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Generational Shifts and Dress in the Novels of Jane Austen and Frances Burney

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Abstract

Das späte achtzehnte und frühe neunzehnte Jahrhundert war eine Zeit enormer Umbrüche auf politischer, gesellschaftlicher und familiärer Ebene. Metanarrative gesellschaftlichen Wandels dominierten somit diese Epoche und schlugen sich nicht zuletzt materiell in der Mode nieder. Hierbei fungiert diese als eine Art Spiegel des gesellschaftlichen Zustands und wurde in der Literatur auch als solcher eingesetzt, um Gedankengängen zu und der Ausarbeitung des Wandels Form zu geben. Dies geschieht auch in den Romanen der britischen Autorinnen Jane Austen und Frances Burney, welche die Grundlage dieser Arbeit bilden und sich als bedeutende weibliche Bildungsromane mit dem Leben und der Welt junger bürgerlicher Frauen auseinandersetzen. Die Mode wird in diesem Zusammenhang von beiden Autorinnen als literarisches Mittel eingesetzt, mit dem sich die Zustände und Realitäten der Welt ihrer Protagonistinnen illustrieren lässt. Durch die Darstellung der theoretischen Grundlage zur Thematik der materiellen Kultur in der Literatur, werden der historische Kontext und Passagen aus den Romanen durch die Linse der Mode gelesen. Dadurch wird sichtbar, inwiefern sich der gesellschaftliche Wandel im Mikrokosmos der familiären Lebenswelt der Romanheldinnen niederschlägt und wie Mode zur Positionierung dieser Protagonistinnen sowohl innerhalb der eigenen Familie als auch auf gesellschaftlicher Ebene eingesetzt wird.

Abstract

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a time of considerable shifts in politics, society, and the family. Metanarratives of transformation thus defined the era and were not least expressed materially in dress, which served as a mirror of society and was used in literature as such to give shape to thought processes regarding change. This can be observed in the texts of British novelists Jane Austen and Frances Burney, whose novels serve as the basis for this thesis and can be understood as seminal female *Bildungsromane*, negotiating the life and world of young women of the gentry. Both authors use dress as a literary tool in this context, which allows them to illustrate the conditions and realities of their protagonists' world. By presenting a theoretical framework concerning material culture in literature, the historical context and passages from the novels will be read through the lens of dress. In this way, it becomes apparent to what extent societal change found expression in the microcosm of the heroines' domestic life and how dress is utilised to position these heroines, both, within their families and society.

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Introduction

“Clothing, more than any other element in material culture, embodies the values of society’s mental image and the standards of reality as it is experienced. It is the obligatory battlefield for the confrontation between change and tradition.”¹ As a powerful measure of conditions within a society, dress, as expressed in the opening quote, offers an interesting perspective from a historian’s point of view. Less obvious, perhaps, is how the messaging behind dress and information contained within it might prove useful to the novelist in constructing and emphasising points about politics, society, and change. Attempting to explore just that, an analysis of the use of dress in the novelistic works of Jane Austen (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*) and Frances Burney (*Evelina*, *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, *The Wanderer*)² will form the basis for this paper, in which dress will be considered as a means of representing the social and familial changes that occurred as part of an overarching shift at the end of the 18th century between about 1774 and 1820. These dates mark, respectively, the accession of Louis XVI to the French throne³ and the end of George IV’s regency in Britain, after which the Regency period in British culture is named.⁴ A period of intense political and social change throughout France and Britain, encompassing the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, is demarcated in this way. Additionally, the publication of Austen’s and Burney’s novels spans this period almost exactly, beginning with the publication of Burney’s first novel *Evelina* (1778)⁵ and concluding with the posthumous joint publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* (1817), Austen’s first and final completed novels, respectively, in 1817.⁶ To illustrate the intellectual and social climate, in which both authors lived and worked, there will, however, also be occasional references to texts, events, and developments beginning in earlier decades of the century.

In analysing the (fashion) historical and domestic context of this time, the main focus of this thesis lies on examining the impact these conditions and developments had on the novels’ young female protagonists and, therefore, female dress. Less concerned with an examination of descriptions of dress per se, however, this thesis will focus on the way dress and textiles more

¹ Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things. The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600-1800*, trans. Brian Pearce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 197.

² Listed in this order, alphabetically, throughout, although Burney’s work as a writer began before Austen’s.

³ Jeremy David Popkin and Albert Goodwin, ‘Louis XVI | Biography, Reign, Execution, & Facts | Britannica’, accessed 5 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-XVI>.

⁴ Hilary Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen. Regency Fashion* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2019).

⁵ Brian C. Southam, ‘Jane Austen | Biography, Books, Movies, & Facts | Britannica’, 5 March 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jane-Austen>.

⁶ The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘Frances Burney | Biography, Books, & Facts | Britannica’, 19 February 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fanny-Burney>.

broadly figure into telling Austen's and Burney's heroines' narratives and conflicts. Dress, it should be noted, is understood in the sense of costume in a more general sense, including clothes but also other details of women's appearances such as hair and jewellery. The novel's double role as a materially real object and object of fiction, as it frequently also features within the texts, will also be appraised for its meta-fictional effects in this context. This additionally extends to the way dress is employed as an element of reality within the texts, spanning a bridge between the fictional and real worlds, all the while articulating social processes.

The historical context of this thesis is a particularly rich time of change in Britain, and Europe more generally. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Europe reached a point at which transformations that had been building up throughout the second half of the eighteenth century came to a head: philosophical developments, such as the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), were greatly influential⁷ and the paradigmatic shift of the French Revolution swept across France from 1789, with its echoes across continental Europe and Britain reflected on in literature.⁸ These changes extended to and were reflected in dress, as the typical female silhouette of the eighteenth century, for example, changed radically in this period: wide hooped skirts and paniers disappeared⁹; structuring undergarments such as stays increasingly followed the body's natural shape¹⁰; and towering wigs and hairstyles were replaced by more natural styles.¹¹ A movement towards greater simplicity and naturalness, begun in the 1760s under the influence of the writings of Rousseau, who advocated for allowing the bodies of children to be dressed in non-restrictive clothing¹², thus came to fruition in the stark rise of the popularity of simpler dress in the last years of the *ancien régime* in France, during which Marie Antoinette frolicked in her idealised country retreat "Le Petit Trianon" in pastoral fashions¹³ inspired by children's frocks¹⁴ and the chemise, a loose undergarment. This latter influence became evident in one of the names that was applied to these flowing, light cotton or linen dresses popularised by the French queen: the *chemise à la reine*.¹⁵

⁷ Madeleine Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1997), 30.

⁸ John Mee and David Fallon, *Romanticism and Revolution. A Reader* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1.

⁹ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, ix.

¹⁰ Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe. 1715-1789*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2002), 172.

¹¹ Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body. Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 153.

¹² Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 30.

¹³ Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion. What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution* (London: Aurum Press, 2008), 132-33.

¹⁴ Leslie Reinhardt, 'Serious Daughters: Dolls, Dress, and Female Virtue in the Eighteenth Century', *American Art* 20, no. 2 (2006): 35.

¹⁵ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 226.

Although France was the fashion centre of the age¹⁶, British influence on this simplification in dress was also undeniable and became encapsulated in the fashion for “Anglomania” in Europe – an aesthetic notion in, for instance, dress and garden design, which saw the greater simplicity in the cuts and materials of British dress become a fashionable ideal.¹⁷ Various influences on dress thus came together to determine the appearance of dress at the end of the eighteenth century – influences later weighed up in fiction such as Austen’s and Burney’s. Just as dress developed alongside greater social and political processes it eventually also came to reflect these and was, further, reflected on in writing.

The transition from ostentatious dress and silhouettes to a pared-down, empire-waist style in muslin for women¹⁸ and neutral-toned trousers, riding boots and crisp linen cravats for men¹⁹, are thus to be understood as more significant than a simple change in tastes or fashions. Ostentatious luxury became unpopular in the wake of the French Revolution, which added a political dimension to one’s choices in dress, as it became an indicator of political sentiment.²⁰ It is of note that Britain was considered a forerunner in the respect of democratising dress, as its constitutional monarchy served as a democratic example in France, just as its more reduced aesthetics inspired French fashions.²¹ However, the seeds of these developments lie in earlier decades, as the rise of the middle classes and bourgeoisie was an ongoing process throughout the century, not least tied to the emergence of a new consumer class.²² Those who continued to be attached to aristocratic grandeur in dress and manners might, therefore, project a sense of social conservatism at this particular historical moment.

In its literary reflection, this change is employed to analyse and communicate a sense of the futility of resistance against new social structures. In both Austen’s and Burney’s novels, proponents of aristocratic culture must inevitably cede to new currents that see the gentry and middle classes, personified in both texts as young women of middling social standing, come into focus as the protagonists of a culture increasingly allowing for upward social mobility.²³ Dress, naturally, figures into this, as the idealisation of simpler styles towards the end of the

¹⁶ Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, ‘French Connections: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, and the Anglo-French Fashion Exchange’, *Dress* 31, no. 3 (2004): 4.

¹⁷ Andrew Bolton, *Anglomania. Tradition and Transgression* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2006), 12–13.

¹⁸ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 24.

¹⁹ Ian Buruma, ‘Tell a Man by His Clothes’, in *Anglomania. Tradition and Transgression*, ed. Andrew Bolton (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2006), 16.

²⁰ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 42.

²¹ Chrisman-Campbell, ‘French Connections’, 7.

²² Vivien Jones, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

²³ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations. The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 230–31.

eighteenth century visually represents this social shift. Broader narratives in society and politics thus ushered in a shift away from aristocratic and towards middle-class culture.²⁴ The complexity of the topic gradually emerges here as an interwoven web of changes in society, domestic structures, and dress towards the end of the eighteenth and in the early decades of the nineteenth century. While seminal changes were occurring in the arena of politics, the conjugal family, moreover, rose in importance in the face of blood relations, as systems of inheritance put women at a decided disadvantage.²⁵ These tendencies were closely reflected in dress and its associations, which by the late 1700s was imbued with notions of democracy, simplicity, and the clear differentiation from earlier styles and generations.²⁶

Working from this foundation of material and historical observations, this thesis directs its focus towards Austen's and Burney's literary treatment of these topics, paying particular attention to both authors' engagement with dress and textiles as a symbolic and communicative medium in this context. The following chapters aim to analyse how dress and its production are treated by both authors while negotiating topics of social and domestic conditions and shifts. As their young female protagonists seek to position themselves in the precarious social structures they must operate within, they are simultaneously in a process of positioning themselves within their families – both consanguineal and conjugal, with the latter typically forming the conclusion to the heroines' narratives.²⁷ A comparative approach is useful due to the intertextual relationship between the two authors.²⁸ Tracing similarities and differences in how both enact dress alongside an analysis of the social and familial conflicts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century – including the ways both authors engage with and frame these – will serve as the thesis' main methodology.

In terms of structure, Chapter 1 will offer a brief overview of the current state of research in the field of material culture and dress in literary studies, as well as presenting perspectives on the luxury debates of the eighteenth century and moral stances on dress. Major historical and fashion processes of the era will be introduced in greater detail in Chapter 2, with a focus on identifying them in concrete passages from Austen's and Burney's novels, always linking this analysis back to the meta-narratives of change and renewal that this thesis is concerned with. These aspects will then be applied to an analysis of domestic and married life in the era in

²⁴ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 7–9.

²⁵ Perry, 34.

²⁶ Chrisman-Campbell, 'French Connections', 7.

²⁷ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 2.

²⁸ In her defence of the novel as an art form, Austen cites two of Burney's works, *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, as examples for the genre alongside only one other work. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31.

Chapter 3, as well as considering their representation in the novels. Questions of female education, inheritance, and intra-familial relationships will feature here as various viewpoints from which to appraise the function of the texts' material dimension. The novel as a medium of education and female opinion will figure into this discussion. Throughout, connections will be drawn between historical and theoretical observations and close readings of passages pertaining to dress, with the aim of establishing links between the authors' awareness of generational shifts in their world and the way this is consequently expressed through dress in the works. It is to be noted here that all novels will be considered alongside one another throughout. Additionally, as has already been stated, as all of Austen's and Burney's novels feature young female protagonists, the analytical focus of this thesis will be placed on the social and familial standing of young women and, therefore, women's dress of the period.

Allowing for the limited scope of this thesis, it will not be possible to offer a comprehensive study of developments in luxury, fashion, commerce, and politics in the period under discussion here – not least as the primary aim of this paper is not historical. Nor is it the intention to offer biographical insight into the lives of Austen and Burney as a means of analysing their attitudes towards dress, as this thesis is primarily concerned with literary analysis. However, in sketching the historical context, central voices and developments will be considered. Though it is undeniable that both authors experienced a literary sphere ripe in discourse on dress and its moral and social implications²⁹, this thesis will, therefore, not consider other texts from the period in detail beyond the discussion of the luxury debates and moral anxieties pertaining to dress presented in Chapter 1.

Finding and tracing the thread tying together varied and disparate areas of life in Austen's and Burney's world is challenging, due to the complexity of each individual aspect under consideration in this context. Though there is no definitive angle from which to solve this issue, this thesis hopes to suggest one such thread or lens through its focus on dress as a mirror of society and the individual – and a powerful tool for commentary on one's world, self-stylisation, and external perceptions of oneself. Building on the idea that "the conventions of fictional plots found in the literature of any period are popular precisely because they are felt to be important in the common experience of that place and time"³⁰, the ideas surrounding dress and its depiction merit similar consideration and, ultimately, stand to be similarly elucidating when it comes to the way dress serves as a literary tool for Austen and Burney.

²⁹ For an overview of this see Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*.

³⁰ Batchelor, 8–9.

1. Current State of Research and Theory

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries dress was understood as a means of expressing certain facts about oneself, as a “powerful signifier of self – a visual indication of gender, social position and occupation”.³¹ Dress was even conceived of as a “form of language through which meaning was generated by the wearer and read by the observer”.³² This idea was, however, simultaneously complicated by debates surrounding dress’ insufficient powers of expression, which, conversely, amounted to it becoming defined as a means of deception.³³ When cast in such textual terms, it is apparent that analysing the literary use of the “language” of dress can serve to open up a further level to texts of the period. As the late eighteenth century is characterised by developments in consumer culture and, therefore, the goods possessed and reflected on, this era particularly offers itself up for a joint analysis of literature and dress.³⁴

These developments were, further, accompanied by the emergence of an increased print culture that was more widely available than in earlier times³⁵ – a link between text and textiles which even extends to the material level, as paper was commonly made of rags at this time and classified by its fibre contents.³⁶ Wigston Smith notes the material circularity of text and textile by citing examples of contemporary writers reflecting on the fact that women’s clothes might return to them in the form of their reading material.³⁷ At the same time, the novel offered women a space to utilise the “language of aesthetics”³⁸, contributing to general opinions on taste, which was a central aesthetic category of the time and one for which women were considered crucial.³⁹ The material field of tension that emerges between texts and textiles, therefore, exemplifies the “unpleasantly doubled position” Jones identifies in women acting “as both the surveyor and the surveyed”⁴⁰ in the taste discourse of the period. When approached from the angle of literature and dress, this argument can be applied to analyse women as, at once, consumers buying and wearing textiles as clothes, and potentially utilising one and the same material as was worn to reflect on dress in writing. Though this meta-fictional material dimension of the topic will not be of central importance, as the thesis’ focus lies on the intra-textual effects of dress, it is,

³¹ Batchelor, 9.

³² Batchelor, 9.

³³ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 67. and Chloe Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 21–22.

³⁴ Jones, *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*, 12.

³⁵ Jane Taylor, “‘Important Trifles’: Jane Austen, the Fashion Magazine, and Inter-Textual Consumer Experience”, *History of Retailing and Consumption* 2, no. 2 (2016): 118.

³⁶ Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, 48–49.

³⁷ Wigston Smith, 52.

³⁸ Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain. The Analysis of Beauty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 155.

³⁹ Jones, 80.

⁴⁰ Jones, 84.

nonetheless, important to note here to establish the different ways that texts and textiles can relate to each other.

With the central aesthetic question of the age of Austen and Burney being: “[H]ow does beauty matter?”⁴¹, one might just as well ask: “How does dress matter?” This question will be approached by presenting the current state of research on material culture in literary studies and, in this context, focusing in on dress. This theoretical perspective will then be supplemented by eighteenth-century views on luxury and the morals of dress, which will include the analysis of select passages from the novels. Due to the fact that this chapter is mostly concerned with a broad overview of how dress can be read in literature – and specifically literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – it will focus on secondary material rather than close reading of Austen and Burney, so as to lay the theoretical foundation for later parts of the thesis.

1.1 Material Culture in Literary Studies

As a discipline of comparative literature and literary studies, the consideration of material culture within and of texts has been a critical approach since approximately the 1990s⁴², when the so-called “material turn”, signifying a movement towards “explor[ing] how things speak, how they affect, condition, and mold us – and how we need them”⁴³, took place in several disciplines. Initially rooted in theoretical exploration of the “aesthetics of print”⁴⁴ – which is to say its material appearance – the material turn in literary studies is now to be understood as an approach that appraises and assigns importance to objects in writing, just as it does to a text’s human characters, without creating stark separations between the two.⁴⁵ This can serve to enrich analytical modes, and add complexity to the conclusions that can be drawn from texts: “The attempt to write the material world into the novel’s moral schema plunges the text into a series of various, but interrelated, debates on gender, sexuality, consumption and class which it cannot overwrite.”⁴⁶ Material culture can, in this way, provide an implicit framework to a textual world, which, once understood, lays open layers of meaning that are contextually fixed and implicitly understood, yet essential details for readers of literary works. At the same time, a greater awareness of the presence of the material world in real life and

⁴¹ G. Gabrielle Starr, ‘Burney, Ovid, and the Value of the Beautiful’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 24, no. 1 (September 2011): 78.

⁴² Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, ‘The Material Turn in Comparative Literature: An Introduction’, *Comparative Literature* 70, no. 3 (September 2018): 251.

⁴³ Brillenburg Wurth, 249–50.

⁴⁴ Brillenburg Wurth, 251.

⁴⁵ Brillenburg Wurth, 250.

⁴⁶ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 51.

literature also serves to question and add complexity to the traditional dichotomy of object and subject⁴⁷, drawing attention to the object's "role in society".⁴⁸ This leads to a new understanding of the relationship between humans and the objects they produce and own, conceding a form of agency and independent meaning to objects, as Culkin summarises in the statement: "We shape our tools and thereafter they shape us."⁴⁹ A question that arises from this understanding of the relationship between humans and objects is how human subjectivity can become affected by the material – at what point does the material world become constitutive for one's subjectivity, replacing the self through "die Summe seiner Sachen" – the sum of one's things?⁵⁰ Subject-object relations are, therefore, a productive arena for literary elaboration and were of particular interest in an era of commercial and material development, such as exemplified by the late eighteenth century.⁵¹

The term "material culture" itself should be clarified at this point. Coined by Edward B. Tylor, it is a concept that works in opposition to and conjunction with "intellectual culture", signifying an expansion of how culture is conceived of. The term argues for a model of culture that no longer restricts its definition to intellectual activity, but to one that encompasses the total output of a culture, significantly including the material dimension, such as dress.⁵² Culture was thus defined as "a whole way of life" by him and later theorists.⁵³ As expressed in the above quote by Culkin, the concept of material culture signifies an understanding of the relationship between humans and objects that is at once an expression of culture through the means of production and interaction, and also a process, in which the possession and acquisition of particular objects are productive processes in their own right, as meaning is created with and through these very objects. Objects in texts can, therefore, also be argued to produce additional meaning by drawing on the real-world significations of particular items and casting them alongside human characters who produce, interact with, and own objects.

In these ways, the cultural significance of the material world has long been reflected on in literature itself, though Scholz and Vedder note that literary studies were slow to systematically appraise the textual standing and effect of material culture.⁵⁴ In addition, the

⁴⁷ Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder, 'Einleitung', in *Handbuch Literatur Und Materielle Kultur*, ed. Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 4.

⁴⁸ Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 2.

⁴⁹ Culkin zitiert in: Scholz and Vedder, 'Einleitung', 10.

⁵⁰ Susanne Scholz, 'Das Reich Der Dinge: Exotische Güter, Gender Und Empire Im England Des Frühen 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Handbuch Literatur Und Materielle Kultur*, ed. Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 210.

⁵¹ Scholz, 207.

⁵² Scholz and Vedder, 'Einleitung', 6.

⁵³ Scholz and Vedder, 6.

⁵⁴ Scholz and Vedder, 8.

fundamental immateriality of objects in texts poses a series of questions related to whether or not objects as represented in writing can still be classified as objects per se, which raises the matter of whether their heightened abstraction in literature serves to, conversely, increase the symbolic value attached to them.⁵⁵ Kimmich, too, argues that objects, once denaturalised as they are in their un-sensory textuality, contain greater symbolic potential, building on the role of everyday objects as powerful signifiers of information such as an individual's social standing.⁵⁶ Beyond the simple representation of objects it is, then, significant to consider their function and enactment in literary texts, placing the focus, for example, on the process of characters and narrators encountering and experiencing them. Vedder points out that language becomes crucial at this point, as the textual objects' immateriality can only be mitigated through description and narration, serving to contextualise them and thus allow them to become "*telling objects*".⁵⁷

Another aspect of the material turn in literary studies considers the materiality of texts themselves. Some aspects pertaining to this approach have already been cited, such as theory surrounding the aesthetics of text and material makeup of paper. Books being material objects, their appearance and production are, of course, also of interest in studying the relationship between literature and material culture. This encompasses the process of writing and creation as it does the act of reading, considering in both cases the impact the material dimension of the experience has on the act in question.⁵⁸ Though not of central importance to how the theory of material culture in literature will be applied in this thesis, it is nonetheless of interest to consider the real material relationship between textiles and paper in the world of Austen and Burney. When reading and writing, and especially when material properties such as the colour and quality of paper are mentioned, there was an implicit link between the life cycles of textiles, dress, and literary production for people living in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁹ These observations on the material history of paper add nuance to Brillenburg Wurth's observations on the novel as an intellectual medium, as she writes that the novel "has been a mediator of human identity and consciousness, and the construction of an individual, humanistic subjectivity in Western culture has often been associated with the reading of

⁵⁵ Scholz and Vedder, 9–10.

⁵⁶ Dorothee Kimmich, 'Dinge in Texten', in *Handbuch Literatur Und Materielle Kultur*, ed. Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 21–23.

⁵⁷ Ulrike Vedder, 'Sprache Der Dinge', in *Handbuch Literatur Und Materielle Kultur*, ed. Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 29.

⁵⁸ These aspects are also discussed in Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder, eds., *Handbuch Literatur Und Materielle Kultur* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018).

⁵⁹ Cornelia Ortlieb, 'Materialität Und Medialität', in *Handbuch Literatur Und Materielle Kultur*, ed. Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 41–42.

books.”⁶⁰ In this definition, dress becomes an invisible, though materially constitutive, factor of knowledge and identity production through texts. The material nature of the novel is based on the necessity of the textile fashion system for the production of paper, as has been mentioned, offering an extra-textual link between the symbolic value of dress for the construction of self and the intellectual value of literary writing for the development of the mind. Returning to the textual level, however, the use and function of dress as an element of material culture in literature shall now be considered more closely.

1.1.1 Dress in Literature

The above general introduction to the theory and study of material culture in literature has already opened perspectives on how textiles might prove a useful and interesting object of study for literary analysis. This shall be expanded on by regarding the specific effects and functions of dress in literature, with particular reference to British literary writing of the era of Austen and Burney, considering how the “rising fashion system was not simply a cultural, but rather an inter-textual experience, relying on the shared reading experiences of consumers.”⁶¹ As Hughes notes, it is not the aim to suggest that dress, above all other details, is a “hidden key to all the mysteries” of a text, but its study can nonetheless “illuminate the structure of [a] text, its values, its meanings or its symbolic pattern.”⁶² Dress is thus not read with accurate replication or representation in mind, but rather its abstracted description is analysed for how it supports authorial strategies and the expression of themes. This point relates to the central idea surrounding dress in eighteenth century writing, namely the “analogy between dress and expression, style and substance”⁶³, in which dress is frequently found to be lacking.⁶⁴ The idea of “clothes as signifiers”⁶⁵, as contained in the eighteenth-century linking of dress with expression, anticipates later conclusions by theorists of material culture and the material turn in literary studies, as shown above. However, an added dimension becomes apparent in the juxtaposition of dress and expression, that questions how appropriate it is to read material signs as signifiers of more profound truths about people and their world.

⁶⁰ Brillenburg Wurth, ‘The Material Turn in Comparative Literature’, 41–42.

⁶¹ Taylor, “‘Important Trifles’”, 128.

⁶² Clair Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2006), 6.

⁶³ Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, 195.

⁶⁴ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 5.

⁶⁵ Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, 173.

The contrast of dress and expression, in which dress is found to be insufficient, suggests the risk of deception.⁶⁶ Doody links this falseness to a psychological response to the conditions and pressures of society: “In order to foil constant observation, people adopt disguise, making this a world where a wig-maker must become rich – society the while hypocritically declaring its preference for the simple and natural.”⁶⁷ This creates grounds for analysing the era’s developments in dress and its tendencies towards simplicity and naturalness, as expanded on in Chapter 2, when contrasted with the psychological realities of life in a society defined by observation, criticism, and closeness. Entwistle describes this idea of dress as a protective medium from a sociological standpoint: “Fashion serves to protect one from prying eyes and enables one to put a distance between self and other – it is the ‘armour’ of the modern world. It opens up possibilities for disguise, for the construction of a self which is ‘artificial’ in the sense of being a work of artistry.”⁶⁸ This correlates with aforementioned concerns about dress and dissimulation and also ties into similar anxieties surrounding politeness and manners, as also negotiated in the novel of manners. Much like dress, good manners – that is behaviour compliant with the demands of society – were seen as “providing opportunity for self-concealment and thus for separation”.⁶⁹ “Covering up” with dress and manners can, therefore, be read as a response to the demands of society. Functioning as a “vehicle for materialised thought”⁷⁰, dress can, therefore, be of particular interest to writers of domestic fiction and the novel of manners, as it functions as a material representation of self-concealment and self-protection for character who must act within the bounds of social expectations.

Whether as a means of concealment, becoming what was understood as deception, or simply as a beautifying measure, there is a real level of fictionality that can be created and presented through dress. As a carrier and signifier of meaning, it can be used for the expression of “ideas and desires”, becoming itself a “species of fiction”.⁷¹ Such an idea of fashion as fiction goes hand in hand with conceptions of fashion as a language, as is frequently posited by dress historians, though the true extent to which dress can be conceived of as a communicative medium is questionable.⁷² If not itself quite a language, though, fashion certainly shares commonalities with the way language functions:

⁶⁶ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 3.

⁶⁷ Margaret Anne Doody, ‘Burney and Politics’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 106.

⁶⁸ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 120.

⁶⁹ Patricia Meyer Spacks, ‘Privacy, Dissimulation, and Propriety: Frances Burney and Jane Austen’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12, no. 4 (2000): 519.

⁷⁰ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 46.

⁷¹ Louise Wallenberg, ‘Foreword’, in *Fashion in Fiction. Text and Clothing in Literature, Film and Television*, ed. Peter McNeil, Vicki Karaminas, and Catherine Cole (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2009), xv–xvii, xv.

⁷² Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, 7.

Like the speaking of a language, fashion proceeded within a structure that appeared to be agreed upon by those who “spoke” and wore it, but was arbitrary and evolving, the whole and the parts existing only in relationship to each other.⁷³

Bearing this in mind, it can also be observed that rhetorical tradition and historical writing on translation establish a link between dress and language from antiquity onwards by using dress metaphors to illustrate the functions and difficulties of these areas of intellectual work.⁷⁴ Likewise, textile crafts, such as weaving, have long been thought of as parallel practices to the narration of stories or production of songs and, therefore, utilised as metaphorical imagery for these processes.⁷⁵

As eighteenth-century writers were critical of direct analogies between dress and expression, the novel articulated interest in exploring how “subjects exploit material goods, often separating and revising their meanings.”⁷⁶ The suggestion of a clear-cut dichotomy, as put forward in the conceptual pair “dress” and “expression”, is broken down and rendered complex, as Wigston Smith notes, in the novel’s negotiation of material objects. It is not necessarily the object of dress itself as a signifier of a single concept that is of interest to writers of the era, but rather the necessity of inspecting how human subjectivity in the shape of characters’ and the narrative’s treatment affects and revises the *presentation* and *meaning* of dress in the novel. Subjectivity is a crucial underlying concept, as “[t]he act of choice”, wielded in personal or authorial choices of dress, “is the expression of individuality and a token of participating in established social categories”⁷⁷, as Davidson writes. Dress’ paradoxical concern with individuality and “established social categories” is one that toes a complicated line between the conception of dress as a means of personal expression and the more fundamental function of dress as a way of conforming to social demands – a process that Entwistle defines as “[o]perating on the boundary between self and other”.⁷⁸ When falling short of these demands, one is threatened with “exclusion, scorn, or ridicule”⁷⁹, which places strong and painful consequences on dressing “wrongly” both in real life and in fiction. When applied to the time of Austen and Burney, fashion was understood as “represent[ing] cleanliness, agency, improvement, decoration, novelty and ephemerality”.⁸⁰ It is within this framework of social

⁷³ Peter McNeil, Vicki Karaminas, and Catherine Cole, ‘Introduction. Fashion in Fiction: Text and Clothing in Literature, Film, and Television’, in *Fashion in Fiction. Text and Clothing in Literature, Film and Television*, ed. Peter McNeil, Vicki Karaminas, and Catherine Cole (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2009), 1.

⁷⁴ Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, 31.

⁷⁵ Kira Jürgens, ‘Stoff’, in *Handbuch Literatur Und Materielle Kultur*, ed. Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 440.

⁷⁶ Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, 11.

⁷⁷ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 43.

⁷⁸ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 7.

⁷⁹ Entwistle, 7.

⁸⁰ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 43.

demands and standards that dress could consequently be used to express subjective individuality both actively and passively – though the social demands surrounding dress also serve as a productive baseline for their subversion and critical appraisal in fiction. At the same time, conventionality as a condition of acceptable dress is an interesting literary tool in “the shared values it produces between reader and writer, and the narrative tensions it generates between the transient and the enduring [...]”.⁸¹ Such a suggestion of shared knowledge naturalises dress to a great degree, which puts particular stress on the instances it is mentioned, as they suggest aberrance or subversion. However, this basis of knowledge is specific to a time and place and part of the “transient” qualities Taylor identifies in the above quote. Acting within an established set of signs shared by the author and contemporary reader, dress is, however, a rich mode of expression even when abstracted and naturalised, as it is always “a compromise between the demands of the social world, the milieu in which we belong, and our own individual desires”.⁸² Underlying facts about the nature and meanings of dress in the world of Austen’s and Burney’s novels must, therefore, be considered when attempting to appraise the function of dress in the texts.

In a broad sense, the representation of dress in literature serves to achieve what Hughes terms the “reality effect”, which she defines as “lend[ing] tangibility and visibility to character and context”. The significance for interpretation, as she expands, lies in the fact that dress as a “visible aspect of history, a material index of social, moral and historical change”⁸³ allows for meaning to be inscribed and found via historical contextualisation. She, however, also notes that dress is frequently “naturalised” in writing, becoming abstracted with particular attention given to its most striking or unusual features.⁸⁴ This supplements the points made about the immateriality of objects in literature, by emphasising that it is of central importance to pay attention to what and how much of dress is revealed in a literary text – and, inversely, what is left out –, as this is based on a conscious choice on the part of the writer making the material dimension of a text’s world visible. As Barthes notes, after all, there are no meaningless objects in texts.⁸⁵ A parallel meta-fictional doubling of how meaning is assigned to dress can be observed here. As Entwistle notes, “not only is our dress the visible form of our intentions, but in everyday life dress is the insignia by which we are read and come to read others.”⁸⁶ Various processes of “reading” involving dress are introduced here. By implementing dress as a signifier

⁸¹ Taylor, “Important Trifles”, 116.

⁸² Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 114.

⁸³ Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction*, 2.

⁸⁴ Hughes, 3.

⁸⁵ Scholz and Vedder, ‘Einleitung’, 12.

⁸⁶ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 35.

on a textual level, then, it becomes refracted through two lenses: the writer's on the one hand, and the reader's on the other – and is, in addition, informed by how dress is understood in real life. Literary dress is thus read on several levels and becomes more complex for all its textual abstraction and the absence of visual detail.⁸⁷

The above consideration of how dress can be employed and read in literature suggests what Brooks terms the “semiotics of bodily adornment and personal accessory”, as concerned with dress as a means of “getting to ‘know’ people”.⁸⁸ Dress as a faulty avenue of expression factors in here, because it is specific to the context of eighteenth-century theorists' concerns in the matter, as has already been mentioned. It is, therefore, necessary to be aware of literary treatments of the dangers of wanting to come to simple conclusions about people as a result of observing their dress. This leads to a certain “opacity of objects”, which in the case of dress can turn into a costume or other self-concealment to the end of false self-presentation – an anxiety which Vedder notes as the threatening potential of objects in literature.⁸⁹ The meaning of objects thus also derives from the intentions with which they are used or worn. It is, therefore, especially relevant in the case of dress to “mov[e] away from the consideration of dress as object to looking instead at the way in which dress is an embodied activity and one that is embedded within social relations.”⁹⁰ In the case of the novel, this translates to not looking for descriptions of clothes, but rather for instances in which clothes are “embodied” or enacted, paying attention to what is revealed in the process, when, for example, characters “*talk* about clothes”⁹¹ – not least, as this constitutes a further multiplication of the levels of dress' fictionalisation and abstraction.

Overall, Hughes emphasises that it is important to bear in mind that dress is always “over-determined”, meaning that it is impossible to come to one single conclusion on its meaning, as there will always be different explanations based on the perspective taken when appraising it.⁹² Whether viewed in the light of “personal taste, fashionable dictates, unconscious self-images, metaphoric patterns and so forth”⁹³, or from the perspective of social and domestic change, as is the case in this thesis, the conclusions drawn from the analysis of dress will necessarily differ. It is, however, always necessary to consider the contextual “system of

⁸⁷ Clair Hughes, ‘Talk about Muslin: Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*’, *Textile. The Journal of Cloth and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2006): 186–87.

⁸⁸ Peter Brooks quoted in McNeil, Karaminas, and Cole, ‘Introduction. Fashion in Fiction: Text and Clothing in Literature, Film, and Television’, 6.

⁸⁹ Vedder, ‘*Sprache Der Dinge*’, 35.

⁹⁰ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 10.

⁹¹ Hughes, ‘Talk about Muslin’, 187.

⁹² Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction*, 4.

⁹³ Hughes, 4.

signs”⁹⁴ influencing a work, as these are specific to social and, crucially, authorial conditions. As Davidson states: “There are no unimportant features in either the gown or the novel, looked at with a certain eye [...]”⁹⁵ – and it is precisely this “eye” that has to be employed when analysing the use of dress in literature.

Due to the intentionality inherent in the inclusion of details of any kind in literary writing, the presence of material culture has a high potential for analytical significance. On an individual level, the things sought to be expressed by including features of material life in texts naturally differ. This section has aimed to offer a general theoretical introduction to the approaches and theories underlying the study of material culture and dress in literature. Building on this, the remaining pages of this chapter will present some of the philosophical and cultural debates relevant to the reading of dress in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature specifically.

1.2 Eighteenth-Century Attitudes to Dress

Though theory on the material turn in literary studies undeniably offers great insight into the functioning of objects in texts, it is also important to take contextual information, such as eighteenth-century views and debates surrounding luxury, dress, and morality, into account to decode the significance of textual appearances of fashionable dress and other luxury goods in Austen’s and Burney’s writing. The so-called “luxury debates” of the eighteenth century are of central significance here, as they reach back to earlier in the century and considerably inform the way in which the era’s simpler dress is to be contextualised. Moral views on dress were similarly shaped by ongoing and historical debates on the matter.⁹⁶ While it will not be possible to go into great detail on these issues, it is nonetheless important to mention them, as they define the intellectual climate reflected in Austen’s and Burney’s treatment of dress, whether implicitly or otherwise.

⁹⁴ Hughes, 2.

⁹⁵ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 284.

⁹⁶ Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850* (Manchester University Press, 1999), 3.

1.2.1 Luxury and the Value of Dress

Initially, one might not consider “luxury” and “necessity” as anything but antithetical concepts. One early and important voice in the luxury debates was the social theorist Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), who defined the matter as such by classifying everything that was not immediately and materially necessary to people’s survival as luxury. He, nonetheless, considered the indulgence in luxury as a positive factor for the public and a nation’s economy, while being critical of it on an individual level.⁹⁷ This nuance was carried forward and theoretical writing on the subject has long observed that both necessity and luxury function similarly in how they correspond to human desires. The divide between both is summarised in the conclusion that a wish or desire is no less real for its being frivolous rather than necessary.⁹⁸ Struggles to define and categorise how luxury and necessity relate to each other found expression in these ways in the luxury debates of the eighteenth century, which were concerned with questioning the nature and value of luxury.⁹⁹ Trade networks grew and a consumer culture developed throughout the century, which led to European markets having increasingly greater access to foreign and rare goods – characteristics that also correspond to Scottish philosopher and economic theoretician Adam Smith’s (1723-1790) theories on the value of goods, as expressed in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (1763).¹⁰⁰ Far more ephemeral, though no less influential to an object’s luxury value, is the category of fashionability, which was equally coming to be of greater importance throughout the eighteenth century and was born of the emerging fashion cycle that was itself a by-product of the increased production, availability, and accessibility of goods to ever broader strata of society.¹⁰¹ Though more of an historical analysis, this brief sketch of the eighteenth-century understanding of luxury and fashionability as elements comprising the value of dress will allow for increased clarity pertaining to dress as signifiers in Austen’s and Burney’s writing.

Luxury is perhaps most easily and commonly defined as a characteristic of materially valuable goods and, in this way, of elite consumption.¹⁰² It can be defined as widely unattainable and conspicuous, and is therefore aligned with moral judgement passed on elite corruption and ostentatious living in the eighteenth century.¹⁰³ Surprisingly, though, considering the historical

⁹⁷ Brandon P. Turner, ‘Mandeville against Luxury’, *Political Theory* 44, no. 1 (2016): 28.

⁹⁸ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* quoted in Matthew Hilton, ‘The Legacy of Luxury: Moralities of Consumption Since the 18th Century’, *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4, no. 1 (March 2004): 111.

⁹⁹ Berg and Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and Peter Stein, eds., *Lectures on Jurisprudence. Vol. 5 of the Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 345.

¹⁰¹ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 7.

¹⁰² Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29.

¹⁰³ Hilton, ‘The Legacy of Luxury’, 103.

and Christian connotations of the words luxury and *luxuria*, which clearly focused on lust, vice, and excess¹⁰⁴, the most central facet discussed in relation to luxury at this time was the question of commerce, rather than moral concerns.¹⁰⁵ When viewed in this light, moral qualms about individuals' luxury consumption were part of a long intellectual tradition and existed alongside the more modern and seemingly paradoxical appraisal of consumption as a positive factor in driving a nation's economy and, therefore, contributing to its public good.¹⁰⁶ As the material nature of luxury was shifting in the latter half of the century, alongside developments that saw the middling and labouring classes gain access to consumer markets, its exact definition becomes a point of contention when simply employing facets of rarity and value. Conceptual connotations of the term are also overwritten to some degree in presenting consumption as something positive – a point which gains further nuance in an economy, in which more people are able to consume more frequently, as the roles of producer and consumer were able to blend to a greater degree than was the case before. However, this should not be understood as the emergence of simply emulative patterns of consumption, as material aspirations were not drawn from a single source, as simplicity became fashionable and, therefore, luxurious in the later eighteenth century.¹⁰⁷

Some of the key philosophical debates on luxury, touched on in this chapter, were carried out by Smith, Mandeville, Hume and contemporary French philosophers Montesquieu, Melon, Voltaire, and Rousseau.¹⁰⁸ The perspectives taken were diverse, as Rousseau formulated a stance of clear opposition to luxury, associating it with corruption and immorality¹⁰⁹, while Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776), was most interested in matters of “commerce, convenience, and consumption” in the wider discourse of the luxury debates.¹¹⁰ His stance is distinguished by its twofold argumentation for the benefits of luxury, which he posited was, on the one hand, linked to the individual, sensual pleasure that could be derived from consumption, and, on the other, offered certain economic benefits.¹¹¹ English author Daniel Defoe also discusses the matter in *A Plan of the English Commerce* (1731), in which he draws a distinction between the spending of the labouring and middling classes and elite consumption, placing

¹⁰⁴ Catherine Kovesi, 'What Is Luxury? : The Rebirth of a Concept in the Early Modern World', *Luxury* 2, no. 1 (January 2015): 30.

¹⁰⁵ Berg and Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Hilton, 'The Legacy of Luxury', 3.

¹⁰⁷ Berg and Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Berg and Clifford, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Jeremy Jennings, 'The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 1 (2007): 81.

¹¹⁰ Berg and Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury*, 3.

¹¹¹ Andrew S. Cunningham, 'David Hume's Account of Luxury', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 27, no. 3 (2005): 233.

emphasis on the fact that the former is less reprehensible.¹¹² This ties into David Hume's definition of commodities as "storehouse[s] of labour", which means that they serve a further function besides the provision of "the ornament and pleasure of life".¹¹³ The value of goods was thus understood to also be based on the labour of production inscribed into them. Those who provided this labour were, subsequently, also considered to be natural and justified consumers of the goods they produced. A further crucial point in defining luxury is made by Smith in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* by separating it from the idea of material value. The materially precious is not necessarily the most valuable commodity, in Smith's understanding, which hinges on whether or not a good serves as a reliable and renewable source of a nation's wealth.¹¹⁴ In this understanding of the matter, more ephemeral and perishable goods are of greater absolute value to a country's economy, as they are a renewable resource of wealth due to their high level of "consumptibility".¹¹⁵ This theory clearly applies to fashionable dress, for example, which was subject to many and frequent changes and, therefore, spurred on cycles of consumption.

Dress is also an outstanding example of the relationship between necessity and luxury, as formulated above, as it bridges the gap between both poles: at once essential to everyday life and social conformity¹¹⁶, it is also an ever – and quickly – changing arena for the display of less tangible virtues such as "culture, taste and style".¹¹⁷ The concept of fashionability emerged as a way to describe this volatile category of value that was distinct from the material properties of the actual object in question: "It was manners, gestures and style as much as the physical attributes of the object which lent it fashion."¹¹⁸ Therefore, it was also relevant who wore and popularised an item of dress and under which circumstances. This aspect is important when trying to understand developments in women's fashion that came to see the dress of the middling and labouring classes incorporated into elite costume, as is shown in greater detail in Chapter 2. The conception of the value of luxury as informed by fashion aligns with Mandeville's and Smith's ideas on the matter and can be applied here by placing the focus on a distinction between the necessary (dress) and luxury consumption (fashionable dress). That a good's material properties might be less sumptuous and – as in the case of dress informed by

¹¹² Neil de Marchi, 'Adam Smith's Accommodation of "Altogether Endless" Desires', in *Consumers and Luxury. Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 23.

¹¹³ de Marchi, 23.

¹¹⁴ Berg and Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury*, 8.

¹¹⁵ Berg and Clifford, 9–10.

¹¹⁶ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Berg and Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury*, 8.

¹¹⁸ Berg and Clifford, 9–10.

labouring women's costume – indeed less “luxurious” is irrelevant in this context, as an item's fashion value serves to also increase its luxury value, as has been shown. In its very fashionability, it becomes a desirable consumer good regardless of its physical and material properties and is thus a renewable resource of national wealth.

The driving force behind fashion was taste, a central category in eighteenth-century aesthetic beliefs, that “is figured as a claim to discernment which rises beyond immediate use or gratification” and could serve to “grant its user, if successful, a prestige and license in other areas of social life; most notably political and cultural debate.”¹¹⁹ There was, then, a parallel economy of taste at play, which informed and influenced the more material market economies of the day as “[t]aste took over [...] as markers of stable social status structures.”¹²⁰ Less tangible than the identification of sumptuous fabrics or precious metals, identifying fashionable dress through the use of one's own faculty of taste added a layer of personal qualification to the “display or reading of signs”¹²¹ in dress. Decoding these signs required a process of “reading” dress not unlike the one employed in studying material culture in literature. At the same time, taste is not an absolute category and, crucially, one prone to error, as there was a belief in the “[i]dea of inimitability of taste in dress that cannot be made up for by simply buying and wearing fashionable items.”¹²² Luxury became a more complex category through the inclusion of taste in the matter. Taste, as the foundation of fashionable dress, was then “an exclusive currency of connection and self-identity among a particular metropolitan elite, one that defined themselves as the ‘people of fashion’”. It was not confined to dress and could not simply be bought.”¹²³ In this way, new luxury goods also served a social function as visual identifiers of one's “gentility” – a fact that was, not least, determined by one's interaction with and use of the items rather than the simple fact of ownership.¹²⁴ Ribeiro, too, points to this fact: “The correct arrangement of dress and accessories, and the borderline between richness and simplicity, was highly perplexing to the eighteenth-century woman, for there were many to judge and criticize.”¹²⁵ Intangible categories like taste seem to have been added to reintroduce visual distinction into a consumer economy, in which more people than before had access to various iterations of the same desirable goods. Taste is, therefore, a useful analytical category that, as

¹¹⁹ Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 10.

¹²⁰ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 29.

¹²¹ Hughes, ‘Talk about Muslin’, 195.

¹²² Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 9–10.

¹²³ John Styles, *The Dress of the People. Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2013), 12.

¹²⁴ Styles, 6.

¹²⁵ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 170.

will be shown in this thesis, was also reflected on in Austen's and Burney's work to distinguish between vulgar spending and elegant dress.

This real-life process of presenting and decoding signs, which placed the emphasis on interpretations informed by the enactment rather than the ownership of material goods, once again echoes methods of reading the material world in literature and adds a layer of meta-fictional experience to the literary staging of dress in Austen and Burney. Just as dress, in its many nuances, various influences, and meanings was experienced as a real system of signs, it appeared so on the pages of literature as part of the "legible body", which Batchelor defines as "one of the most fundamental yet problematic ideas of sentimental literature".¹²⁶ Understanding what constituted luxury in the eighteenth century and how this notion was adapted through developments in consumer culture is, then, helpful or even necessary in understanding certain levels of meaning inherent in the presentation of fashionable dress in the literature of the time.

1.2.2 Morality and Dress

Amid its disparate philosophical movements, such as sentimentalism and libertinism, the eighteenth century's primary attitude to the body was defined by an overall bid for its liberation.¹²⁷ Within this attitude, there was an understanding of dress as "the body's body and an expression of the soul's disposition."¹²⁸ In this doubling of surfaces of meaning, the "legible body" mentioned above becomes twofold and is, additionally, scrutinised as a reflection of an individual's soul. This places an incredible stress on dress as a moral marker and makes the pitfalls of taste assume a far more threatening dimension. It is not just dress or an individual's physical appearance that is judged according to these standards: one's inner life is subject to similar and simultaneous scrutiny. The combination of body and the "body's body" was, consequently, believed to serve as representations of what lay beneath, extending to one's moral integrity. It is for this reason that a character's gradually deteriorating appearance was a frequent device in narratives of corruption and ill conduct in eighteenth-century literature.¹²⁹

This idea was, of course, not necessarily always taken at face value, as shown in Burney's critical treatment of the trope in *Cecilia*. Here, the philanthropist Mr Albany reveals his past failings to the heroine Cecilia, recounting the story of his ill-treated lover, for whose death he feels responsible. Having not made good on his promise of matrimony, he cast her

¹²⁶ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 6–7.

¹²⁷ Gabriela Juranek, 'The Libertine Body: Bare Breasts in French Fashion, 1775-1800', *The Journal of Dress History* 3, no. 4 (2019): 35.

¹²⁸ Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 202.

¹²⁹ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 50.

aside, damning her to a life of sex work and destitution. When he later returns and ruefully takes her in, in a bid to make up for past wrongs, it is his guilt and moral failing that is externalised and materialised in her body, as she refuses to speak, to eat, and eventually succumbs to this passive form of suicide.¹³⁰ Contrary to the more common iteration of the “legible body”, Burney subverts the trope, making apparent its injustice and proving that the external signs of acute misery are not to be simply read as proof of an individual’s own wrong-doing, but can rather point to the guilt of another. She thus rejects the idea of morality and women’s difficulties as existing in a vacuum between the two poles of good and corruption. While the signs of injustice nonetheless mark the body of Albany’s unnamed lover, they are weaponised by the narrative and serve to haunt Albany, who keeps her corpse in his house for an undefined and unsettling length of time, possibly amounting to years: “I kept her loved corpse till my own senses failed me,—it was then only torn from me,—and I have lost all recollection of three years of my existence!”¹³¹ Though this story of female suffering is a problematic prequel to Albany’s philanthropy, it suggests a twist on the moral judgment all too frequently passed in readings of the legible body, relocating criticism from the site of injustice to its perpetrator.

There was a real belief in the concurrence of appearance and identity, while the dangers of appraising dress in such simple terms was also treated critically. However, “[c]lothes were treated as universal credentials. If you dressed, looked, and walked like a fashionable gentlewoman, more often than not you would be taken for one.”¹³² Considering this reality of being judged on appearances, the idea of the “legible body” becomes a little clearer, as it connects one’s outward presentation to internal truths in an expression of anxieties surrounding dress and duplicity, as analysed in Chapter 1.1.1. Such connections between appearance and morals were also an attempt at referring to an imaginary “golden age before fashion and luxury”, in which “inner bodies and outer appearances once corresponded”.¹³³

This critical view of dress and morals is reminiscent of the Medieval use and tradition of the term *luxuria*, which “linked expense and ornamentation, especially in clothing, to excessive bodily appetites and to the generation of lustful desire.”¹³⁴ Anxieties about consumption are thus embedded in a tradition of alarm at women’s sexual desires and self-presentation. When considered in this way, it becomes apparent that fashionable dress was

¹³⁰ Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, ed. Peter Sabor, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 705–8.

¹³¹ Burney, 708.

¹³² Amanda Vickery, ‘Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England’, *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 4 (October 2013): 869.

¹³³ Vickery, 864.

¹³⁴ Kovesi, ‘What Is Luxury?’, 33.

dubious not only for its individual risk of concealment, but also on a more global scale that concerned itself with excess, sexual license, and frivolity in society in general. The idea of dress as a moral indicator was frequently used on this global level and, therein, most often concerned with women's shortcomings. The idea of the existence of perfect harmony between an individual woman's internal and external "appearances" was embodied in virtuous literary heroines, whose virtue was not least articulated in their physical beauty.¹³⁵ The correlation of beauty and virtue, with a simultaneous disdain – and narrative punishment – for the vice of obsession with appearances creates a double bind, in which women are staged as "both most likely to fall victim to the corruption of wealth and fashion and as the emblem of that which is truly virtuous."¹³⁶

In this context, the contrast between taste and fashion or superficial luxury appears once more, as good taste was considered an indicator of good morals.¹³⁷ Berg formulates the contrast between the two concepts as follows: "Taste conveys aesthetically based reason [...]. Fashion, by contrast, is associated with the irrational and impermanent."¹³⁸ Beyond the "legible body's" appearance in narratives of disintegrating appearances, fashionable dress could, in accordance with this, also be read as an indicator of morals shortcomings. While a beautiful appearance was considered something positive, too great a concern with one's looks, and the pursuit of ephemeral fashion, clearly was not. Despite economists' arguing in favour of consumption, "the practices and effects of commerce [were] associated with excess, with lack of control – and therefore with the feminine."¹³⁹ Kowaleski-Wallace echoes this thought and expands on it from a feminist perspective, arguing that "[t]hough it had been necessary to the strong growth of the expanding British economy, the female appetite for goods [...] was also perceived as a sinister force threatening male control and endangering patriarchal order."¹⁴⁰ To be a consuming subject – especially to be seen to be one through the display of one's dress – was not a morally neutral act, while *not* consuming was seen in an equally unfavourable light, as it suggested a lack of support for domestic industry and a want of sensibility.¹⁴¹ It is, then, unsurprising that Batchelor writes that "[r]econciling an appropriate attachment to dress to conceptions of virtuous femininity was to prove one of eighteenth-century literature's most difficult tasks."¹⁴²

¹³⁵ Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 1–2.

¹³⁶ Jones, 205.22/05/2024 19:09:00

¹³⁷ Taylor, "Important Trifles", 123.

¹³⁸ Taylor, 122.

¹³⁹ Vivien Jones, 'Introduction', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace cited in Laura Miskin, "'True Indian Muslin' and the Politics of Consumption in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*", *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (2015): 14.

¹⁴¹ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 100.

¹⁴² Batchelor, 82.

What Jones identifies as a “clear and established link between conduct manuals and later novels of manners, like Burney and Austen’s”¹⁴³ also plays into the authors’ representations of dress in their works, as it is a frequent topic of discussion in such conduct manuals for young women. The *Mirror of the Graces* (1811), for example, advises on the choice of fabric and colour of one’s gowns:

Where doubt may be about this or that hue being becoming or genteel (as it is very possible it may neither be the one nor the other), let the puzzled beauty leave both, and array herself in simple white. That primeval hue never offends, and frequently is the most graceful robe that youth and loveliness can wear.¹⁴⁴

Associations between the colour white and virginal purity are more than implicit in this advice, and made more obvious still by several other of the manual’s statements, including a later declaration of modesty as a woman’s prime virtue and beauty:

What is the eloquence of your beauty? – Modesty! What is its first argument? – Modesty! What is its second? – Modesty! What is its third? – Modesty! What is its peroration, the winding up of all its charms, the striking spell that binds the heart of man to her for ever? – Modesty!!!

Modesty is all in all; for it comprises the beauties of the mind as well as those of the body; and happy is he who finds her.¹⁴⁵

In “comprising the virtues of the mind as well as those of the body”, modesty is the very example of legible female virtue as echoed in outward appearance. That this appearance is not reduced to a woman’s natural physique but, moreover, extends to choices in dress, down to symbolic colour choices, is very telling of the climate of ideas affecting links between dress and morality in the writing of the age. Austen, for example, employs the system of signs pertaining to white muslin in *Northanger Abbey*, when the heroine Catherine Morland goes for a ride in an open carriage with the morally dubious John Thorpe, to which her chaperone Mrs Allen simply notes the danger this poses to one’s dress: “Open carriages are nasty things. A clean gown is not five minutes wear in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction. I hate an open carriage myself.”¹⁴⁶ Though neglectful of her duty to properly warn Catherine of her conduct, Mrs Allen unthinkingly but accurately draws attention to the real threat to Catherine’s virtue, which she – not wrongly, as seen in the above quotes from *The Mirror of the Graces* – relates to the potential

¹⁴³ Kathryn Sutherland, ‘Writings on Education and Conduct: Arguments for Female Improvement’, in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26.

¹⁴⁴ Anonymous, *The Mirror of the Graces; or, The English Lady’s Costume*, 2nd ed. (London: B. Crosby and Co., 1811), 122, <https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/3P2CFTLHCOND8B>.

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous, 137.

¹⁴⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 105.

stain the carriage ride might leave on her dress and thus her reputation. As Miskin notes of white muslin, considering it also in reference to the above-cited passages from *The Mirror of the Graces* and *Northanger Abbey*, it was “a dainty and easily stained material” which, in these properties, also stood for a woman’s “sexual purity and marriageability”.¹⁴⁷ As such it serves as a useful illustrative example for the connection that was drawn between dress and morality – between women’s appearances and their deeper virtue – during the era. In addition, the colour white was linked to the greater concerns with cleanliness that were emerging at this time, symbolising “a hygiene both social and moral”.¹⁴⁸ This observation adds another dimension to the idea of the legible body, in which hygiene is read alongside ideas of morality, modesty, and beauty, with each of the concepts cross-referencing and informing the others. Muslin as a luxury textile and representation of female modesty, further, offers itself up for appraisal within the tradition of the term *luxuria*, as it seeks to negate the potential of criticism on the grounds of lust by acting as a litmus test of kinds for proper conduct.

Dress as part of the body’s legible surface was evidently of crucial importance in the moral discourse of the day. This also encompassed the idea that too great a concern with dress was inadvisable, as this would all too quickly bring to mind “the long tradition of viewing fashionable consumption as a reflection of ‘female superficiality and depraved attraction to things’.”¹⁴⁹ This places the female subject in an obviously paradoxical position of having to, at once, carefully curate her appearance according to the dictates of fashion and conduct manuals on the one hand, and present a consciously unstudied appearance that is apparently unconcerned with the very fashions it must accord with in order to conform on the other. In “a society where appearances are everything”¹⁵⁰, the figure one presents to the world must be perfectly tuned to the visual and moral sensibilities of society. In consciously creating an image that is likely to conform, however, one runs the risk of false self-construction – a central moral concern of the age, as has already been examined. These anxieties apply to the spectrum of authenticity spanning the divide between “the self as constructed and self-styled and the self as natural and authentic”.¹⁵¹ Even when aiming to be “natural and authentic”, however, one partakes in unavoidable self-styling as part of the process of getting dressed. Chico draws attention to the female dressing room as a central space in this context, being a place that offered women room to, at once, refine their bodies and minds:

¹⁴⁷ Miskin, ““True Indian Muslin””, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 202.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, ““Important Trifles””, 116.

¹⁵⁰ Meyer Spacks, ‘Privacy, Dissimulation, and Propriety’, 523.

¹⁵¹ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 113.

The dressing room promises women the potential to design themselves: literally, with clothes and makeup, or figuratively, through private reflection and education. It suggests that women make designs on the world and that they scheme to outwit and ensnare men. But the dressing room also introduces the possibility that women are circumscribed, or designed, by others, drawn into roles that are not necessarily of their own choosing.¹⁵²

With its suggestions of feminine privacy and the associated dangers of self-withdrawal, self-construction, and mental emancipation through reading, writing, and education, the dressing room can be considered as a central spatial topos within eighteenth-century discussions of women's dress, authenticity, and morality. As the spatialised feminine private sphere, it contrasts with the world of appearances that places an intense strain of observation on individuals.¹⁵³ Attendant ideas at the time dealt with an idealised world of non-observance that would allow a young woman to be free from artifice if she could only exist "[w]ith no spectator but herself", making her "presumably [...] less tempted to manipulate appearances, resting secure in her 'modesty'".¹⁵⁴ Falling short of such visions of non-observance, the dressing room instead offers an alternative scene of reprieve from and preparation for the social world beyond its bounds. On a more abstract level, the supposedly moral conduct book serves as a similar space of feminine self-stylisation through self-regulation, albeit on a textual dimension, equally teaching women to "ensnare men" by cutting a moral figure to attract a respectable partner, as is the case in the above-cited advice provided in *The Mirror of the Graces*. Echoing the world's "suffocating sense of surveillance"¹⁵⁵, conduct books ultimately also provided readers with strategies for emotionally distancing themselves through employing propriety and politeness to their advantage. With conduct books forming the framework and foundation for the novel of manners, self-regulation, self-stylisation, self-concealment, and dress ultimately interact on multiple textual and extra-textual levels, inscribing the body and literature with complex notions of fashion and propriety. Employed on the literary level, too great a concern with dress can be seen as indicative of vacuity at best and moral shortcomings at worst in the works of Austen¹⁵⁶, while Burney employs it similarly in her treatment of fashion-obsessed characters in all her novels.¹⁵⁷ In the case of Burney, though, ideas pertaining to dress as a social armour not

¹⁵² Tita Chico, *Designing Women. The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 13.

¹⁵³ Meyer Spacks, 'Privacy, Dissimulation, and Propriety', 518.

¹⁵⁴ Meyer Spacks, 518.

¹⁵⁵ Meyer Spacks, 518.

¹⁵⁶ Hughes, 'Talk about Muslin', 195.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, Mr Lovell in *Evelina*, Miss Larolles and Mr Harrel in *Cecilia*, Camilla and Mrs Mittin in *Camilla*, and the milliner's customers in *The Wanderer*

unlike polite manners, also emerge clearly – most notably in her last novel *The Wanderer*, in which the heroine's clothes figure as protective costumes and disguises throughout.¹⁵⁸

Though not, strictly speaking, applied with reference to only dress and morality, Burney's eponymous heroine Cecilia's moral crisis is indicative of the narrow and often contradictory divides concerning morality in place at the time: "I know no longer what is kind or what is cruel, nor have I known for some time past right from wrong, nor good from evil."¹⁵⁹ Reflecting here on her financial support of the profligate Mr Harrel, such an outcry of moral confusion is remarkable for the eighteenth-century novel's heroine.¹⁶⁰ The downward spiral involving both her and the Harrels that begins when Cecilia, crucially, covers a tailor's bill for Mr Harrel, is beyond the heroine's comprehension, as the immorality of fashionable spending and financial irresponsibility cannot be made up for by randomised moral designs, such as Cecilia's attempts at improving Mr Harrel.¹⁶¹

Aiming to walk the safe middle ground between fashion and modesty, spending and reticence, conformity and authenticity was no easy feat in the age of Austen and Burney, as this section has aimed to illustrate. Springing from writing and replicated therein in its turn, ideas about dress and morality were all but omni-present in the discourse of the time and found entrance into women's private sphere through the reading of conduct manuals and novels of manners. Beyond a mere illustrative or depictive function, Austen's and Burney's novels can be read for how they replicate and engage with prevailing notions about dress and morality – especially for how this relates to the employment of conduct book morality and context-appropriate dress. This is expressed in the authors' analysis of "the intricate rules of propriety" which "work, particularly on women, as an instrument of control, generating a culture of minute surveillance and censure. They in effect mandate hypocrisy, prescribing obsessive attention to appearances."¹⁶² This chapter has aimed to show how this situation could be effectively criticised and subverted, both textually and extra-textually, by authors' and women's self-aware engagement with moral and social standards, employing them to their own advantage. In this way, the break with face-value traditions that equated appearance with substance – the dichotomy of "dressed" and "expressed" which is cited at the beginning of in this chapter – becomes a powerful literary and social tool.

¹⁵⁸ Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, 148.

¹⁵⁹ Burney, *Cecilia*, 396.

¹⁶⁰ Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 132.

¹⁶¹ See Cecilia's regret at her compassion and hope for his improvement in Burney, *Cecilia*, 296–97.

¹⁶² Meyer Spacks, 'Privacy, Dissimulation, and Propriety', 525.

2. Society: (Fashion) History and Context

The decades either side of the turn of the 19th century were a time of “unprecedented and accelerated change”¹⁶³, not just in the realm of fashion – though dress did acquire new significance in the face of political developments in Europe. Most significantly, the French Revolution, which began in 1789, constituted a paradigm shift in politics and society that was reflected in and articulated via dress.¹⁶⁴ Fashionable accessories attained political dimensions, as, for example, chamois gloves with political slogans were worn to make one’s political leanings clearly visible.¹⁶⁵ Delpierre notes that while “[i]t may seem strange that politics should be reflected in a field apparently so frivolous as fashion”, the relationship between dress and politics is a logical one as “political changes reflected current preoccupations”.¹⁶⁶ Burney, who was a more political writer than Austen¹⁶⁷, explicitly cites the French Revolution as the main event of the era, even acknowledging the impossibility of ignoring its impact in the introduction to *The Wanderer*, which she addresses to her father:

[...] to attempt to delineate, in whatever form, any picture of actual human life, without reference to the French Revolution, would be as little possible, as to give an idea of the English government, without reference to our own: for not more unavoidably is the last blended with the history of our nation, than the first, with every intellectual survey of the present times.¹⁶⁸

The French Revolution and Napoleonic wars thus feature more or less implicitly in both authors’ novels.¹⁶⁹ They are, however, not to be understood as the sole factor behind the change in dress, which had begun earlier in the 18th century as the result of a number of aesthetic and social processes¹⁷⁰ that have partly already been discussed with reference to the era’s luxury debates. These will be reflected in the following chapter, in which Austen’s and Burney’s responses to changes in dress, social aspects in the context of dress, and the production of dress will be examined to identify generational shifts and changes in relation to what constituted fashionable dress, who produced and wore it, and how these aspects are reflected in writing.

¹⁶³ Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 84.

¹⁶⁴ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 284.

¹⁶⁵ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 42.

¹⁶⁶ Delpierre, 117.

¹⁶⁷ Doody, ‘Burney and Politics’, 9622/05/2024 19:09:00

¹⁶⁸ Frances Burney, *The Wanderer, or, Female Difficulties*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6.

¹⁶⁹ Admiral Croft, for example, mentions the effect war had on courtship, making it a much faster process, in Volume I, Chapter 10 of *Persuasion*. Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 98–99.

¹⁷⁰ Bolton, *Anglomania*, 69. and Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 10.

2.1 Shifting Focus: Britain and France

In eighteenth-century Europe the “shop-window of fashion was located at Versailles, amid the gold and mirrors of the absolutist celebration, but also in Paris, whence emerged the prints, the news and the fashion-dummies that were sent to the capital cities of Europe.”¹⁷¹ Although France was traditionally a “locus of negative identification” for Britain, viewed as a kind of inherent enemy¹⁷², as evident in Captain Mirvan’s xenophobic tirades against anyone and anything French in Burney’s *Evelina*¹⁷³, it was nonetheless the centre of European fashion for much of the eighteenth century and by around 1760, French fashions were prevalent everywhere and intertwined with ideas of sociability and politeness.¹⁷⁴ Its pre-eminence in matters of fashion, centred at the French court, was, however, increasingly challenged by a fashion for all things English, summarised under the umbrella of “Anglomania”, which took hold from about the 1780s onwards.¹⁷⁵ In matters of dress, this translated to simpler styles in fabrics that were less fine than the silks mainly in use for the typical gown of the time called a “sack gown” or *robe à la française*.¹⁷⁶ In their simplicity, English goods and styles carried political associations with democracy, which in no small part affected their popularity in the political climate leading up to the French Revolution.¹⁷⁷ The apparent conservatism of these English styles thus deceives.¹⁷⁸

The British market produced goods defined as modern, as opposed to the idea of “French fancies”¹⁷⁹ and libertine sentiments articulated in fashions such as nipple-revealing dresses.¹⁸⁰ This “sense of difference”, that set England apart in the concept of Anglomania, was also reflected on in Britain itself, though, as Bolton notes, it was, at its core, an idealised notion:

it has remained a fantasy, based, as it is, on a caricature of England, concocted from the essential ‘otherness’ of the outsider’s perspective of Englishness. [...] It is based on idealised concepts of English culture that the English themselves not only recognize, but also, in a form of ‘autophilia’, actively promote and perpetuate.¹⁸¹

¹⁷¹ Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, 208–9.

¹⁷² Sara Salih, ‘Camilla and The Wanderer’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 47.

¹⁷³ The first mention of his general xenophobia occurs in letter XIV, where Evelina writes that he has “a fixed and most prejudiced hatred of whatever is not English.”, Frances Burney, *Evelina or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Vivien Jones, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51.

¹⁷⁴ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 6.

¹⁷⁵ Ribeiro, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Ribeiro, 219.

¹⁷⁷ Chrisman-Campbell, ‘French Connections’, 9.

¹⁷⁸ Bolton, *Anglomania*, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Juranek, ‘The Libertine Body’, 34.

¹⁸¹ {Citation}

Nor was Anglomania readily accepted by all political instances, as it was a troubling development in the French trade war with Britain, which led to prohibitions against imported textiles in the 1780s.¹⁸² Nonetheless, it can be summarised that both France and England were the pre-eminent centres of fashion of the age and that the fashions that emerged in the period under consideration here were a result of influences emanating from both countries.¹⁸³ A sense of the countries' intertwined relationship, as well as the contrasts and stereotypes present on both sides is personified in the figure of Burney's Evelina.¹⁸⁴ She is continually placed between the poles of her grandmother Madame Duval, "vain, overdressed, highly painted, simpering, and rude"¹⁸⁵, who though originally of lowly origin¹⁸⁶ has so completely assimilated to the fashionable world of her adopted home in France as to overwrite her original identity¹⁸⁷, and Captain Mirvan, who is no less distasteful to her in his nationalism that amounts to xenophobia in its intensity. Burney stages tensions between the countries in this constellation of characters, placing Evelina in the middle as the embodiment of the young modern woman who must configure her identity in the confusion of cross-cultural exchange and tension. Within this framework, however, conflict between Britain and France is implied to be an outdated notion that the modern age seeks to resolve, as both Mme Duval and Captain Mirvan are of an older generation.

The definition of taste was more aligned with middle-class dress by the time of the French Revolution¹⁸⁸ and was linked to Anglomania's democratising influence on the one hand¹⁸⁹, and innovations stemming from Marie Antoinette's pastoral sensibilities and chemise dresses on the other.¹⁹⁰ She, moreover, sent one of these dresses to Georgiana Cavendish, the Duchess of Devonshire – whom British newspapers termed the "Empress of Fashion"¹⁹¹ – in 1784, one year after herself having appeared in one in a scandalous portrait by Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun.¹⁹² The French reception of this style seems also to have consciously reflected English influences, as the fashion magazine *Le Magasin des Modes Nouvelles Françaises et Anglaises*

¹⁸² Chrisman-Campbell, 'French Connections', 6 and 9.

¹⁸³ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 11.

¹⁸⁴ Burney, *Evelina*.

¹⁸⁵ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 50–51.

¹⁸⁶ Madame Duval's origins as a "waiting girl in a tavern" are revealed in Letter II. Burney, *Evelina*, 15.

¹⁸⁷ See Evelina's initial perception of Madame Duval, in which her nationality is unclear due to her accent and self-presentation. It is of that the fineness of her dress is especially mentioned, implying a link between this fact and her ambiguous Franco-English accent. Letter XIV, *Evelina*, 51.

¹⁸⁸ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 7.

¹⁸⁹ Ribeiro, 10.

¹⁹⁰ Lydia Edwards, *How to Read a Dress. A Guide to Changing Fashion from the 16th to the 20th Century* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019), 49.

¹⁹¹ Chrisman-Campbell, 'French Connections', 3.

¹⁹² Tove Engelhardt Mathiassen, 'Textiles', in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Peter McNeil (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 42.

(or *Magasin des Modes* for short) described these gowns as “Franco-English *robes en chemise*”.¹⁹³ These factors combined to naturalise and establish the “once-shocking chemise gown” as the “fashionable female uniform” in both countries in a matter of years.¹⁹⁴

Though the French Revolution is naturally cited as the most significant factor in the stark shift in fashion towards the end of the eighteenth century, it evidently stood at the conclusion of processes already in motion during the *ancien regime*, which it toppled. What was, however, undeniably affected by the Revolution was the perception of dress that had become “linked to the altering face of politics”.¹⁹⁵ Interestingly, the French Revolution failed to affect British interest in French fashion and the custom of having one’s gowns made up by French tailors or engaging the services of French milliners persisted.¹⁹⁶ This post-Revolutionary hunger for the newest styles from Paris is also evident in Burney’s novel *The Wanderer*, which considers the period of the Terror in retrospect and in which the heroine Juliet works as an embroiderer and milliner for a while and is prized by customers for her supposed knowledge of and access to the latest French fashions, having herself recently arrived in Britain as a refugee:

Now and then, however, she was surprised by sudden starts of kindness, and hasty enquiries, eagerly made, though scarcely demanding any answer, into her situation and affairs; followed by drawing her, with an air of confidence, into a dressing-room or closet:—but there, when prepared for some mark of favour or esteem, she was only asked, in a mysterious whisper, whether she could procure any cheap foreign lace, or French gloves? or whether she could get over from France, any particularly delicate paste for the hands.¹⁹⁷

Though Juliet’s “‘wanderings’ take her further and further from Revolutionary France” and “also from urbanized modern life”¹⁹⁸, it becomes evident that her desire to leave behind France and her forced marriage is hampered by consumer demands for fashion, which inevitably cast her in a light that relates first and foremost to her ties to France. The cruelty of this situation is evident and ironic: Juliet, who has had to flee France, cannot hope to receive kindness or compassion unless these are motivated by a hunger for French fashion. Drawn into the private spaces of dressing rooms, suggesting confidence but also falsity, as examined with regards to dress and morals in Chapter 1¹⁹⁹, Juliet is ultimately confronted with the reality that the English market, after all, continued to demand for “innovative French products”.²⁰⁰ Burney

¹⁹³ Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, 186.

¹⁹⁴ Chrisman-Campbell, ‘French Connections’, 6.

¹⁹⁵ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 284.

¹⁹⁶ Chrisman-Campbell, ‘French Connections’, 4.

¹⁹⁷ Burney, *The Wanderer*, 406.

¹⁹⁸ Olivia Murphy, ‘Invasion and Resistance in *Mansfield Park*, *The Wanderer*, *Patronage and Waverly*’, *Sydney Studies in English* 41 (2015): 29.

¹⁹⁹ See p. 30

²⁰⁰ Ulinka Rublack, ‘Material Invention from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment’, in *Treasured Possessions from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Victoria Avery, Melissa Calaresu, and Mary Laven (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2015), 58.

also critically reflects the divide between political ideals and fashionable desires in her presentation of Juliet's clients at Miss Matson's milliner's shop demanding for the "famous French milliner"²⁰¹, while Juliet acutely suffers to put as much distance between herself and France as possible.

In the years following the French Revolution, the fashion for muslin gowns reached a highpoint from 1795 onwards²⁰², and anxieties surrounding the chemise gown's associations with undress were not abating, as rumours surrounding extremes in post-Revolutionary fashion – mainly concerned with women's degree of nudity – persisted.²⁰³ Nonetheless, Juranek argues that dress was one of the interests society focused on to "forget about the horrors of the terror".²⁰⁴ Dress, which had once served to perform aristocratic grandeur, was thus being used as a vehicle for the performance of other, more republican virtues and the styles begun with Anglophilia dominated until 1820²⁰⁵, while French fashions continued to be sought after in Britain.²⁰⁶ The relationship between Britain and France in matters of fashion can, therefore, be concluded to be one of exchange and mutual influence and one that particularly developed to be this mutually influential in the second half of the eighteenth century. More so than Austen, Burney gives space to the consideration of Franco-British relations in her novels, possibly also due to biographical reasons, as she married a French refugee and later spent several years in France herself.²⁰⁷ In treating relations between the two countries on the small scale of village and town sociability in *Evelina* and *The Wanderer*, Burney notes the absolute centrality of dress in questions of French and British influence and exchange in her time – and how the drastic shifts of the French Revolution were responded to when it comes to dress.

2.2 New Fashions, New Meanings

The ways in which dress changed in the final quarter of the 18th century have already been touched on. This sub-chapter will expand on the matter, tracing specific styles and silhouettes in women's dress, while surveying evidence of these changes in Austen's and Burney's novels.

²⁰¹ Burney, *The Wanderer*, 430.

²⁰² Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 24.

²⁰³ Chrisman-Campbell, 'French Connections', 11.

²⁰⁴ Juranek, 'The Libertine Body', 60.

²⁰⁵ Peter McNeil, ed., *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 39.

²⁰⁶ Reinhardt, 'Serious Daughters', 49.

²⁰⁷ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 200–202. and The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Frances Burney | Biography, Books, & Facts | Britannica'.

Davidson summarises this period of dress history as follows: “The French embraced Anglomania, waistlines rose and dresses turned white and flimsy, ornamented with fripperies borrowed from other times and cultures. Women’s heads retreated into bonnets; their bosoms were newly defined and uplifted.”²⁰⁸ This describes the conclusion of developments begun and defined by the aforementioned *chemise à la reine*, Marie Antoinette’s pastoral muslin dress, in 1783.²⁰⁹ As the aim was for simplicity with a focus on a natural and fresh look inspired by shepherdesses and milkmaids, who constituted the beauty ideal of the period²¹⁰, boned stays, hoops and paniers were abandoned – and with them the typical female silhouette of the eighteenth century.²¹¹ This signified the retreat from “the construction of female dress [...] which had been used for centuries”.²¹² The style of dress that was established to replace it by 1795 carried the politically inspired name “Directoire” and was defined by a very high waistline that rested just underneath the bust.²¹³ Despite their radical modernity, these new muslin dresses were also significantly inspired by the aesthetics of classical antiquity.²¹⁴ Neo-classicism was the prevalent aesthetic movement of the age, influenced by allusions to ancient republicanism as part of political transformations²¹⁵, the Grand Tour as part of the typical elite education (depicted in Burney’s *Camilla* (1796), for example²¹⁶), and recent excavations at the archaeological sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum.²¹⁷ This influence was articulated in cuts and materials that referenced ancient drapery.²¹⁸

The most popular materials were cotton and linen, prized for their washability and thus hygiene.²¹⁹ Opposed to silks, cotton and linen could easily be washed and their fashionable white colour became an indicator of cleanliness and bodily health.²²⁰ The comparative fragility and impracticability of silk is evident in *Evelina*, for example, when Mme Duval bemoans the destruction of a new silk gown, – a “Lyons silk negligee”²²¹ – which, to the great amusement

²⁰⁸ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 11.

²⁰⁹ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 226.

²¹⁰ Robin Ganey, ‘Milkmaids, Ploughmen, and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 1 (2007): 49.

²¹¹ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 10.

²¹² Reinhardt, ‘Serious Daughters’, 49.

²¹³ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 27.

²¹⁴ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 30.

²¹⁵ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 155.

²¹⁶ In the earlier sections of the novel, Clermont, whom their uncle destines for Camilla’s sister Eugenia, is on a grand tour of Europe, a traditional part of a privileged young man’s education. This is referenced in Volume I, Chapter VIII, for example. Frances Burney, *Camilla or a Picture of Youth*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, 3rd ed., Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 119.

²¹⁷ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 30–31.

²¹⁸ Clair Hughes, ‘Talk about Muslin’, 189

²¹⁹ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 77.

²²⁰ Styles, 79. and Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 53.

²²¹ Burney, *Evelina*, 67.

of Captain Mirvan, had become soiled when she fell into the mud in rainy weather. The *négligé* was a style of “undress”, meaning informal daytime wear²²², that was highly fashionable by the 1780s.²²³ It was an aristocratic style, defined in opposition to “full dress”, or the *grande parure*, which signified the most formal style of dress, worn in the evenings.²²⁴ Urbain Ruaro notes the *négligé*’s seductive nature and describes it as “an artificial construction for the coquettes who try to appear elegantly neglected”.²²⁵ By assuming this style, the ageing Mme Duval thus aims to cast herself in the role of a fashion-conscious seductress, abreast of the newest developments in style and self-consciously adopting an air of aristocratic undress, while not foregoing luxurious French-made silk. This self-styling is deconstructed by the episode with the mud and even more violently later in the novel, when Captain Mirvan and Sir Clement Willoughby stage a mock attack on Mme Duval and Evelina, posing as highwaymen. Though the attack is not real, this does not translate to a lack of violence, as Mme Duval is physically assaulted and robbed not of her money, but of her illusions of youth and fashion, as well as her carefully curated face to the world:

The ditch, happily, was almost quite dry, or she must have suffered still more seriously; yet, so forlorn, so miserable a figure, I never before saw her. Her head-dress had fallen off; her linen was torn; her negligee had not a pin left in it; her petticoat she was obliged to hold on; and her shoes were perpetually slipping off. She was covered with dirt, weeds, and filth, and her face was really horrible, for the pomatum and powder from her head, and the dust from the rose, were quite *pasted* on her skin by her tears, which, with her *rouge*, made so frightful a mixture, that she hardly looked human.²²⁶

Beginning with an allusion to the earlier episode involving the destruction of Mme Duval’s Lyons silk, this passage offers a break-down of the composites of women’s fashionable dress, showing at the same time how quickly its appearance could disintegrate and how the female subject aiming at fashionability could quickly and effectively be humiliated and laid bare, once robbed of the various parts of her dress. The studied air of effortlessness aimed at by wearing *négligé* styles is, further, disproved in the enumeration of the elements actually necessary for achieving this fashionable appearance. Evelina’s description is empathetic and, at the same time, striking in its honest horror at the subversion of beauty aids such as powder, pomatum, and rouge causing a “really horrible” appearance, which is suggestive of a sentiment in favour of embracing one’s natural appearance, and, moreover, of age-appropriate dress. In

²²² Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 78.

²²³ Elise Urbain Ruaro, ‘The *Négligé* in Eighteenth-Century French Portraiture’, *The Journal of Dress History* 1, no. 1 (2017): 92.

²²⁴ Urbain Ruaro, 93.

²²⁵ Urbain Ruaro, 93.

²²⁶ Burney, *Evelina*, 150.

its high effort and fragility, Mme Duval's choice of dress is violently questioned and mocked in these scenes and notions of the greater hygiene of washable materials emerge in the fact of the destruction of two of her gowns.

Washability and reduced formality also translated to dress that offered greater opportunities for activity, which aligned with impulses related to freeing the body from the restrictions of shaping underwear.²²⁷ Previously, stays had been used from earliest childhood to mould the upper body to the fashionable conical silhouette²²⁸ and doctors' anxieties about their negative impact on women's physical health²²⁹ were echoed by women's testimonies in private writing and fiction, where the discomfort they caused was particularly noted.²³⁰ One of the most influential voices in the move towards non-restrictive and natural conceptions of fashion was the French author and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who advocated for clothes that would allow children to move more freely.²³¹ This development in children's dress directly prepared the ground for a similar development in women's fashion. Alongside political and aesthetic processes and the example of what women wore in the hotter climates of French and British colonies²³², women's dress by 1800 was a close copy of babies' and children's frocks that were worn by children of both sexes in the very first years of their lives.²³³

At the same time, though, women's muslin dresses were also associated with the chemise, the most intimate part of women's underwear as it directly touched the body²³⁴, through the name *chemise à la reine*. This white, round gown – meaning a dress that was closed in the front and would be put on over the head, as opposed to the typical open gowns of the eighteenth century, which had to be pinned to a triangular piece of clothing called a stomacher to close in the front²³⁵ – was thus an item of dress that carried associations with simplicity and modesty, but also allusions to undress. The troubling reality was, then, that modest, childlike dress did not save women from a sexualised appearance, as Rousseau himself even noted that it would be “removed bit by bit by the imagination”.²³⁶ This “fine line between a respectably fashionable and ostentatiously disreputable appearance” which “placed women in an apparently irresolvable double-bind”²³⁷ emerges repeatedly in the context of dress and morality, as has

²²⁷ Engelhardt Mathiassen, ‘Textiles’, 63.

²²⁸ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 47.

²²⁹ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 21.

²³⁰ Chrisman-Campbell, ‘French Connections’, 6.

²³¹ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 7.

²³² Ribeiro, 227.

²³³ Reinhardt, ‘Serious Daughters’, 35.

²³⁴ Isabel Paresys, ‘The Body’, in *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Peter McNeil (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 100.

²³⁵ Edwards, *How to Read a Dress*, 49.

²³⁶ Rousseau quoted in Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 10.

²³⁷ Batchelor, 10.

already been discussed, however it should be noted here that the body acquired a special significance as a locus of moral, political, and aesthetic expression in the eighteenth century, and sentimental literature often treated the female body, and by extension female dress, as a readable surface, on which morality, as well as the movements of the mind and feelings were spelt out.²³⁸

Although it is retrospectively possible to analyse these various influences affecting fashionable dress, they would have been registered implicitly as “absorbed elements”²³⁹ by contemporaries and, as such, they do not appear explicitly in the works of Austen and Burney. Neither author, for example, alludes to classical influences on fashion, though the muslin gowns so popular from the 1790s onwards appear frequently.²⁴⁰ What can, however, be gleaned from both authors’ texts is a general awareness of the fact that the study of antiquity was an important part of privileged young people’s education and, therefore, part of the intellectual climate affecting aesthetics and dress. The Bertram children in *Mansfield Park* (1814), for example, are shocked at Fanny’s lack of a formal education towards the beginning of the novel and, in enumerating her defects, offer an insight into what they consider to be a standard education. As part of this list, they also allude to knowledge of classical antiquity:

[...] I cannot remember the time when I did not know a great deal that she has not the least notion of yet. How long ago it is, aunt, since we used to repeat the chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reigns!”

“Yes,” added the other; “and of the Roman emperors as low as Severus; besides a great deal of the Heathen Mythology, and all the Metals, Semi-Metals, Planets, and distinguished philosophers.”²⁴¹

Burney’s *Camilla* also focuses on the upbringing and education of the Tyrold and Lynmere children. In this novel, the heroine’s sister Eugenia is particularly gifted academically, though it is noted as unusual that she is receiving a thorough education in ancient languages and literatures.²⁴² What emerges from both these examples is the presence of the languages and cultures of classical antiquity among the educated gentry and aristocracy. Though dress is not cited explicitly in either example, they can nonetheless help to find implicit evidence of the ideas and influences affecting dress and new fashions at this time.

A second major influence on dress was the pastoral style, which also formed part of the subtext of Anglomania: “In England, a country style of dress became popular over the course

²³⁸ Batchelor, 16.

²³⁹ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 33.

²⁴⁰ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 23.

²⁴¹ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. John Wiltshire, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21.

²⁴² Her brother Lionel, for example, refers to her as “little Greek and Latin” several times throughout the novel, for instance in Book VI, Chapter XIV. Burney, *Camilla*, 500.

of the eighteenth century; this was distinctly informal compared with the elaborate dress of the French, still heavily influenced by the formality of the court.”²⁴³ This pastoral mode and its idealisation of country living and aesthetics were adopted by Marie Antoinette, as has already be mentioned, in a move which Weber terms the queen’s “iconoclasm”.²⁴⁴ At her “Petit Trianon” within the grounds of Versailles, chemise gowns were worn with unpowdered hair, muslin fichus and cotton bonnets in styles called *à la paysanne de cour*²⁴⁵ or *à la laitière*²⁴⁶, for example. This was tied into a more general “enthusiasm for the ‘picturesque’ in nature”²⁴⁷, leading to increased interest in “[p]laying at rural simplicity”, as acted out in the wish to be “painted as milkmaids, dairymaids, hay-makers and shepherdesses.”²⁴⁸ Pastoral leanings evidently constitute another way in which simplicity and natural styles found their way into elite dress. The paradox inherent in aestheticizing agricultural labour as a fashionable aesthetic is commented on in Austen’s *Emma* (1815), when the vacuous Mrs Elton fantasises about the clothes she will wear to go strawberry-picking, conjuring up an image of pastoral simplicity in a carefully curated aesthetic fantasy which she interestingly ascribes to Mr Knightley at the end of the passage:

It is to be a morning scheme, you know, Knightley; quite a simple thing. I shall wear a large bonnet, and bring one of my little baskets hanging on my arm. Here,—probably this basket with pink ribbon. Nothing can be more simple, you see. There is to be no form or parade—a sort of gipsy party. —We are to walk about your gardens, and gather the strawberries ourselves, and sit under trees;—and whatever else you may like to provide, it is to be all out of doors—a table spread in the shade, you know. Every thing as natural and simple as possible. Is not that your idea? ²⁴⁹

The irony of the passage is revealed as the realities of strawberry-picking and manual agricultural work become apparent and dampen her enthusiasm. This is evidenced in the highly comedic construction of Mrs Elton’s later monologue, who decked out in “all her apparatus of happiness, her large bonnet and her basket” and “very ready to lead the way in gathering, accepting, or talking”²⁵⁰, soon concludes her effusive delight at the benefits of strawberries with the “‘only objection to gathering strawberries the stooping—glaring sun—tired to death—could bear it no longer—must go and sit in the shade.’”²⁵¹ “Naturalness” in dress and action, which Mrs Elton herself cites in the above passage, cannot, then, suffice for the actual adoption of

²⁴³ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 104.

²⁴⁴ Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, 147.

²⁴⁵ Weber, 186.

²⁴⁶ Weber, 146.

²⁴⁷ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 275.

²⁴⁸ Ribeiro, 273.

²⁴⁹ Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 385-386.

²⁵⁰ Austen, 389.

²⁵¹ Austen, *Emma*, 390.

simpler forms of living or the fully fledged participation in manual labour. Austen disentangles the aesthetic notion from lived reality in Mrs Elton's eventual resignation at the exhausting nature of strawberry-picking and thus underlines the point that naturalness in dress, which more accurately translated to "the use of lightweight, easy-to-laundry (and therefore hygienic) materials such as muslin, cotton, poplin, batiste, and linen"²⁵², should not be mistaken for the adaptation of one's behaviour and habits. In this way, the limits of renewal *through* dress are clearly demarcated, while dress as a reflection of new aesthetic desires is also treated critically. Despite Mrs Elton's construction of a rural aesthetic fantasy, its sartorial perfection is not enough to support its reality. In this way, Austen engages with her era's new fashions and the over-arching changes affecting them critically.

2.3 Social Regeneration and Visual Distinction

Among the many aspects influencing the tension field of dress and generational shifts at the turn of the nineteenth century, social factors came into play significantly. Not only were styles being borrowed by one social class from another, as seen in the above example of pastoral dress, but the social significance of these new fashions was also avidly discussed in the period. Anxieties surrounding the democratising effect of simpler dress abounded, as the wide-spread fear that social difference might no longer be visually distinguishable emerged.²⁵³ Peck summarises this development as follows: "[...] previously it had been easy to distinguish between the gentry, dressed in patterned silk, and the common folk, in plain wools and [coarse] linens. When everyone could afford and preferred the fashionable, highly decorative patterned cottons, class lines blurred."²⁵⁴ The trope of dress as a materialisation of class confusion, as in the maid mistaken for a lady due to her dress, became frequent in literature as a consequence.²⁵⁵ The subject area is touched upon by Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park*, for example, as Mrs Norris relates an exchange with Mr Rushworth's housekeeper, who recently "turned away two housemaids for wearing white gowns".²⁵⁶ White muslin gowns were, as has already been mentioned, the fashionable uniform of the age and most women from the middle classes upwards would have owned at least one.²⁵⁷ By choosing to wear them and trying to participate in the latest fashions, the housemaids appear presumptuous in Mrs Norris' eyes. In addition, the

²⁵² Edwards, *How to Read a Dress*, 64.

²⁵³ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 99.

²⁵⁴ Amelia Peck quoted in Engelhardt Mathiassen, 'Textiles', 55.

²⁵⁵ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 168.

²⁵⁶ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 123.

²⁵⁷ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 33.

gowns' white colour, which has already been analysed for its moral dimensions and ties to female domesticity²⁵⁸, might be interpreted as a sign of laxity in their work, antithetical as the colour white is to the physical labour of a housemaid. The supposed corrupting influence of dress with regards to social difference and servants' subordination is also invoked in Mrs Musgrove's complaint to Anne Elliot about her daughter-in-law Mary's nursery maid in Austen's *Persuasion*: "I have no very good opinion of Mrs. Charles's nursery-maid: I hear strange stories of her; she is always upon the gad: and from my own knowledge, I can declare, she is such a fine-dressing lady, that she is enough to ruin any servants she comes near."²⁵⁹ Fashionability comes into play here as a tool of influence, by suggesting that a fine-dressing servant can "ruin" others by suggesting a certain desirable appearance that might intersect too closely with the aesthetics of their employers. Fashion as a facet of luxury and consumption is implicitly referenced in this regard, while the exclusivity of luxury becomes subverted in its adoption by servants. Meanwhile, however, in Burney's *Camilla*, Mrs Mittin, Camilla's milliner and companion whose influence and temptation lead to ruinous shopping sprees, pins an item's level of fashionability not least on its popular adoption as she criticises Camilla's cap:

Mrs. Mittin, in a morning visit to Camilla, found out that she had only the same cap for this occasion that she had worn upon every other; and, assuring her it was grown so old-fashioned, that not a lady's maid in Tunbridge would now be seen in it, she offered to pin her up a turban, which should come to next to nothing, yet should be the prettiest, and simplest, and cheapest thing that ever was seen.²⁶⁰

This passage implicitly suggests the "trickle-down-theory" of the fashion cycle, according to which the popular adoption of elite styles led to a concept of fashionability that was defined by demands for constant novelty, so as to visually ensure social distinction.²⁶¹ Though this theory has been contested in research as too simplistic²⁶², it is nonetheless applied by Mrs Mittin as a reason for updating Camilla's dress, seeing as a fashion that is eschewed even by lady's maids must truly be termed out of date. The fashion cycle's characteristic of constant innovation is also cited here, as Camilla's cap is criticised as much for its frequent wear as it is for its actual appearance – and the fear of appearing outdated takes immediate effect, as Camilla passes over money to Mrs Mittin to secure the turban she suggests.²⁶³ Ironically, the fashionable world must, according to this logic, compete with its servants, which serves to give shape to fears of social instability. Elsewhere in *Camilla*, servants are cited as

²⁵⁸ See p. 23-24 of this thesis.

²⁵⁹ Austen, *Persuasion*, 49.

²⁶⁰ Burney, *Camilla*, 462.

²⁶¹ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 24.

²⁶² Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 62–63.

²⁶³ Burney, *Camilla*, 462.

sources on elegant life to similar effect. When Camilla is unsure about attending the master of the ceremonies' ball in Tunbridge Wells, her friend, the rich and independent widow Mrs Arlberry, assuages her doubts as follows:

Camilla was now still more distressed; and stammered out, that she believed the fewer balls she went to, the better her father would be pleased.

'Your father, my dear, is a very wise man, and a very good man, and a very excellent preacher: but what does he know of Tunbridge Wells? Certainly not so much as my dairy maid, for she has heard John talk of them; but as to your father, depend upon it, the sole knowledge he has ever obtained, is from some treatise upon its mineral waters; which, very possibly, he can analyse as well as a physician: but for the regulation of a country dance, be assured he will do much better to make you over to Sir Sedley, or to me.'²⁶⁴

Here, knowledge gleaned from moral standpoints and formal education is contrasted with knowledge of the world of fashion. However, though Mrs Arlberry manages to convince Camilla with this speech, her invocation of the dairy maid as a source of information on fashionable life and events in Tunbridge Wells has a threatening edge that Camilla fails to register. The dairymaid is cited to prove the point that even the lower levels of the serving class are aware of the social benefits of fashionable watering places. However, the fact that it is precisely Mrs Arlberry's dairymaid that is mentioned, as opposed to another servant, lends the persuasion an air of moral danger, as "milkmaids and ploughmen were often portrayed as exemplars of a wholesome, natural, and vigorous sexuality" and linked to moralists' fears that the countryside "suffered from promiscuity, illegitimacy, and overpopulation".²⁶⁵ In this way, Mrs Arlberry actually confirms Camilla's fears and proves her father's disapproval right, though Camilla is unfortunately unable to see through the subtext of her friend's statement. Fashionability, as it is practised by servants thus often becomes an indicator of moral failings and is a matter that is treated critically in several of Austen's and Burney's novels.

Dress in relation to social rank also features in *Pride and Prejudice* in a different context during Elizabeth Bennet's visit to her childhood friend Charlotte, who has recently married Elizabeth's distant cousin and heir to her father's estate, Mr Collins. As the party is to dine with his patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr Collins advises Elizabeth on her dress:

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us which becomes herself and daughter. I would advise you merely to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest, there is no occasion for anything more. Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved."²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Burney, *Camilla*, 415.

²⁶⁵ Ganey, 'Milkmaids, Ploughmen, and Sex', 42.

²⁶⁶ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 182.

Though Mr Collins' simpering attitude towards Lady Catherine de Bourgh is revealed to be excessive through the text's ironic tone, the question of dressing in a way that is appropriate to one's rank and to the social constellations of an occasion emerges here, alongside the central social conflict of the age, which lay in the rise of the middle classes and their standing in relation to the nobility.²⁶⁷ This brought with it a process, which has been described as a "consumer revolution", in which a greater number of people had access to new fashionable goods as well as the necessary funds for participation in consumer markets.²⁶⁸ A restructuring of the social order took place in this regard, as the access to luxury items had previously been the reserve of the nobility and aristocracy:

As the modern society of commerce swept away the old agrarian order, it brought with it new sources of status not dependent upon land and blood but money. New social groups – merchants, industrialists, the new middle classes – could afford to purchase, 'above their station', luxury items once exclusive to kinds and nobility.²⁶⁹

Lady Catherine de Bourgh as a representative of the old social order, in which members of the aristocracy alone held material and social prestige, is thus being protected by Mr Collins from the suggestion of social equality through equality in dress. This point also casts the conflict at play in mistresses' condemnation of their servants' dress – as seen above – in the light of the more seminal and epochal changes of the era.²⁷⁰ Democratising aesthetics and abandoning "time honoured emblems of aristocratic prestige"²⁷¹, such as hair powder and makeup tied developments in dress into the social and political changes of the age. This was, naturally, not positively received by those who stood to lose status, and so "[t]he transformation of the cultural sphere into an arena of class aspirations was naturally attended by a high level of snobbish competitiveness".²⁷² Austen reflects this in the fact that the confrontation between Elizabeth Bennet and Lady Catherine de Bourgh, which finally escalates into Lady Catherine's panicked call on Elizabeth as she aims to refute rumours of an engagement between the latter and her nephew Mr Darcy²⁷³, is first presented through the lens of dress. Even before Elizabeth has the opportunity to infringe on Lady Catherine's plans to marry her nephew to her daughter, and thereby keep the sum of their wealth and prestige within the family, the reflection of discourses surrounding social democratisation is present in the question of Elizabeth's dress, which is

²⁶⁷ Ros Ballaster, 'Women and the Rise of the Novel: Sexual Prescripts', in *Women and Literature in Britain. 1700-1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 197–217, 200.

²⁶⁸ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 19.

²⁶⁹ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 98.

²⁷⁰ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 20.

²⁷¹ Weber, *Queen of Fashion*, 146.

²⁷² Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 3.

²⁷³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 389.

identified by Mr Collins as a potential social disruptor. The generational conflict inherent in Lady Catherine's desires of maintaining her family's legacy in the face of potential regeneration and change, as embodied by Elizabeth Bennet, is thus first brought to the fore from the perspective of dress.

Upward social mobility through advantageous marriage could be a fantasy and the ultimate aim for women of lower social standing²⁷⁴, as seen in Mrs Bennet's anxiety to have all her daughters make good matches in *Pride and Prejudice*.²⁷⁵ When viewed from the perspective of old-moneyed elites the idea of social mobility could be threatening and was disdained, as Lady Catherine, for example, contextualises the idea of Elizabeth and Mr Darcy marrying as the "upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune".²⁷⁶ Austen depicts Lady Catherine de Bourgh's struggle with Elizabeth Bennet as ludicrously authoritative – only for this exercise of aristocratic power to fall flat in the face of Elizabeth's self-possession and refusal to be cowed: "Whatever my connections may be [...] if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to *you*."²⁷⁷ In its ineffective urgency and intensity, Lady Catherine's attack thus belies an underlying insecurity in the continuation of a "pure" family line and the undisturbed grandeur of aristocratic heritage. The influence of the older generation is simultaneously refused in Elizabeth standing up for herself and the potential wishes of Mr Darcy.

A similar struggle between the gentry and aristocracy, centred around a proposed match between Cecilia Beverly – who though rich must follow a clause in her uncle's will, according to which her future husband must take her name – and Mortimer Delvile, on whom his parents' hopes of continuing the family line and legacy rest, forms the core of Burney's *Cecilia* (1782).²⁷⁸ Though written several decades before the publication of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, both texts illustrate similar tensions between the world of the age-old aristocracy and the emerging society of commerce and public life. In the case of Cecilia, the clause in her uncle's will poses the greatest obstacle, as the prospect of Mortimer losing his hereditary name and identity is unimaginable to both his parents and himself.²⁷⁹ As Mr Delvile is one of her guardians and Cecilia becomes very close to Mrs Delvile, she is a frequent guest of the family – until the growing affection between Cecilia and Mortimer becomes too threatening. The most revealing locale in the novel regarding this generational and class conflict is Delvile Castle, as

²⁷⁴ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 230–31.

²⁷⁵ Perry, 220.

²⁷⁶ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 395.

²⁷⁷ Austen, 395.

²⁷⁸ Burney, *Cecilia*.

²⁷⁹ Burney, 677.

it embodies the social tensions the novel discusses, as well as serving as a point of identification for Mr Delvile. There is a sense of oppression that resonates within the structure's ancestral weight and which the aristocratic Lady Honoria Pemberton, who is in the unique position of being able to speak freely, cuttingly, and with ridicule, describes as a "gaol".²⁸⁰ This "symbol of hereditary aristocracy"²⁸¹, can, in fact, be read as such in Mortimer's case, as his wishes and personal freedom are severely restricted by the need to live up to the legacy represented by the family's estate. Doody also highlights the importance of this building as an encapsulation and reflection of the social structures Cecilia must struggle against.²⁸² Not only does Delvile Castle's impenetrability reveal itself insistently at full view, but its state of increasing decay belies, as in the case of Lady Catherine de Bourgh's bluster, the underlying and constant erosion that these seemingly indestructible structures (both socially and materially) face. Delvile Castle, therefore, also features as a materialisation of social tensions in the way Elizabeth Bennet's dress does in *Pride and Prejudice*. Due to the castle's significance for the novel's central themes, its first description shall be cited in full despite the passage's length:

Delvile Castle was situated in a large and woody park, and surrounded by a moat. A draw-bridge which fronted the entrance was every night, by order of Mr. Delvile, with the same care as if still necessary for the preservation of the family, regularly drawn up. Some fortifications still remained entire, and vestiges were every where [sic.] to be traced of more; no taste was shewn [sic.] in the disposition of the grounds, no openings were contrived through the wood for distant views or beautiful objects: the mansion-house was ancient, large and magnificent, but constructed with as little attention to convenience and comfort, as to airiness and elegance; it was dark, heavy and monastic, equally in want of repair and of improvement. The grandeur of its former inhabitants was every where visible, but the decay into which it was falling rendered such remains mere objects for meditation and melancholy; while the evident struggle to support some appearance of its ancient dignity, made the dwelling and all in its vicinity wear an aspect of constraint and austerity. Festivity, joy and pleasure, seemed foreign to the purposes of it's [sic.] construction; silence, solemnity and contemplation were adapted to it only.²⁸³

What emerges clearly is the sense of an imposing yet uninviting structure – a fact which is underlined by Mr Delvile's habit of drawing up the drawbridge at night, thereby effectively locking would-be intruders out, and the castle's inhabitants in. Lady Honoria's comment identifies the latter function when she states that it would be easy to turn the castle into a gaol. These gothic undertones are heightened by the observation that the presence of the castle's former inhabitants continues to be felt, while an image of decay is conjured up in the same breath. The fortifications, moat, woody park, and drawbridge are ostensibly protective features, however the focus on preservation has led to a lack of attention to matters of comfort and

²⁸⁰ Burney, 506.

²⁸¹ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 140.

²⁸² Doody, 'Burney and Politics', 96.

²⁸³ Burney, *Cecilia*, 457.

fashion. The castle is grand but not “elegant” or comfortable and its inhabitants’ focus on ancestry has blinded them to the fact that they are proud of decaying remains which can serve only as “objects for meditation and melancholy”. The introduction of the castle serves to set the scene and lay out the obstacles for the increasing closeness between Cecilia and Mortimer, which Lady Honoria provokes by suggestive questions.²⁸⁴ Moments, in which this tension threatens to come to a head are often interrupted by Cecilia rushing off to change her dress for dinner.²⁸⁵ These scenes create tension between the static image of Delville Castle and the threat of change, as posed by the potential match between Cecilia and Mortimer. This tension is continually mitigated through Cecilia changing her dress and, therefore, herself as she tries to hide her feelings during her stay at the castle. Getting dressed offered brief moments of privacy throughout the day, as will be considered in Chapter 3²⁸⁶, and is seized on by Cecilia for this reason. However, it can also be read as a pressure valve for the greater transformations to her life and the Delville family that are on the horizon.

The disturbance of the static nature of Delville Castle is foreshadowed in Mr Delville’s first appearance in the novel, when he describes himself as “the head of an ancient and honourable house”, thereby voicing his arrogant disdain for “people but just rising from dust and obscurity” in reference to Cecilia’s other guardians, Mr Briggs and Mr Harrel.²⁸⁷ It is revealed, however, in the above quoted description of Delville Castle that he has overlooked how worshipping the remains of greatness has actually led him full-circle to becoming a “dust-man”²⁸⁸ himself, in the words of the miserly yet rich Mr Briggs, which serve to close the circle on this metaphor of arrogance and decay. This cutting depiction of the circularity of distinguishment and obscurity also serves as a memento mori, implicitly citing the Biblical warning: “For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.”²⁸⁹ This unlocks a further level to the imagery of heritage and legacy so frequently cited by Mr Delville. Locked in on the island created by its moat, Delville Castle and Mr Delville stand removed from the rest of the world, stuck in the decaying grandeur of aristocratic culture, and not noticing that this sense of removal is no longer a mark of distinction, but one of standstill in a world that is developing regardless. This level of social and political criticism in *Cecilia* is identified by Doody as the mark of the “Jacobin” fiction of the age, which criticised established structures.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁴ See, for example, her mischievously provocative questioning of Cecilia in Burney, 466–68.

²⁸⁵ For example in Burney, 468.

²⁸⁶ See p. 65

²⁸⁷ Burney, *Cecilia*, 187.

²⁸⁸ Burney, 456.

²⁸⁹ Genesis 4:19, Michael D. Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New Revised Standard Version. An Ecumenical Study Bible*, 5th ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 24.

²⁹⁰ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 147.

Social factors are articulated in dress not only as the reflection of open social conflict, but also as an indicator of aesthetic exchange between social classes. That this is not always staged as a “trickle down” of elite dress, has already been touched on in the previous section with reference to pastoral fashions. Changes in dress during this era were embedded in a broader process, in which “informal modes of dressing associated with domestic and rural life were constantly gaining ground in fashionable metropolitan circles, offering an opportunity for plebeian practice to inform elite fashion.”²⁹¹ One of the most obvious examples for how the dress of the people was adopted is the apron, which became a part of elite fashion in the first half of the eighteenth century.²⁹² While aprons were an integral part of working women’s dress due to their protective function, fashionable aprons made with “lace, whitework and silk embroidery” were not used with this purpose in mind and would rather be read as “decorative symbols of elite women’s skills as domestic managers”.²⁹³ A symbol of feminine labour becomes transformed into one of domestic gentility, while the two iterations of the same item of dress remain incommensurable. The relation between the apron as a necessary part of working women’s dress and the apron as a luxurious fashion item is reflected on by Burney in *Camilla*. On their way back from the theatre, Camilla and Miss Dannel meet a woman in simple dress who later reveals herself to be their neighbour, as she removes her seemingly minimal disguise: “Why what’s here to do? Why see, my dear, if I must let you into the secret—you must know—but don’t tell it to the world!—I’m a gentlewoman!’ She then removed her checked apron, and shewed [sic.] a white muslin one, embroidered and flounced.”²⁹⁴ It is a comedic moment, as the visual divide between a working woman and gentlewoman, between disguise and recognition, evidently lies in the details – though these ultimately mean a world of difference with regards to social standing. Styles, too, notes this parallel and simultaneous divide in the dress of the elite and of the people, remarking that the standard items comprising a woman’s dress would have been the same across social classes, though differences in material, quality, and cost would be the distinguishing factors²⁹⁵, as seen in the above scene from *Camilla*. The apron, therefore, serves as a good example for how the dress of the people influenced elite styles, adding a further layer to the question of dress and social class amid epochal shifts.

²⁹¹ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 94.

²⁹² Styles, 94.

²⁹³ Susan North, *18th Century Fashion in Detail* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 110.

²⁹⁴ Burney, *Camilla*, 424.

²⁹⁵ Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 31–32.

2.4 Producing and Buying Dress

When considering social aspects in the context of dress, the question of its production naturally arises. In the context of Austen's and Burney's novels, the processes of producing and buying dress are employed as means of character development, enacting domestic tensions, and class conflicts. Interactions with dress on the level of consumption also serve to question the nature and value of luxury in the novels. Viewed in this light, making and buying dress ties into the overall topics of this thesis and will, therefore, be examined in this sub-chapter.

While ladies of the middle classes, gentry, and aristocracy did practise needlework, this was mostly decorative in addition to so-called "plain work", which was the kind of simple sewing done for charity and undergarments such as shirts.²⁹⁶ The construction of gowns and accessories was mostly the domain of professionals such as seamstresses, mantua-makers (female seamstresses named for a style of gown called the "mantua"), and milliners.²⁹⁷ The latter provided accessories and certain finished garments, such as capes.²⁹⁸ Though the term designates hat-making today, milliners were responsible for providing fashionable "trimmings" for gowns, which encompassed ribbons, flounces, lace, ruffles, and much more.²⁹⁹ This line of work was similar to haberdashers, who operated shops selling these articles³⁰⁰, while milliners made up finished accessories or trimmed their clients' clothes in the latest styles. This distinguishment lent the milliner the air of an artist in the eighteenth century and their status was especially high in France, where they worked under the title of *marchandes de mode* – fashion sellers.³⁰¹ These various kinds of involvement in the production of dress, as well as the women that practised them professionally or at their leisure, carried a range of associations, which both authors draw on, as needlework and its objects feature in all of Austen's and Burney's novels – albeit to various ends and effects, depicting the spectrum of female participation in the production of dress. It can be said that needlework was a "common denominator" for women across all social classes in the eighteenth century³⁰², whether as a genteel pursuit or professional qualification. In servants, proficiency with the needle was a recommending factor, as seen in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), when Mrs Jennings suggests that a girl might be a suitable lady's maid despite her lack of qualifications as she is "an excellent

²⁹⁶ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 92.

²⁹⁷ Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, 'The Face of Fashion: Milliners in Eighteenth-Century Visual Culture', *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 25 (2002): 158.

²⁹⁸ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 73.

²⁹⁹ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 54.

³⁰⁰ Chloe Wigston Smith, 'The Haberdasher's Plot: The Romance of Small Trade in Frances Burney's Fiction', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 37, no. 2 (2018): 274.

³⁰¹ Chrisman-Campbell, 'The Face of Fashion', 158.

³⁰² Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 77.

housemaid, and works very well at her needle.”³⁰³ Likewise, in *Emma*, the servant girl Hannah, who has become employed by the Westons, Emma’s former governess and her husband, is remembered by Mr Woodhouse for her good manners and needlework.³⁰⁴

There were, of course, also professionals in the dress trade that worked outside the home. Some of these professions have already been mentioned above and their work – and the trials associated with them – feature frequently in Burney’s novels. *The Wanderer* is the most remarkable example of this, as its heroine Juliet struggles to support herself through most of the professions open to women at the time.³⁰⁵ Among these, are work as an embroiderer, in a milliner’s shop and, finally, at a haberdashery that she runs with her friend Gabriella. The issues she faces, among which sexual threat looms strongly³⁰⁶, even provide the novel’s subtitle “Female Difficulties”, emphasising the fact that it was far from easy for women to be financially self-sufficient and socially stable within their professions at that time. Indeed, certain of these professions suffered from negative associations in the period, leading to the discomforts and difficulties faced by Juliet in *The Wanderer*. Millinery, for example, carried strong connotations of sexual licentiousness, stemming from various reasons, such as the fact that prostitutes would often state their profession as “milliner” when apprehended³⁰⁷, the fact that Louis XV’s mistress Madame du Barry had worked as a milliner prior to her distinguishment³⁰⁸, and perceptions of the trade: “[W]e can easily recognise a milliner by three essential qualities: she is well dressed, she carries the tools of her trade, and she is sexually attractive, perhaps even overtly seductive. These are not just artistic clichés: [...] they were practically job requirements [...].”³⁰⁹ In her seminal feminist text *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft, too, drew the popular connection between milliners and prostitution by describing women in the dress trade as the “next class [...] to those poor abandoned creatures who live by prostitution.”³¹⁰

Though Juliet manages to evade the risk posed by the various men who prey on her as she works at the milliner’s shop, Burney also presents the case of Juliet’s young colleague Flora Pierson, who is less guarded and, therefore, in greater danger. Due to her youth and lack of knowledge of the world, she cannot apprehend the risk of falling for the baronet Sir Lyell

³⁰³ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Edward Copeland, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 325.

³⁰⁴ Austen, *Emma*, 7.

³⁰⁵ Doody, ‘Burney and Politics’, 109.

³⁰⁶ Seen especially during Juliet’s time working for the milliner Miss Matson. Burney, *The Wanderer*.

³⁰⁷ Chrisman-Campbell, ‘The Face of Fashion’, 159.

³⁰⁸ Chrisman-Campbell, 166–67.

³⁰⁹ Chrisman-Campbell, 162.

³¹⁰ Quoted in Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 57.

Sycamore.³¹¹ Rather than positing Flora as inherently morally inferior, Burney directs her focus to the fact that negative associations with the milliner's profession could result from and continue self-perpetuating processes: As men viewed the girls who worked at these establishments in a light of sexual availability, they would continue to prey on them, while, in turn, the young milliners' apprentices would not be able to guard themselves against these attacks due to their youth and naiveté. This could confirm and perpetuate ideas about the moral dangers and failings of the profession. The only solution available seems to be female community, as the milliner Miss Matson and Juliet step in to protect Flora and prevent the worst from happening.³¹²

At the same time, though, the milliner and her workwomen are treated critically through Juliet's eyes, as she notes that "their notions of probity were as lax as those of their customers were of justice; and saw that their own rudeness to those who had neither rank nor fortune, kept pace with the haughtiness which they were forced to support, from those by whom both were possessed."³¹³ This lays open a nuanced perspective of the women who worked in this profession, as condescension is both suffered and dealt out by them, and they are insufficiently equipped to deal with questions of moral uncertainty, as suggested by their reported lack of "probity". Tying in with this quote, fashion-critical consensus of the day considered milliners and other professionals a suitable site for attack, seeing them as the embodiment of the corrupting effects of fashion.³¹⁴ Texts aligned them with the products of their labour, "characterising them, like the goods they produced, as corruptible and insubstantial".³¹⁵

The era's custom of purchasing items on credit³¹⁶ further complicated the work of professionals, as they would often have to wait a long time to receive the pay they were due – and in several cases, as Burney critically reflects in her novels *Cecilia* and *The Wanderer*, they would have to futilely chase up on customers' debts. Negative views of luxury goods and their producers exacerbated issues of payment and of judging workmen and -women for the services they provided. In equating the two with each other, the blame for ostentatious luxury could all too easily shift from the consumer to the producer. This cognitive dissonance is represented and criticised in *The Wanderer* by Mr Giles Arbe, a relative of Miss Arbe's, who is coordinating

³¹¹ Burney, *The Wanderer*, 430–33.

³¹² Burney, 434.

³¹³ Burney, 427.

³¹⁴ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 53.

³¹⁵ Batchelor, 53.

³¹⁶ Donald Grant Campbell, 'Fashionable Suicide: Conspicuous Consumption and the Collapse of Credit in Frances Burney's *Cecilia*', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 20 (1991): 133.

Juliet's work as music teacher – much to her own advantage, rather than Juliet's.³¹⁷ Characterised as a man that is forgetful, slow, and socially blundering, he is disregarded by many of the other characters, which grants him the privilege of speaking freely and critically where others are hampered by politeness. He thus appears as an advocate for Juliet's right to the pay that is her due, while also criticising her neglect to settle accounts with tradespeople *she* owes money to.³¹⁸ Despite his initial appearance of discombobulation, Mr Giles Arbe reveals himself to be an economic and social voice of reason. In a critical conflict scene, the idea that producers of luxury goods and services are themselves indulgent in luxury by devoting themselves to these callings, is dismantled by him while he is opposed by the rest of the company present:

“Goodness, Mr. Giles!” cried Miss Bydel, “why what are you thinking of? Why you are calling all the ladies to account for not paying this young music-mistress, just as if she were a butcher, or a baker; or some useful tradesman.”

“Well, so she is, Ma'am! so she is, Mrs. Bydel! For if she does not feed your stomachs, she feeds your fancies; which are all no better than starved when you are left to yourselves.”

“Nay, as to that, Mr Giles,” said Miss Bydel, “[...] I can't pretend to say I think she should be put upon the same footing with eating and drinking. We can all live well enough without music, and painting, and those things, I hope; but I don't know how we are to live without bread and meat.”

“Nor she, neither, Mrs. Bydel! and that's the very reason that she wants to be paid.”³¹⁹

This passage is revealing of several injustices that arise from placing the blame for frivolity on the providers of services rather than on consumers. Though the matter at stake here is Juliet's work as a music teacher, the reasoning at play is the same that is applied in the general condemnation of fashionable goods such as dress – which also emerges from the text, as Juliet's other ventures, including embroidery, millinery, and dressmaking are met with equally resigning results. The “usefulness” of a service is cited as a justification for not paying its provider, almost implying a moral advantage in *not* paying them, in what is a hypocritical condemnation of unnecessary luxury while all the while indulging in it. Even when spelled out clearly that the luxury goods and services offered by such professionals are “of your luxury, not his”³²⁰, the ladies fail to take the point. The question of applying morality to consumption is thus criticised sharply, as it is revealed here that it quickly becomes a matter of blaming producers and providers of fashionable goods and services, rather than recognising that they would fail to provide these very services were there no market for them. Moreover, the point is

³¹⁷ Miss Arbe frequently pretends at casual practise or the mutual enjoyment of playing, while actually putting Juliet in a position, in which she cannot refuse to provide unpaid lessons to Miss Arbe. See, for example Burney, *The Wanderer*, 225.

³¹⁸ Burney, 280–81.

³¹⁹ Burney, 323.

³²⁰ Burney, 323.

stressed that even though luxurious indulgences such as music lessons or, indeed, fashionable dress are non-essential to the survival of consumers, they are all the more crucial to the material well-being of the people whose livelihood they constitute. Therefore, the moral approach taken by Miss Bydel and the other ladies rests on a fundamental misconception. If taken further, this point can also be seen to apply to a meta-fictional reflection on Burney's own work as a novelist, citing its entertainment value in the light of her labour and need to provide for herself through it.

The ladies' hypocrisy is revealed even more strikingly in a later scene during Juliet's time working at the milliner Miss Matson's shop, where she notices the customers' real attitude to these supposed frivolities, which contradicts statements made in the above-cited debate:

It was here that she saw, in its unmasked futility, the selfishness of personal vanity. 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 [sic.] or despair, than any mistake committed in the arrangement of a feather or a flower.³²¹

What was waved aside as immaterial luxury in the discussion with Giles Arbe, is placed above society's most pressing concerns here. Whatever may have been claimed in the earlier discussion, the truth of how much value is placed on fashionable goods emerges clearly, after all.

Burney frequently criticises habits of living beyond one's means in her novels, as in the example of unsettled bills in *The Wanderer*, though she treats the matter from several different points of view. While *The Wanderer* offers the creditor's perspective, *Camilla* chronicles the heroine's agonies as she accrues a number of debts for fashionable dress and accessories in a bid to keep up with her richer company, and in a misguided attempt to attract the attention of Edmund with whom she has been in love for most of the novel and who reciprocates these feelings, though neither of them is able to make this clear to the other.³²² Despite the supposed light-hearted joy that fashionable and luxurious goods should provide to their consumers, *Camilla* makes it obvious that the acquisition of a fashionable appearance in opposition to one's morals and to the detriment of one's finances will fail to have the desired beautifying effect: "Dressed by the milliner of the day, Camilla could not fail to pass uncensured, at least, with respect to her appearance; but her eyes wanted their usual lustre, from the sadness of her heart, and she never looked less herself, nor to less advantage."³²³ Crucially, the criticism for

³²¹ Burney, 426.

³²² Burney, *Camilla*.

³²³ Burney, 396.

Camilla's sadness and shame is not directed at tradespeople, with perhaps the implicit exception of Camilla's companion and milliner Mrs Mittin, but at Camilla herself for not following her rational inclinations and standing up for herself and her finances – a fact that she must atone for later in the novel.

Perhaps the most visceral example of a debtor in Burney's novels is Mr Harrel in *Cecilia*, one of Cecilia's three guardians. Though he lives in luxury and continues to enlist the services of workpeople, he systematically refuses to pay his debts to them – a fact that Cecilia becomes aware of as Mrs Hill, a carpenter's wife, apprehends her outside the Harrels' house and entreats her to help in the matter of having her husband's accounts with Mr Harrel settled.³²⁴ Though she fails to convince Mr Harrel to pay his creditors and sinks herself into debt in the process – first to a moneylender, then to the scheming Mr Monkton, who pays off the moneylender for her as part of his plan to marry Cecilia once his wife dies³²⁵ – she manages to help the destitute Mrs Hill by providing her with the premium she needs to join her cousin's haberdashery.³²⁶ Although Burney treats millinery and dressmaking critically elsewhere, the haberdasher's trade appears as an exception in her novels, in that it constitutes an unambiguously respectable avenue towards an alternative female model of life. Wigston Smith terms this “the haberdasher's plot”, in opposition to the more typical “marriage plot”.³²⁷ Meanwhile, Mr Harrel succumbs to his debts as the issues related to them culminate in a mad party at Vauxhaull Gardens that reaches its peak in Harrel's suicide.³²⁸ While he pays with his life, this is of little comfort to anyone, as several existences are shown to be irrevocably impacted by his irresponsibility, among them his wife's and Cecilia's, whose personal fortune is lost through his manipulation.³²⁹ The haberdasher's shop as a “feminized space that emphasizes the personal and economic rewards of trade for women”³³⁰, therefore, also serves as a foil for Cecilia and Mrs Harrel who both lose their independence and fortunes in trusting in the institution of marriage and patriarchal systems of inheritance.

Though not all producers of dress were female – indeed, *Evelina* treats male milliners quite scathingly³³¹ – these professions were nonetheless perceived as feminised, just as indulgence in fashion was considered to be a feminine vice. Both Austen and Burney also

³²⁴ Burney, *Cecilia*, 71-72.

³²⁵ Burney, 438-439.

³²⁶ Burney, 200.

³²⁷ Wigston Smith, ‘The Haberdasher's Plot’, 271.

³²⁸ Burney, *Cecilia*, 414-415.

³²⁹ The money she lends him eats up her personal fortune of 10.000 pounds. Meanwhile, the rest of her inheritance is contingent on the clause in her uncle's will, demanding that her future husband take her surname. Burney.

³³⁰ Wigston Smith, ‘The Haberdasher's Plot’, 273.

³³¹ Burney, *Evelina*, 29.

include images of spendthrift and fashion-obsessed men in their novels, treating these characteristics as derisible and incompatible with the texts' morality.³³² The authors, however, differ in their treatment of the people who provide services associated with fashionable dress. While Burney considers the matter from a variety of perspectives, as has been expanded on above, treating the lived realities of members of several social classes, Austen is less forthcoming with descriptions of professional dressmakers, milliners, and haberdashers. When the production and purchase of dress feature in her novels, it is rather from the consumer's perspective – though she is similarly critical of people who place too significant a value on acquiring fashionable goods. Sir Robert Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* serves as an example of such a shopper, as his order of a toothpick-case is described: "The ivory, the gold, and the pearls, all received their appointment, and the gentleman having named the last day on which his existence could be continued without the possession of the toothpick-case, drew on his gloves with leisurely care [...]"³³³ Obviously ironic and critical, the elevation of matters of dress and shopping to ones of life and death is present here as it is in *The Wanderer* – and in both cases this serves to elucidate moral ideas pertaining to dress, as well as the relationship between the production and acquisition of fashionable goods.

Overall, both authors incorporate elements of the production and purchase of dress into their novels, drawing distinctions between desirable needlework skills and the negative perception of professional dressmakers and milliners. While the fashion market and excessive expenditure are treated critically, female opportunities arising from needlework skills are thematised by both authors. In this way, a new perspective on traditional negative views of producing and buying luxury goods is suggested and analysed by Burney, in particular.

3. The Family: Generational Shifts and Dress

The processes of change affecting all areas of life at the brink of the nineteenth century also found expression in matters of domestic life. Whereas earlier centuries had been defined by the extended family, conjugal relationships were gaining significance in this period, as Perry shows in her extensive survey of changes in kinship and their reflection in literary writing.³³⁴

³³² Burney, for example, mentions the "macaroni", hyper-fashionable young men, several times in *Cecilia*, while Austen includes characters such as the vain Sir Walter Eliott or Robert Ferrars in her texts. See Burney, *Cecilia*. Austen, *Persuasion*. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*.

³³³ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 251.

³³⁴ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 1–2.

Following her approach that literature “represent[s] the foci – the obsessions – of the culture”³³⁵, this chapter will survey the family as it is reflected in Austen’s and Burney’s writing, with a particular focus on how dress figures into familial dynamics as a representation of epochal change. As is the case in the changes in society analysed in the preceding chapter, dress becomes the material expression of change in ideas about privacy, the family, and the domestic sphere – and women’s roles within these structures. The central transformative processes here are connoted by young women’s emancipation from their consanguineal families³³⁶ – often staged as tensions between them and parental figures in narratives of disinheritance and contrasts with older women, whether they feature as mothers or female mentors, as well as the opportunities and pitfalls of marriage. In the context of dress, a central facet of these matters can be found in ideas pertaining to appropriate dress.

This concluding chapter aims to show how an awareness of the many social processes and aspects pertaining to dress, its changing fashions, and production factors into Austen’s and Burney’s treatment of parallel intra-familial developments. Common ideas about young people’s adoption of new fashions that placed older generations in the difficult position of whether or not to do so, either option incurring mockery³³⁷, play a role in this context. The way that familial relationships factor into these choices of dress and how, conversely, dress gives shape to the generational conflicts that permeate the narratives between the lines, will also be regarded more closely – as will the question of how dress relates to childlessness and ageing. As for this final point, both authors’ critical appraisal of women who refuse to relinquish youthful ideas of beauty³³⁸ and matrimony, if only as matchmakers³³⁹, will equally be considered and analysed in the light of inter-generational relations.

3.1 The Domestic Sphere: Education, Family, and Privacy

Women of the middle classes and gentry, the strata of society that Austen and Burney mostly handle in their writing, were firmly located in the domestic sphere. This sees the home figure as the scene of familial life, but also of education.³⁴⁰ Whereas male relatives were expected to take up occupations, gain an education abroad by means of projects such as a Grand

³³⁵ Perry, 5.

³³⁶ Perry, 2.

³³⁷ Vickery, ‘Mutton Dressed as Lamb?’, 869.

³³⁸ See, for example, Mme Duval’s obsession with her appearance in Burney, *Evelina*.

³³⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*.

³⁴⁰ Vivien Jones, ‘Burney and Gender’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125.

Tour of Europe – as featured in *Camilla*, for example³⁴¹ – women’s adolescence was defined by learning modes of social conformity. This was idolised as them submitting to and reproducing ideas of passive morality, themselves becoming exemplars of this ideology.³⁴² Such pressures, which were further accompanied by a risk of social exclusion for one’s shortcomings³⁴³, are reminiscent of Entwistle’s definition of dress’ social function. The gendered element present in women’s upbringing is, further, suggestive of dress as part of the performance of gender.³⁴⁴ In the period of Austen and Burney clothing was, indeed, also understood as fulfilling such a function, with dress defined as a uniquely feminine concern and vice, which equally leant itself to accusations of effeminacy and was, in this way, a point of criticism directed at men who showed too great an interest in the matter.³⁴⁵ Such prescriptive notions were difficult to navigate and required guidance and a specified education. This concurs with prevalent ideas about the era, according to which “[e]veryone in the 1790s seems to want some sort of ‘new woman.’ All the writers of the period agreed that girls should not waste time on dress, parties, and coquetting, but should learn something useful to employ their minds.”³⁴⁶ The question of female education in the time of Austen and Burney is, therefore, one of change – and one that particularly intersects with the genre of the novel, which allowed female writers to posit their own ideas of womanhood and female education. Moreover, this matter became “a political arena, for views about women are related to images of the family and of society.”³⁴⁷ As such, Austen’s and Burney’s representation of female education is of note when discussing changing conceptions of womanhood and women’s place within the family and will, therefore, be dealt with by way of introduction to the topic of the domestic sphere. As part of the prescriptions directed at women, dress naturally also figures into the matter, with anxieties about false education also citing worries of about instilling vanity in young women.³⁴⁸

³⁴¹ See, for example, Clermont in Burney, *Camilla*.

³⁴² Gertrud Lehnert, ‘Konzepte Weiblicher Entwicklung Um 1800: Jane Austen Im Kontext’, *Zeitschrift Für Germanistik* 14, no. 1 (2004): 40.

³⁴³ Lehnert, 41.

³⁴⁴ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 21.

³⁴⁵ Entwistle, 105.

³⁴⁶ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 206.

³⁴⁷ Doody, 206.

³⁴⁸ Austen, *Emma*.

3.1.1 Education and the Novel

Female education and development were acutely informed by ideas of propriety, modesty, and domesticity. This can be seen, for example, in the great popularity of Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), which had gone through 14 editions by 1813³⁴⁹ and lectured women on matters of all kind, also extending to dress, which Fordyce desired to be a "a comely habit [...] worn as the sober, yet transparent veil of a more comely mind."³⁵⁰ Inscribed into this ideology is the idea of the "legible body" as discussed in Chapter 1. In the case of Fordyce's advice, Batchelor notes that "[t]he *Sermons*' proposed fashion system thus transforms women into permanently public beings whose clothing acts as a conduit through which to penetrate the surface of the body to the soul that lies beneath."³⁵¹ Batchelor's point is of note, as it offers an angle for analysing the passage from *Pride and Prejudice*, in which the Bennet sisters' distant cousin Mr Collins proposes to read for the family after dinner. Turning down the novel produced for this purpose, he eventually selects Fordyce's sermons and begins to read from them, though he is very soon interrupted by Lydia. He replies to this offence by stating that:

„I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess;— for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin.“³⁵²

Laying open his ideas about female education and the means by which it should be gained – from the pen of a male writer, imparted by a male relative – Mr Collins' later ideas about women's behaviour and appearances are also cast in this light.

For instance, the scene, in which he advises Elizabeth on her dress, which has been analysed insofar as it relates to the age's class conflicts³⁵³, gains a further level of meaning when bearing in mind his opinions on Fordyce, as Mr Collins' condescending imposition of thoughts and intentions onto Elizabeth becomes clearer from the perspective of didactic writing. If one reads the scene before Rosings Park in light of this earlier after-dinner family scene, as a Fordycian concurrence of dress and mind, his directions denote a patronising lack of understanding and interest in Elizabeth's own thoughts. This baseline of misunderstanding, which is crucially shown to be the result of relying on pre-conceived notions, also emerges in an earlier scene, in which Elizabeth refuses his proposal. Here, Mr Collins superimposes ideas about women's duplicity, gleaned from his intellectual climate, onto the situation, declaring

³⁴⁹ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress, and Desire*, 120–21.

³⁵⁰ Quoted in Batchelor, 126.

³⁵¹ Batchelor, 126.

³⁵² Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 77.

³⁵³ See p. 40–41

that he is “not now to learn [...] that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour [...]”³⁵⁴ Elizabeth is not short to remark the unlikeliness of this behaviour, not least as it constitutes an existential gamble, but also advocates for the “leave to judge for myself, and pay me the compliment of believing what I say.”³⁵⁵

The sense of danger to young women if they are judged according to ideas stemming from authors such as Fordyce, underlies this scene, as it does the later question of Elizabeth’s dress for the invitation to Rosings Park, as women’s own autonomy becomes overwritten by narratives perpetuated in educational writing. Though the potential threat inherent here is allayed by Mr Collins’ staging as a fundamentally ridiculous character, the oppressive educational climate for women, as put forward by Mr Collins, raises them to become passive subjects, amounting to potential masochism in its all-encompassing intensity, as posited by Lehnert.³⁵⁶

There is an element of tongue-in-cheek meta-fictionality in Austen showing the unlikeable Mr Collins avow his disapproval of the novel within the covers of one, while instead stating his preference for Fordyce’s sermons, which are rejected by the very audience they are intended for. Tying in with her defence of the novel, and notably of Frances Burney, in *Northanger Abbey*³⁵⁷, this scene serves to prove that certain “skills traditionally associated with sensibility and the feminine” would have been “learned by ‘the domestic fire side’ – or by reading novels”.³⁵⁸ Here once more, Austen makes a case for the novel as a medium of education – and one that is particularly matched to young women’s interests, realities, and self-determination. This is not surprising, as the novel was also noted as “an arena of female authority. The genre was closely associated with women, whose predominance among its readers and writers was widely remarked.”³⁵⁹ This close link between the novelistic form and women most clearly emerges in women’s authorship, which allows for the “female authority” mentioned in the preceding quote. In attaining control through writing their own stories, women writers created a basis for opposing the pre-made narratives about women which colour Mr Collins’ understanding of women and which he himself actively seeks to perpetuate.

Austen, once again, questions the authority on writing *about* women being presented as evidence of their shortcomings in *Persuasion*. In one of the novel’s final scenes, the heroine

³⁵⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 120.

³⁵⁵ Austen, 121.

³⁵⁶ Lehnert, ‘Jane Austen Im Kontext’, 41.

³⁵⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 31.

³⁵⁸ Jones, ‘Burney and Gender’, 125.

³⁵⁹ Jessamyn Jackson, ‘Why Novels Make Bad Mothers’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 27, no. 2 (1994): 163.

Anne Elliot is shown in conversation with Captain Harville on the matter of whether or not women are quick to forget in love. Poignant to the heroine's own story, she negates this idea by drawing attention to the fact that women, entrenched in the domestic sphere – a state she problematises –, have fewer opportunities of distraction when disappointed in love:

“Yes. We certainly do not forget you, as soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions.”³⁶⁰

When Captain Harville argues against this by citing literary examples, Anne is clear in rejecting the idea that men's writing on women can be of relevance in assessing their collective nature, advocating instead for the individual appraisal of each woman: “—Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing.”³⁶¹ Anne rejects notions gathered from literature by pointing to the structural issues underlying the prevalence of male perspectives on women. This, further, adds to Austen's development of ideas about prescriptive authorship and the importance of self-determination – not least through writing and reading. Austen is clear in not devaluing literature as an educational medium per se, however, as seen in her defence of the novel in *Northanger Abbey* and implicit approval of the novel over Fordyce in *Pride and Prejudice*. What becomes clear across these examples is a rejection of narratives about women that are crafted and imposed in writing by men. Instead, Austen posits that women's education must be based on their own perspectives and take into account their home life and, perhaps, reading of novels – by other women. By raising “[f]emale insight [...] to an authorial universal principal”³⁶², as Doody formulates with regards to Burney's narrative voice in *Cecilia* but is equally true of Austen's novels, it becomes possible to fulfil the necessity of a countering perspective. By making use of it, authors can speak to matters that are of relevance and interest to the texts' young female audience – unlike Fordyce's sermons, which are so quickly rejected by Lydia.

Beyond the educational capacities of the novelistic form, Austen also treats female education in the more formalised shape of schooling outside the home, as it is thematised in

³⁶⁰ Austen, *Persuasion*, 253.

³⁶¹ Austen, 255.

³⁶² Doody, *Frances Burney*, 101.

Emma, in which Mrs Goddard's school for girls is introduced as a non-pretentious and, therefore, respectable avenue for girls from backgrounds that do not allow for private tutelage:

Mrs. Goddard was the mistress of a School—not of a seminary, or an establishment, or any thing which professed, in long sentences of refined nonsense, to combine liberal acquirements with elegant morality upon new principles and new systems—and where young ladies for enormous pay might be screwed out of health and into vanity—but a real, honest, old-fashioned Boarding-school, where a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price, and where girls might be sent to be out of the way and scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies.³⁶³

The establishment's definition and distinction from other institutions for girls is of note, placing the emphasis on education of the mind and pointing to other, less recommendable examples, which did not necessarily act as educational establishments and more as “finishing schools” of kinds, imparting etiquette and vanity. This distinction is interesting, as it points at the various kinds of knowledge that were relevant to women, with a clear rejection of certain models of wrong influence and education. Later in the novel, Augusta Elton, who marries the village priest and causes disappointment to Harriet Smith, a pupil of Mrs Goddard's school and Emma's mentee, is none too positively introduced as a former pupil of exactly such a finishing school:

[...] Mrs. Elton was a vain woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance; [...] she meant to shine and be very superior, but with manners which had been formed in a bad school, pert and familiar; [...] all her notions were drawn from one set of people, and one style of living; [...] if not foolish she was ignorant, and [...] her society would certainly do Mr. Elton no good.³⁶⁴

Though reflected through Emma's perception, which itself is coloured by resentment on behalf of herself (as she attempted to make a match between Harriet and Mr Elton) and her friend, Austen cleverly presents an example of the kind of female (mis-)education that is criticised at the beginning of the novel. Mrs Elton's unpleasant manners serve to stress the point that, as is stated at the introduction of Mrs Goddard's establishment, girls ran as much a risk by attaining a wrong education as by having none at all. However, this is not to say that the improvement of young women's elegance and appearance was necessarily grounds for censure, as Austen links the development of one's outward appearance to that of the mind in the example of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, writing that she “grew clean as she grew smart”.³⁶⁵ What appears to be criticised more exactly, is too great a concern with personal vanity that lacks

³⁶³ Austen, *Emma*, 21.

³⁶⁴ Austen, 293.

³⁶⁵ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 7.

substance, which the avid reader Catherine Morland ultimately attains by living through the events of a novel, ironically learning during its course that life cannot be understood by means of fiction alone.

Burney's novels, too, treat the matter of female education, albeit with a different take on the limits of the education gleaned from books. Rather than drawing attention to the dangers of false readings *of* women, Burney's novels treat the question of the limits of women's education as a means of preparing them for the world. Though well-educated, Evelina, Camilla, and Cecilia find themselves at a loss when confronted with questions pertaining to social life, etiquette, and courtship – all matters, for which close and, as is often implied in these novels, female guidance would be necessary. As all three heroines are, however, orphans who, moreover, lack positive or even present female examples, they must contend with a number of confusing and mortifying situations, with the events of the novels constituting a kind of *Bildungsroman*. It was unusual at the time for this genre to feature young women³⁶⁶, but such novels could, crucially, serve to provide readers with informative if not educational examples for how to navigate the intricacies of social life. In showing these difficulties, confusions, and awkwardness, Burney ultimately negotiates the “universal adolescent experience”.³⁶⁷ Here again, the link between the conduct book and novel of manners, which has already been mentioned with regards to dress and morality in Chapter 1.4³⁶⁸, becomes apparent, allowing the latter to assume an educational function: “It can be argued that the appropriation of the language of reason by the ideology of domestic containment offers women some scope for self-development and social influence [...]”³⁶⁹ Much like Austen, Burney negotiates the educational function of fiction in a critical and ironic way, showing its limits in her characters' encounters with knowledge attained through reading, while she nonetheless utilises the novels' narratives for representative and educational means.

Juliet, the heroine of Burney's final novel *The Wanderer*, presents another scenario entirely, when compared to Austen's and Burney's other novels, as she is excluded from her usual surroundings, having to assume disguises throughout the text to evade the risk of persecution by her husband, whom she was forced to marry during the French Revolution. This completely different premise, when compared to the domestic realism of the other novels, also necessitates a different assessment of women's education and preparation for the world. As a woman of the gentry and illegitimate child of an aristocrat, Juliet is in possession of a number

³⁶⁶ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 45.

³⁶⁷ Doody, 41.

³⁶⁸ See p. 26

³⁶⁹ Sutherland, ‘Writings on Education and Conduct’, 31.

of “aristocratic skills”.³⁷⁰ However, her circumstances force her to develop a new relationship to her education, finding ways to monetise and market it to support herself. Besides illustrating the struggles women faced when trying to be self-sufficient in this era, Skinner detects commentary on the labour of the novelist in Juliet’s struggles: “Skills acquired privately for domestic amusement could become the basis for professional activity – as the careers of many writers, including Burney herself, attested.”³⁷¹ Not only are the difficulties encountered by Juliet in her various endeavours considered in detail, but the initial labour of acquiring said genteel skills as part of one’s education is also repeatedly emphasised by the narrator.³⁷² This reads as advocacy for respecting the labour of female accomplishments and can simultaneously be taken as encouragement to realise the marketability and importance of these skills. The talents Juliet must rely on – needlework, music, and singing – would all have been acquired in a genteel domestic setting, such as the dressing room. The following sub-chapter will aim to consider women’s privacy in this context and more broadly as part of the issues pertaining to dress and the domestic sphere.

3.1.2 Privacy, Dress, and the Domestic Sphere

As has already been mentioned in Chapter 1³⁷³, the dressing room could be one of the scenes of domestic education for women, offering privacy and a reprieve from family life. However, not many women were in possession of one and they most frequently feature in Austen’s and Burney’s novels as rooms, in which wealthy acquaintances are visited.³⁷⁴ In her study on this feature of domestic architecture, Tita Chico posits that, as a space, the dressing room has long been neglected in architectural and literary studies³⁷⁵, but becomes significant when discussing modes of privacy within eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century family life:

By institutionalising privacy for some women, allowing them a place to retire by themselves with close associates, the lady’s dressing room transformed the central paradigm of privacy developed in the early modern period and dismantled its system of surveillance.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁰ Gillian Skinner, ‘Professionalism, Performance and Private Theatricals in Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer*’, *Romanticism* 18, no. 2 (2012): 301.

³⁷¹ Skinner, 301.

³⁷² Skinner, 301.

³⁷³ See p. 25-26

³⁷⁴ See, for example, how Elinor first brings Juliet into her confidence by inviting her to her dressing room in Burney, *The Wanderer*, 48.

³⁷⁵ Chico, *Designing Women*, 27.

³⁷⁶ Chico, 76.

Chico expands on this by also citing the dressing room as “a site for the production of women’s knowledge”.³⁷⁷ These points about the dressing room echo matters of women’s morality and privacy, as they can be discussed in the context of female manners and education. Even short of having a physical space to retire to for an extended period of time, the process of dressing itself would, in any case, have provided short periods of solitude in the crowded domestic sphere.³⁷⁸ Davidson points out a scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, in which Elizabeth Bennet is “eager to be alone”³⁷⁹ and, therefore, gladly seizes the opportunity to get changed for dinner, as was customary at the time.³⁸⁰

The various changes of dress that were required during any given day – from the morning’s informal clothes called “undress”, to the “half-dress” worn for walking and visiting, and an evening’s “full dress”³⁸¹ – offered small pockets of privacy, turning the place of dressing, even if it was not a dressing room per se, into a room in which one could briefly be alone. That it could be all the more oppressive when even this time was cut short, emerges in *Northanger Abbey* during Catherine’s stay at the epitomal country house, where General Tilney’s sharp dinnertime does not allow for great alteration in her dress.³⁸² The various outfits worn in a day also created a sartorial distinction between the private and public spheres.³⁸³

White dresses, caps, high necklines, and long sleeves were popular for daytime wear, with old gowns often serving as material that was cut down to make petticoats and day dresses.³⁸⁴ In covering more of the body, these styles echo the idea of privacy, serving as a greater buffer between the self and the external world, to reiterate the idea of dress’ function of metaphorical self-protection. However, the very privacy or, indeed, intimacy of morning clothes could be an imposition when called on by guests one might otherwise want to receive. A dressing gown, for example, as is the case with Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, was fit to be seen only by one’s relatives.³⁸⁵ In this way, dress could act as a factor that tied women to the domestic sphere, or, if seen in a more positive light, liberated them, if only temporarily, from the pressures of being publicly observed. When dressed in their “private” clothes, they were private beings, free also to ease into their private inner worlds, which the rules of etiquette and manners would otherwise cause them to hide.

³⁷⁷ Chico, 75.

³⁷⁸ See p. 43-44 for the analysis of how this idea is enacted in *Cecilia*.

³⁷⁹ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 291.

³⁸⁰ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 193.

³⁸¹ Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 102.

³⁸² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 166.

³⁸³ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 103.

³⁸⁴ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 79.

³⁸⁵ Davidson, 75.

This provides an important avenue of independence, as Meyer Spacks notes that there is a sense in Burney's novels that women need to "preserve some intact inner realm as a vital preliminary to any sense of control or autonomy"³⁸⁶, while she points to the fact that "Austen makes it clear that even a tiny society can threaten privacy."³⁸⁷ In this sense, women's "undress" served as a factor that can be considered as the materialisation of this demand for privacy – albeit within the texts' domestic constellations. Chico, too, notes the potential for women's liberation inherent in the idea of a private space, when considering women's dressing rooms and the process of getting dressed:

If women's private parts – their rooms, their belongings, their behaviors are all seen as metonymies for their bodies – are indicative of a transgressive license, then these same private parts, particularly later in the century, might foreground the liberatory potential of the lady's dressing room as a site for knowledge production and domestic authority, much like the gentleman's closet.³⁸⁸

Here, she subverts the idea of the legible body by implicitly citing its illegibility as a consequence of women retiring into a private room to dress – whether this might be a dressing room or simply a woman's bedroom.

However, the parallel between an intact inner realm of privacy and its spatialised equivalent is rendered all but nought in the case of characters who show little concern for the external perception of the workings of their minds and emotions, as is the case with Marianne Dashwood, for example, who can as easily indulge her feelings in a shop as she could "in her own bed-room".³⁸⁹ In drawing attention to the fact that Marianne requires no spatial separation from the public to engage with her feelings, the narrator is at the same time addressing her disregard for the idea of necessary social veneers such as modest manners. Therefore, this public presentation of private feelings is treated critically by the narrative, which eventually forces her to part with her youthful and titular sensibility in favour of greater moderation. This development sees her assume the roles and behaviour deemed proper by society, reinforcing rather than questioning norms of restraint and privacy. On a narrational level, this is especially done by showing, as Lehnert observes, that Marianne's public displays of intimate feeling contradict their supposed privacy and authenticity through their very performativity.³⁹⁰ Simply externalising one's inner world on principle in a bid for authenticity, as Marianne does, is thus negated, as the performance inherent in doing so precludes the possibility of true and spontaneous emotion. Rather than arguing for the necessity of hiding one's feelings, however,

³⁸⁶ Meyer Spacks, 'Privacy, Dissimulation, and Propriety', 525–26.

³⁸⁷ Meyer Spacks, 529.

³⁸⁸ Chico, *Designing Women*, 26.

³⁸⁹ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 251.

³⁹⁰ Lehnert, 'Jane Austen Im Kontext', 49.

this is a point in favour of true privacy – as found in the above-cited bedroom – as the means for authentic engagement with one’s inner world without fear or awareness of an audience. In this way, the dressing room or bedroom becomes a “site for knowledge production”³⁹¹, as Chico writes, in the sense that it allows young women to engage with themselves, their thoughts, and ideas honestly and without fear of external judgement.

This conclusion is, however, problematised by the fact that although domestic architecture was developing at this time to increasingly allow for such private spaces³⁹², the luxury of privacy was rare in the domestic sphere. And while women’s dress allowed them to attain greater privacy, as observed in the above examples, it also tied them to the home, as the delicate white muslins so favoured in the Regency period were ruined easily. As Miskin notes in her reading of the scene in *Northanger Abbey*, when Catherine is invited on a carriage ride with John Thorpe, not only would the state of women’s dress reflect back on their moral qualities, but the conclusions drawn from such equations could have severely limiting consequences that went beyond concerns of privacy and extended to encompass moral prescriptions: “[S]potless muslin can only be maintained by confining oneself within the domestic sphere, away from the ‘nastiness’ of bad weather and bad men, like John Thorpe.”³⁹³ Burney’s narratives, too, often present the observation that the public sphere could be rife with dangers for young women who were, therefore, only perfectly safe in their own domestic surroundings. Perry highlights this point in reference to a scene from *Evelina*, in which the heroine unwittingly seeks out the assistance and company of two prostitutes, who initially appear trustworthy due to their fashionable appearance, making them seem like “two real fine ladies”³⁹⁴ to Mme Duval. She does so to escape young men that are following her and thus posing a real sexual threat. That, however, either of these situations is equally as compromising and dangerous to the heroine’s virtue as the other is commented on by Perry, as she arrives at the conclusion that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century narratives ultimately expressed a preference for women’s confinement to the domestic sphere:

The same elements thus appear again and again: the fear of exposure and being seen; the widespread perception that a single woman alone is potentially anyone and everyone’s property; the promiscuous mingling of classes in urban space; the sexualized danger of public places; the difficulty of telling good women from bad women in such circumstances [...] ³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ Chico, *Designing Women*, 26.

³⁹² Meyer Spacks, ‘Privacy, Dissimulation, and Propriety’, 516.

³⁹³ Miskin, “‘True Indian Muslin’”, 18.

³⁹⁴ Burney, *Evelina*, 237.

³⁹⁵ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 270.

The lines between sensible advice and restrictive social conditions blur here, with the sense of women's constant danger emerging. Burney's novels show particularly clearly how fragile women's social standing and safety could be – especially when not protected by a family name and social integration.³⁹⁶ These points will now be expanded on in the following chapter. However, it is appropriate to briefly link the domestic and social position of women, analysed from the perspectives of their education and privacy, as it emerges here, to later developments in fiction and society. Murphy particularly refers to women's localisation in the domestic sphere in eighteenth-century novels when it comes to the construction of the ideal Victorian woman: “These sentimental saints will become the self-effacing, domesticating handmaidens of empire. Their greatest delight will be in hearth, home, and their heroes' happiness – they will be the angels in the houses of the Victorian novel.”³⁹⁷ The initial promise of the domestic architecture of privacy, of women's education drawn from the schoolroom and conduct books, of the dressing room as a site of domestic liberation and education thus fails to be fulfilled. However, the period, in which these matters were being promised, can be read as one of change and liberation. Dress and the act of dressing were among the literary tools used to communicate these developments.

3.2 Marriage and Questions of Inheritance

With the domestic sphere featuring as the scene of women's origins, familial developments in the eighteenth century saw “the conflict [...] between belonging to a family with intergenerational blood lines that ran through both parents, or belonging to a nuclear family with responsibility only to one's spouse and immature offspring”³⁹⁸ move into focus in literature. Building on this argument by Perry, depictions of the family in the novels of Austen and Burney will be particularly studied with reference to the divide between consanguineal and conjugal relations. Rather than arguing, as Perry stresses, for the discredited theory of a transformation from extended kinship networks to the nuclear family in this era³⁹⁹, the shift under analysis here is more informed by matters of psychology and women's social standing as it is shown to be linked to their “power in the family”.⁴⁰⁰ Narratives of women's disinheritance frequently constitute the premise to Austen's and Burney's novels. Marriage as the end of the heroines' journey often serves as a means of resolving these familial issues faced by young

³⁹⁶ Perry, 8.

³⁹⁷ Murphy, ‘Invasion and Resistance’, 30.

³⁹⁸ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 2.

³⁹⁹ Perry, 14.

⁴⁰⁰ Perry, 127.

women at the outset of the novels. In this way, it becomes representative of the development outlined above. The domestic sphere naturally factors into such questions of family life, as it was the stage on which courtship plots were most typically played out. Analysing the roles women assume as daughters, sister, wives, and mothers within these narratives presents various realities that are contrasted with each other in the novels. By tracing the upbringing from “child to young woman to wife”, a development Lehnert points out as abruptly moving from one stage to another⁴⁰¹, this following sub-chapter will relate dress to marriage, the family, and inheritance. Generational shifts, which have been analysed from a variety of perspectives so far, become particularly clear when focussing in on the family in this way.

3.2.1 Courtship and Generational Renewal

The fluidity of the relationship between childhood and womanhood long found material expression in dress. However, this perspective on the matter was turned on its head in the late eighteenth century, as earlier practices of dressing children in miniatures of adult women’s clothes⁴⁰², complete with stays used to shape their young and “malleable” bodies to the fashionable silhouette of the day⁴⁰³, were replaced by women, instead, assuming the clothes of babies and children. As has already been noted in Chapter 2⁴⁰⁴, “not only in appearance, but in structure and detail”⁴⁰⁵ women’s dress around 1800 most closely resembled the frocks worn by babies and very young children. This meant that a fashionable female appearance was visually characterised by a sense of infancy and rebirth and, therefore, as Reinhardt posits, a new conception of womanhood: “A woman reaching adulthood in 1800 never wore the clothes that had formerly defined womanhood, never stepped into her mother’s shoes.”⁴⁰⁶ The relationship – and difference – between mothers’ and daughters’ clothes functions as a facet that informs the marriage plots of Austen’s and Burney’s novels, as it materialises processes of differentiation, renewal, and rejected (sartorial) inheritance. As Starr writes on courtship plot tropes “[t]he marriage plot of the novel is deceptively stable: it may serve to subordinate mutability to literary and erotic stability, but it contains the promise of later, generational transformation as (re)birth.”⁴⁰⁷ This idea of regeneration and generational change via marriage,

⁴⁰¹ Lehnert, ‘Jane Austen Im Kontext’, 40.

⁴⁰² Reinhardt, ‘Serious Daughters’, 35.

⁴⁰³ Delpierre, *Dress in France in the Eighteenth Century*, 10.

⁴⁰⁴ See p. 40

⁴⁰⁵ Reinhardt, ‘Serious Daughters’, 50.

⁴⁰⁶ Reinhardt, 50.

⁴⁰⁷ Starr, ‘Burney, Ovid, and the Value of the Beautiful’, 103.

which precedes procreation and, therefore, literal generational rebirth, is thus visualised in new style of women's dress.

The way this could be executed becomes apparent in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, for example, in which Henry Tilney's courtship of Catherine Morland is introduced by means of their conversation about dresses and muslins – a topic that also serves to earn the approval of Catherine's chaperone Mrs Allen. When she probes Henry Tilney on his knowledge of the matter with the question: "Do you understand muslins, sir?"⁴⁰⁸ she is also asking about his familiarity with the world and interests of young women, which he can answer in the affirmative based on his experience of living with and caring for his younger sister Eleanor.⁴⁰⁹ Offering a critical reading of this interaction, Miskin points out how this conversation links back to women by the establishment of the metaphor of dress, which is employed in this context with reference to its alterability: "And like the genuine muslin that can be made into 'a handkerchief, or a cap, or a cloak', as Henry points out, Catherine proves to be a teachable woman who can be refashioned to meet her husband's desires."⁴¹⁰ This interpretation of a conversation about textiles once again brings the idea of the legible body into play. In the context of generational shifts via courtship and family life, the "readers" of women's bodies were usually conceived of as the men and children in their lives.⁴¹¹ If dress and, by extension, women were thought of as being influenced and changed through marriage and family, as suggested by Miskin, women's physical form was integrated into the age's meta-narratives of renewal. What is of particular note in this specific context is that the malleability of dress and its wearers is brought to the fore, expanding on the legible body which thereby becomes a changeable body, further problematising notions about dress as a representation of naïve modesty.

Acting within the rather narrow possibilities afforded them by their plots and the domestic sphere, Austen's and Burney's heroines emphatically strive to create their own ideal futures⁴¹² and achieve them through marriage. That this conclusion is not down to romantic fantasies, but rather pragmatic resolutions to societal and, therefore, structural issues faced by young women⁴¹³, emerges from several of the novels. For example, Marianne Dashwood's final resignation to the realities of the world make her abandon her romantic notions and settle for marriage with the older Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*, whom she had found

⁴⁰⁸ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 20.

⁴⁰⁹ Austen, 20–21.

⁴¹⁰ Miskin, "'True Indian Muslin'", 19.

⁴¹¹ Ballaster, 'Women and the Rise of the Novel: Sexual Prescripts', 210.

⁴¹² Lehnert, 'Jane Austen Im Kontext', 45.

⁴¹³ Lehnert, 45.

romantically uninteresting throughout the novel.⁴¹⁴ Burney, too, resists positing marriage – even if it is a love match – as the ultimate solution or even liberation for women in *Cecilia*, choosing not to “arrang[e] totally exemplary fates for the characters, and deliberately en[d] her novel in a minor key, on the note of ironic ‘cheerful resignation’”.⁴¹⁵ Much like in *Sense and Sensibility*, following one’s romantic feelings is presented as a dangerous choice for women in this conclusion to *Cecilia*, as achieving her goal of marrying the man she loves also severs her from her large inheritance and, therefore, the independence and female community she was able to build at her house.⁴¹⁶

That women’s ideal fate neither lies with their birth families nor marriage per se is made clear in most of Austen’s and Burney’s novels. Fanny Price (*Mansfield Park*) is a particular case in point, as she is separated from her birth family at a young age to be raised with her wealthier cousins, the Bertrams. Due to their negligent and dismissive treatment of her, she idolises and romanticises her birth family and is eventually sent to spend some time with them to “regain her senses”⁴¹⁷ after rejecting the proposal of the wealthy yet rakish Henry Crawford, of whom Fanny does not morally approve. This leads to bitter disappointment and the subtextual conclusion that neither reliance on one’s family of origin, nor marriage for the sake of wealth – as is also exemplified by Fanny’s cousin Maria leaving her extremely rich husband Mr Rushworth⁴¹⁸ to elope with the very same Henry Crawford⁴¹⁹ later in the novel – can reasonably be posited as failsafe strategies for female happiness and security. Austen rather makes the point here that reliance on oneself and one’s morals, steadfastness in one’s beliefs as exemplified by Fanny not being swayed to accept a man she does not consider suitable, and a sensible regard for one’s material security without straying into the territory of open materialism, are the qualities that sustain the new kind of heroine and woman being created in her novels.

This critical appraisal of the marriage plot is also influenced by ideas about gender difference that were emerging in the eighteenth century.⁴²⁰ They created and reinforced popular notions about education, according to which women were not rational beings in the way men

⁴¹⁴ See, for example, her incredulity at the notion that the colonel is romantically interested in her and that she might consider him as a realistic option. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 44–45.

⁴¹⁵ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 144–45.

⁴¹⁶ Burney, *Cecilia*, 793.

⁴¹⁷ Lehnert, ‘Jane Austen Im Kontext’, 51.

⁴¹⁸ With an income of 12.000 pounds a year he is even wealthier than Mr Darcy, though his wealth is cited as his only recommendation when Edmund contemplates that “he would be a very stupid fellow” if not for his income. Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 46.

⁴¹⁹ The news is broken to Fanny in a newspaper article while she is staying with her family. Austen, 509.

⁴²⁰ Harriet Guest, ‘Eighteenth-Century Femininity: “A Supposed Sexual Character”’, in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47.

were and should ideally be left in their uneducated “natural” state.⁴²¹ In this way, marriage as an expression of gender difference was deeply problematic for women. As Clery writes on Austen in this context, she “is careful to commit no illusions about the apparatus of marriage or other institutionalized forms of gender difference.”⁴²² It is precisely this awareness of the divisions created between genders that also informs conceptions of women’s lives and the formulation of attempts at granting her heroines freedom and autonomy in her novels. While marriage can sometimes be a positive factor in this context by merit of its offering an alternative to the birth family, the opposite model is also treated by both writers.

Marriage as an arena of gender could prove problematic to women, because it reinforced ideas about their fundamental difference from men, as the “two-sex-model” of the eighteenth century came to replace earlier “one-sex” conceptions that defined women as broadly the same as men, “assumed to be sensual and strong, to be nearly as independent after marriage as before.”⁴²³ The change that took place saw “this female being who had been defined chiefly as a lesser man [...] redefined as a separate and oppositional being, by ‘nature’ chaste and domestic.”⁴²⁴ The certain hesitancy displayed in these examples with regards to marriage as an unequivocally ideal conclusion to women’s plots can thus be traced back to the era’s ideas about gender. At the same time, alternative conceptions of marriage, in which women were granted the power of choice and were able to maintain their ideals despite all difficulty and potential opposition, are an important literary tool in Austen’s and Burney’s novels insofar as the texts aim to “provid[e] imaginary resolutions to the sexual and social transformations of the eighteenth century, both ‘voicing’ and managing categorial instabilities of gender and class”.⁴²⁵ A new kind of order is applied to these very instabilities and transformations in the heroines’ ability to reject suitors they find disagreeable and even reject marriage when it is forced upon them, opting instead to choose the era’s ultimate existential route for women only when they feel ready and willing to.

Juliet, the heroine of Burney’s *The Wanderer*, presents a special case, as she is shown on the run from a forced marriage and entirely justified by the novel’s narrator in doing so. Even before her identity is revealed, she is presented to the reader as a source of sympathy and trust amid the many unpleasant characters she encounters. By extension, her reactions to the

⁴²¹ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 222.

⁴²² E. J. Clery, ‘Gender’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 173.

⁴²³ Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century. Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

⁴²⁴ Harvey, 5.

⁴²⁵ Ballaster, ‘Women and the Rise of the Novel: Sexual Prescripts’, 200.

extreme narrative of threatened sexual violence, forced marriage for the sake of (her) money, and flight at all costs – substantially aided by the various disguises she assumes – are ratified throughout the novel. She is shown as a victim of an extreme form of a very present horror to women: that of being married against one's will, to a man one does not wish to be married to.⁴²⁶

Arranged matches for practical reasons were not, however, always as violent and threatening as Juliet's and Perry points out that Charlotte Lucas in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is an interesting character within this framework of rational – in the sense of empowered – marriage choices. By choosing to marry the ridiculous and distasteful Mr Collins, who is additionally rejected by her friend Elizabeth Bennet, she shows herself to be a “vestigial character, left over from an era of pragmatic rather than romantic matches, before the discourse of the second half of the eighteenth century created unbridgeable moral conflict over arranged marriages.”⁴²⁷ However, the matter is two-fold in the case of Charlotte, who does not have much hope of other proposals as she is already twenty-seven and, therefore, considered “old” on the marriage market. Her reasonable understanding of marriage as her best chance at material security ensures that her choice of husband is acquitted by the narrative and her act becomes presented less as one of desperation and more one of agency and, indeed, empowerment. Nor is Charlotte Lucas presented as materialistic, hoping to gain happiness from wealth, but rather comes to her decision through thorough reflection and a realistic appraisal of her situation:

She had gained her point, and had time to consider of it. Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. —Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and, however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it.⁴²⁸

Marriage, however unpleasant, is presented as women's “pleasantest preservative from want” in the context of Elizabeth's rejection of Mr Collins and Mrs Bennet's dissatisfaction at this. For all its justification on the grounds of his “irksome” company, her choice is made more difficult by her lack of inheritance and future poverty should she fail to marry hanging over her, her sisters', and mother's heads. This is also the reason for Mrs Bennet's adamance that the match between Elizabeth and Mr Collins must come to pass, though her involvement of Mr Bennet proves unsuccessful. His approval of Elizabeth's choice at once asserts this to be a valid

⁴²⁶ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 255.

⁴²⁷ Perry, 255.

⁴²⁸ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 137–38.

and important category of action, yet also displays his lack of understanding for the particularly female anxiety of disinheritance and homelessness.⁴²⁹ The fact that as Mr Collins' wife Charlotte Lucas will eventually become the mistress of Longbourn, displacing her friend from her birth home, stresses the seriousness of the consideration of marriage for Elizabeth Bennet and women of her age more generally. The crucial distinction here – which is one, too, that separates Charlotte Lucas from the above-cited arranged marriages of the eighteenth century's earlier decades – is choice. The pressing articulation of the fact that the free choice of one's partner, even if he is consciously understood to be unpleasant as Charlotte herself considers Mr Collins to be, is what distinguishes marriage as a means of generational regeneration from marriage as a source of unhappiness. Austen shows the later effects of such regenerative marriage in *Persuasion*, describing the "Musgroves, like their houses, [...] in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new."⁴³⁰ By linking the family's generational changes and varying styles back to the redecoration of their house, Austen establishes a telling connection between the changing domestic sphere, fashions, and generational cycles of change.

Embedded in this set of linked concepts, are progeny and inheritance. In rejecting old styles, one might also read the younger Musgroves, and indeed the younger generations arising around 1800 in general, as rejecting part of their metaphorical inheritance. In a more material sense, however, questions of money feature heavily in the marriage plots of all of Austen's and Burney's novels, with Burney frequently adding the additional pressures of disenfranchised womanhood to such considerations of money, as her heroines and other female characters must contend with disinheritance, exclusion from their birth families, and the attendant material and social insecurities. *Evelina's* plot, for example, is defined by her quest for legitimacy, suffering for her mother's prior mistreatment – which, in fact, served as the basis of a destroyed manuscript for Burney's first novel that preceded the events of *Evelina*.⁴³¹ She cannot fully succeed in finding happiness in marriage before meeting and being acknowledged by her father – though Lord Orville has, crucially, already proposed to her at this point, proving his worth as a suitor in recognising her inherent value as a person.⁴³² In this way, the open ends and pain of the parents' generation is resolved by a younger set of characters choosing to end cycles of unhappiness and bend ideas of social acceptability in favour of what they know to be true based on their own moral self-assurance. In this context, dress features throughout the narrative as

⁴²⁹ Austen, 124–25.

⁴³⁰ Austen, *Persuasion*, 43.

⁴³¹ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 35.

⁴³² Burney, *Evelina*, 384–86.

one among many obstacles of an outdated society of appearances and etiquette. Evelina feels it to be so as she gets her hair styled towards the beginning of the novel, writing of the process:

You can't think how oddly my head feels; full of powder and black pins, and a great *cushion* on the top of it. I believe you would hardly know me, for my face looks quite different to what it did before my hair was dressed. When I shall be able to make use of a comb for myself I cannot tell; for my hair is so much entangled, *frizled* they call it, that I fear it will be very difficult.⁴³³

In becoming unrecognisable to herself, her worth is also hidden from view for others, becoming replaced by a socially and fashionably compliant veneer that leads others to take her for someone who is knowledgeable about the rules and regulations of etiquette. When her fashionable façade is uncovered to be just that, Lord Orville initially and cuttingly describes her as a “pretty modest-looking girl”, “a *silent* one”, and “a poor weak girl”⁴³⁴ based on her failure to deliver the social performance suggested by her dress and hair and, at the same, being encumbered and unable to act naturally due to her dress. What is important to note here, is that this styling is the result of a shopping trip with Mrs Mirvan, whose importance as a mother figure will be considered towards the end of this thesis, and who serves as one among Evelina's guardians from her parent's generation. However, she ultimately fails to be of assistance or guidance, leaving Evelina to find her own path. Guided and influenced by Mrs Mirvan to assume a fashionable appearance, Evelina proves this advice to be a hindrance in her own romantic narrative as the unnatural clothes and hair create a disconnect from herself. From her outset of disinheritance and poor support, Evelina forges her own future, however, and creates generational renewal by rejecting the family legacy suggested to her by her grandmother Mme Duval and finding romantic happiness and improving her social situation as a consequence of not being able to rely on inheritance – all the while aware of the risk of perpetuating her mother's misfortunes and striving for paternal acknowledgement.

As both are concerned with existential and material needs, marriage and disinheritance plots frequently coincide in Austen's and Burney's novels. The premise of disinheritance, further, provides grounds for the heroines' emancipation from their birth families, as they find themselves left to their own devices. In this way, a generation shift is forced in the novels' plots. The following section will, therefore, focus in on matters of inheritance.

⁴³³ Burney, 29.

⁴³⁴ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 44.

3.2.2 Inheritance and Legacy

As has already been noted in analysing the interwoven disinheritance and marriage plots of *Evelina*, the disinheritance plot of Burney's other novels is similarly linked to generational renewal. However, the situation at the outset is not always the same and the difference with regards to *Cecilia* lies in the heroine's initial possession of a substantial inheritance. She is forced to relinquish it as a consequence of choosing the husband of her wishes, Mortimer Delvile. He is also threatened with disinheritance as a consequence for his romantic choices and potential rejection of the family name and legacy for Cecilia, as that is a stipulation of her inheritance in her uncle's will.⁴³⁵ What Perry identifies as the "wish-fulfilment story of initial disinheritance followed by legitimation and adoption"⁴³⁶ in the context of *Evelina* applies here, too, in a different way. It is interestingly Mortimer's mother, Mrs Delvile, who ultimately offers the desired consent and acceptance of Cecilia into the family – though she is, therein, also instrumental in Cecilia losing her inheritance. Claiming the confrontation between Mortimer, Cecilia, and Mrs Delvile as "the very scene for which I wrote the whole book"⁴³⁷, Burney presents Mrs Delvile's later acceptance of the match – and rejection of her own husband, from which she lives separated at the end of the novel⁴³⁸ – as a new process of matriarchal ratification of the next generation. The only impediment to a fully satisfactory ending is acknowledged by Burney as such:⁴³⁹ Cecilia has to relinquish her own independence for the attainment of her marital wishes. The conflict between female independence and marriage, even when it results from a love match, is addressed here, and alleviated by another matriarchal intervention, as Mrs Delvile's sister is revealed at the very end of the novel as a benefactress who, moved by Cecilia's decision, leaves her entire fortune to her new niece-in-law:

[...] having, in her latter days, intimately connected herself with Cecilia, she was so much charmed with her character, and so much dazzled by her admiration of the extraordinary sacrifice she had made, that, in a fit of sudden enthusiasm, she altered her will, to leave to her, and to her sole disposal, the fortune which, almost from his infancy, she had destined for her nephew. Cecilia, astonished and penetrated, opposed the alteration; but even her sister, now Lady Delvile, to whom she daily became dearer, earnestly supported it; while Mortimer, delighted to restore to her through his own family, any part of that power and independence of which her generous and pure regard for himself had deprived her, was absolute in refusing that the deed should be revoked.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁵ Burney, *Cecilia*, 5–6.

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⁴³⁷ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 138.

⁴³⁸ Doody, 140.

⁴³⁹ Burney, *Cecilia*, 941.

⁴⁴⁰ Burney, 939.

This conclusion offers a resolution for several of the novel's preoccupations with inheritance and legacy – ultimately rejecting both categories, as they are not based on choice. The pre-determination of inheritance is shown to be a limiting factor for both Cecilia and Mortimer throughout the novel, inhibiting them from following their wishes and ultimately leading to such emotional tension that Cecilia is overwrought and suffers a serious episode of illness and mental breakdown.⁴⁴¹ Contrary to her wishes of independence, for which she successfully fights throughout the novel, rejecting her guardian Mr Harrel's attempts to literally sell her to the obtrusive Sir Robert Floyer in exchange for having his debts covered⁴⁴², and uncovering her supposed friend Mr Monkton's similarly self-serving plans of claiming her (and her fortune) for himself after his wife's passing⁴⁴³, the social pressures of inheritance and legacy see Cecilia robbed of her agency and advertised in the paper during her illness. Doody identifies this as a low point for the heroine, not least as Cecilia's efforts are rendered void here: "Cecilia, who had thought she was not to be 'set up for sale,' becomes an object, advertised as lost property."⁴⁴⁴ Her dress plays a crucial role in this episode, as she is identified by it in the advertisement and its fineness serves as a signal to her benefactors that she might be "claimed" by someone prepared to pay a reward for their service. The alternative of being sent straight to a mental hospital is far more gruelling and only narrowly avoided by merit of her riding habit, which was ironically women's "most active and therefore masculinised dress" at the time.⁴⁴⁵ Read unironically, however, in her weakest moment Cecilia's dress continues to signal her continuous struggle for carving out her own destiny and rejecting the limitations of legacy and inheritance.

Many other of Austen's and Burney's characters contend with narratives of disinheritance, such as the Dashwood sisters in *Sense and Sensibility* who have to leave their home at the beginning of the novel, opening up the question of brotherly obligation towards the consanguineal as opposed to the conjugal family and leading to the Dashwoods' rather limited living.⁴⁴⁶ *The Wanderer's* Juliet Granville, much like Evelina, is also on a quest for paternal legitimisation, set by Burney in the altered world of post-Revolutionary Britain and France.⁴⁴⁷ Meanwhile the relationship between marriageability and family obligations – both of inheritance and gratitude – are negotiated in Austen's *Mansfield Park*, as has already been

⁴⁴¹ See Book X, Chapter VII in Burney, *Cecilia*, 891-899.

⁴⁴² Doody, 'Burney and Politics', 97.

⁴⁴³ See Book X, Chapter I, Burney, *Cecilia*, 833-837.

⁴⁴⁴ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 142.

⁴⁴⁵ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 157.

⁴⁴⁶ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 141.

⁴⁴⁷ See the introduction directed at Dr. Burney in Burney, *The Wanderer*, 3-10.

analysed, and Burney's *Camilla*, in which the heroine's sister Eugenia is named as her uncle's sole heir due to him causing her double disfigurement through pox scars and the consequences of a see-sawing accident.⁴⁴⁸ In this latter example, the dangers of receiving an inheritance are negotiated, too, as the young and naïve Eugenia, keenly aware of her disfigurement, is at risk of the criminal Bellamy kidnapping and marrying her to secure her fortune for himself.⁴⁴⁹

What emerges from all these examples is the shared significance and overlap between marriage and inheritance for the novels' female characters, which serves to bring the era's more global narratives of change and regeneration into the domestic sphere. By not being able to rely on the security of inheritance, all of Austen's and Burney's heroines must turn to marriage as the most likely course of material wellbeing and improvement of their personal and familial situations. Courtship was, moreover, intertwined with dress, as has been shown with reference to the legible body and gender difference becoming articulated more strongly during this era. As particular aspects of generational relations, inheritance and marriage thus emerge as topoi of generational shifts in the novels. This observation will now be expanded on by the closer consideration of the mother-daughter relationship as a specific dynamic of the domestic sphere, courtship, and family relations, in which the sartorial dimension will be of particular note.

3.3 Mother Figures and Relationships of Contrast

Certain aspects that problematise and help analyse familial and generational relations in Austen's and Burney's novels have already been addressed. A relationship that is particularly valuable as grounds for interpretation when it comes to female characters' standing within the family and, therefore, society is the mother-daughter dynamic, which is also extended to encompass relationships between all kinds of older female mentor figures and their younger female friends or charges. Though also relevant in this context, the concept of female authorship as a form of mothering, both of the text⁴⁵⁰ and of the readership⁴⁵¹, will not be considered closely, as the focus is placed on intra-textual mother-daughter relationships. Nonetheless, the ideas pertaining to authorship as mothering are interesting within this thesis' overall discussion of text and consumer markets, as Jones addresses the matter bearing in mind modern theory on consumption, according to which:

⁴⁴⁸ Burney, *Camilla*, 26–27.

⁴⁴⁹ Burney, 336.

⁴⁵⁰ Jackson, 'Why Novels Make Bad Mothers', 171.

⁴⁵¹ Jackson, 171–72.

[...] far from being a state of passive subjection to meanings dictated by the producer, consumption is creative and unpredictable, a site of agency, interpretation, and therefore, potentially, of resistance. This would be true whether the object concerned were a fashion item or the words of a text.⁴⁵²

Not only the act of consumption, but also that of production can be viewed in this light. This places the potentially educational function of Austen's and Burney's novels of manners – as addressed in the observation concerning the influence of conduct books⁴⁵³ – in a more critical context, allowing for narratives of change and emancipation, and in this way resistance, to be inscribed into the texts and absorbed through their consumption. One of the novels' central loci of female emancipation is found in the mother-daughter relationship, with the older female figures often representing the very systems and expectations the young heroines are contending against, even if they are well-meaning. This constitutes a very clear generational conflict, resulting in regeneration achieved through advantageous and sensible marriage. This conclusion is reached as the heroines manage to reject the models of femininity presented to them by their mothers and mother figures.

The visual relationship between older and younger women was also differentiated by dress to some extent, as has been mentioned. Preoccupations with dress were generally considered unseemly for older and married women, however, who were instead counselled to “display their taste in dress on their children”.⁴⁵⁴ This was not least to do with moral qualms concerning dress, according to which the only morally acceptable way of employing it was to “please a husband or attract a suitor”.⁴⁵⁵ Marriage, dress, and generational renewal are tied together once again in this prescription, as mother figures' interest in dress was also directed at finding husbands for their daughters and charges so as to avoid the material insecurity of disinheritance. Most of Austen's and Burney's novels, however, do not present such a straightforward relationship of support and guidance and, instead, feature disturbed mother-daughter relations, which are either impeded by maternal absence, both temporary and permanent (Austen: *Emma*, *Persuasion*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*; Burney: all four novels) or conflicting ideas of socially acceptable behaviour (Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Mrs Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*). The frequency of character constellations with missing or faulty mothers and mother figures is noticeable and merits closer consideration. Perry sees both, mother and female mentor, as frequently co-existing even in their absence, and ties this in with contemporary issues concerning female inheritance and “disappearing maternal power”.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵² Jones, ‘Introduction’, 13.

⁴⁵³ Sutherland, ‘Writings on Education and Conduct’, 26.

⁴⁵⁴ Vickery, ‘Mutton Dressed as Lamb?’, 870.

⁴⁵⁵ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 150.

⁴⁵⁶ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 7.

That such reflections of real conditions were not, however, the sole novelistic strategy can be observed in the conclusion to *Cecilia*, which has already been analysed. Despite Cecilia's real loss of power and independence, she is compensated to some degree by the female network she becomes embedded in through her marriage to Mortimer. Mrs Delvile, who by the end of the novel has become Lady Delvile⁴⁵⁷, simultaneously emancipates herself from her husband by leaving him and settling in Europe after a serious nervous illness that mirrors Cecilia's towards the end of the novel.⁴⁵⁸ That both the novel's heroine and her primary mother figure, who fulfils this role rather literally as the wife of one of Cecilia's three guardians, both come to suffer from the same social pressures concerning family legacy is striking. This becomes even clearer when considering the fact that Mr and Mrs Delvile are first cousins, thus effectively preserving and maintaining the family's legacy through their marriage.⁴⁵⁹ The prospect of their only son giving up his family name is, therefore, all the more shocking to them – and Mrs Delvile's eventual consent and emancipation from a system of legacy, that she finds herself forced to perpetuate by being married to her own cousin, all the more remarkable. Mrs Delvile's acceptance of Cecilia is particularly valuable to her on the grounds of their close friendship, which on Cecilia's end rather explicitly extends to a "heartfelt longing to make her home with the Delviles, to settle in their family, to finally come to rest as their daughter as well as Mortimer's wife", as Perry writes.⁴⁶⁰ Doody also notes that the relationship between Cecilia and Mrs Delvile is remarkable for the literature of the time, as "[n]o other novelist devoted so much time and attention to the development between two women who are neither contemporaries nor relatives."⁴⁶¹ Despite Cecilia's wealth and social power at the novel's outset, she is orphaned and lacks guidance. Hampered by her uncle's will, which she fails to recognise as the "hereditary arrogance" she is angered by where the Delviles are concerned⁴⁶², she only attains the freedom she desires, which paradoxically comes at the expense of her wealth and independence, when allowed to follow her wishes and marry Mortimer. The bequest of an inheritance at the very end of the novel underlines and ratifies this conclusion. Cecilia's inclusion in the family rewrites hers and the Delviles' legacy and, creating a parallel effect of liberation for Mrs Delvile.

⁴⁵⁷ Burney, *Cecilia*, 938.

⁴⁵⁸ This illness follows the conflict between Mrs Delvile, Mortimer, and Cecilia in Book VIII, Chapter VI of Burney, *Cecilia*, 668-684.

⁴⁵⁹ Burney, 167.

⁴⁶⁰ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 235.

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⁴⁶² Doody, *Frances Burney*, 135.

Austen also treats the subject matter of an older female guide, who seeks to prevent a match she deems unsuitable, in Lady Russel and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. As in *Cecilia*, the reasoning behind this lies in inherited ideas about social status and legacy. However, other reasons also come into play when considering Lady Russell's maternal concern for Anne as a factor in dissolving the match:

Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen; involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence, but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connexions to secure even his farther rise in the profession; would be, indeed, a throwing away, which she grieved to think of! Anne Elliot, so young; known to so few, to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune; or rather sunk by him into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependance [sic.]! It must not be, if by any fair interference of friendship, any representations from one who had almost a mother's love, and mother's rights, it would be prevented.⁴⁶³

Though her reasoning is predominantly concerned with matters of social standing, citing Wentworth's lack of connections and uncertain future, there is a point towards the end of this passage that stands out: the worry of a young woman choosing a life of material want which cannot serve but to cause her a kind of death, as her personhood and youth become subsumed by a life of spousal drudgery and implied resentment. The maternal concern cited towards the end of the passage also emerges in Lady Russell's worry at Anne's young age at the time of the first proposal. Though overall helpful and believably maternal in her intentions, however, Lady Russell's foremost course of reasoning concerns itself with Wentworth's lack of social distinction and is, therefore, aligned with Sir Walter Elliot's arrogant disdain for the match:

Sir Walter, on being applied to, without actually withholding his consent, or saying it should never be, gave it all the negative of great astonishment, great coldness, great silence, and a professed resolution of doing nothing for his daughter. He thought it a very degrading alliance; and Lady Russell, though with more tempered and pardonable pride, received it as a most unfortunate one.⁴⁶⁴

This concurrence is implicitly criticised, as the novel's very outset forecloses the possibility of Sir Walter's opinion being considered a moral benchmark. The novel's opening lines show him to be vainly obsessed with his aristocratic title and relate him studying his own entry in the Baronetage, a book indexing all baronets, and reveal he does so often.⁴⁶⁵ Being in agreement with such an evidently ridiculous obsession with one's own social status and status in general cannot, therefore, be judged to be neutral in Lady Russell, despite her sensible considerations about Anne's material security.

⁴⁶³ Austen, *Persuasion*, 29.

⁴⁶⁴ Austen, 28.

⁴⁶⁵ Austen, 1–2.

Sir Walter's shortcomings as Anne's remaining parent are mainly articulated with reference to his personal vanity – for example when Admiral Croft rents and moves into Kellynch Hall and notes: "I have done very little besides sending away some of the large looking-glasses from my dressing-room, which was your father's. [...] —Such a number of looking-glasses! oh Lord! there was no getting away from oneself."⁴⁶⁶ Surrounding himself with mirrors, Sir Walter is nonetheless incapable of reflection and, as the novel's beginning shows, wants nothing *less* than to get away from himself. In this way he is not of great use to Anne as a guardian or advisor. This makes Lady Russell all the more important to her, though the eventual match between Anne and Wentworth, whom Anne chooses over Lady Russell's preferred suitor Mr Elliot who stands to inherit from Sir Walter⁴⁶⁷, constitutes a further and final act of emancipation from this mother figure.

The wish to marry off a daughter in an arranged match that serves to secure the family's estate is recurrent in Austen's and Burney's novels, echoing the real threats of dispossession faced by women of the age and representing cycles of expected behaviour.⁴⁶⁸ Ideas of legacy tie in with material needs in all these cases, though it can also not be ignored that the preservation of the family's estate through advantageous marriage, as would be the case with Anne's marrying William Elliot or a match between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Collins, was often also of existential importance to women, who, along with losing the status of wife and mistress of the house, stood to lose their home in such cases, nullifying the improved social position women held as wives and mothers.⁴⁶⁹ This makes Mrs Bennet's anxiety to find good matches for her daughters in *Pride and Prejudice* and her personal involvement in attracting attention to them – much to the chagrin and embarrassment of the novel's heroine Elizabeth⁴⁷⁰ – more understandable from the perspective of securing her own as well as her daughters' futures. Perry notes in this context that despite all the ridicule and judgement directed at Mrs Bennet throughout the novel, "Austen's plot vindicates [her]" through the achievement of her goals of settling her daughters in wealthy families.⁴⁷¹ *Pride and Prejudice* is, however, primarily a novel concerned with Elizabeth Bennet's emancipation from the demands placed on her by her mother. That she ironically fulfils these marital demands by the end of the novel is of secondary importance, though it proves Mrs Bennet's urgency and factual awareness of the importance of marriage true. Far more important are the means by which Elizabeth arrives

⁴⁶⁶ Austen, 138.

⁴⁶⁷ Austen, 4.

⁴⁶⁸ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 39.

⁴⁶⁹ Perry, 34.

⁴⁷⁰ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 111–12.

⁴⁷¹ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 220.

at this end and by which she develops as a person and simultaneously catalyses the personal development of her love interest Mr Darcy. This posits a new understanding of how marriage is to be decided on without undercutting the truth of its necessity to young women's future.

The narratives of education and emancipation from one's elders at the core of many of Austen's novels align with Doody's observation regarding the role of parent-child relations in Burney's writing: "In the novels, the effect of relationships with parents or parent-substitutes is to make a heroine learn to stand on her own feet rather than rely on her elders."⁴⁷² By providing them with parents they can only with difficulty rely on for guidance and education, whether this is due to their absence or shortcomings, both Austen and Burney create a central tense dynamic in their novels which catalyses their heroines' further development. Evelina's orphanhood, for example, has already been addressed insofar as it determines her social standing and narrative closure. However, this is not to say that Evelina is entirely without adult guidance and, critically, three different examples of female mentors, who take on aspects of motherhood, are presented to her and are found dissatisfactory examples for her to model herself on by turns. This ultimately allows Evelina to conceive of a version of herself that is neither influenced by these three women nor her own dead mother.

The first of the novel's three mother figures is Mrs Mirvan, the mother of Evelina's friend Maria, treated at the novel's beginning as "[m]y mamma Mirvan, for she always calls me her child".⁴⁷³ However, this is the only instance of her being referred to as such, as the introduction of her husband Captain Mirvan disturbs Evelina's image of the family and her desire to be part of it as a form of "denial and adoption in claiming her friends [...] as a new family."⁴⁷⁴ Mrs Mirvan becomes a negative example here, as her personal merit and kindness are impacted by her rude and overbearing husband's presence, in the face of whom she is, moreover, silent and incapable of intervention when he acts out of turn. In this sense, Mrs Mirvan quickly becomes a troubling example of what marriage can mean for women when it ties them to unpleasant men and thus proves true Lady Russell's anxieties for Anne in *Persuasion*.

Mrs Mirvan's role as a negative example of marriage is also negotiated using the symbolic potential of dress, as Evelina's entrance to London society is marked by a shopping trip under Mrs Mirvan's guidance, buying "silks, caps, gauzes, and so forth".⁴⁷⁵ Evelina's amusement at this shopping experience – the mercers vying for her attention, the overdressed

⁴⁷² Doody, *Frances Burney*, 33.

⁴⁷³ Burney, *Evelina*, 30.

⁴⁷⁴ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 46.

⁴⁷⁵ Burney, *Evelina*, 28.

milliners and “finical [...], affected”⁴⁷⁶ male milliners and, finally, the hairdresser entangling her hair in a hairstyle she cannot hope to comb through⁴⁷⁷ – also belies a sense of disapproval of the sartorial demands of fashionable society and courtship. The threat of dress as concealment that covers up falsity, as discussed in the chapter on dress and morality, emerges here. The hairstyle carries particular weight: not only does Evelina become unrecognisable to herself, as the initial reading of the passage showed, but the hairstyle itself can be read as a representation of the faults of society, as the pomaded and powdered hairstyles of the era were meant to last for a long time and were therefore frequently infested with lice or otherwise unclean. This, on the one hand, was used as a symbol for the “truism that under the varnish fine ladies were filthy and unwholesome”.⁴⁷⁸ On the other, it signals that Mrs Mirvan, taking her young charge to be dressed and styled in this way in order to be presentable and, as is always implied in young women attending society events, able to attract a suitor, is not the most desirable mentor. This implicit criticism levelled at her judgement regarding matrimony is further underlined with the appearance of Captain Mirvan.

The second mother figure Evelina is all but assigned to is her own maternal grandmother Mme Duval. Her company proves that a biological maternal line is no guarantee of positive guidance, as Mme Duval seeks to sue for Evelina’s inheritance from her father and connect Evelina to her relatives, the coarse Branghton family, for self-interested reasons.⁴⁷⁹ Her own overdrawn appearance, concern with dress, French lover, and hot-headed manners also quickly reveal her to be an unsuitable mentor for the young heroine, while her self-serving claim of Evelina as her granddaughter foreshadows a perpetuation of the cycle of poor guidance and abandonment that ultimately led to the ruin of Evelina’s mother, Caroline Evelyn. That the novel is “ambivalent about the matriline, dividing it between a good dead mother and a bad living grandmother”⁴⁸⁰, is a point that gains further nuance when considering Evelina’s characterisation in the novel as an extension or reinvention of her mother. Most notably, Evelina’s name – a central point of contention throughout the novel⁴⁸¹ – is an adaptation of her mother’s maiden name Evelyn, assigned to her daughter also as the anagrammed surname Anville.⁴⁸² In this sense, Evelina herself is virtually nameless, conceived of as a foil for her mother and not acknowledged by her father. Mme Duval is unable to bridge this gap of identity

⁴⁷⁶ Burney, 29.

⁴⁷⁷ Burney, 29.

⁴⁷⁸ Vickery, ‘Mutton Dressed as Lamb?’, 873.

⁴⁷⁹ Burney, *Evelina*, 69–70.

⁴⁸⁰ Jane Spencer, ‘Evelina and Cecilia’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27.

⁴⁸¹ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 6.

⁴⁸² Doody, 40.

and inheritance, as she is presented to be an eminently undesirable mentor through her obsession with her looks and highly curated appearance, as has already been mentioned above. The disintegration of this appearance during the staged highwayman attack, as analysed in Chapter 2⁴⁸³, further proves the duplicity inscribed into her character by the means of dress. That Mme Duval lacks a grounded character, solidity, and morality is also exemplified by her belief in her performance of Frenchness, erasing her British origins “just as she assumes her rouge makes her young”.⁴⁸⁴ In this sense, Mme Duval herself lacks a true and solid identity and ultimately consists of an array of assumed pieces of characterisation. These are as replaceable and as removable as her dress. That she is ultimately a threadbare character precludes the possibility of her being of guidance to Evelina, whose lack of name and, therefore, social identity is a central motivating factor in her journey throughout the novel. By rejecting the matriline that failed and fails her in turn, as embodied by her mother’s suffering and the flimsy Mme Duval, *Evelina* “rewrites abandonment as prefatory to new domestic bliss [...]”.⁴⁸⁵

Evelina’s third main mother figure is Mrs Selwyn, who features later in the narrative and manages to effect a meeting between Evelina and her father and, in this way, her acknowledgement and re-integration into the family’s inheritance.⁴⁸⁶ Arriving in *Evelina*’s story after her disastrous weeks in the company of Mme Duval, Mrs Selwyn’s sensible and self-empowered nature is contrasted with Evelina’s grandmother.⁴⁸⁷ After her time in London Evelina suffers a nervous illness, which provides the impulse for Mrs Selwyn’s intervention, arranging for a trip to Bristol Hotwells to remove Evelina from her usual surroundings and troubles and simultaneously benefit from the healing properties of the spa.⁴⁸⁸ Despite her many helpful qualities, however, Evelina is disturbed by the streak of masculinity that Mrs Selwyn’s authority, self-assured actions, and speech signal to her:

She is extremely clever; her understanding, indeed, may be called *masculine*; but, unfortunately, her manners deserve the same epithet; for, in studying to acquire the knowledge of the other sex, she has lost all the softness of her own. In regard to myself, however, as I have neither courage nor inclination to argue with her, I have never been personally hurt at her want of gentleness; a virtue which, nevertheless, seems so essential a part of the female character, that I find myself more awkward, and less at ease, with a woman who wants it, than I do with a man.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸³ See p. 39

⁴⁸⁴ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 52.

⁴⁸⁵ Starr, ‘Burney, Ovid, and the Value of the Beautiful’, 81.

⁴⁸⁶ Doody, *Frances Burney*, 62.

⁴⁸⁷ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 355.

⁴⁸⁸ Burney, *Evelina*, 261–62.

⁴⁸⁹ Burney, 269.

Though supposedly a more desirable mentor and example by dint of her cleverness, Evelina's internalised ideas about women make her uncomfortable with Mrs Selwyn's atypical femininity, sensing that she might veer too considerably into perceived masculinity through being argumentative and tough.

The spectrum thus created between female passivity as exemplified by Mrs Mirvan and female action as represented by Mrs Selwyn, places the ideal somewhere in the middle, rejecting either extreme. While Mrs Selwyn's dialogue provides a pressure valve for the liberties taken and rudeness shown by men throughout the novel⁴⁹⁰, in the face of which Evelina is continuously powerless, her behaviour is nonetheless censured through Evelina's perspective, even though it is ultimately Mrs Selwyn's stern and powerful assistance that brings about the novel's positive denouement.⁴⁹¹ Moreover, Evelina's guardian, the vicar Mr Villars, is revealed to not be a friend of Mrs Selwyn's⁴⁹² – an interesting fact when also considering his opposition to Evelina's feelings for Lord Orville, leading to an image of stifling male authority. Considering this fact, Evelina's narratorial perspective cannot be taken at face value when it comes to considering the overall treatment of Mrs Selwyn's more forceful character traits. As a representative of intelligent older femininity, Mrs Selwyn is seen in a motherly function by outsiders, much like Lady Russell is in *Persuasion*⁴⁹³ and similarly advocates for the empowerment and mental improvement of her young charge.

In a metafictional appraisal of *Evelina*'s function and effect within the broader context of women's worlds in the late eighteenth century, Mrs Selwyn presents an example of a free woman who does not have to pretend to approve of rude young men or other forms of disrespect. For example, she emphatically counters the question of what Evelina intends to do of an evening if not attending the assembly by stating that she will pass it “[i]n a manner which your Lordship will think very extraordinary, [...] for the young lady *reads*.”⁴⁹⁴ Denying the necessity of imposed male society and of humouring disagreeable behaviour for the sake of politeness, Mrs Selwyn states clearly the ability of women to find the resources for improvement and entertainment within themselves and, in an implicit meta-fictional defence of the novelistic form, in literature. This moment also ties in with Mrs Selwyn's first description, which emphasises her quest for knowledge, and serves to underline the implicit defence of women's reading and education inscribed into *Evelina*.

⁴⁹⁰ Burney, 273–76.

⁴⁹¹ Burney, 373–74.

⁴⁹² Burney, 261.

⁴⁹³ Burney, 275.

⁴⁹⁴ Burney, 275.

Where Mrs Mirvan's and Mme Duval's outward focus, either subjugating themselves to men or trying to please them using the means of dress, is rejected, Mrs Selwyn's perspective of personal improvement and agency in the face of disrespect or injustice is progressively proved correct, despite Evelina's supposed disapproval of it. The novel's epistolary form is relevant in this context, as the overall appraisal of ideal femininity and the creation of a new, regenerated concept of womanhood on the basis of several insufficient examples from the parental generation, cannot be focused from just Evelina's perspective. Rather, the polyphony of viewpoints, including letters from other characters, creates openness and allows for multiple conclusions to be drawn.⁴⁹⁵ A letter's immediacy and psychological depth⁴⁹⁶ must, after all, also be read with the character's potential unreliability and relationship to the letter's recipient in mind. As the epistolary novel also grants readers meta-fictional access to the characters and their world, allowing them to become something akin to novelistic characters in their function as the letters' readers⁴⁹⁷, this adds up to *Evelina* presenting a nuanced take on ideals of femininity and women's agency in life and marriage. Despite Mrs Selwyn's wit and force being presented as too strong by Evelina herself, the plot proves that Evelina's weakness in her moment of illness and disempowerment in the face of unhelpful guidance from Mme Duval and Mr Villars requires the contrasting force of Mrs Selwyn to allow for the novel's final happy conclusion.

This detailed analysis of the various mother figures in *Evelina* has aimed to show some of the strategies at play in Burney's novel when it comes to the communication of new ideals of femininity and the renewal of the roles mothers, grandmothers, and mother figures play within this process. Burney's other novels feature similarly critical treatments of various examples of older women – though these are not always mother figures in the conventional sense. In *The Wanderer*, for example, Juliet is truly orphaned and has no social network to support and guide her. The only examples of older women that take on a form of mentorship in the broadest sense can be found in her various employers. Indeed, their motherly role is thematised particularly strongly in the case of the milliner Miss Matson, who is shown to have some duty of care for her charges and trainees.⁴⁹⁸ Elsewhere, such as in *Camilla*, Burney depicts her heroines' more typical mother-daughter relationships⁴⁹⁹, while *Cecilia* offers a further

⁴⁹⁵ Esther Suzanne Pabst, *Die Erfindung der weiblichen Tugend: kulturelle Sinngebung und Selbstreflexion im französischen Briefroman des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Ergebnisse der Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung 12 (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 112.

⁴⁹⁶ Pabst, 95.

⁴⁹⁷ Pabst, 98.

⁴⁹⁸ See a reference to her protection of her young trainee Flora Pierson, stating that "she had hitherto been rescued by the vigilance of Miss Matson." Burney, *The Wanderer*, 430.

⁴⁹⁹ Camilla's mother and her hopes for her daughter are introduced in Burney, *Camilla*, 13.

variation on the theme of mother-daughter dynamics by involving the orphaned heroine in a tension field with the quasi-mother-figure Mrs Delvile and her son Mortimer.⁵⁰⁰

However, the common thread throughout all Burney's novels is the noticeable absence of the heroines' biological mothers, whether due to their having already passed, as is the case in all novels but *Camilla*, or temporary absence due to unforeseen circumstances, which is the reason Camilla's mother has to leave abruptly towards the beginning of the novel.⁵⁰¹ This leaves them in a kind of vacuum, unsure of which guidance to take and which examples to follow. In certain cases, this forced process of self-discovery is aided by other mother figures that, more often than not, serve the function of negative identification, as has been shown with reference to *Evelina*. Perry summarises the peculiarity of this maternal absence before the background of developments in the ideas surrounding domesticity as follows: "Just when motherhood was becoming central to the definition of femininity, when the modern conception of the all-nurturing, tender, soothing, ministering mother was being consolidated in English culture, she was being represented in fiction as a memory rather than as an active present reality."⁵⁰² The sense of a blank slate can be extrapolated from this statement, as the absence of "good motherhood" in the present forces heroines to forge their own path and thus reconceptualise what motherhood and femininity mean to them and how they can be reconciled with new domestic demands and social change.

Motherhood as absence has so far been considered in the sense of motherless daughters. The opposite situation of childlessness is equally present in Austen's and Burney's novels, however, and frequently represents the complementary side of the coin to orphaned heroines. Most of the mother figures discussed thus far are childless, after all. The most striking negotiation of childlessness from a sartorial perspective is offered by Austen in *Northanger Abbey*. Just as the relationship between Mrs Allen and her charge Catherine Morland is to a great degree characterised by textiles, with the chaperone's advice on morality and courtship couched in conversations about dress⁵⁰³, the novel also focusses in on her childlessness through this lens. As Mrs Allen encounters her old friend Mrs Thorpe in Bath, the gap between girlhood and married womanhood is assessed and ultimately bridged in the terms and logic of dress. The intricacies of this related conversation are revealed and culminate in Mrs Allen's renewed focus on herself expressed by means of positive self-identification via dress:

⁵⁰⁰ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 235.

⁵⁰¹ Mrs Tyrold leaves her family for Lisbon to care for her brother, Camilla's uncle Mr Relvil in Burney, *Camilla*, 238. He fell ill after Camilla's brother Lionel extorted him anonymously and thus caused a nervous illness, as revealed in Burney, 229.

⁵⁰² Perry, *Novel Relations*, 336.

⁵⁰³ As discussed on p. 22-23

[...] Mrs. Allen immediately recognized the features of a former schoolfellow and intimate, whom she had seen only once since their respective marriages, and that many years ago. Their joy on this meeting was very great, as well it might, since they had been contented to know nothing of each other for the last fifteen years. [...] they proceeded to make inquiries and give intelligence as to their families, sisters, and cousins, talking both together, far more ready to give than to receive information, and each hearing very little of what the other said. Mrs. Thorpe, however, had one great advantage as a talker, over Mrs. Allen, in a family of children; and when she expatiated on the talents of her sons, and the beauty of her daughters, when she related their different situations and views,—that John was at Oxford, Edward at Merchant Taylors', and William at sea,—and all of them more beloved and respected in their different station than any other three beings ever were, Mrs. Allen had no similar information to give, no similar triumphs to press on the unwilling and unbelieving ear of her friend, and was forced to sit and appear to listen to all these maternal effusions, consoling herself, however, with the discovery, which her keen eyes soon made, that the lace on Mrs. Thorpe's pelisse was not half so handsome as that on her own.⁵⁰⁴

Austen addresses the stark and abrupt divide between girlhood and womanhood by bringing together two women who used to be close friends and quickly recognise each other by their looks despite the length of time that has passed since their last meeting. Having been “contented to know nothing of each other” it is clear that this can be nothing but a surface-level conversation. Nonetheless, it is thematically layered, bringing into focus both women's desire for self-evaluation, more so than any real interest in the other's life. Sharing an initial path in life, from school to marriage, they find their stations greatly differ at the time of meeting in Bath, as Mrs Thorpe's wealth of children is contrasted with Mrs Allen's material wealth. This difference in fortunes is also revealed elsewhere in the text and finds a material focus in Mrs Allen's lace in this passage.

The bodily associations of motherhood, evoked by Mrs Thorpe's children, are linked back to the body and subverted in Mrs Allen's equation of maternal pride with the pride at being dressed finely. It emerges that this substitution is not simply due to envy or a feeling of personal insufficiency, as the narrative voice ironically casts doubt on Mrs Thorpe's effusions and points to Mrs Allen's indifference, as she listens on with an “unwilling and unbelieving ear”. This situation can effectively be reduced to contrasting two models of female middle age and taking stock of the merits of either existence. That neither woman particularly cares to pay attention to the other's situation and is, instead, busy trying to convince not least herself of the triumphs and enviable nature of her own life, is the sober conclusion to be drawn from this highly ironic passage. Once again, contrasting models of “motherhood”, which encompasses childlessness in this case, are presented here, existing on alternating ends of a spectrum. Much like in the case of a similar spectrum of motherhood in *Evelina*, neither Mrs Allen nor Mrs Thorpe emerges fully victorious. The idea of dress as a cover-up precludes such a clear conclusion and is

⁵⁰⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 24.

implicitly extended to Mrs Thorpe's embellished account of her children's merits, proving in the end that dress is no better or worse than other forms of obsession with oneself.

Mrs Allen's material focus is not treated neutrally in this context, as her frivolous interest in dress once more signals her character's vacuity. Davidson identifies a supporting material dimension to this observation: "In fiction, Austen uses a focus on lace – a textile defined by its empty spaces – to symbolise triviality."⁵⁰⁵ The symbolic potential of these empty spaces can also be taken further and interpreted as a representation of Mrs Allen's childlessness. Such a view adds a melancholy cast to her otherwise self-contented concern with dress. Here and elsewhere in the novel, however, this interest is laid out as a kind of naivety. Though subconsciously sensing the impropriety of Catherine riding in an open carriage with John Thorpe by herself, for example, she is unable to grasp this thought concretely and instead resorts to commenting on the threat posed to Catherine's dress. Here, she displays a similar strain of naivety and simplicity that almost amounts to a sense of arrested development. Whereas Mrs Thorpe shows herself concerned with the fortunes of the younger generation, Mrs Allen falls short of the advice directed at older women to not overly trouble themselves with their appearance and instead focus these efforts on their children.⁵⁰⁶ Being unable to do so herself, with the exception of her kind concern for Catherine Morland, the focus remains on her own appearance. Catherine is to some extent guarded from a similar path of fashion obsession by the intercession of Henry Tilney, who is able to meet Mrs Allen at eye level in conversing about dress and, in this way, reach her in terms she is interested in and understands, though this can also be read critically, as has been discussed.

The intricacy of mother-daughter relationships in Austen's and Burney's novels is evident. The instances of such dynamics of (mis-)guidance and parenting are varied and frequent, making it difficult to arrive at a clear-cut conclusion. However, the sense of emancipation from one's elders apparent in all these examples, paired with a keen awareness of potential cycles of female unhappiness and, indeed, suffering allow one to recognise the pattern of renewal at play in these literary mother-daughter relationships. By rejecting outdated examples and forging their own paths, replete with difficulty and resistance, the era's overall generational shift emerges from these heroines' domestic female relationships. Dress and textiles play into these dynamics at different points, as has been shown, materialising and reflecting various aspects of girlhood, womanhood, and courtship. These aspects all add up to

⁵⁰⁵ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*, 223.

⁵⁰⁶ Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb?', 870.

show how dynamics that emerge from familial tension were seized on to tell stories of generational and social change in the microcosm of the domestic sphere.

Conclusion

By assessing the manifold aspects of change, shifts, and women's life in the novels of Austen and Burney, and contextualising these historically, this thesis has aimed to show how the age's meta-narratives of transformation found expression in domestic novels of manners. The lens of dress and textiles has been employed throughout in order to assess these questions from a material angle that is not immediately obvious yet reveals itself to be a productive tool for analysis.

The initial theoretical and methodological contextualisation of this thesis opened up varied perspectives that spoke to the complex intersection of text and textiles and offered ways of assessing dress in literature. As has been shown, it can be viewed as a signifier, used for its symbolic potential of expression, which is, however, questioned all the same. This has, indeed, been the most frequent analytical approach taken with regards to dress throughout this thesis. Other perspectives that link literature to dress could additionally offer scope for future analyses, considering, for example, the implications of the material circularity of textiles and paper. Approaches specific to the period treated in this discussion of Austen's and Burney's novels have shown that the intellectual climate of the luxury debates and ideas about dress and appearances as litmus tests of morality also find expression and critical appraisal in the novels under discussion here.

When applied to the concrete historical context, taking into account political, social, and fashion developments, this theoretical framework was able to support the argument that both Austen and Burney repeatedly engage with dress and its enactment through its production, purchase, and wear in their negotiations of broader societal change. The difficulty of synthesising the various historical developments and approaches to the texts emerges clearly, however. It has been aimed to be mitigated through the methodological approach of dress as a mirror of these processes. Though both Austen and Burney mostly naturalise dress and treat it implicitly in their texts, the instances in which it is mentioned are all the more telling and have been shown to illustrate the novels' treatment of the varied topics of change listed above.

This thesis took a two-fold approach, separating the question of developments into the public and private spheres, as denoted here by the descriptors "society" and "family". In this way, the meta-narratives of regeneration and renewal that were triggered by the French Revolution were appraised regarding their effects on politics, society, dress, and literature. This initial perspective showed how ideas and anxieties related to, primarily, social distinction and change were reflected in dress in real life and employed in conjunction with dress in literature.

This allowed for materialisations and terms for these developments to be found within Austen's and Burney's literary works.

The second main focus of analysis lay on the family and domestic sphere. As the primary interest of the thesis concerns itself with the lives and possibilities of young women in the novels, the domestic sphere as their scene of life and action was of particular interest. Here, too, dress has been shown to play into various narratives of regeneration, which mostly centre on marriage and inheritance. Privacy and education, too, have been shown to tie in with these changes and with dress, which served as one of the only ways of materialising and claiming privacy within the family home. With regards to the protective function of dress, novels have been conceptualised as a similar materialised form of privacy. Meta-fictional considerations of the novelistic form as a forum of female intellectual activity, both as writers and readers, as well as an educational medium both in the novels and *as* the novels, have also been discussed. Ties to dress emerge most clearly here with regards to the dressing room and bedroom as central private spaces that brought together women's intellectual activity and construction of the self, using the means of dress.

Marriage as the main avenue of emancipation from the heroines' consanguineal families has been read critically with reference to equally insufficient opportunities afforded to female characters by inheritance. The concluding section on mother-daughter relationships ties in with this observation and places the focus on a central dynamic of change and emancipation in the texts, by showing how examples of older femininity are mostly presented as insufficient in Austen's and Burney's novels. The logical conclusion of renewal sparked by this realisation, serves to tie the results of this thesis in with its aims. It has thus been possible to show that in many instances Austen and Burney actively engage with various processes of change and not infrequently materialise these in their novels using the language of dress.

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