C. FASHION IN 18TH CENTURY ENGLAND AND FRANCE

Let us start by considering dress and adornment in the late C18th. In both England and France very unusual circumstances were developing. First of all in both countries fashion was expanding to embrace a wider group of participants. In England the balance of power had followed wealth in shifting from the monarchy to the landed gentry and merchant classes. This shift had been underway for some time but the expansion of the colonies in the late C18th accelerated this process. Demographic evidence confirms that more and more people were empowered to participate in what might be described as the luxury fashion market.[95] In France as in England, there were a number of

Figure 2-4: The Duchess of Devonshire (by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) from the Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth- Painted in 1787.) wearing the latest in dress (hats with ribbons and feathers and full dress) and hair fashions.

[95] While the total number of families in England grew 72% between 1688 and 1805, the number who were classified as 'Aristocrats' (predominately those with landed estates). increased several hundred percent (over 700%) and the average household income amongst this segment also grew over 50% during the same time. Income among merchants increased over 300% during this same time (See H. Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society,* Routledge, London, 1969. P. 21.)

authors at the time that wrote about the greater influence that non-noble men were having on taste, including Mercier (*Tableau de Paris*), Abbé LeBlanc and even Madam Campan (Marie Antoinette's personal household assistant). Mercier, apparently, even suggested that theatres should stage plays for the masses and not the nobility.[96]

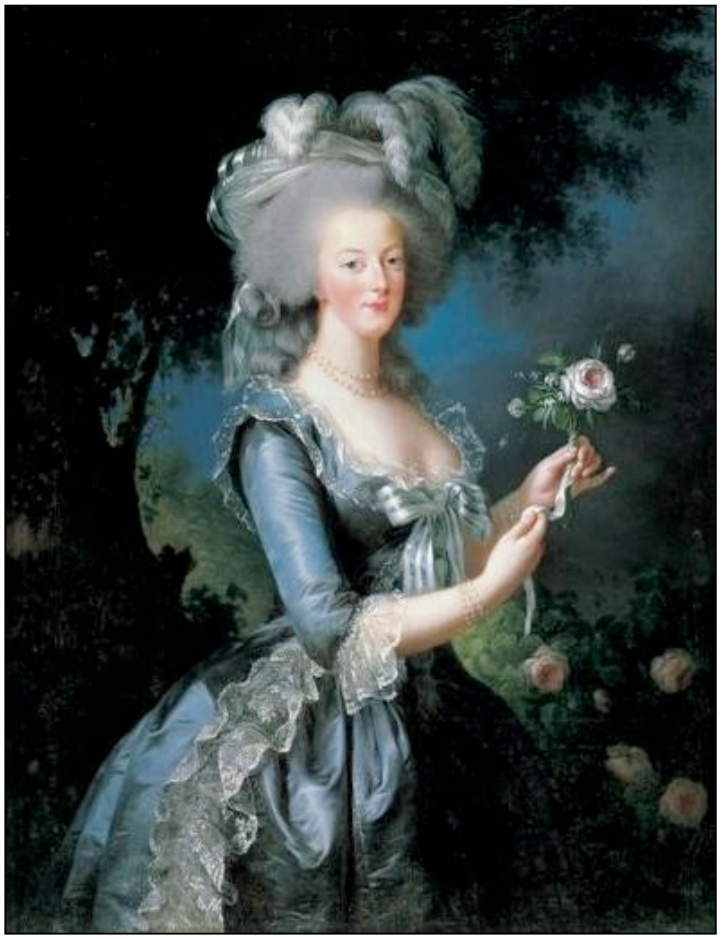

Figure 2-5: *Marie Antoinette à la rose* (1783) painted by Vigée-Lebrun (1755 - 1842) wearing the latest fashions – a variation of the *pouf* hairstyle and feathers and elaborate, full dress.

In England, it is the *absence* of any writing that equates the fashions of the day with the Royal Family (until the Prince Regent, later George IV) that suggests its demographic tendency. In London (the fastest growing city in England and by this time the largest city in Europe) more people were able to afford buying the latest fashions (as we shall see).

To illustrate and to compare the development in fashion in

[96] For a complete discussion of this see: J. Lough, *An Introduction to Eighteenth Century France*, Longmans, Green and Co. LTD, London, 1960, p. 279 - 289.

England and France during this period, two useful figures stand out. In England, for example, there was one person who many saw as the very embodiment of fashion – the Duchess of Devonshire. It should be pointed out that the Duchess of Devonshire, like most 'fashion leaders of the time' was not a designer as such but rather a leader of fashion; others actually were responsible for the designs that she wore and in turn, promoted. In France, this leadership role was provided by Marie Antoinette.

Let us begin with the development of fashion in France. Despite the continuing influence of its Royal family, the number of people who could afford luxury goods was increasing, much like in England. Here it was the result of a growing aristocracy made up of military families and government administrators, as well as a growing population of wealthy businessmen. This was to bring about changes in the way that goods were supplied to this growing consumer base. Discussing the growing luxury markets of C18th France, C. Sargentson notes:

> "*Although most studies of consumption and commercial developments in early modern Europe have looked to Britain as a model of a 'consumer society', historians are beginning to look at consumer behaviour in Paris, particularly within the luxury market place. Whether or not France witnessed a consumer revolution of its own has been debated....However the activities of the mercers during the eighteenth century demonstrate that retailing skills and commercial innovations were becoming integral to the practical organisation of supply and the control and development of demand*"[97]

[97] C. Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth Century Paris*, p. 5.

Now while C. Sargentson notes only that the development of a consumer society was made a *possibility* by such developments, this author will go one step further and argue that there was something developing here in Paris that definitively marks the beginnings of a consumer society. As part of this movement, the French nobility and the more affluent bourgeoisie were beginning to reach beyond the tight control of the French crown for its lead. In his article *Consumption and the World of Ideas: Consumer Revolution and the Moral Economy of the Marquis de Mirabeau,* Kwass similarly argues that France was enjoying a consumer revolution of sorts, even if the Royal family remained the single most prominent family of the day. [98]

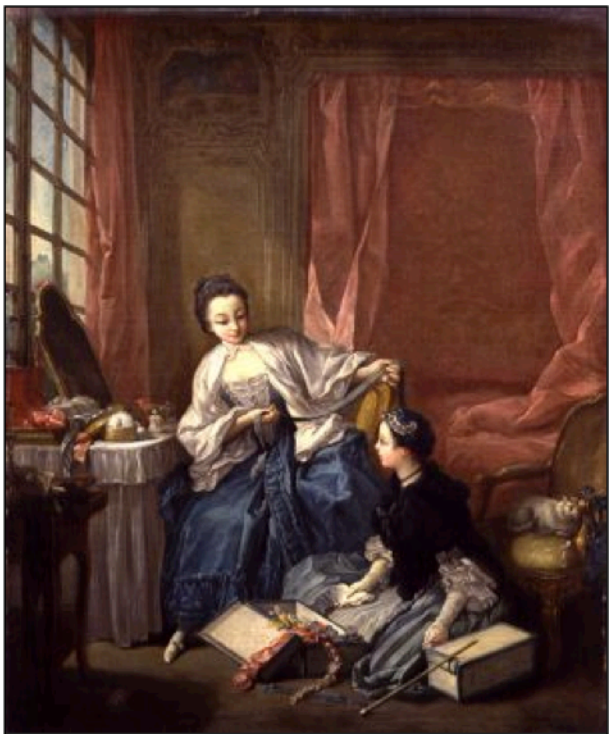

Figure 2-6: The Ribbon Seller or *La Marchande de modes*, by François Boucher in 1746.

In terms of the Royal family, most attention was centred on the Queen – Marie Antoinette. Again, it should be noted that Marie Antoinette was not responsible for the designs she wore, only their selection. However, like the Duchess of Devonshire, by the act of wearing the new fashions she conferred approval and helped launch it across France.[99]

There are several indications that the French luxury trade was expanding and the

[98] To quote Kwass,

> *"…there is no denying that the material world of the French expanded dramatically in the eighteenth century",*

see: M. Kwass, 2004, Consumption and the World of Ideas: Consumer Revolution and the Moral Economy of the Marquis de Mirabeau, *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 187-213.

[99] This could not be illustrated more than by the use of the queen's image in the shops where she was a patron. See for example, the shop of Rose Bertin had a picture of Marie Antoinette as did Madame Eloffe, millner to Marie Antoinette. See: C. Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Pari*s.

shopping experience changing in ways to encourage more people to purchase. We have contemporary descriptions (for example) of how shop premises were changing from the crowded open booths located in central market areas (which were thought to be especially dangerous for women) to enclosed shops where one would be served by the equivalent of a modern day sales clerk or shop keeper (see Figures 2-6 and 2-7). Furthermore, French shop owners also increasingly adopted the English custom of putting displays up behind panes of glass and began to develop a range of displays and signs, to entice and encourage prospective clients to enter and purchase. Prior to this time the wealthy patrons rarely visited shops, instead they ordered clothing made to measure from tailors and dressmakers who would call upon the clients, take fittings in their client's boudoir, make up the clothes back in the workshop and then deliver the finished article to their chambers. The working poor by contrast, bought used clothing or materials for clothes from crammed street markets stalls without the benefit of windows or window displays to separate the act of purchase from the general life in the street.[100]

In addition to the new shops being a more attractive place to visit, an unintended consequence emerged - the process of the opening up of shopping to women.[101] [102]

[100] One interesting attribute of shopping in these crowded market areas involved the use of females (usually the wife or daughter of the stall 'owner') to use flirtation toward male customers in order to generate sales.

[101] J. Jones, Coquettes and Grisettes: Women Buying and Selling in the *Ancien Règime*, in V. de Grazia and E. Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, University of California Press, LA., CA, USA, 1996, pp. 32 – 36 and C. Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Pari*s, pp. 130 -132.

[102] This in itself was causing quite a stir, as there were numerous writings about this being a danger to society and to morals in general. There were also discussions about the perception that women would change the focus of shopping to value more and more new things, of course this too, it was speculated, would lead to disaster. See: J. Jones, Coquettes and Grisettes: Women Buying and Selling in the *Ancien Règime*, in V. de Grazia and E. Furlough, The *Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, pp. 25 -53 who quotes numerous writers of the late C18th who commented on this topic. This even included Rousseau who wrote in his text *Émile* when he noted that he believed that women were more prone to be attracted to visual items *" …from a very early age boys love anything that involves movement and sound whereas little girls love everything visual; mirrors, jewels, cloth, and above all, dolls."*

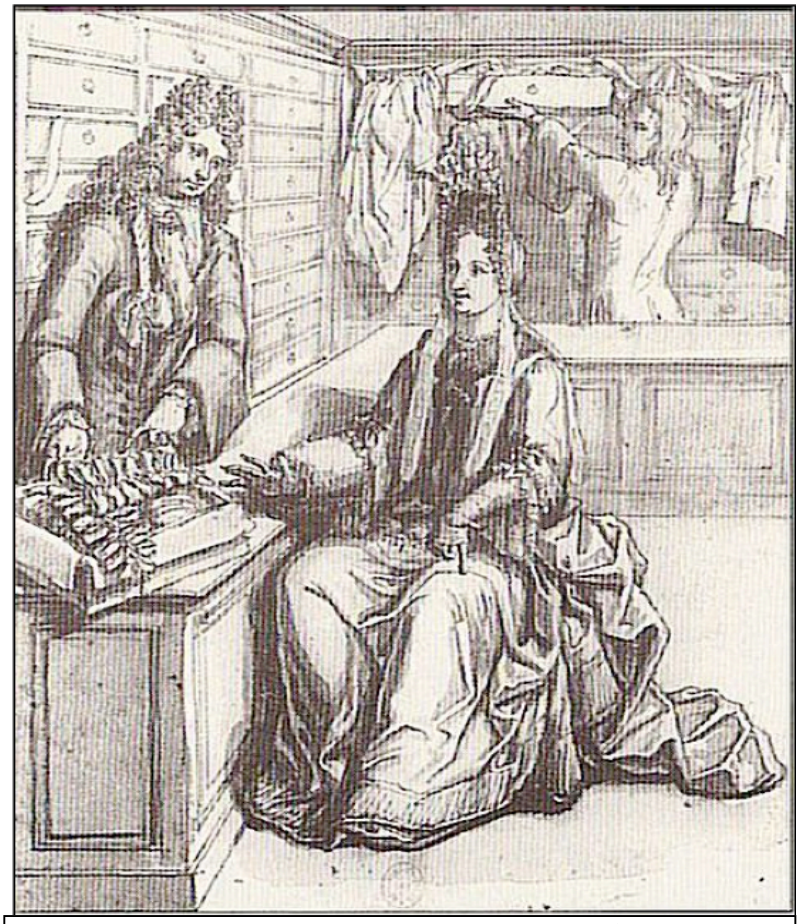

Figure 2-7: *Le Marchand de Rubans*, c. 1700, Etching of a visit to dress makers shop in C18th France.

In terms of impacting furniture, one interesting study by Natacha Coquetry analysed an upholsterer's workshop bills to discover that they did far more than just supply furniture to the elite. In fact, the bills from this shop show that the upholsterer repaired, resold and rented luxury furniture to a much "broader group than previously suspected"[103]. In another study by the same author, ledgers and bills revealed that even though Paris still relied on the patronage of the French court, craftsmen and shopkeepers were well aware of the growing affluence of Paris and invented novelties and launched fashions to enticed new patrons to their shops.[104]

Another indication that France was beginning to democratise is demonstrated by historical studies around the clothes listed in surviving household inventories. Roche (1996) looked at the household inventories of households in at least 100 households per social group (e.g., Nobles, Artisans and shopkeepers, Professionals) in 1700 and 1789 from which he was

[103] N. Coquery, *Fashion, Business, Diffusion: An Upholsterer's Shop in Eighteenth-Century Paris* in D. Goodman, and K. Norberg (eds.), *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture can tell us about the European and American Past*, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 63-79.

[104] N. Coquery, The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris, *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2004, pp. 71-89.

able to arrive at estimates of the relative value of clothing and other non-essential goods owned by different types of households.[105] He came to the following conclusion:

> *"By the end of the ancien règime, everything had changed. For all social groups except the merchant and craft bourgeoisie, wardrobes had increased in value much more rapidly than goods in everyday use and for all without exception, more than average increase in moveable wealth." (Moveable wealth includes all items except land and property, businesses, etc.)*

In Paris, perhaps unsurprisingly, courtesans were to play a vital role in democratising fashion. They would acquire elegant apartments in fashionable areas of town and furnish them in the latest furniture styles. What they adopted, others tried to emulate. In Goddesses of Taste: Courtesans and their Furniture in Late -18th Century Paris (2007) K. Norberg examines the lives of such courtesans and asks us to consider the sale of goods belonging to the courtesan Marie-Anne Deschamps (1730-1764). The auction attracted buyers from many of France's aristocratic families – a measure of her considerable success and evidence of her fashionable status. To the courtesan, furniture was very important:

> *"It was what stood between them and sordid prostitution - to have furniture (être dans ses meubles) was to be above a miserable streetwalker to be free of rooming house, brothel and madam."*[106]

In connection to this thesis, it is particularly interesting to note how the *secrétaire* was the piece of furniture that became '*de rigueur*'. First and foremost it met the need for security of documents; a courtesan needed a place to keep track of her appointments and letters from her clients AND she needed to be able to keep these locked away from others. The *secrétaire* with its multilevel locks (locks for the door as well as the individual drawers on

[105] D. Roche and J. Birrell (Translated by J. Birrell), *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Régime*, p. 108.
[106] K. Norberg, Goddess of Taste: The Courtesans and their Furniture in Late Eighteenth Century Paris in D. Goodman and K. Norberg (eds.), *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture can tell us about the European and American Past*, p. 97-114.

Figure 2-8: *Mademoiselle Rose Bertin* by *Jean-Francios Janinet* 1752-1814. This watercolour was painted around 1780 based on etchings.

many secretaries) fulfilled this need. This is an area that will be explored in much more detail later (See p. 277). [107]

This was also a period which saw the emergence of a new fashion press. One of the first journals dedicated entirely to the reporting of fashion, the *Cabinet de Modes*, began its publication in 1785. Not only did the magazine carry advertising for local fashion merchants but commented on fashion and the shifting market.[108]

Further evidence of the changing cultural scene emerges from the story of Marie Antoinette's dressmaker, Rose Bertin. Marie-Jeanne Rose Bertin (1747 - 1813) was the official *milliner* and *modiste to* Queen Marie Antoinette. However, she was much more and many claim that she was the first true French fashion designer and credited her with having brought fashion and *haute couture* to the attention of the wider public. In any event, she appears to be representative of one of a new social groups for whom fashions was all consuming. As the Queen's modiste, she found it easy to sell her designs to other women through her shop on rue *Saint-Honoré*. In fact, this was a woman who grew up in relatively poor surroundings, yet felt empowered enough to be confident in handling her aristocratic

[107] D. Goodman, The Secrétaire and the Integration of Eighteenth Century Self in D. Goodman and K. Norberg (eds.), *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture can tell us about the European and American Past*, pp. 183-201. In this text, Goodman makes the comparison between a *secrétaire* and a modern day laptop. The *secrétaire* was considered modern for its day, it's main function was to act as a station to write and store personal letters and administrative records such as calendars, it was considered a very personal object, and last but not least it was private. All of these characteristics can also be said of the laptop.

[108] C. Crowston, The Queen and her 'Minister of Fashion': Gender, Credit and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France, *Gender & History,* Vol. 14, No. 1, 2002, pp. 92-116.

clients – perhaps overly so, making enemies along the way. [109] As Baronne d'Oberkirch was to on news of Bertin's later bankruptcy:

> *"The empire of fashion is experiencing a great cataclysm. Mademoiselle Bertin, so proud, so high, so insolent even, who worked with Her Majesty, Mademoiselle Bertin displaying on her bills in large letters: Fashion merchant to the queen: Mademoiselle Bertin has just gone bankrupt. It is true that her bankruptcy is not at all plebeian, it is the bankruptcy of a great lady, two million!... We are assured that Mademoiselle Bertin will cede to all the tears and continue her business."* [110]

This statement illustrates three interesting points concerning Mademoiselle Bertin: firstly she was important enough for the Baronne to write about her; secondly, the statement indicates something of the level of resentment that some of the aristocracy felt about women like Bertin who has risen so dramatically through the social rankings; and lastly, this statement offers evidence of Bertin's unassailable sense of confidence in her fashionable credentials and the status it afforded her.[111]

The shop that Bertin had on the elegant *Rue Saint-Honoré* was exotically named *Le Grand Mogol*. Her boutique had large windows filled with all sorts of enticing displays. As Caroline Weber notes, the windows of Le Grand Mogol were spectacular:

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[109] There are many stories, which tell of Rose Bertin's rather strong attitude taken when dealing with her clients. For a few examples see: S. Zweig, (Translated by C. Paul and E. Paul) *Marie Antoinette*, Cassell & Company, LTD., London, 1952., C. Guennec, *La modiste de la reine,* Jean Claude Lates, Paris, 2004., Mémoirres de la Baronne d'Oberkirch (Paris, 1869), quoted in A. Latour, *Les Magiciens de la mode*, R. Julliard, Paris, 1961 and É. Langlade, (Translated by A. Rapport), *Rose Bertin: The Creator of Fashion at the Court of Marie Antoinette,* John Long, Limited, London, 1913.

[110] C. Crowston, was quoting Baronne d'Oberkirch, S. Burkard, (ed.), Baronne d'Oberkirch, Memories de la Baronne d'Oberkirch sur la cour de Louis XVI et la Société Française avant 1789, *Mercure de France,* Paris 1989, p. 187 which was quoted in C. Crowston, The Queen and her 'Minister of Fashion': Gender, Credit and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France, pp. 92-116.

[111] This arrogance is reminiscent of the English Neo-Classical fashion leader, Brummel who would enter the English fashion world later in the C18th. As part of his being a fashion leader, Brummel took it upon himself to be hyper critical of many of those around him. And although Brummel did not own a shop or sell goods and he was slightly later he, through his displays of fashions and insistent upon a particular approach to dress promoted certain clothiers in the fashionable shopping areas of London. (See I. Kelly, *Beau Brummell: The Ultimate Dandy*, Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., London, 2005.

"…with their artistic arrangements of bonnets, shawls, fans, spangles, furbelows, silk flowers, gemstones, laces and other accessories … (they) set up a bewitching siren's song." Potential customers were ushered through the door by a liveried footman and upon entering, "found themselves in a setting as luxurious as an aristocrat's salon: gilded mouldings adorned the ceilings, full-length mirrors and fine oil paintings hung on the walls, and expensive furniture was scattered about among the piles of damasks, silks, brocades and baubles" …" [112] [113]

And what do we know of Bertin's sense of fashion and her source of inspiration? We know that she worked with Marie Antoinette two days a week and that she presented new fashions to the Queen on these occasions. While it is clear that Marie Antoinette at the very least encouraged Mademoiselle Bertin, it is impossible to determine if the Queen suggested specific ideas to her or whether they ever discussed design in any way. Three observations suggest that she did not. Firstly, several sources suggest that Marie Antoinette considered herself a foreigner who needed to prove her 'Frenchness' and in order to do that she needed to emulate the French style and listen to those like Bertin who were considered 'expert' in the field. Secondly, a description of the change that took place when Marie Antoinette was introduced to Rose Bertin and to her hairdresser Léonard by Marie Antoinettes's lady-in-waiting Madam Campan, suggest a shift from a simpler taste to that of greater elaboration and exaggeration:

"Up to this time the Queen had shown very plain taste in dress; she now began to make it a principal occupation; and she was of course imitated by other women."[114]

Interestingly enough, Madame Campan goes so far as to suggest that this change in style was the cause of Marie Antoinette's eventual downfall:

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[112] C. Weber, Queen *of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*, Henry Holt & Co., NY, 2006.
[113] This description anticipates the development of the *Bon Marché* that was to open in the C19th. It seems that the *magasins de nouveautes,* of which the *Bon Marché* was the first example, started with many of the same ideas that Rose Bertin used in setting up her small store. See S. Bayley, (ed and author), *Commerce and culture : from pre-industrial art to post-industrial value*, Fourth Estate, London, 1989 pp. 45-60.
[114] This eBook of "Memoirs of Marie Antoinette" (Part A, also see Part B) by *Madame Campan* belongs to the public domain. http://www.authorama.com/memoirs-of-marie-antoinette-7.html. Accessed on 17-07-2008.

> *"All wished instantly to have the same dress as the Queen, and to wear the feathers and flowers to which her beauty, then in its brilliancy, lent an indescribable charm. The expenditure of the younger ladies was necessarily much increased; mothers and husbands murmured at it; some few giddy women contracted debts; unpleasant domestic scenes occurred; in many families coldness or quarrels arose; and the general report was,--that the Queen would be the ruin of all the French ladies."*[115]

And lastly, neither biographers of Mademoiselle Bertin nor the 'remembrances' of Marie Antoinette's hairdresser *Léonard Autie* mentions any input from the queen herself. [116]

If Madam Campan was right in suggesting Marie Antoinette's fashion makeover (to use a current term) may have been instrumental in the queen's political problems then no doubt the hair style that Marie Antoinette became famous for wearing played a significant role. [117] This hair style was known as '*la pouf*' and involved combing the hair up and adding extensions wound around a frame intended to create height. Following this the hair was usually then decorated with feathers, jewels or pieces of cloth or in relation to a special event or particular occasion.[118] Ironically, both Bertin and of Léonard sought to take credit for developing this exaggerated hairstyle that was to become so instantly popular and later

[115] Léonard Autie was probably born about 1746 most likely in the south of France. He first worked on Marie Antoinette's hair in 1774, but was assigned officially to be the hairdresser to the then Archduchess Marie Antoinette in 1779 and continued in this capacity until the flight of the royal family which terminated by the arrest of Louis XVI at *Varennes*, June 22, 1791. See L. Autie, (Translated by E. Meras) *Recollections of Léonard – Hairdresser to Queen Marie Antoinette*, Greening and Co., LTD, London, 1912.

[116] L. Autie (Translated by E. Meras) *Recollections of Léonard – Hairdresser to Queen Marie Antoinette*.

[117] It should be noted that C. Weber, in *Queen of Fashion,* argues that Marie Antoinette <u>*was*</u> orchestrating a very delicate PR campaign through her fashion. While many specific situations appear logical (e.g., wearing masculine hunting clothing and having herself painted in this hunting gear while on horseback in a similar fashion to Louis XIV, could have easily been an attempt to display her strength), she does not offer any suggestions that this was Marie Antoinette's reasoning besides through the reactions of the French people. At no time does Weber provide letters or any 'proof' that Marie Antoinette had a strategy behind her fashion choices. One could easily argue that if there was a plan it was not done very well as this became a symbol of the excesses of the court (Much like the use of private jets has become a symbol of the excesses of investment bankers in the US.) (See: C. Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*)

[118] For example, Marie Antoinette's *pouf* was especially decorated following the death of Louis XV in the same year that Léonard arrived. This design was designated a *coiffuer allégorique* and it included a miniature cypress tree on one side (mourning for Louis XV) and a cornucopia on the other (hope for the new reign). Later to celebrate the completion of the American war of Independence Marie Antoinette sported the *pouf à la victorie* and later to announce winning a battle with a British ship, the *Arethusa*, the *coiffure à l'Indépendance ou le Triomphe de la Liberté* was worn.

so vilified.[119] Considering that both of these documents were written after the fall of the queen, one would have thought that both would have sought to distance themselves from the creation of the device that became symbolic of the excesses of the royal family – but such is the power of fashion.

On his first creating the style for the Queen, Léonard was to write:

> *"The dauphine.....has a head seventy-two punces [120] tall from the bottom of her chin to the summit of her coiffure....My happy ideas were realized, the pyramidal coiffure of Marie Antoinette created a sensation at the Opera. People crushed each other in the parterre.... to see this masterpiece of learned audacity"*[121]

Léonard never suggested that Marie Antoinette offered ideas (However, neither did he mention Rose Bertin, except in passing and we learned from other accounts that Rose Bertin did have an influence on the designs of the poufs). However, it appears the Queen did charge them to produce something dramatic and was a willing accomplice in their endeavours and happy to wear their creations, enabling her to set the fashion.

In terms of the fashion, no single style emerges. At one time Marie Antoinette wore the most elaborate of fashions (thanks in part to the efforts of her hair stylist and dress maker) and at other times she displayed very simple tastes (the garden and cotton muslin dress she wore at Petit Trianon, the embrace of the Neo-Classical style, etc.). As she moved back and forth between these two modes, it suggests that she did not have a specific image that she was trying to portray. However, it does point to this also being a time of flux between the two opposing modes of fashion, as well as the idea of fashion becoming more diverse and more 'democratic'. This dichotomy is neatly reflected in contemporary debate; while some

[119] It should be noted that upon reading the *Recollections of Léonard – Hairdresser to Queen Marie Antoinette,* the impression is that Léonard is prone to exaggerate his importance in the activities surrounding the creations of Marie Antoinette's hair fashions as he contradicts several other observers and in all cases he is the person who made the decisions.
[120] Approximately one inch equals a *pouce*.
[121] A. Castelot, *Journal Intime De Léonard, Coiffeur De Marie-Antoinette ,* Sfelt, Paris, 1950, pp. 119-122.

like Rousseau wrote of the virtues of the simple life [122], others, like Jean-François Melon talked of the virtues of luxury which provided employment for struggling artists and craftsmen.[123] In any event, this debate seems to offer further evidence of the society of consumption that was beginning to emerge in C18th France. However, this question of consumption is (clearly) one that needs further comment.

It is interesting to note at this point of this debate that the issues that Marie Antoinette have concern, in this case hair and clothing. While there are also stories of Marie Antoinette also taking an interest in music and theatre, there are few mentions of her taking such an interest in furniture design or architecture. While this leaves the relationship between Marie Antoinette and her furniture makers unclear, it is safe to assume that she had a greater interest in fashions that relate to her adornment and music than she had toward furniture and architecture (a situation which we see change under the Empress Josephine).

[122] Rousseau being a leading voice on this side of the argument - Rousseau in his writings actually discusses the act of disposing of his luxury items and how much happier it made him. *Émile* is one book that discusses his ideas about simplifying life.

[123] See J. Jennings, 2007, The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century French Political Thought, *Journal of the History of Ideas,* Vol 68, No. 1, pp. 79-107, for a complete review of the discussion on this matter as it played out in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries in France.

In both England and France, there was an increased awareness of the issues surrounding what Veblen would later call '*conspicuous consumption'*.[124] Both countries were being acclimatised to wealth and consumption by its texts like Adam Smith's (1723–1790) *Wealth of Nations* which articulated the positive connection between democracy and the pursuit of wealth. However there was also some disagreement concerning the morality of such consumption (Rousseau advocating the virtues of restraint and Melon taking the opposing view). Prior to this period, dress was strictly regulated by class and position in both French and English society. In part this was probably because the aristocrats wanted to make sure they were differentiated from the lower classes. As S. Kroen suggests, consumption had hitherto been restricted to a small elite headed by the king. In both England and France (and the U.S.A.) there were sumptuary laws which restricted the sale of certain goods to the middle classes.[125] However, as the writings of authors like Rousseau and Smith demonstrate, by the middle of the C18th,

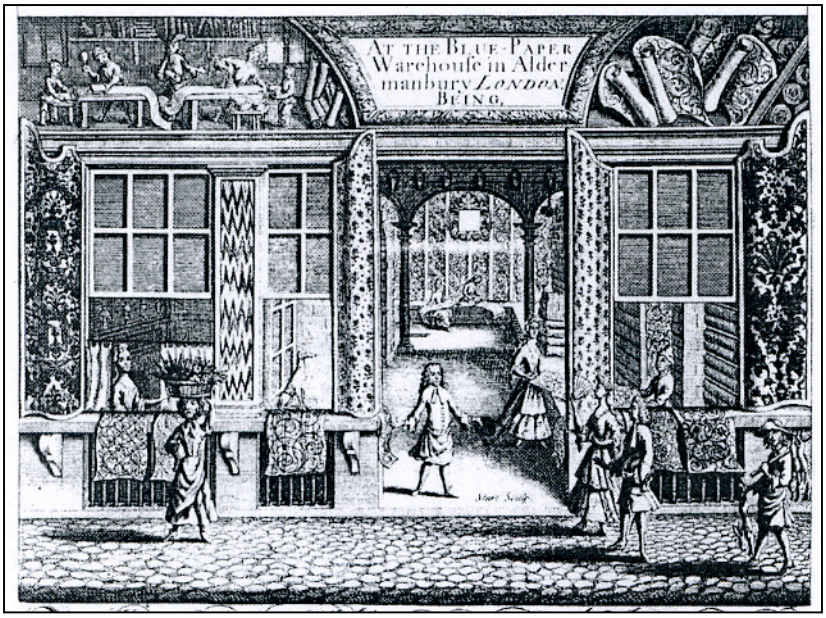

Figure 2-9: Trade Card for Abraham Price another wallpaper seller showing the street in front of his shop in London, 1715.

[124] T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

[125] S. Kroen, S. Historiographical Reviews: A Political History of the Consumer, *The Historical Journal*, Vol 47, No. 3, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 712-713.
While there was consumption by the very limited ruling families in England and especially France before the late C18th that this thesis concerns, it did not spread far from this group. S. Kroen describes it thus:

> *"This system …based on politeness and restraint, that required new possessions such as silverware, hankies and under garments; sumptuary laws restricted such civilized consumption to a narrow, hereditary, social class and thereby regulated consumption to conform to a set of pre-existing norms defining a static and highly differentiated social order. Courtly consumption furthermore represented a way of ruling because it demanded the ruinous spending of elites at court or in their own chateaux,*

wealth had begun to accumulate and such laws seemed increasingly irrelevant in a prospering and upwardly mobile society for whom luxury was ever more affordable and increasingly desirable. In England the aristocracy was being increasingly overtaken by a thriving entrepreneurial class who were making fortunes in trade with the 'new world':

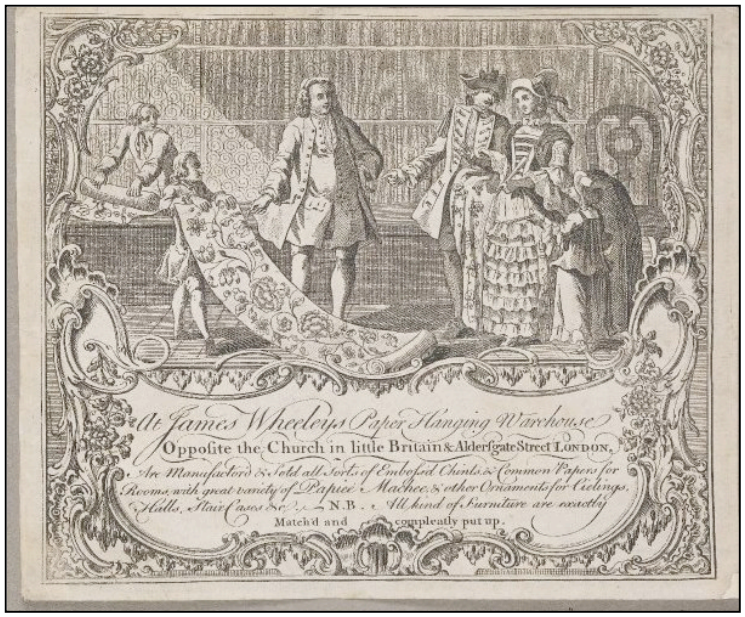

Figure 2-10: Trade card of James Wheeley, wallpaper manufacturer and merchant showing the inside of the shop. Note the similarity to the French drawing shown earlier.

"There was a consumer revolution in eighteenth-century England. More men and women than ever before in human history enjoyed the experience of acquiring material possessions. Objects which for centuries had been the privileged possessions of the rich came, within the space of a few generations to be within the reach of a larger part of society than ever before, and, for the first time, to be within the legitimate aspirations of almost all of it." [126]

Of course, there were critics like Mandeville (1670-1733) who took a different view when he observed, somewhat sarcastically:

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according to fashions emanating from one undisputed centre, the royal court, with one arbiter of taste, the sovereign."

All of this was changing and the late C18th was the time when this was making its most dramatic shift from this top down diffusion model of fashion to a more diverse diffusion mechanism for fashion.
See also L. Brekke, The "Scourge of Fashion": Political Economy and the Politics of Consumption in the Early Republic, *Early American Studies,* Spring, 2005, pp. 111-114.

Another excellent discussion of the debate surrounding the increased consumption of luxury goods that occurred in the C18th can be found in the first chapter of M. Berg and E. Eger (eds.), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, Palgrave, London, UK, 2002 entitled The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates and written by the editors M. Berg and E. Eger.

[126] See N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. Plumb, *The Birth of the Consumer Society*, Europa Publications, LTD., London, 1982, p. 1.

"People...are generally honourèd according to their Clothes... from the richness of them we judge their Wealth.... It is this which encourages every Body, who is conscious of his little Merit, if he is any ways able , to wear Clothes above his Rank." [127]

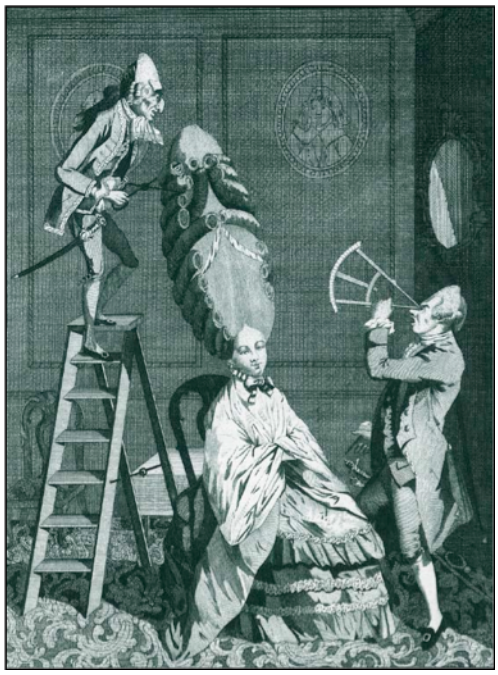

Figure 2-11: Making fun of the lengths that people went to be part of a fashionable society. Mathew or Mary Darly, British, *The Ridiculous Taste Or the Ladies* Absurdity, ca. 1771.

This, like the writing of Melon, in France, stirred up opposition based on the threat to the social orders or on moral grounds.

While the trend was toward a more democratic approach to fashion, the wealthy continued to lead the way with massive spending on houses as might be witnessed by the prosperity of firms like Adam & Co. and Wedgwood and the elegant offerings of catalogues supplied by Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton. Without a doubt, England was growing exponentially in terms of its wealth and was beginning to exhibit all the signs of a society of consumption of the kind we have come to associate with the late C20th.

The C18th for example saw an ever-increasing number of shops in London and other major urban areas as well as new types of stores with storefront displays, business cards and other advertisements (see Figures 2-9 and 2-10). Retail developed and the latest fashion became the goal of every shopper. As with France, by the end of the C18th the experience of shopping had completely changed as open-air markets booths and street sellers, were eclipsed by elegant new shop premises replete with enticing window displays. [128] This was paralleled by a shift on the part of the new shop owners who rather than occupy the same premises, commissioned separate domestic residences, allowing them to make their

[127] B. Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F. B. Kaye, Oxford, 1924, p. 127, Quoted in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. Plumb, *The Birth of the Consumer Society*, p 52.
[128] E. Kowaleski-Wallace, Consuming *Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997.

businesses more focused and more efficient.[129] While there are some who mark the start of the 'consumer revolution' with the advent of the department store (like the *Bon Marché* in Paris for example) and mass advertising (See for example Jeffrey (1954) and Miller (1981)[130]) there is strong evidence that the foundation of this new culture was established in late C18th England and France. Mui and Mui's *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth Century England* show for example how the street market or the itinerant traders had been overtaken by the shops[131]. Furthermore both N. Mckendrick[132] and C. Walsh[133] point to changes in shop designs, the use of trade cards and other promotional devices as evidence that the 'consumer revolution' had already started. Such trade cards clearly show how shopping was beginning to take on the characteristics familiar in modern consumer stores, even if working class markets were still of the open air types which still occasionally survives today with their more rudimentary displays.

Thus, in England, like France, the market was developing towards established shops with window displays, trade cards and advertisements in the local papers. In fact, as pointed out earlier, England was providing France with some ideas about how to create these new shopping experiences. Shopping was also changing as an activity from a "mere exchange point of goods for money"[134] where there was little effort to promote and goods simply "sold themselves".[135] It was becoming a social activity especially among the women.[136] [137]

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[129] One example that was given to support this was that the children did not interrupt business in order to take the trash out. See E. Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 80.

[130] J. Jeffrey, *Retail Trading in Britain 1850-1950*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1954.
M. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France,* University of California Press, 1982.

[131] L. Mui and H. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth Century, England,* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1989.

[132] N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. Plumb, The *Birth of the Consumer Society*.

[133] C. Walsh, Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London, *Journal of Design History*, 8.3, 1995, pp. 157–176.

[134] C. Walsh, Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London, pp. 157.

[135] C. Walsh, Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London, p. 157.

[136] C. Walsh, Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London, pp. 171.

[137] It was also becoming a fashion for ladies to visit the workshops of the craftsmen. One example of visiting the workshops of craftsmen are provided in the journals of Sophie Von La Roche who visited Seddon's furniture workshop as reported in G. Christopher and L. Wood, Sophie Von La Roche at Seddon's, *Furniture History,* Vol 33, pp. 31-34. Another example is Lady Shelburne's diary that gives a description of Zucchi's

It was during this time that Georgina Duchess of Devonshire was making her mark on the world of English fashions. She was one of those described by Berg, M. in her book *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* of whom she observed:

> *"The elites converted their country residences or built new ones; the interiors were revamped according to the latest fashions. New housing for the wealthy in the crescents, lanes and avenues of London's West End, or housing for the industrious trades people of London's Clerkenwell and Spitalfields or Birmingham's Colemore Row and New Street meant new interior spaces to be furnished. The streets were new public spaces with paving and shops."*[138]

Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire lived in a country estate that was fitted out in the latest Neo-Classical fashion. She commuted to her town house in the West End and took advantage shops that were proliferating in London during this time. Always at the forefront of fashion, Georgiana sometimes took her cues from her friend Marie Antoinette and in April 1775 she took hair fashion in England (literally) to new heights by simply piling it on her head in a three-foot *pouf* – Marie Antoinette style. This was assembled by adding pads of horsehair to her own using a scented pomade to stick the confection together and hoist it aloft. According to Forman, this was decorated variously with sailing ships, stuffed birds or waxed fruit. On at least one occasion she decorated it with a pastoral setting of trees and sheep! This inspired others to imitate her - "*the Duchess of Devonshire is the most envied woman of the day in the ton"* the morning post reported.[139]

Another fashionable innovation introduced to England by the Duchess was the four-foot long ostrich feather (given to her by the French Ambassador) that she attached in a wide arch across the front of her hair. This detail became a sensation in England - little wonder that many have subsequently drawn comparisons between the Duchess and the more

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plaster workshops as well as that of the furniture makers Ince and Mayhew. See E. Harris, *Furniture of Robert Adam*, A. Tiranti, London, 1963, p. 27.

[138] M. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 247.

[139] A Quote from the Friday, 7 April, 1775 edition of the *Morning Post* found in A. Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire,* Harper-Collins, London, 1998, p. 37.

modern Diana Spencer. Still another innovation first presented to the English by the Duchess, was the muslin gown called *la chemise à la reine.*[140] Again, this was an innovation first introduced by Marie Antoinette but Georgiana was the one to introduce it to England and the one from whom the rest of English society took their cue.

Like Marie Antoinette, Georgiana was the focus of numerous newspaper articles (sometimes supporting her, sometimes critical of her behaviour) indicating the influence she had over society. [141] However, while the Duchess of Devonshire was considered a fashion leader in England, she was not wholly responsible for the fashionable ideas that she introduced. As we have seen two ideas came directly from her friend in France – Marie Antoinette. The two of them shared interests in dress and fashion and they frequently communicated with each other[142].

Despite Georgina's deference toward Marie Antoinette, there were two factors that suggested that France was less advanced in terms of its consumerism, relative to England. First of all, it appears that in France, there was a great separation between the wealthy and the poorer classes of society.[143] France was a society in which "*you go at once from beggary to profusion*".[144] In England the situation was different; society was more equitable and wealth more democratic. Without a doubt what contributed to this was the fantastic growth in London's population, especially relative to Paris's population changes. At this point in time only 2.5% of Frances population lived in Paris, a percentage which remained fairly constant from 1650 to 1800. In London, on the other hand, the proportion of England's overall population grew from 7% to 11%. In addition to this, many more were exposed to London society and an estimated 5% of the population outside of London visited

[140] A. Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire,* Harper-Collins, London, 1998, p. 176.
[141] A. Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*.
[142] A. Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire, pp. 40-41, 70*
[143] Most suggest that there were three distinct groups in French society at the time (excluding the Royal family which rose above all others) these were: the Nobles (made up of government office holders/ministers and the military leaders), and the Church and everyone else. See M. Bartholomew, D. Hall and A. Lentin, *The Enlightenment*, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK., 1992 PP 417- 426.
[144] N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. Plumb, *The Birth of the Consumer Society*, p. 20.

it at some point.[145] In their article, *Sites of Consumption: The Display of Goods in Provincial Shops in Eighteenth-Century England*, A. Hann and J. Stobart also argue that throughout England (in rural small towns, as well as large cities like Bristol) attractive new stores were opening up to cater for the increasing material aspirations of a prospering nation.[146]

However, although England was probably further ahead in the creation of a consumer society which regarded fashion as an extremely important activity, France was not far behind. Each had its fashion leaders, both were developing new types of shops that catered for the followers of fashion. These shops were developing the kind of marketing techniques with which we are now all too familiar. As a result, more and more people were drawn into the fashion's increasingly democratic empire.

D. Fashionable Furniture

To look at the furniture fashions of the late C18th, we need to understand something about the history of furniture styles and the approaches to making furniture. Following this will be a discussion around the Neo-Classical style that emerged as the preferred style in the late C18th.

Emerging from the Middle Ages, furniture in both England and France went through a series of changes, reflecting the perceived needs, skill sets and fashions of the day. To begin with there was probably no real concept of style or fashion when it came to furniture for most people.[147]

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[145] N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. Plumb, *The Birth of the Consumer Society*, pp.20-21.

[146] A. Hann and J. Stobart, Sites of Consumption: The Display of Goods in Provincial Shops in Eighteenth-Century England, *Cultural and Social History*, Volume 2, Number 2, 2005, pp. 165-188.

[147] This is not to say that the furniture was devoid of design or decoration. However, this only suggests that it was not as strong of a focus of the furniture make's attention. Furthermore, the viewpoint that it was constructional suggests that there was little effort to hide the constructional elements. Dovetail joints were visible, dowels that held pieces in their place were visible, hinges were clearly visible, etc. In fact, in many cases, the constructional elements were made part of the decoration. The decorative elements usually took the form of carvings and paintings, and sometimes inlay work.