

Beyond the Trivial: Austen's Narratives of Fashion

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I, Jane Taylor confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis argues that fashion is central to Austen's artistic project; it describes how Austen manipulates fashion and fashion-consciousness to create narrative drama. By charting the rise of the fashion system and the concurrent surge in fashion-centric literature (comprising novels, satire and the nascent fashion magazine) that occurred in her lifetime, the thesis observes the ways in which fashion and textual practices were interlocked in the period. Austen's well-known epistolary responses to consumer fashions are often seen as irreconcilable with her fictions, in which fashion is, it has often been argued, marginal. This thesis challenges such assertions by revealing how Austen deliberately uses fashion to frame her narratives; like her letters, her fiction and verse respond to fashion as a literary, linguistic and stylistic phenomenon.

Readings of Austen's fiction in this thesis offer new ways to think about the role of fashion within her work. It demonstrates that Austen's deployment of fashion illuminates the construction of her narratives. It contends that in Austen's writing fashion carries distinct and varying narrative purposes in individual texts. In her juvenilia and unpublished verse Austen reconsiders the interconnected tropes of sartorial and literary fashions associated with the sentimental genre, but also relies on the fashion-consciousness of her coterie of readers. In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen's narrative is filtered through the fashion-consciousness of her characters and structured by the exchange of fashionable objects. In *Mansfield Park* fashionable boredom is used to generate narrative structure, whilst in *Emma*, the communication of fashion is intimately tied to the act of self-fashioning. This study examines in detail and for the first time how Austen's literary style, from the minutiae of narrative perspective to wider concerns of genre and structure, is consciously informed by fashion.

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Editions Cited

For clarity and consistency, this thesis uses the Oxford World's Classics edition of Austen's works. This edition of Austen's novels reproduces the Oxford English Novels text (issued 1970-1), based on R. W. Chapman's standard edition of the novels and revised by James Kinsley. In many instances, the Oxford World's Classics edition of Austen's novels draws from a range of editions in order to achieve an accessible and comprehensive version of the text. *Sense and Sensibility* is based on the second edition of the novel collated with the first; *Pride and Prejudice* on the first edition collated with the second and third; *Mansfield Park* on the second edition of 1816 collated with the first; and *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* on their first editions. The Oxford World's Classics texts of *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons* and *Sanditon* (collected in *Northanger Abbey and Other Works*) reproduce where possible Austen's manuscripts with the emendations that would have been implemented upon their publication. *'Catharine' and Other Writings* reprints Austen's three notebooks alongside variants contained within the manuscripts (in the form of 'Textual Notes'); few changes have been made to the manuscript material (misspellings have been retained), although this edition clarifies punctuation and thus improves the readability of these early and unpublished works.

In instances where textual debates and differences exist, and when the Oxford World's Classics edition fails to offer sufficient precision, I have referred to other editions of Austen's work. The Cambridge Edition of the works of Jane Austen offers valuable introductions and notes. I consult the Cambridge Edition of *Emma*, edited by Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan, which reproduces the spelling and punctuation of the original 1815 text (title-page 1816). As well as using the first edition of *Emma* printed by John Murray, I refer to Fiona Stafford's Penguin edition of *Emma* (also based on the first edition), and Bharat Tandon's annotated Belknap Press edition of *Emma* (based on the first edition), which correct typographical errors and leave punctuation unchanged.

Throughout the text, I use the following abbreviations (listed in parentheses) and corresponding editions:

(SS) Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. by James Kinsley, intro. by Margaret Anne Doody (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2004] 2008).

(PP) Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. by James Kinsley, intro. and notes by Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2004] 2008).

(MP) Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. by James Kinsley, intro. and notes by Jane Stabler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2003] 2008).

(E) Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by James Kinsley, intro. and notes by Adela Pinch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2003] 2008).

(NA) Jane Austen, *'Northanger Abbey' and Other Works*, ed. by James Kinsley and John Davie, intro. and notes by Claudia L. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2003] 2008).

(P) Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. by James Kinsley, intro. and notes by Deirdre Shauna Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2004] 2008).

(C) Jane Austen, *'Catharine' and Other Writings*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Douglass Murray, intro. by Margaret Anne Doody (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1998] 2009).

Introduction

This thesis argues that fashion is unequivocally central to Austen's artistic project; it examines the way in which Austen manipulates fashion and fashion-consciousness to create narrative drama. My readings offer new ways to think about the role of fashion within Austen's work: I demonstrate that analysing her deployment of fashion illuminates how her narratives are constructed. Moreover, I contend that in Austen's writing fashion carries distinct and varying narrative purposes in individual texts. Fashion-consciousness, I argue, animates her narratives, whether it is the fashion-consciousness that exists between her characters, or the fashion-consciousness of her reader. This study examines in detail and for the first time how Austen's use of structure, form and language is consciously informed by fashion, revealing the extent to which Austen saw fashion as fundamental to her literary creations.

My first chapter outlines the rise of the fashion system during Austen's lifetime, and explores the responses of Austen and her contemporaries towards this cultural phenomenon. I examine how the deliberate fashion-consciousness that Austen exhibits in her letters is re-worked into a narrative device in *The Watsons*. It is in this chapter also that I consider fashion-consciousness in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's best-known and most frequently dramatised novel, yet a novel in which the centrality of fashion-consciousness is often overlooked. *Pride and Prejudice*, I suggest, exemplifies the fashion-consciousness that this thesis seeks to uncover in subsequent chapters: fashion-consciousness within the novel is tied to interpretive and reading practices. As well as foregrounding my argument in *Pride and Prejudice*, I discuss more generally the ties between fashion and print culture, particularly between the novel and the fashion magazine. The association between the novel and fashion in this period is observed at various levels: not only are they linked materially and as commodities, but also, as Austen reveals, fashion and text are intertwined in the minutiae of literary style itself. As I discuss in a detailed survey towards the end of my first chapter, past discussions of fashion in Austen's work have often focused predominantly on *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*. Whilst this thesis opens up alternative ways of reading fashion in these works (which are discussed selectively throughout), this study is devoted to a different selection of Austen's writings that have been overlooked in analyses of

fashion. Individual chapters are dedicated, chronologically, to Austen's juvenilia and verse, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. This thesis gives such texts the space they require and deserve. I examine these works to reveal not only how Austen's deployment of fashion is closely aligned with her choices of literary style, but also how reading fashion in these writings uncovers Austen's textual intricacies.

I begin this textual examination in my second chapter by tracing the significance of literary and sartorial fashions not only in Austen's mock-published juvenilia, but also in her poetry, an aspect of her writing that has been neglected by critics yet which exemplifies many of the ways in which fashion is interwoven with literary practices. This chapter explores how Austen establishes a fundamental link between fiction and fashion as well as between text and textile within these writings, and exposes Austen's complex attitude towards the literary vogue of sensibility as one of both revision and ridicule. As this chapter demonstrates, not only did Austen embrace fashion as an essential element of her literary form early on, but she also saw her engagement with fashion as key in enabling the shared production of meaning that existed between the author and her close circle of readers.

My third chapter demonstrates how the exchange of fashionable and unfashionable objects structures the narrative of *Sense and Sensibility* by expressing the social networks of the novel. I show that these (un)fashionable objects become contentious pieces of evidence through which Austen's characters come to misconstrue their social world. Fashion thus becomes an important aspect of how characters perceive their environment, and Austen filters her narrative through these perceptions. *Pride and Prejudice* is discussed in my first chapter in order to highlight the semantic and narrative ambiguities of fashion-consciousness that emerge in the rising fashion system and throughout Austen's works. As such, my fourth chapter moves on to consider *Mansfield Park*. I read this novel as a dramatisation of boredom or 'ennui', a feeling which is closely aligned with the fashionable world in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century culture. This chapter, which elucidates the links between the fashion system and boredom, reveals how the structural tensions within fashionability generate narrative in *Mansfield Park*.

In Chapter Five, I examine Austen's 1815 novel, *Emma*. This chapter reconsiders the language of *Emma*, uncovering the fashionable diction that permeates the narrative. Through close reading I examine the dialogue of *Emma*'s characters, in

which both the subject of fashion and fashionable lexicon itself thrive, to reveal the extent to which the (mis)use of the language and semiotics of fashion is related to acts of self-fashioning. In attending closely to ostensibly inconspicuous fashionable neologisms and trivial discussions of dress, I reveal why such acts of communication are deceptively significant within the narrative. I demonstrate that in *Emma* we observe Austen examining the way in which language and fashion are irrevocably tied. Finally, this thesis concludes by returning to Austen's first and last writings, including *Northanger Abbey* and Austen's juvenilia, to reflect upon the author's career-long anxieties regarding the tensions between literary production and fashion.

What this thesis contends is that fashion was not only a perennial concern of Austen as a consumer and shrewd cultural observer; it insists, unlike previous discussions of fashion in her work, that fashion was essential to the way Austen perceived the fiction she read and constructed the literature she wrote. I argue that fashion is pervasive in Austen's work: evidence of Austen's deep-rooted interest in the vicissitudes of fashion is not limited to a handful of texts. I reveal how her anxieties and interest regarding the nature of fashion and its intimate relationship with narrative and language permeate her entire *oeuvre*, including her unpublished and private literary creations. As I show here, to suggest that fashion in Austen's work, particularly the writings I have selected here, is trivial or marginal risks misreading her narratives. To reconsider – indeed recover – fashion in her writing is to discover how her narratives work and to show that the domains of fashion and literary style are, in Austen's eyes, inseparable.

Chapter 1 Austen and the Rise of the Fashion System, 1770-1818

[...] while my Mother & Mr Lyford were together, I went to Mrs Ryders, & bought what I intended to buy, but not in much perfection. – There were no narrow Braces for Children, & scarcely any netting silk; but Miss Wood gave 2s/3d a yard for my flannel, & I fancy it is not very good; but it is so disgraceful & contemptible an article in itself, that its' [sic] being comparatively good or bad is of little importance. I bought some Japan Ink likewise, & next week shall begin my operations on my hat, on which You know my principal hopes of happiness depend.

Letter to Cassandra Austen (27-28 October 1798)¹

We dine now at half after Three, & have done dinner I suppose before you begin – We drink tea at half after six. – I am afraid you will despise us.

Letter to Cassandra Austen (18-19 December 1798)²

Austen's letters, maligned by E. M. Forster, a self-confessed 'Jane Austenite', as 'catalogues of trivialities which do not come alive' have certainly proved to bring alive the consumer world of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³ It is rare to encounter a history of shopping or fashion of the period that does not draw upon the experiences recorded in these 'unique' epistolary records.⁴ Austen's letters reveal how the eighteenth-century consumer navigated a variety of commercial environments, detailing shopping excursions to fashionable London warehouses such as Grafton House, Crook & Besford's, Layton & Shears, Wedgwood and Newton's; the mantua-makers and shops of Bath's Milsom Street; trips to the provincial Basingstoke haberdasher Mrs Ryder; and visits from the itinerant 'Lace Man'.⁵

¹ Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 16. Subsequently abbreviated to *Letters*.

² *Letters*, p.27.

³ E. M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), p.158.

⁴ Alison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping, 1800-1914: Where, and in What Manner the Well-Dressed Englishwoman Bought her Clothes* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), p.5. See also, for example, Neil McKendrick, 'Commercialization and the Economy', in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb (London: Hutchinson, 1983), pp.9-194 (p.41); Ann Bermingham 'The Picturesque and ready-to-wear Femininity', in *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics Since 1770*, ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.81-119 (p.94); Jane Ashelford, *The Art of Dress: Clothes Through History 1500-1914* (London: National Trust Books, 1996), p.170.

⁵ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 27-28 October 1798, p. 17.

Equally, they show how women identified themselves not merely as consumers of fashion, having to spot bargains and carefully select products, but also as producers: just as *Pride and Prejudice*'s heroine Elizabeth Bennet finds employment in 'trimming a hat', Austen delights in her own 'operations' upon her head-wear (*PP*, p.3).

As Austen's letter to her sister Cassandra in December 1798 (quoted in the above epigraph) indicates, fashion-consciousness extended even to minute domestic rituals such as taking tea and eating dinner.⁶ Austen renders this explicit in *The Watsons* when Tom Musgrave, en route from London, calls unexpectedly at the Watsons' home:

He loved to take people by surprise, with sudden visits at extraordinary seasons; and in the present instance he had the additional motive of being able to tell the Miss Watsons, whom he depended on finding sitting quietly employed after tea, that he was going home to an 8 o'clock dinner. (*NA*, p.285)

Tom Musgrave's 'additional motive' in calling is to flaunt his fashionably late hour of dining. Yet, instead of finding the Miss Watsons 'quietly employed after tea', he discovers 'a circle of smart people [...] and Miss Watson sitting at the best Pembroke Table, with the best Tea things before her' (*NA*, p.285). The Watsons, still at tea and sat at their fashionable Pembroke table, unexpectedly rival Tom Musgrave's own display of fashion.⁷ Tom Musgrave, anxious to render the significance of his late visiting hour more blatant, asserts with meaningful nonchalance that, 'whether he dined at 8 or 9 [...] was a matter of very little consequence' (*NA*, pp.286-7). The remainder of the evening is characterised by the way in which the party, particularly Tom Musgrave and the Watsons' 'smart' guests Robert Watson and his wealthy wife, compete, with specious self-deprecation, to be the most fashionable: "I am highly indebted [*sic*] to your Condescension for admitting me, in such Dishabille into your Drawing room", ventures Tom Musgrave in a faux apologetic tone; "You cannot be more in dishabille than myself" retorts Robert Watson, 'stealing a view of

⁶ Maggie Lane notes the significance of meal times in Austen's fiction in *Jane Austen and Food* (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), pp.24-54.

⁷ In 1801 the *Lady's Monthly Museum* publishes a list of fashionable furniture which includes a Pembroke table as well as 'Hexagonal lamps' and 'Convex mirrors'. 'New and fashionable articles of furniture', *Lady's Monthly Museum*, April 1801, pp.288-93. Subsequently abbreviated to *LMM*.

his own head in an opposite glass' in the hope that his own state of (un)dress, like Tom Musgrave's casual tone, conveys self-important negligence (NA, p.287). Likewise, whilst 'Speculation' is the only game played at Robert Watson's home in Croyden, Tom Musgrave insists that at 'Osborne Castle' they play nothing but 'Vingt-un' (NA, p.287). Here, the Watsons submit to Tom Musgrave's ostensibly superior grasp of fashions: 'Mrs. Robert offered not another word in support of the game [of Speculation]. – She was quite vanquished, and the fashions of Osborne-Castle carried it over the fashions of Croyden' (NA, p.288). The fashion-consciousness that Austen exhibits (with knowing irony) in her letters is equally palpable in her characters; narrative drama hinges on the fashion-consciousness that exists not merely between Austen and her reader, but between Austen's characters themselves.

Austen's writings, both epistolary and fictional, confirm the truth of Mitzi Myers' statement that "'fashion" is an extraordinarily charged word in this period [...] it is a trope for a way of living, not just clothes'.⁸ As one contemporary writer insisted, discussing the new vogue for 'athletic' rather than 'delicate' frames, and 'bloomy' rather than 'pale sickly complexion[s]', 'nothing escapes the all-pervading influence of fashion'.⁹ However, the all-encompassing term held multiple and indistinct meanings during Austen's lifetime. As Hannah Greig has observed, whilst there existed one particularly 'modern' definition of fashion, 'designating modishness, newness and the latest style' and often associated with clothing, 'the concept of fashion was, in certain contexts, understood very differently': for some, fashionability was 'aligned to social position. It was associated specifically with the accoutrements and material preferences of those of "high rank or character"' rather than 'modish trendsetting' and the 'circulation of mass-produced goods'.¹⁰ In this second definition, which describes the criteria of what was called the *fashionable world* or, alternatively, the *beau monde*, fashion is not simply something that can be bought or emulated by any individual with sufficient wealth or consumer-knowledge;

⁸ Mitzi Myers, 'Shot from Canons; or, Maria Edgeworth and the Cultural Production and Consumption of the Late Eighteenth-Century Woman Writer', in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800*, ed. by Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.193-214 (pp.194-5).

⁹ 'Fashionable Malady at Paris', *LMM*, April 1801, pp.294-5 (p.294).

¹⁰ Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.33

it also relates more exclusively, and often imprecisely, to ‘an internal currency’ that underpins wealthy metropolitan ‘social networks and alliances’.¹¹ As Scottish essayist Archibald Alison wrote in his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* in 1790, ‘Fashion may be considered in general as the custom of the great’; others, including Adam Smith and Joshua Reynolds, similarly concurred that fashion was ostensibly directed by the wealthy and aristocratic.¹² However, fortune and rank did not guarantee a fashionable status *tout court*.

Pride and Prejudice exemplifies some of these contemporary semantic ambiguities through its dramatisation of fashion-consciousness; such dramatisations shed light on the competing linguistic and social meanings of fashion discussed throughout this chapter. The significance of fashion within Austen’s narrative, often lost in modern criticism, was noted immediately by one contemporary reviewer: in February 1813 the *British Critic* described *Pride and Prejudice*’s Mr Darcy as ‘a young man of large fortune and fashionable manners’, describing his ‘fashionable indifference’ towards Elizabeth Bennet.¹³ For Austen’s Mr Darcy, and this early nineteenth-century reviewer, fashion describes ‘a complex language of social differentiation and distinction’: it reinforces, rather than elides, social boundaries, a contentious issue to which this chapter shall return.¹⁴ The local assembly ball at Meryton, which Mr Darcy attends with Mr Bingley, would have attracted an ‘uncontrolled social array’ of attendees, largely comprising ‘the rising middle classes’.¹⁵ Mr Darcy, discussing the Meryton assembly with Mr Bingley and his sisters, challenges his friend’s characteristically courteous comments to insist that he has ‘seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom he had felt the smallest interest, and for none received either attention or pleasure’ (*PP*, p.11). Mr Darcy freely discloses these fashion-conscious

¹¹ Greig, *Beau Monde*, p.62.

¹² Archibald Alison, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (Dublin, 1790), p.66.

¹³ ‘Novels’, *British Critic*, 41, February 1813, pp.189-90 (p.189), in *British Periodicals* (ProQuest) <<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/docview/4958331>> [accessed 18 January 2016]. James Noggle discusses associations between rank and fashion in Adam Smith, Joshua Reynolds and Frances Reynolds in *The Temporality of Taste in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.152-77.

¹⁴ Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period* (London and New York: Longman, 1989), p.13

¹⁵ Susannah Fullerton, *A Dance with Jane Austen: How a Novelist and her Characters Went to the Ball* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2012), p.42. Prices of assembly balls are listed in various regional newspapers such as *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser* and *Jackson's Oxford Journal*. Ball subscriptions to assembly balls were usually the best value, sometimes costing less than one shilling per ball.

statements to the Bingley siblings, later making it ‘clear to himself and his friends’ that Elizabeth Bennet ‘hardly had a good feature in her face’ (*PP*, p.16); such assertions evidence the ‘fashionable manners’ and ‘fashionable indifference’ observed by the *British Critic*. Yet, through the mode of ‘psychonarration’, a term adopted by Dorrit Cohn to describe the narration of a character’s thoughts, we learn that, internally, Mr Darcy is ‘forced to acknowledge [Elizabeth’s] figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness’ (*PP*, p.16).¹⁶ Juxtaposed with Mr Darcy’s confident judgements of fashion are his comically perplexed internal observations: he is attracted to Elizabeth’s delightfully subversive manners, which contrast pleasingly with the stiffly imitative behaviours of the fashionable elite. Whilst Mr Darcy evinces a self-confident external fashion-consciousness to his companions, Austen dramatises his internal perceptions, which are fraught with uncertainty and ambivalence regarding the value, and his own admiration, of fashion.

Throughout the narrative Mr Darcy’s fashion-consciousness is aligned with a preoccupation with the Bennets’ ‘low connections’, which include ‘a country attorney, and another who was in business in London’ (*PP*, p.143). Such fashion-consciousness is related to his own participation in the fashionable world, membership of which depended upon ‘an “invisible standard” involving pedigree, connections, manners, language, appearance, and much else besides’.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Mrs Gardiner, Mrs Bennet, Lydia and Kitty are associated with the modish consumption of the latest goods, particularly clothing. Mrs Gardiner, coming from London, must on her arrival at Longbourn ‘distribute her presents and describe the newest fashions’ (*PP*, p.108). Mrs Bennet is thrilled by the news that ‘long sleeves’ are now the rage and, on Jane’s return from Gracechurch Street, is ‘doubly engaged, on one hand collecting an account of the present fashions from Jane, who sat some way below her, and, on the other, retailing them all to the younger Lucases’ (*PP*, p.167). Equally, Lydia and Kitty travel to the town of Meryton three or four times a week ‘to pay their duty to their aunt and to a milliner’s shop just over the way’, a frequency which appears to attest to the rapidity with which new fashions in millinery become available for purchase outside the capital (*PP*, p.20).

¹⁶ See Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

¹⁷ Greig, *Beau Monde*, p.3.

Austen suggests that both the Bennets and Mr Darcy are equally fashion-conscious, even if their consciousness of what constitutes fashion might differ. In representing these disparate fashion-consciousnesses, *Pride and Prejudice* raises a question that continues to direct studies of fashion: that of ‘who is entitled to label things as fashionable and unfashionable’.¹⁸ The question, implicit in Austen’s novel, pertains to fashion’s polysemy and to the subjectivity of fashion, calling into question the possibility of a shared meaning of fashion. In a narrative which ‘[darts] from viewpoint to viewpoint [...] studding passages of objective description with clause-length fragments of FID [Free Indirect Discourse]’ the labelling of fashion is doubly challenging.¹⁹

Mrs Bennet’s brother, Mr Gardiner, is described as a ‘sensible, gentlemanlike man’ who lives ‘by trade, and within view of his own warehouses’ in East London (*PP*, p.108). Megan Woodworth, in a rare study that recognizes Mr Darcy’s ‘fashion consciousness’, has astutely discussed the contemporary ‘social split between people of fashion and people of commerce’, although in seeking to examine social ‘shifts’ such as ‘the rise of the middle class’ and ‘the embourgeoisement of the aristocracy’, she writes of ‘merit’ rather than ‘commerce’, opposing it to ‘fashion’.²⁰ Indeed, Austen’s characters, ‘though they might mix socially and marry into the gentry, [identify] much more closely with professional, meritocratic values’.²¹ As this chapter goes on to explore, this demographic, which includes urban tradesmen, professionals and the middling ranks of provincial and rural areas, was increasingly associated with widening consumer practices and the purchasing of modish consumer items.²² As Robert Markeley suggests, Mr Gardiner’s habitation in

¹⁸ Kawamura refers to the assertions of sociologist Howard S. Becker, who ‘says that social definitions create reality, and therefore, sociologists need to ask, in the same manner, who is entitled to label things as fashion or fashionable’. Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p.44. See Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

¹⁹ Thomas Keymer, ‘Narrative’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Pride and Prejudice*, ed. by Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.1-14 (p.14).

²⁰ Megan Woodworth, *Eighteenth-Century Women Writers and the Gentleman’s Liberation Movement: Independence, War, Masculinity, and the Novel, 1778-1818* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp.157, 137-8.

²¹ Vivien Jones, ‘Appendix A: Rank and Social Status’, in *Pride and Prejudice*, pp.299-303 (pp.299-300). Critics have struggled to categorise this socio-economic group, and Jones offers an overview of the various arguments made by Terry Lovell, Nancy Armstrong and David Spring (p.300). See also Robert D. Hume’s discussion of income in ‘Money in Jane Austen’, *Review of English Studies*, 64.264 (2013), 289-310.

²² See Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2005] 2007), pp. 234, 41.

Gracechurch Street suggests the likelihood that he is a trader of ‘tea, porcelain, silks and spices’, thus identifying him ‘with the most fashionable aspects of British overseas commercial ventures’.²³ Mr Gardiner is at the centre of fashionable consumer practices, yet he is far from embodying Mr Darcy’s definition of fashionability. Elizabeth, acutely conscious of the significance of fashion as a language of social distinction, responds to Mrs Gardiner’s assertion that she and her husband “‘live in so different a part of town [from Mr Bingley], all our connections are so different’”, with the contention that

‘Mr. Darcy may perhaps have heard of such a place as Gracechurch Street, but he would hardly think a month’s ablution enough to cleanse him from its impurities, were he to enter it; and depend upon it, Mr. Bingley never stirs without him.’ (*PP*, pp.109-10)

The significance of locality in relation to fashion is emphasised throughout the novel: not only are Mrs Gardiner and Elizabeth highly alert to the disparity between Mr Hurst’s fashionable West End address of Grosvenor Street and Mr Gardiner’s far from genteel lodgings next to his warehouses, but the newly-wealthy Sir William Lucas constantly reminds his companions, including Mr Darcy, of his ‘presentation at St. James’s’ (*PP*, p.12).²⁴ Sir William’s anxiety-ridden and self-doubting repetitions function as embarrassing attempts to foster associations between himself and the metropolitan *beau monde*, in which, Greig emphasises, ‘the royal court was socially, culturally, and politically significant’.²⁵

Following Mr Darcy’s marriage proposal, in which he claims he would consider any alliance with Elizabeth a ‘degradation’ (*PP*, p.145), Elizabeth embarks on her tour of Derbyshire with Mr and Mrs Gardiner. Whilst at Pemberley she reflects on the appeal of being ‘mistress’ of such a house: with a ‘lucky recollection’, she remembers that she would never have ‘been allowed’ to invite her lowly aunt and uncle (*PP*, p.186). In this scene, in which Elizabeth explores the impressive grounds of Pemberley, the ambiguities of fashion are again directly related to Austen’s

²³ Robert Markeley, ‘The Economic Context’, in *The Cambridge Companion to ‘Pride and Prejudice’*, pp.79-96 (p.90).

²⁴ Jane Stabler notes that this fashionable site was ‘where court patronage and political favours were dispensed’ in ‘Cities’, in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. by Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.204-14 (p.205).

²⁵ Greig, *Beau Monde*, p.129.

narrative strategies. Mr Darcy, approaching Elizabeth and the Gardiners, asks

if [Elizabeth] would do him the honour of introducing him to her friends. This was a stroke of civility for which she was quite unprepared; and she could hardly suppress a smile, at his being now seeking the acquaintance of those people, against whom his pride had revolted, in his offer to herself. ‘What will be his surprise,’ thought she, ‘when he knows who they are! He takes them now for people of fashion.’ (*PP*, p.193)

Stepping into Elizabeth’s perspective via internal monologue, the narrative implies that Mr Darcy mistakes the Gardiners ‘for people of fashion’. As Woodworth argues, ‘[t]he Gardiners are dismissed out of hand as liabilities when they are shadowy relations, but when they materialize before him they appear to be fashionable people’.²⁶ To be able to conclude that the Gardiners are ‘people of fashion’ without knowing ‘who they are’ signals the importance of appearance in conveying fashionability. The two definitions of fashion, relating to appearance and social distinction, are not distinct, but overlapping. Yet Elizabeth is mistaken when she believes that Mr Darcy is polite merely because he misconstrues the Gardiners as people of the fashionable world. Indeed, by this point in the novel Mr Darcy’s internal confusion regarding the merits of fashion, dramatised earlier in his observations of Elizabeth and revealed only to the reader, mean that he has become capable of treating the modish but socially low Mr and Mrs Gardiner with the respect he previously reserved for members of the fashionable world.²⁷ It is through the evolving fashion-consciousness of Mr Darcy that Austen undermines any clear distinction between competing fashion ideologies. The scene, with its misunderstandings and revelations, exemplifies Austen’s dexterous dramatisation of fashion’s ambivalences.

We discover early on that Mr Darcy’s fashionable companions, Mrs Hurst and Miss Bingley, maintain ‘an air of decided fashion’ (*PP*, p.6). The phrase conveys the sisters’ distinct appearance and implies that they hold themselves, with fashionable indifference, apart from the Meryton crowd. The expression evidences the fashion-consciousness that exists between all characters of *Pride and Prejudice*:

²⁶ Woodworth, p.158.

²⁷ John Wiltshire notes that ‘Elizabeth’s uncle Mr Gardiner would not be considered a “gentleman” [...] for he is “in trade” and earns his income directly, yet he is called a gentleman and it is an important part of Darcy’s development to realize that he is one’. John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen: Introductions and Interventions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.2.

to the inhabitants of Meryton, even those who consider themselves apart from the world and knowledge of fashion, the sisters' display of fashionability, however indefinable, is palpable and unmistakable.

Mrs Bennet fixates on the exceptional fabric of the sisters' dress: her persistent concern with exterior displays of fashion reflect a coeval yet ambiguous shift in fashion's meaning from 'being', relating to breeding and social standing, to 'appearance', signifying exterior signs of clothing, speech and gesture.²⁸ Mrs Hunt and Miss Bingley demonstrate a fashion-consciousness that rests on the interplay between the two: Miss Bingley, '[p]ersuaded [...] that Darcy admired Elizabeth', jealously asserts that she cannot see 'any beauty' in Elizabeth Bennet: even her skin is unfashionably 'brown' (*PP*, p.205). Miss Bingley concludes, targeting Mr Darcy's fashion-consciousness, that Elizabeth's 'air' conveys 'a self-sufficiency without fashion, which is intolerable' (*PP*, p.205). Miss Bingley's insult rests on the belief that Elizabeth displays a confidence ('self-sufficiency') (acknowledged by Mr Darcy in his observation of her playful manners), that is inexcusable, for she does not possess the status of fashion: she should, according to Miss Bingley, behave like a provincial know-nothing, but instead is incongruously assertive.

In spite of the sisters' insistence, both through their judgements of fashion and 'decided air of fashion', that they are socially distinct from the Meryton inhabitants, they originate from 'a respectable family in the north of England; a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade' (*PP*, p.10). As such, they have more in common with former trader Sir William Lucas, whom Mrs Bennet erroneously declares is "so much the man of fashion!" (*PP*, p.32). Sir William displays, in contrast to Mr Darcy's fashionably indifferent taciturnity, polite and sociable manners: he is, Mrs Bennet declares, "so genteel and so easy! – He always has something to say to every body. – That is my idea of good breeding; and those persons who fancy themselves very important and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter" (*PP*, p.32). The comedy of Mrs Bennet's assertions lies in the

²⁸ See 'fashion', definition 12, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68389>> [accessed 18 January 2016]. Subsequently abbreviated to *OED*. Heidi Thomson discusses this semantic shift in relation to Maria Edgeworth's tale, *The Absentee*. Heidi Thomson, "'The Fashion Not to Be An Absentee': Fashion and Moral Authority in Edgeworth's Tales", in *An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and Her Contexts* ed. by Heidi Kaufman and Chris Fauske (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp.165-191.

fact that she is, according to Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley's sisters, both unfashionable and ill-bred, thus identifying the fashion and good-breeding of others with ill-found confidence.

The ambiguities and uncertainties of fashion emerge, in *Pride and Prejudice*, as part of the narrative drama. Austen dramatises the fashion-consciousness that her characters internally (mis)perceive and externally flaunt: they are *all* implicated in the drama of reading the signs of fashion. Austen's own fashion-consciousness, disclosed in her correspondence, shrewdly revises and parodies the discourse of fashion, revealing, like *Pride and Prejudice*, the association between literary style and fashion within her imagination. Not only is E. M. Forster's claim that Austen's letters deal with 'trivialities' unfairly dismissive, but it also echoes a form of discourse, common in Austen's lifetime, which censured over-attention to fashion and consumption. The inflated language that underpins Austen's letters to Cassandra, in which her 'principal hopes of happiness depend' upon the decoration of a hat and in which her sister will, she suggests, 'despise' her for taking her tea at an unfashionably early hour, raises these 'trivialities' of fashion to mock-epic proportions. With their ironic wit, Austen's epistolary records appear, as Patricia Meyer Spacks notes of bluestocking Mary Delany's fashion-conscious letters, to prove that "'subject" hardly determines literary effect'.²⁹ Austen treats seemingly fatuous subjects with literary flair.

Yet, as this thesis argues, Austen's subject is intimately related to literary style and effect. Austen's use of ironic hyperbole in matters of fashion extends from her letters to her fiction, most obviously in *Sense and Sensibility* when Robert Ferrars, debating his purchases at Gray's, concludes his order 'having named the last day on which his existence could be continued without the possession of the toothpick-case' (SS, p.165). Life and death hangs upon the ownership of fashionable goods. Ferrars' experience at Gray's recalls a letter Austen sent to Cassandra in 1801 in which she again mentions the Mrs Ryder whose goods disappointed her several years earlier:

²⁹ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.95.

The Neighbourhood have quite recovered the death of Mrs Rider [*sic*] – so much so, that I think they are rather rejoiced at it now; her Things were so very dear! – and Mrs Rogers is to be all that is desirable.³⁰

Precariously positioned between satire and earnestness, Austen's letter elevates the cost of 'Things' above the very existence of the haberdasher. It is not so much an expression of Austen's callousness or an astute observation of the commodity fetishism that preponderates amongst her neighbours; it is a reflection of the distinctive culture in which Austen grew up which witnessed what one critic has characterised as 'the commercialization of culture and the rise of the fashion system'.³¹ The caustic tone which saturates her letters and fiction reflects this culture; it undermines – by reproducing – both the inflamed and anxious anti-fashion rhetoric of the period and the concomitant tendency to aggrandize fashion. We cannot pass over the letters as simple records of how and where Austen participated in a burgeoning consumer culture; rather, we must consider them as literary artefacts actively engaging with the rising fashion system.

It is no wonder that so many historians of fashion turn to Austen's letters: obtaining an accurate view of fashion in the period is fraught with complications. Despite being one of the most tangible aspects of the rise of the fashion system (and consequently forming the basis of much of this chapter), it is crucial to note how clothing poses challenges for those seeking to reconstruct eighteenth-century fashions. Many dresses survive for a reason, the clothes being of unique importance and thus not representative of general fashion.³² Dress historian Hilary Davidson combines an analysis of Austen's letters with an examination and subsequent replication of a surviving pelisse (c.1812-14), reputed to have belonged to Austen, to 'investigate what [the author] may have looked like': Davidson's intricate work attests not only to the cultural fetishization of Austen's Regency costumes, but also

³⁰ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 21-22 January 1801, p.76.

³¹ Gary Kelly, 'Jane Austen and the Politics of Style', in *Re-Drawing Austen: Picturesque Travels in Austenland*, ed. by Beatrice Battaglia and Diego Saglia (Napoli: Liguori, 2004), pp.57-69 (p.61). Marvin Mudrick misreads Austen's jokes about death in *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p.193.

³² Christopher Breward argues that both the 'activities and habits' and 'examples of dress and textiles' that have survived are generally those of the aristocracy in *The Culture of Fashion* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp.132-3.

the fascination with, quite literally, the figure of Austen herself.³³ Yet, Davidson's investigations also highlight the barriers to such interpretive practices, in which issues of provenance arise: she even, at one point, reflects that '[t]he only way to corroborate the attribution [of the pelisse] would be to exhume Austen's body from Winchester Cathedral and check her skeletal measurements'.³⁴ Another issue for dress historians is that clothes were frequently recycled and re-sewn; Austen's mother's wedding dress, for instance, led various lives as a day dress, a boy's jacket and a pair of breeches.³⁵ Other transient, ostensibly intangible, aspects of lived fashionable experience – gesture, colloquialism and domestic ritual – are equally difficult to uncover. Textual records, such as diaries and letters, can be rich with information, yet also represent the anecdotal evidence of a literate few. Whilst pamphlets, newspapers, and periodicals offer invaluable insights into the way in which fashion dominated print culture of the period, their various satirical and commercial biases must also be taken into account.

Austen grew up alongside an increasing quantity of fashion journalism and fashion-related literature. A consumer 'evolution' – a term now generally more accepted than 'revolution'³⁶ – occurred in the eighteenth-century, spurring on what McKendric has called a "“fashion frenzy”".³⁷ The dissemination of texts, particularly fashion magazines, formed an essential part of this 'fashion frenzy'. What is more, the regular printing of fashion-plates and fashion journalism arose just as Austen was embarking on her literary career. Whilst all aspects of fashionable life provided fodder for popular publications, sartorial fashion was the dominant interest. As critics such as Lee Erickson have noted, the increase in such publications was materially permissible only as a direct result of increasingly rapid cycles of sartorial fashion towards the end of the century, which in turn increased the speed with which

³³ Hilary Davidson, 'Reconstructing Jane Austen's Silk Pelisse, 1812-1814', *Costume*, 49.2 (2015), 198-223 (p.201). In contrast to this assertion, Claudia L. Johnson argues that '[t]he belief in Austen's uncanny textual power has for the most part depended on the vanishment of her body, that one's presence has required the other's absence'. Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p.18.

³⁴ Davidson, p.202.

³⁵ See Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: The World of her Novels* (London: Francis Lincoln, 2000), p.96.

³⁶ Edward Copeland discusses the two terms as they are used by economic historians in *Women Writing About Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790 – 1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.7.

³⁷ McKendrick, p.54.

old clothes were discarded, thus augmenting ‘the supply of rags available for paper production’.³⁸

Although, as Raven argues, ‘discussion of the “ton” had been a staple for many essayists since the early eighteenth century’ there was, he insists, an unparalleled escalation in the output of fashion-centric literature from 1770 onwards.³⁹ The British adoption of the French term ‘ton’ (meaning vogue or fashion, and used to describe the fashionable world) only in 1769 somewhat challenges Raven’s assertion that its discussion had been a staple for years: whilst the concept itself was debated before 1769, essayists had lacked a vocabulary in which to situate their discussions of fashion.⁴⁰ The term’s coinage attests to the new, growing and often foreign language of fashion in the latter half of the eighteenth century that was promoted by novels, magazines and newspapers.

The burgeoning fashion industry resulted in the first fashion magazines, aimed primarily at women or ‘ladies’.⁴¹ The year 1770 marked the birth of the *Lady’s Magazine; or, polite and entertaining companion for the fair sex*, a magazine that put fashion at the forefront of its cause. Jennie Batchelor insists that ‘dress is so deeply implicated in the magazine’s conception of virtuous femininity that it is an implicit, or often explicit, subtext of countless articles, letters and fictions on various subjects throughout the magazine’s history’.⁴² It is not just dress, but the concept of fashion more generally (particularly within the *beau monde*) which dominates the magazine’s miscellaneous content. Due to its reliance upon free monthly contributions the magazine was at first unable to deliver its promise of frequent fashion-related news from London and, perhaps due to sheer expense, it similarly failed to provide monthly fashion-plates. However, by the turn of the century engravings of fashionable costume had become a monthly staple, running throughout the year.

³⁸ Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1815* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.7.

³⁹ James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p.161.

⁴⁰ ‘Ton’, n.3, definition a and b, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203136>> [accessed 13 August 2015].

⁴¹ Margaret Beetham discusses the significance of the magazines’ favoured term, ‘lady’, with its aristocratic connotations, as opposed to ‘woman’, in *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine 1800-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.27.

⁴² Jennie Batchelor, ‘Reclothing the Female Reader: Dress and the *Lady’s Magazine*’, *Women’s History Magazine*, 49 (2005), 11-20 (p.16).

The impact of this periodical, which placed fashion ‘at the very core of the [its] ideology’, should not be underestimated.⁴³ Whilst Copeland claims that “‘everybody” read the *Lady’s Magazine* [...] That is, everybody prosperous enough to afford a ticket to the local circulating library where current issues and copies of back years in bound volumes could both be obtained’, estimated figures suggest more precisely that it reached 16,000 readers at its height.⁴⁴ Certainly, the accessibility of the *Lady’s Magazine* meant that keeping *au courant* with latest fashions was not limited to an elite few, a Miss Ellen Weeton, a governess from the environs of Preston, being amongst its many readers. In a letter from 1810 she asks a friend to send her ‘patterns of fancy work; I am not quite sure whether they are in the workbag in the bottom, or the middle drawer, or bound up with the new *Lady’s Magazine* in the top drawer’, indicating that the periodical was ‘used’ as much as it was read for material.⁴⁵ Weeton’s practice of keeping the periodical ensconced in petticoats, dresses, workbags and coats attests to the perceived intimacy of text and dress, particularly in the consciousness of eighteenth-century women consumers.

The magazine’s success spurred on similar publications, including the *Lady’s Monthly Museum* in 1798, a publication which boasted, in the preface to its fifteenth volume, of reaching “FIFTY THOUSAND” readers,⁴⁶ and John Bell’s *La Belle Assemblée, or, Bell’s Court and Fashionable Magazine* in 1806, a periodical with which, according to the principled Alfred Percy of Maria Edgeworth’s 1814 novel, *Patronage*, readers were just as familiar as the ‘fashionable Daily Advertiser’, a popular newspaper that had been running since 1730.⁴⁷ Aside from these long-running periodicals was *The Gallery of Fashion*, which in 1794 became the ‘first English publication devoted entirely to fashion’, containing excellently produced and coloured fashion-plates, without the journalism, fiction and poetry that characterized

⁴³ Batchelor, ‘Reclothing the Female Reader’, p.16.

⁴⁴ Copeland, *Women Writing About Money*, p.119. Figures based on Jean Hunter’s ‘The *Lady’s Magazine* and the Study of Englishwomen in the Eighteenth-Century’, in *Newsletters to Newspapers: Eighteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. by Donovan Bond and W. Reynolds McLeod (Morgantown: West Virginia University, 1977), pp.103-17 (p.105). In terms of affordability, Beetham notes that the ‘*Lady’s Magazine* maintained its price at 6d. for several decades but the drift in the new century was upwards’ (p.27). This makes it cheaper than *La Belle Assemblée* (3s.) and the *Lady’s Monthly Museum* (1s. in 1806 and 1s. 6d. in 1813).

⁴⁵ Ellen Weeton to Miss Winkley, 11 May 1810, in *Journal of a Governess, 1807-1811*, 2 vols, ed. by Edward Hall (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), i, p.261.

⁴⁶ ‘Preface’, *LMM*, July 1805, pp.i-ii (p.ii).

⁴⁷ Maria Edgeworth, *Patronage*, ed. by John Mullan (London: Sort Of, 2011), p.241.

other fashion-centred magazines.⁴⁸ The proprietors of these publications presumably saw the production of such magazines as promising entrepreneurial opportunities. The bookseller, printer and publisher John Bell (who also owned a circulating library) was alert to the emerging tastes of the literary market, particularly of ‘the fashionables or would-be fashionables of London who were avid for scandal, gossip, and titillation’: as Adburgham notes, Bell’s ‘most famous newspaper enterprise was the’ popular and successful ‘*World, or Fashionable Gazette*, which ran from 1787 to 1794’.⁴⁹

These magazines, categorised in this thesis as fashion magazines due to their dominant concern with fashionability, appear to offer the reader a privileged insight into changing monthly fashions through textual and graphic descriptions of dress; the editor of *The Gallery of Fashion* stresses that ‘all the new dresses inserted in the GALLERY OF FASHION are not *imaginary* but *really existing* ones’.⁵⁰ However, these images hardly reflect the prevailing fashions amongst the entire British population. Cunnington argues that fashion-plates and articles were prone to ‘exaggeration’ and were often ‘thinly disguised advertisements’.⁵¹ McKendrick’s study has similarly shown that the images were ‘trade plates’ intended to ‘stimulate demand, to spread new fashions, to encourage imitation of the “taste-makers”’.⁵² The salesman is certainly visible beneath the veil of fashion ‘news’ in *La Belle Assemblée*: its hyperbolic commentary on Mrs Bell’s ‘*Chapeau Bras*’ offers the item as an ‘original and unrivalled head-dress of millinery’ and is followed by instructions on how and where to buy the accessory, which can be purchased from ‘the *Inventress only*’ in Bloomsbury Square, London.⁵³ Yet, these magazines also brought the latest London styles to the provinces; as I go on to discuss, the way in which these fashions were appropriated was a more complex matter.

In conjunction with the rise of the fashion periodical various fashion-related almanacs and pocketbooks were also published, which included advice for women,

⁴⁸ Alison Adburgham, *Women in Print: Women and Women’s Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1972), p.204.

⁴⁹ Adburgham, *Women in Print*, pp.178, 180. She notes that the first issue of the *Gazette* sold at least 3,000 copies (p.180).

⁵⁰ ‘An Advertisement’, *The Gallery of Fashion*, April 1795.

⁵¹ C. Willet Cunnington, *English Women’s Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p.3.

⁵² McKendrick, p.48

⁵³ ‘General Observations in Fashion and Dress’, *La Belle Assemblée*, February 1814, pp.38-39 (p.39). Subsequently referred to as *LBA*.

fashion-plates and charts to keep track of one's expenditure. *The Annual Present for the Ladies or a New and Fashionable Pocket Book*, *The Ladies' Companion or Complete Pocket Book*, *The Ladies' Mirror or Mental Companion*, *The Ladies New and Elegant Pocket Book* and *The London Fashionable and Polite Repository* were all produced between 1771 and the early 1800s and priced reasonably at one shilling.⁵⁴ Batchelor notes how these 'pocket books implicitly defended their interest in fashion by apparently subordinating this interest to a dominant moral and economic framework'.⁵⁵ Whilst one page of the pocketbook encouraged women's consumption of fashionable commodities with engraved fashion-plates, the next page would serve as a severe reminder not to spend excessively. Austen kept her monthly outgoings in check with the aid of one such pocketbook: still surviving are two pages from an unidentified book, headed 'Memorandums at the End of the Year 1807. December, 12th Month, 31 Days', in which Austen lists her monthly outgoings for clothing, washing, letters and travel amongst other expenditure.⁵⁶

Austen also encountered the nascent fashion periodical; she borrows and parodies the titles, plot formulae and character names that appeared in the fiction of both the *Lady's Magazine* and the *Lady's Monthly Museum*.⁵⁷ Crucially, these magazines offered a gauge of current tastes in all areas of fashionable culture, from clothing to literature. Austen and her female relatives had a shared knowledge of these fashion periodicals. Le Faye contends that Austen's mother subscribed to the new *Lady's Monthly Museum*.⁵⁸ Similarly, Fanny Knight, a niece whom Austen frequently accompanied on shopping excursions and who, in 1813, she jovially lamented was apt to 'chuse [*sic*] in a hurry & make bad bargains', owned a three-shilling 1814 copy of *La Belle Assemblée*.⁵⁹ These periodicals, which aimed to attract

⁵⁴ Doris Langley Moore discusses the fashion pocketbook in *Fashion through Fashion Plates 1771-1970* (London: Ward Lock, 1971), p.13.

⁵⁵ Jennie Batchelor, 'Fashion and Frugality: Eighteenth-Century Pocket Books for Women', *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 32 (2003), 1-18 (p.11).

⁵⁶ The pages are currently held at Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. As only two pages remain, it is unknown in which pocket book they were originally bound. The pages recording these expenses are reprinted by the Jane Austen Society in 'Report for the Year 1980', in *Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society, 1976-1985* (Chippenham: Jane Austen Soc., 1989), pp.143-51 (p.147).

⁵⁷ See Edward Copeland, 'Money Talks: Jane Austen and the *Lady's Magazine*', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, ed. by J. David Grey (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp.153-71 (p.160) and Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.112.

⁵⁸ Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, p.112.

⁵⁹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 23-24 September 1813, p.225. Mary Hafner-Laney notes that Fanny Knight's copy of *La Belle Assemblée* still survives, in "I was tempted by a pretty coloured

as a wide a readership as possible, from the ‘housewife’ to ‘the peeress’, especially those living outside of London, represent one of many ways in which women were, by the end of the eighteenth century, expected to engage in fashionable culture.⁶⁰ These texts heightened the fashion-consciousness of women, seeking to frame fashionable consumption within a language of economy and virtue.

1.1 Increased Spending Power

Several hypotheses have emerged to explain why, by the eighteenth century, ‘large numbers in society felt that they must be in fashion, whether they liked it or not, even to the point of ridicule’.⁶¹ Whilst historians agree that both cycles of fashion and participation in fashionable culture increased in the late eighteenth century, the social and economic explanations for this development have been numerous and contradictory. However, as Amanda Vickery reminds readers, we must be wary of ‘all-embracing accounts of consumer motivation’.⁶² As Campbell has argued, Thorstein Veblen’s influential notion of conspicuous consumption and emulation theory, as put forward in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), cannot explain the ‘fashion frenzy’ which erupted in the latter part of the eighteenth century, as ‘no good reason is given to explain why people should become more actively emulative

muslin”: Jane Austen and the Art of Being Fashionable’, *Persuasions*, 32 (2010), 135-143. Whilst more expensive than the *Lady’s Monthly Museum* or the *Lady’s Magazine*, Beetham notes that ‘[w]hat distinguished [*La Belle Assemblée*] from its rivals, however, was the quality of its production and its coverage of “fashion”’ (p.32).

⁶⁰ ‘Address to the fair sex’, *Lady’s Magazine*, August 1770. Subsequently referred to as *LM*. In a blog written as part of the Leverhulme-funded project, ‘The *Lady’s Magazine* (1770-1818): Understanding the Emergence of a Genre’, led by Jennie Batchelor at Kent University, Koenraad Claes notes that the contributors to the magazine and the magazine’s readers were based all over Britain, and observes that ‘although every region of England appears to be represented, a disproportionately large part of the located contributors lived close to the magazine’s publishing office in central London’. Koenraad Claes, ‘Location, Location, Location: The Geographical Distribution of Reader-Contributors to the *LM* (Part 1)’, *The Lady’s Magazine (1770-1818): Understanding the Emergence of a Genre* (University of Kent, April 2015) <<http://blogs.kent.ac.uk/ladys-magazine/2015/04/>> [accessed 1 July 2015].

⁶¹ McKendrick, p.40.

⁶² Vickery makes this assertion with reference to Lorna Weatherhill’s research on eighteenth-century inventory data. Amanda Vickery, ‘Women and the World of Goods: a Lancashire Consumer and Her Possessions, 1751 -1781’, in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.274-301 (p.276).

at this time'.⁶³ Whilst emulation was certainly not the root of the rising fashion system this does not mean that forms of imitation did not exist at all. When Frederick Rehberg's book of the 'attitudes' of the celebrated Emma Hamilton was published in 1794 women 'dashed' to buy it, longing to see her statuesque poses and 'borrow ideas for the classical style of dress' from the trend-setter whose novelty 'Trafalgar Dress' was pictured in *La Belle Assemblée* in 1806.⁶⁴



Figure 1.1 'Grace is in all their steps': Engraving of Emma Hamilton performing her dance, the 'tarentella', and wearing the newly-fashionable white muslin neoclassical dress. Print by Mariano Bovi (London, 1796). British Museum.

Here emulation emerges as a form of celebrity-worship, a phenomenon which is undoubtedly distinct from the proposal that the lower classes only adopted fashions – sartorial, cultural and otherwise – that were set by the social elite or *beau monde*.

⁶³ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) p.34.

⁶⁴ Kate Williams, *England's Mistress: The Infamous Life of Emma Hamilton* (London: Hutchinson, 2006), pp.251, 323. See Frederick Rehberg, *Drawings Faithfully Copied From Nature at Naples* (London, 1794).

Vickery's studies of eighteenth-century consumption have helped nullify the 'emulation model' which often, when it comes to an explanation of the dissemination of fashion and taste, provides what she calls a 'traditional interpretation', a narrative 'whereby modes, manners and artistic ideas reached the London court from Paris, filtered out through the gentry to the provinces and trickled down the lowly via uppity tradespeople and artful servants'.⁶⁵ Vickery's study of Elizabeth Shackleton, a linen draper's daughter from rural Lancashire, suggests that employers bestowed gifts of clothing, including their second-hand clothes, upon servants, yet she is wary of the assumption that 'wearing a Lady's dress made a parlour maid look, feel or get treated like a lady'.⁶⁶ Rather, she concludes that, 'the strenuous effort servants made to retrieve their wages and their wardrobe' before quitting the home, or indeed running away, indicates that 'clothing was seen as an important part of their earnings, rather than merely the coveted equipment of social emulation'.⁶⁷ The social emulation model cannot completely explain how women and men viewed fashions. This model in fact emphasised in eighteenth-century rhetoric, promoted by texts such as Dorothea Sophia Mackie's *A Picture of the Changes of Fashion* (1818), which insists on 'the great change in the dress and manner of Ladies maids' who wear 'their mistresses cloaths [*sic*] without the least alteration'.⁶⁸ *Mansfield Park*'s Mrs Norris echoes Mackie's discontent, applauding her neighbour for turning away 'housemaids for wearing white gowns' (*MP*, p.84).

The emulation theory is problematic precisely because it takes statements such as these at face value. There is evidence that such comments grew out of a widening participation in fashion and a steady demise of distinguishing uniforms to separate classes. Labourers of the period, for instance, gradually abandoned 'heavy wools in dark browns, greens, blues and blacks, leather breeches, stuff petticoats' and exchanged 'duffle cloaks' for linens and cottons.⁶⁹ Yet it must also be remembered that between the 1770s and 1820s it was not only the lower classes who

⁶⁵ Vickery, 'Women and the World of Goods', p.275.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.284.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.284.

⁶⁸ Dorothea Sophia Mackie, *A Picture of the Changes of Fashion* (London, 1818), pp.27-8.

⁶⁹ Beverly Lemire, 'Second-Hand Beaux and "red-armed Belles": Conflict and the Creation of Fashions in England, c. 1660 – 1800', *Continuity and Change*, 15 (2000), 391-417 (p.395). Lemire notes that uniquely amongst other European countries, Britain differed in that 'No one group had a specific exclusive garb. One's social station or type of work did not impose an immutable costume' in *Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660 – 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.166

wanted to - and were able to – ‘switch from a more static traditional garb’ and ‘express the desire to construct an appearance defined as fashionable within their milieu’⁷⁰, but also those men of the upper echelons, for instance, who, after the French Revolution, decided to adopt ‘garments which were in origin working class, such as the trousers or pantaloons’⁷¹, yet who did so using the finest fabrics.

On the one hand, as Woodworth asserts, fashion ‘cuts across social, public/private, and gender boundaries’ and can be ‘attained and maintained through emulation and sufficient money or credit’; however, fashion also works to reinforce social distinctions.⁷² As Christopher Breward maintains: there is a ‘danger in reading evidence of increased luxury consumption in terms of a levelling or democratisation of taste’.⁷³ With the aid of social and anthropological theorists such as Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu, critics to whom historians such as Vickery and Breward turn, it emerges that social distinction is in fact more frequently enforced than blurred by fashions, whether these are vogues in clothing, interior decoration, reading or leisure activities.⁷⁴ In turning to Mauss and Bourdieu, Vickery and Breward implicitly demonstrate what fashion theorists have recently suggested: that there is ‘no one set of ideas or no single conceptual framework with which fashion might be defined, analysed and critically explained’ and thus fashion theory must draw from a range of theoretical disciplines, all of which offer ways for conceptualising the complex mechanisms of fashion.⁷⁵ Equally, as Vickery and Breward show, these theories can enlighten our understanding of the historical period in which Austen was writing. Rather than levelling sartorial tastes, it becomes evident that increased participation in fashion only confirmed that there was no ‘single standard of taste’ that suited all social and geographical groups: different fashions emerged in distinct demographics.⁷⁶ Breward contends that the lower classes, whilst ‘undoubtedly receptive to the attractions of novelty and an engagement with the fashion cycle’,

⁷⁰ Lemire, ‘Second-Hand Beaux’, p.392.

⁷¹ Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (Oxford and New York: Berg, [1986] 2003), p.113.

⁷² Woodworth, p.137.

⁷³ Breward, *Culture of Fashion*, p.131.

⁷⁴ See Breward, *Culture of Fashion*, p.131 and Vickery, ‘Women and the World of Goods’, p.278. They refer to Pierre Bourdieu’s influential *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) and Marcel Mauss’ equally seminal study, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (originally published in French in 1925).

⁷⁵ Malcolm Barnard, ‘Introduction’, in *Fashion Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Malcolm Barnard (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.1-14 (p.7).

⁷⁶ Lemire, ‘Second-Hand Beaux and “red-armed Belles”’, p.400.

consumed in a way that gave ‘substance to a particular and individual plebeian identity’.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Vickery’s study of Elizabeth Shackleton suggests that rather than unthinkingly emulating elite London styles in clothing, chinaware and furniture, consumers, particularly of the middling ranks, carefully chose particular elements of fashion that were suited to their own position and taste.⁷⁸ Likewise, Lemire insists that the ‘latest London dress was not always appropriate in rural communities’, as is satirized in the 1777 image of ‘The Farmer’s Daughter’s Return from London’.⁷⁹ Fashion was, for the eighteenth-century consumer, ‘inescapable but segmented’.⁸⁰ Fashions were altered and selected according to one’s sex, location, class, income and also one’s age, the latter being a particular concern for women.⁸¹



Figure 1.2 ‘The Farmer's Daughter's return from London’. Print by William Humphrey (London, 1777). British Museum.

⁷⁷ Breward, *Culture of Fashion*, p.137.

⁷⁸ See Vickery ‘Women and the World of Goods’, pp. 290-91

⁷⁹ Lemire, *Fashion’s Favourite*, p.64.

⁸⁰ Amanda Vickery, ‘Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 52.4 (2013), 858-86 (p.862).

⁸¹ See Vickery, ‘Mutton Dressed as Lamb?’, p.862.

One important reason for widened participation in fashionable dress was the increased variety of affordable fabrics that came about due to technological developments, including new printing methods and the invention of the spinning mule in the last quarter of the century.⁸² Periodicals and almanacs continued to remark upon this change well into the first decade of the nineteenth-century, the author of the 1812 edition of *Crosby's Ladies' New Royal Pocket Companion* noting that '[a]t this period of universal talent, articles of dress may be purchased at a price so insignificant as hardly to be named'.⁸³ Here, the crude narrative of 'trickling down' fashions is complicated by evidence that, faced with an astonishing variety of cheap fabrics, fashionable consumer practices were being led by the middling classes, defined in this period as a group with an average income of around £100 per annum by the turn of the century (up to £700 at the higher end).⁸⁴

Lemire illustrates the fashion obsessions of middling-ranks with reference to Barbara Johnson, a vicar's daughter from Buckinghamshire, who took fabric samples and fashion-plates from periodicals and pocketbooks and copied them in her own 'Sample Book' between 1746 and 1823.⁸⁵ Fashions in clothing, Lemire argues, now 'more than in any previous time' became a 'shared attraction for much of society' and for women like Barbara Johnson these fashion-plates, whilst occasionally exaggerated, 'presented the possible'.⁸⁶ Armed with fashion magazines, and cheaper fabrics, the 'previously fashion-starved and parochial rural classes', as well 'urban tradesmen and professionals', used their 'extra spending power' to lead the 'widening of consumer activity' of the fashion system.⁸⁷

⁸² See in particular Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, p.94. Antje Blank calculates that 'cotton wool imports to Britain increased exponentially from 6.8 million lbs in 1780 to 99.3 million lbs in 1815'. Antje Blank, 'Dress', in *Jane Austen in Context*, pp.234-51 (p.234).

⁸³ *Crosby's Ladies' New Royal Pocket Companion* (London: Crosby and Co., 1812), p.31.

⁸⁴ Berg, pp.219, 224.

⁸⁵ Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, pp.173-4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.174-5.

⁸⁷ Breward, *Culture of Fashion*, pp.129, 136, 139.

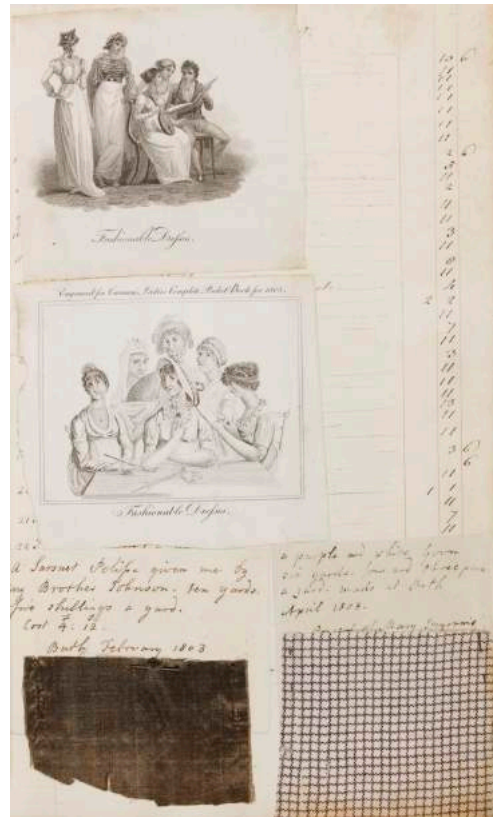


Figure 1.3 Page from Barbara Johnson's sample book showing fashion-plates and samples from 1803. Victoria and Albert Museum.

Characterised as a particularly feminine pursuit, it is no coincidence that fashion was also seen as acutely frivolous. One does not have to look far to find publications disputing the triviality of fashion. Such texts had to justify their existence by defending themselves against claims of frivolity. In 1795 *The Gallery of Fashion* admits that ‘however trifling it may appear at first view to the eye of the philosopher’ a preoccupation with dress can be defended by the future interest that such a record might provide in some ‘remote period’ in the future, claiming a space in ‘the first libraries of Europe’.⁸⁸ Time, the magazine suggests, validates a potentially trivial subject by offering it historical significance. Some years later, the writer Emma Parker, whose defence of novels in *Elfrida, Heiress of Belgrove* (1810) has been likened to Austen’s own vindication of the novel in *Northanger Abbey*, published the paradoxically titled treatise, *Important Trifles: Chiefly Appropriate to*

⁸⁸ ‘Advertisement’, *The Gallery of Fashion*, April 1795.

Females on their Entrance into Society (1817).⁸⁹ Parker attempts to ‘convince’ those women who have ‘attained all the advantages of a liberal education’ that ‘much importance may be justly attached to some particulars, which they have probably been in the habit of supposing unworthy of their consideration’, amongst them ‘Dress and Manners’.⁹⁰ It aggrandizes the ‘trifling’ subject by pointing to the ‘exercise of judgement’ that is ‘as essential in guiding our dress, and controlling our manners, as in enabling us to decide on the most important action of our lives’.⁹¹ Fashion is thus allied to the thoughtful, rather than the vacuous:

To attach any importance to the outward appearance or study the effect of dress and manner, may perhaps be deemed subjects beneath the consideration of a reflective mind. Yet is it precisely by a mind accustomed to reflect, that these things are discovered to be of consequence.⁹²

But fashion was not, as Cumming asserts in her critique of Veblen, ‘indicative of the tastes of idle and mindless women with rich husbands’.⁹³ Not only did fashion for many women require judicious selection and economy in navigating the pitfalls of consumption, but many fashion consumers were men. Male participation in fashion was not limited to the type of wealthy hedonistic men depicted satirically by the *Lady’s Magazine* as being afraid ‘of not appearing in *Bon-Ton*’ in their urban milieu,⁹⁴ but also by gentlemen such as James Woodforde, a country parson, who notes in his diary in 1774 that he ‘Had a new Wig brought home this morning [...] it is a more fashionable one than my old one, a one curled wig with two curls of the side. I like it, and it was liked by most People at dinner’.⁹⁵ Whilst men and women could both enjoy fashion, Adburgham speculates that perhaps *Le Beau Mode* (1806-10), conceived by John Bell’s son as a rival publication to his father’s successful *La Belle Assemblée*, failed precisely because it aimed to attract

⁸⁹ See Isobel Grundy, ‘Parker, Emma (fl. 1809-1817)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21297>> [accessed 8 September 2015]. Subsequently abbreviated to *ODNB*.

⁹⁰ Emma Parker, *Important Trifles: Chiefly Appropriate to Females on their Entrance into Society* (London: T. Egerton, 1817), pp.ix-x.

⁹¹ Parker, *Important Trifles*, p.66.

⁹² *Ibid*, p.65.

⁹³ Valerie Cumming, *Understanding Fashion History* (London: B. T. Batsford, 2004), p.34.

⁹⁴ A Character’, *LM*, August 1770, pp.21-22 (p.22).

⁹⁵ James Woodforde, 4 January 1774, in *The Diary of a Country Parson, 1758-1802*, ed. by John Bresford (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999), p.61.

both sexes; it coincided with a spate of unisex fashion periodicals which were all ‘short-lived’.⁹⁶ Whilst explicitly shared pages of male and female fashions were unappealing to reading audiences, it is evident from the letters of the *Lady’s Magazine* that men did read and contribute to the magazine which intended, somewhat impossibly, both to promote fashion and to keep women’s consumption in check. In a letter to the editor of the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*, one writer acknowledges that although the

publication is professedly the employment of the female pen, yet, as the improvement of the *sex in general* is the grand outline of the plan, I flatter myself that whatever may tend to the accomplishment of that design, will find admission into a work founded upon so liberal a principle, even though it should appear under the unfavourable auspices of a *male* writer.⁹⁷

However, identifying the gender of contributing readers is complex: women sometimes contributed under male pseudonyms, thus allowing them to ‘participate in debates’ deemed unsuitable for women ‘without losing their respectability’.⁹⁸ These magazines enabled women to define themselves, however covertly, as literary consumers *and* producers within the realm of fashion, whilst the male readers and writers entering this ‘feminised space’, were expected, as Beetham’s study of women’s magazines argues, ‘to write or read “as women”’.⁹⁹ Whilst the magazines remained gynocentric in their discussions of fashion, they permitted both men and women to textually reimagine and rewrite their gender in relation to fashion.

⁹⁶ Adburgham, *Women in Print*, p.223.

⁹⁷ ‘To the Editors of the Monthly Museum’, *LMM* August 1798, pp.136-41 (p.136).

⁹⁸ Koenraad Claes, “‘My Signature – but mum! – is _____’”: Pseudonymous Authorship in the *Lady’s Magazine*, *The ‘Lady’s Magazine’ (1770-1818): Understanding the Emergence of a Genre* (University of Kent, May 2015) <<http://blogs.kent.ac.uk/ladys-magazine/2015/05/11/>> [accessed 1 July 2015]. Claes is currently working on the particularly difficult task of author attribution in the *Lady’s Magazine*. He has also noted the frequent use of gender-neutral signatures, such as ‘A Constant Reader’ and ‘A Friend’. For more evidence of women’s use of male pseudonyms see Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron, *Women’s Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman’s Magazine* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1991), p.71. In her study of the *LM*, Hunter insists that ‘true identities are almost invariably hidden behind pseudonyms’, yet she maintains that a ‘substantial number of the correspondents were male’ (p.108). E. W. Pitcher has identified various authors of both the *Lady’s Magazine* and the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*, suggesting, for instance, that the writer William Mugleston was the author of ‘The Matron’, published in the *Lady’s Magazine* between January 1774 and April 1791, and signed with the pseudonym ‘Mrs. Martha Grey’. Edward W. R. Pitcher, ‘William Mugleston and “The Matron”: Authorship of a *Lady’s Magazine* Essay Serial, 1774-91’, *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 12.1 (1999), 28-29.

⁹⁹ Beetham, pp.2, 21.

1.2 Taste and Fashion

Debates between contributors filled the pages of fashion magazines, each one seeking to pronounce judgement on the relationship between fashion and morality. One contributor of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* argued for a direct link between 'men of fashion' and the 'disreputation of matrimony' and the general degeneration in behaviour towards women.¹⁰⁰ Fashion emerged for many as the moral disease of the times. In a letter published by Anne MacVicar Grant in her popular *Letters from the Mountains* (1807), the Scottish author declares that her own children will be taught to spurn 'false taste and affectation', learning to reject the 'love of vanity and dress [which] rages like contagion' in fashionable seminaries.¹⁰¹ Many contributors to magazines sought to treat fashions in dress as earlier periodicals such as the *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* had treated fashions 'in "culture" (literature, drama, opera, music, painting)': 'as avenues for sociocultural reform'.¹⁰² This reform centred upon the language of taste and beauty. The fashion magazine's interest in these issues derived from a branch of aesthetic philosophy that had gained increasing influence since the publication of Addison's 'Pleasures of the Imagination' series (1712) in *The Spectator*. In his series Addison, who is often invoked by the fashion magazines of the late eighteenth century, attempted to analyse beauty by locating 'the several necessities from whence [...] Pleasure and Displeasure arises'.¹⁰³ Addison's focus on the sensory perceptions of pain and pleasure in relation to beauty would later come to influence Edmund Burke's conceptualisation of taste as outlined in his second edition of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ 'On the Prevailing Inattention of Young Men of Fashion, and the Disreputation of Matrimony', *LMM*, July 1799, pp.3-6

¹⁰¹ Anne MacVicar Grant to Bell Ewing Smith, 18 August 1785, in *Letters from the Mountains; Being the Real Correspondence of A Lady Between the Years 1773 and 1807*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, & Orme, 1807), ii, p.94-5.

¹⁰² Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity and Gender in 'The Tatler' and 'The Spectator'* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p.207.

¹⁰³ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 9 vols (London: J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper, 1753), vi, no. 413, Tuesday June 24 1712, pp.70-2 (p.70), in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (Gale Cengage) <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/retrieve.do>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, intro. by Adam Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Reprintings of Addison's writings throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in editions such as *The British Essayists*, which reprinted *The Spectator* in its entirety in 1803 and again in 1817, attest to his enduring influence.¹⁰⁵ Alongside Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, Addison had contributed to a branch of philosophy in which aesthetics and ethics were interlocked. In the writings which followed, fashion emerged as an implicit antithesis to the search for a standard of aesthetic taste. Hugh Blair corroborates this opposition in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* of 1784, in which he urges his audience to exercise critical judgement in art and reading, arguing that real discernment of beauty - the 'offspring of good sense and refined taste' - will 'preserve us from that blind and implicit veneration which would confound their beauties and faults in our esteem. It teaches us, in a word, to admire and to blame with judgment, and not to follow the crowd blindly'.¹⁰⁶

Richard Payne Knight, one of many contributors to the 'taste' debate, makes Blair's aesthetic opposition explicit in *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805). The treatise verbally echoes Blair: he attacks 'fashion' which is 'universally and indiscriminately adopted upon the blind principle of imitation'.¹⁰⁷ 'Is there then no real and permanent principle of beauty?' Knight asks, only to conclude that 'there are certain standards of excellence, which every generation of civilized man, subsequent to their first production, has uniformly recognized in theory'.¹⁰⁸ For these writers, fashion, or the blind trends of the 'crowd' are, as historian Berg articulates, 'associated with the irrational and impermanent', standing in opposition to 'aesthetically based reason'.¹⁰⁹ Their arguments echo David Hume's earlier postulations in his complex aesthetic thesis, 'Of the Standard of Taste' (1757), in which good sense legitimises an objective and consistent standard of taste, a concept

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence E. Klein discusses the popularity and influence of Addison throughout the eighteenth century in 'Addisonian Afterlives: Joseph Addison in Eighteenth-Century Culture', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 35 (2012), 101-118 (p.104).

¹⁰⁶ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 3rd edn, 3 vols (London: A. Strahan, T. Cadell, 1787), i, p.11.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London, 1805), p.2.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

¹⁰⁹ Berg, p.250.

which does not fluctuate like fashion, but is ‘shaped by historical circumstances’, thus remaining ‘valid for generations’.¹¹⁰

The impermanence of fashion, which appeared not to follow any rational rules, was a common complaint of writers: the narrator of the satirical novel *Bath and London* (1811) alludes to Greek mythology in characterising fashion as shape-shifting and ever-changing, mocking the heroine’s ‘quick adoption of the peculiar graces of the modern Proteus – *ton*’.¹¹¹ Dependent upon a system of obsolescence, fashion promoted a concept of beauty that was constantly in flux in order to satisfy consumer desires. As Perrot has argued, succinctly capturing the essence of theories of fashion in the long eighteenth century, fashion ‘produces and reproduces a distinguishable product by systematically rejecting – and debasing – the formerly “beautiful” – declared “out of style” – so as to praise today’s “beautiful” – dubbed “in”’.¹¹² As such, fashion appeared to undermine the empirical ideal of taste: change and novelty proved to be two fundamental principles of the fashion system. Hence, unlike beauty, which was ostensibly eternal and emphatically moral, fashion appeared to ‘have no inherent meaning beyond serving a means to an end; namely, the eternal perpetuation of the system of newness that depends on the desire to acquire each new mode’.¹¹³

Between 1809 and 1812 Maria Edgeworth, one of the best-selling and most popular authors at that time, published a series of narratives entitled *Tales of Fashionable Life*, in six volumes.¹¹⁴ The narratives, which exposed the vices of the fashionable world, from gambling to adultery, were critically acclaimed and commercially popular: Edgeworth received £1050 from the series.¹¹⁵ In *The Absentee* (1809), the seventh narrative in *Tales of Fashionable Life*, Edgeworth offers a damning portrait of the woman of fashion in the form of Lady Dashfort who, in a

¹¹⁰ Hans Reiss, ‘(ii) The Rise of Aesthetics from Baumgarten to Humboldt’, in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume 4: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. by H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1997] 2008), pp. 658-80 (p.663). Noggle discusses more fully Hume’s representation of the historical function of taste (pp.96-122).

¹¹¹ [Anon.], *Bath and London*, 4 vols (London, A. K. Newman and Co, 1811), ii, p.32.

¹¹² Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Richard Bienvenu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.10.

¹¹³ Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.6.

¹¹⁴ See Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.18.

¹¹⁵ See W. J. McCormack, ‘Edgeworth, Maria (1768-1849)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8476?docPos=1>> [accessed 8 September 2015].

series of underhand manoeuvrings, seeks to find a husband for her daughter. Lady Dashfort epitomises fashion's rejection of permanent standards of taste.¹¹⁶ Her pleasure, as the leader of fashion, comes from 'her power in perverting the public taste', 'public taste' signifying the fashion or the trends of the crowd.¹¹⁷ Lady Dashfort is a legislator – or rather dictator – of taste:

she set the fashion: fashion, which converts the ugliest dress into what is beautiful and charming, governs the public mode in morals and in manners; and thus, when great talents and high rank combine, they can debase or elevate the public taste.¹¹⁸

Edgeworth's narrative echoed the kinds of attacks that had been levelled against fashion for several decades: Ralph Schomberg's *Fashion* (1775), a popular satirical poem that went through several editions, was specifically 'Addressed to the Ladies of Great Britain' and criticised the irrational and idle followers of fashion who 'to the Elegant, prefer the New'.¹¹⁹ Elegance had become synonymous with good taste, whilst novelty was debased as the underlying force of fashion and a 'superficial' aesthetic category.¹²⁰ In 1814 Charlotte Campbell Bury, lady-in-waiting to Princess Caroline, mused upon the interplay between taste and fashion, stating, 'when fashion is subject to taste, I like it, but when it is despotic and capricious, and subverts all taste, I cannot endure it. To my idea, the more nearly women's dress assimilates to the antique, the more beautiful'.¹²¹ Lady Charlotte uses the language of political authoritarianism to describe changes in her wardrobe, showing the extent to which the contemporary use of fashion as a 'trope signifying the corruptness of the political system' had been disseminated through texts such as Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).¹²² The vicissitudes of fashion were despotic and unpredictable.

¹¹⁶ See Clara Tuite, 'Maria Edgeworth's Déjà Voodoo: Interior Decoration, Retroactivity, and Colonial Allegory in *The Absentee*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 20.3 (2008), 385-413 (p.412).

¹¹⁷ Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, ed. by W. J. McCormack and Kim Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.100.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Ralph Schomberg, *Fashion a Poem* (Bath, 1795), p.5.

¹²⁰ See Burke's chapter on 'Novelty' in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p.29.

¹²¹ Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury, 1 August 1814, in *The Diary of a Lady in Waiting*, ed. by A. Francis Steuart, 2 vols (London: Bodley Head, 1908), i, pp.265-6.

¹²² Fiona Price, *Revolutions in Taste, 1773-1818* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p.48.

Like Richard Payne Knight, Lady Charlotte acknowledges the caprice of fashion, which claims one style beautiful only to pronounce it ugly the next season, yet her own taste happens to be for the dress *à l'antique*, conveniently also the most fashionable style of dress.¹²³ Whilst Schomberg mocked women who would adopt the latest fashion in spite of its tastelessness, letters and diaries are full of women anxiously embracing fashions they judge to be ugly. The struggle to align good taste with being 'in' becomes an irreconcilable fact of fashionable living for some. In London in 1790 Lady Sheffield, wife of the wealthy owner of Sheffield Place in Sussex, writes to her eldest daughter, the Baroness of Alderley, fretting that 'Mrs. Coxe's Regiment of Caps' are 'are all so fashionable' that they are 'totally useless' to her, 'but I have picked up a decent Cap at one of Mrs. Coxe's millinery friends, that must do; it is the most fashionable sort of undress Cap, but I shall look a scarecrow!'.¹²⁴ In spite of its perceived ugliness, Lady Sheffield insists on wearing the 'most fashionable' cap she can find: aesthetic pleasure is subordinate to the pleasure and perceived necessity of being 'in style'.

Paradoxically, then, and perhaps rather uncomfortably for these eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophers, the fashion system - epitomised by its cycles of changing definitions of beauty - appeared to provide a new standard of taste and elegance. Campbell affirms this, maintaining that 'fashion became the *de facto* answer to the problem which none of the eighteenth-century writers on taste could solve; that is, how to find a commonly agreed, aesthetic standard', the 'criterion of stimulative pleasure' being that of 'novelty'.¹²⁵ Such an attitude stands in stark contrast to the eighteenth-century search for an unchanging standard of taste, which, according to Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste', is a result of a delicate sensibility, a rational mind, and impartial judgement.¹²⁶ However, fashion magazines of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries appropriated the language of aesthetic philosophy in which aesthetics and ethics are united, thus allying taste and sensibility with fashion in order to provide a counter-narrative to the notion of fashion as frivolous and irrational. Throughout fashion magazines one encounters a

¹²³ See Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry*, p.4.

¹²⁴ Abigail Holroyd, Lady Sheffield, to Maria Josepha Holroyd Stanley, Baroness of Alderley, 25 January 1790, in *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd*, ed. by Jane Henrietta Adeane (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), p.26.

¹²⁵ Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, p.158.

¹²⁶ David Hume, *Four Dissertations* (London: A. Millar, 1757), pp.202-40.

Shaftesburian discourse of sensibility, virtue and taste. In the February 1799 issue of the *Lady's Monthly Magazine*, amongst the engravings of the 'Cabinet of Fashion' (the 'Cabinet of Taste' in *La Belle Assemblée*) and the reviews of 'Female Literature', the reader is confronted by a treatise 'On Taste' alongside an article on 'How to Cultivate and Improve the Sensibility of the Heart' in which taste is emphasised as an essential element of female education.¹²⁷

Merged with an appeal to taste, the magazine offers to cultivate the sensibility of its readers, which was 'a crucial moral quality'.¹²⁸ Burke underscores the association between moral virtue and taste in his 'Introduction on Taste' in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, asserting that good taste arises from 'sensibility and judgment'.¹²⁹ As such, bad taste was indicative of 'a moral lapse, whilst correspondingly virtue became an aesthetic quality, such that, in turn, any moral lapse was "bad taste"'.¹³⁰ The magazine's evocation of sensibility draws from these debates concerning the interplay between aesthetics and morality. There is a general agreement amongst these magazines that one could discern a woman's sensibility merely from reflecting on her sartorial choices, one commentator of *La Belle Assemblée* arguing in 1806 that

Women ought not only to adopt colours as suit their complexions, but they should likewise take care that these colours harmonise with each other. It is particularly by this that females of taste may be discovered; habituated to dress with propriety, they possess that delicacy of feeling, that exquisite sense, which admits nothing false – nothing discordant.¹³¹

The belief that elegance (good taste) is, as it is argued in one pocketbook, 'inseparable from propriety' and that dress is an 'index of the wearer's well-regulated mind' affirms the assimilation of fashion into the discourse of taste and

¹²⁷ Edward W. R. Pitcher notes that this latter article is 'bafflingly inconsistent in its principles and assumptions' regarding sensibility. Edward W. R. Pitcher, *The LMM' First Series: 1798-1806: An Annotated Index of Signatures and Ascriptions* (Lewiston, N.Y. and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), p.10.

¹²⁸ Colin Campell, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century England: a character-action approach', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, pp.40-57 (p.49).

¹²⁹ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p.23.

¹³⁰ Campell, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption', p.49.

¹³¹ 'Ladies' Toilette', *LBA*, March 1806, pp.79-80 (p.80).

ethics.¹³² By aligning dress with a language of sensibility, these magazines were able to raise the ‘trifles’ of fashion to paramount importance. As we have seen, Austen astringently reinterprets this aggrandizement and, as I shall discuss in my next chapter, plays on the association between sentimental ‘delicacy’ and fashion.

This discourse was adopted not simply to defend fashion but also to advise readers on fashionable consumption; readers were offered a combined moral and aesthetic instruction. The *Lady’s Magazine* promises its readers that it promotes moral reflection and improves ‘Sentiments’:

THE LADY’S MAGAZINE, by uniting the Precepts of Wisdom with Examples of Virtue, habituates the Mind to the Contemplation and Love of Moral Rectitude, and contains in its various Composition such a mixture of important Truths, improving Sentiments, and useful or entertaining Information, as render it no less adapted to Perusal in the more uniform Tracts of Life than in its great vicissitudes.

It is now our Intention to give, occasionally, Prints of Ladies elegantly dressed in the prevailing Mode of London and Paris; which, for Elegance, will far surpass any Engraving ever given in any other Magazine.¹³³

Attempting to combine fashion with the cultivation of ‘domestic morality’, the task of the *Lady’s Magazine* was, as Batchelor asserts, ‘arduous’.¹³⁴ Notably, the magazine sets this discourse of sensibility and fashion within the marketplace: the moral instruction provided by the magazine, which can be applied to various aspects of life, as well as the new focus on fashion-plates, offer the magazine as good value for money.

As Vickery suggests, invoking taste alongside props such as ‘French silks’ and ‘chinoiserie’ enabled eighteenth-century writers to reconcile wealth with virtue, yet there were ‘no attempts to differentiate between tasteful and tasteless teacups in a way that would inform the consumer’.¹³⁵ The *Lady’s Magazine* does, however, attempt to do just this: it spouts a language of aesthetics and taste and it intertwines this with the language of the marketplace, offering simultaneously to teach its readers

¹³² ‘A Lady of Distinction’, *The Mirror of the Graces: or, The English Lady’s Costume* (London: B. Crosby & Co., 1811), p.62-3.

¹³³ ‘Address to the Public’, *LM*, January 1789, pp.3-4 (p.3).

¹³⁴ Batchelor, ‘Reclothing the Female Reader’, p.14.

¹³⁵ Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p.167.

good virtue and good taste with detailed references to clothes. McNeil and Miller assert that it was magazines that first ‘introduced the lofty concept of taste into the everyday’ aiming not to ‘make accessible aesthetic concepts such as beauty and the sublime’ but rather to help its readers decide ‘which latest millinery or head-dress was in the “best possible taste”’.¹³⁶ In 1808 the *Lady’s Magazine* targets a particular style of tasteless dress:

We cannot help remarking that we have of late seen some few attempts to introduce the long waist: we can only say we sincerely hope the good sense and taste of our fair country-women will prevent so Gothic and barbarous a fashion from becoming general.¹³⁷

Comically, the magazine consolidates the language of Hume and Blair, who assert that good taste requires ‘good sense’ and that, however subjective taste may be, *linguistically* we all agree that the epithet ‘elegance’ signifies beauty in opposition to that which is ‘barbarous’.¹³⁸ Moreover, the *Lady’s Magazine* underscores the united principles of taste and virtue by appending its fashion advice with a ‘MAXIM’. Fashion publications had found a way to legitimise discussion of fashion by appealing not just to the virtues of economy (as pocketbooks did), but also to the ethical implications of taste. Nevertheless, the magazine promoted its own standard of taste, which was far more complex than simply adhering to the prevailing fashions of the season: it accounts for fluctuations in standards of taste by aligning fashions, however vaguely, with complexion, age and social situation. As Batchelor claims, the constant strained justification of the fashion periodical’s existence ‘attests to the perceived difficulty of assimilating such trivial and potentially transgressive material within the periodical’s moral framework’; the two aims appeared to be, in many ways, mutually exclusive.¹³⁹

Moral critiques of fashion were ever-present. The writer Ann Thicknesse, who was, according to the *Critical Review*, ‘[s]candalised by the vices of fashionable life’, dedicated her two-volume moral miscellany *The School for Fashion* (1800) ‘to FASHION HERSELF’, hoping to expose ‘the follies, indecorums, vices and crimes

¹³⁶ Peter McNeil and Sanda Miller, *Fashion Writing and Criticism: History, Theory, Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p.55

¹³⁷ ‘London Fashions’, *LM*, July 1808, p.312 (p.312).

¹³⁸ Hume, *Four Dissertations*, pp.229, 203-4.

¹³⁹ Jennie Batchelor, ‘Reclothing the Female Reader’, p.13.

of my patroness'.¹⁴⁰ Fashion, Thicknesse argues, used to be of little consequence, but has now become a force which is 'very alarming and dangerous to the health, virtue, and happiness of the female world'.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile 'The Old Woman', the *Lady's Monthly Museum's* regular agony-aunt figure, identifies the male character 'Mr. Fashion' as the embodiment of 'wasteful dissipation and criminal indulgence'.¹⁴² The fluctuations of fashions meant that it was, as Parker acknowledges in her treatise, 'impossible' to 'lay down any fixed rule' for consumers, yet it was equally necessary to 'comply' with fashion 'to a *certain* point' in order to avoid equally undesirable accusations of 'eccentricity'.¹⁴³ Men, and women in particular, were caught in a predicament, compelled to prove their moral virtue and good taste in the fashions they adopted, yet required to eschew the underlying excess and capriciousness of fashionability.

1.3 The Vicissitudes of Fashion

One satirical poem, *The Prevailing Fashions, or, The World Turned Upside Down* (c.1795), attacked not just 'fashion herself', but specific styles of dress:

Those low heel'd slippers they do wear,
 Their gouty legs to show, sir,
 Their petticoats are fring'd round,
 They cut a tearing show, sir;
 And when their bosoms you do view,
 The truth I do declare, O
 A Modesty they will have,
 If never a smock to wear O.¹⁴⁴

The 'new antique style' that emerged in the 1790s which consisted of 'a simple muslin dress based on the drapery depicted on Greek vases' became a common

¹⁴⁰ 'Art. 55. The School for Fashion', *Critical Review*, 31, April 1801, p.479, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/docview/4368137>> [accessed 18 January 2016]. Ann Thicknesse, *The School for Fashion*, 2 vols (London, 1800), i, p.vi.

¹⁴¹ Thicknesse, *The School for Fashion*, i, p.xii.

¹⁴² 'The Old Woman', *LMM*, December 1800, pp.425-3 (p.425). Beetham describes 'The Old Woman' as 'a forerunner of the modern agony aunt' (p.22).

¹⁴³ Parker, *Important Trifles*, p.66.

¹⁴⁴ [Anon.], *The Prevailing Fashions, or, The World Turned Upside Down* (London, c.1795), p.1.

object of satire and moral outrage.¹⁴⁵ The dress of previous decades had been criticised for its excessive artifice; women's dresses in particular had relied heavily upon architectural structures of under-clothing in the 1780s, which, as shown in 'The Bum Shop' print (1785), over-emphasised the buttocks and breasts in order to counteract the adoption of masculine clothes such as 'greatcoats with long tight sleeves and caped collars'.¹⁴⁶ Equally, critics such as Mackie retrospectively attacked women's wigs of the 1770s and 80s for being decorated with 'imitations of Wheel Barrows (in Wax) filled with Turnips and Carrots' or 'numbers of feathers and high Caps or Spanish Hats'.¹⁴⁷

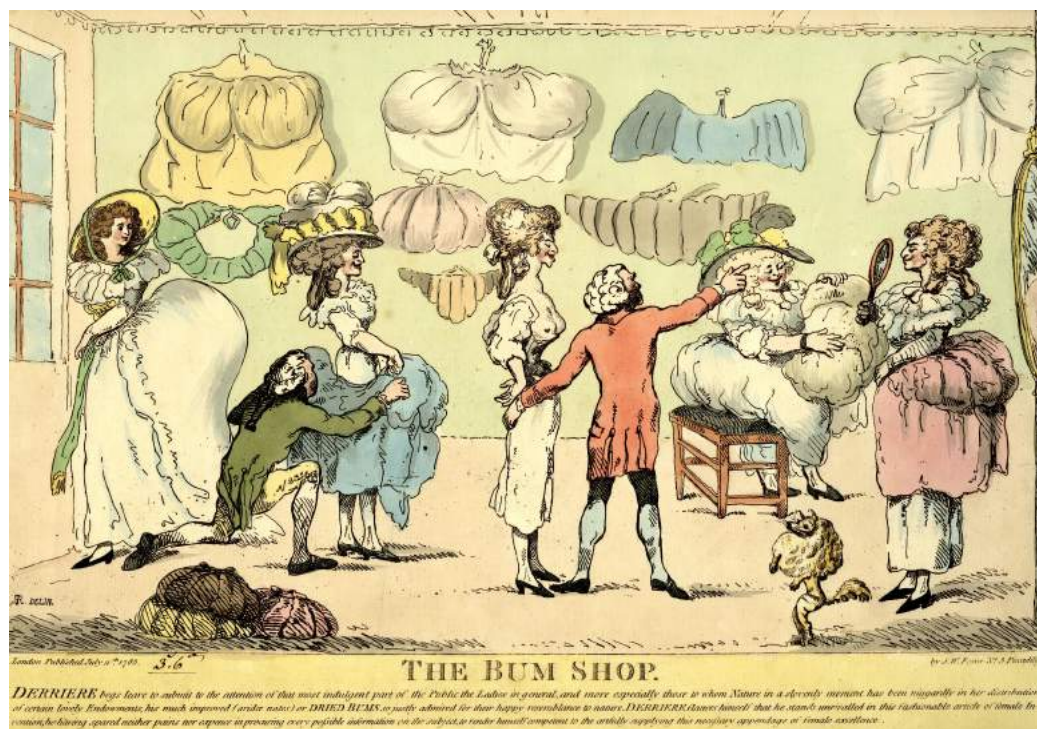


Figure 1.4 'The Bum Shop'. A satirical print showing women trying on 'derrières'. Print by S. W. Fores (London, 1785). British Museum.

As with the change in male fashions in which 'skin-tight breeches and pantaloons which traced the natural shape of the leg suggested an air of nudity', the classical style of female dress revealed women's bodies through the remarkable transparency of white muslin fabrics and the rejection of heavily structured

¹⁴⁵ Ashelford, p.178.

¹⁴⁶ Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, p.115

¹⁴⁷ Mackie, *A Picture of the Changes of Fashion*, p.7.

underwear.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, some women continued to wear long corsets in spite of the change, as these were ‘associated with respectable sexual morality’.¹⁴⁹ Austen’s letters reveal that the corset or ‘stay’ went through numerous changes: returning from a London stay-maker in 1813, she informs her sister that she has

learnt from Mrs Tickar’s young Lady, to my high amusement, that the stays now are not made to force the Bosom up at all; - *that* was a very unbecoming, unnatural fashion. I was really glad to hear that they are not to be so much off the shoulders as they were.¹⁵⁰

Austen favours the ‘natural’ style, yet in one notorious and frequently quoted letter, cannot resist judging Mrs Powlett, a family friend, for the irony of being ‘at once expensively & nakedly dress’d’.¹⁵¹

The neo-classical style inspired both male and female dress. Whilst the idea of such fashions was to free the body from the confines of tight-lacing, caricatures of upper-class dandies of the early nineteenth century suggest that the fashion had rather the opposite effect. Cruikshank’s print, ‘A Dandy Fainting – An Exquisite in Fits’ (1818), marvels at the tightness of the dandy costume, famously inspired by the notorious fashion-leader George ‘Beau’ Brummell at the end of the eighteenth century: all five figures almost suffocate beneath their starched collars. This 1818 print mocks the effeminacy of men devoted to fashion, the impractical dandy clothing which allows for little movement and the desire for these upper echelons of the fashionable world to be the centre of attention, even whilst at the theatre. The tight and constraining costume of dandies drew attention to the idleness of the wearer, who need not lift a finger and could not, according to the satirical pamphlet *The Dandies’ Ball; or, High Life in the City* (also engraved by Cruikshank), even feed himself.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Penelope Byrde, *The Male Image: Men’s Fashions in Britain 1300-1970* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1979), p.83.

¹⁴⁹ Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.30.

¹⁵⁰ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 15-16 September 1813, p.220.

¹⁵¹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 8-9 January 1801, p.70

¹⁵² [Anon.], *The Dandies’ Ball; or, High Life in the City* (London: John Marshall, 1819).

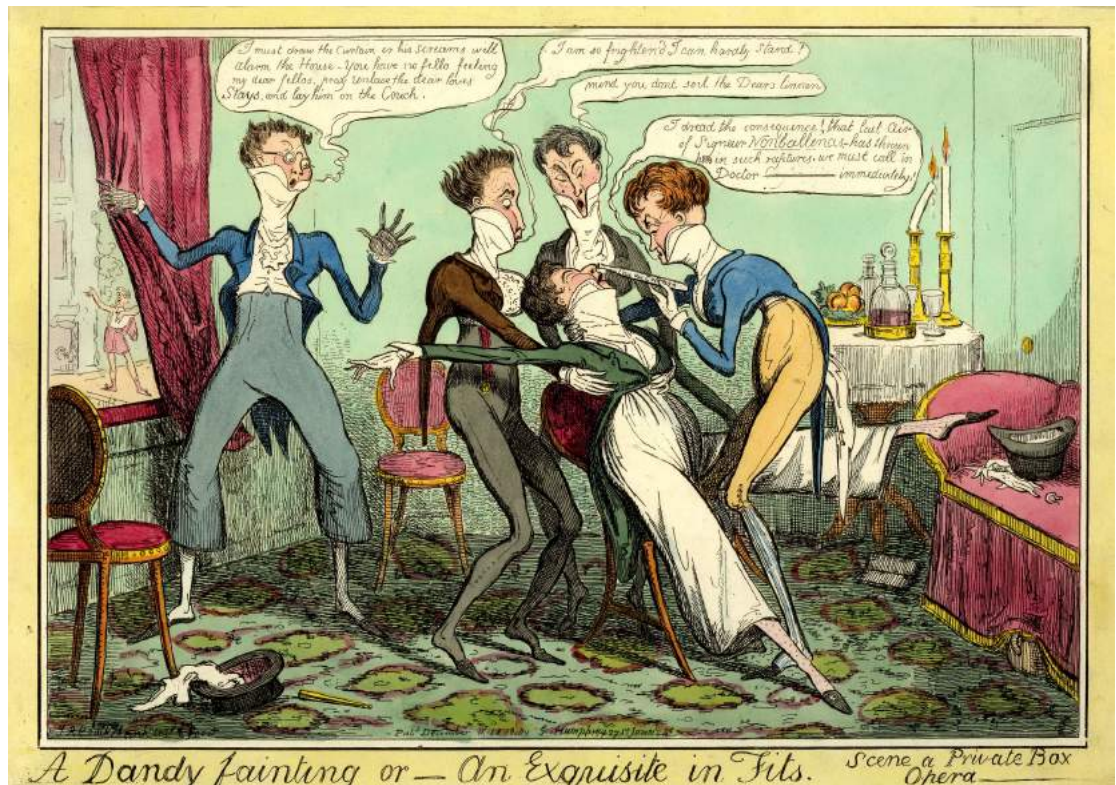


Figure 1.5 'A Dandy Fainting or - An Exquisite in Fits'. Print by Isaac Cruikshank (London, 1818). British Museum.

Whilst male dandy fashions revealed the body in an extreme and elite sense, countering any suggestion of the democratisation of fashion, women's fashions for simple muslin gowns were more universal. The form of the female body altered dramatically as fashions 'filtered out of France', resulting in lower necklines and higher waists.¹⁵³ This more 'natural' style was just as heavily attacked as its artificial predecessor. *Crosby's Ladies' New Royal Pocket Companion* from 1812 confirms the truth of Ribeiro's assertion that 'the history of dress can be seen as a constant battle against new styles, which may be thought of as "immoral" until their novelty is muted by the passage of time'.¹⁵⁴ Arguing that the 'pious bishop Latimer' had 'remonstrated with the females of his time against the monstrous superfluity of their 'roundabout, artificial hips, &c. &c.', the author of *Cosby's* notes that 'our moralists' now 'take up argument on the contrary side, and justly condemn the too adhesive and transparent robe worn by our contemporary belles'.¹⁵⁵ *La Belle Assemblée* discusses

¹⁵³ Ashelford, p.177.

¹⁵⁴ Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, p.12.

¹⁵⁵ *Crosby's Ladies' New Royal Pocket Companion*, p.32.

the history of the ‘taste for the naked fashion’, informing the fashionable reader that ‘among the Romans the women wore dresses of a kind of stuff so transparent that the body might be seen through it as if entirely naked’.¹⁵⁶ The article, written by ‘MODESTUS’ from the fashionable Bath ‘Upper Crescent’ (where such fashions thrived), insists on caution, stressing that ‘A dress too prudish conceals beauty; a costume too free prostitutes it’.¹⁵⁷ Again, female readers were caught in a dilemma, having to carefully navigate between two extremes.

The satirical prints, pamphlets, tracts, and periodicals produced from 1770 onwards reacted to fashion as it was played out in various consumer spaces: on the streets of London, in the ballrooms of fashionable spa towns like Bath and in the theatres. By the late eighteenth century fashion was ‘no longer limited to the higher echelons of court society’, but was a public spectacle.¹⁵⁸ Whilst there remains a dearth of historical research on the changes wrought by the rise of fashion on retail spaces during the late eighteenth century, increasing urbanisation meant that a large proportion of the population no longer depended upon fairs, markets and itinerant hawkers as merchants began to explore what Christine Fowler describes as the ‘rise of a new form of fixed place retailing’.¹⁵⁹

London was, along with its rival Paris, the epicentre of fashion according to the magazines of the period: the *Lady’s Magazine* developed two sections devoted to ‘Parisian Fashions’ and ‘London Fashions’. Breward, in a study of London fashion which focuses particularly on the rise of dandies who ‘fostered a self-love and an infatuation with the possibilities of ultra-fashionable living which drew on the resources of London’, observes that by the 1800s the West End and East End of London had, respectively, become ‘clearly divided into zones of consumption and production’.¹⁶⁰ The areas surrounding Saville Row, Bond Street and St. James’s Street had, by the early 1800s, become a ‘Mecca for male exquisites’.¹⁶¹ Breward focuses on the market created for male consumers of fashion and the fashionable

¹⁵⁶ ‘On the Dress of Women’, *LBA*, February 1806, pp.19-21 (p.19).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.20.

¹⁵⁸ Peter McNeil, ‘Macaroni Masculinities’, *Fashion Theory*, 4 (2000), 373-404 (p.387).

¹⁵⁹ Christine Fowler, *A Nation of Shopkeepers? Retail Developments in Eighteenth Century England* (University of Portsmouth: Department of Economics, 1997), p.8.

¹⁶⁰ Christopher Breward, *Fashioning London: Clothing the Modern Metropolis* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), pp.26, 33.

¹⁶¹ Breward, *Fashioning London*, p.34.

male figure that was simultaneously produced by London, understanding, as Berg does, that men consumed fashion just as avidly as women.¹⁶²

But London was not the only place where men and women could shop for the latest fashions. Living away from London did not, by the late eighteenth century, mean that one could not consume fashionable commodities. One way to continue to be on trend was via print and correspondence; Elizabeth Shackleton regularly read London newspapers and ‘received informative letters from watchful friends in polite towns and London’.¹⁶³ Fashionable metropolitan goods did reach the provinces; improved transportation meant that haberdashers and milliners in Chester and Gloucester were, by 1780, able to take frequent trips to London to choose new products.¹⁶⁴ Spa towns were also growing in population and became centres of consumption, particularly Bath.¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth (‘Betsy’) Sheridan, sister of the famous playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, spent much of her time amongst fashionable society between 1784 and 1786, living in fashionable towns and cities such as Tunbridge Wells, Bath, and London. In one of the many letters she sent to her sister in Ireland, part of the British Isles that was often generalised as unfashionable and which became a dumping ground for clothes that were unsellable in mainland Britain,¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth details the fashions of the spa town of Tunbridge Wells:

We wear no belts over our Coats I have seen no such things but on great Coats – My Habit is what they call *Pitch* colour [*sic*] – a sort of blackish green not beautiful but the most *stilish* [*sic*] now worn. Dark blues are very general – indeed all dark colours [*sic*] are fashionable. Cambrick [*sic*] frills and white waistcoats. Rather large yellow buttons. The most fashionable Hat a large black beaver with gold Band – but in that article you are perfectly at liberty – mine is a black Silk Spanish Hat with feathers.¹⁶⁷

Thirty years later Austen, writing from Henrietta Street in London, similarly reflects on the locale of fashion, informing her sister that ‘Ribbon trimmings are all the

¹⁶² See Berg, p.243.

¹⁶³ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p.172.

¹⁶⁴ See Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping*, p.8.

¹⁶⁵ See Berg, p.210.

¹⁶⁶ On Ireland see Beverly Lemire, ‘Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes’, *Journal of British Studies*, 27 (1988), 1-24 (p.17).

¹⁶⁷ Elizabeth Sheridan to Alicia Sheridan LeFanu, 5 July 1785, in *Betsy Sheridan's Journal: Letters from Sheridan's Sister 1784-1786 and 1788-1790*, ed. by William LeFanu (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 58-9.

fashion at Bath, & I dare say the fashions of the two places are alike enough in that point, to content *me*'.¹⁶⁸ Regional differences in fashion become a point of ridicule in *Northanger Abbey*: the narrator observes derisively that Isabella Thorpe,

being four years older than Miss Morland, and at least four years better informed [...] could better compare the balls of Bath with those of Tunbridge; its fashions with the fashions of London; could rectify the opinions of her new friend in many articles of tasteful attire [...]' (NA, p.20)

Throughout the 1790s and beyond, Austen's letters expose a fashion-consciousness that is, as the epigraphs to this chapter further intimate, rooted in the disparity between her own geographical location and that of her correspondent. The fashions of particular regions were related not simply to the area's distance from London or, as with spa towns and seaside resorts, their associations with leisure, but also to the ease with which fashionable goods could be transported. Newcastle, for instance, with its successful coal industry and established trade routes, was considered fashionable in spite of its being almost 300 miles from the capital: it is where the newly married Lydia Wickham, always in pursuit of fashion, plans to spend the winter.

Geographical disparity in fashions was not the only contentious issue; the territory of the fashionable world – a nebulous community of the metropolitan, wealthy, well-connected social elite whose sartorial fashions were recorded with minute detail in contemporary magazines – was debated with equal vigour. As the very first issue of *La Belle Assemblée* stated:

locality is a thing that does not belong to [the *beau monde*]. The *Beau Monde*, like *Swift's Island of Laputa*, is for ever changing its place. It is now at *London*, now at *Bath*, now at *Bristol*, now at *Brighton*; wherever the Emperor is, say the Civilians, here is *Rome*; wherever fashion resides, there is the *Beau Monde*.¹⁶⁹

John Owen's satirical pseudo-anthropological study of fashionable life, *The Fashionable World Displayed* (1804) similarly claims that, 'in all the improvements which have been made upon the globe, nothing has been done towards settling the

¹⁶⁸ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 5-8 March 1814, p.258.

¹⁶⁹ 'The Beau Monde: or, History of the New World', *LBA*, February 1806, pp.5-7 (p.5).

meridian of Fashion'.¹⁷⁰ On the one hand, pronouncements such as these reflect the migratory movements of the fashionable world from one town to the next along with the progression of the 'seasons'. Equally, however, these comments indicate that phrases such as 'fashionable world' or '*beau monde*' are to a certain extent misnomers. The fashionable world was rooted in certain streets and cities yet, as a network of interpersonal connections and shared material experience it also transcended geographical location, once again revealing the indeterminacy of fashion (in the sense used by Owen and *La Belle Assemblée*): it rests on the 'invisible' criteria of the social elite.¹⁷¹ For those outside the fashionable world who nevertheless participated in the 'fashion frenzy' through consumption, fashion still remained a hazy concept: as the testimonies from Austen and others indicate in this chapter, to be 'fashionable [...] could mean both a loose conformity to prevailing modes and the more demanding definition of possessing the latest model of each season'.¹⁷² Moreover, what exactly comprised the 'prevailing modes' was closely related to location and socio-economic group.

Shopping, and the perceived fashionability of shopping, was intimately related to location. Breward writes that members of the fashionable elite understood that

the idea of a shop-front for elite tailors was at this time an irrelevance, indeed a vulgarity. Reputations were built by word of mouth within a close knit community of sartorial connoisseurs rather than on the back of a flashy window.¹⁷³

For fashion arbiters such as Beau Brummell, who visited the Prince of Wales's tailor, fashion – and where to go for fashion – demanded exclusivity. At a textual level, linen-drapers, milliners and haberdashers mimicked this sense of exclusivity: an 1801 advert for the 'Union Head-dress', whilst readily seen by any reader of the *Morning Chronicle*, was advertised 'to fashionable ladies only'.¹⁷⁴ However, for

¹⁷⁰ John Owen, *The Fashionable World Displayed* (London: J. Hatchard, 1804), p.2

¹⁷¹ Greig, *Beau Monde*, p.3.

¹⁷² Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p.178.

¹⁷³ Breward, *Fashioning London*, p.33.

¹⁷⁴ 'Advertisements and Notices', *Morning Chronicle*, 21 January 1801, in *19th Century British Newspapers* (Gale Cengage) <<http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/bncn>> [accessed 18 January 2016]. Jon Stobart discusses these linguistic strategies of adverts and trade cards in relation to

most consumers the ‘new plate-glass windows’ of the period, which gave shopkeepers a display area visible to passing customers, made shopping for fashion a rather less exclusive experience.¹⁷⁵ Magazines such as *Ackermann’s Repository of Arts* were as interested in depicting fashionable shops as fashions themselves, confirming Berg’s assertion that ‘retailing itself was a fashion’.¹⁷⁶ The decoration and drapery of the shops and shop windows were as important as the fabrics they sold. As German writer Sophie von La Roche observed on a visit to London, one West End shop employed a ‘cunning device’ which demonstrated the ‘effect of this or that material, as it would be in the ordinary folds of a woman’s dress’.¹⁷⁷

Whilst areas of Soho, Bond Street and Regent Street were becoming fashionable centres for those with money to spend, poorer inhabitants of London went east to areas such as Rosemary Lane, ‘known as Rag Fair’, for cheaper commodities.¹⁷⁸ Rather than visiting a draper’s shop and choosing a fabric to be fitted and made-up, they could have access to clothes through the growing second-hand and ready-made clothes industry.¹⁷⁹ As cycles of fashion were becoming more frequent garments were being cast off more quickly; the second-hand trade therefore existed to ‘take advantage of garments and other materials that were no longer of value to their original purchasers’.¹⁸⁰

However, in 1798 Austen complains to her sister: ‘I cannot determine what to do about my new Gown; I wish such things were to be bought ready made’.¹⁸¹ As her letter implies, bespoke clothing was not without its problems. Austen finds an outlet for her frustrations in a poem written some time after April 1805, in which the author expresses her desire that Miss Green, a mantua-maker, will make up her friend Miss Lloyd’s mourning attire from ‘Some yards of a Black Ploughman’s Gauze’ (C, p.234). Whilst mourning attire might appear to lie outside the domain of fashion, evidence suggests that this too followed fashion’s transient cycles; W. Robinson was one of many haberdashers who announced new collections of ‘FASHIONABLE

politeness. See Jon Stobart, ‘Selling (Through) Politeness: Advertising Provincial Shops in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Cultural and Social History*, 5.3 (2008), 309-28.

¹⁷⁵ Dorothy Davis, *A History of Shopping* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1996), p.191.

¹⁷⁶ Berg, p.263.

¹⁷⁷ 5 September 1786, *Sophie in London 1786, being the Diary of Sophie von La Roche*, trans. by Clare Williams (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), p.87.

¹⁷⁸ Davis, *A History of Shopping*, p.219.

¹⁷⁹ Lemire, ‘Second-Hand Beaux and “red-armed Belles”’, p.407.

¹⁸⁰ Lemire, ‘Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England’, p.6.

¹⁸¹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 24-26 December 1798, p.30

MOURNING'.¹⁸² Upon the death of Mrs Churchill in *Emma*, Mr Weston, whose fashion-consciousness is easily overlooked, first resolves that 'his mourning [dress] should be as handsome as possible', while Mrs Weston is presented as anxiously 'sighing and moralising over her broad hems with a commiseration and good sense, true and steady' (*E*, p.305).



Figure 1.6 'Messrs Harding Howell & Co., 89 Pall Mall'. Interior of a draper's shop on Pall Mall, the 'first London street to be lit by gas'.¹⁸³ Engraving from *Ackermann's Repository of Arts* (London, 1809). British Museum.

In her poem, Austen demands that her friend 'receive | This license to mourn and to grieve, | Complete, ere the end of the week - | It is better to write than to speak' (*C*, p.234). Austen's mother, assuming the role of dressmaker, pens a reply to the poem:

I've often made clothes
For those who write prose,
But 'tis the first time

¹⁸² 'Advertisements & Notices', *Morning Chronicle*, 25 June 1801, in *19th Century British Newspapers* (Gale Cengage) <<http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/bncn/retrieve.do>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

¹⁸³ Alison Adburgham, *Shopping in Style: London from the Restoration to Edwardian Elegance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), p.73.

I've had orders in rhyme. (C, p.274-5)

This unusual dialogue in verse indicates the extent to which sartorial concerns, not only as a source of pleasure but also as a form of emotional labour and anxiety, dominated the lives of Austen and her mother, and indeed eighteenth-century women generally. Moreover, it crystallizes Austen's association between literary production and fashion. The association between fashion and novelistic practices in particular becomes even more evident once Austen begins to publish her work: Paula Byrne, who imagines Austen 'preparing for her meetings with John Murray' in London by splashing out on fashionable attire, notes that as soon as Austen received money for her work she spent it on clothing, purchasing a bonnet for £1 and 16 shillings on a cap whilst in London – 'a lot of money to spend on a single cap'.¹⁸⁴

Whilst Austen's poems focus on the pains of bespoke clothing, letters elsewhere reveal concerns that, once made, clothes will soon be out of fashion. Mary Russell Mitford criticises the dress of Mrs Sheridan, wife of Richard Brinsley Sheridan and sister-in-law to Elizabeth Sheridan, which is:

always singular and fantastic; but, even if this masculine adornment be fashionable, the season is so far advanced that it would be impossible to wear it above a month longer, and by next winter it would be discarded for some new whim.¹⁸⁵

Mitford refers to the 'season', which generally began in late autumn when families left their country homes for the amusements of London and continued until summer. As always in the world of fashion, the precise dates of the seasons was a contentious issue. Fashions – in clothes in particular – ran alongside these seasons. However, abandoned garments that could not be reworked were recycled as second-hand clothes. Clothes that had lost value in one social milieu were not necessarily out of fashion in another circle, Lemire arguing that in rural counties 'clothes a year or two old would not offend. Thus, clothes outmoded by the calculations of one group would be in demand and thought desirable by another'.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Paula Byrne, *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* (London: Harper Press, 2013), p.306.

¹⁸⁵ Letter Mary Russell Mitford to Dr George Mitford, 15 February 1807, in *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford*, 3 vols, ed. by A. D. L'Etrange (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), i, pp.62-3.

¹⁸⁶ Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, p.64

It would be false to suggest that the lower classes had no interest in fashion or could not afford it. Fowler's study of the rural Hampshire tailor Robert Mansbridge between 1811 and 1815 shows that many of the tailor's customers, despite having on average an annual income of £50 or less - and thus falling below the threshold of middleclass incomes marked out by Berg - were avid consumers.¹⁸⁷ These customers, often purchasing ready-made or second-hand garments, clearly cared about the quality of clothing; Fowler indicates that, with the cost of one of Mansbridge's woollen coats ranging 'between £2 8s. and £4', working men must have been 'spending a considerable proportion of their income on apparel'.¹⁸⁸ Records of the life of Francis Place, a philanthropist living between 1771 and 1854 reveal that even when he was struggling to earn more than 14 shillings a week, leaving 'only twelve shillings a week for food and cloaths [*sic*] and other necessities', he and his wife resolved that clothes were a priority.¹⁸⁹

Although by the 1820s Paris 'was fully reinstated as an international centre for modish philosophies and luxurious living', for a period of fifty years London – and the whole of Britain – had witnessed an increasing participation in fashion.¹⁹⁰ The entire population felt the effects of the rising fashion system in distinct and individual ways. The change was evident not simply in the streets or in the changing landscapes of towns and communities, but in textual artefacts, from letters to magazines, which disclosed the powerful cachet of fashion.

1.4 Fashion and the Novel

The 'fashion frenzy' could not exist without print culture, which facilitated diverse responses to the consumer boom whilst disseminating fashions throughout the country. Adburgham notes that the birth of the *Lady's Magazine* was coeval with the opening of a popular circulating library by William Lane, owner of the Minerva Press and prolific publisher of both novels and lady's pocketbooks.¹⁹¹ The concurrent

¹⁸⁷ See Christina Fowler, 'Robert Mansbridge, A Rural Tailor and his Customers 1811-1815', *Textile History*, 26.1 (1997), 29-38.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁸⁹ Francis Place, *The Autobiography of Francis Place*, ed. by Mary Thrale (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.105-6.

¹⁹⁰ Breward, *Fashioning London*, p.40.

¹⁹¹ Adburgham, *Women in Print*, p.153.

foundation of these two literary institutions underscores the close relationship between the fashion periodical and the novel, and indeed between the novel and fashion more generally. The very same readers who were visiting circulating libraries to borrow copies of the *Lady's Magazine* were also borrowing novels. The novel was as a strong 'expression of the new world of fashionable consumerism and potential self-fashioning', as was the fashion magazine.¹⁹² Moreover, these magazines were not necessarily read on a monthly basis, as their seasonal content suggests, but were often consumed 'under the same conditions as a single, double or triple decker novel'.¹⁹³ Such reading practices are unsurprising: the *Lady's Magazine*, *La Belle Assemblée* and *Lady's Monthly Museum* all featured serialized fictions; the *Lady's Magazine* prided itself as offering 'asylum for the fugitive pieces produced by female genius'.¹⁹⁴ Batchelor notes how even the short-lived late eighteenth-century *Fashionable Magazine* offered 'literature as compensation for the title's fashion coverage': it served as a device to 'to contain and police fashion reports and plates'.¹⁹⁵ Whilst this might have been the intention, the result of this juxtaposition of fashion and literature was frequently conflation, rather than separation or containment, as much of the literature of fashion magazines concerned fashionability, particularly within the *haut ton*.

We can observe an overwhelming concern with fashion in novels printed from the 1770s onwards, a period that coincides with increased consumer power, faster fashion cycles and the nascent fashion periodical. As noted, discussion of fashion was by no means new but, as Raven maintains, from 'the 1770s to the 1790s the reaction against rampant consumer spending grew increasingly strident in the novels and moral tales'.¹⁹⁶ Discussion – and more often than not, critique – of fashionable practices in novels grew ever more vocal alongside the 'fashion frenzy'. As with all areas of commerce, the establishment of the fashion system transformed the literary market, and was intimately related to both the rise of the novel and the shape that novels would take.

¹⁹² G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.185, quoting Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.92.

¹⁹³ Ballaster *et al.*, p.45.

¹⁹⁴ 'Address to the Public', *LM*, January 1808, pp.3-4 (p.3).

¹⁹⁵ Batchelor, 'Reclothing the Female Reader', p.14.

¹⁹⁶ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p.162.

Literary responses to fashion evolved alongside consumer practices.¹⁹⁷ One author of the period, Thomas Holcroft, in *A Family Picture* (1783), delineated the dangers of the ‘pageantry of high life’ and ‘the vortex of dissipation’ (a key phrase to which I shall return) that was associated with the fashionable world, hoping that his readers would ‘either be happy in mediocrity, or employ the redundancies of riches to better purposes, than in supplying the foolish and incoherent whims and caprices of fashionable folly’.¹⁹⁸ The by now ubiquitous phrase ‘fashionable follies’ had also served as the title for Thomas Vaughan’s popular two-volume novel first printed in 1781 and again in 1810, which was, as Raven notes, ‘little more than a catalogue of fashionable dissipation, from hair-architecture to phaeton-driving’.¹⁹⁹ Holcroft’s narrative did not merely inveigh against social emulation; rather, it paved the way for fashion critiques of the 1780s by attacking the spending habits of the ‘reckless newly-wealthy’, instead prescribing a ‘gentlemanly morality of economy and benevolence’.²⁰⁰

Whilst the plots of these narratives centred around the inevitable downfall of followers of fashion, both male and female, espousing, as did Elizabeth Griffith’s popular and reprinted *Essays Addressed to Young Married Women* (1782), the virtues of ‘Religion, Conjugal, Affection, and Parental Love’ in lieu of the ‘seductive arts of fashion’, it is evident that their attacks on the *nouveaux riches* were not considered severe enough by all who read them.²⁰¹ Theologian and literary critic Samuel Badcock censured the author of *Fashionable Follies* for ‘relating with gaiety what ought never to be thought of without abhorrence’.²⁰² In this sense, Vaughan’s novel, as well as numerous other novels of the 1780s, had much in common with the successful ‘scandal fictions of the *ton*’ or ‘fashionable novels’ as Mandal variously describes them, that emerged at the turn of the century, a genre of novel to which

¹⁹⁷ See Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, pp.160-176.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Holcroft, *The Family Picture*, 2 vols (London, 1783), i, pp.99, 101

¹⁹⁹ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p.176.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.179.

²⁰¹ Elizabeth Griffith, *Essays Addressed to Young Married Women* (London: T. Cadell and J. Robson, 1782), pp.121-22.

²⁰² ‘Monthly Catalogue, Novels’, *Monthly Review*, 66, May 1782, pp.394-96 (p.395), in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/4643211>> [accessed 18 January 2016]. Also quoted in *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. by James Raven, Peter Garside, Rainer Schöwerling, Christopher Skelton-Foord, Karin Wünsche, Stephen Bending and Antonia Forster, *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ii, p.306.

little scholarly attention has been given.²⁰³ The pseudonymous Charles Sedley, who published six novels between 1807 and 1808 including *The Mask of Fashion* (1807) dedicated to the Duchess of St Albans, wrote many of these fashionable scandal novels. In spite of the popularity of his fiction the real identity of Charles Sedley remains unknown: Jacqueline Belanger's research at the CEIR (Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research) has identified three 'dubious' possibilities of authorship including John Battersby Elrington, a translator and satirist, Andreas Anderson Feldborg, a Danish author who came to England in 1802 and, finally, Davenport Sedley, who notoriously blackmailed the real-life characters whose scandalous lives his fictions satirized.²⁰⁴ Sedley's novels nevertheless contributed to a trend for fashionable fiction that had already been established by Mr Lyttleton, author of the familiar-sounding *The Follies of Fashion* (1801) and *La Belle Sauvage* (1803), and Thomas Skinner Surr, sometimes confused with Charles Sedley, whose 1806 best-seller *A Winter in London; or, Sketches of Fashion* was a satire on current 'leading characters of fashion' including the Duchess of Devonshire, and reminded reviewers of Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778).²⁰⁵

These fashionable novels of the early 1800s, like those of the 1780s, exploited the popularity of tales of fashionable life; they 'sought voyeuristically to paint a lurid portrait of upper-class fashionable life, while paradoxically (and not quite convincingly) taking the moral high-ground'.²⁰⁶ The novels were precariously caught in a double-bind, allegedly condemning fashionable life whilst pandering to the taste for tales of the *bon ton*. It was no coincidence that they echoed the fashion periodicals of the day which were guilty of 'shrewdly indulging women's interest' not only in 'dress', as Batchelor argues, but also in fashion and the fashionable world more generally, whilst attempting to contain this (again not quite convincingly) 'within a conservative ideological framework'.²⁰⁷

These scandal novels, like the fashion magazines, were fashionable themselves. In 1806 Benjamin Crosby's *Flowers of Literature* (the same publication

²⁰³ Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, pp.27, 18.

²⁰⁴ Jacqueline Belanger and Peter Garside, 'Addendum I: Charles Sedley', *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text*, 12 (2004), 104-9.

²⁰⁵ 'Art. 15. A Winter in London; or, Sketches of Fashion', *Monthly Review*, 49, February 1806, p.207, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/4677285>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

²⁰⁶ Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, p.19.

²⁰⁷ Jennie Batchelor, 'Reclothing the Female Reader', p.19

which prematurely advertised the publication of Austen's 'Susan' in 1803) is ostensibly unaware of the irony that the very same novels that were purportedly deriding fashion had become the 'leading item[s] of commercialized, fashionable consumption'.²⁰⁸ The author declares that,

Fashion, that universal arbitress, though frequently erroneous in her decisions, has, for once, by sanctioning Mr. Surr's *Winter in London*, which has now passed through eight editions, proved that she is sometimes deserving of attention. This truly excellent novel abounds with satire on the fashionable world.²⁰⁹

It is, of course, no surprise that the magazine is quick to adopt the discourse of fashion in order to bestow praise upon the novel. Whilst some novelists attempted to distance themselves from the suspicion that novels themselves were complicit in promoting fashionability, circulating library novels worked within a 'fashion system': 'their value as cultural capital depended upon their novelty, they were consumed in quantity, and they were considered ephemeral, to be rented rather than purchased as material capital'.²¹⁰ As a genre whose very success had emerged out of the reading habits of the middle class – by now the 'tastemakers for society' – the circulating library novel was irretrievably tied to the fashion system.²¹¹

Between the 1780s and the early 1800s there emerged another literary response to fashion in the interplay between radical and anti-Jacobin fiction, a phenomenon that was somewhat distinct from the attacks on reckless spending and satirical fictions of the *haut ton* (between which it was sandwiched). Fashion becomes a central concern in radical politics: liberal writers repudiated fashion as symptomatic of aristocratic dissipation and vice. Radical writer Robert Bage who penned *Hermesprong* (1796), a copy of which was owned by Austen, wrote fictions which detailed the downfall of aristocratic fashionables whilst depicting the temptations of the fashionable world for those of middling ranks. In one such novel, *The Fair Syrian* (1787), the patient Miss Warren dismisses the temptations of the

²⁰⁸ Kelly, 'Jane Austen and the Politics of Style', p.61.

²⁰⁹ Francis William Blagdon, *Flowers of Literature for 1806* (London: B. Crosby & Co., 1807), p.lxxv.

²¹⁰ Gary Kelly, 'Jane Austen's Real Business: The Novel, Literature, and Cultural Capital', in *Jane Austen's Business: Her World and Her Profession*, ed. by Juliet McMaster and Bruce Stovel (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp.154-167 (p.157).

²¹¹ Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, p.33. Campbell's assertion that this fashion originates with a middle-class readership also challenges the 'trickle down' emulation model.

fashionable world into which Lady Bembridge (previously Emilia Amington) has married: ““though I might envy you now and then at your theatres,”” she declares, ““I pity most sincerely your fashionable people, Routing and Ranelagh-ing it; doomed for ever to the solitude of crowded [*sic*] assemblies; and limited to the slender circle of ideas, Spadille and Chintz can furnish””.²¹² The fashionable world is exposed as narrow, claustrophobic, financially ruinous and repetitive. By the 1790s these themes of fashionable temptation dominated Bage’s fiction.²¹³

Meanwhile in the 1790s, the novelist Elizabeth Inchbald, who had befriended revolutionary sympathiser and novelist Thomas Holcroft, promoted the reformation of the educational rights of women in opposition to ‘fashionable education’ in *A Simple Story* (1791). Opposition to fashionable education would later reappear in both *Mansfield Park* (1814) and Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818), the latter of which details the consequences of the disparate educations, one pious, the other fashionable, of twin sisters Mary and Adelaide.²¹⁴ Equally, in 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft lamented current vogues in women’s education in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, arguing that fashionable education teaches women a form of femininity that is debilitating and dangerous: it breeds ‘vanity’ rather than real ‘sensibility’.²¹⁵ Wollstonecraft lambasts ‘idle superficial young men’ who ‘[awe] simple country people into an imitation of the vices [...] of politeness’ as well as women of ‘middle rank’ whom she distinguishes from ‘women of quality’ who think ‘less of finery’ than those women who ‘ape their fashions and faults without sharing their advantages’, these advantages being a knowledge of literature and general topics.²¹⁶

Ironically, Wollstonecraft, alongside radical literature of the 1790s, had much in common with anti-Jacobin fictions, which also opposed the metropolitan fashions of the aristocracy, advocating instead the pleasures of ‘rural simplicity and domestic affections’.²¹⁷ As Kelly maintains: ‘[s]ympathy for the Revolution is treated as just

²¹² Robert Bage, *The Fair Syrian*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1787), i, p.139.

²¹³ See Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.39.

²¹⁴ For more on fashionable education in *Mansfield Park* and *Marriage* see Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.195-99.

²¹⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*’ and ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Men*’, ed. by Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1993] 2008), p.135.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.81, 248.

²¹⁷ Kelly, *English Fiction*, p.63.

another fashionable vice of the decadent upper classes'.²¹⁸ These anti-Jacobin sentiments coincided with the emergence of evangelicalism in the 1790s. The reactionary writer Hannah More, a proponent of both evangelicalism and anti-Jacobinism, united these sentiments first in *Village Politics* (1792) and later in the influential *Coelebs Search of a Wife* (1808), a novel for which Austen claimed she had a 'real' 'disinclination', stating 'I do not like the Evangelicals. – Of course I shall be delighted when I read it, like other people, but till I do, I dislike it'.²¹⁹

The novel, which went through twelve editions within one year alone, promotes a particular ideal of domestic femininity. Coelebs lauds those 'excellent female characters' who can 'withstand the [...] adoration of the fashionable' and 'resist the temptations of that magic circle'.²²⁰ He remarks that

the jeweller is neither brought into vogue by furnishing their diamonds, nor undone by not being paid for them; the prosperity of the milliner does not depend on affixing their name to a cap or a color [*sic*]; the poet does not celebrate them; the novelist does not dedicate to them.²²¹

Aside from aligning, in his final assertion, fashion and the novel, Coelebs's speech posits fashion not so much as a dangerous symptom of social emulation, nor as a factor underlying the perceived dissolution of class distinction, but rather as a distraction from more important female duties: it is a perversely public pursuit that undermines the domestic demands of home and piety. Indeed, Coelebs extols women who live 'in the quiet practice of their duties' as mothers and as wives: 'above all they possess *His* favor'.²²²

Although politically opposed to Wollstonecraft in many ways, More was united with the radical author in styling fashion as a form of slavery.²²³ Yet, somewhat ironically, More was particularly popular with fashion periodicals: in 1800

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.63.

²¹⁹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 24 January 1809, p.170.

²²⁰ Hannah More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1808), i, p.131.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, i, p.132.

²²² *Ibid.*, i, pp.132-3.

²²³ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace discusses this in depth with reference to More's 1805 essay, 'Hints towards forming a Bill for the Abolition of the White Slave Trade'. See Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, 'White Slavery: Hannah More, Women and Fashion', in *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830*, ed. by Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.148-159. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft describes fashion as a 'badge of slavery' (p.81).

the *Lady's Magazine* included her chapter 'On dissipation and the modern habits of fashionable life' from *Strictures on the System of Female Education* (1799); in 1805 the *Lady's Monthly Museum* reprinted the *Monthly Review's* praise of More's conduct book, *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess* (1805); and in 1809 *La Belle Assemblée* printed an extract from *Coelebs Search for a Wife* in which the anti-heroine Miss Rattle delineates the activities of a fashionable young woman.²²⁴ The juxtaposition of these narratives next to fashion-plates exemplifies the uncomfortable if not bizarre way in which these magazines sought to enforce female virtue whilst threatening this very moral framework by promoting an obsession with fashion that evangelicals such as More sought to condemn.

Novelists of the period attacked fashion from a variety of perspectives, whether it pertained to the 'responsibilities of wealth', the political corruption that excused and permitted fashion amongst the aristocracy, the potentially ruinous effects of social emulation, or the irreligious and damaging compulsion of women to be fashionable.²²⁵ Moreover, the popularity of fashion-in-fiction – the 'fashionability' of such novels – ensured the theme's longevity within fiction. The continuation of these novels, even the re-printing of novels and tales from the 1780s well into the first decade of the 1800s, suggests that themes of debt, economy, social distinction and female propriety were a continual concern of nineteenth-century readers, who were very much still engaged with debates on fashion and saw the novel as central to such discussions.

In 1814 Austen wrote to Anna Austen, commenting on a novel her niece had drafted. Austen teasingly disapproves of Anna's use of the phrase "'vortex of Dissipation'" in relation to her character 'Devereux Forester', claiming: 'I do not object to the Thing, but I cannot bare the expression; it is such thorough novel slang – and so old, that I dare say that Adam met with it in the first novel he opened'.²²⁶ It is the phrase Thomas Holcroft uses in *A Family Picture* (by now over thirty years old) to describe the life of the fashionable world, and the same phrase that one

²²⁴ 'On Fashionable Dissipation (By Miss Hannah More)', *LM*, October 1800, p.548-551; 'The Literary Tribunal', *LMM*, September 1805, pp.198-99 (p.198); 'Coelebs in Search of a Wife', *LBA*, February 1809, pp.47-51. Beetham, noting the fashion periodical's custom of opening with a memoir of a woman, observes that 'The *Lady's Museum's* first subject, Hannah More – author and founder of the Religious Tract Society – was certainly a model woman' (p.22). Nevertheless, she reflects that the inclusion of other notable women, including actress Mary Robinson, were surprising.

²²⁵ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p.179

²²⁶ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Anna Austen, 28 September 1814, p.278.

reviewer uses to illustrate Lyttleton's *Follies of Fashion* in 1803.²²⁷ Versions of it appear as early as 1766 in James Fordyce's well-known *Sermons to Young Women*, a book which not only establishes the term 'vortex' as a word signifying '[a] constant round of excitement and pleasure' but is also read by Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*.²²⁸ Austen's frustration, mediated with comic reference to her biblical first reader, indicates the extent to which representations of fashionable life permeated the novel, by now a genre that was waning under an exhausted phraseology of anti-fashion. Nevertheless, Austen reassures her niece that she has made up her 'mind to like no Novels really, but Miss Edgeworth's, Yours & my own'.²²⁹ Austen teasingly forgives her niece's use of the phrase and makes concessions for Edgeworth, whose own Mr Forester in *Moral Tales* (1801), similarly insists that he 'cannot be at ease in the vortex of dissipation'.²³⁰

Although she famously eschewed the pejorative term 'novelist', Edgeworth published a multitude of novels and moral tales, one of which, *Belinda* (1801), centres on the fashionable Lady Delacour and her effect on Belinda, a heroine who resists both fashionable reading practices and the world of fashion.²³¹ Edgeworth continued her critique of the corrupting potential of the fashionable world throughout her writings. It has been observed that her *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809-12) responded in part to the 'commercial success' of Thomas Surr's fashionable scandal fictions.²³² Edgeworth was, however, keen to distinguish between fashion-in-fiction and fashionable fiction; she publishes her *Tales of Fashionable Life* with a preface by her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth stating: 'we had once thoughts of giving to these books the title of 'Fashionable Tales,' alas! [this tale] could never have found favour with fashionable readers'.²³³ For Edgeworth's father, the concept of fashionable fiction is intimately related to the fashionability of readers themselves.

²²⁷ 'Art. 35. The Follies of Fashion', *Monthly Review*, 80, May 1803, p.104, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/docview/4676720>> [accessed 18 January 2016]

²²⁸ 'Vortex', definition 5.b, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/224685>> [accessed 29 October 2014]. For a discussion of Fordyce's emphasis on female dress see Jennie Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire: Clothing and the Female Body in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.20-9.

²²⁹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Anna Austen, 28 September 1814, p.278

²³⁰ Maria Edgeworth, *Moral Tales for Young People*, 5 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1801), i, p.81.

²³¹ Heather MacFayden explores the trope of fashionable reading in 'Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* and Fashionable Reading', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 48.4 (1994), 423-39.

²³² Kelley, *English Fiction*, p.81.

²³³ Maria Edgeworth, *Tales of Fashionable Life*, 6 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1809-12), i (1809) p.vi.

Another contemporary of Austen's, Sydney Owenson (also known as Lady Morgan), had a rather different relationship with fashion, moulding her own fashionable identity through her novels. Owenson's *Wild Irish Girl* (1806), which Austen had read, attempted to transform Irish culture into the latest fashion.²³⁴ Extra-textually, she adopted the costume of the novel's heroine when amongst fashionable society, resulting in a craze for celtic fashions. The novel inspired the production of fashionable accessories: the Dublin jewellers Brush and Son decided created a "Glorvina ornament" in honour of the celtic dress of Owenson's heroine.²³⁵ Owenson's novelistic output also contributed to the emergence of the so-called 'silver fork' novel. An early example of this genre, Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon, or the Fatal Passion* (1816) depicted the histories of real fashionable figures, thus returning somewhat to the devices of scandal novels of the 1780s.²³⁶ The genre also acted as a guide for those aspiring to the *beau monde*, informing readers

in what London square it was stylish to rent a house for the Season, and when exactly the Season started; what shops and suppliers to patronise; at what time of day it was elegant to drive in the park, to make calls, to dine, to arrive at the Opera and leave the Opera.²³⁷

Doubly appealing was the fact that the silver-fork novel worked, not unlike the fashion periodical, to simultaneously critique and celebrate fashionable culture.

In the same year that Austen published her first novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) the Minerva Press published the anonymous four-volume *Bath and London*, a novel which again depicted the activities of the *haut ton*, following 'a newly instituted club of fashion', the '*incroyables*'.²³⁸ The novel self-consciously points towards current trends in literature: the fashionable Mrs Bentinck complains that 'novels' have grown 'too moral and too full of reflection to please her', instead preferring to read 'squibs of a newspaper, or the fashionable novel of the day': here

²³⁴ Austen writes to her sister Cassandra to inform her she has a copy of Owenson's *Ida of Athens* (1809), declaring 'We have only read the Preface yet; but the Irish Girl does not make me expect much' in *Letters*, 17-18 January 1809, p.166.

²³⁵ Claire Connolly, "'I accuse Miss Owenson': *The Wild Irish Girl* as Media Event', *Colby Quarterly*, 36.2 (2000), 98-115 (p.105).

²³⁶ On the real fashionable figures see 'Art. 23. *Glenarvon*', *Monthly Review*, 80, June 1816, pp.217-18, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/docview/4815750>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

²³⁷ Alison Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814-1840* (London: Constable, 1983), p.1.

²³⁸ [Anon.], *Bath and London*, i, p.132.

the 'fashionable novel' is defined as that which is light, easy to read and seasonal.²³⁹ Such criticisms were levelled against fashionable novels by Thomas Love Peacock, who maintained that fashionable fiction offered amusement which was 'as transient as the gloss of a new coat [...] the soul of fashion is novelty, the books and dress of the season go out of date together'.²⁴⁰ *Bath and London* is, from its very title, clearly hoping to appeal to the same readers enthralled by Skinner and Surr, whose novels were popular, if appropriately seasonal. Caroline, the heroine, discards fashionable novels in preference for the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), suspecting

that what was called fashion by Mrs. Bentinck was but a something of inferior manufacture, and that the first rank of human beings possessed a distinction, not only superior to this boasted *ton*, but wholly independent of it.²⁴¹

The satire, contained within a novel blatantly marketed to readers seeking fashionable fiction themselves, is double-edged.

That same year Mary Brunton, who against her parent's desires turned her back on the *haut ton* by eloping with a clergyman, authored *Self-Control*, a bestselling novel which Austen sardonically declared was 'an excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it'.²⁴² As in More's fiction, Brunton presents an ideal of feminine domesticity, and 'evinces an evangelical moral vision' which eschews idolatry of the fashionable world.²⁴³ Yet moments of *Self-Control*, such as when the heroine arrives in Edinburgh passing 'magnificent shops, the windows, gay with every variety of colour' which attract 'Laura's inexperienced eye', echo scenes from Burney's fiction.²⁴⁴ Brunton here recalls the 'entrance into the fashionable world' trope that governs *Evelina*, *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796), novels that vividly depict the effects of a burgeoning

²³⁹ Ibid., pp.211-12.

²⁴⁰ Thomas Love Peacock, 'An Essay on Fashionable Literature' in *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols (London: Constable, 1934), viii, pp.262-292 (p.264).

²⁴¹ [Anon.], *Bath and London*, i, p.12.

²⁴² Anthony Mandal discusses Brunton's life in his 'Introduction', in Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, ed. by Anthony Mandal (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), pp.xiii-xlii (p.xvi); *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11-12 October 1813, p.234.

²⁴³ Mandal, 'Introduction', p.xx.

²⁴⁴ Brunton, *Self-Control*, p.40.

fashion system.²⁴⁵ Austen recalls, and obliquely parodies, this trope in *Northanger Abbey*, in which Catherine Morland is similarly visually overwhelmed by the spectacle of the fashionable city of Bath: ‘They arrived at Bath. Catherine was all eager delight; - her eyes were here, there, every where, as they approached its fine and striking environs’ (NA, p.10).

In 1776 Burney congratulated herself on the originality and guaranteed entertainment of her novel, which would describe

the Introduction of a well educated, but inexperienced young woman into the public company, and a round of the most fashionable Spring Diversions of London. I believe it has not before been executed, though it seems a fair field open for the Novelist, as it offers a fund inexhaustible for Conversation, observations, and probable Incidents.²⁴⁶

She refers, of course, to what would become the immensely popular and fashionable *Evelina*, a novel that ran through successive editions throughout the first half of the nineteenth century; not having read the novel was tantamount to declaring oneself unfashionable.²⁴⁷ In her subsequent novels – *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, and *The Wanderer* (1814) – Burney not only persisted in satirizing ‘vulgar women cavorting in the “Vortex of Fashion”’, but also continued to place fashion and its related themes of debt and desire at the centre of her narratives.²⁴⁸

To ignore fashion in Austen’s novels is, therefore, to overlook a key part of the literary environment to which she was responding, in which fashion played a central, if complex, role. As Copeland summarises, Austen, ‘as the unmarried daughter of a moderately well-beneficed clergyman’, grew up ‘in the centre of a social group with particularly sensitive relations to consumption’.²⁴⁹ Unlike the

²⁴⁵ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace declares that Burney’s novels offer a ‘powerful representation of a nascent consumer culture’ in *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.92.

²⁴⁶ Fanny Burney to Thomas Lowndes, 26 December 1776, in *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. by Lars Troide and others, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988-), ii, (1990), p.215.

²⁴⁷ Raven notes that ‘Lowndes, the bookseller, recorded a customer begging a copy of *Evelina* in early 1778 and complaining that he was “treated as unfashionable for not having read it” in *Judging New Wealth*, pp.142-53.

²⁴⁸ Raven notes that ‘Fanny Burney, Charlotte Smith, and their imitators devoted many pages to describing vulgar women cavorting in the “Vortex of Fashion” in *Judging New Wealth*, p. 142. On desire and shopping in Burney see Andrea Henderson, ‘Commerce and Masochistic Desire in the 1790s: Frances Burney’s *Camilla*’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 31.1 (1997), 69-86.

²⁴⁹ Copeland, *Women Writing About Money*, p.11.

fiction of her contemporaries, which places the spotlight on urban social elite that comprised the ‘fashionable world’, Austen’s narratives focus on the type of fashion-consciousness that dominated her own life. Fashion is not posited, as earlier novels would have it, as an inevitably ruinous temptation for this group, but rather as a necessary daily encounter. A consideration of fashion was, for the middling demographic which led fashionable consumption, a particular cause for anxiety when negotiating fluctuating consumer practices, social interactions and familial ties.

As a novelist and unashamed reader of novels, Austen was familiar with a culture of literary criticism and marketing centred on fashion: she was enmeshed within this culture. Not only did Austen’s second novel, *Pride and Prejudice* deftly deploy the semantically precarious term ‘fashion’ to dramatise its subjectivities and ambiguities; the novel was also praised as fashionable itself.²⁵⁰ In a letter to her mother in May 1813 Anne Isabella Milbanke, the erudite daughter of a baronet and the future wife of Lord Byron, proclaimed the recently published *Pride and Prejudice* ‘a very superior work’, remarking that it was ‘at present the fashionable novel’.²⁵¹ Milbanke’s comments reflect the popularity of *Pride and Prejudice*, rather than aligning Austen’s novel with disposable novels, such as those maligned by Peacock and satirized in *Bath and London*. As the comments of Richard Lovell Edgeworth and the *Flowers of Literature* similarly suggest, fashionable literature was an ill-defined category: for some it designated the must-read of the season – the critic’s choice; for others it signalled, like other fashionable commodities, throwaway yet commercially successful trash that often took the fashionable world as fodder for its plots; for others still the title designated the patronage of the fashionable world. Such usages reflect the term’s capaciousness and elusiveness, whilst showing the quickness with which readers and critics sought to align novels with fashion. The same month that Milbanke heaped praise on *Pride and Prejudice*’s literary merits, an impressed Charlotte Clavering told Susan Ferrier that she ‘should like amazingly to see that same “Pride and Prejudice” which everybody dins my ears with’: it was the most talked-about novel of the season.²⁵² Years later in 1821 the silver-fork novelist

²⁵⁰ Woodworth, p.151.

²⁵¹ Anne Isabella Milbanke quoted in Malcolm Elwin, *Lord Byron’s Wife* (London: John Murray, 1962), p.159.

²⁵² Charlotte Clavering to Susan Ferrier, 10 May 1813, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier, 1782-1854*, ed. by John A Doyle (London: Murray, 1989; rept. London: Everleigh, 1929), p.117.

Lady Caroline Lamb wrote that her next novel would be called 'Principle & passion', 'since the fashion is to call every thing in the manner of *Pride & prejudice*, sense & sensibility'.²⁵³ Austen was not only responsive to literary fashions; she set them herself.

In Austen's fiction fashion does not function, as in so many of the novels of her contemporaries, merely as a voyeuristic by-word for social corruption, moral vacuity or 'frivolous distinction' (NA, p.52). When Austen uses the latter phrase in *Northanger Abbey* to describe Catherine Morland's guilty musings on '[w]hat gown and what head-dress she should wear' she turns Catherine's (and the reader's) thoughts to the conduct manuals and pocketbooks read by Catherine's 'great aunt', which reinforce this idea whilst cementing the association between dress and with female virtue (NA, p.52). Austen is, as Copeland discerns, 'unique [...] among contemporary women novelists in meeting the new economy with positive enthusiasm, even admiration, for the power of the economic metaphor to describe contemporary life': as this thesis explores, Austen deliberately and unabashedly embraces the fashion-consciousness of her age as a powerful narrative tool.²⁵⁴

In Austen's novels fashion is an ever-present concern for heroines and rivals alike, not merely, as some of her critics prefer to maintain, 'a sign of superficiality and vulgar materialism'.²⁵⁵ Such assertions typically insist on drawing a boundary between her novels which, they claim with alacrity, contain few references to fashion 'because it was not considered a suitable or interesting topic for general conversation', and her letters which display 'a natural and lively interest' in fashion.²⁵⁶ Both assertions, which often perceive fashion as synonymous with 'dress', are simplifications of what proves to be a much more complex pattern; her letters and

²⁵³ Lady Caroline Lamb to Thomas Malfus, c.1821-22, in *The Whole Disgraceful Truth: Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb*, ed. by Paul Douglas (New York: Palgrave, 2006), p.177. Lady Caroline never published a novel under the name 'Principle & passion'.

²⁵⁴ Edward Copeland, 'Jane Austen and the Consumer Revolution', in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. by J. David Grey (London: Athlone Press, 1986), pp.77-92 (p.79).

²⁵⁵ Ann Bermingham 'The Picturesque and ready-to-wear Femininity', p.95. See also Clair Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p.45. Similarly, Barbara M. Benedict argues that 'Like many authors, Austen often uses clothes to symbolize character, and depicts characters who fuss over what they wear as vain or superficial, a traditional charge especially directed to women'. Barbara M. Benedict, 'The Trouble with Things: Objects and the Commodification of Sociability', in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), pp.343-54 (p.351).

²⁵⁶ Penelope Byrde, *Jane Austen Fashion: Fashion and Needlework in the Works of Jane Austen* (Ludlow: Excellent Press, 1999), p.13. First published as *A Frivolous Distinction: Fashion and Needlework in the Works of Jane Austen* (Bath: Bath City Council, 1979).

her fiction are not irreconcilable. Recently, some compelling readings of Austen have emerged, challenging these influential yet over-simplified critiques.²⁵⁷ Indeed, discussion of fashion in Austen's work is by no means new: whilst some recent studies contribute to a culture that eagerly, yet unquestioningly, fetishizes the fashions of Regency costume for a general readership, others cogently analyse the significance of fashion in Austen's novels.²⁵⁸

As noted in my introduction, Austen's last published novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, which emerged jointly and posthumously on 20th December 1817, have long been central in critics' discussions of fashion. Both novels dedicate large sections to the fashionable locale of Bath; as Stabler asserts, alluding to the Musgroves' rejection of Queen Square and Sir Walter's lodgings in the newly constructed Camden Place, *Persuasion* 'is particularly alert to the changing social nuance of location' at a time when 'Bath was losing its high society glamour'.²⁵⁹ Comparative analysis of Austen's treatment of the fashionable spa town in these novels has been plentiful; implicit in these critical responses is that in Austen's fiction, as in her contemporary world, '[t]o be "in fashion" is both and at once sartorial and spatial'.²⁶⁰ It is a cultural and geographical phenomenon that characterises her last fragment, *Sanditon*, critical analysis of which is similarly demonstrably focused on its satirical representation of fashion, advertising and consumer culture within the ostensibly rising fashionable seaside resort.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ See, for instance, Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) and Laura Engel, *Austen, Actresses, and Accessories: Much Ado About Muffs* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Engel dismisses the prevailing critical narrative that 'Austen's representation of clothing, accessories, and consumer culture' is 'obviously condescending and/or deliberately satirical' (p.40).

²⁵⁸ Byrde's *Jane Austen Fashion* serves as a guide for the general reader, as does Sarah Downing's *Fashion in the Time of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2010).

²⁵⁹ Stabler, 'Cities', pp.211-2.

²⁶⁰ John Potvin, 'Introduction: Inserting Fashion Into Space', in *The Places and Spaces of Fashion, 1800-2007*, ed. by John Potvin (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), pp.1-15 (p.1). Discussion of Bath in Austen is plentiful; see in particular: Emma Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen and Steventon; Jane Austen and Bath* (London: Routledge, 1995); Maggie Lane, *A Charming Place: Bath in the Life and Times of Jane Austen* (Bath: Millstream, 1988); Joel J. Gold, 'The Return to Bath: Catherine Morland to Anne Elliot', *Genre*, 9.3 (1976), 215-29; Diego Saglia, "'Here we are at Bath": Jane Austen and the Cultural Geography of Vice', in *Re-Drawing Austen: Picturesque Travels in Austenland*, pp.137-62; Keiko Parker, "'What Part of Bath Do You Think They Will Settle In?": Jane Austen's Use of Bath in *Persuasion*', *Persuasions*, 23 (2001), 166-76; Timothy Erwin, 'Comic Prints, the Picturesque, and Fashion: Seeing and Being Seen in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*', in *Women, Popular Culture, and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Tiffany Potter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp.202-224.

²⁶¹ See Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp.255-79; Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London and New York: Routledge, [1994] 1996),

Aside from *Persuasion*'s depiction of the fashionable environs of Bath, the Regency dandyism of Sir Walter, which is rooted in a form of '[a]ristocratic spending [...] ruled solely by the inflexible constraints of fashion' has garnered attention from various critics.²⁶² Yet, it is *Northanger Abbey* that is considered by critics to be Austen's 'most "fashion conscious"' novel, in terms of its depiction of literary and sartorial fashions.²⁶³ Critics have offered persuasive and conflicting readings of the role of shopping, clothing, consumerism and novel-reading in the *Northanger Abbey*: they have vied with one another over 'Mrs. Allen's vapidness' expressed in her fixation on fashionable dress.²⁶⁴ Whilst Heydt-Stevenson offers an incisive reading of clothing's significance to both the construction and destabilisation of gender in *Northanger Abbey*, Reid-Walsh, reading the novel alongside *Evelina*, focuses on the duality of clothing as both 'circulating' and 'interpretative' objects.²⁶⁵ A recent essay by Laura George 'uses the famous passage from *Northanger Abbey*' in which Henry Tilney discusses the cost and merits of English and Indian muslins (NA, pp.16-17) in order to discuss the significance of textiles in the novel; her essay contextualizes 'the global, technological and economic conditions of the fabric' in the period.²⁶⁶ Similarly, Laura Miskin, in another recent article, considers Henry

p.204-13; Ann Bermingham, 'Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs: The Commerce in Culture and Self-Image in Eighteenth Century England', in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800*, pp.489-513; Clara Tuite, 'Sanditon: Austen's pre-post Waterloo,' *Textual Practice*, 26.4 (2012), 609-629.

²⁶² Copeland, *Women Writing About Money*, p.111. See in particular Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, pp.172-78; June Sturrock, 'Dandies, Beauties, and the Issue of Good Looks in *Persuasion*', *Persuasions*, 26 (2004), 41-50; Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp.90-93.

²⁶³ Jeffrey Nigro, 'Estimating Lace and Muslin: Dress and Fashion in Jane Austen and Her World', *Persuasions*, 23 (2001), 50-62 (p.54). See also Tamara S. Wagner, "'Would you have us laughed out of Bath?": Shopping Around for Fashion and Fashionable Fiction in Jane Austen's Adaptations', in *Women, Popular Culture, and the Eighteenth Century*, pp.257-73.

²⁶⁴ Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.105. Heydt-Stevenson is here challenging Bermingham's reading of fashion in the novel. See Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.105 and Bermingham 'The Picturesque and ready-to-wear Femininity', pp.81-119. Engel extends Heydt-Stevenson's argument 'to suggest that the anxieties generated by Mrs Allen's attention to dress are actually more about the specifics of the practical, embodied, lived experience of late-eighteenth-century women than about the larger backdrop' (p.48).

²⁶⁵ Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp.105-36; Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, "'Do you understand muslins, Sir?": The Circulation of Ball Dresses in *Evelina* and *Northanger Abbey*', *Material Productions and Cultural Constructions*, 19 (2000), 215-223.

²⁶⁶ Laura George, 'Austen's Muslin', in *Crossing Text and Textile*, ed. by Katherine Joslin and Daneen Wardrop (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2015), pp.73-102 (pp.73-4, 76). For other discussions of the 'muslin' scene see Judith Wylie, "'Do you understand muslins, Sir?": Fashioning Gender in *Northanger Abbey*', in *Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature*, ed. by Cynthia G. Kuhn and Cindy L. Carlson (Youngstown, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2007), pp.129-148; Nigro, 'Estimating Lace and Muslin' and Hafner-Laney, pp.135-43.

Tilney's discussion of muslin within both gender relations and global imperial politics, arguing that his particularly fashionable preference for Indian muslin is reflective of a new 'consumerist identity' allied to 'Britain's imperialist expansion', and that in exercising his judgement of the textile he exerts control over 'both female commodity consumption and virtue'.²⁶⁷ These readings of Austen have served, valuably, to illuminate the broader politics of sartorial fashion at work in Austen's period. However, in contextualising fashion in these novels, such arguments frequently favour historical over narrative analysis: they place emphasis on decoding fashions in Austen, rather than observing, as this thesis insists we must, the ways in which fashion and narrative style are intertwined.

Northanger Abbey's treatment of the gothic, a genre in which 'social identity' is 'determined and associated with consumption', has lent itself to readings that highlight fashion.²⁶⁸ Embroiled in discussions of *Northanger Abbey's* gothic textures is the undeniable recognition, examined further in this thesis, that Austen's fiction frequently hinges upon the metaphorically comparable fashions of dress and fiction.²⁶⁹ In both *Sanditon* and *Northanger Abbey*, the library itself is reduced to a space for fashionable display and consumption. It was certainly common for those in the bookselling business to deal in a variety of fashionable products, the anonymous author of *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered* (1797) advising booksellers to stock 'Haberdashery, Hosiery, Hats, Tea, Tobacco and Snuffs: or Perfumery, and the sale of Patent Medicines' in their libraries.²⁷⁰ Charlotte Heywood is sent to Sanditon, a seaside resort which Mr Parker hopes will become the next 'fashionable Bathing Place' (*NA*, p.301), to 'buy new Parasols, new Gloves, and new Broches for her sisters and herself at the Library' (*NA*, p.303). Meanwhile in Bath, Isabella

²⁶⁷ Laura Miskin, "'True Indian Muslin'" and the Politics of Consumption in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 15.2 (2015), 5-25 (p.6).

²⁶⁸ Andrea Henderson, "'An Embarrassing Subject": Use Value and Exchange Value in Early Gothic Characterisation', in *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism*, ed. by Mary A. Favret and Nichola J. Watson (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp.225-45 (p.226). In her reading of *Northanger Abbey* Hughes combines discussion of Radcliffean gothic and dress (pp.5-45).

²⁶⁹ For readings of the relationship between fashion and the gothic in *Northanger Abbey* see in particular Wagner, who argues that shopping in the novel 'doubles as a defining market of satirized society and a metonymy for changing fashions in fiction' (p.257); Jeffrey Nigro, 'Mystery Meets Muslin: Regency Gothic Dress in Art, Fashion, and the Theater', *Persuasions On-Line*, 31.1 (2010), n.pag.; Susan Zlotnik, 'From Involuntary Object to Involuntary Spy: Female Agency, Novels, and the Marketplace in *Northanger Abbey*', *Studies in the Novel*, 41.3 (2009), 277-292 (p.278); and Engel, p.47.

²⁷⁰ [Anon.], *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered* (London, 1797), p.34.

Thorpe is ‘driven by fashion’ in her reading practices, leaning ‘toward single genres’ such as the Gothic, and ‘dismiss[ing] out of hand works deemed insufficiently “new”, as with Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison*’.²⁷¹ Jodi L. Wyatt’s recent essay successfully brings together analysis of *Northanger Abbey*’s implicit parallel between fashions in fiction and dress to challenge the assumption that fashion alone is marked as frivolous in *Northanger Abbey*: she sees that within *Northanger Abbey* ‘essays on the frivolity of fashion are characterized as reactionary moralizing akin to those that decry novel reading’, and insists that the novel in fact inveighs against ‘monomania’ in dress and genre, and not ‘attention to a range of fashionable pursuits’.²⁷²

Whilst these readings of *Northanger Abbey* reveal Austen’s astute and complex treatment of the intimate connections between fashion and fiction, this thesis, which embraces these intertwined categories, argues that to read Austen well one must read fashion-consciously. Reading in Austen is closely aligned with fashion-consciousness, whether the attentive fashion-consciousness of her imagined reader or that of her characters. Interpretative practices, I argue, like her narrative strategies, are filtered through an all-pervading fashion-consciousness that extends beyond the tropes of genre and clothing: it is present in the minutiae of her literary style. Attending to fashion in Austen’s writing takes the careful reader beyond thematic links alone and reveals the construction of narrative itself.

²⁷¹ April London, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.157. For more on the resort library and its goods see Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.91-96.

²⁷² Jodi L. Wyatt, ‘Female Quixotism Refashioned: *Northanger Abbey*, the Engaged Reader, and the Woman Writer’, *The Eighteenth-Century*, 56.2 (2015), 261-76 (p.272).

Chapter 2 Sentimental Texts and Textiles: Fashioning Sensibility in Austen's Juvenilia and Verse

[...] it is too dirty even for such desperate Walkers as Martha and I to get out of doors, & we are therefore confined to each other's society from morning till night, with very little variety of Books or Gowns.
Letter to Cassandra Austen (30 November – 1 December 1800)¹

Dear Martha,

As a small testimony of the gratitude I feel for your late generosity to me in finishing my muslin Cloak, I beg leave to offer you this little production of your sincere Freind [*sic*]

The Author (C, p.2)

Austen's prefatory dedication to the first volume of her mock-published juvenilia, in which she offers her own textual labours as a gift in return for Martha Lloyd's completion of her muslin Cloak, foregrounds an interchangeability – indeed exchangeability – of text and textile that resonates throughout Austen's *oeuvre*, most emphatically in her unpublished writings. Likewise, Austen's letter to Cassandra identifies the comparable pleasures offered by new books and clothes, two of a limited array of acceptable entertainments available to women at the time. Austen extends this association to encompass not merely women's consumption but also their 'production' of texts and textiles: Martha's needlework is analogous to Austen's writing

Austen's language registers the overlapping domains of textual and textile production in female domestic life.² As Penny Gay observes, '[a]t some point Jane Austen stopped calling what she did "writing" and started referring to that as "work"' (the common abbreviation for women's 'needlework'), thus marking 'a semantic shift away from the standard idea that women's "work" was needlework'.³ Austen's linguistic shift, which concurrently undermines and reaffirms the

¹ *Letters*, p. 64.

² Cecilia Macheski has argued that '[t]he development of both needlework and the novel owed much to domestic necessity and to the special female perspective of the emerging artists'. Cecilia Macheski, 'Penelope's Daughters: Images of Needlework in Eighteenth-Century Literature', in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, ed. by Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens and London: Ohio University Press, 1987), pp.85-100 (p.85).

³ Penny Gay, 'Pastimes', in *Jane Austen in Context*, pp.337-45 (p.344-5).

associations between sewing and writing, can be read as part of a wider move made by women authors during the eighteenth century to deploy the highly ‘ambiguous’ analogy between needlework and authorship.⁴ Austen’s juvenilia and unpublished work demonstrate an underlying appreciation of the contentious yet ‘substantive material ties between texts and textiles’ that characterised both material culture and the literary sphere of eighteenth-century Britain.⁵

Text and textiles were, moreover, united by fashion. As Richard Cronin asserts, Austen was ‘as responsive to literary fashions as to fashion in clothing’.⁶ This chapter examines this parallel, which underscores how Austen both worked and consumed according to the dictates of fashion, in detail. It charts the ways in which Austen imitated, parodied and rewrote fashions in sentimental fiction in particular, and argues that Austen’s literary responses to the sentimental vogue play on the association between fashions in dress and fiction. In some instances, examined here, Austen even accompanies her written work with her own textile productions. Austen, I argue, could not conduct either form of ‘work’ (written or sewn) without being highly conscious of the demands of fashion.

This chapter insists that it is within Austen’s juvenilia and unpublished writings that we see most clearly what is implicit in her later novels: how her audience shared with the author a knowledge of fashionable fictional conventions. In her unpublished works Austen relies on the assumption that her fellow novel readers will know a sentimental trope when they see it. It is in these writings, distributed amongst a small domestic circle of readers, that we observe Austen debating most explicitly the ties between fiction and fashion, and materially between text and textile. Not only, I argue, are these writings framed by her own astute fashion-consciousness, but their means of reception is intimately related to the way in which Austen variously deploys, undermines and calls upon fashionable conventions in fiction. Austen expects her familial audience, who were ‘great Novel-readers & not

⁴ See Jennie Batchelor, *Women’s Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750-1830* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.22. Macheski discusses the symbolic function of needlework in the writings of Charlotte Lennox, Samuel Richardson, Charlotte Smith and Elizabeth Inchbald, noting that it is often deployed in relation to heroines’ epistolary writing. She also insists that ‘women writers in fact share patterns of imagery and ideas based on their common experience of needlework, and that this special use of language constitutes a subtext on female experience’ (p.86).

⁵ Chloe Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.48.

⁶ Richard Cronin, ‘Literary Scene’, in *Jane Austen in Context*, pp.289-96 (p.291).

ashamed of being so' and who thus shared with the author a knowledge of literary fashions, to apply this literary fashion-consciousness in their reading practices.⁷ In these unpublished works, many of which are thought to have been 'refined [...] consensually within the circle of family and close friends', fashionable novelistic conventions act as communally understood codes.⁸

Austen's juvenilia, comprising three handwritten *Volumes*, share a complex chronology: they were written between 1787 (when Austen was not yet twelve years old) and 1793 (when she was seventeen), yet Austen returned to these volumes to revise, delete and alter their content until at least 1811 (aged thirty-five).⁹ The unpublished poems discussed later in this chapter were written in 1792 and 1808, thus overlapping with Austen's writing and revision of her juvenile volumes. The unpublished works that Austen assiduously revised during the twenty-four years between her childhood and adulthood – a significant proportion of her lifetime and literary career – cannot be dismissed as youthful trivia that should be sidelined in favour of her published work. Rather, I argue here that they reveal much about the way in which Austen worked: because these reworkings of fashionable fiction were written to be understood by her reading audience, they suggest that Austen was highly conscious of her domestic readership when writing. Austen was clearly alert to the effect that changing fashions might have on the successful communication of meaning in these writings. Indeed, Mandal has noted how Austen returned to her juvenilia from 1809 onwards to update her references to fashions in both fiction and dress.¹⁰ This chapter examines Austen's unpublished work alongside the evolving literary fashion of sentimentalism to reveal how Austen's treatment of fashionable fiction is marked by the varied ways in which it brings together, metaphorically and literally, textual and textile fashions.

⁷ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 18-19 December 1798, p.26.

⁸ Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.225.

⁹ On chronology see Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives*, pp.203-4 and Peter Sabor, 'Introduction', in Jane Austen, *Juvenilia*, ed. by Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.xxiii-lxvii (pp.xxviii-xxxiii).

¹⁰ Anthony Mandal, 'Making Austen MAD: Benjamin Crosby and the Non-Publication of "Susan"', *The Review of English Studies*, 57.231 (2006), 207-25 (p.524).

2.1 The Sentimental Vogue

The literary and cultural association between text and textile began to emerge in the early eighteenth-century, many decades before Austen's first literary productions. Smith makes the case that during the period, 'the production of paper interlocked print culture with the culture of clothing'.¹¹ It is a connection which is manifest in many narratives of the time, and which has been particularly noted in reference to Jane Barker's *A Patchwork Screen for the Ladies* (1723) in which clothes are replaced with 'pieces of paper – her own letters, poems, and romances'.¹² In Barker's text, patchwork even 'provides a metaphor for narrative construction', thus cementing the association between textile, needlework and discursive style that Austen would later come to explore.¹³ The association between textiles and narrative construction was sustained in texts such as the anonymous *The Episode of the Petticoat in Memoirs and Interesting Adventures of an Embroidered Waistcoat* (1760) and, later, *The Adventures of a Pincushion* (1780).¹⁴

However, in order to understand the significance of Austen's early responses to literary fashions, which play on the association between fashion and fiction, and needlework and writing, it is necessary to outline the history of fashionable sensibility. A number of critics have underscored the association between sensibility and fashion. Batchelor, for instance, points to the 'interweaving of the languages of expression, text and dress' that began to emerge in 'late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century literary and aesthetic theory'.¹⁵ This lexicon of text and dress dominated the language of sensibility and anti-sentiment. Hannah More's 1782 poem 'Sensibility', for example, deploys images of sartorial fashions to depict the expression of false sensibility, ironically inviting us to consider the 'exclamations, tender tones, fond tears, | And all the graceful drapery Pity wears', as 'lovely symbols' of sensibility that can be put on at will.¹⁶

The association between sensibility and fashion has similarly been observed in relation to contemporary print culture: G. J. Barker-Benfield argues that the

¹¹ Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, p.48

¹² *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹³ Batchelor, *Women's Work*, p.22.

¹⁴ See Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes* for a discussion of these texts (pp.74-5).

¹⁵ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, p.3.

¹⁶ Hannah More, 'Sensibility', in *Sacred Dramas: Chiefly Intended for Young Persons* (London: T. Cadell, 1782), pp.283-4. Batchelor discusses More's poem in *Dress, Distress and Desire*, p.14.

emerging fashion periodical shared ‘a constituency with the sentimental “ladies” magazines which were promulgating the fashion of sensibility’ by illustrating their serials with images of fashionable life.¹⁷ The generic distinction between the ‘fashion periodical’ and the ‘sentimental periodical’ is ill-defined: the *Lady’s Magazine* has been aligned with both genres.¹⁸ As my previous chapter suggests, those magazines that pioneered the dissemination of fashion, both graphically and discursively, appropriated the language of sensibility in order to reconcile fashionable consumption with virtue. The *Lady’s Magazine* in particular sought to promote fashionability alongside sensibility: in 1770 the magazine opened with the serial ‘A Sentimental Journey, by a Lady’, an imitation of Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), which ran for the next six years. Interruptions and unfinished fragments were a conventional element of the sentimental genre, thus contributors, and to a certain extent the editors themselves, did not have to worry about the demands of producing monthly instalments. The sentimental genre was in fact ideal for the unpaid (and hence unreliable) contributors to fashion periodicals because, as Mayo explains, it ‘offered scribblers a legitimate form of broken contract’.¹⁹

Whilst sensibility was assimilated into fashion periodicals (and, arguably, vice versa) and placed alongside fashion-plates and advertisements, sentimental novels themselves were unquestionably fashion-conscious: fashionable consumer objects, from ribbons to handkerchiefs, litter narratives of sensibility, containing fashionable consumption within the narrative of feeling.²⁰ As Copeland argues, ‘the great joke in the juvenilia is Austen’s youthful discovery of the paradoxical affinity of sentimental literature and consumerism’.²¹ Yet Copeland’s valuable essay, despite its professed interest in Austen’s early literary development, sidelines the author’s unpublished works in favour of illuminating parallels between her published novels and the fictions of the *Lady’s Magazine*. This chapter seeks to fill this critical gap whilst demonstrating that it is sensibility’s association with modishness in particular,

¹⁷ Barker-Benfield, p.211.

¹⁸ Markman Ellis, for example, calls the *Lady’s Magazine* the ‘leading sentimental periodical of the 1770s and 1780s’ in *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.6

¹⁹ Robert Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740-1815: With A Catalogue of 1375 Magazine Novels and Novelettes* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962), p.339. On imitations of Sterne in English magazines see pp.336-46.

²⁰ See Deirdre Shauna Lynch, ‘Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions’, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 12 (2000), 345-368 (p.345).

²¹ Copeland, ‘Money Talks’, p.155.

rather than the related but distinct realm of consumerism, that Austen's unpublished works target and expose. I will reconsider these critical discussions of fashionable sentimentalism in relation to the texts to which Austen's unpublished writings allude and which they revise. In extending the parallels Austen draws between texts and textiles, I argue that we should consider the overt intertextuality of Austen's unpublished work as forming a Derridean 'textile' in which Austen's 'text [is] produced only in the transformation of another text' thus revealing 'differences and traces of traces'.²² Derrida's notion of a textual textile offers a constructive way to read Austen's unpublished writing: it points readers the way in which Austen interweaves texts familiar to herself and her audience, whilst highlighting the association between textual and textile production that she observes throughout her writing. Sutherland's analysis of Austen's extant manuscripts further reveals methodological links between text and textile production. Austen revised her written work 'in much the same way as she might patch a smock or darn a stocking': by 'attaching with straight pins small pieces of paper'.²³ The crafts of writing and sewing were, as Austen intimates in her dedication to Martha Lloyd, interwoven. In reading Austen's work metaphorically as a textile, this chapter turns to the sentimental texts that Austen's unpublished writings transform, thus unearthing Austen's intertextual traces.

Whilst recognising, as Southam concedes, that modern readers cannot completely uncover the 'knowledge of books and people familiar to [Austen's] household', which her unpublished works reference and parody, this chapter demonstrates that it is possible, in turning to popular sentimental texts, to more thoroughly understand the fashion-consciousness Austen's texts both evince and demand from readers.²⁴ In reconsidering the significance of Austen's unpublished works I do not suggest, as Copeland does, that Austen's reworking of sensibility's association with fashion (or consumerism) is simply part of 'the youthful author[']s' attempt to 'establish' both 'her right to belong to a higher literary tradition' and 'her own social claims, as a writer, to the respectable upper ranks of society'.²⁵ Rather, I argue that this literary strategy is related to Austen's awareness of her reading

²² Jacques Derrida, 'Semiology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva', in *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Athlone Press, [1972] 1981), pp.15-36 (p.26).

²³ Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives*, pp.146-7.

²⁴ Brian Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.6.

²⁵ Copeland, 'Money Talks', pp.159-60.

audience, whom the author ‘often addresses directly, in full expectation of their collusion with her’.²⁶ Austen’s interweaving of fashionable sentimental tropes is directly aligned with her desire to inspire laughter and feeling in her reader(s). Austen appreciates that whether or not she is successful in eliciting the ‘correct’ affective response from her reader is determined not only by her ability to deploy ‘the iconic metaphors and symbols recognizable to her “Readers”’, but also her own recognition of the ways in which the meanings of these metaphors and symbols are transformed by the evolution and decline of the sentimental genre.²⁷

It has long been recognised that Austen’s juvenilia must be understood within the context of eighteenth-century sensibility; Austen’s early work frequently dismantles the conventions of sentimental fiction.²⁸ Clara Tuite has suggested that *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen’s first published novel, ‘attacks the cult of sensibility by outmoding and outdated it, casting it as a symptom of fashion’, yet that Austen herself relies on ‘the code of fashion’ to achieve this.²⁹ As is always the case with Austen, her engagement with fashion is complex; this is most evident in her unpublished works, which ridicule and relish the sentimental vogue. As Mandal has noted in his extensive research, Austen draws on an extensive range of sentimental texts in her juvenilia, including, for instance, *Charles and Charlotte* (1777) written by Samuel Jackson Pratt, whose poetry and fiction was featured in the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*; Eliza Nugent Bromley’s *Laura and Augustus* (1784); Elizabeth Helme’s *Louisa, or the Cottage on the Moor* (1787); and the sentimental narratives serialized in the monthly *Lady’s Magazine*.³⁰ Indeed, Copeland observes that ‘[j]udging from what we find in the juvenilia, Jane Austen met the *Lady’s Magazine* (1770-1832) early’.³¹ This chapter reveals in detail the ways in which Austen

²⁶ Laurie Kaplan, ‘Jane Austen and the Uncommon Reader’, in *Jane Austen’s Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, pp.73-83 (p.78).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.78.

²⁸ See, for instance, R. Brimley Johnson, ‘A New Study of Jane Austen (interpreted through ‘*Love and Freindship*’)', in Léonie Villard, *Jane Austen: A French Appreciation*, 4 vols (London: Routledge, [1924] 2011), iv, pp.3-54; Annette B. Hopkins, ‘Jane Austen’s “Love and Friendship”: A Study in Literary Relations’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 24 (1925), 34-49; Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*.

²⁹ Clara Tuite, *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.60.

³⁰ Mandal, *Jane Austen*, p.42-3. On Pratt’s presence in the *Lady’s Monthly Museum* see Pitcher, ‘*The Lady’s Monthly Museum’s First Series: 1798-1806*’, p.214.

³¹ Copeland, ‘Money Talks’, p.153.

acknowledges and undermines the fashionability of these sentimental novels and magazine serials.

Austen's engagement with the sentimental mode in her *Volumes* appears to have begun in 1787, the same year as the publication of Elizabeth Helme's *Louisa, or the Cottage on the Moor*. *Louisa*, an enormously popular novel which was reprinted in a number of countries, contained 'all the accoutrements of sensibility: the rustic cottage, an orphaned heroine, scenes of abduction or melodrama, as well as the usual invocations to its "fair readers" and tales-within-tales'.³² Helme was quick to place her first publication within the literary fashion system. Her preface unwittingly demonstrates the underlying irony that emerges in the fraught relationship between fashion and sensibility in literary culture during this period: 'essay-writing is totally out of fashion', she writes, 'character, or rather caricatura is now the rage. For my part, I am not fashionable enough to enjoy the outré part of creation; therefore shall content myself with exposing vice only'.³³ In spite of the author's ostensible refutation of literary fashions, the paratext in fact exemplifies the fashion-consciousness of contemporary sentimental novels. Not so fashionable that her fiction deals with that which is 'outré', or '[b]eyond the bounds of what is usual or considered correct or proper' (and thus irreconcilable with its sentimental principles), but certainly not so unfashionable that it takes the form of an essay, Helme can define her work against the extremities of fashion whilst depending on the fashion system to situate, indeed market, her novel.³⁴ After setting up her narrative in such a way, she goes on to write a story in which sensibility is equally precariously understood through its opposition to, yet dependence upon, fashionability: Helme's narrator insists that for the sentimental heroine fashion is 'needless', yet, as I examine, it also remains a vital tool through which she can display her sentimental virtue.³⁵

Helme's preface demonstrates the complexity of literary sensibility's fashion-consciousness. Austen responds to this by putting fashion at the centre of her first sentimental narrative, 'Frederic and Elfrida', first drafted in 1787 and copied into

³² Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, p.48.

³³ Elizabeth Helme, *Louisa, or The Cottage on the Moor*, 2 vols (London: G. Kearsley, 1787), i, pp.vi-vii.

³⁴ 'Outré', definition a, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/133881>> [accessed 23 September 2014].

³⁵ Helme, *Louisa*, ii, p.57.

Volume the First of her manuscript notebooks. The narrative opens with an incongruous ‘little adventure’ in which the sentimental heroine Elfrida writes to her friend Charlotte asking for a ‘new and fashionable Bonnet’ to ‘suit’ her ‘complexion’ (C, p.3). In the short narrative Austen deploys the term ‘delicate’ to describe her heroine, a crucial term that encompasses the psychic and somatic qualities of sensibility: moral sensitivity, refined taste, and a particularly fine nerve structure (C, p.9). As a consequence of her delicacy, and in spite of having already bought her ‘wedding cloathes’, for twenty years Elfrida’s parents refrain from pressing their delicate daughter on fixing a date for her marriage to Frederic (C, p.6). Eventually, upon hearing that Frederic has developed an attachment with Eleanor, a girl of eighteen, Elfrida’s somatic delicacy surfaces: she falls into ‘a succession of fainting fits’, thus persuading Frederic to marry her immediately (C, p.10). In the interim, Austen marks the twenty-year gap not with seasons of nature, but of fashion: ‘Weeks and Fortnights flew away without gaining the least ground; the cloathes [*sic*] grew out of Fashion’ (C, p.9). The image of passing fashions exposes the comic disjunction within sentimental fiction, in which trivial concerns are juxtaposed with intense feeling. Indeed, one contributor to the *Lady’s Monthly Museum* observed the ways in which ‘ill-directed’ sensibility was often directed at the trivial: ‘I have known many a fair one’, the commentator complains, ‘bathed in tears for the loss of a favourite parrot’.³⁶ Such criticisms recall More’s ‘Sensibility’: real sensibility, the poem maintains, is ‘not to mourn because a sparrow dies’.³⁷

Clothing recurs in Austen’s sentimental parodies as a particularly prominent trivial detail with which she can seemingly expose sensibility’s status as simply another ‘luxury item in commodity culture’.³⁸ In ‘Frederic and Elfrida’ Austen deploys the extraneous detail of changing fashions not simply to draw attention to the prevailing fashion-consciousness of sentimental novelists, but also to suggest that sensibility itself is nothing more than a passing vogue by aligning worn sentimental clichés with outmoded clothes. Indeed, literary sensibility was reproduced, extra-textually, in consumer items such as the ‘Pamela Evening Dress’, advertised in *La*

³⁶ ‘How to Cultivate and Improve Sensibility of the Heart’, *LMM*, February 1799, pp.117-21 (p.121). Pitcher notes how the writer mixes ‘the trivial with the serious’. See Pitcher, ‘*The Lady’s Monthly Museum*’ *First Series: 1798-1806*, p.10.

³⁷ More, ‘Sensibility’, p.282

³⁸ Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave, ‘Introduction’, in Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press [1987] 2009), pp.vii-xxvi (p.xxi).

Belle Assemblée in September 1814 and named after Samuel Richardson's sentimental heroine. The dress's association with Pamela reveals more the cachet of the sentimental heroine's name than any link with the sensibility: it is not a dress of sentimental simplicity, but an expensive costume of 'finest Indian muslin' and 'superb white lace' dyed in 'maiden's blush'.³⁹ Over half a century after *Pamela*'s 1740 debut, sentimental sartorial fashions persisted with the creation of the 'Pamela bonnet', also named after the virtuous heroine of Richardson's novel.⁴⁰ Ironically, Richardson's sentimental fiction managed to affirm sensibility's status as both fashionable commodity and as a genre that was deeply concerned with images of clothing, in spite of being professedly anti-fashion.⁴¹ In fashionable culture Pamela the character had become inseparable from her dress. Sentimental fiction in general appeared to undermine any clear distinction between person and (often worn) possession. Lynch argues that this conflation was achieved via sentimental feeling: '[t]he emotional attachments that people form with possessions in these mid-eighteenth-century fictions can seem as freighted with consequence as the emotional attachments that people form with each other'.⁴² As this chapter shows, Austen's unpublished works consistently seek to parody and rework this sentimental conflation of person and fashionable object.

Dress often emerges in sentimental fiction, as it does in the fashion periodical, as an important indication of the wearer's moral qualities, thus becoming an extension of the delicate sentimental body. In Charlotte Smith's popular first novel, *Emmeline, or The Orphan of the Castle* (1788), the heroine, 'Simply dressed, with no other protection than Providence' delights in rambling for miles around Pembrokeshire's wild landscape: her unadorned dress is an extension of her moral virtue. Emmeline laments the contrasting 'sober plainness and neat simplicity' of her beloved late housekeeper and the 'dirty, tawdry, and disgusting' figure of Mrs Garnet

³⁹ 'Explanation of the Prints of Fashion', *LBA*, September 1814, pp.81-82 (p.82).

⁴⁰ 'Pamela Bonnet', in Valerie Cumming, C. W. Cunnington and P. E. Cunnington, *The Dictionary of Fashion History* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010), p.147.

⁴¹ The subject of clothing in *Pamela* has proven popular with critics. See Jennie Batchelor 'Reinstating the "Pamela Vogue"', in *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830*, pp.163-75; Patricia C. Brükman, 'Clothes of Pamela's Own: Shopping at B-Hall', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 25.2 (2001), 201-213; Anne Buck, 'Pamela's Clothes', *Costume*, 26 (1992), 21-31; Sheila Conboy, 'Fabric and Fabrication in Richardson's *Pamela*', *ELH*, 54 (1987), 81-96; Caryn Chaden, 'Pamela's Identity Sewn in Clothes', in *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*, ed. by Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch (New York: Greenwood, 1988), pp.109-18.

⁴² Lynch, 'Personal Effects', p.345.

in her fashionable London attire.⁴³ Emmeline's response, as a figure of sensibility, is to 'burst into tears'.⁴⁴ Equally, in yet another 'Sentimental Tale' published in the *Lady's Magazine* in 1786, those who 'vie with fashion's queen' are unfavourably compared to the lovely Maria who 'could only exhibit a few choice muslins, a small addition of chintz, and other trifling acquisitions which served rather to display a delicacy than magnificent taste'.⁴⁵ Maria is not barred from an interest in fashion; a failure to follow fashion at all signalled, as my introduction suggests, the equally undesirable quality of eccentricity (as Helme fears in her preface). Rather, Maria's modesty, which is expressed through qualifying and negating terms such as 'only', 'small', 'trifling' and 'delicacy', is reflective of her 'refined consumerism', a quality which became 'an inevitable dimension of female sensibility'.⁴⁶



Figure 2.1 'Pamela Evening Dress', *La Belle Assemblée*, September 1814.

⁴³ Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline, or The Orphan of the Castle*, 3rd edn, 4 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1789), i, p.23.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Emmeline*, i, p.23.

⁴⁵ 'The Illusions of Love, A Sentimental Tale', *LM*, May 1786, pp.255-57 (p.255).

⁴⁶ Barker-Benfield makes this point in reference to Mary Hay's 1796 novel *Emma Courtney*, although, as the fashion magazine shows, it has its roots in earlier fiction (p.210).

In 1792 one contributor to the *Lady's Magazine*, recalling the 1786 'Sentimental Tale', quotes James Fordyce, asking 'when shall women in general understand thoroughly the effect of a comely habit, that, independent of pomp, and despising extravagance, is worn as the sober, yet transparent veil of a more lovely mind?'.⁴⁷ Margaret Lesley of 'Lesley Castle', from *Volume the Second* of Austen's juvenilia, echoes these sentiments: she feigns dislike of 'the extreme Admiration' she excites due to her 'sensibility for the sufferings of so many amiable Young men' (C, p.131). Margaret ridicules her new mother-in-law's 'highly rouged appearance', exclaiming in a letter,

she must be sensible of the ridiculous impropriety of loading her little diminutive figure with such superfluous ornaments; is it possible that she can not know how greatly superior an elegant simplicity is to the most studied apparel? (C, p.132)

There is, as is so often the case in Austen's juvenilia, a comic disjunction between characters' thoughts and expressions: Margaret censures Lady Lesley's ornaments only to dream of how much more 'becoming' the diamonds would look on her own 'majestic' figure (C, p.132). Margaret's hypocritical dismissal of 'superfluous ornaments' equally reflects the sentimental discourse of the fashion magazine which posited 'accomplishment, learning and virtue' as the 'only truly desirable fashionable ornaments', thus ironically refashioning virtue as a fashionable accessory.⁴⁸ Indeed, virtue came to be evoked through sartorial metaphors: in 'Seymour Abbey', an epistolary novel by 'D. R.' which ran in the *Lady's Magazine* from 1785 to 1787, the heroine Jessey is taken to London by her benefactress, Mrs Hartley, whom she praises for having taught her 'that virtue was the greatest ornament I could have'.⁴⁹ Helme's almost contemporaneous *Louisa* affirms this transformation of virtue into fashionable accessory. The very body of her Louisa is described in terms of precious jewels; the colouring of her skin naturally radiates 'vermillion', a mineral used in women's make-up, whilst her teeth are pearls: she is

⁴⁷ 'On Modesty', *LM*, March 1792, pp.129-33 (p.132).

⁴⁸ Batchelor, 'Reclothing the Female Reader', p.16.

⁴⁹ 'Seymour Abbey', *LM*, August 1786, p.411-15 (p.412).

tall and elegantly formed, her complexion of the most transparent fairness, her lovely down-cast eyes seemed sureties that innocence and virtue dwelt within. The pale blush of her cheek was admirably contrasted by the vermilion of her lips; which opened on rows of pearl; bright auburn locks (whose ringlets needed not the assistance of art) fell negligently on her snowy neck; in fine, she was loveliness itself, without the aid of ornament.⁵⁰

In *Emmeline* the heroine's virtue is communicated through her dress; in *Louisa*, morality is tied to the heroine's body itself. Austen satirizes this sentimental assimilation of ethics and aesthetics and the related association between fashion and feeling in 'Frederic and Elfrida' when her sentimental heroine, employing her Shaftesburian inward eye to examine Rebecca Fitzroy, insists, 'I cannot refrain from expressing my raptures, at the engaging Qualities of your Mind, which so amply atone for the Horror, with which your first appearance must ever inspire the unwary visitor' (C, p.5). In spite of Rebecca's 'forbidding Squint', her 'greazy [*sic*] tresses' and 'swelling Back' which, in a parody of that sensibility which can only be felt not spoken, 'are more frightfull [*sic*] than imagination can paint or pen describe', Elfrida finds Rebecca 'lovely and too charming' (C, p.5). Austen's juvenile parodies necessarily rely on the shared currency of these sentimental clichés, in which fashion is assimilated into the language of feeling.

Whilst dress often emerges in sentimental narratives as an extension of the wearer's moral 'essence', Batchelor contends that, '[i]f the sentimental ideal of moral legibility rested on a belief in the female body as an involuntary index of feeling, then dress acted as a potential barrier to that index'.⁵¹ Dress could thus potentially hide or distort the body which, as Paul Goring argues, provides 'an *inescapable* textual surface' in the sentimental mode.⁵² In a poem, 'To Sensibility' published in the *Lady's Monthly Museum* in 1802, the speaker, praising the qualities of sensibility, calls upon 'lip's mute eloquence' and the physical marks of sensibility which say 'more than tongue could ever tell!'; sensibility emerges wordlessly through the body.⁵³ Austen satirizes this verbal inefficacy in *Sanditon* when Edward Denham paradoxically describes the indescribable: 'in a tone of great Taste and

⁵⁰ Helme, *Louisa*, i, pp.6-7.

⁵¹ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, pp.2, 13.

⁵² Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.19.

⁵³ 'To Sensibility', *LMM*, January 1802, p.66 (p.66).

Feeling’ he begins ‘to talk of the Sea and the Sea shore – and ran with Energy through all the usual Phrases employed in praise of their Sublimity, and descriptive of the *undescribable* [*sic*] *Emotions* they excite in the Mind of Sensibility’ (NA, p.321). In silencing verbal language, sensibility reframes the body as text; virtue is allegedly exhibited on the heroine’s body in involuntary and legible blushes, tears and palpitations, all of which ostensibly offer an ‘eloquence which promises the true communication of feelings’.⁵⁴ This was thought to be particularly true of women, who due to ‘their greater physical susceptibility and because of the social constraints on their verbal expressiveness [...] are more sincere in gesture than in words’.⁵⁵ Discussion of Austen’s intricate interweaving of fashion and text must examine the body, which emerges in sentimental discourse as a particularly feminine ‘text’.

Austen’s initial compositions, begun in the late 1780s, were written at a pivotal moment in the history of sensibility. As we have seen, Hannah More launched an attack on the fashionable cult of sentiment in her 1782 poem ‘Sensibility’ which sought to distinguish the ‘untaught goodness’ of real sensibility from the fashionable cult of sentiment.⁵⁶ Butler has argued that by the 1780s the ‘pendulum of fashion’ began to swing against sensibility, instead favouring anti-sentiment, particularly satire.⁵⁷ Richard Tickell’s anti-sentimental poem *The Wreath of Fashion, or The Art of Sentimental Poetry* (1778) had reached its sixth edition by 1780. The poem aimed to ‘ridicule’ the ‘modish folly’ of ‘*Sentimental Panygerick* [*sic*]’, offering a fashionable Wedgwood vase as the ‘Petrefaction [*sic*]’ of sensibility and depicting the ‘Votry [*sic*] of Sentiment’ seeking after the reward of a wreath of fashion, comically decorated with ‘mimic buds, and artificial flow’rs’: its satire hinged precisely on sensibility’s fashionability.⁵⁸ It is no coincidence that in her own satire of sentiment, ‘Frederic and Elfrida’, Austen places ‘festoons of artificial flowers’ (used to decorate fashionable millinery in the late eighteenth century) in the dressing room of the ‘amiable Rebecca’, a figure who particularly delights, like

⁵⁴ John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p.16.

⁵⁵ Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), p.86.

⁵⁶ More, ‘Sensibility’, p.282.

⁵⁷ See Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, [1975] 1990), p.32. Butler also lists poetical satires of sensibility that were more successful than sentimental poetry, for instance Thomas James Mathais’s *The Pursuits of Literature* (1794), which had reached its eighth edition by 1798 (p.34).

⁵⁸ Richard Tickell, *The Wreath of Fashion, or The Art of Sentimental Poetry* (London: T. Beckett, 1778), ‘Advertisement’ and pp.iii, 5, 13.

Pope's *Belinda*, in the cosmetic artifice of 'Patches, Powder, Pomatum and Paint', whilst erroneously endorsing the sentimental belief that 'art' (artifice) is to be despised (C, pp.5-6).⁵⁹

Whilst satires such as *The Wreath of Fashion* proved popular, the history of sentimental literature – its demise and its criticism – is complex.⁶⁰ As Ellis points out, many readers and writers expressed anxiety regarding the 'Inconveniences of Sensibility' early on: for all its apparent virtues, sensibility appeared to encourage its adherents to pursue incapacitating emotional pain and distress.⁶¹ Similarly, whilst Butler argues for the increasing popularity of satires of sentiment in the 1780s, this was also an important decade for the development of the sentimental genre, as evidenced in the popularity of Helme and Smith. To further complicate the genealogy of satires of sentiment, it is important to note that even during sensibility's heyday, authors such as Oliver Goldsmith and Laurence Sterne blended sentimental portraits with the language of satire, much to the chagrin of some readers.⁶² Equally, ostensibly sincere sentimental novels could be just as 'comic as affecting', as has been argued of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771).⁶³ Austen capitalises upon the 'delicate line between parody and pathos' exhibited by many sentimental novelists.⁶⁴ In 'Frederic and Elfrida', following Charlotte's ridiculous accidental 'double engagement' and subsequent suicide in the incongruously situated 'deep stream', Austen calls the 'sweet lines' of Charlotte's epitaph to the attention of the reader, insisting that they 'were never read by any one who passed that way, without a shower of tears, which if they should fail of exciting in you, Reader, your mind must be unworthy to peruse them' (C, pp.7-8). As with Mackenzie's sentimental epistolary novel, 'whether we laugh or cry, [the narrative] elicits a physical response'.⁶⁵ Whilst Austen elsewhere treats somatic responses to reading with

⁵⁹ See 'Artificial flowers', *The Dictionary of Fashion History*, p.8.

⁶⁰ Ellis discusses of the difference between the demise of the genre, and reaction against sensibility, pp.190-21.

⁶¹ Ellis, p.6. Ellis refers here to 'Rosalia; Or, The Inconveniences of Sensibility' published in the *LM* in May 1773.

⁶² See Barbara M. Benedict, *Framing Feeling: Sentiment and Style in English Prose Fiction, 1745-1800* (New York: AMS Press, 1994), pp. 32, 91. Hannah More rebukes Sterne in 'Sensibility'. Mullan discusses the critical debate as to whether or not Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) is sincere or satirical (pp.136-40), concluding that if it 'was a parody, it was, and is, difficult to distinguish it from the type that it might have parodied' (p.139).

⁶³ Bending and Bygrave, p.xv.

⁶⁴ Benedict, *Framing Feeling*, p.69.

⁶⁵ Bending and Bygrave, p.xv.

cynicism, if not humour, writing of Sydney Owenson's *Ida of Athens* (1809) that, 'If the warmth of her Language could affect the Body, it might be worth reading in this weather', Austen's juvenilia frequently seek, like the sentimental novel in its heyday, to 'affect the Body', transforming sentimental tears into laughter.⁶⁶

In 1787 Charles Dodd published *The Curse of Sentiment*, a widely-reviewed epistolary novel that looked very much like a novel of sensibility with its discovered letters, its frequent 'showers of tears' (which Austen comically recalls in 'Frederic and Elfrida'), its appeal to 'Friendship and Sensibility' and 'Love and Innocence' (echoed by Austen in the title of 'Love and Freindship [*sic*]') and its hero's tearful response to *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), Goethe's enormously popular sentimental portrait of a man of feeling that had been revised and reprinted in English that very year.⁶⁷ Dodd's title appears to allude to a quotation from the Pratt's sentimental novel *Charles and Charlotte* (1777): 'Accursed is the gift of sensibility' writes Charles, Dodd's protagonist, "'Tis the smart that "agonizes at every pore"' .⁶⁸ Charles makes the statement as he searches hopelessly for his former lover, Charlotte, who has left him upon discovering that he has an estranged wife; Dodd reproduces this plot device in *The Curse of Sentiment*, which leads to the suffering and eventual death of the novel's lovers. Crucially, however, Dodd's title enables him to 'degrade sentiment' (offering it as a curse rather than a gift), whilst presenting what is by-and-large a sentimental novel; his method is characteristic of sentimental novelists of the late 1780s who frequently claimed 'not to be writing sentimental novels'.⁶⁹ Indeed, one reviewer remarked of the novel

that the sentiments (with a few exceptions), which, from the title-page, are supposed to be ridiculed, but which, we conceive, the author wishes to recommend, are such as do honour to human nature, when Religion prescribes their course of operation, marks their extent, and ratifies their purport. Sentiment is not productive of the evils ascribed to it; but the

⁶⁶ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 17-18 January 1809, p.166.

⁶⁷ Charles Dodd, *The Curse of Sentiment*, 2 vols (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787), i, p.124; ii, pp.30, 90, 211; i, p.67.

⁶⁸ Samuel Jackson Pratt, *Charles and Charlotte*, 2 vols (London, 1777), i, p.6.

⁶⁹ Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, p.144.

want of principle in persons of sentiment renders them the most dangerous, because the most artful and insinuating, of all characters.⁷⁰

Like the anonymous *Illusions of Sentiment* published a year later, which concluded with the aphorism that ‘the beauty of Sentiment is Simplicity’ which only ceases to ‘become amiable’ when ‘tortured by the elaborate refinements of fastidious precepts’, *The Curse of Sentiment* was not so much a warning against sentiment *tout court*, but rather ostensibly a rejection of the type of sensibility that was exploited to justify morally unacceptable behaviour, particularly adultery.⁷¹ Such publications exemplify what Tuite observes was the arduous task of both sentimental and anti-sentimental texts to distinguish real from false sentiment.⁷² Austen’s juvenilia invoke this generic ‘indistinguishability’ between sensibility and anti-sentiment, embracing the blurred lines between laughter and tears.⁷³

A year after the publication of Dodd’s novel Mary Wollstonecraft published *Mary: A Fiction* (1788). The novel’s ‘Advertisement’ claims that the feeling heroine ‘is neither a Clarissa, a Lady ----, nor a Sophie’, here listing the eponymous of heroines of Richardson’s and Rousseau’s sentimental fictions.⁷⁴ Yet her narrative manages to offer, like *The Curse of Sentiment*, a type of anti-sentimental sentimental novel: hers is a critique of the type of sentimental fiction that fails to depict women with ‘thinking powers’, yet her own novel frequently appeals to the language of sensibility.⁷⁵ Like More, Wollstonecraft did not reject sentiment outright, but instead appears to call for a distinction between what Barker-Benfield outlines as ‘sensibility combined with reason, and the entirely ungoverned and emotional kind characterizing the fashionable, conventional rearing of females’.⁷⁶ It is this second, fashionable form of sensibility that provides the humour for Austen’s parodies. Wollstonecraft’s *Mary* combines a critique of sentiment with an attack on fashionability: Mary’s mother, a woman of fashion, reads sentimental novels to

⁷⁰ ‘The Curse of Sentiment’, *The General Magazine*, October 1787, pp.254-55 (p.254), in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/3288849>> [accessed 18 January 2018].

⁷¹ [Anon.], *Illusions of Sentiment* (London, 1788), p.167.

⁷² Tuite, *Romantic Austen*, p.59.

⁷³ Tuite observes that *Sense and Sensibility* ‘overcome[s] this impasse of indistinguishability between the sentimental and the antisentimental’ in *Romantic Austen*, p.60.

⁷⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘*Mary*’ and ‘*The Wrongs of Woman*’, ed. by Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1976] 2009), ‘Advertisement’ (p.3).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Barker-Benfield, p.281.

‘make amends for her lack of feeling’.⁷⁷ Wollstonecraft refrains from describing the fashionable world in too much detail; the author thus implicitly attacks contemporary novels (such as those by which Thomas Holcroft and Thomas Vaughan), which ‘glamorize[d], and so help[ed] to reproduce’ fashionability.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, heavy criticism of sensibility throughout the 1780s did not lead to the end of sentimentalism.⁷⁹ With the politicisation of sensibility by the 1790s, Wollstonecraft had another cause to rail against sentiment, despairing in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) that sensibility was still ‘the *manie* of the day, and compassion the virtue which is to cover a multitude of vices, whilst justice is left to mourn in sullen silence’.⁸⁰ The *Vindication*, which responds to Edmund Burke’s anti-Jacobin treatise of the same year, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ridicules Burke’s ‘pampered sensibility’: ‘Even the Ladies, Sir,’ she caustically remarks, ‘may repeat your sprightly sallies and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your sentimental exclamations’.⁸¹ Janet Todd identifies the French Revolution as an important marker in the history of sensibility, asserting that neither reformists nor anti-Jacobins ‘wished to be left in possession of a now unfashionable sensibility, but neither side wanted entirely to abandon the power of emotive, sentimental language’.⁸² As with the novels of the late 1780s, including Wollstonecraft’s own *Mary*, political discourse was caught in a double bind, both sides of the debate concurrently appealing to and inveighing against sentiment as it suited their cause.

By 1796 *The Monthly Magazine* located the fashion for sensibility firmly in the past:

There was a time when sensibility was taken under the patronage of that powerful arbiter of manners – fashion. Then, height of breeding was measured by delicacy of feeling, and no fine lady, or gentleman, was

⁷⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Mary*, p.7.

⁷⁸ Gary Kelly, ‘Introduction’, in *Mary*, ix-xxi (p.xvii).

⁷⁹ See Ellis, p.220

⁸⁰ Wollstonecraft, ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*’ and ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Men*’, p.6.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, p.130.

ashamed to be seen sighing over a pathetic story, or weeping at a deep-wrought tragedy.⁸³

Whilst the nascent fashion magazine had displayed concerns about the vogue for sensibility, it continued to appeal to the rigorously challenged, and purportedly outmoded, cult of sensibility. In 1799 the *Lady's Monthly Museum* praises the 'blushing cheek of sensibility' (in an article in which Austen most likely took the phrase 'Sense and Sensibility'); in February 1800 the same magazine lauds 'angelic' sensibility ostensibly without irony, reprinting an essay that had originally been published in the *London Magazine* as far back as 1776; the magazine equally continued to produce imitations of Sterne well into the first decade of the 1800s.⁸⁴ Whilst the fashion magazine aimed to reflect prevailing literary tastes, its prolonged attachment to the sentimental genre demonstrates the seemingly indispensable ethical framework offered by sensibility, in which fashionable consumption could be reconciled with feminine morality.

In satirising sensibility Austen's juvenile writings, like her first novel, degrade sensibility as a 'symptom of fashion'. Yet, as this history of the interrelated genres of sentiment and anti-sentiment suggests, Austen's engagement with sensibility is equally framed by fashion-consciousness. Equally, the content of her mock-published notebooks suggest that, from an early age, Austen was analysing literary genres through the lens of fashionability. Her parodies of the 1780s and 90s respond to the fashion for anti-sentiment in the period, whilst her unpublished poetry of the early 1800s, examined later in this chapter, similarly reacts to attempts to reclaim degraded sentiment by writing within the framework of sensibility.

⁸³ Quoted in Ellis, p.35.

⁸⁴ See 'Effects of Mistaken Synonymy', *LMM*, January 1799, pp.21-24 and 'The Birth of Sensibility', *LMM*, February 1800, pp.85-87. See 'The Birth of Sensibility', *London Magazine*, 45, April 1776, pp.194-95, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/5405531>> [accessed 18 January 2016]. Although Pitcher fails to note that 'The Birth of Sensibility' was reprinted by the *LMM*, he does observe that it also appeared in *Affecting Pieces from the Juvenile Library* (1810) and in *The Gem* (1822). Edward W. R. Pitcher, *Discoveries in Periodicals, 1720-1820: Facts and Fictions* (Lewiston, N. Y. and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), pp.24-6. Le Faye points to the *LMM*'s 1799 article as inspiration for the title 'Sense and Sensibility' in *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, p.112.

2.2 Fashionable Fetishism and Sensible Solipsism

In 'A beautiful description of the different effects of Sensibility on different Minds', a brief narrative from *Volume the First* (c.1793), Austen puns on the interplay between text and textile as it occurs in sentimental fiction. The narrator, 'but just returned from Melissa's Bedside', confesses: 'I never saw so affecting an object as she exhibits. She lies wrapped in a book muslin bedgown, a chambray gauze shift, and a French net nightcap' (C, p.68). Austen presents Melissa whose body, in typical sentimental fashion, is weak: 'illness and signs of physical weakness' were 'essential to the vocabulary of sentimentalism' and served as bodily markers of 'moral sensitivity'.⁸⁵ Whilst the sentimental 'hero or heroine was', Goring notes, 'like a refined patient nobly suffering through nervous indispositions', Austen literalises this, placing Melissa on her sickbed.⁸⁶ Melissa's feeble body is covered by a variety of translucent fabrics. Veiled in such a way, Melissa recalls the fashion for depicting sensibility as a female figure draped, as the *Lady's Monthly Museum* writes, in a 'white veil almost transparent'.⁸⁷ Indeed, the 'diaphanous veil' covering the woman of sensibility was ideally intended to render 'the heroine's and the novel's virtue unequivocally transparent', as Batchelor notes with reference to Pamela's modest dress, and as we have seen with Emmeline's meagre and simple clothing.⁸⁸ However, like the embodied expressions of sensibility which Hannah More likens to deceptive drapery, the veil as a garment both conceals and reveals, thus serving as an apt metaphor for 'sensibility's paradoxical status as both a genuine moral response externally expressed [...] and a cultivated, possibly fictitious, mode of display [...] worn by the covetous and immoral'.⁸⁹

In Helme's *Louisa* the heroine, after having escaped being seduced by her treacherous guardian (the evidence of which is the spots of blood on her virtuously white habit), knocks on the door of a 'small cot', luckily inhabited by the sentimental

⁸⁵ Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility*, p.144.

⁸⁶ Goring is here summarizing Mullan's characterisation of the figure of feeling. Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility*, p.144.

⁸⁷ 'The Birth of Sensibility', *LMM*, February 1800. pp.85-87 (pp.85-6).

⁸⁸ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, p.21.

⁸⁹ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, p.2. On the 'duplicious' nature of the veil see Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and Body* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998), p.xxi.

Mrs Rivers who, it emerges by the end of the novel, is in fact Louisa's real mother.⁹⁰ It is a trope which Austen parodies in 'Love and Freindship' (c. 1790) when Laura's parents, characters of 'natural Sensibility', are 'greatly astonished, by hearing a violent knocking on the outward Door of our rustic Cot', and 'greatly affected by the sufferings of the unfortunate Stranger' (C, p. 78). In Helme's novel, Louisa and her new hostess take a moment to observe one another:

The ladies now had leisure to examine each other, though not with the supercilious eye of envy with which the modern Belle observes her contemporary in dress and fashion: here every fresh glance discovered a new grace, or additional virtue, such is the power of sympathy on uncorrupted minds.⁹¹

Helme contrasts the gaze of the sympathetic spectator with that of a 'modern Belle', explicitly opposing sentimental observation, which renders graces and virtues – indeed, the soul – transparent, and the type of 'examination' that occurs between women of fashion which, she argues, is arrested at the level of dress. Austen offers an example of fashionable examination in *The Watsons*: Miss Watson and Miss Edwards' 'dress', we are told,

was now to be examined; Mrs. Edwards acknowledged herself too old-fashioned to approve of every modern extravagance however sanctioned – and tho' complacently viewing her daughter's good looks, would give but a qualified admiration. (NA, p.260)

Like the mercenary Anne Steele who examines Marianne's clothes (with 'minute observation') and cannot be 'easy till she knew the price of every part of Marianne's dress' (SS, p.186), Mrs Edwards, with her fine silk gown and 'new cap from the Milliners' has none of the truly penetrating gaze of the sympathetic spectator (NA, p.260). Instead of discovering a 'new grace, or additional virtue' simply through observation, Mrs Edwards sees only the skin left bare by the modern fashion for low-cut dresses, thus attending 'with yet greater Solicitude to the proper security of her young Charges' Shoulders and Throats' (NA, pp.262-3).

⁹⁰ Helme, *Louisa*, i, p.1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, i, p.5.

However, Austen also challenges the sentimental mode of examination depicted by Helme. In doing so, Austen is responding to the association, suggested by Lynch, that ‘unfolds’ throughout the eighteenth century between ‘writing character’ and the discourses of fashion and the marketplace.⁹² In ‘A beautiful description’, although supposedly affected by sensibility, our narrator can tell us only of Melissa’s clothing, and nothing of her character, in spite of her dress’ literal transparency. Melissa’s spectators are not even roused by the ‘power of sympathy’ into fellow feeling: Sir William sleeps, Maria ‘talks of going to Town next week’ and Julia speaks of her own loss of appetite (C, pp.68-9). The ‘different effects of Sensibility on different minds’ are, Austen suggests, not only absurd but also solipsistic. Similarly, in ‘Frederic and Elfrida’, Elfrida’s observation of Rebecca leads her into self-absorption. Elfrida, whose name notably recalls ‘the tragedy of Elfrida’, a favourite play of the sentimental heroine of *Laura and Augustus*,⁹³ declares to Rebecca,

Your sentiments so nobly expressed on the different excellencies of Indian and English Muslins, and the judicious preference you give the former, have excited in me an admiration of which I can alone give an adequate idea, by assuring you it is nearly equal to what I feel for myself (C, p.5).

Not only does Elfrida’s nonsensical logic lead her from fabrics to herself, further sending up the collapse of body and clothing in sentimental language, but she also demonstrates that, as Sedgwick argues (somewhat verbosely), ‘the emphatic alloidentifications that were supposed to guarantee the sociable nature of sensibility’ (of the sort we observe in *Louisa*) ‘could not finally be distinguished from an epistemological solipsism’.⁹⁴ The episode reflects more widely Austen’s characterisation of sentimental figures within her juvenilia as following what Spacks calls the ‘plot of narcissism’.⁹⁵ Sensibility, with its tendency to become self-consuming, has the danger of turning into self-approration and conceit. Indeed,

⁹² Deirdre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.11.

⁹³ See Eliza Nugent Bromley, *Laura and Augustus*, 3 vols (London, 1784), iii, p.12.

⁹⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London, Routledge, 1994), p.111. Sedgwick is here engaging with Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability* (1988).

⁹⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks, ‘Plots and Possibilities: Jane Austen’s Juvenilia’, in *Jane Austen’s Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, pp.124-34 (p.129).

Austen's protagonists become engrossed in the pleasure they can derive from sympathetic spectatorship. Austen's Alice and Lady Williams, for instance, from 'Jack and Alice' in *Volume the First* (c. 1790) insist on hearing the 'Life and adventures' of the unfortunate Lucy; it is only after she has given an account of her misfortunes that Austen reveals that the girl has been screaming, lying on the ground with her leg broken in a steel trap (C, p.18).



Figure 2.2 Section of a muslin dress (c. 1800), which gives a sense of the fabric's translucency. Victoria and Albert Museum.

Like Elfrida's muslins, Melissa's draping serves to call out self-interested sensibility: despite the translucency of her nightwear, which should render her virtue transparent, her observers fail, unlike Mrs Rivers and Louisa, to discover any 'new grace, or additional virtue' in the 'affecting [...] object'. Austen's choice of fabric is particularly significant: 'book muslin' owes 'its name to the book-like manner in which it is folded when sold in the piece'.⁹⁶ The fabric is not only extremely thin, but, occurring in a prose fragment in which Melissa's 'punning Doctor' plays with homophones ('week' and 'weak') and deploys the double-entendre of 'spirits' (C, pp.68-9), the name also gestures towards the narrative's intertextuality, emphasising the analogy between text and textile whilst pointing to the pages of novelists such as

⁹⁶ 'Book muslin', *OED*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/21412>> [accessed 23 September 2014].

Samuel Richardson who inform both literary and sartorial sensibility, thus metaphorically encasing Melissa.

Melissa becomes a heap of fabrics, a limp bundle of textiles; she evinces none of the somatic vocabulary, comprising involuntary blushes and sorrowful tears, expected of the sentimental heroine. In Pratt's *Charles and Charlotte*, another source text for Austen's juvenilia, the heroine's dress similarly acts as bodily substitute. In the novel the hero attempts without success to convince his lover to masquerade as his wife while his real life spouse still lives, a story which one reviewer found 'equally humorous and affecting'.⁹⁷ The protagonist writes to his missing lover Charlotte in distress, gazing at her clothes:

I found something to awaken a distressful feeling in every object that the taper exhibited to my view – The toilet was not trusted with its suspended ornaments – the chair was unoccupied which used to sustain your day-dress – but the night robes were hanging idly, and full in view, at the side of the bed: there was nobody to take them down - nobody to wear them.⁹⁸

Charles is affected by the sight and sound of clothing: 'the rustle of silks upon the stairs', he writes, 'What a sensation did this trifle produce! but, ah! how unlike *that I* had been us'd to feel, when the step of Charlotte animated my expectation'.⁹⁹ The 'trifles' of clothing, whether seen or heard, produce indescribable 'sensations' within the protagonist.¹⁰⁰ Clothing comes to represent Charlotte's absent body, revealing the way in which the body of the sentimental heroine is conflated with the fashions that adorn it. In her own narrative, Austen subverts the 'dialectical nature of the fetish object', that emerges in *Charles and Charlotte* and throughout sentimental fiction, in which clothing protects the lover against absence yet also, paradoxically, 'reveals absence': even in Melissa's physical presence she is seen only through her French 'chambray gauze' and 'net nightcap'; she disappears behind her clothing.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ 'Monthly and Critical Review of New Publications', *The Westminster Magazine*, May 1777, p.267, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/6482771>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

⁹⁸ Pratt, *Charles and Charlotte*, i, p.8-9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, i, p.170.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, i, p.136.

¹⁰¹ Katherine Rieder, 'Gifting and Fetishization: The Portrait Miniature of Sally Foster Otis as a Maker of Female Memory', in *Women and Things, 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies*, ed. by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp.247-64 (p.252).

In 'Love and Freindship', an epistolary narrative that opens *Volume the Second*, Sophia, who is 'all Sensibility and Feeling', provides a parallel to these interlocking images of clothing fetishism and sentimental narcissism (C, p.83). Sophia is separated from her husband Augustus who lies in prison as a consequence of having failed to repay his debts, a crime Laura comically reveres as 'disinterested Behaviour!' (C, p.86). In a sentimental fashion, Sophia begins to imagine her absent lover in the objects that lie around her. Elm trees, she insists, remind her of Augustus, "He was like them, tall, majestic – he possessed that noble grandeur which you admire in them", whilst the sky incongruously and melodramatically metamorphoses not into her husband, but rather his clothing:

'Oh! My Laura' (replied she hastily withdrawing her Eyes from a momentary glance at the sky) 'do not thus distress me by calling my Attention to an object which so cruelly reminds me of my Augustus's blue sattin [*sic*] Waistcoat striped with white!' (C, pp.95-6)

The scene bears traces of Eliza Nugent Bromley's epistolary novel *Laura and Augustus* (1784), which a reviewer for the *Town and Country Magazine* insisted displayed 'the warmest effusions of sentimental love'.¹⁰² Laura, the novel's sentimental heroine, describes at length how she and her lover co-ordinate outfits for a fashionable 'fete champetre': she wears a 'petticoat [...] of white lustring, a spangled gauze thrown over it', a gown of 'crape studded with silver stars' and 'sleeves of spangled gauze' whilst her beloved Lieutenant Augustus Montague dons 'white lustring, the waistcoat wrought in rose-buds' and 'a jacket made of the most beautiful tambour muslin lined with white'.¹⁰³ Sophia echoes Laura's description, Austen parodying the superfluity of detail, in which the style, trimming, colour and fabric of Augustus's waistcoat are outlined.

The fashion-consciousness of Bromley's and Austen's heroines underscores the centrality of fashionable consumption within sentimentalism. As I have shown with reference to the fashion periodicals of the period, consumer objects of fashion (particularly dress) were styled as accessible gauges of the wearer's taste and thus an

¹⁰² 'Laura and Augustus', *Town and Country Magazine*, 16, May 1784, p.269, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/6381311>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

¹⁰³ Bromley, *Laura and Augustus*, i, p.120-22. Mudrick explores the relationship between 'Love and Freindship' and *Laura and Augustus* in *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*.

external indicators of one's virtue. Campbell, charting the commercial implications of Shaftesbury's philosophy of aesthetics and ethics, even goes as far to suggest that 'not to be "in fashion" was tantamount to being of dubious moral standing' and so 'fashion-conscious conduct' was 'for those who subscribed to this ideal of character'.¹⁰⁴ Harriet Guest clarifies the somewhat surprising relationship between fashionability and virtuous sensibility, this time turning to the novels of Richardson and Burney, in which women visit shops only to deny shopkeepers their custom. She insists that, whilst 'the figure of the woman of fashion' was a central 'focus for anxieties about the morality of commercial culture', there emerged, in fictions of the latter half of the eighteenth century, a 'counterimage' in 'the figure of the woman who does not consume enough' and whose failure to buy was 'the sign not of prudence, but of a hardhearted lack of sensibility'.¹⁰⁵ As I have shown, the precarious relationship between sensibility and fashionable consumption is equally palpable in the nascent fashion magazine.

In 'Love and Freindship', Austen subverts this image of the feeling consumer, presented in the novels and magazines of the period, instead explicitly equating fashion-consciousness with insensibility.¹⁰⁶ When 'a fashionably high Phaeton' overturns Laura recalls that, 'Two Gentlemen most elegantly attired but weltering in blood was what first struck our Eyes' (C, p.96). Evidently, what 'first' strikes Laura and Sophia is the elegant clothing of the two men; the wounded bodies, which are (at least metaphorically) significant in sentimental fiction, are registered only second. Like Alice and Lady Williams of 'Jack and Alice' in *Volume the First*, the heroines are incongruously insensible to others' suffering. Austen similarly emphasises the irony that, whilst fetishizing trifling articles of dress, sentimental discourse simultaneously 'disregards the mundane necessities – such as food and money – which keeps bodies functioning', fashioning itself as anti-materialistic.¹⁰⁷ The irony emerges in repetitive acts of theft: Augustus steals money from his father

¹⁰⁴ Campell, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption', p.49.

¹⁰⁵ Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp.76-7.

¹⁰⁶ Inger Sigrun Brodey argues that, 'as Jane Austen so admirably parodies in *Love and Freindship* and *Sense and Sensibility*, unchecked sensibility leads not only to solipsism but also to insensibility'. In this chapter I extend this line of argument to suggest that this insensibility is related to sensibility's fashion-consciousness. Inger Sigrun Brodey, *Ruined by Design: Shaping Novels and Gardens in the Culture of Sensibility* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p.99.

¹⁰⁷ Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, p.44.

whilst Sophia takes banknotes from her grandfather's drawer. Edward emphatically denies the need to earn money, as 'an exalted Mind (such as is my Laura's)' has no use for the 'indelicate employment of Eating and Drinking' (C, p.82).

'Love and Freindship' was most likely drafted before the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) in which Wollstonecraft condemns the hypocrisy of fashionable sensibility, yet Wollstonecraft delineates with persuasive rhetoric what Austen treats with irony. 'I once knew a weak woman of fashion', Wollstonecraft writes (alluding to Lady Kingsborough for whom she had worked),

who was more than commonly proud of her delicacy and sensibility. She thought a distinguishing taste and a puny appetite the height of all human perfection, and acted accordingly. I have seen this weak sophisticated being neglect all the duties of life, yet recline with self-complacency on a sofa, and boast of her want of appetite as proof of delicacy that extended to, or, perhaps, arose from, her exquisite sensibility: for it is difficult to render intelligible such ridiculous jargon.¹⁰⁸

Wollstonecraft reviles the woman of fashion who, in spite of performing the external 'jargon' of sensibility – expressed via her 'puny appetite' – 'insult[s] a worthy old gentlewoman, whom unexpected misfortunes had made dependent on her ostentatious bounty, and who, in better days, had claims on her gratitude'.¹⁰⁹ She repeatedly alludes to the weakness of women of fashionable sentimentalism, here rejecting the sentimental lexicon in which 'weakness' denotes 'tenderness and pity' and instead embracing the term's more established association with poor judgement.¹¹⁰ Conversely, we might view Austen's satire as an extension of Hannah More's 1782 critique of sensibility; real sensibility, More argues, manifests itself in acts of 'melting Charity', offered 'with open hand', whilst Austen's avaricious protagonists employ 'counterfeit' signs of sensibility and quite literally steal from their companions.¹¹¹ As Kathryn J. Ready has noted, More's use of the term 'counterfeit' to express false sensibility is 'striking in tacitly connecting signs of

¹⁰⁸ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p.111.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Todd explores the evolution of the term with reference to Johnson's dictionary in *Sensibility: An Introduction*, p.5.

¹¹¹ More, 'Sensibility', pp.279, 284.

false sensibility with the criminal act of counterfeiting'.¹¹² Austen renders this association between fashionable sensibility and criminality explicit in the numerous acts of theft that occur throughout the narrative: as Mandal affirms, 'Austen's principals employ the language of sensibility to mask and excuse their criminality'.¹¹³ As the next section of this chapter explores, Austen yokes criminality to sentimental representations of the fashion-obsessed, self-serving female consumer.

2.3 Dressing Up in 'The Beautifull Cassandra'

In 'The Beautifull [*sic*] Cassandra' (c. 1788) Austen's condensed twelve chapter 'novel' which spans a mere three pages, the language of feeling is deployed to mask criminality and to both satirize and rewrite sensibility's fetishization of fashion. The narrative tells the story of Cassandra, who is, emphatically, the 'Daughter and only Daughter of a celebrated Millener in Bond Street' and who falls 'in love with an elegant Bonnet' made by her milliner mother for the 'Countess of -----' and, stealing it, goes off 'to make her Fortune' (C, p.43). As Mudrick notes with reference to the narrator's ironic explanation that Cassandra's 'father was of noble Birth, being the near relation of the Duchess of ----'s Butler' (C, p.42), the narrative 'redefines the lachrymose infatuation with noble ancestry'.¹¹⁴ It was indeed an infatuation that extended to the novel of sensibility which, in spite of its ostensible emphasis on the meritocratic 'hierarchy of feeling', frequently terminated with a revelation of the heroine's high birth.¹¹⁵

At first, Cassandra's theft appears a simple act of dressing above her station: the milliner's daughter masquerades as an aristocrat. Yet, despite the narrator's claim that the heroine leaves 'her Mother's shop to make her Fortune', Cassandra displays no interest in the economic and marital possibilities of masquerading as a Countess: she bumps into a Viscount, 'no less celebrated for his Accomplishments and Virtues,

¹¹² Kathryn J. Ready, 'Hannah More and the Bluestocking Salons: Commerce, Virtue, Sensibility, and Conversation', *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual*, 15 (2004), 197-222 (p.210).

¹¹³ Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, p.45

¹¹⁴ Mudrick, p.22

¹¹⁵ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, p.11. Todd discusses heroines including 'Mary in Wollstonecraft's novel, Emmeline and the many Julias' who eventually prove to be high born, in *Sensibility: An Introduction*, p.119.

than for his Elegance and Beauty’, simply curtsies and walks on. Instead, Cassandra displaces her love onto an ‘elegant Bonnet’ (C, p.42). As in *Charles and Charlotte*, fashionable accessory is transformed into romantic substitute. On the one hand, Cassandra’s fetishization of the bonnet accords with the treatment of clothing in eighteenth-century masquerade, the costumes of which often possessed ‘elements of fetishistic or aphrodisiac power’.¹¹⁶ Austen satirizes the supposed ‘aphrodisiac power’ of masquerade costumes in ‘Jack and Alice’: Charles Adam, dressed as the sun with a costume of luminous beams ‘So strong [...] that no one dared venture within half a mile of them’ manages to subdue ‘the hearts of so many of the young Ladies, that of the six present at the Masquerade but five had returned uncaptivated’ (C, pp.12-3). Likewise, Austen mocks the assumption that dressing up in masquerade led to ‘intrigue, seduction, adultery, rape, perversion’, and thus facilitated female promiscuity.¹¹⁷ The fact that Charles Adam, despite taking up the majority of the three-quarter-mile-long room, can only capture the attention of one lady in the rural neighbourhood of Pammydiddle, and that Cassandra, on her short adventure, happens to be seduced only by a bonnet, undermines and subverts the connection between female heterosexual desire and sartorial disguise.

‘The Beautifull Cassandra’ vivifies the rubric of sensibility. Whilst ‘Love and Freindship’ satirizes the epistolary fiction produced by authors such as Bromley and Helme, ‘The Beautiful Cassandra’, with its episodic chapters never surpassing three sentences in length, is reminiscent of Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) by now hailed as the ‘ur-text of sentimental fiction’, particularly, as we have seen, by the fashion magazine.¹¹⁸ Plot is sidelined in Austen’s narrative; instead, as in Sterne’s episodic *Sentimental Journey*, ‘[e]ach sentimental experience is momentary’.¹¹⁹ In Austen’s prefatory dedication she employs hyperbolic language to characterise her sister Cassandra as the perfect heroine of sensibility: ‘You are a Phoenix. Your taste is refined, your Sentiments are noble, and your Virtues innumerable. Your person is lovely, your Figure elegant, and your Form, magestic [*sic*]’ (C, p.41).

¹¹⁶ Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture* (London: Continuum, 2010), p.101.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp.101-2.

¹¹⁸ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability* p.190.

¹¹⁹ Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, p.105. Butler discusses marginality of plot in sentimental fiction in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p.14.

The eponymous heroine takes the qualities of taste and sentiment to excess. Her behaviour in the narrative parodies through exaggeration the analogous forms of response that women of feeling were supposed to have to both fiction and fashion; as Barker-Benfield explains, '[f]ashionable books of sentimental fiction celebrated their own emotional effects on properly sensitized readers' and 'registered that readers should have the same sensitized and tasteful relationship to fashionable "objects," selected from the increasing range of consumer items women wore, carried with them, or used to characterize domestic space'.¹²⁰ Barker-Benfield calls attention to sentimental fictions, including Elizabeth Inchbald's novel, *A Simple Story* (1791), in which Lord Elmwood strictly orders his daughter Matilda to stay out of his sight as a form of hereditary punishment for his wife's infidelity. After her father's departure from their country home Matilda is permitted to leave 'her lonely retreat', venturing 'into that part of the house from whence her father had just departed'.¹²¹ The sight of her father's hat in this new domestic space gives way to a profusion of feelings indescribable:

a hat, lying on one of the tables, gave her a sensation beyond any other she experienced on this occasion – in that trifling article of dress, she thought she saw himself, and held it in her hand with pious reverence.¹²²

As with Charlotte's dresses in *Charles and Charlotte*, Lord Elmwood's presence is recalled through a 'trifling article of dress'. Cassandra, of course, does not hold her mother's bonnet in pious reverence; it does not become a receptacle of feeling in the sense that it becomes a fetishized surrogate for a loved one. Instead, the fashionable 'trifle' is sufficiently appealing on its own for Cassandra to develop amorous feelings.

Austen's decision to place Cassandra within the commercial setting of a milliner's shop, rather than the domestic spaces of sensibility to which Barker-Benfield refers, points to the influence of Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, in which Yorick displays his dubious sensibility in various commercial transactions. In a chapter entitled 'THE PULSE. PARIS.' Yorick chances upon a female

¹²⁰ Barker-Benfield, p.208.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, ed. by J. M. S. Tompkins, intro. by Jane Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1967] 2009), p.245.

¹²² *Ibid*, p.246.

shopkeeper selling gloves, an encounter in which Sterne establishes the interlocking discourses of seduction and fashionable consumption within sentimentalism. Yorick, alert to sensibility's somatic conception of feeling, first feels the shopkeeper's pulse – 'one of the best pulses of any woman in the world' – which affirms her 'good nature'.¹²³ After detailing the pleasure he derives from feeling her pulse 'in an open shop!', he requests a pair of gloves which the 'beautiful Grisset' proceeds to measure against his hands.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, Yorick and the shopkeeper exchange looks that 'all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express', denoting a vocabulary of sensibility that lies in physical gestures rather than spoken words:

The beautiful Grisset look'd sometimes at the gloves, then side-ways to the window, then at the gloves—and then at me. I was not disposed to break silence—I follow'd her example: so I look'd at the gloves, then at the window, then at the gloves, and then at her—and so on alternately.¹²⁵

The purchase of gloves facilitates an intimate exchange of looking and touching between Yorick and the shopkeeper. Unlike Austen's narrative, in which the heroine 'aggressively spurns any responsibility for acknowledging or agreeing with the contract between selling and purchasing', Sterne creates a sentimental market of exchange in which he overpays the shopkeeper for gloves that are too large for him.¹²⁶ By spurning commercial exchange Cassandra maintains an aristocratic definition of virtue (the heroine is, after all, dressed as a Countess), in which virtue and commerce are incompatible, thus repudiating the sentimental conflation of commercial, sympathetic and even sexual transactions, though ironically doing so through multiple acts of theft.¹²⁷

After measuring the gloves and exchanging looks, Yorick recalls, with erotically charged language, how the Grisset's eye 'shot through two such long and silken eye-lashes with penetration, that she looked into my very heart and reins—It may seem strange, but I could actually feel she did—'.¹²⁸ The Grisset's power of observation is so strong that she manages to touch Yorick simply by sight alone, in

¹²³ Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, ed. by Paul Goring (London: Penguin, 2001), p.50.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.51-2.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.53.

¹²⁶ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, "'Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business": Stealing Sexuality in Austen's *Juvenilia*', *Historicizing Romantic Sexuality: A Praxis Volume* (2006), 1-44 (p.28).

¹²⁷ See Ellis on sensibility and commerce, pp.129-39.

¹²⁸ *A Sentimental Journey*, p.53.

effect binding both physical and psychic feelings. Various critics have registered Sterne's sanctioning of 'erotic encounter as sentimental innocence', noting that the text 'dares its reader to find anything except innocence in its thrills and encounters'.¹²⁹ Indeed, Benedict points to numerous scenes in *A Sentimental Journey* which exemplify Sterne's ability to 'blend sexual, commercial, and political metaphor', including Yorick's encounter with a '*fille de chambre*' who sews items of clothing for him, and a young woman selling 'lace and silk stockings' whom he entertains in his bedchamber, much to the chagrin of the master of the hotel.¹³⁰ Encounters with women associated with '*marchande des modes*' (the 'fashion market'), serve in Sterne's fiction to eroticize the fellow feeling that is fundamental to expressions of sensibility.¹³¹ Yorick also conflates the sentimental female body with images of textiles and clothing: eye-lashes become 'silken', the shopkeeper becomes 'Grisset', a term used to refer the grey fabric worn by French working girls, and even female genitalia becomes a 'band box', a container for a hat.¹³² Equally, it is no coincidence that Sterne stages the 'PULSE' scene around the purchase of a pair of gloves; it has been argued that, historically, gloves disturbed 'the conceptual opposition of person and thing', fetishized to the extent that they were seen by some as 'external organs of the body'.¹³³ Austen's deploys similar images of clothing, challenging the 'opposition of person and thing' throughout her published *oeuvre*. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen evokes the symbolic 'great slit' in Lydia's 'muslin gown' (*PP*, p.221) as a symbol of her loss of sexual innocence and, more obviously, of genitalia.¹³⁴ Austen again uses clothing as symbolic euphemism in *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price warning her cousin Maria Bertram, whose fidelity is under scrutiny, that she will tear her 'gown' (*MP*, p.79). In the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen calls upon the very fetishism that she earlier parodies in her juvenilia, evoking Lydia's body through the metonymy of dress.

¹²⁹ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, pp.199, 196

¹³⁰ Benedict, *Framing Feeling*, pp.82, 91.

¹³¹ *A Sentimental Journey*, p.88.

¹³² *A Sentimental Journey*, p.93; 'Grissette', *OED*, definitions 1 and 2

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/81605?redirectedFrom=grisset#eid>> [accessed 19 September 2014].

¹³³ Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 114-132 (p.116). Their phrase 'external organs of the body' is taken from William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish, I', *Res* 9 (1985), 5-17 (p.10).

¹³⁴ Heydt-Stevenson discusses the slit in *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.87.

Like Yorick, Cassandra experiences the thrill of encounters in which fashionable objects serve as romantic substitutes, but Cassandra's bonnet lacks a physical counterpart: it does not stand for any 'body', absent or present.¹³⁵ After successive acts of theft and excessive fits of consumption (Cassandra devours 'six ices' and refuses to pay for them, then ascends a 'Hackney Coach' without the money to pay her driver) Austen's heroine encounters Maria, who 'seemed surprised; they trembled, blushed, turned pale and passed each other in a mutual silence' (C, p.44). Heydt-Stevenson observes that this sentence,

a parody of sensibility, no doubt, suggests less the presence of guilt at being on the street and enjoying private pleasures that have suddenly become public, but instead the need to imagine and even make an adventure where there is none, to live an adventurous – and in this example, erotic fiction.¹³⁶

Austen's juvenilia recurrently 'imagine and even make adventure where there is none', notably in their account of Elfrida's 'little adventure' which, like Cassandra's, concerns a bonnet (NA, p.3). Yet in 'The Beautifull Cassandra', the girls' expressions are both involuntary and incompatible (they blush *and* turn pale). These physical manifestations are both sentimental and suggestive, reflecting the eroticism of Yorick's sentimental body that 'is at once innocent and knowing, coy and garrulous'.¹³⁷ This duality is embodied by the blush, which is, as Wiltshire argues, is 'one of the acutest signs of the bodily enigma' and one that 'may be misread – indeed more often than not is misread – to ironic effect'.¹³⁸ As Yorick comments during his encounter with the *fille de chambre*:

There is a sort of a pleasing half guilty blush, where the blood is more in fault than the man:—'tis sent impetuous from the heart, and virtue flies after it,—not to call it back, but to make the sensation of it more delicious to the nerves—'tis associated.—

¹³⁵ Jillian Heydt-Stevenson explores various poems of the period in which 'objects take on a life of their own and offer a substitute relationship when reality does not suffice' in *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.18.

¹³⁶ Heydt-Stevenson, "'Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business": Stealing Sexuality in Austen's Juvenilia', p.29.

¹³⁷ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, p.189.

¹³⁸ John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body: 'The Picture of Health'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.18-9.

But I'll not describe it.—¹³⁹

Austen, however, refrains entirely from commenting upon the blushes, which, following the rubric of sensibility, speak for themselves: they pass in 'mutual silence'. Austen leaves them, as Katie Halsey suggests is true of John Keats' poetic blushes, as 'a wink to those in the know, a laughing complicity that assumes a reader who "gets" the innuendo'.¹⁴⁰ This underlying collusion between writer and reader, and implicit assumption of shared knowledge, characterises Austen's unpublished work.



Figure 2.3 Two fashionably-dressed men flirt with milliners and one displays a Masquerade ticket in 'A Morning Ramble, or The Milliners Shop' (London, 1782). British Museum.

¹³⁹ Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, p.88.

¹⁴⁰ Katie Halsey, 'The Blush of Modesty or the Blush of Shame? Reading Jane Austen's Blushes', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 42.3 (2006), 226-38 (p.231).

Shops, particularly clothing shops, were often associated with sexual desire in eighteenth-century fiction: for women, the shop represented sexual risk, and was even symbolic of their sexual appetite. In her discussion of *Camilla* (1796), Henderson examines the heroine's Southampton shopping excursion with the vulgar Mrs Mittin, in which the women, failing to make any purchases, attract the attention of the men around them; Henderson suggests that in Burney's novel shopping, alongside gambling, is paradigmatic of 'the workings of desire generally, including erotic desire'.¹⁴¹ Indeed, Walsh, in her study of eighteenth-century shopping, maintains that '[p]art of the pleasure and appeal of shopping must have been the erotic encounter of the opposite (or attractive) sex provided within a formalized (and thus safe) setting'.¹⁴² Milliner's shops in particular were associated with sex, seduction and vice in popular eighteenth-century imagination.¹⁴³ Images such as 'A Morning Ramble; or Milliner's Shop' (1782) depicted milliner's shops as spaces for flirtation, showing two fashionable men at the milliner's counter, evidently shopping for women not bonnets. There were many reasons behind these cultural associations between promiscuity and millinery. Records reveal that the Burlington Arcade, opened in 1819, housed a number of milliner's shops that contained backrooms for prostitution, 'milliner' thus emerging as a slang term for 'prostitute'.¹⁴⁴ Milliners, who catered for men and women, enjoyed 'intimate access to the boudoirs and bodies of their social superiors': those in the profession appeared to cross both physical and social boundaries, transgressions that Cassandra enacts in her pilfering of a countess' bonnet.¹⁴⁵ By the turn of the century, Gillray's satirical print, 'The Man of Feeling, in search of Indispensables [*sic*],- a scene in the little French milleners [*sic*]' captured the sentimental colouring of sexual activities within the

¹⁴¹ Henderson, 'Commerce and Masochistic Desire in the 1790s: Frances Burney's *Camilla*', p.70.

¹⁴² Claire Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*, ed. by Amanda Vickery and John Styles (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp.151-77 (p.160).

¹⁴³ See Batchelor's discussion of Robert Drury's *The Rival Milliners* (1737) and Eliza Haywood's *History of Miss Betsey Thoughtless* (1751), in *Dress, Distress and Desire*, pp.58-62.

¹⁴⁴ Alison Adburgham, *Shopping in Style*, p.101.

¹⁴⁵ Kimberly Chrisman Campbell, 'The Face of Fashion: Milliners in Eighteenth-Century Visual Culture', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 25 (2002), 157-172 (p.159). On the way in which the milliner figure 'crosses boundaries' see Sonia Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.78.

milliner's shop, in this instance instigated by the man of feeling 'whose sentimental whims', as Mullan suggests of Yorick, 'sanction [...] erotic encounters'.¹⁴⁶



Figure 2.4 James Gillray's 'The Man of Feeling, in search of Indispensibles, - a scene in the little French milliners' (London, 1800). British Museum.

Many of the texts from which Austen drew positioned the milliner's shop less as a place of consumption, than of labour and production. In *Laura and Augustus* the heroine recalls seeing a woman through the trees whose 'dress was clean, but age had worn it thread-bare'.¹⁴⁷ The woman begins her story:

My father professed a small curacy in Wales: I was the eldest of ten children. At a proper age I was sent to London and bound apprentice to a relation of my mother's, who kept a capital milliner's shop in Tavistock Street, Covent Garden.¹⁴⁸

Austen's parodic genealogies echo *Laura and Augustus*: Cassandra is the daughter of a milliner in Bond Street; Gustavus from 'Love and Freindship' reveals that his

¹⁴⁶ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, p.189.

¹⁴⁷ Bromley, *Laura and Augustus*, i, p.131.

¹⁴⁸ Bromley, *Laura and Augustus*, i, p.132

father is ‘Gregory Staves a Staymaker of Edinburgh’ (C, p.103); and Lucy, a ‘fair nymph’ encountered by the heroine of ‘Jack and Alice’ lying ‘in great pain beneath a Citron-tree’ describes herself as ‘a native of North Wales’ whose ‘Father is one of the most capital Taylors in it’ (C, p.18).

Offspring of milliners, tailors and stay-makers Austen’s characters may be, yet they are not associated with labour production themselves. They do not follow what Batchelor refers to as the

formulaic labour-as-fall plot, in which, as in novels by Burney, Fielding and Charlotte Lennox, the heroine is forced to trade on her domestic accomplishments to earn money as the companion or milliner, but is serendipitously delivered from labour before the novel’s close.¹⁴⁹

Such ‘falls’ are represented in Austen’s source texts. Charlotte from Samuel Jackson Pratt’s novel is forced into self-sufficiency upon the discovery that she must leave the legally married Charles: ‘skilled in the elegant labours of the needle’, Charlotte has ‘some little knowledge of those employments which may assist me from applying to the milliners’.¹⁵⁰ Bromley’s *Laura and Augustus* presents the fall of a stranger who is sent by her family to become a milliner girl, a crucial turning point in her story which leads her to be kidnapped on board a ship to Jamaica and forced into sexual liaisons. Millinery is posited simultaneously as both a threat to chastity and an escape from illicit sexual relations.

In August 1800 the *Lady’s Monthly Museum* published a short piece entitled ‘The Milliner’s Shop’ in which the writer declares, ‘I know no situation more agreeable than that of the fashionable milliner. Everything around her is seducing: - the gauze and the lawn assume whatever shape her fancy directs’.¹⁵¹ Here, as in ‘The Beautifull Cassandra’, it is the millinery itself – the fabrics of lawn and gauze – which is seducing, not the men who visit such spaces. The sensory and sexual pleasure of this scene is rooted in the milliner’s tactile occupation of cutting ribbon and plaiting gauze, again pointing to the interaction between touching and feeling

¹⁴⁹ Batchelor, *Women’s Work*, pp.10-11. Batchelor also discusses novels by Sarah Scott and Sarah Fielding which promote a positive, even virtuous image of women’s economic contributions through millinery (pp.41-3).

¹⁵⁰ Pratt, *Charles and Charlotte*, i, p.45.

¹⁵¹ ‘The Milliner’s Shop’, *LMM*, August 1800, pp.124-25 (p.124).

that Sterne evokes in *A Sentimental Journey*.¹⁵² Specifically then, and particularly following the rise of (and subsequent attack on) sensibility, the milliner's shop became associated with forms of feeling and touching that were, whilst masked as sentimental, highly erotic. It was the fashionable commodities that were on sale that facilitated this interplay between seduction and sentiment.¹⁵³

'The Beautifull Cassandra' cannot, as Ellen E. Martin recognises, be dismissed as a 'youthful work of nonsense'.¹⁵⁴ It is a 'difficult' text, which plays on a number of generic clichés regarding the association between fashion and sensibility. Despite its brevity, 'The Beautifull Cassandra' contains 'traces upon traces' of texts, affirming its status as a textual 'textile'. Austen rewrites and sees through sentimental fashions: Cassandra, with aggressive force, takes what she likes and does what she wants without retribution. She provides a hilarious counter-narrative to the sentimental convention in which women are '[e]ncouraged to know and care only about the love of men', thus becoming 'compulsive and indiscriminate in satisfying their insatiable need of being loved'.¹⁵⁵ Instead, Cassandra cares only for her own love of things, becoming 'compulsive and indiscriminate' in her consumption of fashionable millinery. But Austen also incorporates images of sensibility into a narrative of theft, thus engaging with another favourite genre of fashion magazines: the trials and scandals of women. Readers of fashion magazines expected to hear news reports of thefts; the trial of Austen's own Aunt Anne Leigh Perrot, who, not unlike Austen's Cassandra, allegedly stole a card of lace from a milliner, was reported in the April 1800 issue of the *Lady's Magazine*. The article is most interested in Anne's attire at court, detailing her 'very light lead-colour pelisse, [...] muslin handkerchief [...] a cambric cravat [...] small black bonnet [...] purple

¹⁵² Barnard has notes the intersection of fashion and fetishism, observing that both words 'come to us via the Latin 'facticium' (meaning 'artificial'), from the original 'facere', which means 'to make'. Malcolm Barnard, 'Fashion, Fetish and the Erotic: Introduction', in *Fashion Theory: A Reader*, pp.547-51 (p.547).

¹⁵³ Note also that in stealing, rather than purchasing, the bonnet, Cassandra's actions mirror those delineated by twentieth-century studies of fashion fetishism, in which women would steal the desired garments and fabrics from purveyors. See, for instance, Joanne Entwistle on William Sketal's work regarding silk fetishes. Joanne Entwistle, 'The Dressed Body', in *Real Bodies: A Sociological Introduction*, ed. by Mary Evans and Ellie Lee (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp.133-50 (p.143).

¹⁵⁴ See Ellen E. Martin, 'The Madness of Jane Austen: Metonymic Style and Literature's Resistance to Interpretation', in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, pp.83-94 (p.86).

¹⁵⁵ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, [1979] 2000), p.118

ribband, and [...] black lace veil', even printing an engraving of her.¹⁵⁶ 'The Beautifull Cassandra' draws from the genres popular with the nascent fashion periodical, from sentimental fiction to criminal reports, displaying an adroit receptiveness to literary and journalistic fashions.

In spite of its ostensibly complex genealogy, there is a clear narratological principle which guides Austen's 'novel'. There is a focus, as Heydt-Stevenson maintains, on the 'superabundant', certainly, but also, I would argue, an insistence on lack, on what is missing from the narrative.¹⁵⁷ It is no accident that, in a 'novel' which parodies the association made by sentimental texts between fashionable consumption and excessive feeling, and explores the 'nebulous cross-over between sexuality and theft' as it occurs in a milliner's shop, Austen chose to position the action in the highly fashionable and male-dominated shopping district of Bond Street.¹⁵⁸ Falling in love with a bonnet and knocking over the pastry cook, Cassandra reminds us of the determined women of *Northanger Abbey's* Bath, who wander the streets 'in quest of pastry, millinery, or even (as in the present case) of young men' (NA, p.28). However, in 'The Beautifull Cassandra' Austen places her milliner's shop in Bond Street only to have her heroine ignore the young men around her. Austen omits a common trope of sentimental fictions: male sexual threat.¹⁵⁹ Whilst the removal of Cassandra's bonnet unveils, as John Leffel argues, a potentially 'intimate, fetishized space (encompassing head, hair, and neck) for the masculine gaze',¹⁶⁰ hence endangering her virtue, Austen in fact displaces the male gaze in this short narrative, ultimately destabilising it in a comic episode of cross-dressing when Cassandra places her bonnet on the coachman's head, thus 'blatantly disgender[ing] him'.¹⁶¹ Austen subverts the sentimental aggrandizement of 'trifling articles of dress' to comically overturn the masculine gaze, thus refashioning sentimental narrative into one of unquestioned female pleasures and passions.

¹⁵⁶ 'Trial of Mrs Leigh Perrot', *LM*, April 1800, pp.171-76.

¹⁵⁷ Heydt-Stevenson, "'Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business": Stealing Sexuality in Austen's *Juvenilia*', p.1.

¹⁵⁸ Heydt-Stevenson, "'Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business": Stealing Sexuality in Austen's *Juvenilia*', p.28.

¹⁵⁹ Ellis discusses the trope (p.42).

¹⁶⁰ John C. Leffel, 'Jane Austen's Miniature "Novel": Gender, Politics, and Form in *The Beautifull Cassandra*', *Persuasions*, 32 (2010), 184-95 (p.191).

¹⁶¹ Heydt-Stevenson, "'Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business": Stealing Sexuality in Austen's *Juvenilia*', p.28.

2.4 Feeling the Cambric Handkerchief

In 1808, when Austen was assiduously revising *Sense and Sensibility* for publication and continuing to edit her juvenilia, she completed two poems: ‘Cambrick! with grateful blessings’, four lines of verse sent to her close friend Catherine Bigg on 26 August 1808 and made to accompany some cambric handkerchiefs which the author had hemmed, and ‘Cambrick! thou’st been to me a good’, a second version of the poem – twice as long – which Austen chose not to send. These two slight poems merit careful attention: they reveal much about Austen’s own understanding of the ways in which fashions in fiction and dress are interwoven. The central image of the two poems is the cambric handkerchief, the most pervasive image of fashionable sensibility; no prop was more significant in eighteenth century sentimental fiction.¹⁶² As poems that were written to accompany sewn handkerchiefs, they exemplify the material and discursive ties between texts and textiles, yet they also converge around sentimental tropes in which dress and body (sensibility’s ‘textual surface’) are exposed.

The two poems open up various ways of thinking about the relationship between text and textile as forms of discourse. As recent feminist scholarship indicates, the needle and the pen could function variously as analogous, alternative and even conflicting discursive tools for eighteenth-century women.¹⁶³ Batchelor’s study of women’s work in the period has pointed to the ‘elaborately woven analogies between text and textile production’ that were developed by women writers of the period in order to validate female authorship, although such analogies were equally contentious because needlework’s ‘status derived from its function as a leisured activity, no matter how laborious women may have found the practice of needlework in reality’.¹⁶⁴ For Austen, these ambiguous yet related forms of labour surpass mere metaphor: as I show here, Austen combined the ‘work’ of her needle and pen to create texts and textiles that were offered to their ‘reader’ as interdependent artefacts.

¹⁶² Batchelor calls the handkerchief ‘the most resonant icon of sentimental exchange’ in *Dress, Distress and Desire*, p.157.

¹⁶³ See Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle, and Sue Carter Wood, ‘The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and the Production of Alternate Discourses of Power’, in *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*, ed. by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp.13-29 and Kathryn King, ‘Of Needles and Pens and Women’s Work’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 14.1 (1995), 77-93.

¹⁶⁴ Batchelor, *Women’s Work*, p.22.

Texts and textile accessories were not merely linked through their analogous ability to amuse, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests, neither were they simply equivalent in value as her dedication to Martha Lloyd implies; they were also, as Austen self-reflectively examines in these poems, united by labour and production. Considering these overlapping methods of production need not be reductive; it need not perpetuate the Victorian ideal of Austen as a ‘picture of domestic perfection’ quietly sitting with her satin-stitch.¹⁶⁵ Twentieth-century poet Anne Stevenson has undercut this notion, instead aligning Austen’s sewing with her penetrating wit: she calls upon ‘the needlework of those needle eyes’.¹⁶⁶ Equally, Austen herself shows in her ‘Cambrick!’ poems that needlework and its products can emerge as subversive discursive tools rather than trivial ephemera, working in conjunction with written texts to challenge the same expressions of sensibility that problematically, and somewhat ironically, unite text and (demonstrably fashionable) textile.

The cambric handkerchief was a common feature of sentimental narratives. It was soon associated with the type of fashionable sensibility against which More and Wollstonecraft inveighed. In ‘Letters Between People of Fashion’, an epistolary serial printed in the *Lady’s Magazine* between 1785-7, thus running concurrently with sentimental tales in the magazine, the fictional Captain Lumley narrates seeing Miss Selwyn ‘near the Temple of Solitude’; ‘drawing her handkerchief from her pocket, [Miss Selwyn] clapped it to her face and burst into tears’.¹⁶⁷ Displays of excessive emotion, accompanied by the sentimental handkerchief, were part of fashionable performance. The sentimental vogue for cambric handkerchiefs highlighted the association between the somatic symptoms of sensibility (tears) and fashionable accessories, whilst simultaneously exemplifying the way in which clothing and fashionable commodities might be used, to literalize More’s sartorial metaphors, as ‘counterfeit’ symbols of sensibility.

By the time Austen came to write her ‘Cambrick!’ poems in 1808 the ubiquitous image of the cambric handkerchief had, along with the term sensibility more generally, become pejorative: the term ‘sentiment’ was fully established as

¹⁶⁵ Roger Sales considers the Victorian representation of Austen in works such as Henrietta Keddie’s [pseud.] *Jane Austen and Her Works* (1880). Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, p.4.

¹⁶⁶ Anne Stevenson, ‘Re-reading Jane’, in *Selected Poems, 1956-1986* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁶⁷ ‘Letters Between People of Fashion’, *LM*, April 1786, pp.183-87 (p.186).

signifying ‘debased and affected feeling, an indulgence and display of emotion for its own sake beyond the stimulus and beyond propriety’.¹⁶⁸ Already in 1771 Henry Mackenzie had sullied the iconic ‘cambric handkerchief’ in *The Man of Feeling*: the narrator pinches young Lady Silton’s fashionable ‘lap-dog’, which howls and runs to its mistress; ‘She did not suspect the author of [the dog’s] misfortune, but she bewailed it in the most pathetic terms; and kissing its lips, laid it gently on her lap, and covered it with a cambric handkerchief’.¹⁶⁹ Whilst Mackenzie’s narrative reflects the ambiguity and irony that prevailed in early sentimental novels, by 1801 Maria Edgeworth launched an attack on fashionable sensibility that eschewed irony or satire. Instead, following in the tradition of proto-feminists such as More and Wollstonecraft who disputed sensibility whilst reproducing their own versions of it, Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) is ‘remarkable for its systematic appropriation and dismantling of the conventional tropes of sensibility in a bid to rewrite the sentimental novel from within’.¹⁷⁰ In a famous scene, Edgeworth exposes the cambric handkerchief as nothing more than a symbol of fashionable affectation, Margaret Delacour exclaiming of the fashionable Lady Delacour,

‘O, how I hate the cambrick-handkerchief sensibility, that is brought out only to weep at a tragedy! Yes; lady Delacour has sensibility enough, I grant ye, when sensibility is the fashion.’¹⁷¹

Similarly, Austen’s Lucy Steele uses the handkerchief as a prop of false sensibility: on revealing her engagement to Edward Ferrars ‘she took out her handkerchief; but Elinor did not feel very compassionate’ (*SS*, p.101). Lucy proceeds, with affectation, to wipe at her eyes, performing sensibility to her apathetic audience.

In her ‘Cambrick!’ poems Austen, like Edgeworth, seeks to reconfigure the sentimental trope of the cambric handkerchief which still preponderated amongst discussions of feeling in the early 1800s. By the first decade of the nineteenth century the term ‘cambric’ alone had become shorthand for fashionable and affected

¹⁶⁸ Todd, *Sensibility*, p.8. Todd points to this semantic shift as occurring as early as the 1770s.

¹⁶⁹ Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. by Brian Vickers, intro. and notes by Stephen Bygrave and Stephen Bender (Oxford: Oxford University Press [1987] 2009), p.8. Barker-Benfield notes that this episode perhaps echoes ‘anti-Methodist cartoons’ (p.211).

¹⁷⁰ Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*, p.155.

¹⁷¹ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, ed. by Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.103.

sensibility.¹⁷² By 1803 the status of the cambric handkerchief had become so firmly entrenched within criticism of fashionable sensibility that in ‘The Influence of Riches’, yet another ‘imitation of Sterne’ (published in the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*), the narrator, who calls upon his ‘white cambric handkerchief’ no fewer than three times in his short narrative, must add a caveat to his narration.¹⁷³ Musing upon the philanthropic duties he would perform if he only had more money, the narrator wipes away a ‘sympathetic tear’ with his ‘white cambric handkerchief’.¹⁷⁴ On discovering that his deceased brother has conveniently left him a fortune of 10,000 livres, the narrator recalls: ‘I lifted up my white cambric handkerchief, which I laid upon the table; I lifted it, and put it into my pocket’ because, he discloses, ‘had I not informed the reader what I did with it, he would naturally have concluded, that I used it either to wipe a tributary – or at least a fashionable – tear from my cheek: I did neither’.¹⁷⁵ His does not, he assures readers, perform ‘fashionable’ affectation. His prolix defence of the cambric handkerchief and anticipation of the reader’s sentimental expectations is jarring; it implies that readers were often just as unable to distinguish between scenes of true feeling and fashionable performance as they were between sensibility and its parodies. Unlike this contributor, Austen includes no disclaimer in her poems; instead, she concentrates on the affective possibilities of the cambric handkerchief that have been overturned and ignored by the discourse of sensibility, thus reclaiming the accessory as a symbol of feeling rather than fashionable affectation and sentimental commercialism.

The two versions of the poem serve as an ode to the cambric itself. In the sent version of the poem, ‘Cambrick! with grateful blessings’, Austen writes,

Cambrick! with grateful blessings would I pay
 The pleasure given me in sweet employ: -
 Long may’st thou serve my Friend without decay,
 And have no tears to wipe, but tears of joy! – (C, p.238)

The first two lines of the poem emphasise Austen’s own labour in the production of the handkerchief, ending emphatically with ‘pay’ and ‘employ’ and thus

¹⁷² Barker-Benfield records how ‘An 1806 writer of the *Saturday Review* signified sensibility in this very precise way. “It is not our habit . . . to flourish cambric over the woes of anyone.”’ (p.211).

¹⁷³ ‘The Influence of Riches’, *LMM*, October 1803, pp.236-32 (p.236).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.237.

corresponding to eighteenth-century notions of female gifting practices in which ‘[h]ome-made presents were [...] offered by women and seen as time, labour and affection made concrete’.¹⁷⁶ The first section, then, explores the textile as a reification of abstract values, including affection. The third line serves to invoke Austen’s ‘Friend’ (Catherine Bigg), thus shifting the affective ties from those between Austen and the cambric to those between her Friend and the handkerchief. At first glance she appears, in eulogising the cambric, to continue the sentimental tradition of fetishizing ‘small, purchasable commodities’ as ‘receptacles of feeling’.¹⁷⁷ However, Austen provides a subtle but crucial antidote to this formulation, aligning feeling not with commercialism but with the production of gift-exchange.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, although sentiment was associated with ‘consumption rather production, and with leisure rather than labour’, Austen undermines these oppositions by registering the value of her own labour in fashioning the handkerchief, which can be paid for with the ‘grateful blessings’ of her recipient.¹⁷⁹ Austen concludes her poem by transforming fashionable sentimental tears into tears of joy. The poem shares a constituency with her earlier juvenile parodies which register the (often unintentional) comic effects of sentimental fiction in order to provoke feelings of joy amongst her domestic readership.

Austen avoids turning her subject into a figure of fashionable affectation by focusing instead on the affective experience of the cambric itself. In the unsend version of the same poem Austen is even more preoccupied with addressing and describing the handkerchief:

Cambrick! thou’st been to me a good,
 And I would bless thee if I could,
 Go, serve thy mistress with delight,
 Be small in compass, soft and white;
 Enjoy thy fortune, honor’d much
 To bear her name and feel her touch;
 And that thy worth may last for years.
 Slight be her colds, and few her tears. (C, p.238)

¹⁷⁶ Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, p.188.

¹⁷⁷ Benedict, *Framing Feeling*, p.82

¹⁷⁸ I discuss the significance of these textual-textile productions as objects of gift exchange in ‘Texts and Textiles: Jane Austen’s Gifts to Catherine Bigg and the Lloyd Sisters’, *Women’s Writing*, 22.4 (2015), 472-84.

¹⁷⁹ Bending and Bygrave, p.xxi.

Somewhat playfully, in this unsent version Austen instructs the putatively sentient handkerchief, which she herself has fashioned, how it should look and feel, telling it to 'Be small in compass, soft and white' and subsequently to 'To bear her [Catherine's] name and feel her touch'. Just as sensibility interprets external somatic responses as expressions of inner feelings, Austen likens two forms of 'feeling': internal emotional sensation and exterior physical touch. She underscores what Sedgwick identifies as the bond between 'texture and affect, touching and feeling'.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, Austen tells the handkerchief to be 'soft' to Catherine's touch, pointing to way the cambric, a receptacle of feeling, physically feels to skin. Yet she also instructs the handkerchief to 'feel [Catherine's] touch', suggesting that the cambric is able to feel Catherine who is in turn actively touching the fabric. Whilst feeling in sentimental literature is largely communicated through a physical 'vocabulary' of 'gestures and palpitations, sighs and tears', Austen appropriates the sentimental image of the cambric handkerchief to establish a form of sensation that adjoins the two meanings of feeling in one mutual display of touching between body and textile.¹⁸¹

In this tactile union the surfaces of skin and cambric blur into one another, Austen again playing on the sentimental tendency to conflate person and fashionable 'trifle'. In doing so, Austen exposes her sentimental intertextuality, recalling traces of sentimental narratives. The blurring of body and cambric handkerchief is reminiscent of Charlotte Smith's critically-acclaimed *Celestina* (1791), a novel which emerged from a short-lived 'subtype' of domestic sentimental fiction.¹⁸² Like Emmeline, *Celestina* is an orphan and heroine of feeling. She receives unwelcome romantic attention from various suitors, including Montague Thorold, who keeps 'little memorials' of *Celestina* 'as sacred relics':

A cambric handkerchief which she had dropped, marked by her own hands and her own hair, was one of the principal of these, and in it he

¹⁸⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p.21.

¹⁸¹ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, p.61.

¹⁸² Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, p.8.

constantly kept folded up the sonnet, written with a pencil, which he had steeped in milk to preserve the letters from being creased.¹⁸³

As Smith's use of the term 'relic' renders explicit, and as I argue of *Charles and Charlotte*, the trifles of clothing and fashionable accessories were deployed in sentimental fiction as the physical remains of the absent, revered and beloved, a trope Austen overturns in various ways in both 'The Beautiful Cassandra' and 'A beautiful description of the different effects of Sensibility on different Minds'. In Smith's narrative, Thorold's fetishized handkerchief becomes the container of a preserved text, affirming the particular bond between text and textile that pervades both sensibility and its criticism. Thorold's handkerchief is also 'marked' by Celestina's body, specifically her hands and her hair. In what sense they bear her mark is unclear – it suggests that the lover's touch has left an imprint (no matter how intangible) on the fabric – yet, there is a further blurring of body and textile as the handkerchief becomes a physical substitute for the lover. Thorold's handkerchief, like Austen's own textile gift, serves as an example of the many 'keepsakes that clutter sentimental fiction' with which, in lieu of the person whom such keepsakes evidently signify, 'feelings' are formed.¹⁸⁴

Austen's preoccupation with defining the boundaries of the sentimental body is evident in the various forms of tactile materiality that are explored in her handkerchief poems. The poems that Austen composed in tandem with pieces of needlework indicate a particular interest in the boundaries between physical interior and exterior. In the handkerchief poems this interface between the textures of cambric and skin, alongside the tears which the cambric is intended to 'wipe', works to blur the boundaries between body and textile. Tears, 'the most famous emblem of sensibility', are significant both as somatic markers of feeling and as products of abjection that lie on the threshold between the inside and outside of the body.¹⁸⁵ As Noëlle McAfee writes, the abjected 'hovers at the periphery of one's existence, constantly challenging one's own tenuous borders of selfhood'.¹⁸⁶ As the handkerchiefs in Austen's poems come to be 'marked' by tears, and apparently become able, like skin, to 'feel', skin and textile function as coterminous textures. As

¹⁸³ Charlotte Smith, *Celestina*, 4 vols (London: T. Cadell, 1791), ii, p.241

¹⁸⁴ Lynch, 'Personal Effects', p.345.

¹⁸⁵ Ellis, p.19

¹⁸⁶ Noëlle McAfee, *Julia Kristeva* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p.46

Cavallaro and Warwick have suggested of dress in general, clothing becomes a second skin: it is ‘that which is both inside and outside and thus problematizes the very notion of *boundary*’.¹⁸⁷ As Austen’s early parodies likewise suggest, this dissolving boundary between the sentimental body and its clothing is repeatedly invoked in sentimental fiction: clothing becomes, often like the sentimental heroine’s transparent complexion and pale blush, an extension of the somatic vocabulary of feeling. Austen’s poems, then, mark a shift in her engagement with sensibility: whilst the younger Austen, responding in part to the trend for satire of sensibility, parodies Sterne’s suggestive depictions of touching and feeling, by 1808, twenty years since her first juvenile productions, Austen chooses not to parody the joint somatic and psychic expressions of feeling, nor to satirize the contiguous surfaces of textile and skin, but instead to rhetorically, and comically, reconfigure these tropes through the united production of text and textile.

Whilst Austen’s depiction of the handkerchief undermines the boundary between textile and sentimental text (the body), gaps in the body’s surface, such as eyes and lips, ‘offer an anatomical mark (*trait*) of a margin or a border’, thus determining the boundaries of the body.¹⁸⁸ This form of ‘border’ or edge is tangible in another sewn artefact of Austen’s: a needle-case which she made for Mary Lloyd, sister of Martha Lloyd, in 1792. As with the cambric handkerchiefs, the needle-case was accompanied by verse:

This little bag I hope will prove
 To be not vainly made –
 For, if you should a needle want
 It will afford you aid.

And as we are about to part
 T’will serve another end,
 For when you look upon the Bag
 You’ll recollect your friend. (C, p.234)

The humorous poem, entitled ‘This little bag’, again explores the affective bonds which yoke subject and object, Austen insisting that the needle-case should provoke an affective response ‘For when you look upon the Bag | You’ll recollect your

¹⁸⁷ Cavallaro and Warwick, p.xv.

¹⁸⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.348.

friend'. Whilst the sewn artefact, as it is described in the poem, becomes (following sentimental tradition) a surrogate for the absent companion, the needle-case itself plays on the boundary between body and textile, and between exterior and interior. Janet Todd and Linda Bree offer a description of Austen's 'little bag' which 'unrolls to reveal a needle case of red (with one small needle still in it), giving the appearance of lips within which [the poem is] placed'.¹⁸⁹ As with Montague Thorold's handkerchief which holds a sonnet, Austen embeds her own poem within the little bag, attesting to their mutual interconnectedness and their conjoined production of meaning. Austen has fashioned her needle-case in such a way that it mimics the spoken word's emanation from the apertures of the body, issuing from the lip-like folds of the textile. On the one hand, the structure of the needle-case relies upon the 'border' of the mouth yet, on the other, it only reaffirms the sentimental blurring of the borders between object and person, as the textile becomes a surrogate mouth for Austen. Furthermore, Austen's bag mimics the fashion for eighteenth-century sentimental gifts, particularly jewellery, to 'speak' via prosopopoeia to the receiver or wearer in engravings, by offering not simply an inscription, but a mouth.¹⁹⁰

In Austen's joint textual and textile productions two forms of labour, and ultimately two forms of material artefact, are not seen as alternative, contiguous forms of discourse; rather, they produce meaning in conjunction with one another. Whilst the textile itself might point to meanings – and certainly feelings – not evident in the text, the text arrests and guides the reader's interactions with the textile. That Austen retained a fair copy version of her unsent 'Cambrick!' poem suggests that she took pleasure in the manifold private and public narratives which she bestowed upon her sewn productions whilst carefully considering the implications that such narratives would imply to her recipients: the poem must, above all, communicate effectively. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that Austen ultimately chooses to send the 'Cambrick!' poem which emphasises a more conventional model of gifting and friendship in which labour and affection are united. As with Edgeworth's *Belinda*, which adopts the framework of sensibility only to 'rewrite' it, Austen's handkerchief poems do not merely parody but also rewrite (and re-sew) the props of fashionable

¹⁸⁹ Janet Todd and Linda Bree, 'Explanatory Notes', in Jane Austen, *Later Manuscripts*, ed. by Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.585-742 (p.707).

¹⁹⁰ Shirley Bury, *An Introduction to Sentimental Jewellery* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1985), p.19.

sensibility to give them new meanings. Austen does not attempt to divorce feeling from a consideration of the boundaries between sentimental text (body) and textile that are so essential to any articulation of sensibility; instead, she wishes to affirm the frequently blurred distinction between fashionable sensibility and true affective response, which necessarily demands a consideration of the body's affective experiences of touch, feeling and even texture.

As Martin has noted, Austen's writings seize apparently 'trivial detail[s] [...]' The juvenilia's texture is a float of such fetishes, of misdirected details ripe for the interpreter's obsessing'.¹⁹¹ 'Texture' is a significant word in Austen's affective project and is reflective of the 'textile' she creates, both figuratively and literally. Austen's parodic and revisionist rewriting of sensibility's structures reproduces the very fetishization of the trivial that it targets, but it is by no means 'misdirected': a clearer understanding of Austen's intertextuality demonstrates this, revealing how these trivialities are part of the collusive nature of her literary production. As with fashion, a subject commonly devalued and dismissed as trivial, Austen's unpublished works, particularly her gifts of poetry and textiles to female friends, are likewise potentially ephemeral and trifling. Her poetry has long been judged unworthy of rigorous academic discussion.¹⁹² This chapter recovers Austen's allusive textual 'trifles' to reveal that the shared constituency of texts and textiles, and genre and fashion, is by no means trivial. Her revision of the wider sentimental mode occurs at the most minute levels of literary style. Austen offers us alternative ways to read these sentimental intersections, whether as generic parallels or more literally as forms of labour, throughout her unpublished work. Reading these texts in such a way indicates that that which is potentially trivial is essential to the way in which Austen communicates her literary intentions effectively to her coterie of familiar readers. Sartorial and literary fashions serve as communally understood subjects: they offer a means to directly, even physically, engage her readers, through laughter and affection. These texts shed new light on Sutherland's assertions that Austen was 'deeply immersed in the contemporary novel and followed its fads critically and anxiously': her unpublished works foreground the way in which she 'shrewdly [...]

¹⁹¹ Martin, 'The Madness of Jane Austen', p.85.

¹⁹² Laura Lambdin and Robert Lambdin discuss the scarcity of critical work on Austen's poetry in 'Humor and Wit in Jane Austen's Poems and Charades', in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. by Laura Lambdin and Robert Lambdin (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 2000), pp.275-81.

judged and adapted fashion in launching her novels'.¹⁹³ As these comparatively private and 'trifling' writings suggest, Austen did not merely adapt literary fashions; the way in which she responded to and assimilated such fashions was influenced by the shared fashion-consciousness of her readers, and herein lies the significance of Austen's unpublished works.

¹⁹³ Kathryn Sutherland, 'Jane Austen and the Invention of the Serious Modern Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. by Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.244-62 (p.255).

Chapter 3 ‘The exchange of a few old-fashioned jewels’: Focusing Fashion in *Sense and Sensibility*

In January 1808 the *Lady's Monthly Museum* published the first instalment of ‘The Sisters of Rose Dale’, which that ran until June that year. This fictional serial, hitherto unnoticed by critics, details the lives of sisters Fanny and Matilda and their recently widowed mother as they are forced, not unlike Mrs Dashwood and her daughters, to abandon ‘their former luxuries’ for a rented cottage in Taunton.¹ For Fanny, their downfall is attended with little concern: she ‘lost nothing; her dress had been always coarse and plain’.² Matilda, however, despairs at her newly unfashionable appearance: she ‘did nothing but repine: she could no longer appear at church, without meeting some pointed sneer from her neighbours’.³ Fanny is unable to retain any fashionable garments, running after her wind-swept bonnet with ‘the agility and lightness of the famed Camilla’, yet her sister successfully gains entry into the fashionable world.⁴ In an improbable turn of events, Lady Fitzgerald from London’s *beau monde* adopts the fashion-conscious Matilda; her fortune permits the sister to make the due ‘sacrifices to fashion’ including wearing ‘sleeves [...] cut up to the very shoulder’, which lead her to fall ill from cold.⁵ Matilda exposes the lengths to which she will go to pursue fashion, renouncing her health and her family, and eventually eloping with her patron’s husband.

It is clear why the *Lady's Monthly Museum* would have chosen to feature this narrative, the opening outline of which is so similar to *Sense and Sensibility*, published three years later. The serial dramatises – if hyperbolically – concerns applicable to the its mostly female readership: women’s ownership (and retention) of goods, their financial (in)dependence and the interconnected pressures of female economy and fashion. Austen was attentive to the content of fashion-centric women’s magazines. Two critics in particular have highlighted Austen’s intertextual echoes with these magazines: Copeland, creating a ‘tabulation of five frequently recurring plot motifs in the *Lady's Magazine* from 1793-1815 (Austen’s writing

¹ ‘The Sisters of Rose Dale’, *LMM*, January 1808, 23-7.

² *Ibid*, p.23.

³ *Ibid*, pp.23-4. On the importance of sartorial display at church see John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp.306-7.

⁴ ‘The Sisters of Rose Dale’, *LMM*, March 1808, pp.113-21 (p.113).

⁵ *Ibid*, p.117.

years)', suggests that 'Austen's plots share with the *Lady's* [*Magazine*] the same economic pattern', beginning in *Sense and Sensibility* with the motif of the heroine who must marry to avoid poverty.⁶ He points to 'The Ship-Wreck', a narrative published in the *Lady's Magazine* in 1794, to argue that Austen borrowed the names of her male protagonists (Brandon and Willoughby) from the periodical.⁷ Le Faye, meanwhile, maintains that Austen appropriated the title 'Sense and Sensibility' from the January 1799 issue of the *Lady's Monthly Museum*, but does not look beyond this title to the actual content of the magazine itself.⁸

In this chapter I argue that reading narratives which fall outside Copeland's valuable, yet potentially delimiting, chronological tabulation highlights a different yet equally important economic pattern within *Sense and Sensibility*: its underlying interest in the narrative ramifications of greed and generosity, which are relayed through acts of giving, withholding and exchange. Austen's novel, revised for publication between 1809 and 10, centres, like many narratives of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* during the early 1800s, on the geographically uprooted and financially precarious figure of the widow and her daughters. As Oliver MacDonagh argues, drawing attention to the way in which Austen bases *Sense and Sensibility* 'on closely observed reality in all matters of income, property and possessions': 'the sudden impoverishment of Mrs Henry Dashwood and her daughters is central to the action'.⁹ This chapter contends that we should read *Sense and Sensibility* in light of the prevailing narrative trends of the fashion magazine during the early 1800s, many of which, like their earlier counterparts, share 'a lively consideration of women's economic plight' and women's acquisition of fashionable goods, whilst surreptitiously drawing attention to the 'implied consumerism' of the fashion magazine itself.¹⁰ Such parallel readings highlight the economic plight of widowhood and affirm *Sense and Sensibility*'s concern with the structures and narratives underpinning commodity and gift exchange, charity, debt and gratitude. In Austen's

⁶ Copeland, 'Money Talks' p.163.

⁷ Ibid, p.160.

⁸ Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, p.112.

⁹ Oliver MacDonagh, *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp.63-4. The antecedent to this plot structure was the disinheritance plot of the 1790s. On these plots and their relevance to *Sense and Sensibility* see Edward Copeland, 'Introduction', in Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. by Edward Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.xxiii-lxviii (p.lii) and for an overview of intertextuality and *Sense and Sensibility* see pp.xlix-lix.

¹⁰ Copeland on the earlier narratives of the *Lady's Magazine* in 'Money Talks', pp.160-1.

novel fashion is, as in contemporary magazines, the ‘operative language’ through which objects of consumption and exchange are perceived.¹¹ Attending to these fashionable objects highlights the way in which focalisation is used within the novel: throughout *Sense and Sensibility* (un)fashionable objects are filtered and seen through the diverse observations of Austen’s fashion-conscious characters.¹²

The *Lady’s Monthly Museum’s* dramatisations of the economic plight of widowhood took various forms. In ‘The Sailor’s Widow’ (1803) a destitute widow faints in the street and an audience gathers around her, wondering if she is truly deserving of their charity or a fraud. The narrator, who observes his companion’s ‘tear of sensibility’, reflects upon the moral duty of charitable giving, concluding that, although ‘indiscriminate charity is liable to be misapplied’, it must surely be ‘better to run the hazard of this misapplication than to allow an unfortunate fellow creature to perish in distress’.¹³ In 1806, the magazine published the first instalment of ‘A Village Tale’ in which the heroine Rose and her recently widowed mother are left ‘in embarrassed circumstances’ by their father’s death: ‘The widow sold her stock, and retired to a more humble dwelling’, a ‘small white cottage’.¹⁴ Their fates, like those of Matilda and her family, take a turn for the worse upon the arrival of the fashionable Lord of the Manor and his plotting companion from the *beau monde*, Lady Mary. March 1810 saw the first instalment of ‘Fitzmaurice: An Hibernian Tale’, which begins with the unfortunate death of Mr S— : ‘his widow and daughter, who had been accustomed to all the elegancies of affluence, were threatened with all the horrors of actual want’.¹⁵ The hero, whose father forbids him from marrying the now impoverished Eliza S—, discovers that his stepmother, Mrs Fitzmaurice, who from ‘the ties of gratitude’ should have been faithful to her husband who ‘had generously raised her from a state of poverty’, has in fact been colluding with her

¹¹ Copeland argues that ‘fashion was its operative language’ of the *Lady’s Magazine* in *Women Writing About Money*, p.117.

¹² Diego Saglia also observes that in *Sense and Sensibility* characters are ‘obsessed with conspicuous consumption and emulation, or afflicted by the impossibility of consuming according to the mandates and expectations of their rank or inclination’. Diego Saglia, ‘Luxury: Making Sense of Excess in Austen’s Narratives’, in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, pp.355-65 (p.357).

¹³ ‘The Sailor’s Widow’, *LMM*, August 1803, pp.79-84 (pp.82, 80).

¹⁴ ‘A Village Tale’, *LMM*, January 1806, pp.30-7 (p.30).

¹⁵ ‘Fitzmaurice: An Hibernian Tale’, *LMM*, March 1810, pp.122-31. The serialization ends abruptly in July 1810 when the contributor ceases to continue their correspondence with the magazine. The *Lady’s Magazine* offers various representations of the figure of the widow, such as the artful widow of Bath in ‘Benedict’, serialized between November 1809 and March 1812, and the wise economising widow in Sophia Troughton’s ‘Family Anecdotes’, serialized between April 1806 and March 1807, although in tales such as these the widow (and her children) are less central to the plot.

illicit lover to convince her husband to disinherit his son, thus keeping the money for her own child.¹⁶

The proliferation of these narratives suggests that *Sense and Sensibility* was in line with current fashions in magazine fiction and thus should not merely be read, as has been common practice, alongside literary trends of the 1790s.¹⁷ Equally, it reminds readers that the nascent fashion magazine had a particular interest in publishing serials that, whilst improbable in their sentimentalized depictions of poverty and voyeuristic in their representation of the *beau monde*, pertained to the interests of its female readership.¹⁸ Narratives of widowhood and economic hardship become popular during the era of the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815), a period in which the ‘threat of widowhood was especially acute’.¹⁹ Austen herself experienced the financial distress of her mother’s widowhood after the death of her father in 1805.²⁰ Whilst the author made some profit from her novels (approximately £631 during her lifetime) she was, alongside her sister and mother, financially dependent on her brothers after her father’s death: they lived, like the Dashwood women, on an annual income of just under £500, and benefited from charity, such as Edward Austen’s gift of Chawton cottage in 1809.²¹

Whilst Austen’s representation of the economic life of widowhood is anything but limited (consider the independent and fashionable Lady Susan or the

¹⁶ ‘Fitzmaurice: An Hibernian Tale’, *LMM*, June 1810, pp.333-37 (p.335).

¹⁷ See in particular Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p.182. Diane Shubinsky summarizes various arguments for reading of the novel as an eighteenth-century narrative (from critics such as F. R. Leavis and Margaret Kirkham) in her essay, ‘*Sense and Sensibility*: An Eighteenth-Century Narrative’, *Persuasions On-Line*, 20.1 (1999), n.pag.

¹⁸ Copeland notes that the *Lady’s Magazine* as focusing on ‘the social aspirations of the lower middle ranks’, arguing that the magazine wanted to target its readership with narratives that would appeal to this demographic. Copeland, ‘Money Talks’, p.158.

¹⁹ Laura Fairchild Brodie, ‘Society and the Superfluous Female: Jane Austen’s Treatment of Widowhood’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 34.4 (1994), 697-718 (p.699). She notes that ‘in 1810 one out of every six adult males was at war by land or sea’ (p.699). Jane Spencer considers how ‘the traditionally independent and wilful widow lost much of her economic power’ during the eighteenth century. Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.12.

²⁰ MacDonagh notes a ‘striking correspondence between the widowed Mrs Dashwood’s situation’ and that of Austen and her family (p.63).

²¹ On Austen’s earnings from her work see Marilyn Butler, ‘Austen, Jane (1775-1817)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/904>> [accessed 23 September 2015]. On their annual income see Edward Copeland, ‘Money’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.131-48 (pp.135-6). On the financial perils of widowhood within the Austen family see Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin [1997] 2012), pp.13-4. Bridget Hill notes that Jane Austen’s “poverty” was in a different category to that of the majority of single women of the labouring poor’ in *Women Alone: Spinners in England 1660-1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.177.

wealthy dowager Lady Catherine de Bourgh), in *Sense and Sensibility* Austen offers a revisionary interpretation of prevailing sentimental representations of the widowhood narrative that abounds in the fashion magazine.²² Whilst economic power is a significant trope throughout Austen's *oeuvre*, *Sense and Sensibility* stands amongst Austen's writing as the novel most emphatically concerned with the power imbalances and narrative implications of acts of giving and exchange within society.²³

As Captain Wentworth reminds his auditors in *Persuasion*, consumer possessions circulated within one's immediate society. In conversation with Louisa Musgrove, he asserts that he had "no more discoveries to make" of his ship than she "would have as to the fashion and strength of any old pelisse, which you had seen lent about among half your acquaintance ever since you could remember, and which at last, on some wet day, is lent to yourself" (*P*, p.57). Conjuring an analogy between the male business of warfare and the putatively feminine concerns of fashion, Captain Wentworth highlights women's familiarity with their sartorial possessions – expressly their fashionability and durability – illuminating the manner in which they are circulated and exchanged amongst friends. In *Sense and Sensibility*, a novel preoccupied with the ability of characters to give, withhold and exchange material possessions, it is equally not merely an object's (un)fashionability that instils it with meaning, although this is an important signifier; rather, it is the history of circulation and exchange held by these objects that create narrative and social meaning. In *Sense and Sensibility*, fashionable and unfashionable consumer acquisitions possess hidden and ambiguous histories of circulation and exchange. Austen's narrative calls into question both the rules of eighteenth-century commodity and gift exchange and the epistemological certainties enmeshed in these objects. Austen dramatises diverging fashion-conscious viewpoints as characters internally debate what (un)fashionable objects of exchange – rings of hair, miniature portraits, jewellery – might signify. In order to comprehend and even refashion their material

²² Brodie notes that Austen's widows 'have not received significant critical attention, primarily because of the widow's frequent designation as a minor character', which rings true for women such as Mrs Bates, Mrs Norris, Mrs Smith and Mrs Grant (p.700). However Brodie herself fails to include Mrs Dashwood in her discussion, or mention *Sense and Sensibility*.

²³ Barbara Hardy insists that 'the theme of material considerations permeates the society of the novel' in *A Reading of Jane Austen* (London: Owen, 1975), p.144.

world, the characters of *Sense and Sensibility* look to the fictions and narrative patterns of exchange.

3.1 Marianne and the Fashion Magazine

Austen's engagement with the narrative of the fashion magazine is characteristic: she turns the plot 'on its head'.²⁴ Austen's heroines too must live in a rented cottage in southwest England, but theirs is charitably offered 'on very easy terms' by Sir John Middleton who kindly 'understood [Mrs Dashwood] was in need of a dwelling': Sir John fulfils his filial obligations of charity towards his female relatives (*SS*, p.18). It is one of the many acts of gifting that punctuate the novel and determine the fate of its protagonists. Austen, with sarcasm, depicts Barton Cottage as 'defective, for the building was regular, the roof was tiled, the window shutters were not painted green, nor were the walls covered with honeysuckles' (*SS*, p.22). The Dashwoods' cottage does not conform to the fashionable ideal of a 'tasteful little Cottage Ornée', as *Sanditon's* Mr Parker terms it (*NA*, p.306), which, like the 'beautiful little cottage' inhabited by the widowed Honoria and her daughter Mary in an analogous *Lady's Monthly Museum* narrative of 1801, has 'rough sides' that are 'whitened', a 'roof covered with thick thatch' and 'a room furnished with elegance, yet perfectly in harmony with the rusticity of the place'.²⁵ In narratives such as this, the accoutrements of poverty, like virtue in the sentimental mode, are reconfigured as fashionable accessories.

Whilst Matilda of Rose Dale is rescued from her economic plight by a Countess and member of the *beau monde*, the Dashwood sisters grudgingly partake in the social activities and hospitality laid on by the matriarch of Barton, Lady Middleton, a woman who, according to the narrator, resembles her husband in her 'total want of talent and taste' (*SS*, p.35). Lady Middleton believes herself a shrewd arbiter of fashion: she takes 'patterns' of 'elegant new dress' (p.91); she is quick to see 'enough of fashion' in Mr Dashwood's appearance 'to think his acquaintance worth having' (*SS*, p.171); and upon hearing she is to receive a visit from the Steele

²⁴ Edward Copeland, 'Money Talks', p.161

²⁵ 'Roseville Cottage', *LMM*, August 1801, pp.102-4 (p.102). On cottages see Mavis Batey, *Jane Austen and the Landscape* (London: Barn Elms, 1996), p.120.

sisters, two unknown relations, she is persuaded by her mother, Mrs Jennings, 'not to care about their being so fashionable' (SS, p.89). Of course, Mrs Jennings' 'assurances' (SS, p.89) regarding the fashionability of their newly discovered relations are empty: she cares only for that which is 'old-fashioned', such as Colonel Brandon's estate (SS, p.147).

Marianne's preoccupation with taste and sensibility is formed by fashion. Even William Cowper, her favourite poet, was privileged by the *Lady's Monthly Museum* above all other poets: he is quoted throughout the magazine and, in 1801, the magazine eulogized the poet with its 'Memoirs of William Cowper, Esq', accompanied by an engraving.²⁶ Marianne is quick to ascertain that Willoughby admires Pope, not a fashionable poet, 'no more than is proper' (SS, p.36).²⁷ She associates reading practices with sensibility and 'its cognate category, taste'²⁸; discussing Edward Ferrars' disappointing rendition of her beloved Cowper, she exclaims:

'Nay, mama, if he is not to be animated by Cowper! – but we must allow for difference of taste. Elinor has not my feelings, and therefore she may overlook it, and be happy with him. But it would have broke *my* heart had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility.' (SS, p.14)

As Campbell argues, it was thought that an individual's sensibility could be gauged through their 'aesthetic taste or sense of beauty', which could be 'done directly, by asking someone to demonstrate their sensibility through their own performance on a musical instrument, for example, or by reciting poetry; or, more indirectly, through their response to someone else's performance'.²⁹ As I discuss in Chapter One, by the end of the eighteenth century the concept of 'taste' had become interlocked with

²⁶ 'Memoirs of William Cowper, Esq.', *LMM*, February 1801, pp.85-9.

²⁷ Butler notes that 'Edward's tastes can be considered aesthetically, as Augustan and thus in terms of contemporary landscape art old-fashioned: he has more in common with Pope than would please Marianne' in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p.186.

²⁸ Miranda Burgess, 'Sentiment and Sensibility: Austen, Feeling and Print culture', in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, pp.226-36 (p.231).

²⁹ Campbell, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century England: a character-action approach', p.4. Burgess makes the argument that 'Marianne demonstrates her sensibility in her response to literature' and that 'from *Sense and Sensibility* to *Persuasion* (1818), characters treat books as indexes of sensibility'. Burgess, 'Sentiment and Sensibility: Austen, feeling and Print culture', p.230-1.

fashion. The term 'taste' was adopted to measure the value of fashionable objects.³⁰ Marianne is only too aware that her own language is bound up with fashion elsewhere: believing she is beyond fashion, she concedes 'that admiration of landscape scenery is become mere jargon' (SS, p.73). Yet, Marianne's dismissal of a language that has become 'worn and hackneyed out of all sense and meaning' (SS, p.73) leaves her mute, parodying, as Brodey has argued, 'the "man of feeling"'.³¹ Even in her silence, Marianne falls victim to the dictates of 'hackneyed' sentimental fashions.

Marianne's fashion-consciousness is manifest in her observations of Colonel Brandon's and Willoughby's clothing. It is unsurprising that Willoughby's shooting jacket takes on aphrodisiac-like qualities whilst Brandon's flannel waistcoat is associated with libido-inhibiting connotations of rheumatism and old age. Throughout the late 1790s and early 1800s flannel clothing was associated with illness and spa resorts. Throughout this period calls were made for civilians to donate flannel clothing to British troops fighting abroad. The September 1794 issue of the *Morning Post and Fashionable World*, for instance, asks its readers to donate flannel shirts and waistcoats to the fighting armies, concluding that, such donations were essential 'protection against the effects of the Humidity of the Country they are now employed in'.³²

These advertisements, which continue to appear in newspapers throughout the early 1800s, would have been familiar to Austen's first readers in 1811. As with many former soldiers who continued 'to wear (part of) their uniforms in civilian life', Colonel Brandon is, we can assume, still attired in his military uniform, a form of dress that 'signified attributes of discipline and reliability', qualities which Willoughby conspicuously lacks.³³ Whilst Marianne should associate the flannel waistcoat with 'danger, endurance and courage', she instead, like Cruikshank's satirical drawing, chooses to see the waistcoat as a symbol of illness, weakness and

³⁰ See Andrea Henderson, 'Burney's *The Wanderer* and Early-Nineteenth-Century Commodity Fetishism', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 57 (2002), 1-30 (p.4).

³¹ Brodey, p.170.

³² 'Classified Ads', *Morning Post and Fashionable World*, 19 September 1794, in *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers* (Gale Cengage)

<<http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/bncn/retrieve.do>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

³³ Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p.29.

effeminacy.³⁴ Marianne's dismissal of Colonel Brandon reflects the practice of measuring one's profession by the standard of fashion, a subject which also preoccupies Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. Indeed, Edward Ferrars, contemplating the occupations he could have chosen, concedes that, '[a]s for the navy, it had fashion on its side, but I was too old when the subject was first started to enter it' (SS, pp.77-8). Unlike the army, the 'Navy was a profession in which younger sons could find honour' and 'independence'; historically, 'it was the Navy, rather than the Army, which embodied the heroic tradition of Britain's enterprises'.³⁵



Figure 3.1 Isaac Cruikshank's 'Flannel coats of mail against the cold or the British ladies patriotic presents to the army' (London, 1793). Women's petticoats are being re-sewn into army-wear. British Museum.

Marianne prefers the aestheticised and fashionable image of Willoughby 'carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him', to the unpleasant reality of war (SS, p.32). She exchanges the unfashionable figure of the national hero for a fashionable 'hero of a favourite story' (SS, p.33). This is an image that is 'drawn' (SS, p.33), like the engravings from serials such as 'The Fortunate Escape' published

³⁴ Eileen Sutherland, 'That Infamous Flannel Waistcoat', *Persuasions*, 18 (1996), 58-58 (p.58).

³⁵ Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy*, 2nd edn (London: National Maritime Museum, [2000] 2005), p.19.

in the *Lady's Magazine* in 1800: the image, which depicts a woman in a white dress lying under the trees as a man approaches in his shooting jacket with the fashionable accessories of a shotgun and pointer, is echoed by Austen in her image of Marianne who, 'scarcely able to stand', is assisted by a 'gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him' (*SS*, p.33).

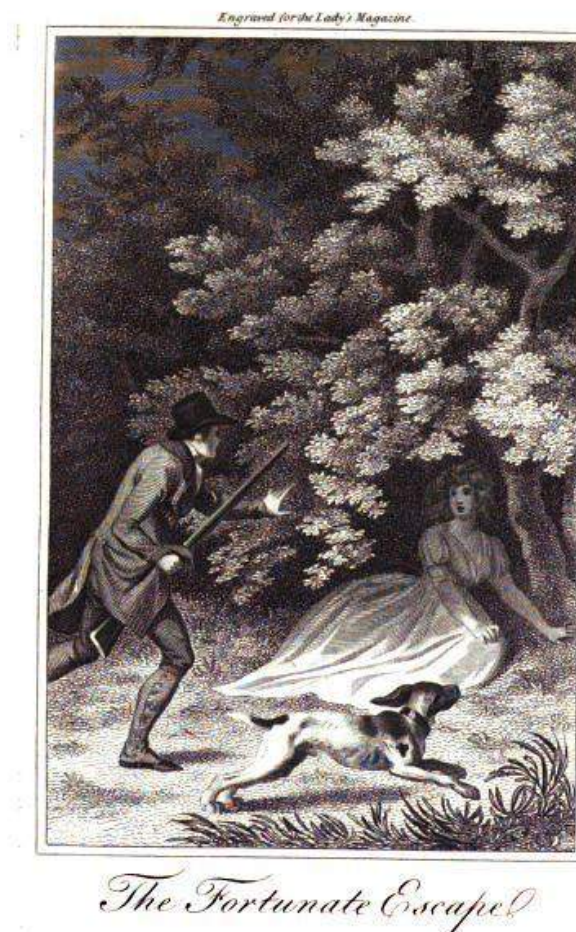


Figure 3.2 'The Fortunate Escape', an engraving printed in the *Lady's Magazine* in June 1800.³⁶

'The Old Woman', the *Lady's Monthly Museum's* regular agony aunt from 1798-1806, contends that the shooting jacket, which Marianne finds 'the most becoming' of 'all manly dresses' (*SS*, p.33), is the male equivalent of the type of *déshabille* worn by Matilda of Rose Dale. The Old Woman's comparison between

³⁶ The image is taken from a moment in the narrative when the heroine, Helen, is rescued from an attempted kidnap by her 'dear Charles', who 'had been out with his gun and his dog'. 'The Fortunate Escape', *LM*, June 1800, pp.286-88 (p.288).

the male and female fashions of Bath – the ‘short, tall-boy, shooting jackets’ and the ‘close’ dress of women – implies that the male shooting jacket was just as form-fitting and sexually charged as women’s controversial translucent muslins.³⁷ More significantly, the shooting jacket is presented not as the hunting garb of country folk, but as the attire of urban fashionability, thus becoming dislocated from its use function. In 1796 Austen playfully asks Cassandra to send her news of a ball and the number of ‘Gentlemen, Musicians & Waiters [the host] will have persuaded to come in their Shooting Jackets’.³⁸ The fashionability of the shooting jacket lay precisely in the fact that it had no use in the ballroom or the city. For an item to be worn or praised for its use value was the very antithesis of fashionability: in *The Absentee*, Mrs Dareville, a member of Regency London’s *beau monde*, calls upon use-value to insult Lady Clonbrony’s newly-upholstered rooms: “‘O! the delicate, the *useful* thing!’” she exclaims of her Chinese Pagoda and velvet hearthrug.³⁹ Willoughby might be fond of hunting, but his attire nevertheless colours him with an air of fashionability which Brandon’s waistcoat emphatically lacks. Marianne is very much a creature of fashion, her fantasies drawn from the narratives of the fashion periodical in which taste, sensibility and fashion coalesce. Marianne must act out her own sartorial ‘exchange’, ultimately swapping the fashionable shooting jacket for Colonel Brandon’s flannel waistcoat.⁴⁰

3.2 The Circulation of Things

Objects of exchange dominate the narrative of *Sense and Sensibility* more than any other Austen novel. It is not just a social but also a narrative fact that the Dashwood women rely on the generosity of others. The narrative is marked by numerous instances of generosity including the generously-let Barton Cottage and meals offered by the Middletons – hospitality which, although materially welcome, leaves Marianne in an resentful state of obligation. Conversely, Marianne fails to perceive that Willoughby’s gift of a horse, unlike her gift of a lock of hair, is as much an

³⁷ ‘The Old Woman’, *LMM*, January 1802, pp.2-8 (p.7).

³⁸ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 5 September 1796, p.8.

³⁹ Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, p.36.

⁴⁰ Engel similarly points to an ‘exchange’, but instead argues that Marianne exchanges her fashionable muff, which she aligns ‘with Marianne’s own fantasies about herself as a romantic and theatrical heroine’ for ‘the reliability and asexuality of the flannel waistcoat.’ Engel, pp.52-3.

imposition as an act of generosity. There are also many gifts in the novel that are never given: although permitted to take household goods from Norland, the widowed Mrs Dashwood and her daughters are denied the promised jointure; John Dashwood and his wife allude to ‘presents’ of money, food and furniture, gifts which they never intend to bestow on the Dashwood women. Gifts can be unexpected, joyous moments of generosity: Elinor has her own part to play in Colonel Brandon’s ‘gift’ (SS, p.218) of a living to Edward Ferrars. Austen presents the manifold possibilities of (un)fashionable exchange in the metropolis: while Elinor negotiates an ambiguous ‘exchange’ of her mother’s ‘old-fashioned jewels’ Robert Ferrars, like Mrs Palmer, is overwhelmed by the possibilities of commodity exchange. When Lucy reveals the secret gift she has received from Edward Ferrars – a fashionable miniature portrait – Austen highlights the role of focalisation in determining meaning in objects exchange: Austen’s readers remain inside Elinor’s head during her conversation with Lucy, recognising not just what Lucy is up to with this imposition, but also that Elinor is quite aware of the way in which she is being tested. Austen also uses gifts such as Edward Ferrars’ ambiguous ring to dramatise multiple, competing points of view, which bestow diverse meanings upon (un)fashionable objects. Such methods of focalisation are without dramatic irony: readers never know more or less about objects of exchange than Elinor, Austen’s primary focaliser.

Sense and Sensibility’s concern with the power of consumption and the exchange of (implicitly) fashionable goods is underscored in the second chapter, which is entirely given over to a private conversation between Fanny and John Dashwood. Fanny presents the ‘irresistible’ argument to her husband that it ‘would be absolutely unnecessary, if not highly indecorous, to do more for the widow and children of his father’ than give them a ‘present’ every now and then, of money, food and furniture (SS, p.11). John Dashwood becomes assured of the virtue of an alternative fiction of exchange: that his father never really intended for him to ‘take three thousand pounds from the fortune of their dear little boy’ and bestow it upon his sisters who are ‘related to him only by half blood’ (SS, p.7). As John Dashwood’s gifts to the widow and his sisters decrease, his assurance of his own generosity elevates: the chapter emerges as a self-enclosed satire on greed, foregrounding the major concerns of the novel.

Fanny dubiously reasons that to leave the women anything more than “‘Five hundred a-year!’” is unreasonable: “‘the china, plate, and linen was saved, and is now left to your mother’”, and will thus save the women the expense of furnishing their new home (SS, p.10). She justifies the reduction of the jointure by pointing to an array of consumer items that do not possess high exchange value but which are instead, as Berg argues, ‘signifiers of family and memory’.⁴¹ As Berg explains, ‘[c]eramics, glass, silver and silver plate, furnishings, and carpets all pursued fashion rather than simply luxury markets’.⁴² Fanny, like her brother Robert, seeks not simply modishness, but fashionability that conveys social distinction: she longs to see her brother Edward Ferrars riding in a ‘barouche’ (SS, p.13). The neologism refers to a type of carriage that emerged in 1801; reports of the Prince Regent’s own barouche, ‘painted a bright yellow, and lined with green’, soon filled the papers.⁴³ Mrs Dashwood and her daughters, who fall from landed gentry to £500 per annum, by no means have an income large enough to support such a purchase, which signalled ‘the greatest single divide for middle-class families’; as Fanny insists, they ‘will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants’ (SS, p.10).⁴⁴

Instead, Mrs Dashwood is permitted to take with her the fashionable china and plate, which were not luxury items: ‘they had some value, but not too much’.⁴⁵ Although during this period women frequently made bequests of items such as silver and linen, as Berg notes, ‘to enhance their family and friendship relations’, here Fanny and John Dashwood deploy goods, including gifts of game, as a substitute for such relations: as Thompson highlights, ‘the transfer of objects’ in this instance ‘takes the place of social relationships’.⁴⁶ The ‘presents of fish and game’ (SS, p.10) (which never materialise) are juxtaposed with those offered by Sir John Middleton, whose ‘kindness’ is ‘not confined to words’ and manifests itself in basketfuls of food and game (SS, p.24). The bestowal of china upon the widowed Mrs Dashwood, a

⁴¹ See Berg on silver and linen, p.242.

⁴² Berg, p.254.

⁴³ ‘Fashionable World’, *Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 4 November 1802, in *19th Century British Newspapers* (Gale Cengage) <<http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/bncn/retrieve.do>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

⁴⁴ MacDonagh, p.59. Hume suggests that ‘an elegant four-horse family carriage could cost £500–800’. Hume, ‘Money in Jane Austen’, p.298. Copeland notes that ‘Jane Austen’s father set up a carriage when his income reached £700 a year, but soon gave it up as too expensive’. Copeland, ‘Money’, pp.323–24.

⁴⁵ Berg, p.242.

⁴⁶ Berg, p.242; James Thompson, *Between Self and World: The Novels of Jane Austen* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988) p.36

convention of eighteenth-century gifting practices in which men and women left tea equipment exclusively to female relatives or friends, contradicts Fanny's pronouncement that the Dashwood women 'will keep no company' (*SS*, p.10): teaware was in fact 'vital to domestic sociability'.⁴⁷ For Fanny Dashwood, the gifting of goods is associated with a denial of both sociability and filial responsibility, thus inverting established narratives of gift exchange which repeatedly affirm that such exchanges, unlike those which occur in the market, effect a form of social binding.

Fanny Dashwood's ruthlessness not only undermines the conventions of gift exchange, but also exposes the distinct ways in which men and women acquired wealth and consumer goods, as well as the subjective forms of value held by objects of exchange. Reider has highlighted the gendered attitude towards material possessions in the eighteenth century, stating that '[m]en's objects were legally and socially encoded as static while women's items easily detached from the home's physical confines, leading directly to their name: "moveables"'.⁴⁸ Indeed, whilst John Dashwood claims his inheritance through the estate, its land and its home, Mrs Dashwood moves with her items, which are passed down from her late husband: linen, ceramics, silverware and furniture which are 'all sent around by water' to the Dashwood's new Devonshire cottage (*SS*, p.20). As Vickery notes, these gendered objects 'conjured the past and ensured continuity into the future'.⁴⁹

Austen is, from the outset, reflecting on the material considerations of the Dashwood family, and the relationships that are substituted, formed and threatened by consumer acquisitions.⁵⁰ Austen exposes the reality that material goods were not only bought on the marketplace, but were, in many instances, passed down and offered as gifts: these narratives of acquisition often gave objects their meaning. Indeed, the value of objects evolved alongside their circulation: those which usually began life as relatively cheap 'fashionable ephemera', such as those inherited by Mrs John Dashwood, became, as they were passed down (usually from one woman to the next), 'family keepsakes'.⁵¹ The value of fashion, typically seen as transient, was gradually transformed into an enduring and portable marker of home and family

⁴⁷ Berg, p. 241.

⁴⁸ Reider, p.257.

⁴⁹ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p.189.

⁵⁰ Hardy argues that the novel 'begins to recognize a more complex interaction of things and people' (p.151).

⁵¹ Berg, p.242.

through exchange. In seeing these consumer goods solely via their (artificially inflated) exchange values, Fanny Dashwood, like her husband who claims that the removal of these 'very valuable' items from his home leaves him far from 'being rich', purposely creates a false convergence of exchange and symbolic value (SS, p.169). Subjective and inconsistent values are ascribed to objects of exchange: the same fashionable ephemera are simultaneously understood by their various focalisers in terms of 'material gain, emotional capital' and even 'social interest'.⁵²

It is the circulation of goods, what Arjun Appadurai calls the concept of 'things-in-motion' through which the 'human and social context' of things are illuminated, that creates narrative complexity in *Sense and Sensibility*.⁵³ Murphy describes Austen's first novel as a 'circulation novel', which 'arises out of an economy in which everything is a commodity, to be bought, sold, possessed and perhaps eventually discarded'.⁵⁴ As the experiences of the Dashwood women indicate, however, it is not just the social and narrative implications of commodity exchange that concern Austen. Her narrative is, obliquely, structured by two kinds of things-in-motion: commodities and gifts. Social theory offers us a framework in which to understand these ostensibly distinct models of exchange. Carrier, building on Mauss's seminal work, *The Gift* (1925), distinguishes these objects by considering them as two distinct forms of social relations: in 'commodity relations objects are impersonal bundles of use value and exchange value that are bought and sold. In gift relations objects are personal possessions that are given and received'.⁵⁵ Whilst commodities are 'fungible' (ostensibly unlike gifts), they are also described as being alienable, meanwhile the gift 'is inalienably linked to the giver, and therefore it is important for regenerating the relationship between giver and recipient'.⁵⁶ As Bowditch suggests: 'contrary to the exchange of commodities in a fully disembedded economy, where the precise monetary value of an object allows

⁵² Jane Stabler discussing the significance of 'things' in *Mansfield Park* in her 'Introduction', in *Mansfield Park*, pp.vii-xxxvi (p.xxviii).

⁵³ Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.3-63 (p.5). Bill Brown similarly makes use of this idea in 'Thing Theory', *Critical Enquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 1-22 (p.12).

⁵⁴ Olivia Murphy, *Jane Austen the Reader: The Artist as Critic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.79.

⁵⁵ James G. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.18.

⁵⁶ Carrier, p.24.

for the liquidation of the relationship between the contracting parties, gift exchange (ideally) serves to create social bonds'.⁵⁷ However, Bowditch's '(ideally)' here gestures 'towards the scepticism with which the gift has been viewed by twentieth century commentators'; these numerous commentators, including Bataille, Bourdieu, Derrida and Irigaray, argue that in many ways the gift 'conceals underlying structures of power and dependence'.⁵⁸ Mauss's work discloses these underlying structures: for him, the gift creates obligation on the part of the recipient, who must reciprocate in order to fulfil the conditions of the gift exchange. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen is similarly sceptical of the idealized 'fiction of the gift exchange', which does not 'account for the problem of obligation' and which 'disguise[s] the calculation and negotiation that informs all economic practice'.⁵⁹ Austen's narrative calls upon and undermines this 'fiction' of gift exchange; equally palpable and significant in *Sense and Sensibility* are the fictions, or rather false narratives, of exchange that her characters zealously embrace as they focus on the fashionable objects surrounding them.

It is the moment of exchange, within both gift relations and the market economy, that is so interesting to Austen. The exchange of gifts could become a source of anxiety for the author: in 1796 she asks her sister for advice on whether she should tip a servant 'half a guinea or only five Shillings' when she leaves Rowling; writing from Bath in the summer of 1799 she describes her elation in purchasing a 'muslin veil for half a guinea' for her sister-in-law, only to note her subsequent disappointment upon discovering that 'that the Muslin was thick, dirty & ragged, & would therefore by no means do for a united Gift'.⁶⁰ In the latter instance Austen combines annoyance that the muslin is unacceptable as a gift with disappointment in her own hasty bargaining; clearly, her 'interest' (a loaded term in *Sense and Sensibility*) in communicating these details lies in the united joys and perils of gift and commodity exchange.⁶¹ These letters, alongside the poems discussed in my

⁵⁷ Phebe Lowell Bowditch, *Horace and the Gift Economy of Patronage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp.48-9.

⁵⁸ Batchelor, *Women's Work*, p.45, pp.53-4.

⁵⁹ Cynthia Klekar, "'Her Gift was Compelled': Gender and the Failure of the "Gift" in *Cecilia*", *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 18.1 (2005), 107-26 (p.113).

⁶⁰ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 5 September 1796, p.8; *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11 June 1799, p.46.

⁶¹ Within the first chapter alone Austen deploys the term 'interest' and 'interesting' several times to refer to issues of inheritance and fortune, as well a particular state of feeling.

previous chapter, point to various unearthed narratives of reciprocal gift giving between Austen and her friends. Austen understood that material artefacts could ‘serve rhetorically as a mnemonically charged marker of friendship’.⁶² However, her confidence in objects to sufficiently ‘speak’ of her friendship is undermined by the carefully revised poems she attached to such gifts. The poems focus on the tensions and uncertainties of gift exchange – obligation, generosity, labour and social binding – whilst demonstrating an awareness that objects of exchange lend themselves to potentially conflicting interpretations, which she seeks to fix textually. Austen calls upon this rhetorical ambiguity of exchange in *Sense and Sensibility*, implicitly exposing these ambivalent structures through the internal focalisations of her characters: objects of exchange are conveyed in the narrative via visual exchange.

Amanda Vickery declares that the moment of exchange itself is fleeting: ‘a mere snap-shot in the life of a commodity’.⁶³ Yet such snap-shots are significant in Austen’s narratives; in *Sense and Sensibility* she turns moments of fashionable exchange into scenes of longer temporal significance. Austen’s narrative technique of lingering upon the shop mimics the very practice of shopping itself. The newly glazed bow windows that fronted the fashionable shops of London’s West End ‘focused the consumer’s gaze’, encouraging passers-by to stop, look in and linger rather than walking past; the interior ‘seductive design’ of these elite shops was similarly ‘intended to encourage customers to stay and look around’.⁶⁴ When Austen takes the reader to Bond Street, Mrs Palmer is paralysed by consumer desire: her ‘eye was caught by every thing pretty, expensive, or new’; she ‘was wild to buy all, could determine on none, and dawdled away her time in rapture and indecision’ (*SS*, p.123). By the time Austen was writing *Sense and Sensibility* “shopping” had become ‘synonymous with leisurely browsing’.⁶⁵ *Sense and Sensibility* embraces the visual enthrallment of browsing; the shop provides an important narrative space in which characters are always on the watch, becoming visually engaged by an array of objects.

⁶² Pristash *et al.*, p.19.

⁶³ Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, p.183.

⁶⁴ Walsh, ‘Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-Century England’, p.154; Claire Walsh, ‘Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London’, *Journal of Design History*, 8.4 (1995), 157-76 (p.168).

⁶⁵ J. Stobart, ‘A History of Shopping: The Missing Link Between Retail and Consumer Revolutions’, *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 2.3 (2010), 342-49 (p.346).

Consumer desire manifests itself in a peculiar kind of inertia: as Tuite observes in her analysis of Harriet Smith who is ‘always very long at purchase’, it is ‘a compounded desire that forestalls activity’.⁶⁶ Regardless of her limited purchasing power, Harriet is as just as enthralled by the shopping experience as Mrs Palmer and Robert Ferrars. Not only does Austen’s lingering echo the gaze of the consumer and focus the gaze of the reader, thus aligning the practices of shopping and reading; the narrative is focused through the gaze of her characters within fashionable elite consumer spaces. Whilst Mrs Palmer is visually overwhelmed by consumer desire, Marianne is ‘on the watch’ for Willoughby; her eyes are

in constant inquiry; and in whatever shop the party were engaged, her mind was equally abstracted from every thing actually before them, from all that interested and occupied the others. Restless and dissatisfied every where, her sister could never obtain her opinion on any article of purchase, however it might equally concern them both [...] (SS, pp.122-3)

Meanwhile, for Willoughby the shop, in spite of its layers of translucent glass, becomes a hiding place. He confesses: “‘I have entered many a shop to avoid your sight, as the carriage drove by’”, revealing that, lodging in Bond Street,

‘there was hardly a day in which I did not catch a glimpse of one or other of you; and nothing but the most constant watchfulness on my side, a most invariably prevailing desire to keep out of your sight, could have separated us so long.’ (SS, p.247)

By focusing on emphatically fashionable consumer spaces, where looks and exchanges (both visual and commercial) collide, Austen discloses a plurality of gazes; she reveals how various parallel narratives and internal perspectives coexist within these fashionable sites of exchange. Encounters with the fashionable world and its environs serve not, as is typical of contemporary novels and magazine serials, as a predictable plot device in which to facilitate corruption, transgression and even abduction; rather, they show how ordinary, even ostensibly banal engagements with commercial exchange, conceal complex and converging personal narratives.

⁶⁶ Tuite, ‘*Sanditon*: Austen’s pre-post Waterloo,’ pp.618-19.

The gaze is narratologically significant in Gray's shop, a real jewellers based at 41 Sackville Street between 1802-1814.⁶⁷ Here, Elinor Dashwood is eager to exchange glances with Robert Ferrars, whose identity is as yet unknown, to hurry him into making a purchase. However, Robert Ferrars reciprocates with

three or four very broad stares; a kind of notice which served to imprint on Elinor the remembrance of a person and face, of strong, natural, sterling insignificance, though adorned in the first style of fashion. (SS, p.165)

Marianne, whose eyes are still focused elsewhere, is 'spared from the troublesome feelings of contempt and resentment' his looks inspire, remaining unconscious of his 'impertinent examination of their features': like the various toothpick-cases which are 'presented to his inspection', the sisters' faces are inspected (SS, p.165). Yet, what Elinor sees staring back at her is similarly an object of 'fashion' and 'sterling insignificance'. The visual exchange appears to illustrate the values enshrined within commercial exchange: as Osteen asserts, in 'a market economy, persons are objectified', which distinguishes such relations from 'a gift economy' in which 'objects are' (ideally) 'personified'.⁶⁸ Austen both call upon and undermines these distinctions. Aside from these 'broad stares' towards the sisters, Robert's eyes are, like Mrs Palmer's, caught by the objects surrounding him. Robert's engagement with the objects around him again focuses on a visual concentration, Austen noting the 'correctness of his eye' which suggests an ability to detect minute flaws or marks of inferior value within the object under his microscopic gaze (SS, p.165). His hesitation over the 'size, shape, and ornaments' (SS, p.165) is indicative of the contemporary consumer who was encouraged to 'inspect goods closely'.⁶⁹ In 1812 *La Belle Assemblée* depicts a shopping experience that requires sensory knowledge: its 'fair readers, in their shopping excursions, pride themselves on knowing a real

⁶⁷ On the location of Gray's see Ambrose Heal, *The London Goldsmiths 1200-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p.163

⁶⁸ Mark Osteen, 'Gift or Economy', in *The Question of the Gift: Essays Across Disciplines*, ed. by Mark Osteen (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.229-47 (p.233). Osteen is responding to C. A. Gregory's work on gift theory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London and New York: Academic, 1982).

⁶⁹ Jon Stobart, Andrew Hann and Victoria Morgan, *Spaces of Consumption: Leisure and Shopping in the English Town, c. 1680-1830* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p.157. Walsh details the use of innovative 'display devices' used by merchants, particularly goldsmiths, during the period, which 'drew the customers' attention to the retailer's stock'. Walsh, 'Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London', p.163.

Indian muslin by both the smell and feel'.⁷⁰ In *Sense and Sensibility*, this inspection extends beyond the object of exchange and is carried over to the shoppers themselves.

Shopping, particularly for fashion, was throughout the eighteenth-century associated with sociability: 'though shopping might be about knowledge, it was also the practice of sociability. Elaborate shop fittings and priority locations provided sites of sociability as much as settings for the display of goods'.⁷¹ Robert Ferrars is thus markedly antisocial and solitary; the shopkeeper, 'Mr. Gray', is also strangely absent from the scene.⁷² Henderson, examining changing modes of retailing within the increasingly fashion-focused cities of the eighteenth century, argues that '[t]raditionally, prices had reflected social relations: the status of the buyer, the status of the seller, and the character of their relationship'.⁷³ However, the decades bridging 1800 witnessed the demise of this socially-determined form of exchange value. As Carrier observes, in London circa 1800, 'a significant number of stores began to cater to anonymous, casual customers, and the impersonal concept of 'the market' began to displace former understandings of trade and older, more durable relationships between shopkeeper and customer'.⁷⁴ As commercial exchanges became dislocated from any recurrent social exchange, many shopkeepers, including Mr Gray, began to reject the old system of credit in favour of 'ticketing' and fixed pricing.⁷⁵ As a result of increasingly impersonal transactions, 'rather than struggle with a merchant over the price of an object, the consumer mentally engaged with the object itself, which seemed to set its own terms for purchase'.⁷⁶ Just as Austen's lingering focus on the site of exchange mimics the new vogue for window-shopping (consuming merely with one's eyes), the way in which Robert Ferrars deploys various objectifying glances, inspections, examinations and stares is reflective of the changing retail experience.

⁷⁰ 'The New System of Botany', *LBA*, October 1812, pp.200-202 (p.201).

⁷¹ Berg, p.278.

⁷² As Stobart observes in his discussion of the 'polite practices' of shopping, trade cards often depicted 'well-dressed shoppers leisurely perusing the wares being shown to them by the shopkeeper' and customers in discussion with one another. In this sense, Robert Ferrars' appears particularly anti-social and impolite. Stobart, 'Selling (Through) Politeness', p.319.

⁷³ Henderson, 'Burney's *The Wanderer* and Early-Nineteenth-Century Commodity Fetishism', p.8.

⁷⁴ Carrier, p.62.

⁷⁵ David Selwyn notes that Gray's was 'an establishment, incidentally, that had announced its intention of refusing credit and selling only for ready money' in 'Consumer Goods', *Jane Austen in Context*, pp.215-24 (p.223).

⁷⁶ Henderson, 'Burney's *The Wanderer* and Early-Nineteenth-Century Commodity Fetishism', p.10

Robert Ferrars' purchase reflects the increasing phenomenon of the 'de-socialization of objects' in this period.⁷⁷ Contrariwise, readers might expect Elinor's mother's 'old-fashioned jewels' to represent how 'sociological exchange' consists of 'a relationship between people and things': in the eighteenth century women nearly always acquired jewellery through forms of gift exchange, jewels functioning as a reification of their intimacy.⁷⁸ Yet, as D. A. Miller maintains, 'Elinor's mother's jewels are the only ones in all of Austen's work whose chief purpose is not to recognize a relationship, or to claim their bearer on behalf of sociality, but to signify a certain independent relation to style'.⁷⁹ Despite the fact that jewellery was customarily 'bequeathed as heirloom or as gift', the only value remarked upon of Elinor's jewels is that they are 'old-fashioned' (*SS*, p.165).⁸⁰ They contain an implicit narrative of gift exchange, yet Elinor's pragmatic 'negociation [*sic*]' of the jewels ostensibly negates any sentimental or historical value (*SS*, p.165). The narrative significance of their unfashionability and their negotiation (representing a form of commercial, rather than gift exchange), is highly ambiguous to modern readers and can be read in distinct and contradictory ways. One might infer that Elinor has come to pawn the jewels: Murphy, taking her cue from the word 'business', suggests that 'this is likely a politely phrased attempt to convert some of their mother's ornaments (traditionally the most valuable portion of a woman's inheritance) into cash'.⁸¹ However, on a separate shopping excursion we learn that 'much of their business' lies in Bond Street (*SS*, p.122), whilst Colonel Brandon equally refers to some 'business' he has at a stationer's shop (p.148) and in *Emma*, both Harriet Smith and Mr Weston are said to have 'business at Ford's' (*E*, pp. 157, 183). Evidently, they are not all out to pawn their possessions; rather, we might conclude that Austen's lexicon reflects the fact that for her and her contemporaries shopping 'was a serious business' requiring, as Robert Ferrars' inspection implies, skill and knowledge.⁸²

⁷⁷ Carrier, speaking in relation to Mauss, p.30

⁷⁸ See Marcia Pointon, 'Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850*, ed. by Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp.120-146 (p.123).

⁷⁹ D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen or the Secret of Style* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p.22.

⁸⁰ Marcia Pointon, "'Surrounded with Brilliants": Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England', *The Art Bulletin*, 83.1 (2001), 48-71 (p.55).

⁸¹ Murphy, p.79

⁸² Stobart *et al.*, *Spaces of Consumption*, p.157

Whilst Murphy's emphasis on 'business' is misplaced, this does not mean that her reading is entirely incorrect. The narrative significance of Elinor pawning her mother's jewels whilst Robert Ferrars dithers over various expensive and useless luxuries certainly exemplifies the central concerns of the novel: male consumer greed and purchasing power is contrasted with women's economic hardship and loss of consumer goods. Contrariwise, Miller, in his analysis of the 'negociation', takes 'old-fashioned' as his linguistic clue, conjecturing that Elinor, doubtlessly in need of some more fashionable attire whilst among metropolitan society, is 'there simply to exchange what is "old-fashioned" for what is not': the jewels have been passed onto Elinor and are now being reset.⁸³ This second form of exchange (old fashioned for fashionable) occurs in Maria Edgeworth's *Vivian* (1812) in the fourth volume of her *Tales of Fashionable Life*: Edgeworth takes her fashionable characters to 'Gray's the jeweller's', where Lady Sarah calls 'for my poor mother's diamonds, which, you know, he has reset'.⁸⁴ Location, in both, is key: Elinor chooses to exchange her jewels in London, at a particularly fashionable West End shop. As Berg explains, what made London goods 'desirable above all else was fashion', rather than quality or price; it would therefore make sense that Elinor uses her trip to London to exchange 'old-fashioned' jewels for fashionable ones.⁸⁵ Whilst both Miller's and Murphy's hypotheses are equally plausible, it is clear that the meanings embedded in the act of exchange rely on the understanding of shared consumer codes. The ambiguity of the narrative significance of such an exchange mirrors the opposing and often contradictory interpretations, explored in later this chapter, of the (un)fashionable objects that Austen's characters scrutinise. As this chapter contends, such objects become contentious precisely due to the uncertain narratives of exchange they carry.

Elinor's mother's jewels encompass conflicting values: whilst as inalienable gifts they possess a trans-historical symbolic exchange value, their claim to fashion was, inevitably, ephemeral. Pointon's study of jewellery from the long eighteenth century indeed discovers that '[o]ne generation usually finds unfashionable the jewellery of the preceding one; stones are removed and reset and consequently

⁸³ Miller, p.22.

⁸⁴ Edgeworth, *Vivian*, in *Tales of Fashionable Life*, iv (1812), p.439.

⁸⁵ Berg, p.247.

examples from earlier periods are rare'.⁸⁶ The 'anticipation of retrospection', central to the fashion system, is, perhaps unexpectedly, congruent with the symbolism of the gift as both a sign of continuity and of the past.⁸⁷ Yet, the replacing and resetting of family jewels ostensibly contradicts the principles that underpin gift exchange. As Baudrillard argues, symbolic exchange value is created by the gift exchange: 'once it [the gift] has been given – and because of this – it is *this* object and not another. The gift is unique, specified by the people exchanging it and the unique moment of exchange'.⁸⁸ Yet jewels become fungible items that eventually end up as essentially different objects from that which is originally gifted, and which, therefore, frequently move within gift *and* commodity exchange. Implicated in the desire for fashion, jewels occupy a transitional space between that of the non-fungible inalienable gift and the impersonal commercial commodity. Within the 'snap-shot' of exchange, Austen's narrative explores and implicitly undermines the distinctions between commodity and gift exchange, reflecting ambiguously on the ways in which gifts are seen to 'move in *and* out of the commodity state'.⁸⁹

3.3 Labour and the Logic of the Gift

Austen intimates that certain objects were intrinsically perceived as gifts: 'moveables' and, as we shall see, miniatures. Conversely, Osteen's assertion that the 'real distinction' between gift and commodity 'is not between different types of objects but between different orders of social relations' offers an alternative paradigm through which to understand how the narrative fictions that Austen and her characters create around objects are related networks of exchange and social webs of intimacy.⁹⁰ Margot Finn, focusing on the gifting practices that were fashionable social practice between eighteenth-century men, observes that

gifting activities ensured that the same items which were exchanged for cash in the burgeoning markets of the consumer revolution also

⁸⁶ Marcia Pointon, 'Women and their Jewels', in *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830*, pp.11-30 (p.11).

⁸⁷ Tuite, 'Sanditon: Austen's pre-post Waterloo', p.613.

⁸⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (1960), quoted in Carrier, p.28.

⁸⁹ Appadurai, p.13. See his reflection upon Bourdieu's treatment of gifts and commodities, p.11

⁹⁰ Osteen, 'Gift or Economy', p.239.

circulated outside the monetarized economy in a domain that claimed to privilege their symbolic meaning over their market price.⁹¹

The meanings and values attached to (the very same) objects were transformed as they moved between various exchange systems. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen takes this distinction further, reflecting on the difference between gifts that were originally ‘exchanged for cash’ and similar items that are made at home by women outside the ‘monetarized economy’.

Bourdieu identifies ‘wastage of money, energy, time and ingenuity’ as the ‘essence of the social alchemy through which an interested relationship is transmuted into a disinterested, gratuitous relationship’.⁹² Fanny and John Dashwood refuse to form an ‘interested relationship’ with the Dashwood sisters primarily due to the ‘wastage of money’ it entails. On meeting at Gray’s, John Dashwood boasts to the sisters, flaunting the fact that he has come all the way to London to “bespeak Fanny a seal” (*SS*, p.166).⁹³ Directly juxtaposed to this highly fashionable gift of a seal to Fanny is John Dashwood’s refusal to give a gift of earrings to the Dashwood sisters:

Having now said enough to make his poverty clear, and to do away [*sic*] the necessity of buying a pair of ear-rings for each of his sisters, in his next visit at Gray’s, his thoughts took a cheerfuller turn, and he began to congratulate Elinor on having such a friend as Mrs. Jennings. (*SS*, p.170)

By claiming the debt he has incurred as a result of his father’s decision to bequeath ‘all the Stanhill effects’ (linen and china) to his stepmother, John Dashwood foregoes any obligation to engage in gift relations with his sisters (*SS*, p.169). He equates, and conflates, the gifts to Mrs Dashwood and her daughters with his own financial loss. John Dashwood convinces himself of the poverty that will befall him if he should turn his ‘disinterested’ relationship into an ‘interested’ one. He insists that Fanny has Elinor’s “interest very much at heart”: Fanny is, we understand, interested in the possibility that Elinor will marry Colonel Brandon, thus leaving the sister financially independent from the ‘interest’ of herself and her husband (*SS*, p.168).

⁹¹ Margot Finn, ‘Men’s Things: Masculine Possession in the Consumer Revolution’, *Social History*, 25.2 (2000), 133-155 (p.148).

⁹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977), p. 192.

⁹³ See Heydt-Stevenson on seals in *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions* (p.30).

As was usual in families, gifts such as earrings were given to girls approaching ‘marriageable age’ because they ‘denoted the standing of the family and their ability to provide a dowry’.⁹⁴ Instead of providing the Dashwood sisters with a dowry or ‘interest’, John Dashwood declares with ‘enthusiastic generosity’ that he wishes Colonel Brandon possessed ‘*twice* as much’ as two-thousand pounds a year (SS, p.167). John Dashwood successively evades gift exchange with the sisters: like the gifts of game which remain hypothetical, and the earrings which are denied, Austen ironically suggests that his ‘generosity’ lies in offering gifts that are not his to bestow, including Colonel Brandon’s fortune. The narrative irony recurs when John Dashwood alludes to the wealth of Mrs Jennings: ““She seems a most valuable woman indeed. – ””, he exclaims, ““Her house, her style of living, all bespeak an exceedingly good income; and it is an acquaintance that has not only been of great use to you hitherto, but in the end may prove materially advantageous”” (SS, p.170). John Dashwood, understanding people in terms of their value and use, objectifies Mrs Jennings as a ‘valuable woman’ (thus encapsulating his own embeddedness within commercial, rather than gift, exchange), and speculates that she will leave her fortune to Elinor and Marianne, again foregoing his own obligations of gift exchange. The scene confirms the comfort that hypothetical fictions of gift exchange can provide; as the novel progresses it emerges that he is not the only character who derives pleasure from implausible and subjective narratives of exchange.

Whilst jewellery was one of the most valuable presents that passed between family members (in exchange value), throughout the long eighteenth century it was common to offer gifts that were valued precisely because they were homemade: the ‘regular exchange and produce of trinkets’ was, as Vickery indicates, ‘significant currency in elite sociability’ and thus signified fashionable social practice.⁹⁵ For the Dashwood couple, however, gifts can never quite be disassociated from the consumer world. Indeed, John Dashwood’s musings on his own financial downfall, and how far this excuses him from the obligation of gift exchange, exemplifies how ‘[g]ift economies can only disguise the calculation and negotiation that informs all economic practices’.⁹⁶ Fanny Dashwood’s gifts originate in the marketplace, and also become implicated in calculation and negotiation; pleased with the Steele sisters, she

⁹⁴ Pointon, ‘Women and their Jewels’, p.13.

⁹⁵ Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, p.188.

⁹⁶ Klekar, ““Her Gift was Compelled””, p.114.

offers ‘each of them a needle book, made by some emigrant’ (*SS*, p.191). Along with thread cases, needle books were, as Susan E. Jones observes, ‘the sort of gift one might make within the family’.⁹⁷ Austen herself sewed a needle book or ‘huswife’ – the name itself affirming the intimate association between female identity and the material world – as a gift for her close friend, and eventual sister-in-law, Mary Lloyd, in 1792. Yet, by engaging the Steele sisters in gift exchanges after having excluded the Dashwood women from any such exchange Fanny, characteristically, also enacts alienation and calculation.

Gifts in Austen are thus not merely kind offerings: they are complex objects of exchange and power, implicating the recipient in various levels of obligation.⁹⁸ As we have seen, obligation and gratitude were central tropes in the *Lady’s Monthly Museum’s* widowhood serials. In *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford embraces the obligations embedded in gift exchange to manipulate Fanny Price. She offers Fanny a choice of necklaces which Fanny then inspects, ‘longing to know which might be the least valuable’: she eventually chooses one ‘of gold prettily worked; and though [she] would have preferred a longer and plainer chain as more adapted for her purpose, she hoped in fixing on this, to be chusing [*sic*] what Miss Crawford least wished to keep’ (*MP*, p.202). Implicated in Fanny’s decision is the understanding that to accept a gift of greater material value entails a greater sense of obligation on her part. Whilst Fanny believes she will be indebted to Mary, Mary reveals that Fanny should think not of her but of ‘the original giver’, Henry Crawford, who first gave Mary the gift: ‘Fanny, in great astonishment and confusion, would have returned the present instantly. To take what has been the gift of another person – of a brother too – impossible! – it must not be!’ (*MP*, p.203). Mary’s actions point to the inalienability of the gift; her own obligation can be transferred to Fanny, now the recipient of Henry’s ‘gift’. It evidences as in *Sense and Sensibility*, that ‘[a]cts of patronage or charity are repeatedly fraught with difficulty’.⁹⁹ Just as Fanny Dashwood’s gift to the Steele sisters underscores her disavowal of her sisters-in-law, Mary’s benevolence is manipulation disguised as charity: the existence of gift

⁹⁷ Susan E. Jones, ‘Thread-cases, Pin-cushions, and Card-racks: Women’s Work in the City in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*’, *Persuasions On-Line*, 25.1, 2004, n.pag.

⁹⁸ This is a central concern of Mauss’s gift theory. Equally, Bourdieu claims that until the recipient of a gift has ‘has given in return, the receiver is “obliged”, expected to show his gratitude towards his benefactor’ in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp.6-7.

⁹⁹ Stabler, ‘Introduction’, p.xxviii.

exchange between Fanny Price and Henry Crawford announces their intimacy. Whilst *Mansfield Park* incisively shows how gifts, including Mary's chain and the fashionable 'new gown' given to Fanny by the Bertrams, are not simply possessions, but too often confer the status of 'possession' onto the obligated recipient, presents such as the Sicilian amber cross given to Fanny by her brother William equally suggest that Austen is not sceptical of the fiction of gift exchange *tout court* (*MP*, p.213). The status of the gift is far more complex. Indeed, on learning that Henry Crawford has obtained a commission for her brother, Fanny experiences a multitude of conflicting, and ultimately distressing, emotions:

She was feeling, thinking, trembling, about every thing; - agitated, happy, miserable, infinitely obliged, absolutely angry. It was all beyond belief! He was inexcusable, incomprehensible! - But such were his habits, that he could do nothing without a mixture of evil. (*MP*, pp.326-7)

In receiving a gift from Fanny Dashwood the Steele sisters enter into a state of obligation which becomes strained when Lucy and Edward's secret engagement is announced. Anne Steele's first thoughts on this revelation turn not to larger narrative consequences, but rather to the fashionable objects that underpin social relations. She fears that she has broken the contractual gift obligations that exist between herself, Lady Middleton and Fanny Dashwood. Lady Middleton, she declares,

'vowed at first she would never trim me up a new bonnet, nor do any thing else for me again, so long as she lived; but now she is quite come to, and we are as good friends as ever. Look, she made me this bow to my hat, and put in the feather last night.' (*SS*, p.205)

Anne directs Elinor's focus: the sight of the bow alone is, she believes enough to confirm Lady Middleton's continued affection. As with John Dashwood's promise to his father, Lady Middleton's 'vow' is hollow: gifts speak louder than words.

Although in gifting etiquette 'saying that the gift is inalienably linked to the giver does not necessarily mean that the giver has the jural right to reclaim the object', Anne, concerned that Fanny Dashwood might wish to recall her gift of the huswifes, takes the precautionary measure of hiding them out of sight.¹⁰⁰ Her actions

¹⁰⁰ Carrier, p.24

confirm the centrality of visibility and sight in the novel and the way in which characters embrace vision in order to reveal and conceal. Whilst her sister's engagement is falling apart and the friendships that were cemented by gifts are threatened to collapse, Anne reveals the extent to which bonnets and needle-cases occupy her thoughts. For Anne, the most dress-obsessed character of the novel, there is no way of (quite literally) viewing relationships other than through fashionable objects of exchange.

However, there is an important difference between the two gifts: the trimmed bonnet involves the time, effort, ingenuity and fashion knowledge of Lady Middleton, whereas the huswife, rather than reflecting the labour of Fanny, points rather ambiguously to the work of 'some emigrant', suggesting that it is the work of one of the many immigrants who fled France for England during the Revolution. Many of these emigrés contributed to England's burgeoning fashion industry: Niklaus von Heideloff, who fled Paris for London, set up the first English fashion magazine, *The Gallery of Fashion* (1794-1802). However, as noted in my previous chapter, '[h]ome-made presents' were seen as particularly valuable: they 'were usually offered by women and seen as time, labour and affection made concrete'.¹⁰¹ By removing herself from the point of labour Fanny negates the value of the gift.

In *Sense and Sensibility* Lady Middleton exploits Lucy's labour, insisting that she finish her filigree whilst unconvincingly expressing concern for her welfare. The term 'work' points to the way in which women's labour and leisure were linguistically intertwined; Lucy will 'work filigree' on her 'work table' with 'working candles', while Elinor, seeing it will be 'impossible' for Lucy's 'labour singly, to finish it this evening' generously claims she 'should like the work exceedingly' (SS, p.107-8). Lucy Steele's 'work', as Heydt-Stevenson maintains, is not simply Austen's representation of a leisure activity that was 'fashionable with wealthy, leisured ladies or, in Lucy's case, with those who toiled for those who enjoyed such status', but in reality a depiction of 'hard labor as [Lucy and Elinor] strain their eyes finishing intricate designs in a darkened room'.¹⁰² In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen implicitly provides a counterargument to the notion, very much alive in the concept of eighteenth-century sociability, that 'there is a real connection

¹⁰¹ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, p.188.

¹⁰² Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunction*, pp. 45, 47.

between women and “gifts”, showing, as Still contends, that ‘those so-called gifts are really the fruits of exploitation’.¹⁰³ Lucy’s forced labour might be excused as an expression of her own pretensions to fashionability, but it is also a suggestion that the ‘bond’ created by gift exchange can effect a form of *bondage* in the obligation not only to receive gifts but ‘to repay (with interest)’.¹⁰⁴ Lucy, like her sister, is indebted to Lady Middleton who offers them fashionable garments made by her own hands, and the interest accrued takes the form of labour, the ‘currency’ of home-produced gift exchange. It reflects more widely manifestations of gift exchange that resemble a form of ‘challenge’, rather than charity, to the obliged recipient.¹⁰⁵ The irony in this is that gift culture commands the logic of debt and interest, and yet that women’s benevolent and, markedly fashionable, work is still economically devalued.¹⁰⁶ The discomfort with which we might read of Lucy’s labour mirrors more widely the material vulnerability of women within the novel, whose economic downfall is ironically annulled through the logic of gift exchange: Fanny Dashwood and her husband describe the Dashwood sisters’ (by now significantly reduced) inheritance as ‘presents’ that they will bestow upon them (SS, pp.9-10). In the language of Fanny and John Dashwood the withholding of money and goods is reframed as charity.

3.4 Making a Gift of Oneself

In 1807 *La Belle Assemblée* published an advert for ‘Ackerman’s Repository of Arts’ which exclusively addressed the nobility and gentry, advertising ‘filigree papers’ alongside ‘ivory for miniatures’, various types of inks and drawing papers, ‘Indian glue’, drawings of flowers, ornaments, and materials for work baskets and fire

¹⁰³ Judith Still, *Feminine Economies: Thinking Against the Market in the Enlightenment and the Late Twentieth Century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.25.

¹⁰⁴ Still, p.14.

¹⁰⁵ George Bataille writes of the system of ‘potlach’ in which a gift is ‘offered openly and with the goal of humiliating, defying and obligating the rival’ and that the recipient, responding ‘to the challenge, must satisfy the obligation (incurred by him at the time of acceptance) to respond later with a more valuable gift, in other words to return with interest’. George Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1937-1939*, trans. by Allan Stoekl, Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p.121.

¹⁰⁶ Batchelor considers the economic devaluation of women’s work within the eighteenth-century novel, particularly those of Sarah Scott. See Batchelor, *Women’s Work*, p.50.

screens (which Elinor also paints).¹⁰⁷ Famously, Austen herself deployed the very ‘à la mode’ comparison between her literary work and ivory miniatures.¹⁰⁸ Todd persuasively suggests that by referring to this ‘miniaturising technique’ Austen ‘wants to embed her work in the quotidian, in new books and goods – in *Sense & Sensibility* she uses the miniature itself as a fashionable artefact to carry a deeper plot’.¹⁰⁹ *Sense and Sensibility*, we might then suggest, encompasses a further development of Austen’s aggrandisement of fashionable trifles. Whilst her unpublished works concurrently deride and celebrate the emotional investment characters place in trifling objects of fashion, *Sense and Sensibility* underscores how these fashionable goods can be used to point the reader towards unspoken and unconfirmed narratives: acts of exchange that are thought to have taken place; alliances that have been made and broken; webs of intimacy. Kristen Miller Zohn, although not employing the framework of gift exchange, maintains that Austen uses miniatures and hairwork to ‘give confusing messages about the various relationships that are ultimately revealed to be deficient or nonexistent’.¹¹⁰ Exactly how Austen ‘gives’ these confusing messages is itself narratologically significant: Austen uses (un)fashionable objects to dramatise multiple conflicting perspectives and meanings. Throughout the novel, people are shown to (mis)understand and be (mis)understood through the material objects that surround them.¹¹¹

If labouring on gifts reflects the notion that to give a gift is, according to Mauss, to ‘make a present of some part of oneself’, then the practice of giving miniatures and gifts of hair reflects this somewhat literally.¹¹² These gifts appear to affirm the inalienability of gift objects: the identity of the giver is present both bodily and mimetically in the gift itself. Wiltshire, discussing Willoughby’s return of Marianne’s lock of hair, observes that this is why the unwanted return of such gifts can have ‘an especially wounding effect, for it is as if some part of the lover’s self

¹⁰⁷ ‘Repository of Arts’, *LBA*, February 1807, p.7.

¹⁰⁸ Kelly, *English Fiction*, p.115.

¹⁰⁹ Janet Todd, ‘Ivory Miniatures and the Art of Jane Austen’ in *Re-Drawing Austen: Picturesque Travels in Austenland*, pp.115-123 (p.122).

¹¹⁰ Kristen Miller Zohn, ‘Tokens of Imperfect Affection: Portrait Miniatures and Hairwork in *Sense and Sensibility*,’ *Persuasions On-Line*, 32.1 (2011), n. pag.

¹¹¹ Margaret Anne Doody notes that ‘knowing and not knowing are among the great subjects of *Sense and Sensibility*’ in ‘Introduction’, in *Sense and Sensibility*, pp.vii-xxxix (p.xxix).

¹¹² Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990), p.12.

were being repudiated'.¹¹³ Yet, these objects are rhetorically contentious. As Wiltshire notes, they cannot 'fix and objectify passion'; as I argue here, it is over-reliance on the narrative fictions of gift exchange that renders these (un)fashionable objects unstable epistemological markers.¹¹⁴

Both Marianne Dashwood and Lucy Steele possess fashionable miniatures in *Sense and Sensibility*. Participation in the gift exchange of miniatures was itself part of fashionable social practice during the eighteenth century.¹¹⁵ In Pointon's history of the miniature focalisation is a key element of their fashionability: she explains that the 'head-and-shoulders view' of the miniature 'might be understood to provide the essence, omitting details of dress, which would rapidly go out of fashion, thus ensuring that one generation would not discard the images of its progenitors'.¹¹⁶ Whilst miniatures themselves were fashionable the portraits they contained were, to a certain extent, designed to defy cycles of fashion; their focus on the head and shoulders prevented them from becoming 'old-fashioned' like Elinor's mother's jewels.

However participation in the gift exchange of miniatures was exclusive: the cost of miniatures was 'prohibitive; only the very well-off could afford such a financial outlay when an equal sum could buy a fashionable sofa or at least three chairs'.¹¹⁷ Lucy Steele cannot afford the expense of sitting for a miniature picture and so instead gives Edward Ferrars the 'anonymous and less expensive, craft-like gift of hair-jewellery'.¹¹⁸ The gifts are not financially equivalent: whilst miniatures cost several guineas, a piece of hair-work, particularly if it had been hand-crafted, could be acquired for a mere shilling.¹¹⁹ Lucy declares not that she cannot afford to sit for a picture but, more vaguely, that she has "never been able [...] to give him my picture. [...] But I am determined to set for it the very first opportunity" (*SS*, p.100). She avoids talking costs and prices, ensuring that her economic motives for marrying Edward remain unarticulated.

¹¹³ Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body*, p.33.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Pointon, "'Surrounded with Brilliants'", p.52.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.49.

¹¹⁷ Rieder, p.249.

¹¹⁸ Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.45. See also Bury, *Sentimental Jewellery*, p.41.

¹¹⁹ Bury notes that 'In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a single curl cost under a shilling if plain, but the addition of gold details or the introduction of seed pearls increased the price to five shillings or more'. Bury, *Sentimental Jewellery* (p.41).

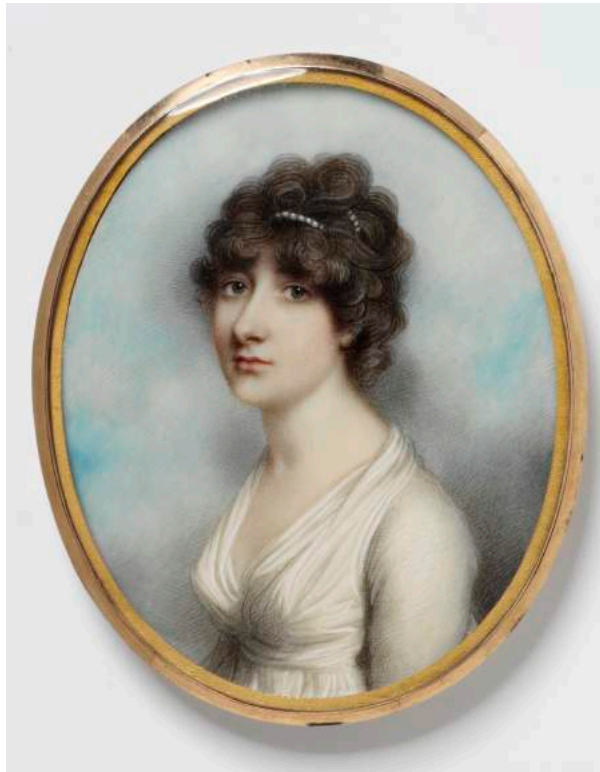


Figure 3.3 Miniature by Andrew Pilmer in watercolour on ivory (c.1800). Victoria and Albert Museum.

Whilst hair jewellery was less exclusive, gift exchanges of hair were ‘popular and conventional’ in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹²⁰ Heyt-Stevenson, who has perceptively analysed Austen’s deployment of miniature jewellery within the novel, argues that Austen is thus referencing ‘up-to-the-minute fashions in her novel when Willoughby cuts off one of Marianne’s locks, Lucy gives her fiancé some of her hair, and Elinor believes that Edward preserves her tresses in a ring he wears’.¹²¹ Lucy might not be able to afford to participate in elite fashionable exchanges, but her gifts are still at the height of popular fashions, representing what Still dubs a ‘feminine economy of abundance’.¹²² What these miniature objects imply beyond the fashion-consciousness of both Austen and her characters, is that such gifts carry (as Todd suggests) a ‘deeper’ narratological significance: the meanings

¹²⁰ Heyt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.43

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Still, p.97.

they convey, however, are not intrinsic; rather, they are dependent on the narrative fictions of exchange generated by those gazing upon them.

Ironically, for an object which is ostensibly inalienably linked to the giver, the value of hair jewellery, for Austen, appears to lie in its ambiguity: Heydt-Stevenson insists that 'Austen exploits the often-justified paranoia that infiltrated the hair-jewelry industry: uncertain provenance'.¹²³ Yet Edward really values his ring 'with a plait of hair in the centre' because he can create a fictional gift exchange behind it: "'it is my sister's hair'" he lies, "'The setting always casts a different shade on it, you know' (SS, p.74). The ring is simultaneously a material token of love and an object of secrecy, echoing the many secret alliances, such as Brandon's history with Eliza and Willoughby's former seductions, that pervade the novel beyond that of Edward and Lucy's covert engagement. Marianne and Elinor concurrently create their own fictional gift exchanges:

Elinor had met his eye, and looked conscious likewise. That the hair was her own, she instantaneously felt as well satisfied as Marianne; the only difference in their conclusions was, that what Marianne considered as a free gift from her sister, Elinor was conscious must have been procured by some theft or contrivance unknown to herself. She was not in a humour, however, to regard it as an affront, and affecting to take no notice of what passed, by instantly talking of something else, she internally resolved henceforward to catch every opportunity of eyeing the hair and of satisfying herself, beyond all doubt, that it was exactly the shade of her own. (SS, p.74)

Just as the various gazes in Gray's shop point to the interior workings of both consumer and romantic desire, here we observe how both Elinor and Marianne 'internally' resolve the mystery of the ring's exchange history through sight alone. The significance of the jewellery is read in distinctly different ways as Austen traces the concurrent yet diverse thought-processes spurred into being by different focalisers. In an instant the reader is presented with multiple alternative narratives of gift exchange: Edward's false history of a benign gift exchange between himself and his sister; Marianne's assumption that it is a 'free gift' from Elinor; Elinor's conclusion that it was theft; and the true gift exchange, between Lucy and Edward,

¹²³ Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.43.

that is later revealed to Elinor, leaving her ‘mortified, shocked, confounded’ (SS, p.102).¹²⁴



Figure 3.4 Hair jewellery from 1810. Victoria and Albert Museum.

Elinor proves herself elsewhere to be perfectly aware of the danger of misreading gifts, chastising Margaret for believing Marianne wears a miniature of Willoughby, which is in fact an image of their great uncle. ““But indeed this is quite another thing””, insists Margaret, “I am sure they will be married very soon, for he has got a lock of her hair.” “Take care, Margaret”” warns Elinor, “It may be only the hair of some great uncle of *his*”” (SS, p.46). Despite Elinor’s earlier scepticism, she shows the ease with which miniature objects can lead to grand delusions. As at Gray’s, within the domestic interior of the cottage looks are exchanged and avoided: Edward looks to Elinor, while Elinor meets Edward’s ‘eye, and looked conscious likewise’ (SS, p.74). Like Robert Ferrars, Elinor decides to mentally engage with the object itself, resolving to ‘to catch every opportunity of eyeing the hair’ in order to convince herself of its true genealogy (SS, p.74). Nonetheless, unlike Robert Ferrars who examines his miniature objects with a ‘correctness’ of eye, Elinor and Marianne show no microscopic skill, instead believing that seeing is knowing.

¹²⁴ John Halperin argues that the narrative teaches the reader ‘to see what is there, and not just what one wishes to see’ in *The Life of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p.90.

Elinor is able to convince herself that Edward's ring is made of her own hair just as she insists that Lucy's miniature does not resemble 'Edward's face'; she exemplifies the subjectivity of observation, which weaves its own self-assured fictions of exchange (SS, p.99). Narratives of gift exchange simultaneously promise to uphold and threaten to undermine the provenance of the object: 'This picture, [Elinor] had allowed herself to believe, might have been accidentally obtained; it might not have been Edward's gift' (SS, p.102). Lucy thrusts the portrait – which, like the old-fashioned jewels, is precariously positioned between commodity and gift – into Elinor's hands: the secret gift is presented for Elinor's examination. Determined to assure Elinor of the authenticity of the object, Lucy reveals Edward's letter, an artefact which, alongside the mirror, was considered to be 'interchangeable' with miniature portraits by continuing to play, as Pointon explains, 'on the idea of love as a recognition of the subject's ego in the other'.¹²⁵ The exchange of correspondence affirms the authenticity of the miniature: 'Elinor saw that it *was* his hand, and she could doubt no longer. [...] a correspondence between them by letter, could subsist only under a positive engagement' (SS, p.102). His signature provides proof of the gift exchange and of the relationship it frames as, according to the rules of eighteenth-century gift exchange in which a 'young unmarried girl might receive nothing from an unrelated man unless she was betrothed to him'.¹²⁶ Whilst Elinor's conjectures are here correct, the scene echoes an earlier moment in the novel in which Marianne reveals Willoughby's gift of a horse. Marianne's acceptance of a gift she cannot afford to keep – for she would have to 'keep a servant to ride it, and after all, build a stable to receive them' – not only highlights her impulsiveness, but signals indecency: Elinor reflects that it is improper for her to receive 'such a present from a man so little, or at least so lately known to her' (SS, p.44).

Austen returns to the narrative implications of such gifts in *Emma* when a 'large-sized square pianoforté' is delivered by 'Broadwood's' to Jane Fairfax's door (E, p.168). Jane Fairfax is, according to the clueless Miss Bates 'quite bewildered to think who could possibly have ordered it', whilst Mrs Bates and her daughter are 'perfectly satisfied that it could be from only one quarter; - of course it must be from Col. Campbell' (E, p.168). In giving a surprise gift of a piano, Frank Churchill

¹²⁵ Pointon, "'Surrounded with Brilliants'", p.63

¹²⁶ Bury, p.44

simultaneously displays his love and flaunts his wealth to his secret lover: a square piano from Broadwood's cost between £31-£52, a significant figure when one considers that Austen's annual income while her father was living was £20.¹²⁷ The piano, like Willoughby's gift of a horse, is both an imposition (according to Mr Knightley's perspective) and an amorous display.¹²⁸

However, more important than the mere inconvenience of the gift is its narrative repercussions. When Willoughby assures Marianne that the horse will be waiting for her once she quits Barton, Elinor is persuaded by 'the whole of the sentence, in his manner of pronouncing it, and in his addressing her sister by her christian name alone' that they are 'engaged to one another' (*SS*, p.45). Similarly, Emma Woodhouse, with Frank Churchill's quiet encouragement, is spurred on to make assumptions about the relationship between Jane Fairfax and Mr Dixon, the assumed giver of "the mystery, the surprize [*sic*]" gift (*E*, p.170). As with Edward's ring, a mere gift can stimulate endless narratives: from an act of "paternal kindness" to a "tribute of warm female friendship" and, finally, "an offering of love", the meaning of the gift, and the secret narratives behind its offering, undergo various transformations (*E*, pp.171-2). The parallel scenes reveal the comic narrative potential of gift exchange; the narrative irony of the gift is, like the shopping experience, forestalled. Whilst the gift functions as a plot device to ostensibly uncover the intimacies of social relations, in reality such objects merely confound and misguide both reader and character.

That Willoughby would offer a gift that is in reality more of a financial burden than an act of kindness contrasts with Marianne's bizarre decision to wear a miniature of her uncle. As Todd explains: individuals wore miniatures of relatives 'in hope of inheriting or in gratitude of having done so; the detail suggests Marianne's refusal to enter the system of money relationships in which her worldly lover Willoughby is enmeshed'.¹²⁹ Rather, it shows her own delusion that she thinks she cares not for money, as exemplified in her insistence that, although "money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give it", "A family cannot well

¹²⁷ Michael Cole prints a list of Broadwood pianos using the company's 1817 price list in *Broadwood Square Pianos: Their Historical Context and Technical Development* (Cheltenham: Tachley Books, 2005), p.181.

¹²⁸ Hardy insists that it is 'a frivolous, self-regarding gift' (p.35).

¹²⁹ Janet Todd, *Cambridge Introduction to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.52.

be maintained on a smaller [income than £2, 000 per annum]. I am sure I am not extravagant in my demands. A proper establishment of servants, a carriage, perhaps two, and hunters, cannot be supported on less” (SS, p. 69). Such statements expose what Hardy succinctly describes as Marianne’s ‘conventional and fashionable materialism’.¹³⁰ Meanwhile, not only does Willoughby commodify Marianne by placing her hair in a pocketbook (an item often used to hold money), he also exchanges her for the ‘very fashionable’ and wealthy Miss Grey, whose very name echoes the jewellery shop on Sackville street (SS, p.131).¹³¹

Unlike Marianne’s miniature, which is conventionally hung around her neck, Lucy’s miniature, like her sister’s huswife, is kept hidden. Edward’s public display of his ring, however, shows how he is “‘fettered”” by his engagement; as with Lucy’s filigree work, gift exchange becomes a form of bondage.¹³² Conversely, Lucy’s covert practice of keeping the miniature for private moments of self-conscious gazing rather than showing the miniature for public display, is notably a masculine form of engagement with miniature gifts. Rieder’s study reveals that ‘when men carried miniatures, they likely placed them in their pockets, doubly ensconcing the object. Women, however, wore miniatures, displaying them publicly as necklaces and/or brooches on their bodices’.¹³³ The clandestine nature of the gift exchange forces Lucy into a conventionally masculine act that further reveals information about her fashionability: that Lucy Steele wears pockets, an item of attire that had, by the 1790s, not altogether disappeared, but instead had ‘become unfashionable in themselves, replaced or ‘driven underground’ by an expanding range of highly ornamental bags’.¹³⁴ What might seem like a banal miniature detail in fact tells the reader something important about the dress of someone who is described by Robert Dashwood, a self-appointed arbiter of fashion, as the ‘merest awkward country girl, without style, or elegance’ (SS, p.226). It is of course a narrative joke on the part of Austen that the foppish Robert Ferrars should say this of Lucy Steele only to end up marrying her. Whilst Robert Ferrars is quick to judge the rusticity of Lucy Steele,

¹³⁰ Hardy, p.150.

¹³¹ Heydt-Stevenson argues that ‘as [Willoughby] kisses her hair and places it in his pocket, he also commodifies her, since pocket books often doubled as notebooks and as wallets, which sometimes held bank notes (paper money)” in *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.38.

¹³² Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body*, p.33.

¹³³ Rieder, p.256.

¹³⁴ Barbara Burman and Jonathan White, ‘Fanny’s Pockets: Cotton, Consumption and Domestic Economy, 1780-1850’, in *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830*, pp.31-51 (p.39).

Lady Middleton, Austen narrates, is surprised to concede that the sisters are ‘by no means ungentle or unfashionable. Their dress was very smart, their manners very civil, they were delighted with the house (SS, p.89). It is part of Austen’s narrative technique throughout that fashion is never seen through a single perspective, but rather through a variety of gazes which offer competing narratives and perspectives.

It is the (in)visibility of objects and the vision of spectators, whether Elinor’s constant ‘eyeing’, Robert’s ‘correctness of eye’, Anne Steele’s ‘minute observation[s]’, Willoughby’s ‘watchfulness’, Margaret’s covert ‘observations’ and Marianne’s ‘abstracted’ gaze, which, however small and however contradictory, become narrative windows into the material exchanges of *Sense and Sensibility*. This focus on the visible and the visual points both character and reader to the invisible and complex relations that exist between people and things. Yet, (un)fashionable objects frequently confound both their observers and Austen’s readers: the fictional ‘depths’ created by Austen’s characters do not always converge with the surfaces they desire see.

Austen ensures that her reader sees via the diverging perspectives of her characters, thus framing our own experience of the narrative within this imperfect epistemological structure. It emerges in the novel that the relations formed between people and objects, and the values ascribed to those objects, are in fact underpinned by narrative itself: these connections are the result of the narratives of circulation, exchange and history of consumer goods themselves. Austen shows that exchange is vital in establishing meaning in both objects and narrative: repeated acts of exchange are echoed and paralleled throughout the novel, serving to concurrently illuminate and disguise social relations between her characters. But Austen challenges the rules of exchange, undermines the distinct values placed on commodities and gifts and adopts strategies of containment and exposure to dispute the authenticity of these narratives. The fashionable commodities that pervade the novel contain, in the mind and gaze of the observer, narratives within them: the daydreaming consumer and the female recipient understand the narrative significance of such objects, whether by anticipating their future obsolescence or acknowledging their past lives. These objects are essential to the way in which Austen chooses to narrate her novel and develop her characters; they reveal the inner workings of her characters’ minds as they navigate, indeed narrate, distinct economies of value and meaning. Austen takes

the tropes of economic dilemma and consumer acquisition, so pervasive in contemporary fashion periodicals and so familiar to early nineteenth-century reading audiences, to create a much more complex narrative in which the movement and acquisition of objects – movements and objects that are always framed by fashion – is central, whether real or imagined, to establishing forms of meaning and knowing within the novel.

Chapter 4 'Nothing to do and no variety to hope for': The Fashionably Bored in *Mansfield Park*

In those dull moments when ennui prevails,
And beaux forget to call, and scandal fails,
What dame of fashion e'er can condescend
At home the solitary hours to spend?
At home! O monstrous! is there then no way
To kill the languor of the irksome day?

'Not at Home', *Lady's Magazine*, 1810.¹

In 1814, when *Mansfield Park* was first published, the word 'boredom' had yet to be coined.² Instead, various terms were employed to express the feelings experienced in 'dull moments' including tedium, languor, idleness, fatigue, indolence, listlessness and, as the narrator of one of the *Lady's Magazine's* serials declared, 'what is fashionably termed *ennui*'.³ The first volume of Maria Edgeworth's *Tales of Fashionable Life* opened in 1809 with a narrative entitled *Ennui*. The tale would have been familiar to Austen; the popular single-volume narrative had reached its fourth edition by 1813.⁴ *Ennui's* key position within the compilation affirms the perceived centrality of boredom within fashionable life: it was represented as an ailment of the fashionable. The tale tells the story of the Anglo-Irish aristocrat and man of fashion, Lord Glenthorn, a chronic sufferer of ennui. After a failed marriage and many disastrous attempts to overcome his ennui with the aid of his fashionable companions, he seeks to escape his surroundings. Glenthorn feels compelled to visit his Irish estates, only to eventually discover during his stay that he was switched at birth with his nurse's son who is in fact the real heir to the Glenthorn estate. In due

¹ 'Not at Home', *LM*, February 1810, pp.85-6 (p.85).

² The term 'boredom' is first used to describe '[t]he state of being bored; tedium, ennui' in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853). 'Boredom', definition 2, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/21650>> [accessed 20 April 2015].

³ 'Benedict; A True History', *LM*, March 1812, pp.99-103 (p.102). The narrator of the long-running (and much interrupted) serial writes: 'I think my readers will allow there has been sufficient diversity in my biographical sketches, to prevent them from feeling, while perusing them, what is fashionably termed *ennui*' (p.102).

⁴ Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan observe that a possible allusion to Edgeworth's *Ennui* occurs in *Emma* when the heroine questions Isabella Knightley about a Scottish bailiff: Austen 'may be remembering Edgeworth's *Ennui* (London, 1809) in which Glenthorn's land agent in Ireland is the exemplary Scotsman M'Leod'. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan, 'Explanatory Notes', in Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.532-528 (p.556).

course, the revelation that he is not a man of fashion enables him to overcome his ennui: turning away from dissipation, he begins to study law, a change which brings about his cure.⁵ The fashionable protagonist and narrator of *Ennui* presents himself as a patient, self-reflectively deriving medical authority from his suffering. He records his ennui with scientific interest, diligently and retrospectively noting its vicissitudes. Reflecting on the ennui from which he has now recovered, Edgeworth's protagonist recalls how he first

began to feel the dreadful symptoms of that mental malady, which baffles the skill of medicine, and for which wealth can purchase only temporary alleviation. For this complaint there is no precise English name, - but alas! the foreign term is now naturalized in England. - Among the higher classes, whether in the wealthy, or the fashionable world, who is unacquainted with *ennui*?⁶

As both the *Lady's Magazine* and *Ennui* intimate, the term 'ennui' was itself a symptom of fashionable sociolect, which hinged on the gratuitous display of European (usually French) words.⁷ In *Mansfield Park* the orphaned Crawfords, brought up in the fashionable environs of Mayfair's Hill Street⁸ and habituated to the company and seasonal diversions of fashionable society in Twickenham, Cheltenham and Tunbridge, convey their cosmopolitanism by punctuating their speech with French. Phrases and euphemisms such as 'belles' (*MP*, p.69), '*esprit du corps*' (p.37), '*menus plaisirs*' (p.177), 'lines passionées' (p.309) and, of course, '*étourderie*' (p.343) spill from their mouths. Even syntactically Mary is fashionable in her use of auxiliary verbs: she uses what Phillipps identifies as the colloquial and modern 'negative preterite form *did not use*': she 'did not use to think [Maria Rushworth] wanting in self possession'.⁹ Edmund Bertram who, unlike his brother, is not an initiate of the fashionable world, throws the Crawfords' fashionable diction

⁵ I discuss the representation of boredom in *Ennui* more fully in "What is fashionably termed *ennui*": Maria Edgeworth Represents the Clinically Bored', in *Disease and Death in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture: Fashioning the Unfashionable*, ed. by Allan Ingram and Leigh Wetherall Dickson (Palgrave, forthcoming 2016).

⁶ Edgeworth, *Ennui*, in *Tales of Fashionable Life*, i (1809), p.3.

⁷ On the use of the term 'ennui' in *Ennui* see in particular Camille R. La Bossière, 'Finessing Indolence: The Case of Edgeworth's *Ennui*', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 25.1/2 (1999), 414-426 (p.416) and Katy Brundan, 'Cosmopolitan Complexities in Maria Edgeworth's "Ennui"', *Studies in the Novel*, 37. 2 (2005), 123-40 (p.125).

⁸ Peter W. Graham notes the particularly fashionable cachet of Hill Street. Peter W. Graham, 'Falling for the Crawfords: Character, Contingency, and Narrative', *ELH*, 77.4 (2010), 867-891 (pp.870-71).

⁹ K. C. Phillipps, *Jane Austen's English* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970), p.125.

- deployed to exclude outsiders – back at them: they should not, he clarifies, expect “a *bon mot*” from him: “I am a very matter-of-fact, plain-spoken being” (*MP*, p.74). By glossing his French with the English clarification that he is plain-spoken, Edmund highlights the way in which meaning is obfuscated, rather than disclosed, by the Crawfords’ use of modish French terms; the meta-linguistic phrase ‘bon mot’ is not only fashionable itself, but refers to the witticisms and communicative forms expected of fashionable society. Likewise, Robert Ferrars of *Sense and Sensibility*, contorting into a bow that ‘assure[s]’ Elinor ‘as plainly as words could have done, that he was exactly the coxcomb she had heard him described to be’ (*SS*, p.187), embraces the performativity of fashionable French diction by ‘lamenting the extreme *gaucherie*’ of his brother, which he attributes to ‘the misfortune of a private education’ (*SS*, p.188). Robert Ferrars performs his condescending fashionability by deliberately deploying a word for his brother which Edward Ferrars could not use himself.

The French term ‘ennui’ and the plethora of other terms used to describe this fashionable ‘mental malady’ in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, reflect what psychoanalysts and philosophers have more recently come to understand: that we ‘should not speak of boredom, but of boredoms, because the notion itself includes a multiplicity of moods and feelings that resist analysis’.¹⁰ Here Adam Phillips’s turn of phrase is redolent of the perplexity of eighteenth-century commentators who felt the inadequacy of the English language to express the plurality and attendant obscurity of this disease, which was labelled – indeed diagnosed – as inherently fashionable during the period. As one 1809 contributor to *La Belle Assemblée* observed in a narrative that bears a striking resemblance to Edgeworth’s recently published *Ennui*: ‘every one pities a fit of the gout, or a stout assault of the stone or of the rheumatism, but no one pities the more afflicting disease of the idle man, because no one but himself can comprehend it’.¹¹ The anonymous narrative, framed as a letter to the editor, is a first-person serialized memoir (again

¹⁰ Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p.82. Antecedents of Phillips’s theory are evident in Martin Heidegger’s 1929–30 Freiburg lecture course ‘On Boredom and Animals’ and in psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel’s essay ‘On the Psychology of Boredom’, published in *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel* in 1954.

¹¹ ‘Life of a Lounger’, *LBA*, July 1809, pp.11–12 (p.12). The series runs until October 1809, at which point the contributor abruptly ceases correspondence.

reminiscent of *Ennui*), in which the idle man presents his personal struggle with boredom. Like Edgeworth's text, the tone of the memoir hovers between sincere existential intrigue and satire of the fashionable world. Despite this contributor's explicit gendering of ennui ('the idle man'), and recent scholarly insistence that 'ennui is the personal, male lacuna of the times', sources such as the above epigraph from the *Lady's Magazine*, as well as the language of early nineteenth-century novelists and their reviewers, challenge this categorisation: they reach agreement in diagnosing the fashionability, rather than the gender, of the patient of ennui.¹² Gendered taxonomies of ennui fail to recognise the sheer capaciousness of boredom in the period. As the quotation from *La Belle Assemblée's* contributor suggests, ennui and its cognates were perceived as uniquely individual and externally incomprehensible, hence boredom challenged (as Phillips acknowledges) the efficacy of objective interpretation required by medical diagnosis.

What is overwhelmingly apparent in these eighteenth-century expressions of boredom is that it is consistently perceived as a malady that was unique to those of the fashionable world, a phenomenon which in turn promoted its commodification; as James Matbrick Adair wrote in his *Essays on Fashionable Diseases* (c.1790), even 'medicine [...] is become subject to the empire of fashion'.¹³ Austen herself reflects on the intersecting worlds of disease and fashion, most notably in *Sanditon*, which satirically exposes the marketability and desirability of illness within a new resort that is 'growing the fashion' (NA, p.298).¹⁴ In the fragment, the Heywood family possess enough money 'to have indulged in a new carriage and better roads, an occasional month at Tunbridge Wells, and symptoms of the gout and a winter at Bath' (NA, p.303). Gout is analogous to visiting a fashionable spa or purchasing a luxury carriage: certain illnesses become exclusive and commodified experiences of fashionable life.

¹² Irene A. Beesmyer, 'Romantic Masculinity in Edgeworth's *Ennui* and Scott's *Marmion*: In Itself a Border Story', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 35.1 (1999), 74-97 (p.78). See also Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction', in Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp.1-56 (p.32).

¹³ James Matbrick Adair, *Essays on Fashionable Diseases* (London, c.1790), p.3.

¹⁴ Tanner writes of *Sanditon*: 'if you want to sell the seaside as a cure, you must also "sell" the notional illnesses which need curing' (p.262). Lynch argues that 'For Diana Parker, the novel's hypochondriac, selling Sanditon is a matter of selling sickness or imaginary complaints in order to sell health or imaginary cures. Putting his faith in mimetic desire, Mr. Parker, for his part, is confident that fashion will attract fashion'. Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, p.225.

Austen scholarship is often quick to note in passing that the Crawfords are fashionable people, a fact most evident in their language, their knowledge of London geography and their association with the seasonal metropolitan world of fashion. Likewise, critics have observed the Mansfield party's love of diversion and play – quite literally in their performance of Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows*. Yet readings of the novel have failed to observe that the plot of *Mansfield Park* centres on the interplay between diversion and inertia that defined fashionable boredom, the *manie* of the day. Such an omission reflects readers' often limited view of what constitutes fashion, and more widely evidences a failure to analyse Austen's fiction within the context of the early-nineteenth-century fashion system. The desire to avoid boredom, an affliction which persistently threatens the fashionable world in eighteenth-century literature and culture, is central to the narrative development of *Mansfield Park*. The fashionable pursuit of novelty and diversion, whether in books, clothes, plays or balls, was, as Emma Parker's *Important Trifles* noted in 1817, perceived as both a remedy for, and a cause of, boredom: 'the determined votaries of what is termed pleasure', the author observes, 'nightly seek each other's society as a refuge from ennui, thus pursuing the very course that engenders it'.¹⁵ It is this paradoxical pursuit of diversion and play which is central to the language and plot of *Mansfield Park*, a novel replete with characters who, like the fashion followers depicted by philosopher Christian Garve in his 1792 essay 'On Fashion', '[dread] boredom more than toil', and perpetually seek 'new images for their imagination'.¹⁶ Fashion and boredom are inextricably intertwined in Austen's 1814 novel.

In magazines fashionable boredom was satirized and analysed with enthusiasm. In 1800 'The Old Woman' of the *Lady's Monthly Museum* led with the story of 'The Morning Ramble of Fashion and Sober', in which Mr Fashion's peregrinations lead him to the fashionable environs of Bond Street where, void of occupation and purpose (one contemporary definition of a 'man of fashion'), he enters shops, eats fruit and pinches kittens' tails until he inevitably ends up at Brooks's club, one of the 'four most exclusive clubs of west London' in the early nineteenth century.¹⁷ It is a tale of boredom: Mr Fashion, we are told, 'yawned

¹⁵ Parker, *Important Trifles*, pp.110-11.

¹⁶ Christian Garve, 'On Fashion' (1792), in *The Rise of Fashion: A Reader*, ed. by Daniel Leonhard Purdy (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) pp.65-71 (p.69).

¹⁷ Rendell, p.64.

repeatedly, and complained of *ennui*’ and ‘damned the dullness of the morning’.¹⁸ In her chapter ‘On dissipation and the modern habits of fashionable life’, Hannah More similarly conjures a figure of the fashionable bored loungeur, asking her readers

to look abroad and see who are the people that complain of weariness, listlessness, and dejection? You will not find them among such as are overdone with work, but with pleasure. The natural and healthy fatigues of business are recruited with natural and cheap gratification; but a spirit worn down with the toils of amusement, requires pleasures of poignancy; varied, multiplied, stimulating!¹⁹

Boredom is allied here with those living a ‘fashionable life’ of leisure. By the late eighteenth century writings are unanimous in the assertion that boredom is a particular affliction of those possessing wealth and fashion, living a life of pleasure and leisure. Nevertheless, as Fanny Burney suggests in *Camilla* (1796), the apparent exclusivity of boredom to the confines of the *beau monde* did not stop working men from imitating its symptoms: Sir Sidney Clarendel (now bored of boredom itself) observes that ‘ennui’ has “‘grown so common’”, that he saw his “‘footman beginning it but last week’”.²⁰ As Silvan Tomkins notes, “the sight of another yawning’, the embodiment of boredom, ‘is a contagious stimulus to one’s own yawn’”.²¹ Burney wryly satirizes this affective contagion as analogous to fashionable imitation: as an ailment associated with the fashionable, boredom has become another accoutrement of fashionability. However, More, whose *Strictures* it has been argued influenced Austen’s writing of *Mansfield Park*, points to the vital intersection between fashion and boredom: a fashionable lifestyle above all depended on the provision of increasingly stimulating pleasures to fill one’s leisure time.²² At the very core of fashion is the desire to escape the boredom induced by monotony. Fashion requires, as Campbell insists, the ‘ceaseless consumption of novelty’; only changing fashions could provide the ‘stimulative pleasure’ needed to (if only

¹⁸ ‘The Old Woman’, *LMM*, December 1800, pp.425-31 (p.426).

¹⁹ Hannah More, *Strictures on the System of Female Education*, 2 vols (London: Cadell & Davies, 1799), ii, p.156.

²⁰ Fanny Burney, *Camilla*, ed. by Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.465.

²¹ Silvan Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, 2 vols (New York: Springer Pub., 2008), i, p.419.

²² On Austen’s engagement with More’s *Strictures* in *Mansfield Park* see Jane Nardin, ‘Jane Austen, Hannah More, and the Novel of Education’, *Persuasions*, 20 (1998), 15-20 and Kenneth L. Moler, *Jane Austen’s Art of Allusion* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), p.113.

temporarily) prevent boredom.²³ Boredom was thus fundamental to the fashion system: as fashion theorist Fred Davis observes, boredom is ‘the well-spring of fashion change’, whilst Joe Moran goes further to reflect that ‘[t]he boredom of the recently vogueish reveals the dependence of capitalism on built-in obsolescence and the stimulation of faddish tastes’.²⁴ As this chapter argues, *Mansfield Park*’s narrative structure rests on this mutual co-dependence of boredom and novelty; it is a pattern that uniquely governs the behaviour of the fashionable and would-be fashionable of *Mansfield Park*.

In the mid eighteenth century, Edmund Burke, discussing the aesthetic category of novelty in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) asserted that ‘those things which engage us merely by their novelty, cannot attach us for any length of time’; in nature, he observes, ‘the same things make frequent returns with less and less of any agreeable effect’.²⁵ By 1799 More similarly responds to the burgeoning appetite for novelty, visible in ever-quickenening cycles of fashion, with fears that the wealthy and fashionable would require increasingly ‘varied, multiplied, stimulating!’ novelties to compensate for the diminishing pleasures such novelties would provide. She echoes Burke’s thoughts on nature whilst implying that fashion’s ‘temporary alleviation’ of boredom is delusive: habitual exposure to novelty, a fundamental principle of the fashion system, only exacerbates one’s propensity to listlessness, creating a perpetual cycle of boredom and novelty.²⁶

Similar observations were made of literature: in 1794 the *Analytical Review*, a periodical to which Mary Wollstonecraft frequently (although anonymously) contributed, reviewed a new gothic novel, *Count Roderic’s Castle*. The reviewer writes that,

The mind, as well as the body, loses it’s [*sic*] sensibility, or to borrow a fashionable term, it’s *excitability*, by the too frequent reiteration of similar impressions; it becomes, in both cases, necessary, in order to

²³ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, pp.205, 158.

²⁴ Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.109 (see also p.16 where he considers if fashion is a ‘device for relieving boredom’); Joe Moran, ‘Benjamin and Boredom’, *Critical Quarterly*, 45.1-2 (2003), 168-8 (p.175).

²⁵ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p.29.

²⁶ Edgeworth, *Ennui*, i, p.3.

preserve the same degree of irritation, to be continually increasing the stimulating force.²⁷

The reviewer, self-consciously deploying ‘fashionable’ lexicon such as the newly-coined psychological term ‘excitability’, relates the embodied affective dimensions of boredom to addiction: the writer employs the analogy of ‘the use of strong liquors’ through which ‘the same tone of hilarity can only be kept up by perpetually increasing the quantity of vinous spirit’, to argue that readers who are

no longer capable of deriving pleasure from the gentle and tender sympathies of the heart, require to have their curiosity excited by artificial concealments, their astonishment kept awake by a perpetual succession of wonderful incidents, and their very blood congealed with chilling horrors [*sic*].²⁸

From observations of nature to the analysis of literature, recognition of the interplay between novelty and boredom, a co-dependence epitomised and reinforced by the fashion system (to which novels and landscapes were equally subject), was pervasive in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century writing.

4.1 Generating Narrative

The narrative techniques outlined by the *Analytical Review* had provided the young Austen with an abundance of parodic material in her juvenilia and she continued to respond to equally ‘wonderful’ contemporary fiction with derisive wit throughout her career. In 1813 Austen reviews *Self-Control* (1809), Mary Brunton’s popular evangelical novel (in its third edition by 1812), in which the jealous rake Captain Hargrave abducts the pious Laura Montreville, kidnapping her and placing her onboard a ship to Canada. Austen, alluding to the heroine’s escape from her captor in

²⁷ ‘Art XIV: *Count Roderic’s Castle; or, Gothic Times, a Tale*’, *Analytical Review: or, History of Literature*, 20.4, December 1794, pp.488-9 (pp.488). An extract of this review appears in Elizabeth Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.55.

²⁸ The *OED*’s first recorded use of the term ‘excitability’, meaning ‘The quality of being excitable, liability or tendency to excitement’ is between 1797-1803, several years after the *Analytical Review*’s use of the term. ‘Excitability’, definition 1, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/65786>> [accessed 20 July]. ‘Art XIV: *Count Roderic’s Castle; or, Gothic Times, a Tale*’, *Analytical Review: or, History of Literature*, 20.4, December 1794, pp.488-9 (pp.488-9).

a canoe, sardonically concludes: ‘my opinion is confirmed of its’ [*sic*] being excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it. I declare I do not know whether Laura’s passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, every-day thing she does’.²⁹ Rather than ‘increasing the quantity of vinous spirit’ in her own fiction, Austen demonstrates how the boredom inherent in fashion provides narrative structure itself. Spacks’ contention that ‘reading [...] resists boredom. Voluntarily picking up a book, we expect – indeed demand – to have our interest engaged’ exposes the irony of adopting boredom as a narrative device.³⁰ However, it also indicates the appeal such a device would have held for Austen, an author whose novels thrive on narrative irony.

Suitably, it is only in the mouths of Tom Bertram, an avatar of the *Lady’s Monthly Museum’s* ‘Mr Fashion’ who entertains himself and his fashionable friends at the Newmarket races and feels ‘born only for expense and enjoyment’, and Mary Crawford, a woman whom Edmund Bertram observes is worryingly liable to be influenced by ‘the fashionable world’ with whom she mixes in London (*MP*, p.331), that we hear the verb ‘to bore’ and the noun ‘bore’, words coined in the mid- and late- eighteenth century respectively.³¹ Tom Bertram cries ‘hastily’ that “‘it is not worth while to bore my father with it [the private theatrical] now’” (*MP*, p.142), whilst for Mary the practice of visiting country houses is, she declares, “‘generally allowed to be the greatest bore in the world’” (*MP*, p.76). Their linguistic expressions disclose the fact that in *Mansfield Park*, unlike Austen’s other novels, boredom is an experience exclusive to characters with ties and aspirations to the fashionable world. Austen deploys the term ‘ennui’ only once in her oeuvre, in *Emma*. It occurs in a moment when the newlywed Mrs Weston reflects that ‘at times she must be missed’ by Emma: she ‘could not think, without pain, of Emma’s losing a single pleasure, or suffering an hour’s ennui, from the want of her companionableness’ (*E*, p.15). As Johnson has observed, it is this state of solitude which produces narrative in Austen’s 1815 novel: ‘*Emma*’, she writes, ‘is set into

²⁹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11-12 October 1813, p.234.

³⁰ Spacks, *Boredom*, p.1.

³¹ Pezze and Salzani discuss the etymology of ‘bore’ and its related terms (p.10). Spacks also discusses the etymology of ‘bore’ in *Boredom* (pp.13-15).

motion by the distinctively feminine boredom Emma suffers after Miss Taylor's departure'.³²

It is, however, a technique Austen had already refined in *Mansfield Park*, a novel in which characters are perpetually arriving and departing, generating excitement and combating boredom as they do so. Julia Bertram, for instance, who longs for the diversions of the fashionable world, is left feeling 'unengaged and unemployed' at the first of Henry Crawford's sudden departures (*MP*, p.91). Whilst the term 'ennui' is absent from *Mansfield Park*, its cognates – dullness, fatigue, indolence, bore and the contentious 'tranquility' – pervade the text: *Mansfield Park* has its own vocabulary of boredom. Equally, the novel focuses less on a 'state of the soul defying remedy, an existential perception of life's futility' which is denoted, Spacks contends, by the term 'ennui', and more on the fashionable person's 'response to the immediate' which relates to the more modern, yet still elusive, concept of 'boredom', a term unavailable to Austen.³³ This sense of immediacy is conveyed through fashionable and would-be fashionable characters' restless dissatisfaction. As ever, Austen's narrative hinges upon the minute, and ostensibly trifling, aspects of fashionable life: here, she structures her fiction around boredom, an ostensibly 'trivial emotion which trivialises the world'.³⁴

Lady Susan, a short epistolary novel first drafted by Austen in 1794, underscores the narrative possibilities of boredom as an ailment of fashionable people and thus a fashionable practice, if not performance.³⁵ In this early epistolary fiction boredom is a unremitting concern of the duplicitous anti-heroine: 'You may well wonder how I contrive to pass my time here – ', Lady Susan writes to her confidante upon arriving at her brother-in-law's home, 'and for the first week, it was most insufferably dull' (*NA*, p.200). Lady Susan, a woman habituated to the social dissipations of the world of fashion, has already disparaged her brother and his wife

³² Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.139. Kathryn Sutherland unites *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, arguing that they 'belong together as mirrored studies of social repression and ennui and of the relationship between human behaviour and environment, the psychology of setting' in 'Chronology of Composition and Publication', in *Jane Austen in Context*, pp.12-22 (p.20).

³³ Spacks, *Boredom*, p.12.

³⁴ Pezze and Salzani on boredom, as opposed to ennui (p.10). Adam Phillips emphasises his focus on the mundane feelings of every day life in opposition to Freudian psychoanalysis which tries to turn these boring emotions into something significant: his focus is on the trivial. See Phillips, p.71 and Moran, p.172.

³⁵ On composition dates see Claudia L. Johnson, 'Introduction', in *Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey and Other Works*, pp.vii-xxxiv (p.xxvii).

as people who ‘do not know what to do with their fortune, keep very little company, and never go to Town but on business’; as she concludes, ‘We shall be as stupid as possible’ (*NA*, p.197).³⁶ Writing to Cassandra from Bath, Austen similarly complains of having to attend ‘stupid’ parties with ‘dull’ company; as Tandon insists, her ‘anger and ennui are palpable and unfeigned’.³⁷ In *Sense and Sensibility*, Mr Palmer, who possesses an ‘air of more fashion and sense than his wife, but less of willingness to please or be pleased’ (*SS*, p.80), rudely voices his dissatisfaction with the entertainments of Barton Park:

‘Dullness is as much produced within doors as without, by rain. It makes one detest all one’s acquaintance. What the devil does Sir John mean by not having a billiard room in his house? How few people know what comfort is! Sir John is as stupid as the weather.’ (*SS*, p.84)

In Austen’s lexicon ‘stupid’ often emerges as synonymous with the yet-to-be coined terms ‘boring’ and ‘bored’: it signals a kind of brainlessness, a dullness and dulling of the senses (recalling the *Analytical Review*) and even stupefaction.³⁸ Lady Susan and Mr Palmer imply that their own stupor is caused by the stupidity of others. This insensible state of inertia emerges as one of a multitude of conflicting responses by the fashionable to boredom, the other most palpable response being a sense of restlessness. Lady Susan tirelessly seeks pleasure through action. She possesses what René Koenig suggests is characteristic of fashion itself: ‘a permanent disposition for change, an unappeasable restlessness’.³⁹ As such, she sets in motion a variety of diversions, always at the expense of her companions’ well-being. Her sister-in-law’s brother, Reginald, ‘promises me some amusement’, she writes:

I have disconcerted him already by my calm reserve; and it shall be my endeavour to humble the Pride of these self-important De Courcies still lower, to convince Mrs. Vernon that her sisterly cautions have been bestowed in vain, and to persuade Reginald that she has scandalously belied me. This project will serve at least to amuse me [...] (*NA*, p.200)

³⁶ As the *OED* records, ‘stupid’ could refer to ‘[h]aving one’s faculties deadened or dulled’ and being ‘in a state of stupor’, definition 1.a, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192218>> [accessed 30 March 2015].

³⁷ Letters, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 12-13 May 1801, p.85; Bharat Tandon, *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation* (London: Anthem, 2003), p.128.

³⁸ See ‘Stupid’, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192218>> [accessed 24 July 2015].

³⁹ René Koenig, *The Restless Image: A Sociology of Fashion*, trans. by F. Bradley, intro. by Tom Wolfe (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), p.78.

She later finds herself ‘fluctuating between various schemes’, including whether to marry or rebuke Reginald, how to ‘punish Frederica’ (her daughter) and in what manner to ‘torment’ her sister-in-law: ‘To effect all this I have various plans’, she informs Mrs Johnson (*NA*, pp.232-3). Lady Susan’s flirtations eventually lead to the separation of Mr and Mrs Manwaring although, as Gillian Russell contextualises in her study of published adultery trials in the 1780s and 90s, she ‘is not publicly identified as an adulteress [...] because as a widow she has no husband to divorce her’; the legal frameworks of divorce and adultery at the time reflected a ‘legal double standard that allowed husbands to commit adultery but condemned a wife who strayed’.⁴⁰ As this chapter will go on to show, the Crawfords’ amorous schemes and the Bertram sisters’ sexual transgressions mirror those enacted by Lady Susan, whose theatrical sociability aligns with contemporary cultural and literary representations of the ‘adulteress as an incorrigible and rootless creature of fashion’.⁴¹ *Lady Susan* confirms that at an early stage in her literary career Austen was conscious of the way in which the tensions between boredom and diversion experienced by ‘people of fashion’ could generate plot in fiction. In asserting that ‘Austen on several occasions [comes] near to presenting idleness as the root of all evil’, Irene Collins’s language is (apparently inadvertently) redolent of Kierkegaard, who contends not only that ‘[b]oredom is the root of all evil’ but also ‘that boredom, in itself so staid and stolid, [has] such power to set in motion’.⁴² Such assertions are dramatised in both *Lady Susan* and *Mansfield Park*.

The increasing force of boredom is underscored in Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1759), a narrative with which Austen was certainly familiar (a second volume of the narrative, owned by Austen, still survives). It is also a narrative to which Fanny Price alludes in her recollection of ‘Dr. Johnson’s celebrated judgement as to matrimony and celibacy’ (*MP*, p.308). Johnson presents a hero, Price Rasselas, who is in desperate need of ‘is something to do’: as Sarah Jordan succinctly notes,

⁴⁰ Gillian Russell, “‘A Hint of It, With Initials’”: Adultery, Textuality and Publicity in Jane Austen’s *Lady Susan*”, *Women’s Writing*, 17.3 (2010), 469-486 (p.479). She argues that in *Lady Susan* Austen alludes to the famous adultery case between the Duke of Cumberland and Lady Henrietta Grosvenor (née Vernon).

⁴¹ Russell, “‘A Hint of It, With Initials’”, p.473. Russell refers in particular to representations in William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785), Mrs Racket in Hannah Cowley’s *The Belle’s Stratagem* (1780) and Lady Bab Lardoon in John Burgoyne’s *The Maid of the Oaks* (1774).

⁴² Irene Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2002), p.187. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 2 vols, trans. by David F. Swenson and Lillian M. Swenson (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), i, p.234

'he is bored'.⁴³ *Rasselas*, alongside Johnson's *Idler* (which Fanny also reads) and *Rambler*, conveys a 'very strong sense of the misery of idleness and its attendant boredom'.⁴⁴ In *Rasselas* Johnson reflects on the pleasure that is derived not only by novelty, but also by the expectation of novelty: when the hero enquires if his sister has 'contrived any new diversion for the next day', she replies that "'such [...] is the state of life, that none are happy but by the anticipation of change: the change itself is nothing; when we have made it, the next wish is to change again'".⁴⁵ Helen Berry gestures towards the role of fashion by reading *Rasselas* alongside George Cheyne's *The English Malady* (1733) as an allegorical representation of 'jaded eighteenth-century consumers'.⁴⁶ Austen underscores this by aligning restless dissatisfaction not with the pursuit of happiness, as in Johnson's tale, but with those who pursue of fashion. Walter Benjamin, whose writings demonstrate a persistent interest in both boredom and fashion, suggest that the 'compulsive desire for fashion' is in fact 'a substitute for a (forgotten) desire for happiness'.⁴⁷ The pursuit of fashion is closely aligned with the search for happiness in the narrative of boredom.

The parallels between Johnson's narrative and the fashion system are evident; Princess Nekayah's aphorism mirrors Campbell's claim that, within the fashion system, the consumer's 'wants and desires will never be satisfied'; as such, 'the gap between wanting and getting never actually closes'.⁴⁸ The abrupt narrative closure of *Lady Susan* – the characters' 'Correspondence', Austen writes, 'could not, to the detriment of the Post Office Revenue, be continued any longer' (*NA*, p.247) – somewhat reflects this quandary: Lady Susan will never be satisfied yet the narrative must be brought to an end.⁴⁹ Edgeworth resolves this narrative dilemma by shaping

⁴³ Sarah Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), p.155. Margaret Kirkham notes that Austen would have encountered the name Lord Mansfield numerous times in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791). Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983), p. 116.

⁴⁴ Jordan, p.155.

⁴⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia*, ed. by Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1988] 2009), p.102.

⁴⁶ Helen Berry, 'The Pleasures of Austerity', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37.2 (2014), 261-77 (p.274).

⁴⁷ David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labour, and Liberation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), p.202.

⁴⁸ Campbell, *Romantic Ethic*, pp.37-8. Campbell is reflecting upon John O'Neill's assertions outlined in John O'Neill, 'The Productive Body: An Essay on the Work of Consumption', *Queen's Quarterly*, 85 (1978), 221-30 (p.225).

⁴⁹ Various critics have discussed the significance of *Lady Susan*'s conclusion. See in particular Debora Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p.169;

Ennui, as Richard Lovell Edgeworth declares in his preface, around the ‘causes, curses’ and eventual ‘cure’ of ennui.⁵⁰ In *Mansfield Park*, Mrs Grant responds to the Crawfords’ fashionable restlessness and aversion to matrimony with “‘we will cure you both. Mansfield shall cure you both – and without any taking in. Stay with us and we will cure you”” (*MP*, p.37). Tom Bertram’s restlessness is cured after his near-fatal fall and his role in the events at Wimpole Street: he becomes ‘what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself’ (*MP*, p.362). However, for the Crawfords there is no easy remedy; as the narrator states, ‘[t]he Crawfords, without wanting to be cured, were very willing to stay’ (*MP*, p.37). Mrs Grant’s promised cure is shrouded in irony: only moments earlier, she has consoled her half-siblings with the reflection that

‘if one scheme of happiness fails, human nature turns to another; if the first calculation is wrong, we make a second better; we find comfort elsewhere – and those evil-minded observers, dearest Mary, who make much of a little, are more taken in and deceived than the parties themselves.’ (*MP*, p.37)

The ‘cure’ means little if Mrs Grant, as she implies here, will overlook sexual indiscretion and, like Lady Susan, seek merely to perpetuate their scheming as each project inevitably fails to satisfy.

By the time Austen began writing *Mansfield Park* in February 1811 she had abandoned the now out-moded epistolary form. In *Lady Susan* this formal structure enabled Austen to disclose her heroine’s ‘various schemes’ and duplicity to the reader. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen exposes the Crawfords’ schemes, whilst concurrently emphasising the novel’s concern with fashionable boredom, in a series of semi-private episodes at Mr and Mrs Grant’s parsonage. These conspicuously ‘freestanding’ scenes are, narratologically speaking, analogous to Lady Susan’s revelatory correspondence with Mrs Johnson: through them, Austen ‘keeps the reader in touch with Mary’s private thoughts’.⁵¹ Equally, it is at the parsonage where the narrator first reflects upon the potential monotony of country life. After the many changes and upheavals that dominate the first four chapters of the novel, covering the

William H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p.122; Russell, “‘A Hint of It, With Initials””, pp.481-2.

⁵⁰ Edgeworth, *Ennui*, i, p.iv.

⁵¹ Wiltshire, *Jane Austen: Introductions and Interventions*, p.16-17.

span of eight years (Fanny's arrival; Mr Norris's death and its attendant 'alterations and novelties' [MP, p.18]; the arrival of the Grants; Sir Thomas's departure; and Maria's imminent marriage to Mr Rushworth) the narrative reaches a brief lull: 'Such was the state of affairs in the month of July' (MP, p.32). Mrs Grant has, 'by this time run through the usual resources of ladies residing in the country without a family of children', and she is 'very much in want of some variety at home' (MP, p.32). Indeed Tom Bertram, a man of fashion who finds himself continuously weary and dissatisfied – he is, he declares hyperbolically, "tired to death" half way through a ball – despairs at the tediousness of Mrs Grant's situation: "A desperate dull life hers must be with the doctor!" (MP, p.94).

At this moment, in which the dullness of both parsonage and park reaches its climax, Austen introduces the Crawfords. Mrs Grant's 'chief anxiety' on their arrival is that 'Mansfield should not satisfy the habits of a young woman who had been mostly used to London' (MP, p.33). As Tanner notes, 'Mrs Grant is worried lest [the Crawfords] get bored'; their need 'for amusements' and 'distractions' becomes a 'potentially dangerous force' in the 'rural world of Mansfield'.⁵² Mrs Grant is not alone in her anticipation of boredom: 'Miss Crawford', Austen narrates, 'was not entirely free from similar apprehensions' (MP, p.33). In a frequently quoted issue of Johnson's *Rambler*, perhaps in the minds of both Mary Crawford and Mrs Grant, 'Euphalia', a fashionable girl who is used to the 'perpetual tumult of pleasure', finds rural life unbearably boring: 'I am languishing in a dead calm', she writes, imagining the many other women 'wishing to be delivered from themselves by company and diversion'.⁵³ Austen rejects the common motif of the ingénue's entrance into the fashionable 'world' of the metropolis, which was epitomised in Burney's 1778 novel *Evelina; or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* and which she satirized in her posthumously published *Northanger Abbey* (1818).⁵⁴ *Mansfield Park* subverts this trope without styling rural life as a form of punishment, cure or fashionable alternative, as is suggested in contemporary fictions, such as Edgeworth's *Ennui* and Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806).

⁵² Tanner, p.149.

⁵³ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, 6 vols (London: J. Payne and J. Bouquet, 1752), ii, no. 42, 11 August 1750, pp.60-68 (pp.67-8), in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (Gale Cengage) <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/retrieve.do>> [accessed 18 January 2016]. This issue is referenced by Spacks in *Boredom*, pp.38-9 and Jordan, p.156.

⁵⁴ For more on the 'entrance into the world' motif see Moler, pp.21-38.

4.2 Not at Home

Mansfield Park is, as Claudia L. Johnson observes, ‘marked by an isolation unmatched in Austen’s novels’.⁵⁵ Isolation works as a narrative device in several ways: the Crawfords’ isolated scenes permit the revelation of schemes, whilst the physical isolation of Mansfield itself ensures that the only diversions open to Austen’s characters are either one another or rural life itself. Maria’s allusion to the caged bird of Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* – “‘I cannot get out, as the starling said’” (*MP*, p.78) – echoes the sense of entrapment and isolation felt by Johnson’s hero Rasselas in the (ironically named) Happy Valley, which he desperately seeks to escape: he is ‘impatient as an eagle in a grate’.⁵⁶ Collins stresses that the ‘sheer boredom of life in a country house should not be underestimated’.⁵⁷ The epigraph to this chapter, an extract from the poem ‘Not at Home’, which has been attributed to both Waller Rodwell Wright (whose 1809 poem *Horae Ioricae* was lauded by Byron) and Robert Charles Dallas (author of several critically-acclaimed novels during the early nineteenth century), concurrently satirizes and colludes in fashionable culture, presenting home as ‘monstrous’ to the ‘dame of fashion’.⁵⁸ *Lady Susan* is not alone in offering evidence of Austen’s enduring fascination with the distinct pleasures offered by the entertainments of the metropolis and rural home. In ‘The Three Sisters’, copied into *Volume the First*, Mary Stanhope, aspiring to be a dame of fashion, demands that her prospective husband facilitate a life of fashionable diversion: they must

[...] spend every Winter in Bath, every Spring in Town, Every Summer in Taking some Tour, and every Autumn at a Watering Place, and if we are at home the rest of the year (Sophy and I laughed) You must do nothing but give Balls and Masquerades. You must build a room on

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, p.119.

⁵⁶ Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, p.16. Sarah Lloyd also notes that this scene, and Maria’s subsequent reference to the ha-ha, ‘draws attention to boundaries and to transgressive, liminal acts’; for Lloyd, it is an allusion to the culture of adultery publications in the 1780s, which appropriated the language of ‘landscape improvement’. Sarah Lloyd, ‘Amour in the Shrubbery: Reading the Detail of English Adultery Trial Publications of the 1780s’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39.4 (2006), 421-42 (pp.436, 421).

⁵⁷ Collins, p.110.

⁵⁸ See Thomas Seecombe (revised by Rebecca Mills), ‘Wright, Waller Rodwell (1774/5-1836)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30065>> [accessed 12 October 2015]. Whilst the *Lady’s Magazine* (February 1810) and *The Poetical Register* (January 1814) attribute ‘Not at Home’ to Waller Rodwell Wright, both the *Universal Magazine* (January 1810) and *The Literary Panorama* (January 1810) attribute the dramatic entertainment to R. C. Dallas.

purpose and a Theatre to act Plays in. The first Play we have shall be *Which is the Man*, and I will do Lady Bell Bloomer. (C, p.62)

Although Penny Gay considers Mary Stanhope a ‘preliminary sketch for Miss Crawford’, vestiges of her character are present in Maria Bertram.⁵⁹ Maria, like Mary Stanhope, primarily fixes on Rushworth as a husband because his income will ‘ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object’; it allows her the possibility to escape rural life for the fashionable diversions of the metropolis (*MP*, p.31). Indeed, Laurie Kaplan notes how, after their marriage, the Rushworths’ parties at the fashionable and expensive Wimpole Street ‘fit into the web of flirting, gambling, and matchmaking that draws the elite from the boredom of their country estates to London houses’.⁶⁰ Maria confirms that her desire for a town house springs not only from a desire for fashionable diversion, but also from boredom of the country home: she feels ‘an hatred of home, restraint, and tranquillity’ (*MP*, p.158).

Likewise, the narrator of *Mansfield Park* emphasises the restlessness of the cosmopolitan Crawfords, who experience an aversion to home and tranquility:

To any thing like a permanence of abode, or limitation of society, Henry Crawford had, unluckily, a great dislike; he could not accommodate his sister in an article of such importance, but he escorted her, with the utmost kindness, into Northamptonshire, and as readily engaged to fetch her away again at half an hour’s notice, whenever she were weary of the place. (*MP*, p.33)

As Mary proudly confesses, she was “‘not born to sit still and do nothing’” (*MP*, p.190). The Crawfords’ boredom manifests itself as excessive motion, both physically and narratologically. Mary’s aversion to stasis – to that which stands (or sits) still - is analogous to Maria’s hatred of ‘tranquillity’, a word which appears a remarkable thirty times in *Mansfield Park*; no wonder Maria seeks salvation in Mr Rushworth, a man whose name misleadingly evokes the restlessness of the fashionable world she longs for.⁶¹ It is apposite that Sir Thomas Bertram, who

⁵⁹ Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.112.

⁶⁰ Laurie Kaplan, ‘The Rushworths of Wimpole Street,’ *Persuasions*, 33 (2011), 202-14 (p.202).

Edward Copeland emphasises that ‘Mr Rushworth’s estate of £12,000 a year supports a house in an expensive, fashionable part of London’. Edward Copeland, ‘Money’, in *Jane Austen in Context*, pp.317-26 (p.324).

⁶¹ The words ‘tranquil’ and ‘tranquility’ appear 10 times in *Sense and Sensibility*, 8 in *Pride and Prejudice*, 11 in *Emma*, 4 in *Northanger Abbey*, and 4 in *Persuasion*.

praises “domestic tranquillity” (*MP*, p.146), should bring the intense theatrical activities of Mansfield to a standstill: it becomes ‘all sameness and gloom’ (*MP*, p.153) on his return from Antigua. In direct opposition to the diversions set into motion by the restless Crawfords the reader witnesses Fanny Price’s struggle to maintain and restore the equanimity of both herself and Mansfield as she is absorbed in the Crawfords’ schemes.

As with Tom Bertram, who at various points remains absent from the narrative on journeys to fashionable resorts and places of diversion such as Weymouth, Ramsgate and the races, the restless Henry Crawford twice leaves the Mansfield party: after the disruption of *Lovers’ Vows* he assures his companions that, “From Bath, Norfolk, London, York – wherever I may be [...] I will attend you from any place in England, at an hour’s notice” (*MP*, p.151).⁶² With the abandonment of the play, Mansfield no longer holds any amusement for him, ‘but if there were any prospect of a renewal of “Lovers’ Vows”, he should hold himself positively engaged’ (*MP*, p.151). As Jane Stabler observes, Henry’s ‘restlessness [...] identifies him as a spoilt Regency dandy’.⁶³ Beyond Stabler’s classification of Henry’s fashionable identity, however, we might note that Henry’s recurrent restlessness exemplifies how Austen’s narrative embraces the ironies of boredom itself, which is, as psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel states, ‘characterized by a craving for stimulus and dissatisfaction with the proffered stimuli’.⁶⁴ Henry’s ‘endless search for novelty and innovation’ turns out to be ‘merely an endless repetition because it always takes a similar form’: his wanderings show novelty to be mere sameness.⁶⁵ *Mansfield Park* relies upon this continual state of dissatisfaction: this repetition is, again somewhat ironically, what allows the narrative to develop. As in *Lady Susan*, it forces the narrative, at each moment of dissatisfaction, into ostensibly new trajectories. Fenichel’s analysis of the pattern of desire and frustration which, preventing closure, is doomed to repetition (itself monotonous), recalls the follower of fashion who ‘never finds a resting place, never attains equilibrium’.⁶⁶

⁶² Tanner also notes that Austen points to the ‘dangers involved in roaming, wandering, restless movement’ in *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Sanditon* (pp.33, 190).

⁶³ Stabler, ‘Introduction’, p.ix.

⁶⁴ Otto Fenichel, *The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel*, ed. by Hanna Fenichel and David Rapaport (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p.292.

⁶⁵ Moran describing Walter Benjamin’s thoughts on fashion and capitalism (p.179).

⁶⁶ Rosalind Williams, *Dream World: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p.139.

This restlessness, intimately aligned with fashionable practices and its seasonal movements from town to town, characterises the way the Crawfords perceive their environment and influences narrative perspective. After Tom Bertram's departure to the races the narrator permits Mary's boredom – her precipitate *anticipation* of boredom, even – to direct the reader's view: in her mind Mansfield will now be 'spiritless', without 'a single entertaining story' and she 'must try to find some amusement in what was passing at the upper end of the table', which is, likewise, where Austen directs her reader's attention (*MP*, p.41). In a conversation with Edmund Bertram on the role of clergymen – whom Edmund has confessed to Mary, "cannot be high in state or fashion [...] must not head mobs, or set the ton in dress" (*MP*, p.73) – Henry Crawford similarly illuminates the extent to which fashion directs his own perspective as he fantasises about becoming a fashionable preacher. Contemporary commentators maligned 'fashionable preachers' for lacking sincerity. As one anonymous pamphleteer wrote,

These gentlemen seem to centre their whole views in themselves, and to forget the very intention of their sacred office. Their great ambition is to display their parts and learning to advantage, and to obtain the character of polite preachers among the polite. At all events their discourse must be learned, their composition elegant, their periods finely turned, and the various parts as nicely adjusted as a Lady's HEAD-PIECE from the milliner's shop.⁶⁷

Likened to the superficial elegance of women's fashionable head-gear, the sermons of these clergymen, 'no sooner heard than forgotten', were as impermanent as fashion itself.⁶⁸ Henry confesses he would only take pleasure in giving sermons 'once or twice in the spring [...] but not for a constancy; it would not do for a constancy' (*MP*, p.267-8). The repetition of 'constancy' is picked up by Fanny who, we are told, 'involuntarily shook her head', prompting Crawford to respond, "You think me unsteady – easily swayed by the whim of the moment – easily tempted – easily put aside" (*MP*, pp.268-9). Crawford self-consciously defends his own restlessness. The Crawfords' dialogue is characterised by these camp and overtly theatrical acts of self-declaration, which, as the following chapter examines, are connected to the self-conscious linguistic performance of fashion. Like her brother, Mary flaunts her flaws

⁶⁷ [Anon.], *The Fashionable Preacher; or, Modern Pulpit Eloquence Displayed* (London, 1792), p.6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

in declarative acts and bizarre aphorisms: “I am come to make my own apologies for keeping you waiting” she remarks to Fanny,

‘I have nothing in the world to say for myself – I knew it was very late, and that I was behaving extremely ill; and therefore, if you please, you must forgive me. Selfishness must always be forgiven, you know, because there is no hope of a cure.’ (*MP*, p.52)

Ostensibly honest self-descriptive statements such as Henry’s declarative “I am not quite so much the man of the world as might be good for me in some points” (*MP*, p.78), in which he appears to assert his unfashionability and lay himself bare, are, as in *Lady Susan*, ‘contrived’ to make others ‘like’ them (*NA*, p.201), and are aligned with the art of self-fashioning that is fundamental to fashionability. As Mrs Vernon writes, Lady Susan, ‘talks very well, with a happy command of Language, which is too often used I beleive [*sic*] to make Black appear White’ (*NA*, p.198).

Henry Crawford is by no means the only character whose dandyish boredom manifests itself as inconsistency and restless motion. Mr and Mrs Rushworth, who depart on their honeymoon accompanied by Julia, travel to circumvent boredom, moving from one novelty to the next to maintain, as the *Analytical Review* would suggest, their ‘excitability’:

The plan of the young couple was to proceed after a few days to Brighton, and take a house there for some weeks. Every public place was new to Maria, and Brighton is almost as gay in winter as in summer. When the novelty of amusement there were over, it would be time for the wider range of London. (*MP*, p.159)

Austen offers a counter-narrative in the demonstrably unfashionable Fanny. Like one of Mrs Grant’s ‘evil-minded observers’ Fanny is, in her own way, able to ‘make much of a little’: she is, as the narrator observes, ‘so easily satisfied’ with her external stimuli (*MP*, p.224). The narrator offers the reader an insight into the distinct interior world of Fanny who, ‘in observing the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children, [...] found entertainment’ (*MP*, p.64). The deployment of the word ‘entertainment’ is ironic: signalling liveliness, diversion, and increasingly associated with public performance in the eighteenth century, ‘entertainment’ is

found by Fanny in the conspicuously mundane images of tranquil country life.⁶⁹ Such images explicitly lack the animation required by Mary Crawford who sees ‘nature, inanimate nature, with little observation’ (*MP*, p.64). Similarly, her brother finds entertainment solely in ‘social pleasures’ (*MP*, p.91): the Crawfords, as More writes of the fashionable world in her *Strictures*, ‘demand mankind for their spectators’.⁷⁰ Austen distinguishes between Fanny, who sees and observes with sensitivity, and people of fashion, who demand to be seen.

4.3 Matrimonial Manoeuvres and Libidinous Diversions

It is in the isolated scenes at the parsonage that the Crawfords reveal the schemes they will animate, projects which will save them from the potential monotony of country life: like the fashionable ‘Lounger’ of *La Belle Assemblée*, ‘[t]he happiest hours in life are those which pass in the commencement of a new project; the mind is then on alert, it flies forwards, and makes consequences for itself’.⁷¹ ‘Matrimony,’ Mary Crawford reveals on her arrival, is her ‘object, provided she could marry well’ (*MP*, p.33). Privately, she has settled on Tom Bertram, the more cosmopolitan of the two brothers: ‘He had been much in London’ (*MP*, p.39). Mary’s ‘scheme was soon repeated to Henry’ (*MP*, p.34). Mrs Grant’s ensuing comment that “‘to make it quite complete’” Henry should also “‘marry the youngest Miss Bertram’”, suggests that Mary’s schemes, although delineated in the narrator’s voice, are uncovered in conversation (*MP*, p.34). Just as Lady Susan reveals her flirtatious projects in her letters to Mrs Johnson, it is at the parsonage that Mary exposes her brother as a “‘horrible flirt’” (*MP*, p.34). Moments later, after meeting the Bertrams for the first time, the parsonage provides the private stage for further revelations:

Mr. Crawford did not mean to be in any danger; the Miss Bertrams were worth pleasing, and were ready to be pleased; and he began with no object but of making them like him. He did not want them to die of love [...]. (*MP*, p.35)

⁶⁹ ‘Entertainment’, definition 8.c, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62856>> [accessed 16 April 2015].

⁷⁰ More, *Strictures*, ii, p.160.

⁷¹ ‘Life of a Lounger’, *LBA*, October 1809, pp.134-5 (p.134).

Again, the three siblings fall into strikingly honest dialogue, Henry professing his moral degeneracy with the shocking axiom that ““An engaged woman is always more agreeable than a disengaged”” (*MP*, p.36).

However, Mary and Henry do monitor their dialogue: it is full of ironies and suppressed duplicity even at the parsonage. Mary’s dismissal of matrimony as ‘a manoeuvring business’ (*MP*, p.37) is one such instance of irony: the term ‘manoeuvring’, first adopted in 1786, referred to ‘[a] strategem, ploy, device; scheming; adroit or underhand manipulation’; it exactly describes the kind of behaviour deployed by the Crawfords.⁷² For contemporary readers, the term was particularly loaded; still more resonant was the noun ‘manoeuvrer’, first used in 1805 and, in Edgeworth’s *Tales of Fashionable Life*, explicitly associated with a form of plotting unique to the fashionable world. In *Manoeuvring*, published in the third volume of *Tales of Fashionable Life*, the reader encounters the fashionable Mrs Beaumont, whose correspondence is riddled with French euphemisms and whose very name suggests a proximity to the *beau monde*. Mrs Beaumont manipulates her own children in order to form marriage alliances of wealth and fashion, inventing what the narrator calls a ‘triple scheme of such intricacy, that it is necessary distinctly to state the argument of her plot’.⁷³ Here the plot, set in motion by Edgeworth’s fashionable and ruthless heroine, is so complex it requires careful outlining to the reader.

The Crawfords enter *Mansfield Park* as similar ‘manoeuvrers’, plotting their romantic alliances and projects from the seclusion of Mrs Grant’s house. As Spacks has highlighted, it is ‘one of Austen’s brilliant jokes’ in *Emma* when the heroine ‘actually confuses boredom with erotic feeling’.⁷⁴ ““I certainly must [be in love]”” Emma internally muses, ““This sensation of listlessness, weariness, stupidity, this disinclination to sit down and employ myself, this feeling of every thing’s being dull and insipid about the house! – I must be in love”” (*E*, p.205). Emma is not entirely,

⁷² ‘Manoeuvring / Maneuvring’, n., *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/113611>> [accessed 27 March 2015].

⁷³ Edgeworth, *Manoeuvring*, in *Tales of Fashionable Life*, iii (1809), p.22.

⁷⁴ Patricia Meyer Spacks ‘Women and Boredom: The Two Emmas’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2.2 (1989), 191-205, p.5. Tanner, who unwittingly employs the term ‘manoeuvring’ to refer to Emma’s romantic schemes, similarly notes that Emma’s matchmaking serves as a means for her to fill empty ‘gaps in her time’ (pp.181-2). Janet Todd, in seeking a generic category for *Emma*, notes that the novel is ‘full of boredom but, because a great novel, *not* boring’. Janet Todd, ‘The Anxiety of Emma’, *Persuasions*, 29 (2007), 15-25 (p.25).

as Spacks insists, confusing boredom and love: it is also a joke shared only with herself regarding whether or not she is “the oddest creature in the world” (*E*, p.205). The Crawfords, however, deliberately drive on ‘wicked’ (*MP*, p.231) sexual plots to distract them from the monotony of their external environment.

Mary Crawford’s boredom transforms into erotic daydreams: unable to bear the monotonous tour of Sotheron, Mary, in a brief fantasy, asks her companions to

‘[...] imagine with what unwilling feelings the former belles of the house of Rushworth did many a time repair to this chapel? The young Mrs. Eleanors and Mrs. Bridgets – starched up into seeming piety, but with heads full of something very different – especially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at – and, in those days, I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now.’ (*MP*, p.69)

Mary is spurred into narrative, forming characters and mental fictions. Her preoccupation with sexual narratives indicates, as Fenichel argues, that the same monotonous stimuli that might bore might also produce ‘a sexually excitatory effect’.⁷⁵

Whilst Russell makes concludes broadly that by the late eighteenth century the ‘alter ego’ of the ‘woman of fashion’ was ‘the adulteress’, the association between female adultery and fashion was, more specifically, embedded in fashionable ennui.⁷⁶ As Jordan observes with reference to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ‘female idleness’ was also linked to female promiscuity.⁷⁷ Equally, in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft, observing that ‘adulteries are so common!’, argues that ‘women of fashion take husbands’ so ‘that they may have it in their power to coquet, the grand business of genteel life, with a number of admirers’.⁷⁸ Flirtation and adultery were, according to Wollstonecraft, part of the ‘genteel life’ of the fashionable world, particularly for idle women.

Mr Rushworth, however, invokes idleness in an attempt to curb Maria’s flirtations, thus exposing the paradox of boredom for the woman of fashion:

⁷⁵ Fenichel, p.295.

⁷⁶ Russell, “‘A Hint of It, With Initials’”, p.474.

⁷⁷ Jordan, p.92.

⁷⁸ Wollstonecraft, ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*’ and ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Men*’, p.22.

‘I must say what I think,’ continued Mr Rushworth, ‘in my opinion it is very disagreeable to be always rehearsing. It is having too much of a good thing. I am not so fond of acting as I was at first. I think we are a great deal better employed sitting comfortably here among ourselves, and doing nothing.’ (MP, p.146)

He implicitly implores Maria to ‘sit still and do nothing’. However, in their marriage she becomes a ‘[prisoner] of *ennui* if not torment’.⁷⁹ Donna T. Andrew’s comprehensive study of representations of adultery in eighteenth-century pamphlets, sermons, newspaper articles, trial records, letters and plays suggests that by the latter decades of the eighteenth century there was ‘almost unanimous agreement’ that the perceived increase in adultery was a direct result of fashionable life: the *beau monde*, it appeared, had their own rules of sexual conduct.⁸⁰ Adultery, a symptom of *ennui*, was seen as vice specific to the elite world of wealth and fashion, affecting those of rank and distinction.

Tales of ‘*crim. con.*’ or ‘criminal conversation’ (which referred to legal action taken by a husband against his wife’s lover in adultery cases) within fashionable society, became a popular form of textual diversion. They were reported in periodicals and papers, and satirized in fashionable scandal novels, including those by ‘Mr’ Lytton and Maria Edgeworth. Magazines such as *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, which was devoted to voyeuristically satirising the world of fashion, reported on cases of ‘CRIM. CON’ as they happened.⁸¹ In 1791, in its ‘Dictionary of the Bon Ton’, the magazine even defines ‘Adultery’ as a ‘very fashionable amusement for married ladies, and never so greatly in vogue, particularly in high life, as at present’.⁸² Legal and literary attention was fixated on the sexual transgressions of the female adulteress. Indeed, in *Vivian*, Edgeworth’s satire of the *beau monde*, the male hero receives only praise after he commits adultery. Lord Glistonbury punctuates his praise of Vivian with fashionable diction: ‘His lordship, far from thinking the worse of him for *his affair* with Mrs. Wharton, spoke of it, in modish *slang*, as “a new and fine feather in his cap”’.⁸³

⁷⁹ Tanner, p.10.

⁸⁰ Donna T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p.150.

⁸¹ See, for instance, *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, May 1791, pp.91-93

⁸² ‘Dictionary of the Bon Ton’, *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, March 1791, pp.14-16 (p.15).

⁸³ Edgeworth, *Vivian*, iv, p.190.

Austen plays on the vogue for ‘crim. con.’ entertainment: she reveals Maria’s adultery in a newspaper report announcing the ‘matrimonial *fracas* in the family of Mr. R. of Wimpole Street’ concerning ‘the beautiful Mrs. R., whose name had not long been enrolled in the lists of Hymen, and who had promised to become so brilliant a leader of the fashionable world’ (*MP*, p.345).⁸⁴ There is an irony in the paper’s declaration: in committing adultery Maria is performing exactly as a woman of fashion. Contemporary newspapers and pamphlets revealed identities ‘with Initials’, as Austen notes of the adultery case of Mary-Letitia Powlett and Lord Sackville: Austen writes of a crim. con. case reported in the *Courier*, noting that ‘Mr Moore guessed it to be Ld Sackville, beleiving [*sic*] there was not another Viscount S. in the peerage, & so it proved’.⁸⁵ Some crim. con. cases were so notorious that the use of initials did little to hide the identity of those involved. The publication of an *Epistle from L—y W—y to S—r R—d* (Lady Worsley to Sir Richard) exemplifies the facetious use of initials: the epistle was published in April 1782 and by this point the affair between Lady Seymour and her lover Maurice Bissett had been a topic of discussion in newspapers for several months: their identities would have been well-known to readers.⁸⁶

Mary Crawford’s anecdotes from her fashionable metropolitan acquaintances hint at the prevalence of illicit flirtations and unsteady alliances within such society: Janet Fraser’s husband, she declares with incredulity, desired his wife, “‘a beautiful young woman of five-and-twenty, to be as steady as himself’”, while her friend Flora “‘jilted a very nice young man in the Blues, for the sake of that horrid Lord Stornaway [...] By the bye, Flora Ross was dying for Henry the first winter she came out’” (*MP*, p.283).⁸⁷ It is no wonder that in her letter to Fanny, Mary Crawford, whose own uncle has taken in a mistress, euphemistically refers to Henry’s sexual transgression as a ‘moment’s *etourderie*’, a term which translates as forgetfulness,

⁸⁴ *The Bon Ton Magazine* also featured a section entitled ‘Fashionable Fracas’, which detailed the amorous disputes of those of rank and distinction.

⁸⁵ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 20-22 June 1808, p.131. Hazel Jones discusses the case of Lord Sackville in *Jane Austen and Marriage* (London: Continuum, 2009), p.103.

⁸⁶ See *Aristocratic Vice*, p.153.

⁸⁷ The hyperbolic use of ‘dying’ here is an example of fashionable slang; note that Henry ‘did not want [the Bertram sisters] to die of love’ (*MP*, p.35). Those with pretensions to fashion use the term: Isabella Thorpe is “‘dying’” to show Catherine her hat (*NA*, p.28); Miss Bingley is “‘dying’” to know what Mr Darcy means (*PP*, p.42) and Lydia Bennet declares she “‘should have died’” (*PP*, p.169) when Colonel Forster was discovered in women’s clothes. The use of the term in Henry Crawford’s case signals a move into free indirect discourse and thus Henry’s lexicon, a narrative strategy I explore in my next chapter.

absent-mindedness and carelessness: the obscure and modish French trivialises Henry's wrongdoing, alluding merely to his temporary neglect of Fanny (*MP*, p.343). Like the newspaper, which uses the French term '*fracas*', Mary eschews plain, and less morally ambiguous, English terms.⁸⁸ Mary is, as Mandal points out of her brother, unable to 'access the appropriate moral lexicon, and is able only to employ the fashionable discourse of the social world'; her (mis)use of language 'points to an inattentiveness to the ethical boundaries that circumscribe human action', suggesting that moral failure is entangled with fashionable expression.⁸⁹

The language of sexual vice was based on euphemism: as Andrew explores, in the eighteenth century the long-established word 'gallantry' became strongly associated with a new, euphemistic meaning, within fashionable society.⁹⁰ It alluded to (whilst exalting and trivialising) the sexual allure, adulterous behaviour and general moral degeneracy exhibited by men of fashion. The words 'gallant', 'gallantry' and 'gallantries' recur throughout *Mansfield Park*. They are used nine times in reference to Henry Crawford, three in relation to Tom Bertram: Mary observes, in a moment of free indirect discourse, that Tom 'had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund, and must, therefore, be preferred' (*MP*, p.38); Edmund lacks the gallantry associated with fashionable masculinity. Mary's preference for the French euphemism '*etourderie*' rather than the gendered and ubiquitous 'gallant' in her allusion to the affair, conceals the seriousness of Henry's crime whilst emphasising the contemporary association between adultery and French culture.⁹¹ It adds further layers of meaning to Mary's earlier insistence that her brother would only marry a 'French-woman' (*MP*, p.34), a claim which at first points to Henry's desire to marry fashionably. Rather, Mary's overtly sexualised use of French implies a further bawdy joke (like that of the '*Rears, and Vices*' [*MP*, p.48] she claims to have encountered at her uncle's home) in which her brother seeks only to enter into a marriage contract in which adultery would be permitted, if not expected.

⁸⁸ See David M. Turner on Samuel Pepy's use of French to record his extra-marital sexual liaisons in *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.31.

⁸⁹ Anthony Mandal, 'Language', in *Jane Austen in Context*, pp.23-32 (pp.25-6).

⁹⁰ See Donna T. Andrew, "'Adultery à-la-Mode': Privilege, the Law and Attitudes to Adultery, 1770-1809", *History*, 82 (1997), 5-23 (p.13). See also Turner, *Fashioning Adultery*, pp.38-42.

⁹¹ See Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice*, p.163.

Whilst the Crawfords' isolated meetings at the parsonage enable them to disclose their own matrimonial manoeuvres, they are not completely candid. Rather, these scenes reveal the extent to which the two siblings will expose their schemes to Mrs Grant. Narratively, the scenes add further layers of duplicity to their characters, revealing the gap between the self they reveal to the Mansfield party and that which they expose to one another. It is only once alone that the siblings can fully expose their intricate plots. In a private dialogue between Mary and her brother, Henry, 'seeing the coast clear of the rest of the family', asks his sister in a manner which echoes Lady Susan's private letters,

'And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt? I am grown too old to go out more than three times a week; but I have a plan for the intermediate days, and what do you think it is?'
(*MP*, p.179)

His plan is not, as Mary supposes, to 'walk and ride' with herself: "that would be all recreation and indulgence," he insists, "without the alloy of labour, and I do not like to eat the bread of idleness. No, my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me" (*MP*, p.179). Henry frames his amusement as toil (which, as Garve had noted, is less dreaded than boredom itself), attesting to his own desire for something to do. Indeed, unlike the women of fashion that Crawford has encountered, Fanny provides an opportunity for novelty and faux labour: 'apt to gain hearts too easily', he finds his struggle with Fanny 'new and animating' (*MP*, p.255). Mary, in what Austen emphasises is a clandestine conversation, confirms the boredom that underlies his scheme: "if you do set about a flirtation with her, you will never persuade me that it is in compliment to her beauty, or that it proceeds from anything but your own idleness and folly" (*MP*, p.180). Mary's reflections upon what she later, in another private dialogue between the siblings, calls a 'wicked project upon [Fanny's] peace' (*MP*, p.231), capture the essence of the novel in which action proceeds from boredom; the 'desire of something new' (*MP*, p.162) lies not only behind Henry and Mary's various schemes, but underpins the narrative movement of the novel. *Mansfield Park* is characterised by the opposing forces of fatigue and restlessness, of idleness and the need for diversion, pivoting around these ostensibly incompatible, yet demonstrably co-dependent, moods.

Fanny has her own confidant in Edmund but their exchange, unlike the directness of the Crawfords' is, somewhat ironically, restrained by oblique euphemism. Fanny, who is 'the only one of the party who found any thing to dislike' (*MP*, p.92) in the behaviour of Henry and the Bertram sisters, which she finds '[stops] short of the consistence, the steadiness, the sollicitude, and the warmth which might excite general notice' (*MP*, p.91), '[hazards] a hint' at the sexual transgressions of Henry and Maria (*MP*, p.92). Fanny admits her surprise at Henry Crawford's continuing presence at Mansfield "for I had understood he was so very fond of change and moving about, that I thought something would certainly occur when he was gone, to take him elsewhere. He is used to much gayer places than Mansfield" (*MP*, p.92). Fanny's hint, however, is 'lost' on Edmund, along with her assertion that Henry is "a favourite [...] with my cousins!" and her conjecture that "If Miss Bertram were not engaged [...] I could sometimes think that he admired her more than Julia" (*MP*, p.92). Here we observe Fanny 'cautiously' (*MP*, p.92) considering how best to reveal her fears, whilst Edmund almost wilfully ignores them: Fanny's euphemism signals thoughtful prudence, unlike Mary's, which denotes fashionable mock modesty. Structurally, this scene is followed by Mrs Norris's assurance to Mrs Rushworth that "Maria has such a strict sense of propriety, so much of that true delicacy which one seldom meets with now-a-days, [...] – that wish of avoiding particularity!" (*MP*, p.93). Fanny, we again observe, is the only character who is capable of 'seeing clearly, and judging candidly' (*MP*, p.92).

Whilst the Crawfords bring animation to themselves and the Bertrams through 'wicked' schemes, hoping to 'trifle' with their companions for their own amusement, Tom Bertram's 'new friend' John Yates who has 'not much to recommend him beyond habits of fashion and expense' (*MP*, p.95) brings diversion to Mansfield via private theatricals, carrying the 'infection' (*MP*, p.96) with him from Ecclesford. Although Sybil Rosenfeld has argued that 'when Jane Austen was writing *Mansfield Park* from 1811 to 1813, private theatricals were no longer the vogue in country houses', there is evidence to suggest that it was still seen as a fashionable diversion in the early 1800s.⁹² The *Spirit of the Public Journals for 1809* listed recent private theatricals given by aristocratic and fashionable personages,

⁹² Sybil Rosenfeld, 'Jane Austen and Private Theatricals', *Essays and Studies*, 15 (1962), 40-51, p.42.

including a 'Lady Mary Crawford' who had performed *The Lady of the Manor*, *The Trial* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.⁹³ Fashion magazines continued, if sporadically, to report on private theatricals after the publication of *Mansfield Park*.⁹⁴

Several novels coeval with *Mansfield Park* including Edgeworth's *Patronage*, Burney's *The Wanderer* and Owenson's *O'Donnell* embrace the private theatrical, using amateur dramatics as a device to expose questions of identity, sexuality and fashionability.⁹⁵ Burney's *The Wanderer* details the trials of French émigrée Juliet Granville, who elopes incognito from revolutionary France to England in order to escape from an unhappy forced marriage. The female wanderer, first disguised as an impoverished black woman, becomes dependent on a series of fashionable patrons whom she encounters on her journey to England, including Mrs Maple and her niece Elinor Joddrel; later, she is forced to rely on her own skills in both music and millinery to earn a living. The heroine, at first nameless to her suspicious acquaintances, refuses to partake in a private performance of *The Provok'd Husband* (1723), a "scheme" proposed by Elinor.⁹⁶ However, the haughty Miss Arbe decides to relinquish the leading role of Lady Townly, concluding that performing alongside "such common persons as farmers and domestics" "might let her down, in the opinion of the noble theatrical society to which she belonged".⁹⁷ Elinor seizes the opportunity to take on the role, which will permit her to perform a love scene with her beloved Harleigh. Unable to learn her part in time, Elinor thrusts 'the part of Lady Townly to the Incognita', a role which the modest Juliet immediately declines.⁹⁸ Whilst Harleigh admires the stranger's decision to abstain from participating in "so public an amusement", Mrs Maple, Juliet's patroness, insists that the 'poor wretch' will perform: 'The stranger now saw no alternative between obsequiously submitting, or immediately relinquishing her asylum'.⁹⁹ Whilst Mrs Maple interprets Juliet's successful performance as evidence of her

⁹³ 'Private Theatricals', *Spirit of the Public Journals for 1809*, pp.260-62 (p. 261), in *Eighteenth Century Journals* (Adam Matthew Publications) <http://www.18thcjournals.amdigital.co.uk/transcript.aspx?imageid=271058> [accessed 19 January 2016].

⁹⁴ See, for instance, 'Private Theatricals', *LM*, October 1816, p.44.

⁹⁵ Elaine Bander offers a comparative reading of the novels in 'Mansfield Park and the 1814 Novels: *Waverley*, *The Wanderer*, *Patronage*', *Persuasions*, 28 (2006), 115-25.

⁹⁶ Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer*, ed. by Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack and Peter Sabor, intro. by Margaret Anne Doody (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.87.

⁹⁷ Burney, *The Wanderer*, p.84.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.89.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.88, 90.

worrying ability to impersonate a woman of fashion, Harleigh understands that she is performing simply as herself: a woman of refinement.

Edgeworth's coeval novel, *Patronage*, which like her other works displays 'an intimate knowledge of fashionable life',¹⁰⁰ juxtaposes two families: the hard working Percys and their scheming cousins the Falconers, manoeuvrers who seek to advance their family connexions and obtain "the patronage of fashion" for their daughters.¹⁰¹ The fashionable Georgiana Falconer and the sentimental Caroline Percy become love rivals to the eligible Count Altenberg. Like Fanny Price, Caroline 'having lived in the country, could not know much of the world of fashion', yet she wins the Count's heart.¹⁰² As Edgeworth narrates, 'Even they who are used to the *ennui* subsequent to dissipation' (which Austen delineates so vividly in *Mansfield Park*), 'can scarcely conceive the complication of disagreeable ideas and emotions' experienced by Georgiana Falconer on her realisation that 'the Count was in love, and that he was not in love with her', but rather with her rival.¹⁰³ Mrs Falconer, giving up her 'scheme' of marrying her daughter to the Count, decides to invite Caroline Percy to act in a private performance of *The Tragedy of Zara*, hoping that her new manoeuvre will 'do away all suspicion of her own or her daughter's jealousy of Miss Caroline Percy'.¹⁰⁴ Of course, the respectable and modest Caroline refuses to take part. It is Caroline's lack of envy that heightens her virtue and desirability in Count Altenberg's eyes: when the performance goes wrong, Caroline, sitting in the audience, evinces none of the 'mean passions, which had disgusted [the Count] in her rival'; instead she displays 'good natured sympathy'.¹⁰⁵ Like the rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows* in *Mansfield Park* the theatricals of *The Wanderer* and *Patronage* are libidinous, eliciting sexual attraction and carrying erotic energy – during their performance Harleigh grows 'every instant more enchanted' by Juliet's 'radiant' 'countenance', her 'lustrous' eyes, and her 'smiles [...] of sweetness and pleasure'.¹⁰⁶ As Harleigh continues to become more enamoured, the jealous Elinor must look on

¹⁰⁰ 'ART. IV. – Patronage; by Maria Edgeworth', *Critical Review*, 5.1, January 1814, pp.39-48 (p.42), in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/docview/4576009>> [accessed 19 January 2016].

¹⁰¹ Edgeworth, *Patronage*, p.152.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.190.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp.369-70.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.378, 370.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.384-6.

¹⁰⁶ Burney, *The Wanderer*, p.100.

as Juliet becomes her rival: eventually, her hysteria rises into an unsuccessful suicide attempt. Yet, in *Mansfield Park*, it is Fanny who experiences jealousy and ‘mean passions’.¹⁰⁷ Fanny’s isolation from the performance, even her apparent lack of boredom, is not, Austen’s suggests, a complete virtue.

The private theatrical turns the tranquil Mansfield Park into a place of bustle and interest:

Every body around [Fanny] was gay and busy, prosperous and important, each had their object of interest, their part, their dress, their favourite scene, their friends and confederates, all were finding employment in consultations and comparisons, or diversion in the playful conceits they suggested. (*MP*, p.125)

But the play does more than simply keep the party occupied: it offers possibilities for further intrigue and plotting. Henry’s amorous schemes are evident right from the start. He insists that Julia must not play the part of Agatha: Julia ‘saw a glance at Maria, which confirmed the injury to herself; it was a scheme – a trick; she was slighted, Maria was preferred’ (*MP*, p.106). The rehearsals allow Austen to handle a variety of viewpoints simultaneously: here Julia watches Maria, who watches Henry Crawford, all of whom share glances that are quietly observed by the all-seeing Fanny. The theatrical similarly unites Tom and Maria in their own ‘project’ (*MP*, p.123). In order to manipulating the stubborn Edmund, they propose to cast Charles Maddox in the role of Anhalt, leaving Edmund no option but to participate in the play. The full extent of their plotting is revealed:

It was, indeed, a triumphant day to Mr Bertram and Maria. Such a victory over Edmund’s discretion had been beyond their hopes, and was most delightful. There was no longer any thing to disturb them in their darling project [...] (*MP*, p.123)

The ‘darling project’ of the play thus spurs on the formation of romances – Henry Crawford decides that whatever Mrs Grant’s hopes are for a romance between himself and Julia, he now has no ‘time for more than one flirtation’ (p.126) – and factions – Maria becomes Julia’s ‘greatest enemy’ (p.127) – within the party. The play thus drives the plot onwards, Austen writing that ‘[e]very thing was now in

¹⁰⁷ See Bander, p.123.

regular train; theatre, actors, actresses, and dresses, were all getting forward' (*MP*, p.128). By deploying the word 'train', which denotes not simply movement but also an 'act or scheme designed to deceive or entrap', Austen implies that it is not just the play that is 'getting forward' (p.128), but the novel itself – its schemes and projects are underway.¹⁰⁸

Scenes such as these, made possible by the leisure time available in the country home, become 'memorable set pieces in which characters reveal things about themselves – things that allow both their fictive partners in leisure and Austen's readers to judge them'.¹⁰⁹ Idleness becomes essential to developing moments in which characters and the novel as a whole are able to progress. Critics such as Beth Lau, who places Austen's representation of home and restlessness within the context of Romantic poetry, concurs that novels 'such as *Emma* and especially *Mansfield Park* embrace stasis'.¹¹⁰ Stasis serves, in *Mansfield Park* to animate 'creative boredom', which, in Svendsen's analysis, forces one 'to do something new'.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the Mansfield party soon reveal their 'dissatisfaction with the proffered stimuli' of the proposed 'scheme' of *Lovers' Vows*: Fanny listens to the performers' complaints and '[s]o far from being all satisfied and enjoying, she found every body requiring something they had not, and giving occasion of discontent to others' (*MP*, p.129). The novelty of the play soon transforms into 'vexation'; Mansfield's co-conspirators, seeking diversion once more, relapse into restless displeasure (*MP*, p.128).

4.4 Memory and Repetition

The novel's overwhelming sense of action – its proliferation of 'schemes' – is accompanied by a concomitant sense of inertia. The word 'fatigue', like the term

¹⁰⁸ 'Train', n.1, definition 1.b, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204408>> [accessed 21 April 2015].

¹⁰⁹ Peter W. Graham, 'Jane Austen and the Labor of Leisure', *Persuasions*, 32 (2010), 173-183, p.175.

¹¹⁰ Beth Lau, 'Home, Exile and Wanderlust in Austen and the Romantic Poets', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 41 (2006), 91-107, p.96.

¹¹¹ See Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. by John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), p.42.

‘tranquility’, is abundant in *Mansfield Park*.¹¹² Johnson defines ‘fatigue’ as ‘[t]o tire, weary; to harass with toil; to exhaust with labour’.¹¹³ It is, then, ironic, that the term abounds in a novel in which fashionable characters struggle to find satisfactory diversion and employment; indeed Henry misconstrues his flirtations with Fanny as a form of ‘labour’.

Fanny is one of the few characters who suffers from any real fatigue, whether from physical exertion or travel. The cosmopolitan Mary Crawford, longing for diversion, misreads and overuses the term ‘fatigue’, a concept that is integral to the fashion system, whilst in Mansfield. When Mary Crawford deploys the term she claims, paradoxically, that ““resting fatigues”” her (*MP*, p.76), and insists that ““Nothing ever fatigues me but doing what I do not like”” (*MP*, p.55). For Mary, who exhibits fashionable expressions of self-declaration that highlight her ability to perform and to transform others’ perceptions of her, the term ‘fatigue’ bears a close affinity to boredom: she is ‘fatigued’ by that which fails to satisfy or entertain her. Such is the impression on her visit to Rushworth’s estate. She has visited ‘scores of great houses’ yet she ‘cared for none of them’; she is bored with the vogue for house tourism and seeks something more lively to animate her interest (*MP*, p.67).¹¹⁴ Such houses represent the ‘permanence of abode’ so detested by the Crawfords. Consequently, the trip to Sotherton presents itself to Mary not as ‘interesting and new’, as it is for Fanny, but instead as dull repetition (*MP*, p.67). Notably, it is not novelty alone which grasps Fanny’s attention, but *interest*, an aesthetic which, unlike novelty, ‘has the capacity for duration and is fundamentally recursive, returning us to the object for another look’.¹¹⁵

Mary, diagnosing Fanny’s weariness, imagines her boredom to be symptomatic of the whole group:

‘That [Fanny] should be tired now, however, gives me no surprise; for there is nothing in the course of one’s duties so fatiguing as what we

¹¹² The words ‘fatigue’, ‘fatiguing’ and ‘fatigued’ occur 25 times in *Mansfield Park*. In comparison, it is used 11 times in *Sense and Sensibility*, 8 in *Pride and Prejudice*, 9 in *Emma*, 5 in *Northanger Abbey* and 4 in *Persuasion*.

¹¹³ ‘Fatigue’, v., definition 1. a, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68538>> [accessed 23 March 2015].

¹¹⁴ On country house tourism see Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p.214.

¹¹⁵ Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), p.133.

have been doing this morning – seeing a great house, dawdling from one room to another – straining one’s eyes and one’s attention – hearing what one does not understand – admiring what one does not care for. – It is generally allowed to be the greatest bore in the world, and Miss Price has found it so, though she did not know it.’ (*MP*, p.76)

We hear the reverberations of Mary’s boredom in the monotonous and repetitive manner in which she lists the day’s activities: whilst Fanny admits that Mary’s conversation is typically animated – she likes ‘to hear her talk’ (*MP*, p.50) – here Mary’s dialogue is punctuated with dashes that perform and accentuate her tedium. The effects of boredom extend from her gaze to the patterns of her speech. Yet Mary, exposing her inadequate powers of observation, is mistaken: Fanny is enchanted with the estate which, ‘amply furnished in the taste of fifty years back’, is not a site of the newest fashion (*MP*, p.67). Stobart and Rothery’s study of eighteenth-century country houses reveals that although the elite did engage in fashionable consumption to a certain extent when furnishing their country homes, these ‘concerns were tempered by the persistence of the old alongside the new’: remarkably, even broken goods were retained.¹¹⁶ These revelations, gathered from inventories and household records, ‘[run] counter to many understandings of consumption as a dynamic process where novelty and renewal are necessary as weapons of social distinction and/or to stave off the onset of boredom’: the country house emerges as a site that withstands boredom, conveying social distinction through historical, rather than fashionable, design.¹¹⁷ Fittingly, then, Mr Rushworth boasts wealth but not fashion and, notably, he is not a sufferer of boredom. Possessing a fortune, he has the money to be fashionable (and have a house in a fashionable part of London) but lacks the *savoir-faire*: even his wedding carriage is a year out of date (*MP*, p.159).

Mary’s speech exposes the way in which her overwhelming preoccupation with fashion, and thus her assumption that others must also experience boredom, leads her to misconstrue Fanny. Fashion informs Mary’s thinking and her interpretive practices: she later misreads Fanny’s blushes as proof of her attachment to Henry, interpreting them as signs of fashionable coquettishness (*MP*, p.217). Fanny is beyond Mary’s comprehension: “‘Pray, is she out, or is she not?’” she

¹¹⁶ Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, ‘Fashion, Heritage and Family: New and Old in the Georgian Country House’, *Cultural and Social History*, 11.3 (2014), 385-406 (p.400).

¹¹⁷ Stobart and Rothery, ‘Fashion, Heritage and Family’, p.400.

enquires of Edmund, “I am puzzled. She dined at the Parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being *out*; and yet she says so little that I can hardly suppose she *is*” (*MP*, p.39). Mary fixates on sartorial codes such as the “close bonnet”, unable to think or see beyond fashion, whether in dress or feeling (*MP*, p.39). Likewise, Fanny confounds Henry Crawford: “I do not understand her” he confesses, “What is her character? – Is she solemn? – Is she queer? – Is she prudish?” (*MP*, p.180). The term ‘character’ is particularly loaded: in using the term Henry not only questions Fanny’s mind but also inadvertently evokes the language of performance to enquire which ‘part’ she is playing. Unlike Henry and his sister whose persistently self-conscious diction highlights their awareness that they must construct how others perceive them, the anti-theatrical Fanny does not know how to ‘perform’ a character, nor does she desire to do so; she does not take on the specious acts of linguistic and behavioural self-fashioning that exemplify the world of fashion.

Fanny has little desire for fashion or novelty; as Edmund observes, she is ‘of all human creatures the one, over whom habit had most power, and novelty least’ (*MP*, p.277). Fanny’s fatigue after her tour of Sotherton is not boredom, but rather exhaustion.¹¹⁸ While Miss Crawford only feigns listening to the history of the house, Fanny attends

with unaffected earnestness to all that Mrs. Rushworth could relate of the family in former times, its rise and grandeur, regal visits and loyal efforts, delighted to connect any thing with history already known, or warm her imagination with scenes of the past. (*MP*, p.67)

It is no wonder that Mary finds her tour of the estate so wearisome: she cares, like Catherine Morland who is brought to life by the fashionable pleasures of Bath, only for ‘invention’ and finds history ‘weary [...] very tiresome’ (*NA*, p.79). Fatigue is explicitly aligned with history; the Crawfords, meanwhile, ‘are all for change, for novelty, for uprooting the old and interfering with the established’.¹¹⁹ History, embodied by the Sotherton estate with its family portraits and seventeenth-century

¹¹⁸ She reveres the values embodied by the estate, and her own reverence for memory has been associated with a form of imperialist ideology that can certainly be seen in tandem with the values represented by the country estate. See Miranda Burgess, ‘Fanny Price’s British Museum: Empire, Genre, and Memory in *Mansfield Park*’ in *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780-1830*, ed. by Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, [2008] 2010), pp. 208-236.

¹¹⁹ Tanner, p.160.

chapel, stands in direct opposition to the values of fashion: novelty, change and transience.

For Fanny, Rushworth's estate functions as a form of 'bygone object' which, in Baudrillard's formulation, encompasses 'testimony, remembrance, nostalgia, escapism'.¹²⁰ Contrariwise, the Crawfords are not creatures of memory. They live only in the present, or in anticipation of a new present, corresponding with Barthes's theory of fashion as the '*amnesiac substitution* of the present for the past': fashion's dependence on obsolescence and novelty is articulated as a wilful, indeed essential, act of forgetting.¹²¹ Miss Rachel, the heroine of 'Mr' Lytton's epistolary satire of the fashionable world, *La Belle Sauvage, or a Progress Through the Beau-Monde* (1803), who refuses, like Mr Bingley's sisters, to acknowledge her trading origins as she moves up in the fashionable world and forms an illicit relationship with the married Lord Varnish, maintains that, "memory is at present rather out of fashion".¹²²

In 1792 Samuel Rogers' *The Pleasures of Memory*, a popular poem (it reached its ninth edition by 1796) set up an opposition between memory and the fashion for landscape improvement, between history and fashion. Favouring history and memory, Rogers points to John Duke of Buckingham who confesses that he is 'oftener missing a pretty gallery in the old house I pulled down, than pleased with a saloon which I built in its stead'.¹²³ Mr Rushworth talks of the vogue for landscape improvement with clumsy phrases and avowed ignorance: "I have no eye or ingenuity for such matters, but as they are before me; and had I a place of my own in the country, I should be most thankful to any Mr. Repton who would undertake it [Sotherton], and give me as much beauty as he could for my money" (*MP*, p.45).¹²⁴ Henry Crawford's easy management of fashion is, conversely, reflected in his confident eloquence. Henry protests that his 'feelings' regarding the potential

¹²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny: 1968-1983*, trans. and ed. by Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 1990), p.35.

¹²¹ Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, ed. by Andy Stafford and Michael Carter, trans. by Andy Stafford (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.117.

¹²² 'Mr' Lytton, *La Belle Sauvage, or a Progress Through the Beau-Monde*, 2 vols (London: Lane and Newman, 1803), ii, p.32.

¹²³ Samuel Rogers, *The Pleasures of Memory* (London, 1792), Note XI, p.66.

¹²⁴ On Austen's representation of the fashion for landscape improvement see Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

improvement of Sotherton, 'are not quite so evanescent, nor my memory of the past under such easy dominion as one finds to be the case with men of the world' (*MP*, p.78). Yet Austen represents an ambivalent gap between Henry's rhetoric and his behaviour. When Henry does look to the past (a rare event), it is in the form of forgetting: deftly deploying the lexicon of diversion and play, he reminisces about the private theatricals, recalling that there

'was such an interest, such animation, such a spirit diffused! Every body felt it. We were all alive. There was employment, hope, solicitude, bustle, for every hour of the day. Always some little objection, some little doubt, some little anxiety to be got over. I never was happier.' (*MP*, p.176)

That they all grew 'weary' (*MP*, p.104) of the objections, doubts, and anxieties brought forth by the theatrics typically eludes his memory, which, in accordance with the amnesia required by fashion, is habituated to such acts of '*etourderie*'.

Henry's subsequent absence from Mansfield Park is sufficient proof of his forgetful nature: two weeks in Norfolk, according to the narrator, should 'have convinced the gentleman that he ought to keep longer away, had he been more in the habit of examining his own motives' but 'he would not look beyond the present moment. The sisters, handsome, clever, and encouraging, were an amusement to his sated mind; and finding nothing in Norfolk to equal the social pleasures of Mansfield, he gladly returned' (*MP*, p.91). As with those fashionables upon whom Hannah More inflicts judgement in her *Strictures*, Henry's mind is over-indulged or 'sated': continually dissatisfied, he returns to Mansfield for more diversion. As the narrator reflects, he is 'welcomed thither quite as gladly by those whom he came to trifle with further'; for him, the sisters are merely a diversion, as Fanny later becomes for both him and Mary (*MP*, p.91). Henry's departure, however, plunges the Bertram sisters into 'a fortnight of [...] dullness', reflecting the ebb and flow of boredom which structures the novel (p.91). Indeed, when Henry Crawford leaves a second time, on this occasion for Bath, and Sir Thomas Bertram returns to Mansfield, putting a stop to the private theatricals, Edmund attempts to articulate their apparent change in situation: "I believe our evenings are rather returned to what they were, than assuming a new character. The novelty was in their being lively" (p.154). The subsequent departure of Mr Rushworth and the Bertram sisters

similarly leaves a 'chasm' (p.160) in the social world of Mansfield, leading Mary, now in need of 'something new' (p.162) to make Fanny her "'friend'" (p.279).

The Crawfords' desire for novelty, their Barthesian state of fashion-induced amnesia, is even more tangible when contrasted with Fanny's wonder at the mind's (mis)rememberings of the past. Struck with a detail as ostensibly banal as the growth of a shrubbery, Fanny muses that

'[...] perhaps in another three years we may be forgetting – almost forgetting what it was before. How wonderful, how very wonderful the operations of time, and the changes of the human mind! [...] If any one faculty of our nature may be called more wonderful than the rest, I do think it is memory. There seems something more speakingly incomprehensible in the powers, the failures, the inequalities of memory, than in any other of our intelligences.' (*MP*, p.163)

Fanny, as ever, remains beyond Mary Crawford's comprehension: Mary is 'untouched' (*MP*, p.163) by Fanny's odd digression, bewildered as to how one can find such 'wonder' (*MP*, p.164) in a hedgerow.

The delight Fanny discovers in the changing natural landscape, which brings forth the "'variety of nature'" (so monotonous to Mary) and the fallibility of human memory, contrasts with the emphasis Henry Crawford places on the vogue for landscape improvement (*MP*, p.164). For Henry Crawford, landscape, whether at Sotherton or Thornton Lacey, becomes another opportunity for diversion. Equally, like John Yates who occupies himself with private theatricals (they become his 'never-failing subject' [*MP*, p.96]), Rushworth obsesses over improvement and can 'talk of nothing else' (*MP*, p.42). The rapidity with which these diversions fall into verbal repetition attests to the ease with which initial novelty transforms into monotony and sameness; it mirrors at the minute level of speech what happens in the narrative as a whole, and in the fashion system more widely. Indeed, Walter Benjamin, describes fashion as the paradoxical 'eternal recurrence of the new'.¹²⁵ David McNally observes that, in Benjamin's writings,

¹²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock, Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996-2003), iv (2003), p.179.

Fashion involves the endless production of novelty – the latest and greatest – which turns out to be nothing but the same thing (exchange value/the commodity) over and over again. Fashion is thus a sort of capitalist repetition compulsion. Just like the neurotic who keeps having the same bad relationship one time after another (each time disguised as something new), the consumer of fashion does the same thing repeatedly (buy the latest products) only to discover that the latest novelty is no different and no better than the last. In the name of an insatiable thirst for the new, fashion addicts us to the eternal return of the same.¹²⁶

The narrative of *Mansfield Park* mirrors this repetition, in which characters repeatedly endeavour to introduce novelty through improvement and schemes – all of which emerge as ultimately the same: transient, unfulfilling and boring. Henry Crawford expresses the dissatisfaction brought by his improvements at Everingham: ““there was very little for me to do; too little – I should like to have been busy much longer””(MP, p.49). The novelty is fleeting; he soon returns to a state of idle restlessness. Austen’s narrative is reminiscent of *Ennui*, in which Lord Glenthorn recalls taking possession of his estate in Sherwood, which is done up with ‘the gloss of novelty’.¹²⁷ Glenthorn reminisces: ‘[t]he bustle of my situation kept me awake for some weeks; the pleasure of property was new, and, as long as the novelty lasted, delightful’.¹²⁸ Glenthorn confirms that the estate’s ‘beauties too soon became familiar to my eye’.¹²⁹ Hannah More characterises this diminishing visual effect as a form of blindness, insisting that it ‘is the novelty of a thing which astonishes us, and not its absurdity: objects may be so long kept before the eye that it begins no longer to observe them’.¹³⁰ Indeed, Mary Crawford speaks of ‘straining’ not only her ‘attention’ but also her ‘eyes’ whilst on her ‘fatiguing’ tour of Sotherton (MP, p.76). Mary’s failures of perception, both cognitive and visual, are rooted in her desire for fashion, which is, like Mary herself, ‘irreverent [...] towards tradition’ and is grounded in the ‘denunciation of the recent past’.¹³¹

¹²⁶ McNally, p.202.

¹²⁷ Edgeworth, *Ennui*, i, pp.5-6.

¹²⁸ Ibid., i, pp.4-5.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.6.

¹³⁰ More, *Strictures*, ii, p.163.

¹³¹ Angela McRobbie on Walter Benjamin’s theory of fashion in ‘The Place of Walter Benjamin in Cultural Studies’, in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. by Simon During, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.77-96 (p.91).

4.5 Women's Diversions

It during autumn, particularly the 'black month' of November (*MP*, p.85) – the date originally fixed for Sir Thomas Bertram's return – that the country home becomes most unbearable to Mary: we observe a 'miserable trio' at the parsonage, 'confined within doors by a series of rain and snow, with nothing to do and no variety to hope for' (*MP*, p.224).¹³² Austen carefully structures her novel around periods of novelty and stasis, following the Mansfield ball, a period of entertainment, with a relapse into 'tranquillity': Edmund, Henry and William leave Mansfield, and the onset of winter only stresses the isolation felt by Mary. November would, for fashionables, signal the beginning of the 'season' in town, constituting a mass exodus from the country home. Popular novels satirized the fashionable aversion to the countryside during the 'season'. One such novel was Susannah Gunning's three-volume *Fashionable Involvements* (1800), a story of debt and illicit romances within the fashionable world. The plot follows the fate of the Isleworth family as they seek to maintain their fashionable lifestyle in spite of mounting debts: Lady Isleworth dreads the thought 'of being forced to exchange the dear distraction of a town life for a dull, sleepy, country retirement'.¹³³ Responding to the suggestion that their daughter, Clarissa, should be sent to the countryside, her father exclaims, "do not mention such a proposition; it would absolutely kill her at once; yes, it would be her death; there is suffocation in the very thoughts of the country at this season of the year".¹³⁴ Yet, for Clarissa, the countryside is, in contrast to the increasing chaos of the fashionable world, 'the calm residence of rectitude – the cradle of peace – the abode of harmony'.¹³⁵

Edmund Bertram, ever-alert to the language and behaviours of the fashionable world, insists that autumn in the country house poses a very real threat for Mary:

'This is the first October that she has passed in the country since her infancy. I do not call Tunbridge or Cheltenham the country; and

¹³² Walter Benjamin notes there is 'the deepest connection between weather and boredom' in *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), p.102.

¹³³ Susannah Gunning, *Fashionable Involvements*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London, 1800), i, p.21.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, i, p.4.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, ii, p.97.

November is still a more serious month, and I can see that Mrs. Grant is very anxious for her not finding Mansfield dull as winter comes on.’ (MP, p.156)

His cure for this is to deploy Fanny herself as a diversion for Mary. In *La Belle Sauvage* Miss Rachel complains of ‘that tedious uniformity, that steadiness so approaching to stagnation, which arises from the odious simplicity of your country manners. Horrible simplicity! Intolerable sameness!—Oh country! I do indeed detest thee!’.¹³⁶ Instead she longs for the

gayer world; the park is never the same for two hours together—new sets of company make it a new place. The playhouse varies with the piece, and the Court with new introductions and even the people themselves seem to vary every hour, and no one is the same character two days together.¹³⁷

The heroine desires a moving scene, analogous to the changing stage sets of the theatre that the Mansfield party seek to recreate. Several years later, Hannah More’s evangelical novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* suggests that the ‘ennui and vapid dullness’ of the countryside was not limited to the ‘thorough-paced town-bred lady’; the hero, Charles, admits that ‘however delightful the country might be a great part of the year, yet there were a few winter months when I feared it might be dull’.¹³⁸

Austen seizes what had become a pervasive image in popular novels to expose the distinct ways in which her female characters respond to idleness and solitude. The narrator observes that,

The week which passed so quietly and peaceably at the great house in Mansfield, had a very different character at the parsonage. To the young lady at least in each family, it brought very different feelings. What was tranquillity and comfort to Fanny was tediousness and vexation to Mary. Something arose from the difference of disposition and habit – one so easily satisfied, the other so unused to endure [...] (MP, p.224)

Here, the tranquillity experienced by Fanny, rather than reflecting the boredom felt by Maria Bertram, is akin to Kant’s concept of ‘*apathia*’ which, as Ngai notes,

¹³⁶ Lyttleton, *Belle Sauvage*, i, p.39.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, ii, pp.146, 154. See *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 24 January 1809, pp.169-70

‘involves a calmness and neutrality that ultimately distinguishes it from the dissatisfied (and often restless) mood of boredom’.¹³⁹ Their contrary responses to winter life at home – tranquillity on the one hand, boredom on the other – expose a fundamental difference in the way in which Fanny and Mary perceive their environments. As Svendson suggests, ‘emptiness of time in boredom is not an emptiness of action, for there is always *something* in this time, even if it is only the sight of paint drying. The emptiness of time is an emptiness of meaning’.¹⁴⁰ Fanny’s ‘delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling’ finds meaning in the soil, the plants and the natural scenery around her (*MP*, p.64). Likewise, when *Coelebs*’ Lucilla Stanley, a woman of filial and domestic perfection (virtues which are highlighted via Charles’ encounters with women of fashion in London), looks out at nature she sees not “‘vegetation in its torpid state’” but rather the slow and “‘silent operations of the winter’”; she observes “‘nature [...] busy in preparing her treasures underground’”.¹⁴¹ Fanny similarly finds joy in the ‘growth and beauty’ of the shrubbery (*MP*, p.163), and later echoes Lucilla’s appreciation of nature when she reflects on ‘how much the beginnings and progress of vegetation had delighted her’ (*MP*, p.339).

Fanny’s ability to perceive that only meaning, not action, can be absent, works in conjunction with her state of *apathia* which, in Ngai’s account, “‘frees’ the subject for other mental activities’ unlike boredom which often ‘immobilizes and stupefies’”.¹⁴² Thus Fanny’s “‘wondering strain’”, “‘rambling fancy’” and “‘rhapsodizing’” is spurred into action; scenes of inaction provide a narrative moment in which the reader can become more intimately aware of Fanny’s interior world (*MP*, p.164). Looking out of the window at a starlit landscape, Fanny cannot contain her usually silent passivity, exclaiming:

‘Here’s harmony! [...] Here’s repose! Here’s what may leave all painting and all music behind, and what poetry can only attempt to describe. Here’s what may tranquillize every care, and lift the heart to rapture! When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of Nature were more attended to, and people were

¹³⁹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2005), p.269.

¹⁴⁰ Svendson, p.31.

¹⁴¹ More, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, ii, pp.155-6.

¹⁴² Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p.269.

carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene.’ (*MP*, pp.88-9)

Fanny reflects that it is the inability to find meaning – the incapacity to feel the ‘sublimity of Nature’ – that leads to ‘wickedness’, a word echoed in Mary’s reference to her brother’s plans.

Mary Crawford is blind to the sublimity of nature. She simply wants ‘something fresh to see and think of’ on a dull, rainy winter’s day (*MP*, p.161). Yet, as Ngai suggests, the sudden and abrupt emotions of astonishment and terror that are associated with the sublime, although ostensibly antithetical to boredom which is “slow or gradual in onset and long in duration”, are often experienced alongside boredom.¹⁴³ It is an effect she has dubbed ‘stuplimity’ (a hybrid of the words ‘stupor’ and ‘sublimity’). *Ennui* dramatises this ‘stuplime’ effect, staging a scene in which Lord Glenthorn concurrently experiences both lethargy and awe. Observing the sublime landscape of the Giant’s Causeway, Lord Glenthorn recalls how he ‘was seized with a fit of yawning’.¹⁴⁴ Lord Glenthorn is abruptly seized with a fit, yet it is not due to terror but rather boredom. He confesses, ‘[t]he sublime and the beautiful had no charms for me: novelty was the only power that could wake me from my lethargy’, yet, as Burke argues, the pleasure of novelty in nature is transient and superficial.¹⁴⁵ Mary Crawford finds no pleasure in nature: ‘her attention was all for men and women’ (*MP*, p.64). Consequently, Fanny’s appearance is a ‘blessing’ to Mary, who is now able to occupy herself by ‘detecting [Fanny] to be wetter than she would at first allow, and providing her with dry clothes’ and by playing her a tune on her harp (*MP*, p.161). Mary’s ‘intimacy’ with Fanny, it emerges, ‘[results] principally from [her] desire of something new, and [...] has little reality in Fanny’s feelings’ (*MP*, p.162). Whilst her brother is able to leave Mansfield to find novelty to ‘wake’ him ‘from his lethargy’, Mary’s freedom is circumscribed by her gender.

Throughout the eighteenth century women were, as Jordan reflects, required to be idle, yet forbidden from experiencing boredom.¹⁴⁶ For Austen, letter writing offered a discursive form in which the author was able to express her boredom,

¹⁴³ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p.261.

¹⁴⁴ Edgeworth, *Ennui*, i, p.236.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, i, p.240.

¹⁴⁶ Jordan points to the ‘two ideological forces’ of the period, ‘one requiring ladies’ idleness and the other forbidding it’ (p.92).

whilst concurrently alleviating idleness: ‘I have read the Corsair, mended my petticoat, & have nothing else to do.–’, she writes to her sister in March 1814.¹⁴⁷ The letter, whilst (characteristically for Austen) it unites the corresponding diversions of dress and literature, conveys the limitations of appropriate and accessible female diversions. In Arnauld Berquin’s pedagogic one-act drama *Fashionable Education* (originally published in French between 1782-3), a translation of which was owned by Austen, the brother of the young and fashionable Leonora (who fills her time ‘with the opera, dress, fashions, walks, and scandal’, all of which prove ineffective at ‘killing-time’) informs his sister he is acquainted with young women who are never ‘idle for a minute’, learning geography, ciphering and needlework.¹⁴⁸ Unlike fashion and scandal, needlework was associated with ‘domesticity’ and ‘modesty’.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, Lady Bertram’s redundant needlework, which is ‘of little use and of no beauty’, is both a manifestation of her boredom, and an attempt to keep idleness at bay (*MP*, p.16).

As Spacks notes, contemporary conduct books including Fordyce’s *Sermons*

convey the sense that youthful female life should contain little of interest; a woman must constantly strive to fill her empty time. Young women’s lives, in short, are mostly boring. But – the other half of the bind – women must under no circumstances allow themselves to be bored.¹⁵⁰

A number of critics have discussed the problem of female idleness during the period; Jordan, for instance, observes that because ‘all ladies’ activities were so circumscribed, the difference between approved and disapproved ways of spending time could be subtle: as Burney’s *The Wanderer* indicates, for instance, playing the harp could be a sign of both excellence and imperfection’.¹⁵¹ Whilst needlework is promoted as an acceptable female diversion in *Fashionable Education*, the harp was far more contentious because it was fashionable. Fittingly, it is this instrument that diverts Mary Crawford. Austen lays the scene before us with typical irony:

¹⁴⁷ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 5-8 March 1814, p.257.

¹⁴⁸ Arnauld Berquin, *Fashionable Education in The Children’s Friend: Translated from the French of Mr Berquin by Lucas Williams*, 6 vols (London, 1793), v, Act I Scene xii. See R. W. Chapman, ‘Jane Austen’s Library,’ *The Book-Collector’s Quarterly*, 3.9 (1933), 28-32.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, p.145.

¹⁵⁰ Spacks, *Boredom*, p.67.

¹⁵¹ Jordan, p.93.

A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself; and both placed near a window, cut down to the ground, and opening on a little lawn, surrounded by shrubs in the rich foliage of summer, was enough to catch any man's heart. The season, the scene, the air, were all favourable to tenderness and sentiment. Mrs. Grant and her tambour frame were not without their use; it was all in harmony [...] (*MP*, pp.51-2)

The scene is an image of arcadian fashion: the low French windows to which Austen refers had only come into vogue towards the end of the eighteenth century, at which point the garden had come to be 'seen as an extension of the home'.¹⁵² The 'harmony' of the scene, which inspires Edmund's matrimonial musings, verbally echoes contemporary prints such as James Gillray's 'Harmony before Matrimony' in which two fashionable young lovers play and sing in their elaborately decorated home.



Figure 4.1 'Harmony before Matrimony', by James Gillray (London, 1805). British Museum.

The harp was particularly modish during the first decades of the nineteenth century: in 'houses with some pretensions to fashion' the harp began to replace both

¹⁵² Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.370. See also Girouard, p.214.

square and grand pianos.¹⁵³ In *Persuasion*, Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, girls who live, ‘like thousands of other young ladies, [...] to be fashionable, happy, and merry’ (*P*, p.38) take every opportunity to perform on their harp. Louisa even walks to Uppercross Cottage ‘to leave more room for the harp’ in the carriage (*P*, p.45), and whilst Anne Elliot plays the piano ‘a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves’ she has ‘no voice, no knowledge of the harp, and no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted’; as such, ‘her performance was little thought of’ (*P*, p.42). The significance of Mary Crawford’s harp-playing has been the subject of much critical discussion. For Tanner, it is a symbol of her ‘vanity’¹⁵⁴, whilst Juliette Wells maintains that it reveals Mary’s “‘precarious balance of selfishness and generosity, self-absorption and self-display’”¹⁵⁵, and for Jeffrey Nigro the harp is not ‘merely an obvious symbol of physical seduction’, otherwise it would be ‘unlikely that the upright Edmund Bertram would dub it his “favourite instrument” and that the propriety-conscious Fanny would be intrigued by it’.¹⁵⁶ Much of the critical focus on Mary Crawford’s harp has been on its ‘moral ambivalence’, and the way in which it permits her to display her body seductively: the harp, held between the legs and revealing the ankle, is undeniably sexual, as was noted by contemporary texts such as *The Mirror of the Graces* (1811).¹⁵⁷ Whilst illuminating and necessary to our understanding of the potential significance of the harp in *Mansfield Park*, these discussions fail to note that the harp becomes such a prominent and contentious

¹⁵³ David Selwyn, *Jane Austen and Leisure* (London: Hambledon Press, 1999), p.125.

¹⁵⁴ Tanner, p.150

¹⁵⁵ Juliette Wells, ‘A Harpist Arrives at Mansfield Park: Music and the Moral Ambiguity of Mary Crawford’, *Persuasions*, 28 (2006), 101-113 (p.101).

¹⁵⁶ Jeffrey Nigro, “‘Favourable to Tenderness and Sentiment’: The Many Meanings of Mary Crawford’s Harp”, *Persuasions On-Line*, 35.1 (2014), n.pag. Nigro summarises the arguments made by other critics of Mary’s harp. Nigro notes that ‘[i]n Austen’s other novels, the harp is either passed over lightly – it is one of Georgiana Darcy’s accomplishments – or gently satirized as a symbol of arriviste pretensions. In *Persuasion*, the Musgrove sisters play both the piano and the harp. In a delightfully quirky inversion of Mary Crawford’s travails with harps and carts, Louisa Musgrove walks to Uppercross Cottage so as to leave room for the harp in the carriage. The fact that “the sound of a Harp might be heard through the upper Casement” of the baker’s shop is a sign of the gentrification of the village of Sanditon. A harp, along with drawing paper and “finery,” helps to form the setting for the hyper-refined lifestyle of the pretentious Beaufort sisters. Although the sisters profess a desire to be “very economical, very elegant & very secluded,” the elder Miss Beaufort, like Mary Crawford, longs for “the praise & celebrity from all who [walk] within the sound of her Instrument”.’

¹⁵⁷ Nigro, n.pag. See also Wells (p.108) and Selwyn (p.126).

image precisely because it reflects the heightened moral risks associated with female idleness and the art of killing time.¹⁵⁸

In *The Wanderer* the virtuous Juliet seeks employment as a harp instructor to the ‘young ladies of fashion then at Brighthelmstone’.¹⁵⁹ It soon becomes evident that it is not the playing of the harp, but rather the fashionable image of sitting with a harp, that is the primary focus of her students. Miss Brinville, who is past her prime and has been brought up in the country ‘with every false indulgence which can lead to idle ease and pleasure, for the passing moment’¹⁶⁰ is one such pupil:

To sit at the harp so as to justify the assertion of the Baronet, became [Miss Brinville’s] principal study; and the glass before which she tried her attitudes and motions, told her such flattering tales, that she soon began to think the harp the sweetest instrument in the world, and that to practise it was the most delicious of occupations.¹⁶¹

Miss Brinville, who notably values only the ‘passing’ moment, suffers from a fashionable form of idleness: ‘habitually indolent’ she has ‘no conception of energy, not an idea of diligence’.¹⁶² In Miss Brinville we observe an inverse model of Kierkegaard’s theory of boredom: boredom does not drive on motion, but induces lethargy. Indeed, Hannah More had deployed the analogy of a ‘palsy’ to describe fashionable indolence.¹⁶³ As Fenichel observes in his study, in boredom there is ‘a need for intense mental activity’ yet ‘an inhibition of that activity’; boredom in this case does not set into motion, but instead stupefies.¹⁶⁴ This is the case with Lady Bertam, who is ‘too indolent even to accept’ the ‘gratification’ of going ‘into public with her daughters’ (*MP*, p.28). Inhibited by her own idleness, Miss Brinville thinks that to practise the harp is to pose with it in the mirror, employing it alongside other fashionable accessories such as her carefully chosen millinery. Burney satirizes the superficiality of such ‘attitudes’: when Mr Giles attempts to collect the money owed to Juliet by her fashionable scholars, he is swayed off course by another student, Miss Sycamore, who “‘threw her arms round her harp, with the prettiest

¹⁵⁸ Spacks observes that ‘[f]or men, [...] boredom presents fewer or less intense moral risks than it offers women’. Spacks, *Boredom*, p.107.

¹⁵⁹ Burney, *The Wanderer*, p.234.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.231.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.236.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.236.

¹⁶³ More, *Strictures*, ii, p.168.

¹⁶⁴ Fenichel, p.292.

languishment you can imagine, making herself look just like a picture; and then she played me a whole set of airs and graces; quite ravishing, I protest”¹⁶⁵.

Whilst Mary might have more talent than any of Juliet’s pupils, she similarly aims to appear ‘just like a picture’. Equally, in *Sanditon*, the Miss Beauforts, always ‘the first in every change of fashion’ (*NA*, p.341), bring novelty to the narrative’s ‘small, fashionable bathing place’ (*NA*, p.301), posing with hired harps and looking ‘at nothing through a Telescope’ in their competition to ‘be the most stylish girls in the place’ (*NA*, p.342). Bermingham has suggested that ‘the Miss Beauforts replace art-making with an elaborate pantomime of elegant female poses. Their image repertoire, whether it be playing harps or looking through telescopes, conforms to those found in fashion magazines of the day’.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Austen’s descriptions verbally mimic fashion plates such as that which is printed in the *Lady’s Magazine* in October 1800.¹⁶⁷ Presenting the reader with an aesthetic gaze which registers what Bermingham calls ‘empty show’ and ‘pantomime’, Austen reflects upon real accomplishment and the surface of fashion.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, in mimicking the still-life images of fashion plates Austen gives the impression of stasis, opposing the idea that fashionable boredom only sets into motion.

Ironically, the *Lady’s Magazine’s* fashion-plate of a woman displaying her ‘attitude’ with the aid of a harp is preceded by an excerpt from Hannah More’s chapter ‘On dissipation and the modern habits of fashionable life’, taken from her *Strictures*.¹⁶⁹ Such apparently contradictory messages are paradigmatic of the multi-authored fashion magazine. The serials and moral tales of fashion magazines simultaneously attacked the current ‘mania for music’, which gave women ‘a false delicacy’, and the fashion for ‘ornamental needle-work’ in female education, depicting heroines such as the virtuous Amelia who refuses to ‘display attitudes over a harp’, whilst continuing to regularly print music for the harp and patterns for such ornamental needlework.¹⁷⁰ Austen adopts the theme of harp mania, using it for the

¹⁶⁵ Burney, *The Wanderer*, p.300.

¹⁶⁶ Bermingham, ‘Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs’, p.490.

¹⁶⁷ Although he does not point to any images, Copeland notes how Mary Crawford ‘poses herself in Mrs. Grant’s parlour in the mode of the fashion plates of the *Lady’s Magazine* or of *La Belle Assemblée*’ in ‘Jane Austen and the Consumer Revolution’, p.87.

¹⁶⁸ Bermingham, ‘Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs’ p.491.

¹⁶⁹ ‘On Fashionable Dissipation. (By Miss Hannah More)’, *LM*, October 1800, pp.548-51.

¹⁷⁰ ‘The Old Woman’ *LMM*, February 1803, pp.78-82 (p.80) and ‘L. M.’, ‘Montravers and Lavinia; or, One Winter in London’, *LMM*, October 1810, pp.219-31 (p.228).

purposes of parody and cliché: Edmund becomes momentarily a dupe of the fashionable surface attractions of Mary, who, like the Miss Beauforts, exploits the fact that a ‘little novelty has a great effect in so small a place’ (NA, p.207).



Figure 4.2 Fashion-plate from the *Lady's Magazine*, October 1800.

Fashion emerges in *Mansfield Park* as a narrative model; boredom is fundamental to the fashion system and in the eighteenth-century this becomes internalized, even pathologized, as boredom itself becomes an ailment of fashionable people and thus fashionable itself. Fanny becomes embroiled in the narrative tensions created by fashionable fatigue; by the end of the second volume, following Henry Crawford’s manoeuvres towards her, she reflects that ‘she had never known a day of greater agitation, both of pain and pleasure’ (MP, p.241). As the others seek (often sexual) diversion, Fanny increasingly seeks to “‘tranquilize” not only herself, as Sir Thomas insists, but the Mansfield party as a whole (MP, p.251). When Sir

Thomas sends her to Portsmouth in the hope that she might miss Henry Crawford, she in fact only misses ‘the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield’ (*MP*, p.308). Fanny appears anomalous; her behaviour repeatedly dashes the expectations of those habituated to the transitory pleasures of fashion. Fashionability, in *Mansfield Park*, is defined as a desire for impermanent novelties, novelties that insist on the anticipation of boredom. Austen dramatises the tensions – between ‘sameness and gloom’ (*MP*, p.153) on the one hand, and novelty and diversion on the other – that characterise fashionability. In doing so, Austen exposes the contradictions upon which the narrative of fashion depends: repetition and sameness disguised as novelty.

Chapter 5 ‘Nothing-meaning terms’: The Phraseology of Fashion in *Emma*

‘[...] Absolutely insufferable! Knightley!—I could not have believed it. Knightley!—never seen him in her life before, and call him Knightley!—and discover that he is a gentleman! A little upstart, vulgar being, with her Mr. E., and her *cara sposo*, and her resources, and all her airs of pert pretension and underbred finery.’

Jane Austen, *Emma* (1815)¹

This chapter seeks to uncover the fashionable diction of *Emma* and the dialogue of its self-styled fashionable characters. As Kowaleski-Wallace contends with reference to the ‘eighteenth-century coinage’ of the verb ‘*to shop*’, fashion was as much a ‘linguistic’ as a ‘cultural process’.² In *Emma*, Austen dramatises the interplay between linguistic and cultural processes of fashion, drawing attention to judgements of fashion (relating to dress, hair, consumer power and dialogue), voguish lexicon (including terms such as ‘*caro sposo*’, ‘puppy’, ‘dashing’, ‘pic-nic’, ‘*carte-blanche*’, ‘*outrée*’) and the physical signs of fashion (such as shops and clothing). This chapter reveals that attending closely to the minutiae of fashion-conscious diction and communication in *Emma* reveals something deeply suggestive about Austen’s construction of voice and character. The ostensible trivialities of linguistic fashion-consciousness are deceptively meaningful in *Emma*; Austen demands that the careful reader examine, if not reread, her text in order to grasp the underlying significance of such communicative acts, acts which on first reading appear to obscure meaning.³

Speech has long been a central interest of Austen’s readers: in March 1818 the *British Critic* described the striking way in which the ‘authoress [...] makes her *dramatis personae* talk’; forty years later G. H. Lewes declared that the ‘genius’ of Austen was how ‘she seems to rely upon what her people say and do for the whole effect they are to produce in our imaginations’.⁴ Throughout Austen’s *oeuvre* but particularly in *Emma*, a novel in which the author refines her experimentation with

¹ Jane Austen, *Emma*, 3 vols (London: Murray, 1816), ii, p.274

² Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, pp.6, 74.

³ Cronin and McMillan discuss ‘rereadability’ and Austen in their ‘Introduction’ to *Emma*, pp.xxi-lxxvii (p.xxxii, pp.lvi-lvii).

⁴ ‘Art V. *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*’, *British Critic*, 9, March 1818, pp.293-301 (p.297), in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/docview/4829487>> [accessed 19 January 2016]; H. Lewes, ‘The Novels of Jane Austen’, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, 86.525, July 1859, pp.99-113 (pp.105-6).

free indirect style, the language of speech, interior monologue and free indirect discourse is essential to the formation of character.⁵ From literary critics to ‘speech language pathologists’, readers of *Emma* have observed that ‘speech – communication – is central’ to Austen’s 1815 novel.⁶ Austen vividly conveys character through linguistic foibles: Harriet Smith with her obsequious ‘to be sure’s’, Mr Woodhouse with his superfluous use of the epithet ‘poor’ and, in the case of Mrs Elton, her ‘elegant terseness’, as Emma declares sarcastically (*E*, p.363).⁷ The latter example is characteristic of the way in which dialogue and action is filtered through the titular heroine; as Wiltshire observes, ‘[t]he reader is hostage to Emma’s attention, sees, hears, understands things as if they were within her consciousness’.⁸ In this chapter, however, I wish to show how the (perhaps unexpected) fashion-consciousness of Emma in particular draws attention to Austen’s use of perspective and voice.

Emma is an imperfect judge: she takes Mr Elton’s ‘exactly so’s (*E*, p.35) as confirmation of his love for Harriet and even reads his riddle as ‘saying very plainly – “Pray, Miss Smith, give me leave to pay my addresses to you. Approve my charade and my intentions in the same glance”’ (*E*, p.58). For Emma, it is not enough to answer the riddle (‘courtship’): she must translate it into imagined speech, just as she elsewhere insists on translating gestures and facial expressions into dialogue (*E*, p.283). Copeland, who has identified parallels between Emma and a narrative featured in the *Lady’s Magazine*, notes how Emma misreads ‘consumer signs’ (such as Jane’s piano) and ‘consumer fiction’ (using the fiction typical of the fashion periodical to interpret Harriet’s social status), both of which are ‘false and misleading’.⁹ As this chapter explores, Emma relies on the codes and narratives of fashionable consumerism throughout the novel. Yet Emma’s misreadings and

⁵ Juliet McMaster asserts that ‘[i]n Jane Austen, talk is character, talk is action’ in ‘Mrs. Elton and Other Verbal Aggressors’, in *The Talk in Jane Austen*, ed. by Bruce Stovel and Lynn Weinlos Gregg (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2002), pp.73- 89 (p.88).

⁶ June Sturrock, “‘I am rather a talker’: Speech and Silence in *Emma*’, *Persuasions On-Line*, 28.1 (2007), n.pag. See Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer, ‘A Speech Language Pathologist Journeys to Highbury’, *Persuasions*, 29 (2007), 155-66; Gay, ‘Pastimes’, p.338; Joseph Litvak, ‘Reading Characters: Self, Society and Text in *Emma*’, *PMLA*, 100.5 (1985), 763-773; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.162.

⁷ Marjet Berendsen discusses some of these ‘stock-phrases’, arguing that they are ‘a *testimonium paupertatis*’ in *Reading Character in Jane Austen’s ‘Emma’* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1991) p.62.

⁸ John Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.130.

⁹ Copeland, ‘Money’, p.138.

imaginary speech acts in which, for instance, she presents Harriet as Mr Elton's social equal, point 'not to the object represented so much as the person who uses the signs'; in these moments the interpretation of signs in *Emma* becomes self-referential, pointing the reader back to speaker rather than to the ostensible referent.¹⁰ As I examine, Emma's judgements similarly reveal her character in other, stylistically striking, ways.

Emma is equally replete with unattributed speech acts that reflect the circulation of overheard gossip in Highbury: 'Somebody talked of rain' (*E*, p.251), reports the narrator; "'Every body said that Mr. Weston would never marry again'" (*E*, p.10) Emma again mockingly condescends, basking in her prescient refusal to believe such "'solemn nonsense'" (*E*, p.11).¹¹ In Highbury, news is filtered through various speakers: Emma learns of Mrs Churchill's worsening health and Frank Churchill's subsequent departure from Highbury through Miss Bates, who hears the news from Mr Elton, who receives the information from the ostler, who learns of Mr Churchill's message to Frank from the servants at Randall's (*E*, p.301). In these chains of knowledge all members of Highbury society become connected via speech acts and attributing verbal signs to specific characters becomes an arduous, if not impossible, task.

Speech in the novel is performative: the way in which characters (mis)communicate is not only revelatory of character, but has the potential to disrupt and direct the narrative. Emma's word-choices disclose the performativity of her speech: she frequently uses active verbs ('I do', 'I made', 'I planned', 'I believed', 'I did not') which are both self-referential and point to her own 'success' (a contentious word in Emma's speech) in directing activity (*E*, p.11) via the use of imperative speech acts: 'you must'; 'do not imagine'; 'comfort me'. Whilst Emma might be able to talk Harriet into breaking and forming various romantic attachments, not all

¹⁰ Armstrong, p.149.

¹¹ Many critics have discussed the role of gossip and gendered discourse in *Emma*. See for instance Christine Roulston, 'Discourse, Gender, and Gossip: Some Reflections on Bakhtin and *Emma*', in *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers*, ed. by Kathy Mezei (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp.40-65; Casey Finch and Peter Bowen, "'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury": Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*', *Representations*, 31 (1990), 1-18; Jan B. Gordon, 'A-filiative Families and Subversive Reproduction: Gossip in Jane Austen', *Genre*, 21.1 (1988), 5-46; Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); Dorice Williams Elliot, 'Teaching about Free Indirect Discourse', in *Approaches to Teaching Austen's 'Emma'*, ed. by Marcia McClintock Folsom (New York: Modern Language Association, 2004), pp.120-26; Patricia Howell Michaelson, 'Language and Gender in *Emma*', in *Approaches to Teaching Austen's 'Emma'*, pp.134-140.

Highbury residents are as easily pliable: Mr Knightley, who frequently displays his own perceptiveness in reading between the lines, assures Mrs Weston that he cannot be “talked out of [his] dislike of [Emma’s] intimacy with Harriet Smith” (*E*, p.32).¹² Harriet, of course, is ‘swayed by half a word’ (*E*, p.183) while shopping at Ford’s, the ‘woollen-draper, linen-draper, and haberdasher’s shop united; the shop first in size and fashion in the place’ (*E*, p.140); unsure of her own mind, she is ready to submit to Emma’s word, whether in fashion or romance.

Whilst the focal site of Ford’s appears to confirm the significance of shopping within Highbury, its role is far more complex. As we observe in Harriet’s swaying over ribbons, the shop is associated with rhetorical persuasion and, later, linguistic ‘double-dealing’ (*E*, p.237). Frank Churchill famously exclaims of Ford’s that it

‘must be the very shop that every body attends every day of their lives, as my father informs me. He comes to Highbury himself, he says, six days out of the seven, and has always business at Ford’s [...] I must buy something at Ford’s. It will be taking out my freedom.— I dare say they sell gloves.’ (*E*, p.157)

In this he is not simply affirming the centrality of Ford’s within the community. Rather, he is employing the hyperbolic mode (common in his speeches) to distract Emma from her unrelenting enquiries into his relationship with Jane Fairfax, thus giving himself time to formulate a response. Selwyn insists that Austen’s ‘description of [Ford’s] as fashionable is gently ironic, in the same way that Frank Churchill’s statement that “every body attends [it] every day of their lives” is: for important shopping people go to Kingston’.¹³ However, the description of Ford’s as ‘first in size and fashion in the place’ is not quite the same as declaring it ‘fashionable’; rather, it suggests rather that Ford’s is fashionable for the community of Highbury, members of which seek the truly fashionable ‘accoutrements of elegant life’ in London, a mere sixteen miles away.¹⁴ Equally, Frank Churchill’s statement is not simply ironic; such an assertion ignores the larger context in which his declaration (a report of a conversation with Mr Weston) occurs. Selwyn’s comments

¹² See Berendsen on Emma’s persuasiveness (p.59).

¹³ Selwyn, ‘Consumer Goods’, p.223.

¹⁴ Tara Ghoshal Wallace, “‘It must be done in London’: The Suburbanization of Highbury’ *Persuasions*, 29 (2007), 67-78 (pp.73-4)

highlight the alacrity with which signs of fashion and fashionability can be misinterpreted and thus how much is to be gained from re-reading these signs; they show how easily readers might take on Emma's focalisation, becoming swayed by Frank's rhetoric and misguided, even blinded, by fashionable commodities.

Frank Churchill displays dexterity in conversation; whilst Mr Knightley sceptically surmises (before meeting him) that 'he can adapt his conversation to the taste of every body' (*E*, p.118), we observe through Emma's focalisation how he moves his auditors through the careful placement of nouns: 'The word *home* made his father look on him with fresh complacency. Emma was directly sure that he knew how to make himself agreeable' (*E*, p.150). However, beyond making himself linguistically 'agreeable', Frank Churchill, using Emma's box of letters, is also able to use words to 'trick' others (*E*, p.273). He assimilates symbols of fashionable consumption into his dialogue, deliberately deploying Ford's, the purchase of gloves, Jane Fairfax's unfashionable hairstyle and the gift of the Broadwood piano as delusive signs through which he can manipulate conversation. He even allows the circulating gossip of Highbury to employ false signs of fashionable folly for him, intentionally beginning the rumour that he is getting his hair cut in London.

Like Frank Churchill's rhetoric, these signs of fashion become subject to interpretive questions. The meaning of the inconvenient gift of the pianoforte (discussed in Chapter 3) varies significantly according to its observers: Emma is swayed by Frank Churchill's gentle prodding into interpreting it as a symbol of Jane's affair with Mr Dixon, yet, for Jane, the fashionable Broadwood's piano 'signifies passion': as Wiltshire notes, the piano is 'loaded with implications – cultural, social, and erotic – that Emma cannot see'.¹⁵ For Jane, the piano conjures up memories of her time in Weymouth, during which she and Frank would sing together. The piano becomes a substitute form of dialogue for the taciturn Jane Fairfax: by playing the piano Jane can communicate her love to Frank in a form of 'eloquence' that 'passes unheard by Emma'.¹⁶

Emma's belief that Frank belongs to the 'fashionable world' establishes in her consciousness the unavoidability of miscommunication between the two: whilst she declares Jane Fairfax 'very elegant' (a contentious term which this chapter

¹⁵ Wiltshire, *Jane Austen: Introductions and Interventions*, p.31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

examines in detail), Frank barely appears to assent to her verdict (*E*, p.153). Emma attributes the divergence of opinion to his fashionability: the term ‘elegant’, she assumes, must possess a different meaning in the ‘fashionable world, if Jane Fairfax could be thought only ordinarily gifted with it’ (*E*, p.153). Emma rightly recognises that the fashionable world holds its own definitions of commonplace terms, a linguistic phenomenon that was observed and satirized in contemporary magazines. Yet, in this instance, Frank’s reticence is part of his ongoing deliberate (mis)use of the signs and language of fashion. In order to hide his romantic alliance with Jane he intentionally persuades others of what Emma identifies as his ‘foppery and nonsense [...] [v]anity, extravagance, love of change, restlessness of temper’ (*E*, p.161). These observations, filtered through the perspective of Emma, recall Henry Crawford’s own dandy-like restlessness. Yet, unlike Henry, Frank encourages others to speak his fashionable identity into being for him. He wants his actions and even his meaningful silences to be misconstrued and translated as evidence of his fashionable foppery. Mr Knightley, scornfully asserting that Frank, with his French amiability, is “‘good-looking, with smooth, plausible manners’”, labels him a “‘puppy’” before he has even met him (*E*, p.118). It is a characteristic that Mrs Elton is quick to scorn: Mr Weston, she observes, has (unlike Robert Ferrars of *Sense and Sensibility*) ‘the least conceit or puppyism’ (*E*, p.252).¹⁷

In the 1791 *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, a satirical periodical addressed to the ‘Fashionable World’ (whom it assures ‘all Hints and Communications – if including innocent raillery only – will be thankfully received, and carefully attended to’) opened with a biographical series on ‘puppies’.¹⁸ The magazine, both satirical and voyeuristic in its reports of the *bon ton*, frequently employs the term ‘puppy’ to describe the men of fashion who possess neither ‘useful’ nor ‘ornamental’ qualities.¹⁹ The unnamed puppy of March 1791 is described as ‘wasteful, avaricious, ostentatious, and narrow [...] To this genuine

¹⁷ According to the *OED*, the word is first used in 1776. See ‘puppyism’, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/154810>> [accessed 16 November 2015]. The narrator of *Sense and Sensibility* refers to the ‘puppyism’ of Robert Ferrars’s ‘manners’ whilst at Gray’s (*SS*, p.165).

¹⁸ ‘Correspondents’, *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, March 1791. See ‘The Untitled Count, and the Titled Matron. Or, the Puppy and Puppiness, of March’, March 1791, pp.3-5 and ‘The Pugilistic Puppy, and his Complying Mistress’, April 1791, pp.43-5.

¹⁹ ‘The Untitled Count, and the Titled Matron. Or, the Puppy and Puppiness, of March’, *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, March 1791, pp.3-5 (p.3).

character may be added certain canine propensities, which appear perfectly applicable to the title of our history; it is a snarling, barking, capricious PUPPY.²⁰



Figure 5.1 ‘The Puppy, of March; The Puppies, of March’, in *The Bon Ton Magazine*, March 1791.

In 1812 the *Lady’s Magazine* published Mrs Peck’s ‘Strictures on Puppyism’, an extract from her new novel, *Vaga: Or, A View of Nature*, which the *Monthly Review* deemed a poor imitation of Sydney Owenson’s fiction.²¹ Mrs Peck attempts to define the modern ‘puppy’: the effeminate creature of fashion is ‘at once a reptile and a beast’ and may, ‘in point of chit-chat, tea-table prattle, dress, and fashions, dispute the prize with the weakest Lady Imbecile that ever performed for the

²⁰ Ibid, p.4.

²¹ ‘Art. 21. Vaga; or a View of Nature’, *Monthly Review*, 71, June 1813, p.213, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/4688449>> [accessed 18 January 2016].

amusement of the company'.²² The derogatory term alluded to a particular sub-species of the man of fashion: it evidenced the need not only for a specific taxonomy of fashionable character, but also a distinct lexicon of fashionable categorisation. Yet, what was striking about accounts of puppyism was that they centred on attempts to define the term: embedded within these definitions of puppies was the recognition that the term itself was imprecise. It is this elusivity of fashionable diction and fashionable categorisation that Austen seizes upon in *Emma*. Fashion, throughout the novel, is associated with imprecise or unstable forms of expression. By naming Frank Churchill a 'puppy' Mr Knightley at once classifies his rival and unintentionally concedes to not quite knowing his character.

5.1 Fashioning Expressions; Expressing Fashion

The connection between language and fashion was the subject of much satire and debate during Austen's lifetime. Equally, it has been a principal focus of modern theories of fashion. In *The Fashion System* (1967) Roland Barthes sought to 'apply the analytical procedures of structural linguistics to a non-linguistic object, Fashion clothing', thus asserting that fashion itself was a form of language, a concept which Alison Lurie extends in *The Language of Clothes* (1980).²³ Whilst Barthes' theory is now largely considered a 'semiological disaster' by contemporary fashion theorists, the question still remains amongst theorists of how and if fashion can communicate as a form of language.²⁴

As we have seen, writers and critics of sensibility appropriated the interconnecting tropes of expression and clothing. Elsewhere, Hugh Blair, to whom both Eleanor Tilney and Mary Crawford allude, and whose lectures appear in Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts* (two volumes of which were published in 1770 and 1784), a popular miscellany read by *Emma*'s characters, adopts sartorial

²² 'Strictures on Puppyism', *LM*, June 1812, pp.276-7 (pp.276-7).

²³ Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, pp.70-85 (p.70). Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (Feltham: Hamlyn, [1980] 1983).

²⁴ Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.96. See also Malcolm Barnard, 'Fashion Statements', in *Fashion Theory: A Reader*, pp.170-181 and Colin Campbell, 'When the Meaning is Not a Message: A Critique of the Consumption as Communication Thesis', in *Buy this Book: Studies in Advertising and Consumption*, ed. by Mica Nava, Andrew Blake, Iain MacRury and Barry Richards (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp.340-351.

metaphors, describing figurative language as ‘only the dress [of an idea]; the sentiment is the body and the substance’.²⁵ In his analogy, Blair used the image of clothing to distinguish between the ornament of language and the substance of feeling. Yet, if clothing provided a constructive metaphor for the mechanics (and failures) of language, language struggled when one wanted to express fashion.²⁶ As is still often the case today, ‘serious’ writers, it was felt, should steer clear of the subject of material fashions altogether.²⁷ Ribeiro argues that this was historically a particularly anglophile outlook: in eighteenth-century France ‘salon culture could embrace the latest modes in dress and design alongside those in literature and philosophy’.²⁸ This is perhaps what Isabella Thorpe attempts yet fails to do when her conversation flows seamlessly from “‘horrid novels’” (hardly the zenith of literary production) to the “‘netting’” of a new cloak, a craft that had become particularly fashionable in the 1790s (NA, p.25).²⁹

As I argue in Chapter One, the fashion periodical sought with difficulty to defend its attention to fashion, insisting that the topic did not compromise its emphasis on female morality, but rather promoted it. One contributor to *La Belle Assemblée* argued that ‘some moralists have censured attention to dress; but very unjustly’, for fashions, as the article insists, are bound to vital matters such as ‘order and regularity in domestic affairs’.³⁰ The periodical magnified the trivialities of fashion in order to defend its discussion of the subject. Yet, as a site where image and text merged, the fashion periodical encountered a persistent conflict between the necessity of discussing fashion and the ostensible inadequacy of language to do so: images were there to present what could not be expressed in writing, yet fashion could not exist outside language.

Recent critical history has articulated the paradoxes and limitations inherent in acts of fashion writing. Andy Stafford, in his assessment of Barthes’ theory of fashion, concludes that for the theorist, fashion ‘at best has nothing to be said about

²⁵ Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, i, pp.349-50.

²⁶ Smith charts the development of the use of clothing imagery to describe language from the classical period to the eighteenth century in *Women, Work, and Clothes*, p.21.

²⁷ See Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, p.20.

²⁸ Aileen Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750-1820* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p.30.

²⁹ Macheski discusses the fashion for netting (p.95).

³⁰ ‘The Ladies’ Toilette; or, Encyclopaedia of Beauty’, *LBA*, March 1806, pp.79-80 (p.79).

it, and at worst invites pure tautology'.³¹ Conversely, in his 1923 edition of Austen's novels R. W. Chapman concedes that '[t]he subjects of dress and dancing are too important to be passed over; but I have judged it prudent to confine myself to documents and to abstain from comment'.³² For Chapman fashion certainly has something to be said about it, yet he 'abstain[s] from comment', instead allowing fashion plates from *Ackerman's Repository of Arts* to speak for him. Similarly, as Clair Hughes observes, Tanner 'betrays a kind of shyness' about writing on dress in *Northanger Abbey* 'by putting a page of his analysis inside brackets'.³³ Even the act of writing about fashion in Austen has historically been accompanied by an implicit sense of embarrassment, suggesting that the topic breaks the bounds of serious academic discussion. This embarrassment is tied to the issue of gender. As Virginia Woolf observed, extolling the 'real life' values of Austen and Brontë,

the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex [...] Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are "important", and the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes "trivial".³⁴

As Chapter 1 indicates, men were just as enthusiastic as women in their participation in the rising fashion system, yet in the popular imagination fashion remained a putatively feminine and thus frivolous preoccupation.

For the eighteenth-century writer certain forms of language were vilified as fashionable themselves.³⁵ Austen was sensitive to fashionable slang and to the modish misappropriation of words: as we have seen, her juvenilia ridicule the 'gap between word and meaning in the fashionable world', depicting the moral inconsistency of her fashionable sentimental heroines.³⁶ Equally, she famously revels in the 'potential for language to be misused' in *Northanger Abbey*, in which the pedantic Henry Tilney ridicules Catherine Morland's misapplication of the adjective 'nice' to describe *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, thus 'drawing attention to [...] the

³¹ Andy Stafford, 'Clothes, Fashion and System in the Writings of Roland Barthes: "Something Out of Nothing"', in *The Language of Fashion*, pp.118-164 (p.123-4).

³² R. W. Chapman, 'Appendix: Manners of the Age', in Jane Austen, *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 5 vols, ed. by R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), iv, pp.499-517 (p.507).

³³ Hughes, p.5.

³⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, ed. by Jenifer Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.80.

³⁵ See Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, p.30.

³⁶ Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, p.189.

slippage of meaning that results from the vagaries of fashionable usage'.³⁷ In *Emma*, however, Austen examines not only how one might talk fashionably, but how one can talk *about* fashion.

5.2 Talking about Fashion

Mrs Elton, the other Highbury newcomer who seeks to style a fashionable identity (for quite different reasons) is far less dexterous in incorporating the signs of fashion into dialogue. In her first conversation with Emma she gauchely mentions her sister's 'barouche-landau' three times in one speech in order to ensure that the affluence and gentility of her connections is conveyed (*E*, p.214). She recalls how her 'brother and sister [...] have their barouche-landau, of course, which holds four perfectly; and therefore, without saying any thing of *our* carriage, we should be able to explore the different beauties extremely well'" (*E*, p.214). Her rhetoric transparently does exactly what it feigns not to do: speak of her own consumer wealth. There is no trickery in Mrs Elton's conversation (unlike Frank's), only patent boasting. Mrs Elton's speeches, like her 'exertions of leadership', offend 'because of their insistent publicity, not because of their intrinsic fraudulence'.³⁸

Mrs Elton is presented as an aspiring woman of fashion by the sceptical Emma ten chapters before she has even laid eyes on her:

Part of every winter she had been used to spend in Bath; but Bristol was her home [...] all the grandeur of the connection seemed dependent on the elder sister, who was *very well married*, to a gentleman in a *great way*, near Bristol, who kept two carriages! (*E*, p.144)

Emma picks out striking details from the 'history' of 'Miss Hawkins' that has been relayed to her through Highbury's gossip: her £10,000, her winters in Bath and her sister's carriages. As the narrator later confirms, Mrs Elton's

Bath habits made evening-parties perfectly natural to her [...] She was a little shocked at the want of two drawing rooms, at the poor attempt at

³⁷ Mandal, 'Language', p.24. Claudia L. Johnson similarly observes that *Northanger Abbey* 'stages many discussions about the proper use of words'. Johnson, 'Introduction', p.xvi.

³⁸ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, p.129.

rout-cakes, and there being no ice in the Highbury card parties. Mrs. Bates, Mrs. Perry, Mrs. Goddard and others, were a good deal behind hand in knowledge of the world, but she would soon shew [*sic*] them how every thing ought to be arranged. (*E*, p.225)

The narration moves from a third person internal narrator to free indirect discourse: it is Mrs Elton, not the narrator, who believes that she will show them the ways of the fashionable world. Mrs Elton declares that her move to Highbury signals a 'retirement' from 'the *world*' of 'parties, balls, plays', alluding to the fashionable circles of Bath (*E*, p.216). Yet, like many of her speech acts, there is a gap between the reality and the expression: her move is no such retirement at all. The crucial detail, picked up by Emma, is that 'Bristol was her home': the city, as Emma knows, is mercantile, not fashionable. Nevertheless, Mrs Elton performs as a woman of fashion, expecting her new Highbury neighbours to delight in the notion that she, with her metropolitan airs, has deigned to settle amongst them. Mrs Elton describes herself and her husband as "quite the fashion" in Highbury, yet the significance of such a claim is undermined by her condescension towards the ostensibly unfashionable tastes of Highbury (*E*, p.227).

Emma, who frequently displays a particular self-consciousness (and self-righteousness) in her lexical choices, turns to the apparent meaninglessness of words and pleasantries to describe her new neighbour: 'Emma would not allow herself entirely to form an opinion of the lady, and on no account to give one, beyond the nothing-meaning terms of being "elegantly dressed, and very pleasing"' (*E*, p.211). Of course, a description of Mrs Elton has preceded her arrival in the form of Highbury's omnipresent gossip: the narrator 'sarcastically'³⁹ observes that

A week had not passed since Miss Hawkins's name was first mentioned in Highbury, before she was, by some means or other, discovered to have every recommendation of person and mind; to be handsome, elegant, highly accomplished, and perfectly amiable [...]. (*E*, p.142)

On first reading, Emma's observation of Mrs Elton's elegance mirrors the assertions of the "Highbury gossips!" (*E*, p.47). Yet, the narration insists that Emma's

³⁹ J. F. Burrows, *Jane Austen's 'Emma'* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), p.94.

observations are ‘nothing-meaning’, and Emma, lingering upon the term ‘elegant’, seeks to qualify its use:

She did not really like her. She would not be in a hurry to find fault, but she suspected that there was no elegance; - ease, but not elegance. – She was almost sure that for a young woman, a stranger, a bride, there was too much ease. Her person was rather good; her face not unpretty; but neither feature, nor air, nor voice, nor manner, were elegant. Emma thought at least it would turn out so. (*E*, p.211)

The entire chapter opening, which follows Emma’s interior thoughts, oscillates between psychonarration, interior monologue (represented as speech) and free indirect discourse. It displays how Austen uses voices, and Emma’s internal voice in particular, to create ironic humour: Emma flatters herself that she cannot ‘entirely [...] form an opinion of the lady’, only to do just that. Just as Mrs Elton does exactly what she feigns not to, Emma maintains that she is not ‘in a hurry to find fault’, only to venture precipitately that Mrs Elton will ‘turn out’ to possess many faults, including a lack of ‘elegance’.⁴⁰ Emma’s view of Mrs Elton is quite distinct from that given by Highbury, a community in which Emma similarly discovers little elegance: “‘There, to be vulgar, was distinction, and merit’ (*E*, p.131).

Harriet relies on the spoken judgements of others in order to understand her society: “‘I did not know she had any taste’”, she says of Jane Fairfax, “‘Nobody talked about it’” (*E*, p.182). Asked by Harriet to voice her judgement, Emma returns to her ‘nothing-meaning terms’: Mrs Elton is “[v]ery nicely dressed, indeed; a remarkably elegant gown” (*E*, p.212). As Austen narrates: ‘Mrs. Elton’s praise passed from one mouth to another as it ought to do, unimpeded by Miss Woodhouse, who readily continued her first contribution and talked with a good grace of her being “‘very pleasant and elegantly dressed’” (*E*, p.220); Emma’s ‘nothing-meaning’ contributions do not challenge the flow of gossip.

‘Elegant’, a word which reverberates throughout the novel, is concurrently privileged and dismissed by Emma.⁴¹ Emma at first associates Mrs Elton’s elegance

⁴⁰ For an analysis of Austen’s movement between free indirect discourse, interior monologue and ‘psychonarration’ in *Emma* see Elliot, ‘Teaching about Free Indirect Discourse’, pp.120-26.

⁴¹ The words ‘elegant’, ‘elegance’, ‘elegantly’ appear 48 times in *Emma*, 29 in *Sense and Sensibility*, 23 in *Pride and Prejudice*, 21 in *Mansfield Park*, 6 in *Northanger Abbey* and 18 in *Persuasion*. Many critics have noted the significance of the word in *Emma*. Phillipps, for instance, declares that it is a ‘key’ word (p.51), while Barbara M. Benedict argues that it is the ‘most contentious value in *Emma*’.

with her sartorial appearance. Whilst critics generally concur that descriptions of clothing in Austen's writing 'are conspicuous for their near absence', here Emma refers to Mrs Elton's clothes, albeit through abstract terminology.⁴² Yet the way in which Austen narrates Emma's observations focuses the reader's attention not on Mrs Elton's attire, but rather on Emma's choice of language and meaning; again, acts of interpretation and observation are self-referential. Built into Austen's description is the confounding assertion that the language in which Emma expresses judgement, disclosed via interior monologue, means 'nothing'. Austen's technique is reminiscent of her juvenilia in which the author lingers upon the 'nothing-meaning' trivialities of sartorial fashion only to suggest that such ostensibly inconsequential details are in fact loaded with unidentified meanings: in 'Frederic and Elfrida' the opening narrative centres on the purchase of a 'wished-for Bonnet' which, when purchased, 'ended this little adventure, much to the satisfaction of all parties' (C, p.3). The 'adventure' has been all about a bonnet, the significance of which we have not learnt; such narratives, common in her juvenilia, provoke a frustrating 'resistance to interpretation'.⁴³

Tanner argues that *Emma* is notable amongst Austen's works for the 'verbal currency' that 'nothing-meaning terms' carry amongst its characters.⁴⁴ Miss Bates' speech on first reading exemplifies this: a 'great talker upon little matters', she is 'full of trivial communication and harmless gossip' (E, p.18). Yet in reality her monologues are full of important information and details, both for the reader and for Emma. The apparent triviality of characters' discourse frequently relates to issues of fashion. McMaster contends that Mrs Elton's conversation is 'largely for show and advantage rather than for communication and exchange' and places her alongside Austen's other fashion-obsessed characters such as Isabella Thorpe and Camilla

Barbara M. Benedict, 'Jane Austen and the Culture of Circulating Libraries: The Construction of Female Literacy', in *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century 'Women's Fiction' and Social Engagement*, ed. by Paula R. Backscheider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp.147-99 (p.191).

⁴² Berendsen, p.51. Berendsen points to critics such as Lefkowitz whose 'observations imply that interest in artificial means of enhancing beauty, dress included is suspect', and Hollander who, 'stresses that Austen refuses to give to clothing and considerations regarding clothes the prominent place they take up in reality exactly because she recognizes their importance' (p.51). See Lori Hope Lefkowitz, *The Character of Beauty in the Victorian Novel* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, [1984] 1987), p.25 and Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1978] 1988), p.424.

⁴³ Martin, 'The Madness of Jane Austen', p.85.

⁴⁴ Tanner, p.202.

Stanley who ‘can convey’, to quote Austen’s *Catharine, or the Bower*, “no information ... but in fashions”⁴⁵ Camilla Stanley from *Catharine, or the Bower* (*Volume the Third* of Austen’s juvenilia) is a caricature of the fashionable young woman who, thinking of nothing but her dress, fails to correspond meaningfully with Catharine. It is possible that in Camilla Stanley Austen was parodying the frequently inadequate communication of unpaid fashion correspondents upon which contemporary fashion magazines relied. The editor of the *Lady’s Magazine* at several points enquires whether their monthly fashion contributor, Charlotte Stanley, can resume correspondence after periods of silence:

Charlotte Stanley must recollect that we have frequently called on her for a regular account of the variations in female dress. Several competitors have darted up in that department, whom we have rejected on account of her priority and precision: but if she should still remain silent, we must beg some other female friend to supply her place.⁴⁶

Whether or not Austen was aware of Charlotte Stanley and substituted ‘Charlotte’ for the more Burneyesque ‘Camilla’, we cannot be certain, yet her depiction of the fashion correspondent who leads to odd silences and interruptions and who flouts the rules of communication sheds light on Austen’s examination of the eruptions and disruptions encountered in discussions of fashion.

The ‘poor’ Miss Bates is anything but a woman of fashion, yet her talk too is marked by its incoherence and a propensity to fall back onto the topic of dress: “if [Jane Fairfax] does but send her aunt the pattern of a stomacher, or knit a pair of garters for her grandmother, one hears of nothing else for a month”, Emma complains (*E*, p.70). Miss Bates is consumed by the homemade production and alteration of clothing: whilst at Ford’s she informs the shopkeeper that Jane is taking in a pair of gloves, which are “a little too large about the wrist” (*E*, p.186). Yet Emma’s mimicry, which she conveys as Miss Bates’ mere prattle, reveals that Jane Fairfax is to a certain extent denied access to fashion: although “delighted” by new ribbons and accessories she must alter and sew the sartorial essentials of her family herself (*E*, p.186). Miss Bates’s garrulousness thus furnishes the scene in which Frank Churchill pokes fun at Jane’s hair with further meaning: unlike Mrs Elton and

⁴⁵ McMaster, ‘Mrs. Elton and Other Verbal Aggressors’, p.75.

⁴⁶ ‘To Our Correspondents’, *LM*, October 1777, p.506.

Emma who have servants to do their hair, or Catherine Morland whose hair is ‘cut and dressed by the best hand’ (*NA*, p.10), Jane has to make-do with her own skills. Frank’s joke is that she has got it wrong. Austen, or indeed Emma, directs us to ‘nothing-meaning’ dialogue – ironically, at a party where one can, as Mrs Weston believes, “say every thing”, Emma is reduced to mimicry of Miss Bates (*E*, p.175) – yet the trivialities of petticoats and ribbons are surprisingly revelatory.

Emma’s characters are continually speaking of, or listening to, ‘nonsense’, a prevalent term in the novel which attests to the narrative’s pervasive sense of meaninglessness in dialogue and words. When we are not told that characters’ words mean “nothing at all” (*E*, p.32), we are often left with gaps in conversation, which like Emma, we might fill with imagined speech. ‘Mrs. Elton’, for instance,

was evidently wanting to be complimented herself – and it was, ‘How do you like my gown? – How do you like my trimming? – How has Wright done my hair?’ – with many other relative questions, all answered with patient politeness. (*E*, p.254)

The reader does not get to hear the patiently polite answers represented by the silently expressive dashes. These silences, contradictions and ostensibly ‘nothing-meaning’ comments recall numerous instances in Austen’s writing in which the subject of fashion is broached. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet is delighted to hear Mrs Gardiner’s news of the new fashion for long sleeves and wants to know more. ‘Mrs. Gardiner’, we are told, ‘made her sister a slight answer, and in compassion to her nieces turned the conversation’ (*PP*, p.108). In *Sense and Sensibility* Anne Steele’s preoccupation with fashion and dress is manifest in her grammatical failures: she speaks of the ‘beaux’ (*SS*, p.93) whom she admires ‘provided they dress smart and behave civil’ (*SS*, p.163).⁴⁷ In this case the subject of fashion resists the act of articulation. Indeed, Anne, refuting the romantic implications of her pink ribbons – “the Doctor’s favourite colour” – via shameless apophasis, wanders “away to a subject on which Elinor had nothing to say” (*SS*, p.205). Discussion of fashion brings conversations to a halt and results in lexical deterioration.

⁴⁷ Phillipps notes the Steele sisters’ confusion with the past tense (p.147).

Austen's characters thus wander onto the topic of fashion, yet Austen leaves the reader with curious silences, with sentences cut off by abrupt dashes and with tantalizing yet 'nothing-meaning' words. Austen, we know, had plenty to say on the subject of fashion: Josephine Ross's calculations reveal that in one letter alone Austen took more than two hundred words to describe a new gown.⁴⁸ Yet even in her letters Austen gives expression to the apparent limitations of language, drawing sketches of bodices and patterns of lace when words fail. However, in her correspondence Austen also reflects on the sociolect of the more abstract concept of fashionability itself, remarking in a letter to her sister that her acquaintance Miss Holder has 'an idea of your being remarkably lively; therefore get ready the proper selection of adverbs, & due scraps of Italian & French'.⁴⁹ As in popular fashion-arbiter Lord Chesterfield's *The World by Fitz-Adam* (1755-57), which describes fashion (with the clichéd phrase) as the possession of 'a certain *je ne sçay quoy* [sic]', fashion is seemingly beyond expression yet is inherently tied to forms of expression.⁵⁰

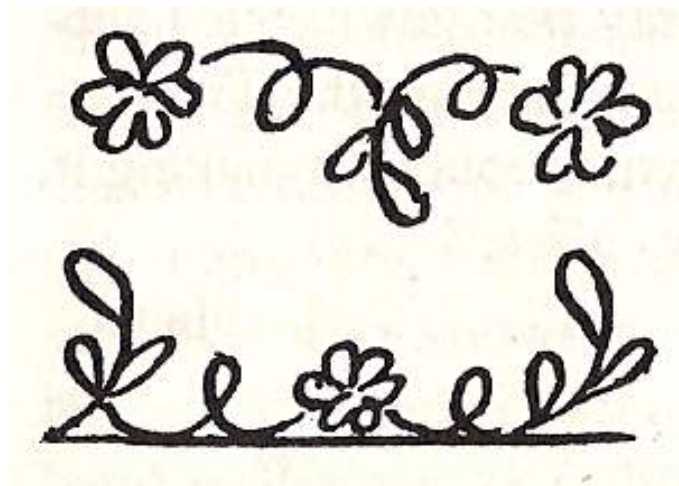


Figure 5.2 'My Cloak is come home, & here follows the pattern of its' [sic] lace'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Josephine Ross, *Jane Austen: A Companion* (London: John Murray, 2002), p.80.

⁴⁹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 26th-27th May 1801, p.90

⁵⁰ Lord Chesterfield, *The World by Adam Fitz-Adam*, 6 vols (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1755-57), iv, p.90. Also quoted in Hannah Greig, 'Leading the Fashion: The Material Culture of London's *Beau Monde*', in *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*, pp.293-313 (p.297).

⁵¹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 2 June 1799, p.42.

5.3 Emma's Elegance

As Amanda Vickery has observed, during the eighteenth century there existed a 'vocabulary of beauty' which furnished fashionable objects with meaning and value.⁵² Many of these terms, such as 'elegant', 'neat', 'smart', lie beyond objective and precise definition. Whilst Austen employs these adjectives throughout her work, she recurrently uses the term 'elegant' in *Emma*. The term is held in particular esteem by Emma, yet Burrows has argued that because her 'moods vary with dazzling rapidity, it is idle to single out a passage for "close reading" and to declare triumphantly that this is the real Emma'; meanings of words, he concludes, vary 'significantly as the novel proceeds'.⁵³ The verbal adroitness of *Emma*'s characters is dependent on mood only to an extent. Frank Churchill, having upset Jane Fairfax, no longer delights his once relished auditors: through the focaliser and voice of Emma, Austen narrates that he has 'nothing worth hearing' (*E*, p.289).

Yet Austen dramatises the internal process of Emma's mind as she muses over words and their meanings. Reflecting on the unjustness of her own dislike of Jane Fairfax, Emma, observing Jane for the first time in two years, is 'struck' by her 'appearance and manners':

Jane Fairfax was very *elegant*, remarkably *elegant*; and she had herself the highest value for *elegance*. Her height was pretty, just such as almost every body would think tall, and nobody could think very tall; her figure particularly graceful; her size a most becoming medium, between fat and thin, though a slight appearance of ill-health seemed to point out the likeliest evil of the two. Emma could not but feel all this; and then, her face—her features—there was more beauty in them altogether than she had remembered; it was not regular, but it was very pleasing beauty. Her eyes, a deep grey, with dark eye-lashes and eyebrows, had never been denied their praise; but the skin, which she had been used to cavil at, as wanting colour, had a clearness and delicacy which really needed no fuller bloom. It was a style of beauty, of which *elegance* was the reigning character, and as such, she must, in honour, by all her principles, admire it:—*elegance*, which, whether of person or of mind, she saw so little in Highbury. There, not to be vulgar, was distinction, and merit. (*E*, p.131, emphasis mine)

To conclude her examination, Emma considers 'what all this elegance was destined to, what she was going to sink from, how she was going to live', thus 'determining

⁵² Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p.178.

⁵³ Burrows, p.9.

that she would dislike her no longer' (*E*, p.131). In the short passage the words 'elegant' and 'elegance' appear a remarkable six times; likewise, in her later 'nothing-meaning' judgement of Mrs Elton she uses the terms five times over several paragraphs. The uncharacteristic overuse of 'elegant' and its variants is deliberately striking: it signals that these are Emma's, not the narrator's, words. The narrative is filtered through the mind of Emma; the passage adopts Emma's lexicon in order to dramatise her internal thought processes. Emma is working over the words 'elegant' and 'elegance' in her mind in a process of internal persuasion: following the movement of her thoughts, we observe how she wills herself with these words to try, once and for all, to like Jane Fairfax just as she persuades herself with the same words that Mrs Elton possesses no real merits.

Elegance has the power here to redeem Jane Fairfax. Yet Emma's value for Jane's elegance is not necessarily discordant with her devaluing reference to the 'nothing-meaning terms of "being elegantly dressed, and very pleasing"' (*E*, p.211). It is not simply, as Burrow might claim, that Emma's mood, and thus moral lexicon, has altered. Emma's assertions do not suggest that elegance itself is meaningless, but rather relate such meaningless to Mrs Elton's fashionable dress, suggesting that that true elegance goes beyond sartorial appearance. The term 'elegance' is so contentious in *Emma* because of its complex relationship with fashion, an ambiguous association which is emphasised in Emma's private musings on what might define the 'distinct sort of elegance' that exists in the 'fashionable world' (*E*, p.153).

As I indicate in Chapter One, the association between elegance and fashion was complex: whilst some commentators and critics embraced 'elegance' as the antithesis of fashion and novelty, contemporary fashion magazines sought arduously to unite elegance with fashion via an appeal to sensibility and the ethics of good taste. 'Elegance' was one of the defining features of the *Lady's Magazine* according to its 1789 'Address to the Public': it claimed to offer 'Prints of Ladies elegantly dressed in the prevailing Mode of London and Paris', prints which were, 'for Elegance', themselves unequalled.⁵⁴ The term resounds throughout the publication. An article on 'Ladies' Dresses on her Majesty's Birth-day' contained the word 'elegant' no fewer than ten times to describe types of embroidery, tissue, dress and

⁵⁴ See 'Address to the Public', *LM*, January 1789, pp.3-4 (p.3).

petticoats.⁵⁵ As in Austen's dramatisation of Emma's thoughts, 'elegance' is repeated without restraint. As one advert for Mr Barclay's Showrooms at Frith Street, Soho suggests when it advertises an 'Elegant and Fashionable Assortment of Morning and Evening Dresses, Spencers, Pelisses', elegance and fashion were not synonymous, but interrelated terms.⁵⁶ The words frequently accompanied one another: the superficial Sir Walter, who longs for the fashionable company of the wealthy Dalrymples in Bath and cares only for beauty (he vows not to send Mary "a new hat and pelisse" because it would "tempt her to go out in sharp winds, and grow coarse" [P, p.116]), describes Mr Elliot's 'air of elegance and fashion' (P, p.114). Elegance, elusive and ostensibly indefinable, alluded to something in appearance and being beyond mere modishness or rank: like fashion itself, it appeared to signify a certain 'je ne sais quoy'.

As I have suggested elsewhere, fashion was perceived as having the ability to distort one's sense of beauty: it had, defiantly and somewhat perversely, become the standard of taste and thus a marker of elegance. The definition of elegance, however, remained subjective and ephemeral; the gap between word and referent in both matters of fashion and fashionable diction itself was conspicuous. As David Hume had noted in his essay 'Of the Standard of Taste', critics may be

united in applauding elegance, propriety, simplicity, spirit in writing; and in blaming fustian, affectation, coldness, and a false brilliant: But when critics come to particulars, this seeming unanimity vanishes; and it is found, that they had affixed a very different meaning to their expressions.⁵⁷

Whilst critics might share the same lexicon, they did not always share the same meaning, a fact of which Emma is acutely conscious.

Critics of Austen have attempted to define the term 'elegant', and, frequently noting that it bears a relation to fashion and yet is separate from it, are often at a loss for words. Tanner asks

⁵⁵ 'Ladies' Dresses on her Majesty's Birth-day', *LM*, January 1810, pp.33-36.

⁵⁶ 'Monthly Compendium of Literary, Fashionable and Domestic Advertisements', *LBA*, February 1807, p.112.

⁵⁷ Hume, 'Standard of Taste', p.204.

What exactly is this ‘elegance’, since it is clearly not a matter of fine shoes and fancy hats (as Mrs Elton would perhaps have supposed)? It is something impalpable, but something which by its very presence (measure and discern that how you will) makes clear where and among whom it is absent.⁵⁸

To understand ‘elegance’ as simply relating to sartorial fashion is, he suggests, superficial; rather, it is an ‘indefinable commingling of manners, morals, and style’.⁵⁹ Jane Nardin, on the other hand, suggests that to be elegant in Austen’s novels is ‘to follow the rules of social convention with aesthetic flair and perfect assurance’, and opposes it to terms such as civility, decorum, and manners, which she sees as bearing multiple meanings.⁶⁰ Surely this is an oversimplification of the term. When Elizabeth Bennet protests that she does not possess ‘the affection and coquetry of an elegant female’ (*PP*, p.84), she uses the term ‘elegant’ in quite a different manner from Emma in her observation of Jane Fairfax: in Elizabeth’s usage it is almost indistinguishable from behaviours that are pejoratively ‘fashionable’. Whilst Burrows interprets elegance as a malleable word which in *Emma*, ‘can be used as occasion requires’, Pimentel, rather than conceding to its inexpressibility, looks to contemporary definitions of the term to better define it, concluding that elegance is not ‘innate, but made, the result of effort and exertion’ and that true elegance must ‘permeate the surface and bind one’s mind to sensibility’.⁶¹

In spite of the critical dispute over the term ‘elegant’, many critics have failed to take into account the new and complex ways in which the term was used as part of fashionable discourse in the late eighteenth century. To many eighteenth-century readers and writers the term ‘elegant’ specifically denoted that which was modern and stylish. 1780 saw the emergence of the noun ‘elegant’, denoting a ‘fashionable and elegant person’ or ‘a fop or dandy’, attesting to the way in which the ‘elegant’ and ‘fashion’ were becoming lexically intertwined.⁶² Throughout the period there was a surge in self-proclaimed ‘elegant’ miscellanies and pocketbooks: the term became shorthand for material that was not only tasteful, stylish and popular but

⁵⁸ Tanner, p.191.

⁵⁹ Tanner, p.193.

⁶⁰ Jane Nardin, *Those Elegant Decorums: The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen’s Novels* (Albany: State University of New York press, 1973), p.12.

⁶¹ Burrows, p.124; A. Rose Pimentel “‘All the rational pleasures of an elegant society’: Re-examining Austen’s view of London”, *Persuasions*, 33 (2011), 215-222 (pp.219, 220).

⁶² ‘Elegant’, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/411943>> [accessed 19 May 2015].

which, self-referentially, could signal the good taste, judgement and fashionability of their readers. *Elegant Entertainments* was published in 1793 and comprised of a collection of tales including James Boaden's *Fountainville Forest*, a dramatic adaptation of Ann Radcliffe's recently published *Romance of the Forest* (1791), a gothic novel which Harriet Smith recommends to Robert Martin; a series of 'Most Elegant' pocket books for ladies were published between the late 1770s and early 1790s, which contained engravings of fashionable new dresses; *The Elegant Repository and New-Print Magazine* published between 1791-2 contained a collection of fine engravings, including scenes from Shakespeare and ancient architecture; 1791 saw the publication of *Elegant Poems* (still being reprinted by 1815), which collected Pope's *Essay on Man*, Robert Blair's *The Grave* and Thomas Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard', a poem which Mrs Elton pitifully misquotes; in 1813 the 6 pence pamphlet *Ladies Polite Museum of Harmony: A Choice Collection of Elegant and Fashionable Songs* was published, which printed songs from the fashionable parties of Vauxhall and Covent Garden; and in 1818 *The Elegant Miniature Pocketbook* was published, which included the usual miscellany of enigmas and charades (popular with Emma and Harriet) as well as ruled pages for memoranda, lists of coach fares and historical and botanical essays. These publications marketed themselves as 'elegant' in what had become the 'age of elegance'. The term, however, is ambivalent and has a dual purpose: in some instances the term was used to market fashionable pursuits yet 'elegance' is also opposed to fashionability. The poetry published in *Elegant Poems*, for instance, were certainly not fashionable; rather, they were regarded as timeless examples of good literary taste, thus representing a standard of enduring taste in opposition to the temporality of ever-changing fashionable tastes.

Vicesimus Knox's best-selling compilation *Elegant Extracts*, which was in its tenth edition by 1816, is read by Robert Martin, Harriet and Emma. The miscellany demonstrates a recurrent interest in issues of elegance, taste, fashion and style, conveyed via an array of authors and texts including Blair's lectures, the prescriptive commentaries of *The Spectator*, issues of Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler*, the satires of Smollett and Swift, and, of course, Lord Chesterfield's frequently quoted musings on

fashionable life.⁶³ ‘Thoughts on Elegance’, an extract written by schoolmaster and writer James Usher and taken from his popular *Clio, or, A Discourse of Taste, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1767) (in its fourth edition by 1803), is reprinted in Knox’s *Elegant Extracts*. He praises the ‘inexpressible loveliness’ of elegance, and suggests that any attempt to pin down its definition would have the effect of destroying it: he argues that this ‘most conspicuous part of beauty, that is perceived and acknowledged by every body, is yet utterly inexplicable, [...] [and] retires from our search when we would discover what it is’.⁶⁴

However, Usher’s discussion of ‘personal elegance’, by which he means ‘the morality of polite behaviour and social grace’ and a submissive femininity, quickly leads him onto sartorial fashion.⁶⁵ Usher attempts to outline the perplexing relationship between elegance and fashion. He argues that the ‘beauty of dress results from mode or fashion’, but that fashion must not restrict ‘the elegance of the form’.⁶⁶ According to Usher, true elegance is, elusively, a ‘reflection of the soul’, yet fashionable dress is often used ‘to make amends for want of true elegance’.⁶⁷ He thus delineates two forms of elegance: ‘outward elegance, which is formed by the mode’ and which cannot always be defined due to ‘the quickness and variety of its changes’, and an inner personal elegance.⁶⁸ Usher’s argument sheds some light on Emma’s use of the term. Whilst Jane Fairfax evidently possesses a personal elegance, Mrs Elton uses fashionable attire as what Usher would call a ‘counterfeit coin’ of elegance.⁶⁹ Indeed, we are told not that Emma *knows* that Mrs Elton lacks elegance, but rather that she ‘suspected that there was no elegance’ (*E*, p.211). Just as Usher’s text emphasises the internal capacities of women to judge elegance, Austen dramatises Emma’s inward judgements in her repeated exploration of the term

⁶³ In a notice ‘To Parents, Guardians and Governesses’, *LBA* notes that its section on the ‘Beauties of British poets will hereafter be confined to eight pages monthly, but by degrees they will compose a complete collection of elegant Extracts, and the Works of all the British Poets, embellished also with their Portraits, which may be detached, so as to form a complete body of elegant Extracts’, September 1808, pp.1-2 (p.2).

⁶⁴ James Usher, ‘Thoughts on Elegance’, in *Elegant Extracts*, ed. by Vicesimus Knox, 9th edn (London, 1808), pp.509-14 (p.509).

⁶⁵ Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.106, 109.

⁶⁶ Usher, ‘Thoughts on Elegance’, p.511.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.513, 512, 509.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.513.

‘elegant’.⁷⁰ The dress, Emma *suspects*, is a counterfeit coin, and Mrs Elton’s form of elegance is nothing-meaning because it starts and ends at her dress: she is only ‘as elegant as lace and pearls could make her’ (*E*, p.229). This renders Emma’s judgement anything but ‘nothing-meaning’: whilst it allows her to voice a judgement of Mrs Elton that is acceptable, even banal, to the gossips of Highbury, her judgement is also a profound assessment of Mrs Elton’s being. As with Emma’s insistence to Mr Knightley that Frank Churchill’s placement of the word ‘Dixon’ in front of Jane Fairfax “‘all meant nothing’” (*E*, p.275), ‘nothing’ in *Emma* is often loaded and often means ‘something’.

As soon as Mrs Elton begins to speak she exhibits the lack of elegance that Emma suspects by mere external observation; as Austen had declared in a criticism of her niece’s deployment of fictional dialogue, she is ‘familiar and inelegant’ in speech.⁷¹ As Woodworth asserts, ‘[f]ashion and fashionable affiliation’ during the period ‘is about self-fashioning: something that can be controlled by the individual’.⁷² Much of this self-fashioning is done, in *Emma*, via speech. Frank Churchill’s dialogue is marked by its playful, confident rudeness: “‘Our companions are excessively stupid’” he whispers to Emma at Box Hill, “‘What shall we do to rouse them? Any nonsense will serve. They *shall* talk’” (*E*, p.290), as well as by its hyperbolic and ‘self-willed’ (*E*, p.196) flattery: “‘Miss Woodhouse’” he declares, “‘you have the art of giving pictures in a few words. Exquisite, quite exquisite!’” (*E*, p.195); “‘Elegant, agreeable manners, I was prepared for,’” he observes to Emma of Mrs Weston, “‘but I confess that, considering every thing, I had not expected more than a very tolerably well-looking woman of a certain age’” (*E*, p.151). As Roger Sales argues, Frank, in response to Emma’s criticism that he has wasted a whole day getting his hair cut, deploys the kind of ‘elegant, polished one-liner that was cultivated by both Brummell and Henry Crawford: “I have no pleasure in seeing my friends, unless I can believe myself fit to be seen’”; his ‘rhetorical costume is that of the dandy’.⁷³ Whilst I have suggested that Frank’s dandification is a more complex performance than this (it deliberately misleads), Mrs Elton earnestly adopts the rhetorical costume of fashion yet, in doing so, inadvertently presents herself as a

⁷⁰ On judging in Usher’s text see Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, p.111.

⁷¹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Anna Austen, 9-18 September 1814, p.275.

⁷² Woodworth, p.138.

⁷³ Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, p.144, p.145.

female ‘puppyess’.⁷⁴ She declares herself a woman of ‘the first circle’ and ‘the world’ (*E*, p.234) through her self-declarative and self-referential speech acts: she is, not unlike Emma, always telling others who she is and ‘tirelessly asserting her centrality in the minds of others’.⁷⁵ Fashionability, which concerns how the self is presented to and perceived by others, is fittingly relayed through a self-conscious performance of dialogue that points persistently to the self.

Aware that over-ornamentation ‘destroys [...] elegance’, as Usher maintains,⁷⁶ Mrs Elton claims in an uninvited ‘half-whisper to Jane’:

‘I have the greatest dislike to the idea of being over-trimmed – quite a horror of finery. I must put on a few ornaments now, because it is expected of me. A bride, you know, must appear like a bride, but my natural taste is all for simplicity; a simple style of dress is so infinitely preferable to finery. But I am quite in the minority, I believe; few people seem to value simplicity of dress, - shew and finery are every thing. I have some notion of putting such a trimming as this to my white and silver poplin. Do you think it will look well?’ (*E*, p.236-7)

Mrs Elton uses Jane Fairfax as an echo chamber; unlike Emma who argues with her over the location of the ‘garden of England’ (*E*, p.214) Jane will not contradict her. Several pages later Jane is yet again bombarded with Mrs Elton’s over-enthusiastic and apophastic sartorial excuses:

‘Nobody can think less in general than I do – but upon such an occasion as this, when everybody’s eyes are so much upon me, and in compliment to the Westons – who I have no doubt are giving this ball chiefly to do me honour – I would not wish to be inferior to others. And I see very few pearls in the room except mine.’ (*E*, p.254)

The woman who protests the least interest in fashion gives the most attention to it. Not only is Mrs Elton’s speech to Jane Fairfax studded with self-delusory declarations, but it also echoes the language of the fashion periodical which promoted the neoclassical style of ‘lightness, elegance, and simplicity’ in clothing.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ On the female term ‘puppyess’ see ‘The Untitled Count, and the Titled Matron. Or, the Puppy and Puppyess, of March’, *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, March 1791, pp.3-5.

⁷⁵ Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, p.129.

⁷⁶ Usher, ‘Thoughts on Elegance’, p.511.

⁷⁷ ‘Fashions for April’, *LBA*, March 1814, pp.131-6 (p.132).

Indeed, imagining the ‘gipsy party’ that will take place at Donwell Abbey, Mrs Elton bores Mr Knightley with an image of her dress: it will be

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. And Jane will have such another. There is to be no form or parade – a sort of gipsy party. – [...] Every thing as natural and simple as possible.’ (*E*, p.279)

Mrs Elton is aping the latest fashions: in February 1814 *La Belle Assemblée* observed that ‘gipsy’ fashions were held in ‘great estimation’, whilst Colleen A. Sheehan notes that in 1811 the Prince Regent celebrated his birthday with a “‘gipse party’” and “‘an elegant cold PIC NIC’”.⁷⁸

It is not necessarily her attention to dress which renders Mrs Elton’s speech ridiculous, but rather its insincerity, its forcefulness, its self-referential style and the gap between what she says and what is meant. Mrs Elton’s repeated and resolute acts of self-description – ‘Nobody can be more devoted to home than I am’ (*E*, p.214); ‘I am doatingly fond of music’ (*E*, p.216); ‘I always stand up for women’ (*E*, p.240); ‘I never compliment’ (*E*, p.252); ‘I have a vast dislike to puppies’ (*E*, p.252) – are not only unique to her way of speaking, but are transparently false. Mrs Elton’s fashionability is painfully conveyed through her linguistic self-fashioning and related acts of self-narration: Mrs Elton declares who she is. The grammatical colloquialism and vulgar informality of these self-referential speech acts, which consistently and intrusively demand attention and answer – “‘I’m in a fine flow of spirits, an’t I?’” (*E*, p.357) – render her speech distinct from the rest of the Highbury community; her character, arguably more than any other, is tied to her intrusively idiosyncratic mode of speech.

At times these acts of self-fashioning are mediated through a second voice, as if they are not self-declarations: ‘Many a time has Selina said, when she has been going to Bristol, “I really cannot get this girl to move from the house”’ (*E*, p.214), Mrs Elton recalls; ‘my friends say I am not entirely devoid of taste’, she brags with faux-modesty (*E*, p.216). Having fashioned herself a character from her own

⁷⁸ ‘General Observations on Fashion and Dress’, *LBA*, pp.38-9. Sheehan quotes from the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*. Colleen A. Sheehan, ‘Jane Austen’s Tribute to the Prince Regent: A Gentleman Riddled with Difficulty’, *Persuasions On-Line*, 27.1 (2006), n.pag.

statements and the reported speech of others, Mrs Elton reveals her true character to be something quite different. Whilst she claims to ‘admire all that quaint, old-fashioned politeness; it is much more to my taste than modern ease; modern ease often disgusts me’ (*E*, p.236), Emma is quite openly disgusted by the ‘familiar vulgarity’ (*E*, p.226) she displays in her use of ‘pronouns’ (*E*, p.226): with implicitly fashionable ‘modern ease’, she calls upon ‘Mr. E’ and, more audaciously, ‘Knightley’. It is a vulgarism that is shared by the dandyish Sir Walter of *Persuasion*, who persistently refers to Mr Shepherd as simply ‘Shepherd’; as is always the case, he falls short of the fashions he so desperately wishes to ape. Like the glaringly ‘studied elegance of her dress’ (*E*, p.251), Mrs Elton’s speech is offensive; even Mr Woodhouse, ‘always the last to make his way in conversation’ (*E*, p.153), discovers she has a ‘quickness of voice [...] which rather hurts the ear’ (*E*, p.218).

At other times, the gap between expression and meaning results in miscommunication. Austen subtly narrates Mrs Elton’s thoughts, taking us from psychonarration into the internal musings of Mrs Elton herself:

Mrs. Elton began to think she had been wrong in disclaiming so warmly. It was by no means her object to have it believed that her sister was *not* a fine lady; perhaps there was want of spirit in the pretence of it [...] (*E*, p.240)

Here, Mrs Elton’s method of communication, in which language ‘does not have an absolutely referential and monologic relationship to external reality’,⁷⁹ recalls the way in which Emma converses with Harriet when convincing her to decline Robert Martin’s proposal: “do not imagine that I want to influence you”, she tells her friend speciously (*E*, p.42). Mrs Elton’s language, and her ability to silence and control the speech of others, is reminiscent of Emma’s diction; Emma similarly is self-referential, but refers to what she has done, rather than who she is. In spite of their ostensible similarities, there is no mistaking the speech of Mrs Elton. Her acts of false modesty are precipitate and unexpected: ‘before Mr. Woodhouse had reached her with his request to be allowed to hand her into the dining parlour, [Mrs Elton] was saying – “Must I go first? I really am ashamed of always leading the way”’ (*E*, p.233). Mrs Elton’s display of ‘sparkling vivacity’ (*E*, p.359) is ill-judged

⁷⁹ Roulston, ‘Discourse, Gender, and Gossip: Some Reflections on Bakhtin and *Emma*’, p.54.

in the Highbury community; her false modesty, modern ease, and emphatic declarations cause misunderstandings in a society unused to hearing garish, and putatively modish declensions of ‘*the world*’ (*E*, p.216). Nevertheless, Mrs Elton’s brand of diction and her unsuccessful attempts to mimic the language of the *beau monde* is specific to her, rather than representative of fashionable diction in general: whilst she shares with the Crawfords and Lady Susan the desire to perform fashionability and to self-fashion through language, not only telling others who she is but also, as I shall explore, deploying fashionable expressions to do so, she does not possess the same ‘happy command of language’ (*NA*, p.198). Rather, Mrs Elton fails to command language at all, revealing her inarticulate mimicry of fashionable speech. Amongst the heteroglossia of *Emma*’s voices, Mrs Elton’s stands out, silencing the hitherto dominant speech of Emma.

5.4 Fashionable Phraseology

Mrs Elton’s excruciating attempts at self-fashioning are done partly through the use of superlative, proverbial expressions – ‘Nobody can be more devoted to home than I am. I was quite a proverb for it at Maple Grove’ (*E*, p.214) – and ironic acts of self-declaration. Her diction is emphatically opposed to that of the ‘man of fashion’ who, according to Lord Chesterfield’s *Letters to His Son* (1774), ‘does not suppose himself to be either the sole or principal object of the thoughts, looks or words of the company’ and ‘never has recourse to proverbs and vulgar aphorisms; [...] takes great care to speak very correctly and grammatically, and to pronounce properly’.⁸⁰

Mrs Elton’s vulgarity and failures of pronunciation are underscored in her attempts to use fashionable neologisms. It is, therefore, necessary in this section to consider the significance of fashionable phraseology in the period. Sartorial fashion played an important role in the formation of new fashion words: fashion magazines of the period invented ‘a technical jargon – dressmaker’s French – which was apt to change its terms and meanings every few years, so that a standard phrase-book

⁸⁰ Lord Chesterfield, *Letters written by the Late Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to His Son, Philip Stanhope* (London, 1774), pp.224-5. On this letter and Lord Chesterfield’s theory of polite discourse see Susan Fitzmaurice, ‘Changes in the Meanings of *Politeness* in Eighteenth-Century England: Discourse Analysis and Historical Evidence’, in *Historical (Im)politeness*, ed. by Jonathan Culpeper and Dániel Z. Kádár (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 2010), pp.87-116 (p.102)

would rapidly become obsolete'.⁸¹ As Austen's reference to the 'scraps of Italian & French' indicates, the application of foreign terms was by no means limited to descriptions of dress but was essential to fashionability itself, as is evident in the very title of *La Belle Assemblée* and Lord Chesterfield's 'je ne sais quoy'. Fashion magazines even printed fiction, poetry and current affairs in French, expecting their fashionable readers to read without translation. As John Owen explains in *The Fashionable World Displayed* (1804), fashionable people 'intersperse their conversational language with scraps of French: they also construct their complimentary phrases with singular dexterity' (as Emma observes is true of Frank Churchill), 'and they have certain epithets such as *dashing*, *stylish*, &c. which are perfectly their own'.⁸² Such words comprised the 'common jargon of *bon ton* talk' of which one old woman, living 'secluded from the world', complained in the *Lady's Monthly Museum*.⁸³ As Hannah More asserts in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*:

That cold compound of irony, irreligion, selfishness, and sneer, which make up what the French (from whom we borrow the thing as well as the word) so well express by the term *persiflage*, has of late years made an incredible progress in blasting the opening buds of piety in young persons of fashion. A cold pleasantry, a temporary cant word, the jargon of the day, for the 'great vulgar' have their jargon, blight the first promise of seriousness. The ladies of *ton* have certain watch-words, which may be detected as indications of this spirit.⁸⁴

Aware of the irony of using a French expression to denigrate the spread of a fashionable cant that not only appropriates French phrases but is also seen as part of French culture itself, the evangelical More reflects upon fashionable dialogue. Like the 'temporary cant' words to which she refers, fashionable speech is difficult to catch. The 'compound' of 'irony', 'selfishness' and 'sneer' is particularly redolent of Mrs Elton's dialogue.

Novels were central to both the satire and dissemination of 'persiflage'. Edgeworth calls attention to one of Owen's choice words: *dashing*. In *Almeria*,

⁸¹ Cunningham, *English Women's Clothing*, p.5.

⁸² Owen, *The Fashionable World Displayed*, pp.57-8.

⁸³ An English Matron, 'To the Editor of the Lady's Monthly Museum', *LMM*, April 1800, pp.270-72 (pp.271-72).

⁸⁴ More, *Strictures*, ii, pp.14-5.

printed in the second volume of *Tales of Fashionable Life*, the narrator describes how the heroine, who chooses a life of fashion over one of friendship, is ‘quizzed’ by the fashionable Lady Agnes, and becomes the target of ‘practical jokes’:

She was astonished to find in high life a degree of vulgarity, of which her country companions would have been ashamed; but all such things in high life go under the general term *dashing*. These young ladies were *dashers*. Alas! perhaps foreigners and future generations may not know the meaning of the term!⁸⁵

The contentious term also appears in *Emma*. Mrs Elton, condescendingly extolling the ‘advantages of Bath’ and insisting she introduce Emma to her friend Mrs Partridge – “‘It would be a charming introduction for you, who have lived so secluded a life; and I could immediately secure you some of the best society in the place’” – arouses fierce indignation in Emma (*E*, p.215). Emma cannot bear the thought of being

indebted to Mrs. Elton for what was called an *introduction* – of her going into public under the auspices of a friend of Mrs. Elton’s, probably some vulgar, dashing widow, who, with the help of a boarder, just made a shift to live! (*E*, p.215)

The narrative falls into free indirect discourse – signalled typographically by the characteristic dash and exclamation point⁸⁶ – and thus into the lexicon of Emma. Emma sneers at Mrs Elton’s term ‘*introduction*’, while her own use of the fashionable neologism ‘*dashing*’ has a dual function: it both dismisses Mrs Elton’s ‘*world*’ as vulgar and internally assures herself (and the reader) of her knowledge of fashionable diction – she is not ‘so secluded’ as Mrs Elton wishes to believe, at least not linguistically.

Whilst Edgeworth’s heroine in 1809 was struck by the terms ‘*dashing*’ and ‘*dasher*’ as fashionable and bizarre neologisms, the *Oxford English Dictionary* locates the adjective ‘*dashing*’, meaning one ‘[g]iven to fashionable and striking display in manners and dress; that is a “*dasher*”’, as first occurring in Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801); meanwhile the noun ‘*dashing*’, (cutting a ‘*dash*’), meaning ‘*showy*

⁸⁵ Edgeworth, *Almeria*, in *Tales of Fashionable Life*, ii (1809), p.69.

⁸⁶ Elliot notes how free indirect discourse in Austen ‘is often marked by distinction punctuation, particularly increased use of dashes and exclamation points’ (p.121).

liveliness in dress, manners’, is attributed to Thomas Skinner Surr’s best-selling fashionable novel, *A Winter in London; or, Sketches of Fashion* (1806).⁸⁷ In Bath in 1805 Austen unites two of Owen’s modish terms, declaring that neither Miss Seymer’s ‘dress nor air have anything of the Dash or Stilishness which the Browns talked of’.⁸⁸ In Austen’s mind, ‘dash’, which occurs only once in her surviving letters, is associated with the ‘talk’ of Bath, Mrs Elton’s favourite fashionable resort town.⁸⁹

Whilst novelists such as Edgeworth and Surr are credited with first using these terms, evidence suggests that the words ‘dashing’ and ‘dasher’ had begun to acquire their fashionable meanings earlier, in the fashion magazine. In June 1799 the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*, in a review of a new play, describes the character ‘*Lady Zephyrina*’ as a ‘dashing belle’, a phrase that is repeated by the *Lady’s Magazine* in a description of ‘Parisian Fashions’ in September 1800.⁹⁰ In January 1802 the phrase is explicitly aligned with fashionable diction when ‘Doubtful Dolly’ writes ‘To the Female Mentor’, another agony aunt figure of the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*, asking for her ‘opinion respecting the dashing men of the present age’; she is being urged by two ‘near relations to bestow [her] fair person upon their different friends; the one of whom is, according to the fashionable phraseology, a complete dasher of the first rate’.⁹¹ This phraseology was clearly in circulation as talk amongst fashionable people before novelists like Thomas Skinner Surr put pen to paper: as More and ‘Doubtful Dolly’ imply, it passed from mouth to mouth, forming an oral sociolect of fashionability that could be difficult to ‘catch’. *Almeria*’s assertion that ‘future generations may not know the meaning of the term’ implicitly signals the term’s fashionability: like any other fashionable commodity, fashionable phraseology would soon become obsolete.

⁸⁷ ‘Dashing’, adj., definition 3.a, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47380?rskey=S792>> [accessed 20 May 2015]; ‘Dashing’, n., 3, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47379?rskey=S792>> [accessed 20 May 2015].

⁸⁸ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 8-11 April 1805, p.99.

⁸⁹ When discussing the fashionability of military professions Edward Ferrars concludes that he “‘might be as dashing and expensive without a red coat on my back as with one” (*SS*, p.78). Mary Crawford is associated with the term in *Mansfield Park*: she asks Fanny to send her news of “‘dashing young captains”” (*MP*, p.310) and the narrator concludes that Mary ‘was long in finding among the dashing representatives [a husband] who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield’ (*MP*, p.369).

⁹⁰ ‘Theatricals’, *LMM*, June 1799, pp.477-79 (p.478); ‘Parisian Fashions’, *LM*, September 1800, pp.501-2 (p.501).

⁹¹ Doubtful Dolly, ‘To the Female Mentor’, *LMM*, January 1802, pp.35-36 (pp.35-6).

Whilst novels were partly responsible for the dissemination of the evanescent language of fashion, the fashion periodical magazine the way in which, during this period, language became ‘objectified, packaged, sold, and bought’.⁹² As Thompson asserts, ‘along with Wedgwood china, Packwood’s razor strops, and other consumer goods in eighteenth-century England, language can be commodified’.⁹³ Fashion magazines generated fashionable terminologies which, even if they did not refer to new commodities, at least gave the impression of novelty. Whilst the neologisms they created suggested precision, these terms seemed to bear little relation to the object that was depicted: they favoured the fashionable gap between word and meaning. Fashion magazines offered an ‘Explanation of the Prints of Fashion’ in each issue; these ‘explanations’ seized on fashionable dressmaker’s French, alluding to the ‘tête buffoune’, the dress ‘à l’Antique’, and the ‘tippet à-la-Diane’ amongst a haze of jargon such as ‘Turkish sleeves’, ‘Circassian white’, ‘Waterloo blue’ and ‘Trafalgar dress’.

Stana Nenadic observes that Waterloo blue was a ‘fashionable product with intense “associated meaning”’. It evoked a spirit of heroic nationalism, coupled with the emotions arising out of victory and the hope for peace’.⁹⁴ In *Sanditon*, Austen portrays this sensitivity to the ‘associated meaning’ of commodified terms: the fashion-conscious Mr Parker, who is often misled by commercial discourse, talks of his House

‘which by the bye, I almost wish I had not named Trafalgar – for Waterloo is more the thing now. However, Waterloo is in reserve – and if we have encouragement enough this year for a little crescent to be ventured on – (as I trust we shall) then, we shall be able to call it Waterloo Crescent – and the name joined to the form of the building, which always takes, will give us the command of lodgers - . In a good season we should have more applications than we could attend to.’ (NA, p.308)

As Tuite has observed, Mr Parker’s ‘anticipation of retrospection’ registers the ‘built-in-obsolescence’ of ‘modern consumer products’; equally, Austen is ‘not referring to Waterloo as a place, but conjuring Waterloo as an object of cultural and

⁹² Thompson, pp.77.

⁹³ Thompson, pp.77-78.

⁹⁴ Stana Nenadic, ‘Romanticism and the urge to consume in the first half of the nineteenth century’, in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850*, pp.208-227 (p.209).

commercial desire'.⁹⁵ Austen emphasises the non-referential nature of fashionable diction and its built-in-obsolence to satirize the apparently arbitrary connections between referent and lexicon. But Austen also suggests, as Roland Barthes himself contends, that it is the way in which fashionable objects are 'transformed' into verbal description that creates meaning rather than the object itself: 'it is not the object but the name that creates desire; it is not the dream but the meaning that sells'.⁹⁶

The act of translating fashionable diction destroyed 'associated meanings': to translate Mrs Bell's 'Chapeau Bras', a hat held under the arm, into 'arm hat', strips the object of the associated meanings offered by the French.⁹⁷ Fashion magazines, in their oblique 'Explanations' of fashionable commodities, take the reader further away from English and deeper into obscurity: *La Belle Assemblée's* September 1814 issue explains euphemistically that, regarding the 'Sea side Morning Dress and Bathing Preserver [...] A principal novelty [...] is the Wellington corset, which will be found particularly desirable for [...] those *belles* who are too much inclined to what the French term *en bon point*'.⁹⁸ In her correspondence Austen explicitly inveighs against the modish use of French euphemism in matters of dress. Commenting on her niece's fiction in 1817, Austen protests:

Your Anne is dreadful [...] But nothing offends me so much as the absurdity of not being able to pronounce the word *Shift*. I could forgive her any follies in English, rather than the Mock Modesty of that French word.⁹⁹

This 'French word' is 'chemise', which was increasingly used to refer to the English term 'shift' (by now considered to be indecorous). By 1820 Leigh Hunt complained that

so rapid are the changes that take place in people's notions of what is decorous that not only has the word 'smock' been displaced by the word 'shift' but even that harmless expression has been set aside for the French

⁹⁵ Tuite, 'Sanditon: Austen's pre-post Waterloo', pp.619-20, 612.

⁹⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (1967), trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2010), p.xii.

⁹⁷ The 'Chapeau Bras', a 'novel and ingenious Ladies' headdress', first appears in a thinly disguised advert in 1814 in which it claims to offer both '*Elegance*' and '*Convenience*'. 'General Observations on Fashion and Dress', *LBA*, February 1814, pp.38-39 (p.39).

⁹⁸ 'Explanation of the Prints of Fashion', *LBA*, September 1814, pp.81-2 (p.81).

⁹⁹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Caroline Austen, 23 January 1817, p.325.

word 'chemise', and at length not even this word, it seems, is to be mentioned nor the garment itself alluded to, by any decent writer.¹⁰⁰

An increasing concern with linguistic morality somewhat ironically (considering More's own objection to French phrases) rendered English terms obsolete and vulgar. Garments became 'unmentionables', signalling another instance in which fashion – whether sartorial or moral – silences and disrupts language. Austen ridicules the arbitrariness of linguistic representations of garments, calling into question the notion that a French term, used to refer to the very same garment, self-referentially conveys the modesty of the speaker.

Significantly, Austen's epistolary rhetoric highlights the tensions between language and fashion as an issue of national pride: she patriotically insists on writing, even underlining, the contentious word 'Shift'. In a letter in 1808 Austen writes that she has 'got the 2nd vol. of Espriella's Letters, & I read it aloud by candlelight. The Man describes well, but is horribly anti-english. He deserves to be the foreigner he assumes'.¹⁰¹ Austen refers here to Robert Southey's *Letters from England* (1807), in which Southey assumes the guise of the Spanish Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella. It is in this '2nd vol.' of Espriella's *Letters* that Southey reveals with satirical wit the tailor's gift for creating a language of fashion that depends upon the 'associated meanings' of sound. 'Language is nowhere so imperfect as in defining colours', Don Manuel argues, reporting on his visit to a haberdasher with scientific interest, 'but' he writes, 'if philosophical language be deficient here, the creative genius of fashion is never at a loss for terms. What think you of the Emperor's eye, of the Mud of Paris, and Le Soupir étouffé – the Sigh Suppress?'¹⁰² Southey reverses the classical trope of orator as tailor; here the tailor supersedes the philosopher, who struggles to find expression for colours, inventing his own nonsensical terms. The very same year a commentator in *La Belle Assemblée* confirmed that the 'mud of Paris, the soot of our chimneys, and the rags of Savoyards' had become 'the fashionable colours' and, parodying the euphemistic use of French, asks if readers have not seen women seeking after the colour of 'the very excrement of the royal infant' under the

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in C. Willet Cunnington and Phillis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p.18.

¹⁰¹ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 1-2 October 1808, p.141.

¹⁰² Robert Southey, *Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella*, 3 vols (London, 1807), ii, Letter XLIX, p.332.

appellation ‘*caca dauphin*’.¹⁰³ Yet, even beyond these incongruous and outrageous names, historical evidence suggests that the names of dyes could refer to ‘several different colours. Other sources hint that the meaning of names changes over time’.¹⁰⁴ Not only did fashionable terminology point to the gap between word and referent, but the reference itself was also in constant flux.

The comic names, where even the colours of dirt and excrement become fashionable if they have Parisian echoes, illuminate the seeming incongruity of the language of fashion, its apparent dismissal of established meanings, its silencing of English and its ability to make anything fashionable if it *sounds* fashionable. Don Manuel further describes these terms as ‘exotic flowers of phraseology’ which have been ‘imported for the use of ladies’.¹⁰⁵ At a time when imported material culture was being exchanged and circulated in English society, language itself had become simply another material commodity that could be absorbed into English culture. If Barthes’ analysis of the fashion system emphasises the arbitrariness of fashion as a language, then both Don Manuel’s examples and Austen’s epistolary comments play delightfully with these arbitrary connections between signifier and signified.

5.5 *Emma’s Vogue-Words*

As I explain in this section, Mrs Elton’s self-conscious diction emerges from this fashionable phraseology in which signifier and signified jar against one another and in which meaning is unstable. When Mr Knightley half-jokingly invites the Eltons to Donwell Abbey as consolation for their postponed outing to Box Hill, Mrs Elton immediately adopts what McMaster describes as her ‘exclamatory mode’.¹⁰⁶ She takes possession of Mr Knightley’s proposed party – quite literally with the possessive ‘my party’ (which ensures her own centrality in the mind of her auditor) – and reels off a flurry of phrases characteristic of her linguistic self-fashioning: ““Oh! leave all that to me. Only give me a *carte-blanc*. – I am Lady Patroness, you know. It is my party. I will bring friends with me”” (*E*, p.278). Acts of self-declaration

¹⁰³ ‘The Ladies’ Toilette’, *LBA*, March, 1807, pp.122-26 (p.126).

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Lowengard, ‘Colours and Colour making in the eighteenth century’ in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850*, pp.103-117, p.110.

¹⁰⁵ Southey, *Letters from England*, ii, Letter XLIX, p.332.

¹⁰⁶ McMaster, ‘Mrs. Elton and Other Verbal Aggressors’, p.74.

follow ‘scraps’ of French that in turn follow exclamation. As Wilson has noted, the ‘term “Lady Patroness” alone would have been sufficient to spark associations between Mrs. Elton and Almack’s’.¹⁰⁷ To contemporary readers the expression ‘Lady Patroness’ would have been understood solely as the name for a well-connected woman of fashion and a leader of Almack’s, the most fashionable club in London at the time. In 1814 a group of ‘Lady Patronesses’, comprising female aristocrats with British and European ties, determined who was and was not allowed entry into Almack’s.¹⁰⁸ Eligibility was determined not by one’s wealth alone, but by one’s claim to the networks and elusive currency of fashion. Mrs Elton, in her *Highbury* ‘retirement,’ ironically styles herself as one of these powerful women who organised the most exclusive evenings of the *beau monde*.

It is appropriate, then, that Mrs Elton, in the same breath as pronouncing herself *Highbury*’s ‘Lady Patroness’ should use the French term ‘carte-blanc’. The phrase, uttered in the same speech in which she identifies herself as a Lady Patroness, highlights the association between Almack’s club and French culture. The emulation of French fashions, language and culture was politically problematic during the raging Napoleonic wars: critics maligned the English appropriation of French dress as paying homage to ‘a nation of Murderers’.¹⁰⁹ Yet Almack’s welcomed French fashions: as Wilson explains, ‘[t]he Lady Patronesses of Almack’s, in particular, demonstrated this English interest in French and European culture, and they competed to see who could invite the most foreign luminaries to Almack’s’.¹¹⁰ The association between France and Almack’s would have been strong in Austen’s mind: whilst she herself never entered the exclusive club, her more fashionable French cousin, Eliza de Feuillide, certainly danced and socialised there.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, the Lady Patronesses of Almack’s were expected to carefully and judiciously oversee the incorporation of foreign fashions, manners and people into this English institution.¹¹² Mrs Elton is anything but judicious in her promotion

¹⁰⁷ Cheryl A. Wilson, *Literature and Dance in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.62.

¹⁰⁸ On the Patronesses and Almack’s see Wilson, *Literature and Dance in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp.62-3 and Cheryl A. Wilson, ‘Almack’s and the Silver Fork Novel’, *Women’s Writing*, 16.2 (2009), 237-252.

¹⁰⁹ Mackie, *A Picture of the Changes of Fashion*, p.13.

¹¹⁰ Wilson, ‘Almack’s and the Silver Fork Novel’, p.249.

¹¹¹ See Wilson, *Literature and Dance in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p.61.

¹¹² See Wilson, ‘Almack’s and the Silver Fork Novel’, p.249.

of fashionable foreign language and culture. Her deployment of French is ill-judged: the patriotic Mr Knightley is wary of French manners and words, particularly those represented by the notoriously ‘amiable’ and conspicuously named ‘Frank’ Churchill who, he insists, ““can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him”” (*E*, p.118).¹¹³ We discover that ‘Frank’s Gallic civility’¹¹⁴ is insincere, as Mr Knightley observes during Frank’s ‘double-dealing’ (*E*, p.273) word games. Like Mrs Elton’s, Frank Churchill’s speech is ‘sprinkled with French words and phrases’.¹¹⁵ Frank Churchill, caught by Emma ‘looking intently across the room at Miss Fairfax’, immediately deploys fashion-consciousness to distract and determine conversation: ““I never saw any thing so outrée! – ””, he declares in his own ‘exclamatory mode’, drawing Emma’s attention to Jane Fairfax’s hair,

‘Those curls! – This must be a fancy of her own. I see nobody else looking like her! – I must go and ask her whether it is an Irish fashion. Shall I? – Yes, I will – I declare I will – and you shall see how she takes it; whether she colours.’ (*E*, p.174)

Like Elizabeth Elliot of *Persuasion* who is devoted to analysing aspects of fashionable display including Lady Russell’s hair which she deems too ‘formal and *arrangé*’ (*P*, p.173) to be fashionable, Frank Churchill looks to Jane’s self-styled hair to mark out her unfashionability. Watched by Emma, he transforms his own amorous gazing into fashionable examination.

¹¹³ As Penny Gay notes, ‘the rather dandyish Frank Churchill is associated with French manners, which contrast with George Knightley’s essential Englishness.’ She notes that Mr Knightley also ‘accuses the as-yet unmet Frank of “manoeuvring and finessing”, French words for slippery French habits’. Although she places too much emphasis on the significance of ‘Frank’ as a ‘version of François’, she does highlight that his objection to the sun ‘is just one more mark of his essential foreignness’. Penny Gay, ‘*Emma and Persuasion*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, pp.55-71 (pp.58-60). Collins discusses the significance of being ‘amiable’ (p.174). Norman Page notes that Mr Woodhouse prefers ‘old-fashioned’ Englishness, which celebrates the stability of meaning and language in opposition to the ‘superficial Gallic associations of the word [amiable] (which we may infer to have been influencing fashionable English usage)’ in *The Language of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), p.69. For a discussion of *Emma*’s ‘Englishness’ see Brian Southam, ‘Jane Austen’s Englishness: *Emma* as National Tale’, *Persuasions*, 30 (2008), 187-201. Emily Auerbach argues that Mr Knightley’s diction is associated with Old English words in *Searching for Jane Austen* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p.224.

¹¹⁴ Michaelson, ‘Language and Gender in *Emma*’, p.139.

¹¹⁵ Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, p.146. Sales, pointing to the body of criticism by Butler, Hellstrom and Roberts on Francophobia in Austen, argues that *Emma* is ‘more open, genuinely dialogic and unresolved than these critics are willing to concede’ (p.145) and goes on to discuss the novel’s dramatisation of English and French values (pp.145-7).

Frank Churchill crystallizes his qualification as a judge of fashion by deliberately using the French term ‘outrée’, which, unlike Elizabeth’s term ‘*arrangé*’, was most frequently deployed in the period in judgements of fashion. The modish term conveyed a sense of the ‘unusual, peculiar; eccentric, unorthodox; extreme’ and by 1795 the anglicised phrase ‘the outré’ denoted that which was ‘extravagant or fantastic’.¹¹⁶ In ‘The Matron’, a regular serial of the *Lady’s Magazine* (and precursor to the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*’s ‘Old Woman’), a contributor writes to Mrs Martha Grey, the persona of the advice-column, detailing how she has been, not unlike Miss Bates, cruelly mimicked for the amusement of others: ‘but as I, fortunately, am not reckoned to have anything particularly ridiculous about me, [the mimicker] was obliged to be rather outrée (if I may use the expression) in her imitations’.¹¹⁷ In this 1774 contribution the writer expresses uncertainty in using the rare and discernibly fashionable term.

However, by the early nineteenth century the expression was widely in circulation in fashion magazines. In 1815 a *Lady’s Magazine* serial, ‘A Peep at My Neighbours’, satirized contemporary attempts to keep up with the Joneses in all matters of fashion. It details a rivalry between ‘Mrs. B***’ and ‘Mrs. L****’ who both aim to lead fashions but, in their ongoing efforts to out-do one another, merely invite ridicule: Mrs B***, ‘desirous of sporting something quite new and *outrée*’, sets her milliner to work on an extravagant dress which her rival observes is “‘the most beautifullest dress I ever seed’”.¹¹⁸ Fittingly, Mrs L****’s grammar, like that of the clothes-obsessed Anne Stelle and Mrs Elton, fails her. To some of fashion’s critics that which was ‘*outrée*’ signalled that which prevailed in fashions: ‘The most fantastic dress has its aim, and they that are most *outrée* are the most followed’ wrote one contributor to the *Lady’s Magazine*.¹¹⁹ Elsewhere in the first decades of the 1800s, magazines insisted that to be fashionable one must avoid wearing anything too ‘outrée’.¹²⁰ In both contexts the word was used in opposition to elegance and beauty: fashion was, in journalistic discourse, an unstable aesthetic category. As one advert for hairdressing in *La Belle Assemblée* insisted, deploying an awkward hybrid

¹¹⁶ ‘Outré’, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/133881>> [accessed 28 May 2015].

¹¹⁷ ‘The Matron’, *LM*, March 1774, pp.655-59 (p.658).

¹¹⁸ ‘A Peep at My Neighbour’, *LM*, July 1815, pp.317-20 (p.318).

¹¹⁹ ‘The Reasoner’, *LM*, January 1775, pp.39-41 (p.40).

¹²⁰ See, for instance, ‘Explanation of the Prints of Fashion’, *LBA*, April 1812, pp.212-14 (p.213) and ‘Costumes Parisiens’, *LMM*, February 1816, p.110.

of French and English grammar, ‘Beauty is *outré*’d not heightened by a complex mechanism’.¹²¹ To some, the aesthetic extreme of the *outré* defined fashionability; to others, it signalled everything that should be avoided by the fashionable.

As the term ‘dashing’ suggests, Emma too has a knowledge of modish lexicon. Mrs Elton is more than comfortable in highjacking Mr Knightley’s Donwell Abbey party, assuming the comic role of Lady Patroness in the only place in which she *can* assume authority and status, a place which she herself has admitted is ‘secluded’ from the world of fashion. Mrs Elton envisions ‘a sort of gipsy party’ taken outdoors, whilst Mr Knightley desires ‘to have the table spread in the dining-room’ with the guests ‘within doors’ (*E*, p.279). Several pages earlier, the narrative falls into Emma’s consciousness and voice: she internally contrasts her own party with that of Mrs Elton, imagining how her excursion to Box Hill will be ‘done in a quiet, unpretending, elegant way, infinitely superior to the bustle and preparation, the regular eating and drinking, and pic-nic parade of the Eltons and the Sucklings’ (*E*, p.277). Several words are of note here: not only does Emma oppose the Eltons and Sucklings to that which is ‘quiet’ and, of course, ‘elegant’, but she also describes the Eltons’ party as a ‘pic-nic parade’ in contrast to Mrs Elton’s assurance that there will “‘be no form or parade”” (*E*, p.279).

Linda Bree identifies ‘pic-nic parade’ as one of many instances in the novel in which Austen creates ‘effect through economical use of ordinary words and phrases’.¹²² Yet, what Bree identifies as an ordinary colloquialism should be re-read as a loaded and fashionable term. The expression ‘pic-nic’, taken from the French ‘pique-nique’, only gradually came to be associated with fashionable out-door meals.¹²³ W. Cutspear, the author of *Dramatic Rights: or, Private Theatricals, and Pic-Nic Supper* (1802) interrupts his dialogue about the vogue for amateur dramatics to give ‘A WORD or TWO on PIC-NIC SUPPERS’.¹²⁴ He does not expect his reader to merely pass over the word ‘pic-nic’; instead, he recognises it as part of the peculiar new cant of the fashionable world. The author admits that if any reader should require an ‘etymological definition’ then he would not be able to supply it:

¹²¹ ‘Bell’s Monthly Compendium of Adverts for July, 1809’, *LBA*, July 1809, p.43.

¹²² Linda Bree, ‘Style, Structure, Language’, in *The Cambridge Companion to ‘Emma’*, ed. by Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.88-104 (p.98).

¹²³ ‘Picnic’, n., adj., adv., *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/143450>> [accessed 5 June 2015].

¹²⁴ W. Cutspear, *Dramatic Rights: or, Private Theatricals, and Pic-Nic Suppers, Justified by Fair Argument with a few Whip-Syllabubs for the Editors of Newspapers* (London, 1802), p.44.

The *inquisitive* reader is therefore referred to some *glossary*, explanatory of the *cant* phrases in the *fashionable* world, (*if* any such book can be found) and there, perhaps, he may get his satisfaction, that, it is a word well-adapted to fashionable life, and *politeness* of manners [...] that is means *something* or *nothing*, just as the speaker chooses to apply it.¹²⁵

Cutspear expresses the need for a fashionable dictionary. In October 1806 *La Belle Assemblée* published a 'NEW DICTIONARY; OR, A KEY TO THE BEAU MONDE' which merely redefined ordinary words such as 'honour' and 'nobody' within the context of the high society of the fashionable world.¹²⁶ It followed the tradition of other fashionable dictionaries such as *The Bon Ton Magazine's* satirical 'Dictionary of the Bon Ton' which ran throughout 1791 and attempted to explain 'elegant Language'; as with Emma's description of Mrs Elton's "elegant terseness" (*E*, p.363), the epithetic 'elegant' is deployed with knowing sarcasm about what constitutes fashionable diction.¹²⁷ The magazine defines words such as 'Honour' as 'Paying one's gaming debts, debauching a friend's wife or daughter, and then running him through the body', meanwhile 'Inconstancy' signals 'The chief felicity of matrimony'.¹²⁸ The dictionary seeks to emphasise the discrepancy between word and referent in the mistakenly labelled 'elegant' euphemisms of the fashionable.

Whilst these 'dictionaries' examined common words of English to reflect on the way in which meaning was distorted in the fashionable world (thus implicitly conceding to the indefinability of new vogue-words), Cutspear is concerned with defining the influx of new fashionable phraseology. Again, with the expression 'pic-nic' the reader is offered a phrase which is simultaneously specific and meaningless: it can, he insists, mean '*something* or *nothing*'.¹²⁹ He goes on to show how the fashionable world use the expression as a prefix for a variety of activities such as a 'pic-nic *chat*, a pic-nic *walk*; a pic-nic *ride*, &c. &c.'. ¹³⁰ In *Dramatic Rights* 'pic-nic' is particularly associated with the theatre: the same year that Cutspear published his musings on amateur dramatics the Pic-Nic Society, an exclusive and fashionable

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.44-5.

¹²⁶ 'NEW DICTIONARY; OR, A KEY TO THE BEAU MONDE. ACCURATELY COPIED FROM REAL LIFE', *LBA*, October 1806, pp.465-568

¹²⁷ 'Dictionary of the Bon Ton', *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, March 1791, pp.14-17 (p.14).

¹²⁸ 'Dictionary of the Bon Ton', *The Bon Ton Magazine, or Microscope of Fashion and Folly*, May 1791, pp.97-8 (p.98).

¹²⁹ Cutspear, *Dramatic Rights*, p.44.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.45.

theatrical club, was formed. As his footnotes suggest, he was not alone in wondering at the possible meanings of this fashionable term:

Since the above was written, there appeared in the *TIMES*, of March, some definition of this significant expression: from which we learn, that it is descended of no mean parentage, coming from as learned and respectable progenitors as *Nic-Nac*, &c. In the *Morning Chronicle*, of March 15, we find similar information.¹³¹

Periodicals and newspapers shared this role as decipherers of the (often oral) phraseology of fashion. Cutspear's reflection that 'pic-nic' comes from 'learned and respectable progenitors as *Nic-Nac*, &c.' satirises such terms as nonsensical and nothing-meaning. Emma's own deployment of the term suggests that, in spite of Highbury's ostensible isolation, which Barchas argues results in a peculiar idiolect in which words such as 'very' are used with extraordinary frequency, fashionable phraseology has permeated the consciousness of its community.¹³² Words such as 'ennui', 'dashing' and 'pic-nic' and 'puppy' evidence the spread of vogue-words (and words which describe fashionable 'things') in the community. Such expressions occur in moments of free indirect discourse, interior monologue and private dialogue. Crucially, then, vogue-words do influence the language of Highbury's community: despite the insistence by some Austen scholars that Highbury is claustrophobic and self-contained, fashionable metropolitan diction has subtly infiltrated the neighbourhood. The influence of cosmopolitanism is perhaps unsurprising: many of *Emma*'s characters, including Frank Churchill, the Knightleys, Mr Elton and Harriet Smith, all take trips to the capital. As Tara Ghoshal Wallace reminds readers, Highbury 'is particularly successful at integrating urban and rural cultures, constituting itself as a highly desirable example of this new hybrid—the suburb'.¹³³ It is not just consumer items such as pianos, screens and picture-frames that are carried back from London, but fashionable vogue-words, too. Moreover, such words were disseminated textually, too: the fashion magazine – which as Copeland contends is implicitly present within *Emma* – as well as popular novels increased the spread of vogue words.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, fn., p.45.

¹³² Janine Barchas, 'Very Austen: Accounting for the Language of Emma', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 62.3 (2007), 303-338.

¹³³ Tara Ghoshal Wallace, "'It must be done in London'", pp.76.

Although fashionable phraseology has a far-reaching influence on the language of Highbury's residents, such residents do not allow it to form a public and common sociolect; their use of such words is, unlike that of Mrs Elton, private and unobtrusive. However, Burrows observes an instance in which Emma does voice a fashionable word out loud: he notes that Emma 'tactlessly pictures how Highbury will welcome Frank Churchill', crying "what a *sensation* his coming will produce"¹³⁴. This term, which in 1818 was still sufficiently new for Southey, ever sensitive to the nuances of language, to call 'the phraseology of the present day', is, Burrows notes, 'italicized as a conscious vogue-word'.¹³⁵ Whilst italics were commonly used to emphasise or denote foreign words of fashion, in *Emma*, italicisation signals a character's emphatic pronunciation of vogue-words. In the case of Emma's voice, italicisation denotes irony or the mockery of vogue-words: she internally parodies Mrs Elton's use of the term '*introduction*', and mimics Mrs Elton's use of '*caro sposo*'; it is equally possible that she voices the italicised '*sensation*', with its francophone associations, with an ironic and theatrical French accent.

After Emma's first encounter with Mrs Elton, she describes her as "[a] little upstart, vulgar being" (of course, Mrs Elton insists she has "quite a horror of upstarts" [*E*, p.243]), "with her Mr. E., and her *caro sposo*, and her resources, and all her airs of pert pretension and under-bred finery" (*E*, p.218). The expression '*caro sposo*', meaning 'dear husband' in Italian, is one of many isolated phrases in *Emma* that has provoked critical discussion: as Barchas argues, specific phrases and individual words 'matter in *Emma* more than they do in any other Austen novel. Only this story features specific episodes centred on riddles that isolate and identify individual words'.¹³⁶ Editors and critics have deliberated Austen's use of '*caro sposo*': E. E. Duncan Jones was the first to connect Austen's use of the phrase with Lady Honoria's speech in Burney's *Cecilia* (1782), concluding that 'her vulgarity perhaps made this slight contribution to that of Mrs. Elton'.¹³⁷ More recently, Paula

¹³⁴ Burrows, p.60

¹³⁵ See 'sensation', definition 3.b, *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175940>> [accessed 26 May 2015]. Burrows, p.60.

¹³⁶ Barchas, p.314.

¹³⁷ E. E. Duncan Jones, 'Notes on Jane Austen', *Notes and Queries*, 197.1 (1951), 14-16 (p.15). See also F. W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp.49, 117. Moler also observes that the phrase is used in Jane West's *Letters to a Young Lady* (1806) and in Frances Brooke 1763 novel *Lady Julia Mandeville* (p.178).

Byrne has observed that the phrase is spoken by ‘the coxcomb Sir Brilliant Fashion’ in Arthur Murphy’s comedy, *The Way to Keep Him* (1760), a play which Austen saw in September 1807.¹³⁸ Critics have failed to note that the phrase also appears in David Garrick’s epilogue to Hannah More’s 1776 play *The Runaway* (reprinted in the *Lady’s Magazine* in March that year), in which Bella voices fears that virtues of her lover will have been marred by his time in Italy, thus proving him to be a ‘*Caro Sposo*’.¹³⁹ Neither do they point to a significant use of the phrase in its feminine form in James Austen’s *Loiterer*, a weekly magazine to which Austen herself is thought to have contributed under the pseudonym ‘Sophia Sentiment’.¹⁴⁰ These various sources suggest that the phrase was invoked by authors for comic purposes: it was used to expose the linguistic pretensions of the *beau monde*. Rogers contends that this ‘fashionable turn of phrase’ was ‘already well on the way out by the opening of the century’, suggesting Mrs Elton unintentionally marks herself as outmoded in her speech.¹⁴¹ Mrs Elton is unable to keep up to pace with the ephemeral language of fashion; her strenuous attempts to style herself as fashionable through her diction ultimately do the exact opposite.

Unlike terms such as ‘puppy’, ‘dashing’ and ‘pic-nic’, the phrase ‘*caro sposo*’ is used infrequently after 1800: in the fashion magazine, perhaps the most accurate gauge of linguistic vogues, it falls out of favour in the early 1800s but comes back into circulation from the late 1810s, several years after the publication of *Emma*. In *La Belle Assemblée* it is used only once in its masculine form and appears in 1820 in a letter, published for the amusement of its readers, in which a woman declares her love for her new ‘*caro sposo*’ who is now a ‘poet’ and ‘writes verses for the fashionable morning papers’; meanwhile in a *Lady’s Monthly Museum* issue of the same year it appears in a comic anecdote which tells of a woman who chooses ‘*Patience*’ as her ‘second *caro sposo*’.¹⁴² When, in 1817, the *Lady’s Magazine* deploys the phrase ‘*caro sposo*’ in a section devoted to current affairs, it records of

¹³⁸ Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2002), p.42.

¹³⁹ The epilogue was also published in the *LM* in March 1776 (p.161).

¹⁴⁰ ‘No. XLIV’, *The Loiterer*, November 28, 1789, p.266.

¹⁴¹ Pat Rogers, ‘Caro Sposo: Mrs Elton, Burneys, Thrales, and Noels,’ *R.E.S.*, 45.17 (1994), 70-75 (p.70).

¹⁴² ‘The Trifler – No. XI’, *LBA*, January 1820, pp.21-23 (p.21); ‘An Anecdote’, *LMM*, January 1822, p.22.

Mrs Billington that she – ‘Mrs. B’ – ‘and her *caro sposo* are upon the best terms’.¹⁴³ The ‘vulgar familiarity’ of Mrs Elton’s ‘Mr E.’s mimic the hearsay of the *beau monde* as it is published in contemporary fashion periodicals, thus verbally echoing printed forms of gossip.

Indeed, the printed form of *Emma* is significant: in the original 1815 edition published by Murray (title-page 1816), Mrs Elton voices three different versions of the expression to refer to her husband: the grammatically incorrect ‘cara sposo’, which is mocked and repeated (presumably deliberately) by Emma, the feminine form ‘cara sposa’ and, finally, the correct phrase: ‘caro sposo’.¹⁴⁴ Mrs Elton becomes a Mrs Malaprop figure – a comic ‘queen of the dictionary’.¹⁴⁵ Not only does she deploy fashionable terms without real understanding, but she resembles a woman of fashion from the satirical dramas of the 1760s and 70s: her fashionable performance is decades out of date. The original printed variants thus work to underscore just how old-fashioned her diction is; the anachronism of her ‘fashionable’ lexicon is also emphasised by the striking topicality of modish words such as ‘dashing’, ‘outrée’ and ‘pic-nic’. Yet, Kathryn Sutherland notes that since R. W. Chapman’s edition of the novel in 1923, the phrase has generally been ‘corrected’ by editors to the ‘standard’ phrasing of ‘caro sposo’.¹⁴⁶ Only recently, in editions such as those by Richard Cronin and Dorothy Macmillan, Fiona Stafford and Bharat Tandon, have editors chosen to reproduce the original variants.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, the variants are very likely to be not errors on the typesetter’s part, but intentional and thus, as Kathryn Sutherland conjectures, ‘part of [Austen’s] joke against those who spatter their conversation with Italian for fashion’s sake, but do not know the basic rules of agreement’.¹⁴⁸ If Mrs Elton sees herself as a Lady Patroness controlling and overseeing the promulgation of foreign culture and phrases, her inability to control her own foreign speech indicates that, as a Lady Patroness, she is woefully inefficient.

¹⁴³ ‘Chronicle’, *LM*, July 1817, pp. 334-36 (p.334).

¹⁴⁴ Austen, *Emma*, ii, p.274; ii, p.327; iii, p.88.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals*, ed. by Elizabeth Duthie (London: A & C Black, [1979] 1989), II. ii.

¹⁴⁶ Sutherland discusses the textual corrections of ‘caro sposo’ in *Jane Austen’s Textual Lives*, p.213-4.

¹⁴⁷ See Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by Richard Cronin and Dorothy Macmillan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by Fiona Stafford (London: Penguin, [1996] 2003); Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by Bharat Tandon (London: Belknap Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁸ Sutherland, *Jane Austen’s Textual Lives*, p.214. John Sutherland disagrees, arguing that Mrs Elton is ‘vulgar, but not so ignorantly vulgar that she would say “cara sposo”’. John Sutherland, *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy? More Puzzles in Classic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.41.

Equally, however, the variants vividly convey the instability of the language of fashion, and the ‘linguistic deterioration’ that results from fashionable diction.¹⁴⁹ As Catherine Morland states in an unintentional “satire on modern language”, she “cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible” (*E*, p.97): pretensions to fashionability have not destroyed her linguistic abilities, unlike Mrs Elton or even Edward Denham. The instability of the language of fashion is a textual fact: even in fashion magazines variants appear, ostensibly unintentionally. In 1815 the *Lady’s Magazine* published an extract from Catherine Cuthbertson’s immense five-volume *Santo Sebastino: or, The Young Protector* (1806), a novel which awed readers by its sheer length (2109 pages) and was, notably, described in 1815 as being particularly delightful reading for those of ‘of pic-nic notoriety – [who] may join in sentimental blind-man’s buff with the author’.¹⁵⁰ The *Critical Review*’s assessment attests to the continued versatility and modishness of the term ‘pic-nic’ in 1815 and marks out the *Santo Sebastino*’s place amongst the scandal fictions and the silver-fork novels of the early nineteenth century. In a seven-page extract of the novel the *Lady’s Magazine* manages to misprint Julia De Clifford’s reference to her intended ‘*caro sposo*’ (as it is printed in the original novel) as ‘*caru sposo*’.¹⁵¹ The textual inconsistencies of both the magazine and *Emma*, whether intentional or not, point to the difficulties in reproducing the foreign importations of fashionable phraseology; with each iteration and reprinting they are transformed into new words of nonsense.

Austen was not alone in her mockery of the mispronunciation and instability of vogue-words. In Edgeworth’s *The Absentee* (1812) the Irish absentee Lady Clonbrony, who claims to be English by birth, has her new London rooms fitted out in the latest Regency style, hoping that such displays will gain her entry into London’s fashionable world. Lady Clonbrony hires the appropriately-named Mr Soho as her interior decorator.¹⁵² Mr Soho is what Tuite calls a ‘marvellous parody of the interior decorator - at once fawning and dictatorial, speaking in patois French, as he delivers his inventory of objects and styles’.¹⁵³ He introduces both Lady

¹⁴⁹ Mandal, ‘Language’, p.31.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Art. 6. Santo Sebastino; or, The Young Protector’, *Critical Review*, 1.3, March 1815, p.312, in *British Periodicals* <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/4574106>> [accessed 20 January 2016].

¹⁵¹ ‘The Breakfast’, *LM*, April 1807, pp.206-212 (p.206).

¹⁵² Charles Saumarez Smith notes that Soho was the centre of artistic and print culture in London. Charles Saumarez Smith, *The Rise of Design: Design and the Domestic Interior in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Pimlico, [1993] 2000), p.194.

¹⁵³ Tuite, ‘Maria Edgeworth’s Déjà Voodoo’, p.391.

Clonbrony and the reader to a language of fashion in which word and meaning are modified as they pass from mouth to mouth, Mr Soho

asserting there was no ‘colour in nature for that room equal to the *belly-o’-the fawn*;¹⁵⁴ which *belly-o’-the fawn* he so pronounced, that lady Clonbrony understood it to be *la belle uniforme*, and, under this mistake, repeated and assented to the assertion, till it was set to rights, with condescending superiority, by the upholsterer.¹⁵⁴

Without any idea of the relationship between word and meaning, Lady Clonbrony assents to the mere sound of the word. Like Mrs Elton who unwittingly changes the meaning of ‘caro sposo’ as her pronunciation fails (at one point it translates as ‘dear wife’, at another it is simply nonsense), Lady Clonbrony can only inarticulately mimic the language of fashion as it passes from mouth to mouth. Equally, just as Austen uses italics to create meaning, pointing to an emphasis on pronunciation that is either self-conscious and mocking, or affected and foreign (as in Mrs Elton’s presumably French, and if so completely unnecessary, pronunciation of the word ‘*mediocre*’¹⁵⁵), Edgeworth too plays with typographical variation. Both texts encourage a hyper-visual form of reading in which typographic stress concurrently privileges and dismisses vogue-words. The emphasis placed on these expressions, both typographically and through their repetition, suggests that these words do mean something whilst simultaneously mocking the opacity and ‘nothing-meaning’ lexicon of fashionable nonsense.

By putting *Emma* in context, situating it alongside the novels and magazines of the period, we can observe that ostensibly ‘ordinary’ phrases in *Emma* are nothing of the sort. When the phraseology of fashion and its interrelated expressions interrupt the narrator’s language it signals a move into free indirect discourse and internal monologue: closer examination reveals the internal drama carried by fashionable terminology in the consciousness of Austen’s heroine. The language of fashion, whether it emerges in direct speech, psychonarration, interior monologue or free indirect discourse, highlights the significance of focalisation and its accompanying

¹⁵⁴ Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, p.12.

¹⁵⁵ Bharat Tandon observes that ‘mediocre’ had ‘crossed over from French to English as early as the sixteenth century’ yet ‘it became fashionable in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to italicize it in writing (sometimes even restoring the acute accent on the first ‘e’) to emphasise its continental sophistication), in Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by Bharat Tandon (London: Belknap Press, 2012), p.316.

voice in the novel. But the signs of fashionability, whether pertaining to linguistic expressions or objects of fashion themselves also have a narrative function beyond this: as with Frank Churchill, they are deployed to create misunderstandings and false narratives. *Emma* invokes the phrases associated with fashionable ‘talk’, yet in *Emma* voice is not limited to spoken dialogue alone: it is embedded within narrative and the printed form. *Emma* attests to the paradox of fashion: language fails in matters and displays of fashion, yet fashion is concurrently dependent on linguistic expression. The novel embodies the tensions and weight of fashionable phraseology: half-heard, ephemeral and seemingly ‘nothing-meaning’ terms of fashion can silence, disrupt and undermine communication, but they also, crucially, have the ability to positively convey narrative and to create character.

Conclusion

This little work was finished in the year 1803, and intended for immediate publication. It was disposed of to a bookseller, it was even advertised, and why the business proceeded no farther, the author has never been able to learn. That any bookseller should think it worth while to purchase what he did not think it worth while to publish seems extraordinary. But with this, neither the author nor the public have any other concern than as some observation is necessary upon those parts of the work which thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete. The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes.

‘Advertisement, by the Authoress, to *Northanger Abbey*’ (NA, p.3)

In her ‘Advertisement’, unique within her *oeuvre*, Austen reflects on the relationship between fashion and the literary marketplace. Fashion is, her ‘Advertisement’ acknowledges, capacious (it concerns places, manners, books and opinions amongst other things) and transient. Austen’s frank admission to her readers that her own work is, by 1816, thirteen years out of date, is the author’s most direct avowal of both her own literary fashion-consciousness and that of her readers. As this thesis has shown, it is a fashion-consciousness that resonates throughout her work, extending to every aspect of her writing throughout her entire literary career.

Like other widely debated aspects of fashion in *Northanger Abbey* (discussed in Chapter One) the significance of both this paratext and the novel’s gothic subject matter has garnered much critical interest.¹ Carol Ann Howels, in her reading of the advertisement, summarises thus:

[w]hat was out of date was the particular list of fashionable Gothic novels that Isabella recommended Catherine to borrow from the circulating library in Bath [...] These girls are reading in the heyday of

¹ Johnson observes that the novel is often placed in the 1790s: ‘posterity has argued that *Northanger Abbey* makes a place for itself by debunking gothic novels and their all-too-recognizable formulas, and has aligned the novel with the numerous satirical essays of the late 1790s that commonly derided gothic novels by calling attention to their predictableness’. Claudia L. Johnson, ‘Introduction’, p.ix. On the fashion for gothic novels see also Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, p.225; Robert Mayo, ‘How Long Was Gothic Fiction in Vogue?’, *Modern Language Notes*, 58.1 (1943), 58-64; Peter Garside, ‘The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal’, in *The English Novel 1770-1829*, ii, pp.15-103, (pp.56-8); Mandal, ‘Benjamin Crosby and the Non-Publication of “Susan”’, 507-52; Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, pp.21-2, 70-1.

Mrs Radcliffe and her imitators, while John Thorpe, in an attempt to be very risqué, says that he has just finished Lewis's *Monk* (1796).²

The 'horrid' novels listed by Isabella Thorpe in her 'pocket-book', which include the 'Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries' (NA, p.25), were all published between 1793 and 1798; analogous to Isabella's reference to 'coquelicot ribbons', a fashionable accessory of the 1790s, this list of novels is out of date at the time Austen wrote her advertisement in 1816.³ All but one of these novels were published by Lane's Minerva Press, a prolific publisher of gothic fiction during the 1790s. Minerva Press novels were synonymous with fashionable circulating-library fiction: they were typically 'produced in editions of 500 or 750 and never reprinted'.⁴ Austen records her father reading one of Isabella's horrid novels 'which he has got from the library', notably Francis Lathom's *The Midnight Bell*, the only novel from Isabella's list not published by the Minerva Press.⁵ Her father borrows and reads this book in 1798, the very same year of its publication. Such reading practices reveal much about the values ascribed to these novels. Like other fashionable commodities, these fashionable novels were meant to be consumed whilst still in vogue, yet, unlike most fashionable items, these disposable novels were borrowed rather than purchased: they were expected to provide only fleeting interest, thus did not merit re-reading.⁶

Northanger Abbey's advertisement and its gothic content exemplify the difficulty of containing fashion within the printed form. Austen's own writing, as she is acutely aware, risks becoming subject to the obsolescence of the fashion system: she acknowledges the predicament faced by writers of how to engage with and use fashion without one's work becoming obsolete, even unfashionable. Like the gowns and caps that she re-dyes, trims and recycles throughout her lifetime, Austen's writing undergoes revision to keep up to date with the pace of fashion. Austen's

² Coral Ann Howels, *Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London and Atlantic Highlands: Athlone, 1995), p.116.

³ See Hughes on coquelicot ribbons (p.41).

⁴ William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [2004] 2007), p.244.

⁵ *Letters*, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 24 October 1798, p.15.

⁶ See Gary Kelly who argues that "'books of the day" were part of the fashion system [...] they were considered ephemeral, to be rented rather than purchased as material capital' in 'Jane Austen's Real Business: The Novel, Literature, and Cultural Capital', p.157.

unpublished manuscripts give the reader a privileged and rare insight into the author's process of revision. According to her dedication, Austen completed *Catharine, or The Bower*, in August 1792. Austen returns to *Catharine* in 1809, the same year that she sent her 'MAD' letter to Crosby demanding explanation for the non-publication of *Northanger Abbey*. Austen 'topically' updates references to books, replacing a reference to Archbishop Secker's *Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England* (1769) with Hannah More's best-selling and recently published *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808).⁷ Likewise, in the original draft of *Catharine* Camilla Stanley receives a letter from Augusta Barlow regarding a 'pierrot', a 'close-fitting, low-necked jacket-bodice' worn in the 1780s and 90s.⁸ Amending *Catharine* some time after 1811, Austen crosses out 'pierrot' along with 'jacket and petticoat', replacing them with the more fashionable and more recent 'Regency walking dress' and 'Bonnet and Pelisse' (C, p.203).⁹ The general term 'revision' does not adequately convey the way in which Austen sees her adjustments to *Catharine*; for the fashion-conscious Austen, revision necessarily encompasses a process of 'updating' her writing, keeping *au courant* with literary and sartorial fashions. Austen's revisions convey the author's underlying anxieties regarding the relevance and longevity of her writing. Her concern with fashionability is clearly one of meaning and significance, relating to the ability of fashion to communicate effectively. The author knows that the 'very same apparel', like the very same text, 'that "said" one thing last year will "say" something quite different today and yet another thing next year'.¹⁰

Yet, as my readings of Austen in this thesis show, Austen's fashion-consciousness extends beyond individual references to fashionable commodities, whether books or dress. The ostensible trivialities of fashion, celebrated and ridiculed with equal vigour by Austen, draw attention to the complex ways in which

⁷ See Anthony Mandal, 'Benjamin Crosby and the Non-Publication of "Susan"', p.524.

⁸ See 'Pierrot', in *The Dictionary of Fashion History*, p.157. Jenny McAuley deciphers the crossed-out word as 'pierrot' in "'A Long Letter Upon a Jacket and a Petticoat': Reading Beneath Some Deletions in the Manuscript of *Catharine, or The Bower*", *Persuasions*, 31 (2009), 191-198.

⁹ Margaret Anne Doody uses the 'Regency walking dress' as a metaphor for Austen's stylistic evolution: 'In bringing her works into line with the new era - putting them into their Regency walking dress, as it were - Austen underwent a sort of personal and authorial revolution. That revolution made her publishable'. Margaret Anne Doody, 'The Short Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, pp.72-86 (p.74).

¹⁰ Fred Davis, 'Do Clothes Speak? What makes them Fashion?', in *Fashion Theory: A Reader*, pp.148-158 (pp.150-1).

she uses fashion to direct narrative and to create her literary style. The fashion system itself possesses, as Austen's writing evinces, a complex and ambiguous narrative structure: in *Mansfield Park* it encompasses novelty and repetition, in *Sense and Sensibility* its commodities possess distinct personal meanings to each individual onlooker whilst in her unpublished work these trivialities hold commonly understood significance, thus allowing her to create a textual sense of community. In *Emma*, whether or not the reader knows the fashions that are being referenced and ridiculed, fashion serves a dramatic role: it creates a sense of voice and perspective, thus bringing to light Austen's innovative experiments with narrative style.

As Austen's 'Advertisement' implies, and as my readings of her *oeuvre* show, fashion was indissociable from literature, whether in its composition, circulation or reception. Austen knew it was common practice for novelists to disassociate themselves and their genre from fashion, even disaffiliate themselves from the novelistic writing completely. Famously, Edgeworth does this in her 'ADVERTISEMENT' to *Belinda* in 1801, in which she declares that her work 'is offered to the public as a Moral Tale – the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel'.¹¹ Edgeworth joins the ranks of those authors who '[degrade] by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding' (*NA*, p.23). In her study of writing and clothing, Smith contends that '[t]he novel defined itself against fashion, refusing to align itself with modish trends by marking its allegiance to a material world represented as reliable, robust, and durable'.¹² Austen's 'Advertisement', however, serves to openly acknowledge the ties that bind her own novel with fashion. Yet, it also laments the failure of certain 'parts of' *Northanger Abbey* to endure: the allegiance of these 'parts' to unreliable, transient fashions renders them obsolete.

The advertisement, which recalls an earlier Austen, is striking when read alongside Austen's other published works. Whilst this paratext questions how an author can use fashion without enslaving their work to a particular fashion, thus predetermining its own obsolescence, Austen's other novels make a concerted effort not to use fashions that will become so rapidly and manifestly obsolete; rather, these

¹¹ Edgeworth, *Belinda*, 'ADVERTISEMENT'. Jocelyn Harris, referencing Austen's defence of novels, also points to Edgeworth's preference for the term 'Moral Tale' in *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression: Jane Austen's 'Persuasion'* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), p.21.

¹² Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes*, p.3.

novels place stronger emphasis on the narrative drama of fashion-consciousness. As this thesis shows, one must distinguish between fashions and fashion itself: Austen's novels consider the self-conscious energy of fashion, which unlike fashions, does not alter or become redundant. Austen's work, which rewrites literary fashions and conveys the fashion system with a psychological and narrative honesty that defies temporal constraints, requires her readers to reconsider and revalue the relationship between fashion and fiction, between transient trivialities and literary classics. Contextualising Austen's work, identifying her references to fashions of her time, sheds light on the extent to which Austen directed her writing practices according to the fashions of her time. Yet, although this process of identification is necessary and invaluable, these fashions alone do not reveal what is most important about the workings of Austen's writing; they are secondary to the enduring concept of fashion alone. Re-reading Austen's work, a practice that attests to her durability, reveals how Austen looks towards the timeless concept of fashion itself to develop her unique literary and narrative voice.

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Online Resources

17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers (Gale Cengage)

<<http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/bncn/start.do?prodId=BBCN>>

19th Century British Library Newspapers (Gale Cengage)

<<http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/bncn/start.do?prodId=BNCN>>

British Periodicals (ProQuest) <<http://search.proquest.com/britishperiodicals>>

Eighteenth Century Collections Online (Gale Cengage)

<<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/dispatchBasicSearch.do?prodId=ECCO>>

Eighteenth Century Journals (Adam Matthew Publications)

<<http://www.18thcentjournals.amdigital.co.uk/index.aspx>>

Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/>>

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford University Press)

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>>

The Lady's Magazine (1770-1818): Understanding the Emergence of a Genre

(University of Kent) <<http://s/blogs.kent.ac.uk/ladys-magazine/>>