

The First Crime of Fashion:

Cloth and Clothing Theft in Eighteenth-Century England

Introduction

In June of 1773, *The Westminster Magazine* began publishing a serial story titled, “Indusiata: or The Adventures of a Silk Petticoat.”¹ The petticoat starts its life as the queen’s undergarment, but by the end of the series it has been sold, re-gifted, pawned and, on one occasion, *stolen*. Through this first-hand account of a garment’s life cycle, the Indusiata story demonstrates that the social life of eighteenth-century clothing was characterized by constant transaction. Many of those transactions were legal, but others were not. This paper explores the illicit traffic in cloth and clothing in eighteenth-century London and what that traffic reveals about how the industry of clothing became the industry of fashion.

As bizarre as it seems today, cloth and clothing theft was very common in the early modern period. The predominant reasons for this were that clothes were easy to carry, easy to hide, and could be worth the equivalent of a year’s salary.² By one estimate, clothing theft alone accounted for 20-30% of all stolen items reported in early modern England.³ This phenomenon has garnered much attention from the historical community. Beverly Lemire devotes an entire chapter of her book, *Dress, Culture, and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the*

¹ “Indusiata: Or, the Adventures of a Silk Petticoat.” (Jun. 1773), 365–368. *The Westminster Magazine*, Jun. (1773), *British Periodicals* 365.

² Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, 127, and Carole Shammas, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America* (Clarendon Press, 1990), 212.

³ J. M Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986), 187.

Factory, 1660-1800, to the issue. For Lemire, clothing theft represents new consumer desires seeping into the lower classes, facilitated by an expanding economy.⁴ Daniel Roche, a French historian, similarly describes clothing theft as a crime of the otherwise well-behaved poor (though not the poorest).⁵ Of course, the expanding eighteenth-century economy has a historiography of its own. Carole Shammas argues that the percentages of incomes spent on cloth did not actually rise, but that the cost of cloth dropped, allowing individuals to buy more without expending a greater percentage of their income.⁶ Shammas and others have also studied the rise of consumer desires, which were most often satisfied in the secondhand market. Lemire describes the secondhand market as a flexible, informal market, “the agency through which popular consumer tastes were developed.”⁷ Maxine Burg demonstrates that these consumer tastes were quickly harnessed by the developing consumer culture.

Like Lemire and Roche, I am less interested in theft as a crime (though that is an interesting topic as well), than as a gear in the machine of the eighteenth-century clothing industry. I begin with a quantitative analysis of textile prices and theft patterns to show that eighteenth-century shoppers and thieves alike were changing their habits. The next section uses court records of servants’ theft from *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*—an online database of Old Bailey court records as chronicled by the early modern news publication, *The Old Bailey Proceedings*—to examine how clothing ownership became individualized, a necessary step for the development of a fashion industry as opposed to a clothing industry. The third section looks at the secondhand clothing market, which was a robust part of the clothing industry, both legally

⁴ Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade Before the Factory, 1660-1800* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, [England] : New York: Macmillan Press ; St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 126-7.

⁵ Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime*, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 339-340.

⁶ Carole Shammas, “Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption from 1550-1800,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 192.

⁷ Beverly Lemire, “Peddling Fashion: Salesmen, Pawnbrokers, Tailors, Thieves and the Second-hand Clothes Trade in England, C. 1700–1800,” in *Textile History* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 1991), 67–82. 67.

and illegally. Through this process, however, secondhand dealers helped solidify a shopping culture that no longer used secondhand items to satisfy their fashion needs. The last section shows how crime also featured in the mainstream market, as the new London shops struggled to keep shoppers in and shoplifters out. In the eighteenth century, crime and clothing were inseparable, and as fashion developed the difference between criminals and consumers only became more confusing.

Soft Numbers and Hardened Criminals

The first part of my quantitative study analyzes figures from James E. Thorold Rogers' *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England: From the Year after the Oxford Parliament to the Commencement of the Continental War* (Vol. VII 1703-1793: Part I), in which he provides two chapters of textile prices organized into charts.⁸ In order to make Roger's work useful, I calculated the average weighted price of textiles for each year, and produced a graph (**fig. 1**).⁹ While this article investigates cloth and clothing, ready-made clothes were not regularly sold in the eighteenth century, and so this section is limited to the study of raw textiles. Nevertheless, the data confirms one of the most significant features of the eighteenth-century textile industry: textile prices dropped dramatically just as consumption boomed.

⁸ James E. Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England, from the Year After the Oxford Parliament (1259) to the Commencement of the Continental War (1793)* (Vaduz: Kraus, 1963).

⁹ The average weighted price is equal to the sum of each individual textile price multiplied by percentage of the overall market held by that specific item. See the appendix for more information on my method.

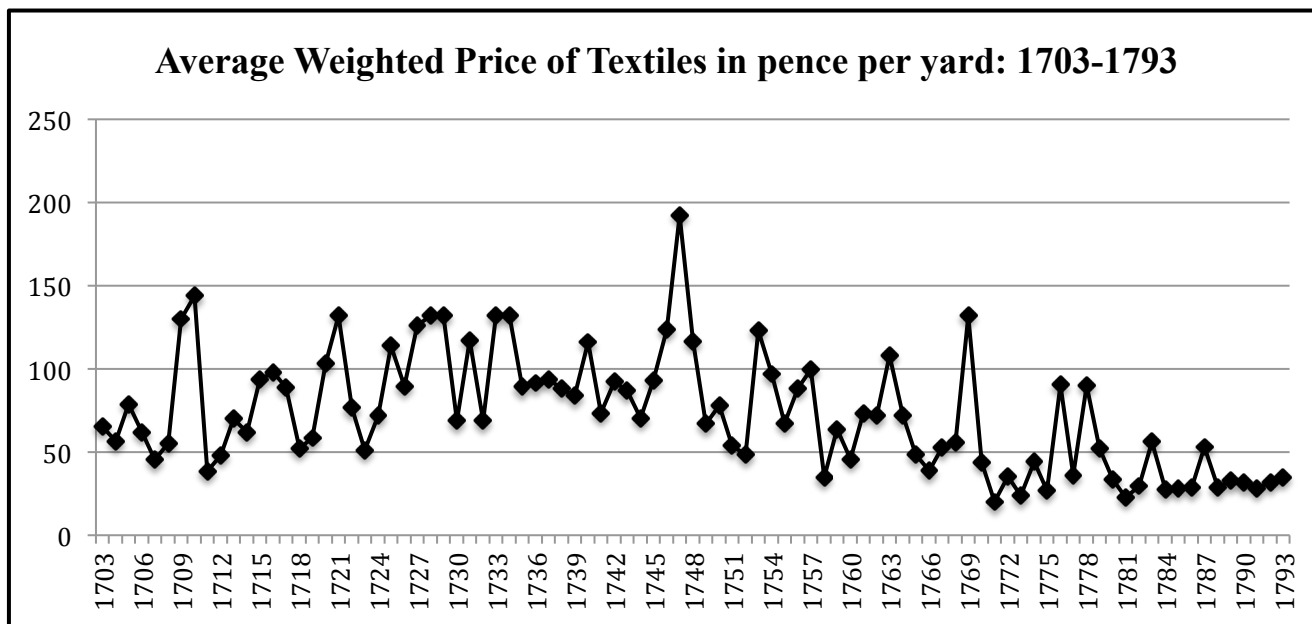


Figure 1: Average Weighted Price of Textiles from 1703-1793 measured in pence per yard

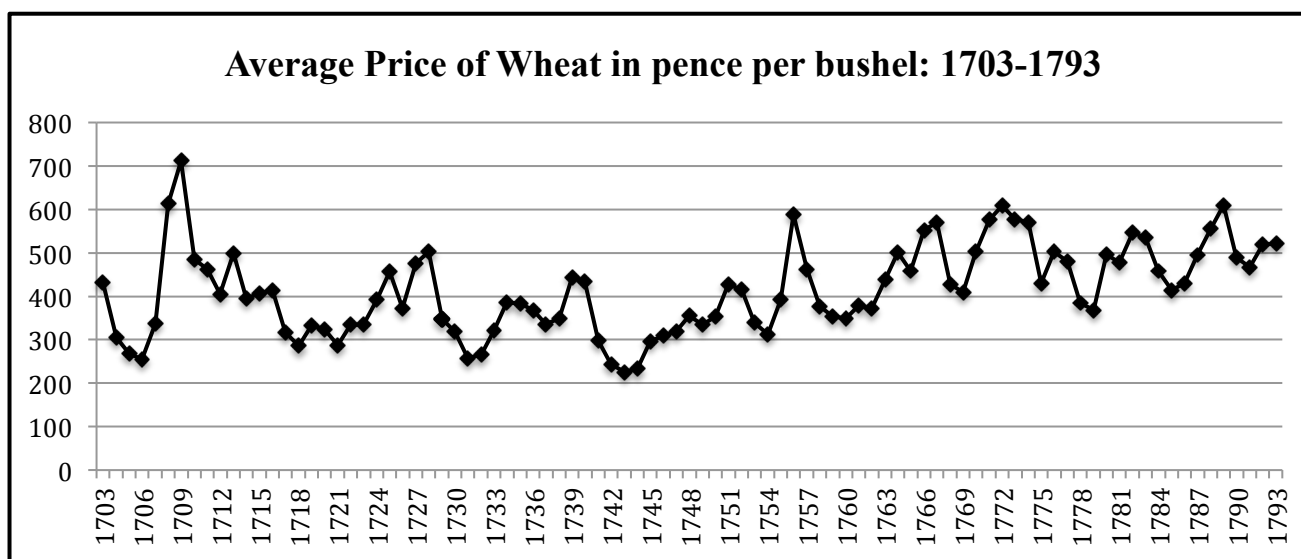


Figure 2: Average Price of Wheat from 1703-1793 measured in pence per bushel.

The graph shows that, while textile prices dropped in the long-term, they varied dramatically from year to year. In fact, what is most striking about this graph is that textile prices not only fell but also stabilized at the end of the century. To see if outside economic factors, like inflation or deflation, could account for the trend, I used another chapter from

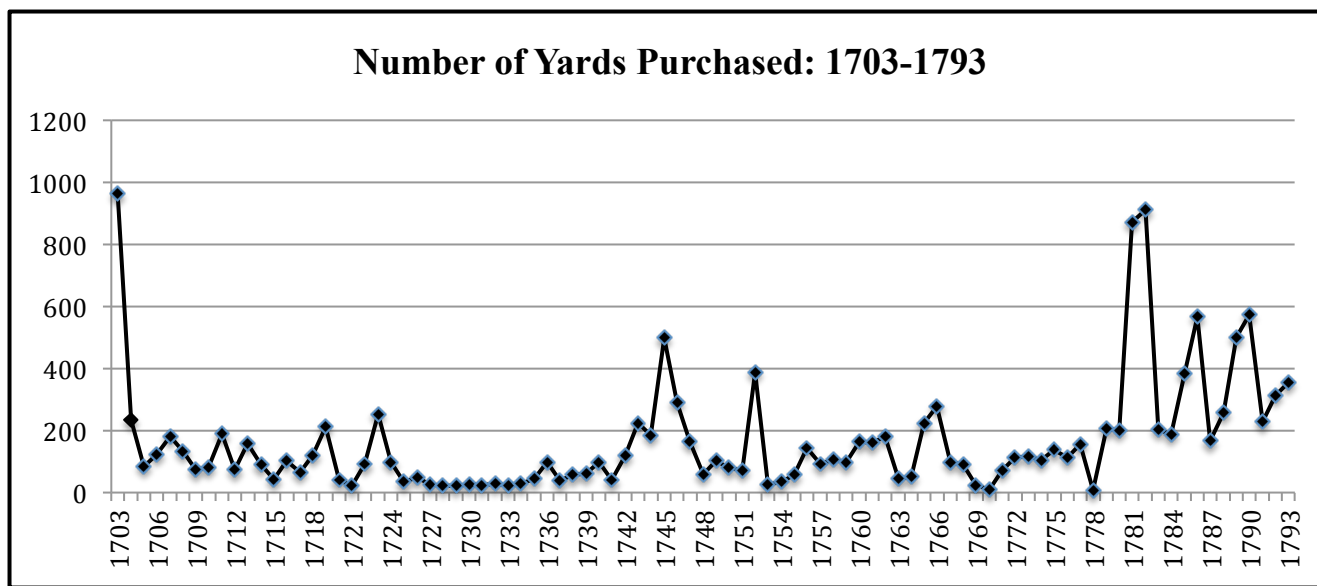


Figure 3: Number of yards purchased: 1703-1793.

Rogers' book to graph the price of wheat for comparison (**fig. 2**). The price of wheat also fluctuated, but, unlike textile prices, it tended to increase over time. This suggests that the trends in textile prices resulted from something unique to that industry. Of course, these findings may result from faulty data; variations in price, for instance, could reflect variations in the widths of fabrics (not recorded by Rogers). Also, Rogers used private account books, and these private purchases may not reflect the market as a whole. Finally, Rogers never mentions the origins of the fabrics, which surely influenced price. However, the fall in textile prices was a long-term trend that has been documented in other historical works, and so is unlikely to be the result of fluke.¹⁰ The eighteenth century decline in textile prices is most impressive when compared to the number of yards purchased for the same period (**fig. 3**). At about the same time the price of textiles stabilized at a relatively low amount, the number of yards purchased escalated dramatically. Comparing the two graphs together shows there was a real, tangible change in eighteenth century market behavior.

¹⁰ See Shammas, in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 195, and N. B. Harte, "The Economics of Clothing in the Late Seventeenth Century," *Textile History* 22, no. 2 (January 1, 1991), 67.

The change was not just in how much was purchased, but also in *what* was purchased. The early English textile industry was largely dominated by the ancient industry of wool, but wool had lost favor among the fashionable people of eighteenth-century London who preferred French silks and Indian Chintz.¹¹ Some local textile producers pushed for legislation against textile importation, but others responded by establishing local production of these fabrics to satisfy growing demand.¹² By the dawn of the nineteenth century, England had surpassed the traditional powerhouses of textile production like France and Italy.¹³ The increased availability of trendy, affordable cloth, and by extension clothing, enabled more people to purchase more clothing. These new customers, however, had new tastes, and merchants discovered that the real money was not in selling clothes at all but in selling fashion.

The next part of my quantitative investigation presents a statistical analysis of court records from *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*. Note that *The Old Bailey Proceedings* was not an official record until 1787, and coverage before that date is inconsistent, often focusing on only the most scandalous or entertaining trials. This makes it difficult to determine whether my findings reflect changes in the cases brought to the Old Bailey criminal court, or changes in *The Old Bailey Criminal Proceedings*, as a publication.¹⁴ Nevertheless, my analysis confirms that textile and apparel goods were among the most commonly stolen items in the eighteenth century. More importantly, my data shows that the behavior of thieves mirrored the behavior of shoppers.

¹¹ Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 40. The English isles are home to some of the highest quality wool-producing sheep breeds. Hentschell, *The Culture of Cloth in Early Modern England: Textual Construction of a National Identity*, (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 3.

¹² Anne Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-century England* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 191.

¹³ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-century England*, 189. Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820*, 40. Also, Jan De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 137.

¹⁴ Clive Emsley, Tim Hichcock, and Robert Shoemaker, "The Proceedings - Publishing History of the Proceedings" *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011).

In his study of early modern England, J.M. Beattie found that clothes accounted for 23.7% of stolen items in petty and grand larceny cases in Surrey, 27.1% in Southwark and Environs, 26.5% in the rural parishes of Surrey, and 29.2% in Sussex respectively. I took the assumption that I would find similar results in *The Old Bailey Proceedings*, and pulled a sample of cloth and clothing theft cases equal to 10% of all eighteenth-century theft cases.¹⁵ In each case, the number of each kind of item stolen was counted, and the results were graphed (**fig. 4 and 5**). The graph shows that thefts of clothing and textiles increased dramatically as the century progressed. The rate of raw textile theft is most dramatic, but is most likely the result of a handful of cases where professional thieves stole thousands of yards of cloth. These cases were atypical and, if removed, the rate of textile thefts would probably resemble the rate of clothing thefts. A more important trend is that cloth and clothing thefts become more targeted; as the century progresses accessories, household linens, and other kinds of goods were stolen less frequently in conjunction with cloth and clothing. However, the rates of both textile and clothing theft dipped at the end of the century, while the rates of stealing other kinds of things in conjunction with cloth and clothing remained low but steady. Had the drop in textile prices made cloth and clothing theft less lucrative, forcing thieves to diversify? Perhaps, but note that the decline of clothing theft was much more gentle than that of textile theft. If fashion had become a motive for theft, it would make sense for clothes to remain targets.

¹⁵ Only 38,338 eighteenth-century cases can be exported from *The Old Bailey Online* API. While there are 4,124 other searchable entries in *The Old Bailey* from this time period, these are “orderly’s accounts,” and not court cases. For a detailed overview of my methodology, see the appendix.

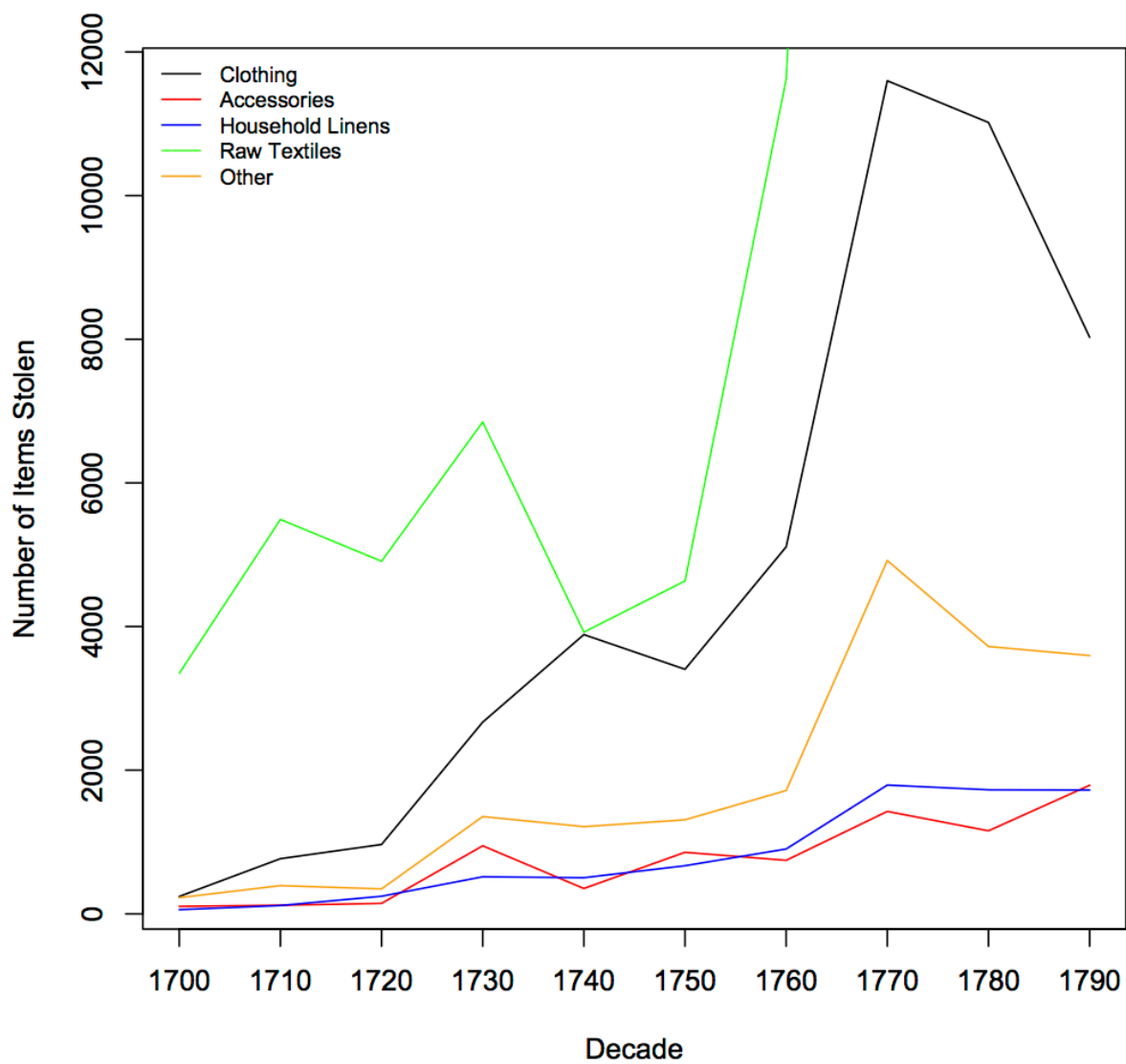


Figure 4: Distribution of Items Stolen in Cloth and Clothing Theft Cases in *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*: January 1790 – December 1799.

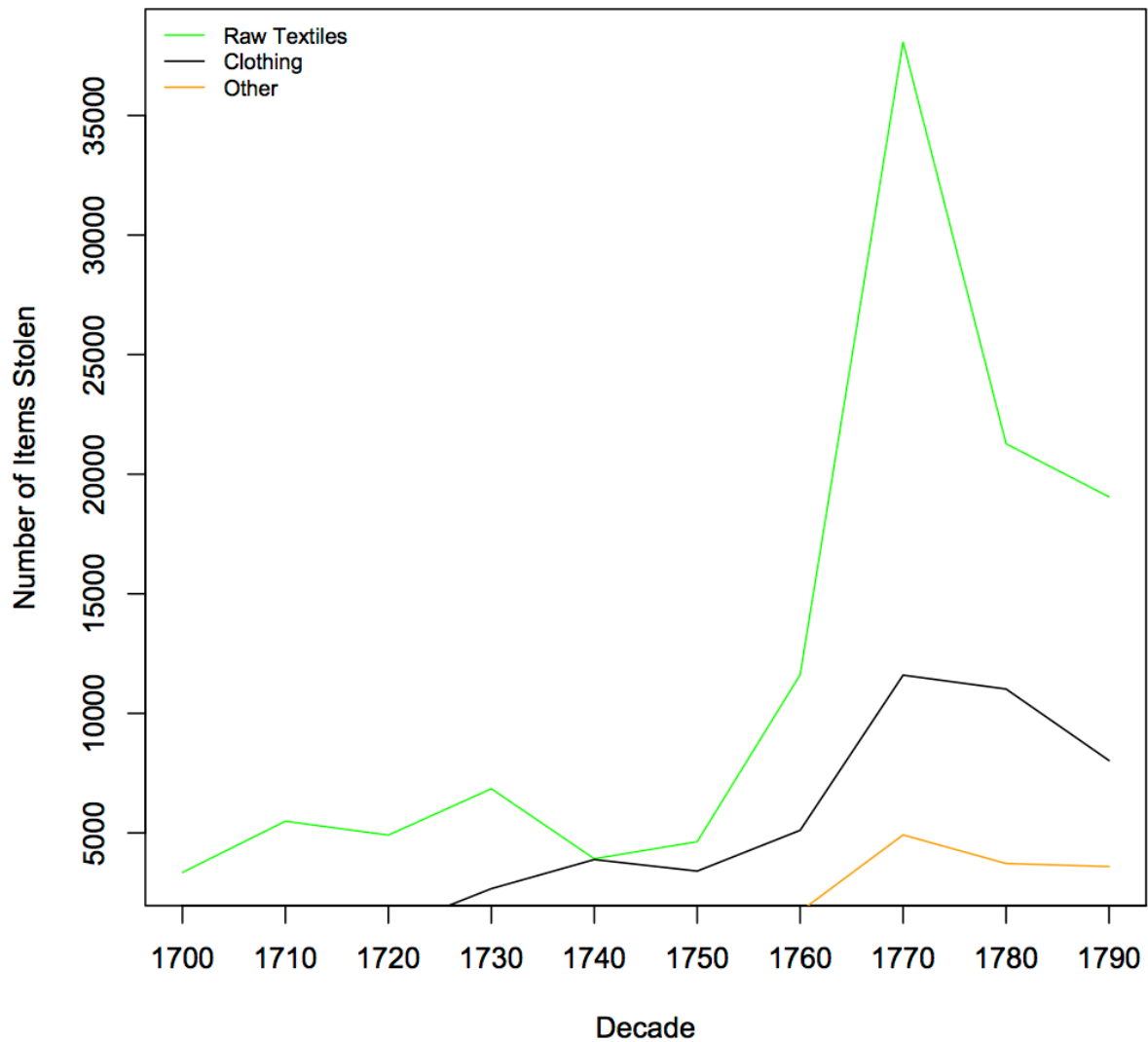


Figure 5: Distribution of Items Stolen in Cloth and Clothing Theft Cases in *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*: January 1790 – December 1799; Showing raw textiles and clothing theft in more detail.

Crime and Fashion

While Rogers' book and *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online* are two very different sources, they both show increased transaction in apparel over the course of the century. As Beverly Lemire writes, "It is difficult to separate the motivation of the opportunistic thief from

that of the resolute shopper.”¹⁶ Any explanation of this data must start with the fact that the end of the eighteenth century marked the beginning of industrialization, which was the culmination of an effort to revitalize and reimagine the entire industry.¹⁷ By the end of this process, clothes were not just cheaper and more abundant; they were entirely different kinds of things. The clothes of medieval and renaissance Europe were thought of in much the same way as cars are today. Just like cars today, a new set of clothing was very expensive, and often treated as an investment. Clothing was a practical item, but also functioned as a status symbol, much as cars do today. To continue the analogy, cars today can reveal a lot about an individual; the model is telling of a person’s socio-economic status, and a bumper sticker might express political leanings. However, a car does not say as much about a person’s inner self as clothing can. Today we change our clothes according to where we are going and whom we are going to see and how we feel; we visually re-create our self as it develops. This new function of clothing began in the eighteenth and nineteenth century; social critics were making statements like, “Costume thus does not dress the body, but rather the person.”¹⁸ Fashion was a quality of the garment, and there had always been an interest in having things that were in fashion. Now one had to be *fashionable*, which is a quality of a person. I define fashionability as the ability, perhaps even the necessity, to manipulate fashionable dress and create a public identity that was revealing of the self as an individual while simultaneously identifying with society; this is the birth of the fashion statement. But, what would these new clothes say?

¹⁶ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, 121.

¹⁷ Jan De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 137. The ancient wool industry paved the way for England’s textile industrial success; Roze Hentschell, *The Culture of Cloth in Early Modern England*, 3. Also Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, 147.

¹⁸ Samuel Simon Witte, “An Answer to the Question: Would it be Harmful or Beneficial to Establish a National Uniform?” in Purdy, *Rise Of Fashion*, 77.

Masters, Servants, and Individualized Ownership

The household was the most basic economic unit of early modern Europe, and the master/servant relationship was at its heart. A lucky servant might acquire clothes as a gift, but livery was a more obvious way clothes entered this dynamic. In Rogers' book there is a "cloth for servants" entry in almost every year between 1706 and 1770.¹⁹ However, it was unclear whether a servant actually owned these clothes.²⁰ While formal liveries were technically the property of the employer, many servants took them anyway.²¹ On the other hand, in an age before regularized wages, many masters chose to pay their servants with room, board, and a set of clothes (not technically considered "livery").²²

Theft, of course, was another way for servants to obtain clothes. Contemporary estimates claimed, "'near one-third of the prisoners tried [in the year 1790] at the Old Bailey, were servants tried for robbing their master.'"²³ Even if these statistics were inflated, the general opinion mirrored the comments of one judge, "your crime is certainly of a very aggravated nature, especially as a servant living in a family, and plundering every thing that came to your hands; this entirely destroys all the comfort and security of private families."²⁴ However, determining whether there actually was theft at all was complicated by the nature of master/servant relationships. In many cases, like that of Elizabeth Freeman, a servant would

¹⁹ Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, 444. Livery could technically refer to anything the master gave to those in his service as part of their compensation, but usually referred to clothing, Ann Rosalind Jones, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

²⁰ Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England*, 87.

²¹ Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-century England*, 108.

²² Hill, *Servants*, 2, and 89.

²³ Hill, *Servants*, 73.

²⁴ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), May 1784, the case of Mary Lawrence and John Lawrence (t17840526-75).

plead that there had simply been a misunderstanding, “I took the prosecutrix to be a mother to me, and she said to me I might make use of the goods when I wanted them.”²⁵

The ownership problem was not limited to master/servant relationships, however, as individualized ownership was necessary for fashionability. Consider the trial of William Badcock, indicted for stealing clothes from his brother-in-law, Mr. Story. The court asked Mr. Story, “was it not customary for you to wear one another’s Things?” To which he answered, “Never but such Thing as a Coat.”²⁶ To the court, Mr. Story’s response was strange, but it makes sense in the context of fashionability. If Mr. Story had accumulated his garments to construct *his* fashionability, they could not simultaneously be part of someone else’s fashionability. Masters and servants may have come to similar conclusions. Simon Witte writes, “Taste alone connects ornament to a person, and this connection ceases as soon as ornament becomes fixed... [livery] concerns only the master and indicates only the master’s taste.”²⁷ Servants may have been introduced to fashion while wearing their master’s clothes, but their fashionability would require that they own their clothes. Theft was one way to sever the master’s ownership of clothes and transfer it to the servant, but it was only a stopgap. In order to effectively develop their own fashionability, servants would need to become masters in the clothing market, and first market they might have turned to was the secondhand one.

Second-hand Market, First Hand Fashion

²⁵ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), April 1755, trial of Elizabeth Freeman (t17550409-11).

²⁶ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), April 1743, trial of William Badcock (t17430413-48).

²⁷ Witte, “An Answer to the Question,” 77.

While today used clothing is a *secondary* market, it was primary component of the early modern clothing industry, for most people could only afford to purchase clothing secondhand.²⁸ That secondhand dealing was common in the eighteenth century, however, does not mean it was always welcome. After all, secondhand dealers were known to buy stolen goods from thieves and resell them. Doing so was technically illegal, but with the exception of a few regulations regarding peddling licenses, secondhand dealers were subjected to little regular policing.²⁹ The only legal action that could be used against secondhand dealers was the charge of “receiving stolen goods knowing them to be stolen,” as an accessory crime to a felony offence. Proving the secondhand dealer had knowledge the goods were stolen was problematic. In regular theft cases, rightful ownership of an item was often determined by the owner’s “mark,” a stamped symbol or embroidered initials, but secondhand dealers commonly removed these marks upon accepting merchandise as standard procedure. In one trial a man admitted, “that he measur’d [the stolen goods] and cut off the Marks,” but this was not seen as evidence of a crime, and he was acquitted.³⁰ However, professional thieves also removed “marks” to erase the evidence of their crime. In many cases, it was impossible to distinguish the legitimate practice of a secondhand dealer from the illegal actions of a thief.³¹ Not surprisingly, receiving accounted for only 4.3% of all theft cases brought to the old bailey in the eighteenth century.³² Furthermore, 70% of those accused were found not guilty.³³

²⁸ Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce*, 112.

²⁹ Shammass, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America*, 237.

³⁰ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), April 1719, William Cooling, (t17190408-42).

³¹ Lemire, “Peddling Fashion,” 78.

³² 1,807 cases of receiving out of 41,214 total theft cases. Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), Tabulating year where offence category is receiving between January of 1700 and December of 1799. Counting by offence.

³³ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), Tabulating year against verdict category where offence category is receiving, between January 1700 and December 1799. Counting by offence.

Ultimately, the secondhand market became a secondary market, but not because of a legal crackdown. Secondhand trade had “knit together a greater portion of national demand...increasing the commercial activity in the lower middling and laboring classes.”³⁴ By selling a few used items, secondhand dealers introduced fashionable things to people who otherwise could not afford them.³⁵ Yet just as sharing ownership of a garment had become unacceptable, a thing with previous ownership became passé. Through the sale of old things, secondhand dealers had created a space for a new market. Secondhand dealers had thrived by providing whatever the market needed, but they created a market that simply did not need them.

Shopping or Shoplifting?

“Shops” in the Middle Ages were informal stalls or kiosks, but in the eighteenth century, shops became specialized, fixed spaces. These new shops took London’s shopping culture by storm as the availability of cheaper textiles allowed shopkeepers to expand their market to the middling sort.³⁶ Shopkeepers were eager to capture this new audience and they, “made the process of finding out about goods pleasurable and exiting.”³⁷ Thus, shopping became an “experience [that] changed the people who took it up.”³⁸

Practically speaking, shoplifting was a new crime that emerged with the new shops, but it was nevertheless considered a very serious crime. The Shoplifting Act of 1699 made the theft of goods over five shillings a felony. On the surface, these laws seem to make much ado about

³⁴ Ibid, 81.

³⁵ De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 145. Also Beverly Lemire, “Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes,” *Journal of British Studies* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 1988), 21.

³⁶ Shammass, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America*, 225, 259.

³⁷ Claire Walsh, “Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London,” *Journal of Design History* 8, no. 3 (January 1, 1995), 174.

³⁸ Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 36-257.

nothing, as shoplifting accounted for only 4.3% of all eighteenth-century theft cases.³⁹ However, shopkeepers felt harsh measures were justified, as “the crime [of shoplifting] was that it was ‘private,’ unseen, undetected at the time.” Even when a thief was caught, many shopkeepers felt they could not afford the expense and hassle of prosecution, not to mention the fact that it was simply bad business to send customers to the gallows.⁴⁰ In the cases that did make it to *The Old Bailey*, the prisoner was perceived as obviously guilty and/or a professional shoplifter; prosecutors often referred to prisoners saying things like, “she had long had the Character of a Shoplifting.”⁴¹

One of the biggest frustrations for shopkeepers was differentiating between shoplifter and shopper. In one case a witness reported, “the prisoner came into his shop and pretended to buy some Cambrick, but they not agreeing about the Price she went away; soon after which he mist the Goods.”⁴² Traditional thieves were thought to be haggard, poor individuals, but many contemporaries noticed that professional shoplifters could look remarkably respectable.⁴³ What was even more troubling was that an increasing number of shoplifters seemed to be women; Tammy Whitlock asserts, “By the nineteenth century, shoplifting was seen as a woman’s crime.”⁴⁴ However the femininity of shoplifters was only fuel on an already raging fire; “Shoplifting was rife in the face of the conspicuous consumerism which resulted from

³⁹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), Tabulating year where offence category is shoplifting, between 1700 and December 1799. Counting by offence.

⁴⁰ Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800*, 179.

⁴¹ Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), February 1719, the case of Jane Scott, Ann Pierce and Sarah Scott (t17190225-7). Also, Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), August 1726, the case of Sarah Turner, and Katherine Fitzpatrick (t17260831-23).

⁴² Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 17 April 2011), May 1727, the case of Elizabeth Wade, and John Boucher (t17270517-16).

⁴³ Whitlock, *Crime, Gender, and Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-Century England*, 142.

⁴⁴ Whitlock, *Crime, Gender, and Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-Century England*, 139. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800*, 179.

[developments in shopping].”⁴⁵ Shopping had created a new kind of public experience, but it also eroded the identifying quality of clothes that that helped identify criminals in the past. By making fashion affordable, it was less easy to distinguish a wealthy shopper from a simply well-dressed shoplifter. After all, my quantitative data shows that shoppers and thieves were behaving increasingly similarly. The shopping culture had solidified, and ultimately, shoplifting was the price to pay for shopping.

Conclusion

By using the lens of theft to study fashion and fashionability, I emphasize the process of transaction and enable theft cases to be a subject of material culture study. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes in the introduction to *The Social Life of Things*, “we have to follow... things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their form, their uses, their trajectories.”⁴⁶ Stolen goods can be “commodities,” in Appadurai’s terms, because he defines the commodity state of an item as a time in its life when its “exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing [was] its socially relevant feature.”⁴⁷ Maxine Berg writes, “Products became fashionable because they contained ‘knowledge.’”⁴⁸ A garment was socially relevant in the eighteenth century as a display of knowledge accumulated through a *past* exchange in the market in which the garment was established as fashionable. I use theft to study fashionability because, even if a thief only wished to sell the garment for cash, the value of that garment had become inseparable from the context of fashionability.

⁴⁵ Palk and Royal Historical Society (Great Britain), *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion, 1780-1830*, 39.

⁴⁶ Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, 1st pbk. ed. (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

⁴⁸ Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820*, 268.

The eighteenth century marks the beginning of the era in which fashion began to negotiate its current place in society. In eighteenth-century *Old Bailey* cases, the courtroom served as a venue to negotiate this new culture of textile and apparel goods. Yet textile and apparel theft has very little place in the modern world. Today it would be downright comical to hear of burglars breaking into homes and stealing nothing but the bed linens and overcoats. Hobby Lobby is probably not too concerned about customers shoplifting three yards of printed cotton. Yet these facts are a direct product of the modern fashion industry. Consider the song, “thrift shop” by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. The lyrics are critical of the idea of spending “fifty dollars for a t-shirt,” because anyone can buy that same t-shirt, but only the savvy, fashionable individual can take twenty dollars and construct their fashionability at a thrift shop.⁴⁹ Ultimately, the very same economic and cultural processes that gave cloth and clothing theft a motive in the eighteenth century gave birth to the modern fashion industry that make this theft almost obsolete.

⁴⁹ Macklemore and Ryan Lewis featuring Wanz, “Thrift Shop,” (2012: Macklemore LLC), song.

Appendix: Notes on Qualitative Methodology

Rogers' A History of Agriculture and Prices: the numbers

In his two chapters regarding textiles, Rogers usually gives the price paid per yard of fabric, but occasionally he lists prices by the ell.⁵⁰ To produce a useful graph, I entered the price per yard and the number of yards purchased for each fabric type recorded in each year. I handled the eighteenth-century currency by converting all pounds and shillings into pence.⁵¹ When there was more than one entry for the same fabric type in a year, I averaged all prices and summed the number of yards for that fabric in that year. When prices were given by the ell, I converted to yards. A few entries had to be disregarded; some entries were recorded by the weight of the fabric instead of the number of yards purchased, or only provided the total price paid for an unknown quantity of fabric. Also, I condensed fabric types such that “fine cotton,” and “drab cotton” were recorded under general category of “cotton,” as it was impractical to create separate categories for each of these qualifiers. Even after condensing, there were 129 different types of fabric in my spreadsheet. Once I had entered Rogers' data into an excel spreadsheet, I calculated the average weighted price of textiles for each year.⁵² A weighted average represents each fabric according to its share of the market, which compensates for the fact that a few expensive yards of silk can skew an un-weighted average otherwise dominated by cheap muslins.

I followed a similar procedure to produce my graph of wheat prices. For simplicity, I discarded entries that were given in units other than bushels, but there was still much more data

⁵⁰ An ell was another common unit of measuring cloth in the eighteenth century. It was approximately 1.25 a yard.

⁵¹ In the eighteenth century, 1 pound was equal to 240 pence and 1 shilling was equal to 12 pence.

⁵² The average weighted price is equal to the sum of each individual textile price multiplied by percentage of the overall market held by that specific item. When calculating for a weighted price, it is not necessary to average the results of the calculation for the weighted price, because the relationship between each individual price to the whole has already been determined in weighting the price.

for this graph than for the textiles graph. Wheat was simply purchased more often. Also, I did not weight the average price of wheat, as different wheat prices are more comparable to each other than prices of different kinds of fabrics.

<p>1703. CAMBRIDGE. King's. 13 surplices @ 2/6. Table linen. 16 yds. Vice-Provost @ 1/10. 20 yds. fellows @ 1/4. 16 yds. scholars @ 1/3. 9 yds. clerks @ 1/2. 3 doz. mappae @ 10/6. 16 yds. mantilia @ 10½. S. John's. Scholars' table. 60 yds. @ 1/3. 10 doz. and 1 napkins @ doz. 12/. Holland for towels. 30 yds. @ 1/. Linen for Master. Diaper napkins. 7 doz. . @ 20/. Diaper for towels. 9 yds. . @ 1/6. Calico. 9 yds. . @ 1/10. Towelyn. 40 yds. . @ 9/.</p> <p>LONDON. Howard accs. Dec. 11. 26 yds. huggaback @ 1/2. 27½ yds. do. @ 1/. 12½ yds. diaper @ 3/.</p> <p>Feb. 19. 97½ yds. damask @ 16/.</p> <p>Apr. 11. 39 yds. damask for napkins and 12 yds. tablecloth £6 9/.</p>	<p>1704. CAMBRIDGE. King's. Vice-Provost's table. 16 yds. @ 1/10. Fellows. 20 yds. @ 1/4. Scholars. 16 yds. @ 1/3. Clerks. 9 yds. . @ 1/2. Towelling. 36 yds. @ 10½. Surplices for choristers. 15 . . @ 2/6. S. John's. Scholars' table. 60 yds. @ 1/3. Audit chamber. Diaper napkins. 2 doz. . £5 2/6½. Broad diaper for tablecloth. 5½ yds. . @ 4/3.</p> <p>LONDON. Holland. 11 ells @ 4/8. Cambric. 1 yd. fine @ 45/.</p> <p>Howard accs. Nov. 10. 8 ells of holland for pillabers @ 5/.</p> <p>1706. CAMBRIDGE. S. John's. Scholars' table. 60 yds. @ 1/3. Communion table. Fine holland. 6½ yds. @ 6/11.</p>	<p>Fellows. 16 yds. @ 10½. Scholars. 10 yds. @ 1/2. Clerks. 7 yds. . @ 1/2. Napkins. 3 doz. . @ 10/6. Towelling. 18 yds. @ 10½. S. John's. Scholars' table. 60 yds. @ 1/2. Fellows' towels. 60 yds. @ 11/.</p> <p>LONDON. Howard accs. Feb. 26. 40 yds. sheeting cloth for servants @ 1/9.</p> <p>OXFORD. C.C.C. Surplice . 55/.</p> <p>1707. CAMBRIDGE. King's. Table linen. 16 yds. @ 1/4. 16 do. . @ 1/1. 32 do. . @ 10½. 13 do. . @ 1/2. Napkins. 3 doz. . @ 10/6. Towelling. 16 yds. @ 10½. S. John's. Scholars' table. 60 yds. @ 1/2. Communion table. 6½ yds. holland @ 7/.</p> <p>LONDON</p>	<p>1708. CAMBRIDGE. King's. Table linen. 16 yds. . @ 1/4. 16 do. . @ 1/1. 13 do. . @ 1/2. 20 do. . @ 7/8. Napkins. 3 doz. . @ 10/6. S. John's. Scholars' table. 60 yds. @ 1/2.</p> <p>LONDON. Howard accs. Holland for 12 shirts for Lord Morpeth £7 4/.</p> <p>1709. CAMBRIDGE. S. John's. Scholars' table. 60 yds. @ 1/2. Master's linen. 6 doz. diaper napkins and two tablecloths £8 11/3.</p> <p>LONDON. Howard accs. June 14. Holland for 12 shirts £13 5/.</p> <p>1710. CAMBRIDGE. S. John's. Scholars' table. 60 yds. @ 1/2.</p>
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Figure 6: A page from Roger's book, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England*.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
1			1703															
2	Alamoede																	
3	Alpoeen (Or Alepine)																	
4	Armoise																	
5	Armozen																	
6	Baize																	
7	Baragon																	
8	Barry																	
9	Beaver (Buff)																	
10	Bombazeen																	
11	Broad (Gold)																	
12	Brocade																	
13	Buckram																	
14	Calicos	22	9	0.00934937	0.2055411													
15	Callimanco																	
16	Cambrics					540	1	0.0042735	2.30769231									
17	Camletten (Or Camlet)																	
18	Canvas, Hessian Long and Broad Fine)																	
19	Caninet																	
20	Cassimere																	
21	Check																	
22	Cheney																	
23	Cherry-Derry																	
24	Chevre de Freez																	
25	China Cotton																	
26	Cloths	157.714286	119.25	0.12379964	19.5249713	66	47	0.2008547	13.2564103	60	45	0.53571429	32.1428571	102	64.25	0.52556237	53.607362	10
27	Cord																	
28	Cotton																	
29	Cotton Velvet																	
30	Crayk																	
31	Crane																	
32	Cuttoney																	
33	Damask	192	97.5	0.10121983	18.4342071													
34	Devonshire																	
35	Diaper (Broad, Russia)	27	21.5	0.02232027	0.60264729	51	5.5	0.02350427	1.19871795									

Figure 7: A Screenshot of the excel Spreadsheet used to analyze Roger’s work

The Old Bailey: Statistical Methodology

With the help of Jeremy Shoemaker, a software engineer, I took *The Old Bailey* API and created a sub-database consisting only of eighteenth-century theft cases in which textile goods were stolen.⁵³ The first step was to develop a method for recognizing these cases. I gathered “Dress of the Month” articles, published in the eighteenth-century periodical, *The Westminster Magazine*, to come up with a list of search terms. Then I used these terms to search *The Old Bailey Online*. Clothing items were of interest because they were directly affected by the fall in textile prices, and they were an obvious part of the fashion industry. Raw textiles were also of interest, as fabrics were often stolen with the intention of producing clothing. Every case in my sub-database is a case where either raw textiles, or clothing, or both were stolen. Note that I did not search through trials of receiving because it was an accessory crime, and the list of items “stolen” in a receiving case is a repeat of items from a previous theft trial.

⁵³ An API is an interface between separate programs such that they can work interactively.

I designed a form to fill out for each case I analyzed to note how many units of what category of item was stolen. I paid particular attention to how many household linens and accessories were stolen along with clothes and/or textiles. During this time period, textile goods were often repurposed, so the difference between a quilted bedcover and a quilted petticoat was often just a matter of time.⁵⁴ While most apparel accessories are not exclusively textile goods, and were unaffected by changes in textile prices, it is possible that the thefts of accessories were inspired by the same motives that inspired clothing theft.⁵⁵ Finally, I also counted how many other things were stolen. When counting the number of items stolen, anything listed as “a pair,” was counted as one item. When several offenses were brought in one trial, the items of all cases were counted together. When items were given in a unit that was less than 1, for example “one half yard,” the appropriate decimal number was entered.

Notes	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Of Interest
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not of Interest
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clothing 0
<input type="checkbox"/>	Raw Textile Goods 0
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Textile Goods
<input type="checkbox"/>	Household Linens 0
<input type="checkbox"/>	Accessories 0
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other 0
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Goods Not Specified

Figure 8: The Form used to count the number of items stolen in *The Old Bailey* Cases.

Defining the Categories

Articles of Clothing: This category includes items that might be considered

“accessories,” but were almost entirely made of textiles and part-and-parcel of one’s attire.⁵⁶ My

⁵⁴ Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade Before the Factory, 1660-1800* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, [England] : New York: MacmillanPress ; St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 68.

⁵⁵ See Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-century Britain*, 254-5.

⁵⁶ Aprons were actually an essential part of a woman’s wardrobe. See Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-century England*.

“articles of clothing” search terms were as follows: Apron(s), Banyan(s), Breeches, Buffoons or Bussoons, Calashe(s) or “Caleche(s), Cardinal(s), Cap(s), Cape(s), Caul(s), Chapeau bras (a silk hat), Cravat(s), Coat(s), Commode(s), Cloak(s), Cuff(s), Disphablille(s), Drawers, Felt(s), Fillet(s), Frock(s), Fringe(s), Garter(s), Girdle(s), Gown(s), Handkerchief(s), Hoop(s), Jacket(s), Jesuit(s), Habit(s), Hose, Lining(s), Manteuil(s), Neckcloth(s), Negligee(s), Nightgown(s), Night-rayl, Palatine(s), Pantaloons, Petticoat(s), Pocket(s), Points, Polonefe(s), Robe de Cour or Robe(s) Ruffl(es), Sacqu(es), Safegaurd(s), Saqu(es), Sash(es), Skirt(s), Shawl(s) or “Shaul(s), Shift(s), Shirt(s), Smock(s), Spatterdashes, Stay(s), Stocking(s), Stomacher(s), Suit(s), Tippet(s), Tucker(s), Vandykes, Waistcoat(s) or Wastcoat(s).

Raw Textiles: Because leather and fur were not included in Rogers’ work, and are rarely mentioned in the “Dress of the Month” articles, I did not include them in the list of raw textile terms. If I came across “leather breeches,” for example, I counted it as an article of clothing. Ribbons were also tricky to categorize. When ribbons were listed by the yard or ell, they were counted as a raw textile, but if the number of units were listed they were counted as an accessory. Also, some records only reported a number of pieces stolen and the exact amount of fabric could not be determined. For these cases, the number of “pieces” became the number of units. The list of “raw textiles” terms was as follows: Applique, Baize, Bays, Broadcloth, Calashes, Calico or “callicoe,” Callimanco or “calamanco,” or Cambrick, Camlet, Cashmere or “cassimere” or “caffimere,” Ciraffian, Chenille, Chintz or “chintx,” Corderoy, Cotton, Crape, Damask or Danmask,” Dimity, Drugget, Duffel, Flannel, Frieze, Fustian, Gauze, Huccaback, Jean, Kersey or Kerseymere, Lace, Lawn, Linsey, Linen or “linon,” Lustring or “lutestring,” Marcella, Marseilles quilting, McChlin, Mohair, Morine, Muslin, Parragon, Penistone, Ribbon, Ruffia,

Russia, Sarsnet, Satin or “sattin”), Serge, Silk, Silesia, Shalloon, Spangles, Stuff, Tabby, Taffety, Tammy, Tissue, Tassel(s), Velvet, Ververet, Wool, Yarn, Zephyrs.

Household linens: This is list of some of the most common household linens found in *The Old Bailey*: Bag(s), Bolster(s), Blanket(s), Carpeting, Chair cover(s), Clout(s), Counterpane(s), Curtain(s), Horsecloth(s), Napkin(s), Pillow(s), Quilt(s), Sack(s), Sheet(s), Stock(s), Tablecloth(s), Valance(s)

Accessories: In this category I include items that were potentially part of a person’s fashionable presentation, but were not necessarily a textile item. A list of some of the most common accessories found in *The Old Bailey* is as follows: Belt(s), Bonnet(s), Boot(s), Buckle(s), Button(s), Cane(s), Chip Hat(s), Clog(s), Comb(s), Fan(s), Glove(s), Hat(s), Jewelry, Earring(s), Hair pin(s), Necklace(s), Ring(s), Muff(s), Lock(s), Parasol(s), Pocketbook(s), Pump(s), Ribbon(s), Slipper(s) Shoe(s), Tour(s), Umbrella(s), Wig(s).

It was not necessary to go through the entire list of search words to come up with a sub-database of almost six thousand cases of textile and apparel theft. Using J.M. Beattie’s work as a reference, I decided a sample equal to 10% of all eighteenth century theft cases, or 3,834 cases, would be significant enough to track any trends in theft behavior.⁵⁷ I pulled these cases by going through each decade of the eighteenth century in my sub-database and pulling a number of cases equal to 10% of all theft cases in *The Old Bailey*. I used this method because the distribution of eighteenth-century cases is so uneven; later decades have over 5,000 cases, but the first ten years only have 724 cases total. Pulling 10% of all theft cases from the entire century would produce a sample that was overly representative of the later eighteenth century. Once I had my sample of tagged, eighteenth-century, cloth and clothing theft cases, the results were graphed.

⁵⁷ There are 4,124 searchable cases of theft in on *The Old Bailey*, but many of these entries are not actually cases, but “orderly’s accounts,” or other documents that were part of *The Old Bailey* publication, but not court cases. Only 38,338 cases are possible to be exported from *The Old Bailey Online* API.

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