Sylvia Kasey Marks calls *Sir Charles Grandison* “a new species of conduct book,” and, while Richardson’s novel is certainly more than that, it is also true that the novel attempts to educate its readers, precisely in the manner of conduct-book literature. Marks writes:

In many ways *Grandison* harks back to an older aristocratic tradition in which the nature of nobility, the formation of the young man, his education and recreation, and his larger responsibilities to his family and the state were important. At the same time, we see the same emphasis on duty and on the responsibilities one has to one’s superiors, peers, and inferiors found in the conduct books directed toward a more general audience.¹

With such a didactic emphasis, it should come as no surprise that *Grandison*’s treatment of dress also conforms to the conduct-book model, not only in its attention to social aspects of attire, but also in its emphasis on general principles of dress, rather than on specific articles of dress. For instance, *The Spectator*, with its emphasis on the reformation of mores, morals, and manners, similar to conduct-book literature, addressed itself to the “Seeds and Principles of an affected Dress, without descending to the Dress itself.”² Or, in Fordyce’s conduct book, “a lovely Modesty and graceful Simplicity of Apparel” is recommended, though any specific details of dress are avoided.³ In *Grandison*, consistent with conduct-book methodology, only one outfit, Harriet’s masquerade costume, is described in any detail—and this for specific reasons, as will be made evident in a subsequent chapter.

Of all of Richardson’s novels, *Grandison* most fully articulates a comprehensive philosophy of dress, with guidelines, rules, and examples,
a conduct guide and etiquette manual guaranteed to smooth all manner of sartorial and social relations. Sir Charles functions as author of this fashion-based guide to manners and mores, expounding upon fashion’s intricacies and subtleties, philosophizing about its consequences and implications. Harriet and Clementina, earnest proselytes and practitioners both, affirm the wisdom of following such sage, sartorial advice through the general conformity of their own clothing choices to Sir Charles’s fashion-based principles; both demonstrate the ill consequences that attend avoidance or neglect of these tenets through the occasional fashion folly.

In dress, as in every thing, Sir Charles follows “the laws of reason and convenience” (1:137), and the novel’s fashion policy purports to be founded upon these cornerstones of common sense and good taste. As noted in the *Female Spectator*, “In effect, nothing can be called a true taste, that is not regulated by reason, and which does not incline us to what will render us better and wiser.” Singularity in dress is a fashion faux pas, as “Singularity is usually the indication of something wrong in judgment” (3:124). Harriet muses that singularity in dress is “a fault to which great minds are perhaps too often subject” (1:230); however, it also provides evidence of a mind too preoccupied with self, too eccentric, too narrow in perspective. Odd or eccentric dress is impolite, as it demonstrates disdain for societal conventions. Often, such idiosyncrasy stems from “a Sorrowness and Spirit of Contradiction,” and such deliberate avoidance of fashion is often “not sincere,” generating instead from “mere Obstinacy,” or, perhaps, from “Fickleness, or vanity, or ambition.” Sir Charles, of course, avoids singularity in his own dress: As Harriet writes, “he is so much above it” (1:230), possessed of “such an easy, yet manly politeness, as well in his dress, as in his address (no singularity appearing in either)” (1:181). To avoid singularity, fashion should be followed, though not slavishly. Again, Harriet notes, “Something is due to fashion in dress, however absurd that dress might have appeared in the last age (as theirs do to us) or may in the next” (3:100). One should “modernize a little” (1:230). Specifically, one should dress like Sir Charles: “He uses the fashion, without abusing it, or himself, by following it” (2:498). (Singularity in dress differs from uniqueness in dress, as exemplified by Clarissa, in a very specific way: Singular dress means something in the attire appears odd or out-of-place, inconsistent with social custom, time, or place, or incompatible with a person’s age, gender, social station, and more. Clarissa’s clothing sense is unique, in that she does not follow fashion slavishly, and she alters or moderates specific styles to accommodate her own unique person.)