

Dress, Class, and Caricature in Late Eighteenth-Century England

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*Heyday! the country Matron in
surprize,/ Is this my Daughter
thus bedizell'd? cries,/ To Town
she lately went a Damsel plain:/
But scarcely now is to be known
again...¹*

In a British satirical print from 1773, a peasant woman reacts with shock at the appearance of a young woman in fine fashionable clothes. The caption exclaims “Heyday! Is this my daughter Anne?,” expressing the older woman’s incredulity at her daughter’s appearance. Standing in a pastoral landscape, Anne could not look more out of place in her exaggeratedly over-decorated and extravagant dress and wig, with a pet poodle at her side. In contrast, her mother wears the simpler dress of a rural peasant woman and expresses concern that Anne’s ostentatious aspect will “frighten here our honest People.” Tensions between rural and urban, young and old, honest and deceptive, and poor and rich all play out in a series of similar cartoons created in the late eighteenth century by professional satirists for a diverse London market.

In this paper, I will analyze a variety of these satirical prints in an attempt to understand how class was expressed visually through clothing, with an emphasis on bringing to light the social forces underpinning these representations. While other sources may be included for context, the bulk of my analysis will focus on prints produced in London in the 1770s which address issues of class through fashionable dress. Within these images, I will look at clothing as an indicator of economic and social status, and discuss the use of juxtaposition and irony as it relates to their interpretations by a contemporary audience.

Captions and accompanying rhymes which are featured in some of the prints communicate essential facts which aid in the construction and interpretation of meaning within the image. These short texts provide additional insight into the discourses surrounding fashion, status, urbanization, and traditional mores within English society, and aid the viewer in discerning meaning from the pictorial component of the satire. Through careful visual and textual analysis of a sample of captioned satirical prints, I will argue that the publications conveyed a general unease with the rapid pace of modernization and the subsequent

¹ Caption to John Bowles’ “Heyday! Is this my Daughter Anne!” 1773. Satirical print, 357mm x 254mm. The British Museum, London. see *fig. 1*

Dress, Class, and Caricature

destabilization of the traditional, Early Modern, world order. These representations graphically blur class distinctions in a way which was meant to be humorous, but reveal an underlying truth: that the visual symbolism of dress which had previously helped to demarcate social and economic status were, with the advent of industrialization, beginning to unravel. Issues of gender, class, and age present themselves within the images, revealing complex cultural attitudes towards women working outside the home, tensions between generations, tensions between “old” and “new” wealth, and tensions between inhabitants of rural and urban regions. There is also an ideological component to the discussion, which demands an analysis of the cultural presuppositions inherent within these images and the means by which they were expressed. All of these disparate components contribute to the overall implications of these satirical prints and influence the ways in which they were approached by contemporary viewers, the nature of the topical issues which they addressed, and the larger social and cultural significance of the trends satirized.

This study combines two strands of scholarly inquiry to offer an academic perspective on the late eighteenth century satirical print: the historiography of early industrialization in England, and the analytical tools of formal art history. Both fields offer a rich and varied source base, but one which has only begun to overlap in the past two decades, through inquiries into the discursive implications of cultural products from this turbulent period. Although development of industrialized systems in Britain, for example, has merited voluminous scholarly research, publications from the 1980s and before tend to focus on quantitative analysis, rather than a qualitative view of the impacts of industrialization on cultural production and social ideologies.² While this approach has revealed the demographic-level change which industrialization precipitated, it does not speak to the cultural ramifications of these changes, or the ways in which such shifts altered the fundamental assumptions under which English society operated.³ In seeking to contribute to the more recent, and controversial, inquiries into the impacts of industrialization on the social and cultural dialogues of eighteenth century Britain, this paper explores the relationship between increased economic mobility and the social symbolism of dress.

There is surprisingly little scholarly literature on the late eighteenth-century print industry. Several art historians have discussed the context in which the painter and social critic William Hogarth

² Robert A. Houston, “British Society in the Eighteenth Century” *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct. 1986), 460.

³ *ibid.*, 439.

produced his works,⁴ however few have gone on to carefully analyze the subsequent generation of satirical artists who took up his mantle, or the development of the industry up to that point. The books and publications which specifically address visual satire and cartoon of the late eighteenth century have only been published in the past two decades, and there is a marked absence of research on this topic from before the 1980s.⁵ A greater emphasis on material culture and ephemera, as well as the introduction of discursive analysis of popular medias, has opened doors for research into topics previously deemed too trivial for scholarly attention.⁶ Recent analyses of dress, for example, both as material object and symbol, have offered a means of understanding clothing within a complex and shifting socio-economic context and have established a vocabulary with which subsequent historians have articulated meanings found within representations of dress and costume in art and popular media.

Of the more recent publications on eighteenth-century satirical prints to have emerged from this historiographical shift, the most prominent and frequently cited are those of art historians Amelia Rauser and Diana Donald.⁷ Donald's text provides an overview of Georgian satirical prints, locating them within their historical context and offering preliminary analyses of individual images, and Rauser, likewise, begins the work of interpreting works of caricature from the Enlightenment onwards. Along with being one of the few to specifically address satirical caricature as a medium, Rauser is the only scholar in the field who has delved into the specific topic of dress as it appears in these images.⁸

This line of inquiry is significant because it gives insight into several facets of English culture during the turbulent industrializing period. The prints themselves, as material objects, are an example of the new modes of mass-production, media consumption, and cultural literacy that the modern period brought with it.⁹ Stemming from a long history of English satire, they nonetheless employed a novel visual language- caricature- which reveals developments in the prevailing modes of social and cultural expression, as well as changes in the

⁴ Mark Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), x.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*, 462.

⁷ Amelia Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity, and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008).; Diana Donald, *The Age of Satire: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

⁸ Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked*, 56.

⁹ Mark Bills, *Satire, Print Shops, and Comic Illustration in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Gresham College, London. October 2010), 7:16.

Dress, Class, and Caricature

commonly perceived relationship between identity and society.¹⁰ As a form of visual communication, caricature was relatively new to Britain and was aptly suited to the topical issues which it sought to lampoon, contemporary modes of fashion in particular.¹¹ These fashions had a place within British culture as a marker of wealth and social status: two historically linked attributes which were becoming increasingly disconnected by industrial forces. Such factors as rural to urban migration, increased availability of paid work, mass-produced luxury items, and increasing speeds of communication influenced fashion on multiple levels.¹² All of these different converging forces and commonly understood circumstances were built into the meaning read from the prints by contemporary viewers.

The system which had formed the structural basis of social interaction for centuries was characterised by clearly delineated status placements that did not allow extensive mobility and were clearly indicated by visual cues in clothing. England had “had no formal clothing ordinances on the law books since 1604,” when James I lifted Elizabethan restrictions on the use of certain types and colors of cloth, however since the fourteenth century laws had existed which restricted the use of specific colors, textiles, and styles based on class.¹³ The following century and a half saw very little change in terms of class distinction based on dress, because there was very little social or economic mobility in preindustrial England and luxury items remained prohibitively expensive and far outside of the means of most individuals.¹⁴ Because of endemic forces which maintained wealth and social status among the nobility and excluded the lower classes from access to luxury goods, it was easily possible to differentiate individuals by class based on the amount and quality of ornamentation on their clothes and the “fashionability” of their dress.¹⁵ Until the late eighteenth century, viewers were literate in the complex symbolic language of clothing and were thus able to gauge a person’s placement within the hierarchy based on what they wore.¹⁶ However with the advent of industrialized economies, the seemingly immutable connection between class, wealth, and fashion was fundamentally destabilized.

¹⁰ Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked*, 17. Rauser goes into detail on this topic both in the Introduction and Chapter 3.

¹¹ Amelia Rauser, “Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* v. 38, no. 1 (Fall 2008), 101.

¹² Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, 207.

¹³ Herman Freudenberger, “Fashion, Sumptuary Laws, and Business,” *The Business History Review* Vol. 37, No. ½. (Summer, 1963), 37.

¹⁴ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, 186.

¹⁵ *ibid*, 13.

¹⁶ *ibid*.

The industrialization of the textile industry in particular, which began on a large scale in the second half of the eighteenth century, opened accessibility to fashionable dress to the lower levels of society. Before industrialization, clothing was hand-made within the home from wool or linen material and featured very little unnecessary adornment.¹⁷ This began to change as new industrial forces overtook the British economy. Innovations in cloth manufacturing and the establishment of first the 'putting-out system' and then factory production, decreased the cost of clothing by producing vast quantities of mass-produced articles. As "prices of [textiles] declined steeply, home production was replaced by the purchase of industrial products," allowing lower class-individuals to become active consumers within the English economy (rather than self-sustaining cottagers) and participate in fashionable display.¹⁸ This process directly contributed to the destabilization of traditional systems of social stratification, class, and the visual demarcation thereof by reducing former visible class-based distinctions in dress.

High fashions of the late eighteenth century, which could legally be worn by any member of society who could afford them, featured tall, decorated wigs, headdresses, or hairstyles; and elaborate gowns or embellished suits.¹⁹ These costumes could be extremely expensive, however, new, increasingly efficient systems of garment manufacturing, along with the influx of raw materials, particularly cotton, from the expanding British Empire made it possible for items of dress which convincingly mimicked upper class fashions to be acquired for prices within the means of individuals who had never before had access to fancy or fashionable dress.²⁰

Urbanization also contributed to the increased accessibility of fashionable dress among the lower classes. As a result of the changing economic landscape of late eighteenth-century England, service and manufacturing jobs became increasingly available to young people from the rural peasant class and opportunities for social mobility, particularly in urban centres drew large numbers into increasingly densely populated cities. According to historian John Styles, hundreds of thousands of rural peasants, often in their late teens, migrated to the city and took paid positions as domestic servants, manual laborers, or apprentices.²¹ These

¹⁷ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, 188.

¹⁸ Jacob Weisdorf, "From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution: Long-Run Growth and Agricultural Development" (*Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 58, No. 2, Apr., 2006), 272.

¹⁹ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, 13-17.

²⁰ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 62.

²¹ *ibid*, 105.

Dress, Class, and Caricature

“extended sojourn[s] in service,”²² made it possible for them to earn wages and have a disposable income, which was either saved, sent back home, or spent on increasingly accessible consumer products.²³ From an analysis of the consumption patterns of these individuals, it becomes clear that they “devoted the bulk of what they spent out of their wages to the purchase of clothing;”²⁴ and, in particular, “the young plebeian women’s more expensive purchases reflected, albeit in a muted, limited manner, the broad trends of high fashion.”²⁵ This economic change wrought huge impacts on the social dynamics of dress, because it became increasingly difficult to determine the social class of an individual simply through a brief visual appraisal of their clothing.

One particular style subculture associated with this trend is the “macaroni” style, which was popularized by young, urban men and women of the upper and aspiring middle classes.²⁶ Although many of the social elite did dress in the macaroni style, a macaroni was not necessarily a member of the upper echelons of society, and was therefore seen as an ambiguous and potentially deceitful character.²⁷ The style, which was based on continental French and Italian dress was controversial because it seemed to “fly in the face of calls to sober, masculine virtue” which characterized the emergent bourgeois sensibility.²⁸ One of the first styles to cut across social divisions, and because it was worn by both the authentically wealthy and the less wealthy aspiring middle class, it became representational of instability within the existing social order, particularly in the urban melting-pot of London where such redesign of the self through clothes was not only possible, but increasingly common.

As well as being the focal point of fashion and social mobility in England, London was also the center of the print industry, which was thriving in the capital city uninhibited by censorship laws.²⁹ During the late eighteenth century, satirical visual prints were mass produced by and cheaply disseminated from London print shops such as that of the Bowles family, which published “Heyday, is this My Daughter Anne?”³⁰ Intended to be humorous visual depictions which could be consumed by a mass audience, these prints addressed widely recognisable cultural,

²² *ibid*, 105.

²³ Styles, “Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England,” 104.

²⁴ John Styles, “Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Edgar, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 110.

²⁵ *ibid*, 111.

²⁶ Rouser, “Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni,” 101.

²⁷ Rouser, “Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni,” 104.

²⁸ *ibid*, 102.

²⁹ Donald, *The Age of Satire*, 19.

³⁰ *ibid*, 15.

social, and political topics through a highly legible visual medium. Expressing clear viewpoints, often popular, they “worked to disseminate the values of personal civility, benevolence, moderation, and aesthetic discrimination”³¹ which were becoming increasingly associated with the new bourgeois, mercantile, and middle classes of the urban sphere. In fact, art historian Mark Hallett argues that, “the satiric format stigmatized the abhorrent bodies and spaces that were to be denied access to the polite public sphere, and reinforced the values of gentility through its deployment of the pictorial negative.”³² This implies that satirical prints expressed, more than anything else, the attitudes and perspective of the rising middle class and the bourgeoisie, who admired social mobility but advocated for austerity and moderation in dress.

Visual satire was initially a product of the protestant reformation, when it was used to criticize and ridicule the Catholic church and its adherents.³³ In England, the engraving and printing trade flourished and reproductions of artworks, satires, and other graphic prints found an eager market in the early 18th century.³⁴ Not typically included in newspapers, satirical prints were manufactured in single sheets of paper and sold individually by publishing houses.³⁵ These images were then purchased and displayed, collected, and shared in stores, coffee shops, and other public and semi-public venues.³⁶ According to historian Diana Donald, “[t]he satiric print was a dynamic and mobile component of english graphic art, and an ubiquitous feature of contemporary urban life”³⁷ and played a central role in civic and community discourse in the British capital in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, satirical prints “reached all echelons of society,”³⁸ making them a pervasive and egalitarian medium. London was the central hub of print production and dissemination, with a complex social fabric and a dynamic population, giving rise to an extensive network of trade and a broad viewership.³⁹ Just as the adoption of fashionable dress by a broader swath of society weakened fashion symbolism as a means of interpreting class, so too did the dialogues and commentaries communicated through satirical print transgress established social boundaries.

³¹ Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference*, 9.

³² Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference*, 10.

³³ Rauser, *Characature Unmasked*, 17.

³⁴ Donald, *The Age of Satire*, 19.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference*, 1.

³⁷ Donald, *The Age of Satire*, 2.

³⁸ Bills, *Satire, Print Shops, and Comic Illustration in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 16:44.

³⁹ Dabhoiwala, “The Appropriation of Hogarth's Progresses,” 583.

Dress, Class, and Caricature

The focus of the prints here analyzed is the consumption of luxury goods, particularly fashionable articles of clothing, by the lower classes. This practice is held up for ridicule in the cartoons, and it is clear that there is a tension between public expectations regarding who should or could wear fashionable dress, and the changing economic realities of the time which allowed social mobility and the adoption of fashionable dress (to varying extents) by members of lower social orders. The style of dress itself, often aligned with the macaroni style, is mocked as being impractical and overblown, an effect which is enhanced by the caricature medium which intentionally distorted and inflated visual elements for comedic and symbolic effect. Humor was derived from the ironic and hyperbolically depicted juxtaposition of fashionable dress –which at the time was strongly associated with the aristocracy– and individuals identified, through text or visual symbolism, as coming from a lower social and economic class. The urban middle class in particular would have seen in these depictions both the vulgarity of the lower classes and the ostentation of the elites as objects of ridicule.

Critical to this discussion is an understanding of the medium of caricature, which developed out of a Renaissance Italian tradition and was imported to Britain in the mid eighteenth century by “grand tourists,” young men of the leisure classes who toured continental Europe as part of their education.⁴⁰ The intentional distortion of certain physical features in a portrait, in order to convey an underlying truth was a central aspect of this visual medium, and was perfectly suited to the changing social landscape of London in the later part of the century.⁴¹ Caricaturists who were producing satirical engravings for the late 18th century British print market were inspired by the conditions and trends that they noticed in contemporary society, in this case the acquisition of luxury goods by lower and middle class individuals, and exaggerated those conditions to ludicrous proportions in order to communicate an “essential truth,”⁴² emphasizing those elements which they perceived as most destabilizing to the changing contemporary society.⁴³ Ostensibly, the goal of caricature was to reveal the true identity of an individual or phenomenon on its external surface.⁴⁴ This new visual language was adapted by London printmakers to suit the needs of their work and society, resulting in a uniquely British form of satire that arose in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked*, 13.

⁴¹ *ibid*, 15.

⁴² Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked*, 17.

⁴³ Styles, “Plebeian Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England,” 104.

⁴⁴ Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked*, 17.

⁴⁵ Donald, *The Age of Satire*, 2.

By the time John Bowles and his contemporaries were critiquing London society through satirical printmaking, their industry already had a long history and was well-established. Credited with developing the market for cheaply-printed satirical engravings is the artist William Hogarth.⁴⁶ Although he was by no means the first, Hogarth is the best-known and most significant of the eighteenth-century social satirists who used visual and printed media, and was responsible for several important innovations in the history of graphic social satire.⁴⁷ Drawing on literary sources, popular visual culture, and the established vocabulary of high art, the classically trained painter created a visual language which appealed to all levels of society.⁴⁸ Originally painted in oil on canvas, the images were copied in engravings and printed when Hogarth realized their commercial potential, allowing the satire to reach a broader audience.⁴⁹ Circulation of the images was further increased by a series of unofficial reproductions, created by engravers hoping to capitalize on the popularity of the initial print run.⁵⁰ Hogarth's images were so popular and widely known that they solidified a certain set of conventions that continued to be drawn upon and quoted a half-century later during the 'golden age of caricature,' and therefore impact the way that a contemporary audience would interpret satires of the third quarter of the 18th century.⁵¹

Marriage a La Mode, one of Hogarth's moral series, is a six-panel narrative cycle that documents the fictional and satirical marriage of the son of a noble family to the daughter of a wealthy bourgeois family. The first panel of the cycle shows the contract of marriage being drawn up between the patriarchs of both families, and emphasises the transactional character of the arrangement.⁵² *Marriage A La Mode* is an early example of satirists remarking on the increasing social mobility and resulting changes in social convention. The image depicts the "infiltration" of the upper class by the up-and-coming of the bourgeoisie, who gained immense wealth through the trades but were not able to legitimize and elevate their place within the social hierarchy to match their economic success except through marriage into the titled nobility.

Like the prints which are the central focus of this analysis, as I will evidence, Hogarth's Marriage cycle, and in particular the first panel of the

⁴⁶ Dabhoiwala, "The Appropriation of Hogarth's Progresses," 583.

⁴⁷ Donald, *The Age of Satire*, 1.

⁴⁸ Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference*, 106.

⁴⁹ Dabhoiwala, "The Appropriation of Hogarth's Progresses," 579.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference*, 106.

⁵² The implication is that the aristocratic family has fallen on hard times financially and that the bourgeois family is looking to attain a title for their descendants.

Dress, Class, and Caricature

series, "The Contract," deals with the issue of social mobility, however, one crucial difference must be noted between "The Contract" panel and later prints that deal with similar issues. In "The Contract," there is no deception or duplicity inherent in the relationships between the character and their dress. In fact, the truth of their character is explicitly written on the body and clothing of the figures. Adhering to a long art-historical tradition, the clothes serve an iconographical function— that is, they act as symbols and convey specific meaning to the viewer which can be "read" by those literate in the symbolic language. For example, the miserly merchant and the gouty aristocrat are both identifiable, in large part, by their clothing and associated props. The aristocrat is dressed in the ostentatious high fashions of the court with expensive velvets and gold brocade, while the merchant wears a more austere suit and coat, indicative of his middle class status but also of his wealth. The role of costume in this image is not to subvert the viewer's expectations, but to communicate specific information about the characters, which the viewer is expected to take at face value.

The only character in whose costume any amount of deception could be interpreted is the merchant's daughter, who wears the fashionable dress of the wealthy. Although it is arguable that the same phenomenon is taking place here, as the daughter dresses within her economic means but not within the bounds of social expectation, the context and execution of the piece still separates it from the overly caricatured images of the 1770s. While those images point out the undermining of dress literacy through radical and exaggerated juxtapositions (for example between the farmer's daughter's dress and her actual social position, as I will discuss later), this use of dress is more ambiguous and therefore cannot be read as having the same intent. The important thing to notice is that in "The Contract" panel, dress is used to communicate the actual social class of the individual characters to the viewer, and draws on, rather than subverts, the symbolism of dress to convey meaning. This is significant because it indicates that although there were trends towards social mobility and middle class aspiration, these trends were not yet destabilizing the classifications of dress in the ways that would become apparent later in the century.

In her 1979 survey of eighteenth-century fashionable dress, dress historian Anne Buck begins the very first chapter by arguing that "[t]he view that dress expressed status in society was an unchallenged commonplace of the eighteenth century."⁵³ This is a critical insight, and one that must serve as a basis for any analysis of visual representations of dress from that period. I would argue, however, that a

⁵³ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*, 13.

challenge to that view was in fact beginning to arise in the third quarter of the century, as increasing social mobility, facilitated by the forces of industrialization, began to destabilize that formerly unchallenged commonplace. Knowing, however, that the eighteenth-century viewer *expected* to be able to read social, and by extension economic, status from a person's garments is essential to understanding the mechanics of these prints, and how humor and the subversion of expectations engage with the viewer through dress.

The image with which I opened this analysis, "Heyday, is this My Daughter Anne?" is a clear example of this approach, as it latches on to real and recognisable trends and extends them into the realm of comic implausibility, relying on the viewer's ability to "read" meaning through the application of contextual information and socially-derived preconceptions. Another example is a cartoon from the same series which depicts Anne's male counterpart, Tom, and brings to light further issues in the destabilization of traditional sartorial modes of class representation. "What is this my son Tom?" juxtaposes the image of the newly refined, cosmopolitan Tom, just returned from the city, with the honest simplicity of his provincial father. Like in the previous image, the tension and humor of the image comes from the understanding that Tom's elegant facade is in fact just that: a pretension made possible by the ephemeral success of the city, and that ultimately he is as rustic as his father.

The uncomfortable tension between the father and the son in the print reveals broader anxieties over national identity and questions of bourgeois and peasant morality. This is most clearly expressed in the caption, which reads, "Our wise Forefathers would express/Ev'n Sensibility in Dress;/The modern Race delight to Shew/What Folly in Excess can do." This clearly contrasts the traditional "even sensibility in dress" which adhered to class-defined expectations and paracticality, with the "folly in excess" which the younger generation embraced. In both the visual structure of the image and within the text there is a clearly intended contrast being drawn between the conventional and the modern, the old and the new, and the moderate and the ostentatious. This contrast speaks directly to the awareness by contemporary viewers that the stable delineations and visual conventions which had for so long maintained class order and stability were being challenged by new, modern forces.

While it is conceivable that Tom was understood as having at least earned his clothes through more or less respectable means, there are more morally dubious implications to Anne's transformation. In a tradition encompassing Hogarth's *Harlot's Progress* among other similar narrative tropes, the rural girl arriving in the city and making her fortune was often

Dress, Class, and Caricature

interpreted as her having sold herself into prostitution.⁵⁴ In a way, the Anne cartoon could be understood as an alternative ending to Hogarth's *Harlot's Progress*, another moralizing cycle like *Mariage a La Mode*, which traces the life of a prostitute named Moll from her arrival in the city to her death.⁵⁵ Rather than contracting syphilis and dying as Moll does in *Harlot's Progress*, Anne returns to her rural origins wearing her ill-gotten attire as an exhibition of her financial success, either from sex work or some other form of public paid labor. This moral ambiguity was almost universally applied to depictions of women working outside of the home, as middle class values emphasizing women's placement within the domestic sphere began to take shape. The shock of the mother then takes on a dimension beyond that of Tom's father, and reflects a moral anxiety which arose during that period among rural peasants, characterizing the city as a center of vice.

The theme of the rural young woman returning from the city in fashionable dress was reprised less than a decade later in 1777. The later image, entitled "The Farmer's Daughter Returns from London," was produced in at least two iterations in England and Ireland. Like in "Heyday, Is This My Daughter Anne," the caricatured macaroni woman returns to her peasant life after a sojourn in the city. In one humorous detail of the composition, her massive wig catches on a meat hook over the door as she rushes to greet her plebeian father, conveying the incompatibility of the city regalia and the rural setting. Again, the absurdity of the situation is emphasised and mocked, but it is clear that concern over shifts in spending and dressing patterns of young women in particular was a source of concern for the everyday viewer of these images.

Once again the implications of her return in finery are unclear, and there is no reference within the image or accompanying text to her occupation, so the viewer is left to imagine that she may have engaged in prostitution in order to achieve her façade of status. These layers of identity: peasant, prostitute, or servant, and, outwardly, woman of fashion, provide the irony and humor of the cartoon. Like "Anne" and "Tom," "The Farmer's Daughter" specifically addresses the destabilization wrought by increasing opportunities for young plebeian men and women to earn wages and use those wages to engage in the consumption of fashionable dress, a capacity which was not fiscally possible before industrialization. In doing so, they were upsetting the clearly delineated traditional visual language of dress, which conveyed

⁵⁴ Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference*, 100.

⁵⁵ Diana Donald, *The Age of Satire: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*, 85.

on the surface level the social and economic class of the wearer with minimal ambiguity.

The lack of clarity as to whether the young women have earned their clothing through respectable paid labor (such as maid-service) or through less respectable means implies that there was a great deal of anxiety underpinning these representations, especially as they relate to female autonomy and participation in the economy, and movement between rural and urban spaces. The city was indisputably perceived as a moral hazard and a center of vice, and there was a great deal of concern surrounding the migration of young people, young women in particular, from the countryside to the city. This manifested itself in, among other ways, a large quantity of literature on the lives of prostitutes, almost always beginning with young rural peasant girls arriving in the big city.⁵⁶ While there is no indication in the prints that prostitution was actually the means by which the clothes were purchased, the fact that it was left open to interpretation implies that the ambiguity existed, or at least that women in legitimate paid positions, such as maid service which implied physical proximity to and dependence upon her employer, still had a morally dubious tinge in the minds of the viewers.

Although Anne and the Farmer's Daughter were both young peasant women who left their rural setting, spent time in the city, and then returned to their peasant family in fashionable dress, the two images are not identical and demonstrate a major shift which was underway in the later part of the eighteenth century in the popular "conception of the self," the construction of fixed identity and the perception of the individual's relationship to society.⁵⁷ The key difference comes out not in the artists' handling of the girls' external facade, but in the overall attitudes towards the possibility of fundamental internal change presented within the narrative of the print. Anne is understood as having been fundamentally altered by the city, such that her "good Housewifery" was "banished" and her fundamental self was as significantly changed as her external appearance. She stands in a ladylike posture, and wears her clothes with the dignity of someone bred for them. Although we, as the audience, are aware that she was originally from the peasantry, and find it humorous that such a transformation could take place, the mother's concerns indicate to us that Anne has been fundamentally reshaped by city life.

In contrast, the Farmer's Daughter betrays that she has not been fundamentally changed by her time in the city, and that beneath her fancy dress she is still an uncultured peasant. This is indicated in the way

⁵⁶ Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference*, 85.

⁵⁷ Rouser, *Characture Unmasked*, 15.

Dress, Class, and Caricature

that she rushes forward to greet her father, in the process catching her overblown coiffure on a pair of meat hooks. Her lack of grace, dignity, and refinement, which were all internal characteristics associated with the higher social classes, mark her as still a member of the peasantry underneath her fancy dress. This distinction was characteristic of the new, modern worldview, which argues for the existence of an essential "identity" in each person, an unchangeable essence that persists despite changes in circumstance.⁵⁸ This was contrasted with the deeply distrusted "external facade" which could be manipulated for duplicitous purposes.

When applied to the issue of class and representations of dress, it becomes evident that, in this new model of understanding, the dress was part of the "external facade" and therefore could no longer be trusted as a means of understanding the true nature of an individual. The interplay between external facade and internal identity is the basis for humor in all of the prints, however it is particularly apparent in prints from later in the period. It becomes clear that the irony of the facade as being eggagerratedly different from "reality" is essential to both the humor and the message of these images. Clearly a shift was taking place in the way that the self was represented and interpreted, and class, and particularly the communication of class through dress, was central to the discussion.

The same trends were, of course, taking place within the urban context, although their effects and interpretations were different when the contrast between the city and the country was de-emphasised. Another perspective on the young proletarian woman in service can be found in a 1776 etching called "Betty the Cookmaids Hair Drest." The image itself depicts an outrageously distorted headdress with kitchen implements arranged to appear like rococo decorations. Near the top, a monkey wearing a jester or fool's cap sits next to a stove. A poetical caption reads, "The Taste at present all may see,/ But none can tell what is to be,/ Who knows when Fashions whims are spread,/ But each may wear this Kitchen Head./ The Noddle that so vastly swells,/ May wear a Fool's cap, hung with Bells." The print appears to be a critique of fashion in general, and the ephemeral nature of fashion, but also expresses concern at the increasing flexibility of fashionable dress with regards to the class of the wearer.

Betty's lowly social and economic role is communicated through the kitchen implements which decorate her hair, however these decorations *mimic*, in form, the rococo design of adornments which might be found on the headdress of a wealthy woman. From a distance then, one might mistake Betty herself as a wealthy woman, although with closer scrutiny it becomes clear that this is an illusion. Through this

⁵⁸ Rouser, *Characture Unmasked*, 15.

reading of the image and text it is humorously indicated that young women appropriated those items which were accessible to them, and used those to emulate fashionable dress of the upper classes, with varying degrees of success. In doing so, they contributed to the process of destabilizing and subverting the visual symbolism of class in dress.

While the picture itself is relatively oblique, despite its use of visual symbolism, the poem conveys more clearly the artist's interpretation. The line "[w]ho knows when Fashion whims are spread" indicates that the possibility for "fashion" to "spread" to the servant classes was a real and recognised threat. This threat is treated lightly, however, within the print: the artists' imaginative conception of proletarian fashions seems to make as much fun of the original, aristocratic styles as criticise the hapless Betty, seemingly a victim of present taste. Underpinning this representation, however, is the acknowledgement or concern that fashionable display was becoming possible for young servants – many from rural regions of the country, others a permanent part of the city's lower class – to acquire and wear some of the trappings of fashionable dress.

Further moral concerns over this trend is expressed in this image as well through the symbolism of a monkey wearing a jester's cap and staring into a mirror, which somewhat ridiculously appears on top of a lit stove crowning Betty's coiffure. The monkey in Western art implies lack of independent thought, vanity, emulation of others, and base pleasures. The jester's cap indicates foolishness and lack of intellect, and the act of staring at one's own reflection is the symbolic embodiment of *vanitas*-vanity. These symbols in combination are a critique of the practice of fashion, which depends on copying the dress and actions of others, the emphasis on cultivating the external appearance over internal character, and vices such as vanity, greed, and lust. These attributes were already commonly associated with women, and a preoccupation with fashion was increasingly seen as feminine or feminizing and was contrasted with the masculine restraint and austerity which was becoming increasingly popular during the same period.⁵⁹

It was not just the peasant and servant classes who became targets for satire. The lower middle class, some of whom were increasingly able to acquire fashionable dress thanks to the decreasing costs of clothing materials through textile mass-production, were also addressed by satirical printmakers. In a 1772 print captioned "The Butcher's Wife Dressing for the Pantheon," printmaker Phillip Dawe depicts a middle aged, middle class woman at her toilette, dressing herself in the fashionable mode. This image, of the aspiring middling sort in dress

⁵⁹ Rouser, "Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni," 107.

Dress, Class, and Caricature

which emulated the upper class and was affordable to them, was common for the time. As Maxine Berg points out in *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century England*, “[a] rapidly growing middle class avid for fashion, modernity, individuality, variety, and choice sought out new products, invented and embellished them, and took delight in the consumer experiences.⁶⁰ The ostentatious consumerism and self-conscious emulation of the wealthy and fashionable by this highly mobile segment of urban society is emphasised and mocked within Dawe’s image.

It is not without significance that the subject of this print is “dressing for the Pantheon.” The Pantheon was a multifunctional public venue in London which hosted cultural dances, masquerades, and other social events in the 1770s, and provided a space for cross-class interactions and sartorial display.⁶¹ Initially, the Pantheon shareholders limited admission to high society only, however when this proved commercially unviable, they opened admittance to any who could afford the ticket price. The result was that the Pantheon became the place to see and be seen, accessible to wealthy and upwardly mobile members of the middle class as well as the true upper crust of society. The architecture of the building itself was said “to show [the company] to advantage.”⁶² With a range of social and economic classes mixing in a common space, and the urge towards fashionable display encouraging those of the middle classes who could afford to dress with as much ornamentation and style as their titled peers, social and class distinctions blurred and interpreting dress became unreliable as a method of distinction. The fact that the Butcher’s Wife is explicitly dressing to go to the Pantheon places this scenario into a context familiar to contemporary viewers, who would have understood the reference to the Pantheon as a place where many of the social conventions relating to the congruity of social class and dress were disregarded.

This effect was compounded by the nature of the masquerade, a popular event which occurred at the Pantheon at least twice per season and was open to all subscribers.⁶³ The masked ball, as Amelia Rouser points out in her 2008 article, “Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni,” was a space in which “participants could leave their regular identities behind and masquerade as other classes.” This inter-mixing and illusion further eroded the perceived boundaries of class and allowed a

⁶⁰ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 20.

⁶¹ “The Pantheon,” in *Survey of London: Volumes 31 and 32, St James Westminster, Part 2*, ed. F H W Sheppard (London: London County Council, 1963), 268-283. British History Online.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Rouser, “Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni,” 105.

greater fluidity of self-representation for individuals from conventionally segregated social strata. Rauser goes on to argue that “[t]he masquerade dramatized the thrill and the danger of self-creation, and as a metaphor for modern selfhood caused anxiety over the gap between the perceived surface—the social mask—and the unseen real character beneath.”

Critically, this analysis reaches the heart of many of the images here discussed. In a metaphorical sense, the city itself acted as a masquerade, providing opportunities for and means of remaking the self. The anxiety which Rauser points out is clearly present in all of the prints here discussed, and extends to a broader understanding of the changing attitudes towards concepts of selfhood, identity, and social interaction that marked the transition from the Early Modern to the Modern period.

With this context in mind it is easier to interpret the various layers of meaning in “The Butcher’s Wife.” To begin with, it is established by the caption that she is a member of the class of urban craftspeople who had inhabited the lower and middle orders of the urban spheres since the medieval period. Her status then is defined as distinctly incompatible with the fashionable continental fashions which she wears, the decorative and elaborate hairstyle, and the overall style developed among the leisure class, which would have proved impractical for working class individuals. Despite this, she wears fashionable dress because it has come within her— or her husband’s— means to do so, despite the fact that, in social terms, her status has not changed.

Although the majority of the prints which speak clearly and directly to the destabilized symbolism of social hierarchy through dress come from the 1770s and ‘80s, there is evidence that these issues continued to be felt and discussed into the 19th century. A 1809 print captioned “Farmer Giles & his wife shewing off their daughter Betty to their neighbours, on her return from school-,” speaks to this tension within the context of aspiration and ostentatious display for the *nouveau riche*. In the print, the newly wealthy farming family entertain guests in the gaudily decorated parlor, encouraging their boarding school educated daughter to play the piano. All members of the party wear fashionable dress to convey their wealth, yet the humor or amusement of the image comes from the ridicule of the farmer and his family, who demonstrate their lack of good taste through their tasteless disposal of this newly acquired status and financial security.

Again the tensions between appearance of wealth and status and the underlying “truth” (in this case that the family comes from farming stock) is evident. In their ostentatious consumption, Farmer Giles and his family do not conform to the ideals of “polite” middle class culture which advocated for such values as austerity and thrift, and which was increasingly taking hold among the middle class. Even so, they were not

Dress, Class, and Caricature

outliers, and the general trend of the eighteenth century was towards greater consumption of luxury goods which displayed and communicated newly acquired wealth.⁶⁴ In attempting to emulate the very wealthy, families such as Farmer Giles contributed to the destabilization of the visual indicators of social hierarchy by engaging in overt and ostentatious consumerism and patterning their behaviour on that of the wealthy in an aspirational style, making it harder to discern the social category in which a family may have originated. This later print shows that although there was a peak in public discourse over the issue of dress and class, as evidenced by the multiple satirical prints that speak to that tension produced during the 1770s, it is clear that this was a small part of a larger historical trend that continued into the 19th century. Among other things, this historical trend encompassed the movement into the Modern Period through changes in consumption patterns, perceptions of the self and society, the breakdown of the old systems of classification, and the construction of new ideals.

One could argue that the process of destabilization of early modern and medieval systems of classification continue to this day, for example with the deconstruction of gender binaries. In this more modern example, clothing is also a major factor in constructing and dissembling traditional visual literacy which allows viewers to perceive the “true” or “natural” self by interpreting the external facade. Just as in late eighteenth-century depictions of class transgression, with lower class individuals adopting the fashionable dress of the elite, so too do many twenty-first century individuals transgress gender boundaries by adopting the visual symbolism of a gendered group other than that in which they were originally classified. The same ambiguity arising around the essential being of Anne, for example, the question if she had been fundamentally changed by the city or whether she was still at heart a country girl, comes to bear on other modern issues that deal with essentialism of the self and questions of personal and social identity.

Ultimately, it becomes clear that there were a number of caricatures produced in late eighteenth-century London which expressed underlying tensions regarding the expression of social and economic class through dress. This can most easily be accounted for by an analysis of economic changes which were taking place, which included rural to urban migration, a growing middle class, and the increased availability of prefabricated luxury items. Social mobility and wage labor blurred the traditional lines of social hierarchy and challenged the customary visual indicators of status, most obviously that of dress. By undermining the traditional meaning given to fancy or fashionable dress and luxury

⁶⁴ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, 18.

adornments, these social and economic changes deconstructed the visual literacy of dress which had been in place since at least the sixteenth century. Furthermore, changes in the way that social and individual identity was conceived and discussed put greater emphasis on the interplay between true internal self and external facade, including dress. All of these changes influenced the production of visual caricature and served as the basis for social commentary and humor. Satirical depictions which blurred the distinctions of class and status through dress, despite being provocative exaggerations, provide evidence that is further supported by economic analysis- that people of lower class status were buying clothing items formerly associated with the upper classes, thus destabilizing the visual sartorial symbolism of the social hierarchy which had been in place for hundreds of years.

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Dress, Class, and Caricature

Appendix



fig 1: John Bowles, "Heyday? Is this my Daughter Anne?" 1773. Satirical print, 357mm x 254mm. The British Museum, London.



fig. 2: William Hogarth, "The Contract," from Marriage a La Mode. 1743. Engraving, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Dress, Class, and Caricature



fig. 3: Bowles, John. "What is this my son Tom," 1774, in *Social Caricature in the Eighteenth Century* by George Paston. London: Methuen & Co., 1905.



fig. 4: William, Humphrey. "The farmer's daughter's return from London," 1777. Satirical print, 353mm x 250mm. The British Museum, London.

Dress, Class, and Caricature

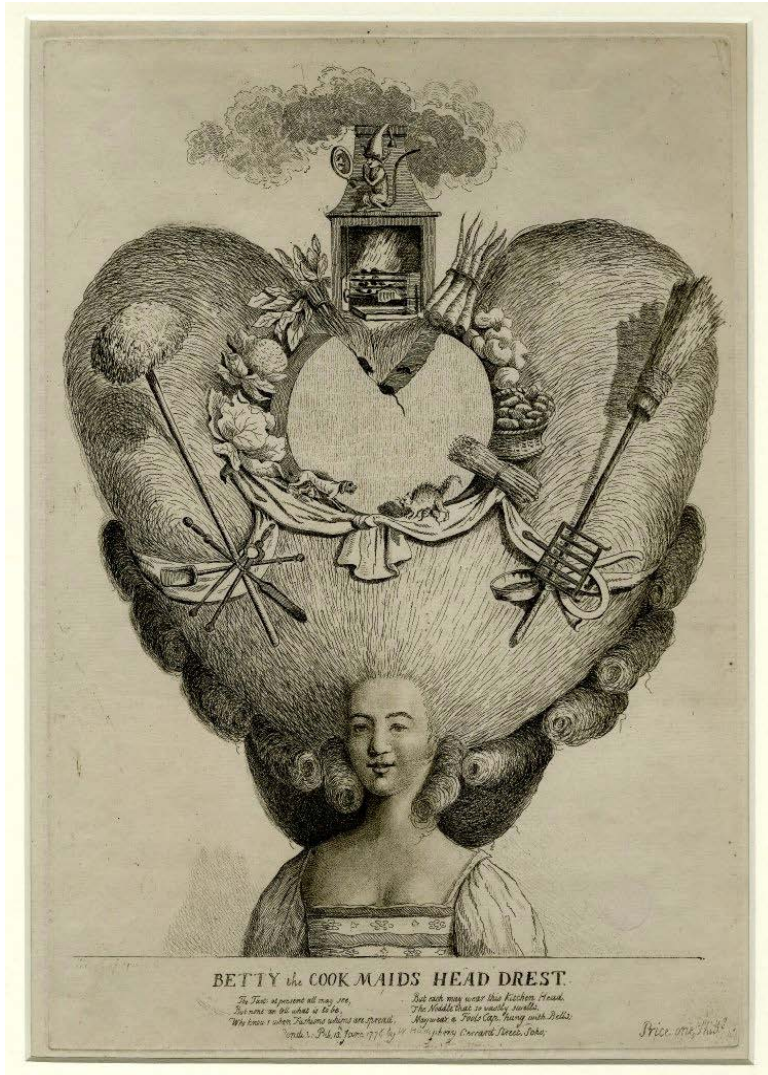


fig 5: William Humphrey (pub.). "Betty the cook maid's head drest," 1776. Satirical print, 330mm x 232mm. The British Museum, London.



fig. 6: Phillip Dawe (pub.). "The Butcher's Wife dressing for the Pantheon," 1772. Satirical print, 354mm x 250mm. The British Museum, London.

Dress, Class, and Caricature



fig 7: Gillray, James. "Farmer Giles and his Wife shewing off their daughter Betty to their Neighbours,

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