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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN**

**FACULTY OF CRAFT DESIGN ,**

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**OVER THE TOP  
(FASHIONABLE SOCIETY IN  
THE 1770'S)**

**BY**

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

"The ultimate goal of decoration is to enhance our perception, to invest the world around us with the enriched content of beauty, order and challenge, to make the ordinary, and the extraordinary."

(Lisa Taylor, Hair, 1980 )

Hair is both the perfect ornament for the body, and one of the most personal. Hair has been used to signify many millions of things throughout history from social stance, rebellion, mourning, sexual appeal and love and has been influenced by as many more, such as religious belief, fashion, tradition, class and climate. Hair has always been an important aspect of fashion and often a much emphasised one. Women's hair in particular has often inspired the most magnificent flights of fantasy throughout history and hair and its ornamentation have always been a focus in the development of fashion in all ages. It is generally believed that people have been decorating their hair from at least the Neolithic period ( c.4,000 BC ). We know this from the figurines that have been excavated from this era.

Throughout history people have done such horrific things to themselves, their hair, faces and bodies for the sake of fashion, from starving themselves, to lacing and tying themselves together in the oddest of ways to poisoning, all in order to achieve the required fashionable 'perfection' of the day. Perhaps the most extreme period in the European history of hairstyles and hairdressing occurred in the mid to late 18th Century, mainly in France and England.

In this decade, women's hairstyles soared to enormous heights, sometimes even three feet above the forehead, and were elaborately decorated with everything from feathers and jewels, to ships in full sail. Aristocrats and the wealthy classes were extravagant in their grotesque show of wealth. The more eccentric the hair and costume, the more fashionable the person was considered person. The nobles tried to accentuate the gap between their declining importance as aristocracy and the rising wealth of the Bourgeoisie.

I have always been fascinated by hair, having experimented a lot with my own and am

interested in the capacity of hairstyles to transform one's appearance. By this transformation the border between fantasy and reality is broken down and it is here that the link between my own personal interest and the fashions of the 1770's occurs. I would like in this thesis to examine this period in France, with specific reference to the court of Louis XV1. I am interested, as well in discussing women's hairstyles and the extravagant and ostentatious behaviour of a society devoted to luxury and excess.

Chapter One of this thesis will study the hairstyles and how they were made with many references to the hair from contemporary verse which, like caricatures of the time, mocked the fashion which was the folly of this age:

'The ladies, I vow,  
I cannot tell how,  
were now white as curd, and now red.  
Law, how you stare  
At the huge crop of hair,  
'Tis a hay-cock at top of their head"

(David Garrick,(1717-79), May -day or The Little Gypsy.)<sup>1</sup>

The second chapter is concerned with health and the absence of hygiene which was so common, and also with the misuse of cosmetics .This verse explains .....

"I need not warn you of too pow'rful smells  
which sometimes Health, or kindly Heat expels  
Nor, from your tender Legs to pluck with care  
The casual Growth of all unseemly Hair....  
Yet, let me warn you, that, thro' no Neglect,  
You let your teeth disclose the least Defect.  
You know the use of white to make you fair,  
And how, with red, lost colour to repair..



Marrows of stag, nor your pomatums try,  
Nor clean your furry teeth, when Men are by."

(William Congreve)<sup>2</sup>

The third chapter deals with Taste, Manners and Society (although mainly with the latter two) which by the late 1780's in the pre revolution years became of the utmost importance. I will discuss the Court's pre-occupation with image, and how by trying to immerse themselves totally in pleasure they disregarded the state of the country around them. Chapter Four is devoted to contemporary comments on these absurd people and their eccentric lifestyles and fashions from the viewpoint of the many artists, printmakers and caricaturists that were becoming ever increasingly popular. This is done both objectively, and satirically with sketches from Rowlandson and paintings by Reynolds and Gainsborough, fashion plates which give accurate and graphic representations, and caricatures of the folly of fashion. Painters such as Hogarth, earlier in the same century, give us today an insight into people's behaviour and ordinary life, and with many portraits of this era it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between reality and exaggeration. Hogarth, although tending towards caricature tried not to be satirical but portrayed instead what he saw across the total social range of society. Rowlandson's sketches are more relevant here, for although they deal with the Bourgeois and not the Aristocracy, one of their basic concerns is the hair fashion and behaviour which are similar to both.

In these chapters I will discuss an era of vanity and pretentiousness that portrays what extremes people will go to for the sake of fashion and social acceptance giving a careful account of the eccentricities and absurdities of the 1770-80's and explaining why such an exaggerated and flamboyant period of fashion was so short-lived.

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<sup>1</sup> Corson Richard, Fashion in Hair, Peter Owen, London, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Congreve William, (1760-1729) †translated from Ovid's Art of Love [Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BC-AD 18)] His writings were very popular in the 16th and 17th cents. cited from Stringer Jenny, The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature, Oxford University Press, 1990.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WIGS AND HAIRSTYLES:

To begin to discuss hairstyles in the 18th century one must first briefly outline the period under consideration. In the aristocratic and non-working wealthy classes life was mainly a source of relaxation, amusement and conversation in what we would perceive as one long holiday. It was

"the functional equivalent of what the occupational sphere is for most people in modern society, in that it was the direct instrument of their career, the medium of their rise or fall and subject to social demands and duties. Rank must be expressed. Their social identity depended upon it. Noblesse oblige "<sup>1</sup>

France in the 18th century had become the centre of the world of fashion and although there was religious and political rivalry between France and Britain, anything French was assumed to be fashionable, even by the British. It was a total contradiction with both countries believing themselves superior to the other, yet France was still recognised as the fashion leader.

The greatest applied arts in this century included fabric ornamentation, often of superbly rich brocade, and intricate embroidery. Intense detail and attention was paid to even the smallest of items such as pill and patch boxes as well as trunks, furniture, curtains and carriages and of course, clothing. The clothes reflected fully the period they were made in, so rich in silk, gold, silver and covered in precious stones like diamonds and rubies or in coloured glass and ribbons that just to wear them must have been an ordeal. Yet probably even more uncomfortable were the wigs. Huge great towering affairs that took hours upon hours to achieve which, at the height of lavishness in the late 1770's, reached over three feet in height.

Generally it was women's hair dressing that rose to this absurd peak, as men's hairstyles had diminished in size from the huge periwigs of the late 1600's to the smaller ones more natural to their own hair, except for the London group nicknamed the Macaronis who amused everyone with their high domed wigs, tremendously huge queues and curls, and large bunches of flowers and lace in their lapels,(fig.1):





FIG.1 - "NOW S'YOUR A COMPLEAT MACARONI"





'Five ponds of hair they wear behind  
The ladies to delight,O  
Their senses give unto the wind  
To make themselves a fright,O  
This fashion who does e'en persue

I think a simple Tony  
This fashion who does e'en persue'  
For he's a fool, say what you will  
Who is a Macaroni"<sup>2</sup>

From the 17th century, wigs had been worn consistently by men. These were mainly periwigs i.e.-which flowed down from the head and over the shoulders in a mass of tight curls giving us the impression of a sheepskin rug (the origin of legal headwear today.) see Fig.2. As a general rule, women didn't usually wear full wigs as they preferred to add volume and length to their own tresses with hairpieces and toupées, yet in the early 18th century when smaller coiffures were so fashionable it was sometimes easier to use wigs in order that a few varied hairstyles could be changed quickly and easily. Queen Charlotte, married to the English King George III who ascended the throne in 1760, having had a great many. By the 1770's women's own hair was needed to hold their huge creations solidly onto their heads.

### **MEN'S HAIRSTYLES:**

In the 18th century the use of the wig was not considered necessarily "to cover the lack of hair, but to extend the costume upwards (like a hat), the wearer creating an impression of importance, dignity and gravity" <sup>3</sup>. For men of both the nobility and the bourgeoisie the wig was considered essential and associated with masculinity. According to G.A.Stephens in his short play A Lecture on Heads in 1764 it was "furniture for the head," the head being perceived





FIG.2 -THE DUC OF ROTHES, G.SCHÜNEMANN, (1667),





as a " field of inscription, as well as a container to be furnished with book learning," for" without a wig a man is of no consequence" yet with one "behold how luxuriant....what importance is now seated on those brows! what reverence the features demand"<sup>4</sup> and what sudden respect is now shown them. Men shaved their heads to accommodate their wigs so they could be fitted tightly to their skulls; a wig could make such a difference to a man. One tale is told in 1782 of how a man, becoming quite hot at a ball, removed his wig to the horror of the surrounding crowd who drew away in revulsion and shock. His colleagues advised him to return it but he couldn't see what all the fuss was about <sup>5</sup>. The Court held manners and social behaviour in such high esteem that the slightest fault ( such as the wig removing ) could cause instant disgrace and disapproval, I will be discussing this in Chapter Four.

Philip Mercier's painting The Careless Husband 1738, ( fig 3) portrays the betrayed wife having just found her wigless husband sitting asleep beside the likewise sleeping maid, revealing not only his shaven head but also his guilt. By placing a handkerchief over his head her instant reaction was to restore at least some part of his dignity<sup>6</sup>. Wigs were often the most expensive and most vital part of a man's wardrobe, and by the late 18th century they were worn by men of all classes. Servants and coachmen usually wore powdered bagwigs which effectively portrayed the wealth of their masters. Men were expected to represent, through dress , their social status, and while...

" Women study dress only to add to their beauty; whereas men should dress suitable to their various ranks in life, whether as a magistrate, statesman, warrior, man of pleasure, etc. for the hair, either natural or artificial, may be dress'd to produce in us different ideas of qualities of men, which may be seen by actors, who alter their dress according to the different characters they are to perform"<sup>7</sup>.

By the time of the court of Louis XV1 in the late 1760-80's etiquette and deportment had become very important, and court social laws grew to incorporate clothes, manners and image. For men as much as women, the act of dressing and social manner indicated how they were to be received in society and what respect was due them. Personal vanity was totally accepted.





FIG.3 -THE CARELESS HUSBAND, PHILIP MERCIER, (1738)





Men and women were instructed through books and journals on how to combine natural and artificial hair so as to appear unnoticeably different through the use of pomades and powder. Women were advised on the use of toupée's and half-wigs as much as men if their own hair was too short or thin to achieve the desired fashion.

Wigs were preferably made from real hair with blond hair imported from the Dutch convents while the hair from the beer-drinking countries such as Flanders was sought after as they were considered luxurious and richly nourished from the wheat-based brew that was drunk there.<sup>8</sup>

Many wigs were also made from horse and other animal hair which was cheaper, such as wool wigs which were used as they kept their curls intact, even in the rain and were therefore popular with coachmen. Wigs were constantly worn right up until the end of the 1780's, and when they were not used, as was the case with more and more men in the later part of the century, their own hair was dressed with pomades and powder to look like a wig.

### **WOMEN'S HAIRSTYLES:**

" Wigs convey the power of hair to provide or disguise one's personal identity, race and destiny, inclusive of texture, style and form"<sup>9</sup>

Women's hairstyles were again rising in the French courts, peaking in height and extravagance by the late 1770's. The society the nobles lived in was dominated by a sense of fantasy which governed their lives, leaving them oblivious to the rise in the political discontent around them. They created a world of illusion, painting their faces to disguise age and dressing in fantastically elaborate costumes.

"No ringlets now adorn her face,  
Dear nature yields to art;  
A lofty Head-dress must take place,  
Absurd in ev'ry part'  
Patch, paint, perfume, immodest stare,

You find it all the fashion;  
Alas, I'm sorry for the fair  
Who thus disgrace the nation"  
The Female Macaroni "10

Aristocrats enjoyed the pleasures of elegant houses and gardens, music, literature and art, assemblies and sport, the benefits of travel and education and especially and overall, the delights of fashion.<sup>11</sup>. Undoubtedly the most fashionable person in France at this time, and someone who was definitely a major trend setter was Marie Antoinette who, since her arrival at the court of Louis XVI when she was fifteen, had a painted face and a great interest in fashion. Up until now no French Queen had ever had any real public respect, and earlier Queens had even been snubbed by lower ranks above the King's own mistresses. But, when Louis XVI married her in 1774, Marie Antoinette vowed, not necessarily to be a good Queen, but to become the most fashionable and talked about person in France, and this she succeeded in doing.

As hair fashions progressed, Marie Antoinette's hair rose higher and higher, and in 1775 when her mother the Empress Marie Theresa of Austria received a portrait of her daughter with one of these magnificent coiffures she returned it immediately with a note expressing her disapproval in her daughter's ostentatious behaviour. Marie Antoinette obviously paid no heed and her hair, and that of the fashionable society over which she presided, kept its height right up until the 1790's when 'La Guillotine' shortened its height.

### **HAIRSTYLES AND STYLING:**

In the late 16th century the 'Friseur' ie: hairdresser, began to get established, and by the 1770's they were in great demand. Until then a personal maid would have been all that any fashionable lady required, as she would often have done up her own hair herself, but as hair fashions became ever increasingly higher and more complicated, the need for professional and experienced hairdressers became essential.



For more than fifteen years Marie Antoinette's extravagant hairstyles were created by the great Leonard Autier who set up the 'Acadademican' of fashions and coiffures, at the Court of Maria Antoinette and " At his most artistic, he was able to incorporate up to 48 foot of cloth or ribbon into a single coiffure"<sup>12</sup>. Leonard became very famous and successful and was sought after by every wealthy lady in Paris. Hair dressers cost the earth, often setting their clients back vast amounts of money, and taking advantage of them because they were so in demand. For example, it was noted that one hairdresser, Monsieur Champagne was so insolent that he often left a hairdressing only half finished or three quarters done on account of the lady in question having refused his advances for a kiss, or more, no matter how high her rank was, and yet the ladies loved him, probably for this very reason<sup>13</sup>. Less wealthy women had to make do with either inferior quality as a result of inferior talent, or to make appointments up to a few days before an event, thus spending the nights in extreme discomfort, unable to move on account of disturbing the masterpiece. The role of the hairdresser was very great indeed, and they usually worked attired in full dress coats and frilled shirts, and travelled in their own private carriages. (fig. .4). The head dressing was usually an event in itself, starting early in the morning and going on for a good few hours. It was not necessarily a private affair as the lady would often receive guests or discuss the latest gossip with her favourite Friseur, whose job as a passer-on of the latest scandals was almost as important as his hairdressing. A good earlier example of the Friseur at work amongst the normal every day life earlier in the century, in London, is Hogarth's The Toilette in the series of Marriage A La Mode ( 1742-43 ). (fig. .5). It was always a matter of great pride for the Friseur and his client to come up with some new and slightly different variation of the most eccentric head-dress that they could achieve. The process usually involved the hair being frizzed, or back combed, and then stuffed with wool, tow, pads and wire to create a huge pillar around which to build the outside hair. False hairpieces were added for extra length, and glued solidly with pomatum to keep them in place. The hair being frizzed accordingly, was then smoothed and sectioned to accommodate the appropriate style. Then quite often a silk cushion, bought specifically to fit the curvature of the skull, was pinned tightly to the top of the head. Then the wool, hemp, tow, etc. were piled up and pinned tightly with huge long black pins called bobbing (hence bobby) pins. The pomatum





FIG.4 -BOURGEOISE IN A PEIGNOIR HAVING HER HAIR DRESSED, LE  
CLERC, (1778)









FIG.5 -THE TOILETTE, WILLIAM HOGARTH, (1742-43)



was brushed thickly and evenly into the hair and then pulled tightly over the inner structure. Huge curls, not soft and fluffy, but stiff and hard like baguettes, adorned the sides of the head, placed horizontally, one beside the other and curled using curling papers and hot tongs. The coiffeur (hairdresser), would adorn these monstrosities in ribbons and bows, lace, jewellery, feathers and even more absurdly, landscape gardens or architectural sites, all based on specific places and often exact and to scale.

An English lady, Hannah More wrote in 1777...

" The other night we had a great deal of company - eleven damsels, to say nothing of men. I protest to hardly do them justice when I pronounce that they had, between them, on their heads, an acre and a half of shrubbery, besides slopes, grass plots, tulip beds, clumps of peonies, kitchen gardens, and greenhouses "14.

Another account in the Lady's Magazine goes as follows ...

" At 'Ranelagh' .....Lady S's head was the most beyond the bounds of propriety, she having so many plates of fruit placed on the top pillar and her being without powder, it was not so delicate a mixture"15

Coiffures were often allegorical and represented rustic poems, settings for an opera, flower gardens, a field with sheep and shepherds( often made from blown glass), miniature models of Paris and the Palais Royale, all including the most minute details such as a coach made of fine gold threads, pulled by four grey horses and a beau inside also made from the same fragile material. One poem written in 1768 reveals a lover's dismay at seeing his mistress's head-dress so changed

"When he views your tresses thin  
Tortur'd by some French Friseur  
Horsehair, hemp and wool within

Garnish'd with a diamond skewer

When he scents the mingled stream

Which your plaster'd heads are rich in

lard and meal and clouted cream

can he love a walking kitchen"<sup>16</sup>

Today this may all seem absurd and probably more than a little far-fetched, but the many surviving accounts in the form of letters (both personal and to newspapers) tell of these absurdities from contemporary perspectives , as do recipes for the strange and horrible concoctions to put on the hair and face for beauty or to control the vermin and other *animalculas* that inhabited these enormous mounds of flour and grease. One recipe for pomatum published in L'Art des Coiffure der Dames Francaises by M. Legros (1768) describes how to " take some beef marrow, and remove all the bits of skin and bone, put it in a pot with some hazel nut oil and stir it well with the end of a rolling pin, adding more of the oil from time to time until it is thoroughly liquefied, and add a little essence of lemon"<sup>17</sup>. This mixture was supposed to keep very well for a month, but imagine the disgusting smell of animal fat left for a month in one place. The perfumes lost their fragrance after a few days, to be followed by the smell of rancid fat. To make matters worse, the hair was not only powdered with loose powder, but it was also brushed into it to get rid of any lumps and to get a more even colour, undoubtedly creating an awfully dirty looking dough-like monstrosity, heavily perfumed and powdered . A prominent London hairdresser Peter Gilchrist advised, in his book A Treatise on the Hair or Every Lady her own Hairdresser (1770):

"Upon the whole, it is evident that dressing is of great benefit to the hair, for the pomatom and powder nourish it, frizzing expands and gives it a larger body, and while it remains in dress it hath rest at the roots, which saves large quantities that would fall off by frequent combing, yet it is very detrimental to let it remain long without being refreshed, for the lacquer of the pins and the powder, gathering in lumps, are apt to



make it tear off in the combing out. Likewise, perspiration, the moisture of the hair, and its being long confined from the air, may occasion effluvia rather disagreeable"<sup>18</sup>.

To create such intricate works of art took so long that women did indeed keep them for such long periods of time, retouching them daily. But they must have been extremely uncomfortably to wear. Silver wire cages were made to fit these enormous head-dresses and were worn (to prevent the occasional mouse from building a nest in the hairstack when ladies went to bed,) propped up by huge cushions so that they slept virtually sitting up. It is evident that there was some concern over leaving the hair too long 'unopened' because, as a result the hair often had to be sliced open, as in an operation, because it was so stuck together with flour and paste. It would not have been uncommon for the hair to be found to contain all sorts of lice and insects making the whole operation of removal pretty revolting. One lady, when asked by her hairdresser "How long is it since her head had been opened and repaired?" answered "Not above nine weeks", to which he replied "That that is as long as a head could well go in summer, and that therefore it was proper to deliver it now, as it began to be a little hazardé"<sup>19</sup>

From the horrific and disgusting accounts of the state that the hair was found in, having been opened, it is astounding that anyone could have persisted in doing it again and again. Ladies were usually equipped with long ivory or wooden sticks often encrusted with jewels, or diamond studded pins that they drew from their hair to prod and poke their heads wherever they itched, "...in hopes of spitting some unlucky restless animal which is struggling through lumps of powder and pomatom to change his position"<sup>20</sup>.

One story tells of a young girl in church who was so amused by the mouse who kept appearing in and out of the woman's hair in front of her that she was completely distracted by the ongoing sermon on vanity<sup>21</sup>. Yet discomfort and ridicule failed to dissuade women from such fashions. A contemporary husband remarked with a sigh "that never before have French women spent so much money simply to make themselves ridiculous"<sup>22</sup> and the more outrageous and outlandish, the more fashionably considered the wearer. A letter to The Spectator in 1778 goes as follows....

"One may observe that women in all ages have taken more pains than men to adorn the

outsides of their heads, and indeed, I very much admire, that those female architects who raised such wonderful structures out of ribbands, lace and wire, have not been recorded for their respective inventions. It is certain there have been as many orders in these kinds of building, as in those which have been made of marble; sometimes they rise in the shape of a pyramid, sometimes like a tower, and sometimes a steeple...

'With curls on curls they build her head before, and mount it with a formidable tow'r, a giantess she seems; but look behind and then she dwindles to the pigmy kind.'" <sup>23</sup>

In the 1770's in Paris, fashion was changing so rapidly that what was fashionable one day might well be gone the next. Court ladies who valued themselves "felt bound to monkey the exaggerations of the mode,"<sup>24</sup> hoping for some extra bit of imagination in the use of their ribbons and bows to distinguish them from the crowd. Each hairstyle had a name conveying various interests and influences, something symbolic being portrayed through the hair. One favourite was à la Belle Poule (1778) which depicted a victorious French ship which was held in full sail high amongst the curls on top of the lady's head (fig.6). This theme and variations of it were favourites of Marie Antoinette, always just slightly higher and more outrageous than those in her court. The price of hairdressing was so ridiculously expensive that it was declared "to be the veritable demon which torments this country."<sup>25</sup> . As a result of being slaves to fashion many people almost went bankrupt trying to keep up with the constantly changing modes both through hair and clothes, as Cowper describes in this verse...

"Her head adorned with lappets pinned aloft  
and ribands streaming gay, superbly raised  
And magnified beyond all human size  
Indebted to some smart wig weavers hand  
For more than half the tresses it sustains."

(Cowper, 1783. The Task, book iii)<sup>26</sup>

Often a specific court dress was essential for everyone in the court for one day which meant a



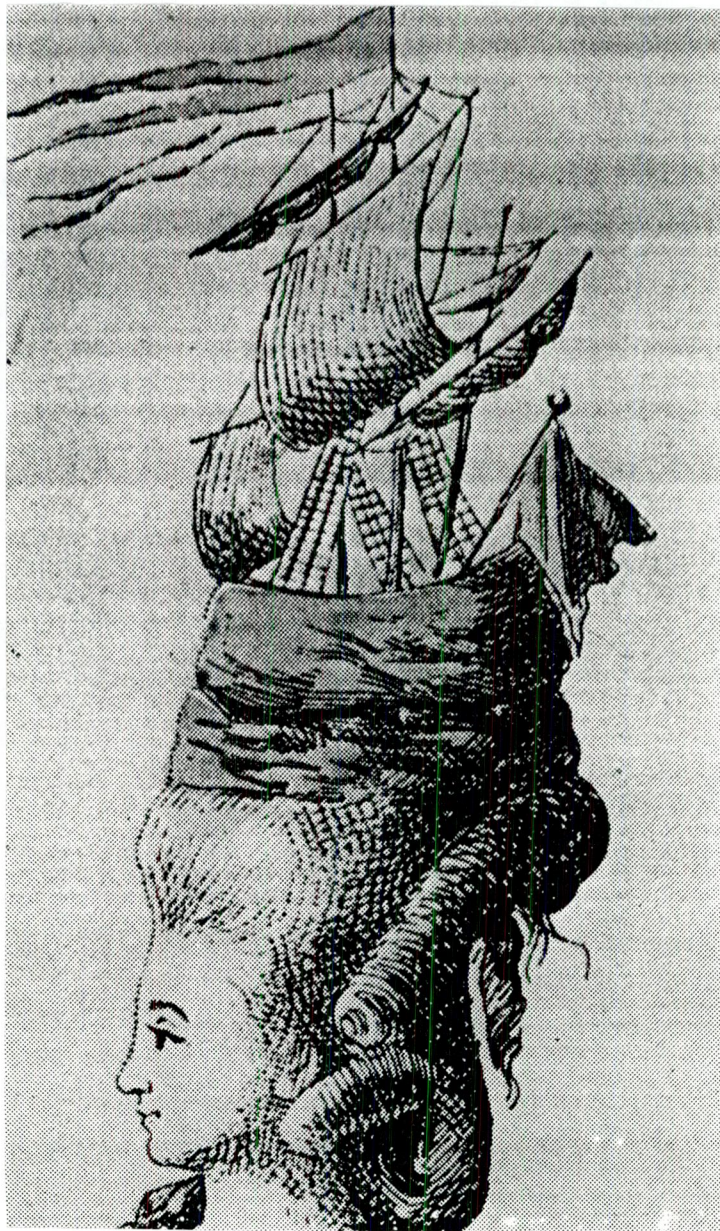


FIG.6 -À LA BELLE POULE COIFFURE, (UNKNOWN)





completely new mode of costume for the next. Enormous amounts of money, time and difficulty were spent on trying to be unique, yet the same.

"To dress fashionably is both to stand out and to merge with the crowd, to lay claim to the exclusive and to follow the herd.."27

One account of an interesting hair style by Mme D'Oberkirch in her memoirs, describes how little flat bottles were attached to the hair in the shape of the curvature of the head. In these bottles a little water was put, and although difficult to achieve, the finished style with flowers kept fresh in the bottles was such that ...

"Nothing could be more lovely than the floral wreath crowning the snowy pyramid of powdered hair." 28

These hairstyles may appear preposterous to us today and although in the 18th century they were just as ridiculous to anyone who didn't wear them. One plea to return to the comparative normality as known earlier in the century came in the form of a letter to The Spectator in 1778:

"The head has the most beautiful appearance, as well as the highest station, in a human figure. Nature has laid out all her art in beautifying the face; she has touched it with vermilion, planted in it a double row of ivory, made it the seat of smiles and blushes, lighted it up and enlivened it with the brightness of the eyes, hung it on each side with glorious organs on sense, giv'n it airs and graces that cannot be described, and surrounded it with such a flowing shade of hair as sets all its beauties in the most agreeable light; in short, she seems to have designed as the cupola to the most glorious of her works, and when we load it with such a pile of supernumerary ornaments, we destroy the symmetry of the human figure and foolishly contrive to call off the eye from the great and real beauties, to childish gewgaws, ribbands and bone lace."29



Doorways had to be enlarged to accommodate the high hairstyles and the wide dresses that were essential for court attire. Coaches often had to have their roofs raised or, as was more common, ladies sat on the floor or on a small stool on the floor with their heads stuck out of the windows; thus, travelling for even a short distance was uncomfortable and a major inconvenience. Marie Antoinette is said to have had one coiffure so high, that on departing for a ball she could not get into her coach at all and instead had to take it off and replace it on her arrival.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, most ladies would not have been so lucky as they needed their own hair to hold the creations to their heads. The Director of the Paris Opera, DuVisme, in opposition to the fashion actually refused entry to all high coiffures on account of their blocking the view of anyone behind them; however they were permitted to sit in boxes.<sup>31</sup> This fashion and in the exaggeration of style lasted fully for over two decades, from the late 1760's until the 1790's, prominent mostly in France where the fashions were more extreme because of the intense urge to distinguish and widen the gap between the Aristocrats and the Bourgeois.

In 1789 the French Revolution brought about the end of huge coiffures in France when the poor rose up against the Aristocrats and their ridiculous use of money for aesthetic pleasure. Hair powder made from wheat starch was so much in use by this period that it resulted in a lot of the poor going even hungrier. The powder came in a variety of colours-pink, blue, yellow, grey - whatever the appropriate colour of the mode; but most popular of all was white. By ordaining white powder for all, it created a uniform agelessness at a time when forty represented, for most, the end of life. The use of powder became so widely accepted that it was even recorded in portraits deposited on the shoulders of some wealthy gentlemen of fashion.<sup>32</sup> In France a hair powder tax was introduced in 1786, and the use of powder diminished so much that it was no longer used, except by a few old faithfuls, by the beginning of the 19th century.

The Revolution and subsequent Reign of Terror overthrew the nobility, punishing them for their frivolous use of wealth to such extremes that some were even "put to death for such wasteful measures as burning too many candles."<sup>33</sup> Hairstyles again diminished in size not rising again until the mid 19th century but never again to such extravagance. It is hard to

believe that such follies in fashionable hairstyles, and such an exuberant and completely artificial manner of living could ever have existed, but contemporary and pictorial evidence both factual and satirical are available today to any disbelievers . Few if any wigs have survived, as the animal fat and flour went rancid very quickly and therefore wigs were generally thrown away after use.



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## CHAPTER TWO

### FATAL COSMETICS:

" I told you to stop using rinses - and - now just look at you!  
No hair worth mentioning left to dye  
Why couldn't you let well alone ?,It grew so luxuriantly  
Right down to below to your hips,  
And fine - so fine you were scared to set it, like silken  
Threads in a vivid chinese screen.....with no pins  
Or curlers to make it go brittle, no bristling side-combs,  
Your maid could relax, I've been there  
Often enough while she fixed it, but never once saw you  
Pick up a hairpin and stick it in her arm.  
Poor down-fine tresses,.....  
If your hair's fallen out, it's not  
Any envious tongue thats to blame.  
You applied ~~that~~ concoction yourself.  
It was you that did it. All your fault.  
Still, after our German conquests  
A wig is easily come by --  
A captive Mädchen's tresses will see you through,  
You'll blush, it's true<sup>d</sup> when your borrowed plumage elicits  
Admiration galore. You'll feel that the praise ( like the hair )  
Has been bought. Once you really deserved it. Now each compliment  
Belongs to some Rhine maiden, not to you.  
Poor sweet - she's shielding her face to hide those ladylike  
Blushes, and making a brave effort not to cry,  
As she stares at the ruined hair in her lap, a keepsake  
Unhappily, out of place. Don't worry, love



Just put on your make-up. This loss is by no means irreparable --  
Give it time, and your hair will grow back good as new."<sup>1</sup>

"Life, as well as all other things, has its bounds assigned by Nature; and its conclusion, like the last act of a play, is old age, the fatigue of which we ought to shun, especially when our appetites are fully satisfied."

(Tertullian - De Senect)<sup>2</sup>

18th century people à la mode could never be satisfied as long as they craved the agelessness that was created through powder and make-up," so admired by all, yet on the other hand, in an age of total contradiction, the act of powdering and rouging one's face was also a means of disguising signs of ageing."<sup>3</sup>.

"For young and old..... the plaster work was the same,"<sup>4</sup>

"Stiff in brocade and pinch'd in stays,  
Her patches, paint and jewels on;  
All Day let Envy view her face;  
And Phyllis is but Twenty-one.

Paint, Patched, Jewels laid aside,  
At night Astronomers agree,  
The Evening has the Day bely'd,  
And Phyllis is some Forty-three.

(Matthew Prior)<sup>5</sup>

The white skin so highly prized and admired was achieved by painting onto the face and bosom, from as early an age as fourteen, with firstly Ceruse (lead or enamel paints), and later

with Mercury water which was considered safer. A paragraph in The Art of Beauty describes how the.....

"..white paint affects the eyes, which swell and inflame, painful and watery, they change the texture of the skin, on which they produce pimples and cause Rheum's; attack the teeth, make them ache, destroy the enamel, and loosen them. They heat the mouth and throat, infecting and corrupting the saliva, and they penetrate through the pores of the skin, acting by degrees, on the spongy substance of the lungs, inducing diseases."<sup>6</sup>

Yet even though the effects were commonly known, porcelain skin was to be achieved at any price to the ultra-fashionable. To further add to the transparency of this beautiful complexion, faint blue veins were carefully stencilled onto the matte white surface of the hands, neck and bosom, whilst rouge was added to the cheeks to emphasise them as they would otherwise be fairly indistinguishable from the white powdered face and hair. As Le Bon Ton forbade women to rouge au naturel, vivid bright spots of colour, red or pink, were often painted onto the cheeks, their various positions, whether placed underneath the eye, the top of the cheekbone etc, signifying statements of interest or mood. The eyes were darkened with lamp black, and the eyebrows were often shaved to accommodate the false eyebrows which were attached and made from the fine hair of mouse skins. These could be placed anywhere which may account for the permanently surprised expression often seen in portraits of the period.

"Her eyebrows from a mouse's hide

Stuck on with art on either side "

(Swift, The Lady's Dressing Room )<sup>7</sup>

To further draw attention to the eyes, Belladonna was dropped into them, dilating the pupil which was considered very sexy and was popular with prostitutes right up into the mid 19th century. To complete the image, face patches made from tiny pieces of black silk were applied



to the face, at first used to cover the blemishes and sores caused by Smallpox and Syphilis which were very common and incurable, but later as beauty marks or, as with every other accessory, commonly used to make a statement or convey a mood, emotion or political opinion. These patches were usually round or diamond shaped, but as they became more extensively used, their shape began to get more and more extravagant. Stars and birds were common and one patch was even cut into the shape of a six horse drawn carriage<sup>8</sup>. The Marquis of Zenobia actually went to a party wearing sixteen patches, one of them a tree holding two lovebirds.<sup>9</sup>

"Our Modern Belles are obliged to retouch their cheeks every day, to keep them in repair- our polite ladies have thought fit to dress their faces as well as their heads à la mode de Paris "

(The Connoisseur , 1754) <sup>10</sup>

Daily life was governed by the pursuit of ideals based in the prevailing standards of fashion and, according to Sir Henry Beaumont in Crito or A Dialogue on Beauty (1752), .....

"..The forehead should be white, smooth and open. The skin in general should be white, properly tinged with red with apparent softness and a look of thriving health in it..the cheeks should not be wide, should have a degree of plumpness, with the red and white finely blended, rather full than thin, semi-circular broader in the middle than at the ends...the mouth should be small, and the lips not of equal thickness. A truly pretty mouth is like a rose-bud that is beginning to grow."<sup>11</sup>

Women were the main users of cosmetics and were continuously criticised by men, but when the Macaronis began to use excessive make-up and the trend spread to other men besides, in the early 1780's, men lost their authority to condemn at least this part of women's extravagance. With such rigid specifications, it is no wonder that women pained themselves so much for fashion, and this pain does not just refer to the discomfort caused by their enormous

head-dresses and shoes, uncomfortable panniers and tight corsets, but to the pain caused through poisoning themselves, usually unwittingly, for fashion.

Perhaps the best known case of the ill effects of using these dreadful cosmetics lies in the fate of the lovely Marie Gunning. The two Gunning sisters were the daughters of an Irish *Squireen* whose mother drew them into the height of London society in the flamboyant 1750's. Their beauty was such that they created quite a sensation, and they both ended by marrying into very noble families which had been the intention of such a move in the first place. Unfortunately, once married and as the Countess of Coventry, Marie continued to use excessive amounts of the mercury-based make-up, despite her husband's disapproval. Eventually, as was a common result of such extravagant behaviour, her skin became permanently rashed and marked and scarred. Poor Marie Gunning died the fate of many beauties of her time; that of the slow and painful death caused by mercury poisoning which not only hurt her inside but destroyed her physically as well.<sup>12</sup>.

To attain that incredible pale complexion could also be achieved by the intake of pinches of arsenic which reduced the number of red haemoglobin cells in the blood, and by the end of the century arsenic wafers were readily available. But Belladonna caused blindness in the eyes, and the mercury was an intense poison and so soluble that it penetrated the skin and did untold damage within as it could never be got rid of. Why hair changed to grey in colour was a total mystery, It was obvious that it arrived with old age, but often occurred after illnesses irrespective of the age of the person. Grey hair was darkened using a lead brush as were eyebrows, causing the poor victim to constantly be breathing in a haze of lead particles, which is one reason why the life span of these people was so short. Venereal diseases such as Syphilis were common and although the wealthy could have paid for treatments, there were no known cures at the time. Tooth decay was widespread and dentures made of ivory and fitted with human teeth were available to the wealthy, while the poor could only avail of lead false teeth, if they were able to afford them.

It is amazing that in one of the most exuberant and extravagant eras ever, personal hygiene was almost entirely disapproved of. Both the poor and the nobles rarely washed; even the King



only felt it necessary to wash his face and hands on a daily basis with rose or orange water, or fragr~~en~~ced oils. The garments worn close to the skin were made from strong cotton and linen materials, and were needed to withstand the vigorously harsh treatment of washday, which occurred every four to five weeks, and took one to two days to complete.

Adding to the lack of hygiene were the flamboyant wigs which must have collected dirt day by day as they slowly rotted away inside. Wigs were often the cause of the rapid spread of disease/ for example, one Doctor, having neglected to fumigate his wig after visiting a smallpox hospital, transferred the disease to his daughter.<sup>13</sup> Wigs, having originally been worn" to avoid the troublesome business of keeping the head clean, eventually acquired a capacity to symbolise human filth and corruption that was widely exploited "<sup>14</sup> (especially by the caricaturists of the day). One account in 1714, tells of a pretty young Quaker women" in all the elegance of cleanliness,"<sup>15</sup> with a dirty beau who were encountered by the author whilst travelling by coach, the beau in a costly suit saturated in old powder and a more costly periwig cast over his shoulders " in so slovenly a manner that it seemed not to have been combed since the year 1712"<sup>16</sup> .Another account tells of a plague that was sweeping through Poland in the 1770's, afflicting women and causing at first the loss of sight, then attacking the entire body. The plague was, according to Thomas Hall in his book, The Loathsomeness of Long Haire associated with the myth of Medusa, as it was.....

"A most loathsome and horrible disease in the haire, unheard of in former times; bred by modern luxury and excess. It seizeth specially upon women, and by reason of a viscous venomous humour glues together (as it were) the haire of the head with a prodigious ugly implication and entanglement; sometimes taking the forme of a great snake, sometimes many little serpents; full of nastiness, vermin and noysome smell, And that which is most to be admired, and never eye sae before, pricked with a needle they yield bloody drops; And at first spreading of this dreadful disease in Poland; all that cut off this horrible and snaky haire, lost their eyes; or the humour falling downe upon other parts of the body, turned them extremely"<sup>17</sup>

I find from my own perspective a rather different picture of this disease or plague. It appears that due to the lack of hygiene and cleanliness, the hair rotted as it consisted of vast amounts of rancid fat and saturated flour that remained stationary for so long, and the hair turned into what would be today termed dreadlocks, although to someone unfamiliar with this appearance it could very likely resemble Medusa's snakes. Since disease was carried through these filthy masses of hair, for the head and face to be attacked first could be understood, and then for the disease to spread to the rest of the body. I find it difficult to believe however, that the hair bled when cut and tend to regard this as the exaggeration of the author who was apparently disgusted and appalled at the results of this horrific plague.

In every age "Dress is the expression of the ideal picture which people make of their own appearance,"<sup>18</sup> and the 18th century is synonymous with dress being "the premier station of one's wealth and station in life."<sup>19</sup> It is really fascinating and horrific to find out what really went on behind the closed doors of these noble courts, and how uncomfortable ,unhealthy and personally dangerous their comfortable and leisurely lives really were..



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## CHAPTER THREE

### MANNERS AND SOCIETY:

Similar to the French

"A Englishman delights to show his wealth; everything in his house, therefore, is expensive"<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the 17th and into the 18th century the French Court gradually became an enclosed society. They developed their own style of refined taste which applied to manners, ideas on etiquette, walking and talking that resulted in distancing them from the Bourgeoisie, and sometimes from their own noble classes in an effort to increase their own personal esteem. To further distance the classes, material wealth was commonly displayed. The more extravagant and costly the hair, costume, coach and home, the higher the ranking of the individual was considered. But to maintain such an extravagance proved rather difficult for many aristocrats. For each rank a certain type of lifestyle was expected to be maintained, yet just because a person was a Duke did not necessarily always mean that they had more money than a lesser ranking person, although they were still expected to live by rank standard rather than by actual capital capacity. According to rank, they had to have a certain amount of servants, coaches, size of house and ornamentation of that house and of their own personal appearance. The nobles were constantly running into debts and selling off their land which was their only source of income, in order to maintain the required social standards.

By today's reasoning one might ask why, in such economic trouble, did they not just decrease their spending since a lot of it appears to be an unnecessary luxury, but the Court had formed its own code of etiquette by which its people had to live, and in a non-working leisure class, whose activities were mainly motivated by pleasure, its rationale could be considered questionable. These seemingly trivial expenses were, to a Court society, a necessity because trivialities were what made up the values of the Court. "They are aspects of what today would



be *private* life. For example a modern business man finds his social identity principally in his work and in his private life.<sup>2</sup> balancing his budget according to his income. But in this *conspicuous consumption*<sup>3</sup> of the 18th century Aristocratic behaviour was, as in any modern society, a luxury that had become a necessity. Is it not true that the more one has, the more one wants, and the more fantasies that come true, the more extravagant and outrageous they become?

Yet, in the 18th century French Court, this amazingly extravagant material consumption was not freely chosen but obligatory under Court convention. What may have started as the *proper* way to live, according to one's rank, became the only way to live. Politeness and correct behaviour were soon seen in such high regard that the actual act of dealing with people ( -whether verbally or otherwise) became an art. The way in which one lifted one's head, or hand, or held one's fan could convey a million and one secret meanings, and so it was possible to actually have two or more conversations with separate people all at the same time. While one was verbal the other could be entirely conveyed through the slight, yet decisive, language of the fan. Whether held on one's lap, covering the face, open or closed it had many interpretations and was considered one of the greatest and most difficult acts to be able to achieve, carrying more significance than any word or emotion. Image, through deportment and etiquette and of course clothing, was of extreme importance in the 18th century, especially at the Court of Louis XVI, and his wife Marie Antoinette, Queen of extravagance. One of the guiding rules at their Court was that "persons of quality must now become persons of taste "<sup>4</sup> and taste was defined by the Court with regard to society, manners and aesthetics. In all, the Court became a rigid society where one's own personality was barely allowed to show, for fear of disrupting the 'way 'in which one was supposed to be. From an early age children were given lessons on deportment and etiquette usually from their dancing masters, and were expected to wear corsets (both girls and boys) that tightened their stomachs and flattened their shoulder blades, forcing them to straighten their backs. One's step was supposed to be light and one's movements graceful.:

"The head being the principal part of the human figure must first be considered because it entirely governs all the rest. If held erect, without stiffness, the shoulders fall into proper position, the chest expands and the back 'straight and light' assists the motion of the hips. They in turn affect the knees and feet. Thus a person whose head is rightly placed is capable of standing, walking, dancing or performing any genteel exercise in a graceful, easy and becoming manner."<sup>5</sup>

With the extreme fashions at the Court of Louis XVI in the 1770's and 80's it must have been very difficult to achieve this gracefulness that was so required. Fainting was common among women, being both fashionable as it emphasised their feminine 'fragility', and unavoidable due to the extreme stress caused by the tightly laced corsets. The wigs must have been both uncomfortable and heavy, the dresses large and cumbersome, and the shoes had no support with heels as high as six inches or more.

"..The rate of walking should be moderate, neither too quick nor too slow. One suggests heedlessness, the other indolence. A lady was advised to walk smoothly and swimmingly without jostling her skirts."<sup>6</sup>

Yet this ridiculous behaviour appeared vital at the Court as a result of the immense pressure on the Court from the King, and on the King from the Bourgeois. With the rising of the middle classes in the pre-revolution years there was more free money in circulation and a greater influx of tradesmen and artisans who were not so dependant on the King's patronage. The Bourgeoisie, like the nobles, could now afford a better lifestyle than previously when the King's power was stronger, The nobility were losing their power outside their own closed society, and to boost their dying prestige they accentuated their image, excelling in extravagance and foppery. The pressure felt by the King was because he too no longer had the power over the people that he once had, resulting in having to become dependant (as opposed to independent) on the Bourgeois. Meanwhile the Aristocrats were under enormous pressure for the King's favour as this resulted in Court prestige, higher ranking and usually financial



gain or repayment of the huge debts brought about by excessive spending. Ritual began to play a major role in Court life just as manner and behaviour did. An example which was in effect in the early 18th century, and still prevailed in the 70's and 80's of what it meant to be in the King's favour was to be present in his bed-chamber in the morning when he woke, and there was rivalry to decide who would hand him his shirt, or hold a lantern (even in a well lit room) just to be in this prestigious position.<sup>7</sup> Each role was of much importance and for a man it often meant a stepping stone for much higher roles, such as in politics. For women, to be in the Queen's bed-chamber was one of the highest roles that they could get, and well paid. Six groups of people each holding some valid item, or there for some *necessary* reason ( eg: man with lantern) were allowed access to the bed-chamber at the *levée* when the King woke, and the *couchée* when he went to sleep. These groups automatically had a higher Court status because of the importance of their jobs, but Court rank could change so quickly that the slightest mistake, or letting down of one's guard for a brief instance, could result in an automatic change and regard of rank. As La Bruyère wrote ....

"Let a favourite observe himself very closely, for if he keeps me waiting less than usual in his ante-chamber, if his face is more open, less frowning, if he listens to me more willingly or accompanies me further to the door, I shall think he is beginning to fall and I shall be right."<sup>8</sup>

It was therefore entirely necessary to know everything about everyone's personal state of affairs, who was going up and who down, and to carefully watch and observe with an achieved air of indifference, ease and unconcern. The English were always just one step behind the French in terms of extravagance and foolish behaviour, and although they followed French fashion and manner, they reprov'd it as much as they accepted it. This difference could be described as the " social and sexual casualness of the French Aristocratic life 'versus' the hectic mixture of restraint and intrigue that characterised the English Court."<sup>9</sup> Vulgar language, always associated with the ill-bred and ignorant poor classes, began to be used in the 1770's by the French nobles, but this coarse language had to be mispronounced, and the words mis-

used with an air of complete innocence. Young ladies returning to England from *improving* trips to France were strongly reprov'd for imitating this loud and lively behaviour, and yet for the French it was used in an effort to break away from the ever-increasing social formality that was tightening in the 18th century Courts. [The highest born in society could get away with this total disregard of social formalities as they were the ones who had made it of fashionable acceptance in the first place]. It would be considered as total ignorance of current behaviour for a member of the Bourgeoisie class to act in such a bawdy fashion. One correspondent to The Spectator in 1778 wrote that.....

"The whole discourse and behaviour of the French is to make the sex more fantastical or, as they are pleas'd to term it, more awakened....to speak loud in public assemblies, to let every one hear you talk of things that should only be mentioned in private, or in whisper, are looked upon as parts of a refined education ; At the same time a blush is unfashionable, and silence more ill-bred than anything that can be spoken. In short discretion and modesty, which in all other ages and countries have been regarded as the ingredients of narrow conversation and family behaviour "10

although...

A natural and uncontrived behaviour has something in it so agreeable, that it is no wonder to see people endeavouring after it, but at the same time it is so very hard to hit, when it is not born with us, that people often make themselves ridiculous in attempting it ."11

It is this striving for something that is not natural that characterises the majority of 18th century Aristocratic behaviour. They strove to stop time and regain everlasting youth, but that in itself is unattainable. By concentrating on image they created a world in which they could live out their fantasies. However, reality eventually broke down the barriers to the outside world and crushed their dreams. As a result of the restraint and rigidity of the Court, by the late 18th



century both the King and Queen, as well as the nobility were "entrapped in an iron cage of etiquette".<sup>12</sup> Every movement and emotion became so extreme that "every element was an object of 'prestige fetishism' (analogous to the money or commodity fetishism in bourgeois society of which Marx speaks) carrying a prestige-value far removed from its intrinsic use-value"<sup>13</sup> The King was unable to change even his own court protocol and so was stuck in a cage of his own making. As a result of being isolated in the world of the Court the nobility did not realise that their enormous expenditures and extravagant behaviour were having an adverse effect on the poor who were starving in order to keep the Aristocrats in sufficient hair powder. The nobles were so caught up in their own enclosed society that they were oblivious to the life of the French country around them. The poor who were living in the squalor of filth, dirt and disease were becoming very angry. It was inevitable that something would happen sooner or later in revolt against the situation. In 1789 when the French Revolution began, many nobles were taken completely by surprise, and did not have enough time to escape. Marie Antoinette was convinced that the British would rescue them because of their monarchical relationship with Britain, and so continued to disregard the terror that loomed on her doorstep. When, in 1791, she tried to escape with her family she was caught in Varennes and returned to Paris. Marie Antoinette was imprisoned and died on the guillotine on 16 October, 1793 at the hands of her own angry countrymen.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### A CONTEMPORARY COMMENT:

Our knowledge and understanding of hair fashions and behaviour of the 1770-80's and the excesses to which they developed during this period is mainly due to contemporary illustrations in the form of paintings, prints, caricatures and fashion plates. This material is symbolic of the dichotomy in 18th century attitudes to contemporary fashions, in the way the art of this period both records and at the same time satirises. The basis of this lies in the fascination which fashion held for the people of the time. The interest which is at the core of for instance Slight of hand with a monkey, 1776 (fig.7) and Rowlandson's Portrait of Jack Bannister, 1783 (fig.8) is a pre-occupation with hair and all that it has to say about status, manners, extravagance, etc. These illustrations were produced for contemporary viewing so that in the same way that every detail in a Hogarth satirical print could be read item for item, the information which these prints and drawings contains was instantly understood by viewers.

My interest in the artistic records of the period with which I'm dealing - and it is worth mentioning that these range from the high art of Reynolds and Rowlandson to the most amateur of anonymous caricaturists lies in the fact that these absurdities really did happen, and their depiction convinces me of this fact. I intend to discuss this under the headings of (a) Contemporary Sketches and Paintings, (b) Fashion Plates and (c) Caricatures.

#### (a) CONTEMPORARY SKETCHES AND PAINTINGS

Documentation is the basis of this category of artistic record. The artists of the period sought to capture what is now achieved by photographs, observing and recording fact, making it wholly interesting from today's perspective. Rowlandson's beautiful flowing ink lines subtly portray typical scenes such as The chaise waiting to carry us to Lymington, 1784 (fig.9) of a man getting his hair dressed by a coiffeur, or Dressing for a masquerade, 1790 (fig.10) which convey to us ordinary everyday scenes which are the epitome of the life of the time. Pugh's





SLIGHT of HAND by a MONKEY... or the LADY's HEAD UNLOADED. ♡

FIG.7 -SLIGHT OF HAND BY A MONKEY OR THE LADY'S HEAD  
UNLOADED, (1776)





From Old Jack Bannister. 65 Gower St.  
to his young Friend W<sup>m</sup> Henderson

(19)



FIG.8 -PORTRAIT OF JACK BANNISTER IN HIS DRESSING ROOM AT  
DRURY LANE, ROWLANDSON, (1738)



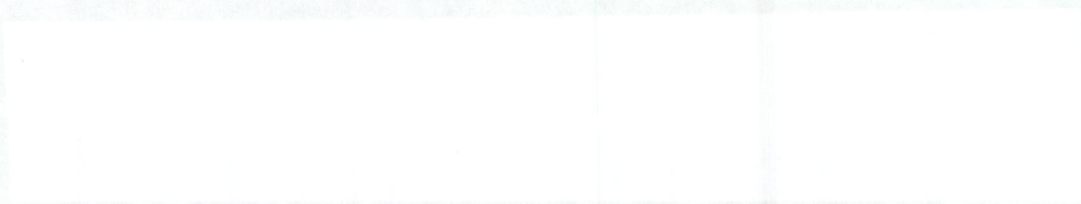






FIG.9 -THE CHAISE WAITING TO CARRY US TO LYMINGTON,  
ROWLANDSON, (1790)



FIG.10 -DRESSING FOR A MASQUERADE, ROWLANDSON, (1790)





FIG.11 -THE EARL OF GRANARD HAVING HIS WIG POWDERED, HERBERT  
PUGH







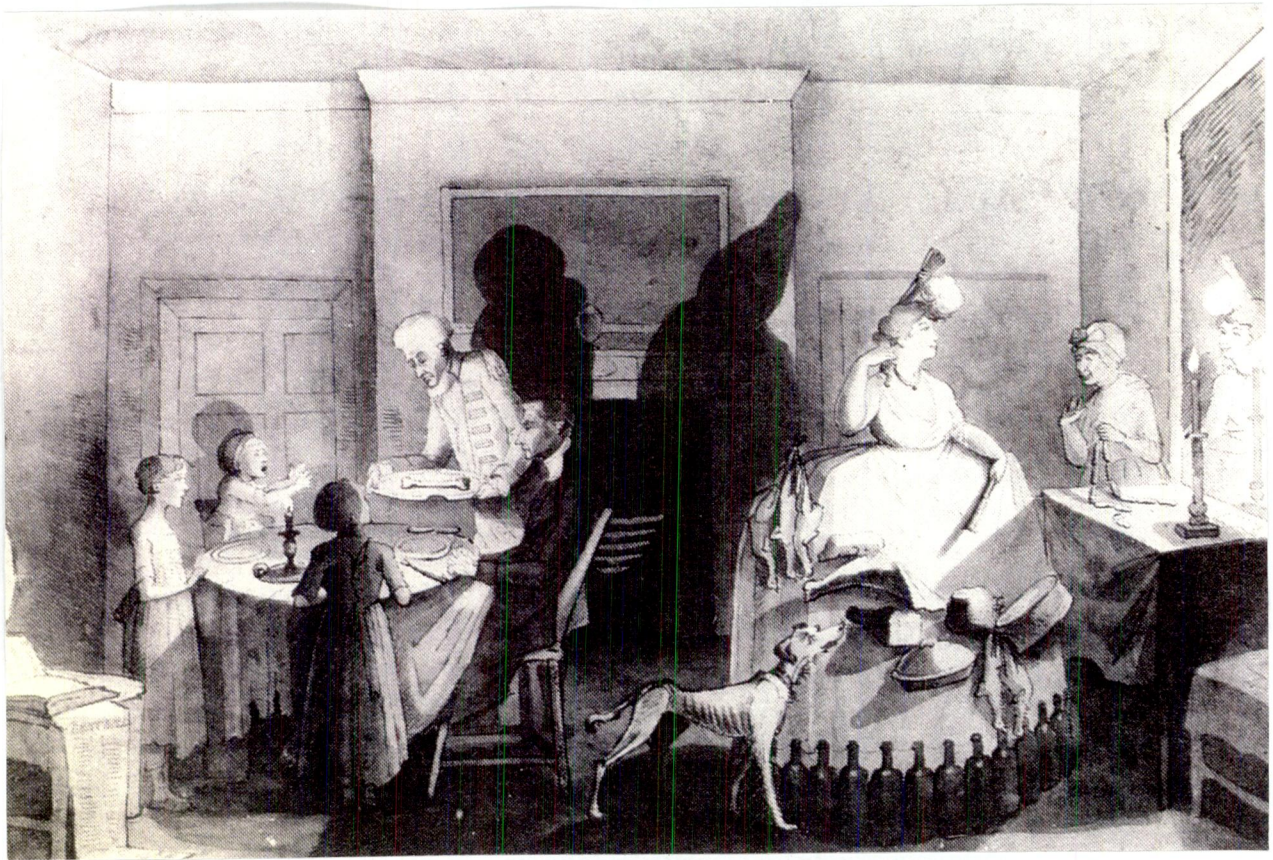


FIG.12 -DOMESTIC HAPPINESS AS ACTED IN THIS CITY, A TRAGI-COMI  
FARCE, CAROLINE HAMILTON, (c.1800)









FIG.13 - THE MARLBOROUGH FAMILY, REYNOLDS, (1778)





FIG.14 -THE HON. MRS GRAHAM. GAINSBOROUGH, (1775)





FIG.15 -ROBE À LA CIRCASSIENNE, LE CLERC, (1778)









FIG.16 -PETITE MAITRESSE, LE CLERC, (1778)







painting of the Earl of Granard having his wig powdered (fig.11) gives a more detailed impression of the rituals of hairdressing in progress taking place in the midst of the domestic business of the household. These works on paper portray the current fashions of the time as factual evidence, while the Dublin artist Caroline Hamilton's Domestic happiness as acted in this city, 1800 (fig.12) although in style and appearance is the same, is actually both documentary and satirical. In this scene the family sits at table while the servant serves the food, but all they are getting to eat is one bare bone for the wife (who stands preening herself in the mirror) has used all the money to keep up with current fashions instead of feeding her family. This is portrayed through the food which decorates her dress. In the academic group portrait of the Marlborough family (fig.13) group portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1778) the different conventions are shown which prevailed with regard to men's and women's hair and wigs. In the case of the Duke, his wig is intended to look like one (note the line around the forehead), whereas for the Duchess, her hair-do which probably combines both false and real hair, is intended to look natural. The difference in approach is based on the desire to emphasise the male's position and formality, as distinct from the women's *natural* beauty, and is more characteristic of England than France. Another painting which expresses the same viewpoint with regard to hair is Thomas Gainsborough's The Hon.Mrs Graham (fig.14) of 1775.

#### (b) FASHION PLATES

Fashion plates of the 18th century became (as well as dolls which were dressed and styled accordingly) the best means of distributing the latest trends in hairstyles and clothing around Europe. They were available in abundance generally from hairdressers' manuals or from aids on how to beautify oneself. These simple illustrations today give us exact representations of the fantastic creations that were worn on the head, and it is amazing how some of them stayed up at all. They also show great examples of the huge curls that were so popular in almost every hairdo of this period, as well as the mountainous layers of hair that heightened every head. In Robe à la Circassienne (1778) fig.15, the huge queue is not so unlike that of the Macaronis (fig.16), while the Petite Maitresse (1778), fig.16 holds such a large amount of hair at an

extraordinary angle which juts out upwards at an almost impossible forty-five degree angle, that it must have been stuck very solidly in order that it did fall off or unbalance the poor lady backwards with it. As there were so many hundreds of different styles, it was vital that names and drawings should be made of each one to correctly identify them, especially as they all had different meanings and were symbolic of so many things. Fig.17 shows a whole range of some of these different styles and how funny they must have looked when they were worn. Marie Antoinette was often used in these illustrations as the model because ~~as~~ between her and her hairdresser she must have created many of the most popular styles. Two rather good prints of Marie Antoinette's flamboyant and crazy dressings for the head are illustrated in fig.18. The importance of fashion was such that the plates allowed even women far removed from the cities to be in touch with the most current modes, and obviously gave a much more graphic illustration than any letter could ever do.

### (c) CARICATURES

Probably the best known of the frivolities and eccentricities of the 1770's are the many contemporary caricatures executed by often unknown artists. Caricature derives from the Italian 'Caricare', and was recognised first in 1755 in Dr.Johnson's Dictionary as meaning...

"..to hold, to ridicule drawing.intended as humour, satire and comment."<sup>1</sup>

The great rise towards flamboyant extremism in fashion in the noble classes was perfect for the caricaturists, who had endless reams of suitable targets for their work. The ridiculously ostentatious hairstyles of the women, and the extravagant hair and dress of the dandied Macaronis were typical examples of some of the most commonly used themes. The Vis-à-Vis bisected (fig.19) 1776 is an excellent example of a beautifully executed caricature which ridicules the ladies for their hairstyles, causing them to sit hunched uncomfortably face to face, in their carriage. Much attention is paid to the detail such as in the vegetables and feathers in the hair, and on the dress. Slight of hand with a monkey (fig.7) and Rowlandson's A Doleful





FIG.17 -TWELVE FASHIONABLE HEAD-DRESSES OF 1777, (UNKNOWN)



FIG.18 -PRINTS RECORDING HAIRSTYLES OF MARIE ANTOINETTE,

(UNKNOWN)



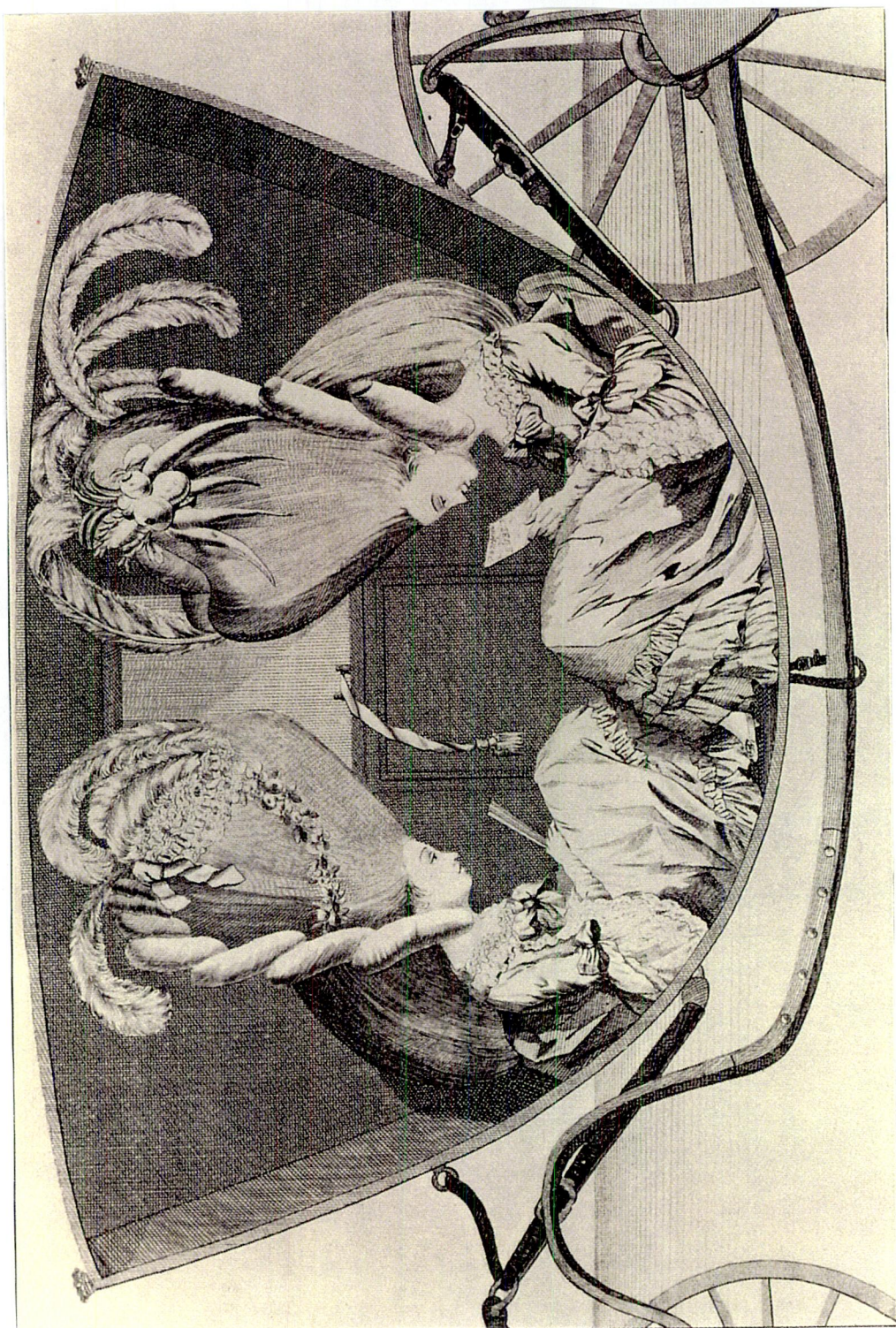


FIG.19 -VIS-À-VIS BIASECTED OR THE LADY'S COOP, (1776)





Disaster, (fig.20), depict the sometimes unfortunate side effects of wearing such tall headwear. In the first, the disgrace of a wig removed is portrayed when the falsity of the head-dress, and the awful reality (whether cut short or lost due to illness or constant mercury use) of the lady's own head is revealed. The second picture gives an example of many of the tragic accidents that occurred when the huge plumes of the head piece caught alight in a candle lit room and led to be dowsed with water or wine (whichever was the most handy). Following one fatal accident, where one poor lady died of her burns in such a situation, a verse in the New Bath Guide warns..

"Miss at the Rooms,  
Must beware of her plumes,  
For if Vulcan her feather embraces,  
Like poor Lady Laycock,  
She'll burn like a haycock'  
And roast all the loves and the graces."

(Christopher Ansley , 1776)<sup>2</sup>

Caricature of hairdressing (fig.21) 1771, although a bad copy, is fantastic in its representation of how long and tedious a time was spent in creating these hairstyles, and the foppery of it all. The lady in the centre of the picture sits under scaffolding that has been erected in order to lay tier after tier of hair onto the mile-high creation, while on the right one poor lady loses her balance on bending over as the result of the weight on top of her head, and the lady's carriage below has no roof to accommodate her silly hair.

Caricaturists were very popular in this period, and although they give us a fascinating view of the follies of the day, for example Contraption for preserving Ladies head-dress at night (fig.22), and tell us how absurd people's intense obsession with image was, they also give us a brilliant insight into the way of life and behaviour of the time, and poke fun at the greed, pretentiousness and vanity of fashionable people. The satirical cartoonists of this period explored such a rich vein of humour and had at their disposal a subject of unparalleled





FIG.20 -A DOLEFUL DISASTER, ROLANDSON, (c.1780-90)







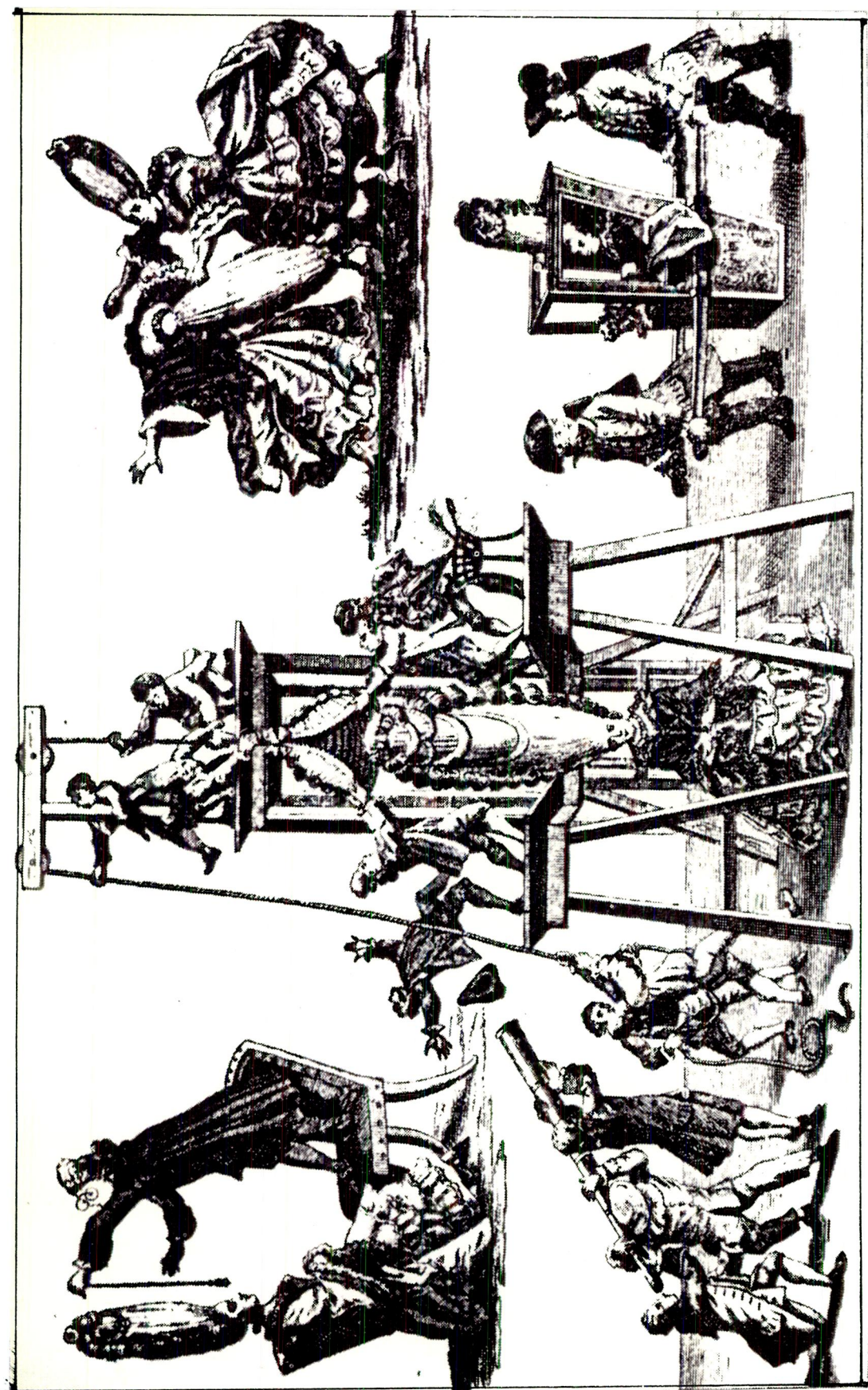


FIG.21 -CARICATURE OF HAIRDRESSING, AFTER VILLERMONT, (1771)







FIG.22 -CONTRAPTION FOR PRESERVING LADIES HEAD-DRESSES AT  
NIGHT, FRENCH CARICATURE, LATE 18TH CENTURY







ridiculousness that these cartoons are as funny today to an audience as far removed as they could be from life at the Court of Louis XVI as they were to the people outside the Court at the time. It is probable that the caricaturist's satirical portrayal of the waste and triviality of high fashion contributed to public awareness, and helped to fan the flames of revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Feaver William, Masters Of Caricature, London, 1981, P.5

<sup>2</sup> Frasko, op.cit.P.38

## **CONCLUSION :**

It is extraordinary that the behaviour of the Aristocrats during the period under discussion really occurred, and if it were not for the convincing evidence for contemporary newspapers and letters, prints and drawings, it would seem entirely fictional . Even with all this evidence I still find it incredible that a whole section of society survived oblivious to the horrifying state of their country, and lived in such a fantasy world for over twenty years. It is as if they retreated into a world where money bought a freedom that justified their existence. Unfortunately, they were very harshly reprimanded for their neglect of their fellow men in the horrors of the French Revolution of 1789, and although some did survive, the *terror* will never be forgotten.

When a society becomes so obsessed with personal adornment, it is inevitable that it is likely to lose sight of the mundane social issues which surround it. It is not unreasonable to see a direct case of *cause* and *effect* between the selfish fantasy world created by the members of the Court of Louis XVI, and the terror of the revolution. The sheer barbarity of the Terror in the manner in which the Aristocrats were humiliated and sent to the guillotine is the converse of the pampered and secure world which they created for themselves.



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