 5th edn (London: J. Roberts, 1741)

[Anon.], 'Remarks on Pamela. By a Prude', *London Magazine*, 10 (1741), 250

Richardson, Samuel, *Clarissa: or the History of a Young Lady* (1747-1748), ed. by Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)


Richardson, Samuel, *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, Author of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison. Selected from the Original Manuscripts, bequeathed by him to his family, To which are prefixed, A Biographical Account of that Author, and Observations on his Writings*, ed. by Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 6 vols (London: Richard Phillips, 1804)

Richardson, Samuel, *Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison, Clarissa and Pamela* (London: Printed for S. Richardson, 1754)

Richardson, Samuel, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded. In a Series of Familiar Letters from a beautiful young Damsel to her Parents* (1740), ed. by T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston, New York, Atlanta, Geneva [IL], Dallas, Palo Alto: Houghton Mifflin, 1971)

Richardson, Samuel, *Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded*, ed. by Peter Sabor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)


[Anon.], *Some Serious and plain Thoughts on the Dress of the Present Times* (London: J. Gurney and M. Lewis, 1772)


Swift, Jonathan, *The Lady's Dressing Room To which is added a Poem on Cutting down the Old Thorn at Market Hill* (London: J. Roberts, 1732)

[Anon.], *The Taylor's Complete Guide, or a Complete Analysis of BEAUTY and ELEGANCE in DRESS* (London: Allen and West, 1796)

[Anon.], 'To the Author of Shamela', *London Magazine*, 10 (1741), 304


Welch, Saunders, *A Proposal to render Effectual a Plan to remove the Nuisance of Common Prostitutes from the Streets of this Metropolis* (London: C. Henderson, 1758)

Wesley, John, *Advice to the People Called Methodists with Regards to Dress* (London: G. Paramore, 1795)

Wilkes, Wetenhall, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady. In which is digested into a new and familiar Method, a System of Rules and Information, to qualify the Fair Sex to be useful and happy in every State* (Dublin: E. Jones, 1740)


**SECONDARY TEXTS**


Allentuck, Marcia, 'Narration and Illustration: The Problem of Richardson's *Pamela*', *Philological Quarterly*, 51 (1972), 874-886


Buck, Anne and Harry Matthews, 'Pocket Guides to Fashion: Ladies' Pocket Books Published in England, 1760-1830', *Costume*, 18 (1984), 35-58


Chico, Marta, 'Peering into the Dressing-Room: Satire and Gender, 1660-1750'


Conboy, Sheila C., 'Fabric and Fabrication in Richardson's *Pamela*', *ELH*, 54: 1 (1987), 81-96


Cunnington, Phillis, *Costume of Household Servants From the Middle Ages to 1900* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1974)

Darby, Barbara, *Frances Burney Dramatist: Gender, Performance and the Late-Eighteenth-Century Stage* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997)


Eaves, T. C. Duncan, and Ben D. Kimpel, Samuel Richardson: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971)


Fairholt, F. W., Costume in England (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896)


Ferguson, Marjorie, Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity (London: Heinemann, 1983)


Folkenflik, Robert, 'A Room of Pamela's Own', ELH, 39 (1972), 585-596

Gonda, Caroline, 'Misses, Murderesses, and Magdalens: Women in the Public Eye', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 53-71

Gonda, Caroline, *Reading Daughters' Fictions, 1709-1834: Novels and Society from Manley to Edgeworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)


Greenfield, Susan C., "'Abroad and at Home': Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth's Belinda", *PMLA*, 112:2 (1997), 214-228


Guest, Harriet, 'Sterne, Elizabeth Draper, and Drapery', *The Shandean*, 9 (1997), 9-33


Gwilliam, Tassie, *Samuel Richardson's Fictions of Gender* (Stanford [CA]: Stanford University Press, 1993)


Harris, Jocelyn, *Samuel Richardson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)


Hunter, Jean E., 'The Lady's Magazine and The Study of Englishwomen in the Eighteenth Century', in *Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Morgantown: The School of Journalism, West Virginia University, 1977)


Kreissman, Bernard, *Pamela-Shamela: A Study of the Burlesques, Parodies and Adaptations of Richardson's Pamela* (Lincoln [Nebraska]: University of Nebraska, 1960)


Lurie, Alison, *The Language of Clothes* (Feltham: Hamlyn, 1983)


McIntosh, Carey, 'Pamela's Clothes', *ELH*, 35 (1968), 75-83


McKillop, Alan, *Samuel Richardson, Printer and Novelist* (Chapel Hill [NC]: University of North Carolina Press, 1936)


Myers, Mitzi, "'Reform or Ruin': A Revolution in Female Manners', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 11 (1982), 199-216


Nestor, Deborah J., 'Virtue Rarely Rewarded: Ideological Subversion and Narrative Form in Haywood's Later Fiction', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 34:3 (1994), 579-598

Nussbaum, Felicity, *The Brink of all we Hate, English Satires on Women, 1660-1750* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984)


Parry, James, 'The True Anti-Pamela', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture, 22* (1992), 37-49


Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow: Croom Helm/Fontana, 1976)