

Even for elite groups, fashions in furniture were very limited as much of the furniture was purely functional. In both countries, most furniture was made by local carpenters, using only materials and tools that were close at hand.¹⁴⁸ Furniture was simple, often making use of a boarded construction. Beds, for example, were frequently made as part of the building structure –and completely enclosed almost like small private rooms. Similarly chairs and benches were frequently incorporated within the walls or doors.¹⁴⁹ H. Cescinsky, in the introduction to *English Furniture of the Eighteenth Century* described this early furniture as ‘constructional’ in that how it was made was readily apparent and few attempts were made to hide the tenon and pegged joints that were employed in the construction of most furniture.¹⁵⁰

Much of the furniture used by the Royal families in both countries tended to be equally basic in its construction and designs. The decoration leaned toward the use of carving and inlay, frequently with different materials such as ivory, stones or marble.

During the second half of the C15th, the use of these simple structures started to be replaced by joined construction techniques using mortise-and tenon joints; which marked the beginning of the development of a range of technologies that were to allow for the making of more complex and more fashionable furniture in the C18th. For example the use of veneers was ‘rediscovered’ in the middle of the C17th and the use of the wood as a decorative element became more important. As technologies improved and became more complex, so did the skills that were needed. During this period of increased complexity there was a need for a separation of the skills. From the carpenter emerged, the turner, the cabinetmaker, the joiner, the carver, and the upholsterer.¹⁵¹ Also during this time more and more materials were coming from the newly explored areas such as the Americas, Asia

¹⁴⁸ For example in France the furniture makers were part of the wood-workers guilds before the C13th. During 1290, these were split into two sets, the carpenters and the *huchiers* (Chest makers) L. Auslander, *Taste and Power, Furnishing Modern France*, p. 78.

¹⁴⁹ J. Cloag, *A Social History of Furniture Design; from B.C. 1300 to A.D. 1960*, Cassell, London, 1966, pp. 2 – 3.

¹⁵⁰ H. Cescinsky, *English Furniture of the Eighteenth Century*, George Sadler & Company, Limited, London, 1909.

¹⁵¹ J. Cloag, *A Social History of Furniture Design; from B.C. 1300 to A.D. 1960*, p. 16.

and Africa. Thus, the craftsmanship to make furniture with different kinds of joints and to piece together more complex structures, as well as the availability of a greater variety of materials from other countries, set the stage for the creation of more fashionable pieces of furniture.

Other changes were also occurring that would allow for greater attention being paid to furniture. Society, and in particular the ruling elite were becoming more stable.¹⁵² It became more practical to own larger pieces of furniture that were more decorative and more complicated, to meet their changing needs. For example Instead of portable X frame chairs, more comfortable chairs with cushions emerged. There was a greater need for permanent storage – as a result wardrobes, and later commodes or chest of drawers were developed.

As furniture became more sophisticated, it also began to reflect a range of design influences.¹⁵³ Most of these influences were derived from the architectural styles of the day, beginning with the Gothic.¹⁵⁴ However, by the C18th, the major shifts seemed to be away from the Gothic and increasingly towards classically influenced design.¹⁵⁵

In terms of furniture, decoration became increasingly sophisticated and made increasing use of inlay and marquetry work and the refined methods that were to reach their apotheosis in the late C18th. Joints became more discrete. Materials would change and

¹⁵² During medieval times noble families were required to travel frequently from place to place in order to rule their territories. Thus much of the “furniture” that was made was designed to be carried from location to location (cases, writing boxes, folding chairs, etc.). This is why the French, Italian and German words for furniture are related to the same root word as ‘mobile’ (for example in French the word for furniture is *meubles*) because they were to be moved from place to place. Examples of these include the folding “x frame” chairs, chests with locks, and portable writing tables.

¹⁵³ There were differences in how furniture fashions were operationalized. Primarily these differences were driven by the very limited group of people who could afford to consider this luxury. Given this limited population to buy the furniture, there was no real system for making and selling furniture to a larger population. For example, there were no stores with displays, or people designing furniture catalogues.

¹⁵⁴ See J. Morley, *The History of Furniture*, Little Brown & Company, London, 1999.

¹⁵⁵ J. Morley, *The History of Furniture*, 1999.

More specifically, starting with the Middle Ages; furniture designs were to move from Byzantine, to the Gothic design, early Italian Renaissance, Baroque, and finally into the classical styles, followed by Rococo and finally Neo-Classical.

timbers become more diverse, making use of exotic woods like mahogany, black walnut, ebony, satinwood and tulipwood; imported from the far east, Africa and America. England would begin to import a better quality oak and deal from Europe then it would start importing from other parts of the world. The growing sophistication of European society saw furniture types expanded from simple tables, chairs, and chests/boxes for storage to include a much broader range of tables and chairs, a much greater variety of upholstery and an increased choice of cabinets and cupboards with more and more complexities in their design and function.

When did furniture begin to become fashionable in a way we might recognise today? As one might imagine, there is no definitive answer to this question. As some fashion theorists argue, there were probably always elements of 'fashion' present but not its broad application. Nor did the infrastructure needed for fashions to circulate amongst a broader population exist. However, even in earlier times, there were recognisably different design influences at play; some (inter)national, some local. Further, there were centres of influence - the royal courts and (to a lesser extent) ecclesiastical courts. While this is all very general, what we do know is that the period from the late C17th to the late C18th saw a remarkable growth of wealth across society that was to result in a sea change in the way people purchased furniture and came to think of it in terms other than utility – of being fashionable in and of itself.

As noted above, the way people shopped became a great deal more sophisticated and there was an increase in the number of people involved in the making and buying of luxury furniture. Clearly, a much broader group became involved in the promotion (to use a more modern word) of furniture styles. One significant step in the development of furniture as a fashionable product was the introduction of books on the subject - 1737 marking the date of the first known text.¹⁵⁶ Written by the architect Jean-François Blondel in France and titled *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance et de la decoration des edifices en general*,

¹⁵⁶ Literally this translates to “the distribution of country houses and decoration of buildings in general” but essentially this was about the decoration of houses and this included furniture as a way to decorate buildings.

this document was not eclipsed in France until 1761 when Roubo's *L'art du menuisier* was published with support of the French Academy of Sciences. By 1761 England had a number of books that discussed furniture with the most well known being Chippendale's remarkable *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director*, first published in 1754.¹⁵⁷ Chippendale's *Director* served to both advertise his services and provide a catalogue and its popularity suggests that furniture had finally come of age in terms of being thought of as more than a utilitarian convenience.¹⁵⁸

During the C18th, although architects did not usually design furniture, it was architecture that provided the inspiration for both furniture designs and decoration – as the preface to Chippendale's *Director* testifies. As France and England became increasingly fascinated with the classical architecture of Greece and Rome and the Neo-Classical Revival began to gather pace, the fascination that was to transform the architectural landscape of England and France, was to impact just as dramatically on its interiors and furniture.

Let us consider England first. As noted above, few English monarchs were conspicuous patrons of the arts. According to Edward Joy:

*"Only Charles I among English monarchs can rank with George IV as a patron of the arts."*¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ T. Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director, First Edition*, T. Chippendale, London, 1754.

¹⁵⁸ It is unclear whether or not Chippendale purposely set out to perform these two functions, however based on the furniture that he did produce and the fact that his name is still associated with quality furniture attests to the achievement of these two objectives. These books also served to provide other furniture makers with designs with which they could make similar pieces of furniture and to spread the design ideas that were presented within the books.

¹⁵⁹ E. Joy, *English Furniture: 1800 – 1851*, Sotheby Parke Bernet Publications, London, 1977, p. 183.



Figure 2-12: France's finance minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert who was assigned by Louis XIV to be the Controller-General of Finances and head of commerce. As such he oversaw the development of design including furniture making.

Consequently during the time that we are concerned with, the monarchy did not take a strong interest in the accumulation of fashionable furniture and King George III (1738-1820) typically exhibited a preference for simple design and things English. However, his son the Prince of Wales - later King George IV (1762 -1830) - was very fashionable and he adopted the French fashion when it came to furniture, making frequent use of the French *Marchand-Mercier* Daguerre to furnish Carlton House. But compared to France, the English Royal household employed fewer craftsmen to deal with their furniture needs indicating its lesser importance to them. To fill this vacuum, the leadership in fashion fell to the aristocracy¹⁶⁰ to lead fashions of late C18th England.¹⁶¹ The progressive Whigs who were

growing in strength during this time, are thought by many to be the group most strongly associated with the Neo-Classical Revival.¹⁶² To a lesser extent the increasing number of

¹⁶⁰ These were made up of the families among the 200 or so in the peerage, the slightly over 1,000 landed gentry all of whom were established landowners as well as a large number of the *Nouveau riche* business men and industrialists who were made wealthy primarily from the trade with the new markets of the Americas, Africa and Asia and the early establishment of manufacturing companies. This was discussed in the beginning of the prior section of this chapter (see p. 76) in that between the late C17th and the beginning of the C19th, there was a very dramatic increase in the percentage of people who could afford considering the purchase of 'fashionable' furniture. Also see H. Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society*, p. 21.

¹⁶¹ There were exceptions to this as some of the wealthy landowners did actively support certain architectural design ideas. One example of this was Lord Burlington who was both an architect and he appeared to have provided both support and direction to the architect William Kent. During Burlington's tour, he discovered Palladio's Four Books, which influenced Burlington's decision to revive what he considered the architecture of Vitruvius as interpreted in Andrea Palladio's drawings.

¹⁶² J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, Yale University Press, London, 1993, p. 295-297. There are some who argue that the fact that many of architectural books based on the ancient civilizations were in the libraries of nearly all of the peers of the time that the revival of these styles was probably 'a-political' For example One of the most important publications on ancient designs was *Vitruvius Britannicus*, first published in 1715 The subscribers were almost all from the upper echelons of society and included all but eighteen of the peers in England at this time. Thus, nearly all of the peers had a copy of this important book

middle-class households also influenced the fashions of the day. However, it was to be a number of key architects who would provide the lead to these groups. As noted previously, it was to be James 'Athenian' Stuart, William Chambers and above all Robert Adam who would introduce and promote the Neo-Classical revival and set in motion a fashion that was to shape the next fifty years and leave an indelible mark on the historic fabric of England.

In France, the situation was different. As L Auslander suggests, the French Royal family purposely used fashion to exert their control over the people of France and in turn, to influence the rest of the world.¹⁶³ ¹⁶⁴ During the *Ancien Régime*, for example, several kings of France took a very active interest in promoting the arts in France, no doubt in part because it was expensive to import luxury goods.¹⁶⁵ However, it was also a political decision – a way to express power. The prime example of this phenomenon was Louis XIV (1638-1715) who used the arts to strengthen his position as leader of France and to exert influence abroad. Louis XIV provided substantial government support for fashionable enterprises through two key people in his administration: they were his Finance Minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) and Charles Le Brun (1619-1690, director of the *Manufacture Royale*.¹⁶⁶ Together they helped France lead the world in terms of the arts by establishing a centre for the decorative arts - the *Manufacture Royale des Meubles de la Couronne* at Gobelins.¹⁶⁷

in their library. See C. Fry, *Spanning the Political Divide: Neo-Palladianism and the Early C18th Landscape, Garden History*, Vol 31, No 2., 2003, p. 180.

¹⁶³ L. Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*.

¹⁶⁴ C. Weber made a similar argument about Marie Antoinette and her use of clothing to manipulate the public through her image and how the press sometimes used this image against her. See Weber, C., *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*.

¹⁶⁵ A. Mayor, 'The Skilled Workforce in Paris, 1500-1800', *Magazine Antiques*, Nov 1999, as found on website http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1026/is_5_156/ai_57590140, Accessed on 15/05/2007.

¹⁶⁶ All three of these people, Louis XIV, Colbert, and Le Brun, were known for their obsessive dedication to their positions. For example, Louis XIV was known to have his first meeting at 6:00 am as he was dressed and bathed and his last meeting at 12:00 midnight as he was getting ready for sleep. (Source: *Tour of Versailles, A Day in the Life of Louis XIV, Jan 2002*.) Similar stories have been told for both Colbert and Le Brun.

¹⁶⁷ Otherwise known simply as the Gobelins, this consisted of a large group of workshops where craftsmen, in different areas of expertise, worked together for the crown – *artisans du roi*.

Other examples were the establishment of Lyons as the silk and textile centre of France, while Alençon, Chantilly and Le Havre were to become centres for making Lace. A. Nietta, *The Louis Styles: Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI*, Orbis Publishing, London, 1972, p. 4.

According to F. Watson, transferring the tapestry works at Maincy to the small town of Gobelins, served two purposes:

*“Firstly, to provide suitable decorations for the royal palaces, and secondly, by raising the standards of the luxury arts in France, the factory was intended to contribute to the economic and moral ascendancy of France in Europe.”*¹⁶⁸

Thus the Manufacture Royale was intended not only to make France into an ‘artistic centre’ but to use the arts to establish France’s cultural pre-eminence on the cultural stage.¹⁶⁹

Stepping back from these more grandiose ambitions, Louis XIV clearly in train an administrative system intended to arbitrate taste in France during his reign – which proved quite successful.

L. Auslander argues that Louis XIV went so far as to control who might have access to certain forms of cultural expression.¹⁷⁰ In fact, she suggests that on one particular occasion when in need of money, Louis XIV chose to melt down his collection of silver furniture to sell the furniture rather than sell it as furniture because he did not want any one else to own such opulent furniture¹⁷¹!

¹⁶⁸ F. Watson, *Wallace Collection Catalogue of Furniture*, The Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London, 1956, p. xxii.

¹⁶⁹ There are three points to consider. First of all this program in the arts and design was under the director of finance and a major concern of his was to create industry, jobs and materials for export. Secondly, the making of furniture was very similar to the making of new computer technologies are today. Else where in this paper, it is mentioned that, for example, the *secrétaire á abattant*’s modern equivalent is the laptop computer. While in this example, the conversation concerned the uses of a *secrétaire á abattant* and a laptop (communication, storage of secret, personal information).

There is another component of this comparison. This was similar to the development and use of computers in that they were developing and applying new technologies, as people like Riesener were developing new locks and other mechanical devises, they were using new materials, designing furniture to fit in to the then contemporary lifestyles. To use a modern phrase, the making of this furniture represented cutting edge technology. The last point is that it squarely placed the King at the head of the fashion hierarchy – he was first to enjoy things that no one else had or could have.

¹⁷⁰ L. Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*.

¹⁷¹ The money that Louis XIV received from selling this melted furniture was to support his war effort. However, he probably could have made more by selling the furniture itself instead of melting it down. The reason for melting it down, instead of selling the furniture, was that he did not want anyone else to have the furniture it is speculated that he did not want anyone else to have such impressive furniture. Interview with Daniel Rault Head of Housekeeping at Versailles on 19/02/2008.

Louis XIV consolidated his hold on the production of furniture by setting up competing systems for its making. He sanctioned three groups that were allowed to be involved in the making of furniture; the Royal workshops, the Guilds and finally the non-guild makers operating in areas controlled by the church.¹⁷² This structure was instituted so that the king could play one agency off against the others in order to exert control over all of them.



Figure 2-13: Madame de Pompadour (1715-1774) - the court arbiter of fashion under Louis XV.

For example, the guilds evaluated products of the non-guild furniture makers and while the Royal family could obtain their furniture from the Royal Workshops they could easily go to other guild members. Non-guild makers could become members of the Guild either through payment of a large sum of money (a years salary in some cases) or through the intervention of a member of the Royal family. The guilds were guaranteed a very strong position in the market but they were threatened by both the non-guild furniture makers and the Royal workshops; non-guild members could challenge the guild through innovation and lower prices for example. It is interesting to note that the three key

artisans identified with Neo-Classical furniture were all German in origin and passed through the non-guild system set up in *Faubourg Saint-Antoine*.¹⁷³

However, neither of the rulers who followed Louis XIV took quite such a strong interest in these activities. Louis XV did recognize the importance of establishing his own mark and

¹⁷² There were also the *Marchands-Merciers* who functioned to design and market decorative items, however their importance grew over time and were not critical during Louis XIV's early reign. They will however be included in a later discussion (see p 163).

¹⁷³ These were Joseph Baumhauer (?-1772), Pierre Garnier (1720-1800), and Jean-Francois Oeben (1721-1763). See Auslander, L., *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*, The University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1996. P. 70.

sold off many of Louis XIV's furnishings in order to replace them with something better suited to his own taste – or that of his consort, Madame de Pompadour (1715 – 1774).¹⁷⁴

While there have been some questions as to the extent of Madame de Pompadour's interest in the arts (beyond spending a significant amount on furniture and other decorative items) she did succeed in placing her uncle, Charles Le Normant de Tournehem and later her brother Abel-François Poisson de Vandières, future Marquis de Marigny (1727 –1781)), to the post of *Directeur Général des Bâtiments* – the body directly responsible for royal expenditure on the arts.¹⁷⁵ In fact (as will be discussed later –See Chapter III, p. 121) it was Madame de Pompadour who sent her brother to study the ancient ruins in Italy in 1749, together with a group of artists and architects including Charles-Nicolas Cochin. As the result of this journey, Charles-Nicolas Cochin was to write several books detailing the early Greek and Roman architecture, which were to play a part in the development of Neo-Classical Revival. It is perhaps ironical then that Madame de Pompadour became known as “the queen of the Rococo” when in reality she oversaw the start of the transitional period from the Rococo to the Neo-Classical era.¹⁷⁶

Interestingly enough, we know that Madame de Pompadour also personally took interest in her furnishings, seeking out furniture makers that were not recommended by the crown, according to records kept by the merchant *mercier* Lazare Duvaux and the diary of the *ébéniste* Pierre II Migeon (1701-1758).¹⁷⁷

While there is no definitive answer to this question, but a number of indications that Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were not as influential as either of their predecessors. Even though Louis XVI did recognize the importance of commissioning his own furniture, he

¹⁷⁴ L. Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*, p. 53.

¹⁷⁵ D. Posner, Mme. de Pompadour as a Patron of the Visual Arts, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol 72., No. 1, March, 1990, pp. 74 – 105.

¹⁷⁶ Posner was quoting de E. Goncourt, E. and J. Le Clercq, (Translated by J. Le Clercq and R. Roeder), *The Woman of the Eighteenth Century*, New York, 1927, p. 243. See D. Posner, D., Mme. de Pompadour as a Patron of the Visual Arts, p. 75.

¹⁷⁷ L. Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*, p. 67

elected furniture in a Neo-Classical style that had already been in vogue for some twenty years. Marie Antoinette did exhibit a different taste from Louis XV and personally supervised the change in the style of her living quarters from Rococo to Neo-Classical in her favourite residence - the *Petit Trianon*. However, this building had been designed in the Neo-Classical style before Marie Antoinette took up residence and it could be argued that she merely consolidated the interior decoration by adopting a consistent style. It is true that when Marie Antoinette did something, others followed.¹⁷⁸ However, it was not because she took an active interest in fashion or in promoting an approach to design but



Figure 2-14: Saint Jerome in his study, a 1514 copper engraving by Albrecht Dürer showing the use of a portable writing slope that has been placed on a simple table.

because she was what the modern marketing experts would call an 'early adopter'.¹⁷⁹ She was clearly interested in what she thought of as 'modern' but left it to others to provide suggestion.¹⁸⁰

In France, there was also no strong proponent of the *à la grecque* style as there was in England – Robert Adam. And while there were architects in abundance in France who had adopted the Neo-Classical style, none were to leave the kind of mark left by Adam. There was also another factor in play as regards the fashion in France – political unrest. As L. Auslander observes, the French aristocracy:

¹⁷⁸ In terms of dress fashions, Marie Antoinette's wearing of feathers initiated a lucrative trade in feathers in France. A. Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*, p.176.

¹⁷⁹ Another way to look at this is to compare Marie Antoinette's passion for both stage performances and dressing. While in neither case did she suggest approaches or story lines, she did actively support certain writers, directors and dress designers as mentioned before. In both cases, she stood out in here support for them. In furniture, Riesener was assigned as the furniture maker but he worked with intermediates (e.g., architects, the *Garde Mueble*.)

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Daniel Rault of Versailles on 19-February-2008. Furthermore in that conversation, Daniel spoke many times that Marie Antoinette liked and wanted everything to be the "modern style" however he was not able to say that she was going for a particular design style nor did he suggest that she was promoting a particular style, only that she wanted to be on the cutting edge of fashion. Again, though secondary or even closer to hearsay as a source, this supports the other inferences that Marie Antoinette was more of an early fashion adaptor not a leader except in the fact that others followed what she adopted.

*"...could buy objects that closely resembled courtly objects and unsettle not only the social but the political order as well."*¹⁸¹

This sense of political threat never attached itself to the conspicuous display of fashion and wealth in England.

E. Writing Furniture

In order to talk about the fashions of the late C18th, it is interesting to consider the growth of literacy and the emergence of reading and writing. During the C18th both England and France experienced phenomenal growth in the literacy rate. Prior to the C18th few people who could read and write. The only two groups who read and wrote were the wealthy



Figure 2-15: Another example of writing furniture before the C18th. This writing box came from Henry VIII's workshop and it is an example of the portable nature of furniture during the C16th.

educated and the church. In terms of related furniture, the church made use of lecterns, with their slope and supporting ledge (see Figure 2-14). The court (which again frequently moved around) tended to use small writing boxes that were fitted with writing implements such as pens, inks, paper, and storage for documents (see Figure 2-15).

Now at the beginning of the C18th both England and France approximately 25% of the population was defined as

literate.¹⁸² By the end of the century, this had increased in both countries to approximately 50%.¹⁸³ Concurrent with this increasing literacy there was an increase in the variety of

¹⁸¹ L. Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France*, p. 33.

¹⁸² It should be pointed out that that literacy is frequently defined in different ways. The current definition of the term is that the person who can read and write is considered literate, however at times it only requires

furniture that was available to people to assist the activities of reading and more especially,



Figure 2-16: Example of changes among women as it relates to writing furniture. This is the Marquise Du Châtelet (1706-49), she was a physicist and mathematician, who participated in debates on Newton - painted by the female artist Marianne Loir (1715-69).

writing. Mercier at the time noted such new types of furniture during this time.¹⁸⁴ By the end of the C18th both England and France had developed a number of different options for writing. While England favoured variations on the library table, the kneehole desk and the bureau bookcase; in France, the favoured forms were the *secrétaire à abattant* and the *bureau plat*.

Women represent a special group that deserves special attention at this juncture. It appears from a number of different sources that there was a very great increase in reading and writing by women during this period of time. Several writers have focused their attention on the increases in the reading and writing habits of

women during this period, which demonstrate this and Turner's *Living by the Pen* offers a detailed statistical analysis demonstrating the growth in the amount of women's fiction that was published during this time.¹⁸⁵ It is clear that C18th women were writing more letters and pursuing more intellectual pursuits as well as reading more fiction – if only from

that a person be able to sign a church document or to read simple instructions to have been considered literate. However, the point that is going to be made is that reading and writing dramatically increased during this period of time and while the exact numbers may be incorrect, in the current definition of the word literacy, this conclusion seems correct.

¹⁸³ English Statistics: J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1997, p. 155.

French Statistics: Evolution of the illiteracy rate in France as a function of 5-year long generations, born from 1720 to 1885. Data from J. Houdailles and A. Blum, "L'alphabétisation au XVIII^e et XIX^e siècle. L'illusion parisienne", *Population*, n°6, 1985, based on a 1985 INED survey and on the 1901 census.

¹⁸⁴ Sebastian Mercier is quoted in F. Watson, *Louis XVI Furniture*, Alex Tiranti, London, 1960, p. 20.

¹⁸⁵ C. Turner, *Living by the Pen, Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, Routledge, London, 1992. There are of course a number of other books that relate to this subject such as Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, The Women's Press, Oxford, 1978 and Leonee Ormond's *Writing*, H.M.S.O. London, 1981.

the quantity of literature that describes female characters engaged in the activity of writing¹⁸⁶. Evidence is also available in many of the paintings and drawings of the period. An inference can also be made by looking at the number of pieces of writing furniture that appear specifically designed for women that emerge during the late C18th. In both England and France the custom for upper class women became to begin the day by attending to written correspondence at a small writing desk, aptly named the *Bonheur du Jour* which literally translates as the 'early part of the day'. In England there were a number of small writing tables that emerged which were specifically aimed at women; the *Bonheur du Jour* like France but also delicate bureau bookcases and so-called ladies writing tables. Most were smaller than their masculine equivalent the library table. Many also incorporated special features designed to appeal to women, such as a fire screens which could be lifted up to protect the writer's face from the intense heat from a fire. There are a number of examples of such designs to be found in publications by Chippendale, Ince & Mayhew, Thomas Sheraton and George Hepplewhite.¹⁸⁷

Interestingly enough, according to both Goodman and Norberg, the *secrétaire* was both the most innovative and popular form of the desk in France, even though it was perceived to be a woman's piece.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ See for example

- L. Ormond, *Writing*, V & A Publications, London, 1981,
- J. Hemmley, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, Vol. V*, Clarendon Press, London, 1975, p.228-229.
- S. Richardson, *Pamela*, W. W. Norton, NY, 1958 (originally published in 1741)
- S. Richardson, *Clarissa*, Penguin Books, NY, 1985 (originally published in 1747).

¹⁸⁷ W. Ince and J. Mayhew, *The Universal System of Household Furniture*, A. Tiranti, London, 1762.

T. Sheraton, *The Cabinet Maker and Upholsters Drawing Book, in Three Parts*, T. Bensley, London, 1794.

G. Hepplewhite, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*, B.T. Batsford, London, 1897 (reprint from 1794)

T. Chippendale, (preface by Symonds, R.) *Chippendale Furniture Designs from the Gentleman and Cabinet-Makers' Director*.

¹⁸⁸ Except for possibly the roll-top desk, which while it was much more complicated than the *Secrétaire*, it was less popular as the *Secrétaire* became a symbol of the literate upper class. Furthermore, the fashion leader Marie Antoinette was known to own several of these *Secrétares* but only one roll-top.

D. Goodman, The *Secrétaire* and the Integration of Eighteenth Century Self in D. Goodman, and K. Norberg, K. (eds), *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell us about the European and American Past*, pp. 183-201.

On the following two pages are examples of some of the desks that were being made in England and France during this period; five English examples, followed by five French (See Figures 2-17 and 2-18).



Figure 2-17: A set of English 'desks' these types of desks were some of the ones considered for this project. Shown are (starting with the top left):

- A.** Mahogany Bureau Bookcase (C 1760) with a slope front and gothic inspired motifs (p. 49).
- B.** Tulipwood Bonheur-du-Jour (C 1775) Neo-Classical marquetry decoration in the Adam style (p. 71).
- C.** Mahogany Library Desk (C 1750) In Chippendale's Rococo style (p. 53).
- D.** Library Writing Table (C 1771) Neo-Classical style by Thomas Chippendale for Harewood House near Leeds covered with extensive marquetry and ormolu (p. 73).

All pictures come from M. Bridge, *An Encyclopaedia of Desks*, The Apple Press, London, 1988 (page numbers follow each entry).



Figure 2-18: A set of French 'desks' these types of desks were some of the ones considered for this project. Shown are (starting with the top left):

- A. Louis XVI Mahogany *Secrétaire à Abattant* by Henri Riesener possibly for the Louvre in 1780 (p. 63)
- B. Late C18th *Bureau à Cylindre* of the Louis XVI period (Neo-Classical) probably made for the Tsar Paul I of Russia by David Roentgen (p. 64)
- C. Ebony *Bureau de Dame* made by Adam Weisweiler probably for the *Duc d'Orléans* but later sold to Louis XVI. (p. 67)
- D. Régence *Bureau Plat* (c 1720) Veneered in kingwood mounted with ormolu (p. 30).
- E. Louis XV *Bonheur-du-Jour* - decorated with marquetry of tulipwood, pear, satinwood (p. 36).

All pictures come from M. Bridge, *An Encyclopaedia of Desks* (page numbers follow each entry).

The increased use of writing furniture, not only had implications in regards to gender roles, or the education of the populations of these two C18th cultural leaders, but it also contributed to the blurring of the lines between luxury and necessary. As a tool for effective commerce, writing furniture was considered essential, but it was also considered a luxury item (most certainly the two examples used in the case studies, Chapter V (p. 192), were considered luxury items. They were at an intersection between the worlds of unbridled luxury goods and of working world of commerce and the gathering of wealth. This also suggests that writing furniture connected the worlds of the aristocrats and of the middle classes, between those seeking frivolity and those seeking something useful¹⁸⁹.

F. Concluding Remarks

The start of this chapter discussed and outlined the characteristics that define the mechanisms of fashion. In summary:

- Fashion represents change.
- There is a historical context to fashion, ideas are seldom completely new and they are nearly always based on prior ideas.
- Fashions need someone or some group to promote it. While the historic model is a hierarchical and top-down, current authors suggest that this is overly simple and wholly unrepresentative of modern times.
- Fashions go through a definite cycle from its inception to its termination -
Invention/Introduction → Fashion Leadership → Increasing Social Visibility →
Conformity Within and Across Social Groups → Social Saturation → Decline and
Obsolescence.

¹⁸⁹ D. Goodman, produced an excellent recap of this aspect of the writing desk in her article *Furnishing Discourses: Readings of a Writing Desk*, See D. Goodman, *Furnishing Discourses: Readings of a Writing Desk in Eighteenth-Century France* in M. Berg and E. Eger (eds.), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, Palgrave, London, UK, 2002, pp 71-89.

We then explored how fashion operated in both England and France. In England, leadership clearly resided with the aristocracy and growing middle-classes. In France on the other hand, the monarchy, whose control was weakening, still exercised an influence on fashion, although (like England) the French nobility was exerting an increasing influence on what was deemed fashionable. In terms of the Neo-Classical Revival, architects lead the way – the diffusion of these ideas will be discussed in detail in the next chapter (p. 118).

Finally, in terms of furniture, one specific trend that stimulated the development of new furniture forms was an increasing literacy which led to the increased participation of more and more people in the activities of reading and writing which led to a proliferation of new forms of writing furniture, ranging from very small writing tables and desks such as the *Bonheur du Jour*, to large library tables, *Bureau à Cylindre* and bureau bookcases. As seen in this chapter, this in turn, had profound implications on the emergence of new social segments (e.g., Females, the middle class) into the centres of fashion.