80. Dress Codes: Deciphering Gender and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century London Through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)* [1]

Elif GÜVENDİ YALÇIN [2]

Abstract

Fashion is regarded simply as a display of individual preference, while it offers deep perspectives on social standards, cultural shifts, and the identity construction. Clothing is a medium for reflecting and expressing complex social dynamics, norms, and changes in identity, particularly during significant cultural shifts. In 18th-century Britain, the fashion industry experienced considerable transformation, driven by increased consumerism, and this period revealed a critical relationship between gender roles in society and fashion trends. Women, usually portrayed as erratic and unpredictable, emerged as the most ardent fans of fashion, personifying its transient nature. This paper examines the intricate bond between fashion and gender roles in 18th century London by using Frances Burney's well-known work *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) as a primary reference. Fashion during this era was not merely a means of decoration; it was inextricably linked to the prevailing social norms and standards. By studying the clothing choices in *Evelina (1778)*, this research aims to expose the rigorous gender conventions of the period and demonstrate fashion's critical role in upholding societal expectations. Essentially, this study goes beyond the physical layers of clothing to uncover the stringent gender conventions prevalent in 18th-century London. It reveals how fashion, typically considered superficial, is a pivotal factor in reflecting and forming societal standards and norms.

Keywords: 18th-Century Fashion, Gender Roles, Frances Burney, Evelina (1778), Societal Norms

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1272 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2023.37 (December)

Dress Codes: Deciphering Gender and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century London Through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)* / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

Kıyafet Kuralları: Frances Burney'in *Evelina; or the History of a young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) adlı romanı Üzerinden On Sekizinci Yüzyıl Londra'sında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Modanın Perde Arkasını Aralamak[3]

Öz

Çoğunlukla bireysel tercihlerin bir göstergesi olarak görülen moda aslında sosyal standartlar, kültürel değişimler ve kimlik inşası hakkında derin görüş açıları sunmaktadır. Kıyafet, özellikle önemli kültürel değişimler sırasında karmaşık sosyal dinamikleri, normları ve kimlik değişimlerini yansıtan ve ifade eden bir araç konumundadır. 18. yüzyıl Britanya'sında moda endüstrisi, tüketiciliğin artmasıyla önemli bir dönüşüm yaşamıştır ve bu dönem, toplumdaki cinsiyet rolleri ile moda trendleri arasında önemli bir ilişki olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Genellikle kaprisli ve öngörülemez olarak tasvir edilen kadınlar, modanın geçici doğasını simgeleyen en tutkulu hayranları olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu makale, Frances Burney'in *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) adlı ünlü eserini temel referans olarak kullanarak 18. yüzyıl Londra'sında moda ve toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri arasındaki karmaşık bağı incelemektir. Bu dönemde moda sadece dekoratif değil, aynı zamanda hakim sosyal normlar ve standartlarla da yakından ilişkilidir. Bu araştırma, *Evelina*'daki kıyafet seçimlerini inceleyerek, dönemin katı toplumsal cinsiyet kurallarını ortaya koymayı ve modanın toplumsal beklentilerin sürdürülmesindeki kritik rolünü göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Esasen bu çalışma, 18. yüzyıl Londra'sında yaygın olan katı toplumsal cinsiyet kurallarını ortaya çıkarmak için giysilerin fiziksel katmanlarının ötesine geçmektedir. Tipik olarak yüzeysel kabul edilen modanın, toplumsal standartları ve normları yansıtmada ve oluşturmada nasıl önemli bir faktör olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 18. Yüzyıl Modası, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rolleri, Frances Burney, Evelina (1778), Toplumsal Normlar

Introduction

At first glance, many people may view fashion as just the latest clothing mode. Upon closer examination, however, it reveals a rich web of ideas, expressions, and social reflections. Numerous scholars and fans, including Alison Lurie, have highlighted the communicative power of fashion. The Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist wrote *The Language of Clothes* in 1992, wherein she compares fashion to a unique language with its visual lexicon. This notion is similar to music's ability to communicate feelings without using specific words (Davis, 1992, p. 8). Fashion, then, isn't just about what one wears but the myriad stories, identities, and ambitions one can convey through attire. Drawing from this, Susan B. Kaiser, in her work on *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, elaborates on the multidimensional nature of fashion. According to her, beyond mere clothing production or external looks, fashion is an intricate system analyzing the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and societal hierarchy (Kaiser, 2013, p. 12). Fashion is

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Kıyafet Kuralları: Frances Burney'in *Evelina; or the History of a young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) adlı romanı Üzerinden On Sekizinci Yüzyıl Londra'sında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Modanın Perde Arkasını Aralamak / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

an ever-evolving phenomenon molded by individual creativity, societal norms, and power relations. In short, fashion is more than just the creation of clothing or a person's appearance. It's an artful pursuit in which ideas are explored and portrayed through clothing selections. It also gives an atmosphere for different opinions on matters such as gender, ethnicity, and class, which constitute the foundation of our social and cultural identities. Fashion's sophistication stems from its capacity to blend a wide range of ideas and techniques. Instead of promoting a single point of view, it stimulates a diverse range of opinions and motivators. The diversity of viewpoints not only infuses the industry with creative vigor but also maintains fashion's role as an ever-adaptive entity, consistently mirroring and assimilating the shifts within cultural currents.

This intrinsic relationship with diversity makes it impossible to separate the influence of culture from fashion's rich tapestry despite its evolving nature. The clothing style captures and demonstrates the significance of culture, the worth of materials, traditions, cultural variety, and social influences. As renowned designer Oleg Cassini notes, fashion mirrors the zeitgeist of its era (cited in Hopkins, 2012, p. 150). It's a tale of aesthetic evolution but also of political shifts, identity transformation, and broader societal expectations. Personal clothing choices are influenced by cultural contexts, communal values, and historical backdrops, in addition to individual tastes. Clothing, often perceived as fleeting or trivial, in fact embodies complex narratives of cultural evolution, political shifts, and, most importantly, the dynamic nature of personal and collective identities. It's more than just fabric and embroidery; it's a piece of human history, a reflection of oneself and those around them. Every feature in the design and functionality of clothes can show the era in which they are made. Fashion has been used to signal class status, define identities, and embody social expectations throughout history. When studying times of remarkable cultural adaptation and change, this combination of fashion and culture is perhaps most visible.

This analysis places the fashion trends of 18th-century London at its core. During 18th-century London, fashion was not merely a decorative choice but a reflection of existing social norms and expectations. Terry Castle highlights the significance of clothes as a marker of identity in the masquerade of this period, denoting gender, social rank, and occupation (1986, pp. 55-7). This point of view is fundamental, foreshadowing the ideas later elucidated by scholars like Roland Barthes, who suggests that clothing acts as a medium of communication, conveying more delicate meanings through the wearer and interpreted by the spectator (1985, pp. 14-5). Following this outlook, numerous 18th- century commentators have proposed that garments acted as a form of communication, similar to language, molding social impressions and interactions. According to Diana Crane, clothing has been a significant factor in the identification and positioning of people in social hierarchies and a valuable mechanism for maintaining or altering the boundaries of status throughout history. Given that it is "one of the most visible markers of social status and gender and therefore useful in maintaining or subverting symbolic boundaries" (Crane, 2000, p. 6). During this period in fashion, there was a profound change: women moved from wearing wide-skirted mantuas to the robe à la française which highlights tiny waists as well as extravagant hairdos, and men put on knee-length breeches, frock coats, powdered wigs, and tricornes. These fashion choices of the era were not just related to style but rather heavily intertwined with gender-based societal norms. Females, usually limited to domestic duties, are dressed in clothes that highlight their chastity, modesty, and submissiveness. Conversely, men's dress highlights their authoritative roles in politics, commerce, and communal affairs, embodying strength and rationality. Within this context, Frances Burney's literary output is an enlightening lens to look through. She is a celebrated novelist and

1274 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2023.37 (December)

Dress Codes: Deciphering Gender and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century London Through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)* / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

playwright who encapsulates her age in her works. Her landmark novel [4]*Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), examines the nuances of 18th-century life, seeking into the joys, sorrows, and passions of its people. Utilizing fashion as a lens, *Evelina* not only reveals the characters' aesthetic preferences but also exposes the social restraints and gender norms they struggle with. Hence, the aim of this study is to examine the interplay between fashion and gender roles in 18th-century London based on Frances Burney's novel *Evelina* by shedding light on the ways in which clothing became a tool for societal control of expectations and reinforcement of gender norms. By examining the characters' clothing choices, the novel exposes the rigid gender norms of the time, highlighting how fashion is used to reinforce and perpetuate these expectations.

Historical Background

In England, the 18th century was a time of tremendous advancements in societal, political, and cultural arenas. England became the most influential and affluent nation globally, and the Glorious Revolution was a noteworthy moment that secured parliamentary authority while diminishing royal control. Additionally, the rise of the middle class, the advent of capitalism, remarkable agricultural and industrial changes, the increasing importance of the novel, and the beginning of empirical and rational thinking—highlights of the Enlightenment—all had crucial contributions to this important period. The Age of Enlightenment, which stressed the importance of reason and the rights of individuals, provided the impetus for the numerous revolutions and shifts in thinking that had a significant impact on society.

Despite the advancements of the 18th century, societal structures were still heavily hierarchical, with the aristocracy and clergy at the top, merchants, artisans, and farmers forming the middle class, and the lower class mainly comprising laborers who had few rights and endured many hardships. In England during the 18th century, the way people were organized was not by classes but rather by status hierarchies (Heyck, 1992, p. 55). An individual's place in the social order was based mainly on property ownership, and, notably, one could acquire property. During the Medieval period, one's status determined the extent of property ownership. But by the 18th century, this had changed, allowing people to acquire wealth, invest in property, and, as a result, raise their social status. On the contrary, a family might squander its riches and surrender its estates, resulting in a decrease in its social status. Prosperous people in business often sought to boost their status by marrying their daughters into upper-class families. Correspondingly, younger sons from aristocratic backgrounds could either espouse women with commercial means or pursue vocations in the professional field to preserve or upgrade their social standing (Heyck, 1992, p. 58). In the social structure of the era, barons strived to achieve the rank of earl, squires wished to be recognized as knights, farmers sought to ascend to squire, merchants desired to be regarded as gentlemen, and shopkeepers aspired to progress to merchants. In essence, riches became the driving force. Despite changes in particular people's and families' statuses, the overall status structure remained intact. As families moved up or down in the hierarchy, they embraced the new lifestyles, responsibilities, and advantages associated with those positions. This flexibility in social mobility acted as a stabilizer, allowing the country's economic strength to flourish (Heyck, 1992, p. 58–9).

In the 18th century, Britain witnessed the ascent and influence of a prosperous middle class in the cultural realm, which included a variety of professionals such as traders, financiers, and the like. As their wealth increased, this class started to imitate the customs and values of the privileged. (Allen et al., 2003, pp. 358–59). Their wealth was made evident not only by their financial means but also by the luxurious

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[4]   For the sake of brevity, Frances Burney's novel [4]*Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)*, will be referred to simply as Evelina (1778) throughout this paper.

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Üzerinden On Sekizinci Yüzyıl Londra'sında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Modanın Perde Arkasını Aralamak / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

belongings they had and the prestige associated with them. They were an integral part of providing the coveted goods and services of that era. Notably, wealthy farming households could possess parlors with pianos and well-educated daughters. In cities, the culture of consumption was particularly evident. Middle-class city inhabitants lived in grandiose homes filled with high-quality furniture and a growing selection of ornamental objects that would eventually become a trait of the Victorian period. They enhanced their food choices with high-quality meats, imported goods, and fine wines, instead of solely relying on ale. Additionally, their attire evolved from being purely practical to exhibiting greater fashion and elegance (Rule, 1992, p. 85).

Simultaneously, the 18th century witnessed the emergence of salons and coffee shops, fostering spaces for scholarly discussions largely led by men. Distinct gender roles were established, with males typically being the breadwinners and decision-makers, often in public and administrative roles. They were seen as epitomes of reason, strength, and authority. On the other hand, women were largely restricted to roles within the home, focusing on family, domesticity, and, for the affluent, participation in social activities. They were often viewed as embodying qualities of modesty, gentleness, and emotional depth. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's influential work, *Emile* (1762), played a crucial role in establishing distinct roles based on gender. Rousseau posited that women were inherently secondary to men, possessing limited intellectual and physical prowess. However, Rousseau underscored the indispensable part women played in the well-being of society. Their contributions were just as vital as those of men, albeit in different spheres, with women's activities mainly centered in the domestic realm. Rousseau's perspectives on gender significantly resonated in Britain, inspiring a range of thinkers, from Jane Austen to Mary Wollstonecraft. Both sought to challenge the prevailing beliefs about distinct roles based on gender (Colley, 1992, pp. 254-55). It's worth noting that the 18th-century gender standards weren't only evident in societal duties and intellectual discussions but also manifested in the garment trends of that era.

Indeed, the 18th century emphasized clothing not only as a functional necessity but also as a competent vehicle of expression, indicative of class, gender, and personal identity. Fashion had a substantial influence on societal standards and gender roles. It served as a visual language that expressed one's social standing, financial level, and adherence to cultural norms. The establishment of distinct standards of appearance for men and women was made possible by fashion, which was closely related to the formation and strengthening of gender identities. Fashion contributed to the maintenance of gender stereotypes and traditional gender norms. Women's clothing, for instance, highlighted modesty, delicacy, and femininity. Female clothing in the 18th-century was an intricate combination of several layers and components. The foundational garment was the stay, a form of corset fortified with rigid materials like metal or the baleen from whales, shaping the torso into the period's ideal silhouette. A stomacher, often lavishly decorated, would then adorn the front, serving both as an ornamental and functional piece, covering the front of the stays and adding to the aesthetic richness of the attire.

During the dawn of the 18th century, women's fashion embraced additional volume with the help of underskirts, petticoats, and even structured enhancements like artificial rumps. The year 1709 marked a milestone with the introduction of the hoop petticoat, which quickly ascended the ranks of popularity. Its initial form resembled a bell, only to later morph into a more rectangular shape, as the penchant for padding shifted to emphasize the posterior, especially with the resurgence of the cork rump in the 1770s. As the century waned, the hoop petticoat faced its decline, with the advent of more naturalistic, classical styles of dress usurping its place. Despite its wide acceptance, the hoop petticoat was not without its detractors, who lambasted the garment for its cumbersome size and the hindrance it posed to mobility. Initially constructed from robust whalebone, the fashion industry later sought out more pliable

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1276 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2023.37 (December)

Dress Codes: Deciphering Gender and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century London Through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)* / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

materials such as cane, wicker, and wire, in keeping with the era's inclination towards more delicate fabrics. While these newer materials allowed for greater flexibility and a closer fit, they also bore the risk of dislocation, potentially leading to unintended displays of the legs, a subject of debate on modesty standards at the time (Haulman, 2011, p.53). Proponents of the hoop petticoat extolled its virtues, arguing that it facilitated easier movement, maintained decorum by deterring too-close encounters with men, and provided a cooling effect while also accentuating the lower extremities (Haulman, 2011, p.54). The hoop petticoat transcended the boundaries of social classes, becoming a widespread trend across the societal spectrum. Resourceful women of modest means found ingenious ways to mimic the coveted style, incorporating penny canes or resorting to heavily quilted petticoats to emulate the grandeur of the hoop, thereby weaving a common thread through the fabric of 18th-century womanhood (Haulman, 2011, p.54). Wide skirts, elaborate haircuts, and corsets were all used to emphasize a woman's contours and create an idealized representation of femininity. Women's fashion aimed to highlight their femininity, fragility, and subordination to men. The use of pastel colors, delicate fabrics, and ornate accessories further reinforced these gender norms. Men's fashion, however, places a greater emphasis on authority, strength, and masculinity. The male elite is represented by tailored clothes, waistcoats, and powdered wigs, which enforce patriarchal power dynamics (Haulman, 2011, p.55). Masculinity is associated with strength, rationality, and the public sphere, and men's fashion is designed to visualize these ideals.

The Role of Clothing in 18th-Century Britain

Elizabeth Wilson, in her book *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, characterizes fashion as "the child of capitalism," citing the remarkable growth of the fashion industry during the consumer revolution of 18th-century England (2003, p. 13). This period saw an unprecedented surge in the marketing of fashionable garments. Neil McKendrick, in *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, stresses the grandness of this consumer revolution: "Men, and in particular women, bought as never before... Even their children enjoyed access to a greater number of goods than ever before" (1982, p. 9). The accomplishments of these commercial enterprises were credited mainly to the entrepreneurs who took advantage of the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution, particularly the growing print culture, and strategically located storefronts to target a more extensive consumer base (McKendrick, 1982, p. 43). Variety was not the only thing; a greater quantity of goods was attainable to a broader array of people more often due to the robust economic success and improved promotional techniques of the time. The commercialization of the fashion industry caused clothing to be transformed into a product that could be bought and sold, with access dependent mostly on a person's capacity to pay rather than traditional indicators such as social rank. The democratization of fashion extended its influence beyond the boundaries of exclusivity it had previously been bound by, allowing a broader audience to enjoy the allure of fashionable purchases. Nevertheless, this alteration also caused fears that the long-standing distinctions, particularly those of rank and gender inextricably linked to fashion, could be in danger of being wiped out. During the 18th century, numerous scholars articulated their concerns about fashion's influence on societal structure. They lamented the dissolution of sumptuary laws, previously enforced to delineate class through dress, positing that this led to a blurring of the lines that defined social strata, and, by extension, a decay in traditional decorum and ethical standards (Edwards, 2011, p. 104). Fashion, in their view, became an instrument that masked true social identity and convoluted the codes of social interaction, rendering the visual cues of status ambiguous. There was a prevalent nostalgia for an era in which attire served as a clear indicator of a person's societal tier, ensuring immediate recognition and understanding. Authors of the period mourned a perceived decline in decorous distinction, where the risk of misjudging a person's societal rank based on their attire became a troubling phenomenon. People from all backgrounds tried to copy the luxury of the wealthy. Even the spouses of

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Üzerinden On Sekizinci Yüzyıl Londra'sında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Modanın Perde Arkasını Aralamak / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

manual laborers could give up their necessities in order to buy used garments, and the poorer classes attempted to imitate the extravagance of the affluent. Fashion among the elite was constantly evolving, often due to their fear that merchants' families would copy their style. This issue, together with the way clothing was passed down through wills to servants and the growth of secondhand markets, was highly talked about by the thinkers of the time (Batchelor, 2005, p. 8). Intellectual figures such as Daniel Defoe, in his work *Every-body's Business, is No-body's Business* (1725), expressed his sorrow that it was too hard to determine a maid from her mistress based solely on a dress (1725, p, 4). While many longed for the days when clothing signified a person's rank, anxieties escalated in the 1780s as even domestic staff began to don clothing that exceeded their station. *The Lady's Magazine*, in a concerning 1785 article, speculated that servant girls' aspiration for fashion could lead to more serious social issues, such as prostitution, and recalled a time when differences in status were more visibly apparent (Batchelor, 2005, p. 8). On the other hand, Bernard Mandeville had an ambivalent view. He accepted the economic benefits of fashion, but he was also critical of its social implications, referring to women who changed their fashion rapidly as "fickle strumpets" and drawing attention to the tension between economic success and moral values (Haulman, 2011, p. 17).

During the 1700s, prevailing perceptions of fashion associated women with extravagance and a seemingly insatiable craving, while luxury was associated with fragility and femininity. Women's involvement with the fluctuations of fashion was viewed as emblematic of their supposed irrationality and inclination toward temporary trends (Berg & Eger, 2003, p. 18). As sociologist Joanne Entwistle astutely elucidates, "Fashion is obsessed with gender[..] constantly working and reworking the gender binary" (2000, p. 52). She contends that fashion does not simply reflect gender but actively constructs it, reinforcing binary gender conceptions that assign traits such as power and rationality to men and elegance and sentiment to women. The 18th century saw a strong link between fashion and women, primarily due to their status as primary fashion buyers, the notion of vanity in displaying clothing, and the fact that fashion has an inherently feminine quality of being ever-changing (Haulman, 2011, p. 49). The works of Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steel, especially *The Spectator* (1711-1712), only served to strengthen the existing ideas. Their regular remarks regarding modern fashion trends and portrayal of women as keen fashion followers further perpetuated the view that fashion was an exclusively female domain, thus reinforcing stereotypes of female ostentation and vanity.

Elizabeth Wilson argues that fashion has been a fundamental influence on how gender is perceived and expressed over time. It is interesting to note that distinct clothing for men and women was not widely adopted until the 17th or 18th centuries; before then, there was far less variation between men's and women's clothing. Wilson observes that although the later medieval times saw the introduction of more intricate attires that distinguished between men and women compared to the baggy robes of the early medieval period, the female lower limb stayed hidden, and both genders still had a lot of resemblances in their apparel (2003, p. 118). Examples such as women wearing trousers and boots for riding and sports were a testament to the 16th century, known for its love of excessive and silly clothing, blurring boundaries between genders regarding fashion. In the 17th century, both sexes adorned themselves with similar items of adornment - from hats, jackets, muffs, and lace to earrings and gloves - thus creating a unified visual style (Wilson, 2003, p. 118). Consequently, in contrast to past periods, the early industrial age saw a notable change in clothing that was more gender-specific, and the growing fashion industry was a crucial factor in expressing gender identity.

Feminists and gender theorists have been discussing the relationship between fashion and femininity for a long time. It is widely assumed that fashion reinforces traditional gender roles, making women objects. Jennifer Craik theorizes that in Western philosophy, men are agents of society while women

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1278 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2023.37 (December)

Dress Codes: Deciphering Gender and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century London Through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)* / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

become passive entities, illustrated by dichotomies of subject and object and male and female (1993, p. 45). This dichotomy in ideology is displayed in Western fashion, where women are depicted as passive objects of desire. Furthermore, media presentations enhance this by portraying women as visual stimuli for male desire, thus sustaining traditional gender roles. This oppression goes back to the 19th century when women opposed tight skirts, demonstrating an early feminist insurgency against constraining beauty norms. These regulations, they argued, imposed a physical and symbolic confinement on women, designating them as the 'other,' and perpetuating their sexual objectification. Simone de Beauvoir reinforces this thought, signifying fashion could potentially perpetuate gender-based disparities. She argues that fashion can reduce a woman to an object, subjugated to masculine desires, rather than a person with her aspirations (2009, p. 586). As a result, women may be more likely to prioritize beauty over their ambitions, thus making it easier for males to exploit. This cycle of self-objectification could impede the progress of women. Fashion expert Helene Roberts emphasizes this further, noting that fashion not only distinguishes between genders but also defines their roles. Clothing demonstrates men as solemn, active, and strong, while women are depicted as fickle, passive, and fragile. This kind of sartorial convention, she postulates, keeps up obsolete gender binaries, fortifying the supposition of women as mere fashion recipients and men as conscious dressers. This prolongation of stereotypes through fashion profoundly affects societal gender role perceptions and expectancies (Roberts, 1977, p. 555). According to a second body of feminists, "woman is not a universal category" (McCracken, 2014, p. 15), illustrating that women's experiences are varied and shaped by variables such as ethnicity, class, and sexual identity. As a result, it is overly simplistic to label all women as victims of patriarchal oppression. Considering this diversity, second-wave feminists contend that fashion can have an empowering effect on some women. This diverse outlook on the experiences of women is also evident in literature.

Evelina (1778)

Frances (Fanny) Burney's pioneering novel from 1778, *Evelina*, provides a vivid depiction of a woman's journey to comprehend the intricacies of 18th-century English society, particularly the pressures of London's upper class with its strict social conventions. Astonishingly, this evocative Bildungsroman, mapping Evelina's journey of self-realization amidst the intricacies of the aristocracy, was authored by a woman when female writers were seldom recognized. For three years, Burney composed her work *Evelina* in secrecy, away from her stepmother's unfavorable view of female writers. Upon presenting it to the esteemed London publisher John Murray, he rejected it for its incompleteness. Thomas Lowndes, nonetheless, availed himself of the opportunity and released *Evelina* under an alias. Cleverly, Burney further disguised her persona, referencing esteemed male writers such as Rousseau, Johnson, Marivaux, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett in the novel's preface, implying a correlation with their textual custom. She masked her identity as a female writer by using male references, and the deception was so convincing that her stepmother read the prologue out loud during breakfast without knowing who had written it. At its release, *Evelina* was met with great acclaim, with Samuel Johnson giving it his enthusiastic endorsement and Edmund Burke being so enthralled that he stayed up all night to read it (Richter, 2017, pp. 117-18).

Burney's literary contributions offer invaluable insights into the societal position of women during the late Enlightenment, a period marked by intellectual awakening yet constrained by rigid patriarchal norms. Her works, crafted with acute intelligence, provide a window into the thoughts and expressions available to a woman of her intellect and standing, albeit within the confines of her era:

> Burney is by most standards the most important female English novelist before Jane Austen, and her novels tell us a great deal about women's place in the late Enlightenment, and what a ferociously intelligent but by no means independent woman was able to think and say about it at that time.

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RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi 2023.37 (Aralık)/ **1279**
Kıyafet Kuralları: Frances Burney'in *Evelina; or the History of a young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) adlı romanı
Üzerinden On Sekizinci Yüzyıl Londra'sında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Modanın Perde Arkasını Aralamak / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

> Obviously and most important, women at this time were dependent upon men: they legally belonged to their fathers until they were married and to their husbands afterwards. It was not until 1870 that married women could own property in their own names (Richter, 2017, p. 124).

Burney's narratives explore the stark realities of women's dependence on men during this period. This dependence was not just a social expectation but a legal binding. Women, from birth until marriage, were legally under the guardianship of their fathers, a situation that transitioned to their husbands upon marriage. This legal framework left women with little independence or autonomy in terms of property and personal rights. It was a stark reflection of the gender dynamics of the time, where women's identities and legal standings were inexorably tied to the men in their lives. This dependence extended to financial and property rights, with women having limited control over their assets. It wasn't until the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 that there was a significant legal shift allowing married women to own property in their own names. This act was a milestone in the gradual progression towards gender equality in property rights, marking a significant departure from the centuries-old tradition of women's financial dependence on men. Through her novels, Burney not only depicted the realities of women's lives in the late Enlightenment but also subtly critiqued the societal norms that restricted women's freedom and autonomy. Her works are thus not only important for their literary merit but also for their socio-historical significance, providing contemporary readers with a nuanced understanding of the challenges and limitations faced by women of her time. Burney's portrayal of women's lives during this period is a testament to her own intellect and ability to navigate and articulate the complexities of a society that was intellectually progressive yet socially restrictive for women.

The plot of *Evelina* centers around a young woman named Evelina Anville, who leaves her peaceful rural life to enter the glitzy world of the 18th-century London upper class. Evelina, educated and raised by Reverend Arthur Villars on his rural estate in Dorsetshire, confronts a past marked by the death of her mother, Caroline Evelyn, who died during childbirth. Even though Caroline and Sir John Belmont's marriage was legitimate but clandestine, Sir John disavowed the nuptials. He eradicated any proof of it, leaving Evelina unable to show her true lineage. When Evelina's grandfather, Mr. Evelyn, bestowed guardianship upon Villars, he supplied a modest inheritance for her. As Evelina's eighteenth birthday and the end of Villars' custody approached, her grandmother, Madame Duval, strived to gain control of the young woman, even considering suing Sir John for denying her as his heir. The story becomes more complex when it is revealed that Polly Green, Evelina's wet nurse, had deceptively presented her daughter as Sir John's child shortly before Evelina was born, causing Sir John to reject Evelina's statements as untrue. Upon encountering Evelina, Sir John immediately recognizes her as his daughter due to her remarkable similarity to her deceased mother. Amidst this backdrop of uncertain heritage, Evelina, uneducated and innocent, contends with societal regulations and customs as she endeavors to gain a foothold in courtship and interpersonal relations. She is confronted with various individuals - acquaintances, suitors, and opponents - who either aid or hinder her journey.

The background of *Evelina* is the English urban Renaissance, a time of extensive cultural and economic expansion. This period saw an emergence of new cultural entities, particularly in metropolitan areas, that provided women with novel chances to participate in public life. During this period, individuals had access to a variety of experiences, from dancing and socializing in assembly rooms to attending concerts and accessing libraries. Meet-up groups for particular interests, as well as outdoor spaces and sporting events like cricket and horse racing, provided opportunities for recreation and amusement. Women's societal roles were renegotiated by their enthusiastic engagement, going beyond the usual functions of domesticity. By the 1730s, wealthy women in cities were partaking in a wide array of public activities, such as going to dances, plays, and music shows (Richter, 2017, p.129). The evolving world of fashion,

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1280 / **RumeliDE** Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2023.37 (December)

Dress Codes: Deciphering Gender and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century London Through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)* / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

which became a prominent tool for self-expression and societal positioning, was central to these activities.

Woman and Fashion in *Evelina (1778)*

Fanny Burney's *Evelina* illustrates the intricacies of the 18th-century London fashion scene and social conventions. Set against the context of Mrs. Mirvan's house and London's well-known places, the novel demonstrates the vital role fashion plays in social connections. Participants in social activities showed off their attire as indicators of rank and personality, emphasizing the meticulous style of the period. For instance, despite their excitement for a show at the Drury Lane Theatre, the primary focus of Evelina and her party was their appearance, as illustrated by the line, "Her [Mrs. Mirvan]chief objection was to our dress, for we have had no time to Londonize ourselves" (Burney, 2004, p. 23). The comment made it evident that when going out in public, there was a lot of pressure to abide by the fashion norms of the city, particularly for women. Evelina's expeditions to memorable destinations further underscore this focus. At Portland Chapel, her remark, "...the ladies were so much adorned, that Miss Mirvan and I could do nothing but gaze at them..." emphasizes her inexperience with such lavish demonstrations of apparel (Burney, 2004, p.24). In contrast, Kensington Gardens, alluded to as "a better company," was the gathering place for the fashionable elite, indicating the era's value on appearance.

In 18th-century England, women valued fashion as a representation of their femininity and status. When they attended social gatherings, they tended to select more extravagant outfits, illustrating the importance of looking good in women's clothing. Rather than being a form of self-expression, fashion was about following societal standards and predetermined gender roles. Women, constantly under the spotlight of society, can feel objectified and super aware of their appearances. This kind of observation might lead them to think that acceptance is dependent on meeting specific beauty goals. John Berger, an art theorist, provides an enlightening opinion on this. He notes, "Men act, and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." (Berger, 1977, p. 47). This analysis shows that women's clothing selections are consistently under scrutiny, particularly by men, generating a context where women are not merely dressing for themselves but also for the societal gaze. Therefore, the need to abide by existing beauty norms and the internalization of these external expectations have had a massive impact on women's relationships with fashion. Evelina had to follow the fashion dictates of the era by wearing a "calash" even for a simple activity like a stroll. This is seen when she rushes to put on her "calash." This bonnet or hat, which covered the face and neck to protect them from the sun and wind, not only safeguarded a woman's health but also shielded her modesty in public. Surprisingly, the attention to appearance was not limited to public appearances. The societal gaze on women's actions infiltrated even the most intimate of moments. Even in supposedly private moments, such as bathing, societal expectations still took center stage. Women were therefore expected to emphasize looks even when bathing: "I must confess it is, to me, very incomprehensible why the ladies choose that frightful unbecoming dress to bathe in! I always hated bathing, because one can get no pretty dress for it!" (Burney, 2004, p. 421). Mr. Lovel's remark on the "frightful unbecoming dress" reflects the widespread belief that bathing suits, particularly for women, were unattractive and unfashionable. The debate implies that appearance and adherence to fashion standards were significant even in seemingly unimportant tasks like bathing. This suggests that, regardless of utility or comfort, society expected people to dress nicely in miscellaneous settings. Lady Louisa's admission that she dislikes taking a bath because she can never find a "pretty dress for it" highlights the pressure women have to look well at all times (Burney, 2004, p. 422). Such sentiments reflect the ever-present pressure on women to prioritize their looks, suggesting that societal expectations precede personal satisfaction and practicality. During this time, the way women groomed themselves went beyond their clothing, with hairstyles being of

RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi 2023.37 (Aralık)/ **1281**
Kıyafet Kuralları: Frances Burney'in *Evelina; or the History of a young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) adlı romanı
Üzerinden On Sekizinci Yüzyıl Londra'sında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Modanın Perde Arkasını Aralamak / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

utmost importance when conveying femininity and social standing. Evelina's description of her visit to a hairdresser before a ball is a vivid illustration of the beauty ideals of the period. Evelina documents her altered appearance following the styling process, noting the utilization of powder, pins, and cushions (Burney, 2004, p. 26). This emphasizes the significance of intricate coiffures in 18th-century fashion, highlighting the commitment and craftsmanship necessary to abide by the period's stringent criteria. The 18th century saw a wide variety of hairstyles for women. The way a lady wears her hair may reflect her social standing or sense of style. Both inside and outside, women frequently wore caps in the 18th century. The pinner, round-eared, and mob cap were the three most popular styles of hats. Big hair was popular from the late 1760s to the late 1780s; it peaked in 1778. Women used artificial hair to maintain their towering hairstyles, which they regularly powdered liberally. They donned huge nightcaps to keep these hairdos. Throughout the century, the most common hat worn by middle- and lower-class women was a chip or straw hat. The hat had a broad, flat-crowned brim that could be folded in at the sides. It was usually worn over a cap of some sort and tilted often. A cord or ribbon was used to fasten the hat on the wearer's head. Such varieties in fashion, while seeming unimportant, often mirrored deeper societal values and norms:

> The first speech was made by Madame Duval, who said, 'It's quite a shocking thing to see ladies come to so genteel a place as Ranelagh with hats on; it has a monstrous vulgar look: I can't think what they wear them for. There's no such a thing to be seen in Paris.'

> 'Indeed,' cried Sir Clement, 'I must own myself no advocate for hats; I am sorry the ladies ever invented or adopted so tantalizing a fashion; for, where there is beauty, they only serve to shade it, and where there is none, to excite a most unavailing curiosity. I fancy they were originally worn by some young and whimsical coquet.'

> 'More likely,' answered the Captain, 'they were invented by some wrinkled old hag, who'd a mind for to keep the young fellows in chace, let them be never so weary.' (Burney, 2004, p. 64).

In this dialogue, the characters engage in a discussion that vividly reflects the intricacies and societal implications of 18th-century fashion, particularly regarding women's attire. The conversation centers on the use of hats by women, a fashion choice that was both a statement of style and a subject of contention in this era. Madame Duval's comment underscores the stark differences in fashion sensibilities between England and France, especially Paris, which was considered the epicenter of fashion at the time. Her remark about hats having a "monstrous vulgar look" at a refined place like Ranelagh reflects the era's rigid fashion etiquette, where specific attire was deemed appropriate or inappropriate based on the setting. This perspective highlights the social importance placed on adhering to fashion norms and the judgment passed on those who deviated from them. Sir Clement's and the Captain's responses further illustrate the gender dynamics in fashion. Sir Clement's view that hats serve to either hide beauty or provoke unwarranted curiosity speaks to the broader societal tendency to view women's fashion choices through the lens of their physical appearance and the desire to appeal to male observers. His speculation that hats were introduced by a "young and whimsical coquette" suggests a perception of women's fashion as a tool for attracting male attention, a common sentiment in the 18th century. Conversely, the Captain's suggestion that hats were likely invented by an "old hag" to maintain male interest reflects a more cynical view of women's fashion, implying manipulation and deceit as underlying motives. This comment also subtly hints at the societal practice of older women adopting fashion to maintain youthfulness and desirability, a theme prevalent in the era's discourse on fashion and aging.

In *Evelina*, Burney employs a critical perspective to analyze the societal mores of the period, highlighting the lack of autonomy for women and the rigid regulations that governed their behavior. Exploring the subtleties of gender roles, societal conventions, and the critical part of appearance, mainly as portrayed through fashion, Burney presents readers with a poignant and lasting critique of the human quest for

1282 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2023.37 (December)

Dress Codes: Deciphering Gender and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century London Through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)* / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

pleasure in a society where physical appearances wield tremendous authority. This perspective resonates with Laura Mulvey's assertions. According to Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist, the act of looking is frequently connected to men and holds the connotation of power and intelligence. On the other hand, being looked at is usually linked to femininity, which is considered to be a more docile and meek role. This contrast can make women feel as though they are being objectified and marginalized (Mulvey, 1975, p. 15). Women have traditionally been judged generally on their appearance. Captain Mervan's criticism of Maria, insulting her nose and describing her as a "tall ill-formed thing" (Burney, 2004, p. 38), illustrates this superficial evaluation. Such overt body-shaming hints at the common outlooks of the era towards women's looks. Unfortunately, this was a regular happening: women were usually judged based on their physical looks, implying those who didn't fit traditional beauty ideals were often ridiculed. Men like Captain Mervan in this 18th-century atmosphere were outspoken in expressing their views, chasing after women, and judging their conduct. His statement, "Women are vain enough already; no need for to puff 'em up more," is both dismissive and patronizing toward women (Burney, 2004, p. 88). Referring to women as "mere dolls" further accentuates this point of view (Burney, 2004, p. 120). This terminology supports the stereotype that women are overly preoccupied with themselves and their sense of importance, and as a result, their thoughts or voices are not given much weight or relevance. This might be read as the Captain downgrading women's sense of self-worth and implying that they shouldn't get any more encouragement or praise. Furthermore, by comparing women to "dolls," Captain hints that women are passive, ornamental objects with no agency or autonomy. The historical stereotype that women's best function is to be aesthetically pleasing and subordinate to others is perpetuated through this objectification.

Women, in comparison, navigated social contexts with elegance, protecting their dignity and liberty while keeping away from male advances. The advice proffered to Evelina to "be nobler than your sex" reflects the gender stereotypes and social conventions of the epoch (Burney, 2004, p. 44). This intimates a widespread notion of women as inferior in grandeur and morality, thus imposing a duty on Evelina to stand out beyond her gender. The quote, "Remember, my dear Evelina, nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman; it is at once the most beautiful and most brittle of all human things," emphasizes the reverence with which a woman's reputation is held, signifying its critical role in creating her sense of self and societal status (Burney, 2004, p. 160). Traditionally, a female's reputation was inextricably linked to her perceived worth and value. Society regularly scrutinized a woman's behavior and conduct, with her reputation significantly influencing her opportunities and social interactions. This depiction of a woman's reputation as delicate and vulnerable to damage and exposure is in line with traditional gender roles that value the assumed decency, humility, and chasteness of females. Deviation from these standards could potentially endanger a woman's reputation, thereby enforcing the expected standards of purity, obedience, and decorum that were placed on women.

In *Evelina*, Burney investigates the deeply entrenched gender norms of 18th-century England, depicting a distinct vision of the accepted role of females. She boldly introduces readers to Mrs. Selwyn, a woman portrayed as highly intelligent and having a knowledge "maybe called masculine" (Burney, 2004, p. 271). This representation emphasizes the prevalent stereotype of the era that intelligence and logic were male territories while females were limited to gentler, more caring roles. Such beliefs are further demonstrated when Mrs. Selwyn, in her attempt to acquire knowledge commonly exclusive to men, was stated to have abandoned "all the softness of her own" (Burney, 2004, p. 271). The unease concerning her character reflects the societal discomfort with women who challenge the prevailing norms. Mrs. Selwyn's conspicuous wit, not Mr. Villars' preference, embodies the period's reluctance towards women exhibiting forcefulness or wit, qualities seen as inappropriate. Burney, however, via Mrs. Selwyn, displays a rising opposition to these gender stereotypes, emphasizing the boldness of women ready to

deviate from conventional norms. The theme of societal expectations is illustrated through Sir Clement's opinion of Miss Anville. Although he finds her attractive and worthy of consideration for marriage, he is discouraged by her "humble origin" and lack of monetary contributions apart from her physical beauty (Burney, 2004, p. 359). This idea emphasizes the importance of a woman's physical beauty in the context of marriage during this period. Nevertheless, beauty alone was not enough without wealth or social status, showing that marriage was not only a matter of love but also a way to acquire wealth and status. Miss Anville's lack of noble origins thus brings to light the strict class distinctions and societal standards of 18th-century England, where marital selections were very much entwined with considerations of rank and advantage.

Men and Fashion in *Evelina*

In the 18th century, it was typically expected of women to be engaged in fashion and to follow its rules. Women were one of the primary consumers of fashion, and it was usual practice to dress nicely for social occasions and shopping. In 18th-century England, men's fashion was marked by a distinctive and elaborate style that spoke volumes about their social status and role in society:

> Men's suits had three essential pieces: vest, jacket, and pants (then called waistcoat, coat, and breeches). When a man got dressed, he put on a shirt, often with ruffled sleeves and, at the throat, a jabot (frilled neck opening) or cravat (something between a tie and a scarf). The richer he was, the more glorious his ruffles and the cleaner his shirt. He also put on a pair of drawers, or linen underwear, tied at the waist and knees and sometimes fitted with a washable, detachable lining (Olsen, 1999, p. 103).

The ideal male attire consisted of a three-piece suit, comprising a waistcoat, coat, and breeches, each piece serving as a testament to the individual's place in the social hierarchy. The intricacy of a man's dress began with the foundational garments: a shirt with ruffled sleeves and a decorative jabot or cravat at the neck, both symbols of refinement and status. Wealthier men distinguished themselves through more ornate ruffles and impeccably clean shirts, a visible marker of their affluence. Underneath, they wore drawers, a form of linen underwear that were practical in their adjustability at the waist and knees and often featured a detachable lining for easy washing. This attention to detail in every layer of clothing not only reflected the fashion sensibilities of the time but also highlighted the role of men in perpetuating and showcasing societal standards. Their attire was a complex interplay of functionality, fashion, and social signaling, illustrating how men's fashion was inextricably linked to their identity and standing within the intricate social fabric of 18th-century England.

Although it is frequently believed that fashion is a feminine pursuit, this is not true. In 18th-century England, men and women had the same enthusiasm for fashion, and they often wore clothes that were just as elaborate and stylish. Unexpectedly, men were at the forefront of the fashion industry, rising as the accepted authorities in the field: "Men pursued the mode for themselves and for their "ladies" at home." (Haulman, 2011, p. 67). Men, actively engaged in the pursuit of the latest styles, not just for themselves but also for the women in their lives, used fashion as a tool to reinforce social and romantic connections. Tailors and seamstresses, particularly those claiming London training, became crucial in this sartorial landscape. They not only offered the latest styles but also symbolized a direct link to the epicenter of fashion—London (Haulman, 2011, p. 68). This phenomenon is visible in Evelina's detailed account of her shopping excursion, wherein she makes a note of:

> The shops are very entertaining, especially the mercers; there seem to be six or seven men belonging to each shop, and everyone takes care by bowing and smirking to be noticed. ...At the milliner's, the ladies we met were so much dressed that I should rather have imagined they were making visits than purchases. But what most diverted me was that we were more frequently served by men than by women, and such men! So finical, so affected! They seemed to understand every part of a woman's

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> dress better than we do ourselves, and they recommended caps and ribbands with an air of so much importance that I wished to ask them how long they had left off wearing them (Burney, 2004, p. 25).

This observation highlights the vital part men had in the fashion industry of that period, influencing the choices women made about their clothing. This era, rich in sartorial splendor, saw women adorning themselves in garments so ornate that a simple shopping trip could be mistaken for a grand social visit. What's intriguing in Burney's observation is the prominent role men played in the fashion scene, especially in roles typically associated with women's clothes. Men were not just bystanders but active participants, showcasing a keen understanding and involvement in women's fashion that was almost theatrical in its execution. They advised on accessories like caps and ribbons with confidence and flair that bordered on the theatrical, challenging the conventional gender norms of the time. This dynamic reflects a unique aspect of the period's fashion culture, where men's expertise in women's fashion was both a professional necessity and a curious societal phenomenon.

As suggested by Susan B. Kaiser and Denise A. Green in *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, fashion is intrinsically connected to femininity, referred to as "a process of frivolous change, colorful details and unnecessary flounces, and superficiality" (2021, p. 207). Therefore, the phrase "fashion" habitually brings to mind representations of female accessories characterized by slight alterations and radiant decorations. This interpretation casts fashion as shallow, mainly focused on outward appearances, thus making the notion of "men's fashion" apparently paradoxical (Edwards, 1997, p. 135). Historically, men were not encouraged to exhibit interest in fashion or use clothing for self-expression. Nevertheless, Burney's *Evelina* disregards this notion, especially bringing attention to the relationship between men and fashion in 18th-century England. During that time, not only did men play a vital role in the fashion industry, running stores and helping women, but those of a more affluent background paid careful attention to their fashion choices. This is clearly demonstrated in Burney's representation of Mr. Lovel, a member of the aristocracy, who frankly articulates: "...I dress well!-...I'm often shocked to death to think what a figure I am. If your Ladyship will believe me, I was full half an hour this morning thinking what I should put on!" (Burney, 2004, p. 422). Mr. Lovel's meticulous attention to clothing choices contrasts with the Captain's statement, "no one cares what [he] wears," and adding that he should "spend the full half an hour thinking about something more important." (Burney, 2004, p.422). The Captain exemplifies a more conventional and clichéd perspective of masculinity. Insinuating that no one is bothered by Mr. Lovel's attire, he dismisses his concern for it. This is consistent with the idea that males shouldn't be overly preoccupied with beauty and fashion. These beliefs held that men should be uninterested in beauty and fashion, favoring stoicism and pragmatism. Burney further brings to life the fashion-consciousness of the times through the protagonist, Evelina, who watches the guests at a luxurious gala attentively. She notices one man flaunting his clothing while the other's tasteful yet plain outfit is pleasing to her eye. These differences emphasize the strong emphasis on physical appearance and how fashion affected people's lives during this time.

Conclusion

In *Evelina,* Fanny Burney meticulously dissects the nuanced relationship between fashion, gender, and societal expectations in 18th-century England. The narrative shines a light on the pressure women faced to conform to societal standards of beauty, even in the most private moments. These expectations were intertwined with societal structures that objectified women, valuing their physical beauty over their intrinsic worth. The constant scrutiny of women's attire and demeanor enforced the gendered norms of the time, where women's worth was assessed predominantly based on their appearance. Yet, it wasn't just women who were entrenched in the world of fashion. Men too played significant roles, not merely as spectators but as active participants and influencers. They were central figures in the fashion industry,

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RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi 2023.37 (Aralık)/ **1285**

Kıyafet Kuralları: Frances Burney'in *Evelina; or the History of a young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) adlı romanı Üzerinden On Sekizinci Yüzyıl Londra'sında Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Modanın Perde Arkasını Aralamak / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

guiding and determining what women should wear. However, their relationship with fashion was layered and complex, both embracing it as an avenue of self-expression and simultaneously being boxed in by societal beliefs about masculinity. Furthermore, Burney's novel presents a critique of these societal norms. Through characters like Mrs. Selwyn and the varying reactions to Evelina's own fashion choices, Burney questions the rigidity of these norms and highlights the struggles individuals face when they deviate from societal expectations. The novel thus becomes a platform for challenging the established gender roles and for advocating a more nuanced understanding of individual identity beyond the confines of fashion and societal expectations. By looking at the clothing of the era, one can see that it not only represented societal standards but also provided a means for people to demonstrate their own identity and show their social standing. Investigating the nuances of fashion in this period highlights the intricacy and extravagance of the garments, which speaks to how fashion was used to express the norms of the day and strengthen social hierarchies. It is a long-standing fact that fashion and gender roles are strongly linked; clothing is used to symbolize one's gender identity and the related societal expectations. According to traditional notions, certain styles, colors, and shapes have been exclusively assigned to men and women, leading to a twofold conception of gender. To sum up, *Evelina* shows how, in the 18th century, fashion was not merely a way of expressing oneself but a reflection of cultural norms and gender expectations.

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1286 / *RumeliDE* Journal of Language and Literature Studies 2023.37 (December)

Dress Codes: Deciphering Gender and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century London Through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778)* / Güvendi Yalçın, E.

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