

## **Crape: Examples from Ackermann's *Repository of Arts* (1809-1828)**

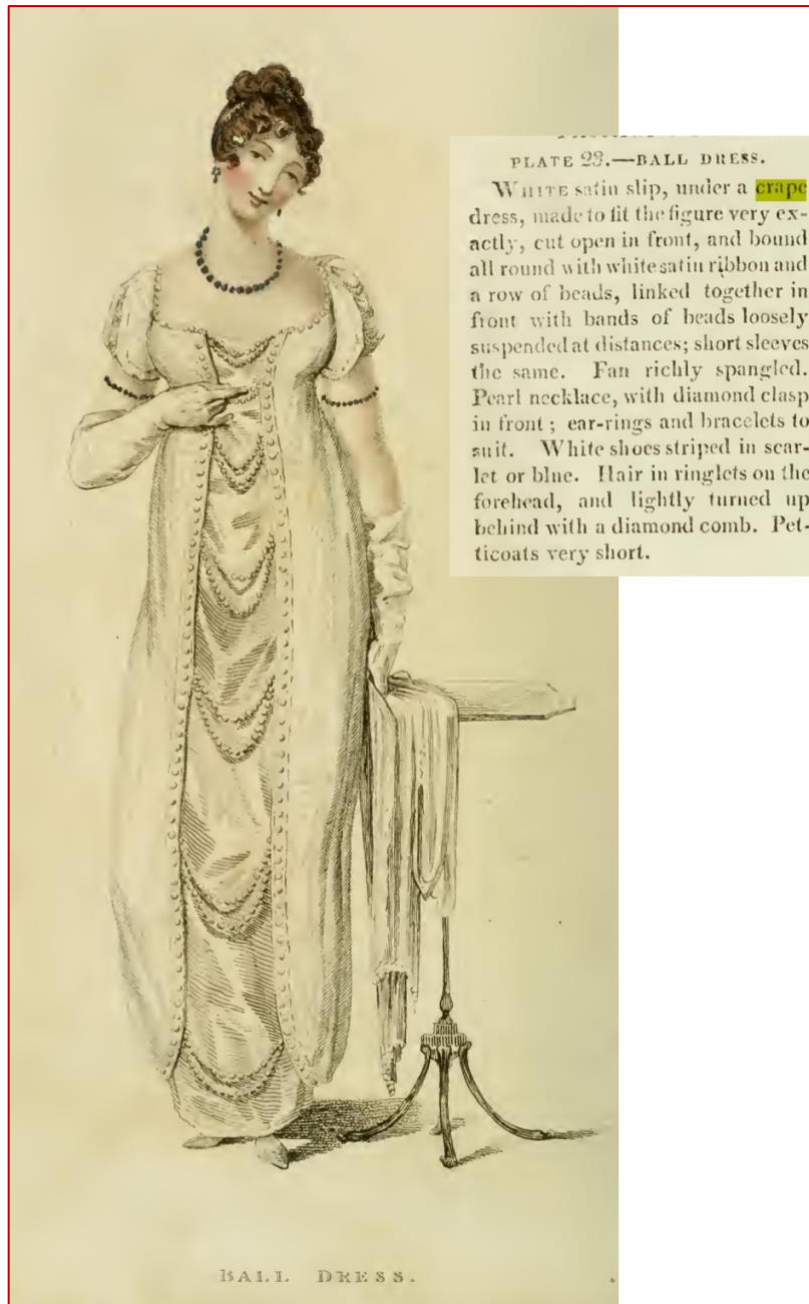
Hope Greenberg, January 2022

Though today the term crape applies to a light-midweight textured fabric, its use in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century seems to refer to something smoother and sheer like gauze. The following is a small sample drawn from dozens of images and descriptions of garments made of this fabric. In addition to a variety of colors, black crape is often associated with mourning wear along with the heavier dull silk known as bombazine. There are also crapes that are a mix of fibres, for example, merino crape which is a wool/silk blend.

One note related to the images and descriptions: the term “dress” as in Evening Dress, Opera Dress, etc. usually refers to the entire outfit, gown plus accessories, much the same we would say “Evening Look.”

## 1809 May: Ball Dress

This description uses the phrase that be repeated in almost all crape gowns: “satin slip under a crape dress.” In this case the layers are white on white but as you will see in many examples, the white crape is worn over a color silk and indicating that the crepe is sheer enough to show that color through the overlay.



## 1809 June: Walking Dress

The crape overlay is shorter than the muslin gown beneath it, a popular look of this year when classical Greek and Roman influence predominated.



## 1809 August: Allegorical Wood-cut, with Patterns of British Manufacture.

During its early years, Ackermann's included actual fabric swatches along with the information about where to purchase them. Promoting these British textiles, the swatches were pasted onto a page with an ornate woodcut. This sample is called *Merino Crape*, a lightweight wool/silk blend in a love autumnal pale orange color.



### ALLEGORICAL WOOD-CUT, WITH PATTERNS OF BRITISH MANUFACTURE.

No. 1 exhibits a specimen of that elegant manufacture styled the *Irish net*, and is particularly well adapted for the dinner and evening dress. The silvery lightness of its texture renders it a most graceful and becoming article in this style of decoration. French cloaks, tippets, and scarfs, with small jockey or poke bonnets to correspond, with variegated green, purple, or grey feathers, have a most light and attractive effect, where formed of this material. It is sold by Mr.

George, silk-manufacturer, 19, Holywell-street, Strand, at 6s. per yard, and is half-yard wide.

No. 2 is another article of new and fashionable adoption, styled *Merino crape*, and is calculated also for ladies' dresses, but in the more intermediate order of personal decoration. The blending of its shades, and its union of silk and worsted, give a sort of distinguishing character to this tasteful article, and render it most appropriate for the approach-

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ing autumnal months, when we may venture to pronounce it will be much in fashionable request. Venetian binding and imperial ribbon of the same shades, will be found the most advantageous trimmings for robes formed of this material. It is three-quarters wide, and is sold by the above manufacturer at 5s. per yard.

No. 3, the *Andalusian washing silk*, an article for robes and pelisses, comprising much delicacy of shade and figure, as well as a graceful adhesiveness of quality. Thread lace, in scallop or vandyke, the Chinese floss trimming, or applique lace beading, are the most tasteful and appropriate embellishments which this pleasing

article can admit of. It is three-quarters wide, and 4s. per yard, and is furnished by Messrs. Richards and Co. 37, Oxford-street.

No. 4 is a printed diamond marcella quilting, for gentlemen's waistcoats. On this article there is little need of comment, except to call the attention of our readers to the peculiar delicacy of the printed stripe, which has perhaps rendered it so universal a favourite with men of high fashion. It is three-quarters wide, and from 9s. to 10s. per yard, and is furnished by Messrs. R. Smith and Co. 2, Prince's-street, Leicester-square.



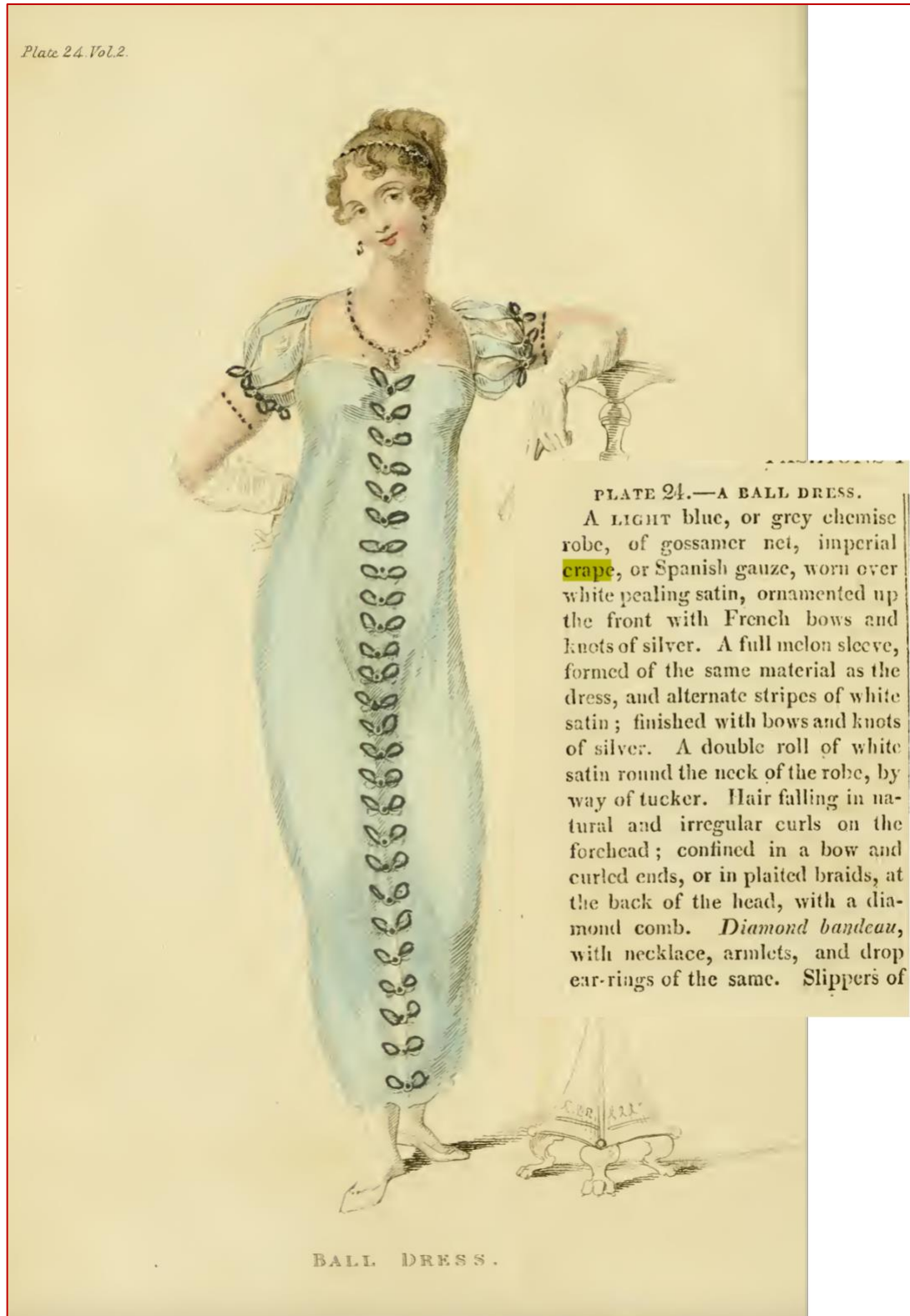
## 1809 September: Mourning Dress

Note how the description differentiates between “slight” mourning where white trim and lighter fabrics could be work and “deep” mourning where unrelieved black is the norm.



## 1809 October: Ball Dress

This light blue crape gown is made short for dancing and often surprises people who are not used to seeing this kind of very narrow cut in this period.



## 1812 February: Ball Dress

Like the earlier gowns, this one has a decided vertical line up the center front. However, we also see a trend that will continue to develop in the next few years: an emphasis on the bodice which will become even more decorated.





## 1812 March: Evening Full Dress

Full Dress refers to the dressiest of outfits—not quite as ornate as Court Dress which had many rules, but quite formal all the same.





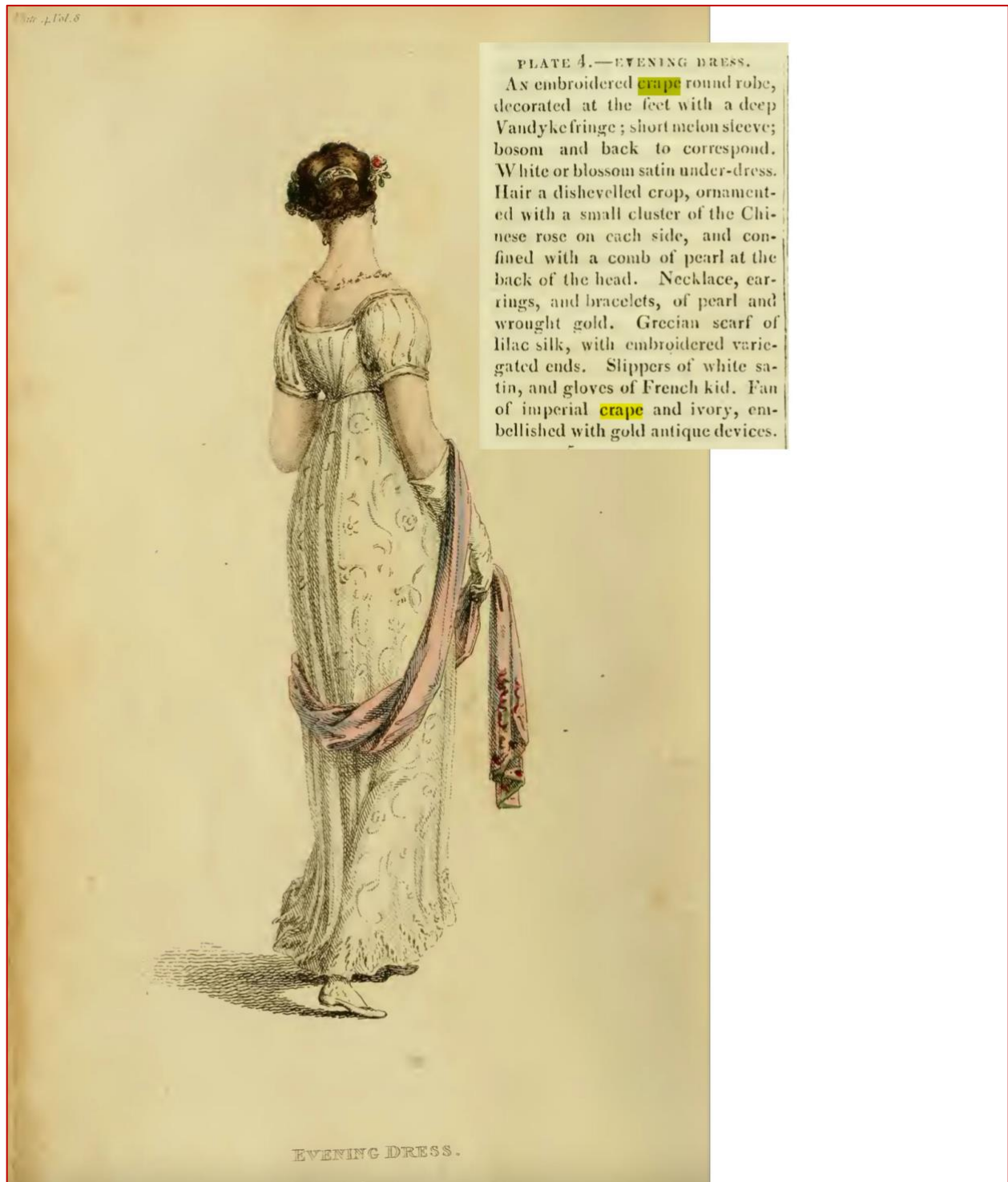
## 1812 April: Ball Dress

This example shows the standard use of crape: color crape over a white satin slip. The hand water-coloured aquatint (a type of engraving) has captured how the white slip shines through the sheer pink crape.



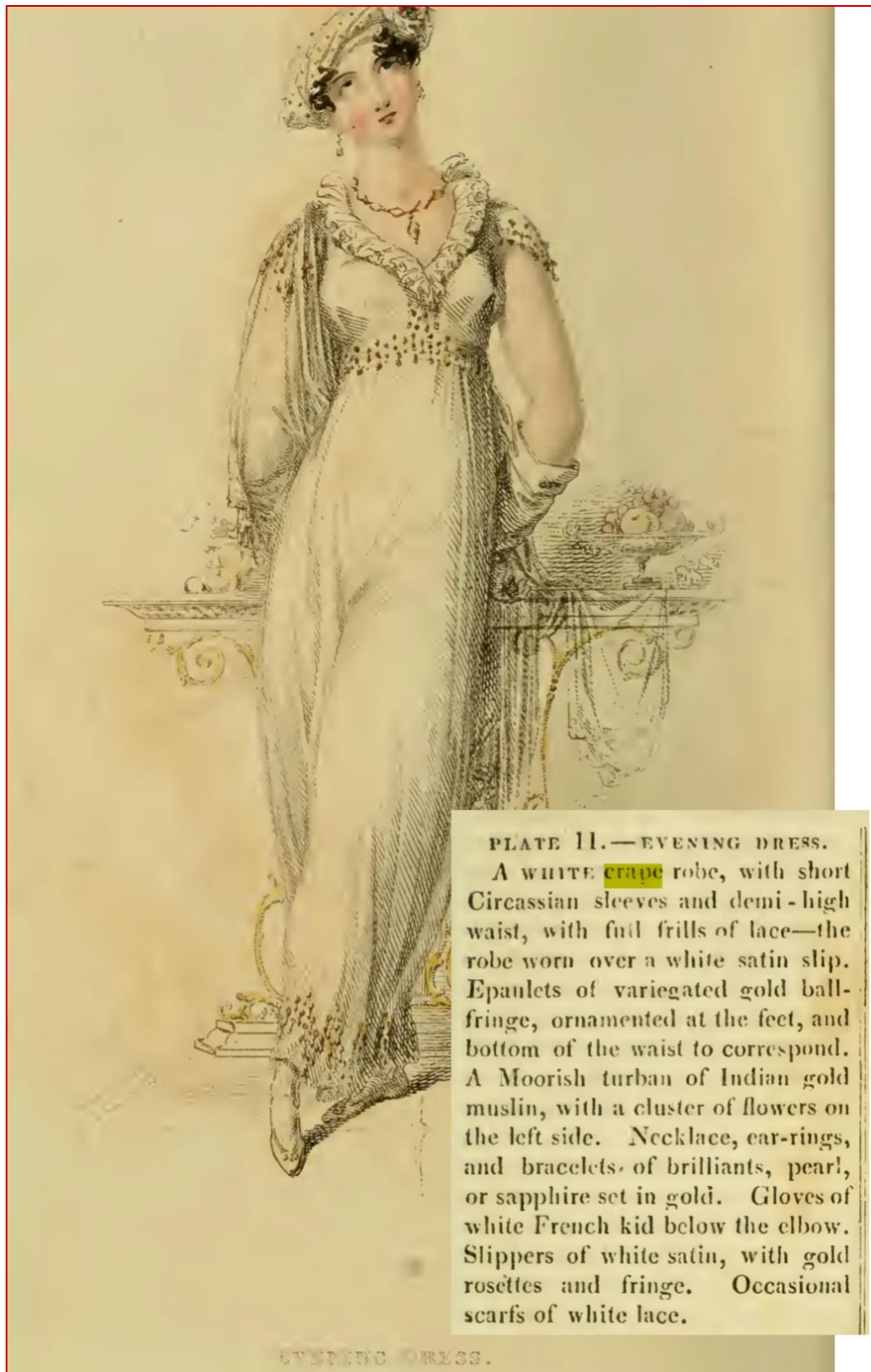
## 1812 July: Evening Dress

This example is somewhat unusual in that it is embroidered.



## 1812 August: Evening Dress

Like the other examples in this year, the bodice is ornate, the skirt is still narrow, and the headdress is small and worn close to the head.





## 1812 September: Letter from a Young Lady to her Sister in the Country

In addition to the two fashion plates and their descriptions that appeared in each month edition of the magazine, there was usually one or two articles that described the latest fashions. They are fascinating to read but frustrating in that we have no pictures to accompany them. Over the years, some of these articles took the form of “letters” although it is doubtful, given their set pattern of writing, that they were written by anyone but the magazine staff! Here’s a portion of a typical sample that includes some talk about crape:

### TWENTY-FIFTH LETTER F

been lately reintroduced by a few of our first-rates: they are ornamented with a small wreath of flowers, or ribbon, puffed round the crown, and terminated with a loose bow and ends on one side. Dress robes are formed of **crape**, sarsnet, or other light articles. With the former, as well as with the white muslin dress, the coloured satin bodice is much worn, and is a very animated relief. The *Wellington robe* is now in high vogue, as an evening dress: it is constructed somewhat in the style of the Turkish robe, but with short sleeves, of the Spanish slash form; and instead of flowing loose from the shoulders, meets at the bottom of the waist, where it is confined with a rich mosaic clasp; and from thence is continued in rounded draperies to the feet. The train of this very graceful garment is somewhat beyond the demi length. If composed of **crape**, or any light article, it is trimmed, at its several terminations, with a *chevaux-de-frise* border, composed of double folds of alternate satin and **crape**; but if composed of a more substantial material (such as satin, sarsnet, or lustre), the trimming is either silver, or silk fringe, or a border of feathers, or matted **crape**. I must not forget to observe that the *chevaux-de-frise* trimming is the most fashionable decoration at this moment for every sort of evening or dress robe; it has a most pleasing effect, when formed (as I have often seen it) of two colours, happily and tastefully contrasted. The Salamanca jacket and petticoat, of white or coloured mus-



## 1812 November: Evening Dress

Once again crape is mentioned alongside a very sheer fabric, mull muslin. Mull was the incredibly sheer, and expensive, form of muslin. One other thing to note: this example, as so many others, mentions crape as a fabric used to make elegant, dressy fans.



## 1813 April: Opera Dress

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### PLATE 13. — EVENING OR OPERA DRESS.

A ROUND robe of mull muslin, or **crape**, over satin or sarsnet, with long sleeve and low front, bordered at the bottom and on the bosom with a rich brocade ribband, or embroidery of coloured silks. A patent net neck-kerchief, edged with lace round the throat. A sash of pale Russian flame colour, tied negligently in front of the waist. The hair flat on the sides, and in waved curls in front, divided in the center of the forehead, and confined in full curls at the back of the head, with an apparent stray ringlet fall-

ing on one shoulder. Neck-chain ear-rings, and cross, of blended gold and pearl. A Cossack cloak or mantle, of pale Russian flame coloured cloth, with arched standing collar, finished with a coloured border, corresponding with the dress; lined with white sarsnet, and confined occasionally at the throat with a correspondent cord and tassel. Satin slippers, the colour of the mantle; and gloves, a pale primrose.

### PLATE 14. — PROMENADE OR MORNING COSTUME.

A plain cambric robe, made high in the neck, with plaited fan frill



OPERA DRESS.

## 1813 May: Evening Dress





## 1813 June: Evening or Ball Dress





## 1813 July: Evening or Full Dress Costume



### 1813 August: The Vittoria or Wellington Costume, for Evening Dress

Wellington's name, along with the names of his famous battles, like the Battle of Vittoria/Vittoria" won on 21 June 1813, was used for several fashions including bonnets and this rather stunningly unusual gown.





## 1813 August: Allegorical Wood-Cut etc.

This sample of green crape is named for Wellington. It also shows how sheer these crepes could be—you can see the glue lines through it.

ALLEGORICAL WOOD-CUT, WITH PATTERNS OF BRITISH MANUFACTURE.

No. 1 and 2. A variegated check gingham, for the intermediate order of costume, or for the sea-side trowser or bathing-wrap. Plaitings of net-lace or scalloped flouncings of plain muslin, are best appropriated to dresses of this order.

No. 3. The Wellington colonnade satin **crape** or gauze, which may be had of the proprietors in the varied colours of the season. It is a perfectly novel article, and warranted as to its durability. It is the production of Thomas and Co. silk-mercers, Fleet-street; and

may be purchased (as on par with their novel mode of doing business) at 3s. 6d. per yard; the general price to the fashionable world being 5s. 6d. per yard.

No. 4 is an article decidedly appropriated for gentlemen's waist-coats, and forms an agreeable contrast to the coat of any dark shade. We have seen the summer trowser composed of the article, but we think its glow a little premature. It is sold by its proprietor, Mr. Kesteven, man's-mercier, York-street, Covent-Garden.

**Poetry.**

S O N G,  
*Inscribed by an Irishman to a young Lady, a native of England.*  
Oh! Lady fair, delay awhile,  
Nor yet forsake the Emerald Isle;

For tho' thy native vales are dear,  
A rich reward awaits thee here.—  
The wretch reliev'd from deep distress,  
Thy hallow'd name shall daily bless.—  
Oh! Lady fair, delay a while,  
Nor yet forsake the Emerald Isle.

No. LVI. August, 1813.

**The Repository**  
Of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions, and Politics.  
MANUFACTURERS, Factors, and Dealers in Fancy Goods, that come within the scope of this Plan, are requested to send Patterns of such new Articles.

## 1813 October: Evening Dress

Once again the colorist has done a superb job of showing how the satin underlayer shines through the colored crape. We can also see a glimmer of what will be happening to headdresses and skirt hems: hair (and hats) will go higher while skirt hems will get larger and more ornate.



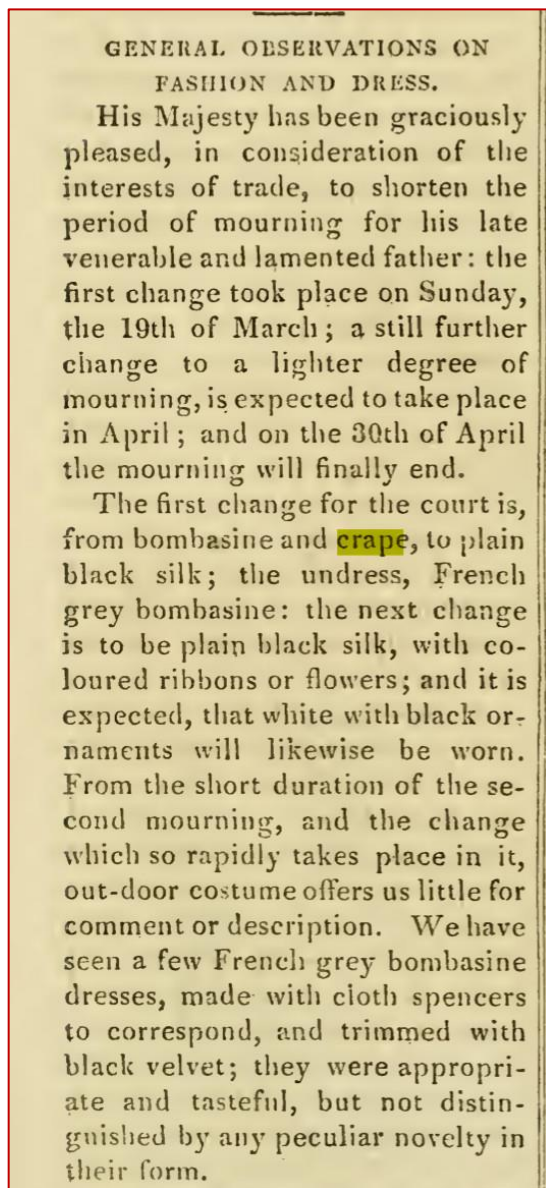
PLATE 27.—EVENING DRESS.

A pea-green **crape** frock, worn over a white gossamer satin slip, with short sleeves of white lace, and waist biased with lace beading; a deep flounce of lace round the feet, headed with silver netting, the bottom of the sleeves and back finished to correspond. Hair in curls and ringlets, confined on the crown of the head, and intermixed with autumnal flowers. Ear-rings and other ornaments of pearl. Gloves of white French kid; and slippers of pea-green satin, trimmed with silver.



## 1820 April: General Observations of Fashion and Dress

A monthly staple of the magazine was the article that described, but did not illustrate, the latest fashions. In the years between 1817 and 1821 there were six royal deaths. Each required mourning to be worn in varying degrees depending on rank. The wording of this article, “considerations of the interests of trade,” is duplicated in many periodicals and shows the importance of the textile and fashion industry. It also shows how specific fabrics were associated with mourning. (Brief notes with more examples of mourning in Ackermann’s can be found at <https://www.uvm.edu/~hag/regency/mourning-ackermanns-1817-1821.html>)



## 1828 May: Evening Dress

Crape is mentioned frequently throughout 1809 to 1828. Skipping to that last year, you can see how, though the fashions have changed quite a bit, the use of crape continued.

