

**Women Behind the Work: Materiality and Identity Formation on and off the
Eighteenth-Century English Stage**

Jessica Banner

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Department of English

Faculty of Arts

University of Ottawa

Abstract

Eighteenth-century Britons witnessed unprecedented growth in garment production. As modes of production moved away from a small-scale domestic model toward increasing mechanization and steadily growing fabrication of clothing for the middle classes, the period's new methods of production relied heavily on the labour of women. Despite the considerable participation of women in the proto-industrial workroom, narratives of women employed in the garment trades remain largely understudied. One of the primary reasons garment trades women have received relatively little critical attention is that they are epistemologically slippery. Unlike the more affluent women of the period whose lives were often meticulously documented, garment workers are largely absent from the historical record. Beginning with popular and well-documented characters and persons in the eighteenth-century socio-cultural lexicon, this project traces networks of female labour that run between the playhouse and the workshop to illuminate the lives of women who have previously been relegated to the margins of discourse. Whereas intellectual history often focuses on garments and fashion as particularly important to female networks of communication, I argue that there is much to be gained by examining the women who made these items and the ways in which they are represented in literary accounts and historical records.

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Acknowledgements

In the early pages of her autobiography Charlotte Charke, actress and somewhat infamous progeny of Colley Cibber, describes how as a child she decided to dress herself up in her father's and brother's clothing. Charke details how she:

[P]addled down Stairs, taking with me my Shoes, Stockings, and little Dimity Coat; which I artfully contrived to pin up, as well as I could... I took down a Waistcoat of my Brother's, and an enormous bushy Tie-wig of my Father's, which enclos'd my Head and Body, with the Knots of the Ties thumping my little Heels as I march'd along... with the Weight of a monstrous Belt and large Silver-hilted Sword, that I could scarce drag along. (10)

Strutting around the gardens adorned in her hodgepodge outfit Charke ends up falling into a “dry Ditch” which, much to her dismay, “was as deep as [she] was high” (11). So far as I have ascertained, writing a doctoral dissertation isn't terribly different from Charke's experience of dressing herself up and tumbling into a ditch. More frequently than I would care to admit during this process I have felt as though I were also playing dress up, and I have certainly found myself in over my head. I am utterly grateful to the incredible community that has seen me through this project, and whose support has made this all possible.

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Charke ends the account of her childhood romp by recounting that once the initial shock of falling into the ditch had worn off she “walk'd up and down the Ditch bowing to all who came by me... 'till which Time I had emply'd myself in this regular March in my Ditch” (11). Covered in dirt and utterly ridiculous, Charke marched up and down her ditch thoroughly pleased with herself and having the time of her life. A final thank you to my best friend and partner. Kelly, I am so thankful for the hours you have spent listening to me practice presentations, read emails, and brainstorm ideas, but I am even more blown away by how lucky I am to have found someone who will pick me up and dust me off when I fall down into the quagmires of my own thoughts. You have truly taught me how to find joy in the mess and to, as Charke so aptly puts it, “march in my ditch”.

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Introduction

“If we lose the intimacy of the connection
between literature and performance, we diminish
something vital in and between them”
– Peggy Phelan, “Just Want to Say”

Eighteenth-century Britons witnessed unprecedented growth in garment production. As modes of production moved away from a small-scale domestic model toward increasing mechanization and steadily growing fabrication of clothing for the middle classes, the period’s new methods of production relied heavily on the labour of women. The commercial market during this period underwent rapid changes, as apparel and fashionable accessories were transformed from luxuries reserved for the elite classes into accessible commodities for much of the population. This rapid growth was profoundly felt in the textile trades. In 1700 the wool and worsted industries “were dominated by small clothiers” (Brown 116) and the “labour force was largely determined by the minimum number of people it took to make a piece of cloth” (116). As the century progressed, a gradual shift occurred within the textile industries during which small domestic-based operations were replaced with a combination of “domestic and workshop manufacture” (116). Relative to other proto-industrial development in eighteenth-century Britain, textile production “as a whole contributed 45.9 per cent of value added in British industry” by the last decades of the period (Berg 27), which continued to grow to “46 per cent in 1831” (27). Propelling this tremendous growth was the work of women, who substantially outnumbered men in most of the textile trades (27). As Alice Clark explains,¹ “the predominance of women’s labour in the textile trades makes their history specifically significant in tracing the evolution of women’s industrial position” (94). Together with

¹ Clark’s scholarship had a tremendous impact on historical studies of women and work in an early modern context for over fifty years after its initial publication. However, as Margaret Hunt points out, Clark’s study set a pattern for historical work on early modern women that “laid heavy stress upon the allegedly ‘cooperative,’ ‘mutually supportive,’ and ‘unindividualistic’ character of the preindustrial household” (135) that has been unfoundedly stretched from the period of Clark’s study in the seventeenth century into the long eighteenth century, particularly in discussions of women in the context of trade or artisanal labour. With this in mind, and in conjunction with the plethora of scholarship in dialogue with Clark, I rely on her work only sparingly.

the gradual change from domestic enterprises to commercial workshops, what is consistent across the long eighteenth century is the steadily increasing number of individuals employed in the garment trades.

By 1726, a report from the House of Commons suggested that there were approximately 700,000 individuals employed in textile operations (James 238). This estimate was updated 13 years later in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which suggested that “more than 1,500,000 persons” (93) were employed in the production of garments. Although scholars like John James suggest that the latter figure (of 1.5 million) should probably be “dismissed as improbable” (238), James adds that this number is not an overestimation if one presupposes that it included “those who gained subsistence from the numerous trades and businesses indirectly connected therewith” (238). Regardless of whether 1.5 million people (or roughly 1 in 5 Britons) were really employed in the textile industry and associated trades by 1739, what is evident is that the growth and dominance of garment associated trades were substantial during this period. The last two decades of the century saw perhaps the most dramatic expansion in the number of individuals employed in the various garment sectors, as well as in the volume of domestic and international trade. James asserts that “the interval between the close of the American War [1783] and the commencement of the French Revolutionary War, (1792) undoubtedly formed one of the most flourishing periods in the worsted trade” (304).

Technological advancements like James Hargreaves’s “spinning jenny” (1768), Richard Arkwright’s “water frame” (1769), and Samuel Compton’s “mule” (1779) contributed to the dramatic increase in production and consumption of textile goods in the second half of the eighteenth century. Although these new technologies undoubtedly helped increase production, particularly in the cotton industry, they were not unilaterally adopted across garment trades. In fact, Richard Brown in his assessment of the economy of Britain from 1700-1850 argues that the response of the clothing trade to increasing demands was largely “not technological” in nature;

rather, rising demands were “satisfied by a simple increase in the number of tailors, needlewomen, seamstresses and dressmakers” (92). Following appraisals from historians like Brown who de-emphasize technological developments, (92) it is evident that scholarship would benefit from a more holistic approach to studying the proto-industrial period, one that accounts for the experiences of working women who comprised the industry’s core.

The garment industry during this period was comprised of a variety of interconnected trades. Illustrated in his multi-volume series, *The Book of Trades; or, Library of the Useful Arts* (1807), J. Johnson describes no less than 14 distinct trades related to the creation, styling and selling of garments. Women were employed in many of these trades and worked as spinners, stocking-makers, hat-makers, milliners, mantua-makers, clothes dealers, dressers, seamstresses, and haberdashers. Within the industry there were complex hierarchies of wealth that typically allocated the least lucrative and most labour-intensive tasks, like the spinning of fibres for garments, to women and children. Despite substantial challenges, a significant number of women were able to establish themselves as milliners, mantua-makers or seamstresses, and created lucrative, thriving, businesses that rivalled those of their male contemporaries. Studying milliners, mantua-makers and seamstresses is, however, easier said than done. One of the primary reasons these women have received relatively little critical attention is that they are epistemologically slippery. Unlike the more affluent women of the period whose lives were often meticulously documented in newspapers, paintings, and lengthy biographies, garment workers are largely absent from the historical record.

Despite the widespread participation of women in the proto-industrial workroom and the considerable success of a number of influential milliners, mantua-makers, and seamstresses, these women remain largely understudied. Scholars have tended to explore either their depiction in literary texts written predominantly by male authors or the function of the dresses they created in relation to the participation of women as consumers in the growing commercial marketplace. Studying literary

representations of women working in garment trades has nevertheless yielded substantial insight. Jennie Batchelor attends closely to the representation of clothing in literary works and argues that dress constituted “a form of language through which meaning was generated by the wearer and read by the observer” (9). Similarly, Alicia Kerfoot and Chloe Wigston Smith turn to Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and Frances Burney’s *Cecilia* (1782) in their respective analyses of the relationship between clothing and women’s social participation. Batchelor, Kerfoot and Wigston Smith not only argue for increased scrutiny of the signifying potential for clothing within novels of the period, but also point to the “readability” of clothing as a crucial facet of identity formation for women. Wigston Smith in particular turns her attention to the “practical habits” and material resources available to the middling and labouring classes that “function first and foremost as tangible objects” which are “put to strategic use” to “reimagine the old hierarchical and cultural codes of dress and style” (2) in literary texts.

Alongside eighteenth-century debates about the role of women in the commercial marketplace, a second and third generation of actresses achieved increasing prominence both onstage and as cultural phenomena and social celebrities.² Recounting her performance as Juliet,³ actress Mary Robinson described how “[t]he theatre was crowded with fashionable spectators... My dress was a pale pink satin, trimmed with crape, richly spangled with silver” (129). Gesturing to both the well-dressed audience members as well as her own clothing, Robinson carefully attends to the details of her costume throughout her retelling of the event. The central role of dress for Robinson is particularly evident in her description of the final scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, where she explains,

My head was ornamented with white feathers, and my monumental suit, for the last scene,

² Felicity Nussbaum differentiates eighteenth-century actresses from their earlier Restoration counterparts, suggesting that actresses on “the English stage from 1700 until the 1780s” recognized “the exchange value of their labor and their potential for self-commodification” and as a result they “demanded remuneration commensurate with their talents” (11).

³ *The London Stage* notes that Robinson’s performance as Juliet occurred on December 10th 1776 at Drury Lane where she played opposite William Brereton as Romeo (43).

was white satin and completely plain, excepting that I wore a veil of the most transparent gauze, which fell quite to my feet from the back of my head, and a string of beads round my waist to which was suspended a cross appropriately fashioned. (131)

Here Robinson's garments take centre stage in the description of her performance, and draw together her role not only as an actress playing Juliet, but also as a woman of taste who is in step with current fashionable styles. Similarly, actress George Anne Bellamy highlights her superior knowledge of fashionable trends in her memoir, wherein she explains:

I had cleared at my benefit the last season upwards of eleven hundred pounds. This was owing to several causes. I had for some time been allowed to be sole dictress [sic] among the polite ranks in the article of dress. My judgement in this point was held in so much estimation, that the ladies would have been wretched who did not consult me relative to their birth-day or fancy cloaths. (1)

Here Bellamy succinctly links her knowledge of fashion to her success as an actress and her ability to earn a substantial sum of money. As illustrated by both Robinson and Bellamy in their respective memoirs, garments chosen by actresses were not only indications of a woman's cultural cachet, but were also intimately linked to her financial success. The costume choices made by popular eighteenth-century actresses, particularly those performing at the large patent theatres, were points of interest that drew crowds who were curious to see the latest styles and interpretations of popular characters.

From this position of cultural visibility, female performers and their public narratives became inextricable from contemporary concerns about corporeal signification and genuine emotion. The rise to prominence of actresses and their complex position – as both benefiting from and contending with larger socio-cultural circuits of consumption – has certainly not escaped scholarly attention. In the twentieth century the foundation for what we would now call “actress studies” was initiated by a number of monographs like Julie Carlson's *In the Theatre of Romanticism* (1994), Betsy Bolton's *Women, Nationalism and the Romantic Stage* (2001), and Judith Pascoe's *Romantic Theatricality* (1997). More recent studies of eighteenth-century actresses by scholars like Joseph

Roach, Julia Fawcett, and Felicity Nussbaum have begun to explore the social capital of female performers both on and off the stage. Delving into the relationship between performance and public identity, Nussbaum suggests that actresses functioned as “signs of modernity” that “drove the economy of the playhouse and acted as agents of their own commodification” (64). By stepping onto the stage, actresses participated in a competitive economic marketplace (26) where many of the period’s most celebrated female performers often earned more than their male counterparts (43). Not only were these women lauded for their acting prowess, but they were also frequently linked to wider social trends in fashion and style. Chronicled in the pages of contemporary publications are debates about the costume choices for a number of actresses ranging from Sarah Siddon’s decision to wear a white dress in the final scene of *Macbeth* (*The London Stage* 796) to the cut of Frances Abington’s bodice in *The Way of the World* (1917). Not only were actresses’ clothing and performances reviewed in the periodical press, but they were also painted by famous portrait artists, sketched in cartoons, and blazoned in literary works. In short, actresses’ clothing “signaled the emergence of a culture in which the ‘self’ – creating the effect of a private interior depth combined with a very real physical presence – produces itself as a fluid commodity to be advertised and exchanged” (Nussbaum 64).

Although actresses garnered considerable social and economic capital through the circulation of themselves as public commodities, this process was fraught with tension. On the one hand, actresses fashioned themselves a place within the male dominated public sphere, but on the other hand the monetized and circulated object that lay at the center of their social and economic success was the actress herself. Moreover, actresses were significantly limited by publicly sanctioned conceptions of ‘appropriate’ public femininity. Following the appearance of actresses on the English stage, two distinct categories for classifying female performers became deeply entrenched in the social lexicon: the virtuous actress (who was represented both on and off stage as a chaste wife and

mother), and the deviant actress (who attempted to live outside the rigid confines of domesticity and who was frequently associated with prostitution). Caught between this binary conceptualization of public femininity, actresses found themselves subjected to ruthless public scrutiny. Elizabeth Howe in *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (1992) speaks to the powerful restrictions facilitated by this dichotomous categorization of actresses as either virtuous or deviant (37), suggesting that this binary trapped women within an exploitative system that demanded public intimacy (Nussbaum 63) and visceral expression while simultaneously condemning ambitious feminine autonomy (88) as transgressive and dangerously sexual. Unlike male performers like David Garrick and Colley Cibber who could simultaneously call upon the performative power of sentimental expression and maintain separate private lives, actresses struggled to establish and maintain boundaries between their public personas and private identities. Nussbaum asserts that the success of female performers was in fact predicated upon eighteenth-century actresses “giving the lie to the separation of public and private spheres” (64). Building upon these assertions, Fawcett offers an explanation for this disparity between male and female performers, suggesting that audiences tended “to read women’s performances as always more earnest than men’s” (138), which in turn was directly connected to a general “hesitance to regard women as professionals with technical skills, or to separate their public roles from their private lives” (138).

Unlike their male contemporaries, women were already contending with considerable pushback for their public visibility both in the playhouse audience and on the stage itself. Jeremy Collier’s *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) highlights the intense public scrutiny of female performers. Repeatedly questioning the moral veracity of the theatre, Collier’s concerns come to focus on the unnatural presence of women in the theatrical space, both as members of the audience and as players on stage. At the outset of his diatribe he asks, “Do the women leave all the regards to decency and conscience behind them when they come to the Play-



Figure 1: “The Triumphal Entry of the Red Kings by Wisdom & Justice with the Expulsion of their Black Majesties” (1768)

House? Or does the Place transform their inclinations, and turn their former aversions into pleasure?” (3). Turning his attention to actresses, Collier asserts that “to bring women under such misbehavior is violence to their native modesty, and a misrepresentation [sic] of their sex. For Modesty... is the *Character* of women. To represent them without this Quality, is to make Monsters of them, and throw them out of their kind” (3). Remarks like Collier’s reflect commonplace and persistent concerns about female social participation and the growing autonomy of women in public spheres.

Contemporary concerns about the “unnatural” place of women in theatrical productions are illustrated in an anonymous satirical cartoon from 1768 entitled, “The Triumphal Entry of the Red Kings by Wisdom & Justice with the Expulsion of their Black Majesties” (see Figure 1). The cartoon shows a group of people standing outside of a theatre, including the patentees, several personified

figures (including Wisdom, Justice, Tragedy and Comedy), and a number of popular actresses from the period who are all identified by a playbill posted on the wall of the theatre. The cartoon primarily responds to “the quarrel between the four patentees of Covent Garden Theatre,” (Curators of the British Museum) from that year and as such the image includes the four male patentees (William Powell, George Colman the elder, Thomas Harris and John Rutherford), depicted as the red kings who are vanquishing the “black majesties” (several of whom are illustrated as half-human and half beast) with the sword of Justice. The actresses included illustrate the two disparate characterizations of female performers. The treatment of each actress in the cartoon varies largely and is directly related to her socially perceived value within the patriarchal hierarchy. On the far left-hand side of the group is Mary Ann Yates dressed as The Queen of Hearts in a flowing gown, small crown, carrying a scepter and smiling brightly at the Kings of Diamonds and Hearts in the center of the image. Yates, as the wife of Richard Yates and sister-in-law to Haymarket Theatre manager James Brooke (Crochunis 570) was not only well-positioned within the theatrical world as both an actress and manager, but moreover her reputation as a virtuous wife allowed her to garner widespread public support (577) which is reflected here in her position as a “red queen.” In juxtaposition to Yates’ bright smiling face the two women in the right-hand corner of the cartoon are not afforded the same generous depiction, and are amongst the group of “black majesties.” Both of these actresses – identified by the playbill as Jane Lessingham and George Anne Bellamy who are respectively cast in the roles of the Queen of Clubs and the Queen of Spades – had reputations for immoral sexual conduct. Lessingham (identified in the image as No. 9) is drawn with a bird on one shoulder and a baby on the other, caressing the ass-ears of the King of Clubs while leading him by the nose with a string attached to her leg. Her skirts have been pulled up to reveal that she has the legs of a goat with the word “LUST” written across her hairy thigh. Lessingham, who had been divorced by her husband in 1765 (Crouch) on grounds of adultery, spent the rest of her life with a

string of other men and for a considerable period of her life was the mistress of Thomas Harris, the King of Clubs in the cartoon. Similarly, Bellamy is portrayed as leading the King of Spades by the nose with a string, but unlike Lessingham she is spared from grotesquerie and is instead simply shown as a woman in shadow. This anonymous cartoon not only echoes the concerns of Collier nearly seventy years earlier by depicting an immoral theatrical space where male social dominance is threatened by the deceptive promiscuity of domineering women, but it also charts a hierarchy of virtue for women in the public sphere. On the one hand women like Yates are celebrated and crowned as virtuous queens, and on the other women like Lessingham are depicted as half-human and half-beast.

Although popular actresses frequently took center stage in contemporary discussions of eighteenth-century theatre, public theatre more generally emerged as “one of the chief entertainment institutions” (Howard 2) in the rapidly developing metropolis of London,⁴ and performed an important role “in shaping how people of the period conceptualized or made sense of this fast-changing urban milieu” (2). By mid-century, James Ralph estimates, Londoners spent approximately 30,000 pounds per year on theatrical entertainment.⁵ Not only did London theatres function as a central hub of entertainment for a wide range of individuals from a variety of socio-economic classes, but the large commercial playhouses also employed a steadily increasing number of people. Account books for Covent Garden illustrate that a wide range of individuals were employed by the playhouse including servants, carpenters, singers, performers, musicians, clerks, carpet makers, candlestick makers, properties managers, and dressers who were essential to the daily operations of

⁴ London experienced unprecedented social and economic development. This exponential growth is succinctly illustrated by the staggering rise of the population, which more than doubled over the course of the period. Records indicate that in 1650 London had a population of 400,000 which reached approximately 1,096,784 by 1801 when the first reliable census data was collected (Emsley, Hitchcock and Shoemaker). One of the driving forces behind this tremendous increase in population was the substantial number, nearly 8,000 per year (Boulton 317), of young migrants who moved to the capital in search of upward mobility through employment as skilled labourers.

⁵ Ralph writes, “it has been said, and I am told it can be proved, that we pay no less than thirty thousand pounds a year, for the support of these two theatres” (45).

the theatre. Estimates put the number of “persons in constant daily pay” at Covent Garden and Drury Lane (Milhous and Hume 288) between 140 to 300 individuals by the mid-1730s.

Several scholars have highlighted how theatres functioned as sites of significant commercial exchange and as lynchpins of meaning-making wherein “Londoners encountered fictions that directly addressed the conditions” of life in the city (Howard 2). The advent of commercial playhouses⁶ like Covent Garden and Drury Lane solidified the permanence of the stage and established it as an increasingly London-centric phenomenon (Grantley 14) both in relation to the physical location of the major playhouses in the recently developed Covent Garden (144), and in the depictions of recognizable features of London in plays throughout the long eighteenth century.⁷ Underscoring the ubiquity of the theatre to eighteenth-century society, in 1761 Charles Churchill asserted that the stage was a subject “fair and free” to critique because “tis yours--- ‘tis mine --- ‘tis public property” (42). Adding nuance to Churchill’s general proclamation of theatre as the property of the people, Jean Christophe Agnew emphasizes how “the language of ‘stage and scene’” (160) became interwoven into the fabric of eighteenth-century life and discourse because no other venue was as well equipped to capture the sentiment of the age (160) and the realities of urban life (154).⁸

It is no surprise that theatre in the capital has been a fruitful for a great deal of research on eighteenth-century life more broadly,⁹ and has been particularly productive in discussions of female

⁶ Darryll Grantley points to the “increasing dominance of private theatres” which was “fed by a new breed of gentlemen writers” who targeted a more literate and sophisticated population (141).

⁷ The importance of the “locality of dramatic action” is underscored by Grantley, who suggests that the setting of plays in familiar London venues (like Covent Garden, Hyde Park, the New Exchange etc.) enabled characters “to be placed in a relationship with the locality that defines their identity and role” which is shared by an urban audience (3).

⁸ It should be noted that other centres of urban theatres and non-urban touring companies were also important social institutions throughout the period, but these operations exceed the scope of this investigation.

⁹ For instance, Gillian Russell uses London theatre as a lens through which to chart the developments of public femininity and sociability, suggesting that theatre of the 1760s and 70s facilitates the historical recuperation of women of fashion; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume use London theatre (specially account books from Covent Garden Theatre) to explore economic facets of business transactions; and Judith Pascoe uses London theatre and theatrical culture to study iterations of female authorship.

social participation. The theatre was an important space, both physically and theoretically,¹⁰ for eighteenth-century women. As Laura Rosenthal points out, unlike a number of other public venues “such as the century’s famous coffee houses, [which] excluded women, the playhouse simply could not function without them” (159). Female participation in theatrical spaces was so pervasive that in James Ralph’s description of the essential practices of theatre-going from his work, *The Case of Our Present Theatrical Disputes* (1743), wherein he describes things like the process of purchasing a ticket and finding one’s seat in the audience (37), he devotes several lines to addressing the commonplace problem of accommodating large hoopskirts of the ladies’ dresses. Describing the experience of being seated in a theatre box, Ralph writes that there “may be in one Box, men and women, and none of them know each other. But the truth is, that sometimes it is very troublesome sitting there on account of the Lady’s hoops” (37). Not only does he emphasize the physical presence of women and how they shaped the theatre’s interior spaces, but Ralph subsequently highlights the ways in which women – and here he is speaking particularly about those who participated in a club for the promotion of Shakespearean theatre¹¹ – directly influenced both the conduct of the audience members as well as the content of what was presented on stage. Ralph writes,

The Ladies have been always the best Patrons of wit, and have distinguished themselves by a true taste in public diversions; from them, therefore we are to expect a constant encouragement of bold, generous and honest sentiments... Their steady pursuit of such a conduct, must at last prevail over all obstacles, and force men to behave like men, at least out of complaisance. Thus much I think, may suffice as to the power of the audience in supporting good plays; and discouraging bad. (44)

Illustrated by Ralph and echoed by other contemporary commentators, it is evident that women comprised a substantial and influential portion of the theatrical audience and were powerful

¹⁰ Scholars like Nora Nachumi and Kristina Straub highlight the importance of female presence in theatrical space (both as actresses and audience members) as integral to the period’s conceptualization of gendered social roles.

¹¹ Fiona Ritchie has explored the impact of what has become known as the “Shakespeare Ladies Club” in *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (2014).

consumers of commercial culture (Russell 4) with the ability to comment upon performances and nurture their own intellectual objectives.

In addition to female spectators, a substantial number of women were employed in the daily operations of commercial venues like Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres. Although female performers dominate discussions of both working women and eighteenth-century theatre, actresses were by no means the only women who relied upon theatres for their livelihoods. London theatres, particularly the large patent theatres of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, also employed women as milliners, dressers, haberdashers and seamstresses¹² both in-house and off-site. These workers were integral to the functioning of the theatres. However, these women have received relatively little critical attention. Unlike the actresses who have featured prominently in recent scholarship and whose lives were meticulously documented by their contemporaries, garment workers are largely absent from the historical record. In rare instances they are mentioned in account books recording the amount paid for particular items or for the salaries of in-house staff. Despite the fact that detailed descriptions and sketches of the costumes these women created are often explored in conjunction with popular performers, the garment workers themselves have remained largely unaccounted for in discussions of theatrical history. These women made important and lasting contributions to eighteenth-century theatrical culture, and as such they merit serious and sustained scholarly attention.

Drawing together the two largest groups of women who worked outside the home during the long eighteenth century, female performers and garment tradeswomen, this project initiates a comprehensive literary historiography of female labour. Integrating theoretical precepts from material culture studies, my research methodology responds to two primary concerns: first, the need

¹² For brevity and simplicity's sake the various categories of working women who were employed in the production of theatrical garments will be referred to in general terms as "garment workers," "textile workers," and "tradeswomen" throughout.

to rethink archival studies to account for scholarly bias and, second, the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to narratives that are more challenging to access and have as a result been passed over as materially insignificant. Whereas intellectual history often focuses on garments as particularly important to female networks of communication, I argue that there is much to be gained by examining the women who made these items and the ways in which they are represented in historical records. Structurally speaking, this project is comprised of a prologue, five chapters and a coda. Instead of moving chronologically through the long eighteenth century, this project begins with popular and well-documented characters and persons in the eighteenth-century socio-cultural lexicon (like Samuel Richardson's titular heroine Pamela, David Garrick's adaptation of Shakespeare's Juliet, and popular actress George Anne Bellamy), and as it progresses, moves further and further away from canonical figures into the margins of discourse to trace networks of female labour that link the playhouse and the workshop.

Setting the stage for this investigation, the prologue explores the integral connections between dress, fashion and expressions of female virtue. As affordable commodities became accessible to larger swaths of English society, critiques of fashion moved beyond discussions of what was stylish for a particular season, and increasingly became important sites of cultural debate about identity formation. I focus on two of the most popular literary forms of the period, conduct manuals and sentimental novels, and trace the development of modest dress as a visual signifier of virtuous femininity that enabled women to participate in the circuits of exchange that drove the proto-industrial marketplace. By examining conduct manuals such as the anonymous *Young Lady's Companion; or Beauty's Looking-Glass* (1740), Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), and James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1796) in conjunction with Samuel Richardson's sentimental novel, *Pamela* (1740), this preliminary section charts the development of a visual

vocabulary of legible emotions and ultimately argues that eighteenth-century conceptions of female virtue and duplicity are indivisibly intertwined.

In Chapter One I begin with a case study of actress George Anne Bellamy. Tracing Bellamy's cultivation of her public image and navigation of life in the public eye, this chapter poses questions about the nature of identity formulation and self-fashioning for working women in the eighteenth century. Bellamy's narrative was industriously chronicled in a multi-volume biography as well as a considerable number of portraits and pieces in the periodical press.¹³ As a woman who made her living working under harsh public scrutiny, Bellamy's experience in many ways parallels other eighteenth-century working women who were "on display" as shop-girls or strictly monitored in garment workshops; her celebrity thus functions as a springboard for the chapters that follow.

Building upon the foundation facilitated by Bellamy's well-documented life, Chapters Two and Three will delve into the often-murky waters of tracing the lives of women working in garment industries, and explore the differences between literary representations and lived realities of these trades. Chapter Two, "Sisters of the Sewing Tribe': Characterizations of Seamstresses, Milliners and Mantua-Makers in Eighteenth-Century Literary Texts," explores the representation of female garment workers in three texts: *The Life and Intrigue of the Celebrated Mrs. Mary Parrimore, the tall milliner of Change-Alley* (1729); *The Beggar Girl and Her Benefactors* (1797) by Anna Maria Bennett; and *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties* (1814) by Frances Burney. Complementing the literary analysis undertaken in Chapter Two, Chapter Three, "Rethinking the Role of Garment Tradeswomen: Exploring Milliners, Mantua-makers and Spinsters in Eighteenth-Century Trade Manuals and Insurance Records" considers archival documents written by and for women working in garment associated industries to present a more complete picture of female social participation in proto-

¹³ Bellamy's life was not only thoroughly chronicled by her contemporaries, but these records have largely been digitized and are exceptionally easy to access.

industrial England. My primary objective here is not to dismiss literary interpretation of fictional texts, but rather to complement existing methodological approaches to exploring eighteenth-century women's labour by drawing together different genres. To this end, Chapter Three investigates trade manuals like R. Campbell's *The London Tradesman* (1757) and J. Johnson's *The Book of Trades* (1807), city registries like the *The Liverpool Directory* (1766), court proceedings from the Old Bailey (1742-57) and insurance records from *The Sun Life Insurance Register* (1791-2). With an aim to reinforce the importance of accounting for individual experience, this chapter explores the records of nearly 40 garment tradeswomen whose lives and experiences are documented in the aforementioned historical documents. Drawing together imagined and historical experiences of female garment workers, Chapters Two and Three when taken together aim to broaden the study of female labour and to trace how the relationship between identity and clothing developed in conjunction with the growth of the consumer marketplace.

Returning to the playhouse, Chapters Four and Five examine both the garments that women created for London's patent theatres and the depictions of garment workers as characters on stage. Turning critical attention to this underexamined group of professionals working in theatrical venues, my objectives for these chapters are two-fold: foremost, I aim to highlight the integral value of textile workers as central figures in both the daily functioning of the patent theatres and as popular characters on the stage itself. In Chapter Four, "Setting the Stage: Costume Procurement in Eighteenth-Century London," I illustrate how theatre companies procured costumes for the stage through three primary avenues: first, the purchasing of new garments from the shops of seamstresses, tailors, milliners and mantuamakers; second, the acquiring of second-hand garments either as donations from wealthy patrons or sourced through the burgeoning commercial trade in secondhand goods; and third, the construction of garments by in-house seamstresses. Once the integral relationship between the theatres and garment trades has been clearly laid out I will move

into Chapter Five, “As in a Mirror:’ Milliners and Seamstresses in the Plays of Etherege and Drury,” where I explore representations of working women on the stage. Positioning the stage as a socio-historic artifact, this chapter aims to rethink popular conceptualizations of the eighteenth-century stage. Looking specifically at the mobility and social capital of female garment workers in *She Would if She Could* (1668) by George Etherege and *The Rival Milliners* (1737) by Robert Drury, this chapter sketches out a framework for rethinking the implicit processes that occur when we talk, write or assess historical objects. My two final chapters uncover the historical practices and theatrical representations of garment tradeswomen working in London patent theatres over the course of the long eighteenth century and add much needed nuance to existing discussions of public femininity during the period.

This project as a whole draws together eighteenth-century insurance records, playscripts, costumes, and literary texts to illustrate how the relationship between identity and clothing for women developed in conjunction with the growth of the consumer marketplace. Although each chapter in this study is firmly rooted in explorations of the eighteenth-century garment trades, the project as a whole has much broader implications for studies of women’s labour. By tracing the history of women who for centuries were dismissed as unimportant and whose crucial labour was denigrated or ignored, my thesis asks that we reevaluate our scholarly orientations toward the objects that we study. If we have any hope of weaving together a more inclusive future for our discipline, we must turn our attention to texts and artifacts that reflect the views of more than just the privileged few.

Prologue: “Decketh herself to all external Advantages:” Dress, Fashion and Expressions of Feminine Virtue in Eighteenth-Century Conduct Manuals and Sentimental Fiction

“What difference is there now between the Dress of a *Citizen* and a *Courtier*, of a *Taylor* and a *Gentleman*, of a *Servant* and a *Master*? The *Maid* is very often mistaken for the *Mistress*, and the *Valet* for *my Lord*.”

– Richard Steele, *The Ladies Library*

“As a symbol that can variously connote wealth, social status, sexuality and moral probity, dress is, as it always has been and probably always will be, a site on which multiple and often completing anxieties are simultaneously focussed.”

– Jennie Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire*

As eighteenth-century commercial markets prospered, so too did debates about the role of dress and fashion in printed works by philosophers, politicians, and social commentators. For instance, the anonymous *The Progress of Fashion* (1786) speaks to the important role of fashion, not only in terms of current trends and popular styles of dress, but also as a lynchpin for broader considerations of identity and participation in the rapidly expanding proto-industrial market. In the prologue, the author underscores the “general influence of fashion on the manners, habits, tempers of mankind,” and identifies how “it is not an unentertaining employment, to enquire how the world differs so widely on a subject, the centre of general attention, and the source of passions so various and opposite” (1). Here, *The Progress of Fashion* emphasizes the important ideological position of fashion in broader socio-cultural conversations and simultaneously underscores how this position was deeply contested. Although the author seems reticent to do more than identify the presence of varied opinions on the subject, they clearly identify that participants and advocates of fashion are antithetical to “men of reason” (3). *The Progress of Fashion* explains that “[f]ashion has justly been held to be the empire of fools; and men of reason, finding that common sense and common appearance

bore so little affinity, were willing to renounce the kindred of the one for the sake of the other” (3). As they are positioned as the opposite to men of sense and reason, proponents of fashion are implicitly feminized.

In an even more extreme stance, the anonymous poem *The Frenzy of Fashion* (1777) positions fashion and dress as primarily the jurisdiction of women. The text begins with the proclamation that,

While whimsy'd fashion's shifting scene renews
The Female's changeful Garb, with transient hues;
Where short-liv'd flowers a quick succession spread,
And bloom, and wither, on sweet Beauty's bed;
One matchless Form, in Fancy's fairy range,
Unrival'd shines alike in ev'ry change;
Bids various charms, all characters express,
Howe'er adorn'd, still more adorning dress. (3)

Not only is fashion distinctly positioned by the speaker as shifting and transient, but moreover this constant changeability is explicitly linked to an insatiable desire for perpetual adornment. Neatly concealed within the metaphor of fashion as a flower that blooms, fades, and returns anew each season is a withering critique of the endless desires of fashionable women to sport the latest trends.

Debates about the growing commercial demand for dresses and accessories were prevalent in a wide range of literary forms, and especially in conduct manuals. Printed and reprinted in new editions every few years,¹⁴ popular texts like the anonymously penned *Young Lady's Companion; or Beauty's Looking-Glass* (1740), James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) engaged with cultural conversations about female participation in the proto-industrial market and the intersections between dress, identity, and social position. My thesis surveys literary discussions of women and identity in the eighteenth century in

¹⁴ For example, Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* was initially published in two volumes in 1773, but over the course of 27 years was published in eight editions and was reprinted ten times (in 1775, 1777, 1778, 1783, 1787, 1786, 1789, 1793, 1797 and 1800).

order to trace the complex connections between clothing and female participation in public life. To this end, I chart the importance of modest dress in particular as a central facet of ‘good’ or ‘acceptable’ female participation in social and labour activities as elucidated by conduct manuals. In addition to exploring the role of mid- and late-eighteenth-century conduct manuals in debates on dress and female social participation, I will also examine the links between conduct manuals and sentimental fiction, looking specifically at how this other popular genre adopted many principles of conduct literature to emphasize the importance of modesty and virtuous femininity.

Before exploring the ways in which fashion was central to eighteenth-century discussions of femininity, it is important to emphasize that the social significance of dress was influenced by the residual cultural resonances of early modern sumptuary legislation. From the medieval period until the early seventeenth century sumptuary laws “were directed at the governance of appearance that allowed the relevant social facts, in particular about social and economic status, gender and occupation” (Hunt 42) to be made legible in an individual’s clothing. In his discussion of sumptuary legislation in England, Alan Hunt explains that clothing came to be a “powerful, if complex, form of communication” (42). Expanding upon Hunt’s remarks, Paul Raffield suggests that “the regulation of dress became an important means of expression for the propriety, authority and indivisibility of divine and common law” (128), and moreover that “the constitution of clothes, which sixteenth-century sumptuary legislation attempts to enforce, affirms the classical principles of citizenship and reason within the Christian nation-state” (128). By explicitly connecting notions of identity and Christian nationhood to clothing both Hunt and Raffield underscore the importance of dress as a foundational element of early modern social networks that visually identified an individual’s socio-economic status. Despite the fact that sumptuary laws were repealed at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Hunt 298), Hunt argues that they were not abolished entirely, but rather “transformed and absorbed into the social fabric” (357). Although they “ceased to exist in their

traditional form” they were converted “without any major dislocation from a form of personal regulation to become part of a wide regulation organized around the discourse of public health and social welfare” (391). Detached from their more tangible form as a legislative discourse that set out “hierarchical dress codes” (391), the fundamental tenants of sumptuary laws became a more nebulous but nevertheless crucial element of eighteenth-century social discourse and were broadly adopted by moralists and incorporated into discussions of dress and ideal female social participation.

Over the course of the period writers increasingly linked dress and fashionable garments to discussions of female participation in non-domestic activities. By mid-century, debates about appropriate women’s dress drew considerably more attention when compared to their male counterparts. Anne Hollander notes this divergence in women’s and men’s fashion, and suggests that whereas women’s fashion became increasingly complex and variable throughout the period, male tailoring became “not just simpler” but “even more aggressively simple as feminine modes became more fanciful” (77). Hollander proposes that generally speaking, “the advance of restraint as a quality of male dress may well have been hastened, spurred by the extremity of ladies’ fashionable excesses” (77), and as a result, sensible men were expected to avoid unnecessary adornment of their own garments “even if they liked it on the ladies” (77). Speaking to this divide between garments for men and women, Hollander highlights how gendered associations of fashion during the period cast women as excessive, frivolous and fanciful in stark juxtaposition to their restrained and sensible male contemporaries. Hollander’s summary of eighteenth-century fashion trends establishes the status of dress as a synecdochic stand-in for the female body in discussions about female participation in various public spheres.

Daniel Defoe in *Every-body’s business is no-body’s business; or, Private abuses, public grievances* (1725) bemoans how modest and appropriate attire for working women was being fundamentally altered by the commercial marketplace. In one instance, he complains that the maid’s “leathern shoes are now

transformed into laced ones with high heels; her yarn stockings are turned into fine woolen ones, with silk clocks” (5). Although the purchasing habits of working women are evidently troubling to Defoe, it is the larger systemic ramifications of their behaviour that most concerns him. He explains that when servants purchase “extravagant” clothing they initiate a chain reaction of excessive consumption which subsequently forces middle- and upper-class women to make superfluous purchases in order to sustain visual differentiations of class status.¹⁵ Describing this process Defoe states,

By their [servants'] extravagance in dress, they put our wives and daughters upon yet greater excesses, because they will indeed they ought, go finer than the maid; thus the maid striving to outdo the mistress, the tradesman's wife to outdo the gentleman's wife, the gentleman's wife emulating the lady, and the ladies one another; it seems as if the whole business of the female sex were nothing but an excess of pride, and extravagance in dress. (13)

To combat potential transgressions, Defoe concludes that “the apparel of our women-servants should be next regulated, that we may know the mistress from the maid” (15). What becomes clear in Defoe's critique of unnecessary spending is that dress functions as an external signifier of virtuous femininity, for which modest spending (by both working women and their more affluent counterparts) acts as the metaphorical glue which holds together existing social hierarchies.

Beyond the material bounds of the garments themselves, dress became a central element in discussions of women's ‘proper’ place in the existing social hierarchies, and fashion became the distinct realm of female expertise. In 1744, the anonymous author of *Man Superior to Woman*¹⁶ succinctly outlines the general association of women with fashion in his prefatory discussion of

¹⁵ The majority of discourse about clothing for working women during the eighteenth century is overtly classist, and is predicated on the problematic desire to restrict lower-income individuals from participating in the same activities as those with more financial means.

¹⁶ *Man Superior to Woman* is part of a much larger cultural discussion about sexual difference and gender ideology that was chronicled by a mid-century debate between the anonymous author of *Man Superior to Woman* and a woman named Sophia (Jones 52). Wendy Jones illustrates that this repartee, which spanned three rounds of published replies between the two authors, is intimately linked to broader discussions about sexual difference that were taken up by authors like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft who famously debated the subject in their respective publications *Émile* (1762) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

female intellect suggesting that “[t]he more judicious part of our sex may perhaps think it dangerous to trust the *women* as judges of anything where Reason is concerned, on account of the weakness of their intellects, which seldom can reach higher than a Head-Dress” (xiv). Here, the author not only dismisses women’s capacity to possess reason and intellect on par with men’s but does so by comparing female intellectual capacities to an implicitly superfluous fashionable accessory. In suggesting that a women’s intellect could reach no further than the height of her head-dress the author relies upon pre-existing associations of women with fashionable frivolity in order to make claims that women should be subordinate to men. The implication here is that because women cannot possibly possess reason beyond the realm of fashionable adornment their intellectual capacities are just as decorative and frivolous as their garments. The narrator then expands upon his metaphor:

If the business of the mind were nothing more than to contrive a Dress; to invent a new Fashion; to set off a bad Face; to heighten the charms of a good one; to understand the economy of a tea-table; to manage an intrigue; to conduct a Game at *Quadrille*, to lay out new plans of pleasure, pride, and luxury: the women must be owned to have a capacity not only equal, but even superior to us. (19)

Instead of focussing on a single item of clothing, this passage extends dress beyond the material garment itself by associating both dress and fashion with other activities connected to polite femininity. Although the narrator acknowledges women’s ability to exceed men in these domestic pursuits, the intellectual capacities of women are confined to the home. By linking dress, fashion and domestic pastimes to conceptions of women’s intellect, the author of *Man Superior to Woman* underscores how these typically “feminine” activities allowed women to thrive within domestic parameters. Operating on the assumption that women were unfit to participate in male activities, presumably all public activities not listed in the summary above, the author intends to undercut or call into question women’s ability to participate more broadly in public discourse while

simultaneously idealizing the role of women within the domestic sphere.¹⁷ Moreover, in detailing the ways in which women generally excel in domestic activities like creating a new fashion, applying makeup, arranging a tea table and playing at cards, the text implicitly divorces these activities from their practical extensions in public life. The narrator does not acknowledge that all the activities listed as the domain of the frivolous woman of fashion are inextricably linked to active participation in the commercial marketplace: the refreshments of the tea table must be purchased; the fabric for the dress was likely sourced and tailored by a professional; and the makeup, or its components, were acquired from a shop, etc. The text thus presents an idealised kind of femininity that is superficially disconnected from and intimately connected to both domestic and commercial activities.¹⁸

As domestic activities became increasingly linked to female social participation in the public marketplace, eighteenth-century conduct manuals and literary discussions¹⁹ began to include sections discussing the importance of dress, and more specifically modest dress, in constituting female virtue. One of the most popular conduct manuals of the period was *The Young Lady's Companion; or Beauty's Looking-Glass* (1740) anonymously penned by "A Person of Quality." Written as a series of instructional letters from a father to his daughter, *The Young Lady's Companion* aims to teach young women the importance of religion and virtue in order to dissuade them from becoming enamoured with "the false beauties assumed by vice and depravity of manners" (2). The instruction of young women comes to be represented not only as an integral element of their development, but also as

¹⁷ Laura Mandell in *Misogynous Economies: The Business of Literature in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, builds upon the work of scholars like Ellen Pollak, Mary Poovey and Margaret Doody to suggest that the idealisation of women was a common facet of literature during the eighteenth century. Mandell asserts that "the representation of ideal femininity [in literary texts] serves a social or economic or political function, that the middle class defines itself around" (22).

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that even in Sophia's rebuttal to *Man Superior to Woman* which was aptly titled *Woman not Inferior to Man*, she refrains from an explicit link between women and the commercial market. Although Sophia covers a variety of topics including the intellectual capacity of women, whether women are fit for public offices or are capable of teaching sciences or holding military positions, she does not touch upon female participation in the commercial marketplace (as either consumers or producers).

¹⁹ For example, writers like Mary Astell, George Savile, Thomas Marriott, John Gregory, Sarah Pennington, Hester Chapone, Hannah More and Jean-Jacques Rousseau all include discussions of dress in their commentary on virtuous social conduct for women (Batchelor 130).

the fabric that binds together ‘proper’ social hierarchies. The author explains that “the utmost attention ought to be given to the formation of young females to religion and virtue; because thereon depends not only their own future happiness, but the honour and felicity of whole families” (3). As outlined by *The Young Lady’s Companion*, modest conduct is of the utmost importance. A considerable portion of the text is devoted to warning against the corrupting nature of vanity. In one such instance the author explains,

Vanity maketh a woman tainted with it, so top-full of her self, that she spilleth it upon the company. And because her own thoughts are intirely emply’d in self-contemplation, she endeavoureth, by a cruel mistake, to confine her acquaintance to the same narrow circle of that which only concerneth her ladyship, forgetting that she is not half that importance to the world that she is to her self; so mistaken she is in her value, by being her own appraiser. (57-8)

Here, the dangers of vanity not only threaten to inflate a woman’s sense of self-importance, but they also upset the perceived natural functioning of social dynamics. Utilizing the language of commerce, the author positions a vain woman as a bad consumer who in the act of “being her own appraiser” inflates her value through the vain endeavours of frivolous adornment. *The Young Lady’s Companion* highlights a fundamental shift in dynamics of female social participation which extends women’s social place beyond the confines of the domestic sphere and like *Man Superior to Woman* positions women as active participants in the commercial marketplace as purchasers of garments and household consumables.

Similarly, Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) underscores the importance of modesty as a guiding framework for ideal female comportment, warning her readers against the detrimental pursuit of “restless vanity” (110), which she suggests will only serve to make young women “more unlovely” (110). Instead of yielding to the temptations of frivolous spending Chapone advises that young ladies “must endeavour to acquire skill in purchasing: in order to this, you should begin now to attend to the price of things and take every proper opportunity of learning the real value of every thing, as well as the marks whereby you are to distinguish the good from the

bad” (61). Much like the anonymous author of *The Young Lady’s Companion*, Chapone frames female social participation in economic terms, emphasizing the role of women as consumers and urging young women to cultivate a comprehensive knowledge of the market from as early an age as possible. She explicitly links together dress and household spending, stating, “in your table – as in your dress, and in all other things, I wish you to aim at propriety and neatness” (61) and cautioning that “to go beyond your sphere, either in dress, or in the appearance of your table, indicates a greater fault in your character” (61-2) before concluding that “good sense and observation on the best models must form your taste and a due regard to what you can afford must restrain it” (62). Running throughout Chapone’s advice are the dual threads of modest spending and awareness of one’s social place which are drawn together through the medium of dress. Unlike the author of *Man Superior to Woman*, Chapone does not detach women from the commercial marketplace, but rather she directly connects individual decisions on taste to a broader socially determined value scale that judged female character on external appearance. Both *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* and *The Young Lady’s Companion* reflect a larger trend in conduct literature that relied upon the regulating of women’s bodies in public spaces through the critique of their spending habits and visual appearance, and moreover established a hierarchy of female social worth that placed significant value on the idealized figure of the modest domestic woman.

In her investigation of eighteenth-century constructions of female virtue, Nancy Armstrong highlights how conduct literature of the period reinforced social expectations regarding female appearance. Armstrong explains that “a woman was ranked according to the specific female virtues she possessed rather than to the value of her family name and social connections” (114), in short that female social value was inextricably linked to perceived virtue, and this notion of virtue was, in turn, linked to external signifiers like garments. By invoking the familiar trappings of old sumptuary legislation and reinvigorating it with contemporary concerns about female spending and activity in

the commercial marketplace, conduct manuals participated in the construction and illustration of a hierarchical value system for female social activity that positioned the modest consumer as the ideal. Situated in opposition to the frivolous woman who consumed to excess and put her body on display by investing time and money adorning herself with material objects (114), the modest woman was educated in the proper “economic policies for the management of the household” (111) and practiced what Armstrong dubs “inconspicuous consumption” (110-11), through “discretion, modesty and frugality” (111) which guided her purchasing habits. “Inconspicuous consumption,” in Armstrong’s estimation provided the moral foundation for the conduct-manual genre. Conduct-book writers agreed “that any woman’s value necessarily depreciated as she took up the practice of self-display” (114-15). Within this value system, the modest domestic woman represented the desired pinnacle of virtuous femininity and was perceived to be superior, not only to the aristocratic woman of fashion, but also to the working woman who pursued practices of self-display as a means of earning her income. Conduct writers depicted women at both extremes of the economic spectrum as morally deficient and deemed them to be lacking in virtues that made them “desirable wives” (116). It is evident that regardless of socio-economic status, virtuous femininity was closely connected to external appearance and provided a “reliable way of assessing women” (115), and by extension of restricting female bodies in public spaces.

By the later decades of the eighteenth century, many conduct-book writers had adopted dress as a hallmark of female virtue. Jennie Batchelor points out that despite its widespread popularity much of the advice on dress actually offered no “concrete sense of how virtue might be materialized into clothing” (130). Instead, many writers relied on either the general hallmark of “simplicity” as the ideal mode of dress (130-31) or the juxtaposition of the prudent domestic woman and her vain counterpart, the woman of fashion, in order to emphasize the importance of modesty without delving into specifics. Dress, and its representative capacity as a symbol of feminine

modesty, was connected to the regulation and policing of women's bodies in everyday life. In the anonymous *Progress of Fashion* (1786) the author uses dress as a representative symbol in discussions of female domestic obligations. The narrator suggests that "if she is a wife, it is not only still incumbent on herself, but it is a duty to her husband, to be neat and elegant as her circumstances will allow" (64). Moreover, *The Progress of Fashion* draws together women's dress and the proper functioning of a household and implies that immodest spending is a violation of wifely duty: "[w]hat man can bear with patience to hear his wife apologize for her dirty nightcap and broken bed-gown, because she and her husband were alone at breakfast? It is her duty also in regard to her children, if she wishes them not to be slatterns" (64-5). *The Progress of Fashion* in no uncertain terms contends that it is not only a woman's duty to maintain her appearance for the pleasure of her husband, but that failure to do so will have dire consequences, inspiring deviant behaviour in her children. In short, the author uses the "dirty nightcap" and "broken bed-gown" as visual signifiers of a wife's inability to raise her children, which threatens to undermine the "proper" functioning of the patriarchal family unit.

Unlike many of his contemporaries who used dress only in general terms in discussions of female comportment, the evangelical moderate James Fordyce in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1796) devotes considerable attention to considerations of what constitutes modest apparel. Fordyce's *Sermons* draws heavily on the New Testament, and he begins his discussion of women's dress with a quotation from the Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy wherein Paul proclaims, "I will – that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good work" (9). By beginning with Paul's declaration on female modesty, Fordyce aligns his views with an established institution of patriarchal power – the Presbyterian Church, and specifically London's Monkwell Street congregation – imbuing his commentary with authoritative support. Infused with

the authority of religious scriptures, Fordyce echoes earlier conduct manual authors by positioning fashionable consumption and modest virtue as the principal categories of feminine expression. For Fordyce, female virtue is not established by the woman herself but is collectively determined and subject to frequent re-evaluation. He cautions readers to “remember how tender a thing a woman’s reputation is; how hard to preserve, and when lost how impossible to recover” (27). Drawing attention to the collective determination of female virtue, Fordyce characterises women in a similar fashion to the commodities he warns them against; in this framework the value of both women and commercial objects is externally determined by the social dynamics of the public marketplace.

Simple or modest dress, in Fordyce’s estimation, becomes a key symbol of female social value. Building upon the work of other conduct-manual writers who generally identify “simplicity” in dress as the female ideal, Fordyce suggests that “simplicity is that, which above every thing else, touches and delights. Without, it, indeed, all else is feeble, and unaffecting” (38). Specifying, he explains that although a “plain dress” is “often found [to be] extremely pleasing” (61), “what such a dress is to the person; that and much more, is sobriety to the mind” (61). Simplicity or plain dress comes to be a central axis around which all other elements of female social participation revolve. Most importantly, it provides a framework for evaluating female bodies in the social fabric. It is not only the simplicity of a woman’s dress but also the cleanliness of her garments that is essential to his notion of modesty: “She, my sisters, that would keep her garments clean, must be careful to avoid whatever might defile them” (77). Fordyce explains that “as there are parts of your apparel, which, without having received any fouler stain, do yet require frequent washing; in like manner, supposing you ever so cautious to ‘escape the pollutions of the world,’ there is yet an actual purification requisite to preserve the whiteness and lustre of your minds and manners” (77). By using the image of properly laundered undergarments to stand in for the purity of female minds, Fordyce explicitly

ties female social value to domestic labour, and warns against activities where women may be exposed to “the pollutions of the world” and thus sully their minds and reputations.

Fordyce’s principal concern is the identification of different types of women in public. Even though it is ostensibly possible with a discerning eye and proper judgement to distinguish between virtuous and immoral women (28), Fordyce warns that there “ought ever to be manifest difference between the attire of a virtuous woman, and that of one who has renounced every title to the honourable name” (28). At the climax of Fordyce’s argument he rails against the frequency with which immoral and vain young ladies are able to “pass for women of reputation” (66), suggesting that this duplicitous act is “an insult, in effect to every man and woman of virtue in the world!” (66). What comes to the forefront in his discussion of female virtue is not only that social conceptions of female value were intimately linked to visual indicators of dress, which were used in turn to regulate female bodies, but moreover that women had the ability to curate their social personae by adopting socially sanctioned images of virtue. Fordyce highlights the status of dress as a malleable social signifier. If, as Fordyce suggests, a woman’s virtue can be ascertained by observing her choice of dress, then it can certainly also be manipulated by ‘immoral’ women who wish to present themselves as virtuous.

In conduct manuals dress not only functions as a synecdochical extension of female bodies, but moreover highlights the paradoxical role of women in eighteenth-century society. The rapid expansion of the commercial marketplace afforded women newfound power in various public spheres, not only as purchasers of household goods, but also as curators of their external appearance according to personal taste and fashionable trends. In response to this new-found sartorial freedom, moralists were quick to link proper dress to desirable social behaviour as a means of controlling

female activity outside the home.²⁰ But to do so they also had to acknowledge the power of fashionable dressing, which was seen as distinctly a female activity. Certainly, conduct writers used dress both to critique female bodies in public spaces and to evaluate a woman's social value in a perpetuation of by-gone sumptuary legislation.

Literary discussions of strictures on female dress were not solely limited to conduct manuals, but also formed a central aspect of the widely popular genre of sentimental literature.²¹ In addition to well-studied sentimental novels written by male authors (e.g., Samuel Richardson, Henry Mackenzie, and Laurence Sterne), a significant number of sentimental novels published in the latter half of the eighteenth century were written by women (Rivero 4) such as Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth, Sophia Lee and Charlotte Smith. Many of these texts focus on the proper functioning of female bodies in the public sphere. John Mullan asserts that the sentimental body is more often than not a female body (61), a body whose “vocabulary is that of gestures and palpitations, sighs and tears” (61). In Mullan's estimation, “the vocabulary [of sensibility] is powerful because it is not spoken (but only spoken of); it is everything that punctures or interrupts speech” (61). Similarly, Paul Goring suggests that sentimental literature reflected the concurrent “preoccupation in British culture ... with the human body as an eloquent object, whose eloquence arises from the performance of an inscribed system of gestures and expressions” (5).²² He explains that sentimental novels participated in a larger social discourse which was “engaged in training the body” (5) and aimed to influence the appearance and function of female bodies in public spaces.

²⁰ Many critics were concerned with discerning between women who were participating in legitimate economic activities and “harlots” who sold their bodies. These fears are outlined by John Gauden in *Several Letters Between Two Ladies* wherein he explains that a “Harlot, will dress herself with a veil of Modesty, as well as chaste Rebekah. The wanton and cunning woman ... dekeeth herself to all external Advantages, applieth with all amorous civilities” (34).

²¹ Albert J. Rivero speaks to the tremendous popularity of sentimental fiction and explains that sentimental novels “reached the height of their vogue in the 1770s and 1780s and were still popular in the 1790s,” and “by century's end, sentimental novels were omnipresent in the British book market” (1).

²² It bears mentioning that as much as conduct manuals and sentimental fiction underscored the importance of female virtue and modest consumption – as integral to maintaining existing social hierarchies – these authors relied upon these same systems of consumption and circulation that they sought to critique in order to sell copies of their texts.

Sentimental fiction introduced a new type of literary heroine²³ whose sentimentality was inextricably linked to the “developing signatory system of politeness” (6). Sentimental novels played an integral role in cementing socio-cultural links between emotional expression and ‘proper’ behaviour for women, and authors like Richardson and Sterne relied upon a “language of feeling for the purpose of representing necessary social bonds” (1). Mullan suggests that particularly in Richardson’s novels descriptions of female virtue were “realized in the capacity to feel and display sentiments” (61), and moreover that this capacity for sentimentality is “not so much spoken as displayed” (61). Sentimentality as a visual rather than verbal expression was part of the period’s preoccupation with scrutinizing how different bodies functioned and evaluating them against an ideal code of virtuous social conduct. Mullan underscores that the desire for external markers of internal moral values, like virtue, was illustrated by the descriptions of sentimental heroines. Moreover, the capacity of these fictional characters to express genuine and legible emotions – through a visual vocabulary of blushes, tears and sighs – was deeply influenced by contemporary concerns about female participation in the rapidly expanding commercial marketplace. In this context, it becomes evident that alongside the perceived power of expression allocated to the sentimental heroine, her body was subjected to tremendous public scrutiny.

The hallmarks of virtuous femininity for middle-ranking and working women, which were explicitly outlined in conduct manuals, were more subtly integrated into sentimental fiction. In Richardson’s *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, concerns over the titular character’s moral integrity are directly enmeshed in discussions of her clothing. Frequently, Richardson uses Pamela’s garments as a means of illustrating her virtuous behaviour. In her fifth letter to her parents Pamela writes that she has been given “a suit of my late Lady’s cloaths, and half a dozen of her shifts, and six fine

²³ Although this project focuses on the role of sentimental literature in discussions of female social participation, it is important to note that the sentimental novel also advanced new male characters who functioned as sentimental or emotionally expressive bodies.

handkerchiefs, and three of her Cambrick aprons, and four Holland ones” (11). Immediately following her description of the garments, she adds that “the Cloaths are fine silk, and too rich and too good for me, to be sure. I wish it was no Affront to him to make money of them, and sent it to you: it would do me more good. You will be full of fears, I warrant now, of some design upon me” (11). This early section of the novel illustrates Pamela’s comprehension of her own problematic social position – a poor servant who has nevertheless received a noble education – as a fraught category that is made legible in her choice of garments. In noting that her, “late Lady’s cloathes” are “too rich and too good” for her Richardson specifically links her proper social function as a servant and working woman to her clothing. In her parents’ response to Pamela’s letter they question her acceptance of the fine garments, and warn against sartorial pride: “what tho’ the doubts I fill’d you with, lessen the pleasure you would have had in your Master’s Kindness, yet what signify the delights that arise from a few paltry fine Cloaths, in comparison with a good Conscience?” (14). Pamela’s parents go on to equate the “temptations” of fine clothes with sexual misconduct: “I tremble to think what a sad Hazard a poor Maiden of little more than Fifteen years of age stands against the temptations of this world ... besure don’t let people’s telling you you are pretty puff you up: for you did not make yourself, and so can have no praise due you for it. It is Virtue and Goodness only, that make the true beauty. Remember that, Pamela” (14-5). Structurally formatted in the familiar conduct manual style of epistolary parental advice, this correspondence links discussions of Pamela’s virtue to the garments she chooses to wear. Expanding upon Pamela’s earlier reservations about accepting such an extravagant gift, her parents’ response not only underlines the central role of garments in determining their daughter’s virtue, but moreover Richardson’s treatment of the common practice

of rewarding servants with secondhand finery hints at a widespread “trickle-down” moral economy in which immorality and pride are bequeathed to the lower orders by their social “betters.”²⁴

Throughout the novel questions related to Pamela’s internal moral value are directly linked to the garments she chooses (or doesn’t choose) to wear, and ultimately her garments are crucial to her claims for “self-definition and self-representation” (Gwilliam 116). Richardson’s focus on Pamela’s clothing speaks to a much broader cultural discussion about the garments of working women where frivolous spending and extravagant dress was seen as a threat to the proper functioning of social hierarchies. Unlike the pedantic morality that filled the pages of eighteenth-century conduct manuals, Marlene LeGates suggests that sentimental literature “succeeded in catching the imagination of the reading public” (27), while disseminating patriarchal values that sought to clearly define male and female social participation. Looking to *Pamela*, as her primary example, LeGates asserts that Richardson’s text is important, not only because it showcases the titular character as a morally superior woman, but also because Pamela’s virtue is ultimately subordinated to Mr. B’s masculine authority, an act which clearly illustrates the proper social roles of master and servant (30) and “delineates the proper husband-wife relationship” (30).

Richardson demonstrates that in order to identify themselves as modest, women had to constantly define themselves against an imagined immoral or duplicitous counterpart, primarily achieved through a woman’s choice of clothing and accessories. As LeGates points out, Pamela’s defense of her virtue relies not only on her education and embodiment of “the traditional pieties of

²⁴ The concerns of Pamela’s parents reflect widespread concerns about the detrimental effects of vanity and extravagant dress particularly for youth. For example, John Guyse in a sermon from 1728 reminds his congregation that the “days of youth are, ordinarily, days of the greatest vanity” (10). Guyse explains that “vain and defiling company, the pride of dress and of every new extravagant mode, merriment and jollity, cards and dice, intemperance, luxury, drunkenness, and debaucheries too often waste their precious time” (10). Guyse’s concerns are similarly echoed seventy years later in Thomas Shillitoe’s *To the Inhabitants of Great Britain* (1798) where he asserts, “with regard to luxury, if we take a view of the manner of life in which most inhabitants of the land indulge themselves, and particularly the trading part of this great and flourishing metropolis; such scenes of dissipation, extravagance, and wantonness appear, as are not less repugnant to the public welfare than to the dignity of the Christian name... How are the sober manners of our forefathers departed from!” (10)

religion, the family and even the state” (29), but also in her ability to perform these virtuous roles in such a way that her internal purity can be externally discerned by the other characters in the novel and by the reader. When examined closely, the seemingly natural virtue of the sentimental heroine actually “appears not so very natural after all but the result of traditional inculcation” (30). Other scholars such as Tassie Gwilliam have also questioned the “naturalness” of Pamela’s legible virtue: “the meaning of the female body is reorganized and reshaped, but that body’s uncertainty, its doubleness or multiplicity, repeatedly troubles representation” (106). Gwilliam suggests that despite the fact that claims of Pamela’s duplicity and disguise are rebuffed throughout the novel, “Pamela’s constitution of herself is shown as directly dependent on forms of duplicity and disguise” through her use of clothing (115). Pamela presents herself as the epitome of virtuous femininity and is rewarded for her unwavering morality with wealth and status through her marriage to Mr. B. However, Pamela’s morality and submission to male authority are primarily made known to the reader through her reliance on the garments to externally demonstrate her internal virtue. Building on Gwilliam’s work, Batchelor in her chapter “Seeing through Pamela’s Clothes” emphasizes that “contestations of the novel’s meaning were and are frequently located in the various perceived analogy or disjunction between the heroine’s physical gentility and her inner self” (19), and moreover Pamela’s garments function as the principal site of these contestations. Batchelor explains that “Pamela’s appearance, first in the garb of her deceased mistress and subsequently in her homespun gown and petticoat, is symbolic either of her nobility of sentiment or of her desire to manipulate others” (19). Despite Pamela’s commitment to presentations of virtue, Batchelor highlights that Pamela’s garments function as the primary site of her virtuous expression, but also call into question the mechanism whereby the veracity of her virtue is produced. Pamela, much like

the women described by Defoe, cannot seem to escape earlier conceptions of women as inherently devious and sexual²⁵ despite consistent efforts to represent herself as virtuous.

What comes to the forefront in discussions of sentimental modes of femininity is that instead of operating as binary opposites – as conduct manuals and moralistic tracts purported – conceptions of female virtue and duplicity are indivisibly intertwined. In this sense, sentimental fiction, drawing on the foundation established by conduct manuals, called for performances of female virtue through dress and behaviour that could be easily identified and objectified by the male gaze. As LeGates, Gwilliam, and Batchelor to varying degrees demonstrate in their work, the catch is that heroines who performed these expressions of virtue were simultaneously suspicious in calling attention to the veracity of their claims. Here, both virtue and duplicity are to some extent performances of expected female behaviour that cannot be entirely severed from each other. At first, the interrelated nature of virtue and duplicity seems to act as yet another patriarchal trip wire that forced women to conform to an unattainable standard of public social conduct. However, the tension created by this predominant desire to ascertain a woman's natural virtue (and by extension her social position) through external signifiers opens the door to alternative readings of female social participation that are not predicated upon a false dichotomy of modesty and immodesty. Instead, when considered alongside sentimental modes of feeling, dress comes to function as a living object that materializes whichever internal attributes the wearer chooses to display. Ultimately, by establishing the social expectations for modest dress, prescriptive literature identified key signifiers of virtuous femininity that could be adopted by women to curate specific public personas. In refusing to read virtue and duplicity as respectively representative of depth and superficiality, as we

²⁵ The persistence of ideas about sexually promiscuous women were likely linked to the medieval and Restoration stock character of the sexually promiscuous or “lusty” woman and her cuckold husband in both dramatic comedy and literature. Despite the fact that this character was replaced in the eighteenth century by “the image of the chaste maiden and obedient wife” (LeGates 23), the implication of the female body as inherently sexual and duplicitous lingered.

might be inclined to do, we open the door to reading these socially engrained cues in such a way that is constructive rather than reductive for women in public spaces.

Chapter One: George Anne Bellamy as Self-Fashioned Sentimental Heroine

“The web of our Life is of a mingled Yarn,
good and ill together; our Virtues would be proud, if
our Faults whipt them not; and our crimes would
despair, if they were not cherished by our Virtues”
– William Shakespeare, *All's Well that
Ends Well*, Act 4, Scene 3.

By her own account George Anne Bellamy was born the illegitimate daughter of Lord Tyrawley in Ireland during the spring of 1733 (22). As chronicled in Bellamy's biographical memoir,²⁶ *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy* (1785), a common thread throughout her entire life was her status as a figure of intrigue and scandal. As a young woman Bellamy became a tremendously popular performer on the eighteenth-century stage. Noted for both her exceptional beauty and her prolific talent as an actress, Bellamy gained attention through her portrayal of popular theatrical heroines like Juliet, Cleopatra, Desdemona and Calista.²⁷ Although her success as a professional actress was relatively short-lived, lasting only from 1744 to 1759,²⁸ Bellamy is an important figure in the study of eighteenth-century working women.

Unlike other popular actresses like Sarah Siddons and Anne Bracegirdle, who aligned themselves with virtuous femininity through close association with the socially condoned roles of wife and mother, Bellamy refused to rely on images of palatable domestic femininity to validate her

²⁶ Although it exceeds the scope of this investigation it is important to note that there is some doubt regarding the authorship of Bellamy's memoir. Bellamy's text is frequently suspected to be the work of biographer Alexander Bicknell (Merrett 31) who likely transcribed and chronicled Bellamy's anecdotes.

²⁷ Characters respectively from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, John Dryden's *All for Love*, Shakespeare's *Othello* and John Fletcher & Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*.

²⁸ Bellamy's first performance is noted in her memoir, and also identified by Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans in their *Biographical Dictionary* (1973). Her last performance is less certain, but her biography mentions that her pregnancy delayed the production of *Romeo and Juliet* at Covent-Garden in 1759 (206), and then subsequently that she was replaced as Juliet by Miss. Nossiter (a change which is illustrated in William Elliot's 1759 print entitled, *Mr. Barry and Miss Nossiter in the characters of Romeo and Juliet, Act 2nd, Scene 2nd*). In lieu of a specific date, it is clear that Bellamy had stopped regularly appearing on the stage by 1760. She did appear one final time in a benefit performance some fifteen years later in 1785 in an attempt to reignite her career and earn some much-needed income (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica).

place in the public sphere. More notably still, although Bellamy's personal life followed a similar trajectory to contemporary actresses like Jane Lessingham and Mary Robinson (both of whom had brief unsuccessful marriages and whose subsequent sexual exploits were well known) Bellamy was not similarly lampooned in the press.²⁹ Instead, many of the images of Bellamy that were circulated during and after her lifetime depict genteel scenes from her autobiography or illustrate some of her particularly noteworthy performances on stage.

In examining this unique characterisation of Bellamy as neither entirely virtuous nor completely immoral I propose that Bellamy used her memoir as a publicity tool in an effort to carefully refashion her public image and to emphasize the legitimacy of her place in the public sphere on her own terms by aligning herself with other more visible female roles. Drawing upon the image of the sentimental heroine allowed Bellamy to align herself with other well-established and generally accepted avenues of female social participation for working women such as domestic service. This chapter will argue that dress acts as a central tenet of Bellamy's sentimental characterization and functions as a non-verbal language that runs throughout her memoir, allowing Bellamy to both align herself publicly with other popular sentimental heroines and resist the commodification of her body as spectacle. To this end, I will explore the parallels between Bellamy's memoir and two eighteenth-century cultural sensations: Samuel Richardson's *The History of Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and William Shakespeare's tragic heroine Juliet,³⁰ examining the ways in which Bellamy pushed the boundaries of 'acceptable' feminine expression to recharacterize herself in socio-cultural discourse as a sentimental heroine.

²⁹ For example, in James Gillray's print "The Thunderer" (1782) Robinson is depicted with her lovers, King George IV and Banastre Tarleton. The two men occupy the foreground and in the background Robinson's body is depicted in miniature; propped up by a post above a doorframe as a "Whirligig" with her breasts bare and her skirt pulled up to expose her thighs.

³⁰ This chapter is specifically interested, and will investigate the parallels between Bellamy and iterations of Juliet tied to eighteenth-century performances of *Romeo and Juliet* from the early 1750s.

This chapter will argue that Bellamy, as a working woman under public scrutiny, was able to effectively draw upon the performative hallmarks of virtue and cast herself as a sentimental heroine in an effort to counterbalance her coquettish reputation and sell copies of her autobiography. She effectively profited from the very system that sought to question and undermine her place in the public sphere. Instead of perpetuating a vertical hierarchy of female valuation, which relies upon the juxtaposition of surface and depth to determine female social worth, this chapter proposes reading Bellamy's adoption of sentimental hallmarks in her autobiography as a horizontal network. This move follows Tassie Gwilliam's critique of the problematic over-reliance of surface and depth in descriptions of eighteenth-century femininity. Gwilliam suggests that to rely on these terms is "to employ a problematic metaphor, one that refuses the resolution it seems to promise" (105). Here, femininity cannot be reduced to the simple division of surface/depth in the classification of virtue/deception because the female body "is itself persistently represented as double" (105). As many eighteenth-century constructions of femininity are preoccupied with cementing this perceived link between surface (body) and depth (soul), they continually fracture under the investigator's gaze because these representations of femininity are irresolvably multiplicitous. Looking for depth, especially in literary representations, can only be a fool's errand because as soon as we begin to rely heavily on the signposts of surface and depth (particularly in assigning value to female bodies in a hierarchy of virtue and vice) we become endlessly trapped in disassembling a transfinite infinity³¹ of indivisible parts. Relying on the problematic hierarchy of female social value where there are "good" and "bad" expressions of feminine identity can only ever reproduce patriarchal subjugation. Instead,

³¹ As Robert John Russell explains that the notion of "transfinite infinity" was developed by Georg Cantor who "has given us a new mathematical conception of infinity in which there are an endless variety of infinities, which he calls the 'transfinities' " (196). Although it may seem slightly anachronistic to apply the theories of Cantor (who lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) to eighteenth century discussions of female dress and social participation, Cantor's notion of "transfinities" builds upon the ancient Greek concept of infinity (196) which was widely discussed and developed during the long eighteenth century by Sir Isaac Newton, Gottfield Wilhelm Leibniz, Carl Friedrich Gauss and Bernard Bolzano (198) as a mathematic, philosophical and theological concept (196).

this investigation seeks to illustrate the value of surfaces³² and will undertake an examination of Bellamy's sentimental characterisation in superficial terms. "Surfaces" and "superficial" are understood to be dually resonant terms signifying both "surface" as a physical entity that constitutes the external part or top layer an object, but also "surface" as a way of reading that encourages a rearrangement of literary objects in search not of depth, but of breadth. In this chapter I will argue that reading superficially exposes horizontal networks of power that move across Bellamy's *Memoir* and extend to the contemporary images of her on stage. Instead of searching for depth, or rather for the "real" Bellamy, my analysis functions horizontally,³³ engaging with contemporary cultural signifiers and literary references to suggest that Bellamy's presentation of public femininity is powerfully subversive.

Before proceeding any further it is important to elaborate upon what I mean by "horizontal networks." My methodology is influenced by recent discussions of material culture studies that are motivated by a reinterpretation of surfaces as potential sites of resistance. In her "Dialogue as Introduction" with Michael Yonan, Eugenia Zuroski draws on Carol Armstrong to suggest that "the material dimensions of objects is, in [her] view, at least potentially a site of resistance and recalcitrance, of the irreducibly particular and the subversively strange" (265). What Zuroski and

³² Michael Yonan explains that "material culture studies can be a way of reclaiming the value of the surface and of the interpreter's senses" (4).

³³ The notion of "horizontal networks" of connection is heavily indebted to Jane Bennett's "vibrant matter" wherein she examines living networks that form an "open-ended collection, a 'non-totalizable sum'" (24), and suggests that these networks form "a materiality that is as much force, as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension" (20). In conversation with Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, Bennett asserts that "every mode is itself a mosaic or assemblage of many simple bodies" or "parts that 'come to it from elsewhere'" (22). Moreover, my use of horizontal networks is also inspired by Thomas Creech's English translation of Lucretius's *The Nature of Things* (1682), wherein he asserts that the material fabric of the world is not made of flat objects, but rather comprised of atoms, that come together in swarming assemblages to create all material surfaces. Much like Bennett's vibrant matter, Lucretius's atoms are not animated by human hands. When a material body dies its atoms scatter to the void and reform in new patterns. Both Bennett and *The Nature of Things* highlight the powerful subversive potential of horizontal networks of matter which do not conform to hierarchies that subjugate the feminine object to the dominance of the masculine subject. Whether one chooses to view these horizontal networks as vibrant matter or as swarming atoms it becomes evident that this directional shift has the potential to resituate dispossessed entities that have been impoverished in the empowerment of dominant subjects within patriarchal hierarchies of power.

Yonan highlight in their discussion is that investigations of material objects in their own right have the potential to facilitate a contestation of “simplistic linear conception[s] of history” (265). Instead of a smooth, homogeneous surface that fits neatly into dominant subject/ subservient object dichotomy, what emerges is a network of complex surfaces that convey elastic possibilities for counteracting dominant narratives of subjugation. Complex surfaces make room for, in their shifting and inherently flexible nature, what has been passed over as previously flat or static. As this pertains to Bellamy, this reading of surfaces allows for a reinterpretation of historical objects that have been typically used to characterize her as a failed author and immoral woman.³⁴ On re-evaluation, superficial readings illuminate networks of power, and these networks in turn offer points of reinvention and means of resistance particularly for those that have been relegated to the margins of discourse. In drawing on this dually resonant notion of surfaces I argue that new possibilities come to light, which allow us to read against and around dominant historical narratives – narratives that are invested in maintaining patriarchal power as the prevalent notion of subjectivity – to instead highlight a complex network of surfaces that hold within them exciting feminist implications, particularly in conjunction with actresses like Bellamy and eighteenth-century working women more generally.

³⁴ Bellamy’s writing has been largely dismissed by subsequent scholarship. For example, in their comprehensive study of eighteenth-century performers, Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A Burnim and Edward A Langhans go to great lengths to emphasize Bellamy’s popularity as an actress while simultaneously diminishing the credibility of her work as an author. Despite acknowledging that by 1748 “Bellamy was fast becoming the rage both on and off the stage” (11), Highfill, Burnim and Langhans devote the majority of their biography to emphasizing Bellamy’s authorial shortcomings and highlighting her ‘immoral’ behaviour. Pointing to small errors in dates, drawing upon the words of her male contemporaries to counter the validity of her stories, and dismissing the merits of her successful professional career Highfill, Burnim and Langhans ultimately suggest that the events of her narrative blur together in a “saga of her gambling and extravagance, supported by her string of lovers” (11) that is most useful for those who wish to track “her progress with various rakes” which can be “followed in some broad outline” (11). Highfill, Burnim and Langhans are not only dismissive, but also patronizingly condescending in their analysis of Bellamy’s *Memoir*.

Bellamy's Performances of Virtuous Femininity:

Reading, as a general theme, recurs as a treasured pastime for sentimental novel heroines. This both emphasizes the importance of a proper education and cautions young women against reading fantastical Romance novels that were divorced from reality. From the very outset of Bellamy's autobiography, she highlights how as a young child she was encouraged to read and taught to discern the 'right kind' of books. She writes that her father, Lord Tyrawley, had "prohibited [her] reading *Cassandra*, the only romance in his library, and on which a girl of my age and lively disposition would naturally have first laid her hands" (22-3). In these initial pages, Bellamy illustrates her youthful desire to read novels like *Cassandra*, but compliments this natural predisposition by calling attention to how she was encouraged instead to read more sensible texts like Alexander Pope's translations of Homer's *Iliad* (23) and John Dryden's translations of *The Works of Virgil* (23). Not only does Bellamy emphasize her education in reading more sensible texts – a contemplative practice that is captured by James Gillray in Figure 2 – but she expands upon this anecdote, directly linking the act of reading these texts to an instance where she learned the value of modesty as a child. Bellamy explains that when she thought herself "sufficiently perfect" (23) in her recitation of



Figure 2: "Contemplation at Brentwood" by James Gillray (1786)

Pope's "The Wrath of Peleus' Son" she begged to be taken to Pope himself to perform her verses.

Lord Tyrawley consented and Bellamy describes the encounter as follows:

As I rode along, the suggestions of vanity overpowered every apprehension; and I was not a little elated when I reflected on the conspicuous figure I was about to make. The carriage stopped at the door. We were introduced to this little great man. But before I had time to collect myself, or examine him, Mr. Pope rang the bell for his housekeeper, and directed her to take Miss, and shew her the gardens. (23)

Rather than occupying the centre of attention at Pope's residence, as she had imagined, Bellamy is brushed off and taken outside to walk in the gardens with his housekeeper. Emphasizing her shock at being cast aside she writes, "How shall I find words to express the mortification I felt upon this occasion! It is not in the power of language to describe the true situation of my mind on finding my vanity thus humbled" (23). Although Bellamy underscores the educational value of reading Classical epics in translation, her experience with Pope himself is a lesson in modest social conduct. Despite the fact that the lines preceding this anecdote characterize Bellamy as a precocious child who demands the time and attention of those around her, ideals of modest femininity demand in return that Bellamy is pushed to the periphery of the literary conversation. Walking in the gardens following Pope's dismissal, Bellamy ruminates upon her exclusion, and concludes that she would "carry into execution the following plan of revenge: I determined never to read the cynic's translation of the Iliad again, but wholly to attach myself to Dryden's Virgil" (23). While outwardly Bellamy has no choice but to perform a passive acceptance of male dominance and accept Pope's rejection, internally she calls into question the injustice of Pope's treatment. Here, Bellamy begins to forge her own notion of female social conduct that neither rejects outright nor fully upholds the social dynamics to which she is subjected.

After frequent childhood vignettes about reading, writing becomes a central element of Bellamy's adult self-characterization as a sentimental heroine and forges a direct link between Bellamy's *Apology* and Richardson's *Pamela*. Both *Pamela* and *Apology* are written as epistolary novels

wherein the heroines use the act of writing letters as a validation and reinforcement of their virtue. From the outset of Richardson's text, Pamela highlights others' descriptions of her as innocent, virtuous, kind and endearing (2) and as the narrative progresses her virtuous behaviour is meticulously chronicled in her letters. Pamela repeatedly draws the reader's attention to the act of writing itself as a manifestation of the heroine's internal moral strength.³⁵ As Helen Thompson explains, this style of "writing to the moment" has the capacity to "transform another person's 'Thought' into a sensible 'idea' for the person who peruses it" (233). For Pamela this instantaneous materialization of her innermost thoughts and actions comes to function as a record of her appropriate moral conduct. Her writing acts as a sort of modest witnessing that draws upon the social capital and authority of scientific observational writing to support her claims of virtue and modesty. Donna Haraway explains that the modest witness "is the legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world, adding nothing from his mean opinions, from biasing embodiment. And so he is endowed with the remarkable power to establish the facts. He bears witness: he is objective; he guarantees the clarity and purity of objects" (24). Although the empirical observer that Haraway constructs as the modest witness is distinctly male, Richardson's construct of "writing to the moment" imbues his female protagonist with male observational authority which even Mr. B cannot deny. After one of Mr. B's earliest assaults, Pamela describes in detail his angry speech to her:

I am very much displeased with the freedoms you have taken with my name to my housekeeper, as also to your father and mother; and you may as well have real cause to take these freedoms with me, as to make my name suffer for imaginary ones ... Be easy, said he; for let the worst happen that can, you will have the merit, and I the blame; and it will be a good subject for your letters to your father and mother. (30)

³⁵ Throughout the narrative Pamela highlights the practice of writing in her letters. For example, the phrase "I have written" appears 14 times, "my writing" 4 times, and "my letter(s)" 30 times and as the novel progresses her letters act as proof of her virtue and innocence.

Despite his attempt to undermine the value of Pamela's letters as an observational framework with his suggestion that she has imagined or embellished the events she recounts, in this instance he simultaneously acknowledges the power of Pamela's letters and the potential impact they have on his public perception. Here, Mr. B. suggests that her letters force him to play the role that she has written for him: that of her rapist. He grants her letters incredible power even despite claiming that they also give him power. Although Mr. B. claims that her letters give him license, in other words, to do "the worst" so that she has a "good subject for [her] letters," he suggests that the "cause" of her anguish is not yet "real" because he has not yet followed through on his threats of sexual violence. Above all his remarks highlight that Pamela's writing defines her conduct as virtuous despite his best efforts to the contrary.

Much like Pamela, Bellamy constructs her autobiography using the epistolary format, and just as Pamela's letters redeem her from speculations about improper behaviour, Bellamy begins her epistolary memoir by asserting that it will "rescue my character from the numerous falsehoods which have been industriously propagated against it" as she "endeavour[s] to recall...every transaction worth recording, and lay them before you in a series of letters, continued as time and opportunity shall serve" (1-2). This initial emphasis on her autobiography as "an Apology" to redeem her public image is supported by repeated emphasis on the act of writing. Like Pamela, Bellamy uses the writing of letters as a means of advocating for her own virtuous conduct, and she draws attention to the act of writing as an emotional process. In two instances, Bellamy must stop writing in order to recenter herself after particularly emotional moments. She explains,

The tear of gratitude stood in my eye, at this noble instance of generosity; and his own glistened with that of humanity and self-approbation. With a story, so much to the honour of that worthy man, and so pleasing, even in recollection, to myself, will I conclude this letter. (59)

A tear that obtrudes itself on the recollection of scenes, which have already caused me so many, dims my sight; – others follow, and trickle in quick succession down my cheek. The subject awakens all my sensibility – and surely, a heart more susceptible of all the tender

feelings never throbbed in a female bosom – the soft effusion overwhelms me – I must lay down my pen. (167)

Despite the fact that her tears are prompted on the one hand by despair and on the other by gratitude, both instances illustrate the ways in which Bellamy's *Apology* aims to make emotion visible through the act of writing. Bellamy portrays the process of such emotional writing as a laborious task that requires considerable effort and as such many of her letters end with a reflection upon the process of writing. In one account, she depicts writing not only as an emotional labour but also as taking a physical toll on her body: "What a quantity I have written! My aching head and fingers have long since hinted to me, that it was time to finish this letter; but I was unwilling to do so till I had ended the account" (54). Here, Bellamy not only represents herself as a woman dedicated to the task of providing her readers with the chronicles of her life, but also casts the act of writing as a physical manifestation of her internal thoughts. By documenting both the physical and emotional challenges of writing, Bellamy characterizes herself as a sentimental heroine.

Unlike Pamela's, the majority of Bellamy's epistolary vignettes are not "written to the moment" but are rather recollections after the fact written in response to public demands for details about Bellamy's personal life. Nevertheless, by identifying and responding to the up-to-date desires of the public³⁶ Bellamy is able to adopt elements of Richardson's "instantaneous description"³⁷ style. As she describes events in her past the "frame narrative" of her autobiography is firmly situated in the present day as she directly responds to public interest. In perhaps the most extensive instance of

³⁶ Julia Fawcett discusses the paradoxical nature of identity for eighteenth-century performers, and addresses questions about the mechanics of performance, asking, "how might an eighteenth-century man or woman perform the legibility that guaranteed his or her citizenship within the ideology of 'unique, expressive identity' while shielding himself or herself from the public gaze that threatened his or her control over that identity's expression?" (3).

³⁷ Richardson describes this style of writing in his "Preface" to *Clarissa*, wherein he explains that "[a]ll the letters are written while the hearts of the writers must be supposed to be wholly engaged in their subjects... so that they abound not only with critical situations, but with what may be called *instantaneous* descriptions and reflections" (ix).

Bellamy's writing to-the-moment,³⁸ she describes a conversation with a reader about their enjoyment of her letters:

“Proceed, and indulge yourself in any manner you please, whenever fancy prompts you to wander from the road of your history; for I read with inexpressible pleasure every part of your letters.” Do you really write thus, my dear Madam? And does my humble attempt to afford you entertainment answer the intended purpose? It does it does. You tell me so; and I know you are too sincere to flatter me. Thus encouraged, I will proceed. (137)

In this instance, Bellamy invokes an image of herself reading, and responding to a letter from a reader who has written to encourage the continuation of Bellamy's narrative. Whether this conversation is real or imagined does not really matter, as the inclusion of these shifts between the past and the present moment in which Bellamy is supposedly writing her autobiography caters to the reader's desire for intimacy and immediacy and thereby affords Bellamy some of the credibility of Richardson's heroine.

By moving fluidly between past and present Bellamy underscores the laborious task of writing, and highlights her motivation to write an entertaining narrative that pleases her readers: “Nor shall one reluctant sigh at the length of the way which still lies before me, or a further fear of proving tiresome to you, escape me” (137). As she continues to reflect upon her role as narrator, Bellamy turns to her success as an actress in order to “prove” that her written subject matter (namely, her own life) has “merit.” To this end she explains that “the applause bestowed upon my theatrical talents by the people of Dublin was an indubitable proof of my possessing no mean degree of merit” (138). In shifting between her public roles as autobiographical writer and celebrated actress Bellamy succinctly links both past and present to emphasize the performative nature of storytelling and the extent to which her labours are motivated by a desire for – and already legitimated by – public approval. Much the same way that “writing to the moment” supports Pamela's claims of

³⁸ In another instance she writes that, “From many instances in my letters, particularly from the whole of this, you see that I have attended to your injunctions of relating the minutest circumstances of my life” (92).

modesty, the strategic shifting between past and present in Bellamy's autobiography empowers her as the agent of her own narrative and aligns her with virtuous epistolary heroines. By drawing together both virtuous "writing to the moment" – with its emotional spontaneity which seems to preclude dissemblance – and past recollections of years of simulating emotions on-stage Bellamy creates a masterful performance of virtue that superficially yields to the public's demands for intimate knowledge and yet refuses to produce the same kind of transparent witnessing that Richardson achieves with the character of Pamela. What we get in Bellamy's autobiography is not the same as Pamela's transparency, but is in fact something much more powerful. On the one hand, Bellamy takes advantage of the social capital of Pamela's virtuous femininity to appease public demands for intimacy. On the other, by writing herself into the role of sentimental heroine she employs a network of literary allusions that facilitates her refusal to capitulate to the reader's desires to consume her as an object of public spectacle. Bellamy manages to present depth without truly exposing herself.

One of the most compelling instances of Bellamy's sentimental performance is an abduction narrative that could be lifted straight from the pages of a sentimental novel.³⁹ Alluding to both Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*,⁴⁰ Bellamy describes the unyielding pursuits of a man named Lord Byron aided by his unnamed friend "The Earl", a notorious womanizer: "as his vanity, was hurt at my rejecting him, he formed a resolution to be revenged of me" (68) by employing a "person [the Earl] who was a disgrace to nobility" (68). Before launching into the details of the story, Bellamy again shifts from her past recollection to the present moment of writing, drawing attention to her

³⁹ In the pages of her autobiography Bellamy describes an abduction by carriage which is a familiar theme in several sentimental novels from the period. Abduction (either actual abduction or the perceived threat of abduction) is a recurrent concept not only in *Pamela* but also in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), and Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791).

⁴⁰ Bellamy's narrative draws upon elements from Mr. B's pursuit of Pamela where she is convinced that he has arranged to send her home to her parents and instead is taken against her will to his estate on the pretense that she has been having an affair with a young clergy-man, as well as Lovelace's imprisonment of Clarissa and her subsequent hiding from him with a shopkeeper.

position as an author and reinforcing the parallels between herself and virtuous sentimental heroines like Pamela and Clarissa: “the following anecdote will however shew that my misfortunes were not always the consequence of my own imprudent conduct” but rather of “deep-laid plans of villainy and deception” (70) that Bellamy asserts she was unable to guard against due to her age and innocence (70). Switching back into her narration of the event itself, Bellamy explains that she was lured into a carriage under false pretenses and kidnapped (70)⁴¹ before being taken first to the Earl’s lodgings and subsequently to the home of a “woman of character” (71). Instead of coming to her aid, Bellamy describes how her family was convinced she had eloped with the Earl and refused to answer her letters (74). Bellamy recounts how she “soon found that my elopement had been most grossly misrepresented in the news-papers. Every thing that ill-nature could suggest was lavishly bestowed upon me, notwithstanding I was innocent of the least depravity of the kind imputed to me” (75), and in the very depths of despair she proclaims, “what was now to be done! I had no friend, no person to look up to for protection” (76). She is so distressed at the loss of her reputation she falls ill, and writes, “never did poor creature suffer more shame and distress of mind from a real crime, than I did from a supposed one. The fever at length yielding to my youth and the goodness of my constitution” (77). Although this vignette comes to an end with Bellamy regaining her health and reconciling with her family, (85) the narrative itself is important for two reasons. First, it allows Bellamy to position herself as an upstanding sentimental heroine by underscoring her virtuous conduct; like Clarissa, she is not at fault despite the fact that her family mistakes her abduction for an elopement. Second, in this anecdote Bellamy explicitly links her mistreatment by her family and the periodical press to false imputations against her reputation, which allows her to position herself

⁴¹ The details of her story are as follows: “one Sunday evening, when this *ignoble Earl* well knew my mother would be engaged, he called to inform me that Miss B ---, the young lady before mentioned, was in a coach at the end of Southampton Street, and desired to speak with me... I ran to the coach; when, to my unspeakable surprise, I found myself suddenly hoisted into it by his Lordship, and that the coachman drove off as fast as the horses could gallop” (70).

as more generally misrepresented. By calling into question the veracity of her public reputation (as circulated by the periodical press and her male adversaries) Bellamy reframes her value on her own terms. She responds to readers' calls for intimacy, but in so doing she presents not one, but several iterations of herself in the abduction narrative: the young sentimental heroine, the author, the newssheet scapegoat, the tragic abduction victim, the sexually promiscuous eloper, etc. This multiplicity suggests interior depth while simultaneously reaching out across a network of allusions that refuses to settle on a single, commodifiable self.

Bellamy complements these sentimental tropes of reading, letter writing, and abduction with repeated emphasis on the importance of dress in determinations of female social value. Like popular conduct manual writers such as Hester Chapone and James Fordyce, Bellamy repeatedly illustrates the importance of learning to dress modestly throughout volume one of her autobiography, putting particular emphasis on moments when she, as a young woman, is taught the importance of modest dress by older women around her. At the outset of her career as an actress, Bellamy recounts her relationship with the Duchess of Queensbury (60) who is introduced in the text as a lady "of the first distinction" (60) who was not only her enthusiastic supporter, but also mentored her in the importance of modest self-presentation. Bellamy describes how, when she was invited to the Duchess's residence at Queensberry-house, her reception was far from what she anticipated. Instead of welcoming Bellamy, "Her Grace was determined to mortify my vanity, before she promoted my interest" (61-2). With much surprise she recounts how the servant at the door,

Informed me, that her Grace knew no such person! My astonishment at this message was greatly augmented, by the certainty I entertained of a ready admittance. I assured the domestic, that it was by the Duchess's own directions, I had taken the liberty to wait on her. To which he replied, that there must have been some mistake in the delivery of it. In this mortifying situation, I had nothing to do but to return home. (62)

Concluding that the entire situation was "ludicrous and humiliating" (62), Bellamy explains that she is obliged to recount this particular anecdote because "it may serve as a lesson to many, who too

readily give way to the impulses of vanity” which “young minds are naturally prone to” (62).

Exposing her humiliation at being denied admittance to Queensberry-House not only characterises Bellamy as vulnerable by exposing her failings to her audience, which in turn fosters a sense of intimacy, but also adopts the same moralizing tone as conduct manuals that proselytize the virtues of modest dress and the consequences of vanity. Bellamy does not, however, conclude this vignette here. Later the same day she was informed that the Duchess had purchased “two-hundred and fifty tickets” (64) in support of her benefit, and extended a second invitation to visit Queensberry-House the next morning (64-5). Bellamy notes that “I was, notwithstanding, so apprehensive of meeting with a second mortification, that I determined to walk to Queensberry-house to prevent any person being a witness to it, should it happen” (65). On this second visit she is welcomed into the house and is greeted by the Duchess who proclaims:

“Well, young woman! – what business had you in a chair yesterday? – It was a fine morning, and you might have walked. You look as you ought to do now” (observing my linen gown). “Nothing is so vulgar as wearing silk in a morning. – simplicity best becomes youth. And you do not stand in need of ornaments. – Therefore dress always plain, except when you are upon the stage.” (65)

By illustrating first her humiliation by the Duchess, and subsequently the Duchess’ support, Bellamy highlights the importance of proper social presentation and explicitly ties this to dress. On her first visit to the Duchess, the extravagance of a chair and the finery of her clothing is interpreted by the Duchess (and subsequently relayed to us as readers by Bellamy) as gaudy and unnecessary; however, when Bellamy returns the following day dressed in a clean and modest dress she is welcomed warmly into the Duchess’s home. Espousing a similar doctrine to contemporary conduct manuals, the Duchess’s insistence on modest dress highlights the ways in which correct female social conduct depends as much upon learned self-presentation as it does upon inner virtue. By depicting this process of learning, Bellamy sets a precedent for her narrative that emphasizes dress as a prime mover of “proper” social conduct.

As Bellamy's *Apology* moves beyond the years of her young adult life, she begins to focus on her stage career. Her initial descriptions of the stage highlight her nerves and uncertainty and emphasize the criticism she received from theatre veterans like Mr. Quin, whom she recalls advising her to take smaller parts (54), and who refused to act opposite to her in her debut performance as Monimia in Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* (55). Bellamy underlines the embarrassing experience of being snubbed publicly by Quin in her first leading role, describing his behaviour as "this mortifying opposition" (55). She explains that Mr. Rich, in his capacity as the manager of the theatre, offered to make up for Quin's snub by taking her to his mercer's to "to choose the cloaths [she] was to appear in" (56). Although Bellamy evidently delights in the attention of Rich, she carefully distances herself from the purchasing of the clothes and the vain connotations of such lavish adornment by positioning the new costume merely as compensation for her mistreatment by Quin. Amid her discussion of her early acting struggles, Bellamy adds what seems to be an unrelated aside in which she details the "dresses of the theatrical ladies" (55) at the time. In comparison to the timid and uncertain girl that Bellamy depicts earlier in the same paragraph, her discussion of theatrical costumes recasts Bellamy as a confident and opinionated expert who understands the nuances of female stage garments. She explains that "the young ladies generally appeared in a *cast* gown of some person of quality; and as at this epoch the women of that denomination were not blest with the taste of the present age, and had much more economy" (55). By pointing to the use of second-hand clothing as the predominant source of costumes for young ladies, Bellamy initially emphasizes the economic frugality of theatrical garments, fostering parallels between actresses and prudently modest heroines like Pamela. However, she soon adds that "the stage brides and virgins often made their appearance in altered habits, rather soiled" (55). Adopting an observational rather than a disdainful tone in her discussion of these garments, Bellamy evokes the familiar rhetoric of conduct manuals like Fordyce's that caution women against appearing in soiled garments (77), and thereby gives

herself a modest rationale for adorning herself in more expensive clothes. Although these few lines on the quality of actresses' costumes initially appear to be nothing more than offhand remarks that set the stage, so to speak, for her dramatic narrative of Quin's rejection and her initial stage fright, this short paragraph fosters the impression that the costumes available to Bellamy might sully her reputation or reflect badly upon her virtuous self-presentation. By presenting her new garments in contrast to the "soiled" second-hand garments worn by other young actresses, Bellamy subtly imbues her own preference for bespoke theatrical dresses with notions of virtue and propriety.

Much later in her career Bellamy again sets herself apart from other actresses by blending together the economy of second-hand garments with her extravagant preference for expensive theatrical costumes. She describes how "the manager, in an excursion he had made to London, had purchased a superb suit of clothes that had belonged to the Princess of Wales" (130-31) for Bellamy to wear in her performance of Cleopatra in John Dryden's *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost*.

Bellamy describes the costuming process in detail:

It [her costume] was silver tissue, my mother thought that by turning the body of it in, it would be a no unbecoming addition to my waist [sic], which was remarkably small. My maid-servant was accordingly sent to the theatre to assist the dresser and mantua-maker in preparing it; and also in sewing on a number of diamonds, my patroness [Mrs. Butler] not only having furnished me with her own, but borrowed several others of her acquaintance for me. (131)

Despite the dress's royal lineage, Bellamy emphasizes the labour required to make the dress truly her own. By recounting the process of embellishing the original costume with additional diamonds and tailoring it to fit her figure (and show off her small waist) Bellamy transforms the second-hand garment, making it clear that the dress has been fundamentally altered to enhance her performance as Cleopatra. As this particular anecdote progresses, the narrative reframes the dress as the central object in a dispute between Bellamy and another actress, Mrs. Furnival. Bellamy frames the conflict by explaining that Furnival "owed [her] a grudge, on account of [Bellamy] eclipsing her" (131) as an audience favourite. According to Bellamy, Furnival stepped into Bellamy's dressing room and

“carried off the Queen of Egypt’s paraphernalia, to adorn herself in the character of Octavia, the Roman matron, which she was to perform” (131). In her account of this incident Bellamy emphasizes the absurdity of Furnival’s plan, suggesting that it was ludicrous that Furnival, as a “Roman matron” would think it suitable to present herself in garments befitting the “Egyptian Queen” (131). Bellamy muses upon Furnival’s motivations for stealing her dress, positing that “perhaps not knowing that there was any impropriety in it, she determined, for once in her life-time, to be as fine as myself, and that at my expense. She accordingly set to work to let out the cloaths, which, through my mother’s economical advice had been taken in” (131). By illustrating the way in which the dress is first taken in to fit Bellamy’s body, and then subsequently let out again for Furnival, Bellamy positions the dress as a sort of second skin that conforms to the wearer’s body and functions as an external signifier of the character’s social status on stage. Bellamy’s discussion of the dress theft not only takes pleasure in highlighting her own beauty and lavish patronage in the form of diamonds lent to embellish this costume, but also emphasizes the importance of visual signifiers on stage. It is absurd, in Bellamy’s opinion, that a woman like Furnival, in the role of a matron, would ever think it appropriate to adorn herself richly in the garments of a queen.

Emphasizing the importance of this dress to her performance as Cleopatra, Bellamy includes a detailed report of the public’s anticipatory desire to see her in the lavish gown and subsequent shock on the night of the performance, explaining that “the report of the richness and elegance of my dress had been universally the subject of conversation for some time before the night of performance; when, to the surprize of the audience, I appeared in white satin” (133). Chronicling the events that transpired, Bellamy explains how Mr. Sheridan in the role of Antony “going to introduce Octavia [played by Furnival] to the Emperor, he discovered the jay in all her borrowed plumes. An apparition could not have more astonished him. He was so confounded, that it was some time before he could go on with his part” (134). Indeed, Furnival’s inappropriate adornment was so

shocking that it not only interrupted the performance of a theatrical veteran like Sheridan but moreover caused members of the audience to call out in shock and horror⁴² and shout, “no more Furnival!” (135). The episode ends with Bellamy’s summation that “the fine dressed lady, disappointed of the acclamations she expected to receive on account of the grandeur of her habiliments, and thus hooted for the impropriety of her conduct, very prudently called fits to her aids, which incapacitated her from appearing again” (135), and the conclusion that,

[E]very attempt to obtain a desirable end, if the means are not consistent with honour and rectitude, marr instead of promoting it. If I recollect aright, I have made a remark somewhat similar to this in a former letter, but it cannot be too often repeated, ‘honesty will be always found to be the best policy.’ – ‘More proverbs, and preaching again?’ methinks I hear you say; ‘pray go on with your narrative!’ – I will, my dear Madam. (135-36)

There are several important elements in Bellamy’s aphoristic conclusion of this incident. Foremost, she balances her penchant for extravagant garments with socially condoned modest behaviour. Despite the fact that Bellamy’s narrative is rife with references to her vanity, it is in turn tempered by her repeated emphasis on the appropriate nature of this lavish dress as an integral element in performing the role of Cleopatra.⁴³ Not only does Bellamy go to great lengths to emphasize the importance of dress as a tool of her trade (i.e. necessary to her successful portrayal of this character onstage), but her personal disgust at having her dress stolen is affirmed in this instance by the support of the theatre audience. The account then shifts to feedback by another audience – this time her reader – whom Bellamy imagines teasing her for reciting a “proverb” on “honesty as the best policy.” The reader’s gentle heckling of Bellamy’s moralistic tone contrasts sharply with the theatre audience’s violent “hooting” of Furnival’s conceited costume choice. At each turn of her

⁴² Bellamy goes into considerable detail here to emphasize the horror of the audience (and particularly her patroness) at the theft of the dress. She explains that “Mrs. Butler exclaimed aloud, ‘good heaven, the woman has got on my diamonds!’ The gentlemen in the pit concluded that Mrs. Butler had been robbed of them by Mrs. Furnival; and the general consternation, occasioned by so extraordinary a scene, is not to be described” (134).

⁴³ In this particular instance, Bellamy’s insistence on the necessity of such an opulent gown is reinforced by subsequent depictions of other actresses playing Cleopatra in equally lavish gowns. See Robert J. Thornthwaite’s engraving entitled “Mrs. Hartley in the Character of Cleopatra” (1776) and Samuel Dee Wilde’s image of “Mrs. Faucit as Cleopatra” (1814).

autobiography Bellamy tempers her extravagance with virtue; both her diamond-strewn dress and her moralizing are evidence of her sound judgement.

Throughout volume one Bellamy repeatedly casts herself as a sentimental heroine, and as the text progresses these initial examples form a foundation that supports her nuanced refusal to fully comply with socio-cultural expectations for women in the public sphere.⁴⁴ She begins, with more frequency, to deviate from her initial sentimental framework. Although structurally the narrative maintains its alignment with Richardson's epistolary novels, Bellamy details the sexual exploits of her later life, chronicling her relationships with several men – most notably her marriage to and subsequent separation from George Metham, and her bigamous marriage to John Calcraft. Drawing in equal measure upon images of virtuous sentiment and immoral extravagance, the balancing act performed by Bellamy's autobiography resists definition. From the very outset of the text, Bellamy's prefatory quote from Act 4, scene iii of Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* foregrounds this tension: "the web of our life is of a mingled Yarn, good and ill together; our Virtue would be proud, if our Faults whipt them not; and our Crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues" (1). This reference not only closely aligns her narrative with the respectability and legitimacy of Shakespearean drama, but moreover it underscores the duality of human nature where virtue and vice are inextricably intertwined. In conjuring up the image of a network woven together by the "mingled yarns" of virtuous and faulty behaviour, Bellamy presents virtuous sentimentality, deviant sexuality, and extravagant fashion as three inextricable parts of the same whole. Her biography

⁴⁴ Highlighting her commitment to self-governance John Galt writes in *The Lives of the Players* (1831) that following an argument between Bellamy and Metham the latter "came next day and endeavored to atone for his rudeness, but she remained inexorable; after some days, finding she still objected to received him as a lover, he solicited to be admitted as a friend, and to this she reluctantly consented" (103). Additionally, later volumes of her autobiography chronicle her intimate relationships with several men, but Bellamy characterises these relationships in terms of their financial value (as opposed to strictly sexual attraction or love). Calcraft, in particular, serves a financial purpose which Bellamy underscores in recounting an argument between herself and Mr. Calcraft wherein she was resolved "to quit his house, if Mr. Calcraft did not pay my debts" (172). Regardless of any pleasure the association with Calcraft provided, Bellamy positions her relationship with as predicated upon his financial support.

refuses to concede to contemporary demands for commodifiable female behaviour that fits neatly within patriarchally determined codes of conduct for “virtuous” women in the public sphere.

In both the early images of Bellamy as a modest sentimental heroine and subsequent discussions of her career as a professional actress, dress is increasingly important to Bellamy’s discussion of female virtue, and comes to be a useful metaphor for Bellamy’s own self-fashioned persona. Like her public persona, the dress that she presents to her readers in the Cleopatra incident is not a single quantifiable commodity. Certainly, the silver tissue and diamond studded garment was once a tangible object, but Bellamy adeptly links the physical garment itself to a much larger, and predominantly female network (her benefactor, the audience, the seamstress, her mother, other actresses etc.) that supports her simultaneous performance of modest sentimentality and immodest extravagance. And it is this network, this interconnection, that allows Bellamy to present herself as existing both within and outside of norms for “proper” female social participation. In this conception of Bellamy’s network I am drawing upon Jane Bennett’s Spinozist assertion that each body acts as a social body in the sense that bodies in proximity to other bodies are continuously affecting and being affected by each other (Bennett 21). Taken together, each body and its affecting capacities forms “confederate bodies” (22) that “congregate with each other.” Agency within the assemblage according to Bennett is Latourian: not strictly limited to human actors but rather drawing upon a “vital materialism” (23) wherein “bodies enhance their power in or as a heterogeneous assemblage” (23) of diverse elements that include both human actors and non-human actants (24). Although the core of a network functions through the collaboration and cohesion of these assemblages working together, Bennett also emphasizes that the possibility exists for individual elements to draw upon the energy of the system and “disturb it from within”(24). This is precisely what I am suggesting that Bellamy does. Bellamy’s use of sentimental tropes in her autobiography appears to strictly adhere to the pre-existing eighteenth-century pathways of interaction for

normative feminine social participation. However, the repeated emphasis on virtue and sentimentality throughout Bellamy's autobiography allows her – according to her “intimate” epistolary frame narrative – to accrue such sympathetic credit with her reader that she can subsequently diverge from the normative narrative without diminishing the agential power of sumptuous attire. In each of the aforementioned instances (with the custom-made costume for her theatrical debut and her visit to the Duchess) Bellamy calls upon notions of virtue and modesty and entwines them with her preference for extravagant consumption and immodest behaviour to challenge the commodification of female bodies as solely virtuous or duplicitous.

The impact of Bellamy's self-fashioned literary persona is two-fold: she resists patriarchal ideals of female social participation and circumvents the public's demands for ever-more intimate details of her personal life.⁴⁵ While this superficial power of Bellamy's autobiography presents a unique challenge for subsequent scholarship, it worked tremendously well for Bellamy because she was able to concede to the contemporary spectator's desire to know her intimately – thus possessing her as an object of entertainment – while evading any real violation. We find an allusion to reading-as-intrusion in Bellamy's discussion of her mother's correspondence with an “Irish friend” named Mr. Crump (17), which Bellamy finds “carelessly scattered about” (17). Although she discovers the letters on the floor and highlights the tantalizing prospect of reading her mother's intimate correspondence, Bellamy resists and instead emphasizes the importance of privacy. She explains, “I always made it a point never to read a letter belonging to another, even if open, esteeming it a breach of the most sacred of trusts” (17). However, only a few lines later Bellamy capitulates to both

⁴⁵ Even when Bellamy seemingly yields to the reader's desire for intimate details she reveals only metaphorical smoke and mirrors. In one such instance, she describes herself as having “a soul of fire” and “thoughts which out-stripped the wind” (186), rather than actually discussing her romantic feelings for Mr. Calcraft.

the reader's curiosity and her own when she admits that she eventually breaches this trust by "accident" (17).

Teasing the reader with the prospect of uncovering the intimate details of her mother's letters, Bellamy changes tack and abruptly turns to a lengthy anecdote about her performance as Lady Froth in *The Double Dealer* that meanders away from the tantalizing subject of the letters. Several pages later she eventually returns to the letters and describes how they were accidentally put into her hands by a servant who wrongfully assumed they belonged to her. Finally divulging the contents of the letters Bellamy describes how her curiosity got the better of her:

I then perceived it was an epistle from my Hibernian admirer to my mother. At the same time a dash annexed to the word daughter exciting my curiosity, I was tempted to break the rule I had hitherto so inviolably observed. The line ran thus: "Dear Madam, I believe your loved daughter cannot withstand the power of —". As I could not understand the meaning of this sentence, and indeed was very indifferent about it, I threw the letter aside, without perusing the remainder. (20)

Even as she yields to the desire to possess intimate knowledge of others and repeatedly draws her readers in by alluding to secret depths, Bellamy ultimately reveals nothing substantial. Despite hints that the letters contain juicy details of her intimate life, all that ends up being revealed to readers is an incomplete sentence.

Bellamy's autobiographical self is not only a social problem in its refusal to fit neatly within established categories for female participation in public life, but it is also an epistemological problem as she invites her readers' attention while simultaneously thwarting inspection (64). Confronting the allusivity of Bellamy's sentimental characterization, we are forced to reconcile with and reorient our own expectations and priorities as researchers. If we seek to analyze historical female figures under the pretense of fully knowing or possessing what we examine, we will only ever succeed in the perpetuation of patriarchal power structures that objectify women like Bellamy in the process of empowering the researcher's own subjective position.

Beyond the Page: Extending the Scope of Bellamy's Sentimental Characterization

In the final section of this chapter I move beyond the text of Bellamy's autobiography and engage with two other depictions of Bellamy that extend her sentimental characterisation beyond the pages of her autobiography. This allows me to focus on the breadth of Bellamy's network of self-fashioning rather than on the depth of her character. I use the horizontal trajectory of Bennett's vital materialism as a disruptive lens for recuperating female agency in patriarchal power structures, and also follow Julia Fawcett's suggestion that autobiography is inherently performative. Fawcett asserts that autobiographical performance, and performance more broadly, is "not only a fiction presented on a stage but also an action executed on the street or even within the home" (6). In her formulation, performance is not "an antonym to print but rather... a term that refers to the interactions between a variety of media" (6-7). With this in mind I explore Bellamy's relationship with the character of Juliet as it is represented in Benjamin Wilson's painting, "David Garrick as Romeo and George Anne Bellamy as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*," (1753) before subsequently looking at Francisco Bartolozzi's print, "George Anne Bellamy" (1785). After moving from painted canvas to printed engraving this chapter concludes by tracing Bellamy's characterisation as sentimental heroine beyond the bounds of her autobiography and will assess the degree to which it influenced her contemporary representations.

Although Bellamy played a wide range of characters throughout her career, her portrayal of Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is arguably her most famous role. Bellamy documents the importance of this role for her career several times throughout her autobiography noting not only that her enactment of Juliet at Covent-Garden drew tremendous crowds (242-43), but her repeated performances in the role led to an increase in salary to such an extent that she boasted: "I was to have a larger salary than any other female performer in that theatre" (261). The character of Juliet was not only personally important to Bellamy's career, but during the second half of the eighteenth century became tremendously popular as a sentimental heroine on the stage.

The popularity of *Romeo and Juliet* in the later part of the century has been largely attributed to David Garrick's 1748 adaptation of Shakespeare's text.⁴⁶ Not only was Garrick's version hugely popular when it debuted, but as Sylvia Alexa Berg points out, it also proved to be the "most enduringly successful production of the play" (30).⁴⁷ In his adaptation Garrick made a number of substantial changes to the text, most notably by cutting down the dialogue in favour of adding in dance numbers⁴⁸ and pantomime elements (45-6). In the context of this study, the most important alterations were those made to the character of Juliet. A review of Garrick's adaptation

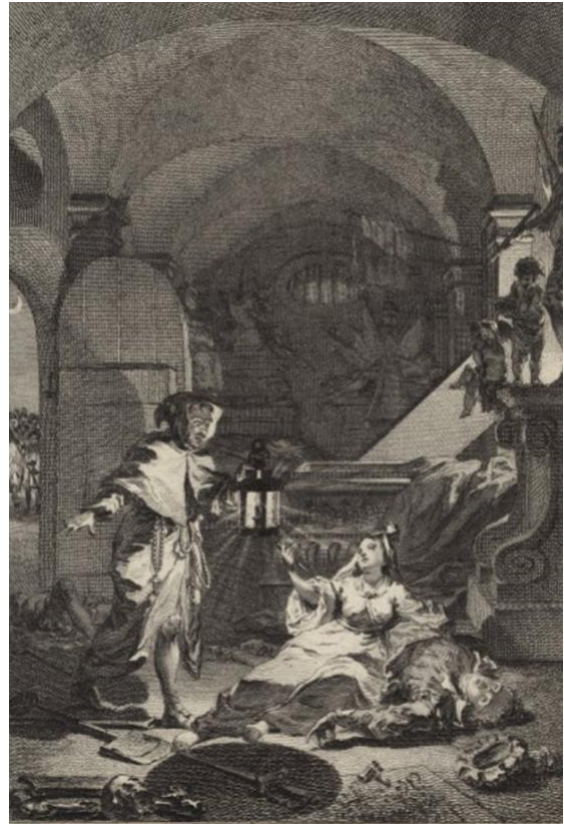


Figure 3: "Romeo & Juliet" by Anthony Walker (1754)

⁴⁶ Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was largely absent during the Restoration and in the first decades of the period. One of the few instances of the play's performance was a short run in 1662 by D'Avenant's Company. The play was adapted by James Howard, and in order to please both audience members who desired a happy resolution and those who preferred the original's tragic ending, the script was made into a "tragi-comedy" that pursued different conclusions on alternating nights; in one ending the lovers died tragically and in the other they survived (Berg 24). In his *Diary* Samuel Pepys succinctly remarks that this version of *Romeo and Juliet* "is the play of itself the worst that ever I heard in my life, and the worst acted that ever I saw these people do" (39). Following this lackluster performance, John Dover Wilson explains, no rendition of the original Shakespearean play was performed for over eighty years (39). Wilson remarks that the Shakespearean script performed in the 1660s was "supplanted by a strange hotch-potch [sic] of garbled Shakespeare matter and new invention" (39) that he identifies as Thomas Otway's *The History and Fall of Caius Marius* (1679), which heavily borrows from *Romeo and Juliet*. Despite being technically correct in his assertion that no rendition of the play was performed until the 1740s, Wilson misses the mark in his dismissal of Otway's adaptation. Otway's play drew large crowds and continued to be popular for more than fifty years. What is made evident by the success of *Caius Marius* is not only the malleability of Shakespeare's original, but also the way in which the general themes of *Romeo and Juliet* had become enmeshed in the socio-cultural fabric of the era. *Romeo and Juliet* next appeared on 11 September, 1744 in a heavily revised adaptation by Theophilus Cibber at the Theatre in the Haymarket (Wilson 40). Although Cibber's version contained some notable changes from the original it was also considered a great success (Berg 27).

⁴⁷ Berg continues to explain that "Garrick's text exerted enormous influence on the stage presentation of *Romeo and Juliet* for over a century and was used, with only very slight variations, as the standard text in performance until the 1840's; some of its innovations were still in use in the 1880's" (30).

⁴⁸ Playbills for Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet* note that performances would include a "minuet by Juliet and the leading dancer of the company" (Stone 142). The important addition of musical elements to Garrick's adaption is highlighted by George Winchester Stone Jr. who describes the first time Romeo and Juliet meet: "they had opportunity for unfolding themselves in their growing, youthful love by pantomimic action, in a location of prominence on stage against the background of dancers and soft music" (142).

from *The Dramatic Censor* underscores the modifications made to Juliet, suggesting that Garrick “has taken very unusual, and very successful pains with his female character” (171). The reviewer finds this new version of Juliet to be a “most amiable lady; she is tender, affectionate and constant; possessed of liberal sentiments and delicate feelings; rather romantic in some notions, but justifiably so from age and situation of mind” (192). Emphasized throughout the review is the ability of Garrick’s Juliet to articulate her emotions and take action as a participant in the drama: she openly expresses her affection for Romeo when they first meet (177), is impatient to be married (174), delivers a passionate soliloquy (182), has an “expressive and affecting” discussion with the Friar (184) and most importantly is given the chance to react to Romeo’s death (187).

Among the forty-eight main stage productions put on at Drury Lane in 1748 (the year Garrick’s adaptation debuted) *Romeo and Juliet* was the theatre’s most performed piece, occupying a “12 per cent share of the overall receipts” (Ritchie 382). By November 23rd of 1749 the rights for Garrick’s *Romeo and Juliet* were bought by Covent Garden (Stone Jr. 160). Playing at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane Theatres in 1750, “*Romeo and Juliet* was the only show in London” (Ritchie 374). In what has subsequently been dubbed “The Battle of the Romeos” (388), Garrick played Romeo at Drury Lane in direct competition with Spranger Barry’s portrayal of the same character at Covent Garden. Most scholars and critics have focussed on the performances of Barry and Garrick as dueling Romeos. However, at the same time Garrick and Barry vied for success as competing Romeos, Bellamy and Susannah Cibber performed “dueling” (*The Dramatic Censor* 192) versions of Juliet. A comparative review from *The Dramatic Censor* remarked that “[o]ne excelled in amorous rapture, the other called every power of distress and despair to her aid; Mrs. Bellamy was an object of love, Mrs. Cibber of admiration; Mrs. Bellamy’s execution was more natural, Mrs. Cibber’s more forceable” (192-3). Certainly, both women are commended for different aspects of their performance, but what comes to the forefront in this discussion of Cibber’s and Bellamy’s respective

merits is that Juliet as a character was evolving from her traditional role as a tragic lover. Taken together, the sentimental facets of Garrick's revised text and the remarks on Bellamy's "natural" performance highlight how Juliet had been reimagined as a figure of sentimental expression.

It is not surprising, considering the popularity of Garrick's adaptation, that Juliet quickly became an integral facet of the socio-cultural lexicon. From mid-century onward the character of Juliet frequently appeared in the periodical press not just in the many reviews of specific



Figure 4: "Romeo and Juliet in Friar Lawrence's Cell" (1794) by Ignatius Joseph van den Berghe.

performances, although those were certainly plentiful,⁴⁹ but also as a cultural touchstone in discussions of sentimental expression. The cultural capital accrued by Juliet is highlighted in a letter "To the Printer of the Lady's Magazine" wherein the author, who identifies himself as a bashful and "dejected youth" (293), draws upon allusions

to Juliet in a discussion of his "sincere and virtuous affection for a young lady" (293). He implores "your fair correspondents whose hearts are susceptible to pity" to write to his "dear charmer, Juliet" (293) on his behalf. Referring to the character of Juliet in his call for relationship advice frames the narrative in terms of a popular romantic relationship that not only aims to engage readers, but

⁴⁹ It should be noted that reviews of various iterations of *Romeo and Juliet* appear in a *considerable* number of general interest periodicals (i.e. publications that were not specifically devoted to the coverage of theatrical performances) like *The New Literary Review*, *The Bee; or Literary Weekly Intelligencer* and *The Universal Museum; or, Gentleman's and Ladies Polite Magazine of History, Politics and Literature*.

moreover helped to communicate the pureness of his love through the use of Juliet as an affective touchstone.

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century the character of Juliet was also frequently the visual subject of prints, engravings and paintings. Imagined by artists like Henry Bunbury, Francesco Bartolozzi, Anthony Walker, Ignatius Joseph van den Berghe and John Opie, Juliet is often characterised as an eighteenth-century sentimental heroine. In two of these images, Walker's "Romeo and Juliet" (1754) and van den Berghe's "Romeo and Juliet in Friar Lawrence's Cell" (1794), both artists use Juliet's garments as external markers of her virtue and to convey genuine emotional expression (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Walker and van den Berghe both clothe Juliet in a dress that features a natural silhouette,⁵⁰ flows loosely around her body and is made of a light-coloured fabric. Despite the substantial changes in fashion that took place in the 40 years⁵¹ between Walker's and van den Berghe's paintings, both images include dresses that feature a modest collar, a small belt (at her natural waist) and wide gigot sleeves. The use of colour in van den Berghe's image, in addition to the position of Juliet's body (sitting upright as opposed to draped over the corpse of Romeo), makes the details of Juliet's garments more easily discernible. Van den Berghe adorns Juliet's dress with slim-banded ribbons at the upper arm, shoulder and at the hem of a simple decorative apron which falls over the skirt. The apron-style detailing on the skirt was a popular feature of women's daywear in the 1780s and 1790s (Edwards 61), and in combination with

⁵⁰ Lydia Edwards in *How to Read a Dress: A Guide to Changing Fashion from the 16th to 20th Century* (2018) explains that one of the most popular styles of eighteenth-century dress (particularly in the later years of the period) utilized a "natural" silhouette" (64), which featured "lightweight, easy-to-laundry ... materials such as muslin, cotton, poplin, batiste and linen" (64).

⁵¹ As identified by Anne Bissonnette the second half of the eighteenth century was a time of "transitional" fashion, which came to a head in the last two decades of the period (215). Bissonnette explains that the 1790's saw a "greater variety of dress," which included "various fullness of skirts, sleeve lengths, colours and waist levels" that were "numerous and coexist[ed] with the narrow short-sleeved white chemise gown" (215).

van den Berghe's choice of a jockey cap⁵² for Juliet's headwear he constructs Juliet as both a virtuous woman donning a modest silhouette *and* a woman of fashion. Although more evident in van den Berghe's work, both artists portray Juliet in gowns with a more "natural" style that enabled the body to move more freely (unencumbered by heavy fabrics and stiff corsetry) and allowed for the easy discernment of bodily cues.

Not only does Juliet's dress facilitate the viewer's ability to interpret her movements and gestures, but moreover these descriptions explicitly connect the character of Juliet to the period's most popular sentimental heroines. Engravings of Arabella from Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, Henrietta from Lennox's *Henrietta* and Betsy from Eliza Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* from the 1780's and 1790's are all similarly depicted.⁵³ Examining the dresses of Arabella, Henrietta and Betsy in visual images it becomes evident that white (or light coloured) flowing dresses, with modified gigot or gigot sleeves, modest caps and small belts emphasizing the wearer's natural waist act as a visual indicator of the character's status as a sentimental heroine. Considered alongside the depictions of these other heroines, the representation of Juliet in both van den Berghe and Walker's images directly links her to well-established visual markers of sentimentality, and effectively dresses her in the trappings of a sentimental heroine.

⁵² It is interesting to note that in addition to being one of the most popular choices for eighteenth-century women's headwear in the later decades of the period, the jockey cap is often thought to be a predecessor to the late-nineteenth-century "Juliet Cap" (aptly named after Shakespeare's heroine), which remains popular today as a choice of bridalwear.

⁵³ See James Heath's "Illustrations to Haywood's 'Betsy Thoughtless'" (1783), Richard Woodman's painting, "Henrietta" (1798), and W. Hawkins' painting "Female Quixote" (1799).



Figure 5: David Garrick and George Anne Bellamy in 'Romeo and Juliet', Act V, Scene III" by Benjamin Wilson, 1753.

Considering Juliet's alignment with sentimentality in popular culture after Garrick's re-imagining of the role, it is not surprising that Bellamy frequently associated herself with the character. I would like to propose that Juliet is a useful figure who plays an important role in this investigation of Bellamy's performances of sentimentality, since Juliet offers us a simplified mirror for Bellamy's more complex performances of identity. Like Bellamy, the character of Juliet refuses to fully comply with patriarchal expectations for female social participation. And yet unlike Bellamy, Juliet can only ever be a character who exists on stage, and as such we can only ever read along the surface of her representation. Bellamy's most notable depiction in the role is Benjamin Wilson's 1753 painting, "David Garrick and George Anne Bellamy in 'Romeo and Juliet', Act V, Scene III" (see Figure 5), which captures Bellamy's performance as Juliet opposite David Garrick. The image depicts Bellamy (as Juliet) in the process of waking up in the Capulet tomb much to the

astonishment of Garrick (as Romeo). Curatorial staff at the Victoria and Albert Museum explain that Wilson's image accurately captures the staging of the performance with the lovers situated upstage centre in the Capulet's mausoleum ("Curator Notes"). Much like the other illustrations of Juliet from Walker and van den Berghe, Wilson paints Bellamy in a light flowing gown and jockey cap that emphasize the movement of her body as she rises from her resting place. Painted in the same style as the depictions of Arabella, Henrietta, Betsy and Juliet, Bellamy is represented in the trappings of a sentimental heroine nearly thirty years before the 1785 publication of her autobiography. Wilson's painting is important not only as it aligns Bellamy with these other sentimental heroines, but moreover because her on-stage performance is captured and expanded beyond the temporally limited bounds of a single evening. Depictions of Bellamy as Juliet highlight the extension of Bellamy's sentimental persona beyond the pages of her autobiography, and underscore her successful deflection of the spectator's consuming gaze. Bellamy's alignment with Juliet, much like in her autobiography, resists readings of depth or claims to interiority, and instead extends outward across a network of socio-cultural signifiers. Bellamy-as-Juliet culminates in a multifaceted public persona that contains only an echo of the actress herself.

These glimpses of Bellamy as Juliet and as a Richardsonian-inspired sentimental heroine in both her autobiography and in Wilson's painting emphasize the success of Bellamy's self-characterization but simultaneously mark an untraversable gap between scholar and subject. Peggy Phelan speaks to the ephemerality of performance and suggests that "performance's only life is in the present" (146), and as such it "cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations" (146) because at its core "performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterwards" (149). In her description of performance as temporally limited, Phelan gestures to the boundaries of scholarly and curatorial

desires to capture and preserve what is essentially immaterial. Amassing agency through the careful use of sentimental tropes, both within and beyond her autobiography, Bellamy draws upon the malleability of performance, which constantly shifts and changes as it is distributed across the social assemblage. Each spectator in the audience, reader of her autobiography or viewer of Wilson's painting engages with a different facet of Bellamy's self-fashioned public persona. Just like Phelan's conceptualization of performance which seeks to challenge the "coopting [of] performative objects for one-dimensional narratives" (165) that only perpetuate the damaging reproduction of "the sterilizing binaries of self/other, possession/dispossession, men/women which are increasingly inadequate formulas for representation" (165), examining Bellamy's representational network that constitutes her public persona forces us to confront the problematic subjective and objective relationship of traditional research in favour of delving into the murky space that lies in between. In performing the role of sentimental heroine Bellamy is able to engage with both duplicitous/virtuous and immodest/modest modes of femininity in such a way that she successfully refuses to be consumed by the spectator's

subjective gaze, repeatedly aligning herself with both modes of femininity by drawing upon representations within representations that allude to depth, but in fact only expand outward through their reference to other novels, figures and elements of the eighteenth-century socio-cultural lexicon.

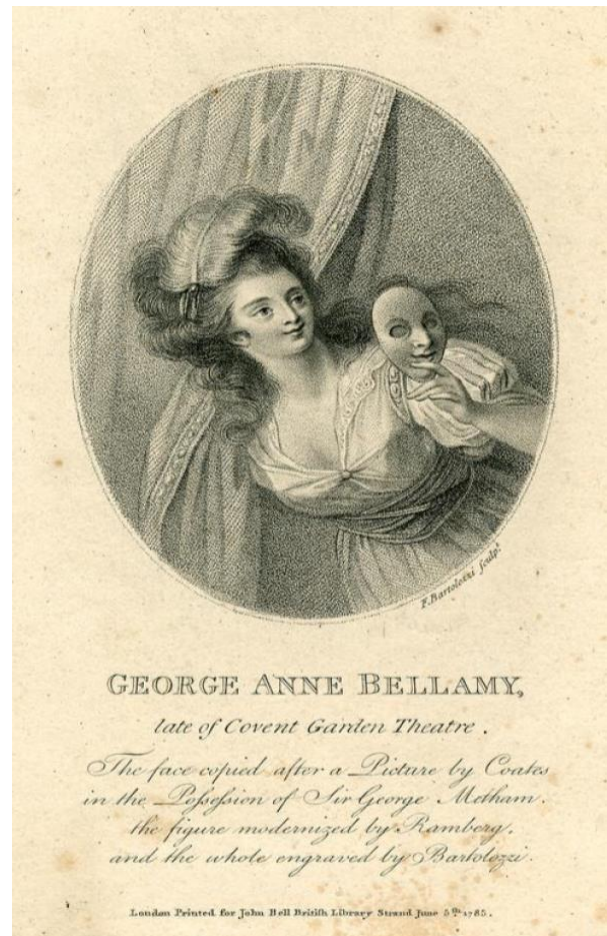


Figure 6: "George Anne Bellamy, late of Covent Garden Theatre" (1785) by Francesco Bartolozzi.

Before concluding, I want to briefly turn to one last image of Bellamy, which succinctly materializes both the success of Bellamy's implementation of her performative identity and the network of representation which I argue lies at its heart. In Francesco Bartolozzi's etching, "George Anne Bellamy, late of Covent Garden Theatre" (see Figure 6), Bellamy is portrayed as "the comic muse."⁵⁴ Printed after her death, this image captures Bellamy's successful refusal to yield to social pressure and spectatorial consumption as an object of pleasure in two ways. First, the composition of the image itself positions Bellamy as simultaneously visible and obscured (holding a theatrical mask while peering out from behind a stage curtain). The orientation of the mask, Bellamy, and the curtain create visual layering that positions Bellamy as accessible to the viewer by revealing her face, while also concealing part of her body behind the stage curtain. Secondly, the subscript that accompanies Bartolozzi's etching identifies that in fact this is not a singular image, but rather a conglomeration of several separate representations of Bellamy: "the face copied after a picture by Coates," "the figure modernized by Ramberg" and "the whole engraved by Bartolozzi." Not only does Bartolozzi create this representation of Bellamy by drawing together elements of other images, but the entire etching was reproduced by Robert Sands without the accompanying description in 1805.⁵⁵ Sands's adaptation of Bartolozzi's etching (which in turn amalgamated elements of Coates's and Ramberg's images) was subsequently printed by John Bell's "British Library," and inserted into later editions of Bellamy's autobiography. Although at first glance Bartolozzi's image of Bellamy appears to contain a singular representation of the actress, in actuality it is composed of layers of different images drawn together that were copied and circulated in other prints. What appears superficially to be a single image dissolves upon closer inspection, evading the spectator's

⁵⁴ Bellamy's representation in this image as "the comic muse" is not identified in the subscript of the image itself, but rather by Highfill, Kalman, Burnim and Langhans in their *Biographical Dictionary* (19).

⁵⁵ This subsequent reproduction is available here: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1257872/george-anne-bellamy-print-robert-sands/>

domineering gaze through the layering of Bartolozzi's, Coates's, Ramberg's and subsequently Sands's images of Bellamy. Instead of choosing to realistically portray Bellamy as she would have appeared in her final years, as a woman in her mid-fifties, Bartolozzi draws together earlier images of Bellamy and immortalizes her as a young woman clothed in the hallmarks of a sentimental heroine. This simultaneously singular and multifaceted image materializes the network of representation enacted by Bellamy's performances of identity and demonstrates not only her enduring popularity as an actress, but moreover her successful evasion of the social objectification of the viewer's gaze. Yielding to the social demands of commodification, the Bellamy in the image, who is really several Bellamys at once, is disseminated as a commodity by the circulation of the press but masks Bellamy as an individual who remains never fully knowable.

Ultimately Bellamy's sentimental self-characterization highlights her successful refusal to yield to the public's demands for intimate knowledge of celebrity figures. Bellamy drew upon a broad network of representation that "cashed in" on the socially determined value of virtue and sentimental expression in order to facilitate her subsequent divergence from the normative network. By examining the heterogeneous assemblages of power that allowed Bellamy to accrue social capital, I also emphasize the continued necessity of interrogating our own preconceptions of scholarly subjectivity. Confronting the allusivity of Bellamy's sentimental characterization – which is always extending outward just beyond our reach – forces us to reconcile with and reorient our own expectations as researchers. Bellamy in her refusal to neatly fit into one category of palatable feminine expression diffuses the one-way nature of the researcher's gaze as it flows from subject to object and mirror-like reflects our own scrutiny back to us. Bellamy's adoption of sentimentality intentionally plays upon the assumption that femininity is universally understood to function according to specific parameters, and by extension that language itself is able to evoke images that are universally understood by individuals from the same time and location.

Attending to Bellamy's performances of identity, which appropriates hallmarks of acceptable femininity only to subsequently undermine the systems by which these determinations are made calls attention to the continued need, after more than 200 years, to challenge one-dimensional concepts of womanhood that seek only to perpetuate a very narrow idea of femininity. Attending to the network of representation which is present in Bellamy's archive underscores the potential for disrupting existing systems of oppression by appropriating the very language that is used to maintain conformity. In short, Bellamy's performances of identity have profound implications for other women who have similarly been passed over and relegated to the margins of discourse. Thinking through Bellamy's reconfiguration of sentimentality in eighteenth-century England underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating diverse practices of identity today in both our research and in our daily lives.

Chapter Two: “Sisters of the Sewing Tribe:” Characterizations of Seamstresses, Milliners and Mantua-Makers in Eighteenth-Century Literary Texts

Since accounts from women working in the garment industries are sparse, one of the most frequently relied upon sources for researchers interested in these women are literary texts. However, much of the material that includes garment tradeswomen is either strongly influenced by eighteenth-century prescriptive literature⁵⁶ or uses seamstresses, milliners and mantua-makers as symbolic representatives of larger socio-cultural issues. Admittedly, this makes garment tradeswomen useful starting points for broader discussions of eighteenth-century fashion, international trade and economic development (particularly in the periodical press), but has largely obscured the women themselves. For instance, in Richard Steele’s “The Spinster in Defence of the Woollen Manufactures” (1719) and Daniel Defoe’s “The Female Manufacturers Complaint” (1720) each author adopts the respective personas of “Rebecca Woolpack” and “Dorothy Distaff,” “Abigail Spinning-Wheel” and “Eleanor Reel” to debate the negative impact of foreign silks on the English wool industry. Steele’s Woolpack harshly criticizes the devaluing of English-made garments (7) and writes “in the behalf of the needy and distress’d in opposition to the wealthy and powerful” who Woolpack fears “may conspire for their own ends, to leave the afflictions and complaints of their miserable fellow-subjects and fellow creatures neglected” (1). Steele initially positions his text as primarily concerned with petitioning for the improvement of wages and sales amongst women working in the garment trades. However, as with much of the discourse on fictionalized garment tradeswomen, here the women are used as a stepping-stone in an appeal to affluent purchasers and a

⁵⁶ For the majority of the twentieth century scholars have overwhelmingly turned to eighteenth-century prescriptive writing (and prescriptive art) that “tended to portray most women as largely passive in the face of men, biology and fate” (Hunt 75). Margaret Hunt explains that this presumed passivity comes from a very small number of eighteenth-century texts (75), which were repeatedly used as indicatory of the lived experiences of real women. Although there is certainly merit in the analysis of canonical prescriptive literature, Hunt contends that we should only look to these texts “to find out what some eighteenth-century people thought women *should* be like” (80).

nationalistic economic agenda (7). Although the precariously employed spinsters feature largely in the title and introduction, they disappear as the narrative progresses, fading into an anonymous mass that is burdensome and ruinous to their social superiors (10).⁵⁷

Writing in direct response to Steele, Defoe uses the personas of Distaff, Spinning-Wheel and Reel to persuade affluent women to stop purchasing calico fabrics, described in the text as “this new outlandish fashion” (10), which are “wholly at the door of your [Ladies’] own fancy” (10). Instead of positioning garment workers as an amorphous impoverished mass, Defoe uses his spinsters to illustrate the virtues of hardworking Englishwomen who “by the help of the spinning of worsted yarns ... [have] maintain’d their said families” (6). Setting the successful futures of working women at the doorsteps of their more affluent contemporaries, Defoe’s garment workers beg ladies to rethink this “new outlandish fashion” (10), asserting that it is “in your own power, and in your own hands, to effect this; and to all intents and purposes to rescue all the poor manufacturers in the nation from the bondage and misery they are now fallen into” (16). Finally, Distaff, Spinning-Wheel and Reel conclude that “[a]s the evil is laid at your door, so the remedy is in your hands; for if you are the cause, you may certainly be the cure” (16). Defoe’s characterisation of garment women is certainly more fully sketched out when compared to Steele’s, but nonetheless the future of garment workers is predicated upon the whims of the social elite, and they are limited to one-dimensional synecdochical depictions that dissolve their individual identities and merge them inextricably with their craft.⁵⁸ Although Steele’s and Defoe’s texts are probably two of the best-known fictionalized

⁵⁷ These burdensome garment workers are specifically gendered female. In contrast to the “needy” and “miserable” women, Steele writes that male wool merchants “knit mankind together in a mutual intercourse of good offices,” expanding upon this to suggest that “[o]ur English merchant converts the tin of his own country into gold, and exchanges his wool for Rubies” (14).

⁵⁸ This is most evident with their last names – Distaff, Spinning-Wheel and Reel – which link them to the instruments of their trade. However, the merging of their identities with their trades is also highlighted by the “signatures” of each woman. Only Distaff actually signs her name, whereas both Spinning Wheel and Reel leave their “mark” in the form of a spinning wheel. For all the faults of Defoe’s characterization, the varied levels of literacy amongst the three spinsters accurately gestures to existing hierarchies of wealth and education within the garment trades.

accounts of periodical ‘non-fiction’ featuring women in the garment industries, we also see milliners, mantua-makers and needleworkers appear in fictional literature of the period. The characterization of garment workers and needlework in novels like Eliza Haywood’s *Anti-Pamela* (1741), John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748-9), Charlotte Lennox’s *Henrietta* (1758), and Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771) have been well documented by scholars like Chloe Wigston Smith who highlights the function of the milliner’s or mantua-maker’s shop as representing “an intoxicating space in which emboldened male customers might hope to seduce women workers” or where needlework as a commercial activity is aligned with promiscuity and other “illicit forms of work” (145). The popularity of these texts, both during the eighteenth century and subsequently in academic analysis, has reinforced promiscuity, seduction and illicit female behaviour as the hallmarks of garment tradeswomen. Moreover, these salacious associations have largely overwhelmed more nuanced depictions of women working in garment associated trades and obscured accounts of them in the context of their actual work.

I am certainly not the first to note the complexities involved when examining garment tradeswomen in the eighteenth-century socio-cultural lexicon. As Kimberly Chrisman Campbell shows, looking into representations (whether literary or artistic) of women working in the garment trades often poses more questions than answers (157). Because of the ubiquitous nature of milliners and mantua-makers on the streets of London, in the pages of literature and in images from the period, these women came to represent not only the burgeoning business of shopping but also the very notion of fashionable culture. As Chrisman Campbell explains, “milliners⁵⁹ played a crucial and sometimes controversial role in the eighteenth-century fashion industry, and eighteenth-century society as a whole” (158). In her discussion of visual culture, Chrisman Campbell aims to focus

⁵⁹ Throughout her study she uses the term “milliners” to represent dressmakers, mantua-makers and milliners more broadly as a euphemism for a broad range of activities related to the selling and making of women’s clothing and accessories (Chrisman Campbell 158-59).

solely on artistic representation of milliners, but she too cannot avoid discussions of female garment workers in literature to support her interpretation. Despite the fact that fictional depictions of garment tradeswomen in literature have been proven by scholars to be largely misleading, they remain an essential piece of the puzzle.

Since literary depictions of female garment workers have substantially shaped the collective historical understanding of these women, it is important to investigate the range of characterizations that form their representational core. In this chapter I will examine two of the most popular characterisations of garment tradeswomen, which portrayed them as either participating in illicit sexual activity under the auspices of legitimate work or as central to the dissemination of frivolous fashion. Looking specifically at the depictions of garment tradeswomen in the anonymously penned *The Life and Intrigues of the late Celebrated Mrs. Mary Parrimore, The Tall Milliner of 'Change-Alley* (1729), *The Beggar Girl and Her Benefactors* (1797) by Anna Maria Bennett, and *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties* (1814) by Frances Burney this chapter will analyze the recurrence of these popular stereotypes in literary fiction. Spanning the long eighteenth century, these three texts illustrate popular characterisations of milliners and mantua-makers, ranging from a sexually promiscuous milliner on the one hand to a sophisticated French milliner who caters to society's elite as a paragon of style and good taste on the other. The objectives of this chapter are twofold: first, by positioning depictions of garment tradeswomen at the centre of my investigation I aim to provide a counterpoint to often-cited accounts of female garment workers from authors like Defoe and Steele who either skim over garment tradeswomen as an amorphous mass of working poor or exaggerate accounts of their promiscuity. Second, by tracing the development and advancement of these popular stereotypes I will explore the mimetic quality of these characterisations in the aforementioned texts. Analyzing the role of mimesis in both disseminating and challenging popular stereotypes I draw upon both Luce Irigaray and Susan Kozel. Irigaray suggests that “[t]o play with

mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it” (76). And Susan Kozel asserts “[m]imesis is a powerful tool available for women to subvert the social order as it is presently defined and preserved by patriarchal structures” which “involves women consciously stepping into the sexual stereotypes provided for them by men. It thus becomes a process of eroding the stereotypes from within” (116). Framing mimesis in these texts as a representational strategy, I will argue that with each new invocation the objectifying power of these stereotypes (which questioned the legitimate place of women in the proto-industrial marketplace as successful actors and agents in their own right) is gradually diminished.

As a product of its time, *The Life and Intrigues of the late Celebrated Mrs. Mary Parrimore* characterises garment tradeswomen as sexually deviant and is an early iteration of the celebrity biography that was in vogue during the middle and later years of the period. The alignment of millinery with sexuality begins in the narrative’s title with the titular character’s name “Mrs. Parrimore.” Although not quite a homonym, the close similarity between “parrimore” and “paramour”⁶⁰ foreshadows the characterization of Mrs. Parrimore as sexually deviant. While the narrative’s title suggests that readers should expect an account of Mrs. Parrimore’s career as a milliner, the verbal slippage of parrimore/paramour undercuts any legitimacy the character might have as a tradeswoman in favour of highlighting her various sexual adventures.

The text begins chronologically by passing rapidly through the early years of Parrimore’s life, and readers are quickly engaged in a detailed account of her increasingly absurd romantic conquests. These adventures begin when Parrimore loses her virginity to a sailor on a church windowsill. Recounting this event as comic misadventure, the narrator describes her first sexual experience by

⁶⁰ Etymologically speaking, the term paramour was widely in use during the eighteenth century, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that it can be traced back to popular medieval narratives like William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* (1387), and Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590).

emphasizing that the windowsill “was very low, and in the heat of action unfortunately gave way, and fell into the church the noise of which unluckily drove the sexton thither to see what was the matter, who found our young Lovers in great confusion, and a posture over which I must draw a veil” (5). The narrator’s gleeful account is filled with zeugmas such as, “our fair one’s virginity and reputation, were at once shipwreck’d as was the church window” (5). The narrative relies upon moments of absurdity to foster a lighthearted tone throughout, which are sometimes at odds with the narrative’s content. For instance, in the next of Parrimore’s sexual misadventures she travels with her husband to visit a ship’s captain, and while her husband sleeps the Captain calls upon the ship’s carpenter to disassemble the door to Parrimore’s bedroom in order to sleep with her. In what can only be describe as a successive series of rapes the narrator cheerily relays how:

[T]he Captain ventured in, and with little or no ceremony boarded his Lady, who was too good natur’d to refuse a Gentleman that had treated them so handsomely. The Captain was pleased with his bedfellow, and made frequent repetitions, till growing tired and sleepy, he retired to rest. The Carpenter, who was in on the secret, thought he might take the same liberty, and succeeded accordingly. The Captain, having had his fill, sent the second lieutenant, he the midshipman and he another, till all the officers in the ship had their will of her in their turns. (11)

The narrator recounts this unsettling series of events in much the same tone as the destruction of the church window. Because the narrative remains strictly in the third person, Parrimore is consistently denied the opportunity to share her thoughts and responses to the intimate events of her life and becomes increasingly flat and two-dimensional as the narrative progresses. The sustained comedic tone not only creates distance between the reader and the titular character, but moreover renders her nothing more than an object in the story with no more agency then the broken church window.

Throughout the 80-page narrative, we only get brief allusions to Parrimore’s work as a milliner in between her adventures with a string of men ranging from the sailor and Captain (as well as his entire crew) to a “young Quaker” (28) and a “tall Irishman” (29). Although the narrator does

repeatedly emphasize her status as a woman engaged in public business (3), this title predominantly underscores how easily various men are able to engage with her under the false pretense of trade.⁶¹ As the text progresses it gestures to Parrimore's profession only in the vaguest instances and uses her work predominantly as the premise for her encounters with various men. Early in the narrative she is able to afford shop premises in a prominent location "opposite to *Garraway's* Coffee-house" where "she succeeded in every Branch of her trade to admiration" (13). The reader receives no description of her actual work as a milliner or the daily running of her shop other than that she maintains "a prosperous trade" which yielded "a tolerable fortune" (77). The narrative culminates with Parrimore leaving millinery to open a new business. Before she can enjoy the spoils of a lifetime of hard work (albeit hard work that has been almost entirely erased from the narrative) she succumbs to melancholy and hangs herself (78). In the final pages of the text the narrator recounts how the coroner's inquest declares Parrimore's suicide the result of "lunacy" (78). Ultimately, Parrimore's association with millinery is sketchy at best and at no point in the narrative do we witness her working. Here the association between Mrs. Parrimore and millinery is used as a smokescreen for some semblance of respectability, and reflects broader socio-cultural practices in that women arrested for prostitution typically "gave their profession as 'milliner' whether or not they actually had a day job" (Campbell 159). This custom, which increasingly aligned garment tradeswomen with sex workers, was widely practiced throughout the long eighteenth century and, as Campbell suggests, these links between prostitution and millinery only strengthened as the garment trades (particularly those of dressmakers, milliners and mantuamakers) became increasingly important to fashionable society (160).

⁶¹ Although the text was published decades before R. Campbell's popular text, *The London Tradesman* (1757), it is evident that Mrs. Parrimore's narrative was influenced by the same general sentiment that pervades R. Campbell's work, which largely viewed female participation in public business as potentially dangerous to female virtue.

Amy Louise Erickson devotes a section of her study on eighteenth-century milliners to addressing the longstanding association between “commercial exchange and sexual promiscuity when women are involved” (165). However, counter to fictional accounts like that of Mrs. Parrimore, which emphasize the sexual dimension of women’s participation in the commercial marketplace, Erickson’s historical analysis suggests that it is highly “unlikely that the risk of seduction and betrayal to a young woman was any greater among millinery apprentices than in any other group, and arguably it was substantially lower” (164). Erickson explains that contrary to the socio-cultural association, young women working as milliners and milliner’s apprentices would have been surrounded by adult women “who had a commercial interest in maintaining their apprentices’ reputation as well as their own” (164). In fact, Erickson concludes that these accounts which conflate millinery with prostitution are ironic in that they likely stem from the reputable connotations of milliner’s shops (164). Research by both Chrisman Campbell and Erickson suggests that it is unlikely that narratives like *The Life and Intrigue* provide much in the way of accurate depiction. However, this does not mean that Parrimore’s narrative is unimportant. In fact, the highly constructed nature of Parrimore’s characterisation subtly undermines the stereotype on which it is based. Instead of affirming the superficial suggestion that millinery functions as a ‘respectable’ disguise for prostitution, the repeated and increasingly ludicrous descriptions of Parrimore’s sexual exploits call into question the plausibility of these instances being anything more than a farce. With each repetition the mimetic action divests the reader of the pretense that Parrimore is anything more than a one-dimensional parody; in short the repetition of ridiculous scenes of ‘sexually deviant’ behaviour reinforces the absurdity of the caricature itself. Here, the mimetic repetition of Parrimore’s promiscuity functions as a signpost that encourages the reader to go beyond the depiction. *The Life and Intrigue* thereby slowly undermines its own assertions by “referring to familiar ground” (Kozel 125). Beginning with a familiar characterisation of the sexually promiscuous

garment worker, the text prompts readers to challenge this notion through the repeated staging of increasingly implausible versions of Parrimore's sexual exploits. The text unravels the very pretense it superficially relies upon, and self-referentially fashions a divide between fictional milliners and their living counterparts. Unlike classical mimesis, which Elizabeth C. Mansfield defines as "a twofold approach to representation: first copying forms... then generalizing or perfecting those forms to achieve a kind of ideal" (xvi), the mimetic repetition of Parrimore's promiscuity devolves with each occurrence from characterization into caricature, thereby eroding the stereotype from within.

In juxtaposition to *The Life and Intrigue*, the fifth volume of Anna Maria Bennett's series *The Beggar Girl*, which follows the life of Rosa (an orphan who is cared for by a variety of wealthy benefactors), opens with a chapter on Rosa's time with "a French Milliner" named Madame La Croix who is immediately positioned as not only a woman of virtue, but also as a successful businesswoman.⁶² Bennett's characterisation of La Croix falls in line with Peter Collinge's assessment of successful milliners in the eighteenth century as creditable, trustworthy and organized (292). In his historical case study of milliner Dorothy Gretton, Collinge finds that Gretton's success and survival over a number of years in business was directly linked to her positive reputation and her skills as a saleswoman. Collinge writes that Gretton's prosperity "necessitated stock control and account keeping skills, and [the] ability to negotiate sales, meet orders and settle debts, and the

⁶² It is somewhat surprising, considering the Anglo-French relations in 1797 (especially in light of Bonaparte's successes that year and the pervasive fear of French invasion of England), that Madame La Croix as a French national (with an overtly Catholic name) is portrayed in such a positive light. Within the first few pages of the volume the narrator assuages any potential concerns about La Croix's French nationality by succinctly explaining that "Madame La Croix, though a native of Paris, spoke English fluently; she was notwithstanding very much pleased to find Rosa could converse with her in French" (3). Here any lingering fears of French infiltration of English society are dismissed by emphasizing La Croix's ability to speak English and the benefits provided to Rosa by practicing her French. Norbert J. Gossman suggests that the popularity of Bennett's narrative was in part due to the imaginative world created by the author. Moreover, Bennett, in *The Beggar Girl*, underscores the importance of allowing authors an imaginative-license. Breaking the flow of the story, the narrator interjects: "Ladies!!! If a novel writer must be taxed for truth and probability every third line, what is to become of the avocation, or profession, or confession, or what the world pleases? The reader is warned, that the author will plead her privilege, and in future annihilate time, space and circumstance, whenever her story requires it" (15).

capacity to build and maintain networks of customers and suppliers”, concluding that “in these respects, Gretton’s engagement in business was both robust and genuine” (292). Echoing the attributes Collinge identifies in Gretton’s millinery business, *The Beggar Girl* begins with an extensive description of both Madame La Croix’s business and her person, which positions her as a woman with substantial cultural capital and extensive social networks: “Madame La Croix lived in a fashionable street, at the polite end of the town, where her house, furniture and apartments were all, like herself, extremely handsome” (1). The narrator describes the admiration Rosa has for La Croix by explaining that “Rosa was ready to say with her patroness, ‘Madame La Croix is the best creature in the world’ ” (1-2). Unlike *The Life and Intrigue*, Bennett foregrounds her narrative in the daily operations involved in La Croix’s trade, fashioning an explicit link between her work as a milliner and her virtuous standing in the community. Beginning with an account of the “smart” (2) work women she employs, the narrator emphasizes both La Croix’s hard work ethic and her commitment to serving her clientele.⁶³

As the chapter progresses the narrator alternates between praise of La Croix’s success and a subtle critique of the nature of her business. Illustrating the luxurious nature of La Croix’s premises the narrator compares her shop to the homes of her affluent clients, suggesting that “the house where her trade was carried on, could vie in luxury and ornament with many of her quality customers. Large mirrors, indulgent sofas, down cushions, curtains of the finest chintz... decorated the apartments at her house” (6). Although this description initially reads as a compliment, with each paragraph the narrator’s commentary becomes more critical as it becomes evident that La Croix is a woman whose business is lavishly decorated to reflect her position as a curator of the most

⁶³ To this end the narrator explains, “[s]he kept a few smart work women, who however were seldom called on to assist in the sale of the tasty frippery they were employed to make, for Madame always waited on her customers herself” (2).

sophisticated fashions. In the description of Madame La Croix's home and shop the narrator draws upon images of fashionable excess, explaining how:

[T]he furniture, ornaments and taste of the house, corresponded more with the beauty of the owner, than with the conveniences of her business; a certain air of something too exquisite for description, runs through the whole, and indeed gave it more the appearance of a temple of luxury, than conveniences for trade. (2)

This description reads like a backhanded compliment. Despite the aesthetically pleasing nature of La Croix's décor and of the owner's beauty, the narrator reminds us that these lavish decorations do not serve either "the conveniences of her business" or the "conveniences for trade," simultaneously celebrating La Croix's ability to afford such lavish goods while also questioning their practicality.

The accounts of La Croix, particularly in the early pages of the chapter, read much like other contemporary accounts of women and fashion, which positioned female participation in both the fabrication and purchasing of clothing as frivolously excessive.⁶⁴

Despite critiques of La Croix's extravagance, these initial associations of excessive luxury are complicated by the subsequent implication that the atmosphere of her shop is carefully crafted to maximize her sales. Following the lavish description of her premises in town, readers are primed to expect similar overindulgence at her country home. However, firmly contrasting the extravagance of La Croix's home and shop in the city, her country "villa" (6) not only serves as a symbol of her success, inasmuch as she has the capacity to purchase and maintain a second residence, but moreover is positioned as a more accurate reflection of her nature. At the villa⁶⁵ "everything was plain, convenient, and useful – but no more" (6), and La Croix explains to Rosa that it is necessary

⁶⁴ Perhaps the best known account of fashion's frivolity comes from Richard Steele's periodical *The Spectator* No. 64 from May 14th, 1711 where he writes, "the most improper things we commit in the Conduct of our lives, we are led into by the Force of Fashion. Instances might be given, in which a prevailing custom makes us act against the Rules of Nature, Law and common Sense" (206). Similarly, Alexander Pope remarks in his *Moral Essays Epistle II Of the Characters of Women* that "men, some to Bus'ness, some to pleasure take; but ev'ry woman is at heart a rake: Men, some to Quiet, some to public strife; but ev'ry Lady would be Queen for life" (215-18).

⁶⁵ Even the name of her country property, "the villa," intentionally misleads readers and suggests that the opulence of La Croix's residence in town is echoed in her second home.

to “have air” and to “relax at least one day in the week” (7). Here, the opulence of La Croix’s shop is positioned as a means of achieving business success and catering to elite clientele, which not only highlights her shrewd business acumen, but differentiates between her lavish business persona and her own personal preference for modest furnishings. In *The Beggar Girl*, Bennett presents us with a kind of doubling in the character of La Croix, who is at once both a sensible country woman and a fashionable city milliner. For La Croix, the repetition of difference within a single character gestures to complex depth in what initially seems to be a uniform surface, enacting what Kozel terms the “affirmation of the invisible within the visible” (121). As explained by Kozel, mimesis functions to make visible the “entwinement of forces that otherwise seem distinct” (121). In this instance, the drawing together of seemingly opposing expressions of femininity – that of the sensible woman and the frivolous fashionista – within the character of La Croix challenges connotations of fashionable excess that aim to undercut female participation in the expanding commercial marketplace, and moreover positions La Croix as a capable and successful agent in the public sphere.

Informed by the interplay between La Croix as luxurious milliner and unpretentious country woman, Bennett further develops the characterisation of La Croix as an adept participant in the commercial marketplace with the description of La Croix’s relationship with her unnamed spouse. During the only discussion of La Croix’s husband, he is referred to exclusively as “her spouse” (5). The narrator elaborates by explaining that “Saturday a handsome coach waited to take Madame and her spouse, for Madame had a spouse, though he was seldom seen or spoken of in the family, to their country villa” (5-6). Remaining anonymous throughout the text, La Croix’s husband exists only in relation to his wife. Not only is he second to her in terms of character development in the narrative but she is positioned as the primary wage earner, and all the objects in their lives are repeatedly described in relation to her: it is “Madame’s business” (8), they take “Madame’s coach” to “Madame’s villa” (6) and live under “Madame La Croix’s roof” (9). The distinct separation of La

Croix from her husband, to such an extent that “he was seldom seen or spoken of” positions La Croix as an independent business woman while still allowing her to retain the optics of respectability associated with being married.

Bennett’s brief description of the relationship between La Croix and her husband reflects a salient feature of actual garment tradeswork for eighteenth-century women, that of the *feme sole* trader. Working as a *feme sole* trader was one of the few options for women who wanted to engage in business during the eighteenth century without direct male oversight. Nicola Philips explains that “some women could claim *feme sole* status, which enabled them to trade as if single, under local borough customs” (13). Historians generally have pointed to the “institution of the *feme sole* trader” as indicative of “the relative ease with which married women could trade on their own account” (Hunt 138). To this end, legislation in many boroughs allowed women working as *feme sole* traders to take apprentices, make business contracts and accrue debt (138), just as their male counterparts did. Although this allowed women to technically enter into business arrangements, Philips underscores the substantial challenges faced by women operating without male support and oversight in the eighteenth century, and suggests that it was exceptionally difficult for women “to raise credit and capital for their businesses” (13-4), which significantly diminished the number of women and the duration of their participation in the commercial marketplace (13-4). The position of the *feme sole* trader was a precarious one, as a woman trading on her own was simultaneously expected to “run her household and to place her husband or male relatives’ trading interests ahead of her own” (136). Additionally, the rules governing *feme sole* trader status, allowed husbands to benefit from their wives’ work “without having to shoulder either the labor or the financial risk” (Hunt 139). Moreover, “even when husbands refrained from taking their wives’ profits (as some must have done), the expectation was that a woman’s earnings would go to family expenses” (139). Despite the fact that the status of *feme sole* traders was precarious in practical terms, the depiction of a successful *feme sole*

trader in the character of Madame La Croix further strengthens Bennet's depiction of a powerful business woman.

Ultimately, *The Beggar Girl* and *The Life and Intrigue* both rely upon stereotypical depictions of garment tradeswomen (respectively as purveyors of frivolous fashion and as sexually promiscuous) to entice and entertain readers, but in both instances the characterisations of La Croix and Parrimore do much more than simply reinforce the perpetuation of popular literary tropes. Although it initially appears as though La Croix and Parrimore are confined within the bounds of these stereotypes which actively functioned to undermine the legitimacy of women's work in socio-cultural discourse, their textual representations utilise repetition and doubling to subtly subvert these harmful tropes and resist their insidious implications from within. Here mimesis acts as what Kozel calls "a strategy of using text, or sexual stereotype, to go beyond it" (125). Kozel explains that the mimetic capacity to work beyond stereotypical depictions has potentially subversive effects because "this unknown area (beyond stereotype) is introduced by continually referring back to familiar ground" (125). For Parrimore and La Croix both authors construct their characters by drawing upon popular negative connotations of garment tradeswork. However, these depictions begin to erode themselves from within. In the case of Parrimore, the repeated staging of increasingly outrageous sexual acts not only has the desired comedic effect, but in juxtaposition to the carefully curated fictional accounts created by Steele and Defoe (which masquerade as non-fiction), the outlandish nature of Parrimore's characterisation underscores that this fictional parody is only a parody and has little bearing on the reputation of actual garment tradeswomen. With La Croix, the mimetic doubling of her persona coupled with her alignment with *femme sole* trading, challenges popular discourse around clothing and fashion, as La Croix is both an active participant in fashionable culture as well as a tremendously successful merchant.

Drawing upon many of the same cultural associations related to garment tradeswork illustrated by these two lesser known texts, in her last novel, *The Wanderer*, Burney constructs a complex and nuanced depiction of a variety of women working as milliners, mantua-makers and seamstresses. Although the text is ostensibly a romantic narrative that follows the trials and tribulations of Juliet,⁶⁶ who comes to England in search of respite from both Robespierre's Reign of Terror and an unhappy forced marriage with a French soldier, and becomes entangled in a tumultuous love triangle, Burney's novel chronicles Juliet's progression through a variety of positions within the garment trades in unprecedented detail. While Burney's text has been well studied in respect to its depiction of French/English relations during the French Revolutionary Period⁶⁷ and its expressions of theatricality and performance⁶⁸ (especially pertaining to the antics of the love-triangle's antagonist, Elinor Joddrell), the novel's depiction of women working in the garment industry during the late eighteenth century has been largely underexamined.⁶⁹ Unique in its depiction of a variety of types of garment tradeswork, *The Wanderer* imagines three distinct arrangements of labour for the protagonist: Juliet's embroidery enterprise which she operates with Gabriella out of her lodgings at Miss Matson's, Juliet's work in Matson's millinery shop, and finally, Juliet's employment at Mrs. Harte's mantua-making workshop. Instead of relying upon simplistic caricatures (as is the case with both La Croix and Parrimore), Burney's depiction of a wide variety of garment tradeswomen allocates what would have been understood by her contemporaries as

⁶⁶ Although Juliet's identity is only revealed to readers mid-way through the novel, and she is interchangeably referred to as "Ellis" and Juliet throughout the text, for clarity and consistency I will exclusively refer to her as Juliet.

⁶⁷ In works like Tara Goshal Wallace's "Rewriting Radicalism: Wollstonecraft in Burney's *The Wanderer*" (2012), Helen Thompson's "How the Wanderer Works: Reading Burney and Bourdieu" (2001), Michael Verderame's "English Novelists Read the French Revolution" (2012), and Garry Kelly's "Women Novelists and the French Revolution Debate: Novelizing the Revolution/ Revolutionizing the Novel" (1994).

⁶⁸ In studies like Marcie Frank's "Frances Burney's Theatricality" (2015), Emily Hodgson Anderson's "Staged Insensibility in Burney's *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, and *The Wanderer*: How a Playwright Writes Novels" (2005) and Francesca Saggini's *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theatre Arts* (2012)

⁶⁹ In one of the few studies exploring the representation of female garment workers in Burney's text, Chloe Wigston Smith delves into the representations of Haberdashery in both *Cecilia* (1782) and *The Wanderer* in her article, "The Haberdasher's Plot: The Romance of Small Trade in Frances Burney's Fiction" (2018).

negative personality traits (like vanity, greed, self-adornment and promiscuity) to individual characters rather than entire professions. I argue that Burney thus forges a previously unprecedented path for literary depictions of women and garment tradeswork during the period. Rather than relying on overdrawn stereotypes for these women, Burney crafts a cast of characters who are each motivated by individual desires, ranging from the capitalizing milliner Miss Matson to her flirtatious young apprentice Flora to the grieving mother Gabriella who takes up small needlework jobs and eventually is able to open her own haberdashery shop. Drawing together representations of milliners, mantua-makers, haberdashers and seamstresses Burney offers a diverse range of female garment workers that is unparalleled by her contemporaries in her rejection of popular stereotypes. By depicting a complex spectrum of female garment labour, Burney's novel imagines female labour *and* female participation to be central tenets of the burgeoning eighteenth-century commercial marketplace.

Burney's unique characterisation of working women has not gone unnoticed by scholars. In her introduction to *The Wanderer*, Margaret Doody highlights the potential for rich analysis of the novel's depiction of garment tradeswork, asserting that "Burney is the first novelist seriously to express sympathy for the working women in their normal conditions of work – and to see how the system of employment, not merely individual employers, creates conditions of impossible monotony" (xxx). Doody's remarks praise Burney's illustration of the normal conditions of work for women trying to support themselves in garment associated trades, and emphasizes the substantial barriers (both social and economic) faced by the characters in the narrative who try to make their living as milliners, mantua-makers and seamstresses. As much as Doody opens the door for further inquiry about the novel's trailblazing characterization of working women, she stops short of undertaking any meaningful analysis of the ways in which these women and their work are depicted.

After Juliet's attempts to be a music teacher and a governess have failed⁷⁰ she establishes a small embroidery business with her French refugee friend, Gabriella, out of their shared room above Miss Matson's shop. Juliet's reliance on what Amanda Vickery dubs "craft skills" (218), first while teaching young women to play a musical instrument and then by sewing to support herself, not only highlights her genteel upbringing, but moreover reflects the experiences of a substantial percentage of young middle-class women. Margaret Hunt asserts that "one of the most potent symbols of girls' familial role was the attention given to teaching them sewing" (83). She explains that "early introduction to sewing was by no means confined to the middling" classes, but resonated slightly differently for "middling families than in upper gentry or aristocracy" (83) because the daughters of middle-class families often made their livings "partly or wholly by their needle" (83). Drawing upon a network of female support, Gabriella and Juliet "solicited the assistance of Elinor, in procuring orders for embroidery, amongst the ladies of her acquaintance" (381). Elinor, who was in turn "zealous to serve, and fearless to demand" (381) immediately acquiesces and "instantly attacked, by note or by message, every rich female at Brighthelmstone; urging the generous, and shaming the niggardly, till there was scarcely a woman of fortune in the place, who had not given, or promised, a commission for some fine muslin-work" (381). Catering to Elinor's genteel and aristocratic friends, Gabriella and Juliet "began their new plan of life under the most favourable auspices" (381), and it seems as though their business will follow a similar trajectory as the affluent and sophisticated Madame La Croix's. However, the practical aspects of executing an embroidery business turn out to be much more challenging than anticipated; they are overwhelmed with projects and before long

⁷⁰ Juliet's struggle to find employment is connected to broader discussions of the barriers facing young women in the workforce. Using the letters of Mary Delany from the mid-eighteenth century Amy Erickson highlights the larger challenges faced by women seeking "respectable" work. As recounted by Erickson, Mrs. Delany who "came from a family of 'successful traders'" ("Esther Sleeps" 148) wrote to her sister in 1750 bemoaning the disparities between working men and women. Delany highlighted how, "young men have a thousand ways of improving a little fortune, by professions and employments, if they have good friends, but young gentlewomen have no way, the fortune settled on them is all they are to expect" (148).

Gabriella is called back to France to care for her sick husband. Left alone and overwhelmed Juliet muses at length about her unpreparedness for this business undertaking. She bemoans how:

in consecrating her time and her labours to so simple an employment as needle-work, she secured herself a certain, though an hardly earned maintenance; but as her orders became more extensive, she found that neither talents for what she undertook, nor even patronage to bring them into notice, was sufficient; a capital also was requisite, for the purchase of frames, patterns, silver and gold threads, spangles, and various other articles; to procure which, she was forced, in the very commencement of her new career, again to run in debt ... She was equally, also, unprepared for continual and vexatious delays of payment. Her work was frequently, when best executed; or set apart for some distant occasion, and forgotten; or received and worn, with no retribution but by promise. Even the few who possessed more consideration, seemed to estimate her time and her toil as nothing, because she was brought forward by recommendation; and to pay debts of common justice, with the parade of generosity. Yet, vanity and false reasoning set apart, the ladies for whom she worked were neither hard of heart nor illiberal; but they had never known distress! (383-84)

Navigating the daily operations of a small business on her own Juliet is quickly worn out by the ceaseless demands of fulfilling orders and the seemingly insurmountable task of paying for the necessary materials of her trade without accumulating substantial debts.

Juliet's account of the barriers she faces working as an independent embroiderer brings to life studies performed by historians like Peter Earle who, relying upon a combination of guild records and court proceedings, paint a bleak picture of the hardships faced by women attempting to support themselves as needleworkers. Earle explains the predicament of Juliet's real-life counterparts by suggesting that women often had to compete for employment opportunities in a limited number of socially appropriate 'female' trades (342). Moreover, Earle asserts that "since nearly three-quarters of women wanted to or had to work for a living, they necessarily competed intensely for the work which was left, much of it as a casual nature and none of it organized by guilds or livery companies" (342). Not only was this type of work inherently precarious in nature, but women were typically paid very poorly.⁷¹ Perhaps the most compelling facet of Burney's characterization of garment

⁷¹ Elaborating on the pay disparity between men and women during the early eighteenth century Earle suggests that "most men's wages ranged from just under 10s. a week to £1 or more. A few women, such as specialist needle-workers,

tradeswomen is this initial vignette of Juliet trying to earn a living through solo embroidery.

Although she eventually fails to succeed on her own and joins Miss Matson and her milliners in the shop, the efforts of Juliet to support herself speak to the experiences of a substantial number of working women whose labour and hardships have on the whole been largely obscured by investigations of the garments they made and the larger commercial marketplace in which they participated.⁷² Following Juliet's trials and tribulations as a seamstress Burney not only speaks to the experiences of a large number of garment tradeswomen, but moreover engages with a powerful dynamic that shifts focus from the objects themselves and instead foregrounds the power of what Wigston Smith dubs, "women's commercial autonomy" (272) as both buyers and sellers.

Juliet's first transition within the garment trades comes when she abandons her embroidery work and rather reluctantly joins Miss Matson in her millinery shop.⁷³ Although Juliet's decision to work for Miss Matson is motivated by the desire to support herself financially, Juliet positions herself at a distance from both the shop and the other young women who work there. The shop is described as "a new scene of life" (404), which frames Juliet's work as a milliner in theatrical terms positioning the shop as a setting for a staged performance rather than a new work environment. The narrator recounts Juliet's initial reaction to the daily goings on: "She found herself in a whirl of hurry, bustle, loquacity and interruptions. Customers pressed upon customers; goods were taken

were paid 10s. or even 12s. a week, i.e. above the minimum level of male pay, but the great majority only earned between 4s. and 10s. a week, most of them at the lower end of this scale, 5s. a week being about the norm" (342-43).

⁷² Wigston Smith speaks to this issue, suggesting that scholarly focus "on consumption overlooks ... women's roles in economic production and has made us less attentive to scenes of women's commercial autonomy within the growing marketplace for domestic and imported goods" ("Calico Madams" 272).

⁷³ Sarah Salih reads Juliet as a constantly shifting figure who "possess[es] an extraordinary ability to disrupt the apparent fixity of male/female, white, English, middle- and upper-class identity" (50) and prompts readers to question the stable distinctions between "class, gender, nationality ... when they can be donned and discarded as easily as a bonnet or a collection of patches" (50). Certainly, Salih's assertion raises a number of interesting questions about the construction of identity for women working, but her comments with regard to Juliet's transition between classes brush over the actual tensions in the text and in so doing she wrongly implies that Juliet seamlessly shifts from one identity to the next. For Juliet, each occupational transition is emotionally fraught and precariously managed, and is far from as easy as changing one's clothes. Moreover, Juliet's ability to shift from one skill to the next is ultimately facilitated by her genteel upbringing.

down merely to be put up again; cheapened but to be rejected; admired but to be looked at, and left; and only bought when, to all appearance, they were undervalued and despised” (404). Illustrating this new “scene of life” Burney creates a sense of the busyness of the shop through the repetition of directional language used to describe these activities – customers come in, goods go up and come down, and items are picked up and left – all of which, when listed in succession, effectively creates an atmosphere of barely-contained commercial chaos. Burney’s fictionalized images of the daily action in the shop shed light on a wide variety of tasks undertaken by the milliners and working women.

However, this vignette is not without subtle critique. Juliet’s distaste for the entire commercial enterprise becomes more evident the longer she works for Miss Matson. She does not communicate her contempt for working in the shop through in-text dialogue or first-person narration; rather, Juliet’s criticisms are indirectly conveyed through the third-person omniscient narrative style that predominates in the text. For instance, the narrator tells us that “it was here that [Juliet] saw, in its unmasked futility, the selfishness of personal vanity” (405). In this instance Juliet is situated as the idealized upstanding moral model, which creates a perceptive distance between her and the other garment workers. Instead of detailing the garments she makes or her exchanges with customers, the narrative positions Juliet as the critical observer of the shop, foregrounding her observations of other women to such an extent that her actual needlework is largely obscured. The longer she works in the shop the greater her disdain grows. The narrator notes that, “[u]pon further observation, nevertheless, her compassion for the milliner and the work-women somewhat diminished; for she found that their notions of probity were as lax as those of their customers were of justice” (405). Juliet is horrified to discover that “every article was charged, not according to its value, but to the skill or ignorance of the purchaser; old goods were sold as if new; cheap goods as if dear; and ancient, or vulgar ornaments, were presented to the unpractised chafferer, as the very pink

of the mode” (405). Taking aim at both working women and customers in equal measure the tone of Juliet’s inner reflections becomes increasingly similar to that of contemporary critiques of fashionable society as she spends the majority of this section of the novel bemoaning the moral laxities that foreground all transactions in the shop. Burney’s narrator focalizes this description of the purchasing habits of fashionable women through Juliet’s point of view:

The ladies whose practice it was to frequent the shop, thought the time and trouble of its mistress, and her assistants, amply paid by the honour of their presence; and though they tried on hats and caps, till they put them out of shape; examined and tossed about the choicest goods, till they were so injured that they could be sold only at half price; ordered sundry articles, which, when finished, they returned, because they had changed their minds; or discovered that they did not want them. (405)

Frivolous female behaviour is made worse by the fact that these consumers are so oblivious to the labour involved in the creation of garments and accessories that they throw them away or change their minds at the drop of a hat.

In her exploration of Juliet’s various employment schemes, Diane Boyd highlights the range of garment trades described in the text. Boyd is particularly interested in the relationship between Juliet’s class status and her education in the practices of millinery and needlework. To this end, Boyd emphasizes Juliet’s preference for more artistic embroidery over the monotonous labour of hemming large swaths of fabric (213), and analyzes Juliet’s attitude toward her new tasks, which are made more tiresome because of “the unpleasant company [Juliet] keeps in both Miss Matson’s and Mrs. Hart’s businesses” (214). Ultimately, Boyd suggests that Juliet’s unease with this type of work, particularly when performed in a public shop, stems from her palimpsestual class status that layers “middle-class pedigree and upper-class training” (215); this is why Juliet has the necessary skills to work as a milliner and is also the source of her distaste for the realities of the job. Juliet’s unease at working in a public shop draws upon similar cultural discourse as the stereotypes that inform Bennett’s depiction of La Croix. Juliet’s discomfort is caused by much more than just her dislike of her colleagues or the monotonous work, and is linked to larger social conversations about

femininity, morality and visibility in public spaces. In both Burney's and Bennett's texts, female garment workers come under fire for being vain, silly or frivolous purveyors of fashion. Although Burney's depiction of Juliet is in dialogue with similar debates about female agency in the marketplace as Bennett's, Burney goes beyond her contemporaries with her nuanced depiction of women's commercial agency as both buyers and makers, which does not fully capitulate to popular stereotypes about extravagant fashion. Instead, Burney highlights the ways in which Juliet navigates challenges related to her visibility in the public sphere as an agent in her own right.

The longer Juliet works for Miss Matson, the greater distance she puts between herself and the other milliners; she refuses to join them on their Sundays off and actively works to counteract the flirtations of her coworkers. Broader contemporary conversations about the supposed dangers of working in the milliner's shop are manifest in the actions of the youngest apprentice, Flora Pierson, and her flirtatious behaviour with Sir Lyell Sycamore. Whereas the milliners' conversations in the shop are generally described as "giggling derisions" (409), Flora specifically is singled out and dismissed as a "simple, deluded maiden" who mindlessly "prattles" (409) on. Although Juliet's actions likely help prevent Flora's social ruin at the hands of Sir Lyell, the way the narrator describes Flora throughout this encounter robs her of any individual agency. Flora's flirtations with Sir Lyell draw attention to the perceived vulnerability of women working in public shops, and her objectification highlights the risks of the shop which are "most dangerous to those women who worked their floors and whose bodies were often conflated with the goods for sale" (Wigston Smith 271). In stark juxtaposition to Flora's endless conversation and 'reckless' decision making, demure and polite Juliet only chimes in to scoldingly ask Flora, "does not your mamma tell you, also, Miss Pierson, that you must not walk out alone with gentlemen?" (409). Juliet's intervention is framed as that of concern and good-natured mentorship while at the same time creating distance between the two characters so that Flora's impropriety does not spill over onto Juliet.

Burney tempers her depiction of flirtatious Flora with Juliet's contrasting moral propriety and in so doing demonstrates the ways in which women of the middle and lower classes could become trapped within a nearly insurmountable double bind. Unlike Juliet, Flora is not an affluent woman who has fallen on hardship and will return to the ranks of the aristocracy by the end of the novel. Sent by her family to apprentice as a milliner at only sixteen years old, Flora is expected to navigate the challenges of living away from home and working in the public eye. From her highly scrutinized position in the commercial marketplace, Flora must uphold nuanced codes of social conduct all while working in a public shop. Juliet's unyielding critique of Flora's behaviour functions as a marker of Juliet's own virtue. By constantly policing Flora's behaviour and undercutting her decisions, Juliet's actions also highlight the substantial restrictions placed upon young women who are (or have the potential to be) skillful agents in the commercial marketplace. By focalizing these social appraisals through Juliet, Burney not only reinforces existing class dynamics and overshadows the tangible skills of Flora and the other milliners, but also presents readers with a subtle critique of social limitations that sought to police female bodies in public spaces. Disguised by the trappings of virtuous characterisation and the veneer of well-meaning care for Flora, Juliet's actions diminish the power and success of young women in the commercial marketplace by holding them to a set of rules for social etiquette that are only achievable for women in the upper classes (who are not required to earn a living in a public shop).

Although Burney's narrative depicts these restrictive social codes and uses her protagonist to enforce them upon other women, the subsequent events of the novel undermine the efficacy of such measures, particularly in relation to Flora. Despite her penchant for flirtation, by the end of the novel we are told that Flora has been rescued from "impending destruction" by Sir Jaspar Herrington who, acting on the wishes of Juliet, has successfully arranged Flora's marriage to "an honest vigilant farmer" (834). Again, Flora is denied subjectivity as the agent of her own actions, but

nonetheless she is not irredeemably ruined by her flirtatious behaviour because Juliet has engineered her a ‘happy ending’ in marrying a working-class man. Burney, in the case of Flora, presents readers with a depiction of how powerful social constructs of polite femininity silence young working-class women. Flora is ‘protected’ right out of the commercial marketplace by her social betters. Burney’s novel celebrates Juliet’s virtue while at the same time suggesting that Juliet’s class status is what makes her virtuous behaviour possible. It is her relative social privilege which allows Juliet to move much more freely within the commercial marketplace and to alleviate some of the restrictions that limit her fellow seamstresses, milliners and mantuamakers.

Rather than relying upon the repetition of popular stereotypes, *The Wanderer* presents a complex web of social interactions in which garment tradeswomen are not all painted with the same brush but are depicted as individuals. Presenting readers with varied depictions of multiple garment tradeswomen, Burney underscores the success of savvy business women (as with Mrs. Harte and Miss Matson) while drawing attention to the dismissal of female agency vis-à-vis the enactment of patriarchal social codes (as with Flora). This nuanced system of checks and balances is particularly noticeable in the context of Flora’s flirtations. Although Burney integrates popular stereotypes, she does not unilaterally depict the milliner’s shop as a dangerous place where foolish young women like Flora are easily seduced. In fact, throughout the section of the novel that takes place in Miss Matson’s shop the narrative emphasizes the built-in ‘safety net’ provided by the shop environment, which includes a shopman who monitors the comings and goings of visitors (417). In addition to the shopman, the other women who work in the shop are characterised as a powerful social force. Initially, Miss Matson’s milliners and Mrs. Hart’s mantua-makers bear some resemblance to the amorphous masses of spinsters described by Steele, since their actions in the text are largely indiscernible from one another. Juliet describes her fellow milliners and mantua-makers as a “sewing sisterhood” (429) and as “sisters of the sewing tribe” (431). This collectivity superficially diminishes

the individual identities of each working woman and sets them apart from the protagonist of the novel. Nevertheless, the milliners and mantua-makers who are employed by both Miss Matson and Mrs. Hart come to have a certain degree of social power in the novel. Their influence throughout the narrative is most prominently illustrated by their ability to spread gossip and rumours; they function as a chorus of sorts that reflects patriarchal social expectations for women in public spaces.

On several occasions various characters who visit Juliet draw attention to the observational power of the milliners in the shop and their ability to spread gossip. On one such occasion Miss Bydel responds to the idea of men and women sitting alone together by proclaiming that she “would not do such a thing for the world. I should think it quite improper. Besides, what will Miss Matson and the young milliners say? Who knows but you may have set them a prating, Mr. Gooch? It’s no joke, I can assure you, doing things of this sort” (396). Bydel’s initial reaction not only draws upon her own internalized code of social behaviour, but also underscores the importance of surveillance within the shop. Here Bydel is strongly motivated by the potentially damaging optics of the situation. Unlike Steele’s unnamed masses of poor spinsters, the milliners in Miss Matson’s shop are empowered by their collective identity and have the power to oversee and therefore influence the actions of their social superiors. While the milliners as a group are not fully formed individual characters, their ability to draw attention to gendered social codes illuminates the implicit social practices that govern female social conduct in the commercial marketplace. However, instead of imbuing these social codes with power at their own expense, the milliners as a collective do what one alone cannot; namely, they strengthen their own position as actors in the public sphere by shifting the perspective of the reader. Interrupting the hierarchical structure of polite society (which allowed men to move most freely in public spaces, and also facilitated the movement of more affluent women over others), the milliners as a group turn the same scrutinizing gaze back upon their social superiors through their capacity to gossip, in turn calling attention to the ways in which

notions of virtue actively shaped, and in many cases limited, women's interaction and movement as commercial agents.

In stark contrast to the public shop run by Miss Matson, Juliet's third employment is in the private workroom of mantua-maker Mrs. Hart. Mrs. Hart's is positioned as a safe, if somewhat tedious, alternative for Juliet that offers marginally greater financial stability than her previous endeavours as a solo seamstress. As she moves from Matson's shop to Hart's workroom, Juliet remarks that she "was mentally, also, relieved, by the local change of situation" (429). She highlights the securities afforded by working in a private apartment, explaining that she was "no longer startled by the continual entrance and exit of strangers; nor exposed to curious enquirers, or hardy starers; and no longer fatigued by the perpetual revision of goods. She worked in perfect quietness, undisturbed and uninterrupted; her mistress was civil, and gave her encouragement" (429-30). Emphasizing the relative security of her new situation, Juliet aligns her role as a mantua-maker with the leisurely pursuits of aristocratic women. Underscoring the relative physical security represented by the privacy of Hart's shop, Juliet puts substantial effort into differentiating herself from her fellow working women, and praises the way that "her fellow-sempstresses were unobservant, and left her to her own reflections" (430). Intending to set herself above the others, the narrator's repeated emphasis on Juliet being Mrs. Hart's favourite (430) only serves to alienate her from the other seamstresses and earns their "enmity" (431). Despite Juliet's best efforts to align herself with bourgeois leisure culture, by emphasizing her needlework and pushing aside the communal facets of the workroom, there is an ironic disconnect between Juliet and the other mantua-makers.

Burney links Juliet's inability to blend in with her peers with her inability to appropriately assess the dynamics of the workroom. Juliet quite literally works herself out of a job by completing tasks too quickly and refusing to fully immerse herself in the professional training required to be a mantua-maker. For instance, when Mrs. Hart offers to help Juliet find more consistent employment

by suggesting that Juliet “bind herself, either to some milliner or some mantua-maker, as a journey-woman for three years” (431), Juliet hastily declines. Reluctant to commit to a future as a garment tradeswoman, Juliet is caught straddling the gap between her upper-class upbringing and the practical realities of financially supporting herself as a middle-class woman, and in the process she finds herself out of work. As the reader charts Juliet’s progression from solo seamstress to milliner and finally mantua-maker, what comes to the forefront is not only Burney’s incredibly nuanced depiction of the challenges facing women who attempted to make their living in the garment trades, but also the perceptible distance between her heroine and the rest of the working women in the novel.

By positioning her protagonist within the world of milliners, seamstresses and mantua-makers Burney gestures to popular characterisations of garment tradeswomen in public shops as both sexually promiscuous and vulnerable, without fully investing in the perpetuation of these damaging stereotypes. Burney’s critique here is not of women working in garment-related industries. In fact, generally speaking, the working women in the novel are portrayed as hardworking, successful and morally upstanding. Instead, *The Wanderer* moves beyond the repetition of popular stereotypes and responds to contemporary debates about virtuous femininity. Juliet’s efforts to implement a strict code of virtuous female behaviour in the shop initially call into question the actions of the other garment tradeswomen. By the time Juliet finds employment with Mrs. Hart it is clear that Juliet is so confined by her virtuous sensibilities that she cannot succeed as a milliner, seamstress or mantua-maker. Juliet’s actions underscore that it is impossible for women to earn a respectable living as agents in the commercial marketplace while abiding by the rules she attempts to impress upon her peers.

Ensnared by her own rules of decorum, Juliet’s progress through various arrangements of garment tradeswork speaks to larger contemporary debates on female identity and literary

representation. Following Richardson's publication of *Pamela* (1740), readers and literary critics alike became preoccupied with the paradoxical position of Richardson's titular heroine. Leslie Morrison suggests that *Pamela* became a matter of public debate because:

[I]ts heroine both disavows and enacts self-interest. The novel is paradoxical: for it to function, Pamela must cling to her virtue as its own reward, a choice that leads to her social ascension... Pamela disavows any ulterior motive for her behaviour but nevertheless takes the exact course of action that benefits her own self-interest. The Pamela paradox requires the protagonist to be coherent, truthful, and transparent in her self-representation, lest readers think she uses her virtue strategically to manipulate Mr B. (36)

In many ways Juliet follows a similar trajectory to Pamela, remaining steadfastly committed to behaving in accordance with modest social conduct despite the challenges she faces. As a result, she is rewarded for her virtue by ascending to the ranks of the aristocracy by the end of the novel. However, where Pamela's virtue relies on the "assumption that the epistolary form is perfectly mimetic" (36), the distance created by Burney's narration between Juliet and the other working women ultimately shatters the mimetic illusion. Not only does Juliet use virtue and modesty as evaluative criteria to assess each woman, but virtue is linked to a specific set of behaviours that she encourages other women to adopt. As the novel progresses it becomes more evident that there is an untraversable gap between Juliet and her peers. Equipped with skills she learned during her genteel upbringing, Juliet expects the other working women to abide by the precepts of virtuous femininity that are impossible for them to achieve. Highlighting her repeated insistence on this rigid decorum Burney's narrator holds Juliet up as a kind of ironic foil who is out of touch with the realities of what is actually involved in earning a living.

What comes to the forefront in Burney's depiction of working women is that the reward of virtuous femininity, particularly for the heroines of eighteenth-century novels, is escape from the necessities of actually having to earn a living. Ultimately it becomes evident that repetition of popular stereotypes can only do so much in terms of reframing or interrupting the perpetuation of harmful characterisations. Moving beyond stereotypes, Burney depicts a diverse range of women

working in garment associated trades, and in so doing is able to emphasize how existing systems of power both rely upon, and constantly police the bodies of working women. Celebrating Juliet's virtue and successful navigation of the pitfalls of working-class life, *The Wanderer* subtly calls attention to the impossible conditions for women whose virtue goes unrewarded.

Chapter Three: Rethinking the Role of Garment Tradeswomen: Exploring Milliners, Mantua-makers and Spinsters in Eighteenth-Century Trade Manuals and Insurance Records

“To be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what ‘matters’ about that body.”

— Judith Butler
Bodies That Matter (1993, p. 32)

Eighteenth-century archives are filled with the work of milliners, mantua-makers and spinsters. From shop inventories, business cards, and bills for garments to insurance policies for shop premises and court cases persecuting shoplifters, the prevalence of garment tradeswomen in eighteenth-century life (and consequently archives of eighteenth-century ephemera) is undeniable. While the paraphernalia of female garment workers has been diligently preserved in archives, the women themselves are notoriously difficult to access. For instance, we might know that on June 17th 1792 Alice Goodyer a “dealer in cloaths” at No. 8 in Barrett Court, insured the utensils and stock for her business with the *Sun Life Insurance Company* for £40 (*Sun Life Insurance Register* 543) or that on July 6th 1798 a milliner named Ruth Wollaston sold 60 yards of banded muslin to a woman named A. C. Clive for £1, 7 shillings (Wollaston), but this information on its own yields relatively little insight into their lives and experiences. Much like the plethora of archival materials that mark traces of garment workers, there is no lack of social commentary describing the ideal attributes of each profession; milliners should have a genteel disposition and capable hands (Collyer 194) and mantua-makers should be business savvy and well versed in making garments with all types of textiles (Johnson 35).

Drawing together archival records (court documents, insurance records and city registers) and social commentary (trade manuals, pamphlets and periodicals), this chapter aims to examine the characterisation of women’s work and the disparities between literary representation in eighteenth-

century non-fiction texts and financial records of garment tradeswomen.⁷⁴ In this chapter I will explore two of the most popular trade manuals of the period, R. Campbell's *The London Tradesman* (1757) and J. Johnson's *The Book of Trades; or library of the useful arts* (1807), looking specifically at descriptions of milliners, mantua-makers and spinsters. In conjunction with Campbell's and Johnson's texts I will also draw upon *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey* (1742-57), *The Liverpool Directory* (1766), and *The Sun Life Insurance Register* (1791-2) in order to bring together literary, business and legal accounts. Ultimately my objective is to present a more nuanced picture of women working in garment trades by drawing upon both prescriptive literature that outlined how these women "should" behave and records that detail how these women actually navigated the proto-industrial market place. Looking first at the more straightforward descriptions of milliners and mantua-makers, this chapter will subsequently unpack the multi-faceted associations with spinsters as garment workers and as single women who remained unmarried. I will pose questions about the nature of archival study and the ways in which we as researchers implicitly participate in practices of narrative creation when we interpret historical registers and accounts. Inspired by Judith Butler's assertion that "to be material means to materialize" (32) and "to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where 'to matter' means at once 'to materialize' and 'to mean'" (32), I aim to highlight the practices of meaning-making that underpin archival studies.

By the mid-eighteenth century millinery was considered a quintessentially feminine trade.⁷⁵ It is unsurprising given the predominance of women working as milliners that they featured heavily in

⁷⁴ Drawing together the records and data that support historical study on the one hand *and* the narratives that inform literary scholarship on the other not only demonstrates the interconnected nature of these two disciplines (which have been partitioned along disciplinary lines only after the fact), but also facilitates in-depth research into the experiences of working women during the period. These women's lives were shaped both by their day-to-day business practices as well as the socio-cultural conversations that circulated in the pamphlets, novels and literary documents about them.

⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that prior to 1700 milliners were predominantly male, but as Amy Erickson explains, "after 1700 their numbers increased and they became predominantly, although not exclusively, female" ("Eleanor Mosley" 156). Moreover, the prevalence of millinery as an occupation for women is highlighted in *The Liverpool Directory* (1766), which contains "An alphabetical lists of the merchants, tradespeople and principal inhabitants of the town of Liverpool" (2). Of the approximately 1090 individuals living and working in Liverpool during 1766, 98 individuals are listed as

trade manuals of the period. Joseph Collyer in *The Parent's and Guardian's Directory* (1760) describes the characteristics of young women who would be ideally suited to millinery work, writing that “the girl, designed for this employment, ought to have a genteel person, and be capable of ready address; she too should write a tolerable hand, understand the first rules of arithmetic, work quick and well at her needle, and have some fancy and imagination” (194-5). Campbell outlines the basic duties in *The London Tradesman*: “[t]he milliner is concern'd in making and providing the Ladies with linen of all sorts, fit for wearing apparel, from the Holland smock to the Tippet and Commode” (207). He adds that “[t]he milliner must be a neat needle-woman in all its branches, and a perfect connoisseur in dress and fashion” (207).

Initially, Campbell takes a similarly impartial tone to Collyer in his assessment of what is required of a milliner, but as *The London Tradesman* continues the narrator becomes increasingly critical. The milliner, he explains, “imports new whims from Paris every post, and puts the Ladies heads in as many different shapes in one month as there are different appearances of the moon in that space” (207). Rather than focusing on the specific skills and tools utilized in the course of business (as Campbell does for the weaver whom he characterizes as exclusively male), here the milliner's work is veiled behind a mystical veneer that likens her labour to the mysterious and ever-changing shape of the moon rather than to tangible business practices and potential commercial output. This thin veil of contempt falls away and he explicitly warns parents against allowing their daughters to become milliner's apprentices (208). Campbell explains that not only can milliners

working in garment associated trades. Despite the fact that Liverpool was not a center for the textile industry during this period, the detailed nature of the directory illustrates both the wide variety in the garment tradespeople, but also the fact that of the 30 women listed as working in garment associated trades a staggering 20 of them worked as milliners.

expect to make a meagre “five or six shillings a week” (208), but moreover the public-facing nature of the milliner’s shop “exposes young creatures to many temptations and insensibly debauches their morals before they are capable of vice” (208). Campbell concedes that not all milliners are guilty of allowing their young apprentices to ruin their reputations (209), but quickly adds:

[N]ine out of ten of the young creatures that are obliged to serve in these shops are ruined and undone: take a survey of all the common women of the town, who take their walks between *Charing-Cross* and *Fleet-Ditch*, and, I am persuaded, more than one half of them have been bred milliners. (209)

Unlike in his assessments of other trades, Campbell’s discussion of millinery is riddled with contemporary anxieties about women working in public spaces and the dangerous corrupting potential of foreign fashions on sensible young ladies.



Figure 7: “Milliner” from *The Book of Trades*, 1804.

In stark contrast to Campbell, Johnson in *The Book of Trades* focuses on the complexities of millinery as a profession. Describing the typical stock of a milliner’s shop, he uses an accompanying illustration (see Figure 7) to give an in-depth description of each area of the shop. Using the image as a guide he begins with the shop windows, explaining that there are “hats, caps and bonnets; a cloak, a muff, and a fur tippet” (38). Moving into the shop properly, he suggests that one might expect to find a milliner seated at the counter working. In the drawers of the counter are “ribands of different widths, colours and prices; threads, laces” (38). Throughout the shop there are boxes, which he explains “are intended either to send home her work when finished, or they are meant to hold some of the articles belonging to her trade” (38). Describing milliners generally, Johnson

explains that “taste and fancy are required” (37), which echoes Campbell’s assessment. However, instead of critiquing the fashionable aspects of millinery, Johnson instead explains that milliners must have “a quickness in discerning, imitating and improving upon the various fashions, which are perpetually changing” (38).⁷⁶ Here, the ability to craft new fashions and anticipate trends is presented as the skilled work of a smart and up-to-date woman of business.⁷⁷

Much like their counterparts in the manuals of Johnson and Campbell, the milliners of *The Sun Life Insurance Register* are exclusively female.⁷⁸ However, unlike Campbell’s description of milliners as largely failed-business-women-turned-prostitutes, the *Register* lists a number of relatively affluent and, presumably, successful milliners. This does not negate Campbell’s claims entirely, but it does cast doubt upon his suggestion of widespread prostitution and failure for 9 out of every 10 milliners. Unlike Johnson and Campbell who both neatly differentiate between garment trades, the *Register* lists both milliners and milliner-haberdasher hybrids.⁷⁹ Haberdashery itself is mentioned only sparingly in *The London Tradesman* and *The Complete English Tradesman* and is largely obscured by discussions of millinery. Differentiating between haberdashers and milliners, Peter Earle explains that although both “engaged in shopkeeping,” milliners actively made clothes and “spent most of their time at their needles making up the stock of the shops” (341) whereas haberdashers were primarily engaged in the selling of garments. Earle also suggests that in historical records haberdashers were often classified as “shopkeepers” (341) who sold items associated with the trade in women’s garments.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ It bears mentioning that Johnson is writing exactly 50 years after Campbell. It is difficult to say whether Johnson’s more accurate and less problematic assessment of milliners is a product of a time when more women were publicly visible in their capacity as shopkeepers and consumers.

⁷⁷ The term “woman of business” as a noun referring to “a woman who works in commerce or has a profession” (OED) i.e. a business woman was commonly used during the period; appearing in works like Wycherley’s play, *The Plain-Dealer* (1677), and periodicals like *La Belle Assemblée* (1816).

⁷⁸ See Appendix Table 1 and 2.

⁷⁹ Although 5 haberdashers are listed in the *Register* (3 as milliner-haberdashers and 2 as strictly haberdashers), the trade of haberdashery is only mentioned sparingly in both *The London Tradesman* and *The Complete English Tradesman* and is completely absent from *The Book of Trades*.

⁸⁰ Although 34 records explicitly reference garment workers, following Earle’s remarks about the general classification of some garment tradeswomen as shopkeepers, it is possible that the four women who are listed as shopkeepers in the *Register* may have also been involved in the sale of clothing.

In the *Register*, women listed as milliners respectively insure £200 and £600, with an average insured worth of £400. This average puts milliners in the middle of the garment trades in terms of average insured worth (with clothes dealers, dressers, tailors, and mantua makers listed as having an equal or lesser total). In comparison to the women listed as solely milliners, the hybrid milliner-haberdashers have a slightly lower average insured wealth of £300 (with respectively £200, £300 and £400 each). This slight financial disparity between milliners and milliner-haberdashers is not surprising considering the relative skill required of milliners to design and construct garments compared to the relative ease with which haberdashers could sell finished products. Looking at the *Register* in correlation with Johnson's and Campbell's descriptions it becomes evident that Campbell's characterisation of milliners falls considerably short. Although he is correct in his assessment that milliners are exclusively female and that there are a substantial number of milliners working in London during the eighteenth century,⁸¹ the *Register* indicates that, contrary to Campbell's assessment, these women were in fact able to successfully support themselves through their work.

It is not just the *Register* that suggests Campbell's claims are exaggerated or false, as *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey* frequently illustrate the respectability of women working as milliners in London. In three separate trial proceedings against shoplifters, milliners Frances Coverley, Joyce Twine, and Mrs. Wycherly were all interviewed about crimes perpetrated against them. In each instance the testimony begins with descriptions of each woman's shop and to varying degrees the trial transcripts describe each milliner as a woman operating a legitimate and respectable business. For instance, Mrs. Wycherly explains the circumstances of the theft, first identifying the location of her shop in Bloomsbury before stating: "I had but one servant in the shop, and I heard two people there; I was busy writing ... and did not go into the shop; afterwards I heard a third person come in

⁸¹ Milliners and milliner-haberdasher hybrids comprise 17% of the total garment tradesworkers listed in the *Register* and are the second largest group of garment workers listed (second only to spinsters).

... and I thought three persons were too many for my boy to serve” (Old Bailey Court Records 1748). Similarly, Joyce Twine identifies her shop in Bishopsgate-street and describes how the accused “brought three pieces of lawn to me and asked me if I would buy any of it ... I bought them of her, and gave her 4 l. 19s. for them, here is the bill and the receipt” (Old Bailey Court Records 1757). Frances Coverley also begins by identifying her shop in White-Chapel and describing how “the two prisoners at the bar came into my shop, and cheapened some lace... I missed a piece of lace, and my son pursued them” (Old Bailey Court Records 1742). In each of these instances, the milliners not only testify against the shoplifters, but in so doing they paint a clear picture of orderly business operations, sophisticated storefronts, and dependable employees or family members assisting with customers. Much like the brief vignettes of daily life in millinery shops offered by the *Proceedings*, Amy Erickson has found substantial evidence to support claims that millinery was generally perceived to be a respectable vocation for middle-class girls. Looking specifically at London milliner Eleanor Mosely, Erickson explains that young women apprenticed to milliners were often from reputable families who paid premiums for their apprenticeships in addition to high start-up costs to milliners in desirable locations across the city (165). Erickson notes the girls apprenticed to Eleanor Mosley (a milliner in the Clockmakers’ Company) “were substantially more prosperous than most of the boys bound apprentice in the same company” (150). Considering both the financial barriers to entry and the location of milliners in the city, Erickson concludes that these factors all mitigated against “any routine association between millinery and sexual impropriety” (165). Although Erickson concedes that “[t]he parents of millinery apprentices took a risk in sending their daughters to the capital for seven years in their teens; but it was a calculated risk, and one that many parents thought worth the gain for their daughters and themselves” (165).

Despite the fact that insurance records, court proceedings and other historical case studies suggest that millinery was a well-respected profession, it is important to note that Campbell’s claims

of widespread failure and prostitution, although largely unfounded, reflected broader and more pervasive associations with the dangers of London for young women. The anonymously penned anti-taxation pamphlet entitled *An Appeal to the People* (1775) highlights the dangerous influence of work on young women. Similarly to Campbell, the speaker of *An Appeal* aligns millinery (as well as mantua-making and warehouse labour) with poverty and prostitution, stating that:

It is already well known, that the first cause of prostitution in the lower class, arises from the want of bread, and the want of bread, from the difficulty of obtaining employment. Successful affluence, indeed, too often ascribes the failures of women to a propensity to vice; when, for the most part, they would be found to arise from necessity; a poor girl, who scrubs and stews for four-pence a day, and occasional assistants to mantua-makers, milliners, warehouses, &c. must annually give half a crown to the King, for liberty to labour in their vocation. (7-8)

Here, the anonymous author evokes the same socio-cultural association (between millinery and prostitution) as Campbell does, but instead of blaming the young women who work in milliners' shops for falling prey to the vices and corruption of the city, *The Appeal* points to larger socio-economic issues that kept poor people poor. Despite the fact that both Campbell and the anonymous author draw upon the image of impoverished girls (who have failed to make a 'respectable' living),⁸² what becomes evident is that despite the relative financial success of established milliners (like those listed in the *Register*), they were working against pervasive social prejudices that aligned women's labour and immoral conduct.

Although critics frequently targeted the immoral behaviour of milliners, it is evident that women working as mantua-makers⁸³ also faced significant competition and opposition from men working in garment-associated trades. Erickson explains that since mantua-making purportedly required less skill "than more structured women's clothing" because it was "all cloth and worn over a separate pair of stays," an influx of women who had previously only made undergarments moved

⁸² In Campbell's case he is motivated by a desire to warn parents against allowing their daughters to become milliner's apprentices whereas *The Appeal* draws upon the same image to argue against unjust taxation.

⁸³ "Mantua-makers" take their name from the mantua, which was "originally an unboned gown for women" that appeared in the 1670s and was widely adopted by 1700 (Erickson "Eleanor Mosley" 156).

into the more profitable business of making mantuas (“Eleanor Mosley” 156). Following the influx of women into the trade of mantua-making, it is not surprising that many writers perceived them to be potentially detrimental to the businesses of men working as tailors or shopkeepers. Record No. CXVIII “Tailors of Perth *contra* the Mantua-Makers” from *The Court of Sessions* on the 4th of August 1756 highlights some of the considerable challenges women faced setting up their own shops and businesses. The court records detail how “the incorporation of the tailors of Perth brought a process against three mantua-makers in that town, for encroaching upon their craft without being free thereof” (Home 169). As a result of this perceived “encroachment” the tailors demanded that the mantua-makers pay the incorporated tailors £20 in damages (169). Explicitly taking aim at all women in craft-based industries, the incorporated guild of tailors explained that the grounds for their case were legitimate since women were unable to participate in the commercial marketplace: “women are not capable to be admitted into a craft, to perform any office in a craft, or to enjoy any of its privileges; that the pursuers accordingly neither do nor can offer to admit them, but only that they must be prohibited from working altogether” (170). Following the regulations regarding crafts in their region, the tailors argued that “the laws and regulations about crafts and royal burghs were made for men only” and as such “women can neither be benefited nor hurt by them” (170). Offering these three individual women no option of participating in their literal boys club, the court records admit that the tailors’ position puts the tradeswomen “in a worse condition than unfreemen” (170), and denies women fair treatment as “if they were not free born subjects, prohibiting them to gain their bread by their labour” (170). Although the court eventually ruled in favour of the mantua-makers stating that the tailors’ “action was accordingly dismissed as not being founded on law” (170), and the court observed “it is not every person who makes use of a needle

that is a taylor (170), this account underscores the hegemonic power structures that were at work against women who wished to earn a living as a mantua-maker or milliner.⁸⁴

Johnson explains that mantua-makers' business includes "almost every article of dress made use of by ladies, except perhaps those which belong to the head and the feet" (31). Unlike more specialized weavers, mantua-makers worked in "silks, muslins, cambrics, cottons" to create a "great variety of articles" (35). Johnson notes that despite the talents of mantua-makers, their customers "are not always easily pleased; they frequently expect more from their dress than it is capable of giving" (32). As such, the mantua-maker "must be an expert anatomist" (33). Not only should a good mantua-maker be an adept manager of ladies' expectations, but moreover according to Johnson she must be inherently adaptable to keep up with the "constant succession of dress" (33). The life of a mantua-maker was highly dependent on the scale of her operation; those with "large scale" operations and "fashionable situations" can be "very profitable" (34), but by and large "the mere work-women do not make gains adequate to their labour" (34). Although the margins of success were very slim for those wishing to make a living as a mantua-maker, Johnson notes that the set-up costs were reasonable (especially compared to other garment trades) and "require[d] but few implements: these are chiefly thread, scissars [sic] pins and needles" (35).

Much like Johnson, Campbell suggests the mantua-maker is well versed in dress and fashion (227). In order to highlight the substantial patience required of women who work as mantua-makers, Campbell emphasizes the demanding nature of both designing flattering garments for a variety of body types and managing demanding clientele. As with the milliner, Campbell makes

⁸⁴ Interestingly, the same hegemonic power structures (particularly guilds) that initially resisted female participation in skilled trades did not push back against women working as spinsters during the same time period. This may be due in part to an internal hierarchy of vocations within the garment trades which for centuries allocated the least lucrative and most labour-intensive tasks—the spinning of wool, flax and other garment fibres—to women and children. Women working as spinners and even as dyers posed little threat to the success of male garment workers and in fact contributed to the success of their employers.

connections between women working in garment trades and poverty, suggesting that “their profits are but inconsiderable, and the wages they give their journeywomen small in proportion” (227). He explains that although “they may make a shift, with great sobriety and economy” most lack the “prudence” to succeed and end up in a state of “general poverty” (227), concluding that the poverty of most mantua-makers and their failure to thrive as women of business have “brought the business into small reputation” (227). As with his discussion of milliners, Campbell struggles to balance his assessment of mantua-making with his deeply entrenched discomfort of women working in public. He concludes his assessment on the capacity of mantua-makers to be “perfect connoisseur[s]” of style (227) with a misogynistic aside that “she must keep the secrets she is intrusted [sic] with, as much as a woman can” (227).

Unlike the literary depictions of milliners that sit at odds with their real-world equivalents, both Johnson’s and Campbell’s descriptions of mantua-makers are, to varying degrees, more closely aligned with the *Register*. In both literary accounts and the historical records mantua-makers are exclusively female (the *Register* lists one solo woman and one group of three women working together – see Appendix Table 1). Moreover, both authors underline the difficulties of establishing a thriving business as a mantua-maker, which is also reflected in the *Register* where mantua-makers comprise only 6% of the total number of garment workers listed. Compared to the substantial number of women who are listed as milliners, the relatively small collection of mantua-makers echoes Campbell’s suggestion that many women struggled to make a successful living off of mantua-making alone. In comparison to the other women working in garment-associated trades, mantua-makers have the lowest average amount of insured capital, respectively listing £100 and £200 each (for an average of £150).⁸⁵ It is, however, important to note that while this information certainly

⁸⁵ It is also important to take into consideration that £150 in 1792 would be worth approximately £19,000 in 2020 currency. This sum has been calculated using the MeasuringWorth interface run by Samuel H. Williamson, Professor of Economics, Emeritus from Miami University: <https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators>

helps identify the relative wealth of the mantua-makers listed in the *Register*, and establishes that they earned the least, on average, of all the garment tradeswomen, this does not mean that women could not make a living as mantua-makers.

The financial viability of mantua-making for a limited group of women is illustrated by *Register* entry No. 583906 for mantua-makers Susannah Parker, Susannah Sarah Parker and Mary Ann Parker in Church Street at Greenwich. Although their insurance policy is only for a sum of £200, which is relatively small in comparison to the insured wealth of the drapers, cotton manufacturers, and weavers listed whose insured wealth ranges from £1000 to £16,300 (see Appendix Table 2), the details of the Parker's entry demonstrate that these three women were able to run a successful business from their home. Unlike the records of other garment tradeswomen,

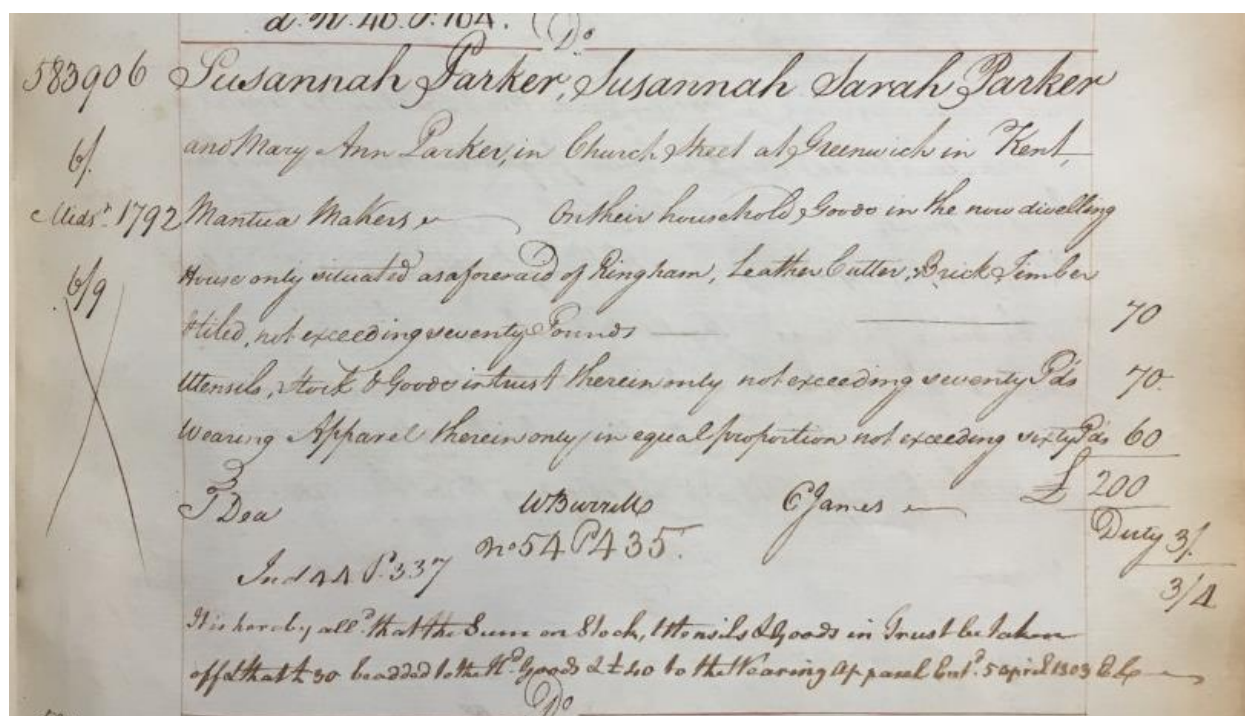


Figure 8: "Entry No. 583906 Susannah Parker, Susannah Sarah Parker and Mary Ann Parker" in the *Sun Life Insurance Register*, 1791-1792.

this entry does not list a separate shopfront premises. Instead, the record suggests that the Parkers lived in a modest brick dwelling where they stored £70 of stock and utilities associated with their business and specifically list a leather cutter as a valuable tool associated with their trade (See Figure

8). Moreover, the insurance record documents the Parker's success over more than a decade; their initial insurance entry for £200 is dated 1792, but an addendum was added in 1803 indicating that they insured an additional £30 of stock and £40 of household apparel, which suggests that their business was gradually expanding.

Much like the Parkers' insurance policy, records from the published proceedings of *The Court of Sessions* speak to the perceived respectability and business acumen of women who were able to succeed as mantua-makers. Case No. CCVI, "Stracy Till, &c. *contra* Robert Jamieson" (1759), describes in detail a conflict over £200 "being left to Margaret Jamieson by her uncle John Hamilton" (273). Although the details of this case largely exceed the scope of this investigation, what does bear mentioning is the way in which Margaret Jamieson is described to the court. The opening remarks highlight how Jamieson was "in good standing as a mantua-maker" (273) and based on her capacity for managing the finances of a successful business her uncle assigned her this substantial sum of money in order to support her father in his old age (273). In stark contrast to Jamieson's success, the case notes detail how her husband "Robert Mason linen-draper ... in a month after the marriage, became bankrupt" (273) and subsequently tried to lay claim upon the assigned £200. Juxtaposed with Mason's poor financial management this introductory assessment highlights not only that Margaret Jamieson was a mantua-maker of good business standing within her community, but moreover that she was a woman with enough financial wherewithal to manage the assigned funds. Although there is certainly evidence to suggest that *some* mantua-makers like Margaret Jamieson, Susannah Parker, Susannah Sarah Parker and Mary Ann Parker were able to support themselves through mantua-making, by and large it seems as though Johnson and Campbell's remarks about the financial challenges of this business are accurate. Despite the fact that start-up costs would have been relatively low, and a mantua-maker's business could be run out of their home (as the Parkers demonstrate), the absence of mantua-makers from the *Register* combined

with the prejudice and systemic challenges facing mantua-makers from men working in other garment trades suggests that most women either made a meagre living or combined mantua-making with other trades.

Comprising the most substantial category of female garment workers in the *Register* are 14 spinsters who have an average insured amount of £226.66 (ranging from £100 to £500 – see Appendix Table 2). Initially, these spinsters may seem to function like the mantua-makers or milliners, but upon closer inspection the categorization of spinsters is far from straightforward. Prior to the eighteenth century the term *spinster* almost exclusively referred to women who spun fibre (predominantly wool, cotton, flax and silk). In the mid-seventeenth century John Collinges described the role of spinsters in his religious allegory entitled *The Act of Weaving Spiritualized* (1649), wherein he drew upon images of weavers and spinsters to praise the power and beauty of God: “He hath provided us finer wools, taught the spinster to draw it into finer threads, and the weaver to bring it into finer webs” (4). Here, the ubiquity of spinsters in the seventeenth-century socio-economic landscape is understood to have such importance that the universal glory of God’s design is embodied by their spinning.

The commonplace nature of spinsters as women who spun fibre continued into the early decades of the eighteenth century, particularly in periodicals and pamphlets responding to the Calico Crisis. In *The Linen Spinster, in Defence of the Linen Manufactures &c.* (1720) by Jenny Distaff⁸⁶ the author speaks to the challenges facing women who worked in the “spinning and weaving” (13) of linen fibres for fashionable garments. Drawing direct connections between broader social campaigns for the employment of the poor (13) and the practical implications for women trying to make a living from the spinning of fibres, *The Linen Spinster* gestures to the precarious financial and social position

⁸⁶ Distaff is a pseudonym likely created by Daniel Defoe in order to respond to Richard Steele’s *The Spinster: In Defence of the Woollen Manufactures* (1719).

of the large number of spinsters who formed an integral part of the English textile industry. Distaff centres her critique on the approach taken by other authors (particularly Richard Steele) in their response to the Calico Crisis, suggesting that these authors have fallen short in adequately addressing the poverty of spinsters. Instead of focussing on the plight of impoverished spinsters, Distaff suggests that literary and cultural discourse has directed a disproportionate amount of attention to discussing the role of “modern ladies” (7). She explains that since “these modern ladies are not a thousandth part of the conversable sex in town; then how sister can we *come at a true state of trade, and the Interest of this Island with relation to the Habits now worn*, when you do not take a survey of the ten thousandth part of them” (7).⁸⁷ Distaff’s critique of contemporary dialogue pertaining to garment tradeswork highlights the short-sighted nature of focusing primarily on ladies of fashion. Reorienting the conversation to include both ladies of fashion and garment tradeswomen, Distaff initiates a more comprehensive discussion that begins to explicitly link social issues like the Calico Crisis to broader struggles of the English working classes. Elaborating on the consistently low wages of women working as spinsters, Maxine Berg explains that not only did these women outnumber “woolcombers and weavers by three to one” (27), but despite the growth of the industry over the long eighteenth century “the gender divisions of the workforce did not change” (27) with women continuing to work in the lowest paying positions. This statistic is particularly astounding when considered in conjunction with the astronomical growth of the linen and silk industries. Berg asserts that “the linen industry contributed more to value added in 1770 than did the iron industry” and “silk contributed 4.4 per cent of value added in 1770, the same proportion as coal” (27).

⁸⁷ Distaff devotes a good deal of her argument to chastising Steele’s literary personas of Isaac Bickerstaff for his analysis of garments worn by “modern ladies” of taste (9). Distaff suggests that if Bickerstaff wants a true account of what ladies of fashion are wearing he would be better off asking the garment workers who make their clothes (9). She concludes by arguing that contrary to Bickerstaff the use of cheaper fabrics “will help maintain the balance of trade on our side” to the benefit of “the daughters of Eve in this Island” (12).

Concerns over spinsters were linked both to discussions of foreign competition and importation as well as widespread poverty and low wages throughout the greater part of the eighteenth century. As Patrick Colquhoun in *Considerations Relative to a Plan of Relief for the Cotton Manufacture* (1788) bluntly asks, “is it not an incontrovertible fact, that a great number of the industrious poor, who spun upon hand-engines or jinnies, are in want of bread?” (57). Jane Humphries and Benjamin Schneider speak to the inherent instability of wages for women who spun cotton, wool, or flax for garment production, explaining that hand spinning “was generally undertaken in the home” utilising a system of incentives “set to drive productivity” (32). As “spinning was seasonal ... it was embraced for its flexibility” particularly in rural communities where spinning work could be taken up or put aside during busy agricultural periods (32). Based on the seasonal nature of spinning it is likely that consistent work was a rarity for spinsters. Despite these less-than-ideal conditions, Humphries and Schneider estimate that “more than 500,000 spinners may have been needed to process Britain’s fibre inputs by 1750” (34), and conclude “the[se] results underline that hand spinning was the largest single manufacturing job in industrialising Britain” (34). By highlighting the substantial number of individuals engaged in spinning fibres as well as the unstable nature of the work itself, Humphries and Schneider identify the key factors behind the impoverished spinsters Distaff speaks to in *The Linen Spinster*.

Alice Clark notes that “the wages paid to women in the seventeenth century for spinning linen were insufficient, and those paid for spinning wool, barely sufficient, for their individual maintenance, and yet out of them women were expected to support, or partly support, their children” (95). Records from *The Rockingham Account Book for Flax Spinning* (1742)⁸⁸ illustrate just how

⁸⁸ *The Rockingham Account Book for Flax Spinning*, is held by *The Bodleian Library* and listed as “MS North d. 51 f.2r” in their collection. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic I was unable to travel to Oxford to examine this document myself and as such have relied upon the digitized copy of “MS North d. 51 f.2r” published in Jane Humphries and Benjamin Schneider’s article “Stranded Spinsters” (2018).

meagre wages continued to be for spinsters well into the middle decades of the eighteenth century. In a tally of payments made to “poor people employed by the order of the Countess of Rockingham to spin flax for the year 1742” 18 spinsters are listed for the date of Nov. 1st 1742. The record notes that most women were allocated 3 quantities of either “seven penny flax” or “eight penny flax” on Nov. 1st and returned their spun flax between November 5th 1742 and January 4th 1743. Depending on the quality of flax spun, the women listed received between 1s. 9p. and 3s. 6p. money paid upon the return of their work. Looking at the wages of Goody Leeson, who returned her work the fastest on Nov. 5th 1742 and was paid 1s. 9p. for 3 quantities of seven penny flax, if she continued to work at the same rate she could expect to make approximately £7 per year.⁸⁹ At the opposite end of the spectrum, Goody Rice was the slowest spinster listed on November 1st, returning her work on January 4th 1743 for 1s. 9p., and if she continued to work at the same rate (taking just over nine weeks to complete three quantities of seven penny flax) she probably earned approximately 9 shillings each year.

In 1791, W. R. Sadler detailed the continued poverty of spinsters in his poem “The Discarded Spinster.” In the prefatory remarks Sadler illustrates the increasingly dire conditions for spinsters engaged in spinning fibre following the invention of the spinning jenny in the mid-1760s.⁹⁰ Sadler explains that despite “the utility and advantage of machines for spinning” (i), these machines, and the spinning jenny in particular, created a “public grievance” for “the labouring poor” (i-ii), which has “fully proved the consequence of discouraging the industrious spirit of our poor, by

⁸⁹ These calculations are informed by the Royal Mint’s article about the pre-decimal system entitled “Pounds, Shillings and Pence” at <https://www.royalmintmuseum.org.uk/journal/history/pounds-shillings-and-pence/>

⁹⁰ Looking at the “Rise and Fall of the Spinning Jenny” (195), John Styles discusses the invention of what he dubs “a familiar icon of the Industrial Revolution” (195), which was invented by Lancashire weaver James Hargreaves. Explaining the mechanical innovation represented by the spinning jenny, Styles tracks its development and explains how “in eliminating the need for the spinner’s fingers, the jenny had a parallel in Arkwright’s water frame and the earlier spinning machine patented in 1738 by Lewis Paul, on which Arkwright’s frame drew. However, the method used to replace the fingers was not the same... in the spinning jenny, the two processes [spinning and winding] were discontinuous, the machine alternating between spinning and winding” (196).

taking our manufactures out of their hands” (iii-iv). In the body of the poem the speaker begins by extensively describing the “poor spinster” (2) as a holdover from a bygone era who, now in the 1790s had been rendered redundant. He writes,

Touch'd with no interest and without a fee,
for the poor SPINSTER pours a plaintive plea.
Poor worm! Who now, discarded from employ,
Lies stript of all her hope, and all her joy:
not jockied she (new arts new idioms give)
but jennied out of every means to live. (2)

Despite the playful tone that pervades this stanza, the effect of the speaker's word play with jockied/jennied is somewhat undercut by the bleak picture he paints of the obsolete spinster who earns rock-bottom wages. Sadler's image of the spinster as a “poor worm” discarded by productive society draws upon the popular and pervasive cultural mythos around spinsters that often characterized them as ugly or deformed by their work.

In addition to the decreasing job prospects and increased levels of poverty, women who spun fibres for garments were increasingly referred to as “spinners” rather than “spinsters” as the period progressed.⁹¹ As the term “spinster” lost its primary denotation of women spinning fibres for the production of garments by the later decades of the eighteenth century, the word “spinster” began to be used to denote an unmarried adult woman. Bridget Hill explains that by the early eighteenth century the dually resonant “spinster” was used both in reference to women who spun fibres for textile production and for women who remained single beyond the typical marrying age (*Women, Work & Sexual Politics* 4). To complicate matters further, women who worked as spinsters

⁹¹ This transition is nicely charted by John Mortimer's history of textile trades in England entitled *Cotton Spinning* (1895). Mortimer begins his study in the mid-sixteenth century depicting the spinster working at an “old English wheel” (15). By the time Mortimer's history reaches the last decades of the eighteenth century his vocabulary has shifted. He writes, “it is a suggestive fact that the operative who superintends these mechanical movements is better known as a ‘minder’ than a spinner” (129). Bringing the historical survey up to Mortimer's present day he notes “we have seen how it [the spindle] left the hands of the earliest spinsters to take its place upon the hand wheel, and how after a long existence ... got itself separated from the spinster altogether” eventually becoming “a unit among multitudes of similar steam driven spindles whirled round at the rate of many thousand revolutions per minute” (173). Mortimer's narrative of industrial progress charts the linguistic shift from spinster to spinner to factory minder.

were also often single. Leonie Hannan highlights this phenomenon in her discussion of the domestic cultivation of silkworms in eighteenth-century England. Speaking particularly about a case study where the Dublin Society (circa 1750) encouraged single women to take up the domestic production of silk, Hannan inadvertently underscores the slippage between spinsters as single women and spinsters as textile producers. To this end Hannan explains, “the Dublin Society was open to the idea of idle ‘spinsters’ putting their hands to work in the service of the nation” (520). Blurring the lines further Hannan showcases the writings of Samuel Pulein who, in his remarks to the Dublin Society in 1750, suggested that “many thousand spinsters of a more curious nature, without the expense of wages’ could become the work force for this new silk manufacture” (in Hannan 513). In contemporary writing from Pulein as well as in the work of scholars like McNeill, Hill, and Hannan, the delineation between the two meanings for “spinster” was often unclear and the term was frequently used interchangeably to refer to single women, women employed in the spinning of fibres or in some instances both at the same time.

Despite the usage of social titles like “spinster” or “Mrs.” that fill the pages of legal records and business registers from the period, it is evident that complex signalling went on beneath the seemingly static veneer of women’s legal marital status.⁹² Instead of interpreting historical records with the preconceived notion that, as Richard Steele put it, “the utmost of a woman’s character is contained in domestic life ... All she has to do in this world is contained within the duties of a daughter, a sister, a wife, and a mother” (in Erickson “Eleanor Mosley” 88), it is essential to further examine the ways in which women represented themselves in public. Erickson explains the use of “Mrs.” in business transactions and records during the eighteenth century was often “a social or occupational designation of status and carried no marital connotation” (159). Although legal

⁹² Erickson explains how “generally, in the historical record, women’s marital status is prioritized over their occupational status” (“Eleanor Mosley” 167).

documentation might superficially suggest shops were run only by married women due to the inclusion of “Mrs.” before each woman’s name, many business women were not actually defined simply by their marital status (167). Instead of a world which mirrored the domestic realm imagined by Steele, wherein business was strictly limited to patriarchal social relationships, Erickson emphasizes the powerful place of single women in the growing English commercial marketplace (167). Erickson’s claims here are based on her case study of early eighteenth-century milliners, and she suggests that in the first decades of the century there were nearly 400 female milliners working in the City of London “who traded with hundreds of other tradeswomen” (167) in complex and extensive networks of commerce driven by women.

The substantial network of women in business illustrated by Erickson’s case study is also discussed by Margaret Hunt, who suggests that “the majority of urban women” by the eighteenth century “supported themselves in full or in part by paid work at some point in their lives” (128). At the same time that many single women utilized the social title of “Mrs.” in their business dealings, some married women disguised their marital status in an effort to establish and maintain business reputations and credit separately from their husbands (128). In one such instance, Mary Holl concealed her marital status from her wholesalers, writing that “many of my cred[it]ors did not even know I was a married woman, & it was upon my Industry & the punctuality of my payments, that my Credit was founded” (in Hunt 140). Holl’s anecdote illustrates the experiences of a substantial category of eighteenth-century English women who “described themselves as wholly or partially maintained by their own paid employment” (128).⁹³ Although Holl may have successfully built up a business on her good reputation, women who actually remained unmarried well into middle age likely faced a large degree of derision and scorn in their daily lives.

⁹³ Hunt asserts that nearly 81% of spinsters in the early eighteenth century supported themselves. To this end Hunt draws upon Peter Earle’s detailed study of London Consistorial Court records from 1695 to 1725 in his article “The female labour market in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries” (1989).

Figure 9: Spinsters listed in *The Sun Insurance Register* (1791-2)

Insured	Trade Goods and Property Insured	Total Insurance Claim
Ann Bishop	Barn, wringhouse & cellar	£100
Mary Bleasdale	Brewhouse & stables	£300
Elizabeth & Charlotte Lintott	–	£200
Elizabeth Dorcas & Susannah Acutt	Shop and warehouse	£500
Elizabeth Saubergue	–	£150
Ann Bishop	–	£150
Catharine Rumball	–	£100
Margaret Sime	–	£200
Sarah Foster	Blacksmith's shop, utensil and stock	£500
Margaret Purnell	–	£100
Fanny Burge	–	£200
Hannah Linsey	–	£100
Hester & Alice Jeffreys	–	£200
Mary Feltham	–	£100

Speaking to the precarious position of older unmarried women, Bridget Hill argues that spinsters (and particularly affluent spinsters) were poorly portrayed in literary documents by their contemporaries (11-2), due in part to the “vital importance attached to chastity” in relation to the marriage market (124). Remaining unmarried and thus assumedly chaste, Hill suggests that because “the virginity of spinsters, to put it crudely, was seen as a frozen asset, unconvertible into any market value....the spinster becomes a freak, an unnatural woman” (124). The disdain for unmarried older

women, as noted by Hill, is illustrated in a number of literary and theatrical pieces across the eighteenth century. The ‘anonymously’ penned⁹⁴ “An Office for Marriages” (1719) proclaims:

As for those wretches who have languished out their insipid lives, perhaps without ever having an offer of a Husband; ‘tis no wonder, if they, (lost to all sense of Modesty, and at their last Cast,) should (rather than sink with that heavy luggage of Virginity into their graves) despising the calumnies of a censorious World...flock in crowds to your office. (in Lee 115-16)

Not only are the spinsters here burdened by the “heavy luggage of Virginity” but they are represented as both unproductive and unnatural.

Keeping in mind the historical connotations of the term “spinster” during the long eighteenth century I want to turn specifically to the 14 spinsters⁹⁵ listed in the *Register* (See Figure 9). Of all the women listed in the *Register* spinsters comprise one of the largest categories, second only to the 34 widows listed. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the low wages paid to women who worked as spinsters in the early years of the period as well as the vocabulary shift which saw fibre “spinsters” increasingly referred to as “spinners,” makes it increasingly dubious to unilaterally assert that the spinsters of the *Register* were involved in the spinning of fibres. Despite the mounting evidence that indicates many of the “spinsters” in the *Register* were likely middle-class adult women who remained single, this does not preclude all 14 spinsters from participating in garment work. Looking at the individual records for each woman listed as a “spinster” in the *Register* there are a wide range of goods insured which indicate that some “spinsters” may have been involved in garment tradeswork and some definitely were not. Of the 14, three women identified as spinsters explicitly insured objects that indicate they were not involved in garment tradeswork: Ann Baker who insured her cider making equipment, Mary Bleasdale who insured her brewhouse and Sarah

⁹⁴ Although the text was originally published anonymously “An Office for Marriages” has been subsequently linked to Daniel Defoe by William Lee.

⁹⁵ Here I used the number 14 to reflect the 14 insurance records where women were given the title spinster. In some cases, there are multiple women insured together, but for the sake of consistency they have been counted as one.

Foster who insured her blacksmith shop. It is notable that Bleasdale and Foster have two of the highest values of insured goods, with £300 and £500 respectively. Based on the items listed in their records and the amount of wealth insured it is safe to assume that the qualification of spinster here refers to their marital status and age rather than occupation.

Discounting Baker, Bleasdale, and Foster, we are left with 11 remaining potential spinsters involved in garment tradeswork. Of those, seven women are listed without any trade goods or property, nor with any other links to the garment industry which likely indicates that the title of spinster here also refers to marital status and age.⁹⁶ This leaves four remaining entries listing spinsters who may have actually been involved in some degree of garment work: Elizabeth Dorcas and Susannah Acutt who insure their shop and warehouse, Elizabeth Saubergue who insures her home in Spitalfields and is affiliated with a dyer, Hester and Alice Jefferies who rent their premises from a farmer, and Mary Feltham who insures her barn and dwelling house. Although none of these women explicitly list equipment associated with spinning fibres they also lack the signifiers of other trades. In the case of the Jefferieses and Feltham neither insurance claim references any livestock or produce, as is the case with other single women who insure similar objects, nor do they identify themselves as farmers (which several other single women with similar property do). Dorcas and Acutt do not identify themselves as shopsellers, shopkeepers or dealers of any sort despite the fact that they identify both a warehouse and shop in their insurance claim (as other women who insure warehouses and stores do). Additionally, their insurance claim makes note that although they rent the warehouse from a man named Brehl who is a cooper, “no coopers work [is] done therein.” Finally, Saubergue’s location in the heart of one of London’s most prominent centres of garment

⁹⁶ It is worth noting that not all single women listed in the *Register* are granted the title of spinster in lieu of being a widow or having their vocation identified. It is possible that the categorization of spinster is used at times in the *Register* to denote the age of insured parties, which would account for the different identifiers on similar records. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that these seven spinsters were involved in garment tradeswork.

production marks her as likely involved in some form of garment work, as does her affiliation with a dyer. Admittedly these connections to garment tradeswork are flimsy at best, but when considered in conjunction with the other records in the *Register* it seems distinctly possible that Dorcas, Acutt, Saubergue, the Jeffries, and Feltham are identified as spinsters partly due to their affiliation with the spinning of fibres.⁹⁷

There is a degree of ambiguity surrounding the spinsters listed in the *Register*, and although it is certainly tempting to draw together the materials of this study and propose what would be an educated hypothesis about these 14 spinsters, I want to conclude this chapter by putting aside any proclamations of absolute certainty. Instead of firmly asserting that some of these women were or were not involved in spinning fibre, I want to dwell momentarily in the uncertain midground. Judith Butler's assertion that "to be material means to materialize ... to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where 'to matter' means at once 'to materialize' and 'to mean'" (32) invites the reader to explore how value is implicitly derived from individual experience. In a sense, the material condition of matter is ultimately dependent on the perception of individuals in positions of power and privilege. If, as Butler suggests, all matter is animated by the relations and associations that create meaning, then what might be involved in rethinking the value of objects, records and individuals who have been pushed to the side of the historical record?

By actively drawing attention to elements of archival study that require the researcher to make educated assumptions (or call upon the researcher to 'fill in the gaps' or 'read between the lines') my goal here is to draw attention to, and think through, the ways in which narrative creation shapes archival study and the presentation of historical narratives. Laura Engel has begun to tackle

⁹⁷ It should also be noted that there is only one person identified explicitly in the *Register* as a "cotton spinner," a man named John Bryce. Although he is identified as a cotton spinner, the insured value of goods and the size of his operation clearly marks him as an affluent owner of a spinning workshop. His record insures Bryce's "stock & goods in his cotton spinning jennie house" and other tools of the trade for £500.

questions about the role of scholars in archival study by suggesting that we must reframe the role of the researcher “as a self-conscious participant in an embodied process” (3). Engel proposes that the researcher functions as a “tourist” of sorts in their documentation of artifacts and recording of experiences (3). Engel explains that “artifacts serve as the material of memory” in connecting past and present, and work “forward to engender performances and backwards to signal acts that are now lost” (2). To this end, it is essential that we as researchers working with archival documents begin to attend to the ways in which we both knowingly and unconsciously impact the objects and stories we document. Entering the archival space we are faced with a plethora of questions that impact our orientations towards the objects we study, e.g. how does a particular item feel in my hands? Where did I have to go to visit the object(s)? What specific protocols (wearing gloves, sitting at a specific desk, using props to support fragile objects, etc.) or behaviours do I need to perform during my visit to the archive in order to follow institutional regulations? However, as with the 14 spinsters in the *Register*, things become increasingly complicated when a physical object illustrates only part of the story. In the case of the *Register* a certain degree of imagining is required to forge the links of communication between past and present in order to fashion data points into cohesive narratives. Without imagination⁹⁸ or interpretation the *Register* would remain simply an account of the names, addresses, wealth and occupations of people who lived in England several hundred years ago. Only when drawn together by the researcher and considered in conjunction with other records, literary texts and information does the *Register* begin to tell us about the stories of working women who have been largely absent from the historical record.

Although my discussion of spinsters, especially when compared to the milliners and mantua-makers from the *Register*, is hampered by a relative degree of ambiguity and uncertainty, this

⁹⁸ Here I use the notion of “imagination” following Esther Milne’s suggestion that “presence is a term that need not refer always to *material, corporeal* presence. Rather, presence is an effect achieved in communication ... where interlocutors imagine the psychological or, sometimes physical presence of the other” (2).

approach (of taking into consideration a number of factors and possibilities without coming to a singular conclusion) enacts a powerful shift in historical and literary analysis that begins to account for casual or alternative arrangements of labour. As much as Dorcas, Acutt, Saubergue, the Jeffries and Feltham possibly engaged in the spinning of fibres for garment production and could likely be counted amongst the other female garment workers in my study, by opening the door to the uncertainty that they did something else – perhaps Dorcas and Acutt used their shop to sell any number of other goods or Saubergue just happened to live in Spitalfields and rent her premises from a dyer with no other affiliation to garment tradeswork – I am actively challenging the predisposed assumptions. Rather than assuming that my role as researcher entitles me to take up a position of absolute authority in uncovering *the* historical narrative and taking possession of the people and objects in my study, there is much to be gained by leaving our work open-ended. Accepting the fact that, for instance, Felham may have possibly used her barn to spin fibres only occasionally allows us to step into the murky space in between rigid classifications of work and encourages readings that include occasional labourers or work done by women while otherwise occupied (whether it be by rearing children or any number of the other complexities of life that take countless shapes and forms). When we begin opening the door to the messiness of everyday life for eighteenth-century working women we begin to account for those who might otherwise slip through the cracks of historical study.

Chapter Four: “Setting the Stage:” Costume Procurement in Eighteenth-Century London

Generally speaking, the study of eighteenth-century theatre has focussed too narrowly on the plays and personalities of the time. Robert Jones highlights the problem, suggesting that “our knowledge of how eighteenth-century theatres were run remains worryingly thin. The managerial enterprise of theatre production, especially its daily practicalities, is largely obscure, though the facts of performance history are well documented” (187). Although scholars like Robert D. Hume, Judith Milhous and Terry Jenkins have produced generative work on theatrical operations, eighteenth-century scholarship more generally has shown considerable reticence to engage meaningfully with surviving theatrical records (187). This scholarly preference for examining individual performances and celebrity performers rather than the technical elements of production and theatrical operations is longstanding, and can be traced back to Charles Dibdin and Francis Godolphin Waldrons’ *A Compendious History of the English Stage, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (1797). Dibdin and Waldron are quick to underscore public interest in attending the theatre, opening the *Advertisement* to their five-volume tome with the proclamation that “few pleasures indeed are more rational than those derivable from the performance of a well-written drama.” They continue on to explain that this popularity has been chiefly manifested through the voracious public appetite for volumes of literature on the subjects of “the history of the stage, the lives of performers, the biography of dramatic authors, and criticism on their productions” (Dibdin and Waldron). In short, Dibdin and Waldron suggest that there is public interest in all elements of theatricality and performance except the mechanics of production (like setting, costumes, props etc.) that make these performances possible. This prefatory *Advertisement* not only illustrates the copious amount of pre-existing contemporary literature on popular performers, but also implies that an updated text detailing “the

merits of new candidates for theatrical fame; and a sketch of the lives of such performers” (Dibdin and Waldron) is both desirable and warranted.

Over the course of their five volumes Dibdin and Waldron only consider theatrical costumes in conjunction with their commentary on specific actresses. On one such occasion they explain that “in addition to the grace, the ease and the elegance, with which Mrs. Abington personated characters in high life and aped politeness in chambermaids, her taste for dress was novel and interesting” (359). Dibdin and Waldron discuss at length how Frances Abington was consulted “by ladies of the first distinction” due to her “judgement in blending what was beautiful with what was becoming” (359). They conclude by holding up Abington as a model of modest femininity, stating that she set an example for “ladies both on the stage and off,” who “piqued themselves on decorating their persons with decency and decorum, and captivating beholders by a modest concealment of those charms” (359). Rather than speak to the role of costumes in aiding her performances as one particular character or another, Dibdin and Waldron use dress to illustrate Abington’s internal merits of modesty and virtue, and encourage other women to follow her example. Dibdin and Waldron position their discussion of dress in relation to the actions of specific actresses in order to warn young female readers about the dangers of vanity and frivolous fashion.⁹⁹ Ultimately, *A Compendious History of the English Stage* perpetuates the privileging of celebrity performers over the mechanics of stage production. The labour of creating costumes and other backstage mechanics is pushed aside and overshadowed by the garments themselves and the actresses who wore them.

Despite the relative paucity of literature about backstage practices and the tradespeople who made theatrical productions possible, eighteenth-century theatre was at its very core “necessarily a

⁹⁹ Dibdin and Waldron explicitly draw upon dress to warn female readers against the dangers of vain self-adornment, stating, “[n]o public character should ever count too long upon popularity, especially when the expectation is built upon no better basis than caprice, and fashionable taste, which vary as often and as unaccountably in matters of amusement, as in dress” (451).

collective endeavour” (Jones 188). As such, continuing to focus predominantly on the performers and plays will only continue to yield an incomplete picture. Shearer West has emphasized the importance of thinking wholistically about theatrical production in the long eighteenth century. Opening her chapter in *The Oxford Handbook on the Georgian Theatre 1737-1832* (2014), West poses a series of questions about the relationship between spectacle and backstage mechanics, asking, “What did audiences see when they watched a performance on the eighteenth-century stage? And how did they understand what they saw? What was the relationship between the performers and the sets, props, costumes, architecture, and machinery of the theatre?” (286) Although her queries may initially seem overly simplistic, they draw attention to the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to the examination of spectacle, which takes into account not only “the place of the stage in the burgeoning visual culture” (286) of the period, but moreover the integral relationship between “theatre design and professional trade in Britain” (298).¹⁰⁰ By going back to these basic questions, West encourages scholars to rethink the narrative of “historical progression” (288), which divorces theatrical production from professional trades.¹⁰¹

As illustrated by Jones and West, eighteenth-century accounts detailing the design and construction of stage mechanics are few and far between. However, John Potter in *The Theatrical Review; or New, companion to the play-house* (1771) is unique in his attention to and discussion of the general importance of costumes, sets and props in his review of Richard Cumberland’s December 1771 adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*. Potter writes that, “the truth and perfection of Theatrical Representations, in a great measure, depends on proper decorations; otherwise all that the

¹⁰⁰ To support her suggestion that theatre design and professional trades were intimately connected in Georgian England, West goes back to the historical roots of theatre, and documents how theatre “was classified as a ‘mechanical science’ in the twelfth century” (298). West’s move to consider theatre alongside professional trades is supported by eighteenth-century writers like Jean André Rouquet who in *The Present State of the Arts in England* (1755) groups theatrical arts together with other industries like silk manufacture, wood carving, steel work and painting of linen (vi).

¹⁰¹ Although West begins her chapter by emphasizing the multifaceted nature of theatrical production (highlighting the importance of sets, props, costumes etc.) the majority of her inquiry focusses almost exclusively on the importance of scenery design and its impact on notions of spectacle; this once again relegates discussions of costuming to the margins.

Player can inculcate will prove ineffectual” (254). He suggests that “scenery and decorations are very important auxiliaries, to the keeping up the illusion, and carrying on an appearance of reality in Theatrical representations. But, it requires great knowledge to introduce them properly; because they should never engross that attention in an audience, which is primarily due to the Player” (254). Not only do Potter’s comments highlight the importance of “proper decorations,” but they also emphasize the importance of striking a delicate balance between stage decoration and action, wherein the former must be carefully constructed in order not to overtake the latter. Potter’s balance between script and spectacle reveals complex doubts about the morality of performance that ran as an undercurrent throughout eighteenth-century discussions on theatrical production.

During the period discussions on the nature of theatrical spectacle were fraught with tension¹⁰² and in many ways the imbalance in eighteenth-century theatrical studies is a continuation of longstanding debates about the nature of spectacle that sought to distinguish between “rational” plays (written by “respectable” playwrights) from frivolous spectacle that served only to delight. For instance, Carew Reynell bemoaned society’s general preference for flashy masquerades, elaborate costumes and farcical pantomimes over what he deems to be more valuable theatrical expression (9) from playwrights like John Dryden, Colley Cibber and Joseph Addison. In the dedication to his work, *The Dangers of Masquerades and Raree-Shows; or, The Complaints of the Stage &c.* (1718), Reynell addresses Anne Oldfield and makes a plea to her as “protectrix” of the rational stage, asking her to help guide the “mob” away from immoral spectacle (5). Comparing the productions of the ‘proper’ stage to those performed by “the Muffl’d Crew in the Haymarket” (5) he describes the merits of Oldfield’s performance, stating that she “entertain[s] our reason” whereas the lesser productions

¹⁰² Some of the most hotly contested eighteenth-century discussions of theatrical performance related to the juxtaposition of plays as textual or literary documents and performance as spectacle. As West explains, “tensions existed between, on the one hand, drama as a literary medium akin to poetry, and on the other, the stage as spectacle which promoted sensuality over judgement. Until the end of the century, spectacle was often associated with genres considered morally suspect, such as pantomime and opera” (286).

only “amuse the sense with a suspension of reason” (5), concluding that these lesser spectacles “administer matter for your [Oldfield’s] ridicule, or compassion. You [Oldfield] in fine live a rational life, they an animal life” (5). Although Reynell’s remarks are specifically directed at Oldfield, the general sentiment of his commentary reflects a larger concern about frivolous or immoral spectacle that was deeply rooted in classist concerns about the dissemination of cultural production outside the social elite.

Costumes during the eighteenth century were regarded as a key element of theatrical performance, one that had a considerable impact upon the audience’s reception of particular pieces. As Joseph Hasselwood explains in *The Secret History of the Green Room* (1790), “the addition of dress, powder, and paint, necessarily allowed to dramatic performers ... renders them dangerous assailants on the hearts of their auditors” (304). Despite the general consensus amongst eighteenth-century critics and playgoers alike that costumes held an important place in the creation of dramatic atmosphere, there were relatively few specifications for the period’s costuming, and more often than not the garments on stage were a smorgasbord of “contemporary” styles.¹⁰³ John Hill in *The Actor: A treatise on the art of playing* (1750) writes disparagingly of attitudes toward stage costumes, stating “the dresses of the actors is another particular that we are usually as careless about”(223). Hill bemoans how “the general taste which we have for extravagance in dress, makes us forget the interest we have in the truth of representation” (224). Primarily addressing the “carelessness” of theatrical costuming, Hill’s critique is a useful indication of the state of costuming generally during the period. Hill’s remarks are nevertheless peppered with more sinister implications about the extravagant nature of women’s garments on stage, which are linked to broader social discussions of modesty and morality of women’s clothing.

¹⁰³ Although costumes were typically understood to be ‘contemporary’ in their style, often the majority of costumes would actually be several years out of step with the current fashions wore by spectators.

Debates about the modesty and morality of women's garments abounded throughout the period, and unsurprisingly female performers were often a target of the harshest critiques. Adding further nuance to his initial complaint, Hill explains that "the dress of the player is another article in which we expect a conformity to nature; but this we expect in vain, especially in the women; the characters of an inferior kind, are always overdressed" (224). While these attacks on extravagant dress were largely directed at specific actresses they were also subtly (and not so subtly in Hill's case) applied more generally to theatrical costuming, typically couched under the guise of critiquing the "realistic" representation or "authentic" staging of particular plays. Robert Lloyd in *The Actor. A Poetical Epistle to Bonnell Thornton, Esq; By the Rev. Mr. Lloyd, one of the Masters of Westminster School* (1760) bemoans actors who "overdress" their roles. He proclaims:

To suit the Dress demands the Actor's Art,
Yet there are those who overdress the Part,
To some prescriptive Right gives settled Things,
Black Wigs to Murd'rers, feather'd hats to Kings,
But *Michael Cassio* might be drunk enough,
Tho' all his Features were not grim'd with Snuff.
Why shoul'd *Polly Peachum* shine in satin Cloaths?
Why ev'ry Devil dance in scarlet Hose? (54-5)

Unlike Hill, Lloyd takes aim at both actors and actresses equally, poking fun at performers who are costumed in garments ill-fitting to their character's social rank or situation.

Despite prevalent critiques of 'overdressed' performers, it is evident that by mid-century theatre-goers could generally expect to see a similar range of stock costumes which had accrued cultural resonance through longstanding associations with particular characters. For instance, John Price's inventory of the stock costumes at Covent Garden Theatre in 1744 indicates that much of the repertoire included garments traditionally associated with easily identifiable trades¹⁰⁴ that would have been familiar to audience members. Instead of systematically allocating costumes based on a

¹⁰⁴ The list includes a waterman's jacket, a shepherd's dress, 2 chimney sweepers' waistcoats, a tinker's pouch and apron, 4 sets of herald's livery and 6 Beefeater's coats (in C. Price 50)

performer's role, complex systems of prestige dictated who had first pick from the existing repertoire, who had garments purchased or made for them, and who was relegated to scour the leftover pieces to pull together their costumes (Nicoll 159). As Allardyce Nicoll explains, "[w]hile there were but few attempts to present the dramatic characters in authentic dress appropriate to their climes or times, it was recognized that some attention had to be paid to established theatrical usage" (159), which was determined partly by "the fictional ranks of the drama's characters" but also often by "the positions which the actors had within the company" (159). This complex system of costume procurement created well-documented interpersonal drama between performers which has yielded subsequent fruitful research into eighteenth-century celebrity memoirs. In contrast to discussions of popular performers, the system of production that circulated garments between the commercial marketplace and the theatres has remained largely under discussed, or when considered has been separated into two categories of "theatre" and "commerce" which are retrospectively divorced from each other.

Over the course of the century, costuming (and stage mechanics more generally) were increasingly subjected to scorn and scrutiny from critics who aligned costumes with notions of exorbitant spectacle or positioned them as fashionable commodities. Even when scholars like West have aimed to encourage a more wholistic view of eighteenth-century theatrical production, costumes (and the women that made them) have continued to be overshadowed by considerations of scenery and musical accompaniment.¹⁰⁵ My objective is to present a more well-rounded picture of theatrical production during the eighteenth century. In this chapter, I show that there were three primary avenues through which the large patent theatres in London procured their costumes: the acquisition of second-hand garments, the purchase of new bespoke garments from shops, or the

¹⁰⁵ For example, in *The Oxford Handbook of Georgian Theatre* an entire section is devoted to what editor's David Francis Taylor and Julia Swindells call "The Whole Show" which examines set painting, set design, musical accompaniment, dance and architectural design.

production of made-to-order garments by seamstresses employed in house. By studying costumes beyond their relationship to the famous actresses that wore them, I argue that we can become more accurate and inclusive in our approach to eighteenth-century theatre culture. To this end, I focus on the contributions of women who worked behind the scenes just as much as those of their exceptional colleagues on the stage.

Following the restoration of the theatres in 1660, costumes were predominantly obtained through the trade in second hand garments. This utilization of second-hand garments for theatrical costumes was integrally linked to London's economic development during the period. By the turn of the eighteenth century, trade in second-hand clothing was firmly centered in the capital,¹⁰⁶ and although initially this business had been primarily located in the east end around Houndsditch and Rag-fair (Fennetaux 123), by 1700 another focal point for second-hand garment selling had begun to develop around Monmouth Street¹⁰⁷ and Covent Garden, which dealt in "a better class of goods" (Ginsburg 121). In the anonymously penned poem "The Humours of Rag-Fair" (1765) the author highlights the wide range of objects available for sale from second-hand vendors:

Do you want a coat or a vest young man,
to dress in this good Easter?
Here is Breeches ... and a plain Banjan, for Barber's Man,
and fustian frocks for bakers.
Cheap left-off cloaths for Spital-field beaus,
and black for undertakers.
Here are ruffled shirts and Cambrick stocks,
For young men to lie clean in,
With nice tucker'd holland smocks,
and a choice of child-bed linen. (550)

¹⁰⁶ R. Campbell's *The London Tradesman* (1747) highlights the wealth of the salesmen who sold second hand garments in London explaining that "[t]hey trade very largely and some of them are worth some thousands: they are mostly taylors, at least, must have a perfect skill in that craft" (202).

¹⁰⁷ John Gay in his poem *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716) associates Monmouth-Street with the trade in second hand garments, and particularly "old suits" (48).

Not only does the poem's speaker illustrate the numerous options available for sale from second hand merchants, but the speaker opens the poem by aligning the trade in second hand clothing with other tradesmen. In this short excerpt we are advised that barbers, bakers, and undertakers can all purchase garments associated with their trades at the Rag-Fair. The speaker then broadens the image of who might be interested in shopping for these goods:

Here are stockings for young women too,
Not darn'd above the quarter ...
Come customers, who buys my shoes,
or pumps scarce worse for wearing,
I had them a bargain from the Meuse,
from a woman who goes a chairing,
Five groats a pair, search all the fair, and see if you can match them,
The shops are so nice, they'll have a good price,
although they clout and patch them. (550)

By extending the image of purchasers beyond tradesmen, the speaker emphasizes the quality of the objects for sale and suggests that sensible young women would be interested in the shoes, stockings and other accoutrements as each item was sold for discounted and reasonable prices. John Gay echoes the notion that budget-conscious shoppers could “support thy family, and cloath thy wife” (48) with the purchase of second-hand garments on Monmouth Street.¹⁰⁸ In addition to the economic benefits of buying second-hand garments, Beverly Lemire emphasizes that the trade in second-hand clothing “was a vital reflection of consumer demand in preindustrial and early industrial England” which was a “common feature of English life” (1) that allowed individuals from a wide range of socio-economic classes to own garments that only a privileged few could afford to buy new. With the proximity of such a burgeoning and affordable marketplace steps from the patent

¹⁰⁸ Similarly, James Ralph in *The touch-stone: or historical, critical, political, philosophical, and theological essays on the reigning diversions of the town* (1728) further reinforces the geographical and economic merging of the trade in second-hand garments with Monmouth Street, dubbing the garments sold as “Monmouth Street Suits” (153). Ralph suggests that those who snub the purchasing of second-hand garments are hypocrites who have no fashionable sense and “cannot put on their own cloaths;” ultimately dubbing them “preposterous!” (153-54).

theatres it is easy to understand why second-hand garments were an appealing option for theatrical costumes.

Not only were second-hand garments purchased from bustling commercial marketplaces, but as a holdover from Elizabethan theatrical practices, many of the costumes were donated by or borrowed from “splendidly clothed persons” (Dufford et al.).¹⁰⁹ As Kimberly Crouch explains, “[r]oyalty and other aristocratic women, on occasion, sold their once-worn coronation robes or elaborate dresses to the theatres or gave them to particular actresses” (72). Since performers were typically clothed in contemporary styles (Price 43), the “cast off finery” from “affluent patrons of the theatre”(43) helped theatre companies establish a basic repertoire of garments upon which performers could repeatedly draw. It was not uncommon for actors to use the same garments regardless of the setting or period of a play. Highlighting the prevalence of donated garments in early eighteenth-century theatres, Cecil Price draws upon the records of “a small Bath theatre” which in 1733 advertised that its actors would be performing in “four suits of men’s rich cloaths, and three of women’s, left off by the Royal family” (43). Price’s remarks illustrate that not only did these garments allow the actors of this smaller theatre to perform in rich costumes, but that the garments themselves as “left-offs” of the Royal family were also a draw for spectators and functioned as part of the attraction.

Second-hand garments were used by the patent theatres well into the mid-eighteenth century, and the practice of patrons donating outfits continued under the management of both David Garrick and John Rich¹¹⁰(43). As theatrical lighting techniques improved over the course of

¹⁰⁹ During the Elizabethan era wealthy individuals often donated garments and successful actors frequently bequeathed their lavish garments to the company in their wills (“Facts Sheet: Costumes and Cosmetics”).

¹¹⁰ Garrick’s managing tenure at Drury Lane began in 1747 (Watson 297) and Rich’s at Covent Garden in 1732 (Chapman 831).

the period,¹¹¹ theatres gradually stopped utilizing second hand garments with the same frequency. In her 1785 autobiographical memoir, George Anne Bellamy notes how improved theatrical lighting made glaringly apparent the flaws in second-hand garments. In her description of the costumes for the leading actresses in a performance of Philip Francis's *Constantine* during the 1753-54 season Bellamy explains that "Mr. Rich had purchased a suit of her royal highness's the Princess Dowager of Wales for Mrs. Woffington to appear in Roxana" which Bellamy describes as being "very beautiful by day-light" but appearing as "a straw colour" which "seemed to be a dirty white, by candle-light" (206). Price echoes Bellamy's critique of using second hand garments for theatrical costumes, noting that garments, which may have looked "sumptuous in the daylight of Elizabethan playhouses ... were not so splendid by artificial light" (43). Price ultimately suggests that the increasing reticence of theatrical companies to use second hand garments was directly linked to this problem of their shabby appearance on stage.

While it is evident that the large-scale use of second-hand garments for theatrical costumes had dwindled considerably by the second half of the century, some of the most popular actresses continued to perform in garments donated or lent to them by affluent friends or benefactrices. Bellamy writes of how her patroness, Mrs. Butler, on one occasion lent Bellamy "a number of diamonds" to be affixed to one of her costumes by the theatre's dresser and mantuamaker (131), while on another occasion Butler gave Bellamy several precious stones to create a headdress (88). Similarly, Thomas Campbell in his biography *Life of Mrs. Siddons* (1834) describes how one of Siddons' earliest patronesses, Miss Boyle, "took upon her[self] the direction of her [Siddons'] wardrobe, enriched it from her own, and made many of her dresses with her own hands" (32). Although the practice of actresses donning the garments of their patronesses continued throughout

¹¹¹ Jennifer Hall-Witt asserts that by the 1781-82 theatrical season, "the auditorium of the King's Theatre was lit even more brightly, for the number of lights had increased 50 percent in the previous six years" (27).

the period, an important shift took place in the middle of the century which increasingly saw actresses acting as fashion consultants for their patrons (Crouch 72).¹¹² Despite the fact that they were superseded by bespoke garments in the later decades of the period, second-hand garments nevertheless established an important standard for expertly crafted stage costumes that privileged contemporary fashions above historical accuracy and showcased the lending of lavish accessories or garments by affluent patrons.

It is also evident that performers frequently purchased bespoke garments made outside of the theatre for their costumes. Describing the buzz around the 1761 theatrical premier of Arthur Murphy's *The Orphan of China*, Frances Abington's biographer writes,

[B]ills were posted up, announcing the representation of this much talked of tragedy that very evening at Smock-alley Theatre. The scenery, dresses, and decorations entirely new ... the characters will all be new dressed in the manufactures of this kingdom. The truth was, they had bespoke dresses, to be made in London, on the models of the Drury-lane habits. (*The Life of Mrs. Abington* 28)

Not only is the tragedy itself “much talked about,” but the focal point of the discussion centers around the fact that each character was to be costumed in a bespoke garment.¹¹³ Throughout the period, the purchasing of bespoke garments by, or at the behest of, particular performers was used to offset any gaps in a theatre's existing costume repertoire.

John Rich's account books for the 1757-58 theatre season¹¹⁴ shed light on the cost of purchasing bespoke costumes. In a long list of the 1757 operating costs there are several lines noting payments to “Mr. Meares Taylor” for £8 and 10 shillings on February 22nd (110), and again for £4, 13 shillings and 2 pence on November 26th (113). The records demonstrate that performers were

¹¹² Crouch points to actress Hannah Pritchard who was “appointed as a dresser for Queen Charlotte for her wedding and coronation in 1761” (72), as well as Bellamy who claimed that “women of fashion” came to her regularly for “advice concerning dress for the[ir] ‘birthday and fancy cloaths” (72).

¹¹³ It is also interesting that the unnamed biographer emphasizes the style of “Drury-lane habits,” which is a nod to the reputation of Drury Lane during the period for having the most expensive and elaborate costumes.

¹¹⁴ Photographs of these archival documents referenced here come from Terry Jenkin's article “Two Account Books for Covent Garden Theatre, 1757-58,” The photographs document British Library manuscript “Egerton MS 2270.”

frequently granted the funds necessary to purchase specific garments required for their costumes. In Rich's *Covent Garden Account Books* for the 1735-36 season,¹¹⁵ several actors were paid for the coverage of costume expenses. In one instance actor "Mr. Leach Glover" was "allowed for Gloves the sum of £4 15s" as well as "for a pair of crimson & silver stockings" at a cost of "£1 11s 6d" (206). In another instance, Mr. Francis Nivelon was allotted a total of "£5 5s 6d" (206) to cover the cost of his costumes for the season. These accounts also make it clear that actors were responsible for the safekeeping of their costumes and props, as an unfortunate Mr. Stephens who "acted under contract for [the] season" was charged for the loss of "a crutch stick" which cost him "10s 6d" (206) to replace.

From both the financial records and discussions in the periodical press, it is evident that acquiring costumes for the stage was an expensive process. In *A Letter to Mr. Garrick* (1747) the author highlights the exorbitant cost of purchasing new costumes in a section on "the unnecessary load of expences [sic]" that are "continually thrown on him" as a theatre manager (18). Detailing such expenses, the author recalls in years past "there was a time when the best actors contented themselves with a new suit at each new play, and then too though they were very fine in Tinsel Lace and spangles" (18). However, the author warns that "our present heroes must not only have a new habit for every new part, but several habits for the same part, if the play continues to be acted for any number of nights," ultimately concluding that "these habits must also be as rich as fancy can invent, or money purchase, — in fine, nothing worse will suffice to appear in even the character of a town rake, but such as would become a prince of the blood on a birth-day or even a foreign ambassador on his public entry" (19). Certainly, this flowery account of the excessive costs of theatrical costumes emphasizes performers' penchant for vain overdressing, but hidden within this

¹¹⁵ The edition of these records which I am utilizing here comes from Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume's 1990 transcript of the original records which are housed at the British Library under the reference number "Egerton MS 2267."

scathing critique of theatrical operations is a brief glimpse of the *modus operandi* of the patent theatres.

During the period, costume choice was largely left up to the performer's discretion (Nussbaum 228). As Felicity Nussbaum asserts, "most celebrated women players often commissioned the design of their own costumes and supervised the sewing" (228). Furthermore, Nussbaum explains that "the purchase of elaborate costuming was a necessary expenditure for actresses who sought to maintain star status" (228-29). As a result, the costumes of leading actresses were often lavish, and they frequently drew in spectators who were interested in looking at the garments (Price 45). This system, whereby costume choice was placed largely in the hands of the performers, not only led to a substantial variation in costumes amongst players in the same performance, but also encouraged dissatisfied patrons to target particular actors or actresses when they found them to be overdressed or their costume to be misaligned with a pre-existing image of a specific character.¹¹⁶ Despite the pitfalls of allowing such variation in costume, leading actors and actresses were typically given a dressing allowance (in addition to their salary) that allowed them to go to dressmakers and other garment tradesworkers outside the theatre to commission bespoke garments. An article from *The Gentleman's Magazine* in November 1743 discusses the practice of giving popular actors and actresses a clothing allowance. Breaking down the sources of income typically earned by performers, the article explains that "50 l. for cloaths, [is] added to the actresses account" (608). However, the author quickly adds that this practice is "absolutely an advantage to the manager, as they [actresses] always lay out considerably more" (609). Although the author singles

¹¹⁶ Over the course of the eighteenth century specific characters became closely associated with particular costumes. Price highlights this practice by drawing upon several eighteenth-century texts that all discuss the character of Lovegold from Fielding's *The Miser*. In the first instance the character is described as wearing "square-toed shoes, an old coat stuffed at the neck to make him look round-shouldered" (51). In another source, the same character is described as wearing "square-toed shoes, and little tiny buckles, a brown coat, with small brass buttons, that looks as if it was new in my great-grand-mother's time" (52), and *The Theatrical Examiner* (1757) writes that "all the feeble old men in comedy are, I think, given us with bend back under surtout coats, a stick and squared shoes" (52).

out actresses as being particularly prone to commissioning expensive garments and supplementing their clothing allowance with their own funds, records demonstrate that leading performers of both sexes often spent considerable sums on their costumes, and moreover that “men’s clothes sometimes cost even more than women’s” (Price 44).

By the end of the eighteenth century costuming costs for celebrity performers had reached astronomical sums.¹¹⁷ Nussbaum notes that at the height of her popularity, Frances Abington was granted the “sum of £500 as her onstage costume allowance” (229). Although such expense is initially staggering, it is important to detangle discussions of the production and use of bespoke theatrical costumes from critiques of extravagant actresses or the commodification of female bodies, both of which not only obscure the labour of the working women who made the garments but also demean expressions of femininity. When we turn away from the simple dismissal of overdressed actresses it becomes clear that bespoke costumes were an integral element of eighteenth-century theatrical productions that were of value to the performers, and also drew in crowds interested in seeing the latest fashions.

In addition to the implications of bespoke garments within the theatre itself, the system of allocating individual performers with clothing allowances also stimulated the London garment trade, and in a number of instances forged meaningful links that closely entwined the two industries. In one instance, Bellamy writes about sponsoring the training of a young milliner “in order to learn the art of making mantuas, robes, trimmings, and all the necessary appendages to dress” (232), and makes reference throughout her autobiography to her close relationship with another milliner, Mrs. Jordan, upon whom she frequently relied to get her out of trouble (313). Not only did actresses, like

¹¹⁷ Perhaps one of the incentives for such lavish spending was that by mid-century existing Renaissance and Restoration restrictions on theatrical costumes, which had previously prohibited performers from wearing their stage garments outside of the theatre, were significantly relaxed and the boundaries between stage and society became increasingly porous (Nussbaum 230).

Bellamy, form close relationships with the women who made their garments, but additionally several actresses initially worked in garment associated trades,¹¹⁸ and used their knowledge of dressmaking to their advantage throughout their theatrical careers. The inter-connected nature of these two industries set increasingly lavish standards for stage costumes as the period progressed.

Another avenue for costume procurement, particularly as the century progressed and the theatres became better established, was through textile workers employed in-house. Emphasizing the importance of the large London theatres as sites of employment, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume point to the appendix of *The London Stage*, which shows that over the course of 15 seasons (between 1740 and 1755) there was a “predictable, steady increase in the number of people employed by the growing theatres” (228-9). However, Milhous and Hume are quick to emphasize the challenges related to analyzing data on theatrical employment, pointing out that often such remarks are anecdotal and unreliable. As an example, they reference two “well-known” claims (228) about the size of the London theatre companies: the first made by Colley Cibber in 1728, who suggests that “one hundred and forty persons” were “in constant daily pay” (228) at Drury Lane, and the second, by actors at Goodman’s Fields in 1735 who argued that closing the theatre “would absolutely deprive above 300 persons of the common necessities of life, whose sole dependence is upon the existence of the said theatre” (228-9). Skeptical that the number of employees could possibly increase by a count of 160 over a seven-year period, Milhous and Hume gloss over the fact that regardless of the range of the precise numbers, both of these claims highlight that theatres like Drury Lane and Goodman’s Fields were important centres of employment in their communities.

Although celebrated performers and notable managers often occupy a central position in discussions of theatrical operations, an equal (and often larger) number of individuals were

¹¹⁸ Nussbaum discusses Abington’s training as an apprentice milliner, and highlights how her knowledge of dressmaking was likely partly responsible for her good eye for fashion. Similarly, Anthony Vaughan in his biography of actress Hannah Pritchard highlights her initial training as a staymaker (24) and her familial ties to the garment industry (55).

employed in off-stage positions, which ranged from clerks and doormen to box keepers and dressers. My study is particularly interested in the substantial number of women employed in the wardrobe department as dressers, seamstresses, and charwomen (Rich in Milhous and Hume 225).¹¹⁹ Illustrated in Rich's *Covent Garden Account Books for 1735-36*, of the 26 off-stage employees (i.e. non performers) listed in Folio 189 (which details the wages paid for one nights work "on account of Mr. French's Benefit") four are listed as women's dressers and two are listed as charwomen¹²⁰ (225). Other records indicate that one of the dressers acted as the "Wardrobe keeper" (227), which was a slightly higher paid position with responsibilities including overseeing the dressers and managing the care of all theatrical costumes. Folio 189 tallies everything from the cost of promotional material (16s 6d) to candles (£2 6s 5d) to individual wages for all performers appearing that evening and the accompanying support staff, lists the evening's total expenses at £22 13s 1d. Of that total cost, only a miniscule 8s 6d accounts for the wages of six garment workers.

In stark contrast to the low wages paid to the women working in the theatre's wardrobe department, Folio 183v highlights the extensive costs associated with the fabrication of in house costumes and the general upkeep of the repertoire. Over the course of the 1735-1736 season there are three entries for new-made garments – including "a widow's crape scarfe & 3 hoods," "2 rich suits of clothes" and a "black velvet gown and coat" (213) – commissioned by the wardrobe keeper Mrs. Gould and another woman named Mrs. Porter for a total of £71 9s 6d. Rich's account books also illustrate a substantial pay disparity between male and female garment workers. Dressers were

¹¹⁹ Here I rely upon the reproduction of R. J. Smith's 1818 compilation of John Rich's "Covent Garden Account Books" for 1735 and 1736 (British Library shelf mark 11791.dd.18, vol. 3, folios 177-89) which were published by Milhous and Hume in 1990.

¹²⁰ In Milhous and Hume's transcript of the folio they list 2 "chair women" named "Broad" and "Warwick" immediately following the four "women's dressers" (225). However, in their subsequent analysis Milhous and Hume refer to the salaries of these women as "charwomen" (226). I have chosen to include Broad and Warwick in my number of garment workers employed at the theatre since I believe Milhous and Hume made an error in their transcription. From other records included in Milhous and Hume's transcription of the folios it is evident that charwomen were typically employed throughout the period and are included in the "1703 Company Plan" from the aforementioned records for 1735-1736 and the records for 1760 (227).

paid 1 shilling and 6 d, and Mrs. Grace Gould the wardrobe keeper was paid 1 shilling and 8 d (225). In contrast to the low-paid female garment workers who were employed on a per-night salary there was also an in house tailor, listed as Mr. Grainger, who was supported by an unspecified number of “Taylor’s men” (216) and who received several payments for himself as well as the wages of his workmen¹²¹ totalling £274 6s 4d for the season (214).

Looking at the pay for female garment workers employed in-house several decades later the accounts for mainstage performances at Covent Garden from October 19th to 22nd 1757¹²² echo the relatively low pay of women associated with the theatre’s wardrobe, listing the respective payments to the wardrobe staff as £1. 6s., £1. 8s., £1. 10s., and £1. 2s per evening (*Covent Garden Theatre Account Book, 1757-58*). In contrast to the total wardrobe salary of 8s 6d from French’s Benefit twenty-two years earlier an average of £1. 4s. initially appears to signify a substantial increase in the wages of the wardrobe staff. However, more detailed accounts included in Milhous’s and Hume’s reprint of the account books suggest that as the century progressed an increasing number of women were employed in wardrobe, and were paid less per person than in 1735 (227). Speaking generally about the compensation for backstage work, Milhous and Hume suggest that between 1703 and 1760 “overall the top of the [pay] scale increased while the bottom stayed steady” (227). For the category of non-performing theatrical staff, which they call “house servants” (227), Milhous and Hume explain that “the pay of the lowest ranks actually decreased” during this time period (227), largely due to increased demand in the number of individuals required. For instance, in 1703 four women are listed as dressers with an average annual income of £25 each, whereas seven are listed in

¹²¹ It is evident from Rich’s account books that in-house garment workers were not only a necessary (and often expensive) part of daily operations, but were also participants in the social culture of their workplace, which is highlighted by one of Rich’s entries on 21 October 1736 that lists a payment to “the Taylor’s men to Drink by Mr. J. Rich: 10s 6d” (216).

¹²² These were Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*; Colley Cibber’s *The Double Gallant*, William Congreve’s *The Mourning Bride*, and Cibber’s *She Wou’d and She Wou’d Not*.

1735 with an income of £13 10s each, which is relatively unchanged with the addition of two more dressers in 1760 (227). The same downward trend occurs to a lesser extent with charwomen who begin the century with £10 annual pay for three individuals in 1703, which drops by one pound to £9 each for six individuals by 1735, and remains relatively unchanged for seven charwomen in 1760, who saw only a £1 increase in their pay. In addition to the extra charwomen and dressers, the role of “wardrobe keeper” was also expanded over the course of the period, with one individual in 1703, which grew to three in 1735. As Milhous and Hume point out, the role of wardrobe keeper is perhaps the only female staff position which saw a dramatic increase in pay between 1735 and 1760, noting that Grace Gould “doubled her income as Keeper of the Women’s Wardrobe” (228) during this period. Although it is unquestionably troubling that with the increased demand for labour individual women were, with the exception of Grace Gould, being paid less and less as the century progressed, the relative decrease in pay is not surprising given the dramatic growth of the workforce between 1703 and 1735, where the women employed in the wardrobe department went from a total of eight individuals to sixteen (227). Ultimately, the figures provided by the Covent Garden account books illustrate an increasing demand for in-house garment workers who were busy making, altering and caring for stage garments.

Examining these records illustrates that the large theatres like Covent Garden acted as important hubs for the employment of women in the garment trades. Although the nature of the relationship between garment trades and the patent theatres certainly changed over the course of the long eighteenth century – moving from the initial reliance upon second-hand garments in the earlier years of the period to the employment of large teams of seamstresses and dressers in the wardrobe department by mid-century – what is increasingly evident is that despite their overwhelming absence from popular discourse, garment tradeswomen were integral to the smooth running of theatrical productions.

I want to conclude this chapter by turning to the prologue spoken after a performance of *The Maid of the Oaks* (1774) by Abington, where she proclaims, “I must confess,/ But what’s a character without a dress?²/ Stripp’d of his frock, the verist Macaroni,/ Might issue forth a very simple Tony (Burgoyne 61-2). Not only do these punchy rhyming couplets playfully highlight the integral nature of costuming in creating the necessary dramatic atmosphere on stage, but the third and fourth lines succinctly undress an actor before the audience’s eyes. Divesting the “verist macaroni” of his costume not only emphasizes the importance of garments for both male and female performers alike, but it underscores that stripping the actor from his costume also simultaneously destroys the magic that draws in spectators – simply put, costume and performance are inextricably linked.

Chapter Five: “As in a Mirror”: Milliners and Seamstresses in the Plays of Etherege and Drury

“[S]ome things are relegated to the background in order to *sustain* a certain direction; in other words, in order to keep attention on what is faced”

– Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*

The notion of the stage as a mirror of society frequently appears in eighteenth-century commentary on performance. Thomas Wilkes¹²³ asserts that “the bard and the player happily hold up the *mirror to nature*” (5-6), William Woty advises that those “who write or play” must “consult the mirror of the day” (4), and Aaron Hill proclaims “You call the stage, a glass; and look, to find/ the imag’d passion, and reflected mind:/ Yet, in one point our glass, but ill agrees/ With *yours*, where each his *own* resemblance sees” (115). Although the objectives of these authors differ,¹²⁴ in each instance the mirror-like capacity of the stage is a crucial part of their descriptions of theatrical practices.

Examining the function of eighteenth-century theatre as a “social mirror” Terry F. Robinson explains that over the course of the period the stage was increasingly perceived as reflecting “the social world in a specific moment, both in its moral and material character” (30). This reciprocal notion of theatre and life was so deeply enmeshed in eighteenth-century cultural discourse that it was frequently utilized in a broader context that was not explicitly tied to the playhouse. More generally, theatre as a metaphor appears in works ranging from sermons that espoused how “this very world ... is represented as such a theatre of the divine goodness” (Abernathy 102); to moral

¹²³ William Hubert Miller in his article entitled “The Authorship of a General View of the Stage” asserts that “biographical authorities relying on statements made by biographical dictionaries have consistently proclaimed that Wilkes was a pen name used by Samuel Derrick” (612). However, Miller subsequently concedes that “this problem of the authorship of the work has never been completely solved” (612), so for the sake of clarity I will refer to the author of *A General View of the Stage* as Wilkes.

¹²⁴ In one instance the piece presents a poetical musing on the affective power of theatrical performance (Hill 116), another emphasizes the moral degradation of performance (Woty 8) and a third discusses effective strategies for actors (Wilkes 6).

essays that asked readers to “call to mind the various revolutions which you have beheld in human affairs, since you became an actor on the busy theatre of the world” (A. M. 12); to philosophical treatises that asserted “in the *theatre of human life*, ’tis only for God and Angels to be Spectators” (Bacon 185). By the end of the eighteenth century, the ability of theatre to reflect life (and vice versa) was deeply imbedded in the period’s literature as well as discourses on theatrical practices. So prevalent was the stage’s function as a mirror to life that when Covent Garden Theatre was rebuilt following a fire in 1808 (Thornbury 230) the phrase *veluti in speculum*, “as in a mirror” was carved into the proscenium arch.¹²⁵

In surveying repeated references to the stage’s mirror-like qualities it becomes evident that the reciprocal relationship between life and stage was frequently used as a catch-all statement during the early years of the eighteenth century, one that was aimed at an audience of predominantly male individuals moving through the public sphere. Within this context, the stage-as-mirror worked well for discussions of moral philosophy and the development of philosophical theories of sentiment that were cultivated throughout the first half of the century. As the century progressed, the concept of the stage as a social mirror became progressively more complex. Robinson, in her discussion of the mimetic qualities of the stage, suggests that in the late Georgian era “the very notion that the stage composed a solid or ‘truthful’ ground on which virtuous morals and polite manners could be based” actually “fueled much of the negative response towards the theatre” (32), for “if the stage was indeed a mirror of the world, then what might it mean for audiences to mirror that mirror?”

¹²⁵ English conceptualizations of the stage as both a moral model and metaphorical mirror of life can be traced back to the late fourteenth century. Alan E. Knight and Lynette R. Muir suggest that the notion of the stage as a mirror was fostered by the exemplary function of plays in the Late Middle Ages, which acted as social models (1) in early English society for devotional life (25). Although the stage largely shed its overt links to Christian religious practices during the Renaissance, the reflective capacity of the stage did not disappear, and was instead reimagined in the notion of the *theatrum mundi*. Adopted and adapted by a number of Renaissance thinkers, the *theatrum mundi* came to be associated with the idea that “the world itself was God’s theater” (Hawkins 174), which was popularized during the seventeenth century most famously by Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (1623), wherein the character of Jacques proclaims, “All the world’s a stage,/ and all the men and women merely players” (86).

(32). Fueled by growing anti-theatrical sentiment in the later years of the period, debates about the reflective practices of the theatre increasingly interpreted theatrical mimesis in negative terms, which Robinson suggests followed “a Platonic logic that understands mimesis as a counterfeit practice” (32). Critiques such as Jeremy Collier’s oft-cited *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) suggested that the educative ethos of drama as a social model dangerously glossed over the vanity and self-interest that lay at the heart of performance. As I detail below, these comments on the vanity and deceit associated with performance were linked

to critiques surrounding female bodies in public spaces and a desire to police or regulate the actions and appearance of women in the public sphere.

The shifting landscape of the theatre in social discourse is most evident in the discussions surrounding the literal mirrors which were installed in the auditorium at Drury Lane Theatre during the 1775-76 season (Robinson 33). Mirrors, which became a commonplace architectural feature of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century playhouses, functioned as a visual allusion to contemporary disputes surrounding morality, vanity, and authenticity. Additionally, playhouse

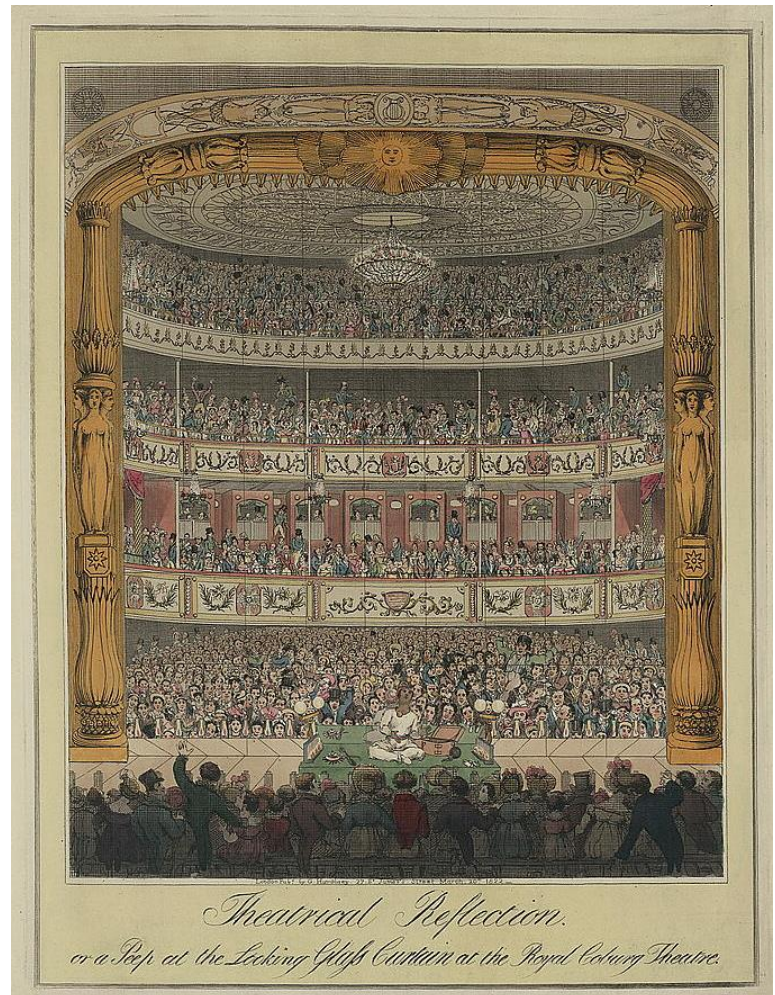


Figure 10: “Theatrical Reflection. Or, a Peep at the Looking Glass Curtain at the Royal Coburg Theatre” (1822) by G. Humphry.

mirrors reflected audiences back to themselves and allowed audience members to see themselves onstage (this phenomenon is succinctly illustrated by G. Humphry's illustration of the mirrors at the Royal Coburg Theatre. See Figure 10). As Robinson points out, the "mirrors transformed what were formerly distinct lines of demarcation [between audience and performers] into effulgent surfaces" that "elicited the illusion of duplication and transference" (36). This transformative experience drew together action both on and off stage and allowed audience members to become "the subject of their own spectacle" (Moody 152-53). Adding fuel to the proverbial fire, plate glass mirrors provided a literal manifestation of theoretical discussions of representation and mimesis. Moreover, by reflecting audiences back to themselves, these mirrors also implicitly began to include women in discussions of subjectivity and identity in a way in which they had been previously excluded.

Whether one chooses to focus on earlier conceptions of the stage as a moral mirror or later views of the stage as a mirror for social performance and duplicity, the broader notion of the stage as mirror draws attention to, and privileges, the objects in sight at the exclusion of a myriad of other elements behind the scenes. Conceptualizations of the stage as mirror have continued to impact the ways in which twenty-first-century scholars interact with plays and performances from the period, often taking them as representative or reflective of eighteenth-century life more generally. Not only does the metaphor of stage-as-mirror privilege the objects in sight, but its continual usage perpetuates the separation of performance from text. The notion of the stage as a mirror relies upon examinations of the objects in sight, or on stage, at the expense of the text and other extra-textual elements. To this end, the mirror metaphor is symptomatic of a much larger problem in more recent studies of eighteenth-century plays wherein "conventional attempt[s] by theatre semioticians (and, one might add, by theatre scholars in general) to 'fix' theatre analysis was doomed to failure because the sociohistorical dynamic which determines meaning, or signification, is constantly shifting" (Carlson 56). Rather than beginning with the premise that the creation of meaning in theatrical

productions is predicated upon the inherently changeable intersections between a play's text, performance and reception, the stage as a mirror is often oversimplified in an attempt to derive a singular "message" from an inherently changeable artform. Marvin Carlson explains this phenomenon as follows: "the staged production was viewed much the same way as the dramatic text upon which it was built or for that matter a painting or piece of sculpture: as a discrete object about the structure and meaning of which the researcher could assemble a body of data, some derived from within the object itself and others from the surrounding culture" (56).

Building upon my previous chapter, which illustrated the integral relationship between garment tradeswork and theatrical productions in London's patent theatres, this chapter examines the representation of female garment workers as subjects in eighteenth-century plays. Looking particularly at depictions of milliners, exchange women and apprentices as characters in George Etherege's *She Would if She Could* (1668) and Robert Drury's *The Rival Milliners* (1737), I suggest that the notion of the stage as mirror merits some further exploration. I certainly cannot deny the usefulness of the idea both for scholars and eighteenth-century thinkers alike, but at the same time we cannot ignore the mirror's function as a tool for critiquing female bodies in public spaces, as well as its privileging of the objects in sight.

To this end, I will analyze the plays considered in this chapter as socio-historical artifacts wherein the works of Etherege and Drury act as a springboard for broader considerations of female garment workers. Rather than dividing the plays into their respective parts (as text, performance, and historical event) and handling each separately, this notion of play as socio-historic artifact brings together these interconnected elements. Here I draw upon the scholarship of Crystal Lake, who maps out the unique function of artifacts in historical studies. Lake proposes that artifacts have the capacity to bring "to light aspects of eighteenth-century English culture that might otherwise go overlooked" (13-4) because artifacts are inherently fragmented. This fragmentation refers not to the

physical condition of artifacts but rather to their position in socio-cultural discourse, where they straddle both the material world as tangible objects and the immaterial realm of discourse as topics of debate. These “states of fragmentation allowed them to enter into the categories of fact and art but also prevented them from settling into either category for good” (16) and “as such, artifacts thrived in textual networks where they could be discursively interpreted” (16). To this end, artifacts not only “occasion ongoing disputes over how to interpret what it was, exactly, they revealed about the past” (13), but also “register recursive, contradictory shifts in themes, tastes, genres and styles in the period’s literary history” (14).

By drawing upon artifacts as inherently fragmented and deeply interconnected objects that have the capacity to illuminate a wide variety of immaterial processes, this chapter extends Lake’s theory beyond strictly corporeal artifacts. Instead of limiting conceptualizations of artifacts to materially tangible objects (like the eighteenth-century coins, skeletons and weapons that populate Lake’s study), I propose the framework applied to material artifacts can similarly be used to investigate eighteenth-century plays. This chapter will consider Drury’s and Etherege’s plays not only as textual objects, but also as inherently complex social entities that gesture to a wide range of processes that have been lost in the intervening years. Instead of handling the plays as strictly literary works this chapter will consider *She Would if She Could* and *The Rival Milliners* as simultaneously text, performance and historical event. Interpreting these plays as socio-historic artifacts begins to take into consideration the relationship between the play’s text as material and reproducible object *as well as* the performance of the play as temporally limited and inherently immaterial. Speaking to the integral relationship between a play’s performance and text Valerie Clayman Pye and Cara Gargano suggest that while a playscript as a literary object is “fixed on the page,” even in its textual form the playscript is always “a representation of the absent performance” (193). Conversely, the performance of a play is both “present on stage in real time” and haunted by “its text, its author and

previous performances” which “hover over it as present but unseen ghosts” (193). Pye and Gargano conclude that both theatrical and literary forms of performance rely “on a spectrum of absence that exists within each respective network,” and moreover that this “interplay between playscript and performance modalities creates a tension of variability between what is, what is not, and what could be: a tension that negotiates an incalculable number of possible manifestations, both materially and immaterially” (193). To this end, approaching the plays in this chapter as socio-historic artifacts opens the door to a variety of interpretations and articulations between playscript and performance which are influenced by a particular production’s director, cast and crew and the artistic choices they make, but also return again and again to the same historic moment.

Considering these plays as socio-historic artifacts draws attention to the myriad of possible interpretations that are illuminated when we attend to plays as both literary texts and performance events. Moreover, the play as artifact also foregrounds the individual experiences and observations of the interpreter¹²⁶ as an often overlooked but nonetheless exceptionally crucial element in theatrical discussions. Anne Ubersfeld speaks bluntly to the substantial challenges associated with analyzing performance when she declares that “confusion reigns” in “the distinction between Text and Performance” (7). Taking aim at Roland Barthes’ famous proclamation that theatricality is “theatre-minus-performance,” Ubersfeld points out that Barthes presents “an endlessly confusing definition” (7). This confusion is generated in part by the malleability of plays:

[O]ne can always read the text of a play as if it were non-theatre. There is nothing about a theatrical text that prevents us from reading it as if it were a novel, from perceiving scripted dialogues as if they were dialogues from a novel and stage directions as if they were descriptions. We can always novelize a play just as conversely we can always theatricalize a novel. (8)

¹²⁶ I have chosen to use the term “interpreter” in this instance as a neutral term that represents both the scholarly observer who is motivated by analytical pursuits as well as the theatre-goer. As scholars we are faced with the difficult task of wading through not only the director’s interpretation of the script, but also the performer’s interpretation of the direction and text, coupled with the audience’s response to a performance, and the relation of one performance to the larger performance history or cultural resonance of a particular piece.

Ubersfeld not only emphasizes the intimate linkage between literature and performance,¹²⁷ but moreover underscores the central importance of the observer in theatrical studies. In Ubersfeld's estimation theatre cannot be boiled down into the separate parts of script and performance, nor can it be expressed by a neat formula. By illustrating the ways in which theatre can be read and novels can be theatricalized, Ubersfeld repeatedly connects the analytical practice of interpreting plays and novels back to the person doing the interpreting.

The "we" is key here. It is not simply that stage and page exist in a perpetual dichotomy, but rather that the interpreter and their interpretation (either through reading the script or performance reviews or in experiencing a performance firsthand) have the capacity to alter the way in which these plays are represented. In tracing our engagement with plays as both playscript (literary text) and performance (temporally limited event), the framework provided by socio-historic artifacts gives shape to the implicit analytical processes that occur when we talk about, write about, and analyze eighteenth-century plays. In other words, by handling these plays as one would historical artifacts – by attending carefully to each aspect of the artifact while also acknowledging that important pieces have been lost to the intervening years – we can draw attention to and embrace the "partial materiality" of the images on display. This is especially true, I argue, when we foreground the roles of the garment workers as both fictional characters on stage and as integral agents of theatrical production behind the scenes. My formulation of plays as socio-historic artifacts draws upon a material culture framework to illustrate the ways in which clothing (both in everyday uses and as theatrical costumes) acts as a springboard for broader discussions of female identity, particularly for working women.

¹²⁷ Ubersfeld is not the first to emphasize the connection between literary and performance in theatre studies. Joseph Roach argues that "the separation of drama from fiction is an arbitrary function of twentieth- and twenty-first century academic specialization" (733).

She Would if She Could is billed as a mainstage comedy and *The Rival Milliners* is a one-act afterpiece that identifies itself as a unique blend of “tragi-comi operatic-pastoral farce” (1). Despite the superficial differences in the generic categorization of these plays, both bear unmistakable characteristics of comedies of manners. As outlined by David Hirst, the comedy of manners centered on “the way people behave, [and] the manners they employ in a social context” (1). Hirst explains that in a comedy of manners “actions ... are unimportant; what matters is the way in which they are performed, or more often the style with which they are concealed” (2). The narrative arcs of both plays follow Hirst’s description of a comedy of manners quite closely. In *She Would if She Could* very little action takes place. Instead, the plot moves from scene to scene chronicling the lengths each character goes to play along with social norms and behavioural conventions all the while working hard to disguise their true actions and desires. Concealment and disguise are prominent themes in the play. For instance, when a discussion between Courtal and Freeman is interrupted, the latter quickly conceals himself inside a closet (6). Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Sentry takes cover in a “Wood-hole” to hide from Sir Oliver (7), and Gatty and Ariana spend a good deal of the play wandering the city disguised by vizard masks (21). Similarly, in *The Rival Milliners* characters aim to present themselves as morally upstanding and virtuous, all the while subtly pursuing their own desires. The concealment of sexual escapades under a veneer of modest conduct features heavily in Drury’s play: Sukey tries to hide a love letter from the eyes of Mrs. Plainstitch (25), while Plainstitch in turn hides her seduction of Pleadwell (15) from her apprentices.

Despite their shared alignment with the conventions of the comedy of manners, both plays were met with substantially different receptions by contemporary critics and audiences. Etherege’s *She Would if She Could* premiered on February 6, 1668, at Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre and experienced enduring popularity throughout the period. *She Would if She Could* was put on almost every year for nearly a century, alternating between Drury Lane and Covent Garden (Schneider 280).

In contrast to the enduring popularity of Etherege's comedy, *The Rival Milliners* enjoyed only a very brief run during the 1735-6 theatrical season. Documented in *The London Stage*, *The Rival Milliners* premiered on January 19, 1736, at Theatre Royal Haymarket as an afterpiece to Edward Young's full-length drama *The Revenge* (544-45), and was performed subsequently as a benefit piece for both Drury (in February of 1736) and the actress Mrs. Talbot (in March of the same year). It is evident that the script underwent major revisions between the 1735-36 season and the 1736-37 season when it was printed for publication. These revisions saw the addition of several tertiary characters including Goosequill, Fieri Facias, Hunks, Trim and Staytape (544). Even in its revised format *The Rival Milliners* does not seem to have garnered much attention and was only infrequently performed. *The London Stage* notes only 4 additional performances of the piece after 1737 (xxvi). Nevertheless, Drury's after-piece is representative of a much larger body of work¹²⁸ and reflects many of the theatrical hallmarks of comedic performance during the long eighteenth century.

Whereas Restoration comedy largely relied upon "the fictitious half-believed personages of the stages" (197), Charles Lamb in "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century" (1823) speaks to the powerful capacity of the stage to represent a much broader swath of society. Lamb argues that later performances presented verisimilar characters; this is highlighted by his complaint that "we recognise ourselves, our brothers, aunts, kinsfolk, allies, patrons, enemies, – the same as in life" (197) as characters on the stage. The plays examined in this chapter present us with characters that, like Lamb's "reconis[able]" personages, have the potential to reflect facets of their real-world counterparts. Instead of staging merchants and other working-class individuals as comic butts

¹²⁸ The comedy of manners was one of the dominant genres of theatre in the Restoration and the early years of the eighteenth century with popular pieces like Etherege's *Man of Mode* (1676), William Congreve's *The Old Batchelor* (1675), William Wycherly's *The Country Wife* (1675) and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700). Not only were all of these adapted and performed throughout the period, but the form witnessed a revival in the 1770s which generated popular new pieces like Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777).

playing opposite the more refined manners of their social betters (Anderson 358), Etherege's and Drury's respective plays do not take for granted that audiences "would have disdain for all servants and merchants" (355), and instead "taught audiences how to read and perform class as it shifted from a marker of birth to a mobile amalgam of economic capital, gender scripts and social affect" (355). In this respect both Etherege and Drury feature female characters involved in garment tradeswork: Etherege's two exchange women, Mrs. Gazette and Mrs. Trinket; and Drury's milliner Mrs. Plainstitch with her apprentices Sukey and Molly.

The presence of a range of working women in Etherege's and Drury's plays highlights a crucial shift in the theatre of the long eighteenth century, which reimagined the staging of class amongst the increasingly economic diversity of English society (355). Drawing upon a material culture framework that positions these plays as socio-historical artifacts, I argue that the garment tradeswomen depicted by Etherege and Drury either have, or accrue, substantial social capital within their respective networks. This not only represents a substantial development in the characterisation of working-class individuals in eighteenth-century drama but, moreover, highlights the unique position of garment tradeswomen as powerful social actors who, empowered by the garments they make and the tools they used, are depicted as being exceptionally mobile within the urban environments of the plays.

Etherege's *She Would if She Could* presents the city of London as a bustling and vibrant metropolis. From the very outset of the play mobility is a central aspect of the narrative, in the movement of characters around the shops in the Exchange, walking in Mulberry Garden, taking carriage rides and patronizing popular "eating houses" (45). Throughout the play Ariana and Gatty, two young ladies from the country and "kinswomen of Sir Joslin Jolley's," a "country knight" (2), traverse the city. Although they are more affluent than garment tradesworkers, their mobility, as imagined in the play, provides an important contrast to the subsequent depictions of Mrs. Trinket

and Mrs. Gazette who run garment shops in the Exchange. Despite the apparent mobility granted to Ariana and Gatty by their social position, both women are concerned with their reputations and spend a good deal of time discussing the optics of social representation:

Ariana: But I am afraid we shall be known again.

Gatty: Pish! The men were only acquainted with our Vizards, and our Petticoats, and they are worn out long since: how I envy that sex! ...

Ariana: The truth is, they can run and ramble here, and there, and every where, and we poor fools rather think the better of 'em'.

Gatty: From one Play-house, to the other Play-house, and if they like neither the Play nor the women, they seldom stay any longer than the Combing of their periwigs, or a whisper or two with a friend; and then they cock their caps, and out they strut again.
(17-8)

In this conversation Ariana is particularly preoccupied with whether or not they will be identified while walking in the gardens at night. By portraying their actions as unbecoming or improper, Ariana draws attention to her competing desires: on the one hand she wants to abide by a social code of behaviour which restricted the movement of affluent women in public spaces; on the other, she longs to enjoy the same freedoms as her male peers. Juxtaposed with the men in the play who “can [and do] run and ramble here, and there, and every where” (17) Gatty and Ariana are forced to disguise their identities to experience the same freedom as their male contemporaries. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White illustrate the substantial pressure on individuals during the period to abide by social scripts, and suggest that “concomitant with the establishing of the ‘refined’ public sphere ... was a widespread attempt to regulate the body and crowd behaviour” particularly in the coffeehouse, playhouse and on public streets (80-4). Although periodical commentary on politeness often focussed on the interiors of public spaces, Alison O’Byrne explains that “regulatory efforts spilled out into the streets as [social commentators] sought to ensure the notions of politeness adhered to in company were also regulating everyday life” (104). O’Byrne describes how in the early eighteenth century, gardens and parks began to be depicted as spaces which fulfilled “the social ambitions” of the middling classes, where “men and women of fashion congregate to flirt, men

come in search of women of light character and City types appear on the Mall attempting to mix with fashionable society” (139).

As spaces containing a unique mix of men and women from a variety of social classes, London’s parks offered titillating escapades for ladies who were willing to conceal their identities.¹²⁹ In *She Would if She Could*, Etherege constructs the nighttime encounter between Ariana, Gatty and their would-be male suitors Freeman and Courtal as a nautical adventure. As the women walk through the park they are followed by Freeman and Courtal. As performed on stage, Freeman and Courtal’s pursuit of the ladies becomes a game that is described to the audience by Ariana and Gatty in terms of two warships “cruising here, to watch for prizes” (21). Ariana proclaims, “Look, look yonder, I protest they chase us,” and Gatty responds, “let us bear away then: if they be truly valiant they’ll quickly make more sail, and board us” (21). Despite the context of being pursued at night by two unknown men, both ladies describe the experience as good fun, and after they have been caught up by Freeman and Courtal they agree to meet them again the following night (24). Throughout this scene the stage directions highlight the movement of the performers, charting their course around the stage:

Enter Ariana and Gatty with Vizards, and pass nimbly over the stage ...
 Enter women again, and cross the stage ...
 The women go out, and go about behind the scenes to the other door ...
 Enter the women, and after ’em Courtal at the lower door, and Freeman at the upper on the contrary side. (21-2)

In this instance the script materializes the action we imagine as readers engaging with the play as a text. Underscoring the highly visual nature of theatrical performance, Etherege uses the stage directions of his script to outline the topography of the stage. Moving across the stage, backstage,

¹²⁹ Stories of affluent women disguising themselves to visit London’s parks at night becomes a recurrent trope in eighteenth-century literature. Some examples include the anonymously penned *The English Women’s Chastity* (1695) and *The Midnight Ramble* (1754). More generally, Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina; or, Love in a Maze* (1725) plays upon the themes of disguised female identity.

and to the lower and upper doors, Freeman and Courtal's pursuit of Ariana and Gatty through the park is superimposed on the physical aspects of the stage; in this moment the invisible backstage and the imagined space of the park at night are woven together. Each time Ariana and Gatty disappear and reappear they are not only furthering the storyline but they are also giving form to the theatrical space around them. Moreover, the emphasis created by the repetition of being seen and hidden engages readers of the playscript in the action of the plot; like Freeman and Courtal, we are wondering where the women will appear next. In this moment the stage directions from the script, the performance of actresses, the space of the theatre, and the broader social dynamics of this particular historical moment are all intimately connected and together contribute to the artifact we identify as the play.

Rather than positioning the playscript and performance as diametrically opposed, thinking of Etherege's play as a socio-historic artifact exposes layers of interconnected meaning. In her examination of literary description in the eighteenth century, Cynthia Sundberg Wall characterises the period as "a deeply material space – a world of things" (30-1). Wall explains that instead of presenting readers with "fully visualized spaces" (1), novels of the period relied on things (which could be anything from the walls, floor, windows, furniture and other objects that occupy space) to "necessitate the protagonist's progress" through the narrative (30-1):

[R]ooms and landscapes can be richly scattered with objects, held together in space more by their emblematic significance than by visual connection ... But the rooms themselves, and any particularities of their features, for the most part arise strictly when called on by the plot... The objects may be lying about waiting to be picked up, but they are not visible to the reader *until* they are picked up. (31)

Although Wall's focus is eighteenth-century novels, her theorization of space works particularly well for thinking about Ariana and Gatty's mobility in this particular scene as both a literary object (in the play's script) as well as a temporally limited performance event. Wall underscores the malleability of fictional spaces. Just as one reads a novel and encounters an entire world contained within its pages,

the stage similarly offers audience members the opportunity to visit a myriad of different places in a single evening. In *She Would if She Could* we move from drawing room, to drinking house, to Mulberry Gardens and back again without ever leaving our seats. The Gardens are materialized through the character's interactions with them as well as the reader's imagination. We begin to get a brief sketch of the gardens from the heading "Act II. Scene I. The Mulberry-Gardens" (19), but the gardens cannot begin to take shape until the characters call them forward. In this particular scene, Freeman asks Courtal, "[w]hat do we here idling in the Mulberry-Garden?" (19), and at his invocation the garden begins to take shape around them. For Freeman and Courtal the garden is a space to bide their time and wait until Sir Oliver gets drunk so they can pursue Courtal's goal of seducing Sir Oliver's wife. The image of the garden is simultaneously created by both the characters as they move through the space, as well as the reader or spectator who are each called upon as active participants in the practice of imagining the garden. Relying upon a variety of authors to co-create the image on stage, both physically at the time of the performance and imaginatively when reading the script, the play as an artifact¹³⁰ returns repeatedly to this same moment in time from a number of perspectives and is deeply reliant on the union between physical and imagined spaces.

The explicit linking of the onstage action with the backstage space gestures to the important relationship between the drama onstage and the backstage. Here, Etherege clearly demarcates the unseen backstage space, which the women use to move unobserved from one side of the stage to the other. The space that spectators can hear but cannot see is nonetheless connected to the performance by Ariana and Gatty's movement around the playhouse. Although it remains obscured from sight, the unseen space is inextricably associated with the stage in a reciprocally referential relationship; the performance on stage relies upon the elements housed behind the scenes in order

¹³⁰ It is important to underscore that the play as an artifact is distinct from the script as a material artifact. The play as artifact only comes into view when we find ways to account for the ephemerality of what cannot be seen, or the "spectres of performance that haunt dramatic texts" (Gavin 60).

to function, and its existence is reinforced because the characters use the backstage space to move from one side of the theatre to the other. The intimate relationship of these two juxtaposed spaces offers a powerful metaphor for investigations of eighteenth-century performances; Etherege's stage directions draw attention to the partial view of the stage we have as scholars. We are not able to analyze the plays as they were performed, and instead must rely upon clues from the script. Just as the objects of a novel are only visible once they come into a narrator's hands, the physical space of the theatre is brought to the reader's attention when it becomes tied to the action of the plot marked out by the playscript.

Ariana and Gatty's nighttime escapades through London on foot are starkly juxtaposed with the daytime errands run by the garment tradeswomen to and from the Exchange. In the play's opening act Mrs. Sentry, Lady Cockwood's servant, is sent to Courtal to arrange a secret meeting on behalf of her lady. Maintaining the appearances of polite conduct, Mrs. Sentry disguises her true purpose (to deliver her lady's new address in town to her would-be lover), by explaining that she simply stopped by on "my way to the Exchange" (7). In the first pages of the script, long before we meet any of the women working at the Exchange, Etherege depicts the practices associated with the selling and purchasing of garments as a legitimate reason for women to move around the city.

The New Exchange was a uniquely female place in the social landscape of London during the long eighteenth century inasmuch as the majority of patrons and business owners alike were women.¹³¹ Visiting from Italy in 1669, Lorenzo Magalotti described the building as containing: "two long and double galleries, one above the other, in which are distributed, in several rows, great numbers of very rich shops ... filled with goods of every kind and with manufactures of the most beautiful description. These are, for the most part, under the care of well-dressed women, who are

¹³¹ James Grantham Turner asserts that the New Exchange was a distinctly "female institution," since it was "largely reserved for small 'female' business such as haberdashery and needle-work" (419-23).

busily employed in work” (295-6). Here Magalotti cannot refrain from evaluating the working women as part of the Exchange, just like the rows of shops and the long galleries. This evaluation of the exchange women who are “well-dressed” and “busily employed,” subtly gestures to a general discomfort that pervaded much of the writing about female labour where a woman’s value was intimately connected to her appearance and her economic participation was constantly under scrutiny, whether it be as a patron of the playhouse, an actress on the stage, a shopper browsing goods or a shopkeeper in the New Exchange.

Will Pritchard speaks to the particular challenges facing eighteenth-century women who participated in the commercial marketplace and highlights the sexualization of female shopkeepers: although their work “could also be defended as [an] important and profitable economic activity that contributed to the nation’s health and wealth” (147), they were often aligned with prostitution (147). This alignment of garment tradeswomen and prostitution is succinctly illustrated in the anonymous *The Compleat Academy of Complements* (1705). While browsing the wares at a “Riband-shop in the Exchange” a gentleman lewdly remarks to a gentlewoman shopper, “*Madam*, your nimble eye where with you do espie the faults of garb and habit, emboldens me to crave your judgement concerning the cut of my breeches ... I wish the Gods would transform me into this Fan, that I am now about to give you, that I might be always puffing into your mouth the breath of my affection” (108-9). The overt sexualization of the female shopper’s fashion sense and the objects in the shop cheapens both the shopkeeper and the shopper for the pleasure of the gentleman. Despite the proliferation of texts like *The Compleat Academy*, a good many contemporary texts worked to counterbalance the sexual overtones of shopping. For instance, “An Answer to the Character of an Exchange-wench: or a Vindication of an Exchange-Woman” (1675) emphasizes the tension between depictions of garment tradeswomen as morally upstanding, hardworking commercial agents *and* promiscuous tempting objects on display: “being generally born to a compitable [sic] fortune, [the Exchange-

woman] wisely shrowds herself under the safe covert of a good trade. To secure her felicity; her shop serves her instead of a nunnery, where being busied with the concerns of a laudible calling, she forgets, or neglects the debauches of the town” (1). Here, the author highlights how women working in textile trades were protected from the dangers of the city by their vocation. However, the author cannot completely avoid sexualizing female bodies in public spaces and adds that Exchange-women are “as tempting as the forbidden fruit” (2). What comes to the forefront in both the depictions of provocative flirting and the illustrations of respectable businesswomen working in the New Exchange is that female garment workers were subjected to harsh scrutiny and objectification irrespective of any substantive links to promiscuity.

Etherege’s Mrs. Gazette and Mrs. Trinket follow contemporary characterisations of exchange women. Before they even appear on stage Gazette and Trinket are aligned with the immoral desires of Lady Cockwood and Courtal, who agree to use the pretense of shopping at the Exchange to cover up their affair, and plan to meet “tomorrow about Ten a Clock in the Lower-walk of the *New Exchange*” (27), where they hope to slip away unnoticed into Courtal’s chariot. When Trinket appears several pages later, she is framed by the usual accoutrement of a garment shop. At the outset of Act III, Trinket proclaims, “What d’ye buy? What d’ye lack, Gentlemen? Gloves, Ribbons and Essences; Ribbons, Gloves and Essences?” (34). Although these opening lines sketch out the contents of her shop, they are overshadowed by the plans of Cockwood and Courtal because the audience has already been primed to be suspicious. Unsurprisingly, the first customer to enter Trinket’s shop is Courtal, who is quickly established as a frequent patron and “faithful counsellor” (36) of both exchange women. It becomes evident that both Trinket and Gazette are aware of Courtal’s reputation as a flirt, but rather than implicating themselves by association they take pity on him and offer their advice. During their conversation it becomes clear that although Courtal is interested in the pursuit and intrigue of flirting with Cockwood, he is not really interested

in taking matters further. Situating Cockwood as a “wicked woman” (35), Gazette suggests that, if necessary, she will intervene during the imminent rendezvous between Cockwood and Courtal, explaining:

I will only step [out] and give some directions to my maid, about a little Bus’ness that is in haste, and come down again and watch her; if you are snap’d, I’ll be with you presently, and rescue you I warrant you, or at least stay you ’till more Company comes: she dares not force you away in my sight; she knows I am great with Sir Oliver, and as malicious a Devil as the best of ’em. (36)

Here, Gazette firmly positions Lady Cockwood as the driving force behind the intrigue, which not only lessens Courtal’s agency and culpability but simultaneously positions Gazette as an influential woman with considerable social capital. Gazette’s connections with powerful figures in the play’s social landscape like Sir Oliver (Lady Cockwood’s husband) means that her mere presence is enough to dissuade Lady Cockwood from trying to steal away with Courtal. This in turn highlights Gazette’s own morally upstanding reputation. Moreover, while she might not wander the city as Ariana and Gatty do, Gazette’s goods circulate the city in her place and accrue influence on her behalf.

Although Gazette is primarily limited to the confines of her shop in the onstage action of the play,¹³² she has a secure position within the play’s social hierarchy. From her long-held respectable premises in the Exchange, Gazette is well positioned to observe others as they come to shop. Even though Gazette is aware of the motivating factors for Cockwood’s visit to her shop, she maintains the pretense of business as a way to investigate Cockwood’s intentions: “I am extream [sic] glad to see your Ladyship here... I have a Parcel of new Lace come in, the prettiest Patterns that ever were seen; for I am very desirous so good a Customer as your Ladyship shou’d see ’em first, and have your Choice” (38). Flattering Lady Cockwood, Gazette works both sides of the situation, aiding Courtal while simultaneously developing relationships with Cockwood, Ariana and

¹³² In one instance Gazette refers to an outing when she visits Gatty and Ariana to take their measurements (36), but this action is not staged.

Gatty, which benefit her business. Gazette's adept management of all parties is highlighted by Gatty who remarks, "Mistress Gazet, [sic] you are skill'd in the fashion, pray let our choice have your approbation" (39). Lace, patterns and handkerchiefs function for Gazette as her entry into the lives of her affluent clients. Etherege's depiction of Gazette positions her as a powerful agent who is well connected and has the power to manipulate the dynamics of the shopping experience to best serve her objectives, whether to sell her wares or to intervene in Courtal's desires to "court all" the women he can. Juxtaposed with the other women in the play, and particularly Ariana and Gatty, Gazette is ultimately the figure with the greatest influence over those around her. It is important to emphasize that it is by handling *She Would if She Could* as a socio-historic artifact that Gazette's social influence and cultural capital come to light. Attending to not only the historical context of the play, but also to the play as literary text and performance illuminates powerful networks of social influence held by women like Gazette who at first glance are relegated to the background. Highlighted by Gazette's powerful position in the play is the importance of surfaces in determinations of social value. Gazette, and the other garment tradeswomen in the play, are able to easily circulate through a variety of public spaces because of the visual significance of the objects they carry. Illustrated by Mrs. Sentry, who disguises her mistress's immoral conduct under the guise of going to the Exchange, the signifying objects of garment tradeswork have accrued social value that relies upon the surface alone. In much the same way that Ariana's and Gatty's movement inextricably links together the unseen backstage space with the performance on stage, working women move through the city empowered by the objects that refer back to the often unseen space of the milliner's or mantua-maker's workshop.

Like the confident Gazette, one of Drury's titular milliners, Mrs. Plain-Stitch, attempts to influence the behaviour of those around her. Rather than influencing her social superiors, as Gazette does, Mrs. Plain-Stitch attempts to control her two young apprentices Sukey and Molly. Initially

Plain-Stitch is positioned as a Gazette-like figure who tries to dissuade her apprentices from acting immorally. When she discovers Pleadwell, Molly and Sukey alone together she is outraged and proclaims: “Bless me, a Man! Incorrigible Jades! What are you both for driving diff^rent trades? Nay, speak not, Husseys, for tis plain, tis flat, tis not the best of work you have been at” (13-4).

Throughout the play, and particularly in this instance, Plain-Stitch frames Molly’s and Sukey’s interactions with their male suitors in terms of idleness. Instead of fully devoting themselves to their millinery work as apprentices, Plain-Stitch implies that Sukey and Molly have found employment as prostitutes. This alignment of improper work, where idleness is construed as the first step down the path of sexual impropriety, is further developed in Scene V when Plain-Stitch catches Sukey with a love letter from Pleadwell. Plain-Stitch again is outraged and declares, “[a] letter, Hussey, therefore give it me – a lye so ready! – this is, Mrs. Smirk, the way you spend your time, and never work... I school’d your idle fellow yesterday, but find my sound instruction thrown away” (25). Directly following an example of “proper” millinery work, when in Scene IV Plain-Stitch sends Molly off to deliver a pattern, Sukey’s romantic attachment is not only improper, but moreover is a distraction from her apprenticeship. Plain-Stitch chastises Sukey for undertaking the wrong type of work.

By repeatedly staging scenes in which the young apprentices are hard at work flirting and are more interested in attracting the attention of the male characters than in sewing or otherwise working in the millinery shop, Drury’s play initially reflects contemporary concerns around idleness and “bad” work, which were commonly connected with prostitution. Bridget Hill asserts that nearly a quarter of women imprisoned on charges related to sex work “were committed for idleness” (106). Reinforcing Hill’s claims, Jessica Steinberg, in her work on idleness, drunkenness and prostitution in London, explains that idleness in the eighteenth-century social vernacular was frequently considered to be a “feminized” crime, and was “primarily applied to the policing of prostitutes” (206). In addition, prostitutes were often charged with being “loose[,] idle [and/or] disorderly,” (209), and

were “regarded as idle and unproductive members of society” (188). Expanding upon the gendered associations of idle conduct, Sarah Jordan underscores the class politics at play in literary discussions of “unproductive” or “idle” bodies and asserts that throughout the eighteenth century, English society as a whole was “involved in the project of defining a national self-image” and an integral facet “of this self-image ... was the idea that the British were an industrious people (63). As such, individuals who did not neatly fit within the idealized image of the working classes as the “hands” of the nation,¹³³ hard at work for the benefit of their social betters, were subject to substantial societal pressure: “[t]o most comfortable-class¹³⁴ writers, the bodies of the so-called ‘idle’ poor were grotesque, objects of fear and revulsion. When the laboring-class body was not industriously engaged in work that would benefit ‘society’ (by which was generally meant the middle and upper classes), it was seen as disgustingly appetitive, dirty and uncontainable” (62). Although Sukey and Molly are certainly a far cry from destitute poverty, the constant refrain of Plain-Stitch dissuading them from idle pursuits at the expense of their millinery jobs creates the impression that working women who desire leisure time are somehow unnatural and must be reprimanded.

Staging the repeated desires of these women to do as they like with their own time, Drury presents a subtle critique of dominant modes for social conduct, which characterized the working classes as nothing more than tools to be used for the economic development of their betters. Plain-Stitch characterises Sukey and Molly as unproductive and uncontainable in their flirtatious desires. However, this depiction of the apprentices is contrasted by their own onstage conversations, which emphasize the substantial effort they put into their work. At the outset of the play Sukey and

¹³³ Jordan points to popular texts from the period like Daniel Defoe’s *Giving Alms No Charity* (1704) and Bernard de Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (1714) as examples of a widespread literary phenomenon where the working body was metonymically reduced to its productive parts (69). Conceptualizing the working classes as the “hands” draws upon notions of the metaphor of the “body politic,” wherein “labourers are almost always positioned as the hands (or hands and feet), while the rich are the head that directs the hands” (68).

¹³⁴ Jordan uses the term “comfortable-class” here as a short hand. She explains in her footnotes that “I adopt the phrase ‘comfortable class’ to avoid the cumbersome repetition of ‘upper- and middling-class’ (74).

Molly are alone on stage finishing up their tasks after what has evidently been a long day of hard work. Griping about the limitations placed on them by their workplace, Sukey compares Plain-Stitch's millinery shop to the shops in the New Exchange, complaining that "I could my sad, my curst condition change with any seamstress of the *New Exchange*; for they can unsuspected cast an eye on young spruce Gentlemen – with, What d'ye buy?" (4). Comparing the two spaces, Sukey describes the milliner's shop as more private in contrast to the relatively public space of the New Exchange. She explains that the lucky apprentices in the New Exchange get "[s]ome respite from fatiguing work they know, in selling of a ribband to a beau; while we! – Oh! 'tis a most abominable shame, our own deplorable hard lot to name' not all the merest youngsters of our trade are forc'd to work so hard, or us'd so bad: There's no one's fate that can with our's compare, in all the streets round *Covent-Garden-Square*" (4). Describing the lucky apprentices at the New Exchange, Sukey imagines how they must benefit from the periodic attention of male passersby as a welcome break from the monotony of their long workday. In contrast to the public attention bestowed upon the Exchange girls, Sukey and Molly illustrate their relative confinement in the shop. Adding to Sukey's description of their labourious work, Molly exclaims, "curst indentures, which have pow'r to bind, in spite of inclination, woman-kind: send me a husband, heaven! ... Blest Marriage! Wish'd by us to be enjoy'd thou mak'st the much more hateful obligation void" (4). Together the two apprentices paint a picture of a relatively sheltered work environment, which contrary to the wishes of the girls, does not afford them with much opportunity to meet potential male suitors. Molly's conclusion that she wants to find a husband in order to free herself from the "hateful obligation" of working for a living emphasizes the fulfillment of idealized female social participation which positioned women's primary role as that of wife and mother. Moreover, Molly's desire to find herself a husband illustrates the potential social mobility provided by an advantageous marriage. Molly believes that if

she works hard at her flirting she has the ability to liberate herself from trade work by making an advantageous match with an affluent merchant or gentleman.

We see the continued emphasis on the hard work of the apprentices in Molly's description at the top of Act 1, where she sets the scene by describing how "the night is come, the happy night, and I have all the labours of the day thrown by; I've laid my Cambrick in a resting place; and put my weary needle in its case" (3). In personifying the objects of her trade as she lays them to rest for the night, Molly neatly maps out the space of the shop. Chiming in, Sukey adds, "[o]h Molly Wheedle, sure our case is hard, to work all day, and work for no reward; behind a counter, like our Cambrick, hem'd, we to eternal labour are condemn'd; and if, as sitting at our work, by chance our eyes on some spruce passer-by should glance, an haughty angry mistress, at whose beck; we're forc'd to be, gives us a saucy check" (3-4). Drawing repeatedly upon the personification of the objects of their trade, Sukey reinforces the relative isolation she feels in the shop, where the apprentices are "hem'd" in behind the counter; they are assigned to their places in the shop just like the needles and fabric with which they work. Here the delineation of specific places for the needles, cambric, and apprentices works to objectify the young ladies and align them with the milliner's materials and tools. Initially, this objectification of Molly and Sukey seems to fall in line with Jordan's assessment of the working classes as the "hands" of the nation. However, pushing back against their initial objectification and Plain-Stitch's constant policing of their bodies, Molly and Sukey begin to unravel the cultural stereotypes of milliners as nothing more than one-dimensional labourers devoid of complex desires. Despite the watchful eye of their haughty mistress, Sukey and Molly are determined to find husbands and improve their social positions. Drury stages Sukey and Molly's desire for and pursuit of social mobility through their repeated refusal to be neatly contained like the inanimate objects that surround them in the shop.

The hypocrisy of Plain-Stitch's constant chastisement of the apprentices' apparent idleness is exposed by Plain-Stitch's own seduction of Pleadwell. For all her proselytizing to Molly and Sukey, Plain-Stitch wastes no time in propositioning Pleadwell once her apprentices are out of the way: "if you a noble Conquest would secure, you should address some Woman more mature. One on whose stern and awful brow appears, the Ripeness and Discerning of her years; one, who the Depth of your Design could see: what would you say to such a one, as me?" (15). Pleadwell consents, proclaiming, "my passion does at high objects drive, I feel the piercing charms of Fifty-five" (15) and the scene draws to a close. Plain-Stitch's seduction of Pleadwell fully undermines her criticisms of the apprentices' idle behaviour. Although Plain-Stitch does seem to regret her actions, proclaiming afterwards, "I am ruin'd past redemption" (16), this is only in reaction to Hunks's discovery of her indiscretion. In what can only be described as a scene of chaotic mayhem, Plainstitch forces Pleadwell to climb out the window (16) and thus undermines the virtuous code of conduct that Plain-Stitch has been imposing on her apprentices. Drury thereby undercuts notions of virtue associated with productive labour by assigning the play's most moralizing lines to the character who acts in the most immoral way. Instead of reinforcing popular messaging from contemporary writers who aligned idleness with promiscuity and social deterioration, the disconnect between Plain-Stitch's actions and advice suggests that it is more important to maintain the optics of virtue than to actually be virtuous.

Even though Plain-Stitch's behaviour might seem to align millinery with prostitution, the farcical absurdity of the situation undercuts any claims that could constitute a serious critique. At the height of this conflict, with Hunks at the door and Plain-Stitch urging Pleadwell to take his leave, Trimstitch (whom the audience knows has been hiding in the closet this entire time and has witnessed everything that transpired) also attempts to run after Pleadwell and escape through the window (17). Unfortunately for Trimstitch, Hunks bursts into the room and Plain-Stitch promptly



Figure 11: "The Charming Milliner of ____ Street" by James Caldwell, 1771.



Figure 12: "La marchande des modes." From the studio of François Boucher, 1746.

frames Trimstitch as a thief, screaming, "Hide me from the Sight; For yonder Thing's a Robber or a Spright. Look to the Rogue ... Secure the 'Thief'" (17). Plain-Stitch successfully diverts attention away from the fact that there were two men concealed in her room, and ultimately has poor Trimstitch arrested for trespassing (18). In all the commotion, Plain-Stitch's immoral transgression is entirely overshadowed by the false threat of a "robber," "murd'rer," "thief" and "villain" (17) breaking into the millinery shop, and the subsequent action of the play shifts to focus on the possibility that Trimstitch will be hanged for his "crimes" (21). Here the farcical staging shifts the audience's attention away from Plain-Stitch's transgression to focus on the ensuing distress of Trimstitch and, subsequently, of Molly, who is horrified that someone might find out she "entertain'd him as a Lover" (17).

Ultimately, thinking about the plays as socio-historic artifacts helps to resolve the tension identified by Marvin Carlson at the outset of the chapter: that between theatre as a constantly

shifting and changeable artifact, and the desire of theatre historians to identify a fixed and unchangeable object. To this end, conceiving of the plays as a socio-historic artifact opens the door to readings of eighteenth-century performances as both inherently changeable and steadfastly fixed. It is, perhaps, most useful to connect these readings to one of the most ubiquitous tools of the eighteenth-century garment trades, the bandbox. Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) vaguely defines “bandbox” as “a slight box used for bands and other things of small weight” (12). Bandboxes were originally designed to transport removable bands for men’s collars, which gave the boxes their name (Herringshaw), but by the late seventeenth century bandboxes were primarily a staple of the millinery trade, functioning as both a safe means to transport hats and other women’s accessories from store to customer and as a storage space for miscellaneous domestic items. The primary function of bandboxes, and their close association with millinery, is illustrated by a number of images from the period. In both François Boucher’s “La marchande des modes” (1746) and James Caldwell’s “The Charming Milliner of — Street” (1771) (see Figure 11 and 12) milliners use bandboxes as a means of transporting their wares or to show off a selection of goods for sale. Emphasizing the ubiquitous association of milliners with bandboxes John Gay in his poem, *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716), writes:

With flattering sounds she soothes the credulous ear
 My noble captain! charmer! love! my dear!
 In riding-hood near tavern-doors she plies,
 Or muffled pinner hides her livid eyes.
 With empty bandbox she delights to range,
 And feigns a distant errand from the ‘Change. (211)

Gay cheekily suggests that prostitutes could escape unwanted attention by carrying a bandbox with them as they moved through the streets of London, since unsuspecting passersby would mistake them for milliners running errands. Underscored in the images by Boucher and Caldwell and reinforced by Gay’s poem bandboxes come to represent a passport of sorts that facilitated unobstructed movement through public spaces.

Turning to the secondary function of bandboxes, Nina Fletcher Little emphasizes the useful nature of bandboxes as storage containers in eighteenth-century households. Little explains that after bandboxes had performed their primary function, of delivering goods from millinery shops, people often used them to store items



Figure 13: “Bandbox.” Maker unknown, 1600-1699.

including “toilet articles and trinkets” (62) “patches or beauty spots” (90) and “to contain hats, combs, and bonnets” (93) and for “fancy needlework and plain sewing” (127). Much like Gay’s sex worker’s closed “empty bandbox”, which “feigns” legitimacy as a container of millinery wares, Little’s detailed survey of the potential uses of bandboxes simultaneously highlights a myriad of objects that *could* be contained within and admits that our historical study of the objects is hampered by a lack of specific detail about the boxes’ contents (xxv). Indeed, only in rare instances do we have an inkling of what specific extant boxes once contained.

The focus on the exterior of the bandbox rather than its contents is also echoed in twenty-first-century museum collections. Many institutions have bandboxes in their collections, but these boxes no longer contain any of their original objects of trade. The internal objects have been lost to time and the boxes are closed and empty. Instead, bandboxes act as a synecdoche of the practices and objects they were once used for. In this way the bandbox as a material object offers us an excellent metaphor for the elements of narrative creation that underpin archival studies – we can only get the general shape of things by looking at bandboxes alone. Although ideally it would be beneficial to historical study to have both the boxes and their contents, the emptiness of the box

isn't inherently a limitation since the boxes themselves act as a springboard that allows curators, researchers and museum-goers to imagine what they might have contained and how they likely were used. Looking to Figure 13, which depicts a seventeenth-century bandbox from the *Victoria and Albert* collections, the curator's notes describe the composition of the box ("made of stiff card covered with leather and lined with paper") and transcribe the faded writing on the label explaining that the box is addressed to a "Mrs. L. Yeovil." Reading further down the curator's list of object details it becomes evident that the box was donated to the museum empty, and in preparation for display the curators have filled it with a "copy of Flemish bobbin lace" and "woven tape with needle lace fillings." It is not unlikely that this bandbox once held bobbin lace and woven tape or other accoutrements for sewing and mending, but the current state of the box is staged with copies of historical objects that gesture to its original purpose. I want to make it clear that I am not calling into question the practices of staging historical artifacts to illustrate their original uses, rather that the imaginative practices that go into the curating of artifacts like the bandbox give material shape to the immaterial narrative creation that drives archival studies.

In the case of the *Victoria and Albert* bandbox, the layout used in the museum's photograph (Figure 13) resembles the bandbox in Boucher's painting (Figure 12), with the contents spilling out of the box as the milliner goes about her trade. The core artifact remains the same, but in a similar fashion to material objects that can be taken from the archive by scholars at various times, picked up, scrutinized, interpreted, reinterpreted and finally returned to the box, the analytical lenses we use shift and change with time. Caught within this paradoxical position of being both resolutely fixed and utterly malleable, artifacts will always be partially material. As Ann Brower Stahl explains, "our understanding of past cultural process will always be partial" (154). However, the partial materiality of artifacts "helps us to move beyond histories of material to produce material histories of past life" (154) and is particularly useful when studying marginalized groups who have traditionally been

overlooked. Ultimately, the bandbox, as an artifact, functions as a link to the material practices that have been rendered immaterial through the passage of time, and gestures to the potential activities and experiences that would have been enacted by those who handled and filled it. Depending on the stories we want to tell and the historical content we want to highlight researchers and curators can ‘pull things out of the box’, so to speak, and draw upon the artifact of the bandbox as a touchpoint in broader discussions of literary narratives, historical letters, legal documents or insurance registers for garment tradeswomen.

Aided by Lake’s emphasis on the partial materiality of socio-historic artifacts, this chapter has traced the ways in which ideas of female virtue (particularly for working bodies) circulated through eighteenth-century discourse. Foregrounding the actions of women working in garment industries like *Gazette* and *Trinket*, who successfully influence the actions of individuals who technically have more social credit, or like milliner’s apprentices, Molly and Sukey, who successfully navigate the rigid expectations for women in public spaces to their advantage by working hard *and* flirting with male suitors, both plays upend the social hierarchies that relegated working women to the background. Rather than obscuring these women by highlighting the beautiful garments they create or dismissing them outright as sexually promiscuous, the actions of female garment workers in both plays illustrate a nuanced picture of the complexities of daily life for female participants in the commercial marketplace.

In many ways the experiences of garment workers and their role in the social fabric of eighteenth-century society closely resemble the garments they created, which were often comprised of a variety of materials and were reused, recycled, reimagined, and redesigned with each new season, taken up again and again until each separate part was absorbed into the circuits of commercial exchange. Like the material garments they created, traces of garment workers have largely been lost to the intervening centuries, absorbed like the lace, muslin and cambric of their

trade into the larger social fabric. However, by embracing their fragmented representation or partial materiality, we as researchers have the opportunity to not only uncover narratives that would otherwise be passed over, but also to rethink the ways in which we approach archival study.

Coda

On June 20th, 1939, horology collector¹³⁵ Courtenay Adrian Ilbert attended a Christie's auction where 161 lots were being sold (Robinson 154). On auction that day were 46 clocks and 115 watches, all of which were described in the auction catalogue as “the property of a lady” (Bauer 2). Ilbert purchased at least 14 of the unknown lady's possessions for his private collection. After his death in 1956 the clocks and watches were acquired by the British Museum (Figures 14 and 15 illustrate two items in the collection). Puzzled by the mysterious identity of the unknown lady with this substantial collection, John Leopold, the Assistant Keeper and Curator of Horology at the British Museum from 1988-93 began to investigate the circumstances of the sale and in 1993 ascertained that the lady was in fact Mrs. Ida Netter. Although Leopold was able to find the lady's identity,



Figure 14 (top): “Calendar Watch” (1590-1610).

Figure 15 (middle): “Horizontal table time piece” (1575-1585) by Hans Koch.

further details about how Netter came to possess such a substantial collection and why she sold it remained unclear.

As a young child I grew up listening to my grandfather tell stories of our family's escape from Nazi Germany in the 1930s; how he was sent away to school in England, how he was

¹³⁵ John Robinson also notes that the British Museum's “outstanding horology collection” exists primarily thanks to “the disposal by Courtenay Adrian Ilbert (1888-1956) of his outstanding private collection, acknowledge in his life-time as the finest and most instructive in the world” (154).

subsequently deported and interned in Canada, and how his mother, Ida Netter, had smuggled a substantial portion of the family's prized possessions out of Germany. I have always known the story of the watches and how my great-grandmother took what she could from the family jewellery firm before the Nazis forcibly stole the business and froze all the related assets. She went first to Holland, and then on to England where she was forced to sell the collection at auction. I conclude my dissertation with this anecdote about my own family history for two reasons: first, to highlight the complex history of material objects that often bear no external traces of the hands and lives that they are profoundly linked to, and secondly, to underscore the vast network of unseen connections that often remains obscured in historical and archival study.

In the first two paragraphs of this Coda I mapped out two parallel but distinctly separate narratives that centered on the same collection of objects. In the first instance, the historical record outlines a very specific series of steps: the artifacts were sold at auction and after passing through the hands of Ilbert they ended up in the care of the British Museum, where their origin remained unknown for decades. In the second account a complex network of personal connections comes to light which illustrates an individual's struggle to save herself and her children. When my great-grandmother's direct descendants are all gone the personal dimension of this narrative will disappear, and the clocks and watches will become just like the bandboxes in Chapter Five. The ways in which material objects circulate through complex networks of interconnection has profound implications for thinking about narratives that have been lost to history. Drawing upon material culture studies as the guiding framework for feminist analysis illuminates networks of connection that work within and around existing social hierarchies. Reading along the surface of material objects allows for a reinterpretation of narratives and an interrogation of existing characterisations of female bodies that begins to bring to light powerful social structures that have previously gone unnoticed.

Moving from the workshop to the stage, and engaging with a wide range of eighteenth-century literary texts, historical documents, and plays this project has traced the central role of dress in figurations of female identity for working women. Although my research has made significant steps toward redressing the relegation of garment tradeswomen to the margins of discourse and dismantling pervasive stereotypes, there is much that remains to be done. Moving forward it is integral that research continues to explore more informal arrangements of eighteenth-century work, particularly work undertaken by women, as these under-examined networks and systems that have long been taken-for-granted are integral to the functioning of English society.

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Appendix

Table 1: Number of individuals listed per trade categorized by business arrangement in *The Sun Insurance Register 1791-1792*.

<i>Business Arrangement</i>	<i>Occupation</i>								
	Spinster	Draper	Weaver	Milliner	Haberdasher & Milliner	Mantuamaker	Haberdasher	Taylor	Dresser
Solo woman	9		1	1	2	1	1	1	
Women and men		2							
Multiple women	2			1	1	1			
Women in tenure of men	2								
Women renting from other women	1								
Solo men		1	1				1	1	1
Multiple men		1						1	

Table 2: Average Insured Amount Compared Across Garment Trades by Gender from the *Sun Insurance Register*

<i>Occupation</i>	Female		Male		Both	
	Individual	Average	Individual	Average	Individual	Average
Spinster	100, 300, 200, 500, 150, 100, 500, 200, 500, 100, 200, 100, 200, 100	226.66	-	-	-	-
Draper	-	-	7000, 1000	4000	6000, 1650	3825
Cotton Manufacturer	-	-	16,300	16,300	-	-
Weaver	400	400	6800	6800	-	-
Stocking Maker	400	400	-	-	-	-
Milliner	600, 200	400	-	-	-	-
Milliner & Haberdasher	400, 300, 200	300	-	-	-	-
Mantuamaker	200, 100	150	-	-	-	-
Haberdasher	500	500	1500	1500	-	-
Taylor	500	500	250, 300	275	-	-
Clothes Dealer	200	200	-	-	-	-
Dresser	-	-	300	300	-	-