

ABSTRACT

FRENCH

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION OF PARISIAN  
FASHION SUPREMACY FROM FRANÇOIS I TO NAPOLEON III

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Thesis dated July, 1999

This thesis charts the development of Parisian fashion supremacy, dating from the 16th century reign of François I to the eventual establishment of *haute couture* in the 19th century. Via a century-by-century analysis, key individuals who contributed to the development of fashion dominance and *haute couture* are highlighted.

This analysis is composed of three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter concentrates on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, identifying François I and Louis XIV as central personalities who influenced French fashion supremacy during their respective eras. This chapter also mentions key aspects of the French Renaissance which makes this a logical starting point for this analysis.

The second chapter identifies Madame de Pompadour and Marie Antoinette as the most influential personal ties influencing fashion trends on a worldwide scale. It marks the emergence of the female as the dominant

arbiter of fashion; taking the position formally held by the French kings. Characteristics during the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI which allowed this transition of authority to take place are discussed. Finally, it is during this chapter that Paris emerges as the fashion capital of the world.

The third chapter reviews the nineteenth century and its ultimate contribution to French fashion dominance: *haute couture*. Key elements during the reign of Napoleon III, along with the creative genius and dressmaking ability of Charles Frederick Worth are credited with its creation. Additionally, the development of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Française* and its influences on the fashion world are analyzed.

The conclusion summarizes the evolution of French fashion and discusses France's current position.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION OF PARISIAN FASHION  
SUPREMACY FROM FRANÇOIS I TO NAPOLEON III

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

JULY 1999

R-iv P-170

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the Almighty God who continues to bless and protect me;

To my advisor, Dr. Earle D. Clowney, thank you for your steadfast guidance and excellent mentoring throughout the years. You are a true role model of fairness, honesty, and excellence.

To my husband, Dylon Ross, thanks for the constant PUSH to complete the projects that I start.

To my son, Dylon Ross II, my beautiful baby boy! You were with me all the way, from the first word to the last, during late night sessions, during my pregnancy, and in the world. You are my motivation to be the best I can be.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

For centuries Paris, France has been renowned as the largest fashion mart in the world. Strategically located and surrounded by luxury industries, it became a city destined for fashion dominance. Globally considered the hub of fashion, it played the key role in the initiation and the creation of fashion trends on a worldwide scale. As far back as the fifteenth century, French kings successfully made their court the most envied in all Europe, creating France's secure fashion preeminence. This supremacy justly made Paris synonymous with unprecedented fashion sense, style and taste and eventually resulted in the city's being the creator of high fashion, otherwise known as *haute couture*.

This thesis charts the development of fashion supremacy through a century-by-century analysis, beginning with the sixteenth century and culminating with the nineteenth. Upon investigating each century, we highlight central personalities who greatly influenced the development and subsequent dominance of fashion supremacy in France.

The sixteenth century, the period of the French Renaissance and the reign of François I, is a logical beginning in our observation of French style.

François I, a monarch dazzled and preoccupied with Italy and the beautiful artistic fruits dating from its fifteenth century Renaissance, is recognized as the leading figure to emphasize artistic appreciation in France. His desire to re-create equally impressive gardens, estates, paintings, and sculptures that he witnessed in Italy, left an indelible artistic mark on French society.

Additionally, Catherine de Medicis will be considered a secondary force promoting the advancement of the arts in France during the sixteenth century. Her sense of style, taste and charm, developed by her Italian upbringing, enabled her to become a fashion figure in France who set the tone for trends at courts. She was responsible for the construction of numerous palaces, and furthermore, protected the artists at work. In summary, she is credited with continuing the legacy of François I as a true patron of the arts.

The seventeenth century will feature the reign of the truly sovereign Louis XIV, the Sun King. This king of all French kings created a court, a monarchy, and furthermore a France which was the most admired and revered in all of Europe. His strict attention to etiquette, his exaggerated extravagance relating to palaces, monuments, dress, and his true appreciation and promotion of the arts in all realms, make him the premier personality to lift France to levels of international acclaim in the area of style.

With the introduction of Chapter II, which spotlights the eighteenth century, we see the importance of French kings in the development of fashion



supremacy diminish with the subsequent emergence of feminine domination in the area of style. Madame de Pompadour, during the reign of Louis XV and Marie Antoinette, during that of Louis XVI, are recognized as compelling female personalities who further perpetuated, sustained, and solidified French fashion dominance. Each woman, possessing a strong sense of style, imagination and charm, initiated fashion trends which influenced French national dress and the world at-large. Their ambitious desire for fame, the finest clothing, art, music, and literature that French society offered, made them integral figures in the foundation of French fashion preeminence.

Finally, Chapter III continues with the influences on the reign of Napoleon III, which culminated with the development of *haute couture*, or high fashion, pioneered by Charles Frederick Worth. The desire for fashionable dress set forth by the court, the industrially-thriving Parisian environment, coupled with the talented dressmaking ability of Charles Frederick Worth, are dually responsible for the development of *haute couture*, for neither element would have successfully influenced fashion to the same degree if independent of the other. Napoleon III's court, led by his wife--the Empress Eugenie--created a need for superior, exclusive and imaginative fashions at court, and Charles Frederick Worth's craftsmanship in dressmaking fulfilled that need.

In the conclusion, this thesis highlights the development of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* in which lie the framework and organization for French fashion as we know it to date.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

#### The Sixteenth Century and the French Renaissance

The sixteenth century, the period of the French Renaissance, according to Burke Wilkinson in his book, *Francis in All His Glory*, is a logical starting point in the analysis of the origin of French style. It represented a deliberate departure from the authority and tradition of the Middle Ages and served as a passage to the modern world. During the Middle Ages, artists' observations of works and the world were reduced to mere commentary, lacking individuality, creativity and opinion. With the Renaissance, a new curiosity led artists to redevelop contact with the text, using a critical spirit. They learned Greek and Latin and gained contact with Italian culture, which nourished their works.

This movement in France can be greatly attributed to the successive invasions of Italy between 1494 and 1525, by Charles VIII, Louis IX and François I. It therefore started with exposure to Italy, which had already experienced the same evolution during the first sixty years of the fifteenth century. The Italians, being great lovers of wealth, extravagance, detail and

creativity, but lacking in political order and military strength, became easy prey to the French, who sought territorial dominance. As a result, the French came into contact with the refinement of Italian courtly life, as well as innovative ways of expressing human life through their art. During this time, luxurious Italian goods and fabrics unknown to France impressed and dazzled the French monarchy, who sought to imitate the fine manners, exquisite taste and new artistic conceptions of the Italians. Italian craftsmen, political refugees and ideas flowed into France and caused France to become the very model of a late Renaissance state.<sup>1</sup>

### François I

The most influential monarch in the development of French style during the French Renaissance is indisputably François I. Born September 12, 1494, in Cognac, France, François I was an unlikely candidate for the throne of France because of his indirect lineage to the current king of France, Louis XI. Unlike other heirs to the throne, he found his roots in the house of Angouleme, a cadet family in the court, on his father's side, and was connected to royalty through his mother Louise, who was the niece of the king, if both descendants died without male heirs.<sup>2</sup>

Just as François I's mother possessed the blood which connected him to the throne, she also played the internal role in his development as king.

Upon the sudden death of Charles d'Angouleme, François I's father, she fought tirelessly to acquire the guardianship and custody of her children during an era when the law prohibited this because of her sex and age. She was determined to assume the key role in the upbringing of her son during an era in which the woman's role in a man's development was minimal. Because François I was not considered an heir to the throne, he was denied instruction in affairs of the state. This allowed Louise to exercise power in his educational development, which included the mastering of Italian, Spanish, Latin, and biblical history. François I, with her guidance, developed a well-rounded education, including the study of literature, while most royal heirs were expected to concentrate on military service and affairs of the state.<sup>3</sup>

Although Charles, François I's father died when François I was only one year old, one can detect a correlation in the literary taste and strengths of father and son. Charles d'Angouleme was never a key player on the political front, but possessed a love of literature and art and continued to develop the library at his Cognac castle started by his uncle, the poet of Rondeaux.<sup>4</sup> He surrounded himself with historians and poets such as "Robinet Testard, a talented illuminator of manuscripts, Jean de Saint-Gelais, the official historian of Louis XII's reign and his brother, Octavian the Poet."<sup>5</sup> After further investigating François I's life, we will see later that he, like his father, received

disproportionate success in the area of the arts, in comparison to his strength and success in political and military affairs.<sup>6</sup>

François I was inevitably influenced by his surroundings at the Castle of Amboise where he was reared. During the summer of 1495, Amboise began an architectural transformation, which was greatly influenced by Italian art. "Tapestries, marble, porphyry, manuscripts and paintings,"<sup>7</sup> were imported from Italy and incorporated into French architecture. We will see later that François I champions the further importation of Italian art into French architecture and society.<sup>8</sup>

As a young boy François I loved, and excelled in, hunting and archery, which was the most popular sport of the court. He later stated, "no matter how old and ill I may be, I will have myself carried to the hunt. And when I die, I shall want to go there in coffin."<sup>9</sup> His long excursions in the forest with King Louis rendered him an excellent hunter and created in him a great appreciation of nature and conquest.<sup>10</sup>

Within the first year of François I's reign he invaded Italy. His determination to succeed in the conquest of Italy stemmed from his desire to reclaim the duchy of Milan, which his great-grandfather inherited through marriage to his great-grandmother Valentina Visconti. He continued the Italian wars begun by King Charles VII in 1494 and devoted his life to the acquisition of Italy. His undying determination to conquer Italy eventually

resulted in failure, earning him a poor reputation for intelligence in military affairs, but conversely made him known as the Renaissance king because of his importation of Italian luxury goods and his emphasis on art and good taste. This king caused a new era in France which effected a revolution in the domination of art and architecture. These efforts determined the course of France's artistic production for years to come. In order to truly understand the impact that François I had on French style, however, we must first examine his persona. Who was this king who so greatly encouraged the artistic development and style of the French and from what resource did this preoccupation and appreciation of art, literature and good taste stem?

At the ripe age of twenty-one, the new king had a fondness for fine clothing and was the embodiment of the Renaissance:

The magnificence of his clothes, the close-fitting doublet, tight at the waist and with long skirts, with slashed sleeves, the tights and extravagant shoes, the feathered hats, drew the crowd's notice to his physical appearance . . . a certain languor in his expression and great affability.<sup>11</sup>

This great presence, due in part to his clothing and also to his height, gave him a grandeur absent in previous monarchs. Fluent in Italian, eloquent and skilled in the art of conversation, François I took pleasure and interest in the intellectual world. He loved engaging in intellectual conversations which challenged the wit of others and was well versed in general knowledge. A lover of literature, François I was also a good writer, who often created poetry

that possessed a sincerity rare to the sixteenth century. François I inherited his love of literature from his sister Marguerite who spoiled and worshipped him. She loved poets and artists and made her brother an amateur humanist and patron of art and literature. With his insatiable desire for knowledge, François I in turn shaped the humanists of his era through promoting the study of history, poetry, literature and philosophy. His lifestyle tended to display magnificence, intelligence and pleasure. This was manifest through his love of fine fabrics, palaces, gardens, jewelry and women. For François I art, literature and extravagance, and desire for pomp and circumstance, were far beyond the grasp of the common French citizen. In sum, he was a king who, to a greater degree, continued the legacy of the pleasure-seeking Valois kings before him.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, François I, tall and statuesque, prided himself on being an athletic man of action who loved hunting and participating in careless sporting events. As an outdoorsman, a lover of nature and competition, he was preoccupied with winning and invited the challenge of a good battle, either while conquering another territory or while engaging in aggressive sporting events with his companions of the court. This reckless, foolish and egotistical behavior proved dangerous when on two occasions it led to loss of consciousness and to temporary loss of sight to the king.<sup>13</sup>



These two contrasting characteristics: love of refinement and intellectualism and the love of fierce, rugged competition and brute force illustrate the unique and versatile nature of François I's personality. Moreover, the events of his reign, when one considers his luxurious lifestyle and his desire to conquer Italy through successive wars, are consistent with these personality traits. History recounts that François I lacked the firmness and wisdom of a true leader. With his pursuit of Italy, however, it graciously pardoned him while choosing to remember him as the most influential individual in the development of the French Renaissance.<sup>14</sup>

Another key development which further distinguished the reign of François I was the extensive augmentation of the king's court. To a far greater degree than previous monarchs, François created a vast network of counselors, advisors, confidants, and entertainers who assisted and accompanied the king in all his travels. Representing all professional backgrounds, they were the most prominent artists, writers, lawyers, tailors and doctors, who offered their skills and talents exclusively to the royal household. The sole purpose of this intimate group was to support and sustain the monarchy. Intimately acquainted with the king and his family, this royal entourage became the living extension of the king, those who educated him, influenced him and carried out his projects. Because of this association, they became privy to royal privileges and treatment. Their

position in the court, therefore, became a means to elevate their social status and position in society. This elite class was exposed to the most current literary works, artistic methods and scientific developments. Unlike the common French citizen, they greatly assisted with the development of the French Renaissance because the innovative art and literature were created for their pleasure.<sup>15</sup>

The most prominent members of the king's court during this time proved to be the artists. Again outdoing his predecessors, François I was hospitable to artists, painters, philosophers, and architects. They represented the most important element of this Renaissance court, for they shaped the new modern era. François found these creative individuals essential to the makeup and balance of his court. He surrounded himself with the most prominent artists and painters, as well as the most innovative ways of thinking.<sup>16</sup>

Again, owing to the Italian wars, François sought to imitate the magnificence in architecture and painting he had seen in Italy. To this end he brought to France the Italian artists, painters and styles that constituted the renaissance of the arts in France. Such artists included Leonardo da Vinci, Del Sarto and Il Rosso, Michelangelo's protégé. François began his outburst of architectural activity in 1515 in the Loire Valley: Amboise, Blois and Chambord. He chose these areas because of their remote locations, which

afforded him seclusion from life in Paris in order to absorb himself in hunting, his favorite pastime sport.<sup>17</sup> These renovations during the sixteenth century greatly changed the facades of these castles which were influenced by fourteenth-century medieval style. Built for defense, these castles had "thick walls, few windows, massive angle towers, machicolations, portcullises and moats filled with water."<sup>18</sup> They lacked aesthetic beauty and served as fortresses to defend against and deter enemy attack. Consequently, with the religious wars ended and peaceful times prevailing, François I aimed to reconstruct castles which exuded luxury and excess; displaying the most innovative and current Italian architectural styles. The aim of these renovations was comfort, pleasure, leisure and physical beauty. With the help of famous Italian artists such as da Vinci, Del Sarto and Il Rosso, François I added classical Italian features to these gothic structures. "Large mullioned windows appeared in the walls and the angle towers were reduced to graceful turrets and machicolations."<sup>19</sup> Other Italian influenced features included columns, large lavish courtyards, double spiral staircases, connecting individual apartments and units and pillars. Emphasis was placed on large galleries and ornately landscaped courtyards decorated with stucco, terra cotta and carved wood trimmed in floral and vine designs. These castles were replicas of Italian villas such as Poggia a Caiano and the Vatican palace.<sup>20</sup>

But François I's crowning glory was displayed in the building of Fontainebleau in 1529, where he spent most of his time. This once medieval castle, oval in shape and flanked with towers and a square keep, was transformed by the famous entrance: Porte Dorée and the spacious Galerie François I. It included "two short blocks linking the new entrance to the keep, a great courtyard, flat pilasters, straight pediments over windows and a large staircase."<sup>21</sup> Its walls were adorned with Italian paintings, including several works by da Vinci, Del Sarto's portrait of the infant Dauphine and works of art by Florentine, Venetian and Roman artists of the Renaissance. Equally impressive, its grounds were decorated by fountains spouting fire, water and wine, encased with statues such as Hercules by Michelangelo.<sup>22</sup>

François also assisted in the development of key industries and promoted independence of French commerce through the introduction of the fulling mill, which fabricated the production of cheaper cloth and through the establishment of a luxury cloth industry, first in Tours, then in Lyon. These two developments encouraged self-reliance in the French industries because previously cloths of gold, silver and silks had been imported at high costs from Italy and the East. With these inventions and developments, France produced quality cloth at a cheaper price and became competitive in trade.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, François's efforts did effect, over time, a change in taste, artistic expression and intellectual importance. There is reason to believe, however,

that Italy's lesson for François was a practical one: great leaders surrounded themselves with great artists and lived in magnificent palaces.

### **Catherine de Medicis**

Another key personality who also impacted French style during the sixteenth century, and for centuries to come, was Catherine de Medicis. Heir to the great Italian family, whose name was linked for three centuries with the history of Florence, Italy and Tuscany, Catherine de Medicis became queen of France through her marriage to Henri d'Orléans, François's second son. This union, made by François, was one to settle conflicts between France and Italy during the 1553 negotiations and was to influence all of Europe in that it united two powerful forces while securing the papacy. Equally important, this marriage was to further introduce France to the intrigues of the Italian court. Catherine, who seemed mannish in appearance, "was no beauty . . . very dark, with marked eyebrows, bulging eyes, a large nose, the upper lip thin."<sup>24</sup> However, she was very cultured and exceptionally charming and gracious. Her entry into Marseille for the negotiations of her marriage illustrates her refined manner: "She's proud," said the Marseillaises, "proud of her Medicis money bags."<sup>25</sup> Catherine was equally impressive, elaborately "dressed in gold brocade and surrounded by her attendant ladies . . . she rode well."<sup>26</sup> On the following day, wearing "a gown of white silk, sewn all over

with gold and precious stones,"<sup>27</sup> Catherine de Medicis was married to Henri d'Orléans.

With her Medicis taste and her protection of artists, Catherine continued the tradition of François I. She held great concerts and gathered treasures which today are displayed in the Louvre. These tapestries, jewels and books display the happy alliance between French and Italian art during this period. Catherine, like François, was responsible for the construction of beautiful palaces such as Ancy-le Franc and the Louvre. Like him, she commissioned the Italian artist Primaticcio to complete the designs.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Seventeenth Century and Louis XIV**

Born September 5, 1638, the son of King Louis XIII and his Spanish wife, Anne d'Autriche, Louis XIV was a child who was deliberately and delicately groomed for the throne from birth. Becoming king at the age of five placed a great sense of responsibility on young Louis. Under the direction of the queen mother and Mazarin, her Prime Minister, Louis was indoctrinated to believe that he was born to lead and that this endorsement of leadership came from God. According to Louis, God bestowed the power of governing to the king, who in turn retained the power for himself. Louis believed that along with his reign came an obligation to himself and to God, for which he

would be held accountable. For the first time in the history of the French monarchy, the king became closely associated with God.<sup>29</sup>

Mazarin, becoming the teacher and trainer of the young king, greatly influenced several aspects of Louis's reign. First, Louis inherited his love of literature, music, theater and art. He, like Mazarin, possessed and appreciated the finest clothes, the best scents and exquisite taste. Amassing a great fortune, Mazarin, by example, instilled that great leaders should indulge themselves in the building and furnishing of palaces and the collection of works of art and precious stones. Additionally, Mazarin rendered his friendship and support, his political and administrative experience and contacts, which proved indispensable in the development of Louis XIV.<sup>30</sup>

In 1661, upon the death of Mazarin, Louis, at the age of twenty-one, assumed his position as ruler of France and started his personal reign. To solidify his authority he decided to rule completely, without a Prime Minister, which characterized his reign as the most absolute of absolute monarchies in French history. Louis XIV took a hands-on approach to leadership and was active in every decision, policy and issue presented in the court and the governing body. His obsession with being in control of all aspects of his government stemmed from his negative experiences during the Fronde, a civil war which forced the monarchy into exile in 1653. Under this absolute

monarchy, none dared to defy the authority of the king without the consequence of death.<sup>31</sup>

Always clothed in ceremonial dress and surrounded by symbols of the monarchy, Louis never departed from his role as king. He enjoyed ceremonies, festivals, fireworks, processions for knights, horse shows, baptisms and marriages for court and hunting parties: all in the end to bring glory to himself. To further perpetuate this royal image, Louis traveled throughout France to display his magnificence to his citizens. He was always on parade--always the king. Never letting down his guard, he created a distinct separation between the God-appointed king and all other French citizens.<sup>32</sup>

Louis XIV's reign was characterized by etiquette and routine to an extreme degree. The king was theatrical in his dignity and insisted on the ritual and formalities of his etiquette. There was a great emphasis on grandeur, precedence and rank. For example, French society itself contained a strict hierarchy consisting of three orders: the clergy, the nobility, and the third estate, composed of the middle and lower classes. According to Louis, everyone in society neatly fit into these defined levels and was to remain there for the good of the whole. Nobility was also divided into two sorts: that of the sword and that of the robe; the former being gentlemen of the robe, the latter being gentlemen of long lineage and having risen from the ranks of the



bourgeoisie. Both were by this time hereditary and the difference became less evident.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, there existed a hierarchical rank within the royal court itself, which was strictly observed. For example, during a royal procession, the king would enter first, followed by the Dauphin, then the king's brother and the Dauphin's children and the grandchildren. Continuing in rank were cousins and illegitimate children of the king. Succeeding these dignitaries came the clergy, followed by those in official government positions. Court etiquette was therefore strange and extreme in nature, but had to be followed. All procedures must follow protocol and precedence. This order of rank was a priority to the king and if broken was a sign of blatant disregard for the king, possibly resulting in tyranny.<sup>34</sup>

The king's daily routine was also extremely formal and filled with pomp and spectacle. For example, he was awakened at 8:00 a.m., immediately examined by physicians, sprinkled with holy water, assisted with his wigs and clothing and shaved, all in the same manner on a daily basis. He then knelt for his prayers and returned to his private room followed only by his most cherished courtiers. The king was assisted in everything he did and all tasks included a precise routine and order. He dressed in public, ate in public, and went to bed in public.<sup>35</sup>

On another level, the grandeur of the king was reflected in the music, art and drama presented for the amusement of the court. Passionately interested in the arts, Louis was the first king to have musicians directed by a conductor in a modern way. Theatrical galas were given at court, often presenting Molière's troupe. The plays of Corneille, Molière and Racine were frequently produced at court in spite of the disapproval of the clergy, who feared the negative influence of the theater. Louis supported an array of artists who beautified his surroundings. These creative individuals were treated as equals, often eating in a court normally driven by strict protocol. Also, Louis spared no expense in compensating his artists or subsidizing his constructions. He considered the development of spectacular palaces as essential to the life of a king.<sup>36</sup>

The men of letters and science also enjoyed a great boon under the Sun King who made certain that no other period in history ever produced such a wealth of artistic and literary talent. In the Academie Francaise, founded by Richelieu in 1635, Louis pressed for a more liberal interpretation of men of letters. He insisted that Racine and Boileau be among its members, although his promotion of Molière did not result in election. Voltaire pointed out that Louis's government stands like a shining light as a patron of art, literature and science. Moreover, the king's government was probably more important to scientists and the artists than the other contemporary foundations, for it

enabled these artists to earn a living and reputation in a society where very few opportunities existed for earning income.<sup>37</sup>

Louis also greatly contributed to the development of Paris. He gave Paris the Pont-Neuf, restored Notre Dame, completed and embellished the Louvre, laid out the Champs-Élysées, previously in marsh land and built the Observatory and Les Invalides. The capital also received two new gates (Saint Denis and Saint Martin), many new fountains and 5,000 street lamps. Two of Paris's finest squares were created during his reign: Place Vendôme and Place des Victoires. Louis believed that the capital of the greatest European king should reflect his grandeur. He sought, therefore, to make Paris the most admired city in Europe.<sup>38</sup>

The crowning glory of Louis's reign, however, is indisputably the renovation and construction of Versailles in 1669. The king's decision to build it stemmed from his desire to commemorate the Bourbon dynasty, which had no grand palace to its credit. Additionally, he wanted to give expression to his own taste in building, which would create a beautiful setting for court parties.<sup>39</sup>

After closely examining the characteristics of the reign of François I and that of Louis XIV, one can truly see the impact that both eras had on the development and subsequent domination of French taste and style. The reign of François I, which ignited the flame of the French Renaissance, initiated and

solidified the importance of art, literature and architecture in a great society. Additionally, with his unprecedented style, grace and good taste, François I gave the French an appreciation for extravagance. His reign attempted to balance military success with literary, artistic, and scientific success. Although unsuccessful in its military conquest against Italy, with the Italian Renaissance as an example, France began its climb in becoming a dominating European force in fashion trends and innovations. François's extensive court equally contributed to artistic supremacy, for as the elite privileged class they desired to emulate royalty with the finest clothing and a great knowledge and appreciation for literature and art. They encompassed the class that supported and sustained the finer extravagant lifestyle, with the exception of the royal family. With the inclusion of the elite class into the court, the wealth of the monarchy was shared and extended beyond the king's household. Here, the ordinary businessman elevated himself to royal status through association with the king. This augmentation of the court was the first indication that culture, previously reserved for the royal family, was beginning to extend to the common citizen, beyond the walls of the palaces. It is very likely that the foundation of the fabric industry was also solidified during this time. The king's inclusion of both artists and scientists, coupled with his emphasis on refinement, motivated the creation of better methods of production and innovative styles.

The reign of Louis XIV is a logical progression in the development of French style, for it further heightened and intensified the emphasis on style and refinement started during the French Renaissance. During his reign, France detaches itself from the guidance of Italy and solidifies its independent supremacy in style and taste. The Sun King's reign strictly required and enforced good manners, etiquette, artistic and literary appreciation; and, unlike François I, was successful militarily. The grandeur and magnificence that this king demanded became the grandeur and magnificence of the French people themselves. A certain pride in French culture and art permeated his reign. Louis considered himself and his country superior to all other nations. The French monarchy, palaces, artists, men of letters and scientists became the most envied of all Europe. Louis created an aura and refinement that many believe far surpassed any other monarch of his time. During this epoch, the world looked to his monarchy to set the tone in all areas of pomp and magnificence.

Like the courtiers of François's time, the elite bourgeois of the eighteenth century sustained French artistic domination, for they were constantly preoccupied with keeping up with current fashions. The taste and style permeating from Versailles became contagious and every bourgeois anxiously tried to imitate it. Men adorned themselves with wigs as the king

and women copied male hair styles with a feminine twist. In sum, external show of elegance and civilized living became associated with French culture.

Finally, Paris, the capital of Louis's kingdom, became equally stylish and tasteful for its king and its elite. With Louis's various construction of palaces, places, and bridges, Paris took on the elegance and refinement of its king and developed a charm rare to a large city. The development of Paris is truly a result of Louis XIV and his erection of several palaces. Prior to his reign, François I initiated the building of palaces such as Fontainebleau and those of the Loire Valley, which was far removed from the capital. Louis, like François, preferred country tranquility, but insightfully understood the importance of developing Paris to the same standard of his monarchy.

The successive impact and combination of these two monarchies initiated and solidified French style to the extent that at the turn of the eighteenth century, the French monarchy was the shining example of style throughout Europe.

## NOTES

### Chapter I

1. Burke Wilkinson, *Francis in All His Glory* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972), 158.
2. Ibid., 142.
3. R. J. Knecht, *Francis I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 48.
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5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 76.
7. Knecht, *Francis I*, 97.
8. Ibid., 180.
9. Hackett, *François the First*, 232.
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11. René de La Croix, duc de Castries, *The Lives of the Kings and Queens of France* (New York: Alfred B. Knopf, 1979), 150.
12. Pierre Gaxotte, *Histoire de France* (Paris: Hachette, 1960), 732.
13. Hackett, *François the First*, 103.
14. Wilkinson, *Francis in All His Glory*, 302.

## NOTES

### Chapter II

1. Burke Wilkinson, *Francis in All His Glory* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972), 158.
2. Ibid., 142.
3. R. J. Knecht, *Francis I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 48.
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## CHAPTER III

### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

#### **The Emergence of Feminine Dominance in French Fashion Preeminence**

The eighteenth century marks a distinct transition in our study of French fashion supremacy in that the leading authorities determining and initiating fashion trends are no longer the kings of France, such as François I of the sixteenth century and Louis XIV of the seventeenth century, but rather the distinguished and powerful women at court, notably Madame de Pompadour during the reign of Louis XV and Marie Antoinette during that of Louis XVI. This shift in importance relinquished by the French kings to these two strong female fashion role models begins at the onset of the eighteenth century, with the end of the reign of Louis XIV.<sup>1</sup>

Although the court at Versailles was firmly established as the center of art and culture, with French fashions dominating at courts across Europe and being copied throughout the world, courtly life lost its excitement and was no longer filled with gaiety and pleasure. Instead, it became boring and humdrum with Louis XIV, now an elderly monarch, preoccupied with a

virtuous and pious lifestyle, resulting from the influence of his second wife, Madame de Maintenon. Encouraging the king to release his frivolous, immoral, pleasure-seeking lifestyle and to convert to a morally disciplined religious one instead, she greatly influenced the lifestyle and wardrobe of the king and his courtiers. Predominantly giving way to brown and somber colors, the general appearance in court became one of formality, stiffness and somberness.<sup>2</sup>

This transition of Louis XIV's court from the center of excitement and fashion innovation to a boring and dreary setting is the first indication of feminine dominance of fashion trends in the eighteenth century. This passing of power into the female realm was to begin a trend giving rise to the strong influences of Madame de Pompadour and Marie Antoinette, later in the century. However, the key difference in the trends emphasized by Madame de Maintenon and those introduced by Madame de Pompadour and Marie Antoinette is that they did nothing to assist France's reign over fashion trends. Instead, France's strong position of fashion rule was maintained as the court anxiously awaited the death of Louis XIV and the hope of a new monarch.<sup>3</sup>

### **Philippe duc d'Orléans and Louis XV: A Monarchy in Decline**

Before delving into the multitude of influences which Madame de Pompadour promoted in the advancement of French fashion dominance, it is

first important to examine the court of Philippe duc d'Orléans and subsequently that of Louis XV, and the elements therein which allowed her authority to flourish in matters of fashion and moreover in matters of state.<sup>4</sup>

Upon the death of Louis XIV in 1715, his five-year old grandson, Louis XV, became heir to the throne. Philippe duc d'Orléans, the uncle of Louis XV was appointed regent during the infancy of the king. In order to remedy the nation's sense of boredom experienced during the latter part of Louis XIV's reign, the first act of the regent was to close the castle at Versailles and move the court back to Paris at Palais Royal. It was a move which signaled a shift of power, establishing Paris as the new center of French society, art and politics. Consequently, the king and his court lost their stronghold on the patronage of the arts which was once consolidated at Versailles. With this shift of the arts from the Versailles court, a wider appreciation of art spread beyond the king's court. Not just the aristocracy, but the rich merchant, the middle class and the financiers became collectors.<sup>5</sup>

The dominance exuded by the court of Louis XIV over the arts and in areas of taste and style no longer existed during the era of Louis XV. Artists were no longer exclusively subsidized and at the sole disposition of the king, but instead established themselves independently in Paris or were at the disposition of the wealthy. This move, therefore, weakened the court's position as the ultimate environment where style and taste existed. This sort

of decentralization of power consequently weakened the image and status of the king himself. Courtiers no longer sought to surround him but built homes and palaces in Paris as their independent dwellings. The great entourage or court was therefore disassembled and spread throughout Paris.<sup>6</sup>

Although the movement of the court to Paris was a key factor in the weakening of the reign of Louis XV and Philippe duc d'Orléans, the personalities of these two leaders further added to the deterioration of the kings' influences. First, the regent, Philippe duc d'Orléans, was one of the most astonishing figures in history. He was highly intelligent, charming, subtle, a man of taste and a connoisseur of art. Since France was at peace and the claim of the king and throne unquestionable, he turned his attention to the pleasures of life, losing focus on areas of state and government. The regent's lackadaisical reign included many mistresses which contributed to female dominance at court. This environment created by the regent, which accepted mistresses and allowed the input of females in all areas, influenced the reign of Louis XV and was a direct result of his being known for his many mistresses.<sup>7</sup>

Louis XV, a handsome, intensely shy, reserved, and proud man, was very much the opposite of Louis XIV; the ultimate authoritarian. Unlike Louis XIV, he disliked being the center of attraction and preferred being in solitude. He often withdrew from his court which perpetuated the further

decentralization of his power. Bored with the daily routine and etiquette of being king, Louis XV simplified his reign, reducing the number of large ceremonies and receptions and had more intimate gatherings.

Unlike his grandfather, he lacked the authoritarian firmness to establish himself as the absolute monarch. As an ineffective leader and decision maker, he loathed the demands of being king which included excessive daily routines, etiquette and formality. His boredom and inability to lead, therefore, led him to relinquish his responsibilities to his ministers.<sup>8</sup>

It was against this backdrop that Madame de Pompadour started her six-year reign as the king's mistress and her thirteen-year reign as his advisor, participating and guiding the king's policies between 1745 and 1764. Formally known as Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Madame de Pompadour's elegance, wit and charm not only made her the favorite mistress of the king, but also the real power behind the throne. This liaison with a woman of bourgeoisie extraction scandalized the nobility, for not even the most elegant of bourgeoisie could rise to such status of first degree nobility as she did.<sup>9</sup>

Possessing beauty, class and charm, Madame de Pompadour won the affection and confidence of the king. Unquestionably, the most attractive woman dresser at court, she paid extreme attention to her appearance. The preservation of her beauty was a direct result of her meticulous nature:

Twice a week in order to keep her clear complexion, she would apply an astringent lotion made with cypress cones, pomegranate and strawberry roots, walnuts, leaves, and alum; boiled in three liters of rain water and strained through a linen cloth. On her hair she used a pomade made of beef marrow, veal fat, hazelnut oil and vanilla; all this was warmed up in a double boiler, filtered and scented with rose or musk.<sup>10</sup>

Although other women at court possessed more physical beauty than Madame de Pompadour, her well-educated grooming, style and taste overshadowed the physical attributes of other women. Brought up among people of excellent taste, she possessed knowledge and respect for all art forms.<sup>11</sup>

As an active participant in several areas of art, she could act, dance, sing, and recite whole plays from memory. As a dedicated student and patron of the arts, she organized the production of plays at court and solicited the involvement of the nobility. With great creativity and innovation, she created a festive and gay atmosphere at court with the goal of curing the king's constant state of boredom.<sup>12</sup>

With the help of her brother, the Marquis de Marigny, Madame de Pompadour controlled all of the arts in France for twenty years with tact and knowledge. Her unique position as mistress to the king enabled her to support artists and philosophers such as Voltaire and Diderot. Involved in all of the intimate details concerning the arts, she subsidized their lifestyles, supplied material with which to work, solicited orders, organized expositions



displaying their work, ensured that they were compensated, arranged the scheduling of sittings, suggested subjects and was always on hand to help and encourage. The result of this support was a happier community of artists and a strong sense of importance concerning the arts at court. Furthermore, the nobility became more cultured and refined with all being capable of some form of artistic, theatrical, or musical expression. Because of Madame de Pompadour's efforts, the position of France as the artistic and intelligence center of Europe was strongly maintained. Her encouragement of painters, sculptors, and architects has as its result La Place de la Concorde, Ecole Militaire and Le Petit Trianon.<sup>13</sup>

In fashion, Madame de Pompadour popularized the "robe à la française" to such a state of beauty and grace that it was worn all over Europe until the 1770s, making it synonymous with French national dress. Derived from the "saque"<sup>14</sup> style of dress, it was:

... a formal gown with a petticoat or underskirt fitted tight to the waist with a stomacher pinned to the sides of the bodice decorated with rungs of ribbon, bows, with yet more bows adorning the sleeves and voluminous engageants, lace cuffs with two or three tier ruffles which finished the sleeves.<sup>15</sup>

The marquise's "robe à la française" is the definitive fashion statement of the Rococo style which she popularized. This style marked a transition from the heaviness and weightiness of the late Baroque to a light, more graceful and delicate style. With the Rococo style, this delicacy was illustrated with the use

of "circular forms, three-dimensional trimmings, lace, bows, ruffles . . . that decorate the garment from the bodice to the hem."<sup>16</sup> With the Rococo style, dress became simpler, ridding itself of excessive ornamentation that, instead of adding elegance to the body, weighted it down. Madame de Pompadour is credited with being the arbiter, the embodiment and the sustainer of Rococo taste, so much that "le style Louis Quinze" is often called "le style Pompadour."<sup>17</sup>

This Rococo style, derived from the French word "rocaille,"<sup>18</sup> meaning rock-work, was also seen in interior decoration. All the courtiers, bankers and businessmen known in court built their homes in Paris and had them decorated in the lightness and gracefulness of this style. The interiors of these townhouses were elegant consisting of "curving architectural forms, with the use of motifs such as foliage, shells, wings and palm branches."<sup>19</sup> This emphasis on playfulness and lightness was also seen in furniture, porcelain, gold, paintings, and sculptures of the period.<sup>20</sup>

The most lasting of all Madame de Pompadour's achievements and the most profitable to France in money and prestige is the porcelain factory at Sèvres. A lover of china, she filled her homes with it and was careful to patronize the French factories at St. Cloud, Chantilly, and Vincennes, instead of foreign markets such as India, Japan, and Korea. As a result of her great love of china, the king gave Madame de Pompadour the whole village of

Sèvres where she would install a china factory which formally existed in Vincennes. Under her guidance it prospered greatly, soliciting the assistance of many artists and sculptors of the day.<sup>21</sup>

Madame de Pompadour's existence epitomizes the pleasures of life, surrounding herself with the finest furniture, china, artwork, books, plants, jewels, linen, silver, and carriages that life had to offer. She lived a fairy tale existence which emphasized only the happy aspects of life. As the most sophisticated and fashionable woman of the era, she initiated fashion trends which spread throughout Europe and was instrumental in the creation of a cultured, well-educated, and well-groomed court. At the time of her death, France continued to set the tone in the area of fashion for Europe and the world. Madame de Pompadour was therefore the sustainer of French fashion supremacy during the reign of Louis XIV.<sup>22</sup>

Ironically, Madame de Pompadour's very existence was the reason for Louis XV's great unpopularity during the last years of his reign. The existence of numerous mistresses, the careless, nonchalant and frivolous lifestyle of the king implanted the seed of hatred toward the monarchy in the heart of French society. Additionally, this excessive pleasure-seeking lifestyle was the aspect most loathed by the French as they approached the Revolution in 1789. This "joie de vivre" continued during the reign of Louis XVI and,

greatly perpetuated by Marie Antoinette, eventually resulted in the demise of the French monarchy.

### Louis XVI

Upon the death of Louis XV and with the emergence of Louis XVI as king, we see a resurgence of hope on the part of the French people. Louis XVI and his Queen Marie Antoinette received an enthusiastic welcome into leadership, and were symbols of hope in the midst of the declining and loathsome reign of Louis XV. The youthfulness of the future king and queen gave France a desire to give the monarchy yet another opportunity to redeem itself and to prove itself worthy of rule.<sup>23</sup>

Good-natured, well-meaning and eager to serve his subjects, and the initiator of reforms that thrilled all of France, Louis XVI seemed to be the perfect monarch and moreover the complete opposite of his grandfather, Louis XV. Always yielding to the demands of the nation, he placed the nation's interest before his own and was open to a more constitutional monarchy which considered the opinions of the people.<sup>24</sup>

Ironically, these great attributes were inadequate in maintaining stability in the declining monarchy. Untrained as an administrator, and lacking self-confidence, Louis XVI became the victim of his grandfather's poor leadership, the scandals of Louis XVI's court and the excessive and

flamboyant lifestyle of his wife, Marie Antoinette. Playing the role of the scapegoat during a time in French history when the people were looking for someone to blame for their malcontentment, he was convicted of treason against the state and executed under the guillotine.<sup>25</sup>

Louis XVI's lack of leadership skills gave way to the influences of Marie Antoinette, which, in turn, contributed to his downfall. As during the reign of Louis XV, feminine dominance overshadowed the authority of the king, causing a weakening of the monarchy. Marie Antoinette's preoccupation with pleasure, making herself the focus of attention with her style and glamour, fostered a contempt toward her and the glittering life she represented.<sup>26</sup>

Marie Antoinette's strongest attributes of beauty and glamour were detrimental to the existence of the monarchy, but instrumental in allowing French fashion to take yet another step on the road to world dominance. At the time of her arrival in France in May of 1770, Paris enjoyed a preeminence throughout the Western world with regards to feminine attire. French dresses sold abroad better than under the regime of Louis XV because of the use and improvement of fashion dolls and the emergence of metal engravings.<sup>27</sup>

Each year the most popular dressmakers would send fashion dolls throughout Europe to Russia, Germany, Italy, Spain, and England. They stood over twenty inches in height, adorned in all of the dresses created by

French dressmakers. These dolls were in essence the forerunners of the traveling models that emerged in the fashion industry during the twentieth century. Instead of watching a runway of models displaying fashion, customers observed the fashion dolls which displayed innovative French styles, such as the "robe à la française" and the polonaise.<sup>28</sup>

Although fashion dolls were used as early as the twelfth century, their effectiveness reached an all-time high during the eighteenth century, owing to improvements in their structure and appearance. The dolls of the twelfth century were poorly made wooden replicas with crude features. It was not until the eighteenth century that these dolls were beautifully carved with realistic facial expressions.<sup>29</sup>

Although fashion dolls continued to communicate the latest fashions well into the nineteenth century, making their wardrobes became increasingly expensive and time-consuming. Metal engravings had been perfected during the fifteenth century and by the late eighteenth many French engravers were beginning to make beautiful fashion plates for distribution. Among the early fashion plate publications were the *Monument du Costume* (1775-1783) and *La Galerie des Modes* (1778-1787). However, the most complete, illustrated fashion history of France during the eighteenth century appears in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, completed in 1780. The plates were sold separately, then collected in volumes. Over four hundred plates were created in a ten-year

span. There is no doubt that such publications and an atmosphere created by the changing of fashions, helped to add to the extraordinary desire for change that dominated people's minds at the onset of the Revolution.<sup>30</sup>

The enthusiasm displayed upon the arrival of Marie Antoinette deteriorated very shortly after her first months as queen, owing to her passion for extravagance and display. As queen, Marie Antoinette had a self-serving agenda. Her sole desire was to be known as the most fashionable woman in France, and she spared no expense to reach this goal.<sup>31</sup>

As the undisputed queen of fashion in the 1770s and the 1780s, Marie Antoinette caused the constant changing of fashion, as illustrated in the fashion plates, through changing the entirety of her wardrobe each year.<sup>32</sup> The cost of changing her extensive wardrobe, consisting of no less than one hundred and seventy articles of clothing, was overwhelming. The funds allotted annually amounted to the equivalent of 200,000 dollars, according to late twentieth century standards. Although this exorbitant amount seemed inadequate to the queen, it resulted in a deficit in the royal budget.<sup>33</sup>

This extravagance, this need to change and update her wardrobe spread throughout the court and soon to the whole of the French bourgeoisie. It created a movement which has continued for two centuries. According to Belloc, it has obliterated the former tradition when mothers willed their dresses for special occasions to their daughters.<sup>34</sup>

The continued variations in taste in fashions are the foundation of the unpopularity of the Austrian-born wife of the monarch. The rich bourgeoisie complained about the desire of their wives and daughters to imitate the unpredictable taste of the queen. In turn, the merchant and the manufacturer no longer had a fixed basis for foreseeing fashions, and consequently these changes caused instability and potential loss of revenues.

The continually changing wardrobe of Marie and its exorbitant cost created a negative impact on the whole of society. The queen was in debt because of overspending; the women of the bourgeoisie, in turn, spent more to keep up with the trends; and the merchant and manufacturer lost money on excess old stock from the previous season.<sup>35</sup>

In the area of feminine attire, thanks to her charm and also to her personal tastes, Marie Antoinette exercised an influence which is hardly questioned. She was helped with her creations by Rose Bertin, now considered the first French woman dressmaker to have her name associated with fashion. The combination of the dressmaking skill of Rose Bertin, along with the creative genius of Marie Antoinette, enacted changes in the "robe à la française." Although it remained the ceremonial costume, numerous transformations made it less formal and useful at both court and in town. Other dress forms popularized during this era were the sheath gown, which was a single piece without a corset or a pannier; the anglaise, a very fitted-to-



the-waist style with a bustle; and the peasant style skirt, made from cotton and with a shorter skirt which made walking easier. The queen's love for comfort and simplicity launched this style which was formerly worn only by the peasant women and lower class in an effort to identify with them. Curiously, this association with the poor through her dress, and the inexpensive materials to construct the peasant look, did nothing to help the queen's unpopularity. Instead, she was criticized for being common to the point of vulgarity and disrespect for the monarchy.<sup>36</sup>

Marie Antoinette also greatly influenced the hairstyles of her day. The fashion for the "pouf, a finely worked decoration in the middle of the hair, skillfully built up in height."<sup>37</sup> Although this hairstyle dates from the end of the reign of Louis XV, a new version of it--the "pouf à la circonstance"--emerged which illustrated special events such as the birth of the dauphin. Great numbers of poufs subsequently began to appear, illustrating various events and sentiments.<sup>38</sup> (Illustrations 1 and 2 are examples of these hairstyles.)

These hairstyles finally became so inconvenient when riding in carriages that ladies had to kneel on the floor instead of sitting in the seat in order not to spoil the fragile structure. Such an uncomfortable fashion trend ended after the birth of the dauphin. To replace the pouf, Marie Antoinette



Illustration 1.<sup>39</sup>

A Caricature Depicting the Enormous Size  
of the 18th Century Pouf Hairstyle



Illustration 2.<sup>40</sup>

Examples of Pouf Hairstyles of the 18th Century

popularized a hair-do which brought part of the hair to the front of the head to cover her large forehead.<sup>41</sup>

In the end, it was Marie Antoinette's love of jewelry that led to her ultimate demise as queen. An unprecedented scandal regarding a multi-tiered necklace, clad with five hundred and forty diamonds, valued at over one million dollars, rocked the stability of the monarchy. Although it was later determined that Marie Antoinette had no intention of purchasing it and that she had been implicated by the guilty parties, she was therefore perceived as guilty because of her previous record of waste.<sup>42</sup>

Yet in 1785 no one had an inkling of the amount of hatred which was brewing. The fact is that Marie Antoinette had the great misfortune of embodying, at that moment in history, happiness which seems equal to that of a fairy tale. She was frivolous, generous with herself, and superficial. All women would have liked to be she; all men dreamed of a woman like her. But French society wearied of a life so gay, so exaggerated, so wasteful. This fairy tale existence, boastful life and glamorous appearance ultimately cost Marie Antoinette her life.<sup>43</sup>

The reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI are characteristic of the steady decline and eventual abolition of the French monarchy. Simultaneously, these eras represent an ascent in the area of French fashion dominance on a worldwide scale. The lack of leadership on the part of these kings created a

loose, "anything goes" environment when spending and excesses were rampant. Without regard for the monarchy, Louis XV gave Madame de Pompadour free reign during his rule and, in turn, Louis XVI allowed Marie Antoinette to create a state of deficit in the royal finances as well as flaunt a glamorous lifestyle which insulted and infuriated French society.

This shift toward female fashion dominance greatly damaged and abolished the monarchy but greatly assisted France's future in fashion. From this point on, as we will see in the third chapter of this thesis, all fashion arbiters became the influential women at court, while the male leaders concerned themselves with matters of state.

## NOTES

### Chapter III

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27. Hilaire Belloc, *Marie Antoinette* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1924), 196.
28. Ibid., 197.
29. Asquith, *Marie Antoinette*, 67.
30. Ibid., 69.
31. Castelot, *Queen of France*, 35.
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38. Ibid.
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**CHAPTER IV**

**THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF HAUTE COUTURE**

**Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie**

We will begin our analysis of the nineteenth century with the reign of Napoleon III, for there are many aspects of his reign which directly influenced the further development of French style and, moreover, served as a catalyst in the development of *haute couture* or high fashion. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte was elected President of the Second Republic in 1849, and later undertook power by a coup d'état forming the Second Empire. This entry by force into the government is reminiscent of the coup d'état in 1799 by Napoleon I. Louis-Napoleon, known as Napoleon III, entered power on the heels of the July Monarchy (1830-1849) of Louis Philippe I, Duc d'Orléans. This era, being one of great industrial growth, was plagued with uprisings, strikes, and protests on the part of disgruntled and overworked factory workers. Fourteen-hour work days and the mistreatment of minors in the workplace, further perpetuated social problems and resulted in the formation of unions and socialist philosophies. In the midst of social malcontentment

and unrest, an unsuspected economic crisis developed in 1846, owing to a poor harvest. Unemployment, poverty and strikes resulted in a second upheaval of the populace. This chaotic atmosphere was perfect for the re-entry of a Bonaparte who, as in the past, would create a thriving French economy and re-establish social order.<sup>1</sup>

Napoleon III's era was a strict, authoritarian reign, where the newspapers were restricted from free expression. However, the French, being preoccupied with economic and social affairs, accepted this authoritarianism in exchange for the industrial and commercial development that he encouraged. Following the example of English industrialism, Napoleon III developed a sophisticated and extensive railroad system and developed the mining industry. His preoccupation with the poor condition of factory workers led to the development of retirement benefits for the aged and insurance for workers. Moreover, workers for the first time acquired the right to strike and the right to association.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to those social improvements, Napoleon embarked on an extensive campaign to rebuild Paris. Under his direction, Paris received a new and modern appearance. Old buildings and structures were demolished and replaced with extensive avenues, boulevards, and streets. New factories, industries and financial institutions were established, which created an economically sound city. The city limits were extended to the suburbs and

connected by big avenues. Paris, during this time became an internationally renowned city. It became a "mecca" for both economic prosperity and aesthetic beauty.<sup>3</sup>

Luxury industries also prospered during this time. Napoleon's regime, which was synonymous with luxury, pleasure, and great wealth, stimulated the production and demand for fine clothing, jewelry, and hairdressers. Paris, now refined and expensive, housed mainly the elite class who could afford (and desired) the most extravagant things that money could buy.<sup>4</sup>

Although successful in industry and in the development of the most admired city in the world, Napoleon lacked the respect and regard of previous monarchs. The British and other European monarchies remained suspicious because of the Bonaparte name, which recalled the massive European conquest of Napoleon I. For this reason, the plotting on the part of other European monarchs resulted in his inability to find a royal wife. Finally, overtaken by the charm and grace of Eugénie Montijo de Guzman, "a countess of mixed Scottish-Spanish descent,"<sup>5</sup> he married in 1853. Unknown to him, this elegant and refined woman would become a key factor in the development of the world's most renowned fashion development.<sup>6</sup>

As a young woman who dressed almost too well, walked almost too confidently, and had rejected many rich suitors, Eugénie was destined and determined to become the Empress of France. As a child she enjoyed listening to stories to the great Napoleon I and she treasured a picture depicting the battle of Austerlitz. At the early age of ten, she first met Louis Napoleon, in passing, in Paris and affectionately referred to him as *mon prince*.<sup>7</sup> From that day forward, her interest in politics, not simply trivial issues, but those impacting national interests, attracted her to her future husband, Louis Napoleon, and moreover to the throne of France.<sup>8</sup>

The entry of the empress brought beauty and grace into Napoleon's regime. With "auburn hair, a rose complexion with skin of almost transparent clarity . . . a long slender neck . . . swan-like . . . blue eyes and a small mouth,"<sup>9</sup> she possessed the "elegance of a dancer."<sup>10</sup> The empress became the shining example of beauty, refinement and fashion trends. All women of the court desired to emulate her style and grace. Furthermore, her taste was important to the luxury industries which sought her patronage.<sup>11</sup>

### **Charles Frederick Worth and *Haute Couture***

Charles Frederick Worth was born on October 13, 1825 in Bourne, England into a family with no connection in the dressmaking industry. Abandoned by his father, William Worth II, Mary Worth, his mother,

assumed the responsibility of raising him. Forced to end his formal school at the age of eleven because of financial hardships, he started an apprenticeship at London's Swan and Edgar in 1838, selling haberdashery. Worth grew up in this establishment for the whole of his adolescence, from twelve to nineteen, at which time he took a job with respected silk merchants, Lewis and Allenby in 1844.<sup>12</sup>

Although Worth valued his position of selling textiles to be made into clothing at Lewis and Allenby, he grew increasingly interested in the dressmaking industry. He understood that if he wanted to be at the center of the dress trade, he would have to move to Paris, which was considered the mecca for women's fashion during this era. Despite the fact that Worth had no formal education or guidance in dressmaking, and that he had no knowledge of French beyond the vocabulary of fashion, he relocated to Paris in 1845.<sup>13</sup>

The industrially thriving and elegant Parisian environment, which possessed a beautiful fashion-forward empress, was the perfect backdrop for the emergence of Charles Frederick Worth. Employed by Gagelin, the most exclusive and luxurious silk manufacturer in France, Worth possessed an extensive background in luxury fabrics. Gifted with the talent of sales, combined with the talent of dressmaking, Worth produced his first gown in order to assist in the selling of shawls. His first dress of "white muslin and

utterly plain"<sup>14</sup> possessed an exceptional fit and line so elegant that customers requested copies. Owing to an innumerable amount of requests, Gagelin was forced to create a dress department. This combination of luxury fabrics and dressmaking under the same roof allowed customers to choose the finest fabrics from a well-informed person and immediately request their gown from a competent dressmaker. Unlike most designers of his era, Worth possessed expert knowledge in both services under the same roof.

Another difference that further distinguished Worth's designs from other dressmakers was his accuracy and preciseness in fit. For Worth, the fit of the garment, not its ornamentation of fabric, was the most important aspect. Worth's creations had a superior construction and fit which resulted in a high quality garment. Moreover, customers only endured one fitting for his gowns, whereas the ordinary dressmaker required several. This emphasis on precise construction might be attributed to his association with the English, who specialized in tailored clothing.<sup>15</sup>

Worth's true recognition came during two key events: *The Great Exhibition of Works of Industry of All Nations* in Britain in 1851 and *The Universal Exposition in Paris* in 1855. During both events, he received awards for his fine construction and style of dresses. The two innovations which made him well known during this period were the crinoline and the development of the court

train where the train extended from the shoulders of the gown instead of the current style with the train extending from the waist.<sup>16</sup>

Unhappy about the lack of recognition given by his employer, Worth decided in 1858 to open his own dressmaking business. Regardless of his exceptional talent in dressmaking, there existed one monumental problem which caused a threat to his future as a dress designer. Prior to Worth's arrival, the dressmaking industry was exclusively dominated by women. It seemed logical for women to dominate and control the dress designing industry, for it catered to women. As women, they related to one another's desires and needs in dress manufacturing. Also, the French society was more comfortable with women dominating industries which involved a woman's body. The idea of a man measuring a woman for fit seemed vulgar and repulsive and was not easily accepted.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, Worth recognized that the success of his business also relied on the patronage of a famous woman of the court. Having an influential woman of the court wear his dress would allow exposure of his product in the upper echelon of society. These women, who were unable by law to wear the same dress twice to any official event, would secure his future success in the dressmaking industry.

Worth first approached Princess Pauline, the wife of the Austrian-appointed ambassador to France, Prince Von Metternick. As a young,

adventurous and outgoing personality, Pauline agreed to purchase one of Worth's gowns, despite the fact that he was a male designer. Astonished by the impeccable simplicity and design of Worth's gowns, she summoned him to become her personal dressmaker.

This relationship between Worth and the princess launched Worth's dresses into international acclaim. For the first time in dressmaking history, women were requesting the patterns or copies of dresses that had been seen. Worth's request for dresses extended from all over the world: all areas of Europe and also the United States. This international growth came at a time when the communication systems were modernized and able to rapidly transport goods. Consequently, an order that once took six months to arrive in the United States, now arrived in two weeks. For this reason, the extensive modernization of Paris and its communication systems greatly contributed to Worth's rapid success. The combination of modernization along with Worth's indisputable talent for creating quality goods was indispensable to his success.<sup>18</sup>

Although modernization assisted Worth with his rapid growth, he in turn assisted in the stimulation, growth and success of the French economy and the textile industry. Possessing a close relationship with fabric manufacturers, he promoted their business by featuring slow-selling fabrics. The sight of Worth's gowns caused slow sales to increase because of the



demand for and prestige of his garments. For example, Worth presented a brocade gown to the empress who refused to wear it. But upon realizing the need for political support in Lyon, where brocade was manufactured, she saw the need to support its brocade business by wearing the gown. As a result of this decision, the empress gained the confidence of the Lyonese and moreover brocade sales increased.<sup>19</sup>

Worth's influence was, therefore, far-reaching. He influenced the fabrics, colors, and styles worn by his era. He assisted in the promotion of less popular fabrics and he impacted politics between individuals with different political ideologies. Never in history did a dressmaker possess such dominance in the dressmaking industry and moreover beyond its realm.<sup>20</sup>

The period of 1858-1870 represented the glory years of the Worth era. However, in 1870 with the collapse of the Second Empire, Worth's business experienced a temporary setback. His strong relationship with the court, which had benefited and sustained him, was no longer in existence. With Bismarck's invasion of Prussia and the subsequent exile of Napoleon III and Eugénie, it seemed that Worth's flourishing business was over. Surprisingly, these events actually benefited Worth's business in the long run, for he became independent and free from the constraints of the court. In 1871 he reopened and summoned the press to dictate the fabrics, colors and styles that would be in fashion for that year. The entire world respected and accepted

his opinion on fashion trends, and consequently, orders continued to flow and business regained its prior status.<sup>21</sup>

During this time Worth also established features in his business that were to become characteristic of all future couture houses. First, he presented a spring and autumn collection, highlighting key styles and colors annually. Second, he used live models to display his product, and third, he presented exclusive designs. All *haute couture* dress designers subsequently followed his lead by incorporating all of these elements into the marketing of their lines.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Development of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne***

By the end of the 19th century, Charles Frederick Worth relinquished his prosperous couture business to his two sons, Gaston and Jean Philippe. With their keen business sense, Worth's sons recognized the competitive environment of fashion and realized that maintaining the most successful couture house in Paris would be difficult when faced with fierce competition from other up-and-coming designers. To prevent this cutthroat rivalry, Gaston organized the industry into the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Française*.<sup>23</sup> This powerful and unprecedented couture organization catered to both the fashion innovators and the fashion unions. Simultaneously, it represented, advised, and defended its members, who included the vast majority of great names in French couture, as well as dealing with the

complicated details of labor relations in couture houses. It, therefore, concerned itself with fashion creation to fashion completion from start to finish; organizing all relations between labor and management.<sup>24</sup>

The creation of the *Syndicale* further aided France to sustain its position in fashion supremacy because it consolidated and organized the fashion industry. The collective joining of forces of France's most influential designers made its fashion industry the strongest in the world. Although in direct competition with each other, the designers collectively supported the organization which in turn supported them by implementing and enforcing rules and regulations concerning the press, the issuance of invitations and the protection of style imitation. Additionally, the *Syndicale* carefully screened and selected its buyers by issuing a "carte d'acheteur" (buyer's card) defining certain rights reserved by the designer and his conditions of sales.<sup>25</sup>

Although these rules and regulations may seem exaggerated to the outsider, there are several reasons for their existence. The most important of these is plagiarism. Style piracy has been a problem in France as far back as the 18th century. At that time, courtesans tried to bribe Rose Bertin, Marie Antoinette's dressmaker, to reveal details of the Queen's latest gown before she appeared wearing it for the first time at some gala function. The first law protecting fashion creation was passed by the French Tribunal in 1920 and couture designs registered with the *Syndicale* are accorded the same legal

protection as literature, cinema and patented inventions. Every model created by every member of the *Syndicale* is registered in his files, with an exact sketch, photograph, and swatch of the fabric, before the official showings to buyers and press.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the *Syndicale* took particular interest in encouraging new designs by creating the *Syndicale* Schools in Paris in 1930 under the guidance of Jacques Worth, president of the *Syndicale* at this time. The schools became the source of skilled labor and new talent for the couture houses. Consisting of two divisions--one for French students and one for foreigners--the *Syndicale* Schools assisted in refining talents and breeding designers. Consequently, they further stabilized the fashion industry in France and made it the most renowned in the world. France, therefore, became a magnet attracting gifted designers from all parts of the world to join its prestigious organization.<sup>27</sup>

It can be said without exaggeration that the economic, political and social climate of the 19th century, along with the contributions of Charles Frederick Worth, were the most influential features in the development of *haute couture* as we know it today. The economic climate during the Second Empire, which encouraged a modern communication and transportation system, along with Napoleon III's desire to be the most envied Empire of Europe, aided Worth's rapid ascent as the most desired designer in the world.<sup>28</sup> With his keen fashion sense, Worth organized the high fashion

industry into seasonal showings which promoted continual business. With the creation of a superior constructed garment, he maintained strong relations with the elite class who supported his work and in turn the development of high fashions. Worth's sons further strengthened the fashion business with the creation of the *Syndicale* and moreover ensured its future through the establishment of its schools. For these reasons, the Worth family can be considered the first family of fashion. Owing to Worth's efforts, *haute couture* found itself at the height of its power and influence.

Worth not only established the business of high fashion, but he assisted in making France the fashion capital of the world. All aspiring designers were drawn to Paris where Worth first initiated his business, and were eager to attend the *Syndicale* School which was considered the best training ground for designers. Inevitably, the world's most talented designers found their way to France and were required to master the language, which further established France's dominance over not only the fashion industry, but also the designers. Eventually, the fashion business became invaluable to the French economy through its promotion of French materials and of the French culture itself.

## NOTES

### Chapter IV

1. Roger Williams, *The Moral Napoleon III* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 198.
2. Ibid., 205.
3. Ibid., 208.
4. Ibid., 192.
5. Albert Guérard, *Napoleon III* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 396.
6. Ibid., 397.
7. Ibid., 423.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 406.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 38.
12. Diana de Marly, *Worth: Father of Haute Couture* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), 3.
13. Ibid., 10.
14. G. P. Gooch, *The Second Empire* (New York: Longmans, 1960), 140.
15. Ibid., 105.

16. Ibid., 167.
17. Ibid., 180.
18. Brison Gooch, *Napoleon III: Man of Destiny* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 359.
19. Guérard, *Napoleon III*, 231.
20. Ibid.
21. Brison Gooch, *Napoleon III*, 505.
22. Ibid., 526.
23. Subsequent references to this organization will be indicated as *Syndicale*.
24. François Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1965), 137.
25. Ibid., 142.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 197.
28. Gooch, *The Second Empire*, 156.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

After an in-depth century-by-century analysis of Parisian fashion supremacy, we can conclude that the French monarchy was responsible for the prestige and acclaim that France enjoys in the fashion domain. Starting with the impeccable style, intellect, and Italian influences of François I; to the etiquette and grandeur of Louis XIV; to the fashions set by Madame de Pompadour and Marie Antoinette, and to the economic growth during the reign of Napoleon III, which fostered the development of *haute couture*; the French monarchy made French fashion ascent on a worldwide scale possible. The great emphasis placed on fashion and the financial support of the monarchs' designs and their lifestyles were integral factors in making French designs visible and appreciated on a global scale.

The French monarchs were equally influential in the establishment of Paris as the principal city of fashion. First, the magnificence in architecture, starting in the Loire Valley during the era of François I, influenced subsequent construction of edifices and avenues. During the reign of Louis XVI we saw the establishment of Pont-Neuf, a restored Notre Dame, a completed Louvre,



and the development of famous avenues and gates, such as the Champs-Elysees, Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin. These magnificent constructions brought Paris to unprecedented heights of beauty and grandeur, and set the stage for its future position as fashion capital of the world. This progress was further advanced during the era of Napoleon III, who essentially rebuilt the city, giving it a modern appearance.

Second, the migration of the court from Versailles to Paris during the reign of Philippe duc d'Orléans was critical in making Paris the intellectual center of fashion, art, and culture. With that move, fashions and arts went from the isolation and confinement of Versailles to exposure to the whole of French society. French citizens from the rich nobility to the poor peasants gained access to the arts. With the later deterioration of the monarchy and its court, because of the French Revolution, Paris retained its position of importance since the location of the arts was no longer moved at the whim of the king.

Finally, the establishment of the *Chambre Syndicale* in Paris afforded the convergence of designers from all parts of the globe to Paris for superior instruction in garment construction. This organization found its home in Paris, guaranteeing its position as the hub of fashion. Owing to the *Syndicale's* leading role in all areas of fashion, talented designers from all parts of the

globe were present in one city: Paris. Complete with its impressive atmosphere, Paris became the well from which all innovative designs, creativity and knowledge sprang.

Although Parisian fashion supremacy was unquestionable during the middle of the nineteenth century with the appearance of *haute couture*, the question as to its current power and influence in the fashion arena still necessitates investigation. The high cost of gorgeous *haute couture* salons and labor costs for hand sewing and finishing these garments have caused uncertainty in an age where mass-produced and value-priced clothing is so prevalent. For a number of years, the French government aided the French fashion industry; however, the government subsidy was lifted in 1963, delivering a great blow to the industry. The fact that *haute couture* survived after this reduction in revenues is remarkable.

The United States, Italy, and England offer the greatest competition to *haute couture*, although other countries are becoming more competitive. Italian designers, with less expensive fabrics of the same quality and cheaper labor, offer serious competition to Parisian designers. In recent years, Italy has become one of the largest exporters of ready-to-wear garments in the world.

Additionally, before World War II, many rich American women bought their entire wardrobes in Paris. But a shift in buying habits occurred with the

realization that American designers are able to create clothes as distinctive and wearable as any in the world. Moreover, because of high import tariffs, the American designs are often available at a lower cost than Paris originals.

Regardless of the plethora of foreign designers posing competition and the threat of mass-produced garments at a value price, Paris remains the fashion capital. Although its position is challenged, in reality it continues to retain its fashion reputation in the hearts of many. Perhaps the ambience and charm of Paris, affectionately known as the "city of lights," retains this label because of the long tradition for art and fashion established by the French court. Four centuries of fashion preeminence are difficult to uproot and dispel, regardless of the new arrival of talent. The legends of François I, Louis XIV, Madame de Pompadour, Marie Antoinette, and the Empress Eugénie will forever live with the presence of the beautiful monuments which they constructed. As long as these structures exist, it will be difficult to eliminate the fashion preeminence so deeply engraved in the fabric of French society. For art, literature, architecture, and cultural intelligence all fall under the heading of "fashion supremacy." This term ultimately encompasses more than clothing.

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