

Marie Antoinette, Queen of Fashion

The French Tradition of Royal Taste-making

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For Opera Lafayette's
Marie Antoinette Salon Series



Overview

- French tradition of royal taste-making
 - Louis XIV (17th c.) – Taste-making as royal self-assertion & absolutist propaganda
 - Mme de Pompadour (mid-18th c.) – Taste-making shifts from the king to the royal favorite
 - Marie Antoinette (late 18th c.) – Taste-making shifts from the royal favorite to the queen
- Marie Antoinette, Queen of Fashion

Louis XIV

(1638-1715; r. 1643/1661-1715)



Taste-making as royal self-assertion & absolutist propaganda

- Countering challenges to Bourbon supremacy by the noblemen of the Fronde (1648-1653)
- Versailles as theatricalized symbol of unrivaled royal supremacy
- Rise to dominance of the French luxury trades & French fashion
- Establishment of the monarch himself as the arbiter of style
- Development of the French Baroque

Fine Arts



Louis XIV was a savvy manipulator of his own public image, casting himself in a variety of guises meant to convey his matchless grandeur, from the sun god Apollo to the **conquering hero** – whether mythical & Roman or contemporary & French

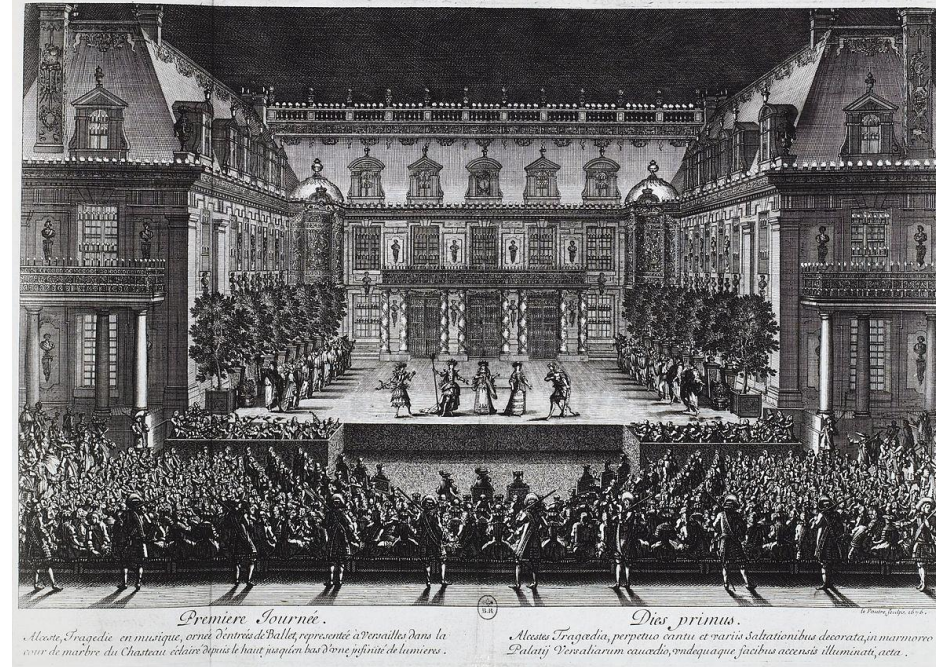
L: Bernini, *Louis XIV as Marcus Curtius* (1674-1681); **C:** Louis XIV as Apollo in *Le Ballet royal de la Nuit* (1753), the debut of his **Sun King persona**; **R:** Rene-Antoine Houasse, *Louis XIV* (c.1679-1690)

Architecture & Landscape Design



“**French Style**” at the **Chateau de Versailles**: After assuming power in 1661, Louis XIV reworked his father’s hunting lodge into the most dazzling palace in Europe, using architects Le Vau & Mansart for its **Baroque** facades & landscape designer Le Notre for its perfectly manicured ***jardins a la francaise***. The strict geometric formalism of the gardens asserted the king’s **symbolic domination over nature**, a victory further underscored by the surrounding parks’ extensive water features which, as at Fontainebleau, the king’s design team created out of unhospitable marshland. The Royal Orangerie & Menagerie – firsts of their kind in France – also conveyed this message.

Music



“The Father of French Opera”: In 1653, 14-year-old Louis XIV first met Italian-born musician & composer **Jean-Baptiste Lully** when they performed together in *La Nuit*, a 13-hour-long royal ballet. In 1661, Louis XIV made Lully the “Master of the King’s Music” at court, & in 1672, he appointed him director of the recently created the **Academie royale de musique** (later the Paris Opera). Lully’s acclaimed “tragedies lyriques” —which forewent the Italian practice of separating arias & recitatives, & which emphasized dramatic development & a diversity of vocal forms – set the aesthetic conventions for state-sponsored **French opera**.

L: 19th-c. engraving of Lully ; **R**: 17th-c. engraving of a performance of Lully’s *Alceste* (1674)

Fashion



Diego Velazquez, *Felipe IV* (1623)

King of Fashion: Prompted by his minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV presided over the creation & expansion of the French luxury trades

Changing fashions proved a natural stimulus to the production of high-quality French textiles, trimmings, & other *marchandises de modes*)

Extravagant in his tastes, Louis XIV exemplified the flamboyant opulence & drama of French style—which soon made obsolete the austere black court dress favored by the Spanish Habsburgs (previously the arbiters of European elegance). **Also the bellwether for men's hairstyles, Louis XIV became the leader of European fashion**



Fashion-plate of Louis XIV (c.1670)

Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, marquise de Pompadour (1721-1764; *maitresse en titre* from 1745)



Taste-making authority shifts from the king to the royal favorite

- Countering challenges by the *parti devot* & nobles opposed to a bourgeois favorite
- Creation of private retreats (hermitages) as escapes from the artifice & rigidity of Versailles; environments with, in her words, “nulle espece de magnificence”
- Controversial assumption by a (middle-class) mistress of a traditionally male & royal role

Fine Arts

Queen of the Rococo: Rejecting the weighty formality & “shock & awe” grandeur of the Baroque, the Rococo emphasized sensuous colors (from delicate pastels to rich jewel tones), sinuous curves, & patterns based on flowers, vines, & shells. In the many portraits she commissioned—most notably from her favorite painter **Francois Boucher**—Mme de Pompadour emerged as the leading exemplar of this new visual style.

Unlike the heroic, mythologizing portraiture of Louis XIV, Boucher’s paintings of the royal favorite emphasize her Rococo sensibility & her predilection for intimate, private spaces. They also idealized her looks, which rapidly showed signs of age from the strain of constantly devising new entertainments for Louis XV.



Boucher, *Mme de Pompadour*
(1759)



Boucher, *Mme de Pompadour*
(1756)

Architecture & Landscape Design



Chateau de Bellevue (c. 1750): With its pared down, unfussy facades & relatively small scale, this square, two-story *maison de plaisance* marked a new phase in French royal architecture: a shift away from the Baroque grandiloquence & monumentality of Versailles. As the first royal favorite not to come from the nobility, Mme de Pompadour disliked the rigid etiquette & ponderous, overwrought atmosphere of the court, & entertained Louis XV—who preferred novelty to tradition—in a more intimate & informal setting. The gardens too boasted a more relaxed design, featuring romantic, curving *allees* & green lawns artfully dotted with hideaway groves & tumbling rockery (*rocaille*)

Music & Private Theatricals



At her “hermitages” (Trianon, Bellevue) & in her private Theatre des petits appartements, Pompadour staged revivals of late-17th & early-18th c. **pastoral compositions**, including Lully’s *Acis et Galatee*, written after his dismissal by Louis XIV in 1686. As Callum Blackmore has shown, *Acis* was composed for an aristocratic “counter-court” set up in opposition to Versailles, & thus **symbolically reinforced Pompadour’s own attempt to establish her power base outside & beyond the court**

L: Maurice Quentin de La Tour, *Mme de Pompadour in Her Study* (1749-1755); note the musical score in her hands &, on her dress, the quintessentially Rococo pattern of trailing leaves & sprays of flowers

R: Cochin le jeune, *Mme de Pompadour in a Scene from Alceste et Galatee* (1746); in this “pastorale heroique,” Pompadour [*in white, far left*] starred as Galatee, & wore a fanciful costume encrusted with seashells – a favorite Rococo motif

Fashion – Look #1: “Naturalness” & “Simplicity”



Francois Boucher, *Mme de Pompadour a sa toilette* (1758)

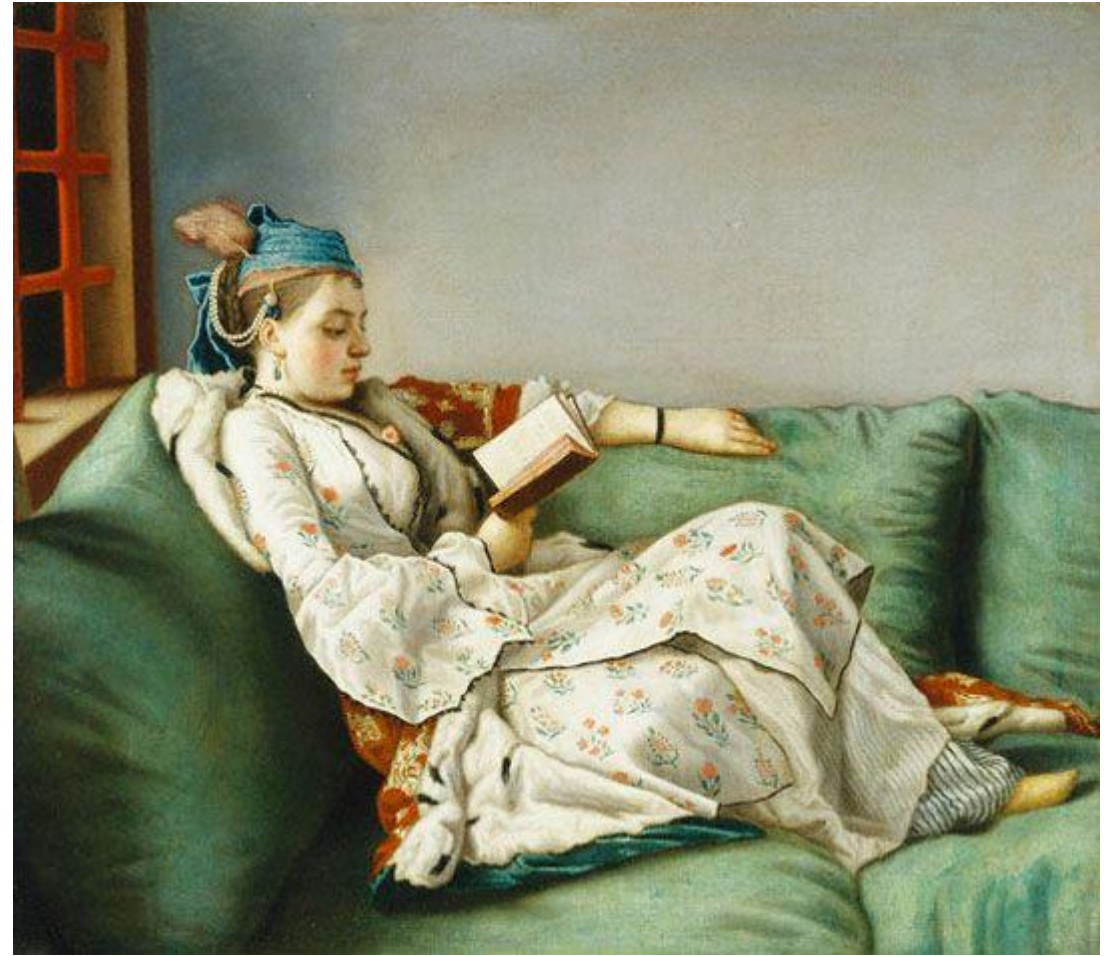


Carl van Loo, *La reine Maria Lecinska* (1740)



Carl van Loo, *Mme de Pompadour en belle jardiniere* (c.1755)

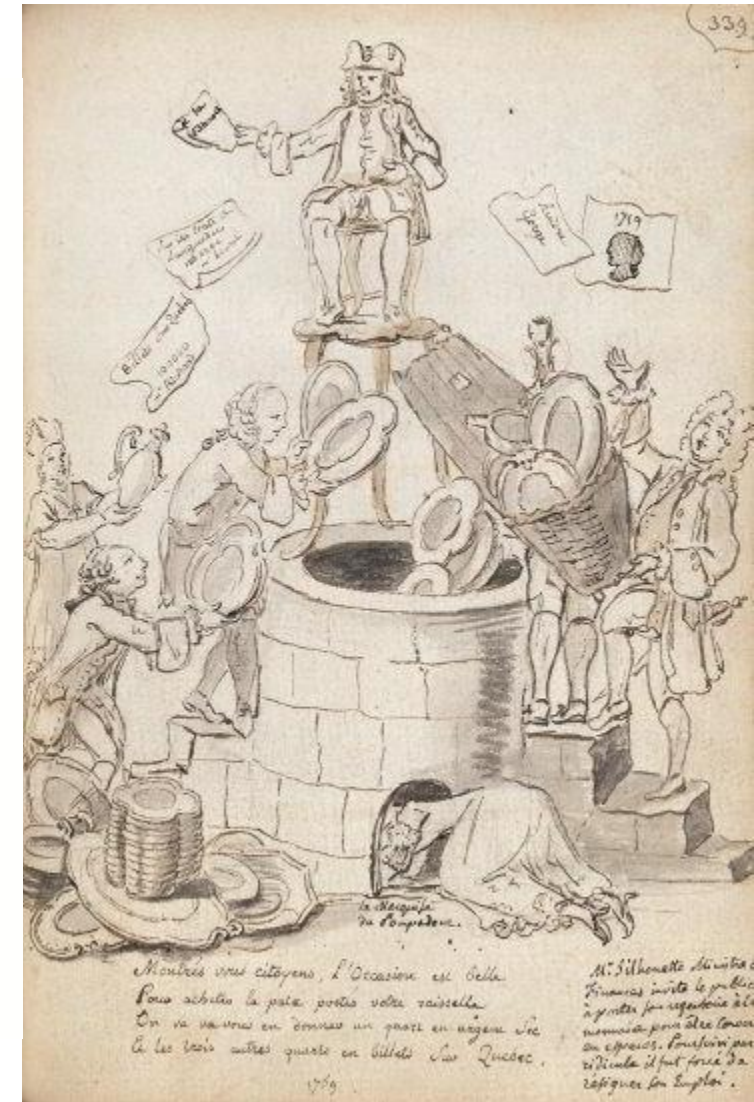
Fashion – Look #2: *Turquerie*



L: Carl van Loo, *Mme de Pompadour en Sultane* (1747)

R: Jean Etienne Liotard, *Marie Adelaïde de France en robe turque* (1753)

Backlash



L to R: three *poissonades* – as clandestinely published diatribes against Mme de Pompadour were called – ridiculing her presumed extravagance, frivolity, & inordinate influence over the king (1750s)

Marie Antoinette

(1755-1793; r. 1774-1792)



Taste-making authority shifts from the royal favorite to the royal consort

- Assertion of power in the face of & in response to challenges by court nobles hostile to an alliance with Austria; & to challenges posed by Louis XVI's refusal to consummate their marriage (married in 1770, they did not have a child until December 1778)
- More radical rejection of court formality & artifice Rise of the "style Marie Antoinette"
- Controversial assumption by a (foreign) consort of a traditionally male & royal role

Fashion - Look #1: Sporty Androgyny (1770-1789)



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

R: Joseph Kreutzinger, *Marie Antoinette en costume de chasse* (1771); C: Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, *La Reine a cheval* (c.1774); L: contemporary engraving showing Marie Antoinette on horseback (c.1770s)



R: Louis Auguste Brun, *Marie Antoinette, reine de France* (1783); **C :** contemporary engraving showing a woman's man-tailored redingote; **L:** contemporary caricature of Marie Antoinette embracing one of her presumed female "favorites," the Princesse de Lamballe. Like most stylish members of the young queen's set, Lamballe quickly adopted the *redingote* style.

Music



L: Joseph Duplessis, *Christoph Gluck a son clavier* (1775): the same year he made his Paris debut with an opera commissioned by Marie Antoinette, *Iphigenie en Aulide* (1775). Reigniting a mid-18th-c. *querelle* between partisans of French & Italian opera, Gluck's bold reforms to the conventions of Neapolitan *opera seria* sparked a controversy in which his partisans, led by the queen, prevailed, establishing Gluck as a leading light of French opera

C: Marie Antoinette's siblings performing a composition by Gluck at court in Vienna (1765)

R: Frontispiece to Gluck's *Iphigenie en Tauride* (1779), dedicated to Marie Antoinette

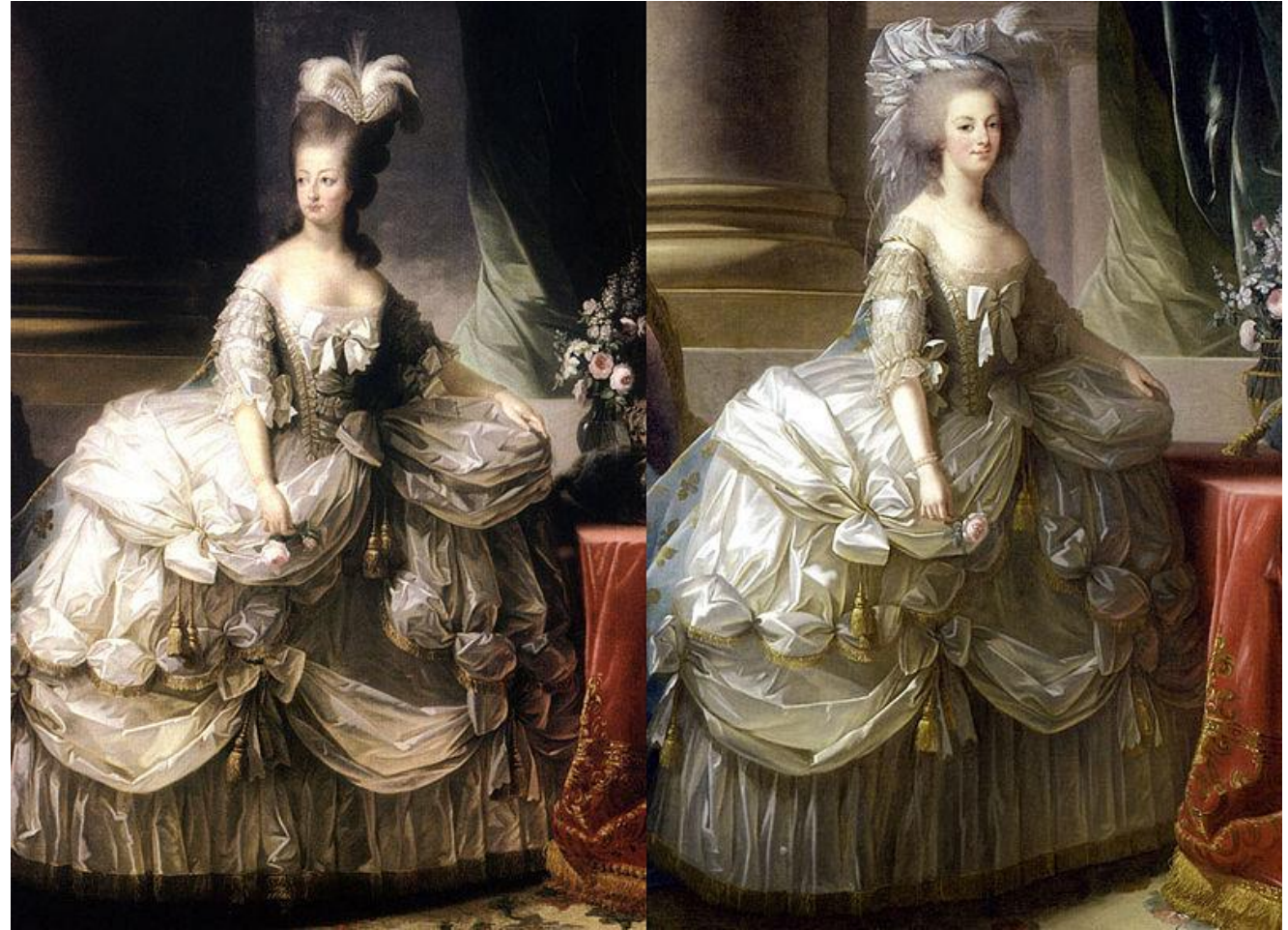
Fashion - Look #2: the *Pouf* (1774-c.1785)



Jeune Dame de Qualité en grande Robe coiffée avec un Bonnet ou Pouf élégant dit la Victoire.



Patronage of Female Artists & Designers



Key to the elaboration of Marie Antoinette's daring, fashion-forward image were two extremely talented women: *marchande de modes* **Rose Bertin**, whom she met in 1774 & who became known as her "Minister of Fashion" (L [c. 1770s/1780s]); & **Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun**, the first female artist to become a French royal consort's official portraitist (C: *Marie Antoinette en grand habit de cour* [1778] R: *Marie Antoinette* [1779]).



Propelled to stardom by her signature towering coiffure, Marie Antoinette was **the first French royal consort to appear in a fashion plate**. Both of these images date from 1775, the year of her husband's coronation, where her *pouf* first drew national attention.

Backlash



Fig. 466. — Bonnet à la harpie.



For its extreme ostentation & costliness, **the pouf became a prime symbol of Marie Antoinette's frivolity & presumed indifference to the hardships of her people.** It sparked endless caricatures, which grew more vicious after French revolutionaries abolished royal censorship in 1789

Fashion- Look #3: Reworking the *robe a la francaise*



L: *Robe a la francaise* (c.1780): the muted color palette & simple striped pattern reflect the neoclassical taste Marie Antoinette helped bring into fashion

C: *Robe a l'anglaise* (c. late 1770s): the “Watteau pleat” of the robe a la francaise has disappeared; the train boasts delicate floral & ribbon-patterned ornamentation supposedly designed by Rose Bertin

R: *Robe a la polonaise* (1775): the ankle-baring hemline was considered audacious; while the triple swag of fabric in the back referenced Marie Antoinette’s mother’s role in the 3-way partitioning of Poland

Private Theatricals



R: Discreet entrance to the queen's private theatre at the Petit Trianon, completed in 1780 & marked by the same radically understated aesthetic as the rest of the property

C: Interior of the queen's private theatre. Eschewing the precious materials of Versailles, this space is decorated with faux finishes trompe l'oeil "marble" paneling & gilded papier-mache, in a restrained, neoclassical style

L: Contemporary fashion engraving imagining Marie Antoinette in one of her performances, which were closed to the public, & in which she enjoyed playing soubrettes rather than royals

Architecture & Landscape Design



L: The Petit Trianon. Originally built for Mme de Pompadour, & gifted to Marie Antoinette by Louis XVI after their accession in 1774, it became her own favorite escape from the stultifying formality of Versailles. The sober neoclassical façade emblemized the so-called Louis XVI style; while the romantic, artfully artless English gardens—radical departures from Versailles’s *jardins à la française*—became the fashion in landscape design

R: Francois-Denis Nee, *Marie Antoinette et ses enfants dans les jardins du Petit Trianon* (c.1789)

Fashion - Look #5: Petit Trianon chic



R: Jean-Baptiste Gautier-Dagoty (1778), *Marie Antoinette en redingote*; **C:** fashion plate showing a pink *robe a la polonoise* with a gauzy tulle underskirt, accessorized with a straw hat *a la corbeille de fleurs*

L: Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, *Autoportrait au chapeau de paille* (1782)



Of all the looks Marie Antoinette pioneered at the Petit Trianon, by far the most popular (its adoption by women of all classes was dubbed a “revolution in linen”) & the most controversial was the *gaulle* or *chemise* dress – a ruffled white shift made of flowing muslin or linen, & typically accessorized with unpowdered hair &/or a rustic straw hat. It became known as the *chemise a la reine*, & was so fashionable that even the queen’s bitterest enemies made it their own. When Vigée painted the queen in this ensemble in 1783, the outcry at the Paris Salon was so great that she had to replace it within days with a portrait of Marie Antoinette in royal attire. **L: Mme du Barry (1781); C: La Reine en gaulle; R: La Reine a la rose** – all by Vigée Lebrun.

Backlash



Critics compared the queen's chemise to a nightgown, & caricaturists soon associated it— & her “undignified” style more generally— with her willful desecration of royal dignity & her depraved sexual appetites



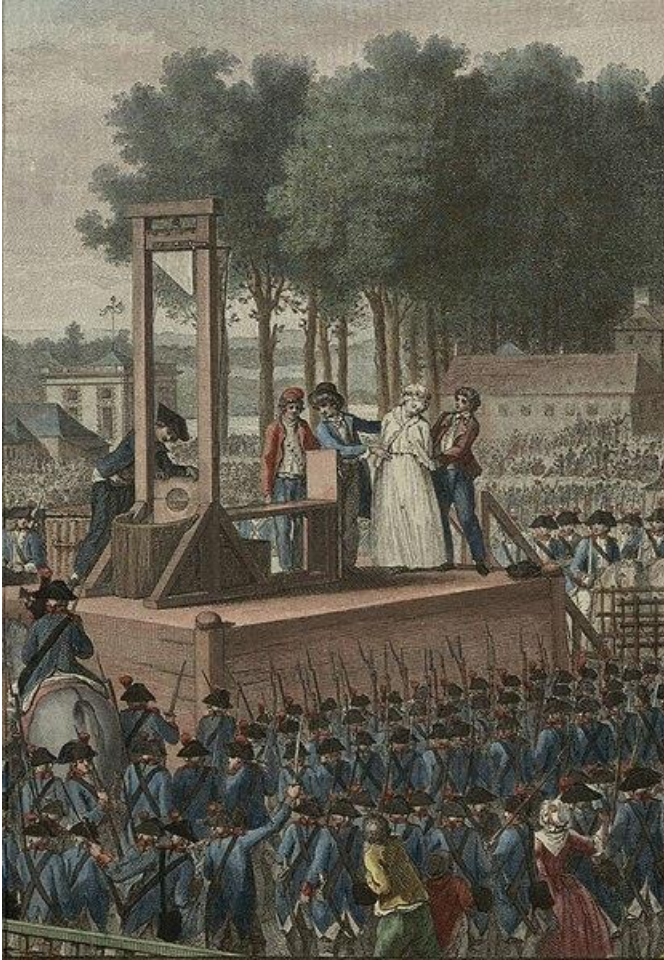
Look #6: *Mode révolutionnaire*



Once the Revolution began in 1789, Marie Antoinette's daring styles—the redingote, the chemise, & headgear *a la circonstance*—paradoxically became popular with the very people who had criticized her for them. **L:** *Le Bonnet rouge* (c.1789), pairing a male *sans-culotte* in the hallmark, revolutionary *bonnet rouge* with a woman in a simple white shift, fichu, & frilly bonnet.

R & C: fashion plates from 1789-1791 showing how the queen's once "scandalous" fashion choices became, as one editor wrote in August 1790, "**the new patriotic uniform**" for female partisans of Revolution.

The Queen's Last Look: October 16, 1793



But Marie Antoinette refused to cede her beloved chemise dress to her revolutionary foes without a fight. When she wore one to her execution in October 1793, the white *gaulle* assumed an altogether contrary political meaning: that of **Bourbon royalist martyrdom**.