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I Never in My Life Saw Anything More Elegant than Their Dresses

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London characters: or, Fashions and customs, of the present century is a book by Sir Barnaby Sketchwell (1809) that depicts the type of fashion in the Regency era and its popularity even in the theatre industry at that time. This writing is reminiscence of Austen (20) reference to a strong taste for fashion in that period. This is what he mention when he describes the manner “… of the fashionable world.” that one of the characters in the book – Darcy – so strongly despises or keeps away from. This shows that clothing in those times was being revolutionized by the introduction of additional costumes like caps or headgears Sketchwell’s story is about a royal family that seems to have a taste for fashion that was cropping up in the Regency era the same way Austen speaks of it. The Duchess of Pyrmont and the Duke are at the center of this story of a fashionable society at that time. Historically, the dukes and Duchesses have been known to have a flair for fashion through their costumes especially during public occasions. It is through this observation that the narrator observes “… both courted fashion and dissipation in whatever form they chose to present themselves …” (Sketchwell 2). Sketchwell is more enthusiastic when describing the women in the book. This might be due to the fact that the women in the 18th century Britain were just like today; overly conscious about their dressing in terms of how comfortable, decent and brilliant they were. The author points out the fashion of clothing at that time that was characterized by unnatural conformations. A good example is the waistline in the women’s dresses that seem to have been raised above the normal waistline but with an appealing effect on the women. But Sketchwell is almost fascinated by the use of fashionable costumes and this is evident in the illustration at the book’s front cover as shown below.

It is characteristic in the book that the type of fashion was also propagated by the need for attractiveness of the opposite sex of the courting partners. It is therefore common to find those who did not subscribe to the popular fashion being ridiculed. For instance, we read of “… Oh! Perhaps the rich sir Marmaduke Brooks, who walks out in an old greasy hat and a coat a cobbler would not be seen in …” (Sketchwell 13). The writer shows how the beauty that resulted from the fashion attracted the comments of other individuals especially men taking advantage of this to flatter the women. For example, the Duke could frequently admire his “… Superbe Beauty of Madame la Duchess …” which was a humorous way of describing the duchess with a French touch. This is what also takes part in Austen’s book through Mr. Darcy and others. This is elegance that Mrs. Bennet says “I never in my life saw anything more elegant than their dresses” (Austen 43). However, it is not only women that were in this fashion in the Regency era but also their male counterparts were also not left behind. It is therefore observable that the men were also elegantly dressed and with accessories like hats common as the Duke in the story is fond of. The two books therefore seem to concur that Regency era was fashion filled.