

# Submission to the Graces

## Neoclassicism, Gender, and the Fashion Press in Revolutionary France

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*During the French Revolution, dress became an indicator of a person's loyalty to the Revolution. Due to the increased controversy surrounding the political implications of dress, the National Convention declared freedom of dress for all citizens and citizenesses in 1793. Some historians have contended that Revolutionary legislators granted women freedom in fashion largely as a substitute for genuine political power in the emerging public sphere. This paper argues that although revolutionary processes may have granted women freedom of fashion, the male-dominated fashion press attempted to undermine women's authority and assert men's control in an area in which it claimed women possessed legitimate power.*

*Through the close analysis of fashion periodicals published during the Directory period (1795–99) of the French Revolution, this paper determines that while fashion periodicals claimed to venerate women and their talents in the realm of fashion, they employed concepts like the relationship between dress and behaviors to dictate women's dress. By regulating women's consumptive and sartorial habits, the fashion press helped to alleviate contemporaries' concerns regarding women's participation in the public sphere.*

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The French Revolution promised *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, but the application of these principles was not 'universal.' Revolutionary legislators, for example, excluded women from their definition of citizenship. Accordingly, historians have debated whether or not women's agency during the Revolution was as 'revolutionary' as that of men. In her study of the *citoyennes tricoteuses*, Dominique Godineau claims that women's militant actions are proof of their active participation in

revolutionary processes.<sup>1</sup> Women's radical actions, like the women's march to Versailles in October 1789 and their participation in armed processions, significantly

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<sup>1</sup> Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). See Darlene Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite, "Women and Militant Citizenship in Revolutionary Paris," in *Rebel Daughters Women and the French Revolution*, eds. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).



I recently graduated from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with a B.A. in History and French. This paper comes from my history honors thesis titled "Masters of La Mode: Representations of Women in the French Fashion Press, 1785–99." This project not only showed me the joys and difficulties of research, but also allowed me to become more confident using and translating French-language sources.

contributed to the success of republicanism. However, other historians argue that because the Revolution did not grant women the same rights and freedoms that it did men, its promise of equality remained inaccessible to women. For Joan Landes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's call for women's exclusion from the public sphere and their restriction to the private realm is a primary indicator of the marked shift that took away opportunities from many women. Revolutionary legislators later endorsed the Rousseauian belief that women belonged in the domestic spaces of the home and family. During the Revolution, the loss of noblewomen's titles and the closing of the salons, where at least some women could exert influence in the public sphere, took political power away from women.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, many women exercised more power and freedom prior to the Revolution than they did during or for many years after it.

Even so, certain women, like Olympe de Gouges,<sup>3</sup> continued to fight for their right to participate in the public sphere and made claims for a recognition of the full rights to citizenship. Women's radicalism incited fear and legislators made subsequent attempts to restrict women to the domestic sphere. The declaration of freedom of dress was one way by which legislators attempted to tame women's radicalism. In October 1793, the Republican National Convention declared freedom of dress for all citizens, stating that "no person of either sex may constrain any citizen or citizeness to dress in a particular manner, each individual being free to wear whatever clothing or attire of its sex that pleases him, under pain of being declared suspect."<sup>4</sup> Some historians, such as Aileen Ribeiro and Jennifer Jones, have argued that the National Convention granted women this freedom largely as a consolation prize for legitimate political power and to quell

men's concerns about women's participation in the public sphere by relegating women's authority to the seemingly unimportant and frivolous domain of fashion.<sup>5</sup> However, this 'freedom' in fashion enjoyed by women had its limits; Lynn Hunt suggests that women only enjoyed the right to freedom of dress so long as their dress remained adequately 'feminine' and did not attempt to intrude into what was cast as a 'masculine' public realm.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, fantasies of female authority continued to threaten men. Concerned about women's potential freedom in the realm of fashion, men used the fashion press to undermine women's authority and to place them under men's guidance. The fashion press editors, whose periodicals encouraged women to promenade in public spaces and highlighted women's role as consumers, did not deliberately reinforce the exclusion of women from the public sphere. Their periodicals nonetheless tried to limit women's public influence to a frivolous sphere of fashion. In this way, the editors helped to promote and police notions of 'propriety' in women's appearance and behavior. In other words, the fashion press was more than a mere symptom of the Revolution's patriarchal structures; it helped both to reshape and to reinforce them.

The first fashion periodical to be published in France was the *Cabinet des modes*, which began in 1785 and continued publication through 1793 under various titles. After the periodical's end, no fashion periodical existed in France until 1797, when Jean-Baptiste Sellèque (1767–1801), a former rhetoric teacher, and Pierre de La Mésangère (1761–1831), a rhetoric teacher and former priest, created the *Journal des dames et des modes*. They published their first issue in March 1797, under the title the *Journal des dames*, a nod to the women's literary periodical published between 1759 and 1779 under the same title.<sup>7</sup> As the periodical's title suggests, the editors were especially preoccupied with the education and emancipation of women. Although it marketed itself almost exclusively to women, the *Journal des dames et des modes* was, at its core, the work of men.<sup>8</sup> A new issue of the pe-

2 Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

3 In her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of Citizen* (1791), de Gouges radically declared that "Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights." See Olympe de Gouges, "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen," quoted in John Cole, *Between the Queen and the Cabby: Olympe de Gouges's Rights of Woman* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 31.

4 *Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur universel*, no. 39 (30 October 1793), recounting the session of 8 Brumaire Year II, as quoted in Lynn Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," in *From the Royal to the Republican Body: incorporating the political in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France*, eds. Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norbery (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 227.

5 Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution* (New York: Holmes & Meyer, 1988), 88; Jennifer M. Jones, "Repackaging Rousseau: Femininity and Fashion in Old Regime France," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 4 (1994): 940.

6 Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," 228.

7 Annemarie Kleinert, "*Journal des Dames et des Modes*" ou la *Conquête de l'Europe féminine* (1797–1839) (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2001), 18–20.

8 Evelyne Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), 87.

riodical appeared every five days and consisted of fashion plates, poems, reviews, and anecdotes. This publication eventually became what Martyn Lyons calls “the most successful fashion paper of the Directory” and continued to flourish through January 1839, making it the only Revolutionary fashion periodical to survive through the First Empire and into the Restoration.<sup>9</sup>

The *Journal des dames et des modes* was arguably the most successful fashion periodical of its time and although there were competing publications, none of them achieved the same level of success. One competing periodical was the short-lived *Journal des modes et nouveautés*, a monthly publication founded in 1797. Despite being sold at a lower cost, the periodical struggled against its competitors. By the end of its run, the magazine, unable to maintain the necessary rate of production, published fashion plates directly from the pages of the *Journal des dames et des modes*.<sup>10</sup> This periodical ended a few months after its debut when the *Journal des dames et des modes* absorbed it in 1797.<sup>11</sup>

The *Tableau général du goût, des modes et costumes de Paris* was another competing publication. Founders Francesco Bonafide, an Italian who was living in Paris, and an engraver only known as Guyot, having had an idea similar to that of Sellèque and La Mésengère, published the first issue of the *Tableau général du goût* in 1797, a month or two after the start of the *Journal des dames et des modes*.<sup>12</sup> Each issue contained thirty-two pages and two colored, finely detailed fashion plates. It initially appeared bimonthly and eventually increased its frequency to two times per ten-day period, while reducing its page count to sixteen.<sup>13</sup> In March 1799, the periodical changed its title the *Correspondance des dames* and in July 1799, again changed it to the *Arlequin*. This title, which evokes associations with the vibrant, multi-colored costumes worn by the eponymous theatrical character, persisted until the publication’s end in October 1799, when La Mésengère absorbed the *Arlequin* into the *Journal des dames et des modes*, creating a monopoly on the French fashion press.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the popularity of these publications, fashion periodicals remain curiously absent from many studies

of the press in Revolutionary France. Numerous studies of late 18th-century French fashions have examined these sources with the intention of determining the period’s popular fashions, but it is difficult to know the prevalence of the fashions reported by the fashion press or the influence that the fashion press exerted on contemporary fashions. Jennifer Jones proposes that the fashions described within the context of the fashion press were not meant to accurately portray those popular among Parisians. She argues that the editors of the *Cabinet des modes* “created an imaginary world in which *la mode* and women reigned supreme.”<sup>15</sup> Imaginary or not, the journalists of these periodicals presented fashions as though they were real styles that they had seen elegant Parisians wear while promenading. The *Journal des dames et des modes* in particular insisted that its fashion plates were ‘*dessiné d’après nature*,’ or real-to-life drawings. When subscribers submitted requests to see a specific style, the editor responded that he could not accommodate them because “we depict what is and not what could be...these are not paintings, but pictures that we produce.”<sup>16</sup> Although these publications claimed that their readers followed the fashions presented in the journals, whether they were being truthful or were simply attempting to bolster their business is unknown. Still, Annemarie Kleinert asserts that regardless of whether these publications accurately portrayed contemporary fashions or not, female readers had great confidence in the periodicals and relied on their male editors to guide them to a state of elegance and propriety.<sup>17</sup>

To guide women, the fashion press during the Directorate dedicated itself to the discussion of lighthearted and pleasant topics, like fashion, love, and the theater, intentionally avoiding direct discussion of ‘serious’ subjects. The periodical claimed that the avoidance of such topics appealed to subscribers. In a letter to the editor, one subscriber wrote that his wife had become obsessed with the periodical because, while other publications only talked of blood and war, the *Journal des dames et des modes* exclusively presented “the mirths of love.”<sup>18</sup> The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* believed that the journal would become “an essential good” that would provide women with everything that they needed.<sup>19</sup>

9 Martyn Lyons, *France under the Directory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 142.

10 Kleinert, “*Journal des Dames et des Modes*,” 31–2.

11 Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France*, 71.

12 Kleinert, “*Journal des Dames et des Modes*,” 12.

13 Sullerot, *Histoire de la Presse féminine en France*, 72.

14 Kleinert, “*Journal des Dames et des Modes*,” 66.

15 Jones, “Repackaging Rousseau,” 950–1.

16 *Journal des dames et des modes*, 4:42. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French are my own.

17 Kleinert, “*Journal des Dames et des Modes*,” 64.

18 *Journal des dames et des modes*, 3:125.

19 *Ibid.*, 4:257.

Therefore, the journal's aversion to more conventionally weighty subject matter suggests that the editors did not believe that women needed to expose themselves to such topics. The editors' desire to protect women extended beyond the gore of the Revolution; they claimed to actively defend women against criticism from their contemporaries.

For example, detailing reports of spousal violence in August 1798, the *Journal des dames et de modes* declared, "one could conclude, in general, that the French have lost a lot of respect for the fairer sex and that consequently, they have taken a step back in civilization."<sup>20</sup> Domestic violence directly conflicted with bourgeois familial ideals, which emphasized companionate marriage, loving parents, and family harmony.<sup>21</sup> The journal argued that because women were purported to be naturally defenseless against men, societal institutions needed to be in place to protect women against men's abuse. To protect the ideal of the nuclear family unit and to prevent the French from becoming less civilized, the editor suggested a return to the ancients' practice of venerating and adoring women, stating, "This was a wise institution, to surround with a type of veneration a weak sex, who, by its nature, has no defense against the strength of the dominating sex, and to compensate, by respects, the dependence in which it reduces its weakness. If this brake were ever to fail, soon we would only see tyrants in men, slaves in women."<sup>22</sup> Although the National Convention had abolished slavery in 1794, the editor suggested that French society still required institutions to protect women and to prevent France from once again falling into the darkness of incivility.

However, a society in which a periodical like the *Journal des dames et des modes* could exist conflicted with the ancients' ideals. In the post-revolutionary era, Benjamin Constant argued that the ancients' concept of liberty, which rendered the individual "a slave in all his private relations" in return for sovereignty in public life, was not suited for a modern commercial society in which modern individuals desired more freedoms in their private

lives.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, a return to the ancients' system was impossible. In his *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater* (1758), Rousseau had claimed,

The ancients had, in general, a very great respect for women; but they showed this respect by refraining from exposing them to public judgment, and thought to honor their modesty by keeping quiet about their other virtues. They had as their maxim that the land where morals were purest was the one where they spoke the least of women, and that the most decent woman was the one about whom the least was said...<sup>24</sup>

By contrast, he wrote, "with us... the most esteemed woman is the one who has the greatest renown, about whom the most is said, who is the most often seen in society..."<sup>25</sup> He noted that the republican values of the ancients were incompatible with the aristocracy of Old Regime France. After the establishment of the French Republic in 1792, the fashion periodicals continued to act consistently with Rousseau's characterization of aristocratic French society. The contributors to the *Journal des dames et des modes* proclaimed themselves to be adorers of 'le sexe aimable' and as adorers of women, they could not help but compliment and defend women's talents and virtues.<sup>26</sup> For example, when a moralist suggestively asked where women kept their keys when pockets were no longer fashionable, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* declared that he and the journal's other contributors were "more fair" and chastised the critic for his attitude, telling him that if he could not appreciate women's efforts to please men, "[He] must no longer torment [himself] guessing where our beauties keep their keys, to shield them from the indiscreet curiosity of a husband, from the jealous worry of a lover. I see work bags on their arms."<sup>27</sup> While the edi-

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., no. XXV (17 August 1798), 2.

<sup>21</sup> According to Sarah Maza, cohesion within the nuclear family became a model for the idea of a moralized French nation; she suggests that the employment of the family model, the idea of *fraternité*, to unify citizens at the beginning of the Revolution. See Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 67–8.

<sup>22</sup> *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXV (17 August 1798), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," in *The Libertarian Reader: Classic and contemporary readings from Lao-tzu to Milton Friedman*, ed. David Boaz (New York: Free Press, 1997), 65–67.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater*, ed. Allan Bloom and Christopher Kelly, trans. Allan Bloom, in *Letter to d'Alembert and Writings for the Theater*, eds. Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth and Christopher Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004), 286.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> *Journal des dames et des modes*, 4:53.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., no. XXV (17 August 1798), 7.

tor defended women against the critic's insinuations, he raised another issue regarding men's concerns that women manipulated fashions to keep secrets.

During the Directory period, men believed that women used fashion to deceive. The fashion periodicals suggested that women kept more than just their keys in their bags; bags became a repository of women's secrets. The *Tableau général du goût* claimed that "One can leave a husband, a lover, never the bag: it is the indivisible companion of our beauties, the faithful depository of their most secret thoughts."<sup>28</sup> The *Journal des dames et des modes* also suggested that women kept their innermost secrets in their bags, stating, "Since the indiscreetness of Ridicules [a style of bag] betrayed the secrets of love, they no longer store love letters."<sup>29</sup> Veils became another accessory that men suspected women used to hide secrets. Veils were not a new fashion; Bonafide himself admitted that "the use of the veil is age-old."<sup>30</sup> However, he claimed that the veil that ancient women wore "does not resemble the veil that our elegant women use," remarking that the veils that women wore more closely resembled "[the] mezarò of Italian women."<sup>31</sup> Bonafide proposed that veils became fashionable again after an outbreak of smallpox, which, according to the *Journal des dames et des modes*, "...destroys and removes all that can to make [life] tolerable to many women, the attractiveness of the figure and the softness attached to this advantage."<sup>32</sup> Describing the veil's fashionableness, Bonafide noted, "ugly women benefit from it and pretty women lose nothing to it."<sup>33</sup> He believed that 'ugly' women could, and readily would, use veils to trick men into thinking that they were beautiful.

The popularity of light, transparent fabrics among women under the Directory offered one solution to the fear that women used styles and accessories to hide their 'deformities.' As the *Arlequin* noted, transparent fabrics "veil forms, they do not hide them."<sup>34</sup> Still, most men and most people outside of Paris were not enthusiastic about this scandalous fashion and women drew criticism from

contemporaries for their dress. Because the styles that they published were so revealing, the *Journal des dames et des modes* felt the need to reassure its subscribers in the provinces that "the fashions for which we give a description do not take their inspiration from prostitutes, as many seem, but always from estimable women, whose taste for adornment takes nothing away from the purity of their behaviors."<sup>35</sup> The periodical explained non-Parisians' shock at women's apparent lack of morality, stating, "If sometimes their appearance seems to violate the laws of decency, it is that the eyes are not accustomed to it. As for us other Parisians, we are so accustomed to seeing an alabaster breast, a leg, an arm drawn by Love that truthfully this sight does not bring about in us the smallest sensation."<sup>36</sup>

Although many people believed that by dressing indecently, women were rebelling against propriety and societal values, the fashion periodicals appeared to be less critical of Parisian women's revealing fashion choices. Describing a tunic without sleeves, the *Arlequin* remarked that "...what it lost on the side of modesty, it gained in elegance, and in lightness."<sup>37</sup> 'Légèreté,' lightness or levity, in fashion was healthful because it was more natural. In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau had noted that "the present French dress cramps and disables even a man, and is especially injurious to children. It arrests the circulation of the humors; they stagnate from an inaction made worse by sedentary life."<sup>38</sup> Fashion periodicals took a similar stance, especially in regards to children. Discussing the merits of dressing children 'à la Turquie,' the *Arlequin* noted that "This outfit, not being tight, does not hinder the body's movements and leaves all the necessary ease to [a small child's] development."<sup>39</sup> Aside from its healthful qualities, *légèreté* was also consistent with women's characters, which were thought to be lighter than those of men. The *Journal des dames et des modes* questioned whether women's taste for nudity was an issue; "Truth is naked," the editor remarked, "Must one make it a crime to approach the truth as close as possible?"<sup>40</sup> If truth was naked, the less clothing a woman wore the more natural and less deceptive her outfit was.

28 *Tableau général du goût, des modes et costumes de Paris. Costumes de l'an VII* (Paris: Guide, 1799), 1:38.

29 *Journal des dames et des modes*, 3:288.

30 *Tableau général du goût*, 1:78.

31 *Ibid.* The modern spelling of *mezarò* is *mezzarò*.

32 *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXXII (21 September 1798), 1.

33 *Tableau général du goût*, 1:78.

34 *Arlequin, journal de pièces et de morceaux Premier Trimestre, du 15 Thermidor, an 7, au 15 Brumaire, an 8.* (Paris: Deferrière, 1799), 41.

35 *Journal des dames et des modes*, 4:13.

36 *Ibid.*, 4:13-4.

37 *Arlequin*, 63.

38 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile or Concerning Education*, ed. Jules Steeg, trans. Eleanor Worthington (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company, 1889), 93.

39 *Arlequin*, 64.

40 *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXX (11 September 1798), 8.

Although the fashion press claimed to support women's controversial styles, their support was superficial. In response to the popularity of transparent fabrics, the *Tableau général du goût* reminded women that "they were always beautiful, because they were always chaste; nice and pure, they commanded men's respect."<sup>41</sup> The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* also warned women that "...it is not enough, for the honor of your husband, for my happiness and your tranquility, that you are an honest woman, a faithful wife; You must still appear it."<sup>42</sup> "Reputation...it is the most precious treasure of your sex," he continued, "You are virtuous, madame, I know it. Why then do you want to renounce the sweetest fruit of your virtues to public esteem!"<sup>43</sup> As Rousseau had remarked, in theory, "...every woman without chasteness is guilty and depraved, because she tramples on a sentiment natural to her Sex."<sup>44</sup> In practice, he had claimed, "In the big cities, chasteness is ignoble and base. It is the only thing for which a well brought up woman would be ashamed. And the honor of having made a decent man blush belongs only to women of the best tone."<sup>45</sup> Contradicting their calls for women to present themselves more virtuously, the fashion press, along with the fashions that they promoted in their issues, helped to elevate an urban culture in which virtues like chastity became increasingly irrelevant. Moreover, although the fashion periodicals cited nature to support women's fashions, both the *Journal des dames et des modes* and the *Tableau général du goût* employed the same argument to stress that France's climate was not suitable for the light fabrics associated with neoclassical dress and noted that women who dressed lightly did so against medical advice.<sup>46</sup> E. Clare Cage suggests that contemporaries used the argument of nature to control women's dress by emphasizing both the inappropriate and unhealthful qualities of the neoclassical fashions, which she argues gave women the power to make themselves artists, art critics, and works of art.<sup>47</sup>

Neoclassicism did provide women with symbolic power. Neoclassical dress allowed women to emulate the

goddesses of antiquity. Styles like 'à la *Minerve*,' 'à la *grecque*,' and 'à la *romaine*' transformed women into visions of the past for men to venerate. Neoclassicism also emphasized the importance of education and fine arts for women. In the *Tableau général du goût*, fashion plates depicted women in neoclassical dress cultivating their art. Examples included a plate depicting a "Young woman plucking the guitar" and another depicting a "young" woman "going to the Museum to study painting."<sup>48</sup> Describing the latter, the journal claimed that "...taste formed itself through the study of the beautiful models of antiquity" and because of her study, the woman depicted in the plate "[resembled] a Muse."<sup>49</sup> By stating that the woman resembled a goddess, the journal granted her the passive power to inspire men to achieve greatness.

Through the style of antiquity, the fashion press also claimed that women could cultivate their talents to surpass each other in the art of fashion, which the fashion press editors claimed women possessed a natural desire to accomplish. According to the *Arlequin*, "Beauty always wants to be without rival."<sup>50</sup> Describing an outfit, one of the benefits that the *Tableau général du goût* underlined was that "The woman who wore it, although she was not pretty, advantageously distinguished herself among beautiful women..."<sup>51</sup> The fashion press promoted competition among women to reinforce the idea that it was more important for women to pay attention to the way they dressed than to intrude into less frivolous areas of the public sphere.

Although the French fashion press had always recognized women's talents and authority in fashion, during the Directory period, fashion periodicals presented women's ritual following of fashion and their inherent desire to please men as if it were their devotions. In their defense against the critic who asked where women kept their keys, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* asserted, "We believe that this amiable sex burns perfumes on the altar of the Graces and in the temple of their mother, only after having rendered to the Penates, the worship prescribed by reason."<sup>52</sup> *Le Mois*, a monthly literary journal that included a fashion section in most of its issues, referred to a female fashion merchant's store as "the temple of taste" and the merchant herself as the

41 *Tableau général du goût*, 1:138.

42 *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXIX (6 September 1798), 1.

43 *Ibid.*, no. XXIX (6 September 1798), 2.

44 Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater*, 313-4.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Tableau général du goût*, 1:136.

47 E. Clare Cage, "The Sartorial Self: Neoclassical Fashion and Gender Identity in France, 1797-1804," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 2 (2009): 201, 205.

48 *Tableau général du goût*, 1:106, 1:130.

49 *Ibid.*, 1:130.

50 *Arlequin*, 209.

51 *Tableau général du goût*, 1:131.

52 *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXV (17 August 1798), 7.

temple's "priestess."<sup>53</sup> Its editor also speculated that women drove themselves to frequently vary their fashions because of "the need to pay tribute to fashion."<sup>54</sup>

In Rousseau's description of the 'civil religion' in *The Social Contract* (1762), he stated that in addition to disassociation with the state, "The existence of an omnipotent, intelligent, benevolent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of sinners; the sanctity of the social contract and the law—these are all positive dogmas."<sup>55</sup> For the worship of *la mode*, the fashion periodicals described dogmas that were consistent with several of those listed by Rousseau. The fashion periodicals sometimes presented new fashions as gifts from the gods, but more frequently depicted *la mode* as its own entity, a creative force with flesh, that established its own laws and empire. The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* remarked, "I recognized [fashion], the daughter of Caprice and Madness, the younger sister of Fortune. Its power was immense, judging by the number of favorites who composed its court."<sup>56</sup>

Yet, despite the immense power of *la mode* as a creative and influential force, it was not stronger than masculine authority. When fashions conflicted with marital or paternal authority, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* advised women to find a means to reconcile the two opposing parties.<sup>57</sup> Bonafide also reminded subscribers that "...fashions will never be in opposition to the laws, the morals, the virtues, the happiness of the social body."<sup>58</sup> The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* likewise insisted that in addition to women's devotion to *la mode*, "The duties of a lover, a friend, a wife, a mother, are as sacred to her as the need to please the society she embellishes."<sup>59</sup> Women could devote themselves to fashion only so long as their devotions did not conflict with their gendered social obligations: being diligent mothers, daughters, and wives who respected masculine authority. The periodicals suggested that only women who minded this restriction while studying the art of fashion would

achieve their purported goal of distinguishing themselves among other women.

Although the contributors to fashion periodicals claimed to support women, they themselves provided criticisms of women's behaviors and dress. One style that the fashion press editors despised was 'à la Titus,' a controversial short hairstyle that was originally popular among men, but that many women under the Directory adopted. To follow this fashion, women sheared their heads. The editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* was critical of the fashion; describing the style, he interjected that women could use wigs to hide "the ravages of fashion."<sup>60</sup> He also suggested that women rejected patriarchal authority to adopt this fashion; describing 'cheveux à la Titus,' the editor proclaimed that despite having husbands who "not very indulgent, [prevented] them from getting sheared," women wore their hair shorter than ever before.<sup>61</sup> Although he continued to publish plates and articles depicting the fashion, he despised women's emulation of men. As an expression of their disapproval, the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* published a letter to the editor in which a man proclaimed that he disliked short hair on women because it "destroys a large part of the charms of this enchanting sex."<sup>62</sup> Overjoyed at the discovery that the director of the *Juif Errant*, a young woman whose work the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes* had previously praised, shared his opinion, the man went to see her. However, he quickly realized that she too had sacrificed her hair to *la mode*, proving to the journal's subscribers that all women were susceptible to the ridicules of fashion.<sup>63</sup>

Women's supposed susceptibility to unflattering fashions reinforced their need for guidance from the fashion periodicals. By May 1799, advising women was no longer sufficient for the editor of the *Journal des dames et des modes*. He asked his female subscribers in the provinces—his primary audience—to surrender their autonomy in fashion so that he could control their dress. He announced that he had recently established a fashion house for women in the provinces. He proposed to them,

Yes, ladies, it is not enough for me to show you the new hairstyles: I aim to do your hair myself. You must not find this disposition strange on

53 *Le Mois, journal historique, littéraire et critique, avec figures* (Paris: bureau du journal *Le Mois*, 1799), 1:22; 1:236.

54 *Ibid.*, 1:238.

55 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 186.

56 *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXX (11 September 1798), 2.

57 *Ibid.*, 3:57.

58 *Tableau général du goût*, 1:13.

59 *Journal des dames et des modes*, no. XXV (17 August 1798), 7.

60 *Ibid.*, 3:516.

61 *Ibid.*, no. XXXI (16 September 1798), 10.

62 *Ibid.*, 4:53.

63 *Ibid.*, 4:52–3.

the part of a man who has made a profession of adoring you. It is so sweet to embellish what you love. Who, better than your lover, will know to direct your dress? Who, more than he, is interested in making the charms that have captivated him shine? The more radiance he will give them, the more he can pride himself on having given into their power. You reign over my heart, ladies, it is an incontestable fact! Permit me to reign over your heads.<sup>64</sup>

The editor asked to ‘reign over’ the heads of his female subscribers not unlike the way the king had reigned over his subjects before the end of the French monarchy or the way Napoleon would assert his authority over the French people as First Consul and Emperor. Because they were unable to easily access the latest trends in Paris, subscribers in the provinces were dependent on fashion periodicals to remain knowledgeable of the latest fashions. In an era in which the *Journal des dames et des modes* dominated, these women had few alternative options. The editor assured women that their loss of power would benefit them; “I will not be a tyrant,” he promised, “. . . my yoke will be as soft as satin, as light as gauze, as gracious as flowers. It is only by assistance that I claim to enchain you there.”<sup>65</sup> The editor proclaimed himself his subscribers’ ‘lover’ and claimed that he only desired to enslave them because he adored them, contradicting his previous claim that the adoration of women would prevent the tyranny of man from enslaving them. The editor’s desire to re-enslave women prefigured France’s return to a strong executive rule under Napoleon, who, much like the editor, ‘loved’ his subjects, and the reimposition of slavery in the colonies just a few years later, in 1802.

Despite the fashion press’s attempts to master and regulate *la mode*, fashion continued to be a wild, uncontrollable force. However, as evidenced by editor’s request to enchain his female subscribers, the fashion press did succeed in mastering the women who consumed fashions. Although the National Convention may have granted women freedom of dress as a replacement for legitimate political power, the fashion press ultimately undermined women’s authority, not only by dictating to women their ideas and values regarding ‘proper’ appearance and behaviors, but also by reducing women’s

authority in the sphere of fashion. While previous publications, like the *Cabinet des modes*, portrayed women as masters of fashion who wielded their command over *la mode* through the creation and refinement of fashions, by the Directory period, fashion periodicals characterized women as subservient to *la mode*—mere worshipers at the altar of this untamable entity. By pushing women’s public influence to areas of slight civil significance and cultural frivolity, the fashion press reinforced the relegation of women to their roles as wives and mothers. This not only alleviated anxieties regarding women’s presence in the public sphere, but because the male fashion press editors dictated women’s consumption of fashions, it also assuaged growing concerns about women’s consumptive and sartorial habits, which were conceived as potential threats to domestic harmony. In these ways, the fashion press effectively contributed to the resolution of the Revolution’s anxieties regarding the relationship between gender and citizenship.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 3:519–20.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



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