Performance of the self in the theatre of the elite

The King's Theatre, 1760–1789:

The opera house as a political and social nexus for women.

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Abstract

This research takes as its starting point the King's Theatre in London, known as the Opera House, between 1760 and 1789. It examines the elite women subscribers who were on display and their approach to self-presentation in this social and political nexus. It makes a close examination of four women who sat in the audience at that time, as exemplars of the various experiences and approaches to attending the opera.

Recent research has examined the performative offerings at the Opera House, the constitution of the audience and the troubled management of the theatre in that period. What is missing, is an examination of the power of the visual in confirming and maintaining status. As a group the women presented a united front as members of the ruling class, but as individuals they were under observation, as much from their peers as others in the audience and the visual dynamic of this display has not been analysed before.

The research uses a combination of methodological approaches from a range of disciplines, including history, psychology and phenomenology, in order to extrapolate a sense of the experience for these women. It applies current understandings of the psychology of dress to writings of the women themselves and commentary from wider society, to build an understanding of the phenomenological experience of sitting at the opera under the gaze of the audience.

The research brings to the field a greater understanding of the dynamic at play at the Opera House. It articulates in detail the importance of the visual to the women in that space and the pressures put on them by their class. It also adds to the understanding of the relationship between the performers, particularly dancers, and the subscribers in the audience. Each had an interest in maintaining the status of the Opera House as a theatre of the great.

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Abbreviations

BA	Bedfordshire archive
BL	British library
NRAS	Nations Register of Archives for Scotland
SCA	Sheffield City Archives

Introduction

> Dress is the most fleeting of the arts, a prey to the arbitrary dictates of novelty and the attacks of critics, subject to endless speculation – and quite meaningless out of historical context. It is, on the other hand, the only art that relates so closely to the narrative of our lives, both as individuals and in relation to the wider world; for clothing is simultaneously intensely personal (a reflection of our self-image) and, as fashion, it is, in the words of Louis XIV 'the mirror of history'. (Ribeiro, 1995)

In almost any age or culture, women have grown up with a sense that they will, in some way, be judged by how they look. Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) encapsulated this in her statement 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (de Beauvoir, 1953). As long as a woman's role and function are determined by a patriarchal society, 'she is all the Other. And, as the other, she is other than herself, other than what is expected of her' (p. 229).

For many women as they grow, expectations from others on how they will conduct themselves and present their bodies becomes internalised and indistinguishable from their sense of self, experienced as part of their own desires (Tseëlon, 2012). The body becomes an object to be worked on and controlled, with a constant sense of an 'other' watching and judging. Self-objectification, viewing their bodies as if from the outside, becomes a part of their self-image (Fredrickson *et al.*, 1998; Calogero and Jost, 2011). For de Beauvoir (1953), women are themselves an 'other' because they are created by civilisation not nature; a woman sees herself and she sees herself being seen (Young 1990, Berger 1972). For Young, it is difficult to imagine one's clothes without also imaging how one will be seen by others. Thus, for women, their experience of clothes is laden with meanings beyond simply covering the body in an appropriate manner.

Expectations for a woman come from many quarters, her parents and family members, friendship groups and, once she is married, her husband and his family. Seeing oneself as part of a group can be a powerful boost to self-esteem, bringing an urge to conform (Frost 2005). However, in order to perform her expected function, she may compare herself to others around her (Tajfel, 1979; Schutz *et al*, 2002). She may also self-monitor her

behaviour (Peluchette, et al., 2006), anxiously constructing whatever seems to be the required front for that occasion (Goffman, 1990; Tseëlon, 1995). She will perform her role in whatever form she feels appropriate to the situation, a function described by Erwin Goffman (1990) in his dramaturgical metaphor. For Goffman, not only the individual but also the function of the group as a whole is important, and pressure to conform may be applied by that group as a whole at moments of perceived threat to their identity.

This is not to say that a woman has no autonomy. Within a group there may be a wish to show individuality, but this likely to be manifested within the expected parameters (Boultwood and Jerrard, 2000). The front presented may conceal other activities that need to be kept hidden, or are simply irrelevant to the current situation (Tseëlon, 2012). Thus, she may weave a path of seeming conformity while at the same time exercising autonomy elsewhere. It is this desire to exercise autonomy within the constraints of a powerful society grouping that is the subject of this thesis.

If a woman's identity is bound up with her body and self-presentation then clothes take on greater significance, they can shape the experience of an event positively or negatively (Woodward, 2005). They can also become endowed with personal significance, enabling their wearer to perform a particular role (Adam and Galinsky, 2012; Smith, *et al*, 2019). They can become a part of the body, a fluid boundary with the outside world (Boultwood and Jerrard, 2000).

This thesis uses research into a women's sense of self and embodiment to examine a particular group of women, the English elite ruling class, in a particular place, the opera house in London, at a particular time, the third quarter of the eighteenth century. It is concerned with how women operated within that milieu at that time and tried to gain autonomy within their social constraints. It uses the experiences of four women to extrapolate a sense of the experience of this space for women at that time. There were many 'others' watching them, both men and women, impinging on their sense of self within that space as part of that group.

By the period of this study the auditorium at the opera had become a meeting place for the titled ruling elite of Britain and a place of display; somewhere where anyone willing to expend the high price of a ticket could go and view their rulers in all their splendour.

It had also become a gendered space and this is crucial to the research. Through the 1760s organisation of the annual subscriptions to the boxes at the opera house was increasingly a role taken by women as part of their social activities (Hall-Witt 2007). It was important to be seen at the opera house and this, in turn, meant that they would be watched. The auditorium was well lit throughout the evening, so all in the audience were on display. The presence in the audience of many society hostesses, women with power within the social sphere, meant that for other women the most important gaze was female. As the century advanced the ruling elite came under greater pressure to prove their right to rule by curtailing their seemingly hedonistic lifestyle. Thus, within this group the pressure to conform to a group identity and the power of their gaze became stronger (Shepherd, *et al,* 2013). Women were expected to visually represent their class and demonstrate status through their dress and deportment; in the face of a threat to this status, any willingness to tolerate dissent lessened dramatically (Jetten and Hornsey 2014).

The period chosen begins in 1760, the accession of George III, and ends in 1789 when the theatre burnt down and had to be completely rebuilt. These years cover a period of change in English society, particularly in its expectations of women, and this affected attitudes within the audience of the Opera House. For the Opera House itself, the period also saw the development of dance from a pleasurable divertissement, both during and between the acts of the opera, into an art form in its own right, that developed a narrative entirely through dance and mime. Dance had always been popular, but developments on the continent reached London and began to give the dance a greater significance.
The audience is the main focus of the research, in particular the elite women and their experience of dressing for that occasion. It does not examine the performance as such; it is not about the costuming of the dance for the opera. However, where the style of costuming has relevance to attitudes to women and social dress of the time, there is a focus on the dance, which was an important part of the offering. There are very few images of dancers in London during this period and they are shown wearing costume that related to the fashionable dress in the audience.

Before discussing the methodology used in the research and the literature that underpinned the findings, it is necessary to set the auditorium at the opera house within its historical and social context.

0.1 The Opera House

> We shall begin with the opera, which is esteemed the politest entertainment in this metropolis. Operas are exhibited at the King's Theatre, as it is called, in the Haymarket. They are serious and comic, and are performed in Italian, for the most part, by castratos (eunuchs) who represent the men, and Italian females. (Anon, 1780, 121)

In 1783, the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, London, also known as the Italian Opera House, published a chart of its annual subscribers, shown in figures 1 and 2. Close examination of the long list below the newspaper chart (appendix A) shows that it included members from many of the most powerful families in the country (Burden, 2013). This section of the audience consisted of peers and baronets, with their wives and children. More than half on the list were titled; Lord, Lady, Hon., or Sir. Those without a title were often members of parliament, or were related to the nobility. Thus, the Opera House, as it was known, had become a gathering place: a nexus of theatre, in the form of opera and dance, elite society, and British political culture. It was a venue for the 'conspicuous display of status' (Hall-Witt, 2007, 3).

Since the accession of George III (1738-1820) in 1760, the ritual and residence of the royal court moved between the relatively small buildings of St James's Palace, the Queen's House (now Buckingham Palace) and Kensington Palace (Greig, 2015). St James' hosted state occasions, but there was no grand central building, open to all, for the display of ritual and the housing of the King's retinue. During this time the Opera House, with its high ticket prices which prohibited all but the very rich from regular attendance, had come to fill this vacuum. As a venue, the Opera House had taken on the aspect of an exclusive private club, where the elite and powerful gathered.
An annual subscription to a box cost twenty guineas, a seat in the pit ten shillings and sixpence, with gallery tickets high up at the back sold at five shillings. A seat in a box at one of the patent theatres cost a similar price to the gallery at the opera. For an aristocrat and his wife with an average income of £2,880 per annum, a subscription to the opera represented approximately one and a half percent of their income. For the average solicitor that same percentage would allow him to take his wife to seats in the pit only twice in each opera season (Hall-Witt, 2007).

The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book (1780), quoted above, considered the opera to be at the pinnacle of the places of entertainment available in the capital. It sat above the theatres, pleasure gardens, private clubs, and assemblies, as part of Georgian public culture in London. It was, however, different, particularly in the style and expense of its performative offerings. London's two main theatres, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, were the only houses granted a patent to perform spoken drama. The licencing act of 1737 had curtailed theatrical activity such that in the second half of the century these two theatres held a monopoly. The King's theatre never held a royal patent, but each year applied for and received a licence to perform Italian opera (Price, *et al.*, 1995). The Haymarket, where the theatre was and still is located, was away from the clamour of traders and prostitutes that surrounded the two patent theatres. It was close to St James's, the private clubs of Almack's and Whites, and the grand new streets and squares being built close to Piccadilly. When the Prince of Wales (1762-1830), a frequent and often drunken patron of the Opera House, rebuilt Carlton House in 1783, he was almost across the road.

The publication of the list of subscribers accompanied a major refurbishment of the interior of the Opera House and served to publicise its grand new interior. What had been a relatively small, dark and gloomy space was now larger, lighter, and grander. It echoed the style of much larger Opera Houses on the continent, such as la Scala which opened in 1778. There had always been boxes at the side of the stage, reserved by members of the royal family. There were also some boxes in the centre of the auditorium, but there is no surviving plan to show how many there were. In 1782 the new arrangement had created three tiers of boxes that ran around the whole space (Price, *et al.*, 1995). It retained the pit, in front of the stage, with its rows of benches, and added two galleries for servants and lower classes at the top. The galleries extended into the roof and would probably have given a restricted view of the stage. William Capon's 1785 painting of the interior, shown in figure 3, shows four tiers of boxes, the upper tier being only at the sides on the level of the lower gallery. Where previously the aristocratic audience had met and mixed in the pit as well as the boxes, hence the feeling of a private club, the new arrangement meant that the women began to be seen only in their boxes; for them, the emphasis gradually changed to a static display. Those of the bourgeoisie able to afford a ticket and wear evening dress, could visit the pit and view their betters, dressed in all their finery and jewels, on display for all to see above them.

0.2 The performance

Throughout the eighteenth century the King's Theatre in the Haymarket held the only licence to perform opera in Italian (Burden, 2009). This formed the majority of their repertoire and Italian singing stars were imported at great expense to form the core of the company. During its heyday, under the leadership of George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), financing for the theatre had come mostly as sponsorship from the elite and for a brief time from the crown; in the form of the Royal Academy of Music (1719-28), the Opera of the Nobility (1733-38) and Lord Middlesex and his associates (1739-47).

For many, the heyday for the opera house was during its association with Handel. He wrote operas in the tradition of grand Italian *opera seria*, generally referred to as *drama per musica,* meaning drama in music (Temperley, 2002). These were classical tales turned into verse and set to music that was largely made up of formal recitatives and arias. By the middle of the century the opera, performed on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, had become part of the elite sociability that constituted the London season (Russell, 2007). One went to the opera-house 'not so much to see or hear Gluck's *Orpheo* or Piccini's *La buona figliuola'*, as to admire the singing of a star such as Pacchierotti or Marchesi, and to chat to one's friends (Price, et al., 1995, 8).

After Handel's death in 1759, financing of the theatre moved to revenue from the sale of tickets and subscriptions under the management of a series of impresarios (Gibson, 1990). From then until the building was gutted by fire in 1789, finances were chaotic and precarious and the theatre often hovered close to bankruptcy. By the middle of the century, alongside *opera seria*, the opera house produced an increasing number of comic operas or *opera buffa*, taking the form of pastiches put together by mediocre composers. Visiting stars would often expect their own favourite arias, relevant or not, to be included in order to demonstrate their vocal skills (Burden, 2016).

Opera sung in English was to be found at Covent Garden and Drury Lane or at one of the other smaller theatres. Music, song and dance were an important feature of their offering, with the main spoken drama often containing long musical sequences which were in effect operatic. Ballad operas such as John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) or Thomas Arne's *Love in a Village* (1762), were always popular, not least because they satirised the style of high Italian opera using recognisable English ballads (Staves, 2006). Opera at the King's theatre was foreign, exotic and expensive, but an important part of the cultural

scene in London. Opera was also enjoyed at the theatres, particularly where the tunes might be familiar and sung on the streets afterwards. Familiar music from favourite Handel operas was often reused in such offerings (Burden, 2007). The patent theatres increasingly challenged the opera house, an example being Thomas Arne's *Artaxerxes*, a full-scale English opera produced at Covent Garden in 1762 (Holman and Gilman, 2001). Opera in English was very popular and was a regular feature of the offerings at the patent theatres of Drury Lane and Covent Garden (Staves, 2006).

Attendance had always been limited by the high price of the tickets, making it a theatre of the elite (Price, et al., 1995). Tickets for the pit were sold on a nightly basis, but seats in the boxes were by annual subscription. This provided the management with much needed finance prior to the season and also gave the subscribers a vested interest in the quality of the performance. Evening dress was a requirement for anyone seated in the pit or boxes, further limiting admittance to the main areas of the auditorium. Anyone else climbed the stairs to the galleries and the few boxes at the sides on a fourth tier. Although the subscribers were mainly from the elite of society, the tickets sold on a nightly basis went to a much wider range of classes (Burden, 2013). *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book* states that in the upper gallery, 'as most gentlemen go there incog. no great attention is paid to dress' (Anon, 1780, 122). Nevertheless, it continues, 'the right hand corner of this gallery from the stage, is preferred by the connoisseurs as the best place in the whole house for hearing the music to advantage' (Anon, 1780, 122).

It was a space where the ruling classes met, socialised and exchanged gossip (Hall-Witt, 2007). The fashionable world was on display, and the ostensible reason for attending an event, to hear an opera or to see a play, was often subordinate to the social performance that contained it (Brewer, 1997). At the opera, a primary function of participating in the occasion was the 'rich, complex, and inward-looking articulation of group identity; at the same time, played out under the public gaze' (Greig, 2013, 97). The refurbishments of the Opera House space in 1779 and 1782, culminating in the construction of a complete horseshoe of boxes arranged over three tiers, gave physical expression to the social interactions taking place in that space. Lady Mary Coke (1727-1811), whose journals have been an invaluable asset to this research, attended the opera regularly, to see friends and gather news of society. A typical entry from March 1768 reads:

> at the usual hour we went to the Opera, where I was told that Mr Wilkes had been arrested for a thousand pounds, but that the debt had been immediately pay'd. he seems to have some very good friends, & people don't scruple to say that Lord Temple is one. […] I saw the Duchess of Buccleugh at the Opera perfectly well. Several foreigners are lately come to England; among the rest a Natural Son of the late King of Sweden's. The Prince of Monaco is expected. (Hume, 1889, II, 217)

On this occasion Lady Mary Coke makes no mention of the performance, her main memory of the evening was the people that she had seen and the news that she had collected.

The auditorium was well lit, 'attesting to the importance of the spectacle in the boxes and pit' (Hall-Witt, 2007, 26). However, this also made it easier to read the libretto as all the operas were sung in Italian (Price, et al., 1995, 34). Each box had lights on the outside that illuminated those seated at the front, usually the women. Thus, with its curtains framing the occupants, each one took on the form of a mini stage framing and highlighting those seated at the front. Those looking up from the pit had an excellent view of three tiers of subscribers seated in their boxes. Anyone interested, in pit or boxes, could gain an uninterrupted view of those attending, with the printed list as an *aide memoir*.
During the period of this study on-stage lighting became increasingly sophisticated (Price, et al., 1995). The oil lights used on stage could be fitted with reflectors to give more direction to the beam, which was already greater than that produced by a candle. Footlights could be lowered below the level of the stage and lanterns masked to reduce light levels, although total blackness was not possible. Operas and ballets often called for elaborate storm scenes which could be achieved with dramatic sound effects and changes in the lighting. However, light levels within the auditorium remained the same throughout the evening (Hall-Witt, 2007). Those seated in the boxes, especially the women in the front row could be gazed at by all at any time.
There was an ebb and flow to the attention that the audience paid to the stage during the evening, as this was a social occasion and the audience expected to move around (Hall-Witt 2007). When listening to the opera, Georgian spectators were traditionally most interested in the solo arias. Fanny Burney (1752-1840) was especially keen to hear anything sung by her friend, the singer Gasparo Paccherotti (1740-1821). In 1783 she noted that: 'Mr. J___, though he talked to me very much, never did it while the Pac. was

singing, or while any thing *[sic]* else was going forward that was worth attention' (Barrett, 1854, II, 234).

The expectation was for a performance of quality on the stage. *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book* stated that: 'The scenes and decorations are usually very magnificent, and executed by the most capital artists; and the dancers, both serious and comic are the best that can be procured in Europe' (Anon, 1780, 122). Dance was at least as important as the opera, and in a similar way to the singers, dancers were imported for each season (Price, et al., 1995). The dance company performed after each act of the opera; one or two between-act divertissements, and a longer ballet at the end. Little evidence has survived of how these productions may have looked, as there are few images of dancers.

The early 1780s was an exciting period for dance, with the growing importance of *ballet d'action*, which presented ballets that depended on a narrative, rather than dance for its own sake. In the 1781-82 season, the innovative ballet master Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810) was appointed, a move that was anticipated with pleasure in the press, suggesting that a sophisticated and knowledgeable audience was to be found in London.

0.3 The subscribers

The introduction of a subscription season in 1721 moved the purchase of tickets into the control of those who organised each family's social life, generally the women (Hall-Witt, 2007).

Attendance at the opera enabled women to observe the shifting allegiances among those not of their immediate circle, and to keep abreast of political developments and changes in the balance of power. In March 1768 Lady Mary Coke recorded:

> Return'd home to dinner, & went to the Opera; the duke of Gloucester was there, & stay'd his usual time, half an Act. Mr Walpole went up to the duchess of Bedford's Box, & when he came back he told us that Mr Rigby (paymaster general) had just received a letter out of the city, saying that Sir Matthew Blackiston (Alderman of Bishopsgate ward; Lord mayor in 1760) had resign'd his Alderman's Gown to Mr Wilkes; this news occasions much surprise. What will he not be at last? (Hume, 1889, II, 214)

Lady Mary Coke's preoccupations were the royal family and, where it impinged on her devotion to the King, politics.

The Opera House also became an important link in the chain of patronage, which allowed mothers to advance their sons by making connections further up the hierarchy. This system, which operated in the grey areas between formal and informal political involvement, was in many ways eminently suited to women, especially those of the social elite (Chalus, 2005, p.112). A mother, anxious to place her son on the ladder to advancement, could petition a man in a position to effect this. Unlike in the growing number of private clubs, such as Almack's and White's, which were factional, at the opera she had the chance to present her son to a much wider group of powerful people. If the mother had a daughter of marriageable age, she could view the range of possible partners, and police those whom she met. Thus, the role of women was to provide a link between family dynamics and the social dimension of politics (Campbell Orr, 2006). In March 1767 Lady Mary Coke, entertaining a Miss Conway in her box and ever watchful for marital alliances, wrote:

> At a quarter after six went to the Opera; less company than I have seen for some time. Mr Damer, Ld Milton's eldest son, came again to our box, which made me conclude he was to Marry Miss Conway. Before the Opera was done, I was persuaded my conjectures were grounded. (Hume, 1889, I, 177)

The women in each box sat at the front looking out over the auditorium, while the men moved around visiting different boxes in turn (Price, et al., 1995). Each box became a mini stage, with the women on show to all those around them; they observed the manoeuvrings around them, and were themselves observed (Hall-Witt, 2007). They could watch the other women and note the men who visited their box. With the help of female relations, young men could court the patronage of society hostesses, as approaching someone to whom you had not been introduced was more acceptable in this social arena (Hall-Witt, 2007).

This social function did not only apply to women; during this period Parliament adjourned each day at four o'clock, enabling members to return home for dinner and partake in the social round. In the 1770s, Frederick Robinson used the Opera House as a key location to meet acquaintances and gather news for his brother, then ambassador to Madrid. The opera itself, he explained, "is long and dull the dances bad, but I always go as I am sure to meet all my acquaintance of all sorts there"' (Greig, 2013, 90).

At this time, under the influence of George III, politics lacked a firm party structure, and the oligarchy operated essentially through the 'politics of influence' (Chalus, 2005, 25). The world of parliament was still the prerogative of a relatively small, largely aristocratic elite. The power networks were conducted through personal associations, connections, and extensive webs of obligation. It was women who operated much of this structure of relationships, through their organisation of many of the social aspects of society, and the restricted nature of access to the Opera House brought about a closeness and familiarity to their surrounding audience in the pit and boxes.

After the refurbishment in 1782, everyone, except those on the stage, were literally both performers and audience, as the building, combined with the differing ticket prices, divided them into strata. The young men and the bourgeoisie gathered in the pit, the servants were placed in the top gallery, with the aristocratic habitués occupying the three tiers of boxes that formed the semi-circular structure of the space (Hall-Witt, 2007). The space at once occupied both a social function and a political one. The number of subscribers was relatively small, a total of 364, so habitués could expect to be at least familiar with many of the others around them (Price, et al., 1995). Of the eighty-eight boxes, eighty of the key-holders were women, and they were the ones who gathered others around them to share their box and spread the cost. Subscribers might choose the fellow occupants of their box on a familial and social basis, setting up the prospect that within their own space the company would at least be familiar and hopefully also congenial.

The Marchioness Grey (1723-1797) and her two daughters conducted annual discussions over who should share their box, something that took negotiations, as can be seen in a letter from her daughter Mary Robinson (1757-1830) in December 1785, to her mother, the Marchioness:

> The only person we can think at all likely to take an Opera subscription, is Mr Bat, who goes frequently to the, & Ld Grantham has wrote to inquire: if both him & Ld Somers could be prevailed with our Box would be full enough to release Mr Carew, supposing Mr Yorke continues his name with us: if neither Mr Bat or Ld Somers should refuse, I know no way of compleating [sic] the number, but as you mention, desiring Mr Yorke to find somebody: Mr Montague seems engaged to us: but return his note for fear

> of mistakes. Should all these Irons fail, we shall be in real distress; (BA, L30/9/81/110)

This complicated manoeuvring ensured that everyone in their box came from a similar background and was likely to share a similar political stance. Thus, each box represented a social set, which often also belonged to a greater group, which might be positioned in adjacent boxes. The chart enables an examination of how these units also formed larger groupings. One side of the auditorium has been labelled as leaning towards the King, the other for the Prince, a visual demonstration of tensions within the royal family. These tensions also played out in politics, with the Prince tending to favour prominent members of the Whig party. The three tiers also began to represent the hierarchy, with the bottom row holding the greatest prestige, as the occupants could converse with those in the pit and be seen to the best advantage. The top tier came to be occupied by actresses and courtesans, and lesser members of the aristocracy, as can be seen in figure 1. The society hostesses, Lady Salisbury (1750-1835), and Lady Melbourne (1751-1818), appear on the bottom row, close to the Duke of Cumberland (1745-1790), the King's brother. These central boxes were the best for watching the performance and being seen by others in the audience. Lady Mary Coke sat in box 3 with Caroline, Lady Aylesbury (1721-1803), directly opposite Lady Rockingham (box 27) on the other side. The boxes on the side were not so good for seeing the stage but gave a better view of the rest of the audience. This would have suited Lady Mary Coke, who went to see others as much as for the performance. Lady Rockingham (1735-1752) went as much for the music; at the side, she would have been closer to the singers and the orchestra.

The chart also shows that on the other side of the Duke of Cumberland, in box 13 was Lady Shelburne (1755-1789), wife of the prime minister. They shared their box, with William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806), a powerful, visual sign of allegiance. The Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806) also used this visual display to her advantage. In the by-election of 1788, having been forbidden by her family to canvas publicly, the duchess invited Lord John Townsend (1757-1803) and the Prince of Wales to her box. Thus her support of Townsend as a candidate was publicly visible, as were her links to the Whigs through the Prince of Wales (Lewis, 2003). For the cognoscenti, their presence in her box was a visual statement that needed no words.
King George III was not interested in Italian opera, and attended infrequently, so there was no royal box, no central focus to the auditorium. When the King did attend,

subscribers were expected to change boxes for the evening in order to make room for the royal party. This was a space where society as a whole, or at least the part of it that attended the opera, could mirror the discussions and struggles being played out in the exclusively male domain of parliament.

During the years of this study, the Opera House underwent several changes of management, and suffered from perilous finances on account of the cost of its star performers. It went bankrupt in 1783, to be revived by Giovanni Gallini (1728-1805), who, as an Italian, was never quite accepted. The glorious and triumphant success of *ballet d'action* and the Noverre season at the beginning of the 80s, was never quite repeated (Price, et al., 1995).
In many ways the Opera House in London survived because it was a social nexus, patronised by the very rich; a group that never completely accepted opera sung entirely in Italian (Price, et al., 1995). During the 1780s due to the rising appeal of *ballet d'action*, and because it did not involve understanding Italian, the dance became an increasingly important part of the evening's offering. In 1789 the theatre was destroyed by fire, leading to rumours of a conspiracy to remove another unpopular manager. Whatever the reason, the Opera House re-opened in 1791, larger and grander than ever, but it never regained the intimate atmosphere that had characterised the original building.

0.4 The research

The impetus for this research has come from a career in the theatre, designing and making period costume for performance. More recently, this has been specifically for baroque dance, which led to an interest in the Opera House in eighteenth-century London. Learning about the format of the performance and the makeup of the audience has, in turn, led to a desire to understand more about the visual display described above. Hall-Witt (2007), Grieg (2013), and Russell (2007), alongside others cited below, all refer to the importance of the performative aspect of life in the second half of the eighteenth century, and this indicates the importance of the visual as a marker of status. The Opera House during this period, with its core audience drawn from the elite, encapsulates this sense of the power of the visual. The fact that it was the women who were the ones on display, and that after 1783 they remained largely static, and were there to see and be seen, takes the need for understanding beyond the merely visual, and into the realm of

phenomenology. The relationship that women have with their clothes is complex and involves touch as well as sight. Taking this further, into the relationship that women have with their bodies, the need for understanding becomes even more complex. This study has used current analysis of dress and the body and applied it to the experience of the women who attended the Opera House in the late eighteenth century.

Society may have changed enormously since the period being studied, however, many of the experiences described in this thesis have resonances with our understanding of human relations today. An elite woman in the eighteenth century, taught from a young age to mind her body and her deportment, with an internal understanding that how she looks will have an effect on her successful achievement of significant life outcomes, does still bear a resemblance to women now. An eighteenth-century woman was expected to take care of her body, dress well, and conform to society's expectations. These aspects could lead directly to a successful marriage and the production of children, her core role in life. This thesis uses recent research and understanding to extrapolate further the visual and phenomenological experience of women in the auditorium at that time, and how this related to their self-presentation and dress.

The research methodology, which is a new combination of approaches, has specific relevance to the gap in understanding of how women used dress in the eighteenth century. It is not simply a matter of how they looked, but how that presentation formed part of their sense of self and position in society. It is accepted, especially since Amanda Vickery's (1993, 1998) research, that women did not live in a separate sphere of experience; they were fully integrated into the public world (Russell, 2007). There is a need for a more nuanced investigation of the motivations behind women's self-presentation, both in the audience and as costume on the stage. This approach is not just in relation to look, as in a history of dress, but closely linked to experience.

0.5 Thesis structure

The thesis begins with a chapter on the methodological approach taken for the research. In order to understand the experience of women in the audience at the Opera House, elements of biography in the form of contemporary writings have been placed alongside modern thinking on the psychology of self-presentation and dress. Twentieth and twenty-first century understanding of the phenomenological experience of women when dressing

for such an occasion, allows for the extrapolation of a similar experience for eighteenth-century women; gaining an understanding of differences as well as similarities. This chapter foregrounds the importance of this approach throughout the thesis.

The second chapter reviews the secondary literature examined alongside the gathering of data. Works on the Opera House and attitudes towards women in the period being studied, have been set alongside theories of dress and the body. In order to reach a deeper understanding, it has been necessary to explore the experience of performers and well as those in the audience.

Chapter three presents case studies of four women. Two aristocrats and two performers have been chosen, to give a varied view of the audience at the Opera House and their response to it. For each of the women their approach to attending the Opera House would have been different, and a consideration of their biography, from both primary and secondary sources, allows for a detailed and deeper understanding of the personal and social pressures that would have affected their approach to the evening.

Each of the four women lived as a part of society, and chapter four examines this wider context. Social attitudes towards women, both audience and performers, exercised powerful methods of control and this is discussed. Primary evidence of the experience of other women from a similar milieu has been used to augment the limited data available from the women themselves. Elite society operated under a complex network of rules, many of them transmitted verbally, and methods of dissemination have been examined, alongside commentary from wider society.

Chapter five combines the biographical detail from chapter three with the wider context discussed in chapter four to describe in more detail the experience for the four women, when dressing for and attending the opera. It combines the two sets of findings to extrapolate in more detail the psychological forces that were at play, and how these affected each women's attitudes towards their dress and self-presentation.

The aim of this final chapter is to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the King's Theatre provide a vehicle enabling women to create a persona appropriate to their milieu, whilst also retaining a sense of personal agency?
2. What part did costume and deportment play in the creation of this persona?

NOTE: Throughout this thesis the King's Theatre, Haymarket, London, is referred to as the Opera House in order to clearly differentiate it from the patent theatres of Drury Lane and Covent Garden.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Recent years have seen a growing understanding of the importance of using visual images as tools for research (Burke, 2001). This thesis is concentrating on the visual aspect of the subjects, as sight represents the first impression that we give to others and has a fundamental effect on their reaction to us. Peter Burke suggests that historians still do not take the evidence of images seriously enough and refers to the 'invisibility of the visual' (2001, 10). It was understood from the beginning of this project that the visual would have to play a major part in the methodology, alongside written records, and would be part of the analysis and the conclusions.

The subject of this research is women in the audience and on the stage of the opera house in London, in the late eighteenth century. The objective is to reach an understanding of how those women created a visual presentation that conformed with social expectations, whilst also retaining a sense of self and personal agency. A qualitative case study methodology has been chosen, deriving from a phenomenological approach. As, alongside the case studies, elements of biography from a wider range of sources is being utilised, this also brings the study into an approach deriving from prosopography.

1.1 Phenomenology as a research method

This research is about people and human relationships. It has taken a particular experience – dressing to be in the audience or on the stage at the opera house – and examined that experience from the point of view of the elite women subscribers. The aim was to relate the experience of being a part of that group to how that would affect a woman and her visual presentation, i.e. her deportment and her dress. The research is not about why the event happened, but about the experience within and during the event.

The phenomenological approach to research is usually taken in order to describe a current social situation (Denscombe, 2007). The social phenomenon being described here, however, occurred more than two hundred and fifty years ago, and so the research is relying on written sources rather than live personal experience. The sources have largely been derived from personal descriptions and anecdotes, considered as generally reliable. It is obviously important to make allowances for the vagaries of personal

recollection in records penned after the event, and this is discussed elsewhere in this chapter. The experience of attending a public performance, where the pleasure of the event may be tempered by consciousness of the critical gaze of other members of the audience, is well known to this researcher.

Phenomenological research also demands a willing suspension of disbelief (Denscombe, 2007). Human interaction can be illogical and messy, and it is important to retain an open mind and not give in to preconceptions or try to tidy up inconsistencies. This can be achieved by adopting the stance of a stranger, even if the phenomenon under investigation is a familiar one. A stranger would have to analyse the situation from first principles and may be naive about how things work. The distance of time is helping in this instance, along with the necessity to examine how the presentation of opera in the late eighteenth century differed from, or contained similarities to, the researcher's present-day experience. For example, the behaviour of people in the audience at the opera in the eighteenth century was very different to today. Members were more vocal and engaged in the performance, whilst at the same time enjoying conversation with friends around them. Close examination of commentary by individuals who experienced this, particularly by Hall-Witt (2007), and Price, et al. (1995), shows that the noise and movement in the audience, and with it the attention of its members, ebbed and flowed during the evening. The behaviour and patterns of viewing and listening may have been different, but the performance on the stage was no less important.

The data collection for a piece of phenomenological research would be expected to come from recorded interviews with the group whose experience is being investigated (Denscombe 2007). The aim is to understand events from the point of view of the interviewee, to see their world as they saw it. On this occasion the data has been collected from journal records, personal letters, and published descriptions. The reliance on data from the past does not allow for questioning to develop particular points, but the data being used is direct; there has been no opportunity for the researcher to lead an interview in a particular direction. The point of view being expressed, and the aspect of the situation described, comes directly from the world view of the participant. For example, it might have been hoped that Lady Mary Coke (1727-1811) would have left a better record of her experience of the performances that she saw, but that was not her prime reason for attending. She went to the opera as much to view the other members of her social milieu,

and observe their interactions, as she did to listen to the music or to watch the dance. The value of her record is in her meticulous recording of a particular stratum of society.

1.2 Phenomenology as 'being in the world'

The discussion above of phenomenology as a methodological tool suggests that the aim is to describe, implying a reliance on the visual and the aural. As a philosophy developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) however, phenomenology involves all the senses, and describes an awareness of being in the world, and how we respond to our experiences (Howson, 2004). A major theme of this research is the women's experience of their clothes and how this developed from social pressures and affected their sense of self. This suggests pursuing the relatively new concept of 'affect studies', and in relation to dress this can be defined as the 'feeling of being dressed' (Ruggerone, 2017, 574). As a starting point, Goffman (1990), has provided a paradigm of social interaction between humans that has stood the test of time. His work was not evidence base, but has been accepted, as many of the traits described by him are fundamental and resonate as observable in daily human communication. His theories have been followed up and reinforced by recent more evidence-based research. It must be possible therefore, to use current thinking on dress to extrapolate meanings from records written by women in the past, and Goffman's (1990) theories have provided a foundation for this research.

Recent studies in the psychology of dress have brought illumination to the experience of women and their dress. Iris Young (2005) described the experience of growing up as a woman, and how social pressures profoundly affected her sense of her body and how to dress it. Joanne Entwistle advocates a framework which addresses the complexity of bodies, and how they are 'rendered meaningful by culture' (2001, 35). But neither of these fully address the important element of the '*affective* practical experience of the clothed body' (Ruggerone, 2017, 577). The work of Sophie Woodward (2005) and Efrat Tseëlon (1995) suggest that there are differences between men and women in the experience of their clothes, and in the social pressures on how to dress. What is interesting, and is the subject of this study, is how women negotiate this difference in order to participate in society. The discourse of their time was internalised and combined with a personal

experience of clothes on their bodies, to produce a visual presentation, that may or may not have felt successful.

1.3 Case studies

The narrowing of the long list of women to a choice of the four subjects suggested that case studies would provide another suitable format for the research. Qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter and Jack, 2008). It provides an in-detail examination of a particular phenomenon, in order to extrapolate to a greater whole (Denscombe, 2007). The variety of experiences of the four women each provided a different approach to the opera house and their reasons for being there. This enabled the gathering of a pool of data from which to extrapolate a more nuanced impression of the experience.

Rigorous qualitative case studies afford the researcher opportunities to explore or describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources. Case studies may focus on an individual, a group, or an entire community and may also utilise a number of data-gathering technologies such as life histories, documents, oral histories, in-depth interviews, and participant observation (Kawamura, 2011). The four women studied in this thesis, two aristocrats, and two performers, offered the opportunity to use letters, journals, newspaper reports and visual evidence to examine their biographies and relationships with the opera house. In the case of the performers, records of their appearances on the stage gave additional information on their activities.

Sophie Woodward (2005) provides a helpful exemplar of the case study method of using interviews. Her subject was the choice of clothes for a particular social occasion, and the success, or not, of those choices. She interviewed three different women, discussing with each their choices for one particular occasion. The approach taken with each woman was slightly different, depending on their character, and the type of occasion being examined. This choice of slightly different approaches allowed Woodward to broaden the discussion in her conclusion and extrapolate a variety of aspects pertinent to many women. The present study has accessed the voices of the two aristocratic women through their letters and diaries. The contemporary record of the two performers, adds to the richness of the

data, allowing the study to examine the opera house from a variety of points of view, in a similar way to Woodward (2005).

1.4 Selection of the case studies

Of the 363 subscribers to the boxes shown in the 1783 list (Fig. 2), 152 were women. Of those women a substantial proportion can be regarded as having been members of the upper aristocracy. Each of the eighty-eight occupied boxes had a designated keyholder, of which only eight were men. From the women keyholders, more than half were Duchesses, Countesses or other titled members of the elite, representing a cross section of that milieu. Initially, the names of as many as possible from the long list were identified, alongside their familial relationships to others in their box. The peerage.com database proved an invaluable tool in this task. For example, Lady Mary Coke was not a keyholder, but she shared box number 3 with other members of her family and close friends. These names were checked against the database of the National Records Office, to discover if there were extant records and letters that could be accessed for further research.
The case studies chosen needed to provide a representative sample of the subscribers and to conform in some way to expectations that were applied at the time to others in the group. However, there also needed to be enough information remaining from the subjects to provide suitable data for analysis. The aim was to find women who seemingly conformed and blended with their peers at the opera, but could also provide new insights on how this was achieved through their dress and self-presentation. An initial list of women was drawn up that included performers as well as aristocrats. It was important to include performers in the research, as there was such a strong relationship between the audience in general, and subscribers in particular, with what was seen on the stage. Professional female performers at the time inhabited an uneasy area within society and this would provide further illumination of attitudes towards social dress and costume for performance.

Several possibilities presented themselves in how to approach the aristocratic women on the list. There were boxes rented by family groups such as the Marchioness Grey (1722-1797) and her daughter, Mary, Lady Grantham (1757-1830) in box 39, Lady Ailesbury (1721-1803) with her sisters Anne, Countess of Strafford (1720-1785) and Lady Mary Coke in box 3, and Lady Rockingham with her half-sister Mrs Weddell in box 27. There

were also several society hostesses in the audience, for example Elizabeth, Viscountess Melbourne (1751-1818) in boxes 16 and 17, and Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806) in box 34.

Scoping trips were arranged to visit archives holding letters associated with women on the list, for example in Stafford, Bedford, Sheffield and the British library.

Letters between the Marchioness Grey and her daughters are held at the Bedfordshire Records office where a selection from the date range of the study were read and transcribed. These letters were delightful to read and they held important background information from their annual negotiations on who would share their opera box. However, there was little to take as a starting off point for an examination of their attitudes towards their dress. This first scoping trip provided important experience on working in an archive, advance procedures, the time taken to transcribe and how to plan for such a visit.

During these first investigations Lady Mary Coke was excluded because extracts from her journals have been widely used as a primary record of movements within the upper classes at this time. The society hostesses were very interesting but also had a certain notoriety and have been written about extensively. The Viscountess Melbourne and Duchess of Devonshire were both members of the *beau monde*, a high profile and fashionable group, often satirised in cartoons. It was this high visibility that put them beyond the parameters for the case studies, as the aim was to identify women who remained relatively unremarked whilst at the same time exercising some personal autonomy.

It was the opportunity to view a court dress created for Lady Rockingham, now held at Hampton Court Palace, that provided a breakthrough moment. Examination of her letters in the Sheffield archive, revealed a description of her reaction to the creation of this dress, which alongside the portraits of her at Muncaster Castle, gave enough information to begin to construct an understanding of her attitude towards her clothes. Added to this was a growing understanding of her relationship to politics, particularly through the research of Elaine Chalus (2000).

Reading around the position of these women in court society at this time also brought a greater understanding of Lady Mary Coke (Tillyard 2007). Not only were their several portraits of her which deserved analysis, but there seemed to be no recent investigation into her attitude towards her own dress. Her journals, written over more than twenty-five

years, encompassed the whole period of the study and it became apparent that with her fixed views on the proper conduct of society, she could be seen as a control subject; a standard of behaviour against which to measure other's actions. Her inability to acknowledge or even name those she considered beneath her might be seen as a drawback, but in fact, noting those that she left out often added further illumination to the fixed nature of her standpoint.

Of the aristocratic women, it soon became clear that Lady Mary Coke and the Marchioness of Rockingham presented interesting symmetries as well as contrasts. They both inhabited a similar layer of the upper aristocracy close to the royal court, and in many ways conformed rigidly to the social expectations of women at their level. However, Lady Mary Coke was a staunch supporter of the King and Lady Rockingham's husband was a prominent leader of the opposing Whigs. The position of their boxes at the opera, on the prestigious bottom level, close to the stage and almost opposite each other, provided a physical manifestation of this relationship.

The initial investigations had shown that two elements were essential to creating a suitable case study of these aristocratic women: Letters written by the subject, and portraits as a visual reference. The court dress worn by Lady Rockingham was an important addition to this, but unfortunately there was nothing similar connected to Lady Mary Coke. However, the three portraits, examined alongside a court dress owned by the National Trust at Berrington Hall in Shropshire more than adequately filled this gap in the information.

There was a substantial archive for both of these women, that could be accessed and read. Lady Mary Coke left journals, written to her sisters over a period of more than thirty years, and substantially published, with the others available through the National Archive of Scotland. Lady Rockingham's letters, mostly to her husband, were available on microfilm at the Sheffield City Archive. Both women had also featured in other research conducted more recently, providing a wider context to their biography. Lady Mary Coke's relationship with Prince Edward, Duke of York (1739-1767), featured prominently in Stella Tillyard's (2007) biography of King George III's siblings. Lady Rockingham's role as a political wife was part of Elaine Chalus' (2005) research into political women of the late eighteenth century.

It is interesting to note that neither of these women had children. For the other women investigated the rearing of the next generation was their most important role and

occupied much of their letters. This is not to say that their self-presentation was not important, but that it took second place to the preoccupation of keeping young children healthy or finding suitable connections for those coming of age.

Two other women, Lady Louisa Stuart (1757-1851), daughter of Lord Bute, and Lady Hariot Eliot (1758-1786), sister of William Pitt the Younger, both provided an interesting collection of letters that have added richness to the wider context of the research. Lady Louisa left memoirs of members of her family, including Lady Mary Coke, that added to the understanding of a woman's role in that stratum of society. Lady Hariot Eliot, before her marriage in 1785, was a young unmarried woman in London writing home to her mother, not only to describe her social activities, but also to reassure her that her daughter was acting with propriety. Their attendance at the opera, however, was intermittent and reliant on tickets from friends, rather than as subscribers who might be expected to have a more vested interest in the institution.

Field trips to Hampton Court and Berrington Hal added to an understanding of the visual, tactile and kinaesthetic qualities of the garments being worn at the time. A trip to examine Baroque opera and dance costume at the theatre in Českÿ Krumlov in the Czech Republic, provided similar insights when considering costume worn on the stage at the London opera house. The theatre at Českÿ Krumlov is one of the few baroque theatres to have survived intact, mainly because it was a private theatre belonging to an aristocratic family. The surviving costumes owned by the family have associations with the opera at the imperial court in Vienna. Operatic connections with London and Paris suggest that the visual presentation of opera was similar across Europe, making them worthy of study in connection with this research.

There were two actresses on the list, found in the top least prestigious tier of the boxes. Mrs Frances Abington (1737-1815) and Mrs Mary Robinson (1757-1800). Mrs Abington was celebrated as a fine comic actress, with one of her specialities being members of the aristocracy and those who imitated them. She was also renowned for her sense of style, being consulted on dress by many women, thus how she presented herself when in public, but off the stage, was very pertinent to the research. As Mrs Abbington made her name satirising members of the aristocracy, it is possible that one of her reasons for attending

the opera was to observe the upper classes; their interactions, manners and modes of dress.
Mrs Robinson was also renowned and made a performance of her presence in her own box at the opera. Her visibility however, came more from transgression of social mores, than from conformity; she was extraordinary and notorious, rather than one of a group. The research was focussing on how women conformed to group expectations, rather than confounded them and Mrs Robinson would have taken the study in a different direction. The archives yielded very little in terms of personal writing by the two performers chosen, thus the approach to identifying suitable performers for the case studies was slightly different. The contemporary response to their life both on and off the stage became of primary importance, alongside imagery as a visual resource.

For the final case study, investigation by this researcher into the portrait of the principal dancer Giovanna Baccelli (1753-1801) by Thomas Gainsborough's (1727-1788), was the initial impetus for this doctoral research. Baccelli provides an interesting example of a performer who, through her long relationship with the Duke of Dorset (1745-1799), also mixed with the upper echelons of society. The research had also hinted at the performative nature of her life beyond the stage, something that was evident from reaction to her appearance in the audience. This could be expected to provide interesting insight into attitudes towards female dancers at the opera house.

These searches were undertaken concurrently, as each facet narrowed down the number of women suitable to study. The four women chosen: two aristocrats, Lady Mary Coke and the Marchioness of Rockingham; and two performers, the actress Mrs. Abington, and the principle dancer, Giovanna Baccelli, offered the possibility of study, partly because there was information to be found, but also because of a desire to have a spread of origins and personalities, and also finally, from personal preference. Lady Mary Coke represented an archetype, a woman for whom the proper conduct of society and adherence to its rules gave validation to her actions and her status within the aristocracy. Lady Rockingham stepped up into that milieu through her marriage and then challenged expectations through her political work with her husband. Thus, she could provide an example of how to successfully exercise an element of autonomy in your life whilst still remaining within accepted parameters, so necessary to the reputation of her husband. For the performers, Baccelli was intimately involved with the Opera House as a professional performer, whilst

also performing a role as the mistress to high status member of the aristocracy. Mrs Abington trod a careful path between being a professional comic actress and consultant on dress to the group she often parodied on stage, a tightrope that would be interesting to examine.

The published chart from which the women chosen were identified represents a moment in time when the Opera House wished to publicise its expensive renovations to the auditorium and it provided an important entry point into identifying the audience in that place. The period chosen to study, 1760-1789 encompasses the time when each of these women were active in their attendance. Their paths would have crossed, if only indirectly, and they would have experienced the same configuration in the auditorium, however different their response to it.
Each woman provided a different aspect and particular focus in their attendance at the opera and could illuminate a different aspect of attitudes and expectations towards dress and self-presentation for women in society. The details of their biography, taken together, provide a rich mix of data about the opera house from which to conduct a phenomenological investigation.

1.5 Prosopography

The chosen combination of aspects of biography from a group of people rather than a single case study suggested prosopography as a suitable category for the approach being taken in the research. Prosopography studies details of individual biography in order to define the connexion between them, and how they operated within a social structure (Keats-Rohan, 2007). Chalus (2000), is considered to have taken a prosopographical approach to her study of elite women in political life (Campbell Orr, 2006). Her use of letters and diaries, combined with biographical data, certainly confirms this definition, and she has provided a valuable exemplar for this thesis.
The approach taken differs slightly, however, from some definitions of prosopography as a method, where the expectation is to use a questionnaire to collect the data (Verboven, *et al*., 2007). It would not have been possible to gather the same information from each subject in order to create a comparison in this way. The information on personal dress, and attitudes to dress in general, from the women studied was variable, as was the source of that information. The two aristocrats left journals and letters, and although discussion

of dress is scarce in both cases, it is still possible to extrapolate opinions and attitudes. Their opinions are primary and personal. The two performers have left little in terms of primary information, however it is possible to use the opinions of others and the visual records left of their appearance to reach a position on their visual presentation. The gathering of this data and the analysis conducted could therefore be considered as prosopography, as it has used relevant details from a group of people to construct a larger picture.

1.6 Journals and letters

Letters and diaries have the potential to illuminate the personal voice of people who experienced the opera house in the late eighteenth century. They allow the voices of the women of that time to be heard. Such records need to be approached with some caution, and should be regarded as '*personal* rather than *private* texts' (Stowe, 2002). They may give an insight into a person's subjective experience, but are seldom written unmediated by the sense of an audience, however abstract (Sangha and Willis, 2016). Such documents need to be considered in the social and historical context in which they were produced and considering intellectual conventions. Letters in particular often have customs of style, particularly in the opening and closing sentences. Lady Rockingham, although she seldom opens with a greeting, but goes directly to her missive, nevertheless always closes with a similar formal ending, albeit an affectionate one. Such conventions would have been learnt as a child; they indicate some form of education, rather than any particular literary merit.

Lady Mary Coke refers to her letters as journals, as they were written over several days each week, in order to apprise her sister of happenings in London. These extensive journals were written over twenty-five years, giving an unprecedented window into the movements of the upper classes during the second half of the eighteenth century. The value of her contribution is in the understanding she gives of how an upper-class woman, who adhered to society's rules to the letter and without question, viewed those around her who had a less rigid view of the world.

Extant records written by women at this time are fragmentary, as female correspondence was considered to be trivial (Chalus, 2000). It is possible that Lady Rockingham's correspondence only survived because it was lodged with her husband's in the family muniments. Letters from several of the women quoted in this research were published by family members a generation or two later, possibly as quaint relics from a previous age. The letters of Lady Louisa Stuart (Clark, 1896) and Lady Hariot Pitt (Headlam, 1914) are examples of this practice, and account has to be taken of the editor, who may have carefully chosen letters to preserve a chosen view of the correspondent. The letters of both these women, however, still provide valuable evidence on how young women in high society conducted their lives, and the pressures that they were put under to conform to parental guidance.

The analysis might be seen as relying heavily on the twenty-five-year span of letters written by Lady Mary Coke, but she was chosen partly for this reason. She is often quoted in research for this period, but close examination of her biography has lent a nuance to the understanding of her motivations, seldom found elsewhere. This researcher has found nothing written about her attitude towards her dress, a vital component in her self-presentation as an upper-class woman. She is often critical of others, especially at court, but there are moments when her own dress takes on an unusual importance and adds a new element to the examination of her character.
She was a fascinating character, and also left an unparalleled record of the lives of women in the second half of the eighteenth century. Stella Tillyard (2007), whose close investigation of George III and his siblings has been an invaluable asset to this research, pointed the way to this conclusion.

The performers have not left a similar written record in this way, but contemporaneous sources add to the understanding of their attendance at the opera. Mrs Abington visited the opera to observe the upper classes, for the purposes of her comedic performances at the theatre. Giovanna Baccelli was a very popular performer, and after her retirement sat in a box with her aristocratic lover. Each of the four women provide a different aspect and experience in building a picture of the world of that auditorium.

1.7 Artefacts – letters, dress and portraiture

The letters discussed could also be regarded as artefacts. It is essential, wherever possible to see and handle the actual letters, as the size and weight of paper, its colour, and the style of the handwriting, all add to the sense of the author, and their intentions for the letter (Stowe, 2002). This is not as easy as it might seem, as not all archives allow access to the originals. Lady Rockingham's letters have to be read on microfilm, which adds another layer between the reader and the original writer. Even viewed on a screen, however, it was possible to gain a sense of her personality from her handwriting and the style of her letters. They all gave the impression of having been written at speed, writing as she thought, rather than stopping to compose careful sentences.

The first nine years of Lady Mary Coke's letters have been published (Hume, 1889b). Sixteen further years are available but are only accessible with permission from the Hume family, via the National Archive of Scotland. The trip to Edinburgh to view the artefacts was invaluable, in that it gave further insight into Lady Mary Coke's character. The letters were uniform in size, a single sheet folded in half to give four sides to write on. Her handwriting is neat and easy to read, and each individual letter contains a week of journal, suggesting forethought as to how much could be contained for each day. They were written chronologically, but sometimes she returned to the day or so before, if subsequent events give more insight, or maybe because she saw that she had room in her preordained space for more writing. All these observations gave more insight into the characters of the writers.

Other objects can offer up similar insights. A gown, shown in figure 4, made for Lady Rockingham is now owned by Kensington Palace. The provenance leads directly to her as having been the wearer of the dress, however there is no record of the occasion for which it was made. It may have been for King George III's coronation in 1761, or for her husband's inauguration at court on the occasion of becoming prime minister in 1765. The dress, made of an extremely expensive French fabric, has been preserved in almost mint condition, suggesting that it was of great significance to her, and was put away carefully. Put together with comments in her letters about a very expensive dress, this combination of artefacts helps to build a more detailed picture of Lady Rockingham and her relationship with her clothes. Relatively little women's dress has survived from the

eighteenth century, as the lengths of fabric needed to make the skirts, worn over paniers, were used and re-used. The huge expense for Lady Rockingham's dress and the fine gold and silver thread of the weave may have made it impossible to re-use, and this is partly why it has survived.

Even less physical evidence has survived of costume for performance. Theatres, including the opera were always short of money and costumes were used and re-made until they were unusable (this is still so today). There is a rare survival of Baroque costume in a theatre at Českÿ Krumlov in the Czech Republic. It owes its survival to the fact that the theatre was private, belonging to the Schwarzenberg family, who were prominent members of the court at Vienna. There are pictures on the internet of some of the costumes, shown in figure 5, but visiting the theatre costume store in person gave extraordinary insight into the look and composition of these garments. Several have been identified as having come from the opera house in Vienna, giving a sense of the magnificence of their productions. There is a direct correlation between productions in Vienna and those at the Paris Opéra, and from there to London, as many French dancers moved between Paris and London. It is quite feasible to imagine that the productions in London at the very least attempted to equal the style and composition of these costumes. A visit to the Museum of Costume in Bath provided an opportunity to view dress from the period. Part of the fascination of their collection is the development of style and silhouette over the period of the study. Alongside style, the variation in fabrics and colours added to an understanding of the visual aspect of the women in the audience.

Another important set of artefacts are contemporary portraits. Portraiture reached new heights of popularity during the second half of the century, and the growing number of performers being depicted in this way brought new tensions and significance to the genre. Aileen Ribeiro (2003, 2010), has shown how the analysis of dress being worn in portraits in the context of their production can provide valuable insights into the sitter and their motivations, adding yet more richness to their biography. Set alongside the discourse of the time on female propriety, it is interesting to note the gestures of conformity, and moments of challenge, presented by the female subjects of these portraits.
A missing set of artefacts was the set of costume designs for the opera described by Sybil Rosenfeld (1976). At the time of writing their whereabouts are unknown, but investigations to find them are underway.

1.8 Fiction written by women

Three epistolary novels written by women in the period being studied have provided valuable information for this thesis. *Evelina* by Frances Burney (1777) and *The Excursion* by Frances Brooke (1777) both include a visit to the opera as a narrative device. Both authors knew and understood the opera and the theatre well. Frances Brooke had been a manager of the opera house alongside Mrs Yates in the 1770s (Price, et al. 1995), and the Burney family were friendly with both Garrick and Sheridan (Chisholm, 1999). Both authors used an outing to the opera to show up the social inadequacies of the company forced upon their heroine. They also each play on the fact that you could expect the audience to contain a wide section of the upper class, by having the heroine bump into the object of her affection while she is in dubious, and therefore embarrassing, company.

The third novel that has been consulted was written by the Duchess of Devonshire (Cavendish, 1779). *The Sylph* describes the arrival in London of an innocent young country-girl who has married an aristocratic libertine. The Sylph of the title is a childhood admirer who appoints himself as her epistolary guardian and guides her through the complications of metropolitan life. One of the biggest changes that the heroine must face is modes of dress, or rather overdressing, for the elite society that she now inhabits. The novel contains several amusing descriptions of her experiences in the hands of a French hairdresser and a lady's maid to a woman of high fashion.

Each of these novels tend towards satire in their descriptions of these events, but also give useful insight into reactions to these occasions, which are directly relevant to the research. They all give a sense of the opinions held at the time towards the opera and high fashion and provide further nuance to the picture being built up of the women at the opera in that period.

1.9 Imagination as a methodological tool

There have been two occasions in the writing of this methodology where the word 'imagination' has appeared attached to a research method: historical imagination (Burke, 2001), and sociological imagination (Kawamura, 2011). For Burke, images are not simply

evidence, but have an impact on the 'historical imagination' (2001, 13). They allow us to share in non-verbal remains of experiences and understandings. Items in pictures bring home aspects of the past that have always been known, but may not have been taken seriously before. A visual image brings the researcher literally face-to-face with the past, and allows researchers to imagine the past more vividly. Kawamura (2011) cites C. Wright Mills (1959) concept of sociological imagination, as a method for understanding fashion and dress. For her, using the sociological imagination means recognising the connection between 'individual, private experience and the wider society' (2011, 36). Mills' work in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), calls on us to make connexions between 'public issues and private troubles', and between 'history and biography' (Gane and Back, 2012, 402). Mills advocates 'the capacity to shift from one perspective to another – from the political to the psychological' (1959, 410).

Applying sociological imagination to the research expands the perspective, and allows you to see how the biography of the subject, or subjects, fits into a larger, more complex picture; the history of which those biographies were a part (Kawamura, 2011).
In the case of this investigation, years of working in the theatre, making costumes, dealing with temperamental artistes and designers, have given this researcher a bedrock of understanding of garments, both as dress and costume, and a response to the visual that is instinctive and intuitive. The imagination comes into play when recognising familiar tropes, interactions and responses, this understanding has been invaluable in the conduct of this research.

1.10 Chapter summary

This research has used a new combination of methodological approaches in order to gather a body of information from which to extrapolate a sense of the women's approach to attending the opera. It was necessary to be able to combine aspects of biography and the physical nature of the actual garments with modern theories of the psychology of dress and social interaction, in order to build a picture of the women's experience. This enabled the research to come as close as possible to understanding their attitudes to dressing for that place; affect studies applied to the late eighteenth century. The time gap made it impossible to directly interview the participants, the method used by Woodward and Tsëelon, but the personal accounts examined, combined with the psychological

investigations discussed above, do however, allow for substantial progress down that road. This is a new method for the examination of historical subjects, a way of combining recent understandings of the complex relationship that women have with their clothed bodies alongside the experience of women from a previous age.

Chapter 2: The eighteenth-century context

> A social establishment is any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place […] Within the walls of a social establishment we find a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of a situation (Goffman, 1990, 231).

2.1 The opera house

For Erving Goffman, those walls were metaphorical, the performers and audience a shifting set of people within a social interaction. In the late eighteenth century, the auditorium of the opera house gave physical form to this metaphor, with subdivisions that displayed a society in microcosm.

Part one of this Chapter discusses the opera house as a nexus for women as a single elite group. The auditorium can be described as a gendered space, because subscription to the boxes was mainly organised by women. They were responsible for choosing a box, gathering a group to share the rental, and ensuring that the subscription was paid. The list of subscribers included several prominent society hostesses who would have held sway over many in the audience. Attention from one of these women gave the potential for preferment, and their status meant that they set an example of behaviour.

The ideas posited by Erwin Goffman (1990), provide an underpinning for this thesis. His work, while not evidence based, is used and widely cited because his articulation of human behaviour resonates with patterns of conduct routinely observable around us. In terms of this research, his theories on how humans operate both as individuals and as part of groups, have formed a basis for understanding the social currents at play in the auditorium of the opera house in the late eighteenth century. This enables a discussion of the group nature of the auditorium and how it functioned as a place for a display of female power. The opera house contained a network of relationships which presented opportunities for women not present in other locations. The elite section of the audience can be seen as, in effect, a single group, whilst also operating on an individual level. Theories of social psychology enable a discussion of how a woman's attention to her personal appearance and deportment mitigated or enhanced her experience at the opera house.

The display of women was about the demonstration of power, and this is discussed in relation to society at that time. The hierarchy, demonstrated both physically in the structure of the auditorium and metaphorically by the relationships between the women can also be analysed by using Festinger's (1954) theories of social comparison, and Tajfel and Turner's (1979) theories of inter-group relationships.

Part two discusses female modes of observation through the concept of 'the gaze', as defined by John Berger (1972) and Laura Mulvey (1975) which provide a reference point for the interactions within the audience. In their writings, the gaze is widely referred to and generally viewed as male, with the female as the object of the gaze. However subsequent theories have taken this further to describe the concept of the female gaze as having a different and separate function (Gamman and Marshment, 1989; Dotterer and Bowers, 1992). The research of Sophie Woodward (2005) and Efrat Tseëlon (1995) have further refined the concept of the female gaze from the point of view of how women dress. As the views and opinions of the other women formed the most significant marker of success or failure for the female audience, it is the concept of a female gaze that forms an important concept within this research.

2.1.1 The audience

Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert Hume (1995), have gathered together the fragmentary evidence remaining of Italian opera in eighteenth-century London, and produced a comprehensive history of the King's Theatre (the Opera House) from 1778 until its re-building in 1791. Their multi-disciplinary approach enables a better understanding of opera and ballet in London during this turbulent period of its history. They state that music historians have tended to avoid this period as it is seen as having produced offerings of poor quality, especially as the limited and confused records have made that time difficult to understand. By taking into account the management and financial disasters, as well as the artistic policy and the huge variety of personnel involved in producing the performances, Price, *et al.* (1995) have added depth to the historical understanding of opera in London at this time. They emphasise that the Italian opera company was equally a ballet company, and consideration must be given to both forms in order to reach an understanding of the performative offerings.

From the point of view of this research, Price, *et al.* (1995) give a clear sense of the backstage structure of the opera house and how the wardrobe department operated. It has been possible to identify how production at the opera house differed from costuming for spoken drama. Their remit, however, was to gather and decode the available factual information about the theatre. This greatly enhances understanding of the method of production, and also the attitude of the audience to what they saw. However, the book does little to enhance our understanding of what the costumes looked like, especially those for the dance, which is a particular concern of this researcher. Price, *et al.* themselves remark that the opera was 'an entertainment in a language that the audience could not understand' (1995, 9). The fully lit auditorium allowed the audience to follow a libretto, and some understood a little Italian from their travels, but these handicaps must have given the visual aspect of the performance far greater importance. Conventions of gesture enabled the audience to follow the emotions of the characters and some of the plot, but this is only part of the visual aspect that would have been read by the audience as the costumes would have indicated character and social position. A review quoted in the final section of this chapter, indicates how disconcerting it could be if a dancer appeared inappropriately dressed for the style of dance that they were performing in.

Hall-Witt (2007) extends the scholarship undertaken by Price, *et al.* (1995) by charting the performance of the audience of the opera house, and how it changed from the lively, engaged, activity of the late Georgians, to the passive, receptive, demeanour of the Victorians. Hall-Witt labels the opera house as 'the theatre of the great' (2007, 16), describing in detail the social implications of the manoeuvrings among the aristocratic subscribers. The succession of changes made to the auditorium of the opera house over the second half of the century placed an increasing emphasis on the subscription boxes and the opportunities to view the women sitting in them. The experience of going to the opera, to sit in a box or in the pit, was thus increasingly weighted towards what the occupants of the boxes looked like, and as in so many occasions in life, what people saw made the greatest impression. Both Price *et al*., and Hall-Witt give due emphasis to the importance, for the elite audience, of seeing and being seen, but go no further into describing that experience. This research investigates the importance of the visual from the point of view of these elite women, analysing how they might have navigated the emphasis on their dress in this social situation. Initial impressions last and are remembered; they form the basis of our memory of the people that we meet. The initial

response to the visual presentation of another person can be surprisingly accurate and is often enduring (Hogg and Vaughan, 2011).

Hall-Witt states, and Price *et al*. imply, that this was a gendered space, largely run by women of a particular elite group. As a gathering place it was a 'satellite of the English court and a magnet for the rich and powerful' (Price *et al*., 1995, vii). Power is only effective if it is visible, and the opera house was an important arena where the ruling elite confirmed their power through public display. If the women were literally, as well as metaphorically, in charge of this space then inevitably much of the success of their venture depended on how they looked. This was not just about their dress, but also their behaviour, deportment, and interaction with others.

There are written records of the experience of opera going at this time, but they are fragmented and scattered. Price *et al*. long for more of the musical understanding and sophistication displayed by Susan Burney (sister of Fanny), in her journals, which unfortunately cover a comparatively short time (Brown, 1999). They quote extensively from the journals of Lady Mary Coke who they consider as a better exemplar of the response from many in the audience. These entries have been dismissed as superficial (Brown, 1999), however, for her the music and dance were an equal part of the whole variety of experiences presented by an evening at the opera. Price, *et al.* (1995) comment on the fact that she seldom names an opera or a composer, but this surely reflects the fact that opera at this time was more about the star performer displaying their talents than presenting a coherent single piece of work.

Hall-Witt emphasises the elite's relationship with the opera, but contrasts the difference of experience according to gender. 'Noblemen regularly developed patronage relationships with the performers, and periodically involved themselves in the opera's management' (2007, 19). As recent historians of women's history have shown, the social whirl of the London season did in fact 'allow women to advance their children's marriage prospects, find lucrative positions for their sons, and, if so inclined, cultivate their family's patronage networks' (2007, 19).

The list of subscribers published in 1783 shows many of the major society hostesses of the 1780s, including the Duchesses of Devonshire and Rutland, the Countess of Salisbury and Mrs Crewe. In the long list (Figure 2) they can be found in boxes 55, 34, 11 and 58 respectively. These women were prominent and active within the social life of the capital and their patronage offered the potential for advancement. A meeting at the opera might

be easier to engineer than an invitation to a private social event. The opera also contained a greater mix of people than might be found meeting in a private house.

Hall-Witt's analysis also reveals a far greater role for women in politics than has previously been acknowledged. This subject has been widely researched by Elaine Chalus (2005) in her comprehensive study of correspondence between women of the political classes. Chalus has shown that female involvement, mostly through familial relationships, was a bedrock of the networks that operated in the political field. Together with other recent histories, Hall-Witt and Chalus have dismissed the traditional belief that women only enjoyed the 'social whirl' of the London season as a welcome relief from the 'tedium of the country' (Hall-Witt, 2007, 19).
For the female leaders of the elite at the opera house providing a united front as a group demanded conformity to the rules of their milieu. Each woman knew that she was watched, and her performance reviewed, by the leaders of the group, in order to present a united front for watchers in the pit.

2.1.2 A group of individuals

In order to analyse this relatively small and enclosed set of elite women subscribers at the Opera House, both as a group and as individuals, the research has utilised concepts drawn from the discipline of social psychology; particularly the theories of Goffman (1990). Goffman has been described as the 'most influential sociologist of the twentieth century', and that his theories have a 'hold on the sociological imagination' (Fine and Manning, 2003). Goffman's theories of human social interaction do not fit into a particular school, nor was he keen to create one. In this sense he could be described as a maverick; but also, as a transitional figure, between theorists such as Georg Simmel (1858-1918), and more recent concerns addressed by Antony Giddens (b.1938), for example. Simmel was among the first generation of German sociologists who, amongst other theories, posited that fashion is a social structure that allows those who wish to conform to the rules of a group to do so, but also allows for those who wish to deviate from those rules. Those who wish to be different are not unique, however, because they are part of another group which labels themselves as unique. Fashion allows for the 'tendency towards social equalisation' to be combined with the 'desire for individual differentiation' (Simmel, 1957, 543). He was also one of the first to consider that the experience of the sense of self when living as

a part of society might be different for women (Scaff, 2003). Giddens' structuration theory removed the separation of agency and structure, as for him, social structures do not simply place constraints on human agency, but actually enable it (Bryant and Jary, 2003). For Giddens, his actors were never cultural dupes, but capable of reflexively scrutinising and controlling their own actions. It is interesting that both Goffman and Giddens resisted classification, and that neither wished to be seen as the founder of a school of thought but remained independent as theorists.

Goffman presented a 'dramaturgical model' for his analysis of human social interaction. His ideas have gained currency for their appreciation of the power dynamics of social relations, particularly focusing on how people present a front, and adopt roles within particular social groupings and situations (Allain and Harvie, 2006). In defining this performative behaviour as a front, Goffman demonstrates how specific modes of self-organisation and presentation (or traits) might be agreed amongst a group or within an institution either implicitly or explicitly. This front also impacts on an audience or the person with whom the performer is interacting, and how they read the performance. For Goffman, the self is not an independent fixed entity which resides in the individual, rather it is a social process. The self is a social construct developed in relation to others. For Tseëlon (1995), two concepts are key to an understanding of Goffman's dramaturgical model: 'region behaviour' and 'audience segregation'.

> …when one's activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressly accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed. […] the accentuated facts make their appearance in […] a front region; […] there may be another region – a 'back region' or 'backstage' – where the suppressed facts make an appearance (Goffman, 1990, 114).
>
> By audience segregation the individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting (Goffman, 1990, 57).

The front and back regions are not a physical space but a psychological sense of being visible or invisible. It is not a case of public or private but a 'repertoire of different faces' each activated in front of a different audience for the purpose of 'creating and maintaining a given definition of a situation' (Tseelon, 1995, 40).

For Goffman, the sense of how others see us is an important factor in managing the self in society. He divides this concept into 'virtual social identity' and 'actual social identity' (Howson, 2004, 20). The virtual refers to normative expectations of that person within a social encounter, and the actual to the cultural and physical attributes actually possessed by that person. The two concepts inter-relate as the front will be created, in part, to conform to social expectations, but also in a desire for others to see us in the way that we wish.

Goffman's actor is not insincere, but manages their sense of self according to the situation. This theory provides an important underlying concept for this research, each individual presented a particular aspect of their self when at the opera.

Goffman's ideas are 'difficult to reduce to a number of key themes'; his work can be broadly described as developing 'a comparative, qualitative sociology that aimed to produce generalizations about human behaviour' (Fine and Manning, 2003). It is his understanding and explication of observable traits of human behaviour that have made his work so important. He may have resisted definition, and his work may not have conformed to accepted styles of empirical study, but what he describes so eloquently is observable around us on a daily basis.

Goffman's themes of personal performance, and operating in teams, have been of particular relevance to this study, as the audience at the opera house can be viewed as a set of individuals who, for the purposes of that venue, also operated as a team. They obeyed implicit and unwritten societal rules, transmitted verbally, in order to present a united front in what Goffman referred to as 'dramaturgical cooperation' (1990, 88).

2.1.3 The Gaze

John Berger discussed the concept of the gaze in his book *Ways of Seeing* (1972), in relation to the visual arts.

> Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. (Berger, 1972, 41)

Laura Mulvey (1975) developed this concept into the 'male gaze', articulating how the visual arts tend to describe the world and women from a man's point of view, using terms based on male attitudes. She was referring specifically to films, and how they portray and side-line women; but the term has come to be applied to a wider range of visual occasions. She discussed how the pleasure of looking has been split between the active/male and the passive/female, and refers to 'women as image, and men as the bearer of the look' (1975, 11). 'In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness'* (1975, 11).

In considering the modes of spectatorship that were functioning in the auditorium of the opera house, it would seem more appropriate to utilise the concept of the 'female gaze'. Mulvey (1975) was describing a particular attitude adopted by many men when viewing women. This concept of a gendered gaze has been developed, particularly by Gamman and Marshment (1989), through a discussion of the ways in which women view each other. Woodward (2005) found that the sense of the gaze of other women was an important factor when choosing an outfit for a social occasion. Tseëlon (2012) considers that Goffman's sense of a backstage is not possible for women as the gaze is a constant presence. This leads into a consideration of the sense of the gaze of the other, which is discussed in the following section. As stated above the auditorium was a space largely run by women, and it was those at the upper end of this small group who policed the behaviour of others. In terms of female fashion and self-presentation, it is often other women who are the harshest critics of their own sex. This sense of being always under the gaze brings a need for validation from others. Those who have the self-confidence to stand out engender a mix of envy and outrage, that often manifests itself as criticism or even denunciation.
Hall-Witt describes the opera at this time as displaying an 'event orientated aesthetic' (2007, 11). In other words, the evening was as much constituted by the activity of the audience, as by that on the stage, and the two together created the event.

2.2 Women in the audience

> Women's crime of being other – of embodying all that man fears and despises yet desires – finds fitting 'punishment' in clothing that draws erotic attention to the body by simultaneously constraining and 'correcting' it. (King, 2001, 34)

Garments exhibited in a museum or gallery display an absence, because they do not contain a living human body. They have an 'eerie quality', and can be a source of 'unease and ambiguity' (Wilson, 2003, 1). At the most basic level, clothes protect us from the elements, but they are far more than that. They are part of the self, consciously or not, and that self, lives and operates in a society. Every elite woman in the audience at the opera displayed something of herself in her visual presentation, but because she was under the gaze of the other women in the group, she would also, to a greater or lesser extent, have bowed to the pressure to conform.

This section of Chapter Two will discuss a woman's relationship with her body and her clothes, from the perspective of psychological research undertaken since the end of the twentieth century. The studies utilised address the female experience of dressing the body in the current age, but these experiences are applicable to any period when expectations have been put on women, in terms of their personal deportment and visual presentation. Social mores and societal rules may have changed in the intervening years, but there are human traits that are recognisable across time (Goffman 1990). The emotional relationships between people, the way that they interact with others has resonances that feel familiar now. Culture, factions, familial groups all put pressure on members to conform in some way, in order to maintain a civilised society. For women, these pressures are often centred on conforming to patriarchal concepts of behaviour and appearance (Tseëlon 2002).

The penultimate part of this section utilises fine art, in the form of portraiture, as a vital record for understanding modes of elite female dress in the late eighteenth century. Portraiture grew in popularity, especially after the advent of the public exhibition, and visiting the Royal Academy became part of the social season (Solkin, 2001). Artists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), Thomas Gainsborough, and Allan Ramsay (1713-1784),

have left a visual record of women at that time which is of enormous value. These portraits have been analysed from the point of view of artistic practices, and used for research into the history of dress (Rosenthal, 2000; Ribeiro, 2003; Postle, 2005). However, little work had been conducted on the women themselves in terms of how they related to their dress and used it in the preservation of their image for posterity. Finally, the section examines the social history of the period, and how changing attitudes during that period affected women. The crisis of national identity caused by the loss of the American colonies has been identified as a moment of change: bringing the whole ruling class under greater scrutiny (Wahrman 2006). This is turn led to a hardening of attitudes towards women, and their perceived roles in society.

2.2.1 The body and the self

For Goffman (1990), the self is a social construct, and is performed in different ways for different audiences. He divides the front into two aspects: appearance and manner. A person's appearance will inform their audience of their social status and their manner the role that they wish to play on that occasion. For many women, whatever the situation, whoever the audience, presentation of their bodies can be of paramount importance. For such women, the sense that their body will, in some way, determine successful outcomes in life has been inculcated from early childhood. Therefore, this construction of the self takes on three aspects: their body; their dress; and the attitudes of others, both from those close to them and society at large.

The feminist philosopher Iris Young, believes that there are no specific attributes that all women have, but that many women's lives are affected by the same set of verbal and visual representation of 'how to be a woman' (Stone, 2007, 175). Young's theories of how these representations operate have formed another important theoretical structure for this thesis. In her essay *Throwing like a Girl*, (2005) Young describes how girls grow up conscious of their bodies, because of the expectations put on them to present themselves in a certain way. Concentrating on the body as a whole, and the modes of female existence, Young describes how for girls, there is a specific style of bodily comportment which is learned as the girl comes to 'understand that she is a girl' (2005, 43). She is expected to be careful of herself and her clothes, not to get dirty, restrain herself in case she gets hurt. Thus at an early stage she develops a timidity over her body that only increases with age.

As she grows, so does a sense that her appearance will always be judged, and that how she conducts her body will form part of her ability to lead a successful life. This becomes internalised, such that dress fashions that body as much from the inside as the outside (Cavallaro and Warwick, 1998). For Liz Frost, the set of meanings that a young girl might see as 'grounded in her identity', such as 'small, passive, fragile', come not from within herself, but are instilled via an 'interactive social process' (2005, 66). The female body is seen as inadequate, and in need of constant modification.

For Young, the most profound difference between men and women comes from the fact that patriarchal society defines women as objects, mere bodies. Thus, a woman lives her body as an object as well as a subject (2005, 44). There is, therefore, the ever-present possibility that she will be gazed upon and judged by her physical appearance, rather than her character or intentions. The attitudes of others around her lead her to regard her body as a thing, and if she wishes to fit in with her social group, it must be cared for, shaped, controlled, and decorated (Young, 2005).

Western society puts great emphasis on physical appearance, especially for women (Noser and Zeigler-Hill, 2014). This leads to many women and girls measuring their worth primarily by their appearance, and thus their sense of self becomes inextricably connected with their body. Their self-esteem is contingent on how they perceive their attractiveness, and this in turn may become the primary means by which they determine how they feel about themselves. This emphasis on physical attractiveness is not as irrational as it may seem as culture links it with a variety of important life outcomes (Noser and Zeigler-Hill, 2014). For the women in this study, the most important life outcome was to make a successful marriage and produce children. Much of the familial pressure put on young women was to this end, and their appearance played a large part in proving that they were acceptable and conforming members of their elite group.

This constant awareness of the body in space has been defined as the 'body image', a complex multi-dimensional picture, or sense of the self (Howson, 2004). 'The body is the medium or raw material through which we navigate the world, but it is also an entity that is invested with meanings' (Kosut and Moore, 2010, 1). The body presents the person to the world and can be read culturally, politically and institutionally; thus we are conscious of our own body relative to the other bodies around us and this sense constitutes the 'body image' (Entwistle, 2000).

The physical sense of the body in the world, can also be seen as a metaphorical one in the expectation that women should not take up too much space, that movement should be constrained, and the body confined (Young, 2005). The restricted space in which women operate, and the 'closed body' characteristic of feminine comportment and movement signifies an 'imaginary space' that confines women (Young, 2005, 45). An obvious parallel can be made with the early eighteenth century when hooped skirts reappeared in the 1720s and evolved into large side hoops (Benhamou, 2001). By the 1760s the size of the hoops had reduced to relatively small paniers on the hips (Figure 6), and the very large hoops had become confined to formal appearances at court (Figure 4). There was a growing perception of an invasion by women, and anxiety over a resulting feminisation (Brewer, 1997). Thus, the reaction to the early hoops, which quickly took on enormous proportions, was one of male outrage and derision, as shown in Figure 7. It could be said that women, stepping more often into the male dominated public sphere, saw these hoops as a physical boundary to their personal space. For women, the hoop provided a physical barrier that prevented others from approaching too closely, a visible and concrete boundary to the body image. The size of the hoops was manifestly impractical, and they reduced, but remained as an important mode of display for the formalities of court. this is an interesting example of fashion exploring the body boundary and experimenting with the function of clothing. What might begin as an emphasis on an erotic area of the body becomes exaggerated and subject to 'flights of fancy' (Boultwood and Jerrard, 2000, 316). Gradually a small panier shape, which added emphasis to the hips, became part of the geometric and vertical silhouette that prevailed until the 1780s.

For many women, the attitudes of others, and their expectations, leads them to experience a constant sense of being watched. The 'other', as an abstract concept, becomes concrete in the form of other dressed bodies. 'I am split. I see myself, and I see myself being seen' (Young, 2005, 63). As well as absorbing the expectations of general society, women will also respond to the more local expectations of their own social group; in the case of this study, elite women on display at the opera. 'Young women may experience their own appearance as a vital tool for establishing social acceptance. They must adopt towards themselves an attitude of continual anxious self-appraisal as they strive to be attractive enough to be accepted' (Frost, 2005, 77).
This can be defined as self-monitoring behaviour, which explains why certain individuals are more sensitive in their choices of what to wear (Peluchette, et al., 2006). As a

personality trait it explains the extent to which individuals try to control the way that they present themselves to others. High self-monitors wishing to behave in socially acceptable ways are especially sensitive to visual cues from those around them on how to behave and are very concerned about what others think of them.

2.2.2 Dress and the self

Joanne Entwistle has explored the connection between dress and the body in the social construction of the self. She sees dress as embedded in the social world ,as a 'situated bodily practice' that is fundamental to the microsocial order (2000, b, 325). She has explored the role of the active, phenomenological body, viewing dress as expressing individuality; however, this identity is also socially constructed. Individuals have to function in the social world; they must orientate themselves and perform in society. For Goffman, the body is the property of both the individual and the social world (Entwistle, 2000).

For Young (1990) a person's identity is often not simply a matter of the individual and their presentation in society, but is mediated within and through membership of a group or groups. They make initial value judgements based on appearance, and attractiveness becomes a form of social capital, referred to by Bordieu (1969-2002) as 'corporeal capital' (Frost, 2005, 77). Henri Tajfel (1979), developed a theory of 'social identity' in the 1970s as a paradigm for identifying group mechanisms and behaviours (Tseëlon, 2010). His theory operates in three stages: classification, the identification of members and non-members; social comparison, the status of each group relative to others; and the use of group membership as a boost for self-esteem. Groups are formed among people of similar class and attitude, and their visual appearance differentiates them from other groups.

Dressing in similar clothing is a powerful way to lend cohesiveness to a group by uniting it together and separating it from others. Wearing the correct style is a route to acceptance within a group; however, there is also the need to be seen as an individual and to be different. There is a desire not to be isolated, but at the same time not to be too similar, and within a group there is a level of acceptable deviance (Boultwood and Jerrard, 2000). Individuals will deviate enough to be unique but at the same time conform sufficiently to be accepted. The rules of entry to the boxes and the pit at the opera imposed a social identity by demanding that attendees wear evening dress.

Clothing mediates the relationship between the self and the outside world (Woodward, 2005). Thus it can be seen as a fixed border, but also as a margin, and therefore liminal (Cavallaro and Warwick, 1998). Boundary and margin are not interchangeable, there is a dichotomy, in that while boundary divides and frames, the margin blurs distinctions and frontiers. This sense of clothes as forming a fluid boundary between the body and the outside world brings them into the same psychodynamic space as the body image (Boultwood and Jerrard, 2000).

Clothing can conduct and connect, rather than separating our sense of self from the outside world (Woodward, 2007). Clothing is not just the medium through which the wearer can successfully impact on others but 'other people's intentions penetrate deeply into the intentions of the wearer' (Woodward, 2005, 22). A carefully chosen outfit for a particular occasion, if unsuccessful, constantly intrudes upon the consciousness of the wearer, and clouds the experience of everything else. If it is successful, it feels right, and thus disappears from consciousness; it can provide a sense of psychological invisibility. There are occasions when everything feels right, the clothes are comfortable, and the social occasion involves a close friendship group. In this case the conscious sense of a self being present disappears as a result of the security of the situation. This can be described as psychological invisibility, where the sense of the other has no effect on the experience. However, if the gathering is happening in public, the awareness that the self may be observed by others not in the group excludes the possibility of psychological invisibility (Tseëlon, 1995). This would have been the case in a box at the opera, as the others in the box might be friends and relations, people who were known and familiar, but beyond the box in the auditorium were all the others, who were looking.

Tsëelon (2012) has applied the theories of Goffman to the experiences of women. Her concept of 'masks' as opposed to 'disguise', as a form of masquerade explores modern discourses of identity (Kaiser, 2001). Her theories have provided another useful tool for examining how the women in this study manipulated their visual presentation. Tseëlon critiqued Goffman's definition of 'façade self' as manipulative, as for Tsëelon, 'he or she plays on different stages, all equally authentic' (2012, 6). The concept of stage and backstage as conceived by Goffman, cannot be equated with public and private, but being self-conscious or unselfconscious, feeling seen or invisible.

> In a secure environment one feels approved, accepted, loved, inconspicuous – in short, confident and psychologically invisible. In an

> insecure environment one is on display, on show, being examined, and measured. One is invaded by scrutinising looks, attention or comments; overshadowed by other people's better presentation, or judgement. It is a feeling of being threatened and psychologically visible. (Tseëlon, 1995, 55)

She argues that women are 'always on a stage, always observed, always visible: they lack a back region both literally and symbolically' (Tseëlon, 1995, 74). In western culture women are 'culturally invisible, yet physically visible – always on stage' (1995, 75). For Tsëelon, the audience is either significant, their judgement and opinion matter, or insignificant, their judgement and opinion do not matter. While some situations may be intrinsically more secure than others, or more familiar, it is actually the audience which creates the feelings of comfort or discomfort.

When dressing the self, however formal or informal the occasion, it is the audience that will mediate between a woman and her clothes. People are not simply formal or informal, they are 'familiar or unfamiliar, supportive or unsupportive, high-powered or unimportant, trendier or less well dressed than herself' (Tseëlon 1995 p55).

Tseëlon also postulates the concept of masks, in the sense of masquerade, as way of retaining control over the construction of meaning to be read by an audience. A mask might be a 'self-conscious device of artifice' such as using stays to accentuate the bosom (2012, 5). It might operate as a type of disguise, a way of blending her with everyone else, or come closer to a parody, displaying dress in an exaggerated form, such as when women's wigs grew to enormous proportions in the 1780s. In each case the wearer has taken control, by constructed meaning in their dress, to ensure that they can either feel psychologically invisible, or draw attention through parody.

While the concept of psychological invisibility has real resonances for this research the idea of masking is more problematic. A mask suggests purposeful dissembling, a barrier, actual or metaphorical, placed between the audience and the real self. Goffman's concept of different fronts suggests different aspects of the same self, all equally real, displayed appropriately to the current situation. This is a matter of nuance, but the idea of different fronts suggests something more intuitive, less purposeful, than the construction of a mask.

The gaze of the other, discussed previously, plays a key role in the construction of the female self, and an internalised sense of this other will influence her choice of clothes to

wear (Tseëlon 1995, 55). Awareness of being watched and of seeing oneself as an object has the potential to shape how women move and engage with the physical environment, how they relate to their body-image. Woodward (2005) demonstrated the presence of the other when her subjects were choosing their clothes for a social occasion. The perceived opinion of the other, realistic or not, impinged on the choices made and affected how each woman felt about their approach to dressing for that event. This is not to say that being the object of another's gaze is always pejorative. There are those for whom the pleasures of fashion are enjoyed without any sense of obligation, just as there are those who gleefully subvert the rules and enjoy ignoring them (King, 2004).

Many women derive enormous pleasure from their clothes (Young, 2005). Young believes that this stems from a sensory difference in the way that women regard their clothing. For men the look is more important, for women it is the feel; the phenomenological experience of the clothing is as important as the look (Woodward 2007). Feminine desire can be seen as less concerned with identifying and quantifying things, and more immersed in the fluid and sensory aspect of clothing (Young, 2005). This is the sense of touch, as the literal feeling of the cloth against the skin, but is also an orientation to sensuality that includes all the senses, the female mode of vision is less a gaze, more an immersion in light and colour. If she sees herself in a particular fabric, wool or silk for example, it is partly the sensation of the fabric that is attractive, the way that it hangs and falls around the body (Woodward 2007). Historically these sensations were part of the display of nobility and wealth through fabric, and Young feels that women have been imprisoned by this history. This pleasure in the tactile qualities of cloth often also leads to an emotional relationship with certain garments. This may be because the fabric, cut, and colour relates to the body perfectly and pleasurably, and thus the garment gains status as a treasured possession, above those bought with more extrinsic motives that will never be more than objects. As the garment ages, the boundary that separates the clothing and the body begins to deteriorate and the clothing more closely becomes the wearer (Woodward, 2005), the firm border becomes a liminal margin (Cavallaro and Warwick, 1998).

The feeling of an outfit or particular garment can have a deeper psychological affect that can shape the wearer's performance while wearing it. Certain clothes carry symbolic meanings that are not triggered until the garment is worn, i.e. embodied, and this affects the demeanour of the wearer. A lab coat, for example, may exert an influence on the

wearer by activating associated abstract concepts that assist the wearer to embody the attitude marked out for the wearer of that garment (Fleetwood-Smith, *et al.*, 2019). The wearer responds to the social resonances that come with the garment. From the point of view of this research, formal garments worn to court can be seen as having the potential to exert embodied cognition (Slepian *et al.*, 2015). The unusual style of dress, which would have felt different to the wearer, would have produced a constant awareness of the situation, including the social importance and modes of behaviour expected from the event. Certain garments, however, are endowed with significance by the wearer, abstract concepts that assist the wearer to fulfil a particular role. The term 'enclothed cognition' describes this 'systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer's psychological processes' (Adam and Galinsky, 2012, 1). These clothes often become attachment garments, gaining irreplaceable significance to the owner (Fleetwood-Smith, *et al.,* 2019).

At moments of high appearance management, when a woman feels particularly exposed or threatened by the gaze, a favourite garment can also give reassurance (Woodward 2015). Women tend to refer to such clothes in the present tense; they talk about what the clothes will do for them on an ongoing basis. For men, favourite garments are more likely to be referred to in the past tense, expressing what that garment did for them or helped them to achieve. The experience of wearing a garment can mediate between a woman's sense of self and the image projected to those around her. Clothes that become favourites are often those that allow her to be psychologically invisible, what the gaze of others sees is something close to her desired body image.

For men, clothes operate more as a badge of status (Tseëlon, 1995). Military uniforms and academic dress, for example, largely created by men for men, display the hierarchies found in those institutions in an immediately visible and quantifiable form. In the military the number of pips or stripes on an epaulette displays the status achieved by that individual, and in academic circles, the shape and decoration of a gown's sleeves or style of hat performs the same function. In both instances the importance of the garment is displayed through the visual aspect rather than as an experience involving several of the senses.

2.2.4 Fashionable dress

Fashion performs as the glue that holds together the different fragments of the self and allows for an apparent unity of presentation (Wilson, 2003). Dress and bodily behaviour combine to produce a complexity of non-verbal meanings, and bodily behaviour, including how we dress and by extension, fashion, is a central aspect of this (Boultwood and Jerrard, 2000). The subject of dress for women is loaded with ambivalence and dichotomy; they are expected to care about how they look and what they wear, but at the same time, caring about your image is considered frivolous and shallow.

Currently we experience our clothes in the context of images of other women wearing clothes, and fashion magazines have become a mirage or a fantasy of a way of being (Hollander, 1978). The late eighteenth century saw the production of the first fashion journals. The earliest fashion plates which appeared in the seventeenth century were records of clothes worn by notable people in the previous season. In the eighteenth century these images began to look forward, setting out a look for the upcoming season, and appeared in pocket books for women (Cumming, 2004). They were line engravings that showed in detail the styles of dress to be worn in the following season, such as that shown in figure 8. The manner in which the clothing was presented also 'gave some indications of appropriate models of female beauty and posture and aided an understanding of the rules of polite behaviour in their portrayals of various activities and settings' (Breward, 2003, 116). Part of their function seems to have been to educate the growing numbers of the bourgeoisie in what was expected in polite society. However, even in these early images the model is an idealised form in an attractive setting, there is no sense of the variety of human shapes that will be wearing these garments.

The proliferation of images of idealised bodies has led to the body being seen as a project to be worked on. For women, there has always been pressure to look good and take care of their appearance, to use diet to produce the ideal body shape, and cosmetics to achieve beauty. Eighteenth-century ideals of beauty called for physical attributes such as those listed by the *Ladies Magazine* in 1772: 'an oval face, transparent skin, firm cheeks (enhanced with vermillion), moderately large eyes, and a small bosom, as too much bosom disfigures and appears rather vulgar.' (Greig, 2013, 172). However, for elite circles these attributes were tempered by other requirements, designed to place the accolade of

beauty beyond the common reach. A range of social qualifications were brought to the fore, such as grace, morality, virtue, manners, and politeness. This interpretation of beauty as social beauty explains how that category was so readily attributed to elite women. By this means, beauty could be aligned with rank, and complex cultural codes could be marshalled in the face of any interloper (Greig, 2013).

Naomi Wolf (1991) believes that the concept of beauty is a myth that has profound consequences for women. It requires constant self-monitoring, checking in the mirror, which takes time and can sap the self-confidence. It encourages a culture where women are constantly measuring their self-worth in terms of how they compare to others. It also means that the pursuit of beauty becomes currency for women and increases competition between them.

Tseëlon (2012), sees the term fashion as a form of hegemonic control via codification of visual appearance, as a measure of rank and power. This may come in the form of uniforms, or a powerful sense of appropriate dress such as the business suit. Leaders of fashion also control what is worn, and through this the gaze. As they are in the public eye, they are also themselves under the gaze, so it is to their benefit if others conform to their view. It is this consciousness of other's expectations that Woodward (2005) identified as such a powerful factor for several of the subjects of her study.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) examined how discourses on the power of the state developed and have a direct influence on the control of bodies. His work addresses issues of power, knowledge and the body, and his emphasis on discourse suggests that knowledge of the world is shaped by particular socio-historical frameworks that comprise a mixture of ideas beliefs and practices (Tseëlon, 1995). Foucault's work examines the macro-sociology of power through language and subjectivity and how discourse can systematically form the object of which it speaks (Gough, *et al.*, 2013). Foucault uses Bentham's description of the Panoptican, a prison where all inmates can be seen at all times, as a metaphor for the pervasive and normalising gaze of society as a whole (Tynan, 2016). He describes the change in the operation of power from that of spectacle to one of surveillance (Cavallaro and Warwick, 1998). The growth of enlightenment thought brought a change from the monolithic structure that exerted power through spectacle, with a populace kept in check by demonstrations pageantry and discipline. This was replaced over time by a change to pervasive surveillance which shifted the nature of the gaze to one where everyone was worth looking at. Foucault

considers that power structures capture the body and manage its movements and that this is a far more effective method of control than physical coercion. Such power is transmitted through public discourse; in the case of fashion, offering acceptable methods of self-presentation. The period of this study sees the arrival of the first fashion plates, setting out an acceptable standard of visual presentation through dress. In Foucault's terms this demonstration in the discourse of a concern around personal presentation through fashion, demonstrates that this power transcends politics, it is 'every-day and embodied' (Tynan, 2016, p.189). A seemingly helpful suggestion on how to dress correctly for a particular situation, can be seen in Foucauldian terms as an example of how power can determine the correct conduct of your body.

Giddens, through his structuration theory however, challenges Foucault's sense of the omnipresence of control, suggesting that the less powerful manage resources in such a way as to exert some control over the more powerful in established power relationships (Bryant and Jary, 2003). Foucault has been criticised for his gender-neutral approach to bodies, but his theories have strong resonances when applied to women (King, 2004). Where the gaze of the discourse dictates what they will wear, it can also impose physical restraint, which in turn will limit their social experiences.

Examination of the discourses around women in the late eighteenth century, suggest a preoccupation with modesty and propriety, allied with politeness and civility (Vickery, 1998). The growth in the number of conduct books, written mostly but not entirely, by men, suggests a need to keep women contained and under control. Foucault suggests that 'power relations are relations in which influence is exercised over the conduct of free subjects' (Smart, 2003). There is always the possibility to overturn or resist the influence, but guidance, direction and influence, especially when exerted from an early age becomes internalised, and thus indistinguishable from the subject's own desires. It is also important to understand that conduct books generally addressed the growing bourgeoisie, in order that they might understand how to behave in society (Jones, 1995).

In the late eighteenth century, Tseëlon's (2012) concept of masquerade and parody, can be seen being played out through the activities of the hyper-fashionable *beau monde.* Hannah Greig has made a study of this small elite within the elite, for whom fashion was about conspicuous display. Their prestige, over and above the traditional markers of wealth, was rooted in the new urban culture of, 'fashion, consumption and public display' (2013, 4). At the time they were referred to as the *beau monde,* the *bon ton,* or simply the

ton (Greig, 2013). Faced with the growth of the bourgeoisie and their purchasing power, they found ways to retain their exclusivity through display and signs, often only properly read within the group. The opera provided an important venue for the display of this exclusiveness (Hall-Witt, 2007). They would be seen, not only by their own group, but by others watching from the pit.

There was no understandable method by which you could join this group; membership was granted through some indefinable quality visible only to them. Greig's study shows that to be fashionable was anything but frivolous, as their outrageous display marked them as different, and superior. She demonstrates that the social status of the *beau monde* was always inextricably bound up with its political status and that 'social politics' (a term coined by Elaine Chalus, 2000) was politics. Greig has used material culture alongside correspondence, to build a picture of the fashionable world of this group within a group, proving that within the public culture of the opera, theatre and public spaces, women such as the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Derby and Lady Sarah Bunbury, leaders of the *beau monde*, were highly visible. It was partly this visibility that provided a focus for discontent at the activities of the aristocracy later in the century.

The *beau monde* was the subject of much interest and speculation, prompting a desire by some to gain entry to the group which could be seen as a desire for social mobility. In the mid twentieth century Festinger (1954)constructed theories of social comparison, which proposed that people search out a bench-mark that will provide a model to determine their progress and standing in life (Myers *et al.*, 2012). Upward social comparisons occur when individuals compare themselves to perceived superior targets, and downward comparisons occur when individuals compare themselves to perceived inferior targets. Festinger suggested that upward comparisons are likely to produce negative consequences such as decreased self-esteem, whereas downward comparisons are likely to produce positive consequences, such as increased self-esteem. He also posited that people are most likely to make favourable comparisons with similar others; however, individuals may seek upward comparisons with a slightly superior other to gain information on how to improve themselves as long as the comparisons are not harmful (Schutz, et al., 2002). More recent research has shown that upward comparisons made by women seem to diverge from Festinger's original theory in two particular ways. First, although social comparison theory argues that people will generally compare themselves with similar others (lateral comparison), women today for example, are just as likely to compare themselves to unrealistically thin images of women in the media, as they are to

compare themselves to similar peers. Secondly, although social comparison theory argues that people will not continue to make comparisons if they are unfavourable and/or damaging to one's self-image, women frequently continue to make appearance-related comparisons, even when they experience detrimental consequences (Strahan *et al.*, 2006). This may be because a woman's self-esteem is dependent on the approval of others, and fitting in; this leads to a constant wish to improve, even if this is patently not possible. The *beau monde* was only a small group, a point emphasised by Greig. Arguably, they have partially obscured the much larger group of aristocrats, the ruling elite, whose conduct and social mores formed the bedrock of government. It is women associated with this larger group that are the subject of this thesis.

2.2.5 Portraits of elite women

From 1769 onwards the summer exhibition at the Royal Academy provided one of the social events of the season, and fed a growing fascination with public figures, both aristocrats and performers. The visibility of public figures through events such as this and the growth in printed visual media has prompted discussion as to whether they inhabited a culture of celebrity (Rosenthal, 2006). The exhibition of portraits in this way came to have cultural and political significance (Solkin, 2001), but Tillyard (2005), suggests that it's a mistake to define this period as a culture of celebrity. For her, portrait artists such as Joshua Reynolds did not inhabit a society full of celebrities in the way that we think of them now, but he and his contemporaries were 'avid consumers' of some of the 'attributes of celebrity' that we would recognise today (2005, 62).

In his portraiture, Reynolds often depicted women in 'quasi-allegorical scenarios, imparting a sanitised eroticism to the female body' (Postle, 2003, 23). For Reynolds, all his subjects were in some way performers. His desire to raise portraiture to the level of history painting as a legitimate art allowed him to use the semblance of classical myth to depict respectable women in erotic guises, as muses and nymphs. Thomas Gainsborough took a different view of his sitters. For him, the person was of primary importance, rather than the role that they might play. He painted the person as he saw them, even when that depiction might betray aspects that the sitters might wish to remain hidden.

The works of these artists have been extensively examined, but mostly from a fine art and technique point of view. More recently attention has moved towards the context in which these portraits were commissioned, to provide a more contextual view of the portraits as part of their time (Postle, 2005; Leca, 2010). Ribeiro, a scholar of the history of dress specialising in the eighteenth century, has examined a portrait of the musician Ann Ford (1737-1824), by Gainsborough (Ribeiro, 2010a). The cross-legged pose that Gainsborough chose for her portrait, shown in Figure 9 is unusual, slightly awkward and inelegant, considering the style of dress at that time. She examines the images in an exhibition in the context of the clothes being worn by the women for their portraits, relating this to attitudes to women at the time, and their modes of dress. Ann Ford was a controversial figure to some, because she was a respectable woman who wished to have a career as a professional musician. At that time the two states, respectability and professional performer, were still seen as mutually exclusive for a woman. Ribeiro's essay provides an interesting exemplar of how a close examination of the sitter, and their choice of costume to be remembered in, provides a much richer understanding of the act of portrait painting as a whole. She uses comments from aristocratic commentators such as Mrs Delany (1700-1788), who was quite disconcerted by the unconventional pose; alongside philosophical concepts of beauty, and the path promoted to women by conduct books. Together, these opinions and attitudes illuminate the context of the portrait of Ann Ford and enrich our understanding of the painter's sensitivity and skill.

Another method of dissemination, that fed the growing speed with which fashion changed in the late eighteenth century, was the growth of print culture, especially visual reproductions. Cindy McCreery (2004) has used an examination of satirical prints to discuss women's progress into the male-dominated public sphere. Such prints give an 'immediate, raw, undigested, and frequently unsophisticated analysis of a situation' (2004, 5). In their wide variety they cover such issues as women's roles and behaviour as wives, prostitutes, widows, old maids, also highlighting intrusions into traditionally male arenas such as politics. The proliferation of images of women suggest a general anxiety over perceived changes in gender roles and is another riposte to the construction of 'separate spheres' discussed below.

2.2.6 Social attitudes to women

The thirty years spanned by this study coincide with a period of change in the experience of women, and society's attitudes towards them. The work on social history undertaken by Dror Wahrman (2006), and Gillian Russell (2007), have particular relevance for attitudes to the elite women in this thesis. Wahrman has examined the changing sense of 'self' across the century, and developments towards the 'modern self' and described the 1780s as a moment of 'gender panic' (2006, 21). For him, the crisis of national identity brought about by the loss of the American colonies, highlighted the growing visibility of women in society and emphasised their identification with scandal, and thus brought about a tightening of attitudes towards them. For Wahrman, this questioning of national identity proved a tipping point for what had been, until then, a gradual change in the sense of a self. Russell (2007) considers that if we are to understand that moment and the effect that it had on women, we must examine the previous two decades, which saw an enormous growth not only in the visibility of women, but also their active participation in society.

Russell is concerned with 'recuperating the centrality of women of fashion' (2007, 1) in the public culture of the late Georgian period. She explores how in the 1760s and 1770s the increasing visibility of these women generated growing anxiety. Amanda Vickery (1993), described how the concept of women existing in a 'separate sphere' of home and domesticity was a myth first created towards the end of the eighteenth century; in fact, women mixed with and were active in the social world throughout the century. This 'rhetorical ideal' was 'a direct response to the increasing involvement of women in public arenas' (Colley, 1992, 269). While women might be 'severely disabled when it came to institutional power, they did not lack access to the sphere, *as they understood it'* (Vickery, 1993, 408).

For Russell, however, this status was not a continuum, there were intense moments of activity, 'hot' periods in the history of women in Georgian public culture (2007, 5). Fashion in the form of consumerism became a major concern, and while representing the growing vibrancy of a new consumer society, also engendered anxiety around its ability to corrupt. Female fashion in the form of dress provided a visible manifestation of the growing speed of change in the second half of the century and the growth of print culture

added to this visibility. The 1770s was a 'hot spot' for the involvement of women in culture, particularly in writing. This included the publication in 1778 of Fanny Burney's first novel *Evelina,* which described a young woman navigating the various activities and amusements on offer in London at the time. Russell (2007) suggests that if we are to understand the shift in attitudes, particularly towards gender, that took place towards the end of the century, we must understand the part played by fashion and scandal in the cultural landscape of the 1760s and 1770s. Russell clearly illustrates this link in a discussion of the fashion for high heads in the 1770s as a metaphor for the increasing intrusion of women into the social sphere.

However, by the 1780s, the society that had displayed such self-confidence was changing:

> 'the distinctive shift peculiar to the late eighteenth century was one from maternity as a general ideal, broadly prescriptive, but allowing for individual deviations, to maternity as inextricably intertwined with the essence of femininity for each and every woman' (Wahrman, 2006, 13).

The crisis of national identity that brought about this shift, according to Wahrman (2006), was then focussed on the growing power of fashion and luxury. The social practices that were resulting in a new sense of self, brought a tendency towards effeminacy. This was not necessarily conceived as gender specific; effeminacy was shorthand for the damaging effects of luxury, such as 'corruption, degeneracy, enervation, supineness, and self-indulgence' (2006, 63).

For Wahrman, the profound questioning of national identity in turn, focussed attention on the public behaviour of the upper classes as rulers of the country. The previous two decades, as detailed by Russell (2007), had seen a number of public scandals, including the trial of the Duchess of Kingston for bigamy in 1776, and an appetite for fashionable consumption in pursuit of a seemingly hedonistic lifestyle, particularly for the *beau monde*.

Wahrman has been criticised for his linking of cultural change with a single political event (Ravel, 2007), and for an over-reliance on literary sources produced for a relatively small audience (McGowen, 2006). His sources were the prologues and epilogues to 600 plays produced in London between 1711 and 1780 for a theatre which was 'one of the most socially open spaces of eighteenth-century urban life' catering to an audience taken from all classes except the very poor (Wahrman, 1998, p.118). The prologue and epilogue to each night at the

theatre was in many ways separate from the play, it was attuned to the particular concerns of the audience at any given moment and provided a grounding for the play within the 'specific temporal context of the world outside the theatre' (p.148). Often written by the manager of the theatre, the prologue and epilogue would change, not only with each production of a play, but also within a single run, to respond to public events and social discourse. These texts provide a barometer of social attitudes, particularly as a venue for the understanding of prevailing attitudes to gender and 'the public exploration of its categories and boundaries' (118).

In terms of this thesis, Wahrman's research has profound resonances. He emphasises that he has demonstrated 'a readiness to explore the *limits* of gender boundaries and roles' (122), that a simple binary view might be incomplete and unstable, and that to some extent transgression might be tolerated. Three of the four women studied here in some way transgressed the traditional role assigned to them, managing through an understanding of social mores and the ultimate limits of tolerance to force some autonomy in their lives whilst largely remaining within acceptable limits.

Wahrman identifies a sudden change in attitudes in the 1780s that he defines as a 'gender panic' (p.156) identifying the American war as the catalyst. This was in reality a civil war, it caused a profound questioning of national identity and brought under a spotlight the perceived transgressions of the upper classes, with the indulgence in luxury and its tendency to effeminacy providing a scapegoat. Experimentations with gender boundaries, previously tolerated, were now seen as transgressive and immoral bringing a greater expectation for remaining within prescribed gender roles, especially for women.

It is a pity that Wahrman did not place more emphasis on the visual manifestation of these trends. He does discuss attitudes to women's dress prior to the change, where an imitation of male attire brought accompanying unease from many commentators, but does not progress to the profound change in silhouette that can be seen as echoing precisely the change in attitude that he describes. The social discourse that he is describing, a growing emphasis on motherhood being the proper role for women, can be amply demonstrated in the changes to the fashionable silhouette that came about during his period of gender panic. Fashion, can be described as a mirror of society and the female silhouette changed, moving from a more sculptural and geometric shape, dominated by the high head, to an emphasis on the female breast, a symbol of motherhood. Satirical images, by heightening reality, can point to the location of the anxieties being highlighted. For example, the artist of the cartoon *Restoration Dresses* (figure 11) has exaggerated the fashionable details of the dress of the four women in order to emphasise the ridiculousness of their sudden about-face in re-

aligning themselves with the crown. The dresses shown in the print highlight this change, with their exaggerated, but softer wigs and large neckerchiefs that emphasise the breast. Fashion, as a mirror of society is reflecting the change in attitudes described by Wahrman. This change in attitude towards the conduct of women in public would have been received by the audience at the opera house and affected attitudes within the group, leading to extra vigilance. Research expanding on Goffman's concept of dramaturgical cooperation by Jetten and Hornsey (2014) has shown how, when group identity is threatened in this way, attitudes can harden and demonstrations of difference by members of the group will become less tolerated; another echo of Wahrman.

The growing sense of selfhood during this period has also been examined by Roy Porter (2003) in his study focussing on medical ideas as indicators of changing attitudes towards the human body. Eighteenth-century philosophers of the emerging concepts of selfhood, the newly conceived autonomous and self-generating mind, were no less censorious of human indulgence than the religious theorists that they superseded. The mind should be liberated, not dominated by the swirling and ever-changing dictates of fashion. This society that increasingly expected to judge who you were by how you looked, exhibited increasing anxiety over fashion's ability to conceal and deceive. Porter quotes Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) who in *The Leviathan* stated that: 'a *person* is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to Act, or Represent himself, or an other' (2003, 250). Porter emphasises the paradox that 'the defining character of rational Hobbesian man should be his ability to deceive' (2003, 251). From the point of view of this research, the dichotomy between the desire for rationality and propriety and an enjoyment of luxury and entertainment, is highlighted particularly in attitudes towards women. Most men desired that their wives should be a credit to them, particularly terms of how they dressed, their visual display. In order to achieve such an outcome however, she must spend his hard-earned money on the latest fashions, an action decried by the moralists. This tension between a simultaneous loving and hating of the new products of a commercial society was a constant presence (Porter, 2003).

Elite women navigated these social pressures and expectations, developing relationships, both personal and political. Tillyard's (2007) research into the relationship between George III and his siblings, alongside Chalus's (2005) illumination of women in politics, enable a better understanding of the relationships between women of the elite. The role

of women in political life of the period has been, until recently, exemplified by the Duchess of Devonshire and the furore cause by her activities in the by-election of 1784. It seems that her activities were similar to those undertaken in previous elections, but as the changes in attitude described by Wahrman (2006) began to take effect, such overt electioneering by a woman was no longer acceptable. Female involvement in politics was, however, widespread, as has been amply demonstrated by Chalus (2005). She highlights women's active involvement in politics, especially during elections, generally on behalf of family interests. These roles have been largely ignored in the male histories of politics, partly because the records are to be found in women's correspondence, until recently widely regarded as containing only the trivial details of family life.

There are women, such as the Duchess of Devonshire, who have received particular attention because their activities were extraordinary. Amanda Foreman (1998), has provided a comprehensive and detailed account of her life. Within a year of her marriage, the Duchess had become a feature of the London scene, with every detail of her dress followed by those who wished to be seen as at the height of fashion. For many, even in the elite, this devotion was based on her visual presentation, rather than personal acquaintance. There is detail in the book of moments when her fashion was of particular interest, but Foreman's main subject is biography, especially the Duchess's gambling addiction, and her important involvement in politics. What this ignores, however, is that the duchess's clothes, her visual presentation would have been a fundamental part of her personal identity and would have been a constant presence in her life. Her frequent changes of dress and style could be seen, from a psychological point of view, as a visible manifestation of the chaos of her life. Her marriage had positioned her within a family with strict rules of conduct that were not always evident to a new member. Left on her own by a taciturn and detached husband, her dress was one of the few elements of her life over which she had some control.

There has been emphasis in this chapter on the growing visibility of women in society, and the social structures through which this was manifested, such as the theatre, opera and pleasure gardens. If society was increasingly emphasising self-presentation as an important factor of sociability, then this was expressed through how people looked, what they wore, and how they behaved when participating in social events. Society placed increasing importance on the need for how you looked to demonstrate visually who you

were (Ribeiro, 2010a). This research discusses female visibility through its manifestation in deportment and dress at the opera house as an exemplar of that social pressure.

2.3 Women on the stage

> The eighteenth-century stage reflected, shaped, and performed British womanhood on the porous boundary between the theatre and the larger society to which it was central. (Nussbaum, 2010, 9)

If the culture of theatre reflects the society in which it functions, then the stage and its audience in this period displayed the increasing numbers of women who were visible in society. It reflected their growth in confidence, and wish to express themselves, both on and off the stage.

The opera house was different, not only because it was the only theatre licenced to produce Italian opera, but also, because its audience, and its methods of production were different.

The lack of visual evidence is a perennial problem for researchers into the history of performance at this time and has led to a reliance on the printed text as the main source of information. Performance is about movement, sight and sound, and without recordings, this is the most difficult aspect to recreate.

This section will discuss attitudes towards female performers and how they were costumed. By the late eighteenth century, the practice of performance in the theatre and the opera house would have been very different, and both experiences provide useful insights into the life of female performers at this time.

The first part examines the visual record of female performers through portraiture and prints. Very few costumes survive from the period, leaving the two-dimensional record as the main source for their visual presentation. The growth of print culture and the production of images during this period provides a greater record than is available for earlier in the century. Portraits and prints can both provide useful insights and give an idea of how the performers looked, but the image is still only partial.

The second and third parts will discuss the production of costumes, and the different processes each performer would have undergone to produce their visual presentation on the stage. Costuming performers was undertaken in different ways by the opera house and the theatre, reflecting the different needs and expectations of their productions.

The final section discusses society's attitudes towards female performers on the stage. This was a period of change which affected the public's relationship with performance. It was a time when women began to challenge the easy conjunction between actress and prostitute, and carve a personal image based on their talent and popularity. In a similar way to the actors, women took steps through their presentation off the stage and the way in which they conducted their private lives, to establish performance as an acceptable profession for women.

2.3.1 Visibility of female performers

It was David Garrick (1717-1779), manager of Drury Lane theatre, who first fully understood the growing power of the image and used it in his desire to promote acting as a legitimate and manly profession. He was an important patron for the young Johan Zoffany (1733-1710), transforming the career of the young painter (Simon, 2012). Zoffany's faithful portraits of Garrick's most popular and important roles, enabled him to promote and cement his position as the greatest actor of his day. It was the actresses however, who evoked the strongest reaction from the public, flocking to see their images at the summer exhibition (Perry, *et al.*, 2011). In the 1780s, Joshua Reynolds created some of the most successful portraits, alongside Thomas Gainsborough, George Romney (1734-1802), and Hugh Douglas Hamilton (1740-1808). The Royal Academy exhibition used a method of display, organised by size, that brought about unexpected juxtapositions between actresses and the upper classes. These performers challenged conventional attitudes to portraits as markers of aristocratic status, with their popularity and public visibility (Rosenthal 2007). Their presence in the gallery alongside the aristocracy created a profound tension between the aesthetic and the commercial (Perry, 2001).
Asleson (2003) considers 1776-1812 to be a period that 'witnessed a remarkable proliferation of pictorial representations of actresses', who were painted in their most popular roles, as well as in 'their own private characters' and in the 'guise of allegorical and literary personae' (2003, 2). Asleson argues that the proliferation of images of actresses demonstrated their influence on artistic production of the day and that they exerted a more profound influence than any other group of women in society (2003, 2).

Sir Joshua Reynolds' contributed to the growing fascination with public figures and their representation at the new summer exhibition. Tillyard (2005) discusses the difference

between the culture of celebrity now, and what it meant then, demonstrating how Reynolds' work fed into this interest in prominent figures. She argues that the concept of celebrity as we understand it today, did not exist then, but there was an appetite for reading about aspects of the lives of prominent figures in a way that we recognise today. Postle (2005) highlighted the fact that Reynolds' notebooks listed the names of prominent and notorious women, and that they subsequently appeared as portraits. In this way Reynolds' was actively pursuing women who would enhance his status, as an artist at the heart of the social world.

The growing body of research into the lives of actresses in this period has led to a different analysis of these portraits, taken from the point of view of the lives of the sitters. The relationship between the theatre and artists, and the remarkable visibility of actresses in that period has been examined by Perry, Roach and West (2011), exploring the place of the actress in eighteenth-century society, and their increasing visibility. They provide an analysis of portraits of actresses from the point of view of the sitters, rather than formal or iconographic analysis, and offer valuable insight into the world of female performers.

Perry (2007) also examined portraiture of actresses, and how they demonstrated changing attitudes to females performers. 'The actress as flirt' was one of many perceived identities, along with that of 'whore' (2007,8). Perry demonstrates the more complex relationship that can be seen emerging through portraiture, of a growing rapport between the actress and an increasingly female audience. This allowed the actress to manipulate her image, blend performance with real life, and take more control.

Further analysis has also been undertaken from the point of view of dress and costume. Ribeiro (1995, 2003, 2010) has analysed portraits from this point of view, considering what they can tell us of the social context indicated by the dress of the sitter. She has provided possible methods for the analysis of available visual information on stage costume (Ribeiro, 2003). Particularly how the need for fashionable dress which demonstrated propriety was enhanced with elements of period or foreign styles to add nuance to the portrayal of character.

There is an interesting omission in this discussion of the importance of actresses and their visual imagery, and that is the singers and dancers at the opera house. John Brewer (1997), in his comprehensive tour of eighteenth-century culture, devotes two chapters of a section entitled 'performance' to the theatre in London. Brewer sees the theatre as a

vital factor in English culture of the time, and the lack of royal sponsorship after the restoration, as a driving force in the cultural life of the country, forcing a new dependence on entrepreneurship rather than patronage. His focus, however, is on the spoken word, especially in the writings and acting innovations of David Garrick as manager of the Drury Lane theatre. The visual and musical spectacle of the opera does not receive the same attention from Brewer, except in his statement that: 'Italian opera persisted, as expensive and difficult to finance as ever' (Brewer, 1997, 317). It is the organisational problems of the opera, the twelve different managements between 1741 and 1778, that took his attention, rather than its artistic contribution to the cultural life of the capital.

There was a growing proliferation of prints of actors during this period, especially in *Bell's British Theatre* (Burnim and Highfill, 1998b). In 1773 John Bell, a London printer, began publishing editions of the scripts of Shakespeare's plays. Each edition contained a single play, with a full-length engraving of an actor in costume and apparently in action as the frontispiece. Different editions of *Bell's Shakespeare* appeared between 1775 and 1778. Their success encouraged him to produce other plays and *Bell's British Theatre* began to appear in 1776. Every play script was prefaced by the picture of an actor in a pose and costume related to the play, for example Mrs Abington as Miss Prue in *Love for Love* by William Congreve (1777), shown in figure 12. These were acting editions, however the dancers, Madame Simonet and Gaétan Vestris (1729-1808) appear in the April 1781 edition of Bell (figures 13 and 14), depicted in their costumes for the ballet *Ninette a la Cour.* Auguste Vestris and Giovanna Baccelli are depicted in *Les Amans Surprise* (figures 15 and 16), but in different editions. There are no images of singers. It is possible that the dancers were only included because the season of Ballet d'Action brought to the opera house by Gaetan Vestris in 1782, caused such a sensation, and attracted many people who would not normally have attended the opera house. Including them in an edition of plays, unlikely as it seems, may have been in acknowledgement of their star status, and an encouragement to greater sales of the book.

Dancers were more likely to appear in satirical prints, and one of the most well-known of these once again highlighted the two Vestris', father and son. Rumours of high fees being paid to the two Frenchmen led to satires on their capering, figure 17. It is possible that the long hours of rehearsal demanded of dancers did not allow them to socialise in the same way as actors. However, the friendly relationship between the opera star Gasparo

Pacchierotti and the Burney family, as chronicled in Fanny Burney's diaries, would suggest otherwise (Hemlow and Douglas, 1973). Maybe because opera performances followed a more conventional path, they did not challenge gender expectations in the same way that actresses did (Rosenthal, 2007). Opera and dance were about spectacle and fantasy, and the productions were extravagant, both in terms of settings and costumes. The demonstrations of their powers on stage, especially for dancers, may have mitigated any lack of delicacy necessary in the pursuit of their career. It is also possible that for the dancers, the omission was because they were regarded merely as a commodity, to be used by the young men in the audience as markers of their status (Price *et al.,* 1995).

From the point of view of this research, it is also interesting to see portraits of actresses in fashionable dress, rather than a costume, for example: Mrs Siddons (1755-1831) and Mrs Robinson (1757-1800), both painted by Gainsborough shown in figures 18 and 19. As discussed previously, Reynolds enjoyed constructing a narrative separate to the sitter, whereas Gainsborough was more likely to present the subject directly as he saw them. The portrait of Mrs Siddons, painted in 1785, shows her in a fashionable silk wraparound gown and large hat. She sits sideways to the viewer displaying her striking profile. Her presence is that of a well-dressed and fashionable woman. The portrait of the actress Mrs Robinson was painted in 1782, after she was abandoned by the Prince of Wales. Unusually for Gainsborough, it conceals a sub-text, that of the abandoned woman. Like Mrs Siddons, she is fashionably dressed, but she sits with a dog, a symbol of fidelity, holding a miniature of her erstwhile lover. These portraits help to place the actresses in the fashionable world of the time, and aid in building a picture of how what they wore offstage fitted into wider society.

2.3.2 Costumes at the opera house

The production of costumes at the opera house differed from the theatre in that they were custom made for the performers on site, in the theatre wardrobe. In the theatre, as is discussed below, actresses often supplied their own costumes. The concept of a single designer for the settings and costume of theatrical performances did not exist at this time. The librettos occasionally named a scenic artist or costumier, but this was erratic, and the names of the painters and machinists appear more often than costumiers (Burden, 2011).

After 1774 however, the name Thomas Lupino appears regularly as the tailor at the opera house. The meticulous study of court proceedings associated with the troubled management of the opera house by Price, *et al.* (1995) has also brought to light important information on costume. In 1783 Lupino sued William Taylor, the manager, for reimbursement of payments to costume assistants and all materials (Price, *et al.*, 1995, 631). In the 1970s Sybil Rosenfeld (1976) traced some opera costume designs, some of which might have been attributable to Lupino (their current whereabouts are as yet unknown).

Lupino's name does appear in the press on two occasions, giving further insight into the presentation of costumes at the opera house. Firstly, from a design point of view, a criticism by the *Morning Post* in 1780 suggests that costumes still adhered to rules written down in 1681 by Le Père Ménestrier (1631–1705) in *Des Ballets Anciens et Modernes* (Collins and Jarvis, 2016). He stated that the costume for the Sun should be 'cloth of gold with a gilt headdress', with a silver version to denote the Moon. The goddess Diana, the huntress, would always appear carrying a bow, wearing an animal skin and a moon motif (usually as a headdress) (Ménestrier, 1682, 255). Audiences at the opera in London, well educated in the classics, would have understood these meanings. It is unusual to find comment on costumes in the newspaper reports of the opera. However, a reporter of a production of the opera *Quinto Fabio* was obviously disconcerted at the appearance of silver and gold costumes in a pastoral ballet:

> Another object of censure is the impropriety of dress, particularly in the last dance where Mademoiselle Baccelli is in silver and gauze, and her partner Mons. Favre Guiardale in gold. Signor Lupino hath for so many years held the gnose [knowledge] and shears at the Opera-house, that we thought him a complete judge of the rules of propriety, from which he has nevertheless in this and other occasions most shamefully deviated, true to the old adage ne suter ultra crepidam: even a stage-taylor, however great and important, should take directions, not pretend to direct. (Morning Post and Daily Advertiser, 1780, Jan. 24)

The Latin quote 'cobbler, not beyond the shoe' suggesting that Lupino had overreached himself. Seen in conjunction with the rest of the long review, the ballet may have been inserted at the last minute to cheer up a tedious production of the opera, and the gold and

silver were all that were available. For the reporter however, as a representative of a largely perceptive and knowledgeable audience, the visual dissonance created was not acceptable. The review is also interesting for the fact that it mentions Lupino by name. It would seem that the audience knew his role and had expectations of how he should fulfil it. The lack of other newspaper comment suggests that he did it very well. This is backed up by the 1783 inventory of the opera house. It lists a 'wardrobe room' and a 'tailor's room', and further costume storage along several hallways (Price, *et al.*, 1995, 651). Lupino was obviously an employee of some status, because he held the keys to these rooms (1995, 161).

The second occasion for the appearance of Lupino's name in the press was more serious, but reveals him as caught up in the turmoil of the managements scandals of the 1780s. The incidents do however, give another insight into the materials used for opera and dance costumes at this time (Price, *et al.*, 1995). In 1789 growing disquiet with the conduct of the management of the theatre, led to several attempts for change. One such, was an anonymous tip-off to the customs that the wardrobe was using contraband French fabrics, which led to two raids on the theatre by customs officers. After the first, in January 1789 *The Times* newspaper published a full list of the fabrics seized: twenty-eight items; including fabrics, lace and spangles (sequins), of which only one was labelled as English. Possibly because the raid had not achieved the desired effect, another was conducted in March, headlined in the papers as *Opera seizure!!!* ('Theatre Cuttings', V41, 1789, Mar. 15). The report described the raid, and how this time they took a whole set of dresses made for the new *Turkish Ballet*. 'Some lacemen *[sic]* and silk weavers were present, who united in declaring the property in question to be of French manufacture' ('Theatre Cuttings', V41, 1789, Mar. 15).
However, a close examination of the list of material published after the first raid suggests the exact opposite in terms of their origin. For example, '2 remnants tiffany painted, and spotted with copper foil' (*The Times*, 1789, Jan. 31). Tiffany was a thin transparent silk, and this had obviously been painted in imitation of the heavily embroidered brocades that were fashionable (North, 2018). Silk was sold by weight, the heavier, the more expensive, suggesting that this was a cheap imitation more suited to the limited budget of the tailor at the opera house. The copper foil would have shone like gold under the limited lighting on the stage, another cheap imitation. Taken as a whole, the extensive list can be identified as what might be expected to be found in the wardrobe of a theatre. On a

limited budget, the costumier had to provide dresses that shone and sparkled on the stage as if made from the most fashionable and expensive materials being worn by the aristocrats in the audience. From the silver foil, which was probably steel, to the cobweb lawn which was a version of tiffany made from fine flax, every item can be identified as a cheaper version of a material used in the highest quality fashionable dress. The court case mentioned above suggests that Lupino was purchasing many of the materials from his own pocket, with little hope of reimbursement. Anyone involved, including the lace men, would have known the real provenance of the fabrics. The costumes for the dance and the opera had all the shine and sparkle of gold and gems, but were actually cheap metals and paste in imitation.

Some opera and dance costumes still exist from this period in continental Europe, in two surviving baroque theatres. There are costumes in the collections of the Drottningholm theatre in Sweden, and at Českÿ Krumlov in the Czech Republic. These have survived because of the status of the people for whom they were made. In Sweden the costumes were made for King Gustav III (1746-1792), who enjoyed performing in his own theatre (Rangstrom, 2002). When he was assassinated, everything that belonged to him, including his stage costumes were preserved. Rangström (2002) has written a very helpful analysis of the costumes, their fabrics and construction, which add to the picture of what was produced for male performers at the time. In the Czech Republic the theatre belonged to the Schwarzenberg family, who were an important family at the Imperial court in Vienna. In this case costumes for both men and women have survived, including a few from this period (Fig. 5). Eighteenth-century fabrics have also been identified among the greater number of costumes that remain from the nineteenth century. In London, the cost of the fabrics allied with the fact that they contained yards of fabric saw a large number of costumes used and re-used, even in these elite circles. These continental survivals are helpful in reconstructing the style worn and suggest that conventions attached to the visual presentation of classical characters were still being adhered to. The raid described above, however, suggests that in London Lupino, on a much lower budget, was using ingenuity, combined with cheap materials, to create the same look.

2.3.3 Costumes at the theatre

There has been more research undertaken into costumes worn in the theatre than at the opera house, particularly by Aileen Ribeiro (1995, 2003). Ribeiro discusses the lack of visual evidence for actual costuming, as almost no stage costumes have survived from this time and very few designs exist. Ribeiro (2003) has used a painting, *The Apotheosis of Garrick* (1782) by George Carter (1737-1795), to illustrate the variety of costume styles prevalent in the late eighteenth century, figure 20. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1784 it depicts a group of actors, dressed for Shakespearian roles, bidding farewell to Garrick as he is lifted aloft by angels (Ribeiro, 2003, 105). The subject here is the women, but it is interesting to note that all the actors look like Garrick displayed in his most popular roles. Prominent at the front are five actresses, who were, from left to right: Elizabeth Younge (1740-1797) kneeling, as Cordelia in *King Lear;* Mary Anne Yates (1728-1787), as Isabella in *Measure for Measure;* Frances Abington, as Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing;* Jane Pope (1744-1818) as Mrs Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor;* and Elizabeth Hartley (1751-1824) kneeling, as Desdemona in *Othello.* Apart from Isabella who is dressed in a religious habit, the group display a variety of styles based on current fashions. Mrs Page has a wide lace 'Van Dyke' collar and cuffs over her black dress, adding an air of historicism, and Desdemona's fur trimmed wrapping gown has a hint of the oriental, but none of them have strayed far from current styles. Actresses at the time received an allowance, extra to their salary, to cover the cost of providing costumes. Mrs Abington negotiated a greater sum than most, to allow her to dress herself in the latest styles (Anon, 1888). Lesser actresses bought clothes second hand, and there are occasional mentions in theatre accounts of buying specific stage costume from specialist suppliers (Ribeiro 2003). For several prominent actresses building a relationship with a rich female benefactor was essential, not only for donations of dress, but for the social contacts that they could bring. For actresses, the association with prostitution was difficult to shift, and dressing not only fashionably, but in upper class dress, allowed them to project an aura of association with the elite in the audience (Crouch, 1997). If they were readily identified with the parts they were playing on stage, then the visual aspect of that persona would be the first to be lodged in the audience's imagination. This was not only about patronage, but also about establishing a positive personal public image. Elite women donated clothes as well as money to their favourite actresses, a form of patronage that allowed them the pleasure of seeing their own clothes on the stage.

As previously discussed, the visual records that exist for costume on the stage come mostly from John Bell and between 1773 and 1776 he published 140 plays (Burnim and Highfill, 1998a). Collectively there were approximately 350 illustrations, fairly evenly divided between actors and actresses, with each person appearing once or possibly twice. However, Garrick appeared ten times, and Mrs Abington eight. She fully understood the power of the image and followed Garrick in his use of it for self-promotion. The popularity of Bell's books led to a further proliferation of such prints which were sold as individual items through print shops.
Prints of Mrs Abbington, show that she wore a wide variety of styles for the aristocratic characters that she played. It is not possible to verify that she wore these on stage, but they suggest that she was aware of the visual message presented by different styles. A French bodice was different from an English one, for example, and would have conveyed different characteristics to the audience.

It is interesting to note that there has been little crossover between research into the opera house and that into the theatre. The opera resides in the genre of music, and the theatre with the spoken word, but both Garrick and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) were involved both at Drury Lane and the opera house. This lack of connection is possibly a symptom of the invisibility of the visual discussed in the previous chapter (Burke, 2001). Historical research into the theatre has tended to concentrate on the text, because it generally survives intact. Wahrman (2006) analyses prologues and epilogues of plays, but anecdotal evidence suggests that much of the success, especially of prologues and epilogues, on which he relies, was in the satirical spin put on the words by the actress's movements as is discussed below.

2.3.4 Attitudes to female performers

An increasing understanding of the performative nature of Georgian society, and interest in the experience of women in the period, has brought a growing body of research on the theatre and performance at this time (Russell, 2007). West (1991) has stated that the eighteenth century was 'not the age of the dramatist, but of the actor' (1991, 1). Theatre in the second half of the century was dominated by sentimental comedies, 'a genre that bordered on the mawkish until made crisper by Sheridan and Goldsmith' (Rosenthal,

2007, 35). Rosenthal suggests that it was the actress, encouraged by the growing female audience, who broke out of the 'formulaic moral language, creating their own modes of dramatic expression' (2007, 36). This was the theatre inhabited by Mrs Abington, who used gesture and props such as her fan and hat pins to highlight the unreality of the heroines that she played. West shows that while it is impossible to fully understand the dramatic effect of a particular actress's gestures, it is possible to gain a sense of how they influenced different aspects of society, aesthetic, literary, and political. She analyses the resonances that a contemporary audience might have found in theatrical portraits, particularly those of Garrick. Added to this is the pervasive presence of theatrical metaphors in written culture. For example, in William Hogarth's description of his own comic historical works such as the *Harlot's Progress* as exhibiting a 'dumb shew *[sic]*', and Burke's use of theatrical references to support his argument in *Reflections on the Revolution* (West, 1991, 3).

As already stated, Wahrman (2006) used the scripts of prologues and epilogues to chart the changing attitudes toward gender across the period. A prologue and epilogue, seldom written by the playwright, were customarily added to the performance of a play at this time. On most occasions the prologue would be spoken by an actor and concentrated on the character they would play, giving context and drawing the audience into the narrative that they were about to see. The epilogue, generally voiced by an actress, placed the performance in the context of the world outside, providing a bridge between the theatrical experience and the society which it inhabited (Ennis and Slagle, 2007). Prologues and epilogues were often published in the newspapers, publicising a production and drawing the audience in. They were also re-written for each new production, or even during it, changing the context of the piece to reflect current issues. In the 1780s as Sheridan's first play *The Rivals* grew in popularity, he changed the prologue from a discussion between two of the male characters, to a musing by a female character on the comedy's success. Thus he was able recast the comedy within the context of its production and play on its success (Ennis and Slagle, 2007).

When speaking an epilogue, the actress, still in costume, but often talking as if as herself, could take the opportunity to shake the audience out of its complacency if she wished, and use her position as a female to great comic effect. The text may have been written by a man, but she could use gesture and expression to augment the sense of what she was

saying. It was in the theatre that for the first time women were speaking to women in a public space (Crouch 1997). Many of the plays of the period present a view of women as desired by men; actresses began to challenge the authenticity of that view with their use of the epilogue as a way of speaking directly to the women in the audience. It was a 'wink' to the audience, providing a 'kind of meta-commentary on the goings-on on-stage' (Wahrman, 2006, 56). Delivered in a light tone, they had more leeway to be bold and provide cultural commentary; the world of the play could be placed in the context of the world outside. Actresses were using their wit and their bodies to comment on their situation, and get their opinions heard.

Printed journals such as *The Town and Country Magazine* and *London Daily Courant* fed an increasing appetite for gossip, with the growth in both the quality and quantity of prints available feeding an appetite for relatively cheap visual representations of prominent people.
The increasing visibility of women in society did not coincide with a greater understanding of the professionalism of the actress (Perry, 2003). The growing bourgeois ideal of femininity that was 'passive, private, domestic' (2993, 59), came up against the popularity of actresses, who were anything but. Added to this discourse were the increasing calls for better education for women, which, if anything, made the status of the actress more fluid and ambiguous.

Women in comedy became very popular, a genre in which Mrs Abington excelled. Comedy, however, was seen as a male genre, and thus unsuitable for women (Evans, 2011, 162). In her novel *Evelina* (1777) Fanny Burney used a visit to the theatre to see William Congreve's (1670-1729) *Love for Love*, as a plot device to reinforce the sensitivity and respectability of her heroine. The production described in the book can be located as one that would have starred Mrs Abington as Miss Prue, one of her most popular and enduring roles. Evelina finds the bawdy humour disconcerting and writes to her guardian that she hopes never to see it again, as it was so indelicate. Evans (2011) describes this episode as illuminating Burney's ambivalence towards actresses. She enjoyed the theatre, her family was friendly with both Garrick and Sheridan, but she makes no mention of Mrs Abington. The episode in the novel is a long one and allows Burney to discuss the biting wit of Restoration drama, allying her style of social comedy with that of Congreve and Garrick. She 'heaps praise on Garrick elsewhere in the novel' but does not even mention

Abington, 'the famous actress who would have been featured in Congreve's play' (Evans, 2011, 158). Like her heroine, Burney was wary of praise heaped on women and preferred the anonymity of print, and she used an intermediary in the process of having *Evelina* published. Later, the suggestion that she should write a play caused her family extreme anxiety (Chisholm, 1999). The playwright would have been required at rehearsals, which would have involved close communication with the actors, considered quite untenable for a woman in Burney's position. Even in fiction, she could not permit the possible impression that she had communicated with an actress.

For Abington, roles such as Miss Prue meant absorbing and reproducing the manners and deportment of the elite. It was these manners that were the subject of the comedies, arguably the site of greatest success for actresses at this time (Rosenthal 2007). The actress presented a challenge to the new 'bourgeois rhetoric of propriety' (2007, 159). While conforming in some ways, they also offered an intriguing alternative to 'traditional hierarchies of rank, and emerging ideologies of gender' (2007, 159). Rosenthal presents an interesting discussion of how attitudes to actresses in the period changed. She places them in the context of the cultural changes and challenges the historical view that they were widely regarded as prostitutes. For Rosenthal this reading presents a false opposition, as while some could indeed be classified as both, others were carving out a different cultural position, more in line with Garrick's desire to be seen as a professional. To simply read the satirical images, of which there were many, as objectification, is to underestimate the 'agency, power and privilege' that some of them enjoyed (Rosenthal, 2007, 160).

Nussbaum (2010) describes how actresses challenged normative ideals of femininity. She examines actresses, not just as performers, but as 'living subjects at stage's edge' (2010, 21). Hers is a mostly economic analysis, describing how actresses were part of the new urban and monied society described by Russell (2007) and Wharman (2006). She takes her discussion away from the trope of 'actress as whore' and demonstrates how actresses carefully crafted their public identities. The eighteenth-century novel created an illusion of 'selfhood' that resulted in an 'interiority effect' (Nussbaum, 2010, 19). The shrewd actress, understanding that her audience might develop a fantasy of intimacy with her, could foster this illusion into a commodity to enhance her image.

For Nussbaum Mrs Abington's manipulation of fashion at a moment when 'conspicuous consumption was considered an act of patriotism' allowed her to 'channel commodification into a potential source of agency', mobilising her well-known affection for material possessions into a successful career on the stage (2010, 244). Surely this affection for commodities largely refers to her dress, as she was known as a promoter of fashion, but Nussbaum does not analyse this. What she does amply demonstrate, however, is that a popular actress in the eighteenth century could make more money from the theatre than ever before (Nussbaum 2010).

2.3.5 Chapter summary

The term 'event orientated aesthetic' (Hall-Witt, 2007, 11) suggests that an evening at the opera house was as much about the audience as the performance, with many of the aristocratic subscribers viewing the occasion as a moment for seeing friends, gathering news, and displaying their status. In large part the organisation of the subscription boxes, occupied by the elite was undertaken by women, and although they were still outnumbered on the list by men, the auditorium was in many ways a gendered space. The presence of society hostesses with their organisational power brought another aspect to the atmosphere. For women, an important way of confirming their status and membership of the elite group would have been through their visual presentation, and there would have been pressure to conform. Their sense of self and self-esteem may have been intimately connected with this sense of belonging.
Goffman (1990) in his description of human relations, both as individuals and as groups, gives an underpinning of theory to an examination of these pressures. His dramaturgical model, and description of the different fronts presented for social occasions, with certain characteristics veiled, or kept backstage, illuminates many of the relationships at play in the opera house auditorium.

Self-esteem can be gained by membership of a group and this may bring with it a pressure to conform. Alongside the desire to conform there may be a need for individuality, a dichotomy that can cause tension. Membership of the elite group at the opera could bring a sense of validation of status, and this would largely have been demonstrated though visual presentation.
Any woman attending the opera would have had a sense of the other watching her, a judgmental gaze, that in this case could be defined as a female gaze. Women have an

intimate relationship with their clothes, such that dressing for an occasion such as this would not simply be a matter of looking right. Many other factors come into play when dressing for a social occasion, the emotional attachment to clothes, their feeling against the body, will be set against the perceived expectations of others who will be present. Many attitudes towards dress and the presentation of their bodies will have been absorbed from childhood, such that they become internalised as part of the self.

Fashion can be seen as a unifying element that brings together different aspects of the self as a unifying force. It can also bring cohesion to a group, allowing for a visual confirmation of membership. Conforming in this way can also be in opposition to the desire for individuality, a dichotomy that can often cause tension. Discourses around fashion have been seen as a form of control, a discouragement to excess by placing parameters on what is expected. During the period being studied the greatest exponents of excess were the *beau monde* who used conspicuous consumption to demonstrate their wealth and superiority. Their extravagance highlighted the hedonistic lifestyle of some in the elite and brought condemnation for their over-indulgence.

During the period being studied women enjoyed greater freedom to participate in society than before. Participation brought them more into the public eye, and with this came a greater pressure to conform. The growing popularity of portraiture added to this sense of visibility, and also brought society women into unexpected contact with the *demi-monde* on the walls of the gallery.

Many of the portraits depicted female performers who had to be particularly aware of their self-presentation if they wished to avoid the taint of prostitution. Some women on the stage were earning more than ever before from their profession, which brought them far greater autonomy and control over their lives. The increasing visibility of women, both from society and as professionals, coincided with a growth in the production of images. This sense of the visual brought a desire that all should conform with expectations for their milieu, that what you looked like should indeed be who you were.

Chapter 3 – Case studies

Biography is a fundamental element in the methodology of this research. In order to place each woman alongside theories of the psychology of dress and self-presentation it is necessary to have an understanding of their personal outlook, how this was affected by those around them, and the society that they lived in.
The case studies contained in this chapter provide largely factual, but also essential, details of the lives of the four women chosen: Lady Mary Coke, Mary Watson Wentworth, Marchioness of Rockingham, Mrs Frances Abington and Signora Giovanna Baccelli. In order to reach a better understanding and then extrapolate their attitudes to dress, it is important to consider each individual biography. Their family, upbringing and adult situation are all important in understanding their approach to attending the Opera House.

The women were chosen after an initial scope of the list of subscribers to the Opera House that was published in 1783, shown in figures 1 and 2. They either appeared as the keyholder, or on the longer list, with the exception of Giovanna Baccelli, who was associated with the Duke of Dorset, named in box 84. Together they present a variety of different reasons for attending the Opera House, but also, each woman had different personal characteristics that made them an attractive prospect for study. All four are approached from the viewpoint of their attendance in the audience at the opera. However, choosing two aristocrats, an actress and a dancer, enabled the research to encompass the experience of women as professionals, as well as members of the elite; society's attitudes towards female performers formed an important aspect of society at the time.

The two aristocrats have both left substantial personal writings, which have proved fruitful in terms of understanding their characters. The two performers were both acclaimed as professional women, Mrs Abington as a comic actress of great skill, and Giovanna Baccelli as an accomplished principal dancer at the Opera House. Very little survives of a personal nature from these two women, however, their success resulted in a substantial record of their careers through other media. Each biography allows for the extrapolation of different elements of the experience of attending the Opera House as a woman. Set alongside the findings discussed in Chapter Four, it is possible to explore their attitudes to social interaction and their self-presentation in greater depth.

3.1 Lady Mary Coke, 1727-1811

Lady Mary Coke (née Campbell) could 'never forgive providence for not allowing her to be born a man and successor to her father, who had no boys' (Campbell 1910, 218). She was the youngest of four daughters of John, the second Duke of Argyll and Greenwich (1680-1743), and Jane Warburton (d.1767), his second wife. After the Duke's death, the title passed to his brother Archibald and then to his cousin. For Lady Mary, the progression of his title to another branch of the family produced a sense of loss that never left her.

Lady Mary Coke can be seen as one of 'a certain group of assured aristocratic women whose status was unquestioned and whose expectations were high' (Chalus 2000, 119). As the daughter of a Duke her family was part of the elite group of aristocrats who surrounded the Royal court. She moved around and within this layer of society her whole life; she knew exactly who she was, her position within the aristocracy and what was owed to one at her level. Attendance at the Opera House gave her a reinforcement of this social status. She was hyper conscious of those above her in the social scale, especially the royal family, had great expectations of how they should fulfil their roles, and commensurate disappointment and confusion when they did not do so.

After becoming a widow at the age of twenty-six, with a legacy that allowed her to live in relative comfort, she lived the life of an aristocratic woman of society. Winters were spent in London, with attendance at court, the opera and social functions, summers in the country, or travelling. For the rest of her life it was her close family, her mother and three sisters, who provided the key stabilising relationships of her world.

3.1.1 Personal life

We are indebted to Lady Louisa Stuart for the most comprehensive description of Lady Mary, contained in a memoir of Lady Mary's father, the second Duke of Argyll (Stuart, 1827). Lady Louisa was the daughter of Lord Bute (1713-1792), advisor to the young George III, and his wife Mary (1718-1794), the daughter of traveller and writer Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762). Lady Louisa seems to have inherited her grand-mother's literary interests and skill at writing, demonstrated in her legacy of letters and memoirs

(Clark, 1896; Barnes, 2015). Lady Mary Coke was a frequent visitor to the Bute household, where they referred to this difficult and temperamental woman as 'Queen Mary':

> Her beauty had not been undisputed, like Lady Strafford's (her sister). Some allowed, some denied it; the dissenters declaring her neither more nor less than a white cat – a creature to which her dead whiteness of skin, unshaded by eyebrows, and fierceness of her eyes, did give her great resemblance. (Stuart, 1827, 57).

All four sisters were known for their shrill voices, gaining them nicknames such as the 'Screaming Sisters' and the 'Bawling Campbells' (Stuart, 1827, 43).

Lady Louisa Stuart (1827) describes Lady Mary's father, the Duke of Argyll, as a well decorated soldier who had lived his life in the field, and 'mingled with London society rarely, only in the intervals between his campaigns' (1827, 7). He married Jane Warburton, a lady-in-waiting to the Queen, who had arrived 'raw from Cheshire' with a 'coarseness of language' (1827, 6) and blunt personality that never left her. Their marriage seems to have been one of adoration on his part, coupled with cool indifference on hers, and this indifference extended to her four daughters. For the Duke, who had a deep 'prejudice against intelligent women' (1827, 16), his daughters were an 'encumbrance' (1827, 25). He forbade them from learning French as 'one language was enough for a woman to talk in' (1827, 25). Thus, Lady Mary and her three elder sisters grew up under the supervision of their mother, whose grudge against them for not being boys was even greater than the Duke's, coupled with 'the natural indifference of her temper, [that] prevented her from concerning herself with them' (1827, 26).

The four girls lived together at Sudbrook in a small house called 'The Young Ladies' House', where they 'romped as much as they pleased' (1827, 26). When they were at an age when husbands needed to be found, the girls began to be admitted to their parents' society. Lady Mary was still quite young, and unlike her sisters, not in the least intimidated by their father, who was entertained by her 'fearless prattle' (1827, 27) and made her his favourite. The Earl of Bute felt that Lady Mary's ungovernable temper later in life was entirely due to her father's 'injudicious indulgence' (1827, 27) of her during this period. She also seems to have inherited her mother's lack of empathy and inability to read social signals, to which she often responded in an inappropriate way. In 1773 Lady

Mary's friend Horace Walpole described her as of unimpeachable virtue and 'her friendship violent, her anger deaf to remonstrances. […] As her understanding is not so perfect as her good qualities she is not always right, nor skilful in making her retreat' (Hume, 1889a, cxxxi). Her magnified sense of her own importance meant that she interpreted any small inattention from others as a major slight to her person, and might hold a grudge for years (Rubenstein, 2004). Lady Mary grew up believing in the primacy of the royal family, as part of a society that adhered to a strict set of rules that were becoming increasingly out of date.

Each sister in turn made a suitable marriage within an appropriate social stratum. The eldest, Caroline (1717-1794), became Lady Dalkeith, and later Baroness Greenwich on the death of her father; Elizabeth (1718-1799) married James Stuart-Mackenzie (d.1800), the brother of Lord Bute, becoming known as Lady Betty Mackenzie. Anne (1720-1785), closest in age to Lady Mary and the first to find a husband, married Lord Strafford (1722-1791). However stormy their relationship, the four sisters remained close throughout their adult lives, and appear regularly in her journals.

The contract for Lady Mary's marriage began in the traditional way when Lord Leicester approached the Duke of Argyll with an offer of union between Lady Mary and his son, Edward, Lord Coke (1719-1753), and the offer was accepted. Lady Mary expressed herself as happy with the match, in spite of doubts expressed by her mother, because Lord Coke was known to be a rake. They were married in April 1747, after an elaborate courtship, during which she remained aloof and haughty, enjoying the role of 'disdainful maiden' (Rubenstein, 2004, 1). There followed two years of misery on her part and bullying on his, during which she maintained the demeanour of a tragic and wronged woman, displaying her 'propensity to give things a high *historical* colouring' (Stuart, 1827, 70). Eventually, in 1750, it was agreed that she might live apart from her husband in her childhood home of Sudbrook, provided that she did not visit London or enter society. Fortunately for Lady Mary, Edward died two years later in 1753, leaving her as an independent widow, with a comfortable income. It was after his death that she began to cultivate the friendship of Princess Amelia, sister of George II, and to appear regularly at court, meticulously recording each occasion when George III or Queen Charlotte (1744-1818) paid her attention or conversed with her. A typical entry from her journal reads: 'At one went to

court […] There seem'd to me a greater crowd then I had ever seen; the King was particularly gracious & civil to me' (Hume, 1889, I, 119).

Lady Mary Coke is remembered now as a diarist and chronicler of the upper classes in whose society she lived. Her writing is generally factual, describing her life in detail, and the movements and relationships of those around her. She gives little sense of an inner life; she reads books on history and travel, and the Bible, but her response to their content is not recorded. She played the base lute, and attended the opera, but little emotion is expressed in response to the music.
One of the main drivers for her journals was to keep her sister, Lady Strafford, informed of the comings and goings of their circle when she was away from London. Lord Strafford had houses in Yorkshire and Derbyshire, where they spent much of their time. Lady Strafford was epileptic and suffered fewer fits in the quiet of the country than in London, hence the need for the correspondence to keep her in touch. According to Lady Louisa Stuart, Lord Strafford did little to mitigate the boredom of the country for his wife, so Lady Mary's journals would have provided welcome relief (Stuart, 1827, 45). A typical entry from 16th November 1766 reads:

> From chapel I came home, dress'd & went to dinner at my mother's, & at a little after seven went to the French Ambassadress, where there was a great deal of company; play'd two rubers [sic] at Whisk, & a little after nine Miss Pelham and I agreed to go to Ly. Harrington's. there we found a croud [sic] of Company; I set down to Loo, & play'd till I came away. The Duke of York (brother of the King) did not stay above half an hour. I won ten guineas, & was home at half an hour after eleven. I eat my roasted apples, read a little in the Bible, & went to bed. (Hume, 1889, I, 101)

In life Lady Mary was a formidable character, very sure when she was right, to the point of becoming overbearing when crossed. Her brother-in-law Lord Strafford eventually refused to invite her to their home in Yorkshire, as his 'love of his own way' and her 'domineering spirit' clashed increasingly often (Stuart 1827, 45). Lady Mary had on occasion scolded her sister Anne into an epileptic fit, another reason for keeping them separated.

The letters are uniform, a sheet of paper folded in half to make four sides for writing on. Each journal covers approximately a week, each page covered in neat writing, sometimes getting closer together as she runs out of space at the end. Sometimes the number of days covered are fewer, such as in 1780 during the Gordon riots, when she wrote from London every day during the worst of the troubles. There are few moments of deep emotion expressed in the journals. She was overcome by the death of her mother in 1767 and confused by the different reactions to this event from her sisters. In 1785, her sister, Lady Strafford, fell into a fire during a fit, an accident that would ultimately result in her death. Lady Mary continued writing but addressed her journals to Lord Strafford. These letters are suffused with her inability to help her sister and the sense of frustration that this brings. There are suggestions about doctors and promises of pots of salve for the burns. The only action that seemed to have meaning was to continue going to court and relaying messages to and from the King and Queen.

There is a strong sense of hierarchy in her journals. The King and Queen are the pinnacle, and if present, mentioned first. Her friend, the writer Horace Walpole, described her as having a ‘frenzy for royalty’ (Rubenstein, 2004, 2). Her loyalty to the crown was fierce and unbending. During the Gordon riots in June 1780 she states herself ‘a zealous friend and faithful servant of my sovereign. I am enemy to all those who are not’ (NRAS859, V490). Other members of the royal family come next in her records, followed by members of her own class. She struggles with those at her level who transgress, and the existence of a demi-monde was simply ignored (Tillyard, 2007).

Lady Mary died in 1811, having outlived most of her family and friends. Her legacy was a set of journals that began in 1766, mostly addressed to her sister Lady Strafford until the latter’s death in 1785. Lady Mary continued writing until 1791 when her brother-in-law Lord Strafford died. They provide an important record of the movements and socialising of the upper classes over twenty-five years of the late eighteenth century.

3.1.2 Public persona

The writings of others who were close to Lady Mary, describe a woman who had no sense of humour and little understanding of the dynamic of human relationships. She often became haughty and uncommunicative when challenged on something where she felt

herself to be in the right (Rubenstein, 2004). On occasion, this refusal to compromise brought her to the point of social exclusion. At the end of her life, an argument with the Princess Amelia robbed her of one of her closest friends (Stuart, 1827, 137). She was also the butt of many jokes, suggesting an inability to understand the subtle nuances of humour.

Prince Edward, Duke of York (1739-1767) became one of the most important people in the life of Lady Mary Coke. In 1759 when their relationship began to develop, he was nineteen and embarking on the life of a young aristocratic man about town. He and his older sibling, King George III were close and had been brought up in relative seclusion away from the royal court by their mother, Princess Augusta (1719-1772). After the death of their father, Prince Frederick (1707-1751), her dislike of the King George II, and his court, meant that her four sons and two daughters grew up in relative ignorance of the world that they were to rule. The Duke of York, more outgoing, sociable and popular than his older brother, enjoyed the company of women, both aristocratic and courtesan, and Lady Mary Coke presented him with a challenge. She was eleven years older than him, a 'beautiful, statuesque and haughty woman' (Tillyard, 2007).
Lady Louisa Stuart suggests that when Lady Mary was first presented to the Prince, her natural deference to the royal family probably made her gracious and respectful approach, accompanied by attractive smiles, quite captivating (Stuart, 1827, 99). He soon discovered that she was not to be won easily, and that she was regarded with some amusement by those around her. Lady Mary's outward response in the journals is curiously unemotional for someone being courted by a young prince; he is simply recorded as being there amongst the others: 'We came down stairs together, & sat in one of the rooms. The Duke of York came to us, & staid [sic] about a quarter of an hour. I came home a little after eleven' (Hume, 1889, I, 207). This hardly seems the voice of a young woman in love.

She remained cool and aloof, possibly because she was unsure of how to receive the attentions of a Prince without opening herself up to speculation as to her motives. This attitude probably only made her more alluring. The Prince may have been flattered by the attentions of an older and more sophisticated woman; while on her part, to be courted by a young man of nineteen (albeit not a particularly attractive one) was equally flattering (Tillyard, 2007). She also had a curiously blinkered view as to his character, possibly

because as a member of the royal family he was beyond reproach. Lady Louisa recorded him as 'silly, frivolous, heartless; void alike of steadiness and principle; a libertine in his practice, and in society one of those incessant chatterers who must by necessity utter a vast deal of nonsense' (Stuart, 1827, 93). Yet Lady Mary, writing to her sister at the prospect of a visit from the Duke of York to the Strafford's home in Yorkshire, painted him as the perfect house guest: 'I believe the Duke of York is always extremely easy and good humour'd' (Hume, 1889b, I, 41). Not the phrase that might have been used by those unwillingly caught up in his practical jokes. 'The duke of York's *crew'* became a popular phrase at the time, when gossip brought his 'frolics' to public attention (Stuart, 1827, 93).

However much the Duke may have laughed with his friends over the strange and distant behaviour of Lady Mary, he spent long enough with the Straffords to be able to spend some time discussing with her the delights of the Strafford's home at Wentworth Castle. An action calculated to endear him to her would also have given him further fuel to amuse his friends. He mimicked her 'pomposity', and the 'reserve and distant encouragement held out by turns'. More than that, it was evident to all that she intended to become his wife (Stuart, 1827, 101).

In 1767 the Prince, newly created Duke of York, and with an allowance to match, decided to build himself a theatre. He asked an acquaintance, the painter Benjamin Wilson, to fit out and manage it, in a building close to the new development of Oxford Street. Wilson commented on the fact that this project was not a part of the racier side of the Prince's life. No opera girls were allowed, and everything was conducted in an orderly and precise fashion (Tillyard, 2007). The Prince and his friends were the actors, and Mr and Mrs Garrick were honoured with an invitation to attend a rehearsal, presumably to give advice. For Lady Mary, her offer of a ticket to the performance must have presented a dilemma. Later, in December 1780, she condemned members of the aristocracy who indulged in private theatrical performances, dismissing the women as 'ladies with small reputations' (NRAS859, V490).

> Never having heard of a Prince of the blood performing in a Play after they had passed their childhood, I was concern'd the Duke shou'd do anything so contrary to decorum, & so unbecoming Royal Dignity' (Hume, 1889, I, 101).

However, this was an invitation from the Prince, and she was to be in the company of respectable people such as her sister Lady Dalkeith. Afterwards, she declared that the Prince had actually acted quite well, maybe for her his performance had felt like an illicit pleasure.

The Prince announced to his friend Benjamin Wilson that soon he might settle down with a wife, but not yet. Later the same year, and accompanied by a small group of friends, he set off for France (Tillyard 2007). A mad dash from Montpelier across the marshy Rhône delta towards Toulon in sweltering heat, brought him down with a malarial fever. His fever did not subside, and after a week, he succumbed and died.

Lady Mary first heard the news while she was staying in Vienna, and refused to believe it, but by the time she had returned to London, she understood that it was true. Her reaction to the Prince's death, and his presence ever afterwards in her journals, suggest that for her, their relationship was serious (Rubenstein, 2004). What she could not admit to while he was alive was her desire to become his wife, and it would seem that over time, and in her mind, she became the Dowager Duchess of York (Tillyard, 2007). No contract between them was ever mentioned. Maybe he told her that on his return he would settle with a wife, but his descriptive and friendly letter to Lady Mary from Rome does not suggest a young man missing the presence of his intended bride. Lady Louisa dismissed it as 'a mere matter-of-fact letter. Any gentleman might have addressed it to any lady' (Hume, 1889a, I, xci). However, for the rest of her life places where they met evoked dramatic emotion for her, and perceived insensitivity from others caused rifts in her relationships. Visiting Lady Harrington was always painful because that was where she had met the Prince. 'Nobody, I believe, guesses how much I still suffer when I go to Lady Harrington's' (Hume, 1889b, III, 54). The Duchess of Norfolk was forever after viewed with suspicion because she had not shown proper respect to Lady Mary in the aftermath of her loss (Tillyard, 2007).

The reaction of those around Lady Mary to her excessive grief suggests that they had heard the Duke mimicking and joking about her and had a much more realistic view of their relationship. Princess Amelia was particularly perceptive on seeing that two years later Lady Mary was still in the throes of grief:

> The Princess, seeing the subject affected me as much as ever, bid me consider if there might not have happen'd events that would have made me more miserable than his death. 'Suppose,' said her R.H. '(tho' I don't

say it was likely) that he shou'd have changed & no longer have had any attachment for you; wou'd not that have been worse that his death?'

(Hume, 1889, III, 75)

For Lady Mary nothing could be imagined that was worse than his death.
There were other friends now seen as enemies, probably because they had tried to make her see sense over the Prince, one of them being Lady Louisa's mother:

> Lady Bute has wrote to me & pressed me very much to come to Luton: in her letter She calls herself my old friend; I own it surprised me. Can lady Bute have forgotten how ill both She and Lord Bute treated me?
>
> (Hume, 1889, III, 77)

The Duchess of Hamilton and her friend lady Susan Stewart were seen by Lady Mary as implacable enemies because they had teased her over her hopes for the Prince. However, letters addressed to Lady Mary by the Duchess of Hamilton suggest the reverse to be the case, in this instance over the rumour of a love affair:

> … I wish with all my heart, that I may be able to direct my letters to a happier Lady Mary… for in downright earnest I have an affection for you, and my best wishes attend you under any name you please. 1758, July 3rd.
>
> (Campbell, 1910, 126)

Lady Mary's opinion of the Duchess of Hamilton may also have been coloured by the fact that the Duchess had little time for the rituals of deference that meant so much to Lady Mary, who was highly sensitive to any breach of etiquette (Campbell, 1910, 126).

Soon after the Prince's death Lady Mary was visited by Colonel Morrison, one of his valets. It is possible that he took pity on her, realising that she may have expected a letter from the dying Prince (Tillyard, 2007). The Colonel described the Prince's deathbed: 'he said that after the letter was wrote to the Duke of Gloucester, with the Message to the King and the Princess that he seem'd to wish to say something more' before he died (Hume, 1889, II, 155). Morrison allowed Lady Mary to imagine that this might have been a message for her. An invitation from Lady Craven to join her in a box at the theatre in October 1781, brought the following comment in her journal:

> Some political flight had I suppose made her intirely [sic] forget everything that related to me. I have not seen the inside of a play House in my own country these fourteen years… (NRAS859, V491)

It would seem that more than ten years after his death, any thought of going to the theatre was still impossible, because of the memories it might bring. It was the death of the Prince in 1767, that would have the most profound effect on Lady Mary. The sense of unfulfilled promises, real or imaginary, and opportunities missed, remained with her for the rest of her life.

It is possible that of all Lady Mary's friends, Princess Amelia had the clearest sense of her real character. The Princess 'knew more of the world than princes usually do' and enjoyed intelligent company, 'having a mind above that jealous fear of the superior of understanding' (Stuart, 1827, 90). However, the Princess also had little time for the 'solemn grandeur of the mock princess' (an apt description of Lady Mary), which struck her as ridiculous (Stuart, 1827, 90). Lady Mary was part of the princess' circle of friends and as such, their relationship lasted for many years, suggesting that even at her most haughty or blunt, Lady Mary could be good company.

3.1.3 Self-presentation

There are three portraits known to survive of Lady Mary Coke, two head and shoulders and a full length, all painted after she was widowed. The two head and shoulders portraits, one by Allan Ramsay and the other by Joshua Reynolds (Figs. 21 and 22), were painted around 1758-60 and seem to have been created almost concurrently. Her sister Lady Strafford was also painted by Joshua Reynolds in a similar style at the same time (Fig. 23), and this may have prompted Lady Mary's commission. The Ramsay has a similar pose to the Reynolds, but is very different in effect, more straightforward, less moody and posed.

In the Ramsay head and shoulders (Fig. 21), she looks to the side, away from the viewer, and wears a dress heavily decorated with braid and pearls, and a neat lace cap. The style of her gown is out-dated, the wide neckline and full sleeves indicate a seventeenth-century cut, suggesting that it may have been a masquerade costume (Ribeiro, 1995). Costumes based on the end of the previous century were popular, possibly because for the

aristocracy, they were to be found in trunks in the attic, and thus expense could be spared. In her second portrait by Ramsay, discussed below and shown in figure 24, she wears a satin gown of a similar fabric and silhouette, suggesting that she enjoyed wearing this style. It is possible that, as a memory of a previous age, it chimed with her need for stability and continuity in society. Whatever the reason for her choice, the curve of the neckline is very flattering, with beautiful white lace that highlights her skin. At her neck, she has a single string of pearls, and on her head a simple lace cap holding her hair, which is pinned up away from her face. The grey silk bodice, heavily adorned with pearls and braid, and the deep red of the curtain behind her, all serve to frame her small face with its white skin and soften the highlight on her cheeks.

This contrasts with the mood of the Reynolds (Fig. 22), another head and shoulders, where she leans on her hand, and looks thoughtfully into the distance, albeit with a slight smile on her face. The tilted head and downward glance was a classic pose for the submissive woman in early Christian and Renaissance portraiture (Berdini, 1998). Lady Mary is wearing a pink robe lined with ermine, which suggests a commemoration of her marriage to Lord Coke, son of the Earl of Leicester. She is pensive and wistful, and the robe is pulled around her as if for comfort. Reynolds was known for constructing a narrative for his portraits, especially those of women, and the mood of this painting may have come as much from him as it did from the sitter (Postle, 2005). He may have been constructing a narrative of a lonely and grieving widow, which was possibly far from the truth, hence the hint of a smile. At about the same time, he painted a similar portrait of Lady Mary's elder sister, Anne, Lady Strafford (fig. 23). She also looks to the side, but her expression is more confident. The ermine robe is draped to show off the beautiful blue of the velvet; she wears several pieces of jewellery, and a blue ribbon at her neck which curls through her hair to highlight the colour of the robe. As far as it is possible to tell from reproductions, the overall tone is different for each sister (Mannings, 2000). Anne's is a portrait suffused with rich colour, a testament to the achievement of her marriage to Lord Strafford. The colour in Lady Mary's portrait is more muted, the velvet robe seems dull, the pearls at her neck standing out against her pale skin, and the blue ribbon in her hair is barely visible.

Lady Mary returned to Ramsay for her full-length portrait, painted four years later, shown in figure 24. The style of gown and jewellery echoes Ramsay's previous portrait, however the mood is very different. Dressed in similar seventeenth century gown, in a plain cream

silk, her figure is silhouetted against the dark background. She looks out confidently at the spectator; the setting suggesting a mature and cultivated woman. It was unusual for the sitter to gaze directly at the viewer, but many of Ramsay's female subjects do this, and he has given her the soft skins tones and warm highlight to her cheeks typical of many of his paintings (Mannings, 2000). She stands beside a keyboard instrument, draped with sheets of music, holding a theorbo, or base lute, in a pose reminiscent of portraits by Van Dyck (Smart, 1999). Lady Louisa Stuart suggests another point of reference, a contemporary portrait of 1750 by Josef Anton Adolf (Fig. 25), depicting Lady Ancram holding a similar lute, an instrument that she played with great skill (Stuart, 1827, 90). Lady Mary had endured much 'wicked wit' from Lady Ancram, close friend of Princess Amelia, and this portrait may have been a riposte. Lady Ancram had little time for women such as Lady Mary who took a grave and solemn view of the world and she was the person whose joke Lady Mary 'most dreaded encountering' (1889, 90). Lady Mary borrowed the lute, took on a lute master, 'laboured and strummed' (1889, 91), but achieved little because she had no ear for music. The setting and mood for the finished picture of Lady Mary may have set out as a parody, but the finished impression creates something very different. Ramsay's influence from Van Dyck echoes Lady Mary's inclination to dress in the style of the previous century, demonstrated in the previous Ramsay portrait. This combined with the signifier provided by the theorbo creates something greater than all of these: a persona, a statement by Lady Mary on how she sees herself in her independent widowhood. The signifiers in the portrait, the lute, her style of dress, all suggest a woman living in the past, for whom the old and familiar rules of society still apply (Tillyard, 2007). The details of her portrait would have been carefully chosen, as for Lady Mary the precise details of dress were the outward indicator of a person, their status, attitude and position in society.

The proper comportment of one's body was also an important indicator of class and social education. Hers was a world of detail and minutiae, she disapproved of a young woman in July 1775 who, in her terror at being in the presence of the King, reached out and held her fiancé's hand (NRAS859, V485). She recounts with approval an occasion at court, in June 1782, where a group of young ladies who had arrived improperly dressed were taken to an ante room and provided with the appropriate head-wear (NRAS859, V492).

Most of Lady Mary's comments on dress in her journals relate to occasions at court, the place that had the most meaning in her sense of the social hierarchy. At the opera she

would have dressed appropriately but was watching others in the audience for faux pas. One of the rare moments where Lady Mary talks about her own dress occurred after her sister's accident. In January 1785 she described in minute detail the dress that she will wear to court to deliver a message of thanks to the King and Queen from Lord Strafford, anxious to prove that she is representing him properly. 'My cloathes *[sic]* are a purple sattin *[sic]* gown with small silver flowers very thick all over it & richly trimmed with green & silver which has really a very fine effect' (NRAS859, V495).

Her concerns over the Duchess of Hamilton and Lady Susan Stewart surfaced again in a form of paranoia, when she became convinced that they were trying to damage her reputation at court, by whispering that Lady Mary's 'fine' new dress was actually old. This false information might have reached the ears of the King and Queen (Greig, 2013, 125). For Lady Mary, to appear at court in an old dress was shameful: 'Lady Egremont was there in one of the oldest gowns I ever saw at a Birthday it was really quite shameful' (NRAS859, V495). To be seen as doing this herself would have been humiliating.

3.1.4 Lady Mary at the Opera House

The Opera House provided a venue where the members of Lady Mary's stratum of society met and socialised. Attendance allowed her to watch all the different factions, not just those who made up her immediate circle. She shared her box with others of her milieu: her sister, Lady Strafford; her cousin Lady Ailesbury; General Conway, Lady Ailesbury's second husband; Conway's brother Lord Hertford; and the writer Horace Walpole. All people with whom she could expect to feel comfortable because she knew them well, they were at her level in society and of a similar age to her. She watched those around her in the audience for validation of her knowledge of herself. The physical arrangement of the auditorium and the placement of her box allowed her to be surrounded by those who she felt were of her outlook, and to observe across the auditorium the political factions who were in opposition to her fixed view of society.
Lady Ailesbury was the key holder of her box, number 3 on the chart shown in figure 1, which was on the bottom tier of the King's side, quite close to the side of the stage. It was not the best position from which to see the performance, but she had an excellent view of the auditorium. Those in the pit could stand in the wide side aisles and speak directly to the occupants of the lowest row of boxes. This area was known as 'fop's alley', where

young men would gather to gossip and enjoy the panorama of feminine beauty above (Hall-Witt, 2007, 4). During March 1768 Lady Mary followed the progress of John Wilkes, the controversial politician; observed with approval a woman's pregnancy; and assessed Lord Beaulieu's son, who appeared in the audience for the first time (Hume, 1889b, II, 214-6).

In her writing, Lady Mary did not give names to the performers that she saw on the stage at the opera, they were 'the first woman' or 'the second dancer'. At times, she also struggled to name those within her own class who she felt were not playing by her rigid sense of the rules. For example, in June 1780, Maria Walpole, the Countess Waldegrave who married the King's brother, was always referred to as 'the Lady calling herself Duchess of Gloucester' (NRAS859, V490). In Lady Mary's eyes, by marrying the Duke in secret, she had not reached her elevated position in a straightforward manner. Conversely, the Duchess of Cumberland, widely considered to be an upstart with no taste or propriety, was given her full name because, for Lady Mary, she had gained her position legitimately. It may have given Lady Mary some satisfaction that the position of their boxes reflected her opinions. The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester were directly above her, but in the top tier among the actresses and courtesans. Whereas, in December 1781 the Duchess of Cumberland was in the centre of the main bottom row, where she could flaunt her marriage to a Prince for all to see.

The King did not visit the opera very often and as the lack of a Royal box necessitated everyone shuffling up to make space, Lady Mary often found herself in a different box with different people. Therefore, for that evening she was faced with a different view, and no longer had any control over who was admitted to the box. She was devoted to the King and Queen, so it is reasonable to expect that she might have enjoyed such a royal occasion, watching the reaction of others, noting who was there and who stayed away. However, she found the disruption disconcerting, stating on one occasion in 1766 that if she had known they were coming sooner she would have gone to Ranelagh (Hume, 1889b, I, 209). Lady Mary's reaction to visits to the opera by the King suggests that for her, the box was a safe space, and that she found any change disturbing.

Lady Mary was a watcher, but she also knew that she was being watched by those around her, especially if the Prince was present. On one occasion the attendance of the King had caused the boxes to be re-arranged, a situation that she always found disconcerting:

> As the forward places in the box which is allotted us are very uneasy, I placed myself in the third row, and found it much easier, little thinking it wou'd be taken so much notice of, as it certainly had no other motive. But I immediately saw the King observed it, & when the Duke of York came into the Box, & placed himself behind me, I saw a whisper in the Duchess of Bedford's Box, & in some others. 'Twas plain they all thought I had particular reasons for changing my place, but the truth is I had none, (Hume, 1889, I, 168).

Later that evening Lady Mary heard that the King had been enquiring closely as to why she had moved her place. It is likely that the King would not have approved of a match between her and his brother, the Duke of York. The Duke may have been making mischief, knowing what his brother's reaction was likely to be, and the amusement it would cause to others present. There was the potential for Lady Mary to be as much the subject of gossip as anyone else.

In December 1782 there is an entry in her journals that suggests that Lady Mary herself was seen as a reliable transmitter of gossip.

> I arrived in town at three o'clock & went to the opera in the evening the same I had seen before. The Duke of Devonshire came into the box looking extremely well he had never heard of Lord Straffords accident and asked many questions about it from which I conclude he felt himself interested. The Duchess was not at the opera her Grace keeps the House on a good occasion being declared above three months gone with child, so the Devonshire family is in a prosperous way – two heirs making their progress into the world. (NRAS859, V492)

The Duke of Devonshire seldom attended the opera (Foreman, 1997). As a prominent Whig, and inveterate gambler at his club, he would have had little time for Lady Mary and her set, and yet he appeared in her box. It would seem that his sole purpose for visiting the box was to ensure that the news of his wife's, so far, successful pregnancy will be transmitted to the opposing side.

3.1.5 Conclusion

Lady Mary outlived her sisters and many of her friends. Sadly, a trivial disagreement with Princess Amelia, about which Lady Mary had refused to apologise, saw her ostracised from the one relationship that might have sustained her declining years (Tillyard, 2007). From then onwards, her greatest obsession was the life of the Prince of Wales, heir to the throne of 'the very best Sovereign we ever had' (NRAS859, V499). His relationship with Mrs Fitzherbert, and the Regency crisis caused enormous upset to her fixed view of the proper conduct of royalty.

She died at her home in 1811 at the age of eighty-four, still railing against the changing world. There were those, such as Lady Louisa Stuart, who remembered her with some fondness. Others lost a comic and eccentric woman who could be easily baited. A comment questioning the use of bowing and curtseying to the King and Queen would have prompted a tirade from her on the importance of etiquette. Professing ignorance of your family would have produced a lecture on the importance of understanding your own genealogy (Stuart 1827, 142). For some time after her death those who had known her could shield a moment of ignorance with a comment such as: 'Well for my part, I don't pretend to Lady Mary Coke's amazing knowledge of history', or 'I am no profound stateswoman, like Lady Mary Coke' (Stuart 1827, 142).

3.2 Lady Mary Watson-Wentworth, 2nd Marchioness of Rockingham, 1735-1804

When Lady Rockingham's husband Charles, 2nd Marquess of Rockingham, died in 1782 at the age of fifty-two, his close political confidante Edmund Burke wrote to her, advising her to ensure that her letters were lodged with her husband's:

> Pray let them be returned to keep company with the rest and to remain with the family as documents of the constant support and assistance you have uniformly given to your excellent Lord in the Course of the Conduct which will make this age a pattern of Virtue to the next […] Your names indeed ought to go down together; for it is no mean part you have had in the great services which that great and good man has done to his Country (Furber & Marshall, 1965, V, 45-7).

During the thirty years of their marriage, Lady Rockingham (c1735-1804) became not only her husband's secretary, but also a well informed and astute observer of the political scene (Farrell, 2008). Rockingham's friend and mentor, the MP Sir George Savile stated in 1774 that he had 'long placed her at the top of his list of politicians' (SCA, WWM/R1-1498). Naturally retiring, she managed to steer a course that enabled her to be active in politics, which she found stimulating and fulfilling, while carefully remaining within the expected familial paradigm (Chalus 2005, 71). She seems to have gained respect from many of the men in her husband's political circle; any censure is more likely to have arisen from other women. Lady Mary Coke, for example, disapproved that she 'entertains herself with politicks *[sic]*' (NRAS859, 499). She did not have any children, which gave her more time to become involved in her husband's political work, which may in turn have mitigated criticism for not producing an heir (Chalus 2005, 72).

3.2.1 Personal life

To outsiders, the marriage of the seventeen-year old Mary Bright to Charles Watson-Wentworth in 1752, may have seemed to be a dynastic one, grounded in Yorkshire politics. She did bring the sum of £60,000 and the estates of Badsworth and Eccleshall near Sheffield, which made her a suitable match, but they were also in love and the couple seem to have had a happy union (Farrell, 2008). The Watson-Wentworth family was one of the wealthiest in England, with an estate in Yorkshire, and a house in London's

fashionable Grosvenor Square. Lady Rockingham's husband, who had become the second Marquess of Rockingham in 1750, was also to become the leader of the strongest Whig faction in parliament, known in retrospect as the Rockingham Whigs (O'Gorman, 1975). She had grown up in a family with political affiliations. Her father died when she was young, and when her mother re-married in 1749 it was to Sir John Ramsden (d1769), another member of the Yorkshire political aristocracy. It is through his friendship with the Watson-Wentworth family that she met Charles, only son of the first Marquess of Rockingham (Hoffman, 1973).

All indications suggest that this was a love match, a marriage that remained happy until his early death in 1782. Alongside politics, the main focus of Lord Rockingham's life was the family estate of Wentworth Woodhouse, outside Rotherham in Yorkshire, and this is the place that Lady Rockingham refers to as 'home': 'I feel an inexpressible delight in the idea of getting back to Wentworth, your arrival soon after would complete my comfort' (SCA, WWM/R168/45). It was not unusual in this period for aristocratic couples to lead largely separate lives, and Lady Rockingham soon learnt that she would spend periods of time apart from her husband, especially when he was at Newmarket with his horses, or fulfilling his duties as Lord Lieutenant of Yorkshire. She was reliant on letters for communication, and friends for companionship. Her letters, of which there are hundreds, mostly undated, are infused with the longing of a wife for the companionship of her husband. 'My Dearest life I most heartily wish you was here again for so many long days are very unpleasant without you' (SCA, WWM/R168/207). Her letters seem to have been written at speed, as if she were writing as she would have spoken face-to-face, and her tone is warm, and often teasing. 'I have brag'd of my having heard three times from you, & Sir George Savile was so savey [sic] as to say the letters were certainly all wrote ready to send before you went; what a pretty husband he would make' (SCA, WWM/R168/156/1). She also teases him for 'coquetting with the feather'd tribe of fine Ladies' when he is away at Newmarket (SCA, WWM/R168/202-1-2). He was not as assiduous a correspondent as she was, and his arrangements for returning to her often seemed to change day by day, leading to much frustration. 'I hope your affection is as strong for me as you say it is, but believe me I never felt more hurt in my life than at you delaying your return so long' (SCA, WWM/R168/135). However, when he did write, his tone betrays the same affection for his wife as hers for him, generally ending, as hers do, with a declaration of continuing devotion.

Lady Rockingham was an intelligent, quick-witted woman, if somewhat eccentric, with an engaging sense of humour (Farrell, 2008). She was seen as headstrong in her enthusiasms, one of which was the Prince of Wales, shortly before he became King George III. To Lady Mary Coke she seemed frivolous, 'Some passion she must have, her first was His Majesty, her second politicks *[sic]*' (Hume, 1889, II, 283). She was also an accomplished musician. While in Italy before their marriage, her future husband bought a harpsichord for his prospective bride because 'Miss Bright is no small proficient in Musick *[sic]*' (Hoffman, 1973, 8). During a visit on her own to Bath in 1765, Lord Rockingham tempted her to return by telling her that Queen Charlotte was anxious to hear her sing: 'I hope your Ladyship's voice will be in excellent order when you do come – as Her Majesty has whispered to me that she intends to hear you sing when you return' (SCA, WWM/R156-6).

At the time of their marriage Lord Rockingham was a Gentleman of the Bedchamber to George II, which would have meant regular attendance at court. As the wife of a prominent politician in the administration of George III, Lady Rockingham's attendance at court functions would have been expected, and she speaks with ease of conversations with the King. On one occasion the King enquired closely after Lord Rockingham's success with his horses at Newmarket. In spite of his disapproval of gambling, she suspected that the King was tempted to place a bet on one of them:

> …he desired to know if you had told me how much he had scolded you for your gaming. I assured him you intended to withstand all temptation at New Market of play. He was so inquisitive about your running horses & whether I was in the secret […] that I took it for granted he had a design to venture a bet & back one of them. (SCA, WWM/R168/70-1)

Lady Rockingham herself disapproved of gambling in any form, except betting on her husband's horses (Hoffman 1973).

Lord Rockingham's position took her regularly into the company of the Duke of Devonshire, a long-term friend from his travels in Italy. In spite of this she found the Duke's cold and aloof demeanour somewhat intimidating (Foreman, 1998). The Devonshires led almost entirely separate lives, and his wife Georgiana, Duchess of

Devonshire, does not appear in Lady Rockingham's letters. As a leading member of the *beau monde*, referred to as the *ton*, Georgiana received a lot of publicity, with the newspapers following her exploits and extravagant lifestyle. The *beau monde* was a sub-set of the most elevated ranks, an 'elite within the elite' (Greig, 2013, 4). They combined the traditional securities of wealth and privilege, with a newer urban lifestyle of fashion, consumption, and public display. As a naturally retiring person, Lady Rockingham may have shied away from the hedonistic and extravagant life represented by Georgiana.

Early in her married life Lady Rockingham had discovered the ease with which a woman in her aristocratic position could engender public attention and scorn. On a visit to the theatre in 1756, she sat in a box at the side of the stage with Lady Coventry (1733-1760) and two other women. It would seem that they were drunk, and became so rowdy that Mrs Belamy, the star of the play, had to leave the stage. A scurrilous poem about the incident appeared in the newspapers the next day. Henry Fox, who was in the audience was disgusted and wrote home to his wife that 'they made such an uproar in the Stage box' (Crouch, 1997, 69). For him, the problem was not so much that the women were drunk, but that they acted 'like men' (1997, 69). There is no record of her husband's or his family's reaction to this incident, but the appearance of the poem in the papers must have been enough cause to shame her and ensure that there was no repetition.
This may have formed part of her reluctance to accept an invitation to attend a masquerade. Masquerades, which were very popular, involved dressing up in costume and masking your identity. For some, they represented a very dubious form of entertainment. She felt that it would not be appropriate to attend without her husband, in spite of assurances that her friends would look after her.

> 'Ld. & Ly. Coventry have both promised to take great care of me at the masquerade on Monday and never to stir from me but I have refused going for I have a little prudishness about it, not chusing (sic) to do any of those frisky things in the absence of a husband, so much do I think of you & love you for I would rather die than do anything that you would perfectly disapprove of tho but an instant,' (SCA, WWM/R168/135).

She was finally persuaded when a friend, Lady Betty, who she obviously respected, showed no surprise that she was going and 'did not lift her eyes up at all […] this has tempted me much not expecting such a permission from her' (SCA, WWM/R168/105/1).

When in London, Lady Rockingham had the company of friends and family. She writes of taking care of Lord Rockingham's niece and nephew, and invitations to dinner. She also entertained in her own home: 'Mrs Watson, Ly. Bullimore & Millbanke (Lord Rockingham's sister) dined with me yesterday & we were very merry' (SCA, WWM/R168/57). She also invited prominent Whigs and possible supporters to dine at their London home. There is a sense in the letters of a need for close female friendship. Sadly, Lady Coventry died in 1760, and the close friendship that she formed with Lady Susan Stuart, later to be the Countess of Stafford, came to an end when Lord Rockingham came to power in 1765. In Lady Susan she had found someone of a like mind who shared her desire to remain apart from 'all the horrid females; for so I must call I fear the greater part of our sisterhood in this our globe' (BL, Add MS 89317/4/2/132). It was a sadness to Lady Rockingham that the friendship could not survive her husband's elevation to prime minister (Chalus 2005, 11). In a letter to Lady Susan describing the tortuous negotiations necessary to form a ministry she hopes that a friend 'will go along with one at least in good wishes & can never look with an indifferent Eye upon a friend's concerns' (BL, Add MS 89317/4/2/136). Her next letter regrets the 'padlock' now placed on her friend's lips and end of their friendship, as they now stand on opposite sides (BL, Add MS 89317/4/2/140).

A large part of a wife's duty to her husband and his family was to produce an heir, but sadly they had no children. Lady Rockingham was acutely aware of this lack, and must have known that she was the subject of gossip. Lady Mary Coke recorded in her journal in January 1767 that the Duke of York had told her that Lady Rockingham was with child (Hume 1889 I 126). The subject was seldom mentioned in their letters, but one comment gives a sense of the speculation that must have surrounded her: 'I must finish this letter and write on to my Aunt Winteringham who has wrote me word she hopes I had not lost you an heir as she heard I was in a likely way to bring you one so I must undeceive her' (SCA, WWM/R168/207). There is nothing that records whether the rumour was groundless, or that her 'lack' resulted from a miscarriage. Lady Rockingham's devout Anglican faith in God may have given her some comfort over her childless state, as she maintained a strong moral sense that underpinned her attitude to Whig politics as well her life (Farrell, 2008). When Charles died in 1784, the Rockingham estate passed to the son of his eldest sister, William Fitzwilliam.

3.2.2 Public persona

Each of the great estates in England controlled the members of parliament serving for constituencies in their area. The Rockingham estate of thirteen MPs was the biggest Whig grouping in the country, closely followed by their near neighbour the Duke of Devonshire, with ten (Foreman, 1998). In the eighteenth century, a member of the House of Lords could not campaign in a parliamentary election. However, the maintenance of a family borough was an important matter; it was part of the estate, as tangible and valuable as the land. It was the wives and relatives who were expected to look after the family interests on these occasions (Foreman 1998). After their marriage Lady Rockingham quickly became involved in her husband's politics. As the Marchioness, she would have been expected to entertain at her home, attend county assemblies, and visit the local race meetings. In 1770 Lady Rockingham's health made it doubtful that she could attend York races, an important week for meeting constituents. To the relief of Lord Rockingham, she attended the first two days, went home, and then returned for the last day (Chalus, 2005). This role as a hostess was not only important in Yorkshire; Lady Rockingham would invite supporters to their home in London, which became a meeting place for Whig followers. She was also politically active in her socialising when in Bath for her health (Chalus, 2000).

Lady Rockingham's interest went beyond that of simply supporting her husband on public occasions. She was an astute judge of character and she soon became a confidante and advisor to him. Many of his political letters are written in her hand and only signed by him, but she was more than just his secretary. A letter early in their marriage suggests that her growing interest in politics had made her neglect her friends in favour of political discussions at home: 'I have got into such a different stile *[sic]* of passing my time that assemblys *[sic]* are very disagreeable to me […] The case is your allowing me to be of your more interesting societies really have spoilt me' (SAC, WWM/R168/21/1). Lord Rockingham was not a natural public speaker; he did not enjoy addressing the house of Lords, and he was often reliant on advice from his wife and his sisters on how to proceed (Chalus 2005, 53). In one letter he refers to his wife as 'my Minerva at my elbow', his goddess of wisdom (SCA, R156-9). On occasions associates would write to Lady Rockingham, if they felt a less direct and more diplomatic approach was needed. To confidantes that she knew well such as Sir George Savile she could be quite open, while

remaining conscious of the niceties demanded from a wife writing to man: 'Tho' now write from myself, to a gentleman & in absence of my husband, yet I shall in the same manner begin Dear Sir George; for our friendship, affection, & sentiments relative to that personage are one & the same, & therefore cannot be differently appreciated' (SCA, WWM/R1-1499).

Lady Rockingham's greatest strength was probably her ability to read the political scene and advise her husband. When the Duke of Cumberland died in 1765, she wrote a long letter advising her husband on how to proceed, as he needed to approach the king and consolidate his position. The Duke of Cumberland had been a friend and advisor to Lord Rockingham, and however much grief he felt, he needed to act: 'Was I you I would take the first opportunity of speaking to the K—g upon the subject of the Melancholy Event, & I would speak boldly & openly for I think all political success will greatly turn upon the Channel his Confidence now falls into' (SCA, WWM/R168/177-1-2). She was aware that others would seize on this moment of instability to advance their own case, but at the same time she tells him to assure the King that he is loyal and will abide by the King's decision, whatever it may be. This was a lengthy and confident letter, but often her advice was more concise and had the bantering and cajoling tone needed if Rockingham was to be persuaded into action (Farrell, 2008). Her advice was listened to: 'Your *Political Letters* are well timed & I make use of them – I would tell you how – but write on – tho' don't suspect that I myself want confirmation & it would be injustice to those of our friends who you know & like, if I did not tell you, that their Sentiments concur most heartily' (SCA, WWM/R156-8).

This support for her husband went beyond what was expected of a wife in terms of stepping into the man's world, and Lady Rockingham was careful to keep her activities largely unseen. To those beyond the immediate family and political circle she was his dutiful secretary, an acceptable role (Chalus 2005). For some, such as lady Mary Coke, the fact that she entertained male Whig supporters when her husband was absent was a transgression. She disapproved of such manoeuvrings commenting to her friends that 'a fine lady wd always have influence, & I wish'd they wou'd not accept of her invitations' (Hume, 1889, I, 178). Lady Mary Coke was a strong supporter of the King and disapproved of Whig politics. Her comments display her partisanship as much as a real disapproval of female political activity. In this she was not alone; women were relied on in many ways to

drive political socialising, but at the same time provided a simple target for their opposition. It was easy to criticise by falling back on traditional notions of a 'women's love of meddling' (Chalus, 2000, 692).

Yet there were moments when she performed delicate and diplomatic duties for her husband that went beyond this expectation. When the Duke of Cumberland died, Lady Rockingham was on her own in Bath, taking the waters for her health. The Rockingham faction needed the support of William Pitt, a notoriously unpredictable politician. As he was also in Bath, Lady Rockingham negotiated the purchase of two of his coach horses. First with a note and then through meetings to view the horses and agree the sale, she was able to speak directly to Pitt. Thus, she could gauge his political stance and pass a Treasury minute to him in private. The negotiation came to nothing, but handled in such a way, neither side lost face. Lord Rockingham was pleased: 'Your Note to Mr Pitt was an exceedingly good one & to be sure His was Superlative. Not being able to go so High or even near – I shall content myself with desiring you to present my best compliments to Mr Pitt' (SCA, WWM/R156-6). Lady Rockingham's husband obviously trusted her to perform such tasks quite often. There is a long letter describing a tortuous negotiation, back and forth between two men, to find a candidate for the next election. Lady Rockingham calls on their friend Sir George Savile to accompany her, and he will take the credit, but it is she who was manoeuvring and providing the impetus to arrive at her husband's preferred choice. By the end of the day she was exhausted and grateful for Sir George's 'usual cheeriness and friendly manner of stating the whole […] was of the utmost comfort to me, who could never have gone thro' such difficulties and niceties, so that although I am worn out, it having been the whole days work, yet I rest satisfied' (SCA, WWM/R168/193/1). Her matter-of-fact tone in her descriptions of these manoeuvrings suggests that this was a true political partnership, and one that was accepted and understood by her husband's close associates (Chalus 2000).

Her strong moral convictions also impacted on her political opinions. After the failed coalition of Rockingham's first administration in 1766, she viewed the executive with distrust, and counselled him against the pursuit of office for its own sake (Farrell, 2008). She admired the Whig adherence to principle and consistency, even if this doomed them to long periods out of office. She told her husband: 'you will allow that a statue will not do

without a pedestal, neither will our best moral actions suffice, except they are raised upon the motive of obeying God's commands' (Farrell, 2008).

After Rockingham died in 1782 the Marchioness struggled in vain to maintain her position within the Whig hierarchy and was condemned for it because she seemed to be exhibiting the masculine attribute of personal ambition. Lady Mary Coke said of her, 'it seems as if politics was her first passion and that even her great misfortune in losing Lord Rockingham is insufficient to make her forget her favourite amusement' (NRAS859, V492).
She settled at Hillingdon house near Uxbridge, Middlesex in 1785. There she cultivated her garden, corresponding with Sir James Edward Smith, the first president of the Linnean society. She died there in 1804 and was buried with her husband in York Minster.

3.2.3 Self-presentation

There are few mentions of dress in Lady Rockingham's correspondence. Where the subject arises, it is usually for practical reasons: 'the bearer of this or somebody must bring me against dinner a silk sack; for my neck & shoulders are so stiff that I dare not wear a nightgown for fear of getting cold' (SCA, WWM/R168/130). A nightgown was an informal gown with a fitted back at the waist. It was practical because it was worn without hoops, and with an apron (Buck, 1979). Aristocratic dress for formal occasions or for visiting followed set rules and the lack of comment in her letters suggests that for the most part, as in so many things, Lady Rockingham conformed precisely to expectations. There are moments when her sense of the ridiculous jumps out: 'His Grace was all joy at the sight of us; & as I hate dissimulation, I will frankly own to you that my black hat almost became a white one with the powder from his Grace's wig' (SCA, WWM/R168/55).

There were, however, moments when her dress was of supreme importance, such as for the coronation of George III in 1761. Members of the Watson-Wentworth family became part of the discussion:

> my dress is at last determined I hope you won't have any objections to my being of the same fashion with you, tis particularly approved of by many people upon that account, & my own choice chiefly for the same reason I think it will be mighty proper & therefore a Spanish dress is

> ordered for me, magnificent it will be & a good deal you will have to pay for it, but tis right it should be so & you may thank your friend Mr Milbanke for it, for he has insisted upon its being fine (SCA, WWM/R168/28)

Mr Milbanke was married to Lord Rockingham's sister. Another friend worries that it is a little bourgeois for them to be in the same fabric, but his sister Anne, Countess Fitzwilliam says they must 'dance together as we are dressed alike' (SCA, WWM/R168/28). It would seem that Lord Rockingham chose the silk and his sisters disliked it thinking that: 'every body *[sic]* will say tis made of your wives petticoat' (SCA, WWM/R168/28). There is a dress in the collection of Kensington Palace that is known to have been made for Lady Rockingham in the early 1760s, shown in figure 4. The suggestion above that her dress will be magnificent, and that he had to pay a lot for it, suggests that this could be the dress referred to. The fact that the dress has survived, complete, and with such a clear provenance, also suggests that it was made for a significant event, and then put carefully away. It is made of silk with gold and silver thread, possibly woven in Lyons, backing up the suggestion that it would have cost the equivalent of £500,000. It is a fine fabric, in spite of the metal, and this might be why Lord Rockingham's sisters felt it looked cheap. Silk was sold by weight, the heavier the more expensive, and in comparison, with a court mantua belonging to Lady Harley (Fig. 26), which is a heavy brocade, the fabric of Lady Rockingham's gown does seem light. But the tones of the silver and gold are graded from dark to pale, from the outer skirt to the centre front, indicating a subtle and sophisticated piece of weaving such as might have come from France.

The two portraits of Lady Rockingham show her in less formal dress, rather than for grand state occasions. The first shows her as a young woman and is undated (Fig 27), but as the words on a panel beside her declare that she is 'Mary, Marchioness of Rockingham, Daughter of Tho: Bright Esq.', this maybe a marriage portrait. Lord and Lady Rockingham were married when he was twenty-two and had been the Marquis for two years, and she was seventeen. She is dressed in a gown with fine gauze sleeves and apron, and looks confidently out at the viewer. The white gown is slightly overdressed with blue bows and braiding, suggesting a celebratory note.

The second portrait, again undated (Fig 28), is a pastel portrait by Hugh Douglas Hamilton. Her wig, topped by a white lace cap suggests a date of the early to mid 1770s. It can be no later than 1778 because the artist left England for Italy, where he worked for

several years, returning to live in Ireland (Cullen, 2015). It is a more intimate and domestic pose, as she is positioned sideways to the viewer, working on a piece of embroidery in a frame. She sits in an upholstered chair at a sewing table, and there are wall hangings behind her. She is depicted as an industrious wife, engaged in an occupation expected of a woman in her position. Her eyes are downcast because she is concentrating on her sewing, but there is the hint of a smile. The neckline of her dress is quite high, with a small frill of lace, and she wears it with an over-gown embroidered with flowers. As far as it is possible to tell, this is a comfortable gown, a day dress, something worn when at home.

There are moments, such as an irritated comment about Mr Burke in one of her letters to her husband, that suggests a profound awareness of her dress on the part of Lady Rockingham:

> Mr Burke arrived last night after I was undressed & desired to see me, so I saw him in my Political Dress, for I really did suppose some vast event by his coming back here: however it ended in my being fatigued to death with a long history about Lancaster which he was anxious to tell you & thought there was a chance of finding you return'd. (SCA, WWM/R168/227)

This suggests an outfit or selection of gowns that were more sober in style and suited to political occasions; such as when she met Mr Pitt in Bath, or spent a long day settling the choice of a candidate in Yorkshire. There would be an advantage to wearing something unremarkable when negotiating or attending a meeting in the company of men. If her dress helped with her state of mind, and how she presented herself, it would be interesting to know what she wore to the opera, a moment of relaxation, but also of social importance, a time when she would be observed. (This awareness of her dress is discussed further in chapter five.)

Both images suggest a confident woman with a pleasing demeanour. The Hamilton depicts a mature woman of some standing, with the hint of a smile suggesting the sense of humour that she undoubtedly possessed. Her half-sister Mrs Weddell, who shared her box at the opera, was an accomplished artist in her own right and one of the Joshua Reynolds set. Joshua Reynolds painted her husband in full Garter regalia in 1766-68, shown in

figure 29, as a gift for the Prince of Wales. It is interesting that these connections never led Lady Rockingham to be depicted by Reynolds, the leading portraitist of the day. Maybe Reynolds' tendency to the theatrical and depicting his sitters dressed up in classical costume was too much for the more straightforward and down-to-earth Lady Rockingham.

3.2.4 Lady Rockingham at the opera

The opera seems to have been a constant part of Lady Rockingham's social life. She was musical herself, and she mentions it is a source of pleasure, rather than as a place to perform any kind of professional social function. Writing from London to his wife in Bath, Lord Rockingham teases her on the possible reason for her to return: 'NB if you like to be in London on Saturday & mean to go to the opera that night – I shall not reckon your return to be placed to my account – but to the opera's' (SCA, WWM/R156-6). Attendance at the opera allowed her not only to observe the political manoeuvrings between the different factions, but also to show herself as a proper and dutiful wife, behaving and mixing in a way that might be expected of someone in her position.

Lay Rockingham is shown in box 27 on the 1783 chart (Fig 1). The longer list (Fig 2), shows that her companions were relations from her own family and members of the Cavendish family who she would have known through politics in Yorkshire. Her half-sisters, Lady Ducie and Mrs Weddell; Lord George Cavendish, brother of Lord Rockingham's friend the Duke of Devonshire; and Lord Duncannon, married to Lord George's sister. The box was situated on the bottom tier, the most important, close to the stage on the Prince's side. This would not have been the best place from which to view the performance, but she would have been close to the musicians and the singers. She would also have had a good view of the auditorium and the other boxes, looking directly across at lady Mary Coke, who was at the same level on the King's side.

She seems to have first taken a box in the 1760s. There is an excited passage in an early letter stating that she will have a box at the side and suggesting several people that she could ask to share it with her; far more than would have fitted. The slightly breathless note to her description suggests that initially this may have been another one of her 'passions'. However, it is probable that she was in the same box twenty years later, but by

then she had settled on familial companions, reinforcing the suggestion that the opera was a moment of pleasure and relaxation. Lord Rockingham's teasing comment that she would return from Bath to the opera rather than him, adds to the suggestion that attendance was a regular part of her social life. The 1783 diagram was published in February, referring to the season that began in the previous autumn, the year in which Lord Rockingham died. How many performances Lady Rockingham actually attended that season is not known, but her fellow subscribers, members of her own family and friends from Yorkshire, suggest an opportunity to appear in society in friendly and supportive company.

She would have known through all the years that she sat at the front to watch and listen to the performance, that she was the subject of speculation and gossip. On several occasions there were rumours that she was pregnant, and the subsequent realisation that it was not to be. Lady Rockingham's letters are full of the people associated with her husband, especially when she has dealings with them in promotion of his cause. However, there are no mentions of such encounters at the opera, a place used by others for social networking (Hall-Witt, 2007). As an instinctively private person, she may have found such encounters, with their attendant possibilities for gossip too public in nature. She was in a position to ask gentlemen to visit her in her box, but this would have been noted by others, and implications assigned. She enjoyed the music, remarking in her letters on favourites such as the singers Regina Mingotti and Colomba Mattei:.

> the Mingotte *[sic]* tonight sang better than ever & the Mattei looked prettier. I am resolved to have the first to teach me & I long to see the other but wish to be generous enough to defer it til you come. (SCA, WWM/R168/35)

It is possible that it was enough just to be seen, playing role of the dutiful wife of the Marquess, rather than advertising her involvement in his work.

In 1774 she would have witnessed the arrival of Georgiana, the new Duchess of Devonshire, who was to become a leader of the *beau monde*, or the *ton*. Lady Rockingham was a prominent member of the aristocracy, and in those terms, she was entitled to her box in the most important bottom row of the Opera House. However, she was not a member of the *ton*, and probably had no wish to be so. The activities of the Duchess of

Devonshire could not have been further from the approach taken by Lady Rockingham to her duties as the wife of a prominent Whig. When the Rockingham Whigs finally gained power in 1782, they went to Devonshire House to celebrate long into the night. All the expectant Whig ministers were there, with the exception of the new prime minister, Lord Rockingham (Foreman, 1998).

3.2.5 Conclusion

Lady Rockingham's desire to remain on the side-lines of her husband's career seems to have been largely successful. In the 1970s there was a renewed interest in this period of political history and a re-assessment of the part played by the Whigs. Frank O'Gorman (1975) makes no mention of Lady Rockingham, Ross Hoffman (1973), includes her, but as an occasional support. He does write about her encounter with Mr Pitt in Bath, but more as a social interlude than as anything of great importance.

It is only since 2000 that historians such as Elaine Chalus (2000, 2005) have begun to re-discover the important part played by women in the politics of the late eighteenth century. Lady Rockingham did indeed have an important and fulfilling career in politics; but by outwardly remaining as a dutiful Marchioness who knew her place, this role remained largely unseen. She knew that more visible activity would have drawn the attention of the press, and more importantly, the displeasure of her peers. Any such publicity would have reflected badly on her husband and his political ambitions.

The Opera House was a pleasure for a musical woman, and an opportunity to meet family and friends. From her position in her box which overlooked the orchestra, she would have been able to observe the movements and manoeuvrings of the rest of the audience, but she does not seem to have actively participated in that arena. Political meetings were for other, less public, locations.

It would seem that Edmund Burke was correct in warning her that unless she deliberately placed her correspondence with that of her husband, her service would be missing from the records. Something that has only recently been corrected.

3.3 Mrs Frances Abington, née Barton, 1737-1815

Mrs Frances Abington (1737-1815), comic actress and fashion icon was described by a contemporary actress as: 'the most lively and bewitching woman I had ever seen: her manners were fascinating; and the peculiar tastefulness of her dress excited universal admiration' (Robinson 1801, 13). Mrs Robinson was a young aspiring actress when she met Abington, and she must have been in awe of her star quality. Abington seems to have possessed an innate ability to inhabit her clothes in such a way that made her eye catching, whatever she wore. This, coupled with her acting skill, natural comic timing and talent for mimicry led to a long and glittering career on the London stage. The period of her active life on the stage, 1751-98, corresponded with an explosion of fashion (Nussbaum 2010, 227). The growth of female participation in society and the arts meant that by the 1770s, the high point of Abington's career, the sight of an accomplished public woman was no longer an anomaly. This was also a period of growing interest in the private lives of public figures, and Abington became the subject of public fascination. The press increasingly published accounts of the activities of such people, feeding a growing appetite for gossip (Rosenthal, 2006).

Abington left a legacy of images that is unrivalled by any other actress of her time. Like David Garrick, in many ways her mentor, she understood the power of the visual. However, all of these portraits depict her playing a part, never as herself, as if to create a barrier between the public desire to consume every detail of her person, and the reality of her personal life.

3.3.1 Personal life

Abington grew up as Fanny Barton in the streets around Covent Garden in London, and the facts of her early life are sketchy. Her father, an ex-guardsman, ran a cobbler's stall close to Drury Lane, and her mother died when she was fourteen (Highfill, *et al.*, 1973). She was twenty-one when she first appeared on the stage at Drury Lane as part of Mr Garrick's company. By then, she had sold flowers, been apprentice to a milliner, and a lady's companion. The streets around Covent Garden and Drury Lane were not only inhabited by actors but were also the central area for prostitution. Whether or not Fanny Barton was ever a prostitute is not known, but that assumption was likely to be made

because she grew up there (Nussbaum, 2010, 228). Her time working for the milliner had given her a practical understanding of the creation of dress, and she had made full use of the tutors engaged for her while working as a companion to a Mrs Parker. The position ended when Mrs Parker's protector Mr Byron became too interested in Fanny (Highfill, *et al.*, 1973). This is another possible reason for the taint of prostitution that hung over her early life.

What does seem certain is that Fanny was known by the players at the two patent theatres as a local character with a good singing voice and a natural talent as a performer. She may also have already been demonstrating a natural sense of style in her dress, a character trait that was to prove a vital feature in her growing popularity. The company of actors at Drury Lane was strong, and however talented Fanny Barton may have been, she spent her first seasons playing minor parts. In 1759 two events changed her life and career substantially: firstly, in the summer she married James Abington (d.1806), a royal trumpeter, and probably her music master. Secondly, by the winter of that year Mr and Mrs Abington were living in Dublin and she had been taken on by the Smock Alley theatre (Oddey, 2004).

After six successful years in Dublin, Mrs Abington returned to England in the company of a lover, the Irish M.P. George Needham. She had become a star of the Dublin stage, but her marriage was in ruins. Mr Abington seems to have been unable to deal with a wife who was more successful than he was, and they had separated soon after arrival in Dublin (Nussbaum, 2010). According to Abington's anonymous biographer, when she gained such success in Dublin Mr Abington became 'extremely jealous, and conceived an antipathy against her' (Anon 1888 38). Abington agreed to pay him an allowance as long as he left her alone (Oddey, 2004). Back in England she and Mr Needham settled in Bath, where he died the same year, after a difficult illness. Mrs Abington had been his devoted nurse during this time, and in gratitude he left her a legacy that gave her a stable income. Unlike many of the other actresses that she would perform with in London, she was not dependent on acting as her sole livelihood. Garrick, having heard of her reputation in Dublin, asked Abington to re-join his company, and in 1765 she returned to London to begin again.
Abington may have come back from Ireland as a star, but Garrick's Drury Lane company was dominated by two actresses, Mrs Clive (1711-1785) and Mrs Pritchard (1711-1768).

They were renowned for playing the leading roles that Abington had grown accustomed to performing in Dublin. Mrs 'Kitty' Clive was known as the greatest comic actress of her day, and Hannah Pritchard as a tragedian to rival Garrick (Richards 1993, 29). On the stage at Drury Lane, Abingdon struggled to establish the star billing that she had achieved in Dublin.

Abingdon had the financial support of her legacy from Mr Needham, and this gave her a measure of independence. She became the lover of William Petty, 2nd Earl of Shelburne (1737-1805), who entertained lavishly and had a wide group of friends. When the relationship began is uncertain, but they appeared together in a 'Histories of the Tête-à-Tête', in the *Town and Country Magazine* in January 1771, the same month that his first wife died in childbirth (Cannon, 2013). The Tête-à-Tête, shown in figure 30, characterises Abington as Thalia (muse of comedy) and Shelburne as Malagrida (the arch dissembler). The accompanying article is very kind to her, and anxious to emphasise her propriety. She was by then a very popular figure, and the praise may have been to mitigate her dubious origins and make it acceptable to follow her. Lord Shelburne was disliked and widely mistrusted, hence the association with Malagrida (Highfill, *et al.*, 1973).

On her return to London in 1765, access to money gave Abington a measure of independence, especially when dealing with the two men who held the keys to her successful career: the actor manager, David Garrick and the artist Joshua Reynolds. With Garrick, a fellow actor as well as her manager their relationship soon became stormy. Garrick has been credited with supporting several women playwrights over his career (Russell, 2007). For example, Hannah Cowley (1743-1809) and Hannah Moore (1745-1833) both benefitted from his patronage. However actresses who challenged him in his own realm on the stage were more problematic (Russell, 2007). Biographers of Garrick have described Abington as a 'cross that he had to bear' (Stone and Kahrl, 1979, 595), because of her seemingly unreasonable demands, quoting his complaint that 'I never yet saw Mrs Abington theatrically happy for a week together' (Nussbaum 2010, 259). However, Garrick was known for his jealousy of his actresses, and constructed the Drury Lane programme to highlight his own talents; thus, Abington's challenges may have had some justification. She argued with him over her parts, demanded longer notice of changes than was normally given to performers, and consistently challenged him to give her star billing (Highfill, Burnim and Langhans, 1973). Their relationship was not entirely

acrimonious; Garrick wrote many epilogues for Abington and consulted her closely to ensure that his text suited her delivery (Anon, 1888). The epilogue was an important moment in the evening's offering, where an actor or more often an actress, still dressed in their costume, addressed the audience in their own voice. It was a moment of transition from the illusion of the play back into the real world, and offered a moment for commentary (Nussbaum, 2010). An actress could take the opportunity to address the women in the audience directly, proving that she shared their response to her character, whether sceptical or approving (Solomon 2013 237). She could demonstrate that she was also a woman of the world. Overall, Garrick and Abington seem to have had a grudging respect for each other; both talented artists, both anxious for their public image and their place in posterity (Nussbaum, 2010).

Her relationship with the painter and portraitist Joshua Reynolds seems to have been generally more friendly and lasted for several years (Postle, 2005). For an artist, painting a portrait of a star could provide useful publicity, it was a mutually beneficial transaction. Visitors would come to the artist's studio to see the person sitting for their portrait. There they would view other works and might be tempted to buy a painting. Reynold's account books show that Abington paid for the portraits that he painted of her, which was not always the case. Reynolds was known for pursuing courtesans in order to paint them, thus ensuring that images of the most beautiful women of the age could be found in his studio (Postle 2005). Presumably this gave her a greater element of choice in his depiction of her. She remained on friendly terms with him, even leading to suggestions that there may have been more than just friendship to their relationship (Postle, 2005).

Abington remained at Drury Lane for more than fifteen years, building a reputation as an actress of skill and comic timing. Her popularity ensured a full house when her name was on the billing, so however difficult a person she may have been to work with, she was a key element in the success of the theatre. During this time, Abington's costume and dress became an important part of her public persona. While in Dublin she had learnt that women took notice of what she wore, and desired to emulate her (Nussbaum 2010). This became an important part of her success and, as will be discussed below, a factor that she carefully controlled.
In 1782 she moved to the rival theatre, Covent Garden, and played various parts there for several seasons (Oddey, 2004). In 1790 she retired, suddenly, and without a benefit

(Highfill, *et al.*, 1973). Mrs Abington died in 1815, having been able to live in some comfort during her retirement, thanks to her original legacy from Mr Needham, and her long-term affair with Lord Shelburne, who had settled an annual income on her when he re-married.

3.3.2 Public persona

For the young Mrs Abington, Dublin was to be an important proving ground. Her natural abilities as an actress, coupled with her innate style and ability to learn quickly, soon made her a star (Highfill, *et al.*, 1973). Dublin was at that time a part of the United Kingdom, with a succession of English Viceroys, who held court at Dublin castle. This meant that there was a society of aristocrats, many of them Anglo-Irish who moved back and forth between London and Dublin, expecting a similar standard of entertainment in the province as in the capital. However great the demand for high quality theatrical entertainment, this clientele was relatively small in number, leading to a fierce rivalry between the two Dublin theatres, Smock Alley and Crow Street.
Taken on by the company at Smock Alley, Abington seems to have 'fairly took the town by storm' (Anon, 1888, 21). Her taste in dress was so superior that it was regarded by fashionable women as 'so good and correct that it became quite the rage to wear different articles bearing her name' (1888, 21). Her first great success was in the farce *High Life Below Stairs*, by James Townley. Within ten days of the first performance Mrs Abington's cap which she wore in the part of the servant Kitty, was being imitated across Dublin by ladies of fashion. 'There was not a milliner's shop window, great or small, but was adorned with it, and in large letters ABINGTON appeared to attract the passers-by' (Wilkinson 1790, II, 183).

There is very little to indicate what this cap looked like. Descriptions refer to it as a mob cap, but there are few images of Mrs Abington wearing a mob cap, even as a stage costume. In her portraits, if she wears a cap at all, it is a 'pompom', a small discreet spray of flowers, feathers or jewels (Ribeiro 1983, 144). Nothing that resembles the gathering of fabric suggested by the title mob-cap. In 1760 when Mrs Abington arrived in Dublin from London, fashionable headwear included lace caps with lappets, two long ribbons of lace that could hang down, or be used to tie under the chin. These caps had ruffles of lace that framed the face. However, styles were changing to a plainer less elaborate decoration for

the head. The hair pulled back away from the face, sometimes curled to give some fullness to the style, with the top of the head adorned with a simple feather, or ribbon of pearls. It is possible that the 'Abington cap' was simply her version of this style, such as in the Reynolds portraits. Whatever it looked like, it was new and different and hugely popular as part of the new actress's style. It is interesting to note that in the surviving portraits, Abington was depicted in this style, with her hair pulled away from her face, either unadorned or with a simple decoration. Something from this early success stayed with her as her favoured style for dressing her head.

The relatively small theatrical scene in Dublin enabled Abington to enhance her skills as an actress and develop a personal style. She became known for her powers as a comic actress playing coquettes, hoydens (a boisterous girl or tomboy), chambermaids and country girls. She learnt that the audience, especially the women, took notice of her, and that her visual presentation, both in dress and gesture, was an important part of her success (Anon, 1888, 21). She did not have a particularly attractive or strong speaking voice, but to judge from contemporary comment, she evidently learned how to use it to good effect:

> She was a woman of great application, to speak as she did, required more thought than usually attends female study […] Her voice was of a high pitch and not very powerful. […] Yet, her figure considered, her voice sounded rather inadequate; its articulation, however, gave both strength and smartness to it, though it could not give it sweetness (Boaden 1831, I, 17).

Abington's lack of vocal power may have led her to place more emphasis on physical gesture and the use of props. It would also have led her to put more emphasis on her deportment and dress. The theatre historian James Boaden, had never seen a 'fan in a hand so dextrous as that of Mrs Abington' (1831, I, 17). The snap of a fan, or one of the many other gestures that it was used for, could not only emphasise the words, but also be played to counter their meaning, to add knowing gestures that built a personal rapport with the audience. In the hands of some women, a fan took on the nature of a weapon. In one epilogue Abington threatened to ward off Gorgons in the audience with her fan: 'if such there be, who thus by measure scan, / Against his *Rule* – I parry with my fan - / An instrument presented by the Graces / To bear me harmless from such Gorgon faces'

(Anon, 1888, 93). She was also said to have used pins in a similar manner, a familiar object from her days as a milliner, and an essential accessory for eighteenth-century dress. 'She had peculiar tricks in acting; one was turning her wrist, and seeming to stick a pin in the side of her waist' (O'Keefe 1826, I, 48). Overall, Boaden felt that Abington 'took more entire possession of the stage' than any other actress he had seen (1831, I, 17).

Actresses increasingly specialised in particular types of parts, and on her return to London, she also began to play upper class women. She was always popular with those in the audience who enjoyed her mimicking of the upper classes or came to look at her clothes. For the upper classes, she was perfect as an ingénue such as Lady Teazle who had risen from humble beginnings, but not right as Lady Modish who was a lady by birth. Their haughty dismissal of her ability to truly portray these upper-class characters suggests that she may have come too close for comfort. Horace Walpole, initially captivated by her, later stated that Abington could 'never go beyond Lady Teazle, which is a second-rate character, and that rank of women are always aping women of fashion without arriving at the style' (Doran, 1888, III, 105). Joshua Reynold's portrait of Abington as Miss Prue, in *Love for Love* by Congreve, shown in figure 31, a favourite part, shows her dressed in a fashionable pink silk dress trimmed with embroidered net. Backing up the comment that her chambermaids were somewhat over-dressed, a 'superfluity that attended many of her characters' (Doran 1888 II 107). It is a beautiful dress, but not that of a simple country girl.

Miss Prue in *Love for Love* by William Congreve (1696), and Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1771), were two of Abington's most popular parts. Both characters were young women from the country navigating the strange manners of the metropolis: Miss Prue longing for love, and Lady Teazle newly married but unsure of her status. Sheridan wrote the part for Abington, in the knowledge that her talent and popularity would bring in an audience. He consciously mirrored Congreve's comedy, but Congreve's cruel satire of a hundred years earlier had been replaced with the more benign sensibility of his time (Evans, 2011). Miss Prue fell for the first sophisticated man that she met, rejected her father's choice, and ended with nothing. Lady Teazle is more astute, in spite of her country origins; she resists the rake and is rewarded with a happy marriage. The success of both plays rested on their mockery of the seemingly sophisticated but deeply hypocritical aristocracy. Both parts enabled Abington to display her comic timing

and mastery of gesture, and to appear richly dressed as a fashionable woman. *School for Scandal* can be seen as a rejection of the fashionable woman, who was a constant source of anxiety in the contemporary discourse (Russell, 2007). The character of Lady Teazle in her high head (wig) and her dalliance with the possibility of adultery, epitomises bourgeois concerns over the corrupting effect of luxury. Sheridan's *coup de theatre,* brought about by the revealing of Lady Teazle hiding behind a screen in the denouement of the play, and the tumultuous laughter it engendered, represented the final rejection of such a character. The literary merit of the play, its biting wit and fast repartee, have obscured this more physical aspect to the drama. James Robert's painting of the screen scene, shown in figure 32, emphasises the physical positioning of the characters. The gestures of three of the figures eloquently act the acute embarrassment of the scene. In the popular print made from Robert's painting (fig. 33), the comeuppance delivered to Lady Teazle in her high head, is witnessed by the high heads of the women in the audience (Russell, 2007). Abington played the part in subsequent productions of the play and made it her own (Evans, 2011).

As Abington established herself as an actress in the company at Drury Lane, she gradually gained a similar star status to that which she had enjoyed in Dublin. The theatre historian Thomas Davies, in his biography of Garrick written immediately after his death, considers Mrs Abington worthy of a lengthy description because of her 'peculiar talents':

> her person is formed with great elegance, her address is graceful, her look animate and expressive. To the goodness of her understanding, and the superiority of her taste, she is indebted principally for her power of pleasing; (Davies 1780, 170).

He comments on the tone of her voice as 'not naturally charming to the ear', but her precise articulation meant that 'every syllable she utters is conveyed distinctly, and even harmoniously' (1780, 170). The interest in Abington's costume and dress meant that she was soon being consulted by women of fashion and gained entry to the houses of members of the aristocracy. For Davies, her superiority of taste in dress was a 'trifling accomplishment', it was her 'good sense, elegance of manner, and propriety of conduct' that gave her entry into high society (1780, 171). However, a German visitor to London saw the way she was consulted on fashion by the upper classes very differently. He

described the way that she drove about town to offer advice as almost equivalent to a consultation with a physician:

> A great number of people of fashion treat her in the most familiar manner, and as if she were their equal. As she never appears on the stage but in the most elegant dress, her taste is sure to be copied by all the ladies who happen to be spectators. It is there that this priestess of the fashions displays her art, being certain that she will be immediately copied with the most trivial exactness (D'Archenholz 1789, I, 110).

For D'Archenholz, the fascination with Abington's 'exquisite taste', and desire to emulate it precisely, had reached ridiculous proportions.

This was a period of growing proliferation in the production and sale of portrait prints of public figures (McCreery, 2004). Engravings sold as prints, which were growing in popularity, provided an ephemeral, but also cheap and accessible record of a person (West, 1991). Abington was depicted in several of her parts in Bell's editions of plays, discussed in Chapter Two. Each illustration for Bell began with a drawing from life of the actor in costume, created in the artist's studio. It is impossible to tell if the costume being worn is the one used on stage, or another better choice on the part of the actor for an image that would be preserved for posterity. However, several of the prints of Mrs Abington suggest a careful consideration in her choice of dress, albeit conforming more to fashionable taste than necessarily the social station of the character being played. She is depicted in different styles of dress, sometimes evening dress, sometimes with a French style of bodice (discussed below). These differences would have been understood by her audience and would have added different points of significance to the character being played. Prints were for a different audience; sold through the print shops to her less aristocratic supporters. Each print was a reminder of a particular performance, a moment in the play, a particular gesture. It is possible that she chose a different dress to the one that she wore on stage, but if the print was to become a memoire, or keep-sake, then it would seem more likely that she was depicted in the recognisable costume. An actress was expected to provide her own costumes and was given an allowance for this on top of her salary. Abington's allowance was another point of conflict with Garrick, and he eventually agreed to a far greater sum than was given to other actresses (Nussbaum, 2010).

Examination of three prints: *Mrs Abington in the character of Miss Prue*, 1777 (Fig. 12), *Mrs Abington in the character of Lady Betty Modish in The Careless Husband by Colley Cibber*, 1777 (Fig. 34), and *Mrs Abington in the character of Aurelia in The Twin Rivals by George Farquhar* 1778 (Fig. 35), will give an impression of how Abington used her costuming, both to enhance the character she was playing, and also to add to her own image as a woman of style. As discussed in Chapter Two, costuming on stage at this time was a mix of the traditional and the modern, as demonstrated by the painting *The Apotheosis of Garrick* (Figure 20).
Each shows her as if on stage in costume, with the title of the play at the top. Below the illustration the sub-title of *Mrs Abington in the character of…* is accompanied by a quote from the play, to specify a particular moment in the drama. The print of Abington as Miss Prue shows a costume more in keeping with her character as a country maid than the fashionable garments that she wore in the Reynolds portrait. However, the garments are still more richly decorated than might be expected for a simple country maid, and her hair is dressed in high fashion. The quote fixes the moment in Act II where she brandishes the fop's snuff box at her cousin, and simpers over the compliments he has paid her. This may have been a moment of high comedy, the simple girl imagining a stylish and experienced man to be in love with her.

As Lady Betty Modish and Aurelia, Abington wears heavily decorated upper-class dress, and a high wig dressed with feathers, very much in the current mode. However, the sack-back that she wears as Betty modish has an English cut to the bodice, but for Aurelia the style is French. Comparing these prints shows that she used her costume in a sophisticated manner to delineate different characters. She knew that her audience understood modes of dress because they were intimately involved in the production of their own clothes, and therefore would have read the signs given by the different styles that she wore. The French court bodice 'bared the shoulders – normally covered at all times – and thrust them back, putting the compressed and lifted bosom on prominent display. It also bared the upper arms, which were sheathed in three tiers of deep lace ruffles rather than sleeves.' (Chrisman-Campbell 2015, 94). In order to enhance the character that she was portraying, Abington played on the English audience's natural xenophobia and perception of the French as lacking in morals.

In both the prints she wears the high wig fashionable during the 1770s, which would have been visible on many of the women in her audience. Both wigs are crowned with decorations of ribbons and feathers, giving even greater height to her figure, an important factor in the low light levels on stage. However, this style does not appear in any of her portraits. In both of the Reynolds discussed later her hair looks natural and is pulled back to frame her face. A comment from the *Gazetteer* of October 1778 suggests that she did not like the style of high wig, and took an early opportunity to reduce it:

> The ponderous towering head-dress, which has been for some time a great weight upon female shoulders, is now lessening almost to its natural size. Mrs Abington has been one of the first to begin this happy reformation in dress, as she made her first appearance this season in School for Scandal with her hair remarkably low, which exhibited such evident marks of propriety that all the high heads in the house looked more like caricatures upon dress than real fashion. (Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser, 1778, Oct. 14)

These prints were a memento for those who followed her on the stage. Each one further cemented her reputation as a woman of talent and style and fed the desire of her followers for an affordable memento of her performance.

3.3.3 Self-presentation

The set of images that would have given Abington the greatest element of choice as to her self-presentation were her portraits. Prints were ephemeral, but a portrait offered the opportunity to fix an image for posterity. However, as with her prints, she only appears 'in the character of', not as herself. Whether or not the dress that she wore in the portrait was her actual stage costume or not, was her own choice. Her close friendship with Reynolds suggests that this was certainly the case when she worked with him.

On her return to London Abington soon began to construct a persona for her public through the use of images. From the eight portraits painted of Abington over her career, closer examination of three, *Mrs. Abington as the Comic Muse*, c1765-68, by Joshua Reynolds (Fig. 36), *Mrs. Abington, as the Widow Bellmour in Arthur Murphy's 'The Way to Keep Him',* by Johann Zoffany, c1765-68 (Fig. 37), and *Mrs. Abington as Miss Prue in Love*

for Love by William Congreve, by Joshua Reynolds, 1771 (Fig. 31), will build a sense of how Abington wished to be understood, and from where much of her popularity and glamour stemmed.

The first two portraits were begun in the year of her return to London, and present very different views of the actress. Zoffany depicts her as a character within a whole theatrical stage setting, albeit with an added hint of realism for the purposes of the portrait; whereas Reynolds gives us the actress as a seductive classical muse, young and alluring. Zoffany's faithful portraits of Garrick's most popular and important roles enabled Garrick to promote and cement his position as the greatest actor of his day. Joshua Reynolds enjoyed the company of performers, and was renowned for his characterisation of young women in classical guises, giving legitimacy to a somewhat 'erotic rendition of their bodies' (Postle, 2003, 83). The contrast between these two images suggests why it was Reynolds rather than Zoffany, who was chosen by Abington, both as a friend and as chief promoter of her as a glamourous and seductive woman.

However, the Zoffany (Fig. 37) is worth discussing not only because it is the only image of Abington in the prevailing style of theatrical portraiture championed by Garrick, but also because of the part that she was playing. The character of the Widow Belmour, encapsulated an ambivalent view of women and how they should perform their role within society. Actresses, as discussed in Chapter Two, were at the centre of the uncertainty displayed by society towards the role of women. The widow Belmour was a well-educated woman, who also enjoyed fashion and the fripperies that went with it. Her role in the play was to lead the women back to their husbands, a good moral outcome, but she did this while at the same time advocating the power of fashion and dress to entice them. It seems likely that in her physical performance, Abington would have played up this dichotomy, making the role especially funny to the many women in the audience.

The painting shows her on stage before a dressing table with a mirror. Her costume is depicted in detail, with the black of the bodice and her widow's shawl highlighting her deep décolletage, but her figure is slightly lost among the detail of the setting. Abington was twenty-eight when she returned to London, and her face as depicted by Zoffany seems to reflect that. A large part of Abington's persona and her popularity were based on glamour, and her ability to charm the audience with her wit and mimicry. Zoffany's

portrait, however skilful and realistic in terms of a likeness, does not project these qualities. Abington is depicted as part of a whole and detailed scene in a role, not as herself, but this portrait seems based on the character as written by the author, rather than on the character as portrayed by Abington. The Widow Belmour was to become one of Abington's most popular roles, possibly because of the ambivalence of the character and the way that it develops an interesting commentary on attitudes to marriage, women and fashion. The slightly older, more experienced, but still glamorous woman; who was beautiful, but also clever, may have chimed with Abington's vision of herself, adding verisimilitude to her performance.

Her first portrait by Joshua Reynolds (Fig. 36), painted at a similar time, gives a contrasting view of the actress. Reynolds shows her as Thalia, the muse of comedy, dressed in a soft robe that shows the contours of her body, with her hair pinned up and framing her face. Holding the mask of Comedy, she leans against the base of a statue in a surrounding of trees. She looks out at her audience, her head tilted to the side, a slight smile on her face, a seductive figure. Where the Zoffany was a portrait of an actress within a play, this is a portrait of the actress as a woman, albeit still playing a part. Her stare is provocative, she has employed the tilted head, but not the downward glance. Reynolds has positioned her legs in a slightly unnatural way, emphasising her thigh, and using the folds of her skirt to draw the eye to her hidden pelvic area, making an implicit allusion to classical statues of Venus.

Ten years later, Reynolds altered Abington's hair to give her a braid that drapes down over her right shoulder. The painting in its original form survives only as a mezzotint created in 1769, shown in figure 38. It is difficult to compare the original with a print, but her face and figure seem younger after the alterations. However, even in the print the figure of Abington shows a marked contrast to that in the Zoffany. The style of portraiture championed by Garrick and Zoffany, explicitly referencing the sense of a performance on the stage, did not suit Abington. Her collaboration with Reynolds moved theatrical portraiture into a new realm that promoted her female allure, the sense of performance implicit, and left to the eye of the beholder.

The informal, wrap-around 'bed gown' that Abington wears, alongside the pose, suggests that this painting was not intended for public display. Artists generally held a selection of costumes at their studios, and a similar gown appears in several of Reynolds other

portraits (Ribeiro 2010, 121). Such a garment that clung to the contours of a woman's body would not be acceptable for an actress. An aristocratic woman might wear that style if playing a character from classical myth, but a performer from the stage would be expected to appear outwardly respectable if the painting were to be displayed in public. Abington as Thalia probably lived for some time in Reynolds' studio for viewing by his visitors. His mainly male audience could have enjoyed her image in the relative privacy of the studio, and thus been encouraged to pay to see the real figure on the stage (Postle, 2005).

One of the most striking portraits of Mrs Abington is the painting exhibited by Joshua Reynolds at the Royal Academy in 1771, shown in figure 31. Its title in the exhibition, *Portrait of a Lady, Three Quarters,* followed the Academy tradition of not naming the subject of the painting. However, many of the viewers would have recognised Mrs Abington in the character of Miss Prue from Congreve's play *Love for Love*, another of her popular parts. Reynolds depicted a mature woman of thirty-three playing a young ingénue, portrayed sitting on a chair that has been turned around so that she leans on its back. She stares into the distance, as if lost in a reverie, her thumb resting against the bottom lip of her slightly open mouth. Her dress, probably a sack-back, is of pink satin with white ruffles at the neck and cuffs, augmented by the lace frills of a chemise. Her hair is neatly pulled up into a top knot, covered by what looks like a lace cap. Her only other adornments are glass earrings and black satin bands on her wrists, a current revival of a restoration fashion (Ribeiro, 2003). She sits twisted in the chair, sharing the seat with a small lap dog.

At first glance the portrait shows a young woman in a fashionable dress sitting inelegantly on a chair and making a lewd gesture with her finger against her mouth. She was allowed this vulgar gesture because she was an actress playing a part, and most of her audience would have understood this (Paulson, 1989). Those who knew the play would also have known that the chair represented a particular scene. Miss Prue encounters Ben, the young man intended for her, who she has no intention of marrying. Congreve used their chairs and the comic moving and placement of them as a metaphor for the complex dance of courtship and love. Her pose sitting leaning on the back of the chair may represent a remembered moment of the staging at the Drury Lane theatre.

However, Reynolds added further layers of meaning though the choice of pose and props. A crude reading of the dog in her lap sees it as a male companion. Dogs often appeared in portraits of couples as a signifier of fidelity, and attached to a woman on her own they could represent courtship and sensuality (May, 1996). In the case of Miss Prue, she is in love with a rake but will not be allowed to marry him. As she refused to marry Ben she will be locked away by her father, making the fashionable black bands on her wrists into signifiers for shackles. Reynolds presents the teenager, locked away and gazing into the distance, remembering (Paulson, 1989). This is not a portrait of Mrs Abington, the person, but Mrs Abington, the actress, playing a part.

The viewer might feel that they know her, especially if they had seen her on the stage, but this is an illusion, the main focus is on the character, not the person. However, the dress that she wears suggests a fashionable woman, not a young country girl; this is after all, a portrait for posterity. She was thirty-three years old at this point, playing a young girl of seventeen, yet her portrayal was accomplished and very popular. The strength of her ability as a mimic, through voice and gesture, as well as her dress, making her loved for her abilities as a comic actress, as well as her looks.

3.3.4 Mrs Abington at the opera

Mrs Abington's career on the stage spanned a time when increasing attention was being paid to actresses, their lives, and how they looked (Perry, 2001). In the chart of the Opera House, (Fig. 1), she appears on the list for a box in the top tier where the minor aristocracy, courtesans and performers sat. The key holder was a Mr Taylor (possibly the then manager of the theatre), and the other occupant was Sir John Eliot, a society doctor (Price, *et al.*, 1995). There were no other women in their box, and her reasons for joining this particular group are not known. This is quite unusual, to see a woman on her own in a list with other men. Had Lady Mary Coke been inclined to take notice of the top tier, she would not have approved. It is possible that Abington did not wish to appear in the company of courtesans and thus be identified with them. It is also unlikely that any respectable woman would have been willing to appear sitting next to an actress. If one of her reasons for attending was to be seen and admired, then she may have been happy to be the only woman in her box.

Sitting at the front of the box, Abington would have been visible to many of the aristocrats around her. She would also have been able to observe most of the auditorium from her vantage point. She mixed socially in upper class society, but that would have been with a fairly limited range of people and in the privacy of their homes. At the opera she could watch the social groupings, and the movements of men between the boxes. She saw the aristocracy on show; not only their dress but also their mannerisms and modes of speech. Some groups, such as the Cavendish family led by the Duke of Devonshire, affected a kind of drawl when they spoke, that gave them a superior and detached manner (Foreman, 1998). Attributes, appropriately mimicked on stage by Abington, would have been very funny to the middle classes in the pit, and caused a frisson of recognition for the richer patrons in the boxes.

There were two occasions where Abington's portrayal on the stage was immediately received by her audience as an imitation of a prominent aristocratic woman. Playing Lady Teazle in the premier of Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, and as Bélise in Moliere's *Les Femmes savants*. Lady Teazle was widely interpreted at the time as based on the Duchess of Devonshire (Foreman, 1997, 50). Recent scholarship has cast doubt on this attribution, but at the time, the audience, the critics, and, even the duchess herself, believed it to be so (Greig, 2013). True or not, the perception added to the power and draw of Mrs Abington's performance, and it remained one of her most popular roles. As Bélise she was considered to have imitated the ageing Duchess of Bedford. The Earl of Ossary wrote to his friend Thomas Robinson that 'I assure you the resemblance is perfect, it is the joke of all the town' (Grieg 2013 252). She used her skill at inflecting her voice, and the power of gesture to imitate these well-known characters, probably heightening any mannerisms for greater effect. For the aristocrats in the boxes there would have been the pleasure of recognition, maybe *schadenfreude*. For the bourgeoisie in the pit, who may not have met the aristocrat, the comedy of an actress mocking the upper classes and their excesses.

3.3.5 Conclusion

Reviews of Mrs Abington's skill as a comic actress suggest an accomplished talent, someone who would rise through the ranks in any age. She added to this skill a natural glamour and facility with clothes that always made her the centre of attention. Her humble origins gave her an understanding of the world and how it worked, which

combined with her intelligence and willingness to learn allowed her to remain largely in control of her own life. Women may have become a more visible factor in social life beyond the home at this time, but few had much control, their fate being largely in the hands of men. Abington's careful choice of lovers gave her access to money, which in turn enabled her to maintain the upper hand with those men who might have controlled her life, especially Reynolds and Garrick. Throughout her time on the stage she maintained a strong relationship with her audience, such that they felt that she belonged to them. Her use of imagery allowed the audience to feel as if they knew her, without her ever having to reveal detail about herself. After her retirement she returned to the stage on two occasions, once to play Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and once to play a breeches role as Scrub in the *Beau Stratagem*. On both occasions, although pleased to see her, she disappointed the audience. As Beatrice she was still funny, but too stout to do full justice to the part (Highfill et al. 1973, I, 14). As the male Scrub she demeaned the star quality for which she had been known (Boaden, 1831). Her large and loyal audience preferred the glamourous, witty, fashion icon of their memories.

3.4 Signora Giovanna Baccelli, 1753-1801

Giovanna Francesca Antonia Guiseppe Zanerini, known as Baccelli, was one of the most popular female dancers of her day. She made her debut at the Opera House in 1774, dancing the Rose in *Le Ballet des Fleurs,* with newspaper comment on her 'brilliancy of execution' (*Public Advertiser*, 1774, Nov. 22). This led to a career as a principle dancer at that theatre which lasted until 1786. Between 1776 and 1783 she appeared several times as a featured dancer at the Paris Opéra, and later returned to her birthplace in Venice to dance at the Teatro San Benedetto (Griffin, 1993). Her career spanned a time when ballet, under the auspices of French dancing masters such as Jean Georges Noverre, was developing from an interlude between the acts of an opera to an independent art form in its own right. Baccelli's style of dancing bridged the transition between the grand classical forms of the French court earlier in the century, and the development of new more expressive styles (Eliot, 2007a).

By the December of her first season, her chaconne, a dance performed at the end of an opera that demanded both virtuosic technique and stamina, was deemed 'exceedingly brilliant' (*Public Advertiser*, 1774, Dec. 7). She became known for her serious and noble style of dancing in the French style, in which she displayed musicality and technical skill (Eliot, 2007b). Her career spanned a time of tension between the grand noble style and more expressive displays of technical prowess, known in France as *demi charactère* roles, such as those displayed in London by Auguste Vestris during the 1780-81 season (Milhous, 1994). During that season Baccelli demonstrated her acting ability and virtuosity as the ingenue Ninette in the ballet *Ninette a la Cour* (Eliot, 2007b), as well as her facility in the noble and dramatic style as the nymph Creuse in tragic ballet *Médée et Jason* (Milhous, 1994). A post in the newspaper from March 1781 suggests this ability in both styles:

> Mademoiselle Baccelli was truly admirable; but she soon put it out of our Power to determine which was her forte, the Comic or the Serious Dance; for, after having enchanted us in the former, she wound up our Wonder and Distress to the highest Pitch in the latter... (Public Advertiser, 1781, Mar. 31)

Having charmed her audience as Ninette, Baccelli amazed them still further in her depiction of the wronged nymph Creuse at the end of the evening. From her second season onwards she was recorded in the London libretti as a principle dancer (Burden, 2015). When she danced at the Paris Opéra in 1782, audiences were impressed by her 'exceptional lightness' and her 'musical ear of great sensitivity' (Guest, 1996, 205). Baccelli, who took her mother's name, came from a family of performers, but her fluent French indicates that her original training was in France (Highfill, *et al.*, 1973). Her Italian origins and ability with French suggest that she probably also spoke English, but presumably with an accent. This may have added to her charm in the eyes of those who met her, as she moved among the French dancers and Italian singing stars at the London Opera House.

3.4.1 Personal life

By 1779 Baccelli had become the acknowledged mistress of the Duke of Dorset (1745-1799), and she began to be absent from the stage for longer periods than might be expected for a dancer of her standing (Eliot, 2007b). They probably met backstage at the Opera House, where 'everyone from the pit was admitted' (Angelo 1830 II 321). Their relationship lasted for ten years, and throughout their relationship Baccelli seems to have been faithful to the Duke, although he had other mistresses during their time together (Lehmann 2008).

John Frederick Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset was a connoisseur and collector of art, and also a patron to several living artists, especially Joshua Reynolds who became a friend (Einberg 1976 11). However, he was also a dilettante and a large part of his life was taken up with social activities. He was described by the Duchess of Devonshire as a 'dangerous' man, who was known to be manipulative and vain (Foreman, 1998, 196). As an attractive man, he also collected women, notably the courtesan Elizabeth Armistead (1750-1842), and Lady Betty Hamilton, Countess of Derby (1753-1797) (Sackville-West, 2010, 131). But it was Baccelli with whom he had the longest relationship, ending in 1789, when his horror at the violence he experienced in France at the beginning of the revolution turned him back towards family responsibilities and the need to produce an heir. The parting with Baccelli seems to have been amicable. He settled on her an annual pension of £400 a year, and she left their son, the young John Frederick (c1779-1796) to be brought up and

educated by him (Sackville-West, 2010, 132). The Duke then married the heiress Arabella Cope (1767-1825) who bore him a son and two daughters.

During their time together the Duke took Baccelli to his home at Knole in Kent and gave her a personal suite of rooms. An interesting insight into Baccelli's life there comes from a record by Fanny Burney on a visit to Knole to see the paintings, in October 1779,

> The Duke of Dorset was not there himself; but we were prevented from seeing the library, and two or three other modernised rooms, because Madlle. Bacelli was not to be disturbed. (Barrett, 1854, I, 217)

Burney's pique at not being able to see the refurbished rooms hints at Baccelli's status in the household. At the time of Burney's visit Baccelli was probably pregnant and her rooms must have given her unaccustomed and welcome privacy. Accounts from the time list stockings, shifts and petticoats for her, and later, payments to a wet nurse for her son, cat food, and toys for Master Sackville (Sackville-West, 2010, 133). In 1783, an itinerant artist painted portraits of the servants at Knole, including five who were associated with Baccelli. Two of these, her companion Mary Edwards and her personal servant Andrea Coronin, were still with her at her death nearly twenty years later, suggesting an employer capable of engendering loyalty and friendship (Eliot, 2007a, 25).

The fact that her affair with the Duke lasted as long as it did, suggests a deep affection and friendship between them, as well as a degree of tolerance on her part when he strayed from her. He does not seem to have prevented her from continuing with her career on the stage. As discussed in a previous case study, it was expected that aristocratic couples might live partly separate lives. The time that they spent apart while she was at the opera was not unusual. Winters would have been spent in London, for the season and Baccelli performing, and summers, once she was no longer required by the Opera House, in the country or travelling.
Baccelli seems to have been a woman with a strong capacity for friendship, meeting and enjoying the company of aristocrats, both in London and Paris. Through her association with the Duke, she formed several long-term friendships, including one with Lord and Lady Cowper (Lehmann, 2008, 85). Terms such as 'graceful', 'elegant' and 'sweet-tempered' recur often in accounts of her (Einberg, 1976, 7).

Towards the end of their relationship as he turned towards marriage and family, she developed an affection for their long-term friend Henry Herbert, 10th Earl of Pembroke (1734-1794). She lived with the Earl until he died, causing great consternation to his son, who felt the relationship reflected badly on the family (Herbert, 1950, II, 353). The final move for Baccelli was to a house in Sackville Street where she lived with a John Carey until her death in 1801.
By the time of her death, Baccelli had spent twenty-two years as the mistress and companion to three different men; the Duke of Dorset, the Earl of Pembroke and John Carey. The prospects for a female performer once they had retired from the stage were bleak. Without savings from their earnings, a husband, or a protector, destitution beckoned. While there seems little doubt that these relationships were affectionate, each man would have given Baccelli a home and some security for the duration of their relationship, allowing her the comfort to which she had become accustomed. Legacies from Baccelli's will to her servants suggest that even at the end she was still living in relative comfort.

3.4.2 Public persona

Baccelli built a reputation as a talented dancer during the second half of the 1770s dancing in divertissements within and between the acts of the opera, and in the ballets that were composed for the end of the evening. During this time, the principal ballet master was Louis Simonet (*fl.*1765-1817), a dancer trained in France. Unlike opera on the continent, London continued to produce dances that bore little relationship to the operas that contained them. The 1778-79 season saw the beginnings of a change in the style and importance placed on ballet by the Opera House. Simonet had been sent to Paris in the summer of 1778 to learn how ballet operated in France and in February 1779 the opera *Zemira et Azore* contained ballets more closely linked to the opera.

Traditional divertissements and ballets based on theatrical versions of social dances, with the addition of character dances based on *commedia dell'arte*, could be repeated as often as desired. They allowed for straightforward substitutions in dancers and for costumes to be easily re-cycled. Specialist dances called for more rehearsals and costume of a more specific style, putting greater strain on limited budgets. The new managers, Richard Brinsley Sheridan from the Drury Lane theatre and Thomas Harris from Covent Garden

put a greater emphasis on the ballet, and in the second half of the season Simonet's influence from the continent in the integration of dance with the opera was more apparent. That he was able to 'galvanise the same dancers into doing vastly more work than they had the previous season suggests the level of excitement felt around the house' (Price, *et al.*, 1995, 449). Debts accrued by the management made the next season (1789-80) less innovative, in spite of the appointment of Favre Guiardele, a protégé of Noverre as dancing master.

It was the 1780-81 season that was to prove pivotal in the development of dance in London and must have constituted the highlight of Baccelli's career on the stage. The London Opera House contracted the young French dancer Auguste Vestris and with him came his father Gaetan. Gaetan Vestris, known on the continent as a 'god of the dance' was working increasingly as a choreographer (Price, *et al.*, 1995, 452). He had worked as a principal dancer at the Paris opéra during the development of the style known as *ballet d'action;* dance that told a story entirely through gesture. The two productions that he brought to London, *Ninette à la cour* based on a ballet by Maximilien Gardel and *Médée et Jason* by Noverre, were unlike anything that had been seen in London before (Price *et al.,* 1995). The twenty-year-old Vestris junior burst upon the London stage with an athletic and expressive style of dancing engendering a fever of excitement, that brought full houses crowding to see the beautiful young prodigy. He was the first real dance celebrity, whose fame spread beyond the cognoscenti to those with no real understanding of dance (Milhous, 1994). Baccelli partnered Vestris junior, not simply dancing in his reflected glory but, according to the newspaper reports, more than holding her own:

> The new dancer, equally surprised us by his unparallel'd Agility and Strength of Body; whilst the Gracefulness of his Attitudes made us forget all we had seen before of the Kind […] He was powerfully seconded by Mademoiselle Baccelli and Madame Simonet. (Public Advertiser, 1780, Dec. 18)

Madame Simonet, married to the dancing master Louis Simonet, was the other resident principal dancer at the Opera House.

Vestris senior choreographed the ballets performed by his son after the opera, at the end of the evening. The resident ballet master Simonet, a fellow Frenchman, produced the

shorter *divertissements* for between the acts. Baccelli partnered the young Vestris in every one of the four ballets created by Vestris senior, and in two of the four created by Simonet. It was Vestris junior who had caused the stir among the public at his debut performance alongside Baccelli in the divertissement *Les Amans Surpris*. Some of the reports were a little dismissive of his lack of technique, and reliance on showmanship. As most of the writers were probably male, and the biggest response came from the female section of the audience, there may have been more pique than reality in this reaction:

> Great praise is due to the two Vestris; but as we are womanlishly *[sic]* inclined, we paid greater Attention to the inimitable Baccelli, and the very graceful Simonet; nor do we remember to have seen them to so great an advantage. (Public Advertiser, 1781, Mar. 19)

This response to the dancers, with the resulting creation of the first real dance celebrity was unprecedented (Milhous, 1994). This was a hugely important season for the development of ballet in London, and the acceptance of *ballet d'action* as an art form. Baccelli, as principle dancer, was at the forefront of the presentation of these developments.

How the public viewed Baccelli as a person was largely coloured by society's attitudes towards performers, who were generally considered to be of dubious morality. A portrait of Baccelli painted in 1783 by Joshua Reynolds presented her in the character of a Bacchante (fig. 39), personifying a male view of performers. The image played to the expectations of the male viewer, who wilfully 'confused and conflated' the two professions of actress and courtesan in order to maintain a 'fantasy of control and accessibility' (Postle, 2003, 23). The original picture, commissioned by the Duke of Dorset was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1783, but has since been lost and survives only in prints (Einberg, 1976). Baccelli looks out at the viewer, having turned away from the theatre mask that she holds up to her face. Her hair, decorated with vines, is tousled and a ringlet falls down her back, the dramatic lighting highlighting one side of her face and her naked shoulder. The mask was an overt sign of the two-faced nature of the theatre, giving the viewer a brief glimpse of the real person behind it. The vines indicated that she was a follower of Bacchus, God of wine and fertility. It is as though she has paused on her way to the stage, looking out of the picture, about to move away from the viewer towards the dark backdrop of trees beyond her. This is Baccelli as a performer, a member of a group

seen as dubious because of their protean abilities to change character and imitate others as part of their craft.

In spite of the fact that female dancers displayed bodily exertion on the stage, which was seen by some as unfeminine, the public censure that applied to actresses and their private lives did not extend in the same way to dancers (Thorp 2014 121). Female dancers had been seen and accepted on the public stage from early in the eighteenth century (Collins & Jarvis 2016 171). Dance was exotic and unreal, and enjoyed for its artistry and emotional resonances. Dancers transported their audience into a world of fantasy, using the combination of movement and music to take them out of their current world and lift their souls. Then as now, in order to achieve their art, they had to develop their bodies through dedicated and arduous training, and their professionalism was evident whenever they performed. Baccelli was the recipient of much press comment as to her activities, but little censure was expressed, it was merely gossipy in tone. This generally benign attitude contrasts with that displayed towards the actress Elizabeth Farren, who was the long-term mistress of the Earl of Derby. She eventually achieved some acceptance by marrying the Earl, but during her time as his mistress, she was the subject of much disparaging comment and was depicted in several satirical cartoons (McCreery 2004 109).

Baccelli's appearance alongside the exciting young dancer Auguste Vestris led to the production of a number of images, both serious and satirical, that give an unusual insight into her costume. Prints of actors in costume were becoming increasingly popular in the second half of the century, but prints of dancers were unusual (West, 1991). The *ballet d'action* entitled *Médée et Jason,* based on the myth of the murderous Medea, was so different and caused such a stir, that it prompted the creation of a burlesque across the road at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. Publicity for this performance may have been the impetus behind a print (Fig. 40), by Francesco Bartolozzi entitled *Jason et Medee, Ballet Tragique* (Einberg, 1976). It shows a dramatic moment in the ballet with Vestris senior as Jason recoiling in horror, Madame Simonet as Médée brandishing a dagger, and Baccelli as the nymph Creuse, cowering behind Jason. Bartolozzi has emphasised the figures and style of dancing: he is not interested in the scenic elements, but in the movement. The fact that this popular performance brought about a burlesque suggests the dramatic effect that the new style of ballet had on its audience. Bartolozzi may have exaggerated the spectacle of the moment in his choice of poses, in an attempt to satirise

the high emotional drama being portrayed. However, what the dancers demonstrate are gestures of emotion formulated by John Weaver (1673-1760) much earlier in the century, and regularly employed in the intervening years (Ralph, 1985). This suggests that it was the type of narrative, rather than the style of movement that was new. Audiences had become accustomed to ballets or dances based on classical myths since before the establishment of opera and dance at the court of Louis XIV in France (McGowan, 1998). In these dance performances the denouement brought resolution to the drama through the intervention of the gods, to calm the passions and restore order to the world (Collins & Jarvis 2016). In *Médée et Jason* the only resolution was brought about by the jealous and murderous rage of Médée, taking the production closer to a Jacobean tragedy than the elegant and formalised court ballet.

There is also an oval print of Baccelli in her costume for Creuse, standing with her arms outstretched as if at the side of the stage (Fig. 41). Entitled *Signora Baccelli, In the Character of Creusa in Medea and Jason,* it is the type of image that would have been sold as a keepsake, or memory of the performer, and has nothing of the drama of the Bartolozzi. A comparison of her costume with that in the Bartolozzi, suggests that his image, however satirical, was an accurate rendering of their costumes. The style is similar to fashionable dress, and yet she was dancing the role of a classical nymph. It would seem that for dancers as much as actresses, when performing on the stage the expected style was that of a respectable woman. However, unlike actresses in the theatre, Baccelli had little choice over her costuming, as the Opera House produced the costumes for their performers. At that time they were the responsibility of the tailor, Thomas Lupino (Rosenfeld, 1976). His name sounds Italian, but whether he was a native of that country, or took the name to boost his credentials, is not known. However, an English tailor would not have been accustomed to cutting the French style of bodice shown in several images of costumes. This suggests that at the very least, he received some training on the continent.

The divertissement *Les Amans Surpris* also prompted the production of images. A print of Vestris junior was published in *Bell's English Theatre* in 1782, and one of Baccelli in the 1791 edition (Figs. 15 and 16). They are shown in costumes decorated with ribbons and flowers, suggesting a light, possibly comic dance, and both costumes are worth examining in detail. The jacket worn by Vestris has very short sleeves, exposing his shirt underneath.

This was not unusual for female dress, where sleeves often ended just below the elbow to reveal layers of lace ruffles on the chemise, however, the exposure of so much skin was unusual for a man. Coat sleeves ended at the wrist, revealing the ends of ruffles on the cuff of a shirt; a man's combination of shirt, waistcoat, and coat was buttoned to the neck. The only area of skin that might be visible on a respectable man was his face and hands. The engraving in *Bell's English Theatre,* set next to a water-colour drawn by Nathaniel Dance for a print (Fig. 45), suggest that Vestris's shirt was open at the neck revealing the top of his chest, and that his breeches were far more skin tight than those worn by most English men. The French had been developing knitted fabrics for ballet costume, which made a skin-tight, flexible fabric quite possible (Collins and Jarvis, 2016). Some of the ridicule heaped on Vestris junior may have stemmed from the reaction of the female members of the audience, not only to his athletic dancing, but also to the revealing of his young toned body.

Baccelli's costume is an interesting mix of English and French styles of dress. The bodice, which has a deep décolletage and wide shoulders has the French cut of a *grand habit* (Chrisman-Campbell, 2015). The inverted 'V' line of the jacket front and the bows looping up the sides of the skirt suggestive of a French Polonaise. The *robe a la Polonaise* was a gown without a fitted waist, worn over a bodice and looped up at the back (Van Cleeve and Welborn, 2013).

It is interesting to consider why the costume was cut in this French style. Vestris, father and son, would have brought their costumes with them from Paris, where they had been performing at the opera. If not, then the aesthetic that they required from the costumier at the London Opera House would certainly have been French. It is also possible that costume for dance had settled into this French style some years before. The choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre made his first visit to London in 1755, creating *The Chinese Ballet* for David Garrick at Drury Lane. The designs for costume and décor were created by Boquet in Paris (Lynham, 1972). The production, which had been paid for by Garrick, was a disaster and closed after only a few performances, due to animosity between the English and the French; the seven-years' war broke out a few months later (Thorp, 2014a). It is not surprising therefore that Garrick, having incurred considerable expense in mounting the production, continued to use the costumes for dances in his productions (Davies, 1780). This would have set an expectation that costumes for dance would have a 'French' style. The fashionable audience in the 1780s would also have

recognised the style as French because over the second quarter of the century English court dress had diverged in style and cut, due to a Hanoverian desire to separate themselves from their enemy, the French. Whatever the wish of the King, the aristocracy also travelled regularly to the continent, promoting a healthy exchange of fashions (Ribeiro, 2010b).

Baccelli's costumes may have been cut in the style of a fashionable and aristocratic woman, but the fabrics used suggest that they were actually cheap imitations. As discussed in Chapter Two, a raid on the wardrobe at the opera has given insight into the choice of fabrics used for costumes in the 1780s. Within the limits of his budget the costumier, Thomas Lupino, was expected to produce costumes that imitated the grand style of the audience. To do this, he was relying not on expensive imports from France, but on cheap imitations sourced in London.

Baccelli was not only a performer, she was also the mistress of a Duke, bringing an ambiguity to her social position, which made her a subject of much interest in the press. This was a period of growing interest in the private lives of public figures, with descriptions in the press which represented them as a type of public property (Rosenthal, 2006). Press interest continued for the whole of Baccelli's time with the duke, and their response to her return from a visit to Paris to dance at the Opéra in 1783, is a good example of the tone adopted:

> Baccelli's return occasioned her amorous partner to take several steps to convince of her of his extreme attention [sic]; with this view he met her immediately after she landed in England and conducted her to his seat! (Morning Herald and New Daily Advertiser, 1783, Jan. 3)

This interest from the English press in her person and her relationship with the duke continued in 1783 when he was appointed as English ambassador to France. He took Baccelli with him and set her up in her own apartment in Paris, where she obviously became part of the social scene:

> Madame Baccelli lives in great splendour in Paris, and no lady more truly deserves good fortune than herself. Her house is the resort of all the fashionable English in that gay metropolis; and it is the chief pleasure and study of her life, to show her gratitude to our nation for the

> protection with which she was honoured by our nobility. ('General news', 1785, Feb. 9)

She was reported as the owner of one of the most brilliant carriages seen in the annual parade of mistresses to Longchamp in 1787: 'Baccelli, elegantly simple, à l'Angloise, attracted the eyes of the company.' (*General Evening Post*, 1787, Apr. 11)The next month, the same coach was reported alongside the Duke's at the King of France's annual review, that year graced by the presence of the queen, Marie Antoinette:

> In the duke of Dorset's carriage were Col. Gardiner, his Lady etc. Baccelli appeared in the elegant vis-à-vis she had built on purpose for Long Champs, and added Splendour to the pompous Cavalcade. (St. James's Chronicle, 1787, May 17)

She was not a paramour hidden away from society like a guilty secret, but someone who participated fully in the Duke's life in Paris and at the French court. Occasional newspaper reports in London speak of this honorary English woman, about the entertainments that she gave, concerns over minor illnesses and the possibility of her imminent return to London, where she might be seen again on the stage as a dancer. Baccelli did return to London and continued as a popular principal at the Opera House until she retired.

3.4.3 Self-presentation

The images that we have of Baccelli reflect her profession as a dancer, or when commissioned by the Duke, her persona as his mistress. However, there is one image, a full-length portrait of Baccelli painted by Thomas Gainsborough, shown in figure 43, that analysis suggests presents us with Baccelli as she saw herself: a professional woman at the peak of her career. The portrait was paid for by the Duke, but Gainsborough, as an artist, would not have been an obvious choice for him (Einberg, 1976). Gainsborough had gained a reputation as a portraitist who would paint what he saw before him, without the use of artifice in the set-up or costuming. He was interested in the reality of the sitter, and produced his best work when he could develop an empathy with his subject (Leca, 2010). Gainsborough seems to have accepted his sitters on their own terms, and been willing to ignore gendered priorities (Rosenthal 2000 176). Together they produced a painting that shows Baccelli as a performer in her stage costume and wearing makeup, but in a Gainsborough setting of a grove of trees. This was an unusual format for Gainsborough, a

woman in theatrical costume and makeup, suggesting that he was Baccelli's choice, rather than the Duke's (Einberg, 1976). She did not choose to be represented as Creuse in *Médée et Jason,* arguably her most significant role, but as her character in *Les Amans Surpris,* a light dance divertissement. This was the moment when she danced alongside the young 'Adonis', Auguste Vestris, and enjoyed the adulation that they engendered from the audience. It is possible that nothing that came afterwards matched the excitement and applause that greeted her when she danced on that occasion. The Gainsborough can be seen as representing the persona which had the greatest significance for Baccelli herself, as a talented professional woman.

She is shown dancing with a white mantilla shawl, having come to rest in fourth position, left leg behind taking her weight, and her right foot pointing forwards. Her right hand takes one end of the shawl behind her back, and her left sweeps the other end away from us and up into the air. Gainsborough has placed her in a landscape, with tall trees shadowing her outstretched arm, and a low horizon that allows high white clouds to frame her upper body. She turns towards her audience, with a slight smile on her pale, rouged face. On the ground at her feet lies a tambourine, signalling her vocation as a dancer.

The portrait, when it was shown at the Royal Academy in 1782, presented the viewer with a dichotomy. Here was a representation of a woman, in Gainsborough's 'best style'. (*Morning Herald and New Daily Advertiser*, 1782, May 1) However, the portrait of Baccelli clearly signalled her profession as a performer, particularly in his use of rouge on her cheeks. Gainsborough's emphasis on her white makeup and rouge may also have been a riposte to persistent criticism of his use of colour when depicting women's faces, an explicit flouting of the rule that expected demure femininity in the depiction of women (Leca 2010 91). The reviewer of the exhibition wrote:

> […] in the character of an Italian opera Dancer, the artist was not only obliged to vivify and embellish, but if he would be thought to copy the original to lay on his colour thickly; in this he has succeeded for the face of this admirable dancer is evidently paint-painted [i.e. wearing stage makeup][…]. (Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser, 1782, May, 1)

Gainsborough was known for his naturalistic portraits of the aristocracy and his ability to produce a good likeness, and this portrait shows a performer for whom costume and makeup are her 'natural' state (Rosenthal, 2000, 33). For society at that time the visual held primacy, and ideally, how one looked indicated who one was (Ribeiro, 2010a, 111). The attitude displayed by the reviewer from the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* to Gainsborough's use of her stage makeup stems from society's unease around performers, especially female ones, who were widely perceived as covering up their real selves with costume and makeup, in order to perform as different characters. Goffman's (1990) concept of social interaction as 'dramaturgy' has been made concrete by the sight of an actress in makeup, beside others presented 'normally'. Gainsborough's unusual depiction of makeup had highlighted that everyone on those walls was in some way acting a part, an aspect more normally associated with Joshua Reynolds.

The public exhibition allowed people from a wider range of classes to view these images of the aristocracy and public figures. In the gallery, a portrait held the same status as the person depicted, and to see members of the upper classes hung alongside members of the demi-monde was problematic (Rosenthal 2006 75). The social hierarchies that operated in the public world held true within the walls of the Academy, leading to discomfort from unexpected juxtapositions brought about by the hanging of the paintings. The portrait of Baccelli and reactions to it highlight the unease felt over the status of performers. Many of the viewers would have seen Baccelli on the stage and enjoyed her performances. However, here she was not in the theatre, being viewed by an audience that was separate from her, but hanging on a gallery wall next to those who would consider themselves as her superiors (Riding, 2002).

3.4.4 Giovanna Baccelli at the opera

Giovanna Baccelli was a principal dancer on the stage of the Opera House throughout the 1780s. This was the location of her professional career, necessitating attendance at classes and rehearsals as part of the company (Price, *et al.*, 1995). She would have met the Duke there, as male members of the aristocracy expected to be invited backstage to meet the young dancers (Hall-Witt, 2007). Her relationship with the Duke meant that she had absences not recorded for other dancers, but she seems to have been accepted back with pleasure by her audience. When she returned from performing at the Paris Opéra, the

newspapers noticed an improvement in her technique, because she had taken classes with the company there.

> the re-appearance of that excellent performer [Baccelli], after so long an absence from a stage where she always was, and deserved to be welcome, was the more acceptable to the lovers of graceful and animated dancing. That she is astonishingly improved, and by her example verifies the truth of the remark, of which the French are so proud, tho' of a very light importance, that in point of dancing, the Paris school 'can perfect perfection itself. (Morning Herald and New Daily Advertiser, 1786, Apr. 3)

She does not appear in any of the subscription lists as having sat in the audience, although her lover the Duke of Dorset does appear on the 1783 list for Lady Broughton's box, on the top tier (Fig. 1). Lady Mary Coke, who paid close attention to the activities of the upper aristocracy, recorded in her journal that: 'the duke of Dorset has got a new passion but not a young one he is now very much attached to Lady Broughton he has sat these three last operas the whole time in her box & as Mrs Hill is not come to town there is no other Lady in the box the house is very dark not unfavourable to these sort of affairs.' (21st December 1782) In her inability to acknowledge the existence of members of the demi-monde, Lady Mary Coke has failed to understand that the Duke's increased attendance at the opera may have been in order to see his mistress on the stage. Her concern was for the reputation of Lady Broughton, the sole woman in a box with a 'dangerous' man. Dancers may have appeared in the audience in the top tier of the boxes and there is one newspaper indicating that Baccelli sometimes joined the Duke in Lady Broughton's box:

> Baccelli displayed from one of the upper boxes at the Opera on Saturday evening, an enormous balloon hat; this was imported from Paris on her late return from that city. Baccelli has declared she did not leave a smaller hat behind; and yet this is so monstrous, that it is not an unreasonable conjecture to say, that she took her passage in it through the air! (Morning Herald and New Daily Advertiser, 1784, May, 10)

Baccelli would not dance on the stage of the Opera House again until 1786 (Highfill, *et al.*, 1973). She was announcing her return to London through a fashionable response to the Montgolfier brother's historic ascent in a balloon over Paris. Her possible motivations for

such a display are discussed further in Chapter Five. London would not see its first ballooning feat until September of that year.

3.4.5 Conclusion

The small amount of information about Giovanna Baccelli suggests that she was on the whole accepting of society's attitudes to her position as a dancer, and status as a mistress to the Duke of Dorset. There is no evidence that she tried to step outside the boundaries set for her by society, excepting the fact that she became the mistress of a Duke. Even within that relationship she does not seem to have done anything other than what would be expected of a mistress.

Early in their relationship she appeared at a local assembly in Kent, dressed in the Duke's family jewels, which caused some offence, but this seems to have been her only transgression (Sackville-West, 1958). She must have learned quickly what was expected of her when she was in his company.

She presented society with a dilemma. On the one hand she was a performer on the stage, with all the connotations that came with her profession. As a dancer, unlike an actress, her professionalism was accepted, which removed the easy reaction of parody and caricature. On the other hand, she was the mistress of a Duke, and mixed with the aristocracy. She took on their attributes, making friends, and having her portrait painted by leading artists of the day. This disconnect between the two facets of her life led to a fascinated following of her life in the press throughout her career.

The Gainsborough portrait now hangs in Tate Britain in London, alongside other luminaries of the eighteenth century. The memory that we have of her, viewed by more than a million visitors every year, is that of a talented and accomplished professional woman, surely the persona that Baccelli would have wished for herself.

Chapter 4: Dress and Identity

> Lady Hardy amused her young friend till the Opera began, with telling her the names of all the company as they came in […] The assembled audience; an audience which the world cannot parallel, composed of all that is great and lovely in the kingdom; struck her young mind with an extasy *[sic]* almost too great for words. (Brooke, 1777, 42)

On 29th January 1785, Lady Mary Coke wrote in her journal: 'I dine today with Lady Gower & am to carry her two eldest daughters to the opera' (NRAS859, V495). As a widow of 58, from the same stratum of society, Lady Mary would have represented an eminently suitable guide for Lady Georgina, aged 15, and Lady Charlotte, 13. She shared her box with friends and relations of similar status, and the girls would have been greeted as members of that same group, and would have felt relatively at home in their company. Walking to the front of the box and looking out over the auditorium, they would have seen many members of this same social group arranged before them, and they would have known that they were observed. Those who knew them would be watching to see that they were appropriately dressed, and behaving properly, as a credit to their upbringing. Those who did not know them could assume that they were of a certain social standing because of the box that they sat in and would be asking who they were.

As young girls they would have been accustomed to being looked at, and therefore, acutely conscious of their appearance. How they held their bodies, and the clothes that they wore, were strictly controlled from birth, leading to a constant sense of an 'other' watching them (Young, 1990). This sense of being observed and judged by outward appearance would have become internalised as part of their sense of self, becoming experienced as part of their own desires (Tseëlon, 1995). Thus, although the degree of internalisation differs from woman to woman, conforming through modes of dress would have become a facet of their sense of self; this was more complex than just expressing a personal preference. The comfort of being with friends and feeling comfortably and appropriately dressed can be complicated by the sense of the other watching, and possibly judging, at the same time (Woodward, 2005). Expectations for women of their class were expressed through various methods of control, transmitted verbally

throughout their upbringing. How they dressed, and their deportment, were carefully controlled and watched over by those around them.

The women in the auditorium at the opera watched the others around them for confirmation of their group status. Many diary entries speak of coming to the opera to pick up the latest news, and gossip was a big part of the reason for going there. The girls would have known that any transgression of the social codes would have been noted, discussed, and transmitted to their mother. This sense of being watched may have led to self-monitoring behaviour, constant vigilance to ensure conformity to social expectations. Non-conformity would have led to comment and potential embarrassment.

This chapter will discuss the complex network of social interactions at play among the elite women in the audience at the Opera House, and how their sense of self, under the gaze of others, manifested itself in their self-presentation and dress. The discussion uses attitudes prevalent in elite society as a whole, and the pressures put on women to conform, to assist in an understanding of the pressures around appearance that were at play within the Opera House auditorium.

The first section discusses the group of elite women at the opera as a whole. It examines how their monitoring of the group to ensure its stability and continuance, can be characterised as a form of 'the gaze'. Chapter one discussed the 'gaze', and how adapting the term to the 'female gaze' gives an appropriate emphasis for this research. This chapter discusses how the rules of behaviour were transmitted verbally, using discourses published in conduct books to illustrate the main concerns for women in this patriarchal society. Gossip was an important mechanism for transmitting messages between the various factions of the group. It rewarded good behaviour by bestowing prestige and gave warnings of the consequences for transgression. Female performers were also recipients of 'the gaze' but in a slightly different form, and this is also discussed. As with any age, there were ideals of beauty for women, discussed openly in the newspapers, and transmitted through portraits on the walls of the galleries.

The second section examines the rules around dress, and how the risk of embarrassment from getting it wrong might affect approaches to self-presentation. This was another form of control that led to self-monitoring, and also competition between women. Dressing for the opera offered the opportunity for display, but also the self-esteem of being seen as part of an elite group. Membership of this group demanded elements of conformity as

well as personal preference in your choice of dress. There was one occasion, towards the end of the century when both men and women used uniforms to make statements at a moment of political crisis.
Finally, the chapter discusses dress as fashion, and how sensitivity to the latest trends can take various forms. For some women following fashion, as well as being well-dressed, can be a real pleasure; there is a sense of self-esteem to be gained from dressing well and looking good when out in society. Fashion can also form a means of escape, a fantasy that mitigates the pressures of life. There may also be a strong element of competition and exclusivity to following the latest trends and taking a step further towards the extreme than others beside you.

4.1 Under the Gaze

4.1.1 A group of elite women

Each woman attended the opera as an individual, a wife, daughter, mother, widow but she also identified herself, to a greater or lesser extent, as part of a group. Goffman (1990) uses a dramaturgical model to describe social interactions within groups. He describes each member as managing their personal presentation for that occasion in order to present their desired impression for the benefit both of the group, and the others watching. This was a high status grouping, women associated with the most powerful families in the land, and as such had a vested interest in maintaining their position. Gathering together at the Opera House provided an important moment for monitoring the stability of the group, as different factions were present in one place at the same time. It was also a relatively small group, as of the nearly four hundred subscribers, one hundred and fifty were women, and it was mostly other women that they were monitoring. Society at their level exacted strict rules of social behaviour, and adherence to those rules gave the group status, bringing higher self-esteem to those who obeyed them. Such rules were communicated verbally, and thus demonstrating such knowledge through your actions indicated membership and further bolstered self-esteem.

When Harriot Pitt, daughter of the elder William Pitt, arrived in London in 1778, she was sent to live with her elder brother and his wife. She embarked on a social round appropriate to a young woman of high status and her letters home speak of the pleasure

of visits to the opera, always chaperoned, among many other activities. Alongside her descriptions however, there is a constant thread of reassurance to her mother that she is obeying the rules. In 1776 she wrote:

> I have been once to Mrs Montague's, where I was excessively amused and met with a great many People. The Dutchess *[sic]* was there and Lady Granby. I desired the former to introduce me to the latter, and on last Tuesday I went and left my name at the Door (Headlam, 1914, 8)

Lady Harriot's adherence to expectations was not only beneficial to her, but reflected on her parents; her self-esteem and status within her new group was intimately bound up with theirs. There is no sense of rebellion in these letters, other than the occasional pique of a teenager who wishes simply to enjoy herself; her status and the expectations that go with it had become internalised as part of her life. In 1779 she wrote:

> It is indeed a very ridiculous fancy in Lady Miller not to receive any visit of any day but Thursday. But however so it is, and I am obliged to this Law as well as others, for as she has done me the honour to visit me, I must return a Civility with which I am so much flatter'd. (Headlam, 1914, 46).

A new arrival within the subscribers at the Opera House would have been assessed by the others for their suitability as members of the group. Young women from families of higher social class gained automatic entry to this elite group of women, but their membership was not necessarily assured and stable unless they adhered to the unspoken rules that maintained the stability of the group and its high status. They knew that their actions and behaviour were monitored in order to maintain group stability. Lady Mary Coke's young companions, or Lady Harriot Pitt, already had assured entry through family membership. Further judgements, over and above family would have been made visually, entirely based on how they presented their bodies. This gave them what Bourdieu referred to as 'corporeal capital' (Frost, 2005, 77). As social beings they would have identified themselves with others at their level and made 'social comparisons'. Tajfel's theory (1979) sees comparisons as mainly horizontal, identifying oneself with those at a similar level. Further research, however, suggests that women will also look upwards, comparing themselves with ideals that may not be obtainable (Schutz, *et al.*, 2002). Group membership can be a powerful boost to the sense of self-esteem, but looking upwards to higher status groups gives impetus to the creation of a 'future' or better 'self'. These

comparisons have been shown to be more likely to continue for women, even when this become detrimental.

Within this group of elite women there were other hierarchies: political hostesses, for example, or the fashionable *beau monde* (to be discussed in a later section). A young woman might aspire to entry to one of these higher groups, as a boost to her self-esteem. Failure to achieve this perceived gain would have ended in a sense of failure and personal detriment, however acceptable and prestigious the person's natural group. In the early days of her marriage, Lady Lavinia Spencer attempted to follow the family interest in politics, but she soon waned and admitted her lack of interest (Chalus, 2000). This was partly because electioneering involved mixing with people of lower rank, which offended her sense of her own status, and because she was jealous of anything that took her husband's attention away from her, especially his sisters (Foreman 1997). The power with which she then voiced conventional and oppositional attitudes towards women in politics betrayed her disappointment in her own position within the family group. Her own self-esteem was better served as part of the settled and more conventional group of elite wives and mothers. She bolstered this through expressions of disapproval of her glamourous and politically active sister-in-law, the Duchess of Devonshire. She had a strong sense of propriety, and came to particularly disapprove of women in politics, and particularly resented Georgiana's way of using 'we' and 'us' when discussing the party. This dislike runs through her correspondence with her husband, remarking about the 1788 election:

> She says <u>they</u> are sure of carrying the election but it will cost <u>us</u> dear [...] the bribery is as high as it ever was and so are the shameful riots and excesses – such blood shedding I never heard of… (Foreman 1997, 205)

Lady Rockingham was careful to keep her political activities away from her attendance at the opera, there is no mention in her letters of discussions of any sort, as might be expected in this meeting place. However, within elite society there was a 'consistent undercurrent of politics, a wary mindfulness that no longer exists today' (Chalus, 2005, p.8). The very fact of her attendance, that she would be seen and her companions noted, was in itself a political act. She may not have wished to overtly use the occasion to political ends, but she was part of this group and as such her presence was of importance to those also in that place.

Lady Mary Coke, a devoted follower of society's rules, which gave her confirmation of her sense of self as a woman of high status, looked to the top, i.e. royalty, for role models. Her cousin Horace Walpole wrote of her: 'She has a frenzy for royalty, […] for next to being one herself, she adores the Empress Queen' (Hume, 1889, I, cxxx). The King and Queen, in their strict adherence to a set of rules for behaviour that were becoming increasingly outmoded provided her ideal and left her increasingly disappointed in the behaviour of other members of the family. In her vision of royalty, the Prince of Wales would have followed his father's example, seeing his life as a programme of training in preparation for his own accession. As the Prince grew up and moved towards adulthood and the acquisition of his own household budget, she got increasingly anxious about his behaviour. For example, in November 1779:

> I return to the Prince of Wales who begins to be a good deal talked of & will if I am not mistaken be subject of more conversation every day. He has this year gain'd some degree of liberty yet is still attended by governors who some of them never lose sight of him but this can't be the case long, in a few months he must be his own master, & I fancy we shall then see he does not in the least resemble his Majesty. (NRAS859, V489)

He was already, not surprisingly, attracting the attention of young women, but seemed unable to resist them. Lady Mary refers to several young women in the royal household, particularly a Miss Hamilton, but it is possible that the actual reason for the gossip was the actress Mary Robinson, the Prince's first mistress. As a member of the *demi-monde*, Mrs Robinson would have been beneath Lady Mary Coke's notice, and certainly never named, unless she came directly into her view. For Lady Mary the royal family were at the pinnacle of her group, their behaviour was part of, and reflected on, the whole group. It was not possible for their status to be maintained, if the leaders did not provide sufficient example.

4.1.2 The 'Female Gaze'

The Opera House can be seen as giving concrete form to the metaphor of the 'gaze': a space where many of the expectations of society were concentrated on the group of women who sat at the front of the boxes. However, the gaze in this instance was not only male, but also female, and it was, on occasion, purposefully returned. The men might

enjoy the spectacle displayed before them, for the straightforward pleasure of its erotic effect; but the women, as social gatekeepers of the boxes, were reading the display for deeper social meanings (Hall-Witt, 2007). Below the surface the Opera House also operated as a social and political barometer (Greig, 2013). Alliances were made, patronage sought, marriage contracts negotiated, all under a hyper-vigilant gaze, finely tuned to read meaning, truthful or speculative, into every small gesture. Matters that often caught the attention of Lady Mary Coke, especially in the case of the prince of Wales, as in December 1786:

> The Prince of Wales seem'd restless and stay's nowhere long, I don't know whether Mrs Fitzherbert was there or not, he went for a little while into Lady Lonsdales box it appeared to be for Lady Arskine as he talked only to her, Mr James her son was speaking in the House of Commons which I suppose is the Mothers merit (NRAS859, V496).

In her obsession she would unpick every possible nuance from his movements.

An increasing awareness of feminine display in the growing number of public arenas brought a commensurate watchfulness among participants, that their grouping should not lose status through the behaviour of members of the group (Russell, 2007). The growing popularity of the public exhibition brought a new sense of spectatorship and connoisseurship to public commentary, such that the gaze can be seen as functioning in different ways in different circumstances (Asleson, 2003). Diverse possibilities such as: beholding, scrutinising, glimpsing, peeking, watching, glaring, or simply seeing (Olin, 2013). Female subscribers at the Opera House might expect to be scrutinised and watched, and possibly glared at. It is easy to imagine those such as Lady Mary Coke, whose barometer of acceptable behaviour was finely tuned, might be caught glaring at transgressors, such as in January 1779, at the suitors to the daughter of the Duke of Argyll:

> His daughter lady Augusta was at the opera with Lady Melburn *(sic)* and Miss Damer. Mr Fawkner *(sic)* & Sir Harry Featherstone at first sat in the pitt *(sic)* over against the box and then went into it each has his particular reasons as the world says. I shou'd be sorry if Lady Augusta from the motives of being her own mistress shou'd marry Mr Harry Featherstone for as he is very disagreeable in his figure & very weak in

> understanding she will see so many men superior to him that it will be a great chance if she does not like someone better than him from whence may arise disagreeable circumstances. For you know one of the misfortunes of this age is that the ladies have no notion of controlling their passions (NRAS859, V489).

Lady Mary Coke was not a mother, but her observations clearly articulate the type of feelings many mothers must have had, when observing their marriageable children at the opera.

4.1.3 Conduct books

Many of the rules for women operated as forms of control, keeping them contained within the rules of a patriarchal society. The social discourse of the time, particularly through conduct books, gives a clear indication of the issues about women that were felt to be of concern. Many of these conduct books were in reality aimed at the growing number of the bourgeoisie. They were entering society without the benefit of the understanding from birth that came with membership of one of the elite families. The seventeenth century attitude, that men as the law-givers had a larger share of reason bestowed upon them, had become outdated by the second half of the eighteenth, but society still operated on the basis of such views (Porter, 2003). For writers such as Dr Gregory in *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774) and James Fordyce in his *Sermons to young women* (1766), a woman's main role was to grace society with her superior sensibilities, that 'through their placidity and compliance, the fair sex should be a softening agent' (Porter, 2003, 262). These books do, however, highlight certain priorities that would have applied whatever your class, such as deportment, modesty, and dress (which will be discussed in the following section).

The tone applied by much of the literature suggests the need for women to contain their bodies, not to take up too much space, and to be quiet and refined in their movements. Until the 1780s the female silhouette, created by boned stays and neat paniers, was almost geometric, compared with the actual curves of the female body. This achieved the desired 'slender waist and high rounded bosom' (Bruna, 2015, 118). The overall look was a neat silhouette that almost erased the natural volumes of the body. The first fashion

plates, such as those in *The Lady's Magazine* of 1774, show women of an average shape and size, presumably demonstrating an ideal shape for the time. An English bodice owned by the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 44), demonstrates the upright quality of the silhouette.
The stiff vertical bones in the stays which rose high at the back, squeezing the shoulder blades, and low at the front, forced an upright carriage to the body. Walking with ease and grace was a skill that had to be mastered, and a graceful carriage marked out a woman of distinction (Bruna 2015). The dancing master, an essential tutor for the aristocrat, was employed as much for teaching correct deportment, as for how to dance a minuet (Brewer, 1997).

In her novel *The Sylph*, Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire provides some telling examples of the expectations put on her young protagonist Julia, in regard to dress. For example:

> My dear Louisa you will laugh when I tell you, that poor Winifred, […] broke two laces in endeavouring to draw my new French stays close. You know I am naturally small at bottom. But now you might literally span me. You never saw such a doll. Then, they are so intolerably wide across the breast, that my arms are absolutely sore with them; and my sides so pinched! – But it is the ton; and pride feels no pain. It is with these sentiments the ladies of the present age heal their wounds; to be admired, is a sufficient balsam. (Cavendish, 1779, 34).

Women were there to be admired, to give pleasure to the men around them, and it was part of their role to strive to achieve this. It is interesting that in this case it was French stays that were causing the problem. This would have been anathema to the conduct books, as anything French spoke of louche, extravagant ways, and the shape emphasised the bosom and shoulders by pulling the shoulder blades together at the back; the English shape was neater and more confined. Figure 45 shows a French bodice also owned by the Victoria and albert Museum. On a body the bust line would be flatter than in the photograph, but the cone shape is visible, clearly contrasting with the very small waistline.

The fashionable English shape might be unnatural, but not surprisingly, the discourse of the time suggests a fascination for the female form contained within the clothes.

Newspaper descriptions of the actress Mary Robinson often refer to her being '*em-bon-point',* a term that evoked plump flesh. It is interesting that among the voyeuristic comments about actresses and their bodies, the attitude taken to Baccelli, as a dancer is subtly different:

> The Baccelli is much admired by the P___ of W___; in consequence of which, this goddess of the 'light fantastic toe' now constantly heightens her performance by a few amorous attitudes, and other wanton graces (Morning Herald and New Daily Advertiser, 1782, Feb. 2)

This description sat in the newspaper among other gossipy items about celebrities, in an attempt to connect Baccelli with likes of Mrs Robinson, but the comments are about her dance moves rather than the shape of her body. It is interesting that when comments are made about Garrick, that he was 'well-shaped' or 'neatly proportioned', they refer directly to his acting and suitability for the role.

The English man wished his wife to be neat and contained, respectable, but well dressed and a credit to him. This did not mean, however, that he was any less interested in the bodies of other women, particularly those that chose to parade them on the stage, as being under the gaze was part of their profession. This dichotomy between expectations and desires has never changed, and certainly seems to have passed the eighteenth-century authors by. The general tone of these volumes, that a woman should be dutiful and modest, is often at odds with a belief that they should appear as elegant and attractive as possible at all times. Beauty was a gift from God, and it was a woman's duty to give pleasure to men, but at the same time they must not excite the passions. On the one hand Fordyce urges his readers that:

> none but the most contracted, or the most prejudiced, will deny that women may avail themselves of every attraction, that can lead to a state for which they were manifestly formed; and that, should they, by any neglect of their persons, render themselves less amiable than God has made them, they would so far disappoint the design of their creation (Fordyce, 1766, I, 3).

However, fashion was not to be allowed:

> How long will you be ambitious of flaunting in French attire, of fluttering about with the levity of that fantastic people? When will you be satisfied with the simplicity of elegance, and the gracefulness of modesty, so becoming in a nation like this, supported by trade, polished by taste, and enlightened by true religion? (Fordyce, 1766, I, 30)

Being pretty to look at gained approval, but not if your behaviour excited male passion.

Where Fordyce was quite general in his instructions, Gregory was more specific, giving chapters to religion and conduct and behaviour, among others. The *Lady's Preceptor, or A Letter to a Young Lady of Distinction Upon Politeness,* was far more prescriptive. Claiming to be 'translated from the French of the Abbé D'Ancourt, and adapted to the Religion, Customs, and Manners of the English Nation', it worried that young women should not feel under any less restraint when out in public in places where 'people go only for diversion'. The following instructions were given for visiting assemblies, operas and plays:

> It would be absurd and conceited on you to assume an Air of Gravity and Reserve, whilst every body else was laughing round you; but only take care to remember the Part you ought to perform yourself; indulge in lively Mirth for a while if you please, but without Clamour or Extravagance; taking care at the same time that Purity and Modesty always appear to be your governing Principles (Anon, 1743, 66-7).

Similar advice from Gregory (1774) suggests an element of embarrassment for the men, sitting next to women at the theatre. Many of the comedies that were enjoyed so much, and at which actresses excelled, were quite bawdy. The best that might be hoped for is that: 'A virtuous girl often hears very indelicate things with a countenance no-wise embarrassed, because in truth she does not understand them' (1774, 24). He cannot conceive that a woman might enjoy such a spectacle, for if she does happen to understand an 'improper' thing, 'she suffers a very complicated distress, she feels her modesty hurt in the most sensible manner, and at the same time is ashamed of appearing conscious of the injury' (1774, 24). Women were invading the male public sphere, were open to all the diversions that it could offer, and also perhaps, spoiling the men's unabashed enjoyment of them. Gregory's answer is that if women must go to the theatre, they should confine themselves to tragedy, which 'subjects you to no such distress. Its sorrows will soften and

ennoble your hearts' (1772, 25). If Gregory's daughters had followed the instructions in his letters, their lives would have been completely constrained and without any of the character or amusement that would have produced the gentle companions that he so desired them to be.

A letter in the newspaper (*Morning Post*, 1780, Dec.), expressed a similar desire that at the opera, instead of clapping their hands, it might be 'more consonant to delicacy' for ladies to express their appreciation by striking their fans against the front of the box. Once again there is the worry that women might let go of themselves and express unrestricted enjoyment, incompatible with the writer's view of how they should be. At the heart of many of the conduct books is the wish that the ladies would simply stay at home.

Another popular book of instructions was a poem by Thomas Marriot (1759) that ran to more than two hundred pages. Marriot gives voice to a male longing to easily understand a woman simply by looking at her:

> Let your Apparel manifest your Mind,
> Not ostentatious, simple, yet refin'd;
> The Neatness of a Female wakes Desire,
> Alluring, as Smile is clean Attire;
> Simplicity of Dress a Maid becomes,
> Beyond the pride of Persia's looms.
> (Marriot, 1759, 202)

The elite had no need of such books; they learned the correct behaviour from birth, from mothers and fathers who had themselves received similar instruction. There was one book, however, that gained popularity among elite women. The letters of Madame de Sévigné, a courtier to Louis XIV, and written to her daughter, were published in English in 1727. They were often quoted as an exemplar of polite and educated correspondence between women. The bluestocking group, elite women who advocated an open and sociable form of female intellectual discourse, found that the introspective and loving nature of Madame de Sévigné's correspondence provided an example and validation of how women could converse in such an intimate and open way (Eger, 2009). The French Marchioness' letters also provided an example for Lady Louisa Stuart in correspondence

with her mother, Lady Bute, and her grandmother Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Unlike her grandmother, now seen as a bluestocking, before the term was coined in the 1760s, Lady Louisa believed that 'learned ladies should only be heard within the circle of their intimates' (Watson, 1985, xi). For Lady Louisa, education was acceptable as long as it was not visibly demonstrated beyond a very close intimate circle. In 1768 Lady Mary Coke saw the letters in a different light: 'I have certainly read Madame de Sevignés [letters] before now, but like the Spectators, I shall read them all my life' (Hume, 1889, II, 400). For her, Madame de Sévigné occupied a position comparable to the educational nature of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*, to be dipped into for personal amusement and reinforcement of the rightness of her own opinions.

4.1.4 Concepts of beauty

In 1780 *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book* directed gentlemen, unused to the ways of London society, on how to behave. Among its suggestions on sights to be seen was included a list of the 'most celebrated Toasts of the Year 1780, with various Gradations of Beauty, Grace, and Elegance' (Anon, 1780, 120). Where the conduct books told women that they should present themselves in ways that gave pleasure to their men, the newspapers gave them standards to aspire to. The women were displayed in the form of a chart that gave their names, and then graded them with a score out of fifty for 'Beauty, Grace, and Elegance' (Fig. 46). The list of names begins with the Duchess of Devonshire, widely considered the greatest society beauty, at the top with a score of 133, far ahead of anyone else, and then descends through the ranks of the nobility to actresses, finishing with courtesans. The numerical scores do not follow the list exactly, but none of the lower order of courtesans reaches a score of fifty. Similar charts were published in the newspapers; in October 1776 the *Morning Post* graded its beauties for 'beauty, figure, elegance, with, sense, grace, expression, sensibility, and principles' (Fig. 47). The *London Chronicle* listed 'person, expression, complexion, and grace' (Fig. 48). Each list puts the Duchess of Devonshire at the top, although the list of women below vary according to the political leanings of each newspaper. Descriptions at the time do not record the Duchess of Devonshire as a conventional beauty, but she was the leader of the *beau monde*, suggesting that these scales had more to do with status than actual physical looks (Greig, 2013). When Fanny Burney met the Duchess she wrote: 'I did not find so much of beauty

in her as I expected, not withstanding *[sic]* the variations of accounts; but I found far more of manner, politeness and gentle quiet' (Hemlow and Douglas, 1973, I, 41).

The common factor among the women in *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book* was that they all in some way could be perceived as enjoying a measure of autonomy in their lives. This might be through family wealth, the patronage given to a courtesan or, in the case of the actresses, their professional lives. Such charts and numerical ordering fixed them in an acceptable female role, as the decorative adornment to a man's life so favoured by the conduct manuals. Some of these women did enjoy a real measure of autonomy in their political involvement and social authority (Greig, 2013). This male ordering and classification, however, allowed the perception of women as adjuncts to the male world to remain fixed; the discussion was not about beauty, but about control (Wolf, 1991). A sense of control also helped to allay fears over the growing feminisation of culture; the company of women was good, they made men less brutal, more refined, politer, and public socialising played important role in this. The danger was that men, 'seduced by women to life of pleasure, would lose civic responsibility' (Brewer, 1997, 77).

The newspapers did not contain illustrations; their charts relied on a subjective evaluation by their anonymous male correspondents. The growing popularity of portraits and their public display gave visual form to discussions of beauty. In 1755 the French miniaturist, André Roquet, having been living in England for thirty years, wrote a treatise on the arts in England for his fellow Frenchmen (Roquet, 1755). He described the desired form for a fashionable English woman in her portrait:

> She must have a fine white skin, a light complexion, a face rather oval than round, a nose somewhat longish, but of a fine turn, and like the antiques, her eyes large, and not so sparkling as melting; her mouth graceful, without a smile, but rather of a pouting turn, which gives it at once both grace and dignity; her hair clean and without powder, so as to shew by its colour, the various effects for which nature designed it; her shape tall and erect, her neck long and easy, her shoulders square and flat, plump rising breasts, her hands generally rather too lean, and of such a make as I think would not be looked upon as handsome in any other country but England (Roquet, 1755, 47).

It was up to the artist to ensure that the women in their portraits conformed in some way to this high ideal, and the portraits discussed in Chapter Three mostly conform. Allan Ramsay was known for his 'delicate colouring and subtle characterisation' (Smart, 1999, 5). Reynolds gave his three-quarter portraits of Lady Mary Coke and her sister Lady Strafford a fine turn to their nose, and plain hair unspoilt by powder. Many of Gainsborough's portraits, an artist known for his perceptive depiction of his sitters, still conform in many ways to this fashionable aesthetic.
Roquet then goes on to describe the English woman's character as displaying 'excessive decency in manners, in discourse and dress; a modesty delicate, tempting and witty'. For many Frenchmen, used to women brought up to be intelligent conversationalists, English women were too reserved, expected simply to be demure and ornamental (Ribeiro, 2010b).

Beauty was also discussed as a philosophical concept; for example, by the artist William Hogarth in his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), and Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) (Ribeiro, 2010, 113). For both of them beauty, although seemingly neutral, and a subject for classification, was female in gender. Hogarth discussed the beauty of the curve and the undulating lines created by female costume. Burke enjoys the quality of smoothness; in the natural world, smooth streams and the smooth polished surface to a piece of furniture, but also the smooth sensation of a woman's skin. The real cause of beauty however:

> strikes us without any reference to use [...] we must conclude that beauty is, for the greater part, some quality in bodies, acting mechanistically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses. (Burke, 1757, 112)

Burke came closer than Hogarth to the sensation of touch, so important in considering the female relationship with dress. For him it was not just the look of the curves or lines, but the imagining of a sensation of touch; the emotions of the man break through the detachment of the philosopher. This was the same Edmund Burke who was assistant to Lord Rockingham. It would be interesting to know if philosophy ever intruded on his conversations with Lady Rockingham. His treatise on the sublime is about a concept, but as an observant man, based on the truth of his personal experience (Boulton, 2008). He does however, equate the sublime, defined by him as 'the pleasurable sensation of

astonishment', with the masculine; beauty, he equates with femininity (Brewer, 1997, 212).

In England, a society with an aristocracy that governed more by culture than force, appearances were a matter of political significance (Perry and Rossington, 1994). One of the places where the visual appearance of the ruling classes was displayed was at the opera. It was through dress and adornment that elite women gave visual manifestation to their position of power.

4.1.5 Gossip: a pro-social force

The rules of behaviour within elite circles were passed on by word of mouth, and this demanded a complex network of communication if they were to be transmitted between different families and cliques. Gossip, as a form of communication, is often referred to in pejorative terms, but it can also be seen as a prosocial force (Feinberg *et al.*, 2012). Defined as 'an exchange of evaluative information about an absent third party', gossip can be seen as a bonding mechanism for groups that 'communicate[s] unwritten norms' (Yao *et al.*, 2014, 1). For this group of elite women, gossip provided a mechanism by which status and cohesion could be maintained. Examples from the diary of Lady Mary Coke show moments of positive reinforcement such as young women becoming engaged to suitable partners and then producing heirs, as well as moments of transgression. Gossip that helped to inform new members of the rules worked in two ways: by rewarding good behaviour with social approbation, and deterring transgression through highlighting selfish behaviour (Feinberg *et al.*, 2012).

At the opera in April 1767 Lady Mary Coke recorded that Lord. Barrymore: 'came in quite drunk, & behaved in a very extraordinary manner' (Hume, 1889, I, 203-4). He went to the box of Lady Harrington and her daughter, his fiancé, and 'those over against it told me poor Amelia seeing him in that condition cry'd very much: what a miserable prospect She has in marrying a Man of such a Character' (Hume, 1889, I, 204). Although Lady Mary Coke felt sorry for the girl, she does not question the fact of her engagement, or suggest that it should be broken off; the union is obviously important to the family. To her credit, however, Lady Mary Coke is obviously relieved to find that during his recent serious illness, when he thought himself dying, Lord Barrymore had 'made his will and left her six

thousand a year'(Hume, 1889, I, 204). This at least proved that he cared for his future bride, whatever their age difference, and this would have appealed to Lady Mary Coke's sense of fairness.

For women, status was achieved through making a good marriage and then producing heirs, so an engagement was an important occasion, and spreading the news was another method of reinforcing its importance. People are most likely to gossip about those who are familiar to them, but now presented in an unusual and interesting situation (Yao *et al.*, 2014). These changes in circumstances result in such a magnitude of emotions, expectations and reputational shifts, that they become the natural subjects of gossip; supportive for those obeying expectations, questioning for those who were not.

Lady Mary Coke never had children herself, but the arrival of heirs in the due course of time after a marriage was a subject to be enjoyed and commented on. At the opera in March 1768, the heavily pregnant Duchess of Buccleuch visited their box. Lady Mary Coke noted, with some satisfaction, 'She looks better than She had done for some time. Many people think she will have two children; She certainly is uncommonly big' (Hume, 1889, II, 220). Lady Rockingham must have been aware that her lack of pregnancy was the subject of gossip. In 1767 Lady Mary Coke notes in her journal that the Duke of York told her of a rumour that Lady Rockingham might be pregnant. That a prince would concern himself with such things suggests the importance given to the production of heirs, but as he also enjoyed teasing Lady Mary Coke, he may have been playing up to her sense of the importance of such things. Similar speculation followed the new Duchess of Devonshire, who failed to produce a child for some time after her marriage, and in 1775 she miscarried:

> So the duchess of Devonshire has miscarried but how is it possible she can ever go on her time if she will not be a little more quiet. Lord Frederick says she cannot walk into a room she must come in with a hop and a jump, she seems to have unfortunate good spirits and tho' I believe she is perfectly good humoured and innocent I don't believe she will ever be a day older (NRAS859, V485).

The same entry also noted: 'Lady Hertford told me Lord Beauchamp's marriage with Miss Ingram was all agreed he is now at Lord Erwines & has been so this month all sides are

now pleased and happy'. Miss Ingram, it would seem, unlike the duchess, had assimilated the rules.
Such gossip spread a message to the group of continuance, and the importance of the status quo. Women who married well and produced children prospered by the standards of the group, and such stories encouraged others to conform in this way in order to gain prestige and status.

When members did not conform however, the gossip was less benign. Another entry by Lady Mary Coke, in October 1764, reports on the elopement with her footman of Lord Rockingham's younger sister. At an evening gathering Princess Amelia was lamenting over the terrible event to which Lady Mary Coke reported:

> I really pity them all. Lady Mansfield went with a Doctor & Surgeon to acquaint poor Lady Bell Finch with her favourite Niece having run away with her Footman; they bloodied her; but everybody is apprehensive it will go near to kill her, as She was not well at the time. How does Lord Rockingham bear it?' (Hume 1889, I, 16).

Lady Mansfield was Lady Bell's sister. The event affected them both, as well as the immediate family. Lady Bell may have been unwell at the time, but her sister obviously anticipated an extreme physical response to the news of the young woman's defection. Such a gesture of defiance to the rules of her class sent ripples out across the whole group. Eventually, the young lady renounced her title and moved with her husband to France, removing all record of her existence from the family. This was an extreme sanction, but she had married beneath her and shamed her family. In this case the gossip functioned as a warning for others who might consider such a transgression.

The Duchess of Cumberland threatened instability to the group through her flouting of the rules of dress and deportment. Her personality was not given to airs and graces, but she flagrantly enjoyed her elevation to the royal family, and the opportunity that it gave her to dress lavishly (Tillyard, 2007, 184). Comments in Lady Mary Coke's journals suggest that she often found her choice of dress questionable. Cushioned from real censure by her connection with royalty, the disdain displayed by others such as Lady Mary Coke suggests a need to distance themselves from her. She may have had an unshakable right to membership, but that did not mean that her behaviour represented an acceptable

example for others, especially beyond the group. Such deviant behaviour, from anyone, could be tolerated while the group felt secure in its position and status. At moments of threat, however, such as the Regency crisis (discussed in the next section), levels of tolerance lowered, and censure applied sooner and for less. During the 1784 Westminster by-election the Duchess of Devonshire was openly criticised for canvassing on behalf of the Whigs, and yet she was doing no more than she had before in other elections (Foreman, 1998). The difference was that previously she had worked on behalf of the family, either hers or her husband's. On this occasion she had stepped outside of the familial sphere to canvas for Charles James Fox (Foreman 1998). The extreme reaction to her activities suggests that the mood of society and its attitudes to women were changing (Wahrman, 2006).

4.1.6 The self and the other

The high level of control and observation of the rules necessary to maintain the status of the group led in turn to a sense of being watched: the gaze. In this case the gaze was that of other women, although they were maintaining and enforcing the rules of a patriarchal society. The effect for the individual in this situation would have been a constant sense of the other watching them. 'I am split. I see myself, and I see myself being seen' (Young, 1990, 177).

At the opera, this other had two forms: firstly, the women leading the group of subscribers, society hostesses such as the Duchess of Northumberland and Duchess of Bedford, women whose attention could affect your status within the group; secondly the people in the pit, those who came and observed the ruling classes in the boxes, leading to the necessity to present a cohesive whole. Whether or not they aspired to membership, it was important that they be overawed by the spectacle before them (Hall-Witt, 2007).

As a woman grows up this sense of the other becomes deeply internalised, as she is constantly told how to behave in front of others, and this influences her choices and self-presentation (Tseëlon, 1995). Patriarchal society regards women as bodies, objects of possession (Young, 1990). Much of the structure of eighteenth-century society acted as a form of control, ensuring that women, for the most part, adhered to their given role as wives, mothers and supporters. They would have experienced their bodies as 'object' as

well as 'subject' (Young, 1990, 44). The Duchess of Devonshire described this sense of being owned by a husband in her novel *The Sylph* (1779). Her protagonist, Julia, describes her husband's reaction to her presentation at court:

> Sir William seemed to tread on air, to see and hear the commendations which were lavished on me from all sides. To a man of his taste, I am no more than any fashionable piece of furniture or new equipage, or, what will come nearer our idea of things, a beautiful prospect, which a man fancies he shall never be tired of beholding, and therefore builds himself a house within view of it; by the time he is fixed, he hardly remembers what his motive, nor ever feels any pleasure but in pointing out its various perfections to his guests; his vanity is awhile gratified, but even that soon loses its gout; and he wonders how others can be pleased with objects now grown familiar, and , consequently, indifferent to him (1779, II, 61).

The Sylph is a novel, a piece of fiction, but it is clearly based on the duchess's own experience of a society marriage and expresses much of her disappointment. Once it became known that she was the author, it was pored over for details of her life. Portraiture reinforced this attitude in grand dynastic family statements such as Reynolds' image of the Duke of Marlborough and his family (Figure 49). This painting is particularly interesting because it places the 'coiffured woman of fashion' as central to her family group (Russell, 2007, 191). This could be seen as a structural device, as Lady Marlborough's wig sits at the top of a pyramid composition. However, the arrangement of the rest of the family puts the Duke, sitting down and with his eldest son at his side, slightly apart from his other children and his wife, who dominates the picture. She can be seen as the mediating factor between the Duke and his younger children, but her upper torso and head, adorned with a high wig are framed by the window behind. A comparison with the composition of a similar dynastic portrait of the Duke's father, painted in 1755 by Thomas Hudson (Figure 50), demonstrates the dramatic change of priorities. Both paintings present a formal grouping of a family from the upper aristocracy who are also part of the public sphere and have claim to public and social authority. However, Reynolds' painting could also be read as literally highlighting the woman of fashion; the visibility of women in society made manifest in a classical dynastic statement (Russell 2007).

There is a constant theme in Lady Rockingham's letters demonstrating her need for her husband's approval, and her worry that she might do something to cause him embarrassment: 'so much do I think of you & love you for I would rather die than do anything that you would perfectly disapprove of tho but an instant' (SCA, WWM/R168/135). She knew that all her actions reflected on him and his family; the visceral response from the wider family to his sister's defection gives ample evidence of the need for everyone to conform to the rules.

Lady Louisa Stuart, an intelligent woman and talented writer, whose memoirs of her family have left a perceptive account of Lady Mary Coke, grew up understanding that her actions reflected directly on her family. Her father, Lord Bute, was tutor to and leader of the government for George III. Criticism of his actions in that role directly affected the family and her childhood (Watson, 1985). By the time that she reached adulthood her sense of the strict rules of society and the expectations of a woman of her class and standing had become completely internalised (Tseëlon, 1995). She was acutely aware of how she was viewed by others and sensitive to any deviance by those around her. For example, in April 1789 she found the self-confidence of the younger generation, in this case her niece, unnerving:

> she appears very sensible and very honest, and people in general like her very much – the men especially; but between you and me, she is a little too rough and rude and regardless not only of forms, but of common civility, and I never saw any creature who had so little conception of mauvaise honte [shyness] (Clark, 1895, II, 127).

Walking through the crowds at the Pantheon, she was embarrassed by Mary's easy bonhomie and loud laughter: 'I felt myself the little young girl, and her the woman used to the world, the difference between us is so great on that point' (Clark, 1895, II, 127). A woman such as this presented different facets of her 'self' to different audiences, referred to by Goffman as 'fronts' (1990, 32). Among her intimate friends and with her mother, Lady Louisa could demonstrate the intelligence and wit that were natural to her. In September 1778 she wrote:

> Lady Mary Lowther came this evening, and found ourselves very comfortable; you know I always tell you a tête-à-tête does best. We both read the same book, and it furnished us with a great deal of

> conversation; it was La Nouvelle Héloïse, with which I am charmed, perhaps more than I should be, […] and I do think it, notwithstanding several absurdities, the most interesting book I ever read in my life (Clark, 1895, I, 50).

In the manner of Madame de Sevigné, literary conversation in private with a trusted friend was pleasurable and acceptable (Barnes, 2015). She could delight in the slightly *risqué* nature of the book, considered shocking by many. She quotes Rousseau's own comment that 'any girl who dares to read a single word is a lost girl', stating that she does not feel the worse for it, she is safe, for she has 'nothing to do with love' (Clark, 1895, I, 51). In company she had to maintain the persona expected of the daughter of Lord Bute. The opinion of the first audience mattered to her, the second mattered to her family, and thus equally to her, but to satisfy each she presented different facets of herself.

Lady Louisa's personal choice for a husband was refused by her father as not suitable, and in spite of subsequent efforts by her family she never married. As a consequence, she never achieved the level of status or respect granted to married women. Writing in 1785 she laments:

> Lady Betty and Mr. Mackenzie have a great bridal dinner for them (the Grahams) this week, and have invited me, which I am very sorry for, for there will be three pair, and I shall be the only unmarried woman, so all the jokes will fall on me (Clark, 1895, II, 24).

The response of others is an important indication of how they regard self-presentation. In this case, Lady Louisa knew that she demonstrated a lack, having never married. She would never be able to feel comfortable, psychologically invisible, in that company unless she was a wife. She had no interest in standing out and making herself feel vulnerable to comment and criticism (Tseëlon, 1995).

Having accepted that she must play the role of spinster and companion to her mother, attending the opera would have given her a moment of affirmation to bolster that sense of self. She would have been among friends, and there would have been others in the audience in the same situation as herself. Within the group she was accepted on those terms. Fanny Burney met Lady Louisa with her mother Lady Bute, who had an 'exterior most forbidding to strangers', on several occasions, and enjoyed their company (Burney,

1854, III, 237). On one occasion, mother and daughter had just returned from Bath and were full of anecdotes:

> Lady B. and Lady Louisa were both in such high spirits themselves they kept up all the conversation between them with such vivacity, and acuteness, an archness, and an observation on men and manners so clear and sagacious, that it would be difficult to pass an evening of greater entertainment (III, 463-466).

Out in company with her mother, Lady Louisa's persona was that of dutiful daughter and foil to the raconteur.

4.1.7 Female performers and the gaze

Female performers and courtesans were among the few women to enjoy any kind of autonomy in the conduct of their lives in the late eighteenth century. The 1783 diagram of the boxes at the opera shows the performers and courtesans as occupying the least prestigious, top tier of the boxes. They could, of course, take seats in the pit, but as the century progressed fewer and fewer women did so (Price, *et al.*, 1995).

Many female performers were at least partially dependent on the patronage of elite women, who donated money, but also passed on clothes and accessories to be worn as costume on stage (Crouch, 1997). This patronage must have been to mutual advantage, the patron gaining the satisfaction of seeing her garments worn on the stage, the actress from the pleasure of wearing beautiful, expensive clothes, and also looking like a member of the elite. But this desire on the part of actresses to dress well was not only about patronage, but also about establishing a positive personal public image. The visual presentation of their bodies was so bound up with perceptions of their personal character that dressing as elite women, for some, became a necessity. The critic John Hill bemoaned the weakening of the drama by the sight of 'an actress whose part is that of a chambermaid, enter upon the stage in a habit that in real life might be worn by a Duchess' (Hill, 1750, 223). For Giovanna Baccelli at the Opera House, most of the audience were from the elite that actresses wished to emulate, and as discussed in Chapter Two, the costumier at the opera provided the performers with suitably grand looking costumes.

In the context of the Opera House it is worth considering courtesans alongside actresses, as in many ways their lives were lived as a performance, and they enjoyed a parallel status within society. Courtesans enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle, but at the behest of their patrons. They were not prostitutes, but often intelligent women for whom this way of life provided an entry to society, albeit a constrained one (Asleson, 2003). Their existence was tolerated provided that they did not exceed society's expectations. Lady Mary Coke would not acknowledge their existence, except when brought face to face with their behaviour, as in the case of the Duke of Grafton in 1768 who sat in the pit in full view of his wife, the Duchess:

> Did I tell you that last Saturday at the Opera he came and sat by his Mistress the Whole night, & just under the Duchess's box? So sensible as he is I cou'd not have suspected him of such indecency! (Hume, 1889, II, 244-5)

The mistress was a courtesan known as Nancy Parsons, who had begun her affair with the Duke in 1764 when the Duke's wife was pregnant. Lady Mary's view of him as sensible may have come from the fact that he was prime minster at the time of her report. The indecent aspect to his action came from its very public nature and obvious snub to his wife. Nancy Parsons could be seen as having returned the gaze, in her refusal to behave in the way expected from one of her station. She did not remain tucked away in one of the boxes but flaunted herself in the full sight of everyone. Extra-marital affairs could be conveniently ignored, and therefore tolerated, as long as they remained private.

Such women, performers as well as courtesans, could expect to be gazed at; it was a part of their professional life. Mrs Abington attended the opera, but she does not appear in Lady Mary Coke's journal, even obliquely, in that context. Mrs Abington conducted a long affair with Lord Shelburne, and although he appears on several occasions in the journals, never in the context of having a mistress. It would seem that for both of them, keeping their relationship invisible, as far as possible, was important. Mrs Abington would have dressed appropriately, because of the entry requirements, but not extravagantly as this would have excited interest. She was there to gaze, not to be gazed at, as she observed the deportment and personal presentation of the women she would later imitate on the stage.

One performer used her box at the opera as a personal stage to announce her presence in society. The 1783 opera plan (Fig. 1) shows Mrs Robinson as the tenant of box number 69, with her new lover colonel Tarleton. Having purchased the whole box, Robinson was entitled to decorate it as she pleased. The actress had recently returned from a trip to France, occasioned by the end of her disastrous affair with the Prince of Wales, which had garnered her much notoriety but little personal gain. She wished to re-establish herself in London society, presenting herself as a fashion icon, dressed in the latest styles from the continent. She decorated her box with drapes and mirrors in the French style, as a backdrop for the performance of her life. Generally depicted as a courtesan, she was referred to as Perdita by the press, her stage persona when first spotted by the Prince. During the spring of 1783, the progress of these decorations covered many column inches, particularly in the *Morning Herald*. The paper highlighted her refurbishment of her box in the 'Parisian taste', remarking on the pink satin used for the furnishings and the mirrors on the walls, and mused on what payment might be exacted from the 'beau' or 'hero' who might wish to 'behold himself there at full length'. It also brought its readers up to date on the real purpose of the mirrors, placed 'not for the benefit of the those in the box, but for the convenience of seeing the stage from every part of it' (*Morning Herald*, 1783, Spring). Such manoeuvres would have been anathema to the likes of Lady Mary Coke, who made no mention of them in her journal. They would, however, have been of interest to many in the audience, as, in a similar way to Nancy Parsons, Mrs Robinson harnessed the Gaze to her own ends. Her efforts were largely unsuccessful; society still regarded her as a courtesan, and her position as the first mistress of the Prince of Wales gave her a very dubious form of notoriety. Robinson's use of her theatre box, with its mirrors that reflected her as much as the happenings on the stage made her the most prominent audience member at the opera and made manifest the interplay between theatrical and real life performance in eighteenth-century London.

4.2 Dress: Playing by the rules

4.2.1 Sartorial codes

Alongside advice on viewing the most beautiful women in London, *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book* also offered directions on 'The fashions of the different Seasons, in full Dress, Deshabille *[sic]*, walking and riding, in public and private' (Anon, 1780, 135). These 'rules' on what to wear applied equally to both men and women, especially when evening dress was required, such as at the opera, or in the absolute rules applied when going to court. Such rules acted not only as a form of social control, but also allowed the elite to maintain their exclusiveness, as their dress performed as a visual display of their wealth and difference.

The art of dressing well was thought an important part of good manners, and felt to be 'essential to the general well-being of society' (Ribeiro, 2010, 111). The demands of adhering to the rules led to acute worries over the embarrassment to be felt by getting it wrong (Goffman, 1990). The response to these rules would have been different for men and women. For women garments take on a greater significance, because so much of their sense of self is embodied in how they look (Tseëlon, 2012). It is not that men are indifferent to clothes, but that their attitude to them is different. A man is more likely to concentrate on the visual aspect, what the garments say about his status, and to remember individual garments for what they did for him in the past, what they helped him to achieve. A woman has a more sensory relationship with her clothes, and she is more likely to talk about favourite clothes as part of a continuum, what they did for her is associated with the sense of touch (Woodward, 2005).

Elite women learnt the rules as they grew up, conforming to their parents' understanding of their importance, and the role that dress would play in their self-presentation. Newly enriched members of the bourgeoisie were expected to pay attention to conduct books in order to conform. Rules for dress where royalty were to be present, such as at the theatre, were published in the papers. The rules for court dress ensured that everyone who attended gave proper respect to the monarchy and were suitably conscious of the gravity of the occasion. To understand the minutiae of these rules, however, demanded membership of an elite group, otherwise there was always the possibility of a slip-up and

the following embarrassment. Newcomers to the rituals of court had to observe those around them closely to understand the finer points of how to behave.

Evening dress for women consisted of a gown, petticoat and stomacher, with jewellery and headdress (Fig. 6). The outer gown which had been referred to as a mantua in the first half of the century, and made by a female 'mantua maker', began to be referred to as a 'night gown'. It was worn with paniers, giving a fullness to the sides, and in the evening the décolletage formed by the stays underneath would be low, and filled in with a gauzy handkerchief.

A letter of 'complaint' from a husband, probably satirical, in the *Lady's Magazine* of 1783, gives a sense of the difference in dress for the evening, as he describes his wife following the latest style. She was covered up all day, but come the evening:

> She sallies forth in a large bell hoop, low stays, and so transparent a piece of drapery is thrown over the bosom, that it discovers, what it attempts apparently to conceal. Now I cannot, by any means, approve of this method of dressing: she is so inclosed [sic] from head to foot all day, when she is with me, that I cannot see a single charm lower than her chin; at seven or eight in the evening, she is quite undressed for company, and every man who falls in her way, has an opportunity to gaze on those beauties which are exhibited for the observation of all men (Waugh, 1968, 123).

The 'sack' or 'saque', fashionable in the 1740s, which had pleats at the back that hung loose and created a train, returned in the 1760s and 70s, but in a more slender form (Figure 51). It was this form of dress, with the very wide paniers that remained as court dress, for formal occasions such as royal birthdays and weddings, until the end of the century, long after the fashion had ended. (Figure 52) The ensemble of evening dress gave entry to the more exclusive areas of the Opera House, such as the pit and the boxes, and this was a space within which your visual appearance would be closely monitored.

4.2.2 Dressing for the opera

Dressing for the opera was not about modesty, as encouraged by the conduct books, but about display. A seat in a box or in the pit required the occupants to be wearing full evening dress, and the gaze of others required women to take full advantage of the opportunity to visibly demonstrate their status as members of this elite group. The women were not only demonstrating membership of the group, but also their understanding of the latest fashions and styles of dress. Fashion plates were relatively new in the second half of the century. Most information on the latest modes was gathered in person, and visitors to London and Paris were questioned closely on what they had seen (North, 2018). Betsy Sheridan, sister of the playwright, wrote regularly from London to her sister in Dublin describing the latest styles. In 1786 her sister was instructed to gradually reduce her 'stuffing' as: 'Rumps are quite out in France and are decreasing here but can not be quite given up till the weather grow warmer'. In 1788, hats are worn, like riding hats, the hair universally dressed 'very loose in small curls' (Lefanu, 1960, 138).

In the 1760s lady's pocket-books began to carry illustrations of the fashion for each season, and the first fashion magazine, the *Gallerie des Modes* appeared in 1778. These fashion illustrations, which reflect the growing consumerism of Georgian society, also reflect a need to control the appetites of women. A man might work hard to earn money for a comfortable life, only to have it frittered away by his wife, and the discourse around modesty and restraint in dress was a part of this need for control (Breward, 1995). The prescriptive nature of a fashion plate helped to keep their wilder fancies in check. There was a sense that the growing taste for luxury and refinement was 'weakening the moral fibre of the nation' (Brewer, 1997, 77). For the first time members of the growing numbers of the bourgeoisie had disposable income to spend on luxuries such as dress. This presented a man with a dilemma; he would wish his wife, or daughter to be well dressed, a reflection on his probity and hard work. He would not, however, wish to be seen as a man who could not control the spending of the frivolous women under his charge. The increasing spending power and taste for luxury of the bourgeoisie began to challenge the exclusivity of the aristocracy. This, in turn, led to a need for the elite to retain the visual difference between themselves and the middling sort: those who wished to differentiate themselves from the poor, but were not part of the elite (Muldrew, 2017). The cost of a box at the opera was still far beyond this group, but for the upper echelons,

the professional classes who might visit the pit at the opera occasionally each season, the growth of disposable income brought a greater possibility to dress in imitation of the elite, a visual mimicking. The excesses of the *beau monde* were in many ways a response to this challenge, and an effort to retain this difference (This will be discussed in the next section). Thus the display at the opera gained further importance for the elite as a visual reaffirmation of their superiority and right to rule (Hall-Witt, 2007).

Within the confines of the gown and petticoat, there was the opportunity for personal choice over fabrics and decorations. Women were intimately involved in the construction of their clothes, visiting shops to choose fabrics and trimmings, and instructing the mantua maker on how it should be constructed. Such occasions provided important moments of bonding between women (Young, 2005). In 1785, Lady Louisa Stuart, faced with creating the necessary grand court dress for a royal birthday, missed the company and advice of her sister. 'I am really at a loss without your advice and taste about my gown' (Clark, 1896, II, 28). She feels that she should have: 'a gown rather more expensive than a plain lustring for my dress' [light summer silk]. She tried to construct the trimmings at home, but, 'my maid being as ignorant, we have together contrived an ugly thing which cost twice as much as I intended […] I have quite lost the little genius I had for dress'. The sisters were close and would have had an intimate knowledge of each other and their attitudes to dress. Lady Louisa, not naturally interested in clothes and inclined to spend as little money as possible on them, was lost without her sister's advice. The maid, had she been inclined to creativity in that area, might have been a suitable substitute, but even she had failed.

The expectations placed on women for important court occasions are a recurrent theme for the elite, and especially in the journals of Lady Mary Coke. A new gown for such an occasion was a vital part of feeling correct and at ease in that elevated group. However, some clothes, over time, become so comfortable that they almost become another outer layer of the body (Woodward, 2005). Mrs Papendiek, who was a lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte, recalls in her memoirs a gown that served her over several years. It was 'born' in 1782: 'a nice puce colour', trimmed with white satin, and a petticoat of the same colour to match the trimming (Papendiek, 1887, II, 147). In 1783 it was trimmed with white, for her wedding, and the same garment reappears at various times, retrimmed and revived, until the end of her recollections in 1792. The reason for the continuing reconstituting of

this one gown, may have been financial: being part of the court was expensive. The description of some of the new trimmings however, added to Lady Louisa Stuart's comments on the cost of accessories for her dress, suggests that this was not the only reason for its revival. The gown came to be more than just an object, it offered the comfort of an old friend. The bodice in particular, being worn so often, would have become like another skin, part of, rather than separate from, her body image. Such a garment would have allowed Mrs Papendiek to feel psychologically invisible when wearing it. Mrs Papendiek's comfort in her old dress, which she simply re-dressed for each new occasion, suggests someone at ease with her body, comfortable within a fluid boundary. Her sense of self was not dependent on conforming precisely to the look of those around her. In many ways she occupied the opposite end of a scale to Lady Mary Coke, for whom the appropriateness of her dress was indivisible from her sense of self and self-esteem.

For Lady Mary Coke, it was the look and expense of the fabric that mattered, an attention to the visible effect that was almost male. For Mrs Papendiek, the touch, the sensation of the fabric against and around her body, that gave comfort and reassurance was of most importance, greater than the possibility of being noticed for non-conformity. Lady Harriot Pitt described a sensation of non-conformity when attending a gathering after her presentation at court. She told her mother: 'I got thro' ye fatigue of ye Drawing Room perfectly well. Dress universally approved' (Headlam, 1914, 59). She then moved on to Gloucester House where she was 'received in great state in my Large Hoop ye congratulations of ye greatest part of ye Company, which I did not dislike very much as you will imagine'. Whatever the congratulations, she feels exposed in her large court hoops, none of the rest of the company are wearing them. However legitimate the reason for her appearance, the hoops were remarked on, and made her stand out, which she found discomforting.

4.2.3 The danger of embarrassment

Society and the discourses around fashion can exert a powerful controlling force over how individuals behave and present themselves through dress. For Goffman, coherent self-presentation is achieved by a balance between 'virtual social identity' and 'actual social identity' (Howson, 2004, 20), a combination of the persona that an individual feels is expected of them in a given situation, and the attributes actually possessed by that

individual. Goffman argues that we tend to see ourselves through the eyes of others and respond to their expectations in a given situation. What we actually respond to however, is our own impressions of that other person, and a lot of energy is expended in trying to conform to what we believe the other expects of us (Leary and Allen, 2011).

The fear of embarrassment is a powerful motivating force in leading individuals to conform to social expectations, and can lead to self-monitoring, especially in the form of outward appearance, which will form the first impression of your persona when meeting others (Frost, 2005). Lady Rockingham's letters seldom mention dress, suggesting that it was not a great preoccupation, unless the occasion was of significance, such as her husband's reception at court on becoming Prime minister (as was discussed in Chapter Three). For Lady Mary Coke the importance to her of being in the right clothes surfaces often in her journals, suggesting that she was highly self-monitoring. She was constantly aware of herself in relation to the others around her, and how her visual presentation compared with theirs. Her self-esteem was dependent on feeling correct, if not better than those around her; the thought of getting it wrong, with the accompanying social embarrassment, was a constant source of anxiety.

A good example of this hyper-consciousness is provided by an invitation to dinner from her neighbours at Holland House in London in 1776. She enquired carefully if 'company' were expected, which would have meant wearing evening dress, and was assured there would be none. It was thus agreed that she might come in a riding dress:

> I was exceedingly deceived in their having no company there were four gentlemen and three ladies none of which I had ever seen before excepting a son of Mr William Campbell who I had formally seen when a child however I was not ashamed of my dress as it was excessively pretty. […] Vastly preferable as it appeared to me to the three ladies high heads, I made myself perfectly easy with them as you know the scotch never likes one the better for being shy & not speaking (NRAS859, V486).

Her comments suggest that the company were young and fashionable, the high heads referring to the tall wigs fashionable throughout the 1770s (which are discussed in the next section). On that occasion she persuaded herself that although improperly dressed in

her own terms, she actually looked better, and was more comfortable than the young women in their high heads. She had little sense of humour and where others might have laughed it off, she 'made herself agreeable' to the company, replacing any initial discomfort with a sense of superiority. By her own terms, Lady Mary was embarrassed, although that embarrassment may have been either invisible or incomprehensible to the others in the company. She was faced with a dilemma as to whether she should laugh it off or complain. The host who had invited her obviously did not have her finely tuned sense of appropriate dress, or what constituted 'company'. He had agreed to her wearing the informal day gown, or riding habit, which for Lady Mary was quite acceptable at dinner in close company, a gathering of maybe two or three people. For her, the first impression that she made on new company should live up to her sense of her own status as a high-born woman, and this would not be achieved by wearing undress to an evening occasion. Her perception of her high status and the responsibilities that came with that obviously did not have the same meaning for the young people in the group. To judge from her comments about being agreeable and not being shy, she may simply have come across as a rather pompous, old fashioned, elderly woman; someone whose opinions could be, at best humoured, at worst ignored.

Lady Mary also suffered when shown up by other members of her family, feeling their transgression as a personal reflection on her status. In 1780, her sister Lady Greenwich, aged sixty-three, had retired from general society, and seemingly no longer felt obliged to conform to its rules for dress:

> tho' she says she loves retirement she seldom stays at home, at the same time I acknowledge she is perfectly in the right to please herself in all those sort of things, but I must wish she wou'd dress herself a little more properly for one of her rank, her Sunday dress tho' she goes to church & makes visits in the evening is a linen gown tied up, which discovers a bad stuff petticoat with a muslin hankerchief (sic) & single ruffles. If ones servants wou'd dress in this manner, it wou'd be very proper for their station but Alass! (NRAS859, V490)

Lady Mary Coke's sisters were an important bedrock of her sense of identity, any actions of theirs were keenly felt because, in her eyes, they reflected directly on her.

Neither Lady Mary Coke nor Lady Rockingham comment on their own clothes at the opera, suggesting that the required evening dress offered sufficient latitude for them within the set parameters of gown, jewels and headdress. Their lack of comment suggests that they felt comfortable in their clothes and therefore psychologically invisible (Woodward, 2005). When a garment is uncomfortable, or feels visually inappropriate, it induces a sensation of psychological vulnerability. This becomes a constant presence at the front of the mind, overshadowing all the other experiences of the occasion (Woodward, 2005). Conforming in this way allowed them to feel part of the group and feel accepted as individuals. It also lessened the likelihood of gossip, something that would have been humiliating for both women. For Lady Rockingham, any hint of gossip reflected directly on her husband, and might have curtailed her political activities. She had a vested interest in remaining unnoticed by others of the group at the opera, and this would have meant conforming visually to expectations. She may not have been interested in her dress as a pleasure, but blending in was a necessity, and this meant dressing correctly.

Lady Mary Coke was quick to notice any deviance in look. In 1781 she wrote to her sister that the Duchess of Cumberland: 'was at the opera on Tuesday in a rose colour satin nightgown & white apron a dress I know you don't like for that entertainment' (NRAS859, V491). The rose satin nightgown might have been acceptable, but the apron was not. Aprons were widely worn, and took many forms, but they were not part of evening dress.

4.2.4 Dressing for court: a hyper-indicator of status

Much of Lady Mary Coke's sense of self was dependent on her status as an upper-class woman, and member of the elite that surrounded the royal court. Her self-esteem was therefore dependent on seeing herself as presenting the correct visual persona for such occasions. In 1767 there was a period of great concern expressed in her journals that rumours were being spread that she had appeared at the Queen's birthday in an 'old' dress. 'I had reason to suspect that it was the Duchess of Hamilton & Lady Susan Stewart that had raised the report'. Only the Duke of York was able to reassure her that the King had 'taken great notice of my clothes' (Hume, 1889, I, 126). Celebrations such as royal birthdays were moments for appearing in the full sack with wide hoops, and much attention was paid to what everyone wore. The report was probably untrue. Lady Louisa

Stuart records that Lady Mary's paranoia about these two women often led her to sense imaginary slights from them. Her terror of being seen as having worn an old dress at court was real, however, as it would have been humiliating for her, and severely decreased her sense of her status.

Instructions on dress for special occasions at court would be announced in the press, for example for the investiture of the Prince of Wales with the order of the garter:

> Notice is hereby given, that, at the installation at Windsor, on Thursday the 25 instant, ladies are expected to appear in the chapel or hall there, full dressed with hoops; but ladies who propose to dance, and such as shall sit in the front rows at the ball in the evening, are expected to come full dressed, as to the Court at St James. (The Lady's Magazine, July 1771)

Full dressed for court indicated the very wide hoops, with a sack back mantua, ruffles at the sleeves and a lace cap with 'lappets' that hung down the back (Fig. 52). Full dressed with hoops was evening dress, i.e. nightgowns. Hoops were at their most fashionable in the 1740s and 50s, but by the 1770s they were increasingly confined to evenings and formal occasions. In June 1773, Lady Mary Coke visited the Princess Amelia: 'I had put on a hoop to be very respectful, which I was sorry for, as we walk'd all round the grounds in the rain, which, being dress'd, was not agreeable' (Hume, 1889, IV, 178). Three years later she was again with the Princess but much more comfortable: 'as we were all without hoops [we] did not want for room' (NRAS859, V486).

A similar royal notice in the paper obviously caused Lady Rockingham some anxiety when organising a box at the theatre. There was always the danger of getting it wrong and being the cause of gossip and embarrassment to the family:

> I could wish to be instructed in every article that I may be sure to act right & properly I beg you won't fail to mention every thing that ought to be done that it may not be in my power to mistake, it will be the greatest distress that can be if you learn any one thing to my judgement and determination, tho in the most trifling thing in the world (SCA, WWM/R168/23).

Lady Mary Coke, hyper-conscious of the rules, often comments on court dress. In 1785: 'The Duchess of Beaufort and Duchess of Rutland had the Honour of being sent for by the Queens House on Sunday evening. The duchess of Beaufort went but the Duchess of Rutland having brought no sack from Ireland sent her excuse' (NRAS859, V495). Such summons often arrived with immediate effect, as noted by Lady Louisa Stuart in 1785:

> I arrived just in time at the Dutchess's *[sic]* at the same moment that she and Lady Frances came from the Queen's House, to which they had been unexpectedly sent for. That is a provoking trick of their majesties', if one durst say so; the message came at seven o'clock and put poor Lady Frances at her wits' end, but Mrs Turner was so good as to give her back an old white sash she had had in her possession these two years, and so she went. (Clark, 1896, II, 24)

These comments come from the 1780s, by which time the court dress of sack-back gown with very wide side hoops, which had been the height of fashion at the beginning of George III's reign, was long past; fashionable dress had moved on (Greig, 2015). The court however, remained the same, a visual representation of the increasingly fossilised attitudes and expectations from the royal family. Two images of formal court occasions, created more than fifteen years apart, show very little difference in the style of the clothes being worn. They depict different events, the earlier 1766 image (figure 53), shows a drawing room, where courtiers were formally presented to the Queen, and the later image a more formal court ball in 1780 (Fig. 54). The mode of dress, however, is very similar, the main markers of difference being the women's hair styles, which are closer to the head in the earlier image, and the men's sleeves, which by 1782 are slimmer at the cuff.

The simmering resentment expressed at the expense of going to court grew, as there was less and less chance of using the hugely expensive garments on any other occasion. The rules, however, remained the same, and the likelihood of embarrassment by being incorrectly dressed as strong as ever. For Lady Harriot Pitt in 1783, a visit to court represented an unnecessary expense: 'I did not think it necessary for me to make my Appearance at St James to day, […] it is rather lucky for me not to be obliged to go as I have no suitable Apparel and I should grudge my self extremely a new Gown merely for one day' (Clark, 1896, 67-8).

For Lady Mary Coke the ritualistic nature of court gave her a sense of continuance, and she resented the presence of those who she felt had no right to be there and did not take the trouble to dress correctly. ‘Lord George Gordon and Adams the American […] did not ornament the court either by their dress or persons or their virtues’, she wrote in 1785 (NRAS859, V495). She was shocked by a young woman who, caught up in the terror of the moment, held on tightly to her fiancé's hand; such physical contact was not appropriate. In 1785 she recorded the consternation expressed by a young woman who had never worn a sack, but does not make any suggestion that things might change:

> The company at the Queens House is much encreased (sic) this year, abundance of new people are invited & some are put to difficulties, for as sacks are little wore many people do not make them & as the message seldom arrives till after six o'clock there is no other means of obliging the command than by borrowing a gown from a friend, this necessity I saw happen yesterday to a lady who I dined in company with yesterday at Lady Betty Mackenzies. The forms of courts are little known the husband said may she not send her excuse? & a Lady found another method yet more extraordinary that she shou'd send to ask leave to go in a night gown however a sack was borrow'd & she went. (NRAS859, V495)

Her journal does not mention however, the appearance of the actress Mrs Siddons, who in 1785 was invited to read to the royal Princesses (Ribeiro, 2003). Siddons recalled in her *Reminiscences* the formal *sacque* dress over a hoop, with treble flounced sleeve ruffles, and lace lappets in her hair. She may have been unaccustomed to such restrictive dress, but she accomplished the moves required by court etiquette with dignity. Complimented on her posture, she responded that on the stage she had ‘frequently personated Queens’ (Siddons, 1942, 21).

4.2.5 Dress as political display

In the lives of women, clothes become a facet of their persona, indivisible from their sense of self (Tseëlon, 1995). The sense of touch, the sensation of wearing a garment, is a crucial factor in the experience of being dressed. For men, their attitude to clothes is based more on the sense of sight, providing visual markers of status. Military uniforms and academic dress, for example, largely created by men for men, display the hierarchies found in those

institutions in an immediately visible and quantifiable form. These two differing attitudes became highly visible in the reactions of the opposing sides during the Regency crisis.

When the king fell ill in 1788, the strength of feeling, for or against a regency, became so strong that the veneer of politeness was broken, and the ruling class as a single grouping became unstable. The crisis was 'an intensely divisive socio-political event, one in which women took a leading role' (Chalus, 2005, 100). Women from the opposing camps became actively partisan, and criticism soon began to be aimed at them, trying to suggest that it was their political enthusiasm that instigated much of the trouble (Chalus, 2005).

The elite group broke into two factions with, on occasion, women shouting at each other across the auditorium of the opera, an unheard-of lapse of decorum. These two new, but highly unstable groups focused inwards on how to enhance group resources to achieve dominance; as a consequence, there was less concern with the appearance of the group as a whole (Shepherd, *et al*., 2013). One effect of this inward focus was in their outward appearance, as increasingly the opposing factions declared their allegiance through their dress. The use of fashion to declare political allegiance was nothing new (Chalus, 2000). During elections both women and men sported cockades, and women often dressed in party colours, but an election was a contained moment with its own set of rules. The adoption of the 'regency cap' by women during the crisis, took this sartorial display further than it had been before. Designed by the Duchess of Devonshire, it sported three jaunty feathers, for the Prince of Wales, and his motto, *Ich Dien* [I serve], sewn at the base (Foreman, 1998, 218). It grew into a mountain of tumbled gauze, held together by a ribbon, with, *Honi soit qui mal y pense, de la Regence* [Evil be to him who evil thinks of the Regency] printed in gold letters (Chalus, 2000). The cap was expensive, making it an exclusive item, but it served its purpose in making a forceful, visual statement at many social gatherings and especially at the opera.

The challenge, on this occasion, came not from other women, but from the men. Those who supported the King developed a uniform referred to as a 'constitutional coat'. It consisted of a dark blue frock [coat], with a broad orange velvet cape and large yellow buttons round each of which was the inscription, 'constitutional club'. The waistcoat and breeches were in white, with yellow buttons bordered round with orange-coloured silk. James Bland Burges wrote: 'In point of taste we certainly beat the Blue and Buff of our

opponents' (Burges, 1885, 126). This was another expensive outfit, but worn mostly by members of parliament, who could afford it. Referring to another M.P., Burgess says that: ' I never saw [him] so pleased with anything than this dress, which he says is a 'wise and manly thing'. The uniform also appeared at the opera, presenting a more sober, considered appearance to the wearer, than the fluttering feathers of the regency cap. The men of power answered the women meddlers at their own game, creating a uniform, that by contrast made the Regency cap a frivolous and meaningless accessory.

Eventually, the King recovered, and the crisis passed, but such had been the fissure caused, that much retrenchment was needed on the part of the supporters of a regency to prove their continuing loyalty to the King. The Queen took charge of sartorial display, laying down expensive rules on what would be worn for the celebratory events. The special ball at Windsor specified deep blue, trimmed with scarlet and gold, to match the uniform of the King's Hunt. These could only be purchased from Mrs Beauvais, the Queen's chosen mantua maker. The ball at White's club was to be white and gold, with gold tassels, with a plain cap with a white satin bandeau and 'God save the King' in gold spangles.

Attitudes, from the women in particular, had to be reversed. Sartorially, this was demonstrated by bandeaus variously embroidered with patriotic slogans: *God save the King*, *Long life to the King*, or *Vive le Roi, Dieu nous l'a rendu* [god has returned him to us] (Clark, 1896, II, 119). The larger group had to re-form, not least because at court, to be seen without some token of support beside the Queen, who sported *God Save the King* in diamonds, would have been social suicide (Fig. 11).

Lady Louisa Stuart calculated that to attend all the expected events would have cost more than three hundred pounds, leading her to remark that 'Loyalty is a most expensive virtue at present' (Clark, 1896, II, 117). After the ball at Windsor, she thought it 'the finest sight I ever saw, and answered one's idea of Royal magnificence' (Clark, 1896, II, 132). The Queen had effectively re-established loyalty and attendance at court as the pinnacle of social status.

4.3 Fashion: Status & Pleasure

> Fashion is gentility running away from vulgarity, and afraid of being overtaken by it. It is a sign the two things are not far asunder. (Hazlitt, New Monthly Magazine 1826, 251)

4.3.1 Fashion

Fashion works as a unifying force, it cements social solidarity and imposes group norms (Wilson, 2003). At the same time it encourages both individuality and a herd instinct, the desire to stand out whilst also being one of the crowd (Boultwood and Jerrard, 2000). Each age has its own code of correctness for dress, and the discourse on fashion is full of words on what is 'in', with images presenting a fashionable ideal (Woodward, 2007, 27). This sense of rightness at any given time allows for a feeling of belonging, being part of a group, large or small. Within that group, however, there is also the facility for personal agency, space to experiment within the norms and create a personal style that also conforms with expectations. Fashion can also be a vehicle of fantasy, that allows us to play out our desires (Wilson, 2003). It is when those norms, are fully breached that shock becomes a factor and social censure comes into play.

In the eighteenth century, fashionable dress often formed the subject of social commentaries because it represented a sense of constant change, its essence was about 'transience and jitteriness' (Wahrman, 2006, 205). This had always been the case, but the increase in printed media brought about a change in the speed of dissemination. New publications specifically aimed at women began to publish engravings showing the latest styles. The first to do this was *The Lady's Magazine* in the early 1770s (Ribeiro, 1984). Such printed material could be distributed to a wider number of the population and at greater speed than the dressed dolls which had performed the same function previously. As fashion was largely associated with women, it also provided a convenient target to blame for any perceived ills in society.

This section moves on from the rules of dress and social conformity, to discusses how dress, as fashion, can be a source of pleasure and self-affirmation. For some, this pleasure is gained in playfulness, by unashamedly enjoying clothes for what they are; while for others, it is in going one better than their neighbours. Some see fashion as a confirmation

of status; the aim is not to stand out as different, but to gain pleasure from being the best presented, among the highest possible group. There are also those who while outwardly conforming, also perform some small act of rebellion that reminds them of their own individuality (King, 2001).

4.3.2 Fashion as pleasure

For many women there is a real pleasure in wearing clothes (Young, 1990). This may be because the garments suit them, they are comfortable, or simply fit in with those around them, so that they feel psychologically invisible (Woodward, 2005). On other occasions, this might be because the clothes are simply fun. In 1774 the Marchioness Grey wrote to her daughter Amabel about the current vogue for feathers as decoration:

> As to the subject of fashions, I am in danger of going Head & Shoulders deep into the Nouvelles Modes, & tis well if I do not Fly to you on all the (Geese's) Feathers I can collect. Feather ornaments were always Passion, & one of the chief difficulties in Dress was making two sides Alike: […] In consequence, your sister shall I assure you be Feathered, (not Tarred I hope) & I expect more amusement at the Opera tomorrow in seeing all the Nodding Plumes about me off the stage, than in anything Performed upon it (BA L30/11/122/71).

There is a real sense of pleasure and anticipation in this letter. Fashion, in the form of the feathers, provided the Marchioness with a moment of bonding with her daughters, as well as the pleasure of being part of the group at the Opera House. Both sensations formed an important part of her sense of identity.

For Lady Mary Coke clothes were about status, and there were moments when she took obvious pleasure in being well dressed, especially for court. For the dinner at Holland House in 1776, where she was surprised to find company, she described her dress as: 'excessively pretty. A green tabbersate [thick silk taffeta] with the loops & lappets of silver with a head of the same colour' (NRAS859, V486). Her description suggests self-satisfaction, that although differently dressed to the rest of the company, she was, by her own standards, very well dressed. Therefore, she was able to carry off the occasion with some aplomb.

In 1767, Lady Mary Coke's journals record the creation of a new gown for the Queen's birthday ball, an annual occasion of great importance. Royal birthdays demanded full court dress with very wide hoops, and she commissioned a length of silk to be woven for her, in order to create an entirely new gown. The mercer who wove the fabric delivered it to her house, and on the same day she: 'Sent for the lace man & chose some silver lace to trim my gown' (Hume, 1889, I, 115). Three days later she had a fitting for the new dress, presumably with the mantua maker, and thought it 'very pretty'. The next day: 'My gown came home & my sute of point finished [lace accessories]; both very fine. […] Went to Lady Dalkeith. She had just tried on her birthday gown; tis very fine, but I don't think so pretty as my own' (Hume, 1889, I, 118). There is a similar tone of satisfaction and superiority in her description, to that of the Holland House dress. She had spent a lot of money on the silk, and had it made into a gown in which she knew would be the equal of, if not superior to, the others at the ball. It is also interesting to note that the silk was delivered from the loom on a Tuesday, and the gown was finished and delivered to her on the Saturday, four days later, ready for the royal birthday the next Monday. A woman of her class could summon the vendors and makers to visit her and complete the transaction in the comfort of her own home.

Lady Mary's tone of satisfaction may also have stemmed from the fact that her dress, made from fabric woven in London, could be seen as equal to any from France. The presence of Huguenot weavers in Spitalfields in London gave their silks all the glamour of French fashions, so attractive to the English upper classes who felt Parisian fashions to be the best (Anishanslin, 2016). At various points throughout the century the British government succumbed to pressure and banned imports of luxury goods from France in order that the wealthy would shop at home. The actual number of French weavers in London may have been relatively small, but their presence enabled the perception that Lady Mary's silk had all the status and glamour of French luxury.

As she entered the drawing room at court, she received a compliment from Lady Powis who thought the fabric so beautiful, she took it for embroidery. Lady Mary's comment on this in her diary expresses satisfaction at the recognition. It was not in her nature to indulge in the kind of intimate conversation with other women about her clothes, which for many can be a source of friendship and bonding (Young, 1990). A similar weighty silk fabric to that woven for Lady Mary Coke, with a weave that could be mistaken for embroidery, was used for a court dress from this period currently on display at

Berrington Hall in Shropshire (Fig 26). It was made for Lady Harley, wife of the builder of the house. The mantua maker arranged the centre back of the bodice so that the bunches of flowers to mirror each other, giving the impression of hand-sewn panels. The whole effect is one of wealth and display for a state occasion at court, something close to the heart of Lady Mary Coke.

All the more disappointing therefore for Lady Mary Coke, that this was the dress that she believed had been described as old. Two days later, one of the suspected culprits, the Duchess of Hamilton, told Lady Mary Coke that: 'She thought my birthday gown one of the finest and most beautiful she had ever seen; it surprised me, having reason to think that either her grace or Lady Susan Stewart had told the Princess of Brunswick that I was to come in an old gown' (Hume, 1889, I, 121). The Duchess probably received a rather haughty response, when to others, such as Lady Louisa Stuart, it seemed that the Duchess of Hamilton's compliment was genuine. With a woman other than Lady Mary Coke, this might have led to a pleasant discussion of the gown's creation, and the choices made. These conversations are part of the network of discourse around dress, that performs an important function for women in providing support and reassurance in their choices (Woodward, 2005). Understanding the opinions of others on dress can be a powerful guard against the possibility of embarrassment.

Not all women organised their dress by bringing the tradesmen to their homes. For others, there was pleasure to be found in visiting the mercer's shop to make choices of fabric, in the company of friends. The shop might offer a greater selection of fabrics, and the possibility to enjoy the sensations the different fabrics offered. For women the sense of touch, the feel of the fabric is an important part of the choice. In 1780, Lady Harriot Pitt, obviously charged by her mother to find fabric for her, wrote: 'We […] have chose two lute strings and two chintzs [sic] that I hope will suit you. I have bought one for myself not quite so grave a sort which is remarkably pretty' (Headlam, 1914, 56). Probably shopping with her sister-in-law, Lady Harriot had taken the opportunity to purchase something for herself. Her duty to her mother had given her the opportunity for a pleasurable sojourn with friends, and the reassurance and support on her own taste in dress that came with this.

Lady Rockingham's comment in a letter, discussed in the previous chapter, that when Mr Burke called late in the evening, she put on her 'political dress' (SCA, WWM/R168/227). This suggests not only that she had different garments for different occasions, but that the dress she was wearing at any time could affect her state of mind. She endowed her clothes with significance that empowered her to fulfil a desired role, referred to as enclothed cognition (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). This endowment of significance to a garment by the wearer means that when it is worn the abstract concepts are activated and will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter. Such an attitude to her clothes would have assisted Lady Rockingham in keeping the various facets of her life separate.

4.3.3 Fashion as fantasy – the *beau monde*

A gentleman visiting London in 1780 and following the guidance in *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book,* would have realised that the place to see many of the 'beauties' listed was at the opera. In that space he might also have caught sight of members of the *beau monde* or the *ton,* leaders of high fashion, described by the pocket book as:

> The gay, the brilliant vortex, consisting of the polite, the elegant the refined of both sexes, and who constitute the real ton. It is never to be met with on the eastern side of Temple bar, where the tar of Thames street, and the tallow of Blow-bladder-street, contaminate the air, and give such an offensive smell to an alderman, or a common councilman's lady, as all the eau de luce in Warren or Baily's shop cannot eradicate (Anon, 1780, 150).

Members of the *beau monde* were recognised as leaders of London fashion (Greig, 2013). They can be described as an elite within the elite, consisting largely of members of the aristocracy (Hall-Witt, 2007). They displayed new preoccupations grounded in fashion, consumption and conspicuous display, which added to the status gained from their inherited wealth. They were an identifiable group, and were referred to as such by observers, such as Lady Mary Coke, who remarked in July 1776, when most of the aristocracy had left London for the summer: 'The bon ton are still in town Duchess of Devonshire Lady Melburn Mrs Damer etc they have dinners suppers & live much together' (NRAS859, V486). For Lady Hariot Pitt the *ton* represented a horrible fascination because

of their addiction to gambling, telling her mother in 1785: 'The Beau Monde have been entertaining themselves very finely at ye Pharoh [sic] table at Brook's. Ld. William Gordon lost four thousand Pound one night' (Headlam, 1914, 115).

For the participants, an occasion such as attendance at the opera was about making a statement about their membership of an exclusive group. It was important to show that they were capable of competing, whether by style, expense, or panache (Boultwood and Jerrard, 2000). In many ways, the modern red-carpet parade performs a similar function of display. The onlookers, looking up from the pit, saw women dressed in the height of fashion, including some who had taken their look beyond what was expected. These were fantasy figures; for a fleeting moment it was possible to imagine a different self, another possible narrative, where there was no voyeuristic gaze, the other was not present (Young, 1990). The women in the boxes might be pleasurable to look at, but for watchers in the pit, the look could not be realistically achieved, nor was it desirable (Budgeon, 2003).

The Duchess of Devonshire and her Whig friends, referred to as the 'Devonshire House circle', formed a distinctive group within the *beau monde:*

> Whigs prided themselves on their patronage of the arts as much as they venerated their contribution to statecraft. They were the oligarchs of taste, proselytizers of their superior cultivation. But the *ton*, by definition, inhabited the realm of the extreme (Foreman, 1998, 44)

When Georgiana Spencer had married William Cavendish, and became the 5th Duchess of Devonshire in June 1774, she excited considerable interest in London, as the union formed an alliance between two of the most powerful families in the land. There had been no Duchess for more than twenty years, so the seventeen-year-old Georgiana excited much interest. Her presentation at court was the cause of some excitement as this was the first occasion when many people actually saw her. Lady Mary Coke found the drawing room:

> 'fuller than ever I saw it […] owing, I suppose to the curiosity to see the Duchess of Devonshire. She looked very pretty, & happiness was never more marked in a countenance than in hers. She was properly fine […] & her diamonds are very magnificent: the girdle is a piece of finery so

uncommon it made it the more admired. […] I made no doubt but his Grace is as happy as his Duchess, but his Countenance does not mark it so strongly'. *(Hume, 1889, III, 364)*

In the final words of this entry Lady Mary glosses over the fact that, in reality, the Duke had shown no interest whatsoever in his new bride; to the point of being several hours late for her presentation (Foreman, 1998). Lady Mary Coke's pleasure at the sight of the Duchess, was soon tempered however. During the next three weeks, when protocol demanded that Georgiana visit every notable family in London, not one of her five hundred visits was made to Lady Mary Coke. Whatever Lady Mary's own sense of importance, she obviously did not come high enough on the Duchess's list of priorities. The Duchess was only seventeen, and presumably anxious to please her new family. The Cavendishes were Whigs, at the pinnacle of a huge social and political grouping. A solitary widow of fifty-three, who was a loyal servant of the King, must have been low on the Duchess's list of priorities.

Georgiana's arrival coincided with a growth in the press-reporting of public figures, and the papers noticed that her presence in their pages added to their sales (Foreman, 1998). A relationship developed between the public, anxious to know of her latest exploits, the papers who reported on her, and the Duchess herself, who enjoyed the attention. The fashion for feathers in the 1770s, enjoyed so much by the Marchioness Grey, provides an example of how the Duchess took a fashion to its extreme, and the response that she engendered. Wigs were already tall when she arrived in London, but she began to arrange hers in a tower. On the top she added a single, long, drooping white ostrich feather, attached at the side, which hung across her hair (Foreman 1998). It was soon copied by other members of the *ton*, and competition grew as to who could wear the tallest wig and find the longest feather. The feathers were extremely expensive, and therefore exclusive, adding a cachet of superiority to those who could afford them, and annoyance to those who could not. The competition to find feathers caused much simmering resentment and a lengthy discussion in the press on their relative merits. In the end the Queen put an end to the forest of fluttering feathers by banning them from court; an edict that was remarked upon in the newspapers such as the *London Evening Post*, although they suggested that this was 'owing, we suppose to her being eclipsed in length' (1775, Apr. 18). Lady Louisa Stuart wrote that they were attacked as 'seriously wrong and immoral […] the unfortunate feathers were insulted, mobbed, hissed, abused in the newspapers,

nay, even preached at in the pulpits and pointed out as marks of reprobation' (Home, 1899, 186).

The Duchess was very young when she married, with little self-reliance to guide her through marriage to a monosyllabic, taciturn, and indifferent husband. The reaction of society to her arrival gave her affirmation, and her response can be seen as an attempt to create a persona, using clothes to experiment with versions of a self. She obviously enjoyed clothes, and the playful aspect that they can bring to life, and she was after all, only seventeen. She had learnt how to please the adults around her, and ultimately a husband, but in that, she was not succeeding (Foreman, 1998). In her married life it was the women around her who seemed to be pleased with her, rather than her husband or his family. Fashion must have provided a diversion from the confusions of daily life, and because it thrives on imitation, she found that others followed her (Catalani, 2015).

However, fashion moves on, and the duchess came to epitomise the dangerous speed with which society was changing. A new mode which might seem shocking initially, gradually becomes absorbed into the norm (Davis, 1992). To retain attention, she needed to go one better each time or to try something completely new. The *Morning Post,* among others, played to the public desire for news of the Duchess' activities (Foreman, 1998). Known for its anti-Whig sentiments, it claimed that she had a:

> fashionable coat of mail; impregnable to the arrows of wit and ridicule; many other females of distinction have been made to moult, and rather than be laughed at any longer, left themselves featherless; while her Grace with all the dignity of a young Duchess is determined to keep the field, for her feathers increase in enormity in proportion to the public intimations she receives of the absurdity. Her head was a wonderful exhibition on Saturday night at the Opera. (Foreman, 1997, 38)

Headdresses and hair were a recurring motif in the anti-fashion rhetoric of the 1770s and 80s (Figure 55). During the 1770s the height of women's wigs grew, and the styles were embraced with enthusiasm and much competition. The visual record of the fashionable 'high heads' comes largely from satirical cartoons and so must be read with caution, as they had their 'own modes of rhetorical inflation and exaggeration' (Russell, 2007, 179). Much of the rhetoric in the cartoons is aimed not only at the visibility of women in society, but at their attendance at new venues of entertainment such as the Coterie, Carlisle

House, and the Pantheon. The first two were venues for gambling run indirectly by fashionable women, and the last a concert venue that became a popular place for visual display.

The disapproval from society, illustrated by the cartoonists, reflects a dismay at the growing presence of women in public places. The Opera was one venue for display, and this was expected. The excesses of the *beau monde,* however, took them beyond the accepted parade of wealth and status, and into a realm of fantasy and excess. Each new exaggeration took them further into the domain of masquerade, eventually becoming a kind of parody (Tseëlon, 2012). Ridicule was the only possible response from the bourgeois man fearful of his wife's suggestibility and susceptibility to every vagary of fashion. In fact, for most women, the activities of the *beau monde* represented fashion as a fantasy, a pleasurable sight, but ultimately unreal.
The head had long been seen as the centre of the mind. In the earlier part of the century, a man's wig had come to represent his status and probity as man; to lose your wig was to be emasculated (Russell, 2007). The male wig was both a symbol class and authority. Women were trespassing into the male realm of the intellect and displaying the opposite, an empty head. Between 1776 and 1778 a growing number of satirical prints pointing at the ridiculousness of this fashion suggests a growing anxiety over this transgression (Russell 2007).

Such excess was not only symptomatic of the dangerous and growing commercialising of culture, but also reflected the national crisis of identity brought about by the American war of independence.

> I fear […] that high female headdresses, frequent adulteries, divorces, forgeries, perjuries, suicides, murders, ETC. which have followed so closely after one another in this country, civil war in one, which not so long since we deemed our eldest daughter, forebode some sad calamity. (London Chronicle, 1777, Jul. 29-31)

Female fashion leads the list of all that forebodes ill in society as part of a growing collective anxiety over national identity. The year before, the trial of the Duchess of Kingston for bigamy in Westminster Hall had attracted huge publicity, and distracted attention from the far more important threat posed by the rebels in America. Fashion was

displaying the hiatus of change rocking society and gave an easy target for those who needed someone to blame. The country's problems were retribution for the dissipation of the upper classes, especially the elite women who subscribed to the vagaries of fashion. The *beau monde* at the opera must have represented an invasion of that chaos into the steady world of the elite group. While they felt secure in their status, such nonconformity and excess of dress could be accepted and glossed over (Shepherd, *et al.*, 2013). It could even be laughed at, as on one occasion at the Opera in 1775, when the celebrated singer Signor Lovattini sang dressed in a large headdress in imitation of the Duchess of Devonshire. Georgiana entered her box during his performance, and the audience burst out laughing. Rather than taking offence the Duchess gave him a bow, much to the delight of the crowd (*Morning Post*, 1775, May 24).

As attitudes hardened towards the excesses of the *beau monde*, concerns began to be expressed from within the group as to the propriety of the new styles. This growing instability meant that the group could no longer tolerate such deviance. The Duchess had moved on however, and the stiff unbending form of the high head changed, taking on a light curled fullness that contrasted strongly with the sculptured form of the previous style (Fig. 11). This new style had a more relaxed and louche quality as remarked on by Lady Louisa Stuart when, in 1784, her mother made her leave a gathering before she was ready:

> I wished to stay longer and see the humours of it. Some of us are glorious figures. Such wings and tails to our caps! Such shelves of plaited gauze under the chin, it puts one in mind of a Carçau, a Chinese moveable pillory. The Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Duncan had their hair hanging down to their waists, curled in ringlets at the end. They were dressed in redingotes-robes turques, that is to say, with three capes and capells. But a Figaro is the right thing, and that I have not seen. I don't think I ever saw new fashions set in with such a vengeance, except in the year when feathers and high heads first began, and yours scandalised Lady Betty [Mackenzie] (Clark, 1896, II, 294).

Dishevelled, or undressed hair could be read as a sign of loose morals (Russell, 2007). Lady Louisa, sensitive to any signs of transgression, was disconcerted by this and their

lack of attention to the proper form of gown for the occasion. Lady Mary Coke also remarked on hair styles in 1784:

> Several very fashionable dresses ten times more ridiculous than last year. Miss Pulteney had her hair curl'd over her face and blous'd out at the sides the caps and hats have trains to them behind that reach down to the bottom of their backs as does the hair (NRAS859, V494).

In 1786 she also noticed an interesting development to the gauze under the chin:

> I observed a new fashion which is too ridiculous to pass unnoticed Lady Caroline Barry who by her connections is much among the bon ton had her hankerchief (sic) as usual so high that it made a case for her chin, but instead of being fasten'd with a pin, from the highest part there hung a gold key. Twou'd (sic) be dangerous for some of our fine ladies to have their breasts unlock'd, but whether the key is to denote a greater security or an invitation to the opening some of them who have set the fashion must tell us (NRAS859, V496).

In 1780 she had remarked on the Prince of Wales as wearing a similar style of neckerchief: 'The Prince of Wales had so large a knot under his chin that his face rested upon it' (NRAS859, V490). She may have felt the size of the neckerchief was ridiculous, but it was the male style of the moment, and the Prince was already gaining a reputation for being a close follower of fashion. Her remark on Lady Barry's neckerchief was part of a general unease at the adoption of male styles by women. There had been wigs, as discussed above, as well as the adoption of a type of military uniform. This was in response to the entry of the French on the side of the American rebels; led once again by the Duchess of Devonshire, who adopted a type of military dress, and joined her husband encamped with his regiment in anticipation of invasion from France. Once again, women were trespassing into the male preserve of uniforms. They distracted the soldiers from their preparations for war by staying at the camps and socialising with the officers. Worst of all, by adopting a form of uniform, they devalued the serious intent of such hierarchical markers of status, by taking them into the fantasy realm of fashion.

4.3.4 Chapter summary

The sense of the other watching, being under the gaze of those around you are important factors in a woman's sense of self and can affect her self-esteem and how she presents herself to the world. The gaze has been categorised as the 'Male Gaze ' (Mulvey, 1975), but can also manifest itself as a female gaze. From the point of view of the women in the audience at the Opera House it was the female gaze that held the most power and would have led to a constant sense of the other.

This sense of the other watching would have led many of the women to constant self-monitoring, checking that their presentation and deportment matched a perceived standard. They would also have compared themselves with others, both those on a similar level and those above, as the fear of embarrassment can be a powerful force towards conformity.

Elite society operated by a set of rules that were passed on by word of mouth. Correct behaviour, for both men and women, would have been learnt from parents during childhood, and internalised to become part of a person's sense of self. In an arena such as the Opera House gossip provided an efficient way of ensuring that everyone remembered the rules. Gossip could reward those who conformed to expectations, such as achieving marriage and children, with approbation, whilst also transmitting censure to those who transgressed. For some the fear of embarrassing themselves and their family would be enough to keep them within expectations.

This does not mean that there was no facility for self-expression. Fashion, and the pleasure of dressing well could provide a boost to self-esteem, through the knowledge that one looked good and the recognition of others. It could also provide a route to escape through extravagant display, providing watchers with an element of fantasy, and the wearer with a moment of self-expression. Such spectacle, especially as demonstrated by the *beau monde,* could bring censure from the wider elite group, especially when outside forces made the presentation of a united front a necessity.

The sense of the other was a powerful force at the Opera House, as everyone was on display, both within the elite group and to the variety of watchers in the pit.

Chapter 5: Creating a persona for the opera

The previous chapter considered dress and fashion, and how, for the elite women in the audience at the opera, sartorial expectations operated on several different levels. It discussed how conforming to these requirements was important for the cohesion of the group, and how this in turn affected each individual and their attitude to their dress and self-presentation. It also examined some of the public discourses around women and their dress, which had an impact on how they conducted themselves. This chapter will develop the discussion, applying it directly to the four women examined in the case studies in Chapter Three.

Goffman defines the performance displayed by an individual at any one time as a front (1990, 32), and this defines the situation for the audience of that performance. Each person also has a 'personal front', 'items of expressive equipment' most intimately identified with that person, that follow them wherever they go (1990, 34). This personal front can be divided into 'manner', actions that warn of the interaction role the performer expects to play, and 'appearance', visual signals of the performer's social status (1990, 34).

Section one of this chapter discusses the four women in terms of the front that they put on for the Opera House, the manner in which this was displayed, and level of intentionality present in its construction. This front was constructed to enable each woman to face the presence of the other in the audience at the opera. Each woman needed to display cultural competency to confirm membership of their social group, whilst also satisfying their own desire for individuality, and for each woman there were different others (Woodward, 2005). These were groups or individuals whose opinion or attitude could impinge on them as individuals and affect how they presented themselves.

The second section turns to the appearance of each woman individually and how their dress was constructed to display their cultural competency to the others in the audience, as each woman experienced the other at the opera in a different way. For Lady Mary Coke, how she dressed at the opera and her view of those around her provided validation for her sense of self as an aristocratic woman. Lady Rockingham and Mrs Abington sought psychological invisibility in different ways, and for different reasons. Giovanna Baccelli

was the mistress of a Duke and would have dressed appropriately, although there are suggestions that she also enjoyed the display that this enabled. The discussion extrapolates an attitude and expectation for each of the women in their approach to dressing for the opera, by returning to principles and examples of their mode of dress discussed in previous chapters.
The final section brings together the themes in a wider discussion related to the Opera House and the expectations that place engendered in its audience.

5.1 Putting on a front

For Goffman (1990), each individual constructs the part that they play in any situation, relative to the parts being played by others around them; yet those others are also an audience. This front defines the situation for the surrounding audience, it is the expressive equipment 'intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual' that forms their performance at that time (1990, 32). The front that is displayed on a particular occasion is not false, but one that conceals irrelevant information (Tseëlon 1995). Considered in these terms, each of the four women described in the case studies, in some way created an intentional persona; there was nothing unwitting in their performance or front. This intentionality, can be described as sitting on a scale dependent on the level of self-monitoring that they performed for their appearance at the Opera House (Peluchette, *et al.*, 2006). Lady Rockingham and Mrs Abington can be seen as taking the greatest care, followed by Giovanna Baccelli and lastly Lady Mary Coke.

Lady Mary Coke appears as the least constructed in terms of the Opera House, because her persona was constant. There was nothing different about the Opera House, because she took immense care, at all times, to appear as a woman of status and as a widow of some standing in society. Her own view of where she stood relative to others may have been somewhat inflated, but there is no doubt that she came from a family grounded in the highest echelons of society, and that position meant a lot to her. Her appearance in public at any time would have reflected this status and been appropriate to each particular occasion. The care that she took when dressing for court suggests that this was the one time when she felt personally under scrutiny. One of the few occasions in her life where others might judge her from a higher level than herself, and it was necessary to exercise extra care to show herself as worthy of their attention. Her personal front might

be no different than at other times, however, on those occasions she was more self-aware than was normal.

Lady Mary Coke's sense of self was rooted in her position in society, and her writings suggest a self-assured and aloof persona. Her box at the opera was an important part of her whole world and provided her with validation relative to the others around her, but this stability depended on familiarity. When the King attended the Opera she had to move to a different box and this was disconcerting. She had no way of telling who she would be sharing with, or the view that she would have of the auditorium. Her companions might not be agreeable company, or even known to her, and the people that she could see from the front row of the box might be unfamiliar, or in a different order. Her stability and self-assurance were not as fixed as they might seem, they depended on repetition and constancy.

There is little evidence of how Giovanna Baccelli conducted herself when in the audience at the Opera House, however it is possible to infer from the trajectory of her biography that she was a pleasant and gracious companion to the men that she lived with. The Duke of Dorset, whose patronage formed the first and probably the greatest relationship of her life, in terms of status, would have expected his mistress to be appropriately dressed. The fact that Baccelli took part in the display of mistresses at Longchamps in 1787 (discussed in Chapter Three), suggests that this appropriateness contained an element of display that went beyond simply looking right. She was the mistress of a Duke, and this man collected women. Baccelli was more than a companion, she was a visible manifestation of his charisma and potency as a man, as well as his status as a Duke. Her appearance on his arm, may have been very carefully constructed as much by him, as by her.

Baccelli was also a performer, moving among her audience. However, unlike Abington, audience and performance were contained within the same place. She was friendly and gracious, but also compliant and companionable to her lovers. Where her position as mistress demanded display she would oblige, as wearing a costume and playing a part was her professional career. Unlike Mrs Abington however, she did not seek to pursue any status beyond that of professional dancer on the stage and companion in the home. There is no sense that Baccelli had a persona beyond these two roles, and her appearance in the audience was that of well-loved performer, sponsored and dressed by her patron. As long

as she did not deviate from those roles the other that may have impinged on her sense of self, was relatively benign.

Lady Rockingham and Mrs Abington, both had more complicated reasons for the front that they constructed, which puts the self-monitoring of their display higher up the scale. They both had more to lose if their appearance and demeanour excited notice and comment.
For Lady Rockingham, an evening at the opera represented the pleasure and relaxation of music and being with friends. The position of her box above the orchestra allowed her to enjoy the proximity of the musicians (Fig. 1). This did not mean, however, that she could be less vigilant over the front that she displayed; her political activities needed to be veiled. Other members of the audience must have known of her involvement in the political life of her husband, and to a greater or lesser extent approved of her actions, but that was not what was on display. Her front was that of a wife and hostess, enjoying the company of family and friends in her box. She must have observed the comings and goings in the other boxes, and she was in a position to do so, sitting as she did at the side on the lowest tier. Comments in her letters suggest that these observations would have been reported to her husband, but that was not the main purpose of the evening. Those others in the audience would also have known that she was a musician of some talent, and her presence in that capacity may have gained approval and mitigated her other shortcomings. There would also have been occasions when she knew that rumours were circulating over possible pregnancies, making appearing in such a public arena very difficult. Facing the group, putting on a front of normality, however difficult that might have been, was necessary to remove the speculation; she needed to be visible, but not specifically noticed. In the manner of Lady Mary Coke, there is no indication that she dressed for the opera other than in the required evening dress of gown, and headdress. Evening dress would have been part of her repertoire as an aristocratic wife.

Lady Rockingham's writings suggest that in her box at the opera she would have been a friendly, but also anxious, hostess. Like Lady Mary Coke she was aware of the minutiae of social interactions, but had not necessarily the self-confidence to carry such occasions without instruction. Unlike Lady Mary Coke, the self that she presented was not a whole self, but a facet. Her front for an evening of enjoying the music and dance, displayed the part of her sense of self that was appropriate to the occasion, her front as political

assistant and ally was not visible. For Lady Rockingham, the groups of others present that might have impinged on her consciousness were different. The expectation that she would produce children was an ever-present concern, so other wives who had children, and other women with a declared antipathy towards wives who seemingly interfered in their husband's affairs would both have been present in the auditorium. Society had particular expectations of a woman in her elevated position as a Marchioness, and she needed to be seen as participating, deflecting attention from her other activities.

Mrs Abington appears highest on the scale of intentionality, as her motivations were more complex than the other three. When she appeared in public off the stage, she was seen as a woman of fashion, someone who could be looked on to provide an exemplar of elegant dress. If she wished to observe the aristocrats around her, to provide verisimilitude and nuance to her performances on the stage, then she could not stand out; as far as was possible, they needed to be unaware of her presence. She was also however, their mentor, as evidenced by the quote from a German visitor that she was consulted on dress in the manner of a physician. She had to appear elegant and refined in her manners, restrained and suitably compliant to her betters, displaying carefully constructed simplicity. The height of Abington's career was before the restructuring of the auditorium displayed by the 1783 chart. At the point when she was gathering information to enhance her stage performances, she would have been mixing with other aristocrats in the pit, sitting beside them, rather than detached and viewing them from the top tier of the boxes. In that situation, her visible presence would have been about elegant restraint, not noticeable display. She knew that she would be noticed, but she did not wish to stand out.

It may have become more accepted to see a professional woman in a position such as that occupied by Mrs Abington, but her early apprenticeship to a milliner and the easy conflation of milliner's girls with prostitution still provided an easy put-down for commentators who wished to criticise the actress. An example of the attitude adopted towards her appears in the *Life of Garrick* by Thomas Davis (1780), when he somewhat ponderously emphasises the 'decency of her behaviour' and her 'good sense, elegance of manner, and propriety of conduct' (1780, II, 173). This propriety and restraint as a public woman allowed her supporters to ignore the impediment of her youth, but the front needed careful maintenance if it was to survive. The loss of this positive perception of her

conduct, would have led to exclusion from the elite circles that bestowed her status and public success.

Mrs Abington's path to achieving invisibility in that audience was far more complex than that of the previous women. She was breaking into a group situated in a class above hers, both from the point of view of her origins and also her chosen profession. She may have been admired and consulted by many of the women in that audience, but that was in the privacy of their homes, not a public arena. It would be interesting to know how many of the women would have acknowledged her in such a public place, and if so, in what manner. The chart of the boxes shows her solely in the company of men, suggesting that when she moved among them in the pit, it was only men who would address her directly; that in public, elite women could not be seen to associate with one of her profession. Unlike Baccelli, she did not have the explicit protection of an aristocratic lover as a shield to comment. Her relationship with her protector, Lord Shelburne, was discreet and out of the public eye. Her approach to visiting the opera must have been strategic in its construction. As has been previously quoted she was lively and bewitching in company, and a generous hostess when entertaining for Lord Shelburne (Highfill, et al. 1973, 18). The quote below about her 'elegant simplicity' (Anon, 1888, 86) when in public, suggests greater restraint when off the stage, as the other was all around her. All the people in the opera auditorium, the men who looked at the presentation of her body, the women who admired her dress, were also her potential audience at the theatre. The self that she needed to present was not the actress of the stage, but the respectable, demure, restrained public woman, demonstrating her propriety through her conduct. Her ability to maintain her status as a woman of fashion among the upper classes depended on the restrained front that she presented in public. She needed to be seen and admired but also accepted, in order that she could observe those around her, their modes of address, manners and deportment.

5.2 Dressing the self for the 'other'

Dressing for the opera involved choosing an assemblage of clothing that met the expectations of the occasion as well as the wearer (Tseëlon, 1995). The clothes worn would mediate the relationship between the individual and the outside world, displaying not only personal choice, but also cultural competency (Woodward 2005). The elite

women discussed here did not have the range of choice in a wardrobe available to many modern women when choosing dress for an evening out, but they could expect that their dress would be read by the others present as representative of their social self. As has been discussed previously, perceived expectations of the opinion of the others present would have impinged on the choices made for dress. At the opera, to feel sufficiently at ease in one's appearance as to achieve psychological invisibility may not have been possible. To be so comfortable as to forget your clothes, demands not only the presence of others who bestow approval and allow a feeling of being loved, but also self-confidence in the face of the different others present in the auditorium (Tseëlon, 1995).
The women in the boxes at the opera were part of the ruling classes, and their display of power had become an integral part of the experience of the occasion. For the performers on the stage, the progress of the evening was in many ways shaped by the audience, creating an 'event-orientated aesthetic' (Hall-Witt, 2007, 45). The society hostesses at the top of this hierarchy therefore had a vested interest in ensuring that the greater group conformed to this expectation. For them, the important others were the members of the bourgeoisie seated in the pit and the galleries. It was necessary for the maintenance of their exclusivity, that the elite group presented a united front. There were others within the group who, from their point of view, required monitoring and another set of others beyond them in the pit. Thus, for each of the four women studied here, sartorial judgments could be expected from friends and allies, in anticipation of adherence to the norms of the group.

The *Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book* (Anon, 1780) told its readers that full evening dress was the expected mode of attire for the pit and the boxes at the Opera House. There were two galleries above the boxes for those who did not conform to these rules. Full evening dress for women gave some leeway for personal choice in decoration, but the silhouette was uniformly that of bodice and gown over side paniers (Fig. 6). For Lady Mary Coke and Lady Rockingham, evening dress was a fact of life, worn regularly. The portraits that survive of each of the four women give clues as to their mode of dress, but they highlight an aspect of their persona that they wished to leave for posterity. For the two performers the records that remain show them in costume for performance, not every-day or evening dress. Dress for a portrait however, whether or not you were a performer, was in many ways a costume, a conscious dressing up; the clues as to a normal evening dress must be

found elsewhere. In the case of the two aristocrats this comes from their own writings, for the two performers from the responses of others to their appearance.

The full-length portrait of Lady Mary Coke by Allan Ramsay (Fig. 24), discussed in chapter three, shows a woman dressed in the style of a previous age, who looks confidently out at the viewer. The pose, her style of dress and the musical instrument, all creating an aura of nostalgia, that can be interpreted as a longing for continuity. Her consternation on one occasion, at the possibility that contemporaries thought that she went to court in an old dress, and the care with which she prepared a robe for the Queen's birthday in 1767, suggest that in real life this need for continuity manifested itself as a fanatical adherence to the rules. There is nothing in her writings to indicate that she behaved differently at the opera, in terms of her dress, even when the King was to be present. Very often she progressed to the opera after dinner with a relation or friend, with no indication that a change of dress was required or sought. The self that Lady Mary Coke presented at the opera was, as always, that of a well-dressed aristocratic woman.

Lady Mary's sense of her own correctness may have meant that she had no need of psychological invisibility, as she was constantly comparing herself, in a favourable way, to those around her. Her dress was a vital part of her sense of identity, but its value was as a representative display of her status, not in the experience of wearing it; the pleasure that clothes gave her was largely visual. The modes of dress worn by Lady Mary Coke, to court or in the evening, for example, were approached by her almost as if they were uniforms. Her writings do not convey a consciousness of the phenomenological effect of wearing the garments. Her descriptions focus on the correctness of her display, as their visual presentation, in a masculine sense, was what was important to her (Woodward, 2005). Her vigilance also mitigated against the possibility of embarrassment, an experience to be avoided at all costs (Goffman, 1990). Her experience at the dinner party at Holland Park demonstrates an occasion where she suffered a high level of embarrassment. From Lady Mary's point of view, she had been misinformed as to the correct mode of dress for the occasion, her self-presentation was wrong and thus embarrassing. This may not have been the case for the young people present, but that was not the point, as Lady Mary felt herself to be in the wrong. She overcame this by talking loudly and seeing herself as superior to the others present, allowing herself to blame her host for the misunderstood message. Where others might have made a joke of their embarrassment and drawn the

other guests to their side, Lady Mary's highly developed sense of right and wrong made this social nuance impossible.

The writings of Lady Rockingham suggest that she was very aware of how clothes and the rituals around them could affect her state of mind. There was an ambivalence in her relationship with her dress, on the one hand the necessity to conform, on the other a desire for less fuss. On occasion, her impatience with the complications and length of time necessary to prepare, made her less inclined to socialise: 'I don't go to Ly: Darlington to night because I did not chuse *[sic]* to dress to be out this evening' (SCA, WWM/R168/105/1). She was a regular visitor to the opera, as is demonstrated by her husband's comments in his letters to her. Particularly when he anticipates her return from Bath, but teases her, that she will prefer going to the opera to seeing him. Unfortunately for this research, her remarks on visits to the opera contain no comment on her clothes, it is through an examination of her approach to other modes of dress that extrapolation can be made on how she managed that occasion.

In 1767, her expectation of important news from Edmund Burke, when he called late in the evening after she had retired, led her to put on her political dress (SCA, WWM/R168/227). This intimates that the style of this gown had a direct effect on her state of mind. She makes a deliberate statement in a letter to her husband, a small comment that tells him that she made an effort for Mr Burke, in spite of his calling so late in the evening. This would seem to be an example of what is referred to as enclothed cognition, when the physical sensation of wearing a particular garment combined with the understanding of its symbolic meaning, affects the wearer's state of mind (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). It occurs when the resonances felt by the wearer have been personally constructed (Fleetwood-Smith, *et al.*, 2019). Lady Rockingham's court dress would have had socially constructed resonances connected with the expectations of being presented to royalty, embodied cognition; her political dress gathered a significance constructed entirely by her. When she wore either garment her psychological processes would have been activated by the conceptual meanings embedded in the garment (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). In the case of her court dress these concepts were extrinsic, whereas for her political dress they were intrinsic. She knew that her political dress would enable her to present the correct front to Mr Burke; she would be serious and competent, not sociable and possibly frivolous. It was a garment that she had endowed with personal

resonances, such that when she wore it, the symbolism of its purpose empowered her to be a politician (Fleetwood-Smith, *et al*., 2019). It was the experience of wearing the dress that 'triggered the associated abstract concepts and their symbolic meanings' (Adam and Galinsky, 2012, 919). For some, items of dress endowed with enclothed cognition become attachment garments that cannot be replaced. They are cared for, handled carefully and mended in order to postpone replacement, as even an exact replica would not contain the same resonances (Fleetwood-Smith, *et al*., 2019).

It is interesting to consider how this need for political garments came about. It is possible that the idea came from a comment by her husband or Sir George Savile. It is more likely that she sensed that when wearing something plainer, more sober, possibly even more masculine, she was taken seriously and listened to. The chalk drawing of Lady Rockingham working on her embroidery, by Hugh Douglas-Hamilton (Fig. 28), shows her in a more relaxed and comfortable gown, she wears a silk over-gown embroidered with flowers and a frilled and decorated lace cap. This suggests that in more relaxed and social occasions she was quite conventional in her dress; that the political dress was unusual. For her, dress was a signifier, she only wrote about it at moments of great importance in her working relationship with her husband; political negotiations, or state occasions at court. The opera may have required the construction of a front, but it was a social one, and the fact that dress was not mentioned relegates it to a more relaxed social occasion. Garments for occasions such as this were endowed with different resonances designated for more public events; occasions where she was the hostess or moments of leisure such as visits to the opera. Political occasions, such as with Sir George Savile in Yorkshire, needed something more serious. Such a dress would have separated her from the 'feather'd tribe of fine Ladies' (SCA, WWM/R168/202-1-2), that often surrounded her husband. It must also be remembered that when undertaking political negotiations in this way, the other that was present would have been male. A plain dress would not only have helped her own frame of mind, but also made her less conspicuous to those around her. She was accompanied by a man, Savile, and the men could have addressed themselves to him if they wished. The tone of her letters, however, suggest that it was she who set the tone for each meeting, so she needed to be taken seriously. Her description of the negotiations undertaken with Sir George Savile on behalf of her husband, demonstrated the patience and understanding needed to sooth ruffled egos and keep different factions at ease with each other. This would have required a single-minded concentration on the

matter in hand, she wished to be unaware of her dress; psychologically invisible. This invisibility was achieved by a conscious choice of a dress that empowered her to act, not only in the desired manner, but also to be taken seriously.

Her description of the preparation of her court dress (fig. 4), suggests a desire to be of credit to him, but also a slight impatience with the rigmarole involved. There is a note of relief in her tone when she tells her husband that a decision has been made on its style (SCA, WWM/R168/28). She is anxious to reassure him that she intends it as a compliment to him, in spite of his sister's dislike of the fabric that he has chosen. For Lady Rockingham, sensitive to the symbolic resonances endowed in each garment, a court dress was socially constructed to a heightened degree. The norms of formal dress are constructed to emphasise difference and to obtain respect by signalling professionalism (Slepian *et al.*, 2015). Court dress signalled the elevation of the wearer, but was also endowed with social expectations. This was an occasion where many of the expectations were known only to the cognoscenti. The court might publish rules for dress, and some modes of behaviour might be transmitted verbally, but for an elite group such as this understanding was gained innately from childhood. For Lady Rockingham, constantly anxious not to let her husband down through a slip up in her behaviour, the dress must have presented many possibilities for getting it wrong. Hence her relief at finding a good maker.

This sense of a relationship between Lady Rockingham's clothes and her state of mind offers another explanation for her reluctance to attend a masquerade without her husband. Masquerades held dubious connections because of their association with disguise and deceit (Castle, 1986). If Lady Rockingham had chosen to dress herself as another character very different from her own, there would have been the possibility of acting out that character and actually embodying the actions suggested by the clothes. Such actions, performed when unaccompanied by her husband, had the potential to be disastrous. There is a sense in her letters of a hyper-consciousness of what is expected of a woman in her position. This is where Goffman's (1990) concept of a front differs from a mask as described by Tseëlon (2012). The mask hides everything from the viewer, literally in the case of a masquerade; the actor can be whatever they wish. A front implies the existence of other facets, on this occasion relegated to backstage, but nonetheless present. The audience could at any time view these other fronts should this become

appropriate, or the actor slip up in any way. This was also the case at the masquerade, as there was often a moment of revealing, especially if the occasion were a private one. However, the mask offered the opportunity to remain hidden, there was the possibility of hiding one's real identity entirely, the mask could be complete. For Lady Rockingham this possibility was unsettling. She was only persuaded to go the masquerade by the reaction of a woman whose opinion she respected, and after the reassurance that her friends would not let her out of their sight. It would be interesting to know what costume she chose and how far that strayed from her sense of her proper self.

The same care undertaken when dressing for the opera would require a gown that allowed Lady Rockingham to relax, and possibly demonstrate a softer less serious side to her character when out with friends. There would have been no desire, however, to stand out in any way, as she was constantly self-monitoring for any transgression of a code that might reflect on the probity of her husband. In the atmosphere of the opera, among other women of her own class, she needed to be visible and conforming, an accomplished hostess, a musical wife enjoying the performance and the spectacle of the occasion.

The two performers, Mrs Abington and Giovanna Baccelli, have left no visual record of themselves in any dress other than theatrical costume. However, there are portraits of female performers in social dress. For example, Gainsborough's portraits of the Linley Sisters in 1773 shown in figure 56. The sitters are shown in fashionable dress of the time, but simple in style, not over decorated or flamboyant. In the 1770s at the height of her career Mrs Abington's dress was described as having 'boasted that elegant simplicity, for which she has long been considered as the Priestess of Fashion' (Anon, 1888, 86). The sitters in Gainsborough's portraits above are dressed simply, but theirs is not the sophisticated look suggested by the comment on Mrs Abington, who obviously took great care in public to show herself as elegant and restrained. The following quote from 1776, suggests that her look was very carefully constructed:

> Mrs Abington having long been considered in the beau-monde as a leading example in dress, her gown on Saturday night was of a white lutestring, made close to her shape, sleeves to the wrist, and a long train; her hair was dressed very far back on the sides with curls below, and not high above, nor did she wear one of those tremendous hair frizzed peaks, which of late have disguised the ladies, - so probably they will no

more appear as unicorns with a horn issuing from their foreheads.
(Anon, 1888, 86)

The correspondent notes that her dress hugged her figure, a suggestion of the body under the clothes, but is also careful to note that her sleeves were to the wrist in a fashionable style. There is a portrait by Reynolds of Garrick and his wife Eva Maria painted in 1773 that depicts Mrs Garrick in what could be a similar dress (Fig 57). Although the shawl that she is wearing gives the outfit more frills than is suggested by the description above, the long sleeves and white lutestring silk, help to give an impression of how Mrs Abington might have looked.
The most emphasis is given to her hair, close to the head with curls that hung down. This is the style illustrated the next year in the print entitled *Restoration dresses* (Fig 11) She was not wearing the despised high head, and the commentator hopes that as her influence on fashion was so strong, the style might soon die out in imitation of Mrs Abington, suggesting that she was indeed a leader of fashion. It is tempting to read significance into the white colour of the lutestring, a soft silk worn in summer, however, it was not until the next decade that the *chemise a la reine* ushered in the fashion for light pale muslins, or until 1840 that Queen Victoria set the fashion for white wedding dresses. She cannot have been aiming to blend in completely, as the white would also have shimmered in the low light levels of the candlelight. She could be pointed out, 'there is Mrs Abington', and presumably admired for her elegant dress. For Mrs Abington, the plain white can be read as a way of maintaining the simple elegance that she wished to present.

The anonymous biographer of Mrs Abington, in his description of her growing career as an actress in the mid 1770s, was anxious to emphasise that the actress was equally admired for her style of dress; it was a 'theme of admiration' (1888, 86). He goes on to reproduce a series of passages from print media of the time, including the quote above. The words 'elegant' and 'simplicity' recur in descriptions of the actress, suggesting that she stood out among fashionable women for her sense of style rather than as a wearer of high fashion. The commentator above refers to her as a member of the *beau monde* whose excesses caused such anxieties for cultural commentators. She was not a part of their aggressive and competitive display, on the contrary, she could be held up by such critics as an exemplar of how female fashion should look, i.e. restrained and elegant. At the opera she would have been present and visible, but at the same time she blended with the aristocrats with whom she was mixing.

There is the least information available for the last of the four women studied, Giovanna Baccelli. As a talented principle dancer at the Opera House she enjoyed much popularity. There are three reports however, that suggest that she enjoyed the display afforded to her by being the mistress of a Duke. Early in their relationship she appeared at a local ball in his home town of Sevenoaks wearing the Sackville family jewels, causing some offence at the time (Vita Sackville-West, 1923, 182). It is difficult to imagine that she would have done this without encouragement from the Duke, or at the very least, his permission. Secondly, there is a newspaper report, quoted previously, describing her appearing in the audience at the Opera House; a slightly startled and amused description of her in a balloon hat, brought back from Paris in 1784. The Mongolfier brothers had astounded Paris by flying a balloon 6,000 feet into the air, prompting fashions that celebrated their achievement. The same feat would not be demonstrated in London until the autumn of that year. The tone adopted by the commentator suggests a sense of fun in her method of announcing her return to London and a desire that she should be noticed, which she certainly achieved.
Not surprisingly, Lady Mary Coke had a very different view of the hats:

> […] these Air balloon hats which have wafted themselves over from France are a real nuisance in a public Place, yet you will see numbers at the Opera and at Assemblies. At the play House they are very wisely excluded, the ladies who have gone there in them have been civily [sic] desired to go back as they were determined not to admit them. (NRAS V493)

There are various cartoons of outrageous styles based on balloons, but the most plausible representation of the hat described here is shown in a portrait by an unknown artist of the actress Letitia Sage (Fig. 58), the first woman in England to ascend in a balloon. The hat is a little difficult to see in the picture, as it is black against a dark background, but its size would certainly have caused the displeasure expressed by Lady Mary Coke. The newspaper description of Baccelli implies a hat that was even bigger, with its novelty drawing attention to the wearer. It is also likely that the hat was more exuberant in its colour and decoration, as this was a celebratory moment.

Later, when the Duke of Dorset was appointed English ambassador to the court of France, Baccelli took part in the annual parade to Longchamps outside Paris. This was an occasion where aristocrats displayed their mistresses, expensively dressed, riding in smart

coaches, pulled by fine horses. It was a moment of ostentatious display, French mistresses were not paramours, secret and illicit, but occupied a particular place in French society. The Duke had no wife, and in his position as ambassador he was using Baccelli as his hostess in Paris. He must have felt that displaying her among the mistresses of the highest echelons of French society reflected well on him.

Each of these reports suggests that Baccelli, at the very least, concurred in the need for display occasioned by her role as mistress to a Duke. It is also possible that the Duke, who was considered by many to be a rake, enjoyed displaying his mistress in this way. His status cushioned her from any adverse comment that might have been made about her behaviour. Like Mrs Abbington she was an accomplished professional performer, but it would seem that, unlike the actress, she did not feel the need to display restraint in her public appearances off the stage. As the lover of a Duke she would have been provided with clothes of the highest quality, providing a sensual element to the pleasure of dressing up for her public (Woodward, 2005). The comments on her character, that of a charming and engaging companion, suggest that dressing up for display, necessary for the Duke, was for her, a pleasure.

5.3 A society in microcosm

The other must have been a very powerful force in the auditorium of the Opera House and everyone was, is some way, on display. To enter the pit or sit in a box the rules demanded evening dress, so even the most careless of their dress had to conform. The moments of political and national crisis during the period being studied brought the ruling classes under greater scrutiny. At the Opera House they gathered *en masse,* and after the refurbishments in 1782, that gathering became a display. It is important to understand the different individual experiences of this occasion to gain a better understanding of the group as a whole. The fact that the 1783 chart labels each side, for the King or the Prince, politicises the space and adds significance to the groupings. There was also a wider cross-section of society in the pit than is suggested by the list who were observing from the boxes (Burden, 2013). The subscribers may have presented visually as a single social class, but within that there were tensions and pressures. The individual biographies of the women who participated enables a better understanding of those pressures. Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical model, the sense that everyone creates a front appropriate to a

situation that allows them to perform in an appropriate manner, allows for this sense of the individuals within the group. The phrase to 'see and be seen' has relevance here. Lord Rockingham may not have attended the opera himself, and teased his wife for her devotion to it, but her presence confirmed him as one of the group. At moments when the tide of opinion wavered for and against the Rockingham Whig faction her presence at the opera, in a box on the most prestigious bottom tier, was a moment of validation. In that sense, whether she used the opportunity for political conversation, or not, was irrelevant.

Lady Mary Coke cannot have been the only watcher, a woman who classified the performance of those around her in comparison to her own. For her, self-esteem came from judging herself superior to the others, unless they were royal, in which case her gaze was aspirational. Once a routine had been established whereby the women remained static at the front of their box and it was the men who moved around, the gaze of the other had a fixed subject. Where Mrs Abington, shimmering slightly in her white dress, might have moved freely and respectfully among the elite, she was now confined to an upper tier, a watcher from above. The gaze refocussed, and taking Lady Mary Coke as an example, centred on the lowest and middle tiers where the leaders of the elite began to gather.

Any group, however cohesive, is made up of individuals, and for each woman in that situation who felt themselves to be under the gaze, their other would have been different. The gaze might be judgemental, but it is not always negative. There is a real pleasure to be gained from the sense of having got it right, that one's self-presentation fits and is appreciated (Woodward, 2007). It is a validation of the self and a huge boost to self-esteem to not only be a member of a group, but also a representative one. This was, after all, a social occasion created ostensibly for the enjoyment of an art, the pleasure of listening to music, enjoying the emotion of the singing and watching the dance. For Lady Rockingham, as a musician herself, this was a moment of relaxation and pleasure. She gathered friends and relations around, at least familiar and hopefully also convivial. Properly dressed, she could put her anxieties aside and ignore the other. She might even achieve psychological invisibility, where the sense of self is so strong that the other ceases to exist.

The route to such validation comes through observation, seeing and understanding what is expected, by comparing oneself with others (Festinger, 1954). For those brought up as part of the elite, such comparisons should have been unnecessary, as the rules would have been internalised from a young age. Lady Rockingham entered this elite level from a slightly lower strata, and her anxieties stemmed from a half-knowledge of the rules, an understanding of the penalties for disobedience, that bred a worry of slipping up and the embarrassment that would cause those around her. The individual significance that she gave to her clothes may have been a shield to this, each garment endowed with a sense of the correct deportment for a separate occasion, that enabled her to approach society with some confidence.

For some the opportunity for display presented a moment of pleasure. Giovanna Baccelli may not have been a member of the *beau monde*, but her enjoyment of dressing up for an appearance in society echoes their display. Where she differs from them seems to have been in the lack of competitiveness to her enjoyment of her clothes. She is the only one of the four who gives the impression of having experienced the sheer pleasure of dressing up in expensive garments made of sensual fabrics. There is a sense of aggression in the assertive nature of the display by the *beau monde* that is entirely absent from Baccelli. Her liaison with the Duke offered her the opportunity to indulge in her dress, possibly going even further than he might have expected. Ultimately, for a man focussed on his own status as a man of the world, this was to the duke's advantage. He was in possession of a popular and talented woman who displayed his wealth and potency to the world.

Women were adjuncts to their men and their role, according to the conduct books, was to provide an attractive and civilising force. The female subscribers, however, were not aspirational members of the bourgeoisie, but members of the ruling class, who at various moments during this period experienced a need to prove that right. If the expectation from those below was for women who knew their place, whatever autonomy a female aristocrat might have enjoyed needed to be kept to Goffman's (1990) backstage region when on display in public.

A woman on her own, such as Lady Mary Coke or Mrs Abington, did not have a partner to bestow validation on their position. Lady Mary Coke's sense of her inalienable right to a high social position came from her family, but for Mrs Abington there was no such buffer.

For her, every appearance that she made was dominated by the other. The bourgeoisie who followed her stage career as well as the social class that she aspired to, were all finely tuned to any slight misdemeanour that betrayed her origins. The descriptors of restraint and propriety that often accompany comment on her activities, suggest the constancy of the gaze upon her. The restraint that she displayed in her dress and deportment not only displayed her elegance, but also kept her from attracting the wrong type of attention. Aristocratic women could look to her for supportive advice on dress and fashion, as she was known for her sense of style. Male commentators from the bourgeoisie, faced with the outrageous flights of fancy displayed by the *beau monde*, could view her as someone for their women to aspire to. Mrs Abington walked a tightrope between the two.

For women, dressing well and presenting a cohesive front as a member of the elite class, was more than simply dressing well and correctly. Dress presents the self to the world, and so represents so much more than just a visual presentation. Many women have an emotional relationship with their clothes that relates to the sense of touch, the feel of the fabric against the skin. The rules of dress as set down by the Opera House would have dictated the form of the clothes, the silhouette, but personal taste would have dictated the form that the outfit took. Pressure to conform to modes of dress was nothing new, but during this period the growth of women's magazines, especially those with illustrations of the latest styles, brought a new type of control. Although this effort to dictate can be seen as coming from the patriarchy, it would have manifested itself through the gaze of other women. Lady Mary Coke, in her horror at the old dress worn by Lady Egremont to a royal birthday, perpetuated an upper class need for the conspicuous display of wealth. Conventions gave continuity and the comfort of the familiar, so any breach was unsettling. They also bring the possibility of embarrassment if you get it wrong, a constant worry. For Lady Egremont, enjoying the comfort of a familiar gown during the stress of attending a royal occasion, the embarrassment may have been non-existent, it was Lady Mary Coke who had the problem, not her. Lady Mary Coke could never have imagined wearing such a garment in that way, but maybe she never experienced the comfort of a garment that not only suits you and fits like a second skin, but in its contact with your body, also carries with it memories of other occasions and moments of pleasure that can mitigate the stress of the moment.

However strict the rules, there was always the space for some personal choice in dress, be it colour, fabric or decoration, and being fashionably attired could bring a sense of pleasure and self-affirmation. The *beau monde* represented such personal choice taken to an extreme, 'a brilliant vortex', in the words of *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book* (1780). Membership of such a group demanded a display of your exclusivity and ability afford such luxury. Such conspicuous consumption engendered competition that led to extremes. This was about assertiveness, not pleasure, displaying your wealth, not the enjoyment of luxurious display. For leaders of the *beau monde*, there was an element of aggression that went beyond the pleasure in the display of luxury as demonstrated by Baccelli.

The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book (1780) described the Opera House as at the pinnacle of the entertainments on offer in London. The operas and dances were performed by the best and most expensive professionals that could be gathered from the continent. It was patronised by the elite ruling classes, both financially and in person, becoming a gathering place for socialising and hearing news. Thus, the Opera House also became a place where those lower down the scale could view their rulers. The chart published in 1783 testifies to a desire to be able to identify them and adds another layer of political interest by defining the allegiance of each side of the auditorium. This diagram was significant in that it recorded the subscribers and allows for an analysis of the social status of each member. It defines the audience as significant, by naming them.

The gathering place became a place of display, with the attendant pressures to present a united front as an elite group. The four women described above each, in some way, responded to that pressure and presented an acceptable front. They were aware of other people's intentions and in some way, these penetrated their decisions, but within such strictures they could also exercise elements of personal autonomy. What they achieved was to be able to attend the opera and enjoy the spectacle as part of the group, but also as individuals with their own place in the world and contribution to society.

Conclusions

The aim of this research has been to investigate the approach to self-presentation through dress taken by elite women in the audience at the Opera House in the late eighteenth century. It has investigated how the King's Theatre (Opera House) provided a vehicle enabling women to create a persona appropriate to their milieu, whilst also retaining a sense of personal agency and what part costume and deportment played in this creation. It has utilised a new combination of methodological approaches for research into historical dress, by combining primary personal accounts from the period with current thinking on the psychology of dress and self-presentation. This has enabled the extrapolation of attitudes and concerns in order to answer the questions posed. Archival letters, written by women at the time, have been set alongside current thinking on dress and deportment, to arrive at a description of the phenomenological experience of dressing for a location where women were particularly on view. Much of the detail of this picture has been formed by the close examination of four women, two aristocrats and two performers, as exemplars of the audience members.

6.1 Overall conclusions

The research has presented new understandings in two particular areas: a more detailed articulation of the importance of visual presentation to female subscribers, and the relationship between the expectations of the audience and the visual presentation of the dancers on the stage. These will add to the overall understanding of eighteenth-century theatre and society, and within that how women used their dress and self-presentation. Members of the ruling elite had a vested interest in the performance on stage through their subscription sponsorship. Investigation of the chart of subscribers shown in figures 1 and 2, provided an entry point for identifying women who exemplified the issues under investigation and from these the four case study subjects were chosen. The chart, by naming individual subscribers, emphasised the importance for others in knowing who they were; that their status had significance.

The findings have provided new insights into the attitudes of elite women to their dress; particularly in the area of dressing for public social occasions, and these findings will add to the understanding of the social dynamic of the auditorium at the opera during this

period. The visual aesthetic of self-presentation is the aspect first encountered by others, it creates the initial impact and first impressions endure. Many women have a dynamic relationship with their clothes and the sense of their dressed bodies is closely bound up with their sense of self. These attitudes to dress are particularly relevant to elite women of the time as they were expected to represent their class and demonstrate status through their dress and deportment. The Opera House has provided a unique grouping of these women, gathered in one place, watching each other and being watched by others from different classes. This was a period that paid a lot of attention to the visual aspect of self-presentation, and this has not been investigated in psychological depth before. The research has taken the examination of elite women's dress beyond the fact of its construction and constituents and into the phenomenological experience of dressing for such an occasion and the psychological pressures put on the women who wore the garments. In its concentration on elite women it has also taken such research further than before into this wider group. There has been an understandable interest in members of the *beau monde* and those who chose to be extravagant in their display, causing contemporary reaction and comment. This has obscured the larger number of women who outwardly conformed but may also have had hidden motivations and personal reasons hidden behind their seeming acceptance of the rules.

Previous researchers into the Opera House during this period, especially Price *et al.* (1995) and Hall-Witt (2007), have commented on the importance of the space as a nexus for a section of the ruling elite. Attendance at the performances provided opportunities for this group, not only to meet and exchange news, but also to present a united front to others watching from the pit. This research has formulated a more nuanced view of this relationship from the point of view of the women present. Society, both externally through commentary, and internally through family connections had expectations of how these women would comport themselves. This research has presented a detailed account of the methods by which these expectations were transmitted directly to the women concerned. Goffman's (1990) description of the structure of interactions between and within groupings, and how a set of individuals coalesce to present a united front, has enabled the articulation of how this operated within the elite group of women at the Opera House. It has described how this seemingly fractured set of individuals functioned almost entirely through verbal messages. Research that continued Goffman's (1990) work, such as that of Feinberg (2012) added nuance to this picture by articulating how, at

moments of pressure from society outside, a group will close ranks, imposing censure to members sooner that might normally be expected.

For the women, this group solidarity was largely presented through their visual presentation. Their conformity to the expectations of their class that ruled their lives was on view on this occasion, both to the peers and wider society. A close examination of the modes through which these expectations operated, such as the power of the female gaze and perceptions of a woman's role, has provided detail of the experience of these rules for the women involved. This detail, combined with the biographies of the case studies has shown how seeming conformity can also be constructed with individual agency through careful personal choices and the presentation of different fronts.

The few images remaining of female dancers on the stage at the Opera House show women dressed in a similar manner to those in the audience. The same pressures from society described above applied to these women, but with the added weight that came from choosing a profession that demanded that you display yourself in public. Identification with the aristocratic members of the audience mitigated some of this pressure. It was the visual that made the greatest impression on the audience, thus presenting your body in the same form as them, created a connection. However, at the Opera House, this relationship was more complex as members of the audience directly financed the performative offerings. Therefore, the subscribers had a vested interest in seeing their contribution in the quality of each season. This extended to the visual presentation as much as the musical and choreographic. In many ways the subscribers could expect to see a reflection of their status presented on the stage, that the performers should literally shimmer in the same way. Thus, the audience received validation for their contribution.

6.2 The case studies

The four women were carefully chosen to provide a variety of experiences from the audience at the Opera House. The two aristocrats could be seen as typical of the subscribers to that place, however, closer examination of their personal writings revealed very different attitudes and motivations to their self-presentation. The two performers represented a class of women who were regarded with some ambivalence by society and

their presence in the audience at the opera showed them to have had very different approaches to their appearance in public off the stage. For both these groups it has been possible to extrapolate their motivations in greater depth. Evening dress, the required standard for attendance in the boxes and the pit, provided a wider set of possibilities than might be expected though an examination of visual records.
They did not write often about the constituents of their dress, but their comments are infused with their sense of self and the personal impact of the opinions of others. Current thinking on the psychology of dress indicates that this relationship between the self and the other would have had a profound effect on the self-presentation of these women. It is understanding these variations that has provided the richness and nuance to the extrapolation of their motivations.

The information on dress supplied by contemporary writings, from a wider reading, as well as from the case studies is limited; however, modern psychology describes many female attitudes to dress and self-presentation that are directly applicable. For example, the internalisation of parental attitudes to the female role and the presence of the other in social situations. Passing comments record attitudes to and from others around the women, and an examination of the wider context of society's attitudes to the proper conduct of women, fills in many of the gaps. This is not complete however, without a consideration of each individual biography. Many attitudes towards dress and self-presentation come directly from the early life experiences of each individual. Often the constraints that each person may put upon their actions, while seeming deeply personal, stem from parameters laid down and fully internalised at an early age. For example, Lady Mary Coke's consciousness of the importance of family and continuity, which stemmed from the lack of male heirs to carry on a direct line. Whereas Lady Rockingham's constant concern that she might not let down her husband or his family, probably came from her family's awareness of their lower status to that of the dynasty that she married into. Mrs Abington became a professional woman, respected for her craft and her sense of style, with the constant background concern of her origins among the prostitutes in Covent Garden. Giovanna Baccelli, as an Italian immigrant to England and a talented performer, probably had the fewest concerns, as long as she demonstrated that she had learnt proper behaviour from those around her.

Lady Mary Coke's writings showed her to be deeply conformist in her self-presentation, as a highly conventional and dedicated follower of the rules. These conclusions were reached through her own writings in her journals and contemporary accounts of those who were close to her, especially those of Lady Louise Stuart. Set alongside Goffman's (1990) concept of presenting a front at each social occasion, it has been possible to reach a greater understanding of Lady Mary Coke and her attitude to the world around her.
Her biography helped to illuminate the motivations for her seeming rigidity. Her upbringing left her with a sense of inadequacy that, as a woman, she was unable to carry forward the family line. It also demonstrated her seeming incapacity to relate to others and read the emotional signals from social interactions going on around her. This led to a self-presentation that relied on traditional rules for her parameters and an inability to understand, or even acknowledge, those who did not live by her standards or at her level. She enjoyed the music and performance at the opera, but much of her motivation for attending stemmed from a need to re-validate her persona as correct and superior to many of those around her. She accomplished this by comparing her dress and her behaviour to others, to confirm the rightness of her self-presentation. Thus dress, self-presentation and deportment were all important factors in Lady Mary Coke's persona at the opera.

Lady Rockingham, a musical woman, attended the opera largely for the pleasure of the music. This attitude is confirmed by comments from her husband on her devotion to it and her own pleasure at the performers shown in her letters. However, she also used her attendance to confirm her role as a dutiful wife. She was under pressure from family and society to produce an heir and her letters indicate that she was conscious of this expectation. Her role as a political assistant to her husband was frowned on, particularly by other women and attendance at the opera allowed her to present an acceptable persona as a dutiful wife, thus drawing attention away from her other deficiencies. She did not write specifically about dress for this occasion, but her attitude to her self-presentation on other occasions, suggests that she presented a persona that conformed exactly to expectations of a woman in her position.
Current theories on the intimate relationship between many women and their clothes have brought greater understanding of Lady Rockingham's attitudes to dress. Of particular interest has been the concept that some women assign significance to particular garments, referred to as enclothed cognition (Adam and Galinsky, 2012). The

personal significance assigned to certain garments enhances the ability to perform particular roles when wearing them. Lady Rockingham did not write about dressing for the opera, but comments made about other occasions show her to have had a strong relationship with certain garments. Set alongside the front of dedicated wife that she presented at the opera, it is possible to conclude that her dress would have conformed to expectations of a woman of her class in that place.

At the opera the two performers, Mrs Abington and Giovanna Baccelli, were moving among those who would have seen them on the stage as professional performers. For Mrs Abington, anxious to maintain entry to the upper echelons of society, appearing in public in the audience at the opera presented many possible pitfalls. This was in part because she was seen as a reliable consultant on matters of dress, but also because on the stage she often mimicked these same people and their upper-class mannerisms. These two aspects to her life demanded that her persona at the opera maintained a fine line between the two. She could not stand out through showy or extravagant dress, as she would be condemned as an upstart, but she also needed to construct a high standard of self-presentation in order to maintain her position as a woman of taste and fashion. This position demanded that she consistently demonstrate an air of propriety and restraint. She was constantly under the gaze, both of male commentators who watched for any sign of her dubious origins, and of the women who wished to justify their patronage of her as an acceptable adviser on fashion.
An understanding of Mrs Abington's attitude to her dress has come in large part from male commentaries on her activities, both on and off the stage. She was very popular, but the words of praise often come loaded with reiterations of her demonstration of propriety and restraint, suggesting a need in the writer to justify their admiration. The front that Mrs Abington presented at the opera was a complex one, treading a fine line between her desire to be accepted by the elite and her observations of their behaviour that would add potency to imitation of them on the stage.

Giovanna Baccelli seems to have felt the least pressure from the gaze of the other. Her dual position as an admired principal dancer and also the mistress of a Duke, in many ways shielded her from the disapprobation that might have been aimed at a woman in her position. She also seems to have positively enjoyed the opportunities that life offered her to dress in the highest quality and to display her persona to the benefit of her lover. Her

presence in the parade of mistresses at Longchamps in Paris, alongside her appearance at the opera in an outrageous balloon hat, suggests that this kind of display was not only accepted by her, but was also a positive pleasure.
In many ways, Giovanna Baccelli has been the most difficult of the women to investigate, as contemporary records of her person are very thin. As a performer, like Mrs Abington, she was very popular and there are responses to her performances. As a woman associated with a Duke, she may also have been shielded from criticism by his elevated position in society. Newspaper reports give the sense of a highly talented dancer, with a dedicated following. Unlike Mrs Abington, the attitudes towards dancers from their audience were not as loaded with ambivalence at the sight of a woman performing in public. The few moments when a record has survived of how Baccelli looked in public has been combined with the deeper understanding of female self-presentation gained from the study of the other women, to provide an understanding of the front that Baccelli presented when in the audience at the Opera House.

6.3 Methodological approach

Modern theories on the psychology of dress have shown in detail the complexity of self-presentation through clothes, and how for women, their visual presentation is loaded with many expectations from others. Utilising these theories alongside more traditional historical methodologies has enabled the detailed extrapolation described above.
On reflection, it could be said that another aristocratic case study might have added to this picture. However, in the case of the aristocrats, focussing on a small number enabled the detailed reading of a large quantity of letters. The attitudes of the two women became clearer through the understanding of their voice facilitated by this deeper study. The greatest insights were gathered through noting passing comments, given greater significance through an understanding of the overall situation of the woman writing them.
It could also be said that the inclusion of performers, with their lack of personal records, diluted this understanding, but as has been described above, the relationship between the audience and the performers was more complex than simply that of actor and watcher, and in many ways their relationship was co-dependent. The inclusion of two performers allowed for a wider understanding of the network of female relationships operating within the Opera House.

The combination of approaches from different areas of research has provided a powerful tool in gaining a greater understanding of the actions and motivations of these women, by enabling a deeper reading of their records.

6.4 Future research

The findings in this thesis provide several fruitful areas for future study. There are more letters and writings by women of the elite to be explored to add to the growing understanding of women's attitudes to their dress and self-presentation during this period. This understanding can also be fed into further investigation of costume for dance on the stage at the Opera House. The expectations of the elite subscribers undoubtedly influenced the presentation of costumes and this can be added to the existing images to develop a more nuanced view of their design. The French aesthetic to some of the styling in stage costume was not present in fashionable dress at the time and this requires further study.

The raid on the Opera House, instigated in an effort to oust the manager by discovering contraband materials, resulted in a list of fabrics published in the newspaper that also deserves further analysis. Each of the fabrics listed is recognisable and an investigation into what they were and how they would have appeared on stage, could add another layer of understanding to how the costumes looked. There are also costume designs from the period identified by Sybil Rosenfeld (1976) that need tracing and examining.

The biography of Mrs Abington deserves greater study, as she performed at a pivotal moment in the development of acting as a respectable profession for women. She also cultivated a sense of style and influence on fashion through her self-presentation that has not been investigated.

6.5 Final reflections

Focussing the research for this thesis on women at the Opera House in London during late eighteenth century has brought to the field of study further understandings of the relationships that operated within that space. The innovative approach to methodology aimed to bring depth and nuance to the analysis, a concept borne out by the findings.

Initially it was surprisingly difficult to identify a suitable approach to the Opera House, but the realisation that the chart, with its accompanying list of names, had both social and political implications beyond that of simply facilitating identification, provided an entry point. It was the list of names that suggested case studies as a suitable approach and some time was spent identifying each individual and their suitability for study. It always seemed important to include performers in the mix, for the reasons discussed above, but that choice was more limited and there was always the possibility that this would limit the scope of the investigation.

The understanding of the psychology of dress was completely new to this researcher at the beginning of this investigation, but the time spent gaining a basic understanding, which is constantly growing, has paid dividends in the extra depth that could be brought to the reading of these women. This understanding can only grow and will provide a bedrock for future research.

This thesis brings new insights into the experience of women in the late eighteenth century and their attitudes to dress and self-presentation. It will form the starting point for further investigations into women, both audience and performers, at the Opera House in London, in the late eighteenth century.

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L30/11/122/71

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Performance of the self in the theatre of the elite
The King's Theatre, 1760–1789:
The opera house as a political and social nexus for women.

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Illustrations

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Schematic box-plan of the King's Theatre, 1782, (Price, et al., 1995).

A PERSPECTIVE PLAN of the NEW OPERA HOUSE,
With the NAMES of the different SUBSCRIBERS to each BOX.

PIT.

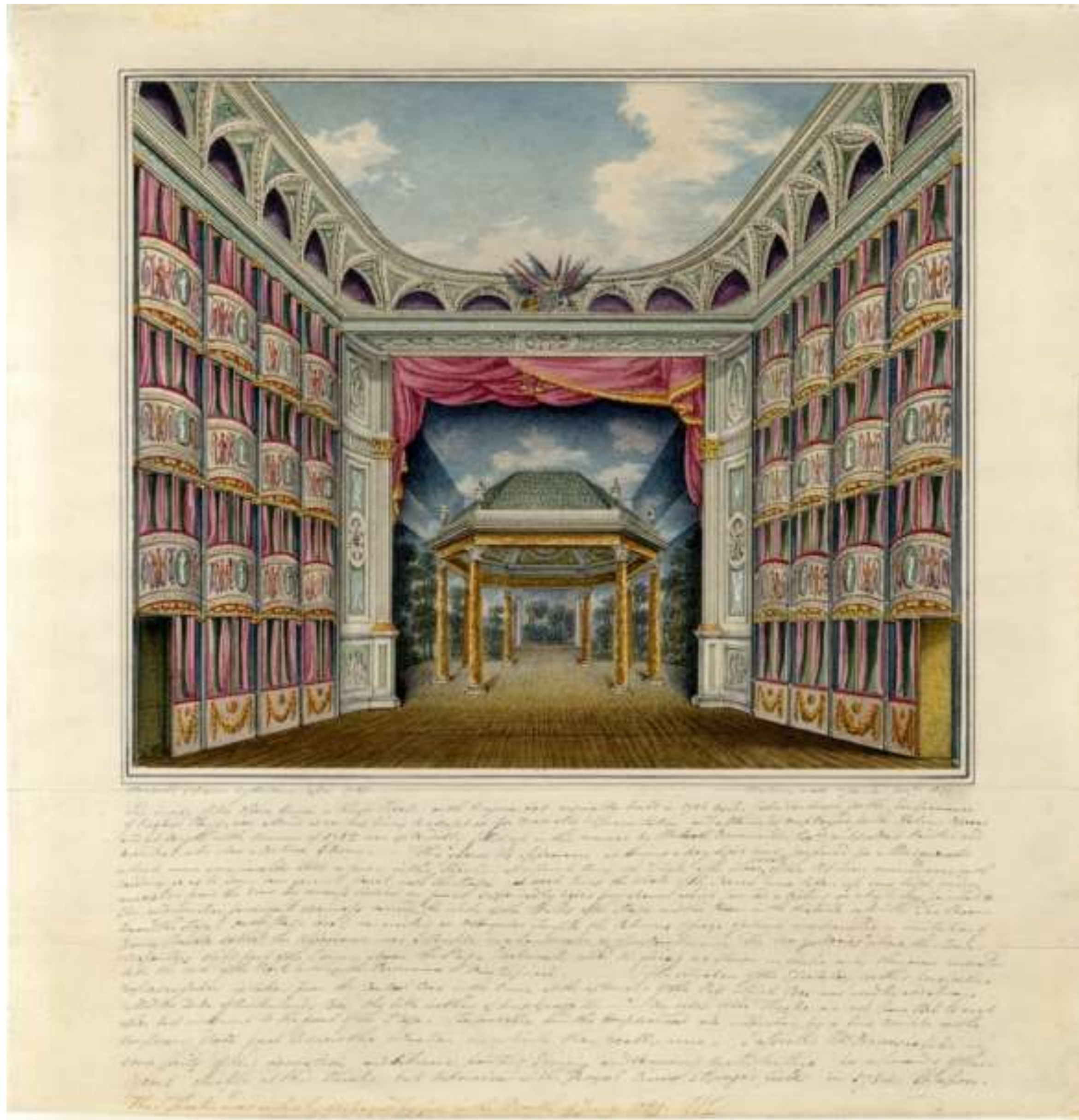
PRINCE's SIDE.

KING's SIDE.

STAGE.

A LIST of SUBSCRIBERS, with References to their Boxes.

Figure 2
'A Perspective Plan of the New Opera House', *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, 5th February 1783
For a transcription of the full list see appendix A.



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English stays, 1780s, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 45
French stays, 1780s, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
(Author's photograph)

(120)

The SCALE of BEAUTY,

OR,

A LIST of the moſt celebrated Toaſts of the Year 1780, with their various Gradations of Beauty, Grace, and Elegance.

N. B. The higheſt Degree in each Scale does not exceed Fifty.

	Bea.	*Gra.*	*Elg.*
The ducheſs of Devonſhire	42	46	45
Lady Beauchamp Proctor	41	23	24
Lady Broughton	46	26	25
Miſs Wynyard	45	27	24
Lady Melburne	44	26	23
Viſcounteſs Villiers	45	24	22
Lady Auguſta Campbell	47	23	21
Lady Catherine Beauclerc	46	24	22
Lady Catherine Fordyce	47	23	20
Lady Jerſey	46	22	19
Lady Barrymore	47	26	24
Lady Craven	44	23	18
Lady Harrington	46	24	21
Miſs Halifax	42	21	18
Lady D—by	46	22	16
Lady Sarah B—y	43	20	[illegible]
Lady Gro——r	[illegible]	21	18
Lady Lig——r	41	20	16
Lady Car——then	44	36	36
Mrs. Ell—t	42	34	30
Mrs Hartley	48	49	48
Mrs. Robinſon	42	38	36
Mrs. Baddeley	36	18	14
Miſs Walpole	31	42	39
Miſs Farren	32	18	16
Miſs Brown	38	17	15

	Bea.	*Gra.*	*Elg.*
Mrs. Bulkley	34	19	16
Miſs Catley	36	17	15
Mrs. Crawford	33	34	30
Mrs. Yates	22	34	30
Miſs Clara Haywood	20	16	15
Miſs Nancy Parſons	21	14	12
Miſs Lawſon	18	13	11
Miſs Stanley	16	12	8
Mrs. Armſtead	17	13	9
Mrs. Mahon, or the Bird of Paradiſe	18	14	12
Mrs. Frederick	19	15	14
Miſs Carter	17	14	12
Miſs Stanley	16	13	9
Mrs. Baker	12	14	13
Miſs Martin	13	8	6
Mrs. Marſhal	12	7	4
Mrs. Smith	10	6	5
Miſs Fiſher	13	14	9
Miſs Hemet	16	12	8
Miſs Armſtrong	15	9	6
Miſs Maria Brown	14	8	5
Miſs Bonwell	16	10	8
Miſs Williams	13	11	9
Mrs. Jones	12	6	4

☞ As we propoſed fixing the Standard of Beauty at Fifty, we have limited the Number of Toaſts alſo to Fifty, which we think may ſerve the Reader for a Twelvemonth; but if he ſhould judge it expedient to have a Toaſt for every Week, he may take Mrs. Brereton and Miſs Younge to complete Fifty-two.

Figure 46
The Scale of Beauty, 1780, *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book.*

For the MORNING POST.

SCALE of BON TON.

	Beauty,	Figure,	Elegance,	Wit,	Sense,	Grace,	Expression,	Sensibility,	Principles,
Duchess of Devonshire	15	17	13	11	10	5	3	9	16
Duchess of Gordon	12	5	0	14	13	5	15	13	3
Countess of Derby	4	11	5	2	3	7	4	9	11
Countess of Jersey	11	6	1	2	0	11	12	5	0
Countess of Barrymore	19	18	18	19	18	19	17	19	18
Countess of Sefton	14	16	13	3	4	6	9	12	13
Lady Harriot Foley	9	17	14	13	7	12	11	13	16
Lady Anna Mar. Stanhope	7	17	13	15	12	11	2	18	17
Lady Melbourne	9	0	11	3	5	14	6	8	15
Mrs. Damer	7	16	15	13	14	12	14	5	2
Mrs. Crewe	15	7	4	6	3	0	15	14	12
Mrs. Bouverie,	12	16	14	7	9	10	8	19	12

Figure 47
'Scale of Bon Ton', Wednesday, October 2, 1776, *The Morning Post*

SCALE of BRITISH and IRISH Beauties.
Twenty the Heighth of Perfection.

	Person.	Expression.	Complexion.	Grace.
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Figure 52
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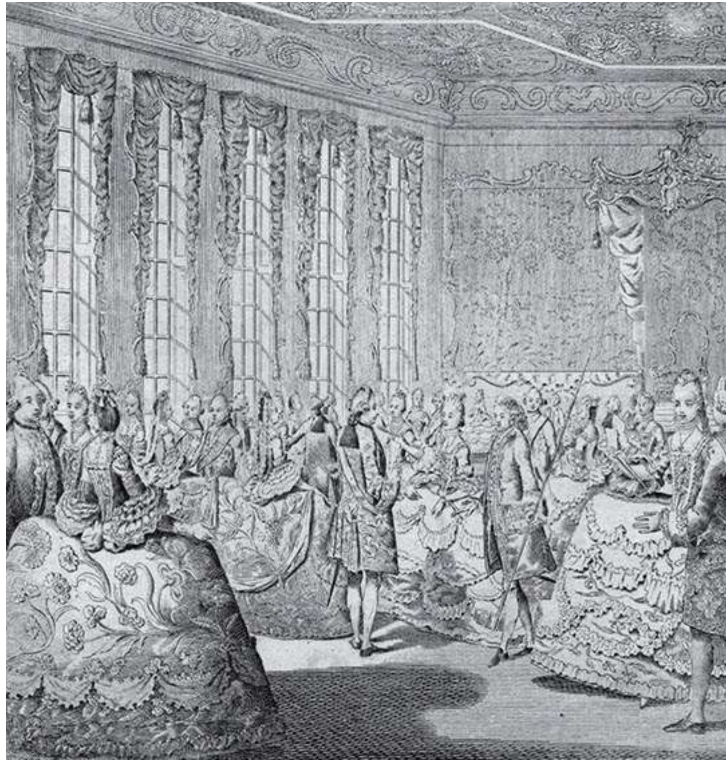

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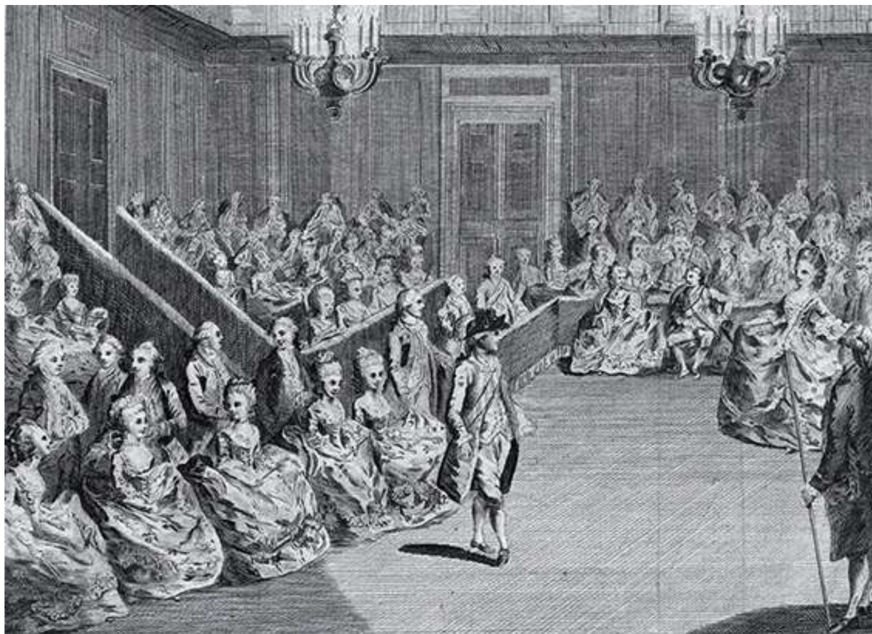
The Court at St James's, c1766, etching with engraving, 17 x 16 cm, The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.



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Appendices

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Appendix B

Measured and drawn by William Capon 1785

The inside of the Opera House or King's Theatre in the Haymarket originally built in 1706 by Sir John Vanburgh for the performance of English plays, was altered at various times to adapt it for Dramatic Representations and afterwards employed for the Italian Operas and at length in the summer of 1788 was splendidly fitted up in this manner by Michael Novesielski Esq. an excellent painter and architect who was a native of Rome. This shews [sic] its appearance as during a daylight view prepared for a Masquerade which were occasionally held or given in this theatre at which time the whole of the floor & seats of the pit were covered over with boarding so as to form one general with the stage. At such times the whole of the scenes were taken up very high and concealed from the view by canvass stretched on frames suspended by ropes from above which formed a ceiling on which was painted a sky, and similar framework and canvass covered the whole of the walls of the stage and the Room in the distance called the tea room beyond the stage. In the stage itself was erected an octangular temple the columns & frieze of which was painted in imitation of Sienna marble so that the appearance was a temple in a landscape or open country. The two galleries + where the – scene – carpenters shift part of the scenery above the stage + (technically called the flies) are shewn in shape only they were concealed like the rest of the work behind the proscenium or prompt's place. The situation of the spectator for this perspective representation is taken from the Central Box in the curve at the extremity of the pit which box was used by and always called the Duke of Cumberland's Box the late brother of King George III. The sides of the theatre are not parallel to each other but inclining to the front of the stage. The orchestra and the harpsichord are indicated by a line visible on the temporary floor just to shew the situation in which they really came. I assisted Mr Novosielsky in some parts of this decoration and likewise painting scenery and drawing architecture for upwards of three chiefly at this theatre but likewise at the Royal Circus St George's fields in 1784. M. Capon. This theatre was entirely destroyed by fire in the Month of June 1789. M.

Appendix C

Mary Collins & Joanna Jarvis (2016) The Great Leap from Earth to Heaven:
The Evolution of Ballet and Costume in England and France in the Eighteenth Century,
Costume, 50:2, 169-193, DOI: 10.1080/05908876.2016.1165955

The Great Leap from Earth to Heaven: The Evolution of Ballet and Costume in England and France in the Eighteenth Century

By MARY COLLINS AND JOANNA JARVIS

The evolution of classical ballet from its accepted origins as one method of displaying status and aristocratic power in Renaissance Italy to its Romantic form, featuring professional ballerinas in white costumes dancing en pointe*, took place largely during the long eighteenth century. This article discusses this transformation from the dual perspectives of choreography and costume by using the premise that these two vital elements in the presentation of ballet were co-dependent, each prompting the other to develop and evolve. Concentrating on Paris and London, it examines the relationship between court dress, fashion, and theatre costume, and how this affected both the choreography and the style of dance throughout the long eighteenth century*

KEYWORDS: *eighteenth century, ballet, costume, baroque, theatre, Louis XIV*

INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth century saw the significant transformation of ballet from its early origins as a lavish aristocratic entertainment in Renaissance Italy to the form we now know as classical ballet, featuring professionally trained dancers dressed in white dancing on their toes *en pointe* - the Romantic image of ballet so familiar today. Most current definitions of ballet mention the formal gestures, steps and poses, and the costumes and scenic effects which ballet as an art form employs 'to convey a story, theme or atmosphere'.[i] From the spectacles at the French court of King Louis XIV (1638 – 1715) and the earliest appearances in the seventeenth century of professional dancers at the Paris *Opéra,* to the seminal ballets, *Flore et Zephyr* by Charles Didelot (1767-1837) in 1776 and *La Fil Mal Gardée* by Jean Dauberval (1742-1806) in 1789, the essential elements of costume, dance technique and style changed radically.

Taking a chronological approach, we begin in the 1660s, in the middle years of Louis XIV's reign, when the focus for dance moved gradually from the court to the theatre, and professional dancers began to appear. The article investigates the factors which reversed the early eighteenth-century theatre convention of representing ancient gods descending to earth, so that by 1800 man is himself depicted attempting to ascend to heaven. The first professional female dancers are recorded appearing as early as 1681 dancing at the *Académie Royale de Musique* (later to become the Paris *Opéra*).[ii]

The Regency of Philippe d'Orléans (1674–1723) from 1715-1723 during the minority of King Louis XV (1710-1774), saw the consolidation of a professional regime at the Paris *Opéra* which regulated and codified both court and theatre dance, producing the first internationally renowned dancers, both male and female. Performances on the stage became ever more elaborate and in its role as the European leader of ballet as an art form, the Paris regime set the parameters for movement and costume, which became gradually more restrictive. However, the third quarter of the century reflected a desire to move away from the strictures of the Paris *Opéra* and to create a new form of dance that told stories entirely through mime. Focus shifted away from gods and goddesses, and concentrated more on human dilemmas and emotions. It was the era of *ballet d'action*. The final years from 1789 brought the upheaval of revolution in France. This revolt against constraint and control was mirrored at the *Opéra* which was ultimately forced to employ costumes that released the body to move more freely, and expressed the new fascination with classical lines.

BEFORE 1700: *BALLET DE COUR*

Ballet at the court of Louis XIV was presented as part of a spectacle of music, dance and voice designed to dazzle and impress the courtiers, ambassadors and other visitors who formed the audience with the wealth, taste and magnificence of his court. In England the masque, another composite form of court spectacle, had performed a similar function earlier in the century.

Louis XIV was acknowledged to have been an accomplished dancer, 'Since his childhood, this prince, who had received from the hand of Nature a noble and majestic figure, had loved every sort of physical exercise and had added to his natural gifts every grace that could be acquired.'[iii] He displayed his talents frequently in entertainments known as *ballets de cour*. Supporting roles were taken by aristocratic amateurs, those who had the social status to perform alongside him. The formal intricately patterned choreographic figures within these court ballets demanded only that those courtiers who danced should stand and move with strength and elegance in order to enact their roles. This *dance noble* style represented such courtly attributes as elegance, nobility, generosity and honour.[iv]

Costumes for the dancers participating in these court entertainments were heavily embellished and decorated, not only to depict the character being represented but also to dazzle the spectator. The costume design for Louis XIV's appearance as Apollo in *Le Ballet de la Nuit* in 1653 clearly illustrates the male style (Figure 1). Louis is shown wearing a classical-style Roman breastplate, fitted to the form of his body and worn with tunic and heeled shoes. His helmet is surmounted by tall plumes in accordance with convention. Feathers had come to signify gods and heroic characters; the feathers added height and grandeur to these characters' presence, and allowed them to be easily distinguished, even at the back of a dimly-lit stage. The stiff ruff of the previous era which had restricted head movements has gone, and the padded sleeves, soon to disappear, are softer allowing for greater arm movements. The Italian designer Stefano della Bella (1610-1664) among others, was summoned to France to design for the court in 1645, bringing with him this Italian classical style for male costuming.[v] In England the Italian style of design was imported much earlier by the architect and designer Inigo Jones (1573-1652), who had travelled across Italy between 1596 and 1604. He was responsible for settings and costumes for most of the masques produced at the Stuart court of King Charles I (1600-1649).

Women's costumes, essentially an embellished form of court dress, were more restrictive, as can be seen in a *c.*1700 engraving of Mademoiselle Marie-Therese de Subligny (1666–1735), one of the first female professional dancers at the Paris *Opéra* (Figure 2).[vi] The diminishing size of bulky sleeves in fashionable dress from the middle of the century meant that elegant arm gestures were now possible for women, but heavy skirts and long trains would have been inhibiting and hidden any footwork, thus making the women's movements generally more limited than men's. By the 1660s Henri Gissey (*c.*1621–1673), who is thought to have designed Louis's Apollo costume, had been appointed as costume designer at the French court. Gissey created many dramatic and fantastic costumes for ballets which required zephyrs, nymphs, and other mythical beings, alongside the usual gods and goddesses.

The Roman style of skirted tunic for men, later referred to as a *tonnelet*, allowed them to perform jumps, turns, complex footwork, both *à terre* (on the ground), and *en l'aire*

(raised), in what was later known as a *half-aerial* position.[vii] The heeled shoes required dancers to use *pliés* (bending the knees outwards with a straight back), and *demi- pointe* (heels raised with the weight on the balls of the feet), in order to articulate phrasing when dancing. They also demanded a more exaggerated turning-out of the feet than is otherwise natural. The audience would have instantly recognised the classical iconography displayed on the costumes, the golden rays of the sun representing Apollo, or a lion skin and club denoting the character Hercules, for example. Rules for costuming were written down in 1681 by Le Père Ménestrier (1631–1705) in *Des Ballets Anciens et Modernes*.[viii] He tells us that the costume for the Sun should be 'cloth of gold with a gilt headdress'; with a silver version to denote the Moon.[ix] The goddess Diana, the huntress, would always appear carrying a bow, wearing an animal skin and a moon motif (usually as a headdress).

As he grew older, Louis retired from appearing in *ballets de cour* but remained a staunch supporter of the art of dancing. With the formation of the *Académie Royale de Dance* in 1661, and the *Académie de l'Opéra* in 1669 (later known as the *Académie Royale de Musique),* Louis sought to raise both the technical and artistic standards of dance and choreography in order that even more spectacular entertainments could be created, and so that professional dancers could be trained to appear in them.

One of the first of these professional dancers was Jean Balon (1676–1739), who joined the dance *Académie* in 1691 and became a popular virtuoso during the later years of the reign of Louis XIV. [x] The first female professional to appear was a Mademoiselle Lafontaine (1665–1738), who was recorded as dancing in Jean-Baptiste Lully's (1632–1687) *Triomphe de l'Amour* in 1681.[xi](Figure 3) Another prominent principal dancer, Mademoiselle Subligny, succeeded her as France's 'Queen of Dance' in 1688. [xii] Referred to as *danseurs seria* these professional dancers generally took the roles of deities, heroes and monarchs. They undertook a seven year training programme which consisted of classes with a designated Master (*Maître*), followed by a gradual introduction into performances at court or at the *Opéra*, beginning in the chorus and *coryphée* ranks before moving up to leading roles as a principal dancer.[xiii]

Dancing institutions at this time used a written system of symbols to record choreographies; principally Feuillet notation (Figure 4) which is alleged to have been the invention of Louis XIV's dancing master, Pierre Beauchamp (1631–1705). These intricate diagrams, printed alongside the music, were developed to transmit the precepts, rules and steps of *danse noble*.[xiv] Feuillet-Beauchamp notation and the accompanying treatises which began to be published from the start of the eighteenth century onwards, show that dancers moved mainly on three levels; in *demi-plié* with knees bent, the knees being directly over the line of the toes without lifting the heels from the floor, *à terre* with feet flat on the ground, or on *demi-pointe* standing on the balls of the feet, heels off the ground (*en relevé* in classical ballet). Footwork was rhythmically intricate, operating almost as another line of the music. Kellom Tomlinson (1688–1761) the celebrated English choreographer, dancing master and composer, remarked in his seminal work *The Art of Dancing* (1735), that:

'the Music seems to inspire the Dancing, and the latter the former: and the Concurrence of both so requisite to charm those who behold them, that each of them in some Measure suffers by a Separation.'[xv]

Intricate beats and virtuosic waving of the feet whilst turning or maintaining perfect balance were possible and were frequently employed by male dancers – rarely by female dancers. Springs or *jetés* were mainly employed by men and were generally near the ground.

For such accomplished *danseurs seria* in their noble and heroic roles, suitably spectacular costume design was essential. By *c.*1674 Jean Bérain (1637–1711) had succeeded Henri Gissey, designing costumes that demonstrated elegance, imagination and wit.[xvi] Like Gissey's designs, Bérain's creations were closely connected with court dress in silhouette, but embellished with embroidery, spangles and motifs in order to catch the light and to give an indication of the role. The move to the long, narrow Baroque stage from the more intimate 'in the round' setting at court had implications for costume and its visibility. Because the audience now viewed the stage from one perspective and at a greater distance, the detail added to dress needed to be exaggerated in order for it to be 'read' by the audience. Stage costumes were made of heavier fabrics and were more layered than in court dress; headdresses were wider and higher while flounces on sleeves were fuller and longer, giving greater emphasis to every gesture.

1700 – 1725: BALLET IN THE THEATRE

The beginning of the eighteenth century was a period of enormous development for the ballet when the traditions of dance established by Louis XIV firmly transferred from the court to the theatre stage, as the elderly monarch withdrew from performing. France now dominated music and dance across the continent, as was made clear by the French dancing master Pierre Rameau (1674–1748), who in 1725 stated that 'there is hardly a court in Europe where the dancing master is not French'.[xvii] Publications by leading international dancing masters, including John Weaver (1673-1760), and Kellom Tomlinson in England, bear this out.[xviii] The Bolognese poet and librettist, Pier Jacopo Martello (1665–1727) tells us:

The Frenchman dances in a way that gives you the impression that he is swimming. His arms, always raised and supple […] his waist […] following the motion of a current with its gentle bendings. From time to time he skips, as a swimmer who lets the crest of a wave push him high in order to be carried forward […] with such grace that one is enchanted […]. This style of dancing greatly pleases the French, who are disposed towards amorous attitudes.[xix]

This is a perfect description of the *contretemp*s step or its adaptation, the *baloné*, for which Jean Balon was famous.

The 1681 print of *Triomphe de l'Amour* in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* clearly shows the attitudes of which Martello speaks (Figure 3). It also depicts a new style of staging that had become necessary due to the introduction of the proscenium arch which separated the performing space from the audience, framed the action, and enabled a single perspective to lead the eye to the central triumphant god or hero. This use of perspective was also employed in conjunction with a clever mirroring of the central heroic figure on stage with the central position of the French king's throne in the audience. The king's power and status was therefore reinforced despite the fact that he was no longer dancing. On stage, impressive, tableaux could be created, as seen in the *Triomphe de l'Amour* print, simply by using pattern, gesture and costume to great effect.

The Italian designer Giacomo Torelli (1608-1678), who was brought to Paris to design the production *La Finta Pazza* in 1645, had equipped the *Théâtre du Petit-Bourbon* with the style of elaborate machinery which had been in use in Italy since the late fourteenth century, and which had already been employed by Inigo Jones in England earlier in the century. The *Paradiso*, a system of ropes and pulleys, enabled whole choruses of heavenly

creatures to descend, while the revolving triangular columns known as *periaktoi* permitted rapid changes of scene. Torelli also introduced the proscenium arch as a frame for the action.[xx] These Italian machines allowed stage directors to create astounding special effects: deities could descend from the heavens to dance upon the earth, spreading their beneficence, whilst other gods watched and sang from above. The political message was that, if the king is represented as a god, however bad things may become he can 'descend' to dispense his wisdom and bounty, restoring order and harmony for the lesser mortals, his subjects.

Because such performances were sponsored by the king within the context of court life, designers such as Jean Bérain were employed to produce costumes which reflected the opulence and status of both the aristocratic performers and their monarch. Bérain's costumes for female performers, although following the silhouette of court dress, were more heavily embellished with decoration. Skirts were layered and included at least one over-skirt, shorter at the front and falling to a train at the back. His costumes for men followed the tradition of the style *á la Romaine*, with tight fitting body and skirted tunic. Bérain was also a designer of furniture, tapestries and other decorative arts, an aspect highlighted by the bands of decoration on the costumes that clearly echo patterns seen throughout all of his designs. He soon began to design the settings for the stage as well as the costumes. In contrast to the statuesque figures of the heroic characters his designs for the more fantastical characters, such as marine gods and goddesses with their scales and shell patterns, and winds with feathers and wings, display his inventiveness. The same could be said of the costume designs for symbolic figures such as music and architecture, which are heavily decorated with motifs that give a sculptural quality to the costume. Inhibiting movement they reflect the fact the choreography itself was statuesque and generally moved from one tableau to another. Bérain was succeeded by his son, also Jean Bérain (1678–1726), whose design style closely mirrored his father's.

By 1720 Claude Gillot (1673–1722), in whose studio Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) was an apprentice, had become chief designer to the court. Gillot is chiefly remembered for his designs for the ballet *Les Éléments* of 1721 which show a real departure from the previous style.[xxi] His costumes were not covered in heavy embroidery as were Bérain's, but used lighter fabrics, responding to the dancers' physical requirements as more complex moves were now being employed in the choreography.[xxii] In Gillot's designs, the silhouette is still based on court dress and shows the arrival of wider hoops for women, but with the lighter fabrics and softer colours they move dance costume further away from the stiff formality of court dress and bring an even greater element of fantasy to the characters being created.[xxiii] For example a design for Folly shows a dress covered in rows of flounces, and The Hours of the Night wears a dark dress covered in stars with the Roman numerals of a clock spread around the hem. The lighter style of these designs suggests a greater understanding of the dancer's needs; however, Gillot still tended to exaggerate the male *tonnelet* for noble characters, taking it almost to the dimensions of the female hoops. This mirrored the power to dominate physical space previously associated with exaggerated female styles, especially those with wide hoops. This curious, stylized silhouette can be seen across Europe during this period, even being worn by actors for leading tragic roles. The English actor James Quin (1693-1766), known for his work as a tragedian was depicted playing Coriolanus in 1749 wearing a strange extended skirt akin to a *tonnelet*.

In England in the early part of the century ballet was developing along different lines. Theatrical dancing was performed between the acts of plays to divert the audience during lengthy costume or scene changes. These dances were often entirely unrelated to the drama. John Weaver, ballet master and manager at Drury Lane theatre in London and writer on

dance, spent his life trying to elevate the status of the art. His most famous production, *The Loves of Mars and Venus* (1717), combined mime and plot with dancing to tell a story and therefore conforms, for the first time, to the current definition of ballet. In his preface he wrote, 'I have endeavour'd to enter into the Characters, I represent and describe their Manners and Passions by proper Actions and Gesture suitable to the Fable.'[xxiv] An engraving by Canaletto (1697–1768) of the 1758 production of *Le Turc Genereux* in Vienna gives a fair impression of Weaver's gestures in action (Figure 5), and shows how the style continued to influence choreographers such as the Austrian Franz Hilverding (1710-1768) and the Frenchman Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810) in successive decades. Gestures were still fairly stiff 'attitudes' with arms based upon French *dance noble* style. Weaver chose the accomplished and popular dancer Hester Santlow (*c.*1690-1773) to dance Venus, and the production was staged at Lincoln's Inn Fields by John Rich (1692–1761), a champion of such hybrid performances that alternated serious scenes with Harlequinades, grotesque episodes, dance, and song. [xxv]

Italian *commedia dell'arte*, with its mix of improvised comedy and slapstick, and played by such stock characters as Harlequin, Columbine, Scaramouche and Pantalone, had been a popular draw at the London fairs since the previous century.[xxvi] Popular characters like Harlequin began appearing on stage and remained in demand throughout the century; the manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, John Rich (1692-1761), was himself a brilliant Harlequin, as was David Garrick (1717-1779). The dancer Hester Santlow was also associated with the role. Wife of the Drury Lane actor-manager Barton Booth and a celebrated dancer on the London stage, Hester Santlow can be seen in John Ely's portrait of *c.*1720 (figure 6) portrayed as the character she created, a female version of Harlequin complete with slapstick and hat. Harlequine was not a female partner for Harlequin but a solo character in her own right, and Santlow was constantly in demand for her interpretation of this role. [xxvii] John Essex wrote in the preface to his 1728 translation of Pierre Rameau's Le *Maître à danser* (1674-1748)· 'the Produce of the many different Characters she represents is the Wonder and Admiration of the present Age [...] Besides all this, the Harlequin is beyond Description.'[xxviii] Her husband, Barton Booth, tells us: 'She whirls around! She Bounds! She springs! As if Jove's Messenger had lent her wings.'[xxix] Women's technique was at last catching-up with the men's. It is worth noting that two other important French dancer/choreographers, Marie Sallé (1707-1756) and Jean-Georges Noverre both made significant steps in the development of their art after visiting the vibrant dance scene in London.

An engraving of another French dancer who had performed in London, a Monsieur Dubreil (*fl.* 1711 -1733), depicts him dancing le Scaramouche (Figure 7) at the Paris Opéra in 1711.[xxx] Dubreil's pose makes it evident that French principal dancers who could dance in the comic or grotesque style had already incorporated popular acrobatic techniques into their repertoire to produce a more aerial, elegant form of pantomime. Movements were more stretched and exaggerated, involving greater elevation of both arms and legs, particularly typical in the role of Scaramouche. He is shown wearing a long-sleeved fitted tunic with a soft ruff and knee-breeches without padding, a costume which would have allowed him a much wider range of movement.

French *danse noble*, however, was mainly à *terre* – Rameau claimed that, 'dancing is no more than knowing how to bend and straighten the knees at the proper time'.[xxxi] He was obviously referring to social dancing here though he also mentioned steps used in theatrical dance which are a little more difficult. For example:

Battements are movements off the ground made by one foot while the body is supported on the other, and make dancing very brilliant […] *Jetés* can […] be done in another manner which requires more strength in the hop. This is done by rising much quicker, sharply extending the legs, beating one against the other, and falling on the *demi-pointe* contrary to that on which the bend was made. They then have a different name and are called *demi-cabrioles*. But this belongs to theatrical dancing, only suited to those endowed with a particular aptitude for dancing and who make it their profession […] and for ladies, they should not hop so high.[xxxii]

We know from surviving choreographies, mentioned earlier, that *battements*, *jetés, cabrioles, tours en l'air* and even *entrechats six* were already used extensively by male professional dancers. Their costumes allowed considerable freedom for the legs, and generally sleeves were becoming less restrictive which enabled preparation and balance in *jetés* and *pirouettes*. Existing dance notations confirm Rameau's comment that female dancers usually performed far less virtuosic steps than men.

1725 – 1750: THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN

By 1725, however, women's footwork had become more complex, incorporating turns and jumps. the illustration by Anthony l'Abbé (*fl* 1688-1738), of a *Turkish Dance* shows English dancer Elizabeth Younger (*fl.*1711-34) dancing cabrioles.[xxxiii] Whilst in France Marie-Anne Cupis de Camargo (1710 – 1770), is reputed to have been able to execute the *entrechats quatres* (where the feet are crossed and uncrossed, changing four times during one spring into the air), for which she was renowned.[xxxiv] *La Camargo*, as she was known, made her debut in Paris in 1726, having trained with François Prévost (1680–1741) who, in turn, had succeeded Subligny as principal dancer at the Opéra. Complex footwork was obviously difficult in long skirts – the engraving of *Fille de Barquerole dansant la furlana al'Opera* shows one solution in the *forlana* (also known as *furlana)* – a gigue requiring numerous *cuts* (where one foot springs into the place of the other, which is simultaneously raised) and successive backward *chassés*. Here, the dancer is shown wearing flatter, softer shoes on stage, allowing her greater flexibility of the toes and instep. This is a significant practical difference from fashionable shoes which were still stiff and heavy with higher heels, restricting the foot's agility. The dancer is also shown lifting up her skirts to ensure that she did not tread on them while executing rapid *chassés* backwards. *La Camargo* excelled in such virtuosic footwork previously only performed by male dancers, and is renowned for shortening her skirts so that her spectacular footwork could be seen. She also began to wear close-fitting knickers known as *caleçonde précaution*, to preserve her dignity, a necessary addition because at this time women generally never wore such items of underwear.[xxxv]

These are significant examples of how costumes and footwear were beginning to change to accommodate the dancer. Conversely, the 1730 painting of Camargo by Nicholas Lancret (1690-1743) illustrates that a change in the fashionable silhouette for women was being reflected on the stage. Hooped petticoats, known in France as *paniers*, gave width to the skirt, initially in a bell shape, then flattened front and back through the use of tapes underneath to control the shape. The flattening of the hoops allowed partners in a minuet to bow or curtsey face to face, despite the fact that the tapes increased the width. Hoops gave women greater presence simply through the physical space that they inhabited; for the dancer they lifted the fabric of the skirt away from the ankles and allowed much greater freedom of movement for the feet. During the 1730s stage costumes were still fairly inhibiting and the

traditional wearing of masks limited the dancers' ability to represent the emotions of the characters they played. Masks made facial expression impossible and were really only used effectively by comic and grotesque dancers whose costumes allowed them the flexibility of movement to affect and influence the spectators' perception of the mask's expression.

While Camargo excelled at feats of technical ability, another outstanding female dancer of this period, Marie Sallé (1707–1756) who is acknowledged to be one of the first female choreographers, sought to develop the expressive and choreographic possibilities of dance.[xxxvi] As the conventions governing dance remained restrictive in France, dancers looked to other courts in Europe for the freedom to develop their art. Many dancers were attracted to London where the lack of state patronage meant that theatre was an entirely commercial enterprise. Furthermore, London audiences were appreciative and receptive to innovation. Foreigners were exotic and intriguing so John Rich imported a great many French dancers, often whole troupes, including notable soloists such as Sallé. Her acting abilities found a natural place in the pantomime tradition in England and she was inspired by the relatively liberal climate she found there. Sallé was notably the first female dancer acknowledged to have both choreographed a production – *Pygmalion* (1734) – and to have danced in it. She is also famously credited as being the first female who 'dared to appear […] without a *panier*, without a skirt […] no ornament on her head: dressed neither in a corset nor a petticoat, but in a simple muslin robe […] in the manner of a Greek statue'.[xxxvii]

There were earlier contenders; Hester Santlow, for example, was described long before in 1723 when appearing as Diana in John Thurmond's '*Masque of Deities'*, with:

[. . .] her hair loose, a Bow in her hand, and a quiver of Arrows hanging at her Shoulders; a Deer skin fastened to her Breast, a Gown of Purple, tuck'd up to her knees with jewels; her legs adorned with Buskins up to the calf, her Dress, tho' careless, handsome; her behaviour free and easy, tho' modest and decent.[xxxviii]

The portrait of the dancer Françoise Prévost, (*c.*1680–1741) by Jean Raoux (1677–1734) in her role as a *Bacchante*, also painted in 1723 and now in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tours, gives some impression of this style, although it may only be allegorical and not based upon an actual appearance. It may therefore be more accurate to claim that Sallé was the first '*danseuse seria'* trained at the Paris Opéra to be recorded appearing thus.

Actresses had also been appearing in so-called 'breeches roles' (i.e. dressing as men), for decades. Any costuming that exposed the female form was popular with audiences especially the male segment, as they were given an opportunity to view more of the contours of her body than usual. Criticism from commentators, when it came, tended not to be aimed at the performance, but at the performer if her body was considered to be unsuitable to be viewed in this way.[xxxix] Conversely, when men dressed as women this was seen as burlesque, and was considered amusing, with commentary focusing upon the comedy rather than the body.

In London the introduction of the Theatrical Licensing Act in 1737, and the monopoly given to the patent theatres of Covent Garden and Drury Lane for the performance of serious spoken drama, caused problems in the English theatre which particularly affected dancers. Music and dance had always been an integral part of the presentation of plays but the Licensing Act forced unlicensed theatres, in order to survive, to make these elements a much greater part of the evening's entertainment. By dividing the musical presentation into two parts, a play could be performed "gratis" (ie: without charge) in the interval; the legal rules

circumvented with pantomimes useful as afterpieces. Such independent theatres also capitalized on the public taste for tumblers, rope dances, burlesque acts and the Italian *commedia dell'arte* troupes previously enjoyed at the London Fairs. These entertainments began to fill the vacuum left by the Licensing Act's ban on serious drama. Grotesque dancers used their exaggerated movements to great comic effect, and slapstick or harlequinades began to fill the unlicensed English theatres. Such dances are depicted in Gregorio Lambranzi's (fl. 1716) *Nuova e curiosa scuola de' ballitheatrali* (Figure 7) published in Germany in 1716.[xl] This tradition of antimasque or grotesque dancing was well-established in England and was very popular. Its comic and acrobatic style satisfied public expectations of skill and virtuosity on stage. This change of emphasis in theatre programming had a significant effect on the development of dance. When Drury Lane presented serious drama, dancers who wished to continue working there were forced to accept acting roles. Whilst many actresses had modest dancing proficiency, for professional dancers acting ability now became a desirable skill. This was a radical step, one which led to a phenomenon which would now be referred to as the *dancer-actress*, in the tradition of Hester Santlow.[xli]

'One great leap' for dancers, with the rise of pantomime and a new genre soon to become known as *ballet d'action*, was the emerging role of the *demi-caractère* dancer. This term denotes a fusion of the *danse noble* technique with the more athletic steps and movements of the *commedia* and grotesque styles. *Demi-caractère* roles were often danced by young performers on their way up through the ranks. These roles required the same range of technique and style expected from the *seria* dancer but they allowed for a more diverse range of steps and movements as a contrast or support to the main serious roles. Martello's description of Italian dancing describes techniques becoming fashionable in *demi-caractère* dancing:

(He) displays his spirited dance with great precision; he jumps in the air and there performs nimble caprioles. He comes down on the boards very lightly, on the points of his feet and barely touching the planks he reascends […] This […] type of dancing, which is displayed more in the air, is similar to flying.[xlii]

In 1748 Jean-Baptiste Martin (1659-1735) became costume designer for the Opéra, bringing with him the spirit of the Rococo.[xliii] Although still highly decorated, his costume designs appear much lighter, ribbons and pale colours have replaced heavy embroidery.[xliv] Martin's *demi-caractère* figures demonstrate a *joie de vivre,* with the men in coats and waistcoats, closer to fashionable dress in their lines. He can be credited with introducing the French peasant to the stage, but not in any form that would be recognizable as someone who ever kept animals or milked a cow. Other more exotic characters, Chinese roles for example, could only be recognized from perhaps one item - such as a hat - or from their gestures and stance, since the main part of their costume followed the overall signature style of the period. As before, no attempt was made at accuracy, the desire was to evoke the exotic through adding small touches to a set style of costume. All the women wore wide hoops, and for the male *dance noble* characters, their *tonnelets* had swelled to enormous proportions. As Scaramouche was now not the only role where legs and arms were being lifted higher, the old-style costume designs of the Paris Opera had to respond.

1750 – 1775: *BALLET D'ACTION*

Stage costumes at the Opéra trailed behind the innovations in dance in terms of practicality and suitability for the more natural dance style being employed, especially by the *demi-*

caractère dancer. Performances at the *Opéra* still had to conform to the pattern set by the Royal court as it was the king who sponsored the company. However, some choreographers who had worked outside this narrow milieu began to publicly question the fixed style which this created. One such was Jean-Georges Noverre, who was one of the greatest innovators of ballet style in the century[xlv]. In 1760, he lamented:

Greek, Roman, Shepherd, Hunter, Warrior… Laughs, Tritons, Winds, Fires, High Priests … all these characters are cut to the same pattern and differ only in colour and the ornaments which a desire for ostentatious display rather than good taste causes them to be bespattered.[xlvi]

Noverre was first invited to bring a company to London in the early 1750s, by the new manager of Drury Lane, the celebrated actor David Garrick (1717–1779). Garrick's more naturalistic acting was replacing the antiquated declamatory style and was similar to Noverre's views on more expressive dancing. Despite the anti-French riots which destroyed his production of *Les fêtes Chinoises* in 1755, Noverre's time in England, working in Garrick's library, confirmed his determination to develop the new genre *ballet d'action* in which a story could be told clearly and comprehensively through dance and music alone – just as Weaver had tried to do earlier in the century. Noverre returned to London on several further occasions, both to Drury Lane and to the King's Theatre Haymarket, known as the Italian Opera House, where opera and ballet were performed. In 1760 he published his manifesto in the form of *Lettres sur la Danse, et sur les Ballets,* addressed to an imaginary correspondent, allegedly Jean Dauberval (1742–1806), which was a clarion call for reform. As a choreographer Noverre was keen on depicting realistic narrative and emotional range. He complained that dancers in Paris found themselves trapped in the stiff conventional costume designs of previous decades with elaborate headdresses, rigid *tonnelets* and excessive decoration. Such conventions were still rigidly adhered to, although somewhat modified for the freer arm movements required for gesture.

By the middle of the century the chief costume designer at the *Opéra* was Louis-René Boquet (1717–1814), who also designed entertainments for the traditional environment of the royal court. His style dominated French costume design for most of the second half of the century.[xlvii] Many of his drawings survive in the *Bibliothèque de l'Opéra* in Paris; they have a light, fresh style, with a real sense of movement. However, the feeling of movement his drawings imply seems at odds with the greatly exaggerated hoops and *tonnelets* worn by the principal dancers, with their decorations of embroidery, swags of flowers and fabric that echoed the fashions of the court. There was still little attempt to suit the style of the costume to the character being played, and foreign dress was barely hinted at, if acknowledged at all.

Noverre reacted strongly against this outmoded style of costume, praising performers who 'discarded *tonnelets* or those stiff *paniers* which deprive them of all freedom' and made them 'resemble, as it were, an ill-contrived machine'.[xlviii] Noverre's ideas were almost certainly influenced by the general growing fascination with the scientific advances which contributed to this part of the eighteenth century being termed 'The Age of Enlightenment'. Noverre strongly endorsed Weaver's lectures on the *Anatomical Workings of the Human Body* in his own *Lettres;* which he may have encountered through his teacher, Louis Dupré (1690–1774), who had played the role of Mars in Weaver's seminal work *The Loves of Mars and Venus*. [xlix] Noverre wrote that, 'in my youth I studied osteology which I have found of great advantage in my teaching. This art has taught me […] the bony structure of man and the levers and hinges which govern its play'.[l] Studying anatomy had revealed to man that, although he was formed in the image of God, the human body was, in fact, the kind of

complex machine to which Noverre alludes. Dupré was responsible for the young Noverre's first professional engagement at the Opera Comique in Paris, and is thus a significant link between Weaver's ideas, possibly even his writings, and Noverre who later affirms in his *Lettres* the importance to a dancer of a knowledge of the mechanical workings of the body. That two significant dancing masters, one in England and one in France, proclaim the essential link between anatomy and movement for the first time in print, demonstrates its place in the development of dance technique.

Noverre believed that the only way to try and develop his ideas of more natural movement and 'Ballet pantomime' was to move away from Paris; first within France at Lyons, and then in Stuttgart (where he was joined by Boquet). Here, the extravagant patronage of Duke Carl Eugen (1728–1793) of Württemberg allowed him to create productions on a grand scale, using the best composers of the time, notably Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756- 1791). By this time many of the courts across Europe had set up ballet companies in imitation of the French court, to where prints of Boquet's designs were widely circulated. In Sweden King Gustav III, a patron of the arts founded the Royal Swedish Opera and the Royal Swedish Ballet under the umbrella of the Royal Theatre. Some of the few surviving ballet costumes from the eighteenth century are to be found in the Drottningholm theatre museum in Stockholm.[li] It is fascinating to observe that the richness of the colours, fabrics and embroidery, combined with the elaborate gold and silver decoration that would have shimmered and glistened in the candlelight, were really as spectacular as the designs would suggest.

By the mid-1760s a more athletic, aerial dance style had developed from the livelier, more acrobatic, Italian manner of dancing, as described earlier. This style evolved from the athletic leaps and exaggerated postures represented in the caricatured personas of the *commedia dell' arte* tradition, and as a result of the more natural dramatic expression required by *ballet d'action.* Such change meant that the existing style of costume design was no longer appropriate. Noverre, as we have seen, favoured abandoning stiff *tonnelets* which he claimed would 'transport[…]the hip to the shoulder and conceal all the contours of the body' and he highlighted the crucial connection between fashion and function when it comes to dance and acting, 'If the style of a ridiculous costume annoys the dancer so that he feels overcome by the weight of his clothes to the extent of forgetting his part, how can he act with ease and warmth?'[lii] Following Noverre's advice, his pupil Dauberval championed *ballet d'action,* helping it evolve with more natural costumes, gestures and facial expression, thereby allowing a greater range of movement and storytelling to be exhibited. It was perhaps Noverre′s influence that led the young Maximillian Gardel, dancing as an understudy, to finally abandon both mask and wig in his triumphant debut as Apollo in the 1772 revival of Rameau′s *Castor et Pollux*.[liii]

It is difficult to imagine what these performances looked like because very few images survive. Dauberval was depicted with Mlle Allard (1738–1802) in a *pas de deux pantomime* from the opera *Sylvie* in the painting of 1766 by Louis Carrogis Carmontelle (1717-1806) which became a popular print by Jean-Baptiste Tilliard (Figure 8). The dancers are shown in a woodland setting, where Allard as the nymph, who only a moment before had been scorning the advances of her admirer Dauberval, has now become aware of the torment she has caused and is turning slightly towards him. Dauberval, meanwhile, is looking away, hopeless, despairing of ever touching her heart. It is a moment of deep emotion. Their costumes show the changes which have been taking place; his *tonnelet* has become a swathe of fabric around his hips, merely suggesting a similar shape. His shoes are flat and supple,

possibly made of leather, while the heels on her shoes are considerably reduced, as are the hoops beneath her skirt.

It is interesting to compare the image from *Sylvie,* where the performers have been placed in a more naturalistic setting, with the engraving by Francesco Bartolozzi (1727-1815) of *Jason et Medée ballet tragique,* published in London in 1781 by John Boydell (Figure 9) which satirizes the ludicrous unsuitability of some costumes still being worn by many dance companies. Bartolozzi's image shows musicians in the pit and the dancers on stage frozen in a moment of high emotional drama. The style of gesture would seem to be similar to that depicted in *Sylvie,* but their costumes, hoops for the two women and a wide *tonnelet* for the male lead, strike an incongruous note for such a dramatic and affecting story and for such extreme gestures. *Jason et Medée*, one of Noverre's most important creations, was first performed in Stuttgart in 1763; the version depicted in Bartolozzi's engraving was the London production – the creation of Gaetan Vestris (1729–1808).[liv] Vestris is shown dancing the leading role of Jason, gazing up and posed in the stock Weaver attitude of astonishment while, to the left, Giovanna Baccelli, (*c.*1753-1801) as the nymph Creuse, recoils in terror from Medée, danced by Adelaide Simonet (*c.*1776 – *c.*1791), who clutches a dagger. [lv] This tale of passion and murder was quite shocking to the audiences of the time and marked a new departure in storytelling through dance.[lvi]

1775 – 1800: REVOLUTION AND ROMANTICISM

In 1776 Noverre achieved his ambition to be appointed ballet master at the *Opéra*, the highest and most prestigious position available to a choreographer. However, the appointment been made at the command of his former pupil Marie Antoinette, now queen of France, and without attention to precedent. This caused much discontent and his tenure was not a happy one; he resigned in 1781. This underlying resentment towards Noverre had caused him many problems, not least from some of the star performers such as Mlle Guimard (1743 – 1818). She had risen from humble beginnings to become a talented and popular principal dancer. She counted aristocrats among her lovers, whose allowances allowed her to live in some splendour. Guimard was strong minded and very aware of her public and what she felt they expected from her, especially when it came to her costumes. She had no interest in wearing character costumes required by Noverre, believing that she looked best in pale colours, and her desire to control the designs produced for her by Boquet brought her into direct conflict with him.[lvii] In 1770, dancing the part of Creuse in Noverre's ballet '*Jason et Medee'* in a pale dress, she had used muslin petticoats instead of hoops to give volume to the skirt, and it has been suggested that this may have inspired the style of tutu for '*La Sylphide*'.[lviii] In the finale of the same ballet she appeared as a shepherdess in a costume completely out of keeping with the other dancers. Her chosen style of dress, with the outer skirt pinned up to reveal a petticoat of a different colour, was considered audacious. It had been seen before at the *Comédie-Italienne*, but never at the *Opéra* and in the next few days, in a city always ready for the next craze, everyone in Paris had taken up the style and was wearing their own '*Robe à la Guimard*'.

By the 1780s fashionable dress was reflecting the move to neoclassicism, with a slimmer line to female dresses and a rising waistline. The change can also be seen in costume for the ballet, as female dancers begin to appear, sixty years after the infamous experiments by Santlow, Prévost and Sallé, without *paniers*, in dresses made from flimsier fabrics that revealed more of their bodies and allowed much greater freedom of movement. Such changes

led, in turn, to the wearing of flesh-coloured tights, a combination of knickers and long stockings – moves to preserve the dancer's modesty.[lix] This innovation is often attributed to Maillot (*d.* 1838), a costume designer at the *Opéra* in the early-nineteenth century, but Guimard, and the French dancer Charles Didelot (1767 – 1837) are both known to have worn them long before in the 1780s and 1790s. Dancers adopted flat pumps, a style which though fashionable, evoked the type of footwear which had been worn since the beginning of the century by circus performers and acrobats, the soft leather giving suppleness and grip.[lx] They were far more practical.

In 1789 in Bordeaux, just two weeks before the storming of the Bastille and the outbreak of the French Revolution, Dauberval produced his radical ballet *La Fille mal gardée* in which, for the first time, ordinary mortals, not deities or heroes, were the main protagonists. [lxi] In a bucolic setting, the story revolved around five credible country characters, which in itself was a significant departure, with a plot free of any artificial theatrical effects. It employed action which needed no explanation beyond that of the gestures used by the dancers. This comic ballet revolved around a mother's attempt to marry her only daughter to the witless son of a rich landowner. The daughter, who is already in love with another young man, has other ideas. Dauberval intended that the part of the mother, la Veuve Ragotte (Simone in modern versions), should be played by a man and in the first production it was danced by the popular comedic dancer, M Brochard (dates unknown).

Another print by Bartolozzi (Figure 10) provides some evidence of how the costumes used in this production might have looked. Gaetan Vestris's son Auguste (1760–1842), who had made his debut when he was twelve, had begun to perform in a new style of costume more evocative of the ordinary citizen comprising a simple jacket, shirt and breeches, a style which permitted greater virtuosity and a higher leg line. The young Vestris was noted for spinning endlessly in effortless pirouettes and for high leaps, one spectator remarking that 'he rose towards the sky in such a prodigious manner that he was believed to have wings.'[lxii] Like many dancers in this period he performed in London as well as Paris on several occasions and his celebrity resulted in a range of images. The London prints show how dance was changing. The noble style, of the elder Vestris, with its bulky *tonnelets* had slipped gradually out of fashion, although the new, more athletic dance style exhibited by the younger Vestris was not universally admired, with critics alluding to performing monkeys, and remarking that 'a goose [could] stand on one leg too'.[lxiii] The criticism may have been in part because many women in the audience enjoyed the vigorous display of his physical charms. This liberation in dance style is recorded in Gennaro Magri's (*fl* 1779) treatise, *A Practical & Theoretical Treatise upon Dancing* (1779) in which he redefined the positions and steps used in dance, which now included aerial and forced or exaggerated positions for both the legs and the arms, made possible by lighter, less inhibiting costumes. [lxiv]

On the London stage, Rose Parisot (*c.*1775–*c.*1837), frequently wore costumes that accentuated her legs as she danced and led the *Monthly Mirror* to remark that, in a 1796 performance of the ballet *le Triomphe de l'Amour,* she created 'a stir by raising her legs far higher than was customary for dancers'. [lxv] The Bishop of Durham, who had never seen her perform, complained in the House of Lords about, 'female dancers, who, by the allurement of the most indecent attitudes and most wanton theatrical exhibitions succeeded but too effectually in loosening and corrupting the moral feelings of the people. '[lxvi] In response to the outcry, the colour of dancers' tights was changed from light pink or flesh-toned to a more obvious and less provocative white. It was also decreed that the performances were not to extend past midnight; this caused a riot in 1805 when the curtain was brought down before Rose Parisot had finished her solo.

Aerial display became a feature of the male repertoire. Dauberval's pupil, Charles Didelot (1767-1837), began to include simple lifts designed to show man's strength contrasted against a woman's lightness and fragility. Antoine Cardon's engraving of the ballet *Achille et Diedamie*, shows Andre Jean-Jacques Deshayes (1777–1846) as Achilles disguised as a handmaiden of the Princess Deidamia, being lifted by James Harvey D'Egville (1770–1836) as Ulysses (Figure 11). In his production of '*Flore et Zephyr'* in 1776, Didelot took another great leap. With the aid of almost invisible wires, his dancers in light, simple costumes could be lifted or lowered, appearing to fly across the stage or stand *en pointe*. Such elevation was truly astonishing and the stage was set for the development of what we now term Romantic ballet.

CONCLUSION

The French court had dominated taste and culture in Europe for the hundred years leading up to the revolution of 1789. The fact that ballet terms, even today, are still in French is a direct result of Louis XIV's founding of the Académie Royale de Dance in 1661, and many of the great ballet companies of Europe were founded during this period in imitation of the French tradition, including the Danish Royal Ballet was in 1748, the Swedish Royal Ballet in 1773 and the Bolshoi in 1776. In England ballet culture was independent and commercially driven throughout the eighteenth century; Great Britain did not have a royal Ballet company until 1956. However, in codifying the dance, the Académie, by its very nature, set ballet on a restrictive path. It was the influence and innovation practiced in other cities: Lyons and Bordeaux within France, and Vienna, Stuttgart, and especially London, that allowed ballet to flourish and develop into the vibrant art form seen today. At the dawn of the century, machines had been used to help magnificently robed deities descend from the heavens to the earth below; as the century closed, man himself had the opportunity, unencumbered by heavy costumes, with an athletic body and spirits suitably inspired, to leave the earth and ascend to heaven – a great leap indeed.

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[ii] See Susan Au, *Ballet and Modern Dance* (London: Thames & Hudson 2002) p. 24-26. The ballet school of the Paris Opera, still in existence today, was founded in 1713 to train professional dancers for the stage.

[iii] Pierre Rameau, *Le Maître à danser* (Paris, 1725) trans. by Cyril W. Beaumont (New York: Dance Horizons 1970), pp. ix–x. For biographical detail see: Graham Sadler, *The Rameau Compendium* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press 2014).

[iv] *Danse noble* and other terms associated with dancing techniques in late-seventeenth century France are discussed in Jennifer Thorp, 'Pecour's Allemande, 1702-1765: How German was it?' in *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 1:2 (2004), p. 183-204.

[v] James Laver, *Drama: Its Costume and Décor* (London: The Studio Publications, 1951) p. 150.

[vi] Details of Subligny's career are found in Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University 1991) Vol 14 p.328-329

[vii] *Tonnelet* is the French word for a little barrel, which aptly describes the shape that the male tunic skirt began to take, as designers added small hoops of a similar shape to those worn by women, to denote leading characters. The term *half-aerial* was defined by Gennaro Magri, whose 1779 treatise, *Trattato Teoricico-prattico di Ballo*, is one of the leading publications about eighteenth-century dance technique, see Deborah Crane & Judith Mackrell *Oxford Dictionary of Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.290.

[viii] Details of Ménestrier's career can be found in Marian Hannah Winter, *The Pre-Romantic Ballet* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1974) pp.7-12

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[xi] For Jean Baptiste Lully see Alison Latham (edit) *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002)

[xii] See Au *Ballet and Modern Dance* p. 26-27.

[xiii] A coryphée is a rank above the chorus but below soloist; usually dances in a small group. See: Sandra Noll Hammond, 'The Rise of Ballet Technique and Training: The Professionalization of an Art Form' in *Cambridge Companion to Ballet, ed. Marion Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 65-77

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[xv] Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing* (New York: Dance Horizons 1970), p. 151. Details of Kellom Tomlinson's career can be found in Highfill, Burnim and Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. 15 pp. 21-23.

[xvi] Laver, *Drama,* p. 150.

[xvii] Rameau, *Le Maître à danser*, p.xii.

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[xix] Pier Jacopo Martello, *Della tragedia antica e moderna* (Rome 1715) discussed in Winter, *The Pre-Romantic Ballet*, p.65.

[xx] See, Lincoln Kirstein, *Fifty Ballet Masterworks* (New York: Dover Publications, 1984) p. 70, Laver, *Drama – Its Costume and Décor*, p. 112, and Roy Strong, Ivor Guest, Richard Buckle, Barry Kay, Liz da Costa, *Designing for the Dancer* (London: Elron Press 1981), p. 14.

[xxi] Laver, *Drama,* p. 152, and Martin Eidelberg, 'Watteau and Gillot: A Point of Contact', *The Burlington Magazine,* (1973 Vol. 115, No. 841, pp. 232-239

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[xxiv] Ralph, *The Life and Works of John Weaver*, p. 743.

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[xxxii] Rameau, *The Dancing Master*, pp. 94-95 & 110

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[xxxiv] See Au Ballet and Modern Dance p. 31

[xxxv] James Laver, *Costume in the Theatre* (London: George Harrap, 1964) p.165, and Strong, Guest, Buckle, *Designing for the Dancer*, p. 36. Arlene Cooper, La Camargo's Skirt: The Eighteenth Century Ballet Re-dressed in *Dress* Vol. 10 (Philadelphia: Maney Publishing 1984) pp. 33-42

[xxxvi] See Au Ballet and Modern Dance pp. 31-32

[xxxvii] *Mercure de France*, April 1764, pp. 770 – 772.

[xxxviii] John Thurmond, *Three Entertainments Performed at Theatre Royal Drury Lane* (London, 1727), pp. 17 – 18.

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[xl] Gregorio Lambranzi *New and Curious School of Theatrical Dancing: The Classic Illustrated Treatise on Commedia dell'Arte Performance* (New York: Dover Publications 2003)

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[xlii] Martello, *Della Tragedia*, p. 313.

[xliii] The symmetrical grandiose style of the Baroque, gave way to the Rococo (from the French word *Rocaille* - rocks), a style based on natural forms, especially shells, from which were derived abstract ornaments in S and C shapes, with asymmetrical twists. It was a lighter, more capricious style that spread to all forms of decoration.

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[lix] Chazin-Bennahum, The Lure of Perfection, pp. 105-7.

[lx] Chazin-Bennahum, The Lure of Perfection, pp. 103

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