

Ladies' Magazines: Women's Fashion as Politics in Georgian England

Madeline Josa

HIST 194BH

Senior Honors Thesis

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Erika Rappaport for all of her guidance and mentorship in the process of writing this thesis, I would not have been able to write this without her support. I would also like to thank Professor Debra Blumenthal for her mentorship and insightful feedback in this process as well.

I also owe a huge thank you to my research partner Marisol Cruz as well for her support and feedback as we worked on our senior honors theses together.

Introduction

In January of 1808, Queen Charlotte of England wore a purple and gold dress to her January birthday celebration, complete with “draperies tied up with rich pearl bows, and rich gold cords and tassels, gold fringe at the bottom of the petticoat; ... trimmed with gold fring.”¹ Even though Charlotte was the Queen, and one would expect her to be the style icon of England, the ladies’ magazines of Britain promptly declared her dress a resounding flop and “not very splendid.”² As the most prominent female figure in Great Britain, during a time when the aristocracy and monarchy were arbiters of fashion, critics had no issue condemning her fashion choices, at her own birthday celebration no less. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the social role of women’s fashion was changing. Influence on women’s fashion followed a complicated path, and the role of fashion itself shifted during this time for women. Fashion started to become tied to politics in many ways, with ladies’ magazines being a key facilitator for this. The way ladies’ magazines described and critiqued fashion, like seen here commenting on the Queen’s birthday attire, affected how women dressed and viewed the monarchy. Women could submit their own writing to ladies’ magazines for publication, expressing their views, thoughts, and opinions to the public. Ladies’ magazines disseminated information about political events to readers and then subsequently documented the influence of that news through fashion, poetry, and letters within their pages. Ladies’ magazines allowed women to engage with politics, whether they meant to or not.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century in Great Britain, it was impossible to separate ladies’ magazines, fashion, and politics, even as this was an era in which politics was coming to

¹ "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47.

² "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47.

be seen as only a male pursuit and women were supposed to occupy the private sphere of home and family. This thesis examines the role of ladies' magazines in linking fashion and politics for women during this time, asking who and what factors influenced women's fashion choices and how that ties into politics. To start, it is important that we define how politics will be used in this context. I am defining "politics" as an interaction or engagement with events and topics considered to be outside of the female private sphere. This engagement with politics would be making the choice to read and be influenced by ladies' magazines that discuss domestic and foreign affairs. It would also be submitting material to be published in these magazines that expresses one's opinions and views because that was outside which was public and therefore outside the private sphere. From the magazines' point of view, this engagement with politics would also be choosing to publish material for female readers that discusses the monarchy and foreign and domestic political affairs.

The two main scholars I will be in conversation with here are Margaret Beetham's *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Women's Magazine, 1800-1914* and Chloe Wigston Smith's "Fast Fashion: Style, Text, and Image in Late Eighteenth-Century Women's Periodicals." Beetham's work discusses the role of ladies' magazines in women's lives, the content shared in ladies' magazines, and why they became popular.³ Smith's work discusses the differences between two of the most popular ladies' magazines: *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*, and how fashion became a distinguishing factor between the two.⁴ What I intend to address is the role of fashion in ladies' magazines, specifically in *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*, and how these magazines allowed fashion to be used by women as a

³ Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Women's Magazine, 1800-1914*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 1-36.

⁴ Chloe Wigston Smith, "Fast Fashion: Style, Text, and Image in Late Eighteenth-Century Women's Periodical," In *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century*, edited by Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell, (Edinburgh University Press, 2018) 1: 446.

political tool. Neither of these works connect fashion in ladies' magazines to politics, but I will be.

In this deep dive into the politics of fashion in ladies' magazines, we will be looking at two ladies' magazines in particular: *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*. These were the most popular ladies' magazines in the early 1800s in Great Britain, and featured all of the essential components of the genre of ladies' magazines. Ladies' magazines during this time always featured a section dedicated to style and fashion, a section of reader-submitted short stories, poetry, and letters, a section devoted to society news like births, deaths, and marriages, and other sections that rotated through that always pertained to women's interests and what was deemed acceptable material for them to read. *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* had all of these sections, as well as their own specialties. *The Lady's Magazine* had a special news section delving into both foreign and domestic affairs that was unlike most other publications, and *La Belle Assemblée* was renowned for its rich fashion section and fashion plates. Both of these magazines illustrate the complex ways that women interacted with fashion and politics at the same time through a medium that was accessible to them.

The Lady's Magazine; or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex, was one of the first of the ladies' magazines to be published, and became one of the most well known and read. It was founded in 1770 by publisher and bookseller John Coote, and ran until 1832, when it merged with another ladies' magazine, *The Lady's Monthly Museum*.⁵ Historian Jennie Batchelor argues that *The Lady's Magazine* was the "first recognisably modern women's magazine."⁶ In contrast to *La Belle Assemblée*, which had a strong focus on fashion and style, *The Lady's Magazine* was

⁵ Jennie Batchelor, *The Lady's Magazine (1770-1832) and the Making of Literary History*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022) 2; "The Lady's Magazine (1770-1832)" National Portrait Gallery, Accessed February 26, 2023, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp64662/the-ladys-magazine>

⁶ Batchelor, *The Lady's Magazine (1770-1832) and the Making of Literary History*, 3.

known for its eclectic mix of contents, more so than its competitors. Beyond the standard sections of content in ladies' magazines, *The Lady's Magazine* also routinely included essays on science, history, and education, as well news, reviews, and embroidery patterns.⁷

La Belle Assemblée was one of the most important early periodicals to blend fashion and politics in Georgian England. It was founded by John Bell and was printed in London from 1806 to 1832.⁸ The magazine featured sections of poetry, letters, gossip, politics, short stories, and fashion all geared towards the ladies of fashionable aristocratic British society, just like *The Lady's Magazine*. What made *La Belle Assemblée* unique from other ladies' magazine publications was its focus and coverage on fashion, and the fact that its fashion plates and descriptions were all centered around women and the Queen.⁹ Besides *The Lady's Magazine*, one of *La Belle Assemblée's* rivals, *Le Beau Monde or Literary and Fashionable Magazine*, published by John Bell's son John Browne Bell, tried to masculinize fashion-writing in ladies' magazines, but this strategy proved to be unpopular and didn't sell.¹⁰ There seems to have been no interest in men's fashion in *La Belle Assemblée*, as ladies' magazines were developing into a predominantly feminine space.¹¹

At the start of the nineteenth century, a distinct shift in men's and women's fashion began to take hold that altered dramatically from the previous century. Ostentatious elements of clothing, like vibrant colors, fancy patterned cloth, and embellishments began to disappear from men's dress, while becoming more and more prominent in women's dress.¹² This was in sharp

⁷ Batchelor, *The Lady's Magazine (1770-1832) and the Making of Literary History*, 5.

⁸ "La Belle Assemblée or Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine," National Portrait Gallery, accessed October 9, 2022, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp160026/la-belle-assembly-or-bells-court-and-fashionable-magazine>

⁹ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 32.

¹⁰ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 32.

¹¹ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 32.

¹² Hilary Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen: Regency Fashion*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019) 30.

contrast to the previous century, where both men and women's dress were similar in their excessiveness and displays of wealth and status. This dramatic shift in men's fashion towards demure simplicity and inconspicuous dressing was due largely to the emerging idea of "separate spheres" for men and women.¹³ Women were relegated to the private, female sphere of the home as caretakers, whereas men were subjected to the public sphere outside the home in business and politics.¹⁴ Men needed to be productive citizens, and move away from the "feminized sphere of consumption," like fashion.¹⁵ It was considered feminine to worry about external dress rather than character,¹⁶ making fashion a feminized space. This turn towards simplicity for men's fashion was summarized by historian Aileen Ribeiro: "It symbolizes gravitas and an indifference to luxury-essential elements of republican austerity; its virtual uniformity emphasizes the revolutionary ideal of equality."¹⁷ With men's interest turning away from external dress, fashion became a part of the feminine private sphere as this ideology of separate spheres took root. This led to the explosion of ladies' magazines at the dawn of the nineteenth century, like *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*, that heavily focused on fashion as part of women's interest.

Since fashion came to be viewed as a feminine space at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was deemed acceptable for women to engage with all parts of fashion: shopping, critiques, illustrations, and more. Fashion became a pivotal avenue for women to express themselves, their beliefs, and their interests because it was one of the only ways women could express these things while still remaining in their private female sphere. With the rise of ladies' magazines that discussed, critiqued, and displayed fashion, women had more accessibility to engage with the world through fashion. I argue that these ladies' magazines, as exemplified by

¹³ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen: Regency Fashion*, 30.

¹⁴ Harper Franklin, "1800-1809" Fashion History Timeline FIT NYC, Accessed February 27, 2023 <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1800-1809/>

¹⁵ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen: Regency Fashion*, 30.

¹⁶ Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen: Regency Fashion*, 30.

¹⁷ Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution*, (London: Batsford, 1988) 141.

The Lady's Magazine and *La Belle Assemblée*, two of the most popular at the time, allowed women to break into and engage with the male public sphere of politics, while still remaining within the accepted realm of the feminized space. Fashion was deemed a socially acceptable way for women to participate and engage with politics and male space, and these ladies' magazines document the many ways fashion could allow this. From these ladies' magazines, we glean insight into the complex ways women's fashion and politics overlap in a time when fashion and politics were supposed to be residing in different gendered spheres.

We will be dissecting two case studies, as represented in *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*, in our discussion of the intersection of fashion and politics. The first we will be looking at are the portrayals of fashionable style between the years of 1807-1810 in the magazines, paying particular attention to descriptions of dress worn at royal court events and descriptions of the monarchy. This section will be analyzing how both *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* voiced their opinions and influenced their predominantly female audience through their respective commentary on fashion worn at the King and Queen's birthday celebrations. It will look at how the magazine perceived their role as a fashion news source, as well as their relation and feelings towards the monarchy. How the female audiences received this reporting on fashion as royal court events was also very important. This section will also dive into the differences between the two publications and how this affected their fashion reporting. There were many similarities between the two ladies' magazines, which in and of itself speaks to the role of ladies' magazines and what was acceptable opinion regarding politics and the monarchy, but they also contained some key differences. This section will explore who shaped influence on women's fashion during the start of the nineteenth century: the monarchy or ladies' magazines, and how it is not a neat, clear answer.

The second case study we will be examining is the influence of the Persian Ambassador's visit to the royal court in 1809-1810. We will be looking at the reporting of the political event in both *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*, as well as the documented effect on women's fashion and consciousness within the magazines. Both of these magazines introduce their predominantly-female readers to the details of the Persian Ambassador's visit, despite the fact that his visit is politically motivated and therefore part of the male public sphere. After, and even during his visit to Great Britain, these magazines documented the widespread influence that the visit had on women's fashion. The section discusses how ladies' magazines facilitated women's engagement with this political event, and then subsequently reflected the effect this engagement had on women in Great Britain.

From these two case studies, we can see the multifaceted and complex ways that ladies' magazines interacted with fashion and allowed women's space to overlap with the male public sphere of politics. We will see how ladies' magazines played a role in political influence, and how the monarchy were and were not a part of this. We will also see how outside events in the public sphere influenced women in the private sphere and the indefinite separation of the two spheres. Fashion used to be written off as a frivolous and shallow part of cultural history, but as scholars are increasingly showing, this thesis demonstrates how in early nineteenth-century England women's magazines reveal how fashions were politically charged. Fashion editors regularly criticized the monarchy's style and as readers, writers and shoppers women engaged with public events. By looking at the history of fashion magazines during a period of political, economic and cultural change, we can see the ways in which the public and private spheres were never totally separate.

Political Context of Britain 1806-1812

At the start of the nineteenth century, Great Britain was embroiled in a war with France that lasted from 1793 to 1815 with little interruption.¹⁸ During the particular years we are discussing, 1806-1812, Napoleon and the French were determined to gain control of the European continent and cut off the British economy in order to try and win the war against Great Britain.¹⁹ This was a very long and drawn-out conflict that Great Britain needed to pay for in order to fight back against Napoleon and the French. This led to many new heavy taxes for British citizens relating to customs, excises, and income or property in order to fund this war.²⁰ These new taxes helped solidify a shift in British social order that was becoming evident by 1815: the shift to a class society organized into three distinct classes—the landed class, the middle class, and the working class.²¹ These economic and social classes, particularly the landed class and the middle class, realized that they needed to support one another in order to protect their own power and economic interests during this time of war and subsequent economic upheaval.²² As a result, these first few years of the nineteenth century bore witness to a great social and economic shift in British society as Great Britain solidified into a class-based society.

During this time that Great Britain was at war with Napoleon and France, the British monarchy was also undergoing change and upheaval. King George III of Great Britain was prone to experiencing bouts of intense mental illness, and during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the last of his life, his mental health was rapidly declining.²³ His mental capabilities declined so much during this time that his son, the Prince of Wales, had to take over as prince

¹⁸ Thomas William Heyck, *The People of the British Isles, A New History: From 1688 to 1870*, (Chicago: Lyceum Books, Inc, 2002) 208.

¹⁹ Heyck, *The People of the British Isles*, 208-209.

²⁰ Heyck, *The People of the British Isles*, 208.

²¹ Heyck, *The People of the British Isles*, 212.

²² Heyck, *The People of the British Isles*, 212.

²³ Christopher Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History*, (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 394-398.

regent of Great Britain once the Regency Act of 1811 was passed by parliament.²⁴ The need for a regent was rapidly becoming clear in the exact years we are looking at, 1806-1812, and the Prince of Wales officially took over as regent just as these years we are examining came to a close. King George III did not participate in governing the country thereafter until his death in 1820, when the Prince of Wales then became king.²⁵ King George III and his son, the Prince of Wales, held opposing political views, but King George III's mental illness had deteriorated so far by 1811 when the Prince of Wales became regent that it did not matter.²⁶ Prior to the regency, this discrepancy in political views had caused problems when King George III had bouts of mental illness in the 1780s and the Whigs, the political group the Prince of Wales supported, wished to replace him with the Prince of Wales as regent.²⁷ King George aligned himself more with the group known as Tories, so the Whigs were eager to replace him with a regent. By the time that the Prince of Wales actually took over as regent, King George III had such severe mental illness problems that he did not even recognize when his wife, Queen Charlotte, died in 1818.²⁸ During King George III's last few years of life, Queen Charlotte and King George III lived separately and the Queen continued to host court events, as was her duty.²⁹

The Lady's Magazine

At the same time Britain was at war and the monarchy was in crisis, wealthy women had a new means to read, think, discuss and disseminate knowledge. New magazines directed at elite female readers emerged in this period and in addition to articles about important female figures,

²⁴ Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History*, 394-398.

²⁵ Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History*, 394-398.

²⁶ Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History*, 394-398.

²⁷ Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History*, 394-398.

²⁸ Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History*, 394-398.

²⁹ Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History*, 394-398.

they included poetry, fiction, reviews and fashion news.³⁰ Women were readers but also writers and editors, and thus, as one historian has argued, women were “simultaneously positioned as consumers and producers of these texts and as objects of their analysis.”³¹ Ladies' magazines thus enabled the development of a female public sphere where women could present and share beliefs, ideas, and thoughts with the wider public. Even though many of the owners of these magazines were male, Georgian ladies' magazines helped create a space for elite women to comment on the political developments of the day. Politics were generally not discussed directly in these texts, rather they were embedded in fashion news, commentary and plates. From these magazines designed for the female audience, women could engage with the wider political world beyond the female private sphere through a medium that was socially accessible.

One of the popular ladies' magazines published during this time was *The Lady's Magazine*. *The Lady's Magazine* was one of the first of this type of periodical to be produced, several decades prior to the other periodical to be discussed shortly, *La Belle Assemblée*.³² This publication featured a fashion section every issue, and once a year published a section pertaining to the ladies' attire at the Queen's birthday celebration, as did *La Belle Assemblée*. *The Lady's Magazine's* content established what was standard for later magazines. It included sections pertaining to poetry, short stories, correspondence, and of course fashion articles and plates. Unlike other ladies' magazines that would follow, it also always had sections dedicated to both foreign and domestic news and politics in every issue, which was abnormal in terms of ladies' magazine content.³³ A hallmark of ladies' magazine content was the lack of political news present, so to have sections solely dedicated to news and politics for women was unusual for *The*

³⁰ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 21.

³¹ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 17.

³² Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 17.

³³ Smith, “Fast Fashion: Style, Text, and Image in Late Eighteenth-Century Women's Periodicals,” 1: 446.

Lady's Magazine to do.³⁴ *La Belle Assemblée*, the other periodical to be discussed, in contrast, did not have specific sections focused on foreign and domestic news and politics in every issue, and was instead renowned for its fashion content.

A notable section that appeared annually in *The Lady's Magazine* was a section describing all the dresses worn for Queen Charlotte's birthday. The magazine *La Belle Assemblée* also included this section, and the two are interesting to compare. When looking specifically at the reporting of the ladies' dresses at court for the Queen's birthday celebrations, one glaring difference that becomes apparent between *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* is the month of publication. Queen Charlotte's birthday was celebrated at court every year in January, and so the subsequent reporting on what the ladies attending the celebrations were wearing was published in the January edition of *The Lady's Magazine* every year. Contrastingly, the reporting of ladies' attire at the Queen's birthday celebrations were published in *La Belle Assemblée* in the February editions of the magazine, rather than the January editions like *The Lady's Magazine*. In all of the examples from *La Belle Assemblée* analyzed in the next section, this is the case in terms of the date of publication, and this is the case as well for the surrounding years. While this may seem like an insignificant detail with reasonable explanation, it is actually worthy of examination when comparing the exact descriptions of what the ladies in attendance, particularly Queen Charlotte, were wearing at these birthday celebrations.

The text in both publications are almost word-for-word matches, meaning that *La Belle Assemblée* copied the descriptions of the fashion worn at the Queen's birthday celebrations from *The Lady's Magazine*. The description of the Queen's attire at her birthday celebration in the January 1810 edition of *The Lady's Magazine* begins with "A rich dark green velvet petticoat

³⁴ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 19.

superbly embroidered in gold sprigs,”³⁵ and the description of the Queen’s attire at her birthday celebration in the February 1810 edition of *La Belle Assemblée* opens the same way.³⁶ This continues line for line throughout the whole description of the Queen in both magazines. For the entirety of the fashion sections dedicated to what was worn by whom at the Queen’s birthday celebrations in 1810, both magazines are the same, line-by-line. They both discuss the same people in the same order with the exact same words as each other.³⁷ The descriptions of the ladies’ attire is again almost identical in both issues in 1809, as well as in 1807.³⁸ There are only minor changes in word choice in all of these descriptions, like for example in the 1809 descriptions. In the January 1809 edition of *The Lady’s Magazine*, Queen Charlotte is described “Her Majesty—Wore a scarlet velvet petticoat, ornamented with black lace,” whereas *La Belle Assemblée* in the February 1809 editions writes about the Queen “Her Majesty—Scarlet velvet petticoat, with black lace.”³⁹ It is really only slight minor changes like this one scene in 1809 that ever differentiate the descriptions between the two magazines. This is seen in multiple years, so it is clear that it is a recurring event that every year *La Belle Assemblée* prints the same

³⁵ “Ladies’ Dresses on Her Majesty’s Birth-Day.” *The Lady’s Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 41 (01, 1810): 33.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081685871>

³⁶ “GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON FASHION AND DRESS.” *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1810): 43.

³⁷ “GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON FASHION AND DRESS.” *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1810): 43. ; “Ladies’ Dresses on Her Majesty’s Birth-Day.” *The Lady’s Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 41 (01, 1810): 33.

³⁸ “Ladies’ Dresses on Her Majesty’s Birth-Day.” *The Lady’s Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 38 (01, 1807): 37.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081685848> ; “Ladies’ Dresses on Her Majesty’s Birth-Day.” *The Lady’s Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 40 (01, 1809): 33. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081685855> ; “LADIES’ DRESSES.” *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 6, no. 41 (02, 1809): 31-35.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/ladies-presses/docview/2715794/se-2> ; “HER MAJESTY’S BIRTH-DAY.” *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1807): 51-53.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/her-majestys-birth-day/docview/2681743/se-2>.

³⁹ “LADIES’ DRESSES.” *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 6, no. 41 (02, 1809): 31-35. ; “Ladies’ Dresses on Her Majesty’s Birth-Day.” *The Lady’s Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 40 (01, 1809): 33.

descriptions of the attire worn at Queen Charlotte's birthday celebration as *The Lady's Magazine*. *La Belle Assemblée* thus copied *The Lady's Magazine*. This is the reason that the order and month of publication is so pertinent when examining these two ladies' magazines.

Part of the reason why these two publications could have identical descriptions of the ladies' dresses, with *La Belle Assemblée* clearly copying *The Lady's Magazine*, is because of the practice of anonymous authorship in ladies' magazines. Ladies' magazines typically did not give credit or name the authors of their particular articles, which allowed publications to steal and copy from each other since there was no actual author who received credit for their writing.⁴⁰ Since no one knew who the real authors were, the case could be made that any of the publications were the first to write a particular article or section that was published, giving magazines free reign to copy each other without consequence. While this may seem like a detrimental practice for the authors themselves, it did allow female writers to be published.⁴¹ It was uncommon for women to get their work published, but since ladies' magazines would publish articles anonymously, no one would know that it was a woman who wrote it. These female authors would not receive credit for their work, and their work could be stolen by other publications, but ladies' magazines were still inundated with submitted work from to be published by women.⁴² Many women may have appreciated the opportunity and ability to have their work published, even if it was anonymously, the practice ended up being beneficial to women.

In the following section analyzing the descriptions of Queen Charlotte's birthday dresses in the February 1808 and February 1810 editions of *La Belle Assemblée*, I will discuss some of the possible political implications that arose from the reporting in the magazine in more depth

⁴⁰ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 19.

⁴¹ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 19.

⁴² Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 20.

than I do in this section. Here, I will discuss the specific political implications that come about from the context of *La Belle Assemblée* copying the descriptions reported by *The Lady's Magazine*. The description in *La Belle Assemblée* from 1808 paints a rather unflattering picture of Queen Charlotte's dress for her birthday celebration, which implies that *La Belle Assemblée* did not feel required to flatter the monarchy and had the freedom to pass critique and judgment; they were not censored by the crown.⁴³ While this implication could be the case, it is more likely that *La Belle Assemblée* felt they had the freedom to critique the Queen's clothes because *The Lady's Magazine* had already done so without consequence. *The Lady's Magazine* published their judgment and lackluster commentary first in January of 1808, and *La Belle Assemblée* copied them and followed a month later because it was shown to be an acceptable stance to take without repercussions from the crown. In reality, it is more likely that *The Lady's Magazine* perceived their role to not be required to flatter the monarchy, and *La Belle Assemblée* followed suit.

Both of the identical descriptions of Queen Charlotte's birthday dress featured in the 1810 editions were longer and far more complimentary than the matching descriptions from Queen Charlotte's birthday in 1808.⁴⁴ In the following section, I theorize that this was due to it being more advantageous for *La Belle Assemblée* to display their support of Queen Charlotte at this time rather than before, and that the longer, more flattering description was an overtly political move to support the Queen in her diplomatic endeavors with Persia. A visit from the Persian Ambassador to Great Britain captivated the British consciousness, both royal and middle class minds alike, so this support would make sense. I believe these political motives to be true for *La Belle Assemblée*, even with the context of the magazine copying the exact fashion

⁴³ "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47.

⁴⁴ "GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON FASHION AND DRESS." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1810): 43. ; "Ladies' Dresses on Her Majesty's Birth-Day." *The Lady's Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 41 (01, 1810): 33.

reporting from *The Lady's Magazine*, but I believe there is more nuance to it with this knowledge. Since *The Lady's Magazine* published their report of Queen Charlotte's birthday attire first in January of 1810, they set the precedent that *La Belle Assemblée* could follow, word for word, in supporting the Queen. While *La Belle Assemblée's* flattering writing about Queen Charlotte still displays their support for the Queen and implies that they now saw it as advantageous to support the Queen, *La Belle Assemblée* did not reach that political decision on their own without the influence of *The Lady's Magazine* showcasing their support first. This also makes *The Lady's Magazine* the one to make the political move to support Queen Charlotte's diplomatic actions regarding the Persian Ambassador, while *La Belle Assemblée* follows in their footsteps. Because *La Belle Assemblée* repeatedly copied the fashion writing in *The Lady's Magazine*, *La Belle Assemblée* might not have even meant to showcase their support of Queen Charlotte's diplomacy with Persia and were simply copying the already-published reporting in *The Lady's Magazine* as they always did. Regardless of whether it was intentional or not, *La Belle Assemblée* made that political statement, but only because *The Lady's Magazine* did it first.

What is surprising about this revelation that *La Belle Assemblée* copied their reporting of the ladies' attire at the Queen's birthday celebrations is that *La Belle Assemblée* was regarded as the ladies' magazine to go to for fashion content and information, rather than *The Lady's Magazine*. This was despite the fact that, as exemplified in the fashion sections about the Queen's birthday celebrations, *The Lady's Magazine* published first and then *La Belle Assemblée* copied some of their fashion content. How did *La Belle Assemblée* come to be regarded as the desired magazine for fashion information even with the glaring evidence that they copied portions of their fashion content from other magazines? The answer lies in *La Belle Assemblée's* more extensive coverage and quality of fashion content in comparison to *The Lady's Magazine*.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 32.

La Belle Assemblée was known for their detailed fashion plate illustrations, available in color, that accompanied their extensive descriptions and writing on fashion in every issue.⁴⁶ An example of these fashion plates featured in every issue from *La Belle Assemblée* can be seen here in figure 1, from the January 1808 edition of the magazine discussing the dresses worn for the Queen's birthday celebration.⁴⁷ As you can see, *La Belle Assemblée's* standard fashion plates were fully colored



Figure 1



Figure 2

and had many minute details, particularly in

the trims and embroidery. Although perhaps

they had the time and resources to have such extensive and illustrated content because they copied some fashion sections

from *The Lady's Magazine*, like we have been examining. In

comparison, *The Lady's Magazine* had less detailed and colorful fashion plates, and they were included in the

publication much less frequently. In figure 2, we see an

example of the types of fashion plates that occasionally graced

the pages of *The Lady's Magazine*, this one published in the

⁴⁶ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 32.

⁴⁷ "A Lady of Quality in the Birth day Court Dress, Jany. 18, 1808" National Portrait Gallery, accessed January 26, 2022, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw279725/A-Lady-of-Quality-in-the-Birth-day-Court-Dress-Jan-y-18-1808?LinkID=mp160026&role=art&rNo=12>

year 1805.⁴⁸ This particular fashion plate from *The Lady's Magazine* in 1805 has much more muted colors when contrasted with the fashion plate from the February 1808 edition of *La Belle Assemblée*, as well as much less fine detail work. While *The Lady's Magazine* may have started publication decades before *La Belle Assemblée*, they struggled to provide the popular types of fashion illustrations that *La Belle Assemblée* featured in every issue.⁴⁹ *The Lady's Magazine* had already been providing readers with fashion content, but with the explosion of new ladies' magazines on the market at the opening of the nineteenth century like *La Belle Assemblée* to compete with, *The Lady's Magazine's* fashion section began to pale in comparison.⁵⁰ Despite other ladies' magazines copying fashion sections from their pages, *The Lady's Magazine's* fashion section was not viewed as their most notable content in every issue.

What was particularly notable about *The Lady's Magazine*, especially when compared to *La Belle Assemblée*, was its regular foreign and domestic news sections. *La Belle Assemblée* did not have any regular, recurring sections of their publication that explicitly discussed news events in a foreign or domestic context, they focused strictly on the traditional elements of a ladies' magazine. In this way, *The Lady's Magazine* differed from the traditional model they helped set as one of the first of this type of periodical by having dedicated news sections. Ladies' magazines were not supposed to publish foreign and domestic news because news events, particularly foreign news events, were becoming linked to politics and government, and this was deemed unsuitable reading material for women.⁵¹ Politics and government were part of the public sphere, which was viewed as a male space, as established in the introduction, and therefore it was frowned upon for women to engage with politics and government. It then followed that

⁴⁸ Lady's Magazine. *London Walking and Full Dress*. London : Printed for Robinson and Roberts, 1805.
<https://jstor.org/stable/community.29953714>.

⁴⁹ Smith, "Fast Fashion: Style, Text, and Image in Late Eighteenth-Century Women's Periodicals," 1: 446.

⁵⁰ Smith, "Fast Fashion: Style, Text, and Image in Late Eighteenth-Century Women's Periodicals," 1: 446.

⁵¹ Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, 19.

ladies' magazines, designed for a female audience, typically did not include news sections like *La Belle Assemblée*. By simply having a recurring, dedicated news section, *The Lady's Magazine* engaged with politics because it introduced and included women in the male-dominated sphere of politics and government. The second case study to be examined here is a comparison of the reporting present in the news section of *The Lady's Magazine* and the "Varieties, Critical, Literary, and Historical" section of *La Belle Assemblée* on the Persian Ambassador's visit to Great Britain, and how these reports engaged with politics. Both *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* were intended to reach a predominantly female audience, as evident by their title, and also published writings by female authors, so women were included in the public political sphere by reading and engaging with the text, particularly the foreign and domestic news section of *The Lady's Magazine*.

It is clear from types of content present in each respective publication that *The Lady's Magazine* was a more political publication than *La Belle Assemblée*. Yet, both ladies' magazines engaged with politics and broke into the male-dominated public sphere of politics and government, they just went about it in different ways. *The Lady's Magazine* overtly discussed news and politics in their recurring foreign and domestic news sections, but *La Belle Assemblée* was more subtle in their political engagement. *La Belle Assemblée* engaged with politics through their presentation of fashion content and imagery, so it is less obvious than *The Lady's Magazine*, but we can still conclude that both magazines allowed women to engage with politics. Whether that engagement was through readership, writing, or fashion choice was dependent upon the publication and the audience, but both *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* allowed women to participate and engage with politics in an avenue that was accessible to them.

La Belle Assemblée

The most notable content of *La Belle Assemblée*, and what separated the magazine from other publications like *The Lady's Magazine*, was its robust fashion sections. The focus of *La Belle Assemblée's* content was on the reporting, describing, and illustrating of women's fashion for their readers. The magazine featured other content appealing to women's interests as well, but they became popular and well-known because of their fashion sections in every issue. A big part of their popularity as a ladies' magazine known for fashion were their detailed, illustrated fashion plates accompanying their reports and descriptions of styles, which will be discussed here.

The fashion sections of *La Belle Assemblée* often followed the format of a series of fashion plates followed by a narrative section describing everything depicted in the plates, as well as some commentary regarding the opinion of the writer. However, an exception to this format occurred annually in the February issues of the magazine, in which the fashion section became dedicated to the fashions featured at the Queen's January birthday celebrations. As discussed above, this section was nearly always copied from *The Lady's Magazine*. This section listed the ladies in attendance at court for the Queen's birthday and then succinctly described exactly what each lady was wearing, including the Queen herself. These annual discussions of Queen' Charlotte's birthday celebrations were not just about clothes, but rather they established how clothes were political. The first examples of this I will be looking at in *La Belle Assemblée* are two different descriptions of what Queen Charlotte wore at her birthday, from 1808 and 1810 respectively.

In the February 1808 edition of *La Belle Assemblée*, Queen Charlotte had just celebrated her sixty-fourth birthday and, as was customary, *La Belle Assemblée* provided a detailed

description of the festivities. Notably, it gave the same space to the queen's outfit as that of the others in attendance, and the description of the queen was not flattering. The description is brief, only eight lines long, which is about the average length of the descriptions of what the other ladies in attendance were wearing as well.⁵² The unflattering description states that "Her Majesty - As usual on her own birthday, was not very splendid."⁵³ The short description paired with the lackluster commentary about her style suggests that this magazine did not perceive its role as flattering the monarchy, and instead was passing judgment on her to influence their target audience, the aristocratic ladies who interact with her through court. This could also be read as a reflection of what aristocratic ladies who attended court thought about the Queen, rather than an influence. The monarchy insisted upon a strict and rigid set of rules for court attire that differed greatly from what was considered fashionable dress outside of court, so perhaps this unflattering descriptor of Queen Charlotte's dress is an expression of discontentment with court attire dress code. Nevertheless, even if this account was hardly fawning, the magazine does take pains to note the details of Queen Charlotte's dress: fabric type, color, embellishment types, and trim. An interesting point about these details is the fabric type of Queen Charlotte's dress, it is stated that her dress was made with "British point."⁵⁴ Despite the unenthusiastic description of Queen Charlotte's dress, what the Queen wore still influenced readers of this magazine, otherwise there would be no point in printing it. By choosing a British-made fabric, the Queen may have been trying to support the British economy, especially since Britain was at war in these years. Her choice could have influenced more ladies to buy and wear British fabrics, and if this did

⁵² "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47-48.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/ladies-dresses-on-anniversary-her-majestys-birth/docview/2691785/se-2>.

⁵³ "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47.

⁵⁴ "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47.

influence ladies to wear more British fabrics rather than imported fabrics, this would benefit British textile makers and bolster the British economy. While it may sound like an unimportant quip about fabric choice, the Queen knew that what she wore would be printed for a wider audience and have influence, so this can be read as a political choice by Queen Charlotte.

In comparison to the February 1808 issue of *La Belle Assemblée*, the other issue I am looking at, the February 1810 edition, has quite a contrasting description of the dress Queen Charlotte wore for her birthday at court. To start, this time around the description of the Queen's dress is much more extensive, twenty-lines long, which is over double the average length of the descriptions of what other ladies wore in this issue and far longer than the eight lines written about Queen Charlotte's dress in the February 1808 issue.⁵⁵ The February 1810 edition also makes a point to compliment the Queen's dress, saying "this was by far the most suburb dress wore by the Queen on her own birthday for many years past," which is also very different than the unimpressed attitude regarding the Queen's dress expressed in the February 1808 edition.⁵⁶ This year the magazine makes much more of an attempt to flatter the Queen and her choice of dress. The question is why the change? The magazine could be trying to appeal to the Queen and earn her respect or support, or it was now advantageous to be on the Queen's good side and in her good graces. As mentioned before, I believe this much longer and flattering description of the Queen's dress to be a political move instead, following in the footsteps of *The Lady's Magazine*. *La Belle Assemblée* concludes the description of Queen Charlotte's dress with "we have heard that it was meant as complementary to the Representative of the Persian Court,"

⁵⁵ "GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON FASHION AND DRESS." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1810): 42-43.
<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/general-observations-reflections-on-fashion-dress/docview/2695025/se-2>.

⁵⁶ "GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON FASHION AND DRESS." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1810): 43.

the Queen's attire? One reason could be that *La Belle Assemblée* was trying not to draw attention to the very unusual dress shape required to be worn at court events, as it was ridiculed by other royal courts in Europe.⁶⁰ Another reason *La Belle Assemblée* might have tried to not draw attention to the Queen's dress shape is exclusivity and elite readership. These court dress descriptions were the ways that people who could not attend court events got to hear about what was worn and who was in attendance at court events like the Queen's birthday. Readers who were part of Great Britain's elite and titled peerage could attend court events, and therefore it would already be expected that they knew the requirements of court dress and would not need to read descriptions of the Queen's dress shape. By excluding this information about the dress hoops,



Figure 4

La Belle Assemblée could be alienating any readers who were not part of Great Britain's elite and titled peerage who already attended court events, making it clear who was supposed to be reading and engaging with this magazine and its ideas. This reason is conflicting though, because *La Belle Assemblée* had previously printed fashion plates in its magazine of illustrated depictions of this hooped court attire. In the July 1807 edition of the magazine, there is a fashion plate and description of the Princess of Wales wearing this type of dress shape, as well as a fashion plate and description of the Marchioness of Townshend in this silhouette at the Queen's birthday in the February 1806 edition of *La Belle Assemblée* [See Figures 3 and 4].⁶¹ This makes it clear that the

⁶⁰ Kathryn Hennessy, ed., "Female Geometry" in *Fashion, The Definitive Visual Guide*, 99.

⁶¹ "EXPLANATION OF THE PRINTS OF FASHION." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18 (07, 1807): cccxxix.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/explanation-prints-fashion/docview/2662754/se-2>; "THE MARCHIONESS OF TOWNSHEND:" *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 1, no. 1 (02, 1806): 16-17. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/marchioness-townshend/docview/2659705/se-2>.

magazine was not trying to hide the silhouette style required at court, since not only were there multiple descriptions but illustrations as well displaying the court-required hoop.

The key reason I suspect that descriptions of the Queen's dress silhouette were minimized was because the silhouette itself was not in favor with most attendees of court events, and Queen Charlotte was often blamed for the hooped skirt requirement at court.⁶² Multiple ladies commented on the absurdity of wearing hoops at court with such a high empire waist line, like the Comtesse de Boigne who was "torn between the desire to laugh at the sight or frown in irritation at the time and effort it took to achieve this ridiculous style."⁶³ Historian Kay Staniland also remarks that Jane Austen's sister-in-law was "daunted" by the idea of having to wear such a heavy and cumbersome hoop at court.⁶⁴ Many ladies did not enjoy the outdated hoop and resulting outlandish silhouette, so perhaps *La Belle Assemblée* tried to minimize references to the shape of the Queen's dress because it was so unpopular. While Queen Charlotte may be blamed for the rule, the hoop requirement was not abolished at court events until two years after Queen Charlotte's death so it is uncertain who actually set this requirement at court.⁶⁵ This ties back into the politics of fashion descriptions in the ladies' magazines: it could be viewed as support for Queen Charlotte to not report on the shape of court dresses in reference to her since the silhouette was ridiculed and she was blamed for it. By not reporting on the shape of the court dresses, it lessens the connection between the required silhouette for court events and Queen Charlotte. While the first description of Queen Charlotte's birthday attire was lackluster in praise for the Queen, it still makes no mention of the unfavorable silhouette we know she was wearing.

⁶² Kay Staniland, *In Royal Fashion: The Clothes of Princess Charlotte of Wales and Queen Victoria 1796-1901*, (London: Museum of London, 1997) 29.

⁶³ Lauder milk and Hamlin, *The Regency Companion*, 24.

⁶⁴ Staniland, *In Royal Fashion*, 29.

⁶⁵ Staniland, *In Royal Fashion*, 29.

Another interesting thing to note about the February 1810 description of court attire for the Queen's birthday is that the editor for this section was a woman named Mary Ann Bell.⁶⁶ The description was coming from the female perspective to a female audience, which perhaps explains why there are more details and an in-depth commentary in the 1810 description compared to the 1808 description, whose editor is unknown. This could also give insight into why the 1810 description is more flattering towards the Queen in contrast to 1808; a female writer might have been more inclined to support a female power figure rather than a potentially male author. In the 1808 issue of the magazine, the fashion section begins by describing its writings as "fashion intelligence," which when put in the context of the majority-female audience of the magazine suggests that fashion for women was a way to engage in political machinations.⁶⁷ With this idea of women viewing fashion in a political sense in mind, it makes sense that a female writer would be making a political statement by writing positively about the Queen's attire in the 1810 issue of *La Belle Assemblée*. Mary Ann Bell was displaying her support of Queen Charlotte through the political implications of fashion.

Both of these descriptions of Queen Charlotte's court dresses for her birthday express the politics behind the Queen's attire, but in different ways. By comparing these two descriptions, as well as the descriptions in *The Lady's Magazine*, we get a sense of the role ladies magazines played in the politics of the Queen's attire as well as the politics of the magazine itself. Sometimes the magazine made a direct political statement, and sometimes it helped Queen Charlotte make a political statement to a wider audience. Regardless of what role the magazine was fulfilling, the descriptions of Queen Charlotte's attire for her birthday at court connects

⁶⁶ "La Belle Assemblée or Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine." National Portrait Gallery. Accessed October 9, 2022.
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp160026/la-belle-assemblee-or-bells-court-and-fashionable-magazine>

⁶⁷ "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 46.

fashion with politics. These two descriptions of Queen Charlotte's clothes are just case examples of the ways that ladies' magazines, specifically *La Belle Assemblée* and *The Lady's Magazine*, used fashion as political engagement, but *La Belle Assemblée* had other examples of fashion as politics within its pages as well.

Another section of fashion writing in *La Belle Assemblée* that was a form of political engagement were the special features sections on important female figures in society. These sections normally focused on a woman who wore a particularly special or fascinating gown at an event, and would describe everything she was wearing in full detail with an accompanying fashion plate illustration. I will be focusing on one example from a court event in particular, the special feature on the Princess of Wales from the July 1807 edition of *La Belle Assemblée*. The fashion plate illustration from this special feature is already displayed above, see Figure 1.⁶⁸ The Princess of Wales' special feature in the fashion section was written in response to what she wore for the King's birthday celebration in June the previous month. From the special feature, it is clear that *La Belle Assemblée* is in support of the Princess of Wales. The Princess of Wales in 1807 was Princess Charlotte, the granddaughter of Queen Charlotte and King George III, and the heir presumptive to the throne as the only child of George, Prince of Wales (later George IV).⁶⁹ Her father, George, Prince of Wales (George IV) and mother, Caroline of Brunswick, had a fraught marriage that eventually ended in their separation, which made Princess Charlotte appear more favorable to the public as the only child.⁷⁰ This favorable view is very much reflected in Princess Charlotte's July 1807 special feature. The Princess of Wales' feature is the first fashion plate of the magazine discussed, and it is also the longest description and explanation from the

⁶⁸ "EXPLANATION OF THE PRINTS OF FASHION." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18 (07, 1807): cccxxix.; "THE MARCHIONESS OF TOWNSHEND:" *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 1, no. 1 (02, 1806): 16-17.

⁶⁹ "Princess Charlotte of Wales," Royal Collection Trust, accessed November 30, 2022, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/georgian-papers-programme/princess-charlotte-of-wales>

⁷⁰ Royal Collection Trust, "Princess Charlotte of Wales."

fashion section of the July 1807 edition of *La Belle Assemblée*.⁷¹ In this edition there was one other special feature with an accompanying fashion plate illustration of French fashion, and that feature was far more succinct, and less complementary than Princess Charlotte's.⁷² The minute details of Princess Charlotte's ensemble are described in her feature, such as "the body and ground of the drapery was formed of a rich silver and lilac tissue; with a most superb border, composed of emeralds, topazes, and amethysts, to represent the vine-leaf and grapes."⁷³ This lengthy and detailed description is in sharp contrast to the concise description of French fashion in the second feature. The French fashion feature only describes the fashion plate illustration as "ornamented round the bottom and drapery with a border of shells, painted to nature," which is far less descriptive in comparison.⁷⁴ In addition to the lengthier descriptions, the language used to describe Princess Charlotte is much more flattering and flowery than the language used to describe the second fashion plate illustration. This could be a reflection of the contentious relations between England and France, but the magazine itself does have a French name so I do not know if *La Belle Assemblée* wished to reflect that.

The opening line of the Princess of Wales' feature is a prime example of the complementary and flattering language used to describe Princess Charlotte in her dress from the King's birthday. The first line claims that "this dress, for taste and magnificence, stood

⁷¹ "GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE FASHIONS FOR THE SEASON, with a Complete List of Ladies in their Court Dresses, as Worn on the Birth-Day." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18 (07, 1807): 329-330.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/general-observations-on-fashions-season-with/docview/2659992/se-2>.

⁷² "GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE FASHIONS FOR THE SEASON, with a Complete List of Ladies in their Court Dresses, as Worn on the Birth-Day." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18 (07, 1807): 329-330.

⁷³ "GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE FASHIONS FOR THE SEASON, with a Complete List of Ladies in their Court Dresses, as Worn on the Birth-Day." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18 (07, 1807): 329-330.

⁷⁴ "GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE FASHIONS FOR THE SEASON, with a Complete List of Ladies in their Court Dresses, as Worn on the Birth-Day." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18 (07, 1807): 329-330.

unrivalled” among the other ladies in attendance, and that “we [*La Belle Assemblée*] consider ourselves fortunate in having it in our power to procure a representation of it for our fair correspondents.”⁷⁵ This line is full of complementary language to Princess Charlotte, and can definitely be interpreted as support from *La Belle Assemblée* for her. Displaying such obvious support for a political figure is an act of political engagement, as the magazine is displaying its political views. This type of language is not shown in the second feature on French fashion in the July 1807 edition of *La Belle Assemblée*, and if we look at the previous examples above describing Queen Charlotte’s clothes at court events, is not always shown when describing Queen Charlotte, the monarch, as well. As we saw in the contrasting descriptions of Queen Charlotte’s attire at her birthday in 1808 and 1810, Queen Charlotte is not always described in the most complementary way in terms of her fashion, making support for her from *La Belle Assemblée* more ambiguous.⁷⁶ In the February 1808 edition of *La Belle Assemblée*, there is also a description of Princess Charlotte in addition to Queen Charlotte, and the Princess of Wales’ clothes are described in an equally as flattering manner as her special feature in July of 1807.⁷⁷ As we know, Queen Charlotte in the February 1808 edition was described as “not very splendid,” but Princess Charlotte was described as “surpass[ing] all we ever saw,” in that same edition.⁷⁸ This shows a consistency of support for Princess Charlotte, as expressed by *La Belle Assemblée*, which is a form of political engagement because the magazine is displaying their political beliefs. By looking at these descriptions of the Princess of Wales in the fashion section, and the

⁷⁵ "GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE FASHIONS FOR THE SEASON, with a Complete List of Ladies in their Court Dresses, as Worn on the Birth-Day." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18 (07, 1807): 329-330.

⁷⁶ "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47-48.

⁷⁷ "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47-48.

⁷⁸ "LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27 (02, 1808): 47-48.

subsequent comparisons to Queen Charlotte and other fashion plate illustrations, we pick up on the political engagement carried out by *La Belle Assemblée* through writings about fashion.

The various forms of fashion commentary featured in *La Belle Assemblée* were a socially acceptable way for the magazine to express their beliefs and influence the political beliefs of their readers. In both the commentary in the descriptions of dresses worn at court for the Queen's birthday and the special sections dedicated to individuals with fashion plates, clear favor is expressed for certain political figures over others. This clear favor for political figures, conveyed through fashion commentary by *La Belle Assemblée*, demonstrated how ladies' magazines could engage with and participate in politics without breaking out of the accepted realm of the female private sphere. In a way, these sections of fashion commentary that expressed political intent and beliefs helped to create a female public sphere of politics that masqueraded as accepted feminine space. In the next section, I will be further analyzing how ladies' magazines as a whole, beyond just fashion commentary, helped to create what is essentially a female public sphere that allowed women to engage with news and politics. To do so, I will use a case study of the Persian Ambassador's visit to Great Britain that will discuss fashion commentary and other features of ladies' magazines in *La Belle Assemblée* and *The Lady's Magazine* that helped to create this female public sphere.

The Persian Ambassador's Visit

In 1809, Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan, known to the British as the "Persian Ambassador," visited the court of King George III as an envoy for the court of Fath-ʿAlī Shah of Iran.⁷⁹ He stayed at the court until the summer of 1810. This visit left a lasting impression on the consciousness of

⁷⁹ "ABU'L-HASAN KHAN ĪLCĪ" Encyclopædia Iranica, Accessed March 1, 2023
<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abul-hasan-khan-ilci-mirza-persian-diplomat-b>

the British people and influenced many aspects of their culture.⁸⁰ The Persian Ambassador visited Great Britain in the midst of tensions and stakes rising during the Napoleonic wars. Specifically, Napoleon planned to march to India, making Iran's international relations very prominent.⁸¹ Fath-‘Alī Shah had signed a friendship treaty with Napoleon in 1807, and hoped to win Georgia back from the Russians with his help, but Napoleon made peace with Russia later on that same year.⁸² Napoleon making peace with Russia ruined Fath-‘Alī Shah's plan, so he turned to Great Britain and sent Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan as ambassador instead in the hopes of securing his goal.⁸³ While in Great Britain, the Persian Ambassador received many hearty welcomes and fanfare, and was welcomed into the upper echelon of the aristocracy and the court.⁸⁴ As we will discuss in the following section, there were parades, parties, and events held in his honor upon his arrival, many of which are documented in the ladies' magazines *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*.

How The Magazines Addressed The Visit

Both *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* widely reported about the Persian Ambassador's visit to Great Britain. These magazines thus allowed women to participate in foreign affairs as well as domestic politics. This section will look at the January 1810 edition of *The Lady's Magazine* and compare its news content to that of the February 1810 edition of *La Belle Assemblée*, because both discuss the visit of an Ambassador from Persia to the royal court

⁸⁰ For further reading and examples of the influence of the of the Persian Ambassador's visit on British culture, see Abū al-Ḥasan Khān. 1988. *A Persian at the Court of King George, 1809-10 : The Journal of Mirza Abul Hassan Khan*. London: Barrie and Jenkins; Savory, R. M. "British and French Diplomacy in Persia, 1800-1810." *Iran* 10 (1972): 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4300463>

⁸¹ "ABU'L-HASAN KHAN ĪLČĪ" Encyclopædia Iranica.

⁸² "ABU'L-HASAN KHAN ĪLČĪ" Encyclopædia Iranica.

⁸³ "ABU'L-HASAN KHAN ĪLČĪ" Encyclopædia Iranica.

⁸⁴ Eskandari-Qajar, Manoutchehr. "Persian Ambassadors, Their Circassians, and the Politics of Elizabethan and Regency England." *Iranian studies* 44, no. 2 (2011): 251–271.

of England. Both publications have articles dedicated to the visit of the Persian Ambassador, but they touch on vastly different aspects of his visit and express very different attitudes towards his visit. The articles are also located within their respective publications in different types of sections. In *The Lady's Magazine*, the article discussing the Ambassador's visit is located in the magazine's dedicated foreign news section, so it is merely just one of many news articles being talked about in the publication.⁸⁵ Comparatively, the article discussing the Persian Ambassador in *La Belle Assemblée* is located in the edition's "Varieties, Critical, Literary, and Historical," section, which is a conglomerate section of things like theater reviews, book publication information, and the occasional news story like this one.⁸⁶ The February 1810 edition of *La Belle Assemblée* had no section designed specifically for the presentation and discussion of news, so this article was lumped in with other miscellaneous bodies of writing. The actual content of both of these articles talking about the same occurrence vary quite a bit as well. The article in *The Lady's Magazine* takes a significantly more critical approach to discussing the fanfare of the visit, and in turn the article takes a stronger political stance than the news article in *La Belle Assemblée*. The article in *The Lady's Magazine* opens by stating that all the other English papers are discussing the festivals held for the Ambassador's arrival, but that this is unnecessary because he "is neither more nor less than an officer of the household of the Governor of Ispahan."⁸⁷ Already this opening statement is politically charged because it clearly takes the stance that the Ambassador's visit is less important than everyone is making it out to be, and by taking such an overt political stance, *The Lady's Magazine* is engaging with English politics and

⁸⁵ "Foreign News." *The Lady's Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 41 (01, 1810): 43. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081685848>

⁸⁶ "ACCOUNT OF THE RECEPTION OF HIS MAJESTY'S MISSION AT THE COURT OF PERSIA." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1810): 46-47. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/account-reception-his-majestys-mission-at-court/docview/2666379/se-2>.

⁸⁷ "Foreign News." *The Lady's Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 41 (01, 1810): 43.

participating in the discussion. *The Lady's Magazine* is not merely stating the facts of the visit, they are presenting a political opinion to their predominantly female audience, which brings women into the public sphere of politics just by reading and engaging with the publication. The rest of the article continues on to report the facts of what happened during the Ambassador's visit, but then again concludes by presenting this same opinion that the Persian Ambassador's pompous reception was unnecessary.⁸⁸ The article located in *La Belle Assemblée* presents quite a different perspective to this same event, with far less of an assertive opinion included. The article in *La Belle Assemblée* actually does exactly what *The Lady's Magazine* critiques in their article, and recounts the festivities held in honor of the Persian Ambassador's arrival.⁸⁹ The entirety of the article just presents the exact details of what happened to welcome the Ambassador, and no opinion regarding the matter is presented like is seen in *The Lady's Magazine* article. The article in *La Belle Assemblée* is significantly longer than the article in *The Lady's Magazine*, but this is due to the fact that it is just a full recount of the events that transpired and not a critique of the event itself like *The Lady's Magazine's* is. *La Belle Assemblée's* article is less of political engagement than *The Lady's Magazine's* article because it does not display a political opinion, but it does still challenge the politics of the belief that it is unsuitable for women to read about news.

It is clear from types of content present in each respective publication that *The Lady's Magazine* was a more political publication than *La Belle Assemblée* in the traditional sense of discussing foreign news and politics. *The Lady's Magazine* overtly discussed news and politics in their recurring foreign and domestic news sections, but *La Belle Assemblée* was more subtle in

⁸⁸ "Foreign News." *The Lady's Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 41 (01, 1810): 43.

⁸⁹ "ACCOUNT OF THE RECEPTION OF HIS MAJESTY'S MISSION AT THE COURT OF PERSIA." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* (02, 1810): 46-47.
<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/account-reception-his-majestys-mission-at-court/docview/2666379/se-2>.

their political engagement. *La Belle Assemblée* engaged with politics through their presentation of fashion content and imagery, so it is less obvious than *The Lady's Magazine*, but we can still conclude that both magazines allowed women to engage with politics. Whether that engagement was through readership, writing, or fashion choice was dependent upon the publication and the audience, but both *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* allowed women to participate and engage with politics in an avenue that was accessible to them.

Influence of the Visit

Both *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* reflected the influence of the Persian Ambassador's visit on British consciousness throughout their pages, particularly the influence the visit had on women. The visit seems to have sparked an interest in Persian styles and culture. Respective to each magazines' specialty, the influence the visit had is more clearly seen in the fashion sections of *La Belle Assemblée* and writings and literary sections of *The Lady's Magazine*. The documentation of this influence in both magazines showcases the various ways that women could engage with a political event like the Persian Ambassador's visit to Great Britain through an accepted medium: ladies' magazines. Despite political events being relegated to the male public sphere, women found ways to be influenced by and engage with politics that can clearly be witnessed in the pages of *The Lady's Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée*, as this case study into the Persian Ambassador's visit will highlight.

We can see the influence of the Persian Ambassador's visit to Great Britain between 1809 and 1810 reflected particularly in the fashion plates featured in *La Belle Assemblée*. The visit from the Persian Ambassador sparked an interest in all things considered "the orient" in the British consciousness, and women's fashion is no different. The fashion plates in *La Belle*

Assemblée illustrated and described the latest and most fashionable styles in Great Britain to their readers, so to see influences from the Persian Ambassador in the images means that the Ambassador's visit had a widespread influence on women's fashion. These fashion plates in *La Belle Assemblée* document the effect that an international political event had on women's fashion in a space specifically designated for women to participate in, despite the fact that it was frowned upon for women to be exposed to politics and international affairs. This documentation of the effect on women's fashion allows us to infer that women did keep up to date on political events and engaged with them in ways that were acceptable for women: through their choices in fashion. As we saw in the previous section, these ladies' magazines still reported on the political happenings domestically and internationally, allowing women to engage with politics, which we then see reflected back in those same magazines later on through things like fashion plates. It becomes very full circle, and it all ties back to these ladies' magazines reporting on women's fashion.

The first fashion plate in *La Belle Assemblée* that we see the influence of the Persian Ambassador's visit is from the March 1810 edition of the magazine. The fashion plate features two women dressed in evening wear, one sitting and one standing, in contrasting dresses of white and a red-orange color [figure 5].⁹⁰ The woman standing in the red-orange dress is the figure we can see the influence of the Persian Ambassador reflected in. The magazine describes her ensemble as follows:

Evening Dress. A robe of amaranthus figured sarsnet, made to sit high in the neck, with a full cuff of lace; long sleeves with short loose tops trimmed with swansdown. A turban of

⁹⁰ "Evening Dresses for April 1810" *La Belle Assemblée* (no. 3, 1810) National Portrait Gallery, accessed February 15, 2023.
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw280063/Evening-Dresses-for-April-1810?LinkID=mp160026&wPage=1&role=art&rNo=25>

amaranthus crape and velvet. Gold brooch and earrings. Swansdown muff. White kid gloves and shoes. Hair in light ringlet curls.⁹¹

What sticks out the most in this description of the fashion plate is the mention of the “turban of amaranthus crape and velvet.”⁹² Amaranthus refers to a briefly-popular shade of rich-red that was seen frequently in the 1810s.⁹³ While this may seem like an innocuous description of the headwear featured on this woman in the fashion plate, it is actually very relevant to the Ambassador’s visit. She is wearing a turban, which was not a fashion item frequently worn prior to the Persian Ambassador’s visit. However, during and after the visit, as one historian put it, in 1810,



Figure 5

“Londoners were strutting in ‘Mirza turbans.’”⁹⁴ This historian has coined the phrase “Mirza turbans” to refer to this phenomenon, named after the Persian Ambassador himself, Mīrzā Abu’l-Ḥasan, because the influence was so directly linked. Like I mentioned before, this visit sparked a major interest in things deemed “oriental”, and the turban is one of those things, as seen here in *La Belle Assemblée*. This was published in the midst of the Persian

⁹¹ “Evening Dresses for April 1810” *La Belle Assemblée* (no. 3, 1810) National Portrait Gallery, accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw280063/Evening-Dresses-for-April-1810?LinkID=mp160026&wPage=1&role=art&rNo=25>

⁹² “Evening Dresses for April 1810” *La Belle Assemblée* (no. 3, 1810) National Portrait Gallery, accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw280063/Evening-Dresses-for-April-1810?LinkID=mp160026&wPage=1&role=art&rNo=25>

⁹³ “Beatrice Knight’s Regency Color Compendium” Beatrice Knight, Accessed March 5, 2023, <https://beatriceknight.com/all-things-regency/regency-fashions-1800-1830/regency-color-compdium/>

⁹⁴ Humberto Garcia, “Queering Fashion in *Hajji Baba*: James Morier, Mirza Abul Hassan Khan, and the Crisis of Imperial Masculinity,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 34, no. 1 (2021): 1-31. muse.jhu.edu/article/807767.

Ambassador's stay in Great Britain, so it did not take long for the influence to spread to women's fashion.

The next instance we see in *La Belle Assemblée's* fashion plates of Persian influence is in the March 1811 edition of the magazine. The Persian Ambassador left Great Britain in the summer of 1810, and a full year after the first fashion plate exemplifying Persian influence was documented in the magazine we still see the visit's reaching impact on women's fashion and the British consciousness. This particular fashion plate features just one woman this time, rather than two, and it is not the headwear that is inspired by the Persian Ambassador this time around. In the description of the fashion plate, the woman is stated to have a "A short Persian scarf of



Figure 6

morone coloured silk, with rich border and tassels.”⁹⁵ This time, it is the women's style of scarf that is influenced by the Persian Ambassador's visit, seeing as it is actually a Persian scarf. "Morone" was a popular shade of chestnut-based red that was featured heavily in women's clothing in the winter seasons for the duration of the early nineteenth century.⁹⁶ From this fashion plate and description, we see that it was not just headwear that was influenced by this great political event in British history, it was multiple aspects of women's fashion that were affected by the event. The influence of the Persian Ambassador's visit

⁹⁵ "'Evening Full Dress' designed by Miss Blacklin, March 1811," *La Belle Assemblée* (no. 3, 1811) National Portrait Gallery, accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw280065/Evening-Full-Dress-designed-by-Miss-Blacklin-March-1811?LinkID=mp160026&wPage=1&role=art&rNo=27>

⁹⁶ "Beatrice Knight's Regency Color Compendium" Beatrice Knight.

permeated a wide array of women's fashion items, and sometimes, like seen here, it was the actual items themselves that permeated British women's fashion, rather than influencing items that British women were already familiar with.

The fashion plate from the December 1811 issue of *La Belle Assemblée* also features elements inspired by Persia, meaning that the impact of the Persian Ambassador's visit was lasting and not just a fleeting fad. This fashion plate depicts a woman seated in full evening dress, with the description describing her headwear as "A cap in the Persian form, of white satin, with ornaments of gold to correspond with the dress; two gold tassels depending over the left ear, and the same side the head is adorned with a plume of white ostrich feathers, and one light gold sprig." [figure 7]⁹⁷ At this point, the style of headwear was referred to as the "Persian form," which implies that the influence of the Persian



Figure 7

Ambassador's visit to Great Britain had solidified its place in British women's fashion.⁹⁸ The political event had a lasting and preserving influence on fashion, as documented through these continuing fashion plates in *La Belle Assemblée*. Women continued to engage with Persian fashion influence from this Ambassador's visit, long after the visit had concluded, despite political events not being part of the female private space.

⁹⁷ "Evening Full Dress, January 1812" *La Belle Assemblée* (no. 12, 1811) National Portrait Gallery, accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw280067/Evening-Full-Dress-January-1812?LinkID=mp160026&wPage=1&role=art&rNo=29>

⁹⁸ "Evening Full Dress, January 1812" *La Belle Assemblée* (no. 12, 1811) National Portrait Gallery.

Women were relegated to the private sphere, and politics were part of what was considered the male public sphere, but we see through these fashion plates that women still found ways to engage with political events. Fashion was deemed acceptable for women, and became part of the female private sphere, so it was a way for women to engage with politics. Through fashion choices, women could be influenced and impacted by political events, which negates the argument that women were not a part of politics. Political events were presented to the predominantly female audience of ladies' magazines, and in turn these ladies' magazines then documented the effect these politics had on women's fashion. If women were unaware and unengaged with political happenings, there would be no reflection of these events in women's fashion choices, but there is. These fashion plates are one example of the influence that this political event had on women, but ladies' magazines documented other influences of the Persian Ambassador's visit as well beyond fashion plates.

In contrast to the fashion plates in *La Belle Assemblée*, *The Lady's Magazine* documented the influence of the Persian Ambassador's visit through written work rather than images, but the influence is still very much present. Looking at the fashion section in *The Lady's Magazine* specifically, the writings show the influence of the visit. The fashion sections in *The Lady's Magazine* are significantly shorter than the fashion sections in *La Belle Assemblée*, but the writings still reflect this influence. In the March 1810 edition of *The Lady's Magazine*, the fashion section describes two different dress styles for the season: an afternoon dress and a full dress style, the afternoon dress being the more casual of the two styles as full dress referred to the most formal style of attire.⁹⁹ The description of the afternoon dress is where we see the influence of the Persian Ambassador's visit in multiple ways. Firstly, the description of

⁹⁹ "London Fashionable Afternoon and Full Dress." *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (03, 1810): 104.

fashionable afternoon dress describes “over the dress a Persian robe of rich figured amber sarcenet, made without sleeves, and loose from the shoulders.”¹⁰⁰ Here the influence of the Ambassador’s visit is explicit, the fashionable style of afternoon dress is described as a Persian robe. The color, however, was an early nineteenth century staple for women’s and men’s fashion in Great Britain.¹⁰¹ The description then continues on to talk about the headwear, and as we saw with the fashion plates in *La Belle Assemblée*, the turban is again referenced. *The Lady’s Magazine* writes “Turban, head-dress of crimson velvet,” so again in this same description there is a reference to the Persian Ambassador’s influence on women’s fashion.¹⁰² The new shape of the turban head-dress was popping up repeatedly in women’s fashion. This description is very telling of the influence this visit had on women’s fashion and the British consciousness in general because the fashion section itself is so brief. The fashion section in this March 1810 edition of *The Lady’s Magazine* is only two paragraphs long, and takes up only a quarter of the page it is on, and half of that section is devoted to documenting the influence of this political event. Not only that, but references to Persian influence are spotted twice in this very brief section, which speaks to the major impact that this visit had on fashion and culture. All of these references mention Persian styles, but generally they are fashioned in traditional and popular British colors. If women were not so interested in the Persian Ambassador’s visit, there would be minimal influence on fashion and most likely nothing to reflect in this fashion section, but that is not the case. Women took influence from Persian styles, and adapted them into fashionable styles and garments for British fashion.

¹⁰⁰ “London Fashionable Afternoon and Full Dress.” *The Lady’s Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (03, 1810): 104.

¹⁰¹ “Beatrice Knight’s Regency Color Compendium” Beatrice Knight.

¹⁰² “London Fashionable Afternoon and Full Dress.” *The Lady’s Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (03, 1810): 104.

The fashion sections of *The Lady's Magazine* also documented the influence that the Persian Ambassador's visit had on women of the royal family. In the June 1810 edition of *The Lady's Magazine*, there is a fashion section dedicated to the fashions worn at court for the celebration of the King's birthday, much like the sections dedicated to fashions worn for the Queen's birthday in the January editions. In this June 1810 fashion section, there is a description of Princess Elizabeth's dress worn for the celebration, and she is described as wearing "A dress of white satin embroidered with silver, and ornamented with draperies of silver tissue, elegantly disposed in the Persian style," and then decorated with "Persian crescents."¹⁰³ We do not have any images of what these "Persian crescent" decorations looked like, so we can only guess, but the description makes a point to label them as "Persian". The Persian influence on Princess Elizabeth is very clear here in her dress, and this makes quite the political statement on her part. The King's birthday celebration was quite a momentous occasion at the royal court that is always well-documented in ladies' magazines, as evidenced here, so to wear a dress that is so explicitly tied to the Persian Ambassador's visit at an event that is so well-recorded means that Princess Elizabeth wished to make a political statement in a way that was accessible to her. The dress is an exclamation of diplomatic intentions with Persia that would be widely spread by a member of the royal family; the clear influence on the dress expresses support and respect towards the Persian Ambassador and Persia. This message of diplomacy was then documented and disseminated by the pages of *The Lady's Magazine*, extending the political statement to a wider audience.

Beyond fashion, *The Lady's Magazine* published other reflections on the Persian Ambassador's visit. For example, in many of the 1810 issues, the "Poetical Essays" section

¹⁰³ "Ladies' Dresses on His Majesty's Birthday," *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (06, 1810): 262.

referenced the visit. Both the March 1810 edition of *The Lady's Magazine* and the April 1810 edition featured submissions of poetry influenced by “oriental” ideas that stemmed from the Persian Ambassador’s visit. The poem published in the March 1810 edition of *The Lady's Magazine* is titled “Arabian Song” and opens with the line “Come Maid of Yemen! sit with me.”¹⁰⁴ The poem romanticizes ideas deemed “oriental” and draws parallels to beauty with these ideas. One of the most telling stanzas that exoticized “oriental” ideas goes “Or is it some sly child of air / Some genie bright, or houri fair, / With beauties that can never fade, / Who sits beneath the almond shade?”¹⁰⁵ The word “houri” refers to “one of the beautiful maidens that in Muslim belief live with the blessed in paradise,” and almond trees are very common in western Asia because they are native to that area.¹⁰⁶ “Arabian Song” has no author listed under the poem, so we have no idea who the writer of the poem is, but all of the submissions in the “Poetical Essays” section of *The Lady's Magazine* were generally submitted by readers of the magazine. Since the audience of *The Lady's Magazine* was predominantly female and there is no author listed, there is a fair chance that this poem was written by a woman. If this were to be the case, and we can only presume here, then this would be another example of the influence that political events had for women despite their general exclusions from the male public sphere of politics. This time though, it is a body of writing rather than fashion choice that is the vehicle of political engagement. Even if the author of this poem was not a woman, the fact that it is published in a magazine designed for female readership means that women could still engage with and be influenced by political events in Great Britain.

¹⁰⁴ “Poetical Essays,” *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (03, 1810): 134.

¹⁰⁵ “Poetical Essays,” *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (03, 1810): 134.

¹⁰⁶ “Houri Definition and Meaning” Merriam-Webster, Accessed March 5, 2023
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/houri>

The poem featured in the April 1810 edition of *The Lady's Magazine* is also more abstractly influenced by the Persian Ambassador's visit than the more explicit references in the fashion sections. This poem is titled "Arabian Elegy" and is quite a bit longer than the poem in the March 1810 edition, and it has, more broadly speaking, "orientalist" themes and references to "the east."¹⁰⁷ The poem does not make many references to ideas or things deemed "oriental," it is predominantly a poem about missing love, but one line in particular that stands out as referencing things deemed "oriental" goes "I saw them urge the camels' hastening flight."¹⁰⁸ While this is a shorter, more subtle reference, the mention of camels situates the reader in an exotic "oriental" locale that is not Great Britain. This poem is a reader submission and has no author listed as well, so we can once again speculate that the author might have been a woman. These poems are examples of the influence the Persian Ambassador's visit had on women's culture beyond just fashion, and also showcase other forms of political engagement women had. The Persian Ambassador's visit sparked an interest in all things considered eastern and "oriental" for the British, so while the poetry featured in these editions may not explicitly pay homage to Persia like the fashion influences, the poetry still stems from the influence of the Persian Ambassador's visit. These poems in ladies' magazines were acceptable mediums for women and considered part of the female private sphere, but they still made a point to engage with and be influenced by politics and political events.

Further beyond poems, *The Lady's Magazine* also had reader-submitted letters to the magazine that were then published in multiple editions in 1810 that reference Persian and "oriental" influence. Many reader-submitted letters are signed with the signature "Orientalis," so

¹⁰⁷"Poetical Essays," *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (04, 1810): 181-182.

¹⁰⁸ "Poetical Essays," *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (04, 1810): 181-182.

presumably some of them are from the same reader and author to the magazine.¹⁰⁹ Because this is a pen name, the author is anonymous and just like the poems, we can speculate that there is a chance the author of these letters is a woman. Obviously we can not just assume that because the readership of *The Lady's Magazine* was predominantly female that the author is as well, but because it is anonymous there is a fair chance that the reader submitting these letters was a woman. In the April 1810 edition of *The Lady's Magazine*, "Orientalis" wrote a letter spanning three pages extolling the value of the writings and learnings of "the East," making explicit references to the Persian language and Persian studies.¹¹⁰ "Orientalis" writes "the concurring testimony of all who have made either the Sanskrit, the Arabic, or the Persian, the subject of their researches, is not only highly favorable to the languages themselves, but also of the numerous compositions with which they abound."¹¹¹ The author of this letter has clearly been influenced to research Persian writings, which perfectly coincides with the visit of the Persian Ambassador to Great Britain. Unlike the more broad and general poems discussed above that mostly contained "oriental" influences, this letter is very clearly referencing Persian ideas and influence, so it is more directly engaging with inspiration from this political event. The author of this letter was most certainly inspired by the political events that transpired given their pen name. They also definitely wished to engage with the politics occurring in a medium they were allowed to, writing to a ladies' magazine that could publish their thoughts anonymously, considering they submitted multiple letters to *The Lady's Magazine*.

¹⁰⁹ "To the Editor of The Lady's Magazine," *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (04, 1810): 163-165. ; "To the Editor of The Lady's Magazine," *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (5, 1810): 223-225.

¹¹⁰ "To the Editor of The Lady's Magazine," *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (04, 1810): 163-165.

¹¹¹ "To the Editor of The Lady's Magazine," *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (04, 1810): 163-165.

The next letter from the anonymous author “Orientalis” occurred in the May 1810 edition of *The Lady’s Magazine*, and it acted as an introduction to a story submitted by “Orientalis” to be featured in the magazine. The story is titled “The Fall of the Barmecides,” and “Orientalis” writes that it is a “piece of Biography from Carlyle’s celebrated work on Arabian poetry.”¹¹² This work “Orientalis” references is a collection of English translations of Arabian poetry from 1796 by J.D. Carlyle, an Arabic professor at the University of Cambridge.¹¹³ The story “Orientalis” samples from opens with “The family of Barmec was one of the most illustrious in the east. They were descended from the ancient kings of Persia, and possessed immense wealth.”¹¹⁴ From this published story and the introductory letter, we again see the “oriental” influence sparked by the Persian Ambassador’s visit to Great Britain. The influence was so strong and politically moving for some like “Orientalis” that they studied and wrote work to be published centered around this new idea of “the East” repeatedly, like we see in these examples here. These letters from “Orientalis” published in *The Lady’s Magazine* display how ladies’ magazines could be a vehicle of expression and political engagement for otherwise-silenced voices. These letters showcase both the influence that the Persian Ambassador had, and how there were other forms of political engagement beyond what men could do in the male public sphere.

In both *La Belle Assemblée* and *The Lady’s Magazine* we see the influence of the political event of the Persian Ambassador’s visit to Great Britain, and we see this influence and political engagement in multiple forms in these magazines. We see this engagement and influence through both fashion, poetry, and letters, but all forms highlight lasting influence from the Ambassador’s

¹¹² “To the Editor of The Lady’s Magazine,” *The Lady’s Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (5, 1810): 223-225.

¹¹³ “Arabian Poets” Antiquariat INLIBRIS Gilhofer Nfg. GmbH, Accessed March 16, 2023, <https://inlibris.com/item/bn29788/>

¹¹⁴ “To the Editor of The Lady’s Magazine,” *The Lady’s Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41 (5, 1810): 223-225.

visit. In particular, the fashion plates in *La Belle Assemblée* and the fashion sections in *The Lady's Magazine* speak to the longevity and lasting political engagement caused by the visit. Fashion was considered an acceptable part of the female private sphere, so women had more freedom to engage with politics through their fashion choices, which were then reflected in the published ladies' magazines. The poetry and the letters, on the other hand, were a different form of political engagement made only possible through the accepted medium of the ladies' magazine. It was very difficult for women to get their thoughts and ideas published, particularly if they engaged with topics deemed unacceptable for women like politics, but they could be published in the accepted form of ladies' magazines designed for the female audience. The reporting on fashion was a reflection of political engagement in ladies' magazines, whereas the published poetry and letters in ladies' magazines were a vehicle of political engagement.

Other scholars have discussed the influences on British culture and consciousness that the Persian Ambassador's visit had, particularly in literature, but in ladies' magazines we see the influence clearly through a female-oriented lens. Beyond just fashion and writings for ladies' magazines though, the influence brought about by the Persian Ambassador's visit was vast. Historian Humberto Garcia argues that the Persian Ambassador's visit, as it lived in the British consciousness, was pivotal in shaping and influencing the well-studied book *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*.¹¹⁵ This is not the only body of literature scholars argue was shaped by the visit, but there was also more influence documented than just literature and what was seen in the ladies' magazines. One scholar writes that Londoners were "dancing to Persian music, speaking Persian, and raising toasts to the shah of Iran, with ladies displaying Eastern-style hairdos, riding

¹¹⁵ Garcia, "Queering Fashion in *Hajji Baba*: James Morier, Mirza Abul Hassan Khan, and the Crisis of Imperial Masculinity." 1-31.

Arabian horses, and sporting elegant Kashmir shawls.”¹¹⁶ While the ladies’ magazines may not provide evidence of all of those things, *La Belle Assemblée* and *The Lady’s Magazine* can definitely support the notion that women were influenced and engaged with the politics of the Persian Ambassador’s visit. The reflection and engagement with political events as witnessed in ladies’ magazines is not as extensively studied or discussed like it is for literature during this time period, but as we see here it is still present and vital when centering women’s voices in the narrative of politics in Georgian England.

Conclusion

As the nineteenth century came to a start, the ideology of separate public and private spheres for men and women began to dominate British society, with the intent to exclude women from the public sphere involving politics and government. It started to be expected that women would stay within the accepted female private sphere of the home, which included fashion, and stay out of the male public sphere. This delineation of separate spheres began to break down though with the introduction of ladies’ magazines, which helped facilitate women’s participation in the male public sphere and essentially helped create a female public sphere. Ladies’ magazines, like *The Lady’s Magazine* and *La Belle Assemblée* examined here, became a way for women to participate and engage with politics. The magazines themselves were a political entity that disseminated opinions and beliefs to their female-intended audience, and in turn women could express their own opinions and beliefs to the public through reader submissions to the magazines. The central component connecting these ladies’ magazines to politics was women’s fashions and the multifaceted ways it reflected and expressed political opinions. As seen in *The*

¹¹⁶ Garcia, "Queering Fashion in *Hajji Baba*: James Morier, Mirza Abul Hassan Khan, and the Crisis of Imperial Masculinity." 1-31.

Lady's Magazine and *La Belle Assemblée*, the way styles were reported and who was wearing said styles, the different ways styles were described, and what was depicted in fashion plate illustrations all expressed political opinion and helped create a female public sphere. These magazines then reflected back the political influence they had on their readers within their own pages, becoming a vehicle for women to engage with politics and discuss their beliefs with a wider audience. The two case studies discussed at length here, the fashion reporting and the coverage of the Persian Ambassador's visit, are both prime examples of the ways these ladies' magazines blurred the line between the female private sphere and the male public sphere. The magazines themselves acted politically and gave women a voice to act politically as well.

While this research only delves into the ways ladies' magazines used fashion as a form of political engagement, I think there are multiple avenues to explore beyond this to dive deeper into women's political history and fashion. To take this further, it would be interesting to explore how political factions in the British government were also a part of the politics expressed through fashion in ladies' magazines, and in the future I would like to do so. I also think exploring how ladies' magazines facilitated women's engagement with other sectors of society that were traditionally closed off to them, like higher education, would be necessary.

Women have always been a part of political history, and it is important to include women in this narrative. By looking at alternative forms of political engagement, like fashion in ladies' magazines, the influence of women in politics begins to take shape. There is much more work to be done in women's history to unlearn the narrow view that the ideology of the male public sphere wholly excluded women from politics, but looking at works like ladies' magazines that centered around female voices and the female audience are a good step to help with this.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

"ACCOUNT OF THE RECEPTION OF HIS MAJESTY'S MISSION AT THE COURT OF

PERSIA." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 02, 1810.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/account-reception-his-majestys-mission-at-court/docview/2666379/se-2>.

"A Lady of Quality in the Birth day Court Dress, Jany. 18, 1808" National Portrait Gallery.

Accessed January 26, 2022.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw279725/A-Lady-of-Quality-in-the-Birth-day-Court-Dress-Jany-18-1808?LinkID=mp160026&role=art&rNo=12>

"'Evening Full Dress' designed by Miss Blacklin, March 1811." *La Belle Assemblée* no. 3, 1811.

National Portrait Gallery. Accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw280065/Evening-Full-Dress-designed-by-Miss-Blacklin-March-1811?LinkID=mp160026&wPage=1&role=art&rNo=27>

"Evening Full Dress, January 1812." *La Belle Assemblée* no. 12, 1811. National Portrait Gallery.

Accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw280067/Evening-Full-Dress-January-1812?LinkID=mp160026&wPage=1&role=art&rNo=29>

"Evening Dresses for April 1810." *La Belle Assemblée* no. 3, 1810. National Portrait Gallery.

Accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw280063/Evening-Dresses-for-April-1810?LinkID=mp160026&wPage=1&role=art&rNo=25>

"EXPLANATION OF THE PRINTS OF FASHION." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18, 07, 1807.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/explanation-prints-fashion/docview/2662754/se-2>.

"Foreign News." *The Lady's Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 41, 01, 1810.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081685848>

"GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON FASHION AND DRESS." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 02, 1810.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/general-observations-reflections-on-fashion-dress/docview/2695025/se-2>.

"GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE FASHIONS FOR THE SEASON, with a Complete List of Ladies in their Court Dresses, as Worn on the Birth-Day." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 2, no. 18, 07, 1807.

"HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 02, 1807.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/her-majestys-birth-day/docview/2681743/se-2>.

"La Belle Assemblée or Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine." National Portrait Gallery.

Accessed October 9, 2022.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp160026/la-belle-assemblee-or-bells-court-and-fashionable-magazine>

"LADIES' DRESSES." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 6, no. 41, 02, 1809.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/ladies-presses/docview/2715794/se-2>.

"Ladies' Dresses on Her Majesty's Birth-Day." *The Lady's Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 38, 01, 1807. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081685848>

"Ladies' Dresses on Her Majesty's Birth-Day." *The Lady's Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 40, 01, 1809. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081685855>

"Ladies' Dresses on Her Majesty's Birth-Day." *The Lady's Magazine : Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement* v. 41, 01, 1810. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081685871>

"Ladies' Dresses on His Majesty's Birthday." *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41, 06, 1810.

"LADIES DRESSES ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HER MAJESTY'S BIRTH-DAY." *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 4, no. 27, 02, 1808.
<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/ladies-dresses-on-anniversary-her-majestys-birth/docview/2691785/se-2>.

Lady's Magazine. *London Walking and Full Dress*. London : Printed for Robinson and Roberts, 1805. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.29953714>.

"London Fashionable Afternoon and Full Dress." *The Lady's Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41, 03, 1810.

“Poetical Essays.” *The Lady’s Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41, 03, 1810.

“Poetical Essays.” *The Lady’s Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41, 04, 1810.

Royal Collection Trust. “Princess Charlotte of Wales.” Accessed November 30, 2022.

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/georgian-papers-programme/princess-charlotte-of-wales>

"THE MARCHIONESS OF TOWNSHEND:" *La Belle Assemblée : Or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 1, no. 1, 02, 1806.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/marchioness-townshend/docview/2659705/se-2>.

“The Lady’s Magazine (1770-1832).” National Portrait Gallery. Accessed February 26, 2023.

<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp64662/the-ladys-magazine>

“To the Editor of The Lady’s Magazine.” *The Lady’s Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41, 04, 1810.

“To the Editor of The Lady’s Magazine” *The Lady’s Magazine: Or Entertaining Companion For the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, v. 41, 5, 1810.

Secondary Sources

“ABU’L-ḤASAN KHAN ĪLČĪ.” Encyclopædia Iranica. Accessed March 1, 2023.

<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abul-hasan-khan-ilci-mirza-persian-diplomat-b>

“Arabian Poets.” Antiquariat INLIBRIS Gilhofer Nfg. GmbH. Accessed March 16, 2023.

<https://inlibris.com/item/bn29788/>

Batchelor, Jennie. *The Lady's Magazine (1770-1832) and the Making of Literary History*.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

“Beatrice Knight’s Regency Color Compendium.” Beatrice Knight. Accessed March 5, 2023.

<https://beatriceknight.com/all-things-regency/regency-fashions-1800-1830/regency-color-compendium/>

Beetham, Margaret. *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Women's Magazine, 1800-1914*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Davidson, Hilary. *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen: Regency Fashion*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019.

Eskandari-Qajar, Manoutchehr. “Persian Ambassadors, Their Circassians, and the Politics of Elizabethan and Regency England.” *Iranian studies* 44, no. 2, 2011.

Franklin, Harper. “1800-1809.” Fashion History Timeline FIT NYC. Accessed February 27, 2023. <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1800-1809/>

Garcia, Humberto. "Queering Fashion in *Hajji Baba*: James Morier, Mirza Abul Hassan Khan, and the Crisis of Imperial Masculinity." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 34, no. 1, 2021. muse.jhu.edu/article/807767.

Hennesy, Kathryn, ed. “Female Geometry.” In *Fashion, The Definitive Visual Guide*. New York, New York: DK Penguin Random House, 2019.

Heyck, Thomas William. *The People of the British Isles, A New History: From 1688 to 1870*. Chicago: Lyceum Books, Inc, 2002.

Hibbert, Christopher. *George III: A Personal History*. London: Penguin Books, 1999.

Laudermilk, Sharon, and Teresa L. Hamlin. *The Regency Companion*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989.

Ribeiro, Aileen. *Fashion in the French Revolution*. London: Batsford, 1988.

Smith, Chloe Wigston. "Fast Fashion: Style, Text, and Image in Late Eighteenth-Century Women's Periodicals." In *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century*, edited by Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell. Edinburgh University Press, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv2f4vmmq.38>.

Staniland, Kay. *In Royal Fashion: The Clothes of Princess Charlotte of Wales and Queen Victoria 1796-1901*. London: Museum of London, 1997.