



# An Analytical Perspective On Regency Fashion In Jane Austen's Novels

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## Abstract

Jane Austen was a prolific author of a few novels, including Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Persuasion, and Emma. This research analyses Austen's use of fashionable consumerism to represent persons in the narrative, while exploring the socio-economic factors that shape these consumerist traits. The varied readings and implications provide a robust foundation for analysing how the novel contests the notion of the natural and investigates the interconnection of different trends, whether in jewelry or the textiles of that particular period. Austen skillfully employs contemporary styles and the metaphor of attire to examine the characters' adherence to societal norms. Jane Austen employed this writing style, cognizant of her audience, and frequently interacted with them, anticipating their participation. Austen's works possess pragmatic relevance in literature, education, and cinema studies. Her novels are extensively read and analyzed, providing insights into human relationships, cultural conventions, and individual aspirations.

**Keywords:** Austen, Dress, Fashion, Novels, Regency

## INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen, born on December 16, 1775, and deceased on July 18, 1817, was an English author renowned for her six works that intricately analyse, assess, and contemplate the British landed nobility of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Austen's narratives often explore women's dependence on marriage for attaining favourable social standing and economic security. Her works implicitly challenge the novels of sensibility from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and contribute to the transition towards 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary realism. Her adept integration of social commentary, realism, and incisive irony has earned her acclaim from reviewers and historians. Published anonymously, Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), Mansfield Park (1814), and Emma (1816) attained some success but failed to confer any acknowledgment upon the author during her lifetime. She wrote two additional novels, Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, both of which were published posthumously in 1817. She commenced another work, subsequently titled Sanditon, but died before completing it. She also bequeathed three volumes of juvenile manuscripts, the concise epistolary work Lady Susan, and the unfinished novel The Watsons.

## OBJECTIVES

This suggested study aims to clarify the close relationship between Regency dress and fashion in the works of Jane Austen. This study assesses the influence of fashion on Austen's structural, formal, and linguistic choices, prompted by the emergence of the fashion system in the eighteenth century. This study analyses how Austen exposes the intrinsic shortcomings of the Regency fashion narrative by emphasizing the dependence on repetition and homogeneity disguised as individualism. The research demonstrates to readers the diverse meaning of fashion narratives that will pervade the entire story.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study examines Austen's novels and early writings to comprehend her writing style, subjects, and literary strategies. It also analyses the historical background of her writing, encompassing the social conventions and expectations of her era. The techniques employed in the text involve the examination of Jane Austen's literary works, specifically *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*, with an analysis of her writing style and the investigation of societal conventions. Austen's works and novels examine Regency dress using descriptive and analytical methods.

## AUSTEN'S WRITINGS

Austen's novels have remained continuously published after her demise. In 1833, a significant alteration in her renown occurred when her writings were republished in Richard Bentley's Standard Novels series, illustrated by Ferdinand Pickering and marketed as a collection. In 1869, fifty-two years posthumously, Jane Austen's nephew released *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, offering an engaging depiction of her literary career and ostensibly mundane existence to an eager readership. Her work has incited multiple critical essays and has been included in various literary anthologies. Her literary works have been the foundation for numerous films, including *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), and *Love & Friendship* (2016).

Limited biographical information of Austen exists, sourced from her extant correspondence and familial accounts. Approximately 160 of the almost 3,000 letters authored by Austen have been preserved and published. Cassandra Austen eliminated the majority of the correspondence from her sister by incinerating or otherwise obliterating them. Cassandra omitted details regarding illness, suffering, and other unpleasant matters to safeguard reputations from Jane's propensity for honesty and directness.

"I have now attained the true art of letter-writing, which we are always told is to express on paper exactly what one would say to the same person by word of mouth.

I have been talking to you almost as fast as I could the whole of this letter" — (Jane Austen Letter 29, 3-5 Jan 1801)

## THE SILK PELISSE COAT

A closer look into the physical characteristics and historical context of a silk pelisse coat, dating from approximately 1812–1814 and currently held by Hampshire County Museum Services and Archives, suggests a possible association with Jane Austen (1775–1817). The pelisse is the exclusive garment that can disclose coveted insights regarding the physique of this visually elusive author, and it is a well-established item of sartorial Austenalia. It is the sole garment for the body. Given that the origins cannot be definitively proved, the offered material information is substantive, rather than dependent on secondary descriptions or narrative interpretations. In 1813, Jane Austen commissioned a ball gown crafted from 'China Crape' and another gown fashioned from lilac net. This suggests that silk was not an unfamiliar fabric in her attire. The Austen pelisse is composed of a warm brown silk twill featuring a design of pale gold or straw-colored oak leaves. The motif is interlaced in contrasting diagonals, with each four-inch repeat including four leaves. The cotton features diagonally printed brown lines that mimic the woven design of the silk pelisse, indicating that the silk was produced in 1812. The pelisse measures twenty-one inches in width. Jane Austen exhibited a preference for brown gowns, owned a silk pelisse in 1814, required 7.5 yards of fabric for a gown, sought to maintain a respectable and contemporary appearance, and was notably tall, as evidenced by her writings.

In 1808, when Austen was meticulously editing *Sense and Sensibility* for publication and revising her earlier works, she completed two poems. The initial poem, entitled 'Cambrick! with Grateful Blessings', was four lines of verse that Austen dispatched to her intimate friend Catherine Bigg on August 26, 1808. This poem was intended to accompany cambric handkerchiefs that Austen had meticulously stitched herself. The second poem, entitled 'Cambrick! thou'st been to me a good', was an extended iteration of the first verse; nevertheless, Austen chose not to dispatch it. These two succinct poems require careful examination as they offer important insights into Austen's view on the relationship between literary and fashion trends. The central theme in both poems is the cambric handkerchief, which functions as the dominant symbol of refined sensibility. In the domain of sentimental fiction during the eighteenth century, no other object possessed greater significance. These poems were expressly composed to accompany the stitched handkerchiefs. They illustrate the intimate relationship between written texts

and textiles, while also emphasizing emotional issues in which clothing and the body, symbolizing sensitivity, are depicted.

### THE PORTRAYAL OF FASHION IN THE NOVEL SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Similar to several narratives in the *Lady's Monthly Museum* throughout the early 1800s, Austen's tale, updated and published between 1809 and 1810, centers on a widow and her children who must vacate their residence and are concerned about their finances. Oliver Mac Donagh asserts that Austen grounded *Sense and Sensibility* in meticulously documented realities of wealth, property, and possessions. The narrative is predicated on the abrupt impoverishment of Mrs. Henry Dashwood and her daughters. The *Lady's Monthly Museum* portrayed the financial challenges faced by widows in a more realistic manner. Elinor opts to exchange her gold in London, at an exclusive establishment in the West End. Berg asserts that it was fashion, rather than price or quality, that rendered London items particularly popular. Elinor should utilize her vacation to London to dispose of her antiquated jewels. The significance inherent in the act of exchange depends on individuals' comprehension of common consumer rules. Both Miller's and Murphy's propositions are feasible.

The gemstones bestowed upon Elinor by her mother symbolize various significances. Symbolically, they possess enduring significance throughout time and space, as they are irremovable gifts. Nonetheless, their fashion significance was consistently ephemeral. Pointon's examination of jewellery from the extended eighteenth century reveals that each generation typically deems the jewellery of its predecessor unfashionable; stones are extracted and reset, leading to a scarcity of examples from prior eras.

### FASHION IN MANSFIELD PARK

The narrative development of *Mansfield Park* centers on the essential issue of the necessity to evade ennui, a persistent affliction that endangers the fashionable milieu of eighteenth-century literature and society. In 1817, the pursuit of novel and stimulating experiences, like reading contemporary literature, donning stylish attire, and attending theatrical performances or social gatherings, was perceived as a means to mitigate and simultaneously exacerbate ennui. The quest for amusement and recreation is a fundamental element in the language and narrative of *Mansfield Park*. The novel features people who, according to the fashion enthusiasts depicted by philosopher Christian Garve in his 1792 essay 'On Fashion', prioritize the avoidance of tedium over diligent effort and perpetually seek innovative concepts to invigorate their creativity. The correlation between dress and ennui is intricately linked in Austen's 1814 novel. Nonetheless, More, whose critiques are said to have influenced Austen's writing of *Mansfield Park*, underscores the vital link between fashion and ennui: a stylish lifestyle predominantly depended on the availability of more engaging diversions to fill one's leisure time. The core of fashion is in the desire to escape the monotony of conformity. Individuals can only enjoy the invigorating delight that briefly mitigates boredom by adopting constantly evolving trends. Boredom significantly influences the fashion system. Fashion theorist Fred Davis thinks that boredom is the primary catalyst for changes in fashion. Joe Moran contends that the ennui felt by individuals who were formerly in vogue underscores capitalism's dependence on planned obsolescence and the endorsement of ephemeral trends. This chapter asserts that the narrative structure of *Mansfield Park* relies on the interplay between monotony and innovation. This trend notably affects the behaviors of the stylish and aspiring stylish folks in *Mansfield Park*.

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen exposes the Crawfords' manipulative schemes while emphasizing the novel's examination of fashionable boredom through a series of somewhat isolated events occurring at the parsonage of Mr. and Mrs. Grant. These distinct instances can be likened to Lady Susan's candid correspondence with Mrs. Johnson. Austen used these sequences to sustain a link between the reader and Mary's inner reflections. Likewise, it is in the parsonage where the narrator first reflects on the potential monotony of country life.

### FASHION AS INTERPRETED IN NORTHANGER ABBEY

*Northanger Abbey* is a novel authored by Jane Austen and published posthumously in 1817. *Northanger Abbey*, published concurrently with *Persuasion* in a four-volume collection, was written in 1798 or 1799, perhaps under the provisional title *Susan*. The work contrasts a satirical critique of conventional novels portraying elite life with a critique of Gothic horror narratives. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen examines a diverse array of characters who partially construct their identities via their engagement with fashion and business. Austen deliberately emphasizes the notion of

self-fashioning through fashionable consumption in her characters to impart a moral lesson. Austen recognizes the socio-economic importance of fashionable consumption in her era, articulates discontent with women who overly prioritize attire or are readily swayed by the deceptive aspects of fashion, and examines the personal ramifications of an increasingly commercialized Regency England. Austen used clothes as a mechanism to construct moralized character identities inside the narrative. She links descriptive clothing, shopping experiences, and fashion discourse, all aimed at facilitating deliberate identity formation. Focusing exclusively on one's clothing, as Mrs. Allen does, or dressed flamboyantly, like Isabella Thorpe, reflects a lack of discernment. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that Northanger Abbey neither contests nor disparages fashion. Choosing elegant clothing and exhibiting a strong interest in fashion economics, like to Eleanor Tilney and Henry Tilney, reflects a cultivated and discriminating character. Austen's work presents several characters who are duplicitous, fraudulent, or disingenuous. These characters, including Wickham, Willoughby, Lucy Steele, Henry Crawford, Mrs. Elton, and Sir Walter Elliot along with his successor, all emanate a demeanor reminiscent of preadolescents. Henry Tilney, Isabella, Mrs. Allen, and John Thorpe from Northanger Abbey exhibit inauthenticity by their manipulative, hypocritical, and, in some instances, foolish actions. Their duplicitous conduct elicits amusement, although it also underscores how convictions can compromise genuine dating customs.

### FASHION AS IDENTIFIED IN PERSUASION

Jane Austen's last completed novel is among her most highly regarded masterpieces. Persuasion is a narrative often described as possessing an autumnal ambiance. The narrative centers on a mature protagonist and examines the concept of redemption opportunities. Cassandra's timeline indicates that Jane Austen began writing Persuasion on August 8, 1815. The original version was completed on July 18, 1816; however, she voiced discontent with the ending and subsequently revised it by writing two more chapters. The novel's premise is around an occurrence that transpired eight years before the narrative, whereby Anne and Captain Wentworth's romantic engagement was obstructed by adverse circumstances. They wished to marry, but Wentworth had neither wealth nor any guarantee of obtaining it in the future or achieving social advancement. Anne was convinced that it would be in his best advantage to refrain from marrying her (Austen, 20-21). Consequently, despite their reciprocal devotion, it was clearly an unsuitable time for them to marry. They needed to wait until they were both in more favorable situations to unite. Ultimately, both are afforded another chance to pursue their love due to their patient anticipation of the ideal moment for union. Austen creates timeless characterizations that continue to resonate in modern times. Considering the relationships these folks share with Anne, we can empathize with them by identifying like individuals in our own life. An example of this is the relationship between Anne and Lady Russell, a common interaction that I believe individuals still experience today.

Persuasion is a novel that examines issues of love, social status, and gender roles in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England. It analyzes the impact of society expectations and standards on the behavior and performance of men and women to attain approval and evade rejection. In Persuasion, the protagonists Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, both enduring the anguish of their broken engagement from eight years prior, conform to their socially prescribed roles and responsibilities to manage their emotions of alienation. Anne fulfills the societal expectations of unmarried women during that era by caring for her family, which includes attending to the ill, the young, and the elderly, despite her family failing to provide her with love and admiration in return. Conversely, Wentworth embodies the contemporary male ideal by striving to achieve personal wealth through a successful career as a naval officer.

### FASHION DEPICTED IN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

In Pride and Prejudice, a novel by Jane Austen, the five Bennet sisters exemplify the divergent views on love and marriage within a conventional societal framework. Pride and Prejudice is largely acknowledged as a celebrated love narrative. Nonetheless, Austen's purpose seems to transcend simple narrative; she seeks to illustrate that love is not exclusively dependent on monetary factors. Nonetheless, Austen does not solely illustrate this. She clearly illustrates that financial resources improve the quality of a marriage connection. Therefore, I contend that love is of utmost importance in this novel, and it is this issue that I plan to examine in my dissertation. At the outset of the novel, Darcy evaluates Elizabeth, remarking that she is satisfactory but lacks the allure to captivate him; moreover, he expresses a disinclination to value young women who are overlooked by other men (Austen, P22). Darcy

continually exhibits an attitude of superiority towards others, leading him to disregard Elizabeth throughout that time. Permit us to modify the configuration. During another social event, Darcy starts to see that Elizabeth has a lively and cheerful disposition, and he is oblivious to the fact that he is gradually becoming attracted to her. Nonetheless, his inflated pride exacerbates Elizabeth's growing prejudices toward him. Darcy's pride is a representation of social standing differences. Their arrogance will preclude the possibility of sharing thoughts, emotions, or attaining an ideal marriage.

The narrative presents finely developed characters and dialogues that thoroughly examine the subjects of social class, marriage, and love. Nonetheless, it facilitated the exploration of the English countryside in the early 19th century. Historically, clothes symbolized an individual's social rank, unlike today. It functioned as a means to conform to societal norms and as a vehicle for self-expression. In her narrative, she utilized glamor to examine various individuals and draw a connection between identity and looks. Furthermore, she elucidated stereotypes and their influence on judgment and perception. Let us analyze how attire critiques conventional conventions and reveals the true nature of the character. The book depicts a transient fashion of the Regency Era. The Regency era occurred from 1811 to 1820. During that period, King George III was deemed mentally unable to reign. Consequently, his son ascended to authority as a proxy or prince regent. The tradition continued until his father's death in 1820, after which he became King George IV. This period marked a shift from the elaborate and structured Georgian fashion style. Austen's narrative illustrated the trendy trends common among the upper class of English society. Women's gowns had heightened waistlines, flowing fabrics, and elongated, columnar silhouettes. They wore high-waisted gowns with form-fitting skirts. The gowns exhibited truncated sleeves, deep necklines, and elaborate embellishments including ribbons. Women employed fine muslin, satin, silk, floral patterns, and lightweight textiles. They employed bonnets as vital accessories, alongside gloves, shawls, and other fashionable adornments. Men throughout the Regency era displayed a more simplistic dress aesthetic. They wore tailored jackets with exaggerated tails, complemented with trousers and waistcoats. Unmarried males outdoors donned neck scarves or cravats and top hats. Men generally favor deeper shades in contrast to women. Consequently, the fabrics utilized included silk, linen, and wool. Glamour was confined solely to the upper layers of society. The servants and middle class wore clothing that was simple and functional. The ensemble comprises simple outfits and straightforward dresses made from resilient fabrics. Servants occasionally found satisfaction in acquiring second-hand items due to their inability to acquire new ones.

Pride and Prejudice underscores the importance of attire in indicating social class and hierarchy. An individual's physical appearance directly reflects their wealth, social status, and conformity to societal norms. Furthermore, it served as a mechanism to evaluate the values and characteristics of certain persons. For example, individuals with ostentatious personalities like Mr. Darcy and Caroline Bingley employed their clothing to signify their superior social standing and wealth. The wealthy elite wore exquisitely tailored and luxurious garments. Their garments comprised luxurious fabrics embellished with ornamental features. Members of this class employed it to assert dominance. Furthermore, it distinguished them from the lower social classes. It offered a visual representation of an individual's status. Consequently, their mode of expression exacerbates the gaps between the higher echelons of society and the lowest socioeconomic class.

## FASHION IN EMMA

Published 200 years ago this month, Emma was deemed revolutionary not because of its subject matter. Austen's whimsical portrayal to Anna of the quintessential subject for a novel—three or four households in a rural village—aptly encapsulates it. It was devoid of any intellectual or political substance that would render it revolutionary. Nonetheless, it was revolutionary in both its framework and approach. The narrative's protagonist is a young woman who is misled regarding her capabilities and possesses the leisure and power to intervene in the matters of others. The narrative was exceptionally original, designed to express her fantasies.

Emma has undertaken the endeavor of molding Harriet. Emma's former companion, Miss Taylor, has lately married and adopted the name Mrs. Weston, leaving Emma solitary and devoid of a distinct purpose. Harriet will execute the assignment. She perceives her objectives as altruistic, as she seeks to augment the wisdom and innocence of this naive young woman. Her motives are clearly driven by self-interest, and this should be apparent to us. She swiftly persuades Harriet to decline a marriage proposal from a farmer who adores her and misleads her with the entirely fabricated notion of marrying the charismatic young clergyman, Mr. Elton. Choose an alternative succinct statement from a subsequent portion of the document. Emma is accurate; but she also exhibits a considerable degree of self-

importance. Unbeknownst to her, she inadvertently uses the same words as her opponent, who assertively states, I really despise newcomers. In Emma, Austen presents the figure of Mrs. Elton, who is simultaneously admirable and repulsive. Austen adeptly illustrates Mrs. Elton's character through her voice, thereby examining novel and distinctive techniques for animating a character's speech in written form. Certain aspects of her methodologies presage the advancements of modernism. At the gathering at Donwell Abbey, Mrs. Elton participates in an extended and authoritative discourse while harvesting strawberries. This monologue adeptly illustrates her exigent and disjointed discourse, encapsulating the quintessence of no less than thirty minutes of uninterrupted dialogue. Emma is unquestionably one of Austen's most distinguished novels, illustrating the sentiments and dispositions of England during the Regency Era. The narrative is captivating and invites examination because of its departure from the author's earlier writings. In contrast to her earlier works, the protagonist in these novel experiences no financial hardships. This distinctive feature allows Austen to explore the inner life of a young, gorgeous, wealthy, and slightly pampered woman. Emma's metamorphosis throughout the book is captivating, allowing the reader to examine the impact of cultural conventions and personal interactions on her maturation. Multiple factors influenced Emma's behavior at the beginning of the novel. Moreover, her developing personality is influenced by various environmental factors. The novel effectively demonstrates the impact of culture on individuals, while also emphasizing personal agency and the capacity for revolutionary change.

## CONCLUSION

The study indicates that Austen's works are distinguished by her distinctive literary style, which examines the intricacies of human relationships, social conventions, and individual aspirations. Her novels, like Persuasion, exemplify her capacity to craft intricate characters and relationships that touch with readers. This research underscores the need of distinguishing between fashions and the concept of fashion itself. Austen's novels examine the self-aware dynamic of fashion, which, in contrast to fads, is enduring and never becomes outmoded. Austen's literature critiques conventional literary trends and authentically depicts the fashion business with a timeless sincerity. Her work encourages readers to reevaluate and value the relationship between fashion and narrative, as well as the importance of ephemeral trends within the framework of timeless literary works. Examining Austen's oeuvre in relation to her historical environment and acknowledging her references to modern fashion illustrates how Austen adapted her writing methods to conform to the dominant fashion trends of her period. Key results encompass Jane Austen's distinctive literary style, her examination of society conventions, and her. The study indicates that Austen's works are important not only for their literary value but also for their illumination of the social standards and expectations of her age. Her stories remain pertinent, providing readers with a sophisticated comprehension of human interactions and individual aspirations.

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