

CLOTH, FASHION AND REVOLUTION
‘EVOCATIVE’ GARMENTS AND A MERCHANT’S KNOW-HOW:
MADAME TEILLARD, DRESSMAKER AT THE PALAIS-ROYAL

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Revolutionary upheavals have substantial repercussions on the luxury goods sector. This is because the luxury goods market is ever-changing, highly competitive, and a source of considerable profits. Yet it is also fragile, given its close ties to fashion, to the imperative for novelty and the short-lived, and to objects or materials that act as social markers, intended for consumers from elite circles. However, this very fragility, related to fashion’s fleeting nature, can also be a strength. When we speak of fashion, we speak of inventiveness and constant innovation in materials, shapes, and colours. Thus, fashion merchants become experts in the fleeting and the novel. In his *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* [*Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce*], Savary des Bruslons assimilates ‘novelty’ and ‘fabrics’ with ‘fashion’:

[Fashion] [...] It is commonly said of new fabrics that delight with their colour, design or fabrication, [that they] are eagerly sought after at first, but soon give way in turn to other fabrics that have the charm of novelty.¹

In the clothing trade, which best embodies fashion, talented merchants are those that successfully start new fashions and react most rapidly to new trends, which are sometimes triggered by political events. In 1763, the year in which the Treaty of Paris was signed to end the Seven Years’ War, the haberdasher Déton of Rue Saint-Honoré, Paris, ‘in whose shop one finds all fashionable merchandise, invented *preliminary* hats, decorated on the front in the French style, and on the back in the English manner.’² The haberdasher made a clear and clever allusion to the preliminary treaty, signed a year earlier. He transformed a political event into a sales argument; how could anyone be any more fashionable? During the American War of Independence (1775-1782), hats ‘in the Boston manner’ and parures ‘in the style of Philadelphia’ were abundant.

¹ Jacques Savary des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce...*, Paris, Veuve Estienne, 1741, entry ‘Mode [Fashion]’.

² *Gazette du commerce*, Paris, Prault, 1763, No. 1.

The relationship between fashion, politics, and clothing reached new heights during the French Revolution. Attire became a political sign for all members of society.³ It conveyed principles and ideological values in a visual manner: patriotism, seriousness, modesty, and simplicity. Uniformity in attire was meant to abolish the social inequalities of the *ancien régime*. This conceptual process involved all clothing, in its most ordinary aspects: how to make clothing an accurate reflection of a new society.⁴ The revolutionary badge, established by law, was the perfect patriotic symbol, conveying a citizen's adherence to the revolutionary cause. Simplicity contrasted with splendour, freedom and equality with pride and privileges. Republican attire came to symbolise a new man, and popular societies considered creating and enforcing an 'equal national attire' for everyone.

Shopkeepers quickly took advantage of these new opportunities. We can see how by looking at advertisements as well as changes in clothing. Press advertisements emphasised a desire for an openness in dress, along with equality and simplicity, as signs of adherence to the new ideals. Articles of clothing were renamed using appropriate vocabulary: a political language in fashion. Madame Teillard, a dressmaker established at the Palais-Royal in Paris, typifies the ease with which some merchants adopted the new rules. She ran several advertisements in the *Journal de Paris*, the first French daily paper (1777-1840), between 1790 and 1794.⁵ She changed the vocabulary of her advertisements, erasing the old terms – 'Ladies', 'royal', 'sovereign', 'queen' – and replacing them with new catchwords: 'citizen', 'Equality', 'republican', 'economical'. The advertising headline was skilfully transformed: the women in this trade were simply 'citizens':

[2 March 1790] Madame Teillard, Maker of Fancy Gowns, has the honour of announcing to Ladies

[16 March 1794] Citizen Lisfrand, formerly Teillard, Maker of Fancy Gowns, has the honour of announcing to Citizens

[27 September 1794] Citizen Lisfrand, formerly Teillard, Maker of Fancy Gowns, has the advantage of announcing to her Fellow Citizens

³ Annemarie Kleinert, 'La mode, miroir de la Révolution française', in *Modes et Révolutions 1780-1804. Exposition, musée de la mode et du costume*, Exhibit at the Palais Galliera in Paris, 8 February – 7 May 1989, Paris, Éditions Paris-Musées, 1989, pp. 59-81. See also, in the same book, Jean-Marc Devocelle, 'D'un costume politique à une politique du costume', pp. 83-103, and Daniel Roche, 'Apparences révolutionnaires ou révolution des apparences', pp. 105-127. A. Kleinert has studied the relationship between fashion and politics, based on one of the most important newspapers dedicated to fashion, *Cabinet des modes* (1785-1786), which became *Magasin des modes nouvelles* (1787-1789) then *Journal de la mode et du goût* (1790-1793).

⁴ Devocelle, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁵ Jacqueline Hellegouarc'h has studied Madame Teillard's catalogues (spring and winter collections) from a strictly lexicographical standpoint, based on the advertisements that appeared in a fashion paper (*Magasin de la mode et du goût*) from March 1790 to September 1794: *Vocabulaire de la mode féminine pendant la Révolution française...*, Nancy, CNRS Institut de la Langue Française, 1980.

The 'Palais-Royal' (1790) became the 'Palace formerly known as the Palais-Royal' (1792), then the 'Maison Égalité' (1794). The 'Golden Pavilion' banner, too ostentatious, disappeared in September 1794. The dressmaker gave new names to her dresses: 'dresses and skirts in the sovereign style', 'girdles embroidered in the Queen's style', 'fancy gowns in Madame Première's style', 'French royal gowns', and 'gowns in the Infanta's style' became described as 'in the style of La Carmagnole' (named after a revolutionary song) or 'in the republican style'. These advertisements extolled the new virtues of simplicity and convenience: 'economical dresses' (these 'compose, as desired, at the same time, three types of dress: gala dress, evening dress and fitted negligee'), 'in the modest style', 'in the milkmaid's fashion' ('this simple dress is easy to wear'), 'for the lazy woman' ('can be slipped on in an instant'). The dressmaker played on the themes of the day, but these advertisements were also an appeal to new customers: the terms were aimed at a new audience. However, as Daniel Roche has written, the apparent search for egalitarian simplicity was only confirmation of elegance, wealth and distinction, as shown by the high, and constantly rising, prices of the dressmaker's creations. The imperatives of fashion remained unchanged: differentiation based on the materials chosen, a hierarchy of fabrics, and a capacity for even faster changes in trends.⁶

⁶ Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

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